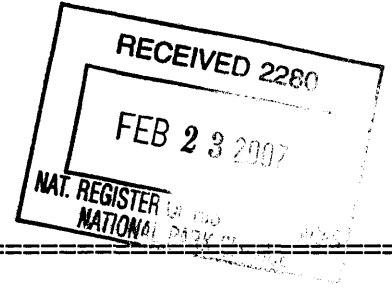


257

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM



1. Name of Property

historic name Keel Creek Bridge

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

2. Location

street & number State Highway 31 over Keel Creek not for publication N/A  
city or town Coalgate vicinity X  
state Oklahoma code OK county Coal code 029 zip code 74358

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  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 \_\_\_ statewide  locally. ( N/A See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature] \_\_\_\_\_ 2-20-07  
Signature of certifying official Date

Oklahoma Historical Society, SHPO  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria. ( \_\_\_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:  
 entered in the National Register Ethan H. Beall 4.4.07  
\_\_\_ 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] \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Keeper Date  
of Action

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5. Classification

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Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

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

Category of Property (Check only one box)

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

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>      </u>	<u>      </u>	buildings
<u>      </u>	<u>      </u>	sites
<u>  1  </u>	<u>      </u>	structures
<u>      </u>	<u>      </u>	objects
<u>  1  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register   0  

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

---

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: TRANSPORTATION Sub: Road Related

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: TRANSPORTATION Sub: Road Related

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: Concrete slab bridge

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE: Sandstone

roof \_\_\_\_\_

walls \_\_\_\_\_

other CONCRETE

\_\_\_\_\_

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

=====  
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.)

A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

B removed from its original location.

C a birthplace or a 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)

TRANSPORTATION

POLITICS/GOVERNMENT

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

Period of Significance 1939-1940

=====  
8. Statement of Significance (Continued)  
=====

Significant Dates 1940  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)  
N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Architect/Builder WPA, builder  
\_\_\_\_\_

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

=====  
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)

- 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 # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data

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

Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

=====  
10. Geographical Data  
=====

Acreage of Property less than 1

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	<u>14</u>	<u>761810</u>	<u>3833250</u>	3	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____	4	_____	_____

N/A 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 Jim Gabbert/architectural historian

organization OK/SHPO date August 30, 2006

street & number 2401 N. Laird telephone (405) 522-4478

city or town Oklahoma City state OK zip code 73105

=====  
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 location.

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 the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form

Keel Creek Bridge  
Coal County, Oklahoma

=====  
Property Owner  
=====

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Oklahoma Department of Transportation

street & number 200 NE 21<sup>st</sup> St telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town Oklahoma City state OK zip code 73107



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 9

Keel Creek Bridge  
name of property  
Coal County, Oklahoma  
county and State

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The Keel Creek Bridge is a three span, concrete slab bridge supported on stone piers and abutments. It carries State Highway 31 over Keel Creek in eastern Coal County, seven miles northeast of the county seat, Coalgate. State Highway 31 runs directly north/south here, but generally runs from southwest to northeast across the county. The bridge is located in a rural area characterized by a rolling terrain broken by small drainages. The surrounding landscape is primarily pastureland broken up by small woodlots. The bridge crosses Keel Creek, a tributary of Muddy Boggy Creek

Keel Creek Bridge is a concrete slab bridge of three spans. It has simple post and beam concrete rails, a concrete deck, and stone piers and abutments. The total length of the bridge is sixty-six feet. Each span is twenty-two feet and the width is twenty five feet. The height of the bridge is between fifteen and eighteen feet at the center span.

The deck of the bridge is smooth-finished concrete, approximately eighteen inches thick. A rail system of simple concrete posts, eighteen inches in height, and concrete beams runs atop a slight curb on each side of the bridge. Each of the three spans has four posts and three beams. The posts are rectangular, with the wider side having a single vertical indentation as a decorative element. Stamped into the top of the concrete curb, two per side, is a shield that reads "WPA 1940."

The deck slabs are supported by stone piers and abutments. The piers are battered, and consist of regular ashlar, quarry faced stone blocks. The mortar joints of the piers are extruded. The stonework exhibits evidence of skilled workmanship in its regularity and uniformity. The abutments are also regular ashlar stone with extruded mortar joints. The wing walls extend fifteen to eighteen feet out from the bridge at an angle of approximately thirty degrees. The angled wing walls step down to match the grade of the raised roadbed.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 10

Keel Creek Bridge  
name of property  
Coal County, Oklahoma  
county and State

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**Summary**

The Keel Creek Bridge, carrying State Highway 31 over Keel Creek in northeastern Coal County, is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A, for its significance in the transportation history of the area and for its association with the federal work relief agency, the Work Projects Administration. When constructed, the highway that this bridge carried was State highway 34. Infrastructure improvements were a large focus of the WPA and improving a significant transportation fit well into the federal program's mission. In using stone as the primary load bearing material for the bridge, the project met another need of the relief agency – putting as many men to work as possible.

**Background**

Coal County is located in southeastern Oklahoma, along the dividing line between the historic Chickasaw and Choctaw nations. The land is broken, hilly and cut by drainages. The major drainage systems are the Clear Boggy and Muddy Boggy creeks, which run to the south and east. The 336,000 acres of Coal County were carved by the Constitutional Convention out of the Choctaw Nation as Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory were wed into a new state. Its name is derived from its chief economic commodity, discovered in the area in great quantities around 1880. Sparsely settled by the Choctaw, after 1880 the area began to attract the attention of coal mining companies, especially those owned by railroads. The discovery of high grade, shallow seams of coal was an economic boon for the Choctaw, who received lease fees and royalties off of the coal mining operations in the area. Mining camps coalesced into small communities – Phillips and Liddle, named for local coal mining operators (Liddle later became Coalgate), Lehigh, named for the famous coal mining city in Pennsylvania. These towns were concentrated in the southeast portion of the county, where most of the readily available coal was located. As populations increased and as Indian lands were surveyed and allotted, these mining camps/towns were platted into town sites. Agriculturally, the land was fairly productive, and cotton became a staple crop. The four rail lines that crossed Coal County helped to make both Coalgate and Lehigh, with three rail lines each, major commodity shipping centers, while towns like Clarita and Centrahoma were established as agricultural shipping centers along single rail lines.

Coal County came into being with statehood on November 16, 1907. The county seat was Lehigh, but an election in June, 1908 named Coalgate as the new seat of government. Although coal was an important factor in the area's economy, the county was still considered poor. Almost immediately, the county went into debt to pay for a courthouse and infrastructure improvements. Coal mining and agriculture dominated the economic life of the county to such an extent that when both failed in the immediate post-World War I years, the effects were felt county-wide. Coal mines closed nearly everywhere as the railroads, the chief owners and customers of the mines, switched from coal-fired steam engines to fuel oil. Coincidentally, the boll weevil devastated the cotton crop. The twin calamities spelled doom for the overall economy of the county. Bank after bank closed. The *Coalgate Record Register* noted in

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 11

Keel Creek Bridge  
name of property  
Coal County, Oklahoma  
county and State

January, 1924 that “During 1923, two banks failed in Lehigh, one in Clarita, and one in Coalgate. The only banks left in Coal County are: Centrahoma 1, Clarita 1, Tupelo 2, Bromide 1.” Soon, the railroads began to stop service, abandoning their lines one by one.

Popularly, the Great Depression started with the stock market crash on Black Friday, October 25, 1929. In rural America, the economic downturn had begun a decade earlier as agricultural prices fell and debts mounted. Coal County suffered during the 1920s, losing population and its economic base. The Great Depression served to bring other areas down to Coal County’s level. The promise of relief through Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal was one that the county embraced. However, it often seemed to the residents that even the New Deal might pass them by. One of the early New Deal programs was the ECW, Emergency Conservation Work, of which the Civilian Conservation Corps was a focal point. Created in the First 100 Days of Roosevelt’s administration in 1933, the CCC was put to work in parks, in forests, and in the fields across the country. It soon became evident that having a CCC camp nearby was a boon to a local economy. Not only did the enrollees pay help the economy, but the day-to-day operation of the camp meant that local suppliers would benefit.

Communities and counties actively lobbied for CCC camps to be located within their jurisdiction. Coal County was no exception. By 1937, the editors of the *Coalgate Record Register* were feeling slighted by the New Deal administrators in Washington and Oklahoma City, “There is not a county in the state that could make better use of a CCC camp than this county. Other counties have CCC camps – they have armories, post offices, parks, swimming pools, and many other improvements too numerous to mention.”<sup>1</sup> The creation of the Work Progress Administration in March 1935 added yet another program that the county might tap into for relief. The first WPA project announced was for street leveling in Coalgate, a \$2,138 project announced by Congressman Percy Gassaway on August 15, 1935.<sup>2</sup> In the first year of the program, Coal County projects were small – including malaria control, sewing rooms, a library, and street improvements. A total of just over \$98,000 in federal money poured into the county in the first year of the WPA, but again the locals felt as if they were not getting their fair share; \$35,456,421 had been spent across the state.<sup>3</sup> By 1937, they were grateful for what projects they did get, listing them under the headline “Year’s WPA Projects Big Help to County.” In detailing the county projects, which at their peak employed over 900 men and women, averaging 340 on any given day, it is clear that drought relief projects and infrastructure improvements topped the list of activities. Farm to Market roads and street projects in Coalgate accounted for the majority of spending, with over 20 miles of road graded, drained, and resurfaced; over 300 culverts and drop structures constructed; five new bridges; school improvements in Coalgate and Lehigh; and farm ponds, drainage ditches and wells excavated across the county.<sup>4</sup>

1 *Coalgate Record Register*, June 17, 1937, page 1.

2 *Coalgate Courier*, August 15, 1935, page 1.

3 *Coalgate Courier*, October 31, 1935, page 1; March 12, 1936, page 1; June 4, 1936, page 1. *Daily Oklahoman*, September 27, 1936, page 1.

4 *Coalgate Record Register*, September 23, 1937, page 1

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 12

Keel Creek Bridge  
name of property  
Coal County, Oklahoma  
county and State

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The National Youth Administration (NYA) was busy in Coal County, as well. Terracing of farm land, construction of a Boy Scout Hut and a homemaking/sewing room were among the projects undertaken by the teenagers of the NYA in 1938. The WPA construction program included school projects in Cairo, Bromide, Tupelo, and Coalgate but it was roads and infrastructure that again dominated the workload. The Coalgate Chamber of Commerce, convinced that designation of a new state highway through the county to supplement US Highway 75 would attract investment, pushed for the Farm to Market road being constructed by the WPA between Bromide and Coalgate to be upgraded to a state highway. They were also interested in a road heading northeast out of Coalgate being considered.<sup>5</sup>

Because Coal County's various projects were not as visible as those in other counties (no armories, swimming pools, parks, etc.), they did not seem to attract as much public attention. In the spring of 1940, the local administrators of the WPA announced an "Open House Week," inviting citizens to visit ongoing WPA projects. The local newspaper enthusiastically touted the idea. "We may not be in a position to really appreciate what has been done if we don't take inventory and check up." "We have been able to obtain roads, bridges, buildings and other things of value that possibly could not have been built if we had no participated and sponsored these many projects."<sup>6</sup>

The New Deal programs had a significant impact on Coal County, especially in terms of infrastructure. Street improvements in the towns, drainage ditches in towns and country, and miles and miles of Farm to Market roads provided a safe, efficient transportation network in a county known for its poor roads. Across the state of Oklahoma, the WPA was involved in the construction of 2,712 bridge and viaducts.<sup>7</sup> A total number of bridges constructed in Coal County is not available, but between 10 and 15 are known to have been built, including two large steel truss bridges and numerous smaller, multi-span concrete bridges. These bridges, located on US 75 and the numerous Farm to Market roads built or improved by the WPA, were constructed of quality materials to (then) current Department of transportation specifications.

**Keel Creek Bridge**

The main road heading northeast out of Coalgate is State Highway 31. This road passes through the community of Cottonwood. Approximately five miles outside of Coalgate, the road branches; SH 31 turns directly north while SH 131 continues northeast, both eventually heading to McAlester. SH 31 carries traffic from the southwest corner of the county, near Bromide, to the northeast corner of the county. This is the highway that the Coalgate Chamber of Commerce lobbied for so strenuously in 1938. Improvements to the road were made in the southwest section in 1938; it was 1939-1940 before improvements were begun on the section northeast of Coalgate.

5 *Coalgate Courier*, February 3, 1938, page 1; April 10, 1938; July 28, 1938, page 1; August 31, 1938, page 1.

6 *Coalgate Courier*, May 16, 1940, page 1.

7 U.S. Work Projects Administration, Oklahoma, "Final Report of Activities and Accomplishments," 1943.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 13

Keel Creek Bridge  
name of property  
Coal County, Oklahoma  
county and State

=====

State Highway 31 heads directly north from its junction with SH 131. The topography of the area is rolling, cut by streambeds that drain into Muddy Boggy Creek. Keel Creek is one of the larger tributaries of Muddy Boggy; it drains from northeast to southwest, joining with the Muddy Boggy in Section 32, township 2 North, Range 11 East, approximately 3.5 miles northeast of Coalgate.

In 1940, a Farm to Market road project was approved for a north/south road that would cross Keel Creek in Section 27, T2N, R11E. The streambed of Keel Creek is fairly deep and fairly wide at the point where the road was to cross. A masonry and concrete bridge design was chosen for the location. The abutments for the two-span bridge would be stone, allowing for the maximum use of labor; the deck would be a poured concrete slab, meeting state Department of Transportation specifications for strength and width.

The completed bridge is not dissimilar to others constructed in Coal County during the same time period. On SH 131, ½ mile east of the junction with SH 31 are two nearly identical bridges. What sets the Keel Creek Bridge apart is the quality of workmanship shown in the masonry. It is evident that the workers employed during the construction of the Keel Creek Bridge were either more skilled stonemasons or had improved their skills while constructing other similar bridges in the county.

In comparing the masonry of the Keel Creek bridge to the other, similar bridges, it is evident that more skill and more care went into its construction. The twin bridges on SH 131 are two spans, with a single central pier. The Keel Creek Bridge is three spans, with two piers. The height of the twin bridges is about five feet; Keel Creek lies nearly eighteen feet below the bridge deck. The central piers of the twin bridges are vertical; the Keel Creek bridge's piers are battered. The stone used in the construction of all of these bridges is similar – native sandstone quarried, most likely, from the same source. The stone used in the Keel Creek bridge, though has a more finished look. The rough textured faces of the blocks of stone are similar on all of the bridges, but the edges of the Keel Creek bridge's stones are sharper, giving the random ashlar bond a more refined appearance. In addition, the Keel Creek bridge exhibits a feature that no other WPA project in the county has – extruded mortar joints. None of the bridges and none of the stone buildings constructed by the WPA in Coal County display this extra level of artisanship.

The size and quality of the Keel Creek Bridge sets it apart from its WPA brethren. And, as highway bridges in the county are replaced or upgraded to modern traffic standards, it is becoming an increasingly rare example of bridge construction from the New Deal era in Coal County. All of the truss and trestle bridges constructed by the WPA in the county have been replaced. Many of the concrete and masonry bridges either have been, or are slated to be replaced.

Transportation was and is a significant aspect of the development of Coal County. Early wagon trails were supplanted by a network of rail lines that crossed the county from all directions. Reliance on iron rails and the relative poverty of the county meant that the road network was generally neglected. In recounting the efforts of the county

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 14

Keel Creek Bridge

name of property

Coal County, Oklahoma

county and State

=====

commissioners in Coal County soon after it came into existence, a local historian noted: "the county built bridges, but did little for the roads. They were surfaced in red shale, a byproduct of the mines."<sup>8</sup> Poor roads plagued the county for years. After the coal mines closed and the cotton crops failed, the railroads abandoned their lines into Coal County one by one. Road transportation was ever more important, but the county was poor and lacked the funding necessary to maintain or improve their roadways.

It is not surprising, then, to note that when the opportunity to take advantage of New Deal programs rolled along that city and county officials chose infrastructure enhancement over the sexier, more visible projects that other counties chose. The WPA and its companion agencies required that their expenditures be for projects that enhance the public good. "It must be socially useful."<sup>9</sup> While other counties built stadia, parks, and armories, as the editors of the *Coalgate Record Register* pointed out in 1937, Coal County spent its money on street and road improvements. Local politicians and officials understood that a quality infrastructure would go a long way in improving the economic viability of the county. WPA funds were channeled into two primary areas – roads and schools. This decision looked beyond the present needs of the community to the future. Investing in up to date educational plants and investing in a modern road network would go a long way in enhancing the quality of life in Coal County.

The Keel Creek Bridge is a prime example of the quality of construction done by the WPA as a part of the modernization of the county's road network. It is representative of the efforts of local and state government to take advantage of the programs of the new Deal to improve the quality of life of its citizens. For over 65 years this elegant masonry bridge has served the citizens of Coal County, a bargain considering the investment of time and labor invested in its construction. It is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A with areas of significance in transportation and Politics/Government.

<sup>8</sup> Poe, Bessie, ed., *History of Coal County, Oklahoma*, Dallas, Tex.: Curtis Media Corp., 1986, page 8.

<sup>9</sup> *Questions and Answers on the WPA*, pamphlet prepared by the Federal Works Agency, 1939.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 9, 10 Page 15

Keel Creek Bridge  
name of property  
Coal County, Oklahoma  
county and State

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**Bibliography**

*Coalgate Courier*. Coalgate, OK. August 15, 1935. October 31, 1935. March 12, 1936. June 4, 1936. February 3, 1938. April 10, 1938. July 28, 1938. August 31, 1938. May 16, 1940.

*Coalgate Record Register*. Coalgate, OK. June 17, 1937. September 23, 1937.

*Daily Oklahoman*. Oklahoma City, OK. September 27, 1936.

Federal Works Agency. *Questions and Answers on the WPA*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office. 1939.

Poe, Bessie, ed. History of Coal County Oklahoma. Dallas: Curtis Media Corp. 1986.

US Work Projects Administration, Oklahoma. *Final Report of Activities and Accomplishments*. 1943.

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The bridge is located on the section line between Sections 27 & 28, Township 2 North, Range 11 East, approximately 500 feet north of the corners of Sections 27, 28, 33, and 34. It carries State Highway 31 over Keel Creek. The nominated property extends fifteen feet north and fifteen feet south of the existing bridge abutments and twenty-five feet east and twenty-five feet west of the centerline of the road as it crossed the bridge.

**Boundary Justification**

The boundary encompasses the entirety of the bridge and its abutments and a portion of the approaches necessary to define the bridge area.