

## **Finishing the Ice Age Trail: A Journey of Health and Discovery**

In January 2020, my diabetes diagnosis marked a turning point in my life. Determined to slow its progression, I adopted a healthier lifestyle, focusing on diet and exercise. Hiking quickly became a cornerstone of this transformation. After exploring local trails, I discovered the Ice Age Trail, marked by its distinctive yellow blazes, and decided to give it a try.

I began my section hike on May 15, 2021, initially exploring segments near my hometown of Racine. By June, my friend Jeff joined me, and our weekend hikes turned into a shared passion. After reaching our first 100 miles, we started dreaming of completing the entire trail. Though the idea seemed far-fetched, we gradually made it a reality. Hiking year-round in Wisconsin's ever-changing seasons, we embraced every challenge and joy the trail offered.

As we progressed, we decided to hike every single mile of the trail, including both sides of the bifurcation. From frozen winter treks to ferry rides across the Merrimac Segment, we left no stone unturned. Despite a brief hiatus due to a foot injury, we completed the 1,246.1 miles in 87 days of hiking, finishing at the Saint Croix Western Terminus on December 15th.

This journey was more than a physical accomplishment; it was a testament to resilience, friendship, and the kindness of strangers. From the welcoming communities to the dedicated Ice Age Trail volunteers and trail angels who provided over 80 shuttles, the support we received was incredible.

Today, I am proud to be a Thousand Miler and even more proud to share that my diabetes diagnosis was officially reversed. The Ice Age Trail not only transformed my health but also deepened my connection to Wisconsin and its people.

Eric Haney