

My name is Mary Kempf and I have completed my segment hike of the Ice Age Trail. I began at Sturgeon Bay/Eastern terminus on 1/1/21. My plan was to complete the entire trail, hiking East to West, by 12/31/21. I am so happy to say I have completed the entire trail 6 weeks ahead of schedule. I finished at St. Croix Falls on 11/13/21. I know it is listed as a 1200 mile trail but with my Apple watch stats , it seems I have actually hiked 1209.18 miles total.

This was an absolutely amazing adventure, with many new experiences along the way.

I used the 2017 maps and guide book to plan and hike the trail. I like paper maps and dislike technology (doesn't work well for me) therefore I made copies of the trail maps and carried them with me.

My process had evolved with each planning of a hike, the actual hike, and the documenting of the hike. I had difficulty engaging people to join me, so did all of the planning on my own and most of the hiking on my own.

I started with having my husband drop me off at the trail head and meet me at the end of my hike for the day. This was the process for much of my hiking. When this was not possible I would drive to the end of my planned hike, bike to the beginning of my planned hike, hike back to my car and drive back to the start to pick up my bike. This was difficult as I would tire from the bike ride and have difficulty finishing my 13-20+ mile hike. But I continued to do this when necessary (which was quite frequent).

Travel became an issue on my own as well. I stayed with friends, with family, car camped, truck camped , van camped, and stayed in AirB&B's.

I met several section and thru hikers along the way, and learned about some various ways to get help on the trails. I had already perfected my process and preferred to figure it out on my own (part of the adventure) so did not act on seeking out trail help.

I found the trails to be both adventurous and beautiful for the most part. I did find also that some trails are really not marked well especially from east to west. I would not see a yellow blaze for a lengthy period of time and decide to turn around and backtrack to the last yellow blaze seen and see if I was on the right track. (this accounted for the extra miles I ended up hiking) Several times when I turned around I would see how nicely marked the trail was from west to east and how poorly it was marked from east to west. I thought many times that I wish I would have yellow paint to mark the trails as I went.

That being said , I do plan on becoming active in my local IAT chapter.

I have seen and appreciated all the work the IAT volunteers do. Thank you.

I also want to say that as a lone female on the trails, I felt generally safe. I carried a hefty walking stick with luggage tags jingling most of the way to keep wildlife at a distance. I carried pepper spray, bear spray, a sound alarm and my cell phone with me throughout this journey. The only item I could not count on was my cell phone as there was no service much of the time. Another reason I did not count on digital tools.

I felt the road connects to be dangerous at times with the narrowness of the roads and traffic not slowing down or moving over. Cannot remember specific areas at this time.

I have LOVED the river/creek water crossings on the trails but did not like the persistent wet muddy areas. I loved the boardwalks and historical/educational signs in areas. I LOVE the beauty and different landscapes of this state. I Love the beauty of each season. Though I like fall the best. I also appreciate the private land owners that allow the IAT to go through their property. That is so wonderful. And some offer their own greetings with sculptures, signs, painted stones ,etc. I Love the fun that homes along the road-connects add to make a hiker smile as they go by.

I Love the Ice Age Trail and my adventure of hiking it in its entirety,

I can say that the only things I did not like were the mosquitoes and the ticks. Oh well. Everything else was wonderful and amazing!!!!

A Grateful Thousand Miler

Mary Kempf