

My friend, Eric Haney in June 2021 Hiked a section of the Ice Age Trail by himself. He, and I have been on trails in Wisconsin multiple times throughout our lives, but never really made the connection or did any research on the IAT. He learned about Trail Angels, and used one for his very first hike. He was hooked. When he got back, he called me and asked if this was something I'd be interested in doing with him. I said I'd give it a try... "Have you ever walked 7 miles at once?" Eric asked. "Never! But I think I can." The next weekend we set out for Eagle Segment, as it was really close to where we live in Racine. I was hot and sunny that day. Lots of open fields. I really wasn't prepared for how difficult it would be. We made mental lists of what we'd need for the next hike. When we finished that day, I was so excited! I was proud I did it, and I was hooked immediately!

We hiked the majority of the weekends the next year, when work and family didn't interfere with our new passion for the IAT.

The trail was incredible. The connecting routes were brutal. But sometimes, the roads were a welcomed break from some of the more difficult sections.

The Trail Angels were so very amazing, and we could not have done this without them. Sometimes we did take 2 cars, once even biking back and forth to get it done. But we leaned heavily on the Trail Angels.

We loved having breakfast at small diners each morning, and local pubs in the evenings. We met some incredible people in each town. The trail was an amazing way to see this beautiful state. And this trail made us experience the kindness of volunteers, of strangers in bars, and diners.

But most of all, what a bond Eric and I have formed. He's my brother now, not just a friend. And we cannot wait to revisit some of our favorite segments together.

From Eagle, we continued to head west, until we were about a 90 minute drive from home... so we went back to Eagle section and started heading East. Then we decided to continue to the Eastern Terminus before we went back to the western part of the state.

I am proud to say that we completed both sides of the Bifurcation. We completed each side back to back, as we knew if we finished the trail, we would most likely not return to a 92 mile road walk.

Finishing the Western part of the trail was a big goal to finish in 2024. Majority of our trail weekends was spent in the cars it seemed. 10-11 round trip to knock out 25-29 miles. Luckily we took turns driving, and loved to tease each other when it was the others turn to drive.

I never expected to be so emotional when we saw the plaque on that stone overlooking the St. Croix River. We both paused and just stared for quite awhile. Happy and sad that it was completed. This trail has become part of my identity, and I am so proud of what we accomplished.

We are forever grateful to every volunteer, staff and trail angel and private land owners of the IAT. Thank you for all you have done and continue to do.

Jeff Mudlin