

# BEARSKIN STATE TRAIL

## County K to Minocqua

### Main Attractions

Northern forest, numerous railroad trestle crossings with scenic views of creeks, natural springs, spruce/tamarack bog, and several lakes. Very little development along the trail. The north trailhead is near downtown Minocqua.

### Distance

Minocqua to County K  
18.4 miles, point-2-point (one-way)

### Pedaling Time

12 mph average: 1 hour, 30 minutes  
16 mph average: 1 hour, 10 minutes

### Trail Surface

Compacted granite

### Tire Tread

Studded tires recommended

### Exertion / Intensity

Light to moderate (distance)

### Trail Terrain

Mostly flat, one small hill climb

### Total Elevation Gain

150 feet

### Grade

Average: 2%  
Maximum: 9%

### Assurance Markers

Yes, along with mile markers & distance signs

### Trail Management / Ownership

The trail is part of the Wisconsin DNR's State Park System.

### Trail Access Fee \$

Wisconsin State Trail Pass required, daily or annual (good for all WI State Trails). Self-registration available @ both trailheads.

### Hours / Season

The trail is open for bicyclists and pedestrians throughout the warm-weather season.

### Trail Facilities

Minocqua trailhead: paved parking area, restrooms, drinking water, and shaded picnic area. South Blue Lake Wayside: shaded lake side picnic area, picnic tables, bbq grill, fire-pit, restrooms, and drinking water (hand pump). County K trailhead: restrooms, drinking water (hand-pump), paved parking area, self-registration station, and a small shaded picnic area. Picnic tables are scattered along the trail.

### Pets

Pets are allowed on the trail but must be kept under control on a leash no longer than 8 feet long. You must clean up after your pet.

### Directions

Minocqua trailhead; from Hwy 51 in downtown Minocqua, turn west onto Front Street, go one block, then turn north into the parking area. County K trailhead; from Hwy 51, north of Tomahawk, turn east onto County K and drive 0.8 mile to the trailhead parking area. More trail access parking areas are located at: Rantz, Hazelhurst, Harshaw, & Goodnow.

### Camping

No camping along the trail. Several lakeside campgrounds are in the Northern Highland - American Legion State Forest.

### Nearby Trails and Parks

Tomahawk River & Manitowish River paddle trails. Northern Highland - American Legion State Forest features: BATS bicycle paths, hiking trails, & mountain-bike trails.

## Trail Notes

The Bearskin State Trail - part of the Wisconsin State Park system - is one of the most popular rail-trails in northern Wisconsin.

During the summer the trail is mainly used by bicyclists, but is also open to joggers and walkers. Bicyclists will find a wonderful, shaded ride through a beautiful Wisconsin northwoods forest of pine, spruce, oak, maple, elm, and birch. This scenic trail features: lakes, creeks, natural springs, several spruce/tamarack bogs, and plenty of wildlife. Development along the trail is limited. The grade is mostly flat with one small hill climb. This is a fun, scenic ride suitable for families and folks of all ages.

The trail is named for Bearskin Creek, which flows alongside the southern portion of the trail. The entire eighteen-mile corridor runs along a former rail line that was built in the 1880's to transport pine logs from nearby logging operations south to the large cities. There are several historical sites along the trail with more than a dozen interpretive signs that offer brief descriptions of the history of the railroad and the local area.

The north trailhead rests on the shore of Minocqua Lake near downtown Minocqua. Nicknamed the "Island City", Minocqua is

one of the more beautiful and popular vacation destinations in northern Wisconsin. There are a large number of hotels and resorts in and around Minocqua. Several public campgrounds are located in the nearby Northern Highland - American Legion State Forest. The surrounding area is inundated with hundreds of gorgeous lakes and lake-chains in the scenic Wisconsin northwoods. Besides bicycling, summer recreational opportunities abound, including: camping, hiking, mountain-biking, canoeing, kayaking, boating, fishing, and bird-watching.

Bicyclists riding the Bearskin Trail will find several bike shops in Minocqua that provide rentals, repairs, parts, and retail sales. If you're hungry there are several restaurants within a short distance from the Minocqua trailhead, several with casual lake side dining.

### Trail Surface and Grade

The trail surface is hard-packed, compacted granite that is mostly solid and level. Occasionally you'll ride through short stretches of shallow, loose sand. These sandy stretches usually last for only a few yards. Smooth and easy riding for the most part. The trail has

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long, flat, straight stretches. Hills and steep gradients are absent except at the "Pollnow Bypass", a small hill where the incline and decline are paved.

### Riding The Bearskin

If you were to split the trail in half at the South Blue Lake Wayside, you will find the surrounding landscape north of the wayside to be much drier than it is to the south. To the north, the trail passes by low rolling hills through a mixed hardwood forest. South of the wayside, the trail runs through a much wetter landscape of lowland pine forest, spruce/tamarack bog, fresh water springs, creeks, and numerous wooden trestle crossings. Many consider the lower half of the Bearskin Trail to be the more scenic.

If you're up for it, you should consider riding the full length of the Bearskin from County K to Minocqua. That's 18 miles one-way (36 miles out-&-back), but you'll be rewarded with everything the trail has to offer. If you want to do a shorter ride that includes the scenic trestles of the southern half of the trail, here's a few ideas:

- An out-&-back trip from County K to South Blue Lake Rest Area, 19 miles round trip. This trip encompasses all eleven trestle crossings south of Highway 51, the observation deck, and the beautiful rest area at South Blue Lake.
- An out-&-back trip from County K to the observation deck, 11.2 miles round trip. This trip encompasses what many consider to be the most scenic trestles: Harshaw, Goodnow, Cedar, and Tamarack; and the observation deck.
- An out-&-back trip from Harshaw to South Blue Lake Rest Area, 14 miles round trip. A little shorter than the first suggested trip, this ride encompasses the 'heart' of the Bearskin Trail. It features eight trestle crossings including the following scenic trestles: Harshaw, Goodnow, Cedar, Tamarack, and Scott, the observation deck, and the rest area at South Blue Lake.
- An out-&-back trip from Harshaw to the observation deck, 6.6 miles round trip. An excellent short trip that features six trestle crossings including the: Harshaw, Goodnow, Cedar, and Tamarack Trestles, and you turn around at the observation deck.
- And here's a final option; just get on the trail wherever you want and ride as far as you want...

### County K Trailhead (riding north to Minocqua)

This is a shaded, paved parking area with room for about ten vehicles. A kiosk with information for trail riders, and a self-registration station sits at the north end of the parking lot. A short spur-trail leads from the parking area, past the pit toilets, to the Bearskin Trail. A small shaded picnic area with a water pump, picnic table, and grill sits next to the trail.

The surrounding landscape varies throughout the southern half of the Bearskin Trail. Oftentimes, the trail passes through areas of open marsh or spruce/tamarack bog, and a trestle crosses over springs or a creek. At other times, dry land rises above both sides of the trail and oak, birch, spruce, and tall red and white pines canopy the corridor. Occasionally, the route passes by open fields. There are very few signs of development along the trail from County K to the Highway 51 crossing.

There are small interpretive signs all along the Bearskin Trail that detail some of the history of the rail line and its construction.

### Lakewood Trestle (64 feet)

Spruce and a thin line of alder surround the roughly twenty foot-wide creek as it flows southward under this short and scenic trestle. This is the southernmost trestle of the Bearskin Trail. From here, the trail will cross over the same creek (Bearskin Creek) - again and again - all the way to the Observation Deck.

### Bearskin Rapids Trestle (45 feet)

Another short trestle that crosses over Bearskin Creek. The creek is narrow and riffley and surrounded by alder, birch, and tall white pines.

### Brandy Trestle (80 feet)

High banks and dense brush surround the narrow Bearskin Creek as it passes under this short trestle. Tall red and white pines often surround the trail.

### Harshaw (parking area)

A long, gravel trail access parking area sits next to the trail on Church Road in front of a long wooden fence. There are no facilities here.

### Harshaw Trestle (746 feet)

This is the longest and possibly the most scenic trestle of the Bearskin Trail. The long wooden bridge curves past Bearskin Creek over an open spruce/tamarack bog, all surrounded by pine forest. Spruce and tamarack often grow in small clusters right next to the trestle. You'll have plenty of scenic views of the surrounding bog and of the wide creek. Mitchell Springs lies to the east. The spring outlet flows beneath the trestle and feeds into Bearskin Creek, which flows along the west side of the trail.

As you ride north, the trail runs through a narrow valley. Spruce, tamarack, white pine, and red pine often canopy small pools of standing water alongside the trail. The damp forest floor is often covered with sphagnum moss and dense patches of ferns. The surface of the wetlands is almost level with the trail. Scenes like this are common all the way to the Cedar Trestle.

### Tamarack Trestle (238 feet)

The Bearskin Creek flows wide and slow as it passes under the 238 foot-long Tamarack Trestle, this time from east to west. Cedar, mixed pine, spruce, alder and oak surround the trail and creek. This crossing is another beautiful scenic highlight of the Bearskin Trail.

### Cedar Trestle (156 feet)

The Bearskin Creek runs wide and slow as it passes from west to east under the long Cedar Trestle. This is a very scenic spot as the creek and trestle are surrounded by alder, cedar, and spruce.

### Horsehead Trestle (36 feet)

This short trestle passes over Horsehead Creek, which feeds into Bearskin Creek off to the west. As you ride north, spruce lines the trail giving the air a strong scent of pine. About a half-mile north of Horsehead, the trail detours from the original grade to bypass the Pinewood Country Club Golf Course. The bypass lasts for about a third of a mile where the trail once again continues on the original grade.

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### **Pinewood Trestle (63 feet)**

This short trestle sits about fifty feet south of the Lakewood Road intersection at Goodnow.

### **Goodnow (parking area)**

A small parking area, mostly used by trout fisherman, is located here next to the trail. There are no facilities. A small interpretive sign briefly describes the town that once existed here:

*"Goodnow - a town that disappeared".*

### **Goodnow Trestle (292 feet)**

This is one of the longer trestles of the trail. The Bearskin Creek is about thirty feet wide as it flows under the trail from west to east, then bends south. You'll have views of open water surrounded by dense brush, and tall pines. Riding north, the creek often runs within feet of the trail until Bearskin Springs.

### **Bearskin Springs**

The Bearskin Creek passes under the trail through a buried culvert. A sign marks this area as the headwaters of Bearskin Creek. There are a number of springs in the area.

### **Observation Deck**

Wooden stairs lead from the trail, down to an observation deck that stands over open water with views of open wetlands to the west. Bring binoculars to spot birds and other wildlife. Bearskin Creek flows through the wetlands, crosses under the trail and then continues south, along the east side of the trail. This is another scenic spot and a great place to stop and stretch your legs.

### **Big Bearskin Trestle (48 feet)**

The trail is once again surrounded by marsh at Big Bearskin Trestle. The short bridge passes over Big Bearskin Creek - which is actually quite narrow - with pleasant views of open marsh to the west. The grade is only a foot or so above the surface-level of the surrounding wetlands north and south of the trestle.

### **Hill, Pollnow Bypass**

The trail makes a short detour from the rail grade and climbs a small hill, quickly descending down the other side. The trail is paved on the steepest gradients to prevent erosion. Though traffic along the trail is usually light through here, please ride in a single file if you're in a group, and stay in your lane to avoid possible collisions with oncoming riders. This is the steepest gradient/climb of the Bearskin Trail.

As you ride north for the next mile and a half, the surrounding landscape is noticeably drier as the trail passes through hardwood forest and past small rolling hills.

### **Old Railroad Line Shed**

A small wooden shack sits next to the trail. The shed was built in 1888 and was used to store equipment to make repairs to the rail line. This shed was used by a couple of brothers who lived in Minocqua. Check out the interpretive sign to learn more.

### **Scott Trestle (680 feet)**

The second longest of the Bearskin Trail, Scott Trestle crosses an open area of spruce/tamarack bog surrounded by white pine, cedar, and oak trees. Scott Springs lie to the east. The spring's

outlet flows under the trestle, in a westerly direction where it eventually connects with Rocky Run. This is a very scenic wooden bridge.

### **South Blue Lake Wayside**

(This is not a road wayside, but a rest area for trail users.) The wayside is a beautiful rest area for cyclists on the shores of South Blue Lake. This is roughly the mid-point of the Bearskin Trail and is an excellent place to stop and take a break. A picnic table with a fire pit rests under the pines along the shore of the lake. The waters of the lake are very clear and are fun for wading or swimming. A second picnic table with a bbq grill sits next to the trail. There are also restrooms, and drinking water (hand-pump).

### **Rocky Run Springs**

You'll have scenic views of open marsh and spruce/tamarack swamp as you approach Rocky Run Springs. A beautiful carpet of sphagnum moss often covers the forest floor beneath the spruce and tamarack right next to the trail. This is a very scenic stretch. At Rocky Run Springs, the trail passes over a small culvert. The springs lie east of the trail, and are a long and narrow thirty-acre body of water that curves to the south. The springs discharge into Rocky Run Creek, which begins at the culvert and flows off to the west then south for about seven miles before emptying into the Tomahawk River.

As you ride north, a slight but noticeable up-grade exists for the next mile and a half - all the way to the Highway 51 crossing. The surrounding landscape becomes noticeably drier. Forest and small rolling hills surround the trail.

### **Highway 51 bridge**

The trail crosses over Highway 51. The Minocqua trailhead is about 6.7 miles north of the Highway 51 crossing.

There are several road crossings over the next five miles. Watch for automobile traffic when you cross a road.

### **Hazelhurst (parking area)**

A small parking area for trail users is located next to the trail at the corner of Leigh Rd and Oneida St, close to Hazelhurst. There are no facilities here except for a self-registration station. A gas station/convenience store is a short distance up Oneida St, on Highway 51.

### **Rantz (parking area)**

A small parking area sits next to the trail on Blue Lake Road. There are no facilities here. A small community named Rantz Junction once existed nearby after a spur line was built in 1901. The spur was abandoned in 1931, and so was the town.

As you travel north, the trail is closely surrounded by forest that provides almost constant shade. Oak, white pine, maple, birch, and elm are most common.

### **Baker Lake**

A narrow footpath leads from the side of the Bearskin Trail to a scenic point that gives unobstructed views of Baker Lake, which is a beautiful northwoods lake ringed with spruce, marsh, and tall pines. You are likely to see and hear loons. It's about a 3 minute walk from the Bearskin Trail to the point .

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North of Baker Lake, the trail passes an area of open marsh. Homes and businesses appear sporadically. About a third of a mile south of the Kawaga Trestle, a picnic table sits on a small rise with scenic views to the west. An interpretive sign next to the trail describes a tragic incident where three teams of horses, six yoke of oxen, and thirteen railroad cars sank into the marsh when the railroad corridor was being constructed. The oxen, horses, and railcars are still here today, about 90 feet down.

### **Kawaga Trestle (98 feet)**

The trestle crosses a narrow channel that provides boat access to the scenic Kawaguesaga Lake from Minocqua Lake. A lot of boat traffic passes under the trestle. Foot traffic is common along the northern part of the trail, especially close to Minocqua, so please be mindful.

### **Minocqua Trestle (375 feet)**

This is the 3rd longest trestle on the Bearskin Trail. The trestle crosses over a channel of Minocqua Lake and provides scenic lake views to the north and south as you cross.

### **Minocqua Trailhead**

The north trailhead is located near downtown Minocqua next to the post office. The trailhead is part of a small park with several benches overlooking Minocqua Lake. The park offers a wide shaded lawn, picnic tables, restrooms with running water, a drinking fountain, and a large paved parking area. There are several interpretive signs and an exhibit that explain the rich modern history of the area, from the early explorers to today's vacation town. The trailhead is located on the site of an old train depot that was originally built in 1888. The original depot was torn down and replaced with a new depot in 1912, about a hundred yards to the north. The "new depot" still stands today and is the now the "Train Station Shops".

### *GPS - NAD83 / WGS84*

Minocqua Trailhead	45.87145,-89.71330
Baker Lake Footpath	45.85213,-89.73149
Rantz Trail Access	45.83208,-89.72962
Hazelhurst Trail Access	45.80512,-89.72920
Highway 51	45.78390,-89.71225
South Blue Lake Wayside Hill, Pollnow Bypass	45.75704,-89.69853
Observation Deck	45.72830,-89.69403
Goodnow Trestle	45.70755,-89.67894
Goodnow Trail Access	45.69941,-89.67514
Cedar Trestle	45.69669,-89.67253
Tamarack Trestle	45.68116,-89.65661
Tamarack Trestle	45.67047,-89.65460
Harshaw Trestle	45.66745,-89.65442
Harshaw Trail Access	45.66591,-89.65495
County K Trailhead	45.64689,-89.68765

*For best results, set waypoint arrival radius to a minimum of 50 feet*

### *Driving Directions (Google Maps)*



**Minocqua Trailhead**



**Rantz Trail Access**



**Hazelhurst Trail Access**



**Goodnow Trail Access**



**Harshaw Trail Access**



**County K Trailhead**