



2024

TrailLink Unlimited



Guides



Prairie Farmer Recreational Trail

Iowa



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The Prairie Farmer Recreational Trail follows part of the former Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad corridor, which traces its origins as far back as 1866. Its history lives on in Cresco, where you can view a restored Milwaukee Road diesel engine at Beadle Park (on State Route 9/Second Avenue, between Second Street and Elm Street) just over a half mile from the trailhead. Its history also lives on in Calmar, where a small interpretive loop explores signage from the Milwaukee Road era, and a historical rail depot (which houses an antiques store) greets travelers as they begin or end their journey.

The trail makes its way through some of the last native prairie habitat of the region, with spectacular wildflower meadows and scattered woodland areas lining the pathway. There are also ample opportunities to see

wildlife and a wide variety of birds.

Start your journey in Cresco at Second Avenue SE/IA 9 and Eighth Street East, although be aware that there is limited parking at this trailhead. The path begins on a wide sidewalk and follows IA 9 to the edge of town. Note that additional parking is available at the access point at IA 9 and 345th Avenue, where the trail enters more of a tree-lined corridor paralleling the highway.

A little more than 8 miles in, you'll reach the town of Ridgeway, where the trail shares a roadway through town. Sharrows are marked on the road but are a bit faded. Turn right onto Short Street and then left onto County Street Road. When you reach the edge of town, take a sharp left onto 295th Street where it meets with County Road W14. The short gravel road will take you back to the off-road portion of the trail at Ridgeway Roadside Park, where you'll find a sheltered picnic area, a playground, water, parking, and pit toilets.

The trail continues through a mostly wooded corridor. Just after the town of Conover, there's a small interpretive loop with historical signage from the Milwaukee Road era. The loop provides a nice shaded rest area under the forested canopy.

As you enter the town of Calmar, you're greeted on your right side with the portion of the railway that remains in use. The trail passes through a small park that is home to the Winneshiek County Freedom Rock—a memorial to honor veterans and first responders. The memorial is a project of artist Ray Sorensen, who paints patriotic scenes on the stones and hopes to decorate one for each of Iowa's counties. The park has plenty of parking, a gazebo, and benches.

The trail ends at the restored train depot in Calmar. Inside the depot you'll find a range of displays on the city's railroad history as well as an antiques shop. A public restroom is available on the south side of the building, and plenty of



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Iowa

States: Iowa

Counties: Howard, Winneshiek

Length: 20 miles

Trail end points: SR 9/Second Ave. SE and Eighth St. E (Cresco to Maryville St. and Lewis St. (Calmar)

Trail surfaces: Asphalt

Trail category: Rail-Trail

Trail activities: Bike, Inline

Skating, Wheelchair

Accessible, Snowmobiling, Walking, Cross

Parking & Trail Access

To reach the northern trailhead in Cresco from Waterloo, take US 63 northbound for about 60 miles, and turn right onto IA 9. Go 9 miles to Cresco, and turn left into the trailhead parking lot just past Eighth St. E. Farther along SR 9, you can reach another small parking area at 345th Ave., after the highway makes a bend to the right.

To reach the southern trailhead in Calmar from Waterloo, take US 63 northbound for 34 miles. Turn right onto 240th St., go 6.5 miles, and turn left onto Roanoke Ave. After 4 miles, turn right onto SR 24, and go about 20 miles. In Calmar, turn right onto Main St., go three blocks, and turn left onto Maryville St. The Calmar train depot will be on your left, just past the railroad tracks. Parking is available on the north side of the station, and street parking is available throughout the town. The trail begins 0.2 mile east at Maryville St.

