



2026

TrailLink Unlimited



Guides



Waupoosee Glacial Trail

Illinois



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In just a few short miles, the Wauponsee Glacial Trail leaves the urban confines of Joliet to bask in open farmland and reclaimed tallgrass prairie where the bison roam again. Named for a glacial lake that covered the area 13,000 years ago, the Wauponsee Glacial Trail sports a mastodon logo on its trail signs. The surface is paved through Joliet but is crushed stone the rest of the way. The route passes through areas where towns are few and far between and shade is a rare commodity.

The 22-mile-long path follows the route of two historical railroad lines: the Illinois, Iowa & Minnesota Railway (later acquired by the Chicago Milwaukee St. Paul and Pacific) from Joliet to Manhattan, and the Wabash Railroad (eventually sold to Norfolk Southern Railway) from Manhattan to Custer Park.

Beginning near the I-80 overpass in Joliet, the trail leaves an industrial area as it briefly runs alongside the Metra commuter railway and then passes through woodsy neighborhoods. Leaving the city behind, you might consider stopping at the Sugar Creek Administration Center to get more information on forest preserve trails and camping permits or to fill your water bottles.

After the center, you'll notice that the path becomes crushed stone, on which horseback riding is permitted. Vast fields of corn and soybean stretch to the horizon along this 5-mile stretch that aims southeast toward Manhattan, where a trailhead with restrooms and water greets you. Restaurants and an ice cream parlor are a couple of blocks away in town.

In 1.5 miles, the trail transitions away from Manhattan in a southwesterly direction on the old Wabash Railroad spur. (The corridor heads northward as a Metra line between Manhattan and Chicago.) You'll find another trailhead (parking entrance on West Hoff Road) 1.8 miles south of Manhattan as you begin to pass the 18,500-acre Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie. You can gain access to the prairie reserve's 33 miles of trail on a path that's another 0.8 mile south on the right. The Joliet Arsenal controlled this land from World War II until its decommissioning in the 1970s, and many ammo bunkers are still visible. The U.S. Forest Service introduced a bison herd on the west side of the property in 2015.

After passing nearly 5 miles of reclaimed prairie on the right, you'll come to a trailhead in the farming community of Symerton, and another trailhead is 4.6 miles south in Wilmington township. Another 2.3 miles brings you to a circa 1902 trestle, originally a four-truss bridge, that stretches 600 feet across the Kankakee River. A pony plate girder span replaced the easternmost truss after a railroad accident.

The trail ends just across the river in unincorporated Custer Park.



Wauponsee Glacial Trail

Illinois

States: Illinois

Counties: Will

Length: 22.3miles

Trail end points: S. Rowell Ave. under I-80 (Joliet) to Washington St. and IL 113 (Custer Park)

Trail surfaces: Asphalt, Crushed Stone

Trail category: Rail-Trail

Trail activities: Bike, Horseback Riding, Inline Skating, Walking, Wheelchair Accessible, Cross Country Skiing

Parking & Trail Access

To reach the southern trailhead in Custer Park: From I-55, take Exit 240 for Lorenzo Road. Head southeast on Lorenzo Road 0.2 mile, and then turn right onto SE Frontage Road. Go 2.5 miles and turn left onto IL 129/Washington St. In 0.2 mile, turn left at the first cross street onto W. Strip Mine Road/ County Road 29. In 1.6 miles, turn left onto Baltimore St. and make an immediate right onto W. River Road. Go 3 miles and turn left onto IL 113. Continue 1.8 miles and turn right onto Washington St. The parking lot is immediately on the right.

To reach the Symerton trailhead: From I-57, take West Wilmington Road for 12.3 miles and turn right onto South Symerton Road. After 0.5 mile, turn right on West Commercial Street and continue for just over 0.1 mile. The trailhead facilities are on the left.

Only on-street parking is available at the northern trail terminus on the outskirts of downtown Joliet. To reach this endpoint: From I-80, take Exit 134 and go south on S. Briggs St. Take the first right onto W. Haven Ave. (which becomes New Lenox Rd.) and go 1 mile before turning right onto Rowell Ave. In 0.2 mile, the Wauponsee Glacial Trail begins on the left, though there is no parking lot.

