

North Country National Scenic Trail

Chequamegon Chapter Segments

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From east to west, the Chequamegon Chapter area of responsibility includes 7 miles of trail in Copper Falls State Park; a short segment along the Bad River and some road walk through the City of Mellen, Wisconsin; a 2.6 mile westbound road walk along Forest Road 390/ Kornstead from Mellen; and then 61.6 continuous miles of certified trail west to Bayfield County Highway A, 5 miles south of Iron River, Wisconsin. The first 60.4 miles of trail from Forest Road 390/ Kornstead Road are in the vast Chequamegon- Nicolet National Forest, where camping is allowed without a permit so long as the camp is more than 100 feet from the trail or water's edge.

Northern Wisconsin has a healthy population of black bears. Because of fall hunting, 99%+ of the bears are extremely shy of humans, and will flee upon the first sight, smell, or hearing of them. Actual observations of black bears on the North Country Trail are rare. But for those who are camping, precautions should be taken to keep all your food in a bag hung in a tree while away from camp or at night. The food bag should be hung 10 feet from the ground and four feet from the tree and any branches.

Wolves live in the Chequamegon National Forest. Never in the history of the United States has there been a documented case of a healthy wolf killing a human being. You may hear them, but seeing one in the wild may be a once in a lifetime occurrence.

Ticks can crawl on your body and attach from spring through fall, but are in especially huge numbers in May and June. The mostly likely areas to encounter ticks are in tall grass and vegetation and most ticks will climb on your body from your ankle to your knee. Spraying your clothes with permethrin as directed on the label until you get a color change will kill 99% of the ticks before they can attach to your bare skin. DEET on bare skin repels ticks also. Since it usually takes more than 24 hours for a tick to infect its host with Lyme disease, it is imperative that hikers check themselves thoroughly at least once a day before going to bed.

Mosquitoes hatch in huge numbers every year between May 12th to the 16th in this part of Wisconsin, and will make life miserable for those outdoors until their numbers diminish, usually around early July. Using DEET on your skin, and wearing light colored, loose fitting long sleeved shirts and long pants will greatly add to the enjoyment of your outdoor experience at the height of mosquito season.

Many of the higher elevations along the trail near Mellen and Drummond have cell phone reception of one or two bars. The rest of the trail, and most of the lower elevations are strictly no coverage. While a cell phone can be a lifesaver in an emergency, having one should be your plan B and should not encourage trail users to take risks or push themselves beyond their normal capabilities.

While the trail remains open to hikers during the hunting seasons starting in September, it is unwise to hike the trail during hunting season without a blaze orange hat and outerwear. The woods along the North Country Trail get filled with large numbers of rifle carrying deer hunters starting at dawn on the first Saturday before Thanksgiving and continuing to the end of daylight on the Sunday after Thanksgiving. The large number of hunters in the woods during this time makes it prudent to reschedule any hikes away from this week as most do, or to wear a

substantial amount of blaze orange clothing.

On line maps can be viewed on the Chapter's Website at: <http://www.northcountrytrail.org/che/> and by clicking on "Map and WIKI Downloads" on the top bar. To order a map of the Chequamegon Chapter segment of the trail, or to report trail maintenance needs, please email: che@northcountrytrail.org. Topographic Water Resistant Maps are also available to order (for a fee) on the North Country Trail Associations website at www.northcountrytrail.org

Please note that you will not find the familiar "blue blazes" in the two Wilderness Sections of our North Country Trail (not allowed by the Chequamegon National Forest USFS). Instead you will find rustic signs on cedar posts with pointing arrows.

You can also find USFS information and regulations for Chequamegon National Forest segments on the Chapter's Website at: <http://www.northcountrytrail.org/che/> and by clicking on "Chequamegon National Forest NCT Information/Rules" on the top bar. This includes special wilderness regulations that you will need to follow.

Penokee Mountain Ski Trail Segment 3.1 miles

Forest Road 390 Trailhead (parking for 3 or 4 cars) on Forest Road 390/Kornstead Road 2.6 miles west of Mellen, Wisconsin to Forest Road 604 Trailhead (parking for 4 cars) on Forest Road 604/Quarry Road 1 mile north of County Road GG.

The east half of this segment is a rather flat section twisting through mixed hardwood and softwood forest with a several boggy areas, while the west half utilizes the rather flat Penokee Mountain Cross Country Ski Trails.

Starting out southbound from Forest Road 390, the trail goes through some boggy areas for 1.3 miles before crossing the North Fork of Rock Run Creek. From this wide bridge over flowing water, the trail continues .2 miles west to the next trail head, Penokee Mountain Ski Trailhead (parking for 25 cars) which is located on County Road GG 3.6 miles southeast of center of Mellen, Wisconsin. The town of Mellen has several restaurants, a small grocery store, Laundromat, post office and other businesses typical for a town of 845 people.

From the Penokee Mountain Ski Trailhead the next 1.5 mile westbound section utilizes part of the wide 16.9 kilometer of loop ski trails of the Penokee Mountain Ski Trail system for cross country skiers in the wintertime. From the parking lot, go 90 yards north down the trail to the first intersection, then left turn west bound along the 8.6 kilometer/ 5.1 kilometer ski trail loops until the right turn northbound on the 5.1 kilometer loop trail, then left turn westbound following the 5.1 kilometer ski loop to the intersection of the 8.6 kilometer loop, then continue westbound on the 8.6 kilometer ski trail to Forest Road 604/Quarry Road. Several NCT arrow signs and several ski trail maps will assist the hikers through the four intersections of the ski trail system.

Hanson Field Segment 4.2 miles

Forest Road 604 Trailhead (parking for 4 cars) on Forest Road 604/Quarry Road 1 mile north of County Road GG to the Forest Road 188 Trailhead on Forest Road 188/Hanson Road (parking for 5 vehicles) near John Frank Lake.

This segment is dominated by the forested gentle Trout Brook valley in the east and the large Hanson Field with abandoned farm homestead north of Forest Road 188. A trail re-route completed in 2009 has moved the NCT closer to Hanson Road and away from the field and has eliminated the hard to follow original trail in the field and most of the very rough ground caused by sphagnum hummocks.

From the Forest Road 604 Trailhead, the trail heads west .4 miles to the newly built Penokee Adirondack Shelter with a fire ring and grill in a wooded setting of mature hardwoods and scattered evergreens. The nearest water is west .25 miles at a small tributary to Trout Brook, and 1 mile west of the shelter which is Trout Brook. These two brooks have just a trickle of water flow in normal years but can be dry during the summer drought years.

Continuing westbound from Trout Brook, a third of a mile distance is a small overlook with a limited view to the south. In another .4 miles you cross Forest Road 188/York Road, and continue through the woods until you come to Hanson Field, about 500 feet of sometimes wet, sphagnum hummocks with very rough ground. At the south west end of the field is the foundation and remains of an old farm house adjacent to the current location of the trail. Another 130 yards west bound from the foundation of the farm house, the trail crosses Forest Road 188/Hanson Road again, and quickly enter a mature pine plantation, followed by the mixed forest dominated by mature hardwoods. After a total distance of 4.2 miles from Forest Road 604 trailhead, you come to the Forest Road 188 Trailhead just northwest of John Frank Lake.

Brunsweler River Segment 3.8 miles

Forest Road 188 Trailhead on Forest Road 188/Hanson Road (parking for 5 vehicles) near John Frank Lake to Lake Three Trailhead (parking for 2 vehicles) on Forest Road 187/Mineral Lake Road.

This trail segment goes through mixed matured forests through the Brunsweler River Valley in the middle, and passes Lake Three with an adjoining National Forest Campground on the western edge.

From the John Frank Lake Trailhead, the trail goes westbound through mixed hardwood forest slightly downhill, losing about a hundred feet of elevation until turning left to follow an old abandoned railroad bed for 300 yards before turning right to cross the scenic Brunsweler River Bridge, 2 miles west of the trailhead. In this area in the late 1880's, a native American Indian known as Old Ice Feathers and later called Chief Namekagon used to collect native rocks of pure silver to trade for goods in Ashland Wisconsin. Many men tried to follow Chief Namekagon to where he obtained the silver without success. He died under suspicious circumstances, taking his secret location of silver to the grave. The mineral rich area of the Brunsweler River was thought by many to be the most probable location of this native load of silver.

Continuing west from the Brunsweler River you will find another trail re-route completed in 2009 that changed the trail from a steep climbing grade to a gradual benched trail. From this point the trail then crosses flatter ground over six almost equally spaced foot bridges that span sometimes dry or damp or shallow stagnant water. After 1.8 miles from the Brunsweler River, the trail turns right north and after 100 yards goes along the banks of Lake Three, then west into the former Lake Three Campgrounds (currently closed by the USFS).

Leaving the former campground, the trail goes another 150 yards to the Mineral Lake Road NCT parking.

Marengo River Valley Segment 9.8 miles

Lake Three Trailhead (parking for 2 vehicles) on Forest Road 187/Mineral Lake Road to Forest Road 202 Trailhead (parking for 5 vehicles)

This segment is the Chequamegon section's most popular and scenic, dominated by many creek crossings in the east, a spur trail to the Swedish Settlement, and then gorgeous vistas on both sides of the wooded Marengo River Valley in the west.

From the Lake Three Trailhead, the trail goes along the south side of Seitz Lake, offering a picturesque view of a classic Wisconsin farm on the north side of the lake, and then crosses the Spring Brook and two more boggy areas north of Beaver Lake. Three miles from the trailhead, a signed spur takes you to Beaver Lake which is populated by trout and channel catfish and has a small fee National Forest Campground.

From Beaver Lake intersection, go one mile to Whiskey Creek which is normally dry, and another mile to Coffee Creek which may have a trickle of water. After 6.1 miles from the Lake Three Trailhead the trail crosses Forest Road 383 that offers no engineered off road parking.

Continuing west, the trail comes to the highest trail altitude in the Chequamegon segment at the overlooks of the Marengo River valley before descending 344 feet into the valley floor. Once in the valley floor, a sign marks the spur trail to the Swedish Settlement, 200 yards south of the trail. This location was once farmed by a rather large Swedish family in the late 1800's which was abandoned at the start of the Great Depression. What remains are the foundations of the house, barn and other buildings, as well as an intact Spring House covering a spring that flows all year. Several remarkable juice apple trees still bear fruit in the fields below the house foundation despite a lack of care for over 70 years and winters with temperatures down to 45 below zero Fahrenheit. As you visit this historic site, remember that the removal of artifacts is illegal.

Two hundred yards southeast of the Marengo River Bridge is 50 yard spur trail to the small Marengo River Adirondacks Shelter on the bank of the river. The shelter can sleep 4 people and has a fire ring in front. A few small brook trout can be caught in the deeper pools of the Marengo River after the start of trout fishing on the first Saturday in May each year. A trout stamp is required, and the popular spots along this narrow river are quickly fished out.

Climbing up out of the Marengo River Valley, the trail comes to the 50 yard spur trail to the south to the most scenic section of the Chequamegon Segment, the Juniper Rock overlook. The overlook has a grand unobstructed view in three directions over the Marengo River valley. From the spur trail intersection it is another .6 miles west to the Forest Road 202 Trailhead parking.

Long Mile Lookout Segment 6 miles

Forest Road 202 Trailhead (parking for 5 vehicles) to County Highway D Trailhead (parking for 5 vehicles) 3.9 miles south of Grand View, Wisconsin

This segment is dominated by mature mixed hardwood forest and well drained kettle moraine hills of various heights up to 260 feet of elevation gain along the trail.

From the Forest Road 202 Trailhead, the trail goes east for 1.6 miles before crossing a creek

shown on the topographical maps as Twenty Mile Creek and shown on the trail maps as Pearl Creek. This creek has water in most years. From the creek it is another 150 yards to Forest Road 378/Wisco Road which has no engineered off road parking. Near the middle of this segment, 3.5 miles from the Forest Road 202 parking, is the decommissioned Long Mile Lookout fire tower with the bottom rungs of the ladder removed. Little view can be had through the trees to the south.

Westbound from the fire tower, the trail continues through pine and hardwood forests, crossing Forest Road 201/Club Lake Road and then another .5 miles skirting the north end of East Davis Lake until the County Highway D Trailhead.

Porcupine Wilderness Segment 4.3 miles

County Highway D Trailhead (parking for 5 vehicles) to Porcupine Lake Trailhead (parking for 2 vehicles) on Forest Road 213/Porcupine Lake Road.

This segment is dominated by a relatively flat forested wilderness walk with no blue blazes, going by West Davis Lake, a large beaver pond, and Porcupine Lake.

Westbound from County Highway D, the trail enters the Porcupine Wilderness where painted blue blazes are prohibited. At first the trail skirts very shallow West Davis Lake. This lake is surrounded by bog and contains no fish due to winter kills caused by the thick ice. The trail is flat, and skirts a rather large beaver pond. Between the beaver pond and Porcupine Lake, the trail is sometimes hard to distinguish, so hikers have to pay attention and look carefully for the trail tread way. Near the western edge of this segment is Porcupine Lake, an excellent pan fish lake teaming with easy to catch sunfish and bluegills. The Porcupine Wilderness is home to the Porcupine Lake wolf pack estimated in 2009 to consist of 6 wolves. The wolves are rarely seen but can be heard howling on some nights. Flowing north out of this lake is Eighteen Mile Creek.

The lower sections are sometimes stocked with Brook and Brown Trout which can be caught on worms in the deeper holes. Along the east edge of Porcupine Lake are two idyllic campsites overlooking the lake 80 yards and 200 yards south of the trail. North of the trail and the lake is a rather large hill that offers a good campsite at the top with a high view of the lake through the trees. Westbound from the lake, the trail crosses a well built rustic bridge, then immediately goes to an intersection. The North Country Trail continues to the left westbound, and a short but wide quarter mile spur trail turns right northbound goes to the Porcupine Lake Trailhead parking.

Lake Owen Segment 7.3 miles

Porcupine Lake Trailhead (parking for 2 vehicle) on Forest Road 213/Porcupine Lake Road to Lake Owen Picnic Grounds Trailhead (fee parking for up to 11 vehicles)

This segment is dominated by views along the wooded shores of clear spring fed Eighteen Mile Springs Pond and Lake Owen, the largest lake in the Chequamegon section of trail.

From the Porcupine Lake Trailhead, go south .25 miles on the spur to the North Country Trail just west of the Porcupine Creek rustic bridge, then follow the trail generally south and west climbing up to a high ridge surrounding Eighteen Mile Springs Pond, 1.3 miles from the trailhead. The pond has always held native brook trout and was dredged out by the Wisconsin

Department of Natural Resources in the 1970's to improve the habitat for trout. One or two brook trout can sometimes be caught on worms in the spring months after the opener on the first Saturday in May each year.

From Eighteen Mile Springs Pond, the trail goes northwest through an area of trees blown down by a severe storm in 2005. Many downed trees are cut up alongside the trail. At a distance of 3.1 miles, a half mile spur trail heads off west to the Two Lakes Campground, which has hundreds of fee campsites, a dumpster, and water pumps.

Following the North Country Trail 400 yards north from the intersection you cross Forest Road 213/Porcupine Lake Road leaving the wilderness area. The trail continues through generally flat, well drained mixed hardwoods for 1.5 miles before crossing Forest Road 213/ North Lake Owen Drive. Within a hundred yards the trail passes to the west of a large unnamed pond, then crosses Horseshoe Road before descending to the shores of Lake Owen and a bench offering a close view of the lake. From the bench the trail goes through one of the three remaining areas of virgin forests in the entire state of Wisconsin. From the logging era beginning in the 1880's to the great depression, the entire state of Wisconsin was clear cut save for 7 acres of virgin pine in three small areas. From these several acres of virgin red pine, white pine and rarer hemlock, the trail turns northbound following the shores of Lake Owen. Recent archeological diggings along Lake Owen have documented that this shore was the site of Archaic Tradition Indian occupation as early as 2,000 B.C. and Terminal Woodland Indian occupation up to 1500's B.C., and an Initial Woodland Indian village occupied continuously between 120 A.D. to 610 A.D.

The trail continues along the shore of Lake Owen until Melland Pond and the intersection to the spur trail that goes west 250 yards to the Lake Owen Picnic Grounds Trailhead with its ample fee parking, shelter and water pump. North of this intersection, the North Country Trail crosses Forest Road 213/North Lake Owen Drive. There is an engineered off road parking on North Lake Owen Drive but the wider shoulders will accommodate short term parking for high clearance vehicles.

Drummond Ski Trail Segment 3.8 miles

Lake Owen Picnic Grounds Trailhead (fee parking for up to 11 vehicles) to Old 63 Trailhead on Forest Road 235/Old 63 (parking for 5 vehicles) which is 80 yards west of the current location of U.S. 63.

This segment is dominated by mature hardwoods and evergreens in gently rolling kettle moraine hills through a maze of ski trails and old logging roads.

From the Lake Owens Picnic Grounds Trailhead, take the 250 yard spur trail east to the North Country Trail, then turn left northbound and go .2 miles until it crosses Forest Road 213/ North Lake Owen Drive. From the road 250 yards up the hill, the trail meets up with the many looped Drummond Ski Trail system. This section was extensively marked in 2009 with carsonite posts to differentiate the North Country Trail from the Drummond Ski Trails. Follow the emblems on the carsonite posts and the blue blazes through this network of ski trail north bound for 3.4 miles until you cross U.S. 63, and then another 80 yards north to the Old 63 Trailhead.

Hikers will find a several restaurants and the Bear Country general store on U.S. 63 just 1.1 miles southwest of the Old 63 Trailhead, The general store has basic camping supplies, groceries,

canoe, kayak, and boat rentals as well as shuttle services for hikers and backpackers. (715-739-6645). Summertime hours are normally 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.
<http://www.bearcountrysportinggoods.com/store.htm>

Drummond Area Section 6.1 miles

Old 63 (parking for 5 vehicles) which is 80 yards west of the current location of U.S. 63 to Forest Road 382/Reynard Lake Road Trailhead (parking for 3 cars) which is .7 miles west of highway 35/Delta Drummond Road

This segment is dominated by gently rolling low hills in deep woods skirting the shores of Overby Lake, Esox Lake, Mirror Lake, Bullhead Lake, Nelson Lake and Stratton Ponds.

From the Old 63 Trailhead, the trail goes north 300 yards to the largest of the last three remaining tracts of virgin forests in Wisconsin. Towering pines averaging three feet in diameter abound for acres, shading out the under story and leaving mostly pine needle covered bare ground underneath., just as it existed for thousands of years before the logging era from the 1880's to the 1930's. The trail continues north, crossing an abandoned railroad grade .8 miles north from the Old 63 Trailhead, then over some gentle hills before descending into the Long Lake Branch river valley 1.9 miles from the Trailhead. The Long Lake Branch River used to support a population of native brook trout until successive drought years stopped the water flowing out of Drummond Lake into the river. In 2007 and 2008 the river from dam 2 miles upstream to well downstream of the North Country Trail Bridge was bone dry. An often used campsite exists at the southwest side of the river at this bridge. This is the lowest trail altitude in the Chequamegon segment of the North County Trail.

From the bridge over Long Lake Branch River, the trail turns northwest and goes .8 of a mile to Forest Road 397/Cisco Lake Road which has no engineered off road parking. The trail from this forest road enters a relatively flat area going first by Overby Lake which has excellent trout fishing from stocked fish, then by Esox Lake which holds large bass, then smaller Mirror Lake and Bullhead Lake. Often used campsites are visible on the east shore of Esox Lake and the northeast shore of Mirror Lake. At 4.5 miles from the Old 63 Trailhead, the trail crosses the paved road of Forest Road 35/Delta Drummond Road that has paved parking for 3 vehicles off the west shoulder of the road. Continuing west bound, the trail goes 1.5 miles through mixed forest with puncheons over several wet areas before coming to the Reynard Lake Road Trailhead.

Rainbow Lakes Wilderness 6.4 miles

Reynard Lake Road Trailhead (parking for 3 cars) which is .7 miles west of Highway 35/Delta Drummond Road to Forest Road 228 Trailhead (parking for 2 vehicles) which is on Forest Road 228/West Delta Road at the northwest corner of the Rainbow Lakes Wilderness.

This trail segment skirts five medium sized lakes in a remote, relatively flat forested wilderness. The Rainbow Lake Wilderness is best known for its picturesque lakes and its wolf pack which on some nights can be heard howling.

Going from the Reynard Lake Trailhead, the trail goes past the south corner of scenic Wishbone Lake, then runs along north the east shore of Reynard Lake which holds some panfish.

Continuing northwest for 1.9 miles from the trailhead, the trail runs 200 feet west of Bufo Lake which has some bass fishing and a primitive campsite on the peninsula on the north end. Two tenths of a mile further, the trail crosses the wide Anderson Grade, an old railroad bed traversing the wilderness from an east to west direction. If you want an excellent campsite with excellent bass fishing, go west on the trail 1 mile to Anderson Lake. The campsite is on the northwest shore where beavers have cleared the trees from the shore. The North Country Trail continues generally northwest from the Anderson Grade going past Rainbow Lake 3.3 miles from the Reynard Lake Trailhead and going past Tower Lake 4.2 miles from the Trailhead. Easy to find campsites can be found along the trail at each lake. The last 2.2 miles is through relatively mature forests.

Ruth Lake Segment 7.1 miles

Forest Road 228 Trailhead (parking for 2 vehicles) which is on Forest Road 228/West Delta Road at the northwest corner of the Rainbow Lakes Wilderness to County Highway A Trailhead (parking for 5 or 6 vehicles) on the east side of County Highway A 4.5 miles south of Iron River, Wisconsin.

This segment primary follows old logging roads through flat to gently rolling forested hills with two moderately steep climbs.

From the Forest Road 228 Trailhead, the trail first heads west for a mile before turning northwest and going past a small unnamed pond which is the only source of water visible from the trail in this segment. After 2.6 miles, the trail crosses Forest Road 412 which is a narrow two track road with no parking availability. After another 2.3 miles the trail crosses a more used Forest Road 411, but with no engineered parking spots. With a mile to go, the trail goes through several small clearings until leaving the National Forest and entering the Bayfield County Forest lands for the last .6 of a mile in this segment.