

Take a Ride and Explore

Take a ride and explore the five remaining covered bridges of Pennsylvania’s Americana Region. Make our Self-Guided Covered Bridge Tour the centerpiece of a longer visit, then switch-on the cruise control as you set your sights on the sites of Berks County.

We recommend you point your compass north and begin your travels at Wertz’s Bridge, located at Berks County Heritage Center. Continue on the northern half of the tour, doable in about two hours, allowing plenty of time for detours to places like - Crystal Cave, the shops in Kutztown, and Saucony Creek Brewery for a quick bite and a craft beer.

Want to stay longer? We think you will. Make sure to pack an overnight bag so you can get a good night’s sleep at one of our member lodgings.

Take a ride on that road less traveled and discover these rustic architectural wonders!

Spin your wheels and your imagination as you scare up some fun with the stories that make these landmarks legendary.

Berks County’s covered bridges offer a whole new definition of “drive-through,” so ease off your accelerator as you rattle the floorboards through enchanted shadows, swirling with stories of stolen kisses and departed souls. Ride through a simpler time, when the milkman and paperboy crossed routes in rush-hour traffic. Dare to unplug for the day—or the weekend—and tune-in to the tempo of a horse’s gait, the songbird’s whistle, and the rhythm of the creek under your feet. In every creak of the floorboards is the heritage of more than one hundred years of yesterdays. Soldiers and spirits. Travelers and tourists. Drivers and dreamers. They’ve all been there.



Our self-guided tours are great for bicycle rides too!

Find biking directions for the Covered Bridge and Barn Star Art Tours at VisitPaAmericana.com.



Our sincere thanks to the County of Berks for their support and sponsorship of the Covered Bridge Tour.

The Covered Bridge Brochure is the result of an alliance formed by the following organizations to promote the remaining covered bridges in Berks County, PA:

- Pennsylvania’s Americana Region Vistors Center
- Berks County Parks and Recreation Department
- Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center at Kutztown University
- Kutztown Folk Festival
- Dutch Hex Tour Association
- Schuylkill River Heritage Area



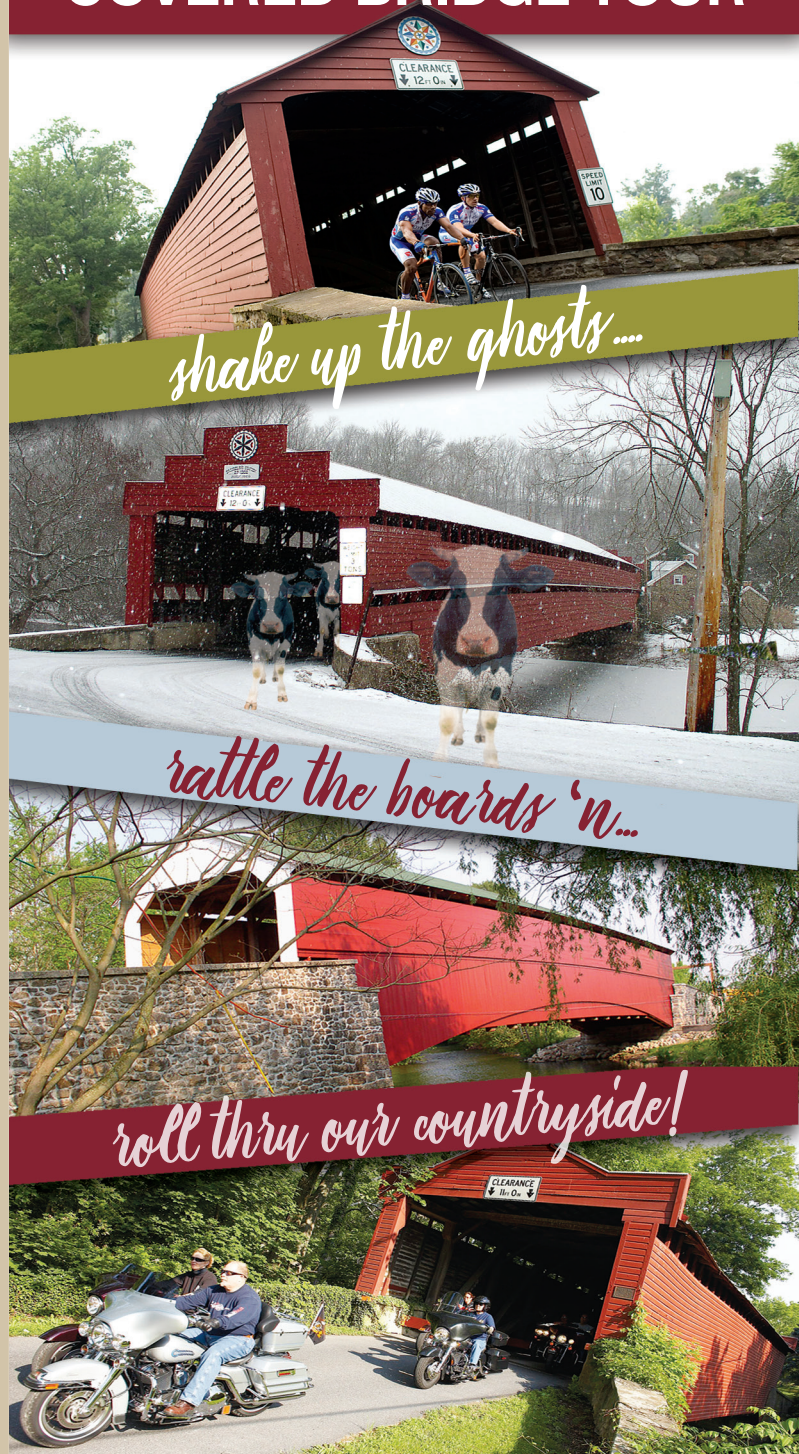
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Bridge photos courtesy Fred J. Moll, Bridge Historian and Rick Gomez Photography

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COVERED BRIDGE TOUR



Bridge Facts...

- Roofs were built over wooden bridges to preserve and protect the decks in extreme weather. Ironically, snow had to be shoveled into the bridges, so that horse-drawn sleighs could maneuver the passages after a snowfall.
- A “bridgeman or toll keeper” typically lived at one end of the bridge in a tiny hut. It was furnished with a single mattress on a slab of wood, under which his watchdog slept.
- A bridgeman earned his salary by collecting tolls around the clock. It was not uncommon to be awakened by late-night travelers wishing to cross. Typical earnings were less than \$10 for three months’ work.
- A bridgeman’s responsibilities included keeping up with the structural wear and tear of the bridge. To that end, the county provided him a planing bench and a full set of tools, along with coal and wood.
- Early tolls were calculated by foot, not axle. Humans paid a penny, and a horse cost five cents. In a precursor to today’s E-Z Pass, frequent two-footed visitors paid 25 cents in advance for a season’s permission to pass. Farmers also warranted special rates and arrangements, since they were the bridge’s most regular crossers.

Kurtz’s Mill Bridge

As you cruise along Route 143 to **Dreibelbis Bridge**, turn back the clock more than a century. Picture yourself in a driving snowstorm, frozen hands gripping the reins of a one-horse sleigh. As you turn onto the bridge, the runners grind onto dry wood, ripping the reins from your fingers as the rig suddenly lurches forward. So goes the story of a Virginsville-area man who collided with his fate on this very bridge late in the 19th century. As he tumbled from the sleigh, the loose reins gripped his neck, snapping his head clean from his shoulders. Later, the sleigh, the horse, and the man’s body were found, but his head was never recovered. Some believe you can still see his spirit wandering the bridge seeking his lost head.

If you catch a glimpse of the spirit lurking around **Kurtz’s Mill Bridge**, give Frank a wave. After World War I, shell-shocked veteran Frank Leiby returned home from the front and settled at Kurtz’s old mill. For over 30 years, he faithfully tended the property as its handyman in exchange for room and board. Frank died of natural causes in the 1940s, and ever since, his friendly ghost returns to the porch of the house, next to the mill for which the bridge is named.

Wertz’s Bridge

Believed to be the longest single-span covered bridge in Pennsylvania, **Wertz’s Bridge** gets its name from the grist mill it was built to access. Amandus Kner erected the bridge over Tulpehocken Creek in 1867 so farmers could get to the nearby mill in Sinking Spring. Known today as the Red Bridge, for its undeniably vibrant hue, it is the only bridge in Berks that restricts motorized traffic. If you want to explore all 220 feet of it, you’ll need to do it by foot or bicycle.

Travelers long believed **Wertz’s Bridge** to be haunted due to sightings of strange white forms wandering the bridge at night. The mystery of the hauntings was later resolved by a brave young man who dared to hide in the shadows one night. The ghosts? Simply a handful of Holstein cows that slept on the bridge on hot summer nights. As they walked back to their barnyard, the white patches of their hides could be seen in the darkness!

Covered Bridge Driving Tour

TOTAL DRIVE TIME IS 2 TO 3 HOURS

Reading, Berks County, Pennsylvania

Begin at Penn Street Bridge —

WERTZ’S BRIDGE (approx. 6 miles)

- Take 422W (Lebanon)
 - Follow 222N
 - Take 183S (Bernville/Strausstown)
 - Continue for approximately 1/4 mile
 - Turn right onto Red Bridge Road at the Heritage Center Sign
 - Park in the Heritage Center Parking Lot and walk a short distance to Wertz’s Bridge
- In addition to Wertz’s Bridge, the Berks County Heritage Center is home to Gruber Wagon Works, C. Howard Hiester Canal Center, Melcher’s Grist Mill, Deppen Cemetery, Union Canal Trail Tour and other memorials. Tours available daily, May through October.



Wertz’s Bridge is believed to be the longest single-span covered bridge in Pennsylvania and the third longest in the United States.

From Wertz’s Bridge to
KUTZ’S MILL BRIDGE (approx. 17 miles)

- Take Red Bridge Road back to 183 and
- Turn left onto 183N
- Take 222N (Allentown)
- Take the Virginville/Kutztown Exit – the Kutztown Folk Festival*, held in July, is America’s premier folklife festival with thousands of handmade quilts, entertainment, children’s activities, PA Dutch food & craftsmen.
- Turn left onto College Blvd. (becomes Saucony Road)
- Turn right onto Kutz’s Mill Road
- Kutz’s Mill Bridge will be ahead of you
- Cross the bridge, turn around and drive back over the bridge



Kutz’s Mill Bridge was built in 1854. This 93-foot bridge spans Saucony Creek.

From Kutz’s Mill Bridge to
DREIBELBIS BRIDGE (approx. 9 miles)

- Follow Kutz’s Mill Road back to Saucony Road
- Make a right onto Saucony Road
- Bear left at the “Y” (do not take Dutch Mill Road)
- Make a right at the “T” onto Crystal Cave Road – Crystal Cave ☆ is Pennsylvania’s most popular natural attraction and includes a rock shop, museum, ice cream parlor, restaurant, miniature golf course, and sluice for gold panning.
- Turn right onto 143N towards Lenhartsville
- Continue for approximately 2.5 miles
- Turn right to cross the bridge, turn around and drive back over the bridge



Dreibelbis Bridge was built in 1869 by Manassas Dreibelbis, owner of a nearby saw and clover mill. He and 13 others petitioned the court to build a bridge across Maiden Creek. The 168-foot bridge was built for an estimated cost of \$6,000. Its wood was brought to the site by the Schuylkill River and Lehigh Railroad. Thanks to rail traffic, the area became known as Dreibelbis Station, though little of the railroad remains today.

YOU HAVE JUST COMPLETED THE NORTHERN HALF OF THE TOUR.

From Dreibelbis Bridge to
PLEASANTVILLE BRIDGE (approx. 19 miles)

- Follow 143S through Virginville toward Moselem Springs
- Make a left onto 662S
- Cross over 222 and continue on 662S into Fleetwood
- Make a right at the light onto West Main Street
- Make a left onto South Richmond Street (662S)
- Continue through Historic Oley on Main Street (do not take the 662 bypass around Oley)
- Make a left onto 73E (Philadelphia Ave.) at the flashing red light and continue for 2 miles
- Make a right onto Covered Bridge Road—The Pleasantville Bridge Inn is a great place to break for lunch and stretch your legs—or continue on 73E into Boyertown and visit the Boyertown Museum of Historic Vehicles ☆ then return to the Bridge Inn and make a left at the light to continue with the tour)
- The Pleasantville Bridge is approximately 1/2 mile ahead

— continued next column



Built by David Renno in 1852, Pleasantville Bridge was originally an open bridge due to a lumber shortage after the flood of 1850. Four years later the 126-foot bridge over Little Manatawny Creek was covered by Jonathan Bitner.

From Pleasantville Bridge to
GRIESEMER’S BRIDGE (approx. 2 miles)

- Drive through the Pleasantville Bridge and continue on Covered Bridge Road
- Make a left onto Church Road (just before Salem United Church of Christ)
- Pass the Oley Cemetery
- Make a left onto Spangsville Road
- Make a sharp right curve to cross the bridge



Griesemer’s Mill Bridge is thought to be the oldest covered bridge in Berks County. This 124-foot bridge over Manatawny Creek dates its origin to 1868.

From Griesemer’s Bridge back to
READING (approx. 18 miles)

- Make a right at the stop sign onto Manatawny Road
- Make a right at the stop sign onto Longview Road
- Make a right onto 562W
- Take 662N
- Take 73W to 12W
- Take 422E (Pottstown) to 422 Business to Penn Street

HAVE AN EYE FOR ART?

Don’t overlook the hex signs or “barn stars” adorning the bridges. This unique PA Dutch art form has its very own self-guided tour. Follow it across our countryside for a better look at these distinct barn decorations. Download the tour from our website, or contact us for a Barn Star Art Tour brochure.

- BERKS COUNTY HERITAGE CENTER ☆**
2201 Tulpehocken Road, Wyomissing, PA 19610 | 610.374.8839
- PA GERMAN CULTURAL HERITAGE CENTER ☆**
22 Luckenbill Road, Kutztown, Pa 19530 | 610-683-1589
- BOYERTOWN MUSEUM OF HISTORIC VEHICLES ☆**
85 S. Walnut Street, Boyertown, PA 19512 | 610.367.2090
- CRYSTAL CAVE ☆**
963 Crystal Cave Road, Kutztown, PA 19530 | 610.683.6765
- JOIN US FOR SOME SPECIAL FUN...**
- KUTZTOWN FOLK FESTIVAL ***
Kutztown, PA 19530 — July
- CHILE PEPPER FOOD FESTIVAL ***
Bowers, PA 19511— September

shake up the ghosts
rattle the boards ‘n
roll thru the countryside

