

Summary of the Ice Age Trail Hike

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Living in Janesville and a half mile from a trail head of the Ice Age Trail was the perfect combination to start my journey on the Ice Age Trail. My official hike began on May 15, 2019 with the Walk Across Rock County which was organized by the Rock County Ice Age Trail Alliance. By November I had completed Walworth, Jefferson, and Green Counties with solo out and back hikes. I had also hiked in Waukesha County with my husband, Bernie.

In 2020 I had finished Waukesha County and most of Dane County with solo out and back hikes. I had recruited my husband to join me and we continued to work our way up the horseshoe on the east and west sides. By the end of the year we had completed Waukesha, Washington, Fond du Lac, and most of Sheboygan Counties on the east side. On the west side we had finished Dane and Southern Columbia County. We were still hiking mostly out and backs but a few times we had friends that would shuttle us to a trail head. With the help of my family we had hiked most of Polk County and two segments of Langlade County to end the hiking season.

In 2021 we had developed a shuttle system, where my husband would drop me off, move the vehicle ahead, and walk to meet me. Now we were able to hike on average 13 miles a day. We had completed the east side with Sheboygan, Door, Kewaunee, and Manitowoc Counties. On the west side we had completed Northern Columbia, Sauk, Waushara, and Marquette County. We had completed more than half of Lincoln County. We had help from family and friends too.

Working on the west side in 2022 we had made it through Portage, Waupaca, Marathon, Langlade, and the rest of Lincoln Counties. The goal of finishing the entire trail seemed doable.

In 2023 we conquered Taylor, Chippewa, Rusk, Washburn, Barron, and the remainder of Polk Counties. We had a quick celebration at the completion of the trail at McKenzie Lake on 9-25-2023 around noon. There were heavy rainstorms over the weekend so our celebration was cut short.

The experience of hiking the trail was an adventure. I had learned so much about the various landscapes, the wildlife, and myself. The journey had reminded me of the hikes I had taken on my childhood farm in Delavan, WI. My husband and I had also taken our

children camping in Wisconsin many times as they were growing up so some trails had looked familiar. My Ice Age Trail hike did not start with any overall grand plan but the planning and organizing developed as the experience grew. My husband and I had learned how to prepare for the hikes and find our way to our starting point.

During the years of hiking the trail I learned more about the natural challenges that you would face. One obstacle was dealing with insects and we learned how to prevent them from interfering with our goals. My husband and I had over 21 ticks on us after a day hike near Portage. I learned that the winter weather effected the trail with downed trees and branches. It had left 18 inches of snow on the trail in Taylor County at the end of April of this year. I had learned to keep moving forward during rain, hail, snow, and graupel storms. I came to view how important it is to stay hydrated. I had a run-in with wild parsnip. I dealt with how to handle a wrong turn or a turn when you miss a blaze. I had learned that determination is important while hiking challenging segments like Devil's Lake, Turtle Rock, and Thornapple Creek. I learned that there are many beautiful spots along the way with breathtaking views. Each season that I had hiked had it's own rewards such as the trails lined with trilliums. The fall colors were brilliant at the end of each years hikes. I had learned that it was important to have family and friends support along the trail. The people hiking the trails were positive and supportive too.

We were able to see wildlife at it's best. We had seen eagles, cranes, hurons, grouse, peafowl, humming birds, and swans just name a few birds. Seeing several porcupines and a black fox added to our adventure. My husband encountered a bear on the Lumber Camp Segment. He was able to scare it away. I had seen many snakes such as rat snakes and fox snakes.

It was a pleasure to wonder through the forests, along creeks, near rivers and lakes, and there were interesting points on connectors too. I am glad that I was able to spend time meeting a goal that had so many rewards and experiences along the way. It was truly a great way to build an appreciation toward nature and the volunteers that help maintain the trails. I appreciate my husband's support as he helped me complete the Ice Age Trail.