



2024

TrailLink Unlimited



Guides



**Sam  
Vadalabene  
Great River  
Road Bike  
Trail**

*Illinois*



# Sam Vadalabene Great River Road Bike Trail

Illinois

*Sandwiched between towering limestone bluffs and the confluence of two mighty rivers, the Sam Vadalabene Great River Road Bike*



Sandwiched between towering limestone bluffs and the confluence of two mighty rivers, the Sam Vadalabene Great River Road Bike Trail offers scenery once enjoyed by riverboat captains. Today, you can experience the views from an asphalt trail and bike lane that runs just over 20 miles between Pere Marquette State Park and the outskirts of Alton.

Much of the trail that hugs the Illinois shoreline follows the Alton-Grafton section of the Illinois Terminal Railroad, which ran interurban lines in western and central Illinois. This section served residents along the river from 1896 to the 1950s.

The state Department of Transportation opened the eastern 15.5-mile segment in the late 1970s, and the

Department of Natural Resources extended the trail to Pere Marquette State Park in the early 1990s. It was named for a state senator who was remembered as a champion of bicycling resources.

Visit Pere Marquette State Park, the largest park in the state's system, before setting out. Named for the first European to set foot on Illinois soil, the park is known for its scenic overlooks, American Indian burial mounds, autumn colors, and winter population of bald eagles.

Leaving the park, you might be challenged by some short hills until the trail settles in comfortably alongside IL 100 after 3 or 4 miles. You can catch fleeting glimpses of the Illinois River through the woods here and visit a stone monument commemorating Jacques Marquette's arrival in 1673 at 4.5 miles into your ride.

You'll roll into the historical river town of Grafton in another 0.5 mile as the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers meet. The trail traces the waterfront for a mile, where you'll see turtles and waterfowl, then it shares a street, where it passes a marina and ferry landing within a block of shops and cafés on Main Street.

At the east end of downtown Grafton, the trail merges onto IL 100 as a 3- to 4-foot-wide bike lane separated from traffic by rumble strips. While traffic whizzes past on your left, barges make their way up and down the wide river that's flowing just beyond your right shoulder. Adding to this spectacle, towering limestone bluffs soar above the trees across the road. You'll ride next to the Mississippi River for the next 8.3 miles on this highway that's part of the Great River Road, which runs from Minnesota to Louisiana and is designated as a National Scenic Byway.

Four miles from Grafton, you'll find a pleasant detour in the town of Elsah. A spin through the hamlet on LaSalle and Mill Streets reveals pre-1860 stone buildings still in use, lending



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**States:** Illinois

**Counties:** Jersey, Madison

Length: 20.6 miles

**Trail end points:** Pere Marquette State Park at Scenic Dr. and IL 100 (Grafton) to Piasa Park at IL 100/Great River Road, 0.9 mile northwest of US 67 (Alton)

**Trail surfaces:** Asphalt

**Trail category:** Rail-Trail

**Trail activities:** Bike, Inline Skating, Fishing, Wheelchair

## Parking & Trail Access

To reach the trailhead at Pere Marquette State Park from I-55, take Exit 52 toward Litchfield and Gillespie and head west on IL 16. Go 8.4 miles and turn right onto Broadway St., remaining on IL 16. Go 8.0 miles and turn right to remain on IL 16. Continue 33.2 miles, pass through Jerseyville, and turn left onto IL 100. Go 9.7 miles and turn left into the park. Parking is straight ahead; follow signs for the trail.

To reach the trailhead at Piasa Park from I-270, take Exit 3 or 3B toward Alton on IL 3/Lewis and Clark Blvd. Head north on IL 3 for 6.7 miles and turn left onto IL 143 W/Great River Road. Then go another 4.3 miles and continue straight on US 67 N/Broadway Connector. Go 0.8 mile and take the left lanes onto W. Broadway, which becomes Great River Road/McAdams Pkwy. In 0.9 mile turn right into the parking lot at Piasa Park.





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