

Michael Weldon

A cautionary tale: Hiking in the winter has severe hazards and so far, I've survived the lessons.

Part 1: The highlight of my adventure was when I collapsed on the Holy Hill Segment within sight of Glassgo Drive. Going north from the IAT/Pleasant Hill Rd., I immediately encountered my first open field and my wife and I contemplated ending the hike because we couldn't see the Trail. I tested the snow's depth, and I felt the Trail under about 4 inches of snow - no problem. But my hiking experience took a turn for the worse midway across the field. I stepped off the covered trail into snow up to mid thigh. Where was the Trail? I decided to keep trudging along. By the time I got to .7 miles from Glassgo Drive, I was exhausted. There before me was yet another field to cross!

I was so fortunate to have cell service - it saved my life. I called my wife and told her to hike back to the car and pick me up at Glassgo Road, thinking I could get that far. As soon as I ended the call though, I collapsed against a tree. I was feeling awful - weak and nauseated. I'd never felt so bad. I'm diabetic and can always tell when I have low blood sugar. This time I never felt it. I'd taken care of myself since I began this journey in August without incident. Trudging through heavy snow and burning all my calories, left me extremely tired. I collapsed with little warning. I knew I was in trouble and gratefully was still able to call 911.

It took the Sheriff and EMS team an hour to reach me. I couldn't explain my situation well to 911 and dispatch thought I was at the IAT/Glassgo Rd intersection. The rescue team used snowmobiles and found me hunched over and blacked out against a tree. (Later we finished this Segment and found my power drink next to a tree. What an eerie moment to see the exact spot where I was so close to death.)

I am incredibly grateful for the entire rescue team that came to help me, Washington County Sheriff's Office, Hartford Dispatch, and the 911, fire, ambulance, and snow teams. The staff at Aurora Medical Center Hartford Emergency Room were wonderful.

The lesson: Eat even if you don't feel hungry and drink fluids even if you're not thirsty!

During our final hike through the St. Croix River Segment, I felt empty while my wife was crying with gratitude for the accomplishment. I was thinking "what comes next?"

The hike was exercise I enjoyed, and I plan on continuing a five-to-eight-mile hike weekly. I am going to revisit some IAT Segments and look for new trails in the Madison area.