

Railroad Buff Day Trip

The region around Ebensburg has a rich history in railroading. This ride includes the Cresson Rail Yard, the Gallitzin Tunnels, Horseshoe Curve, Railroaders Museum in Altoona, a curvy ride climbing the mountain alongside the railroad from Altoona, the lookout at Cassandra, and a great old ride on an abandoned section of Route 53 through several railroad underpasses.

Just east of Ebensburg you turn off Admiral Peary Highway (old Route 22) onto Route 53N through the town of Cresson. Cresson is home to a busy rail yard, one of the most storied parts of the old Pennsylvania and B&O railroads, presently served by Norfolk Southern and CSX. The Cresson yard slope sees up to 80 moves each day including helpers. There are several places along Front Street (one street to left of Route 53) to pull over and view the rail yard activity, including the Cresson Area Heritage Park which hosts a N5C caboose and observation platform.



Cresson Rail Yard



Gallitzin Tunnel Park

Continue on Route 53 and turn right into Gallitzin. The Gallitzin Tunnels are a must see for any rail buff. There is a park adjacent to the tunnels, including a 1942 N5C caboose restored to original condition. Visitors can tour the caboose's sleeping areas, eating area, pot bellied cooking and heating stove, cupola, and lighting and bathroom facilities. The park

is an excellent site for photos. You cross the Jackson Street bridge while approaching the park. The bridge offers a terrific view of the tunnels.



Gallitzin Tunnels



Horseshoe Curve

The museum is situated nearby the park, and features a display of historical artifacts donated by railroad enthusiasts. There is a souvenir shop, and a 24-seat theatre with a schedule of railroad programs.

The next stop on this trip is the world-famous Horseshoe Curve, a National Historic Landmark and one of the world's most incredible engineering feats.

Ride the Funicular, or walk 194 beautifully landscaped steps to the tracks for a front seat view of a train man's wonder. There is a visitor center with descriptive displays of the building of the marvel, and a souvenir shop.



Horseshoe Curve's Incline Funicular

Following this trip highlight, we continue down the mountain to Altoona. Next stop... the Railroaders Memorial Museum at 1300 9th Avenue. There is a \$9 admission to the museum.

The Railroaders Memorial Museum has attempted to duplicate what life was like in Altoona in the 1950s when the Pennsylvania Railroad was booming. The museum has duplicated places like Kelly's Bar, which was a bar located near the entrance to the railroad shops. The museum has also mimicked several of the neighborhoods that were present in Altoona during the railroad era. Visitors will see places like Little Italy and Dutch Hill.



Altoona's Railroaders Memorial Museum

The museum consists of three floors filled with attractions. One of the attractions is The Newsstand, which is reminiscent of the newsstand that was located by the foot of the 12th Street Bridge in Altoona. The attraction has a holograph of a newsboy, and the holograph tells visitors the story of old Altoona. On the first floor of the museum, visitors are transported back in time to a rail station. The sounds of steam engines and whistles blowing can be heard. In the lobby, visitors see their first attraction - a life-size replica of K-4 #1361. A replica of a train conductor compliments the

replica of the locomotive.

The Altoona Railroad Museum Theater shows films that are designed to explain how the small town of Altoona became a bustling hub of activity for the Pennsylvania RR. There is a children's museum on the third floor of the Railroaders Memorial Museum. The children's museum contains model train displays and a variety of toys for the children to play with.



Railroaders Museum Display

A variety of old train cars and other equipment that the Pennsylvania Railroad used is stored on the grounds outside of the museum. One of the train cars on display is a private rail car that belonged to Charles M. Schwab, the famous steel magnate. This particular rail car was acquired by the museum in 1975. The antique equipment is well-maintained and nicely displayed.



Bennington Curve

From Altoona you head back up the mountain toward Ebensburg, but by a different route. Take Sugar Run Road, a curvy road that follows alongside the railroad as it winds its way westbound up the mountain to Gallitzin. Just before arriving in Gallitzin you will see above you Bennington Curve, the site of the Feb. 18, 1947 derailment of the Pennsylvania Railroad's Red Arrow. Twenty-four people lost their lives and 131 were injured when the Red Arrow express passenger train, traveling in excess of 50 m.p.h., jumped off the track on the Bennington Curve and tumbled down a 200 foot deep gorge,

Bennington was a coal mining and railroad village located one half mile east of the Gallitzin tunnels, on the Pennsylvania Railroad's mainline. The village of Bennington was first erected during the construction of the Gallitzin tunnels. The Pennsylvania Railroad at that time owned a coal mining operation in order to supply coal for the railroad. There were coke ovens located in Bennington and the iron ore was smelted in glowing coke ovens that line the country road running from Bennington to present day Gallitzin. You can still see them, in place, to this day. The only other remnant of Bennington is the cemetery.



Wreck of the Red Arrow on Bennington Curve, 1947



Bennington Cemetery

Sugar Run Road ends in Cambria County's smallest town, Tunnelhill. If you want to see Bennington Cemetery and get a real close-up of the tracks, turn right on Tunnelhill Street, and at the RR tracks turn right on a gravel road, Bird Eye Road. You can ride to a gate, and it's a short walk from there.

To continue the trip, make a left turn on Tunnelhill Street and ride over to the Allegheny Portage Railroad National Historic Site.



The park contains the summit level Visitor Center, historic Lemon House, Engine House #6 Exhibit Shelter, the Skew Arch Bridge and a picnic area. The Visitor Center, right along Route #22 is the best place to begin your visit. There is a 20-minute movie in a 60-seat auditorium that tells the story of the Allegheny Portage Railroad, the first direct route between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh through the Allegheny Mountains.



Allegheny Portage RR Skew Arch Bridge



Allegheny Portage RR Visitor Center

From here we take Route #22 west for just one exit to Route #53S. This road will follow the mainline of the railroad through several small communities, and we will stop at a few interesting points along the way. Route #53 zigzags, switching sides with the railroad, taking you through several old stone underpasses.

Our first stop along this route is the railroad overlook in Cassandra. The iron bridge is an abandoned single-lane road bridge now used exclusively as an overlook as freight trains rumble underneath it.



Cassandra Overlook



Portage Station Museum

We return out to Route #53 and continue on to the town of Portage. Here we visit the Portage Station Museum located in the restored 1926 railroad depot at 400 Lee Street. The museum has a “Mainline in Miniature” 173 sq. ft. model railroad display that runs on the first Saturday of each month from Noon to 5 p.m. You might want to call ahead to see if the museum is staffed (814-736-9223) for your visit.

Continuing south on Route #53 the next town is Wilmore, known for the “track pans” constructed there for the steam railroad. While the train continued at fast speed, large scoops dropped down into pans along the tracks and filled the train’s tender with water for its steam.



Painting of Wilmore Track Pans by Fred Connacher



Route #53 Underpass

Just south of Wilmore, bear right onto “Old Route #53”. This road is a bit rough, but it allows you to travel through three of the longer railroad underpasses along the mainline. Be careful on this section; there are some bumps in the old concrete road.

Old Route #53 (Tunnel Street) brings you back out onto Route #53 in Summerhill. Make an immediate right onto Main Street into town.



Triple Stone Arch at end of Old Route #53 in Summerhill

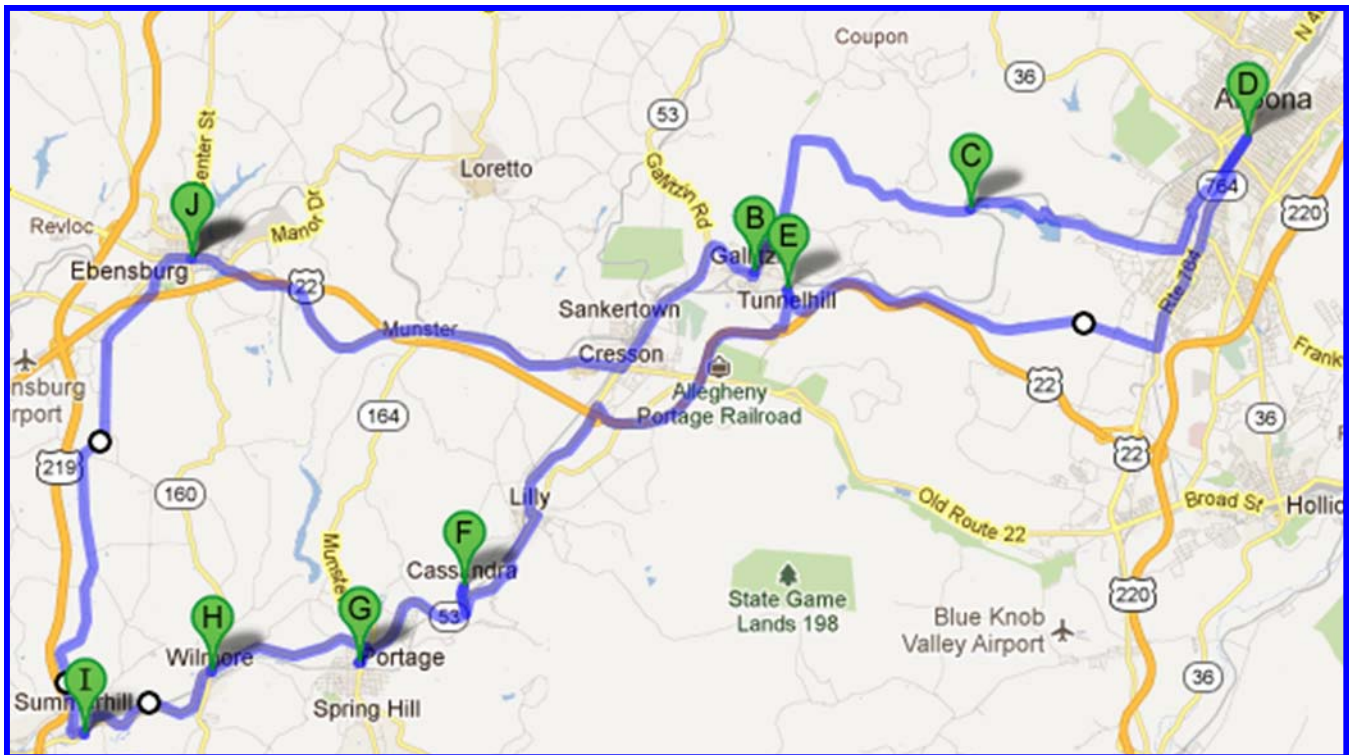


Summerhill Bridge and Signal Tower

Because of the highway bridge and how close one can get to the tracks, this location in Summerhill seems to be a favorite photo location for railroad enthusiasts. If it’s time to eat, Vince’s Place is right next to the signal tower, has great food, and is highly recommended by the locals.

Notice the old concrete ground-level walls on the north side of the mainline. Those are remnants of the old pedestrian subway that used to allow residents to cross from one side to the other underneath the tracks. At one time, a third entrance rose between the tracks, where years ago a train platform stood. The subway was damaged in the late 1960's when a runaway truck from New Germany hill plowed over all four sets of tracks and the subway entrances. Stop in Vince's Place to see a photo of that accident, and photos of other railroad and mining interest.

This ride has reached its end, and it's time for a short trip back to Ebensburg. Simply follow Main Street across the railroad bridge, and it will eventually become New Germany Road. Just follow New Germany Road all the way to Ebensburg.



Railroad Buff's Day Trip Route

Total ride time on this day trip for railroad buffs is 2:12, and we will have traveled 62 miles. But remember, this trip will take most of the day due to the length of the stops.

A = Ebensburg		
B = Gallitzin	:21	11 mi.
C = Horseshoe Curve	:15	6 mi.
D = Altoona Museum	:20	6 mi.
E = Allegheny Portage RR	:35	12 mi.
F = Cassandra	:55	8 mi.
G = Portage	:05	3 mi.
H = Wilmore	:05	3 mi.
I = Summerhill	:10	3 mi.
J = Ebensburg	:15	9 mi.

Directions

Railroad Buff Day Trip

- ◆ From center of Ebensburg head east on East High Street and continue on Admiral Peary Highway (old Route #22) without getting on 4-lane Route 22. (8 miles)
- ◆ Turn left on Route #53 (Second Street) in Cresson. You want to actually travel along Front Street, which is one block to left and parallel to Route #53. Front Street will bring you back to Route #53 after following along the rail yard.
- ◆ Continue on Route #53 to the Gallitzin turnoff. (2.5 miles)
- ◆ Turn right toward Gallitzin (Chestnut Street). In 1 mile turn right onto Main Street and an immediate left to stay on Chestnut Street. Make the first left onto Jackson Street to the bridge. This is the view if the Gallitzin Tunnels, and the park is just ahead.
- ◆ Continue on Chestnut Street to Hemlock Street. Turn left on Hemlock Street. In ½ mile it becomes Circle Street and brings you to Coupon Road. Turn left on Gallitzin-Coupon Road. (1 mile)
- ◆ Turn right on Horseshoe Curve Road. (4 miles) As you exit the tunnel you are at the Horseshoe Curve.
- ◆ Continue on the same road, now called Burgoon Road. The name changes a few times, but stay straight until you get to Beale Avenue. (4 miles)
- ◆ Turn left on Beale Avenue. Turn left at Logan Valley Blvd, actually staying on Beale Avenue. (1 mile)
- ◆ Turn right on 27th Street and then left on 9th Street. The Railroaders Museum is in 1 mile.
- ◆ To head toward Sugar Run Road, turn back on 9th Street. Turn left on 22nd Street. Take the second right onto Route #764S, or 6th Avenue. (3 miles)
- ◆ At the fuel storage tanks on right, turn right onto Sugar Run Road. (½ mile)
- ◆ You will need to turn left on Broad Avenue and then an immediate right to stay on Sugar Run Road. (6 miles)
- ◆ Sugar Run Road ends at Tunnelhill Street at the top of the mountain.

If you wanted to see the Bennington cemetery, turn right hereon Tunnelhill Street, and at the RR tracks turn right on a gravel road, Bird Eye Road. You can ride to a gate, and it's a short walk from there. If you want to move on toward the Allegheny Portage Railroad, turn left on Tunnelhill Street and go only 1.5 miles.

- ◆ When done at the Allegheny Portage Railroad, you are headed to Cassandra. Head west on old Route #22, the road right in front of the Visitor Center. (1 mile)
- ◆ Turn left onto new Route #22W. Exit at the next exit, Route #53. (2 miles)
- ◆ Turn left on Route #53. Follow through Lilly to Cassandra turnoff. (5 miles)
- ◆ Turn right at Cassandra Road. Follow road to end to the overlook.
- ◆ Leave Cassandra the same way, turning right on Route #53. In Portage, turn left on Main Street (at the light) and take second right onto Dulancy Drive. This is the Portage Museum. (3 miles)
- ◆ Return to Route #53 and head south again. The next town is Wilmore. (3 miles)
- ◆ One mile beyond Wilmore bear right onto old Route #53 (Tunnel Street). (2 miles)
- ◆ Tunnel Street meets Route #53 again in Summerhill. Turn right on Route #53 and make an immediate right up Main Street. The railroad and described sites are just ahead.
- ◆ To head to Ebensburg, continue to follow Main Street up through Summerhill. It becomes New Germany Road, and will take you straight back to Ebensburg. (9 miles)