



2026

TrailLink Unlimited 

Guides



North Central State Trail

Michigan



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The nearly 75-mile North Central State Trail offers a multi-use trail adventure into the hills, agricultural areas, woods, and waterways



The nearly 75-mile North Central State Trail offers a multi-use trail adventure into the hills, agricultural areas, woods, and waterways of Michigan, with connections to well-established tourist towns at both ends.

About the Route

From the northern end, the trail leaves off just south of the famed Mackinac Bridge spanning 5 miles across the Straits of Mackinac (pronounced "Mackinaw") to join the Lower and Upper Peninsulas of Michigan.

Leaving off from Mackinaw and heading south, the trail is paved and well-used for the first half mile, after which its surface turns to well-maintained crushed stone and is sparsely used. The trail's route is mostly flat throughout

its length, even where there are rolling vistas.

Although the route parallels US 23 for the first 15 miles, it boasts the beautiful northern woods as its backdrop, where trail users can spot interesting birds as well as an occasional view of Lake Huron, to the east. Rail buffs may be interested in the remaining railroad tracks and historical markers along the trail, chronicling old rail towns. Snowmobiles use the trail in season, and trailside businesses cater to them.

Usage increases again as the trail reaches Cheboygan, at about mile 16. The Cheboygan trailhead offers parking, restrooms, water, and picnic facilities. Trail users can also detour off the trail here for food and beverage options. Those planning to continue south should fill their water bottles at the trailhead, as water is scarce between Cheboygan and Gaylord.

Continuing south from Cheboygan, the trail passes through a popular section of trail that skirts Mullett Lake, a beautiful, 15-mile-long inland lake that stretches to Indian River. A highlight of this segment is the town of Topinabee, which has a public beach, park and playground, parking, and restrooms, as well as a library inside an old railroad depot. Nearby Indian River has restrooms, a market, covered picnic tables, a playground, and a train depot repurposed into a boutique.

Trail users should be extra-vigilant when crossing busy MI 68, south of Indian River, as the trail is located near an entrance ramp from I-75. South of Indian River, the trail feels more solitary and wildlife sightings increase; be on the lookout for turkey, deer, snakes, and frogs.

As you near the trail's southern endpoint, you'll pass a state forest campground and then a train depot in Wolverine. You'll parallel I-75 between Wolverine and Vanderbilt, after which the remote feel of the trail continues until reaching Gaylord. The trail here passes through downtown Gaylord and then continues on to Waters. The trail's southern



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States: Michigan

Counties: Cheboygan, Otsego

Length: 74.9 miles

Trail end points: Mackinaw Highway
(Mackinaw City) to Bradford Dr. (Frederic)

Trail surfaces: Asphalt, Crushed Stone

Trail category: Rail-Trail

Trail activities: Bike, Fishing, Horseback
Riding, Mountain

Biking, Snowmobiling, Walking, Cross Country

Skiing

Parking & Trail Access

The North Central State Trail runs between Mackinaw Highway (Mackinaw City), which offers parking, and Bradford Dr. (Frederic).

Parking is also available at:

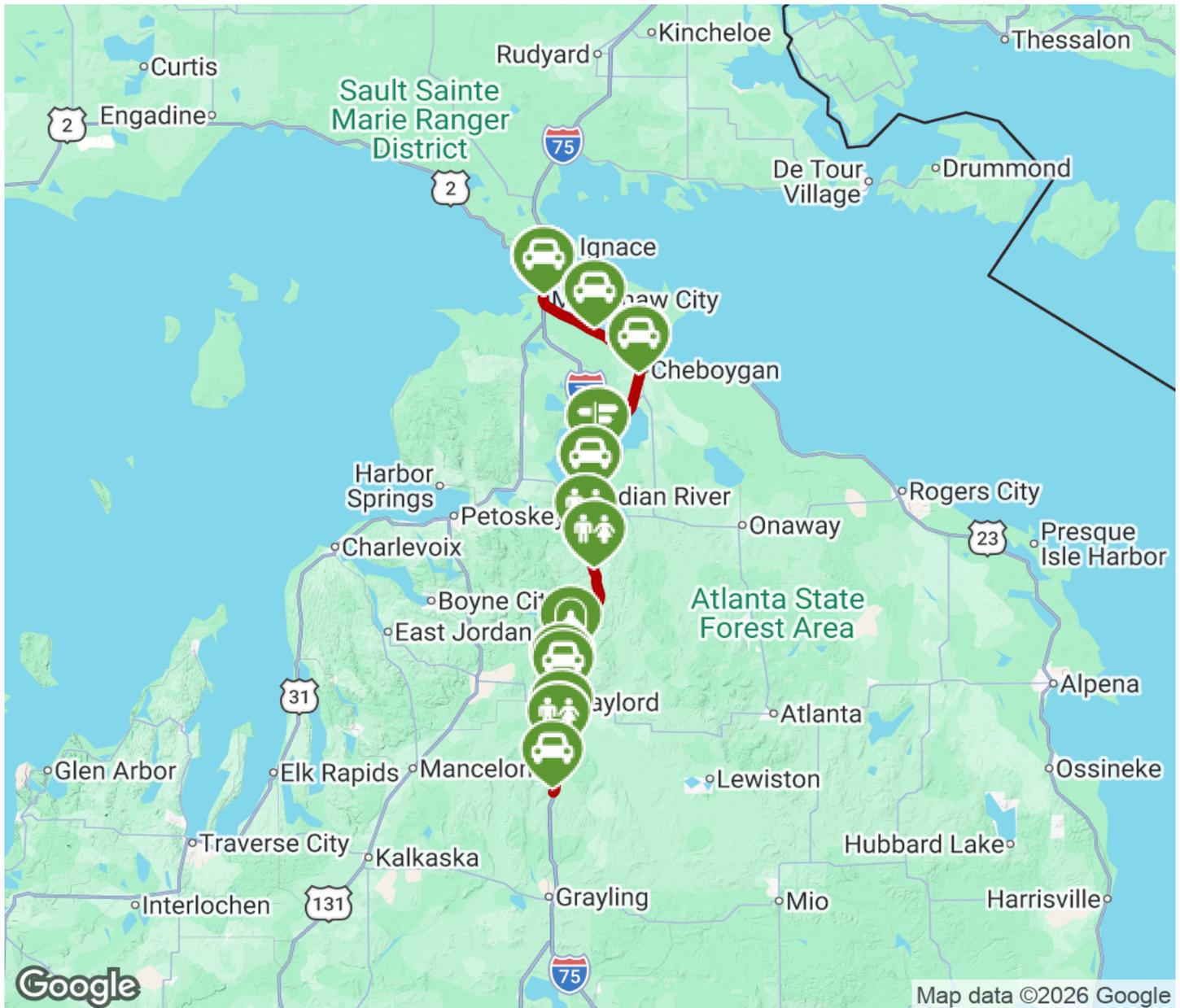
- MDOT Roadside Park, 5536 US-23 (Cheboygan)
- 1550 Topinabee Shore Dr. (Indian River)
- Otsego Lake State Park, 7136 Old US Hwy 27 S (Gaylord)

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



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Trailhead



Restroom



Parking



Water Fountain



Tunnel



TrailLink
by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

TrailLink.com