



KEWEENAW

A GUIDE TO VISITING THE MONTREAL FALLS

Author: Brad Barnett on June 9, 2023

As travel enthusiasts with an adventurous spirit and a love for the great outdoors, we all yearn for those hidden gems. The kind of places that are off the beaten path, a little rugged, and unspoiled by tourist crowds. If this speaks to you, then a visit to Montreal Falls should be high on your bucket list. Follow along to learn how to safely (and legally) access this incredible natural wonder which resides on State of Michigan land in Keweenaw County. As always, please practice Leave No Trace and responsible recreation when visiting this remote area.

WHY VISIT THE MONTREAL FALLS?

Imagine a place where nature's raw beauty takes center stage - welcome to Montreal Falls. Situated deep within the verdant expanses of the Keweenaw, this remote waterfall offers an unparalleled spectacle of untamed wilderness that's sure to captivate any nature lover.

Montreal Falls is fed by the Montreal River which empties into Lake Superior. The falls showcase the stunning geology of the area. Water has coursed down the rocky terrains for centuries, carving a picturesque waterfall that dances down a series of layered basaltic rock formations. The thunderous roar of the water as it cascades down, surrounded by steep cliffs, creates an awe-inspiring symphony that's music to any adventurer's ears.

The ecology of the area is equally captivating. The forest surrounding the falls is a diverse mixture of hardwoods and conifers, which provide habitat for a wide range of wildlife. You might spot white-tailed deer delicately treading through the undergrowth or hear the distinctive call of the pileated woodpecker resonating through the trees. In the late spring and early summer, you'll be treated to a stunning array of wildflowers adding a splash of color to the green canvas.

During summer and fall, the allure of Montreal Falls is elevated to new heights. In summer, the lush green forest creates a vibrant backdrop against which the white rush of the waterfall stands out spectacularly. In autumn, the area transforms into a painter's palette, with the leaves on the trees turning a myriad of colors, from fiery reds to golden yellows, framing the waterfall in a riot of color.

Visiting Montreal Falls is more than just a destination, it's a journey into nature's masterpiece. The untouched beauty of this place offers an escape from the regular hustle and bustle, providing a serene and tranquil retreat where you can truly connect with the wild.

GETTING THERE

The adventure to Montreal Falls is a journey that matches the destination in terms of excitement and wonder. The trek will take you through some of the most breathtaking landscapes in Keweenaw County. Be sure to wait until mid to late May so that the trails have time to firm up after the snowmelt.

Here are the revised step-by-step directions:

1. **Start at Copper Harbor:** The closest public restrooms are in Copper Harbor, so plan to make this your starting point. We recommend using these facilities before you start your journey, as there are no amenities at the falls.
2. **Take the Mandan Road:** From Copper Harbor, **head east on US-41** until you reach the end of the Highway from there continue on the Mandan Road for just over 7.5 miles then turn left on the Hoar Lake/Fish Cove Road. **Note** that this is a two-track, unpaved former logging road. High-clearance vehicles are recommended and expect to travel at slow speeds.
3. **Reach Hoar Lake:** Travel on Mandan Road until you reach the Hoar Lake and Fish Cove turnoff. Follow directional signs to Fish Cove where you'll find a rustic parking lot.
4. **Find Montreal Falls:** From the Fish Cove parking lot, hike a short distance south to the shore of Lake Superior. Here, you'll find a foot-worn hiking path that heads west along the lake shore. There are no signs for this trail and it is not maintained. Continue hiking for about mile. Here, you'll encounter the serene and beautiful lower Montreal Falls.

Please Note: This route isn't a manicured trail, and it requires a fair amount of navigation. It's crucial to be prepared with a reliable map or GPS and to stay alert throughout your hike. *You will lose cell service so plan accordingly.* Remember to wear sturdy footwear and be sure to pack plenty of water. Also, consider starting your hike early in the day to avoid navigating the trail in low light. Early summer requires some bug repellent to keep those pesky, flying fiends at bay. Check out our bug guide for more info. If you're feeling particularly adventurous, you could even consider camping in the surrounding Michigan State Forestland. Just make sure you have the required backcountry camping permit.

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR VISIT

The journey to Montreal Falls is a perfect mix of challenge and reward. Its untouched beauty and the thrill of reaching it make this experience truly unique and unforgettable. The remote and natural setting of Montreal Falls provides a multitude of opportunities for nature lovers and those interested in geology and ecology. Here are a few activities you can indulge in to make the most of your visit:

1. **Nature Photography:** With its rugged cliffs, cascading waterfalls, and diverse flora and fauna, Montreal Falls offers countless opportunities for stunning photography as you hike the rugged terrain. Whether you're an amateur with a smartphone or a professional with a high-end camera, you're sure to capture some memorable shots.
2. **Birdwatching:** The surrounding forests are a haven for a variety of bird species. Bring your binoculars and enjoy the tranquil pastime of birdwatching. Keep an ear out for the distinctive calls of local species, like the pileated woodpecker, bald eagle, common loon, and black-capped chickadee.
3. **Geology Exploration:** The layered basaltic rock formations that create the backdrop for the falls are a testament to the area's volcanic history. Spend some time observing and studying these geological features. Just remember, while it's tempting to take a piece of the beauty home with you, it's crucial to leave everything as you found it for others to enjoy.

4. **Sketching or Painting:** If you have an artistic streak, why not bring along a sketchbook and some pencils or paints? The natural beauty of the waterfall and surrounding forest can provide great inspiration for a piece of art. Wildlife include white-tailed deer, red fox, black bear, snowshoe hare, beaver and others.
5. **Mindful Meditation:** The remote location and serene atmosphere at Montreal Falls make it an ideal spot for mindful meditation. Take a few moments to sit quietly, soak in the sights and sounds of nature, and ground yourself in the present moment.

Remember, there are no amenities at Montreal Falls, so come prepared. Pack in all the food and water you'll need for your activities. And, of course, always follow the 'leave no trace' principle. Carry out everything you bring in to help preserve this special place for future visitors.

OWNERSHIP AND STEWARDSHIP OF MONTREAL FALLS

When it comes to land ownership, Montreal Falls falls within the jurisdiction of the State of Michigan. This land was acquired about 20 years ago by the State of Michigan to keep it forever in the public trust. The falls and the surrounding lands are part of the vast Michigan State Forest system. This is significant as the management and preservation of these lands fall under the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, a government agency dedicated to the conservation, protection, management, and accessible use of the state's environment, wildlife, and natural resources.

This state-owned status also indicates that the area is open to the public and encourages the spirit of exploration and appreciation of natural beauty. However, with such freedom comes responsibility. Visitors are expected to follow all state regulations regarding use of state forest lands, including obtaining necessary permits for activities like backcountry camping.

Furthermore, the 'leave no trace' principles apply here. Visitors are encouraged to respect the natural environment, ensuring that they do not disturb the local wildlife or vegetation, and that they carry out any waste or litter they bring in. By following these guidelines, each visitor contributes to the long-term preservation of this beautiful site, ensuring that future generations can continue to enjoy the splendor of Montreal Falls.

RESPONSIBLE RECREATION

Visiting Montreal Falls offers a unique opportunity to experience nature in its rawest form. It's vital to respect the environment during your visit. This means staying on marked trails to avoid damaging the local flora and packing out all trash. Remember, the goal is to leave the place as beautiful as you found it - or even more so!

Author

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Brad is the Executive Director of Visit Keweenaw. He gets paid to share all the cool stuff about the Keweenaw Peninsula. It's a tough job, but someone's got to do it.

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