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# The Loop: Rebuilt After the Great Fire

Chicago, IL

**Distance:** 1.6 mi (2.5 km)

**Time:** about 3 hrs (1 h 5 m walking + 1 h 45 m at stops)

**Difficulty:** Easy

**Stops:** 10

**Route:** Loop

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By Gregg.

A short loop through downtown Chicago from the 1897 Quincy 'L' station, past the Board of Trade, the Monadnock, the Rookery and other buildings that rose after the Great Fire of 1871 and made Chicago the birthplace of the skyscraper.

Free hike kit — generated October 12, 2026

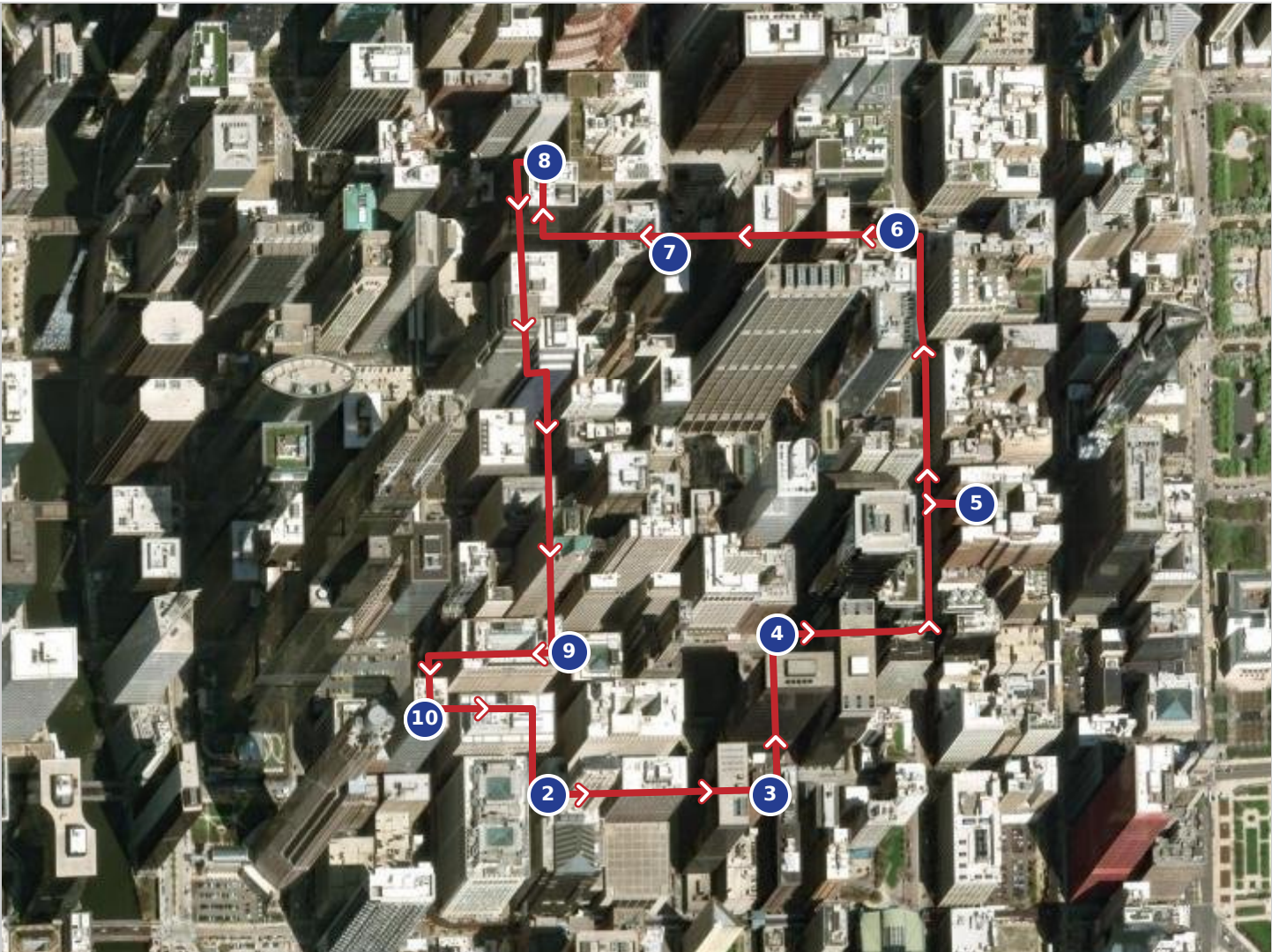
## About This Hike

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On October 8, 1871, a fire began on DeKoven Street. It burned three and a half square miles in the heart of the city, destroyed more than 18,000 buildings and left a third of Chicago's 300,000 people homeless. About 300 people died.

Chicago rebuilt fast. Most visible signs of the fire were gone within a year. In the decades that followed, architects here developed the steel-skeleton frame, and the Loop became the place where the modern skyscraper took shape. On this walk you'll see buildings from both sides of that change: brick walls six feet thick, and towers wrapped in glass and terra cotta.

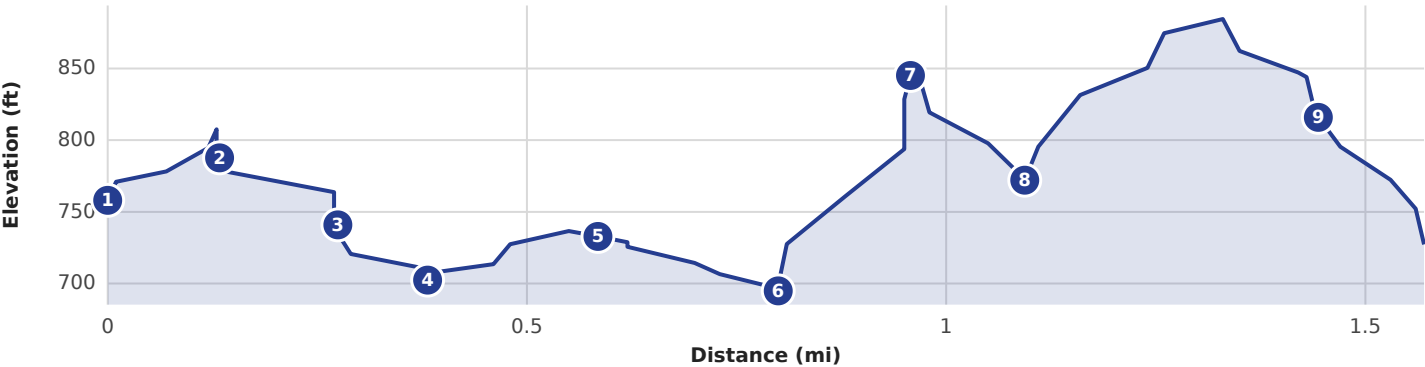
# Hike Map



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

## Elevation Profile

↑ 466 ft (142 m) gain · ↓ 466 ft (142 m) loss · 695–884 ft (212–269 m) elevation



# The Trail, Stop by Stop

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## 1 Quincy 'L' Station (41.87875, -87.63370) [Google Maps](#) [Apple Maps](#)

Suggested stop: 5 min

Quincy opened in 1897, and it's been restored to look the way it did then. Look at the front of the stationhouse before you head down the stairs: the pressed metal wreaths and fluted pilasters are original decorations. Elevators were added in 2018 on both sides of Wells Street.

Directions to next waypoint: Walk one block east on Quincy St. to LaSalle St., then turn right (south) to Jackson Blvd. The Board of Trade closes off the end of LaSalle Street.

## 2 Chicago Board of Trade Building (41.87806, -87.63222) [Google Maps](#) [Apple Maps](#)

Suggested stop: 10 min

This tower was finished in 1930, designed by John A. Holabird and John Wellborn Root Jr. It was the tallest building in Chicago for 35 years.

Look up to the very top. The 30-foot statue up there is Ceres, the goddess of grain, and she has no face. Grain was what they traded here. Now look lower on the building: you'll find carved figures of a farmer holding grain and a Native American holding corn.

Directions to next waypoint: Walk two blocks east on Jackson Blvd., past Clark St., to the Monadnock Building at 53 W. Jackson, at the Dearborn St. corner.

## 3 Monadnock Building (41.87806, -87.62950) [Google Maps](#) [Apple Maps](#)

Suggested stop: 15 min

This is really two buildings in one, and you can see the change from old to new. The north half was finished in 1891 by Burnham & Root. Its brick walls hold the whole building up, and they're six feet thick at the bottom. It's the tallest load-bearing brick building ever built.

The south half, finished in 1893 by Holabird & Roche, has a metal skeleton frame inside. Walk along the building and compare the two halves. Step into the lobby to see the shops and the staircase.

Directions to next waypoint: Walk one block north on Dearborn St. to Adams St. The Marquette Building is on the northwest corner, at 140 S. Dearborn.

## 4 Marquette Building (41.87952, -87.62942) [Google Maps](#) [Apple Maps](#)

Suggested stop: 15 min

The Marquette was built in 1895 by Holabird & Roche. Look at the windows: each one is a big fixed pane between two narrow windows that open. They're called Chicago windows, and they let in lots of light and air.

Over the main entrance are four bronze panels that tell the story of Jacques Marquette's journey. Check the revolving doors for panther heads. Inside, the lobby has mosaics made by the Tiffany firm and bronze heads of Native Americans, animals and early explorers. It's worth going in.

Directions to next waypoint: Walk two blocks east on Adams St. to State St., turn left (north) one block to Monroe St., then turn right. The Palmer House is at 17 E. Monroe.

## 5 **Palmer House** (41.88070, -87.62700) [Google Maps](#) [Apple Maps](#)

Suggested stop: 10 min

The first Palmer House opened on September 26, 1871. Thirteen days later the Great Fire burned it down. The owner rebuilt and reopened in 1873, advertising it as the world's only fireproof hotel. The building you see now went up on the same site between 1924 and 1927.

One more thing for your group: the brownie was invented in this hotel's kitchen for the 1893 World's Fair.

Directions to next waypoint: Walk back west to State St., then two blocks north, past Madison St., to Washington St. The Reliance Building is on the southwest corner, at 32 N. State.

## 6 **Reliance Building** (41.88318, -87.62797) [Google Maps](#) [Apple Maps](#)

Suggested stop: 10 min

Look at all that glass. The Reliance Building is known around the world as the direct ancestor of today's glass-and-steel skyscrapers. The base went up in 1890 and the upper floors in 1894-95.

The frame is covered in cream-colored terra cotta with Gothic-style decoration. The architects chose glazed terra cotta because its smooth surface would let rain wash the dirt away. The City restored the outside in 1996. It's a hotel now.

Directions to next waypoint: Walk west on Washington St., past Dearborn St. Daley Plaza and the Picasso are on your right. Cross to the south side of Washington at Clark St. to find the marker at the Chicago Temple, 77 W. Washington.

## 7 **Daley Plaza and the Chicago Temple** (41.88297, -87.63073) [Google Maps](#) [Apple Maps](#)

Suggested stop: 15 min

Across the street is the Picasso. Thousands of people came to Daley Plaza when it was unveiled on August 15, 1967. It's 50 feet tall and made of Cor-Ten steel, the same material as the Daley Center behind it. Picasso never said what it was supposed to be. Ask your group what they see.

Now find the plaque near the entrance of the Chicago Temple, behind the Miro sculpture. A church has stood on this corner a long time, and the plaque tells you what happened to one of them in 1871.

Directions to next waypoint: Walk west on Washington St. to LaSalle St. and turn right (north). The City Hall entrance is mid-block at 121 N. LaSalle.

## 8 **City Hall-County Building** (41.88379, -87.63226) [Google Maps](#) [Apple Maps](#)

Suggested stop: 10 min

The County Building half was finished in 1908 and the City Hall half in 1911, both by Holabird & Roche. The earlier courthouse on this block burned in 1871; its bell rang the alarm before the building went down.

Look above the LaSalle Street entrance for four relief panels. They show four jobs the city does for its people. Way up top, in 2001, the city planted a green roof with about 20,000 plants.

Directions to next waypoint: Walk south on LaSalle St. four blocks, past Washington, Madison and Monroe, to Adams St. The Rookery is on the southeast corner; use the Adams St. entrance.

**9 The Rookery** (41.87936, -87.63195) [Google Maps](#) [Apple Maps](#)

Suggested stop: 15 min

The Rookery got its name from a temporary building put up here after the fire. Pigeons loved to roost on it. Burnham & Root built this building from 1885 to 1888, and when it opened it was thought to be the finest office building in the country. It mixes load-bearing outer walls with a skeleton frame inside, one of the steps toward the skyscraper.

Look for birds carved near the entrance. Then go inside. In 1905 Frank Lloyd Wright redesigned the two-story skylit lobby. Don't miss it.

Directions to next waypoint: Walk two blocks west on Adams St. to Wells St., then turn left (south) half a block to the Quincy station.

**10 Quincy 'L' Station (finish)** (41.87875, -87.63370) [Google Maps](#) [Apple Maps](#)

Pass by

Done! You've seen the Loop that rose from the ashes. Use the east station house for the Inner Loop and the west one for the Outer Loop.

## Planning Your Hike

**Start and finish:** Quincy station, 220 S. Wells St. (Brown, Orange, Pink and Purple lines). Station houses are on both sides of Wells St.; the west one serves the Outer Loop and the east one the Inner Loop.

**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.

**Best days:** Monday through Saturday. The Rookery's lobby is closed on Sundays, and several lobbies on this route are office buildings.

**Lobbies:** The Rookery, Marquette and Monadnock lobbies are free to visit. The Board of Trade, City Hall, Reliance Building and Palmer House are sidewalk stops; don't count on getting inside.

### Waypoint hours & fees

| Waypoint                              | Hours                                                                                                    | Fees                                           | Restrooms | Notes                                                                                                     |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Quincy 'L' Station                 | —                                                                                                        | CTA fare needed only to go past the turnstiles | —         | Check <a href="https://transitchicago.com">transitchicago.com</a> for service alerts. Accessible station. |
| 2. Chicago Board of Trade Building    | Sidewalk view                                                                                            | Free                                           | —         | The lobby is not regularly open to the public.                                                            |
| 3. Monadnock Building                 | Lobby open during business hours                                                                         | Free                                           | —         | —                                                                                                         |
| 4. Marquette Building                 | Lobby open 7am - 10pm daily (check <a href="https://marquette.macfound.org">marquette.macfound.org</a> ) | Free                                           | —         | The lobby exhibit is run by the MacArthur Foundation.                                                     |
| 5. Palmer House                       | Sidewalk view                                                                                            | Free                                           | —         | This is a working hotel. Call ahead before bringing a group inside.                                       |
| 6. Reliance Building                  | Sidewalk view                                                                                            | Free                                           | —         | —                                                                                                         |
| 7. Daley Plaza and the Chicago Temple | Plaza always open                                                                                        | Free                                           | —         | —                                                                                                         |
| 8. City Hall-County Building          | Sidewalk view                                                                                            | Free                                           | —         | Government building with security screening; plan to see the reliefs from the sidewalk.                   |
| 9. The Rookery                        | Lobby Mon-Fri 7am - 6pm, Sat 8am - 2pm, closed Sunday                                                    | Free                                           | —         | Phones and handheld cameras are fine; no tripods. The Frank Lloyd Wright Trust offers paid tours.         |

| Waypoint                        | Hours | Fees     | Restrooms | Notes |
|---------------------------------|-------|----------|-----------|-------|
| 10. Quincy 'L' Station (finish) | —     | CTA fare | —         | —     |

# Challenge Quiz

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

## 1 Quincy 'L' Station

1. Look at the front of the stationhouse. Which pressed metal decoration can you see?

- A. Wreaths
- B. Lions' heads
- C. Stars
- D. Anchors

## 2 Chicago Board of Trade Building

2. Look up at the top of the building. Which goddess does the statue show?

- A. Ceres, goddess of grain
- B. Athena, goddess of wisdom
- C. Venus, goddess of love
- D. Nike, goddess of victory

## 3 Monadnock Building

3. About how thick are the brick walls at the bottom of the north half?

- A. About 6 feet
- B. About 6 inches
- C. About 1 foot
- D. About 20 feet

## 4 Marquette Building

4. Look at the revolving doors. Which animal's head is on the door panels?

- A. Panther
- B. Eagle
- C. Bear
- D. Horse

5. How many bronze relief panels are over the main entrance?

- A. 4
- B. 2
- C. 6
- D. 10

## 5 Palmer House

6. How many days after it opened did the first Palmer House burn in the Great Fire?

- A. 13
- B. 1
- C. 100
- D. 365

7. Which dessert was invented in the Palmer House kitchen?

- A. The brownie
- B. The cheesecake
- C. The ice cream sundae
- D. The doughnut

## **6 Reliance Building**

8. The architects hoped this building's shiny terra cotta would do what?

- A. Clean itself when it rained
- B. Glow in the dark
- C. Keep the building warm in winter
- D. Stop the building from swaying

## **7 Daley Plaza and the Chicago Temple**

9. Read the plaque near the Chicago Temple entrance. Which church building on this corner burned in 1871?

- A. The third
- B. The first
- C. The second
- D. The fifth

10. What is the Picasso made of? (Hint: it matches the building behind it.)

- A. Cor-Ten steel
- B. Bronze
- C. Marble
- D. Aluminum

## **8 City Hall-County Building**

11. Which of these is one of the city jobs shown in the reliefs over the entrance?

- A. Water supply
- B. Railroads
- C. Banking
- D. Farming

## **9 The Rookery**

12. Look near the entrance. What animals are carved into the front of the building?

- A. Birds
- B. Lions
- C. Fish
- D. Horses

13. Which architect redesigned the skylit lobby in 1905?

- A. Frank Lloyd Wright
- B. Louis Sullivan
- C. Mies van der Rohe
- D. Charles Atwood

## Challenge Answers — Leaders Only!

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1. A — Wreaths
2. A — Ceres, goddess of grain
3. A — About 6 feet
4. A — Panther
5. A — 4
6. A — 13
7. A — The brownie
8. A — Clean itself when it rained
9. A — The third
10. A — Cor-Ten steel
11. A — Water supply
12. A — Birds
13. A — Frank Lloyd Wright