

Matt 'Trail Mix' Helmeid

During the pandemic in 2020, my wife and I decided to move our family back to Wisconsin to where we were both born and raised. As an avid hiker and backpacker, I had spent the previous 13 years in Phoenix, AZ where I frequently hiked the desert, mountains and canyons. When we decided to move, I knew I needed to find a new hiking home as well – and that is where I found the Ice Age Trail. What began as a 'this would be fun' idea, the Trail quickly became a focal point of my life, along with my brother and hiking partner, Ben 'This Side' Helmeid. Together, we plotted out the entire length of the trail in 56 total trips. Some were 20+ mile day hikes, and some were multi-night backpacking trips. We began our adventure in October 2020 and typically hiked during the winter months to avoid crowds, ticks and heat. Having never winter camped, this was a whole new experience for us and we loved it. We camped in negative temperatures, snowshoed various sections and made it a point of pride to not let cold or snow keep us from the Trail. To hike in winter became something of a badge of honor for us and 41 of our trips took place between October and March, with our final hike taking place on Saturday, March 2 as we completed the Sturgeon Bay segment to finish the 1,100+ mile line.

My favorite part of the experience was spending countless hours with my brother and sharing the planning, logistics, hardships, highs, and lows of the adventure together. We saw bears, eagles, river otters, heard wolves, encountered friendly locals, and discovered so much about Wisconsin that we never knew. It's a bittersweet feeling to know our hike is done, but I find solace that it will never truly end.