

Ice Age Trail Thousand-Miler Essay

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Well, I did it. I didn't start out thinking I would, but I did it anyway. I sort of got hooked – especially during 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

I started on May 21, 2017 – finished on Sept. 9, 2023. A 6 ½ journey for me.

I battled cold, heat, rain, snow, mud, insects (mostly ticks, mosquitoes, and gnats), poison ivy, blisters, and some aggressive dogs while hiking CRs. Also, I was challenged with Lyme's disease and anaplasmosis (tickborne diseases), heat exhaustion, plantar fasciitis, and at times, fatigue. I had Lyme's disease and anaplasmosis in October 2021, causing me to be admitted into the hospital for a three-day stay (Ugh!).

My wife hiked with me once (about 5 miles) and my daughter hiked (3 miles) with me once. Otherwise, I walked the 161 day-hikes alone, which was my preference. I would park my bicycle at the end of the trail section I planned to hike for the day, travel by car to my starting point, hiked the trail, and bicycled back to my vehicle via connecting roads.

Along the way, so many simple and little stories...

- Upon returning to my bike after my hike, I discovered that a tree had fallen within 5 feet of where my bike was secured. It was a challenge to get my bike out from underneath all of the tree limbs of the fallen tree.
- Wildlife encounters – though I wished that I had seen a bear (I saw traces), I did have a close encounter with an albino deer along with so many other wild birds and animals.
- Once I mistook some private yard space for a public park while securing my bike to a tree. The owner came after me shouting more obscenities at me than I had ever heard. I quickly apologized and set off for a different spot to lock up my bike. My fault, but still – he was an ass hole. 😊
- I always carried my lunch – stopping to eat wherever I was at the time. Sometimes while hiking CRs, I would sit on a culvert or in a ditch which perplexed people in vehicles passing by. Other times when hiking CRs I would sneak into the woods and sit under a tree. The best lunch stops were when I was completely alone on the forested trail next to a stream or lake in the woods.

Was it worth it? Absolutely! I was privileged to see Wisconsin like few others. And at age 70, this was a significant personal achievement that I will remember for the rest of my life.

I kept a detailed hiking log. After each hike, I recorded all the pertinent data and wrote notes and memories about the hike. I love looking back on this diary (of-sorts). Maybe someday, my grandchildren or great-grandchildren will read my hiking log. Also, I took photos during most (not all) of my hikes – usually of something particularly interesting in nature.

I am grateful that my family was present with me when I finished the trail. They hiked the final mile with me. It was a good day!