

Jeffrey Frazer (Trail Name: Chasing Yellow Blazes)

Thousand Miler Essay and Itinerary

COMPLETED SEGMENT HIKING THE ICE AGE TRAIL: December 11, 2021

It all started when I finally ordered the map and atlas in December of 2020. I had no intentions of doing the CRs or the entire trail. My first recorded hike was at Chaffee Creek on December 27, 2020. It was an out and back. I did not care for that. I had read a lot of posts on the Thousand Mile Wannabes Facebook page about bike shuttles. I inquired about riding and traction about riding in the winter months.

My first bike shuttle was January 9, 2021. It went well and the Thousand Miler group needs credit for inspiring me to try it. I hadn't ridden my bike in the winter in 40 years. I used my bike a lot after that day. I bike shuttled over 20 times after that.

I did a few group hikes and reached out for shuttles or hiking partners. It wasn't long, and I was receiving offers for both.

Within a couple of months on the trail, I pretty much had completed all of the trail segments in Washara, Waupaca, Marquette, and Portage counties. I decided that if I had any interest in finishing the trail, I would have to do the CRs. I also knew that I did not want to do the CRs at the end. It was catch up time. The day I did the CR between Skunk and Foster and Iola, it was a sleety, cool gray day but perfect for black and white photos. I love rural Wisconsin backroads and this one is all of that. I took more photos that day than I have on a lot of the trails. I was now "gut hooked" on the trails and the CRs.

By early summer when the roads were clear, I did not need to use my bike anymore since I got more offers for shuttles than what I needed. I started meeting fellow Wannabes for shuttles, hikes, and shared campsites. One of these Wannabes, Sue Nelson Greenway, even came up with my future trail name - Chasing Yellow Blazes and then fellow hiker Laura Hinesh shortened it to just Chase. The Wannabes became an extended family.

I worked diligently after that and didn't pass up many opportunities to hike with fellow Wannabes all summer long.

Fall is my favorite time of year. During Labor Day weekend, a fellow hiker and I did a three day backpacking trip through Lake Eleven and Jerry Lake with Buzz Meyer as a shuttle. My number one passion is archery and bowhunting. From Labor Day to October 15, I didn't hike. From October 15-30, I hit it hard and finished a gap between Walla Hi and Glenbeulah and also continued west from Hemlock Creek to Straight Lake. In November, I finished Straight Lake to the St. Croix Falls esker, leaving about 3 miles for my last hike.

My family had an Airbnb leased for December 11, 2021 for my finish. The winter's first major snowstorm was predicted for the day before my planned finish; however, all my family members made the 3 1/2 hour trek safely to Balsam Lake where we were staying. I realized that I was planning on finishing the trail where I had family ties since my maternal grandmother was from the Balsam Lake area. That meant a great deal to me. The actual day of my hike was a beautiful, sunny day and my sister Marci and my grand-niece Kaiya and fellow Thousand Miler Pam Bowe joined me.

I spent 82 days hiking 1151.4 miles. I did all the suggested CRs because someone put a lot of time and effort into mapping them out.

At a young age, I learned the value of being out in Mother Nature like the cathedrals of the pines. There was a wooded hill behind my parents home where I grew up. We called it the "big hill." There was a pine plantation that you had to walk through to get to the big hill. Over the years those pines and the big hill became the go-to spot for me to think, heal, grieve, etc.

At first the trail was just another tool to get me outdoors. Once the IAT bug took hold of me, I soon realized how blessed I was. I met so many that were just discovering later in life the healing benefits of Mother Nature. I did not feel the need to do the trail solo. I enjoyed meeting the different hikers where we all had one thing in common: the trail. We all had the drive and desire to finish the trail and were willing to help one another when we could.

I repeated this saying several times in Facebook posts, and it is as true as the first time I posted it: I had some tough days on trail but I never had a bad one.

ITINERARY BY MONTH/SEGMENT:

December 2020: Chaffee Creek, Parnell

January 2021: Chaffee Creek, Wedde Creek, Greenwood, John Muir Park, Mekan, Bohn Lake, Merrimac, Devil's Lake, Hartman Creek, Emmons Creek, Skunk and Foster, Waupaca River, Greenbush, New Hope/Iola

February 2021: Gibraltar Rock, Highland Lakes, Thornapple, Ringle, Lodi Marsh, Sauk Point, Parrish, Devil's Lake

March 2021: Milwaukee River, Deerfield, Lodi East Marsh, Springfield Hill, Cross Plains, Indian Lake, Table Bluff, Albany, Monticello, West Bend

April 2021: Cedar Lakes, Holy Hill, Slinger, Pike Lake, Kewaskum, Loew Lake, Summit Moraine, Dells of Eau Claire, Plover River, Lumbercamp, Kettlebowl, Montrose, Brooklyn, Valley View, Madison, Verona, Merrimac

May 2021: Harrison Hills, Arbor Ridge, Devil's Staircase, Janesville, Underdown, Alta Junction, Grandfather Falls, Turtle Rock, Averill-Kelley, Point Beach, Pine Lake, East Lake, Timberland Wilderness

June 2021: Firth Lake, Harwood, Chippewa Moraine, Storrs Lake, Milton, Blackhawk, Blue Spring Lake, Stoney Ridge, Eagle, Scuppernong, Waterville, Wood Lake, New Wood, Camp 27, Rib Lake, Mishicot

July 2021: Point Beach, Tisch Mills, Kewaunee River, Two Rivers, Dunes, Manitowoc, Mondeaux, East Twin River

August 2021: Whitewater, Clover Valley, Monches, Merton, Delafield, Lapham Peak, Hartland, Sturgeon Bay, Forestville, Southern Blue Hills, Northern Blue Hills, Hemlock Creek

September 2021: Lake Eleven, Jerry Lake

October 2021: Tuscobia, Grassy Lake, Bear Lake, Timberland Hills, Sand Creek, Indian Creek, McKenzie Creek, Straight River, Pine Line, Walla Hi, LaBudde

November 2021: Straight Lake, Trade River, St. Croix

December 2021: Finish St. Croix