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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor or computer to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name: Wawona Covered Bridge
other names/site number:

2. Location

street and number Pioneer Yosemite History Center, Yosemite National Park Not for publication.
city or town Wawona vicinity

state California code CA county Mariposa code 043 zip code 95389

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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 ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ___ nationally X statewide ___ locally. (___ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Joe Wallis
Signature of certifying official Date 12-4-06
National Park Service
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property X meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria. (___ see continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Stephen D. Miksa DNAPC
Signature of commenting or other official Date 1-3-06
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:
 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): _____

Signature of the Keeper [Signature] Date of Action 1/11/2007

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

contributing	noncontributing	
.....0.....	.....0.....	buildings
.....0.....	.....0.....	sites
.....1.....	.....0.....	structures
.....0.....	.....0.....	objects
.....1.....	.....0.....	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A.....

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0.....

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Category	Sub
Transportation.....	Road-Related (Vehicular..... Pedestrian, and Stock).....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Category	Sub
Transportation.....	Pedestrian-related.....
Entertainment/Recreation.....
.....
.....
.....

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Other: Modified Queen-post Through Truss.....
.....
.....

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete with Stone Facing (not original).....
roof Wood: shingles (not original).....
walls Wood: truss members; covering structure;.....
dacking; siding.....
other.....

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

See Continuation Sheet.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

- Exploration/Settlement.....
- Entertainment/Recreation.....
- Transportation.....
- Engineering.....
-
-
-

Period of Significance

1868 to 1957.....

Significant Dates

Dates of construction: 1868, 1878, 1956-57.....

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

.....

Cultural Affiliation

N/A.....

Architect/Builder

.....

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See Continuation Sheet.

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

Primary location of additional data:

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

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

recorded by Historic American Engineering Record
 # CA - 106

Name of repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: 1 acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	11	265450	4157750	3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2				4			

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Seth Bergstein/Charles Palmer
 organization Architectural Resources Group/NPS--Yosemite National Park date October 2002/2006
 street & number Pier 9, The Embarcadero/PO Box 700-W telephone (415) 421-1680/(209) 379-1378
 city or town San Francisco/El Portal state CA zip code 94111/95318

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's locations

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property

Additional items (check with SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

name National Park Service, Yosemite National Park
 street & number P.O. Box 700-W telephone 209-379-1220
 city or town El Portal state CA zip code 95338

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National Park Service

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Wawona Covered Bridge
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Description of the Wawona Covered Bridge

The Wawona Covered Bridge spans the South Fork of the Merced River at the Pioneer Yosemite History Center in Wawona, Yosemite National Park. The structure is a modified Queen-post truss constructed with native woods braced by steel tie rods. The overall length of the structure is 130 feet, 4 inches; overall width is 16 feet, 6 inches. A pair of longitudinal stringers spans between the trusses. The trusses and stringers are supported by a system of seven transverse floor beams, or outriggers. The covering structure, added in 1878, a decade after construction of the original bridge, has an internal frame with timber siding. The total height of the bridge is 30 feet, measured from the peak of the gable-roofed covering structure to the top of the transverse floor beams.

The principal truss members are made of hand-hewn Ponderosa Pine; the vertical and diagonal elements of the truss are made of plain-sawn Douglas fir. The internal frame covering structure is made of plain-sawn Douglas fir with a roof consisting of hand-split sugar pine shakes. The piers and abutments are composed of concrete with stone facing. The property was meticulously rehabilitated in 1956, reusing all salvageable materials and replacing deteriorated materials in-kind, regarding species, dimension, and hand-hewn method of preparation. The bridge remains at its original location in the Wawona region. Because of this accurate approach to the bridge retains integrity of design, location, workmanship, rehabilitation, feeling, and association. The interior structure is currently in good condition. The covering structure is in good condition, with many original siding boards extant.

Construction Evolution of the Wawona Covered Bridge

Historic photographs of the bridge taken in the 1880s indicate that the appearance of the structure is essentially the same as the present structure. Galen Clark, original steward of the Yosemite Grant, built the bridge as an open-deck structure in 1868. The bridge used a modified Queen-post truss with main members composed of hand-hewn Ponderosa Pine, reinforced with vertical iron tie rods. Following acquisition of the bridge by the Washburn Group (consisting of Albert Henry Washburn, William F. Coffman, and Emery W. Chapman), the bridge was covered in 1878, using lumber prepared in the Washburn Group's nearby sawmill. Anecdotal evidence found in the National Park Service archives suggests that the bridge was covered to emulate popular covered bridges in Henry Washburn's native Vermont. More likely, the bridge was covered to protect its timber elements from the heavy rains and snows found in its mountainous location. The covering structure was of internal-frame design with plain-sawn Douglas fir structural elements and siding and a gable roof finished with hand-cut sugar pine shakes. The original foundation for the bridge consisted of timber cribs filled with stone.

The bridge has undergone a series of alterations since the early Twentieth Century. In 1900, both approaches were lengthened approximately 13 feet, with new abutments installed. Running boards for the handling of automobiles were added in the 1930s. The bridge, which served the original Wawona Stage Road to Yosemite Valley, was taken out of automobile service in 1937, as the Wawona Road was routed over a new bridge located

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approximately 200 yards southwest of the original bridge. The covered bridge was kept in service for local and pedestrian traffic. In that same year the Civilian Conservation Corps undertook repair work to several transverse floor beams, replacement of some of the wood siding, and the addition of stone to the timber crib foundations.

The bridge suffered severe damage from the floods of 1955 that ravaged the Yosemite region. Following inspections by Park engineers, the bridge was determined to be in poor condition and replacement was recommended. Park engineers evaluated several options, but Park Superintendent John Preston recognized the historical significance of the structure and pursued methods to save it. Along with landscape architect Thomas Vint, who was head of the Park Service's Office of Design and Construction, the two officials successfully lobbied for rehabilitation of the bridge, which began in 1956. The bridge was pulled to one shore using an ingenious system of rails, cables and pulleys. The entire structure was field surveyed, with careful measurements of all timber elements taken. Photographs of this process exist in the records of the Yosemite Research Library (see Bibliographical References Continuation Sheet). Severely damaged elements were replaced using the same wood species, dimension and historical method of preparation. The bulk of the original siding was reused; the sugar pine shake roof was replaced. Despite the flood damage, the bridge was still robust enough to withstand the use of dynamite suspended under the roof to loosen the old shingles. The following structural elements were replaced: both truss lower chords, all transverse floor beams, and all knee braces. The timber crib substructure was replaced with concrete piers and abutments faced with stone. Articles appearing in local newspapers and journals, hailed the rehabilitation for its historical accuracy.

Various structural elements have been repaired since 1956. In 1972, Yosemite Park crews replaced five transverse floor beams. Five transverse floor beams were replaced in 1978 as well, with three of the 1972 transverse floor beams replaced. The above dates are approximate, as there is some contradiction in actual dates of replacements in the archives. In 1983, replaced elements included the stringers of the approach spans, several transverse floor beams, several truss elements, all knee braces and the wood decking. The 1983 restoration work also included replacement of the original iron tie rods with steel tie rods. In 2001, 5 transverse floor beams were repaired with sistered wood bolted to the existing fabric. The two inner stringers that span between the south abutment and south pier were replaced at this time. Rehabilitation work in 2002-2003 replaced additional transverse floor beams and compression members of the truss.

Current Appearance of the Wawona Covered Bridge

In form, materials, and many details, the Wawona Covered Bridge retains its historic appearance. The 1956 rehabilitation duplicated the original wood structural elements in-kind, using measurements taken from the original structure. The dimensions of the principal structural elements are as follows: top chord 13" x 14"; bottom chord and stringers 14" x 16"; transverse floor beams 14" x 14"; knee braces 4" x 6." Wherever possible,

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the 1956 rehabilitation reused sound timber structural elements. However, due to subsequent replacements, it appears that the clear-span interior stringers are the only principal supporting elements that are original. However, it appears that greater than 50% of the original siding for the covering structure is extant.

Several alteration campaigns have compromised the original appearance of the bridge. The 1956 rehabilitation changed the appearance of the abutments, which are presently composed of concrete faced with stone. The stringers replaced in 1983 duplicated the original dimensions accurately, but used a faux method of wood preparation, in which the timbers were sawn first and then dressed on the surface to give an appearance of hand hewing. The 1983 structural strengthening campaign is the only work documented by existing construction drawings. These drawings indicate that the grade of steel used in the existing tensioning rods could not be verified, thus the steel reinforcing rods were replaced with sizes from 1 1/4" to 1 3/4" in diameter, tied to the wood structural elements using 1" bearing plates and hex nuts. It is not clear from historic photographs of the first bridge if the reinforcing rods used a similar system of attachment to the wood structure.

Integrity of the Wawona Covered Bridge

The Wawona Covered Bridge retains a substantial degree of integrity according to the seven aspects of integrity defined by the National Register: location, design, setting, materials workmanship, feeling and association. The original design of the bridge was meticulously documented and duplicated during the 1956 rehabilitation. The workmanship of the envelope is still evident in the remaining original siding, the hand-hewn preparation of the original and replaced timber structural elements, and the hand-split shake roof. Although the substructure has been replaced, the existing stone-faced abutments relate the bridge to its surroundings and represent an appearance common to other structures in the Yosemite area.

The Wawona Covered Bridge retains integrity of setting, feeling and association. The structure remains at its historic location. The setting has been somewhat altered by the addition of buildings moved to the north of the bridge to create the Pioneer Yosemite History Center. However, many original buildings remain at Wawona, including the wagon shop constructed by the Washburn Group, located immediately south of the covered bridge. The existence of the bridge and wagon shop at their historic locations, as well as the Wawona Hotel and associated buildings are all contributing structures to a probable nomination of the Wawona district as a cultural landscape. The Wawona Hotel, adjacent buildings and over 16 acres of the hotel grounds were placed on the National Register in 1975. The Wawona Hotel was listed as a National Historic Landmark in 1987.

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SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Wawona Covered Bridge is significant at the state level under National Register Criterion A for its association within the contexts of transportation, entertainment and recreation. The bridge was constructed by Galen Clark, original guardian of the Yosemite Grant, in 1868 to service local horse, stock and pedestrian traffic, as well as the trail to Yosemite Valley. Clark also recognized the potential of both tourism and recreation if he could complete a road from Wawona to the Valley that could accommodate stage coach traffic, something that was not possible on the existing horse trail. Clark's attempts to construct this road encountered numerous financial and logistical difficulties, causing him to sell his Wawona holdings, which included the bridge, to the Washburn Group, consisting of Mariposa businessman Albert Henry Washburn ("Henry"), Mariposa County Assessor William Coffman, and Merced businessman Emery Chapman, in 1874. This group recognized the financial gains possible if stage routes could be operated into Yosemite Valley from towns associated with the railroad. The group already operated such a route from Mariposa to Wawona at the time of their purchase of the property from Galen Clark.¹ The stage lines proved quite successful, particularly following the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, which doubled the number of tourists visiting Yosemite.² In addition to the covered bridge's significance as a pioneer transportation link, the development of stage routes, and the tourist trade in Wawona and Yosemite, the bridge became a crucial link in the first stage road that led from Wawona - and its famed Mariposa grove of Giant Sequoias - to Yosemite Valley. Again, the Washburn Group was the driving force behind the road's construction, which was completed in 1875.³

The structure is significant at the state level under National Register Criterion C because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, a covered bridge. It represents an excellent example of vernacular engineering during the pioneer era in California. There are reportedly only twelve remaining covered bridges in California; the Wawona Covered Bridge is the only example of this historic type of construction in the western region of the National Park Service.

The Covered Bridge meets Criteria Consideration E for Reconstructed Properties. It retains some original fabric, but it has been extensively rebuilt and rehabilitated during the course of the twentieth century. These efforts made use of existing materials when possible, and replaced deteriorated elements in-kind, duplicating the original wood species, dimensions, and hand-hewn methods of preparation. The bridge remains at its original location in Wawona, and represents a unique element in the area's cultural landscape. Because of the accurate approach to reconstruction, the bridge retains integrity of design, location, workmanship, rehabilitation, feeling, and association.

¹ *Wawona Road, Yosemite National Park*, Historic American Engineering Record (HAER CA-148), p. 4.

² Hank Johnston, *The Yosemite Grant, 1864-1906*, p. 75.

³ HAER CA-148, p. 6.

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**CRITERION A: HISTORIC TRENDS IN ENTERTAINMENT, RECREATION AND
TRANSPORTATION**

The development of Wawona and its associated roads to Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees is intricately associated with the rise of pioneer transportation routes and tourism in the Yosemite region. The significant historical trends with which the Wawona Covered Bridge is associated are the development of stage routes to Yosemite Valley via Wawona and the completed transcontinental railroad and the building of the Wawona Road.

Galen Clark was one of the first men to explore Yosemite Valley, making the trip from the mining town of Mariposa in 1855.⁴ A late addition to the throngs of Eastern transplants seeking riches in the goldfields of California, Clark was captivated by the grandeur of Yosemite's scenery and filed a claim for 160 acres of land in what is now Wawona in 1856. He built his first structure, a windowless log cabin, in Wawona meadow in 1857.⁵ Sustaining himself entirely on his own wilderness abilities, Clark epitomized the early California Pioneer: "My nearest neighbor was 16 miles distant. I was entirely alone"⁶

Clark recognized the coming tourist trade in Yosemite and would feed travelers passing by his rustic cabin. By the 1860s, Clark had developed his primitive lodgings into an inn that was appreciated by visitors for its facilities and for Clark's hospitality. The inn became known as "Clark's Station," and it was the precursor of the current Wawona Hotel.⁷ In 1855, an employee for the Mariposa Ditch Company, Richard H. Ogg, found three Giant Sequoia trees near the South Fork of the Merced River. After hearing this description, Clark set out to find the trees. In the summer of 1857, Clark publicized what is now known as the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees.⁸

Clark's efforts to preserve the region, as well as his discoveries of outstanding scenery in the Wawona area, reportedly aided in the establishment of the Yosemite Grant, the first legislation enacted by Congress to preserve a wilderness area. The Grant included Yosemite Valley, and Clark's Mariposa Grove of Big Trees. Although decided in 1864, the Grant required approval by the State Legislature, which did not reconvene until 1866. On April 2, 1866, the Grant was ratified by the California legislature.

The Washburn Group was determined to develop Galen Clark's humble inn and associated buildings in

⁴ Johnston, p. 29.

⁵ Johnston, p. 89.

⁶ "Reminiscences of Galen Clark Yosemite Valley 1880," *Yosemite Nature Notes*, Vol. 29, No. 3, p. 23.

⁷ Sargent, p. 12.

⁸ Johnston, pp. 49-50. Greene, p. 47 also notes others that passed through the Grove, but Galen Clark and Milton Mann (one of the early trail builders of Yosemite) were the first to realize the tourism potential of the Grove.

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Wawona into a gateway to Yosemite National Park. They achieved considerable success, first by developing stage routes from Wawona to the newly completed Southern Pacific Railroad, and second by building a road from Wawona to Yosemite Valley.

Development of Stage Routes

Following completion of the Wawona stage road in 1875 (discussed in the next section), Henry Washburn dissolved his partnership with William Coffman and Emery Chapman, but remained intent on opening stage routes from the towns of Merced, Berenda and Madera. In 1877, Washburn incorporated the Yosemite Stage & Turnpike Company, forming partnerships with prominent Merced businessmen, which would enable the new company to operate a stage line from Merced to Wawona, via Mariposa. With this first line accomplished, Washburn's new stage company sought to increase their control of southern routes into Yosemite and looked to Madera, another stop along the railroad.⁹ On April 1, 1879, Washburn awaited his first passengers along the newly-completed Madera route as they arrived at Wawona.¹⁰ To reduce the length of stage travel and offer a more direct route into Wawona via the railroad, the Yosemite Stage & Turnpike Company persuaded the Southern Pacific Railroad to build a spur line from Berenda (seven miles north of Madera) north to Raymond in the Sierra foothills. This third stage route was completed in 1886 provided comparatively luxurious service, with daily trains from Los Angeles and San Francisco delivering eager tourists to Wawona.¹¹ By the late 1880s, these three routes increased tourist travel via Wawona substantially, bringing travelers from the East and the major cities of the West by rail and stage to Yosemite Valley.

In 1886, James Mason Hutchings one of the first travelers to Yosemite and later an innkeeper in the valley, wrote his noteworthy guide to the Yosemite region. In his book, *In the Heart of the Sierras*, Hutchings described Wawona as follows:

Wawona (the Indian name for Big Tree),¹² formerly called "Clark's," is the great central stage station where the Berenda, Madera and Mariposa routes all come together; and which also forms the starting point for the Mariposa Big Tree Grove. The very instant the bridge is crossed, on the way to the hotel, the whole place seems bustling with business, and business energy. Conveyances of all kinds, from a sulky to whole rows of passenger coaches, capable of carrying from one to eighteen or twenty persons each, at a load, come into sight. . . . Hay and grain wagons; freight teams coming and going; horses with or without harness; stables for a hundred animals; blacksmiths shops, carriage and paint shops; laundries and other buildings look at us from as many different stand-points.¹³

⁹ Shirley Sargent, *Yosemite's Historic Wawona*, pp. 28-31.

¹⁰ Sargent, p. 33.

¹¹ Sargent, p. 43.

¹² Wawona is actually the Southern Miwok name for the Dense-Flowered Evening Primrose. S. A. Barrett and E. W. Gifford, *Miwok Material Culture: Indian Life in the Yosemite Region* (1933).

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Hutchings describes a bustling Wawona, containing shops and services of a typical pioneer town and filled with tourists arriving from the various stage lines, eagerly anticipating their visits to the Yosemite Valley or the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees; or relaxing on the generous veranda of the Wawona Hotel, rebuilt by Henry Washburn in 1879. For those traveling to the valley from Wawona, the first landmark they encountered was the Wawona Covered Bridge.

The Wawona Road

Following establishment of the Yosemite Grant in 1864, Commissioners granted private companies or individuals franchise rights to construct access roads into Yosemite Valley. The owners could collect tolls for road use as compensation for their construction costs. A stipulation of the agreement was the right of the Commission to purchase the road back from the owners for the cost of construction.¹⁴ Galen Clark used this incentive to attempt construction of a stage road from Wawona to Yosemite Valley. However, he proved unable to complete the road due to financial and construction problems and sold his Wawona holdings to the Washburn Group in 1875. A section of the deed is reprinted and appears in the discussion regarding National Register Criterion C.

After their purchase of Clark's Station from Galen Clark, the Washburn Group renamed Wawona "Big Tree Station." The Group proceeded to contract with builder John Conway to construct a road from Wawona to Yosemite Valley, which was completed in June 1875. The event was cause for much celebration and a great party was held in the valley, which included the Yosemite Band, speeches, poetry recitals, numerous tourists, and throngs of locals who made the trip from nearby towns. The Mariposa Gazette noted, "The celebration on the 22nd at Yosemite of the completion of the wagon road, has greatly depopulated our population."¹⁵ Following this landmark event, the Washburn Group completed a road from Wawona to the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees in 1878, enabling tourists to view the splendor of the Giant Sequoias from the relative comforts of a stagecoach. Galen Clark's Wawona Bridge was covered in 1878 as well.¹⁶

Tourism to Yosemite increased substantially because of the Wawona Road, for it was regarded as the most scenic route into the famed valley. A Congressional Report on the state of the Wawona Road published in 1900 noted the road's significant impact on tourist travel to the park:

Since the construction of this road, a large majority of the tourists visiting the Yosemite Valley have selected it as their route of travel, induced so to do by the location of this road into the Mariposa Big

¹³ James M. Hutchings, *In the Heart of the Sierras*, pp. 253-254.

¹⁴ Linda Wedel Greene, *Yosemite, The Park and Its Resources*, p. 91.

¹⁵ *Mariposa Gazette*, July 24, 1875. Copy in Wawona Road File. 979.447, Y20-d, Yosemite Research Library.

¹⁶ HAER CA-148, p. 6.

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Tree Grove and the points of interest on the road, including Inspiration Point and Glacier Point; also because this road traverses the National Park and enters the valley on the south side thereof, where the most comprehensive views of the wonders of the valley are obtained¹⁷

The Wawona Covered Bridge also carried the first automobile to travel to Yosemite, which entered the park via the Wawona road in 1900. Known as a "Locomobile," and powered by steam, the vehicle was driven by photographer and promoter Oliver Lippincott. On June 22, 1900, Lippincott arrived at the Wawona Hotel amidst a throng of eager onlookers. He proceeded to cross the Wawona Covered Bridge and continued on to Yosemite Valley via the Wawona Road.¹⁸

Transportation to Recreation

The Wawona Covered Bridge was originally built simply as a functional river crossing. It fulfilled this role for almost a century before heavy flood damage in 1955 called its continued existence into question. NPS director Conrad Wirth initially favored demolishing the structure after historic documentation and replacing it with a modern bridge. Superintendent John Preston and Thomas Vint, the service's Chief of Design and Construction defended the bridge as an important historic artifact. Vint stated to the regional Chief of Interpretation that "The bridge at Wawona is the only covered bridge under the jurisdiction of the Service and for that reason, if for none other, we are interested in its preservation."¹⁹ A strong argument in favor of preservation was Yosemite's development of the Pioneer Yosemite History Center on a site adjacent to the bridge as a part of its Mission 66 development projects. The History Center was intended as an attraction to draw visitors out of Yosemite Valley and so lessen crowding there. By 1956, the covered bridge was specifically included in the park's Mission 66 prospectus as a key element of the History Center for the interpretation of "early Yosemite trails, roads, and transportation."²⁰ Through this process the covered bridge was transformed from a working transportation resource for visitors to an interpretive and recreational resource emblematic of these visitors from years gone by.

Summary: The Wawona Covered Bridge as Gateway and Destination

The covered bridge was and remains an important component of the Wawona visitor experience. The bridge was a vital link in local pioneer trade, carrying horses, stock and people on business in Wawona or Yosemite Valley. By the late 1870s, stages regularly used the bridge; automobiles followed until the bridge was taken out of vehicular service in 1937. A diverse and important list of travelers has taken the bridge, including Theodore Roosevelt and

¹⁷ *Report of the Commission on Roads in Yosemite National Park, California.* Senate Document no. 155; 56th Congress, 1st Session, February 8, 1900, p. 5.

¹⁸ Johnston, pp. 214-216.

¹⁹ Quoted in *Wawona Covered Bridge, Yosemite National Park*, Historic American Engineering Record (HAER CA-106), p. 4.

²⁰ Memorandum from Lawrence C. Merriam, Regional Director, Region Four, to Director, December 19, 1956; "Wawona Visitor Center - History," December, 1956. Central Files, D-18 Master Plan 1 of 9, Acc. 4972, Shelf 72, Yosemite National Park Archives (both).

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Ralph Waldo Emerson. For politicians and scholars, as well as typical tourists seeking the grandeur of Yosemite, the bridge was a vital link between Wawona and Yosemite Valley. However, Wawona itself was a destination, with Galen Clark's Mariposa Grove of Big Trees a short stage ride from the Wawona Hotel and the covered bridge.

CRITERION C: ARCHITECTURAL/ENGINEERING SIGNIFICANCE OF THE COVERED BRIDGE

The date of initial construction is 1868. An article from the Mariposa Gazette states, "We learn from Mr. Galen Clark that by tomorrow he will have his bridge completed across the South Fork of the Merced River." The date of this article is July 3, 1868.²¹ The original uncovered bridge was constructed by Galen Clark over the South Fork of the Merced River, as Clark desired to collect tolls for local and stock traffic as well as horseman riding the early trail to Yosemite Valley and eventually hoped to develop a stage road to link Wawona to Yosemite Valley. The following excerpt from Clark's deed of sale to the Washburn Group confirms the existence of the bridge prior to 1875:

Sale of Clark & Moore's to Washburn, Chapman & Coffman recorded on page 467, Book 2 of Deeds, Mariposa County, dated January 6, 1875; includes a hotel, lodging houses, bar, blacksmith shop, sawmill, bridge across the South Fork of the Merced River, and all other improvements.²²

After their purchase of Clark's Wawona holdings, the Washburn Group covered the bridge in 1878. Subsequent structural rehabilitation and strengthening occurred in 1900, and also in the 1930s after Wawona was added to Yosemite National Park. The bridge was taken out of automobile service in 1937 but was rehabilitated by the Civilian Conservation Corps to serve local pedestrian and stock traffic (see the continuation sheets for Section 7). This work included repairs to several transverse floor beams, replacement of some of the wood siding, and the addition of stone to the timber crib foundations.

Following the 1955 floods, various replacement schemes for the Wawona Covered Bridge were considered by Park staff. Letters and memoranda from the National Park Service files and the archives of the Yosemite Research Library indicate a strong sentiment existed in the 1950s to save the bridge. Wendell Robie, a resident of Auburn and a local naturalist and philanthropist, wrote to Congressman Clair Engle noting, "it is of special interest to people of Tuolumne, Mariposa Counties, and those historical interests around the state to see this

²¹ Quoted in HAER CA-148, p. 2.

²² Quoted in Memorandum from Donald McHenry, Park naturalist, to Park Superintendent John Preston, June 29, 1954, in Wawona Covered Bridge file, National Park Service Western Regional Office, Oakland, California. The listing of "Moore" in the deed refers to Edwin Moore, who purchased a half interest in the Wawona property from Galen Clark to alleviate Clark's financial difficulties in 1869.

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remaining covered bridge in Yosemite park continued and maintained.”²³ Congressman Engle forwarded Robie's letter to Park leadership, stating “I would like to be brought up to date on the status of the case.”²⁴ Letters from Park Superintendent John Preston and landscape architect Thomas Vint (located in the archives of the Yosemite Research Library) also discuss the importance of preserving the bridge. The existence of this correspondence among Park staff, citizens and governmental representatives, testifies to the historical significance of the Wawona Covered Bridge. The letters from Park staff, citizens, and governmental officials successfully built a constituency to save the structure.

Rehabilitation of the bridge commenced in 1956. The entire structure was field surveyed, with careful measurements of all timber elements taken. The process was photographed extensively. Severely damaged elements were replaced using the same wood species, dimension and historical method of preparation. The bulk of the original siding was reused; the cedar shake roof was replaced. The following structural elements were replaced: both truss lower chords, all transverse floor beams, and all knee braces. The timber crib substructure was replaced with concrete piers and abutments faced with stone. Although considerable replacement was necessary, correspondence prior to and during the rehabilitation note the importance of “preserving as many structure members as possible intact.”²⁵ Articles appearing in local newspapers and *Yosemite Nature Notes* hailed the rehabilitation for its historical accuracy. Examples of these articles are found in the Bibliography.

Although thought to be based on a Howe Truss plan, the bridge is a modified Queen Post design, with metal rods tying the truss system. This design is relatively unique for covered bridges, particularly in the West.²⁶ The engineering of this bridge combined elements of the Howe truss design with a more vernacular Queen Post truss system.²⁷ The vernacular approach to the bridge's covering structure, which was integrated to the existing truss structural system in 1878, adds to the unique qualities of the Wawona Covered Bridge. In addition, the surviving interior stringers of the structure are testimony to the skill needed to prepare the 106-foot long timbers in the Nineteenth Century, which included the laborious tasks of felling, transporting and hand-hewing great trees into the required dimensions.

23 Letter from Wendell T. Robie to Congressman Clair Engle, File 979.447, Y-19, Yosemite Research Library. The letter is undated, but was written after the 1955 flood and before rehabilitation commenced in 1956. Robie and his wife Inez went on to form the Wendell and Inez Robie Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving California's scenic land.

24 Letter from Congressman Clair Engle to Conrad Wirth, Director of the National Park Service, File 979.447, Y-19, Yosemite Research Library.

25 Telegram from Associate Director Scoyen, National Park Service to Yosemite National Park Superintendent Preston, dated November 7, 1956, File 979.447, Y-19, Yosemite Research Library.

26 Kramer A. Adams, *Covered Bridges of the West*, published in 1963, lists the covered bridges remaining in Oregon, Washington, and California at that time. A letter from Adams to Richard T. Hart, Yosemite Park naturalist, dated September 25, 1962, also notes that the bridge “is located at the highest elevation of any covered bridge in the nation.”

27 HAER CA-148, p. 5.

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The Wawona Covered Bridge is one of only twelve remaining covered bridges in California. A structure type that continues to vanish from the American cultural landscape, the Wawona Covered Bridge is an extant example of a type of construction that is not considered common in the West. The Wawona Bridge is the only example of its type found in the western region of the National Park Service. The bridge has been linked historically to the Wawona Hotel, pioneer transportation, the development of stage roads, and the tourism industry of Yosemite National Park for its entire existence.

CRITERIA CONSIDERATION E: RECONSTRUCTED PROPERTIES

Today the Wawona Covered Bridge remains in a prominent tourist region of Yosemite National Park enabling it to be experienced by a variety of tourists. The bridge currently aids in interpretation of the National Park Service's Mission 66, a plan that included the development of the Pioneer Yosemite History Center located north of the existing bridge. Mission 66 was implemented in 1955 by the Director of the National Park Service, Conrad Wirth, as a nationwide plan to improve interpretation of National Park history, protect wild and historic resources and improve visitor services. At Wawona, the Pioneer History Center was a manifestation of this plan to educate the visiting public about the early history of this vital area of the Yosemite region. The Wawona Covered Bridge was viewed as a critical component of the Pioneer History Center during its creation and remains a vital link in interpreting the history of the Wawona area today.

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- Letter from author Kramer A. Adams to Richard T. Hart, Yosemite National Park naturalist, dated September 25, 1962, File 979.447, Y-19, Yosemite Research Library.
- Letter from Wendell T. Robie to Congressman Clair Engle, File 979.447, Y-19, Yosemite Research Library (Undated but between 1955 and 1957).
- Mariposa Gazette*, July 24, 1875. Copy from Wawona Road File, 979.447, Y20-d, Yosemite Research Library.

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Memorandum to Park Superintendent John Preston from Donald McHenry, Park Naturalist, June 29, 1954,
Wawona Covered Bridge file, National Park Service Western Regional Office, Oakland, California.

“Reminiscences of Galen Clark Yosemite Valley California 1880.” Published in Yosemite Nature Notes,
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Wawona Covered Bridge
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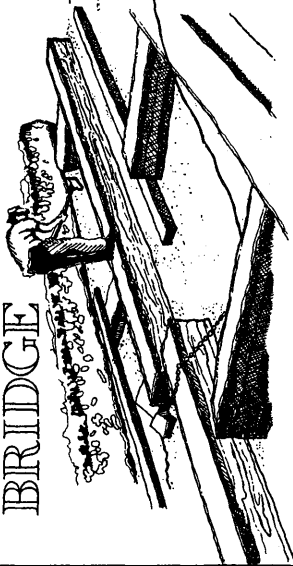
VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The covered bridge that spans the South Fork of the Merced River at the Pioneer Yosemite History Center, Wawona, Yosemite National Park, California. The boundaries for the property include a distance of 25 feet surrounding the bridge in all four directions to include lateral distance for the wingwalls, outriggers (transverse floor beams), and the wood fence at both entrances of the structure. The boundary is shown as a dashed line on the attached sketch map, Page 2, of this section.

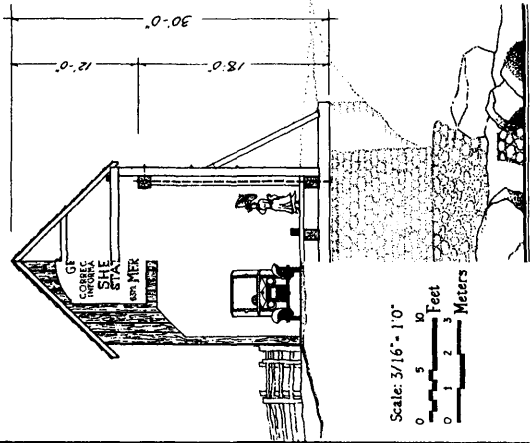
BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The 25-foot buffer around the footprint of the bridge was chosen to include projections of the bridge beyond the deck and covering structure, such as the abutments, wingwalls, and outriggers.

WAWONA COVERED BRIDGE



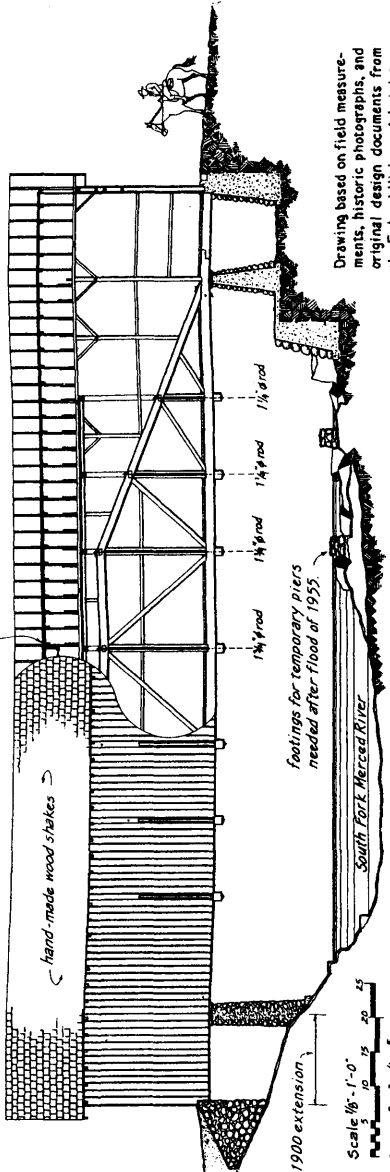
The main truss timbers of the bridge are hand-hewn ponderosa pine. When reconstructed in 1956, historic techniques and tools were employed.



Scale: 3/16" = 1'-0"
 0 5 10 Feet
 0 1 2 Meters

ELEVATION / SECTION

fire extinguishing system

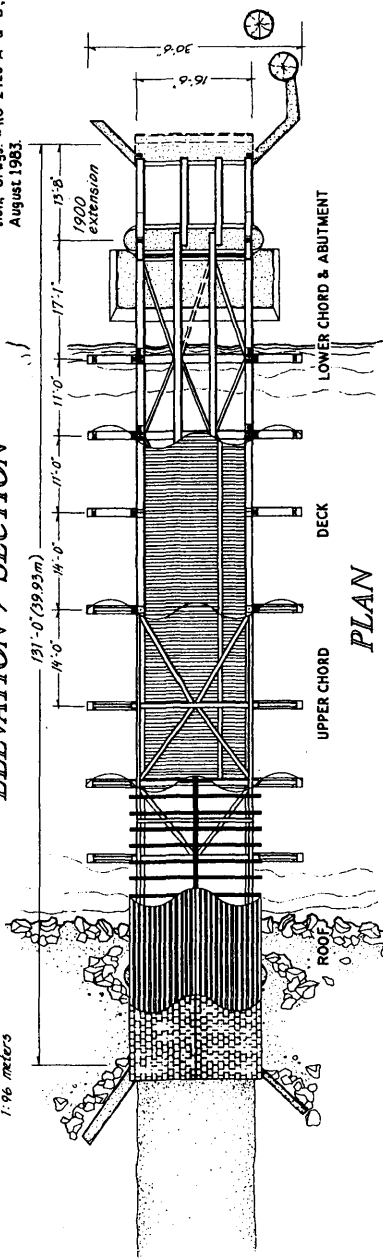


footings for temporary piers needed after flood of 1955

Scale: 1/8" = 1'-0"
 0 1 2 3 4 5 Meters

ELEVATION / SECTION

Drawing based on field measurements, historic photographs, and original design documents from the Federal Highway Administration, Drawings # RG 2420-A & B, August 1983.



LOWER CHORD & ABUTMENT

DECK

UPPER CHORD

PLAN

Spanning the South Fork of the Merced River in the southern part of Yosemite National Park, the Wawona Covered Bridge was originally constructed as an open-deck structure. It is supported by modified Queen-Post trusses of native woods, braced by steel (originally iron) tie rods sandwiched between vertical hand-hewn ponderosa pine and floor beams are hand-hewn ponderosa pine, while vertical and diagonal members are Douglas fir. The housing, added in 1928, consists of an internal frame of Douglas fir and external tie braces extending from the trusswork floor beams. The bridge originally rested on wooden crib fills with stone rubble, these were later replaced in 1957 by reinforced concrete piers and abutments faced with stone.

The Wawona Bridge was built in 1868 as an open pony-t-us bridge by Galen Clark, the first settler at Wawona and the first Guardian of the Yosemite Grant. In 1978, the bridge was acquired by Washburn Coffman & Chapman and converted to a covered bridge, subsequently ordered by Washburn to remain in the original Wawona home. John Conroy, builder of the original Wawona Bridge, was contracted to cover the bridge and used wood from Washburn's sawmill. The bridge was extended in 1900 by 40-foot additions at each end. The structure has been repaired numerous times, and following a major flood in 1955, WGS abandoned and reconstructed the oldest surviving bridges in California. Now a part of the Pioneer Yosemite History Center, the bridge continues to carry horse, stage and pedestrian traffic.

This recording project is part of the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER), a long-range program to document historically significant engineering and industrial works in the United States. HAER is an agency of the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. The Yosemite National Park Bridges Project was co-sponsored by Yosemite National Park, Michael Finley, Superintendent, Kevin Cann, Chief of Maintenance and Engineering, the NPS Roads and Bridges Program, John Engle, Manager, and the Historic American Buildings Survey/HAER, under the general direction of Robert J. Apesch, Chief.

The fieldwork, measured drawings, histories and photographs, were completed under the direction of Eric Deary, and supervised by Architectural Historian, Ted C. Grubb, field supervisor, Architectural Historian, Diana Belmont, David R. Fleming, Mark-Claude LeSautour, Project Historian, Richard H. Quin, Formal on-site photography was done by Brian C. Egan.

WAWONA COVERED BRIDGE

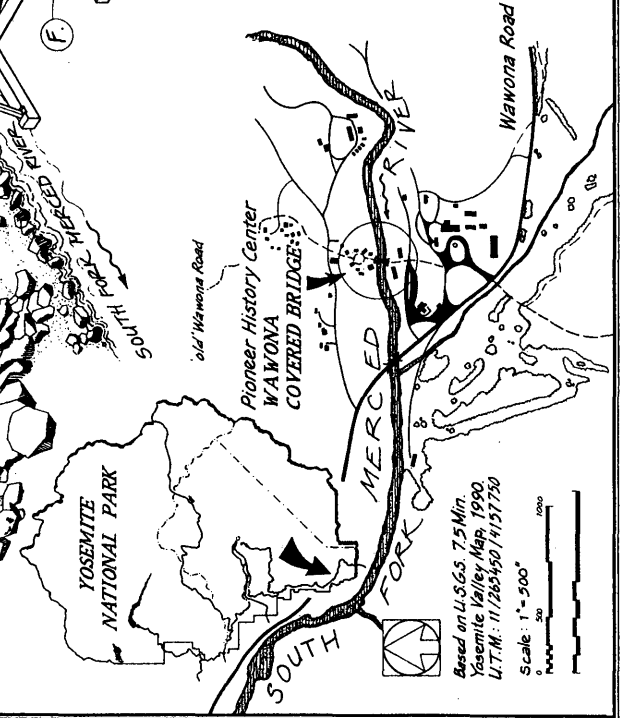
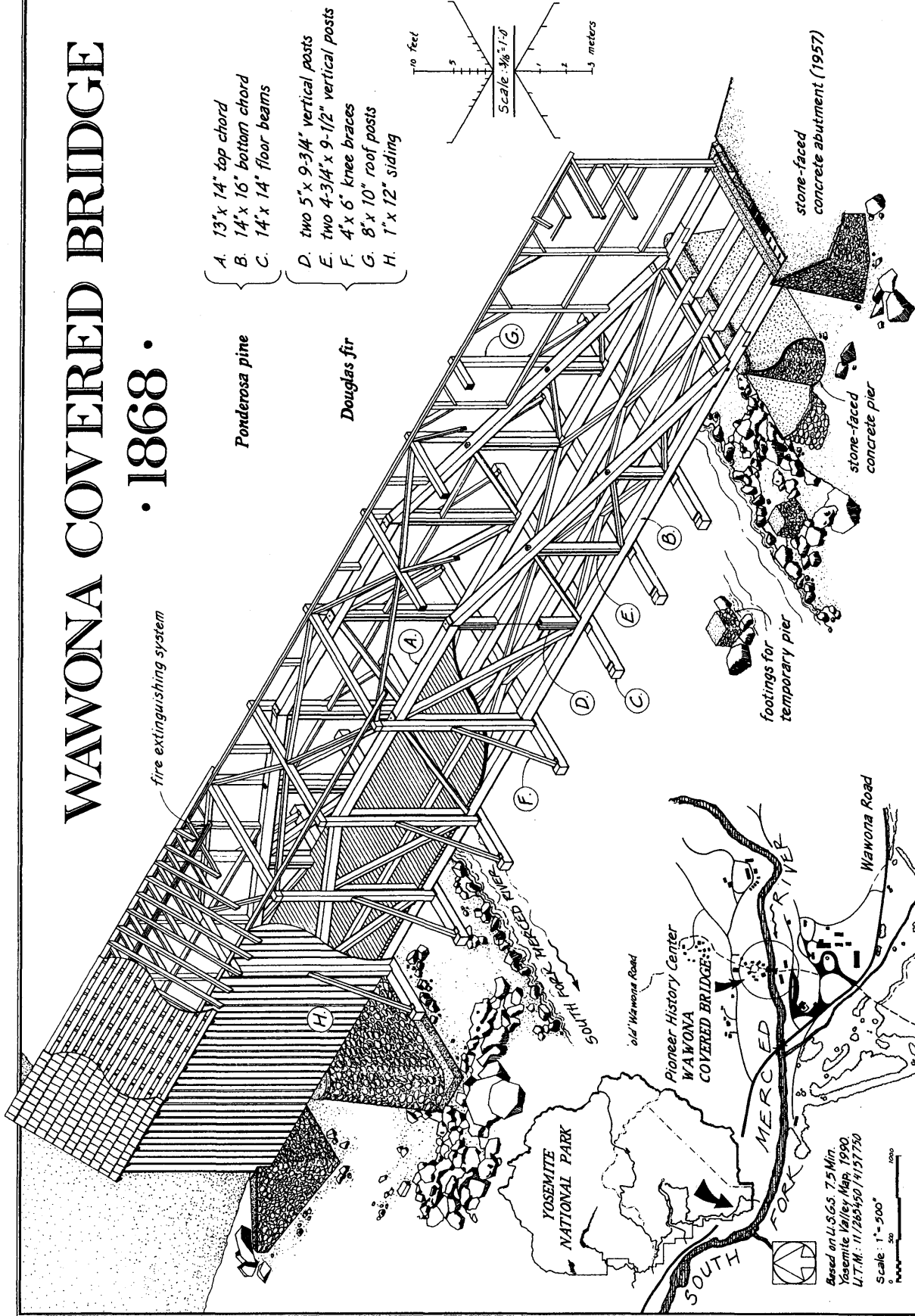
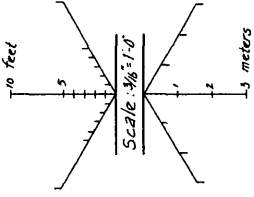
• 1868 •

fire extinguishing system

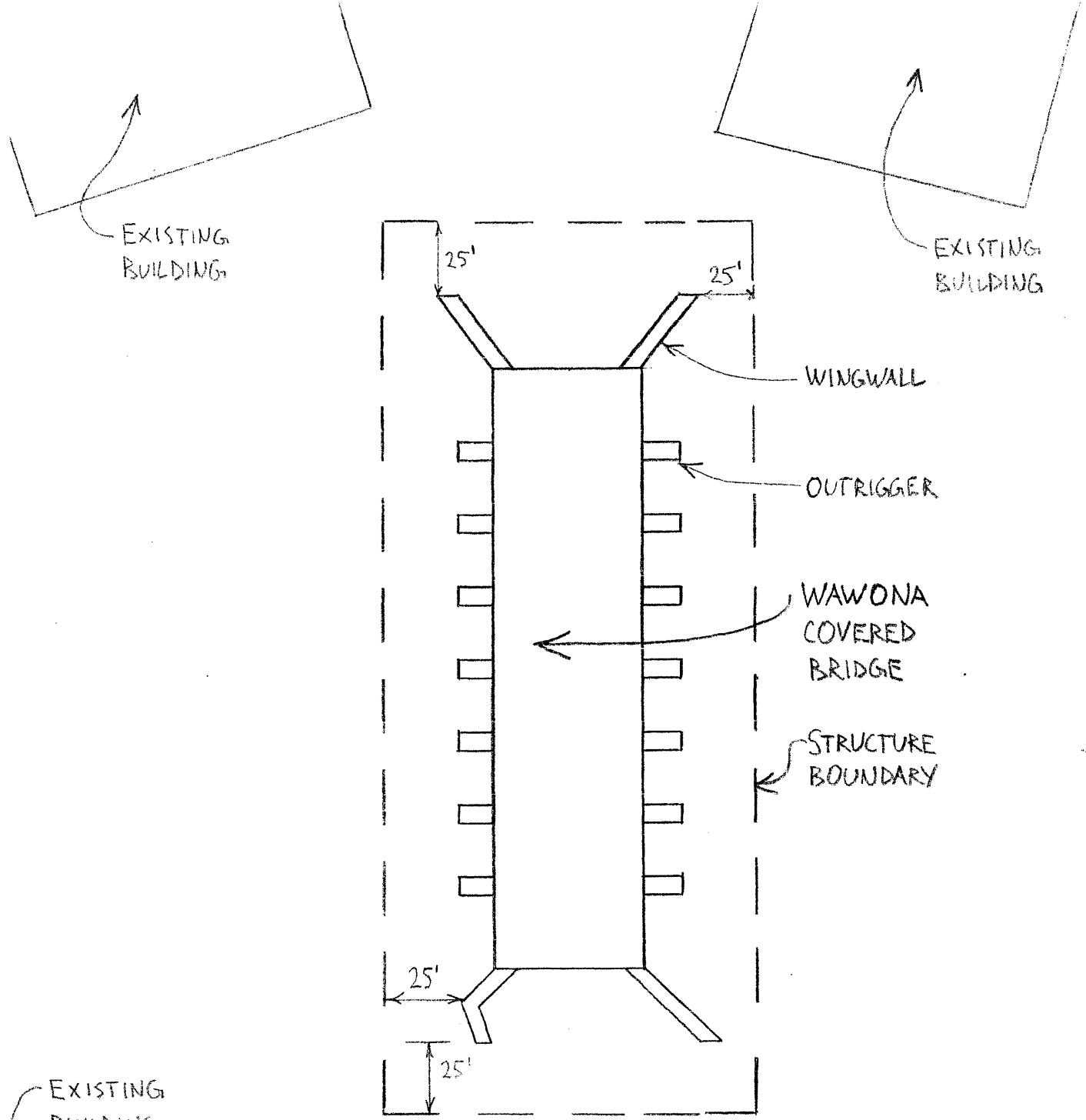
Ponderosa pine

Douglas fir

- A. 13" x 14" top chord
- B. 14" x 16" bottom chord
- C. 14" x 14" floor beams
- D. two 5" x 9-3/4" vertical posts
- E. two 4-3/4" x 9-1/2" vertical posts
- F. 4" x 6" knee braces
- G. 8" x 10" roof posts
- H. 1" x 12" siding



Based on U.S.G.S. 7.5 Min.
Yosemite Valley Map, 1990
U.T.M.: 11285450 / 4151750
Scale: 1" = 500'
0 100 200 300 400



WAWONA COVERED BRIDGE
 NATIONAL REGISTER NOMINATION

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(NOT TO SCALE)