Lookout Mountain Loop perfect for fall color chasing

I’ve been spending the last month monitoring the changing of colors in northern Minnesota, so when I saw that the Lookout area was reaching its peak last weekend, I was ready to drop everything and head up the North Shore.

My boyfriend and I decided to take the Lookout Mountain Loop Trail at Cascade River State Park in Lutsen and Grand Marais on Oct. 2.

This trail has everything: waterfalls, panoramic views, bridges, and an elevation change of nearly 800 feet, according to my fitness watch. We arrived around 12:30 p.m. on a sunny day and I was pleasantly surprised by the number of other hikers we came across, considering it was peak fall color and a weekend. It was definitely a popular park, but it didn’t feel crowded at all.

The parking lot to access Cascade River State Park is on the side of Minnesota Highway 61 right around mile 2. You don’t need a state park pass to park there. The trail entrance has suffered from rheumatoid arthritis nearly all her life and is mobile on land mostly through the use of a heavy, power-drive wheelchair. "Being from Wisconsin, I had been up to Ashland and Bayfield several times before. But, until a few years ago, I was never able to actually get to the waterfront and tour on the water because it wasn’t accessible for me," Badura said. "I understand not every place is going to be accessible for me. ... There are some places that can’t be because of the ecology or the landscape. But, where it’s possible, our parks should be accessible to everyone."

Rudin is looking forward to construction of a new, 500-foot ramp at Meyers Beach that would allow people in wheelchairs and others with mobility issues step-free access from the parking lot to the water’s edge. The $650,000 project is still on the drawing board. But members of the Friends of the Apostle Islands Lakeshore are hoping to raise $325,000 in coming months to kick-start the project. It’s expected that a National Park Service grant would be available to match the remaining $325,000.

The ramp is also part of a years-long effort by local park officials and Friends activists to make what is a wild place into an example of how to provide better access outdoors. "It doesn’t do much good to have an accessible tour boat, or accessible kayak programs, unless you have accessible walkthroughs and destinations for people to experience," said Jeff Rennicke, executive director of the Bayfield-based Friends of the Apostle Islands.

A kayaker inspects one of the mainland sea caves at Apostle Islands National Lakeshore. Friends of the Apostle Islands is trying to raise money to improve access at several sites in the park, including the Meyers Beach access on Lake Superior used by kayakers to get to the popular sea caves.

A participant in the Courage Kenny Northland adaptive sports program is assisted into a tandem kayak at Meyers Beach in Apostle Islands National Lakeshore.


Rennicke noted that the improvements aren’t a cure-all. "It’s not like all the ramps and wooden benches and accessible viewpoints have disappeared," he said. "Some use by deaf and blind people and people with other conditions who otherwise might not be able to do certain things is still required. "Access is a journey, a slow process," Rennicke added, noting the progress must not be "sudden. "We’ll never arrive; we’ll just keep going, " he said. The Local Park Natural National Lakeshore board had an internal audit of the access issues in 2013. The results made clear the challenges for a park that generally requires a boat or kayak to get around, and that has sometimes unfriendly terrain on the mainland for people who’s not fully mobile. Moreover, however, thanks to the support of the Friends group and other resources, several barriers have come down.

Recent improvements include:

- A wheelchair-accessible ramp to the dock at Little Sand Bay.
- More accessible viewpoints and more than a mile of accessible boardwalk on Sand Island.
- An amphitheater and campsite on Stockton Island.
- Audio and tactile descriptive materials at visitor centers and several lighthouses.
- A new Friends options for people with hearing or visual impairments.

The fact that groups are working together and the courage Kenny said program has been slow but sure. "It’s a process. We’re looking for outdoors for everyone, and that’s the goal," he said. "We’ve worked hard. We’ve accomplished much work."

Americans have ongoing access issues. About 40,000 people annually, statistically, Americans have ongoing health experts say 1 in 5 he said. "We really shouldn’t against people with disabilities," she said. "Most of our national parks were built in the 1920s and 1930s, said the act was "in 1973 with a federal ‘Access. ’" said. Thanks to the access. Rivers noted, "Because it’s not just a structure or "improvements will be made to facilities and as access. … As I get older and "The beauty of the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore is an example of "It’s a long road to accessibility. "The proposed new access ramp at Meyers Beach, National Lakeshore, would allow wheelchair and other mobility-impared visitors to get from the parking lot to the waterfront without a steep set of stairs that now stand in their way. "At some point we all well benefit from accessibility improvements," she said. "When I had small children, I needed stroller access. When I was in a car accident and in a wheelchair, I needed wheelchair access. … As I get older my eyesight may not be as good as it was, so I still need access.

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