

Pittsburgh Steps Walking Tours – Schenley Park

A Beautiful Bonus

In its Pittsburgh Citywide Steps Assessment, the City of Pittsburgh notes, “The City’s steps connect communities and provide residents access to transit and other amenities.” Schenley Park’s six sets of steps access its extensive trail system. Some of these steps were built by the Works Progress Administration, later named the Works Projects Administration, in 1938 and 1939. That means these staircases are not truly “city steps” as we have come to think of other steps throughout Pittsburgh. Nonetheless, the city includes them on the steps map accompanying the Pittsburgh Citywide Steps Assessment. So, you get the bonus of a pleasant hike through a beautiful park!



Entrance to First Set of Lower Panther Hollow Trail Steps

At the bottom of the first staircase you descend, you will find an informative sign describing the impressively extensive activity of the WPA during the 1930s, both throughout the United States and here in Pittsburgh, including the steps you will encounter during this tour. The WPA also constructed bridges in Schenley Park. Learn more about the bridges here.

<https://livingnewdeal.org/projects/schenley-park-bridges-pittsburgh-pa/>

Schenley Park was created in 1889 on land donated to Pittsburgh by heiress Mary Schenley. Flowing through the middle of the park is Panther Run. Steep hillsides on either side of the run create the impressive, thickly forested Panther Hollow. Learn more about Schenley Park here. [Schenley Park | Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy](#)

This walk is 2.3 miles long and should take less than one and one-quarter hours. I recommend wearing good hiking shoes, as the Hollow Run Trail portion of this walk is narrow and, depending on the time of year and recent precipitation, may require stone-stepping across the stream and navigating muddy patches. There is also a short, narrow stretch along the edge of a hillside that requires extra care. There are six sets of steps in this hike, with a total of 374 steps. In addition to the map I have provided you, I suggest downloading the official park map. It is here. <https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/415693/Park%20Maps/Schenley%20Map.pdf>

This tour is current as of March 2024.



Second Set of Lower Panther Hollow Trail Steps

Start your walk on Lower Panther Hollow Trail behind the Schenley Park Café and Visitors Center. Two sets of steps aid your descent into the hollow. The first long, serpentine set of 83 steps ends at a trail. Across the trail you'll find the second set of steps, numbering 43 and built by the WPA in 1939. The stairway leads you to a stream, flowing under an impressive stone arch. This is one of two tufa bridges you will see during this scenic walk. Learn more about these bridges here. [What's tufa stone, you ask? It's the reason two Schenley Park bridges may become City Historic Landmarks \(nextpittsburgh.com\)](http://nextpittsburgh.com)

Follow the trail to the right. You are now on Hollow Run Trail. At the bottom of the trail you will see Panther Hollow Lake to the right and Panther Hollow Bridge arching 120 feet above you. How many of us have driven across the bridge but never walked beneath it? My guess is you, too, will say "Wow!" as you are looking up.

Walk along the lake, keeping it to your right, until you see a set of steps leading up the hill to your left. These 138 steps connect Hollow Run Trail to Upper Panther Hollow Trail. After climbing them you will cross Upper Panther Hollow Trail and take the next set of steps, numbering 58, to Panther Hollow Road. At the beginning of this stairway you will notice a memorial plaque indicating that Alexander C. Speyer, Jr., had the steps restored in memory of his wife. I suspect this is the late Mr. Speyer who founded the North Star Coal Company in West Mifflin and was an active Pittsburgh philanthropist.



Steps from Hollow Run Trail to Upper Panther Hollow Trail

At the top of the steps you will be near one end of Panther Hollow Bridge, affording you a close-up view of one of the fierce panthers that guard the bridge entrances. In the distance, at the other end of the bridge, you see Phipps Conservatory. Did panthers ever roam these woods? Find out here.

<https://www.pittsburghparks.org/blog/panthers-in-parks-in-pittsburgh>



Steps from Upper Panther Hollow Trail to Panther Hollow Road

Go back down the steps to Upper Panther Hollow Trail and turn right. The trail is wide, suitable for biking and walking. This is a pleasant walk - the hillsides are thickly forested and the view down into the hollow gives you a sense of the forest primeval, but for the sound of the cars above you on Panther Hollow Road.

I found this stretch of the walk teeming with chipmunks, a creature I much prefer in nature, not in my backyard. So overrun was my yard in Rochester, New York, that I would bait the little fellas into Have a Heart traps with peanut butter and take them to the city park a half mile away and set them free. One day, well into this never-ending battle, as I drove off with my captives, one of the workers then employed at our house said to my wife, "Poor Stew. He doesn't realize those little guys

will find their way back here before he does!" In this forested Chipmunk Heaven, I could enjoy their determined scurrying.

At the junction of Upper Panther Hollow Trail and Lower Panther Hollow Trail, bear right and follow the trail to Bartlett Street. Turn left on Bartlett Street and proceed until you see its intersection with Serpentine Drive. On your left, descending into the woods, you will see the entrance to a set of steps, numbering 40, that becomes Hollow Run Trail.

Hollow Run Trail wanders alongside Panther Run, which will be on your right for most of the rest of your hike – walking along a babbling brook is a rare city pleasure. Now, barely able to hear the cars far above you, you truly get the sense of being in the forest primeval. Far along the trail, and quite a ways after you passed under one of the tufa bridges, you encounter another set of steps. After ascending these 12 steps, bear left to stay on Hollow Run Trail, again keeping panther Run on your right. You will soon pass under Panther Hollow Bridge again and retrace your footsteps to the visitors center. I recommend stopping in the pleasant center for a refreshment after your hike.



Entrance to Steps Leading to Hollow Run Trail



Figure 1Tufa Bridge Along Hollow Run Trail

The long walks through quiet woods that are part of this tour were calming, leaving me alone with my thoughts and the occasional sounds of birds and insects. But one thought remains – were those chipmunks scurrying about for food, or were they on their way back to yards to torment the homeowners who had deposited them in Schenley Park?

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