

# Photographer's Site Guide

## Split Rock Lighthouse State Park

**Summary:** Split Rock Lighthouse, perched on the cliffs along Lake Superior in Minnesota, is a photographer's dream. The best shots often happen during the golden hours—early morning or late afternoon—when the light casts a warm glow on the historic structure. Many also capture it against a backdrop of the vibrant fall foliage or the dramatic stormy skies. Besides the lighthouse itself, the rugged coastline, with its rocky terrain and sweeping views of the lake, adds a great dynamic to photos. A popular spot is from the shoreline below, providing a majestic upward angle of the lighthouse. Whether you're capturing its pristine beauty on a clear day or the ethereal mist surrounding it in the early morning, every shot tells a unique story. This guide will help you explore those opportunities.

**Location:** Split Rock Lighthouse is located along the picturesque North Shore of Lake Superior in Minnesota. Perched atop a 130-foot cliff, it offers stunning views of the vast lake and the rugged coastline below. The lighthouse is situated within Split Rock Lighthouse State Park, which is about 20 miles northeast of Two Harbors and around 50 miles north of Duluth. The area is known for its striking natural beauty, with dense forests, rocky shores, and the shimmering expanse of Lake Superior providing a dramatic backdrop. This historic landmark is a must-visit for those exploring Minnesota's North Shore.



### GPS Coordinates & Elevation

Grid: 47°12'0.0756"N, 91°22'8.9508"W

Elevation Range: Lake Superior 602 ft and lighthouse 732 ft.

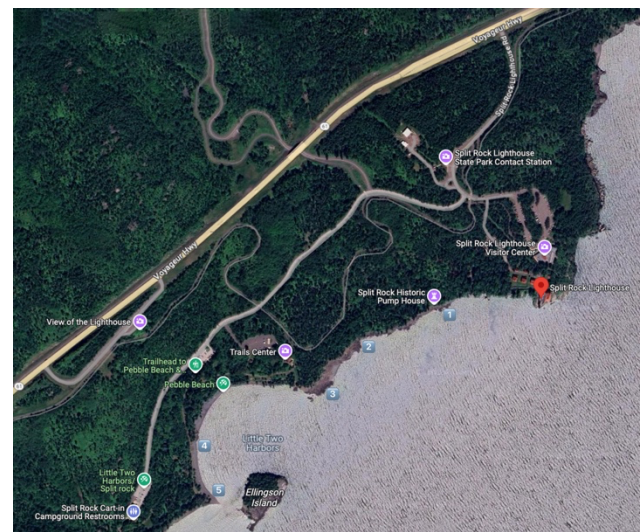
**Best Time of Year to Shoot** This location is a year-round gem. Fall colors captivate visitors and photographers alike. For more on fall foliage, check out [this webpage \(https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/fall\\_colors/park\\_details.html#SPK00266\)](https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/fall_colors/park_details.html#SPK00266). While winter offers unique photographic opportunities, park services are more limited. Check out their [winter map \(https://www.explor-ingnorthshore.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Split-Rock-Lighthouse-Winter-Map.pdf\)](https://www.explor-ingnorthshore.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Split-Rock-Lighthouse-Winter-Map.pdf). For more detail on seasonal photography, check out their webpage at <https://www.mnhs.org/splitrock/activities/photography>. The lighthouse hosts a live video stream on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9EnmgL3fXW8>

**Best Time of Day to Shoot:** The most popular shooting location is on the Western shoreline and shooting Eastward. With the lighthouse being 120 ft higher than the shoreline,

then morning blue and golden hours will require some back-light photography skills.

**What Lenses Do You Need:** Will vary depending on the shooting location mentioned in the following paragraph. A wide angle lens is logical for shooting from position 1. Shooting positions 2 and 3 will entice the photographer to use a wide angle to medium range. Shooting points 4 and 5 are best shoot with a telephone lens at around 200mm.

**Direction of the Shot:** While other types of photography are available, this review will focus on landscape opportunities directed at the lighthouse. The most common shooting direction is from West to East and most commonly along the shoreline. The above link addressing seasonal photography also provides a map of five shooting locations with two being in the wood line that are suggestions offered by the Split Rock Lighthouse Minnesota Historical Society. This guide suggests these five locations.



1. Shoreline at the bottom of the pumphouse steps gets you to the closest shooting area on the shoreline. Hides the other buildings that are part of the lighthouse park. This is a great area to capture the fall foliage that dominates the cliff. Special note: This is where you can find the reflection pool popularized in Greg Lundgren's photo [Split Rock Lighthouse Reflection](#).
2. East point of the bedrock shoreline is a great location to frame waves splashing against a narrow rocky shoreline

next to a colorful variety of trees, bushes, and vegetation. This location allows the addition of outcropping of the shoreline between 1 and 2 points in the middle ground.

3. West area of the bedrock shoreline and closest point to the trail point. This location offers a shot that frames trees on each side. Most photographers seem to like to enter onto the bedrock, who then would look for a shooting location between points 2 and 3.
4. Middle of the West pebble beach is a large rock outcropping that gives an elevated shooting position, but just to South are some large boulders that offer a nice setting option to shoot from this location. When you're at the shoreline location the bedrock accessible from points 2 and 3 offer a nice middle ground terrain feature into your composition. It also offers the potential to add recreators in the water or on the bedrock. This is a popular point for a milky way, sunrise, and moon shot. This is a telephoto shooting location. It is also the current default picture in Google Maps for this location.
5. West pebble beach point offers the opportunity to add the North ridgeline of Ellingson Island on the right edge of your composition. It is also a telephoto shooting location.

📷 **Shooting Nuisances:** Three nuisances are prevalent to plan for that are also somewhat typical elsewhere.

- Recreator's and tourists interjecting into the image. Recreator's may unintentionally enter the shooting angle either on the water or walking along the shoreline. Tourist on the lighthouse tour will pause in the scene at the overlook area.
- Atmospheric conditions. Windy days increase wave height. Waves can affect shooting locations. Fog can obscure the lighthouse. Rain and snow make is slippery on the shoreline. Tide times will affect shoreline visibility.

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🧰 **Special Equipment Needed:** Shoes that have good grip, comfortable walking on sharp rocks and are water resistant. Consider these other photographic support gear:

- A sturdy tripod to offset the wind and rocky terrain.
- Neutral Density Filters (10-stop, 6-stop, & 3-stop) to smooth the water & ghost out movement.
- Circular Polarizer Filter to enhance the sky and water.
- Clear MRC-Nano 007 Filter or a UV Haze MRC-Nano 010M Filter to protect your glass from wave spray.
- [Peak Design Shell Medium Form-Fitting Rain and Dust](#)

### Cover

- Infrared, Bluetooth, or Wifi connecting wireless remote or smartphone remote camera app to avoid water getting into port circuits.
- Ground coversheet like the [MindShift Gear Contact Sheet Multi-Purpose Tarp](#) to protect your camera bag.

👥 **Photography Crowds:** Visitation to the Dunes varies based on time of year, but even during the busiest periods (Memorial Day through Labor Day), the majority of visitors will stay near the Star Dune, which is the tallest dune in the Park and closest to the main parking lot. Staying near this area presents an issue with footprints, so I suggest walking Westward past the crowds or work your way to the ridgeline on the North side to get away from dune hikers. You will not encounter many other photographers outside of the main area.

👣 **Trail Difficulty:** Walking along the rocky shoreline is a balancing act with some slippery spots. Also the 100+ stairs that make up the staircase that is part of the trail you can take from the Pump House down to the shoreline.

♿ **Accessibility:** The visitor and trail centers, bathrooms are handicap accessible. Most of the trails use chip gravel. Shoreline is challenging for those with mobility impairment.

🏃 **Hiking and Backpacking:** The Chief Ranger at 719-378-6321 maintains a list of commercial hiking/backpacking guides authorized to lead trips into the national park and preserve. [Click here for the AllTrails available trails.](#)

☁ **Weather:** The weather in Colorado is normally mild in the summer and cold (lows in the 20's) in the spring and fall. Expect thunderstorms and strong winds during July and August.

📶 **Communication & Cell Service:** My AT&T signal was spotty. Here are links on coverage maps.

- [Federal Communications Commission's Mobile LTE Coverage Map.](#)
- [AT&T Wireless Coverage Map.](#)
- [T-Mobile 4G & 5G Coverage Map.](#)
- [US Cellular Coverage Map.](#)
- [Verizon Cell Phone Coverage Map.](#)


📄 **Permits:** The Minnesota state parks vehicle permit has a \$7 one-day permit, a \$35 year-round permit, and a military discount See [https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state\\_parks/permit.html](https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/permit.html). If you want to visit the lighthouse then a general admission pass cost \$15 for adults; \$12 for Seniors, military, and college students; and \$8 for children (5-17). See <https://www.mnhs.org/splitrock>


- 📷 **Film & Photo Permits:** Commercial use of photos may require a permit.


⛺ **Camping Permit:** See Split Rock Lighthouse State Park Camping and Lodging at

[https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state\\_parks/park.html?id=spk00266#overnight\\_facilities](https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/park.html?id=spk00266#overnight_facilities)


 Lodging: <https://www.google.com/maps/search/lodging/@47.1871533,-91.5384911,47271m/data=!3m2!1e3!4b1!4m7!2m6!3m5!2sSplit+Rock+Lighthouse,+3713+Split+Rock+Light-house+Rd,+Two+Har-bors,+MN+55616!3s0x52af4958ddf5c5bd:0x76eb8a39bcab80bc!4m2!1d-91.3670132!2d47.1999918?au>.

 Camping: Use this link <https://www.google.com/maps/search/camping/@47.1869875,-91.4146014,11865m/data=!3m1!1e3!4m7!2m6!3m5!2sSplit+Rock+Lighthouse,+3713+Split+Rock+Light-house+Rd,+Two+Har-bors,+MN+55616!3s0x52af4958ddf5c5bd:0x76eb8a39bcab80bc!4m2!1d-91.3670132!2d47.1999918?authus>.

 Backpacking Permits: Only need a state park day permit.

 Nearby Restaurants: <https://www.google.com/maps/search/restaurants/@47.115022,-91.6916407,47335m/data=!3m2!1e3!4b1!4m7!2m6!3m5!2sSplit+Rock+Lighthouse,+3713+Split+Rock+Light-house+Rd,+Two+Har-bors,+MN+55616!3s0x52af4958ddf5c5bd:0x76eb8a39bcab80bc!4m2!1d-91.3670132!2d47.1999918>

 Gas Station: <https://www.google.com/maps/search/gas+station/@47.115253,-91.6923289,47335m/data=!3m2!1e3!4b1!4m8!2m7!3m6!1sgas+station!2sSplit+Rock+Light-house,+3713+Split+Rock+Lighthouse+Rd,+Two+Har-bors,+MN+55616!3s0x52af4958ddf5c5bd:0x76eb8a39bcab80bc!4m2!1d-91.367013>

 Airport Options: <https://www.google.com/maps/search/airport/@47.1153614,-91.8582412,94670m/data=!3m2!1e3!4b1!4m7!2m6!3m5!2sSplit+Rock+Lighthouse,+3713+Split+Rock+Light->

Closure: Photographing Split Rock Lighthouse is a journey through history and nature's grandeur. The striking contrast of the lighthouse against Lake Superior, especially during the golden hours, offers moments of profound beauty. Each capture, whether in the warmth of summer, the colors of fall, or the icy embrace of winter, tells its own story.

[house+Rd,+Two+Har-bors,+MN+55616!3s0x52af4958ddf5c5bd:0x76eb8a39bcab80bc!4m2!1d-91.3670132!2d47.1999918?au](https://www.google.com/maps/search/house+Rd,+Two+Har-bors,+MN+55616!3s0x52af4958ddf5c5bd:0x76eb8a39bcab80bc!4m2!1d-91.3670132!2d47.1999918?au)

 **Pets:** Pets are permitted Please carry out waste.

#### Area Guides and Workshops

- ColdSnap Photograph: Split Rock Photography Weekend Getaways @ <https://coldsnapphotography.com/product/splitrocklighthouse/>.
- Four Elements Photo Adventures: Offers summer and fall photo tours along Lake Superior @ <https://fourellementsphotoadventures.com/workshops>.

#### Other Resources

- Google Map Links:
- [The Photographer's Ephemeris](#): A valuable tool for landscape photographers to determine the direction of the sunrise/sunset & moonrise/moonset.
- [PhotoPills](#): Is a fabulous smartphone app with exceptional training resources that will unlock the solar, lunar, and celestial alignment of the Milky Way. It extends to what The Photographer's Ephemeris leaves off. The augmented reality feature is a great way to ensure your positioning for the composition will materialize as conceived. [Watch the video to learn more.](#)

#### Other Nearby Photography Opportunities

- Gooseneck Falls: Five falls that are especially beautiful in the Spring after the snowmelt.
- Palisade Head, Tettegouche State Park: Offers massive cliffs overlooking Lake Superior that is impactful at sunrise.
- Cascade River State Park: provides seven waterfalls in less than one mile with picturesque views of Lake Superior.
- Kadunce River Canyons: Offer twisting canyons, green moss, and a shallow river.
- Artist Point, Grand Marias: Offers multiple compositions between the lighthouse, tombolo, and breakwater basalt. Winter mornings turns iced sprays into interesting art.
- High Falls on the Pigeon River: Passing into Canada is the large and impressive High Falls that shows large volumes of water dropping over a 90 feet of sheer cliff.