

✦ Descriptions of the Iron County Area ✦

Today Iron County is a county of approximately 13,000 people. Surveyed in 1851 by Harvey Mellen, and set aside from Marquette County in 1885, it is roughly square-shaped, and contains 749,440 acres of 1,171 square miles, excluding surface water.

Much of Iron County consists of hilly terrain formed by glacial deposits which overlay iron ore deposits in the Menominee range. Recessional and ground moraines with gentle to moderate slopes are common. Over 400 small lakes are found, especially in the northern half of the county. Key hydrological features of the county include the Brule River valley in the south, the Iron River valley in the west, and, in the east, the Paint River basin, with the Hemlock River its main tributary, and the Michigamme River basin, with the Deer and the Fence rivers its main tributaries. The Michigamme River is utilized by the Wisconsin-Michigan Light and Power Company (Wisconsin Electric), which operates two dams; the Michigamme Reservoir, created in the 1950's by the firm's Way Dam, is the largest body of water on the east side of the county. Draining through the Menominee basin, all of the main rivers in Iron County are in the Lake Michigan watershed, a factor important for the lumbering of white pine in the county in the late nineteenth century.

Iron County's wilderness character is primarily derived from its vast areas of forested land. The western third of the county is part of the Ottawa National Forest, and large tracts of land in the northern half of the county are owned by companies engaged in forest management practices. Agricultural concerns are limited, due to the short growing season.

Garms under cultivation are fairly small in num-

ber, and are confined to the southern half of the county.

Iron County is traversed from east to west by U.S. 2, which runs across the southern half of the county, and from south to north by U.S. 141, which runs from Crystal Falls to the Keweenaw Peninsula. Major railroad lines in the county were the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad, which ran from Florence, Wisconsin to Crystal Falls and Iron River until 1982, and the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad, which ran north from Crystal Falls to the Keweenaw Peninsula. The one railroad remaining, the Escanaba and Lake Superior Railroad Company, running from Green Bay via Channing to Amasa and thence to Ontonagon. Iron County has eight populated centers, seven of which are in the south, along or near U.S. 2. All are small. The population of the county's settlement, Iron River, is less than 2,500. Stambaugh is located on the hill above Iron River, and Caspian and Gaastra to the south. Mineral Hills to the north completes a string of five communities.

The other major community, also on U.S. 2, is Crystal Falls, dominated visually by the Richardsonian Romanesque county courthouse. Alpha and Amasa are also located in the east half of the county. Alpha is six miles southwest of Crystal Falls; Amasa, another mining type settlement, is 16 miles north of Crystal Falls on the west bank of the Hemlock River, and is the only populated center in the northern half of Iron County.

In addition to these eight populated centers, Iron County contains several "Junctions" or road crossings, such as Beechwood or Keslo Junction. These are extremely small, however, and contain only a handful of structures, thereby emphasizing the overall wilderness or rural character of the county.
