

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, or so the saying goes. The fact that my husband, Mike, and I took that first step together on the Ice Age Trail in 2017 has made a world of difference to me. I learned so much about the geography, geology, and culture of Wisconsin, possibly as much or more as people who were born and raised here. I learned my physical limitations and how to adjust to them. I learned about hiking, what equipment to use, how to deal with challenges, when to continue on, and when to throw in the towel. I learned about healthy eating, tick repellent, mosquito netting and hiking boots. I learned not to quit, but to keep coming back. I learned about the goodness of friends, family and strangers alike in helping us to meet our goals. I learned so much about the flora and fauna of Wisconsin, especially wildflowers, trees, beaver dams and porcupines. In addition, I learned about John Muir, Ray Zillmer, and perhaps just as importantly, about spouse and myself.

Highlights of the journey were many and varied, ranging from spiderwort in fields of the Lodi Marsh to beaver activity and pristine lakes throughout the north woods, to the Chequamegon National Forest in fall. Challenges included blown down trees in the Parnell and Ringle segments after bad storms and high water and fast current crossing the Newgood River.

Both the highs and the lows, and everything in between, have worked to give me an experience of a lifetime. This experience is something I will remember fondly and share with others. It has given me a greater appreciation of the incredible natural beauty around us, and motivated me to be more of an advocate to save and share these special places. I am especially thankful for having been able to slow my life to walking pace on the trail and once again learned to take life's challenges one step at a time. A journey of a thousand miles may begin with a single step. However, after a thousand miles, I'm not sure the journey is over. Hopefully, the lessons will carry forward, and perhaps in some ways, a new journey has just begun. It has truly been a pleasure and an honor to complete my journey on the Ice Age Trail.

*Mary Smaly*