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# The River and Michigan Avenue

Chicago, IL

**Distance:** 1.8 mi (2.9 km)

**Time:** about 3 hrs (1 h walking + 1 h 35 m at stops)

**Difficulty:** Easy

**Stops:** 10

**Route:** Loop

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[historictrails.org/hikes/os7byfh](https://historictrails.org/hikes/os7byfh)

By Gregg.

A loop from the Grand Red Line station to where Chicago began: DuSable's homesite, Fort Dearborn and the bridge that bears DuSable's name, then up Michigan Avenue past the Tribune Tower and Wrigley Building to the Water Tower and Pumping Station, survivors of the Great Fire.

Free hike kit — generated October 12, 2026

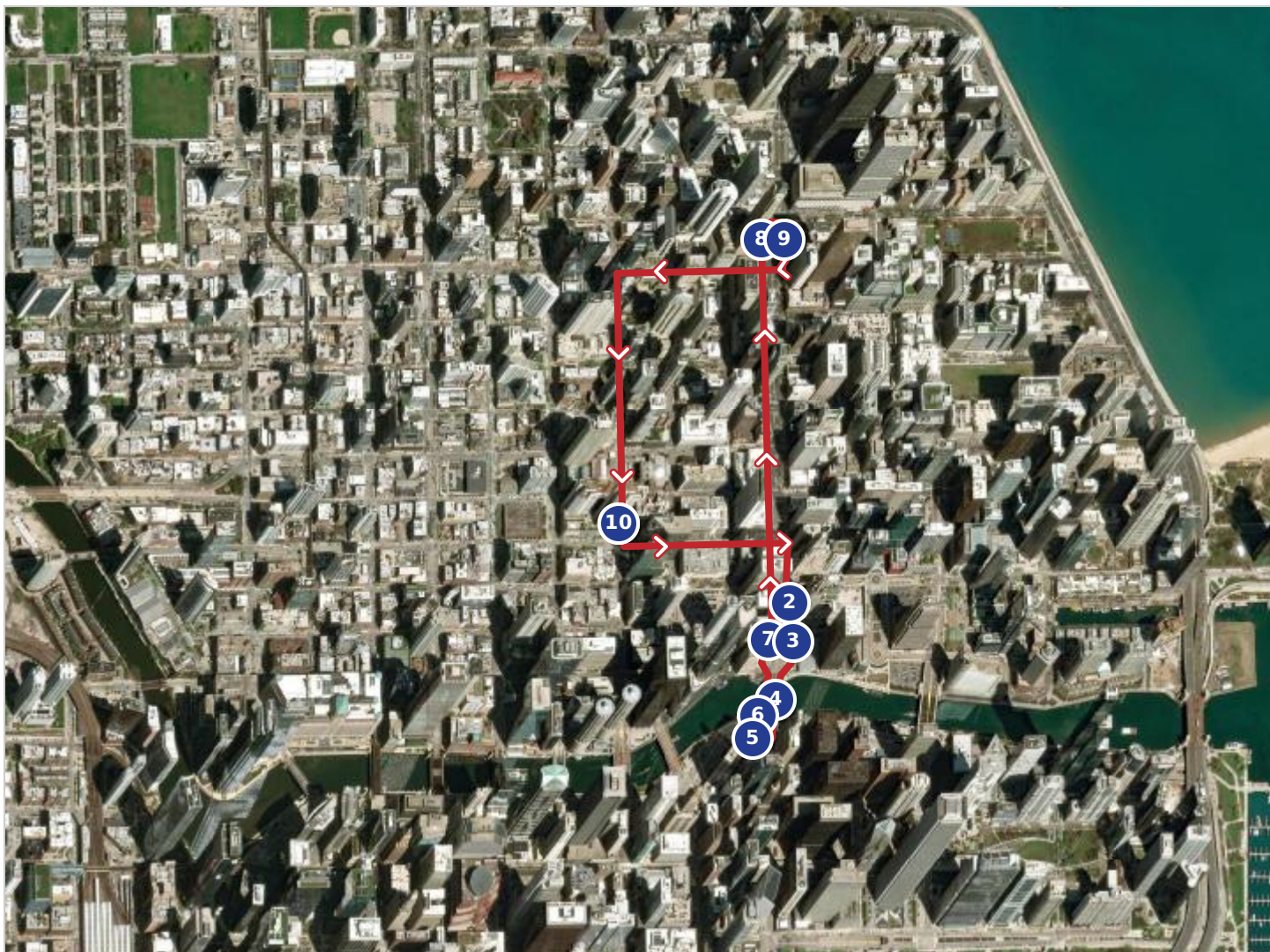
## About This Hike

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Chicago began on the north bank of this river. Jean Baptiste Point DuSable, a Haitian of French and African descent, set up a trading post and farm here in the late 1700s. When he sold it in 1800 it was a sizeable estate with a mill and a bake house.

In 1803 the Army built Fort Dearborn, a wooden stockade on the south bank. It was burned during the War of 1812, rebuilt in 1816, and gone by 1857. In October 1871 the Great Fire jumped the river and burned north all the way to Fullerton Avenue. Almost 100,000 Chicagoans lost their homes. Two stone buildings on Chicago Avenue came through it: the Water Tower and the Pumping Station. You'll finish there.

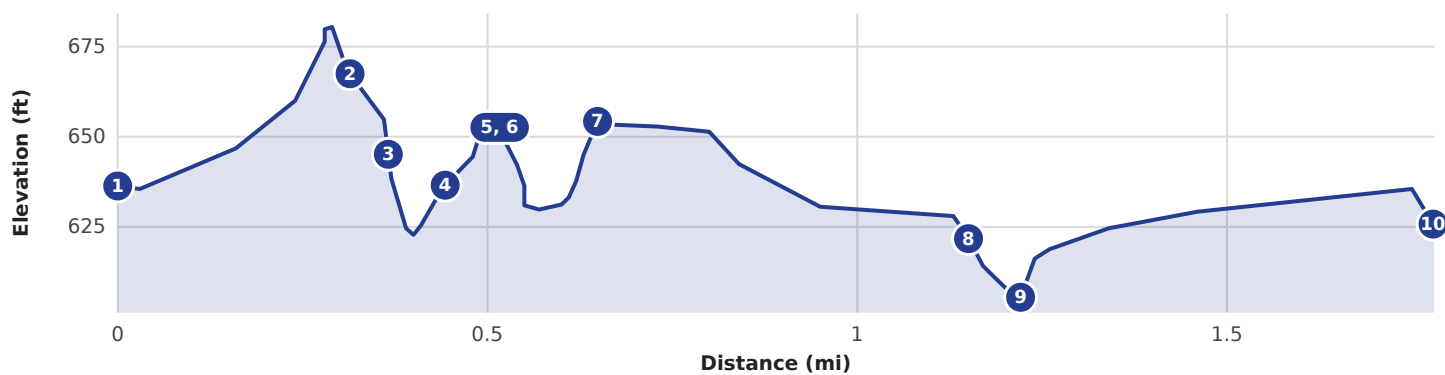
## Hike Map



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

### Elevation Profile

↑ 192 ft (59 m) gain · ↓ 184 ft (56 m) loss · 605–680 ft (184–207 m) elevation



# The Trail, Stop by Stop

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## 1 Grand 'L' Station (41.89203, -87.62809) [Google Maps](#) [Apple Maps](#)

Suggested stop: 5 min

Grand is a Red Line subway station. It was rebuilt between 2007 and 2012 with wider stairs and elevators. Gather your group at street level at State and Grand.

Directions to next waypoint: Walk east on Grand Ave. to Michigan Ave. and cross to the east side. Walk south to the Tribune Tower at 435 N. Michigan.

## 2 Tribune Tower (41.89057, -87.62392) [Google Maps](#) [Apple Maps](#)

Suggested stop: 15 min

In 1922 the Chicago Tribune held an international contest to design 'the most beautiful building in the world.' Raymond Hood and John Mead Howells won, and the tower was finished in 1925. Its crown is modeled on a tower of Rouen Cathedral in France.

Now look at the lower walls. Close to 150 pieces of famous buildings and places from around the world are set into them, and each one is labeled. See how many your group can find. Then look at the carved stone screen above the main entrance. The architects hid jokes on their names there. The Tribune moved out in 2018, and the building is now condominiums.

Directions to next waypoint: Continue south a few steps to Pioneer Court, the plaza just north of the river.

## 3 Pioneer Court: DuSable Homesite (41.88987, -87.62380) [Google Maps](#) [Apple Maps](#)

Suggested stop: 10 min

Somewhere near here stood Jean Baptiste Point DuSable's house, generally considered the first permanent non-native home in Chicago. It was named a National Historic Landmark in 1976. John Kinzie later lived in the same house.

No picture of DuSable exists. The bronze bust near the river at Michigan Avenue, by sculptor Erik Blome, was dedicated in 2009. The bridge you're about to cross was renamed for DuSable in 2010.

Directions to next waypoint: Walk south onto the DuSable Bridge on the east sidewalk. Stop at the bridgehouse towers.

## 4 DuSable Bridge (41.88884, -87.62424) [Google Maps](#) [Apple Maps](#)

Suggested stop: 10 min

This bridge opened in 1920. It was the first double-deck, double-leaf, fixed-trunnion bascule bridge ever built. In plain words: two decks for traffic, and two halves that tip up to let ships through. Each half weighs about 4,100 tons, but it's balanced so well that a 108-horsepower motor can lift it. In the 1920s it went up more than 3,000 times a year. Now it's about 40.

Look at the reliefs on the two east bridgehouses. The northeast one, 'The Discoverers,' shows French explorers of the 1600s. The southeast one shows Chicago rebuilding after the Great Fire.

Directions to next waypoint: At the south end of the bridge, cross Michigan Ave. with the signal at Wacker Dr. to the southwest corner.

## 5 Fort Dearborn Site (41.88812, -87.62479) [Google Maps](#) [Apple Maps](#)

Suggested stop: 10 min

You're standing where Fort Dearborn stood. The Army built it in 1803 as a wooden stockade on a small hill on the south bank. It was named for Henry Dearborn, the U.S. Secretary of War. In 1812 it was burned, and it was rebuilt here in 1816. By 1857 it was gone.

Look down. Bronze markers in the sidewalk show where the fort's walls stood. The London Guarantee Building on this corner sits on part of the fort's land. Fort Dearborn is also one of the four red stars on Chicago's flag.

Directions to next waypoint: Go to the southwest bridgehouse and take the stairs down to the Riverwalk. The museum entrance is at 99 Chicago Riverwalk. Step-free access is the ramp at State St. and Wacker Dr.

## 6 McCormick Bridgehouse & Chicago River Museum (41.88855, -87.62468) [Google Maps](#) [Apple Maps](#)

Suggested stop: 15 min

This museum fills the five-story southwest bridge tower. Inside you can see the gears that raise the bridge.

Look at the relief on the outside of this tower. It's called 'The Defense,' by Henry Hering, and it shows the 1812 Battle of Fort Dearborn, when soldiers and settlers leaving the fort were attacked. It was a hard day in Chicago's history, and people still disagree about how to tell it.

Directions to next waypoint: Climb back up to Michigan Ave. Walk north across the bridge on the west sidewalk, past 'The Pioneers' relief on the northwest bridgehouse, to the Wrigley Building.

## 7 Wrigley Building (41.88991, -87.62440) [Google Maps](#) [Apple Maps](#)

Suggested stop: 10 min

The Wrigley Building went up in 1921, with a north annex added in 1924. It's covered in more than 250,000 pieces of terra cotta in six shades of white, which is why it gleams. The clock tower is modeled on the Giralda Tower of the cathedral in Seville, Spain. There's a clock face on every side.

On your way here you passed 'The Pioneers' on the northwest bridgehouse. It shows Chicago's first settlers, DuSable and John Kinzie among them.

Directions to next waypoint: Walk north on the west side of Michigan Ave. about half a mile, past Grand Ave. and Ontario, Erie and Huron Sts., to Chicago Ave.

## 8 Chicago Water Tower (41.89716, -87.62458) [Google Maps](#) [Apple Maps](#)

Suggested stop: 10 min

William W. Boyington designed this tower, and it was finished in 1869. It's built of rough cream-yellow limestone from Joliet and looks like a little castle. Inside it hid a pipe that relieved extra water pressure from the pumps across the street.

In 1871 the Great Fire burned everything around it. The tower came through scarred but almost untouched, partly because it had little or no wood in it.

Directions to next waypoint: Cross Michigan Ave. at the signal to the Pumping Station on the east side.

**9 Chicago Avenue Pumping Station** (41.89716, -87.62405) [Google Maps](#) [Apple Maps](#)

Suggested stop: 10 min

Boyington designed this building too, from the same Joliet limestone. It pumped lake water from an intake crib two miles out, through a tunnel under the lake.

During the fire, the roof here collapsed by 3:30 in the morning, and with it went any real hope of fighting the fire. The walls stood, though, and it was quickly repaired. Part of it still pumps water today, and Lookingglass Theatre uses much of the inside.

Directions to next waypoint: Cross back to the west side of Michigan Ave. Walk west on Chicago Ave. to State St., then south on State to the Grand station.

**10 Grand 'L' Station (finish)** (41.89203, -87.62809) [Google Maps](#) [Apple Maps](#)

Pass by

Done! You've walked from Chicago's first home to the buildings that outlasted the fire.

## Planning Your Hike

**Start and finish:** Grand station on the Red Line, 521 N. State St. It's accessible, with entrances at the corners of State and Grand.

**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.

**Bridgehouse museum:** The McCormick Bridgehouse & Chicago River Museum is open Wednesday through Sunday, 10am - 5pm, through October 25, 2026, on a pay-what-you-can basis. Going inside adds 30 to 60 minutes. Upper floors are stairs only. Groups should call ahead (312-939-0490 ext. 28).

**Safety:** The bridge and Michigan Avenue are crowded. Keep the group to the inside of the sidewalk and cross only at signals.

### Waypoint hours & fees

| Waypoint                                        | Hours                                                                        | Fees             | Restrooms | Notes                                                                                                                             |
|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Grand 'L' Station                            | —                                                                            | CTA fare         | —         | Check <a href="https://transitchicago.com">transitchicago.com</a> for service alerts. Accessible station.                         |
| 2. Tribune Tower                                | Exterior always viewable                                                     | Free             | —         | Private residential building; treat this as a sidewalk stop. Some stones are high on the wall, so a phone zoom helps.             |
| 3. Pioneer Court: DuSable Homesite              | Public plaza                                                                 | Free             | —         | The plaza was redesigned with the Tribune Tower redevelopment; the bust has been moved before, so look around.                    |
| 4. DuSable Bridge                               | Always open                                                                  | Free             | —         | Keep the group to the inside of the sidewalk. The bridge lifts on scheduled spring and fall days.                                 |
| 5. Fort Dearborn Site                           | Always open                                                                  | Free             | —         | Don't let anyone step into the street to follow the markers.                                                                      |
| 6. McCormick Bridgehouse & Chicago River Museum | Wed-Sun 10am - 5pm through October 25, 2026                                  | Pay what you can | —         | Only the first floor and gear room are wheelchair accessible. Groups call 312-939-0490 ext. 28. The Riverwalk is open 6am - 11pm. |
| 7. Wrigley Building                             | Exterior always viewable                                                     | Free             | —         | Private office building.                                                                                                          |
| 8. Chicago Water Tower                          | Exterior always viewable. City Gallery inside opens only during exhibitions. | Free             | —         | —                                                                                                                                 |
| 9. Chicago Avenue Pumping Station               | Exterior always viewable                                                     | Free             | —         | Theater entrance at 163 E. Pearson St.                                                                                            |

| Waypoint                       | Hours | Fees     | Restrooms | Notes |
|--------------------------------|-------|----------|-----------|-------|
| 10. Grand '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.

### 2 Tribune Tower

1. Find any of the stones set into the wall. What is written next to each one?
  - A. Where it came from
  - B. The date the Tribune was founded
  - C. The stone's weight
  - D. The name of the person who brought it
2. Above the main entrance, which carving is a joke on architect John Mead Howells's name?
  - A. A howling dog
  - B. A lion
  - C. An owl
  - D. A bear

### 3 Pioneer Court: DuSable Homesite

3. In what year did DuSable sell his farm on the north bank?
  - A. 1800
  - B. 1779
  - C. 1803
  - D. 1812
4. Who later lived in DuSable's house?
  - A. John Kinzie
  - B. Henry Dearborn
  - C. John Whistler
  - D. William W. Boyington

### 4 DuSable Bridge

5. The northeast relief, 'The Discoverers,' shows explorers from which country?
  - A. France
  - B. Spain
  - C. England
  - D. The Netherlands
6. What does the southeast relief celebrate?
  - A. Rebuilding Chicago after the 1871 fire
  - B. The Battle of Fort Dearborn
  - C. The arrival of French explorers
  - D. The opening of the bridge in 1920

## **5 Fort Dearborn Site**

**7.** What are the markers in the sidewalk made of?

- A. Bronze
- B. Wood
- C. Red brick
- D. Glass

**8.** Fort Dearborn was named for whom?

- A. Henry Dearborn, Secretary of War
- B. John Kinzie
- C. John Whistler
- D. Jean Baptiste Point DuSable

## **6 McCormick Bridgehouse & Chicago River Museum**

**9.** What event does 'The Defense' show?

- A. The 1812 Battle of Fort Dearborn
- B. French explorers arriving
- C. Rebuilding after the 1871 fire
- D. The opening of the bridge in 1920

**10.** How many stories tall is the bridgehouse?

- A. Five
- B. Two
- C. Three
- D. Eight

## **7 Wrigley Building**

**11.** The clock tower is modeled on a cathedral tower in which city?

- A. Seville, Spain
- B. Rouen, France
- C. Paris, France
- D. Rome, Italy

## **8 Chicago Water Tower**

**12.** What is the Water Tower built from?

- A. Cream-yellow Joliet limestone
- B. Red brick
- C. White marble
- D. Poured concrete

## **9 Chicago Avenue Pumping Station**

**13.** Which architect designed both the Pumping Station and the Water Tower?

- A. William W. Boyington
- B. Raymond Hood
- C. Edward Bennett
- D. Alfred S. Alschuler

**14.** What happened to the Pumping Station early in the 1871 fire?

- A. Its roof collapsed
- B. It was blown up to stop the fire
- C. It flooded from the lake
- D. It became the firefighters' headquarters

## Challenge Answers — Leaders Only!

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- |                                                      |                                                |
|------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1.</b> A — Where it came from                     | <b>8.</b> A — Henry Dearborn, Secretary of War |
| <b>2.</b> A — A howling dog                          | <b>9.</b> A — The 1812 Battle of Fort Dearborn |
| <b>3.</b> A — 1800                                   | <b>10.</b> A — Five                            |
| <b>4.</b> A — John Kinzie                            | <b>11.</b> A — Seville, Spain                  |
| <b>5.</b> A — France                                 | <b>12.</b> A — Cream-yellow Joliet limestone   |
| <b>6.</b> A — Rebuilding Chicago after the 1871 fire | <b>13.</b> A — William W. Boyington            |
| <b>7.</b> A — Bronze                                 | <b>14.</b> A — Its roof collapsed              |