

Lamoille County Vermont Covered Bridge Tour

The following tour will take drivers or cyclists through some of the most beautiful country in Vermont, through historic villages, mountain passes, and rolling farmland. The final destinations are covered bridges but there is much else to see along the way. The whole tour is easily possible in a single day in an automobile, but only the most fit and able cyclist on a touring or racing bike could accomplish it in a single day.

The starting point is Stowe, but could be anywhere along the described route. This circuit takes you through Smugglers' Notch, itself a kind of bridge between Stowe and Cambridge that includes miles of narrow and winding roadway and towering cliffs.

Stowe

Gold Brook or Emily's Bridge has been carrying travelers over Gold Brook for more than 150 years and is a fine example of an authentic structure, even though it was built in 1844 using an unusual construction technique, the Howe truss. More widely used in heavy bridges to carry railroad traffic, the Howe truss employs iron rods and angle blocks and is considered overkill for a one-lane bridge of less than 50 feet.

Perhaps of more interest is the tragic story associated with the bridge. There are several versions, but the best known, according to Joe Nelson's book, "Spanning Time," involves a local farmer's daughter named Emily who lived in the 19th century. After being deserted by her lover, Emily hanged herself in the bridge. Sightings of a ghostly presence have been reported, especially on moonlit nights around Halloween. To visit the bridge, go 3.5 miles south from Stowe on Route 100 to a left turn onto Gold Brook Road, then 1.2 miles to a left turn on Covered Bridge Road.



Morristown

Take Route 100 headed north out of Stowe to Stagecoach Road, which is on the left soon after leaving the village of Stowe. Sterling Valley Road will appear on the left after 1.7 miles and another 1.6 miles will lead you to the bridge, on the right, over Sterling Brook.

As with many of the bridges, it has been known by several names, but most commonly is now called the Red Bridge, an obvious choice given its color. Only 64 feet from portal to portal, the Red Bridge appears longer because of an additional 10 feet in its extended gables. This 1896 structure includes the oddity of a kingpost truss with a superimposed queenpost system that was later strengthened with iron rods in 1897.



In 1971, the bridge was reconstructed with the original stone abutments being replaced by cast concrete and the roadway supported by two steel beams.

Retracing your route to Stowe will bring you to the T-junction with Route 108 and a right turn will put you on your way through Smugglers' Notch to reach the other bridges on the tour.

Cambridge

Enjoy the spectacular views of Smugglers' Notch but also keep an eye on the road! On the northern side of the Notch, as the road nears the Brewster River, look for Canyon Road on the right and the Grist Mill (other names include Brewster, Canyon, Scott, or Bryant bridge) Covered Bridge. Neither the builder nor the construction date are known, but it has been carrying traffic with a current load limit of five tons over its 87-foot Burr arch for at least 100 years.

At one time, the town of Cambridge had 13 covered bridges, but now only the Grist Mill Bridge remains on the public road system.



Stay on Route 108 and proceed to Main Street in Jeffersonville, which is on the Historic Register. Take a right turn at the stop sign. At the traffic light, turn right on Route 15 and after .7 miles, left on to Jct 23 Road (across from Jack Corse fuels) to visit the Cambridge Junction Bridge.



Also known as the Polland Bridge for the Waterville judge who helped sue Cambridge to put in the bridge (but died in his hayfield the year it was built), the bridge gave direct access to the freight station at the railroad junction for communities to the north after it was built in 1887. It was closed to vehicle traffic in 1993 for safety reasons. Despite the "No Trucks Allowed" sign and a two-ton load limit, heavy vehicles continued to use the 140-foot span and damaged it. As the second longest single span in Vermont and possibly the longest Burr arch in the U.S., it is a suitable recipient of the first-round of restoration money.

Waterville

From Cambridge village, retrace the route on Route 15 to Route 108 north, turning left at the Jeffersonville traffic light. After crossing the Lamoille River once again, the next right puts you on Route 109 and in four miles you reach the village of Waterville and the first of three bridges over the North Branch of the Lamoille, a notable source of trout in season.



All these bridges now carry road traffic on reinforced steel beams, which were installed after a number of trucks went through the decks of each of the bridges. But the "queenpost design" bridges, each around 60 feet in length and built in 1877, remain authentic. Church Street Bridge on the left is in the village itself, while the other two are found to the right of Route 109 the Montgomery Bridge about 1.2 miles north of the village and the Jaynes Bridge leading to Coddington Hollow another half a mile further on.

Belvidere

The North Branch of the Lamoille is spanned by two more covered bridges in the next town. About 3.7 miles north of Church Street in Waterville, turn left onto Mill Bridge Road to visit the structure by that name half a mile further on. This 70-foot queenpost bridge dates from 1895, but was reinforced by four steel beams after a snowplow went through the deck in 1971.



After the bridge, bear right at the first fork and go 0.8 miles to the Morgan Bridge, another 60-foot queenpost built in 1877. It features some unique reinforcing rods in the trusses and five-foot gable overhangs not found on other queenpost bridges in the county.



At this point in the tour, you can either continue north on Route 109 to Belvidere Corners and go right on Route 118, then right again on Route 100C to head for the village of Johnson or retrace your route back to Route 15 and go left to reach Johnson.

Johnson

The Power House Bridge is a third of a mile north of Route 15 on Route 100C and carries vehicles across the Gihon River at School Street. Another 60-foot queenpost structure, it was built in 1870 of massive timbers, but had to be reconstructed in 1960, 1993, and 1995 due to heavy traffic.

Another mile north on Route 100C, a right turn on Sinclair Road will lead to the Scribner Bridge on left. Of



comparatively recent origin, this 45-foot queenpost over the Gihon River was built in 1919, probably as an open bridge, with massive timbers for such a length. Reconstructed in 1960, the deck is supported by four steel beams and the original stone abutments were replaced with concrete, a good example of historical authenticity bowing to modern requirements.

Wolcott

The only remaining stop on the tour requires a side trip of almost 25 miles east on Route 15 to the Fisher Railroad Bridge, a 103-foot Town-Pratt lattice structure built in 1908. Preserved through the cooperation of government, business, and community, there is a historical marker at the bridge which points out the full-length cupola to release the train smoke, which gives it somewhat of a "sugarhouse" look.

Of the three covered spans over the Lamoille River that carried the St. Johnsbury and Lamoille County Railroad the St. J and L.C. was once locally called irreverently the "St. Jesus and Long Coming" only the Fisher Bridge on Route 15 near Wolcott survives as such. It is the last covered railroad bridge in Vermont and one of the few left in the United States.

