

Self-Guided Tour of Woolwich Area through Mennonite Country

Tour Length: One hour, 42 kilometers

When leaving the Woolwich Visitor Centre in Elmira go to the traffic lights at the corner of First Street and Arthur Street and turn right onto Arthur. At the next set of traffic lights turn left and continue out of town on Church Street West. This becomes Line 86 and you will continue along this road to Wallenstein. In the hamlet of Wallenstein turn left at the Wallenstein General Store onto Herrgott Road. The fields in this area are worked using horses and old fashioned farm machinery. Turn left into Hawkesville at Broadway Street, and continue through the village to Hemlock Hill Drive (Woolwich Road 23) and turn right. The Conestogo River will be on your right. At Three Bridges Road you will turn right and cross over Hawkesville Road. Down the road on your right you will pass an Old Order Mennonite Meeting house with a parking lot for horses and buggies.

A little further along the road you will drive over a seven span, concrete low level, Old Order Mennonite buggy bridge which is located next to the St. Jacobs Dam. The surface of the one-lane bridge is only about two feet above the normal river level, and there are no railings because the river floods at this point each spring. The bridge is designed so that water and ice will not cause any damage to the structure.

The first dam on this site was built in the 1840s, to provide power for a sawmill. After crossing the bridge turn left at Henry Street and you are in the village of St. Jacobs. Turn left onto King Street. You may want to stop and browse at this time, or you can continue on your tour and come back another time. Follow King Street to Sawmill Road and turn right. At the roundabout continue on Sawmill Road into Conestogo. Turn left onto Northfield Drive at the traffic light.

Approximately four kilometers down Northfield turn right onto Jiggs Hollow Road, as you follow along this gravel Road you will pass a little one room school house used by the Old Order Mennonite children living on nearby farms. A bit further along you will get a breathtaking view of the "Kissing Bridge", the last remaining covered bridge in Ontario. The bridge is a 198' span across the Grand River. If it is a sunny day you will see the bridge reflected in the waters of the Grand. Turn right at Hill Street and this will take you into the tranquil village of West Montrose. At the bottom of the hill turn right onto Covered Bridge Drive. You can drive across the bridge, or you can park your vehicle in the parking area and walk across the bridge. When you drive though the bridge you follow the road around to the left. Continue on Rivers Edge Drive to Katherine Street North. Turn left and at Line 86 turn left again. Look to your left when crossing the bridge and you will see the other side of the "Kissing Bridge."

Continue along Line 86 and back to Elmira. In town Line 86 turns into Church Street. You may want to park in the parking lot off Church Street and browse in downtown Elmira.