

# Railroad: Copper Range Railroad

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## Time Line

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Source: [CRH] = The Copper Range Railroad by Clarence J. Monett, 1989

- 1873 – Businessmen build a narrow gauge railroad, called the Mineral Range Railroad between Hancock and Calumet. Its purpose was to move people and merchandise, particularly copper ore from mill mines to stamping mills. [CRH]
- 1885 – A wooden bridge is built which allows the original Mineral Range Railroad to reach Houghton from Hancock. [CRH]
- March, 1899. Copper Range Company formed, owns lands. [CRH]
- Note: 1899 – The only ore producing mine south of Portage Lake is the Atlantic Mine. [CRH]
- May 1, 1899: Works begins on the Houghton Yard. A few scattered houses on the lake front were taken down. [CRH]
- May 2, 1899: Work is started on clearing the right-of-way. [CRH]
- Fall, 1899: The main offices for the Copper Range Railroad were established at the east end of the yards, consisting of a rectangular two-story brick building. A 400 foot boardwalk was built around the station. [CRH]
- September 26, 1899: Rail is first laid south from Houghton (75 lb.). Rail is also laid at Mass City. [CRH]
- December, 1899: A train is operated for "trappers" between Houghton and Winona. [CRH]
- December 27, 1899: The line is completed from Houghton to Mass City, 41.11 miles. [CRH]
- Early 1900: The Painesdale Branch from Painesdale Jct. (one mile south of the Atlantic Mine station) to Champion Mine at Painesdale, a length of 4.38 miles. The line passes through the Baltic Mine, Tri-Mountain Mine, and the Champion Mine. [CRH]
- 1900: The Company purchases passenger cars from the Pullman Company. [CRH]
- 1900: A coal-unloading hoist is erected on the Portage Lake at West Houghton to provide for large coal tonnage which would be required by the South Range mines. [CRH]
- 1900: A roundhouse is completed which used a 60 foot turntable. It holds 10 locomotives. [CRH]
- 1900: Depots are built at Houghton and at Range Jct. These are the largest depots on the line. The Range Jct. Depot is built in conjunction with the C&NW and Milwaukee Road. [CRH]

- ~1900: COPR (Copper Range) reaches mines at Elm River, Winona, Wyandot and Belt. [CRH]
- 1901: Property is purchased to secure the right-of-way to build a bridge between Houghton and Hancock. [CRH]
- July, 1902: Work begins on building a tunnel underneath the Hecla and Torch Lake Railroad northeast of Hancock. The tunnel was situated above the Lake Linden reservoir where the H&UTL made a large curve. It is build mostly of concrete for durability. [CRH]
- December, 1902: The extension from Houghton to Calumet and Laurium was now completed, except for ballasting. Freight trains were running and passenger service would start about May 1, 1903. Six new passenger coaches were purchased, and three locomotives were added bringing the total to 16. [CRH]
- 1903: The bulk of the railroad's business was rock transportation between the mines and mills served by the line, but timber and fuel traffic was heavy and steadily increasing. Passenger traffic and general freight business has shown steady and surprisingly heavy growth. [CRH]
- **1903: A rail connection is made between the side-hill (Michigan) smelter site (located at the mouth of Cole's Creek on the Portage lake) and the main track after the property was acquired from the Atlantic Mining Company. The Michigan Smelting Company was built about three miles west of Houghton and just a little beyond the site of the old Atlantic Stamp Mill. Mineral was delivered to the smelter in 40-ton bottom-dumping steel cars by the COPR, which also hauled away the refined copper. They also brought coal to the trestles on the upper plateau, which held 15,000 tons of coal within tunnels. [CRH]**
- **Early 1900's: COPR begins transporting students to school for the Adams Township school district between Atlantic and Painesdale and intermediate points. The service continued in some capacity until the 1940's. [CRH]**
- **Early 1900's: COPR builds a park at Freda, home of the Champion Mill. This was one of the range's favorite parks. Special trains were operated to the park on Sundays from the region. [CRH]**
- 1906 (Map): The COPR extends from Calumet on the north via Lake Linden and Hancock, to Houghton, Mill Mine Jct. to Mass. They also had branch lines from Mill Mine Jct. southeast to Painesdale, and from **Mill Mine Jct. to Freda Park**. Branch lines also existed from Greenland Jct. to Greenland and the Adventure Mine, from Calumet Jct. to Laurium, from Calumet Jct. to Centennial Mine, **from Redridge Jct. to Redridge, from Edgemere Jct. to the Adventure Stamp Mill** and from the Painesdale Branch to Baltic, Trimountain Mine and the Champion Copper Mine. [CRH]

- 1909: COPR switches from the U.S. Express Company to the Wells, Fargo and Company. [CRH]
- 1909: COPR builds a branch line to Senter, near Dollar Bay, where the E. I. DuPont De Nemours Powder Co. had constructed a plant to manufacture explosives on a large scale. [CRH]
- 1910: 90 lb. rail is laid near Painesdale due to the heavy rock being transported. [CRH]
- 1910: A reserve coal trestle was erected at Mill-Mine Jct. which could be used to supply coal to the mines, mills or the railroad. It held 16,000 tons of coal. [CRH]
- 1910: COPR now has trackage rights on the Milwaukee Road between McKeever and Ontonagon and operates a daily passenger train between Calumet and Ontonagon. [CRH]
- 1910: COPR also has trackage rights on the Milwaukee Road between McKeever and Channing. The COPR operated through freight service to Channing and the MILW operated a through electric-lighted passenger train between Chicago, Milwaukee and points in the Copper Country. [CRH]
- 1910: COPR purchases a modern, electric-lighted café observation car, called the Miscowaubik, meaning "red metal". [CRH]
- 1910: COPR has 22 engines in service. Rolling stock is completely equipped with air brakes. [CRH]
- **1911: A rail spur to the lake shore is completed for the Baltic Mining Company stamp mill. [CRH] (Redridge)**
- November, 1913: An extension of the line was installed south from Painesdale to the main line, just over three miles. This resulted in a new route for through traffic between Mill-Mine Jct. to a point known as Milepost 30. The main line now ran through South Range, Trimountain and Painesdale. (Previous to this, these three towns were on a branch line). [CRH]
- 1914: A siding was built into Dollar Bay to reach a sawmill and other industries there. [CRH]
- 1914: COPR rebuilt a business car and names it the "Ranger". It had a capacity of 27 passengers and was 60 feet long with an observation platform on both ends. [CRH]
- 1915: New stations were built at Painesdale and Hubbell. [CRH]
- December, 1917: COPR enters into an agreement with the Mohawk Mining Co. and the Wolverine Copper Mining Co. for the transportation of their rock, coal and supplies. COPR improved the Mohawk, Wolverine and Keweenaw Central Railroad tracks for operation, including scale tracks at Mill-Mine Jct. [CRH]
- 1917: The railroad purchases the Mohawk and Traverse Bay Railroad to carry copper rock from the Wolverine and Mohawk Mines to the stamp mills at Gay. [CRH]
- 1918: Note: The Copper Range Hospital was located in Trimountain.

**Freda was the location of the copper stamp mills and a beautiful natural park on the shores of Lake Superior.**

- Atlantic Mine was home to the Atlantic Mine and the D. A. Stratton Handle Co., manufacturers of broom handles, chair stock, etc. Dollar Bay was home to a wire mill, saw mill and the Lake Superior Smelting Works. Senter was home to the powder plant of the Atlas Powder Company. [CRH]
- 1925: COPR purchases the bus line from Painesdale to Lake Linden and named it the Copper Range Motor Bus Company. [CRH]
- 1926: The railroad purchases the telegraph "plant" and facilities from the Western Union Telegraph Company, which was located along the right-of-way of the railroad. [CRH]
- June, 1927: The Seneca Mine closes at the end of the month. [CRH]
- September 24, 1929: Copper Range President William A. Paine dies at his home near Boston. Paine was also president of Paine Webber. [CRH]
- January 8, 1933: Arrangements are made with the Mineral Range Railroad (DSS&A) to operate jointly between Hancock and Calumet, with a joint agency in Calumet. [CRH]
- 1933: The water tank at Redridge Jct. was retired from operation. [CRH]
- May 15, 1934: The joint operating agreement with the Mineral Range Railroad between Houghton and Calumet was discontinued. [CRH]
- November 1934: The Boniface-Gorman Lumber Co. of Lake Linden commences operations at Gay which is served by the railroad. [CRH]
- March 26, 1935: COPR enters bankruptcy. Eight locomotives and 254 freight cars are retired from service. [CRH]
- July 1, 1938: COPR resumes control, now out of bankruptcy. [CRH]
- 1939: The railroad abandons the Greenland Branch, 2.3 miles long. [CRH]
- 1940: COPR purchases its first diesel engine. They now operate nine steam locomotives (down from 22 or more), and 1 diesel. COPR retires its derrick. [CRH]
- June 12, 1941: The last student is transported by COPR by rail for the Adams Township School district. [CRH] (or is this date for Stanton Township Schools and 1944 for Adams?)
- September 1945: The Copper Range Company closes mining operations. [CRH]
- March, 1947: The railroad purchases two 1,000 horsepower Baldwin Westinghouse diesel locomotives. Steam power was all but eliminated. [CRH]
- June 16, 1950: The coal dock at Houghton is razed. The need for coal was lessened because the railroad had dieselized and the Freda stamp mill had converted to electricity. [CRH]
- 1951: A 1,200 H.P. diesel locomotive is purchased. [CRH]

- 1952: The two remaining steam locomotives on the COPR were retired. [CRH]
- 1954: Most railroad operations are limited to Gay to Calumet (wood products) and Hancock to McKeever. [CRH]
- February 1, 1960: Copper Range Co. suspends mining operations at the Champion Mine. [CRH] (Painesdale).
- December 16, 1960: The Atlas Powder Co. closes its Senter Plant and the plant is dismantled.
- April 14, 1962: The Houghton freight station is destroyed by fire. [CRH]
- **1963: The railroad moves stamp sand from the old Atlantic Mill site to the Copper Range Company's concentrating plant at Freda for reclamation purposes. [CRH]**
- March 31, 1964: The ICC authorizes the abandonment of the branch from Atlas to Senter, Lake Linden Jct. to Calumet, Calumet Jct. to Laurium, Calumet Jct. to Nichols and Mohawk to Gay. They are also authorized to operations over the Keweenaw Central Railroad, a leased line, from Nichols to Fulton, effective June 30, 1964. [CRH]
- **April 29, 1964: The COPR connects two locomotives for multiple operation, a first on the railroad. These are used to pull sand trains from the Atlantic site or Houghton to the mill at Freda. [CRH]**
- 1966: The Vulcan Corporation at Donken, the largest lumber mill on the tracks, terminated operations.
- **1967: The Champion Mine and the mills at Freda are closed. [CRH]**
- September, 1969: A short branch line is built to the wood fabricating plant of the Northern Hardwoods Division of the Copper Range Company. [CRH]
- **1971: Rail is taken up between Mill-Mine Jct. and Freda. [CRH]**
- August 24, 1972: The ICC grants permission to abandon the entire line. The order is stayed because of a union appeal. [CRH]
- November 3, 1972: The final train came back to Houghton from McKeever with one car and a load of wood products out of the Northwoods facet at South Range. [CRH]
- March 31, 1973: The remaining line was abandoned. [CRH]
- April 10, 1973: The Board voted to dissolve the corporation and distribute the assets. [CRH]
- Spring, 1974: The rail is pulled up. [CRH]

<http://www.michiganrailroads.com/RRHX/Railroads/CopperRange/COPRTimeLine.htm>