

Pittsburgh Steps Walking Tours – Oakwood

Sometimes It Takes a Sleuth

Pittsburgh Beautiful calls Oakwood “a quaint and relaxing community. The area has many pleasant homes with large yards and lots of trees . . . thus the shady streets of Oakwood. There are undeveloped areas that give this neighborhood, while still in the city of Pittsburgh, a rural feel.” I was in one of those areas when I did some of my best steps sleuthing so far. But more on that later.

Learn more about Oakwood here. <https://www.pittsburghbeautiful.com/pittsburgh-neighborhoods/oakwood/>

The Pittsburgh Citywide Steps Assessment shows five sets of steps in Oakwood, with a total of 145 steps. One of those is inaccessible. There is also a 37-step stairway not in the Assessment that you will be encountering. So, plan on navigating five stairways and a total of 110 steps.

This short walking tour is 1.6 miles long and will take you about 45 minutes. This tour is current as of July 2022. Use the map that accompanies this tour to supplement the written directions that follow. The map shows where you will encounter the five staircases in Oakwood.

One of the stairways in Oakwood used to connect Noblestown Road and Baldwick Road. Constructed in 1980, it has 11 wooden steps that now leads directly into someone’s backyard. As a result, it is cut off from the rest of the neighborhood and is not easily incorporated into a neighborhood tour. If you want to see the steps, park in the lot of the large office complex that sits on a hill above the intersection of Holiday Drive and Noblestown Road. Walk down Holiday Drive to the intersection, where you will see the top of the stairway across Noblestown Road. Alternatively, you can experientially “claim” them via the accompanying photograph.



Steps Along Noblestown Road

After visiting the steps on Noblestown Road, I began this tour near the Crafton Elementary School, at the intersection of Crafton Boulevard and Oakwood Road. Start your tour by crossing the Oakwood Run Bridge, which is the beginning of Oakwood Road. The bridge crosses over Pensdale Street and Oakwood Run, which has carved an impressive gorge over the centuries.

While taking photographs on the bridge, I was greeted by a young man, a high school junior, who was eager to tell me about how much he liked walking down into the gorge to take photographs and enjoy a natural setting in the midst of a bustling city. He was in the photography club at Brashear High School. His family had moved from Beltzhoover to Oakwood

a couple months prior, but he still went to Brashear. He told me about an easy way to get down into the gorge (which involved taking some steps!), and he promised me I would encounter a babbling brook and deer.

At the end of the bridge you will find steps to the right that lead from Oakwood Road to Balver Avenue. Much of the 165-foot length of these relatively new steps, built in 1964, is a sidewalk that runs along the rim of the gorge, affording a view down the steep and thickly wooded hillside. There are only 18 steps along the way, most of them leading up the final ascent to Balver Avenue. Turn left when you reach Balver Avenue and then take another left at Turner Street. When you reach the end of Turner Street, turn right onto Craftmont Avenue. As you look up Craftmont you see a good example of “the shady streets of Oakwood.”



Oakwood to Balver Steps

Turn left when you reach Durbin Street. Oakwood Park is on your left. Halfway down Durbin Street you’ll encounter 16 steps that lead up to the park. I find it unusual that these steps are included in the Citywide Steps Assessment, as they



Oakwood Park

are clearly part of the park and not a sidewalk or street that “official” steps most often are.

Nonetheless, they are clearly worth climbing for what you will see once you do. At the top of the steps on your left is the old school bell from the elementary school that once stood on the site. Every school day the bell welcomed students to their studies until the school closed in 1971. Also in the park are the well-preserved remains of a reservoir. The old walls now shelter basketball and tennis courts. Old folks in Oakwood still talk about their youthful adventures of enjoying the reservoir

as a swimming hole in defiance of local police. After enjoying these sites, walk across the park until you find Carrot Way, a small two-track dirt road leading downhill to your left to Craftmont Avenue. Turn right on Craftmont Avenue and follow it to Oakwood Road.

Turn right on Oakwood Road and walk to its end, where you will encounter a set of steps that descends to Glendon Street. These 28 steps were built in 1948.

Turn left on Glendon Street, only a block long. When Glendon Street turns left to become Grassmere Street, there is a turnaround in front of you with a large fallen tree. Save the image of this fallen tree for later in the tour.



Oakwood to Glendon Steps

Continue down Grassmere Street to its intersection with Oakwood Road. At the intersection you find a sight common to many Pittsburgh steps walking tours – a small war memorial, this one “erected as a lasting tribute to the men and women of the Oakwood community who loving liberty served its

cause in our country’s conflicts.” During one of my visits to Oakwood I watched a woman and two of her children doing some “spring cleaning” around the monument – mowing the grass, trimming the bushes, and tending to the flowers – just after doing the same in their yard on Grassmere Street.

Cross Oakwood Road and walk across the Oakwood Run Bridge. After crossing the bridge, turn right to cross Oakwood Road again. As soon as you do, you will see a set of steps to the right that descend to Pensdale Street (also called Steen Street on some maps). These 37 steps, it seems to me, were part of the 1984 reconstruction of the bridge. They do not appear in the Pittsburgh Citywide Steps Assessment. Descend these steps to Pensdale Street and turn left. You’ll drop further into the gorge as you walk down the street, which parallels Oakwood Run, and is lined with houses with spacious yards – providing very much the rural feel described by Pittsburgh Beautiful.



Glendon Street Steps

Now comes the sleuthing part of this walking tour. After you have walked along Pensdale Street for a while, you will see ahead on the right, just before Pensdale Street turns left to become Glendon Avenue, an old iron grate with guardrails on either side. Before reaching the grate, and also on your right, you will see a bright yellow fire hydrant. Peer into the woods about halfway between those two landmarks and you’ll spot a telltale set of yellow brick steps ascending the hill. Sadly, their condition makes it difficult to climb them and see what might remain of the 72 Glendon Street steps. That is, unless you want to do some “bushwhacking,” which I did on one of my visits to Oakwood. As I got near the top of the hill, what came into view? Yes, the impressive fallen tree at the end of Glendon Street. So the yellow brick steps once led to somewhere. If

not the Emerald City, at least to Grassmere Street.

Walk back up Pensdale Street. After passing the last house before reaching the steps leading down from the bridge, you will pass a gradual slope that leads down to the babbling brook recommended by the local high schooler I’d earlier encountered. As promised, a deer was there to greet me.



In the Gorge

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