

LAKE CATHERINE STATE PARK BRIDGE NO. 2  
Arkansas Bridges 2005  
Spanning creek at AR 171, Lake Catherine State Park  
Malvern vicinity  
Hot Spring County  
Arkansas

HAER AR-79  
AR-79

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

# HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

## LAKE CATHERINE STATE PARK BRIDGE No. 2

### HAER No. AR-79

Location: Spanning an unnamed creek at AR 171, Lake Catherine State Park, Malvern vicinity, Hot Spring County, Arkansas

UTM: 15.505541.3809784, Lake Catherine, Arkansas Quad.

AHTD #: HS0073

Structural Type: Concrete slab

Construction Date: 1938-39

Designer: Rex C. Conner, Landscape Architect  
Thomas H. Clay, Engineer

Builder: Civilian Conservation Corps Company 3777

Owner: Arkansas State Park Commission

Use: Vehicular bridge

Significance: Lake Catherine State Park is one of six Arkansas state parks developed in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps under the direction of the National Park Service.<sup>1</sup> Bridge No. 2, the largest vehicular bridge within the park, is representative of park architecture of the period.

Project Information: The Arkansas Historic Bridges Recording Project is part of the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER), a long-range program that documents historically significant engineering sites and structures in the United States. HAER is administered by the Heritage Documentation Programs Division of the National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior, Richard O'Connor, Manager. The Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department sponsored this project.

Lola Bennett, HAER Historian, 2007

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<sup>1</sup> Petit Jean, Mt. Nebo, Crowley's Ridge, Devil's Den, Lake Catherine and Buffalo Point are considered the "charter parks" of the Arkansas State Park system. When the Buffalo National River was created in 1972, Buffalo Point State Park was turned over to the U.S. Department of the Interior.

## Chronology

- 1803 Louisiana Purchase doubles the size of the United States
- 1819 Arkansas Territory created from part of Louisiana Purchase
- 1836 Arkansas becomes 25th state to join the Union
- 1885 Niagara Falls becomes America's first state park
- 1916 National Park Service established
- 1921 National Park Service initiates National Conference on State Parks
- 1923 Arkansas Committee of State Lands authorized to accept land donations for state parks
- 1924 Arkansas Power & Light Company dams the Ouachita River, creating Lake Catherine
- 1927 Arkansas State Park Commission created
- 1929 U.S. stock market crash marks beginning of the Great Depression
- 1932 President Franklin D. Roosevelt proposes unemployment relief programs
- 1933 Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) created
  - CCC Company 1781-V begins development of Petit Jean State Park
- 1935 Industrial magnate Harvey Couch deeds land for Lake Catherine State Park
- 1937 CCC Company 3777 begins development of Lake Catherine State Park
- 1938 National Park Service approves plans for Lake Catherine State Park bridges
- 1939 Lake Catherine State Park bridges completed
- 1942 CCC Company 3777 disbands
  - Lake Catherine State Park opens to visitors
- 1992 Bridge No. 2 listed in the National Register of Historic Places

## Description

Bridge No. 2 is the larger of two extant Civilian Conservation Corps-built bridges in Lake Catherine State Park.<sup>2</sup> It is a single-span reinforced concrete slab bridge with stone-faced concrete abutments and parapet walls. The bridge is approximately 25' long, 28' wide and 10' high, with a 10' clear span. The concrete slab is 16" thick. Designed to resemble a timber stringer bridge on stone abutments, the structure originally had squared timbers along the outer faces of the concrete slab. The timbers have since decayed or been removed.<sup>3</sup>

## History

In March 1935, Harvey C. Couch (1877-1941), President of Arkansas Power and Light Company, deeded 2,700 acres of land to the State of Arkansas, with a stipulation that the land be developed as a state park.<sup>4</sup> Located 25 miles southeast of Hot Springs, in the rugged Ouachita Mountains, the property included numerous mountain springs and waterfalls and 10 miles of shoreline on Lake Catherine.<sup>5</sup> The lake, formed in 1924, when Arkansas' first hydroelectric dam was built on the Ouachita River, was considered an ideal spot for a new state park. In June 1935, the Arkansas State Park Commission and the National Park Service (NPS) began developing plans for Lake Catherine State Park.<sup>6</sup>

In September 1937, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) transferred members of Company 3777 from Little Rock to Malvern, Arkansas, to begin work at Lake Catherine.<sup>7</sup> Construction began on the park entrance road October 1, 1937.<sup>8</sup> The NPS approved plans for park bridges in May 1938, and they were completed in 1938-39.<sup>9</sup> Newspaper accounts indicate that WPA work crews built the road and bridges outside the park boundary at about the same time.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Three bridges have been identified within the park boundaries:

| BRIDGE       | LOCATION      | DATE | BUILDER | SPANS | LENGTH | DESCRIPTION               | NOTES                   |
|--------------|---------------|------|---------|-------|--------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| BRIDGE No. 1 | DITCH         | 1938 | CCC     | 1     | 4'     | STONE-FACED CONCRETE SLAB | CULVERT                 |
| BRIDGE No. 2 | UNNAMED CREEK | 1938 | CCC     | 1     | 10'    | STONE-FACED CONCRETE SLAB |                         |
| BRIDGE No. 3 | SLUNGER CREEK |      | AHTD    | 3     | 40'    | MODERN CONCRETE SLAB      | REPLACED CCC BRIDGE (?) |

Bridge No. 1 is a smaller CCC-built structure not included in the 1992 National Register nomination.

<sup>3</sup> Arkansas State Park Commission, "Lake Catherine State Park Vehicle Bridge," 1938.

<sup>4</sup> "H.C. Couch Gives Deed to Park at Lake Catherine," *Malvern Daily Record*, 23 August 1935. "State Park Commission Soon Will be Inviting Visitors to Lake Catherine," *Arkansas Gazette*, 2 July 1935.

<sup>5</sup> Lake Catherine was named for Arkansas Power & Light Company President Harvey Couch's daughter.

<sup>6</sup> Arkansas State Park Commission, "Proposed Lake Catherine State Park," 13 June 1935.

<sup>7</sup> "CCC Unit Obtained for State Park Near Here," *Malvern Daily Record*, 10 September 1937.

<sup>8</sup> *Arkansas Gazette* (Little Rock, Arkansas), 18 September 1937.

<sup>9</sup> Arkansas State Park Commission, *Third Annual Report*, 5 December 1939, 10.

<sup>10</sup> Additional information is needed on the remaining AR 171 bridges. Features of the bridge at MP 1.45, particularly its stone-faced piers, suggest that it *may* be an extant WPA structure.

Between 1938 and 1942, CCC Company 3777 completed Lake Catherine State Park's facilities, including utility systems, a camping area, several housekeeping cabins, hiking trails, a beach, a boathouse and a fleet of rowboats. The park officially opened to the public in 1942.

## Builder

The Civilian Conservation Corps was a government-sponsored Depression-era recovery program that conducted public-works projects primarily on federal and state lands. From its inception in 1933 until 1942, the CCC employed almost 3 million young men nationwide to do over 100 types of manual labor, including planting trees, sodding farmland, erecting fences, building roads and developing recreational areas.

In Arkansas, a significant portion of the CCC's work was constructing state park facilities at Petit Jean, Mt. Nebo, Crowley's Ridge, Devil's Den, Lake Catherine and Buffalo Point.<sup>11</sup> CCC Company 3777 organized at Devil's Den State Park in 1935, and later moved to Boyle Park in Little Rock, before transferring to Lake Catherine in the fall of 1937. Development of Lake Catherine State Park took place in 1937-1942 under the supervision of the Arkansas State Park Commission and the National Park Service.

Approximately 170 CCC enrollees worked six hours a day, five days a week, for which they received \$1 per day, room and board, clothing and vocational training. Project superintendents Gilbert G. Lawson (1937-39) and Roy C. Donaldson (1940-42) oversaw the work.<sup>12</sup> Engineer Thomas H. Clay, landscape architect Rex C. Conner and stone mason William A. Mills supervised road and bridge construction.<sup>13</sup>

## Design

*"In any area in which preservation of the beauty of Nature is a primary purpose, every proposed modification of the natural landscape deserves to be most thoughtfully considered."*

-Arno B. Cammerer, Director, National Park Service, 1938<sup>14</sup>

In the 1930s, the National Park Service's design ethic was applied to the development of state and local parks. Architects and engineers used naturalistic landscape principles and indigenous materials to design permanent, utilitarian structures that harmonized with their natural

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<sup>11</sup> *Memories of Arkansas District Civilian Conservation Corps*, 1940.

<sup>12</sup> Civilian Conservation Corps, "Camp Inspection Report: Company No. 3777, Camp No. SP-9, Lake Catherine," 13 September 1938.

<sup>13</sup> Civilian Conservation Corps, "Technical Personnel, Camp No. SP-9, Arkansas," 2 June 1939.

<sup>14</sup> Albert H. Good, *Park and Recreation Structures* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Interior, National Park Service, 1938), Preface.

surroundings and added rustic appeal to the landscape.<sup>15</sup> Combining reinforced concrete construction with rustic timber and stone elements, Lake Catherine State Park Bridge No. 2 is highly representative of Depression-era park architecture.

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<sup>15</sup> Good, 175-176.

**Sources**

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