

## IAT Hiking Essay

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I did not start out thinking I would complete the trail.

When I started my IAT journey during the Mammoth Challenge in October 2020, we were amid COVID, my youngest had left for college, and I was kinda lost. I grew up loving the outdoors and hiking is always something I had enjoyed. Spending time outdoors has always grounded me.

My daughter mentioning the trail which brought it to my attention. Then the 2020 Mammoth Challenge happened, and I hiked my first 40 miles in a month. I enjoyed it. My husband would shuttle me to areas close to our house. I joined GOTC (Get Off The Couch) Facebook group. I think it was when I was hiking with GOTC group several times and miles started to stack up, that I realized this is something I could accomplish.

I did about 25% of the trail myself. I did like the solitude. I learned you bike/hike, not hike/bike. I did have some wonderful trail angels and shuttlers along the way. 75% of the trail was with people. Many that I met through GOTC. I could not express enough how wonderful the hiking community has been. Hiking with people was some of the best therapy sessions I have had! There is something about spending weekends with people that start out as strangers that become friends. Through this journey I have found some of the most amazing people.

The IAT provides a variety of landscapes. I have found beauty in each segment. Hummocky became part of my normal vocabulary. I found winter to be one of my favorite times of year to hike. Spring has the flowers, autumn has the leaves, winter (if no or little snow) provides beautiful views. Summer is my least favorite time to hike since most hikes are dealing with mosquitos and ticks. And the rain, I feel like I hiked a lot in the rain, finally graduating to a large poncho in the last year.

Thank you to everyone involved with the trail – The Alliance, the Chapters, The Communities, the volunteers. I'm very excited to be amongst the Thousand Milers. Thank you for introducing me to different places in the state that I want to return to and explore.

Very much appreciate all you do!