



2024

TrailLink Unlimited



Guides



# Chichaqua Valley Trail

*Iowa*



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The paved Chichaqua Valley Trail crosses nearly 30 miles of central Iowa farmland between the northeastern Des Moines suburbs and the rural community of Baxter. The trail's name, pronounced chee-chak-wah, is derived from a Native American word. Pioneers mistook it to mean skunk, but actually it refers to the aroma of wild onions that grew along the Skunk River, which the trail spans.

The trail follows the original route of the Wisconsin, Iowa & Nebraska Railroad, built in 1885. Other railroads to subsequently use the corridor include the Chicago, St. Paul, & Kansas City Railroad (1886–1892), the Chicago Great Western Company (1892–1968), and the Chicago & Northwestern Railroad Company (1968–1984). Abandoned in 1984, the route became one of Iowa's first rail-trail conversions in 1987. A 6-mile extension ushered the trail

into Des Moines in 2015.

Although the trail is paved, the inconsistent surfaces at the eastern end of the trail make for rough traveling between Baxter and Mingo. The trail surface is much smoother and trailside services are more frequent west of Mingo. The trail crosses gravel roads every few miles, but the crossings are easy, and for most of the trail there is no noise but the wind rushing past. You can gauge your progress by watching for old railroad mile markers that show the distance to Kansas City.

The southern end of the trail begins just south of Mally's Weh-Weh-Neh-Kee Park (meaning "good place") in the former coal-mining community of Berwick, the junction with the [Gay Lea Wilson Trail](#) is 0.8 mile to the west and the trail end is 0.3 mile beyond that. Heading east, you'll leave behind suburban sprawl and pass farms before arriving at Bondurant in about 5 miles. The town completed the trailhead park, featuring a replica train depot for restrooms and drinking water, in 2013.

You might spot wildlife and wildflowers as the curvy route passes through the Santiago Creek greenbelt east of town. In about 7 miles you'll cross the Skunk River railroad bridge that dates to 1885 and enter the Chichaqua Wildlife Management Area.

The trail takes a serpentine course through the creek drainages and river valleys that is uncharacteristic of the straight routes charted by many Midwestern rail-trails. The next three small towns—Valeria, Mingo, and Ira—don't offer much in the way of food or refreshments over the next 15 miles.

Arriving at the end of the trail in Baxter, you'll be greeted by a restored 1913 wooden caboose that also contains historical displays and restrooms. Baxter offers cafés, taverns, and markets to replenish weary travelers.



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**States:** Iowa

**Counties:** Jasper, Polk

Length: 29.7 miles

**Trail end points:** W State St. (Baxter) to NE 46th Ave. (Norwoodville)

**Trail surfaces:** Asphalt

**Trail category:** Rail-Trail

**Trail activities:** Bike, Inline

Skating, Wheelchair Accessible, Walking, Cross

Country Skiing

## Parking & Trail Access

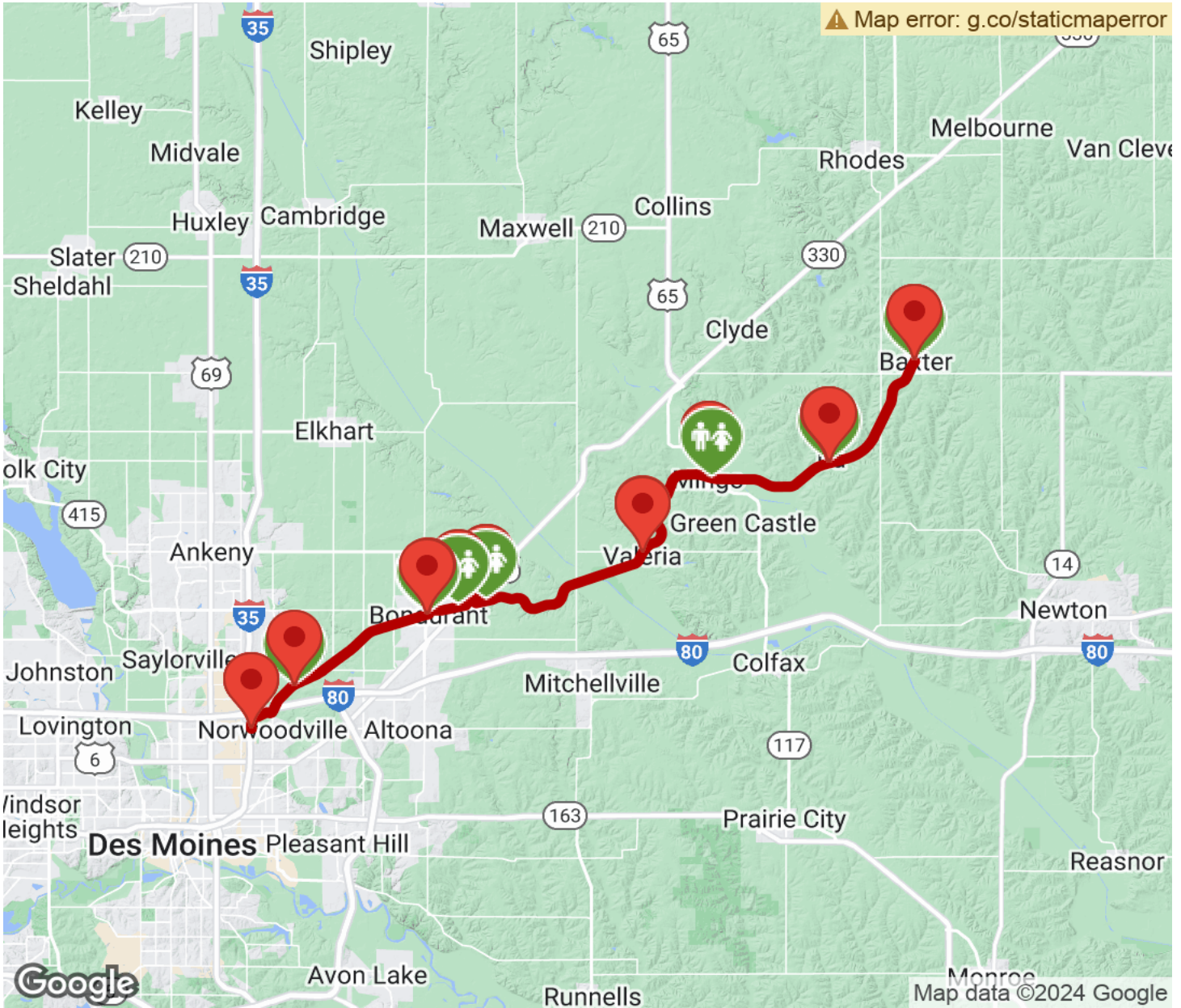
Parking can be found at numerous locations along the trail including at the trail's southern endpoint (2425 NE 46th Ave), in Berwick at Melly's Weh-Weh-Neh-Kee Park (NE 38th St), in Boundurant at 110 1st St SE, in Mingo at 205 Station St, and at the trail's northern endpoint at 105 Railroad St in Baxter.

See [TrailLink Map](#) for all parking options and detailed directions.



# Chichaqua Valley Trail

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Trailhead



Restroom



Parking



Water Fountain



Tunnel



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