

SHENANGO RIVER CORRIDOR DRIVING TOUR

Shenango River Corridor Driving Tour
(Estimated tour time, without side trips, is 4 to 5 hours)


This tour loosely follows the route of the Shenango River, which has been the backbone of Mercer County's industrial growth throughout most of its history. The Erie Extension Canal (1840-1871) followed much the same course, entering Mercer County in the southwest corner of Shenango Township and exiting at the Crawford County line in Sugar Grove Township. This important route of trade and travel from Pittsburgh to the Great Lakes was responsible for the emergence of many towns along its banks, some long forgotten, and was vital to the rise of the Western Pennsylvania iron industry before the railroads. Several stops along the tour highlight the importance of the Shenango River and the Erie Extension Canal.




The tour begins in the heart of West Middlesex, at the junction of Routes 18 and 318, one mile south of I-80.

Stop #1: Alf Landon Birthplace (3096 East Main Street, West Middlesex) and Historical Marker (Tam O'Shanter Golf Course):

Less than one block east of the intersection sits the birthplace (private residence with marker on front porch) of politician and U.S. Senator Alf Landon, who ran against Franklin Roosevelt in the presidential race of 1936. 1.5 miles north on Route 18, at Tam O'Shanter Golf Course, is a historical marker noting that Landon kicked off his presidential campaign on the No. 1 Tee in 1936 in front of a crowd of 10,000 supporters.

 **WHILE YOU ARE HERE:** Considered one of the finest public golf courses in Pennsylvania, Tam O'Shanter is a certified Audubon Sanctuary. Emil Leoffler, who was superintendent of the famous Oakmont Country Club in Pittsburgh, designed it in 1929. Why not play a round?

 **WHILE YOU ARE HERE:** 3.5 miles west of West Middlesex on Route 318 is Mercer County's Korean War Memorial, honoring all soldiers of that conflict.

Stop #2: Hermitage Historical Society (5465 East State Street):

2.8 miles north of Tam O'Shanter, at the intersection of Route 18 and Business Route 62, is the Shenango Valley Mall. Turning right at the mall and proceeding on Route 62 for 2 miles brings you to the

Hermitage Historical Society. Their headquarters is located in the Robert Stewart House, a 3-story brick Italianate home built in 1868.



The property also houses a restored carriage house. Several rooms contain exhibits, including a military room, a quilt room, a scout room, and more.

**Stop #3: Buhl Mansion
(422 East State Street):**

Returning to the Shenango Valley Mall, follow Route 62 South (East State Street) toward downtown Sharon (three miles).

The Buhl Mansion, listed on the National

Register of Historic Places, is located on your left on the East Hill, just before the downtown area. Industrialist Frank H. Buhl built this Richardson Romanesque castle for his wife, Julia Forker Buhl. Buhl was the "Father of the Industrial Shenango Valley." The Buhls, who were childless, dedicated much energy and fortune to the betterment of the Shenango Valley, and their names are associated with many philanthropic ventures still in existence. The 14-room mansion, steeped in history, was saved from longtime neglect and restored to its former opulence by local businessman James Winner. Operated by the Winners' as a bed and breakfast, the Buhl Mansion also contains a spa and houses the Winner's art collection. Guided tours are available for a fee.



WHILE YOU ARE HERE: While driving from Hermitage to Sharon, you will pass Hillcrest Memorial Park on your right.

This large cemetery is home to the "Avenue of Flags," the largest display of American flags in the world, dedicated to the honor of the American hostages held in Iran in 1979-80. Also in Hillcrest is a new memorial dedicated to those who lost their lives in the War on Terror. Next to the memorial park is Kraynak's Garden Center, where Christmas and Easter displays feature lavishly decorated trees and animated characters delight all ages.



WHILE YOU ARE HERE: At the corner of East State Street and Sharpsville Avenue is the Shenango Valley Community

Library—the home of the Mercer County Genealogical Society. If you have ancestors in Mercer County, this is a great place to stop and learn.



Further down State Street, the Shenango River flows through the heart of Sharon. The Erie Extension Canal flooded an area near Dock Street with a harbor large enough to hold over 200 canal boats. The Shenango River Watchers operate a canoe launch on Budd Street. Throughout history, the Shenango River flooded—sometimes severely—leading to the building of the Shenango Reservoir.



WHILE YOU ARE HERE: Downtown Sharon is home to Reyer's, the world's largest shoe store; The Winner, the world's largest off-price clothing store; Daffin's and Philadelphia Candies; several themed restaurants, including the Quaker Steak &

Lube; the Shenango Valley branch of Penn State University; the Mercer County Convention and Visitors' Bureau (for more information on Mercer County, stop here); and many more shops and restaurants. View our industry and remnants of the industrial past in this area.

Stop #4: Buhl Farm Park:

Perhaps the greatest legacy left by the Buhls was Buhl Farm Park. From the Buhl Mansion, travel one mile north on Route 62, towards the Shenango Valley Mall. At the sixth traffic light, (Buhl Blvd.) turn left. This road ends at one of the entrances to the park. A statue of Mr. and Mrs. Buhl is nearby. In 1911, Mr. Buhl announced his plan to turn 300 acres of farmland into a playground and donate it to the people of the Shenango Valley. The park opened in 1914 and to this day follows much of the original blueprint, including beautiful Lake Julia, a "Casino" for dances and entertainment, picnic shelters, and 75,000 trees and shrubs. Later additions include a stone gatehouse (1936), the Julia Forker Buhl Memorial Garden (1936), and a Performing Arts Center (1981). Another remarkable feature of Buhl Park is the 9-hole Buhland Golf Course (Dum-Dum to locals), believed to be the only free golf course in the United States.

Stop #5: Sharpsville Historical Society at the Former First Universalist Church (131 North Mercer Avenue, Sharpsville):



Returning to the Shenango Valley Mall via Forker Blvd and State Street, follow Route 18 north for 1.6 miles to its intersection with Route 518. Near the intersection, note the historical marker for the Erie Extension Canal. Turn left on Route 518 towards Sharpsville. At the first traffic light (Mercer Avenue), turn right. The Sharpsville Historical Society is located in the former First Universalist Church, listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



WHILE YOU ARE HERE: The Jonas Pierce Mansion, also on the National Register, is located around the corner at 18 East Shenango Street. Pierce's father, noted industrialist James Pierce, lived in an opulent 30-room mansion, now demolished, near the intersection of Shenango and Mercer Avenues. President George W. Bush is a direct descendant of James Pierce.

Stop #6: Raisch Log Cabin, Erie Canal Lock #10, and Shenango Dam and Lake:




From the Sharpsville Historical Society, proceed one block further on Mercer Avenue and turn right on High Street.

Just before the bridge is the cabin and lock.

Discovered inside at the core of a house in Hermitage in 1978, the Raisch Log Cabin stands as a memorial to our frontier roots. It was moved and reconstructed, and is now used by the Mercer County Historical Society for programs in the summer months.





Down a short trail along the river is Lock #10 of the Erie Extension Canal, the only known remaining canal locks still in existence. By following the trail along the river, one can see the Shenango Dam from a unique angle.

 Further along High Street (Kelly Road) is the Shenango Dam, operated by the Army Corps of Engineers. This 68-foot dam, built in 1965, controls flooding on the Shenango River.


The 6-square mile reservoir created by the dam has many recreational opportunities, including camping, hiking, picnicking, and fishing. Horsepower on the lake is unlimited in most areas. Bass, walleye, muskellunge, and pan fish reward anglers. The outflow area of the dam near the log cabin and lock is popular with trout fishers. Just past the dam is the Mahaney Recreation Area, with a boat launch, picnic shelters, and the Seth Myers Nature Trail, a ½-mile self-guided walk.


Stop #7: Clark Area and the Shenango Trail (Big Bend, New Hamburg, and Kidd's Mill):

 From the junction of Route 18 and 518 in Hermitage, proceed on Route 18 north 2 miles to Clark. The town of Clarksville, located on the Shenango River and Erie Ext. Canal, was flooded in 1965 by the construction of the Shenango Dam. The small town was renamed Clark and several of the buildings were relocated near Route 258. Saved by its higher ground was the Koonce home, a Greek revival-style antebellum mansion built in 1859. After some expansion, it became the Tara, a bed and breakfast establishment and restaurant. It is open for meals or for a guided tour (fee).

 Turn right on Route 258 south, passing a historical marker for Alfred Bushnell Hart, distinguished scholar and historian, who was born nearby. Proceed on Route 258 for 5.7 miles and turn left on North Bend Road. One mile ahead is a parking area for the Big Bend Historical Area (listed on the National Register) and a trailhead for the Shenango Trail. Big Bend, known at one time as Shenango, was one of the largest industrial towns along the canal. Nothing remains now but a few foundations near the banks of the river. The Shenango Trail runs from Big Bend to Pymatuning. The most accessible section runs 7.5 miles from Big Bend to the Kidd's Mill Covered Bridge, passing through the New Hamburg Historical Area along the way. For much of this distance the trail follows the towpath of the canal, and south of New Hamburg ripraps are visible along the riverbanks. The trail is remote for most of its length and is replete with wildlife, including bald eagles.


Stop #8: Camp Reynolds:


 Returning to Route 18 in Clark, continue north 4.6 miles to the intersection with Reynolds Industrial Park Road (also known as Kidd's Mill Road). The current industrial area near the intersection was the site of a 3300-acre U.S. Army facility from 1942-45, as noted on the historical marker south of here. During World War II, about one million U.S. troops passed through Camp Reynolds. At its peak capacity, 75,000 soldiers billeted here at any one time. A race riot occurred here during that time and is chronicled in Studs Terkel's award-winning oral history, *The Good War*. In addition, it was an internment camp for over 1800 German prisoners of war from 1944-46.

 **WHILE YOU ARE HERE:** Just north of Camp Reynolds is the Brucker Great Blue Heron Sanctuary, accessible by going north one mile further on Route 18, turning on a "jug handle," and returning south for a short distance. This preserve, operated by Thiel College, is home to the largest colony of breeding great blue herons in

Pennsylvania, with over 210 nests.


Stop #9: Kidd's Mill Covered Bridge and Bigler Home:


 From Route 18 turn right on Reynolds Industrial Park Road and travel .8 mile to Kidd's Mill Covered Bridge. Built in 1868 and restored in 1990, Kidd's Mill is the last historic covered bridge in Mercer County and the only remaining bridge in Pennsylvania with an all-wood truss design. Its 120 foot length is open to hikers and bikers. A canoe launch nearby is the perfect spot to launch a trip down the Shenango River to New Hamburg or Big Bend, passing in the opposite direction of the Shenango Trail trip described above.


 Just past the covered bridge is the home of Jacob and Susan Bigler, parents of two governors. It was relocated (from near Kremis) and restored. The Biglers' son, William, became governor of Pennsylvania in 1852, the same year their son John became governor of California. The Shenango Conservancy operates both the Kidd's Mill Covered Bridge and Bigler Home.





Stop #10: Greenville Historical Society, Greenville Railroad Park & Museum, & the Canal Museum:


 From the Bigler Home, continue on Reynolds Industrial Park Road until it ends at Route 58. Turn left and follow Route 58 north for 3.8 miles to the center of Greenville at the junction with Route 18. Turn right for .3 mile to the Greenville Railroad Park & Museum at 314 Main Street. This park boasts the largest steam switch engine ever built, a coal tender, an ore car, and a caboose. The museum area houses railroad memorabilia, including a reconstruction of a stationmaster's quarters and dispatcher's office.


 **WHILE YOU ARE HERE:** By turning right where Reynolds Industrial Park Road ends at Rt. 58 and traveling several miles, you can visit the Mercer County Historical Society (MCHS) Caldwell One-Room School and Teachers' Garden. Continuing further south on Route 58, you can visit the MCHS Rural Life Museum located on Munnell Run Farm and behind Woodland Place. If you continue south into Mercer, you can visit the MCHS headquarters—a museum and genealogical library. The Mercer Community Band, during mid-summer, performs free concerts on the Courthouse lawn. This is undoubtedly the "best free entertainment on a Friday night" in the County.

 Returning to the junction of Routes 58 and 18 in Greenville, travel .4 mile straight ahead to the Waugh House, 23 West Main St. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, this is the home of the Greenville Historical Society. The museum here recreates life in Western Pennsylvania during the canal and railroad eras and highlights the growth of modern industry.

 From the Waugh House, return towards downtown Greenville and turn on the third street to the left, Race Street. .3 mile on the right is The Canal Museum, located on the exact site of Lock 22 of the Erie Extension Canal. Inside the museum is a history of the canal, complete with a 40-foot replica of the canal freighter Rufus S. Reed.


 **WHILE YOU ARE HERE:** The Greenville Commercial District, bounded by Main Street, Clinton Street, and Canal Street, is on the National Register of Historic Places. During the canal era, many shops sprang up along Canal and Race Streets, feeding off the canal, which led to the growth of Greenville. The area still contains many unique small businesses.


 **WHILE YOU ARE HERE:** Across Race Street (Alan Avenue) from The Canal Museum is Riverside Park, Greenville's community park. Operated by the Greenville Area Leisure Service Association, the park features nature trails along the Shenango River, an amphitheater built by the WPA in 1934, ball fields, and a swimming pool. The Recreation Center was originally built as a USO center during World War II. Many servicemen stationed at Camp Reynolds came here for entertainment.


 **WHILE YOU ARE HERE:** Thiel College, a small liberal arts, sciences and professional studies school founded in 1866, is located nearby. From the Canal Museum, turn right on Alan Avenue (Race Street) and proceed a short distance until the street ends at Route 58. The tree-lined campus of Thiel is straight ahead.




Stop #11: Gibson House and the Jamestown Historical Society:

 From Thiel College, follow Route 58 north six miles to the borough of Jamestown. The Gibson House, now operated as the Mark Twain Manor, a restaurant, is located straight ahead on the right. Built by Dr. William Gibson, who traveled with Samuel Clemens to Russia, this house is on the National Register. It is also featured on our Underground Railroad Tour because it has been rumored to be a stop for fugitive slaves. The Jamestown Future Foundation now owns it.

 From the Gibson House, return to the junction of Route 58 and Route 322. Several blocks east on Route 322 make a left at the carwash onto Summit Street. The Jamestown Historical Society is the first house on the right. The Society has been revitalizing the house that dates from the 1870's and they have filled it with photographs, scrapbooks, and memorabilia from Jamestown's history. The last weekend in July each year the Historical Society sponsors a Pioneer Festival at Pymatuning Lake.

 **WHILE YOU ARE HERE:** Pymatuning Deer Park, located .5 mile south of town on Route 58, houses over 200 animals. Features include petting and feeding the animals, pony and train rides, and picnic areas.

 **WHILE YOU ARE HERE:** Jamestown is the "Gateway to Pymatuning." Built in the 1930's, the Pymatuning Dam attempts to control floodwaters along the Shenango River and is in Crawford County. The lake is a major recreation area managed by the Pennsylvania Department of Natural Resources.

This is the end of the Shenango River Corridor Driving Tour.