

The Ice Age 50 Endurance races are held every Mother's Day weekend primarily on the Blackhawk, Whitewater Lake and Blue Spring Lake segments of the Ice Age trail. Running 50 miles on these sections seemed like a good idea in 2003 and again in 2004, but more importantly served as an introduction to a trail that has since variously served as a hobby, a chapel, a refuge, an art gallery and a gym.

While the trail and I had been introduced, we remained only casual acquaintances until 2020 when my gym (as well as most activities in the country) shut down. Seeking to find something to do and get some exercise I turned to nature and my old friend the Ice Age Trail. That year, I completed more than half the trail and realized it wasn't just a great place to work out. I realized I truly enjoyed being on the trail. The world reopened and other priorities again kept us apart. My bike shuttle would again be replaced by a spin class. The run down a peaceful forest trail would again be done on a treadmill.

Retired and finding plenty of time on my hands has again reunited the trail and me. My final day on the trail served as a microcosm of the experience. I woke up in the County Forest to a cacophony of birds. After a quick breakfast, I started out on my bike shuttle passing by a forest at peak color, ponds, lakes, a big buck, 2 coyotes (not quite as cool as the elk, the bear or the rattlesnake seen previously), 1 big hill and plenty of solitude. I would soon get to walk into this big forest and see the flora and fauna up close. Around seemingly every turn, there was nature's beauty that any artist could only but hope to create. The day's journey would include a quick conversation with a highway worker who kindly explained why I would have to take a slight detour on the connecting route and to a small town grocery store which caters to hikers. It made me realize the goodness of humanity. Nearing the day's and trail's completion, I found a bench that allowed me to contemplate all the trail has given me and I saw that it was good.

Thank you to the Alliance and the volunteers that make it all possible.

Todd Bartels