

**MNDOT HISTORIC ROADSIDE DEVELOPMENT  
STRUCTURES INVENTORY**

OT-PEL-001  
CS 5618

Minnesota Woman Roadside Parking Area

<b>Historic Name</b> <b>Other Name</b>	Minnesota Woman Roadside Parking Area	<b>CS #</b> <b>SHPO Inv #</b>	5618 OT-PEL-001
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<b>Location</b>	E side of TH 59 .7 mi N of CSAH 4	<b>Hwy</b> <b>District</b> <b>Reference</b>	TH 59 4A 243.7
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<b>City/Township</b> <b>County</b> <b>Twp Rng Sec</b> <b>USGS Quad</b> <b>UTM</b>	Pelican Township Otter Tail 136N 43W Sec 11 36N 43W Sec 12 Pelican Rapids Z14 E725700 N5165700	<b>Acres</b> <b>Rest Area Class</b>	2 4
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<b>Designer</b>	Minn Dept of Highways (MHD)	<b>SP #</b>	5618
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<b>Builder</b>	Minn Dept of Highways (MHD)	<b>SHPO Review #</b>	
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<b>Historic Use</b> <b>Present Use</b>	Roadside Parking Area Roadside Parking Area	<b>MHS Photo #</b>	013529.12-16
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<b>Yr of Landscape Design</b>	1959	<b>MnDOT Historic Photo Album</b>	Ols 2.92
<b>Overall Site Integrity</b>	Intact/Slightly Altered		
<b>Review Required</b>	Yes		

<b>National Register Status</b>	Not Eligible, see Statement of Significance
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<b>Historic Context</b>	
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**List of Standing Structures**

Feat#	Feature Type	Year Built	
01	Marker	1959	
02	Well/Pump	1973	
NOTE: Landscape features are not listed in this table			

<b>Fieldwork Date</b>	07-20-97
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<b>Prep by</b>	Gemini Research Dec. 98 G1. 47
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<b>Prep for</b>	Site Development Unit Cultural Resources Unit Environmental Studies Unit
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<b>Final Report</b>	Historic Roadside Development Structures on Minnesota Trunk Highways (1998)
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■ BRIEF

The Minnesota Woman Roadside Parking Area is located about 0.7 miles north of CSAH 4 and about 1.5 miles north of the Pelican Rapids city limits. It is a 2-acre site on the eastern side of T.H. 59.

■ STANDING STRUCTURES

**Limestone Marker.** Built 1959 by MHD. The principal structure on the site is a free-standing, lectern-style marker that is built of tan, random ashlar limestone, probably laid on a concrete footing. The marker is positioned a few feet north of the parking area near its midpoint. The marker is approximately 9' wide by 4' deep by about 4'9" tall. The northern and southern sides of the marker are stepped to form two low limestone seats (about 1'4" by 2'6"). Set into its slanted top is a black metal plaque (about 3' by 4') that was installed in 1992 to replace the original plaque that was installed in 1959. It has the seals of the Minnesota Department of Highways and the Minnesota Historical Society cast near the bottom. The text of the plaque addresses the discovery of a prehistoric human skeleton. (See text at the end of this document.)

**Metal Pump.** Erected 1973 by MHD. A red metal pump (still working) is located approximately 195' southeast of the marker. It is set into an 8' by 8' poured concrete slab. There is a metal drain in the concrete slab, directly beneath the pump.

■ OTHER LANDSCAPE FEATURES AND PLANTINGS

The site contains a semicircular, asphalt-paved access drive that is approximately 800' in length. The drive widens into a parking area in front of the marker, which provides parking for about 12 cars. Directly west of the parking area is a 5' by 96' curb-lined asphalt-paved walkway that extends north and south in front of the marker. The marker is located immediately west of the walkway at the top of a grassy embankment that slopes down to T.H. 59. The rear (western) side of the marker can be prominently seen from quite a distance along T.H. 59. There are five metal-framed wooden portable picnic tables scattered throughout the site. Along the eastern edge of the site is a barbed wire fence and the remains of a gravel road.

This gently rolling site is planted with grass and deciduous trees, including cottonwoods, maples, and basswood. Many of the trees are original plantings, with a few newly-planted deciduous trees in the picnic area near the northwestern edge of the site. There are no plantings around or near the marker, with the exception of one deciduous bush on the southwestern edge of the asphalt-paved walkway. Most of the site and the embankment down to the highway is planted with grass.

The original planting plan specifies the planting of six juniper shrubs, 18 silver maples, and 30 deciduous shrubs.

■ **SETTING**

The site is located in a rural setting about 1.5 miles north of Pelican Rapids. It is bounded on the west by T.H. 59, Prairie Lake, and a residential area screened by a dense growth of deciduous trees. East of the site, the land gently slopes to farmland and trees. North and south of the site the T.H. 59 right-of-way is prominent, as well as grassy hills and deciduous trees. Prairie Lake (west of T.H. 59) and Lake Lizzie (northeast of this site) are linked by the Pelican River which runs east and west about 600' north of the site.

■ **INTEGRITY**

**Alterations**

The site appears to closely follow the 1959 construction plans.

A guardrail and posts, which were located on the northern and southern edges of the parking area, have been removed. Six junipers and several deciduous shrubs that were planted along the edges of the guardrail are gone. The short section of gravel drive, currently located on the eastern boundary of the site, once ran the length of the site. Two privies located near the eastern edge of the site have been removed. The original metal plaque was replaced in 1992.

The Minnesota Woman Roadside Parking Area retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

**Notes on Condition**

The asphalt drive is in good condition, but the asphalt walkway and curb in front of the marker are cracked and in poor condition. Two of the bolts that secure the metal plaque to the marker are missing, and graffiti has been scratched into the metal plaque. The marker has been remortared. A few stones are missing from the base of the marker. The landscaping seems to be well-maintained and in fair condition.

■ **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Prior to the development of this site, a small white metal sign had been placed on the T.H. 59 right-of-way near this location. The text of this sign read: "The bones of The Minnesota Man of Pleistocene Age were found in this road cut June 16, 1931."

The wayside rest was established in 1959. The marker was erected in 1959 by the Minnesota Historical Society and the Minnesota Department of Highways after the text was approved by the Minnesota Historic Sites and Marker Commission in June of 1959. The metal plaque on the stone marker was replaced in 1992. The previous plaque contained a very similar text to the current plaque. However, the skeleton was referred to as "Minnesota Man" rather than "Minnesota Woman."

**Minnesota Woman**

During the summer of 1931, a highway construction crew unearthed a human skeleton while excavating a roadway along the eastern shore of Prairie Lake. The skeleton was found nine

feet below the surface and was encased in laminated glacial clay. Archaeologists examined the bones and determined they were from a 15-year-old and dated back at least 10,000 and perhaps 20,000 years. To many scientists, the discovery of this skeleton is proof that a prehistoric people occupied this region of North America, arriving from Asia by the Bering Strait land bridge. An elk antler knife and unusual conch shell were discovered near the skeleton.

**■ PREVIOUS SHPO REVIEWS**

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

**■ STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The Minnesota Woman R.P.A. is a roadside parking area with a simple site design that was developed in 1959 by the MHD. Its stone marker is nearly identical to the markers at Clifton-French River and Bolles Mill, also in this inventory. Numerous lectern style, tan, limestone markers in this series were built by the MHD in the 1950s-1970s.

This property has been evaluated within the historic context "Roadside Development on Minnesota Trunk Highways, 1920-1960." It is recommended that the site is NOT ELIGIBLE for the National Register under this historic context because it does not meet the context registration requirements.

**■ OTHER COMMENTS**

This property may require further evaluation for potential archaeological resources.

T.H. 59 is busy past this site, but access to the site is safe because of the deceleration lane and appropriate signage.

The text of the historic marker is specifically associated with the site of the wayside rest and uses the phrase "was discovered at this point."

**■ REFERENCES**

Blegen, Theodore C. *Minnesota: A History of the State*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1975.

Minutes of Minnesota Historic Sites and Markers Commission. Mathilde Rice Elliot Papers. MHS. Nov. 3, 1958 and June 15, 1959.

Olsenius, Richard. *Minnesota Travel Companion: A Guide to History Along Minnesota's Highways*. Wayzata: Bluestem Productions, 1982.

*Pelican Rapids Diamond Jubilee: 75 Years of Progress*. Pelican Rapids: 1958.

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

WPA Guide to Minnesota. *Minnesota WPA Writers' Program*. 1938; rpt. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1985.

■ **ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND TEXT OF MARKER**

**Text of Metal Marker**

There is a map of the region at the top of the metal plaque. The text reads: "Minnesota Woman. Minnesota Woman -- the skeleton of a girl about 15 years of age -- was discovered at this point in 1931 by a highway repair crew. Although the skeleton has not been dated exactly, based on the site geology scientists believe it to be perhaps 10,000 years old. This would make Minnesota Woman one of America's oldest human skeletons.

"Two artifacts -- a dagger of elk horn and a conch shell -- were discovered with the bones. Archaeologists believe that the girl drowned in Glacial Lake Pelican, which had joined Glacial Lake Agassiz, a huge body of water that covered much of northwestern Minnesota at the end of the last ice age.

"Erected by the Minnesota Historical Society 1992." [Seals of the Minnesota Department of Transportation and the Minnesota Historical Society]