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TrailLink Unlimited 

Guides



## Great American Rail-Trail - Midwest

*Illinois, Indiana,  
Ohio*



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The Midwest has many calling cards that serve to define its identity, from its agricultural roots to Ohio's central location within the Industrial Heartland to the region's contributions in the areas of music, aviation, engineering, navigation, and other cultural and scientific pursuits. All these attributes come together to make the Midwest section one of diverse opportunities for people exploring the Great American Rail-Trail.

Stretching from the Northern Panhandle of West Virginia to the Quad Cities along the Mississippi River, the Midwest portion contains everything from large, bustling cities to remote and rural communities.

Multiple water bodies, including several rivers and former canals, contributed to the region's agricultural

abundance and today serve as milestones for trails along the Great American route. In many cases, these waterways were key to supporting various industries—including meatpacking, shipping, brewing, and manufacturing—that helped make cities in the Midwest economic powerhouses. In modern times, the trails that now travel and connect them are redefining the region through outdoor tourism.

In Ohio, the Great American makes its way from the border of West Virginia to the [Wolf Creek Trail](#) in Verona. In the east, the [Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail](#) follows a route where mules once pulled boats from New Philadelphia to Cleveland and Lake Erie from the late 1820s to 1913. The full canal route, inspired by the Erie Canal and linking to Cincinnati, was created to connect ports on the Great Lakes with inland cities and eastern markets like New York City. The canal vastly cut down on transportation time to the east, and its heyday served as a boon for the mineral, agriculture, wool, and whiskey industries.

A large section of Ohio's Great American, nearly 160 miles, travels along the developing 326-mile [Ohio to Erie Trail](#), which is made up of 24 independently operated, named trails, all offering unique opportunities for cultural and historical exploration. On its trajectory between Fredericksburg and Xenia, this section features Amish country; the lively city of Columbus, with its extensive trail network around the Scioto River; multiple communities that played a role in the Underground Railroad in the 1800s; and Dayton Aviation Heritage National Park, a central hub of America's aviation history.

In Indiana, more than half of the Great American is complete between Richmond and the Illinois state line near the southern tip of Lake Michigan. Indiana's significant agricultural heritage—which includes the corn, soybean, and livestock industries—contributes to the region's abundance of pastoral landscapes. Trail users can expect a range of other environments, as well, from tree-lined corridors to wetlands, prairies, and the small towns and cities that have played



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**States:** Illinois, Indiana, Ohio

**Counties:** Bureau, Carroll, Clark, Cook, Delaware, Franklin, Fulton, Grant, Greene, Grundy, Harrison, Henry, Holmes, Jefferson, Knox, La Salle, Lake, Licking, Madison, Miami, Montgomery, Porter, Preble, Pulaski, Randolph, Rock Island, Stark, Starke, Summit, Tuscarawas, Wayne, Will

Length: 740 miles

**Trail end points:** Illinois to Ohio

## Parking & Trail Access

There are numerous parking options along the Midwestern portion of the Great American Rail-Trail. Please check the individual trail records to see all available options.