

There are so many highlights and unique experiences from my thru-hike of the Ice Age Trail (IAT) that it is hard to pick which ones to write about. During the summer of 2022, I had the fantastic opportunity to thru-hike the Ice Age Trail (IAT). The hike exposed me to Wisconsin's many diverse ecosystems, communities, and welcoming hospitality. The craziest thing about hiking the IAT was the sheer size of it. The IAT really shows you Wisconsin's true size.

My favorite part of the trail was hiking in northern Wisconsin because it felt more untouched by civilization. There were times when I wouldn't see a person for days, even up to a week. This allowed me to get lost in my thoughts. It's crazy how your thought process changes when you don't talk to a person for a week. This was especially poignant because cell phone and internet reception were often unreliable. It was very beneficial for reconnecting with yourself but also for working through some negative thoughts. When my days seemed to blend together, I always knew when it was the weekend because that's when the trail gets busier.

There were so many things I learned on the trail. The first was that not every sound outside my tent was a bear. The first night I was alone in the deep woods, miles from any other human, and I was convinced there was a bear rummaging around my campsite. I had to garner the courage to check my surroundings and then go hang my food! I really learned to face my fears and gained confidence in myself. Throughout those early days, I also had to learn to tune out the insects. I now understand what the Dalai Lama meant when he said, "If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito." I think I would also add "hiking with flies and ticks" to that list. There was a particular portion of the Point Beach Segment along Lake Michigan where the flies were biting too!

My favorite lessons were learning, understanding, and relying on others' humanity. That included my mom and sister, who drove me to the start at the Western Terminus and helped me get through the first couple of days. The many trail angels that provided snacks and drinks during the hot days of July and August. The people who opened their homes to a perfect stranger who appeared a lot worse for wear. The number of people that stopped their cars to ask if I needed help. I think they probably thought I was homeless. What sane person would voluntarily choose to walk 1200 miles?! Humanity played an especially important role in the last 200 miles of my trek. I was over the adventure by then and just wanted to be done. So many people encouraged me and helped me through that difficult time, and I am very thankful.

I am also thankful to the many people working hard to acquire and maintain the IAT. The connector routes between segments were my least favorite part of the IAT. The more the IAT gains and gets overhauled over the years, the better it will be. The IAT is breathtaking, and I continue to hike it whenever I can. My life has changed in so many ways because of my thru-hike of the IAT.