

Covered Bridges Around Scio, Oregon

~ A Guide ~

July 11, 2014 • Use this brief guide along with the map of the covered bridges.

The Need to Cross

“Pioneers armed with only hand tools, sweat and ambition began building covered bridges in Oregon during the mid-1850’s. They often camped out at remote sites, living off the land or contracting with local farmers for food. Early covered bridge owners often financed construction by charging tolls: 3 cents for a sheep, 5 cents for a horse and rider.

In the early 20th century, the state provided standard bridge designs to each county. Most of these structures incorporated the Howe truss. The abundance of Douglas Fir and the shortage of steel during the World Wars continued construction of covered spans well into the 1950’s. A wooden bridge was covered to keep the huge truss timbers dry. A covered bridge could last 80 years or more, while an uncovered span would deteriorate in about nine years.” by Covered Bridge Society of Oregon.

Scio and the area around were once served by at least nine covered bridges; two were demolished and two have been moved to neighboring communities as park features; these four have all been replaced by modern steel & concrete structures; five covered bridges remain in daily service now. This is a brief story of the remaining five covered bridges around Scio.

Howe Truss

The bridges in the Scio area are each constructed with variations of the Howe truss.

This design could be constructed from local materials with a minimum of tools. Wood was readily available in the Scio area and these bridges were constructed as late as 1966. Only steel cables or rods were required to complete a very strong, rigid structure capable of carrying great weights over wide spaces without intermediate supports.

William Howe of Massachusetts patented the Howe truss design in 1840. It is really an elaboration on the multiple kingpost design where by two heavy metal rods are substituted for the vertical timbers.

There are also variations on this pattern that add a second diagonal timber to the original single diagonal of the multiple kingpost and/or another diagonal timber running in the opposite direction between the vertical rods.

Some accounts indicate that the Howe design provided a bridge that was stronger than an all-wood structure; as a result, it became the forerunner of iron bridges. Because of its inherent great strength, the Howe truss was and is still used commonly in the construction of railroad bridges.

When we visit Larwood bridge the structure of its Howe truss is clearly visible because the bridge is being renovated and rebuilt. The floor and roof have been removed. Notice that the cross horizontal floor beams are suspended below the side rails rather than resting on the side rails as shown above.

Shimanek

The Shimanek Covered Bridge was built in 1966 with the Howe truss design and spans 130 feet across Thomas Creek.

The bridge is Linn County’s newest and longest covered bridge span.

The current bridge is the fifth bridge built at this location, and the fourth being covered.

It has been rumored that the 1891 bridge had a welcomed accommodation of a two-hole toilet built into the foundation, a “luxury” not found at the current covered bridge.

The Shimanek Covered Bridge is the perfect setting for some summer fun water activities. The only thing missing is a rope swing.

Larwood

The Larwood Covered Bridge was built in 1939 with the Howe truss design and spans 105 feet across Crabtree Creek. The covered span is located next to the Larwood Wayside Park.

A unique feature also at this site is the Roaring River, which empties into Crabtree Creek near the bridge. Roaring River is the only river to flow into a creek; an oddity in U. S. geography that was featured in Ripley’s Believe It or Not. (Creeks flow into rivers, and not the other way around.)

The attractive Larwood Bridge was built to Highway Commission specifications, which included standard partially exposed trusses, white-wash interior and rounded portals.

The Larwood community was named for William Larwood, who settled on the banks of Crabtree Creek and Roaring River in 1888. He platted the little town, built a store and blacksmith shop, and operated a post office from 1893 to 1903.

A prior covered bridge was built about this time over Crabtree Creek, and for a while, covered bridges spanned Roaring River and Crabtree Creek just a few feet apart.

The town and old covered bridges are gone, but the rebuilt water powered mill (which has recently collapsed in a storm. vrg) and the present covered bridge are reminders of the area's previous activities.

Hoffman

The Hoffman Covered Bridge was built in 1936 with the Howe truss design and spans 90 feet across Crabtree Creek.

Gothic style windows grace this structure, instead of the usual open truss design.

This bridge is one mile north-east of the town of Crabtree. Both the town and the creek were named for John Crabtree, who settled in the area in 1845.

The portal design, originally rounded when the bridge was constructed, was enlarged and squared to allow passage of larger loads.

The upper chords show signs of being shaped with hand adzes and as most bridge crews in 1936 had yet to use power tools, logs were often cut nearby and shaped before placement.

The Crabtree Creek setting of Hoffman bridge can make an afternoon experience of swimming a venture into the past. At

Hoffman it is easy to see families along the sandy shore picnicking and enjoying the water on a hot Sunday afternoon.

Gilkey

The Gilkey Covered Bridge was built in 1939 with the Howe truss design and spans 120 feet across Thomas Creek.

Gilkey was once a town and served as a shipping point for farm products. As noted by a nearby sign: "Gilkey Station was established when the railroad arrived in 1880 and was named in honor of Allen and William Gilkey."

The familiar swimming rope is tied to the framework of the railroad bridge, and during the summer swimmers enjoy this area of Thomas Creek.

In fall of 2007, the bridge had to be closed due to severe damage caused by a large farm service truck crashing into the bridge with its boom extended. The truck and boom broke several of the upper beams and braces. A floor beam was also fractured. It was a mess.

Permanent repairs were installed in 2008 and the bridge was reopened to traffic.

Hannah

The Hannah Covered Bridge was built in 1936 using the Howe truss design and spans 105 feet across Thomas Creek.

The Hannah Bridge is the oldest of the five covered spans on Thomas Creek in Linn County. The Howe trusses are exposed through the large side openings on the bridge.

This characteristic is an attractive feature typical of the Linn County covered bridges, which

also includes segmental portal arches, exposed beams at the gable ends, and white board-and-batten cladding.

In 1912, another covered bridge crossed Thomas Creek just east of the present structure, according to Aileen Howell, granddaughter of Hannah. Lumber from the dismantled bridge was used by the Hannah family to build a tool shed and sheep barn.

During the summer months, the bridge is a popular spot for swimmers often jumping from the bridge into the deep pool beneath.

A store known as Thomas' Y Store and service station were once located near the picturesque Hannah Covered Bridge.

Weddle

Please note the site for the Weddle Bridge which once spanned 120 ft across Thomas Creek. Bypassed by a steel & concrete bridge in 1980, Weddle CB was moved to Sweet Home for use as a fixture in their city park.

Thanks
For Visiting Scio.
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Sources

Some of the text came from the website for the Covered Bridges Society of Oregon; i.e. <http://www.covered-bridges.org/>.

The bridge descriptions are excerpted from the excellent blog put together by Steven Michael; i.e. <http://journeywithstevenmichael.blogspot.com/2010/01/oregon-covered-bridges-scio-region.html>