

Pittsburgh Steps Walking Tours

Lincoln/Lemington/Belmar

The Mystery of the Church

“All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” Leo Tolstoy, Anna Karenina

All neighborhoods are unique; each in its own way.

Lincoln-Lemington-Belmar is the only Pittsburgh neighborhood to straddle a river, in this case the Allegheny. That counts as unique. The neighborhood was home to the old Belmar Racetrack, which no longer exists. The impressive Brilliant Cutoff Viaduct, constructed as part of the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1902, remains a defining visual neighborhood landmark to this day. While during this tour you won't walk under the viaduct's towering and expansive arches, measuring 80 to 100 feet wide, you can drive beneath them if you approach the neighborhood from Washington Boulevard. Learn more about the viaduct here <http://pghbridges.com/pittsburghE/0592-4479/brilliantSilver.htm> and learn more about the neighborhood here. <https://www.pittsburghbeautiful.com/pittsburgh-neighborhoods/lincoln-lemington-belmar/>

The Pittsburgh Citywide Steps Assessment identifies seven stairways with a total of 495 steps in the neighborhood. You will be exploring all of them, along with one additional set of steps I discovered, which I will describe when we get there in the tour. So overall, you will be navigating eight stairways with 553 steps.

The walk is 2.9 miles long and can be completed in about one and one-half hours. The tour is current as of March 2024.

I recommend starting this tour near the intersection of Verona Boulevard and Broadcrest Drive. I found convenient street parking on Broadcrest Drive.

This tour starts out with a unique set of steps, the Verona Boulevard steps, numbering 110. Why are they unique? They initially appeared to be nonexistent; the sidewalk along Verona Boulevard had no steps! But then I noticed the 13 sets of steps leading



Verona Boulevard Steps

from the street down to the sidewalk, serving each of the 13 houses along this section of Verona Boulevard. The houses then had their own sets of steps leading from the sidewalk to their front doors. While I chose not to walk up and down each set, feel free to do so if you want to claim you climbed ALL the steps in this neighborhood!

Proceed toward Lincoln Avenue on Verona Boulevard. As you cross Lincoln Avenue, having looked left and right for safety's sake, your eyes will be drawn to a beautiful ornate church steeple down the hill to your right. You may be tempted to walk down Lincoln Avenue to study the steeple closer up. But resist temptation and stay on the straight and narrow. You will find your reward later in the tour.



Laporte Street Steps

Shortly after crossing Lincoln Avenue, and immediately after passing Poketa Street, you will find a set of 24 wooden steps that lead down to Laporte Street. Descend these steps and continue along Laporte Street to Campania Avenue, where you turn left. Turn right onto Gopher Street at the end of Campania Avenue. Gopher Street quickly becomes a narrow, wooded lane. Often the case in Pittsburgh, a city street takes on the feel of a remote country lane. Gopher Street becomes Worthington Street. Turn left when you reach Rugby Street and left again when you encounter Somerset Street. Immediately on your right you will see a set of steps.

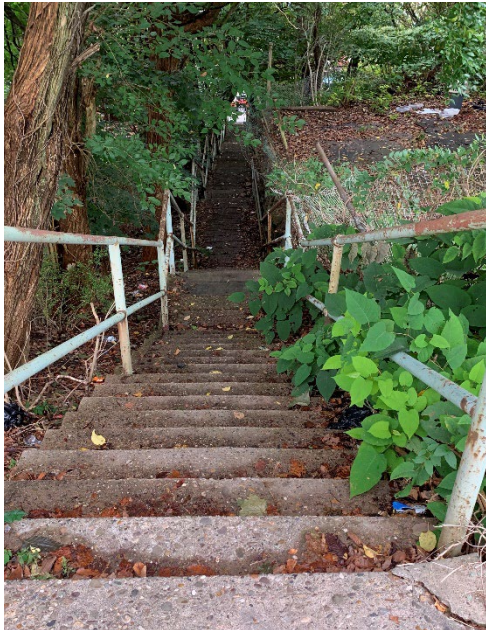
These 50 steps, built in 1961 and known as the Oberlin Street steps, lead down to Lemington Avenue. If you are as old as I am and fondly remember the movie "Cool Hand Luke," starring Paul Newman, the railings along these steps will remind you of the movie's opening scene. If you need a reminder, or are unfamiliar with the movie, YouTube its opening scene after you descend the steps. [Cool hand Luke opening scene \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)



Oberlin Street Steps

At the bottom of the steps, look to your left. In several of these walking tours I recommend "watering holes," as I call them. For obvious reasons, Fred's Pub is not one of them. Since you cannot stop there for a refreshment, turn right on Lemington Avenue. Follow Lemington Avenue until you encounter Westmoreland Avenue, where you turn right. As you walk along Westmoreland Avenue, on your left you will see a fine view of the Cathedral of

Learning. As with the Pittsburgh skyline, I always enjoy views of the Cathedral from different directions and distances. <https://www.tour.pitt.edu/tour/cathedral-learning>



Toga Way Steps

Where Westmoreland Avenue takes a sharp right you will see the Toga Way steps descending to your left. These 91 steps were built in 1944. Descend the steps, which return you to Lemington Avenue.

Turn right on Lemington Avenue and follow it to Lincoln Avenue, where you will turn left. The sidewalk for Lincoln Avenue is on the left. On your right you will pass Arbor Street and a set of steps. Ignore those steps for now. But don't worry; you will be returning to this stairway soon. Continue walking on Lincoln Avenue.

Finding the next set of steps takes an eagle eye. When you reach a large vacant lot on your left, look across Lincoln Avenue. (If you reach Sweet Tooth Soft Ice Cream at the corner of Apple Street, you have gone a little too far.) Depending on the time of year, you may barely be able to

see a set of steps ascending into the woods. It took me a little while to find them during my September exploration, as the brush and foliage had all summer to try to foil me. But a winter excursion made the steps quite visible. These 57 steps were built in 1945. The railings are in bad shape, but follow them up to Arbor Street, where you will turn right and walk back down to Lincoln Avenue.

Now you can take the steps you ignored a few minutes ago. They lead up to your left and become Bower Street at the intersection with Pointview Street. Built in 1946, they number 142; a number that is always good for a cardio workout! Continue straight on Bower Street and then turn right on Oliviant Street. I met a pleasant gentleman along my way on Oliviant Street. We talked about his boat sitting on a trailer across the street from his house. He is happy to live so close to the Allegheny River, where he planned to be spending a lot of time in his boat in the coming summer.



Steps from Lincoln Avenue to Arbor Street

Continue along Oliviant Street and soon you will see a set of steps on your left, near Oliviant Street's intersection with Montezuma Street. These steps lead down to the Paulson Playground,



Bower Street Steps

which appears to be an exceptional neighborhood resource. These steps do not appear on the Pittsburgh Citywide Steps Assessment. I wondered why, as they have all the characteristics of city stairways in terms of appearance and construction. Perhaps they were built as part of the development of the playground and are considered integral to it, rather than a walkway.

Follow the steps down to the playground, walk past the basketball court to the baseball diamond, turn right, and sprint alongside the ballfield, down the first base line, like you are trying to beat out a groundball to deep short. Or you can walk if you prefer. Either way, turn right at the driveway leading out of the park and then turn left when you rejoin Olivant Street.

After crossing Paulson Avenue, Olivant Street continues uphill until it ends while taking a sharp

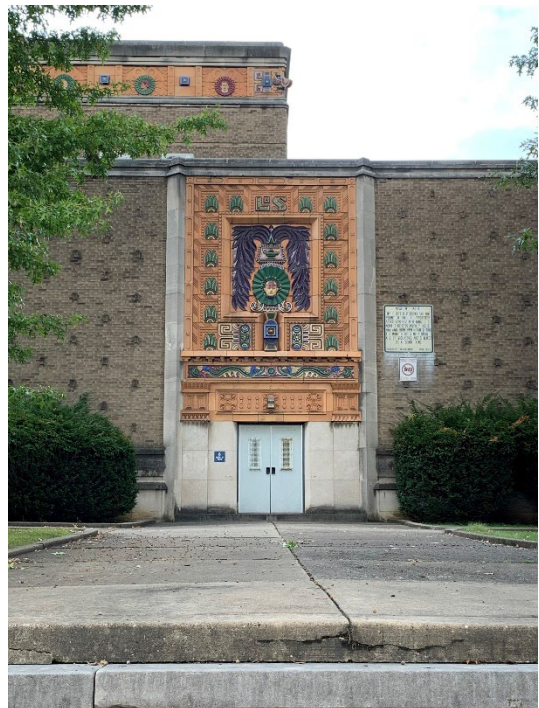
right turn to become Missouri Street. Soon on your left you will find 21 steps that lead uphill to a chain link fence. I suspect it used to go to a street that disappeared when a new housing development was constructed on the hill. Continue along Missouri Street after exploring the steps.

At the corner of Missouri Street and Lemington Avenue you will find a fire station, Engine Company No. 38. It's always a joy to find lovely old buildings still serving their original purposes.

Turn right on Lemington Avenue. On your left you will see the home of Catalyst Academy Charter School in the former Lemington Elementary School. This striking building, constructed in 1937, features Mayan-inspired terra cotta motifs and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1986. Learn more about the building here.

<https://livingnewdeal.org/projects/lemington-elementary-school-pittsburgh-pa/>

Across the street you will see a church. Built in 1928 as the Epiphany Evangelical Lutheran Church, the



Former Lemington Elementary School

impressive stone structure now houses Nabhi Christian Ministries.

Turn left when you reach Lincoln Avenue. Soon on your left you will see the Rev. Dr. Bruce W. Thielemann Building, housing the Lincoln-Lemington Family Health Care Center and the Dorothy Day Apartments. My best guess is the structure originally served as a school. On these walking tours we see many old school buildings now serving new and useful purposes. Rev. Thielemann was described as “the preacher’s preacher” by his biographer, John Zingaro. I am guessing that the apartments are named for Dorothy Day, the journalist and activist.

Farther along Lincoln Avenue, and on your left, you will find a new sign and fresh landscaping invitingly beckoning you up the driveway. The complex, named Mary Peck Bond Place, houses a new apartment complex along with a new office of East Liberty Family Health Care Center. Mary Peck Bond was an Underground Railroad activist. You can learn more about Mary Peck Bond here. [Historic legacy | The Pittsburgh Foundation](#)



Cornerstone Baptist Church

As you continue up Lincoln Avenue you will be impressed by a large stone church looming above you, topped off by the steeple you saw as you were starting out on this walking tour. See? Good things come to those who wait! This is the Cornerstone Baptist Church. But wait! When did Baptists start adorning their churches with statues of the Blessed Virgin Mother and saints? In 1969, according to the cornerstone near the church’s front door! “But this can’t be right,” I thought to myself. “This building is much older than that.” Sure enough, as I explored the church’s exterior, I solved the mystery of the saints. Over the side door is the inscription “19 St. Walburga 28.” I found no record of when St. Walburga Parish ceased to exist, paving the way for this impressive structure to become Cornerstone Baptist Church.

Continue up Lincoln Avenue, turn left on Verona Boulevard, and return to your starting point. If you didn’t walk up and down the 13 sets of steps

that constitute the Verona Boulevard steps, as I didn’t first time around, go ahead and do it now. It will save you from going back, which I did. I couldn’t leave the trek uncompleted!