


Hiking the Ice Age Trail has been formative for me in many ways: experientially and personally. I've lived in Wisconsin for 30 years, having moved here after growing up in Arizona. I used to see Wisconsin as a decent place, but I'd much rather be back in Arizona. Hiking the Ice Age Trail has opened my eyes to the widespread beauty of our state. I'd had a narrow view of the stunning opportunities in Wisconsin, like Devil's Lake and Pike Lake. But I've discovered the many out-of-the-way locations that are filled with history and geology and small/large wonders. I've learned the many faces of each trail segment. A warmish January day can be a great hiking day. An otherwise superb hiking day in the middle of July up north can be derailed by flies and mosquitoes. I've learned the many factors which go into a successful and enjoyable day on the trail: the direction of the sun and wind, the height of the streams, the trail conditions, the availability of hiking friends and trail angels, etc.

Hiking the trail together has been a great growth time for my wife and me, having begun this journey after becoming empty-nesters. The IAT was initially a training ground for us as we prepared for hiking overseas trails. After receiving our first patch, however, it became both a process and a goal for us. We enjoyed both day trips as well as 4-day weekend excursions up north.

A few highlights that come to mind: seeing my first beaver dam and actually walking across it; realizing that connectors can be cool in and of themselves; having a passing ATV serendipitously give us a ride over an unexpectedly flooded 50 meters of trail; resting on a bench on a long boardwalk that was the only mosquito-free oasis the whole day; solidifying friendships with friends who are also section hiking the IAT, as we shared rides and trail with them; meeting Buzz in Taylor County; getting to color in my map after finishing a chunk of the trail; and days/nights spent just talking with my lovely wife.

Meeting other IAT hikers was the chance surprise, not the norm. The blogger lady who still keeps us informed of her exploits around the world. The slow hiker who taught us to slow down and enjoy the journey. The fast hiker who was using the IAT as a stepping stone to harder trails, and helped quell any pride we were feeling in becoming thousand milers. And, of course, several trail volunteers who we can't thank enough.

I am very thankful to all who bring the IAT into reality. It has been a great journey of togetherness and discovery for my wife and me. I love new things. However, going forward, I may even look forward to repeating sections of the IAT with my wife 😊



Brad Allen