**St. Croix Falls Segment** (Atlas Map 1f)

**SNAPSHOT**

**9.0 miles:** Ice Age Trail Western Terminus in Interstate State Park to River Rd.

This segment highlights several outstanding features including the Dalles of St. Croix River, Hospital Esker and Riegel Park.

At the Ice Age Trail Interpretive Center and other locations in Interstate State Park, the Polk County Tourist Information Center and Lion’s Park.

From the St. Croix River, Big Rock Creek and other small streams/creeks. Do not take water from Mindy Creek as the headwaters are at the site of an old landfill.

Walk-in campsite (BP20) in the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway.

Interstate SP campgrounds and campgrounds in nearby Taylors Falls, MN (see Area Services).

At Interstate SP and Lion’s Park.

At Interstate SP (incl. Interpretive Center), Polk County Tourist Information Center, Lion’s Parks and St. Croix National Scenic Riverway campsite.

By law, dogs must be leashed in Interstate SP.

Portions overlap with bike trails, ski trails, roads and sidewalks.

Interstate SP and the Wert Family Nature Center have a network of trails; Riegel Park and Ray Zillmer Park each have white-blazed loop trails.

Portions of this segment may be suitable for those using wheelchairs or similar devices.

**TRAIL ACCESS AND PARKING**

**Ice Age Trail Western Terminus in Interstate State Park:** From St. Croix Falls at the intersection of USH-8 and STH-35, take STH-35 south for 0.6 mi. Turn right, enter Interstate State Park and follow park roads 1.5 mi to the Pothole Trail parking area. A brief walk clockwise on the Pothole Trail leads to the western terminus marker.

**River Rd.:** From St. Croix Falls at USH-8 and STH-87, take STH-87 north for 3.0 mi. At River Rd. turn left and go northwest 0.5 mi to the Trail access. Roadside parking.

**Additional Parking:** (i) Interpretive Center and other parking areas in Interstate State Park. (ii) Polk County Visitor Information Center at STH-35 and USH-8. (iii) East Georgia St. parking area near its intersection with Vincent St. (iv) Riegel Park on Louisiana St. A spur trail leads to the Ice Age Trail. (v) Oregon St., roadside parking. (vi) Ray Zillmer Park on Day Rd. (vii) Wert Family Nature Preserve on the east side of STH-87. (viii) Lions Park on STH-87.

**THE HIKE**

The St. Croix River valley that hikers pass through on this segment was formed when the glacial lobe in the area retreated. Meltwater created Glacial Lake Duluth. Then giant floods drained the lake and cut the valley through billion-year-old volcanic basalt bedrock.

Access to the Ice Age Trail’s western terminus is via Interstate State Park’s Pothole Trail, a loop trail that was built shortly after the park was created in 1900 and is one of Wisconsin’s oldest recreational footpaths. From the Pothole Trail parking area, hikers can reach the Ice Age Trail’s western terminus either by trekking on the northern non-Ice Age Trail portion of the loop or along the Ice Age Trail southern portion of the loop. The glacial potholes and Dalles of St. Croix River...
highlighted on the Pothole Trail were formed when torrential glacial meltwater scoured the riverside bedrock cliffs with rock and silt in a drilling-type motion. The potholes vary in size and depth, with one 16 feet deep and 3 feet wide. Additional larger potholes are located in Minnesota’s Interstate State Park on the other side of the St. Croix River.

Upon reaching the Ice Age Trail’s western terminus, hikers will find the official terminus marker (similar to the marker found at the Trail’s eastern terminus in Potawatomi State Park, Door County) affixed to a large glacial erratic on a basalt cliff overlooking the 100-foot-deep gorge of the Dalles of the St. Croix River. From just below the terminus marker, looking upriver, one can see the famous rock face of the “Ol’ Man of the Dalles.” Looking downriver, one can see a basalt rock protrusion that was hard enough to turn the roaring outflow of the prehistoric lake and river, making a rare 90 degree turn in the river. This protrusion was the site of the world’s largest log jam in 1886. It took three months to dynamite the river clear for log traffic coming from the logging forests to the saw mills.

From the segment starting point at the western terminus, hikers will head back to the Pothole Trail parking area on the southern portion of the loop, cross Park Road and head southwest and then southeast on the state park’s Horizon Rock Trail. The segment ascends steeply, passing a stone shelter near a rock-ledge overlook (BP26) with views of the river as it makes its way toward the Ice Age Interpretive Center. At the center, hikers can pick up a map for detailed information on the park’s trails and facilities.

From the interpretive center, the segment briefly shares the northern portion of the Skyline Nature Trail loop then departs the nature trail by heading eastward toward the state park entrance road. The segment then links up with a paved bike path and turns north along STH-35, quickly leaving (BP25) Interstate State Park and soon passing the Polk County Tourist Information Center, located across
STH-35 just south of the STH-35/USH-8 intersection.

After crossing USH-8 the segment ascends the Hospital Esker (BP24). From here hikers can enjoy excellent views of the city of St. Croix Falls and the glacial lake plain left behind by the drained Glacial Lake Duluth.

The segment descends the esker to the hospital parking area on State Street and continues north on Roosevelt Street, then turns east on Kentucky Street. The segment leaves Kentucky Street and continues east then southeast up a bluff into a wooded area, then connects with a paved city bike path heading east through a school grounds.

After passing through the school grounds, the segment enters another wooded area, intersects Blanding Woods Road and then enters the city-managed Florence Baker Riegel Memorial Park. The segment makes its way northeast through the park passing over rock outcroppings and basalt knobs. Shortly before reaching Louisiana Street the segment intersects a blue-blazed spur trail that leads west to the Louisiana Street parking area. The segment soon intersects a white-blazed trail that explores other areas of Riegel Park.

Crossing Louisiana Street, the Trail climbs to the top of a ridge and meanders through the woods as it gradually descends to an opening and the intersection of Oregon Street and Sunrise Road. The segment briefly follows Oregon Street to the left and then turns right and crosses through open fields between two fence lines. The segment eventually reenters the woods and crosses into Ray Zillmer Park.

The segment winds through Zillmer Park crossing exposed rock outcroppings, basalt knobs and surface bedrock. The Trail comes to a large rock outcropping, curves around to the right side of the outcropping and reaches a junction (BP44) with a white-blazed loop trail. A short trek on the loop trail leads to a sign identifying the rock outcropping as Zillmer Point. At the highest point on the outcropping there are two Leopold benches with long views of the St. Croix Falls river valley. The segment continues its journey through Zillmer Park, intersecting the western end of the white-blazed loop trail and reaching the Zillmer Park parking area on Day Road.

The segment briefly follows Day Road to the left then turns to the right and crosses a 26-foot-long footbridge. Look carefully at the bridge’s limestone landing (BP22) closest to Day Road; when the limestone is wet, two 6-inch nautilus fossils appear. The segment continues west through woods and goes downhill along boulder-strewn Mindy Creek, named after a Native American woman from the Bad River Band of the Ojibwe who was the last of the Native Americans to live and work by the St. Croix River in the area.

After leaving Mindy Creek, the segment heads north as it continues to descend toward the STH-87 Trail access through the Wert Family Nature Preserve. The segment crosses STH-87 and passes through part of Lions Park, then turns north and takes hikers to the scenic shoreline of the St. Croix River. There are several social trails (“unofficial” trails created by meandering hikers) in the area; hikers should pay close attention to signage and stay close to the riverbank.

Heading north, hikers will soon come across a shoreline primitive campsite (BP20). The campsite is part of the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway and is available on a first come, first served basis. After passing the primitive campsite,
the segment reaches bridgeless Big Rock Creek (BP19), which hikers can usually cross on steppingstones but may have to ford in high water. Once across the creek, hikers will continue north along the St. Croix River to the segment terminus at River Road.

Mobile Skills Crew project site, 2005, 2014

AREA SERVICES

**Interstate State Park**: Camping. On Trail (715-483-3747, dnr.wi.gov/topic/parks/name/interstate; reservations: 888-947-2757, reserveamerica.com).

**St. Croix Falls**: Restaurant, grocery store, convenience store, general shopping, lodging, camping, library, medical service. On Trail. Most services in downtown on Washington St., USH-8 and STH-35. Camping at Minnesota Interstate State Park (Taylors Falls, MN, 651-465-5711, dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/interstate; reservations: 866-857-2757 or see website) and at Camp Waub-O-Jeeg (Taylors Falls, 651-465-3500, tfcamping.com). Medical services at St. Croix Regional Medical Center (235 State St., 715-483-3261 or 800-642-1336, scrmc.org). Outfitter/boot repair at St. Croix Falls Cobbler Shop (715-483-5798). For area info, contact the Falls Chamber of Commerce (715-483-3580, fallschamber.org) or the Polk County Tourist Information Center (715-483-1410, polkcountytourism.com).