



2026

TrailLink Unlimited



Guides



Iowa Great Lakes Trail

Iowa



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The Iowa Great Lakes resort on the northern border with Minnesota is a longtime destination for fishermen and vacationers



The Iowa Great Lakes resort on the northern border with Minnesota is a longtime destination for fishermen and vacationers who arrived from big cities by rail. Dickinson County employed two different former rail corridors, as well as streets and sidewalks, to create a 14.3-mile paved trail, known locally as the “Spine Trail,” that can be used by a new generation of visitors to Spirit Lake, East and West Okoboji Lakes, and Upper and Lower Gar Lakes. There’s a nearly limitless inventory of cafés and ice-cream stores along the route for food and refreshments.

The segment between the towns of Orleans and Spirit Lake follows a former corridor of the Iowa Northwestern Railroad, which abandoned the line in 2009. Historically it operated as the Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern Railway, succeeded by the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific

Railroad. From Spirit Lake south through Milford, the trail runs on and off the old railbed of the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific Railroad (Milwaukee Road) that served the area from the 1890s. Parts of the trail date to 1992.

Beginning on the eastern shoreline of Spirit Lake, you’ll head south between farm fields and lakeside homes for 1.5 miles to the town of Orleans. Throughout the Iowa Great Lakes Trail, your route switches from multidirectional trail to sidewalks to on-street bike lanes, so you’ll have to watch for painted pavement arrows and bike signs.

Crossing a land bridge between Spirit Lake and East Okoboji Lake, the trail puts you along the water in Isthmus Park with picnicking and fishing areas. After crossing Hill Avenue, you’ll zigzag through a wooded area, then pass cow pastures and crop fields before you enter the town of Spirit Lake. The trail here follows the former Iowa Northwestern Railroad right-of-way for less than 2 miles. The trail route then heads south alongside Peoria Avenue.

Turn left onto 20th Street and right onto Lincoln Avenue to find the trail again at 23rd Street, this time heading southwest on the former Milwaukee Road railbed. A side trail heads west alongside 175th Street toward Kenue Park Nature Center and a grand loop around West Okoboji Lake.

Following US 71/Okoboji Avenue past boat dealers and other marine businesses, turn left onto Gordon Drive and follow it right to cross the inlet linking East and West Okoboji Lakes on the 1902 swing railroad bridge to Arnolds Park.

This lakeside community is home to a 125-year-old lakefront amusement park of the same name, in addition to the Iowa Rock ‘n’ Roll Hall of Fame, which celebrates many of the acts that performed in local resorts over the years. Turning left onto Bascom Street and right onto Rohr Street takes you through a neighborhood to a trailhead on 195th Street. You’ll enter a shady area along the Minnewashta Lake shoreline,



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States: Iowa

Counties: Dickinson

Length: 26.2miles

Trail end points: 125th St. and 253rd Ave.
(Orleans) to 230th St. and Q Ave. (Milford)

Trail surfaces: Asphalt

Trail category: Rail-Trail

Trail activities: Bike, Inline

Skating, Snowmobiling, Walking, Wheelchair

Accessible, Cross Country Skiing

Parking & Trail Access

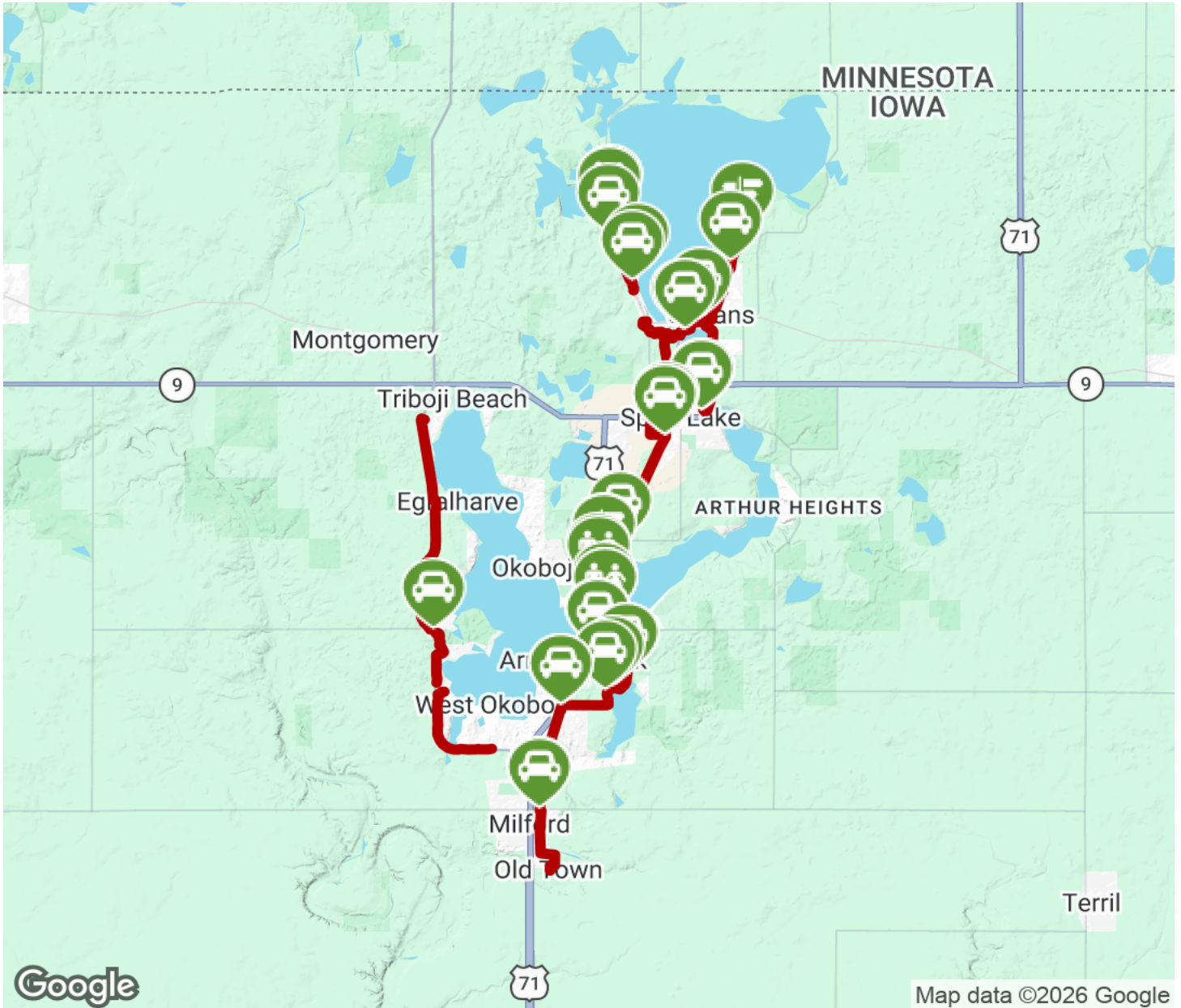
There are numerous parking options along the trailhead including the northern endpoint at Marble Beach State Recreation Area, 12320 240th Ave, in the town of Spirit Lake at Memorial Park, 300 Lake St. and Kiwanis Park, 2200-2298 Keokuk Ave and in Milford off of 220th St.

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



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Trailhead



Restroom



Parking



Water Fountain



Tunnel



TrailLink
by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

TrailLink.com