

Hagwilget Bridge, near Hazelton, British Columbia

Description of Historic Place

The present day Hagwilget Bridge is a single-lane steel suspension bridge located along Highway 62, (New Hazelton Hi-Level Road) between the Village of Hazelton and the District of New Hazelton in northwestern British Columbia. The highway approach to the bridge runs through Hagwilget Indian Reserve (IR) 1 and crosses to Tsitsk IR 3.



Suspended over the Bulkley River canyon, the bridge is constructed of steel and cable, with one tower at either end, and cement abutments at the approaches to the bridge. The main suspended span consists of a trussed steel deck, 140 meters long and 4.9 meters wide, located 80 meters above the Bulkley River. This contemporary bridge was designed by Alexander Carruthers and was opened in 1932 with upgrades occurring in 1990 and 2003.

This Historic Place includes the contemporary bridge (Carruthers) and its approaches, the footings from the previous bridge (Craddock), and the physical site of the earlier aboriginal bridges which no longer exist. The footings of the bridge built by Craddock and Co. in 1912 are located approximately 30 metres north of the existing bridge on either side of the canyon. The aboriginal bridge site is located approximately 80 meters south of the existing structure on either side of the canyon.

Heritage Value of Historic Place

The Hagwilget Bridge holds a number of heritage values that support it as a Historic Place. These values include: its evolution over time; the continuity of its use throughout history; its role in connecting northern communities; its association with Chief Charles of Hagwilget and Alexander Carruthers; the complexities of the engineering of all the bridges; its association with changes in the historical settlement and changing economies of the region; its reputation as an important landmark.

The Hagwilget Bridge is valued for its spatial and temporal evolution. The term “Hagwilget Bridge” signifies a number of different bridges which have been well documented since the late 19th century, and which existed prior to visual or written documentation. The earliest bridges are known through First Nations oral histories. All ‘versions’ of this bridge have existed on one of the three sites within this single Historic Place: the site of the current 1932 bridge, the site of the 1912 bridge built by Craddock and Co. and the historic site where the aboriginal bridges existed.

The heritage value of the Hagwilget Bridge also lies in the continuity of its use over time. Since the original aboriginal- built bridges, the Hagwilget Bridge has continually been an

important part of an extensive regional transportation system of roads which connect communities, transporting people, goods and ideas across vast distances.

Similarly, this bridge holds heritage value in its role of connecting the inland First Nation communities with coastal First Nations communities resulting in important and invaluable trade networks. The aboriginal bridges were located at a strategic point, providing an important link between the inland Wet'suwet'en nation on the east side of the canyon and the Gitksan on the west side of the canyon.

The Hagwilget Bridge is valued for its association with Chief Charles of Hagwilget, who owned the aboriginal bridge in the late 1800s and with Alexander Carruthers who designed the present-day version of the bridge. After designing the 1930s bridge, Mr. Carruthers became Inspector of Bridges for the Province of British Columbia and later, Deputy Minister of Highways.

The Hagwilget Bridge has heritage value in the complex engineering technologies used in order to span the Bulkley River Canyon. Early images of the aboriginal bridges reveal a cantilever bridge with a central suspended span built with wood and rope and later with wood and telegraph wire. The bridge built by Craddock and Co. in 1912 was a suspension bridge constructed of wood and wrought iron. The present-day suspension bridge designed by Carruthers is constructed of steel and cable and when it opened, was the highest suspension bridge in Canada. The basic suspension bridge concept has remained consistent over time, also adding heritage value to this site.

This bridge has historic value for its close association with important regional historic themes. Significant changes to the social landscape of the region are reflected in the evolution of the construction materials and styles. The aboriginal bridges were built using natural local materials. When the men working on the Collins Western Union Overland Telegraph moved through this area in the late 1800s, the bridge was reportedly strengthened with telegraph wire.

With the settlement of the region by newcomers, economies were changing and there was a need to improve commercial transportation in the area. Thus, in 1912 the wire and cable company Craddock and Co. built the first bridge to replace the aboriginal bridge, moving the location to a new site. Unfortunately, this bridge was too narrow for cars and in 1931, with the possibility of the road becoming part of a new highway through to the Yukon, construction began on the present bridge.

The most recent version of the Hagwilget Bridge reflects the increase in commercial traffic in the area and the burgeoning regional industries of the mid 1900s. More recently, upgrades to this bridge were required to increase the load carrying-capacity of the bridge due to changes to the size and tonnage of trucks required to pass through the region.

For all of the above identified values, the Hagwilget Bridge has heritage value as an important regional landmark. Similarly, the surrounding geography including the

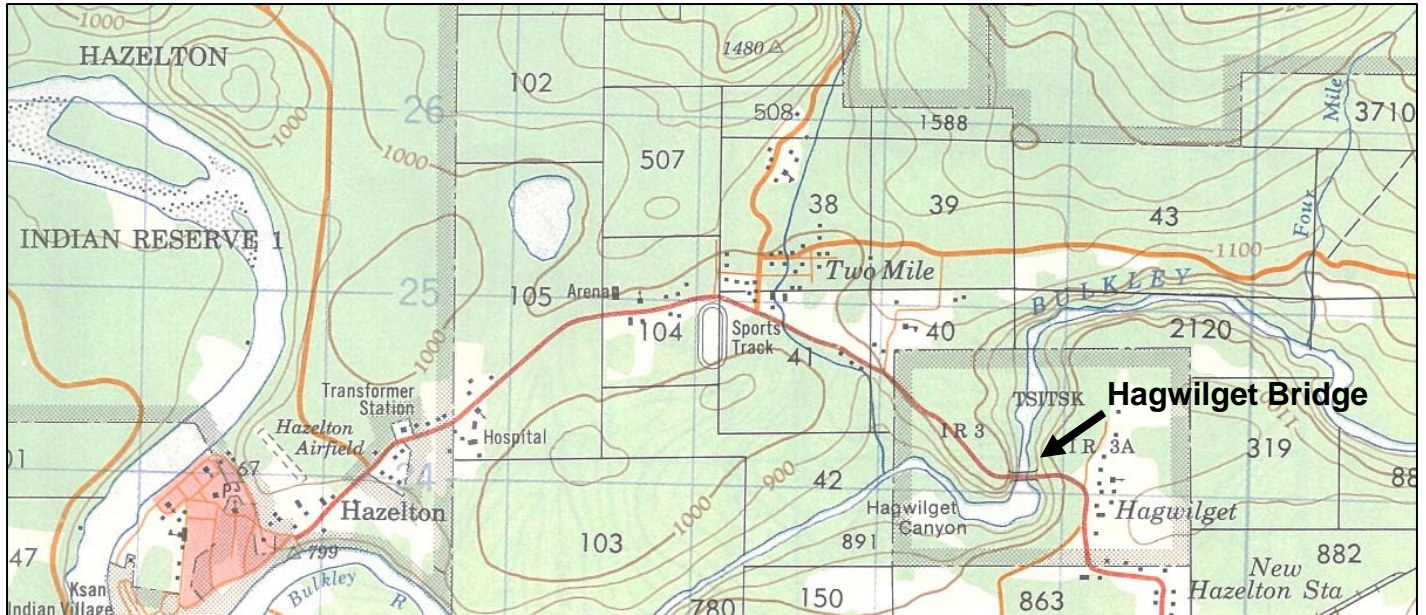
physical form of the canyon and the natural benches in the canyon are valued for the spectacular views and are popular vantage points for visitors to the site.

Character-Defining Elements

Key character-defining elements that contribute to the heritage value of the Hagwilget Bridge site include:

- Its construction as a one-lane suspension bridge, relevant to its original construction
- Its historic relationship with the Wet'suwet'en and Gitksan communities as well as with the communities Hazelton and New Hazelton
- Its spectacular location high above the Bulkley River at the canyon
- Its historic location on what has been a key transportation route for, at the very least, hundreds of years
- Its function as a transportation route connecting communities and people across the region
- The rock cliffs from which the bridges have been suspended over time
- The remaining concrete footings from the bridge built by Craddock and Co.
- The informal bridge viewing sites located on the natural grass benches above the canyon

Statement of Significance
Hagwilget Bridge
Maps



**Figure 1: NTS map of Hagwilget Bridge Site [Canadian Dept. of Energy Mines & Resources,
NTS Map 93M/5 Edition 2, 1975]**



Figure 2: Aerial view of Hagwilget Bridge site with approximate site boundaries [Province of British Columbia Air Photo BC80051 #278, 1980]

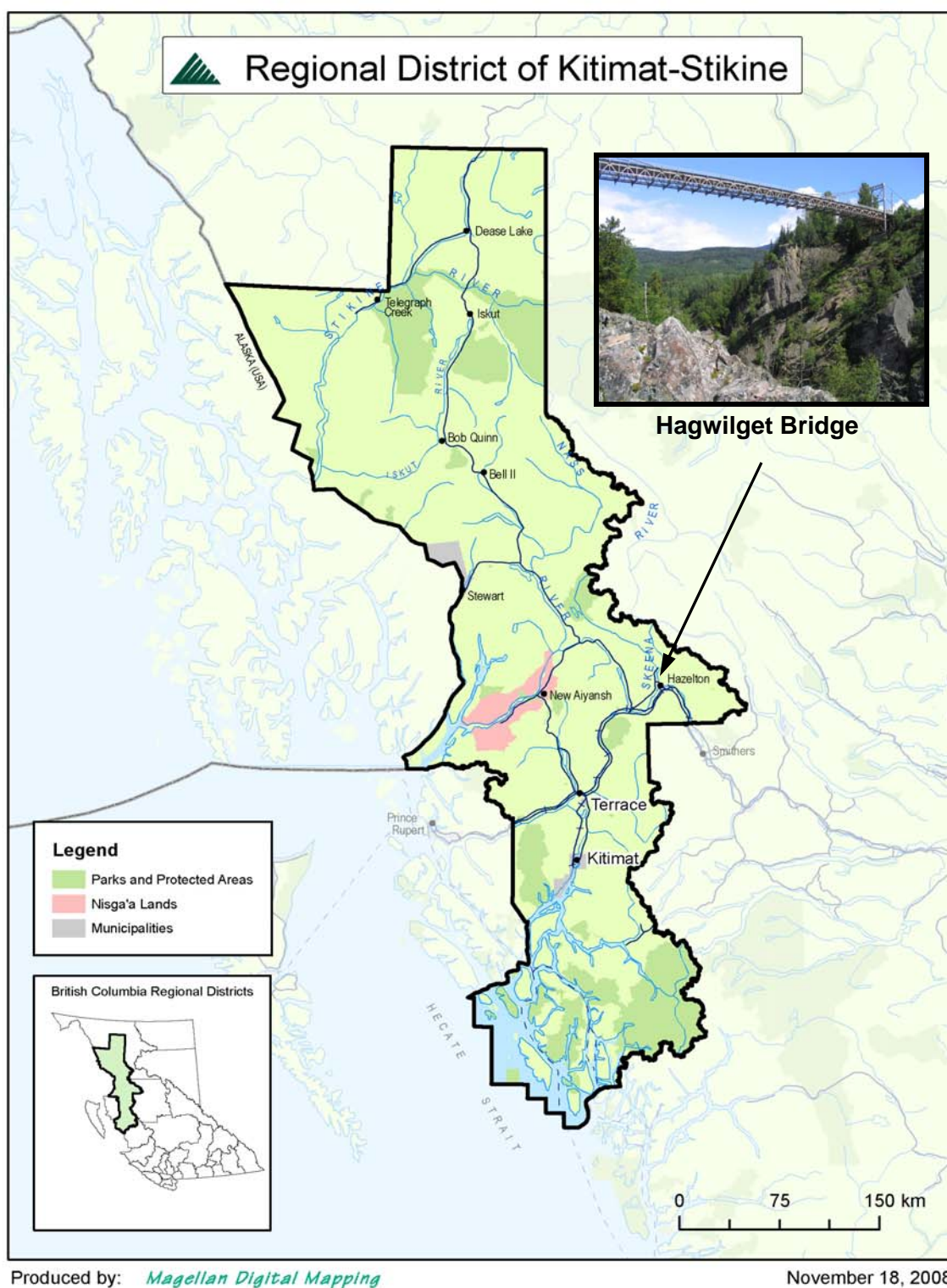


Figure 3: General loaction of Hagwilget Bridge within the Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine

Hagwilget Bridge
Statement of Significance
Images



Figure 4 Hagwilget Bridge, taken by Charles Horetzky in 1872
[Image A-06048 courtesy of Royal BC Museum, BC Archives]
* note the cantilevered ends with suspended span in centre

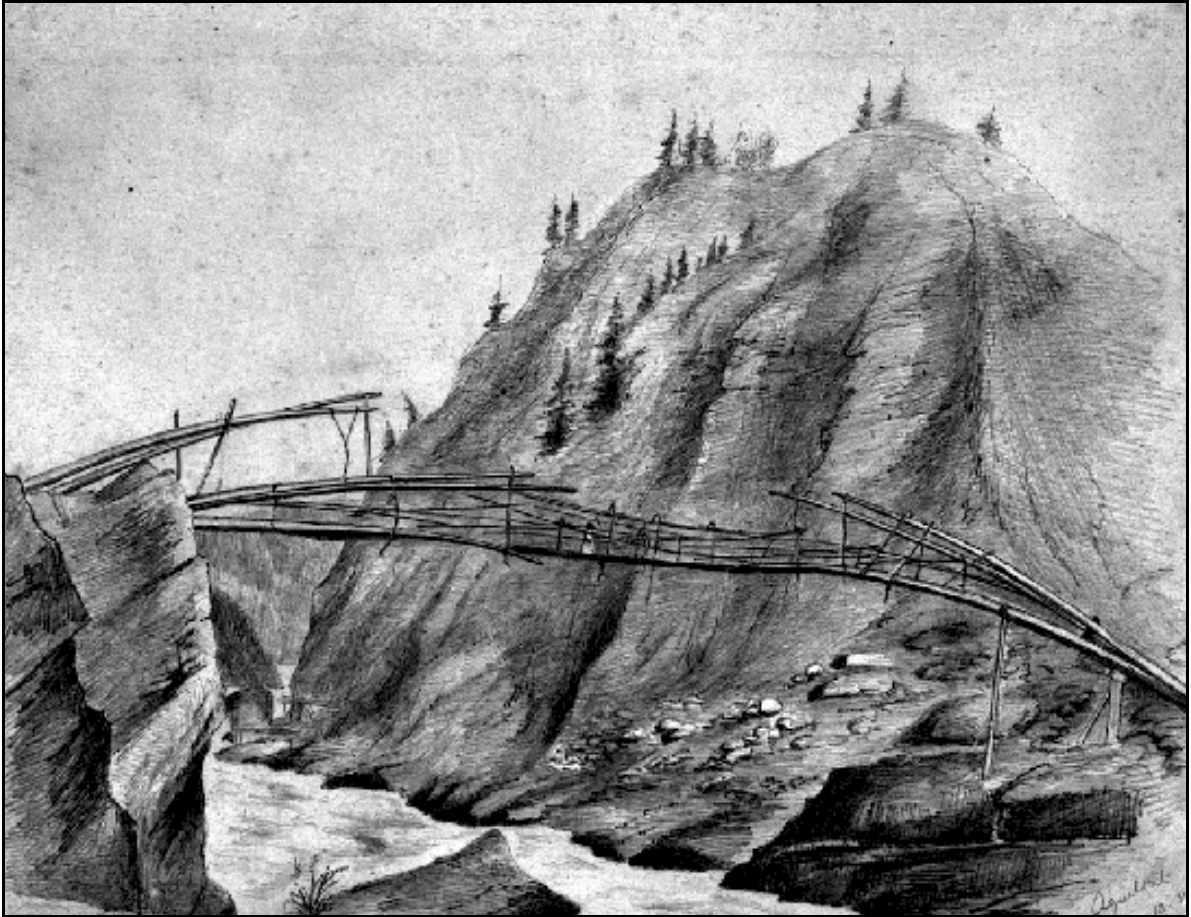


Figure 5 Sketch of "Aquilket" Bridge by Helen Kate Woods in 1880
[Image PDP 01682 courtesy of Royal BC Museum, BC Archives]
* note the cantilevered ends with suspended span in centre

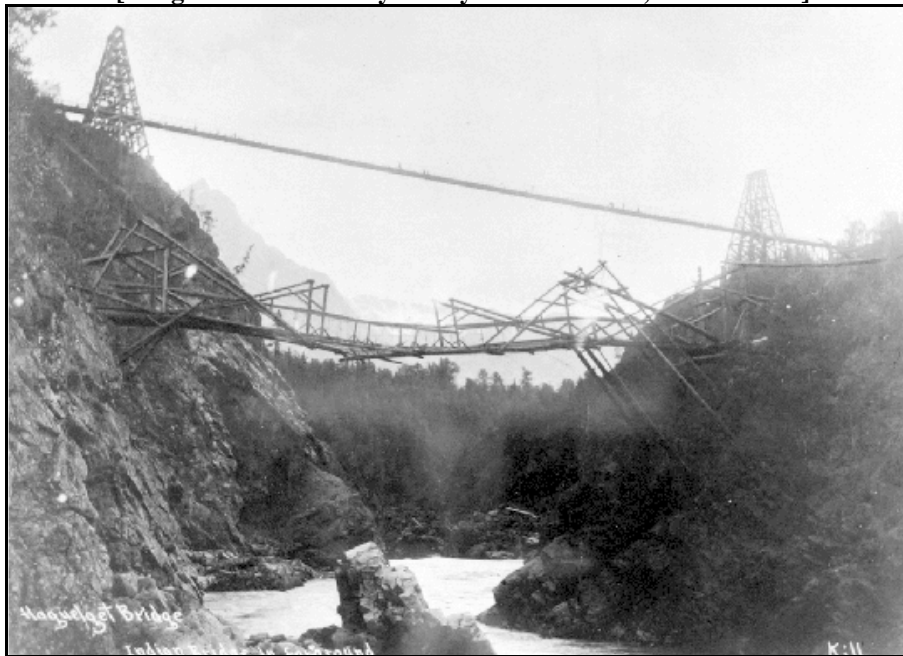


**Figure 6 "Bridge at Hagwilget, built by Chief Charles..." c.1890s
[Image A-00783 courtesy of Royal BC Museum, BC Archives]**

* The telegraph wire used as part of the construction materials of this bridge. When the bridge finally collapsed, the wire on the four heading poles kept them from being taken downstream [see grooved post in foreground and later discovered posts in Figure 9].



Figure 7 Aerial view of Bridge at Hagwilget, n.d
[Image I-62876 courtesy of Royal BC Museum, BC Archives]



**Figure 8 Two Hagwilget Bridges: Craddock & Co. bridge, background
 with Chief Charles' bridge, foreground. C. 1914**
[Image A-04014 courtesy of Royal BC Museum, BC Archives]



Figure 9 Archaeologist Dr. George MacDonald in 1981 with discovered bridge support and telegraph wire from Chief Charles' bridge [Northern Sentinel 1981]



**Figure 10 Hagwilget Bridge 1967 designed by Carruthers and built in 1931
[Image I-21845 courtesy of Royal BC Museum, BC Archives]**



Figure 11 Hagwilget Bridge 1971
[Image I-28191 courtesy of Royal BC Museum, BC Archives]



Figure 12 Present day Hagwilget Bridge designed by Alexander Carruthers [Buckland & Taylor 2005]



Figure 13 Present day bridge at Hagwilget [Gitanmaax Band 2008]



Figure 14 Hagwilget Bridge, 2007. Note footing in background from the Craddock and Co. bridge [Photo Credit: Ken Newman]



**Figure 15 Hagwilget Bridge, 2007. Note footing from the Craddock & Co. bridge in background
(Photo credit: Ken Newman)**

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