

Goood morning hikers!!!

Toward the end of my journey I was asked several times why I started hiking the Ice Age Trail. My story usually started with, "I was recovering from knee surgery in December 2018 and nine months later it still wasn't going well; so I started walking." After building up from a half mile path around where I lived, I started branching out to walk/hike trails in city and county parks within an hour of me (Whitewater at the time); finally, I ran out of them. I had not been a hiker ever in my life, but hiking seemed to take over my life.

I found the Ice Age Trail just into the pandemic in June 2020. As I lived alone and then worked at home alone, I needed some company. I found Get Off the Couch (GOTC) via Facebook and started hiking with them. I chased the yellow blazes almost every weekend – meaning like 65 of 68 Saturdays at one point including hiking in -20F and well into the 90s. I wasn't the fastest hiker; I didn't hike the most miles in a day; I didn't get a fun trail name (or one at all for that matter). I did gain confidence in myself (and my knee). I gained many, many new friends. And, I gained an appreciation of the wonderful state of Wisconsin, roads and all. Ok, maybe not all of the roads, especially the ones I hiked in the summer.

I was about 500 miles into the trail before I said to myself, "I think I can be a 1,000 miler." Then, right on cue, on Memorial Day weekend 2021, I picked up a type of Lyme disease, Anaplasmosis. It knocked me on my ass for the rest of the summer in 2021. I slowly started hiking again in the fall. This time I started hiking to recover from the debilitating effects that it had on me, physically and emotionally. Then I started to plan how to finish it. I found that many northwestern sections are treacherous to reach between November and April, and believe me, I tried; I didn't say my plan was perfect. I also enjoyed my hikes more by hiking about one (long) weekend a month. That allowed me to hike 3-4 days in a row in some northwestern areas and I didn't have to drive back and forth to Waukesha as much.

Besides a tick getting me (lucky me), I got bit by the hiking bug. Lucky me!

I learned...

- My Honda Pilot can hold a queen air mattress and I don't mind sleeping at rest stops.
- The Thousand Miler Wannabees Facebook page brings strangers together. Thanks Paul, Lee and Michael! (and SO many others).
- I greatly enjoy hiking with my new partner, Debbie.
- Good shoes/boots, great socks, permethrin, handwarmers and a positive attitude are a requirement on the trail; everything else is extra.
- Boots need to be replaced after 500 miles or so (or get extra band aids, lots of them!).
- Be prepared for dogs on the CRs, if not with a horn or hiking pole, at least mentally.
- Roads (CRs) should be hiked and enjoyed in the late fall and winter months.
- "10 more minutes!" really isn't 10 more minutes.
- Be VERY careful where you park if you're hiking in a snowstorm as the road will need to be plowed and your car might not be there when you get back. Yes, there is a story there. There are lots of stories.
- Ice Age Trail volunteers, Trail Angels and landowners are people to be thanked over and over.

I pushed myself; others pushed me. I encouraged others and they encouraged me. Many turned me in the right direction. I wouldn't have finished without the support of GOTC and so many others along the trail. A special "thanks" to the Ice Age Trail Alliance and all of their work and to everyone I met along the way.