

Section Four

Havana Road through Green Valley Ranch

Recreation districts in charge:

Denver Parks and Recreation Department

Aurora Parks and Open Space Department

General Information

This portion became a recreation trail in 1970. Prior to that, development near the canal toppled many old cottonwoods and left the ditch looking barren. Neighbor activism has since produced agreements to plant thousands of trees and shrubs along the canal, and today the canal is embraced with pride by Aurora.

Ironically, Aurora owes its early life to water delivered by the High Line. When Denver began to grow, developers eyed the flat farmland to the east. German Baron Walter von Richthofen, whose east Denver castle is a landmark, dreamed of a real estate bonanza near here to lure Denver bluebloods to country homes. The High Line promised irrigation and drinking water. Unfortunately, its fickle nature did not fulfill its promise, and positioned at the canal's end, customers could not count on a supply. The High Line was directly responsible, however, for attracting government installations that





became the base of Aurora's economy, including Fitzsimons Army Medical Center and the Rocky Mountain Arsenal.

Among the tree species growing along the canal include: piñon pine, Newport plum, crab apple, white autumn ash, Austrian pine and America basswood. A historic farmstead on the canal, Delaney Farms, gives walkers some idea of the farmland that greeted pioneers when they arrived in the late 1800s.

- **Length:** 21 miles; the trail north of Sand Creek is somewhat primitive but can be negotiated by the determined trail user. The 13 miles through Aurora is paved for most of its length, with a dirt path running adjacent to it. Near its end, the trail reverts to a dirt road that is not maintained. The High Line is one of many continuous trails in Aurora, but crosses many streets. The canal continues until Mile 71 (though much has been filled in), but water stops flowing at Mile 63, near Tower Road and I-70.
- **Access:** Walking, cycling, in-line skating, horseback riding.

Mile 49.9 – When High Line water reaches Aurora, it is fulfilling a wish as old as western pioneering. Settlers arrived after traveling across the Great American Desert. The streams they found were erratic, with rainfall less than 15 inches a year, and the promise

of a canal to grow crops gave Aurora its first long-term settlers. The first water reached Aurora in 1883, not more than 20 years after American Indians were camping there. That water helped sell agricultural land prior to the founding of Aurora south of Colfax Avenue in 1889. By the time High Line water reaches Havana Street, it is running at 40 cubic feet per second, compared to 120 cubic feet per second when it is diverted from the South Platte in Waterton Canyon. *Caution: Watch out for heavy, dangerous traffic.*

Mile 50.0 – The High Line skirts Expo Park at the edge of Aurora Hills and hooks up with the Westerly Creek Trail. The bluegrass of this urban park has replaced the shortgrass prairie native to the High Plains. When Aurora was settled, the only trees were cottonwoods, willows and box elders along the sporadic creeks. Today, many species grow along the High Line. *Note: Parking, restrooms and water in season, playground, picnicking, handicap access.*





Mile 50.4 – Crossing Alameda, the character of the neighborhood reflects a rural atmosphere for a few blocks. Cattails in the canal signal storm drainage. Blackbirds, ducks and fox frequent the canal. *Caution: Heavy traffic. Cross at the traffic signal. Parking and refreshments can be found on the Alameda corridor.*

Mile 51.5 – The canal crosses Peoria Street with access to Del Mar Park to the north. A senior citizens center, playground and picnic areas with parking are contained in the park. The old Sand Creek Lateral used to deliver water by ditch and pipe to the grounds of the former Fitzsimons Army post. *Note: Phones and, in season, restrooms and water are available.*

Mile 52.0 – The trail passes Lyn Knoll Elementary and South Middle schools. Highline Park, which has ball fields and parking, is across East Second Avenue. The canal skirts the Aurora Hills Golf Club, which is a public course. At the club's eastern edges, a bridge and long trail lead to Bicentennial Park at Alameda and Potomac. *Note: Parking can be found at the schools and parks; retail shops with refreshments are on Alameda and Potomac.*

Mile 52.3 – The trail borders Aurora’s city maintenance shops and nursery. The city greenhouse is on the left at Potomac Street. *Caution: Watch for heavy traffic. Note: Parking can be found nearby.*

Mile 52.8 – The canal runs in a pipe under Interstate 225. The trail runs north along Potomac Street and under the freeway on Second Avenue. After the underpass, the trail jogs right on Abilene and rejoins the canal. *Caution: Potomac is wide and always busy: use extreme caution.*



Mile 53.3 – Cross Sable Boulevard. Ahead, the canal has been rerouted in a concrete channel through Aurora’s municipal justice complex. The Aurora Municipal Courthouse, detention center, history museum and public library

are in this center. The old canal line is visible to the southwest along a line of Russian olive trees. A remnant of an old holding pond or reservoir is now a pond in City Center Park.



There is bridge access across the canal to the municipal buildings, or follow Chambers Road south to East Alameda Drive. Aurora settlers grew sugar beets in this area, using water from the High Line, and developers such as William Smith used the promise of water to sell land. Smith was one of the canal's builders and in 1882 settled in Arapahoe County to found the community's public school system in 1885. *Note: Parking is available, and refreshments can be found at the center.*

Mile 54.1 – The High Line resumes a rural atmosphere with horse properties on both sides of Chambers Road. Birds have been on the decline in this section of the canal as cottonwoods disappear. Among immigrants passing through: warblers, orioles, vireos and buntings. Residents are woodpeckers, house finches and chickadees. Ducks also frequent the canal. *Caution: Be careful crossing Chambers Road. A new underpass is expected to be complete in 2012.*

Mile 54.4 – The High Line loops around Delaney Farms, a city park designated as open space, historic district and landmark. At the siphons for East and West Tollgate Creek, the trail connects with Toll Creek Trail. The historic John Gully Homestead, built in 1871, and white round barn are on the National Register of Historic Buildings. The Gullys



came from Tipperary, Ireland and followed the Smoky Hill Trail from Kansas along what is now Colfax Avenue. The route also was called “starvation trail,” and the Gullys never really succeeded, despite operating a toll gate at a stage stop. Behind the barn, a large garden is maintained by Denver Urban Gardens. This open space, once slated for development, was purchased by Aurora in the 1980s. *Note: Tollgate Elementary School, east of Tollgate Park on Kalispell Way, has parking.*

Mile 55.0 – Shelter and land for public par-three Centre Hill Golf Course was donated by Hughes Corp., which operates the space satellite programs at Buckley Air National Guard Base east of here. The huge towers that look like golf balls are satellite receivers. The Community College of Aurora is just up the trail.

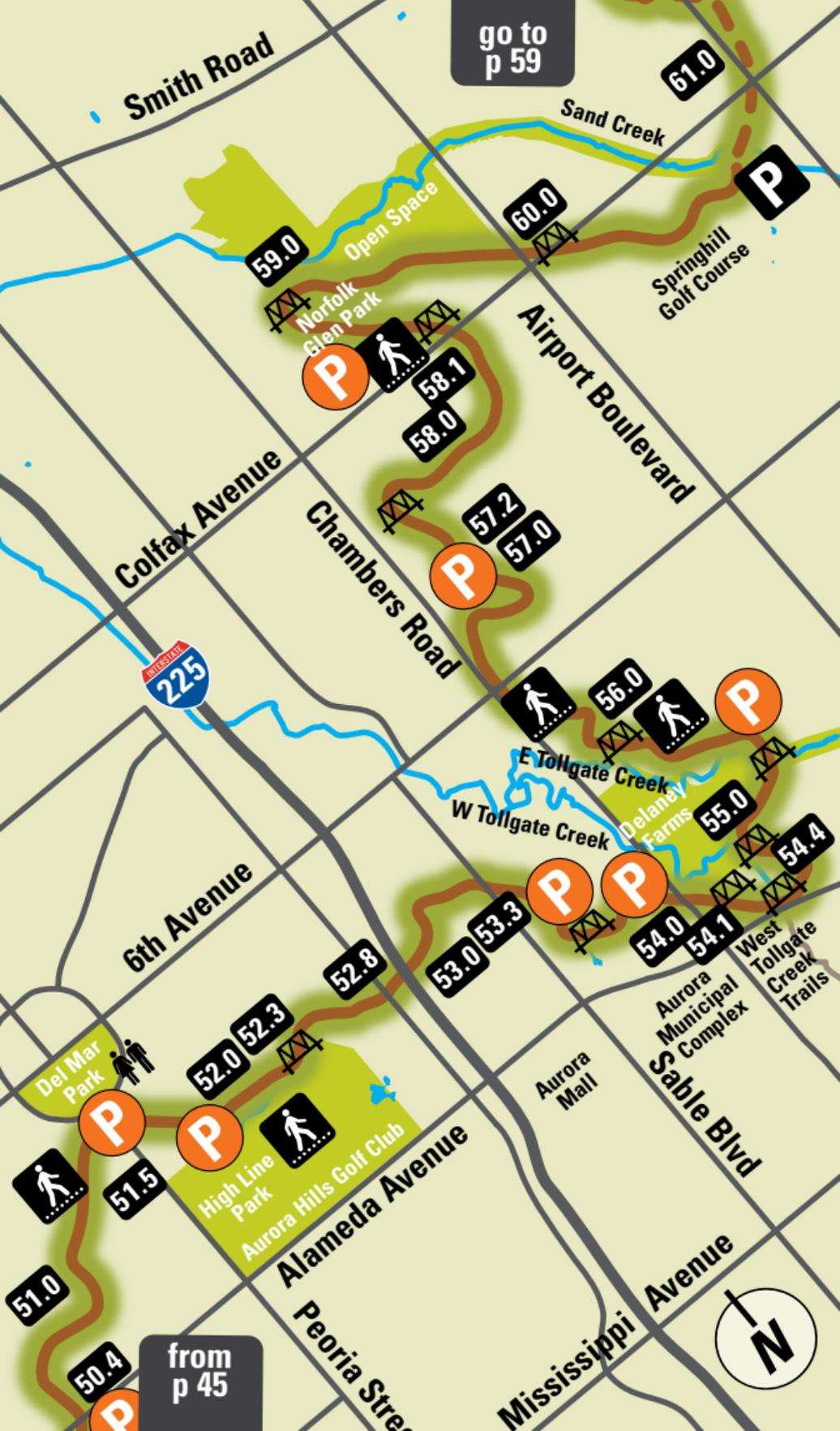


Archeology has turned up evidence of American Indian encampments near Tollgate Creek. Two school children found an American Indian burial site in 1982, and excavations discovered the remains of an adult and child, circa 670 AD. In this open space today, fox, beaver, herons and many butterflies can be seen.

Mile 56.0 – Stop and take note of the outstanding vista of the Front Range. Three-tenths of a mile farther on, cross Sixth Avenue and pick up the canal behind a shopping area. Many private bridges cross to homes. Open space here is private. *Warning: This is a busy crossing; be careful. Note: Parking, retail shops with refreshments are nearby.*

Mile 57.2 – Hinkley High School has a bridge to sports fields. Horses are common and avian habitat nesting boxes have been erected. Many cottonwoods have been cut down here. Prairie dogs thrive. *Note: Parking at Hinkley High and Laredo Elementary schools at Laredo and East 13th Avenue.*

Mile 58.1 – Cross Colfax Avenue. The canal skirts a mobile home park. The canal is now a shadow of its former self. *Caution: Heavy traffic.*





E 64th Ave

71.0

trail's
end

East 56th Avenue

Picadilly Road

First Creek

Green Valley Ranch Blvd

65.0

66.0

Argonne Street

Green Valley Ranch



Himalaya Road

43rd Ave

64.0

Tower Road

East 38th Ave

63.0

East 32nd Parkway

62.7

Smith Road

62.0



from
p 58

Mile 59.0 – The trail borders Norfolk Glen Park and looks back to the southeast, running parallel to Sand Creek, a greenway. The open space here is a mix of the Star K Natural Area and private property. Horse stables and a rural, plains atmosphere are evident.

Mile 60.0 – After crossing busy Airport Boulevard and Colfax, the High Line skirts Springhill Municipal Golf Course and recreation center. A siphon takes the canal





under Sand Creek. The paved trail ends here and becomes a ditch rider's road when it resumes south of Colfax. But it is still suitable for hikers, horses or mountain bikes. Past Springhill, you can follow Sand Creek on a soft surface trail to the Aurora Sand Creek Riparian Reserve less than a mile away to the east. There are picnic tables, and parking is located at Coal Creek Rodeo Arena to the south, accessible by car from Sixth Ave and Highway 30 (Gun Club Road).

Caution: Heavy traffic on Airport Road and Colfax. The High Line Canal Trail is not maintained past the golf course. Note: Parking, refreshments available at the recreation center. To see all of the trail, drive from Springhill to the Aurora East neighborhood at Colfax and Tower Road and pick up the path at Mile 61.

Mile 61.0 – After crossing Colfax again and Tower Road twice, the canal enters a warehouse district. The path is marked by cottonwood trees but is very rough.

Mile 62.0 – The canal goes under Smith Road and Union Pacific Railroad tracks. The trail is interrupted where the canal passes under Tower Road and disappears below Interstate 70. Northbound users should head back to their cars, drive north on Tower Road to East 32nd Parkway and head east to where it intersects with the trail. Parking is usually available at the intersection of East 32nd Parkway and 34th Drive, about 0.2 miles east of the trail.

Mile 62.7 – The canal emerges from Interstate 70. From East 32nd Parkway, travelers can head south to this point on a rural quarter-mile stretch that butts up against the interstate and then retrace their steps to the parkway.





Mile 63.0 – Years ago, one of the last customers for the High Line water was the Rocky Mountain Arsenal, which was fed by a lateral that started here. The Arsenal was built in 1942 to manufacture chemicals and incendiary bombs. As the largest stakeholder on the canal, the Arsenal kept the canal flowing at 30 cubic feet per second. The facility is now a National Wildlife Refuge.

Note: Three-quarters of a mile north of East 32nd Parkway is a ranch gate that prohibits further progress. Go back to your car and drive north on Tower Road to Green Valley Ranch.

Mile 64.0 – The trail, now paved, resumes as a greenway through Green Valley Ranch, past Marrama Elementary School, Himalaya Road (Mile 65) and East Ranch Park off Jebel Street. No water is carried in this portion, and the canal acts as a storm ditch. Green Valley Ranch is part of Denver, and the trail here is owned and maintained by the Denver Parks and Recreation Department. *Note: Marrama Elementary School has parking. To get there, drive north on Tower Road. Turn Right on 43rd Avenue and take a right on Argonne Street. Street parking also is available.*

Mile 66.0 – After crossing Malaya Street, the canal reaches site of the First Creek Flume. In the High Line's heyday, First Creek Farm was a large user. The canal once ran to Second Creek and served a number of

large truck farms, which are farms that sold vegetables. But their demise led to a decision to terminate the canal at First Creek.

Follow the sidewalk along Piccadilly Road north to Green Valley Ranch Boulevard, where the trail continues. The trail weaves through the Green Valley Ranch Golf Club, and currently ends at Maxwell Place, just east of Ireland Street.

Mile 71.0 – The canal, little more than a furrow, turns northwest under Piccadilly Road, and near 64th Avenue bends back toward the Rocky Mountains, from where it came. Headgate No. 165, the last on the canal, is inactive. From this gate, the tower of Denver International Airport is visible to the northeast.



About the High Line

Operation of the High Line Canal

Why High Line? The name is not unique. Irrigation canals dug to follow contour of the land so that they gradually drop in elevation are common. The High Line Canal is cut generally following a geographical contour to control rate of descent, flow and destination.

The profile: At its beginning, the canal is 7 feet deep with a width of 40 feet. Near its end, the High Line is 4½ feet deep with a 20-foot wide bottom. The canal was designed to carry 1,200 cubic feet of water per second out of Waterton Canyon, but usually runs at 120 cubic feet per second there when it is operating. The water's depth is never more than 4 feet. Original construction cost: \$650,000 in 1883.

The builders: The Platte Land Co. Ltd., parent of the Northern Colorado Irrigation Co., was called "The English Co." in newspapers of the day because the canal's backers were an interlocking collection of Scottish and British land developers.

Ditches and laterals: A network of smaller canals is connected to the High Line. A few are still in use to feed water to reservoirs and irrigators off the canal. The High Line Trail does not follow any of these laterals, and thus they are not addressed to any great extent in this guide.

Ditch riders: Denver Water employees responsible for operation and maintenance of the canal. Several live in Denver Water houses along the High Line.

Flumes: Bridge-like structures built of wood, concrete or steel to carry water over lower elevations along the canal.

Water right: A property right to make beneficial use of a particular amount of water within a specified time. Colorado and other western states follow the rule of prior appropriation in determining water rights. Prior appropriation is a water law doctrine that confers priority to use water from natural streams based upon when the water rights were acquired. Holders of senior rights have first claim to withdraw water over holders who have filed later claims. Denver Water owns the rights to the water at the High Line's main headgate in Waterton Canyon and leases it to irrigators downstream.





MAP LEGEND

-  High Line Canal
-  6.0 miles from start
-  parking
-  trail access
-  wheelchair access
-  trail interruption
-  bridge
-  bench
-  picnic table
-  restrooms