

Thru Hike 1/28/2023 – 5/27/2023

My name is Stephanie Johnson, a.k.a. Fish Out Of Water. I started my thru hike journey at the Eastern Terminus on January 28, 2023. I was fortunate to meet some really amazing people along the way that helped me throughout my journey. I was asked to be a speaker (arranged by Jeannie Georgson) and got to speak with the 8th graders at the Hartland Middle School regarding my hike; question/answer session. I was also interviewed by Melissa Pierick and one of her interns at the Ice Age Trail Alliance.

I thought starting in the winter would have been more of a challenge than what it was but I really enjoyed hiking in the winter; however, I wish I would have started earlier. I encountered some really really deep snow in one of the toughest known segments, Parrish Hills, which caused me leave the trail on April 3rd until some of the snow melted; mid-thigh even with snow shoes. Therefore, my hike took longer than anticipated.

I mainly camped along the trail at DCA's, shelters and/or stayed at hotels. I am fortunate enough to have an extremely supportive husband that would meet up with me at the hotels to bring my resupply items; otherwise, I would just resupply when I went through towns.

I slept in an ultra light tent that I set up using my trekking poles (no tent poles). I had a 0 degree sleeping bag as well as a 20 degree sleeping quilt. The coldest night was -4 degrees and I was perfectly toasty. I used a small compact stove top that screwed onto a butane/propane canister. I tried to bring mainly food I didn't have to cook but on the really cold days it was nice to have something warm in my belly. I had to overcome an obstacle my first day with my water bottle leaking and freezing so I had to stop at Bay Shore Outfitters, in Sturgeon Bay, to buy a Hydro Flask; water never froze again after that. I carried a Sawyer Water Purifying system as well.

When I returned to the trail, it was warmer and the bugs were horrible; without a bug net I wouldn't have been able to handle it; hence, why I mainly chose to start in winter- hahaha. I never really encountered any problems other than the snow that was too deep and too hard on my knees. I did take a few spills but nothing that took me out ☺!

I finished the trail on Saturday, May 27, 2023.

My time on the Ice Age Trail was to prove to myself that I could start and finish a thru hike and many future thru hikes are in the works/planning stages...

Thank you to everyone that maintains the trails, volunteers, shuttles and everything in between.

Happy Trails!

Stephanie Johnson

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