

I began just hiking in the northern Kettle Moraine for several summers, not really thinking about completing the entire trail. I'm old, that would be craziness. My sister-in-law finally put the idea in my head that I could accomplish this feat. I first started recording my hikes on Dec 4, 2021, when hiking with a group of women on the Cedar Lake, Slinger, and Pike Lake segments. My journey had officially begun. In July of 2022, I responded to a request from two women from the Lake Geneva area, looking for a shuttle and/or another hiker. Liz Abel and Barb Makovec became my constant hiking buddies. Liz was the planner and my miles recorded really took off. In Sept, we added another person to our group, Mike Mudler. He was just beginning his journey, so he and I would hike at other times, trying to catch up to Liz and Barb on the sections they had already completed before we met.

Over the winter, we concentrated on the connector routes and kept on racking up the miles (Jan 2023 totaled 112 miles for me). I spotted my first snowy owl on one of those CR, it made the long road walk worth it. Once the snow cleared to the north, we headed back on the trails. The havoc wreaked by the late heavy snow was unbelievable, but with each trip north, we saw the evidence of the volunteers at work clearing the trail. THANK YOU!

By now, we were hiking far enough from home that we needed to do 3- or 4-day trips and increasing our daily miles. We received many recommendations for hotels, restaurants, and sights to see from various people who had already been in that area. On one occasion, we stayed at a thousand miler's parents house near Cornell. Wonderful people. We loved seeking out the Mom-and-Pop places of businesses, they were able to give us so much more information about the area in which we were hiking. Some even posted our pictures on their websites, to show their enthusiasm for what we were doing. Meeting new people along the way from various parts of the state was wonderful. I loved hiking in a group, no one leaves at the end until all are out the woods. No one gets left behind, and everyone encourages others when needed. It is definitely a team effort.

On Aug 23, 2023, Mike, Twila and I reached the Western Terminus. My journey was over, except for one mile I had saved in my hometown. I wanted to finish with family and friends. So, on Sept 5 at 6:06 p.m., I crossed the finish line. (On round one.) I am already planning on revisiting some of my favorite segments; Gibraltar Rock, Northern and Southern Blue Hills, Dells of Eau Claire, just to name a few. In my notes from each trip, I have noted to go in a different season to further experience God's wonderful creation. God has been with me every step of the way encouraging me when needed and listening to my comments of both compliments (on the beautiful vistas), and complaints (too buggy, or too hot, or oh my aching feet). The Ice Age Trail is truly a thing of beauty and the wonderful insight and dedication of all those that made it a reality, is awe inspiring. Thank you. Wisconsin and the trail communities are proud to show it off and I have learned so much about our wonderful state. Happy 43rd birthday!

NolaRae Asmus