

Walk & Talk Self-Guided Tours

The Winchell Trail

Difficulty: 2 miles roundtrip on mostly unpaved trail with moderate climb

For as long as people have lived this area, there's likely been a trail running along the Mississippi River from Saint Anthony Falls the convergence of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers. This tour covers the northern half of what is today called the Winchell Trail.

To start: Look for an unmarked, unpaved trail going into the woods about halfway between 32nd and Lake. That trail descends into the river gorge. Once at the bottom, you are on the Winchell Trail.

A. You are standing in the only **gorge** found anywhere on the Mississippi River. The bottom of the gorge is about 70 feet below street level, so it's easy to forget you're in the middle of a city. The gorge is home to a wide range of plants, 170 species of birds, and a host of mammals, including muskrats, minks, foxes, bats, and coyotes.

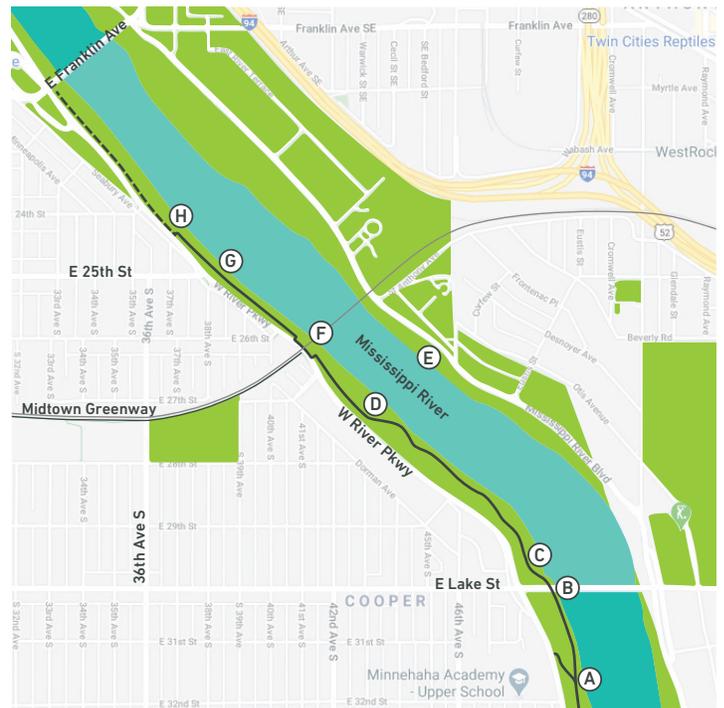
B. Lake Street – Marshall Avenue Bridge, opened in 1992. This replaced a 2,500-ton riveted wrought iron bridge built in 1889. In its final years, crossing the old bridge had become a somewhat precarious endeavor. But in the end, it took engineers several attempts to demolish it, much to the amusement of onlookers, which included Lorena Sewall, the 100-year-old daughter of its designer, Joseph Sewall.

C. The **Minneapolis Rowing Club Boathouse** was built in 2001. From the boathouse, you'll start to ascend on a dirt road. At the road's switchback, keep walking north to pick up the Winchell Trail on the far side of an unpaved parking area.

D. White Sands Beach is made of material dredged from the river bottom in the early 20th Century. White Sands Beach was selected by City Pages as the best beach in the Twin Cities metro area in 2017. Wading or swimming in the river is definitely not advised.

E. Meeker Dam began operating at this site in 1907. As a "low dam," it allowed for boat navigation upriver but did not generate electricity. When the Ford Dam was made taller in 1912, the top five feet of the soon-to-be-underwater Meeker Dam were blasted off so as not to impede river traffic. Nowadays the Meeker Dam's lock can be visible on the Saint Paul side of the river during periods of low water. The lock's iron moorings sometimes protrude from the river.

F. The **Short Line Bridge** was built in the 1880s, and its two stone pilings are truly massive. To follow the Winchell Trail, ascend stone steps back up to the street level, walk under the railroad bridge, and then take a right on an unpaved trail.



G. As you continue your hike along the river, consider the Winchell Trail's namesake. **Newton Horace Winchell** was a leading geologist of the late 19th Century. A prolific writer, he taught at the University of Minnesota and was the first to accurately date Minnesota's geologic past. He accompanied General George Custer on his expedition to the Black Hills of South Dakota in 1874. He wrote the first scholarly book about the Ojibwe and the Dakota. Newton and his wife, Charlotte, raised five children, all of whom became or married geologists.

H. The Winchell Trail ends although there is a foot path up to the west end of the Franklin Avenue Bridge bridge.

To return to the start of the walk, head south on the paved trail along West River Parkway or retrace your steps on the trail.

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