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Look Up America - Pennsylvania Turnpike: Walking Tours of Towns Along America's First Superhighway

Doug Gelbert

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Pennsylvania was one of the first states in America to create a Highway Department and in the 1930s plans were undertaken for a new type of road to cross the Commonwealth - The Pennsylvania Turnpike. It was a revolutionary undertaking. Before the Turnpike roads had been built with flat curves to discourage speeding. Now the engineers were tasked with adapting the roadway for high-speed travel. There would be long, sweeping curves and a maximum grade of 3% or three feet of climb for every 100 feet of road. Before the coming of the Pennsylvania Turnpike it was not unusual to find mountain roads with grades of 12%. There would be no cross streets, no traffic signals, no railroad grade crossings. By contrast the Lincoln Highway (now Route 30) that was the main artery across Pennsylvania at the time sported 939 cross streets and 12 railroad crossings. it was expected that the new “superhighway” would cut travel time across the state. The first cars queued up to drive on the four-lane all concrete highway on October 1, 1940. The original roadway covered 160 miles from Carlisle, just west of Harrisburg, to Irwin, just east of Pittsburgh. To tackle the steep Allegheny Mountains in between seven tunnels were required. The Turnpike was an immediate success and in the coming years would be extended from border to border, eventually swallowing up 359 miles. Along that route are major cities and historic towns. There is no better way to see the towns of the Pennsylvania Turnpike than on foot. And there is no better way to appreciate what you are looking at than with a walking tour. Whether you are visiting a new town or just out to look at your own town in a new way, a walking tour is ready to explore when you are. Each walking tour describes a mix of historical and architectural and ecclesiastical landmarks. Tours Included: New Castle Pittsburgh Greensburg Ligonier Johnstown Carlisle Harrisburg Lancaster Reading Norristown Philadelphia Bristol

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