



2026

TrailLink Unlimited 

Guides



Switchback Railroad Trail

Pennsylvania



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The Switchback Trail inspires tourists and locals alike. Two parallel routes intersect to make up the Switchback. Regardless of which you choose, it is the best idea to start in Summit Hill and bike downhill toward Jim Thorpe. The grade in reverse is challenging. Although this trail doesn't require a lot of pedaling, it commands your attention. (For a shorter ride, pick up the trail in Mauch Chunk Lake Park, which has parking, restrooms, picnic areas, and campgrounds. Fishing is permitted.)

About the Route

With its hard-packed dirt surface, the Down Track is the easier southern route. This track takes you along Mauch Chunk Lake for 0.5 miles and then plunges into a lush forested area. At mile 7, the trail ends abruptly on Lentz

Trail Road. Cross the road, head downhill toward Jim Thorpe, and continue past the power plant entrance (go around the gated drive); pick up the trail again at the back of the power plant access road. From here continue on a peaceful wooded trail, riding on a bluff overlooking the community of Jim Thorpe below.

The northern BackTrack is suitable for mountain bikes. Be prepared to pay attention as you traverse ballast, navigate large rocks in packed dirt, and portage your bike around sections of the trail that are too steep to cross otherwise. As this section of the trail winds down outside Jim Thorpe, you'll discover an optional small loop that takes you to a scenic overview. Beware: locals say copperheads have been seen in that area. At the trail's end, trail users will encounter a knee-breaking descent on a steep, slippery rock surface, where keeping a footing while holding onto the bike will be challenging.

Bike rental and shuttle services available in downtown Jim Thorpe will drop you off at the trailhead in Summit Hill, where trail users can take the Switchback Trail downhill right back into town and spend the rest of their day enjoying the many quaint shops and restaurants.

Connections

The Jim Thorpe area has several other rail trails to explore, including the [D & L Trail](#).

Trail History

When it began operating, the Switchback Railroad was the second railroad in America and the first in Pennsylvania. Built to haul coal from the Summit Mine to the Lehigh Canal, the railroad evolved from a gravity-powered system (The Down Track) and mule-powered system (The Back Track) to a 95% gravity-run operation.



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States: Pennsylvania

Counties: Carbon

Length: 12.8miles

Trail end points: E. Holland St. (Summit Hill)
to Packer Hill Rd. (Jim Thorpe)

Trail surfaces: Ballast,Dirt,Gravel

Trail category: Rail-Trail

Trail activities: Fishing,Mountain
Biking,Walking

Parking & Trail Access

The Switchback Railroad Trail runs between E. Holland St. (Summit Hill) and Packer Hill Rd. (Jim Thorpe).

Parking is available at:

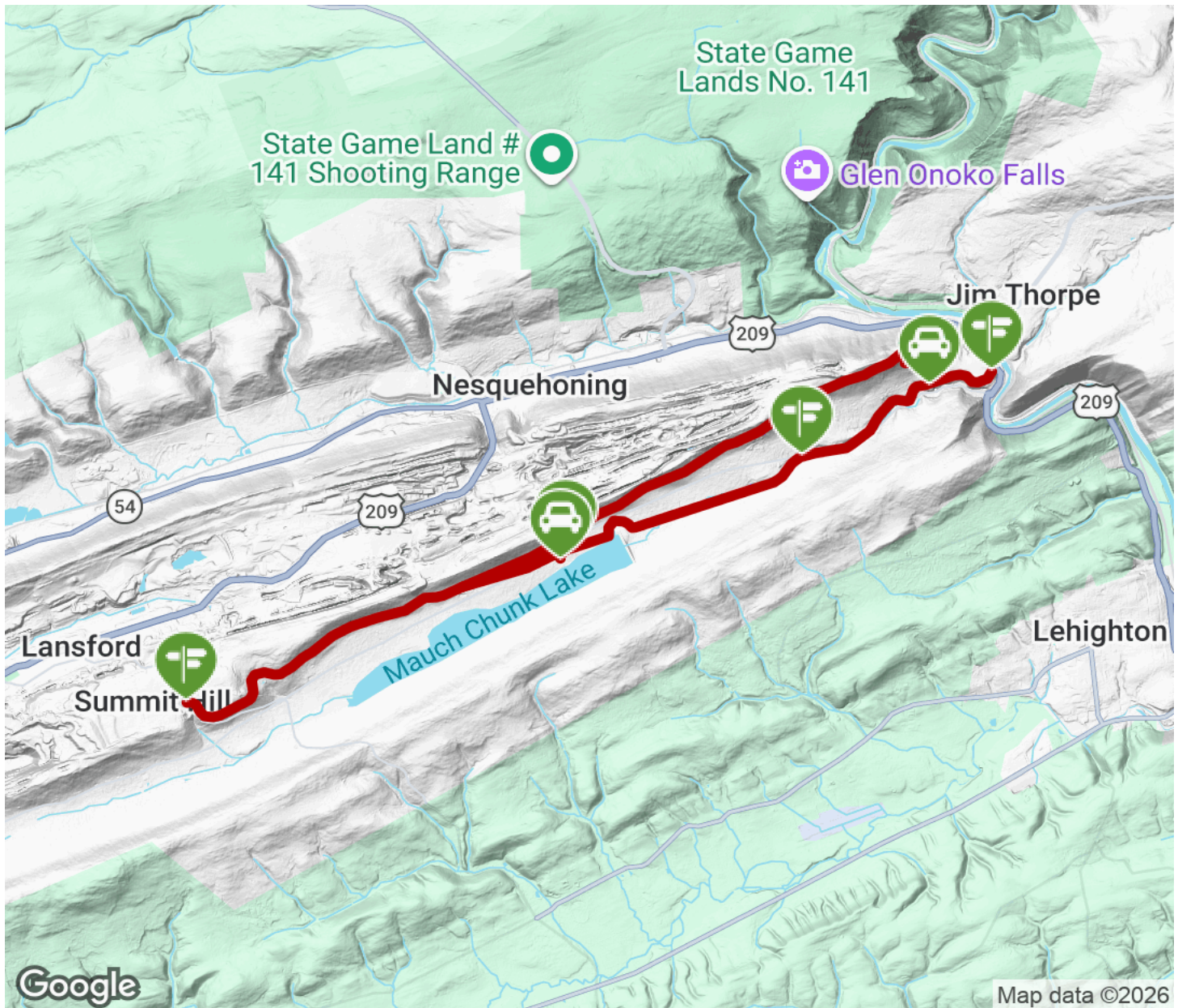
- Mauch Chunk Lake Park, 625 Lentz Trail (Jim Thorpe)
- 8-20 Hill Rd. (Jim Thorpe)

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

TrailLink.com