



2026

TrailLink Unlimited



Guides



Cinder Path

Iowa



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The Cinder Path in southern Iowa is notable as the state's first rail-to-trail conversion. Following a shady route past farms and wetlands along the Chariton River between Chariton and Humeston for 13.5 miles, the crushed-stone and cinder surface shows its age in places. Grass covers the trail south of Derby, and the path can be challenging in rainy weather.

The trail follows a branch line of the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad built in 1872 that ran between Chariton and St. Joseph, Missouri. The railroad later became the Burlington Northern Railroad, which abandoned the railbed in 1974. The Lucas County Conservation Board bought the corridor that same year and established the trail.

Beginning in Chariton, you'll find a monument at the trailhead for community champion Dwaine Clanin, who played an integral role in the trail's conversion and development. Be sure to stock up on food and water before setting out, as services are rare along the Cinder Path. The trail soon takes you into woods along the river—offering the sight of a flock of pelicans or waterfowl whenever an opening in the tree buffer arises. You'll frequently pass benches and resting areas along the way, although they show lots of wear.

Several wooden bridges mark the route to Derby, including a covered bridge about 6 miles from Chariton. You're also likely to see deer, rabbits, and other wildlife along the trail.

The trail enters Derby in 9.7 miles and runs through town streets for 0.3 mile. Turn left onto Front Street when you arrive, follow it to the right onto Derby Avenue, and then turn right onto Vine Street at a T-junction. The trail reappears on the left in what looks to be an empty grassy lot; the groomed section and a small sign will help you identify the path.

Riding a bike with fat tires or walking is the best way to explore past Derby, as the trail is grass-covered and can be soggy. Entering Wayne County, you'll notice that gates bar horses and all-terrain vehicles at the rural road crossings.

You'll arrive in Humeston 5.6 miles after leaving Derby. The Humeston Union Depot and Museum, one block south of the trailhead at 422 North Eaton Avenue, is worth a visit for railroad buffs. The town served as a junction for the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy and the Missouri, Iowa and Nebraska Railroads beginning in 1880. The two railroads agreed to build the combined depot, which was completed in 1883. A wooden water tower across the street is said to be the last remaining such structure in Iowa.



Cinder Path

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States: Iowa

Counties: Lucas, Wayne

Length: 13.5 miles

Trail end points: Court Ave./US 34 Bus.
between Hy Vee Road and S. 17th St. (Chariton)
to Fletcher St. between N. Eaton Ave. and N.
Third St. (Humeston)

Trail surfaces: Cinder, Crushed Stone

Trail category: Rail-Trail

Trail activities: Bike, Mountain
Biking, Snowmobiling, Walking, Cross Country

Parking & Trail Access

To reach the northern trailhead in Chariton from I-35, take Exit 33 onto US 34 E toward Osceola. Go 24.7 miles, turn left onto Bus. US 34/Court Ave., and then immediately bear right onto Bus. US 34. Go 0.3 mile, and look for trailhead parking on the right.

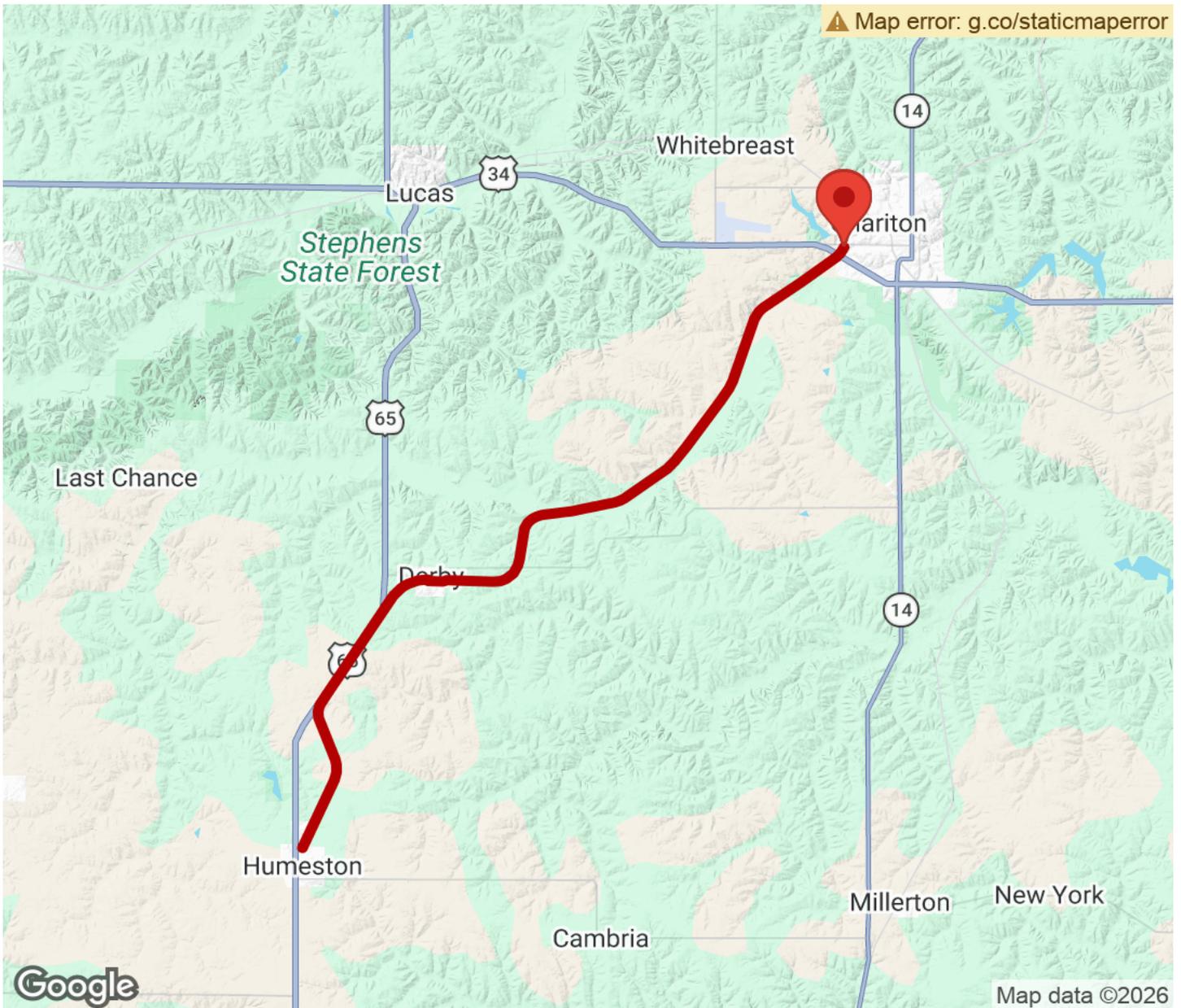
To reach the trailhead in Derby from I-35, take Exit 33 onto US 34 E toward Osceola. Go 17.7 miles, and merge with US 65 in Lucas; then go 0.6 mile, and turn right onto US 65. Go 6.8 miles, and turn left onto Front St. Go 0.8 mile, and look for on-street parking in the vicinity of Front and Broad Streets. After parking, backtrack 0.1 mile to Vine St., turn left, and look for the trail on the right.

To reach the southern trailhead in Humeston from I-35, take Exit 22 east onto E. Line St./120th St. Go 1.8 miles, and turn right onto US 69; then go 1 mile and turn left onto County Road J22. Go 14 miles, and turn left onto S. Front St./US 65; then go 0.6 mile, and turn right onto Fletcher St. Go 0.1 mile to find the trail on the left. On-street parking is available in the vicinity of Fletcher St. and N. Eaton Ave. and at the Humeston Union Depot and Museum at 422 N. Eaton Ave.



Cinder Path

Iowa



Trailhead



Restroom



Parking



Water Fountain



Tunnel



TrailLink
by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

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