



SAWMILL DISTRICT RAILROADS

Couple on steam locomotive, Osceola Historical Society

Once a hub of railroad activity, trains no longer run to Stillwater. The rail lines that once served the city have been converted to trails, and today trains only cross through the Sawmill District of the Byway on their way to other destinations.

Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Freight House, 1883

239-305 S. Water St, Stillwater

Now used as a restaurant, the former Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway freight depot also housed Stillwater's telegraph office. Listed in the National Register of Historic Places, this building and a railroad bridge to the north of town are the only reminders of Stillwater's railroading history. The city's beautiful Union Station, which was designed by Cass Gilbert in 1887, was demolished in 1960. (The faux depot at the north end of town is a modern construction).

Arcola High Bridge

St. Croix River at Arcola

While not visible from the Scenic Byway and best viewed from the water, a guide to railroad-related features of the St. Croix River valley would be remiss not to include the Arcola High Bridge. Constructed in 1909 by the Wisconsin Central Railroad, this steel arch bridge towers nearly 200 feet over the water as it crosses the river gorge. Listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the bridge is considered one of the most impressive steel arch bridges in the world. It is currently part of the Canadian National Railway system. *Please Note: This is an active railroad bridge and trespassing is not only dangerous but will be prosecuted, and if you intend to approach the bridge by water, due to the possible spread of zebra mussels into the upper reaches of the St. Croix River, the National Park Service has restricted most boat traffic originating downstream from passing the check-point at River Mile 28.5 just south of the Arcola High Bridge.*

Before the Arcola High Bridge was constructed in 1909, trains descended a steep grade to the bottom of the bluff where they crossed a bridge set within the bottom of the valley. The piers that supported this earlier bridge can still be seen in the St. Croix River about a mile to the south of the high bridge. A portion of the original 1884 rail grade to that earlier bridge can also be seen on the west side of MN Hwy 95 about 0.25-miles to the south of the Canadian National Railway bridge that passes over MN Hwy 95 where the rail line heads toward the high bridge. Note how the highway was excavated to go under the tracks.

At the north end of the Sawmill District segment of the Scenic Byway, MN Hwy 95 passes over the former Minneapolis St. Paul and Sault Ste. Marie (SOO Line) Railway. This route is now part of the Canadian National Railway, which grants use of its tracks to the excursion trains of the Osceola & St. Croix Valley Railway.

Left photo:
Steamboat
Oliver S.
heading
upriver toward
Arcola High
Bridge in 1915,
photographer
H. E. Jackson,
Minnesota
Historical
Society

Right photo:
Kettle River
High Bridge,
Banning
State Park,
photographer
Bill Neuman



IMMIGRANT TRAIL DISTRICT RAILROADS

In 1880, the Taylors Falls and Lake Superior Railroad branch line was completed between Wyoming and Taylors Falls, Minnesota—the most historically significant rail line built in the Immigrant Trail segment of the Byway. This scenic line skirted through the beautiful Chisago Lakes area and offered dramatic views of the St. Croix River as it hugged the river bluff into Taylors Falls. The route, which was sold to the St. Paul and Duluth Railroad Company in 1882 and which was later subsumed into the Northern Pacific Railway, was a popular daytrip excursion from the Twin Cities. The line stopped operation in 1948, but memories of this locally significant railroad are preserved in Taylors Falls.

Osceola & St. Croix Valley Railway

114 Depot Rd, Osceola, Wisconsin

A Side Trip, deviating from the St. Croix Scenic Byway at MP 45.1, leads to Osceola's historic 1916 Soo Line depot where one can board a vintage train for a scenic trip through the St. Croix River valley. The depot is in the National Register of Historic Places. It is owned by the Osceola Historical Society and operated seasonally by the Minnesota Transportation Museum, the Osceola & St. Croix Valley Railway offers a variety of train rides including pizza, dinner, and brunch trains. The railway provides an ideal way to experience the region's scenery, including the 1887 Cedar Bend Drawbridge over the river. Be sure to check their train ride schedule.

Northern Pacific Railway Grade into Taylors Falls

Interstate Park, Taylors Falls

The most dramatic segment of the Northern Pacific's Taylors Falls & Lake Superior branch line was the last three miles into Taylors Falls. Here the former railroad skirted along the limestone bluff, crossed ravines on dramatic bridges, and traveled through rock cuts on its way to the end of the line. Prior to entering Taylors Falls, train engineers were required to make a running air brake test at Franconia to be sure the brakes were working properly before making the precipitous drop into the valley. Piers that once supported the towering trestles are still visible in the gorges to the west of MN Hwy 95, while Interstate Park's Railroad Trail follows a portion of the old grade south from the depot for about 1.5 miles.

Northern Pacific Railway Depot

312 Government St, Taylors Falls

Constructed in 1902 by the Northern Pacific Railway, this depot was the fourth building to serve as the Taylors Falls depot. When the railroad stopped running in 1948 the building was given to the town and it is now used as a community center. A mural at the depot by local artist Terry Hildebrand memorializes Engine No. 328 and the railroad that formerly served the community. On board July 8, 1948, the last day of train service to Taylors Falls, were 211 round trip passengers picked up between Wyoming and Taylors Falls—all wanting to be part of history. Also on board were Charlie Olson, 83 year old lumber camp cook, Bill Leske of Taylors Falls, and Mrs. C.E. Carlson of Lindstrom, who as children were among the first passengers on the train when it came, bedecked with bunting, into Taylors Falls for the first time in 1880.

Shipping cattle had been big business for the local railroad, and in 1897 the stockyards at the Taylors Falls railroad yard had to be rebuilt and enlarged due to the success of the cattle-shipping business. Many cattle were driven into Taylors Falls "on-hoof," and herds of cattle and other livestock were once a commonplace sight—sometimes several times a week—on Taylors Falls' main street (Bench Street).

NEVERS PLACE DISTRICT RAILROADS

The Northern Pacific Railway's "Skally Line" (originally built by the Lake Superior and Mississippi Railroad to connect St. Paul and Duluth) passes through the community of Rush City on its north-south journey. No other major railroads were constructed within the Nevers Place District of the Byway despite the dreams of the "Arrow Line" planners who, in 1907, had hoped to build an all electric railroad.

The Arrow Line: Twin City & Lake Superior Electric Railway

Sunrise and Wild River State Park

Near Sunrise can be found a reminder of one of Minnesota's more unique railroad ventures. In 1907 the Twin City & Lake Superior Railway was formed for the purpose of constructing an electric railroad between the Twin Cities and the Lake Superior ports of Duluth and West Superior. The line was referred to as the "Arrow Line" because the proposed route was so direct. A portion of the line was graded from just north of Minneapolis to the town of Sunrise, but the railway was never completed. Today, a portion of the rail bed can be seen along Wild River State Park's Sunrise Loop overlooking the point where a bridge was planned to carry the line across the St. Croix River.

The "Blueberry Special": Rush City to Grantsburg

Rush City

A branch line of the St. Paul and Duluth Railroad (originally the Lake Superior and Mississippi Railroad) that ran east from Rush City, Minnesota to Grantsburg, Wisconsin was dubbed the "Blueberry Special" because so many passengers took the train to gather blueberries near Grantsburg. Originally constructed in 1884 by the Grantsburg Rush City and St. Cloud Railroad Company, the tracks were taken up in 1951. A section of the old rail grade can be seen to the north of Blueberry Trail between Co Rd 55 (Government Rd) and Co Hwy 5 (River Rd) about 1.5 miles to the east of Rush City and just off the Military Road and Rushseba Trail Historic Backway.

WHITE PINES DISTRICT RAILROADS



Sandstone Train wreck 1907, Minnesota Historical Society

the newly completed railroad. In 1877, this route (known as the "Skally Line")* became the St. Paul and Duluth Railroad, which was later subsumed into the Northern Pacific Railway in 1900. While the portion of the railroad to the north of Hinckley has been dismantled (now the Willard Munger State Trail), the St. Croix Valley Railroad still operates along 36 miles of the route between North Branch and Hinckley.

Another railroad crosses the Byway at Hinckley and heads north from there to Sandstone. Constructed by the Eastern Railway Company of Minnesota, this line eventually became part of the Great Northern Railway in 1907 and is now part of the Burlington Northern and Santa Fe Railway's system.

During the Hinckley Fire of 1894, both of these rail lines were instrumental in saving lives.

*A number of sources indicate that the name "Skally" most likely comes from a phrase uttered by Swedish train crew members: "Ja skall go till Duluth" meaning "I shall go to Duluth" or "Yes will go to Duluth." Minnesota History magazine credits the phrase to the great influx of Swedish settlers in Rusheba and Nessel townships at the time.

Northern Pacific Railway Depot – Pine City

Near 2nd Ave SE and Railroad St SW, Pine City

Located two blocks east of the Byway, this unique brick depot was constructed around 1940 to replace an earlier depot. It has been converted to a private business.

Northern Pacific Railway Depot (Hinckley Fire Museum)

106 Old Hwy 61, Hinckley

Hinckley's historic Northern Pacific Railway Depot, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places, is now home to a museum dedicated to the 1894 fire that destroyed Hinckley and surrounding communities. Built in 1895, the wood-frame depot was constructed using the same plans that were used to build the original depot lost in the fire. The depot features a dining room and a second-story stationmaster's quarters.

Kettle River High Bridge

Banning State Park

The impressive railroad high bridge over the Kettle River can be seen from within Banning State Park and from within Sandstone's Robinson Park, site of the historic Kettle River Stone Quarry. The trains of the Burlington Northern and Santa Fe Railway still cross this bridge. During the 1894 Hinckley Fire an earlier high bridge at this location burned and collapsed into the river just moments after a rescue train bound for Duluth passed over it.

St. Paul and Duluth Railroad Quarry Spur Track

Banning State Park

In 1892 the St. Paul and Duluth Railroad completed a spur track east to the sandstone quarries located along the Kettle River. The town at the edge of the quarry was named Banning in honor of the president of the railroad, William L. Banning. The quarry and the town both ceased to exist when structural steel began to replace stone as a preferred building material. The tracks serving the quarries were removed in 1918. Portions of the quarry railroad are now part of the rail system within Banning State Park.

Flemming Logging Railroad

In 1895, the Empire Logging Company constructed the Flemming Logging Railroad that began just southeast of Mansfield (now Bruno) Station. The railroad transported logs from Pine County lumber camps to the St. Croix River's Yellow Banks landing, now within St. Croix State Park. In fact, a contemporary reminder of the logging railroad era is the main park road running south from MN Hwy 48, which closely follows the railroad bed for the Flemming Railroad.

Construction of the Flemming Railroad began in 1894 and eight miles of line were built that year. The entire Flemming rail line was under 20 miles in length, and built through the thick pine forest to the river. A new Porter Mogul plus a small saddle-tank locomotive and several logging cars, acquired from the Weyerhaeuser's Mississippi River Logging Company near Chippewa Falls, were on hand when operations began. This equipment was shipped to Grantsburg, Wisconsin over the St. Paul & Duluth Railroad and sleigh hauled from there to the landing at Yellow Banks on the St. Croix River.

The Flemming Logging Railroad was typical of other short-term use rail lines built in the St. Croix valley—with an intended useful life only long enough to cut down the pine from an area and ship the logs to sawmills or to the St. Croix where they could be floated to sawmills farther downstream. Known locally as the "Flemming Road," it functioned until 1899 at which time the rails were pulled up and, along with its three locomotives and rolling stock, shipped north to the Empire Lumber Company's new logging operation in Douglas County, south of Superior, Wisconsin. The rail bed became a wagon road around the turn of the century and today brings visitors into St. Croix State Park. The Flemming Logging Road Historic Backway provides an opportunity to step back in time and drive through the now reforested area that was once served by the Flemming Logging Railroad.