

COPPER FALLS STATE PARK

Doughboy's Trail

Main Attractions

Copper Falls, Brownstone Falls, Bad River Gorge, The Cascades, Devil's Gate, Observation Tower.

Distance

1.7 miles, loop trail. Additional 0.2 miles to the Observation Tower along the CCC 692 Trail.

Approximate Time

40 minutes to 2 hours.

Trail Surface

Wide & level dirt paths, 3 segments of steep stairs, & several footbridges. A half-mile segment is graded for disabled access with several views of the gorge and waterfalls.

Rocks & Roots

Occasional, often occurring on inclines.

Exertion / Intensity

Easy to moderate.

Trail Terrain

Several easy, level segments & several segments of moderate to steep inclines.

Total Elevation Gain

< 500 feet

Assurance Markers

Yes, trails are well-marked with reassurance markers & map signs.

Camping

Copper Falls State Park has 2 campgrounds within easy walking distance of the Doughboy's Trail. There are 56 family campsites & a backpack campsite.

Facilities

Staffed contact station / park HQ, concessions (summer), picnic areas with tables & grills, drinking water, restrooms, covered shelter, child play areas, pet area, campground.

Trail Management / Ownership

Copper Falls State Park, Wisconsin DNR
Tel: 715.274.5123

Hours / Season

Open year-round from 6am to 11pm. Some areas of the park are closed for winter.

Trail Access Fee \$

Wisconsin State Park Vehicle Admission Sticker is required.

Pets

Pets are not allowed on the Doughboys Trail but are allowed on several other trails in the State Park. There is a pet area near the main day-use area parking lot.

Directions

The park entrance is on Hwy 169, 1.7 miles north of the Hwy's 169 & 13 intersection in Mellen.

Nearby Trails and Parks

There are 5 summer trails in Copper Falls State Park including the Doughboy's Trail. The Doughboy's Trail, CCC 692 Trail, Red Granite Falls Trail, & a portion of the North Country National Scenic Trail are for hiking only. The Takesson & Vahtera provide fun mountain biking through hilly & scenic terrain.

The Great Divide Ranger District of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest is located nearby & provides numerous camping & recreational opportunities.

Trail Notes

The 3,000 acre Copper Falls State Park is located in northern Wisconsin near the town of Mellen, a short drive south from Ashland. The highlight of the park is a dramatic, narrow, two mile-long rocky river gorge where the Bad River and its tributary, the Tyler Forks River converge and form several scenic waterfalls. Two of the waterfalls are named: Copper Falls (29 feet), and Brownstone Falls (30 feet), along with a named rapids called the Cascades. Other scenic features include a large natural, conglomerate rock formation on the Bad River appropriately named "Devils Gate", and an observation tower with excellent views to the north of forest covered hills, and Lake Superior in the distance.

Much of the development you see in the park today: wooden footbridges, log fences, and log buildings were originally constructed in the early 1920's by returning veterans from World War 1, with more work being done in the late 1930's by the Civilian Conservation Corps. Today, the log buildings, bridges, and fencing add a great deal of rustic character to the park.

Overall, Copper Falls State Park rates as one of the most beautiful parks in Wisconsin, and is very popular among families and couples.

Disabled Access

The entire eastern segment of the trail - about a half-mile in length - from the twin observation decks above Brownstone Falls to the wooden footbridge overlooking Copper Falls (east side of the river) is graded for disabled access (wheelchairs). There is a small, separate parking area that is designated specifically for disabled access only.

Concession Building

The concession building sits between the main day-use area parking lot and the Doughboy's Trail trailhead and offers hot food, sandwiches, soda, and water along with souvenirs and post cards. Inside the building you will also find a very cool world map where hundreds of previous visitors have placed pins to mark where they're from. There are also restrooms with running water and an indoor children's play area. The concession building is open every day during the summer.

Picnic Area

A large, beautiful picnic area surrounds the parking lot and features: picnic tables, bbq grills, water, a covered pavilion, a well-kept grassy lawn, and plenty of shade beneath tall white pines and huge oak trees. A designated pet area is located off the

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southwest end of the parking lot.

The Doughboy's Trail

The Doughboy's Trail is a well-maintained, self-guided nature trail in a 1.7 mile loop around the rugged Bad River Gorge and a small segment of the Tyler Forks River. There are numerous observation decks and scenic overlooks along the trail that provide gorgeous, dramatic views of the waterfalls and the gorge. Signs along the trail detail the unique geologic history of the river, waterfalls, rock formations, and surrounding area.

Much of the trail runs along the top of the Bad River Gorge and is surrounded by pine forest with limited views into the gorge. However, the observation decks and scenic overlooks easily counteract the limited visibility from the trail. The pine scented air and the steady roar of the falls which may be heard from almost any point along the trail add to the experience.

The trail is mostly flat and level except where it nears Devil's Gate, where several flights of stone steps built into the hillsides on both sides of the river lead down from the top of the gorge to the river shorelines. It is recommended that you walk the trail loop in a clockwise direction. A relaxed stroll around the trail with stops at most of the scenic points takes about two hours.

Trailhead

The trailhead is a few steps east of the concessions building. The trail begins over a log footbridge that crosses the Bad River above the gorge. Most of the first segment of the trail is between 5 and 15 feet wide, hard packed dirt and sand, and usually covered in pine needles. This is a beautiful trail that meanders through a forest of hemlocks, balsam fir, and towering white pines. Maple, birch, ash, and oak become more common wherever the trail wanders away from the top of the Bad River Gorge.

Observation Tower

Soon after crossing the log footbridge, you'll come upon wooden stairs leading uphill to your left. This is the beginning of the CCC 692 Trail that leads up to the observation tower. There are over 140 steps, plus a moderate incline to hike before you get to the base of the tower. The observation deck at the top of the wooden tower once gave unobstructed views of the entire area. However nearby trees in the surrounding forest have grown to obstruct much of the views to the west, south, and east so that now you'll only have clear views to the north, where you can see Lake Superior in the far distance.

Scenic Overlook, Bad River Gorge and Copper Falls

At this point, the Bad River flows through a deep, rugged, narrow gorge of ancient black lava where steep rock walls rise between 60 and 100 feet above the river. Copper Falls is directly below you, occurring where the river splits around a massive chunk of rock and plunges 29 feet in a short series of scenic drops. From this vantage point you'll have limited views of Copper Falls, but you will be able to see the upper gorge and a smaller waterfall above Copper Falls. A better vantage point for Copper Falls is across the river on a log bridge near the end of the Doughboy's Trail.

Scenic Overlook, Brownstone Falls

This overlook offers an excellent frontal view of Brownstone Falls, a beautiful 30-foot waterfall surrounded by red basalt rock that

tumbles from the Tyler Forks River into the Bad River Gorge. The confluence of the two rivers lies directly below the falls. Of the two main waterfalls in the State Park, Brownstone and the immediate surrounding section of the gorge are the most dramatic and scenic.

Footbridge, Devil's Gate

A wooden footbridge crosses the Bad River below the Gorge and offers wonderful views upstream of Devil's Gate, a place where two massive conglomerate outcroppings extend into the river directly across from each other, creating the appearance of a naturally formed 'gate'. The river narrows where it passes between the two formations.

When river levels are lower, many people walk down from the south end of the footbridge to the rocky shelf along the river's edge where it's easy to kick off your shoes and wade in the cool copper-colored waters. Only do this when the river is low and slow!

Observation Decks, Cascades and the Bad River Gorge

A pair of wooden observation decks offers excellent, unobstructed views of both: the Cascades on Tyler's Fork above Brownstone Falls, and of the Bad River Gorge to the south. One of the decks is perched directly above Brownstone Falls and gives an awesome perspective of the drop into the gorge.

The Cascades

The Cascades are a series of scenic rapids on the Tyler Forks River just above Brownstone Falls. Most of this segment of the trail around the Cascades runs close to the water's edge along both sides of the river. There are several places where you can walk down to the rocky river banks. Cedars and hemlocks surround the river creating a wonderful setting.

Driving Directions (Google Maps)



Copper Falls SP Entrance