

Pittsburgh Steps Walking Tours

California-Kirkbride

Restored Rowhouses, Vestiges of Former Houses, and Great Skyline Views

The Pittsburgh Beautiful website describes California-Kirkbride between 1870 and 1900 as an “industrial area with tanneries, slaughterhouses, and the local railyard all flourishing . . . The workers needed housing for their families and several business owners bought land in the area to build rowhouses. Thus, the area is primarily residential in nature.” When taking this steps tour you get to see several of the remaining rowhouses, some attractively renovated, and you can enjoy the sites and sounds of the busy railroad lines that serve as the neighborhood’s southern boundary. You can learn more about California-Kirkbride here.

<https://www.pittsburghbeautiful.com/2020/01/27/california-kirkbride/>

The California-Kirkbride walking tour provides a variety of interesting things to observe: a classic old school building, a beautiful cemetery, distinctive houses, long and steep steps, steps that have been overwhelmed by vegetation, and spectacular views. You will navigate seven staircases with a total of 551 steps during this walk. You will also encounter two inaccessible staircases and one that is no longer recognizable as a set of stairs.

The walk is about 2.3 miles long and can be completed in an hour and a quarter. This tour is current as of June 2023.

I recommend starting this tour near one of the two intersections of Ridgeland Drive and Marshall Avenue. Ridgeland Drive is a short U-shaped street and the two intersections are close to each other. I found convenient street parking on Marshall Avenue.

Walk up Ridgeland Drive until you come to Ridgeland Place, a short dead-end street. At the end of Ridgeland Place, and to the left, you will see a set of 14 steps that lead from Ridgeland Place to a sidewalk along the grounds of Pittsburgh Oliver Citywide Academy, the former Oliver High School. The high school was named for David B. Oliver, President of the Pittsburgh City Schools 1911-1922. Follow the steps to Brighton Road and turn right.

As you walk along Brighton Road, the impressive Academy building, constructed in 1923, is on your right and the



Ridgeland Place Steps



Pittsburgh Oliver Citywide Academy

beautifully maintained Union Dale Cemetery is on your left. Among those resting in peace in the cemetery are several Civil War officers, a navy lieutenant who died on the U.S.S. Maine, a Tuskegee Airman, Allegheny City's first female physician, and a "horseplayer" nicknamed Pittsburg Phil. You can learn more about the history of the cemetery on their website here.

<https://www.uniondalecemetery.org/about-us>

By the way, note the missing "h" in Pittsburg Phil's Pittsburgh and ponder, as you will, the historical controversy and local pride in the spelling of our fair city's name. Why a burg-ending "h" in Pennsylvania's Pittsburgh, when like-pronounced towns in Kansas, California, and New Hampshire have no "h" at the end of their names? Learn the fascinating story here.



Union Dale Cemetery

<https://popularpittsburgh.com/whatsinanh/#:~:text=The%20official%20spelling%20of%20the,at%20the%20time%2C%20William%20Pitt.>

Turn right when you reach Island Avenue and then turn left when you reach Hyena Way. At Success Street, Hyena Way becomes the steep and dramatic Hyena Way steps. These 166 steps



Hyena Way Steps

were built in 1945 and afford spectacular views looking southeast to the West End Bridge. In my most recent descent of these steps, it appeared they were used frequently by local neighbors, as branches of annoyingly overgrown knotweed were broken and pushed aside. But at the bottom of the steps I found a "steps closed" railing, although there was not one at the top. While descending the steps I found no safety issues, so the reason for the sign is curious. I was able to step over the railing.

Near the bottom of the steps, just before you reach Marvista Street, you encounter a steps "junction," where two sets of steps meet each other. Leading to your left are one of the three staircases that form the Marvista Street steps. This section of the steps is impassable, so continue down the last

few steps of Hyena Way to Marvista Street. Turn right and walk down to the bottom of Marvista Street. Turn around and climb 66 steps that form the first of the three Marvista Street



Marvista Street Steps from California Avenue to Hyena Way

staircases, all constructed in 1951. These are high-rise steps that elevate from the street, are very close to the houses, and end in a tangle of overgrowth, so you will need to go back down the steps to Marvista Street to continue your journey.

After you pass Hyena Way and are walking along Marvista Street, you can study the second set of Marvista Street steps, which may be barely visible through overgrowth in summer months. For awhile they run as an elevated sidewalk and then start to ascend a hill, where they make a 90-degree turn and join the third set of Marvista Street steps, which have already started climbing the steep hill on the other side of the street. Disappointingly, the 209 steep steps comprising the third set of Marvista Street steps are also closed. Nonetheless, Marvista Street is the home of one of the more intriguing sets of steps you encounter while exploring Pittsburgh's steps:

high-rise steps, elevated sidewalks, steps on structures, and steps junctions. Marvista Street has it all!

Unable to continue along Marvista Street, continue to walk down Hyena Way until it meets Sunday Street, where you turn left. As you start to walk up Sunday Street you will notice the backs of new townhomes that have been built a block below you on Kunkle Avenue. These lovely homes blend in nicely with the recently renovated rowhouses original to the neighborhood. And as you pass Sedgwick Street on the right, you will be gratified to see that the new sidewalk's initial descent consists of, yes, steps!



Sunday Street Steps

Ascend the 90 Sunday Street steps, built in 1946, as you continue your journey. Along these steps there is a striking Victorian home on your left, with a stunning view of Pittsburgh's skyline to your right.

At the top of the steps you will find another steps junction, where you turn left to ascend 54 widely-space sidewalk steps that line Sunday Street as it curves left. This will also serve as our exploration to see where the closed Marvista Street steps led. Not surprisingly, it was to another stretch of the "real" Marvista Street, which comes in from the left when Sunday Street ends. Walk along Marvista Street until it ends, where you again encounter the third section of Marvista Street steps. Gazing down the hill, you will discover why they are closed – a section of four steps that are missing, along with two fallen trees draping the staircase. Impassable, indeed.

Retrace your steps to Sunday Street and turn right. You're afforded a fine view of Mount Washington as you descend the hill.



St. Ives Street Steps

Continue straight when you reach the previously-navigated steps junction, where you can now enjoy a shaded descent along the St. Ives Street steps, built in 1946. These 91 steps end at Morrison Street.

Look down Morrison Street to your right and you will see good examples of renovated Nineteenth and Twentieth Century workers' rowhouses, and appreciate again how beautifully the new townhomes on Kunkle Avenue blend in.

Turn left on Morrison Street. When you reach St. Mark's Place, look closely to your left and you will see remnants of the 13 Morrison Street steps that once led to an elevated sidewalk, the railings of which you can still see. And if you peer up through the overgrowth as you walk along, you can see remains of steps that led to houses that no longer exist.



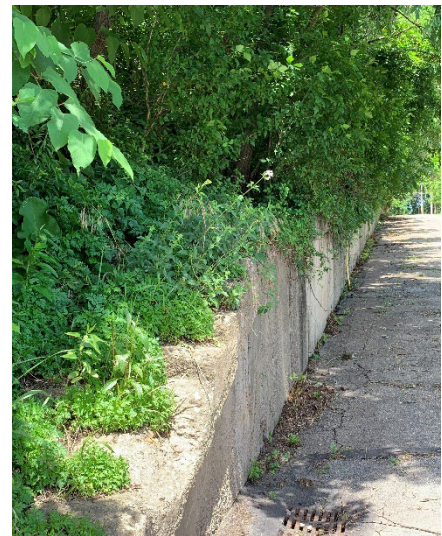
B Street Steps

Turn right on B Street and descend the 70 B Street steps, built in 1948. These steps afford great views of Pittsburgh's skyline.

Turn left on Kirkbride Street and follow it to Brighton Road, where you will turn left to return to your starting point. As you again walk past the Union Dale Cemetery, you'll have an even better appreciation for the "rural cemetery movement" in the United States in the 1830s and 1840s, as described in the cemetery's history. The peaceful green hills of the cemetery would have been a stark and welcome contrast to the hustle

and bustle of the tanneries, slaughterhouses, and busy railroads down the hill where you just hiked.

When you complete this tour, you might want to drive a few short blocks to Shadeland Avenue in Marshall-Shadeland. Here, at Café on the Corner, you can enjoy some gumbo and meet the



Remnants of Morrison Street Steps

café's owners, Michael and Lateresa Blackwell. Learn more about their inspiring story here.
<http://www.cafeonthecornerpgh.org/>

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