



1918

Bridge Facts

Bridge opened: Feb. 10, 1919

Contractor: Ross Construction Co.

Cost of construction: \$74,940

Type of structure:
Open-spandrel arch

Type of material used:
Steel-reinforced concrete

Length of bridge: 511 feet

Length of arch span: 209 feet

Width of bridge: 31 feet

Height above the water: 70 feet

Weight of arch: 4 million pounds

Do you know?

When it opened in 1919, Rainbow Bridge was officially known as the American River Bridge at Folsom and informally called simply "the bridge." In the early 1950s, a Folsom resident suggested to a Sutter Street shopkeeper that the more descriptive designation be used on postcards. The name immediately took hold, and the picturesque crossing, with its rainbow-shaped arches, has been Rainbow Bridge ever since.

Rainbow Bridge was the second concrete arch bridge in Folsom to be designed by county surveyor Drury Miller. Miller also drew the plans for the smaller Figueroa Street bridge, which opened in 1916.

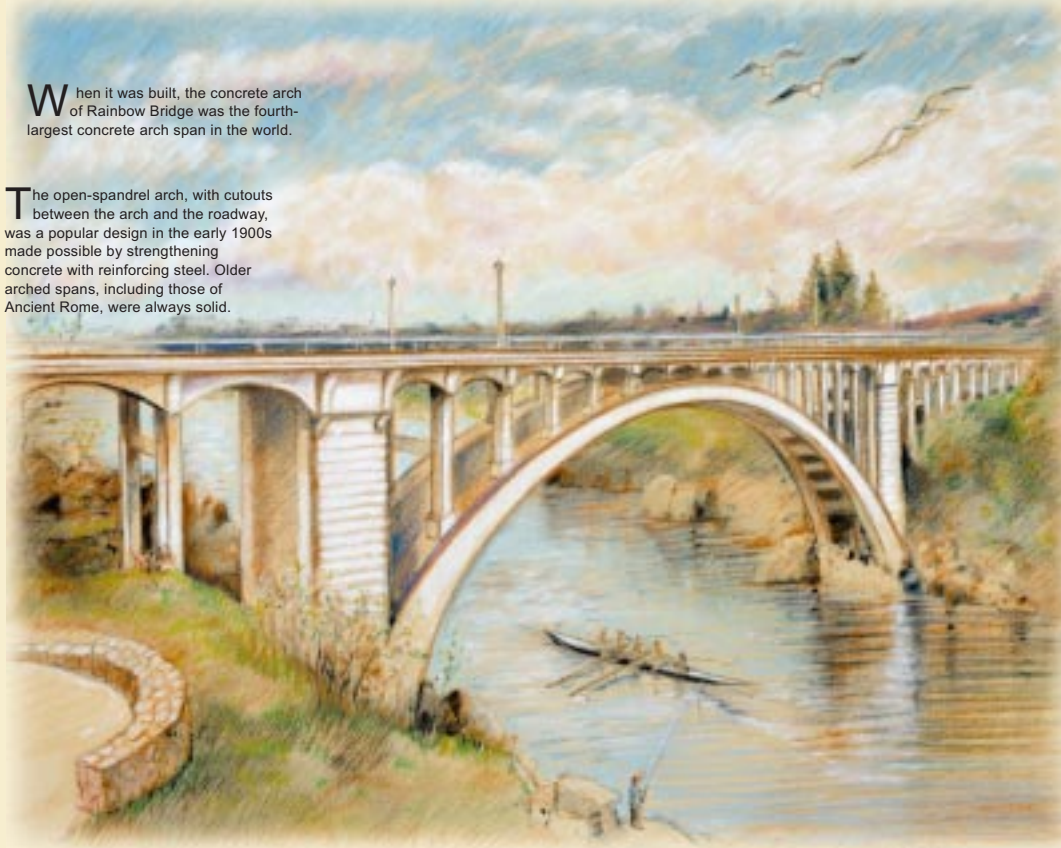
In the year Rainbow Bridge opened, 1919, the state raised its maximum speed limit to 35 mph.

A rainbow rising out of solid rocks

In 1918, when Rainbow Bridge was going up amid granite outcroppings, *The Folsom Telegraph* described the structure as "rising apparently out of solid rocks." It still looks that way today.

When it was built, the concrete arch of Rainbow Bridge was the fourth-largest concrete arch span in the world.

The open-spandrel arch, with cutouts between the arch and the roadway, was a popular design in the early 1900s made possible by strengthening concrete with reinforcing steel. Older arched spans, including those of Ancient Rome, were always solid.



A bridge meant for tourists

Sacramento County had big plans for Rainbow Bridge when it opened it 1919. The graceful structure with its distinctive concrete arch was to be the final link in a "40-mile loop ... through some of the richest agricultural lands in the state." County officials predicted the pastoral drive between Sacramento and Folsom "was destined to become famous" as a tourist attraction. The route followed Greenback Lane on the north and Folsom Boulevard on the south. Those roads no longer lure sightseers, but Rainbow Bridge is still one of the most photographed spots on the American River.



Look above you: In spring and summer, the skies fill with cliff swallows darting about to catch flying insects. These little gray birds, the famed species of San Juan Capistrano, live in mud nests under the eaves of the bridge. Each nest contains nearly 1,000 tiny "bricks" of mud.

Rainbow Bridge was part of highway history

For one year, in 1927, Rainbow Bridge was part of the historic Lincoln Highway, the first coast-to-coast route in the United States. By 1915, the Lincoln Highway reached from New York City to San Francisco. It divided in Nevada to circle Lake Tahoe – roughly following today's Highway 50 and Interstate 80 – and became one road again in Sacramento. In 1927, the route was altered to cross Rainbow Bridge and rejoin at Greenback Lane. The Lincoln Highway designation was removed in 1928 when the federal government began numbering its highways.

