



Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike



Spanning the width of the state, the Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike National Scenic Byway witnessed some of the great Civil War battles that determined the future of western Virginia. Begun in 1838, the turnpike followed ancient Indian paths from Staunton, Virginia to the Ohio River port at Parkersburg, (present-day) West Virginia. This road employed the advanced macadam style of paving which involved placing larger stones as the base of the road beneath smaller stones that would serve as the surface. This revolutionary tactic made roads much more navigable and greatly improved transportation all across America.

Dozens of Sights Along the Way

Whether it's the Union trenches alongside the Swecker House, or the beautiful covered bridge in Philippi, motorists will enjoy this glimpse into the Mountain State's past. Any one of the sites along this roadway could easily be a day trip by itself. The National Radio Astronomy Observatory in Green Bank is one of the largest radio telescopes in the world and is helping scientists discover things about our universe unimaginable even 20 years ago. To the north, visitors can ride one of three trains offered by the Durbin & Greenbrier Valley Railroad. These three greatly different trains offer both unique sights and a chance to ride some railroading legends.

For over 30 miles, the turnpike passes through the Monongahela National Forest, a beautiful expanse of trees and mountains. This gigantic protected forest is ideal for camping, sightseeing, hiking, biking, railroading, and spelunking. Further west, the North Bend Rail Trail stretches for 72 miles from Parkersburg to Wolf Summit. Once part of the CSX rail line, this

rail-trail is now open to hiking, biking, and horseback riding. This is no ordinary trail; there are 10 tunnels and 36 bridges! At Blennerhassett Island State Historical Park outside Parkersburg, visitors can learn about the fascinating lives of Harman and Margaret Blennerhassett. Their palatial mansion burned to the ground in 1811, but over the years, the mansion has been restored to its original grandeur.

But the fascinating drive does not end with the turnpike; the four backways alongside this famous roadway have an enthralling history all of their own.

Camp Allegheny Backway

Starting on the West Virginia/Virginia border, the Camp Allegheny Backway follows the original route of the Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike. Coming down from Allegheny Mountain, this short 10-mile drive passes the former Confederate stronghold at Camp Allegheny. The Confederates fought desperately to protect this mountaintop camp from the onslaughts of Union troops coming from neighboring Cheat Summit Fort. The camp's earthworks and gun positions can still be seen and the Monongahela National Forest provides interpretation of this fierce battle. Further down the road, the smaller Confederate encampment at Camp Bartow can be seen, complete with its own earthworks.

Back Mountain Backway

Traveling west from Camp Allegheny, visitors will soon come to the Back Mountain Backway. This backway served as the main route around part of Cheat Mountain until U.S. Route 250 was built in the 1950s. You'll be thankful that this backway is fully paved as you navigate the switchback at the base of Cheat Mountain. In Durbin, railroading fans love to check out the Durbin Rocket, powered by one of only three remaining Climax engines in the entire world. Both the rail excursion and the Back Mountain Backway are a great way to take a leisurely look at West Virginia's beautiful mountains.

Cheat Mountain Backway

Only a few miles from the Back Mountain Backway, the Cheat Mountain Backway allows motorists to visit the former Union fort at Cheat Summit. General George McClellan ordered that a fort be built at the top of Cheat Mountain to prevent the Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike from falling into Confederate hands, thus giving them an easy gateway to the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. The Confederates' failed attempt to take the fort largely doomed Robert E. Lee's campaign for western Virginia. Today, staff of the Monongahela National Forest provides historic interpretation of the great importance this fort had in protecting the turnpike. There are also numerous trails and an overlook allowing visitors to get a more

personal experience of the fort and battlefield.

Rich Mountain Backway



Besides also being on the original route for the turnpike, the Rich Mountain Backway makes its way through the Rich Mountain Battlefield. During the middle of July in 1861, Union troops came upon a small Confederate outpost guarding the mountain pass beside Rich Mountain. Utterly surprised, the Confederates were soundly defeated and General George McClellan, top commander in the area, was given command of the entire United States army shortly afterward. Interpretive trails cross the mountain leading up to the battlefield and both Union and Confederate structures can be seen in the nearby area.

Together, these four backways and the Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike are a perfect way to learn about West Virginia's Civil War heritage. There is so much to do and see, there is no way anyone could spend just one day taking in the sites --- and who would want to, anyways?