

## Laura Schneider Thousand Miler Essay

I had known about the IAT for years. I'd hiked Table Bluff in all seasons I don't know how many times. 3 years ago, my older son was in an Exploring Wisconsin class in High School. He had to go visit 4 places in the area that were all part of the IAT. Imagine my surprise to realize Gibraltar Rock and Indian Lake were part of the IAT as well. We visited them, Table Bluff and Prairie Moraine for his class. It got me looking into what the IAT really was. I found the Thousand Miler Wannabes page on facebook and got hooked. Little by little I started hiking Dane and Columbia Counties that summer by myself. Out and backs – bike shuttle – loops etc. I had decided I was going to hike the segments. That didn't last long – I was going to do the CR also. I convinced my then boyfriend, now husband to hike with me on weekends. Then covid hit and we had nothing to do but explore the IAT. I loved every moment of planning out the hikes, choosing where to go – how to bike it, out and back etc. It was safer to be out on the trail than inside anywhere. I loved it! Wisconsin has so much to offer and I was seeing parts of the state I didn't know existed.

My husband got burned out from the travel once it got further away. I was loving the experience of the trail. I was up for hiking in extreme heat (thank you Algoma Joe for the bottle of water that day for Forestville!!!), the danged cold, the black flies, mosquitos etc. The only thing I tried to avoid was ticks. I did almost all of the north in the fall and winter and early spring before they were abundant.

I can hike all day alone and be great with it. I can drive 3+ hours – hike 20 miles and drive home in a day. I had my windshield broken at a baseball field in Brill last summer. It was hard – it was mentally challenging and I did it. The mud – the hills – that water – the ENDLESS SNOW!!! I had to tell my hiking partner to turn around in Kettlebowl this winter. He was unsafe and not going to make it. Both our cars were at one end. He got out; I finished and went to rescue him. He was so so cold by then but we made it. I had to learn to respect the conditions on the day I was hiking. I had to learn that not all theories for how many miles to hike fit into real life. Many days I cut short the miles I wanted because of other priorities in life.

Wisconsin has some fun wildlife – 2 bear cubs in trees on Tuscobia. A porcupine on the road by Grassy Lake. Swans on McKenzie Creek. Deer, bald eagles, cranes, blue herons, turkeys and many other small birds and mammals.

My IAT journey was incredible. I am excited to go hike some miles with people that are still in process and help them complete their goal. People in Wisconsin are fortunate to have this trail so accessible to them!!