

My Ice Age Trail Snapshot

My mantra has always been to "Learn something new—Every. Single. Day." Be curious, listen, observe, question, and learn.

I have always loved hiking and have explored many Wisconsin state and county parks. In the spring of 2021, I realized I had already been hiking parts of the Ice Age Trail without knowing it. After a little research, I found myself intrigued and eager to learn more; hike more. Soon after, I discovered my daughter was already hiking IAT trails in the Madison area, while I had been exploring those yellow blazed trails in Central WI.

Initially, I assured myself I was interested ONLY in hiking true segments. What was the point of hiking those pesky connecting routes anyway?? Then, when I hit 100 miles, I thought, Why not? Why not hike the entire trail? I was hooked! I was in it for the 1200 miles!

My story started like so many others on this journey. I hiked solo, hiked out-and-back, hiked with my husband or had him shuttle me, and then graduated to bike-shuttling myself. But I yearned for companionship of other like-minded, nature-appreciating, goal-oriented hikers and found myself reaching out to others to share the experience. The people I have met have been great teachers, listeners, friends, and partners in this amazing adventure! Some have become friends for life.

One of my most memorable hikes was when my daughter and I decided to "rookie-backpack" for 12 days starting at the Eastern Terminus.

In the beginning, we had to convince our feet that they could complete this journey, especially when we hit the Northern Kettles. We hiked and camped in the rain, groaned at climbing steep sided ridges and trying not to slide down the other slippery side. We thought the MRE at the end of our day was the best dinner ever. Later, we would ask ourselves, "Was it really that good? Or was it because we were so tired and hungry?" We hung our food each night, but, truly, it was comical to watch each other try to swing that weighted rope over a tree branch. We were always successful, but I won't share how long it took us some evenings. And I will never, EVER, forget the one crazy, moonless night, that involved a mouse and a cookie. One of our last nights on the trail, we stayed at a shelter in the Northern Kettle Moraine State Forest. My daughter hung her hammock inside, and I thought I could sleep on the inside ledge with my backpack for a pillow. What a mistake!!!!

In the black of night, I felt something scamper across the top of my head. My shriek could be heard across the forest. It turned out that I had left a cookie in my backpack and a little mouse was determined to get his midnight snack. Lesson learned.

That mother-daughter adventure along with every other segment hike has given me an unforgettable experience that has made me stronger, wiser, and more appreciative of the trail and this incredible journey.

By Teresa Aspeslet