

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NR 5/22/09

**National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Highway A-7 Bridges Historic District

other names/site number Bridge #580, Sites #PO0073-PO0075

2. Location

street & number Old U.S. 63 over Ditch No. 1 and its reliefs

☐ not for publication

city or town Marked Tree

☒ vicinity

state Arkansas code AR county Poinsett code 111 zip code 72365

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set for in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Cathie Matthews
Signature of certifying official/Title

3/17/09
Date

Arkansas Historic Preservation Program
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See Continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

☐ entered in the National Register.

☐ See continuation sheet

☐ determined eligible for the National Register.

☐ See continuation sheet

☐ determined not eligible for the National Register.

☐ removed from the National Register.

☐ other, (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Highway A-7 Bridges Historic District

Name of Property

Poinsett County, Arkansas

County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

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

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

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

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in count.)

Contributing

Noncontributing

		buildings
		sites
3	1	structures
		objects
3	1	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

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

Historic Bridges of Arkansas

**Number of Contributing resources previously listed
in the National Register**

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

TRANSPORTATION/road-related(vehicular)

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

TRANSPORTATION/road-related(vehicular)

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

walls N/A

roof N/A

other CONCRETE, STEEL

Narrative Description

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

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.** birthplace or grave of a historical figure of outstanding importance.
- ☐ **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.

Levels of Significance (local, state, national)

Local

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Transportation

Engineering

Period of Significance

c.1922-1959

Significant Dates

c.1922, 1927-1928

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked)**Cultural Affiliation** (Complete if Criterion D is marked)**Architect/Builder**

V. W. Clanton, Builder (Bridge #580)

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

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:

Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department

Highway A-7 Bridges Historic District

Name of Property

Poinsett County, Arkansas

County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one.

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 15 736250 3933302
Zone Easting Northing
2 _____

3 _____
Zone Easting Northing
4 _____

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Ralph S. Wilcox, National Register & Survey Coordinator
organization Arkansas Historic Preservation Program date January 8, 2009
street & number 1500 Tower Building, 323 Center Street telephone (501) 324-9787
city or town Little Rock state AR zip code 72201

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name _____
street & number _____ telephone _____
city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listing. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P. O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

HIGHWAY A-7 BRIDGES
HISTORIC DISTRICT
MARKED TREE
POINSETT COUNTY,
ARKANSAS

--- = BOUNDARY
NOT TO SCALE

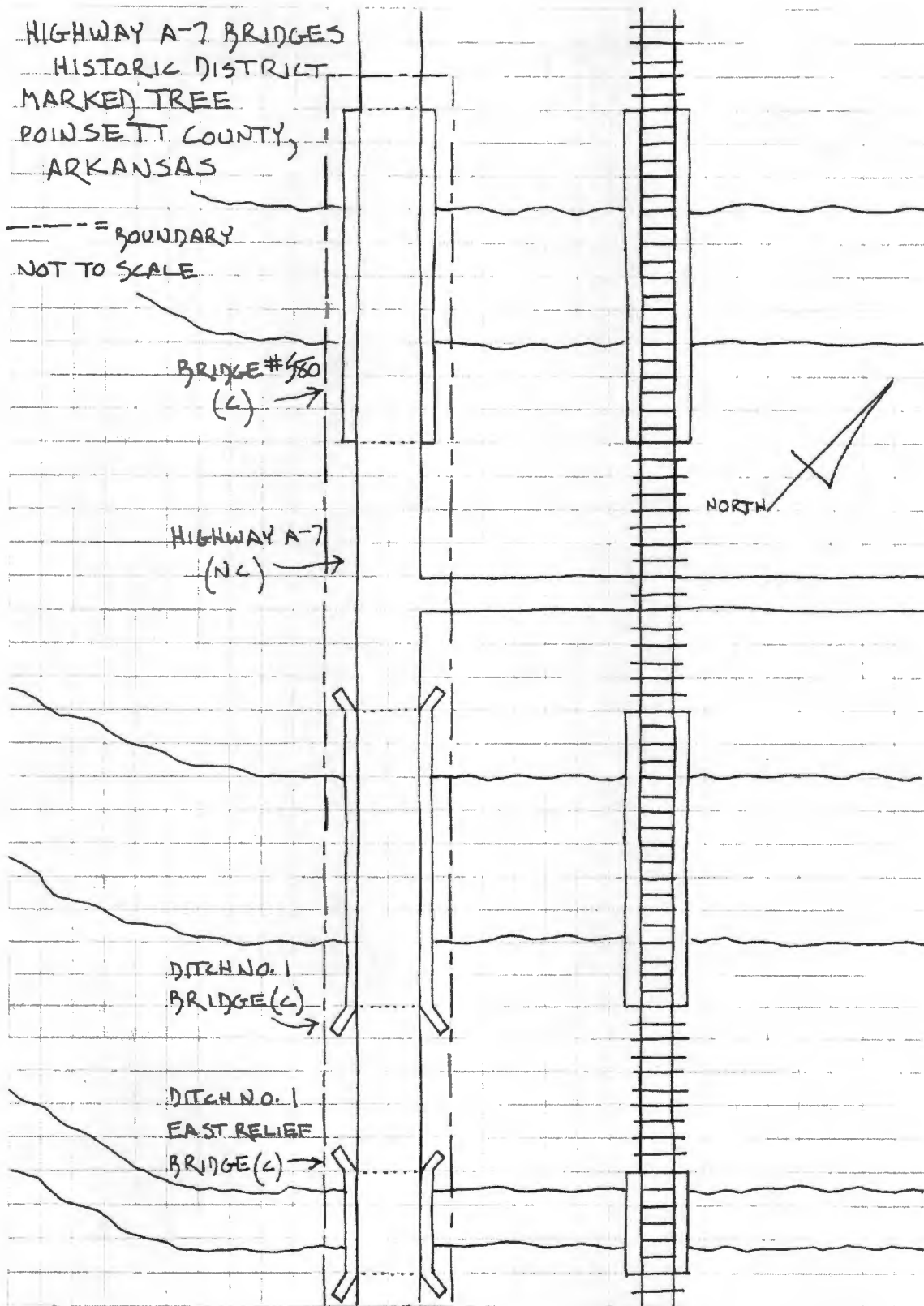
BRIDGE #580
(L) →

HIGHWAY A-7
(N) →

DITCH NO. 1
BRIDGE (L) →

DITCH NO. 1
EAST RELIEF
BRIDGE (L) →

NORTH



National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Name of Property: Highway A-7 Bridges Historic District

County and State: Poinsett County, Arkansas

Name of multiple property listing (if applicable): Historic
Bridges of Arkansas

Section number 7 Page 1

SUMMARY

The Highway A-7 Bridges Historic District consists of three bridges spanning drainage ditches to the southeast of Marked Tree and northwest of Tyronza in rural Poinsett County, Arkansas. Two of the bridges were built c.1922 as part of an effort to develop a spur of the Ozark Trail from Springfield, Missouri, to Memphis, Tennessee. The shorter 1922 bridge is reinforced concrete while the longer bridge is reinforced concrete with a steel plate-girder center span. Both of the bridges have decorative concrete guardrails. The third bridge, Bridge #580, which is also reinforced concrete, was built in 1927-1928 to replace another bridge likely destroyed in the 1927 flood. Bridge #580 also has decorative guardrails and is much stouter in its construction.

ELABORATION

The Highway A-7 Bridges Historic District consists of three bridges spanning drainage ditches to the southeast of Marked Tree and northwest of Tyronza in rural Poinsett County, Arkansas. The total length of the district is about 400 feet along the original route of Highway A-7. The route of Highway A-7, which later became U.S. 63, runs southeast from Marked Tree to Tyronza parallel to the railroad line. The area of the bridges is surrounded mainly by agricultural fields.

The southeastern two bridges were built c.1922 as part of an effort to develop a spur of the Ozark Trail from Springfield, Missouri, to Memphis, Tennessee. The shorter 1922 bridge is constructed strictly of reinforced concrete while the longer bridge is reinforced concrete with a steel plate-girder center span over Ditch No. 1. Both of the bridges have decorative concrete guardrails.

The third bridge, Bridge #580, which is also reinforced concrete, was built in 1927-1928 to replace another bridge likely destroyed in the 1927 flood. Although simpler in its detailing than the 1922 bridges, Bridge #580 also has decorative guardrails. Bridge #580 is also employs much stronger construction to better handle heavier traffic loads.

Bridge #580 (Contributing)

Bridge #580, according to the plans in the files of the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department, consists of three spans. The center span is 50 feet long while the other two spans are each 18 feet long. The spans rest on cast concrete piers with rounded ends and thick, projecting caps. The bridge's overall length is 92 feet 2 inches, and the clear roadway width is 20 feet. The overall width is approximately 30 feet.

The guardrails of the bridge, which are massive at 11 inches thick and almost 4 feet tall, are decorated with pressed rectangular panels. Large piers at each end of the guardrails had plaques on them originally, although they have been stolen over the years.

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Name of Property: Highway A-7 Bridges Historic District

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Ditch No. 1 Bridge (Contributing)

The Ditch No. 1 Bridge is a three-span bridge that is approximately 100 feet long and 20 feet wide. The main span of the bridge is comprised of a plate-girder truss while the end spans are reinforced concrete spans. The bridge's deck is also constructed out of concrete and has a continuous concrete curb on each side.

The guardrails of the center span are comprised of the plate girder truss. Each truss also has seven vertical bars evenly spaced along the top that held wires that were strung through them for additional protection.

The guardrails on the concrete spans are also constructed out of reinforced concrete. Each span's guardrail is comprised of five panels, four along the span and one angled panel at the bridge's end. Each panel has an arched projecting cap along the top and an incised rectangle on the side. The panels are divided by square concrete pillars with pointed, projecting, concrete caps. The guardrails on the southeastern span are also arched to compensate for the elevation difference between the bridge and the road to the southeast.

Ditch No. 1 East Relief Bridge (Contributing)

The Ditch No. 1 East Relief Bridge is likely a two-span bridge that is approximately 50 feet long and 20 feet wide. The bridge's spans are reinforced concrete spans. The bridge's deck is also constructed out of concrete and has a continuous concrete curb on each side.

The guardrails on the bridge are also constructed out of reinforced concrete. The bridge's guardrail is comprised of eight, six along the span and one angled panel at each end. Each panel has an arched projecting cap along the top and an incised rectangle on the side. The panels are divided by square concrete pillars with pointed, projecting, concrete caps. The northeastern end of each guardrail is also arched to compensate for the elevation difference between the bridge and the road to the northwest.

Highway A-7 (Non-Contributing)

The bypassed section of Highway A-7 that exists around the bridges has a width of 17 feet and no paved shoulders. (For comparison, the current American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials Green Book indicates that a lane width of 11 feet 9 inches is desirable.) The pavement is composed of unreinforced concrete. However, because of extreme deterioration, including cracking and shifting of the pavement, due to the use of unreinforced concrete on swampy soils, it is considered to be non-contributing to the nomination.

 Integrity

The bridges in the Highway A-7 Bridges Historic District retain excellent integrity. The bridges are unaltered from the time of their construction in c.1922 and 1927-1928, with the exception of some guardrail damage on the c.1922 bridges, likely caused by auto accidents. The c.1922 bridges still exhibit their original

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Name of Property: Highway A-7 Bridges Historic District

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Section number 7 Page 3

construction and still possess many of their decorative characteristics. Bridge #580 also remains unaltered, with the exception of the theft of the plaques, and has suffered no deterioration, a testament to its massive construction and over-engineering. Although the road itself has deteriorated and is considered non-contributing, it does provide a linkage and continuity between the three bridges.

The setting around the bridges also reflects their period of significance. Tyronza and Marked Tree both remain small towns (each has less than 3,000 residents), and the area in the immediate vicinity of the bridges is still an agricultural area as it was during the 1920s when they were built. Although rarely used, the bridges are still open to vehicular traffic.

 National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Name of Property: Highway A-7 Bridges Historic District

County and State: Poinsett County, Arkansas

Name of multiple property listing (if applicable): Historic
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SUMMARY

The Highway A-7 Bridges Historic District is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under **Criterion A** with **local significance** for its associations with the development of highway infrastructure in Poinsett County during the 1920s. The three bridges in the district, which were all built between c.1922 and 1928, were part of an effort to develop a spur of the Ozark Trail from southeast Missouri, to Memphis, Tennessee. They illustrate the importance of providing good infrastructure for automobiles, something that was sometimes difficult in the swampy areas of Eastern Arkansas. The bridges continued to be used as part of Highway A-7 (later U.S. 63) until the current U.S. 63 was constructed in 1967.

The Highway A-7 Bridges Historic District is also being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under **Criterion C** with **local significance** for its good examples of early twentieth-century bridge-building technologies. The bridges in the district that date to c.1922 illustrate early reinforced concrete bridge design. The decorative detailing and delicate proportions, along with the combination of a steel plate-girder span to cross the longer distance of Ditch No. 1, illustrate the small amount of traffic that the bridges needed to handle along with the limited knowledge of concrete bridge construction available at that time. Bridge #580, on the other hand, which dates to 1927-1928 and exhibits massive proportions, illustrates how far bridge design (and automobile traffic) had come in a short period of time. Built as a likely replacement for a bridge destroyed in the 1927 flood, Bridge #580 improved on the deficiencies of earlier designs to provide a much improved reinforced-concrete bridge.

The Highway A-7 Bridges Historic District nomination is being submitted under the multiple property listing "Historic Bridges of Arkansas" and under associated historic context "Early Transportation Era."

ELABORATION

Poinsett County was created on February 28, 1838, in accordance with an act of the General Assembly, and was formed from land taken from Greene County.¹ Although settlement of the county began in the 1820s, it was slow through much of the nineteenth century, since many of the settlers came from the hilly parts of the eastern U.S. and wanted to settle in similar areas. As a result of the lack of settlement, many of the early settlers in Poinsett County endured an isolated existence.²

Surprisingly, agriculture played a lesser role to the timber industry in the early economy of Poinsett County. Goodspeed's *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Northeast Arkansas* stated that, "At present, and for many years, the lumbering industry of Poinsett County is and will be a great source of income, especially to those

¹ *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Northeast Arkansas*. Chicago: Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1889, p. 570.

² *Ibid*, p. 576.

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Name of Property: Highway A-7 Bridges Historic District

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engaged in the business, and to those owning the timber. There are a number of saw-mills here engaged in cutting the timber into lumber, for which the shipping facilities are excellent.”³ On the other hand, in 1880 there were only 297 farms in Poinsett County with 7,979 acres of improved land that produced only 1,514 bales of cotton. (By contrast, there were 87,133 bushels of corn produced in Poinsett County the same year.)⁴

The area in the Marked Tree vicinity remained sparsely populated until the arrival of the Kansas City, Fort Scott & Memphis Railroad in the area in the early 1880s. One settlement, Lewis, was in the area in 1872, but it had disappeared by 1895.⁵ A post office with the name Kovics was established at the location of Marked Tree in 1882, but the name was changed to Edwards in 1883 to honor the postmaster, Jonathan Edwards. In 1888, however, the name was changed once again, this time to Marked Tree.

Although it is not known exactly how Marked Tree got its name, there are two different theories. One theory is that Native Americans marked a tree in the area to show them where it was safe to remove their canoes from the St. Francis River. The other story, on the other hand, theorizes that the tree was marked by outlaws in the 1830s to mark their hideout. Whatever the reason for the markings was, the marked tree washed away during an 1890 flood.⁶

The arrival of the railroad brought services to Marked Tree and nearby Tyronza fairly quickly. By 1889 Marked Tree had a depot, post office, and a general store while Tyronza had a depot, post office, two general stores, and a stave factory.⁷ The presence of a stave factory in Tyronza was not surprising, given the importance of the lumber industry in the early history of Poinsett County – nearby Trumann would be the location of the main woodworking factory for the Singer Sewing Machine Company by the early 1940s.⁸

During the first part of the twentieth century, as automobiles became more prevalent as a means of transportation, it became imperative to improve America’s roads to better accommodate them. As a result, several organizations formed in the early 1900s to work towards providing improved and marked highways for drivers to make it easier to get from place to place. Some of these highways, including the Bankhead Highway and the Albert Pike Highway, passed through parts of Arkansas and at least gave Arkansas drivers marked routes in parts of the state. However, one organization, the Ozark Trails Association, had much stronger ties

³ *Ibid*, p. 575.

⁴ *Ibid*.

⁵ *Maps showing Arkansas Central, the Helena & Corinth, and the Pine Bluff & Southwestern Railroads together forming the Texas & Northeastern Railway*. Map. New York: G.W. & C. B. Colton & Co., 1872, and *Cram’s Township and Rail Road Map of Arkansas*. Map. Chicago: George Franklin Cram, 1895.

⁶ Information on Marked Tree found at: <http://local.arkansas.gov/local.php?agency=Marked%20Tree>.

⁷ *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Northeast Arkansas*. Chicago: Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1889, p. 572.

⁸ West, Elliott. *The WPA Guide to 1930s Arkansas*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1987 reprint of 1941 publication, p. 293.

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County and State: Poinsett County, Arkansas

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to Arkansas, mainly through its founding and leadership under Arkansan William Hope "Coin" Harvey.⁹

William Hope Harvey was born in West Virginia in 1851 and was a real estate entrepreneur who became involved in mining ventures in Colorado. After he lost his fortune, he became an advisor to William Jennings Bryan during the 1893 Free Silver crisis. He was also involved in publishing the weekly *Coin* in Chicago, which is where he got his nickname, but after Bryan's defeat as a presidential candidate in 1896, Harvey retired to Monte Ne, Arkansas, in 1900. In Monte Ne, Harvey developed a railroad to promote a health resort and executive retreat that he started.¹⁰

Harvey understood that automobile travel was growing in popularity and importance, and after he abandoned his railroad spur in 1910, he began to look at alternative means of transportation to Monte Ne. In fact, in June 1911 *Southern Good Roads* proposed an auto highway from Muskogee, Oklahoma, to Monte Ne. Other developments during the same period, including the formation of a National Highway Association in Washington, DC, the holding of a National Old Trails Road Convention in Kansas City in April 1912, and the formation of a Western Good Roads group in Joplin, Missouri, in May 1912, further inspired Harvey.¹¹

As a result, Harvey organized his own auto road association, and a map published in the May 9, 1913, *Gravette News Herald* illustrated proposed "Ozark Trails" connecting Monte Ne with St. Louis, Kansas City, Wichita, and Oklahoma City through Tulsa. To further spread his ideas for the "Ozark Trails," Harvey hosted a meeting of the Ozark Trails Association (OTA) on July 10-13, 1913, in Monte Ne. The meeting was a huge success, attracting over 300 delegates, and at the meeting Harvey proposed 1,500 miles of white-signed auto routes through Missouri, Kansas, and Oklahoma. In addition, M. J. Kelley of Neosho, Missouri, was elected president of the organization.¹²

At an unknown date, although probably in the 1910s, the OTA also developed specifications for their roads, which read:

Our specifications call for a road 32 feet wide; 24 feet crown with curvature half an inch to the foot; culverts concrete 24 feet wide, same as crown of road; good drainage; above high water; curve turns on radius of not less than 150 feet, outside raised two feet; no grades to exceed 5 per cent; and hard surface of either sand and clay properly mixed, gravel or crushed rock with clay binder, concrete or other hard surface. When the road is not thus completed, we rely on

⁹ Krim, Arthur. "The Original Mother Road." *SCA Journal*, Spring 1996, pp. 14-15, and 22.

¹⁰ Krim, p. 22.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

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the enterprise of the local people and road authorities to complete it in a reasonable time. There is an enterprising and public-spirited people living on our roads. We try to never route a road through a graveyard.¹³

Although Kelley had been elected president at the meeting in Monte Ne, Harvey was elected president at the meeting in Neosho, Missouri, in November 1913, and Harvey would remain president for the next ten years. Even though the original focus of the organization, and of Harvey, was to develop roads radiating from Monte Ne, the organization's focus soon shifted to providing good roads in Oklahoma and Missouri. Conventions of the organization held in Oklahoma and Missouri in the mid 1910s were hugely successful – approximately 3,000 delegates attended the meeting in Springfield, Missouri, in April 1916 and over 7,000 delegates attended the Oklahoma City meeting in November 1916.¹⁴

After the success of the Oklahoma City meeting of the OTA, the organization was viewed more as a national organization that was trying to boost road development in the western frontier. Harvey also established a national headquarters of the OTA in Oklahoma City in 1916. Although there was a lot of factionalism in Oklahoma over promoting different proposed routes of the road in Oklahoma, Harvey saw it more as a singular road that would eventually go all the way to southern California. In fact, Harvey said in the January 1917 issue of *Better Roads* that "The Ozark Trail will not only be constructed, but it will be the 'mother' of other great roads feeding or intersecting this road that will span the state in continuous mileage in every direction."¹⁵

The OTA remained a vibrant organization throughout the rest of the 1910s – the May 1917 Amarillo convention drew approximately 6,000 delegates and concrete obelisk markers were erected along the route in the late 1910s – but by the 1920s, the organization began to decline. In 1920 at the Pittsburg, Kansas, meeting, J. E. Swepston was elected president, although in reality he had been selected by Harvey and Harvey really continued to run the OTA. The 1922 meeting at Sulphur, Oklahoma, attracted more than 1,000 people, but the next two meetings in Joplin, Missouri, in 1923 and in Duncan, Oklahoma, in 1924 attracted around 100 members. The 1924 meeting also proved to be the last reported meeting of the OTA.¹⁶

Although the OTA disbanded in 1924, it was not before they had done some work in Arkansas. A 1919 route map of the organization showed that roads had been adopted and marked from Monte Ne to Rogers and Bentonville and then on to Vinita, Oklahoma. Another route from Bentonville to Joplin, Missouri, had also been adopted and marked. In addition, in northwest Arkansas, the OTA was promoting roads from Siloam

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

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Springs to Rogers and Bentonville, and also to Salina, and Westville, Oklahoma. Additional routes were being promoted from Monte Ne to Springdale and from Rogers to Cassville, Missouri.¹⁷

Even though the OTA was most connected with northwest Arkansas, they also undertook some efforts of road promotion and improvement in northeast Arkansas. In fact, a "mini" convention was held in Jonesboro in early 1917. Although 2,000 people attended the convention, it was considered a disappointment, because attendance was smaller than at past conventions and also because the delegation from Memphis was small. Harvey had stated that the whole purpose of the convention in Jonesboro was to promote the eastern extension of the Trail.¹⁸ However, by 1919, they had adopted a route proceeding south from Cabool, Missouri, to Mammoth Spring, Arkansas (although it was not marked), and they were promoting a continuation of the route to Hardy and then on to Memphis. This route eventually became Highway A-7, and later U.S. 63.¹⁹ In March 1919, at a meeting the office of Ritter and Company, E. Ritter, D. D. White, and J. A. Emrich were named the local Ozark Trail Commissioners for the Marked Tree and Tyrone area.²⁰

The 1910s and early 1920s was a good period for road building in Poinsett County. In the mid-1910s approximately 250 miles of road grading had been done and County Judge S. T. Mayo said that "The road and bridge conditions in the county are good. The sentiment for general road improvement in the county is the best you ever saw." In addition, estimates for additional roads had been obtained, including a concrete road from Marked Tree south to the county line, a gravel road from Harrisburg via Greenfield to the Craighead County line, and a macadam road from Harrisburg to Trumann.²¹ The good state of the roads that Judge Mayo was able to report on, in addition to the efforts of the Ozark Trail commissioners, was partially the effort of his predecessor, Judge Benjamin Cole. One of Judge Cole's first actions as Poinsett County Judge was to inspect the roads in the delta. In addition, he also travelled to Mississippi with Ernest Ritter, John Krier, and M. W. Hazel to inspect the roads there.²²

The state of the roads in Poinsett County was due in part to the activeness of the Ozark Trail Association and its supporters and, early on, the efforts of the farmers to try and access the Memphis market. Jeannie Wayne writes in her book, *A New Plantation South*, that,

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁸ Lawler, Nan Marie. "The Ozark Trails Association." Diss. University of Arkansas, 1991, p. 37.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Wayne, Jeannie M. *A New Plantation South: Land, Labor, and Federal Favor in Twentieth-Century Arkansas*. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1996, p. 123.

²¹ *Third Biennial Report of the Department of State Lands, Highways and Improvements*. Publisher unknown, c.1918, pp. 71-72.

²² Wayne, p. 130.

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County and State: Poinsett County, Arkansas

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Two important features of road building in the delta stand out. First, Marked Tree was the center from which all roads ran; second, the manner of road building in the county as a whole heightened the isolation of the delta from the ridge and prairie. This isolation reflected not only geographical peculiarities that made it difficult to maintain a road across the notorious swamp in the western delta but the preference of the delta planters for the Memphis market. Delta men petitioned the county court for the construction of seven roads in 1901 and 1902. Only one led to the ridge. Of the remaining six, three connected Tyronza Township in the southeastern section of the delta with Marked Tree and linked up with a fourth road leading to Crittenden County and eventually Memphis. A fifth road led from Lepanto in the northeastern delta to Marked Tree, and the sixth stretched from Marked Tree north to the Craighead County line.²³

Efforts regarding the Ozark Trail had been ongoing since at least 1916 when the *Marked Tree Gazette* reported in an article titled "Let's Join the Ozark Trail" that "The purpose of the meeting is to organize a good first class road from Jonesboro to Marked Tree and Truman [sic.]" Meetings were held around the area in Marked Tree and Jonesboro by early 1917, and a headline in the March 23, 1917, *Marked Tree Tribune* reported that the "Good Road Meeting [was] a Success, No Opposition to Ozark Trail."²⁴

Work on improving the road in the area was underway by 1918. An article, "Road to Tyronza Now Ready for Travel," in the *Marked Tree Tribune* reported that "Thanks to T. J. Bennett, M. W. Hazel and others who donated their time, teams, and labor, the road leading to Tyronza has been put in fairly good condition, so that we can now get out of town through the country. The thanks of the entire community is given these gentlemen."²⁵

By 1920, work was progressing even further in Poinsett County on the Ozark Trails Road, as it was referred to in the *Fourth Biennial Report of the Department of State Lands, Highways and Improvements*. The *Fourth Biennial Report* listed a 6.20 mile gravel section of the road along with a 9.80 mile-long concrete section. The estimated cost of the concrete road was \$524,950.00 and \$42,000.00 of federal aid had been allotted to the project. (The federal aid section of the road encompassed 4.33 miles.) By November 1, 1920, 65% of the grading for the concrete road project had been completed, although none of the surfacing had been

²³ Whayne, p. 42.

²⁴ "Let's Join the Ozark Trail." *Marked Tree Gazette*, 15 September 1916, p. 1, column 1, and "Good Roads Meeting a Success, No Opposition to Ozark Trail." *Marked Tree Tribune*, 23 March 1917, p. 1, column 3.

²⁵ "Road to Tyronza Now Ready for Travel." *Marked Tree Tribune*, 28 June 1918, p. 1, column 1.

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completed.²⁶ It is not exactly known when the paving was done – the 1918 through 1926 issues of the *Marked Tree Tribune* no longer exist – but it is known that the road was paved by 1924.²⁷

The construction of the road through the Marked Tree area, including through the Highway A-7 Bridges Historic District, was thanks in large part to Ernest Ritter and his brother Louis. Ernest Ritter had been involved with the experimental use of Portland cement as a road material. Apparently, Ritter believed that one could form up a section of muddy overflow and pour the cement mix into it and it would set up. Although at least one Portland cement company had insisted for at least fifteen years that it would not work, the company later had to change its mind after Ritter's successful experiments. Ritter served as one of the directors of the Ozark Trail road section in the Marked Tree area, and Louis served as the contractor, and it is quite possible that the Ritter brothers used Ritter's experimental method to construct the road around the bridges.²⁸

Jeannie Whayne also notes of the importance of the Ritters in road building in the Marked Tree and Tyronza area by writing that "The fact that Marked Tree was the nexus for all delta roads was not coincidental. Marked Tree was the center of commerce and credit and therefore drew in the people from the surrounding countryside. In addition, those organizing the roads were often either Marked Tree residents or related to them. Ernest Ritter did not petition for the roads himself, but he won the contracts and built them. His brother, Louis Ritter, was one of the petitioners for the Tyronza roads leading to Marked Tree and to the Crittenden County line and Memphis."²⁹

The completion of the road through Marked Tree and Tyronza was an important event in the area, and really helped to transform the area as well. As Jeannie Whayne writes, "[The road] contributed to considerable economic growth in Marked Tree... In March [1919] businessmen in Marked Tree gathered to discuss the town improvements that would be necessary to accommodate the Ozark Trail, including not only paving the streets but also constructing a new hotel at 'a cost of \$60,000 and \$75,000.' ... A few months later [Ernest] Ritter announced that he would erect 'an entire block of new brick buildings' on land that he owned along the new highway. That block of buildings became the main business street in Marked Tree."³⁰

By the time that the two earlier bridges in the district were constructed, the State Highway Department had begun to develop standard bridge plans for use across the state, and they had also developed an awareness of the

²⁶ Fourth Biennial Report of the Department of State Lands, Highways and Improvements. Publisher unknown, c.1920, p 154.

²⁷ Woolfolk, Margaret Elizabeth. *A History of Crittenden County, Arkansas*. Greenville, SC: Southern Historical Press, Inc., 1993, p.

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²⁸ Grisham, Cindy. E-mail to the author. 22 August 2008.

²⁹ Whayne, p. 42.

³⁰ Whayne, p. 123.

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need for stronger bridges to carry heavier loads. The *Fourth Biennial Report* stated:

In order to have bridges and structures designed and built to meet present and future traffic and to comply with the Federal aid requirements, it has been necessary during the past two years to revise some of the old standard plans and to make many new plans.

Loads have increased to such an extent that the bridges and culverts upon all main roads must be designed to carry safely a load not less than that of a 10-ton truck, and in many cases a 15-ton truck, together with the impact caused by these heavy loads moving rapidly over the structures.³¹

Interestingly, though, all of the standard plans listed in the report that had been developed in the previous two years, with the exception of one timber bridge plan, were for metal trusses. Apparently, no concrete standard plans were in development during the late 1910s or early 1920s, although concrete bridges would become more prevalent in the late 1920s. As a result, it is unknown if these bridges were designed by the highway department or came from another source.³²

The agricultural nature of Poinsett County that was present in the late nineteenth century was unchanged by the 1920s and 1930s. *The WPA Guide to 1930s Arkansas* described the area around the bridges by saying that "South of Marked Tree US 63 passes through the plantation land of Poinsett and Crittenden Counties, where cottonfields run for miles from each side of the highway. The plantation houses, appearing at long intervals, are large, well built, and usually set on beautifully landscaped grounds."³³

Although a lot of highway construction and improvement began to occur across Arkansas in the 1910s and 1920s, including this section of highway, the state suffered a major setback in 1927 with the spring floods that affected just about every corner of the state. The *Ninth Biennial Report of the Arkansas State Highway Commission* stated:

The floods occurring in the spring of 1927 were unprecedented in the annals of the state and wrought a vast amount of damage to the Highway System as well as to local and county roads. This damage was not merely confined to the overflow areas contiguous to the Mississippi River and its larger tributaries but encompassed the highland regions as well, the intensity of the rainfall during the

³¹ *Fourth Biennial Report of the Department of State Lands, Highways and Improvements*. Publisher unknown, c.1920, p. 131.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ West, Elliott. *The WPA Guide to 1930s Arkansas*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1987 reprint of 1941 publication, p. 295.

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prior part of the flood period being such as to overflow practically all water courses in the state. ...

The money value of the damage to roads and structures was so appreciable in this, as well as in other delta states, that the situation received the cognizance of the National Congress, and as a result provision was made to compensate the states of Arkansas, Louisiana, Missouri, and Mississippi through Federal funds for losses suffered to roads and bridges on the State Highway Systems.

This provision was included in the Act of Congress approved February 28, 1929, entitled An Act Making Appropriations For the Military and Non-Military Activities of The War Department For The Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1930, And For Other Purposes, (Public No. 843, 70th Congress)...³⁴

Of the \$3,654,000 that was made available to the states through the act, Arkansas received the lion's share of the amount with an award of \$1,800,000. (The next closest state was Louisiana, which received \$967,582.) However, reimbursement of the state's expenditures could not occur until the money was spent, and was apparently only limited to 50% of what the state spent. The amount that the state was reimbursed was controversial at the time, as indicated in the *Biennial Report*. The report states: "That part of the Act which reads, 'That any sum hereby appropriated for any state shall become available when the state shall have actually expended or shall have made available for expenditure a like sum from state funds for the purposes contained herein,' would seem to indicate that the state would be entitled to reimbursement to the extent of one dollar for each dollar expended. This view, however, has not been accepted by the Federal Government, and reimbursement is limited to 50 per cent of the amount expended by the state."³⁵

The 1927 flood would have been particularly devastating in Poinsett County because of its close proximity to the Mississippi River and because of the other rivers that traverse the county. (The St. Francis and Little rivers, for example, merge at Marked Tree.) In fact, a graphic in the Highway Department's *Ninth Biennial Report* that shows what parts of the state were inundated illustrates that almost the entire eastern half of the county was underwater. The flood's effects on the county's highway infrastructure is perfectly illustrated in this district because of the fact that the bridge to the northwest of Ditch No. 1 was replaced in 1927 and 1928, likely as a result of the original bridge being damaged or destroyed in the flood.³⁶

 Arkansas State Highway Commission. *Ninth Biennial Report of the Arkansas State Highway Commission*. Russellville, AR: Russellville Printing Company, 1930, p. 124.

³⁵ Arkansas State Highway Commission. *Ninth Biennial Report of the Arkansas State Highway Commission*. Russellville, AR: Russellville Printing Company, 1930, p. 126.

³⁶ Arkansas State Highway Commission. *Ninth Biennial Report of the Arkansas State Highway Commission*. Russellville, AR: Russellville Printing Company, 1930, p. 125.

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By late 1927, the Highway Department was already in the process of replacing the bridge to the northwest of Ditch No. 1. Proposals for a new bridge (referred to as Bridge #580 in the plans) were received by the department on December 15, 1927, and a contract for \$16,435.75 was awarded to V. W. Clanton of Tyronza for the construction of "1 reinforced concrete cantilever thru girder bridge." It was estimated that the construction of the new bridge would take 100 calendar days, and by the time the bridge was finished, the final cost actually came in under the contract amount at \$16,245.12.³⁷

The design and construction of Bridge #580 was quite a departure from the other bridges in the area that were built in the early 1920s. The bridges that date to c.1922 illustrate early reinforced concrete bridge design. The decorative detailing and delicate proportions, along with the combination of a steel plate-girder span to cross the longer distance of Ditch No.1, illustrate the small amount of traffic that the bridges needed to handle along with limited knowledge of concrete bridge construction available at that time. Bridge #580, on the other hand, exhibits massive proportions and illustrates how far bridge design (and automobile traffic) had come in a short period of time. The massive, almost overly-built, design of Bridge #580 improved on the deficiencies of earlier designs to provide a much improved reinforced-concrete bridge. In fact, even today, Bridge #580 shows virtually no evidence of deterioration, illustrating just how strong and well-built the bridge is.

The three bridges in the Highway A-7 Bridges Historic District represented an important link in the transportation network of Poinsett County and northeast Arkansas. By 1926, Highway A-7 had been redesignated U.S. 63, and it was an important highway linking northeast Arkansas with Memphis, Tennessee, and ultimately connecting Benoit, Wisconsin, with Ruston, Louisiana. However, the amount of traffic that the road was receiving eventually led to its bypassing in 1967, and today it remains in use only for the few local residents who live on the road between Marked Tree and the Tyronza River. The bridges in the district still remain excellent and rare examples of early reinforced concrete bridge-building technology in the Marked Tree area. In addition, the Ditch No. 1 Bridge is a rare example of a plate girder span used in conjunction with reinforced concrete spans, a type that was seldom used in Arkansas and is today found only in Poinsett County.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Highway A-7 Bridges Historic District is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under **Criterion A** with **local significance** for its associations with the development of highway infrastructure in Poinsett County during the 1920s. The three bridges in the district, which were all built between c.1922 and 1928, were part of an effort to develop a spur of the Ozark Trail from southeast Missouri, to Memphis, Tennessee. They illustrate the importance of providing good infrastructure for automobiles, something that was sometimes difficult in the swampy areas of Eastern Arkansas. The bridges continued to be used as part of Highway A-7 (later U.S. 63) until the current U.S. 63 was constructed in 1967.

³⁷ Arkansas State Highway Commission. *Ninth Biennial Report of the Arkansas State Highway Commission*. Russellville, AR: Russellville Printing Company, 1930, pp. 158-159.

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The Highway A-7 Bridges Historic District is also being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under **Criterion C** with **local significance** for its good examples of early twentieth-century bridge-building technologies. The bridges in the district that date to c.1922 illustrate early reinforced concrete bridge design. The decorative detailing and delicate proportions, along with the combination of a steel plate-girder span to cross the longer distance of Ditch No. 1, illustrate the small amount of traffic that the bridges needed to handle along with the limited knowledge of concrete bridge construction available at that time. Bridge #580, on the other hand, which dates to 1927-1928 and exhibits massive proportions, illustrates how far bridge design (and automobile traffic) had come in a short period of time. Built as a likely replacement for a bridge destroyed in the 1927 flood, Bridge #580 improved on the deficiencies of earlier designs to provide a much improved reinforced-concrete bridge.

 Highway A-7 Bridges Historic District nomination is being submitted under the multiple property listing "Historic Bridges of Arkansas" and under associated historic context "Early Transportation Era."

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Maps showing Arkansas Central, the Helena & Corinth, and the Pine Bluff & Southwestern Railroads together forming the Texas & Northeastern Railway. Map. New York: G.W. & C. B. Colton & Co., 1872.

"Plan of proposed Bridge over Ditch No. 9, Marked Tree - Tyronza Road." From the files of the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department, 1927.

"Road to Tyronza Now Ready for Travel." *Marked Tree Tribune*, 28 June 1918, p. 1, column 1.

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

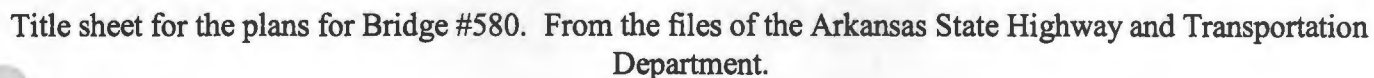
Beginning at a point in the center of Old U.S. 63 20 feet northwest of the northwest end of Bridge #580, the boundary includes the area within 20 feet of each side of the centerline of Old U.S. 63 to an ending point 20 feet southeast of the southeast end of the Ditch No. 1 East Relief Bridge.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

This boundary includes the three bridges in the Highway A-7 Bridges Historic District and their immediate setting.

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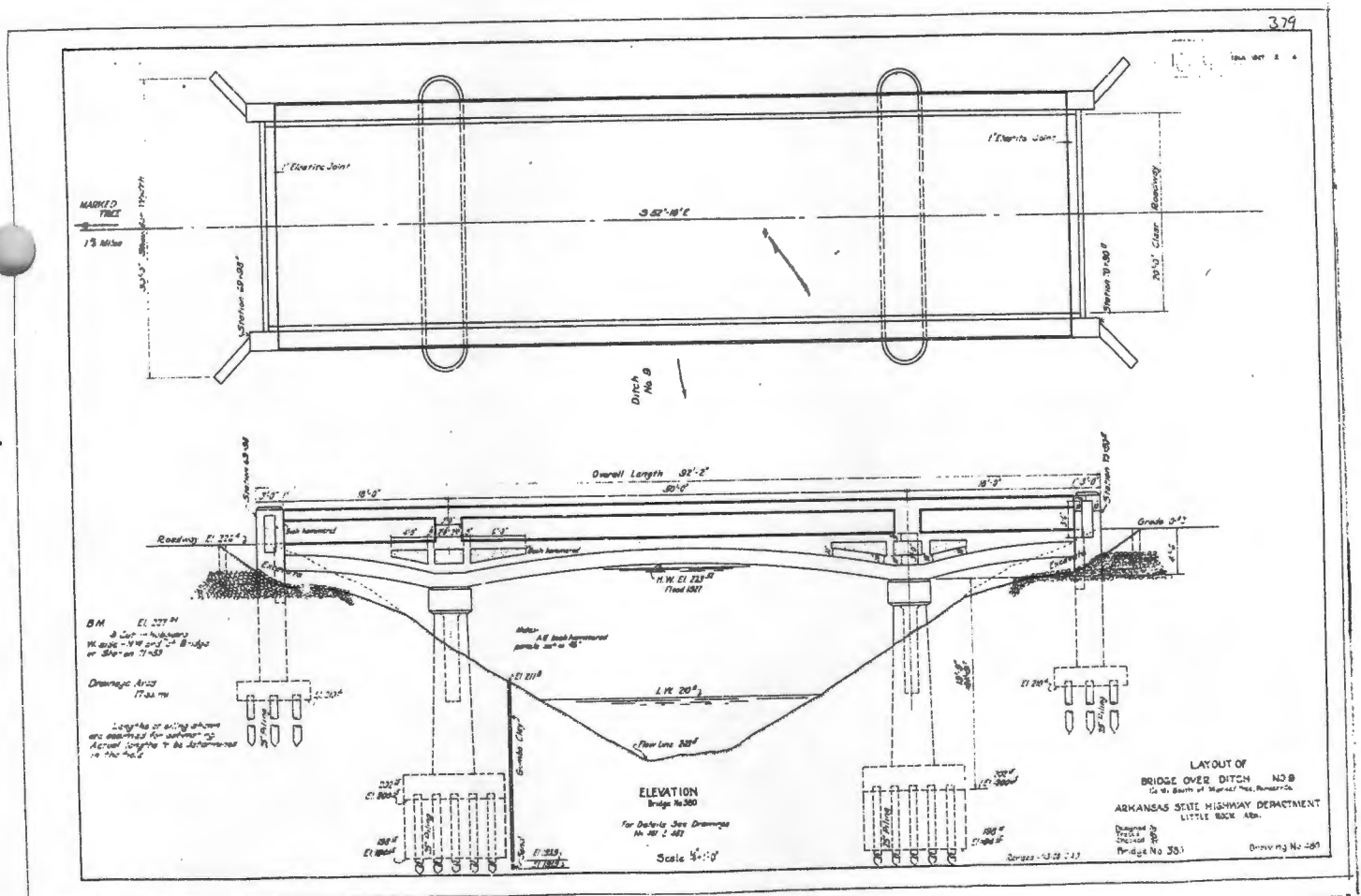
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Sheet #1 of the plans for Bridge #580. From the files of the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department.

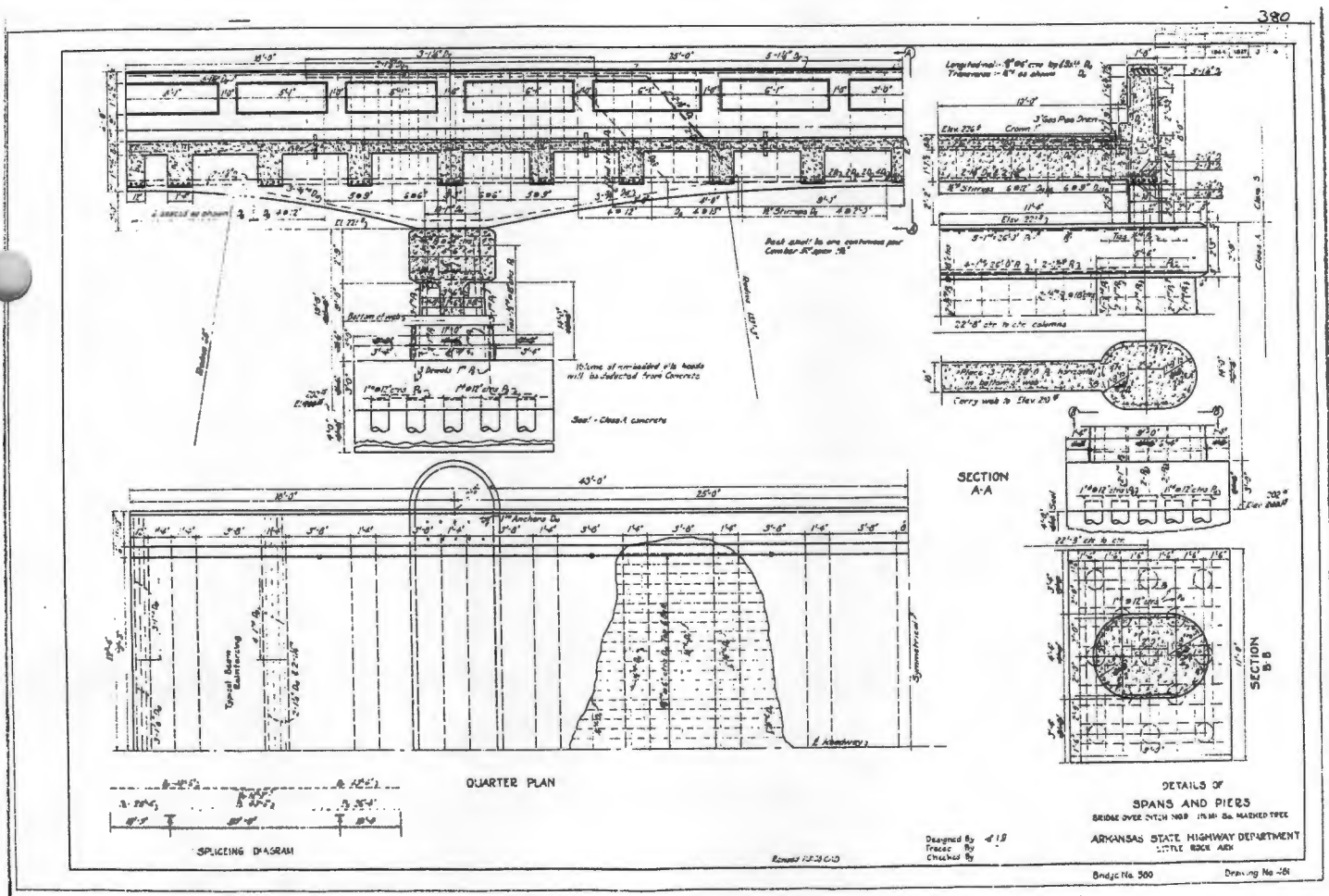
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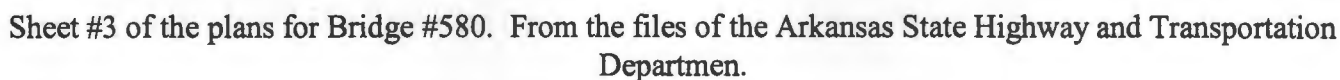


Sheet #2 of the plans for Bridge #580. From the files of the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department.

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United States Department of the Interior
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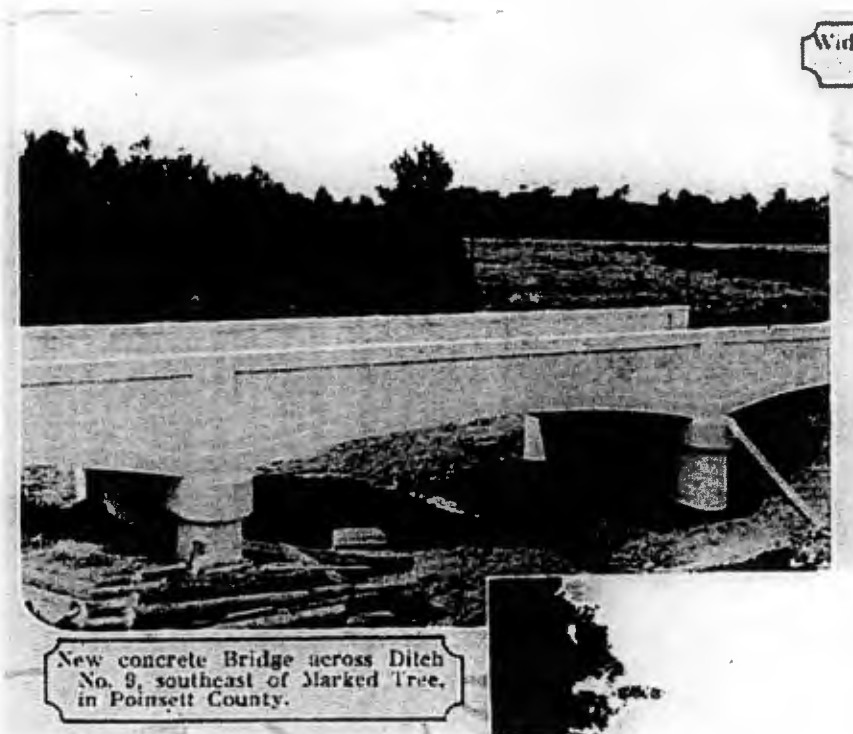
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c.1928 photograph of Bridge #580. From the *Eighth Biennial Report of the Department of State Lands, Highways and Improvements*. Little Rock: H.G. Pugh & Co., 1930.







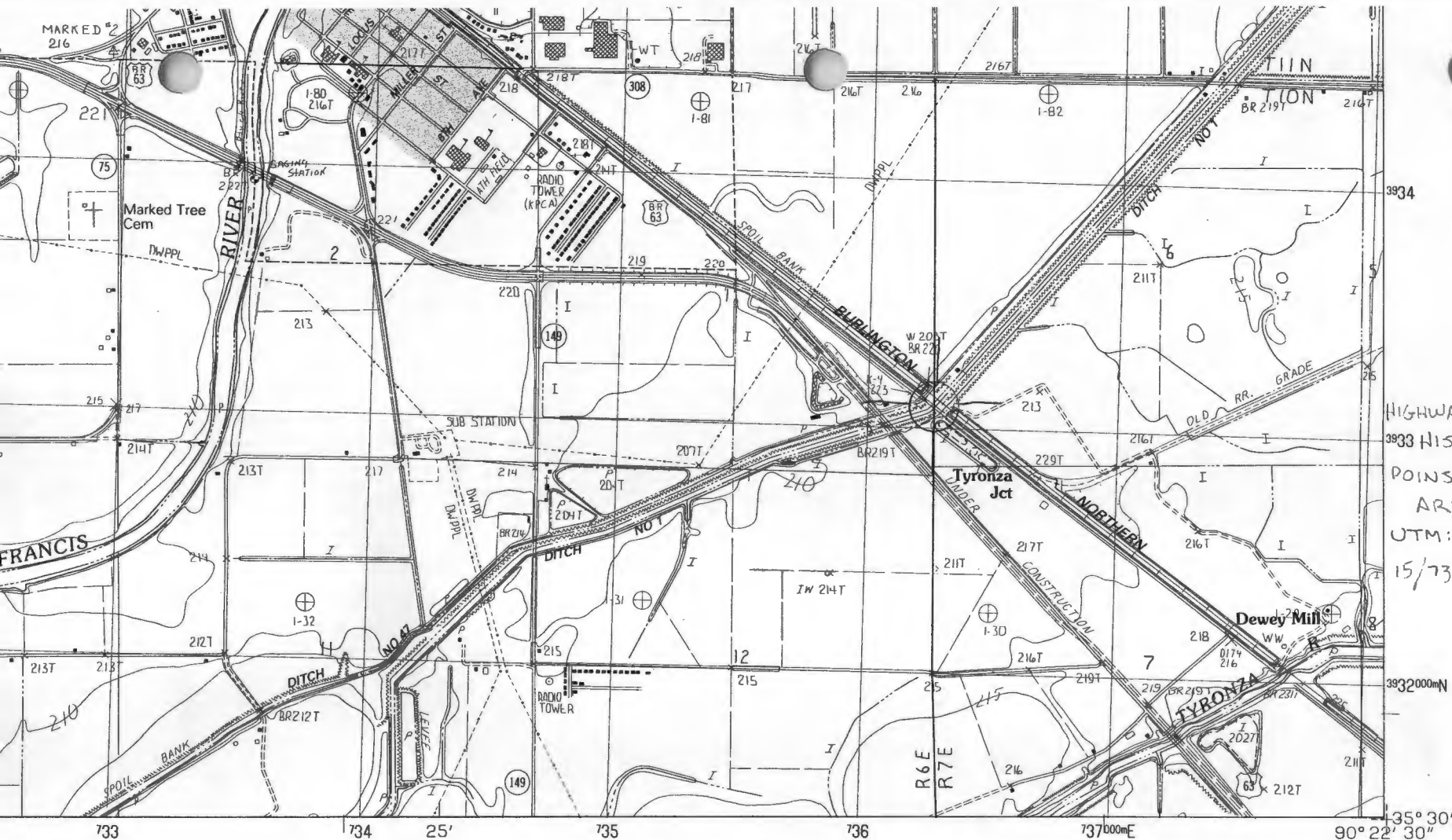




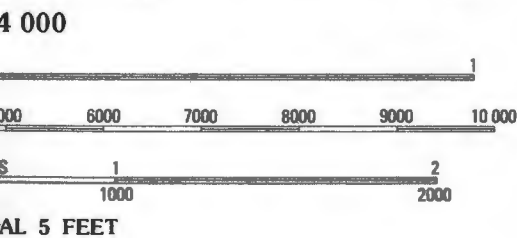








HIGHWAY A-7 BRIDGES
3933 HISTORIC DISTRICT
POINSETT COUNTY,
ARKANSAS
UTM:
15/736250/393200



1	2	3	1 Trumann
			2 Hatchie Coon
			3 Rivervale
4		5	4 McCormick
			5 Lepanto
			6 Monterey
6	7	8	7 Joyland
			8 Tyronza

ADJOINING 7.5' QUADRANGLE NAMES

INTERIOR—GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, RESTON, VIRGINIA—1984

ROAD LEGEND

- Improved Road
Unimproved Road
Trail
○ Interstate Route ○ U. S. Route ○ State Route

MARKED TREE, ARKANSAS

PROVISIONAL EDITION 1983

35090-E4-TF-024

MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092
ON, LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS 72204