

**MNDOT HISTORIC ROADSIDE DEVELOPMENT  
STRUCTURES INVENTORY**

SL-DUL-2468  
CS 6982

Thompson Hill-Skyline Pkwy Overlook

<b>Historic Name</b> <b>Other Name</b>	Thompson Hill-Skyline Pkwy Overlook	<b>CS #</b> <b>SHPO Inv #</b>	6982 SL-DUL-2468
<b>Location</b>	E side Skyline Pkwy 200 S of Skyline Pkwy and TH 2	<b>Hwy</b> <b>District</b> <b>Reference</b>	I 35 1A 250
<b>City/Township</b> <b>County</b> <b>Twp Rng Sec</b> <b>USGS Quad</b> <b>UTM</b>	Duluth, City of St. Louis 49N 15W Sec 14 W Duluth Z15 E560650 N5175060	<b>Acres</b> <b>Rest Area Class</b>	4
<b>Designer</b>	Minn Dept of Highways (MHD)	<b>SP #</b>	
<b>Builder</b>	Minn Dept of Highways (MHD)	<b>SHPO Review #</b>	
<b>Historic Use</b> <b>Present Use</b>	Roadside Parking Area Roadside Parking Area	<b>MHS Photo #</b>	014746.15-25 014748.01-5
<b>Yr of Landscape Design</b>	Ca. 1967	<b>MnDOT Historic Photo Album</b>	
<b>Overall Site Integrity</b>	Intact/Slightly Altered		
<b>Review Required</b>	Yes		
<b>National Register Status</b>	Not Eligible, see Statement of Significance		
<b>Historic Context</b>	Roadside Development on Minnesota Trunk Highways, 1920-1960		

**List of Standing Structures**

Feat#	Feature Type	Year Built	Fieldwork Date
01	Overlook Wall	Ca. 1967	10-19-03
			<b>Prep by</b> Gemini Research May. 04 G1. 112
			<b>Prep for</b> Site Development Unit Cultural Resources Unit Environmental Studies Unit
NOTE: Landscape features are not listed in this table			

<b>Final Report</b>	Historic Roadside Development Structures on Minn Trunk Hwys (1998) <b>Addendum</b>
---------------------	--

■ **BRIEF**

The Thompson Hill-Skyline Parkway Overlook is a scenic overlook on the eastern side of Skyline Parkway within the City of Duluth. This segment of Skyline Parkway is located above (northwest of) the I-35 driving lanes and below (southeast of) Mn/DOT's Thompson Hill Travel Information Center (TIC) building.

■ **STANDING STRUCTURES**

**Stone Overlook Wall.** Built circa 1967 by the Minnesota Department of Highways (MHD). The overlook wall is a long, low stone structure that is aligned roughly north and south along the eastern shoulder area of Skyline Parkway. The wall is about 2' tall, 2' thick, and about 560' long. The wall is divided into three segments: a central 250'-long section, and flanking northern and southern sections that are about 150' and 160' long and angled slightly. The wall is built of undressed pieces of dark gray and dark brown native stone which blend with the site's natural rock outcroppings. The core of the wall appears to have been built of concrete and rubble fill. The inner (western) side of the wall has a distinctive course of large angled boulders mortared shoulder-to-shoulder with their pointed ends facing upward. Distributed evenly along the wall are about 25 piers that are spaced about 21' apart. The piers measure about 2' by 5' by about 2'6" tall. They project about 6" above the wall and give the wall visual solidity.

■ **OTHER LANDSCAPE FEATURES AND PLANTINGS**

The overlook was sited to provide a dramatic view of the St. Louis River, Lake Superior, and the cities of Duluth and Superior. The view is shared with other Mn/DOT structures that are found in successive layers as one descends eastward down Thompson Hill. They include Thompson Hill Travel Information Center (completed 1973), whose building is located about 500' above the overlook, and the MHD's Thompson Hill Overlook (built 1938, SHPO# SL-DUL-2431), which is located about 170' below the overlook under discussion. The I-35 driving lanes are located about 150' below the Thompson Hill-Skyline Parkway Overlook.

This section of Skyline Parkway consists of two driving lanes, each about 12' wide, and two paved shoulders, each about 8' wide.

Along the inner (western) side of the overlook wall is a combined parking area and pedestrian walkway area that is paved with bituminous. The parking area is about 22' deep near the wall's midpoint and tapers to a narrow point near the northern and southern ends of the site. The parking area has been repaved fairly recently. A shallow concrete gutter divides the parking area from Skyline Parkway's northbound lane.

Sections of circa 1960s post-and-cable guardrail extend from each end of the overlook wall.

One of the chainlink fences that lines the I-35 roadway angles close to the eastern face of the southern one-third of the overlook wall.

**Thompson Hill-Skyline Parkway Overlook**

There are no formal plantings associated with the site. The overlook wall is surrounded by volunteer grasses and small deciduous shrubs. In the general area are many deciduous trees and shrubs including aspen, sumac, and birch.

■ **SETTING**

The overlook is located on the eastern side of Skyline Parkway about 600' south of Kingsbury Creek and about 800' south of the junction of T.H. 2 and I-35. The overlook provides dramatic views of the cities of Duluth and Superior, the St. Louis River, and Lake Superior.

The site is surrounded by the Thompson Hill TIC on the west; I-35, the Thompson Hill Overlook (SL-DUL-2431), the Duluth, Missabe, and Iron Range Railroad tracks, and the forests of Fairmont Park on the east; and the roadbeds of I-35 and Skyline Parkway on the north and south.

■ **INTEGRITY**

**Alterations**

The wall's mortar joints have been poorly repaired and stones are missing. The site otherwise appears intact.

**Notes on Condition**

The wall is in very poor condition. Stones are falling off and its core is crumbling -- especially near the center where people stand on the top of the wall to get a better view. (The wall's 2' height makes it very inviting to stand on.) Mortar joints throughout have been poorly repaired and are crumbling.

■ **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The Thompson Hill-Skyline Parkway Overlook was built circa 1967 by the Minnesota Department of Highways (MHD). The site may have been created in association with the widening of the adjacent segment of TH 61, which then became a four-lane expressway called I-35. This portion of Skyline Parkway was apparently newly constructed as part of the building of I-35. This portion of Skyline Parkway brings local traffic (those who don't wish to take I-35) southward around the side of Thompson Hill toward the southwestern edge of Duluth, Jay Cooke State Park, and the nearby town of Proctor. The overlook was likely built shortly before the construction of Thompson Hill Travel Information Center (TIC) began. The TIC opened during the summer of 1973.

The overlook wall apparently existed by 1973 when Sheet 11 of 26 for S.P. 6982-79 (TH 35) indicates "in place overlook."

No names of specific designers or builders have been identified.

(More detailed research information: A plan sheet for work on TH 61 -- Sheet 20 of 107 for S.P. 6923-16/6924-02/6909-08 (signed May 21, 1958 by Benson) -- suggests that this portion of Skyline Parkway had not yet been built in 1958. The plan shows scattered small poplars existing at the position of the road, and shows the future centerline of Skyline Parkway as "C.L. future const."

**Thompson Hill-Skyline Parkway Overlook**

Another set of plans suggests that this segment of Skyline Parkway and the overlook were built circa 1967-1970. A plan sheet for the reconstruction of TH 61 as TH 35 -- Sheet 35 of 130 of S.P. 6982-14 (TH 35) -- specifies the construction of a 152 cubic-yard "squared" stone masonry wall at this location. On Sheet 61 of 130 of the same set, the words "Proposed Overlook" appear at this location. It is unclear whether these sheets date from 1965 or from 1970, however, because some sheets are signed 1965 and some signed 1970. The MHD's Construction Project Log Record for CS 6982 indicates that S.P. 6982-14 was constructed in 1967. The log also indicates considerable construction in this area in 1971.)

■ **PREVIOUS SHPO REVIEWS**

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

■ **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The Thompson Hill-Skyline Parkway Overlook was built circa 1967 by the Minnesota Department of Highways. The property has been evaluated within the historic context "Roadside Development on Minnesota Trunk Highways, 1920-1960." It is recommended that the property is Not Eligible for the National Register because of its recent construction date.

The property may also be associated with the "Tourism and Recreation in the Lake Regions, 1870-1945" historic context.

■ **OTHER COMMENTS**

At the time of fieldwork (a weekend day in autumn), Skyline Parkway was relatively quite past the site.

■ **REFERENCES**

Construction plans, various. Minnesota Department of Highways. St. Paul.

Construction Project Log Records. Minnesota Department of Highways. St. Paul.

Granger, Susan, Scott Kelly, and Kay Grossman. *Historic Roadside Development Structures on Minnesota Trunk Highways*. Prepared for Mn/DOT. Dec. 1998.

■ **ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

**Skyline Parkway**

Today Duluth's Skyline Parkway extends 25 miles from Beck's Road (on the west) to Seven Bridges Road (on the east). In its modern form, the parkway connects Jay Cooke State Park on the extreme west with the Lester River and Lester Park on the extreme east.

**Local Stone**

Three of the four major types of stone found in the Duluth area are black. They are basalt, gabbro, and diabase. All three are igneous rocks that predate glaciation of the area. Gabbro, in particular, was quarried in and around Duluth and marketed under such names as "green granite," "black granite," and "trap rock." Gabbro was used to construct roadside development features and state park structures along the North Shore, as well as many buildings in Duluth.