

Pittsburgh Steps Walking Tours – Crafton Heights Into the Woods

Crafton Heights received its name from the nearby borough of Crafton. How did Crafton get its name? According to the Crafton Borough website: “Crafton is named after James S. Craft, a frontier attorney who was granted land near the ‘forks of the Ohio’ in present-day Oakland. The sale of this land partly financed purchases of land in the Chartiers valley. Charles Craft, son of James, divided the land into lots on the death of his father and submitted it to the Allegheny County Courthouse as Crafton. Following a period of building, the borough was incorporated in 1892, with Charles as the first burgess.”

The Crafton Heights Walking Tour traces a long and pleasant neighborhood walk. Crafton Heights is an early Pittsburgh suburb built on land that had been used for farming. As a result, and unlike older Pittsburgh neighborhoods, you will not encounter lots of interesting old buildings or historical sites. Nor is this walk for the faint of heart, as you’ll encounter many steep inclines and declines.

There are eight stairways on this tour, offering an interesting blend of old and new concrete steps, wooden steps, wooden steps replacing decrepit concrete steps, high-rise steps, and a lovely pathway of steps through the woods. Seven of the eight stairways are safely passable, with a total of 488 steps.

This walk is 5.1 miles long and takes about two and one-quarter hours. This tour is current as of June 2023.

The best place to start this tour is with the Litchfield Street steps at their intersection with Chartiers Avenue. I found convenient parking on Chartiers Avenue across from Pittsburgh Langley K-8 School.



Cork Run Tunnel

As you cross the Chartiers Avenue Bridge to reach Litchfield Street, take note of a plaque on the left side of the bridge, celebrating its construction in 1939 as a Federal Works Agency project. Learn more about the Federal Works Agency here.

<https://livingnewdeal.org/glossary/federal-works-agency-fwa-1939/>

Then look right and see a tunnel serving the Port Authority’s West Busway. The Cork Run Tunnel, as it is known, was built in 1850 and is the sole surviving tunnel of nine that were built on the original Pittsburgh and Steubenville Railroad line. Learn more about this

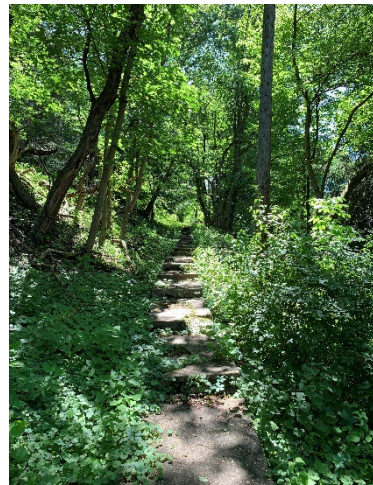
fascinating piece of history here.

http://pghbridges.com/articles/haer/corkruntun_HAER_PA382/corkruntun_HAER_PA382a.htm

Take the Litchfield Street steps from Chartiers Avenue to Toledo Street. These steps have two sections, divided by Fusion Street. The 113 steps were built in 1947 and become the “real” Litchfield Street at their end.



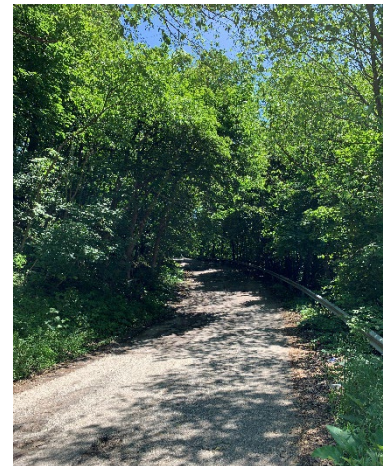
Litchfield Street Steps



Straka Street Steps

woods. But I was pleasantly surprised to find a long, delightful set of well-spaced steps that gradually rise through a beautiful wooded area. The stairway is 724 feet long and contains 104 steps. The pathway seems to get plenty of use by the locals, as greenery was cleared away to make the trail easy to navigate. But be careful: I did see some poison ivy along the way, particularly on the lower part of the steps. The steps eventually come out of the woods and become the “real” Straka Street at its intersection with Sanborn Street. Proceed straight on Straka Street, which is as pretty as the wooded part of the street.

When you reach the end of Straka Street, turn left on Middletown Road. Turn right on Winloch Avenue (spelled Winloch on maps and Winlock on the street sign) and then take an immediate left onto Stratmore Avenue. Turn right on East Steuben Street and walk down the hill and turn left on Cumberland Street. It’s always surprising to find, amid densely settled urban neighborhoods, roads or streets that appear to be climbing thickly forested hills or descending into wooded hollows, only to rejoin urban streets. Cumberland Street is one of such streets.



Cumberland Street

After climbing Cumberland Street you will turn right on Earlham Street and follow it to Ridenour Avenue. The Ridenour Avenue steps are to your right. Visually explore these 107 wooden steps as best you can. For safety reasons, I don’t recommend walking down them. Although I navigated this stairway once, several steps are missing and others seem ready to break or become dislodged. The stairway ended at a path through the woods. I suspect it used to go all the way down the hill to East Steuben Street.



Ridenour Avenue Steps

Return to Ridenour Avenue and follow it to Crafton Boulevard. Ridenour Avenue provides a good opportunity to see the Pittsburgh skyline on this walk, off to the left. Across Crafton Boulevard from the end of Ridenour Avenue you will see 18 steps that lead from Crafton Boulevard to Clearview Avenue in the Westwood neighborhood. These steps will be included in the Westwood neighborhood walking tour.

Turn left on Crafton Boulevard and proceed to Stratmore Street, where you will turn left, but not before looking across Crafton Boulevard and seeing 31 more steps that lead to Clearview Avenue. These steps are also in Westwood.

Proceed up Stratmore Street and turn right on Clairhaven Street. You will pass Pittsburgh Spice and Seasonings, housed in a former school. You don't have to venture very close to the building to catch the wonderful aroma of spices. Visit their website, sadly scent-free, here. <http://www.pghspice.com/> The "real" Clairhaven Street becomes the 67 Clairhaven Street steps, constructed in 1945. You will notice that wooden steps have been built to replace concrete steps that fell into significant disrepair. Proceed down these steps to Arnold Street. Along the way you will pass some "orphan" houses. "Orphans" are houses accessible only by steps. As Bob Regan notes in his book, Pittsburgh Steps, "These houses have mailboxes on the steps and also have steps themselves from the city



Clairhaven Street Steps

steps to the house.

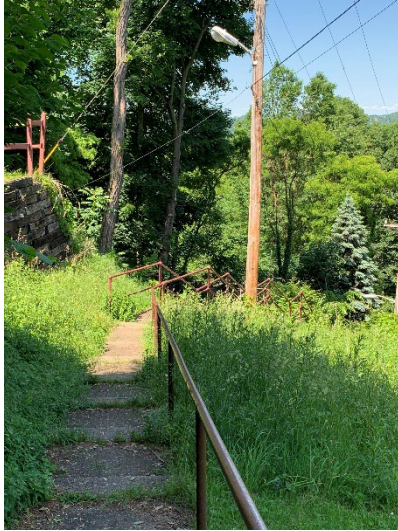
There is no other access to the houses except via the steps. The thoughts that occur to a visitor are *Where do they park? What about groceries? What about moving?"*



Round Top Street Steps

Turn left when you reach Arnold Street and proceed to Round Top Street. Turn left and take the Round Top Street steps to Norwalk Street and return to Arnold Street. Originally built in 1948, these 57 steps were recently reconstructed, gaining four steps over the original 53. A resident I spoke with whose front yard faces the steps was most appreciative of the reconstruction. And in a true competitive neighborhood spirit, disparaged the condition of the Clairhaven Street steps, just a few blocks away.

After returning to Arnold Street, turn left and then bear right to walk up the hill to East Steuben Street. Turn right and start your way to Ringgold Street. On the way you will pass the 28th Ward War Memorial at the corner of Obey Avenue. The flag was at half-staff on the day I first took this walk, it being Memorial Day. Behind the memorial is the Obey House Tavern. Based on



Small Way Steps

excellent reviews, it might be a good place to stop for a refreshment, especially since it is the only watering hole that you pass on this tour. It also seems appropriate that it is near a war memorial, as one of the reviews notes “. . . this place totally has a VFW or Elks/Eagles club vibe to it.”

Turn left when you reach Ringgold Street. At the end of Ringgold Street turn right on Wilton Way and then left on Small Street, appropriately named as it isn't even a half block long. The steps that lead off Small Street become Small Way. These 117 steps, built in 1949, are quite a bit longer than the street from which they take their name. Take them down to Crucible Street, but not before enjoying another fine view of our beloved Pittsburgh skyline off to the right.

Turn right on Crucible Street and follow it to Azalia Street (yes, Azalia and not Azalea), where you will turn left and walk to Chartiers Avenue. Across Chartiers Avenue from Azalia Street you will see a set of 14 steps that lead up to an elevated sidewalk, which after a short distance and serving three houses, becomes impassable, as it is very much overgrown. These steps are in Elliott, as Chartiers Avenue serves as part of its boundary with Crafton Heights.

Turn left on Chartiers Avenue. After you pass Nittany Street you will find another example of a set of stairs, in this instance a dozen and a half, that lead up to a house and then another impassable elevated sidewalk. You will see some



Dubois Street Steps

colorful murals on the wall you walk by on Chartiers Avenue just past these steps.



Wall Mural Along Chartiers Avenue

Turn left on Dubois Street, which becomes Idola Street for a short distance, and walk up the hill to India Street, where you turn right and then left on Dubois Street. You'll find the 12 DuBois Street steps on the left side of the street. After

ascending these steps, you will first think me a diabolical person for serving up such a steep trek practically within sight of your end point, and then you'll return to Chartiers Avenue and turn left to return to your starting point.

Walking along Chartiers Avenue you'll pass the Port Authority's West Busway Sheraden Station. The busways provide dedicated, speedy alternatives for some of our bus routes, allowing passengers to avoid congested rush-hour streets and backed-up tunnels. And you'll be reminded that many of our Pittsburgh steps begin and end at bus stops, still serving as important means of public transportation for many of our residents to get to work. Just like in the old days.

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