



2024

TrailLink Unlimited 

Guides



## Rockingham Recreational Rail Trail (Portsmouth Branch)

*New Hampshire*



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The Rockingham Recreational Rail Trail brings at least two superlatives to mind: it's one of New Hampshire's longest rail-trails at just more than 28 miles, and it begins in Manchester, the state's largest city. Travelers will find lakes and forests here, as well as former mill towns where they can stock up, relax, or visit historic buildings and relics left over from the railroad days.

The Boston and Maine Railroad was the last to run trains on the Portsmouth Branch between Newfields and Manchester, selling the corridor to the state in 1988. The oldest railway section dates to about 1850 and was built by the Portsmouth and Concord Railroad. Succeeding railroads finished other sections of the Portsmouth Branch to Manchester in the early 1860s. The eastern section of the branch from Newfields to Portsmouth is still

in service, while service to Epping, Raymond, Candia, Auburn, and Manchester ended in 1982.

The first 2 miles of trail in Manchester are scheduled for paving by the end of 2018, while gravel or crushed rock covers the rest. There are few at-grade road intersections east of town, as the old railbed passes beneath the roads. Some of these underpasses have low ceilings, however, as the bottom of the culverts are planked with wood, so cyclists and equestrians should be prepared to dismount. In winter cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, snowmobiling, and dogsledding are permitted.

Beginning on the paved trail at Mammoth Road/SR 28A, you head east for 0.9 mile to a tunnel under I-93/SR 101. The packed gravel starts at Lake Shore Road (mile 2). In another 0.5 mile you arrive at the trailhead for 2,500-acre Massabesic Lake, the source of water for Manchester. It's also home to deer, fox, loons, and other wildlife. This is a popular trailhead for the rail-trail because of adequate parking and the scenic location. Motorized use is prohibited west of here in Manchester.

About 8.5 miles from that trailhead, you'll cross paths with railroad history at a marker for the demolished site of an 1889 railroad station on Depot Road in East Candia. The railbed rises above the forest floor in places here, while other stretches thread through high-walled cuts blasted through New Hampshire's famous granite.

From East Candia, you'll travel 4 miles to a surviving railroad station in Raymond. Originally built in 1893 and restored by the Raymond Historical Society, the station features local museum collections inside and railroad relics, such as a locomotive, a caboose, and a push car, outside. You'll find plenty of places for food and refreshment near the depot and on the outskirts of town in 1 mile.

In 4.7 miles the trail passes through Epping, where you'll find



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**States:** New Hampshire

**Counties:** Hillsborough, Rockingham

**Length:** 28.1 miles

**Trail end points:** Mammoth Rd/SR 28A between Nelson St & Porter St (Manchester) to Ash Swamp Rd near Exeter Rd/SR 108 (Newfields)

**Trail surfaces:** Crushed Stone, Dirt, Grass, Gravel, Sand

**Trail category:** Rail-Trail

**Trail activities:** Horseback Riding, Mountain

## Parking & Trail Access

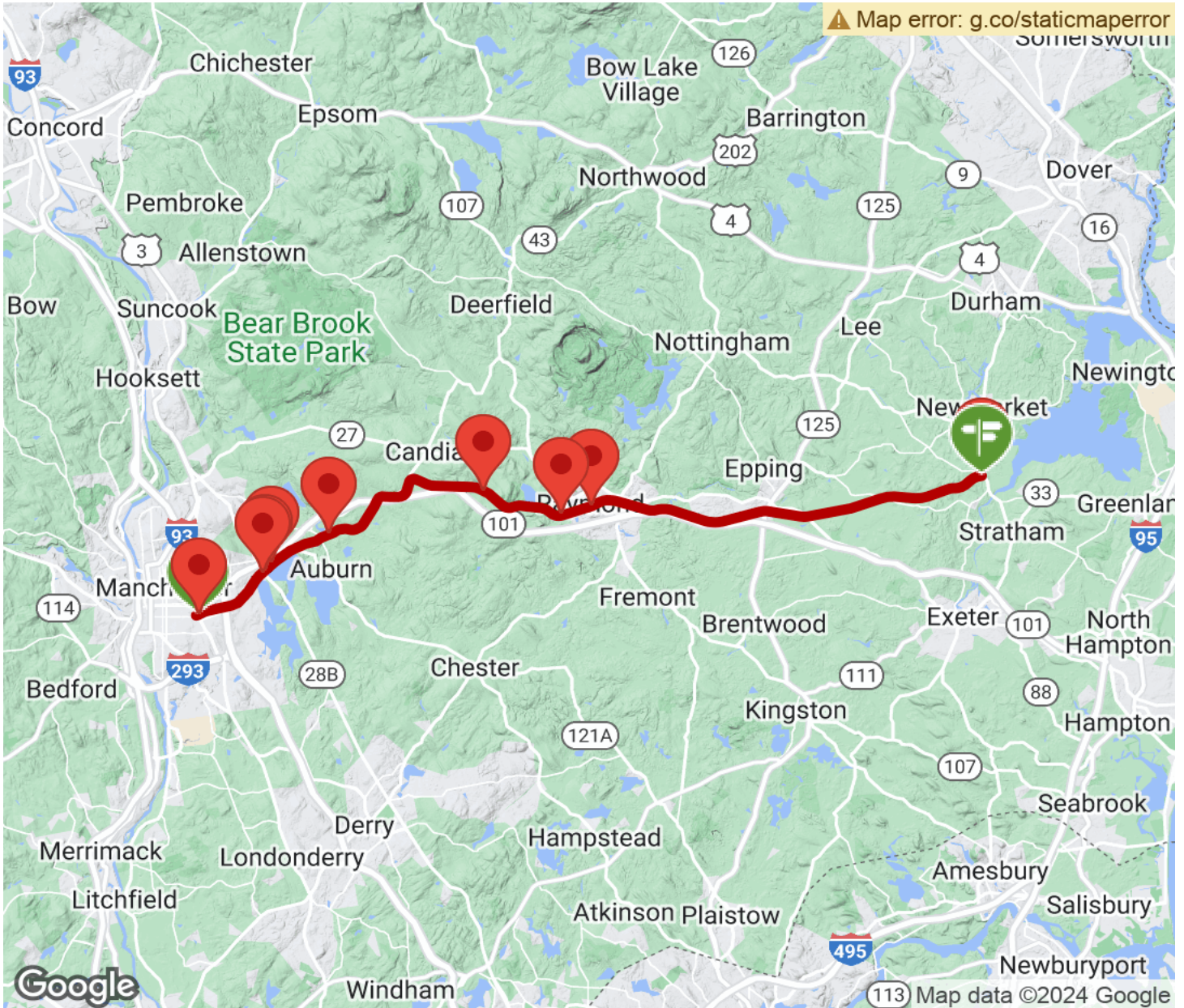
While a small parking lot is located at the western end of the trail, the best place to park is at Massabesic Lake, which has ample parking. To reach the Massabesic Lake trailhead from I-93, take Exit 7 onto SR 101 toward Portsmouth. Head east 1.5 miles, and take Exit 1 onto SR Bypass 28B/Londonderry Turnpike toward Auburn. Turn right, go 0.3 mile, and turn right into the parking lot, just after the traffic circle. The trail begins 2.6 miles west in Manchester.

To reach the Newfields trailhead from I-93, take Exit 7 onto SR 101 toward Portsmouth. Head east 25.8 miles, and take Exit 10 onto SR 85 N toward Newfields. Turn left, go 3.3 miles, and turn left onto SR 108/College Road/Exeter Road. Go 0.8 mile, and turn left onto Ash Swamp Road. Go 0.2 mile, and the trailhead and parking are on the right (just before Ash Swamp Road makes a sharp turn right).



# Rockingham Recreational Rail Trail (Portsmouth Branch)

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Trailhead



Restroom



Parking



Water Fountain



Tunnel



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