

## 2. Carlton Trail Route



View from swinging bridged, photo spot #1

### Highlights:

The scenery crossing the **swinging bridge** is spectacular in all seasons. The cascades and waterfalls along the river are mesmerizing. If the water is low enough, you will get a good view of the river bottom which was formed from mud into **shale 100,000** years ago. As you approach the end near the dam you will see **large gray rocks that are 1.9 billion years old and some of the oldest exposed rocks on earth**. Just below the dam there is a **jagged canyon** cut through the rock. You will need to take a right at the Munger Trail and walk to the bridge over the river to get a good look at the canyon.

## Parking and Directions:

From I35 heading south take the **239 Scanlon exit**. Turn left on highway 45 into Carlton.

Parking is available at the **Swinging Bridge Center on Highway 210** and at the **Carlton Park at 3<sup>rd</sup> street in Carlton**. If you happen to have two cars park at both sites and hike from the Swinging Bridge.



1. Cross the **Swinging Bridge** and climb over the rocks.
2. Climb the hill till you get to the crossing of several trails
3. **Take the trail to the right** and look for the **summer Trail** sign heading down to the river.

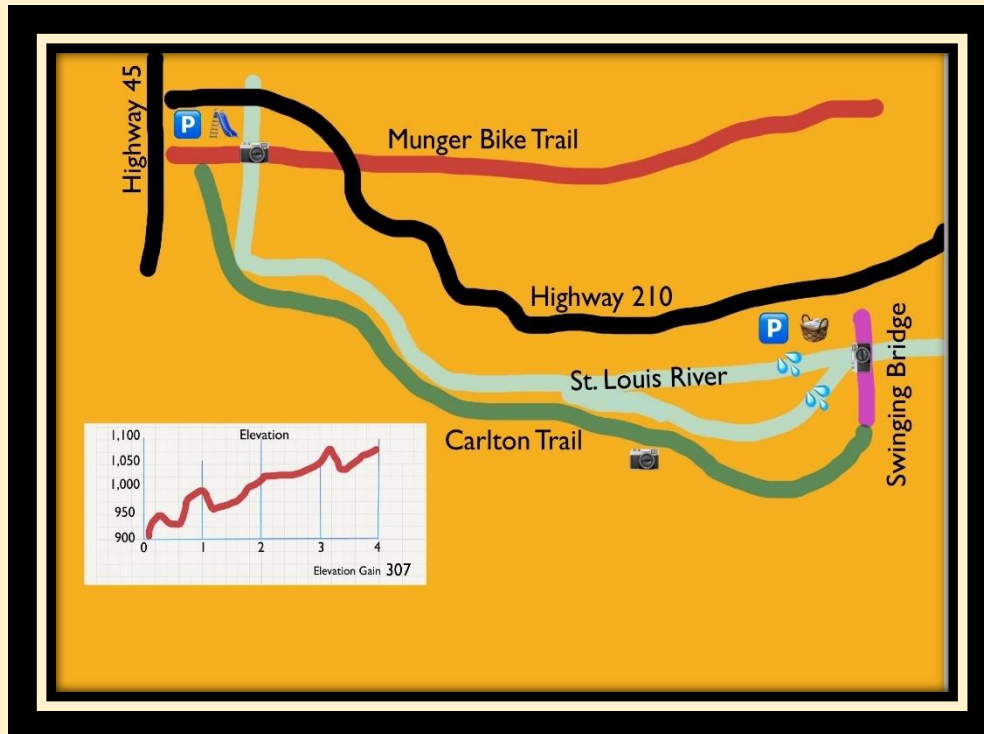


**Summer trail sign and path down to the Carlton Trail**

**Distance:** one way trip **3.5 miles using two cars.** Out and back, half way from either end, **4 miles**

**Difficulty Level:** moderate

**Recommended for:** most hikers



## The Route:

**Mile 1:** You head down a steep trail to the river and need to climb down a rock face. At the bottom of the rock face is a small creek. After you cross the creek, the trail follows the river with roots and rocks the whole way. On a hot day, there is plenty of shade on this trail.

**Mile 2:** The trail gradually goes upwards and you will find muddy spots as well as a rock wall to navigate. Waterbirds frequent this section of the river.

**Mile 3:** The trail heads up to a ridge overlooking the canyon just below the Thompson Dam. Here is where you will get good views of the ancient rock formations. You can get a better view of the canyon by heading east on the **Munger Trail to the bridge over the river.**

**Mile 4:** The trail levels out through a nice wooded area and then over **Otter Creek bridge.** Finally, you head up to the **Munger Trail** and into Carlton.

**Extended Route:** You can complete the out and back either way in **seven miles**

**Family Friendly Route:** From the **Carlton Park parking** area head down the **Munger Trail** to the **bridge** over the St. Louis River. Head back toward the parking area and look for path on the left the leads down to a bridge over **Little Otter Creek**. Follow this path through a beautiful wooded area until the path gets more difficult. Head back to the park where there is a playground and picnic area.



**View along river, photo spot #2**



**View of Canyon and Munger Trail Bridge, photo spot #3**

## **After the hike:**

Personally, I think this trail can be a great hike for a group of hikers. The river and its geology are truly spectacular. Also, at the end of the hike, you can enjoy ice cream and snacks at the **Magnolia Café in Carlton**. ([magnoliacafecarlton.com](http://magnoliacafecarlton.com)) For a special treat head west on highway 210 to the **Sweetly Kismet Candy Store**. [Sweetly Kismet Candy Store](http://SweetlyKismetCandyStore.com) Or you could enjoy a cold beverage and burger at the **Streetcar Kitchen and Pub**.

<https://www.facebook.com/CarltonStreetcar/> The best time of year would be late summer and fall. It is spectacular in the first half of October, when the park is in full color.

For trail maps and current trail conditions, head to the Jay Cooke State Park web site.

[www.dnr.state.mn.us](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us)

## **Strava Link**

[JLCarlton Trail Route \( Swinging Bridge to Carlton\) | 3.2 mi Hiking Trail on Strava](#)