

Wartime Comrades Bridge the Kananaskis River

In October 1950, the Canada Cement plant at Exshaw, Alberta faced a problem. A steel truss bridge across the mouth of the Kananaskis River had collapsed restricting access to a slate pit that was located across the river from the plant. It was critical to replace the bridge for the safety of workers in the pit.

The General Manager of Canada Cement, a wartime Royal Canadian Engineer field company commander, had maintained contact with his former comrades and sought their help to erect a Bailey bridge on the site. Ontario Hydro had large stocks of bridging on hand that they had used in construction of their power dams. Arrangements were made to deliver the necessary parts to the shale pit siding in November. Calling on their wartime experiences, they prepared the plans and specifications for the bankseats. Canada Cement constructed them in preparation for the erection of the Bailey bridge.

The 13th Field Squadron in Calgary provided a skeleton crew of trained sappers who supervised the work parties composed of company employees and other Militia members. Company employees under the supervision of wartime sappers had done the initial set-up. After a busy Sunday, work was finished using vehicle headlights and 160 feet of Triple- Double Bailey bridge was in place and ready for use.



Kananaskis Bridge in 2016



Kananaskis Bridge under construction

Many years later, as the size of trucks increased, it was necessary to modify the bridge to accommodate the large dump boxes. With the bridge still in-situ, the company raised the deck from the bottom truss to the top truss. This is another illustration of the flexibility of the Second World War era Bailey Bridge equipment.