

Interviews with "Trail Steward of the Year" Award Winners Chet Anderson and Ed Spoon

RACHELE KRIVICHI

Maintenance of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail relies on help from devoted volunteers. Consistently, there are volunteers who go above and beyond in their efforts to improve the Ice Age Trail. To honor the work of these industrious folk, the Alliance created the Trail Steward of the Year award in 2017.

The award has been granted to two recipients thus far: Chet Anderson, the award's first ever recipient in 2017, and Ed Spoon in 2018. Chet and Ed have made significant contributions to the Trail, including, but not limited to: boardwalk building, hosting hikers, trail rerouting, bridge building, and fixing storm damage. Chet and Ed are both avid hikers who understand the importance of having a well-maintained National Scenic Trail in Wisconsin.

Enjoy one-on-one interviews conducted by volunteer Rachele Krivichi with Chet and Ed, exploring their thoughts on being volunteers and hikers.

RK: What inspired you to become involved as a volunteer?

CA: I don't know if hiking the Ice Age Trail directly inspired me, but it was a logical way to go. I like to be physically active and it was a way to be involved. I now think of the volunteers as extended family. Volunteering kind of wrecked the hiking because before I started volunteering, I was happy to find a trail and move on. But now when I walk a trail I'm pretty critical of it. It's a mixed blessing.

ES: I had this interest from earlier in my life that I wanted to indulge again. I need to be outdoors. The biggest way to keep me unhappy is to keep me indoors. Doing trail work gives me a lot of satisfaction...in my job I would work on things for years sometimes before I would get any results. But on the Ice Age Trail, you can see right away that what you're working on is better than when you first got there. Jokingly (but actually seriously) I don't belong to a health club...I volunteer for the Ice Age Trail.

RK: What are some challenges you've had to overcome to achieve the changes you made to the IAT?

Ed Spoon stands by his work, a newly installed mileage sign he made for the Verona Segment at the Prairie Moraine Park. Photo by David Lonsdorf.





CA: There weren't too many challenges. It's mostly just doing a little documentation and awareness. The trails here are a constant job of mowing and clearing and stuff like that. When you hike out West, with the lack of rain, the trails don't have to be mowed as much.

ES: Well, one challenge for me are the things I don't know how to do, I just know what needs to be done. What I try to do is tap into all of the skilled volunteers we have, especially locally...We built a retaining wall back in June to fix damage from several years back, and I just stepped back and watched some crew leaders do a beautiful job. More than anything, my role is collaborating and facilitating, and trying to put all the pieces together. Humility is really important. I need to know when to say, "Hey, this person is a lot more skillful than me."

RK: What is the importance of the IAT in Wisconsin, and why is it important for you to be involved?

CA: It's an evolving thing, but I think the Trail's becoming more known. When I'm hiking in other places, more and more people are aware of it and have it on their bucket list. Having a trail like this in Wisconsin stands out as a state offering. It's personal satisfaction to be involved with it, but also, all the trails I've hiked wouldn't be there without volunteers, so I'm just paying back.

ES: Well, first and foremost, it's a recreational resource for people who want to get out and walk their dog and get out and go backpacking. It's relatively close to a lot of things, and also it's important to try and interpret

the last Ice Age, so hopefully people can learn more about glacial features and how the glaciers shaped the land. One of the things I've been hoping to achieve is more interpretive materials, so that if you walk a specific section you know what you're going to see and what it means. More than anything, though, the Trail encourages people to get out and relax and clear their head. Also, it's fairly unique, it's one of the only National Scenic Trails contained completely within one state.

RK: What is your current involvement with the Trail?

CA: My chapter is the Indianhead Chapter, so whatever it needs, that's what I help with.

ES: Right now we're working on new segments. Currently, I'm the chair of the trails committee for the Dane County Chapter. What that means is I try to oversee trail maintenance and trail building in Dane County. I say "try" because I try more than I succeed. A lot of our Trail in Dane County goes through restored prairie, and a lot of those paths need to be mowed. I try to schedule workdays with our local chapter to get as much of that done as we can. During a recent project, approximately 40 brush piles were accumulated, so this winter we will go in and burn as many as we can because they're unsightly...Volunteerism is a big thing in Dane County. We try to get the younger people out as much as we can because they're the future of the Trail.

Rachele Krivichi is a writer, artist, and outdoor lover from Wisconsin. Her work has been seen in Wisconsin Gazette newspaper, Temporary Art Review, and Cultural blog, based in the Netherlands. In 2016 she finished her first book, a study of camper and recreational vehicle culture. She recently moved to Minneapolis, but Wisconsin and the Ice Age Trail are some of her earliest loves.



Award NOMINATIONS!

Besides Trail Steward of the Year, the Alliance bestows nearly a dozen awards each April at the Annual Conference. Many times these awards are bestowed because someone like YOU was willing to recognize the volunteer efforts, of someone in their midst, and fill out a nomination form.

Go to www.iceagetrail.org/volunteer/awards to view the complete list of awards available and get started recognizing your fellow Ice Age Trail volunteer for the fine work he or she does.

Chet Anderson takes a break from using the grip hoist while moving enormous rocks used for building stone steps at the Gibraltar Rock Segment in 2015. Photo by Jo Ellarson.