

I retired at the end of May, 2018, and completing the trail was one of my retirement goals. My emotions on completing the trail were akin (I imagine) to finishing a marathon. It feels like an accomplishment of persistence, fitness, and endurance.

I took many pictures along the way and many of them were published on the weather page of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. This added to my enjoyment of being outdoors, exercising, and completing the trail. I have also submitted photos to the Guidebook Photo Contest.

One impressive thing about the trail is the sheer length of the moraine and kettle lake topography. This truly gets impressed on you as you hike along. In some areas where there are connecting roads you can see the moraine in the distance. No doubt the IATA is working on getting access to that land! I was also impressed with some of the massive erratic boulders that you see along the trail.

I don't think I ever saw beaver dams and beaver lodges in the wild before I took on hiking this trail. I also noticed muskrat lodges, which I don't recall seeing before. I saw two porcupines in the wild, also a first. I also saw a bear, a coyote, deer, eagles, sand hill cranes, many white swans, etc.

One thing I learned is how comfortable you can be hiking in the winter. No bugs! Speaking of bugs, I used a foreign legion style cap with ear flaps during bug season and this did the trick. I did not feel the need to also cover my face. Another tip for future hikers is to bring extra socks. On one hike I had to wade through two streams in cold weather. No problem. I had extra wool socks. On other occasions after hiking eight miles or so (and biking the same amount) I got a second wind just by changing my socks.

While hiking the trail, I also took the opportunity to visit nearby State Natural Areas. Some that stand out are the Bear Caves State Natural Area, with its world class boulder train, the New Hope Pines State Natural Area, and the Blue Hills Felsenmeer.

Some of the connecting roads are pleasant, but the busy highways are not. I would like to see the State work with the IATA to expand shoulders or allow trails in public right-of-way along these busier highways. This trail is an immense asset to Wisconsin. The tourism potential is enormous. There could be lodges, hostels, and inns to stay in along the way, like there are for the Camino de Santiago in Spain.

Another improvement would be to prohibit logging within 50 yards on each side of the trail. I passed many logging operations on my hike and I am concerned that the wonderful scenery we are hiking through is being taken down. A one hundred yard corridor for the trail would also be great for wildlife.