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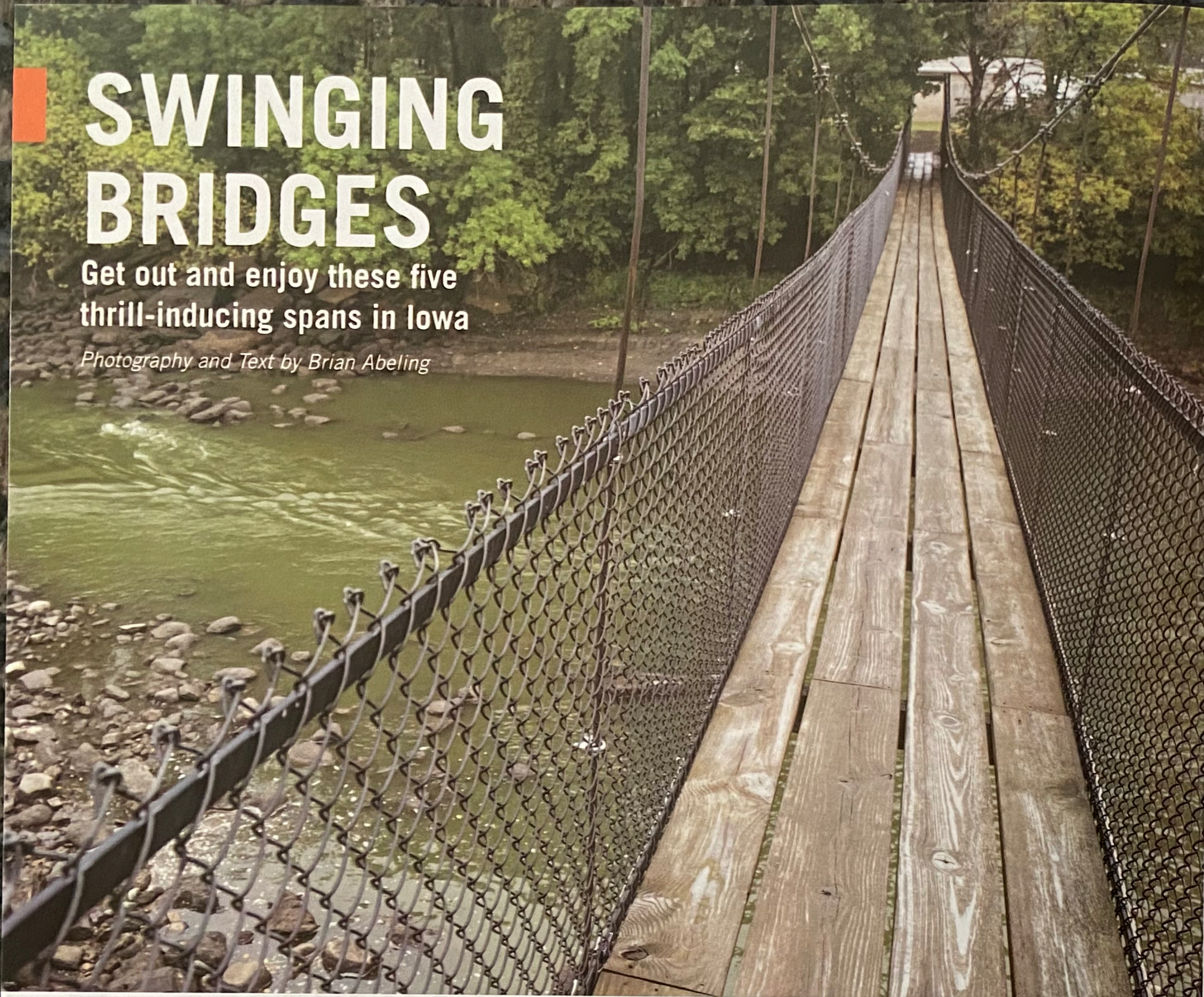
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SWINGING BRIDGES

Get out and enjoy these five thrill-inducing spans in Iowa

Photography and Text by Brian Abeling



Getting outdoors is what we do in the summer. This year, with the Covid-19 risk affecting businesses the way we live our lives, we're relying on the outdoors even more. So, if you're looking for quick adventures, photographer Brian Abeling has compiled his five favorite swinging pedestrian bridges in Iowa.

So what is a swing bridge? They are suspension bridges built using anchor cables secured to heavy foundations. Typically, the walkway is wood, and because of the flexibility of these bridges, they can withstand forces that more rigid structures can't. But, of course, this flexibility leads to a walkways that move as you walk across them. That's where the adventure comes in.

Here's a quick rundown of where you'll find them:

Story City swinging bridge, located at South Park, 1058 Broad St., Story City; cityofstorycity.org/parks-department/

Iowa Falls swinging bridge, located at Assembly Park on Mildred Avenue in Iowa Falls; cityofiowafalls.com/iowa-falls-parks

Forest City bridge, located at Pammel Park, 602 East J St., Forest City; cityofforestcity.com.parks

Estherville swinging bridge, located at Riverside Park on North 1st Street in Estherville; cityofestherville.org

Columbus Junction swinging bridge, one block from Highway 92 near downtown; columbusjunctioniowa.org/swinging-bridge



STORY CITY

At 71 feet long, it's the shortest bridge on our list and has the least amount of movement for a swing bridge. However, the picturesque setting makes up for it. Be sure to bring your camera—you'll want to get some family snaps—and don't be surprised if you have to wait until others leave, as it's a common place for family photos and portraits. It's very accessible and parking is right next to

the bridge. The walkway takes you across the South Skunk River leading you to Story City's South Park.

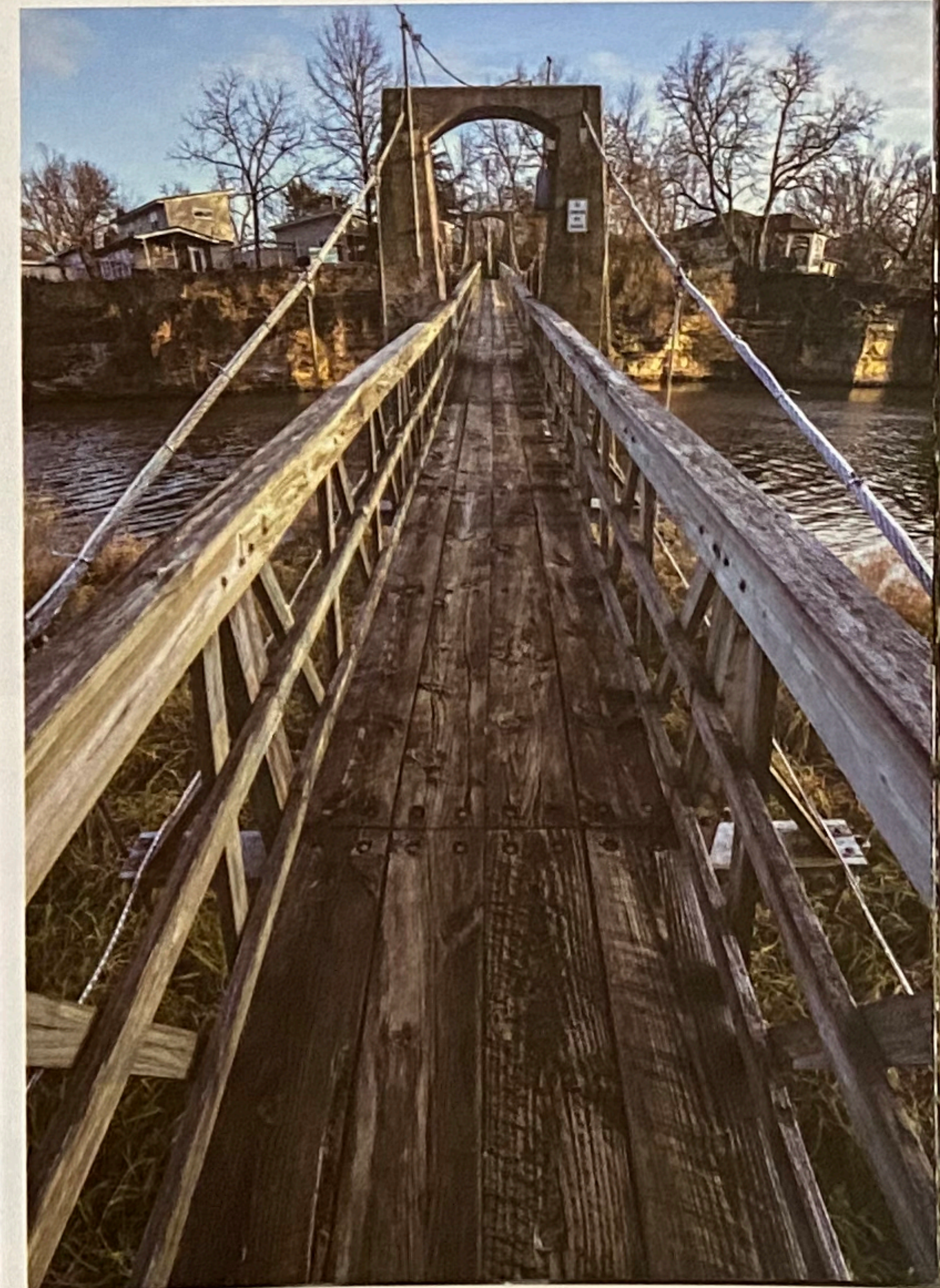
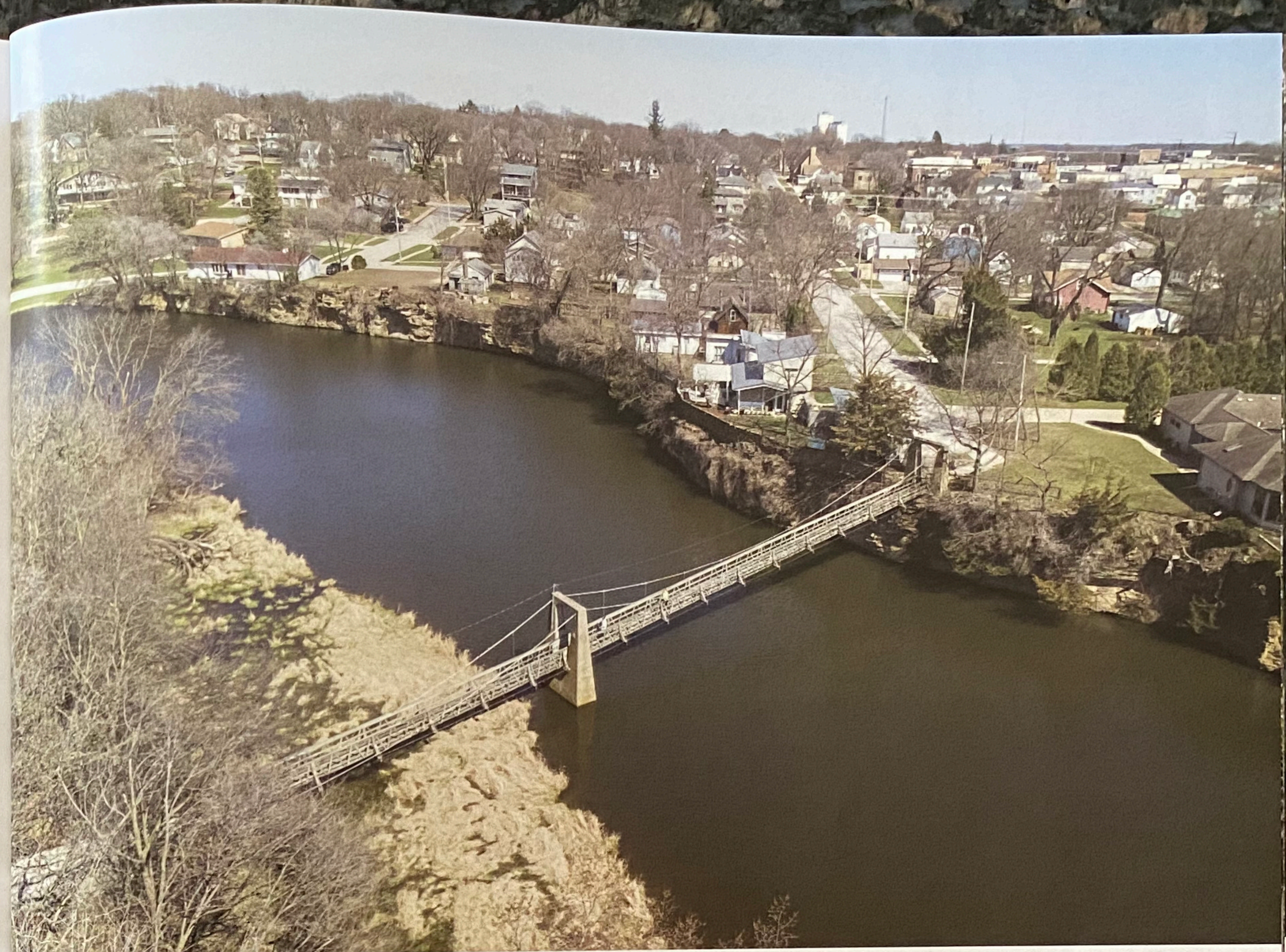
The bridge was built in 1936 as a Works Progress Administration (WPA) project. Spring flooding in 2019 heavily damaged it, but the city council voted unanimously to repair the bridge, and it's now open to the public again.



IOWA FALLS

This structure was originally built in 1897. Just over a hundred years later, in 1989, the bridge was rebuilt. Of all the swing bridges on the list, this is the “creakiest.” Yes, the sound that it makes as you cross is one of the unique aspects of this bridge. The setting is also unique, as this

section of the Iowa River cuts through limestone bluffs. During the summer, you’ll likely see sightseeing boats running up and down the river. As for sway, it’s actually a fairly solid structure that has some give (but not nearly as much as the other swing bridges).





FOREST CITY

This swinging bridge crosses a dam on the Winnebago River, and it connects Pammel Park and Eastwood (Clarks Woods) Park. This bridge has just the right amount of swing—nothing too overwhelming, but also enough to warrant its status as a swinging bridge.

The city has tastefully engraved the names of donors into the wood treads on the walkway, and the water flowing over the dam provides relaxing sights and sounds you can enjoy as you linger on the bridge.

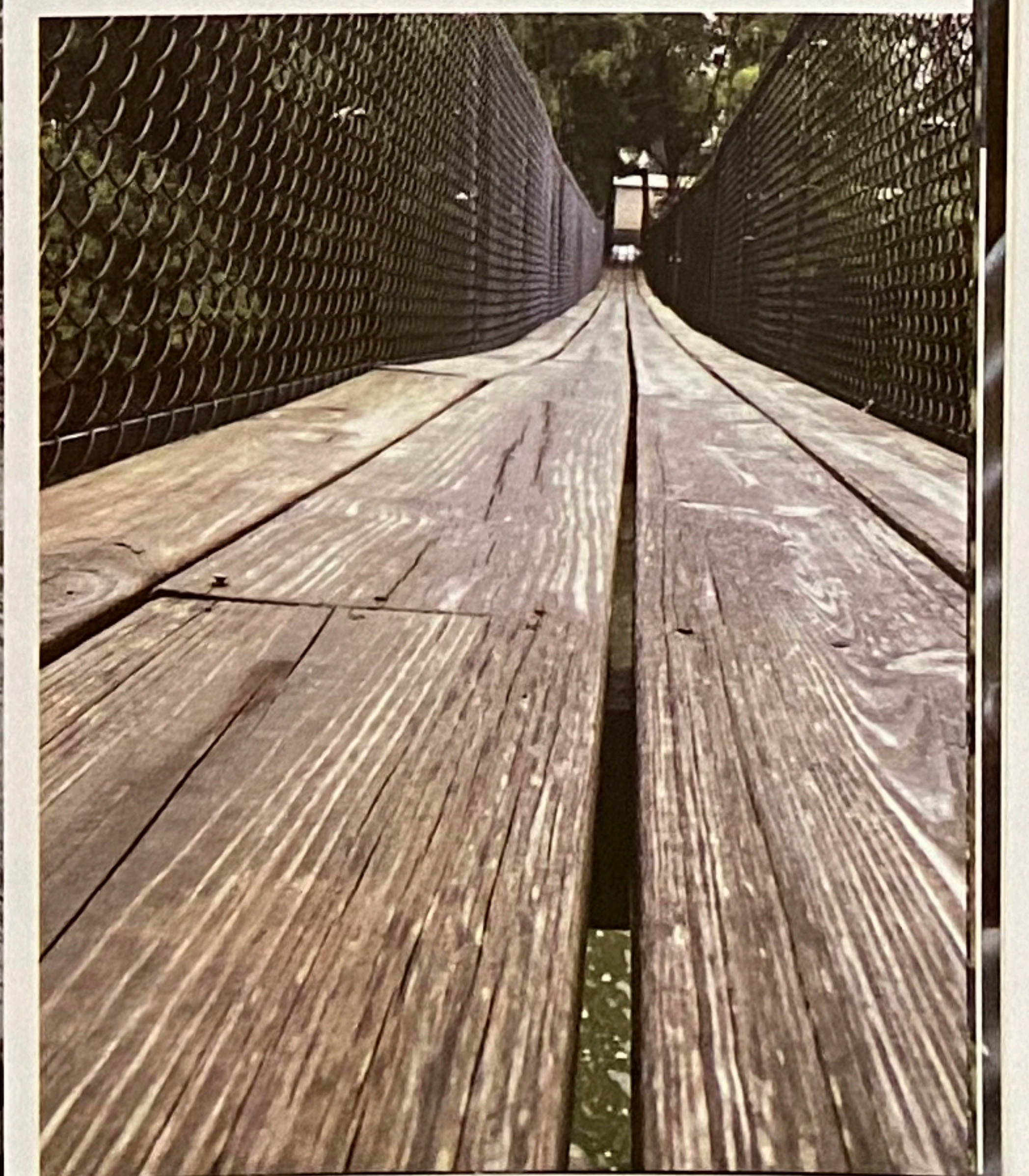
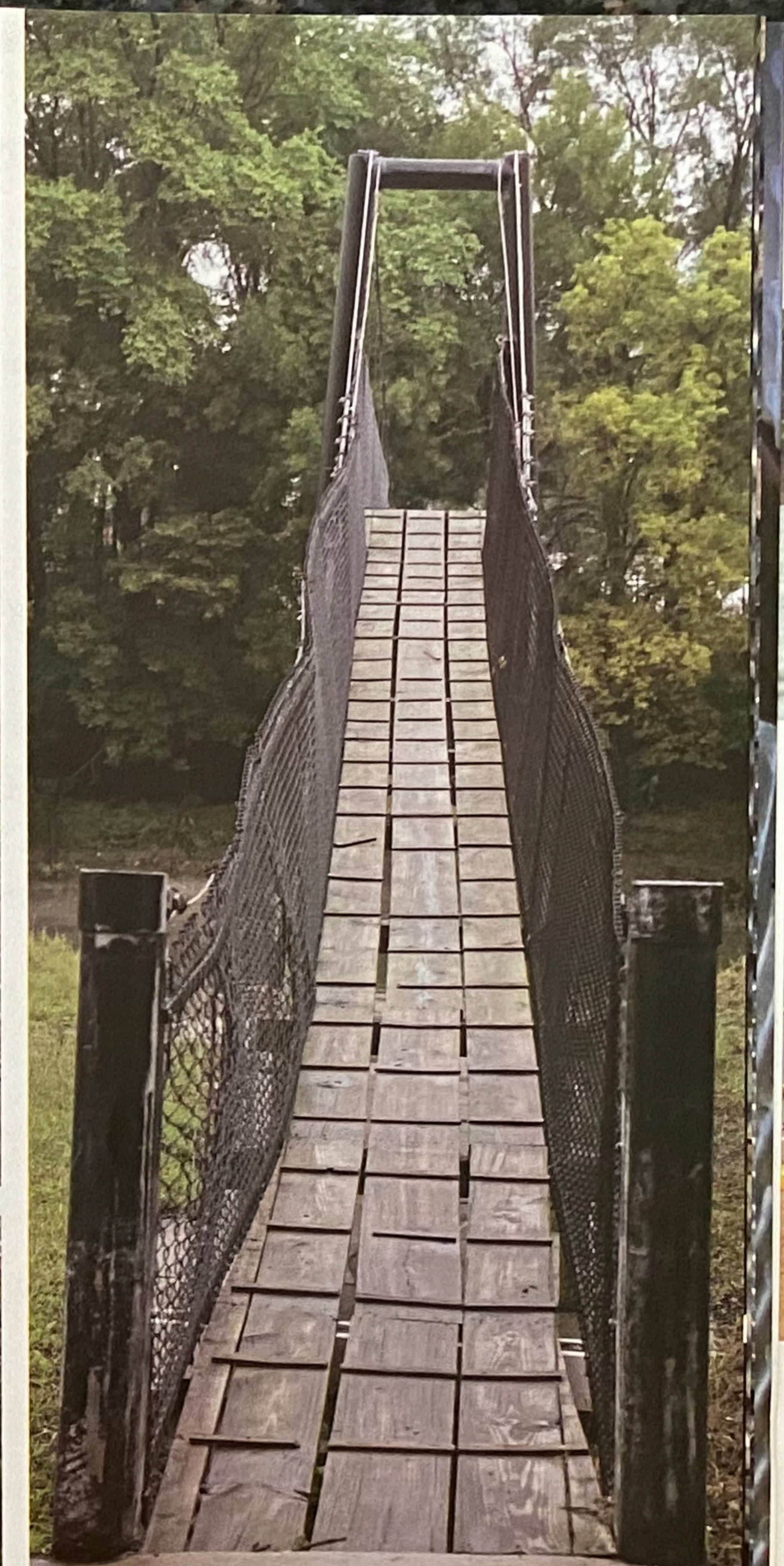
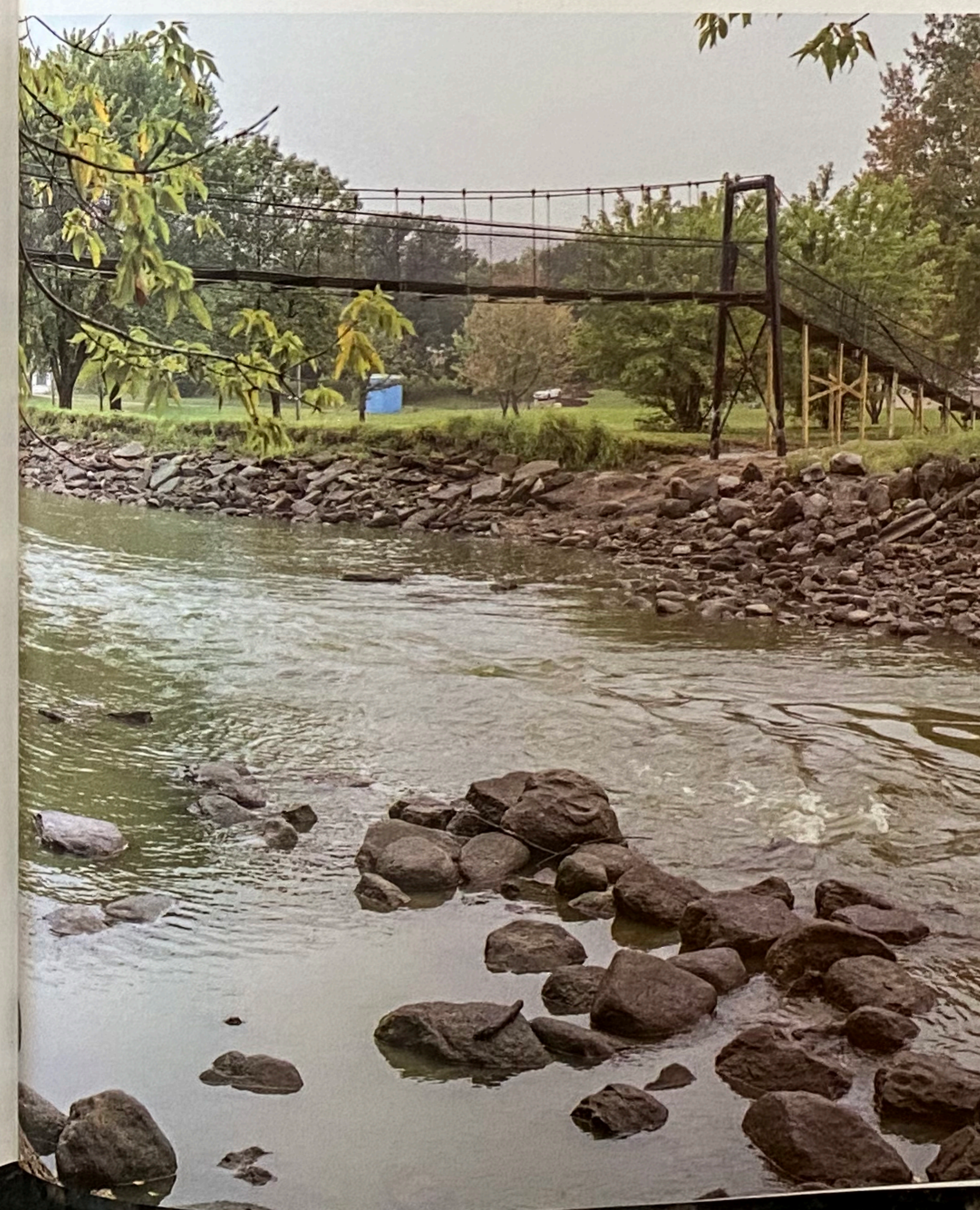




ESTHERVILLE

The Estherville swinging bridge is the most underrated in Iowa. The structure in Columbus Junction (see page 44) is certainly the most popular and most well known, but if you're looking for adventure and plenty of swing, Estherville has what you want.

It was originally built in 1937 as a WPA project and was most recently rebuilt in 2011. It spans the west fork of the Des Moines River, providing views of the rapids below. It definitely has more sway than most swinging bridges in the state.





COLUMBUS JUNCTION

Legend has it that a young American Indian woman heard that her lover had died in battle, so she threw herself from the bridge. She is said to be buried at the bottom of the ravine and still haunts the bridge today. Because of this story, the bridge is also known as Lovers Leap. The

bridge dates to 1886 and has been rebuilt many times. At 262 feet, it is the longest in Iowa, and it swings—a lot. Especially when multiple groups are on it. If you aren't adventurous, stay in the middle and hold the side cables with both hands.

