

Essay

Beyond Hiking

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My journey of hiking the Ice Age National Scenic Trail started on December 24, 2019 when I first hiked the Cross Plains Segment in Dane County with a small group of friends. At that time, I had no plan to hike the entire IAT. I simply enjoyed the fresh feelings of hiking and outdoor adventures. As I continued to hike additional segments in Dane County and learned more about the IAT, I was quickly drawn to the beauty of the trail and the excitement of seeing rustic nature of Wisconsin. Having lived in Madison, Wisconsin for 20 years, I found myself embarking on a journey of rediscovering Wisconsin through hiking the Ice Age Trail. It has been an eye-opening journey to me, to say the least.

After the Covid-19 pandemic hit in early 2020, hiking the Ice Age Trail became my routine outdoor activity. I did some solo hiking initially, exploring the trail segments in Dane County, and became a Dane Drifter, one of many awards for finishing all segments in an IAT chapter, on March 14, 2020. Soon, I was joined by many friends in Madison area and spent almost every weekend on hiking, one segment after another, one county after another. I went on to become Glacial Drifter, Walk-the-Walk, Kettle Trekker, etc. As group hiking continued, more friends joined me on the trail, and we decided to have a trail name for the group. Then came the group name “BEYOND HIKING” (occasionally called “HIKING BEYOND”). As a hiking group on the Ice Age Trail, it’s not just hiking itself that excites us, but also the interaction with both nature and people. We treasured every moment out in the nature, from navigating through the trails, enjoying a diverse of landscapes and natural beauties (forests, farms, plants, flowers, birds, and animals), to meeting fellow hikers and new friends. Most of all, we enjoyed conversations and laughter with each other, which made each hiking trip special and memorable.

On October 8, 2022, after 2 years and 10 months of section hiking, I completed the entire Ice Age National Scenic Trail (1200 miles) at the West Terminus along with two other group members and good friends, Nianqing Wang and Grace Wu. This was definitely the highlight of our IAT journey. Over 20 friends came to hike the last segment with us and held a big celebration party for three new Thousand-Milers.

Looking back to the countless hiking trips, I am deeply grateful to my dear friends of BEYOND HIKING group who supported me and accompanied me throughout the IAT journey. Without their supports, I won’t be able to complete the entire trail. Thank you BEYOND HIKING — Nianqing, Grace, Ping, Elaine, Qiqi, Mike, Helen, Huiyu, Tony, Xiaoping, Liping, Wei, Sharon, Leilei, Ruisong, Haiyan, Xu, Maggie, Rick, Jill, Jeff, Danny and Brian.

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