

Hank Meals
Nemophilist, History Buff, Writer & Photographer

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Attn: Emily Rinaldi, Associate Architectural Historian
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Re: Edwards Crossing Bridge

August 16, 2020

Dear Ms. Rinaldi,

My name is Hank Meals and I have driven (and walked) over the Edwards Crossing Bridge, usually several times a week, for the last 50 years. I'm writing because Sol Henson, of *Yuba Watershed Institute*, forwarded me your email seeking comments on the proposed replacement bridge. Among the many interesting jobs that I've held include 13 years as an archaeologist/historian with the Tahoe National Forest, based in Nevada City, CA. Those of us who live here are aware that we have inherited a cultural landscape and are mindful and cautious about proposed changes to it. I'd appreciate it if you would place me on your mailing list.

Edwards Crossing Bridge is located between Hwy 49 and North Bloomfield (now Malakoff Diggins SHP) on North Bloomfield Road, north of Nevada City. It was built in 1904 and is 114 feet long with 3 hinged metal arches. It's the fourth bridge built in that location, the first having been built in the 1850's.

My understanding is that the existing bridge is listed on the Caltrans Historic Bridge Inventory and is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

Some Historic Context

I'm sure that you are aware of the basic history of Edwards Crossing bridge. The South Yuba Turnpike was an important road that crossed the South Yuba River at Edwards Crossing connecting Nevada City to "Backbone Ridge", a narrow segment of the San Juan Ridge. Immediately to the south of Backbone House was Lake City, a hub with a road extending eastward to North San Juan, Cherokee, North Bloomfield and Relief Hill. At North Bloomfield there was a road along Humbug Creek to Snow Tent that continued on to Graniteville, formerly

Eureka. From Backbone Ridge a road extended northeasterly to the hydraulic mines of Woolsey Flat, Moores Flat, Orleans Flat and Snow Point (all located on the north slope of San Juan Ridge in the watershed of the Middle Yuba)

“Important to travelers--Robinson’s Upper Crossing”, “The bridge at Robinson’s Upper Crossing 1 1/2 miles below Illinois Bar on the South Yuba River is now completed for horsemen and footmen. The road will be ready for carriages on the first of next May (1856). Travelers will find this the best and convenient route to Orleans Flat, San Juan, etc.” – (*Nevada Journal*, November 9, 1855 pg 1 col 2).

The bridge and surroundings are a Cultural Landscape that potentially qualifies under Criterion A-Events or Broad Patterns of Events

Robinson’s Upper Crossing was wisely constructed at this location high above the South Yuba. The flood of 1861-1862 was the largest recorded flood in California’s history.

Because **“Location”** is a consideration in the evaluation of integrity in the 106 Process, I’m including the following newspaper quotes:

“The South Yuba River was 26 feet above the low water mark. The abutments at Robinson’s Upper Crossing are heavily damaged.” (*Nevada Democrat*, December 10, 1861 pg 2 col 1)

“...the bridge at Coopers lower crossing (Robinson’s Upper Crossing, Edwards Crossing) was not in the least injured by the late flood. A breakwater above the bridge was swept away, but the foundation of the bridge was not injured, and the structure is as firm as ever. This is the only bridge spanning the South Yuba River that was not carried away by the late flood.” (*Nevada Democrat*, January 14, 1862, pg3 Col 1)

The bridge and surroundings may potentially qualify under Criterion C - Engineering / Road Design

The current Edwards Crossing Bridge spanning over the South Yuba River was built in 1904. The bridge is a steel truss arch with a timber deck supported on concrete piers. In 1903 the Gault Bridge over Deer Creek in Nevada City was also built by the American Bridge Company. Both bridges are made of green painted steel with an unusual three-hinged metal arch, triangular members and steel pins.

Both the Gault Bridge and the Edwards Crossing Bridge are discussed in the *Historical American Engineering Record* (HAER No. CA-158 Page 10): “Although common in the eastern United States, the three-hinge arched truss bridge was a form rarely used in California. According to the 1985 Caltrans Bridge Inventory, only two examples of the three-hinge arch bridge survive in California from the period 1900 to 1930. The Gault Bridge is one example, and the other is the nearby 1904 Edwards Bridge, also designed by the American Bridge Company, built over the South Fork of the Yuba River. With its graceful arch and light, delicate truss members, the

Edwards Bridge achieves the ideal of the three-hinge arch open to its natural surroundings. Likewise, the Gault Bridge "represents a very successful attempt to integrate a truss bridge into a sensitive rural environment."

The bridge and surroundings may potentially qualify under Criterion C - Engineering

In the Survey for the Historic Resource Evaluation Report (HRER) some attempt should be made to locate rock retaining walls and foundations for structures. Buildings on the south side of the river are depicted in *The History of Nevada County: 1880* (Wells:1880) and the undated photograph of what appears to be the same buildings on file at the Nevada County Historical Society's Searls Library (see attachments).



(Wells:1880)



(Searls catalog #PIC 4-BLO 6)

One more thing: In 1969 and 1970 I spent the summers camping downstream below the Edwards Crossing Bridge, just below the mouth of Spring Creek. I shared the swimming hole with a small group of people who remembered the “Hobbit House” on the south side of the river near the unnamed stream and the location of the current toilets. The cabin was destroyed in 1968 or 1967 by BLM or hostile locals (a real problem then). I never saw the cabin. But there was a Depression-era cabin painted bright blue on the north side of the river known as the “Pegasus House.” I knew those people, but I don’t know what happened to the cabin.

Also, about 30 years ago, I talked with Ruth Paine, of Nevada City (now deceased), who taught the children of the many Depression-era mining couples who lived at Edwards Crossing, Illinois Bar and other places. I’m not certain, but I think she said the children assembled for school at a one-room structure near Moore’s Flat. Since 1969 the bridge has taken quite a beating; most of the abuse started about 20 years ago and it’s accelerating.

I fully support nominating the Edwards Crossing Bridge to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). If I can be of further assistance, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Hank Meals