

My, How Times Change!

In the "early days", pack horses crossed the Stillaguamish near the Falls on a large log. Soon after the start of the 20th Century, a steel bridge was erected (well before there was a decent road on either side).

That bridge lasted almost 30 years, when it became obvious that the 7-ton weight limit wasn't nearly enough for the one-log loads "modern" logging trucks could carry.

In 1934, the first major link in the dream of the Mountain Loop Highway was completed; funding for a 360 ft steel arch bridge across the Stillaguamish River at Granite Falls was approved in February and the grand opening parade and ceremony was held in July of the same year!

The Federal government had set aside \$11,000 and the State had set aside about \$44,000, but all later articles about the bridge refer to it as the "\$40,000 Granite Falls Bridge" (the County calls it Bridge #102).

The original blueprints only took five or six sheets of paper, with instructions like "remove rock as necessary". Driving across it today, you don't really get a feel for the significance of the structure, but a view from below shows the attractive piers and arch designed to span the river gorge, that have stayed structurally sound well into the 21st Century.

Remember, five months from funding to completion!

Last year a contract was let to perform maintenance on the bridge. The work was largely cleaning and painting, but there is also some expansion joint replacement and other relatively minor (but difficult nonetheless) structural preventive maintenance.

With 100% Federal funds, the bridge is a critical link in the delivery of gravel materials throughout the County. The original projections estimated the maintenance work would continue through the summer of 2010 and potentially stretch into 2011.

Many of the challenges stem from the need to avoid dropping any material into the river. If you traverse the bridge now (Nov 2011), you'll see work is still underway. The bid price for the maintenance was \$1,087,650.00, about 27 times the original construction costs. The work has already taken 3 times longer to complete, and the end date isn't clear.

Not complaining, just making an observation . . . my, how times have changed.



The first bridge across the falls.



The 7-ton weight limit bridge



Building the third bridge next to the second bridge.



The third (and current) bridge.

