

MY THOUSAND MILE JOURNEY

May 20, 2020 - January 28, 2023

“Let’s do it!”

“Yes! Let’s.”

“How long do you think it will take us?”

“I don’t know but I think we could do it in 3 years. Should we make that our goal?”

“Okay! Let’s get started!”

And so the journey began. And WOW! What a ride it was!! Never have I ever done anything so awesome, so powerful, so unexpected, so crazy, so difficult, so fun, so meaningful, so...EVERYTHING! And the icing on the cake, the cherry on top was being able to spend two years, eight months, one week and a day with my best friend, my partner in crime, my F-Bomb bestie...my sister: Tweedle Dum!

This time on the trail has taught me so much about myself. I always knew I loved a challenge but sometimes this was a challenge beyond what I thought my mind could endure. And many times it was indeed a mental challenge. But I did endure!

Before beginning the IAT I wasn’t in love with Wisconsin. I have lived here all my life but mostly in urban areas. This experience has completely changed my mind-set about our beautiful state. Who knew such beauty existed right here?!? I never want to leave!

Throughout my journey people would ask me why I took this on. Why would I want to walk the entire state? Am I crazy? Well, yes I’m crazy...and many times while on the trail I did ask myself that very question: Why *am* I doing this? But after giving it some serious thought the best reason I could come up with was “why not”?

Looking back I can say some of my favorite things about life now (thanks to the IAT) are being in absolute silence listening only to my footsteps

shuffling through the path, watching the fresh-fallen leaves dance on the road as I follow my sister to our parking spot, camping in the Northwoods, the darkness of the tree bark against the autumn colors, the aroma of the pine forests, the haunting wind in the trees, a single track tree-lined view, and the view of the yellow blaze (which is *a/ways* your friend), getting awards and patches...the list could go on and on. So yes, why not? Why not hike this gorgeous state?

My final random thoughts about this experience:

Switchbacks are much better than straight up or down.

The Leopold Bench is a sight for sore feet, legs or back; and sometimes all three.

Fall is my favorite time of the year.

Hiking awards and patches make me feel like a kid in a candy store.

YakTrax and hiking poles are your friends.

Cows are my absolute favorite.

CR's don't have to be boring, especially when passing a bar.

Drunk walking makes the miles go faster.

Beavers are very industrious animals.

Water crossings are not as scary as I once thought.

Winter hikes are another kind of beauty.

Dells of the Eau Claire is my favorite.

Gibraltar Rock is a close 2nd.

Even the hills on Harrison Hills have hills.

Hiking the rock wall of Devils Lake with snow, ice and 40 mph winds is not a good idea.

I almost died only once (see above).

Not paying attention *a/ways* adds extra miles.

When hiking Underdown east to west it's proper name is "Over-Up".

Fraction 'street names' really exist.

And so does "Uphill both ways".

Anyone who speaks "trail-talk" is my friend.

Meeting people on the trail is fun, especially when it's Buzz, Butch & Huck.

I can pretty much deposit my DNA anywhere.

Two open car doors make a great bathroom.

Signless segments are a bummer.
I found where hell freezes over.
Determination is in my soul.
My sister is my ultimate best friend.
And...don't forget to look back; sometimes the best view is behind you.

I will *forever* look back on this journey as a special time in my life. Thank you to the IATA, the Chapter Coordinators, the trail maintenance folks, thank you to EVERYONE who make this trail possible! A special thanks to my trail buddy, my sister "Tweedle Dum" for sharing this experience with me. It was a metric F-ton of fun!!!

HAPPY TRAILS!

Nancy Lehman aka "Tweedle Dee"
Finally...A *THOUSAND MILER!!!*