THE ARROWHEAD & TACONITE STATE TRAILS are located in northern Minnesota’s Itasca, Koochiching and St. Louis counties. They are primarily snowmobile trails and form the backbone to an extensive Grant-in-Aid trail system. Portions of both trails are suitable for horseback riding, as well as mountain biking, hiking and backpacking in the summer. Call the DNR for specific information.

The Arrowhead State Trail stretches 135 miles, from 10 miles west of Tower at the intersection of the Taconite State Trail, to Ericsburg, 10 miles south of International Falls.

The Taconite State Trail stretches 165 miles from Grand Rapids to Ely and intersects with the Arrowhead State Trail just west of Lake Vermilion. Eight trail waysides and picnic facilities offer scenic vistas of the hills, lakes and rivers of this area.

THE ARROWHEAD TRAIL
The southern part of the Arrowhead features rolling hills with numerous lakes and streams. Many of the hills have large areas of exposed rock and coniferous vegetation. This part is highly timbered with a mix of hardwoods and conifers. This mix of trees on the Arrowhead is spectacularly colorful in autumn.

The northern part of the trail is relatively flat between International Falls and the Rainy River. The highest point is marked by a stone marker, north of the town of D Swimming Hole. The trail passes through various forest areas that have standing water in the summer which makes these portions of the trail mostly suited to winter use.

The TACONITE TRAIL winds through forests of birch and aspen intermixed with pine, loading the visitor by many isolated lakes and streams. From Grand Rapids heading north you see the impact of the saplings and iron ore mining activities of days long past. You also see the steep and rugged ridges and canyons of the Arrowhead. The trail passes through the rugged ridge and under the tall trees of the Arrowhead. The trail is primarily snowmobile trails and form the backbone to an extensive Grant-in-Aid trail system.

The trail enters the Arrowhead State Park, built around Soudan Underground Mine State Park. The mine is an underground iron ore mine open to the public. Tours descend to the bottom of the mine, where there is a constant year-round temperature of 52 degrees. The park also contains picturesque stands of old-growth white birch and northern pines mixed with larch fern and aspen. The lower elevations are dominated by white cedar interspersed with larch fern, tamarack, black spruce, aspen and mugwort.

Native northern Minnesota wildlife is abundant along both trails. Some species to watch for are moccasins, timber wolf, black bear, white-tailed deer, black bear, lynx, porcupine, red fox, snowshoe hare, fishes, pine marten and mink.

Over 100 varieties of birds live in the area. Some birds, like the grosbeaks, nuthatches, chickadees and perched woodpeckers, inhabit the area year-round. Birds like the snow bunting and snowy owl migrate south.

The Arrowhead and Taconite State Trails provide a great opportunity to explore this area. To optimize this opportunity for the future, please respect the area’s plant and wildlife communities.

THE NATURAL FEATURES
The trail away may see a ridge of solid white pine changing to a vine of mixed hardwoods, then a ridge of aspen, birch and balsamed mixed with maple.

The trail into three state parks: Bear Head Lake, Soudan Underground Mine and McCarthy Beach. The landscape is in and around Bear Head Lake State Park, which is a scenic lake with rolling and rocky elevations ranging from 1,410 feet up to 1,900 feet.

Soudan Underground Mine State Park is located on a rugged ridge and contains the historic Soudan underground mine. It is Minnesota’s only underground iron ore mine open to the public. Tours descend 27 levels to the bottom of the mine, where there is a constant year-round temperature of 52 degrees. The park also contains picturesque stands of old-growth white birch and northern pines mixed with larch fern and aspen. The lower elevations are dominated by white cedar interspersed with larch fern, tamarack, black spruce, aspen and mugwort.

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A variety of game fish including walleye, northern pike, trout and smallmouth bass are found in the area’s large number of lakes and rivers. The landscape of the area is the result of the underlying geology. The area’s bedrock formation known as the Canadian Shield is some of the oldest rocks on earth. It was formed by volcanic action approximately 2.7 billion years ago. Later, erosion was laid down the unstable iron ore that is still mined in the area. The area is bordered by the Superior Upland and the Superior Upland, the two mountain ranges. The advancing and receding of glaciers, and millions of years of erosion have worn the mountains down, resulting in the present rugged landscape found along some parts of the trail.

The Arrowhead and Taconite State Trails provide a great opportunity to explore this area. To optimize this opportunity for the future, please respect the area’s plant and wildlife communities.
The Arrowhead and Taconite State Trails were developed by the DNR with logging assistance from the counties, other local governments, U.S. Forest Service, private businesses and trail groups. The trails connect towns and travel past lakes, rivers, resorts, mining sites, logging camps and trapline shacks.

The earliest indigenous inhabitants of the area, living thousands of years ago, left rock carvings, rock paintings and petroglyphs (rock carvings) north of the present trail area. Many Indian tribes had settled in the area, including the Lakota. Dakota and more recently in history, the Ojibway (Chippewa). European immigrants forced the Ojibway to move west along the St. Lawrence Seaway and Great Lakes. They entered present day northern Minnesota in the late 1500s. The lake and forest resources provided a new home with abundant fish and wildlife in spite of the harsh winters. However, contact with the Europeans eventually forced them from most of their land.

For travel planning information contact:

DNR Regional Office
1201 E. Highway 2
Grand Rapids, MN 55744 (218) 999-7920

*Taconite Trail Headquarters

DNR Arrowhead/Taconite Trail
650 Highway 169
Tower, MN 55790
(218) 753-2580

DNR provides outdoor recreation information, brochures, maps and snow & trail conditions.

**Most tree species harvested in Minnesota are used to make paper and cardboard, but larger trees are also used to make lumber, cabinets, and furniture parts. When traveling near a harvesting site please watch out for logging trucks and other equipment.

In addition to the natural resources provided by the forest, the discovery of iron ore dramatically changed northern Minnesota. The rich iron ore deposits contributed to the industrialization of the whole country. The development of the mining industry created a large demand for labor. This led to a wave of European immigrants and to the growth of mining towns.

Mineral harvesting is often done in the winter when the ground is frozen which makes it easier to access harvesting sites that would be inaccessible in the summer due to wet conditions.

The major tree species found along the trail include aspen, white and black spruce, tamarack pine and white pine. Aspen, a pioneer species, is harvested by clearcutting to allow sunlight to reach the roots of the recently cut trees which will then sprout and produce aspen saplings in the first year after cutting.

Black spruce is also harvested in this manner, but it is usually used to get new trees on the site. White spruce, norway and white pine are usually thinned a number of times before the final harvest is undertaken when all remaining trees are removed and the site is replanted with seedlings.

For travel planning information contact:

Office of Tourism
100 Metro Square, 121 7th Place East
St. Paul MN 55105-2146
651-296-5029 (metro area)
1-888-TOURMN (toll free)
1-800-766-8667 (Canada)

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1201 E. Highway 2
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