

Discovery Around Every Curve!

Traveling the Otter Trail Scenic Byway, you'll discover a land steeped in tradition and beauty. From more than 1,000 sparkling lakes and wildlife-filled wetlands to 19th century flour mills, scenic trails and spectacular roadside sculptures, the Byway offers something for everyone.

You'll find many intriguing historic sites, informational markers, and the rich natural and cultural resources that make this picturesque route an attraction for visitors from around the world.



The Byway connects many of the county's scenic and historic locales. You'll pass by tribal hunting grounds and battle sites of great Indian nations. You'll trace the routes of fur traders and explorers. You'll learn about an old Mormon colony, the first permanent white settlement in the

county. You'll see where towns were platted, boomed and died. You'll also discover the important roles played by railroads and European immigrants in developing the region.

So let's hit the trail! You're in for adventure, scenic beauty and a fascinating learning experience on the Otter Trail Scenic Byway.

Use this guide to plan your scenic tour

Byway Sites

We've selected 23 LOCATIONS we think you'll find interesting, both historically and culturally. Many have kiosks or display panels containing information about the site, and many have other features such as trails, picnic facilities and opportunities to view wildlife.

Services

The various communities along the Otter Trail Scenic Byway offer everything you'll need: food, lodging, restrooms, fuel, emergency services and lots of unique shopping opportunities.

Starting Point

You can begin your tour at any point - "A" through "S" - along the 150 mile loop of the Otter Trail Scenic Byway. Be sure to watch for the colorful Otter Trail signs which provide directions along the way.

Always Drive Safely

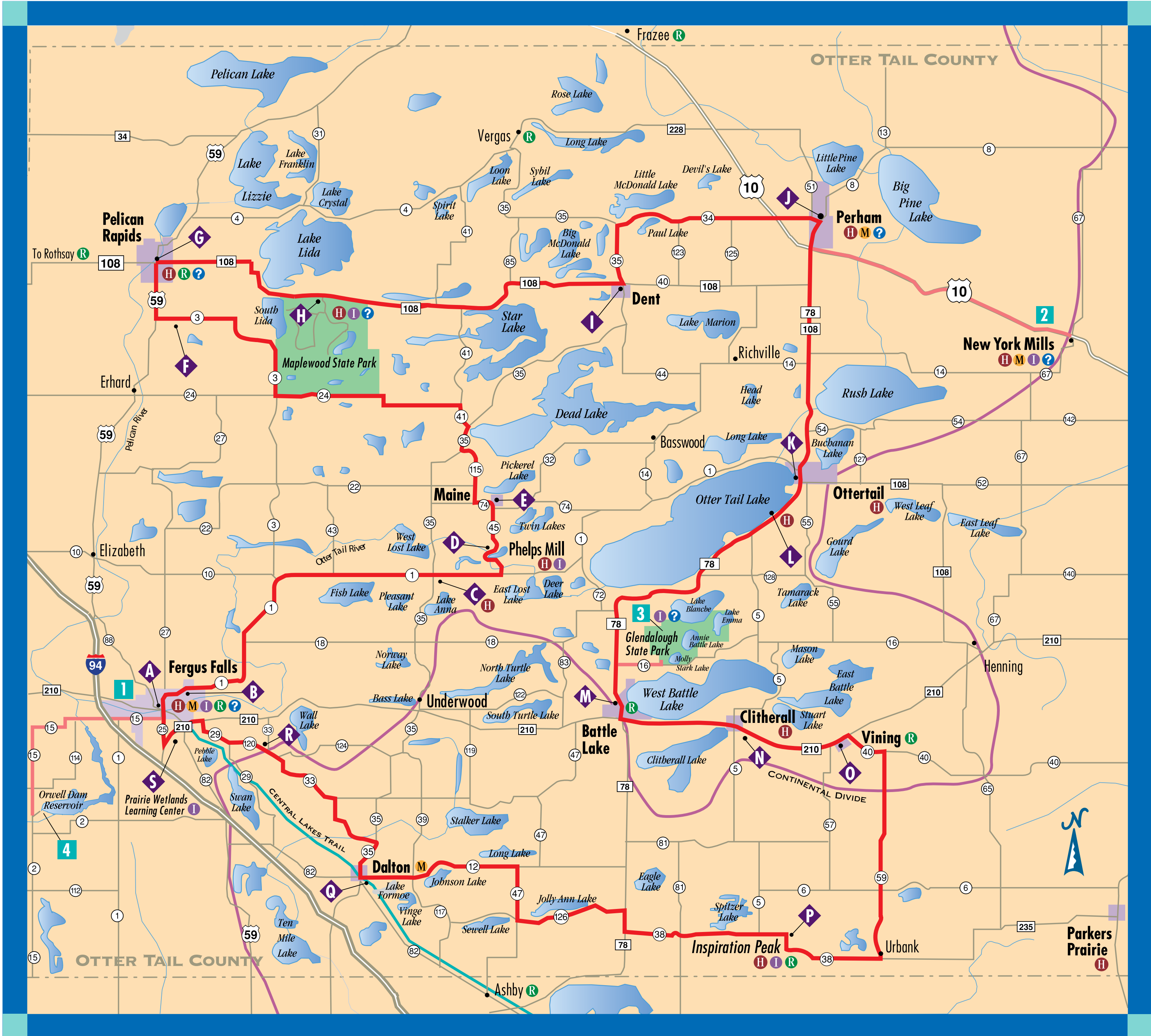
The Byway has many curves and turns as it winds throughout the county. Always watch your speed and look for pedestrians, especially children and tourists, blind driveways, slow-moving farm equipment (be careful as you pass) and wildlife as you enjoy your drive.

Environmental Stewardship

We're proud of our historic, cultural and natural resources and are glad to share them with you. However, we ask you to remember that taking plants or animals from their natural environments may harm or destroy fragile habitats - and may also be illegal. Please don't litter or leave any items behind. We also ask that you respect not only the historic sites but also the private property along the Scenic Byway.



A State Scenic Byway in the
West Central
Lakes Area



This brochure provides information to support the many sites along the Byway. Corresponding interpretive sites along the route provide more detailed information and historical perspectives. The Otter Trail Scenic Byway makes a particularly spectacular fall color drive - with colors typically peaking in late September.

- Central Dam
- Fergus Falls
- Side Trip #1
- Barnard School
- Phelps Mill
- Maine
- Central Lutheran Church
- Pelican Rapids
- Maplewood State Park
- Dent
- Perham
- Side Trip #2
- Ottertail City
- Otter Tail Lake
- Side Trip #3
- Battle Lake
- Clitherall
- Vining
- Inspiration Peak
- Dalton
- Dane Prairie Town Hall
- Prairie Wetlands Learning Center
- Side Trip #4

- DISCOVERY SITE
- SIDE TRIP
- HISTORICAL MARKER
- MUSEUM
- INTERPRETATION
- ROADSIDE SCULPTURE
- INFORMATION
- CONTINENTAL DIVIDE
- CENTRAL LAKES TRAIL



Let's hit the trail. You're in for an adventure!

Otter Trail Scenic Byway

BYWAY SITE A

Dams

Location: *On Cascade Street, between Lincoln and Washington in downtown Fergus Falls.*

The river has always been important to Fergus Falls. Sawmills, flour mills and woolen mills were built along its banks, and the rapids were harnessed for hydropower. A working turbine is above the rushing river at the Central (formerly Wright) Dam site walkway. For a pleasant stroll, visit the Riverwalk, a half-mile brickwork path along the Otter Tail River.



Wright Dam

Photo [#21557] from the collections of the Otter Tail County Historical Society.



Central Dam – current day

BYWAY SITE B

Fergus Falls: River City

Location: *On the southeast corner of Friberg and Summit, at the river parking area.*

Fergus Falls is a river city, and it was the rapids along the river that lured James Whitford to set up a townsite here in 1857. He named the location after his employer, James Fergus. Fergus Falls became the county seat in 1872; the arrival of the railroad in 1879 assured the city's success.

A cyclone that struck Fergus Falls in June 1919 killed 62 people and injured 200. The storm damaged more than two-thirds of the city.

Fergus Falls is now a bustling city and Otter Tail County seat. Performing arts, a history museum, environmental learning center and art galleries offer entertainment and education to residents and visitors. Shopping varies from the quaint to national chain favorites. A world-class equestrian center, bee farm, model-car museum and major conference center help draw people to the region. Nature's finest – tallgrass prairies, lakes and rivers – draw enthusiasts to relax and enjoy Fergus Falls. The Pine to Prairie Birding Trail, Central Lakes Trail and golf courses round out Fergus Falls with recreational offerings.



Lincoln Avenue in 1871

Photo [#12108] from the collections of the Otter Tail County Historical Society.



Lincoln Ave. – current day

SIDE TRIP 1

Fergus Falls: Otter Tail County Historical Museum

Location: *1110 West Lincoln Ave., Fergus Falls.*

Considered one of the best local history museums in Minnesota, a trip to the museum's exhibit gallery reveals over 100 permanent and changing displays. While strolling past the stunningly realistic dioramas and authentically furnished period rooms, visitors are carried back in time to recreated sounds of 19th century agricultural life and a 1915 main street. In the Chicken Scratch Theater guests watch the award winning production "Changes and Challenges: This Great Field of Agriculture." The entire family can play Museum Bingo which requires keen eyes and makes a visit fun and educational. The museum also has an extensive genealogy library and gift shop.

Visit www.OTCHS.org or call 218-736-6038 for more information.

For Byway Information



Otter Trail Scenic Byway

800-726-8959

www.VisitFergusFalls.com
info@VisitFergusFalls.com

Helpful Resources

Fergus Falls Convention & Visitors Bureau
www.VisitFergusFalls.com
800-726-8959

Perham Chamber of Commerce
www.Perham.com
800-634-6112

Fergus Falls Area Chamber of Commerce
www.FergusFalls.com
218-736-6951

Explore Minnesota
www.ExploreMinnesota.com
888-TOURISM (868-7476)

Pelican Rapids Chamber of Commerce
www.PelicanRapidsChamber.com
218-863-1221

Otter Tail Country Tourism
www.OtterTailCountry.com
800-423-4571

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This project has been financed in part with funds provided by the State of Minnesota through the Minnesota Historical Society from the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund.

BYWAY SITE C

Rural Schools

Location: *At the southeast corner of the intersection of County Roads 35 and 1.*

Education was a priority for settlers in Otter Tail County; as soon as an area had enough children, citizens applied to the county to form a school district. By 1938 the number of rural school districts had grown to 289, more than any other county in Minnesota.

The Barnhard School, built of local fieldstone in 1939, is on the National Register of Historic Places. A WPA project, it was designed by local architect E.O. Broaten in art deco-moderne style.



Barnhard School

BYWAY SITE D

Phelps Mill National Historic District

Location: *On County Road 45, halfway between Fergus Falls and Pelican Rapids.*

The three-story mill, built in 1889, was powered by two 7,000-pound turbines. It produced between 60 and 75 barrels of flour daily, making Otter Tail County the largest flour-producing area west of Minneapolis at that time. Inside the mill, visitors can enjoy the self-guided tour and video. Cross the street and shop at the mill's historic general store.

Visit www.co.otter-tail.mn.us/phelpsmill or call (218) 826-6159 for more information.

The Phelps Mill Festival, held every year during the second weekend in July, offers high quality art in a variety of mediums. In addition to shopping, the festival features great entertainment on the main stage and around the grounds each day.

Visit www.PhelpsMillFestival.com for more information.



Phelps Mill

BYWAY SITE E

Maine Stagecoach Stop

Location: *At the intersection of County Roads 45 and 74, between Fergus Falls and Perham.*

In 1889, after brief stints as a school teacher and store clerk, W.L. Wilson launched his new store and stagecoach stop here, halfway between Fergus Falls and Perham. The 45-mile trip took a day each way. Widely known as a generous man, Wilson often "carried over" lines of credit for settlers during lean years until the next crop was harvested.

BYWAY SITE F

Churches & Cemeteries

Location: *Central Lutheran Church, south of Pelican Rapids off Highway 59 on County Road 3.*

Scores of picturesque churches are tucked among the hills and lakes of Otter Tail County. Though simple in design, they symbolize the faith, community and tradition of the early settlers. Along with the many churches, some 240 cemeteries also dot the landscape.

BYWAY SITE G

Pelican Rapids: The Immigrant Story

Location: *The parking lot on the northeast corner of State Highways 59 and 108, facing Pelican Pete, the World's Largest Pelican.*

In 1868, two employees of the British Northwest Company, while working to establish trading posts with the Ojibwa, discovered these rapids and spread the word to the cities of St. Cloud and St. Paul. Hearing the news, a young Swedish immigrant named John M. Johnson set out on the Red River Oxcart Trail and became the first settler to file a claim in Pelican Township.

Ten years later, one of the area's most industrious immigrants arrived. R. L. Frazee not only built a flour mill, bank, hardware store and post office, he also hired men to change the natural course of the river.

Today, Pelican Rapids annually celebrates the Pelican Fest, recognizing the new wave of settlers from Eastern Europe, Central America, Mexico, Africa and Asia.

On the north end of town, between State Highway 59 and Hwy 9 is the Township Historical Monument. Constructed of split fieldstone with inset bronze plaques the monument memorializes the early history of these communities and was dedicated on September 22, 1946.

Another historic marker just north of town on State Highway 59 identifies Pelican Rapids' earliest immigrant, "Minnesota Woman." Her skeleton was discovered in 1931 and is believed to be 10,000 years old.

BYWAY SITE H

Maplewood State Park

Location: *East of Pelican Rapids on State Highway 108.*

This beautiful and scenic 9,200 acre park is nestled between the state's eastern forests and western prairies. Autumn brings a stunning display of brilliant reds, oranges and gold to these rolling maple forests. The eight major lakes and many ponds offer water lovers places to swim, fish, boat and simply relax. A wide variety of fishing opportunities are available. The park offers a beautiful picnic shelter along with a sandy swimming beach along the shore of Lake Lida. Drive along the 4.5 mile scenic Park Drive to observe wildlife: the park is host to 150 species of birds and 50 species of mammals. An extensive trail system offers 25 miles of hiking and 20 miles of horse-back riding trails. Cross-country skiers and snowmobilers find excellent trail opportunities during the winter. The park also offers several camping areas with a wide variety of camping facilities. A Trail Center has information on watchable wildlife, archeological sites and interpretive trails.

Visit www.dnr.state.mn.us/maplewood or call 218-863-8383 for more information.



Maplewood State Park

BYWAY SITE I

Dent

Location: *At the intersection of State Highway 108 and County Road 35.*

Platted in 1903, Dent grew as a major wood shipping center. Heavy timber, interspersed with farms, covered most of the area. Much of the open land you see today was cleared as Dent was coming of age. Pay for grubbing (removing) stumps was 50 cents a day.

In the early years, Dent was a thriving village with a lumber yard, creamery, feed mill, restaurants, railway station and a busy barrel factory.

BYWAY SITE J

Perham: Railroads and Industry

Before the arrival of the railroad, it took nearly 14 days in two-wheeled oxcarts to travel from Perham to St. Cloud, the nearest railroad town. When the Northern Pacific Railway laid tracks through Perham in 1871, the city's economic future changed forever. Grist mills and lumber mills sprang up, and the resulting growth in trade provided employment for hundreds.

One of Perham's more recent entrepreneurs also found value in locating his business along the railroad line. In 1947 "Tuffy" Nelson launched Pine Lakes Feed Co., which grew into the highly successful Tuffy's Pet Foods. Tuffy and his son Kenny founded the Barrel O'Fun snack food company in 1973 and Kenny's Candy in 1987.

In Their Own Words museum is a Veteran's Museum that invites visitors to experience the memories and events of those who were there. Today, Perham is a thriving economic community with specialty shops, restaurants, tranquil lakes, pristine golf courses, a biking trail, abundant wildlife and parks.



Perham City Hall and Chamber of Commerce

SIDE TRIP 2

New York Mills: Regional Cultural Center/Finn Creek Open Air Museum

Location: *Southeast of Perham at the intersection of U.S. Highway 10 and County Road 67.*

Located in the 1885 Olaf Pary building, the New York Mills Regional Cultural Center sponsors an on-going schedule of art exhibitions and cultural events including the annual Great American Think Off. Due to the Cultural Center, New York Mills has received national attention as a haven for art and culture in rural America.

Finn Creek Open Air Museum is patterned after the 1894 farmstead of Sifert and Wilhelmina Tapio. The original site had nine known structures of which the sauna and farmhouse survive. Finn Creek sponsors an annual folk festival which celebrates Finnish culture through food, dance and music.

Visit www.kulcher.org or call 218-385-3339 for more information.

BYWAY SITE K

Ottertail City: Boom & Bust

Location: *Halfway between Battle Lake and Perham at the intersection of State Highways 78 and 108.*

The term "boom and bust" sums up the colorful history of Ottertail City. It boomed as the headquarters of the Northern Pacific Railway – boasting a population of 1,200, a jail and 27 saloons in its heyday – but busted when local landowners couldn't come to final terms with the railroad, and the tracks were re-routed north to Perham. Ottertail City not only lost the railroad, it also lost the designation of "county seat" not once, but twice.

Visit www.VisitOttertail.com or call 218-367-2250 for more information.

BYWAY SITE L

Otter Tail Lake

Location: *Approximately 13 miles south of Perham on the lake side of State Highway 78. Pull into the wayside rest area (not the public boat access) on the west side of the roadway facing Otter Tail Lake.*

Abundant wildlife made this area the prime hunting ground of the Ojibwa and Dakota people long before Europeans discovered it. In fact, Otter Tail Lake was named by the local Indians because of a sandbar shaped like an otter's tail where the river flows into the lake.

The Otter Tail River Trail winds 157 miles through three distinct ecosystems crisscrossing the Byway on its way through coniferous forests, deciduous forests and prairie grasslands. Along the way, it flows through thirty lakes, the largest of which is its namesake.

Later, enterprising voyageurs and traders established outposts for the biggest trading firms of the time, including the rival Northwest, Astor and Hudson Bay companies. An early fur trader set up a trading post on the lake's eastern shore, now the location of Ottertail City.

Today, Otter Tail Lake, the largest lake of the 1,048 lakes in Otter Tail County, features clear blue water, great fishing and water activity, resorts, restaurants and a golf course.

BYWAY SITE M

Battle Lake

Location: *The picnic/rest area on the west side of State Highway 78, at the foot of the Chief Wenonga roadside statue.*

This lakeshore is the site of historic battles between Dakota and Anishanabe (Ojibwa) warriors. In 1795, after being badly beaten by a large Dakota war party, the Anishanabe tribe, led by young Chief Wenonga, renamed the lake "ish-quan-a-de-win-ing," meaning "where but few survived."

The Prospect House, a Georgian-style "mansion," is a treasure in its own right. The house, which was built in 1882, features

a Civil War Museum in the lower level. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and has been continually inhabited by descendants of Cap Colehour since its construction.

From Battle Lake, a 12 mile long paved trail passes through woods and prairie looping through Glendalough State Park and offering striking views of Annie Battle and Molly Stark lakes along the way.



Prospect House & Civil War Museum

SIDE TRIP 3

Glendalough State Park

Location: *The park entrance is north off county Road 16, 1.8 miles east of State Highway 78.*

Nine miles of pristine lakeshore and almost 2,000 acres of woodlands and prairie provide a scenic backdrop for hiking, biking, picnicking, fishing, swimming, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing. Following a primitive theme, this park offers cart-in and canoe-in tent camping, camper cabins, and yurts alongside Annie Battle Lake, Minnesota's first Heritage Fishery. A paved bike and pedestrian trail loops through the forest and prairie, and the historic lodge recounts Glendalough's past as a private game farm and retreat. Wildlife and wildflowers abound along the park's many hiking trails. Equipment rentals are available.

Visit www.dnr.state.mn.us/glendalough or call 218-864-0110 for more information.



BYWAY SITE N

Clitherall

Location: *At the roadside pulloff east of County Road 5 on the south side of State Highway 210.*

The first permanent white settlers in Otter Tail County were the Cutlerites, a Mormon sect founded by Alpheus Cutler. They established homesteads on Clitherall Lake in 1865 and built the first church and school in the area. The Cutlerites lived as a colony, sharing land, tools and labor.



Old Town, Clitherall, 1865

Photo [#2560] from the collections of the Otter Tail County Historical Society.

BYWAY SITE O

Vining Roadside Sculptures

Location: *On the south side of State Highway 210 at the "foot" statue in downtown Vining.*

This is where you'll find a bare foot weighing 1,200 pounds and standing 12 feet tall, a giant metal coffee cup supported by a stream of pouring coffee, an enormous square knot, a larger than life-sized watermelon slice and other huge roadside figures. It's an outdoor gallery of mammoth metal sculptures along the streets of Vining, created by Ken Nyberg.



Roadside Sculpture in Vining

OTHER ROADSIDE SCULPTURES

Unique roadside attractions and other sculptures can be found at various locations in and near Otter Tail County, including:

Ashby: The Coot

Battle Lake: Chief Wenonga, American Indian Woman

Fergus Falls: Otto the Otter, The Goose, The Working Man, George B. Wright, Joe Whitford, Madison School and the Continental Divide

Frazee: The Giant Turkey

Ottertail: The Otter

Pelican Rapids: Pelican Pete

Rothsay: The Giant Prairie Chicken

Urbank: The Virgin Mary

Vergas: The Loon

BYWAY SITE P

Inspiration Peak

Location: *The entrance is off County Road 38, two miles west of Urbank (follow signs).*

Minnesota's Nobel-Prize-winning author Sinclair Lewis praised the "enchanted peace and seclusion of this place."



Inspiration Peak

Inspiration Peak, rising 400 feet above the surrounding terrain, is the highest point in central Minnesota. A paved footpath with several rest stops along the way, offers spectacular views of three counties and nine lakes from the top.

Visit www.co.otter-tail.mn.us/inspirationpeak for more information.

BYWAY SITE Q

Dalton

Location: *The entrance to the Threshermen's Grounds is one block south of the junction of County Roads 35 and 12.*

Wanting to share the colorful history of farming with younger generations, St. Olaf Township brothers George and Ralph Melby and their nephew Kenneth Bratvold organized the first threshermen's reunion in October 1954. Since then, the Lake Region Pioneer Threshermen's Association has sponsored a show each September, featuring vintage tractors, threshing machines and exhibits. A number of antique buildings have been reproduced or relocated to the site to create a small historical village.



Threshing Grounds
Photo by Steve Melby

BYWAY SITE R

Rural Architecture: Dane Prairie Town Hall

Location: *At the northwest corner of the junction of County Roads 120 and 33.*

The landscape of Otter Tail County is dotted with graceful farm houses, barns, outbuildings, and abandoned rural school buildings. Organized in 1870 the Dane Prairie Township has more lakes within its limits than any other in the county.



Round Barn, Otter Tail County

BYWAY SITE S

Prairie Wetlands Learning Center

Location: *602 State Highway 210 East, between I-94 and County Road 82 on the south side of 210 East.*

The Prairie Wetlands Learning Center offers interpretive and educational programs focusing on the prairie pothole region, and is the first residential environmental education center operated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Open to the public, this 330 acre site includes 3.5 miles of walking trails, 28 wetlands and acres of restored tallgrass prairie. The Visitor Center includes interactive exhibits, a sod house theater with interpretive videos, and the Bluestem Store which features books and gifts related to the prairie pothole region.



Prairie Wetlands Learning Center

The Visitor Center is open Monday through Friday from 8 am to 4 pm, and some Saturdays for special programs. The trails are open dawn to dusk daily. Trail maps and program schedules are available in the office and at the information kiosk near the parking lot.

Visit www.fws.gov/refuge/Fergus_Falls_wmd or call 218-998-4480 for more information.

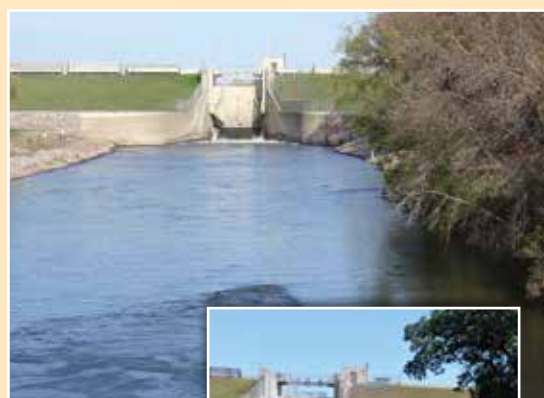
SIDE TRIP 4

Orwell Lake and Dam Wildlife Viewing Area

Location: *Six miles southwest of Fergus Falls on County Road 15; the picnic area is on the east side of the roadway between County Roads 114 and 2.*

Orwell Lake, created by a federal dam, is the perfect spot for watching wildlife in a natural setting. The Department of Natural Resources maintains a 2,000-acre wildlife sanctuary adjacent to the lake's recreation areas, providing food and shelter for many animals all year long.

Bank fishing is popular at the Orwell Lake recreation area. The site is equipped with picnic shelters, a playground and restrooms.



Fishing at Orwell Dam