Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, the “U. P.,” has so much to offer visitors it is hard to know where to start. We decided to take an expansive view, starting from the gateway cities of Duluth, Minnesota, Green Bay, Wisconsin, Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan/Ontario, and St. Ignace, Michigan.

A Word for Campers

Regardless of your direction of travel, campers will find that Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan have some of the best state park campground systems in the USA. In addition, there are many National Forest, National Park, and private campgrounds throughout the North Country.

From the West

Travelling from the West, the route starts at Duluth, Minnesota, about 60 miles south of the Mesabi Iron Range. The 2008 MHA Meeting was held on the Mesabi in Chisholm, Minnesota (https://www.mininghistoryassociation.org/Chisholm.htm). US 2 runs along the south shore of Lake Superior to Ashland, Wisconsin where a large ore dock once serving the iron mines on the southern Gogebic Range has been recently demolished and is being converted to a municipal park. The highway continues inland to Ironwood, Michigan at the north end of the Gogebic Range.
(Above) Copper Falls in the State Park of the same name near Mellen, Wisconsin near the southwest end of the Gogebic Iron Range.


An optional “historic detour” from Ashland via Wisconsin highways 13 and 77 takes you up the backbone of the Gogebic Range passing through the historic towns of Montreal and Hurley (Al Capone hung out there). From Ironwood, Highway 2 continues east through the old mining towns of Bessemer and Wakefield. Many of the towns along the Gogebic Range have small museums and outdoor exhibits portraying their iron mining past.
The mining town of Montreal, Wisconsin is now a National Historic District.

Miners’ Memorial in Montreal, Wisconsin.

Mining Memorial in Ironwood, Michigan.

Mining equipment on display in Ironwood, Michigan.

At Wakefield, Michigan Highway 28 (M-28) takes you directly to Marquette. About 20 miles from Wakefield at Bergland, Michigan, Highway 64 takes you to the copper mining town of White Pine, Michigan. The White Pine Mine was opened in 1955 by the Copper Range Company. Later, a smelter and refinery were constructed. After several changes in ownership, low ore grades, metal prices, deteriorating conditions underground caused the final shut-down in 1995. The road continues and will take you to the south shore of Lake Superior and the Porcupine Mountains State Park. Michigan State Parks require a Vehicle Permit. If you plan on visiting several parks, the annual permit is a good buy otherwise daily permits are available.
Further down M-28, at Bruce Crossing you can take US 45 to Houghton and Michigan’s Copper Country, site of the 1997 MHA Meeting (https://www.mininghistoryassociation.org/Houghton.htm). Much of the eastern half of the M-28 route follows the Marquette Iron Range. The MHA field trips will visit the most important sites in this area.

**From the East via M-28**

From the East, US 2 or M-28 take you to Marquette via two equally scenic routes. Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan (locally called “The Soo”) and its twin city Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, Canada (AKA “Soo Canada”) are at the eastern end of M-28. They are home to the famous Soo Locks which connect the Great Lakes of Superior, Michigan, and Huron. The locks provide passage to the west end of the St. Lawrence Seaway in Duluth. From the early spring to the late fall, there is continuous boat traffic carrying iron pellets to steel mills at lower-lake ports and grain to the World. The locks are a “must see.”

A 1000-foot-long ore freighter clears the Poe Lock is Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan to pick up a load of iron taconite pellets from the mines in Minnesota or Michigan.

Pt. Illinois Light Station helped guide mariners in Lake Superior’s treacherous waters.
The U. P. is “Lighthouse Country.” We won’t mention them all, but several are not far off M-28. The Point Iroquois Light Station is located a few miles north of Brimley. Take Highway 221 from M-28. If you haven’t been to Paradise, you will want to exit M-28 at Highway 123. Once again you are driving along the south shore of Lake Superior and on your way to Paradise, a quaint tourist town and watering spot. Continue on to the lighthouse at Whitefish Point and the Shipwreck Museum. Whitefish Point is a key landmark and navigational hazard for Great Lakes ships. The most famous of dozens of ship wrecks off the point is the SS Edmund Fitzgerald which sank in Canadian waters during a fierce winter storm on November 10, 1975 with the loss of 29 lives. It was carrying a cargo of Mesabi Range iron ore pellets from the ore docks in Superior, Wisconsin.

Next, return to Paradise and take Highway 123 toward Newberry, Michigan. About 12 miles down the road you arrive at the Lower Falls of the Tahquamenon River, a Michigan State Park. Take time to hike the trail to the series of cascading waterfalls. You will want to make another stop at the completely different and spectacular Upper Falls of the Tahquamenon River. They have the 3rd largest flowrate of falls east of the Mississippi, a mini-Niagara. Newberry, Michigan was once the center of the logging industry in the Eastern U.P. and home to the Lake Superior Charcoal and Iron Company which utilized Michigan ore to make pig iron. Unfortunately, the iron furnaces have been gone for decades.

Spectacular Tahquamenon Falls State Park is located between Paradise and Newberry, Michigan.

The historic Charcoal and Iron Company furnaces in Newberry, Michigan produced pig iron from Michigan iron ore and locally produced charcoal and limestone.

If the side-trips have consumed your daylight, Newberry has several motels for your overnight stay. Next, rejoin M-28 just outside Newberry and head west toward Marquette, but there is still one side trip to come. At Seney, Michigan, head north on Highway 77 to Grand Marais. This picturesque old fishing and logging town has a safe
harbor for small watercraft boasts a beautiful but cool water Lake Superior beach, an historic Coast Guard Station, and a warmer water beach on the harborside. It is also the eastern gateway for The Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore. If you are looking for a bite to eat (whitefish tacos at the Dunes Saloon are delicious) or a place to pick up picnic supplies, Grand Marias is the place. From the center of town, take Route 58 to the Lakeshore Visitors’ Center and grab a park map. As you travel through the park, you will not want to miss the Grand Sable Banks and Sand Dunes, the Au Sable Light Station, shipwrecks along the shore, the Miner’s Castle rock formation, Munising Falls, and, of course, the Pictured Rocks themselves. Route 58 ends in Munising, Michigan where you can take a boat cruise and get a great view of the towering Pictured Rocks.

A view of the beach and harbor at Grand Marais, Michigan.

Au Sable Light Station in the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore near Grand Marias warns ships to stay away from dangerous rock ledges.

Th Miner’s Castle stands above Lake Superior in the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore near Munising, Michigan.

Bay Furnace in Christmas, Michigan was another effort to produce pig iron from local iron ore, limestone, and charcoal.

Once you are back on M-28, there is just one more stop at Christmas, Michigan, to see the Bay Furnace. Sitting along Lake Superior, the Bay Furnace made pig iron from Michigan iron ore from 1870-1877.
From the East vis US-2

The east end of US 2 starts at the Mackinac Bridge in St. Ignace, Michigan and follows the north shore of Lake Michigan across the U. P. to Escanaba. Many visitors take a detour on Interstate 75 from St. Ignace to Sault Ste. Marie just to see the Soo Locks. Tour boats carry visitors from St. Ignace to historic Mackinac Island for day trips or longer stays. Back on US 2, the scenery along Lake Michigan is amazing. There are many roadside picnic areas where you will be tempted to climb sand dunes or take a dip in the lake. In the quaint fishing villages along this route, you can stock-up on picnic supplies. Be sure to try the locally caught smoked lake trout and whitefish. Michigan’s mining heritage will already be on display at roadside stands selling Cornish Pasties.

At Gulliver, Michigan, take Route 432 south to visit the picturesque Seul Choix Lighthouse. Looking across the bay from the lighthouse, you can see one of the many modern limestone quarrying operations located along the Lake Michigan shoreline.

Manistique is a paper milling town with a unique dam and canal system that powered the early mills. They are easily seen with a quick trip into the town. West of Manistique, take Route 149 to see Kitch-iti-ki-pi (Big Spring) in Palms Brook State Park. This unusual geologic feature is a natural spring that gushes 10,000 gallons of crystal clear water per minute. You can take a self-operated raft from shore to view the center of the spring.
Travelling westward again on US-2, there are traces of Michigan’s iron industry heritage. Route 483 takes you south to Garden, Michigan and the nearby Fayette State Park. There will be an MHA field trip to Fayette during the Marquette conference. Fayette is a nearly-complete iron smelting townsite which once had 500 residents. Two blast furnaces were constructed there in 1867 by the Jackson Iron Company. The objective was to make value-added pig iron using locally available charcoal and limestone. This avoided the costly shipping of the waste components of the iron ore to the lower-lake customers. The furnaces operated until 1891.

The last stop along US-2 is Escanaba, Michigan. This important Lake Michigan port shipped iron ore from the East and West Menominee Iron Ranges. The last mine operating in that area was the Hanna Mining Company’s Groveland Mine located near Randville. It closed in 1981. The last ore dock (see below) in Escanaba was closed in 2017.

From Escanaba, it is about a 1 1/2-hour ride north to Marquette via Highway 41. It is worth mentioning one last travel tip. Because many visitors want to see the sights both along US-2 and M28, there are several roads that connect the two popular routes. Grab a Michigan highway map at any of the State Welcome Centers or check your GPS.

From the South

We will concentrate on the route from Green Bay, Wisconsin, to Marquette. However, it is easy to drive to Green Bay from Chicago via Interstate 94 to Milwaukee and then via I-43 to Green Bay. Green Bay and many of its surrounding towns have made paper and paper products for decades using wood from the forests to the north. Perhaps Green Bay’s most famous product is football. The green and gold signs everywhere let the visitor know that they are in Packer-Land. Whether or not you are a football fanatic, there is much more to see in Green Bay. The Door County Peninsula just east of Green Bay has a New England ambience and is also very popular with summer visitors. But we are headed to Marquette…
Highway 41 takes you from Green Bay to Marinette, Wisconsin and its twin city, Menominee, Michigan. Marinette and Menominee both offer much to see for the visitor. While mining did not extend this far south, the area prospered during the heyday of the upper-Midwest lumbering era. The North Pier Lighthouse in Menominee is a beauty. It is the first of many historic lighthouses that dot the U. P. shoreline.

From Menominee, Highway 35 follows the scenic northern shore of Lake Michigan to Escanaba. This important Lake Michigan port shipped iron ore from the Menominee Iron Ranges. The first ore dock in Escanaba was built in 1865 and several others followed. The last ore dock was closed in 2017. The port of Escanaba had the advantage of being open for Lake Michigan shipping nearly year-round. Unlike many of the ore docks along Lake Superior which held the ore in rail car-sized pockets, the last Escanaba dock used a conveyor system to load from a stockpile located on land. Check it out while you can. The Sand Point Lighthouse and the Delta County Historical Museum are located in the waterfront park.

From Escanaba, it is about a 1 1/2-hour ride north to Marquette. Simply retrace your route on US-2 to Rapid River and then take Highway 41 to Marquette.

Regardless of the route you take to Marquette, we are sure you will enjoy your stay in the U. P.

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