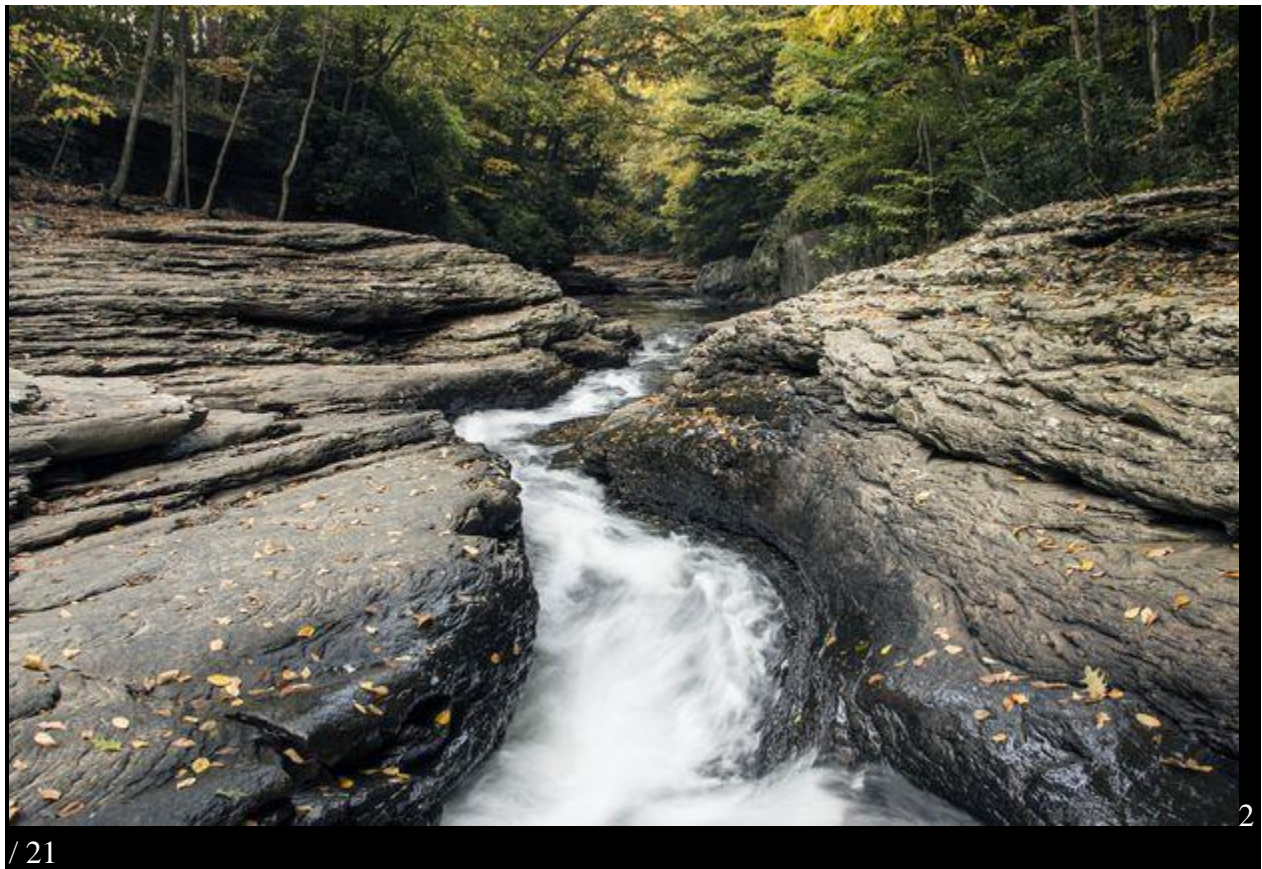


From Locomotive to Locomotion

The heyday of the American railway is long gone, but in its place, something new has sprung up: the rail trail. Across the country, state and local governments have joined forces to turn abandoned rail corridors into pathways where everyone can enjoy the great outdoors. The result are some of the best places in the country to bike and walk, or in some cases, skate, ride a horse, or even cross-country ski.



/ 21

JZHunt/istockphoto

Great Allegheny Passage | Maryland and Pennsylvania

Length: 150 miles

Stretching from Cumberland, Maryland, to Pittsburgh, the Great Allegheny Passage takes riders alongside the sun-dappled rivers and streams of what used to be an important rail corridor for moving iron, steel, and coal.

Riders can continue from Cumberland to Washington, D.C., by connecting with the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal Towpath for an even longer journey.

Highlights: The trail winds through Pennsylvania's Ohiopyle State Park near its midway point. This 20,000-acre wonderland is one of the region's best spots for whitewater kayaking, rafting, and canoeing.

Related: Abandoned Factories Across America



/ 21

ErikaMitchell/istockphoto

Island Line Trail | Vermont

Length: 14 miles

Though it's a relatively modest 14 miles, the Island Line Trail starting in Burlington sets itself apart with its dazzling views of Lake Champlain. And it's not just shoreline views on offer, though those are plentiful. A 3-mile section of the path, the marble-lined Colchester Causeway, seems to float atop the lake. A small bike ferry allows riders to hop across a small gap in the causeway formerly occupied by a rail bridge.

Highlights: Allow plenty of time to explore lovely Burlington, where must-sees include the thriving Church Street Marketplace. A bit further south, the Shelburne Museum is an important center for American folk art.



/ 21

Paul Bunyan State Trail, Minnesota by [Tony Webster](#) (CC BY-SA)

Paul Bunyan State Trail | Minnesota

Length: 115 miles

Forests, rivers, lakes, and plenty of wildflowers await along the Paul Bunyan State Trail, which connects Brainerd and Bemidji in north-central Minnesota. It's the country's longest continuously paved rail trail and welcomes snowmobiles during winter. Though the route is long, this is a popular trail that's dotted with towns, ensuring you won't be lonely for long. Wildlife spotters may even spy an elusive gray wolf on some of the trail's more isolated stretches.

Highlights: The thriving trail town of Nisswa hosts its famous turtle races every Wednesday throughout the summer. A small Pioneer Village, restored train depot, and cabooses are other points of interest.



/ 21

dwalker2/istockphoto

Virginia Creeper National Recreation Trail | Virginia

Length: 34 miles

One of the nation's most well-known rail trails, the Virginia Creeper Trail is a recreational gem that draws not only bicyclists but walkers, runners, fishers, skiers, geocachers, horseback riders, and more. Most trail enthusiasts start at Whitetop Station in the east, at an altitude of roughly 3,600 feet, to enjoy the steady downhill ride to Damascus, the trail's midway point.

Highlights: The trail's western endpoint, Abingdon, is a charmer of a town that's home to the historic Barter Theatre, the state theater of Virginia. It always has a diverse slate of shows on its two stages.



/ 21

marekuliasz/istockphoto

Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail | Nebraska

Length: 195 miles

Connecting the northern towns of Valentine and Norfolk, the Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail may eventually extend another 126 miles and become the world's longest rail trail. Riders following this former agricultural rail route get a true sense of the Nebraskan countryside,

passing through farmland, native prairie, and the grassy dunes of Sandhill country.

Highlights: The trail passes over more than 200 bridges, including a trestle 150 feet above the Niobrara National Scenic River. If you have time, the Niobrara is a lovely spot for tubing, kayaking, or canoeing with one of the area's outfitters.



/ 21

Sunday on the Longleaf Trace by [John Perry](#) (CC BY-SA)

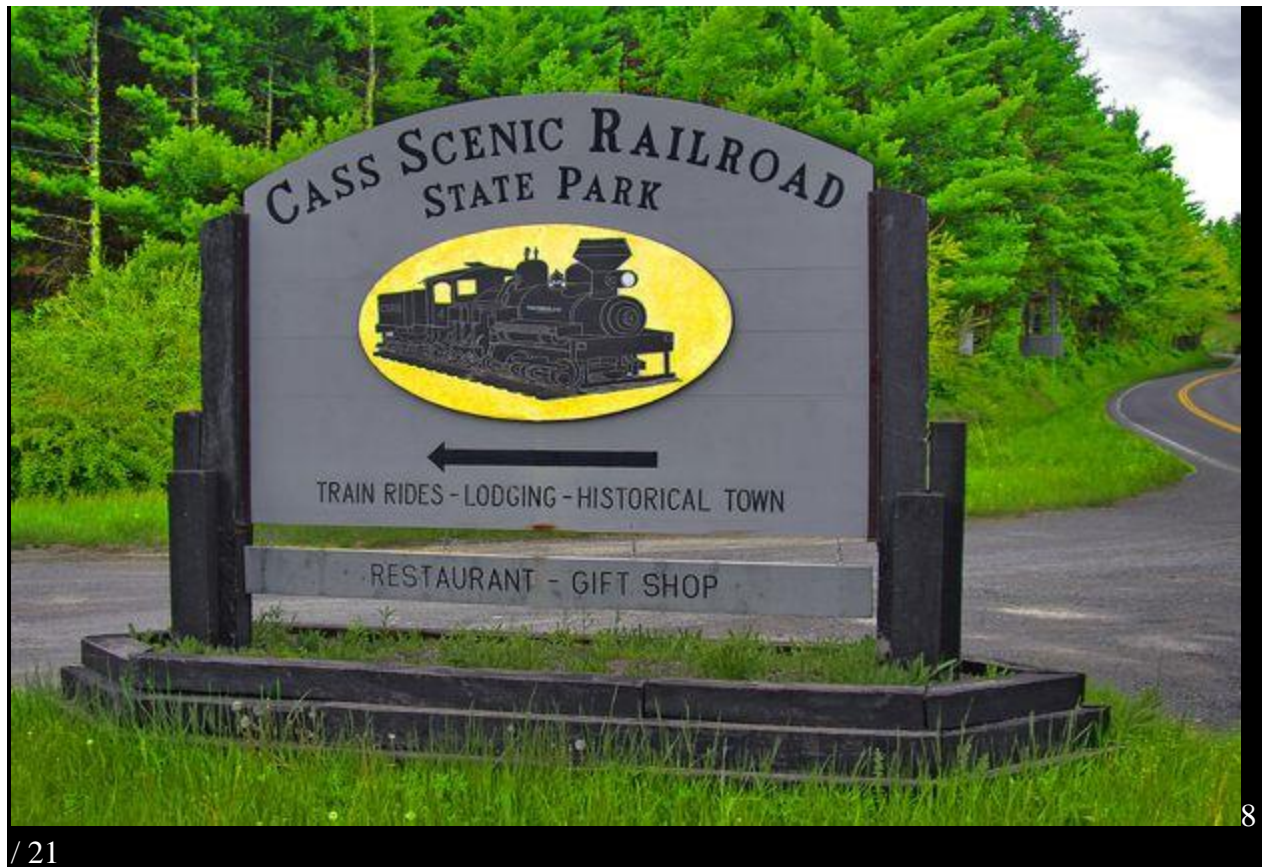
Longleaf Trace | Mississippi

Length: 44 miles

Following the path of an old rail line that ferried lumber from turn-of-the-century sawmills, this National Recreation Trail links the college town of Hattiesburg to Prentiss, a small town to the northwest. Between is an

asphalt ribbon popular with skaters, cyclists, and runners that bisects woods and wetlands. Ample shade and several covered shelters along the way provide a respite from the often-brutal Mississippi heat.

Highlights: Hattiesburg is packed with interesting sites including the Mississippi Armed Forces Museum. It's also the starting point for the Freedom Summer Trail, a driving tour that links important sites from the Civil Rights movement.



/ 21

Sign for the Cass Scenic Railroad State Park (WV) May 2013 by [Ron Cogswell](#) (CC BY)

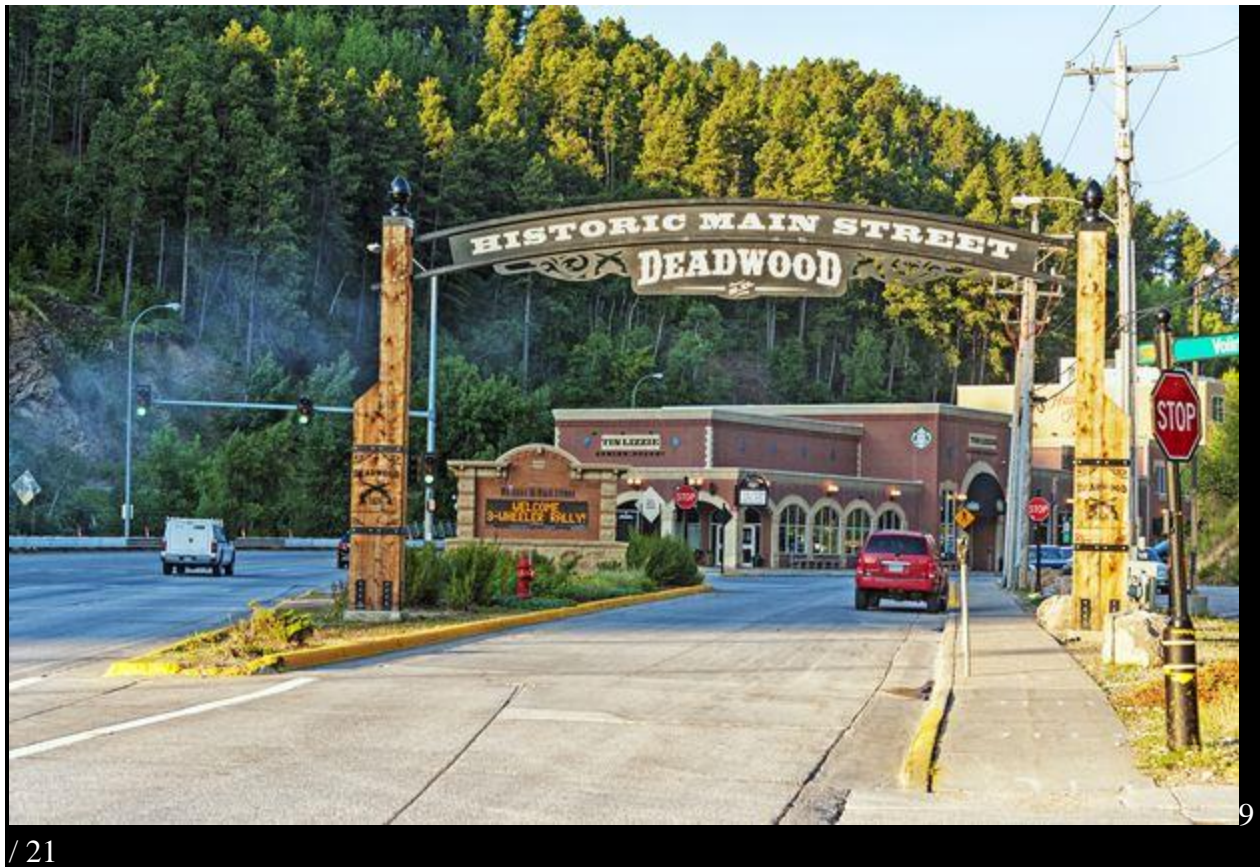
Greenbrier River Trail | West Virginia

Length: 78 miles

If you're looking for a more remote rail-trail adventure, the Greenbrier River Trail in West Virginia delivers. It snakes alongside the Greenbrier

River, following a former Chesapeake & Ohio rail line that primarily hauled timber. Today, it showcases the state's rolling hills and dense forests. There is only one major town, Marlinton, along the way, meaning those who want to bike the entire thing will need to pack food, repair supplies, and other necessities.

Highlights: Check out Cass Scenic Railroad State Park at the trail's northern end and explore its lumber rail museum and company town. Scenic train rides are also available.



/ 21

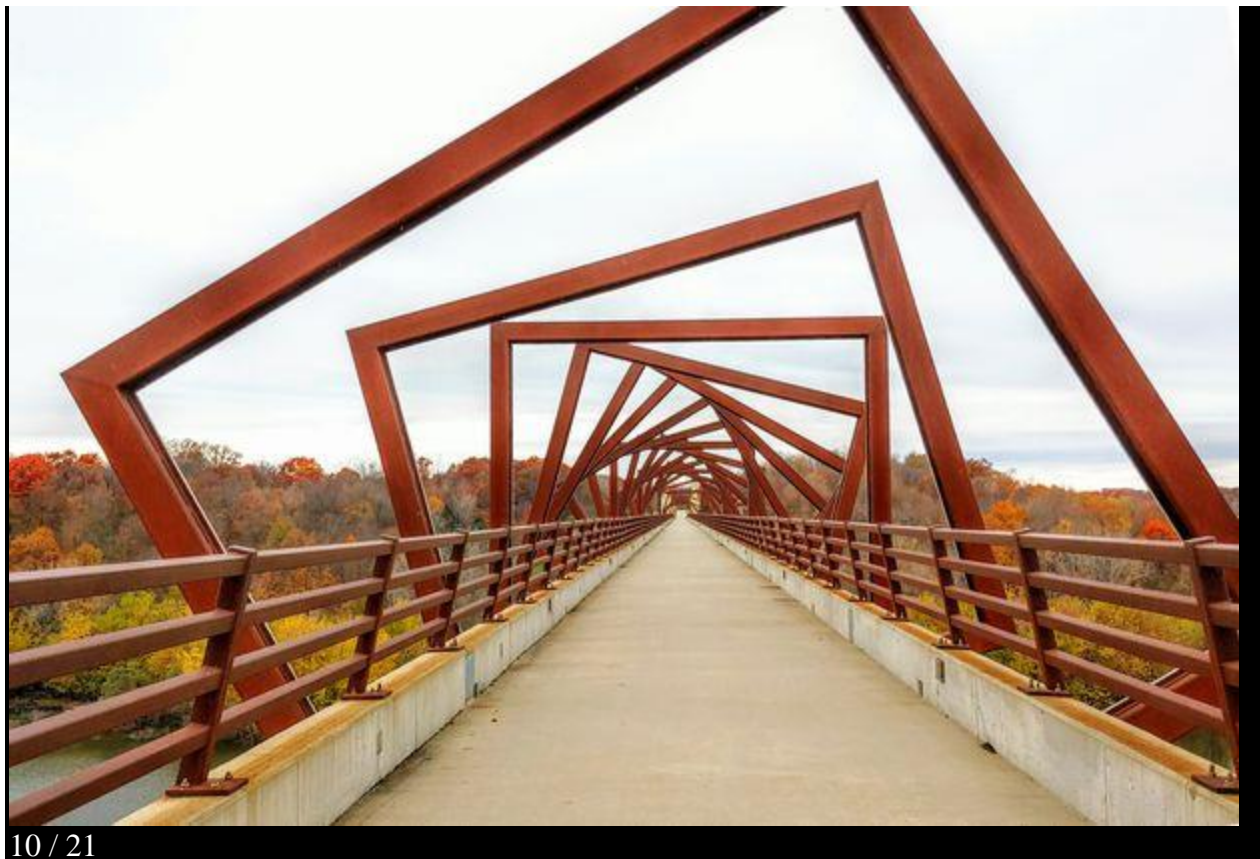
jmoor17/istockphoto

George S. Mickelson Trail | South Dakota

Length: 109 miles

Take in the splendor of the Black Hills from the George S. Mickelson Trail, which snakes from Deadwood to Edgemont in southwestern South Dakota. Much of the trail bisects the Black Hills National Forest, and riders will be rewarded with views of canyons, forests, and prairies. More than 100 trestle bridges, old mining towns, and wildlife including bighorn sheep and elk add to the allure.

Highlights: Mount Rushmore and bison-packed Custer State Park are both just a short detour from the trail. One of the trail's endpoints, Deadwood, is worth exploring for its campy embrace of the Wild West, including Main Street "shootouts" in the summer.



10 / 21

Allison Cherry/istockphoto

High Trestle Trail | Iowa

Length: 25 miles

Farmland, forests, and the placid Iowa countryside await on the High Trestle Trail. It starts near Des Moines and snakes northwest to tiny Woodward, where a former rail house offers a glimpse of the trail's origins. Though not on the trail, just a short drive north is the Boone and Scenic Valley Railroad, where you can hop on a coach car from the 1920s for a throwback of a journey.

Highlights: The crown jewel of this trail is a half-mile, 13-story-high bridge across the Des Moines River valley that's home to more than 40 twisting steel frames. They light up at night, making for an especially breathtaking sight.



The Lone Rider by [Thomas Dwyer](#) (CC BY-NC)

Little Miami Scenic Trail | Ohio

Length: 78 miles

The Little Miami Scenic Trail is an easy ride through woodlands, farmland, and quaint small towns, much of it skirting the Little Miami State and National Scenic River. It begins near Cincinnati and ends in Springfield, east of Dayton, with plenty to see along the way, including Fort Ancient, a national historic landmark that's home to prehistoric tribal mounds.

Highlights: Be sure to stop in Yellow Springs, near the trail's northern end. This counterculture town is home to eclectic shops and restaurants, including Ye Olde Trail Tavern, the state's oldest bar, and Young's Jersey Dairy, where you can play mini golf, pet a goat, and grab some ice cream.



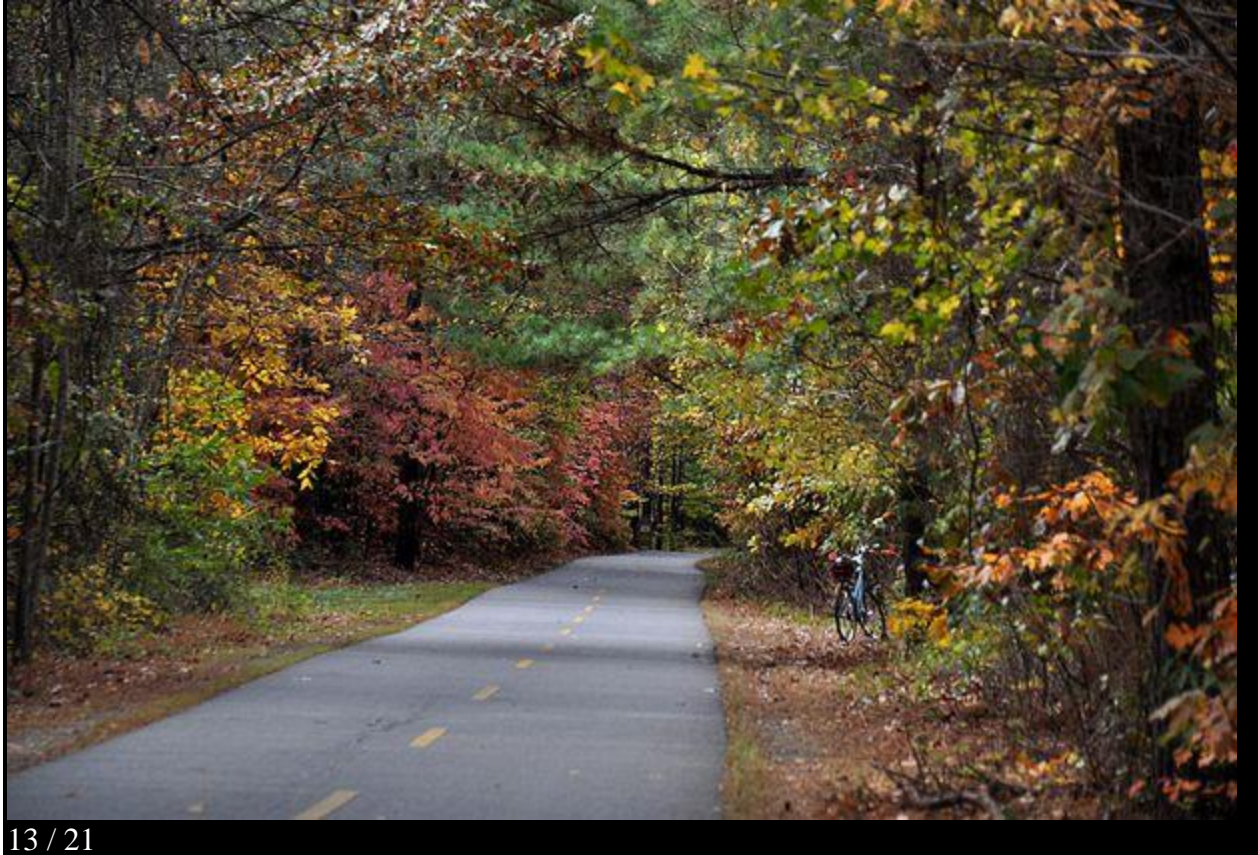
Courtesy of flickr.com/photos/blmcalifornia/

Bizz Johnson National Recreation Trail | California

Length: 25 miles

What the Bizz Johnson National Recreation Trail lacks in length, it makes up for in dazzling scenery. It winds through the Susan River Canyon along a former timber railway route, providing breathtaking views of upland forest and the rushing water below. It crosses the river a dozen times on bridges and trestles that provide ample vantage points for photos.

Highlights: Go during the fall for spectacular foliage and October's Rails to Trails Festival, held at a historic depot across from the Susanville trailhead.



13 / 21

Silver Comet Trail | Georgia by [Cynthia Phillips](#) (CC BY-NC-ND)

Silver Comet Trail | Georgia

Length: 62 miles

This wide, paved trail, a favorite not just for cyclists but runners, rollerbladers, and exercisers of all stripes, begins northwest of Atlanta and heads west along an old luxury passenger-train route used from the late '40s through the late '60s. Scenery includes farmland, pine stands, and residential neighborhoods closer to Atlanta. At the trail's western edge, pick up the Chief Ladiga Trail for a 33-mile jaunt into Alabama.

Highlights: Bits and pieces of this trail's history survive, including an 800-foot rail tunnel near the midway point and a restored depot in Cedartown that houses a small Silver Comet museum.



Autumn Tunnel by [Heath Cajandig \(CC BY\)](#)

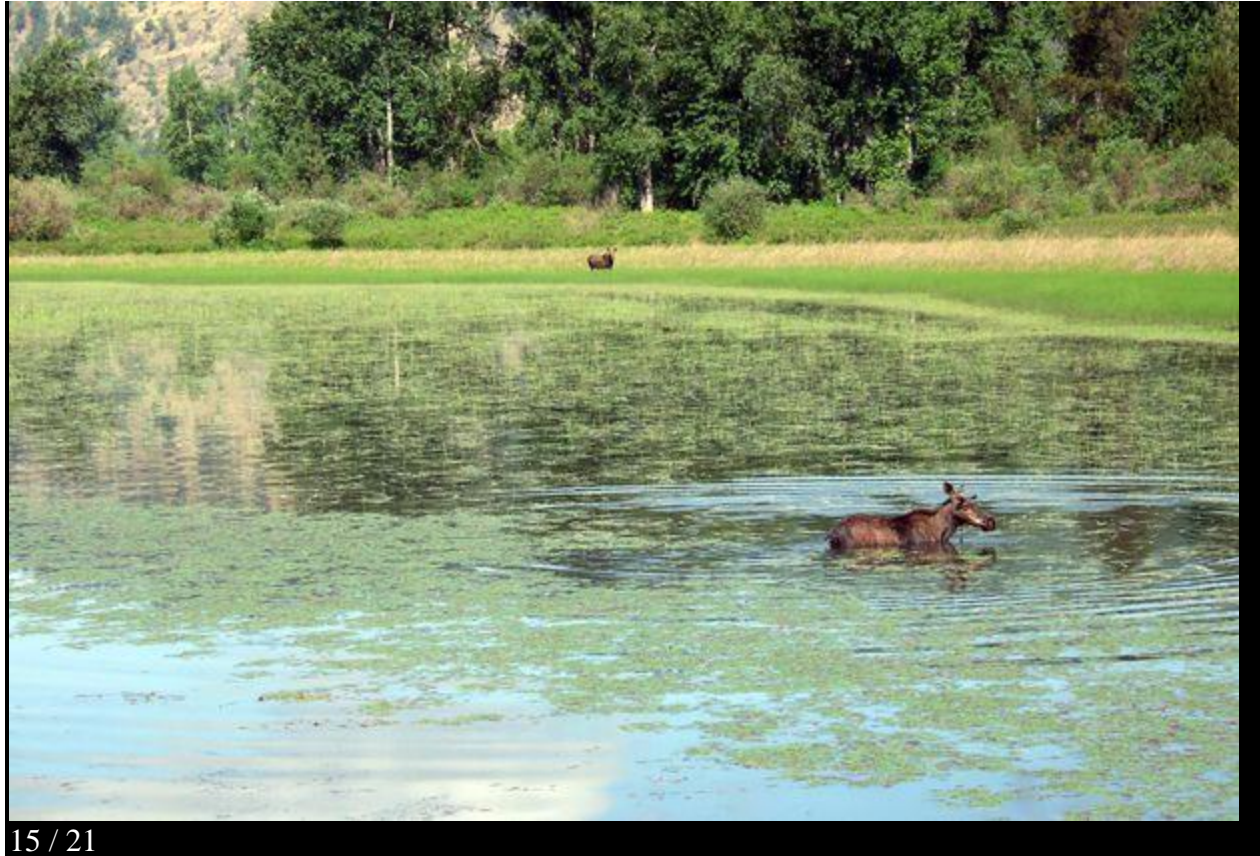
Katy Trail State Park | Missouri

Length: 240 miles

You can ride nearly the entire width of central Missouri on the well-maintained Katy Trail, the nation's longest developed rail trail. Much of it follows the Missouri River and allows glimpses of the state's diverse landscapes, from farmland and forests to riverside bluffs and prairies. Train buffs can glimpse the trail's history by looking out for pony truss and trestle bridges, restored depots, and a rail tunnel cut through solid rock. Bird watchers can download a checklist of 176 species that have been spotted along the trail.

Highlights: The town of Hermann, settled by scouts from the German Settlement Society of Philadelphia in the 1830s, still has its old-world

charm. There are also plenty of wineries to explore along the Hermann Wine Trail.



15 / 21

Moose - Trail of the Coeur d' Alenes by [David Taylor](#) (CC BY)

Trail of the Coeur d'Alenes | Idaho

Length: 72 miles

Explore Idaho's panhandle with a ride along the Trail of the Coeur d'Alenes, a swath of well-maintained asphalt that stretches almost from the state's border with Washington to the Montana line. Expect abundant forests, lakes, and meadows; you also may spy wildlife like moose, bears, and birds of prey. Scenic waysides provide opportunities for picnics and pictures, and there are plenty of trailheads along the way, too.

Highlights: Wallace, one of the most notable towns along the route, has a mining museum, the Northern Pacific Railroad Museum, and summer melodramas at the Sixth Street Theatre.



16 / 21

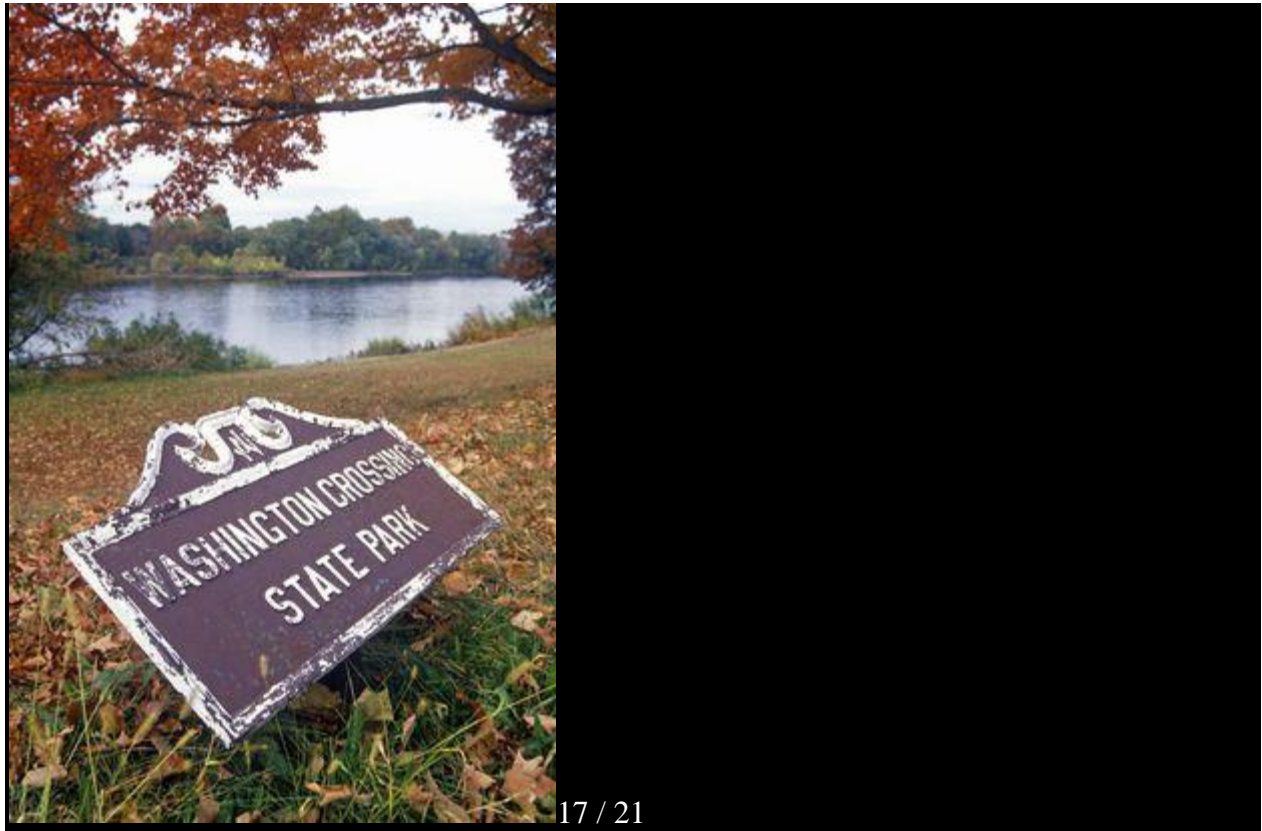
Elroy-Sparta State Trail by [Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources](#) (CC BY-ND)

Elroy-Sparta State Trail | Wisconsin

Length: 33 miles

The Elroy-Sparta State Trail is the nation's oldest rail trail, beginning its second life roughly 50 years ago when Wisconsin purchased the abandoned Chicago & North Western Railway line to convert into parkland. Today, it allows views of the state's placid wetlands, farmland, and forests. Tiny towns dot the route, and those seeking a longer route can hop on the La Crosse River State Trail in Sparta.

Highlights: The trail is home to three hand-dug rail tunnels that are pitch black, damp from trickling spring water, and full of impromptu songs and shouts from visitors enjoying the acoustics. The longest is three-fourths of a mile.



VisionsofAmerica/Joe Sohm/Getty Images

Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park | New Jersey

Length: 73 miles

The D&R, as it's known locally, is an easy way to get a taste for New Jersey's rustic side. A mostly canal-side path that connects several notable towns and historic points of interest, there's plenty to see and do for those who like to take frequent breaks from their bikes. Geocaching, kayaking,

birding, fishing, and horseback riding are also possible along certain stretches.

Highlights: One of the many historic highlights is the Washington Crossing State Park, near the Titusville trailhead. This is the spot where George Washington led the Continental Army across the Delaware River.



18 / 21

trail through ledge, NRT, 19 April 2015 by [mwms1916](#) (CC BY-NC-ND)

Northern Rail Trail | New Hampshire

Length: 58 miles

Quintessential New England scenery awaits on the Northern Rail Trail, connecting a hodgepodge of quiet forests, lakes, ponds, and quaint small towns. This isn't just a fair-weather trail, either — summer's cyclists,

equestrians, and runners give way to snowmobilers, cross-country skiers, and even dog sledders in the winter.

Highlights: Explore Shaker history at the Enfield Shaker Museum, just off the trail on Mascoma Lake. A restored village is part of the draw.



Banks-Vernonia State Trail, Oregon_Jonathan Rogers by [Rails-to-Trails Conservancy](#) (CC BY-NC-ND)

Banks-Vernonia State Trail | Oregon

Length: 21 miles

The Banks-Vernonia State Trail, Oregon's first rail-trail park, showcases thick forests, clear streams, farmland, and abundant fresh air on this link between the trail's namesake towns northwest of Portland. The Buxton Trestle, an 80-foot bridge that runs for more than 700 feet over a creek, is one of the most dramatic reminders of its origins as a timber railway.

Highlights:L.L. Stub Stewart State Park, close to the trail's midway point, offers plenty of room for hiking, mountain biking, and disc golf on an 18-hole course. Some of the most iconic parts of the Oregon coast, including gorgeous Cannon Beach, are a short drive away.

Related:The 20 Best Beaches on the West Coast



20 / 21

Wabash Trace Nature Trail | Iowa

Length: 63 miles

This jewel of southwest Iowa provides an idyllic route through the state's abundant farmland, from Council Bluffs outside Omaha on the Nebraska-Iowa border through a chain of small towns down to the Missouri border. Scenery along the northern part of the trail includes the windswept Loess

Hills, and history buffs can spy remnants of ghost towns that disappeared along with the once-bustling Wabash Railway.

Highlights: On Thursday nights from spring through fall, you can join in popular "Taco Rides" from Council Bluffs to Mineola, where dinner and camaraderie await. The journey is 10 miles each way.



21 / 21

Withlacochee State Trail Sign, Inverness by [Steven Martin](#) (CC BY-NC-ND)

Withlacochee State Trail | Florida

Length: 46 miles

This shady respite from theme parks and overcrowded beaches, a National Recreational Trail, is a true taste of "old Florida." About halfway between Tampa and Orlando, the Withlacochee Trail is a quiet mishmash of trees,

towns, and opportunities for spotting turtles, herons, and perhaps even a gator or two.

Highlights: The scenic Withlacoochee River is visible on certain stretches of the path and is one of the state's best spots for paddling. For a faster-paced way to explore the water, try an airboat tour.