PRESS KIT

Organization Profile: Ice Age Trail Alliance

For all media requests, please contact
Lysianne Unruh, Communications Manager
Lysianne@iceagetrail.org
608-798-4453, ext. 228

Introduction to the Ice Age National Scenic Trail

The Ice Age National Scenic Trail is a thousand-mile footpath winding across Wisconsin, showcasing some of the nation's most beautiful natural areas along the way. One of only eleven National Scenic Trails in the United States, it follows the terminal moraine left by retreating glacial ice, immersing users in the fascinating, world-renowned Ice Age features of Wisconsin.

More than 12,000 years ago, an immense flow of glacial ice sculpted a landscape of remarkable beauty across Wisconsin. That glacial period, known as the Wisconsin Glaciation, left behind a varying and scenic terrain. As the glacier retreated, it left behind a variety of unique features: moraines, eskers, erratics, kettles, drumlins, kames and dells. These glacial remnants are now considered among the world's finest examples of how continental glaciation sculpted our planet.

The Ice Age Trail meanders through 30 counties along the general outline of the glacier's outermost advance. Uniformly marked with yellow blazes, it's composed of unique, individual segments connected to each other directly or by unblazed rural roads (also known as connecting routes), making it easily accessible for all Wisconsin residents.

The Ice Age Trail is a space where people of all ages and backgrounds come together to work and play. This linear park winds through woods, farm fields, small towns, and large cities, making Wisconsin's natural beauty accessible and available to both rural and suburban populations. No matter where you live in Wisconsin, you can find a segment of the Trail that's not too far from home and worth exploring. Head out for a rejuvenating day of hiking, backpacking, or snowshoeing through some of Wisconsin's prettiest natural surroundings.

The Trail offers a little something for everyone. Long stretches of uninterrupted tread through quiet Northwoods forests meet the demands of backpackers looking for a multiday adventure away from it all. Closer to home, the Trail

weaves in and around more populous areas, such as West Bend, Janesville and St. Croix Falls, satisfying those seeking a brief, after-dinner jaunt to recharge life's batteries with plenty of fresh air. For the scientific-minded, the story behind the kames, drumlins, eskers and erratics seen along the Trail invites a lifetime of investigation, while for the artistic crowd, there are innumerable spots, both quiet and grand, that will inspire the author to pick up her pen and the artist to grab his sketchpad or camera. And, perhaps most importantly, the Ice Age Trail provides an outlet for those who like to give as well as receive, with volunteer opportunities to match most any talent.

Economic Benefit of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail

Wisconsin's tourism and travel industry widely recognizes the Ice Age Trail, one of only eleven National Scenic Trails, as a crown jewel in the state. The economic impact of the Trail is quantified at over $355 million (and growing) annually. Its notable rise in popularity is reflected in the 2.3 million people from across the country who use the Trail each year. Convenient to a tri-state area, 18 million Americans living within a two-hour drive of the Trail are able to enjoy its benefits.

The Ice Age Trail Alliance

The Ice Age Trail Alliance (IATA) is a nonprofit volunteer- and member-based organization whose mission is to conserve, create, maintain, and promote a thousand-mile footpath tracing Ice Age formations across Wisconsin.

Established in 1958 (and then known as the Ice Age Park & Trail Foundation), the IATA has more than 5,000 members across the nation, and celebrated 60 years in 2018. This longevity is a testament to effective public, private, and corporate partnerships, active collaboration, and strong financial support. An important corner stone in these efforts are the 19 IATA volunteer chapters, organized throughout Wisconsin, whose members actively support the organization's mission.

The IATA works cooperatively with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), National Park Service, local governments, businesses, and private landowners to protect, promote, build, and maintain the many segments of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail.

Another celebrated milestone, in 2020, included the 40th anniversary of the Ice Age Trail becoming a National Scenic Trail. Although the Trail is not yet complete and more than 500 miles of gaps remain between sections of it, the IATA remains focused on a premier, continuous, permanently protected Ice Age Trail. This steadfast commitment is reflected in the 676 miles of Trail that are open and actively used by Trail enthusiasts.

A Beneficial Partnership: Ice Age Trail Communities
Most of the yellow-blazed Ice Age Trail segments fit the image of a traditional, off-road hiking experience. Some segments, however, lead hikers right down the main streets of 142 Wisconsin communities, connecting people with the Ice Age Trail. Currently, 13 municipalities (with more joining each year) have chosen recognition as an Ice Age Trail Community, underscoring the Trail's positive economic impact, locally. Together, the Ice Age Trail Alliance and Trail Communities promote the unique qualities that make the Trail, and the community it travels through, a meaningful destination.

Ice Age Trail Landscapes
Through the eons, the landscapes along the Ice Age Trail have been shifted, shaped and eroded by wind, sedimentation, hardening of molten rock and the movement of water and glacial ice. The Trail showcases the dramatic effects of continental glaciers.

Colossal ice sheets repeatedly gripped the Earth during the Ice Age of the past two million years. Ice sheets are the largest glaciers, and unless you travel to Greenland or Antarctica, it may be hard to imagine their immensity. They can be two miles thick and stretch for more than 1,000 miles. The modern glaciers found at some of America's national parks are mountain glaciers—mere rivers of ice. Ice Age ice sheets were like oceans of ice with lobes along their margins similar to gulfs or bays.

Glaciers scrape, sculpt, carry and drop materials of all sizes, from tiny particles of clay to huge boulders. During the last period of the Ice Age, more than a third of the Earth's land was impacted. Some materials were deposited directly by the ice while others were transported by the meltwater that flowed over and away from the ice sheets. Glaciers and their meltwater piled material into particular landforms that we call moraines, drumlins, kames and eskers.

The Ice Age Trail is one of the best places to witness many of the landforms created by continental glaciation. The most recent period of the Ice Age, which slowly ended about 10,000 years ago, is known as the Wisconsin Glaciation. Most of the landforms of the Ice Age Trail were created near the end of the Wisconsin Glaciation. Some features are much older. Along eastern segments of the Trail are occasional outcrops of 400-million-year-old dolomite. The bedrock at Dells of the Eau Claire and Grandfather Falls is approximately 1.8 billion years old.

Rounded boulders scattered along the Trail (sometimes piled in fencerows By farmers) were likely carried by glaciers from sources far to the north. These are

known as erratics. Some erratics were carried from as far away as Canada. Rocks that look like and come from local bedrock are not erratics.

As you hike the Ice Age Trail, look for evidence of past glaciation. Take the time to speculate how far an erratic traveled to reach its resting place. Guess how large the block of ice was that created a kettle. Envision a torrent of sand-laden meltwater gushing through a valley. Imagine a thousand feet of glacial ice above a kame.

Additional Resources:

Mission and Vision

History

About the Ice Age Trail

Staff Profiles

Annual Report

Videos

Economic Impact of the Ice Age Trail

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