

My overall impression of the IAT is that it is a really nice walk in the woods. The trails were meticulously maintained in many areas with good infrastructure and the trail volunteers seemed responsive to sections that suffered from blow downs due to the late winter snows. Although the trail contains a significant amount of road walks, I found them to be manageable given the low use roads, wide shoulders, and polite Wisconsin drivers.

In my opinion, the trail in its current state really appeals to local users and section hikers. Thru-hiking the trail is a real challenge primarily due to lack of infrastructure, community support, and trail layout. Let me address each:

Trail Infrastructure—Thru-hikers rely on places to camp or affordable accommodations along the trail. The northern woods portion of the trail had options but many of the portions highlighted as dispersed camping in the Atlas were simply unsuitable for camping. I recall going through many dispersed camp sections only to find the trail lined by a wall of brush, water soaked areas, or terrain so uneven that you could not set up a tent. The road section from Antigo south through the bifurcation had no camping options that I could use. I ended up staying at hotels which get pretty expensive when doing a thru-hike. Sections up through Door county also were difficult to find camping and if DCAs or back country sites in the State Forests existed, they were so far apart that it made for long days just to get from one camp to the next. I found only about half to two-thirds of the DCAs to be suited for camping. For example, the DCA at Rice Lake was not even maintained and water logged when I arrived. The DCA at Gibraltar was at such a steep angle you could not set up a tent. The DCAs north of Mishicot were swampy and so mosquito infested that I just went to private campsites. Camping options did not match the level of quality the trail received. Overall it caused a lot of anxiety and in several cases I had to pass points of interest like the basilica in the Holy Hills segment just to reach the next campsite. I routinely hiked 30+ mile days due to this issue.

I know that this is an ongoing issue and had one thought how to at least mitigate the problem in the short term. The trail has numerous benches where folks can take a break. From what I

observed, the bench areas are sculpted to accommodate the bench. Adding a 6' X 12' pad next to the bench would not be too much of a challenge in many cases and would provide a temporary place to camp until more formal infrastructure can be installed.

Community Support—Many of the towns and cities did not have camp spots for thru-hikers (except for Verona—which was excellent). I realize some small communities may not want to create public camping in their towns for any number of reasons. However, sites for IAT hikers could be created for those hikers holding IAT membership. This allows the town to enforce who is allowed to stay and allows hikers to use the services of the town. It also benefits the IATA since membership can provide access to services along the trail. Communities that provide more infrastructure could be identified by another designation beyond just “Trail Community” to recognize efforts to accommodate hikers going the distance.

I can't recall seeing one community that offered trail magic or showed some sign of welcoming hikers along the way. There were a few individuals that did, but not from communities. Made me wonder why the “Trail Community” designation was made other than to identify a town or city the trail goes through.

Trail Layout—There are two configurations for the trail: one is published and the other is unpublished but routinely used. The option of choosing connector routes seems unique to this trail. The road walks are a real problem for thru-hikers not only because of the vehicles, but the lack of resources like water, shelter if caught in a storm, etc. I found references to resources like water be far and few in the Farout app when on the connector routes.

Anyway, those are my thoughts for now. I appreciate the efforts of all the volunteers who build, maintain, and administer the trail. I know it's always a tremendous amount of work and progress is hard won. Thanks!

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