

Wabash Trace Nature Trail



Rails to Trails

This former rail line was started in 1878 as part of the Council Bluffs to St. Louis Railway, which was later acquired by the Wabash Railroad. Although it was eventually taken over by the Norfolk & Western after World War II and later by the Iowa Southern Railway, the line continued to be known as the Wabash by locals.

In 1988, two non-profits groups, the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation and Southwest Iowa Nature Trails Project, Inc., rail-banked the corridor and made possible the preservation and development of the former railroad as the Wabash Trace Nature Trail. Today, the Wabash Trace is used by hikers, runners, bicyclists, cross-country skiers and nature enthusiasts. The linear park of the Wabash Trace provides many recreational opportunities, along with habitat for many birds and animals. The corridor also harbors remnants of native prairie. Residents and tourists alike enjoy the trail for social, educational, transportation or health & wellness purposes. The communities and small businesses along the trail benefit from the economic boost the trail provides. Trail maintenance is done primarily by volunteers and members of the SWINT Board, and paid for by donations, grants and trail pass fees. Since the Wabash Trace is not funded by tax dollars, users are encouraged to purchase an annual or daily trail pass. More information is available online at www.wabashtrace.org.

Background: Wabash Trace through Imogene. Photos by Rebecca Castle.

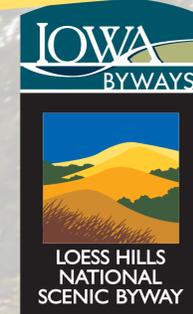


Traces of history along the way

The Wabash Trace is dotted with historic sites such as service depots that once provided settlers with various essentials to survive life on the prairie. Some of these depots grew into towns while others dwindled and disappeared, unable to withstand the changes that highway transportation brought about. If you look closely, you may be able to find some remnants of ghost towns such as Neoga, Dumfries, White Cloud, Lawrence, Strahan, Solomon, Summit and Bingham. Even in the towns that survived, the end of the railroad left traces of infrastructure behind, such as depots and grain elevators. In Malvern, the Depot has been repurposed into an overnight lodging accommodation, and in Shenandoah the Wabash Depot was moved from its original location to the Sportsmans Park trailhead and restored. It is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



Spanning four counties in Southwest Iowa, the Wabash Trace has its northern end in Council Bluffs and then winds southeast through the picturesque Loess Hills to Blanchard, at the Missouri Border. These fragile hills are formed of windblown loess, a very fine, fertile, and highly erodable soil, which built up over thousands of years to heights exceeding 200 feet in some places. Deep loess formations of this expanse can only be found here in western Iowa and at similar latitudes in China along the mid-section of the Huang He, or Yellow River.



The Loess Hills National Scenic Byway™ is a 220 mile paved route through the Loess Hills. The 16 excursion loops make up an additional 185 miles (some gravel) for the more adventuresome!



www.iowabyways.org
www.visitloesshills.org

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www.goldenhillsrcd.org

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