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Grant Park and the Lakefront

Chicago, IL

Distance: 1.9 mi (3.0 km)

Time: about 3 hrs (1 h 5 m walking + 1 h 15 m at stops)

Difficulty: Easy

Stops: 7

Route: Loop

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historictrails.org/hikes/4x02r2e

By Gregg.

A loop from the Adams/Wabash 'L' through Grant Park, the lakefront Chicagoans fought to keep "forever open, clear and free": the Route 66 sign, the Art Institute lions, the Bowman and Spearman, Buckingham Fountain and Millennium Park.

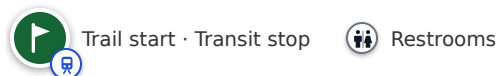
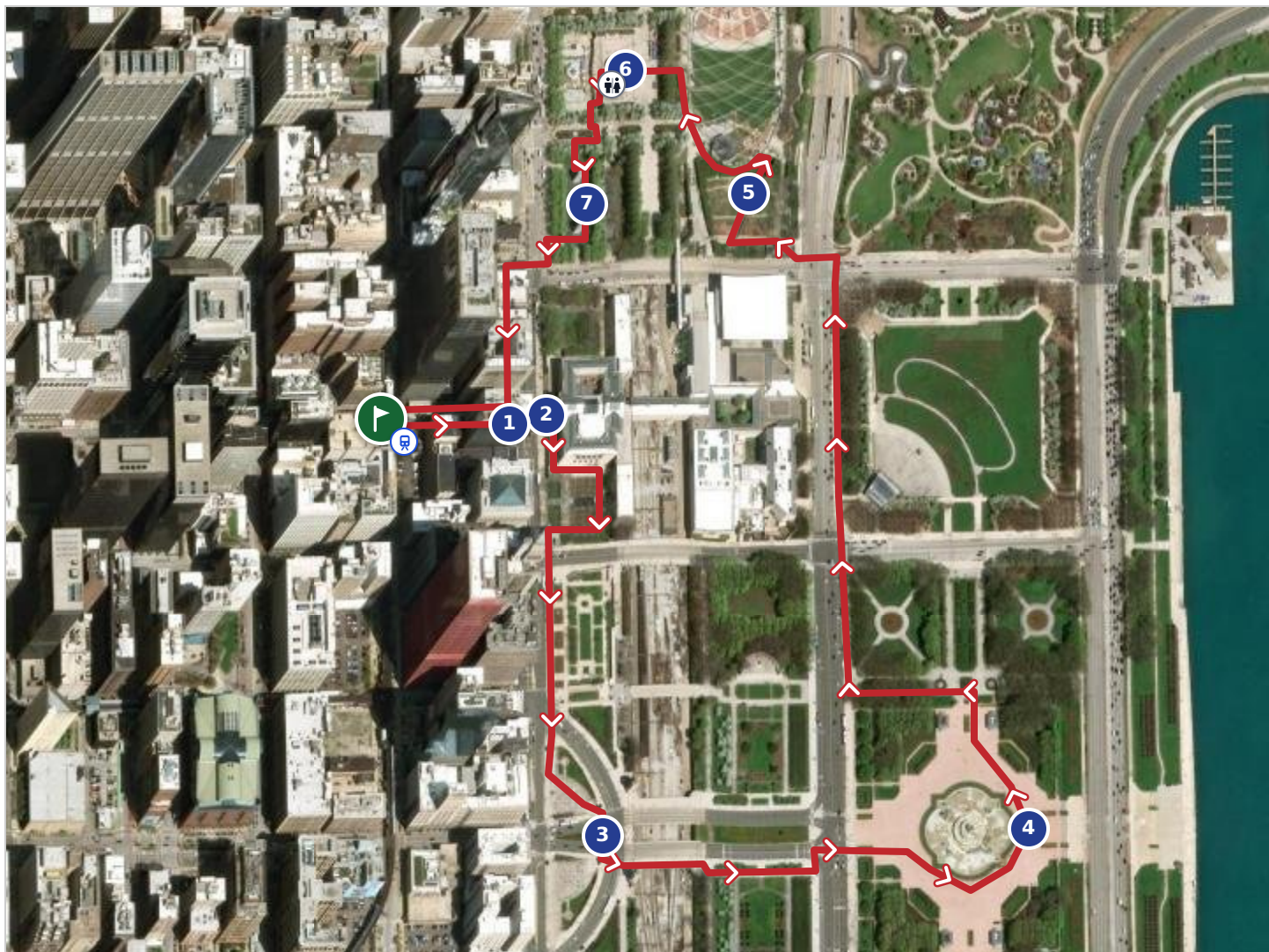
Free hike kit — generated October 12, 2026

About This Hike

In 1836 a canal commissioners' map marked this lakefront as public ground, to remain "forever open, clear and free" of buildings. Keeping it that way took a fight. The park was named Lake Park in 1847. Railroad tracks ran out in the lake, and after the Great Fire of 1871 much of the rubble was dumped into the lake here, building up new land.

In 1890 the merchant Montgomery Ward sued the city to keep buildings off the lakefront. He won in 1909. Because of him, Daniel Burnham's grand civic center for Grant Park was never built, and the park is still open land today. It's named for Ulysses S. Grant.

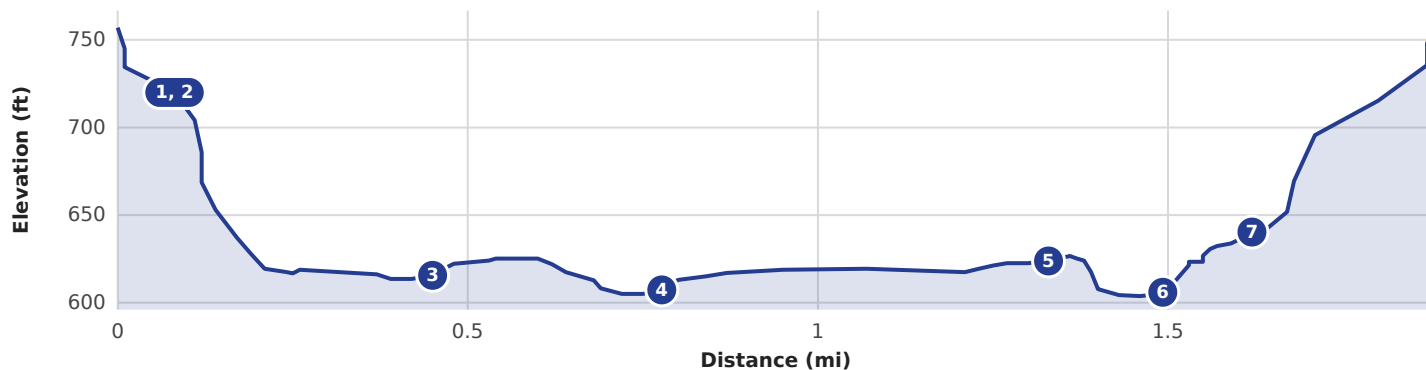
Hike Map



Satellite imagery © Esri — route and numbered waypoints as drawn by the hike author.

Elevation Profile

↑ 232 ft (71 m) gain · ↓ 231 ft (70 m) loss · 604–759 ft (184–231 m) elevation



The Trail, Stop by Stop

1 **Route 66 'Begin' Sign** (41.87949, -87.62458) [Google Maps](#) [Apple Maps](#)

Suggested stop: 5 min

Route 66 was created in 1926, and for decades it started right here in Chicago and ran all the way to California. Look for the 'Begin' sign on Adams Street. It faces cars heading west, so turn around to read it.

The starting point moved around over the years as downtown streets changed. In 2026, for the road's 100th birthday, Navy Pier became the ceremonial start, paired with Santa Monica Pier at the other end.

Directions to next waypoint: Cross Michigan Ave. at Adams St. to the steps of the Art Institute.

2 **Art Institute of Chicago Lions** (41.87956, -87.62411) [Google Maps](#) [Apple Maps](#)

Suggested stop: 10 min

The two bronze lions on the steps were made by Edward Kemeys and put in place in May 1894. The south lion weighs more than two tons. Kemeys described the south lion as standing in an attitude of defiance; the north one is on the prowl. Compare them and see if you can tell which is which.

During the 1893 World's Fair, the fair's World's Congresses met in the building behind them. The museum opened here on December 8, 1893. It was the only building put up in the old lakefront park that year. For big games, the lions often wear Chicago team gear.

Directions to next waypoint: Walk south on the park side of Michigan Ave., past Jackson Dr. and Van Buren St., to Ida B. Wells Dr.

3 **The Bowman and The Spearman** (41.87574, -87.62344) [Google Maps](#) [Apple Maps](#)

Suggested stop: 10 min

These two horsemen guard the entrance to Congress Plaza. Sculptor Ivan Mestrovic designed them in 1926, and they were dedicated in 1928. Each one is 17 feet tall. They were cast in Zagreb.

Look closely at both riders. Something is missing, on purpose. Mestrovic wanted you to use your imagination.

The street between them was renamed Ida B. Wells Drive in 2018, the first downtown street named for a woman of color.

Directions to next waypoint: Walk east through Congress Plaza, cross Columbus Dr. at the signal, and continue to Buckingham Fountain.

4 **Buckingham Fountain** (41.87581, -87.61825) [Google Maps](#) [Apple Maps](#)

Suggested stop: 15 min

This fountain is a memorial to Clarence Buckingham. He and his sister Kate were both art collectors and supporters of the arts. It opened on May 26, 1927. Architect Edward H. Bennett modeled it on a fountain at Versailles, and it's built of granite and pink Georgia marble.

Count the groups of sea horses around the fountain. Each one stands for a state that borders Lake Michigan. When the fountain is running, the center jet shoots 150 feet into the air. The big shows start at the top of each hour and last 20 minutes.

This is a good place to tell the Montgomery Ward story. Without him, there might be buildings where you're standing.

Directions to next waypoint: Walk west back to Columbus Dr. and head north about a third of a mile to Monroe St. Enter Lurie Garden at the northwest corner of Columbus and Monroe.

5 Lurie Garden (41.88158, -87.62166) [Google Maps](#) [Apple Maps](#)

Suggested stop: 10 min

This garden opened in 2004, and it's sitting on a roof. Underneath is a parking garage, which makes it one of the largest green roofs in the world. That fits Chicago's story: the whole lakefront was filled in, raised up and built over.

Look at the tall hedge around the garden. It's 15 feet high and stands for Carl Sandburg's famous name for Chicago. Then walk across the wooden boardwalk in the middle, called the Seam.

Directions to next waypoint: Follow the paths northwest through Millennium Park to Cloud Gate.

6 Cloud Gate (41.88269, -87.62316) [Google Maps](#) [Apple Maps](#)

Suggested stop: 15 min

Millennium Park opened in 2004 on top of old rail yards and parking lots. Cloud Gate, by British artist Anish Kapoor, was his first public outdoor work in the United States.

It weighs 110 tons and is 66 feet long. It looks like one smooth piece, but it's made of 168 stainless steel plates. Walk under the 12-foot arch and look up into the mirrored chamber. To the north is Frank Gehry's Pritzker Pavilion; the public restrooms are on its lower level.

Directions to next waypoint: Walk south through the park to Crown Fountain, near Michigan Ave. and Monroe St.

7 Crown Fountain (41.88149, -87.62363) [Google Maps](#) [Apple Maps](#)

Suggested stop: 10 min

Spanish artist Jaume Plensa designed these two 50-foot glass block towers with a shallow pool between them. The faces on the towers belong to 1,000 Chicago residents. Watch for a while and you'll see water seem to spout from a face.

Directions to next waypoint: Walk south on Michigan Ave. to Adams St., turn right (west), and walk one block back to the Adams/Wabash station.

Planning Your Hike

Getting There

Trail start: Adams/Wabash 'L' Station (Transit stop)

You're standing under the elevated Loop tracks. Five 'L' lines stop here, and you can transfer between them for free. Gather your group on the sidewalk at Adams and Wabash before you start.

Directions to next waypoint: Walk east on Adams St. toward Michigan Ave. Stop just before Michigan Ave. and look back at the street signs.

Start and finish: Adams/Wabash station, 201 S. Wabash Ave. (Brown, Green, Orange, Pink and Purple lines). This station has no elevators; for step-free access use Washington/Wabash, two blocks north, which serves the same lines.

Getting there: Take the CTA 'L'. Downtown parking is expensive and hard to find. This hike starts and ends at the same station, so you can ride in from anywhere on the system.

Restrooms: There are few public restrooms on this route. They're noted at the stops that have them.

Things you'll need: Water, comfortable shoes, a camera, and a Ventra card or the Ventra app for each person.

Restrooms: On the lower level of the Jay Pritzker Pavilion, just north of Cloud Gate.

Seasons: Buckingham Fountain usually runs from early May to mid-October, and Crown Fountain's water runs from mid-spring to mid-fall. In the off season you'll still see the sculptures.

Youth groups: Millennium Park requires anyone under 18 to be with an adult 21 or older after 6 p.m., Thursday through Sunday, with no more than four minors per adult.

Optional: Cross DuSable Lake Shore Drive at the signal east of Buckingham Fountain to Queen's Landing, where Queen Elizabeth II came ashore from the royal yacht Britannia in 1959. It adds about a quarter mile.

Waypoint hours & fees

Waypoint	Hours	Fees	Restrooms	Notes
1. Route 66 'Begin' Sign	Always visible	Free	—	Adams St. is busy. Keep everyone on the sidewalk.
2. Art Institute of Chicago Lions	Lions viewable anytime	Free to see the lions	—	—
3. The Bowman and The Spearman	Grant Park open 6am - 11pm	Free	—	The statues are on both sides of a busy street. Cross only at the signals.
4. Buckingham Fountain	Water runs 8am - 11pm, usually early May to mid-October	Free	—	—
5. Lurie Garden	Daily 6am - 9pm	Free	—	—
6. Cloud Gate	Millennium Park open 6am - 11pm	Free	Yes	Restrooms on the lower level of the Pritzker Pavilion. Welcome Center at 201 E. Randolph St., 9am - 5pm.

Waypoint	Hours	Fees	Restrooms	Notes
7. Crown Fountain	Water runs mid-spring to mid-fall	Free	—	—

Challenge Quiz

Answer as you hike — check your score with the answer key on the last page.

1 Route 66 'Begin' Sign

1. In what year was Route 66 created?

- A. 1926
- B. 1893
- C. 1933
- D. 1955

2. Which way does the Begin sign face?

- A. Toward cars heading west
- B. Toward cars heading east
- C. Toward cars heading north
- D. Toward cars heading south

2 Art Institute of Chicago Lions

3. What are the lions made of?

- A. Bronze
- B. Marble
- C. Cast iron
- D. Granite

3 The Bowman and The Spearman

4. Look closely at both riders. What is missing?

- A. Their weapons (the bow and the spear)
- B. Their horses' tails
- C. Their pedestals
- D. Their heads

5. This street was renamed in 2018 for which journalist?

- A. Ida B. Wells
- B. Jane Addams
- C. Harold Washington
- D. Jean Baptiste Point DuSable

4 Buckingham Fountain

6. Count the sea horse groups. How many states bordering Lake Michigan do they stand for?

- A. 4
- B. 2
- C. 3
- D. 5

7. Who is the fountain named for?

- A. Clarence Buckingham
- B. Queen Elizabeth II
- C. Montgomery Ward
- D. Daniel Burnham

5 Lurie Garden

8. The tall hedge stands for which famous nickname for Chicago from a Carl Sandburg poem?

- A. City of Big Shoulders
- B. The Windy City
- C. The Second City
- D. Chi-Town

6 Cloud Gate

9. How many stainless steel plates make up Cloud Gate?

- A. 168
- B. 66
- C. 110
- D. 1,000

7 Crown Fountain

10. Watch a face on the tower. Where does the water seem to come out?

- A. The mouth
- B. The eyes
- C. The nose
- D. The ears

Challenge Answers — Leaders Only!

1. A — 1926

2. A — Toward cars heading west

3. A — Bronze

4. A — Their weapons (the bow and the spear)

5. A — Ida B. Wells

6. A — 4

7. A — Clarence Buckingham

8. A — City of Big Shoulders

9. A — 168

10. A — The mouth