



WESTMORELAND
Ramble
2024

A scenic drive through southern Westmoreland County ...

*From the Flanks of Chestnut Ridge to
the Banks of Sewickley Creek*

... for a driver and a navigator



*At a minimum, a driver and a navigator are required for a Ramble!
Route information is provided only as a suggestion for a scenic drive.
Please drive safely and observe all traffic rules.*

Enjoy this Westmoreland Ramble!



From the Flanks of Chestnut Ridge to the Banks of Sewickley Creek:

*A Scenic Drive Through Southern Westmoreland County
(with a small excursion to Fayette County)*

Duration: 1 hour / Length: 34 miles

Bordered on the east by Chestnut Ridge and on the west by the valley of the Youghiogheny River, southern Westmoreland County is a scenic landscape of rolling hills dotted with farms. Small towns throughout this region grew up around coal mines, steel furnaces, or railroad depots, and were once connected by streetcar and railroad lines rather than highways. Streams here flow down from Chestnut Ridge to either Sewickley Creek or Jacobs Creek, both of which will be seen at various places along our driving tour.

This year's Ramble driving route will start at the Westmoreland Land Trust's St. Xavier Nature Preserve in Latrobe. We will travel south-west along the flank of Chestnut Ridge to the Kecksburg Space Acorn and historic Mount Vernon Iron Furnace in Bullskin Township (Fayette County). From there, our route will swing west with stops at Jacobs Creek Park and West Overton Village & Museum, then head north to end at the Sewickley Creek Wetlands.

Start your Ramble at St. Xavier Nature Preserve, located just off Route 30 at 106 St. Xaviers Road in Latrobe PA, near the Latrobe Regional Airport.

IMPORTANT! . . Set your Trip Odometer to “Zero” as you pass or exit from the driveway of Bellbrook, the Nature Preserve’s Visitor Center.

Mile

0.0 Bellbrook, former guesthouse of the St. Xavier Academy & Convent

At mile 0, you will see the historic Bellbrook residence on the right side of St. Xavier’s Road, which was once the guesthouse of the St. Xavier Academy and Convent. The Westmoreland Land Trust (WLT) acquired the 248-acre St. Xavier campus in 2022, with funding assistance from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) and from the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas. The land will be conserved in perpetuity as a nature preserve open to the public, with the Civil War-era guesthouse “Bellbrook” serving as the base of operations for the park. Note - If you wish to tour Bellbrook as part of your Ramble, please contact docent Dominic Demangone at ddemangone.pmsc.wlt@gmail.com.



0.0 Pass by or turn right out of the Bellbrook Driveway and continue south on St. Xavier’s Road.

The grove of trees visible on your left leads to the meadow where the former Convent and Academy once stood. The academy was founded in 1845 by Sister Frances Xavier Warde, one of the original seven Sisters of Mercy who travelled to Pittsburgh from Ireland in 1843. The building seen in this postcard was built in 1868 after a fire destroyed the original building. It operated as a boarding school, day school, and convent until 1972 when it was also destroyed by fire.



0.3 St. Xavier Cemetery

The Sisters of Mercy own the St. Xavier Cemetery, consecrated in 1866. Five of the original sisters who came from Ireland are buried here, along with many of the later sisters who taught here or served in the Pittsburgh area.



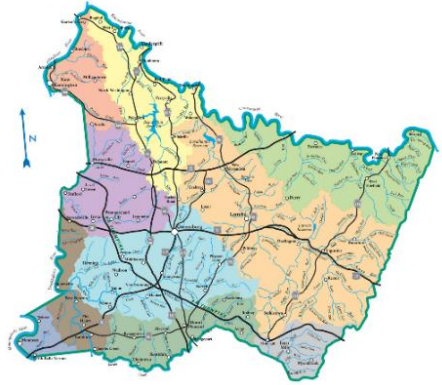
0.6 Chestnut Ridge comes into view on the left horizon

0.9 Bear right past Smith Hill Road onto Sessi Road

1.9 Turn left onto Schmucker Road

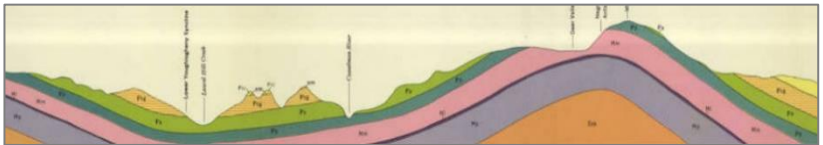
2.3 Headwaters of the north branch of Sewickley Creek

The small farm pond that you can see along the left side of Schmucker Road is the origin of the northern branch of Sewickley Creek. As you drove here, you crossed a subtle but important watershed divide in our county. To the north of this point, rainfall drains into Monastery Run and Four Mile Run, then flows north into the Loyalhanna Watershed (orange on the map) to eventually join the Allegheny River. Rain that falls from this point southward, however, either drains into the Sewickley Creek Watershed (light blue on the map) or the Jacobs Creek watershed (dark green on the map), both of which flow west toward the Youghiogheny and then the Monongahela Rivers.



2.5 Turn right onto PA Route 981 South (no road marking visible)

As you drive south along Route 981, you are following the valley of Sewickley Creek, although it can only be seen as a line of trees across the farm fields to your left. You are also traveling along the axis of the Latrobe syncline, a downward sag in our county's underground rock layers. In the far distance, the slopes of Chestnut Ridge represent a parallel anticline or arch which lifts hard older rock layers like the Pottsville Sandstone high above the softer and more easily eroded shales and coal layers of the Latrobe synclines.



3.9 Bear left and merge onto PA Route 130 (Main St) in Pleasant Unity

The village of Pleasant Unity was formerly called "Buzzards Town," taking its name from a family who were descended from John Buzzard, who owned the land upon which the town is built. The name is now written "Bossart." The Jamison Coal and Coke Company opened an underground coal mine three miles north of the town in 1918 and by 1940 it employed approximately 300 miners. The company store was located on Route 981 at Phillips Street. Like many of our county's underground mines, the mine shut down in the 1960's.

4.0 PA Route 130 East crosses over Sewickley Creek

The name of Sewickley Creek comes from two Native American words: *sawi*, meaning raccoon, and *ukli*, meaning town. Charles A. Hanna, in his history of this region, *The Wilderness Trail* (1911), says 'The name of the Asswikales Indians who came from South Carolina has been preserved to the present day under the form of Sewickley, a name now applied to two creeks, forty miles apart, one on the east and the other on the west side of Pittsburgh.'



4.7 Excellent view of Chestnut Ridge on the eastern horizon

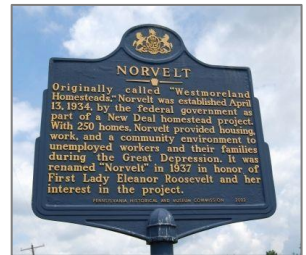
As you travel eastward from Pleasant Unity, you will be rewarded with a spectacular view of Chestnut Ridge directly ahead of you, weather permitting. From this vantage point, you can see how linear the ridge is, running in a nearly straight line from the southwest to northeast along the grain of the Appalachian Mountains. The ridge gradually disappears as it heads north into Indiana County, but it grows even more noticeable to the south in Fayette County and continues on into West Virginia as well.



5.2 Turn right from PA Route 130 East onto PA Route 982 South

7.0 PA Route 982 South passes over Welty Run

Welty Run flows from its headwaters on Chestnut Ridge west to Norvelt, where it joins Sewickley Creek. Founded in 1934, Norvelt is named for Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. It was one of several homesteads created by the federal government during the Great Depression as part of the New Deal, to support “stranded industrial workers” and their families.



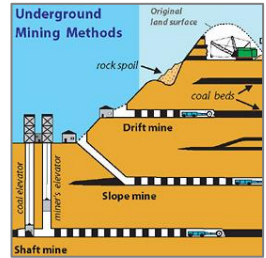
7.7 PA Route 982 South passes the entrance to Mammoth Park

Mammoth Park is the oldest park in Westmoreland County's park system. Acquired in 1964, it currently offers accessible fishing docks, a kayak/canoe launch, a skate park, a giant slide, a model airfield, athletic facilities, and picnic pavilions. Events and festivals such as the Westmoreland County Senior Games and Mammoth Fest I are held there each year.



8.0 Turn left to stay on Route 982 South as you enter Mammoth

The town of Mammoth was so named because it was the largest coal mine in the world at the time. The Mammoth mining complex consisted of the Mammoth No. 1 Mine (a shaft mine) and the Mammoth No. 2 Mine (a slope mine). Begun in 1879 by a Greensburg coal company, both mines were later purchased in 1889 by Henry Clay Frick.



In January of 1891, a build-up of underground methane gas, known at the time as firedamp, was ignited by a miner's oil lamp, resulting in the deaths of 109 immigrant coal miners. Sadly, most of the men and boys trapped in the mine were not killed by the explosion itself, but rather were suffocated by the gas.



8.7 Follow PA Route 982 South as it turns left at Springertown Road

8.8 Follow PA Route 982 South as it turns right at Meteor Road

9.5 Look for the blue and white Fire Department Building on the right. Turn right off PA Route 982 South before passing it; continue onto Water Street in Kecksburg

Kecksburg was founded in 1866 when John Martin Keck, a German immigrant, purchased five acres and laid out plans for a small community. His son William worked with a local bottling firm to sell the mineral water that flowed from an artesian spring on the Keck farm. The firm later also sold a popular line of soft drinks including the well-known Keck's Ginger Ale in a unique 'big stick' bottle.



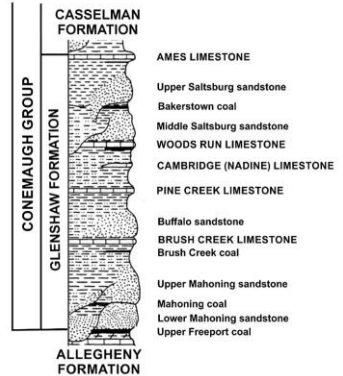
9.6 The Kecksburg Space Acorn can be seen to the right of Water Street

On the night of December 9, 1965, a brilliant fireball was seen across six U.S. states. People in Kecksburg reported seeing smoke and hearing something crash in the woods nearby. The area where the object landed was sealed off by the US Army and PA State Police and a bell-shaped object was reported to have been taken away to be examined. In 2005, NASA released a statement reporting that experts had examined this debris and determined it was from a Soviet satellite. However, many conspiracy theorists still believe it was an alien spaceship. An episode of the TV show Unsolved Mysteries covered this event, and their mock-up of the 'spaceship' can be seen here. The Kecksburg Volunteer Fire Department sells UFO souvenirs and holds an annual UFO Festival here every July as a fundraiser.



9.6 Turn left from Water Street onto Kecksburg Road / Claypike Road

As Kecksburg Road continues east toward Chestnut Ridge, its name changes to 'Claypike Road.' Clay is abundant in the soils of Westmoreland County, formed by weathering of our predominantly shale bedrock. In the early days of the area's settlement, many townships had 'clay pikes.' These roads were based on packed clay and were therefore easy on the feet of horses and oxen during dry weather. During wetter weather, however, these roads could become treacherous and slippery.



9.8 Turn right from Kecksburg/Claypike Road back onto PA Route 982 South

Claypike Road runs up the flank of Chestnut Ridge toward Acme, so named because it is the highest point in Mount Pleasant Township. Along the way, it passes by Polymath Park, a collection of four Frank Lloyd Wright residences along the crest of Chestnut Ridge that now offer lodging and dining.



10.9 Passing Fairview Church and Cemetery

Fairview Church of God was established in 1862 by a group of local families. Originally located in a one-room building on the opposite site of the road, the foundation of the present-day church contains logs from the original Civil-War era building.



12.1 PA Route 982 South crosses over the Pennsylvania Turnpike

12.6 PA Route 982 South crosses over Jacob's Creek

In several places along Chestnut Ridge, large streams like the Conemaugh and the Loyahanna have cut deep gorges through the hard sandstone crest of the ridge, creating 'water gaps'. This pattern of 'superimposed drainage' suggests that the streams are geologically old, eroding through the mountain as it was uplifted.



Jacob's Creek has cut a similar 'water gap' east of here, and the Pennsylvania Turnpike uses this valley to cross Chestnut Ridge. South of this point, PA Route 982 also follows Jacobs Creek as it flows out of the water gap west toward the Youghiogheny River.



12.7 PA Route 982 South passes by Mennonite Camp Road

The Mennonite camp that gave this road its name was founded near the clear waters of Laurel Run in 1943 by a group of Mennonites affiliated with the Mennonite Publishing House in Scottsdale, PA. The initial 45-acre property has since expanded to 600 acres and now operates as Laurelville Retreat Center, a non-denominational conference center.



13.3 Continue straight through the stoplight intersection with PA Route 31 to remain on PA Route 982 South / Pleasant Valley Road

During the earliest days of Westmoreland County, the main east-west route through the Chestnut Ridge did not follow Jacob's Creek, probably because its deep gorge was too choked with vegetation to be easily passable. Instead, the route ran straight from Donegal through Acme to Laurelville (the current path of PA Route 31) on a road built of wood planks. Wide boards were laid over dirt roadways on log foundations, slightly elevating them to stay out of the slippery clay. Plank roads were often built by toll companies, and they felt and sounded like boardwalks. The wagon drivers who used this road called this slope of Chestnut Ridge 'Three Mile Hill'. The descent was only two miles long, but they claimed the bumpy plank road made it feel a mile longer.



Note – at this point, our Ramble will take a small excursion from Westmoreland County into northern Fayette County to visit two important historical sites.

17.2 Turn left onto Eutsey Road after passing Woodale Brethren Church

17.6 Continue on Eutsey Road for 0.4 miles and turn right onto Park Road

17.7 Turn right into the parking lot of Bullskin Twp. Historical Society

The Mount Vernon Iron Furnace was built in 1798 by Ironmaster Isaac Meason and operated until 1830. It and the small village that once existed around it were named in honor of George Washington. The furnace obtained its iron ore and limestone from local mines on Chestnut Ridge (where limestone is still mined at the Bullskin Quarry for road aggregate). Water came from nearby Mounts Creek and timber to make charcoal was cut from local woods and dragged to the furnace by work horses. The smelted iron was cast into kettles, pots, skillets and cannonballs, then shipped from Connellsville to markets in Pittsburgh and beyond. The furnace was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1991 and has been maintained by the Bullskin Township Historical Society since 1996.



17.7 Turn left out of the parking lot onto Park Road, then turn left onto Eutsey Road and retrace your route back to PA Route 982.

18.2 Turn right onto PA Route 982 North (heading back the way we came)

19.1 Turn left from PA Route 982 North onto Mudd School Road. Continue straight through stop-sign to stay on Mudd School Road

19.8 Mudd School Road passes the entrance to Jacobs Creek Park

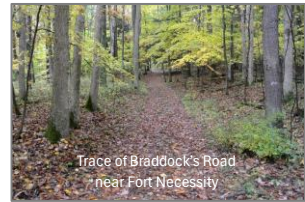
Green Lick Run Lake, created by a dam at the confluence of Green Lick Run and Latta Run, is a shallow flood control reservoir where only non-motorized boats are permitted. The 100-acre Fayette County Park around the lake is named for Jacobs Creek, since it discharges into Jacobs Creek just past Green Lick Dam. The park offers pavilions, a playground, and a fishing dock, and is popular with birders.



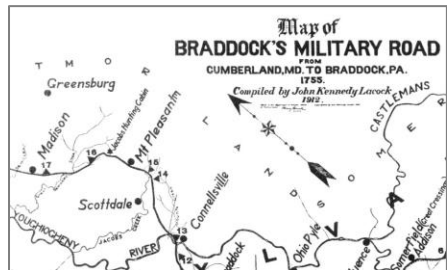
20.0 Pull off Mudd School Road on the left-hand side to view the historical marker for Braddock's Military Road / Great Swamp Camp

In May of 1755, during the French and Indian War, British General Edward Braddock set out from Fort Cumberland in Maryland with a force of British and Provincial troops on a major expedition. His goal was to capture Fort Duquesne at the Forks of the Ohio (later Pittsburgh) and drive the French north into Canada. George Washington, then a 23-year-old Lieutenant-Colonel, served as Braddock's aide-de-camp and frontiersman Daniel Boone was one of the wagon-drivers.

The terrain was rugged, and Braddock's forces had to blaze a road through the wilderness to accommodate their wagons, cannons, and supply train. On July 1, 1755, they camped near this spot while they felled enough trees to create a bridge or corduroy (plank) road across the "Great Swamp" wetlands of Green Lick Run and Jacob's Creek. The army made only one mile of travel the day after leaving Great Swamp Camp (#14 on the map), pausing again at Jacob's Cabin Camp (#15) south of Mt Pleasant before traveling north.



Braddock's Expedition met the French and their native allies near present-day Braddock where they were defeated in the Battle of the Monongahela. General Braddock was mortally wounded and died during the retreat; he is buried on the grounds of Fort Necessity.



20.2 Turn right from Mudd School Road onto Gimlet Hill Road

20.3 Continue north from Gimlet Hill Road onto Hammondville Street

20.8 Hammondville Street bends left here, paralleling Jacobs Creek

21.2 Turn right onto Main Street, crossing over Jacobs Creek

- We are now re-entering Westmoreland County. -

21.2 Make a sharp left at this five-way intersection onto Buckeye Road

21.4 Buckeye Road crosses the Coal and Coke Trail

Set on scenic old railroad corridors, the six-mile-long Coal & Coke Trail connects the communities of Mount Pleasant and Scottdale. It follows the railroad corridor of the Southwest Pennsylvania Railroad, originally used to transport coal and coke from the many coal mines and coke ovens that operated in this part of Westmoreland County in the early 1900s.



21.6 Buckeye Road passes Buckeye Tram Road

In the late 1800's, industrial workers in Westmoreland County either lived in company 'patch' towns near their jobs or commuted to work on trains and trolleys like the West Penn streetcar seen here at the Pennsylvania Trolley Museum in Washington PA. West Penn Railways operated more than 150 miles of streetcar lines in Westmoreland and Fayette Counties. It is possible that the name of Buckeye Tram Road is a vestige of some former trolley route.



22.1 Buckeye Road bends right and passes Evergreen Drive-in Theater

The Evergreen Drive-In originally opened on June 19, 1947, as the Ruthorn Drive-In. It was built by Donald J. Ruth, owner of Ruth Lumber and Builders Supplies of Scottdale, Pa. The Drive-In was renamed the Evergreen Drive-In sometime in 1949. In 1961 the theatre was sold to the Michaels family of Pittsburgh, Pa. The Michaels family owned and operated the theatre until 1998 when it was purchased by the Warren family who still own and operate it. The Warren family also owned the Blue Dell Drive-Inn Theater and Swimming Pool in North Huntingdon, near the Westmoreland Land Trust's Ackermann Nature Reserve.



22.5 Turn right from Buckeye Road onto Mount Pleasant Road

22.7 Turn left from Mount Pleasant Road onto PA Route 819 South

23.1 Stay in right lane as PA Route 819 South crosses over US Route 119

24.0 Make a sharp right off PA Route 819 South onto West Overton Road, then turn right into the parking lot of West Overton Village & Museum

West Overton Village is one of only two pre-Civil War industrial villages remaining in the United States. A nonprofit historic site and museum that preserves nineteen historic buildings across 40 acres, it is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. First settled in 1803 by the Overholt Family, the homestead gradually grew into a center of industry, including a rye whiskey distillery, gristmill, coal mine, and coke ovens. West Overton is also the birthplace of industrialist Henry Clay Frick, grandson of Abraham Overholt. The West Overton Museum is open and offers guided tours to visitors Thursday through Sunday from May to October.



24.1 Turn right out of the West Overton Museum lot onto Frick Avenue

24.2 Frick Avenue passes by the Jacobs Creek Watershed Association

Jacobs Creek Watershed Association originally helped to create flood control structures like Greenlick Run Dam and Bridgeport Dam to protect creek-side homes in the watershed from flash floods. The association re-formed in the 1990's to combat abandoned mine drainage and stormwater issues, as well as to promote environmental awareness.



24.2 Merge onto PA Route 819 North, and return to US Route 119

24.9 Turn left onto the entrance ramp for US Route 119 North

32.1 Merge onto US Route 66 and then take Exit 1, Arona Road (no toll)

33.5 Turn left from the exit ramp onto North Center Avenue

33.6 Turn left into the parking area of the Sewickley Creek Wetlands

Wetlands are areas where water is present near the surface of the soil for some part of the year. They play an important role in the water cycle, filtering out contamination and providing habitat for wildlife. The Sewickley Creek Wetlands are man-made, built by the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission as a replacement for natural wetlands lost during construction of Toll Route 66. The 21-acre interpretive area is maintained by Westmoreland County Bureau of Parks & Recreation.



We hope you enjoyed this Westmoreland Ramble!

2024 Westmoreland Ramble Map and Simplified Directions

Mile

0.0 (STOP) St. Xavier Nature Preserve

0.0 Head south on St. Xavier's Road

0.9 Bear right onto Sessi Road

1.9 Turn left onto Schmucker Road

2.5 Turn right onto PA-981 South

3.9 Bear left, merging onto PA-130 East

5.2 Turn right from PA-130 onto PA-982 South (note – no road sign here)

8.0 Turn left as you pass through Mammoth to stay on PA-982 South

8.7 Stay on PA-982 South as it turns left at Springertown Road, then right at Meteor Road

9.5 (STOP) Turn right at the blue and white building onto Water Street to see the Kecksburg Space Acorn

9.6 Turn left from Water Street onto Kecksburg Road / Claypike Road

9.8 Turn right from Kecksburg / Claypike Road back onto PA-982 South

13.3 Continue through intersection with PA-31 to stay on PA-982 South

17.2 Turn left after Wooddale Brethren Bible Church onto Eutsey Road

17.6 Turn right from Eutsey Road onto Park Road

17.7 (STOP) Turn right into the parking lot of Bullskin Township Historical Society to visit the Mount Vernon Iron Furnace

17.7 Turn left onto Park Road, then left onto Eutsey Road.

18.2 Turn right onto PA-982 North

19.1 Turn left from PA-982 North onto Mudd School Road

20.0 (STOP) Pull into the left-hand parking area by the lake to see the Braddock's Expedition / Great Swamp Camp historical marker

20.2 Turn right from Mudd School Road onto Gimlet Hill Road

20.3 Continue north from Gimlet Hill Road onto Hammondville Street

21.2 Turn right onto Main Street, crossing over Jacobs Creek

21.2 Make a sharp left at this five-way intersection onto Buckeye Road

22.5 Turn right from Buckeye Road onto Mount Pleasant Road

22.7 Turn left from Mount Pleasant Road onto PA 819 South

23.1 Stay in right lane as PA 819 South crosses over US Route 119

24.0 (STOP) Make a sharp right off PA 819 South onto West Overton Road, then turn right into the south entrance of West Overton Village & Museum's parking lot to visit the Museum

24.1 Make a right turn out of the Museum parking lot's north entrance onto Frick Avenue

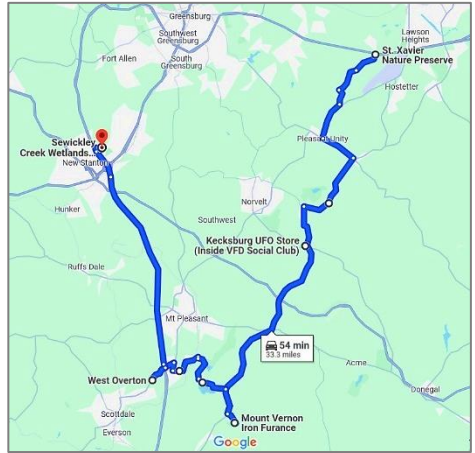
24.2 Merge onto PA-819 North and return to US-119 North

24.9 Turn left on the ramp to merge onto US-119 North; continue on US-119 for seven miles

32.1 Merge onto Toll Route 66, and then take Exit 1 for Arona Road (no toll)

33.5 Turn left from the exit ramp onto North Center Avenue

33.6 (STOP) Turn left into the parking area to visit the Sewickley Creek Wetlands



Scan this QR Code
for a link to this
driving route in
Google Maps



218 Donohoe Road
Greensburg PA 15601

<https://westmoreland-landtrust.org>
westmorelandlandtrust@gmail.com