No other feature has had more impact on the founding of Minnesota. The waterfall not only built the city of Minneapolis but served as the nexus between nearly every part of the state.

The waterfall provided power. Throughout the years, mill owners took advantage of this power by installing water wheels. These water wheels helped turn the saws in sawmills which cut logs from the north and turned the millstones in flour mills which ground grain from the wheat fields of west. As a result, Minneapolis became the flour milling capital of the nation for fifty years.

Father Hennepin Bluffs Monument
On this spot in 1680, a band of Dakota led Antonine Augalle and his travelling companion, Father Hennepin, by the falls, making them the first Europeans to see the falls. Hennepin received most of the fame for what he called his “discovery,” when he published an exaggerated account of his travels.

The Stone Arch Bridge
Railroad tycoon and mill owner James J. Hill built the Stone Arch Bridge in 1883. Dubbed “Hill’s Folly” because of its cost, the Stone Arch Bridge connected the west and east banks of the river, linking Minneapolis’ milling operations with the agricultural fields of the Dakotas and the barge and rail traffic of St. Paul. The bridge stands eighty two feet in height and has 23 arches with spans ranging from 40 to 100 feet. Built to last, the Stone Arch Bridge is composed of the same rock that forms the waterfalls’ edge and contains sediment layers, fossils, and fossil burrows, tell-tale reminders of the ancient tropical sea in which the rock formed. The last passenger train passed over it in 1978 and it opened to pedestrians in 1994.

1. From the intersection of Main Street South East and Sixth Avenue South East, walk west toward the Stone Arch Bridge. Before you reach the bridge, on your left, will be a small garden with a stone marker.

2. From the entrance of the Mill City Museum, walk east on Sixth Avenue South East to the intersection with Main Street South East. On your right will be the Father Hennepin Bluffs Monument.

3. As you start your walk on the bridge, look to your left, where you will see the Southeast Steam Plant (now known as the Southeast Heating Plant)
This steam plant, built in 1903, helped power the electric trolley cars that dominated Minneapolis streets for over forty years. The University of Minnesota purchased the plant in 1974 and set about renovating it while retaining its historic character. It now supplies steam heating to the university.

4. Continue walking west on the Stone Arch Bridge. On your left will be
Lower Bridge/Tenth Avenue Bridge Remains
A single pillar in the Mississippi is the sole remnant of an iron truss bridge that used to cross the river. The Tenth Avenue Bridge was originally built of wood in 1872. Soon an iron-truss bridge replaced it. However, the city intended the bridge for wagon use and thus did not make it strong enough to support cars or electric streetcars. Consequently, the city closed the bridge in 1934 and tore it down nine years later to provide scrap metal for use in World War II.
5. Continue walking west on the Stone Arch Bridge. On your right will be

**St. Anthony Falls Laboratory**
Located on Hennepin Island, the University of Minnesota’s Saint Anthony Falls Laboratory uses water from the Mississippi, which flows underneath the building, to conduct experiments. Construction started in 1936 and ended in 1939 with the help of the Works Progress Administration, Northern States Electric, and the city of Minneapolis. The building uses the foundation of the paper mill built on Hennepin Island in 1857.

6. Continue walking west on the Stone Arch Bridge. On your left will be

**The Lower St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam**
Visible from the Stone Arch Bridge, the lower St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam still produces power. Built in 1895 to 1897 by Washburn-Crosby, it earned the nickname “La Barre’s Folly” after its incredibly high cost (nearly a million dollars) and after the engineer who thought of it, William de La Barre. The dam helped power electric street cars for fifty years.

7. Continue walking west on the Stone Arch Bridge. On your right will be

**St. Anthony Falls**
The face of waterfall has changed over the centuries. Originally a natural waterfall dependent on the Platteville limestone, St. Anthony was in danger of collapse throughout the early years of milling. Logs would fall over it and shatter the Platteville. Also complicating manners was a dam upriver that prevented water from flowing over the falls’ lip. This caused the limestone to freeze during winter and crack. As early as 1866, mill owners were trying to build a large wood covering, called an apron, to cover the falls and protect it. However, floods destroyed it. Later, another miller decided to build a tunnel underneath the waterfall to increase waterpower. The plan backfired and nearly destroyed the falls. The Army Corps of Engineers stepped in and by 1880 had built a massive wall beneath the falls to prevent further erosion and a concrete apron, a forerunner to the current apron over the falls.

8. Continue walking west on the Stone Arch Bridge. On your left you will see a long man-made pier stretching downstream. At the end of that pier, stood

**Spirit Island**
Now gone, Spirit Island was a small tree-covered rocky island that once stood downstream of the falls. Although the island held special significance for the Dakota, later Minneapolis residents quarried the island away to use its rock as building stone. The Army Corps of Engineers removed the last remnants of Spirit Island when they installed the lock next to the falls.

9. Continue walking west on the Stone Arch Bridge. In front of you, you will see the

**Washburn-Crosby A Mill and Complex**
The Washburn A Mill stood seven and a half stories high, making it the largest mill at the falls when it was built in 1874. However, four years later, the mill exploded and killed eighteen men. The explosion, resulting from flammable dust created by the milling process, shot the roof of the building hundreds of feet into the air and leveled a third of the falls’ industry. A month later, the remains of the Washburn A Mill still smoldered. However, by the next year, Washburn-Crosby rebuilt the Washburn A mill and the other millers rebuilt their mills. The mill produced flour until 1965. Its owners abandoned it, and a fire destroyed most of the mill in 1992. In 2003, the ruins became part of the Mill City Museum.

10. Continue walking west on the Stone Arch Bridge. On your right will be

**The Upper St. Anthony Falls Lock**
Between 1950 and 1963, the Army Corps of Engineers constructed a lock on the west side of the falls, vastly improving upriver navigation. The lock has a drop of 49.2 feet, the largest of any lock on the Mississippi River.