

In the mid 1980's my husband and I were asked to join friends at their family cottage on North Harper Lake in Taylor County. While we were there, we hiked the East Lake segment of the Ice Age Trail. This was the first time on the Ice Age Trail for me. At the time we had an old Basset Hound named Stanley. He made it a few miles out but, in the end, we carried him back. As it turned out hiking was not to his liking, but it was to mine.

When we got home to Milwaukee, we continued hiking the Ice Age Trail in the Northern and Southern Kettle Moraines. First, we would put our children in a backpack. Then, going for our "walk in the woods" with them became a regular activity whenever we could find the time. My husband and I have backgrounds in plants, so we especially enjoyed walking through the different environments and discovering rare plants. Some of my favorite finds were Butternut trees on the edge of some woods on a connecting route in Sheboygan County and a Dirca in bloom in the Harrison Hills!

We continued taking short hikes with our children through the nineties and early 2000's. In 2005 I bought my first Ice Age Trail Atlas and started to take note of what we had hiked with no thought of ever really hiking the whole trail. To be honest, it was to map out where we found morel mushrooms. In 2014, I bought a Guidebook and then said, "someday I would like to hike the whole trail". Still working full time, it was kind of a pipe dream.

I started to hike by myself more often and to mark off my progress in the Guidebook. I retired in March of 2020 and as a present my husband gave me an electric bike. That was a real game changer for me. Now, when I got the chance to hike, I could just take off and hike farther distances. I had hiked most of the eastern and central segments but realized that if I was going to hike the whole trail, I would need to hike with other people. I got lucky and ran into another lone woman hiking a CR in Marquette County. We ended up hiking together and she invited me to join a hike the next week she had organized on Facebook. Through that hike I met two women who turned into hiking partners. Because of them I met more people to hike with and learned how to connect with people on Facebook.

In the fall of 2023, a group I was hiking with was talking about how many miles they have hiked. Until that point, I hadn't added up my miles. There seemed to be no point to adding the miles. I was just walking, enjoying it and marking off what I had done. I would just say I have these counties done or maybe I'm about two thirds done. Finally, curiosity got the better of me and I was over 800 miles. Maybe I could do this.

It took a long time to hike the trail and that was ok because the trail was always there for me. I am so lucky to have hiked it. Wisconsin is truly an amazing and beautiful place. It gave me so much happiness to be out there hiking.

I could never have done it without the support of my family and friends and from the wonderful volunteers and staff of the Ice Age Trail.

Thank you!

Margaret (Peggy) Zautke