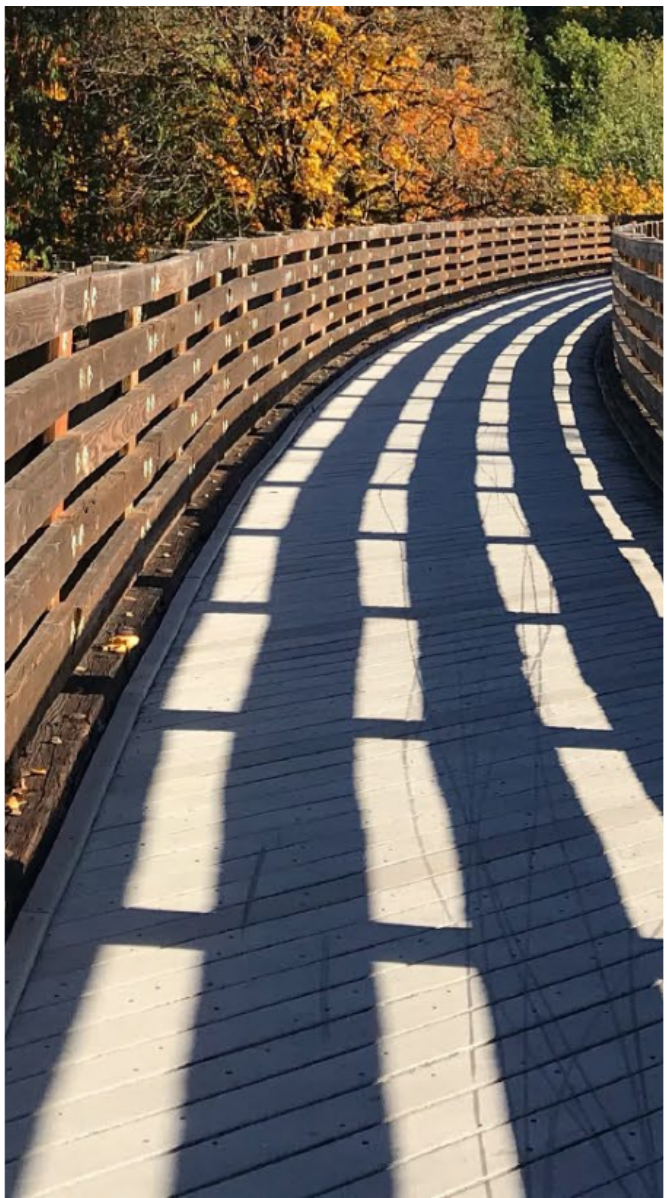
TrailLink
by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

2024

TrailLink Unlimited

Guides



Elroy-Sparta State Trail

Wisconsin

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Overview

Three hand-dug tunnels along the Elroy-Sparta State Trail make utter darkness as much a part of the scenery as rolling hills and farmland along what's widely acknowledged to be the oldest rail-trail conversion in the United States. The 33-mile journey atop crushed limestone is a trek through time, tunnels, and towns, making this Wisconsin trail a true gem of the American heartland.

About the Route

The Elroy-Sparta State Trail's western endpoint is at the Sparta Chamber of Commerce, a building which was once a rail depot. Signage makes the direction of the Elroy-Sparta trail clear. (For fans of quirky monuments, consider a quick detour here a half mile north on Water Street to check on "Ben Bikin'," a large statue of a mustachioed 19th-century sportsman atop a Victorian-style "penny-farthing" high-wheel bicycle.)

A mile east of Sparta, a bridge takes trail users over I-90, before shortly approaching the Sparta DNR Campground, one of four camping options along the route.

8.9 miles southeast from Sparta, trail users will find the longest tunnel along the route, Tunnel 3. Open from May-October, the route becomes pitch black as it passes through the tunnel for 3,810 feet—bring a flashlight! Just past the tunnel is the Summit Rest Area, home to a reconstructed watchman's shack and, where, with a little searching, trail users can find a 8-foot-deep stone flume to divert water away from the rails.

East of Tunnel 3, the trail turns south and meets the town of Norwalk, which offers another camping facility and an opportune spot for a picnic. Ahead another 3.2 miles is Tunnel 2, at 1,694 feet long.

Southeast from Tunnel 2, the trail continues to Wilton, where a community campground can be found a few blocks off the trail, south through the town, at the end of East Street.

3.8 miles east of Wilton, the trail passes through Tunnel 1, which is 1,649 feet long and the driest of the three. East of Tunnel 1, the trail makes a 3.3-mile downhill run to the trail headquarters in Kendall at a restored depot that also serves as a museum and bike rental shop.

The easternmost segment from Kendall to Elroy consists of 6 miles of mostly flat, open farm country. The Elroy-Sparta

Elroy-Sparta State Trail

Wisconsin

States: Wisconsin
Counties: Juneau,Monroe
Length: 33.8miles
Trail end points: S. Water St. and Milwaukee St./La Crosse River State Trail (Sparta) to SR 82 at SR 71 (Elroy)
Trail surfaces: Crushed Stone
Trail category: Rail-Trail
Trail activities: Bike,Wheelchair Accessible,Mountain Biking,Snowmobiling,Walking,Cross Country

Parking & Trail Access

The Elroy-Sparta Trail runs between 111 Milwaukee St (Sparta) and State Route 82 (Elroy), with parking available in Sparta.

Parking is also available:

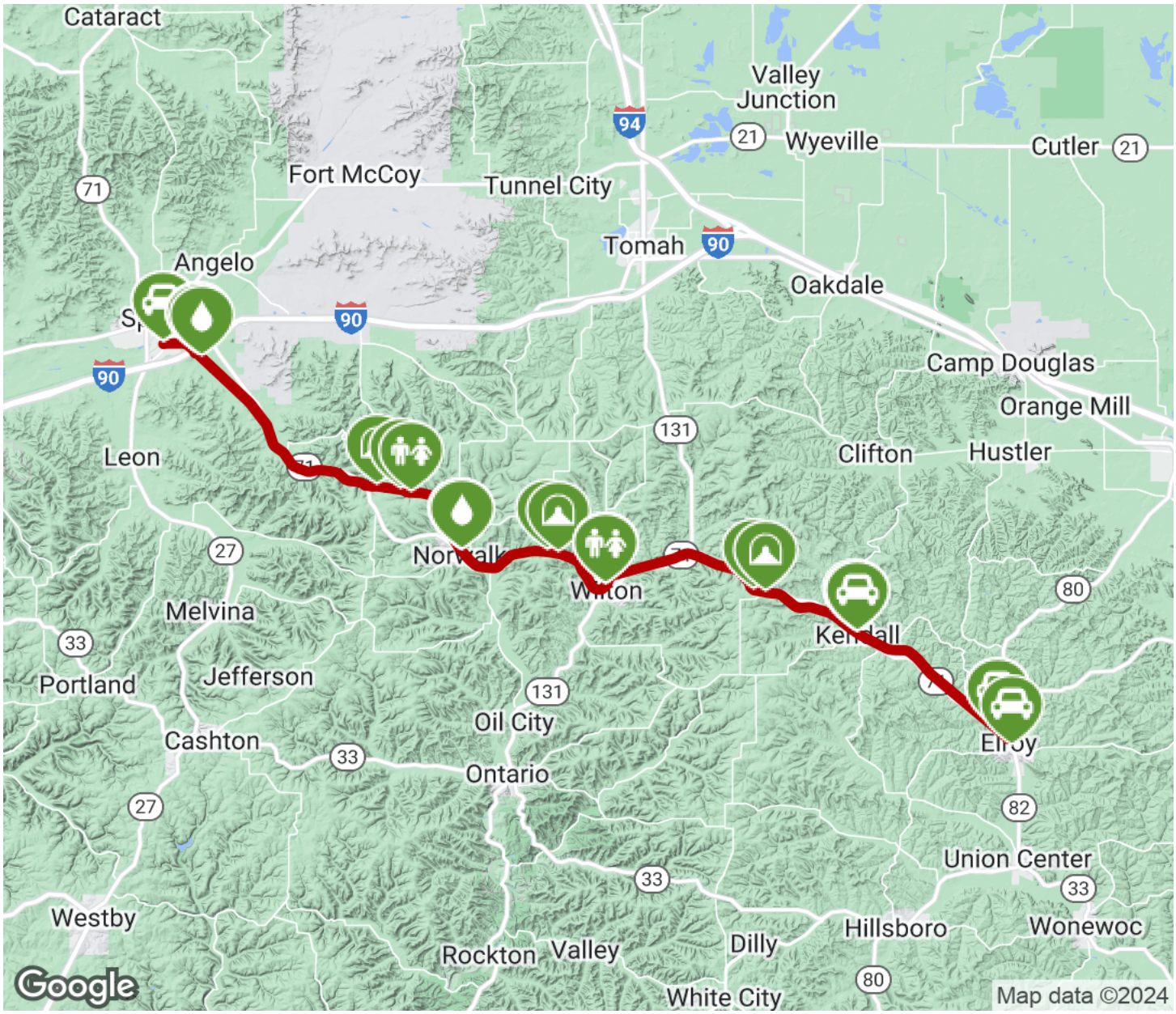
- 9890 Imac Ave. (Sparta)
- 101 Railroad St. (Norwalk)
- 113 White St (Kendall)

Please see TrailLink Map for all parking options and detailed directions.

A State Trail Pass ($25 annually/$5 daily) is required for bicyclists ages 16 and older. Snowmobilers must display either a Wisconsin registration or a snowmobile State Trail Pass. Refer to the Wisconsin DNR website for more information.

Elroy-Sparta State Trail

Wisconsin



Trailhead Restroom Parking Water Fountain Tunnel

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