

What is the Iron Range?

Located about 60-100 miles North and West of Duluth lies the Iron Range. There are three major ranges in Minnesota: the Cuyuna, Vermillion, and the Mesabi.

The Cuyuna Range is located west of Duluth in Crosby and Ironton Minnesota. There is no active mining in this range as ore from this range was no longer needed in the years following WWII. Both underground and open pit mining was performed to extract its high grade manganese ore. The first shipment occurred in 1911.

The Vermillion Range shipped its first iron ore in 1884 from the Tower-Sudan Mine. This deposit is located deep underground and required underground mining techniques. It possesses the highest grade ore in the world. Underground mine tours down to 2,500 feet are available.

The Mesabi Range extends over 100 miles long from Grand Rapids to Babbitt. Mesabi is an Objibwe word meaning “Giant”. Shallow basin ore deposits were discovered in 1890 by the Merritt brothers. This is the only range with active mining. Today, five large mines continue to operate in producing taconite. Today, this is a less rich ore that requires processing before shipment to last furnaces. The end product is considered to be of the highest quality in the World. There are over 4,300 direct mining jobs and an additional 13,000 secondary jobs associated with today’s active mining. Underground deposits are thought to be adequate for another 100 years of mining. Additionally, rare earth metals are located on the eastern parts and mining initiatives for these metals are in process.

Voyageurs Retreat is located along a “gap” in the Mesabi Range which runs along the Laurentian Divide. Typically, the water shed south of the Mesabi Range flows to Lake Superior or the Mississippi River. This “gap” allows the Embarrass River, which originates North of the Range, to flow through the Ridge of the Mesabi Range to eventually allow its water into Lake Superior. Giants Ridge Golf and Ski Recreation Area location takes advantage of this “gap” and uses the contours of the land to shape its character.

More than 400 mines have produced three billion metric tons of ore. Railroads were developed through remote country by early entrepreneurs to ship the ore to ports in Duluth, Two Harbors, Taconite Harbor (closed), Silver Bay, and Superior. These railroads coalesced into the DM&IR Railroad, now operated by CN Railroad. Ore boats then carry the ore across the Great Lakes to steels mills out East.

During the development of the mines, immigrants from 43 different nationalities came in two waves to work the mines. Migrants came from Scandinavia, Italy, England, Canada, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Slovakia, Austria-Hungary, Germany, Greek, Romania, Poland, Bulgaria, and other Eastern Europe countries. These migrants and their descendants give the Iron Range its cultural heritage. Individuals living on the Range are often called “Rangers.” Festivals throughout the area celebrate this heritage.

