



Russ Slocum at Bernhart Dam. Photo by Karen Weber

The Plein Air Painter's Guide to Berks County

P E N N S Y L V A N I A



Plein *Air*
2022
West Reading



From an artist's perspective, Berks County is uniquely multi-faceted. You can find some of practically anything here: bustling urban areas, rolling Amish farmlands. Waterways, forests, parks and valleys of inspiring natural splendor. Beautifully preserved historical structures, vestiges of a national industrial powerhouse.

This printable version of guide compiles many places favored by local artists, divided into 7 categories. Most of the underlined entries have a counterpart in the Google Map version:

- West Reading
- City of Reading
- Parks & Recreation
- Waterways
- Historic Sites
- Farmlands
- Towns & Villages

These are offered just as places to start—there is still much for all of us to discover in Berks County.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

1. Use this index to make a shortlist of promising spots.
2. If you don't have it already, download the Google Maps app to your phone or tablet. Go to <https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/1/edit?mid=1SmTFxfdPIFIKaaG1iTIkdBVc2u4QFEke&usp=sharing>
3. In the nav bar, you'll find much of the same information as in this printed/PDF version.
4. Click on any icon in the nav bar or on the map for details, images and directions.

WEST READING

This 1.5 square mile social, dining and cultural hub of Berks County extends east-west from the Schuylkill River to 8th Avenue, N-S from the railroad tracks to the creek in Reading Museum Park. Anything in or viewable from this area will qualify for the "Best West Reading" Award. An app is needed for parking in the large lot in the 500 block of Penn Ave. Participating artists may use the restroom at Art Plus Gallery.

- **Penn Avenue**: Sidewalk cafes, boutique shops and art galleries
- **Cherry Street alley**. Stop in Art Plus to get a guide to the dozens of murals painted in this alley. You'll also find murals on the opposite side of Penn Avenue on Court Street between 6th and 7th avenues.
- **Knitting Mills complex**: Once the sprawling manufacturing complex and outlets for Vanity Fair, some vestiges still glimmer through the billion-dollar overhaul into today's retail/office/residential complex.
- **Reading Museum Park**: Several manicured acres or gardens, paths, and statuary, with a creek and arboretum.
- **Bertolet's Landing**: Nice view up the river to Penn St. Bridge, several parking spaces under the highway. Secluded spot with occasional reports of thuggery, so best to paint as a group. No rest rooms.

CITY OF READING

Though currently somewhat rough at heart as well as around the edges, the City of Reading continues to offer healthy veins of awesome architecture, historical richness, beauty and charm. Plentiful potential subjects for the Urban Alleyways theme; traveling with prudence and groups recommend.

- **Centre Park Historic District**. Dozens of historic homes and mansions line the park on Centre Avenue.

- **Pagoda and the William Penn Fire Tower on Skyline Drive.** Sweeping vistas overlooking the city of Reading.
- **Riverfront Park:** Good access to the Schuylkill River, adjacent to the RACC campus.
- Charles Evans Cemetery (Historic Gatehouse located at 1119 Centre Ave. The historic Stirling hotel is directly across the street. Also historic Witch's Hat pavilion in the cemetery)
- **Norfolk Southern Reading Yard.** Located on North 6th Street and Railroad Street, this site was once the main station for the historic Reading Railroad of Monopoly board game fame, and once the largest corporation in the world. The decaying open air structures at this site have many backdrops of the city of Reading, Mount Penn, the fire tower and the Pagoda as backdrops. No amenities.
- **City Park.** Hillside urban park with a bandshell as a centerpiece.
- **Canal Street.** A mix of industry and warehouses ranging from robust and rehabbed to abandoned.
- **Franklin Street Station.** Beautifully restored train terminal, now home to Saucony Creek Brewpub.
- **Brentwood Schuylkill River Trailhead.** Located at the intersection of Morgantown and Brentwood roads, the parking lot is a short walk from lot east on the trail to an old railroad bridge with views of the river on both sides and the city of Reading and Neversink Mountain to the north.

PARKS & RECREATION

- **Grings Mill.** Popular site for artists and strollers. Large parking lot, a couple hundred yards to the picturesque bridge with old stone mill, toll house and waterfall. Convenient rest rooms.
- **The Nature Place.** Home of Berks Nature Conservancy. Pond, creek, plentiful flora & fauna. Public rest rooms in the nature center.
- **Wyomissing Park.** Popular 3-mile park extending west from the Museum Park in West Reading, will well maintained trails and mature trees along the creek. Convenient parking near the Stone House across from YR club on Parkside drive and two other lots along Cambridge.
- **Nolde Forest.** Beautiful state environmental education center, with convenient parking, 11 miles of trails, and picturesque Tudor mansion and Watershed Trail.
- **Antietam Lake Park:** Restored pump house with a lake view and a scenic waterfall at the same location. 2 potential paintings at the same spot on Angora Road.
- Nolde Forest (Mansion, Sawmill, North & Painted Turtle Ponds, Oregon Rd., Watershed
- **Blue Marsh:** Several of the main access areas require a pass or paid parking, but you'll find free parking and good places to start at the Visitors Center, Water Street, State Hill Overlook, and Church Street (off Rt. 183).
- **Mid-Atlantic Air Museum:** located at Reading Airport, off Rte 183. Awesome collection of classic aircraft.
- **Neversink Mountain.** Park on the back lot on Klappertal road next to Forest Hills cemetery. Hike uphill and cross the first foot bridge, continue and turn left at the next bridge. In less than a mile there is a sweeping overlook above the Schuylkill river and mountains to the south.
- **Hawk Mountain Sanctuary.** 1700 Hawk Mountain Road Kempton PA. A short hike leads to many mountaintop vistas. Close to quaint Wanamaker's general store.

WATERWAYS

There are 50+ named creeks in Berks, most leading to the Schuylkill River. A few favorites, some of which are also noted in Parks:

- **Angelica Creek.** Sawmill Lot at Nolde or the Nature Place off Morgantown Road. Nice trails, creeks and convenient rest rooms at both.

- **Antietam Lake**. Parking lot on Angora road, short walk downstream to the restored pump house and waterfall below the dam.
- **French Creek**. Lakes, creek, woods, boating & camping.
- **Manatawny Creek** (See Greisemer's Bridge)
- **Northkill Creek** (Old Forge Rd lot), gently cascading down from the Appalachian Trail.
- Lake Ontelaunee, Maiden Creek. Large dam, spillway and bridge at the intersection of Lake Shore and Bowers roads.
- **Schuylkill River**. A few of the many access points: West Hamburg Park, Kernville Dam, Jim Dietrich Park, Riverside Park, and Exeter Scenic River Trail.
- **Wyomissing Creek**. Ruth's Bridge on Old Wyomissing Road with an adjacent spring house. The Highlands Hill parking lot is close to Pinewoods Trail.

HISTORIC SITES

Featured Sites for the Berks History Award

Our juror will select one painting done at any of these locations to receive the \$500 award. The Google Maps version highlights these in yellow:

- **Leesport Lockhouse**, E Wall St, Leesport, PA 19533
- **Outdoor Railyard Collections at Reading Railroad Heritage Museum**, 500 S. Third Street, Hamburg, PA 19526. Museum Admission: \$7, Check website for visitation details
- **The Dreibelbis Bridge**. 11 Covered Bridge Rd #1, Lenhartsville, PA 19534
- **Joanna Furnace**. Furnace Rd, Morgantown, PA 19543
- **Beidler House & Mill** 1130 Old River Rd, Birdsboro, PA 19508
- **Pavilion from the Neversink Mountain Hotel (aka The Witches Hat)**. 1996 Neversink Mountain Rd, Reading, PA 19606. Limited parking near the power line. Remote area, likely most comfortable visited as a group.

Addition Sites of Historical Interest

The Berks History Center has documented over 900 locations of historical significance around the county. Here are some in addition to the featured sites that might also appeal to artists.

CANALS

- **Union Canal Lock #47** and lock history on **Union Canal Bicycle and Walking Trail** , Plum Creek, Leesport, PA 19533
- **Allegheny Aqueduct** Interesting little park off Rt 724, where an aqueduct for the Schuylkill Canal was built to cross over the creek. Also near the award-eligible Beidler House at 1130 Old River Rd, Birdsboro 19508
- **Kelly's Lock**, 2820 River Rd, Reading, PA 19605

RAILROADS & TROLLEYS

- **Reiffton Trolley Stop**. Perkiomen Ave & E 36th St
- **Temple Trolley Stop Shelter**. 11th Ave & Park Ave, Muhlenberg Township, PA 19560
- Railroad Trestle at **Ironstone Park**. Boyertown, PA 19512
- **Existing Train Stations in Berks County**: Comprehensive List of Locations found at west2k.com/pastations/berks.shtml
- **Swinging Bridge & Railroad Ruins** at **Heritage Park at Canal Street**
- **Geigertown Train Station** - **Geigertown Central Railroad**, 1396A Geigertown Rd, Birdsboro, PA 19508 Great abandoned looking rail cars and trains etc near the road. Quiet rural location.

COVERED BRIDGES

- **Wertz's Covered (Red) Bridge**, Tulpehocken Rd, Reading, PA 19605, Located at the Berks Heritage Center. Longest covered bridge in Pennsylvania. Gruber Wagon Works is a historic structure that was relocated adjacent to the bridge when Blue Marsh dam was built and the

pleasant valley flooded for Blue Marsh Lake. There is also a Pennsylvania Dutch Distelfink statue here, which is a stylized Pennsylvania Dutch bird, a familiar regional icon. Parking on either side of the bridge on Red Bridge road or Tulpehocken road. 3 possible paintings in one location.

- **Kutz's Mill Bridge**. Kutz Mill Rd, Kutztown, PA 19530
- **Pleasantville Bridge**. Covered Bridge Rd, Oley, PA 19547
- **Greisemer's Bridge & Mill**. Spangsville Rd., Oley. Historic mill and covered bridge over trout stream, several parking spaces. No rest rooms. Nearby Union Jack's pub opens at 3PM.

INDUSTRY, ARCHITECTURE & MORE

- **Hopewell Furnace**. 2 Mark Bird Ln, Elverson, PA 19520
- **Gring's Mill**. 2083 Tulpehocken Rd, Reading, PA 19610. County park with restrooms and many different vantage points on the Tulpehocken Creek, dam and spillway.
- **Berks History Center**. 940 Centre Ave. Reading, PA 19601. The heart of our history scene, with its own fascinating museum.
- **Nicholas Stolfus Homestead**. 1700 Tulpehocken Rd, Wyomissing, PA 19610
- **Mouns Jones House (aka Old Swedes House)**. Oldest structure in Berks. (Check to make sure it's open). 31 Old Philadelphia Pike Douglassville, PA 19518
- **The Pagoda**. 98 Duryea Dr, Reading, PA 19602. Iconic landmark overlooking the city.
- **William Penn Memorial Fire Tower**. 621 Skyline Dr, Reading, PA 19606
- **Gruber Wagon Works**. 1102 Red Bridge Rd, Reading, PA 19605. Adjacent to Wertz's Tulpehocken covered bridge.
- **Conrad Weiser Homestead**. 28 Weiser Dr, Womelsdorf, PA 19567
- **Daniel Boone Homestead**. 400 Daniel Boone Rd, Birdsboro, PA 19508

FARMLANDS

Agriculture thrives throughout Berks, especially dense toward the northeast and west. Dairy farms and corn are big around here.

- **Rodale Farm**. 611 Siegfriedale Rd, Kutztown, PA 19530. Major research center for this global leader in organic farming. Artists are welcome, must sign in at the Visitors Center.
- **Dreibelbis Farm**. 356 Hard Hill Rd, Hamburg, PA 19526. Historic farm with great trails, buildings and view of Maiden Creek. Unstaffed but artists are welcome.
- **Oley Valley**. Settled in the early 1700s, lots of well-preserved old stone homes and barns. The entire valley is on the National Registry of Historic Sites. 2 covered bridges within 2 miles of each other. Parking can be a challenge; but private property owners are normally friendly and accommodating.
- **Fleetwood-Kutztown**. Bountiful Amish farms between Fleetwood and Kutztown. The Echo Hill Market on Dryville Rd. is popular among natural food shoppers as well as said locals (ever wonder how many different kinds of flour there are?), adjacent to a sprawling, hilly field, and has a restroom for customers.
- **Robesonia**: A mile north of Rt. 422 is a ridge overlooking a long valley with serpentine fields of crops. Great view, parking and shade at the cemetery on Big Spring Rd Fritztown Road west toward Lebanon. Great light late afternoon-evening.
- **Albany Township**: Between Hamburg and Kempton to the east are beautiful rolling fields and foothills up to the mountain range of the Appalachian Trail. Kempton itself offers a characterful hotel, mill and rail station. Legendary painter Ben Austrian, who around 1900 listed his studio locations as New York, Paris, and Kempton, is buried at nearby New Bethel Church.

TOWNS & VILLAGES

The 100+ towns & villages in rural Berks average about 3 miles apart, with at least as many artistic treasures to be found in between them. The Google Maps version pinpoints a number of specific sites within these towns:

- **Hamburg**: The historic district, Carnegie library, and armory are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Also of potential artistic interest are West Hamburg Park, post office and St Johns Lutheran Church.

Two miles to the west, the property of Art Plus members Jay & Martha Ressler, (15 Rocktown Rd, Hamburg, PA 19526) offers gardens, fields, a fledgling forest, good view of the Blue Mountain range, easy parking and bathroom privileges to PAWR participants.

- **Boyertown**: In this bustling burg at the eastern corner of the county you'll find a medley of fine old architecture, pocket gardens, restored train yard with a steam locomotive, and a wonderful (yet little known) Museum of Historic Vehicles built between Reading and Philadelphia. From two cemeteries on the hill you'll find panoramic views of orchards and farms.