

The High Steel Bridge on the Olympic National Forest

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History

The historic High Steel Bridge was the second of two large steel arches to be erected by the Simpson Logging Company on the Olympic Peninsula in 1929. Once completed, it carried a single railroad track across a formidable chasm to expansive tracts of previously inaccessible timber on the private land and on the Olympic National Forest.

The 685 foot steel riveted webbed arch rises 375 feet above the Skokomish River's South Fork and rivals its majestic surroundings. The building materials were hauled to the remote site by rail across Vance Creek Bridge. Vance Creek was the first arch constructed and provided the effective access to the remote construction site. The construction of the new railroad route permitted the undertaking by supplying a considerable amount of lumber for decking, concrete forms and footings as well as 750 tons steel for the tracks and massive steel arch. (Photo 1: High Steel Bridge, US Forest Service)



(Photo 2: High Steel Bridge, by Simpson Logging Co.) area was logged. As construction costs increased, enormous structures like the High Steel Bridge were only feasible if they could be used over a long period of time.

By the 1930's, the West's most accessible timber had been logged, and the initial investment of construction and equipment costs for even the shortest railroad lines, was becoming prohibitive. It was only the largest corporations, such as the Simpson Logging Company, that found the unit cost of hauling logs by rail was



cheaper than that by truck. The High Steel Bridge is among the only open long span structures remaining in Washington State that functioned as part of a logging railroad. Its steel construction was particularly unusual, and reflected the evolution in the use of logging railroads.

The High Steel was converted for vehicle use in 1964, when the rail bed was replaced by a concrete deck. Eventually the Forest Service took possession and (Photo 3: US Forest Service in 2016) management of the bridge.



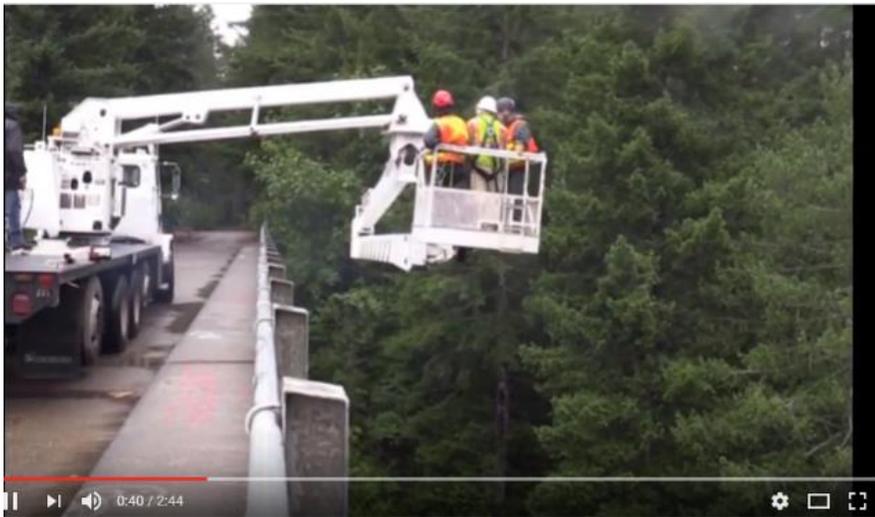
for the greatest good

USDA Forest Service is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

After a period of more than fifty years, logs continue to be hauled over the High Steel Bridge. Alterations to the bridge reflect the inevitable changes in the transportation of timber - the gradual disappearance of the logging railroads.

Maintaining the High Steel Bridge

One of the duties of our forest engineers is to help provide safe access to the forest by inspecting & maintaining the safety of structures like the High Steel Bridge. The High Steel Bridge requires an expert crew using an under-bridge inspection truck to examine the bridge's critical components including: the foundation, the entire steel arch, paint and the deck condition. (View a [video of engineers inspecting the bridge.](#))



Assessments are used to collect condition information specific to the bridge, and are scheduled every 2 years to meet National Standards for public road bridges. The condition information is used to plan future repairs and administrative decisions.

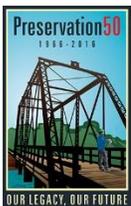
Nationally the Forest Service's road maintenance budget has decreased dramatically.

Limited financial resources require the agency to plan carefully for current and future use of roads and bridges:

- Small, critical, low cost maintenance can be addressed
- Larger repairs may require special funding or grants, however alternate funding sources are scarce. The National Forest System has to balance multiple funding priorities with many needs always keeping safety a priority.
- **Safety to public is the highest priority** and when critical maintenance can't be funded:
 - ✓ We can change the proposed use of an engineered structure to by restricting the use of the structure through bridge permit requirements and sign posting.
 - ✓ In some cases road bridges may be converted to trail bridges.
 - ✓ Closure of a bridge structure is always an option.



(Photo 4: US Forest Service replacing vandalized signs at High Steel Bridge)



Decision making & safety planning for forest buildings, roads and facilities are part of our management duties on the national forest. Thank you for taking time to learn more about your National Forest's history and current management! Please always respect your public lands and recreate safely.