CONNECTING COMMUNITIES:

COLERAIN AND BOVEY, MN
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INTRODUCTION

Project Background
In 2005 as the plans for constructing the Highway 169 bypass around the City of Bovey proceeded, concern about the bypass’s impact on both Coleraine and Bovey grew. Citizens were concerned that the new alignment would add to the separation between the two communities at a time when members of both communities were setting aside historic differences and starting to work together.

Cotton Park as Amenity
The future of Cotton Park was also a concern. Located just south of the bypass, Cotton Park provides public access to Trout Lake. In times past it was an important public space that drew people from all over the Western Iron Range to enjoy its amenities. With the Center for Changing Landscapes’ help a citizen’s group obtained a Community Assistance Program grant from the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA), University Of Minnesota for a landscape architecture student to develop a preliminary master plan Cotton Park.

Connection Needed
In planning for Cotton Park it became evident to all involved that a more comprehensive plan with preliminary site designs was needed that addressed the area between Coleraine and Bovey. Because the Bovey bypass project was proceeding, the citizens recognized that the new bypass could provide an opportunity for citizens from both Coleraine and Bovey to work together to create a plan for new connections between the two communities that would take advantage of the public land associated with the old highway alignment, address the physical barrier between the two communities created by the new four-lane realignment of State Highway 169, enhance the amenities of each community, and address pedestrian and cyclist safety issues associated with crossing the highway.

Project Scope
The highway bypass provided an opportunity for citizens of Coleraine and Bovey to work together on a physical design and planning project that would enhance the quality of life for the residents of both communities and help support the local economy by improving Coleraine and Bovey as destinations or stopping places for visitors.

Connecting Communities
The Coleraine and Bovey design project addresses:
- Mesabi Trail connections
- Keystone Snowmobile Trail connections
- Public park and green space enhancements and connections
- Water quality enhancement and waterway beautification
- Trout Lake shoreline restoration
- Trout Lake boat landing
- Civic gathering spaces
- Awareness of the recreational opportunities in the area
Regional Context

“The Mesabi Iron Range is one of fifteen iron ranges and districts located throughout Minnesota, Wisconsin, and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and Ontario. The Mesabi Iron Range produces a pronounced topographic ridge in the northeastern Minnesota landscape. The ridge increases in elevation from west to east, the highest elevations along the top of the ridge vary approximately from 1540 feet to 1880 feet above mean sea level.

“The resources of the Mesabi Range overwhelm those of the other 14 ore producing regions, accounting for more than 70% of the total ores extracted from the Lake Superior region between 1900 and 1980 and about 60% of the nation’s total output (Pitt et. al 2000 as quoted by Alanen 1989). In Minnesota, the Mesabi is the only iron range still in production.”

“Shallow deposits of the iron oxide ore were first “discovered” near Mountain Iron on the Mesabi Iron Range in 1890 by Leonidas Merritt and his sons, but it wasn’t until 1894 that the first ore shipment left the Mesabi. Initial mining activity used deep shaft methods. However, the red hematite and limonite ores were so close to the surface, that miners quickly switched to the strip-mine method of operation. The hematite ore was 67% iron and was so soft that it could be shoveled. The Mesabi hematite reserves became a major supplier of the world’s iron ore, accounting for one-third of the world’s iron ore production in the late 1940’s and early 1950’s (Schwartz and Thiel 1954 as quoted in Sansome, 1983). The high quality hematite ore was exhausted by the late 1950’s, and mining activities switched to extracting the lower quality taconite reserved. Taconite must be concentrated at the mine site and processed into marble-sized taconite pellets that are then shipped to steel plants.”

“Mining has tremendously influenced the cultural, economic and political development of the Mesabi Iron Range. Extraction of the ore reserves was and still is a labor-intensive process. European immigrants flocked to the Range, imprinting their home cultures onto their New World landscapes. Mining provided the impetus for the creation of most of the communities on the Mesabi Range, and nearly all of the settlements were initially platted by mining companies.”

“Mining became the economic engine of the Iron Range and a way of life for “Rangers.” A landscape evolved on the Iron Range that was as much defined by the ore deposited there by nature as it was by the cultures of the people mining the ore. The landscape produced by the intersection of these natural and cultural processes is unique within the state of Minnesota. It in turn provides a sense of economic, social and political identity for Range residents. In this way, the Iron Range landscape is both a product of natural and cultural process and it is an agent that impacts the natural medium of the environment and changes the culture of it inhabitants.”

“Throughout its tenure, mining has greatly affected the visual character of the Mesabi Range landscape. Extracting the hematite ore transformed the pineries, conifers and hardwood forests that originally characterized the Range landscape into a series of long, narrow and deep ravines of red ore that contrasted sharply with the verdant stands of north woods. Taconite extraction and processing technology transformed this pattern into a collection of monumental-scale pits and piles of overburden, waste rock and lean ore reserves. Mining reclamation laws have resulted in the formation of ziggurat-like stockpiles of coarse tailings, lean ore, waste rock and overburden. The fine tailings basins are almost perfectly flat expanses of silica and water.”

“The seemingly never-ending national demand for steel and the bounteous local reserves of ore seemed to assure many Rangers perpetual economic prosperity based solely on the mining industry. Minnesota Department of Economic Security figures for 2000 show that in St. Louis County, where 70% of the Mesabi Range is located, the mining sector ranks fourth behind the retail trade services and government sectors in total employment. However, the future of mining is uncertain. Even if the supply lasts, changes in steel-making technology may make the taconite pellets obsolete for use in the major steel producing areas of the United States. In recognition of this potential, there have been numerous attempts to diversify the economy of the Range to provide greater economic security for Range residents.”

“Demand for outdoor recreation and tourism in the United States has grown dramatically in the latter half of 20th century. As a result, tourism has become a significant industry on the Mesabi Range. Nature’s endowment of the Range landscape provides significant opportunities for fishing and hunting, especially since a large percentage of the region is on public ownership. The numerous lakes in the region provide excellent sites for cabin development. Significant efforts to enhance regional recreational trail facilities include the Taconite Trail developed by the IRRRB and the Mesabi Trail being developed by the Regional Railroad Authority of St. Louis and Lake Counties. These facilities have been created to promote the Iron Range as a year-round recreation area. Other natural resources that provide excellent opportunity or outdoor recreation in northeastern Minnesota are found in 13 state parks, 14 state forests, the Superior and Chippewa National Forests, Voyageurs National Park and the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.”

“In addition to developing recreation opportunities associated with the region’s natural features, the cultural heritage of the region is being developed as a tourism resource. This involves interpreting the diverse cultures that inhabit the Range through living history displays, historic photographs, stories, artifacts and landscape features.”

INTRODUCTION

Historical Context

“During the first years of the 20th century, while steam shovels and trains removed vast quantities of rich iron ore from the central and eastern regions of the Mesabi Iron Range, the western end lay quiet and deserted.”

“Only in 1904 did the U.S. Steel Corporation begin making plans to utilize the low-grade iron ore in the western region.”

“News of the plans spread quickly, and, in response to expected large-scale mining activity with men and payrolls, the rough little town of Bovey came to life. A site for a new town to be called Bovey was chosen on land owned by the company near the north end of Trout Lake. The Bovey Townsite Company filed a plat in May 1904, and began advertising lots for sale. In the Grand Rapids Herald-Review the ad read: “Bovey! The New Town—this new town is splendidly located overlooking one of the prettiest lakes in northern Minnesota. Surrounded with, and then in huge block letters, “BEDS OF IRON ORE” underlined twice for emphasis.”

“Although started by merchant-entrepreneurs hoping to take advantage of mining operations, the place was soon known for its rowdy bars and many gamblers and prostitutes. The town was also known for its unfinished look, grubby streets and—because of a lack of concern for sanitation—a high incidence of typhoid fever.”

“With mining due to get underway, Thomas Cole, who was Oliver Iron Mining president, chose John Campbell Greenway as the general superintendent of the new western Mesabi Canisteo District. The energetic Greenway, a southern gentleman, Yale-educated, celebrated athlete, and Rough Rider and close personal friend of Teddy Roosevelt, arrived to assume his duties.”

“As Greenway considered the enormous task of beginning large-scale mining operation in a remote wilderness, he placed high priority on obtaining a reliable and competent work force. He wanted trustworthy family men looking for a permanent home, and he had little to entice them.”

“Bovey may have been an exciting place, but hardly the drawing card for the clientele Greenway sought. Thus, he attempted to convince the conservation directors of U.S. Steel that a whole new town, indeed a “model” town, was needed posthaste.”

“Although the corporation had never before sponsored a company town, Greenway’s request was approved and he was given a free hand and adequate funds to develop his new community. Coleraine was started in 1905.”

“Coleraine, named in honor of Thomas Cole, was erected under Greenway’s close supervision. Just one mile from Bovey, Coleraine stood in marked contrast to its neighbor: residential lots were large; streets were wide, paved and curbed; the business district was substantial with brick buildings; and the houses of varied architectural styles, were attractively painted following the occupant’s wishes.”

“The company-controlled city administration carefully screened all potential residents. The two bars in town were tightly regulated and encouraged to sell as much soda pop as possible, and, of course, gamblers and prostitutes were nowhere to be seen.”

“A park featuring formal gardens and walkways were designed near the shores of the then-pristine Trout Lake. Fine public buildings including a Carnegie library, school and village hall were constructed. Free land and company financial aid resulted in the building of several churches.”

- Donald L. Boese
The first trainload of ore from the Canisteo Mine, Coleraine
MHS Photograph Collection ca. 1907

Second Avenue, Bovey
MHS Photograph Collection Postcard ca. 1905

Canisteo Mine
MHS Photograph Collection ca. 1920

View of Coleraine
MHS Photograph Collection ca. 1910