

Trio Brings Back Rich History of the Hiouchi Bridge

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The rich history of the iconic Hiouchi Bridge has been brought to light and on proud display at the Hiouchi Café on 199.

Hiouchi's unofficial Mayor, Walter Ussery, Del Norte Historical Society Director, Karen Beteljewski and graphic artist Curtis Wohlgmuth combined their talents and research acumen to bring back decades-old photographs of the original Smith River Bridge developed and constructed by the California Division of Highways, Bridge Department, in 1929. Transfer of ownership moved to the California Department of Transportation (Cal Trans) and the Bridge name was changed to the Hiouchi Bridge, spanning Smith River at mile post 4.22, on 199.

When the original Smith River Bridge was demolished in July, 1989 all the rich history fell into the debris pile.

Thanks to this trio of dedicated historians, the process of bringing back the past has been successful. You can see the display at the Café.

A bit of history...The Smith River Bridge was a rare California example of the cantilever highway truss Bridge, a type that enjoyed brief popularity during the decade spanning the late 1920's and 30's. Because this type was best suited to specialized applications, only limited numbers were built in the State. In fact, there are only seven remaining, following the removal of the Smith River Bridge some 35 years ago. The iconic Smith River Bridge was likely influenced by the Carquinez Bridge in the North Bay (1923-27).

The construction of the Smith River Bridge was an element of the old Smith River Road (now Highway 197) in the development of the Redwood Highway. The plans for this roadway relocation and improvement were dated as early as 1926, though final bridge plans were not ready until 1928. Roadway improvements were being undertaken by convict labor (pre-Pelican Bay State Prison era).

Economy and local conditions dictated the choice of cantilever design; the type required no expensive falsehood be placed in the channel. The Smith River carried a large drift and was apt to rise rapidly at any

time of the year, conditions which would have threatened any false-work, any structure this would have supported, and workers as well.

On April 17, 1928, the State awarded the construction contract to the Parker-Schram Company. Construction began May 21.

The contractor built a small industrial railroad from the storage site to the bridge site. Painting was completed by July 6, 1929.

Governors C.C. Young (California) and I.L. Patterson (Oregon), highway officials from both States and Washington State along with a thousand on-lookers gathered at the Noon hour for the dedication.

The ceremony was highlighted by the wife of the chairman of the California Highway Commission breaking a bottle of Smith River water (Prohibition was the law, then) upon the Bridge and christened the Bridge "Hiouchi," the Tollowa word for "blue water."

The Hiouchi Bridge is described as a through steel cantilever truss with suspended center span. The specifications of the Bridge are as follows:

- Length: 615 feet overall
- Width: 25.6 feet
- Two lane 24 ft. Roadway which crosses the Smith at right angles (no skew)
- Cost: \$154,987.47.
- Lifespan: 1929-1989.

Sixty years... May she RIP.