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**TOP 10 RAIL-TRAILS FOR AMERICAN HISTORY**

*This Fourth of July Weekend, Rail-Trails Offer a Journey To America's Past*

From the finery of America's oldest cities to the wild open spaces of our pioneering past, rail-trails are the perfect way to relive key moments in the nation's history.

This Independence Day weekend, celebrate the birth and growth of America by riding or striding into the past. These former railroad corridors are deeply rooted in American tradition, trials and triumphs, and they provide accessible and inexpensive getaways.

Here's a list of **The Top 10 Rail-Trails for American History:**

**1. Heritage Rail Trail County Park – Pennsylvania**

It is perhaps the most famous train journey in American history: Abraham Lincoln on his way to the small town of Gettysburg to deliver a speech at the dedication of a military cemetery. Along the Heritage Rail Trail County Park in York County, riders and hikers can now follow Lincoln's journey that day, seeing the same views and landscapes he pondered through the train window as he composed the speech that began "Four score and seven years ago..." Sadly, Lincoln's final journey would be made along that same Northern Central line just months later. After Lincoln's assassination, the train carried the funeral cortège from Washington, D.C. to his hometown, Springfield, Illinois, for burial.

**Trail map, info:** [www.traillink.com/trail/heritage-rail-trail-county-park.aspx](http://www.traillink.com/trail/heritage-rail-trail-county-park.aspx)

[TrailLink.com](http://TrailLink.com) is Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's free trail-finder website. It provides verified GIS maps, user reviews and photos of more than 24,000 miles of trails across the country.

## **2. Katy Trail State Park – Missouri**

The expedition of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark changed forever what modern Americans would know of their nation. Heading west from St Louis toward Kansas City, the Katy Trail parallels the route taken by these two iconic explorers. Following the Missouri River as they did, trail users can appreciate the toil and time it would have taken to row, pull or push the keelboat and canoes laden with the expedition's supplies. Along the trail, exhibits and signage bring visitors deep into the history of this famous route.

**Trail map, info:** [www.traillink.com/trail/katy-trail-state-park.aspx](http://www.traillink.com/trail/katy-trail-state-park.aspx)

## **3. East Bay Bike Path – Rhode Island**

Bristol calls itself “the most patriotic town in America,” and it mounts a solid case. Bristol boasts the oldest continuous Fourth of July celebration – the first Independence Day festivities in Bristol took place in 1785. From Providence, you can pedal the East Bay Bike Path along the shores of Narragansett Bay into Bristol, the perfect way to arrive for a two-day celebration that includes music, the Military, Civic and Firemen's Parade, a Drum Corps show, a firefighters muster, a 4th of July Ball, and, of course, fireworks.

**Trail map, info:** [www.traillink.com/trail/east-bay-bike-path.aspx](http://www.traillink.com/trail/east-bay-bike-path.aspx)

## **4. Historic Battlefield Trail – Texas**

The site of the first battle of the Mexican-American War in 1846, Palo Alto Battlefield National Historical Park is a key site of a war that literally changed the landscape of North America. Connecting the park with downtown Brownsville, there is a rich history to explore at both ends of the Historic Battlefield Trail. During the Civil War,

Brownsville was used as a smuggling point for Confederate goods into Mexico, and the city's streets are rich with historic buildings and a number of lovely churches.

**Trail map, info:** [www.traillink.com/trail/historic-battlefield-trail.aspx](http://www.traillink.com/trail/historic-battlefield-trail.aspx)

## **5. White River Trail – Nebraska**

If you happen to be in the area, the White River Trail in northwestern Nebraska provides a journey into a notorious episode of American history – the surrender and death in custody of Crazy Horse, the famous leader of the Oglala Lakota tribe. Fort Robinson State Park—the western end of the White River Trail—encompasses the fort and military camp that was home to the Red Cloud Agency in the 1870s. The fort was later the regimental headquarters of the Buffalo Soldiers, and served as the site of a German prisoner-of-war camp during World War II.

**Trail map, info:** [www.traillink.com/trail/white-river-state-trail.aspx](http://www.traillink.com/trail/white-river-state-trail.aspx)

## **6. Schuylkill River Trail – Pennsylvania**

Philadelphia is, of course, one of the best places for reflecting on the grand moments of America's past. For those eager to pedal out of town for their history excursion, the Schuylkill River Trail takes you from the heart of the city to Valley Forge National Historic Park, where thousands of Continental Army soldiers camped during the American Revolutionary War. One of the most popular attractions of the park is the restored colonial home used by General George Washington as his headquarters during the encampment.

**Trail map, info:** [www.traillink.com/trail/schuylkill-river-trail---valley-forge-to-philadelphia.aspx](http://www.traillink.com/trail/schuylkill-river-trail---valley-forge-to-philadelphia.aspx)

## **7. Piscataquog Trail – New Hampshire**

What better way to spend the ultimate day of American celebration than with a trip to a minor league ballpark? In New Hampshire, the Double-A Fisher Cats of Manchester are

hosting an Independence Day classic against rivals, the Binghamton Mets. Avoid the parking hassles and ride the lovely Piscataquog Trail from the western edge of the city across the Merrimac River and right into downtown, just a few yards from the stadium.

**Trail map, info:** [www.traillink.com/trail/piscataquog-trail.aspx](http://www.traillink.com/trail/piscataquog-trail.aspx)

## **8. Historic Railroad Tunnel Trail - Nevada**

War and exploration were two bold forces that shaped America. Another was construction. Few projects represent the pioneering spirit of America like the Hoover Dam. In the early 1930s, construction planners needed a way to transport materials from Boulder City to the dam site on the Colorado River. So they laid tracks across the desert and blasted cuts and tunnels through the red volcanic ridges above the river. Almost 90 years later, the Historic Railroad Tunnel Trail lets riders and hikers explore this historically, and visually, impressive site. The trail travels through the same massive tunnels the workers did, and hugs the hills on the shoreline of the vast Lake Mead.

**Trail map, info:** [www.traillink.com/trail/historic-railroad-tunnel-trail.aspx](http://www.traillink.com/trail/historic-railroad-tunnel-trail.aspx)

## **9. Blue River Rail Trail - Kansas**

Established as a trading post and ferry terminal in 1851, the city of Marysville in northern Kansas was a remarkable hub of migration and exploration, located on the Oregon Trail, the Mormon Trail, the route of the Pony Express, the St. Joe Road, the Overland Stage, the Military Road, and the Otoe-Missouria Trail. The old Pony Express Station there still stands. British explorer Sir Richard Francis Burton, who stopped there in 1860, once called Marysville “a country-town which thrives by selling whiskey to ruffians of all descriptions.” Don’t let that deter you. In honor of Independence Day, Marysville will throw “An Old Fashioned 4th of July” party, which includes a Walk-Ride-Run along the Blue River Rail Trail. This 8.7-mile rail-trail meanders along the course of the Big Blue River, the origin of the city’s settlement.

**Trail map, info:** [www.traillink.com/trail/blue-river-rail-trail.aspx](http://www.traillink.com/trail/blue-river-rail-trail.aspx)

## **10. The D & L Trail - Pennsylvania**

If you've got the time, the 165-mile D&L Trail through eastern Pennsylvania is a journey through many eras of American history. Here are just a few historic highlights of this wonderful cross-state rail-trail:

- In Catasauqua, about 70 miles north-east of Philadelphia, the trail runs right by the George Taylor House, a National Historic Landmark that was the residence of one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence.
- In Allentown, see where the Liberty Bell was hidden from British forces during the Revolutionary War.
- In Easton, the Declaration of Independence was read from the steps of Northampton County's first Court House on July 8, 1776, just the third time it had been read to the American public. Easton Heritage Day, held this year on Sunday, July 7, celebrates that historic moment with colonial reenactments, period pageants and other festivities.
- The trail passes by Washington Crossing Historic Park, where George Washington and a small army of men crossed the Delaware in a surprise attack that changed the course of the Revolutionary War. You may have seen the famous painting by Emanuel Leutze, but have you ever walked into the McConkey Ferry Inn, where Washington and his aides made plans the night of the crossing?

**Trail map, info:** [www.delawareandlehigh.org/index.php/trail](http://www.delawareandlehigh.org/index.php/trail)

A few other rail-trails worth a mention:

### **Richard Martin Trail (Limestone Rail-Trail) - Alabama**

This 10-mile rail-trail passes through Sulphur Creek, the site of Alabama's bloodiest Civil War conflict. During the 1864 Battle of Sulphur Creek Trestle, a Tennessee & Alabama Central Railroad supply train moving Union Army troops and goods from Nashville to Atlanta came under attack; more than 200 soldiers were killed.

**Trail map, info:** [www.trailink.com/trail/richard-martin-trail.aspx](http://www.trailink.com/trail/richard-martin-trail.aspx)

### **Capital Crescent Trail - Washington, D.C.**

This 11-mile rail-trail takes you from the peaceful woods of Silver Spring, Md., to the historical waterfront of Georgetown in Washington, D.C.—and only a short bridge ride over the Potomac River to Arlington National Cemetery, where you can take part in Memorial Day activities. It's a great route to reach the fireworks show in the nation's capital without the hassle of crowds or parking.

**Trail map, info:** [www.traillink.com/trail/capital-crescent-trail.aspx](http://www.traillink.com/trail/capital-crescent-trail.aspx)

### **Minuteman Bikeway - Boston**

This 11-mile rail-trail offers a rolling history lesson. The corridor carries visitors through Lexington and near the Lexington Battle Green, where colonial militia—the minutemen—fired some of the first shots of the American Revolution in 1775.

**Trail map, info:** [www.traillink.com/trail/minuteman-bikeway.aspx](http://www.traillink.com/trail/minuteman-bikeway.aspx)

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*Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, a nonprofit organization with more than 100,000 members, is the nation's largest trails organization dedicated to connecting people and communities by creating a nationwide network of public trails, many from former rail lines and connecting corridors. Founded in 1986, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's national office is located in Washington, D.C., with regional offices in California, Florida, Ohio and Pennsylvania. For more information visit [www.railstotrails.org](http://www.railstotrails.org).*