

THE LAST STONE CULVERT ON THE WHITEWATER CANAL IS DESTROYING ITSELF!!

Come with me, readers, for just a moment. I'd like you to see what I believe to be the last stone arch culvert on the Whitewater Canal. In late Fall this little canal ruin stands out like a monument along US 52 at the North edge of Brookville. Like an unattended cemetery, it receives sparse notice. I believe that apathy has done more for historic preservation in Indiana than any other force, as this site owes its existence today to the fortune of neglect.

W.S. Webb was the State surveyor who laid out this culvert in June of 1839. The forgotten contractors were Reid and Kelly Construction Co. It is within canal section #83 and is of approximately 17' chord. Butler Run Aqueduct (at the South property line of the Whitewater Canal State Memorial) is in the process of destroying itself and could easily weaken its arch to the point of collapse in a few years.

In an open cut, a wooden arch was constructed over the creek. On this wooden form the stone arch was carefully laid. Each stone set like a wedge, one keying into the next, and finished off with dressed stone wing walls and cap stone railing. With the arch completed and backfilled, the shoring was knocked out and forms removed. The arch is thereafter held up by the forces of gravity. I inspected this ruin in 1979 and, other than a small weep hole over the center arch, it was in excellent condition. The small funnel of erosion no bigger than the loss of one key stone increased the next spring to the size of a garbage can.

The culvert is located in one of those typical small patches of fringe jungle tied up in easements and overlapping right-of-ways for highway, railroad, power lines and the whims of both creek and river. As has been written, the tow-path of the Whitewater Canal by 1863 became a railroad bed and with it the railroad inherited the culvert aqueducts. My first memory of this aqueduct was a time when the creek was up and neighbor boys invited me to use this ruin as a diving platform, and some years before that I am told, the local farmer found the stone arch to be a

peaceful access to his flood-plain corn field. He'd cross the railroad fill with horse and grain wagon by going through the culvert. A stone arch is a very durable design you know. This canal ruin withstood a century of vibration from railroad boxcars without a flinch. Well, perhaps one.

I suppose I should have patched it. For anyone who cared, a sheet of plywood propped up with one of several discarded railroad ties could have formed up the leak. Any three Boy Scouts with a five gallon bucket of cement along with the amply abundant creek rock, gravel and sand, might easily have done the job in an afternoon. Might one be arrested for patching a railroad canal culvert? Probably not. What if someone saw me. Very unlikely. Might they lock me up as a 'danger to society'? An alternative. Much more professional. I'll contact State Authority. The center line of Butler Run Creek is the South property line of the Whitewater Canal State Memorial; therefore at least half of this hole is the property of the Dept. of Natural Resources. At that time it was under the authority of the Division of Historic Preservation. I notified this office and in a short time a field investigation was made. They never acknowledged any particular gratitude to me for bringing this to their attention but did instruct their local property manager to put a snow fence around the hole to discourage a person from falling in.

Today the hole has grown enough strength to cave in a tree at its edge and what was an ankle twister could now conceal a picnic table. The purpose of this article is to give this warning:

Hunt Indiana culvert aqueducts if you care, and periodically inspect them. For Butler Run Culvert the alarm is already ringing and time is running out. Take heed of a funnel with the sands of time washing into it. This is a first hand account of the disastrous effects of erosion on a stone arch culvert. The remains of Indiana's vast canal system are today not abundant; and, of them, stone arch culvert aqueducts are nearly extinct. -Paul Baudendistel