

Dear Ice Age Trail Alliance,

We hike with a wonderful group of friends. There are 7 of us in the group and we've done hikes around the world together for a number of years. We try to do one big hike a year, along with many training hikes. When Covid restricted travel and gathering together indoors, we had to postpone our trip to hike Kilimanjaro. Gary in our group suggested that we do the IAT together. This way, we could get out in nature and enjoy the challenge of completing the trail. This also gave us flexibility and ease if we would need to cancel plans due to the unpredictability of Covid. On June 6, 2020, we began our journey to complete the entire trail.

We hiked the trail from West to East consecutively, starting at St. Croix Falls and ending in Sturgeon Bay. What I mean by consecutively is that we hiked each section in order – end on end. I've lived in Wisconsin for most of my life and thought our state was beautiful. But, my eyes were opened to so much more than I realized that our state has to offer. From waterfalls to lakes to beaver dams to forests to flowers to wildlife to quaint little towns; we experienced something new and beautiful on every hike. We met and had great conversations with fellow hikers, local townspeople, farmers, etc. along the way. One man even gave us a bag of his homemade beef jerky, which was delicious and welcome on a long day of hiking connecting roads!

We hiked during all four seasons. We even hiked in a snowstorm that lasted all day and gave us several inches of new snow. When we started out one morning, we saw bear paw prints, on the snow covered trail, that went for quite a distance. I found out that I actually really like hiking in the winter!

Three years later, to the day, we crossed the finish line in Sturgeon Bay. It was a time of emotion and celebration. It was exciting and bittersweet all at the same time. It was exciting because we had accomplished our goal of hiking the whole trail and it was bittersweet because it had become a part of regular life to coordinate our calendars to plan our next days of hiking – what segments we'd complete, where we'd stay (Airbnb, tent camp, hotel), meal planning and enjoying each other's company on a very regular basis.

Thank you to all of the IAT volunteers, staff and land owners who have made it possible for people like us to enjoy the beauty of God's creation on over a thousand miles of trails!!!

With Gratitude and Blessings,

Lynn Rawhouser