

MINNESOTA ARCHITECTURE - HISTORY INVENTORY FORM

Project: Local Historic Bridge Study - Phase II Eden Township, Pipestone County, Minnesota

Identification
Historic Name Split Rock Bridge; Bridge 5744
Current Name Split Rock Bridge; Bridge 5744
Field #
Address Country Road 54 over Split Rock Creek
City/Twp Eden Township
County Pipestone County
Legal Desc. Twp 105N Range 46W Sec 22 QQ NWNW
USGS Quad Pipestone South
UTM Zone 14 Datum 27
Easting 753104 Northing 15962495
Property ID (PIN)

SHPO Inventory Number PP-EDN-001

Review and Compliance Number

Form (New or Updated) Updated

Description
Linear Feature? No
HPC Status Unknown
Resource Type Structure
Architect/Engineer Albert G. Plagens; Elmer Keeler, Pipestone County Highway Department
Style WPA/Rustic style
Construction Date 1938
Original Use Transportation
Current Use Transportation

Description

The Split Rock Bridge is a single-span stone-arch bridge that carries County Road 54 over Split Rock Creek. The bridge is located in a rural area of Pipestone County, approximately 8 miles southwest of Pipestone. Surviving in unaltered condition, the bridge forms part of the western boundary of the Split Rock Creek State Park.

The Split Rock Bridge is constructed of locally quarried, bluish-pink Sioux Quartzite with rock-faced and split-faced surfaces. Symmetrically framed by stepped, flared, random-ashlar wingwalls, the bridge displays a single segmental arch with random-ashlar spandrel walls. Rising 12 feet over a span of 50 feet, the arch springs about 12 feet above grade from coursed-ashlar abutments. The overall width of the bridge is about 28 feet. Except for oversized keystones, the rectangular ring stones are of uniform size and shape. Masonry joints are about one-half-inch thick. Surmounted by well-defined cap stones, the parapets rise above roadway level to serve as railings. At the south end of the east railing, a commemorative stone plaque bears the inscription: "Split Rock Bridge/Works Progress/Administration/ Project/1938."

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EVALUATION AND ANALYSIS

Historical Context

Minnesota Masonry-Arch Highway Bridges, 1870-1945; Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota, 1933-1941

Historical Narrative

In 1935 state and federal officials authorized the construction of a masonry dam across Split Rock Creek in the southwest corner of Pipestone County. The project had both short- and long-term goals. It aimed at providing immediate employment for the local citizenry, as well as future recreational opportunities for the entire region. By impounding the waters of Split Rock Creek, the dam created the county's only lake, intended as the nucleus of Split Rock Creek State Park. The general plan also included the construction of a stone-arch bridge on the park's access road, just downstream from the dam. Although funded as separate projects, the bridge and dam were conceived as an integrated landscape design. Rising above the surrounding prairies, the two massive masonry structures form a visually arresting point-and-counterpoint of delicately colored pink Sioux Quartzite.

In December 1936, as the dam was nearing completion, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) submitted final specifications for the stone-arch bridge to the Minnesota State Highway Department. The specifications and presumably the plans were prepared by Pipestone County Highway Engineer Elmer Keeler and Albert G. Plagens, a consulting architect from New Ulm, Minnesota. Plagens is best known for his work on another New Deal project, the WPA-sponsored, Moderne-style Public Library and Historical Museum in New Ulm. Construction on the bridge commenced in 1937 using Sioux Quartzite quarried a few miles away near the city of Jasper, long-known for its building stone and accomplished masons. The bridge was completed in 1938 for an approximate cost of \$46,000.

WPA bridges were typically designed in two stylistic trends: a Rustic, traditional style or a WPA/government Deco Moderne style. Rustic style bridges were often found in park or park-like settings and featured wood, stone, or stone veneer construction. The Split Rock Bridge reflects the WPA Rustic style, and was clearly intended to showcase the area's masonry tradition. On most New Deal bridge projects in Minnesota, stonework was used only as a decorative veneer. In contrast, the Split Rock Bridge is an authentic, load-bearing stone arch with an impressive 50-foot span. Instead of the Moderne or historic revival styles customarily employed during the period, the bridge has an almost modernist simplicity, which focuses attention on the natural colors and textures of the local Sioux Quartzite, skillfully laid in a captivating random-ashlar pattern.

Significance

Bridge 5744 was evaluated under the "Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota, 1933-1941" Multiple Property Document Form (Federal Relief Construction MPDF) for *Criterion A* for its association with the WPA. The Federal Relief Construction MPDF identifies Transportation Systems as a property type. The property type is further divided into the following "structural types": highway, street, and sidewalk projects and airport facility projects. While bridges are not specifically mentioned as a structural type, bridges were often constructed as part of highway or street projects and, for the purpose of this evaluation, they are reviewed as part of the highway, street, and sidewalk project structural type. According to the registration requirements, the Transportation System is eligible under *Criterion A* if it provides an important change in the existing transportation pattern such as a newly developed farm-to-market road, a highway incorporating the principles of landscape design into the construction process, accessed the resort areas of the state or a new airport. Research did not reveal that Bridge 5744 was constructed as part of a larger highway or street development program, improved the state or city's

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existing transportation pattern, or accessed the state's resort areas or a new airport. As such, Bridge 5744 is not significant under *Criterion A* as part of the Federal Relief Construction MPDF.

A bridge may be eligible under the Federal Relief Construction MPD for its association with a significant park and parkway. Split Rock Creek Park is one example of the WPA's park development efforts during the Great Depression. Bridge 5744 was constructed in 1938 as part of the WPA-developed Split Rock Creek Park and, therefore, should be evaluated as a contributing or noncontributing resource within a potential Split Rock Creek Park Historic District. However, such an evaluation is beyond the scope of the current project. Further research and evaluation of Split Rock Creek Park within the context of the Federal Relief Construction MPD is recommended.

Bridge 5744 is significant for its architectural design under *Criterion C*, engineering, within the Multiple Property Documentation Form of "Minnesota Masonry-Arch Highway Bridges, 1870-1945" (Minnesota Masonry-Arch Highway Bridges MPDF). The context states in the Registration Requirements that a masonry arch bridge may be eligible under *Criterion C* if it displays exceptional masonry workmanship. Bridge 5744 fulfills these registration requirements by maintaining the exceptional workmanship displayed in the skillfully laid local Sioux Quartzite. The Registration Requirements also state a masonry-arch bridge may be a noteworthy structure with a span length greater than 30 feet. With a span length of 50 feet, Bridge 5744 fulfills this requirement. Furthermore, according to the National Register nomination for the bridge, it is the largest stone arch span of any active bridge in the state.

Bridge 5744 is also significant under *Criterion C*, engineering, as an excellent example of a park bridge within the Minnesota Masonry-Arch Highway Bridges MPDF. The Registration Requirements state that a masonry arch bridge can be eligible if it is an excellent example of one of the basic categories of "country," "city," or "park" masonry arch bridge. Bridge 5744 is a highly representative form of a park masonry arch bridge. The Minnesota Masonry-Arch Highway Bridges MPDF refers to the Split Rock Bridge as the state's most notable masonry arch park bridge, clearly reflecting the roadside beatification efforts of the WPA and showcasing the local random-ashlar pink Quartzite masonry.

The bridge has a period of significance of 1938, which corresponds to the year the bridge was built.

Integrity

Bridge 5744 retains a high degree of integrity. The bridge remains in its original location and continues to carry Country Road 54 over Split Rock Creek in Eden Township. Its setting over the creek near the Split Rock Lake Dam within Split Rock Creek State Park and association with transportation, as it continues to carry vehicular traffic, are also retained. To meet the requirements of the Minnesota Masonry-Arch Highway Bridges MPDF, the bridge must retain the masonry arch design with little alteration to the arch, and the masonry arch must remain visible. The masonry arch design of Bridge 5744 remains intact, and research did not reveal any substantial alterations since the bridge's construction in 1938. As such, the bridge retains integrity of design, materials, workmanship, setting, location, feeling, and association.

Recommendation

Bridge 5744 is significant under National Register of Historic Places *Criterion C* in the area of engineering as an outstanding example of a masonry arch park bridge, retaining all aspects of integrity, and achieving its aesthetic effect through the purity of its form and the beauty of its WPA Rustic style random ashlar Quartzite masonry. In addition, the bridge displays an exceptional span length of 50 feet, the largest stone-arch span of any active bridge in the state. It is significant within the Minnesota Masonry-Arch Highway Bridges MPDF. It meets the Registration Requirements by displaying exceptional

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masonry work and a span length greater than 30 feet. It also meets the Registration Requirements as an excellent example of a park masonry-arch bridge. However, within the historic context of the Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota MPDF, Bridge 5477 does not have significance as a Transportation System as it does not meet the Registration Requirements for the property type. Additional research, study, and evaluation of Split Rock Creek Park are necessary to determine if the bridge is contributing to a historic district under the Federal Relief Construction MPD's Registration Requirements under the Social and Recreational Facilities property type. While the bridge is recommended not eligible under *Criterion A*, Bridge 5744 is still recommended as eligible for the National Register under *Criterion C: Engineering* as an important type, a variation of type, and for high artistic value. The period of significance is 1938, which corresponds with the year the bridge was built.

Sources

Hess, Jeffery A. *Split Rock Bridge*. Washington, D.C.: National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, 1989.

Hess, Jeffery A. *Minnesota Masonry-Arch Highway Bridges Multiple Property Documentation Form*. Washington, D.C.: National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, August 1988. Prepared for the Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minn.

Consultant's Recommendation of Eligibility

Eligible-Individual

Prepared By

Mead & Hunt, Inc.

Date Surveyed

02/10/2013

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Eden Township, Pipestone County, Minnesota

Property Photographs



View facing west



View facing east

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Project: Local Historic Bridge Study - Phase II **Eden Township, Pipestone County, Minnesota**



View facing southeast



View facing north

MINNESOTA ARCHITECTURE - HISTORY INVENTORY FORM

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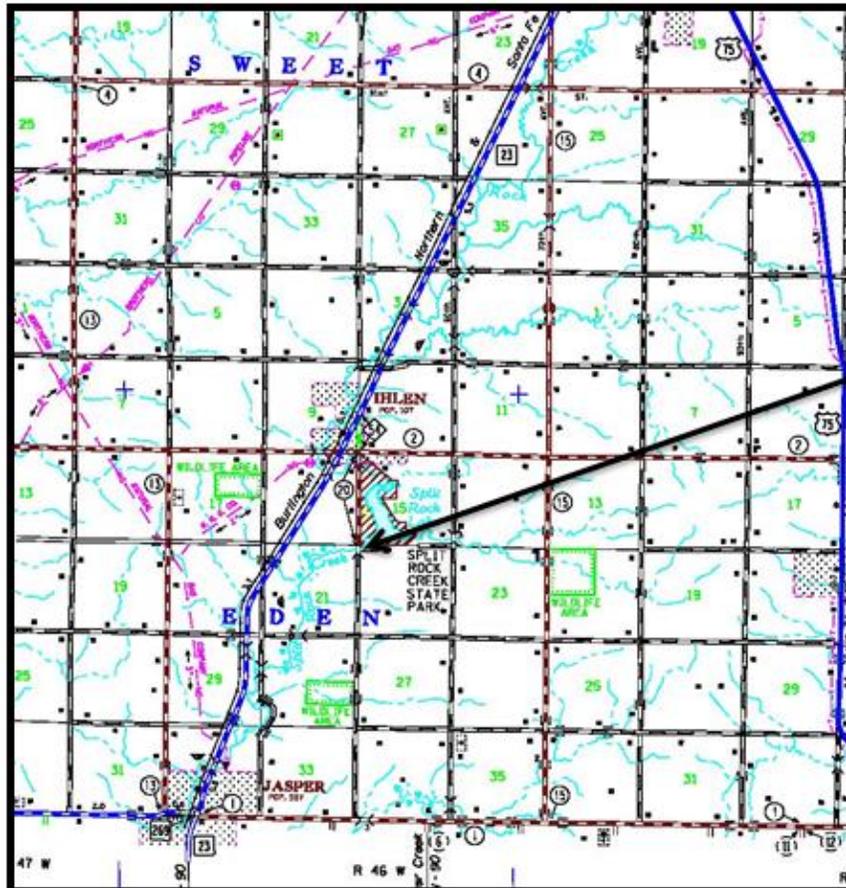


View facing northeast

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BR. NO. 5744

Bridge 5744 – TWP 254 over SPLIT ROCK CREEK



PROJECT LOCATION

PIPESTONE COUNTY

SEC. 22, TO 105NN, R 46W

UTM ZONE: 14 NAD: 27

USGS QUAD NAME: PIPESTONE SOUTH

EASTING: 753104 ft.

NORTHING: 15962495 ft.