

CENTRAL LAKES TRAIL - TRAIL DESCRIPTION

The Central Lakes Trail (CLT) runs 55 miles from Osakis west to Fergus Falls.

This description uses the Central Lakes trailside markers for reference. They have been developed from the old Burlington Northern Railroad mile markers.

The CLT begins at mile 129.5; where it is a continuation of the same numbering system from the Lake Wobegon Trail.

•M 129.5

The Central Lakes Trail begins where the Lake Wobegon Trail ends. This point is on the outskirts of Osakis, MN; about 1 mile east of the downtown. If you are looking for a place to park a car it is best to head downtown.

•M 129.6

The first of three nice trailside Gazebos found in Osakis. The trail also passes over a rural highway on an old wooden trestle here.

For the next mile or so you will be passing through the small town of Osakis. There are many trailside amenities, including benches, picnic tables, and gazebos,

•M 130.4 Downtown Osakis

At this location you can find a nice parking area (look for the four sided clock tower), the commercial district, the information center, etc. The Chamber of Commerce is located about a block to the south of the trail. Check it out for local and trail information.

Just to the north is a public boat launch and parking area for Lake Osakis.

•M 130.4 to M 130.8

Traveling west, you pass through a beautiful tunnel of trees for about one-half mile, where you leave Osakis.

•M 130.9

This is a fairly busy highway crossing; please be careful! You will then head uphill for a couple of hundred yards. This is the largest single climb on the entire trail.

•M 131.2

The trail is really out in the open and in the sunshine. No wonder crops grow so well here. The next several miles provide for great views of the surrounding farmland and prairie. You will likely be feeling you left the towns and highways well behind.

•M 132.9

The trail goes under a large, wooden bridge. Note the cross bars on the bridge that once carried power lines. The marking for "132.9" is a mile marker left over from the days when trains used the trail corridor.

•M 133.5 to M 134.3

The trail is elevated on an old railway grade; which provides for very nice views of the surrounding farms and wetlands.

•M 134.5

A very nice trailside shelter awaits.

•M 134.6

A couple of very small streams pass under the trail near here. Stop and enjoy the sounds if you desire.

•M 136.0 Town of Nelson

Meet the little town of Nelson as you cross Nelson Street, named after the rugged pioneer politician who became a Minnesota governor and U.S. Senator. There is a small commercial area just to the north where you might pick up something to eat or drink.

•M 138.0

The trail crests on a small hill, crosses a highway and dips for a short ride down a steep hill and into another valley of trees. Note the sign that says you're passing Westin Station.

•M 138.5 to M 142.5 Alexandria area

The trail passes through several miles of commercial, business, and residential areas. There are a number of street crossings to be careful for. The section also passes along many lakes and wooded areas, and provides some nice "rest stops" for trail users.

The trail goes back into seclusion at about mile 142.5

•M 139.0

Stop on this bridge for a view of Lake Geneva and Lake Victoria.

•M 140.8 to 141.0

Pass under a railroad trestle and then under busy Highways 27 and 29.

The Alex- Bike and Fitness Center is located just to the north, and between the bridge and underpass. There is a connecting path to the store.

•M 141.6

Watch for the statue of "Big Ole," the Viking at the north end of downtown. With plenty of parking, this is another good spot from which to start a trail ride. The Kensington Runestone, the Douglas County Historical Museum and the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce are within a block of the trail here. Ahead, note the former depot that once was a stop for trains, and is now a restaurant.

The trail skirts the south side of Lake Angus, and has a connecting path to a public swimming beach.

•M 142.3

A very busy road crossing, and the end of the commercial area.

•M 142.5 to M 148.0

This is a very scenic section of the trail. It passes along many lakes, through wooded hills, and offers several trailside rest stops. Please take time to enjoy!

•**M 148.5** Garfield

A nice trailside picnic shelter welcomes cyclists to Garfield with a place to rest and find trail information. There is parking and a waterless toilet. A convenience store can be found just to the south, and the town center just to the north, where a couple of cafes are located.

The next ten miles of the trail are predominately in open country, with long views of prairie, farms, and scattered wetlands and lakes. You will be within sight of a paralleling highway on this stretch.

•**M 151.6**

The raised former railroad grade offers nice views of Aldrich and Nelson Lakes.

•**M 153.9** Brandon

You pass along the south side of town, with convenience stores visible to the south. The downtown is about a block to the north. A small trailside park and shelter are located at mile 153.8.

•**M 154 to 156.2** Stowe Lake Wildlife Area.

The trail passes along the south side of this prairie wetland area, offering many opportunities for bird and other wildlife watching. A display area can be found at Mile 156.2.

•**M 156.9**

You pass over the very small Chippewa River.

•**M 158.8** Entering Evansville

A nice picnic shelter with parking and a toilet is located along the trail. Informational signs are also present. The downtown area is located a few blocks to the southwest, where you can find a convenience store, and a couple of eating establishments.

•**M 159.0**

A street crosses in the downtown area of Evansville.

•**M 159.5**

An old railroad bridge crosses a creek.

•**M 159.8**

Douglas County Highway #1 crosses the trail. Please be careful!

The next 7 miles of trail pass through a very scenic area of woodland, lakes, and wetlands. The scenery is quite different from the more open landscape just to the east.

•**M 163.4** Melby

The trail skirts the south side of the very small community of Melby.

•M 165.3

The trail passes between two large lakes, Lake Christina to the north and Pelican Lake on the south. There is a boat landing at the Grant County line with a parking lot. Pelican Lake's claim to fame is the large walleye taken from this lake that appeared in the movie "Grumpy Old Men". The fish was returned after its brush with fame and is said to be still swimming around the lake. The Seven Sisters hills are located on the north side of Lake Christina, several miles to the north. This lake is well known for its large population of ducks during migration times.

•M 167.5

You pass over Highway #178 on a large bridge.

•M 167.6 Community of Ashby

A bright sign welcomes you to the Ashby business district. A small parking area with picnic tables is here as well. If you are biking into town you will likely want to exit the trail at this point. A little further up the trail there is a grassy rest area. If you are leaving your bike and walking the block or two to the main commercial area this may be a more convenient stopping point.

In either case, the main street lies only a block south of the trail. You can find a café or two, a grocery store, two convenience stores, a hardware store, Ashby City offices, etc. There is a nice city park just to the south of the main street with bathrooms. A Bed and Breakfast is adjacent to the Park.

•M 167.7

If you do not exit the Central Lakes Trail in Ashby, you will not see much of town, as the trail passes through a fairly deep cut of land. You will however get an intimate view of the Ashby Elevator and the sweet smells of grain processing. This is another reminder that you are in grain country.

•M 167.9

Leaving Ashby, the trail turns to the Northwest running straight and flat through slightly rolling farm fields and marsh lands for about 6 miles. This region is quintessential rural farm landscape, dotted with many wetlands. There is limited shade and refuge from the wind on this stretch between Ashby and Dalton.

•M 169.1

You are now entering the Otter Tail Empire where Grant County Hwy 48 becomes Otter Tail County 48 also called Otter Tail County Veterans Memorial Drive. It will also connect with the Otter Tail Scenic Byway at Dalton.

•M 175.1 Town of Dalton and Highway 35 crossing

The Threshermens Grounds entrance is on one side of the highway, and a very nice city park on the other side.

The Lake Region Pioneer Thresherman's Association's annual Threshing Show is held the first weekend after Labor Day. Their Threshermen's breakfast is worth scheduling for.

You will also find a sign there telling of the great ski jumping days at the Walter Erickson Ski Jump which was once the highest ski jump in Western Minnesota at 64 feet. The jump was blown down in 1967 by 80 mph winds.

Skiing was a regular form of transportation for the early Norwegian immigrants to the area. They would often ski to Dalton in the winter for supplies.

Many locals use the entrance to the Threshing Show grounds as an unofficial trailhead.

The city park has a shelter, toilets, drinking water, and a playground.

To visit the downtown, head north a few blocks on Highway 35. You can find a small grocery store, a classic small town café, and a few other facilities.

•**M 175.4**

About three tenths of a mile from the entrance of the Dalton Threshing Show area you pass under Main Street. This provides a second opportunity to get to the downtown area.

•**M175.4 to 182**

The trail now takes you a long way from the highway. You will be passing through miles of rolling woodland and along a multitude of lakes and wetlands. Bring along your binoculars, find a quiet spot and watch nature in its splendor. Wildlife and Wildflowers abound here. If you visit in June you might wish to keep an eye out for the many yellow, and rarer pink Lady Slipper flowers.

•**M 178.0**

A highlight of this section of trail is the Stony Bridge over the Pomme de Terre River. The French explorers named this river after the potatoes or apples of the earth the Indians shared with them. You will easily miss this stream if you are not looking down for it, or listening for its babble.

The railroad bed is very high along here and provides many beautiful views of the river valley. There is a bench with a spectacular view a few tenths of a mile past the stream.

•**M 179.2**

The trail crosses a small gravel road.

•**M 181.6**

The trail crosses a small gravel road.

•**M181.9**

The trail crosses Highway 29.

•**M 182 to 182.5**

You pass along Lye Lake, which offers a wide array of bird life. Birders will want to pack their binoculars and spend some time here. The trail stays along the north shore in a tunnel of trees. Across the Lake (to the south) is Swan Lake.

•**M 183.0**

A sign indicates the continental divide. The wetland only a few hundred yards to the south flows into a chain of rivers ending in the Mississippi (Gulf of Mexico). The Lakes and wetland just to the north flow into the Otter Tail River, eventually ending up in Hudson's Bay.

•**M 183.2 Entering Fergus Falls**

A sign indicates a short connecting trail to Pebble Shores Drive (a residential area). This can provide trail users access to the Pebble Lake Swimming Beach by riding about 0.6 miles on Pebble Shores drive, then walking or riding down the hill at the golf course maintenance building.

Riders can also continue on Pebble Shores Drive about another one-half mile, and then catch a city bike path into town.

•M 183.5

The trail passes along Pebble Lake on a high embankment, providing wonderful views of the lake. DeLagoon Park can be seen on the north side of the Lake, the Swimming Beach and Golf course on the southwest side.

•M 183.9

A well signed “turn off” to DeLagoon Park and trailhead. This is a very large and beautiful park, with campground, toilets, drinking water access, picnic shelters, boat ramp, softball field complex, etc. The connecting trail from the Central Lakes Trail is however unpaved at this time, and is about one-eighth of a mile long.

There is a city bike path that connects this park to the golf course, swimming area, and into the city along Pebble Lake Road.

•M 184.3 to 184.7

The trail passes along a section of the Federal Prairie Wetlands area. There is a kiosk providing some information and a nice overlook of the wetlands. Wildlife is quite abundant here.

•M 184.7

Trail passes under MN Highway 210.

•M 184.7

The Central Lakes Trail officially ends. The trail currently ends in the parking lot of a storage facility on the north side of the highway. A new trail into town has been recently completed however, allowing trail users to continue.

SPECIAL NOTE

Continuing into Fergus Falls

You will quickly (within one mile) encounter convenience stores and some fast food restaurants. You will also see Grotto Lake Park on the left, with a large Otter statue, and a nice park. The Downtown area lies about one-half mile farther to the northwest. The primary hotel and “big box” shopping zone lies about another 2 miles to the northwest along Lincoln Avenue.