



2024

TrailLink Unlimited



Guides



Bearskin State Trail

Wisconsin



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The Bearskin State Trail follows a route blazed into the heart of the great Northwoods, first by pioneers and loggers, and then by passengers and outdoors enthusiasts on trains with such names as the Hiawatha and Fisherman's Special. Now it's bicyclists, hikers, and snowboarders who disappear into the woods on a mostly crushed-gravel trail that runs for some 26 miles between Minocqua and Heafford Junction.

The trail follows an old spur of the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad (the Milwaukee Road) built from New Lisbon to Minocqua in 1887 to haul logs and lumber. As the timber industry declined, residents of big cities escaped to the area, encouraging the Milwaukee Road to run a Fishermen's Special on weekends. Later, the streamlined North Woods Hiawatha ran vacationers

north.

Passenger service ended in 1955 because of slumping ridership, and the Milwaukee Road ceased freight service to Minocqua in 1971. The state of Wisconsin acquired the rail bed and opened a trail in the late 1970s. The state extended the route 8.5 miles, including 4.5 miles on road, in 2016.

The trail traverses a sparsely populated area known for dense forests and a proliferation of lakes. Those lakes are a destination for fishermen as well as birders, especially during migratory season. In addition to spotting bald eagles and loons from the lakeside, you might spot deer from the trail. You'll cross 16 converted railroad trestles, 8 alone spanning Bearskin Creek, the trail's namesake.

Beginning in Minocqua, you'll cross the longest of those trestles—375 feet long, to be exact—spanning Minocqua Lake. Although occasional clearings can be found next to marshes or lakes, the trail is mostly forested. Tree branches arching over the trail give the impression of passing through a tunnel.

Restrooms, drinking water, and food are scarce. Hazelhurst, at 5.1 miles, is the last town with full services until the end. A pit toilet and pump water are available at a picnic spot next to South Blue Lake (8.9 miles), and Goodnow (13.6 miles) has a restaurant.

You'll gain insight into the former backwoods life from interpretive signs posted along the trail. A century-old railroad line shed, about 9.5 miles from Minocqua, attests to the rustic living conditions of some railroad workers. Elsewhere, you can read about the flora and fauna.

A rest stop is located on Old Highway K at 18 miles, and 1 mile later you'll arrive at a 4.5-mile on-road segment. The final 2.5 miles of off-road gravel trail start again on Lake Nokomis Road and cross the lake on two trestles, one which completes a 0.3-mile causeway. The trail ends in Heafford Junction,



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States: Wisconsin

Counties: Lincoln, Oneida

Length: 26.5 miles

Trail end points: Front St. and Flambeau St.

(Minocqua) to County Road N between Heafford Road and Beach Road (Heafford Junction)

Trail surfaces: Crushed Stone

Trail category: Rail-Trail

Trail activities: Bike, Fishing, Wheelchair Accessible, Mountain

Parking & Trail Access

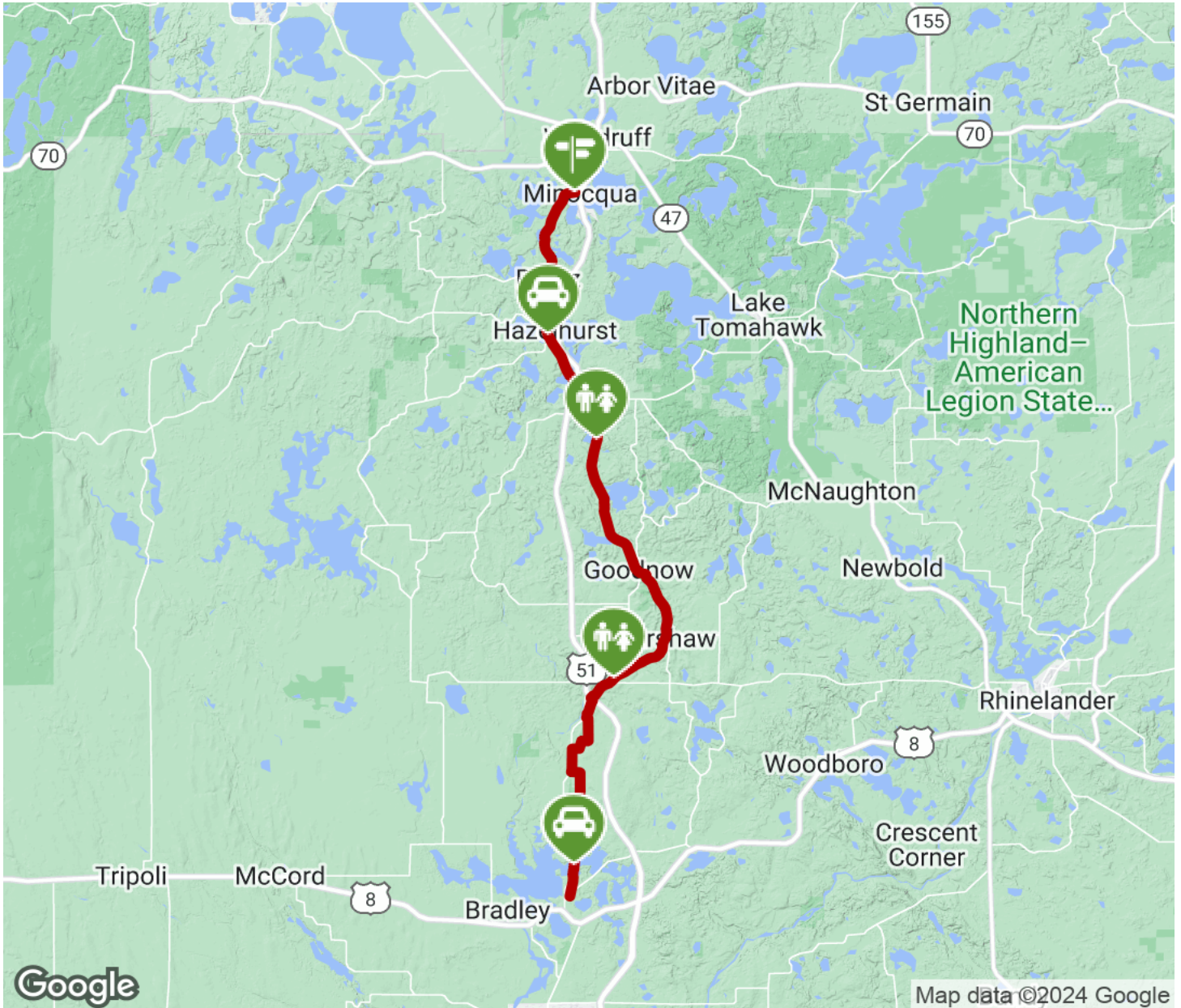
To reach the trailhead in Minocqua from US 51, turn westbound onto Front St. in Minocqua (about 2 miles south of Woodruff or 0.3 mile after crossing Minocqua Lake heading north). Turn right into the trailhead parking lot (behind the post office) 1 block after you pass Flambeau St. The trail starts at the west end of the parking lot.

To reach the trailhead in Heafford Junction from US 51, take Exit 234 westbound to US 8. Go 2.5 miles, and turn right onto County Road L. Go 1.6 miles, cross a bridge, and look for parking on the right, just past an ice-cream shop. The southern trail end is about a 1 mile south, at County Road N.



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Trailhead



Restroom



Parking



Water Fountain



Tunnel



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