

Teton County Historic Site Survey

1. Name of Property

historic name Snake River Bridge Piers and Jetty

other name/site number Jackson-Wilson Bridge Piers

2. Location

street & number c. 1/2 mile north of Snake River Bridge on Hwy 22 ☐ not for publication

city or town Wilson ☒ vicinity

state Wyoming code WY county Teton code 039 zip code 83014

3. Ownership of Property

(check as many boxes as apply)

- ☐ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☒ public-Federal

4. Category of Property

(check only one box)

- ☐ building(s)
☐ district
☒ site
☐ structure
☐ object

5. Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
		buildings
		sites
<u>5</u>		structures
		objects
<u>5</u>		Total

Property Owner

name/title U. S. Bureau of Land Management

street & number 432 E. Mill Street telephone

city or town Pinedale state WY zip code 82941

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

National Register Status:

- ☒ Eligible ☐ Unevaluated
☐ Not Eligible ☐ District Potential

6. Function or Use

Historic Function

(Enter categories from instructions)

Transportation: road-related

Current Function

(Enter categories from instructions)

vacant / not in use

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Other

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation

walls

roof

other

concrete / steel

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

☒ See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 7

8. Statement of Significance**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property.
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Areas of Significance

Transportation

Period of Significance

1915-1955

Significant Dates

1915, 1917, 1922, 1927

Significant Persons

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation**Architect/Builder**

Levy Construction Co.

☒ See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 8

9. Major Bibliographical References**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☒ Other Name of repository:

Jackson Hole Historical Society

☒ See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 9

10. Geographical DataAcreage of Property about 10 acres**UTM References**

(Place additional boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

1 1/2 5/1/0/4/7/1 4/8/1/6/3/2/2
Zone Easting Northing2 1/2 / / / / / / / / / /
Zone Easting Northing3 1/2 / / / / / / / / / /
Zone Easting Northing4 1/2 / / / / / / / / / /
Zone Easting Northing**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

☒ See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 10**11. Form Prepared By**

Michael Cassity, Ph.D.
Historical Research and Photography
304 W. Albuquerque
Broken Arrow, Oklahoma 74011
Phone: 918 451-8378 • Fax: 918 451-8379
mcassity@valornet.com

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Maps**
- **Photographs:** Representative photographs of the property.

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Continuation Sheet

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Snake River Bridge Piers and Jetty

Narrative Description

This property consists of the remains of the Snake River Bridge at Wilson, Wyoming, which constitutes four pairs of concrete bridge piers in the riverbed and one associated jetty located on the east bank of the river. These remnants are about one-half mile north of the present bridge over the Snake on Highway 22. The bridge piers can be seen clearly from the riverbed, and even glimpsed from the new bridge, but not from the road that courses along the levee on the east bank. During normal river flows only one or two pairs of the piers are in the water, and when the river is low only one pair may be wet. The other two sets of piers are ordinarily dry, the braided river over which the bridge once crossed having narrowed and deepened its channel because of (1) control over the flow upstream and (2) the system of levees constructed in post World War II years. The log and rock cribbed jetty is located slightly north of the line of the bridge and east of the access road on the levee. While it appears to be on Bureau of Land Management property, this has not been precisely verified.

The four sets of piers—eight columns in toto—are reinforced poured concrete cylinders anchored into the riverbed to form an east-west line. The steel casings for the concrete remain in part and allow each pair to be connected to each other with a horizontal steel brace; thus each pair is considered to be a single structure. Each cylindrical pier is approximately three feet in diameter, but the height is not known.

The rock and log crib jetty is a linear feature approximately eight feet tall that stretches generally east and west for a distance of about one hundred feet. Cribs made of logs coped with saddle notches to attach to each other in a line and then filled with rock make this a sturdy barrier to riverine erosion. Because of the change in the river channel, so that it is no longer a braided river in this segment to the extent that it was in earlier years, the jetty is now on dry land and is used as a part of a network of fences to form a barrier to grazing livestock. The rock used in the cribs is sharp and was clearly brought here for this use and contrasts markedly from the rounded river rocks in the flood plain.

The bridge, of which these features were directly and indirectly a part, of course, is no longer present. These are only the remnants but they are regarded as eligible, not under Criterion C, for which more structural integrity would be necessary, but under Criterion A because of the historic events they not only mark on the riverbed and surrounding country, but because of the historic development of which they were a critical component.

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Snake River Bridge Piers and Jetty



Snake River Bridge east of Wilson, undated postcard. Close analysis shows a 1920s automobile on the bridge near the fourth set of piers (from the west). Postcard from collection of Michael Cassity.

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Snake River Bridge Piers and Jetty



Snake River Bridge Piers east of Wilson, Wyoming, western (first and second) two sets of piers. Looking northeast. Photo: Michael Cassity, 2004.

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Snake River Bridge Piers and Jetty



Snake River Bridge Piers, east of Wilson, Wyoming, westernmost piers. Looking north. Photo: Michael Cassity, 2004.

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Snake River Bridge Piers and Jetty



Snake River Bridge Piers, east of Wilson, Wyoming, second set of piers from the west. Looking northeast. Photo: Michael Cassiv. 2004.

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Snake River Bridge Piers and Jetty



Snake River Bridge Piers, east of Wilson, Wyoming, pier sets one and two from the west. Looking northwest. Unlike other survey photos, taken in the fall of 2004, both piers are out of the water in the spring of 2005. Photo: Michael Cassity, 2005.

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Snake River Bridge Piers and Jetty



Jetty for Snake River Bridge, east of Wilson, Wyoming. Looking east. Photo: Michael Cassity, 2005.

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Snake River Bridge Piers and Jetty



Jetty for Snake River Bridge, east of Wilson, Wyoming. Looking east. Photo: Michael Cassity, 2005.

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Snake River Bridge Piers and Jetty



Jetty for Snake River Bridge, east of Wilson, Wyoming. Looking north. Photo: Michael Cassity, 2005.

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Snake River Bridge Piers and Jetty

Narrative Statement of Significance

This property is significant under Criterion A in the area of significance Transportation.

The Snake River is one of the major river drainages of the northwest, with its origins in Yellowstone National Park and its mouth in the Columbia River near Pasco, Washington, with a multitude of major rivers and small drainages feeding it along its course. Because of its enormous length of more than a thousand miles, the river sometimes presented an avenue of travel for early peoples, but it also proved to be a challenging, even threatening, path to take and was known as the Mad River, for example, by the Wilson Price Hunt party that traveled it downstream from Jackson Hole in 1811. The river was fast, turbulent, and dangerous, especially during the spring runoff. The river also thereby proved to be more of an obstacle than an aid to transportation, especially at the end of the nineteenth century when white settlers began to filter into Jackson Hole from Idaho. There were, of course, places where the river could be forded at certain times of the year. A ford across the Gros Ventre River and the Snake River each at the place where they merged was one possibility. Another ford existed upstream at an unidentified point (see Daugherty, p. 186) between the Gros Ventre and Menor's Ferry. Several ferries emerged to reduce the danger and difficulty of fording the river and the most important of these, Menor's Ferry, came into being in 1894 at the point where the village of Moose would appear. As the settlement of Jackson and the southern part of Jackson Hole increased at the beginning of the twentieth century, settlers with greater frequency forded the river at the bottom of the trail over Teton Pass rather than going north fifteen miles to cross at Menor's Ferry. This crossing near the town of Wilson thus became a critical part of transportation in and out of the valley. A ferry sometimes operated in this area too, including one operated by Ed Blair who built a cabin east of this location; while the early ferry was not completely reliable, given the braided river and the changing flow it carried, it lasted until 1915 when this bridge replaced it.

One of the critical factors shaping the flow of the Snake River downstream was the construction of a dam at the mouth of Jackson Lake. Originally, in 1906-1907, the Reclamation Service raised the water level of the lake by constructing a dam of log and rock cribbing, but that dam gave way in 1910 and the government built a new concrete structure. Although that new dam was not finished until 1916, its impact was felt earlier. In 1912 the *Kemmerer Camera*, a prominent newspaper in Uinta County, of which Jackson Hole was a part at the time, noted that "Prior to the building of this dam, the Snake River was always fordable except during the high water season, but now this storage water which is used for the benefit of the people in Idaho and Oregon, is turned loose in such a way that the river is maintained at a height above normal making it impossible at any time in the year to use the fords, and requiring that the ranchers and others must make wide detours in order to get to a ferry which will allow their crossing." The newspaper then concluded: "The great need of a bridge in the Jackson Hole, is well known" "There is nothing," the paper maintained, "which advertises a community better than good roads" Negotiations for a bridge between the county and the U.S. government, especially to determine which entity would pay the majority of the cost of the bridge, continued for some time, but finally agreement was reached between Lincoln County (which had

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Snake River Bridge Piers and Jetty

become separate from Uinta) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Public Roads so that a modern steel bridge was constructed in 1915. This was the bridge that was placed on the piers included in this survey, and it was a magnificent structure, a five-span Pratt through-truss bridge, with each span 130' long—the longest bridge in the state of Wyoming at the time. Log crib abutments on either side extended the length of the bridge and it was put to good use immediately. In the spring of 1917, however, the Snake River flooded. After the flood had done its damage, local citizens accused the operators of the dam at Jackson Lake of releasing too much water and causing the flood, but the Reclamation Service denied the claim, saying only that a normal flow was permitted. In any case the damage to the bridge was huge. The floodwaters washed away the approaches to the bridge on both sides, thus leaving the bridge itself intact but disconnected from either shore. For five years the discussion, sometimes quite heated, resumed over whose responsibility it was to rebuild, or more correctly, to reconnect the bridge. Lincoln County officials and the Wyoming State Engineer maintained that it was the responsibility of the Reclamation Service (it would not be renamed the Bureau of Reclamation until 1923) to do the work since it was the dam at Jackson Lake that made the bridge necessary. Ultimately, in 1922 with shared financing, the work to make the bridge serviceable was undertaken. The planning for the bridge this time included greater attention to the connecting roadway, so in addition to sturdier abutments and approaches, the construction in 1922 involved a complicated system of embankments, jetties, and rip-rapping. The jetty included in this survey appears to date from this effort.

When the bridge was finally reconstructed and reopened in 1922 the celebrants were from all over the valley. The officials set off twenty-five sticks of dynamite "to fittingly celebrate a victory over the treacherous Snake." Victory was, indeed, finally at hand and, as the local paper noted, "The people of Jackson's Hole and the many tourists who visit here year after year, have waited a long time for the completion of such a bridge as this."

Victory was to be short-lived. In May, 1927, the lake that had been formed upstream on the Gros Ventre River by the 1925 landslide that blocked the river tore through the dam of rubble and earth and sent a wall of water rushing down the valley, causing the Snake River also to flood. The bridge survived the flood, but the approaches did not. The extent of the damage to the approaches is unclear and some sources seem to conflate the 1927 flood and the 1917 flood so that references to the washed out approaches in 1927 may, in fact, be referring to the 1917 damage. In any event, it appears that the damage in the 1927 flood was more temporary than the previous devastation and that the bridge was operable before too long. The repaired bridge continued to serve the traffic between Jackson and Wilson for three decades.

The bridge was replaced by the modern bridge on Highway 22 in 1959. Parts of the five bridge spans were taken eight miles south to the Swinging Bridge crossing of the Snake when this bridge was being dismantled in 1959 and other parts were taken to a point at Johnny Counts Flats below the junction with the Hoback River to make another bridge. Thus all that is left of the bridge at this location are the four sets of piers and associated structures. While there may be other jetty remnants extant, they have not been located by this researcher yet.

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Snake River Bridge Piers and Jetty

The significance of this bridge—and its associated features—is that this marked a major effort by the county(ies) to develop a permanent crossing of the river, so vital to provide connection with the outside world and ultimately, as the one newspaper quotation indicates, to encourage the flow of tourists into the valley. While Jackson Hole residents from the earliest days seem to have valued the isolation that the difficult access provided, some elements, especially those of a more commercial bent, sought to break down that isolation and improve communication and transportation to other parts of the nation. That divergence in vision is an enduring issue in this area. Plus, this also revealed in the starkest way possible another issue. The role of the management of the river resources in the West has always been fraught with complexity and has proven to be a model of the political framework in which the government's actions to benefit one group automatically impact another group. As contemporary observers noted, this bridge was made necessary by the installation of a dam upstream at Jackson Lake. Then, they argued, it was the management of the water flow at that dam that destroyed the approaches to this bridge. The issues symbolized by these remnants of the Snake River Bridge are vital issues, contentious issues, and issues that go to the heart of much of modern debate over the future of Jackson Hole.

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Snake River Bridge Piers and Jetty

Bibliography

Allan, Esther. "History of the Teton National Forest," unpublished manuscript (1973) located in Jackson Hole Historical Society files.

Daugherty, John. *A Place Called Jackson Hole* (Moose, Wyoming: Grand Teton National Park, 1999).

Hayden, Elizabeth Wied. *From Trapper to Tourist in Jackson Hole* (n.p.: Grand Teton Natural History Association, 1957).

Huser, Verne. *Wyoming's Snake River: A River Guide's Chronicle of People and Places Plants and Animals* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2001).

"Jackson Hole Bridge," Kemmerer Camera, January 31, 1912.

Land Records, Office of the County Clerk, Teton County, Wyoming.

"Snake River Bridge," Kemmerer Camera, June 18, 1913.

"Snake River Bridge," Kemmerer Camera, January 10, 1912.

"Snake River Bridge at Jackson Finished," Jackson Hole *Courier*, February 23, 1922.

"That Snake River Bridge," Kemmerer Camera, February 4, 1914.

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Snake River Bridge Piers and Jetty

Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

This property consists of a divided parcel in the NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of the SE $\frac{1}{4}$, Section 22, T 41, R 117.

Boundary Justification

This boundary includes the property historically associated with the Snake River Bridge and associated features.