

History of the Dead Fall Lane Bridge

Plumas County Bridge #9C12

Caltrans Bridge #091200C

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The Dead Fall Bridge is located on Plumas County Road #112, about 2.1 miles north of Taylorsville, spanning Lights Creek, a tributary of Indian Creek.

The road, locally called Dead Fall Lane, appears to have been a major transportation route through Indian Valley to the North Arm of that valley at least as early as the mid-1850s. Local tradition has it that a saloon was located at the north end of the road about where it intersects Diamond Mountain Road and North Valley Road on the north side of Lights Creek.¹ According to one source, in the winter of 1858, an Indian accused of robbing goods from local ranchers was hanged at the Shaffer Bros. Ranch near the Dead Fall Bridge. For some time after that, passers-by supposedly experienced strange phenomena, attributing them to revenge of the hanged Indian who, it turned out, was innocent.²

On August 6th, 1872, the Plumas County Board of Supervisors authorized the location of a new road commencing at a point at the south end of Dead Fall Lane near the Young and Hardgrave ranches and running nearly west to Indian Creek and thence into Taylorsville. This is approximately where today's road, via the Hardgrave Bridge and Nelson Street, is now located.

The first legal reference made to the Dead Fall Bridge appears on October 10th, 1870 in the civil case of Michael Madden vs. J.M. McKinney. Madden claimed that since April 10th, 1870 he owned a tract of land commencing on north side of Indian Valley on Lights Creek at the Dead Fall Bridge, then south along the road to where the fence intersects Indian Valley Creek, then down Indian Valley Creek to where it joins Lights Creek, then up Lights Creek to the beginning. It consisted of 150 acres, and was known as the "Cap McKinney Ranch."³

In 1872, the Board of Supervisors declared the Crescent Road District and Union Road District as being bounded on the north and south respectively, near the Dead Fall Bridge across Lights Creek.⁴ On March 28th of that year, they also declared the road from Arlington via Taylorville to the Dead Fall Bridge as a county road.⁵

The bridge must have been failing, as on September 7th, 1874, the Board of Supervisors ordered that "sealed proposals will be received at the Store of Wm. G. Young in Taylorville untill [sic] Sept. 18th 1874 at 12 o'clock M. for the Repairing of the Bridge across Indian [sic] Creek, known as the Dead Fall Bridge, according to specifications to be furnished by Jerry Evans, Road Overseer and J.S. Carter, Supervisor."⁶ On October 6th all bids submitted were

¹ Norman Lamb, Indian Valley Museum, conversation August 28, 2013. The definition of "dead fall" is 1. An accumulation of timber, brush, etc., 2. A snare or trap set to fall on a victim or prey. Perhaps the saloon was thought of as a trap, hence the name.

² Kurtz, Patricia. *Mountain Maidu and Pioneers – A History of Indian Valley, Plumas County, California, 1850-1920*. (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse Press; 2010), 42.

³ Plumas County District Court Records, *Madden v. McKinney*. Plumas County Museum Archives.

⁴ Plumas County Board of Supervisors Minutes, Vol.2, pp.6-7.

⁵ Ibid, p.13.

⁶ Ibid, p.213.

rejected and the new deadline was advanced to November 2nd.⁷ By this time reference was to “building” rather than “repairing” of the bridge. On November 3rd, 1874, the Board awarded the contract to build the bridge to Geo. W. Boyden for the sum of \$420.⁸ On February 2nd, 1875, the Board authorized payment in that amount to Boyden for completion of the Dead Fall Bridge.⁹

This bridge apparently served for the next thirty-two years until 1906 when on June 8th of that year, the Board of Supervisors advertised for bids to construct two steel bridges, one across Long Valley Creek and the other across Lights Creek at Deadfall Lane at the site of the Deadfall Bridge. Bids were to be submitted by July 6th, 1906. On July 6th bids were opened with M.B. White of Stockton the low bidder at \$4,195 for both bridges. Clarence W. Swain bid \$4300 for the Deadfall Bridge and Geo. Brandt of Taylorsville \$3,365 for the same. M.B. White was awarded the contract with the deadline for completion on or before January 1st, 1907.¹⁰ On October 15th, 1906, the local paper noted that the Deadfall Bridge was completed and was a very substantial one. They further stated that, “Indian and Genesee Valleys, in the matter of the construction of steel bridges, has been unusually fortunate during the past two years. It is economy to construct steel bridges, for when the work is done it lasts for a long period of time. It is the right policy and should be continued.”¹¹

On Sunday, November 11th, 1906, three of the Board members went to Indian Valley and inspected the Deadfall Bridge, finding it “... an excellent structure, one that will last the county a long time, it being of steel.”¹²

The 1906 Deadfall Lane Bridge was a steel pin connected Pratt pony truss with steel stringer approach. It was three spans of 50 feet, 21 feet and 19 feet going north, with the total length being 92 feet. The road width was 15.6 feet between light steel rails. It had 3” x 12” Douglas fir lateral and longitudinal planking, concrete fill steel cylinder piers and reinforced concrete abutments. Plans were provided by Plumas County engineers.

Some thirty years later, in 1937, its general condition was rated as good. The load limits for this bridge were given as 4 tons per vehicle except 5 tons per 2-axle truck and 1-axle semi-trailer or 6 tons per other semi-trailer units (same as the 1951 report for the current bridge). For a detailed structural description refer to the Bridge Inspection Report of April 27, 1937, on file at Plumas County Public Works.

However, after forty years, the old bridge was ready for replacement. A photograph taken in 1937 has it looking pretty rickety even then. The *Feather River Bulletin* of February 6th, 1947 reported, “When the Board of Supervisors acted Monday to buy the steel for the new Deadfall Lane Bridge ... Plumas County’s postwar bridge construction program got into high gear.” It was also noted that, “The Deadfall Lane bridge has been temporarily reinforced each summer for the past several years to keep it from falling apart under the weight of the heavy logging trucks that have had to use it. ... The present Deadfall Lane bridge was erected in the early horse-and- buggy era of 1907-8, and was adequate for traffic needs of that day.”¹³

⁷ Ibid, p.217.

⁸ Ibid, p.224.

⁹ Plumas County Board of Supervisors Minutes Vol.2, p.236.

¹⁰ Ibid, Vol.2, pp.449, 457-8, 498.

¹¹ *Plumas National-Bulletin*: October 15, 1906.

¹² Ibid, November 12, 1906.

¹³ *Feather River Bulletin*: February 6, 1947. It was also noted that the Rich Bar bridge was near collapse, the Hardgrave bridge had come apart a few years earlier and the previous summer the Drumm bridge on the Red Clover Road had fallen into Clover Creek. Due to a lack of funds the county had found it impossible to replace either of the

On February 3rd, 1947, bids were received for steel fabrication for the Deadfall Lane Bridge from Moore Dry Dock Co., Oakland in the amount of \$11,493; Judson Pacific-Murphy Corp., San Francisco for \$10,809; and Osborne Engineering Co., San Francisco for \$15,538. The Judson Pacific-Murphy Corp. bid was accepted.¹⁴ The reason for this purchase was that the County preferred to buy the steel themselves and then bid out the construction phase.

On May 5th, 1947, bids were solicited for construction of the Deadfall Lane Bridge, to be received on or before 10 a.m. June 2nd, 1947.¹⁵ On that date, bids were received and opened for construction of the Deadfall Lane Bridge. Bos Construction Co., Oakland bid \$20,731; C.C. Gildersleeve, Marysville bid \$23,933 and C.C. Steele, Sacramento bid \$22,061. On the same date, Supervisor Branley was authorized to tear out the old Deadfall Lane Bridge and to build a detour with costs charged to the Bridge Fund.¹⁶

The local paper headlined its June 5th issue with, “Deadfall Lane Span Ordered.” ... “Acceptance of a bid for construction of a new Deadfall Lane bridge, and setting the date for the recall election involving Supervisor J.P. Branley [Supervisor of Indian Valley district], featured Monday’s meeting of the Plumas County Board of Supervisors in the courthouse. ... Three firms of contractors had entered bids on the Deadfall Lane bridge job. That of the Bos Construction Company of Oakland was low, its figure being \$20,731. This bid was accepted.”¹⁷

Construction occurred over the summer and autumn of 1947, with partial payment of \$4,457.99 made to Bos Construction in September. Later that month the Board authorized an additional \$1,300 for piles and \$995 for floor beams on the Deadfall Lane Bridge.¹⁸ On October 2nd the Board held a special meeting for the purpose of substituting fabricated floor beams in place of I-beams for the bridge. Four days later they issued another payment of \$2,340 to Bos, a month later another payment for \$3,526.88,¹⁹ and on December 1st, \$5,155.55. The next day Judson-Pacific Murphy was paid for the steel.²⁰

On December 6th, 1947, the Board authorized warrants in favor of the Donald R. Warren Co., one for \$100.00 in connection with the Deadfall Lane Bridge; one for \$100.00 in connection with the Chester Bridge; and one for \$160 in connection with the Hamilton Creek Bridge, all for engineering services, and all to be paid from the Surveyor’s budget. On the same date, the Deadfall Lane Bridge as accepted and payment in the amount of \$5,815.80 authorized to the Bos Construction Co.²¹ After 40 years of service the 1907 Deadfall Lane Bridge was replaced.

The current bridge is steel, riveted, curved chord, pony truss span of 100 feet on straight RC abutments, with concrete deck and curbs. The roadway is 24 feet between curbs with no sidewalks. The overall length is 109.4 feet. Refer to various bridge inspection reports on file at Plumas County Public Works for further structural information and specifications.

As of November 28th, 1951, the Deadfall Lane Bridge had one coat of red lead paint, which at that time was reported as in fair condition. It was recommended that the entire structure be cleaned and painted with two coats of red lead, and edge and rivet head coat, and a finish coat.

spans. County Engineer A.J. Watson reported that the county was in need of 44 new bridges, at a cost of about \$1,200,000, “ ... but [couldn’t] see where the county would get that kind of money.”

¹⁴ Plumas County Board of Supervisors Minutes, Vol. 13, p.245.

¹⁵ Ibid, p.259.

¹⁶ Ibid, pp.261-262, 264.

¹⁷ *Feather River Bulletin*: June 5, 1947.

¹⁸ Plumas County Board of Supervisors Minutes, Vol. 13, p.278, 281.

¹⁹ *Feather River Bulletin*: October 16, 1947 and November 20, 1947.

²⁰ Plumas County Board of Supervisors Minutes, Vol. 13, p.294.

²¹ Ibid, Vol. 13, p.302 and *Feather River Bulletin*: January 8, 1948.

The load rating for the bridge was given as 4 tons per vehicle except 5 tons per 2-axle truck and 1-axle semi-trailer or 6 tons per other semi-trailer units.²²

On August 10th, 1979, the first report since the 1951 report was made, and gave the average daily traffic over the bridge as 300 vehicles. The paint by this time was aluminum pigment, generally in overall good condition with several trouble spots where rust had developed. It was recommended the bridge be repainted or at least given a thorough touchup. A seismic retrofit was also recommended.²³

On June 11th, 1992, the paint was noted as still in very good condition with some small areas of medium rust. No other recommendations were made.²⁴

A Caltrans Bridge Report dated July 6th, 1999 recommended debris removal, cleaning, sealing and replacement of two missing rivets.²⁵ Various examinations conducted from that time up through 2009 show minor issues that are being kept under surveillance.

Since the earliest days of Plumas County, it appears there have been at least four bridges spanning Lights Creek at this point. The current bridge has had the longest life, at this writing being sixty-five years old.



1906 Dead Fall Bridge, view to south from north approach at Diamond Mountain Road intersection, April 1937.

²² Bridge Report, November 28, 1951: Plumas County Public Works, Deadfall Lane Bridge file.

²³ Ibid, August 10, 1979.

²⁴ Supplementary Bridge Report, June 11, 1992.

²⁵ Caltrans Bridge Report, July 6, 1999: Plumas County Public Works.



1947 Dead Fall Lane Bridge, view to south from north approach at Diamond Mountain Road intersection, June 2013.

Plumas County bridge plaque dated 1947, attached to the west side of the Dead Fall Lane Bridge, June 2013.

