

FRIENDS OF
BIRCH ISLAND WOODS

SOUTHWEST REGIONAL LRT TRAIL GUIDE

Hopkins • Minnetonka •
Eden Prairie • Chanhassen
with connections to other trails

Copyright, 2002, 2003 Jeff Strate. All rights reserved.

The Southwest Regional LRT Trail's South Branch is a ribbon of discovery through surprisingly varied landscapes and communities. This guide is intended to help make your bike and hike treks along it even more enjoyable. It describes much of what you'll be seeing along the way, suggests some great side trips, identifies the pit stops and Kodak views and brings to the fore some history and trivia.

We apologize for the awkward name with which the trail has been tagged (not our fault) and regret any inconvenience that unintended errors in this presentation might cause. That said, enjoy your trail and the places through which it passes.

Jeff Strate
Friends of Birch Island Woods, Eden Prairie
<http://www.birchislandwoods.org/>

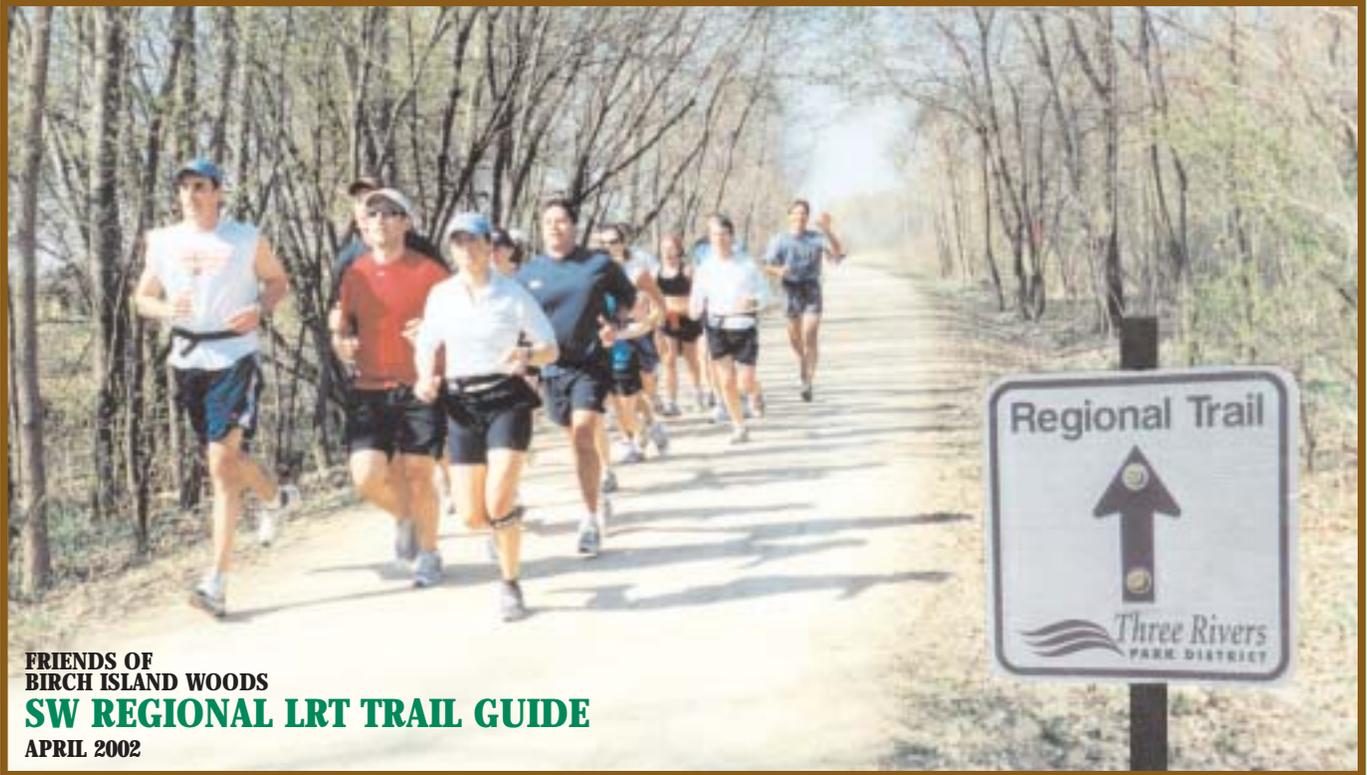


Written by
Jeff Strate
tv / video / print
952-949-8980



Designed by
Ned Hirschler Design
Eden Prairie
952-949-0345
nhirschler@msn.com

Posted and managed by
Dave Spoor, webmaster,
Friends of Birch Island Woods,
Eden Prairie/Minnetonka



**FRIENDS OF
BIRCH ISLAND WOODS
SW REGIONAL LRT TRAIL GUIDE
APRIL 2002**

CONTENTS

1. OVERVIEW
2. POINTS OF INTEREST ALONG THE SOUTH BRANCH
3. BIKE ROUTE CONNECTIONS
To MINNEAPOLIS, CHASKA and the
MINNESOTA VALLEY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
4. DISTANCES ALONG THE SOUTH BRANCH
5. WHO THE HECK OWNS AND RUNS THE TRAIL?
6. LINKS TO TRAIL MAPS, BIKING AND TRANSPORTATION INTERESTS,
HISTORIC PHOTOS AND MORE.
7. ***TRAIL GUIDE PATRONS***

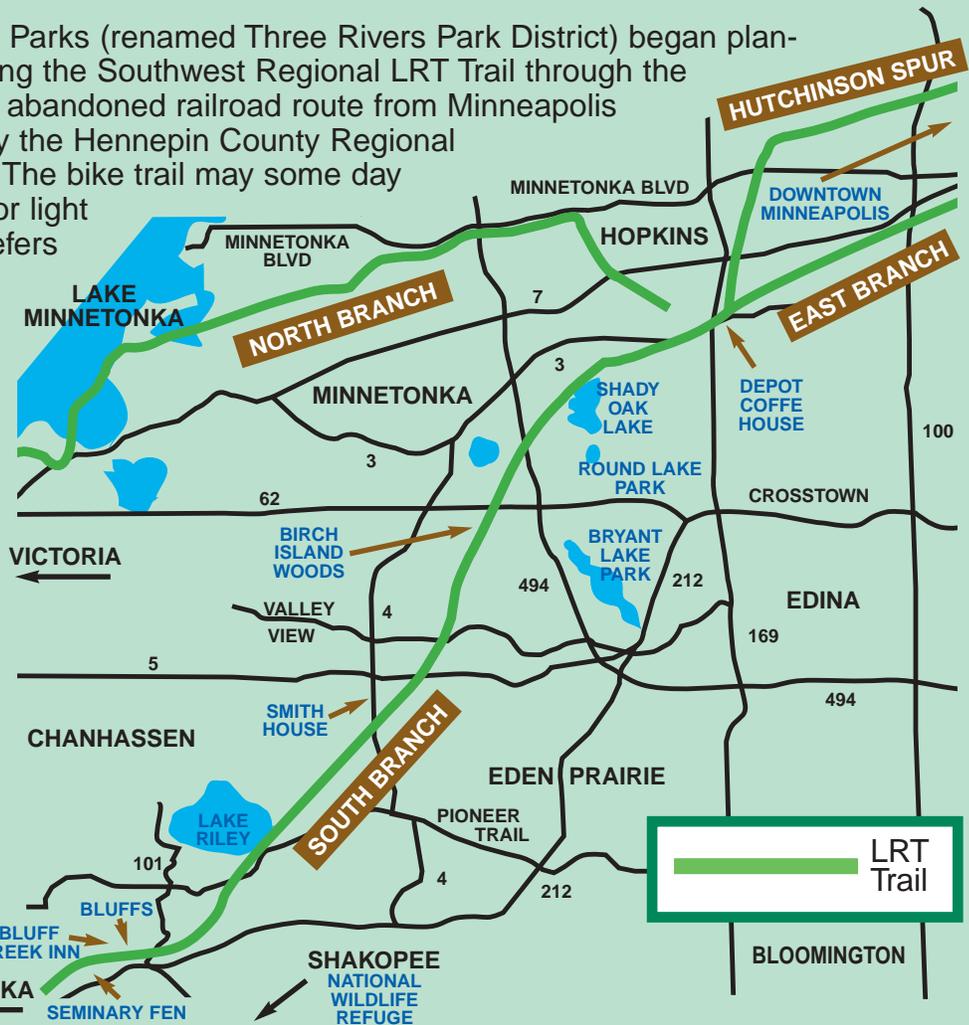
DISCLAIMER

Jeff Strate, Ned Hirschler Design and Dave Spoor have attempted to provide readers of this guide with accurate, useful and entertaining information. Readers and second hand recipients of information appearing in this guide, agree to hold Jeff Strate, Ned Hirschler, Ned Hirschler Design, Dave Spoor and the Friends of Birch Island Woods blameless and not liable for any accidents, injuries or death; or loss and theft of or damage to any property which may occur during activities that are described in this guide. Readers of this guide also agree to accept full responsibility for their own actions, safety and enjoyment while using the trails, routes, parks and facilities described in this guide and accept full responsibility for briefing themselves on current regulations, restrictions and conditions affecting the trails, routes, parks and facilities described in this guide.

OVERVIEW

In the mid 1990's, Hennepin Parks (renamed Three Rivers Park District) began planning, constructing and managing the Southwest Regional LRT Trail through the Southwest Transit Corridor, an abandoned railroad route from Minneapolis through Eden Prairie owned by the Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority (HCRRRA). The bike trail may some day share the corridor with buses or light rail transit (that's what "LRT" refers to), but for now it remains a splendid means of liberating one's self from gridlock and noise pollution. Pages 14 through 17 may be helpful in linking you up with more information about the trail's future.

The way we see it, the Southwest Regional LRT Trail has an east branch (Hopkins to Minneapolis), a north branch (Hopkins to Victoria) and a south branch (Hopkins through Chanhassen). The entire system is open in spring, summer and fall with some sections re-opening in winter for snow mobiles and ski touring. Page 12 describes some of the bike routes that connect to the south branch.



EAST BRANCH The 3 mile-long, asphalt-paved, east branch starts at the Depot Coffee House on Excelsior Boulevard in Hopkins and passes through St. Louis Park to the Midtown Greenway, Kenilworth and Chain-of-Lakes trails in Minneapolis. The HUTCHINSON SPUR also begins at the Depot Coffee House connecting to the Cedar Lake Trail through the northerly parts of St. Louis Park.

NORTH BRANCH The 15 mile north branch runs from Eighth Avenue N. in Hopkins to Victoria, passing through woodsy Minnetonka to the salubrious Lake Minnetonka towns of Deephaven, Greenwood, Excelsior and Shorewood and then out to Carver County where the eastern forest yields to the western prairie.

SOUTH BRANCH The south branch courses 11.2 miles from the industrial and railroading environs of the Depot Coffee House in Hopkins through hidden neighborhoods and pristine greenways in Minnetonka and Eden Prairie to the Minnesota Valley blufflands in Chanhassen. This branch follows the right-of-way of the Chicago & Northwestern Railroad and its predecessor, the St. Louis & Minneapolis Railway which began laying track in the area around 1871. Much of the original road bed was straightened in 1902.

TRAIL SURFACES AND GRADES The south and north branches are ten-foot wide, hard-packed trails of crushed limestone except for the asphalted stretch east from 11th Street in Hopkins to the Depot and a few under and over passes elsewhere. The East Branch to Minneapolis is entirely asphalted. Grades on the system are less than 5%.

POINTS OF INTEREST ALONG THE SOUTH BRANCH

Hopkins through Chanhassen

Depot Coffee House, Hopkins

This trail hub doubles as a rush hour java pump for commuters and a cool hangout for community groups. Sandwiches, brownies, pop, juices, coffees and free drinking water are available. The Depot has parking, rest rooms, tables (inside and out) and irregularly scheduled entertainment. Located near Hwy 169 exits to Excelsior Blvd. 952-938-2204.

HOURS Monday – Thursday 6:30 a.m. – 9:00 p.m. Friday 6:30 a.m. – 11:00 p.m. Saturday 8:00 a.m.- 10:00 p.m. Sunday 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Closed Sundays January through March and October through December

While absorbing a kiwi-strawberry, ruminate over the fact that the coffee house was crafted from a 1902 Minneapolis & St. Louis Railway depot by student volunteers from the Hopkins School District with ample support from businesses, service organizations, government agencies and charitable foundations. Ruminates again about the railroad tracks out front.

Trains

For nearly a century Hopkins was a major junction for several railways. Twin Cities and Western Railroad engineers, to the delight of kids, keep the locomotives powered up in the Canadian Pacific switching yards just to the west of the coffee house. Reportedly, mornings from 6:30 a.m. and afternoons from 3:00 p.m. (except Sundays) are good times for train spotting.

SuperValu

Giant, national food distributor SuperValu serves Minnesota, Wisconsin and Iowa from its various Hopkins locations. 11 football fields can fit inside its largest warehouse.

5th Avenue Crossing

Stop, Look and Listen. Then cross.

8th Avenue Park & Ride Lot - a connection to the North Branch

From here, wheel north on 8th Avenue through downtown Hopkins to First Street North and the start of the trails north branch.

Minneapolis Moline (“Modern Machinery”)

For nearly 9 decades, Hopkins was dominated by several incarnations of one company. Minneapolis Moline was one of the nation’s premier farm equipment innovators and makers and developed some of the army’s first jeeps during World War II. White Motors took over in 1963. The huge, power machine factory (which began to be dismantled in 1986) was on the site now claimed by the Cornerstone Business Center, the large, dark tan, building south of the trail between 8th and 11th Avenues. M-M’s precursor, the Minneapolis Threshing Machine Company, which began operations here in 1887, sparked the birth of West Minneapolis which was renamed in 1928 for Harley H. Hopkins, an early homesteader. Now you know (dramatic pause) the rest (short pause) of the story! Good day.

NOTES: (a) The Minnesota Historical Society’s on-line archives have a great 1925 aerial photo of M-M’s Hopkins plant. See Part 6 below. (b) M-M’s signature, gold-colored farm tractors were assembled at its Minneapolis plant on Lake Street.



Hopkins through Chanhassen (continued)

11th Avenue Crossing

From here to the northeast you wheel over asphalt and to the southwest over crushed, packed limestone. Pit stops at Wendy's and Holiday Gas. Look for an old Minneapolis-Moline smoke-stack west of 11th Avenue between the trail and Excelsior Boulevard.

Shady Oak Road Underpass (Hopkins/Minnetonka boundary)

The 2 3/4 mile segment of the trail from Shady Oak Road in Minnetonka to Birch Island Woods in Eden Prairie mostly courses through a green corridor of lakes, wetlands, ponds, meadows and woods. Wildflowers come into their prime from mid-July through September.



Dominick Drive Crossing

A bench on the lake awaits.

Shady Oak Lake Side Trip: 250 yards west of Dominick Dr. you'll find a connector trail to Shady Oak Beach. The connector joins Dominick then turns left at Jorrisen Rd. to follow an old alignment of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad which bisects the lake to the beach. (The old RR line reappears as the main trail in Eden Prairie's Birch Island Woods. See below.)

They'll want your hard earned money to use the beach and parking lot during swimming season. But you're on a bike and the picnic area is free. Except for the steep, short approach to the parking lot, the grade is flat. Tom Sawyer and Becky Thatcher have been spotted fishing from the footbridge; Huck Finn from the shore along the regional trail. The side trip to the beach takes as long as you need to whistle the themes to the Andy Griffith, Donna Reed, Petticoat Junction and the Casey & Roundhouse shows.

Minnetoga Lake

Railroad historian Ron Keagle has demonstrated the high probability that a steam locomotive jumped an old wood trestle that crossed Minnetoga when it was more descriptively referred to as Mud Lake. The trestle ran parallel a bit north of the trail. Oral history collected by Mr. Keagle and magnetometer tests run by one of the firms that helped locate the Titanic strongly suggest that a steam locomotive and coal tender lie buried in lake bottom mud. The mishap occurred sometime between 1871 and 1902. For more on the "Legend of Mud Lake" call Mr. Keagle at 952-471-0208.

Hopkins through Chanhassen (continued)

Rowland Road Crossing.

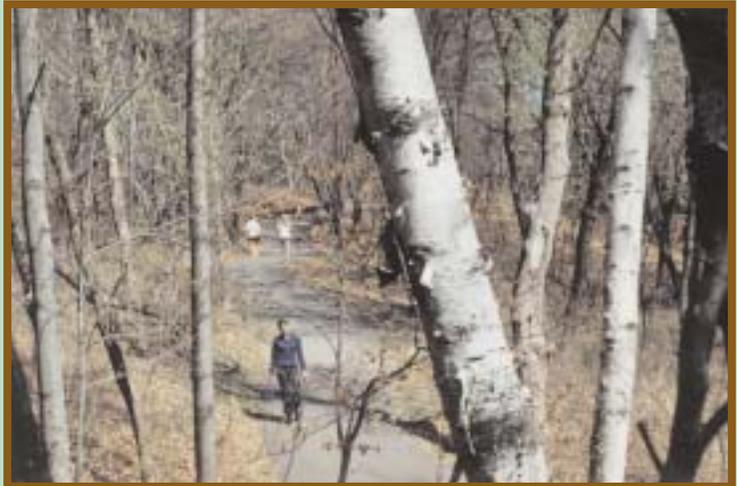
Caution: Fast Traffic.

Side Trips via Rowland Road Trail:

(1) **Lone Lake Park** (a half mile east of the SW Regional Trail): A loop around a pristine, restored prairie and over steep, forested hills leads to the lake and its unexpected gold fish which can be seen from a public dock.

There's a frisby golf course, a playground, picnic tables and tennis courts. Parking is available at the Rowland Road trail head.

(2) **Bryant Lake Regional Park** (1.8 miles from the SW Regional Trail — 3.6 miles round trip): Pick up the Bryant Lake Trail a few hundred yards in from Lone Lake Park's Rowland Road trail head. The crushed limestone trail follows the scenic valley of a branch of 9 Mile Creek into Eden Prairie over rolling, meadowed and forested terrain. Bryant Lake Park has paddle boat rentals, picnic areas, a playground, a fishing dock, a swimming beach, hiking trails, rest rooms, drinking fountains and concessions. Kids can handle the hills but on the return trip may have to walk part of the grade ascending from the lake. Free entry for bikers and hikers. Call 952-941-4518.



Rowland Road to the Crosstown Highway

This section of the trail has been adopted by Bailey Properties of Minnetonka. Snowy Egrets and Great Blue Herons love the pond on the east side of the trail between Rowland Road and Interstate 494.

Highway 494 Underpass

Baker Road Crossing

Parking (in an unofficial area). Caution when crossing Baker — fast traffic.

Glen Lake Wetlands

In the fall and spring you can see tamarack trees in the lake's expansive wetlands to the west. Look for deer and a variety of birds.

Skyridge Business Center

The office complex opposite the Glen Lake wetlands features a nature preserve and trail. Snowy egrets, black-crowned night herons and green heron chicks have been seen near the lagoon in 2002. Very cool! Call 952-933-2020. **A Trail Guide Patron.** See Page 18.

Hopkins through Chanhassen (continued)



Crosstown Bridge (Hwy 62) - The Olympian Hiawatha

The Olympian Hiawatha

The railroad track near the Crosstown Highway bridge is used by the Twin Cities & Western RR which was preceded by the Soo Line which in turn was preceded by the Milwaukee Road. In this area, that mainline track crossed the mainline of the Minneapolis & St. Louis Ry which became the Chicago & Northwestern and then the bike trail. Got that? The trail curves up to join the bridge. From the top, stop and look back at the track. During the 1950's, about 9:30 in the morning, the Milwaukee's Olympian Hiawatha, one of the nation's premier passenger trains, would glide by on its way to the Rocky and Olympic Mountains and Puget Sound. The impressive, streamlined, yellow, gray and silver trimmed train featured the Skytop Observation and Super Dome cars for panoramic viewing of the scenery.

Side Trip with a Putting Green

300 yards west of the Crosstown bridge you'll find the pastoral County Home School and the Glen Lake Golf Center. The 9 holer sports a bicycler friendly snack bar and washrooms, a practice green and loaner clubs. Phone: 952-934-8644. Note: The course occupies the former site of the nationally admired Glen Lake Tuberculosis Sanitarium.

Crosstown to Edenvale Boulevard: Found Art.

An industrial/business district between the Crosstown and Edenvale Boulevard features a storage lot of rusted, wrought iron sculpture, furniture, structures and thingamajigs — found art that suggests a flattened Watts Tower (of East L.A. fame). Nearby, mountains of crushed aggregate grow then disappear a few weeks later as Midwest Asphalt recycles highway pavement.

Hopkins through Chanhassen (continued)

Edenvale Boulevard / Birch Island Woods

The juncture of the trail, Edenvale Blvd. and Indian Chief Road leads to the Birch Island Woods district, an urban-bound pocket of rural settings and history.

Side Trip: Birch Island Woods District

(1.5 - 3 miles)

Head north on Indian Chief Rd for 200 yards to the Birch Island Woods Conservation Area. The half mile-long woods trail provides a shady change from the regional trail over a mostly flat, cinder-topped, railroad bed from the 1880's. Listen for song birds, loons, pileated woodpeckers and wild turkeys. Tandem bike riders may have to walk a bit at the trail heads.

At Birch Island Road turn up the hill for two small garden farms and Edenvale Boulevard. On the Edenvale trail, wheel east (left) 1/4 mile to the SW Regional Trail (where this side trip started) or head west (right) 1 mile through wooded, and hilly, cul-de-sac country and the regional trail's entry and overpass at Valley View Road.



The Picha Heritage Farm celebrates its 100th birthday this year.

Note: The Woods district boasts several "Kodak Moments" and historic sites including the century-old Picha Heritage Farm which still produces raspberries and the Glen Lake Children's Camp which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. For more info on Birch Island Woods, look for the self-guided maps that are sometimes posted at the trail heads or visit www.BirchIslandWoods.org/ on the web.

Edenvale Boulevard to Valley View Road and Highway 5

This section of the trail passes by newer and older neighborhoods, wooded hills, Bent Creek Golf Course, wetlands and a small industrial district. Along with the Edenvale Boulevard trail, this leg is popular with local runners training for the Twin Cities and Grandma's Marathons.

Valley View Road Overpass

The modern, pre-fab, bike/hike bridge replaces the colorful "Graffiti Bridge," a favorite of lovers, truants and political activists armed with paint and, as an object-de-arte, by serious photographers and painters. Note: The new bridge is off set from center alignment to accommodate possible light rail transit tracks or a bus way. Valley View follows a route once popular with Native Americans.

Hopkins through Chanhassen (continued)

Purgatory Creek

This meandering stream flows out of a series of conservation areas from the northwest and through Bent Creek Golf Course into a landscape of under-appreciated irony — just beyond the golf course, overlooking Purgatory Creek, waits a Washburn-McReavy Funeral Chapel.

Martin Drive

Look both ways. Martin Drive is next to the trail's Highway 5 Underpass.

Highway 5 Underpass

A gap in the south branch of the trail was eliminated in September 2001 with the duet opening of the trail's Hwy 5 underpass and Highway 312, a freeway which splits off from Hwy 5 but ends less than a mile away at Eden Prairie Road. Some hope Hwy 312 will get to Cologne and the corn fields of Carver County but for now it remains Minnesota's most elaborate on / off ramp.

Eden Prairie Road (Co. Rd. 4)

**Fast traffic, look both ways,
but first ...**

Short Side Trip to a Pit Stop

Embedded in History: Nothing remains here from the 1870's (or the 1970's for that matter) when the Minneapolis & St. Louis Ry (you've been following its route) operated a whistlestop here which attracted livestock pens, a store, creamery, grain elevator and a pickle factory. A few blocks north on EP Road, however, you'll find the Smith Douglas More House which has survived.



Built by Sheldon Smith in 1877, the red brick house has been carefully and comfortably restored by the City of Eden Prairie and is occupied by a Dunn Bros' Coffee operation (952-934-0145). Bicyclers and SUV jockeys alike can now relax with the bean-of-the-day in the home and overnight guest house of a guy who was a farmer and a depot agent for -- the M & StL Ry.

Miller Park Entry and Parking

This large, recreational city park has trail side parking a couple of hundred yards west of the Eden Prairie Road crossing. Course through it to find athletic fields, Mitchell Lake, picnic areas, playgrounds, drinking fountains, and a fishing dock.

Candlewood Parkway Crossing

Leave the trail and head north for another way to Miller Park through a handsome residential area. 1/5 mile.

Dell Road Crossing

Caution, fast traffic both ways.

Bearpath

After crossing a Bearpath street, the trail traverses this lovely, residential community built around a Jack Nicklaus designed Golf Course and such natural features as a protected cranberry bog.

Hopkins through Chanhassen (continued)

Riley Lake Road Crossing

Caution: fast traffic both ways.

Riley Lake Park

Swimming, picnic areas, playground, boat launch, parking and the historic Jacques-Riley farmstead and Eden Prairie's oldest, settler-built house.

Riley Creek

Pioneer Trail Underpass (Chanhassen/Eden Prairie boundary)

From the Pioneer Trail underpass to Bluff Creek Drive, the trail arcs through scenic river bluff country with lush forests, wildflowers and great views.

Ravine Scene

As the trail begins to span a deep ravine you'll see cliffs, safety fencing and an overlook. Stop and look over. The Minnesota Valley and the Church of St. Mark in distant Shakopee are wonderfully framed by the terrain. Vermont it ain't, but it is ours and it's simply breath taking in early May and mid October.



Cliffs caused by erosion.

The high and steep, earth crossing was constructed by Minneapolis & St. Louis Ry crews in 1904 to replace a timbered trestle. Note: Railroad historians Ernie Shuldheiss (Eden Prairie) and Ron Keagle (Spring Park) have posted a circa 1903 photo of the trestle being dismantled and a 1991 photo of crews removing the Chicago & Northwestern rails. Find these photos on the net by going to a really cool website about the C&NW and M&StL railroads at www.eldora.net/lyndon/ Click on the "Towns" link. Next click on the "Chaska, Minnesota" link. Half a song west of the overlook, you'll find a broader panorama of the Minnesota Valley. Those are the elevators of the Rahr Malting Company in Shakopee — serving the brewers of America since 1847.

Co. Road 101 Crossing

Caution: Steep, asphalt approaches to 101 (Great Plains Boulevard). Self-involved drivers gunning up and down the curves pose real danger.

Bluff Creek Ravine

A bit west of 101, the trail edges along the top of Bluff Creek Ravine. Summer foliage hides the awesome drop to the stream below and the steeps beyond it. Bring the camera in spring and fall.

Bluff Creek Drive Crossing

Parking and porta johns. **Caution:** Fast, hidden traffic both ways. The DNR maintains the trail between Bluff Creek Road and Highway 212.

Hopkins through Chanhassen (continued)

Side Trip to Bluff Creek Inn.

150 yards down BC Drive you'll find a bed and breakfast inn that the Chicago Tribune has rated among the best of its kind in the midwest. The Bluff Creek Inn is built around the



1860 yellow brick farm house of Joseph and Veronica (Kessler) Vogel. The Inn, gardens and out buildings sit on land that had been deeded to Captain Luther Clark by President Abraham Lincoln for Clark's earlier service in the War of 1812. Call inn keepers Maida and Jim Eggen at 952-445-2735.

Seminary Fen: Rare and Threatened.

The most important and pristine ecological site in Carver, Scott and Hennepin Counties lies on the south side of the trail west of Bluff Creek Drive. Seminary Fen -- a cold-water, calcareous wetland -- embraces a suite of endangered plant species. The DNR, Chanhassen and others want to save the fen but time is running out. Call the Friends or the MN Valley at 952-854-5900 to help.

Highway 212

The trail ends here but read on.



BIKE ROUTE CONNECTIONS TO MINNEAPOLIS, CHASKA and the MINNESOTA VALLEY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

EAST BRANCH <> MINNEAPOLIS

With the recent connection of the East Branch of the SW Regional and the Midtown Greenway trails, bicyclers and in-line skaters can now loop the Depot Coffee House, St. Louis Park and the lake district of Minneapolis. The flat, straight, 3 mile-long, East Branch is a cruiser's dream that flanks a railroad, manufacturing and warehouse corridor. The Beltline Boulevard crossing puts the sweaty and parched within a few blocks of St. Louis Park's superb outdoor Aqua Park with its slick water slides.

HUTCHINSON SPUR /CEDAR LAKE TRAIL < > MINNEAPOLIS

"I'm good enough, I'm smart enough, and dog gone It, people like me!"

- Stuart Smalley

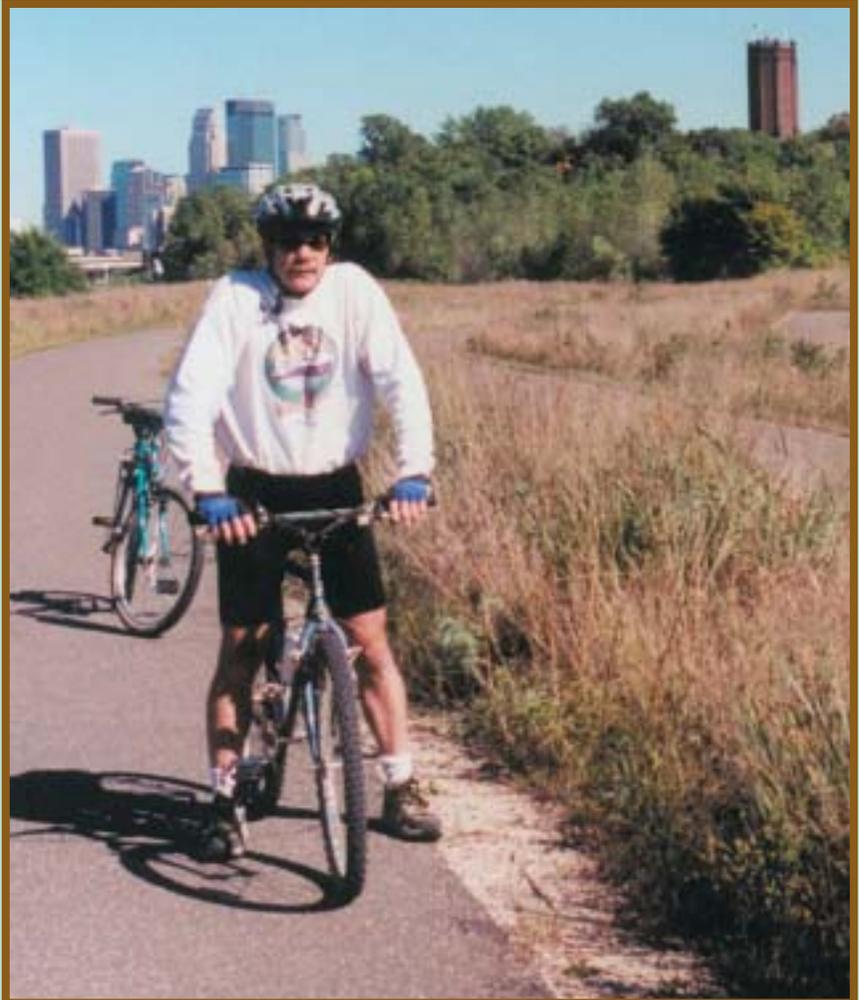
At the Depot Coffee House, walk your steeds north, across Excelsior Boulevard to the unmarked start of the 4.3 mile-long, Hutchinson Spur section of the Cedar Lake Trail. The "Spur" winds through neat, compact neighborhoods in northern St. Louis Park along a greenway that snugs up to back yard gardens and baseball diamonds that Saturday Night Live, self-affirmation guru Stuart Smalley (Al Franken) would find familiar.

After following a Burlington Northern/Santa Fe mainline, the trail passes under Highway 100 then serpentine nearly 3 miles through a man-made prairie built on abandoned railroad yards. East of Cedar Lake, look for Minneapolis skyscrapers levitating above a sea of tall, waving grasses. Dog gone It, people like this trail!

Just south of Interstate 394, one can fork north to the Guthrie Theater, Walker Art Center and Lee's Liquor Lounge or southwest through the woodsy Kenilworth Trail to the Midtown Greenway, SW Regional, Chain-of-Lakes, Minnehaha Creek and Mississippi River Trails.

BIKE COMMUTING

The above trails form America's only bike commuter freeway system. It is now possible, possums, to dump the SUV for the Schwinn to get to work and back without gridlock. For bike commuting maps, see page 15.



BIKE ROUTE CONNECTIONS (continued)

CHASKA

Caution: Until and if the remaining old rail alignment from the Chanhassen/Chaska border is converted for bicycle use, you'll have to take Highway 212's five foot wide, paved shoulder along the unpleasant, traffic-mad mile to Chaska's very pleasant town square. There are other ways of getting to Chaska including one described in the following 1886 account.

Scott County Argus, May 13, 1886

Two young bloods of Eden Prairie after visiting with friends near the [Eden Prairie] depot until a late hour at night started for home. Finding the box cars invitingly near and slowly moving, they climbed up, supposing the cars were being sidetracked. The train slowly, but surely, moved out of the depot and obligingly side tracked in Chaska; and those two well known gents mourn, fully plodded their way home, sadder but wiser men. But this is a profound secret, as they will know when this paragraph meets their gaze.

Article located by Ernie Shuldheiss, Eden Prairie.

Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge

Celebrating its Silver Anniversary as the National Wildlife Refuge System Celebrates its First Century

Louisville Swamp Unit of the MN Valley National Wildlife Refuge is SW of of Chaska on the south side of the Minnesota River  Picture at Right.

One of the portals to America's largest, metropolitan, national wildlife refuge is about a mile from the SW Regional Trail's junctures with Hwy 101 and Bluff Creek Drive. **Caution:** Bluff Creek Drive and 101 are narrow. Highways 212 and 101 have paved, but variably wide shoulders.

From the trail at Bluff Creek Drive or Hwy 101, bike toward the valley floor, cross Hwy 212 and head east along the paved shoulder, turning south with Hwy 101. Follow 101 through the backwaters of the Minnesota River. On the approach to Shakopee, cross the MN River on the decommissioned, traffic-free bridge to the right. On the other side, turn right and wheel to Fuller Street; take another right and go one block to Levee Drive. The Minnesota Valley State Corridor Trail to Chaska picks up a bit to the west and a mile-long segment into Veteran's Memorial Park starts to the east beyond the Highway 101 bridge.

The State Trail from Shakopee to Chaska passes through old, forested river banks, bottom lands and farm and refuge land and by the picturesque ruins of the Strunk/Nyssen Brewery which began operation in 1854. Except for the twisty, alternately rocky, dusty and sometimes muddy mile nearest Chaska (a detour), this stretch is asphalted.

Look for the unmarked spur to a parking lot. (If you arrive at the Hwy 41 river bridge, turn back.) The spur and lot lead to Highway 41 for a short run (with fast, heavy traffic) over the bridge to Chaska with its river town ambience, watering holes and classic town square.

Mountain bikes are recommended for the trail beyond Co. Rd. 41. The Refuge's untamed, Louisville Swamp Unit has settings which remind this writer of Africa's Serengeti plains and Louisiana's bayous. Call the MN DNR in Jordan at 952-492-6400 for current trail conditions.

Alert: The State Corridor Trail is a multi-use trail operated by the MN DNR. Each unit of the MN Valley National Wildlife Refuge has a map which identifies specified bike trails. Stay on the approved trails.

Alert: Unpaved trails can get mucky or flooded. Call the DNR's office in Jordan for current trail conditions 952-492-6400.

SOUTH BRANCH SW REGIONAL LRT TRAIL **Approximate Distances**

Miles NORTHEAST to SOUTHWEST

2.25 Depot Coffee House < > Dominick Dr / Shady Oak Lake
0.75 Dominick Dr / Shady Oak Lake < > Baker Road
0.75 Baker Road < > Crosstown Hwy
0.40 Crosstown < > Edenvale Blvd (Birch Island Woods)
1.75 Edenvale Blvd (Birch Island Woods) < > Hwy 5
0.70 Hwy 5 < > Eden Prairie Road (Co. Rd. 4)
2.50 Eden Prairie Road < > Pioneer Trail Underpass
1.00 Pioneer Trail < > Hwy 101
0.40 Hwy 101 < > Bluff Creek Drive
0.70 Bluff Creek Drive < > Hwy 212
11.20 Depot Coffee House <<< >>> Hwy 212

Miles SOUTHWEST to NORTHWEST

0.70 Hwy 212 < > Bluff Creek Drive
0.40 Bluff Creek Drive < > Hwy 101
1.00 Hwy 101 < > Pioneer Trail underpass
2.50 Pioneer Trail < > Eden Prairie Road (Co. Rd 4)
0.70 Eden Prairie Road < > Hwy 5
1.75 Hwy 5 < > Edenvale Blvd (Birch Island Woods)
0.40 Edenvale Blvd < > Crosstown Hwy
0.75 Crosstown Hwy < > Baker Road
0.75 Baker Road < > Dominick Dr / Shady Oak Lake
2.25 Dominick Dr / Shady Oak Lake < > Depot Coffee Shop
11.20 Hwy 212 <<< >>> Depot Coffee House
3.25 EAST BRANCH Depot <<< >>> Beltline Pky
15.00 NORTH BRANCH Hopkins <<< >>> Victoria



WHO THE HECK OWNS AND RUNS THE TRAIL? AND WHAT ARE THEY GONNA DO WITH IT?

Well, the taxpayers of Hennepin County own the trail, but the deed is held by the Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority (HCRRA) which is headed by Hennepin County's 7 elected commissioners who also form the Hennepin County Board.

The Southwest Regional LRT Trail is currently the major component of the Southwest Transit Corridor which is intended to be a "multi-modal" trail and transit route from downtown Minneapolis through Eden Prairie.

In 1995, HCRRA permitted Hennepin Parks (renamed Three Rivers Park District) to plan for and build the regional trail for temporary recreational purposes. The HCRRA is in the midst of a \$400,000 study to determine if light rail or bus transit, possibly in combination with a bike trail, is feasible along the corridor.

For more information on the SW Regional Trail and transit corridor consider the links listed on next page.

LINKS TO TRAIL MAPS, SIDE TRIPS, SELECTED PIT STOPS, LOCAL RAILROADS & HISTORIC PHOTOS AND BIKE & TRAIL CORRIDOR GROUPS

The following addresses, phone numbers and *live* links can also be found in the SW Regional Trail section of the Birch Island Woods website: www.BirchIslandWoods.org/

TRAIL MAPS

HENNEPIN COUNTY BIKE MAPS AND PLANS

Printed and down-loadable bike maps for commuting and recreation.

website > <http://www.co.hennepin.mn.us/transp/TP/BikePlan/bikeplan.html>

Bob Byers, Hennepin County Transportation Department

1600 Prairie Drive, Medina, Minnesota 55340-5421

Phone 763-745-7633, Fax 763-478-4000

email> robert.byers@co.hennepin.mn.us

Milton Schoen, Citizens Advisory Committee

612-348-3300 email > milton.schoen@co.hennepin.mn.

Met Council Regional Trails and Parks Map

General maps of regional bike trails and parks in a seven county area.

website > <http://www.metrocouncil.org/parks/>

Three Rivers Park District

This great parks system manages the SW Regional and other trails. Its website is best for describing trails within its parks and reserves.

website > <http://www.hennepinparks.org/trails/>

phone > 763-559-9000 for park schedules.

Minnetonka Trails and Parks Maps

website > http://minnetonka.govoffice.com/index.asp?Type=B_BASIC&SEC={E0366E50-A6F9-4AAB-9048-FA5866391E52}

Eden Prairie Trails and Parks Maps

Note: EP's map section may not yet be posted.

website > <http://www.edenprairie.org>

Chanhassen Trails and Parks Maps

website > <http://www.ci.chanhassen.mn.us/parks/trail/>

MINNESOTA VALLEY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE STATE CORRIDOR TRAIL

Shakopee <> Jordan <> Louisville Swamp Unit

Bike Trail Conditions > 952-492-6400 (MN DNR's office, Jordan)

Trail restrictions information > 952-854-5900 (Refuge Visitor Center)

Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge

website > <http://midwest.fws.gov/MinnesotaValley/>

Visitor Center > 3815 East 80th Street Bloomington, MN 55425

Phone/TTY > 952-854-5900 Fax > 612-725-3279

Louisville Swamp Unit

website > <http://midwest.fws.gov/MinnesotaValley/louisville.html>

SELECTED PIT STOPS, RAILROADS & HISTORY

The Depot 952-938-2204

Track and trail side gourmet coffee, soda pop, bakery goods and entertainment in Hopkins on Excelsior Blvd. just north of Hwy 169. The hub for the north, south and east branches of the SW Regional Trail and the Hutchinson Spur Trail.

website > <http://www.thedepotcoffeehouse.com>

Twin Cities & Western Railroad

Freight trains of the TC&W RR are assembled in the switching yards near the Depot Coffee House in Hopkins and can be seen from the Crosstown Hwy and the Birch Island Woods area in Eden Prairie.

The TC&W's official website > <http://www.tcwr.net/www/tcwr/>

Twin Cities & Western Online

A rail fan's comprehensive take on one of the nation's best small railroads.

website > <http://www.tcwronline.net/>

Dunn Bros. Coffee

at the Historic Smith Douglas More House

The 1877 Minneapolis & St. Louis Railway depot agent's house now serves java, teas and sandwiches. Look for it 200 yards north of the trail's intersection with Eden Prairie Road.

Phone: 952-934-0145.

Lyndon's M&StL Ry / C&NW RR Website

History, photographs and items of interest for railfans of the Minneapolis & St. Louis and Chicago and Northwester railroads.

website > <http://www.eldora.net/lyndon/>

Picha Heritage Farm (Birch Island Woods District)

The century-old farm produces raspberries, flowers and vegetables next to the Birch Island Woods and the TC&W RR.

call > Terry Picha 952-934-3088 e-mail > pichagreenhouse@msn.com

Minnesota Historical Society Photo Archives

Vintage photos of long gone sites along the SW Regional and Cedar Lake Trails.

Minneapolis Moline Factory, West Minneapolis (Hopkins) 1925

The First Jeep. Made by Minneapolis Moline.

<http://collections.mnhs.org/visualresources/>

Use the site's search engine to locate photos of "Minneapolis Moline".

Click on thumbnail previews.

Minneapolis & St. Louis Railway Cedar Lake Yards.

Now a constructed prairie through which the Cedar Lake Bike Trail passes.

<http://collections.mnhs.org/visualresources/>

Use the site's search engine to locate photos of "Minneapolis & St. Louis Railway". Click on thumbnail previews

TRAIL CORRIDOR & BICYCLING GROUPS

Southwest Regional Corridor Study

Overviews of the SW Transit Corridor (which includes the trail) and updates on its use for light rail and bus transit are provided by a website sponsored by the Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority.

phone > 612-373-6875

website > <http://www.co.hennepin.mn.us/tcw/southwest/swhome/>

email > swcorridor@co.hennepin.mn.us

Trails Without Rails

Opposes Light Rail Transit & bus routes on the SW Regional Transit Corridor.

website > <http://www.trailswithoutrails.org/>

email > info@trailswithoutrails.org

7223 Sunshine Drive, Eden Prairie, MN 55346

Midtown Greenway Coalition

A grassroots group that promotes recreation, transportation, cultural, business and housing resources along the 29th Street rail corridor in Minneapolis.

2801 21st Avenue South, Suite 230, Mpls, MN 55407

612-278-7170 Great website > <http://www.midtowngreenway.org/>

Twin Cities Bicycling Club

Multi-faceted, recreational organization

P.O. Box 131086 Roseville, MN 55113

Activities hotline > 952-924-2443

website > <http://www.mtn.org/tcbc/>

Hiawatha Bicycling Club

Multi-faceted, recreational organization

PO Box 24920, Minneapolis, MN 55424-0920

website > <http://www.hiawathabike.org/>

National Center for Bicycling & Walking

Promotes bicycle-friendly and walkable communities.

Works with public agencies, non-governmental organizations and advocates.

1506 21st Street, NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20036

202.463.6622 email > info@bikewalk.org

website > <http://www.bikefed.org/>

<http://midwest.fws.gov/MinnesotaValley/>

visitor center > 3815 East 80th Street Bloomington, MN 55425

Phone/TTY > 952-854-5900 Fax: 612-725-3279

Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge

Louisville Swamp Unit

website >

<http://midwest.fws.gov/MinnesotaValley/louisville.html>



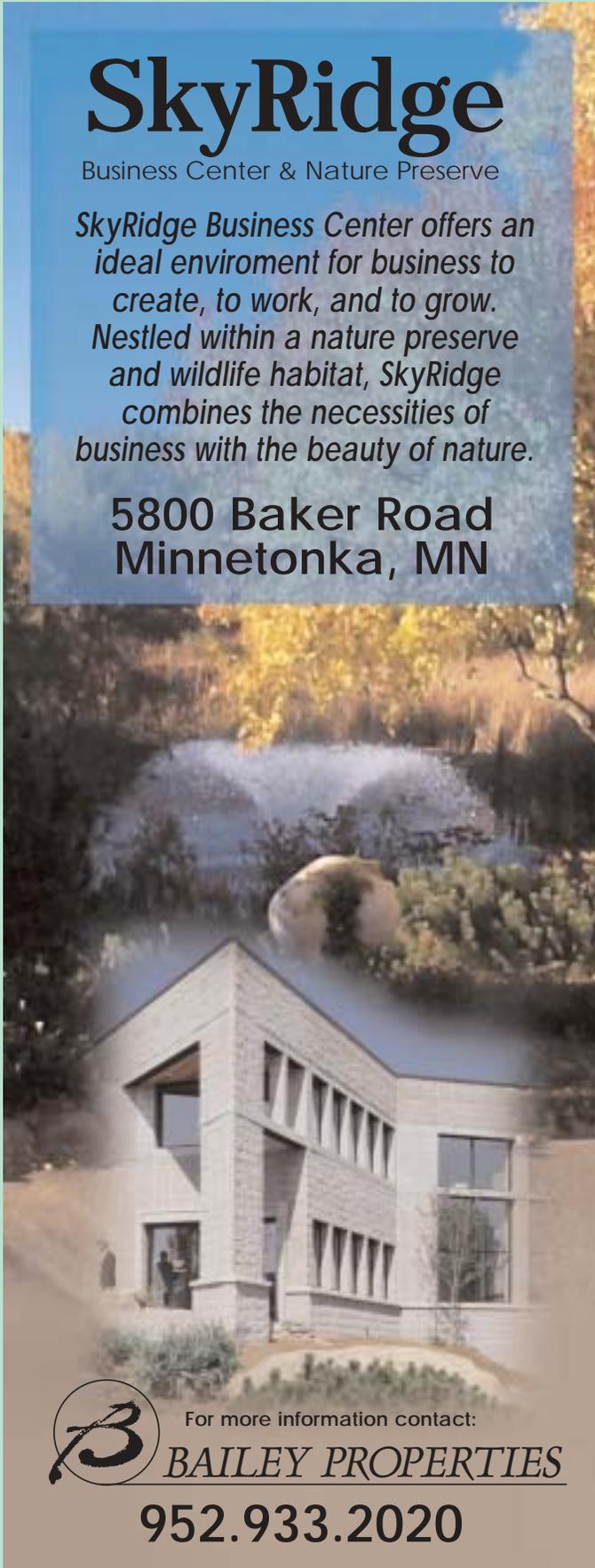
**Thanks, and
ride safely!**

SkyRidge

Business Center & Nature Preserve

SkyRidge Business Center offers an ideal environment for business to create, to work, and to grow. Nestled within a nature preserve and wildlife habitat, SkyRidge combines the necessities of business with the beauty of nature.

**5800 Baker Road
Minnetonka, MN**



For more information contact:

BAILEY PROPERTIES

952.933.2020

Ned Hirschler Design

I have been working as a graphic designer in this area for more than 25 years, and have been on my own for more than 14 years. Over the years I've had experience in most forms of print design and production and can offer a wide variety of graphic design services, including web design. Give me a call and see if I can help you out. You won't be disappointed.

952-949-0345

nhirschler@msn.com