Unburied Treasure Along the South Fork of the Stilly

Located about halfway between Red Bridge and the town of Silverton, a unique artifact is gradually being uncovered by the forces of nature along a rocky "beach" of the South Fork of the Stillaguamish River. At Waldheim, also known as Camp Silverton, a wooden structure began to show itself about 12 years ago after some serious flooding during the winter of 2006-07, revealing just a few smaller timbers. But did anyone notice? Prior to that it was completely buried in river rock and was always below water level, and could not to be seen by the infrequent visitors to that part of the camp. For those familier with the layout of the old Camp Silverton, this wooden ruin was right at the river's edge, just off the open-end entrance to Glacier, the most rugged of the cabins because of its long distance from the restrooms and dining hall, its closeness to the always-dangerous river, and because its A-frame end was open to the weather and the rest of nature's critters.

A Google Earth image dating back to July of 2003 shows that the entire structure was not only covered by various sizes of rock, but was also under the canopy of large trees (note the images on page 3 taken April 2, 2019). In June of 2003, just a month before the satellite image was taken, the last group of school students to experience Camp Silverton before it was closed by the Everett School District were enjoying their outdoor environmental education classes. This part of the river at camp was always off limits. The April 2006 image shows about the same location where the wooden ruins was buried on the little seasonal island where the gold panning classes were taught. No Glacier boys would have seen the wooden ruins at that time even if they were standing right on top of it!

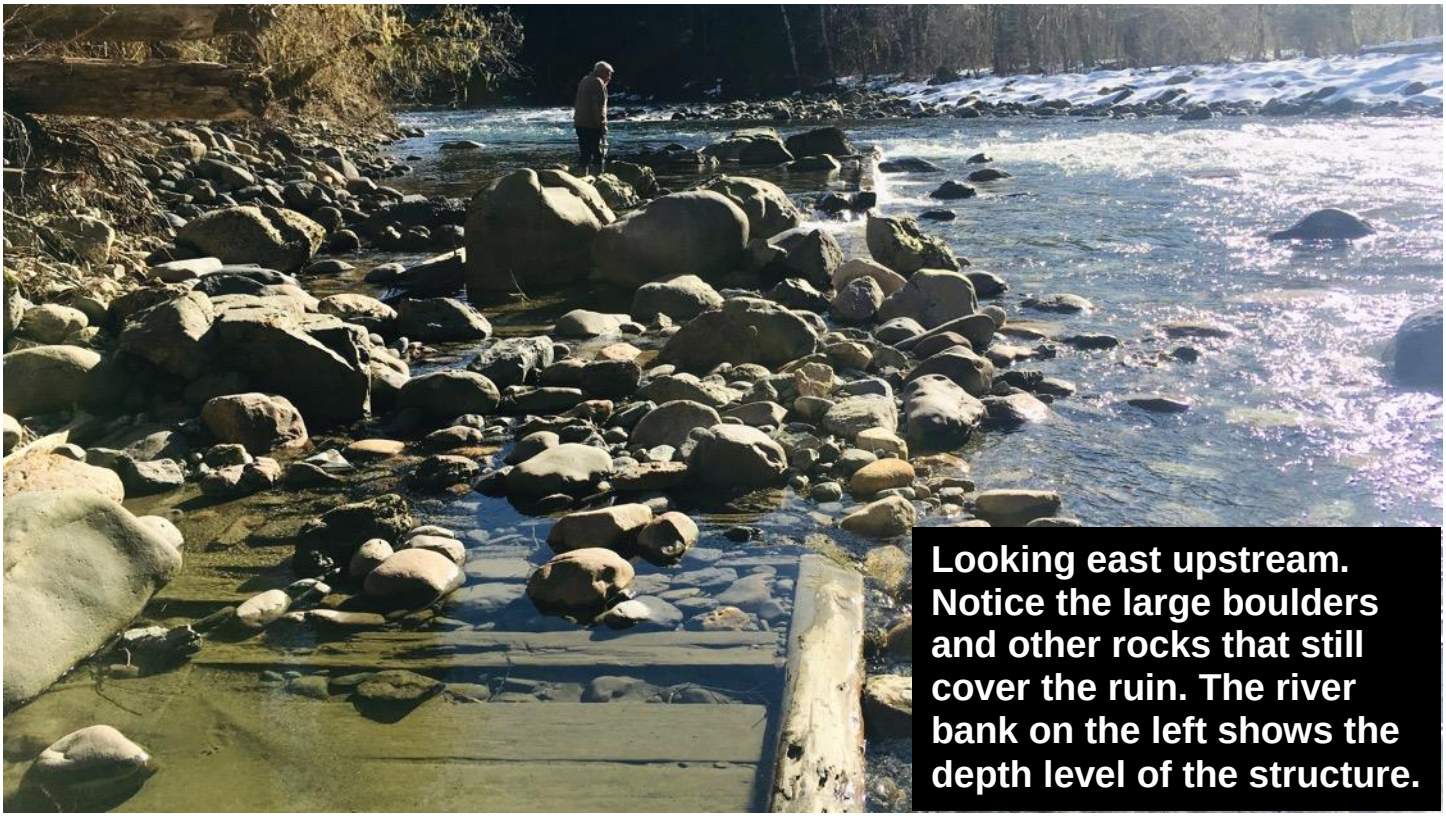
The big changes came in the winter of 2006-2007 when heavy flooding ravaged most of Western Washington. That was the winter when the Big Four footbridge was washed out and made the popular hike to the Ice Caves inaccessible for the summer of 2007. Notice in the 2007 image that the river, with the ground covered with snow, had drastically changed course and was flowing over the entire ruin. Notice that no longer was there much of a canopy of trees. When the water receeded, the 2009, 2011 and 2013 images showed about the same location for the ruin,

which had finally started to poke out from under the rocks to resurface after being buried for years. The 2015 image shows the river and the ruins were barely visible over the next two years. There was another significant change in the river between the June 2015 image and the July 2017 image. The most recent image, July 2018, is similar to 2017, and shows the majority of the ruins sticking way out into the river and visible in the piles of river rock, but still mostly submerged in shallow water. A closer look shows more of the details of the ruins, almost unbelievable when considering the image was taken from space.

Measurements taken using Google Earth "Tools" indicated that the rectangular shape was over 70 feet long and between 11 and 12 feet wide. This seemed awfully large, yet very intriguing. A quick road trip to the site made for some interesting discoveries.

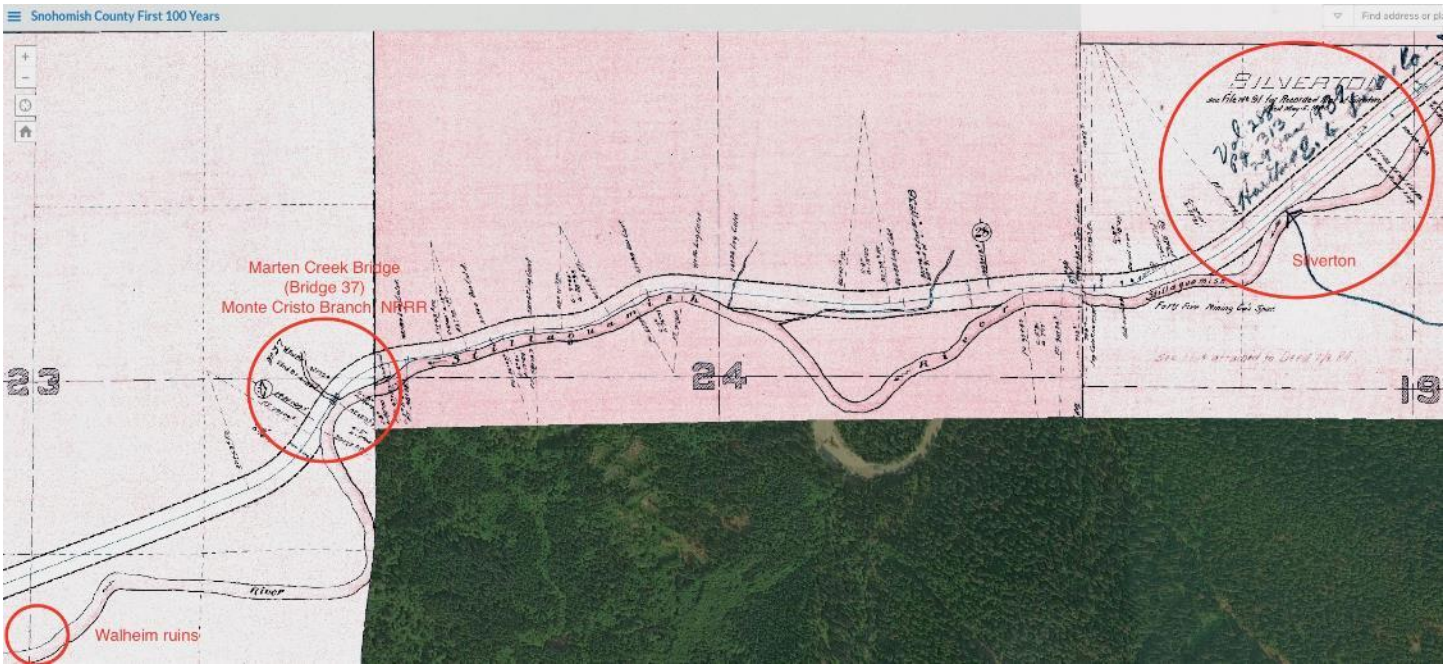
The pictures on the next page show the ruin. The structure was measured to be about 90 feet long and 11' wide (on center), confirming the size found by using Google Earth. There were large timbers, railroad ties, spikes and metal rods that were very well preserved. Notches were noted in the longer "stringers". The entire structure seemed to be intact, but with a few timbers missing (or at least hidden from view by the piles of rocks). Huge 3' - 6' boulders that were smooth but not really round were resting on top of the wooden structure holding it down. Other large rocks were also on top. This obviously looked like a bridge of some sort, and based on it's width and beefy construction, it most likely was a railroad bridge. But from where?

Looking west from the river towards the bank. Notice the exposed tree roots from 2' - 5' above river level.

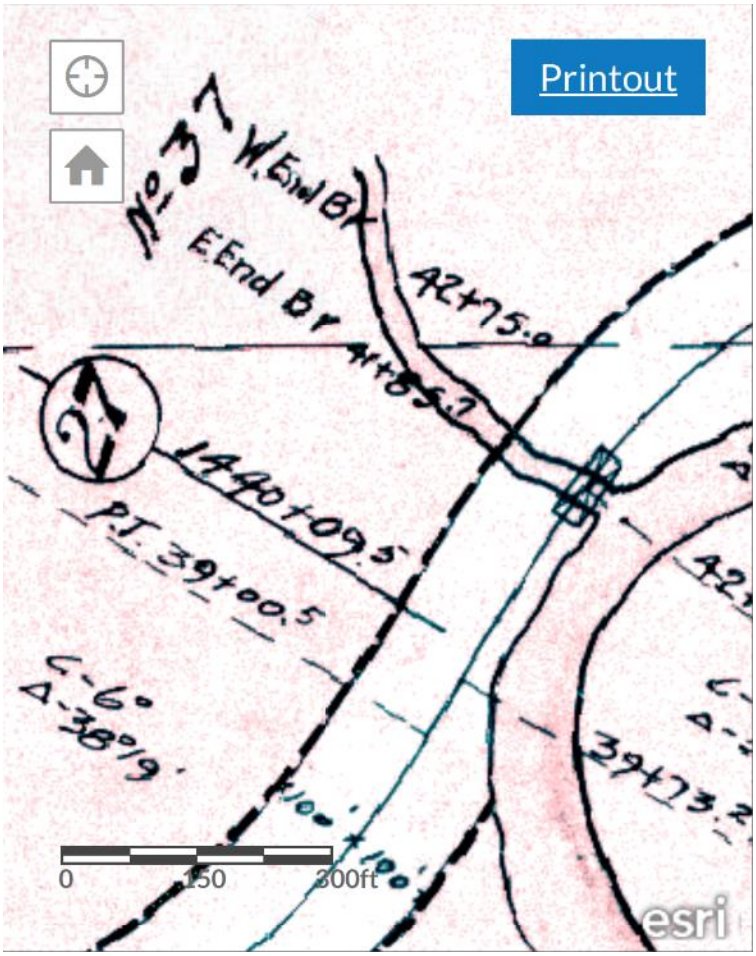


Looking east upstream. Notice the large boulders and other rocks that still cover the ruin. The river bank on the left shows the depth level of the structure.

Observing the ruin on site, using actual measurements of the ruin, and referencing what we saw using the Granite Falls Museum's online historical maps, there are some interesting things to note. The "homesteads and maps from the first 100 years of the county" map shows several layers of historical and modern layers of Snohomish County. Selecting "Railroad NPRR" and searching for "Silverton WA" will get you the general area. By unselecting the NPRR layer, just the aerial photo can be seen. Reselecting the NPRR layer will show the railroad maps again. In the image below, the red circles and text have been added to the map to assist with orientation.



Because the data for the online map layers is very large, the online maps are a "lite" version of the full set of data found at the Granite Falls Museum (and at many other museums around the County). The online maps are an excellent launch for most any kind of historical research. When more detailed information is needed, the Museum's full set will show incredible details. In this case, take a look at the Marten Creek Bridge area when zoomed in. It is identified as (Bridge) "No. 37" and shown on the 1910 maps as "Martin Creek". The "E.End Br" numbers and the "W.End Br" numbers give the bridge length of 89.3 ' long! Now that's detail!

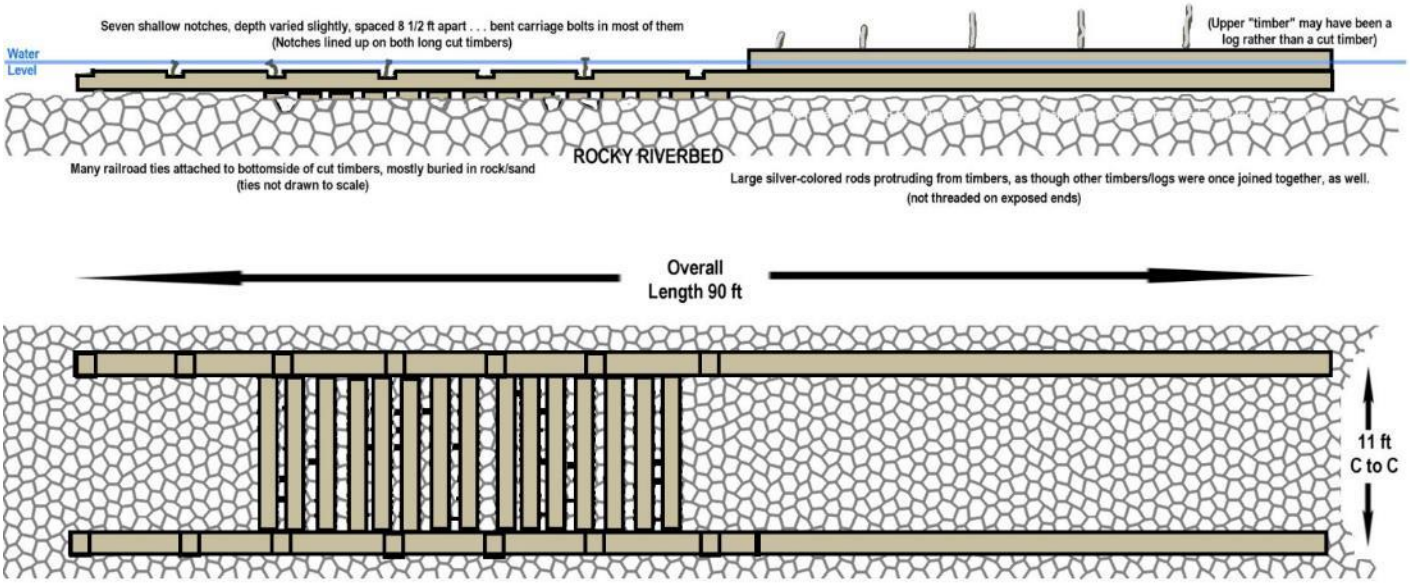


Bridge 37 at Marten Creek is the closest bridge upstream from the ruin site. Using the measuring tool, the distance from Bridge 37 to the ruin site is 3/4 mile (± 100'). The map shows the next bridge, Bridge 38, as only 15.1' long, but it is another 2 miles upstream from Bridge 37.

The sketches on the next page recreate the bridge using information gathered from the various maps as well as the on-site visit.

ROAD TRIP! Sitting in the river at the Silverton-Waldheim school camp is a large wooden structure. It was not visible until relatively recently, as can be verified using multiple vintages of aerial pictures from Google. However, since it was apparently completely submerged/buried for a long time, it is in surprisingly good condition. The cut timbers and railroad ties are remarkably well-preserved. The carriage bolts sticking out from the timbers are likewise in surprisingly good condition, as are the large (3/4" dia.) rods protruding from the timbers at one end. The structure is still weighted down by a number of very large rocks, but enough has been uncovered for a close-up inspection. The rock riverbed makes it impractical to determine how far beyond each cut timber the railroad ties project, but the overall structure has remained quite straight and "square", considering the rough treatment it apparently survived.

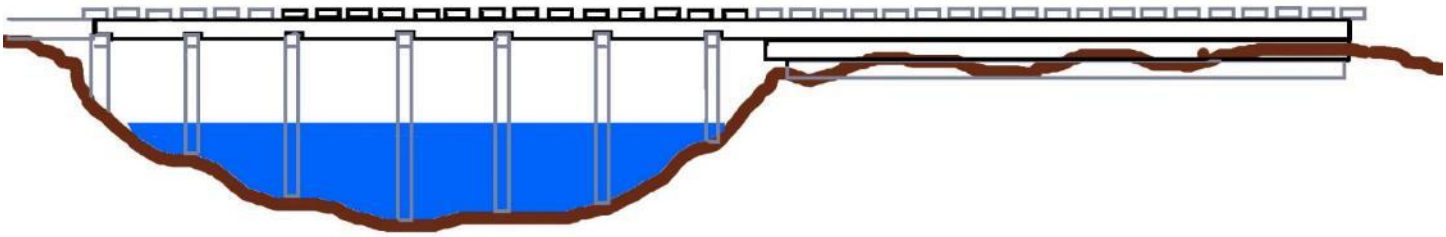
The obvious questions are "what was it?" and "where did it come from?" Given the robust construction (8x8 or 8x10 cut timbers, apparent railroad ties, large bolts, VERY large rods, etc., it seems likely that it might have been a railroad item. Only 3/4 mile upstream was Bridge #37 of the Everett & Monte Cristo Railway . . . a 7-bent, 90 ft bridge, built with cut timbers. Could it be?



DESCRIPTION: Two cut timbers, 90 ft long, submerged and half-buried in rocky riverbed. Railroad ties fastened to the lower side of both timbers, but many of them buried in rock, so impossilbe to see exactly how far they extend. On the upper side of the timbers were cut notches, seven on each side, with depths that varied from almost zero up to about 1 1/2". The notches lined up on the two timbers. Toward one end of the timbers, another "layer" of timber was attached with long silver-colored rods (unthreaded) which extended up to 18" out of the upper timber (as though more timbers/logs had once also been attached by the rods). Due to erosion and weathering, it's possilbe that upper "timber" was originally a log, rather than a cut timber. The timber and ties were buried enough that it was not possible to determine by how much (if any) the ties extended beyond the two longitudinal timbers, but the two timbers were spaced 11ft center-to-center.

Flip the structure over, and you might ask yourself

"Could the structure have been part of the original Marten Creek Bridge #37 (or #37a) ?"



According to the Everett & Monte Cristo Railway book (Woodhouse, Jacobson, Petersen) Bridge #37 was 90 ft long and had seven bents. It was about 1/2 mile upstream from the current site of the remains. Several generations of aerial pictures show the remains to have been completely buried until the last year or two, and even now several very large rocks are on top of the structure, holding it firmly in place.