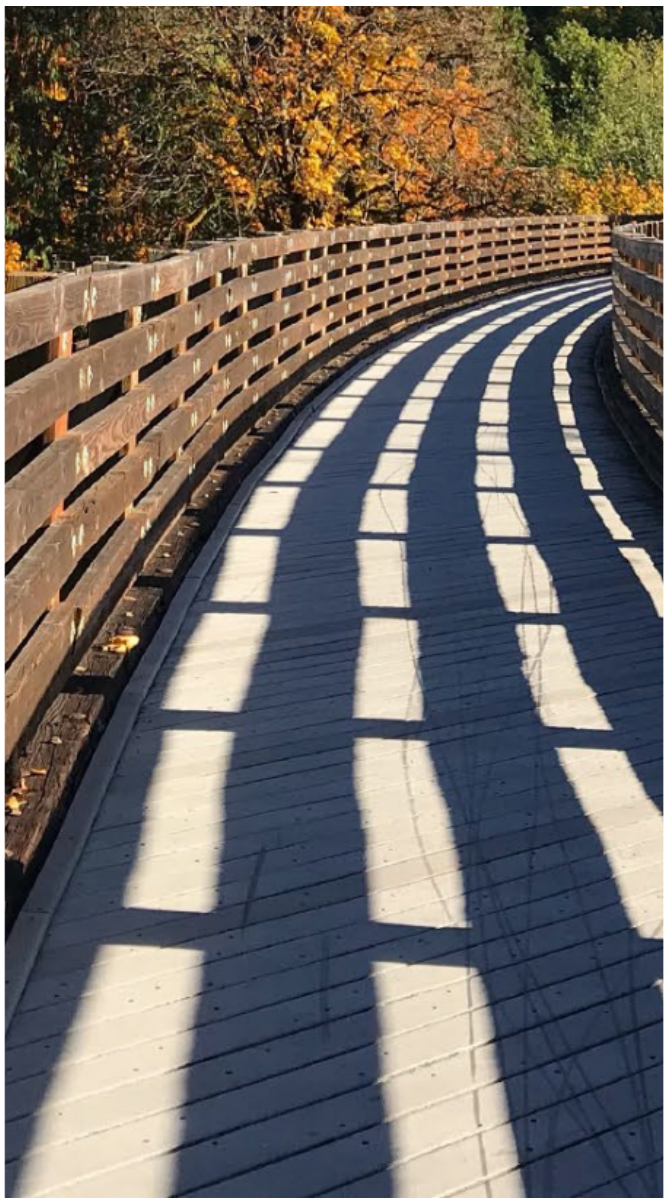
TrailLink
by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

2026

TrailLink Unlimited

Guides



Bill Nicholls Trail

Michigan

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The Bill Nicholls Trail wanders for 41 miles through the Upper Peninsula's scenic Copper Country, where visitors can spot wildlife

The Bill Nicholls Trail wanders for 41 miles through the Upper Peninsula's scenic Copper Country, where visitors can spot wildlife and see remnants of the copper mining that flourished for more than 100 years. The soft-surface trail is a popular destination for motorized off-road vehicles such as all-terrain vehicles and snow-mobiles, so mountain bikers and hikers should be prepared to deal with wear and tear on the trail.

Most of the trail follows the route of the Copper Range Railroad, built between 1899 and 1901 to haul copper ore from the mines that proliferated on the peninsula from the mid-19th century until the 1960s. When the state acquired the line in 1974, it was among the first disused railroad corridors in Michigan converted to a public trail.

Beginning at the Ontonagon County Fairgrounds outside of Greenland, the first couple of miles can be challenging for trail users. A rock escarpment, steep grades, and mine tailings placed on the trail to prevent erosion will force you to watch your progress. You'll soon pass the Adventure Mine, a copper mine (1850–1920) that's now open for tours as part of the Keweenaw National Historical Park, a collection of heritage sites celebrating the region's copper-mining history.

At 2 miles, the trail heads northeast and merges with the former railroad line and its level surface. Not long after crossing MI 38, you'll cross the first of three steel bridges over the Firesteel River, which total 1,300 feet in length and clear the rivers by 85 feet, creating one of the trail's scenic highlights.

The trail passes through a remote stretch of pine and hardwood forests as you reach Twin Lakes State Park near mile 16.4, where the trail parallels MI 26 and allows access to the park and nearby businesses. After the state park, the trail passes several small lakes, traverses scenic woodlands, and is periodically lined with wild blackberry and thimbleberry bushes.

With a tower as your beacon, you arrive at the crossroads community of Toivola, which offers a restaurant and grocery store near mile 25.2. You'll pass old ruins of the mining era and piles of mine tailings. After crossing SR 26 into South Range at mile 34.4, you can visit the Copper Range Historical Museum and check out local offerings.

The last 4 miles into Houghton are all downhill. About 1.5 miles from the trail's end is a scenic overlook at the Portage Lake Ship Canal, which played a big role in the copper industry by removing an obstacle for shipping. The final leg of the trail parallels the canal. About 1 mile from the end, you'll encounter a steep slope with loose stone. The trail ends at the city's RV park in Houghton, near the Raymond C. Kestner Waterfront Park, which provides picnic facilities, restrooms,

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States: Michigan
Counties: Houghton,Ontonagon
Length: 41.5miles
Trail end points: Depot St. (Greenland) between Ridge Road and Adventure Ave. to Raymond C. Kestner Waterfront Park at Houghton Canal Road west of W. Lakeshore Dr. (Houghton)
Trail surfaces: Ballast,Dirt,Gravel,Sand
Trail category: Rail-Trail
Trail activities: ATV,Horseback

Parking & Trail Access

To reach the southern trailhead in Greenland from the intersection of US 45 and MI 26 near Rockland, head right (northeast) on SR 26. Go 5.5 miles, and turn left on SR 38 W. Go 0.5 mile, and turn left onto Plank Road. Follow Plank for 0.7 mile, and turn left onto Depot St. in Greenland. Parking at the fairgrounds is in 0.3 mile on the right; the trail is another 0.3 mile on the left.

To reach the northern trailhead in Houghton from the intersection of US 45 and SR 26, head right (northeast) on SR 26. Go 43.1 miles to Houghton—SR 26 joins W. Memorial Dr.—and turn left at W. Lakeshore Dr. Parking is available in the park on your left. The trail starts about 0.3 mile west through the RV park.

The northern trailhead is also accessible via US 41, a trip of 28 miles north from the intersection with SR 38 in Baraga. Heading into Houghton, US 41 will eventually turn into Memorial Dr. After 0.3 mile, turn right onto W. Lakeshore Dr. Parking is available in the park on your left. The trail starts about 0.3 mile west through the RV park.

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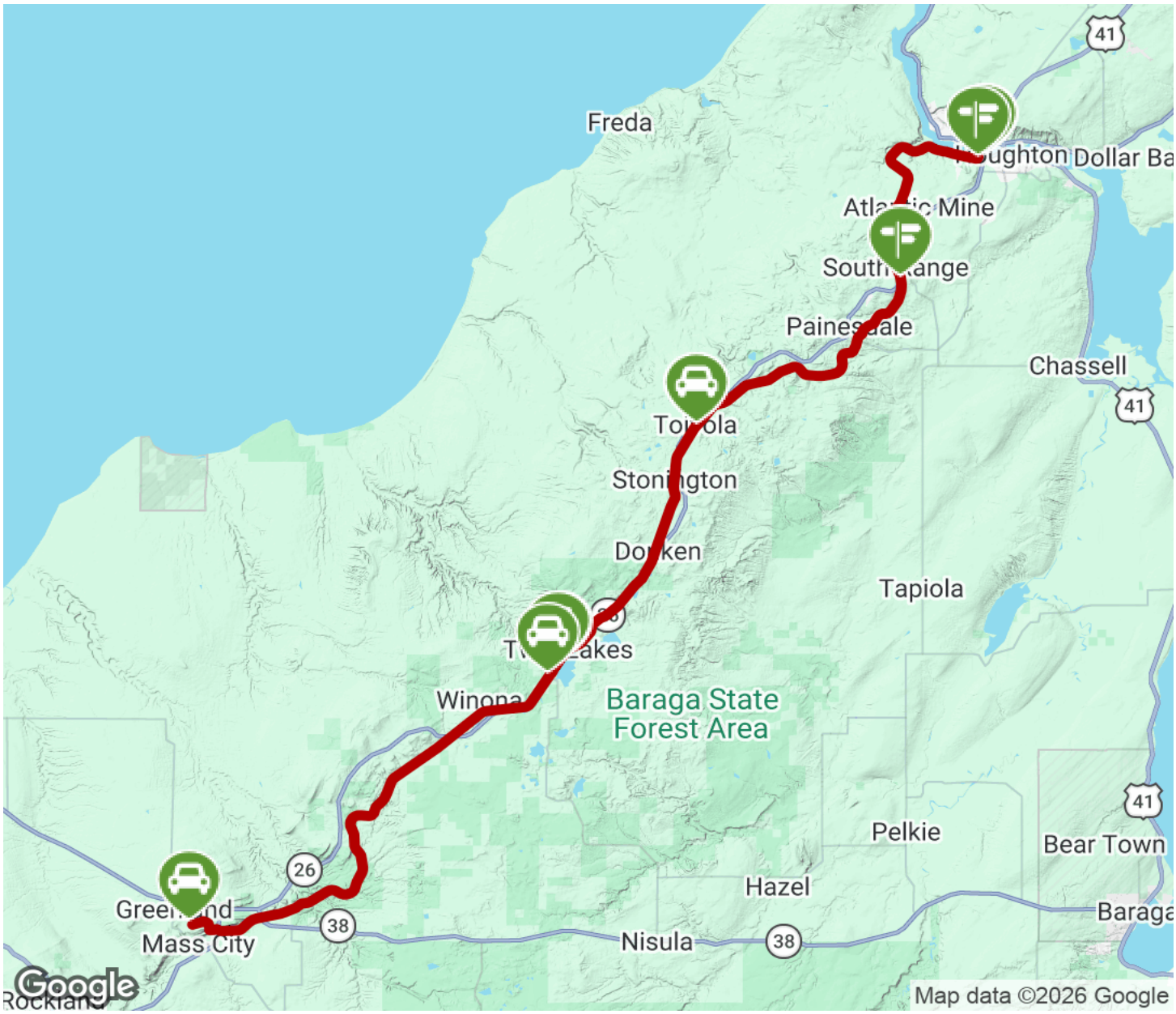

Trailhead Restroom Parking Water Fountain Tunnel

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