

I wrote something each night about the day. This was the last day and a little longer than usual. 6/7/2023- Ice Age Trail, Day 44 - 14 Miles. Miles 1131.9-1145.9. Ascent 484', Descent 460'. Finished at 722' Sleeping in a hotel near the Green Bay Airport at 669'. Weather 45-72 degrees, sunny.

I woke like any other day. But it wasn't any other day. It was today. And it was the last day. A trail angel was picking me up at the Terminus at 1pm, so there was no time for dawdling. I rejoined the gravel bike path and was hiking at sunrise, 5:15am.

The rabbits hopped out in dozens, like a parade line waving their congratulations and goodbyes. I saw deer, of course. I don't think a day has passed on this trail that I didn't see at least one. The birds sang. I saw blue herons, egrets, red wing blackbirds and more. A chipmunk stood on her hind legs and chirped at me.

The gravel trail turned to road and a couple miles later I was in Sturgeon Bay. I stopped for breakfast. I only had a few bars and a single package of tuna and cornuts left and who wants that when eggs and potatoes can be bought. I left with my Nalgene bottle of chai latte. I stopped at a coffee shop and bought two cookies- both got eaten in the next mile.

And because it was this special day- the last day- I stopped in an outdoor outfitter shop to buy clothes to travel in. My 3rd son is an Engineer for Delta, so I can fly free on standby. He has tactfully explained to me, that when I do, I am a guest of the airline and need to be clean and look nice. I left with a comfy pair of pants, a tank top and a hoodie. This combination probably weights more than all the clothes I have worn and carried the last 6 weeks. But, I only had to carry them 5 more miles, only 5 more miles.

I followed the road out of town along Lake Michigan and ended up back on dirt trail in the forest. The forest paralleled the lake for awhile. The trees were beautiful, the trail was quite except for the wind and lapping waves, giving me time to reflect on the last 6 weeks and my finish, now only a mile or two away. There were huge rocks where the trail turned away from the lake, reminding me of all the glacial erratics on the first 1/2 of this journey.

I thought of how the 14 miles today represented the whole trail so well- bike trail, roadwalking and actual dirt to tred on. There were farms, swamp, wetlands, a cute town, neighborhoods, forest and the lake all squished into this last morning. There were quiet parts and busier moments. I ate a couple things out of my pack and decent town food. The day had started cool. I put my gloves on for the first time in weeks. By mid-morning I was in my shorts and Tshirt. My feet hurt a bit, but I felt strong and ready to hike some more.

Just before noon, I turned a corner and the Terminus was there. I approached slowly. It was in the sun, warmer than the shady forest. I reached out and touched the rock. It was hot. I closed my eyes and let the heat radiate through me and with it the last 42 days of

memories, lessons, and experiences. I was alone, as I had been for all of my miles. I camped and talked and stayed with people, but hiked each and every step alone. It just worked out that way.

I took pictures using my hiking pole as a tripod-selfie-stick as I have many times before without other hands to help. I breathed. I contemplated the vast difference between solitude and loneliness, knowing I was rich in one and rarely felt the other.

Minutes later, Jon, my trail angel arrived. He drove me back to his beautiful home, but had to return to work. He left me instructions like the shower is on the lower level, the laundry is here, help yourself to whatever you need. My wife and I will be back at 4 and left. Left me alone in his house, for hours. Complete trust in a stranger, this was strong trail magic on the last day.

I emptied my pack and did all my chores- laying out my stuff to dry on the sunny back porch, laundry, shower, and repacking. I found a banana, veggies, hummus and crackers to munch on. Was I allowed to eat on the white sofa? I sat at the table. I talked and messaged with a variety of people- making an effort to text each of my trail angels a thank you and Terminus picture. I am so grateful for all the people known and unknown who were so kind and helpful to me on this journey and to those who work diligently and hard on making the trail what it is.

Jon and his wife, Leanne, appeared at 4:00 and drove me almost an hour to my hotel near the Green Bay airport. They have an 18 year son attempting an IAT thru hike right now and said they were happy to payback some of the magic he has gotten.

This hike felt easier than any of my others and I felt stronger, even at the end, despite putting in many more miles a day than I ever have before. I took shortcuts on many of the connector (roadwalking) routes. It will take some time to figure out exactly how many miles I did (or missed). But 1146 miles divided by 43 days is 26.65 miles- a marathon a day for 6 weeks. If I missed 71 miles (and I think it is less than that) it would be 25 miles a day.

However many miles, it took 42 days and 20.5 hours to finish. I thought it would take, at least, a week or two longer. I'm totally ready for another hike to begin... As soon as I spend some time with some very-important-to-me-people and replace my tent that the raccoons destroyed.

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