

Thousand-Miler Essay

Serena Stipek

10-23-21 I completed the IAT with 1121.6 miles. My total with out and backs was 1278 and 129.1 miles of biking, but that seems like that should be higher 😊

I was camping at Hartman Creek in Waupaca and decided to follow the ones with the yellow blazes on 7/13/20. I thought the Ice Age Trail was the one I had close to home in Chippewa County. Once learning the trail went across Wisconsin, I ordered the guidebook. I was looking to find places that weren't so busy with people and getting me outdoors. I would leaf through the book several times a day, along with thinking I was going to bed and turning the light back on to browse some more. I would look at the next day's weather to decide where to go. I also searched for trails that had parking points so I could return to continue on. I was focused on enjoying the day and not about the mileage. I was doing lots of out and backs and still enjoy doing those. The views are different and you see things you missed the first time. It was after hiking East Lake and having no cell service and frustrated that I had no idea how far along I was on the trail, I learned about the Guthook app. This sure makes my hiking a much better experience in things I want to know. At this point I am also buying the Atlas. I did join the Ice Age Trail fb page and made lots of sticky notes to attach to my maps. This page was a good connection to the trail and resources.

In October, 2020 while hiking, I met Wannabe Carla Moore from Merrill and we exchanged information. She also shared that she was a volunteer in Langlade County and encouraged me to reach out to trail angels for shuttles so I was doing out and backs or to connect with other hikers. I wasn't so sure about this since I was just looking to get out and the state of our community health. Carla had tried to reach me after her hike wanting to give me a shuttle so I didn't need to hike back to my vehicle. I had my phone on airplane mode so missed her attempts and had my first big hiking day for miles just over 17. Before the end of the month, we connected to hike part of the western area. I learned how this shuttling cars worked, heard about her journey to finish the trail by January, 2021 and she did 😊 It was also interesting as she shared her knowledge of birds and trees that we were seeing. I also reached my first 100 miles 😊 and tends to be more memorable than the other hundreds to come. There is something to be said about your first.

It's now November and I am taking my bike on my hikes to shuttle even into December. There were times the bike stayed on the car, as I felt the walking back was a better idea. For example, a newly re-graveled road or little to no shoulder to the road and lack of visibility. I generally put my bike away when fall ends. Thanks to the Ice Age Trail fb page and learning about Thousand Miler Wannabe page, I am seeing many other riding bike as it turns cold and we've had some snow. I was surprised how much fun I had been missing by putting my bike away for the season. It was also time to purchase some more orange and bright clothing. I did start wearing an orange vest and hat in September, but will need a few more warmer things.

January, 2021 I had Wannabe Pam Bowe message me about needing to finish a CR that I had just posted about. She celebrated her 500 miles and I was so excited for her. I have enjoyed being on hikes to share others hitting milestones. After this hike, Pam had me joining several more with her and connecting me with other Wannabes Teresa Jolivette (she finished the trail on 9/11/21) and Virginia Welke. I didn't know if I would be hiking the western or eastern bifurcation or both. I had did some searching to see what would work best for bike shuttling. I ended up joining a hike with Pam and Teresa so Teresa could finish the eastern bifurcation and guess that would be a first hike of the eastern bifurcation. Shortly, thereafter Wannabe Shelley Botchek had posted an event for the eastern bifurcation so I went. I was able to finish a large part of the bifurcation with her and various other hikes.

Shelley knew I was interesting in backpacking some of the trail and in April I had purchased enough light gear to go. I had lots of stuff for tent camping, but nothing light enough. In May we camped the before our hike at Brunet Island State Park and I brought kayaks to explore the waters. We spent 2 nights on the trail hiking the Chippewa County segments. I had hiked them already but appreciated getting to try another way on the trail and in my area. I do lots of things solo, but can see this being more beneficial to do with a buddy.

At this point I had connected with a few more hikers; Laura Hinesh, Bruce Davis, Peggy Hess, Roxane Kelley, Jeff Frazer, Sanjay Shoney, David Gerst, Sarah Driscoll, and Christopher White. There definitely were a few more but this was the main bunch I got to share some miles with.

I had never intended to hike the entire trail and was focused keeping the hikes fun and seeing more of Wisconsin. It was close to 600 miles when I said I would complete the trail. I had my niece make me signs for 700 and 800. After that the miles flew by but yet the closer I got, the end was feeling far away. I couldn't get away from home as easily as I could before and most of my segments left were on the east side so my short drives were 3.5 hours one way. I stuck with day trips and didn't think about how I was going to camp in certain areas. I realized I can go back another time and do that. Thanks to my connections in this group, I was able to arrange shuttles or have someone join me to get my last 100+ miles done before snow. I did contact trails angels at Lakeshore Chapter, Lisa Maraka and Cheryl Gorsuch. Earlier when I stayed at Mauthe Lake Scott Peschke provided a shuttle to hike Parnell. Alison Fuehrer also provided a shuttle to hike the CR from Skunk-Foster to Iola. I appreciate the trail angels and enjoy meeting them to learn more about the trail and area.

10/23/21, is my final hike to complete the trail at Timberland Hills. I hadn't thought much about where to end when I started hiking. As I hike with others, it is a question that tends to come up, and I am saying I didn't know I was going to hike the entire trail, lol. It was suggested to leave something close to home, but I had a lot of it done. I decided on the east half of Timberland Hills from Leach Lake Road to parking at Boyd Lane. It is a large parking area and would be plowed in the winter since it is used for skiing. I had to think about winter and parking, not knowing when I would finish and didn't want it to be a connecting route. I am happy with this as having friends and family join me, the width of the ski trail allows you to walk next to each other and visit. The parking area allowed those waiting at the end to be off the road and gather for the celebration. I did think about ending my hike solo as that was how I started hiking, but realized I am no longer solo on the trail even when I am. I had a great support group

that has enjoyed my photos and journey and wanted them to be able to share this moment if they wanted. I wouldn't have been here if it wasn't for this wonderful Ice Age Trail community, along with my friends and family. I say the easiest part is hiking, it's everything that comes before to get you there. It is truly one step as time 😊

I always thought my last hike was my favorite segment and I do have a few I want to re-hike in another season. The eastern side of McKenzie was so golden in the fall, Scuppernong I enjoyed with switchbacks, the southern end of West Bend for the windy open trail view. Lake Eleven and Jerry Lake Segment are close for me and had no idea how much I would enjoy them. They give you a variety of terrain. The never ending up and down on Parnell or Harrison Hills. The eastern side with views of Lake Michigan made me feel like I wasn't in Wisconsin. I really liked Plover and could do that in all the seasons. It was neat to hike Ringle just after the new section opened and seeing the handprints on the trail vs footprints. I also met Gail Piotrowski who was painting yellow blaze and she took time to share information on the process. I didn't realize how neat it is to be in the woods in spring and see things starting to grow and then watch how it changes in the next few months, that you think you are looking at something different. The jack-in-the-pulpit and Solomon's seal are ones that stand out.

I do look forward to helping others achieve their goal of the trail or guide new people in getting started. I do want to volunteer to work with trail maintenance and projects. I want to learn more about how the trail happens and paying it forward.

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