

**WHERE HAVE ALL THE BRIDGES GONE??****By Dwight A. Smith**

Back in the 1800s when railroad promoters in Northern New England were surveying new routes from the Atlantic Seaboard to destinations in Vermont, Quebec and beyond they came across natural barriers such as mountain ranges and river crossings. One of the major barriers was the Connecticut River on its course separating New Hampshire from Vermont. Eventually a total of thirteen railroad bridges crossed the Connecticut River linking the two states. Over the years ten of the bridges were regularly utilized by freight and passenger trains running between the United States and the Province of Quebec, Canada. The bridges spanning the Connecticut River were important links between the B&M and connections with the Rutland RR at Bellows Falls, the Central Vermont Railway at White River Jct., and the Canadian Pacific RR at Wells River, VT. The bridge at Dalton, NH, was an important link to the Maine Central connections to the Canadian Pacific and St. Johnsbury and Lake Champlain RRs at St. Johnsbury, VT. Abandonments over a period of time of important rail lines in the state of New Hampshire by the Boston & Maine and the Maine Central made ten of the bridges superfluous.

Two bridges were utilized by the Beecher Falls branch of the Maine Central RR to jump from New Hampshire to Vermont and the back again to New Hampshire. And one bridge was a joint highway/railroad bridge linking Springfield, VT, with the B&M at Charlestown, NH. Today only 5 bridges still carry in-service railroad tracks across the Connecticut River. Two of the five in service bridges serve only a short stub of trackage on the New Hampshire side of the river. That leaves only three of the original 13 bridges carrying regular trains on a daily basis. Two are on the New England Central's Connecticut River main line that touches the New Hampshire side of the river between Windsor, VT, and Bellows Falls, VT. Amtrak utilizes these two bridges on the daily "Vermonter" run. And one bridge continues to serve mainline freight trains running between the United States and Canada, and that is the SLR bridge at North Stratford, NH.

**A ROSTER OF THE 13 BRIDGES**

New Hampshire to Vermont, South to North

1. Dole Junction (Hinsdale, NH, to South Vermont, VT. Former B&M Connecticut River line was also used by Central Vermont Ry. Also served as a connection to B&M's Ashuelot Branch in New Hampshire, now abandoned. Tracks removed, bridge has been scrapped. Alternate route still in service via New England Central tracks on the Vermont side of river.
2. North Hinsdale, NH, Brattleboro, VT. Former B&M Connecticut River line, was also used by Central Vermont Ry. Also served as a connection to B&M's Ashuelot Branch in New Hampshire, now abandoned. Tracks removed. Bridge structure still exists. Alternate route still in service via New England Central tracks on the Vermont side of river.
3. North Walpole, NH, to Bellows Falls, VT. Former B&M Cheshire Branch. In service, currently bridge serves a short stub of Vermont Rail System yard tracks in North Walpole. Balance of B&M Cheshire Branch has been abandoned.
4. North Walpole, NH, to Bellows Falls, VT. Former B&M Connecticut River line, now operated by New England Central RR. Also Pan Am trackage rights. In service.
5. Charlestown, NH, to Springfield, VT. Bridge was owned by Springfield Terminal Ry. And served as a joint rail/highways toll bridge. Springfield Terminal Ry. abandoned in its entirety, and rails removed. Bridge still in existence for highway purposes only and is now owned by State of New Hampshire and carries NH Route 11 from Charlestown to the Vermont state line.
6. Cornish, NY, to Windsor, VT. Former B&M Connecticut River line, now operated by New England Central RR. Also Pan Am trackage rights. In service.
7. West Lebanon, NH, to White River Jct., VT. Former Boston & Maine's Northern Line, now abandoned. A short spur remains, operated by Claremont-Concord RR that links Westboro station

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7. Continued – (West Lebanon, NH) with White River Jct. yard. In service.
8. Woodsville, NH, to Wells River, VT. Formerly Boston & Maine's White Mountains line, bridge was also used by Barre & Chelsea RR and Canadian Pacific RR. Rail lines on the New Hampshire side of the bridge have been abandoned and rail have been removed from the bridge. Rails on the Vermont side of the bridge are currently served by Vermont Rail System. The bridge structure still remains intact.
9. Dalton, NH, to South Lunenburg, VT. Former Maine Central's Mountain Division line between Portland, ME, and St. Johnsbury, VT. Rails and bridge intact. The portion of this route located in New Hampshire is owned by the state with some segments in service and other segments out of service.
10. Coos Jct. (Lancaster, NH) to Guildhall, VT. Former Maine Central Beecher Falls branch. Bridge and rails in Vermont between the two bridges abandoned in 1940s. Maine Central trains continued to serve the Beecher Falls branch by utilizing trackage rights over B&M and GT rails in New Hampshire to return to their own trackage at North Stratford, NH.
11. Mason's, NH, to Maidstone, VT. Former Maine Central Beecher Falls branch. Bridge and rails in Vermont between the two bridges abandoned in 1940s. Maine Central trains continued to serve the Beecher Falls branch by utilizing trackage rights over B&M and GT rails in New Hampshire to return to their own trackage at North Stratford, NH.
12. North Stratford, NH, to Bloomfield, VT. Former Grand Trunk Railway line between Portland, ME, and Province of Quebec, now operated by St. Lawrence & Atlantic RR. In Service.
13. West Stewartstown, NH, to Beecher Falls, VT. Former Maine Central branch that once stretched up into Canada, later cut back to the border town of Beecher Falls, VT. Abandoned.