

Photographing Upper Peninsula Waterfalls

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Photography is one of my passions. The following spread showcases several Upper Peninsula waterfalls. At times a single drop is captivating. In other instances the waterfall's river invites exploration. Some falls are more remote than others, but the hiking is equally magic.

Photography is an artistic medium, a way of working with a pleasing image. To that end the computer is as much a part of photography as a camera. These tools allow for personification of a scene or how the photographer's mind might conceptualizes it. Often what is captured with the camera may be enhanced with the computer to identify specific aspects of the image. Other times the camera exclusively captures the image—each scene is different. Today's cameras are computers in themselves and may manipulate an image as a computer does, or as Ansel Adams did in his darkroom. Ansel would have likely approved of Photoshop, since an artist works with the tools at hand.

The accompanying images sample seven central and western Upper Peninsula waterfalls. Included are a brief description of the falls' uniqueness, simple directions, and points of photography captured in the shots.

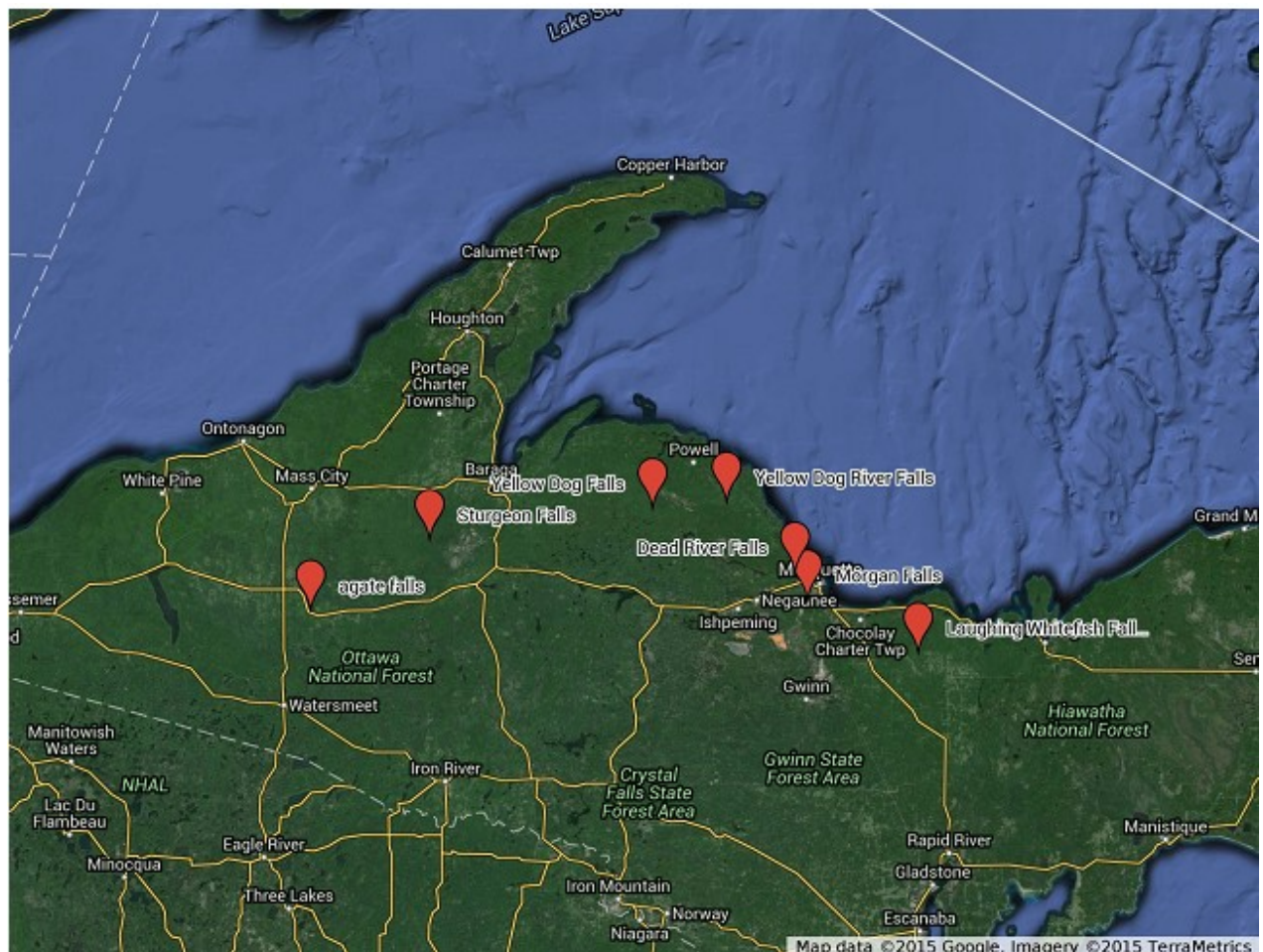
The initial image is a location map of the waterfalls. Some are no more than a five minute walk from the nearest highway. Others are remote and involve hiking to the location to enjoy their beauty. What follows are images of Agate Falls, the Dead River Falls, Laughing Whitefish Falls, Morgan Falls, Sturgeon Falls, the Yellow Dog River Falls, and the Yellow Dog Falls.

These falls and locations have inspired literature, served as ancient portage trade routes, and continue to be favorite camping locations. They are a sampling of why the Upper Peninsula is unique. They also remind us of our responsibility to the environment and provide a touchstone to the region's heritage.

Waterfalls

U.P. Waterfalls

- 📍 Agate Falls
- 📍 Dead River Falls
- 📍 Laughing Whitefish Falls
- 📍 Morgan Falls
- 📍 Sturgeon Falls
- 📍 Yellow Dog River Falls
- 📍 Yellow Dog Falls



Agate Falls



Agate Falls is one of the most stunning drops. It cuts through layered red sandstone and the water pours over countless little shelves.

It is located off of M-28 near Trout Creek on the Ontonagon River. The viewing platform is a couple of minutes' walk under the highway. The platform is situated under the top of the falls looking at it through a few trees. There are trails that cut through the steep hillside to the river below the falls allowing a different vantage point. There is also a railroad trestle high above the river that is reminiscent of days past. It is also rumored that sometimes large fish swimming up from Lake Superior are stopped at the base of the falls and stay until they return to the lake or a lucky fisherman hooks them.

This shot was taken in summer, 2015 with an ultra-wide angle lens after trying several vantage points, including hiking about halfway up the falls and shooting them sideways. This image has a long exposure to create the 'ghost-like' appearance of the water. It was digitally treated with an infra-red filter to bring out some otherwise hidden highlights.

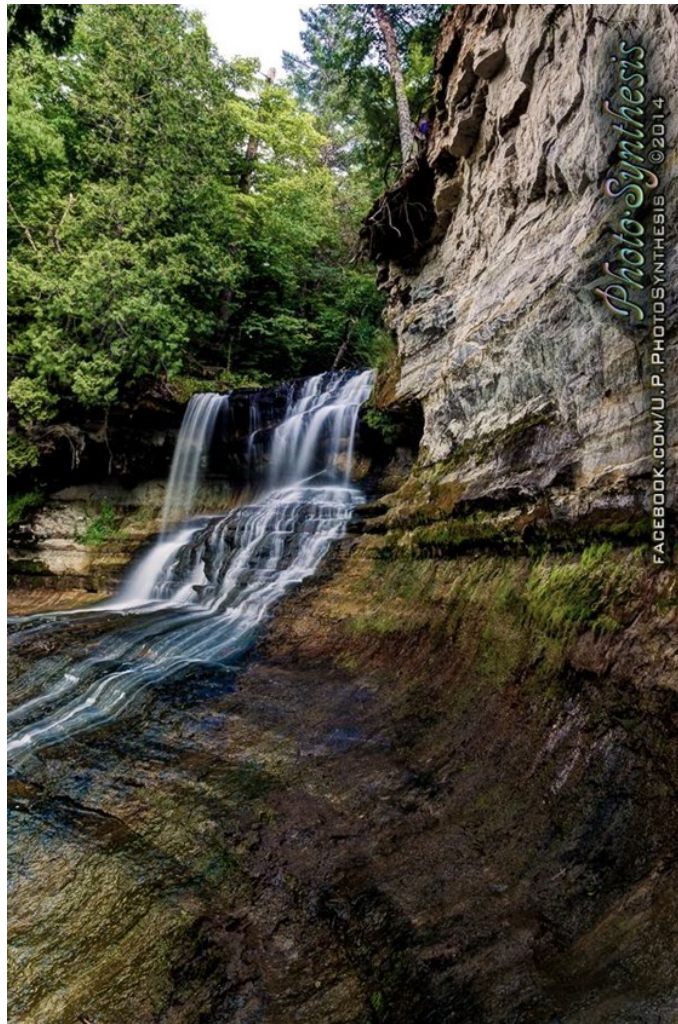
Dead River Falls



The Dead River Falls are near Marquette and a popular destination for the locals. Follow the Forestville Road off Wright Street to the end, park at the lot, and follow the signs. This river has amazing views. This is perhaps my favorite photo of the falls, but far from the biggest drop. There are five major drops along the trail with smaller points of interest throughout the hike. There are many excellent points available to spend the night right under one of the main falls.

This shot occurred in almost-darkness. The long exposure, nearly thirty seconds, makes the scene deceptively bright. It also gives the water a magic quality.

Laughing Whitefish Falls



Laughing Whitefish Falls is an easy hike. This is another set of falls cut out of sandstone. There are also a few shallow caves nearby that may be explored. For the adventurous, there is another stunning hidden falls on a feeder creek downstream. These are accessed by an old logging road about halfway between the parking lot and falls. This hidden trail traverses a small swamp and two foot wide creek. The hidden falls offer a forty foot drop on their way to the main falls.

It is accessible from M-94 east of Skandia. Signs alert visitors to the location. The trail from the parking lot is easy to walk. Steps provide access to the bottom of the falls and many accessible points at the top of the falls.

This shot incorporates the beauty of the environment and Laughing Whitefish Falls. The elements of the composition provide an understanding of the region's rugged landscape.

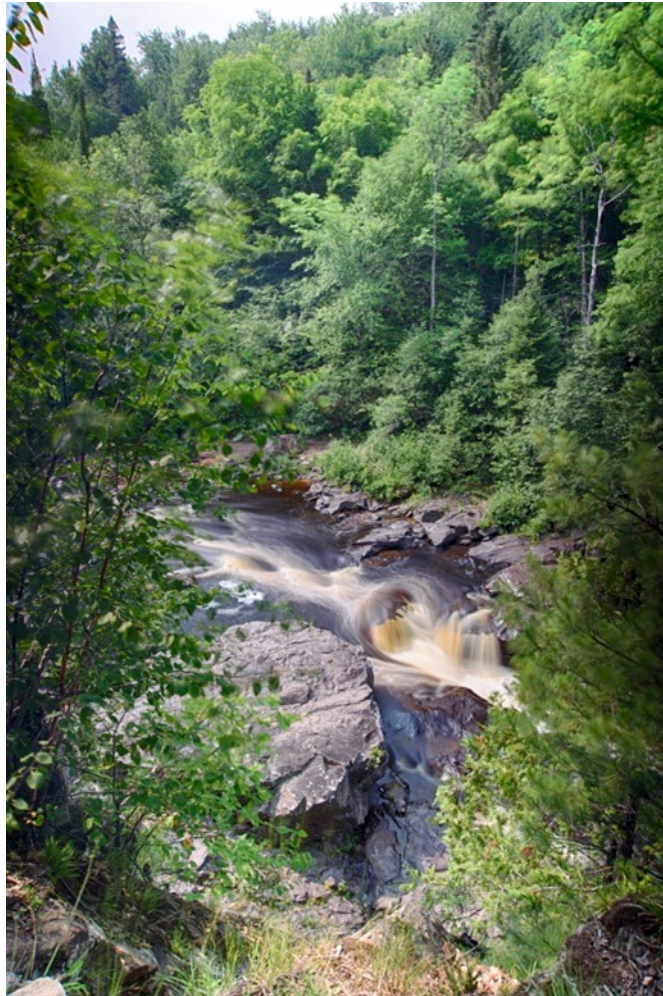
Morgan Falls



Morgan Falls is an unexpected gem at the conflux of the Morgan Creek and the Carp River. They are located off County Road 553 when traveling from Marquette towards Marquette Mountain. There is an unmarked dirt road to the right – Marquette Mt. Rd. The road is usually in rough shape and may only be driven a short distance. Park and walk until the set of stairs and sign for Morgan Falls. The rough trail is worth the experience of the large falls.

Shooting Morgan Falls is a challenge because it is often more crowded than other falls. Also, the trees are close and it is a small waterfall, which compounds the obstacles. These limitations tend to produce similar images of the falls. This image is an experiment with close-ups, wide angles, and shots from low to the ground. In the end, it is the beauty of the falls and the reminder of the time on the trail that matters.

Sturgeon Falls



Sturgeon Falls, not to be confused with Canyon Falls, is in the Sturgeon River Gorge Wilderness. The river through here is absolutely beautiful and on a good day full of trout that will easily rise to a fly.

To access the falls travel west on US-41 towards L'Anse. Head south at the intersection with M-28. Just before Sidnaw, look for the Sturgeon River Gorge sign on Forest Service Road 2200. There is a remote rustic campground on the river past the first bridge. When the road forks stick to the left and watch for the parking lot on the right. The steep trail going to the falls is a series of switchbacks but the view at the bottom is worth the hike.

The geography here is unique – the falls lie on a fault line and the rock above the falls is hard granite while the rock below the falls is soft sandstone. The adventurous explorer may continue downstream where there are stunning sandstone cliffs along the river. This is a quick peek of the falls between the trees on the trail, shot with a long exposure.

Yellow Dog River Falls



The popularity of the Yellow Dog Watershed often obscures the length and splendor of all the river's falls. The most accessible falls are a short walk downstream from where the river crosses County Road 510. While many argue these are the most impressive falls, others prefer the drops further down river. In all there are three public drops and a fourth on Bushy Creek Falls, which is on private property.

Shooting the Yellow Dog is easy as there are many falls and drops and scenic stretches of river. The challenging aspect is focusing on a particular stretch of river to shoot. This black and white is treated with an infrared filter, which increased aspects of the drama and contrast.

Yellow Dog Falls



The Yellow Dog Falls and West Branch Yellow Dog Falls are in the north half of the McCormick Tract, a wilderness area donated to Michigan by the McCormick family. To access these falls, take the AAA road west off of County Road 510. Follow for many miles to Anderson Corner. Here, veer left and travel a few more miles to an unmarked small two-track that will end in the trailhead parking lot.

The trail to the falls meanders through several terrains and crosses the West Branch of the Yellow Dog just downstream of the falls (pictured here) and continues to the main branch of the Yellow Dog. Upstream for the next half mile is continuous falls culminating in a unique split in the river and a double falls around a small island in the stream.

The Upper Yellow Dog Falls are a photographer's paradise. This is another stretch of river that is packed with so many photographic opportunities that it is hard to decide what to shoot. This is the upper third of a falls. Instead of a sheer drop it cascades over a ledge set at varying angles to the perpendicular. An impressive white pine died and dropped across the river about halfway down the falls. This makes shooting them a challenge, but finding the right vantage point to take advantage of features of the falls is one of the better ways of capturing this particular cascade and highlights the power of the water.