

## Essay

After seeing a brochure that I could earn a patch for hiking the Marathon County portion of the Ice Age Trail, my daughter, Taylor and I decided we could do it.

On December 31, 2021, we began the trek from the border (going east to west) all the way to the Ringle Segment. We hiked some of that segment, as well. In total, we hiked 24.6 miles that day, mostly connecting roads. Upon losing my two big toenails, I took a nine month hiatus.

Then I heard about the Mammoth Hike Challenge. Another patch? That motivated me to get back on the trail. I did complete the Challenge, as well as the rest of Marathon County. Once again I took some time off.

On January 1, 2023, I made a New Year's resolution to complete the Ice Age Trail within two years. I am a stubborn, strong-willed woman. Once I set a goal, I become driven to achieve it. My goal was obtained on March 3, 2024. I hiked the 3.3 mile section of the Cross Plains Segment (3.3 on 3/3) with my son, his fiance, my two daughters and husband to end my journey.

My favorite segment was Camp 27 due to the beavers engineering magnificent dams and its remoteness. I felt I was one with nature. Even though I got lost multiple times, there was always a "trail angel" who appeared to give me guidance. I did have a German Shepherd follow me over six miles on a connecting route and trail. When completed, I had to hoist her into my vehicle and find her home. Luck was on my side. It was the first place I stopped to ask.

The family had been looking for her. Her name was Margo.

Once I hit the 800 mile mark, it became an obsession. I was mainly a weekend hiker, due to work. On some weekends, I was hiking 25 plus miles a day. My record was back to back days of 34 miles. While hiking the connecting roads, several people stopped to offer me rides, ask if I was okay and even give me treats.

In the end, I lost one more toenail and hiked 1290.4 miles, due to hiking segments twice with my daughter. I was blessed to get to know more about my state and fall in love with small towns in Wisconsin.

I patronized many of their restaurants and shops. I give a great big THANK YOU to all who have worked to make the trail, maintain and conserve the trail and those who continually work to develop more segments.

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