

My Ice Age Trail Journey --- Sept 25, 2021 thru Dec 2, 2023

It all started with a goal to run a 5k in 2020. It evolved into a LOVE of hiking.

I began by exploring all hiking trails near my home not even realizing I was on the IAT. Then a friend invited me to hike one segment per month (thanks Bethany) and that turned into hiking ALL the segments and quickly realizing my goal-oriented personality was not going to let me get away without becoming a Thousand Miler and CR's here I come!

The more I hiked the more addicted I became. Not leaving gaps and highlighters mean so much more to me now. I appreciate the newfound love I have for the state I have lived in my whole life and can't believe the beauty that was in my back yard this whole time! The most surprising thing about hiking the trail was finding my people. I had always enjoyed solo hiking and when I started meeting strangers on the internet, I didn't realize so many people like me were out there. I appreciate each and every person I met from the trail, from new hiking buddies to trail angels willing to sacrifice their time to give me a ride. Thank you to all the volunteers that maintain the trail and all the landowners willing to let us hike on their properties. I met people from all walks of lives but with the same goal in mind and willing to help each other out. I will forever be grateful to have met Karen & LuAnn who were once strangers and now great friends. They made so many miles possible and the trail so much fun! I couldn't have completed this goal without my number one fans, my husband Justin and son Chase. They supported me, cheered me along, joined me on hikes and even provided foot rubs after really long days.

Now that this journey has come to a close the IAT has not seen the end of me yet, as I plan to volunteer with my local chapter to give back to the trail I love. I would also like to re-hike some of my favorite segments. My top five include: St Croix Falls, Dells of Eau Claire, McKenzie Creek, Plover River and Point Beach.

My most memorable hikes were:

1. Parrish Hills in December after a fresh snowfall, it felt like walking into Narnia. Temps when we started the hike were at -11 degrees and we were shocked to find the river crossing NOT frozen over!! I will NEVER forget this hike!
2. Parnell during a thunderstorm, that included pouring rain, hail, lightning and thunder. I swear the weatherman did not predict this or we would not have gone!
3. Taking my shoes off and hiking thru the water on the Point Beach Segment. I felt like I was on a beach vacation.
4. Deerfield, Bohn and Greenwood Segments. I don't know what it was about this hike but I remember the feeling of pure joy the day I hiked these trails.
5. My final hike on Holy Hill & Pike Lake with my best hiking buddies and family by my side. I couldn't have asked for a more perfect day that ended with tacos!

The question I get asked most is what is next? The truth is...I don't know. But what I do know is that this is definitely not the end but the beginning of many adventures to come!

Nicole Gaiche (aka Fireball)