

## **Beginnings**

**Ric Leitheiser**

December 26, 2020. I stood at the head of the trail and breathed in deeply. Hemlock and cedar filled my senses as I took my first step. I had just begun my 1,000 mile journey. Moments earlier, as we gathered in a small circle in front of the terminus rock, my wife Amy said a prayer of thanks, of hope and of health. She and my friends wished me well and I was off.

Amy is not running with me. It's hard for me to write that because of how much I know she wants to be there with me every step of the way. She has been struggling with her running – knee injuries and a recent stroke have held her back from running and from this dream. She has recovered physically and is doing some hiking and even some short runs but emotionally she is struggling to accept her limitations. But she is happy for me and I am so lucky to have her here, supporting me and experiencing this with me, if only in the way she can.

Amy is the real runner and the only reason I began running in the first place. I was an athlete, participating and competing. But I wasn't a runner. Too boring, too hard, too whatever I needed to say to get out of it. But after while I saw how much Amy loved it, how it made her so happy and how it connected her with so many fun, healthy people. So at the age of 40, I joined her and her running group for my first real run. It was hard. So hard I could not run with the group. I had to craft my own route and stay close to where we started so I could get back easily. Getting back meant coffee and donuts and after the first week that became my motivation. But after a while, one mile became two and two became three and pretty soon, I was a runner.

Amy was the first one to declare her goal of running a marathon, something I swore I would not do. Mostly out of stubbornness but it also seemed so daunting, so not possible. But in 2011, at the age of 47, she did it. Qualifying for Boston in her marathon debut. I was incredibly proud. One of the most emotional moments I have had in any sporting event was watching her turn the corner onto Boylston toward the finish. She was crying and I couldn't help myself from crying with her as the gravity of what she had just done sunk in.

That moment, when I saw how finishing made her feel, was the moment I decided to run my own marathon. It didn't happen right away. I wanted to do it but had so publicly declared I would never do it that it took me some time to say it out loud. I also needed to be confident that I could do it and to not fail. Saying I would never do it was me sort of saying I don't think I can finish therefore I won't even start. I quietly began to increase my mileage and I grew more confident. With that, my friends grew suspicious and the secret was out.

I chose Chicago. Close to home, a somewhat familiar route and about 1 million people cheering me on. It was incredible and I imagine that was what Amy felt like as she experienced the Boston route. Its an unbelievable community of people. All shapes and sizes and ages and backgrounds. All working, at their own pace, toward one common goal – finishing. Working to make the most with what they have. Reaching their own goals, setting their own PRs , supporting others in hopes they can accomplish the same.

I finished. No BQ for me but I had not expected it. I was more than satisfied. I had finished a marathon before the age of 50 and I thought I was done. Back to 5Ks, 10Ks and half marathons. I was going to be 50 and knew my running days were numbered. I just wanted to participate again and enjoy the coffee and donuts.

But then Amy said – hey , we will be 50 next year so let's run a 50K. It was another beginning and it changed everything. In spring of 2014, ten of us signed up for a trail ultra and we began to train. The event was scheduled for October on something called the Ice Age Trail. I had heard of the trail. It was close to home. I had likely been on it, but it wasn't identifiable to me. It was just that trail down the road that went somewhere. I had no concept of what it was, where it began or where it ended. And I didn't know that it would become such an important part of my life.

All ten of us began that 50K journey together and all ten of us finished the race. Not at the same time and not in the same place mentally, emotionally or physically. Everyone took something different from it. For me, it was at the same time one of the most difficult and one of the most beautiful things I had ever done. Not just the run itself but the training. I so looked forward to the Saturday morning long runs. A train of 10 people weaving through the woods, sweating, freezing, swatting deer flies and mosquitoes, and discovering this thing called the Ice Age Trail. Now that I had finished my first ultra, I was hooked and it was the beginning of another chapter for me and my new found relationship with the IAT and with my son Alex who was one of the ten.

I am now newly retired. That word sounds so terminal, so final. When I tell people that I am retired I usually follow it up with some version of how I am starting something new, beginning a new chapter in my life, not ending one. But aren't all endings really just that though – a new beginning. Something ends so something new can begin. And an ending for some is a beginning for others.

So there I was, 16 years after my first run, standing at the eastern terminus – my beginning. It was a half hour before sunrise and as near as I could tell we were the only ones in park. The smell of Christmas was still in the air and most people were likely still in bed sleeping off that holiday hangover. There was light dusting of snow on the ground and some soft flakes in the air. It was cold and it was cloudy but it was the beginning of a good day.

## **A Two Eagle Run**

There was no drama on this first run, something I hope to say every time I go out. I didn't get lost. I didn't get hurt. I enjoyed every moment. The first segment, the Sturgeon Bay segment, runs the length of the park, takes you on a tour of Sturgeon Bay and then heads out of town to the south on the Ahnapee State Trail. The park is beautiful but a bit challenging with sharp granite rocks lining the path. Along the lake in winter, a thin layer of lake spray turned to ice can make for a bad day if you don't watch your step. But it can also provide some creative ice sculpting if you have time to look up as you run.

As you exit the park, Waterfront Mary's Bar and Grill greeted me with its palm tree Christmas lights. Not too much going on there early in the morning the day after Christmas but looked like it could be a fun spot almost any day of the year. As I wound my way into and through town and down to the harbor, I spotted what I hope to be just the first of many bald eagles along the way.

There are a few twists and turns as you make your way through Sturgeon Bay and I did have my atlas map to help guide me. But the City of Sturgeon Bay has apparently embraced the IAT as it was clearly marked with blazes all the way to the Ahnapee State Trail which starts near Cherry Blossom Park on the south side of town.

As you exit Cherry Blossom Park, you wind through a thriving industrial park. Sturgeon Bay seems to have it all, a vibrant downtown, a thriving industrial base, including the ever busy shipyards, all set on a beautiful stretch of Sturgeon Bay shoreline. The Ahnapee State Trail runs 48 miles from Sturgeon Bay to Casco Junction along the line of the former Ahnapee and Western Railway. 17 of it are part of the IAT as it makes a perfect connection for the trail in that part of the state, linking the cities of Sturgeon Bay, Algoma, Kewaunee and Casco Junction.

The State Trail is flat and as straight as you might imagine any rail bed to be. That may sound easy, but straight and flat can equal long and monotonous. The trail however was anything but that. It runs through a wetland area just south of Sturgeon Bay, where I saw my second eagle of the day as it flew up from the tree line as I was passing. The wetland must be prime deer hunting area. I stopped trying to count the deer stands that I saw along the way although one in particular does stand out. About a mile in on the west side of the trail stands a worn but functional tree stand with sliding glass windows, a 360 degree view, and a TV antenna that is sure to pick up the Packer game. Apparently, deer hunting is important but not as important as catching the game.

My first day ended in Maplewood. Where my second day began.

## **Maplewood**

Maplewood today is an intersection with a few homes extending in either direction, creating the sense of place and helping drivers notice its presence. At some point, it was likely more thriving than it is today, with what was a hotel that housed up to 75 guests, now turned a bar and grill, and an old granary, now turned into someone's storage for firewood and other odds and ends. It is a town like many throughout Wisconsin that was the center of commerce for surrounding farm families. As those farms went away so did the families and so did the commerce. There are a few very nice homes left but the main intersection has a least two vacant buildings and the old granary that looks like its fading fast.

The pride of Maplewood, at least from an outsider vantage point, is Holy Name of Mary Catholic Church. It was the first thing I saw as I neared town. The steeple rises up to the east of the trail and is visible well before you get to town as the church is built on one of the few hills in the area. The church is red brick, with the soaring steeple overlooking the town and the cemetery. We didn't go in but you can see from the outside that this is a source of pride for Maplewood and is now likely the center of the town's spirit.

The Forestville segment of the trail begins at Hwy 42 in Maplewood and has a new parking lot complete with men's and women's restrooms which were open for use even at 7am in December. Thank you Maplewood!

The Ahnapee State Trail takes you straight south to Algoma through Forestville, another larger than Maplewood but fading community along Hwy 42. On the way are several interesting plaques depicting the history of the building of the railway, the Forestville Depot (which as far as I could tell is no longer there) and the derailment at Forestville. It's incredibly scenic as you run through the Ahnapee River watershed area. I saw two more eagles soaring and scanning the river as I crossed over the bridge. As you near Algoma, the trail is lined with cedar and aspen and periodically allows peeks into adjacent parks, campgrounds and idyllic farms.

I ended the Forestville Segment in Algoma, where my third day will begin.

## **Connecting Routes**

The IAT is not complete and today is roughly 600 miles of trail and 600 miles of connecting route or CR. CR is technically any route to get from one segment of the trail to the next, mostly on roadways. To be a 1,000 miler you need to finish all of the connecting routes, not just the trail segments. You can make up any connecting route you want but need to hike or run between the trail segments to be recognized as a finisher. What I have heard is that the CRs can be as interesting as the trail, taking you on roads and through towns that you would normally not experience.

Despite the glowing reviews of CRs, I was dreading this first day as the of CR ran pretty straight and flat for 12 miles from Algoma to Kewaunee. It was snowy, windy and cold and I was expecting to be in for a long morning.

I started at the Crescent Beach Parking area in Algoma, where I had finished the day before. On most days, you are able to run the boardwalk along the beach to the south end of town. That day the boardwalk was covered in snow and not distinguishable from the beach so I headed up to Hwy 42 and ran the shoulder through town. The sun was making its way to the horizon as I headed out of town and created what I decided to call a six-color sunrise. Pinks, golds, yellows, greys, blues and purples took their turns at painting the sky. I enjoyed the view as much as I could as I dodged traffic, snow and ice along the highway.

At the south end of town, you turn to the west away from the lake for a mile or so – that day into a stiff breeze. I was happily greeted by a man shoveling his driveway and apparently enjoying the sunrise as much as me. As I ran down the road to the west, I could not see the intersection where I was to turn south and it already seemed like it was going to be a tough and boring morning.

I finally found my turn, Longfellow Rd. It turned out to be anything but boring. It had some turns and some hills and more so had some of the most beautiful homes and barns and views that I had experienced all weekend. The road did straighten out and the farms became larger with alternating snowy fields and fence lines until they gave way to large lake homes as you neared Kewaunee.

It was my third day of double digit miles and I was tired and cold. I was to finish at Clock Tower Park in Kewaunee and I was hoping it was on the north side of town, not the south, as I was ready to be done. As I started my descent into Kewaunee I could see a clock tower and hoped that someone had the sense of putting Clock Tower Park next to that clock tower so I could be done. Once I saw Amy walking across the road toward the tower, I knew that was it and I drifted into town completing my first big weekend of running the IAT.

### ***Eat Locally:***

Trattoria Dal Santo in Sturgeon Bay – the dinner was wonderful and I can't take my mind off of the dessert – Pumpkin Cheese Cake with caramel drizzle. Beautiful downtown spot with a great view of the snowstorm while we ate.

Bridge Up Brewery in Sturgeon Bay – great spot to while away a snowy afternoon. Great beer, free popcorn, a 1970s console stereo with turntable and lots of vinyl. The cool retro couches made you feel like you were hanging out in your parent's basement circa 1978.

Kunkels in Kewaunee – Post run breakfast locale. Special of the day was a large (emphasis on large) pancake with two eggs. Added a side of bacon and a bottomless cup of coffee and felt the local flavor.

## How Far Is it?

The IAT is made up of about 600 miles of official trail and 600 miles of connecting route. It has a bifurcation or alternate route in the center of the state – if you choose the eastern branch of the bifurcation it totals 1,147.4 miles and if you choose the western branch it totals 1,146.7 miles. If you choose to do both branches it totals 1,229.3 miles. Confused? I am and most are. That's why its often just simply called the "Thousand Mile Journey".

Either way you look at it, it is long and it traverses the entire state from east to west and, as it dips toward the Illinois state line and then back up to some of the northernmost counties, it covers most of the state from north to south as well. It's a terrific way to see the entire state – both the natural beauty and the diversity of communities throughout.

My goal is to cover it in contiguous but not continuous segments from east to west. I aspire to about 80 days of running or about 14 to 15 miles per day over the course of a year or so. That's my goal today but I am willing to adjust as necessary depending on our calendar, the weather and my soon to be 57 year old legs.

After my first big weekend, I took a few days off but then charged back up to Kewaunee to begin where I left off – Clock Tower Park. What I did not know last week when I stopped at Clock Tower Park but have since found out is the clock in Clock Tower Park is the World's Tallest Grandfather Clock. Built in 1976 for the U.S. Bicentennial by a local manufacturer, Svoboda Industries. It is 36 feet tall and alternates its three faces of morning, noon and night.

I arrived at Clock Tower Park at 7am and was joined by our friend Terrie (nee Swoboda) whose great grandparents had settled in the area - relationship to the clock makers however is unknown. Amy snapped a picture and Terrie and I headed out of town on the Ahnappe Trail which once again served as a proxy for the IAT. The track was soft from the recent snow. A big thanks to the trail groomer and the hiker pulling a sled which combined for miles to provide a somewhat solid surface in middle of the trail. Regardless, the pace slowed considerably compared to the prior snowless weekend.

What the trail lacked in traction it made up for in scenery – both natural and scenic and unnatural and curious. For the unnatural and curious, the trail runs on the rail bed on the edges of village and rural properties – perfect spots to hide a lifetime of collecting. Hide, that is, until the railway went away and hikers began to traverse the trail. We saw wood piles and scrap metal piles, a significant number of bee hives and old pickup and delivery trucks. There was also a solid inventory of spare parts for trucks, appliances, farm equipment – all waiting their turn to be reused - someday.

The most curious thing we saw was a desk and chair just off the trail in the middle of a field with no home or barn nearby. I guess in these days of COVID, you need all options for working remotely.

This section was called the Kewaunee River Segment and covered 12 ½ miles from Kewaunee to Casco Junction. It passed through a tiny town called Footbridge and past Bruemmer County Park as well as two separate sections of C.D. "Buzz" Besadny State Fish and Wildlife areas and the C.D. "Buzz" Besadny Anadromous Fish Facility. My curiosity was peaked. Just who was C.D. "Buzz" and what is an Anadromous Fish Facility?

Well C.D. "Buzz" is famous in conservation circles in Wisconsin having served the WI Department of Natural Resources for 40 years and under three governors and was labeled "Father Nature" and as "Wisconsin personified" by the Milwaukee Journal. This 2,632 acre wildlife area was named after him as was the fish facility, which provides trout and salmon stock for the Lake Michigan fishery. Anadromous by the way means fish that swim up stream to spawn. Now you (and I) know.

The wildlife areas were glowing as ice crystals were forming on the forest and grassland areas all morning. By the time we were done, the trees were shimmering.

Terrie finished on the Ahnape Trail and I tried to bite off a little bit of the following CR – all road for 25 miles. I was tired but as I transitioned from the snowy trail to the hard road surface it felt as if someone had removed two weights from my feet. I was only able to eke out two more miles though as my support crew looked hungry and anxious to be done for the day.

I finished at the corner of Hawthorne and Luxemburg where I will begin again.

### ***Eat Locally:***

Rose's Family Restaurant in Luxemburg. Bright and clean. No specials on the menu so I had the Belgian waffle with coffee and bacon. Seemed appropriate in the heart of Belgium farm country.

### **One Mile Squares**

A few hundred years ago, when settlers were laying out their communities, they settled on six mile by six mile areas for townships which were further divided into one mile by one mile or 640 acre sections and then further divided into 40 acre parcels for farmers to occupy and cultivate. Roadways were laid out around the sections and the result was a perfect grid of one mile squares. Whatever they used to measure their miles a couple of hundred years ago synced exactly with my Garmin as my watch rolled a mile each time I hit an intersection and made for a great way to pass the miles.

Kewaunee County is the middle of farm country. There were farms and farms and more farms over the course of my 15 mile run. Farms mean farmhouses, farm smells and farm dogs and I had the pleasure, sort of, to experience all three.

First the farm dogs. I only encountered three but it was early in the run and it got my radar up for the remainder of the day. The first farm I passed had two dogs that appeared to have the run of the yard, a beautiful golden retriever and a menacing looking german shephard. I saw them and immediately prayed the owners had either trained them well or installed a heavy duty electric fence.

They picked me up as I approached, and barked and ran along with me as I moved past the house and then the yard. I was getting comfortable that the owners had put in the proper safeguards for people like me, when suddenly the golden retriever bolted out of the yard and across the road right at me. I thought the german shephard would follow but he halted at the ditch. The golden ran hard straight at my heels and got within a couple of feet when she pulled up, sniffed and turned back around. My heart rate went up 20 beats for the next few hundred yards then another 20 when I saw the next dog. The next farm house had a husky that probably outweighed me and she barked quite bit as she watched me

pass. But she stayed put and I continued to run on without incident. That was the last dog of the day but I will surely encounter more as I move along. I will certainly need to develop a strategy for dog interactions if I am going to run confidently over the next 1,000 miles. Hoping they are all friendly seems too optimistic.

I understand that Kewaunee County has the highest concentration of dairy cows per acre in the entire state of WI. I didn't see a lot of cows, I think they were all milking that early morning, but I certainly could smell them. There was the sour smell of manure, either building up within the confines of the barn or the manure pit or freshly spread across the frozen fields. There was also the sweet smell of silage being fed to the herd. I didn't mind either smell one bit. I grew up near and currently live in farm country so I know well and can appreciate the smell of Wisconsin's finest.

The one smell that sort of overwhelmed me though was not familiar. As I came down Townline (mile 7 intersection) and neared County F, I began to smell something that was really overpowering and not too pleasant. As I rounded the corner and headed south on F, I came upon a rather large calf ranch. I had never seen one this large and I had never smelled one either. And this was a crisp 20 degree January morning. I cannot imagine what that smell must be like on a hot and humid mid July morning. Because of the consistent one mile squares, I knew I had exactly one mile on F before I turned back to the east on Sleepy Hollow and away from the ranch. That was the longest mile of the day.

Each of the farms I passed were a bit different. Most of them though contained a barn, some a shed or two or three, and all a farmhouse. Farmhouses were usually two stories with a porch, now enclosed as a practical matter, or some yet open for sitting or stacking or just because their occupants appreciate the beauty of what is a good solid open porch. Some were recently painted, some were not, all mostly white. Except those that were made out of cream city bricks and had not seen a coat of paint in all of their years. Those still looked as perfectly light brown or golden as the day they were built.

In some places the road names matched the names on the farms. Belter Farm, established 1883, on Belter Rd. and Prah's Silverstreak Farm on Prah Rd., evidence that families have continuously occupied and farmed this land since the settlement days. Crossroads that may have once had names bore evidence of past commerce. Old abandoned granaries stood empty and some not too straight. And large homes that looked like they may have once been boarding houses or general stores or both were likely the center of activity for the families in those one mile squares.

I ended this run in the middle of the connecting route at the corner of Old Settlers and Manitowoc roads. It was halfway between Ellisville and Bolt or you might say, the middle of nowhere, except I suppose if you happen to live there. I will return there soon to pick up where I left off and to tackle the next leg of the journey.

### ***Eat Locally:***

Today we chose Clubhouse Diner, Mishicot. It appeared to be lady's day or at least lady's morning as I was the only man in the place. The special sounded good to Amy which consisted of two pancakes, some fresh smelling strawberry preserve topping and enough whip cream to hide everything else. I had the breakfast burrito with some nicely spicy salsa. Christmas decorations were still up and the waitress carried a pocket full of candy canes for what I presumed were her customers. The only disappointment of the morning was that we did not get one.



$$d = (r \times t)$$

I love the simplicity of just being dropped off at the place I finished my last run and picked up where I intend to finish the next run. But I also do not want to make this journey alone. I want Amy to not only be there to support me I want her to be able to experience the trail as much as possible as well. I also want to run with my friends and eventually my sons. That said, we don't all run at the same pace and are not all committed to run 15 miles each day. So things can get a little more complicated.

Today's run planning brought back memories of the familiar algebraic formula from high school –  $d$  (distance) equals  $r$  (rate) times  $t$  (time). Or, if Ric starts at point A and runs  $x$  pace and Terrie starts at point B and runs  $y$  pace in the same direction as Ric and Amy starts where we intend to finish, let's call it point C, and runs at  $z$  pace and comes toward us and then turns around to meet us at the finish, where does Terrie need to start and how far can Amy go before she needs to turn around so that we all meet at point C at the same time.

Collectively we did not have the ambition or the recall from our story problem days to sit down and calculate the exact answer to the question, but we did spend a lot of energy thinking and talking about it before we finally decided on our plan. And, at the end of the day, we came out just about right. That, despite my decision to change my route about 10 minutes before I started.

Today's route was part CR and part trail segment. We needed to run down the road, eventually through the town of Tisch Mills and find two separated trail segments, neither of which had a designated trailhead. All week, we studied the IAT Atlas, the Guidebook and the IAT Alliance GIS interactive map. Terrie even plotted the route on MapMyRun. But what we have learned over the years is that while the roadways are normally clearly marked, there are no flashing lights and billboards where the roadways meet the trail. Sometimes there are well marked trailhead parking areas but more often than not there are small, sometimes hidden, IAT signs tucked back from the road. And in new territory and in the dark, they can be very difficult to find.

So in addition to all of our pre run prep, we spent some driving the route and looking for the trail entry points prior to the run. It was dark and they were hard to find, but we found them and we were much more confident in the day's run knowing the route. On the way to my drop off point, we traced Terrie's CR route in the car. Her CR route was aligned to the IAT Alliance GIS map but not to my 2019 edition of the Atlas. But her route was much nicer on quieter roads- and was one mile shorter. It was an easy, albeit last minute decision, to change my route – and well worth it.

My original route was to take me 3 or 4 miles down a county highway into Bolt, WI where I would hang a left and run mostly straight east toward Tisch Mills and the trail segment. Terrie's route headed east down Old Settler's Road to Sleepy Hollow Rd and ended in the same place. Old Settler's and Sleepy Hollow Rd were as quaint and as quiet as their names suggest. I didn't meet one single car along the way and the only sign of life I saw stirring on this cold early Sunday morning was a man standing on his second story balcony in his bathrobe having a morning smoke. As I ran past, I could not help but be concerned for the man's health and safety. Not because he was smoking and not because he was barely clothed on this frosty morning. But because he was on a balcony that was one size smaller than he was and it looked to be ready to break off its supports at any moment. I just waived and kept running.

My run took me down Sleepy Hollow and Old Settlers then headed down Nuclear Rd., likely a nod to the nuclear power plant to the south and east. It took me past Deer Run Dairy, one of the largest dairy operations I have ever seen, situated right across the street from tiny Sleepy Hollow CSA, advertising vegetable and herbs for sale. And finally, in Tisch Mills, the route ran through the main intersection with Fat Boyz Bar and Grill on one side and Third Eye Yoga on the other.

I could not help but think of the contrasts in each of those and wondered how they could coexist in such close proximity to each other. Then as I was headed out of Tisch Mills, I saw a few signs that seemed to help me make sense of it all. One sign said something like, Welcome to Tisch Mills. Thanks for visiting. Please follow the rules. Then there was a sign containing the ten commandments and finally a sign that said – Welcome to Tisch Mills. No Mayor. No City Council. Life is Good.

It struck me that this was a town that was comfortable with itself and its beliefs but could also handle diversity of thought or approach. It could live with its past and its present, with large dairy operations and small CSAs, and with those that made Fat Boyz what it was and those that supported Third Eye Yoga. Each of these coexisted with no political infrastructure to tell them how to do it. They just “follow the rules” and get along. How refreshing.

Before I close this chapter of my journal, I have to say something about the trail segment as it had been a while since I had gotten off the road. The trail segment is split by a short CR in town. The northernmost part of the segment follows the East Twin River through a wide valley with high ridges on either side. Be careful as I had quickly gotten off the trail and away from the river as I took what appeared to be a four wheeler path through a frozen swamp. I finally found the yellow blazes of the IAT again half way through and was happy I did as the river was partially frozen and running beautifully through the valley into town.

The southernmost trail section takes you on a short trail through Weber Woods and crosses Tisch Mills Creek. No bridge though. Each of us separately tried to step across the frozen snow but the water was flowing and the snow bridges gave way to wet feet. We decided to back track and run each side of the creek separately to make sure we completed the full segment without getting our feet completely soaked. I finished the trail segment and decided to keep running down County Hwy B so I did not have to look forward to that busy road on the next leg of the journey.

I finished at the corner of Holmes and Rabitz Rd, where I will begin again in a few days.

### **Eat Locally:**

We stopped at Two Rivers Family Restaurant in Two Rivers. Best diner of the journey so far. It was busy with the Sunday morning breakfast crowd and the special was the buffet. None of us are fans of buffets, so we ordered off the menu. We all had some version of eggs, bacon and French toast or pancakes along with another bottomless cup of coffee. 5 stars to the wait staff as we were attended by no less than four during our short stay. The food was very good and the final tab was ½ of what it was for a similar breakfast in Luxemburg. We will go back.

## Sightseeing

I was going to call this one the “Three Eagle Run” but there was so much more to see beyond the awesome seat we had for the eagle viewing. As we ran down the road toward the Mishicot Segment trailhead, we saw what appeared to be an eagle flying across the field and maybe one sitting in a tree. But as we moved further along, we decided that we were likely just seeing things. The one in the tree looked too small from a distance and the one flying around was no longer visible. Likely just big crows.

We ran about 100 yards down the trail when this time I clearly saw an eagle flying across the field again, and Terrie, at the very same moment, saw one sitting 40 feet above us in a tree. We stayed and watched the perched eagle for a few minutes and, it seemed, so did the eagle watch us. It was incredibly close and majestic. I see more and more of these each year but always stop and stare in wonder at their size and beauty. I don’t think it took its eyes off of us as we stood there trying to take pictures with our frozen fingers. We did manage one good picture between the two of us and headed out of the woods only to see a third eagle soaring across the field and toward the tree line ahead. I turned to look back and saw two eagles in the tree we just passed and knew this new sighting was the third of the day.

We had set out about a half hour before sunrise, which has become our routine. On cloudy or foggy mornings, there is just enough light to get started. The roads were slushy and somewhat slippery this morning and we watched our footing carefully as we headed down the first three miles of CR to the head of the East Twin River Trail segment.

We are still in farm country. I suppose that defines much of what we will see as we work our way across the state, though it seemed the farms were becoming smaller and the buildings becoming more challenged. Some were leaning, some were opened up to the elements and some were on their way down, beyond repair. One creative property owner painted messages of prayer and modesty to those passing as one last ditch effort to provide their buildings with a purpose.

The East Twin River Segment was once again a true trail segment. There was not much snow on the ground and the little ice that had formed was somewhat crunchy so the footing was relatively solid as we moved through a lowland cedar forest along the East Twin River. There were many board walks and bridges providing safety from wet feet, although these short wooden platforms were extremely slippery. But slowing down was not a problem as it was a very peaceful segment that we were not in a hurry to get through. It gave us glimpses of the river, adjacent farm fields where I can imagine the farmer passing away an afternoon on his or her tractor and enjoying the peace and beauty of the land, and a couple of notable and curious sights.

The first was what looked like a metal sculpture in the middle of the woods. It was attached to a fallen tree trunk and looked like a rocket ship or the head of the Tin Man from the Wizard of Oz. What I think it really was, was a trash receptacle with a pointy lid – either for decoration or someone’s version of squirrel proofing. The next curious spot was the Thompson Family Maple, a huge hundred plus year old silver maple complete with a sign designating it as the family tree. There was no other information about the tree but it was interesting thinking about why they might have named the tree. Terrie thought that maybe it is where the Thompson “family tree” started one night down near the river.....

We had a short CR as we exited the Twin River Segment and passed Amy as she was doing an out and back. My directions said to turn right on Princ'l Rd. then cross Assman Rd. to the next trail head. Yes, Assman Rd, like the Seinfeld episode. As I was studying the route this past week, I came across that road name and thought the road sign would make a great picture that I could share with my friends. But there was no sign. I guess if you live on Assman Rd., you don't necessarily want a sign. That, or the area kids keep stealing it.

The eagle field was a bit trying as the top layer of dirt, or worse, manure, was not frozen and very slippery. We made it through upright but with a lot of slipping and sliding along the way and headed into Mishicot via Pit Road. Pit Road, probably named for the now overgrown, hard to distinguish gravel pit that defined the area, was now a quiet, wooded neighborhood with many nice homes. The road was still gravel and slushy but it was a nice back road entry into the Village of Mishicot.

Mishicot has embraced the IAT like I hope many communities along the trail have. The yellow trail blazes guided us easily through town. Kudos to whoever laid out the path, which was a very scenic way to show off the Village. We passed a restored 1870's schoolhouse with a very nice cupola that once or maybe still houses the school bell. It is now a museum and research center. Not sure what they are researching in the Village of Mishicot but it was apparent they have taken great pride in preserving the old school.

Across the street was the newer, old school. A three-story brick structure that likely once housed the high school. It was boarded up and just waiting for someone with a vision to restore and reuse it. The trail continued down the village streets past pretty homes and tidy store fronts toward the river and the park. The entrance to the park was a covered bridge, a rare sight anywhere in WI or beyond. It wasn't an original covered bridge, however, as it was first covered in 1995 after it was closed to traffic and converted to a pedestrian bridge. Historic or not, it was a beautiful bridge leading to a scenic park right in the heart of the village and along the East Twin River.

We headed past the schools to the east edge of town to meet up with Amy, namely to change into my road shoes and take a small break before we headed out of town on the next CR. Amy was nowhere to be found. She had gotten turned around and I think was on the other side of town looking for the designated intersection. By the time she arrived we had gotten a solid break and were ready to tackle the next and last 5 miles of the day. It was the first time, but not the last time, one of us will get lost along the way.

The CR ran out of Mishicot straight to Lake Michigan where we would stop for the day before heading into Point Beach State Park. CRs have mostly been quiet and scenic but when they run along county highways, they can be busy and flat. This one was busy but not flat. We wondered for most of the stretch how we could be running up hill to the lake. While it flattened near the end, I still don't know where it ends up heading down to the lake except maybe a sharp cliff at the beach.

We stopped for the day at 13.1 miles or a perfect half marathon, Terrie's first in over a year. It was a fun run with a good mix of road and trail and farms and village. There was a lot to see and it made the miles fly by. We start again in a couple of days at Rahr School Forest, a Manitowoc School District Preserve which takes us into Point Beach State Park and then the City of Two Rivers.

### **Eat Locally:**

We found ourselves back at Two Rivers Family Restaurant and were not disappointed. Highly recommend it to anyone in the area. The waffle today was as good as the French Toast last week with a more than you can eat portion of bacon and two eggs.

We have also been frequenting 310 Mobil Mart at the corner of Hwy 310 and Cty B. It's the perfect distance from home for an early morning bathroom break and a coffee and Gatorade refill. We aren't sure what they think of three runners coming in early in the morning 3 or 4 times in the course of a couple of weeks to use the bathroom. The ladies at the counter are all very friendly but there is a gentleman having coffee and holding down the one table in the place that looks at us suspiciously each day. I engaged him with a question today and got a slight nod as an answer. Although I'm not sure if his nod meant yes or a no.

### **100 miles**

As I was planning this run some months ago, I was focused on where I would land as I crossed the 100 mile mark. That was a number that, to me, would make it seem like I was really doing this thing. It was material and had some critical mass to it and would provide me with a sense of how this run across Wisconsin could really happen. Well, I crossed that milestone today. There was no fanfare. I don't even remember exactly where I was when it happened and I didn't actually think about it until I was done for the day. But I did it. I passed the 100 mile marker and I do really feel like I am on my way.

I finished yesterday at 109 miles. That is almost right on track to cover the distance within my goal of 80 days. I started 24 days ago and have run 8 times over the course of those weeks. I am running 13 to 15 miles a day and I think that will get me to my mark if I can keep it up. So far, tired legs and some plantar fasciitis are the only challenges I have had but nothing to stop me from going back out each time. Amy and I have talked about the calendar and how we might progress along the trail as the months go by. I do want to keep going but don't want to feel pressured to maintain a calendar. I am enjoying it so much and I don't want it to become work. And besides, the faster I go, the sooner it will be over. And then it's over....

Today I covered three segments. A very pretty and relaxing Point Beach Segment, through the Rahr School Forest and Point Beach State Park. A shorter, and somewhat harder, City of Two Rivers segment. I could feel the brisk wind more sharply as I ran the city streets and along the lake. And finally, the Dunes segment that connected Two Rivers to Manitowoc through a beautiful wooded preserve but with a difficult and icy trail.

Through all of today's run there was light snow. I have been lucky to have snowflakes in the air the last couple of days out. It always makes the day softer and more peaceful and even warmer. I was worried about the weather starting in late December. Winter running is something I have done without hesitation for a number of years, but it can be more difficult and it can alter your plans. Biting cold, wind, ice and snow cover can make for much more challenging days. I have had a little of all of those things in my eight runs. Enough so I don't forget its winter but not enough to really slow me down. I am hoping the weather will hold but have lived here long enough to know it will not.

The 10 miles through Rahr School Forest and Point Beach State Park were the highlight of the run. The guidebook had me concerned for my route as there are many crisscrossing trails throughout the park. Rahr School Forest had maybe 10 trails and Point Beach another 5 or 6 each providing many opportunities to take a wrong turn. Except for a few hundred yards before I hit the beach, I managed to easily find and stay on the trail. There was great signage and the trails were extremely well maintained including many bridges and boardwalks, all in great repair. The donor signboard at the end of the boardwalk in Rahr School Forest is a testament to what it must have taken to build and maintain that 1500 foot walkway through the wetland. Given the animal tracks in the light snow, the native critters appreciate it as well.

As I ran through the park it seemed like so many of Wisconsin's beech, maple, oak and pine forests. Not until I passed over a frozen sand hill was I reminded that this forest was growing on top of ancient sand dunes hundreds of feet inland from the current lakeshore. The landscape here 5,000 years ago looked much different than today. Ten thousand years ago, a million years ago or a billion years ago, it was even more unrecognizable. The lake levels have risen and fallen over 600 feet in the past 10,000 years. The forest was there, then buried and gone, then back again. Further back in time, the area was part of a vast inland sea and at one time shadowed by Alp like mountains and volcanoes bearing no resemblance to the landscape today.

As I ran along the beach I saw live pine trees covered half way to the top with sand, a reminder of the Two Creeks Buried Forest to the north and maybe a signal to the next area of buried forest centuries from now. I saw sand sculptures and small cliffs in the dunes that were temporary, miniature reminders of what water and ice can and did do to shape the rest of the Wisconsin landscape over thousands, millions and billions of years.

It all reminded me that we live in just a point in time. What we see today will be different tomorrow. We may not like it but it will happen. We will, as man has before, contribute to and even accelerate some of those changes. We may begin to slow them down if we figure out the right way and the will to do that. But, even if we succeed, changes will occur as they have long before we came upon this place. And the landscape one day will be as unrecognizable to future generations or versions of us as it would be to anyone or anything from millions of years ago that came upon it today.

### **Eat Locally:**

Manitowoc Coffee. A lively coffee and sandwich shop in the heart of downtown Manitowoc. Grabbed a bottomless cup of coffee and a bagel sandwich before heading back.

## Road Shoes

I really enjoy the off road or dirt trail more than anything. The quiet, the insulation from the wind, the pace. Its all incredibly relaxing and easy on your feet and knees. But, the IAT is not just dirt. To finish I need to cover the 600 miles of CR and some urban trail segments that are really just paved path or road segments. After a fantastic run through Point Beach State Park and the Dunes segment, both all dirt, I have almost 45 miles of road ahead of me before I get to run on dirt again. I said I would embrace the road, and I will. I mean, I have. Truthfully, while I don't look forward to the road, I have enjoyed it. That is, until today.

Today was tough. The City of Manitowoc Segment while technically a "trail" segment, took me down a paved path along Lake Michigan and through the city streets. The lake was calm with geese and ducks floating near the shore and the sunrise, while a bit muted today, made for a very scenic stretch early in the morning. As I turned into the heart of the Manitowoc, I passed the Maritime Museum and floating submarine exhibit, ran through and past well-kept parks surrounded by turn of the century Victorian homes, and got a sense for what sustains the city – a balanced blend of commerce, industry and history along a beautiful stretch of Lake Michigan and the Manitowoc River.

All of that would have made for a fantastic run except for the temperature. In Wisconsin, it's not so much the temperature in the winter, it's the wind. And today, the wind made for below zero wind chill. It was cold. It is January in Wisconsin and we should expect that kind of weather more often than not but the weather so far this year has been mild – 20s and 30s for the most part and no significantly low wind chills.

I was cold by the time I finished the city segment and headed out of town to the west on what is one of the longest CRs in the state at 27 miles. My two neck warmers were frozen solid negating any warming effect they may have had to start the day. My fingers froze any time I took my gloves off to look at the map or at my phone in case there was a message from Amy. I kept hoping I would hear from her soon or she would come rolling up so I could climb into the warm car and call it a day. But no message and no Amy. And the cold was just starting.

I cleared the city limits and headed directly west into farm country with no wind break and a strong northwest wind. The sun was out but was only a visual today. The temperature never warmed and I had no choice but to keep going. Amy had gotten lost but finally caught up with me around mile 11. I had planned on 15 for the day and when Amy pulled up beside me, I decided if I could get a quick break, something to eat and a fresh neck warmer or two, I could make the target. For the first time on this journey, I got into the warm car to take a break. I grabbed some raisins and a stroop waffle – my snack of choice so far – found my spare neck warmer and also took Amy's, warmed up my hands and headed back out.

Amy drove off, the wind picked up and I slowed down. It was the hardest four miles of all that I have covered so far. Very exposed, not incredibly scenic and a long uphill sloping stretch. When I saw the car again I knew I was done. No extra credit today. Just a warm car and a hot cup of coffee to look forward to.

It wasn't all bad. I did manage to see three more eagles today – total of 10 so far. And I saw my first turkey. Unfortunately, it did not see me nor do I think it saw the car that had hit it earlier and landed it

in the ditch. I saw hundreds of geese huddled and floating on Lake Michigan. I think they were actually floating there to stay warm. While nearly freezing, the lake was probably 20 to 25 degrees warmer than the land without the wind chill. Although I don't know if geese actually care about wind chill. I also saw a few hundred Bufflehead ducks doing the same. Bufflehead are primarily white with a black back and head and a large white patch on the side and back of their head. They were striking against the grey blue of the lake.

I was happy to be done but even more happy I had kept going. A couple of hours of hard work create days of satisfaction for the effort and the accomplishment.

### **Eat Locally:**

Amy had a meeting to get to so we grabbed a cup of coffee and a muffin for the road at Sunset Bakery in Kiel WI. It looked to be a newer bakery, trying to find its niche. The coffee was ok, the muffin a little better. There was a lively table of locals, likely regulars, having a great conversation. As we were walking out, I heard something about a dead poodle and a poodle purse. I am hoping they weren't one in the same.

Since we skipped breakfast, we cleaned up and went out to lunch – burger and beer at Tap N Tavern in West Bend. We both had an amber and a French Onion Burger. It was as good as it sounds.

### **Clarks Mills to School Hill**

One of the interesting things about CRs is that they take you down roads and through small towns you would never venture on or through. My run started just east of Clarks Mills today and finished in School Hill. Never heard of either of them before I started this journey and if I had, I would still not ever have taken the time to pass through them. I was looking forward to both of them, though, just based on their cool sounding names. From what I could find they had similar pasts like many small towns that were settled in the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century. But today, they seemed very different from each other.

Clarks Mills is at the intersection of two county highways on what looked to be the main thoroughfare between Manitowoc and Chilton, two communities with solid employment bases. I encountered too many cars, trucks and buses to count and pulled up many times on the narrow snow-covered shoulder to make sure that cars could pass easily. All of the drivers were courteous. I wave to each one to acknowledge them and thank them for not hitting me, and most wave back. It was a harrowing 7 miles of county highway, though, to start my day.

I didn't explore the town much but could see that there was little commercial activity remaining and from what I could find in my research, some of the history has actually been moved away. There is an active Catholic Church but little else. Clark was one of the early settlers and had three cheese factories, none of which exist today. The town's general store history is well documented on the internet but the actual building has been moved to a Manitowoc historical village called Pine Crest. Sadly, Clarks Mills is mostly a very busy intersection today with no reason for travelers to stop. But it still has a cool name.



School Hill has an even cooler name, I think. Early German settlers built a school, you guessed it, on a hill and called the school Schulberg, or School Hill in German. The town, over time, became known then as School Hill. If I had to choose School Hill or Clarks Mills to live, it would easily be School Hill. The road I came in on was tree lined and winding with very pretty homes, farms and views. There is a county road at the main intersection but it seemed to be much quieter based on where the highway comes from and goes to. Here too was a church, a cheese factory and a general store with only the church remaining.

Overall today's run gave me some real positive momentum. I felt strong after a difficult run just a few days prior and I seemed to get a second wind, emotionally if not physically, at mile 10. The last 5 miles moved along very quickly. I have been making real headway on the trail and am starting to near the border of Manitowoc and Sheboygan counties and what is the northern reaches of the Kettle Moraine.

For me, the Kettle Moraine area is the defining geography of the Ice Age's impact on Wisconsin. It is unusual in that it is not a terminal moraine like most of the rest of the trail but is at the intersection of two glacial lobes, the Green Bay and the Lake Michigan lobes and called an interlobate zone. It runs about 130 miles north to south and has some of the most unique and varied features found anywhere in Wisconsin. It also has the most area of actual contiguous trail and it is the section of the trail I call home.

My wife and I grew up in Kewaskum, known as the Gateway to the Kettle Moraine, moved just south of there for some time and recently returned to live in Kewaskum. We have always felt home here and the Kettle Moraine terrain is some of the most beautiful in the state. It is defined by high ridges and deep kettles, many in the form of small lakes.

As I moved away from the City of Valders through more farm country, I crossed over Cty C and immediately felt the change and the familiarity of the Kettle Moraine. The road changed from straight, field and farm lined to winding, tree and lake lined. Pine trees marked the road boundaries and the road moved as it meandered between and around the many small lakes. My mood shifted and my legs quickened and when I hit 15 miles at School Hill I felt that I could keep going. I stopped though, partly because I don't want to overdo it and partly because Amy is already so patient allowing me to make this effort a couple of times a week. I don't want to push my luck on either point.

I stopped at the intersection of Spring Lake Rd and Cty X just north east of Kiel and I look forward to returning there to explore a little more of School Hill before I move on to the heart of the Kettle Moraine.

### **Eat Locally:**

We really went really local today, almost native, at Badger's Den in Kiel. Open from 6am until "close", daily. It was listed as a breakfast stop but, in reality, it was a bar. We went in anyway thinking it would be quiet on a Monday morning after a Packer loss the night before. It was anything but. By the time we left all of the bar stools were full and only a couple of tables were available. Some of the crowd was thinking about ordering breakfast but not as the main course. The main course was Coors Light, Bloody Mary's and Cranberry Vodka. We heard stories of patrons DUI's and watched what might have been a prelude to some mid- day romance between one guy and two women. We were definitely out of place, but ate our breakfast and soup and moved on as quickly as possible. It's all part of the Wisconsin experience.

## Alex

Today, Alex made his first appearance and joined us for a couple of miles at Walla Hi. I had always hoped that my family and friends could be a part of my experience. So far, I have had a few close friends join me for parts of the run and, of course, my wife Amy has been there as my main support every step of the way. But I have also been hoping my two sons will be able to experience part of this challenge with me. Both have completed ultramarathons and both enjoy running and have spent some time with me on the IAT.

Steve, the oldest, lives in Europe, though, making this a little more difficult. Not a runner historically, he did complete an ultra with a friend in Belgium a few years ago and runs occasionally around his neighborhood in his current home in the Netherlands. We are all waiting on COVID challenges to clear the way for a visit back home to the U.S. with his fiancée, Esther. He is looking forward to joining me wherever I may be in the journey at that point.

Alex, the youngest, lives nearby in Sheboygan and has logged many more miles on the IAT than I have. His running passion blossomed in college and he joined Amy and me and some friends in training for our first ultra marathon in 2014. Since then, his love for trail running has taken off way beyond our limits and abilities having competed in several 50 milers and a 100K race in the past few years. We have helped him train as much as we can, resulting in many hours spent running, talking, and laughing on the IAT. Sometimes in pursuit of training for a specific event and sometimes just for the sheer joy of being outside together and exploring the trail. It has been a wonderful way to spend time together and build our adult, parent child relationship. Unfortunately, he recently reinjured his knee that had a run in with a rock on the Parnell Segment and he has not been able to get out and join me until today. I was thrilled to see him.

Today's run was a mixed bag. Some roads and some trails. Some flat farm roads and some challenging hills. Warmer temperatures but colder wind chill. While hard at times, I embraced it all as I have each time out. Terrie started the day with me. She is a great conversationalist and her presence today made the first road segment fly by quickly. It seemed like we barely got going when we were entering the Walla Hi trail segment at 6 miles. There we met Amy who had been hiking the trails and waited for Alex as we had made good time getting there and were 15 minutes ahead of schedule.

The Walla Hi segment is brand new, cut into and along side a series of horse and hiking trails in Walla Hi County Park. It is a wonderful piece of land with very distinct kettle and moraine features. The trail was cut through beech and maple forest and climbed sharp ridges as it wound through the park. It even crossed through a surprise covered bridge right in the middle of the dense woods. The trail was just two miles and ran past an active stone quarry and along a farm field easement before it emptied onto LAX Chapel Road.

From there, you turn left on the CR which takes you 5.3 miles to the La Budde Creek Segment. Turn left, that is, unless you don't look at your map and decide to go right, like I did. I got maybe a ½ mile down the road before Amy and Terrie pulled up in the car to redirect me. I was irritated at myself but thankful to them for not letting me get one or two miles down the road in the wrong direction.

The CR took me across Hwy 32, out of Manitowoc County and into Sheboygan County. Another milestone on my run across Wisconsin. Winding LAX Chapel Road turned into Rhine Road, straightened out, and headed south through unincorporated Rhine Center. Rhine Center is very small with not much to note except for two remarkable properties. One building recently housed the now closed Black Dog Bistro bar and restaurant. It's a three story Victorian structure with a corner turret or tower topped by a very large and ornate cupola. The building was once white with green trim and is now mostly grey and weathered wood. A quick internet search indicates that it was a bar dating back to pre Civil War days but is short on much detail other than the structure burnt down in 1907 and was rebuilt. It dominates the main intersection in town and I can only imagine it was the center of activity for that small community for the past century and a half. The building is for sale and, along with it, a significant piece of Rhine Center history.

The other building to note is the Horneck Cheese factory, a well preserved field stone structure dating back to the 1880. It was one of 45 cheese factories operating in Sheboygan County at one time and the internet indicates that it was built with "Italianate" features. It now appears to be in the midst of a caring restoration and will hopefully be preserved for future generations of Rhine Center residents and IAT runners and hikers to enjoy its architecture as I did.

As I left Rhine Center and turned right onto Cty FF, I passed the St Peter Evangelical Church, a white clapboard structure with a soaring steeple set behind a roadside cemetery. The setting made a pretty picture against the white snow of the morning and I imagined it look very much like it did 100 years ago. The farms and homes surrounding it were all mostly original and other than the paved road would have looked familiar to any of the early members of the congregation. What I wondered about though was the very large, almost 3 or 4 foot high rooster decorating the weather vane on the tip of the steeple. Rarely do you see a weather vane on the top of a church steeple and, I think, more rarely would it be topped by a strutting rooster.

I turned off of FF onto the La Budde Creek Segment of the trail. La Budde Creek is not a long trail segment but is divided into 3 parts as it crosses a couple of roads. I tackled the segments just north and just south of Keystone Rd, or maybe it tackled me. The running was hard in soft snow filled with hiker and snow shoe footprints and I bounced around using every muscle and tendon in my feet, ankles and knees. I didn't make great time but was able to take in the beauty of this piece of land. North of Keystone Rd, the trail was flat and wooded and hugged LaBudde Creek. South of Keystone, the trail rose above La Budde Creek on a more open expanse with smaller pines and spruce along side thick rows of sumac. The contrast of the green pines and spruce and the red sumac in the fall must be striking. Today, like all winter days, the striking colors of fall gave way to shadowed greys and layers of texture set against the fresh white snow. While fall is my favorite season in Wisconsin because of its colors, I have found a lot of joy in those winter layers. Winter allows me to see through the landscape and experience the textures and subtleties normally not seen in other seasons.

I finished the day at the parking lot off of Hwy A just east of Elkhart Lake, 15 miles from our start at School Hill. And we saw our first eagle of the day (11 so far if you're counting with me) soaring above the creek just west of the trail. Starting there again on Monday and will be looking for that eagle again.

### **Eat Locally:**

Today we headed to Plymouth in search of a diner, not a bar, for breakfast. We ran into the Red Shorts Café before we found what we had originally targeted as our destination. It was a clean and bright looking storefront in the heart of downtown. The special of the day was Apple Cinnamon Pancakes with candied pecans and caramel topping. I got the caramel on the side and smothered it with butter and maple syrup instead. Both the butter and the maple syrup were real – not some fake version – and it was delicious. Best pancakes – aside from Amy's sourdough pancakes – that I have ever had.

The coffee, served in glass mugs, was equally good. Lots of food, fair prices and great wait staff and atmosphere. I am sure glad we found it and I highly recommend it.

When we got up from the table, we saw the red shorts framed above the fireplace. I checked the website and the red shorts have some significance – something about Vic and Jane, the owners, and the Jungle Room at the Ambrosia Hotel in Key West. Something tells me I am glad I didn't ask for more details.

### **Half Day**

Today's plan was a shorter run to accommodate Amy's calendar. It almost ended before sunrise where it started in the parking lot off of Hwy A on the La Budde Creek Segment. I looked for the eagle as we were driving up but what I should have paid more attention to was the large pile of snow that had been left by the snow plow the day prior. The entrance to the parking lot was down hill and I thought I could easily get through the snow bank and pull into the lot. My Highlander has four wheel drive and I assumed it would get me out. Initially, I didn't even get me in. The snow was too high I got stuck in the bank on the way in with my rear end sticking out into the road. It felt like my wheels were barely touching the ground as I rocked back and forth in four wheel drive trying to move either into the parking area or back out. I finally broke loose and rolled down hill into the lot. I had made up my mind I wasn't staying so I immediately tried to turn around and head back out. That wasn't working either. I did more rocking back and forth, finally broke loose and headed back up the hill to the highway, hoping for no traffic as I accelerated through the snow bank and onto the highway. We made it. But we never saw the eagle.

Amy let me out on the roadside and headed to another La Budde Creek lot hoping it had been plowed or at least driven on and packed down. I headed to the trail. The day prior, Terrie and her husband Pat had snowshoed the remainder of La Budde Creek and had left me a set of snow shoe tracks as a trail break. But it turned out they were the only ones to break the trail. Well, the two of them and one deer who decided it was much easier to follow their footsteps than to navigate what is over a foot of snow in the woods.

The fresh snow made for a beautiful, albeit challenging run. In fact, it wasn't much of a run at all up a very steep hill on the first stretch of trail. Fortunately, the trail exited back to the road about a half mile in and offered some easier footing. The next section of the trail about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile ahead was equally snow covered but had been traversed by a few more snowshoers.

I ran into Amy doing and out and back in a very pretty snow covered, tree lined section. This section of the IAT is the northern most of four Kettle Moraine segments and runs along a glacial drainage way – what is now La Budde Creek. It is one of three streams in Sheboygan County that naturally produce significant amounts of trout and is home to the La Budde Creek Fishery. The creek starts from springs and seepage in the watershed area and runs for seven miles before it empties into the Mullet River which eventually joins the Sheboygan River and flows into Lake Michigan. It only averages eight feet in width and 10 inches in depth but is a critical watershed with significant diversity of plants and insects and was historically important to Native American cultures.

The entire trail section today was only two miles and it was a winter wonderland on this near perfect winter morning. The IAT is only half way complete with equal parts trail and road but the trail segments stretch through some of the most incredible geologic areas anywhere in the state and continue to amaze me with their diversity and beauty. I can see why the IAT has achieved national recognition as a National Scenic Trail on the same level as the Appalachian Trail or the Pacific Crest Trail.

I exited La Budde Creek on Garton Rd which crosses Hwy 67 and winds toward Quit Qui Oc Golf Club and the resort town of Elkhart Lake. Elkhart Lake is a small (pop. ~ 900) but still thriving community that grew up as a turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century resort town. It was a rail road vacation destination for those in both Chicago and Milwaukee and known for its scenic beauty, its cooling lake and its racing heritage. I ran down Golf Course Road to the outskirts of Elkhart Lake, turned left and made my way down what was the original race track in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is marked by roadside signs indicating the historical significance of the straightaways and the turns that take you around the lake and back into the Village. It's the same route as the 5 mile Lake Street Run that we have participated in for many years.

I ran down Schoolhouse Straight, the first high- speed straightaway on the 1951-52 raceway circuit. As it hit Kimberly Korner's, named for James Kimberly, noted as the one person most responsible for bringing open road racing to Elkhart Lake, I hung a right following the race course as it was a half century ago and what is the familiar 5 mile run loop I have been on many times. It turned out to be my second wrong turn in as many days. This time I didn't have Amy and Terrie to haul me back in and I ended up almost a mile out of my way before I realized my mistake. Fortunately, it was a short day and I was close to my destination. I made a quick phone call to Amy to let her know where I was and headed back to the south and to the Glenbeulah Trail Head which marks the start of the Greenbush Segment and the end of my day.

The weather forecast, which is calling for single digit highs this coming weekend, and the trail surface, which is a foot or more of soft snow, may shut me down or at least slow my pace for a bit. But the next 40 miles or so is my home trail. I have logged hundreds if not a few thousand miles on the IAT segments from Glenbeulah to West Bend over the past 15 years and am looking forward to covering them all over again as part of this IAT journey.

### **Eat Locally:**

We headed into Dundee to the 3Sweets Bakery, a newly opened bakery/café in downtown Dundee. If you have ever been in Dundee, there isn't much besides the "downtown" but 3Sweets makes a great addition to this community which seasonally draws campers, hikers, snowmobilers, cross country skiers

and fisherman. Amy and I shared the three eggs and bacon entrée and a cinnamon roll that was equal parts roll and cream cheese frosting. The bakery is housed in what appears to be a building of some historical significance that was recently not just run down but falling down. It is completely remodeled and nicely decorated and the owner indicated they will have lots of outdoor seating come summertime. We spend a lot of time in this area and look to add this to our post run list of coffee destinations going forward.

## **Hummocky**

One of my favorite words. There are a number of official definitions but the one I like is - “describes an extremely irregular surface.” I first learned the word a few years ago in direct reference to the Northern Kettle Moraine topography and the Greenbush segment is a perfect introduction to what that means. The Greenbush segment starts in Glenbeulah, the northern entrance to the Kettle Moraine State Forest and travels just under 9 miles to Hwy 67, just south of Greenbush and the Greenbush camping, xc ski and mountain biking area. The trail does its best to follow the high ridges of eskers as it travels south but cannot help but find its way up and down, up and down every few hundred feet. In fact, I recorded 1,276 feet of elevation gain or 150 feet for every mile I ran. For those in Colorado, that doesn’t sound like much, but for Wisconsinites that is considerable “high relief hummocky topography.” And, in soft snow, makes for a very challenging run.

We changed our schedule up a bit today. For one, we went out on a Wednesday. It was partly because the forecast is calling for more snow tomorrow and then subzero temperatures for several days including wind chills as low as -35. Seemed like an easy decision and it was a beautiful winter day with temperatures climbing to the mid 30s and the bright sun of February shining throughout the morning.

We also did not go at sunrise due to Amy’s schedule, but hit the trail at 10am instead. I had under 9 miles to travel and having run this trail many times I estimated my arrival time, even with the snow, at 1 hour 45 minutes. That should have given me plenty of time. It did not. The first 3 miles took me 45 minutes. Quick math and a quick text to Amy changed my arrival time to 2 hours 15 minutes, unless the conditions got better. They did not. The snow had been trodden down by hikers and snow shoers but was still very soft and caused considerable slipping even on the flats. To climb the most severe hills I had to turn my shoes on an angle and dig in to get any traction, even with my yak tracks. It was exhausting and exhilarating at the same time.

As I ran, I recalled so many trail memories known to me and a few of my close family and friends – the very rocky and uphill first half mile out of Glenbeulah, the spot where Alex saw the wolf, the tree with the hornets nest just a foot off of the trail, my favorite spot in the Red Oaks area with the most beautiful birch stand reminding me of my father who loved birch trees, the tree I held onto tightly as my hamstrings cramped in the NK50K, the other tree I hung onto as my hamstrings cramped again. And so on. I will have many of these trail memories over the next 30 or 40 miles of home trail and they will remind me why I live here and why I love the trail so much.

I met a man and his dog xc skiing just south of Hwy 23. He was as astounded that I was running as I was that he was skiing this very difficult section of the trail. We talked for a bit and I think exchanged inspiration and energy as we both continued forward – he to the north and me to the south. As I neared

Greenbush, I began to see more people, running and skiing and snow shoeing and embracing winter in Wisconsin. I finally ran into Amy as she was doing her out and back. I walked a few hundred yards with her and then continued running. I only waited for her for a few minutes after I finished at the parking area on Hwy 67, evidence that, today, running and walking were almost the same thing.

We will spend this next weekend inside, hiding from rather than embracing winter with the hopes to head out to do the Parnell segment the following weekend. That will take me to Mauthe Lake and within just a few miles of home.

### **Eat Locally**

Today we shook things up again. Instead of going to lunch when we finished at mid day, we went home and cleaned up and attended to our afternoon work, then headed out for a nice dinner at The Norbert in West Bend. The Norbert's specialty is an ever-changing small plate menu with eclectic dishes and flavors. Wednesday night was also burger night and I had the smashed burger with bacon sauce and pickles along with a bowl of tomato bisque soup. Amy ordered a cauliflower dish sauteed in lemon brown butter and mustard vinaigrette with fried capers, golden raisins, hazelnuts and a smear of goat cheese. I don't like cauliflower but I liked this. She also enjoyed the coconut shrimp for her entrée. We ordered a bottle of wine - \$10 off a bottle of wine night too – and shared tastes of each dish. Pretty nice change of pace on a Wednesday night in February.

### **Where is the Trail?**

I started today where I left off 5 days ago. The trail had been there. While soft, it was a clear trail that had been trod down by skiers and snowshoers. Today, I convinced myself that, 5 days later, the trail would be more solid, easier to run on given the very cold temperatures the past few days. We had gotten some snow, but not enough to really make a difference. I thought.

When we pulled up to the trailhead today, we could not confidently pull into the snow covered parking lot that had been nicely plowed just a few days ago. That should have been my first clue. The next clue that it was going to be a very difficult day was that I could not see the trail. What had been a nicely packed two foot wide path just a few days ago was now a crisp, clean snow field with no evidence of the trail. I had run this route many times and knew which way to point to start my run. After navigating knee high drifts for a hundred yards or so I soon found the trail as I neared the woods. In the shelter of the trees, there was finally a path with some evidence of human travel.

But that evidence proved to be fleeting. A few snow shoe tracks gave way to virgin snow cover with no visible prints but those of a few rabbits, some deer and maybe a coyote or two. At its best, there was some solid base under 2 to 3 inches of snow. At its worst, I was post holing through knee high drifts over long stretches. Before I reached the first road crossing, I had reached for my phone twice to call Amy to pick me up. I didn't, however, deciding that by the time she got herself off of the trail and found me, I could have run to our original meeting point anyway.

It turned out that I do wish I had called her. While I eventually did find some evidence of a trail traversed by a single hiker or snow shoer, their tracks did little but turn the fresh clean trail into not much more than a rough snow drift. I plowed ahead at a considerably slower pace than I had been experiencing with my shoes covered with snow the entire way.

There was little time to think about much today other than keeping my balance and finding the next step but I could not help but be reminded of how this section of the trail has changed so much over the past two years. Two years ago, this was a densely wooded area with beautiful stands of maple, beech and aspen. There were also enough dying ash trees to know the view was going to change once the diseased ash finally gave in to the ash borer and fell into the forest floor. But that is not what happened. What happened was an incredible tornado or wind sheer that left dozens of acres of trees leveled – thrown about the forest floor and across the trail closing it for months while loggers came in to clean up the devastation. I say devastation because that is what we see. It's not the same pretty, untouched landscape that we are accustomed too and we mourn the change. But wind storms are really just a natural disruption like fire or avalanches. Every tree that gets blown down and dies makes room for and creates energy for a new tree or plant to grow. Natural disasters, or disruptions, just accelerate that process of change.

It's been just two years since the storm but I thought I would notice it less than I did. I thought the snow cover would have softened the edges, made it less noticeable. But it hadn't. The change was very evident with stacks of logs and brush where the loggers didn't or couldn't take them along. The dense forest was now an open expanse. Will it take 10 years or 20 years or 50 years before you don't see or think about the change any longer but just take the landscape for granted again? As if it were always that way.

I bounced my way to the finish at Butler Lake with those thoughts in mind – just 6 ½ miles today and halfway to the end of the Parnell segment. It was 4 degrees when I started and maybe 6 by the time I finished. Today was the warm day of the week. With the temperatures falling again and the snow cover hiding the trail, I will take some time off. Unless I change my mind again.

### **Eat Locally**

Today we decided to eat at home. It's as local as you can get, I guess, since we are in now running in our backyard. Amy slow cooked a whole chicken in a cast iron skillet and made some beets and cauliflower. We also had home-made lemon meringue pie for dessert, a birthday tradition for me. It was the best meal of the journey so far and the leftovers will turn into wonderful chicken soup for the coming days.

### **Relentless Forward Progress**

After an 11 day break due to the cold weather and trail conditions, I finally got back out. The temperature this morning rose into the teens and the wind chill was above zero. There was light snow in the air and it seemed a perfect winter morning to run again. I started at Butler Lake, where I had slogged into early last week in the knee- deep snow. Today, the trail was still snow covered and the



steps that take you up the steep rise of the esker and out of the Butler Lake parking area were not visible. Thankfully, there had been some traffic on this part of the trail and the day started out easily.

This section of the trail runs along eskers and past numerous kettles, some still deep with water like Crooked, Forest and Mauthe lakes, used by canoers, kayakers, fisherman and swimmers, and some losing the battle of natural progression as sediment layers build over time and aquatic plants give way to wetland plants and eventually woodland plants. There are a few examples of this natural progression but none likely better than Butler Lake. A boat landing is an indication that fisherman still work the waters of Butler Lake but the lake area gets smaller each year. 50 or 100 years from now, fishing may no longer be possible as the wetland plants will have overtaken the lake and it will begin to blend into the landscape. As you run south from Butler and look closely you can see evidence of other kettles transitioning from lakes to wetlands as well as kettles that have succumbed to nature and are now woodland areas with dense coverings of maple, beech and ash.

It is a beautiful section of trail, one I find myself drawn to over time. I had some trail memories today from those many Saturday runs with Amy and Alex and our friends including the spot where we saw the bobcat and the spot where we saw the fox. Both sightings were random and not likely to happen again but each time I pass through I wonder if I might spot them again. Today I also passed the spot on the trail where Alex and I came across the old Buick one Saturday morning, buried in the mud a solid ½ mile from the nearest road. That probably requires some additional narrative as it is not something you or I might ever see again.

Hard to imagine just how he got there, but apparently an intoxicated man in a 90s model Buick took a very wrong turn late at night and somehow managed to navigate his way down the IAT, up and down steep hills and around sharp bends on a trail about as wide as his car. He also managed to turn the car around - in the dark, in the middle of the woods - and start to work his way back before he got stuck, up to his hubcaps, in the mud. The front seat full of empty beer cans told the likely story but some runners we encountered also confirmed they had called the sheriff the night before around 10pm to come and help the gentleman who was sound asleep at the wheel, deep in the woods and deep in trouble. So much for Google Maps.

The trail today was more well-traveled as a whole than the one I ran on the previous week, but the going was still slow as occasional stretches had little traffic and required considerable effort to dig through the snow. I felt like I was running on sand for much of the way, without the benefit of the waves and the warmth of the sun. But I also thought in many ways, the woods was much prettier than a beach, more diverse and complex, at least to the visible eye. No matter how hard it was, I had no choice but to continue on to my target destination. It doesn't pay to turn back, there is no one there to pick me up. Or to stop short, as I still wish to tackle the whole trail in a reasonable amount of time.

I know the deep snow will transition to hard packed ice eventually and then to soft mud before the beautiful days of spring running come around. In the meantime, I need to keep going. On days like today and others where it gets tough, I think about a book that Alex gave me to read a few years back. It was titled, "Relentless Forward Progress". It was sort of a "how to" book on running long distances and not a very good read, but the title stuck with me. I have used that phrase in my professional career, for myself and with my team, as a way to think about working our way through tough issues or long, difficult projects. And I have used it in my running, to keep me moving forward no matter the day and no matter the pace. I no doubt will use it again before this journey is over.

## **Eat Locally**

Since I started this idea of trying to find a local diner or coffee shop after each run to grab something warm to drink and good to eat, I had been looking forward to the day we could go to my favorite place for coffee and bakery – the Coffee Corner Bistro in downtown Kewaskum – our hometown. Our good friends' daughter, Jessie, runs the coffee shop her mother Cindy started 20 years ago. It has become a daily destination for so many locals and those visiting the beautiful Kettle Moraine area. Jessie has taken what her mother started and taken it up and notch, especially with her bakery. She has a daily selection of scones and muffins, rarely the same ones twice in a month, and, daily, her very tasty cinnamon rolls. She also has a good variety of parfaits and other entrees for breakfast, and soups and sandwiches for lunch and dinner made from local ingredients, including some from her garden right out the back door. Amy had a nice tea today to warm her and I had a coffee and blueberry orange muffin with just the right amount of icing. We will, of course, be back.

## **Home Stretch**

Just a couple of miles from my house is a sign on the IAT Kettle Moraine Scenic Drive road crossing heading north that says "Welcome to the Lakeshore Chapter of the IAT - 184.4 miles to the Eastern Terminus." I have run past that sign so many times and wondered what the trail was like north of here, and how long it would take me to actually run it, if I ever did. Well, today I did. Thank you, Lakeshore Chapter! You have been the whole of my experience on this journey until today and I cannot thank you enough for well- groomed and well- marked trails– from the Terminus at Potawatomi State Park to New Fane at Kettle Moraine Scenic Drive. I know there is work to do to complete the trail through the CRs, but based on what I have seen and experienced, you will no doubt find the perfect tracts of land to complement what is already a beautiful route.

There were many good memories made and many beautiful segments run in your Chapter. I was lucky enough to have Amy with me through every segment and Alex, Emily, Pat, Terrie and Mark through some. I started in early winter but didn't really encounter snow until late January and the temps were mild until the cold snap of early February. I enjoyed Point Beach State Park and the tours I took through the streets of some wonderful Door and Manitowoc County communities, but I think the LaBudde Creek segment was my favorite. We did it on a crisp and sunny winter day, after a fresh snowfall. The segment is on a diverse and beautiful piece of land, on the fringes of the Northern Kettle Moraine. It's close enough to my house that I should have already done it, but had not. I am so glad now that I have.

Today was my home stretch. Not because I am almost done. Far from it. But because, today, I finished at the IAT trail head closest to my house, just one mile from my driveway in the Township of Kewaskum. My wife and I grew up here, and while we didn't move far - just a few miles south - while we had a family and enjoyed our careers, we were always drawn back. It's where we spent an increasing amount of our leisure time, exploring the Northern Kettle Moraine, mostly through the lens of the IAT. Now we are lucky enough to live here and enjoy the State Forest and the IAT, every day, right out our front and back doors.

This morning we had a full complement of Emily and Alex, Terrie and Pat and Amy and me. I had been running alone the entire month of February and was looking forward to having some company today. Alex and Terrie made for an enjoyable morning run. The conversation flowed easily, the sunrise was beautiful and the trail conditions were much improved. The miles flew by quickly and I found myself wishing we could keep going. But, as we approached the Hwy 28 trail head, already a couple of miles past the original target end point, the support crew of Amy, Emily and Pat were there, ready to go get a cup of coffee. It didn't take too much arm twisting and I agreed we were done for the day. I have had some shorter runs lately but started to build some momentum back this weekend and I made a promise to myself to get back out there and keep moving, starting again tomorrow morning.

### **Eat Locally**

I told you we would be back and we were. The Coffee Corner once again. It was a crowded Sunday morning with just one table left and a non stop line while we were there. We enjoyed some hot coffee, hot chocolate and a variety of things to refuel us including cinnamon almond muffins – like a warm coffee cake shaped like a muffin - yogurt with fresh fruit, and a breakfast burrito.

It will be time to move on and explore other venues eventually, but as long as we are close to home, we might be back.

### **Exhausted**

So there I was, as I had promised myself, back out on the trail this morning. There were many reasons I could have said no, not today. It snowed overnight, I had to shovel this morning, Amy had to go to work, I had just run yesterday and two days prior, I could use the rest. But I went. I had promised.

I have found myself describing how difficult the trail has been the past few weeks and I fear this will sound redundant. But, today was the most challenging I have encountered. We have had just a little more snow than average to date but it has mostly fallen in the past month or two and has had little chance to melt. That means there is a lot of snow on the ground. And where its not trod upon and worse, where it is drifted over, it is soft and it is deep. Today I found how deep.

After a winter wonderland stretch from Hwy 28 to Hwy H, I crossed over Hwy H to catch the trail that runs toward the Eisenbahn Bike Trail and Sunburst Ski Hill. The trail traverses several long stretches of open field and is used pretty regularly throughout the year. But apparently not in the past month. There was no trail. Just a few signposts and blazes set in the deep and drifted snow indicating the past existence of a trail. But no indentation and no shadow to indicate where. I was at least knee deep and sometimes hip deep crossing the open fields and when I found some wooded areas, only the deer, coyotes and rabbits seemed to have chosen to walk or run the trail in recent weeks. The footing, or lack of it, persisted for about 4 miles with just a couple of respites. The last two miles climb Sunburst Ski Hill to finish at Ridge Road, both of which scream out “uphill all the way”.

From Ridge Road the trail is interrupted by a CR. I fought my way uphill to the parking area and found myself looking forward to a firm foundation for my feet. But first I stopped to help, or try to help, dislodge a stuck vehicle. Apparently, the driver thought his snow tires would not only get him in, but

also get him out of the parking area. I tried to push a bit to see if I could budge him backward but he wasn't moving. I empathized and moved on myself. He called Road Side Assistance.

From Ridge Road to the next trail head is downhill, almost all of the way. I made up some time while dodging the traffic which seemed pretty heavy for a snowy rural road that really doesn't end up anywhere. I was carrying my yak traks that I had removed at Ridge Road and elected to not put them back on as I headed into the South Kewaskum Segment. This is a short but pretty stretch if you can mentally block out the power lines overhead that line the trail from one end to the other. The snow here was less deep with a solid base a few inches down. I was thoroughly exhausted by this time, however, and my movement must have looked like something other than running. The trail ended with a 200 yard post hole through the deep snow to the road. I literally finished with a hand over hand climb through the ditch, up and over the snow bank and onto the road. I had just a few hundred yards of road left before I found the car and headed to the coffee shop.

Along the Kewaskum Segment are a series of signs that talk about the area and its history. One describes the Village of Kewaskum and its history, one is about Sunburst Ski Hill which allows the trail to cut right through its property and up the bunny hill next to the tow rope. There is also one about Ray Zillmer, champion of the Ice Age Trail and instrumental in promoting it federally and helping it to ultimately attain its National Scenic Trail status. I had run past these signs many times and not stopped to read them. But today, I needed a break so I stopped to read the one that talked about the Kettle Moraine area.

Here is a little overview of what it says - (courtesy of the Ice Age Trail Alliance)

The Kettle Moraine runs for more than 120 miles from Glenbeulah to Whitewater and the IAT runs pretty much along its spine – the spine is basically the intersection of the Lake Michigan and the Green Bay glacial lobes. It has not always been called the Kettle Moraine which I found very interesting. The French that came in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century called it the Smokey Mountains. Other, later, settlers called it the Bluffs, the Potash Kettle Moraine and the Kettle Interlobate Moraine finally settling on the Kettle Moraine. It was heavily logged and in the early 1900s over 70% was pasture or marginal farmland. Some of the forest areas have been replanted with pines and others left to naturally reforest over time. Today it is a quiet and beautiful, if not somewhat underappreciated, recreational area for anyone interested in spending time outdoors. And we would like to keep it that way.

### **Eat Locally**

Amy was at work today having dropped a car off at my destination and me off at the start of my run. When I finished, she met me for a cup of coffee and a muffin at The Hub in West Bend. The Hub is a coffee shop and gathering space run by The Volunteer Center of Washington County or VC. VC is a not for profit that helps to identify and organize volunteer resources within the community and helps to deploy them where needed. A few years ago, they opened this coffee venue as a means to raise money and fund the organization. The coffee shop relies on both full- time paid staff and volunteers to run the operation and uses the profits to support its and others service in the community. It's a great concept and a great destination on a cold winter day. Or any other day for that matter.

## Norm

Today I ran a section of road or CR that I had driven on many times but run only once in my life. It was the day I ran to Norm's house. It brought back some memories of Norm, a friend who had passed away a few years ago from complications of Parkinson's disease. He was a runner, a biker, loved to play sheephead and a great friend. Amy and I cannot recall how exactly we met Norm other than he was just there one day as we set out with our running group for a weekly run. But after that day, it seemed he was always there. Always willing to help. Always willing to run or bike with you to help support your training or to just enjoy the day. Always willing to have us out to his home that he shared with his mother on Big Cedar Lake. We didn't know until late in the game that Norm had Parkinson's, he just became less present in the things we did. Then one day he invited us to his church for a festival and for the first time we saw him with a walker and he told us about his diagnosis. It wasn't long after that he passed. The last time we saw him was over a game of sheephead. Fitting.

The run today was going to be back in the double-digit miles, if the track and the weather cooperated. Amy and Pat dropped off Terrie and me at the north end of West Bend off of Hwy D where I had left off earlier on the week. It had been melting and freezing all week and it snowed a bit overnight but the trail was nicely packed and not too slippery. We made good time, not fast but comfortable, through the trail sections which cover the City of West Bend from north to south. The trail runs through and over a series of high ridges that cut through town on the west side. There is one short road section that runs past Culvers (Butter Pecan was the flavor of the day) and down University Dr. before cutting back into the woods and into Ridge Run Park before exiting on Paradise Dr. , which makes up the southern border of the city.

This West Bend section is one of my favorites and the one that had been closest to our home since we began running. It is challenging with steep hills and tons of rocks – one Strava segment is called Ankle Death Toll for the amount of ankle busting rocks that dot the trail. We enjoyed the bright orange sunrise and felt like spring was coming as we made our way.

When we hit the Paradise Dr. trailhead parking area, we shed the yak traks and headed out for the second half of the run, starting with a steep and winding road. Thankfully there was little traffic as the roadway was narrow and slippery. We made our way up and then down a steep hill on Scenic Dr to Little Cedar Lake past beautiful farms and woodlands. Despite the sunny and warm weather of the past week, there were still a few fishermen enjoying maybe their last weekend out on the ice.

Amy caught up with us and we took a brief break to say hi before we turned on the busy county highway to our final destination. We saw lots of cars and a few deer that didn't seem to mind the heavy traffic. Several hundred yards ahead a single file line of deer started to cross the road. First a few then five and finally seven deer proceeded in a nice straight line across the road without hesitation as to the traffic. Fortunately, it was bright and sunny they were easy to spot in the open stretch of road.

The warming temperatures and the bright sunshine kept our mind off of the traffic as we made our way to the Cedar Lake Segment trailhead at Polk Kames where Amy was again waiting patiently.

## **Eat Locally**

We decided to head to The Hub one more time to support that wonderful volunteer run coffee shop. We spent almost an hour talking and sipping on coffee at a table perfectly positioned in the warm sunlight. Amy had a Maple Mama which looked like an Au Lait flavored with real maple syrup. She ordered just half the syrup and loved it.

## **Kames**

Kames are a geologic feature formed when glacial melt water carrying debris cuts holes through the glacier allowing the sediment to pile up. Once the glacial ice melts, a high conical formation or kame remains. Although not the highest points in WI (which is Timm's Hill at over 1,950 feet and lies further along the IAT route) these kames rise steeply and sharply a few hundred feet to over 1,300 feet of elevation.

I started my run today at the Cedar Lake Segment Trailhead, also known as the Polk Kames segment. These aren't the only kames along the IAT but this section and the surrounding areas of Slinger and Pike Lake are really defined by these kames. Once you take note of and understand what a kame is, you only need to look around the immediate area to see many examples. Little Switzerland Ski area adjacent to the Slinger Segment and Powder Hill in the Pike Lake segment are two examples of very large kames with many smaller ones dotting the landscape in between.

The Cedar Lake trail winds in and around the kames turning a one mile square of land between roads into a two mile trail. A mile or so into the Cedar Lake Segment you find yourself in a large stand of birch trees surrounded by 3 or 4 very large kames. I felt like I could be in a different, discreet world but for the hum of interstate traffic today and the plastic red sled standing upright just off the main trail, maybe signaling the side trail that heads straight up the largest kame in the segment. It's a narrow and steep tree lined trail that Alex, Amy and I ran up a couple of years ago to catch the view and I think just to say we did it. I hope the owner of that sled did not attempt to use it to come back down that trail.

The short but pretty Cedar Lake Segment empties onto Cedar Creek Road which takes you a short way over the top of interstate 41 to the Slinger Segment. On Cedar Creek are two very well kept cream city brick farm houses, one with a bronze plaque set just far enough off the road that I could see that it said "Winter Farm" but not close enough for me to see the explanation. A quick search for some information revealed the plaque was set there by the Landmarks Commission of Washington County in 1997 and indicates that the parcel the home and outbuildings sit on was the first land entry in the County Records. The original parcel or section of 160 acres was acquired by the Guthe family on July 7, 1846, who then sold a parcel to the Hassinger's in 1848 which was subsequently acquired through marriage by a Peter Winter in 1883. Both the original 1843 log cabin and the 1800 cream city brick home are among other original outbuildings on the property. And I might add, very well restored and maintained.

The Slinger Segment takes you around the base of the Little Switzerland Ski area. Just a small temporary fence separates the trail from the ski lift line. While not running at the moment, it would have been just a few quick steps to get in line and head up and over the hill. That would have been an easier option today as this segment was no more than a series of frozen footprints making running very challenging. It was fairly short though and the trail segment emptied out in the Village of Slinger Community Park,

and into the downtown area. A short run on the sidewalks and over a couple of railroad crossings took me to a short dead end road that emptied back out on the trail and took me across the busy state highway to the Pike Lake Segment northern trailhead. I had run in the Pike Lake State Park many times on the park trail loops that overlap with the IAT but I had never just run the IAT. The northern section is nice and flat and winds around through typical Kettle Moraine pine, beech and maple forest areas before it heads down hill to the lake and the main parking area. From here the trail heads to the south and away from the Lake toward Holy Hill – a national shrine set at the peak of one of the largest kames in the area.

I had earlier ambitions to continue on almost 15 miles to Holy Hill today but cut it short. The icy, uneven trail conditions make it still challenging to do very long segments. The warmer temperatures this week should soften the trail surface and I hope to be able to tackle another double digit run toward the end of the week.

### **Eat Locally**

We headed to Hartford today, the nearest town with a coffee shop. On the main drag has been a thriving little café called Perc Place. Like the name implies, it offers a full array of coffee drinks but also a fulsome breakfast and bakery menu along with lunch options including adult beverages. Quiche is served every day, so I tried one of their daily versions along with a bottomless cup of coffee and a muffin.

Good food and a very cozy atmosphere.

### **Sand Hills**

I stepped out of the car today just after sunrise and was greeted by the bugle of a Sand Hill Crane. I had just spotted two circling our house a couple of days ago marking their return from warmer climates south. They are back. And not just back from their migration, they are literally back from nearly disappearing from this region. In the 1930s, only a dozen or so breeding pair lived in Wisconsin. Now the population is closing in on 100,000 with most of that increase seemingly in the past decade or so. Increased wetland habitat and the birds' willingness to live in proximity to development have combined to give them a boost.

We love them, though not all do. They can be destructive to gardens and were pecking away at our neighbor's siding this past year. But their prehistoric look and sound, especially in the early morning on the trail, are what I can't get enough of – for now.

Sand Hills were not the only birds I heard this morning. The woods were filled with song birds singing and owls hooting. Despite the crisp temperatures and the, yet, abundance of snow, it felt like the woods were waking up to spring. The snow was solid as I made my way south from Pike Lake on the Holy Hill Segment and I was able to pick my way among the frozen footprints on the top layer without sinking. It was more icy than not, but with yak traks, the ice made for a solid surface to run on and was a nice respite from the soft snow and drifts I had encountered these past couple of weeks.

The early part of the Holy Hill Segment cuts through fields and wooded areas dotted by homes, including many nicely updated farm houses, log homes and barns. The trail runs directly alongside and in the backyard of many of the homes and I found myself silently thanking each of those homeowners for allowing access to this beautiful land. The trail crosses a couple of quiet roads and takes you down Pleasant Hill Rd for about a ½ mile before turning back to the south. In this section, the IAT is working to restore what is now a farm field to its woodland origins. There are small saplings, no more than a couple of feet tall, planted in several rows along the trail as you cross the field. An IAT sign indicates the restoration plan and invites you to watch the forest grow. I will watch it with earnest, but don't think I will likely see the finished product. Kudos to the IAT and the landowners, though, for good "long range" planning.

As I turned south off of Pleasant Hill at the trailhead, I spotted the three steeples of Holy Hill Shrine or more technically, Holy Hill – Basilica and National Shrine of Mary Help of Christians. It was still three miles out but it is a landmark that can be seen all over the area, from a great distance, soaring above the trees. The basilica opened to the public in 1863, making it one of the first significant landmarks in the state of Wisconsin. It is Roman Catholic and under the care of the Discalced Carmelite Friars, whose order dates back to Spain and 1562. Discalced means "without shoes" which is probably why I didn't see any friars out this morning walking the trail.

The shrine sits on the highest of many large kames in the area and is surrounded by forest that itself feels sacred, like an extension of the shrine. The trail wound around the base of the large kame and eventually cut upward and along the ridge for stretches so steep and icy that I needed to cling to tree trunks and lean into the hill for fear of sliding down the incline. These hills are glacier made, not remnants of past mountains and don't sit at high altitudes. But make no mistake, the IAT and this part of Wisconsin is not flat. The elevation changes and incredibly steep ridges challenge the fittest hiker or runner and provide amazing views for those willing to take them on.

The segment finished on the south side of the shrine on Donegal Rd., a CR that takes you to the Loew Lake Segment just over a mile up the road. I finished the day by running the CR and will start again tomorrow at Loew Lake.

### **Eat Locally**

On the way to the trail this morning we saw the Organic Market just outside of Slinger and Amy decided that was to be our post run destination for the day. They have a small café set in the back of a nicely stocked organic market, with fresh fruit, wine, dairy and assorted packaged goods – all organic of course. We each ordered a coffee to go but skipped the bakery items. They were homemade, gluten free and looked delicious including a Dream Bar that was the size of my hand. But it just wasn't what I was looking for this morning. As we drove through Slinger on the way home, we passed Sweet Creations Bakery, known for sweet rolls the size of a dinner plate. We stopped. I think it's changed hands since the last time I had been there and the sweet rolls are now more reasonably sized. I ordered a smaller than a dinner plate walnut danish that tasted like a kringle. Amy had a bite or two and we finished it with the organic coffee as we drove home for the day.



## **New Territory**

Today marked the first day in new territory in over a month and provided me with a new, exciting and somewhat daunting thought – I am now moving further and further from home into the great unknown of Wisconsin. Since I started in late December, I had been running toward home. Each time out the trail and the landscape became more familiar and the routes landed me closer to home. This past week I started to move past my home territory and today ventured into segments I had not yet experienced. With just under 1,000 miles to go, that will be the new normal for some time. And I am looking forward to the adventure.

The day was sunny and somewhat warmer again, topping out in the high 30s – which for trail running is almost perfect. The footing was icy but firm and I made good time from my drop off point to the spot I was to meet up with Terrie for the last leg of the run. Amy, Terrie, Pat and Mark were all along and we somehow managed to figure out how to coordinate everyone's ambition today and arrive at exactly the right places at the right time.

I did the first segment, Loew Lake, alone. I had been on this trail a couple of other times and I moved through it pretty quickly today. I encountered a runner coming at me early in the run who didn't seem to mind the crisp early morning air and icy conditions. I was well dressed with several layers of running specific apparel, my neck warmer, the latest trail shoes and yak traks. All the things I needed to ensure a perfect run. He, on the other hand, was running faster than me and looked to be much stronger and more experienced but was dressed more casually in a Green Bay Packer hoodie, no yak traks and untied shoes. So much for needing the "perfect" equipment.

There were sections today that you could have easily traded your shoes for ice skates and made better time. There were also sections today with no ice or snow – just good old dirt. It felt so nice to be able to run on the soft earth again. I could feel the warmth coming back up at me and it was soft and quiet – much different than the constant crunch, crunch of yak traks on ice. It also gave me a moment or two to hear the bugle of the cranes again on this early morning.

I finished Loew Lake just a bit ahead of schedule and headed across the main highway intersection in the Town of Monches to the Monches Segment. A trail sign gave me a brief history of Monches, settled in the 1840s by Irish immigrants fleeing the potato famine. The original name, O'Connellsville – no doubt the name of some of the early settlers – was changed to Monches in 1848 to honor the name of the Potawatomi and Chippewa Indian Chief who is buried nearby. Once thriving with 3 general stores, a couple of schools, blacksmith shops, two doctors' offices and much more, it now is quieter with a bed and breakfast, a tavern, some artisan shops and a cemetery dating to 1850, holding the bodies of the early settlers and their descendants.

The Monches segment was a nice, rolling and wooded trail that ran along the Oconomowoc River. It was just hilly enough to make it interesting while allowing us to continue to make good time. The Monches Segment transitioned to the Merton Segment with a brief road CR. Merton was less interesting than Monches as it ran along the Bug Line trail, a long flat, sometimes paved trail that runs throughout Waukesha County. Terrie and I thought we would be able to pick up the pace on the Bug Line but found that the IAT was either prohibited from using or for some reason chose to build a parallel trail sometimes just 5 feet from the Bug Line's smooth, paved surface. The IAT here was anything but

smooth and paved as it ran through a stand of trees along side the Bug Line, offering no incentive for anyone, other than us I guess, to have run through its frozen snow covered track.

A couple of CRs later we ended up at Centennial Park in Hartland, almost at the exact moment our shuttle support team pulled into the parking lot. Like the past couple of runs, it was a fantastic day, with a fun group of friends, on an incredible trail.

### **Eat Locally**

We are in new territory so we need to look for new opportunities to have a post run snack. Pat and I had both done some homework and he suggested we go north instead of south to find our spot. It made sense but somehow we got turned around and ended up at the Pink Mocha Café and Coffee Shop, which was the southern alternative I had scouted. It turned out to be one of those good mistakes.

The Pink Mocha's location is much more nondescript than its name, hidden in a strip mall on a busy intersection. Once inside though we knew we made a good decision. The Pink Mocha has a complete menu of breakfast entrees and coffee drinks plus an incredible assortment of bakery making it very difficult to choose. I think I changed my mind three times as I moved down the line past the bakery trays and to the barista who stood ready to take my order. I reverted to the first thing I had seen, the lemon blueberry scone, which was more like a large slice of scone pie. It was incredible. Luckily, everyone ordered something a bit different and we were able to sample a number of offerings – all huge servings and all delicious. I would say we will be back but I am not sure I can afford myself another huge serving. Well maybe.

### **A Run in the Park (s)**

Today I started in Centennial Park, a small community park near downtown Hartland, and finished just outside of Lapham Peak State Park, less than a mile south of the Village of Delafield. In the 10 miles in between, I ran through or along the edges of 8 other parks and one county trail segment. Make no mistake, it was an urban or at least suburban run overall, cutting through alley ways and winding around subdivisions, but was very well routed and took advantage of all of the natural areas these two communities had to offer.

It was also very well marked. My navigation protocol before each run has been to review the Ice Age Trail Guide, the Ice Age Trail Atlas and the interactive online GIS Ice Age Trail Map. Each provides a different view of the trail route, and sometimes they do not agree. I do have the same version of the Guide and the Atlas but both are now two years old and neither provides the street level turn by turn view that the GIS map does. The GIS map is current and it allows me to feel comfortable that I am taking the correct route, especially through urban segments that sometimes get too creative in how they mark the trail, resulting in confusion on my part.

I find myself taking notes each evening before my runs to document each turn and intersection, along with relevant landmarks, so that I can follow along easily as I wind my way through these towns. Today's notes covered two sides of a page with countless turns and intersections. But today's route also went through two IAT Trail Communities, a partnership between the IAT Alliance and local communities that provides mutual visibility and support for the trail and area businesses. I am not sure of the all of

the requirements of a Trail Community, but having now run through several of them, I think good IAT signage is one of the key qualifiers. So today, despite having taken two pages of notes, I challenged myself to run as far as I could without looking at them but instead to rely on the yellow blazes. I am proud to say that I made it over half way without looking at my notes. I probably could have managed to continue on without the notes, but I got nervous while winding through a subdivision that apparently had a rule against yellow blazes. So I peeked.

Today marked my first day on this journey running in shorts. It was 45 degrees at sunrise and just warm enough to shed the sweatpants. But not warm enough to have melted all of the ice. I had plenty of road surface to run today so I decided on the road shoes without the yak traks. It was probably the right decision but came with a trade off. Particularly down the steep, icy inclines in the woods. I found myself holding on to the trees and finding soft spots off the trail to maintain my footing. The quick progress I made on the roads was offset by the meticulous step by step pace on the icy trails.

Overall, it was a great day with the sun and the warmth and I managed my third long run of the weekend. I feel like I am making great progress having checked off nine segments this weekend and am closing in on another milestone – 250 miles.

### **Eat Locally**

The Village of Delafield is a bit like a postcard. Well, a lot like a post card having benefitted from the investment of the former owner of the Lang Co, a very successful purveyor of calendars and candles. The community sort of mirrors the themes portrayed in the Lang product line and has a number of unique and charming shops and buildings.

Today, we chose to stop at the Blue Collar Coffee shop. We had been here before, under a previous owner. It hadn't changed much but they had swapped some of the décor for lunch boxes and thermoses to align with their blue collar theme. We each had a cup of coffee and I had a ham and egg breakfast sandwich. It was comfortable and the food was good. But we didn't linger as we now have long drives to get home after each run again.

### **Focus on the Positives**

Today was an easy day to get down and to be frustrated. I got lost. I took a turn one road too early and ended up running an extra two miles on what was already a long and difficult run. I worked really hard to contain my emotions and to enjoy the detour but I didn't do so well - at first. By the time I was done, however, I was recalling the beauty of this run from the bright morning sunrise, to the interesting prairie and oak savanna restoration project and the firm and dry track almost the entire way. I was also too exhausted to be upset any longer.

I started the day at the western trail entrance to Lapham Peak State Park. A wonderful park in the Southern Kettle Moraine State Forest area boasting a very active group of volunteers – Friends of Lapham Peak – who are involved in everything from trail maintenance to landscape preservation and restoration. As you enter the park on the west side, you can see the evidence of their hard work in a large prairie and oak savanna restoration project. More on oak savannas later in my journey as they will

become more prevalent as I move into the south central areas of Wisconsin. What was more obvious today though was the prairie restoration. According to the Friends of Lapham Peak, there was a 50+ acre prairie burn last fall. Today, you could see small green shoots emerging from the scorched soil reaching to the ever warming spring sun. I look forward to returning in late summer to see the prairie in full bloom. I'm sure it is spectacular.

The rest of the route through Lapham is typical Kettle Moraine – up and up then down then up again. The trail here tracks a large ridge to a high tower sitting at the peak of the park then back down the other side and emerges onto the Glacial Drumlin Trail – a long paved path that runs from Waukesha to near Madison. After a brief run on the Glacial Drumlin – I turned onto the wrong connecting route and ran a full mile before I saw another runner and yelled out – I am lost! She was a lone female runner and I wasn't sure she would stop to help. Thankfully she did and confirmed I needed to turn around, get back on the Drumlin Trail, and keep going west to Waterville Road and the Waterville Segment.

There was more road than trail for the last half of the run but the trail was worth the pounding road section. Here the trail winds through a rugged area on the outskirts of a quiet residential area, although for most of the route you forget you are even near civilization. The trail was very well maintained despite my concern that there would be broken bridges and boardwalks resulting in wet feet. The name "Waterville" had me thinking there would be lots of water – which there was. And a quick read of the latest edition of the IAT Alliance Mammoth Tales periodical indicated a series of boardwalk and bridge repairs planned for this summer on the segment. I am happy to say, while I can see why they are working to upgrade and repair the tired wood, everything was intact and my feet stayed dry.

A short CR once I emerged from the Waterville Trail Segment took me to the finish – at the Scuppernong Segment Trailhead where I will be joined by Amy, Alex, Terrie and Pat tomorrow morning. Hoping for some cool overnight temperatures to keep that trail from becoming muddy. Will let you know tomorrow.

### **Eat Locally**

We were not anywhere near the next town following our Hartland and Delafield stops so we headed back to the Pink Mocha in Hartland for another great cup of coffee and, this time, an apple pie bar that filled me up and will also serve as dessert tonight and maybe tomorrow night.

### **Scuppernong**

I had been running along Scuppernong Creek the other day with signs for the Scuppernong Watershed Area posted along the way. Today we ran the Scuppernong Segment. So I wondered, just what is Scuppernong. I found a couple of things. The most prevalent definition is that a scuppernong is a variety of sweet tasting grape found in the humid climates of the Southern United States, apparently also referenced in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. That definition did not seem to fit the cold and harsh climates and the glacial terrain of southeastern Wisconsin. So I looked further and found that it is also a Ho Chunk word meaning sweet smelling land. I guess that is somewhat related to a sweet tasting grape but more likely a nod to the beauty and the variety of plant life in the area for which it is named.

Scuppernong Creek runs through the Lapham and Waterville segments through a larger channel that is known as the Ethan Allen Channel. Scuppernong didn't likely cut the channel but took advantage of what existed from this larger meltwater channel that formed as the glacier receded. All of this water flows to an area that was once the large glacial Lake Scuppernong located just west of the hilly trail area that sits on the Niagara Escarpment. It is no longer a lake but is now a large, very flat and very beautiful prairie.

The Scuppernong Segment trail is one of the hilliest segments of trail I have encountered. Many small kettle lakes with steep ridges exist create a constant up and down route. The hummocky terrain changes dramatically as it empties in the Eagle Segment, which is the flattest 5 or 6 miles of land that I have encountered in all of Wisconsin.

The Eagle Segment runs through this large prairie area which, according to the IAT Guidebook, covers the Scuppernong Prairie State Natural Area, one of the oldest state natural areas in Wisconsin, and the Scuppernong River Habitat Area that contains the largest native wet prairie east of the Mississippi. It also skirts the Kettle Moraine Low Prairie State Natural area. Combined, it was a beautiful layering of perennial prairie plants, low lying woodlands plants and a stand of aspens as far as the eye could see and is apparently the result of a significant restoration effort including controlled burns over the past 20 years, returning this land to its original condition.

Today I ran with Terrie and Alex while Amy and Pat manned the support vehicles. Terrie and Alex spent the Scuppernong segment trading memories of runs, hikes and campouts in this area over the past several years. I had spent some time in this general area tracking Alex during the Kettle 100 race but it was less familiar to me. I felt fortunate again to run through and experience yet another perfect piece of preserved land that gives testament to the forces of the glaciers in Wisconsin.

One thing did catch my eye as we ran through a stand of pines, in an apparent open hunting area early in the Scuppernong segment. There were two bright orange signs affixed to trees along the trail that said something like – Don't Shoot in This Direction, There are Houses Back Here. I thought those signs were likely to help but if I lived in the direction of fire, I think a "No Hunting" sign would make me more comfortable.

Alex dropped at about 9 ½ miles and picked up a car. Terrie and I finished the last open prairie section of the Eagle Segment. Earlier in the day we had aspirations of continuing on to the Stony Ridge Segment but we were both spent and thought better of it. We stopped at Hwy 59 where I will pick up again in a couple of days, much to the appreciation I think of the support crew. If we would have gone further, Amy and Pat had spied a very large eagle sitting atop a tree in the Stony Ridge Segment. I will be on the lookout for it as I continue on my journey.

### **Eat Locally**

Amy chose Mama D's in Genesee Depot, a small town crossroads tucked in the Southern Kettle Moraine. It is named after the train depot that served the rail line that passed through in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century and is now home to several nice restaurants and boutiques housed inside original historic buildings. Mama D's was no exception. It is housed in the gracefully restored depot and has a very nice and somewhat busy outdoor firepit that looked cozy even on a 50 degree spring morning.

We had our usual array of coffee and breakfast entrees and spent a while in a sunny spot near the front window. We enjoyed our time and I can see why it's a popular spot for locals and for those biking or hiking through the area.

## **Fire**

I had seen some recent evidence of fire from the prairie restoration efforts on the Lapham and Eagle Segments but today was the first time I had ever seen fire scarred forest in Wisconsin. I saw it very early on the northern most section of the Stony Ridge Segment and then again as I approached Bald Bluff on the southern end of the Blue Spring Lake Segment.

Fire throughout the history of the Wisconsin landscape was anything but uncommon both on the prairies and in the forest. It was naturally triggered by lightning for millions of years and then strategically used by the Native Americans for thousands of years. It has always served the purpose of maintaining the landscape, so that its inhabitants could optimize its use. Before humans, the mammals and insects thrived in the prairie plant and low forest undergrowth landscape and the occasional fire only served to regenerate that landscape to ensure their survival. Native Americans did not wait for the lightning to spark the fires but learned to set them and control them independent of nature.

Fire is not that common in Wisconsin any longer. Maybe what I saw is evidence from decades old activity or maybe from recent efforts at restoring the oak savanna. I don't know the answer but will continue to be curious and will look for continued scarring as I move through the next part of the journey that contains what is left of the oak savanna in Wisconsin.

Maybe a coincidence, but I also saw a lot of oak savanna today. Oak savanna is defined by scattered oaks with broad spreading branches and areas that allow significant sunlight to reach the ground. It has an almost park like appearance. Bur Oak in particular because of its fire resistant bark is prevalent in oak savanna but other species like White Oak can be present as well. Oak is part of a very mature forest and is likely more prevalent in southern and central Wisconsin because the glacier receded here first and the forest has had more time to grow and mature.

The savannas or wide open areas exist because of the constant burning over the centuries that kept the other mature hardwoods from growing and overshadowing the oak trees that don't survive well in those shady conditions. The open areas also allowed large mammals like deer and elk to thrive and in turn to feed on the low lying plants and hardwoods, further suppressing their growth. It is a unique and fragile landscape and one that is disappearing due to agriculture and fire suppression and one worth noting and appreciating while it's still here.

I also started to notice the glacial erratics today. Maybe because of the sign indicating a trail highlight – the Stone Elephant – which had my radar up. Erratics are glacially deposited rocks that differ in size and type from the other naturally occurring rock in the area. They are different because the glacial movement has carried them sometimes hundreds of miles from where they originated and deposited them when they started to recede. The Stone Elephant is one of them.

This rock is a couple of miles from the nearest road buried deep in the forest. But it has been a destination for humans for thousands of years apparently. I am not sure for how long it has been called

the Stone Elephant but I do know it has been for longer than I have been around. Therefore, I am not the resident expert but if I had to provide my simple perspective, it does not look like an elephant. Yes, it is a stone. And yes, it is large and grey. But that is a close to a Stone Elephant as it gets. I think it looks more like a T Rex beak coming up out of the ground.

The trail was very diverse today. Pine forests, some soon to be former pine forests due to logging, prairie, oak savannas, beech and maple forests were all part of the landscape today. I ran some long, low flat areas but also climbed some steep ridges with switchbacks. Stony Ridge was in fact stony and a ridge but it was also flat and sandy making me think it was part of the ancient shore of the glacial Lake Scuppernong.

There is a lot to see and do in this area including the State Forest Headquarters that is home to a museum of both pioneer day artifacts and displays of native plants and mammals. There is Old World Wisconsin which is a great outdoor history museum for kids and families. McMiller Sports Center, Emma Carlin Trails, Palmyra Horse and Snowmobile Trails including a horserider's camp area and two lakes – Blue Spring Lake and Lower Spring Lake – all within the ten miles covered by Stony Ridge and the Blue Spring Lake Segments that I ran today.

I finished at the border of Jefferson and Walworth Counties having now covered both Waukesha and Jefferson Counties in the past couple of weeks. I head out next time on the Blackhawk and Whitewater Lake Segments which take me to the end of the Kettle Moraine.

### **Eat Locally**

Having driven through Eagle Wisconsin many times as we took the kids to Old World Wisconsin, we have driven past but never stopped at The Hen House, a local diner in the middle of downtown Eagle. So, today we stopped. It was a very clean and friendly place specializing in breakfast all day, homemade donuts and homemade pies. They also serve lunch and dinner and it looked like some cocktails as well. From the name you can guess it has a chicken theme. Chickens and roosters of all shapes and sizes throughout the inside and on the outside likely collected over the years. Not cluttered and busy though but enough to know you are at The Hen House. I thought that at one time there was a chicken on the roof but the waitress assured me that never happened.

I had a waffle, and egg and some bacon and Amy had the oatmeal and blueberries. We both had some warm coffee to help take the chill off a cold and windy March morning. It was good, diner fare and I am glad we finally stopped after all these years.

### **Better Kettles?**

Today marked the official end of the Kettle Moraine segments – both North and South. While the area was formed by the same natural forces – the overlapping lobes of the Green Bay and the Lake Michigan – they are somewhat different and they are managed separately as a Northern Unit and a Southern Unit of the Kettle Moraine Forest. And there is a quiet debate among those that use them frequently, about which are better. I haven't had a strong opinion since, before today, I have not experienced the entirety

of the Southern Unit . Although since I have lived in the Northern Unit my entire life, I likely have a bias of course. Now that I have run both, at least from an IAT perspective, I feel compelled to comment.

So here goes –

- They are the same in that they enjoy maybe the longest connected trail segments found anywhere along the IAT. For over 100 miles there are very few urban areas and even those urban areas are primarily identified as official trail segments.
- They are both hilly but the Northern Unit is more hummocky. That is, has a lot more up and down. Larger hills with fantastic views are found throughout the Southern Unit but with more flats including the beautiful Eagle Segment that runs across the ancient bed of glacial Lake Scuppernong.
- The vegetation is similar – many hardwoods dispersed with man made pine plantations. The vegetation changes subtly over the 100 miles, though, from primarily beech and maple forest in the north to more prairie and oak savanna in the south.
- The Southern Unit has more infrastructure. That is, more designated recreation areas for camping, skiing, horseback riding and mountain biking. Not that the Northern Unit lacks these but there are more in the Southern Unit and they are much larger with more amenities.
- Both have their fair share of lakes. The Southern is in “Lake Country” and many of the lakes are larger and have significant numbers of residences. But there are also some very pretty remote lakes that are seen from the trail. The Northern Unit’s lakes are smaller kettles, the result of the very hummocky terrain.

With all that said, I could call it a tie. Both are wonderful and have tons to offer anyone who loves the outdoors. I will give a nod to the Northern Unit, at least from a runner’s perspective. The hummocky terrain makes it just a bit more challenging, and interesting and beautiful – in all the seasons of the year.

I expect that this entire area – Northern and Southern Unit - will top my list of favorite parts of the trail. It is, I think, the signature evidence of the glaciers’ impact on Wisconsin’s geography. But I will reserve my final judgment until I am done.

Today’s run started out crisp. It is spring, but the frost of late winter was present as we headed out. The sun was coming up and it warmed to a perfect running temperature as Mark, Terrie and I wound our way through the Blackhawk Segment. With an initial rise up a steep ridge, the trail flattened along the top and wound its way through a dense forest for 7 miles. Along the way there was signage for a Pioneer Lime Kiln and for Ole Oleson’s Historic Log Cabin. The cabin was visible from the main trail but we didn’t venture over. I do wish we had as it appeared to be sitting on a ridge with a great view to the west. Maybe one day we will come back to catch the sunset and enjoy the view in a different season.

The dense forest opened into an oak savanna that ran alongside Lake La Grange. We spotted Amy less than a half mile from the parking area and dropped Mark. Terrie and I continued onto the car for a brief respite and refill of water and headed across the highway to the Whitewater Lake Segment.

The Whitewater Lake Segment started with what turned out to be just one of many steep climbs, the last of which provided one of the prettiest views yet along the trail – that of Whitewater Lake in the distance. Both Terrie and I seemed to get our second wind and enjoyed the last 5 or so miles through the pines. We were in a nice running groove and feeling strong when we looked up and saw the car.



Normally you are tired and look for the car for some time before arriving but today the end snuck up on us before I think we were ready. It was the perfect place to stop however. Not only the end of the last Kettle Moraine Segment but the end of the trail before the start of a long CR. I'll be back out in a couple of days to try and tackle that stretch of road.

### **Eat Locally**

We were headed to the LaGrange General Store, a place we had stopped at a couple of times over the course of the long day tracking Alex in his Kettle 100 race a couple of years ago. It had offered a little of everything and was charming. But today it looked closed – permanently.

We continued on through Palmyra and Eagle and back to Genesee Depot and stopped at the Cornerstone Restaurant. This was one of a few good options in Genesee Depot and just across from Mama D's Coffee Shop where we stopped the previous week. The Cornerstone was a typical café and served a great breakfast. You could also smell the start of their lunch and dinner menu wafting from the kitchen.

The only odd thing about the restaurant is it seemed they sort of got into the retail wine business recently or maybe fell into a shipment of wines. There were bottles of wine huddled in different areas around the café – on a shelf, atop some of the dining tables and on the counter. Each huddle with a different price point. Almost like a wine rummage sale.

We passed on the wine but had a wonderful breakfast washed down with good coffee.

### **Do the Work**

This is a thought that has been running through my head on this journey and one I used quite bit this morning. It is what gets me out of bed at 4:30 am for a 1 to 2 hour drive in the dark to do a 2 to 3 hour run. Just get up and do the work. Just do the work and you can rest at the top of the hill. Once you do the work, you can relax and enjoy your day. While I am enjoying every mile, it is work. You cannot run 10 to 15 miles without feeling like you did some work. But it is good work. Work that makes me feel great and lets me experience this trail and this beautiful state.

Today was my longest run at just under 16 miles, and I crossed the 300 mile milestone somewhere along the way. I have now run 309 miles in just under 3 months, traversed 8 counties and covered 36 separate trail segments. My thought of getting this done in 80 runs is probably not going to happen. Too many short runs during the difficult winter trail conditions will limit that opportunity. I am feeling really good about where I am at, though, and am committed to finishing in whatever timeframe makes sense.

The run today was mostly road. I donned my running shoes and shorts but with mittens and a neck warmer to be safe. It finally felt more like spring but for a stiff wind coming out of the south that had a bite to it. The roads were nice and quiet. I didn't count specifically but I bet I didn't see 5 cars over the course of the 16 miles today. Early on I flushed a Great Blue Heron. The Sand Hill Cranes seem to get all of the attention these days but I really like the herons. They are expansive as they take flight and are

incredibly graceful. Unlike the Sandhills that loudly announce their every move, the herons are quiet. The only sound I heard today was the ripple of the water as it took flight.

I also passed a local wonder – The Flowing Well. A sign along the road brought attention to a pipe with flowing water. It looked as clear and clean as you would want your water source to be and was flowing nicely. The sign above indicated that the well was dug in 1895 by Adam Channing and “has been flowing steadily to this day”. Oh, and original depth was 55’. I cannot imagine hand digging a 55’ hole. It is challenging to dig a 3 foot hole for a tree much less go down 55’ hoping you might find water. But I guess if you didn’t have water in 1895, you just needed to “do the work”.

The run started out fairly flat as we had come out of the hilly kettles and onto a large swath of agricultural land dotted by large spreading oaks. The early farmers who settled and cultivated this area did damage to the natural occurring oak savanna but were conscientious enough to leave a scattering of oaks throughout the fields. This flat agricultural area gave way to wetland and lowland in the Clover Valley State Wildlife area and further along in the Lima Marsh State Wildlife area.

The Clover Valley Segment cut through the designated wildlife area on a soft, grassy path. I saw my first (live) turkeys of the journey, about 20 of them to be exact, and struggled to keep my shoes dry as I traversed this marshy segment. Somewhere deep in the woods I crossed a creek on a bridge and saw a post that said “Rock”. I stopped and looked around expecting to see another stone elephant or comparable local site but only saw on the other side of the post the word “Walworth”. There was no famed Rock to see but I quickly realized I had just crossed over from Walworth County to Rock County, apparently with the 2 foot creek as its boundary.

I exited the Clover Valley Segment on County Line Rd., where I would have thought the county line sign might be, and headed out for a long road run. The run took me past more farms and through Lima Center, a mostly fading town center with a few modest homes and a town hall. Most notable was a home that looked more like an outdoor museum for Case farm machinery. I didn’t finish counting but I think there were over 20 older, orange and cream colored, Case tractors in various states of repair or rebuild littering the front yard and adjacent lot. Other than the fledgling tractor museum, there was not much to see in Lima Center.

I headed out of Lima Center on Willow Drive, a dirt road that cut straight through the Lima Marsh State Wildlife Area, a haven I think for geese and deer with signs indicating it was a public hunting area. The dirt road emptied onto a county highway and then onto a more hilly Bowers Lake Rd. which took me to the finish line at the head of the Storrs Lake Segment. Amy and I met at the car at the exact same time as she had headed down the Storrs Lake Segment for a short hike. After a short road trip with Amy for spring break later this week, we will head back to Storrs Lake and Rock County to start on the next 300 miles of the journey.

### **Eat Locally**

We were on a time schedule this morning and had to get back home but found a nice coffee shop in downtown Fort Atkinson called the Beauty and the Bean. It was a newly remodeled coffee shop and bakery and was busy enough for a Monday morning. I had a cup of coffee and muffin and Amy a small

smoothie to go. It almost filled the hole we both had from our work this morning and it got us through the long drive home.

## **Urban Trails**

Urban trails can define a community. Connect it. Make it healthy, less congested and more social. I have been on a number of urban trails around the country. Some, like Boulder and Sioux Falls, are significant in scale and can move you from one side of the city to another. Others are less evolved and disconnected but works in progress. Today, I ran on one of the nicest urban trails I have seen anywhere. This one in Janesville WI. I didn't get to the whole thing yet but I did see enough to appreciate what a beautiful community asset it is.

Janesville is a community that has had to redefine itself. Once the home to a General Motors assembly plant that employed thousands. The plant closed a couple of decades ago and a couple of generations of families and a community lost the identity and the security that comes with a large employer like GM. But Janesville has evolved and is now defined as Wisconsin's City of Parks and appears to have rebuilt its industrial and commercial base likely with much more diversity and less risk than comes with being a one company town.

The Janesville urban trail is the centerpiece of the community and is the Ice Age Trail. You can see how the city has embraced the opportunity to have the IAT run right through its heart. The trail was not just well mark with IAT signs, it was celebrated. There were the usual yellow blazes of course and some IAT insignia signage, but there were also speed limit sized Ice Age Trail signs pointing the way at intersections and turns. There was a 7 foot pillar sign with 12 inch letters letting walkers and runners know they were on the IAT and an Eagle Scout project built kiosk that contained all sorts of IAT Alliance information and maps.

I started the day with Terrie at the Storrs Lake segment trailhead, which was underwater and had a posted detour. We did run on a bit of the trail segment but mostly on the pavement as we started our day. It was somewhat disappointing as I had heard how beautiful this segment is but apparently about 750 feet of it was under two feet of water. The Storrs Lake Segment ends where the City of Milton begins. Here there was not a defined urban trail but the IAT took you on a tour of Milton and its historic downtown and neighborhoods including the Historic Milton College Neighborhood which highlights the now defunct Milton College.

Its not clear how a private college grew and initially thrived in a small community like Milton but it eventually succumbed to declining enrollment and increasing debt. At the time of its closure in 1982, it was the oldest continually operating college in the state with 135 students. The campus is now maintained as part of a preservation effort and are open for tours and antique shopping.

It was a nice quiet run through town but included not a dog running at us as we ran along but a dog owner running at us. As we passed a row of small homes just before entering the downtown district a young woman came running out the front door waving her hands at us. I thought she might have had an emergency and needed us to call 911. It turned out that we didn't have to call 911 but she did lose her dog and thought we might see or have seen Sky, a black and white husky. We hadn't, but kept our eyes out just in case.

For a town of just over 5,000 Milton is expansive and we ran through much of it finally exiting on the west side onto a two track dirt trail. We met our support group of Amy, Pat and Mark on the trail and confirmed our next meeting point at which time Terrie would drop. She had done over 10 the day before covering Point Beach and some of the Tisch Mills CR. I continued on and met the group in the middle of Janesville at Palmer Park where I will start again in a couple of days.

### **Eat Locally**

The plan at the start of the day was to go to the Citrus Café in downtown Janesville. As Terrie and I ran I thought I smelled donuts and suggested that maybe the group find a bakery and buy some donuts and coffee so we could eat and drive home at the same time. They found two bakeries, not opened on Saturdays. Let me say that again. They found two bakeries, not opened on Saturdays. Holy cow. When they did find a small shop serving cakes and cupcakes – only with pre order – they asked about a local bakery or donut shop and we directed to Dunkin Donuts. Hard to believe that a city of 50,000 people only has a Dunkin Donuts open on Saturday morning for donuts. But I guess it's the City of Parks, not the city of donuts.

We ended up at the Citrus Café anyway. It was bustling and was evident as to why it was the top rated breakfast in Janesville several years running. The menu was expansive if not somewhat overwhelming. We all found something that suited us including a try at the specialty – fresh squeezed orange juice. After a nice conversation and some coffee, we hit the road as the drives are getting longer and longer as we move through the state.

### **Forward Progress**

I struggled with a title for today's entry, but forward progress seemed like a good summary of the day. Both Terrie and I did just over 15 miles, a bit more than planned for me and I think a lot more than planned for her. That takes me to just under 340 miles overall and just a few runs shy of 1/3 of the way and just short of the turn to the north and the next 1/3 of the route. I've decided that I don't need to finish in any number of runs and by any specific date. That decision I think will help me continue to enjoy the journey and relish each run as its own adventure. So, I guess then today should be about more than forward progress, it should be about our adventure. Here are some highlights.

Terrie and I started where we left off last week, in Janesville's Palmer Park and on the urban trail, dubbed The Ice Age Way. The last half of the trail did not disappoint. It meandered through Palmer Park, past Blackhawk Golf Club than through a beautiful downtown area. Once we exited downtown, we hugged the Rock River through more park area all the way to Devil's Staircase.

The downtown area looked very vibrant although there was not much activity on an early Saturday morning. We did encounter a man on a bike that seemed friendly and full of local advice. Mostly he wanted to tell us about the views from the top of the ridge. In fact, we ran into him somehow a few times and he kept telling us about the view from the top of the ridge wanting us I think to stop what we were doing and to follow him up there. We did finally drop him but not before he had brightened our morning by pointing out a beautiful heron sitting on a fallen tree on the shore of the river. We also saw maybe one hundred white pelicans using the river as a stopover on there migration north.

We finally exited Janesville and headed up the Devil's Staircase, so named because of the staircases, of course, taking you up and down the steep ridge and because of how treacherous it could be with its steep sides falling right to the river. I can see it being very difficult to traverse with any amount of mud or ice. Today the trail was decent as we picked our way along the rocks and steep staircases careful to make sure we didn't slip or slide.

The staircase segment ended at another city park and golf course and into the Arbor Ridge Segment. The highlight of Arbor Ridge is the Robert O'Cook Memorial Arboretum containing 160 acres of mature forest, prairie, wetlands and marshes. It is another of the amazing parks in and around the City of Janesville. It contains a rebuilt 1840s log cabin along with the history of the man, Mr. James Hornby, and his wives that owned and occupied it through the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The cabin measured only 16' x 22' and was last occupied by an Amish family, Joe and Lydia Slaubaugh and their 11 children. If you are counting, like I did, that is 13 people inside of 352 sq feet or about 27 square feet per person. I hope they didn't live there long.

Arbor Ridge was the last of the official trail segments today. We had just 9 miles in and were now facing 30 miles of CR. I stopped at the car to get some water and took off to dig into as much of the CR as possible. Little did I know, Terrie, after a change of shoes, decided to follow me. I finished about 6 miles later with Terrie just a few minutes behind me. The CR was tough, as it went down a long stretch of county highway with many cars few of which thought they needed to move over as we navigated the narrow, sloped shoulder. After about 4 miles of that experience, we finally got off on a much quieter country road where we finished for the day.

### **Eat Locally**

We thought we would try the coffee and bakery to go today and found a coffee shop in the historic Milton College area that looked interesting. The coffee shop was in one of the old Milton College buildings, a former library built in 1907 with \$6,500 donated by Andrew Carnegie, who was contributing to causes like this across the country at the time. The coffee shop was busy but had little remaining bakery by the time we arrived. So, we decided to head to the Milton Family Restaurant, where it seemed everyone else was having late breakfast or early lunch.

We were able to be seated right away and had a combination of breakfast and lunch to fill the void. Pat ordered banana cream pie, one of about 10 varieties of pie offered. It arrived first and was so big he ate it before his meal and after and almost, just almost, needed to take some in a box back home. Terrie helped him finish and we got back on the road for what is now about a 2 hour drive home.

### **Smell the Dirt**

When we got out of the car this morning, Amy said, "you can smell the dirt!". And you could. It had rained for several days, the ground was completely thawed and the smell of dirt was in the air. It's a wonderful smell if you haven't experienced it. It's like smelling spring. There was a sharp wind this morning but outside of that it was spring. I saw mowed lawns, daffodils and tulips. The sun was out and it gave me energy to do my second long run this weekend.

I started on the very rural Roherty Rd. which ran past a few farms before crossing the state highway and turning into Eagle Rd. Both roads were nice to run on with many nice homes and farms along the way. Roherty Rd., for some reason, was a repository for a lot of empty beer cans. I counted maybe 10 different varieties of beer in a two mile stretch along with various other flavors of beverages. If I had brought a bag, I could have filled it up and likely paid for my gas home with the proceeds from the aluminum.

Eagle Rd. was much cleaner and took me to the entrance of Gibbs Lake County Park. Amy had parked here and found a number of trails to hike on while waiting for me to complete my run. The lake had a few fishermen on it early in the morning but outside of that the park was quiet. I moved through it pretty quickly and exited on some more farm roads. As I got out of the park, I spotted a dog ahead, alone, with no sign of the owner. I moved to the other side and it stared at me as I approached it and passed it. But thankfully it didn't make a sound and didn't make a move. I've been lucky so far and sure hope it stays that way.

Today I running alone and started to pay attention to the sheds. It seems a requirement of rural homes to have a shed, or two or even more. They come in all sizes but many times they are bigger than the homes beside them. I counted 10 of them surrounding one farm property, all within about 100 feet of the house. What is inside is a mystery but likely the lifelong accumulation of possessions that can't be replaced. Many times, there are items on the outside. Sometimes because there are more possessions than sheds but other times to show off part of the collection of what is inside. Today I saw the cab of an old fuel truck on top of a shed flanking the entrance to the other sheds. Those other sheds had a very large Do Not Enter sign but also an old lighted Pabst bar sign for the Eagle Tap right next to an authentic Marc's Big Boy holding the hamburger platter high in the air.

The last leg of my run today was on another county highway. Not as busy as the other day but a solid mile of the two mile stretch was uphill dead into that sharp spring wind. I finally turned into the city of Evansville and ran through a wonderfully kept, thriving downtown area. As you cross the railroad tracks heading west on Main, you enter an area of small businesses in renovated buildings with large two story Victorian era historic homes surrounding the business district. Evansville appears to have made the transition that many other farming based communities have not. It looks to be not only surviving but thriving.

A quick search revealed that the Wisconsin Historical Society has described Evansville as the "finest collection of 1840s to 1915 architecture of any small town in Wisconsin. It has 3 historic districts including almost 300 structures listed on the National Register of Historic Places. We saw only a small part of that and it lived up to its billing. We will look forward to going back to start again on the next leg of the journey which will begin in Leonard – Leota Park, right in the middle of town, and also listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

### **Eat Locally**

The drives have been getting longer and we have been trying to find a good cup of coffee and a snack for the ride home rather than stop and eat a full breakfast. Today Amy found a nice coffee shop, Ceili, and picked up a nice medium roast and an oversized blueberry muffin for the road. It warmed me up and got us home.

## **Unremarkable**

Today's run was unremarkable. That is to say, everything went as planned. It was another great run like many others have been. The terrain was hilly and very scenic as we wound through the rural roads of south central Wisconsin. Terrie and I started in Evansville, at Leonard Leota Park and finished in Albany at the start of the Albany Segment as we finished the long 34 mile CR.

The start of the run took us on a tour of the rest of Evansville including a circle around the former Evansville Seminary, now an apartment complex. The seminary was built by the Methodists in the 1850s and has a long and storied history almost shutting down several times including as soon as the 1860s. It persisted until recent decades when it transitioned to residential housing and is part of what is a very historic, albeit aging, community.

The only two notable things we saw on the route were the dog that chased us, but didn't catch us. Not because we were faster but because the dog decided we weren't worth the full effort, I think. And we saw a great blue heron flying gracefully past us looking for food or a wet place to land or just admiring the view as we were.

We finished the CR in Albany at an intersection of the Sugar River State Trail, a former rail bed turned bike and hike trail. We ran a short part of that trail in order to reduce the distance of the next run which will take us down the Sugar River trail to the Badger State trail, another of the state's many rails to trails routes. Once on the Badger State trail, we begin turn to the north in what seems to me as a significant milestone of this journey.

## **Eat Locally**

We have struggled a little to find a perfect place for coffee and breakfast but have decided that there is no perfect place. They are all unique and all part of the experience of discovering Wisconsin's backroads, so we will enjoy each venue as it is. Today we ended up at the Main Street Café in Evansville. It was busy and the entire front area was full so we were directed to the back of the restaurant in what appeared to be the banquet room. Or the former banquet room. It looked like the room that the local Lions or Kiwanis Clubs met for lunch or dinner meetings circa 1970 or 1980.

We enjoyed the short break and conversation before hitting the road for home.

## **Heading North**

I hit a big milestone today. I turned north. The IAT starts on the far northeastern side of the state in Door County, and takes a big dip to the south through the Southern Kettle Moraine and then bumps along the southern part of the state before turning north. I have been bumping along the southern part of the state for about a month now, looking forward to the turn north. Today was the day!

I have enjoyed the run through southern WI. It's not an area I have explored and I found it interesting and scenic. As the IAT moves along to the West and now to the north, the trail becomes the border between the glacier lobe advance and the Driftless Area, or non glaciated area of WI. Because the Driftless Area was not glaciated, it retains its high ridges and deep valley and comes with some of the

best views in the entire state. I saw some of those views today and am looking forward to more of that as I move to the north.

As I was anticipating the turn north, I wondered if I would notice or feel the sense of change in direction. Since the trail is not straight and does move north and south as it traverses east and west, that change would have been subtle. Today, however, I did notice and it was not subtle. It came in the form of a cold, harsh north wind as I made the turn in Monticello. My legs were tired today and the wind and the cold provided another level of challenge for the final hour of my day.

Today's run started in Albany, a small farming community with the Sugar River at its center. The Albany segment takes advantage of the Sugar River Trail which runs next to and occasionally over the Little Sugar River and through several sections of the Albany State Wildlife Area. I started at sunrise, although the sun was scarce throughout the day. When it was out, it provided a dappled, bright view of the trail and surrounding area. I spent the first two hours of my run, listening to the wetland and the woods wake to the morning light. I saw cardinals and blue jays darting among the honey suckles, I followed a couple of turkeys that ran in front of me for a time and refused to fly away. There were rabbits and hawks playing a game of catch me if you can. And there were many more song birds that I did not see but kept me company as I ran down the long flat stretch of trail.

I did encounter a few people. A woman dressed from head to toe in bright pink including the hood she had pulled tight over her head. A hiker and her dog who I startled with a good morning as I ran up to them. And a couple of older gentlemen going out for their morning walk. One quickly finishing his cigarette as his buddy rolled up to join him. There were a couple of more scattered over the latter part of the trail trying to enjoy the cold spring day. All in all, it was a much more peaceful run than the 34 miles of CR we just finished.

The Sugar River Trail took me to Monticello where it intersected with the Badger State Trail for the last leg of my run. I didn't have a chance to explore Monticello but ran past the former railroad depot that no doubt served both the Sugar River Trail and the Badger State Trail rail lines that run parallel to each other as they pass through town. At the north end of Monticello, the Sugar River and Badger State Trails diverge. Just reading the map alone and trying to translate it to navigating through town would have confused me as to where the IAT stopped on one trail and started on the other. The yellow blazes are extremely helpful here and I am confident I chose the right route and officially covered the trail through town.

As I headed north out of Monticello, my legs started to tire even more. I put on my music as the sound of the birds was now drowned out by the sound of the wind. The music boosted my spirits and gave me some energy to continue. Although, it was a mile by mile run at that point. Meaning, just think about and get through the next mile and then the next.

With just a couple of miles to go, I encountered a fence across the trail and a sign indicating that the next mile or so was closed. It provided me with a detour alternative on Tunnel Rd. that added a little bit of mileage and a lot of elevation. Turns out there was a tunnel ahead that was in disrepair. The ceiling of the tunnel was falling down or in danger of falling down. That knowledge helped me feel a lot better about the detour. That and the wonderful views at the top of the hill on Tunnel Rd.



I found the trail again with less than a mile to go. I seemed to speed up as I could see the end of trail for the day. Later, as we went for breakfast, I saw a quote that summed up the run for today – and maybe most days. “The greatest gift is the courage to get uncomfortable and put effort over perfection.” – Brenda Martinez, World Athletics Championships, 800M Silver Medalist.

### **Eat Locally**

We broke from our routine a little as ended up at Café Hollander in Madison. It is Wisconsin based but is a small chain, not a local independent merchant. Our good friend, Brian, bartends during the day and he has talked up the bloody marys and the breakfast. He was working and we had a nice chance to catch up over a beer for Amy, a bloody mary for me and a salad and omelet respectively.

I grabbed a cup of coffee for the road and we headed for home.

### **Understory**

Today we met Terrie and Pat at the start of a short CR which led to a couple of beautiful trail segments. They had been camping at nearby New Glarus State Park and we arrived right on time to start our next leg of the journey. Terrie had been out the day before making up for missed segments and was planning to run just part of the way with me today.

We headed down the county highway, much busier than it should have been for an early Saturday morning. But drivers were courteous and we soon found our way to a quieter section of road in a crossroads town called Dayton. Dayton was so small a quick search didn't even result in a hit other than another Dayton WI further north. I did find it finally but the search offered little more than coordinates. Dayton consisted of one open bar set nicely along the river bank and one maybe former bar that was in the later stages of falling into itself. Hard to say if it was the result of a fire or neglect – likely both. It was for sale for some optimistic entrepreneur. We almost missed a yellow trail blaze hidden off the road down the snowmobile trail as we passed the ruins and crossed the bridge.

We weren't looking for a blaze as there was not supposed to be a trail section, only a CR. We decided to take the trail since it was clearly a yellow IAT blaze. The trail took us about a ¼ mile off the road and emptied back to the same road via the snowmobile trail. With that little point of confusion behind us we found our turn and headed toward the trailhead for the Brooklyn Wildlife Segment.

Brooklyn Wildlife starts out on a prairie that is in the process of maintenance and restoration. Prairie maintenance and restoration continues to be a key theme along the route today as further on there is a large area of new prairie that had been planted by the Dane County IAT Alliance members. This trail was wide and mowed and took us upward, gently at first, then more dramatically until we reached a very scenic overlook. The view was back to the east and offered a picture of the rolling hills and valleys of the Story Creek wetlands. The landscape is dotted with farms and the barns in incredibly idyllic settings.

The trail continued on and merged with the Montrose Segment. It was here I left Terrie behind as it was her plan to slow down a bit and save her legs for more running and hiking tomorrow. The Montrose segment headed uphill to a couple of high ridges, each of which crossed a corn field, before heading back down. It was here in the woods I started to notice the understory.

The understory is the lowest level of plant life in the woodland setting and today the emergent signs of spring were evident. I saw early May Apples emerging and purple violets blooming in bunches. I saw signs of trilliums pushing through and getting ready for a May showing. There were ramps and what looked like a couple of large pockets of Lillys of the Valley along with the usual weed suspects, garlic mustard the most notable. The understory was green and vibrant and well ahead of the overstory which has soft but discernable buds poking through, shading but not coloring the landscape. It made for a great distraction as I continued my run alone.

I finally caught up with Amy and Pat toward the end of the trail segment and continued on down a short road section to a recently planted prairie. It was so recent you could not tell where the prairie started and the corn field ended but for the signs noting the work. We are in our second year of our prairie restoration at home and the change over the course of one season has been remarkable. I will be interested to go back to this segment in a year and two to witness the same transformation of the land.

The final leg of today's run took me down the Badger State Trail again. It was a nice change of pace and a long flat finish. I had passed a few runners and bikers making good use of this sunny and warming morning. I was nearing the end of the route and one biker passed by and called out – "I know you!". Turns out she was a runner we knew from Kewaskum who was out on her own journey to hike the IAT. We chatted for a few minutes and she told me she started on January 1 in Sturgeon Bay, just a few days after I did and had been doing a solo journey using her bike and car to transport herself to and from the trailheads. She had been tracking our journey very closely but we had not run into each other until today. Her plan was to continue her solo segment hike and finish by year end. The chance meeting and her similar story gave me some energy and momentum to not only finish today's run but to continue to move forward in the overall journey.

### **Eat Locally**

Today we had a couple of options for post run breakfast back on Main Street in Belleville. We chose the Lingonberry Llama coffee and bakery which served up locally roasted Rusty Dog Coffee and had a variety of delicious bakery items along with some egg dishes. Other than the cool alliteration of the name, I'm not sure of the significance as I did not see any lingonberry or llama references in the coffee shop. I ordered a dark roast and scone and it was delicious. We sat outside on the sidewalk in the sunshine and enjoyed our post run snack for a few minutes before heading back home.

### **Trust Your Legs**

Monday runs are tough. Saturday runs are tough too, don't get me wrong. It's just that Monday runs are usually on tired legs. The routine, regardless of the day, has been – wake at 4am. Drink coffee. Eat oatmeal. Leave the house by 5am. Drive 2 hours give or take. Get out of the car and run for 2 ½ hours give or take. Get back in the car. Stop for coffee or breakfast and drive for 2 hours give or take. Home by noon give or take.

Nowhere in there did I list any time to warm up those tired and stiff legs or for that matter wind down and stretch before getting back into the car. That routine takes it toll especially on Mondays after a long Saturday run.

I'm not complaining. I chose this schedule. I am just describing the challenge that comes with it. So, Monday mornings I wake up tired and the drive usually makes me stiff and tired. I get out of the car and wobble for a while before I get comfortable and my stride loosens. I know I can get through it though, as I have many times before. I just tell myself to trust my legs. They have pulled me through before and they can and will do it again, and again.

My legs did not disappoint me today as I ran through the hills of Verona and west Madison. Not terrible hills but it is getting hillier the further north I get. The run started at the Badger State Trail where I left off on Saturday and took me down a couple of quiet roads past a llama ranch and some nice, manicured properties before taking a right at the Old Duffers Pub on the county highway. This morning's county highway segment was less than a mile but uphill and busy. The Monday morning commuter traffic heading into Madison was heavy and I spent a couple of minutes a couple of times trying to cross over the road.

I finally got off the highway and ran into Prairie Moraine Park which had a nice series of trails for hikers and their dogs behind a gate and a fence. I had to open the gate to get onto the IAT but once inside the trail was well manicured and wound through recently burned prairie and through some nice examples of oak savanna. Several large, one or two hundred year old oaks stood guard on the ridge that I traversed before heading out of the park and across the highway again to the IATA's Moraine Kettles Preserve.

The IATA's Moraine Kettle Preserve was a short section of mostly dying ash. I saw a red headed woodpecker who is likely feasting on the ash borer and anything else making its home in the dying trees. This section also had a fenced off area that I would say was a pen much like you would see at the zoo. Inside the pen there was a small shelter with a stuffed monkey sitting inside. Outside of the pen was a full peanut dispenser that you could use – for 25 cents – to presumably feed the animals inside the pen. Only there were no animals present that I could tell. A short way up the trail there was a rusty folding chair perched on a stump overlooking the trail. I don't think it was a rest area, but maybe just left to interest or intrigue passing hikers and runners. I admit, the whole thing did leave me wondering.

This area, like the Prairie Moraine Park area and almost every other area I encountered this morning had evidence of a recent or a past years' burn, to both maintain the prairie and the oak savanna. I moved into the City of Verona and encountered a trail detour that took me into the downtown area to the Military Ridge Trail. The City of Verona is not large but the surrounding Town of Verona is growing rapidly. The trail took me through parks and past the largest little league facility I had ever seen before crossing the road to a first class soccer facility. In between these two sports complexes, the paved bike trail led kids and parents directly past the Pizza Ranch and Taco Bell, and then into another prairie dominated park that was home to the Ice Age Junction Area parking. Here there was a dispersed camping area and some facilities laid out in the large prairie area. The trail continued up a steep ridge through an even larger prairie to the top before descending into the University Ridge Golf Course.

Most golf courses would not allow the IAT to run through it and disturb golfers or risk hikers or runners getting hit by errant golf balls. But this golf course does. It is owned by the University of Wisconsin and is home to the university's men's and women's golf teams and is also the home to the UW cross country

teams. The trail does not take you onto or across their course but it is clearly visible to hikers and golfers as they enter the area.

I had played golf here many times and knew the IAT ran through it. I had seen the yellow blaze running behind the 7<sup>th</sup> green but didn't have a sense of where it went after that. But as I ran through the course on the IAT, it was clear to me that I had not been paying attention. The trail was woven into the golf course, neatly hidden in plain sight. The trail ran past tee boxes, alongside and between fairways and shared cart paths at some points. There were yellow blazes and signs all over the place guiding me through. It covered both the front nine and the back nine. I guess maybe I am too focused on my game and need to start paying attention to my surroundings. Not that it has helped my handicap.

I finally got through the course and the Madison Segment and ended up on the west side on a tree lined road where I met Amy. I had some life left in my legs and decided to continue on to finish the short CR that followed. I finally met Amy on the top of a long hill at the start of the next segment – the Valley View Segment – where I called it a day.

### **Eat Locally**

Not having a clear sense of where we were, I thought we would head into Madison to try Mickie's Dairy Bar, a local favorite. Apparently not a favorite on Mondays though as they were closed. So we found a nice coffee shop called Yola's Café, named for the owner's grandmother. It seemed waffles were their specialty and I kind of wished I would have taken the time to sit down and dine but we grabbed a coffee and scone and headed back home. The coffee and scone were very good and it was nice to get home well before noon.

### **A Day of Firsts**

Today was the first day it rained on my journey. Not a lot and not the entire way. We needed the rain and I was happy to be running in it this morning. Today was the first day I ran in shirt sleeves on my journey. I started in winter and we had a cold spring, so not surprising. I had run in shorts a few times but it was never warm enough to take off my sweatshirt or the many layers I have worn most days. Today was the first day I ran over 16 miles. Although that was not the plan. And finally, today was the first day I missed an IAT segment and had to back track after I finished. That part accounts for the additional unplanned mileage.

The segment I missed was new. But I had seen it on the IAT GIS map and I knew where to look for it. I never saw it and finally realized that I had run past it when I saw the trailhead on the north end, the end of the trail segment not the beginning. I decided to keep going, not knowing where it was exactly and not wanting to spend time trying to find something I had already missed. When we returned to it in the car, I was explaining to Amy that it must be hidden and difficult to see. But as we came upon it, there was a large sign, a large parking area and it was very evident to anyone passing along the road. Why I didn't see it as I was running slowly up the hill I cannot figure out. I guess the only thing I can say is that I was on the other side of the road. It was a short leg and I covered it in 10 minutes to finish the day.

The day's run started at the head of the Valley View Segment, aptly named with a gorgeous view of a deep valley and the Blue Mounds to the west. The Blue Mounds are three significant mounds or hills with a bluish hue to them that served as a distinct landmark for Native Americans and early settlers. The segment ran through a number of residential areas and through a nicely restored prairie and oak savanna. The number of natural areas that I have passed through and that have been restored to original native species is growing each day. It is a biased sample as the IAT and connecting routes are designed to route hikers and runners through the most beautiful natural areas in the state, but it gives me a lot of hope that there are a significant number of individuals and groups within that state that have a focus on protecting and restoring native habitat.

I exited the Valley View segment on Timber Drive, a straight but rolling CR connecting to the Cross Plains segment. Cross Plains is home to the headquarters of the IAT Alliance or IATA. There are a couple of new legs to the Cross Plains segment that do not appear in my 2017-2019 atlas. The one I missed and one that is closer to town. I almost missed the second one as I ran past it, paused to look around, and spotted it behind me. The segment that I missed runs past the Ice Age National Scenic Trail Interpretive Site, a newer land acquisition that is owned and operated by the National Park Service. It is a former dairy farm and includes the short trail, an interpretive center with a few outbuildings and a total of 157 acres of field and forest.

The segment closer to town rises high and traverses a ridge that overlooks a neighborhood on the south side of Cross Plains before descending sharply into town. From there the trail works its way through downtown and then up a steep ridge on the north side of town. The trail on the north side of town winds around for a couple of miles before descending sharply back into town, almost doubling back on itself. As I ran the winding trail, I wondered why it took me so far out of town only to come right back. A mile or so into it, I understood at least part of the reason as I came upon another incredible oak savanna on a hillside that opened into a large prairie restoration on top of the ridge. From there, the trail ran further north into Andersen's Preserve before coming back into town.

Once in town, the trail turned into residential streets and turned to the west and out of town where it ended at the Table Bluff trailhead where I will start again in a few days. Overall, with the backtrack, I ran 16.4 miles but felt good throughout. Hoping for another big mileage weekend coming up as I get closer to the trail bifurcation and to the half way point.

### **Eat (and shop) Locally**

Before heading to the Crossroads Coffee Shop and to the segment backtrack, we went to the Shoe Box, the largest shoe store in the Midwest, located just a few miles west of Cross Plains in the village of Black Earth. Its not a convenient location for us, so we took the opportunity while in the area. We picked up some shoes and complimentary laces and shoe horns and headed back to Cross Plains where we picked up some coffee, tea and a carrot cake for me. The carrot cake was wonderful and served as a quick snack and as dessert later in the day.

## Feeling Lucky

As I started my run this morning, with the sun coming up and a little frost in the air, the thought running through my head was just how lucky I feel to be able to run on these incredible pieces of land that, without the IAT, I would not otherwise get to experience. The Table Bluff trailhead, where I started the day, is located just outside of Cross Plains in a large flat outwash area. It heads north into a 400 plus acre parcel of land called Swamplovers Preserve and then exits at Holmes Preserve at Table Bluff Rd. The flat outwash makes an easy entrance to a very large ridge that runs over two miles to the north.

The land was owned by a small group of individuals, the Swamplovers, interested in preventing development and preserving the area's significant ecological features which include prairie and a large oak savanna. Recently, they turned over the stewardship of this land to the Ice Age Trail Alliance, so that it can be protected, and enjoyed by others, into perpetuity. Without that kind of foresight, I would never get to venture into this habitat and experience its beauty.

Table Bluff is actually not a glaciated area, it is in what is called the Driftless Area. The Driftless Area is a region in southwestern WI that was not glaciated, or, where the glacier did not drift. It is defined by high ridges and deep valleys that were not ground up by the mile thick ice and redeposited in the hummocky kames and eskers that we see within the glacier's path. It has its own beauty with incredible views of its rolling hills and valleys. I will be tracking the edge of this Driftless / Glacier divide for a few more miles before I head into central WI and look forward to its challenging terrain.

The initial climb onto the ridge was marked by several signs denoting the origins of the bluff which is made of pre Cambrian Sandstone that was laid when WI was part of a tropical land mass that sat on the earth's equator. There were large pieces of rock that were exposed and you could just sense the history and the age of those boulders. As I ran I heard turkeys gobbling below, I saw and heard woodpeckers and songbirds, and I felt the rising sun warm my face.

I exited Table Bluff and headed into the CR, maybe the prettiest CR yet with its rolling terrain and small farms and homes set within its ridges and valleys. It was along this route and past these many farms that I felt lucky for the second time this morning. Each time I approach a farm I wonder about the dogs. Do they have a dog or dogs? Are they outside? Will the owners hear them barking at me when I run past? I have been pretty fortunate with very little dog contact to date but today was my most concerning run in with dogs.

I passed a new, or newly remodeled, farmhouse with a pretty barn complete with a very interesting barn quilt. I was admiring it and the surrounding area when I heard the dog, or should I say dogs. There were three of them – a large black german shephard, a small white, cutsie dog, and a Lassie like herding dog. The german shephard held its ground, thankfully. The other two came out on the road to greet me. The white cutsie dog barked a bit then went on its way. The Lassie like dog however did not like me or the fact that I was in its territory and it let me know it for at least a quarter mile. It came at me constantly, barking and baring its teeth. I picked up the pace but so did he. I went past the property boundary and so did he. I could not shake him as he persisted in making sure I got out of the area as quickly as I could. I finally shook him and he felt extremely lucky I did not get bitten. The rest of the CR was uneventful. The next farm had chicken crossing sign and no sign of dogs. I felt confident that I could handle any chicken contact and I ran comfortably past.

The next segment was called Indian Lake, a rolling and wooded Dane County Park. The park had wide and smooth trails that served as hiking trails, dog walking trails and, in winter, cross country ski trails. Thankfully, leashes were required and I had no further incidents with the dogs. I met up with Amy in the park, who was managing a six mile hike while she waited for me to finish my run. We chatted for a minute before I continued on and it was for the third time this morning that I realized how lucky I was. Not only is Amy a wonderful wife and mother, she is patiently allowing me to realize my goal of running the IAT. She wakes up at 4am twice a week to drive two hours each way for my run. While she does manage to get to experience the IAT in her own way, I know it's not the most exciting way to spend a Saturday morning. But she does it and she does it with a smile, or sometimes a yawn or two. And I am lucky to have her support through this journey.

I was going to wrap up the run after another short CR at the trailhead for the Spring Hill segment, but I had some life left in my legs and the support of Amy who encouraged me to keep going. It was a short segment, just another 1.6 miles, and I headed off into the prairie to cover my third trail segment of the day. About a half mile in I encountered the ruins of a log cabin that had belonged to a Frederich Hahn, a German immigrant who settled in the area in the early 1850s. There was a small sign that recounted his life and that of the farm. It was the second set of ruins that I had run into that morning. The other was at the Indian Lake segment, where two of the four walls of a cream city farmhouse were standing next to a small cream city brick shed. This was the homestead of a Frederich Matz, another German immigrant. I wondered if they had known each other or even come across each other. They weren't that far away, just an hour's run, but in the 1850s, a couple of ridges to cross could seem like a day's journey, and wholly unnecessary when there is work to do.

I finished the Spring Hill section up a ridge and through a wooded area before emptying into yet another oak savanna area in the midst of restoration. Amy was sitting patiently in the car waiting and I was thankful, if not feeling lucky, to be done.

### **Eat Locally**

We traveled up the road to Lodi WI and found a coffee shop called the Butter Cream Bakery. I didn't order anything with Butter Cream, although cakes made to order seemed to be their specialty. I did have a cherry almond scone and Amy and I each had a coffee to go. There was a very long line as one barista was on duty. We waited very patiently after noticing that the shop's owner had declared that she had just delivered a baby boy. I was sure the woman behind the counter felt the pressure of stepping up on her own to make sure the new mother, likely her boss, could be at home with her newborn. I hope the others in line behind us felt the same way.

### **Susie the Duck**

As you enter the city of Lodi you pass a large sign that says, "Lodi, Home of Susie the Duck". It has been the town's nickname since 1948 when a young girl named a mallard nesting in the town's park, Susie. Seems like an odd nickname for a very pretty town. I ran past a mural painted on an historic building downtown that said, "Lodi, Peaceful Valley", which apparently what Lodi means in Italian. I prefer that nickname as it is a very pretty and peaceful town full of turn of the century (20<sup>th</sup> century) homes and

commercial buildings. It was settled in 1848 and chosen for its beautiful location and access to flowing water. It is surrounded by high ridges and has a spring fed trout stream flowing through it.

After about an 8 mile CR up and over a large ridge south of town, I had two trail segments to run before heading into the City. The segments were named the Lodi Marsh and Eastern Lodi Marsh Segments. I had visions of a nice flat run, maybe across a series of boardwalks to keep my feet dry. It sounded pleasant after a tough start to the day. I made it to the entrance to the first segment and could see the trail crossing a prairie, but instead of running out toward the marsh in the distance, it headed up a ridge. Half way up the ridge the trail turned to the left a bit and headed around it, straight through yet another restored oak savanna. For being one of the rarest plant habitats on earth, I have found at least one oak savanna on each run for the past several weeks. Once you see them and experience them they are easy to spot with their majestic trees set on steep ridges. And it again reinforced my confidence that there are many with foresight to want to preserve, protect and even expand these once ubiquitous habitats.

The trail took me up the back side of the ridge, a high esker really, to a gorgeous 270 degree view of the surrounding ridges and the marsh. I had hopes that I would continue to the marsh and that easy finish to the day's trail. I did have a nice down hill run that took me to the area where Amy had parked for the morning and then across the road to the Eastern Lodi Marsh segment where apparently the only connection this trail had to any marsh was that it was in fact east of the marsh.

The Eastern Lodi Marsh segment was anything but flat. In fact it was one of the highest climbs to date on this journey. From the first step off the road it rose straight up before flattening a bit to yet another steep climb. It was here that I encountered Amy who had been doing some off trail hiking ( read, getting lost) but had found her way back to the trail and was headed to the car. I was a bit worried and disappointed she was not able to experience the rest of the trail in this segment. The trail continued to climb and the surrounding woods turned from maple, beech forest to another very large expanse of oak savanna. Here you could easily see the stages of restoration with the top of the ridge yet untouched. It was also evident just how much work needed to be done to remove the dense undergrowth that threatens these savanna areas. The area was thick with woody understory that would be burned but would also require some manual intervention to complete the task. I imagine it will take generations of dedicated volunteers to continue this effort as it had been with the Native Americans in the past.

As I climbed this last ridge, I turned to look back to the west and saw an incredible palette of soft green shades painting the hillside. There were maybe a dozen different shades of green marking the emergence of the spring leaves across a diverse overstory of hardwood trees. As the trail continued, I saw wild purple geraniums and an abundance of burnt red columbines lining the trail. At the top, the trail wound through a prairie marked with bunches of yellow flocks before descending sharply to town. Somewhere deep in the woods on the way down this trail there was a rather large sign that said, "Welcome to Columbia County" and referenced the distance from the IAT's eastern terminus and to the IAT's western terminus. The distances were a bit off the mark as the trail expands each year but read – 425 miles from the eastern terminus where I started just over 4 months ago and 625 miles to the western terminus. I have just over 450 miles in to date and estimate that I have 700 to go. It seems incredible to me that I could have gone that far, but I have, just one step at a time.

The run finished in the City of Lodi which toured you through the town past many of the town's historic homes and finished at a wonderful overlook at the northwest edge of town. From here, I will need to



back track through town to get to the next CR before heading north again to cross the Wisconsin River on the Merrimac Ferry – which is an official part of the IAT journey.

### **Eat Locally**

For some reason much of Lodi was closed on Monday morning. We could have gotten gas station coffee to go but elected to hit the road and found a nice local coffee roaster in Portage called Two Rivers Coffee Roasters. We each grabbed a coffee to go and I had a nice cherry almond scone. We returned home to get some yard work done and decided to continue our eat locally theme and go out for a beer and dinner at a new restaurant, Dooleys, in West Bend. I had a delicious burger although I was so hungry I think anything would have been good at that point. It was a bacon brie burger on brioche with a very good Helles Lager beer. Amy was less impressed by her beer and beet salad but it was a nice way to end the day as we talked about each other's experiences hiking and running today.

### **Free Speed**

Our friend, Wayne, an accomplished ultra runner has provided good running advice to many of us over the years. One of them that Amy often repeats whenever we run downhill is, "free speed." Or in other words, relax and let gravity take over. It is easier on the quads – they don't take the pounding of trying to put on the brakes with each step – it helps with your overall pace – and it can be fun. It sounds easy but depending on the degree of decline can be a little harrowing. Today by no means was just down hill but there were some very long and gentle downhill stretches where we could relax and enjoy the "free speed".

The run started in the City of Lodi at the top of the bluff overlooking the golf course, which may or may not have been the end of that segment. It wasn't obvious to any of us that there was more trail as we stood there looking for the yellow blazes but the guidebook said we should be at the Lodi School Complex and not the golf course. More research and I think a backtrack are in store for us there. The run was downhill for some time before heading into the Fern Glen segment which was just a short loop entering and exiting on the same stretch of road. Terrie described it as lush and sort of like running in a rain forest. It was a cool but damp morning and it felt like a turning point in the weather and in the season. The undergrowth including scattered ferns was in full force and starting to infringe on the trail. Warnings of Poison Ivy and something even more insidious, Wild Parsnip, had us on the lookout as we ran through the winding path.

We exited and were treated to another beautiful CR with the Baraboo Hills silhouettes in the distance. We found the Gibraltar Rock trailhead just off the main road and ran into Amy and Pat who had just finished hiking this short but hilly segment. They warned us of the short and steep climb but also told us of the scenic payoff at the top. Gibraltar Rock is not the highest point in Wisconsin but at over 1,200 feet it is among the highest. At the top, the trail winds very close to sharp 200 foot cliffs. A misstep or accidental trip on a rock or a root would have been in Terrie's words, "instance death." If you can get past the danger, you can enjoy a panoramic view of the surrounding valley. We stopped for a quick picture before the descent which was long, gentle and winding and on a carpet of soft pine needles. We

took our fill of free speed down this section before heading out on a short CR that took us to the last section of the Gibraltar Rock Segment.

From here we could see Lake Wisconsin, a flowage lake, in the distance and started to anticipate the ferry ride that is a unique part of the IAT. The ferry runs 24/7 from spring until fall and is the connecting point not just for the IAT but for State Highway 113. It is the last of over 500 ferries that operated throughout Wisconsin in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century before bridges took their place. If not for the ferry, it would be a long detour to find another way across the river. We arrived just as the ferry was heading back into dock and only had time for a short bathroom break before boarding. Amy and Pat had met us at the ferry landing with the vehicles and we joined them for the crossing. It was just a half mile across but was a nice change of pace and marked another milestone in our journey.

We had planned on running just another short CR to the day's finish but called an audible and elected to take on the 3.7 mile Merrimac Segment as long as we were in the area. It would make the next day's run at Devil's Lake a bit easier. It turned out to be a good decision as the Merrimac Segment was fairly flat and enjoyable. As we neared the end of the segment which finished in a flat, former lakebed, we saw a sign that marked the end of glacier ice flow and pointed to the moraine in the distance that formed and help to create what is now Devil's Lake. It was a good finish to a wonderful morning run.

### **Eat Locally**

We were camping in the area for the weekend and finished within a mile of our campground. Pat and Terrie had prepared breakfast packets and we headed to the campsite to start the fire and heat them. While Pat cooked, we showered and changed out of our sweaty clothes and finished just as breakfast was ready. We ate sausage, egg, spinach, potato and cheese packets straight off the fire. They were delicious and filled the large void we created on our 16 mile run.

After the late breakfast and a short nap for some, we headed over to nearby Wollersheim Winery, an historic winery nestled in the hills near Prairie du Sac. The property was first developed into a winery in the 1840s by a Hungarian immigrant, Agoston Haraszthy, who failed to find a variety of grapes able to withstand the cold Wisconsin climate. He headed west to Sonoma where he became the founding father of viticulture in California. The property was sold to another immigrant who tried his hand and failed. The winery lay dormant for many decades before Bob and Joann Wollersheim bought the property in the early 1970s. They and their family have restored and created an incredible property and award winning winery complete with an 1840 restored limestone farmhouse and wine cave and an incredible rock lined terraced hillside. It was a treat to visit. Oh, and the wine was good too as we enjoyed a locally grown red variety over a game of Railroad Ink and Yahtzee.

### **The Week Ahead**

We rose early in the morning today and broke camp, leaving the site just after 6:30 am after a small breakfast of oatmeal and coffee. The drive to the trailhead was a short one and we headed off on our run with the sun rising behind us. It had been a busy morning taking down camp as we had wanted to get everything packed up and ready to go so we could head directly home after our run. As we started

the run, I had to fight the thoughts of the day and the week ahead and the planning that was taking place in my head to make sure I could get everything done at home. Even in retirement, there are things to do and calendars to keep. As we ran through a flat prairie before heading into the hills, I thought about those that may have settled in this spot thousands of years ago.

The early settlers had the luxury of staying here, not heading home to go to the dentist or to mow the lawn or to do whatever it is we do to run our daily lives. It seems our existence runs on a schedule that takes us places and does not allow us to sit still and to just exist. I know the early settlers had a challenging life to ensure food and shelter but their worlds were small, maybe just the size of this prairie, where they could just exist within the nature of the space. Where they could experience the changing seasons and the understand the interaction of the plants and the wildlife and the weather. Where they didn't have to always go somewhere or be somewhere. It helped me to push back the thoughts of the week ahead and to enjoy the few hours I had to be here and to exist in this wonderful landscape.

It turned out we needed every bit of that focus to tackle what is probably the most difficult segment along the IAT. We had done some recent segments climbing 1,500 feet over the course of 15 miles but today we had just over 2,000 feet over the course of 11 miles. To mountain runners that may not seem much, but for Wisconsin, that is serious elevation.

The run took us over the terminal moraine and up to the steep bluff that forms the eastern side of Devil's Lake and into Devil's Lake State Park. Devil's Lake is probably the state's premier lake and state park area and was formed by the damming of the pre historic river by the moraine that formed as the glacier retreated. The trail descended down talus, which is a field of sharp boulders that tumbled down from the sheer cliffs after years of freezing and thawing. The descent down the talus was incredibly technical and the slowest pace of the day.

The rocks are striking with their purplish, pink hues. They were formed almost 2 billion years ago as layers upon layers of sand built on the floor of the pre historic sea and hardened into this stone. Leaching or mixing of iron oxides and the sand created the beautiful hues.

We counted four significant climbs as we traversed around the lake and through the park. The sun was up and warming the day and the fog and mist layer of the morning was gone providing a perfect view of the still lake. A couple of fishing boats dotted the surface and a few shoreline fishermen were readying themselves as we passed along the southern edge. In a month, there will be lines of cars streaming in and crowds dotting the beaches and picnic areas as this is one of the most popular summer destinations in the state. Today, the campgrounds seemed full but the business of the summer season had not set in and we ran quietly through the park before exiting along the Johnstown Moraine and to the meeting point for the day.

### **Eat Locally**

We found the Coffee Bean Connection in nearby Baraboo, home of the historic Ringling Bros Circus Museum. The town was quiet on a Sunday morning but the coffee shop was bustling. We were tired and sweaty and quickly grabbed a coffee and scone for the road. It was a nice stop and the coffee and treat helped to pass the miles on the ride home.

## Bifurcation

Today was the first full day along the bifurcation. Bifurcation is not a word often used in day to day conversation but when it comes to the IAT it is a commonplace term. In the middle of last week's run, in the middle of the Devil's Lake Segment, the IAT splits or bifurcates into an eastern route and a western route. Each route is mostly road and about 80 miles long and to be considered to have done the full trail, you only need to choose one. For a trail that had a specific route in mind, that of tracking the terminal moraine of the advancing glacier, why are there two alternatives?

It turns out the eastern route was the route first identified by Ray Zillmer, considered the father of the IAT, and Henry Reuss, the congressman most influential in obtaining the national designation. The eastern route runs true to the terminal moraine and through John Muir's boyhood home and past Aldo Leopold's shack, both considered legends in conservation. So, while the eastern route made most sense, landowners along this route initially provided an obstacle in obtaining easements and the planners were forced to look at an alternative route just in case the first route was not feasible.

It turned out that they were able to identify and obtain permissions on both routes. While loops were permitted by the National Park Service as part of their national scenic route designation, apparently the stakeholders on either side of the bifurcation wanted the other side to be the loop and for themselves to be the primary designated trail. When it was left for the National Park Service to decide, they compromised and approved both routes as officially part of the main route.

I chose the eastern side for my journey. Partly because of the proximity to the Muir and Leopold areas but also because it's closer to home and easier to access. It has a bit more off road trail than the western side which is 99% road. After all of this running, if I ever decide to do the western segment, I think I will drive it.

We started the day on the Sauk Point segment, a nicely wooded and shaded trail segment that ran gently downhill to Parfrey's Glen State Natural Area, a popular day hiking area that is highlighted by a deep gorge or glen. The IAT didn't take us into the glen but we were able to experience the surrounding area in near solitude before the crowds started to appear. The guide book suggested we look for two - trunk oak trees, a product of regrowth after harvesting almost 80 years ago and for Jack in the Pulpits, a woodland plant abundant in the area. We did see a number of good examples of two trunk oaks but no Jack in the Pulpits. It was a pretty run and we enjoyed the downhill and the coolness of the early morning shade.

It was starting to heat up as we left the wooded area and headed to the road. Thankfully, much of the stretch was downhill almost to the end of the day's run. Along the way we continued to admire the houses and small farms set in the woods or on the edges of prairies. Some well kept and some ready to fall into the earth. Not much in between. Toward the end of our run, we came upon what I would call a whimsically decorated small farm. Our first impression was of the neatly kept white house and sheds with a neatly stacked wood pile in the back tree line. I admire neatly stacked wood piles but it continues to remind me that I have work to do on mine. As we approached the property we could see more of the yard and the yard decorations. First, we saw two large giraffe heads poking out from behind a fence, then Sponge Bob and some blue dodo characters that we could not recognize perched on the fence. As we continued on, we saw a flower bed of artificial cacti and metal flowers and of course the ever -

present yard globe among many other things scattered about. While the property was mature and full of characters and treasures, I am sure that for the owners, it was a continual work in progress.

We finished the today's run on State Hwy 33. County highways can be difficult but state highways present an even greater challenge. The traffic is heavy and fast and there are few opportunities for cars to slow down and move over for runners. In fact, most drivers I am sure don't think runners should even be on those highways. I wholeheartedly agree. We could not get off of it fast enough and picked up our pace considerably for the 1 ½ mile stretch. We were on a bit of a schedule so we could get Amy back home to get to a wedding shower but were able to get a full half marathon in as we turned off the highway and proceeded another 1/3 mile up a more quiet rural road.

### **Eat Locally**

It was a quick stop back to the Two Rivers Coffee Co. in Portage for a quick roast and a bakery treat before hitting the road. We made it back right on schedule despite the very slow traffic along the way and Amy got in a quick shower before heading to the other shower.

### **Aldo Leopold**

Aldo Leopold was an early 20<sup>th</sup> century author, conservationist and ecologist, farmer and educator. He was born in Iowa but settled with his young family in Wisconsin. While living in Madison and teaching at the University of Wisconsin, he went on a search for a property that he and his family could escape to on the weekends. Rather than some lakefront property or land rich with forest and wildlife, he found an old abandoned chicken coop on a challenged piece of property along the Wisconsin River, just west of Portage. It was here he put into practice many of his thoughts about conservation and land restoration and wrote his book, the Sand County Almanac which has sold millions of copies and espouses a call for a "land ethic, a caring relationship between people and nature. Today, the National Park Service has designated this Shack and surrounding land as a National Historical Landmark and it is now open for tours and education.

The IAT route runs past this spot and I could not help but wonder what attracted him to the area. The route is flat and tracks the river frontage which is lowland and wet in many areas. The nearby Baraboo Hills are somewhat majestic by comparison. But I think the challenge of recreating and preserving the land are really what attracted him. Here he experimented and planted and restored and wrote about it and in the process started a movement in this country to focus on caring for the land. I guess in that regard, the IAT could not have picked a better route.

Today's run was solo and a contrast in effort and ease. I started the day sore from running and from all of the physical work I have been doing to restore my property from its long time crop fields to a prairie and native landscape. As I got moving, I loosened up and the miles started to tick off quickly. The route became long and flat and monotonous as it tracked the Wisconsin River Levee heading into Portage and my destination. The hazy sky held the sun back at times, but the day heated up and I found myself working hard to finish.

There was nothing more remarkable about the run, but there doesn't need to be every day. I continue to enjoy the journey and the progress I am making on both the trail and my understanding and awareness of the state that I have lived in my whole life. I see something new and learn something new each time out and look forward to the next day and the next experience.

I met Amy at the start of the Portage Canal segment in Paquette Park, situated on the Wisconsin River. She had spent the morning walking along the Portage Canal and throughout the city looking at the many historic homes. She was excited to show me a few and we did a short tour through the back streets before heading home.

### **Eat Locally**

Portage is a nice community but short on coffee shops and breakfast opportunities. Many were closed on Monday and some on Tuesday's as well. We ended up at the Two Rivers Coffee Company for the third time in 3 weeks and grabbed a coffee and treat to go. The drive back was restful and we recharged for the rest of the day's work restoring and reshaping our own land.

### **David**

David is our oldest son, born 32 years ago in March and passed away on this day the same year. I look back on the past 32 years and I would say that while I don't think I have carried his death as my identity over this time, I do think it has shaped me and strengthened me in many ways. It's a difficult thing of course and those that go through it all react in their own way. Some stop living and others move forward, maybe not in a straight line, but in any way that they can. I don't know how we got through the days and weeks and months afterward, but we did. We kept getting up every day and putting one foot in front of the other. We continued on no matter how hard things were without him.

David hasn't ever been able to run with me like my other sons have. But in many ways, he is with me on every run. While we don't talk about him a lot, we carry him with us and think about him often. For me, his death and the experience of moving on with life has provided me with the knowledge that I can keep moving forward no matter how difficult things seem at the time. In this way, I have used that experience and drawn on that strength to get me through tough challenges at home, at work and while running. When even the first step seems difficult, I know I can do it and when the next step seems impossible, I think about him and he carries me through.

I thought about him more so today than most and I seemed to run with patience and ease. I thought about how the few months we had with him were so short and so fleeting. I wondered if I made the most of them and enjoyed being in those moments with him or if I was looking forward to the next thing as I so often do. I have said that on this IAT journey I am enjoying every moment, that I am not in a hurry to be done because when it is over, it's over. Today's thoughts reminded to maintain that perspective and to enjoy each moment for what it is, not only on this run but in my life.

I ran alone today and started in Portage. Both Amy and I agree that it seems we have been in Portage for way too long. But Portage has been the route to get where we needed to go for several weeks. It has also been a city we have traveled through hundreds of times getting to where we need to go, in the

center of the state and beyond. It seems natural though as Portage has been a crossroads for its entire history. Situated between the Fox River and the Wisconsin River, it was a natural spot for a portage of canoes and those traveling by water in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. A portage canal was built between the two rivers and resulted in a connecting point between the Great Lakes via the Fox River to the Mississippi River via the Wisconsin River. Today, it is still that crossroads - the intersection of two major interstates, many state highways and railroad routes and even a large power grid.

The route today took me, or tried to take me, along the portage canal but was detoured due to construction. I ended up with a couple of extra miles as I wound around trying to find the trail. I eventually found my way to the north end of the city to the short cut and back that takes you to the Indian Agency House, a restored home built by the U.S. Government in 1832 for the Indian Agent assigned to protect the interest of the local Indians and pay them their stipend. The sign doesn't go into any detail on how the agent upheld his duties but does indicate that the home was built for \$3,497.18, almost two centuries ago. Interesting how they accounted for every penny back then while today a million dollars is a rounding error in government accounting.

After the short but interesting trail to the Agency House, the next leg of the journey was all CR. I headed up a relatively quiet county highway for several miles before being able to turn off on a more rural road that hugged the Fox River. I am headed north now and can feel the change of scenery. Those that are from Wisconsin understand what "up north" means and I could feel that sense of starting to be "up north" as I moved along. What I didn't know this morning when I started but found out when I got home is that the Portage city slogan is "Where the North Begins". I am not sure who came up with that slogan but I think they nailed it.

Amy found me on the road after a couple of hours and after her own 5 miles of hiking both in city of Portage and at the Agency House. When she pulled up beside me, I was still feeling good and enjoying the morning and decided to run a couple of more miles. I finally stopped at the corner of Grouse Road where I will begin again the next time. It was a good run on what is sometimes a tough day. I enjoyed reconnecting my thoughts with David and look forward to him continuing on with me through my journey.

### **Eat Locally**

We are getting close to Montello, WI where there is a large enclave of Amish. Amish are known for their austere lifestyle that does not allow electricity or motorized vehicles. They have found a place within the state, in this and a few other areas that are more remote and tilted toward agriculture. They are hardworking, make good neighbors and are successful using their skills to thrive within or maybe despite this crazy society. One thing they do well is baking and there are several Amish bakeries dotted around the area. We went looking for one but found that most are open only Friday and Saturday and none were open on Monday. It will be a destination for the next time out, however, as their cherry turnovers are one of my favorite treats.

We did find the Hilltop Café in Montello open on this Memorial Day Monday. It didn't look like much from the outside, or I guess the inside for that matter. There were a few scattered cafeteria style tables and a short counter for dining. There was also an assortment of crocheted and wood carved home

made crafts and home made jellies for sale. We stayed and committed to enjoy the experience no matter the result. The food turned out to be very good. We both had good coffee, pancakes and shared some bacon on the side. Amy had a large single pancake with strawberry preserves and I had the special of the day, two apple pancakes.

We enjoyed the quick service despite the crowd that was filling in as we ate. Oh, I didn't mention that earlier I had found both a quarter and a \$20 dollar bill on the ground while running. I paid it forward as the \$20 covered breakfast and a generous tip for our hard working waitress.

## **John Muir**

Today the IAT took us through the John Muir segment, the only trail segment on the eastern bifurcation. It's a short 1.8 mile segment, not terribly hilly, but beautiful and historic. The segment is of course named after John Muir, who was born in Scotland and settled with his family at a young age in south central Wisconsin, just south of what is, today, Montello. While he lived during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, his impact on environmentalism and conservation in America and around the world will live on for centuries. He is celebrated in both Scotland and the U.S. for his writings and his preservation efforts and is often called the "Father of the National Parks" in America, having a direct hand in creating several parks and in convincing then President, Theodore Roosevelt, to preserve millions of additional acres of national forest and 23 national monuments.

He left Wisconsin to explore the world and much of his preservation work was done in the western United States, but his love for nature was born of his time spent exploring the land near his home, Fountain Lake Farm, on Ennis Lake in Wisconsin. In what is now John Muir Park, preservation efforts have worked to restore the wet sedge meadows, the spongy fen and the oak woodlands that Muir explored and inspired him to devote his life to conserving land and forest.

Terrie and I started a few miles south of John Muir Park on Grouse Road and had a somewhat hilly but shady start to what was to be a very warm morning. We ran past the Nature Trails Amish bakery that was to be our stop for the day's treat and into the south parking area of the Muir Park. Our eyes took us directly to the story board detailing some of Muir's life and his work as well as some glaciation history of the area. A yellow blaze next to the story board took us out to the trail.

The trail began on the north sloping area of Lake Ennis, a 30 acre kettle lake in the heart of the park. The trail was soft and spongy and still a little wet even after the very dry period we are currently going through. We learned that this type of area is identified as a calcareous fen, a rare and distinctive peat accumulating wetland. It's characterized by soft and spongy peat rich with calcium and other minerals supplied by a constant upwelling of groundwater. Calcareous fens are home to deciduous shrubs, grasses, sedges and rushes and are often hot spots for rare species of plants. We did see a variety of plants, some flowering some not, but I am not sure we identified any particular plants or rare species for that matter. I tried to imagine that this part of the land was much like Muir experienced it over 150 years ago and envied his ability to witness and study the emergence of the plant life through the seasons.

The trail was easy to navigate through the fen, prairie and along low drumlins through oak woodlands, with intermittent views of the lake. We went the wrong direction to start and ended up redoing a short



part of the segment. But it was pretty and short and a nice break from an otherwise very long CR. We ran into both Pat and Amy on the trail, although not together. We often see them separately, after having started out together, each of them asking if we have seen the other. So far in this journey I have never lost Terrie or anyone of my other running partners so this usually gives me some pause and worry that Amy will find her way and be safe on her own. I am more comfortable having Pat with her and, so far, even with some challenging moments on her own, she has been able to navigate to where she needs to be.

We exited Muir Park at the north parking area complete with another story board detailing the farm family that owned and worked the nearby land. It's obvious that the local population is proud of its farming heritage and has taken the time to celebrate its ancestors. We headed up a shady 10<sup>th</sup> Ave and wound our way through the hilly, sandy terrain and pine tree lined roads. It was warm when we started at 6:30 am and getting hotter as we progressed down the asphalt roads toward our destination. We had in mind to finish in Montello but our mileage clock was off and a Montello finish was not going to happen, particularly on this steamy morning.

We did manage to make it almost 15 miles and ended at Williams Lake, about 4 miles south of Montello, where we will start again in a few days.

### **Eat Locally**

While Pat and Amy waited for us to finish our run this morning, they made a quick trip to the Nature Trails Bakery for some Amish turnovers. As we continued our run, I said to Terrie after Amy and Pat left for the bakery that I wished I would have asked them to buy two for me. Terrie assured me that if Amy didn't buy two, Pat was likely to buy 6 and there would be plenty to go around. It turns out that Amy bought 4 and Pat, I think, did buy 6 and there was plenty to go around. Amy also came back with a bag of fresh early season strawberries from the Amish family's garden, that were both sweet and refreshing.

There was no nearby coffee shop so we decided to drive to Princeton, a pretty little town on the way back home, to get a coffee and to sit and eat our turnovers. We stopped at Twister, where they specialize in good roasted coffee and espresso drinks but don't serve food, making us happy we had brought our own Amish treats. Twister didn't sell food, but they did sell toys, kitchen gadgets, clothing and home décor – a strange but interesting combination of offerings.

We sat on a nice table on the sidewalk and enjoyed our coffee, the Amish treats and some conversation before heading on home to continue our day.

### **Pure Enjoyment**

Our son Steve's friend, Louie from Belgium, has been tracking my progress and reached out to me yesterday to see how things were progressing. I told him it has been "pure enjoyment" – and I meant it. That really sums up my run for today as well – pure enjoyment. I continue to be amazed by the beauty of rural Wisconsin and I am very thankful to be able to experience it through running. Each run brings a slightly different set of challenges and experiences and I continue to look forward to and enjoy all of them.

Today's challenge was my hamstring. I have been very lucky in that any nagging aches and pains I have had usually work themselves out in the first 5 minutes or so of every run. I came up a little lame the past couple of days due to very tight hamstrings probably the result of the work I have been doing hauling wheel barrows full of topsoil in my yard. I was worried that this might be the moment things don't work out so well and I would be forced to ease up or shut down for a while. But I got up in the morning like I do every time, got in the car and drove to my starting point for the day, optimistic that this too would pass. I did tell Amy as I prepared to take my first step that she should keep a closer eye on me today just to make sure I didn't get stuck out there.

The first steps were tough. A bit choppy and a little painful. But after 100 yards I loosened my stride and the pain lessened. After another 100 yards I was feeling like this was going to work out. By the time I hit my first mile I was running with ease again and looking forward to the morning.

Today's run started just south of Montello, also known as Granite City for its geology, as much of the subsurface rock is Red Granite, also the name of another nearby town. The city highlights this fact with a large waterfall at the main intersection in town that flows over several very large slabs of Red Granite. It is mostly a rustic tourist town but with few amenities other than the nearby lakes and rivers. It is the place of my earliest childhood vacation memories as my parent found Montello to be one of their go to destinations.

It is also home to the state's largest tree – of any species. As you make the turn at the waterfall and head to the west, there is a very nicely preserved stone home and in front of the home on an expansive lawn sits an enormous cottonwood tree. The sign on it – from 1978 – indicates that the trunk is 23.2 feet in circumference and the tree is 138 feet high with a symmetrical crown of 132 feet. It doesn't provide an exact age but it is suspected that it was born when only Native Americans and a few French fur trappers inhabited the area. That would make it over 300 years old today.

This massive tree is also directly across the street from the Emporium, which looks to be the largest collection of metal lawn art sculpture anywhere in the state. As I ran past, I saw cactus, sunflowers, a six or seven foot T Rex and a large three dimensional, blue, VW bus, all for sale and ready to be placed in your yard. It would be an interesting place to visit the next time through.

I continued my run on the state highway that ran to the west out of town. I admit that this part might not have been pure enjoyment, but it only lasted for 15 minutes or so before I was able to turn to the north on Fern Road. Fern Road proved to be wonderfully shady and lined with a campground, a Boy Scout Lodge and a couple of lakes along with the occasional hay field and associated farm buildings. I also ran past a wandering flock of, I think, domesticated prairie chickens. They didn't bark or run after me like dogs have but did eye me curiously as I moved across the road to avoid any contact.

At this point, the sun was getting higher along with the temperatures and Amy had found me to fill up my water bottles. I was nearing the end of my run but decided to keep going just a little bit more. I am glad I did as I ran into a young man with a full pack walking the opposite direction. I stopped and chatted for a minute learning he was an IAT Thru Hiker working on doing both sides of the bifurcation and was doing the hike solo. He seemed to be enjoying the journey as much as I am.

I finally shut it down for the day after 14 miles, on the corner of 8<sup>th</sup> and Ember Dr., sort of in the middle of nowhere. Amy was waiting for me, leaning on the outside of the vehicle, looking like a stranded motorist. Not a good look for a woman alone out in the middle of nowhere.

### **Shop Locally**

We travelled a little north to Westfield, the next town we will run through, to find the Amish Market, a bulk goods store, not run by the Amish but carrying many Amish made products. We did not find any bakery, as they only deliver once a week on Fridays and when “it’s gone, its gone.” We did find a good cup of coffee and some organic coconut along with a very large bag of popcorn and a braided rug for our home. We took our coffee and popcorn ( and coconut and rug) on the road.

This area of the state is also home to numerous nurseries and greenhouses and we were looking for some plants to fill our pots at home. We stopped near the resort town of Green Lake at Bloch’s Farm, at what looked like a family run nursery just off the highway. It proved to be a great stop as we found more than we had planned. It was a perfect stop almost half way home and let us stretch our legs and check plant shopping off our list for the day.

### **Road Signs**

I wrote early in my run about the logical one mile square grids of northeastern Wisconsin’s agricultural area. That road layout changed as we ran south and encountered the many lakes and kettles of the Kettle Moraine. Roads cannot not run straight in the hummocky glaciated areas of southeastern Wisconsin and begin to wind around. However, as windy as the roads are in southeastern Wisconsin, they are still marked fairly clearly with distinctive names. Unfortunately, as we move into central Wisconsin, the consistency and logic of road signs seems to be waning.

We have encountered, within the same 14 or 15 mile run, 4<sup>th</sup> Rd, 4<sup>th</sup> Ave, 4<sup>th</sup> Ct and maybe even 4<sup>th</sup> Lane. The map has told us to turn on Elk Ave, not to be confused with the two roads just prior called Elk Ct. and Elk Rd. Pioneer Park Road in Westfield was either Charles St or Thomas Ave, both of which I think lead to the park, noted by the Veteran’s Park directional sign but with no evidence of the map’s Pioneer Park label. 6<sup>th</sup> St., running north out of Westfield, is labeled Adams Rd., but turns into 6<sup>th</sup> St. after about 50 feet of Adams – not discernible by either the road itself or the signage.

The most interesting road signs I think we have seen so far were in the town of Harrisville, Home of the Bratfest (as if there is only one in the state). Harrisville was not part of our running route but part of our driving route to get to the start of the day’s segment. As you roll through town from east to west, 3 of the 4 crossroads in town are named, in order, Yankee St, Doodle St. and Dandy St. after the pre Revolutionary War nursery rhyme, Yankee Doodle Dandy. The fourth crossroad, Middle St, is not in the middle and must have been named in order to not distract from the three other more interesting street names.

We had gotten an early start on our drive , but today’s run got started a few minutes past the planned st time due to our first interaction with law enforcement. Pat elected to drive today and was pulled over for speeding on the way to the trail. It was early in the morning and the officer was not in a terrible

mood so only issued a warning – no ticket, no fines. We slowed down a bit after that and made it to the start of our run, just a few minutes past 6:30 am. The days have been very hot lately and today was to be no exception, but getting an early start makes the mileage more bearable.

Today's run was through the City of Westfield and then north into Amish country. Pat and Amy headed for Chaffee Creek, the next trail segment of the IAT for a short hike. Because of the heat, we asked them to place some water on the route so we could replenish our stores along the way. The first water stop was to be at Pioneer Park, where the town was hosting the Dairylicious Days 5 mile run. Pat and Amy left the water with those in charge of the event and told them we would be running past to pick it up. Because of the signage challenges we overshot the park by a few blocks and were too lazy to backtrack for the water. I hope they aren't still waiting for us.

The next water stop was north of town at a small trailhead leading into Caves Creek Preserve. On the way we passed a yet unmanned Dairylicious Days Run water stop. While we were tempted to take some, we did the respectable thing and left that water for the event runners. Our water was just a few miles up the road. On the way, we passed several very nice well kept Amish farms with traditional white farmhouses and red outbuildings. The Amish are incredibly enterprising, with one farm operating a bakery, a cabinet shop, selling maple syrup and apple butter, while growing a huge garden and raising animals to feed their family. For the first time, we passed an Amish buggy clattering down the road. We waved as we do with all vehicles that pass by and received a very friendly wave in return, something we do not see from all cars that pass by.

We missed our turn at the Amish schoolhouse, by a few hundred yards, but backtracked easily on 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. to find our water reserves. There we met a couple heading out on their road bikes for a morning ride. We chatted with them briefly about our run and our aspirations. It feels good to talk to people who understand what it is we are doing and why. Too many of our friends, family and acquaintances don't really understand the whole thing and don't ask too much about it. I always find some energy after those brief chats and we found ourselves running strongly toward the county line, where we would end for the day.

The rest of the route was intermittently shady with a breeze coming out of the north, both helping to push back the heat of the day. We encountered another biker three times over the course of the last few miles. After the third encounter, he assured us he wasn't following us, but he was, sort of. It was a good thing he was, as we met him at an unlabeled intersection that was not easy to identify on the map. He helped to point us in the right direction and we met Amy and Pat just a short distance up the road. We were feeling pretty good and we decided to continue on another mile or so to Pleasant Lake, where we shut it down for the day.

### **Eat Locally**

Pat and Amy stopped at the Amish bakery near the 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. schoolhouse and found some wonderful glazed cherry filling topped donuts. They were as good as they sound. I ate mine on the way to breakfast which was to be at the Once in a Blue Moon café in Princeton. We have been in and through Princeton now several times on our journey and are impressed with the historical preservation of the community. They advertise a cemetery tour, to help, I think, tell the history of the community through

the stories of those that have been buried there, and have labeled all of the downtown buildings with a short history of the occupants and uses.

The Once in a Blue Moon Café was in one of those buildings that had several uses over the years. It has been a hotel and a merchant store as well as a restaurant. It is currently a restaurant / merchandise store run by a couple that call themselves newbies to the community even though they have been there 25 years. We had a nice breakfast of egg dishes and coffee and enjoyed some conversation about the history and the beginnings of the community.

Wikipedia searches didn't tell us much about why the community started and grew but talked about its Polish Heritage and its ongoing tribute to that heritage with its annual Polish Fest. The café owners however helped us understand that the community was an agricultural hub, specifically for beans that were grown in the area and floated into town on the river to be transported by railroad to the markets. Today, it is home to one of the state's largest flea markets which brings in dozens of vendors and thousands of people on weekends throughout the summer.

### **Another Milestone**

Today I completed the bifurcation. It's a milestone only in that it is an interesting part of the trail and is sort of the doorway to the northern section. It is interesting in that very few trails have two official routes and it's the gateway to the north based on our now northern driving route and the increasing number of kettle lakes dotted with vacation cottages.

If you recall I chose the eastern route for its proximity to our home base and the fact that it was the original or first route drawn by the trail makers. The eastern bifurcation route also had two trail segments, or two more than the western route. One, the City of Portage, utilized a paved path and the city streets. The other, the 1.8 mile John Muir segment, was a real dirt trail. Of the past 75 miles, I have been on the pavement for over 73 miles and was ready to complete the bifurcation and to get back on the dirt. Today was the day.

I started the day on a shady and winding lakeside road dotted with those vacation cottages, each with a name. The one I recall as I sit here writing was the "Sandy Feet Retreat". Where apparently sand on the floor is all part of the vacation. The initial CR portion of the run was just a few miles and took me to a parking area and the start of the Chaffee Creek trail segment.

Amy had parked the car there and thoughtfully left my water out for me to replenish my reserves. I headed down a grassy, somewhat overgrown path and soon hit a trail divide. This trail is odd in that the parking area starts you in the middle of the trail segment, requiring a short out and back in one direction in order to have completed the full trail. I chose the right path and did a very quick out and back through a wooded area, across what I believe is Chaffee Creek, and through a nice prairie. Upon the return, the path took me under the interstate through a culvert and beside a fast running creek. The trail exited the culvert and headed across a spongy fen and up into the woods.

I met Amy on Chaffee Creek headed back toward the car. She was looking fit and strong as she walked along at what seemed like a new, brisk pace for her. Chaffee Creek trail exited on Czech Rd. for a short CR to the head of the Wedde Creek trail segment. This segment was on somewhat higher ground, and

more firm, and dry than Chaffee Creek. The creek itself was not wide, maybe 10 feet across, but was running fast and clear. I suspect there are native trout in that creek at some point along its path. The trail itself smelled like a Christmas tree lot, with dense pines in all directions but was also shaded with a canopy of oaks lining the trail. It was a very pretty and pleasant combination.

Wedde Creek was just under two miles and took me back out on the road for short run into the unincorporated town of Richford. For being small and unincorporated, it boasted a beautiful church, Mt. Morris Mutual Insurance Company and its very own two story hotel among a nice town hall and a couple of bars. Just outside of Richford, I caught the first part of the Mekan River segment and met Amy at the parking lot on Hwy 21. I had given her an estimate of 2 hours to complete the days run and I stopped at the car at 1:59:59. That's why they call me "On Time".

### **Eat Locally**

Wautoma, the nearest city of size, listed McDonalds and Taco Bell under its area coffee shops so we sped on through to nearby Red Granite, where we had stopped at "The Rock" coffee house on a previous trip. Unfortunately, the Rock did not survive the past year and was closed permanently. We did find, on the curve heading out of town, the Curve Inn, where there were many cars and good reviews. I ordered the French Toast special and we split it with a cup of coffee before heading back home. It was good but not sure it lived up to the rave reviews online. But it capped off another very good day of running the IAT.

### **Halfway**

I have logged 47 runs on my IAT journey and covered just under 600 miles, but it seems in many ways like I just started. I think back on the first day and the first weekend. With the entire trail in front of me it seemed like an enormous task to run this thing. Not that it's been easy - rising at 4am, driving a couple of hours each way, running for 2 to 3 hours, braving cold and snow (but not much rain and heat yet), but it really has flown by and it has been incredibly fun.

Here I am, not yet 6 months into the journey, and I am past the halfway mark. I am feeling a sense of accomplishment but also a sense that this is fleeting. That it's gone so quickly. That it will be over at some point and I will need to look beyond to another challenge. I decided to day though, that I am not in any hurry. I don't know if it will take me another 6 months or another year to finish, but I intend to continue to enjoy it, one step at a time.

Today's run was back on the trail. There was a bit of terrain and Terrie and I needed to get our trail legs back. I think we did fine, finishing about 14 miles in just over 2 ½ hours. The run started on the Mekan River segment and continued to the Greenwood segment, both of which I had done a couple of years ago with Amy and Alex. That previous run was in late fall and contrasted to today, which is mid June. Today we saw more and more woodland and prairie flowers emerging, some beginning to bloom. We have witnessed the emergence of plants through the spring, from controlled burn green shoots to mature plants ready to bloom. I hope that as this run continues, we get to complete the experience and see the full awakening and colors of the prairie landscapes.

We saw some more wildlife today – three very large turkeys, some deer and a rare quail sighting. We spooked a mother quail with her brood (not sure that is the correct term for a bunch of baby quails but it sounds good) and she flew away toward me before disappearing into the thick woods while her brood took off in a different direction. I saw the mother very clearly while Terrie got to see both the mother and the young ones. Looking forward to seeing even more wildlife as we continue to head north, but hoping not to title one of these short entries, “The Bear Encounter.”

We took the time to take some pictures today. One at the IAT’s halfway marker sign, and some at a couple of man-made benches, complete with ottomans, sitting deep in the woods. These were the product of a local group that wanted to leave their mark on the trail. The first was at the head of a short spur that led to a dispersed camping area. It seemed like a nice spot to take a moment, so I sat down and put up my feet while Terrie snapped a picture. The second was overlooking a vast prairie in the Greenwood segment where it was Terrie’s turn to relax while I took her picture. I haven’t taken too many pictures so far but these will be nice keepsakes when the journey is complete.

We made it to the end of the Greenwood segment, ahead of our support vehicle. We decided to continue on rather than wait. A quick phone call to Mark, Pat and Amy indicated that they weren’t far behind. Any sense of impatience on our end was forgiven as they had found another Amish bakery and loaded up on sweet treats. We finished the day on what seemed like a very new trail section that ran along the prescribed CR on the map and ended at Bohn Lake. We will start there again in a few days. Before we jumped in the car to dig into the bakery, we spent a few minutes looking for and finding ticks, clinging to our clothes and finding their way to our soft spots to try and dig in themselves. I am afraid that this will be our new normal along with deer flies as the summer continues.

### **Eat Locally**

We spotted a sign for MD Bakery on our way to the trailhead this morning and the crew took a few minutes to load up on donut holes and fruit pies. Although I thought Amy over did it with her bag of donuts, she had little in comparison to Mark and Pat’s bounty. We found a coffee shop – that opened at 9am – in Wautoma. We were a little leery of a coffee shop that didn’t open until 9am on a Saturday and found that our apprehension was somewhat founded. The coffee was *Collectivo* – good start. But was lukewarm at best and took some time to pour into a cup for us to go. We finally got our order completed and sat on a nice outdoor patio enjoying the Amish treats and some good conversation before heading home.

### **Bohn Lake and Deerfield**

Today I ran the Bohn Lake and Deerfield segments and about half of the upcoming CR. It was a cool and cloudy and somewhat windy morning, unlike the hot and humid days we have experienced over the past few weeks. It had finally rained overnight and the ground was soft and comfortable. The grass and weeds that lined the trail were heavy with the early morning rain, however. I left Amy in the parking lot at Bohn Lake to start my day.

The trail headed into deep woods and descended quickly to the beautiful 13 acre “wild” Bohn Lake. It has been described as “wild” in that it has maintained its natural state with zero development along its shoreline. You can see by the trees that extend into the lake that the shoreline changes over time with the water table. The trail runs very close to the high point of that natural shoreline providing great views as it winds around the lake. Toward the east end, and before the trail veers away from the lake, a boardwalk was built that takes the hiker or runner directly across the narrower end of the lake. The sun was peaking through the trees as it had found a crease in the cloud cover and seemed to light up the entire lake. Out on the boardwalk, I felt like I was in the middle of this wonderful lake and paused to enjoy the view. I could have stayed there all morning but had more to do today, so I continued on, leaving Bohn Lake behind.

As I headed up the hill toward the end of the trail segment, I heard, before I saw, an adult quail burst from the brush and fly directly over my shoulder before taking a hard left across the trail in front of me. It could not have been more than a few feet from me and startled me on what was an otherwise quiet morning. I don’t think I had ever seen a quail before the last run and now I have seen two in two separate outings. Later in the morning, I even spotted a few baby quail scurrying away from me as I ran past and disturbed their day’s routine.

Bohn Lake was short but definitely top on my list of segments so far. I headed onto the road for a short CR to the Deerfield segment trailhead. Deerfield is more of a wooded area, in the process of restoration, led by a conservation minded landowner. There is a sign a mile or so into the segment indicating his work – “Thinned the forest in 2004. Removed poor quality oak. Planted good quality pine.” You can see the efforts at work as the young, white pine seems to be flourishing in the openings.

This segment has a large number of side trails crisscrossing the IAT and I was concerned for Amy as she tried to navigate it on her own. It was well marked however with a yellow blaze seemingly every 30 or so yards and before and after each trail intersection. That said, with your eyes down watching your steps, it is easy to miss the turns. Fortunately, Amy found the trail easy to navigate and was able to get a several miles of quality hiking on this segment.

One of the trail crossings is marked by a sign indicating what was a stagecoach trail, likely utilized by both travelers and merchants in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is not well maintained but you can certainly make out the trail that runs about 15 miles between Wautoma and Plainfield. It is the first stagecoach trail that I have seen in Wisconsin.

The Deerfield segment overall was not well traveled and somewhat overgrown. The high grasses and weeds were heavy with rain and my shoes and socks were soaked through quickly. High grasses also mean ticks, and I checked myself regularly as I ran through the grassy path. I finally reached the end and headed out on the road, continuing to check myself for ticks on my legs or heading up my shorts. The first three times I checked I saw no ticks and was feeling comfortable I had made it through cleanly. Just as I got going again, I felt something on the back of my leg and looked down to see a wood tick beginning to burrow into my calf. It was early in its efforts and came out easily, but proved to me that I cannot be too careful as I continue through the woods of northern Wisconsin.

The CR started down a busy county highway before heading back to the north on 15<sup>th</sup> Road, not to be confused with 15<sup>th</sup> Ave or 15<sup>th</sup> Lane. I ran a few miles up 15<sup>th</sup> and covered about half the CR before



finishing for the day. I will start again this weekend on the CR before heading onto the Hartmann Creek and Emmons Creek trail segments.

### **Eat Conveniently**

We are out in the middle of the state in a remote area among a lot of very small towns, most of which either have very few opportunities for coffee and breakfast, or if they do, their cafes are closed on Monday mornings. Today we struck out trying to find an open restaurant near our ending point. So, we decided to just type in our home address on Google Maps and try to find something along whatever path it took us. We went through a number of small towns we had not been to in some time and some we never heard of – Wild Rose, Saxeville, Poy Sippi, Borthers. We saw some diners, some closed recently and permanently and none open on a Monday morning.

I drank the leftover coffee I had brought with me for the drive up this morning and Amy and I split a very refreshing grapefruit but it still left a hole in our stomachs. Just as we got on the interstate, I saw a sign for Panera and decided to stop and grab a coffee and bagel for the balance of the ride home. It didn't meet the definition of eat locally, but Panera does serve each local community it operates within, so we didn't feel too badly that we compromised for this one day. I do think we will have this challenge as we continue into even more rural Wisconsin, not known for its coffee shops and no longer populated enough to support local diners during the quiet weekdays.

### **7% Chance of Rain**

7% chance of rain means that it can actually rain. In fact, it rained all morning despite that forecast. We had moved our planned Saturday run to Sunday due to the stormy forecast for Saturday and were happy we did, given the heavy rain and intermittent thunderstorms. Sunday was going to be much drier, in fact just a 7% chance of rain. We woke early and looked to the clear east sky as validation of the forecast. But when we got in the car and headed west to our destination for the morning, it began to rain. And it rained the entire drive and the entire run. While that didn't make for a perfect morning, it was the first real rain we have experienced on this journey and we made the best of it.

Amy dropped me at the corner of Hwy P and 15<sup>th</sup> Road and I began the day running alone while Terrie and Pat headed to an earlier trail section to close some of her gaps. I had to finish my CR before I was able to get back on the trail at Emmons Creek. The road was a somewhat hilly but very quiet and I broke in my new road shoes as traveled the almost 8 miles to Emmons Creek trailhead. It was an uneventful run as I passed the last house on the route before Emmons Creek. I say house, but it was really an old brick schoolhouse that I would have said was abandoned if it were not for the pretty flowers around the flagpole. The rest of the property was not well maintained with old furniture and appliances littering the high grass around the property. I took a few looks as I ran past and began to look to the road ahead for the trailhead sign.

Just as I neared far edge of the property boundary the front door flew open and two large dogs emerged, ran across the yard, and headed straight for me. It was evident by their barking and snarling that they were not happy I was there, and were followed by two women, one fully clothed and one not.

Thankfully the fully clothed woman was the one that ran onto the road to try to tame the dogs while the woman in the t shirt that wasn't quite long enough to hide her underwear, stayed on the porch. The dogs circled me, one gnashing its teeth while barking loudly and the other bumping its nose into me to signal it did not want me around. After what seemed like an eternity, the women finally got the dogs under control and I was able to continue down the road, unharmed but unsettled. Not sure if the unsettled part was due to the dogs or the partially clad woman. Either way, I was glad to get that experience behind me.

I found the Emmons Creek trailhead hidden in the dense underbrush and I calmed down as I headed into the woods. The trail was narrow and the trees surrounding it were laden with the morning's rain. My road shoes went from damp to soaking wet in minutes. I saw Amy just a short distance into the run and she assured me that she had set out my trail shoes at the car so that I could change. It was another mile or so of wet and now muddy trail before I reached the car and was able to change my now dirty and wet, day old road shoes, and fill my bottles up with water. It was a nice break and I headed down the trail, with dry shoes but wet socks, to finish my day's run.

The Emmons Creek segment turned into the Hartman Creek segment at Hartman Creek State Park. The trail widened a bit in the park and I continued on at a good pace through the, sometimes, hilly terrain, crossing several prairie and oak savanna restoration areas. A sign in the middle of the woods, at the edge of one of the oak savanna areas, told of the history of the endangered landscape and the continued efforts to preserve and restore. It also told of a rare and endangered Karner blue butterfly that loves the blue lupine that grow in this area of the state. I did not see any Karner butterflies or blue lupine on this morning's run but will continue to be on the lookout in the coming days.

There were more and more wildflowers blooming, especially the black eyed susans that are scattered about the edges of the trail. I passed through a prairie area that was predominantly milkweed, a preferred plant for the monarch caterpillars and butterflies. The trail continued on toward the park's campground, that I didn't see, but knew I was near, by the notes of campfire smoke and bacon in the air. As I neared the camping areas, the trail turned more dense again, this time lined with evergreens and full of scattered erratics. Erratics are large, usually granite, boulders dragged by the moving glaciers from parts north and then left in place, erratically, as the glaciers melted and receded. There were hundreds of them in this area, some fully exposed and some partially submerged. One was particularly large - as big as a large pick up truck - and was flanked by a Leopold bench for hikers to rest and contemplate the incredible force it took to drag that rock a thousand miles from where it had originated.

The trail ended on Edminster Road at a trail closed ahead sign. I had read about the trail closure before the run and decided to end my day here. I will start again on the road reroute that will take me a couple of miles before I hit the trail again on the Waupaca River segment. I think my next run will include my son Steve and his wife Esther, who are scheduled to arrive back in Wisconsin in a few days. I am looking forward to the chance to experience some of the IAT journey with them.

## **Eat Locally**

It was Sunday and we found a bustling coffee shop in nearby Waupaca, the Aquamos Coffee Collaborative. The coffee was great as was the Applesolutely Appealing warm apple Belgian waffle. I skipped the whip cream but the warm and crispy waffle was topped with apple cinnamon sauce and came with sides of real butter and real maple syrup. It was a warm and delicious compliment to the dark roast coffee on this wet and chilly morning. We enjoyed our breakfast and coffee before yielding our spot to an ever growing line of people clamoring for the same thing on this Sunday morning.

## **Steve**

### **Waupaca River and Skunk & Foster Lakes Segments**

#### **Cumulative miles: 632**

I have been fortunate to be able to share some of the running with our son, Alex, but not yet Steve – until today. Steve and his wife, Esther, live in the Netherlands and have not been able to travel back to the States until this past week. And once they landed, the first order of business was to get him out on the trail. Actually, the first order of business was to throw them a party since they are newlyweds, and the second order of business was for me to recover from some yet unknown sickness that laid me down for about 5 days. With Steve recovered from jet lag, me from my fever and all of us from the party, we set out to cover the Waupaca River and Skunk & Foster Lakes segments today.

Esther stayed back today but will join us then next time out. Amy dropped us off on Edminster Road, at the head of the Waupaca Segment, but in front of a long term trail closure sign. I guess there are some repairs needed and the landowner wanted the segment shut down until they are completed. That took us on the road to start. It was a cool and quiet start for a couple of miles until we ran into the state highway, which was busy enough for a Monday morning. Fortunately, the state highway was only one half mile before we were able to turn off and get back on the trail.

The grass was high and wet to start and we scared up a grouse and a turkey early on, each hiding in the grass just a few feet off the trail. The trail coursed around the edges of farm fields, corn on many but a nice mix of tomatoes and maybe peppers on another. We emptied back on a more rural road, one designated by the state as a Rustic Road, before catching the rest of the trail segment. On the way, we passed four deer, 3 of which appeared to be six point bucks, all having their way in a cabbage field. We met the trailhead again in Cobbtown, no more than a collection of a few homes along the banks of the Waupaca River. Here the trail dove down toward the river and ran adjacent to it for a mile or so before heading up and away back toward the road.

We passed through areas of emerging prairie and fading oak savanna and admired the periodic views of the river and the very large and interesting oaks. Along this section, we encountered a trail hut in the middle of the woods. It was built by the Wisconsin Conservation Corps in 1986 and is open to the public. Inside was a journal, a collection of candles, a few knickknacks and a small supply of firewood. It was a one bunker but the floor could expand that to two. A few yards down we came upon an outhouse. We didn't check but assumed that was a one seater as well.

The trail descended back to the road and we ran just a short distance before catching the Foster and Skunk Lake Segment. We actually missed the new trailhead for this segment and ran about a mile on the CR before realizing we had missed it. We later backtracked and caught that segment which is not on the IAT Atlas map version we have but was shown on the interactive GIS map. It was just a short, one mile segment and we easily recovered from that miss.

We did find the old trailhead off of Grenlie Road, guarded by two massive erratics. This area of the IAT was littered with erratics, almost making the term “erratic” a misnomer. The guide book labels them Wolf River granite boulders, and they were everywhere, buried in the earth but also lining the fields adjacent to the road and trail. I wondered what amount of effort it must have taken to unearth those from the fields and move them to the borders, out of the way of planting, long before the days of very large equipment.

Before we headed into the trail, we spotted a small fox ahead on the road. It appeared to be a young kit and was almost completely black in color. It stayed ahead of us, stopping occasionally to check us out before heading into the brush and out of our way. The Skunk and Foster Lakes trail starts in an area called the Farmington Drumlins, making the terrain hummocky and interesting. One more short road section and we headed back onto the trail to finish. The final section wound past several small undeveloped lakes, including Skunk and Foster and the trail was lined with ferns for much of the way. Some very large. Steve commented on the fresh smell of the area and it was a nice finish to a great morning.

Note: Today, in the entry title, I added the segments covered and the cumulative miles to date. I had been thinking of this but had not pulled the trigger. Thank you, Rinke, for the suggestion and for pushing me forward on this thought. I will at some point go back and add that information. If there is any additional information you would like to see, please let me know.

## **Eat Locally**

It was Monday morning and our options were again limited. We ended up back at the Aquamos Coffee Collaborative in downtown Waupaca. They were celebrating their two year anniversary and handing out free tickets to win an assortment of prizes. We will keep you posted on our winnings. I enjoyed another of their waffles, this time a traditional waffle with butter and maple syrup. We ordered enough coffee to keep us awake for the ride home and hit the road.

## **Quiet Run**

### **Skunk Lake to New Hope Iola Ski Area Connecting Route**

**Cumulative Miles: 646**

Today Steve and I got out a little earlier than normal. It was just a few minutes past 6:30am, the sun had been up for an hour but still cast a nice low light across the hazy landscape. It was cool, clear with a nice breeze. We started at a nice easy pace as both of us had tired leg. The nice easy start gave way to a

feeling that Steve's legs, which were still pretty sore from the prior week's run and from his leg workout and our bike ride the day before, were not going to last. We slowed even more, and took a few walk breaks after a couple of miles, but his calves started to cramp and we made the call to Amy to ask for an early pick up. Esther and Amy had just gotten to the trailhead for the start of their hike but returned to meet us mid run. By the time they got there, Steve had run almost 5 miles – not bad for cramping, tired legs. He jumped in the car and I filled my water bottles before they drove away to restart their hike.

I continued on down a shady quiet road. We had run over 45 minutes and we had seen only two cars to this point. I was to see just another two ahead, on a short stint on a state highway, for the two plus hours of my run. The connecting route was shady and winding early but did give way to open fields and straighter roads toward the latter half of the run. There were enough turns and hills and interesting small farm properties to keep my focus. The lack of traffic was noticeable and I really enjoyed this quiet time.

Early in the run, we did have a dog incident. As we crossed Peterson Creek and the intersection of Peterson Road marked by the self- made, self -labeled, Petersonville sign, we encountered two farm dogs at what I suppose was the Peterson farm. One of them stopped quickly and watched while the other came onto to the road, snarling and growling alternately at Steve and me. We continued to run trying to gain some distance from the property but the dog seemed intent to follow. Finally, one of the Petersons, I suppose, came out of the shed and called after the dog. It did have an effect, I think, or maybe we just got far enough along as the dog finally stopped and trotted back to the property, maybe to rest up for the next set of runners to come by.

Despite that incident, we enjoyed this nice little slice of Wisconsin. The Petersonville sign had 4 or 5 arrows below it pointing to the various Peterson family homes nearby. The cows were grazing along the creek and on the hillside in what appeared to be a perfect central Wisconsin location for a farm. I am sure the first Petersons felt the same way when they came upon it likely over a century and a half ago.

The rest of the run was quiet and without incident with many quaint rural properties along these untraveled roads. I came across one person, a woman, sitting on her porch having a cup of coffee, enjoying the sunrise and looking over her small farm and rather large pumpkin patch which was filled with pumpkin blossoms, indicating a rich harvest to come. There were also many creek crossings, each labeled as natural trout stream and open for public fishing. I didn't encounter any fishermen this morning but it looked like an interesting destination for those interested in fly fishing these small but clear streams.

My quads started to yell at me a bit as I neared the hilly finish. A short but steep downhill took me to a short stint on the county highway before I rolled into the parking area of the New Hope Iola Ski Club where I will start again, this time on the trail.

### **Eat Locally**

While not directly on the way home, we made a stop in Stevens Point to check out a local bakery featured on the PBS show, Wisconsin Foodie, and to shop the local farmer's market, which runs daily through the summer and fall. The bakery, the Main Grain, which specializes in sourdough, lived up to its billing with fresh bread, cookies, muffins and cinnamon rolls. The long and steady line and the fresh smells were clear evidence that this was a good spot to make a detour.

Esther and I could not resist trying the chocolate, raspberry sourdough cinnamon rolls. They were good if not a bit too sweet. We enjoyed some coffee and tea and a short rest before heading over to the Stevens Point Farmers Market. The market is open 7 days a week and a sign in the town square indicated that there had been a market operating in that downtown space since the 1870s. It was bustling on this Saturday morning. A good variety of produce, meats and bakery with a background of live folk music made for a fun atmosphere. We bought some broth meat, some radishes and a few eggs before heading back to the car for the long ride home.

## **Untitled**

### **New Hope Iola Ski Hill Segment and CR**

#### **Cumulative Miles: 661**

Ran 15 ½ this morning starting on the New Hope Iola Ski Hill Segment and finishing at the Portage County / Marathon County Line – not quite half way on a very long CR.

#### **Eat Locally**

Stumbled upon a wonderful little place called the Village Hive Bakery and Local Foods Collective in Amherst.

## **Slow It Down**

### **New Hope to Ringle Segment CR**

#### **Cumulative Miles: 669**

My mantra today was “slow it down”. I had intentions to finish the long CR and had left myself an 18.4 mile segment on long straight road. It can be tempting to pick up the pace on those long stretches but I had not done 18 in some time and wanted to make sure I left something in my tank to finish. I did the first 7 miles faster than I had planned but felt pretty good. In mile 8, I caught up with Amy who was walking toward me on the road. She had some extra water in the car and was the targeted rest stop. I walked with her for a bit and chatted. The car was somewhat off the road in a county park and rather than run down there to refuel I kept moving and asked her to meet me whenever it worked for her. I saw her again just a few miles down and took a moment to not only fill up my water bottles but to put on a dry shirt and hat. After the change of clothes and a handful of raisins, I felt brand new.

The weather today was overcast and humid, even somewhat foggy to start. The lack of sun was a godsend on the long stretches of open road and helped to keep my energy level up. I spent the morning trying to make a mental list of the things I saw along the roadside. That is not much unlike other days but it was more intentional today given the lack of trail and small towns on this segment. I have started to be able to identify many of the trailside and roadside plants given the work we have done on our land. Both in our prairie and in our landscaping, we planted native species to both revitalize and blend into the surrounding natural space as much as possible. It only makes sense then that I should see those same plants as I run throughout the state.

Of the things we have sown and planted, I saw wild bergamot, gray coneflowers, different versions of black eyed susans, much goldenrod, yellow primrose, wild hyssop, tamarack or larch and elderberry. I also saw a large field full of horseweed, an invasive plant that I have been battling a bit in our prairie. It was as pretty a stretch as possible for a county highway. And it was quiet, without much traffic and zero dogs. I did finally see another eagle, something I have not seen in some time. I think I last spotted one on the LaBudde segment in eastern WI, which I recall was covered in snow.

I ran past a couple of interesting areas. One was the Crossways Waypost Daycamp, which appears to be a traditional summer camp for kids. It was set on a beautiful wooded area on the southeast side of Mission Lake. There were several cars parked along a mowed area on the roadside. In front of each car was a sign that read, "Please stay in your car until someone comes out to assist you". There didn't appear to be any line of sight between the camp buildings and the cars and I am not sure how you would let anyone know you had arrived. I looked to see if anyone was in their car, still waiting. But given the time of day, it is likely if they were, they were slumped down sleeping and waiting for someone to come and check them in.

I also saw a very nice baseball facility seemingly in the middle of nowhere. It was an adult diamond, with a short porch in left and center (265 ft) and not that far straightaway center, at 310 ft. It had a shorter temporary fence set up for the little leaguers and looked like it got quite a bit of use. There was a covered grandstand with two uncovered sections on the side and a large concession stand. The sign on the grandstand indicated it was the home of the Pike Lake Anglers, since 1998. I googled it and could not find a reference. There was no nearby high school and no nearby town for that matter. Pike Lake itself was a mile down the road but was more of an area by the lake than a town. What I think it was, was an indication of a strong community sentiment and a collective effort to provide area residents with a community center, and a place to gather, compete and socialize. I have seen that in other areas of the state, specifically with baseball diamonds. I love that about WI.

I had not looked forward to today's run. I went into it with a bit of an edge, not looking forward to the distance and the wide open road. But I found myself enjoying it more and more as I went along. I stopped wanting it to be over and just "slowed down" to enjoy it. It was a good day.

## **Eat Locally**

We were in the area of the Steven's Point Farmers Market again and made a quick trip there to get a mushroom grow kit. It was something Amy had her eye on the last time but did not purchase. I found a nice smooth cup of coffee, roasted locally in Almond, WI and we got in the car to head back to Amherst and the Village Hive Bakery and Local Foods Collective for something to eat.

In my abbreviated entry last time, I failed to give this place its due. We stumbled on it trying to find a restroom early in the morning before last week's run. It is located in Amherst WI, a small village of 1,000 people. Steve spotted it as we were heading back out of town and thought it looked interesting. It was. Interesting enough to go back again today.

The eatery and bakery are centered on a collective or cooperative concept and share both space and employees while it seems maintaining separate ownership. The eatery also shares space between a group that does breakfast and a group that does lunch. They have wonderful food and bakery along

with a variety of locally sourced groceries – cheese, meats, seasonal vegetables – as well as locally made cards and crafts. I highly recommend it if you are ever in or near Amherst.

## **Volunteers**

### **Ringle/Thornapple Creek/Dells of the Eau Claire Segments**

#### **Cumulative Miles: 693**

While there exists a governing body called the IAT Alliance, a not for profit charged with developing the overall vision for the trail, working with the federal government to maintain its status as a National Scenic Trail and working to continue to acquire land and/or easements to improve and expand the trail, the IAT itself is maintained by volunteers. Maintenance of a dirt trail through the woods doesn't seem too intensive day to day. The brush needs to be trimmed and portions of the path maybe mowed once or twice a year. An occasional downfall needs to be picked up or moved out of the way. These folks play an invaluable role but are not every day staff. They are people who love the trail and everything it stands for and are willing to contribute some of their free time to ensuring the trail can be enjoyed by all. However, sometimes they are called into action, immediately and intensively. This past week was one of those times and the value and the commitment of the volunteers was evident to Steve and I on our run today.

Steve, Amy and I started our day at 5 am as we climbed into the car for our journey to the Village of Hatley, in north central WI and home to the start of the Ringle Segment. This area had experienced a significant windstorm a week and a half ago and we were aware of at least one posted trail closure within a few hundred yards of the start. Terrie had run these segments last weekend and had so much difficulty getting through the dozens of downed trees she had taken to the road in many areas.

The Ringle segment started on the Mountain Bay bike trail and headed out of town to the west. A few hundred yards down the road we took a left and headed for the road detour for a couple of miles before returning to the trail. The interactive GIS map had warned of a trail closure here for downed trees. It was a nice start nonetheless as we headed down a couple of quiet village streets toward the edge of town. We jumped back on the straight flat trail and looked backwards at what appeared to be an open trail, likely already cleared of any obstacles.

The IAT veered off quickly into a dense forested area and onto a winding dirt path. We could see downed trees everywhere as we wound through the woods, but we didn't have many trees in our way as we coursed easily down the hummocky path. A week ago, or maybe even a few days ago, the trail would have been impassable and this run impossible. Terrie's experience was just that this past weekend. Today, however, the work of a few very dedicated trail volunteers was evident as very large, downed trees were cut and moved off the trail to ensure people like Steve and me had a chance to enjoy the trail.

This trail was a gem and I am glad we got to experience it. Deep and dense forest, bubbling creeks traversed by well built and maintained board walks, and more mushrooms than we could count. In fact, I think I saw more mushroom varieties on these 8 miles of Ringle segment than I have seen anywhere in my life. Large, small, short, tall. Orange, white and even bright yellow. They went on and on and made



for an interesting distraction and conversation as we each found new and strange varieties to point out to each other.

As if that wasn't interesting enough, the Ringle segment was highlighted by an incredible number of erratics. They were strewn across the forest floor and made for an almost unworldly terrain covered in moss and plants and downed trees and branches. In one open area, it appeared the stones were gathered together and created a roosting spot for at least a dozen very large turkey vultures, peering at us and the landscape with their white eyes poking out of their red heads. The storm damage continued through the Ringle segment as the trail opened to a small country subdivision, where downed trees surrounded surprisingly untouched homes and outbuildings.

The Ringle segment finally ended on a dirt road, called Fire Lane that took us to the start of the Thornapple Creek segment. The guide book pointed to a fire tower perched on top of a hill just east of the trail. There are not too many fire towers in the state and I am not sure if this one is in use. It's the first and only one that I have seen in WI in my lifetime. Fire Lane Road devolved into a two track logging road that also served as a winter snowmobile trail. The area had received a lot of rain in the previous week's storm and we found ourselves dodging puddles and soft muddy areas only to begin to get wet in the heavily soaked high grass. I say devolved, because the logging road became nothing more than a wet muddy lane that turned into marshy, bumpy trail. We stopped trying to dodge the sometimes shin deep water and mud and gave into wet and dirty shoes and socks for the remainder of our day's run. We did cross Thornapple Creek on a couple of boardwalks, when we weren't running in the middle of it's overflowed banks, and it appeared to be a deep, clear fast running stream.

Finally, and thankfully, the Thornapple Creek segment ended on Thornapple Creek Road where our road running help to push the water out of our soaked shoes. A short run on the road led to the final segment of the day, the Dells of the Eau Claire. Amy had put out some water at the trail head and we refilled our bottles and our bodies on this very hot humid morning.

As we started down the Dells trail segment, we both wondered out loud what a "dell" really is. In WI we have the famous town and area called Wisconsin Dells, once a destination for visitors to experience the high limestone cliffs and beautiful waterways winding through that area. It is now known for its enormous indoor waterparks where most visitors are unaware there is anything called a "dell" to see and experience. I did a quick search for "dell" and once I filtered out the references to a multinational computer company, I found that dell is sort of a universal term for any secluded area or safe haven found in nature. It is related to the word dale which has a similar meaning and I think is a more common term.

The Dells of the Eau Claire trail segment ran along the Eau Claire River which was wide and fast moving due to the rainfall this past week. The trail ran through dense hardwoods then grassy areas and finally through a thick pine forest and felt secluded the entire way. The trail was rugged with sharp rocks alternating with soft wet muddy areas and completed what was a very technical running day that slowed our pace considerably. We found Amy waiting at the end of the trail, avoiding any falls or turned ankles and finding the sparsely marked trail after crossing the river on the high wooden bridge. All in all, the Dells of the Eau Claire lived up to its billing as one of the most scenic spots along the IAT. It was a challenging but interesting day and maybe one of the best days on the journey so far.

## **Eat Locally**

The drives are getting longer and this may be the last day trip for a while or maybe for the balance of the run. We will work to stay overnight and try to tackle as much as we can in a weekend without driving back and forth. To that end, we had a long trip back home ahead of us and we weren't anxious to stop for a sit down breakfast. Instead, we looked for a nice coffee shop to grab a cup and a quick to go bite to continue our journey home. We found the Living Room in Clintonville. A very nice and comfortable spot to wind away the morning, if you are not in a hurry to get home. The shop was the entirety of the first floor of an old building that could have been a general store in past years. It was set up with several nice tables next to its large windows overlooking the sidewalk and had a few large couches that made it look as comfortable as anyone's living room.

We ordered some coffee and tea along with a yogurt cup and scone. The service was good on this busy morning with all hands pitching in to ensure we were on our way as quickly as possible. If ever back in Clintonville, we will stop again and maybe enjoy the comfort of the Living Room for a bit before heading back on our way.

## **Changing Plans**

### **Plover Segment**

#### **Cumulative Miles: 707**

Today marked the end, I think, of the day trips to the IAT trailhead. With the exception of the first weekend after Christmas last year and one early summer camping trip, we have slept at home, awakened early, drove to the trail head, run, and then returned home, usually by noon or so each day. Each drive to the trailhead and back was normally not more than about 2 hours each way. A decent drive but doable in a day. Today's drive was closer to 2 ½ hours so we elected to find accommodations near the trailhead and will be camping or bunking it somewhere going forward as the drive will extend to 3 and then 4 hours from home.

It was a nice morning for a drive. We left a little earlier and still got to the trailhead at the normal time. The sun had just risen and I started on a short stretch of trail across the Eau Claire River to finish the Dells of the Eau Claire segment. As I crossed the bridge, I looked to my left at the sun streaming through the mist down the fast flowing river. I smiled at our decision a few days ago to stop just a ¼ mile short of finishing this segment, saving it for the start of today's run so I could relish the view. The trail soon disappeared into the dark woods with high weeds for a few hundred yards before ending on the gravel packed Sportsman Drive.

Sportsman Drive ran directly east into the sun for 3 ½ miles, mostly shaded by thick forest and mostly gravel, at least until you cross North Pole Dr. where it turns to pavement and runs through open farmland. I hesitated at North Pole Dr., just for a second, thinking my curiosity might pull me to the left to find out just where this North Pole Dr. would take me. I thought better of it as I again focused on my IAT journey and left the North Pole exploration for another day.

Shortly after North Pole Dr, but after a very long hill, the Plover River trailhead emerged on the left. The trail started as many do with a pretty prairie leading to a thicker forest, this one lined with recently planted oaks, balsam firs (think Christmas trees), white cedar and hemlocks. Amy's cousin, Donna, had recently shared with me that she had snowshoed this segment this past winter and I can imagine that this stretch would have been a wonderland during or shortly after a soft snow. It was pretty this time of year, nonetheless, and I enjoyed the diversity and beauty of the forest as I ran deeper into the trees.

The trail grew dense and dark and more technical with every step. I needed to pay attention to every footfall to avoid the rocks, roots and mud, that seemed almost unavoidable. The forest floor was a boulder field of erratics and the path was sometimes not discernible in the thick trees. Fortunately, it was well marked with a yellow blaze looming each time I got nervous that I had lost the trail. It was slow going all the way to the next road crossing where Amy had put out some water for the balance of my day.

At the road crossing I met an older gentleman in the parking area walking his dog outside of his well outfitted camper van. He told me his was from Florida, the home of the Florida Trail, another National Scenic Trail. He has been working his way around Wisconsin exploring and has been intrigued by the IAT. We chatted briefly about our experiences and impressions and I continued on my way. I sometimes think the IAT is just a Wisconsin thing and am pleasantly surprised when non Wisconsinites come to explore.

The next section started out on a very long raised board walk. Long enough to have a couple of turn outs with benches to rest if needed. It kept me above the wetland and made for a nice easy stretch before turning to higher ground. The balance of the Plover River segment could not have been much different from the first half. Higher ground, dotted with esker and kettles and maple and beech forest reminded my home trail stretch in the Kettle Moraine State Forest.

The trail segment today was challenging in the heat and emptied into a 25ish mile CR. I wanted to tackle as much of it as possible so I could get back on the upcoming trail segments – Kettle Bowl, Lumbercamp, Summit Moraine – that I have heard and read so much about. I tackled about 4 more miles of road before succumbing to tired legs and heat and packed it in for the day. Amy was waiting with fresh clothes and water and we headed out to find some coffee before turning toward, Wausau, our evening destination.

### **Eat Locally**

We were near Antigo, an “up north” vacation community. After a quick tour of downtown and very little luck locating a destination, we turned to our phone and searched for a spot. We found a newer and nice coffee shop at the edge of town, Sweet Thyme Coffee Shop and made that our stop for the day. It appeared to be a newer store, with good coffee but a limited menu. We did order a breakfast panini that held us over for our drive to Wausau where we spent a relaxing day downtown and found among other things, a wonderful downtown food co op, a well stocked 100 year old book store and a fantastic Italian restaurant for dinner. We set out our camp chairs at the city green in the afternoon to save a spot and returned in the evening to enjoy the town's version of music in the park with Copper Box, a local band with eclectic sound centered on an accordion accompaniment and a variety of other instruments.

The band's strong finale, The Pink Floyd Polka, gives you a sense of their creativity. We finished our evening at the Stewart Inn, a local bed and breakfast housed on an early 20<sup>th</sup> century Arts and Crafts mansion near downtown. We found a nice walking path along the river on the morning and enjoyed a leisurely breakfast at the Inn before heading out. It was a nice change of pace and made me look more forward to the new adventures we will have in the Northwoods of Wisconsin as we finish this journey.

## **Changing Plans v2**

### **Plover Segment to Kettle Bowl CR**

#### **Cumulative Miles: 722**

We intended to camp for the weekend and tackle the remainder of the CR but changed our plans due to the forecast for very warm, very buggy and maybe stormy weather. Turns out we made a good decision and rather than camp and run twice we drove up today and ran once. The goal was still to take a large bite out of the remaining 20 or so miles of the CR. We did 15 ½ and finished in Polar WI, population 984 (or less by now).

Terrie joined us for the first time in maybe two months. Our schedules had not aligned for many weeks. While I had gone out a few times with Amy and Steve, Terrie made good use of her time filling in many of the gaps in the trail behind us and has just about caught up. We are now in sync and intend to finish the remaining 400 or so miles together. That will mean a slowing down in the frequency of the runs but will be much more comfortable and satisfying for both of us as we finish what I think will be the most challenging part of the trail

We started the day, stiff and tired from the long drive up but overall rested from a week or so of not running the trail. The first ½ mile or so was up a long steady hill and we were warm and ready for the balance of the day's run by the time we crested the hill. The day and the miles flew by quickly without much fanfare as we ran through a mix of farm fields and nice rolling hills.

We did have one (or almost one) dog incident. Terrie saw a dog in the front yard of a home up ahead and he or she spotted us almost immediately as we approached. There was also a second dog some feet behind the first, both tied to separate trees thankfully. The dogs were not happy we were there and the first dog seemed particularly irritated. It snarled and growled and tugged at its leash with such ferocity I thought it would either break the chain or pull the tree right out of the ground. I crossed the road, not that it would have mattered much, and Terrie produced her dog pepper spray. I could feel my heart rate, and pace, increase as we ran past and was happy for the conscientious dog owner that had the presence of mind to keep the dogs tied up and to prevent them from tearing apart unsuspecting runners.

The rest of the run went on without incident. Amy had been hiking the north section of Plover River and found us as we neared the end. We took a short stop to refill the water bottles and ran the final 2 miles or so into Polar where we shed our very soggy running gear and headed to Antigo for some breakfast.

## **Eat Locally**

Today Amy had researched a place to eat and found a diner called Dixie Lunch. They had a couple of claims to fame. One was the Sunday Turkey Dinner and the other was that they had been in business under the same family ownership in the same location in Antigo for over 75 years. It was still mid morning and we opted for breakfast rather than turkey and enjoyed eggs, pancakes and waffles along with a good cup of coffee.

It may have been the only place bustling in Antigo that morning and you could tell it was a local favorite. The diner's walls were filled with pictures from the past and other than the staff's outfits, looked little changed over the years. Customers at the counter in farm and Harley wear along with others on their way to or coming from church in coats, ties and dresses filled the space with a loud hum of morning conversation.

As we left, we took a quick tour of Antigo Lake Park, a nice downtown park with several camp sites, to measure its potential for our coming weekend's camping/run adventure. We booked a site when we got home and look forward to returning to Antigo and maybe Dixie Lunch

## **Goldenrod and Asters**

### **Kettlebowl Segment**

#### **Cumulative miles: 738**

I am currently reading a book suggested to me by both my son and daughter in law, Steve and Esther. It's called Braiding Sweetgrass, a collection of essays about life and nature written by a Native American botanist. One of the early chapters focuses on the author's life and how she came to be a botanist and describes her life long wonder at why Goldenrod and Asters grow so closely to each other in native settings. The contrast between the gold and the purple is beautiful to the human eye. It turns out that the contrast, and the reciprocal nature of those two colors, is also more inviting to the pollinators and gives both plants a leg up on survival. I had recently read that chapter and had yet to see an example in nature. Today we saw it in abundance. There was goldenrod and aster growing almost at every interval along the way. And just like it in book, it seemed to seek the other out and was thriving in this remote and challenging place.

That description may lead you to think that today's run was a walk in the park. It was anything but. I could also have named this entry something like, "The Big Muddy Mess." We encountered all types of terrain, hilly, hummocky, wet and muddy and would probably consider this the toughest run yet. It started back in Polar, at the intersection where we had stopped a week or so ago. It started out misty or maybe it was just falling fog, but turned to steady rain for a bit. But we were on the road for about 5 miles and enjoyed the quiet of the morning and the coolness of the air after what had been a hot and humid summer of running.

The smooth road section transitioned to a muddy, gravelly stretch before finally hitting the Kettlebowl trailhead, which was our real challenge for the day. Kettlebowl, a 10 mile section of trail that either starts the turn IAT's turn to the south for west to east runners, or for us, marks the turn of the trail to the west toward the finish, has a reputation among trail users. It is often talked about as being

challenging and difficult to navigate. The area is crisscrossed with logging and other primitive roads as well as cross country ski loops. Its history of being poorly signed was worrisome to us as we approached.

Pat and Amy helped us find the trailhead and we took a minute to refuel before heading out. We took 10 steps onto the trail and stopped to try to figure out which fork in the path was the real IAT. Not a good sign, no pun intended.

Both Terrie and I had downloaded the Guthook app, a trail users must have in the dense and remote woods of northern Wisconsin. We found ourselves checking it regularly and it helped to navigate some of the less obvious intersections along the path. I do have to give credit to the trail team that has upgraded the signage over time, however. Kettlebowl's main reputation had been the poor signage and we found sections that were well signed and easy to navigate as well. Feeling more confident of our path, we could focus on the challenging terrain.

Logging operations in the area had created wide and deep rutted two track and recent rains had filled those ruts with water. We tried to stay in the grassy median to maintain some sense of footing but found those areas to be soft and slick at times with high and very wet grass and weeds. At times the path changed to single track which meant that there were no ruts, only high grass and weeds that did not appear to have been mowed all year. We scrambled through areas dense with thorny berry bushes hanging wet and tangled across the path, at times obscuring any sense of a real trail.

The path eventually widened back to two track toward a nice descent and finish into the abandoned Kettlebowl downhill ski area. At the bottom of the descent, we emerged from the woods into an open area at the bottom of a high and steep ski hill. The lifts were still in place and a once nice chalet at the bottom of the hill appeared abandoned and starting the process of decay. We had hoped for a nice bathroom, maybe serving the cross country crowd but there were none apparent as we headed toward the parking area and our end point for the day.

It was one of the longest and most remote runs so far and helped us to realize we could navigate the challenging Northwoods terrain we will encounter as we finish our journey.

## **Lumbercamp**

### **Lumbercamp Segment**

#### **Cumulative miles: 750**

Lumbercamp just sounds like a cool name for a trail segment. It invokes a sense of history and ruggedness that I think we felt along the way today. Northern Wisconsin was heavily logged in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and this area was at the center of that logging activity. This segment contains the remnants of an old logging camp, the Norem Lumbercamp. Once a thriving community of log buildings that served as bunk houses and mess halls for the lumbermen, it is now an open field of native plants and grasses with remains of the buildings foundations the little evidence remaining. There is a restored structure, named the Hillbilly Hilton that we did not see that serves as an overnight shelter for hikers.

The trail today followed the once abandoned logging roads that cut across the area. I say once abandoned because there is now active logging occurring again in this area. Today's logging is not what it once was, there is no more clear cutting of the forest and a few pieces of machinery replace the dozens of men once needed to cut and move the trees. We saw evidence of the current work but no activity on today's run, only a quiet forest.

Terrie and Pat had connected with a neighboring camper in Antigo who had been hiking the IAT. He had done both Kettlebowl and Lumbercamp in spring and warned us of challenging trail conditions. He suspected we would have a tougher time on Lumbercamp based on his early spring experience, but we were fortunate that September conditions had improved and, though wet and muddy, the Lumbercamp trail was overall easier than Kettlebowl.

We still ran through muddy rutted sections and occasional high grass. There were rocks and hills and high grass, just less intense than the prior day. And we only had 12 miles to cover today making for a better day. The trail was marked sporadically and rerouted a number of times due to the logging and standing water. We found ourselves checking Guthook to augment our navigation skills and were fortunate again to have that technology in our pockets. Pat and Amy dropped us off, put out some water near half way and managed almost 6 miles of hiking today. We found them waiting patiently as we ended our Lumbercamp experience and headed to camp to break down our tents and head for home.

### **Eat Locally**

We had decided to camp this weekend and found a wonderful city run campground in Antigo. For \$10 a night, we had a nice grassy site with nearby showers and bathrooms. The camping area was located in the city, near downtown and next to a river walk that allowed for easy access to walk to restaurants or a grocery store. There was dry campfire wood available for a donation and bikes to use if needed.

While we were running Saturday, Amy and Pat made the wise decision to forgo their usual hike and instead kept their feet dry at the downtown farmer's market. Amy found a gallon of pure Wisconsin maple syrup for a very reasonable price and Pat found some rhubarb tort to supplement the delicious bacon, egg and hashbrown breakfast he made for us at the campsite.

We had arrived on Friday night and stayed until Sunday morning, avoiding the long morning pre run drive. We are committed to travel simply but managed to make a wonderful meal at the campsite Friday night prepared by Amy, and made pre run coffee and oatmeal in addition to Pat's satisfying post run breakfast. We ate at the local, #1 rated in Antigo, El Tequila, Saturday night and made a return visit to Dixie Lunch Sunday morning post run. We were able to get back on the road by noon on Sunday and returned home to catch the balance of the holiday weekend.

## **Perfect Fall Weekend**

### **Summit Moraine/Highland Lakes Segments**

#### **Cumulative Miles: 776**

This weekend we headed up to northern Wisconsin for a couple of runs and a weekend of camping. We chose a campground run by Langlade County just north of Antigo. Jack Lake Campground at Veteran's Memorial Park turned out to be a fantastic choice. It was quiet, tidy, scenic and the IAT ran straight through it. The campground was located on one of the many lakes in the area and was full of families enjoying what turned out to be a perfect fall weekend.

With overnight temperatures in the 40s on Friday night, we prepared for one of the cooler starts since the snowy and raw days of winter and spring. But the sun was just coming up over the horizon and showing off crystal blue skies as we headed for the Summit Moraine trailhead. Terrie and I started down the first few hundred yards of trail through high and dewy grass, so cold that our feet were beginning to freeze. We had worn mittens and gloves for our hands but our feet were left to fend for themselves in our trail shoes. It was a sensation we knew but hadn't experienced in months.

The beauty of the trail made the cold start worth it. The sun was shedding filtered light through the trees and the many lakes we passed had banks of fog shimmering in the morning light. Just a couple of miles into the run, we stopped to take a picture of the mist hovering over Upper Vantor Lake which sat alongside an area for dispersed camping. There was no one at the site and I wonder how many beautiful sunrises and sunsets have been missed by those not knowing of this gem of a campsite.

Upper Vantor Lake was just the first of many lakes we ran alongside that morning. Many were unnamed but those that were included the lake named, "Unnamed Lake." All were small, crystal clear and calm with pictures of surrounding trees emerging with fall color reflecting on their surfaces. The Summit Moraine segment trail makers understood the beauty and inspiration that lakes can offer to the runners and hikers and made every effort to lay the trail along as many shore lines as possible. Unfortunately, the winding single track did turn into wide and rolling logging roads for a couple of miles but fortunately they were just rutted dirt this weekend and not the mud and puddles that we encountered a couple of weeks ago. Nonetheless, our feet were still wet and cold as we moved through the woods.

We made good use of our Guthook navigation app once again. While the trail was pretty well marked, running with our heads down caused us to miss a couple of turns. Emptying into a large field of ferns with no discernible path is a good clue you are off trail. A quick look at the app confirmed our misstep and helped point us in the right direction, back to the trail intersection with the large yellow arrow pointing to the right where we headed straight.

We made that same mistake a couple of more times including a good half mile detour past a turn that took us into the campground. Once we found our way back, we encountered our only hikers that day, Pat and Amy, who were on the return leg of their out and back. Past Amy and Pat, the trail took us on a tour of the campground that we may not have encountered had we just sat by our fire enjoying the campsite and the beautiful weather. The trail passed through an arboretum and along a nature trail, through a playground area and a disc golf course and headed out to the park entrance road past the Veterans Memorial monument.



The road segment was short and took us into the Jack Lake Ski cross country ski area marked by a large sign and a warming hut. XC ski paths are normally wide, smooth and rolling and this one was no exception. It was mowed well and our pace quickened as we approached the end of our day's run. We passed one more warming hut, deep into the woods, in the center of the ski area. It appeared worn and weathered from the outside with the door propped wide open for both the weather and the forest creatures to enter. I pulled open the door slowly concerned about what we might find but to our surprise the inside was clean and well furnished with a wood stove, a good supply of wood, and tables and chairs that offered a good respite for both summer hikers and runners and winter skiers. We didn't stop to linger and did not succeed in getting the door to stay shut as we left to finish our run.

Just a few miles ahead, Pat and Amy were waiting with homemade peanut butter cookies and lukewarm coffee leftover from the morning drive to the trailhead. Both tasted wonderful as we ended what was a perfect fall morning run.

Day 2 of our fall weekend runs started where we left off on Saturday, at the head of the Highland Lakes Segment. This segment, by name, promised even more lake views and the map confirmed that we were to encounter many of the area's small kettle lakes during the 13 mile trek. The segment was broken into two pieces by a 4ish mile CR that appeared on the map to be a combination of rural road and some type of fire lane.

The Highland Lake trail makers did not plan as well as those that did the Summit Moraine route. This segment did not run along the shores of the lakes but wound between them at a distance where you could sense there was a lake nearby but more often than not, could not see the surface and appreciate the beauty that we saw the day before.

The run started on a flat and solid surface gravel road. Really just a very long driveway that headed into Camp Susan, what we think was a local girl scout camp. We encountered an RV camper along the way and a number of parked cars. We did see some very young children playing in the distance outside a lodge but did not stop to investigate any further. The driveway turned into a single track and offered a number of nature trail signs that described the areas native trees. We slowed to read the headlines of White Pine, Red Pine and others, but not the details as we continued on our way.

The single track ran just a few miles before emptying onto the CR, Forest Road. Forest Road turned out to be an extremely quiet, newly paved and rolling, incredibly scenic road. It was dotted by a number of "up north" cottages or small homes, but we saw no evidence of the area residents early on this Sunday morning. We were enjoying our CR run so much we ran past our turn onto the unmarked gravel road that would take us back to the trail. A random Guthook check as I paused for some water signaled our mistake.

We turned back and headed down the gravel road that was to take us to our water refill, placed earlier by Pat and Amy. We found it exactly as promised at the corner of Kleever and Lowell roads at the school bus turnaround. There was one property at this intersection and was apparently the end of the line for the school bus. We turned onto Lowell and the start of the next leg of the trail.

Lowell Road was, we think, was an actual town road, not a fire lane. It was not inhabited and it made sense that the school bus would not proceed down this narrow, somewhat potholed gravel road. There were no signs of life for almost two miles until we reached the next intersection, Saddle Bag Road.

There, buried deep in this forest, a couple of miles from where the school bus was no longer willing to travel, was a sign marking addresses of three residence and pointing down what was an even more narrow gravel road. It made me wonder if the neighborhood kids, if there were any, would walk, or ride a snowmobile or ATV, to and from the school bus stop each day. Either way, it must be an adventure for both the parents and the kids each morning and afternoon just to be sure they get to school on time.

As we continued past Saddle Bag Road, the gravel road turned to dirt road turned to grassy, bumpy two track. The woods got more dense and remote and we encountered a couple of gates, seemingly in the middle of nowhere indicating the presence of private property and signs indicating that only IAT hikers could proceed. Further along I noticed one of the signs indicated that this land was owned by the Knights Templar Club. I did a quick search indicating that it is a fraternal not profit organization headquartered in Summit Lake WI and is a "pleasure, recreational or social club." I do know that the Knights Templar is a very ancient order founded in Europe but don't know any more about its current focus or its members. Later that morning as we were driving back to the campsite, we did encounter a sign indicating the location of its local lodge,. Its members must take a very strict vow of secrecy as no other information on its activities was available.

The run through the Knights Templar woods was evidence of very early forest maturity. The area was dense with an incredible diversity of trees, plants and flowers each vying for its spot and survival. Through the weekend we saw maple, oak, birch and beech hardwoods next to a wide variety of evergreens like pine, balsam, hemlock, tamarack and cedar. Growing among and between them were sumacs and ferns and goldenrod and asters among hundreds of other species not seen or understood by most of us running or walking past. The fall colors were starting to emerge as the ferns were turning bronze, the maples were beginning to shine their reds and yellows and oranges and the stark contrast of the bright red sumacs next to the brilliant white birch made for an incredible palette that reflected the early morning sunrise.

We finished our run this morning at the small wayside next to Townline Lake where all of the above came together in portrait that summed up the weekend and defined what fall in Wisconsin can be. Terrie, Amy and Pat took a dip into the cold lake to soothe their feet and legs and we enjoyed a few minutes of rest (and more of Amy's peanut butter cookies) before wrapping up our perfect fall weekend.

### **Eat Locally**

We made some meals at the campsite Friday evening and each morning but ventured out to Sammy's Bar and Grill for a good Northwood's bar dinner on Saturday night. A round of beers was less than \$10 and we were able to select walleye dinner and pork chop dinners from a large menu of good, Wisconsin supper club fare.

Sunday post run we headed to Ruby May's in Summit Lake and were looking forward to a good breakfast to boost our energy for breaking camp and driving home. As we drove up, Ruby May's appeared to be a new or newly remodeled diner that held up our hopes for a quality meal. Unfortunately, Ruby May's was closed for late season cleaning. We talked to the owner who was there with her daughter's doing the deep cleaning. She offered to give us some coffee but not to fire up the

griddle so we moved on to break camp and find an alternative. After we packed up and showered, we hit the road to find what was now lunch not breakfast. Stop #2 was closed for the season. Stop #3 was closed for good. Stop #4 was closing soon and could only offer us soup. Stop #4 did offer a suggestion for Stop #5 - Bluebirds Café, down the street - and promised they were still open "for a while."

We quickly found Bluebirds Café and were greeted by a very young but very experienced server. She said that yes, they were open for a while and that if we had just arrived and they had been closing soon, "I would not have this nice smile on my face." They were out of soup but "what do you expect for coming late in the day on a Sunday." She was funny and pleasant and we were treated well. The food was good including homemade pies and strawberry shortcake. We ate quickly and were on our way home enjoying the golden day as we drove through northern Wisconsin on our way home.

## **On the Trail Again**

### **Parrish Hills Segment**

**Cumulative Miles: 788**

It had been about six weeks since the last IAT run. Not that we weren't doing any running. Both Terrie and I ran the Door County half recently, putting in a pretty good effort. And both of us had been running periodically over the past month or so, although much shorter distances. Amy and Pat had been keeping busy as well, Amy with short hikes and Pat with his workouts. It was a nice break though, both from the heavy mileage as well as from the weekends away. It gave Terrie a chance to travel to Norway to visit her kids and grandkids and gave Amy and me a chance to enjoy some weekends at home.

That said, it was wonderful to get on the trail again. My legs seem to be itching for it and I felt ready to tackle what proved to be a couple of the most difficult sections in the state. Alex was able to join us and we planned two consecutive runs and one night of camping, which was a roll of the dice in early November in the Northwoods. We left early Saturday morning and made the drive in just less than 3 hours. The morning yielded its light slowly and we were treated with a beautiful sunrise as we pulled up to the trailhead. The same trailhead we left weeks back on what was a perfect fall day, perfect enough for Amy, Terrie and Pat to take a dip that day in Townline Lake, at the head of the Parrish Hills segment.

We had planned to meet some friends who were to join Amy and Pat for a hike. They arrived a bit late but Terrie, Alex and I headed out, anxious to get started. The morning air was crisp but not November frigid and the sunshine on the lake provided a scenic glimpse of what was to come. The trail wound around the shore of the lake and headed off into the wilderness. We passed through lowlands and highlands, ran on tight single track and wide logging roads. We forded the Prairie River near mile 10, a very cold but refreshing 30 foot crossing through shin deep water. The 12 miles flew by quickly even though we promised to be kind to ourselves on this first time out in weeks.

The forest had been brilliant with color in late September but was now a muted rusty amber, with a few splashes of bold red oak leaves holding their color for a few more days before yielding to the season. It was very pretty in its own way and we could appreciate the permanent greens of the pines and firs and the whites of the birch without the distraction of the oranges, reds and yellows of peak leaf season.

The 12 miles turned out to be just the right mileage for the return to the trail and we caught up with Amy, Pat and friends as we neared the finish of today's run. What was a wonderful run for us was not quite as wonderful for Amy on her hike, as she pulled up with knee pain and limped into the end of the segment. She continues to press forward each time, trying her best to experience the trail, knowing that it comes with a price for her vulnerable knees. And she continues to get excited to go out each week to experience the new adventure in any way she can and to partner with Pat to provide a level of support that makes our runs go smoothly.

### **Eat Locally**

Our friends Wendy and Dave have a family cabin on a lake near the area we have been running, hiking and camping recently. We finally connected with them this weekend for a joint run and hike and they experienced a part of the trail they had not been on in all of their time up north. They thoroughly enjoyed the hike and were more than eager to recommend a spot for all of us to go for lunch. Oddly, the spot they chose was the exact spot we tried unsuccessfully the last time we were in the area – Ruby May's, The Jewel of the Northwoods.

We got to the small but nicely appointed diner just as they were turning over the menu from breakfast to lunch and we ordered a variety of burgers, salads, salmon and grilled cheese. All of it was delicious and worth the six weeks we waited to get a table. The place was littered with locals, both full time and part time residents, likely, and was as clean and comfortable as any north woods restaurant I've experienced.

We left the restaurant to find a campsite. It was early November and the privately run campgrounds had shut down for the season. We were left with a nearby (as nearby as you get in that remote area of the state) county run campground. It was a primitive campground – no running water – and first come first serve on the sites. Given it was almost a 60 degree November weekend, we thought we might get shut out of a campsite but we found quite the opposite. With over 20 sites, the campground was completely empty. We got our pick of the place and chose a flat sunny spot perched just above the shore of Otter Lake.

Amy soaked her swollen knees in the cold lake, we sat and enjoyed the sun on the shore, played some Yahtzee and a wine and cheese happy hour, and enjoyed a wonderful dinner of pumpkin soup. At night we sat beside a blazing fire watching the lake turn to glass as the stars emerged in a moonless sky. We were treated to both an amber sunset and a purple and pink sunrise. It was the perfect spot to rest before our Sunday morning adventure on Harrison Hills.

### **Slowing it Down**

#### **Harrison Hills Segment**

#### **Cumulative Miles - 802**

The IAT guide book has a 5 point rating system – both difficulty of terrain and elevation intensity for each segment. Both contribute to the pace you are able to sustain. Parrish Hills was rated a 3 for

elevation and a 5 for difficulty of terrain and Harrison Hills a 4 and a 4 respectively. I would agree with the elevation rating for Parrish Hills but if yesterday's run was a 5 for difficulty of terrain, Harrison Hills should have been rated a 6.

The single track was extremely narrow, seemingly just wide enough for each footfall. And the topography was cruel. Which is not to say it was the fault of the trail makers as the trail emerged from whatever route the glacier allowed. But the land was the very definition of hummocky and with every step the trail switched directions and went up or down slightly. That was true whether the surrounding area was "flat" or whether you were headed up or down the very steep inclines. Combined with the fact that this segment has the second highest peak in Wisconsin at its center, it made for a leg crushing day.

It was, though, as beautiful as it was tough. If it weren't for the hills, today's segment could have been called Harrison Lakes, as the trail wound near and around countless lakes that could never have been experienced without the benefit of the trail. These lakes were both spring fed and run off kettle lakes and were not accessible by road, just trail. They were undeveloped and unspoiled and my wish is they stay that way forever.

We encountered more hikers today than we had in some time. In fact, most of the time, we run for 2 or 3 hours without ever coming across another person. Today we saw 5 or 6 couples or small groups enjoying the same remoteness and beauty we were lucky enough to experience.

Alex joined us for the second day as well and we enjoyed his company and third set of eyes watching for trail blazes. He bowed out at 10 miles and Terrie and I finished up the last bumpy section, getting lost briefly, just once. We flushed a number of grouse today and saw one buck. The grouse are heard and not seen as they startle you with a flurry of beating wings and disappear before you get a chance to even turn your head. One did fly down the trail ahead of us and we caught a brief glimpse of its beautiful brown and black accented feathers before it flew into a thicket of young aspen.

I thought to myself as I was finishing the run, how we see so little large wildlife. I know it probably sees us first and scampers away. But I did encounter a buck a few yards ahead of me today as it thought briefly about taking the trail toward me, stopped and measured my threat, and took off into the woods. Its neck was thick with rut and I am sure it was both hungry to mate and skittish about arrows and gunfire making it more alert and active mid day today than most days.

As we finished our run, we encountered Pat making his way back to the end of the trail. Terrie stayed back and finished with him and I met Alex and Amy ahead, waiting very patiently for me. We finished the run at Hwy J and the Alta Junction trailhead, where we will start again next week.

### **Eat Locally**

Alex had been given today's task of choosing a restaurant and made the unlikely choice of a truck stop restaurant, The Friendship House. It was attached to a BP gas station just off the interstate, it was convenient and it met the definition of locally owned. We jumped in the car, famished and ready to try anything.

The diner was full, it seemed with both locals and with travelers returning from their own up north weekend. The place was expansive and clean and the prices were more than reasonable. Among us we ordered the Sunday special “real” Turkey dinner, the liver and onions, beef and gravy sandwich and grilled cheese with pickles. The hearty soups and salads that came along with the entrees were homemade and we left more than full and in need of a nap and not a long drive home. We hit the road and made it home safely, unpacked and got ready to plan the next weekend’s adventure.

## **One More Mile**

### **Alta Junction/Underdown Segments**

#### **Cumulative Trail Miles: 820**

If you have ever seen the Seinfeld episode when Kramer goes for a test drive on an empty tank and refuses to turn around or stop for gas you will know what today felt like. We were past our planned exit and kept going, one more mile, despite an empty tank. It was hard, it was exhilarating and it was fun. We finished at 19 miles for the day, the single longest run so far and made our Sunday run that much shorter.

The day started like most other days, with a long drive to the trailhead at sunrise. The first section, called Alta Junction, was straight and flat and bordered on either side by lowland and wet forest. It turned out we were running on the one high spot in the area, an abandoned rail bed, one part of a junction that ran through the now ghost town of Dunfield. Neither the rail bed nor the town were recognizable today but apparently were the center of a bustling late 19<sup>th</sup> century water bottling company. The springs in the area were purported to have medicinal qualities but they either ran out of water or out of customers and what once was is now not discernable from the surrounding forest.

The first segment was short, just a mile, and emptied onto the highway for another mile or so of CR before coming to the highlight of the day, Underdown. The trail is named for the area’s first settler, Bill Underdown whose cabin remains are found deep in the woods alongside the trail. The only information available at the site is one sign that reads “Homestead”. No year or other indication of when or whose home existed there. Give the 30’ or 40’ tall trees rising from the center of the foundation, the home had not been lived in for some time.

The trail was like many others, hilly and winding, and ran past many kettle lakes, some yielding to the forest but others, like Dog Lake, still full of water and fish, and incredibly scenic. Not that the ones filling with peat aren’t beautiful, they just hold a different kind of beauty. The unnamed lakes we ran past today had large areas of peat overtaking the wet areas and were dotted with some type of dried flower that was holding a small dollop of white snow from the overnight dusting. The white dollops made for a very interesting scene spread over several acres of otherwise brown and amber grassland.

Dog Lake had a shoreline shelter that appeared to be well used and well kept. Alex and Emily had come upon this site unknowingly a year or so ago and could not say enough about how perfect a day and night they spent enjoying the lake and the forest’s beauty.

Amy sat in the support vehicle at the end of the Underdown segment and helped to refill our water before we headed out to tackle some part of the 10 mile CR. It was cold and windy and we were not excited about hitting the road, but we knew we had to push through it, either today or tomorrow.

Our plan had been to finish at 14 or 15 for the day, but as it turned out, Pat had gone further than he had planned on his hike, wanting to see Dog Lake. By the time Amy and Pat caught up with us we were already at 15 miles and wiling to keep going. Each time we saw them, we said just one more mile until we decided to just get the road segment behind us for the day and pushed through to the end. It turned out to be the right decision given what was to come tomorrow.

### **Eat Locally**

We finished later than we had planned and decided to skip our routine of stopping for coffee and something to eat. We headed straight to the upper flat we had rented for the night in Wausau and decided to cook an early dinner. We each grabbed a hot shower, enjoyed some wine, cheese and grapes for an appetizer and sat down to a wonderful dinner cooked by Pat. He had prepared thick cut pork chops with a maple glaze, long wild rice with dried cherries, celery and apple and a wonderful beet salad. We topped that off with homemade apple cobbler that Amy had baked the night before. We still had some time to run to the local bookstore, owned by the same family since 1919. We spent the better part of an hour their and returned to the apartment before 5:30 pm, wanting to go straight to bed. We did stay up for a bit but all slept soundly given the day's adventure.

### **20 Minute Mile**

#### **Grandfather Falls/Turtle Rock Segments**

#### **Cumulative Miles: 833**

We woke early to a winter wonderland. Snow covered every surface and clung heavy on the trees. It was still coming down and would not stop for another hour or so. We woke slowly to some coffee and breakfast before gathering our things and heading out into what was for us, instant winter.

The day was supposed to be a long one, covering about 17 miles. But given our extra effort yesterday we were looking at just under 13 miles. Our legs were feeling good and we were excited to get going and experience our first snowy run of the new winter. The morning started easily enough. The Grandfather Falls segment is just 4 miles long and runs primarily along the Wisconsin River past a small waterfall and a past a dam and hyrdo electric plant fueled by the fast running waters. But, for some reason, before it heads up along the river, the trail sends you away from the river and into the Merrill School Forest. The forest dates back to 1944 when a local 1898 graduate of Merrill High School purchased just under 600 acres of land and donated it to the school in honor of his father, an early area settler and woodsman. Students have planted over 60,000 trees on the property, scouts have carved out the Ice Age Trail as well as numerous loop hiking and ski trails and donors have built a cordwood sided educational center deep in the woods.

With 3 inches of fresh powder covering the path and hanging on the trees and a gently sloping trail that ran alongside fast flowing Ripley Creek, we hardly noticed the slippery rocks underneath the snow. The out and back went quickly and we crossed the road onto the riverside section of the trail. It was here, the real challenge of the trail began.

This section was no less beautiful with the wide and flowing Wisconsin River at our side for several miles. But the bank was steep and the trail was pitched making each footfalls on the slippery underlying rocks questionable. We slipped and slid our way along the banks finally reaching the falls. At this point the river was strewn with large sharp boulders creating many areas of small rapids and a very pretty waterfall area. The challenge for the day soon became evident as the large sharp boulders were now not only in the river bed but strewn along the banks as well. That meant the trail had only one path - through, over and around the rocks. The scrambling started pretty innocently with a slowing pace and open eyes to ensure we found the right route through the rocks. A rabbit track was the only evidence of activity on the trail that morning but the rabbit seemed to have a keen sense of direction and we followed the tracks all the way to the dam.

We had a brief respite on a 2 mile CR that took us up river and across to the west side to the Turtle Rock segment. Here the trail headed deep into the woods again, and straight for the river bank. We had hoped for a smooth run and a faster pace but soon found ourselves slowing even more and scrambling sometimes on hands and knees up and over the now larger rocks. The snow cover was pretty but made the granite extremely slippery slowing us at one point to a 20 minute mile pace.

After a couple of more miles of pushing through the jagged terrain, we finally headed west up the steep ridge. Neither Terrie nor I had ever been happier to head up a hill. When we reached the top we stopped for a moment to regather our senses. We were of course physically drained but also I think emotionally drained. For maybe the first time it was hard to enjoy the beauty of the trail. We had come off of a very long Saturday run and spent the past two plus hours slipping and sliding and climbing over slippery granite, hoping not to turn and ankle or slide into the river. We were spent and mentally done for the day.

But, we had a few more miles through the forest. The trail widened for a bit before heading back into the woods. The boulders did not disappear, they just became smaller, and the snow got a little deeper, keeping our pace down as we continued our plod along the winding path. When we finally saw the car, Terrie remarked how so much more beautiful it was then the trail today. I do think as the days and weeks pass, we will begin to understand just how pretty that area was and maybe even one day make another trip back there. This time, though, on a drier day to enjoy a short and slow walk through the woods.

### **Eat Locally**

We hungry but so spent we weren't ready to eat immediately. We also had a long drive just to get back to civilization. So we jumped in the car and headed toward home committed to find a restaurant as we got further down the road.



We ended up in downtown Stevens Point at a cozy little restaurant, serving breakfast and lunch until 2pm. It was called the Wooden Chair and as you might expect it was outfitted with an eclectic mix of old wooden chairs surrounding an equally eclectic mix of old wooden tables. We ordered a mix of breakfast and lunch and enjoyed some warm coffee before heading home. The restaurant was bustling with late waking college students and couples and families getting something to eat before heading some place to watch the late afternoon Packer game. How do I know that? It's what most people do on a Sunday in November in Wisconsin.

## **Plan. Then Adjust**

### **Averill-Kelly Creek Wilderness/Newwood Segments**

#### **Cumulative Miles: 846**

The next leg of the trail had no fewer than four river or creek fords – a/k/a water crossings with no bridge. A reroute due to a hunting closure took the first one off the table and a shortened day took the last one off the table. That left two to overcome. The two that caused us the most concern and the two that we needed to think critically about as we planned for the day's run. It was December and the temperatures were expected to be in the mid 20s, meaning the water crossings could have been fully or partially covered with ice. Crossing early season ice on a flowing river would have been a deal breaker. But thinking about crossing open, flowing, 33 degree water on a cold December day, a mile or so from the next meet up spot, also caused much anxiety. Despite Terrie and Alex's investigation, we were unsure of the depth or the width of the river as we drove up Saturday morning.

Terrie had made some inquiries with the area's trail steward and found that the first crossing was likely ankle deep and not too wide. But less was known about the second crossing other than a few pictures we found of hikers crossing in spring and summer showing waist deep, flowing water. We didn't want this to stop us so we needed a plan. One option was to reroute around the entire segment but that would have been disappointing and not aligned with our goal of completing the trail. A second option was to run to the river and then double back to the road – a few miles away – in order to run around and come in the other side. Since the two crossings were just 75 yards or so apart, this plan would have us hitting most, but not all, of the trail segment. Not the preferred option, but we would have taken it had we encountered a river that appeared uncrossable.

The best scenario was a crossing that allowed us to navigate by stripping off our shoes and socks, rolling up our pants and wading across. Our plan was to pack towels to aid in the drying and warming process. We also thought we might be able to leave our shoes and socks off between the crossings since they were so close.

The morning's run started on the road, a reroute to a mile or so of closed trail due to hunting. The air was cold and the wind brisk as we made our way to an abandoned logging road that took us back into the woods and down to the Averill Kelly Creek crossing. The crossing was maybe twenty feet wide and appeared to be just a couple of feet deep. The creek looked clean and clear with small but maybe sharp rocks lining the bottom. Ice was just beginning to form shore, but not wide or thick enough to hinder the initial step into the frigid water.

The crossing was a real test of will. But then the entire trail has been a test of will in one form or another and I was encouraged by the way we have made it through each obstacle along the way. As we approached the creek, my plan was to quickly remove my shoes and socks and plunge in without hardly stopping. I didn't want to think too much about the challenge and wanted my forward mental momentum to take over and get me across. I am terrible at walking barefoot on rocks, especially rocky lake and river bottoms and feared that I might not be able to move fast, or worse, that I might stumble and fall trying to move quickly on the painful rocks. With about a mile left after the crossing before we got to our support vehicle, that would have been a dangerous scenario.

I removed my shoes and quickly took the first step. I was amazed at both how quickly I lost feeling in my feet and how little I felt the sharp creek bottom rocks. The numbness turned out to be a blessing as I was able to take each step without stopping and did not lose my balance. By the time I reached the other side, my feet were like bricks and beginning to throb. Terrie had packed in a pair of water shoes and easily made it across with much less numbness than I think I experienced. We immediately decided we could not just continue to the next crossing with bare feet and we sat down to dry and warm our feet and don our shoes and socks.

We continued on with our plan to keep moving and rose quickly to get to the next crossing. My feet were moving but I could not feel them hitting the ground as we walked quickly (running wasn't an option at this point) to the Newwood River crossing. Newwood was definitely a river, not a creek, but wasn't waist high as we had feared. It was deeper and much wider but looked navigable. This time, Terrie had suggested I leave my socks on as I had packed in an extra pair just in case. This proved to help tremendously, both mentally and physically. We quickly traversed with no stumbles and repeated the process of donning our dry shoes and socks. We hopped up to get moving and to restore the blood flow to our feet. A hundred yards of walking turned into a slow trot and then a run as the warmth and feeling returned. We had done it. We planned for the worst and experienced the best. No need to adjust. That would come tomorrow when winter really set in.

Alex and joined us just after the water crossings and together we enjoyed another 7 miles of trail, finishing the day at the end of the Newwood Segment, just a few miles short of our original plan. It had been an exhausting but exhilarating run. We had run in snow, we crossed the river and creek and we encountered our first wolf tracks, fresh prints that were made as a single wolf loped down the trail maybe just minutes before us. The snow cover was just deep and soft enough to matter and the trail alternated between extremely narrow and hummocky and wide, soft and flat footing. Both of these tired us quickly and we called it a day at just over 13 miles. The run finished down a narrow, snow covered lane, one step down from the primitive access roads that led to it. This was an important detail as we rose to a changing forecast the next morning.

### **Eat Locally**

We stayed at the same apartment in Wausau as the last time out and planned another wonderful meal. This time Amy brought lasagna with homemade noodles, Alex brought the salad and Pat scored a wonderful german chocolate birthday cake at a local bakery to celebrate Terrie's birthday. A nice glass of wine completed the meal. We watched Tommy Boy for a few laughs and retired early to ready ourselves to face the next morning's run.

## **Zero Miles**

### **Camp 27/Timberland Wilderness/Wood Lake Segments**

**Cumulative Miles: 846**

Our weekend had been planned a couple of weeks out with a cold but dry forecast. As we approached the end of the week, the weatherman added 1 to 3 inches of possible snow to the Sunday forecast. That was doable and created some excitement for Sunday's run. Saturday evening, that forecast changed to 3 to 5 inches, with some icing and winds as high as 40 mph. That was less exciting but still doable. Sunday morning we woke to an expected inch or two of snow, but also a forecast that was now calling for 5 to 8 inches, mostly over the following 4 or so hours.

We had our morning oatmeal, packed our things and headed out to the trail. The drive took us onto the interstate, which was nearly empty but for the blowing snow and ice. Visibility was poor but we forged ahead to Merrill where we were to take the state highway to a gravel county highway, then to a dirt access road and onto a narrow, snow covered spur road to a lane meant more for ATVs than vehicles. It was the same spot we emerged from yesterday with little issue. But today, with accumulating blowing snow, no chance of a snow plow clearing the way and very little phone service in the area, the drive to the trailhead seemed more dangerous than it was worth. This is real wilderness and the roads are labeled primitive, not maintained, and few and far between. The treacherous drive to the trail, combined with the fact that our support team's drive to the meet up point, just 11 trail miles away, was almost an hour on clear roads, caused us to adjust the plan.

When we exited the interstate in Merrill, we stopped and collectively decided to turn around and head for home. While it did not support the adventurer in all of us, it was the right call on this day. The trail will be there the next time and will continue to provide us with fun and adventure without causing us to put ourselves in a dangerous spot.

## **Taking What the Trail Gives**

### **Camp 27/Timberland Wilderness Segments**

**Cumulative Miles: 856**

We are learning more each time that the trail, and mother nature, are in charge of our plans and our progress. We had intended to complete Camp 27, Timberland Wilderness and Wood Lake three weeks ago. We did not, and we fell short of that goal again this weekend. The challenge of unplowed access roads and our sheer exhaustion with the ever deepening snow have resulted in shortened runs and adjusted plans.

Today's adventure actually began in the garage, just before heading out on the road this morning. We had packed the car and were ready to roll as the Sanders' pulled into the driveway. However, as I climbed in to start the car and back out of the driveway, a short series of clicks told me that my battery was dead and the car would not start. I had left the tailgate open after doing some preliminary packing the night before and now had a dead battery. We quickly pivoted by moving all of our gear to the other

car, which was fortunately full of gas and ready to go. We were off and running and headed to the trailhead just a few minutes late.

The ride to the trail was just about 3 hours with a short stop to stretch and use the restroom. The roads were dry and the sun was shining by the time we arrived at our destination. Well, almost arrived at our destination. We had taken two vehicles up north to accommodate the 5 of us and stopped to park one so that we could consolidate before we headed down the more primitive access roads that would get us to the trailhead. We drove about 3 miles of the needed 5 before the icy dirt road became impassable from the past few weeks' snow accumulation. Terrie, Alex and I jumped out of the car to run the final stretch to the trailhead and Amy and Pat headed back to make the almost one hour drive to the meeting spot, just 4 ½ trail miles ahead. Camp 27 and Timberland Wilderness segments are located in one of the most remote areas of Wisconsin and limited access roads and winter driving conditions made it challenging for our support team to get to our meeting points. But the running conditions proved to be as challenging as the driving conditions and they arrived before we did.

We headed down the access road, running and trying to recall exactly where and how far away the trail access point was. Each time we neared a bend in the road or a small pull out, we thought we were almost there. We ended up running 1.7 miles through 4 to 6 inches of snow before we arrived at our starting point. We had hoped for some fresh hiker or snowshoer tracks on Camp 27, which would have made our run much easier, but found only wolf, coyote, deer and rabbit tracks. In fact, we saw A LOT of wolf tracks both on the access road segment and down the trail. The animals, particularly the wolves, seemed to like the trail route and we followed their tracks through most of our Camp 27 run. We saw a few deer but no wolves or coyotes, although I am sure they saw us.

We slogged through untrodden snow that was soft and provided no traction. We slipped and slid, working to keep our balance for the 2.9 miles to Tower Rd, the meeting point and the start of a short CR. The woods were gorgeous, moving between hardwood forest and hemlock and birch stands. The snow was deep and soft dampening all of the sound and we could picture ourselves stopping and enjoying the quiet woods with a cup of hot coffee or cocoa. But we had work to do and trail to run so we forged forward. We did have one creek to ford which proved fairly easy. There was rock solid ice just a few yards upstream from the open flowing area of the creek. We kept our feet dry on that ford, but the deep snow on every step made us both cold and wet as we neared the CR.

At Tower Rd, we took a small break to gather our thoughts and rethink our plan. It was obvious that the footing was not getting any easier and that we might need to adjust our mileage goal. We agreed that Pat and Amy would meet us at the end of the next segment, a few miles short of our destination but along the same road, so that we might have another chance to reevaluate our day's effort. We started down Tower Rd. looking forward to a hard and dry running surface, if only for a couple of miles. Tower Rd., however, turned out to be glare ice with just a few thin bands of crusty snow suitable for running. Any step off the crusty snow risked a sudden fall. We each had our moments, but somehow managed to stay upright as we neared the end of the CR and the start of the Timberland Wilderness Segment.

Pat's car was parked ahead as we ran up a short hill. It was near the end of the CR but seemed too close to be at our agreed upon next meeting spot. It turned out Pat was parked at the intersection of what was to be the road he and Amy were to drive to get to our originally planned end of the day destination point. As we neared the car, we could see Pat was staring down what was now just a shadow of a road, completely covered with snow and completely inaccessible to any vehicle. We wondered out loud how

long it might take them to get to that final meeting point and if any road to that spot would be plowed and accessible. We had about an hour of Timberland Wilderness running to think about that answer to that new question.

Timberland Wilderness was as pretty as Camp 27. Snow covered hemlocks dotted the forest in and among the hardwoods. Occasional stark white stands of birch guarded the trail and wildlife tracks criss crossed the soft white snow. It was peaceful. And it was exhausting. We spotted a few more deer, saw an old but still sturdy deer stand and came across a shelter like structure that was too big for an outhouse, too small to sleep in and too drafty to provide much cover. The bench and old dirty cushion inside gave some clue that it was used for rest or shelter at some point, but was not at all inviting to anyone passing through today. The end of this segment brought us back to Tower Rd. and the start of Wood Lake. We had just passed the 10 mile mark and decided, I think against Alex's judgment and to his dismay, to call it a day.

We could have gone the 3 miles additional miles to Wood Lake County Park as planned, but we had already done an extra couple of miles just getting to the start of today's run and now risked more unplowed roads and no clear understanding of what to do if our final meeting point was not accessible. And we were exhausted. It had been a wonderful run and we had gotten as much or more of what the trail had planned for us that day.

### **Eat Locally**

We had found, online, a small café in the nearby town of Rib Lake and headed there immediately for something to warm us. The outside of the Northside Café was not anything like the clean, inviting pictures posted online of the inside. From the outside, it looked worn and dirty and we even had trouble identifying the front of the building and the appropriate place to park. It had gotten good reviews, though, and we were not about to start our search for food all over again at this point. So we headed in and found ourselves in a bright and clean environment. Colorful signs and décor greeted us. There were a few patrons at the counter but the tables were all open on this early Sunday afternoon. We grabbed a spot and quickly scanned the menus.

One by one we headed into the restroom to clean up. Amy was the first to emerge and could not believe it – there was a gas fireplace inside the bathroom and it was as cozy and warm an environment as you could hope for after spending the better part of the day in the cold woods. Alex emerged from the men's room and confirmed an equal placement of a fireplace there. If it weren't for the need to order and then eat, I think we would have all gone back in and spent some time warming up.

The food came quickly and we enjoyed some breakfast items as well as some lunch and dinner entrees. The food and the experience lived up to the reviews and we would recommend it to anyone heading to or through Rib Lake.

## **West to East**

### **Wood Lake Segment**

#### **Cumulative Miles: 862**

After our stop at the Northside café yesterday, we had scouted the access roads needed to complete today's run. Both Wood Lake County Park and the access points of Bear Ave. were open. Icy, but plowed and accessible. We needed to return to Tower Rd. to start our run and both Wood Lake and Bear Ave. provided bail out points should the run prove to be too challenging to complete the full segment. The forecast for the evening, though, was calling for up to 6 inches of new snow, freezing rain and accumulations of ice, and wind gusts as high as 40 mph. The storm was coming mainly overnight and ending by mid morning. While we had found clear and clean access points Sunday afternoon, we were not yet sure what Monday morning would bring. It would have been practical to call it off and head home, but we decided to stay and find out what the morning would bring.

We headed to our accommodation for the evening, a couple of rented rooms in a remodeled farmhouse near Medford. We weren't quite certain what we were renting, but found a picturesque location and warm inviting hosts that shared their home with us. Our rooms were adjacent to a shared common area and bath and we had access to the host's large and well appointed kitchen. We had brought a dinner of soup, bread and salad and after cleaning up and enjoying a nice dinner, spent some time resting and playing games. It was as cozy and comfortable as we have found anywhere along the trail.

We headed to bed as the winds picked up and the snow began to fall and woke to a brighter and whiter snowy morning. We ate a quick breakfast, packed the cars and headed to the trail just before sunrise. We debated alternative plans dependent on what conditions might find as we headed out on the road. The winds had died down, there wasn't much new accumulation of ice but there was a fresh new layer of powdery snow.

We first headed to Bear Ave. to again check on road conditions and found the trail connection points with Bear Ave to be inaccessible on this snowy morning. We then headed over to Wood Lake County Park, which was now the last alternative bail out point for the day. The park was accessible but was at the western end of what was supposed to be an east to west run. The reader may not have picked up on this point, but the run to date has been both contiguous – starting each time where I ended the last time – and from east to west – not west to east. In order to continue with that plan, we needed to drive back to Tower Rd., a 30 to 45 minute drive, not knowing yet if Tower was accessible. Or, as Alex suggested, we could run to the start - from Wood Lake County Park to Tower Rd – west to east – and then turn around and run back – east to west – thereby keeping the contiguous east to west run intact. And after much debate, that is exactly what we did.

The trail was softer and snowier than the day before with a few more inches of fresh powder. It made for an incredibly beautiful and peaceful experience and we didn't mind seeing that trail more than once in those conditions. We passed an enveloping section of hemlock forest, wrapped in soft white snow and smelling deeply of pine. We passed through alternating sections of hardwood and birch, as the day before, but on a more hummocky, and hilly path. We had early views – and then again late views – of Wood Lake, frozen over and with just one solitary fisherman on the ice visible through the misty air.

We passed through areas dotted with signs describing the history of the logging activity that had shaped the land. There was evidence of the dam used to raise the lake level to accommodate the log float and evidence of the old railbed used to move the wood from deep in the forest to the lake. We saw a large eagle nest a few hundred yards off the trail and a sign on the trail indicating that the local conservation authority had assigned protective status to the 3 acres surrounding the nest to help maintain a natural boundary. It was a wonderful piece of land with a rich history and one that local conservationists seemed proud to maintain and provide access to for hikers (and the occasional runners).

What we didn't see, oddly, were animal tracks. The adjacent trail and forest floor, the day before, was covered in tracks and today's trail was starkly absent of tracks. The new snow, of course, had covered any existing tracks, but it seemed odd that on a somewhat warm, quiet morning, before a cold front that was about to bring in a deep freeze, you would not see any new evidence of animals wandering about trying to find food and water. It did, though, add to the ambience of the forest. We seemed to be the only ones in the area, man or beast, for miles.

We ran 6 miles to get just 3 more miles of trail behind us, but it was the right decision given the day's conditions and as we reached Wood Lake, we felt good about the day's effort. We met up with Pat and Amy, gathered ourselves and headed to find a second breakfast.

### **Eat Locally**

We are now pretty far north and pretty far west in the state and the ride home proved to be long, especially early on the snowy roads. We were headed for Stevens Point and the Wooden Chair again for a late breakfast, but after getting some cell reception and confirming they were closed on a Monday morning we adjusted our sights to the Mint Café in Wausau. Amy and I had seen this restaurant on another trip to the area but had not yet experienced it. We had heard good things about it and when we arrived, we found a bustling diner, with a rich history and delicious food.

The Mint Café has been serving Wausau since 1888. It has been updated since then and is a classic diner wonderfully decorated with local historical pictures and memorabilia. We were too late for the breakfast menu but found a great choice of lunch options along with warm pie and coffee for dessert.

The service and the food were fantastic and we were able to get back on the road quickly to head for home. Another step – or few – closer to the Western Terminus and the end of our journey.

### **Wood Lake or Bust**

#### **Wood Lake Segment**

**Cumulative Miles: 873**

It has become traditional in running circles to “Run Into The New Year”, so Amy, Alex, Pat, Terrie and I piled in the car early this New Year's Eve morning and headed for the IAT. Earlier in the week, barely recovered from the previous week's effort, Alex suggested we do a one day road trip to finally finish the

Wood Lake Segment. We had planned to complete it on two previous trips but winter weather and trail conditions altered our plans. It would be nice to get this one behind us, and it would make for an epic “Run Into The New Year”.

It was going to be a long day but I was excited for the day’s adventure. We left our house at 5am expecting just over a 3 hour drive to the trail, just over a 3 hour run and just over a 3 hour return trip, all so we could get to our New Year’s Eve dinner reservations at 5:30pm. This day, we did not encounter any dead batteries or any bad road conditions. We made good time and got to the trail a little after 8am.

We were all, I think, quietly hoping for a solid track to run on but knew the chances of that were fairly slim. It had snowed a bit this past week in northern Wisconsin, only adding to the soft, deep snow that was there early in the week. The new snow softened the landscape and felt like a warm blanket as we ran through the cold and crisp morning. More hemlock and birch alternated with mature hardwoods as we wound our way through the woods. The snow varied in depth but was no less than 6” deep and at times was nearly 12”. For the first 3 miles, only the deer had braved the winter woods and we followed their tracks almost continuously toward our first check point with Pat and Amy. The snow was soft and we sunk near the bottom with each step, ensuring our shoes were constantly surrounded by ice and cold. About 3 miles in we encountered our first human tracks – some snow shoe track that led us to Bear Ave and the support vehicle.

I know I had hoped for snow shoe tracks to ease our effort but as we started down the semi hardened path, we found the traction almost more difficult. Rather than stepping to the bottom of the soft snow, we pressed an inch or two into the now almost packed snow absorbing all of our energy and making each step feel like two. We finally reached the vehicle and found it empty and locked. Amy and Pat had gone down the trail to the west and had not made it back in time. We continued on and met them a few hundred yards ahead, close to the checkpoint, but too far to turn back to refill water. We adjusted and now planned to meet them just another two miles ahead, at the last opportunity before the finish.

The next two miles proved to be brutal. The snow depth increased considerably and there were no tracks of any kind to guide us down the trail. At one point, we encountered a poorly marked detour near a large beaver dam. Not knowing exactly which way go I made the mistake of taking one step to the right rather than the left, and sunk down into several inches of water. My once damp sock and cold foot was now completely soaked and in danger of freezing. I had brought another pair of socks and trudged forward to the car anticipating a change and a warmer and drier finish. I did change socks at the car but did not have a change of shoes. My right shoe was completely wet and water logged now and my dry cotton sock quickly became soaking wet. With 3 ½ miles to go, I felt anxious about frostbite.

The next few miles didn’t let up. It was remote, it was hilly, and it was still covered in deep snow. This time we saw our first bear tracks. They didn’t appear to be bear at first. The tracks were fresh and they were big, but whoever made them was dragging its feet, or its belly, along the snow making it difficult to see what was traveling ahead of us. Alex finally spotted a claw imprint. A quick picture and a later post to the Thousand Miler Wannabees group confirmed that we were looking at bear tracks. Apparently its not that uncommon to see active bears, not hibernating mid winter. Maybe the wolves will have something else to focus on now besides us.



The trail continued to be challenging to run and we averaged 20 minute miles almost consistently throughout the morning, running where we could and walking where we had to. We can run 3 ½ miles in under 40 minutes on a good day but today that same distance took us almost one and a half hours. With slush forming in my socks and my feet getting numb, every minute counted. When we finally encountered Pat on the trail and then Amy, and were near the end, and my toes had lost most of their feeling. I did not have a dry pair of socks or shoes along so got into the car and turned the heat on high. It worked and after a while my feeling returned. Now I was just wet and clammy, not frozen, for the ride home.

I know I had struggled the week before, but today I felt a new level of exhaustion as we crossed the segment finish at Hwy 102. Exhausted, but exhilarated to finally have completed Wood Lake. It took three attempts and it was trying at almost every step, but with its winter coat on, it was also one of the most beautiful 13 miles in Wisconsin or anywhere.

### **Eat Conveniently**

We knew we were going to be pressed for time so we planned ahead and packed lunches to eat on the road. After a quick change of clothes (but not shoes and socks unfortunately), I jumped into the driver's seat and we headed for home. Those in the back worked on trying to open their wet shoelaces and changed in the car as we moved down the road. We ate while driving and made the return trip ahead of schedule, and early enough to clean up, dress up and make our dinner reservations.

### **Re Emergence**

#### **Rib Lake, East Lake, Pine Line Segments**

#### **Cumulative Miles: 886**

Spring has been dragging her feet here in southeastern WI while winter is just ending in the northern part of the state, where we left off on our last run. It was almost 4 months ago that we last ran. It was cold and the snow was deep and it was exhausting. Since then, we have been burrowed in, waiting for spring, better conditions and the re emergence of our journey.

It seems like it's been a long cold winter. Not a lot of snow, but enough. Not a lot of cold, but more than enough. And no January (or February) thaw that I can recall to provide a respite and to peak our optimism for the warmer days. But spring always comes, eventually. It reappears, in the same way each year, if not always on the same date. The snow melts, the leaves and grass dry out, the green shoots begin to emerge and the trees begin to bud. The animals end their hibernation and begin to roam the forest again. And we re emerged as well. Heading back to northern WI, to the trail, to begin again.

We weren't certain what we'd find as we headed north today. Reports from a couple of weeks ago had the trail still covered with knee deep soft snow and reports from last week had news of heavy flooding and washed out roads. The forecast for today, though, called for 60 degrees with the chances for rain diminishing. Terrie, Pat, Amy, Alex and I headed out at 5am and found the Rib Lake segment parking lot at 8am, clear of any snow and dry enough to drive into, and more importantly, to drive out.

We had packed a mid run change of clothes, socks and shoes and some garbage bags for to keep the mud in one place within the car. We were dressed in varying layers and expecting the worst of conditions if not the best of weather as we headed out. The temperature was 50 with considerable fog blanketing the area but expecting to warm and clear as the day went on.

The trail started out fairly firm with some low wet areas, some slushy snow fields and some slippery ice packs. We made good time the first mile or so with the only real challenges the fallen branches and downed trees. As we came to the first road crossing, we stopped to read the recently posted sign indicating a trail re route, taking us down the road instead of to the next section of trail just across the road. We hesitated just a minute wondering if we should ignore the sign, but thought better of it and headed down the road. The road route turned out to be scenic and quiet, down a state designated rustic road and past a couple of lakes. The road route also took us past the trailhead to Timms Hill, a National Trail spur leading to the highest point in WI at 1,951 feet. It was a 10 mile spur so we made a note to come back some day to experience what is described as some of the hilliest terrain in the state.

We headed down Rustic Road at a measured pace. We had all been running over the past 4 months but not always 13 or 14 miles and weren't sure how we would fare. The fog was lingering and the temps were cool but not cold. The rain had held off, but it seemed the whole forest was dripping from the fog and the previous night's rain. Perfect running weather.

We were looking for the next turn off the road and onto the trail when we came to a XC ski area and the Rib Lake School Forest. There was a nice kiosk with a colorful detailed map – and no mention of the Ice Age Trail. We looked at our own maps and concluded we must be in the wrong place so headed back out to the road. We ran about another 10 steps down the road and saw a yellow blaze leading us right back into the XC ski area. Here the IAT wove through the ski area and the school forest but was apparently not important enough to make the map.

The trail crossed the Sheep Ranch Creek, one of the prettiest creeks I have seen on the trail. It then headed up steeply before descending to Hwy D and the end of the segment. There we met Pat and Amy who had been doing some hiking and were ready to top off our water and allow us to change clothes. The trail conditions and the road segment re route though were dry enough that none of us felt the need to change clothes. We were dry and warm and ready to continue to the East Lake segment.

East Lake also started on a set of XC ski loops and the initial climb off the road was hard packed with ice and difficult to navigate. Once we cleared that we headed up to high relief terrain and the top of what was called, locally, Moose Mountain. We had already passed Moose Mountain when I asked about where Moose Mountain might be. It had apparently been a half mile or so earlier at the spot of a couple of signs indicating scenic views that were blanketed in fog and blocked by dense forest. It wasn't the scenic mountain top I had envisioned and I wondered if there is any day of the year you can spot the two scenic view points, Olah Farm or the village of Rib Lake, from Moose Mountain.

The East Lake trail proved to be a test of our trail readiness. It had very steep climbs, more muddy footing and some washed out areas of trail and many downed trees. Our pace slowed to accommodate the obstacles but we kept moving and eventually met up with Pat and Amy once again on a forest road just before the end of the segment. We paused just a little to refuel but did not need to change as we had kept warm and dry once again. We had just a couple of miles to go on East Lake then a short CR to Pine Line before we wrapped up for the day.

East Lake leveled out a little and we made good time. We crossed some more easily traversed seasonal creeks, ran adjacent to East Lake and passed the headwaters of the Black River. Each time we neared the water, the temperature cooled, the fog increased and the trail conditions worsened. The micro climate that the water created had not yet allowed the snow and ice to melt or the ground to dry. In fact, the lakes were still blanketed in fog and completely locked in ice. Spring was knocking on the door in this part of the state, but mother nature had not yet let her in the room.

The end of the East Lake segment was a wayside on State Hwy 13 and led to a short but busy run along the highway to the start of the Pine Line segment. Alex had done some pre reading about Pine Line which indicated it was not an interesting route, just a short, straight trail that ran along an electric fence line before finishing on Fischer Creek Road. The last 100 yards of the trail did run along that electric fence, but the rest of the less than a mile trail was maybe the most difficult of the day. It was not the elevation, though, and not the water and the mud. It was the twists and turns and downed trees that slowed us down this time. It seemed that every 50 or 100 yards, a large tree had fallen on the trail including a large aspen that had fallen in the middle of a Boy Scout built campsite. In this short, .9 mile segment, I think we went under, over or around more downed trees than in the previous 12 miles.

I finally saw Amy ahead, hiking back to the car and I knew we were about done. 13 ½ miles of water, mud, ice and snow and we were still dry. As I passed Amy, she told me it was wet near the finish, but easy to get through. I don't know how many steps I had taken that day, successfully keeping my feet dry, but I do know that changed on the last two. In my race to the road and the finish, my last two steps sunk into the muddy water and soaked through my socks and my shoes. I turned to see both Alex and Terrie do the exact same thing.

Despite those final two steps, it was a good day. We had overcome the anxiousness we felt not knowing the conditions we would confront as we planned and prepared. We had moved forward again. It felt good to be back, making progress to our goal of the western terminus, and enjoying each step on the trail – flat or hilly, warm or cold, dry or wet.

### **Eat Locally**

The finish to today's run was near Medford, WI population just over 4,000. It seemed larger as I think it serves a broad rural demographic despite the size of the village itself. We found a place called the Medford Diner. I didn't think we could get more local than that. We pulled up to what looked to all of us to be a funeral home. It clearly had a sign that said Medford Diner but it clearly had the look of a funeral home. The full parking lot was either a sign of a funeral that day or a very good place to eat. We decided to go in.

The interior was newly and nicely remodeled and you could no longer sense what might have been there before. It was bright and open and airy. They seated us in "the back room" which was a little unsettling but we were not alone as the place was bustling. Our hunger had us looking at the menu and not wondering what the room had been used for in the recent past.

I ordered the Medford Skillet, which also seemed like the local choice, and enjoyed a filling plate of hash browns, bacon, ham, sausage, onions, tomatoes and two eggs over easy. I topped it off with some raisin toast and coffee. Others had different versions of the skillet, a country fried steak and a patty melt. The food was good, the service even better and we left full and satisfied and ready for the 3 hour journey back home.

## **Where is the Esker?**

### **Mondeaux Esker Segments**

#### **Cumulative Miles: 900**

Esker - definition, a long winding ridge of gravel and other sediment, typically having a winding course, deposited by meltwater from a retreating glacier. The Mondeaux segment was so named, we thought, because it tracked the course of a nice, high relief winding path atop an esker. In this case, an esker overlooking the Mondeaux Flowage, a 411 -acre lake created from a Depression era Conservation Corp dam building project that controlled the Mondeaux River.

The trail segment was just under 12 miles, and we found ourselves wondering out loud to each other, over the course of the first 7 miles, “where is the Esker??” The day started out easy enough with a 3 ½ mile CR on a rolling, quiet road. Terrie and I made it quickly down this road, with the wind at our back, while Alex, Pat and Amy parked ahead at the trailhead. The CR run was nicely unremarkable except for spotting what we think was a nearly full skeleton of a beaver lying on the road’s shoulder. The skeleton was almost completely intact, from head to tail including most of the rib cage. It was almost 4 feet long and the ribs stood a foot or so high. The tail was pronounced with what looked like vertebrae all the way to the tip. It was too big to be a possum, racoon or any of the weasel family and we think it was a beaver. What it was doing on a roadside, and not swimming in a creek, is a question I think it is still asking itself.

We got to the car to meet up with Alex, who took a break from running the road section. He is a trail running purist it seems at this point. The meet up point was crazy windy and we quickly moved on to the trail and the protection of the forest. The trail was taking us into the Chequamegon National Forest, which covers a large portion of northwestern WI and is known for its beauty and remoteness. Amy and Pat had already started out ahead to get a couple of miles of hiking in before they headed to the next meet up point.

The weather was mild (ish), windy but not freezing, and the forecasted rain was holding off as we headed into the forest. The trail was firm and winding as we started and we stayed dry – both our heads and our feet. As we moved further into the forest, we quickly experienced what was to be the trail condition for most of the morning – soft, wet, muddy and hummocky – with many downed trees and branches to navigate over, under and around. We slowed considerably and walked, or I say, picked our way, more than we ran. Each step at times was a critical decision that either resulted in a soaking wet foot or a dry, semi firm foothold. We managed to keep our feet dry for a couple of miles, crossing many seasonal and one more permanent creek, before giving into the wet and mud, at an unnavigable area of muck and standing water.

Every time the trail began to head up an incline, we all said in unison – “I think we are finally headed up the esker,” before quickly realizing we were not, as we began to head downhill to another area of lowland, wet forest. And so it went, for 7 miles, and almost 2 hours, following the trail that was serving as a seasonal runoff outlet for the melted snow and recent rains. We did begin to see glimpses of the beautiful flowage as we moved forward, including a view of two, beautiful white swans, dipping their heads for a mid morning breakfast. We also saw two, what Alex said were likely Mergansers ducks, flying quickly over the water.

We also came across an area of animal fur, spread out in about 6 or 7 piles, one of which had a few bones lying within it. We spent a bit of time, talking while running, (well, almost running) trying to figure out just what it was that we saw and what might have happened. To us, it looked like the fur from a deer or other large animal, that was likely all that remained from a kill. Wolves might have killed a deer we thought, each grabbing a section of the animal and moving away from the others to eat their portion of the remains, leaving only the fur and a couple of scattered bones. It was also likely pretty fresh as the rain and wind had not blown away the dry loose fur hair that lay in piles throughout the area. It was incredibly interesting if not a little unsettling.

We finally connected again with Pat and Amy at the northern end of the flowage, in a parking area near a couple of cabins that were part of the improved camping area within the national forest. Here the wind was howling up the flowage as we refilled our water and changed out our layers. Here also, it appeared, was the esker. Finally, the esker. We headed to the west side of the flowage to a trail tucked in the corner of the beach area and headed out and up. And then.... it started to rain.

So here we were, finally out of the wet, muddy lowland, with just 5 miles to go. We found the esker and climbed steeply upward to the pine covered, winding, esker trail. The wind was blowing hard at the top and it was not only raining, but intermittently sleeting as we made our way down this firm, scenic overlook trail. We focused on the beauty of the surroundings and not the worsening conditions as the next couple of miles seemed to fly by. We met up again with Pat and Amy, refueled once more and headed to the day's finish. As we headed west away from the esker, the trail returned to its muddy condition and the weather continued to worsen. We finished on what seemed the muddiest half mile or so in a heavy downpour. Alex talked aloud about craving chicken soup and we were motivated to finish and find some dry clothes and warm food.

Today was maybe the worst day in terms of weather and trail conditions since we started. We went just under 15 miles, one of our longer runs in some time. We finished wet and cold and muddy. But we all felt accomplished, and confident, that we could continue on our journey, no matter the conditions. It is all part of the adventure.

### **Eat Locally**

As we had headed home the week prior, we passed through the nearby town of Abbotsford and by the Abby Diner. We decided last week that the diner would be our destination for something to eat today. Abbotsford is just south of Medford and near the interstate that was our route to get home. It boasts to be the first city in Wisconsin, not due to its founding date, but due to its place in the alphabetical order of cities within the state.

The Abby Diner had been a place that Pat and Terrie had stopped in the past on trips to visit family in the Twin Cities and it seemed as good a destination as any. It was nicely furnished and very clean with attentive wait staff. At noon on a Saturday, it was busy enough, but not too crowded. Four of the five of us ordered the chicken dumpling soup that Alex had been craving. The fifth, me, decided against it but wished I had chosen the soup. Amy went for the grilled cheese with her soup and not her usual patty melt and Terrie followed suit. Pat went for one of the day's specials, tenderloin tips, and Alex paired a couple of pancakes with the soup. I had a craving for a waffle but mistakenly ordered it with what I thought were fresh blueberries. It turned out I got blueberry pie filling instead. Too sweet for my taste but not bad if you like that kind of thing. The food went down quickly and we made our way down the very windy street and back to the car for the long, and somewhat damp, sweaty smelling ride home.

## **The Smell of Ferns**

### **Jerry Lake Segment**

#### **Cumulative Miles: 915**

I really never thought about the smell of ferns before this weekend. But, yesterday, our daughter in law, Emily, brought over a vase of flowers from her yard and included one fern leaf in the vase. I overheard her telling someone how recently she was driving in a car full of ferns and how the fresh, wonderful smell filled the space. I leaned over and smelled the fern leaf. There was a faint smell of fresh plant but I didn't get the sense that Emily had gotten. I was left wondering.

Then today, we hit the trail. After a mile or so of muddy, hummocky trail we entered a forest full of ferns. Tall hardwoods had provided plenty of shade for carpet of ferns to thrive. I noticed it right away. The smell was earthy and fresh all at the same time. Almost floral, but not quite. I thought about how coincidental it had been that I just listened to Emily describe that same smell. Or, maybe, it wasn't coincidental. Maybe, I had smelled it before, but never paused to enjoy it with as much appreciation as Emily had. Maybe, Emily had given me the inspiration and a means to see, or in this case, smell, what had been in front of me this whole time.

Beyond just the ferns, the Jerry Lake trail was a joy to experience. It was deep in the heart of the Chequamegon National Forest and ran alongside the Yellow River and over the Hemlock Esker. It was flat early, or as flat as the IAT can be, but moved to high relief across the esker and near the river. All the while, the mosquitoes were thick. Mosquitoes aren't fast enough to keep up, even with our pace, but each time we paused, they attacked quickly.

It's the season for mosquitoes and soon deer flies and black flies and we are resolved to persist through that annoyance. It's also the season for wildflowers. We saw purple flocks, red and gold columbines, bright yellow marsh marigolds and small white creeping dogwood, sometimes known as bunch berry. There were fading carpets of trilliums that a week ago would have been amazing and in full bloom. We also saw a wash of white flowers in a marshy area near the trail but never got close enough to see what they were. It was fun to look for and see the spring flowers. It's one of the many rewards the forest and the trail provide.

Off the trail, we also continue to get rewarded with the sights of rural Wisconsin. On the drive into the trail head, near Curtiss, WI, we passed by what was as close you would ever come to an Amish traffic jam. As we were driving north, almost a dozen Amish buggies were driving south, likely to church, on this Sunday morning. Each buggy was much like the next – a small black box with two wheels and one horse. Only two or three occupants, all dressed in their Sunday best. The last few had a rather odd attachment though. A bicycle attached to the top. We had seen an Amish man on a scooter earlier in our journey but we had not seen any Amish riding a bike. It seemed out of place, to us, to have these modern bicycles attached to these old fashioned modes of transportation. Then, at the end of the line of buggies, we saw a peloton of young Amish bicycling down the road, on their way to church, tagging along behind. They may have been some of the rest of the too large families not able to fit into those small buggies.

It had been a good day. Alex, Terrie and I ran an easy 15 miles. Amy and Pat hiked 5. The mosquitoes stayed at bay, for the most part. And we got another great taste of Wisconsin.

### **Eat Locally**

We are still in very rural Wisconsin with towns of any size few and far between. We had delicious, inexpensive food at the Abby Diner the last time up here and we decided to head back. I learned my lesson and passed on the waffle with blueberry jam and ordered the Sunday soup special, chicken dumpling with a side grilled cheese. It was great comfort food after a long run and provided some fuel for the long drive back.

### **High N Dry?**

### **Lake Eleven**

### **Cumulative Miles: 930**

We were cruising along on high ground for 10 miles on what we expected to be a muddy Lake Eleven track and I was thinking that a catchy journal entry title for today would be High N Dry. And then we hit the beaver dams. Beavers are industrious builders and provide a needed ecological benefit by slowing down the water flow and creating a habitat not only for their enjoyment but for many other plants and animals. Apparently though, beavers don't much care about getting their feet wet and muddy. We went from soft, dry pine straw to wet and soggy shoe sucking mud in a matter of a few seconds. The dam was holding but the water was lapping over the top and spreading throughout the area and across the trail. There was no way around it. I was lucky to have saved my shoe after plunging deep into the mud and any thought of finishing with clean shoes was forgotten.

Despite that experience, this trail was really beautiful. Easily among the most scenic along the journey with high relief hemlock and hardwood forest dotted with small kettle lakes and pretty meadows. We crossed 20 or so creeks or small streams on carefully placed logs and passed near several very nice ponds and lakes as we wound our way through the woods. The trail runs directly through Richter Lakes Hemlocks State Natural Area which is preserved for public use as well as research on plant habitat.

The guide book points out that there are two ice walled lake plains in this area. The formation of these features is hard to explain and the evidence of them is even more difficult to see. This feature is formed when a lake develops within ice covered dams or walls and when that lake sits on a flat and solid underlying surface. As the ice melts, the debris in the ice falls to the lake and settles on the bottom accumulating into a raised flat plain. It's not a common feature and, though we were on the lookout, we could not identify one.

Today we saw more people. Its summer now and we are getting out of the very remote area of the trail. At the trailhead we saw at least 7 vehicles, mostly from out of state, and expected to see a large group camping or hiking on the trail. We did see several small groups hiking or taking down camp but no large crowds. It was good to see the activity and it did not seem overcrowded or unwelcoming. It also likely keeps the wolves and bears away.

We were on the trail for 3 hours and 45 minutes today, one of the longer runs of our adventure. It didn't seem to me to be that long or to be that difficult. It was warm, but not hot. It was sunny but there were also long segments of dappled sunlight or cool shady areas along the mostly wooded path. I just felt lucky to be outside, enjoying the environment and this hidden wonder called the Ice Age Trail.

### **Eat Locally**

Last night, Terrie called with the idea to have a post run picnic lunch today. It seemed such an obvious and wonderful idea that I cannot believe we haven't done this yet. She was making mango bean salsa, avocado tuna salad and had bought some fresh bread at the farmer's market. Alex found some veggies and some chips to go with the salsa and we threw in some freshly picked strawberries and some ice cold Leinenkugels.

We found a county park just a couple of miles from where we finished. It was called Diamond Lake County Park and was a gem. There was a large and deep lake surrounded by forest with a small picnic area and boat landing carved out on one hilly shore. There we ran into several couples and families swimming and launching boats for fishing. I spoke to an older gentleman that was launching. He told me he has been fishing this lake for over 50 years. When I asked him if there were northern pike in the lake, he responded, "lots of big ones....". I took that as a yes and figured that was all of the fishing intel he was going to provide for today.

We spent some time relaxing and refueling and Amy and Terrie took a partial dip in the lake before we headed home for the day. It was a perfect addition to a wonderful road trip and run.



## **Long and Lonesome Highway**

### **Cornell Connecting Route**

#### **Cumulative Miles: 947**

To be an official IAT 1,000 miler you are required to hike all of the trail segments and the connecting routes in between. The IAT has suggested connecting routes usually mapped to the shortest distance between trailheads but sometimes mapped to avoid the major highways. You are allowed to map your own connecting routes which is what we did this weekend. The IAT suggested CR between Lake Eleven and the Chippewa River segments is just over 41 miles. It avoids the state highway and takes you south and around the lakes before heading back to the north and into Cornell WI. That is almost 3 solid days of road running. We found a more direct route, down the state and county highways, and cut our distance to 27 miles. 27 miles in two days is still a lot of road unless you compare it to the 41 miles it could have been. This was my continuous thought and motivation as we headed down the very long and straight highway.

This weekend was our first back to back and overnight stay in quite a while. Both Terrie and I felt rested and up for the challenge. Terrie suggested and I quickly agreed to do as much as we could on day one and lessen the load on day two's tired legs. With Alex and Emily's due date looming, Alex stayed home and we were able to get an earlier start on Sunday morning. We left the driveway at just after 4am and found the end of the Lake Eleven trailhead as we left it a couple of weeks ago. The trail had been beautiful and was beckoning but we left it at our backs as we continued our journey west.

After a few steps down the road, we began to raise our heads and stare down the highway. It was long and straight and rolling and all we could see was pavement to the vanishing point in the distance. We wondered out loud how far that distant point might be and decided to check our mileage when we arrived. I picked a spot in the distance, near what was the vanishing point, and it turned out to be almost 3 miles of uninterrupted view in front of us. The hills were long but not terribly steep. The traffic was light on this early morning holiday Sunday. After 5 miles or so we merged straight onto a county highway as the state road made a turn to the south. That road continued directly west and became just a bit more hilly for another 7 miles before we finally made a sharp turn to the north.

It had been a while since we experienced this much rural road running and the dogs that usually come with it. The first property we approached had two seemingly friendly but curious dogs that came running toward us. One stopped at the roadside while the other continued on to the road to greet us. Never sure about what the dogs will do, Terrie pulled out her dog spray and was ready to combat any aggressive behavior. Fortunately, that dog returned to its friend and we continued on. The next dog we saw was a black lab standing in the middle of the road a couple of hundred yards up. Pat and Amy were parked nearby and Pat offered it a treat and ensured we were safe. We had two more dog sightings, with some anxiety but without incident and hope that was the last of them for this journey.

The Amish are prevalent in the area and we encountered more than a little horse and buggy traffic during the morning's run. It was Sunday and the Amish families were on the move to meet for morning church services. The horses seem to deal with the traffic and the traffic seems to deal with the horses. I figured if they could manage each other without incident, a couple of runners on the road should be

safe from harm as well. We kept moving at a decent pace and found a spot to finish right at 17 miles, well over half of the weekend's distance.

### **Eat Locally**

We had enjoyed the picnic lunch so much a couple of weeks ago we decided to pack another one this week. Amy made avocado chicken salad and we spread it on fresh bread with a side of watermelon. We found a gem of a state park, Brunet Island State Park, just outside of Cornell, WI. We had never heard of it before today but feel like we will return there someday to camp and bike and maybe kayak.

We ate lunch near a depression era open air lodge with two enormous brick and stone fireplaces flanking the large common area. The picnic area we chose overlooked the Chippewa River which was wide and deep, likely a result of the upriver dam at the power station. We watched a couple of red headed, white striped birds that we thought might be woodpeckers, flit about in the sunlight while we ate.

A few minutes after wondering why this park was not busy on a beautiful Sunday before the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, a dozen or so people began to arrive and move toward the river front. It appeared to be a family reunion of sorts with some young families and a few older adults. They milled around for a bit as they greeted and seem to catch up with each other. A couple of older men decided to take a dip and waded into the chilly water. After a minute a young shirtless man with red white and blue trunks joined them. They gathered together in waist deep water and one of the men turned back toward the beach and began to speak. He told us why we were there, that this young man had found Jesus and was about to be baptized in the river. As the older gentleman, now understood to be the pastor, recited some prayers, the two men held the younger man as they tipped him back and submerged him in baptism. I had never witnessed that in person and it was incredibly moving.

Once the round of applause ceased, the pastor asked a young couple to come into the water and take their turn. He spoke again of how this couple had turned toward the good in life after making many bad decisions and encountering many difficult challenges. Each took their turn and was baptized beneath the current. As the pastor was thanking everyone for attending and looking to come back to shore, another older gentleman raised his hand and asked if he could take a turn. The pastor welcomed him to the waters and the gentleman strode straight out – shirt, jeans and boots!

We moved on from the park and returned to our rented rooms in the Medford farmhouse we stayed at during the Christmas holiday. Terrie and Pat brought a delicious meal of grilled brats, burgers, salad and homemade strawberry shortcake. We skipped both the town's and the neighbor's fireworks, played one game of cribbage and turned in before the sun set for the night.

## **CR Day 2**

### **Cornell Connecting Route**

#### **Cumulative Miles: 957**

We woke early on Monday the 4<sup>th</sup> after a very restful night's sleep. We made some coffee, ate a little breakfast and were on the road by 6am, fully packed to head straight home after the run. A short 45 minute drive to the starting point had us on the road before most of the sleepy holiday travelers and we had a quiet run for most of the 7 miles into the small town of Cornell. As we passed the 35 and then the 25 mph hour speed limit signs, our pace seem to ease and we relaxed as we made our way past quiet homes and closed for the day businesses. The coffee shop I had hoped was open was not, and I began to look around to plot another strategy for our post run coffee. We had been running through what seemed like downtown but the real downtown in this small community of 1,453 turned out to be a few blocks over. I decided to suggest a drive through that main area in search for coffee after our run and before we headed for home.

The road to the trailhead headed west out of Cornell toward the bridge that the long expanse of the Chippewa River. There was a small city park on the village side of the bridge complete with a baseball field and a community center identifying it as an Ice Age Destination Community. Those signs make us feel right at home on our journey and I hope that more communities take on that designation and embrace this great amenity.

The city park also had a one of a kind monument to the former paper mill that stood on the banks of the river at the edge of town. A sign told the story of this 175 foot tall pulp wood stacker that was built to accommodate the delivery of raw material for the paper mill. It was set at an approximate 45 degree angle and looked like a tipped over oil derrick or a over leaning Eiffel Tower, somehow stuck in mid fall. While the paper mill in this town, like many others in small northern Wisconsin towns, is gone for good, the pulp stacker stood as a testament to an industry that was a critical component in the development of these small communities throughout the state.

We ran past the park, the pulp stacker and across the large bridge before heading out of town down a winding county road to the trailhead. We were finishing, what ended up to be just under 10 miles, well ahead of schedule and a we made a quick call to Pat and Amy to tell them to meet us sooner than planned. As we neared the trailhead, my watch battery ran out, a sure sign we were meant to finish. A young couple was just arriving at the trailhead ready to start their day on the Chippewa River and Firth Lake segments. We talked a little about our trail journeys before we headed back down the hill to meet Pat and Amy.

#### **Eat Locally**

We jumped in the car quickly after we met up and began our journey home, first turning down Main St. Cornell hoping for an open coffee shop. It was still early morning on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July and the only establishment open had a neon Pabst sign in the window. Not a good place to ask for a latte or even a cup of dark roast.

Our detour took just a couple of minutes and we headed toward the highway vowing to stop at the first gas station to get a cup to go. We found a nice gas station at the freeway interchange and filled up to

make the journey home. We planned to drive a while and find a city or county park to eat our picnic leftovers. A few hours down the road, we pulled into Lake Emily County Park just outside of Stevens Point. The park was small but nice and had a picnic area at the head of a long and steep stairwell to the beach. We ate our lunch and took a quick walk down the stairs to see the lake. There was a mother with a small family in the water but no others on the tiny beach. After stretching our legs, we headed back to the car and back on the road, making it home by mid day with a nice afternoon left to unpack and unwind.

## **Don't Run in the Heat**

### **Chippewa River and Firth Lake Segments**

#### **Cumulative Miles: 969**

I was going to call this one "Bonking" (which in exercise terms is the act of conking out due to overheating, dehydration or lack of nutrition) but when I looked it up, it had a very different meaning in British parlance and thought it best to change the headline. Nevertheless, this weekend was all about bonking, due to the heat (of the day). We headed out late in the day on Friday due to work schedules and the temperature read 90 degrees. The first couple of miles were deep in the woods and the shade made the run seem bearable. Then we emerged onto a 3 mile CR, first on paved highway, then on gravel road. The sun was beating down and the temperature must have been more than several degrees higher than 90 with no shade in sight. We made decent time but the sun was unbearable.

We found the trail again at the 5 mile mark and were done with the road for the day, but Terrie was visibly overheated and struggling to keep moving. She has never backed down from the challenge but today she was bonking. We let Terrie lead the way and she made it another few miles before calling it a day. My son Steve was with us today, back from the Netherlands for a short visit to see his new nephew (our grandson) James. We helped each other and managed another 4 miles or so to the end of the Firth Lake Segment and called it a night.

The trail seemed secondary tonight as the heat and the concern for Terrie took the main stage. The first couple of miles of Chippewa River was very pretty and ran along the Chippewa River for a mile or so before ending on the hot, dusty CR. Firth Lake was equally pretty but fleeting as we moved ahead with focus on our next steps and getting to the finish line.

## **Eat Locally**

We pitched our tents for the night at Lake Wissota State Park. It's a pretty park with wooded and secluded campsites. We checked out the lake hoping for a cooling plunge but the geese seemed to have the run of the beach and the wading water. We chose the showers.

Steve had made a nice vegetable soup for dinner and brought with him some wonderful, creamy Dutch cheese. We had some beer, some wine, some homemade crackers and cheese along with our soup. It was easy to make, eat and clean up and was delicious. We had some quality time around the campfire before turning in early for the next day's early start.

## **Deer Fly Season**

### **Harwood Lakes and Chippewa Moraine Segments**

#### **Cumulative Miles: 983**

Deer fly season lasts just about a month in Wisconsin. Its short but it is intense. They tend to be the most abundant near areas of water and Harwood Lakes had its share of water. The map showed dozens of small, named and unnamed kettle lakes along the 6 mile Harwood Lakes segment and dozens more around the Chippewa Moraine segment. The trail was mostly high and dry but wound its way in and around these remnants of the flowing glacier. To emphasize the threat of deer flies, we noted that Deer Fly Trail was our first road crossing.

There wasn't much to do but just put our heads down and go, hoping for the best. The morning weather was 25 degrees cooler than the evening before and the flies weren't too bad for the first mile or so. But as the sun rose, the deer fly activity increased, dramatically. Terrie and I both had sticky patches on, hats of course, and I wore a piece of cloth that draped down my neck and covered my ears. I felt like I was running inside a small tent and while the flies buzzed and darted around me, and I kept them off of my face and neck.

Steve stayed back and walked with Pat and Amy. Terrie had recovered well and was ready to go. We were scheduled to cover 14 miles on what was a very hilly route. While Terrie ran strong, it was my turn to bonk. I had finished strong the night before but felt tired this morning. Heavy legs and a heart rate that would not settle in made the run very challenging. I could picture this route on a cool October morning and I know I would have enjoyed it much more. The lakes were plentiful and beautiful and the hardwood forest and hummocky hills reminded me of our home trail segments in the Kettle Moraine.

We ran out of water with about 4 miles to go. I started to cramp in my calves and ankle tendons, but Terrie stayed strong and I found a way to finish. We found the end of the trail and were completely soaked, tired of the buzzing deer flies and ready to hit the road. Or I guess I was. Terrie had decided to go back and complete last night's segment after a short rest. She texted just a short while later that she had finished the gap and was also headed home. That would make almost 18 for her for the day and 26 for both of us for the weekend.

## **Eat Locally**

Steve, Amy and I headed south looking for the way home. We decided to go back through Cornell and ended up at the Rise and Shine Café, a nice little coffee shop and bakery. We each ordered a coffee and I grabbed a scone for some energy and we got back on the road – destination Wausau and the Downtown Grocery. The Downtown Grocery describes itself as an Everyday Farmers Market, Kitchen and Bakeshop. It's changed its business model a bit recently, closing the kitchen, but you can still do a ready made grab n go salad or sandwich. We each found something to our liking and also bought some fruit as well as a few groceries for home. We sat on the sidewalk, ate and began to bounce back from the morning's heat and effort. It was the perfect refueling stop for the balance of the ride home and another great finish to a weekend on the IAT.

## **Trail Weary**

### **Southern Blue Hills CR**

**Cumulative Miles: 1,003**

Yes, we just crossed one thousand miles and yes, we are growing weary. I have said all along that I am in no hurry to be done because, well, then it's done. But the drives each weekend are long, our schedules seem tight, and we are now both ready to be done. I think we will thoroughly enjoy the home stretch but we will be happy to hit the finish line and spend the following months enjoying the memories and basking in the glow of the accomplishment.

This weekend we planned to finish what is the longest remaining CR. Our plan was to leave on Saturday, run more than half of the 21 miles on Saturday, camp overnight and pick up the remaining miles on Sunday morning before returning home. The drive to the trailhead was 4 hours and the drive back from the end point of our planned run was 4 ½. Throughout the week, the weather forecast continued to deteriorate – hot and muggy Saturday with increasing chances for storms Saturday evening and continued rain on Sunday.

Saturday began as predicted, in the 70s early in the morning with very high dew points. We got to the trailhead just after 8am after our normal early morning road trip. As we hit the road running, I wondered to myself just how far we would be able to get today given the heat. Our bodies are tired, and, in Terrie's case, hurting. But we continue to push through and do what we need to do.

After some early run chit chat, Terrie announced that we should really try to push through the whole CR in one day. I was a bit surprised, thinking and hoping we could get in a long day but not a complete day. Her logic was simple. The forecasted storms Saturday night and Sunday morning could leave us short of our planned goal. Since we drove this far, we really should make sure to get the entire CR in today so in case we got rained out tomorrow. If tomorrow brightened up, we could always get in some extra credit miles. I immediately embraced the goal. I knew we could finish, and had the entire day to do it.

The CR started on some rolling and winding road, in and around many lakes. It was definitely a vacation lake cabin area and we saw very few in state license plates through the course of the early morning. As the morning wore on, we encountered those vacationers out walking, likely trying to beat both the impending heat and storms. The sky stayed overcast, though, and while extremely muggy, the temperatures stayed moderate. We made good time as the miles seemed to click by quickly.

Amy and Pat had very few of their own hiking options so committed to drive ahead and meet us every hour or so. The first refueling stop was right on schedule and we moved on quickly vowing to meet again in an hour. We had a map and checked it fairly frequently, but it was getting soaked, blurring both the printing and my written notes. We thought we were tracking the map but it was getting past the time we had expected to see them again. We had rounded a curve on the highway and were headed toward the east when Pat rolled up behind us to tell us we had missed our turn off point. Fortunately, we were just ¼ mile or so down the road and we hitched a ride back to the correct intersection. Amy and Pat had set up lawn chairs on the road side and were serving water, bananas and salted

watermelon. It was perfect, except for the fact they didn't choose the "missed" intersection for their road side stand but were just a few hundred yards down the road and out of view.

At that point we had crossed 11 miles and were more than half way. Our next waypoint was the Village of Weyerhaeuser off of Historic Dr. Weyerhaeuser boasts to be the "Biggest Small Town in the State". It is certainly a small town, but we did not figure out what was big about it. The 2010 population is listed at 238 and estimated to be 215 in 2019. It was named for Frederick Weyerhaeuser of the Weyerhaeuser Lumber Company. I didn't spend much time tracking down the complete history of the Village and the Company but I did note that the Company was founded in 1900 in Washington State, not Wisconsin. The one historical marker we did see indicated that the village has a history of lumber harvesting and was the site of the first railroad built to haul logs.

We entered the south end of town and took a quick left only to encounter the current version of that railroad – a train stopped and blocking our path into town. Fortunately, the train was split, 12 cars to the north, and we were able to walk down the tracks and around the train. There was no telling how long it might be there. I had not ever climbed up and between two stopped railway cars and was happy not to have done it today.

We were now on today's home stretch, just a few miles out of town to the Southern Blue Hills trailhead. The last couple of miles didn't go as quickly as the first few but we managed our way to the finish line, having completed our longest distance and longest time on feet of our journey. The rain had held off, the temperatures weren't bad but we were completely soaked from the humidity and our sweat of the day. Despite that, we had more important things to do as we quickly jumped in the car and headed back to Weyerhaeuser to find a bathroom.

We had done what we had come to do, run the CR. The weather for the remainder of the day looked stormy and the forecast for Sunday looked the same. We collectively decided that a nice soft bed at home sounded better than camping in a thunderstorm and packing in the morning in the rain. So, we headed home, one day closer to the finish line.

### **Eat Locally**

We had planned to camp in Chippewa Falls and visit the Leinenkugel Brewery Lodge for lunch and a beer. Amy and I had been there before, when we had taken a short trip with Steve to this area to hike the IAT. The Lodge website had highlighted a food truck for the day with locally sourced food on its menu. The lure of good food, combined with a fresh Leine's beer, sounded like the perfect ending to a long run.

We rolled up to the Lodge and saw several hundred families and couples had the same idea. What else is there to do in Chippewa Falls on a cloudy soon to be rainy day? We found a parking spot and went in to inquire about the beer and food truck. They had beer, of course, and a line to get it. But no food truck. It had canceled in anticipation of bad weather. On a recommendation from the Leine's staff we went downtown to Max's Bistro for a good burger and a local beer. There we too found beer, but no burger. It was 1:30 in the afternoon and they were out of burgers for the day.

We ordered the beer, not wanting to chance that our next stop might be out of that option. And we shared a couple of appetizers to get us some fuel to get on the road. We agreed that our destination was going to be the Red Dog Brewery in Wausau, under 2 hours away. We crossed our fingers hoping that they would have both beer and burgers for an early dinner.

We found both at the Red Dog and enjoyed a nice meal and a short rest on the patio. We talked about our plans for the upcoming weekends back on the trail and all of the other fun plans we have for the upcoming fall. The IAT is intertwined with all of those plans. It has become part of our lives. I think we will miss this journey when it is done.

## **The Beginning of the End**

### **Southern Blue Hills/Northern Blue Hills/Hemlock Creek/Tuscobia**

**Cumulative Miles: 1,041**

#### ***Southern Blue Hills***

We spent the past couple of weeks working on a plan for the finish of the trail. This weekend was the beginning of that end. Although, in our first weekend, we threw the plan away and instead of running for two days and 27 miles, we ran for 3 days and 38 miles. We covered four segments, three pretty difficult and, thankfully, one flat and easy.

Our weekend started early, as we were able to leave at 5am on Friday morning. The plan was to do the drive, run the Southern Blue Hills and following CR, then decide if we could bite off any of the Northern Blue Hills yet on Friday. Northern Blue Hills is over 9 miles long and has just one crossroad, of sort. Southern Blue Hills was tough, scoring a 4 and a 4 out of 5 for elevation and ruggedness.

The trail in the Blue Hills segments are of course, hilly, and also wet and rocky and slippery. The woods are dense but we did cross through an open grassland early in our run Friday morning. It looked like it was a pasture for cows and had a rather large and ominous metal sculpture in the middle of it. The sculpture had 3 or 4 very large circles, taller than me, welded together and decorated with what we think were skulls from dead cattle. Very random placement for a sculpture with no apparent audience – no adjacent road, no live cattle, just some trail hikers and runners.

We talked a bit about bears, having been a topic we have avoided for a while. When we reached the trailhead that morning and were prepping to take off, an older gentleman in a pick up slowed as he past us and engaged us in a short discussion about the area's bears. He has been feeding one mother with two cubs and a male on his land in anticipation of the upcoming hunting season. I think he was attempting to scare us but did offer that he lived on the other side of the highway and he was sure they wouldn't bother us. We didn't see any bears today, but we our chances are still high that we will before we finish.

We got to the end of Southern Blue Hills and Terrie allowed me to make the call on continuing or stopping for the day. We wanted our weekend to get off to a good start and to ease the required



mileage for the next couple of days. I decided that we should keep moving and make it an almost 13 mile day.

We finished the day on a wet and muddy logging spur road to a parking area where the vehicle awaited. We were both exhausted and wondering how we would fare again tomorrow as we headed toward the town of Birchwood and our campsite for the next couple of days.

### ***Eat Locally***

Before we found the campground, we found the Birchwood Café. It was a plain but comfortable diner on the edge of Main St., and was serving lunch and breakfast. It was a Friday in northern WI and my mind immediately thought of a traditional WI fish fry. You would have thought that any place serving lunch on a Friday in northern WI would have been serving perch or blue gills - but we struck out. Pat did have their version of a fish fry – cod and perch. Amy and I split a very good Patty Melt and Terrie decided to have just one pancake – bigger than a skillet and very tasty - along with some eggs. The food hit the spot and we headed to the campground on the edge of town overlooking Birch Lake.

The campground was unlike the state and county parks we have been visiting. The Dolittle Campground, run by the Village I think was really designed for RV camping and not tent camping. They fit as many sites as possible on this very small strip of land jutting out into the lake. Our site was maybe 20' wide and we were wedged between two campers. We were able to tuck out tents between them and settled in with some afternoon naps, Yahtzee and happy hour before Pat made some tasty zucchini boats over the fire. We turned in at 8pm, well before our neighbors, and slept despite their late night bonfires.

### ***Northern Blue Hills / Hemlock Creek***

We rose early on Saturday and after some coffee and oatmeal we headed back to finish the Northern Blue Hills and Hemlock Creek before finishing on a short CR into the Village of Birchwood. It hadn't rained since Friday morning but the trail was still wet and slippery and despite the hills, there were large flat areas of deep puddling. After a tip toe crossing of an active beaver dam, we made our way slowly around a road lined with large puddles before finally finding our way into more upland drier areas. The Northern Blue Hill segment rose pretty quickly up and adjacent to Christie Mountain, a local ski and snowboarding hill and near the Northern Blue Hills Cross County Ski Park. From the road we had seen the area was surrounded by beautiful vistas but was difficult to tell in the dense area that was the trail.

We emptied out of the Blue Hills area at the Murphy Flowage Recreational Area and headed down Bucks Road – no more than a dirt two track that became more overgrown and less of a two track as we headed west. After a mile or so, we found the IAT sign at the head of a more overgrown and very narrow single track that headed into the woods. The grass was high and it was wet, but mostly flat to down hill and very runnable. The trail took us to a gravel road that led to the very green and grassy Hemlock Creek Picnic area complete with a log shelter and a bathroom. Hemlock Creek flowed briskly through the park and made for an idyllic setting deep in the woods.

There was a large purple – wood, maybe – object hanging over the creek and appeared to be littered with dead bugs. A nearby sign indicated it was an Emerald Ash Borer trap doing its part to stave off or

slow the spread of Ash Borer. It seemed woefully small and significantly the underdog against what has been a devastating insect infestation killing almost all of the existing Ash throughout the upper U.S.

We continued into the Hemlock Creek area and wound past and around many different wetland areas and ponds. A few times, it threatened rain with a flurry of drops, only to stop within seconds each time. No matter, we were wet with sweat and from the surrounding vegetation and a little rain would only help to cool and clean us. Eventually we passed what was designated as a Heron Rookery, a very large wetland area. As we slowed our run to take it in, we saw a Great Blue Heron lift and float over the area. I can only imagine how many of those herons this area has supported over time and how lucky we are to have these environments, although small in scope, still vibrant and still protected.

The Hemlock Creek area finished along a very grassy and very wet segment leading to a residential area just south of Birchwood. The trail ended at the corner of 28 11/16 St. and 28 ¾ St. In fact, throughout the entire residential area just west of Red Cedar Lake and south of Birchwood, nearly the entire network of streets was some increment of 28 – fourths, eighths and sixteenths. It was as if someone only gave them permission to use 28<sup>th</sup> St. as their label but they wanted more streets so they improvised with each additional increment.

The road segment was long enough and mostly uphill and took us just west of town and just south of the main highway and the start of the next day's segment – Tuscobia.

We headed to the campground for a much needed shower. We were muddy, sweaty and loaded with green sticky hitchhiker seeds we had picked up all along the way. The small triangular seeds with fuzz that sticks to clothing are likely called Sticktight or Tick – trefoil and are loved by quail. Which makes sense, as we had flushed many trailside quail feasting on sticktights the past couple of days.

### ***Eat Locally***

On the way to the site and a shower, we passed the Rustic Café which had a few cars and some nice outdoor seating. We decided it was our destination for a relaxing lunch. We made a quick turnabout and found a nice table on the patio. We ordered our usual mix of lunch and breakfast and returned to the campsite for another nap, more Yahtzee and a little happy hour before enjoying some brats, corn on the cob and beans made over the campfire. It was a very windy night and our dinner was made a little nicer by the tarp Pat fashioned as a windbreak. However, it didn't serve us well as we tried to enjoy the evening campfire and we decided to move to the park's pavilion for a couple of cribbage games before turning in early again in anticipation of another early morning.

### ***Tuscobia***

Sunday morning came early and foggy and we were fed and had broken camp by 6:30 am. We finalized the site clean up and headed out to the trail to hopefully beat the traffic. I say traffic, because the Tuscobia segment runs along the Tuscobia State Trail, one of the oldest rails to trails corridors in the state. We had seen and heard the UTV and ATV traffic along the trail the past few days and were anticipating sharing the trail today.

The trail started out with a mile or so trail segment that ran parallel to the highway and across the road from the state trail. It hadn't been cleaned up and had more than a few fallen down trees that slowed our progress. After a mile or so, we crossed the highway and headed down the gravel corridor encountering our first UTVs immediately. They turned out to also be the last UTVs we saw on the trail as the gravel path quickly turned to a grassy path with posted signs barring UTV traffic. What we thought was going to be a dusty and maybe noisy run turned into a Zen like run. The grassy path was mostly taken care of and short enough to enjoy a good pace. And the very flat and wide rail corridor ran through a peaceful and pretty tunnel of trees. The view ahead was occasionally broken by open areas of road crossings identified by brighter spots of fog and gave us some reference points.

Terrie and I made remarkable progress for having completed two difficult days of running and our first three day weekend since the early days of our journey. We ran mostly silently, stopping for a short water break at every mile. We met Pat and Amy in Brill WI at the half way point, refilled our water and headed out quickly. Brill was small, or very small, and anyone who did live there was sleeping in on this Sunday morning. We connected with Pat and Amy next to the ball diamond, the home of the Brill Millers. A quick search brought up their website complete with schedule and some video recaps. The Millers play in the area's adult amateur league and the sign at the diamond indicated their league champion status in both 1978 and 2013. Another example of a small town with a big league mindset when it comes to their baseball.

The last half of the run went by as quickly as the first half. It was extremely pretty and peaceful with many birds, some turkeys and some deer occasionally in view. I slowed once as I spotted a medium sized bird with a black crown of feathers and a longish black beak. I looked up both kingfisher in WI and found a Belted Kingfisher that looked exactly like the bird I saw. I had not known they existed in WI and have never seen one before today.

### ***Eat Locally***

We finished the run at a parking area close to the main highway home and took some time to change clothes and settle in before we hit the road. We decided to grab the first cup of coffee we found and then head to Wausau for lunch. We found a coffee at the local Kwik Trip and found the Blue Willow Café in Wausau. The café was packed but we found a booth and enjoyed a nice lunch and some pie before heading back on the road.

Another, and one of the last weekends, in the books. 38 more miles down and just under 100 to go. We will take a week off then head back up for another three day weekend hoping to do as well, continuing our journey to the end.

## **Bluebird Skies**

### **Bear Lake/Grassy Lake/Timberland Hills/Sand Creek/Indian Creek**

**Cumulative Miles: 1,084**

This weekend's run was as much about what it wasn't as what it was. It wasn't cold or rainy. It wasn't hot or humid. It wasn't muddy or buggy. It wasn't the hilliest or the most challenging. It was tough enough, cool enough, and then warm enough. And there wasn't a cloud in the sky for three days. We needed a big mileage weekend and we needed everything we had and everything that the trail and the weather offered to get us there. We ran almost 45 miles. It was the furthest either of us has run in three consecutive days. We were tired but not exhausted, and we were thrilled to have gotten it done.

I woke Saturday morning with a slight headache, a light fever and a sore throat. I didn't let myself focus on it because I didn't want to reschedule this weekend. Amy and just gotten over some of the same symptoms and Pat showed up feeling under the weather as well. I think my challenges were allergy related and similar symptoms had caused me to cancel an event a few years ago. I ignored it hoping I would feel better once I got going. And I did.

We got to the trail around 9am on Saturday morning and headed out on the last remaining CR of any length, just about 6 miles. The map showed us running up a busy county highway but we saw the Wild Rivers State Trail parallel to the highway and decided that was to be our path. We headed up the former railway turned multi use path toward the Village of Haugen. The surface was soft sand with some large gravel. Not the easiest to run on but better than what turned out to be a very busy highway. And it was out of the sun that was getting higher in the sky and starting to warm the day.

We ran straight north a few miles into Haugen, WI, a beautiful small town on Bear Lake that appeared to be nicely lost in time. We ran past Third Base, the local tap. Up the road, the old brick Haugen School, now a museum of local history, sat across from the Ceska Opera House, a refurbished old wooden structure, once a gathering place for Czech immigrants in this Norwegian settled village. We made a right turn past a nicely kept park and hung a left to a more winding rural road that took us out of town and to the Bear Lake Trailhead. On the way we passed signs for L.E. Phillips Scout Reservation, a self proclaimed premier camp for Boy Scouts. There were several other scout camp signs along the way and the Bear Lake Segment took us right into the heart of the Phillips camp sitting on Bass Lake, a stone blue lake glimmering in the morning sun.

For me, the trail environments along each segment blurred together over the course of the weekend. The trails varied from very technical single track, both flat and hummocky, to the wide and grassy trails of the Timberland Hills Ski area, including the rolling Diggins Dragons, a series of sharp ups and downs, like a dragon's tail, named after U.S. Olympic Cross Country Ski Medal winner, Jesse Diggins. Grassy Lake was lined with many small and grassy lakes that have succumbed to the flow of sediment over time

and Indian Creek and Sand Creek wound near around several water ways. The trails ran through dense aspen groves, pretty pines and a significant amount of high, dry hard woods. The trail, where open, was bright with late season prairie flowers, and where not, was lined with ferns. Occasionally, a pretty blue lake appeared, some the seasonal home to Trumpeter Swans.

I had seen my first Trumpeter Swan just a few years ago as Amy, Steve and I hiked the nearby Straight Lake segment in early spring. The lake was frozen over at the time and the pair of swans flew low and fast across the lake sounding their unique song. This time, we saw a pair flying overhead, and several pairs swimming in the local kettle lakes. These swans are majestic. They are the largest waterfowl in North America with a wingspan of up to 7 feet. They are snowy white with black heads and seem to exist in pairs. I have only seen them in this area of the state and I count myself lucky now to have seen several in one weekend.

We covered over 16 miles on Saturday, the first day of the three day weekend. We woke feeling tired but not sore and were able to cover another 16 on Sunday. Monday was Labor Day so we had a chance to do it again. We didn't score a hat trick with another 16 but covered our planned segment, Sand Creek and decided to tackle another, Indian Creek. We finished strong physically, if not mentally after many hours of trail time, and looking forward to our next trip scheduled just a couple of weekends away. 54.1 miles to go.....

### **Eat Locally**

We packed some chicken salad, fruit, cookies and muffins for a short picnic before we checked into our room for the weekend. Not knowing much about the area, we headed south toward our accommodations hoping to find a nice park and a picnic table. A few miles down the road, we entered the small but very cool little town of Barronett. There we saw a nice little café, a coffee shop and, of all things in the Northwoods, an organic grocery store. We stopped for groceries. Not that we needed anything specific but wanted to check it out. Had we not brought plenty of weekend provisions we would have found them all there. We purchased a few fill in items and headed out of town still in search of that picnic table.

As we headed south again, we came upon Cumberland, the Island City. And the first thing we saw, after Louie's Fine Meats and Louie's Lodge and Louie's Café, was a pretty little park alongside Beaver Dam Lake. They had plenty of picnic tables, beautiful scenery and lots of sunshine. We ate our lunch and headed toward our lodging.

We had rented a room to share in a rural farmhouse at the Inn Greener Pastures. It was an eclectic, kind of whimsical property with many stone sculptures, think Stonehenge, created from the area's erratics. It had an old restored barn, a very rustic mini golf course, various other non descript structures and a very large farmhouse with rooms for rent. We had rented a large room to share and think there was only one other couple in the home during the weekend. I say think, because we never saw them and that meant we had the very large living and dining area and large commercial kitchen all to ourselves. We made Shephard's Pie the first evening, played some cards and fell fast asleep by 8pm. The next morning, Pat and Terrie prepared a slow cooker pork loin dinner with squash and apples that was able

to slow cook while we were away for the morning. We returned mid afternoon to a very nice dinner, some more cards, a short stint on the veranda and an early bedtime.

After our Monday morning run, we decided to head to the Norske Nook, an Northwoods favorite known for their Norwegian food and especially their pie. We found one of their now four locations in Rice Lake. The restaurant was busy and we had a short wait for a table. We then had a long wait for our food given their challenges with staffing but enjoyed the meal and the conversation.

We finally headed back to the highway shortly after noon feeling full, feeling accomplished and feeling very close to the finish line.

## **We're in Luck**

**McKenzie Creek/Pine Lake/Straight River/Straight Lake/Trade River**

**Cumulative Miles: 1,113**

In Luck, WI that is. We arrived in Luck this morning on the Gandy Dancer segment, after another solid weekend covering almost 30 miles of rugged terrain. Not only did we finish in Luck, we had a bit of luck this weekend, both good luck and a little bad luck.

The bad luck started on the morning drive to the trailhead. A missed turn, by me, resulted in an over 30 minute delay getting to the start of the day. And, as we were driving and driving, trying to get to the trailhead, we watched as a storm front got closer and closer. Just a few drops had hit the windshield when we finally got the parking area around 10am, but the skies let loose soon after we started running. The trail was dense and tree covered and although it was pouring rain, we weren't immediately soaked. That took a few minutes. The rain persisted for about 20 minutes and we were completely soaked by the time it had stopped. The trail wound through dense woods carpeted with large ferns. The thick undercover was laden with rain and kept us wet as we ran through it, despite the brightening skies.

After a few miles, my legs usually loosen and my energy level rises, but today, I seemed in a fog and found every step difficult. What I later learned, and I attributed to more bad luck, was the allergy medication I had taken a couple of hours earlier was not the non drowsy formula. A big mistake when you are about to tackle 16 miles on very hilly trails.

That was, however, the end of our bad luck for the weekend. Everything else about the weekend was wonderful and we felt lucky to be out in nature experiencing this challenging trail through this beautiful state.

We did find the going tough but were committed to finish our intended segments for the day. Frequent visits from Amy and Pat throughout the day to refill water and provide motivation, helped considerably. By days end, which turned out to be almost 4 hours after starting, we finished at the end of Straight River.

The segments took us through pristine forests crisscrossed with crystal clear creeks. The creeks weren't terribly wide or deep but were very clean and flowing fast. Many were designated as Class I and III trout

streams boasting self sustaining wild trout populations. We didn't need to drink from them, but would have felt comfortable if needed.

After crossing the state highway, the final segment, Straight River, finished on a high ridge above Long Lake. After the noisy road crossing, the trail felt incredibly tranquil and peaceful. The ridge turned steeply downward to another clear creek, the ridge apparently being the wall of what was the glacial tunnel channel, evidence of what formed the bodies of linked water in this area of the state.

The next morning, we found the trailhead much more easily and directly and set out on a short CR down a gravel road. The CR found the highway briefly then headed into the woods through what seemed an oddly placed gate. We ran a few hundred yards then passed out of another oddly placed gate, not quite sure if the gates were meant to keep something or somebody in or something or somebody out.

The trail segment for the morning was Straight Lake. It was rated as very hilly and proved itself in the early going. It was also very dry and the running was comfortable. The trail eventually entered Straight Lake State Park, a primitive park that wraps around Straight Lake, a 120 acre lake with no development on its shores. The trail wound around behind a ridge for a time, shielding views of the water. A nice stepping stone bridge crossing took the trail closer to the main body of the lake and this flat, relatively straight trail, provided wonderful views of the water for the next mile or two. A few very large, very old white pines lined the shores along with typical Wisconsin hardwoods slowly moving toward their fall colors.

As we near the end of Straight Lake we began to notice the changing landscape once again. Basalt stone outcroppings began to appear and the trail surface became more difficult with embedded sharp edged stones. Basalt is the most common rock on the earth's surface but not necessarily in Wisconsin. Granite, I think, outranks other stone, at least for the most commonly seen and recognized. Basalt is volcanic and is found under the oceans and in areas where the earth's crust is thin. A quick search indicated that Basalt formed in this area due to the Mid Continent Rift, a splitting of the earth's surface that usually ends up with the formation of an ocean. There is debate why the rift didn't complete its job here and form an ocean, but deep below the surface of the Upper Midwest's earth crust, it is very much like that of the ocean. In fact, there is apparently a very massive volcano that sits directly under Lake Superior – dormant for now but once active and likely the origination of the lake, the largest freshwater lake in the world.

We moved on from Straight Lake onto Trade River and the basalt formations increased. The trail became more difficult for a time with the sharp embedded rocks but eventually emptied into a prairie and finished on grassy trails. We did spot one, very large basalt rock, likely as big as my one car garage and wondered aloud how much force and energy it took to split that rock from its source and allow it to tumble from wherever it originated to its current resting place. It's really unimaginable.

Our morning ended on the Gandy Dancer segment, a Wisconsin Rails to Trails path that runs 98 miles through Minnesota and Wisconsin. We did a few miles of the 15 mile segment, a nice, flat (ish) crushed gravel path that helped to ease us to our finish for the weekend in Luck. At that point we needed some easing given the almost 120 trail miles we had put on since late August. The past month was a much needed push to the end and set us up for one last weekend to get us to the Western Terminus in St. Croix Falls. Stay tuned for the finish, scheduled for November 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>.

## **Eat Locally**

We found a restored log cabin for the night and made a very nice spaghetti dinner that provided much needed refueling. A shower, a nap and some card games finished the day and we retired to our beds just after sunset on Saturday.

On Sunday morning, after our finish in Luck, we found Café Wren, a local coffee and bakery just down the road from the Ice Age Trail parking lot and near the Gandy Dancer. The café serves the community and the hiking, biking and running population and provides a nice relaxing setting. There is an adjacent art gallery, called the Common Room, that was displaying the art of Emily Anderson, a self proclaimed artist and mom from nearby Minnesota. The art is landscape imagery and is reminiscent of some of the work of the Canadian Group of Seven artists that were commissioned to paint the landscape of Canada around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I found it very peaceful and it reminded so much of what we have seen and experienced throughout our Wisconsin trail journey. I hope to see more of her work someday.

## **Almost There**

### **Gandy Dancer Segment**

**Cumulative Trail Miles: 1128**

Alex, Terrie and I headed out just before sunrise on Saturday morning, one day shy of completing the trail. We started in Luck WI, where we had left off a few weeks back. The morning was crisp and dry. The rain and the wind that were predicted and was happening in most of the rest of the state, somehow had avoided us. We could smell the breakfast from the nearby diner but we moved on down the trail without stopping.

It was nice having the three of us together again and we quickly caught up on our lives as we headed down the flat and firm Gandy Dancer. Terrie had been recovering from an earlier illness so we started slow to ensure we stayed together. The trail quickly headed out of town but stayed flat to downhill as it passed behind many houses and farms. Unfortunately, those farms and homes used their backyards to store a lot of one time treasures, now mostly rusty and no longer useful junk.

After a few miles of conversation, Terrie had to slow her pace considerably and drop back. This was expected as she had planned a three day effort for the mileage that Alex and I were going to do in two. Terrie's lung capacity was not fully recovered and her 3 day plan would allow her to complete all of the remaining miles and ensure that we could all finish together tomorrow.

The remaining Gandy Dancer Segment was just over 10 miles. Alex and I moved along at a nice pace as we passed more backyards and more one time treasures. The trail passed through Milltown and Centuria, two sleepy northern Wisconsin villages but was mostly unremarkable with one exception. At one of the final crossroads, Alex looked up and back at the home adjacent to the trail. High in a tree was what initially looked like a deer stand but turned out to be a rather large eagle nest. There were no eagles present but we stopped a moment to admire the enormity and craftsmanship of the nest. Neither of us had ever seen one so close.



We soon reached the end of our time on the Gandy Dancer and after a brief water stop provided by Amy, Terrie (who had finished her day's run) and Pat, Alex and I headed west on the CR toward the St. Croix River and the final segment. The CR was busy with traffic and had a narrow shoulder but we did run comfortably through the early rolling hills and past an overgrown and likely abandoned race track and a number of nicely kept homesteads. The road flattened a bit before heading steeply downhill into the river valley. I hadn't done a 15 mile run in some time but I seemed to get a second wind as we neared the day's finish. The descent to the river was steep and long though and the downhill pounding would be felt for a few days to come.

### **Eat Locally**

We needed a cup of coffee and a little breakfast and found 3 Arrows Coffee at the edge of town. The parking lot was packed and the line for ordering coffee long. It was worth the wait as the food and coffee was very good and the coffee shop had a large and comfortable conversation area filled with chatty guests.

For dinner we headed across and just downriver to Stillwater MN to meet up as a group and were joined by Terrie's brother, his wife and their daughter. We had a wonderful celebratory dinner at LOLOs in anticipation of our next day finish. We exchanged a few gifts to mark the occasion and more than a few stories.

### **The Final Stretch**

#### **St. Croix River Segment**

**Cumulative Miles: 1,137**

We got up earlier than usual Sunday. My sleep was affected both by daylight savings time and by the anticipation of finishing. I had been asked many times and had thought about for a long time how I will feel at the finish line. I don't think I have had a good answer to that over time and I didn't as we headed out to the trail that morning.

Alex and I started along the river at the head of the St. Croix River segment and Terrie started just under 2 miles ahead having covered the interim miles the last two days. It was a little lighter and a little warmer and so much prettier than the day before. The river was by our side for almost two miles and was calm and smooth in the morning light. We paused a few times along this rugged path, sometimes to look at the river and sometimes to catch our breath and ensure our footing. Each time, we took in the view, one of the prettiest along the entire trail.

We caught up to Lions Park and headed across the highway away from the river. The trail began to wind into the bluff and headed deceptively uphill as we covered a few more miles. We caught up to Pat who ensured us that Terrie had gotten off to a good start but we were likely to catch her before the finish. The trail headed up over the bluff and continued to wind on rocky and narrow paths brushing past a neighborhood and then eventually into a city park.

The trail had been laid out perfectly to capture the beauty of the bluff, the views of the river and the adjacency to the city of St. Croix Falls. It passed through a rugged and at times seemingly remote area but always seemed to stay connected to the city. We passed through Zillmer Park and Reigel Park and through the St. Croix Middle School and the area hospital parking lots. We encountered our last dog scare with two neighborhood dogs that would not let us pass as they continued to run back and forth between us jumping and barking before finally relenting and running back toward their home, or the next unsuspecting runner or hiker.

We caught up with Terrie at the hospital parking lot. She had gotten a bit turned around trying to navigate to the next trail connection and thoughtfully waited for us in full view so we didn't make the same mistake. From the hospital, the trail headed up maybe the steepest hill of the day and across a ridge behind and above the St. Croix Falls HS football stadium, one of the prettiest football stadiums I have seen anywhere. It was tucked against the wooded ridge and surrounded by a stone fence. The contrast of the green grass and the colorful forest backdrop made for a postcard view.

From the ridge we headed back down to the city's main street and headed south toward Interstate State Park. Interstate State Park as you might suspect by the name is located in both WI and MN, and divided by the St. Croix River. St. Croix Falls WI is on one side and Taylors Falls MN is on the other. It is Wisconsin's oldest state park, established in 1900. It was formed like many other parts of the state by the incredible forces of the advancing and retreating glaciers. It left behind the river and a very steep sided gorge known as the Dalles of the St. Croix. It is also the home to the glacially carved potholes, formed under very high pressure by eroding sediment and whirlpools at the bottom of the melting ice.

The trail headed into the park off the main highway, through a small prairie, past the visitor center and down to the Pothole Trail. It was here we would find the terminus. We could see our small group of supporters gathered out at the point as we headed across the road and down the final stretch of the trail. Alex fell back a little and Terrie and I finished in tandem to the cheers of our families.

The sun was shining, the morning air was crisp and there were smiles all around.

## **Endings**

I still have not answered the question, "how did it feel" to finish the trail, for myself or for anyone that has asked. As I reflected on it some more this week, I think that answer is that it was never really about the finish. It was about the journey. It's not the final miles but the cumulative experience that have really made an impact on me.

I have often said along the way that it was at the same time one of the hardest and most challenging things I have done and also one of the most fun and rewarding. I enjoyed the runs, the scenery, the small towns and coffee shops, the drives to and from the trail. I have enjoyed tracking my progress and have enjoyed sharing my thoughts and experiences through the writing of this journal.

What really made this for me though was something beyond all of those tangible things. The real personal impact for me was in the building of relationships and the sharing of experiences with Pat and Terrie, who were with me almost every step of the way. It was sharing some runs with Alex and Steve, who joined me both in running and in spirit whenever they could. And it was with Amy, who supported

me through every kind of emotion, both hers and mine. Not only could I have not done it without each of you, it would not have been anywhere near as rewarding without you.

As I sit here and write, I look at the map I kept, tracking each run and each segment. I see how the map traverses the state, north to south then north again before crossing all the way to the western border. A thousand miles of experiences. Each one different but all linked by something called the Ice Age Trail. Each end of the trail is a beautiful spot in the woods, quiet and peaceful, but permanent and lasting. I like to think my IAT journey both started and finished the same way – quiet and peaceful – and that it will, like the trail, be a permanent and lasting part of me.

### **By The Numbers**

- 86 runs
- 71 car trips
- 225 hours 42 min 44 seconds of running
- 1,136.5 miles of trail covered
- 13.2 miles per run
- Ave pace – 11:51 per mile
- Ave run time – 2 hours 31 minutes
- Shortest run - 6.3 miles - Wood Lake