

1823

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

SEP 29 1989

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

NATIONAL REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Split Rock Bridge other names/site number Bridge No. 5744

2. Location

street & number County Road 54 over Split Rock Creek not for publication N/A city, town Eden Prairie Township vicinity Ihlen state Minnesota code MN county Pipestone code 117 zip code 56140

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: [x] public-local, [ ] public-State, [ ] public-Federal, [ ] private. Category of Property: [x] structure, [ ] building(s), [ ] district, [ ] site, [ ] object. Number of Resources within Property: Contributing 1, Noncontributing 0. Total 1. Name of related multiple property listing: Minnesota Masonry-Arch Highway Bridges, 1870-1945. Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0.

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this [x] nomination [ ] request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property [x] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. [ ] See continuation sheet. Signature of certifying official Nina M. Archabal, State Historic Preservation Officer, Minnesota Historical Society. Date 9/22/89.

In my opinion, the property [ ] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. [ ] See continuation sheet. Signature of commenting or other official. Date. State or Federal agency and bureau.

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is: [x] entered in the National Register. [ ] See continuation sheet. [ ] determined eligible for the National Register. [ ] See continuation sheet. [ ] determined not eligible for the National Register. [ ] removed from the National Register. [ ] other, (explain:)

Entered in the National Register 11/6/89

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)  
Transportation, road-related (vehicular)

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)  
Transportation, road-related (vehicular)

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)

Other: Stone-arch bridge

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone

walls

roof

other Stone

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 1

---

Split Rock Bridge: Description

Located in a rural area of Pipestone County about one mile south of the City of Ihlen, the Split Rock Bridge is a single-span stone-arch highway bridge that carries an unpaved north-south road over Split Rock Creek. Surviving in unaltered condition, the bridge forms part of the western boundary of the Split Rock Creek State Recreational Reserve.

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 wing walls, 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 bridge's overall width 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 a well-defined coping, 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."

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally     statewide     locally

Applicable National Register Criteria     A     B     C     D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)     A     B     C     D     E     F     G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Engineering  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance  
1938

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Dates  
1938

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation  
N/A

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Architect: Plagens, Albert G.

Engineer: Keeler, Elmer

Builder: Works Progress Administration

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 1Significance: Split Rock Bridge

The Split Rock Bridge embodies engineering significance in the context of Minnesota masonry-arch highway bridges constructed during the period 1870 to 1945. In addition to displaying the largest stone-arch span of any active highway bridge in the state, the structure is an outstanding example of an ornamental park bridge, achieving its aesthetic effect through the purity of its form and the beauty of its random-ashlar masonry. The bridge survives in unaltered condition.

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 a small state park known as Split Rock Creek State Recreational Reserve. The general plan also included the construction of a stone-arch highway bridge on the park's access road, just downstream from the dam.<sup>1</sup> Although funded as separate projects, the bridge and dam seem to have been 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 WPA submitted final specifications for the stone-arch bridge to the Minnesota State Highway Department.<sup>2</sup> The specifications, and, presumably, the plans as well, were prepared by Elmer Keeler, the Pipestone County Highway Engineer for many years, and Albert G. Plagens, a consulting architect from New Ulm, Minnesota who is best known for his work on another New Deal project -- the PWA-sponsored, Moderne-style Public Library and Historical Museum (1936) in New Ulm.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

Split Rock Bridge 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 facing. 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 native Sioux quartzite, skilfully laid in a captivating random-ashlar pattern.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 2

## Notes

1. "Split Rock Creek State Park," A History of Pipestone County (Pipestone County Historical Society, 1984).
2. Elmer Keeler and Albert G. Plagens, "Specifications for Labor and Materials for Split Rock Bridge . . . Works Progress Administration Project," in Bridge No. 5744 File, Minnesota Department of Transportation Minnesota; in the same file, see also the cover letter for the specifications: Victor Christgau, WPA State Administrator to M. J. Hoffman, Bridge Engineer, Minnesota Department of Highways, December 16, 1936.
3. According to an exhibit on display in the Pipestone County Historical Society Museum in 1987, Keeler was the county's first highway engineer. He occupied the position during 1917-1923 and 1928-1940. Plagen served as supervising architect on the New Ulm Library; see "New Ulm Public Library," Brown County Journal, January 1, 1937; David Gebhard and Tom Martinson, A Guide to the Architecture of Minnesota (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, for the University Gallery of the University of Minnesota and the Minnesota Society of Architects, 1977), p. 245.
4. "Split Rock Creek State Park." On Jasper quartzite -- considered to be "one of the most beautiful and durable stones in the State" -- see Oliver Bowles, The Structural and Ornamental Stone of Minnesota (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1918), pp. 203-204; Gebhard and Martinson, p. 341. Local stone stonecutters who worked on Split Rock Bridge were Ed Sandberg, Jack Dewitte, Aaron Straw, Maurice Swanson, and John Bergeman. Their foremen were Ludwig Swenson, Bill Hoskins, and Toby Iverson; see David Rambow, Assistant Director, Pipestone County Historical Society Museum, Letter to Jeffrey A. Hess, February 10, 1988, in Split Rock Bridge File, Minnesota Historical Society.

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property Less than one acre

UTM References

A 

1	4	7	1	1	5	1	0	4	8	6	3	1	0	0
Zone		Easting					Northing							

B 

Zone		Easting					Northing							

C 

Zone		Easting					Northing							

D 

Zone		Easting					Northing							

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property is defined by a rectangle measuring 68 feet north-south by 48 feet east-west, whose vertices coincide with the outside corners of the bridge's wing walls.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

Based on field measurements, as well as measurements provided by the Minnesota Department of Transportation, the boundaries enclose the bridge's superstructure and substructure, including wing walls.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Jeffrey A. Hess, Historical Consultant  
organization N/A date August 1988  
street & number 305 Grain Exchange Building telephone 612-338-1987  
city or town Minneapolis state Minnesota zip code 55415

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 1

---

Bibliography: Split Rock Bridge

Bowles, Oliver. The Structural and Ornamental Stone of Minnesota. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1918.

Christgau, Victor to M. J. Hoffman, Bridge Engineer, Minnesota Department of Highways, December 16, 1936, unpublished, in Bridge No. 5744 File, Minnesota Department of Transportation.

Gebhard, David and Martinson, Tom. A Guide to the Architecture of Minnesota (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, for the University Gallery of the University of Minnesota and the Minnesota Society of Architects, 1977), p. 245.

Keeler, Elmer and Plagens, Albert G. "Specifications for Labor and Materials for Split Rock Bridge . . . Works Progress Administration Project," unpublished, in Bridge No. 5744 File, Minnesota Department of Transportation Minnesota.

"New Ulm Public Library." Brown County Journal, June 1, 1937.

Rambow, David. Letter to Jeffrey A. Hess, unpublished, February 10, 1988, in Split Rock Bridge File, Minnesota Historical Society.

"Split Rock State Park." A History of Pipestone County. Pipestone County Historical Society, 1984.