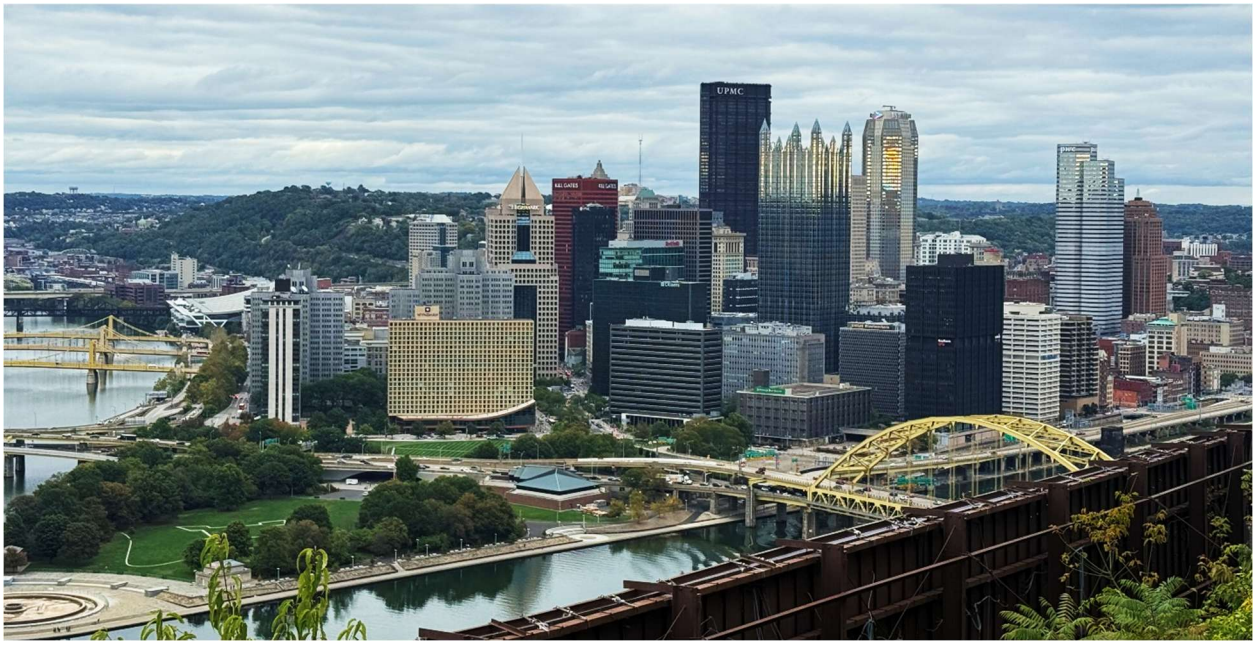
The Flyin' Solo VanLife on the Highways and Byways of North America
RICK'S ROADS
Ride Along and Enjoy the People, Places, and Who Knows What

BLOG POST: 2025.10.13
Pittsburgh, PA



I had not been through Pittsburgh since last century, and I was looking for a different route to Florida (like this wasn't already different enough), so the Steel City made the itinerary.



I hoped for a sunny day, and the ride in was promising. It also had a milestone – literally – as Blue Maxx hit the 150,000-mile mark about a half-hour before reaching the urban sprawl.

Sadly, though, thick cloud cover moved in minutes later, and gray became the mood of the day. The main reason I came to Pittsburgh was to snap some photos of the city's architectural centerpiece, PPG Place, which would look spectacular under blue skies, reflecting brilliant sunshine. Under overcast, it might be overly underwhelming.



Natural wonders tend to impress me more, but clever or extreme architecture gets my admiration too. PPG Place definitely qualifies.

Built in the early 1980's as the headquarters of Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company, (as well as home to numerous other businesses), the complex covers six city blocks and consists of multiple buildings, shrewdly named One PPG Place (40 stories), Two PPG Place (6 stories), Three PPG Place (6 stories), Four PPG Place (6 stories), Five PPG Place (6 stories), and Six PPG Place (14 stories).

Two things make it visually striking: the shape and the materials.

All the buildings have spires, in the neogothic style, like castles. The six buildings have a total of 231 spires, which is crazy: almost 40 per building!

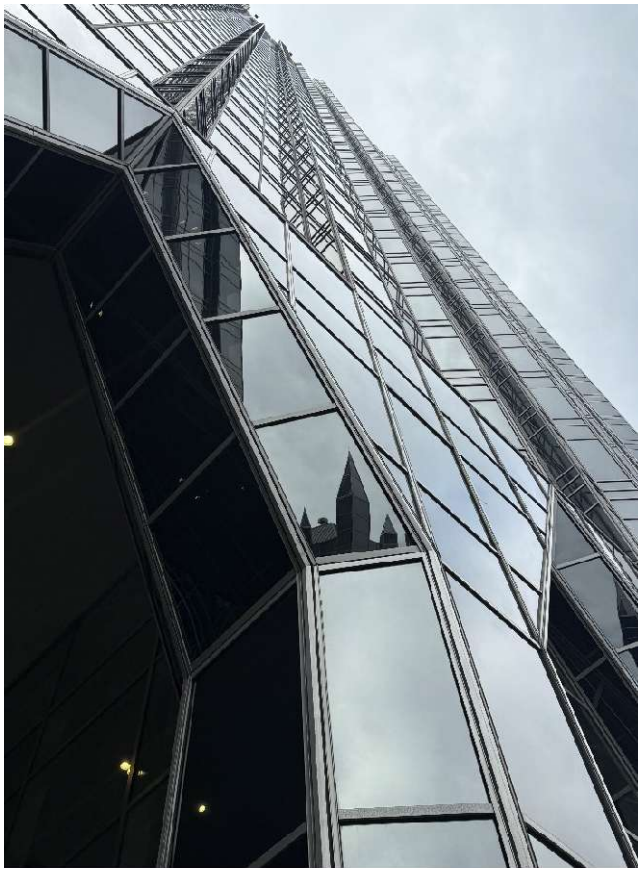
But what makes it all sing is the reflective glass: **19,750** panes of it – over one million square feet!

Kinda figures, doesn't it? Pittsburgh ***Plate Glass*** Company? Did anyone else even waste their time *bidding* on this job??

But this is no ordinary glass – as I'm sure PPG would want you to know.

The glass makes the buildings energy-efficient, reflecting solar heat away in summer, but allowing infrared warming in winter.

Not related to the glass, another smart feature about the structures is that they trap harvest heat from computer equipment and recycle it throughout the building. Pretty savvy for 1983!





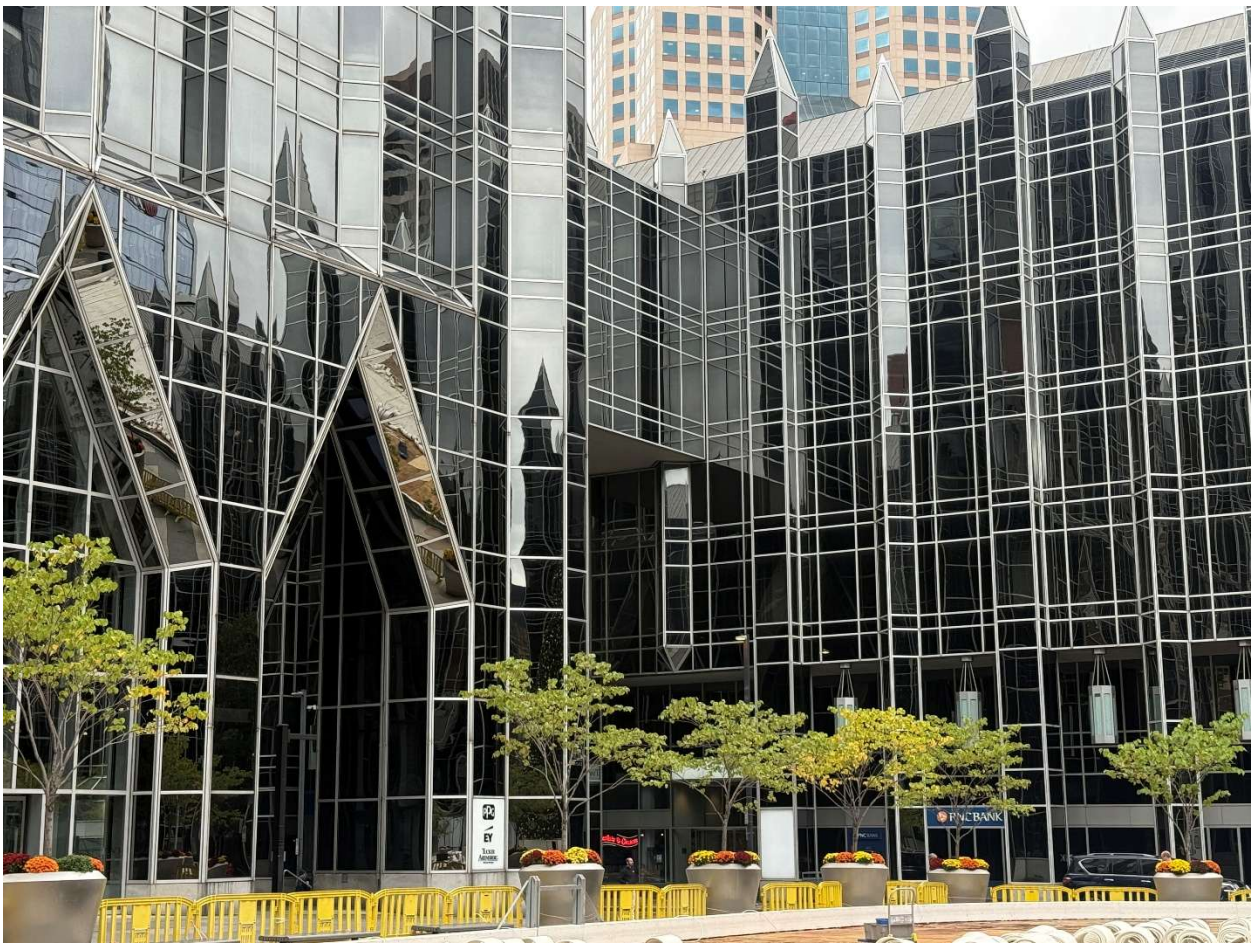
The buildings surround an 8,000 square foot courtyard. In warm weather months, the centerpiece is a huge fountain with 140 water jets.

In cold months, the area is converted into an ice skating rink that is more than double the size of the famous rink at NYC's Rockefeller Center.

When I arrived this day – Columbus Day – workers were laying down the flooring and curbs of the rink. *And* they had already put up the 60-foot-tall Christmas Tree in its center.

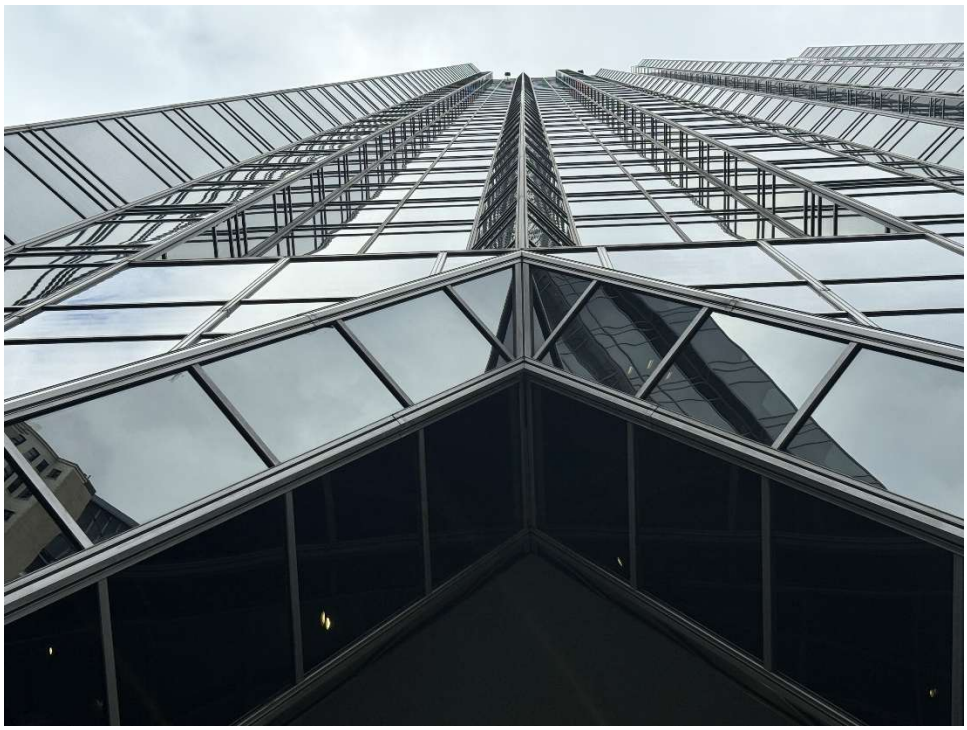
The tree was fully decorated and ready to be lit up. It kinda had to be, right? How are you gonna trim a 60-foot-tree surrounded by ice? I don't think ladders would work.





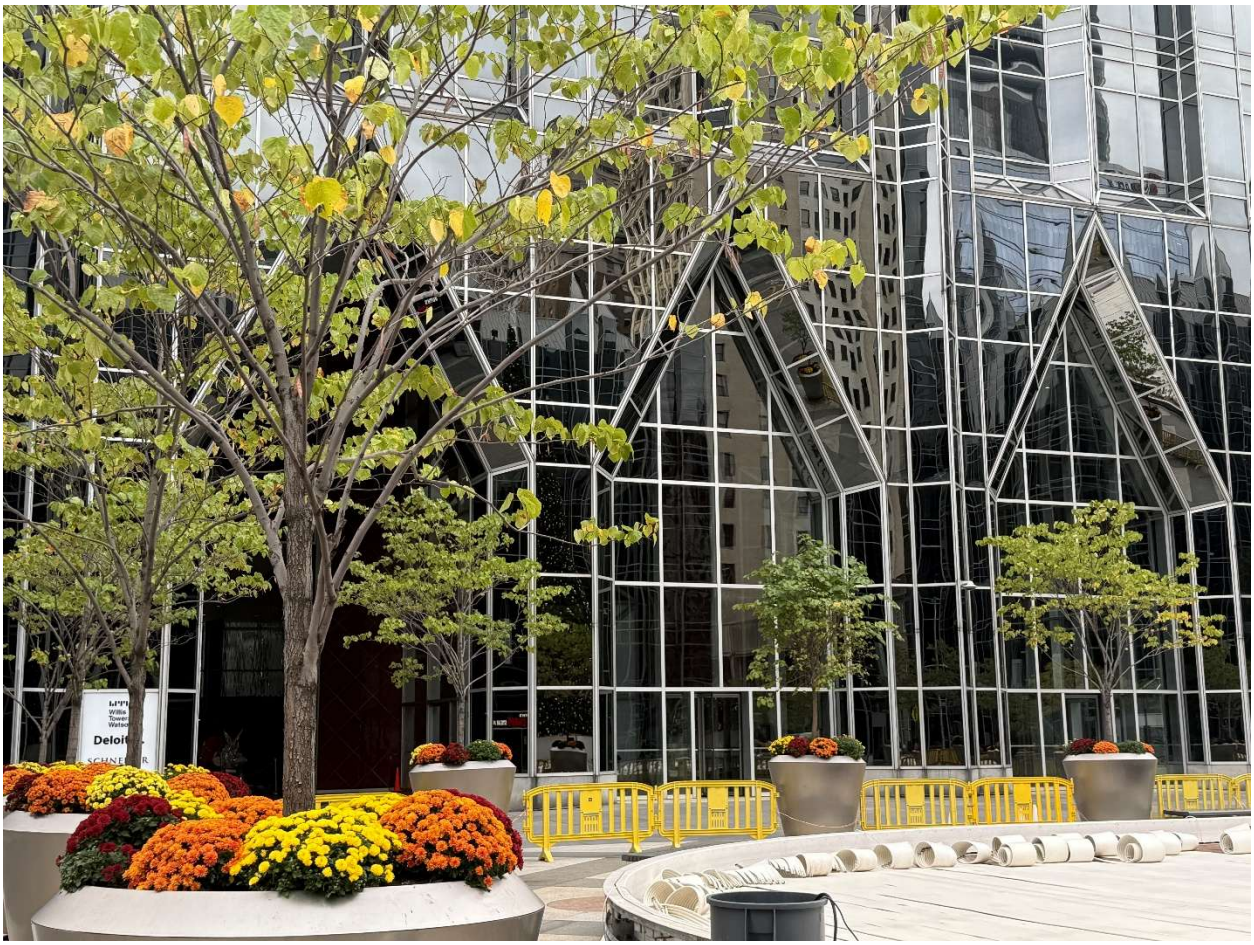
Despite being made of the same materials, the courtyard area has a different atmosphere than the tall towers.

The towers reflect the sky, while the lower floors reflect the buildings across from and beside them. It becomes a black-glass look that brightens as you look higher.



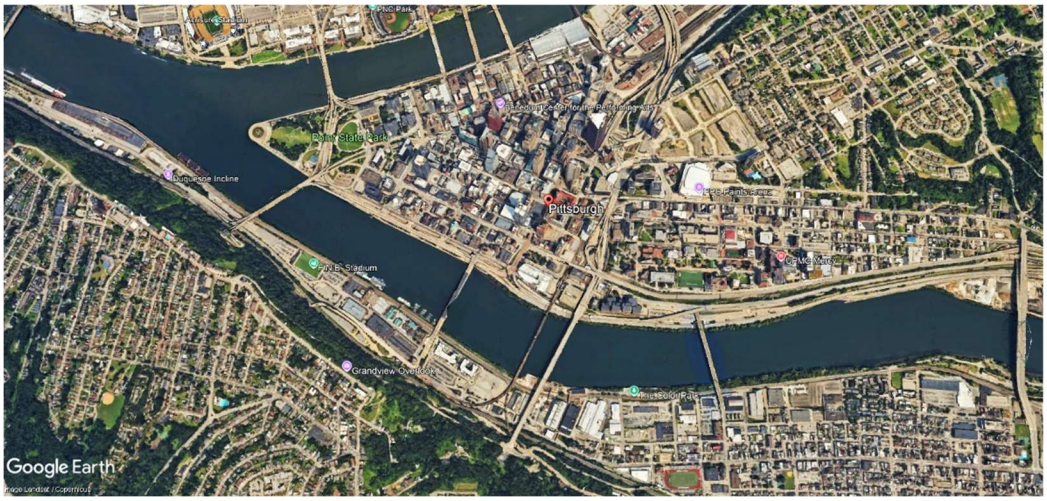






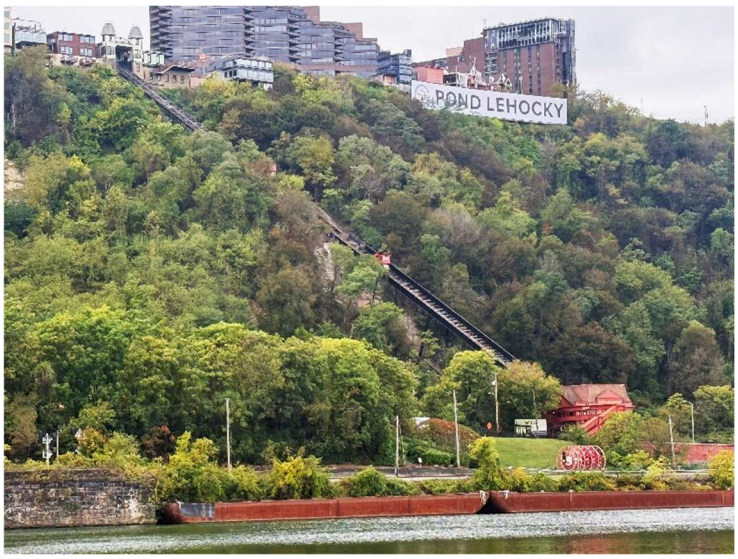
So, that was all really cool. But the money shot I wanted of PPG Place was from the high bluff across the river known as Mount Washington.

Pittsburgh is located at the confluence of the Allegheny River and the Monongahela River whose joining forms the Ohio River. The Pittsburgh Steelers' stadium used to carry the very fitting name of Three Rivers Stadium (now it's named after some insurance company, I think).



So, BM and I crossed the biggest of those bridges that you see, and we *climbed*.

That's Mount Washington in the photo. From the river to its summit (which extends back and up from what you see here), it is 1,255 feet tall, which is almost exactly double the height of the tower at One PPG Place.



There are a few official overlooks up there, including one across the street from a pretty cool-looking church.



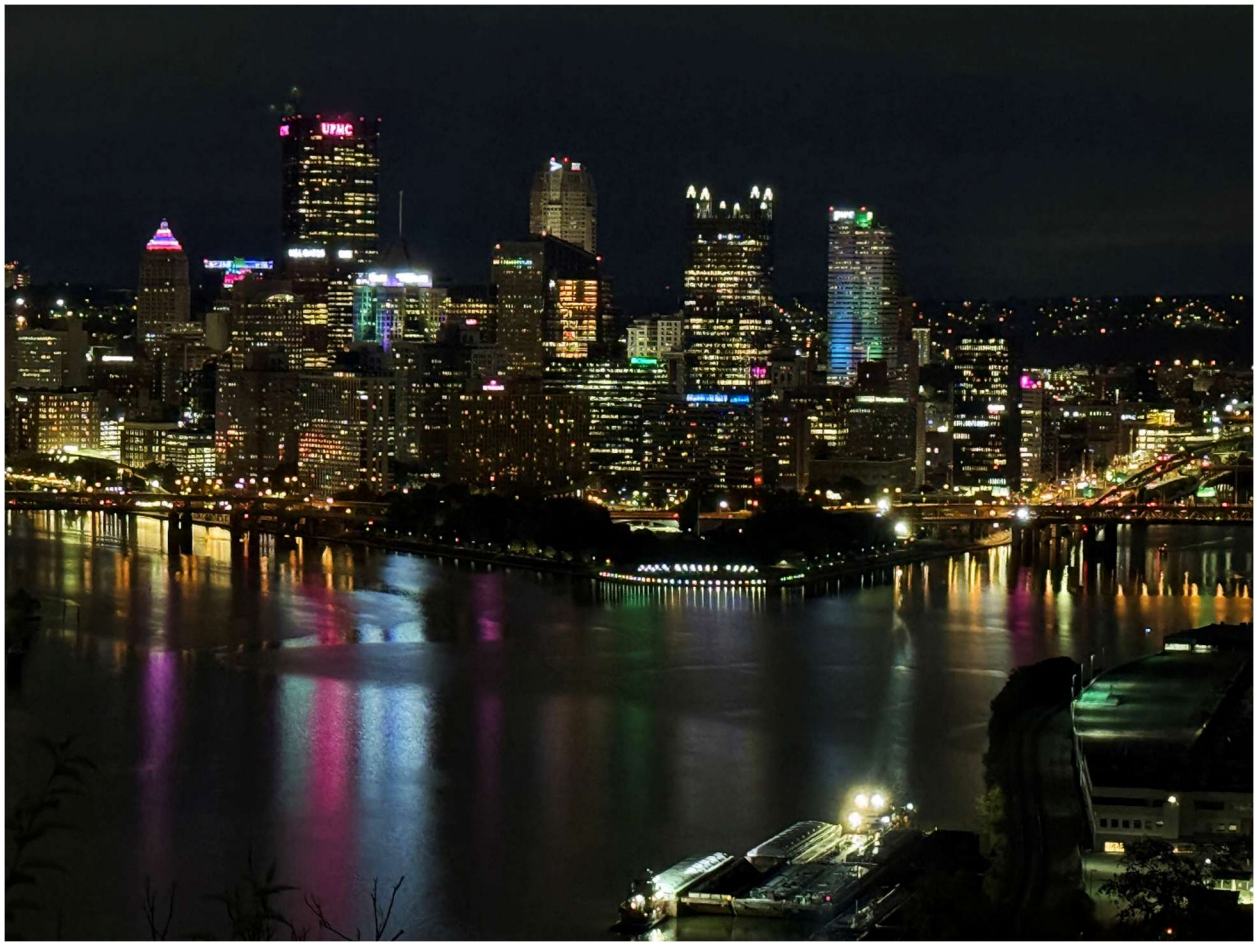
There was still a lot of daylight left when I got up here. My hope had been to catch a dazzling sunset with it's glorious gleam reflected in the high tower, and the fiery hues captured in the glass walls.

Nope. Not a chance. Not a single break in the clouds. Oh well, it was still a nice view. But, even though the sunset shot did not materialize, there was another coveted photo just waiting to be clicked: the nighttime view of the full-illuminated city.




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