Headline: Explore covered bridges in Buckeye State

Deckhead: Ashtabula County blessed with a host of beautiful spans

Covered bridges are synonymous with rustic locations. The barnlike structures speak of peace and simpler times. Horse-drawn carriages, the sound of a restless stream and lush trees quickly come to mind.

The wood under your vehicle’s wheels creaks. A blanket of appreciation sets in, knowing a farmer built this structure from wood to cross a waterway in an area of God’s country that is lucky have a zip code.

Covered bridges can be found throughout the U.S., particularly in Ohio. It has more 100 covered spans – 19 of which can be found in Ashtabula County, a sliver of charm on the state’s northeast corner.

Some are dated to the mid-19th century. Others are newer; inspired by historic designs, including the longest and shortest covered bridges.

The vision of a county engineer sparked Ashtabula’s idea to promote its structures. The rehab project bolstered the beauty of its historic bridges, making them coveted attractions to sightseers and photographers.

Smolen-Gulf Covered Bridge spans over the Ashtabula River and is the county’s crowning glory. It’s the longest covered bridge in the U.S., measuring 613 feet. Just beneath it – in Indian Trails Park – the 150-foot pedestrian-only Riverview Covered Bridge leads to hiking trails and fishing spots.

Plymouth Township is home to the Olin Covered Bridge. Built in 1873, the 115-foot-long expanse has a Town lattice truss, based on a design by Connecticut-born architect Ithiel Town.

The Middle Road Covered Bridge highlights the small lakeside town of Conneaut. Built in 1868, it is one of the county’s oldest. Root Road Covered Bridge sits fewer than 10 miles away. It has pleasingly worn whitewashing that makes it ideal for a photographing.

The area’s prettiest covered bridge spans Mill Creek. The neo-Victorian Netcher Road Covered Bridge opened in 1999. It’s painted red with cream trim with copulas on each end. Nearby, South Denmark Road Covered Bridge, built in 1890, crosses the same creek. The 81-foot-long span is decorated with a colorful barn-quilt panel and is one of the county’s shortest.

South of the tiny town of Geneva, which is near Geneva-on-the-Lake and more than 20 wineries, is the county’s most famous bridge. The 228-foot-long Harpersfield Covered Bridge dates to 1868 and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Visit the nearby Mechanicsville Road Covered Bridge. It’s 156 feet in length and is the county’s longest single-laned covered bridge.

The Windsor Mills Covered Bridge was built in 1867 and is listed on the NRHP. It’s located off a quiet gravel road in the county’s southwest corner and crosses over Phelps Creek.

Ashtabula County has the highest concentration of covered bridges in Ohio, but it doesn’t have the oldest ones. Eaton sits fewer than 25 miles east of Dayton and is home to one of the longest surviving covered bridges in the U.S.

The Roberts Bridge – built in 1829 – is one of a dwindling number of “double-barreled” covered bridges (two-lane bridges with individual frames for each lane) remaining in the U.S. The 1831 Newton Falls Bridge is located 24 miles west of Youngstown. The 117-foot-long span crosses the Mahoning River.

Covered bridges are more than infrastructure. They’re colorful works of art sure to awaken your senses.

Cutline: TAKE COVER – The Windsor Mills Covered Bridge lights up during autumn in Ashtabula County, Ohio. Image: Sherman Cahal. Adobe Stock.