

IAT Thousand Miler Recognition Essay

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July 31, 2023

My IAT section hike began as a late-winter day hike in 2022 to shake off cabin fever. Winter seemed to drag on that year, as my first two hikes in early March were on ice- and snow-covered trails. And I hiked them out-and-back. After these hikes, I discussed the IAT with my brother-in-law who had started section hiking in 2021. I attended the conference in 2022 and at that time decided to challenge myself to complete the IAT as a section hiker.

After retiring in April of 2022, I focused on the hike. After about a dozen out-and-back hikes I decided to try shuttling by bike. After a few pedal bike shuttles and car shuttles with my family, I concluded that bike shuttling would be my preferred method. Since I am not a biker, I bought an e-bike and used it for nearly all the remaining shuttles. I did receive a few rides from trail angels and I hiked and shuttled with my brother-in-law and his wife, but the vast majority of my shuttling was by e-bike. My e-bike has about 900 miles, of which nearly all are IAT shuttle.

We have a camper trailer and that was one of my secret weapons. I stayed at various state and county campgrounds along the route. Since I was primarily shuttling myself, I was able to efficiently complete parts of the trail. Almost everything I hiked was out-of-order, and sometimes different sections of CR's or trail segments in the same day. About a quarter of my way into the hike I discovered that following the published CR's was not a requirement for recognition. For me this was a game changer. I developed my own CR's between segments where it made the most sense. The most notable custom CR's were between Janesville and Albany, the Western bifurcation, and the long CR between Cornell and Jerry Lake. (Note that I shortcut the Janesville CR before the Gibbs Lake segment was opened.) These shortcuts plus a few other less notable ones cut off about 75 miles, which for me would be 5-6 days of hiking.

I have several observations about my experience on the trail.

Most of the trail was well maintained, with some exceptions in the less populous areas. While I am not a fan of road hiking, I met a handful of friendly local people. Twice while on road walks I had locals bring me ice-cold bottled water to relieve my thirst. I didn't ask; they saw me and just

brought me cold water. One of my last days on the trail, on the short CR between Trade River segments, a fellow who was riding bike stopped to chat. Turns out his grandfather owned acreage along that road and he now lives on a plot of land there. We probably chatted for 15-20 minutes. I met other locals along the way but that was the most memorable interaction with a local person.

I was impressed with the amount of work done by volunteers. I helped at an MSC event in May of 2022 (the Rush preserve) but in the past 16 months I have learned that the MSC events are but a sliver of the volunteer time needed to build and maintain the trail. Especially this spring after the April snow storms with downed trees everywhere, the trail needed a lot of volunteer work and it happened. Downfall was cleared and the trail was made passable again. And then all summer long there is trimming and mowing required on many sections. I registered with the Langlade chapter because I am within 1 ½ hours of most of the Langlade county segments and I found those to be most in need of additional volunteer time. I do plan to spend time with chapter trail maintenance now that my section hike is complete.

I was also impressed with the number of segments that go through private land. Such landowners prove the Leopold land ethic in their willingness to share their land with the public. One person's generous act positively impacts the lives of countless others, the majority of whom will never be named or known.

It would be virtually impossible for me to summarize regions/counties hiked by quarter since I hiked so much out-of-order. Because of this I have attached a detailed chronology. Probably too much detail, but if you just look at a few of the trips you'll see how I put together bits-and-pieces as was most efficient and convenient to allow me to maximize my time and mileage. I have also chronicled all of my hikes since May 4, 2022 on the Thousand Miler facebook page. I learned about the Facebook page at the 2022 conference and joined it shortly thereafter.

Many thanks to the volunteers and IATA staff for their hard work and dedication to the trail.