

Three friends (Fiona McTavish, Susanne Dane, and Liz Lusk) and I finished the IAT this fall after 5 and a half years of section hiking. We kept a diary of our hikes and are in the process of putting together a book for ourselves. Below I have copied the entries of my original reason for the hike, and our first and last diary entries. Thanks to you and all the great IAT people who have built and maintained this lovely trail!

One morning while doing my daily exercises, I mused on my past adventures. So many involved hiking, or biking or paddling, physical prowess now fading away. Those days are over I thought. No hiking the Appalachian Trail, no paddling down the Mississippi, no walking across Europe. Are the adventures over? What could I still do? Hmmm...

Aha! The Ice Age Trail in my own back yard! Now, who do I know adventurous (or dumb) enough to go with me?

May 4, 2017:

We started our great adventure in St. Croix during what would turn out to be a beautiful week of sunshine, temperatures in the 70s. The first night was at the Dalles House Lodge. We all had some anxiety about taking on the job of choosing lodging but Fiona came up with the perfect solution, which would become our mantra of the trip to cover all situations: "No credit, no blame." We had an additional thought, "funky over fine." How true that first week!

May 5, 2017: St. Croix segment; 9.0**miles****0.0-9.0**

After breakfast at the Dalles House Coffee Shoppe, we started along the St. Croix River through land pockmarked by glacial potholes. The trail then passed mostly through parks with ups and downs over forest floor carpeted with wildflowers (spring beauties, trout lilies smelling like lemon, anemones, marsh marigolds, trillium, skunk cabbage, bellwort, yellow violet). We encountered high school students cleaning up the IAT on a service project. There were 3 streams to ford, but we were able to skip across the first two on rocks. The final time, shoes came off, except for Liz who walked through the stream then disappeared from view into the woods beyond. Susanne wanted to walk across a log (shades of her Nepal adventure) but thought better of it. At the end of our first perfect day, we supped at the Dalles House while listening to old songs out on the patio restaurant

September 23, 2022: Sturgeon Bay; 4.8 miles**1142.6-1147.4**

We couldn't have asked for a more beautiful day for our last IAT hike. It was a crisp fall day, partly sunny and no wind. We started in downtown Sturgeon Bay and walked on city streets for the first couple of miles. When we turned into Potawatomi State Park the track turned into true trail. It was reminiscent of the western portion of the IAT with roots and rocks and ups and downs. Somehow that seemed very appropriate. Most of the trail passed along side Lake Michigan and had benches and views....There were others on the trail and most commented on the great day for hiking. When we arrived at the eastern terminus, we had an unexpected reception when we asked a young woman to take our picture. She and her companions, and other people at the parking area, showered us with congratulations when they learned we were

just finishing the 1200 mile trail. There was a man and his wife, a local runner, another fellow we asked to take a second picture and finally a nice couple and their dog who we met previously on the trail. They were vacationing and planning to go to the upper peninsula. Their black lab dog Gretchen was writing Facebook posts from her perspective (We ended up on the Facebook page. Gretchen thought we needed a dog). One woman appeared to be just hanging around when suddenly her son appeared carrying all the paraphernalia for backpacking. He had just hiked from Madison. All in all, it seemed an excellent reception for our trail's end. We sat at a picnic table and ate chocolate and cookies and reflected on our time together. This journey was more than just miles. It was personal stories and intimacy, profound and silly thoughts, and lots of laughter and some pain. Through it all we have been kind and caring of one another. Truly a journey of perseverance and love.

- Kate Gabriel