

TRAIL HISTORY

Central Iowa's **Chichaqua Valley Trail** takes you across rolling hills, wooded clearings, picturesque rivers, sprawling meadows, rolling farmland, and beautiful hardwood timber on a twenty-six mile journey from Berwick to Baxter. The CVT, designated a National Recreation Trail in 2007, is a peaceful change of pace from urban trails of the nearby Des Moines metro area.

The relatively level asphalt trail follows a right-of-way constructed by the Diagonal Railroad in 1883. The rail line was abandoned in 1984, reopening three years later as the Chichaqua Valley Trail, a multi-purpose recreational path. Chichaqua (pronounced "cha-chak-wah") derives from a Fox Indian word early settlers mistook to mean "skunk". It actually refers to the smell of wild onions along the Skunk River, which the trail crosses.

The trail starts a mile west of **Berwick** at a junction with the Gay Lea Wilson Trail to Altoona and Des Moines, and a connection to Ankeny and the High Trestle and Neal Smith Trails. Rest stops and parking can be found in Berwick, Bondurant, NE 88th Street, Valeria, Mingo, Ira and Baxter.

From the junction west of Berwick, the Chichaqua Valley Trail winds downward to an impressive wooden trestle with a commanding view of **Fourmile Creek**. Once across the bridge, the trail passes Mally's Weh-Weh-Neh-Kee Park and the town of Berwick, before beginning a gentle uphill climb out of the valley. Completed in 2015, the section between Berwick and Bondurant is open country punctuated by bucolic vistas of lush Iowa landscape. **Bondurant** features a trailhead shelter inspired by the town's original train depot that served passengers from 1883 to 1962. From the depot the trail continues two and a half miles east on a section built in 2014. This portion skirts the southern shore of **Lake Petoka**, then ducks under Highway 65/330 before arriving at the 88th Street trailhead.

Here the original 1987-built trail begins. This 20-mile segment (paved in 1998) begins with a sinuous route through a dense forest that shields the trail from the hot sun and strong winds. Midway downhill is the little hamlet of Santiago, where the trail crosses a waterfall named Santiago Falls, and proceeds by historic concrete railroad mile markers indicating the distance to Kansas City. After exiting the timbered bluff, the CVT follows the level valley floor to a spectacular crossing of the **Skunk River**.

Continuing over marshy terrain on a straight stretch, the trail traverses from Polk to Jasper County. An uphill climb commences at **Valeria**, taking the trail to a highpoint with an expansive 360-degree panorama of the pastoral countryside. Continuing downhill, the path meanders through a canopy of towering Cottonwood trees and scenic valley views before arriving in **Mingo**. East of town is **Indian Creek** and a four-mile section resurfaced in 2016 after floodwaters caused heavy damage. **Ira** marks the beginning of a gradual five-mile incline into **Baxter** to view the trailhead caboose.

TRAIL TOWNS

BAXTER

First known as Independence Center, the name was changed in February 16, 1872, due to confusion by the Postal Service with the similarly named town of Independence. Originally, Postmaster Sidney Baxter Higgins suggested the new name of Sidney, but that was refused. Eventually he submitted his middle name, which was accepted, and the town became Baxter. In 1883, the community was excited about the Diagonal Railroad building from Marshalltown to Des Moines. However, they couldn't understand why the station was being located a mile and a half to the northeast of town. Recognizing the importance of being on the rail line, the town migrated towards the station. Baxter is now the northern trailhead of the Chichaqua Valley Trail.

BERWICK

Located near the confluence Fourmile Creek and Muchikinock Creeks, Berwick was first settled in 1846. Henry Taylor platted the town in 1884 and secured a station on the newly constructed Diagonal Railroad. He served as the first postmaster and named the town after his hometown of Berwick, Maine. In the early 20th century, Berwick was home to several coal mines, including the 200-acre Norwood-White's Klondike No. 1. For nearly twenty years Berwick compared in size to the neighboring towns of Altoona and Ankeny. By 1920, the mines had played out and these other communities began to surpass Berwick in size.

BONDURANT

Pioneer settler A.C. Bondurant arrived in Iowa in 1857. With the 1883 building of the Diagonal Railroad, the town of Bondurant was platted and A.C. Bondurant offered a lot to anyone who would build on it. The town's first business was a general store and post office, with the second floor serving as a church, social center and undertaker's parlor. After the turn of the century, the community continued to grow and prosper. Through the years, A.C. Bondurant's homestead became a thriving rural community, blending the rich heritage of farming with commercial enterprises. Today it is the largest city along the trail.

IRA

Ira was established in December 3, 1883, after a plat was drawn to coincide with the Diagonal Railroad's placement of a depot and water tank. Resident William F. Rippey proposed the new town be named after him, but a community of the same name already existed. After a second choice of Millard was also rejected, Ira was agreed upon in 1884. Some suggest Ira was named for a railroad superintendent, while others attribute the name to a local resident.

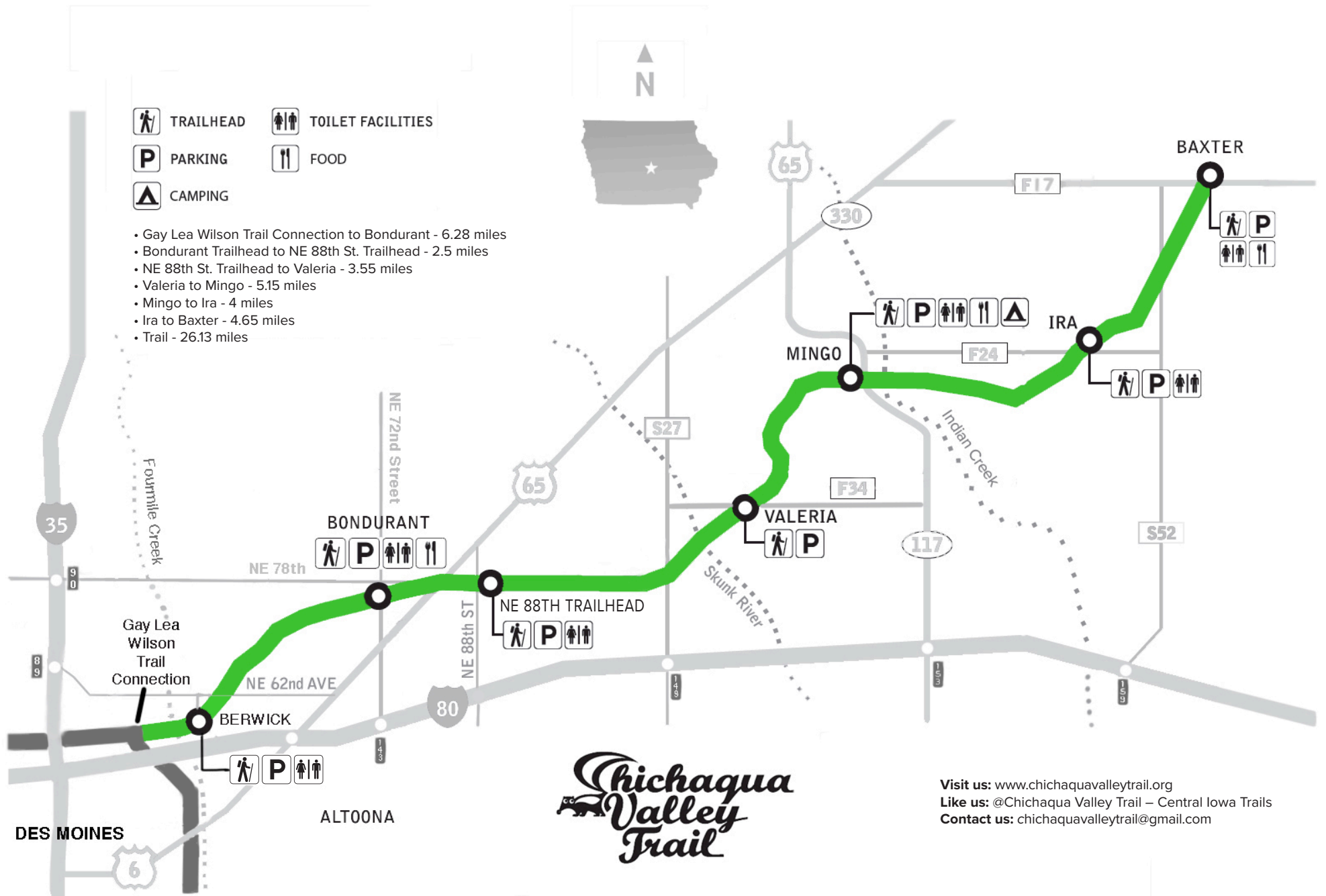
MINGO

Mingo's history started with the small coal-mining village of Greencastle in 1855. When the Diagonal Railroad built two miles north of Greencastle in 1883, citizens decided to relocate their town adjacent to the railroad. By May of 1884, fifteen businesses, two churches, five doctors and a large school had moved to form Mingo, named by the postmaster after the town of the same name in Ohio. In 1904, a second railroad, the Newton and Northwestern, was constructed through town, establishing Mingo as an important Jasper county town.

VALERIA

In the early 1860s, the William H. Johnson family left the South to escape the Civil War, and settled at the present-day site of Valeria. William's daughter, Edna Valeria, fell in love with a young civil engineer named McBride, who worked for the Diagonal Railroad. She and her beau convinced her father to allow the tracks to cross the Johnson land. An agreement was reached based on the condition the town be named Valeria. Edna ultimately married McBride, and subsequently Valeria adopted the slogan, "Town of Railroad Romance". In addition to the Diagonal mainline, there was a three-mile spur line to tap coal along the Skunk River, and a junction with the Colfax and Northern Railroad. Much of the town was destroyed in a massive tornado in May of 1896.





Visit us: www.chichaquavalleytrail.org
 Like us: @Chichaqua Valley Trail – Central Iowa Trails
 Contact us: chichaquavalleytrail@gmail.com

Bondurant:

- ◆ Boxcar BBQ - 103 Main St SE
- ◆ Brick Street Market & Café - 114 Brick St SE
- ◆ Founders Irish Pub - 110 1st St SE
- ◆ Reclaimed Rails Brewing Company – 101 Main St SE

Mingo:

- ◆ Greencastle Tavern - 115 N Station St

Baxter:

- ◆ Baxter Family Market – 103 N Main St
- ◆ Blue Ribbon Café – 106 W Buchanan St
- ◆ Bea's Place - 106 N Main St
- ◆ Kountry Korner – 312 E Buchanan St

Area Bike Shops:

- ◆ Bike Country - Ankeny
- ◆ Kyle's Bikes - Ankeny
- ◆ Mojo Cycling - Newton
- ◆ Rasmussen Bike Shop - Altoona