

Pittsburgh Steps Walking Tours – Morningside

The Loveliest Valley in Pittsburgh

“Were it possible to travel back in time to 1868, when the area known as Morningside was annexed to the City of Pittsburgh as part of Collins Township, one could choose no better place to alight than the top of the hill between present-day Greenwood and Baker Streets. There, on a site once occupied by Civil War trenches, one could have a spectacular view of one of, if not the, loveliest valleys in Pittsburgh.”

This statement appears on the History page of the website for the Morningside Area Community Council. A resident I met on that hill during my hike through Morningside seemed as happy to be living there as the description of the scene portended. The history goes on to describe dairy and vegetable farms, as well as orchards. The bucolic scene started to change in 1905 when the Chislett Street trolley line clanged into operation and suburban development began. You may learn more about Morningside by clicking here <https://www.pittsburghbeautiful.com/pittsburgh-neighborhoods/morningside/> and here. [MORNINGSIDE AREA COMMUNITY COUNCIL \(morningsidepgh.org\)](http://MORNINGSIDE AREA COMMUNITY COUNCIL (morningsidepgh.org))

The Morningside Walking Tour is a pleasant neighborhood walk along streets of well-kept two-story brick homes with old-fashioned porches. This tour has 11 staircases, with a total of 764 steps, some of which are in the Stanton Heights neighborhood, just west of Morningside. I chose to include them here, as they are proximate to the best route to cover all the steps in Morningside in a circular fashion.

This walk is about 4.2 miles long. You can complete this walk at a leisurely pace in about one and three-quarter hours.

This tour is current as of June 2023. The accompanying map shows the locations of the staircases you will encounter on this walk.



Baker Street Steps

I recommend starting your walk with the Baker Street steps at their intersection with Jancey Street. I found convenient street parking on Baker Street just east of the intersection.

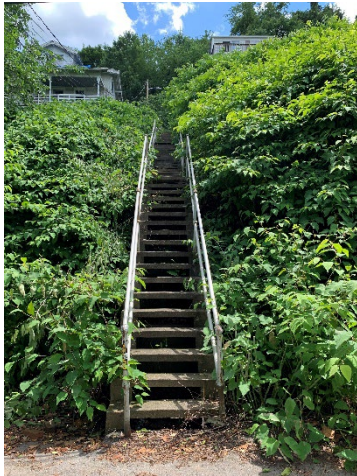
Proceed west on the Baker Street Steps. For decades these steps had been a mixed marriage of 22 brick and wooden steps and an asphalt pathway. More recently, however, it appears a steps-loving neighbor replaced the old wooden steps with sturdy landscaping stones. Some good local initiative!

Continue west on Baker Street until you arrive at the set of steps connecting Baker Street to Butler Street. This stretch of Baker Street is quite pleasant, with a steep hill up to your left and a steep hill down to your right, both thickly forested. There are 61 steps that descend from Baker Street to Butler Street, built in 1958. I could tell these steps get a fair amount of use as the knotweed was trodden down.



Steps at Baker Street and Butler Street

Head back east on Baker Street and turn right on Marietta Street. To your left you will see the 90 Dressing Way steps, built in 1950.



Dressing Way Steps

During my May 2019 visit I found these to be impassable because of the overgrowth of knotweed. But when I returned a month later, I found that the knotweed had been cleared by an occupant of one of the street's "orphan houses" - houses that front only on a set of steps and not on any street. The residents enjoy spectacular views north across the Allegheny River. These steps are in the Stanton Heights neighborhood. But in my most recent visit, June 2023, the steps were once again impassably overgrown with knotweed.

Return to Baker Street and turn right. As you walk along Baker Street and come out of the woods you will see both the Highland Park Bridge and a dam on the Allegheny River to the left.



Adelphia Street Steps

Turn right onto Morningside Avenue. As you start up Morningside Avenue, on your right you will see brick residences with their own impressive sets of steps leading to the front doors. You will then turn right onto the 45 Adelphia Street steps. During my May 2019 visit the initial portion of these steps was also invaded by knotweed, but the overgrowth had been cleared when I revisited this walk a month later and in June 2023. More local hands have helped maintain these steps in another way, applying roof shingles to the wooden steps to make them less slippery (or slippy, as we say in Pittsburgh). The steps evolve into a pleasant walking and driving path that joins to Duffield Street, where you bear left.

Follow Duffield Street to Greenwood Street. Turn right on the Greenwood Street steps. Duffield Street is the border between Morningside and Stanton Heights, so you enter Stanton Heights when you climb these steps. But hey, they are right

there, so you might as well walk them! They rise in two sections – 83 steps from Duffield Street to El Paso Street and 20 steps from El Paso Street to Nolo Way. They were built in 1948.

Turn left on Nolo Way, which appears as Windcrest Street on some maps, and proceed to Martha Street, where you will turn left and descend the Martha Street steps. These steps are in three sections with a total of 144 steps. They were built in 1949 and, at one point, afford a nice view of the rooftops of the houses that now occupy the “. . . loveliest valley in Pittsburgh.”



Martha Street Steps

Turn right on Morningside Avenue, a pleasant street lined with two-story brick homes with old-fashioned porches. As you are walking down Morningside Avenue you will see two steps on the right where Duffield Street joins Morningside Avenue, constituting one of the easiest staircases you will ever have to climb! Continue along Morningside Avenue until it ends at Stanton Avenue, where there are four steps joining the sidewalks along the two streets.

Turn left on Stanton Avenue and follow it until you come to Heths Avenue. Along the way and to the right across Stanton

Avenue you will see a set of steps going up the hillside. Because of the railing in the middle and the pillars on either side, my guess is this was the stairway to a mansion that once presided at the top of the hill. Once you become a Pittsburgh City Steps Explorer, it's easy to become obsessed with steps wherever you see them!

Turn left on Heths Avenue and follow it until you come to Hampton Street, at Heth's Park. Turn right and walk up and back down the Hampton Street steps. These 23 steps are relatively new, at least by Pittsburgh City Steps standards, having been built in 1976.

After walking back down the steps continue on Hampton Street and then turn right on Chislett Street. You soon stroll by the four buildings related to St. Raphael's Church. St. Raphael's Gym (Gallagher Hall) was built in 1911. It served as the first church for the parish.



Greenwood Street Steps



Hampton Street Steps

Further along Chislett Street you pass the Spigno Saturnia Italian American Society building. There was a large influx of Italian immigrants to Morningside after World War II, and this society appears to still be active.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Urb5JxQ_qQI

Turn left on Greenwood Street and then right on Jancey Street. Here you will see an old school building (over 120 years old) that has been put to good use for a variety of senior services and housing. Click here to see a 2017 news article about this project.

<https://www.post-gazette.com/local/city/2017/08/23/Old-Morningside-Public-School-housing-for-senior-citizens-Morningside-Crossing/stories/201708230392>



Former Morningside Public School



Gallatin Street Steps

Continue along Jancey Street and turn right on Gael Way, which becomes Witherspoon Street. Turn left and descend the Gallatin Street steps. These 133 steps were built in 1948.

At the bottom of the steps turn left and walk back up Baker Street to Jancey Street, where the 137 Jancey Street steps descend to Butler Street. You pass another orphan house while navigating these steps.

Climb back up the steps and return to your starting point.

While you do not directly pass a watering hole during this tour, you are very close

to a highly rated one when you finish. Just a block or two away you'll find the Bulldog Pub, located at 1818 Morningside Avenue. I enjoyed a cold Rusty Rail brew and a basket of pickle ricks while the bartender, who grew up in Morningside, enthusiastically told me which sets of steps he would use while running to the Dairy Queen in the summers of his youth. I asked him if he liked the ice cream. "No. But that's where the pretty girls worked!"



Jancey Street Steps