

# Iowa's Snake Alley out-slithers San Francisco's Crookedest Street

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BURLINGTON, Iowa -- If you've been to San Francisco and think you've seen the Crookedest Street in the World, think again.

Bragging rights actually belong to Burlington, Iowa, according to Ripley's Believe It or Not.

The twisting Snake Alley in this city of 26,839 in southeastern Iowa dates to 1894.

It was created from curved limestone curbing and blue-clay brick 28 years before its California rival, which is part of Lombard Street.

Although Lombard's crooked section is longer, Snake Alley's curves are steeper and sharper, and each brick is tilted.

The block-long stretch has five switchbacks and a 60-foot climb with a 12.5 percent grade.

In addition to experiencing Snake Alley by car (a good test for brakes), bicyclists take it on, traveling uphill in the annual Snake Alley Criterium and downhill whenever the famous Register's Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa tour ends in Burlington. Children sled down it in winter, a feat unlikely to be mimicked on Lombard.

The Snake Alley Art Fair, held each Father's Day, closes the road to motorized traffic. Visitors may walk up or down, stopping to have their portrait sketched or to shop among more than 100 vendors, some featuring the alley in their designs.

Snake Alley was intended for travel by horse carriage, as a link between a neighborhood shopping area and the downtown business district.

Although the local newspapers declared it a "triumph in engineering" and the city considered building more curvy streets, it proved too difficult for horses.

Today, it is open to one-way traffic, from the top on Columbia Street.



The original bricks and limestone remain, as do the five houses and a church that bordered it when it was built, giving it the look of a 19th-century European neighborhood. A museum and gift shop are in one of the houses.

Group walking tours may be arranged with the Greater Burlington Convention and Visitors Bureau.

*Resources: Visitors Bureau, 319- 752-6365, [www.growburlington.com](http://www.growburlington.com); Phelps House museum, 521 ! Columbia St., 319-753-2449.*

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