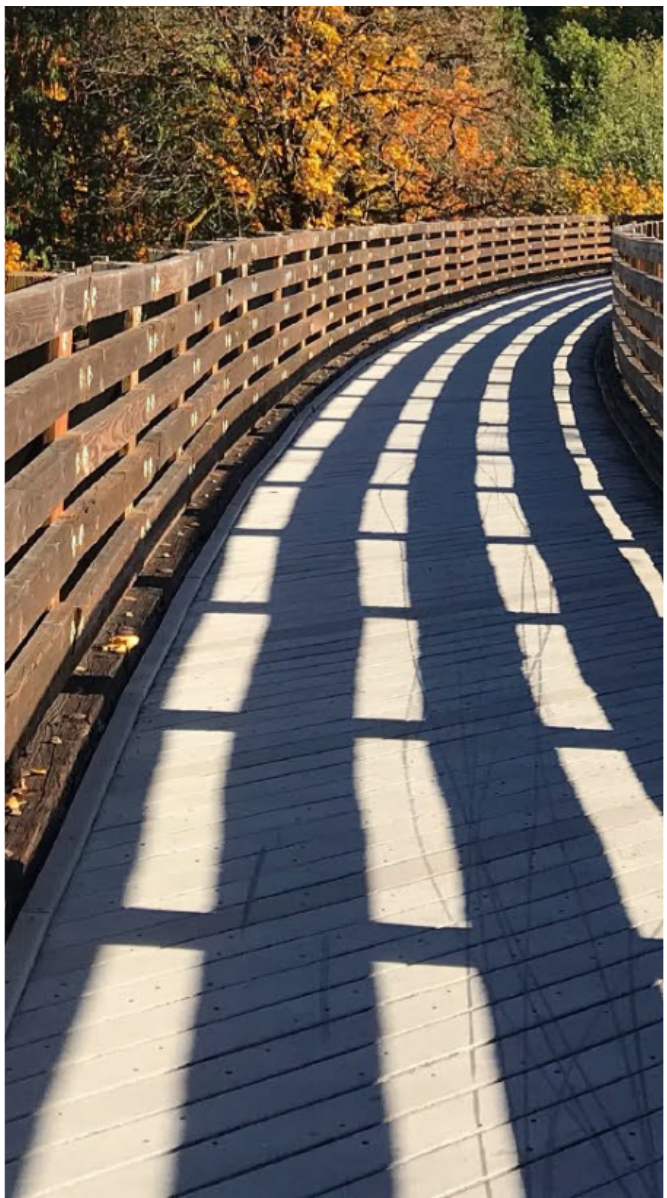
TrailLink
by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

2025

TrailLink Unlimited

Guides



Summerset Trail

Iowa

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The Summerset Trail links the two central Iowa communities of Indianola and Carlisle, both of which have embraced the trail, including providing helpful signs at each end with clear directions for trail users to reach local amenities. Between the two towns, there is a lot of peaceful nothingness, with the dominant farm views ranging from an occasional peek through the surrounding tree cover to wide-open vistas.

In Indianola, the Summerset Trail proceeds north from a well-appointed trailhead, while the connecting McVay Trail travels more than a mile southeast past the local high school to community softball fields. This easy access means that you're likely to encounter cross-country teams and other area youth as you head north out of town on the longer trail to Carlisle.

As you first travel north out of Indianola, you'll encounter a few road crossings without signals where patience is required. (Take some comfort in knowing that it is these frequent crossings that provide easy access to the trail for residents of the many nearby neighborhoods.) After East Hillcrest Avenue, the scene quickly turns rural in nature, and you won't encounter another road—and sometimes another person—for miles. Enjoy the surrounding tree cover; you'll lose the shade roughly halfway through the route, shortly after you pass an entrance to Banner Lakes at Summerset State Park. Consider taking a detour into the park to enjoy the water views.

Losing the envelope of trees is a worthy trade for the spectacular scenery that is gained thereafter. Farmland seems to stretch endlessly in both directions, and in the summer, the trail is lined spectacularly by bright yellow wildflowers. The trail is joined by a parallel road for the final couple of miles into Carlisle, and an adjacent subdivision means that the trail becomes more frequented by families with young kids. In Carlisle, you can connect to the three-mile Carlisle Nature Trail to head northwest through prairies and wetlands, or continue along the former rail corridor to the end at the large trailhead, where you can briefly head west along State Route 5 and then north along South First Street to reach the community's charming downtown.

Summerset Trail

Iowa

States: Iowa
Counties: Warren
Length: 12miles
Trail end points: McVay Trail at N. Fifth St. north of E. Clinton Ave. (Indianola) to 165th Place and SR 5 (Carlisle)
Trail surfaces: Asphalt
Trail category: Rail-Trail
Trail activities: Bike,Inline Skating,Walking,Wheelchair Accessible,Cross Country Skiing

Parking & Trail Access

To reach the southern trailhead in Indianola from I-35, take Exit 56 for SR 92 W, and head east on SR 92 for 11.8 miles. Turn left onto S. Jefferson Way, go 0.2 mile, and then turn right onto E. Ashland Ave. and go 0.2 mile. Turn left onto N. Fifth St., go 0.2 mile, and turn left into the trailhead parking lot (restrooms and drinking fountains are available here).

To reach the northern trailhead in Carlisle from I-35, take Exit 68 for SR 5 toward West Des Moines/Norwalk, and head south on IA 5 for 11.1 miles. Continue onto IA 5 S/US 65 N for 1.8 miles, and then take Exit 72 for SR 5 S toward Carlisle for 0.5 mile. Continue onto SR 5 S, and go 2.3 more miles. Turn right onto 165th Place, and turn right into the trailhead parking lot.

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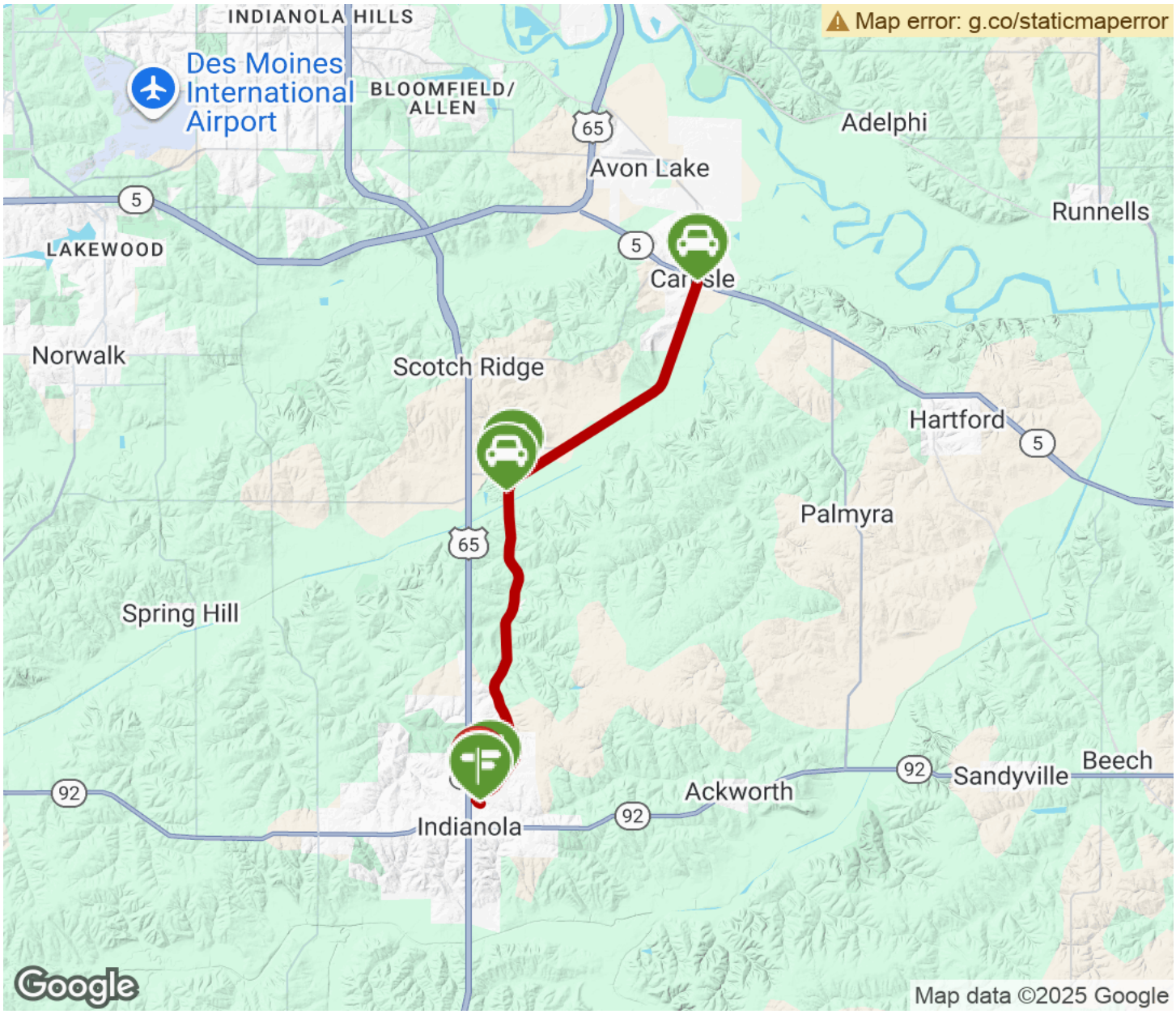

Trailhead Restroom Parking Water Fountain Tunnel