

New River Gorge

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

New River Gorge National River



New River Gorge Bridge



New River Gorge Bridge. Photo by Gary Hartley

When the New River Gorge Bridge was completed on October 22, 1977, a travel challenge was solved. The bridge reduced a 40-minute drive down narrow mountain roads and across one of North America's oldest rivers to less than a minute.

When it comes to road construction, mountains do pose a challenge. In the case of the New River Gorge Bridge, challenge was transformed into a work of structural art — the longest steel span in the western hemisphere and the second highest in the United States.

Bridge Construction

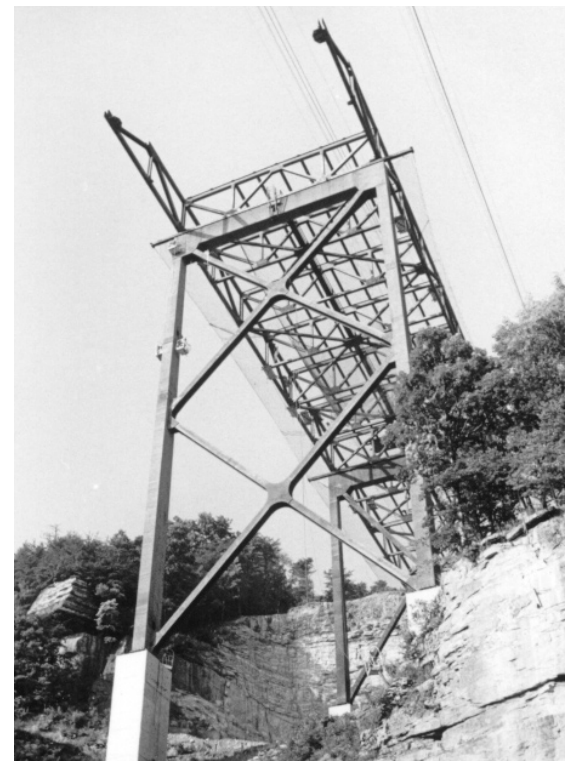
The West Virginia Division of Highways chose the Michael Baker Company as the designer, and the construction contract was awarded to the American Bridge Division of U.S. Steel. In June 1974, the first steel was positioned over the gorge by trolleys running on three-inch diameter cables. The cables were strung 3,500 feet between two matching towers. Cor-ten steel, with a rust-like appearance that never needs painting, was used in construction.

Bridge Day

On the third Saturday of October, the Fayette County Chamber of Commerce hosts "Bridge Day," the only day that visitors may walk across the bridge. The event lures hundreds of parachutists, cheered on by thousands of spectators, to float the 876-foot drop to the river below. For more information on Bridge Day, call the New River Convention and Visitors Bureau at (800) 927-0263.

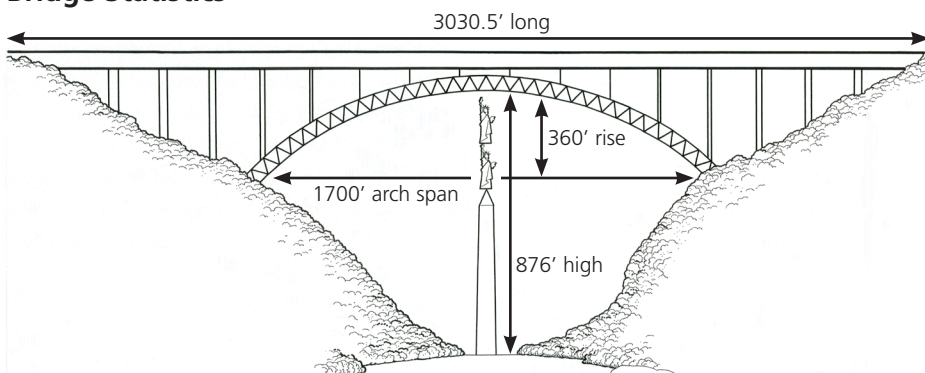
Canyon Rim Visitor Center

The National Park Service operates this visitor center just north of the bridge. Here, visitors are introduced to New River Gorge National River. The site features a museum, slide show, picnic tables, and scenic views of the gorge and the Bridge.



Bridge during construction. Photo by Don Kodak

Bridge Statistics



How high is 876 feet? Beneath the bridge, the Statue of Liberty could stand twice atop the Washington Monument with 20 feet to spare.

	FEET	METERS
Height (to road base)	876	267
Bridge Length	3,030	923.6
Arch Length	1,700	518.1
Rise	360	109.7
Deck Width	69'4"	21.1m
	Lbs.	Kilos.
Weight (total)	88,000,000	39,916,129
Steel	44,000,000	19,958,064
Concrete	44,000,000	19,958,064
Heaviest Piece Arch	184,000	83,461
	21,066,000	9,555,377

Bid Price	\$33,984,000
Final Cost	\$37,000,000

Early Transportation in the Gorge

For centuries, the deep, narrow gorge of the New River has been a barrier. Rising an average of one thousand feet above the river, the steep slopes have presented barriers to all forms of travel. American Indian hunters established early trails by following wild game along the gorge rim and down tributaries to suitable river crossings.

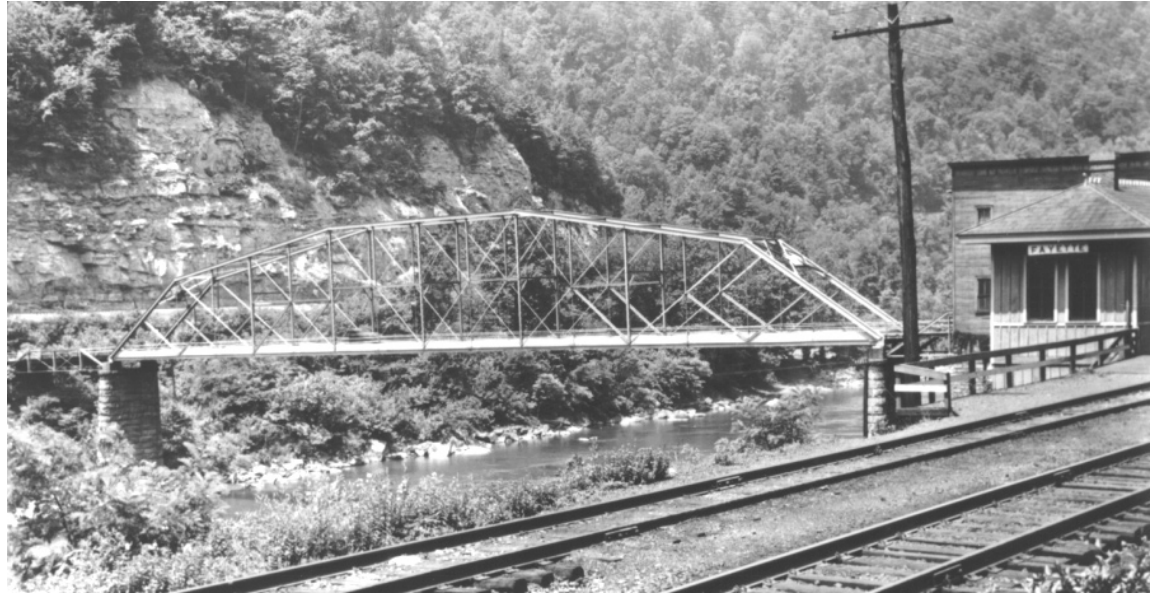
Early European travelers used the same crossings. As early as 1798, Peter Bowyer operated a ferry seven miles upstream of Fayette Station. The ferry was a vital link in an early route through the wilderness.

The development of railroads following the Civil War met the need for better transportation. As the emphasis shifted from trails to railroads, the Chesapeake & Ohio Railway (C&O) completed its route through the New River Gorge in 1873. With

the completion of secondary rail corridors, the Southern Appalachian region was opened to the coal and coke industries. "Black gold" became accessible to markets around the world.

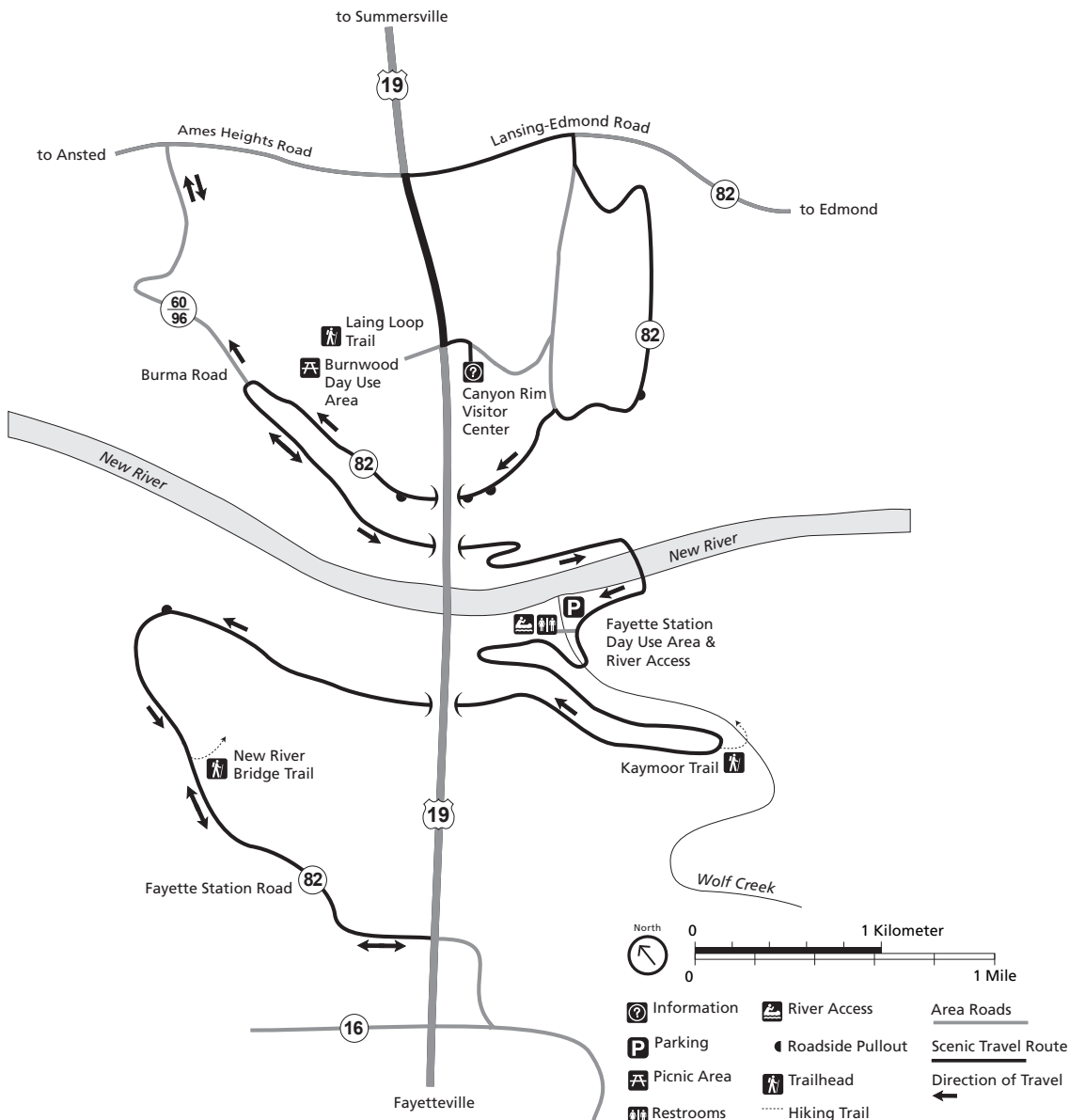
The railroad provided contacts with the outside world for the otherwise isolated inhabitants of the gorge. Some communities on opposite sides of the river were connected by swinging or suspension bridges. By 1889, a road wound down the steep slopes providing wagon access to Fayette Station. A truss bridge spanned the river connecting Fayette Station and South Fayette.

The Fayette Station Bridge was 279 feet (85 meters) long and was flanked on both ends by short-span pony trusses. The original bridge was reconstructed with all new materials and re-opened to vehicular traffic in September 1998.



Fayette Station Bridge (circa 1947). Photo courtesy of West Virginia Division of Highways.

Fayette Station Road Map



For Park Information:
New River Gorge National River
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9/2006