

**MNDOT HISTORIC ROADSIDE DEVELOPMENT
STRUCTURES INVENTORY**

SL-ORC-005
CS 6922
Orr Roadside Parking Area

Historic Name Other Name	Orr Roadside Parking Area	CS # SHPO Inv #	6922 SL-ORC-005
Location	W side of TH 53 1.6 mi N of the jct of TH 53 and CSAH 23 (jct is south of Orr)	Hwy District Reference	TH 53 1B 110
City/Township County Twp Rng Sec USGS Quad UTM	Orr, City of St. Louis 64N 20W Sec 1 Orr Z15 E512610 N5322550	Acres Rest Area Class	5 4
Designer	Nichols, A R, Consult Land Arch	SP #	6922-07 53-11-39-3
Builder	Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)	SHPO Review #	
Historic Use Present Use	Roadside Parking Area Roadside Parking Area	MHS Photo #	013558.15-25
Yr of Landscape Design	1938	MnDOT Historic Photo Album	Nic 1.17 Ols 3.135
Overall Site Integrity	Intact/Slightly Altered		
Review Required	Yes		
National Register Status	Eligible, see Statement of Significance Now listed: see http://www.dot.state.mn.us/roadsides/historic/files/wayrep-suppl.pdf for additional information.		
Historic Context	Roadside Development on Minnesota Trunk Highways, 1920-1960		

List of Standing Structures

Feat#	Feature Type	Year Built	Fieldwork Date
01	Overlook Wall	1938	08-10-97
02	Picnic Shelter(s)	Ca. 1980	
03	Footbridge	1989	
04	Dock	1989	
NOTE: Landscape features are not listed in this table			Prep by Gemini Research Dec. 98 G1. 53
			Prep for Site Development Unit Cultural Resources Unit Environmental Studies Unit

Final Report	Historic Roadside Development Structures on Minnesota Trunk Highways (1998)
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Property approximately 10 acres; see <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/roadsides/historic/files/wayrep-suppl.pdf> for additional information.

■ BRIEF

The Orr Roadside Parking Area is located on the western side of T.H. 53, 1.6 miles north of the junction of T.H. 53 and CSAH 23. The ~~5-acre~~ site is on the eastern shore of Pelican Lake within the city of Orr.

■ STANDING STRUCTURES

Overlook Wall. Built 1938 by the CCC. The principal structure on the site is an overlook wall constructed adjacent to T.H. 53 on the top of a hill overlooking Pelican Lake. The wall is built of random rubble pink, red, and gray granite on a stone footing. The wall is aligned north and south. It consists of a straight section measuring approximately 200' long, and two curved end sections that are each about 55' long. The wall is 18" thick and varies in height from 29" to 37" on the eastern face. (The western face is taller and varies in height with the terrain from about 4' to about 7'9" exposed.) It is anchored by 18 piers that are about 26" square and project about 6" above the wall. The straight portion of the wall has six sections of open balustrade that alternate with sections of solid wall. The balustrades are comprised of pairs of 6"-diameter, 12'-long rustic log railings. The balustrade sections are each about 13'-long. At the wall's midpoint is a 13'-wide opening and a gravel ramp and path that lead westward to the lakeshore. (In early plans it appears that this opening may have been blocked with one removable rail.) The pier on the northern side of the opening contains a gray granite stone incised with the following: "Built by C.C.C. Camp S-52 1938." The straight section of the wall is lined with a 5'-wide flagstone walkway and stone curb. The southern 40' of the walkway has been replaced with (or covered by) concrete.

Picnic Shelter. Built circa 1980 by the Orr Lions Club. A 24'-square picnic shelter is located near the southern end of the site about 35' east of the Pelican Lake shoreline. It is linked to the overlook wall via a footpath through the picnic area. It is constructed of logs that have been painted brown. It has an open-raftered ceiling and an asphalt-shingled hipped roof. It rests on a poured concrete floor. The walls are about 4' high and there are four entrances. Above the walls the shelter is open.

Footbridge. Built 1989. A small, wooden footbridge spans a narrow drainage ditch that flows under T.H. 53 and westward through the picnic area and into the lake. The bridge links the picnic area and the asphalt-paved parking area at the southern edge of the site. The bridge is constructed of wooden posts and planks, and timber railings. It replaces the footbridge shown in the 1937 plans.

Fishing Pier. Built 1989 by the City of Orr and the MnDNR. A 150'-long, wooden, T-shaped fishing pier extends into Pelican Lake immediately west of the midpoint of the overlook wall. It is approached via the gravel footpath that leads to the lake from the opening in the wall. The fishing pier replaces several earlier docks at this site. The 1937 plans indicate an "existing dock" at this location.

■ **OTHER LANDSCAPE FEATURES AND PLANTINGS**

The entire site is about 1,300' in length. It is divided into two areas, a 2-acre overlook site at the northern end and a 3-acre picnic area with an asphalt-paved parking area at the southern end. The overlook wall is located on a hill above the lake, while the picnic area is located at a lower elevation near the lakeshore.

The overlook wall is located approximately 45' east of the Pelican Lake shoreline. Its parking area resembles a simple widening of the highway. A gravel footpath (entered through an opening in the center of the overlook wall) leads westward, down to the shore of Pelican Lake and to the dock.

Scattered boulders line a footpath that leads south along the lakeshore through the picnic area. Also located along the edge of the footpath are the remnants of several round, poured concrete light pole bases. Apparently the path was once illuminated, but the lights have been removed and the concrete bases have been cut close to the ground. The path broadens into a large grassy area with 20- to 30-year-old deciduous trees growing along the lake shore. There is a playground in the picnic area near the picnic shelter. The picnic area also has wooden portable picnic tables, a circa 1970 metal picnic fireplace, and two circa 1980 metal park benches. There were once two small bathhouses at the picnic area's swimming beach.

There is an 80' by 100' asphalt-paved parking area at the southern edge of the picnic area that is accessed by a short asphalt-paved entrance drive off T.H. 53. The remnants of cement guardrail posts are located along the eastern edge of the parking area.

Much of the site is planted with grass and with many mature deciduous trees and shrubs and evergreen trees. There is a dense growth of trees at the northern end of the wall. Trees screen the picnic area from the highway. The area is heavily forested and it's likely that the original landscaping made use of the natural trees. No original planting plan has been located.

■ **SETTING**

The overlook was built on top of a hill that overlooks Pelican Lake's Orr Bay to the west. The site is bounded by T.H. 53, a dense growth of trees, and the former Duluth, Winnipeg, and Pacific railroad tracks on the east; the town of Orr on the south, and a forested area on the north. An impressive, large granite bluff, which has been cut, is located directly across the highway east of the overlook wall. It is possible that this rock ledge was cut at the time that the overlook was constructed, as the 1937 construction plans indicate that another parking and picnic area were to be located on top of this granite outcropping. They were apparently never built.

■ **INTEGRITY**

Alterations

The site was not built according to the several plan sheets drawn in October 1937 (see Historic Background below).

The site has had several alterations, most fairly minor:

The overlook wall's log railings have been painted brown. The southern 40' of the flagstone walkway has been replaced with (or covered by) concrete. A metal guardrail now extends off the northern end of the overlook wall. The parking area at the overlook wall has been paved with asphalt.

The lights that once lined the footpath to the picnic area have been removed. The picnic shelter was added circa 1980 on the same site that the original plans specify a bathhouse structure that was apparently never built. The footbridge and the dock were replaced in 1989 (at their original locations). Small elements -- portable picnic tables, a metal picnic fireplace, park benches, and playground equipment -- have been added to the picnic area. Privies, two small bathhouses, and six small fireplaces have been removed from the picnic area.

The southern parking area has been paved with asphalt. Its original rustic timber guardrails were probably replaced by the concrete guardrail. The eastern portion of the concrete guardrail still exists.

In general, the site retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. While the integrity of design is compromised somewhat by the new dock, footbridge, and picnic shelter, the dock and footbridge are replacements of original structures on the same locations, and the picnic shelter is sited where a bathhouse of roughly the same size is specified on the original plans. No new major elements have been added to the site.

Notes on Condition

The overlook wall is in poor to fair condition and needs repair. For example, the curved southern end of the overlook is pulling away from the straight section. (There is a 3" gap between the sections.) Stones are missing from the overlook wall, and a pier has broken. The wall has been repaired with black mortar in a few places. Weeds are growing up along the front of the wall.

The picnic area and the site's grassy areas are being maintained.

■ HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Orr Roadside Parking Area was constructed by the Roadside Development Division of the MHD in cooperation with a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) unit that was under the supervision of the Minnesota Department of Conservation's Forestry Department.

The site was constructed by Company 725 of the CCC, which occupied CCC Camp S-52, also known as the Cusson Camp. The Cusson Camp was located near the town of Cusson about three miles north of the Orr Roadside Parking Area. Former Camp S-52 enrollee Reinhold Holmer said in a telephone interview during this study that a CCC instructor from International Falls was the stonemason who supervised the construction of the stone wall. Holmer said that the CCC instructor also had one assistant stonemason, a Cusson Camp enrollee, who was taught the trade.

Construction plans were signed in November 1937 by Harold E. Olson (Engineer of Highway Development), A. R. Nichols (Consulting Landscape Architect), and O. L. Kipp (Construction Engineer).

These construction plans show a wall more elaborate than the final design. For example, a plan sheet drawn in October 1937 (and signed in November 1937) shows an overlook wall with four stone stairways and six metal lanterns to be mounted on top of the wall. The plan specifies a water fountain below the wall and a narrow island within the parking area that was to be lined with a stone curb.

Another plan sheet, drawn in October of 1937 and stamped "Final Plans Constr. Div. E.C.W. [CCC] July 11, 1938," omits the outer two stairways, the lanterns, and the water fountain, but includes the two inner stairways and the island. In final construction, none of the stairways and lanterns, nor the waterfall or island were apparently built (despite the "Final Plans" stamp on the plan sheet). (See photo taken in June of 1941.)

A "Tentative Sketch" of the site (drawn July 3, 1937, and signed in July of 1937) shows a fairly large bathhouse in the picnic area. It also shows proposed development on the eastern side of T.H. 53 including a parking area, picnic area, stone overlook and council ring, pedestrian underpass beneath T.H. 53, and hiking trails. The eastern side of the project was apparently never developed and is currently a granite outcropping.

The 1938 *Annual Report of the Roadside Development Unit* summarized the project:

On the east shore of Pelican Lake near the Town of Orr is located the lookout tower of the Forestry Department. At this location the trunk highway skirts the lake shore on a somewhat higher elevation than the water level. Here a turnout off of the main highway has been constructed leading into a nicely wooded area, to provide a roadside parking area. The area, from which an outstanding view over Pelican Lake is obtained, is defined by a stone masonry wall. Picnicking, bathing and boating facilities are also being provided (*Annual Report* 1938:22).

The *Annual Report* indicates that the work included 720' of "rustic guard rail" (which usually refers to timber guardrail), four latrines, two bathhouses, and two roadside parking signs.

The Site Development Unit files indicate that in 1961 this site had drinking water, six tables, six fireplaces, and two toilets. By circa 1964, the site had four toilets and electricity.

The Orr Lions Club built a log picnic shelter at the wayside rest in circa 1980. In 1989 the City of Orr, in cooperation with the Department of Natural Resources (MnDNR), constructed the 150'-long fishing pier.

Cusson CCC Camp

The Cusson CCC Camp was operated by the Minnesota Department of Conservation's Forestry Department, in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service. CCC Camp S-52, Company No. 725, was organized on June 2, 1933, at Fort Snelling. The enrollees were from Minnesota, with most of them originally from the metropolitan area or from northern Minnesota. The camp was located near the town of Cusson, a few miles north of Orr on T.H. 53. The company constructed permanent quarters for their own camp (as well as for Camps F-29 and S-94) and also used the buildings formerly owned by the Virginia Rainy Lake Lumber Company.

While the company built the overlook wall at the Orr Roadside Parking Area, most of their work was involved in forestry and conservation. The Cusson CCC Camp's remaining camp buildings were named to the National Register of Historic Places on March 2, 1989.

■ **PREVIOUS SHPO REVIEWS**

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

■ **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The Orr Roadside Parking Area, built in 1938 by the CCC, incorporates one of 37 stone overlook walls recorded in this inventory. It is one of 14 sites in the inventory known, or suspected, to have been built by the CCC. The property is one of more than 60 sites in the inventory that were designed by, or whose design is attributed to, Arthur R. Nichols.

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

Significant to the History of Roadside Development. The Orr Roadside Parking Area is among the 68 Depression-era properties in the inventory that represent the MHD's first large-scale effort to construct roadside development facilities in the state. The site is important as a well-preserved example of the work of the CCC in cooperation with the MHD. The property is an example of the distinctive and well-constructed public facilities, built by the MHD in partnership with federal relief agencies, that met the objectives of roadside development while providing essential work and job training to the nation's unemployed during the Depression. (National Register Criterion A.)

Design Significance. The Orr R.P.A. has a well-preserved example of the stone overlook walls built by the Roadside Development Division during its first two decades. It is an excellent example of the application of the "National Park Service Rustic Style" to a roadside development facility. The stone overlook wall contains rare, Rustic style log rails. The only other site in the inventory that retains log rails is the Spruce Creek Culvert (Bridge 8292). The Orr wall displays the special labor-intensive construction techniques and distinctive use of indigenous materials that characterize both the Rustic style and federal relief construction in Minnesota. Furthermore, the Orr Roadside Parking Area is an important example of the roadside development work of prominent landscape architect A. R. Nichols. (National Register Criterion C.)

The site may also be associated with the "Federal Relief Construction, 1933-1943" and "Tourism and Recreation in the Lake Regions, 1870-1945" historic contexts.

■ **OTHER COMMENTS**

This property may require further evaluation for potential archaeological resources.

The picnic area and overlook are easily accessible from T.H. 53.

Although T.H. 53 passes close to this site, the traffic noise and motion (on a Sunday afternoon) was moderate and did not detract from the experience of visiting the overlook. Very little traffic noise can be heard within the picnic area, as it is screened by a dense growth of trees.

The picnic area and fishing pier are maintained by the City of Orr and the DNR.

■ **REFERENCES**

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

Tweton, Jerome D. *The New Deal at the Grass Roots. Programs for the People in Otter Tail County, Minnesota*. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988.

■ **ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Kabetogama State Forest

The Orr Roadside Parking Area is located within Kabetogama State Forest, one of 13 state forests established in Minnesota in 1933. Under the guidelines of the Emergency Conservation Work (ECW) program (established in March 1933), CCC camps could only be located in Federal or State forests. Having no state forests at the time, the State quickly passed

legislation to establish these forests which would provide locations for CCC camps in Minnesota. Kabetogama is also the name of a large lake that is located along the northern boundary of the forest. Kabetogama is an Ojibwe word meaning "the lake that lies parallel or double, namely with Rainy Lake."

Local Stone

The granite used to construct the overlook wall was probably quarried locally, or at least within the Arrowhead region. A few granite quarries were located south of Orr, near the towns of Cook and Angora. The Winchester Quarry, near Angora, was opened in 1929 by the Melrose Granite Company of St. Cloud. Two quarries near Cook yielded a grayish-blue granite and one quarry had deposits of green granite.

Orr

Orr was named for William Orr, the postmaster and owner of the general store. He first homesteaded near the junction of Elbow and Pelican Rivers in 1898. In 1902, he sold his buildings and relocated to the eastern shore of Pelican Lake where the village of Orr is now located. In Orr he established the store, saloon, and hotel. The town was also the nearest railway station for the Bois Fort Indian Reservation, one of a group of five reservations that were within the jurisdiction of the Ojibwe reservation at Cass Lake. Pelican Lake is one of the largest lakes in the Arrowhead region, with 54 miles of shoreline.

Cusson

Cusson was founded by the Virginia and Rainy Lake Lumber Company and was named for a cruiser, the S. J. Cusson. The company constructed a number of buildings, including the headquarters offices, a warehouse, doctor's offices, residences, a general store, a school house, a theater, a recreation building, and repair sheds where train engines and railroad cars were repaired. Cusson was the lumber company's headquarters for twenty years. Charles E. Aguar writes: "During this period, the timber was cut from 32 townships with as many as 5,000 woodsmen employed at one time. The work of transferring logs from the woods to the main line at Cusson required 18 locomotives. The established cut during this period was four billion feet of logs plus unknown quantities of ties, pulpwood, and cedar products" (Aguar 1971:35).