

https://captimes.com/news/education/new-path-on-ice-age-trail-open-in-cross-plains/article_5a8480ac-6f94-11ee-9585-f7fc75351022.html

New path on Ice Age Trail open in Cross Plains

By Kayla Huynh

Oct 22, 2023

1 of 8



Mike Borkowski, of McFarland; Mark Lindau, of Birchwood; Eric Wild, of Edgerton, and Wendell Holl, of Lodi, work t segment of the Ice Age Trial in Cross Plains.

RUTHIE HAUGE

In Cross Plains, a volunteer team removes rocks, leaves and trees from a wooded area, creating a new path that will soon be part of Wisconsin's 1,200-mile Ice Age National Scenic Trail.

Led by the nonprofit Ice Age Trail Alliance, around 300 volunteers have traveled from across the Upper Midwest to help build the nearly three-mile path on land owned by the National Park Service.

After four days of clearing the area — including eliminating a dangerous roadwalk and constructing three boardwalks and three bridges — the new trail opened to the public Oct. 22. It's located near the National Park Service Office at 8075 Old Sauk Pass Road in Cross Plains, about a half-hour drive from Madison.

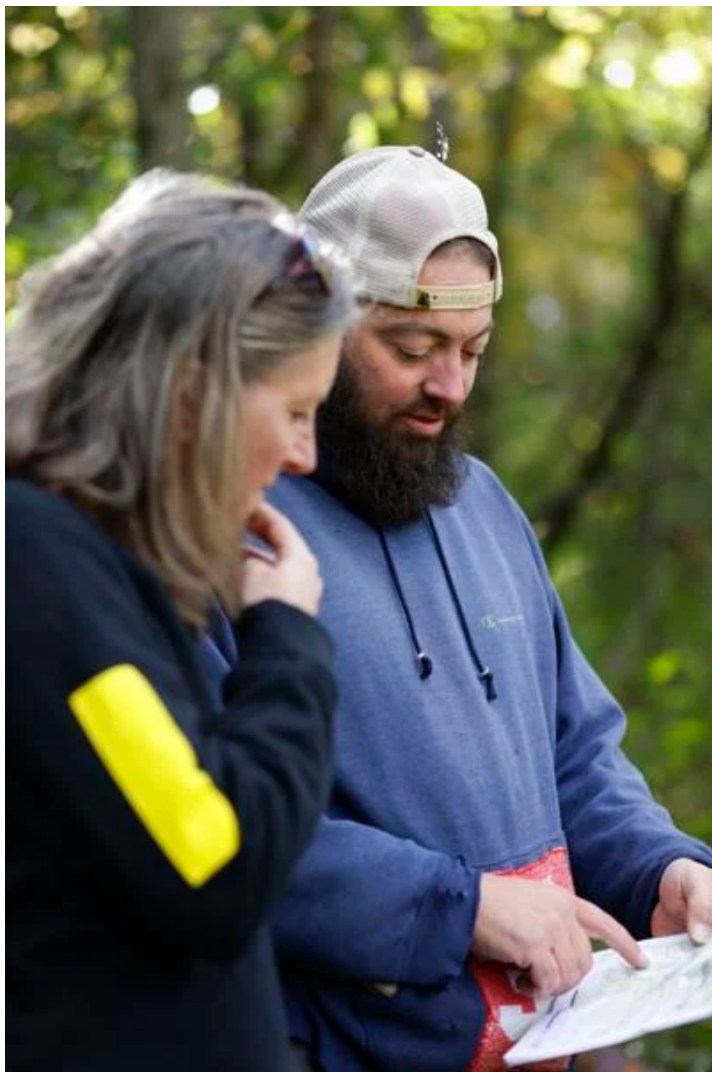


Signs notify hikers of the newest segment of the Ice Age Trail as it is being built in Cross Plains on Friday.

RUTHIE HAUGE

“If you ever hike a trail, I think it’s essential that you see how that trail is created and all the work associated with it,” said Melissa Pierick, marketing director of the Alliance. “With the power of 300 people, some amazing work can be done.”

The volunteers on Friday ranged from an 8 year old who had the school day off to those in their 80s, with some traveling from as far as northern Minnesota and central Iowa. Many of them are driven to help by their love for nature and a desire to contribute to a project with lasting impact, Pierick said.



Dave Caliebe, trail program manager of the Ice Age Trail Alliance (IATA), shows a map to fellow staff member Melissa Pierick, during a multi-day event to build a new segment of the Ice Age Trail in Cross Plains.

RUTHIE HAUGE

“People really love the trail,” she said. “They love being part of something that's going to be around 100 years from now.”

Several participants even stay the night after their volunteer work, showering at the Cross Plains Fire Department and camping outside of a local business in town.

“Everybody's got the same passion for getting up, being in nature and doing constructive things like this,” said Wayne Surguy, of Cedarburg, who helped put together a retaining wall of rocks on the path. “I'm 83 years old. What bugs me is, why didn't I do this 10 years ago?”



Wayne Surguy, of Cedarburg, WI places stones to act as a retaining wall on new segment of the Ice Age Trail in Cross Plains.

RUTHIE HAUGE

“I don't know how long I can do this,” he added, “but I want to do what I can.”

The new path is one of eight projects the Alliance has worked on this year as part of its mission to maintain and create parts of the Ice Age Trail. In total, the organization's volunteers contributed over 100,500 hours of work for the

Alliance during its last fiscal year.

The most recent addition of the trail takes hikers further into the Ice Age National Scientific Reserve in Cross Plains, one of nine reserve units in the state. Designated by Congress for its scenic and scientific value, the area is managed by the Alliance, Dane County, the National Park Service, the Wisconsin Department of National Resources and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



Tom Stendel and his daughters, Hailey, 8, and Maddie, 10, refill their water bottles as they take a break from volunteering to build a new segment of the Ice Age Trail in Cross Plains on Friday.

RUTHIE HAUGE

The project has been in the works for about two decades, when the National Park Service first purchased the land in which the new trail lies. The path, located on both glaciated terrain and unglaciated Driftless Area, guides visitors through a quiet wooded area teeming with tall trees, past a corn field and over dry gorges.

Creating the layout of the trail was no easy feat, said Luke Kloberdanz, the Alliance's executive director. Staff from the Alliance traversed — and often got lost in — the unmarked area during all four seasons of climate.

The team would split up individually, with each person using a ribbon to mark his or her path, keeping track of must-see landmarks or obstacles to steer clear from.

Archaeologists and ecologists later surveyed the chosen path to ensure the trail wasn't disruptive to endangered species or areas with cultural significance, Kloberdanz said.



Gary Krause, of Weston, Craig Johnson, of Madison, and Michael “Moose” Moen, of Middleton, help build 92 feet of boardwalk on a new segment of the Ice Age Trail in Cross Plains.

RUTHIE HAUGE

With its picturesque topography and proximity to Madison, he foresees the Cross Plains addition becoming one of the most visited hikes on the Ice Age Trail. And while the trail has gained popularity in recent years, Pierick said she hopes the Alliance’s efforts will attract even more people to the area and foster a sense of community among those who visit it.

“What makes this trail unique is people’s sense of ownership to it once they hike it,” she said. “I think the popularity of the trail will only continue.”

Kayla Huynh joined the Cap Times in 2021 and covers higher education. She graduated from Northwestern University with a master's degree in journalism after attending UW-Madison.

Support Kayla's work and local journalism by becoming a Cap Times member.

To comment on this story, submit a letter to the editor.

Kayla Huynh

Higher education reporter