

**MNDOT HISTORIC ROADSIDE DEVELOPMENT
STRUCTURES INVENTORY**

LA-BBT-023
CS 3806

Split Rock Lighthouse Overlook

Historic Name Other Name	Split Rock Lighthouse Overlook	CS # SHPO Inv #	3806 LA-BBT-023
Location	SE side of TH 61 1.75 mi NE of Split Rock River	Hwy District Reference	TH 61 1A 45.1
City/Township County Twp Rng Sec USGS Quad UTM	Beaver Bay Township Lake 55N 8W Sec 32 Split Rock Point Z15 E622760 N5228390	Acres Rest Area Class	.22 4
Designer	Minn Dept of Highways (MHD)	SP #	3806-01
Builder	Minn Dept of Highways (MHD)	SHPO Review #	
Historic Use Present Use	Roadside Parking Area Roadside Parking Area	MHS Photo #	013538.10-24 013544.07-09
Yr of Landscape Design	1948	MnDOT Historic Photo Album	Ols 2.53 Ols 2.54 Ols 2.54a
Overall Site Integrity	Intact/Slightly Altered		
Review Required	Yes		
National Register Status	Eligible, see Statement of Significance		
Historic Context	Roadside Development on Minnesota Trunk Highways, 1920-1960		

List of Standing Structures

Feat#	Feature Type	Year Built	Fieldwork Date
01	Overlook Wall	1948 Circa early 1950s	10-12-97
02	Bench(es), Other	1948 Circa early 1950s	
03	Marker	1955	
<p>See http://www.dot.state.mn.us/roadsides/historic/files/wayrep-suppl.pdf for additional information.</p>			<p>Prep by Gemini Research Dec. 98 G1. 70</p>
<p>NOTE: Landscape features are not listed in this table</p>			<p>Prep for Site Development Unit Cultural Resources Unit Environmental Studies Unit</p>

Final Report	Historic Roadside Development Structures on Minnesota Trunk Highways (1998)
---------------------	---

■ BRIEF

The Split Rock Lighthouse Overlook is located on the southeastern side of T.H. 61 about 1.75 miles northeast of the Split Rock River. It is situated west of the Split Rock Lighthouse and History Center that is located on Split Rock Point, and was designed to provide a view of the lighthouse. The wayside rest is located within the bounds of Split Rock Lighthouse State Park, about 5.5 miles southwest of Beaver Bay.

■ STANDING STRUCTURES

Overlook Wall. Built 1948 by MHD. The only standing structure on the site is an overlook wall built of stone laid in a random pattern on a stone and concrete footing. Several different types of stone were used: local brownish-black gabbro; pink, dark gray, and whitish-gray granite; a greenish stone; and tan limestone. Some of the stone is rockfaced and roughly-cut and some appears to be quarry rubble. The stones vary in size from about 6" by 8" to about 2' by 2'. The wall is irregular in shape with both curved and straight sections. It is about 2'6" tall. The central section has seven lengths of open railing. The rails are made of rusting iron beams, but are specified as stained and varnished timber on the original plans. (It is difficult to tell on Sept. 1955 photo whether the rails are timber or metal. See Olson photo album, Volume 2, p. 54a.) The rails are supported by rectangular piers (about 18" by 3'6") that are spaced at 8' intervals. The inner side of the wall is lined with a 10'-wide asphalt-paved walkway that is edged with a concrete curb. Near the southeastern corner of the wall is a rectangular lookout bay that is entered via three angled, poured concrete steps. (The steps are asymmetrical in shape on the original plan but were built in a symmetrical shape.) Within the lookout bay is a raised terrace that is paved with asphalt (specified as concrete paving on the plans). The southern wall of the bay has three sections of open railing.

Each end of the 280'-long overlook wall is marked by an 8'5" tall pier. Each pier has a projecting iron beam that originally served as an arm to support a hanging wooden sign. (The plan specifies that the signs be made of redwood clamped with iron straps. The plans specify that the signs say "Parking Overlook.")

A geological plaque on a free-standing, lectern-type pedestal was erected near the wall's midpoint in 1955. The text of the plaque addresses the geology of the Split Rock Region. (See marker text at the end of this document.)

Concrete Bench. Built 1948 by the MHD. A 16'-long poured concrete bench sits against the northern side of the overlook wall's lookout bay. The bench is supported by four concrete pedestals.

■ OTHER LANDSCAPE FEATURES AND PLANTINGS

The site's access road is an asphalt-paved pull-off drive that widens into a paved parking area. There is a very narrow, 124'-long, poured concrete, curb-lined island between the parking area and T.H. 61.

The parking area and wall are surrounded by an area of grassy lawn which ends at the edge of a dense forest. The forested land drops off fairly steeply down to the lakeshore south of the wall.

■ **SETTING**

The Split Rock Lighthouse Overlook is located in a forested, rural setting on the northwestern side of T.H. 61 about 1.75 miles northeast of the Split Rock River. It is situated west of the Split Rock Lighthouse and History Center that is located on Split Rock Point, and was designed to provide a view of the lighthouse. The wayside rest is located within the bounds of Split Rock Lighthouse State Park. The site is surrounded by a cafe and souvenir shop to the west, forests in all directions, and Lake Superior to the south.

■ **INTEGRITY**

Alterations

The site was built fairly close to plan, with the exception of the variations in the construction of the wall that are cited in the wall description above.

The site is basically intact. The island between the parking area and T.H. 61 has been made more narrow. The trees south of the overlook wall have grown up and now block the intended view of the lighthouse.

The site retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

Notes on Condition

The wall is in poor condition. It is missing many stones, the iron rails are rusting and missing, and the wall has been poorly remortared with various mortar materials. The trees along the shoreline have grown up and block the intended view of the lighthouse. The rest area is only minimally maintained and the wall is overgrown with weeds.

■ **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The Split Rock Lighthouse Overlook was built as a 600'-long roadside development project that focused specifically on the construction of this wayside rest. The plans were signed in March of 1948 by Harold E. Olson (Engineer of Roadside Development), R. J. Wolfangle (Engineer of Plans), Walter Schultz (Assistant Engineer of Plans and Surveys), and G. G. Gladman (Engineer of Plans and Surveys), and, in October of 1948, by O. L. Kipp (Chief Engineer).

The site may have been designed by Fred Vogt, who was the Roadside Development Division's staff Landscape Architect during this period. Retired Roadside Development employee Ken Madole indicated during an interview for this study that he worked on the Split Rock Overlook.

■ PREVIOUS SHPO REVIEWS

There apparently have been no previous SHPO cultural resource reviews of the property.

■ STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Split Rock Lighthouse Overlook was built in 1948 by the MHD. It is one of 37 stone overlook walls recorded in this inventory.

This property has been evaluated within the historic context "Roadside Development on Minnesota Trunk Highways, 1920-1960." It is recommended that the site is ELIGIBLE for the National Register under this historic context because it meets the following registration requirements:

Non-Federal Relief Property That Closely Resembles a Federal Relief Property. The Split Rock Lighthouse Overlook is an excellent example of a Non-Federal relief property, built during the decade immediately following the end of the federal relief programs (1943-1953), which strongly represents a continuation of the design principles and philosophy of the federal relief-built roadside development sites. (National Register Criterion A.)

Design Significance. The Split Rock Lighthouse Overlook is a basically intact example of the application of the "National Park Service Rustic Style" to a wayside rest that incorporates an overlook wall. It displays labor-intensive construction techniques and distinctive use of indigenous materials that characterize both the Rustic style and federal relief construction in Minnesota. (National Register Criterion C.)

The property may also be associated with the "Tourism and Recreation in the Lake Regions, 1870-1945" and "Minnesota State Park Development, 1889-1943" historic contexts.

■ OTHER COMMENTS

This property may require further evaluation for potential archaeological resources.

T.H. 61 past this site is very busy during the summer months.

The text of the marker is associated with the region between Split Rock and Beaver Bay. It is not specifically associated with the site of the wayside rest.

■ REFERENCES

Architectural Resources, Inc. *A Master Plan for Split Rock Lighthouse Historic Site*. Duluth: Architectural Resources, Inc., 1977.

Meyer, Roy W. *Everyone's Country Estate. A History of Minnesota's State Parks*. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1991.

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. *A Management Plan for Split Rock Lighthouse State Park*. June 1980.

Olson, Harold E., comp. *Historical Markers in Minnesota*. 4 vols. Prepared by the Roadside Development Division, Minnesota Department of Highways. Ca. 1942, updated ca. 1954.

Site Plans. Minnesota Department of Transportation, St. Paul.

Thiel, George A. and Carl E. Dutton. *The Architectural, Structural, and Monumental Stones of Minnesota*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1935.

■ ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND MARKER TEXT

The gabbro used in the overlook wall was probably quarried locally. Duluth gabbro is an igneous rock that differs from granite because it has feldspar that gives it its green, dark gray, or black color. The stone is commercially referred to as "green granite," "black granite," and "trap rock." As early as 1896, gabbro was quarried in and around Duluth. There were many quarries in the Arrowhead Region including quarries in the Superior National Forest 18 miles southeast of Ely, an Arrowhead Granite Company quarry near Cook, and the McDonald Quarry near Angora. Gabbro was used to construct dozens of retaining walls, bridges, overlooks, and state park structures along Lake Superior, as well as many historic buildings, bridges, and other structures in Duluth.

The Ojibwe called the Split Rock River "Gininwabiko zibi," meaning "War Eagle Iron River." Euro-Americans named it the Split Rock River for the two high cliffs at its mouth. When viewed from a distance, the cliffs appear to be one rock formation that has split apart.

The U.S. Lighthouse Service constructed the Split Rock Lighthouse in 1910 on a rock outcropping 168' above the level of Lake Superior. The octagonal lighthouse is 54' high and the light was visible for 23 miles. The lighthouse was operated by the U.S. Coast Guard from 1939 to 1969. In 1971, the federal government deeded the lighthouse and ten other buildings (including the fog signal house and the keeper's house) to the State for a park. The Department of Natural Resources transferred jurisdiction of the lighthouse to the Minnesota Historical Society in 1976. Split Rock Lighthouse was listed on the National Register in 1969. The lighthouse has been a tourist attraction on the North Shore since 1924 when T.H. 61 (then called T.H. 1) was completed.

The Split Rock State Park was established by the Minnesota legislature in 1945. The legislature first appropriated funds to purchase 35 acres near the Split Rock Lighthouse. Park development did not take place until 1967 when the park was expanded to include the land around the Split Rock Lighthouse. At that time the name was changed to Split Rock Lighthouse State Park and the acreage was increased to 997 acres. Currently the state park includes the lighthouse, three highway rest areas (Split Rock River, Day's Hill, and the Split Rock Lighthouse Overlook), and 2.5 miles of Lake Superior shoreline. The Department of Natural Resources administers the park and the Minnesota Historical Society administers and interprets the lighthouse site.

Lake Superior and T.H. 61

Lake Superior is the largest body of fresh water in the world. The lake is 383 miles long, 160 miles wide, and is 489' to 1,400' deep. The Ojibwe called the Lake "Kitchigumi," meaning "Great Water." The early French traders called the lake "Lac Superieur" because it

was located at the head of the Great Lakes. By the early 1920s, Duluth and the North Shore area had become a mecca for tourists.

Trunk Highway 1 along the North Shore was built during the 1920s and 1930s and named the "Lake Superior International Highway" by the highway department in 1926. Its number was changed from 1 to 61 in 1934. The highway was the only thoroughfare to serve North Shore towns in Minnesota and to provide access to the Canadian North Shore from the state. It was specifically designed (and in some places, realigned) to provide outstanding views of the lake. Between Duluth and the Canadian border, T.H. 61 travels approximately 165 miles through three counties: St. Louis, Lake, and Cook. With the completion of the highway, recreation and tourism became important components of the North Shore economy.

Text of Metal Plaque on Geological Marker

"Geology of Minnesota Split Rock Region"

"The scenery of the region between Split Rock and Beaver Bay is the direct result of important events of the early geologic time.

"Lava flows, which had accumulated in this region to a thickness of about 30,000 feet, were lifted and arched by a huge mass of molten material rising through the earth's crust farther north. This mass, the Duluth gabbro, is now extensively exposed in the Duluth area.

"The lighthouse cliff standing 100 feet high is a fine-grained phase of gabbro named Beaver Bay diabase, the massive, resistant character of which makes the shore of this region particularly bold and rocky.

"At the base of the lighthouse on top of the cliff is another kind of rock, light green in color and coarse in texture, called anorthosite. It is this rock, anorthosite, which shows an excellent exposure in the highway cut at Silver Bay and stands up as prominent rounded hills from Split Rock to Carlton Peak near Tofte.

"Erected by the Geological Society of Minnesota and the Department of Highways, State of Minnesota aided by a grant from the Louis W. and Maud Hill Family Foundation, 1955"