

MYRTLE CREEK BRIDGE



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myrtle river bridge plan

Location

OVER MYRTLE CREEK, DON ROAD DON VALLEY, YARRA RANGES SHIRE

Municipality

YARRA RANGES SHIRE

Level of significance

Registered

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H1855

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO102

VHR Registration

November 18, 1999

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - September 3, 1999

What is significant?

Myrtle Creek Bridge, originally constructed to Country Roads Board approved plans, is a three-span timber-beam road bridge on the Don Road crossing of the Myrtle Creek, 8 kilometres north of Launching Place. It is a standard CRB longitudinal-timber motor-deck type bridge. It has a curved ground-plan and deck, involving two changes of direction in the decking. The present bridge is thought to have been built c1930; it probably replaced an earlier First World War era bridge. The longitudinal timber deck would have been added later, presumably in the years after the Second World War. The bridge is set on a tight curve on a quiet mountain road, at an unusually beautiful creek crossing amidst surroundings of tree ferns and eucalypts. It is currently maintained for motor traffic by VicRoads.

How is it Significant?

Myrtle Creek Bridge is of architectural , historical, and scientific (technical) significance to Victoria.

Why is it Significant?

It is of architectural significance as a compact all-timber road bridge, with a beautifully curving timber deck enhanced by its longitudinal-timber planks. Its design is complementary to its fern gully setting .

It is of historical significance as a good example of an increasingly rare remaining 'Development Road' timber bridge. This was an historic epoch in Victoria, wherein a determined fresh effort to open new land for farming, by widespread investment of government loan funds in rural road-and-bridge systems, was achieved through the agency of the newly established Country Roads Board. The County Roads Board members had a particular interest in the fertile well-watered hill country within easy reach of Melbourne, and in the 1920s the main mountainous section of Don Road was officially designated a CRB Developmental Road, with the aim of encouraging development of adjacent forest reserves and rich potential farmland. The present Myrtle Creek Bridge is a relic of this early government Developmental Road scheme.

It is of scientific (technical) significance as a good remaining example of a fast-dwindling standard CRB longitudinal-timber motor deck. This type of deck, developed in Victoria by the CRB in 1931, dramatically improved durability and maintenance, making timber bridge construction economical and viable in an era when reinforced concrete rural bridges were becoming standard. In addition, its curved ground-plan and deck, involving two changes of direction in the decking, is a good example of an extremely rare bridge type in Victoria. The bridge's neatly curving timber frame is enhanced by its compact three-span design. At 9.3 metres, its main timber-beam span is of notable length for an all-timber longitudinal deck structure (defined as anything over 8.5 metres for this type), and, with the two shorter minor spans at either end, contributes to its distinctive symmetrical form. The modified longitudinal-timber motor deck of the post-1931 pattern clearly distinguishes the Myrtle Creek Bridge from its equally remarkable contemporary, the Bete Bolong Creek Bridge on the Buchan-Orbost Road in East Gippsland.

Permit Exemptions

General Exemptions:

General exemptions apply to all places and objects included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR). General exemptions have been designed to allow everyday activities, maintenance and changes to your property, which don't harm its cultural heritage significance, to proceed without the need to obtain approvals under the Heritage Act 2017.

Places of worship: In some circumstances, you can alter a place of worship to accommodate religious practices without a permit, but you must **notify** the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria before you start the works or activities at least 20 business days before the works or activities are to commence.

Subdivision/consolidation: Permit exemptions exist for some subdivisions and consolidations. If the subdivision or consolidation is in accordance with a planning permit granted under Part 4 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and the application for the planning permit was referred to the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria as a determining referral authority, a permit is not required.

Specific exemptions may also apply to your registered place or object. If applicable, these are listed below. Specific exemptions are tailored to the conservation and management needs of an individual registered place or object and set out works and activities that are exempt from the requirements of a permit. Specific exemptions prevail if they conflict with general exemptions.

Find out more about heritage permit exemptions [here](#).

Specific Exemptions:

General Conditions:

1. All exempted plans and alterations are to be carried out in a manner which prevents damage to the fabric of the registered place or object.
2. Should it become apparent during further inspection or the carrying out of alterations that original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the place or object are revealed which relate to the significance of the place or object, then the exemption covering such alteration shall cease and the Executive Director shall be notified as soon as possible.
3. If there is a conservation policy or plan approved by the Executive Director, all works shall be in accordance with it.
4. Nothing in this declaration prevents the Executive Director from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions.
5. Nothing in this declaration exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the responsible authority where applicable.

Specific Provisions/Exemptions

No permit is required for routine maintenance or minor repairs which replace like with like.

Construction dates 1930,

Heritage Act Categories Registered place,

History

Contextual History:History of Place:

It has not proved possible to ascertain the precise construction history of the beautiful curved all-timber stringer bridge in a tight fern-gully corner of the Don Road where it crosses Myrtle Creek. Structurally, it is a standard CRB type all-timber motor bridge of a kind that became standard after 1931 wherever CRB engineers exercised influence, but which is now rapidly disappearing from the State's roads.

Although the history of the various timber bridges that have occupied this Myrtle Creek crossing is not now known, the Don Road itself has a long and interesting history. The Don Valley was first settled in the 1870s, and 'Don Road' existed by 1884-5 when the Roads and Bridges Branch of the Victorian Public Works Department received a complaint that 'Contractor Buller' was damaging cultivated land beside 'Don Road'. That was probably during the earliest stages of construction of this road. An historian of Healesville cited a construction worker involved in building the Don Road in 1888. He was impressed by the numerous lyrebirds along the steep bush track. As in many other country areas, pioneer settlers were the first road contractors and they depended upon simple farm implements, so early bridges were usually crude timber constructions.

Records of correspondence between the old Shire of Healesville and the Roads and Bridges Branch of the Victorian Public Works Department in the earliest years of this century, indicate that between 1900 and 1905 more intensive effort went into forming the Don Road. This work presumably involved forming a basic earth roadway through what was still largely virgin forest land. However, major formation works on the Don Road including the creation of good timber bridges, appear not to have occurred until after the Country Roads Board was formed, in 1912.

The three original Country Roads Board members, led by William Calder, had a special interest in the development for agricultural purposes of fertile and well-watered hill country within relatively easy reach of Melbourne. Thus in commenting on the land stretching along the Dividing Range between Whittlesea and Healesville in 1914, the Board noted that 'this district has an ample and regular rainfall, and fertile soil, and being comparatively close to the city, would quickly develop if reasonable road facilities were provided'. William Calder obviously thought the same of the land spreading between Healesville and Launching Place on the main Warburton-Melbourne Road. Despite earlier efforts to create dirt roads through the forest, in 1914 this country still lacked adequate roads and bridges to make it viable farmland.

Launching Place near Warburton on the main Melbourne to Warburton Road had increased in significance with the coming of the Warburton Railway. In 1914 it was described as a postal township and holiday resort with a church, saw mills, a hotel and boarding houses, only 41 miles from Melbourne by rail. By then it was the rail connecting point for farmers at Hoddle Creek and Beenak to the south east, which area had been served by a postal-road connection with Woori Yallock before the railways came.

The two local saw mills would increasingly depend on obtaining timber from the hill country towards Healesville, where better all-weather roads were badly needed. The main local industries were fruit growing, dairying and milling the messmate, blackbutt and blackwood timbers that then abounded in the surrounding hills. In the eyes of William Calder of the C.R.B., the conversion of blackbutt and messmate trees into sawn timber provided a sensible way to turn forest land into orchards and dairy farms. In 1926 when the Don Road was being extended further towards Healesville as a C.R.B. Developmental Road project, the little township of Launching Place claimed a population of 200 souls.

The road that we know as the Don Road, linking the Warburton Road at Launching Place with the Maroondah Highway at Healesville, was improved by the Country Roads Board in two distinct stages, during World War One and the later 1920s. The first section of the road out from Launching Place was planned and surveyed as one of the very earliest Main Road projects of the Country Roads Board, and appears on the earliest C.R.B. map of Victorian Main Roads entitled to receive State funding, printed with the 1914 C.R.B. Annual Report No. 1. This

first section of 'Main Road' as shown on the 1914 map extended out from Launching Place to the boundary of the then Shire of Upper Yarra, probably linking there with earlier more primitive road-works of the Healesville Shire. The C.R.B. Report for 1914 indicated that five and three quarter miles of the Don Road north from Launching Place had already been surveyed by the Board.

The 1915 C.R.B. Annual Report indicated that at that date more than seven miles of the Don Road north from Launching Place was not only surveyed, but was also fully planned by Board engineers in preparation for road works. Timber-bridge and culvert works were under construction during 1917 and 1918 when little road work was done because of the war, indicating that the Don Road section out from Launching Place was given a high priority among C.R.B. Main Roads.

Contractors Sly and Starling were building one such timber bridge on this section of the Don Road in 1917, at a cost of £147, and in 1918 contractor D. McHugh was busy building seven timber culverts on the same section, at a total cost of £390. Interestingly the latter contract, as also the formation and grading of 3.5 miles of permanent road works in 1917-18, is listed as directly under C.R.B. supervision rather than under Shire supervision, suggesting a direct Board involvement in this obviously important wartime project.

The motorist wandering along the quiet Don Road today might well be puzzled at the urgency of these construction works during a war crisis early this century, but in that era when agricultural development was a number-one priority Country Roads Board officials considered it a very significant enterprise.

The Don Road, taking its name from the Don River which it crossed, was also one of the very earliest roads officially declared by the Country Roads Board under the new State Developmental Roads scheme implemented at the end of World War One. This meant that it could be constructed with State funds, to encourage forest and agricultural industries. Road construction out from Launching Place continued through 1919-20. In the latter year the C.R.B. recorded another 1.58 miles of construction works, plus five miles of road maintenance on this section of State-funded Main Road. Although I have found no reference to a Myrtle Creek Bridge in these reports, since it was situated in the Upper Yarra Shire this crossing was probably bridged in this earliest phase of C.R.B. Main Road construction between 1915 and 1920. The date given to the current bridge by VicRoads is 1930, which would indicate a fairly short life for any wartime timber bridge constructed at Myrtle Creek. Perhaps an earlier bridge was incorporated into the first C.R.B. roadworks.

The 1926 Annual Report of the Country Roads Board indicates that the sum of £3,510 pounds had been allocated for works on the Don Road, under Developmental Roads Act No. 3255. Developmental Roads were built by the Shires from State funds, on condition that the Shires maintain them in perpetuity once constructed, and two further miles of the Don Road within Upper Yarra Shire were built during 1926. In 1927 the C.R.B. was directly involved in supervising a 'temporary bridge' contract on the earliest Main Road section of Don Road where it crossed the Yarra River at Launching Place, which might suggest a flood-damage emergency situation there.

The Don Road appears on current VicRoads maps as a Main Road, and when major road works were undertaken during World War 1 and the later 1920s it was constructed in two distinct segments, with the first section out of Launching Place being financed both in terms of construction and ongoing maintenance as a Main Road, using State funding. The second section on towards Healesville was constructed as a Developmental Road, which meant that (while it retained that status) there was no government contribution to its ongoing maintenance, once constructed from State funds.

The Myrtle Creek Bridge on the Don Road was probably constructed in 1930 as part of the ongoing Developmental Road project, although I can find no reference to its construction in C.R.B. published reports of that era. C.R.B. Annual Reports for 1928 and 1929 suggest on-going Developmental Road construction works on the Don Road in Upper Yarra Shire, but they appear to contain no information for any such works in 1930. In 1931 the first sealing with 'cold tar and bitural' began on the 'Main Road' segment of the Don Road, near Launching Place, indicating that it was then evolving into a motor road.

Whether built circa 1918 or in 1930, the first Myrtle Creek Bridge would have been built to pre-motor patterns, with a transverse-timbered deck fitted either directly to the timber stringers, or to spiking planks attached thereto. That original timber bridge probably had the same attractive built-in curves where the road tightly hugs a bend in a tree-fern gully, that makes the longitudinally-decked motor bridge at Myrtle Creek so fascinating and rare a structure today. If originally built with the Developmental Road extension works circa 1930, the Myrtle Creek Bridge was presumably re-decked to standard post-1931 C.R.B. motor-deck specifications in the years after

World War 2.

Assessment Against Criteria

Criterion A

The historical importance, association with or relationship to Victoria's history of the place or object.

The bridge is a relic of an early government Developmental Road scheme, for the Don Road. In the 1920s the main mountainous section of Don Road was officially designated a Country Roads Board 'Developmental Road', with the aim of encouraging development of adjacent forest reserves and rich potential farmland. This was an historic epoch in Victoria, wherein a determined fresh effort to open new land for farming, by widespread investment of government loan funds in rural road-and-bridge systems, was achieved through the agency of the newly established Country Roads Board.

Criterion B.

The importance of a place or object in demonstrating rarity or uniqueness.

It is of historical significance as a good example of an increasingly rare remaining 'Development Road' timber bridge.

It is a good example of a very rare timber bridge with a curved deck in Victoria.

Criterion C.

The place or object's potential to educate, illustrate or provide further scientific investigation in relation to Victoria's cultural heritage.

Criterion D.

The importance of a place or object in exhibiting the principal characteristics or the representative nature of a place or object as part of a class or type of places or objects.

It is a good remaining example of a fast-dwindling standard CRB longitudinal-timber motor deck. This type of deck, developed in Victoria by the CRB in 1931, dramatically improved durability and maintenance, making timber bridge construction economical and viable in an era when reinforced concrete rural bridges were becoming standard.

It is a good, compact and neat example of a rare curved timber bridge in Victoria.

Criterion E.

The importance of a place or object in exhibiting good design or aesthetic characteristics and/or in exhibiting a richness, diversity or unusual integration of features.

Its curved ground-plan and deck involves two changes of direction in the decking. Its neatly curving timber frame is enhanced by its compact three-span design.

At 9.3 metres, its main timber-beam span is of notable length for an all-timber longitudinal deck structure (defined as anything over 8.5 metres for this type), and, with the two shorter minor spans at either end, contributes to its distinctive symmetrical form.

Its beautifully curving timber deck is enhanced by its longitudinal-timber planks.

Its rare shape and all-timber materials are complemented by an equally beautiful fern gully setting. No more beautiful eucalypt and tree ferns landscape setting for an historical timber bridge is known in Victoria. The neatly curved vernacular timber structure fits snugly into its idyllic bush surroundings.

Criterion F.

The importance of a place or object in demonstrating or being associated with scientific or technical innovations or achievements.

Criterion G.

The importance of a place or object in demonstrating social or cultural associations.

Criterion H.

Any other matter which the Council considers relevant to the demonstration of cultural heritage significance.

The bridge also has the rare advantage of being set on what is today a quiet, winding 'bush' road, a delightful motoring trail for tourists in the Healesville-Upper Yarra region, close to Melbourne.

Its very rare shape and beautiful timber form in an equally beautiful fern-gully setting on an historic CRB Development Road make this bridge an important part of Victoria's heritage.

Extent of Registration

1. All the bridge marked B1, including its abutments and land five metres on either side of the bridge and its abutments, as marked on Diagram Number 1855 held by the Executive Director, being part of the land described as government road (Don Rd) in the Parish of Yuonga

This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.

For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>