

Thousand-Miler Essay

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My dream of completing an IAT thru-hike did not start when I was a child. I did not grow up with a dream of hiking from the western side of Wisconsin over to the east side. In all honesty, I did not even know the IAT existed until December of 2020 found me searching the Guthook app for trails that might be done in 2 months or less. 2 months was the maximum amount of time I could take off from work and still have a job upon my return.

It did not take much planning time to see that the IAT would be a logistically tricky beast to tame. I made use of every IAT resource I could find, and there are a lot of them: IAT atlas, IAT guidebook, IAT interactive resource map/website, Thousand-Miler-WannaBe FaceBook group, camping/mileage spreadsheets, books written by previous thru-hikers. As with most hiking trips, planning for the IAT was more about understanding where to find information and help than it was about making an itinerary.

IAT Step 1: Create a plan.

IAT Step 2: Get punched in the face.

IAT Step 3: Find a new plan.

IAT Step 4: Repeat.

My favorite memories of the IAT are of the people we met along the way, the random acts of kindness that could not be planned for. Strangers swooped in and turned terrible days into wonderful nights. Some of our trail angels were official IAT coordinators while others had never heard of the IAT and were just happy to help people in need. Trail angels gave us shelter during storms, rides into town, food and water, one even opened up her wellness center business to my wife when she hurt her back and had to jump off the trail.

Thoughts for future IAT hikers:

Take your time. If I could do it all over again, I would take 12 weeks instead of 8.

Do not underestimate the IAT. The trail miles are challenging and the road miles are grueling.

Reach out to the IAT community early and often. The trail coordinators we met were happy to receive updates on their trail segments and hear from the hikers traveling on them. The people are amazing and the land is beautiful.