



Prominent Peaks of Otter Tail County, Minnesota

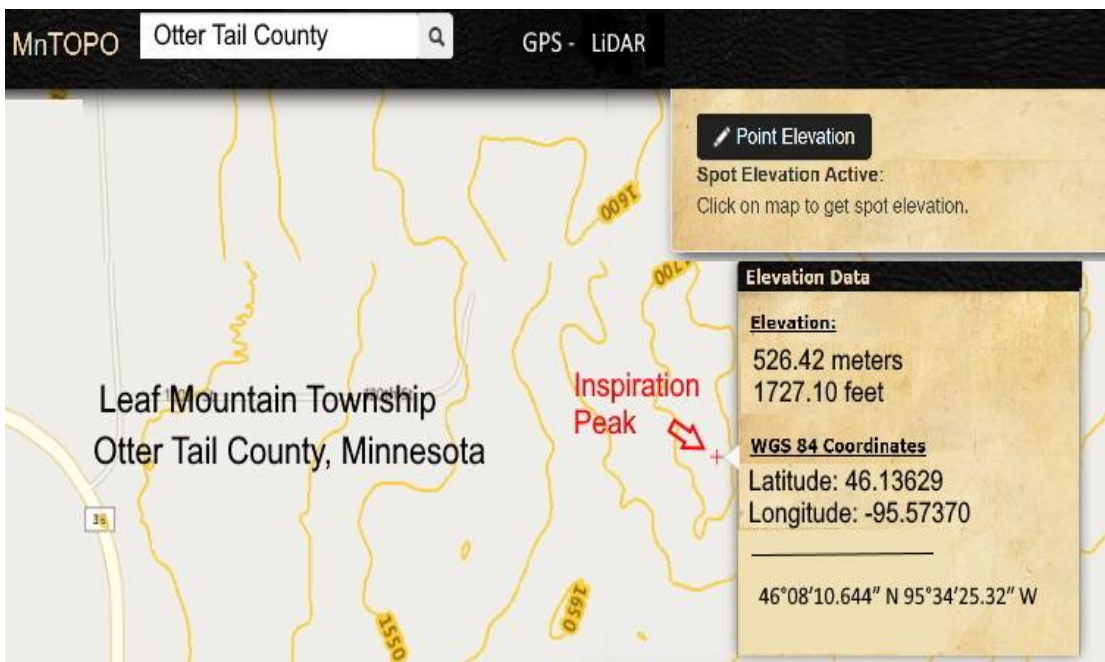
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JOHN H. SANDY

When continental glaciers advanced over much of North America during the late Pleistocene, they altered the land in significant ways. In Minnesota, vast areas are covered by glacial deposits. Glacial till covers the pre-glacial landscape, and thousands of lakes formed as the ice melted dot the landscape. Landforms unique to glaciated areas, such as drumlins, eskers, moraines, and outwash plains are common.

In Otter Tail County in west-central Minnesota, the ice sheets created a complex glacial landscape. Hills with elevations that rise and fall over short distances are a dominate feature. Wetlands, bogs, small ponds, and lakes of many sizes are a major part of the landscape in areas of low elevation.

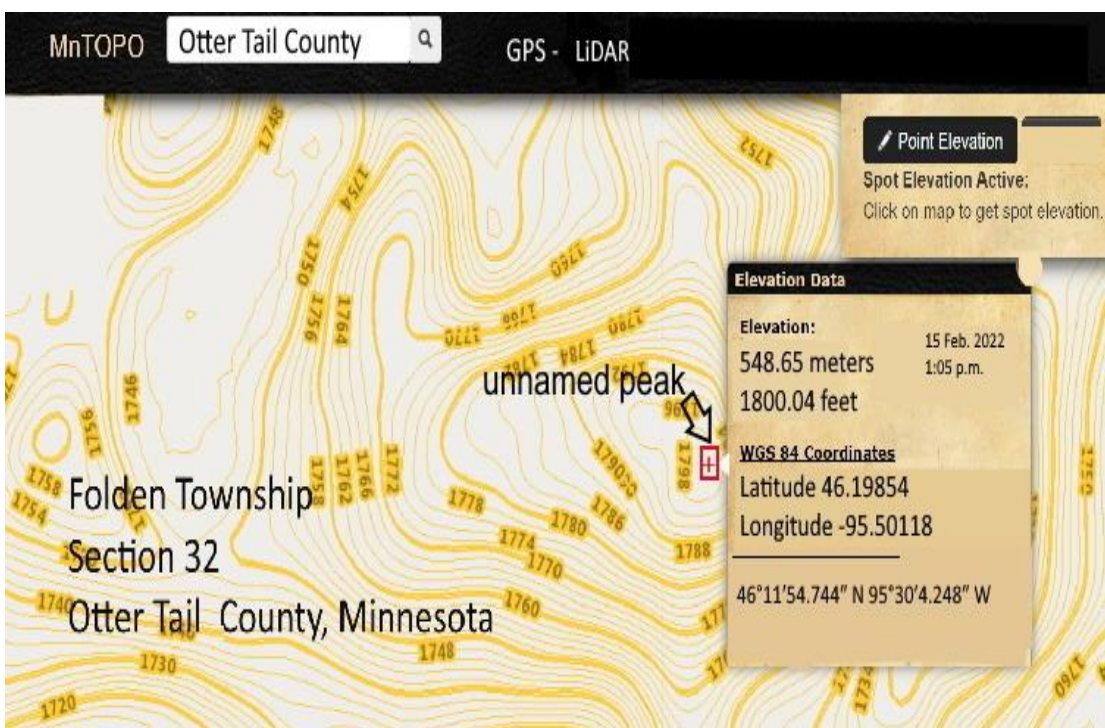
Early homesteaders in Otter Tail County observed a few natural features with exceptionally high elevations. One such feature in Leaf Mountain Township, northwest of the village of Urbank, is called Inspiration Peak. The Geographic Names Information System of the U.S. Geological Survey lists Inspiration Peak (Feature ID 645430) at 1,726 feet (526 meters). On a Web page published by Otter Tail County, the elevation of Inspiration Peak is reported as 1,750 feet. In agreement with U.S.G.S., data collected by this research using MnTOPO shows an elevation of 1,727.10 feet for Inspiration Peak.



As a highly visible and prominent feature on the land, Inspiration Peak with coordinates at Latitude 46.13629 Longitude -95.57370 (DD) or Latitude 46°08'10.644" N Longitude 95°34'25.32" W (DMS) is recognized for its recreational value. The peak rises about 310 feet above the surrounding terrain. Abundant prairie wildflowers cover the ground at the summit. Officially it is called Inspiration Peak State Wayside and is managed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

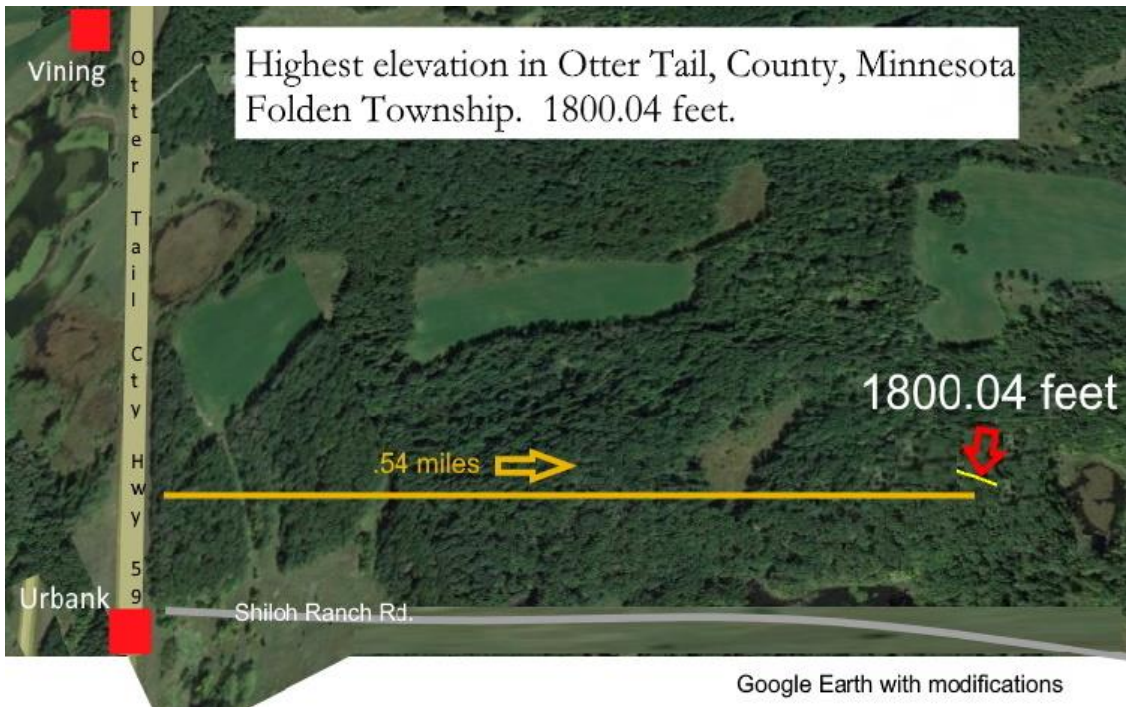
Inspiration Peak is not, however, the highest elevation in Otter Tail County. An unnamed peak northeast of the village of Urbank is much higher. MnTOPO shows that this peak rises to an elevation of 1,800.04 feet (548.65 meters). This unnamed peak, located in Section 32, Folden Township, is about 73 feet higher in elevation than Inspiration Peak.

The elevation information shown on MnTOPO maps is fully accurate. Data is measured and recorded using a sophisticated technology called LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging).



Coordinates for the unnamed peak in Folden Township: Latitude 46.19854 Longitude -95.50118 (DD) or Latitude 46°11'54.744" N Longitude 95°30'04.248" W (DMS), Otter Tail County, Minnesota. Highest point on the land found using "Point Elevation." This gives a reading on the exact spot with highest elevation.

A preliminary investigation of counties in Minnesota known for high elevations suggests Otter Tail County ranks in the top 10 for having landforms with high elevations. How this unnamed peak in Otter Tail County ranks among highest points in each of the 87 counties in Minnesota remains a topic for further research, however. In a state with abundant glacial features, Otter Tail County rivals what's found in other regions of Minnesota.



A prominent feature on the land merits special recognition to create public awareness of its existence. This is often achieved by giving the feature a name. Such is the case for the unnamed peak in Folden Township. The process for approval of special names for lakes, mountains, and other natural features begins with 15 or more registered voters in a county submitting a petition to the County Board of Commissioners for a public hearing and is governed by a Minnesota statute.

The glacial landscape in Otter Tail County is well suited for tourism. Outdoor sports such as fishing, camping, cycling, hiking, and other activities drive thousands of visitors to this region during the summer and fall months. The major topographic features such as Inspiration Peak and the unnamed peak identified and described in this article are significant assets which also can be used to promote tourism.

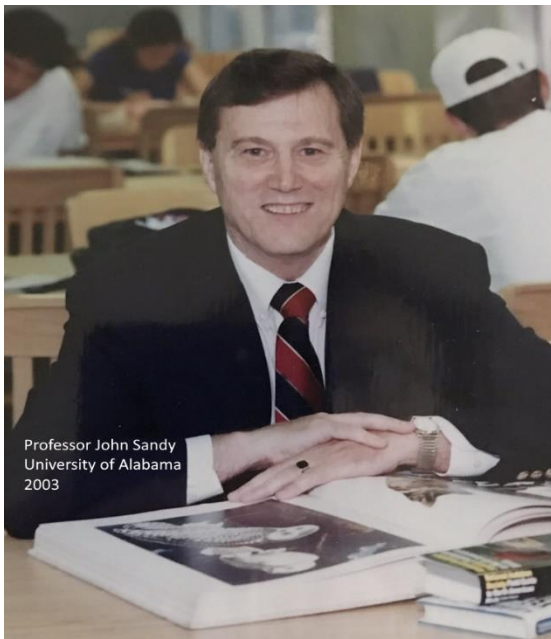
Suggested Readings

Gartner, William C. "A Perspective on Rural Tourism Development." *The Journal of Regional Analysis and Policy* 35 (1), 2005.

Ojakangas, Richard W. *Roadside Geology of Minnesota*. Missoula, Mont.: Mountain Press, 2009.

Rea, Amy C. *Explorer's Guide Minnesota*. Woodstock, Vt.: Countryman Press, 2012.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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John Sandy, author of this article, is former head of Rodgers Library for Science and Engineering, The University of Alabama. He also was head of the Natural Resources Library, Natural Resources Research Institute, University of Minnesota Duluth, 1984-1991.

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