



## *A Grand look at Coos County's Covered Bridges*

About 20 years ago, author Robert James Waller was inspired by covered bridges to pen his novel, *The Bridges of Madison County*, which was later turned into a movie starring Clint Eastwood and Meryl Streep.

The bridges of Coos County may not have inspired novels or movies - yet - but they are a source of community pride, spanning not only rivers and streams, but well over a century of history.

Spring is a nice time to explore the eight covered bridges, for this is a quiet season, lending itself well to standing in the middle of the bridge and contemplating the sense of history and mesmerizing flow of water beneath you.

In the early years of covered bridges, they were called "spooning places," where lovers found some privacy in their courtships. One romantic 1930s-era author suggests that if you stand in a covered bridge at midnight, "you will hear a murmuring like little kissing winds ..."

Your covered bridge tour will, with a couple of exceptions, follow the mighty Connecticut River along U.S. Route 3, from Lancaster clear up to Pittsburg, a distance of about 60 miles. Depending on your sense of adventure, you will want to leave at least half a day to see them all.

**LANCASTER** - Home of two covered bridges. The 94-foot Mechanic Street bridge, right off Route 3 in downtown, crosses Israel's River. Built in 1862, it owes its longevity to citizens electing to prohibit driving across the bridge at a pace faster than a walk. The bridge was rebuilt several years ago.

The 266-foot Mount Orne bridge, a few miles' detour off Route 3, west on Route 135, crosses the Connecticut River into Lunenburg, Vt. First built around the 1860s, the bridge was taken out by a log jam in 1908. A ferry service operated until the bridge was rebuilt in 1911, for less than \$7,000!

**GROVETON** - Continue north from Lancaster to the next town up, Northumberland, where the Groveton bridge welcomes visitors. Spanning 126-feet across the Ammonoosuc River, the pretty bridge, built in 1852, is closed to traffic, but pedestrians can walk over it.

**STARK** - A detour off Route 3, about 7 miles east

on Route 110, is worth the time. Even if you have never visited Stark, you may get a little sense of déjà vu when you come upon the pretty tableau of the 135-foot span over the Upper Ammonoosuc River. The sight is classic New

PITTSBURG - The northernmost, and largest, town in New Hampshire once had seven covered bridges; now, just three remain.

Just south of Pittsburg, on Bacon Road, the 88-foot

Pittsburg-Clarksville bridge is the first bridge to cross the Connecticut River, on its 400-mile journey south to Long Island Sound. Town records indicate that money was raised to build this bridge back in 1876. It was closed to traffic in 1981.

Six miles north on Route 3, on Hill Road, the 60-foot Happy Corner bridge crosses Perry Stream. It was built sometime in the mid-1800s, taking its name, according to lore, from the store where “a group of jovial men ... while away the hours with cards and fellowship.” It is one of the oldest covered bridges in northern New Hampshire.

Finally, we come to River Road bridge, located 7 miles north of the village on Route 3, on the road to Lake Francis State Park. Measuring 50-feet, it also spans Perry Stream and was built in 1858. It is closed to traffic,

but in the summer, pedestrians can walk across it and chat with volunteers who try to keep it clean and take care of minor repairs.



The Stark Covered Bridge, Stark, New Hampshire.

Lorna Colquhoun Photo

England, with the Union Church alongside the bridge, and over the years, it has graced innumerable magazine covers, bank calendars and jigsaw puzzles. Legend has it that when residents voted in the 1950s to replace the bridge with a steel one, the outcry from photographers, artists and covered bridge aficionados was such that plans changed and it was renovated, rather than torn down.

COLUMBIA - A sign on Route 3 points over to this bridge, which demonstrates that the scourge of any old wooden structure is fire and the 145-foot Columbia covered bridge was built in 1912 to replace the one destroyed by fire. The claim to fame for this bridge is that it is the northernmost covered bridge connecting New Hampshire with Vermont. It is presently undergoing repairs.

***Suggested Stops on your way...***

After visiting Stark and Groveton bridges, stop in to lunch at North Country Family Restaurant on Main Street in Groveton for the great food.

In Pittsburg, indulge a little and get the famous 1-pound whoopie pie. Common now, you deserve it!