

Why are Covered Bridges Covered?

By Robert Parks

One of the most popular questions we hear about Covered Bridges is, why are they covered? Over the years many theories of why bridges are covered have been told. Some say the bridges were covered to prevent horses from getting spooked when they realized they were above flowing water. Other theories state that the bridges were built to resemble barns so farm animals would feel more at home or that they were covered to protect the wary traveler who got caught in a storm. The most common thought is that roofs were added to these bridges in order to keep the snow off, so the steeper the better. "Keep's em dry" an old Pennsylvania carpenter always answered, wrote Richard Sanders Allen in his book "Covered Bridges of the Middle Atlantic States" (1959). "not for the travelers, not for the horses, or the wagonloads of hay, or for the sweethearts who halted in their shadows."

The actual truth to it all is that the bridges were covered to protect the mighty wooden trusses that held the bridge together. If the trusses were left to the sun, wind, and rain, the life expectancy was only about ten years. When they were covered, their life span increased tenfold. When it snowed, bridge tenders actually shoveled snow onto the bridge to aid the crossing of sleighs.

The 25 covered bridges that still stand in Columbia and Montour County are well preserved, some for over 150 years. A few have been repaired or rebuilt by preservation groups or by the county. Seven of them are closed to auto traffic and are open to the public, while the remaining bridges are still in use. Should you tour the bridges of Columbia and Montour Counties take a moment to park your car and walk across bridge. Traveling on foot allows you to take in the intricacies of the bridge. Read through the many hand carved initials expressing a couples love or the signature of a visitor dating back to 1888. Should you meet a nearby neighbor, you may hear a tale or two about the bridge. They may even tell you that their great grandfather had a hand in building the bridge.



If you have an afternoon, take a picnic and spend the day exploring at the covered bridge of your choice. A favorite pastime on a covered bridge is hanging out the window with a fishing pole attempting to catch a trout or two. Or take a dip in the creek beneath the bridge in the summertime. Or catch a downpour and listen to the drumming of the raindrops on the covered roof. Parts of the region are also home to the Mennonites and Amish. Should you be lucky enough to be on or under the covered bridge when they pass through, just imagine you're back in the 1800's as they drive the horses thundering through the bridge in their wagons or carriages.

So why are the covered bridges of Columbia and Montour County Covered? They are covered for you to enjoy!

Conveniently located near Interstate 80, and State Routes 11, 15, 487, 54 and 42, the Columbia-Montour County region in East-Central PA is easily accessible from any direction.

There are 208 Covered Bridges still standing in Pennsylvania, and you can find 25 of them in Columbia and Montour Counties. For a detailed Covered Bridges driving map, please contact the Columbia-Montour Visitors Bureau.

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