



Father and Son on the Ice Age Trail

ERIC SHERMAN, MEMBERSHIP COORDINATOR

FIRST

The first experience my dad and I had together on what is now the Ice Age Trail was in January 1985, or thereabouts, at Hartman Creek State Park, near Waupaca. My aunts and uncles lived in nearby Weyauwega, and the extended-family cabin was just a few miles east of the park, on Stratton Lake. Hartman was our go-to spot when we wanted a break from the cabin, our home away from home away from home.

That January outing was on skis, and what I remember most is the hills. Most were comfortably fun and left me wanting to do them again, holding nothing back the second time. At the top of the few steep ones, I leaned hard into my snowplow, all the way to the rubbery-legs moment when gravity gets the best of you. All semblance of control out the window, I then readied myself to sit and roll into the “dead bug” (as my daughter Indigo calls it) the moment I felt a crash coming on. Toward the bottom, once

it looked like I was going to somehow stay upright, my dad would whoop in celebration. *Att-uh-BOY!*

Along with the hills, I remember the deep kettle toward the northwestern end of the ski loop, which turned out to be one of those, “Hey, I remember this spot” spots when I passed by years later. I also remember the late afternoon light, with the sky turning coral and the snow transitioning from white to the coldest blue.

In addition to my dad, brother, and Uncle Dave, my Uncle Jim was with us, sort of. Jim disappeared shortly after we departed from the parking lot near Allen Lake, and we didn’t see him again until after we had wrapped around the west side of the lake and approached a parking area on Windfeldt Lane. Jim was *flying* along a trail on the south side of the road, doing an activity that also involved skis but otherwise had little in common with our activity. My immediate thought was, “What is THAT, and why on earth are we doing THIS?” My dad told me that Jim was doing something called skate skiing (as opposed to the classic skiing we were

doing), and that he was getting ready for a ski marathon called the Birkiebeiner.

From the parking area on Windfeldt, we continued back toward Allen Lake, fun hills behind us and sweet light fading. I was struggling with fatigue and the newfound realization that classic skiing was totally lame. I threw my kick wax under the bus. The conversation with my dad went something like this:

Me: “Dad, I’m slipping.”

Dad: “Makes sense...snow has warmed up since we started. Put on some more green.”

5 minutes later

Me: “Dad, still slipping.”

Dad: “Alright, try some blue.”

3 minutes later

Me: “Daaaad?!”

Dad: “Okay, violet.”

30 seconds later

Me: “How much longer?”

I don’t remember my dad’s reaction to his wilting son, but I know from my experiences with my own daughters that it may have fallen short of Zen. It’s possible he left Hartman thinking I had ruined his day. But he didn’t stop taking me places. Chalk that up to the memory filter, fast-acting and common to most parents, that lets through joy while straining out the oh-for-Pete’s-sake moments. (Also, in my dad’s case, the oh-for-cry-eye moments.)

When I think of that day four decades





later, what bubbles up first is fun hills and late-afternoon light. That's probably what was floating around in both our heads as we drifted off to sleep that night.

MOST THRILLING

Twenty years on, back in Waupaca County. My parents had retired there to be closer to family and the cabin. I had just started my job with the Alliance. We explored every Ice Age Trail segment in the area, and we fell in love with it. Our favorite was the new-at-the-time Skunk and Foster Lakes Segment, with its "sure reminds us of Vilas County" topography and forest cover. (Keep an eye out for hemlocks.) "Took Mom to Skunk today," was my dad's frequent report when catching up by phone.

One winter weekend, I was visiting my folks and suggested to my dad that we skip the groomed ski trails at nearby Hartman and instead bushwhack-ski at Skunk. The suggestion seemed a dud for the first part of our outing: 15 minutes down a crusty, well-trod trail that led to Skunk Lake. The last part of the day's adventure was significantly better, but nothing exceptional: breaking trail on the

white-blazed loop north of Skunk Lake.

The middle part was a significantly different matter. Skunk Lake that day was covered with a hard crust of snow over the ice. On top of the crust lay an inch or so of powdery fluff. We ventured out onto the lake, happy to escape the rut that had brought us there. We skied a little bit here and a little bit there, enjoying the novel views to the shoreline instead of from it. I was then moved by some benevolent spirit to try skate skiing.

Neither my dad nor I had followed in Uncle Jim's footsteps; we didn't have skate skis (too expensive) and just farted around with the basic side-to-side movement now and then. Any experienced skater would have described our form as squirrels reaching for acorns at the end of a very skinny branch. But that day on the frozen lake, something unusual happened. Not unlike the people who get a railroad spike through the skull and can suddenly name all the world capitals, the blend of crusty snow with a little powder on top turned us into Norwegian Olympians.

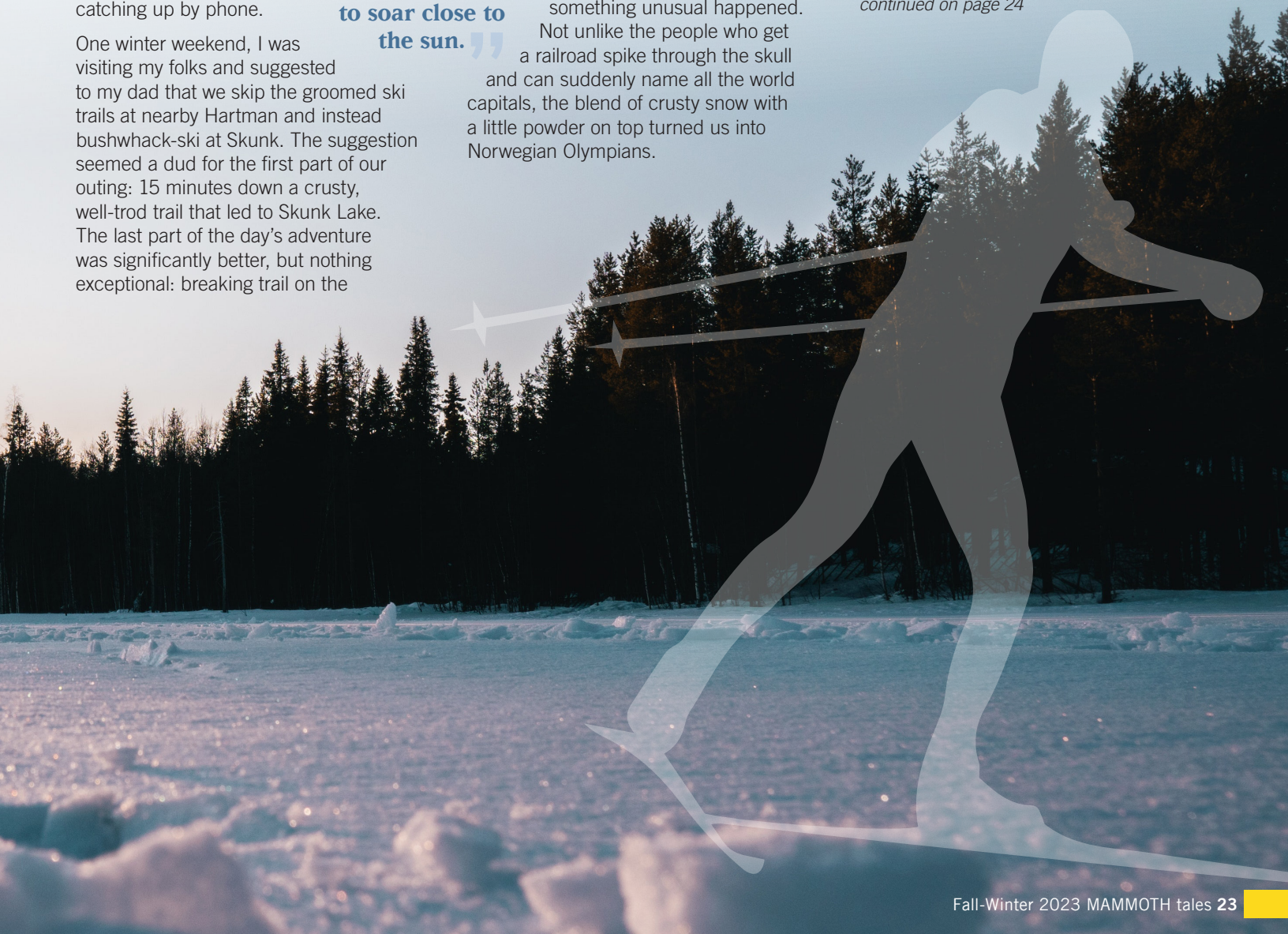
**"...buoyed
by the thought
that we had a few
minutes, anyway,
to soar close to
the sun."**

The positive feedback that came with the first stride, and each thereafter, was a shock. Each shift of weight was accompanied by a firecracker blast underfoot, then a giddily long glide on the opposite leg. I had never moved even remotely so fast on skis across flat ground. The experience was also tinged with dissonance, an inability to understand how this could be happening. Why don't I feel clumsy? Where's the friction? Have we stumbled upon the world's sole downhill-tipped lake?

For a good 10 minutes, we flew from one side of the lake to the other, two pucks on an air-hockey table.

Reality then set in. We weren't conditioned for this, nor did we have the right equipment. So, back to classic skiing. But buoyed by the thought that we had a few minutes, anyway, to soar close to the sun.

continued on page 24



WORST, AND BEST

In 2013, my parents left Waupaca to return to Madison. They landed in a home a short distance from the Ice Age Trail's Verona Segment. The portion of the segment passing through a ridgetop prairie south of McKee Road became their new favorite. "Took Mom to the prairie today," was my dad's new shorthand report.

In August of 2022, my parents transitioned from their home to an assisted-living apartment. My dad was being battered by leukemia, while also serving as full-time caregiver for my mom, who has Alzheimer's. As predicted, the move from their home to assisted living was very hard on my mom, which in turn was very hard on my dad. Several times a week, he texted my siblings and me with a plea: "Can someone take Mom for a walk? Not sure how much more of this I can take."

I answered his call one day in September and drove over to pick up my mom. As I entered their apartment, my dad started putting on his hiking boots. Apparently,

while I was driving over, my mom had told him that he needed to come, too. I took him aside and asked if there was any way he could stay home and take the break he needed, but he lowered his head, muttered something under his breath, and continued to the front door.

After a wordless 10-minute drive to the trailhead, we got out and started walking. It was a weird day... muggy, mid-sixties, but with a cold north wind and low clouds. Hardly the stuff of good cheer. For the first quarter-mile, I saw zero chance of this walk lifting anyone's spirits.

My dad and I had become armchair botanists in recent years, and our walks through the many prairies restored by Dane County Chapter volunteers took on an additional layer of excitement as we played name-that-flower. "What's that one?" my dad would ask. I would either state the name off the top of my head or consult the app on my phone. (Or, throw out a name with confidence and then check the app after my dad had turned his back.) "Rattlesnake-master," I'd say.

“My dad seemed whole again, unburdened.”

"Ah, that's right," he'd say. Sometimes, he'd make the opening bid: "Culver's root, right?"

Today was no different. About one-third of the way in, my dad's anger-induced tunnel vision started to ease as the plants began to grab his attention. Each instance of pausing to appreciate a different flower brought my dad to life, like a blow-up beach toy and a bicycle pump.

Purple giant hyssop, WHOOSH.
Tall boneset, WHOOSH.
Partridge pea, WHOOOOOSH.

By the time we started the final third of our hike, my dad was chatting freely with my mom and me. From where we were 45 minutes ago, the weather remained unchanged, but the atmosphere around the three of us was entirely different. My dad seemed whole again, unburdened.

Squint a bit as you watched him stride down the home stretch, and he looked little different from the fortysomething beaming as his child navigated a Hartman hill, or the sixty-something rocketing across Skunk Lake, no care in the world except where the boot would land next.



*The author's parents,
Springfield Hill Segment.*



Time Change in Waushara County

ERIC SHERMAN, MEMBERSHIP COORDINATOR

It isn't often I have a whole day to myself to go hiking, yet here I was: my wife and daughters visiting my in-laws in Chicagoland; me, arriving shortly after daybreak on the Ice Age Trail's Chaffee Creek Segment on a nice-enough April day. So happy and excited, I could have run from Madison faster than I drove.

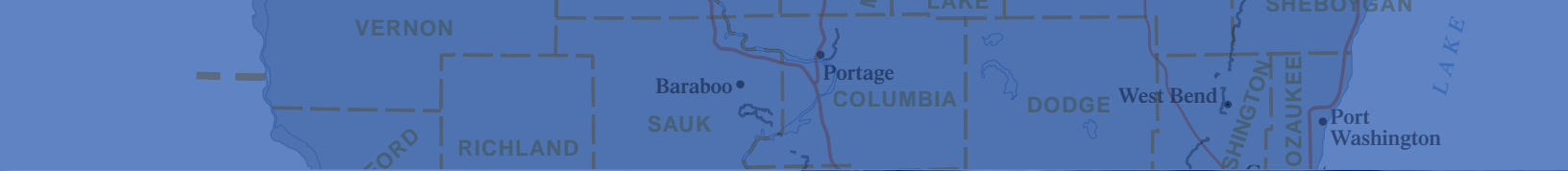
Bounding south from the cul-de-sac on 6th Avenue, I wandered through a stand of aspens, crossed a meadow and the bridge over Chaffee Creek, and then made my way toward the I-39 rest area. I was feeling cheerful but already running up against a common problem. When you are doing an activity you love but don't get to do often, time zips past much faster than it should. I checked my watch and was alarmed; I had already been out for 45 minutes. That meant only an hour until I had to return to the trailhead to meet up with a late-arriving friend. At the pace things were going, that hour would feel like 10 minutes. And then, we'd have only half a day left, which would probably feel like an hour. And then, back home, and then, wait another six months for the chance to do this again. And then, and then, and then. If the day was gum, I was chewing all the flavor out of it.

Fortunately, I had a tool on hand that corrected the flow of time: a Pentax SMC M 100/4 Macro camera lens. Manufactured in 1977 by Asahi Optical Co. of Tokyo, this chunk of metal and glass found its

way into my life via eBay about 20 years ago for the bargain price of \$75. With this lens, a camera can focus on things at very close distance. The lens encourages you to eat your photographic meals with a baby spoon instead of a grain shovel.

I attached the camera to my tripod and started to look around for interesting things. First, I noticed the black and white bands of a horsetail (scouring rush) on a bed of dried-up leaves. Then, 10 feet to my right, an oak leaf covered with a fist-sized swarm of ants... ants on top of ants on top of ants. Next, making my way down to Chaffee Creek, I noticed a single blade of grass standing strong against the current. Then I found a patch of watercress floating atop a bubbling spring. To capture each of these scenes, all I had to do was adjust the legs and head of my tripod, adjust the legs and head of my body, adjust the lens on the camera, adjust the lenses on my face, adjust the aperture and shutter speed, check the focus once more, wait for the wind to die down, and, finally, click. And then repeat the process in the event the sun came out or the wind kicked up in the moment between my brain telling my finger to press the shutter-release button and my finger following orders.

An hour of fussing in this manner relaxed me considerably. Things felt a little panicky before; now, all was mellow. Noticing a patch of skunk cabbage on the far bank of the creek, I smelled it, rather than



just seeing it, as before. Likewise, the creek itself now had a smell: marl, just like the nearby lake I swam in as a child. Birds in a nearby dogwood patch graduated from “birds” to ruby-crowned kinglets, song sparrows, and (for me) the first phoebes of spring, insistently notifying every other bird in Waushara and Marquette counties of their return. By slowing down and giving my full attention to this small portion of the trail, I walked into a different world, much more interesting than the one I had been inhabiting.

In a much-improved mindset, I ambled back to the car to meet up with my friend. We relocated west to bushwhack through State Fishery Area land. After a period of getting reacquainted, we spent the rest of the day enjoying the conversational equivalent of close-up photography, our talk as deliberate and meandering as the creek we were following.

By day’s end, time had been turned on its head. At daybreak, I had hours ahead, but they slipped by like seconds, more like Class III rapids on the Peshtigo River than the gentle waters of Chaffee Creek. Nearing the end of the hike, time truly was in short supply but, by then, minutes might as well have been days. After my friend hit the road, I returned briefly to the creek. As I sat down under a streamside white pine and snapped a final photo, the usual chatter in my head was nowhere to be found. The only thing left was the gurgle of the creek.



CLASS NOTES:

Father/Daughter Backpacking 101

ERIC SHERMAN, MEMBERSHIP COORDINATOR

"The forest smells so good...even better than the car, which smells like granola and cheesy bunny crackers."

– Pearl, shortly after arrival

"We need to lock these shoes in a safe and never smell them again."

– Pearl, shortly before departure

In October of 2021, I took my then-10-year-old daughter, Pearl, on an introduction-to-backpacking trip. We chose Polk County in northwestern Wisconsin, with a plan for a night of car-camping at Straight Lake State Park followed by a one-night backpacking hike on the Ice Age Trail's McKenzie Creek Segment.

Though I had identified several other segments along the trail's northern tier as strong candidates for our destination, ultimately, it was a rigged election. McKenzie is an old favorite of mine, a place where my wife and I enjoyed an epic day of hiking 15 years prior. A few lower-key hikes since have reinforced my high regard for it. To appropriate a turn of phrase from Aldo Leopold: I love all of the Ice Age Trail, but I am in love with the McKenzie Creek Segment.

What transpired on this most recent outing is well summarized by Pearl's quotes, above. Upon arrival, we were elated: Together!... Just the two of us!...In the woods!...It's fall! We then proceeded to take our lumps. By the end of our adventure, we were somewhere between lumpy and elated, which felt about right. Still in a joking mood, but also glad that the low points (which weren't *too* low) yielded experiences to learn.

In the interests of helping others who are planning parent/child adventures on the Ice Age Trail, and backpacking trips in particular, here are a few suggestions.



TIP 1: DON'T BE DISCOURAGED BY RAIN...

The morning after our first night's stay at Straight Lake, we fueled up at the highly recommended Café Wren in nearby Luck. From there, we headed to the McKenzie Lake trail access to start our hike. It had been a muggy fall, but not a wet one, with lots of days where it felt like it should rain

but didn't. This was the weekend the sponge finally got squeezed, with on-and-off rain for our entire seven-mile hike. Had you told us beforehand this was going to happen, we might have cancelled the trip. We were glad for what we didn't know, however, as we learned that hiking in the rain can be really enjoyable. The colors in the woods had a special pop, from the bright yellows of the decaying ferns and maple saplings to the deep reds of wintergreen berries and Virginia creeper. Smells were richer, too; it took no special effort to fill up on the aroma of forest decomposition, especially near pines. Mainly, however, the rain was enjoyable because it defied our expectations. As we made our way north, sometimes right along McKenzie Creek, sometimes on the ridge above, mostly at points between, the rain felt like a gift more than a burden.



TIP 2: ...BUT BRING THE UMBRELLAS

An earlier chapter in my life included a fair number of backpacking trips, and one thing that stuck with me from that period (and the accompanying obsession with gear) is the umbrella, which I learned about from ultralight-hiking guru Ray Jardine. For our hike, it proved again to be just the thing. Instead of having to stop repeatedly to put on or take off rain gear, we could just raise or lower our umbrellas. With the mild temperature we would have roasted in plastic clothing, but were liberated to dress as we pleased with the umbrellas up. Pearl found it entertaining to try and squeeze through archways of encroaching trees without getting her umbrella snagged. When the rain stopped, the umbrellas doubled as hiking sticks, and around camp, they doubled as mini gear shelters.

TIP 3: DON'T THROW THE BABY (CARRIER) OUT WITH THE BATHWATER

Speaking of gear: Parents, if you use a baby carrier like an Ergo or Baby Bjorn, hold onto it after your kids outgrow it, as it's a great piece of backpacking equipment. It nicely counter-balances a heavy load; I didn't feel the usual "how much longer?" backpacking disgruntlement until we reached Dinger Lake, more than five miles in. The frontpack is also a much better place than the backpack for your water bottle...no more grasping behind you blindly like a rake with a bent tine. The frontpack makes a good conversation starter, too, as those walking toward you may ask how well the carrier works for backpacking (after admitting with a smile to being mildly disappointed yours doesn't contain an infant).



TIP 4: KNOW YOUR CAMPSITE, AND DESCRIBE IT TO YOUR CHILD, BEFORE ARRIVING

Most of the walk in was smooth sailing and, in hindsight, we got a little carried away with the good vibes. Toward the end of our seven miles, the wheels started to fall off. Pearl, who had been chattering pretty much non-stop all day (even scolding me, at one point, for not holding up my end of the conversation), suddenly got very quiet. I asked a few times if she was okay, but all I got in return was an unconvincing, "Oh, nothing." It turns out that, aside from the obvious problems of being tired and soaked, she was worried about the terrain we were walking through, which had transitioned from the beautiful valley of McKenzie Creek, lined with towering white and red pines, to flatter ground and much younger, denser forest. She was concerned about where we would finally make camp, and upon reaching that spot, she started to cry, and stated that she missed her mama and little sister. My heart broke...what have I done? We sat down on a nearby stump, and I invited Pearl up on my lap for a hug and reassuring words. Given where we were, those words were hard to come by.

In planning, I had identified for our campsite a patch of county forest about a quarter-mile off the Ice Age Trail where primitive camping was permitted. It was next to a small pond that had, according to topo maps, a ridge on its western side. The pond turned out to be more of a swamp, and getting up onto the ridge

demanded more bushwhacking than we could stomach at day's end. We wound up on a low, flat, open area between the pond and a snowmobile trail. Though it was ultimately not a terrible spot, it was also charmless, and a far cry from the perfect site we had enjoyed the previous night at Straight Lake State Park.

My suggestion is to scope out your intended camping spot ahead of time, or go someplace you've hiked very recently and know well. This will help you paint an accurate scene not only for yourself but also your companion(s), so spirits don't nosedive upon arrival.

TIP 5: HAVE A PLAN FOR TENT TIME (LOTS OF IT, IN THE FALL)

As soon as we set up our tent, we started to feel better. We felt better still after enjoying our meal of freeze-dried pasta with marinara sauce and strangely bouncy meat bits. It was now 6 p.m., and Pearl cheerfully suggested we walk east along a part of the segment we had not yet covered. That was fun, and as we were crossing County O on the way back, Pearl spotted a mama black bear and two cubs crossing about a quarter mile up the road. After a few beats of staring in excitement, thoughts pivoted to the half-ass job I had done stringing up our food bag. We rushed back to camp and proceeded to execute a hoisting job that had me bursting with pride. Our food was now safe not only from bears, but also any teams of circus elephants that might wander through.

That brought us to 7 p.m., and darkness. I'm not the kind of person who has the skills or confidence to start a fire where there's no fire ring, so that was out. It had crossed my mind to bring along a few books or a deck of cards, but I left them behind when seized by ounce-count fever at the trailhead. So, the plan we backed into was to chat for a little while, then go to sleep, reasoning that the exciting, challenging day warranted an early bedtime.

Big mistake. There were a variety of factors at play that would have made it a rough night regardless: the swans on the pond were in a trumpeting mood, there were distant rumbles of thunder and flashes of lightning, raindrops blown off the trees drum-rolled our fly at perfectly



continued on page 22

irregular intervals, and humidity was off the charts — the word “dank” was invented so it could someday perfectly describe the inside of our tent. Still, the biggest problem seemed to be the restlessness caused by going to bed way too early. We tossed and turned for much of the night, and I recall at least three rounds of giving Pearl a backrub to help her drift back to sleep. Minutes passed like hours, and each check of the watch triggered a “You’ve got to be kidding me” response. Things really slowed down at 2:30 a.m., when nature called. Adhering to my least-favorite camping tradition, I laid there uncomfortably for a good long while, debating what to do. (In retrospect, the answer was pretty straightforward.) After an eternity, taking care of business was deemed the appropriate course of action. Out I went, shuffling toward the nearest tree, the fog of agitation just as thick in a standing position as lying down. For hours, from the confines of my sleeping bag, I had been picturing the sky as bringer of thunder and lightning and pelting rain and dank. Glancing up, however, I discovered that the sky was, in fact, cloudless, ablaze with starlight. Time, the weather, me... all now seemed officially jumbled ass over teakettle. Had my pee started drifting up toward the heavens, I would have simply shrugged and crawled back into the tent.

At 5 a.m., Pearl asked what time it was (answer: “Two hours until sunrise”), then asked if we could get up. That was followed by a fool’s errand of trying one last time to go back to sleep, before deciding we could take no more. Time to get out of there.

TIP 6: THERE’S NO SHAME IN A CAFÉ

At that point, I was even lower than I was the previous afternoon. My stomach was off, owing to the rough night and thoughts of the swamp water I had been drinking. (Even with five minutes of boiling, I had a hard time convincing myself it was sterilized.) Worse, with seven miles ahead of us and still 30 minutes from sunrise, Pearl announced she wasn’t feeling up for breakfast because of the butterflies in her stomach. We have gotten into trouble in the past when Pearl’s anxiety cuts

off her appetite, and I had a stretch of dread, imagining having to call 911, then imagining the account of our rescue in the *Amery Free Press*: **KNUCKLEHEAD ICE AGE TRAIL ALLIANCE EMPLOYEE NEEDS RESCUE ON HIS OWN DAMN TRAIL.**

Fortunately, the move away from camp, along with onset of daylight, cured our ills. An hour in, Pearl asked for breakfast, and I breathed the biggest sigh of relief. From there, the day got nicer and nicer, and our walk out turned out to be just as enjoyable as the walk in, shoe odor notwithstanding.

Next came the best part of our trip, and it wasn’t even on the Ice Age Trail. We drove back to Straight Lake State Park and jumped into Rainbow Lake. It was a cleansing dip, just on the right side of bracing, that rinsed away both the funk of a soggy 24 hours and the accompanying feelings of vulnerability, stress, and fear.

From there, back to Café Wren. Owing, I would guess, to my Norwegian blood, I tend to associate enjoyment of outdoor adventures with denial of creature comforts. Café visits vs. on-trail meals were something to be embarrassed about. For this trip, I’m so glad I was able to come down off the high horse and embrace my recessive gene for glamping. Never have a bowl of apple-sweet potato soup, a cup of coffee, a molasses cookie, and idle chit chat with one’s daughter been more savored.



Things That Might Happen on Your Next Adventure

Thoughts and Photos from a Trip to the Blue Hills/Superior Lobe Area

ERIC SHERMAN, MEMBERSHIP AND GRANTS COORDINATOR

You might find that a charming Rusk County campground is all but empty on a beautiful September weekend. This may contrast nicely with your experience trying to find a campsite in the middle of summer at a popular Wisconsin state park, where the opening of the online reservations period leaves you feeling like a homesteader during the 1889 Oklahoma Land Rush, blazing across the Plains desperately searching for someplace, any place, to pound in your stakes.

In defiance of your tendency to inflate the loveliness of past experiences, you might find that the walk-in campsite (#9) you spent a night in 10 years ago is somehow even lovelier than you remembered.

As you walk the perimeter of your site for a preliminary inspection, you might ponder whether the person who broke off part of your picnic table for firewood is the same person who, seeking atonement, perhaps, left a ¾-full bottle of Smirnoff cherry vodka in the fire ring. Realizing you didn't pack any spirits yourself, you might briefly ponder

what's the worst that could happen should you partake. Probably (hopefully), you'll think better of it and take a quick walk down to the dumpster and back.

During campsite setup, you may be pleased to learn that monastic study of YouTube tutorials on tying the bowline, power cinch, and taut-line hitch has allowed you to trim the fair-weather setup time of your camping tarp from 2 hours all the way down to 1 hour, 50 minutes. You might wonder how the same drill will go should you ever have to set up the tarp during a rain shower, when the tarp would actually serve a purpose.

Setting off from your campsite for some hiking on the Ice Age Trail's Hemlock Creek Segment, you might find that, within the first quarter-mile, the aroma of almost-ready-to-fall, recently fallen, and long-ago-fallen leaves fills your head to bursting, like the old cartoon character whose nemesis has crammed a fire hose in his mouth and turned it on

Hemlock Creek Segment.





Timberland Hills Segment.

full blast. Though you may not be a fan, in general, of aspens and other runty softwoods, on this hike, you might take a moment to reconsider, appreciating the unique, sweetly pungent aroma of their decomposing leaves. Further on, you might find that the sight and smell of a

carpeting of white pine needles momentarily turns you back into an 8-year-old, climbing the tree in front of your grandparents' house and getting your clothes all full of pitch (which your grandma had warned you about).

Rounding a bend, you might be pleased to encounter an old friend, the winterberry shrub, which triggers memories of lovely red berries rescuing an otherwise monochromatic day on a November hike years ago. Rounding another bend, you might be agitated to find an old enemy, buckthorn. It's possible you'll think that it grew in your area only, and you might despair that it's apparently everywhere now. Hopefully, you won't stew in those juices too long. Thinking about invasives is a stone-cold drag, baby. Today: not going there.

Mid-day, you may decide to take a momentary break from hiking and camping to head into town and meet up with an old Ice Age Trail friend. With any luck, he will recommend you gather at the best place in town (Lona's), and be able to speak from experience when telling you that yes, the biscuits and gravy are a good choice. After an enjoyable time hanging out, you may reflect on how cool it is to be able to pick up right where you left off with a fellow Alliance member who you see only once every five years. You may further reflect on how the Trail is as much about people as it is places.

Back on the Trail, because you saw a fisher on a hike on the Chippewa Moraine Segment a few years back, you might hold out hope that every flash of movement you catch out of the corner of your eye may have been a fisher (when in fact, it was squirrels). When coming upon the shore of a remote pond, you may hear the sound of what sounds like a large person doing a cannonball. Waiting patiently, you will hopefully soon discover that the sound is coming from a beaver slapping its tail in agitation on account of your presence in its corner of the world. You might ponder that scientists would tell you that your gawking while this beaver freaks out is actually taking years off its life, before thinking further that your taking the time to sit and watch quietly in a place like this can't possibly be bad for the universe.

Heading back to your campsite, as you pass by a swing set at the picnic area near the trailhead, if you have children you might get a surge of happiness at the thought of your kids, then a surge of sadness at the thought that your kids will soon be too old for swing sets. This may prompt you to vow to bring the kids along the next time you do something like this.

Finally, in spite of the fact that the best picture you typically get on hikes like this is from an iPhone weighing all of 6 ounces, you may decide to lug around on your weekend adventure a tripod suitable for Ansel Adams, two digital SLR camera bodies, six lenses, and an array of filters that you haven't used in 15 years but might be proven, on this trip, to be entirely worthless. That said, you may find the whole tripod-and-camera-setup process, and the subsequent image-composition process, to be a breath of fresh air, regardless of the quality of the pictures. Like making a phone call instead of sending a text, or meeting for coffee instead of making a phone call, you might decide that the world needs more activities that slow us down and fewer that speed us up.



Timberland Hills Segment.

An excerpt from *Mammoth Tales*, Summer 2318

Looking Back on Three Centuries: Big Changes and Some Fundamental Continuities

ERIC SHERMAN VER. 16.4.3, MEMBERSHIP COORDINATOR

In preparation for celebrations marking the Alliance's 360th anniversary, I was recently browsing a portion of our archive, focusing on items from 300 years ago. In spite of our leaders identifying it as a priority in each of the Alliance's past 114 strategic plans, our archive remains a dust-collecting assortment of shoeboxes in our basement, out of sight and largely out of the minds of our 57 staff members. Once I was able to make peace with the chaotic state of things, however, I dug in and found some fascinating materials.

One exciting discovery was an issue of this publication from the year 2018. In browsing through it, I realized how much certain things have changed since then. For example, the publication references the work of glaciers in creating Ice Age landforms. A few years later, it must have come as a shock to readers of this publication when the preeminent glaciologists of the time turned the Ice Age world on its head. These scientists, of course, discovered that our state's topography was the work not of ice sheets, but rather a herd of highly advanced mastodons and woolly mammoths. As tribute to Lichenestra, the goddess of moss, these beasts moved mountains to construct the landforms now highlighted along the route of the Tusk Age Trail (née Ice Age Trail).

Further reading highlighted further differences. The hard-working volunteers of 2018 labored endlessly to eradicate our most treasured wildflower, child's spirit, then known by a less-endearing name, garlic mustard. They spent countless hours clearing our virgin glossy buckthorn forests. Oh, to be able to go back in time and wander those glorious, endless tracts of pure buckthorn — how utterly happy it would make us! Alas, we can only hope that these volunteers, working hard to preserve species diversity, just as our modern Tusk Age Trail Alliance volunteers do, found great meaning in their work and enjoyed every



minute...yet also didn't take themselves too seriously, understanding that best practices are always a moving target. After all, within a decade of this publication, the pines planted by the godfather of the Land Ethic, Aldo Leopold, were felled to make way for native prairie wildflowers and grasses.

Elsewhere in the newsletter, the executive director thanked more than 2,000 volunteers for their remarkable contribution of more than 79,000 hours of work. One can hope that, in the thick of their hard work, these individuals allowed themselves to daydream about a time like the year 2318, when the Trail is 100% complete, has convenient camping options every 10 miles, and is widely recognized as the world's most enjoyable hiking trail. The renown for today's Trail is due in no small part to the groundbreaking approach — pioneered just a short time before this old issue of *Mammoth Tales* was published — of exceptionally thoughtful trail layout, design, and construction practices.

Another item connecting past to present in this antique issue of *Mammoth Tales* was a list of new Thousand-Milers. Gazing at the list of those who crossed the finished line in 2018 made me wish I could go back in time and ask these hikers a few questions. What was your favorite segment? How many miles a day did you average? Were you ever lost? Our "trail

talk" hasn't changed much over the centuries, and neither has the fact that the bold adventurers of 2018, like modern Thousand-Milers, probably found something significant on the Trail: a new perspective, growth through adversity, much-needed open spaces. Or, on a lonely stretch, a helping hand where none was expected.

The last page I glanced at helped make the most direct connection between then and now. A photo showed past recipients of the original Spirit Stick happily passing it along to 2018's recipient, a woman named Dolly McNulty. Those pictured are either beaming or shedding tears of joy; you'd be hard pressed to find a happier-looking crew. These folks would likely say that the thousands of hours they contributed to the Trail were a great investment. This has been a constant from the start of our project...we have a thriving community of kind and generous individuals, and each minute of time we give to the Trail is reflected back in the form of enriched and happier lives. Much has been said about what we do to move the Trail forward. Just as much can be said about what our involvement does FOR US.

Having come to the end of the old issue of *Mammoth Tales*, I realized it was past time to pivot to more pressing tasks on my day's agenda. I got up, stretched my achy back, sneezed a few times from the dust I had stirred up, then decided that what I really needed was to sneak out for a quick walk on the Ice Age... er, Tusk Age Trail.