



2026

TrailLink Unlimited



Guides



Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail

Nebraska



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The Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail, informally called the Cowboy Trail, one of the country's longest rail-trails, stretches 203 miles between the Nebraska towns of Valentine and Norfolk (beginning at Ta-Ha-Zouka Park south of town), and another short spur trail between Gordon and Rushville. When complete, the trail will continue west another 126 miles to Chadron.

The entire pathway also includes more than 200 bridges.

About the Route

The Cowboy Trail is mostly surfaced in finely crushed gravel, though some short sections are paved with concrete in the towns along the route. Mountain or hybrid bikes will provide the best experience on the trail. An adjacent natural-surface path is also available for equestrian use.

Communities along the trail are generally spaced about 10-15 miles apart. Although dedicated trail restrooms and drinking fountains are not available on the trail, these amenities are typically available from town parks and trailside businesses. In addition to water, it's also recommended that travelers bring spare tire tubes as Texas sandbur seeds (puncturevine) can occasionally be found on some sections of the trail.

The westernmost section of trail, the spur between Rushville (pop. 812) and Gordon (pop. 1500) can be considered the most rural, separated from the main section of the trail by hundreds of miles. However, both trail towns that anchor both ends of this route offer dining and convenience options and this spur provides a pleasant 14-mile route.

Once on the trail's main route, The trail heads east from Valentine, a modest town with options for dining and lodging. The trail passes the Niobrara River along a dramatic quarter-mile trestle bridge, where five major ecological system converge. The Niobrara is a National Scenic River and is an excellent spot for tubing, rafting and kayaking.

From here, trail users enter the Sandhill Country. This area of the trail, between Valentine and Long Pine features grass-covered dunes (largest in the western hemisphere). The Sandhills are a wetland region with large freshwater reserves that are home to rare bird, fish and mussel species.

As the trail rolls east, it passes small trail towns including Ainsworth, Atkinson, O'Neill and Neligh.

This section of the trail enters the vast native prairie country. This part of eastern Nebraska is characterized by tallgrass



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States: Nebraska

Counties: Antelope, Brown, Cherry, Holt, Madison, Rock, Sheridan

Length: 202.9 miles

Trail end points: N. Main Street (Rushville) to S. Cornell Street (Gordon) to N Thornton St. (Valentine) to Ta-Ha-Zouka Park (Norfolk)

Trail surfaces: Concrete, Crushed Stone

Trail category: Rail-Trail

Trail activities: Horseback Riding, Mountain Biking, Walking

Parking & Trail Access

The Cowboy Nature and Recreation Trail runs between N. Main Street (Rushville) to S. Cornell Street (Gordon) and N Thornton St. (Valentine) to Ta-Ha-Zouka Park (Norfolk), with parking at the easternmost end.

Parking is also available at:

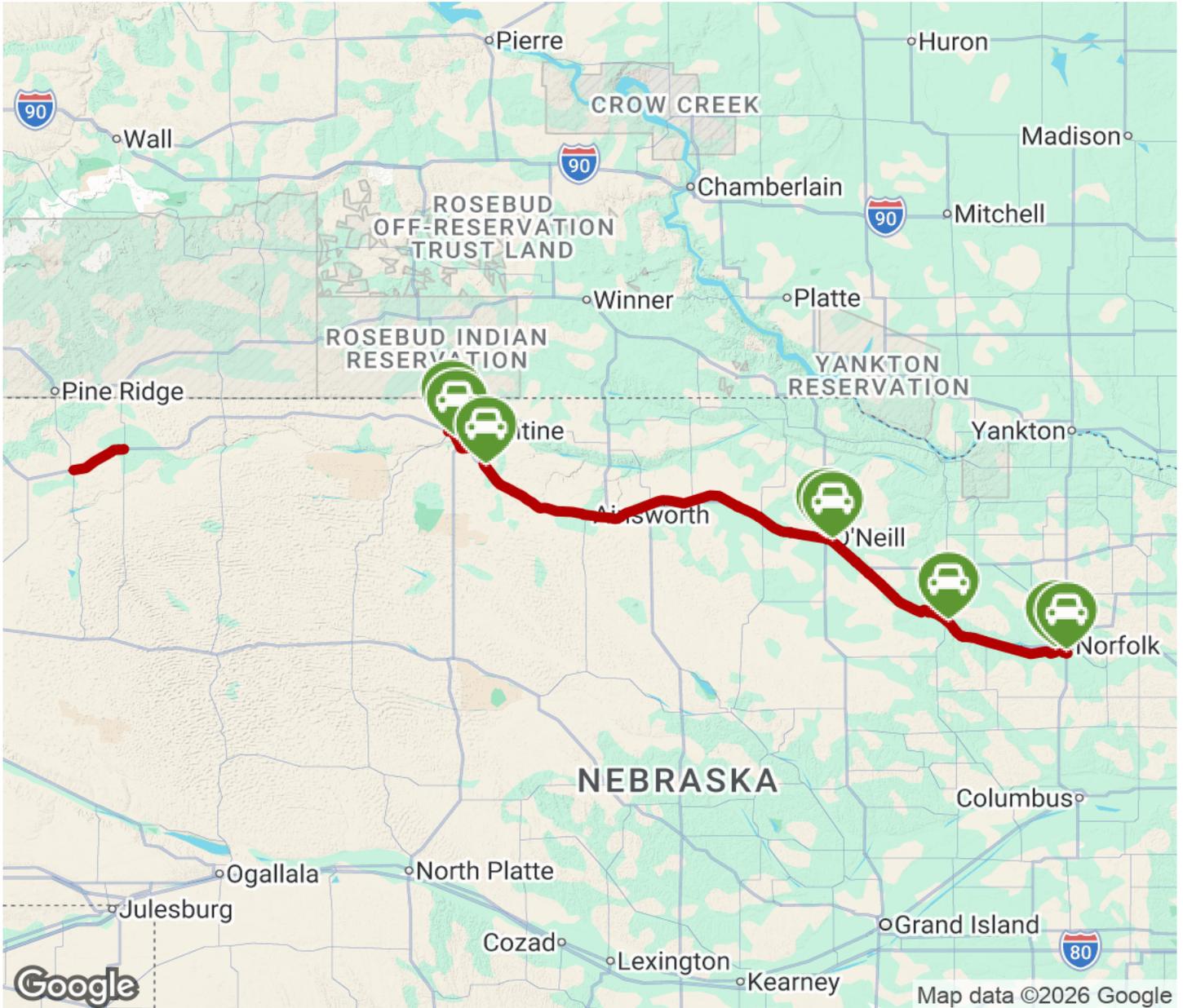
- 109 E 1st St (Valentine)
- 39783 River Dr (Valentine)
- 330 E Hancock St (O'Neill)

There are numerous parking options along this route, please see [TrailLink Map](#) for all parking options and detailed directions.



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Trailhead



Restroom



Parking



Water Fountain



Tunnel



TrailLink
by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

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