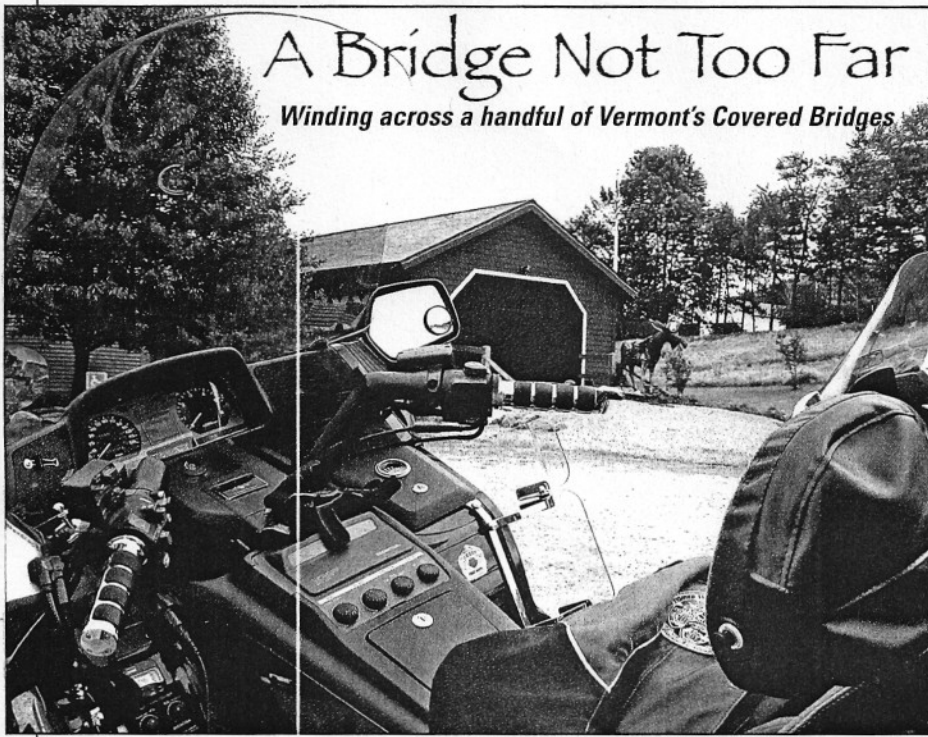


# A Bridge Not Too Far

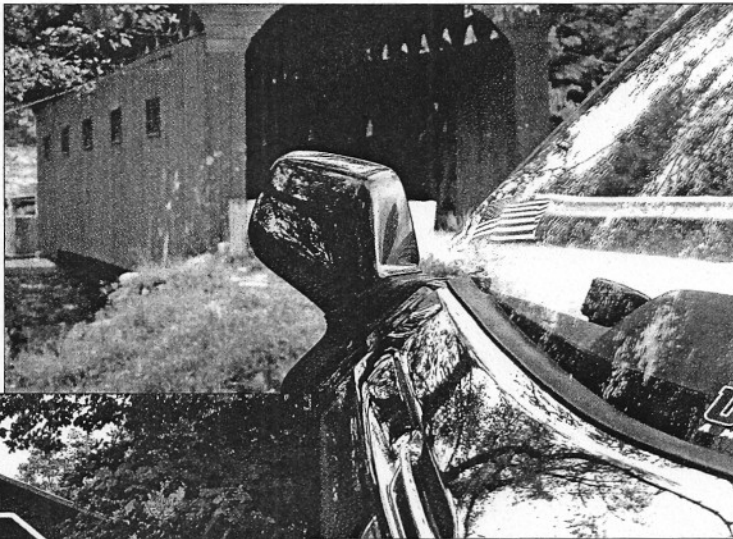
*Winding across a handful of Vermont's Covered Bridges*



*Words and images: Robert Laford*

Are you searching for that perfect ride on your motorcycle to build new memories? The roads through New England are some of the most wonderful routes for a motorcyclist to venture. Many of these roads began their service as deer runs and Native American hunting trails many generations ago. These travelers of yester-year had to cross the wetlands, streams, and rivers via means that might not have kept them dry. Although there is a segment of the motorcycle community that still enjoys crossing a stream through the water, most of us would prefer to cross over the water. Planning a motorcycle ride to visit bridges may not seem like the top choice for a ride, but locating the architectural masterpieces we call "covered bridges" is a journey into the past, offering views of the mountains above, the valleys below, and the villages nearby, all in one memorable glimpse.

Vermont is the day's destination, not only because it is home to the Green Mountains with wonderful roads to ride, it is also host to 103 covered bridges to visit and explore. It is said that Vermont has more covered bridges still in existence than any other state. The bridges



and the routes leading to them are rich in history offering not only beauty for the rider to behold but each holding a story that is waiting to be told.

The hospitable roads of Vermont are welcoming to motorcyclists and offer the rider well maintained curves and scenic byways at every junction and corner. The Green Mountain State is synonymous with red-roofed barns, farms, rolling hills, maple syrup, and covered bridges. As each road bends and winds its way through the lush greenery of Vermont, it is apparent that the routes may pose a challenge to truck traffic moving freight as they crawl, climb, bend and curve through the hills and valleys. During the summer season, these same roads give motorcyclists a feeling of exhilaration, adventure, and freedom as the rider leans and banks his or her ride upward and throughout the beckoning mountains. During cold weather months, these roads are filled with those sportsmen celebrating the winter wonderland that the nearby hills and villages offer, as they travel to the ski slopes and sled trails that call Vermont home.

Vermont's Route 9 is one of these classic roads that is unintentionally engineered and designed with the motorcyclist in mind. Route 9 cuts east and west across the southern border of Vermont, just north of the Massachusetts State line, leading to Bennington, Vermont. This route takes the rider up and over Hogback Mountain, with picturesque views atop the mountain and its open valley to the south.

When the rider crests each hill along the route, the mountain tops sport crystal lakes, blue skies, and open fields, while the road hugs the Deerfield River basin when rolling into the valley below.

The rider's senses are not only piqued by a twist of the wrist in the corners, but nature's presence also helps in leading the rider on the perfect ride. Throughout the winding route, visions, like the meadows filled with wild flowers, or the Red-tailed hawk perched in a treetop all offer peaceful scenic beauty for the rider to enjoy.

A quiet stop in nearby Searsburg, just off Route 9, finds a farm of towering windmills looking down over the old graveyard of farmers' past. Their

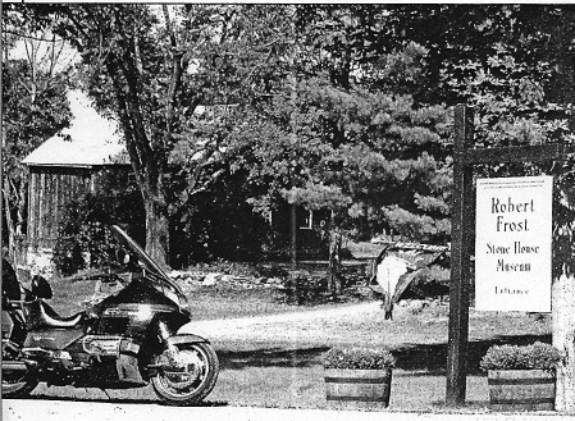
melodious whooshing sounds mark their pose as the mountain top's sentinels. In this peaceful setting the rider can begin to contemplate the lives of the nearby villagers in their eternal sleep while the modern wind towers provide for today's homesteaders.

A few miles further on Route 9, nestled in the southwest corner of the state rests Bennington. Bennington is a beautiful community and is the gateway to Vermont from nearby New York State. It is a great place to visit as riders can easily find scenic roads in any direction with green mountains and lush valleys waiting to welcome each visitor.

Bennington and its surrounding villages are known for their history, outdoor recreation, and the availability of reflection in the arts in many museums

and other attractions. Located in the hills outside of town on Route 9 is one of the museums that begin our quest for a specific piece of Vermont history. The Vermont Covered Bridge museum is part of the Bennington Center for the Arts and offers the rider a very peaceful and enjoyable spot to venture off the road and into the facility. The stop at the museum not only gives us further destinations to find, but also offers us the history of the structures with samples of the many tools that were used in their creation. ([www.benningtoncenterforthearts.org/vtCBM](http://www.benningtoncenterforthearts.org/vtCBM))

Leaving the museum with maps in hand, a quick stop at a local deli for sandwiches and lemonade "to go" starts the search for the covered bridges that await the bikes and riders. Bennington County is home to five covered bridges. For today's traveler the bridges are part of the beautiful backdrop to enjoy. When created, however, the concept of a covered bridge was more



practical than visual. The roof structures were to keep the decking and support structure of the bridges protected from the elements. The first bridge found is the Henry Bridge, one of three bridges located off Route 67A. The Henry Bridge is located on Murphy Road. Along side the restful current of the Walloomsac River it is a fine place to enjoy lunch as the periodic sojourner crosses the bridge above the picnickers. This bridge was originally built in 1840 and completely restructured in 1989. It sits across from the Henry House Bed and Breakfast.

Following the country road across the river from the main route the riders make their way a few miles back towards Bennington to take advantage of the opportunity to cross a couple of the nearby Bennington County Bridges - the Paper Mill Bridge and the Silk Road Bridge.

After visiting the covered bridges in Bennington, the route takes the rider north, up Route 7A to Arlington for more of the nearby classic structures. Passing through the small villages that line the road, the traveler may think of the poems of Robert Frost, with his New England-based poetry of small town descriptions. Passing through Shaftsbury, Vermont we come across his stone museum, a memory of his life in the valley. During his time spent at this rural spot along our route, Frost wrote his poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening." The grounds surrounding this stop can evoke many Frost images to the two-wheeled visitor, such as birch trees and stone walls.

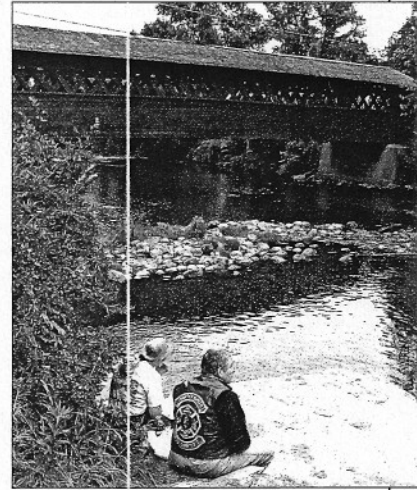
Riding further north through Arlington the rider passes by the center of town complete with a church fair and dinner in progress - another easily transcribed vision from one of Frost's stories. The selected journey takes us onto Route 313 to follow the Battenkill River towards the West Arlington Bridge. The West Arlington village, complete with its namesake bridge is a picturesque New England setting that includes the nearby church and steeple. The rider's view of the river finds fishermen, swimmers, and "tubers" all sharing the recreation of the summer's day and the river's clear water and tranquil current.

The last bridge in Bennington County is the Chiselville Bridge in East Arlington crossing the Roaring Branch Brook. The bridge's name comes from the former chisel factory that was near to its location. "One Dollar Fine if traveled faster than a walking speed," is on the sign above the one lane bridge.

After visiting the final of the five bridges of Bennington County the riders continue north on Route 7 to Route 30 in Manchester. Mount Equinox overlooks Manchester's village offering a tranquil and comforting alternative to urban America and continuing our two-wheeled love-affair with the Green Mountains. There are many opportunities to shop and eat in the village, making it a popular place for not only the winter sport visitors but travelers throughout the year.

From Manchester's center, Route 30 climbs back out of the valley and then dives down Bromley Mountain curving southeastward back towards Brattleboro, some forty-five miles away. The last leg of the ride - just as the beginning - is through wonderfully exciting mountain roads and rural villages full of shops and shoppers enjoying the atmosphere of the Green Mountain State.

Each small town and their local lore wait to welcome travelers and tell their visitors the stories of their history. The Vermont routes and bridges are also awaiting the rider to visit and develop his or her own story and memories of their perfect ride within the Green Mountains of Vermont. What will your story tell?



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