

*In addition to answering the questions below, please attach a brief essay including highlights or unique aspects of your hike. Section hikers: Please include a brief itinerary of your hikes (e.g., a quarterly summary of which regions/counties you hiked).*

Dear IAT Alliance Staff,

This is the essay you asked for, though I can't promise that it will be brief! Also, I have included both a photo of my IAT map and my spreadsheet logging my hikes. The map shows the areas I hiked in different years - each year with a different color. I started hiking in 2019 and completed it in 2022, so there are four colors on the map. I didn't stick to particular regions or counties at different times. Instead, I walked roads in the winters, tried to stay off of roads in the summers, hiked in areas where friends lived more often due to convenience, and then just powered through the remaining parts over the last year. I hiked much more in the summers because I'm a teacher and still working. Anyway... here's my essay.

Hiking the Ice Age Trail has been a journey of healing, growth, and awakening for me. I have always loved the woods, having grown up near the arboretum in Madison, and went to the woods whenever I needed some time to think and regroup even as a teen. I learned to love camping as a young adult, and spent a lot of time doing that with my own family as my daughters grew up, but I was never really a hiker. I've learned so much about hiking and about myself while traveling the trail.

My hike has primarily been a hike of healing. I learned about the trail from a friend. She was there for me, as were other friends, while I went through the losses of my only two brothers in the winter and spring of 2019. Both of my brothers were in their 60's when they died, and I was 59, looking at my own mortality again, after I had had a scare with cancer myself (but was SO lucky to easily live past it). I decided that I needed something positive to focus on, a goal to reach in order to work through the depression I was feeling. Ironically, I thought that things couldn't get worse after that year and then 2020 and a pandemic hit! Unlike many others, I hardly hiked at all during the early pandemic because I'm a teacher and I was buried trying to learn how to teach virtually. I literally only took two days off, I think, between Christmas and the start of June in 2020. But the trail was still there waiting for me to come back. I spent time on many hikes talking to my brothers and having a good cry. They were times when I could let go of the stress I was feeling. My nature therapy.

My hike has also been one of growth for me. I grew in my knowledge of the state. Being a science teacher I really enjoyed learning more about the geologic history of the state and actually designed an Earth Science unit for my students around the question "Why does northeast WI look like that?" I grew in my knowledge of hiking. I learned about hiking shoes and boots, clothing, sticks, foot care, the importance of wind direction and wearing layers...and so much more! I learned about hiking with my dog, Cashew, who was a very frequent hiking buddy. She is a joy! I learned to not be too worried about bears and wolves - but to be smart about them, too. And I think that my relationship with my husband, Daniel, which has always been

strong (I'm a very lucky person!), became even stronger as he supported me and sometimes joined me on my hikes throughout this entire journey.

I need to say more about what I learned about hiking. I learned that in the winter it's really important to hike with the wind at your back. I learned that the Kettle Moraine area of the state is gorgeous (I had no idea!) I learned to use the elevation maps on Far Out to hike downhill as much as possible because I'm not good at climbing hills. I learned that the route, as it is written in the 2020-2022 atlas is great, even when it seems like it's unnecessarily long. I was a purist and hiked it exactly as it was suggested on all trails and roads (unless something was closed). I learned to watch out for uncontrolled farm dogs. I learned that you can walk on beaver dams! And I completed the trail after hiking 1,147.2 miles I had no idea that I could walk that far!

My hike has also been an awakening for me. I learned to crawl out of my shell and reach out to others and make new friends on the trail. It started out as a private journey about the pain I was feeling, but turned into a way to include others. I had a lot of fun posting about my hikes and sharing my journey, especially with friends I have who can not hike. They let me know how much they enjoyed reading about my adventures. My sister-in-law and her husband, Jennie and Bruce Davis, started the trail after learning about it from me and have learned to love it, too. I've invited other friends to hike with me, and now know of a number of others who are taking on the journey themselves after hearing about what I've done. I have students who are excited about hiking parts of the trail who might eventually take on the whole thing, too. It's been amazing to see how my passion for the trail is inspiring others.

When I started the trail, I thought it might take me eight years to complete. I started on my brother Rick's birthday, July 28th, 2019. I finished it in only about three years, finishing it on my brother Steven's birthday, September 25th, 2022. I've healed, I've grown, and I've come to love hiking our beautiful state so much since I started. Dan and I have discussed retirement plans that involve buying land near the trail and being trail angels for others, setting up a "rest stop", and continuing to be a part of the trail community in a while variety of ways. THANK YOU and everyone who has helped to make the IAT a reality. I love it!