

Walk & Talk Self-Guided Tours

RiverFirst: Central Riverfront Tour

Difficulty: 2 mile loop on sidewalks and paved trail with stairs.

This Walk & Talk will explore the Central Mississippi Riverfront Regional Park and showcase some of the most visionary parks-building efforts in generations. Sights you'll see include Nicollet Island, the Stone Arch Bridge, St. Anthony Falls, and the Water Works at Mill Ruins Park.

★ Start – Nicollet Island Public Parking Lot –

From here, go west to W. Island Ave and take the stairs under the Hennepin Ave. Bridge to the walking/biking path over Hennepin Ave. Bridge.

A. Hennepin Ave. Bridge – From here, you can see West River Parkway and Boom Island. As you walk across the bridge towards West River Parkway, you can see the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis upriver and the United States Postal Service downriver. Descend to W. River Pkwy and head downriver towards the Third Ave. Bridge.

B. Stop under Third Ave. Bridge – This is the oldest bridge in Minneapolis that crosses the river, built 1914-1918. It is slated for repair within the next couple of years. Water Works at Mill Ruins Park site begins here and continues downriver to Portland Ave.

C. Mill Ruins Park – This area is commonly known as the birthplace of industrial Minneapolis. Underneath the parking lot lies the remains of a gatehouse, which channeled the river towards multiple mills.

Water Works Park and Pavilion – The long-awaited expansion of Mill Ruins Park, Water Works Park and Pavilion (as well as the Overlook at 26th Ave N upriver) was made possible through the Minneapolis Parks Foundation's RiverFirst Capital Campaign. Water Works opened in the Spring of 2021. It includes a park pavilion—with public restrooms, the Lenzmeier Family Foundation Classroom, and the Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation Atrium, and the renowned restaurant, *Owamni by The Sioux Chef*—along with General Mills Plaza, Bank of America City Steps, the Nature Play Lab by Caroline Amplatz, and increased connection from the city to the river.

D. Stone Arch Bridge – An architectural wonder built by one of America's railroad barons, James J. Hill, the limestone and granite Stone Arch Bridge was a working railway bridge until 1978. Converted to trail in the 1990s, it offers the best experience of the only waterfall – *Owamni Yomni*, in Dakota –



on the Mississippi River. The Upper St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam adjacent to the falls was closed to navigation in 2015 and is under review for future use. The Lower Lock, which is visible downriver, remains open.

E. Father Hennepin Bluff Park – Once across the Stone Arch Bridge, you arrive in Father Hennepin Bluff Park. Across the cobbled street is the Pillsbury A Mill, once the largest mill in the world, now has been converted into artist lofts and affordable housing. Continue walking North towards the Third Ave. Bridge; you will pass the Xcel Energy hydropower plant.

F. Cross back under the Third Ave. Bridge – You will pass through the vibrant area known as St. Anthony Main (once the City of St. Anthony) and Nicollet Island will come into view.

G. Pass over the Merriam St. Bridge to Nicollet Island – At 48-acres, Nicollet Island is the largest and only inhabited island on the Mississippi above St. Anthony Falls. Known as *Wita Waste* ("beautiful island") to the Dakota, it was once covered with elm and maple trees and remains an important gathering place for both Dakota and Ojibwe nations.

Our Walk & Talk event series explores little-known or fascinating aspects of Minneapolis parks. Contributions to the Minneapolis Parks Foundation help us highlight the important history and impacts of Minneapolis Parks through free programs like this. Learn more, suggest a topic, or donate at MplsParksFoundation.org.



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