ITINERARY · NORTHWEST ILLINOIS

PRAIRIES, PALISADES, AND SMALL-TOWN BITES

This full-day NW Illinois loop mixes backroad nature, living history, and two memorable meals. Begin with big-sky prairie at Nachusa Grasslands, then step into the story of innovation at the John Deere Historic Site. Spend the afternoon chasing Mississippi River overlooks at Mississippi Palisades State Park, and cap it all with a rewarding drive to Mount Carroll for standout comfort food and pizza worth planning around.



Three bison grazing in a large green field in front of a tree line and power line tower

Full Day	5	2
HOW LONG	STOPS	COUNTIES
		Lee County, Carroll County

OPEN ONLINE

Open the live itinerary
visitnwillinois.com/itineraries/full-day-prairies-palisades-and...

DAY 1

THE TRIP

Created by Laura Boudreau from the SHRPA creator visit “Bike, Bites, and Backroads in NW Illinois”. Location: NW Illinois · Distance: > 10 Miles SHRPA creator visit: “Bike, Bites, and Backroads in NW Illinois”. Photo: Laura Boudreau.

DRIVING ROUTE

Open this day in Google Maps

www.google.com/maps/dir/?api=1&origin=Frank...

5 PLANNED STOPS

1

SCENIC STOP

Nachusa Grasslands - Visitor Center

Franklin Grove

WHY IT BELONGS

Nachusa Grasslands opens the day with wide prairie views and the feeling of being far from the bustle, even though it’s an easy stop in NW Illinois. The open-air visitor center pavilion is a great place to get oriented with information about the landscape and wildlife before heading toward nearby trails. With luck and patience, bison may be visible in the distance—though sightings aren’t guaranteed.

Pro tip: Plan to spend time at the pavilion—bison are free-range, so visibility can change quickly.

Address: 2075 S Lowden Rd, Franklin Grove, IL

VIEW SOURCE OPEN IN MAPS

2

SCENIC STOP

John Deere Historic Site

Dixon

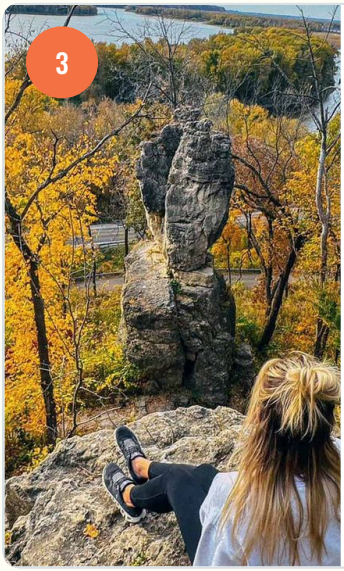
WHY IT BELONGS

The John Deere Historic Site in Grand Detour is a history stop that stays engaging from start to finish. After checking in at the welcome desk, visitors can join a guided tour that begins with an indoor archaeology area and a short film, then continues to a blacksmith demonstration and a visit through the original home. A small gift shop rounds it out, making it an easy add to a day on the road.

Pro tip: If a demo is happening, the blacksmith shop is the can’t-miss moment—plan your visit around the tour flow if possible.

Address: 8334 S Clinton St, Dixon, IL

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3

OUTDOOR RECREATION

Mississippi Palisades State Park

Savanna

WHY IT BELONGS

Mississippi Palisades State Park delivers the signature “river bluffs” payoff—wooded hikes, stair climbs, and scenic overlooks above the Mississippi River. Exploring both the North and South Units lets you choose your own adventure, from more rugged, narrow trails to picnic-friendly viewpoints. Keep an eye on closure signs at overlooks, and don’t hesitate to ask rangers for navigation help if the layout feels confusing.

Pro tip: Bring a simple picnic for an overlook stop—this park’s views are made for a relaxed lunch break.

Address: 16327A IL-84, Savanna, IL

VIEW THIS PLACE OPEN IN MAPS

Savanna

4

SCENIC STOP

Molly’s Kitchen and Bar

Mt Carroll

WHY IT BELONGS

Molly’s Kitchen and Bar in Mount Carroll is the kind of small-town dining room that feels like a reward after a day outdoors. Expect a lively, cozy space where friendly service helps you navigate the menu and settle in. The visit included hearty favorites like a smash burger and a pork bowl, plus homemade ice cream for dessert—an easy way to end the day on a celebratory note.

Pro tip: Save room for dessert—the homemade ice cream is part of what makes this stop feel special.

Address: 110 W Market St, Mt Carroll, IL

VIEW SOURCE OPEN IN MAPS

5

SCENIC STOP

Market Street Pizza

Mt Carroll

WHY IT BELONGS

Market Street Pizza keeps the Mount Carroll food momentum going with a casual, locally owned spot that’s easy to love. Dine in for a relaxed meal and explore the variety of pizza options—this visit included crowd-pleasers like chicken bacon ranch and a “whole hog” style pie, with a dough that stands out as homemade. It’s a straightforward, satisfying stop before heading back to the backroads.

Pro tip: Check business hours before you go—hours can be limited, so it pays to plan ahead.

Address: 108 W Market St, Mt Carroll, IL

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