

The Below Content Was Recovered From The Internet Archive For The Now-Dead Website "Disappearing Bridges" www.venangoi.com/Bridges.html by Daniel C. Alward. All content is the work of Daniel Alward and is not associated in any way with HistoricBridges.org. Some of the images from the original website were not recoverable and so are omitted. This has been provided as a courtesy by HistoricBridges.org since the website no longer exists.

## Endangered Foxburg Steel Warren Truss Bridge

### The Double-Decker, Warren Steel Truss Bridge Connecting Armstrong and Clarion Counties



The old steel bridge pictured below once carried a railroad over its upper deck as well as wagon, foot and automobile traffic over the lower deck. It's located at the Clarion County Borough of Foxburg and what a gorgeous configuration of sturdy metal it is!



The Foxburg Pennsylvania Truss Bridge in October 2001  
photo copyright © 2001 Daniel Alward

Pennsylvania Route 58, which crosses the Allegheny River on this single lane bridge, isn't an especially busy highway. But, since around 1990, the state has had plans of replacing the Foxburg Bridge with a modern bridge. The Foxburg Bridge currently has a hefty 35 ton posted weight limit and I haven't heard that structural problems are a concern. I can only conclude that the bridge is to be replaced solely in the name of progress.

The replacement plan was delayed pending a study of the effect that new construction would have on the aquatic environment. A couple of endangered freshwater mussels populations - northern riffleshell and clubshell - inhabit the area. **A report was created for the USGS in 1998** and the last I heard, the state was waiting for the all-clear signal from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Commission to get the process rolling.

The end could be near.

Although PennDOT has several options for dealing with the bridge, it looks like the 10 million dollar option of building a new bridge near the existing bridge and then demolishing the existing bridge is the option most likely to be implemented. According to *The Clarion News*, the District PennDOT spokesperson anticipates that bids for the bridge replacement project will be solicited in 2003 with work commencing in 2004.

Clicking small photos usually provides enlargements and information



### Failed Preservation Efforts?

There are certainly people who don't want the steel bridge demolished. But apparently the view of the Foxburg Borough Council is that the old bridge should be demolished once replaced. I'm sure they have their reasons.

In 1991 a very unusual preservation proposal was put together by the Allegheny Clarion Valley Development Corp. A \$20,000 plan was developed that proposed turning the bridge into a two-level hotel and shopping center!

The plan envisioned retail shops and a restaurant on the current deck level, with hotel rooms lined up in a row on the upper deck. The steel of the truss would be enclosed and would be visible from inside of the resort bridge.

I have to say that if the bridge really has to go (it will), then turning it into a resort sounds like a grand idea! Some people might think a hotel on a bridge sounds dangerous, but I, for one, would rather sleep on a sturdy bridge than in a towering building on dry ground.

Apparently the plan must have lost steam somewhere along the line. Perhaps financial backing wasn't forthcoming. As was mentioned before, Foxburg Borough Council wants the bridge demolished.

### Facts and History and Such

The quest to become an authority on old bridges is not an easy one! But with a little effort, one can uncover some clues and begin to paint the

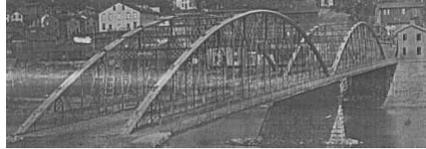
historical picture. I'm no authority, but I have found some clues.

Further down on this page is a link to a page that shows some really old photos of the Foxburg Bridge provided by someone with historical Foxburg ties. Upon examination of the old photos I noticed that several showed a bridge of a different type of truss construction than the existing bridge. So just how many bridges have there been here?

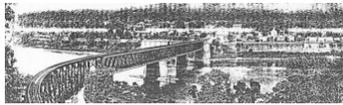
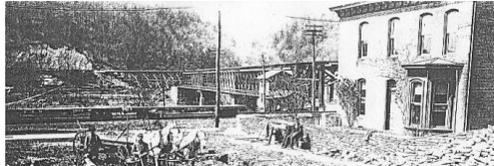
A trip to the **Foxburg Free Library** helped answer this question.

First, I've heard a couple of mentions of a wooden bridge at this location, but haven't seen any photographs. It looks like there have been at least three metal bridges erected at Foxburg.

A rare lithograph in the Foxburg Free Library shows an 1878 view of the town. Included in the view is a two-span metal arch bridge with cut stone abutments and pier. Another photo above a library bookshelf also shows this arch bridge quite clearly. There is a tollhouse on the Foxburg side of the river. The date of the photo is unknown, but it does show an oil derrick in Foxburg, not far from the bridge. There are no railroad tracks on the arch bridge.



The arch bridge disappeared sometime by 1908. A photo of the library under construction in 1908 clearly shows a three-span truss bridge with intersecting diagonal support members. (Does that make it a Double Warren Truss?). The supporting stone piers and abutments appear to be the same ones currently in use. Photos of this truss bridge are shown immediately below and more are available on the **Old Foxburg Bridge Photos Page** which is featured a little further below. This bridge has the railroad on top. There are curved railroad approach spans connected to the main river crossing spans.



The Bethlehem Steel Bridge Company built the existing Subdivided Warren Truss Bridge in 1921. It is 520 feet long and 20 feet wide and appears to have used the cut stone substructure from its predecessor. It continued to provide a railway on an upper deck and a crossing for other vehicular traffic on its lower deck. The bridge ceased being a railroad bridge in 1964 at which time the railroad approach spans and tracks were removed. (The facts in this paragraph were pulled from that hotel/shopping center proposal by the A-CVDC mentioned previously, so I hope you got it right!)

One of the appealing features of the current Foxburg Bridge is its box-like shape. If you look closely though, you will see that it is a "normal" looking truss bridge with diagonal supports at each portal. The addition of mini-bridges in between spans, including the now removed railroad approach spans, gives the appearance of a continuous beam on the top of the structure.

**Want to see more *old* Foxburg Bridge photos?**



**Take a look at the Foxburg Bridges in earlier times!**

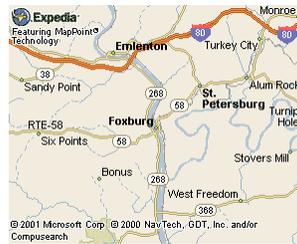
Thanks go to Jim Fowler, descendent of one of the Foxburg Bridge's builders, for info and inspiration.

#### **A BRIDGE APPRECIATION TOUR SUGGESTED BY THE FOXBURG BRIDGE**

Several rural/small town bridges pictured on these Disappearing Bridges pages are quite close together. You can literally view four of them within 15 minutes of getting off I-80 at the Emlenton exit.

If you want to see some grand old bridges in beautiful surroundings, maybe a visit to the area is in order. The map below can help plan your trip. Send an email if advice is needed.

You could visit the Foxburg Bridge, of course, as well as the **Emlenton I-80 Bridge** a little to the north, the **Clarion River Bridge** a little to the south, and the **Parker Bridge** a little more to the south. And if time permits, there's a gorgeous **iron pony truss** and an **ancient stone arch bridge** at one dirt-road spot at Mill Creek on Dotter Road a little north of Emlenton, along the River.



Foxburg vicinity map provided by Expedia.com

Foxburg's population was recorded at 275 people in the 2000 Census. As is the case with most places on the map around here, prosperity from the oil boom that began in Venango County in the 1860's helped build the town. Most towns around here have slimmed down quite a bit since those oil boom days!

If you do decide to show up for this suggested bridge tour, you might be interested in knowing that there is a restaurant on the east bank of the River, just below the bridge at Foxburg. The Foxburg Inn On The Allegheny has changed hands since I last visited, but when I was there the atmosphere was casual. You are welcome in the beautiful surroundings even if you're dressed in your hiking boots, jeans and flannel shirt. As a bonus, you might get a view of the bridge while you dine (if it still exists).

One of Foxburg's other claims to fame is a very old golf course. An historical marker bills it as the oldest golf course *in continuous use* in the United States. That must mean that one or more older golf courses exist somewhere that took a break from golfing at some point! The American Golf Hall Of Fame is also located at Foxburg.

On the hillside above Foxburg there is a beautiful stone church and cemetery. The church, built in 1881, is called The Memorial Church Of Our Father and was built as a memorial to one of the prominent Foxburg Foxes.

Further explanations of Foxburg attractions and historical detail are beyond the scope of this article and beyond my ability to spew forth facts at this late night hour! Oh yeah - don't forget to visit Emlenton while you're in the area. It's loaded with charm. And while you're at it, if you have time to spare, you might want to swing up into **Franklin** and take a look around.



#### FACT SHEET\*

**PENNDOT DISTRICT:** 10

**COUNTY:** ARMSTRONG

**OWNER:** PADOT

**MUNICIPALITY:** HOVEY

**LOCATION:** NW ARMSTRONG COUNTY-CLARION LINE

**FACILITY CARRIED:** SR 58/LR 251

**NAME/FEATURE INTERSECTED:** SR 58/LR 251 OVER ALLEGHENY RIVER

**TYPE:** THRU TRUSS

**DESIGN:** WARREN

**MATERIAL:** STEEL

**#SPANS:** 3

**LENGTH (feet):** 538

**WIDTH (feet):** 15

**YEAR BUILT:** 1921

**ALTERATION:** 1981/1985

**DESIGNER/BUILDER:** BETHLEHEM STEEL

**NATIONAL REGISTER STATUS AT TIME OF SURVEY:** Eligible.  
SHPO Finding. 10/15/91.

**COMMENTS:** The bridge has been determined eligible by PHMC.

Since the Foxburg Bridge had been previously determined to be eligible for the **National Register of Historic Places**, the Historic Bridge Survey crew didn't elaborate in its description. Their objective was to make eligibility recommendations and provide documentation for bridges not already studied.

I noticed that the length and width figures recorded in the Historic Bridge Database differ from the 520 ft x 20 ft figures I previously found in other documentation. I guess I'll have to dig out the old tape measure and see for myself!

\* The data in this FACT SHEET is a subset of the data found in the **Pennsylvania Historic Bridge Inventory and Evaluation** database (data circa 1997). That survey evaluated bridges for potential eligibility to the **National Register of Historic Places**. In the database, MUNICIPALITY is most often given as a township name, but could be a borough or city name. COMMENTS here are generally taken directly from comments in the database, although they may be summarized. Additional comments, if any, added by Venangoil.com are in **orange**.

**Sources:**

Along with personal observations and conversations with strangers, important sources of information for this page came from newspaper clippings and photographs on file at the Foxburg Free Library whose helpful librarian offered great assistance. (I sort of forgot to get her name.) There was a recent (2002?) clipping from the Clarion News that reviewed the status of the bridge replacement effort. There was a newspaper article from the Pittsburgh Post Gazette from June 19, 1991 and some other materials in an Allegheny Clarion Valley Development Corp proposal for converting the bridge into a hotel and retail space. There were a couple of old uncredited photographs on the wall and in filing cabinet folders. Across the street from the library, a general Foxburg history was found in the back of the menu at the Foxburg Inn. And then there were the wonderful photos and recollections of Jim Fowler. Hopefully, that covers it all!

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#### Guest Shots:

##### Old Photographs of the Foxburg Bridge

This page is a departure from my normal monopolization of VenangOil.com's content! Jim Fowler of Fort Myers, Florida contacted me with some Foxburg Bridge anecdotes and old photos. He has been kind enough to share his pictures and memories with us.

As you look at the old photos, keep in mind that most of them show an earlier incarnation of the Allegheny River crossing at Foxburg. See the **main Foxburg Bridge Page** for more details.

From here on down, the words and photos are those belonging to Mr. Fowler.

Your Host,  
Daniel Alward

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And now, here are a few comments from our guest, Jim Fowler ...

My Great Great Grandfather, **James Fowler**, joined as a partner with Mr. Fox and established the very first ferry across the Allegheny at Foxburg. Both eventually went on to build the iron bridge with money made from area oil leases.

The first crossing method here was a raft/barge that was a business partnership venture between my Great Great Grandfather and Mr. Fox. It was profitable and a portion of the earnings were saved and then invested in building a wooden toll bridge. That was used for many years, but was eventually replaced by another bridge.

When I was really young (about 4 or 5) I caught my very first fish right underneath that bridge. My Grandfather ran the B&O railroad yard at Foxburg. What great memories!

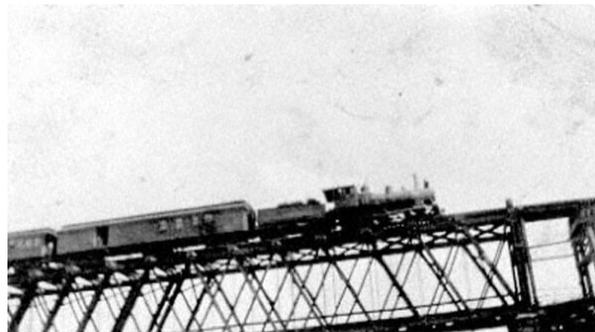
My Great Great Grandfather was also a partner in the first railroad in the area and that is why the structure had the addition of a track support system added to the top of the bridge. The cars (and horses) traveled over a wood covered iron framework on the bottom and the trains crossed over the top.

When the steam era ended and diesels arrived the B&O closed the Foxburg Railroad Yard and my Grandfather was transferred to Punxsutawney. The primary use of the Foxburg railroad yard was to provide "helper" locomotives for the big coal trains that had to cross over the steep mountain grades.



This one is really faded. I tried my best to pull out the image in Photoshop... not a lot of luck... [but a train is a train](#).

Image copyright J.T.Fowler



This is a much better "train" shot. Note the trestle coming off the bridge is shown pretty well. This locomotive will arrive at the Foxburg RR Yard just as soon as it leaves the bridge.

Image copyright J.T.Fowler



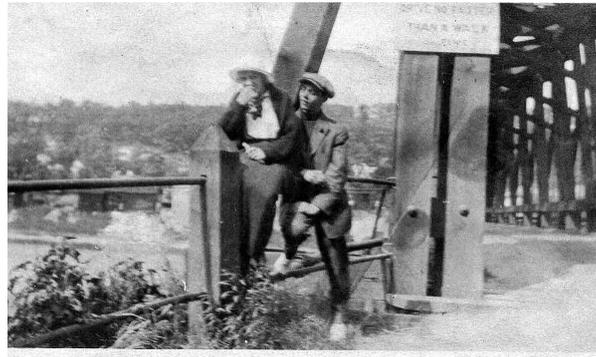
Note the timbers under the center span. I was told there had been some ice damage and repairs were being made. I haven't dated the photo yet, but locomotive number 94 is pulling a baggage car and two passenger cars across the top span.

Image copyright J.T.Fowler



This photo shows some ice damage to the stone pilings. There are 3 girls with fishing poles in lower, left side. One is my Aunt "Kay" Fowler.

Image copyright J.T.Fowler



This one shows the entrance to the bridge with Foxburg in the background. The sign says "Drive no faster than a walk. \$5 Fine". The couple in the photo is My Grandfather, James Tonks Fowler and Evalyn Lucille Horam (soon to be Fowler) my Grandmother just before their marriage.

Image copyright J.T.Fowler