

What started as a nice day hike in October 2020 while camping at Hartman Creek State Park quickly turned into a continuation to reach the 40 mile IAT Mammoth Challenge. We (Dorene Disch and I hiked the entire trail together) surpassed that 40 miles easily and moved on to more segments within 60 miles of New Glarus. Add in more camping the next year along with the connecting routes, and we were quickly past 100, then 200, and then 300 miles. Well, if we could reach 300, we then wanted to become Thousand Milers over time. Some hike through; others take many years, but this is our progression story... And before we knew it, we were within reach of that 1000 miles and beyond. We finished our hike on 3/15/2023 on the Hemlock segment, with roughly 80 of the last 100 miles on snowshoes and cleats. I don't recommend it to anyone but we did finish in the most arduous way for a task of such magnitude. It put the exclamation point on the trail's completion!

The IAT took us to new state, county and city parks, encouraged purchases of new tents, cots and stoves, required more hiking shoes, pants and outerwear, and gifted us with endless adventures and earned steps. We hiked in every month except February and August, and every season over 30 months. We hiked in a variety of weather conditions too - sunshine, wind, rain, heat, cold, snow, and sleet. (We could've been mail carriers!) By far, the easiest hikes were in cool temps adorned with intense colors (or nude trees). We explored parts of the state we had never been to. Each segment had its own uniqueness, as did the trail communities. We met other awesome hikers and citizen/observers and never had a bad experience with the public or traffic. The trail angels were essential to our success, and we can't thank the trail and chapter maintenance crews enough for their diligent work. And did I mention what we learned about the geological features in Wisconsin, wildflowers, foot prints, trees, fungi, waterways and flowages? While we expected to experience the trail, we weren't expecting to learn so much. And we were able to include stops at local craft breweries; there had to be some reward for a good day's hike, right?

I have been and will continue to recommend the IAT to whoever will listen, whether they check it out now or in five years. What a treasure we have here in Wisconsin! I have been fortunate and blessed to have experienced it.

(I had my son make a map with a 1200 mile radius around New Glarus. It's a great way to illustrate just how far 1200 miles reaches. Attached.)

JoAnn Cruse

