

Rock River Canyon Wilderness

Rock River Canyon Wilderness Area (RRCW) is roughly a 4700 (7.5sq miles) acre area that was designated Wilderness in 1987; it was included in the Michigan Wilderness Act of 1987. Rock River Canyon Wilderness is managed by the Hiawatha National Forest.

What is Wilderness?

A Wilderness is a congressionally designated area of land that has special or unique qualities that are to be preserved in a natural state. It is a non-motorized, road-less area where solitude and primitive recreation opportunities can be found. Wilderness is also an area that is untrammled by humans, where the landscape has been primarily affected by the forces of nature. Wilderness tends to draw people who want a natural or wild experience.

Because visiting this Wilderness has become popular, care is needed to retain the very qualities people seek. People are encouraged to move about this area in a way which leaves no trace on the land and does not intrude on the experience of others.

Wilderness Ethics

When visiting a designated Wilderness, remember to “Leave NO Trace”. Here are some good practices to follow.

- Never cut live or dead standing trees.
- Never bury trash. Animals will dig it up. Pack out all trash with you.
- Always bury human waste and toilet paper at least 6 inches deep and 200 feet from campsites, trails and water sources.
- Never pick or collect wildflowers, plant specimens, rocks, pinecones, etc.
- Keep pets under control at all times.

- Leave audio devices and boisterous conduct at home.
- Keep group size to 10 or fewer people if possible.
- Pack out what you pack in.
- Do not blaze trees or build rock piles to mark your route when traveling off trails. Use a compass.
- Avoid trampling vegetation.
- Plan ahead to avoid crowded dates and places.
- Glass containers should not be used.
- All ropes and other ice climbing equipment should be removed.

Mechanized equipment, bikes, motors, carts, trailers, snowmobiles, or other wheeled devices are not allowed in the Wilderness.

Wilderness travelers are on their own. There are few evident trails in the Wilderness. Careful preparation is essential for a safe trip. Facilities such as campsites, wilderness toilets and fire rings are not found in RRCW. Before entering a Wilderness, leave an itinerary with someone. Use topographic maps and a compass. The key to enjoying a visit to the Wilderness is to plan a trip that matches your experience and expectations.

What can I do in the RRCW?

Dispersed recreation opportunities for orienteering, backcountry skiing, snowshoeing, hunting, fishing, hiking and backpacking may be found by the adventurous user.

Camping is allowed in RRCW however, there are no designated campsites and permits are not required. When selecting places to camp, stay at least 200 feet from trails, cliffs, water sources and

other campsites. Fires are presently allowed, however gas or sterno stoves are preferred. If you must have a fire, keep it small and use only downed vegetation. Be sure to put your fire dead out. Follow all wilderness ethics and leave no trace principles for backcountry camping.

While in RRCW, remember that there may be others around who are enjoying the solitude Wilderness provides. Be courteous and keep noise to a minimum at all times.

ICE CAVES

The Rock River Canyon ice caves (Eben Ice Caves) are the most notable and well known feature of the RRCW. This attraction is very popular and receives high visitation on weekends from Mid- December through March. If you would like to visit the ice caves when there are fewer visitors, weekday mornings are recommended.

The ice formations are formed from water that seeps through the sandstone bedrock bluffs. As the temperatures drop, these intermittent leaks through the sandstone create ice stalactites over the entrance of undercuts in the bedrock. While the ice caves are a phenomenon in the winter, the summer visitor would only see algae covered rocks and dense foliage.

Please be aware that there are some safety issues at the ice caves. The path to the ice caves is about 2 miles round trip and it is almost always packed down by heavy use. The packed snow becomes very slippery. There are some very steep sections of the trail that can become treacherous. The area around the ice caves is also extremely slick. Wearing yak tracs, crampons or snowshoes with metal teeth is **HIGHLY** recommended.

Supervise small children closely. There is a small creek that runs alongside a section of the trail that may not be completely frozen over. There are steep ravines alongside the trail that one could fall into and become injured.

Venturing within the ice caves is at your own risk. Fluxuations in temperature can weaken the ice and cause large chunks or ice-cycles to fall unpredictably.

Ice climbers are allowed to climb on the ice formations. This can become a hazard for spectators or other visitors to the caves. As climbers move up the ice columns, their axes can cause chunks of ice to splinter and fly up to 20 feet. Always give ice climbers a wide berth. Be alert and keep children and pets out of the path of falling ice and away from the ropes of the climbers.

Please note that ice climbers do not damage the ice formations. Although they do leave holes and gashes while they are climbing, these generally disappear after a few days of thawing and freezing. Ice continually moves and changes throughout the winter. The ice is thick enough that it protects the rock underneath so no damaged is caused by this recreational activity.

Access to the Ice Caves

The easiest route to the ice caves requires visitors to park on private land and cross over a private field before entering the Wilderness. Currently, the owners have not prohibited or blocked this access. However, please be respectful of the private land and realize that the owners have the right to regulate the activity on their land as they see fit.

From Munising, travel west on 94 past the town of Chatham to the flashing light at Eben Junction. Turn right at this intersection on to North Eben road and travel 2 miles on the narrow gravel road until it dead ends at Frey street. Turn right on Frey street and that will lead you to a large parking area that is hard to miss.

For a more challenging, less traveled route to the ice caves, contact the Munising Ranger District.

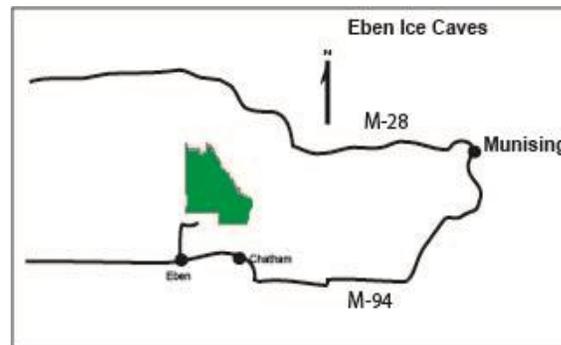
For More Information Contact:

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USDA Forest Service, Hiawatha National Forest
1/30/2014

Remember that you should "take only pictures and leave only footprints."



HIAWATHA NATIONAL FOREST

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Munising Ranger District

