



2024

TrailLink Unlimited



Guides



West Fork River Trail

West Virginia



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Many of the Mountain State's rail-trails are known for their long grades up mountain valleys, but the West Fork River/Ralph S. Larue Trail is not one of them. The 14-mile trail follows the slow-flowing West Fork River in northern West Virginia and gains only a few feet between Shinnston and Fairmont.

The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad (B&O) acquired the corridor along the West Fork River in 1860 but waited until the 1890s to lay track. By then, coal companies had opened mines throughout the river valley, and populations soared in the small river towns. The railroad served those miners and hauled the coal to markets. The Marion County Parks and Recreation Commission gained the property in 1995 and opened the trail in 1997, due in large part to efforts by commission director Ralph S.

Larue, for whom the trail is named.

The trail is also a segment of the 1,500-mile trail network through Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio, and New York that is being developed by the [Industrial Heartland Trails Coalition](#), a Rails-to-Trails Conservancy [TrailNation](#) project.

Visitors to the trail will find that the western 3.5-mile section in Harrison County is hard-packed crushed limestone, while the remainder in Marion County is paved. Horseback riding is allowed only in Marion County, and dogs must be leashed the entire length. The trail follows the serpentine river, which might be partly obscured by vegetation in the summer. Deer and smaller mammals are often seen along the path, and it's not uncommon for a raucous gaggle of geese to wander up from the river.

Starting in Shinnston, the trail is sandwiched between US 19 and the river and crosses a few residential streets before reaching the woods flanking the river in less than a mile. About 0.7 mile south of the trailhead on Pike Street, town founder Levi Shinn's log cabin, dating to the 1770s, still stands (not part of this route). Always a center of commerce, the town's economy grew with the coal boom. In 1944, it was devastated by the loss of 66 residents in a tornado.

Along the trail, you will see many historical markers, such as the Enterprise Coal Mine and coke ovens in about 3 miles, and will pass through Worthington Park, a favorite local fishing spot. As the river swings south just beyond the park, you'll see a dam used by a mill across the river, as well as abutments for a railroad bridge that served a mine.

The trail heads south for 1.4 miles through Chiefton, at one time a bustling coal mine company town, before swinging north and east to Monongah, where, in 1907, an explosion killed 361 miners in the worst mining disaster in the nation's history. A commemorative statue of a miner's widow holding her child stands on Main Avenue at Bridge Street, two blocks



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States: West Virginia

Counties: Harrison, Marion

Length: 14 miles

Trail end points: East end of pedestrian bridge, 0.2 mile east of Norway Rd (Fairmont) to S Pike St/US 19 near Lynn St (Shinnston)

Trail surfaces: Asphalt, Crushed Stone

Trail category: Rail-Trail

Trail activities: Bike, Wheelchair

Accessible, Mountain Biking, Walking, Cross Country Skiing

Parking & Trail Access

In Shinnston, parking is available by the Sue Ann Miller Trailhead (S Pike St/US 19 & Lynn St),

In Worthington, parking is available at Sunrise St & Pike St and by Worthington Park on Meadowridge Road/CR 90.

In Everson, parking is available at Everson St/CR 27 & Everson Rd.

In Monongah, parking is available at Bridge St & Riverview Ave.

In Fairmont, parking is available at Mary Lou Retton Park (Norway Loop Rd at Olympic Ln).

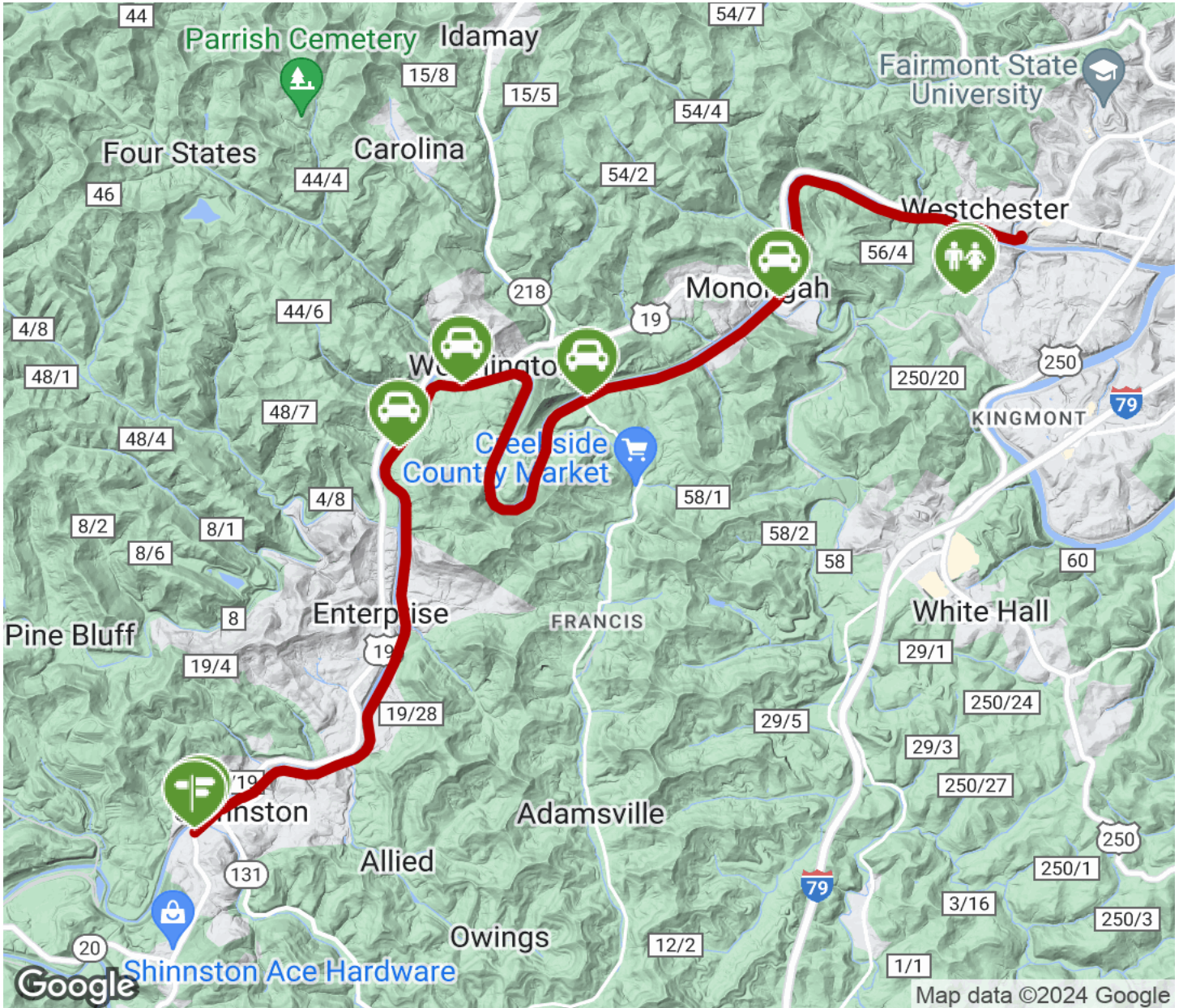
The starting point in Shinnston is accessible from US 19 on the southern end of town. To reach Shinnston from the Shinnston/Saltwell Road Exit off Interstate 79, turn left (west) and proceed 0.25 mile to the gas station. Turn left on Saltwell Road (SR 131) and follow this about 7 miles to US 19 in Shinnston. Turn right on US 19 (Pike Street) and drive 6 blocks. Turn left on Mahlon Street at St. Ann's Catholic Church, before the bridge across the West Fork River. Go 1 block and park on the street. The trail begins under the US 19 bridge.

To reach the northern end in Fairmont your best bet is to actually park in Monongah. In town on the east side of the West Fork River, turn off Bridge Street into the parking lot immediately after the bridge. The trail is right off the lot.



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Trailhead



Restroom



Parking



Water Fountain



Tunnel



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