

Bridgespotting: A Guide to Bridges that Connect People, Places, and Times

A book by Bob Dover

Review by Frederick Gottemoeller

"Among everything that man builds, nothing is more valuable than bridges. They are more important than houses, more sacred than shrines. Belonging to everyone and available to everyone, useful, always built with sense, on the spot where most human needs cross, they are more durable than buildings, and serve openly and honestly, where all can see."

—Ivo Andrić, novelist and Nobel laureate

Since the advent of the railroad, which was closely followed by the development of motorized vehicles, we have primarily seen bridges as a means to get across barriers at high speeds. Many of us have forgotten about all the interesting aspects of a bridge that develop from its location, the history of that place, the culture of the people who built the bridge, the buildings or natural features that can be seen from the bridge, or any other mainly nontransportation aspects of the bridge. However, the increased popularity of walking, running, and bicycling, the growing number of bridges with sidewalks open to pedestrians and bicycles, and, most importantly, the growth of tourism as a leisure activity,

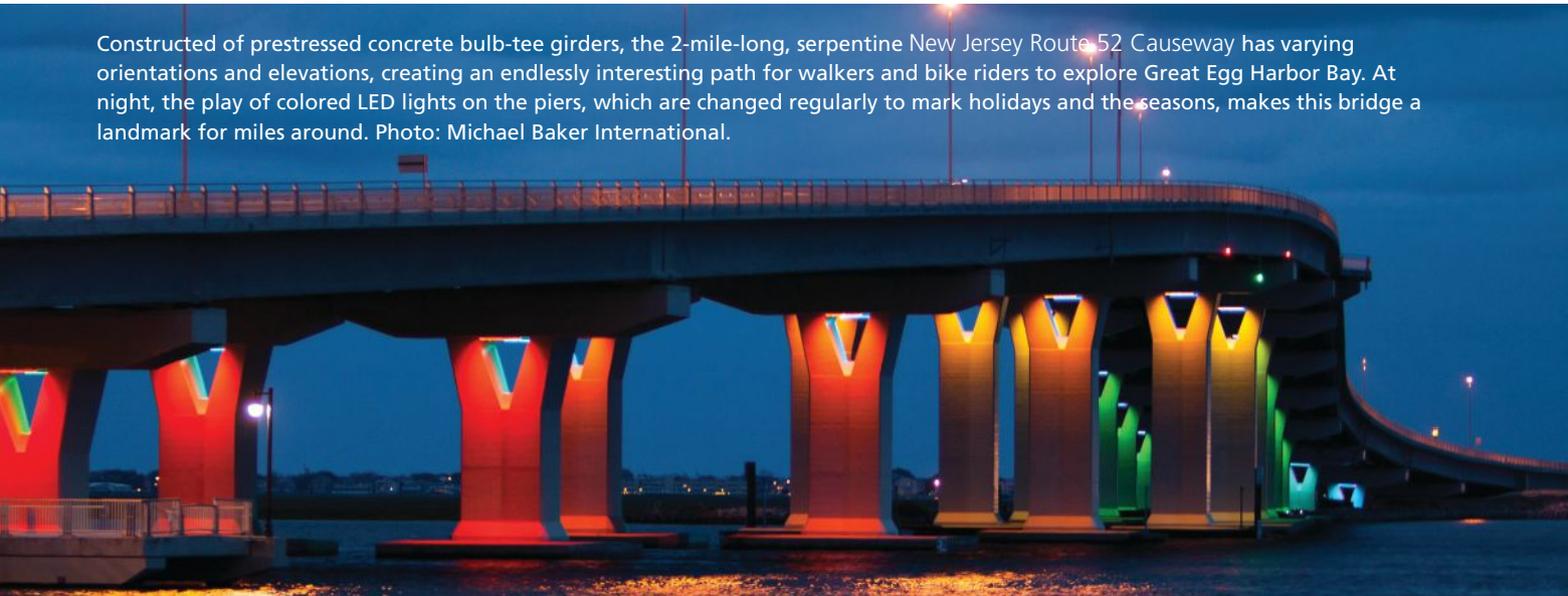
are bringing these aspects back into prominence.

For example, take the New Jersey Route 52 Causeway, a two-mile-long, prestressed concrete bulb-tee girder bridge connecting the mainland at Somers Point with the barrier island of Ocean City, N.J. Completed in 2011 to replace a pair of aging draw spans and to raise Ocean City's main access route above the increasingly high tides, the bridge included a brand new feature: a wide walkway/bike path. Suddenly, vacationers tired of the beach had a new alternative: leisurely walks or bike trips back to the mainland. The goal of these trips could be to visit Somers Point's restaurants (and liquor store). Or maybe

the aim is to take in the high-level views of the waterscapes and wetlands of Great Egg Harbor Bay, and to appreciate the bay's rich history. Or vacationers might want to visit the Ocean City Visitors Center halfway across the bridge, with its vending machines and second-level deck overlooking the surrounding bird sanctuary. Now, in addition to quick and reliable access to Ocean City, the bridge offers a variety of new recreational opportunities, along with features of environmental and historical interest.

In *Bridgespotting: A Guide to Bridges that Connect People, Places, and Times*,¹ author Bob Dover addresses this new trend. He states that his purpose in writing the book is to

Constructed of prestressed concrete bulb-tee girders, the 2-mile-long, serpentine New Jersey Route 52 Causeway has varying orientations and elevations, creating an endlessly interesting path for walkers and bike riders to explore Great Egg Harbor Bay. At night, the play of colored LED lights on the piers, which are changed regularly to mark holidays and the seasons, makes this bridge a landmark for miles around. Photo: Michael Baker International.

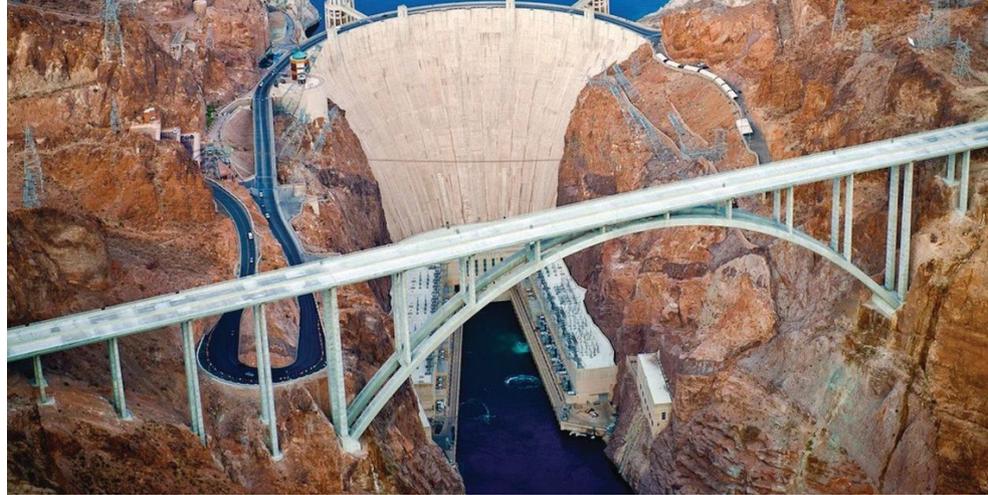




The Columbia–Wrightsville Bridge across the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania is a reminder of the Art Deco artistry in concrete that was standard when the bridge was constructed in 1929. Photo: Bob Dover.

explain why people visit bridges, and how to get there to see for yourself. To encourage you to walk across at your own pace, to look at the details of the construction, to take in the scenery and understand why it was constructed here and not there. To show how the bridge influenced the location and settlement patterns of the city around it. To describe how it supports the economic and social life of the local community. To demonstrate how the presence of the bridge influenced, and even caused, important events that have changed history. To help you get up close and personal with some of the high-speed bridges that you have already seen from a distance, and to tell you about many amazing slow-speed bridges hidden in smaller towns and rural areas. To suggest some things at each bridge, whether it is historical plaques, or decorations or construction details, or bridge-focused events and festivals, that you want to make sure to see.

Bridgespotting contains profile descriptions of the visual, cultural, and historical aspects of 140 bridges, and additional information about many others. Bridges throughout the United States and most of Europe are included. The writing is aimed at triggering your curiosity and getting you interested in visiting them. Rather than classifying bridges by size, construction type, or age, *Bridgespotting* organizes them by the features that attract visitors and tourists. The guide starts with landmark bridges like the Golden Gate, and then continues



The Callahan-Tillman Bridge is the longest concrete arch in the Western Hemisphere and carries Interstate 11 and U.S. Route 93 over the Colorado River between Arizona and Nevada, just downstream of Hoover Dam. Its sidewalk offers stunning views of the Hoover Dam and the Colorado River canyon, and the bridge itself has joined the dam as a symbol of this corner of the Southwest. Photo: HDR Inc.

with historic bridges, community bridges (famous for the events that occur on and around them), decorated bridges, cultural bridges, and so on.

However, the themes are just the beginning. Each bridge has multiple aspects that make it unique. Maybe the bridge is historically important, such as the site of a long-remembered religious or political event; maybe it is the crossing of a particularly spectacular gorge; or maybe it has an intricate lighting scheme. The possibilities and their combinations are infinite, which makes the book great fun to read and visiting the bridges so intriguing.

For those of us who design and build bridges, *Bridgespotting* provides a useful reminder that bridges have many potential functions, and that transportation is only one of them. Reading the book, and visiting the bridges that interest you, will not just whet your appetite. It will also sharpen your ability to identify and accommodate those other functions on your bridges, even if they are not clearly articulated, or even anticipated, by the communities involved.

The Callahan-Tillman Bridge over the Colorado River is an example of a bridge with such other functions. It is adjacent to the Hoover Dam and supported by the longest concrete arch in the Western Hemisphere. Its transportation function is to carry Interstate 11 and U.S. Route 93 between Arizona and Nevada, but it also has many other functions. Most of these additional functions are made possible by the bridge's sidewalk, which

connects to nearby parking. The sidewalk offers stunning views of the Hoover Dam and the Colorado River canyon, views otherwise accessible only by helicopter. The sidewalk provides an unequalled opportunity to see and understand Hoover Dam, to learn the Depression-era history in which it was created, and to see the geology of the Colorado River gorge. The bridge itself also serves a critical nontransportation function. Its image now appears along with the dam in photos describing the area. Thus, the bridge is now a partner to the dam in the mental picture that residents and visitors have of this corner of the Southwest.

The best use of *Bridgespotting* is to plan visits to bridges—both those you have always wanted to see and those you have learned about from the book. While traveling on business, you may realize that an interesting bridge is just down the street from your hotel. Perhaps you and your spouse have planned a trip to Dublin, and now you know that a dozen bridges there are worth seeing. You might even want to organize a whole trip around visiting bridges, such as a trip to Iowa to see the bridges of Madison County. In all these cases, *Bridgespotting* will provide valuable information and guidance. It can also serve as a source of inspiration to plan your own trip, say, down the Oregon coast to see the bridges of renowned designer Conde McCullough.

Reference

1. Dover, Bob. 2022. *Bridgespotting: A Guide to Bridges that Connect People, Places, and Times*. Columbia, MD: Sewell Pond Press. 