

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Mountain Iron Mine

AND/OR COMMON

Mountain Iron Pit Reservoir

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

off old U.S. Highway 169

\_\_ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Mountain Iron

VICINITY OF

8th

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Minnesota

CODE

27

COUNTY

St. Louis

CODE

137

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

**CATEGORY**

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

**OWNERSHIP**

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH

**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**

- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

**STATUS**

- OCCUPIED
  - UNOCCUPIED
  - WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE**
- YES: RESTRICTED
  - YES: UNRESTRICTED
  - NO

**PRESENT USE**

- AGRICULTURE
- COMMERCIAL
- EDUCATIONAL
- ENTERTAINMENT
- GOVERNMENT
- INDUSTRIAL
- MILITARY
- MUSEUM
- PARK
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- RELIGIOUS
- SCIENTIFIC
- TRANSPORTATION
- OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

United States Steel, Inc. (Mr. Clifford W. Niemi, General Superintendent,  
Minnesota Ore Operations)

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Mountain Iron

VICINITY OF

Minnesota 55768

STATE

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

St. Louis County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Duluth

STATE

Minnesota

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Historic Sites Survey

DATE

1968

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service

CITY, TOWN

Washington,

STATE  
D.C.

# 7 DESCRIPTION

## CONDITION

EXCELLENT  
 GOOD  
 FAIR

DETERIORATED  
 RUINS  
 UNEXPOSED  
 flooded

## CHECK ONE

UNALTERED  
 ALTERED

## CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE  
 MOVED      DATE \_\_\_\_\_

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### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Mountain Iron Mine was an open pit enterprise begun in 1892. It yielded 48,664,453 tons of ore before ceasing operations in 1956. The pit quickly filled with water and is now used as a reservoir by U.S. Steel. Because the water level is relatively low in the crater, the dimensions of the open pit are easily recognizable. It measures some 3600 feet long from north to south and 2900 feet wide east to west at its most extreme points. In the town of Mountain Iron at the end of Missabe Avenue, an observation tower and telescopes are available with a vicinity map offering some interpretation.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
__PREHISTORIC	__ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	__COMMUNITY PLANNING	__LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	__RELIGION
__1400-1499	__ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	__CONSERVATION	__LAW	__SCIENCE
__1500-1599	__AGRICULTURE	__ECONOMICS	__LITERATURE	__SCULPTURE
__1600-1699	__ARCHITECTURE	__EDUCATION	__MILITARY	__SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
__1700-1799	__ART	__ENGINEERING	__MUSIC	__THEATER
X 1800-1899	__COMMERCE	__EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	__PHILOSOPHY	__TRANSPORTATION
__1900-	__COMMUNICATIONS	X INDUSTRY	__POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	__OTHER (SPECIFY)
		__INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

1892

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The discovery of the Mountain Iron Mine in 1890 marked the opening of the famous Mesabi Range, the largest iron ore deposit in the world. It set in motion events that made Minnesota the largest producer of iron ore in the Nation and enabled the United States to become the world's largest manufacturer of steel. Minnesota steel was a significant factor in the decisive role this country played in the two World Wars.

During its period of operation, the mine yielded more than 48 million gross tons of ore. From the first shipment of ore from the Mountain Iron Mine in 1892 until 1961, the Range supplied over two billion gross tons of ore--more than half the ore mined in the United States during those years.

### History

French explorers were the first to believe that valuable minerals might be found in northeastern Minnesota near Lake Superior. For decades rumors persisted and influenced the actions of settlers and legislatures. General Lewis Cass persuaded the Chippewa in 1826 to cede him the mineral rights to this region, and in 1854 the Grand Portage and Found du Lac Indians relinquished theirs. A number of geological surveys confirmed the presence of iron, but it was not until 1884 that the first mine began operation. The opening of the Soudan Mine (a National Historic Landmark) on the Vermilion Range marked the beginning of the exploitation of one of the richest iron deposits in the Nation. In less than a decade a second iron range--the Mesabi--was discovered. Located between the towns of Grand Rapids and Aurora, the Mesabi proved to be the largest iron ore deposit in the world.

Early iron ore samples from the Mesabi had not been of sufficient quality to interest most miners. But Leonidas Merritt and his six brothers, all timber cruisers, had been hard to discourage. For 16 years they had searched for the paying lode without success. Finally Merritt and his son sought professional assistance: they employed a mining captain, J. A. Nichols, to prospect for

(Continued)

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Folwell, William Watts, A History of Minnesota, IV, 1930.  
 Holmquist, June D. and Jean A. Brookins, Minnesota's Major Historic Sites: A Guide, 1963.  
 Mattison, Ray, "Mountain Iron Mine, : Historic Sites Survey report, 1964.  
 University of Minnesota, University of Minnesota Bulletin, Mining Directory, 1958.

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 240 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A	15	528230	5260170	B	15	528960	5264980
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C	15	528680	5264260	D	15	528080	5264200

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Stephen Lissandrello, Historian, Landmarks Review Project

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey Division, National Park Service

DATE

8/11/75

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street, NW.

TELEPHONE

(202) 523-5464

CITY OR TOWN

Washington,

STATE

D.C.

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

Designated: Nov. 21, 1968  
 date  
 Boundary Certified:  
*George E. ...*  
 Date: June 21, 1978

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
 ATTEST:

DATE

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

*W. ...*  
 11/24/78

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Mountain Iron Mine

**CONTINUATION SHEET**

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

them. In 1890 he found the Mountain Iron Mine and laid bare the abundance of the Mesabi Range. The discovery of the Mountain Iron Mine set in motion events that were to make Minnesota the largest producer of iron ore in the Nation and enabled the United States to become the world's largest manufacturer of steel. From the first shipment of ore from the mine in 1892 until 1961, the range supplied over two billion gross tons of ore--more than half the ore mined in the United States during those years.

The Mesabi had an advantage over other ranges. Unlike the deep iron deposits of the Vermilion Range, those of the Mesabi were horizontal in position and lay near the surface. This circumstance led to the invention of a technique known as open pit mining. As it eventually evolved, earth movers exposed the ore and giant steam shovels extracted and loaded it into railroad cars bound directly for the steel mills. The process eliminated the high costs of underground mining, and one scoop of a gigantic shovel carried as many as five tons of ore to a waiting car. Owners of the Biwabik Mine were the first to begin experimenting with the method in 1892.

Unfortunately the Merritts were not destined to reap a harvest in payment for their discovery. They overextended themselves, and the Panic of 1893 brought them to ruin. John D. Rockefeller bought their ore properties and later sold them to Andrew Carnegie and his associates, who subsequently merged them, as the Oliver Iron Mining Company, into the United States Steel Corporation. The Oliver Iron Mining Division of U.S. Steel operated the Mountain Iron Mine until 1956, when it was discontinued. During its period of operation, the mine yielded more than 48 million gross tons of ore.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 10 PAGE 2

From a point at the intersection of Second Street Railroad Street, and an unnamed railroad, proceed north and northeast along the railroad about 5500 feet to its intersection with a service road leading to the Minntact East Pit. Proceed east along this road about 700' to its intersection with a second service road leading to the U. S. Steel Administration Building. Proceed south and southeast along this road about 3500' to the building entrance drive, and then about 700' up the drive, west and south around the building to an 8" sanitation sewer line at its rear. Proceed southwest along the line about 1500' to the foot of Mineral Avenue, and then northwest along the printed contour lines about 1000' to a point at the foot of Missabee Avenue. Proceed west, southwest and west about 1500' along the marked property lines to the point of origin.