

Pittsburgh Steps Walking Tours – Banksville

Scaling the Banks of Banksville

Driving along busy Banksville Road, it is hard to picture present-day Banksville as a farming and coal mining community. But it once was, according to Pittsburgh Beautiful, when it was settled by Scottish and Irish immigrants after the Civil War. No traces of either industry remain.

Banksville got its name from Alexander Carnahan, an early landowner, honoring the family name of his second wife, Eliza Banks. But it could have been easily named for the steep hills that rise on either side of the valley through which Banksville Road now runs. Prepare to be tested by those banks during this walk.

You can learn more about Banksville here.

<https://www.pittsburghbeautiful.com/2020/01/28/banksville/>

This tour includes four sets of staircases, with a total of 330 steps.

This walk is about 2.1 miles long and takes about one hour. The tour is current as of May 2023.

I recommend starting this tour at the intersection of Potomac Avenue and Strachan Avenue. I found convenient street parking on Strachan Avenue.



Potomac Avenue Steps

Cross Potomac Avenue and descend the Potomac Avenue steps to Banksville Road. These 106 steps were built in 1964. As you start climbing back up the steps to Bellingham Avenue, you'll wonder, as I did, how Potomac Avenue is *not* one of the five steepest streets in Pittsburgh. Imagine the others! Actually, at least two of them also have city steps – Rialto Street (#5 with a 25 percent grade) in Troy Hill and Dornbrush Street (#2 with a 32 percent grade) in East Hills.

Bellingham Avenue is a pleasant street with well-kept brick ranch houses on the right. Two things give the street a peaceful feel – the high wooded ridge behind

the houses and, oddly enough, the muffled sounds of Banksville Road below, including the constant hum of an always busy Mr. Magic carwash. Follow Bellingham to its end, and turn left onto Tole Street, then left onto Wenzell Avenue. While the Pittsburgh Citywide Steps Assessment indicates there are 8 steps on this section of the Wenzell Avenue sidewalk, they no longer exist. When I first devised this tour in 2019, the 8 steps had been reduced to 4 when a new pharmacy was built nearby. Then, in 2022, a completely new sidewalk, sans steps, was constructed as part of rebuilding the bridge on the other side of Banksville Road.

Cross Banksville Road, where Wenzell Avenue becomes Carnahan Road. After crossing the new bridge over a small stream, turn left on Banksville Avenue, a reminder of a less busy and congested time in Banksville's past, when two narrow lanes sufficed.



Carnahan Street Steps

You will soon see a set of steps on your right. Climb these 74 steps to Carnahan Road, where you will turn left. As you pass Banksville Elementary School, stop to admire the large iron bell adorning the school's sign. The bell was cast by A. Fulton's Son & Co. in 1874 and, apparently, was the school bell for the Union Township School at the time. Banksville was annexed by the city of Pittsburgh from the former Union Township in 1928. Andrew Fulton, the founding owner of the bell company, also served as mayor of Pittsburgh.

After passing the school and stopping to admire the bell, proceed up Carnahan Road until you reach Woodcove Place, where you will turn right. Woodcove Place is another pleasant street lined with well-kept brick ranch houses. You will find a 73-step staircase on your left, built in 1958, lined by large trees and Rose of Sharon bushes. Take these steps to Kirsopp Avenue and then return to Woodcove Place.



Union Township School Bell



Steps from Woodcove to Kirsopp

Turn right on Woodcove Place, returning to Carnahan Road, where you turn left. Turn left onto Younger Street, as in “I don’t feel any younger climbing up and down these hills!”

Next, turn right on Anise Street, which soon becomes Anise Way, a street comprised entirely of steps. These 77 steps date to 1948 and are some of the steeper steps you will encounter anywhere in Pittsburgh.



Upper End of Anise Way

After descending the Anise Way steps, turn right on Banksville Avenue and make your way back across Banksville Road. After walking back up Wenzell Avenue, turn right onto Tole Street, but not before admiring the 90 steps, built in 1968, that continue to ascend Wenzell Avenue. Save them for another day, when you decide to explore the 40, yes 40, sets of steps in Beechview.

Walk back up Tole Street until you reach Bellingham Avenue, where you will turn right to return to Potomac Avenue. Turn left at Potomac Avenue and chug back up the steps to your starting point at the intersection with Strachan Avenue. Take pleasure knowing that the cars heading up Potomac Avenue are chugging as much as you are.

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