

Cross-country skiing & snowshoeing in some special UP places

Many of the U.P.'s wild and special places provide great potential for non-motorized winter adventure. The places suggested here don't have groomed trails. They may not even have trail signs or blazes. What they often have, though, are quiet, remoteness, and scenic beauty.

Described below are only a few such places; there are too many to include in one article. Future newsletter and on-line articles will feature more.

McCormick Wilderness

Access:

From US 41 / M-28 between Champion and Michigamme, go north on Marquette County Road 607 about 10.5 miles to a plowed parking area on the right. The trailhead has a vault toilet, but since this area often receives heavy snowfall, opening the door in mid-winter may not be easy! CR 607 and the lot may not be plowed for a while after a snowstorm. Carry a shovel in your car in case you get plowed in. Please register at the registration station just before the bridge.

Trails in McCormick are not blazed.

Places to go:

The routes most commonly skied or snowshoed start at this lot. Cross the bridge over the Peshekee River and continue on the old road. The road is growing in in spots, but is usually easy to follow, especially if others have been there earlier in the winter.

The main route leads to White Deer Lake, a 7-mile round trip. Don't attempt this in fresh deep snow unless you are in very good shape and have lots of time. Expect plenty of old forest, rock bluffs, and wetlands. The terrain on the trail is easy for snowshoeing, but skiers should use caution on some hills. There is no bridge where the trail crosses Camp 11 Creek, about a mile from the trailhead. The creek is typically shallow, and a snow bridge forms there by mid-winter, but in early and late winter crossing there may not be easy. Some folks use White Deer Lake as a winter camping destination, though there are no designated campsites in McCormick.

A shorter trip, to Lower Baraga Lake, utilizes the White Deer Lake Trail for a little over a mile, and then the Lower Baraga Lake Trail for the next 1.25 miles or so. A popular destination is the narrow point about half way up the east side of the lake. This trail, though, is not as obvious as the White Deer Lake Trail, as it does not follow an old road. It should only be attempted by those experienced in off-trail navigation unless following others' tracks. It is often best to travel on the lakeshore as opposed to on the ice, which may be slushy or unsafe. Thin ice or open water are sometimes present in the narrow channel at the south end of the lake.

Other areas known to have thin ice are the channel between White Deer and Bulldog Lakes and the westernmost narrows on Upper Baraga Lake. Falling through the ice in these remote areas is very dangerous and potentially fatal.

The North Country Trail, which heads east just after the Peshekee Bridge, is very hard to follow in winter and is seldom skied or snowshoed. Novices might consider a short trip into the scenic mature spruce stand at the beginning of the trail.

A map and compass are HIGHLY recommended for trips into McCormick. Topographic maps and aerial photos are online at <http://www.mytopo.com/maps/index.cfm>. Using "McCormick Wilderness, MI" as a search term will take get you a map centered at White Deer Lake. These maps show all trails and trailheads in the wilderness, and can be printed following links at the bottom of the web page.

This Ottawa National Forest online pamphlet about McCormick, http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5109821.pdf, provides more useful information.

Sylvania Wilderness

Access:

Most winter users access the wilderness at the entrance station off Thousand Island Lake Road. From Watersmeet MI, go west about four miles on US 2, turn left on Thousand Island Lake Road (Gogebic County Rd. 535), go west about four miles on CR 535, and turn left at the Sylvania entrance sign, which leads you to a plowed parking lot. Access is also possible from the southeast via the Land O' Lakes Ski Trail system or at the end of a road just northwest of Land O' Lakes. See map links below. Traditionally, one has been able to enter the wilderness via a side trail off Sylvania Outfitters' cross-country ski trails. Contact them at 906-358-4766 for more info.

Do not expect to find trail blazes on trails in Sylvania, though campsites and portages between lakes may be obvious.

Places to go:

Routes from the southeast are used less frequently than those from CR 535, so they are not recommended for those without experience in off-trail navigation unless you are following an existing track.

At the parking area off CR 535, fill out a permit before entering the wilderness. Daily permits are free in winter. Likewise, winter camping is free, but is limited to designated sites.

All trails are easily snowshoed, and many are fine for intermediate skiers. With a broken trail, many are fine for novice skiers.

One option, suitable for skiing or snowshoeing, is to head east on the unplowed road just south of the entrance station, and then head south after about ¼ mile on the trail to the south end of Clark Lake. Some maps show this as the Thompson Lodge Trail, but no signs indicate that. This route is frequently skied. At the south end of this trail, continue on to the southeast corner of Clark Lake. Several trails converge in this area, the former site of a privately-owned lodge. One can return from here to the trailhead, or explore some of these trails. Good options are the trail heading west along the south shore of Clark Lake, the portage trails to Loon and Crooked Lakes, and the trail to Badger Campsite. Since you would be going out and back on all the trails mentioned, getting to this

area from the trailhead, exploring, and returning would take perhaps three or four hours if snow conditions are good.

Another option is to ski or snowshoe the loop trail round Clark Lake. This highly scenic route is quite challenging in some areas, and if no one has skied there for a while you would be breaking trail the entire trip. This choice would be for strong, experienced skiers or snowshoers. The trip could take six or more hours, depending on snow conditions.

There are numerous other options, as shown on maps. Many involve a combination of lakes and trails, and are generally not recommended for those inexperienced in off-trail navigation.

Sylvania lakes may be slushy or have a hard surface of snow, and you won't know which until you're out on them; your route-planning should take that into account. As with any lakes, thin ice is always a possibility, and falling through could be dangerous or even fatal if you're far from the trailhead.

A map and compass are HIGHLY recommended for trips into Sylvania. Topographic maps and aerial photos are online at <http://www.mytopo.com/maps/index.cfm>. Using "Sylvania Wilderness, MI" as a search term will take get you a map centered at the south end of Clark Lake. These maps show all trails and trailheads in the wilderness, and can be printed following links at the bottom of the web page.



Skiing across the south bay of Crooked Lake