

OverTheHedgerow Travel Guide

Number 1 v 1.0

Heart of Vilas County Bike Trails

Including the great towns of...

Manitowish Waters

Boulder Junction

St. Germain

Mercer

Sayner/Star Lake

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While doing research to take various trips to destination bike trails, I got frustrated and tired of not having one source which would give us honest reviews and in-depth guidance on what to do, where to stay, best locations to eat and most importantly where to ride.

Each of these OverTheHedgerow (OTH) Travel Guides is meant to be a review of our experiences during each of these trips to unique destinations and to perhaps make your visit much more enjoyable. We will share what worked for us and what we feel we could have done to improve the experience. Our goal is to make your day trip or weekend getaway more enjoyable with great food, local experiences and accommodations, while having fun.

We will provide links in our OTH Travel Guide to all key items mentioned and provide links to all of our social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and YouTube.

Podcast? Yes, we go even more in depth, highlighting these businesses and destinations on our live, interactive streaming podcast.

Overview:

I was born in Chicago and grew up in Northern Illinois for the first 30 years of my life and I spent a lot of that time going to camps “Up North” in Wisconsin. There was nothing better than spending a week near the Wisconsin/Northern Michigan border near Watersmeet at a Boy Scout canoe base camp, or at the YMCA camp at Phantom Lake and at church camp in Lake Geneva.

The outdoors was a key part of my life growing up which lead me to go to [Michigan Tech](#) in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Unbeknownst to me on my way up Highway 51 from Northern Illinois to Tech several times a year, I was passing one of the most beautiful and serene places on earth.

As I researched destination bike trails online, the Heart of Vilas County bike trail popped up.....and the rest is history as they say.

How do you get here?

The Heart of Vilas County Bike trail is easily accessible from anywhere in Wisconsin, Northern Illinois or Minnesota. For the most part, you are on interstates or at least divided

highways, until the last hour or so of your trip. As you head north, you see the hustle and bustle of civilization fall by the wayside and begin to spot small lakes along the road and pick up the intoxicating smells of the north, including of course, evergreens along the road. I invite you to roll down your window to truly experience Up North.

The Heart of Vilas County Bike Trail System:

Our experience so far after multiple visits to this trail is primarily focused on the trail from Mercer to Boulder Junction. This trail, in its entirety, winds through the [Northern Highland American Legion Forest](#). The trail is now 52 miles from north to south and is constantly being extended and improved. Most recently these extensions include a bridge over the Manitowish River which connected the trail to Mercer. There is also an extension being added to the trail in the Boulder Junction area to provide safe trail access from some area campgrounds and developments.

Of all the bike trails we have ridden in the Midwest, I have got to say this is THE best maintained bike trail you will find in the State of Wisconsin and maybe anywhere in the Midwest. The surface is blacktop and it seems like it is as smooth as the day they first installed the trail. There are quite a few trestle style bridges along the trail that traverse the edges of the endless lakes and gin clear streams in the area. Click [here](#) for a map.

There are six bike Fixation stations along the trail if you need to pump up your tires or maybe or maybe tighten a bolt. There are twenty different access points to the trail with parking, so you can pick the trail up wherever you want. Simply take your bike to the portion of the trail you haven't ridden yet and enjoy the ride.

You don't have a bike or you may not be in Tour de France condition to ride? There is a solution for that as well. We stopped by [Coontail Sports](#) in both Boulder Junction and [Arborvitae](#) and you couldn't meet nicer people. Besides having anything you need for outdoor sports, they also rent [Specialized eBikes](#) to make your trip on the trail enjoyable, but more on that later.

Hungry along the way? Well, that is another highlight of this trail as it goes right by great restaurant after restaurant. Simply hop off your bike and order your cheese curds, you've earned them! You may actually gain some weight while riding 20 or 30 miles on this trail...

Lodging

Each time we have ridden this trail, we have stayed at [The Lodge at Manitowish](#) in the very quiet “village” of Manitowish which is about three blocks long. The owners of this lodge and their additional lodges on Rest Lake are committed to providing the best in service and facilities. As noted in our other OTH Travel Guides, we like to ride destination bike trails, but we also like to find great lodges to stay in and this is the best we have found anywhere we ride our bikes.

At 6’4”, my search when staying somewhere is to find a king size bed, which is not always easy especially in smaller resort towns where these bike trails are located. In the main lodge not only do they have great units with a king size bed, they also have fireplaces since this is a year round resort which also serves snowmobilers in the winter. There is also what they refer to as a Luxury Apartment, which is exactly as described. We have stayed in both the regular rooms and the apartment.

Since we enjoy making our own breakfast and Cheryl is a gourmet cook, we often try to find units with a full kitchen. If you stay in the Luxury Apartment you are only a few steps away from their morning breakfast of fresh fruit and muffins and to die for granola bars. There is also a full size kitchen with everything you would expect to if you would like to stay in after a bike ride and enjoy a relaxing evening.

If you have bikes which you would like a little more secure than on your car’s bike rack, they allowed us to keep our bikes in the locked garage during the night.

We have also stayed at their [Condos on Rest Lake](#) as well as most recently at the [Vance Lake House](#) which is nothing less than the best accommodations we have stayed on while biking.

If you are looking for a relaxing weekend, book some time at their spa or stop by the world class [Manitowish Waters Athletic Club](#) they built adjacent to their condos on Rest Lake. There you can go for a swim, workout or take a sauna for a minimal daily cost.

If you need groceries there is a great little grocery store across the street from the Lodge at Manitowish Waters that carries everything you will need for dinner or a snack.

We think their rates are more than reasonable for the level of service and rooms/condos they have developed in Manitowish. Dana is the General Manager and she always provides outstanding service. We are not sponsored by The Lodge and pay the current rate whenever we stay there.

Restaurants

As I mentioned before, we do cook most of our breakfasts and dinners in our room/condo when we travel to destination bike trails, but we enjoy finding great places to enjoy a good lunch.

[The Granary](#) in Boulder Junction

Located less than 100' off the bike path is The Granary restaurant and it directly across the street from Coontails Bike Rental Store. You can sit out on the screened in porch or inside the restaurant. When you ride into the parking lot you will see a lot of other parked bikes and trucks with fishing boats in tow. During our last trip, we ate lunch during a break from riding during some intermittent rain storms . The staff and food was great and we will eat there again as we ride through Boulder Junction.

[Smokey's](#) in Manitowish Waters

This spot has been on our list since we started visiting MW a couple of years ago, but it just has not fit into our schedule. This is fine dining in a casual Northwoods setting.

[Dixies](#) In Manitowish Waters

Being located right on the bike trail, Dixie's is a great place to stop for breakfast or lunch with their made to order food and refreshing smoothies. Did I mention they are located right on Vance Lake so you can either sit inside next to the large windows and look at Vance Lake, or you can sit out on the large outside patio or maybe walk down the stairs and sit on the dock while enjoying your lunch.

Shopping

Although our main purpose on our trips is to find great trails to ride our bikes on, we also love to take in the local/regional flavors of adjacent towns and available activities.

Each town along the bike trail has locally owned stores with unique offerings such as [People Lures](#) or [Coontails](#) in Boulder Junction.

Day Trips/Outdoor Activities

Rivers Edge Outfitters

No need to bring your own kayaks to paddle...you can rent one of theirs and take a leisurely paddle on the Manitowish River. During the winter, they also rent XC Ski equipment and fat bikes. When you are done, simply give them a call and they will come pick you up and bring you right back to your car at the end of the day. Rivers Edge Outfitters has also added a self service bike rental station located right on the bike trail in Manitowish Waters.

Bayfield Wisconsin/Apostle Islands

Just a quick and scenic two hour ride brings you into the quaint town of Bayfield, Wisconsin. Besides the great shops of local artisans in town, the highlight for us was taking a trip right out of the marina at the bottom of the hill to visit the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore. The lakeshore and islands that make up the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore are much more breathtaking in person than any video you may have seen. I highly recommend this day trip or if you want to break up the trip, stay overnight and head back to Manitowish Waters area the next day.

OverTheHedgerow Social Media Platforms/Links

Website: overthehedgerow.com from our website you can launch any of our social media platforms.

Instagram We will post photos and short videos on IG which are automatically shared with our FB page.

Podcast Our live, interactive, streaming podcast will highlight some of our trips, talks with interesting people in the biking community and other thoughts related to enjoying life on a bike.

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