

Ortonville Driving Tour Guide

Self-guided route through Big Stone Lake country

Stops: 15

Audio: about 13 minutes of narration

Downloads generated from the current site tour data.

Stop 1: Lakeside Park - Welcome & Big Stone Lake Origins

Location: 45.306667, -96.449444

Glacial origins, Dakota presence, modern angling culture, and Big Stone Island.

Welcome to Ortonville, on the southern tip of Big Stone Lake-the 26-mile border lake that helps launch the Minnesota River. This long, narrow lake sits in a trough carved by the last retreating ice sheets. When glacial Lake Agassiz drained through the low pass at Traverse Gap, it scoured a channel and left this ribbon of water behind. Long before the town was platted, Dakota people lived with and traveled

Stop 2: Shorewood Castle - Merchant's Lakeside Legacy

Location: 45.310169, -96.450274

Whimsical late-19th-century lakeside home; public roadside viewpoint coordinate provided.

Set above the water along Lakeshore Drive, Shorewood Castle channels the romance of the 1890s lake era. Local history ties the home to Ortonville's merchant class-families who built substantial lakeside retreats as the town grew from supply post to county seat. Foundation work here meant dealing with bedrock; crews cut into the granite that underlies Ortonville to anchor the structure near the shore. This

Stop 3: Historic Downtown - 2nd St NW (Commercial Historic District)

Location: 45.306040, -96.446314

Main street resilience: fires, rebuilding, brick, and Ortonville's purple-tinted granite accents.

This stretch of 2nd Street NW is the heart of the Ortonville Commercial Historic District. After devastating fires in 1879-and again in 1897-merchants rebuilt with more fire-resistant materials: brick storefronts trimmed with locally quarried granite that carries a distinctive purple hue. Grocers, hardware dealers, and outfitters served a region that spanned farms, lake cabins, and river traffic. Look

Stop 4: Big Stone County Courthouse & Memorial

Location: 45.304631, -96.444356

1902 courthouse by Fremont D. Orff-brick with Ortonville granite trim-overlooking Main Street.

Completed in 1902 to designs by Minnesota architect Fremont D. Orff, the Big Stone County Courthouse stands on a rise at 2nd Street SE and Jackson Avenue. The building's light brick is accented with local granite-durable, quarried stone that ties the public square to the very geology beneath town. From this hill you can look north down Main Street and toward the glint of Big Stone Lake. On the lawn, the

Stop 5: Ortonville Free Library (Carnegie)

Location: 45.308485, -96.448216

1915 Mission Revival library at 412 2nd St NW-Carnegie philanthropy on the prairie.

Opened in 1915 with funding from industrialist-turned-philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, the Ortonville Public Library adopted Mission Revival styling-unusual in west-central Minnesota. Broad eaves and clean, symmetrical massing echo the era's fascination with Southwestern and Mediterranean forms. Inside, the library became a civic living room: newspapers spread across tables, schoolchildren paging through

Stop 6: Pepsi / Former 7-Up Bottling (Transfer/Distribution)

Location: 45.303123, -96.443154

148 2nd St SE-longtime home to local soft-drink bottling and later Pepsi distribution.

This corridor along 2nd Street SE once rang with the clink of glass and the steady rhythm of conveyors. For decades it housed a local bottling operation-memories linger of 7-Up cases stacked high-and later served as a Pepsi distribution hub. Delivery trucks radiated from here to main streets across the county, keeping cafe coolers and bait-shop fridges full. The operation evolved with the beverage

Stop 7: Museum Campus - Paul Bunyan's Anchor & Historic Boat

Location: 45.296933, -96.432383

Hilltop displays at Big Stone County Museum: a 110-ton granite "anchor" and a preserved boat hull.

On the grounds of the Big Stone County Museum you'll find a legendary oversized artifact: Paul Bunyan's Anchor-an approximately 110-ton block of local granite, set here for Minnesota's 1958 centennial. It celebrates both tall-tale folklore and the region's quarrying heritage, where granite was split and hauled with astonishing ingenuity. Nearby rests a preserved historic boat hull associated with early

Stop 8: Ortonville Water Tower - Symbol & Skyline

Location: 45.316083, -96.446722

A modern landmark that greets drivers along US-12 and crowns the residential ridge. As you roll toward the western edge of town, the water tower pops above the neighborhood canopy-a simple piece of infrastructure that reads like a welcome sign. From here, look back east across the ridge toward downtown and the lake. In communities like Ortonville, everyday landmarks become memory anchors: meeting points, photo backdrops, and way-finding beacons for visitors finishing the loop.

Stop 9: Pier Park - Fishing Pier & Beach

Location: 45.307950, -96.451150

Public fishing pier and sandy swim beach along Lakeshore Dr.

Welcome to the lake's front porch. You're standing by Ortonville's public fishing pier and sandy beach on Lakeshore Drive-where summer really feels like summer. Kids race the length of the dock, anglers compare perch and crappie, and on windless evenings Big Stone Lake turns to glass. Big Stone is long and relatively shallow, which makes it a productive fishery. Spring brings panfish action, summer is

Stop 10: Sioux Historic Pavilion - Lakeside Events

Location: 45.315720, -96.450870

Beloved pavilion for dances, skating, and weddings.

The best nights here are the simple ones-music, a lake breeze, and a roomful of neighbors. The Sioux Historic Pavilion has hosted generations of gatherings: wedding receptions with cake and coffee, school events, roller-skating nights, and those summer dances where the doors stay open and the shoreline becomes part of the party. The building's charm is its purpose. It's not grand for the sake of grand-it's

Stop 11: Neilson Park - Hilltop Overlook

Location: 45.310980, -96.439310

Classic hillside vista over downtown and lake.

From up here at Neilson Park the puzzle pieces snap together-downtown stepping toward the water, neighborhoods folded into hills, and the long slate-blue run of Big Stone Lake disappearing to the south. Historic postcards were made from hilltops like this. The reason is obvious: light, elevation, and a clean line to the shoreline. On fall mornings, you can catch bands of fog lying low over the water. In

Stop 12: Bike & Walking Path - Refuge Connector

Location: 45.295150, -96.431350

City path linking Riverside Park/Hartman's toward the Refuge.

One of Ortonville's perks is how fast you can slide from town into prairie. This bike and walking path threads through neighborhoods and green spaces, then angles toward the countryside. Depending on your starting point, it's a casual ride-or a brisk walk-to the edge of the wild. Listen. You'll hear meadowlarks, red-winged blackbirds, and the soft clatter of cottonwood leaves. On cool mornings, the air

Stop 13: Big Stone National Wildlife Refuge - Auto Tour

Location: 45.260165, -96.339764

Prairie, granite outcrops, and birdlife near Odessa.

Out here, the land tells an older story. Granite outcrops-some of the oldest exposed rock in North America-break through the prairie grasses. In spring and fall, skyways open for migrating birds: white pelicans in formation, skeins of geese, and dabbling ducks painting motion across the ponds. The auto tour lets you ease through this landscape without rushing. Windows down on calm days. Pull to the side when you want

Stop 14: Mound Cemetery - Historic Resting Place

Location: 45.313333, -96.434167

Historic hillside cemetery; veterans' markers and family plots.

Please take this stop slowly. Mound Cemetery holds the names that built everyday life here-shopkeepers, teachers, veterans, and families whose stories turn up on street signs and in old photographs. The hillside lanes give you views back toward town and the lake. In spring, robins search the grass between stones; in winter, wreaths and flags add color to the quiet. If you walk a row or two, you'll notice

Stop 15: Ortonville Municipal Golf Course - Lake View

Location: 45.316450, -96.439350

Fairways above the water with a clubhouse vista.

The municipal course is golf with a lake breeze. Fairways step along the ridge, and on clear evenings the clubhouse windows glow like lanterns above Big Stone Lake. Even if you're not playing, the overlook is worth a detour-morning light rakes the grass in long lines, and at sunset the water below picks up orange and violet. On windy days you'll feel the gusts tug at your hat; on still days you'll hear tees