

My introduction to the Wisconsin's Ice Age Trail is similar to numerous other thousand milers. On May 2, 2022, I had embarked on my IAT journey exploring the sections near my residence. My wife and I live near Fond du Lac, so I drove the 30-40 minutes to the Northern Unit of the Kettle Moraine State Park. My future plan included an overnight backpacking adventure covering approximately 35 miles through the park.

That exact plan never happened for me. However, I did harness on my unused 20 year old framed backpack. Convincing myself the 25 pound backpack was a training tool for a future adventure, I lugged it around on 3 separate day hikes. Then I returned it to my basement. A few days later at a thrift store, I discovered a *like new* camouflaged National Guard Reserve backpack. The backpack was ideal for day hikes as it was smaller and lighter, with shoulder and waist straps.

Semi-retired, I randomly explored sections of the trail which were north and south of the KMSP. I was blessed to be hiking at a time with agreeable temperatures, dry conditions, clear views, and no nagging insects. I was introduced to yellow blazes, trail segments, trail chapters, trail angels, connecting routes, IAT volunteers, the IAT atlas, and the IATA's website.

During that first month, I finished over a hundred miles of the trail. I also walked 20 miles of connecting routes. I had completed all the miles as "out n back" hikes. I uncomplainingly accepted the "back" miles, analyzing I would notice missed items on the return hike. Then due to other commitments, I did not hike in the summer months.

By September, I was completing day trips in all directions from my residence. I hiked weekdays as my schedule allowed, and when suitable weather would be forecasted. I drove early to my destinations, and tried to make use of the entire day. I became a firm believer in a camelback, hiking sticks, bright clothing, face netting, hiking shoes, and bear spray.

I was not anticipating hiking the winter months, but after finishing in November the trail around Janesville, I continued my day hikes. Nearing the Madison area, my ambition to hike the entire Ice Age Trail was firmly set. I researched the details involving the guidelines and needed documentation. My adopted secret goal was to solo hike all of the IAT "out n back".

In February of 2023, I took a nasty fall on the Gibraltar Rock Segment. Returning to my truck with painful ribs, I decided to hike only connecting routes during the winter months. Also, I had recently decided to strictly hike "east to west". Though I did bypass Devil's Lake State Park that month, and I would complete the gorgeous park at a later time, minus the snowice.

In April of 2023, I was viewing additional IAT information through videos and internet articles. I had created in my mind a frenzy of the trail from Antigo to St. Croix Falls. My concerns were the harsher wilderness, the isolated environment, and the huge travel distance and time. By the end of May, I had reached the ford at the Prairie River in the Parrish Hills Segment. Once again I did not hike the IAT in the summer months, and my trekking resumed in September.

Several influences steered me towards backpacking and camping. After my first night in a county forest, I was totally hooked on the experience. Even after a lone wolf crossed my path within 30

yards, I was not deterred from the overnight backpacking. And it was over 2100 miles of hiking before I encountered my first bear. Coming around a small hill, I noticed the bear 25 yards in front of me. It immediately exited my view by crashing through the trees. Ironically, this was the only time I had left my bear spray in my truck.

There are many clichés often shared by thousand milers, which are absolutely true statements. The volunteers in connection with the Ice Age Trail are fantastic! Their dedication of time and incredible efforts, make the IAT a wonderful place. We are absolutely blessed in Wisconsin with beautiful scenery, a storied history, and numerous outstanding people.

On June 28, 2024, I completed my solo “out n back” hiking journey of the Ice Age Trail at the Western Terminus in St. Croix Falls. I humbly thank the Lord for my safe travels, for the opportunity and ability to hike the IAT, and for my interesting experiences. I sincerely thank my wife for allowing me the time to spend the 139 days on the trail. She was extremely patient, enduring, and encouraging throughout the entire ordeal!

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