

Item name: Buried timber trestle rail bridge (archaeology)

Location:

Coffs Harbour

Address:

Planning: Northern

Suburb/nearest town: Coffs Harbour 2450

Local govt area: Coffs Harbour

Parish:

State: NSW

County:

Other/former names:

Area/group/complex:

Group ID:

Aboriginal area: Gumbainggar

Curtilage/boundary:

Item type: Archaeological-Terrestrial

Group: Transport - Rail

Category: Railway Bridge/ Viaduct

Owner: State Government

Admin codes:

Code 2:

Code 3:

Current use: Archaeological site

Former uses: Trestle timber rail underbridge

Assessed significance: Local

Endorsed significance: Local

Statement of significance: The buried timber trestle rail bridge at South Coff Headland is of high local significance as a surviving and integral part of the original infrastructure of the large-scale harbour reclamation works that were undertaken in Coffs Harbour between 1913 and 1939. The trestle rail bridge was built between 1913-1915 and progressively filled in as part of the works until completely buried by 1928 and today forms part of the land bridge between the former South Coff Island and the mainland. The buried timber trestle rail bridge is also significant as an example of a standard timber rail underbridge built by PWD until 1935, of which few remain in NSW.

All surviving buildings and remnants of the PWD harbour construction works are important in demonstrating this critical phase of Coffs Harbour's past history as a busy, shipping port and are essential to understanding how Coffs Harbour was created. The buried timber trestle bridge is of high social significance as a well-known and highly esteemed part of those early capital works.

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Historical notes of provenance: The buried timber trestle bridge forms part of the standard-gauge rail line built to facilitate the construction of Coffs Harbour's two breakwalls in 1915.

Following the completion of the government jetty in August 1892 and the rapid growth of the timber, sugar cane, and dairy industries around Coffs Harbour, it was decided to improve the town's harbour facilities. The large-scale engineering scheme to create a safe and tranquil shipping harbour was designed by government engineers de Burgh and Keele in 1910-1911.

The scheme involved building two breakwaters to link North Coff (Muttonbird) and South Coff Islands to the mainland and enclosing some 200 acres of water (at low tide).

A timber trestle bridge or viaduct was part of the first stage of works that began in 1913 and involved building a timber trestle bridge that linked South Coff Island to the mainland. This was done so that the base of South Coff Island could be used as a quarry to source rocks for the breakwaters. By 1915 a rail line had been built to transport the rocks from the quarry to where the northern breakwater was to start.

As work progressed, fill from the quarry was used to build a reclamation wall along the southern side of the harbour. This eventually created a land bridge between the southern end of the beach and South Coff Island. By 1928 the island had been joined to the mainland and the earlier timber trestle bridge completely enclosed by earthworks.

Work on the northern breakwater began in 1915, with the engagement of Norton Griffith and Co. However, this contract was terminated shortly after and the NSW PWD took over the works in May 1917. The northern breakwater reached Muttonbird Island on 12 May 1924 and concrete capping of the crest was undertaken in stages until completed in July 1935.

Work on the eastern breakwater began in 1917 with a ceremony to mark the first stone being put into position on 17 June 1917. However, work didn't begin in earnest until 1918. The breakwater was built between late 1918 and October 1939 reaching its current length of 1530 feet. Over the next 2-3 years the crest was concreted in stages.

Following the completion of the jetty and the harbour breakwaters, Coffs Harbour became a major NSW coastal shipping port exporting large amounts of hardwood timber, fruit and vegetables, and dairy products. It was also the major point of arrival for visitors and settlers to the Coffs Harbour area until the Coffs-Glenreagh section of the North Coast Railway was completed in 1922 and the later completion of the Pacific Highway.

The years after the Second World War saw a gradual decline in coastal shipping. Shipping activity at Coffs Harbour gradually wound down until 22 July 1979 when the last commercial ship was loaded. Following that, various sections of the government rail lines that serviced the jetty, the breakwaters and the private timber tramlines no longer in use were taken up at different times. The exposed rail lines along the length of the eastern breakwater are the only rail and tram lines still visible and it is uncertain if any section of either the earlier narrow-gauge timber tramlines or standard gauge PWD rail lines survive under later road works.

Themes: National theme

4. Settlement

3. Economy

State theme

Towns, suburbs and villages

Environment - cultural landscape

Local theme

Designer: Public Works Department

Builder: Public Works Department

Year started: 1913

Year completed: 1928

Circa: No

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Physical description: The bridge has lain completely buried since 1928. Nothing of the bridge is visible.

Photographs of the trestle bridge before it was enclosed by infill reveal it was built in the standard manner of PWD timber trestle rail underbridges. It consisted of a series of tall cross-braced timber trestles supporting timber beams over which were laid the rail deck and tracks.

The early photographs show the bridge comprised nine spans and included timber side rails.

Similar rail underbridges from the same period survive on the nearby Glenreagh-Dorrigo branch line and in a few places in NSW. Such rail underbridges are increasingly rare in NSW and survive mainly on disused branch lines.

Note on the gauge: According to John Kramer's history of the Coffs Harbour jetty railways, the original rail lines along the jetty itself were narrow-gauge (ie 3 ft 6 inches in width) but with the completion of the Coffs-Raleigh section of the North Coast Railway in standard gauge, the jetty tramlines lines were converted to standard gauge in 1915 (ie 4 ft 8 inches). The earlier, privately-built BAT and other timber tramlines were built in narrow gauge. The breakwater rail lines, built after 1915, were always standard gauge.

Physical condition level:

Physical condition: Current physical condition is not known.

Archaeological potential level: High

Archaeological potential Detail:

Modification dates:

Recommended management:

Management: **Management category**

Statutory Instrument
Recommended Management
Recommended Management

Management name

List on a Local Environmental Plan (LEP)
Produce an Archaeological Management Plan (AMP)
Carry out interpretation, promotion and/or education

Further comments: More information on specifications of the bridge's construction might be contained with PWD records within NSW State Records, which have not been consulted for this report.

Any future interpretation of Coffs Harbour's jetty and foreshore needs to explain the full extent of government works around the harbour, the changes to the landforms, and how all the major elements (jetty, breakwaters, buildings, timber tram lines and railway lines, quarry and rolling stock etc) worked together to form a busy, industrial complex that served Coffs Harbour as a working port for 80 years (1892-1970s).

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Criteria a): The buried timber trestle rail bridge at South Coff Headland is of local significance as a surviving and integral part of the original infrastructure of the large-scale harbour reclamation works that were undertaken in Coffs Harbour between 1913 and 1939. The works involved the earlier constructed timber jetty, two harbour breakwalls, a reclamation wall along the harbour foreshore, the timber trestle bridge and the associated rail lines used in the construction of the breakwalls and for later regular maintenance. These works drastically re-shaped the physical form of Coffs Harbour's coastline and created the man-made harbour we see today. These works, and the North Coast Railway, were largely responsible for the growth and development of Coffs Harbour itself. The trestle rail bridge was built between 1913-1915 and progressively filled in as part of the works until completely buried by 1928 and today forms part of the land bridge between the former South Coff Island and the mainland.

[Historical significance]

The buried timber trestle rail bridge is also significant as a rare example of a standard timber rail underbridge built by PWD until 1935, of which few remain in NSW.

All surviving buildings and remnants of the PWD harbour construction works are important in demonstrating this critical phase of Coffs Harbour's past history as a busy, shipping port and are essential to understanding how Coffs Harbour was created.

Criteria b):
[Historical association significance]

Criteria c):
[Aesthetic/ Technical significance]

Criteria d): Of high local significance. Knowledge of, and curiosity about, Coffs Harbour's harbour formation works, the breakwater rail lines and the earlier privately-built timber tramlines are an important aspect of Coffs Harbour's sense of identity. They evoke a now-defunct industrial past and their period of operation (1917-1970s) is still within living memory.

[Social/Cultural significance]

The story of how Coffs Harbour foreshore came to be continues to exert a powerful sentimental and romantic appeal over Coffs Harbour residents, and the buried timber trestle bridge is a well-known and highly esteemed part of those early capital works.

Criteria e): Of high local significance having some potential to reveal information about timber trestle rail underbridge construction. Has high archaeological potential as a surviving and integral part of the original infrastructure of the large-scale harbour reclamation works.

[Research significance]

Criteria f): Of high local significance. Potentially rare example of a standard timber rail underbridge built by PWD until 1935. Two similar timber rail underbridge survive in the LGA on the former Glenreagh-Dorrigo branch line and several similar rail overbridge also survive. Timber trestle rail underbridge are increasingly rare within NSW and survive mainly on disused and former branch lines.

[Rarity]

Criteria g): Likely to be good representative example of the standard timber trestle rail underbridge built by PWD until 1935 and of high local significance.

[Representative]

Intactness/Integrity: Not known

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References:	Author	Title	Year
	Neil Yeates	Coffs Harbour Vol 1 & 2	1990
	Robin Hedditch	Coffs Harbour Eastern Breakwater Rail Line Photographic Survey	2012
	John Kramer for the Light Railways Research Society	Ships and Timber: A Short History of Coffs Harbour Port and Harbour	1985
	Coffs Harbour Regional Museum	Historic Photograph Collection	

Studies:	Author	Title	Number	Year
	EJE Consulting	CHCC Heritage Study		1998
	Robin Hedditch	Coffs Harbour Heritage Study		2013

Parcels:	Parcel code	Lot number	Section number	Plan code	Plan number
	LOT	21		DP	850150

Latitude:**Longitude:****Location validity:****Spatial accuracy:****Map name:****Map scale:****AMG zone:****Easting:****Northing:**

Listing:	Name	Title	Number	ListingDate
		Local Environmental Plan	18	27/09/2013

Data entry: Data first entered: 22/05/2013

Data updated: 18/01/2014

Status: Partial

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Location:

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Image:



Caption: Timber trestle bridge and rail line built in 1915

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Image by: Coffs Harbour Regional Museum

Image date:

Image number:

Image url: <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/maritimeheritageapp/resources/Heritage/shi/WebAPP/345579225e1732148bb83feedf27fb5e876.jpg>

Thumbnail url: http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/maritimeheritageapp/resources/Heritage/shi/WebAPP/Thumb_test345579225e1732148bb83feedf27fb5e876.jpg

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Image:

DRAFT

Image missing

Caption: Plan of the original 1911 harbour scheme for Coffs Harbour, designed by government engineers, de Burgh and Keele (reproduced from the Clarence and Richmond Examiner,

Copy right: 15 August, 1911, p2)
Out of copyright

Image by: Clarence and Richmond Examiner

Image date: 01/01/1911

Image number:

Image url: <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/maritimeheritageapp/resources/Heritage/shi/136/harbour.JPG>

Thumbnail url:

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Image:



Caption: World War II gun turret

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Image by:

Image date:

Image number:

Image url: <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/maritimeheritageapp/resources/Heritage/shi/WebAPP/34540478506ca0242a5b4a698496360d299.jpg>

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