

We finished our hike last Saturday, 9/2/2022. At the western terminus. We had done 76 miles during the last 6 days and my hiking partner, Kathy, was really hurting the last three miles, but we were so close, she refused to give up. After we finished we stopped by the Interstate Park lodge, and the volunteer working the desk gave us a standing ovation. He said he had never met anyone before that had completed the entire trail.

Favorite segment: We hiked the west side of the Mondeaux flowage on a glorious fall day when the trees were about a peak color. The hike is mostly up on an esker, so it is easy walking. The sun glistened off the water. It was about the perfect hike. The Dells of the Eau Claire were a close second.

Best side trips:

1. Milton House. We stopped by the Milton House, but the museum was closed. However, there were some guys in there working and one of them was a guide, so we got a personal tour. The story of the 7th Day Baptists involvement with the underground railroad was fascinating and moving. Highly recommended to all future hikers.
2. Gerstberger Pines. They are 3-4 miles off the trail near Rib Lake. There is something special about walking through an old growth forest. There are nice stands of white pine and hemlock along the IAT, but it just isn't the same.

Best advice we got on the trail: Cheryl Whitman of the Indianhead Chapter told us that we really should hike the Gandy Dancer – St Croix Falls connecting route east to west, as it then goes downhill. It really shouldn't have taken me over 1100 miles to figure out it is easier to hike downhill than uphill, but then gravity never was my strong suit.

Best advice I can give to future hikers:

1. Insoles matter. I don't know how shoe companies can sell you boots for \$150 and put crappy insoles in them. Good athletic insoles have made more a difference for my feet, knees and hips than anything else.
2. Embrace your inner muck.

Thanks for a great adventure.

Stu Hansen