Narrow Gauge Trail

This is a well-used local trail running through pastoral countryside north of Chicago Park. It follows the route of the Nevada County Narrow Gauge Railroad (NCNGR) and includes a short section where some of the original earthen berm for the tracks can still be seen. Unofficial extensions of this trail to the south connect it to the community parking area near the post office at Chicago Park.

**Place:** Chicago Park, CA  
**Season:** Year around  
**Land:** Official section follows right of way on public and private land  
**Trail signs:** Land trust signs on Metz Ranch Rd, and on Cattail Lane; otherwise unsigned  
**Length:** Official section: 0.9 mile. Entire trail including unofficial "use" section: 1.7 miles  
**Altitude change:** Slight  
**Difficulty:** Easy  
**Trail surface:** Mostly dirt; some graveled  
**Environment:** Pine forest and pastures in a rural residential area along the Colfax Highway (CA 174)  
**Rules:** No motorized vehicles; respect private property; stay on trails

**Trailheads:**

Talking Pines Trailhead: The official trail runs along the west side of Hwy 174 from Bar Ela Ranch Road on the north to a point about 60 yards north of Powerline Road where it comes out on the road shoulder. You can access this section of trail most conveniently at the Talking Pines Road trailhead where there is a small parking area alongside the trail just off Hwy 174. From the intersection of South Auburn Street and Colfax Avenue in Grass Valley take Colfax Avenue (Hwy 174) east about 7.7 miles to Talking Pines Road and turn right. The trailhead parking is immediately on your left with the trail just beyond it.

Chicago Park Trailhead: There is an informal trailhead at the unpaved community parking lot located between the Chicago Park Store and the post office at the intersection of Hwy 174 and Mt. Olive Road. Look for a narrow dirt path running close to the highway at the north end of the parking lot. From this point you can go north 0.8 mile to Powerline Road, then continue north from there on the official trail. Look for the unsigned trail entrance along the road shoulder of Hwy 174 about 60 yards north of the Powerline Road intersection.

**A bit of history:** The trail takes its name from the historic Nevada County Narrow Gauge Railroad (NCNGR) linking the transcontinental railroad at Colfax to the prosperous gold mining and fruit growing area around Grass Valley and Nevada City. It operated between 1876 and 1942. Providing both freight and passenger service, the railroad carried a fortune in gold and other cargo during its 66 year history. If you would like to learn more about this history, visit the Nevada County Narrow Gauge Railroad Museum at 5 Kidder Court in Nevada City or visit their web site.

**Trail Tips:** From the Talking Pines Trailhead, take a few minutes to go north on the trail about 500 yards to its end at Bar Ela Ranch Road. For most of this stretch you will be walking or riding along a rare remaining section of the original earthen berm on which the tracks of the NCNGR were laid. It isn't hard to imagine the sound of the steam engine and whistle as the train made its way through this countryside.

Going south from the Talking Pines Trailhead, the trail stays close to Hwy 174. It is often screened from the highway by intervening woods and brush on your left while, on your right, you will pass some fine pastures and meadows. Fallen pine needles and oak leaves soften the tread of the trail. The official trail presently ends where it comes out onto the paved highway shoulder about 60 yards north of Powerline Road.

From Powerline Road it is possible to continue south another 0.8 mile to the community parking lot in Chicago Park. Look for a dirt trail leaving the south side of Powerline Road just a few yards west of Hwy 174. In less than 0.2 mile, this trail comes out of the woods onto a very wide farm driveway at a road intersection (with Wabash Avenue and Moore Hill Road on the east side of Hwy 174.) Keep going south across the driveway area and pick up the trail again as it parallels Hwy 174 the rest of the way to Chicago Park.
From the Narrow Gauge Trail, bicyclists can easily connect with Lower Colfax Road, the popular bike ride between Chicago Park on the south and Laws Ranch Crossroad or Rattlesnake Road on the north. Take Powerline Road west 0.4 mile from the Narrow Gauge Trail at Hwy 174 to reach Lower Colfax Road. You can also get on Lower Colfax Road where it intersects with Mt. Olive Road near the Chicago Park Store.

From the community parking lot in Chicago Park you can also ride or walk west along Mt. Olive Road as far as the Chicago Park Elementary School using the Park & Walk Trail. A trail description is included under Trails > Trails Portal on this web site.