

Teresa Jolivette
Thousand-Miler Essay

I began this hike three years ago as a solo hiker. I am mostly a life long resident of Wisconsin and have always been a "walker." Hiking is extremely appealing to me. It is meditative, great exercise, challenging and satisfying. I only discovered this trail challenge after finding the 1,000 mile Wannabe facebook page. This community is so wonderful, smart, helpful, encouraging, enthusiastic and joyful! I have meet so many wonderful hikers in the last three years. Some have become very close friends.

This trail has taken me to places in our state that I have never had the opportunity to explore. The beauty of the trail is astounding! The rolling hills, the green fields, pine trees, mighty oaks, shaking aspen, snow covered landscapes, lakes, rivers, erratics, eskers, beautiful farms and urban trail communities, gravel roads and highways are just a few of the incredible vistas I experienced.

My first hike was a solo hike. I only had the trail guide book. I missed so many yellow blazes, got turned around, but just kept figuring it out. I also used my mountain bike to shuttle myself. Turns out St. Croix Falls is quite hilly!

I was contacted by a seasoned hiker, Vicki Christianson, who lived nearby, and she was a wealth of information! I then bought the atlas and Guthooks. Vicki kindly hiked with me the second time out and I got smarter just listening to her enthusiastically tell me about how shuttles with trail angels worked, how to plan a safe hike, etc..

I soon met friends on the facebook page and met up with them all over the state to hike together. I also solo hiked. I found an ebike changed my world. There is something wonderful about meeting new friends to hike with and chat for hours or just hike in silence. The solo hike has its merits too. Self sufficiency can be very satisfying. I did learn that it is important to have extra battery power for your phone or flashlight on those shorter winter hike days. I ran through the woods a few times to beat the sunset to get back to my car!

I hiked first through the fall months, then throughout the winter. Snowshoe hiking in knee deep snow is really hard. But, I did learn that my body will hike 9-10 miles for two days in a row in deep snow. Laughing after you face plant in the snow can be funny and very difficult to recover from. My first spring hikes were after an extremely snowy winter. There were several times we had to turn back in our cars due to spring flooding. The spring flowers on the trail are a treat! The hot summer months brought their own challenges. If you have to ford a stream after a big rain, your hiking poles are essential. Also, turning around and retracing your steps to avoid a flooded area of the trail is also a good idea. I added a few extra miles doing that. I found out that an umbrella can be your friend. Rain or shine. And, even if you hate Gatorade, you drink it or you pass out. The occasional mean-sounding dog is usually not that big of a threat. I've hiked as few as 4 miles a day in the snow and up to 22 miles a day in the summer.

I think the fall hikes are my favorite. The crunching leaves and the ethereal smell of the woods is mesmerizing. Those rolling hills got my heart rate pounding and my quads screaming. Each

time I came across a bench along the trail I paused to say "thanks for the rest!" The dedication plaques told their own story and I appreciated them. I was scared into a brief scream more than once by a grouse flying in my face along the trails. Many sweet faced deer crossed my path. I also met many horses and cows along the way.

I hiked many different directions in my journey. At first, I joined other seasoned hikers to complete their hikes. Then, as I met more hikers we formed our own destinations. It took me 2+years to hike the first 600 miles. Then, it took me 8-9 months to hike the second 600 miles. I met a local friend who had a similar amount of miles left to hike. We partnered up and hiked together for the last year. The pandemic has been devastating. As a nurse, my stress was extremely elevated. Hiking the trail brought me peace and strength. Nature is my therapy. The IAT is my healer. I will be forever grateful for the experiences this wonderful trail has given me. I completed my IAT journey today, September 11, 2021.

Thank you,
Teresa Jolivette