

Salinas River Bridge
Chualar River Road
at Salinas River
Chualar vicinity
Monterey County
California

HAER No. CA-70

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Western Region
Department of the Interior
San Francisco, California 94102

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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

Salinas River Bridge

HAER No. CA-70

Location: Spanning the Salinas at the crossing of Chualar River Road, 2-1/2 miles west of Chualar, Monterey County, California

UTM: 10.630000.4046170
Quad: Chualar, California, 7.5'

Dates of Construction: Constructed in 1914-15, at Soledad, over the the Salinas River; moved to present site west of Chualar c. 1940. Scheduled for demolition in 1990.

Builder/Designer: Mesmer & Rice, of Los Angeles - contractor
American Bridge Company - subcontractor

Present Owner: County of Monterey
Department of Public Works
312 East Alisal Street
Salinas, California 93901

Present Use: Vehicular bridge

Significance: The Salinas River Bridge on Chualar River Road is an eight-span, pin-connected Pratt through truss bridge. As such, it is the largest multiple-span through truss bridge, particularly of its period of initial construction, in the central coast area of California. With a high degree of integrity, and representing a type, period, and method of construction, the Salinas River Bridge has been determined eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places, meeting Criterion C at the local level of significance.

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I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

By all accounts, the winter of 1913-14 proved to be a tough one for Monterey County. A series of storms in late January 1914 swept in from the coast, and the resulting deluge sent virtually every river and stream in the central coastal area over their banks. The Salinas River, in particular, went on a rampage, overtopping its banks and changing its channel. When the storms has passed, almost every bridge crossing the Salinas in Monterey County had been either destroyed or severely damaged. One of those destroyed was the bridge at Soledad, washed out when the river changed its channel at that location. The old bridge had been built in 1888 by the California Bridge Company, of San Francisco, for #35,300, and was comprised of four combination timber and iron truss spans totaling 812 feet long overall. It was declared a total loss. In fact, every bridge south of Chualar was gone.

With country road transportation routes severed, the Board of Supervisors acted quickly to remedy the situation. At their February 1914 meeting, they ordered County Surveyor Lou G. Hare to begin emergency work on the county's bridges, authorizing \$102,000 for new bridges at Soledad, Nacimiento and Neponset. Repair to damaged bridges took first priority, and it was not until April 1914 that the supervisors directed Hare to prepare plans and specifications for a new steel bridge at Soledad. Working quickly, Hare had the task complete by the time the supervisors met in May, at which time they approved the plans and specifications and ordered County Clerk T. P. Joy to advertise for bids.

When the bids were opened on June 2, 1914, the bidders were the Clinton Bridge Works (of Clinton, Iowa, but with offices in San Francisco), the Security Construction Company, the W. N. Concannon Company, and the Merry [sic] Elwell Company (Mervy Elwell Company, of Oakland). No indication was given of the successful bidder, and on June 12, 1914, Hare submitted new plans and specifications. It is likely that all bids had exceeded estimates, requiring revision on the part of the county. Bids were again opened by the supervisors in July, with the same companies bidding, but joined this time by the Midland Bridge Company and by Mesmer & Rice of Los Angeles. The supervisors awarded the contract to Mesmer & Rice, with a bid of 448,970.

In August 1914, county elections saw Hare lose his position to Howard F. Cozzens, and construction of this and other bridges designed by Hare came under Cozzens's supervision. Newspaper accounts fail to provide details of the construction, but by early January 1915, the contractors had completed the substructure of the Soledad bridge, and the supervisors accepted the work on January 4, 1915. Completion of the superstructure followed quickly, and the supervisors accepted the completed bridge on January 18, 1915. As completed, the new bridge stood 500 feet downstream from the old

bridge site, and consisted of eleven 119-foot pin-connected Pratt truss spans on concrete-filled steel cylinder piers (known as "lally [pronounced 'lolly'] columns"), with each cylinder founded on five 50-foot piles. American Bridge Company, as subcontractors to Mesmer & Rice, had supplied the trusses.

Eventually taken into the State Highway System, the bridge continued to serve traffic through the ensuing years, though its design soon began to pose constraints. With the change from horse-drawn vehicles and early automobile traffic to heavier vehicles moving at higher speeds, by the mid-1930s it had been necessary to post the bridge for one-way traffic for trucks and buses, with a 15 mile per hour speed limit and a 12-ton load limit per vehicle. In 1934, a truck wrecked the northernmost truss span, which was then replaced by a roadway carried on temporary timber bents, the constraints of the Depression preventing replacement of the bridge at that time. In 1935, a fire, blamed on a cigarette thrown by a passing motorist, destroyed a portion of the deck. With that damage repaired, the bridge continued in service until February 11, 1938. On that date, events similar to those which had led to the bridge's construction repeated themselves, when storm waters washed out the two southernmost truss spans, severing the highway at Soledad once more.

Throughout the next month, State forces undertook repairs, while traffic was diverted from Soledad to King City on county roads east of the river. Repairs were complete by March 18, 1938. By this time, however, construction of a new reinforced concrete bridge, 500 feet downstream, was underway. The new structure was completed and put into service on October 23, 1938, rendering the old bridge surplus.

At this point, the available historic record becomes less clear as to the exact sequence of events. The records of the California Department of Transportation indicate the eight surviving truss spans were moved approximately 15 miles to the present site on Chualar River Road ca. 1940. This date seems reasonably accurate, as it is known that the steel cylinder piers were being removed from the river bed at Soledad by late 1939. The trusses may have been moved by that time, or may have been placed in storage for a short period. In either event, the bridge has continued to serve traffic in its new location for almost 50 years.

II. ENGINEERING INFORMATION

The Salinas River Bridge (Bridge Number 44C-21), on Chualar River Road, FAS W009 in Monterey County, is described as follows: the east approach spans are simple span untreated Douglas fir timber stringers with concrete deck slab on treated Douglas fir four-pile bents; the west approach spans are simple span steel stringers with concrete deck slab; the main spans are eight pin-connected Pratt through trusses with untreated Douglas fir timber stringers and concrete deck slab, on reinforced concrete piers.

The eighteen spans total 1,134 feet in length, 18.1 feet in width (17 feet between the guardrails) and carry a single traffic lane between the metal beam bridge railing. The trusses provide 13 feet, 8 inches vertical clearance at the portals. The bridge crosses the Salinas River at right angles (no skew). Originally built in 1914-15 across the Salinas River at Soledad, south of the present location, the bridge was moved to the present site ca. 1940.

III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Books

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Periodicals

Ele, V. J., "New Salinas River Bridge At Soledad Officially Opened," California Highways and Public Works, November 1938.

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"Monterey County is Hit Hard by the Last Storm," Salinas Daily News, January 27, 1914.

"Statement of Damages to Salinas River Bridges," Salinas Daily News, February 6, 1914.

"Aftermath of the Recent Floods," Salinas Daily News, February 12, 1914.

"Supervisors End a Busy Session" Salinas Daily News, April 8, 1914.

"Supervisors End Monthly Session," Salinas Daily News, May 6, 1914.

"Soledad Bridge Bids Are Opened," Salinas Daily News, June 2, 1914.

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July 8, 1914.

"Late Returns Change Results," Salinas Daily News, August 27, 1914..

"Proceedings of the Supervisors," Salinas Daily News, January 13, 1915.

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Manuscripts

Andrews, C. E., "Final Report for Reflooring, cleaning and painting on Salinas River Bridge, One mile south of Soledad in Monterey County, Road V-Mon-2-D, Contract M-138," California Department of Transportation, Sacramento, March 1927.

Gibson, L. H., "Final Report For Repairing Fire Damage To Bridge No. 44-02 In The County Of Monterey Over Salinas River At Soledad, Day Labor Work Order 65K47, Road V-Mon-2-D," California Department of Transportation, Sacramento, August 19, 1935.

Jones, K. E., "Bridge Report, Bridge No. 44C-21," California Department of Transportation, Sacramento, April 12, 1977.

Snyder, John W., "An Evaluation of Salinas River Bridge on Chualar River Road, FAS W009, Monterey County Department of Public Works, Salinas, November 4, 1983.

IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The proposed project which would affect the Salinas River Bridge on Chualar River Road is the replacement of the bridge itself, with its subsequent removal. Built to early 20th century design standards, the bridge today is functionally a one-lane structure with limited load capacity and impaired vertical clearance; indeed, it was posted as one-way for trucks and buses more than 50 years ago.

The new structure is proposed to be built to current design standards, and to be located approximately 850 feet downstream and crossing the river on a skew. The bridge will be a reinforced concrete box girder structure, 40 feet, 8 inches wide between barriers, and 1,050 feet long.

