WADE BRIDGE REPAIRS



Wade Bridge of Whitebridge Trust Repairs in summer 2022

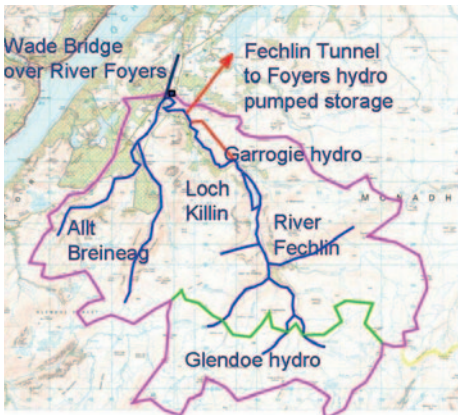
The Trust is planning a return to the bridge twelve years after first-aid repairs, to restore the missing north-west abutment corner which suffers from past river erosion. The arch above it shows new cracks and gives the repair some urgency. As it is not practical to rebuild in heavy stone, the trust will use shuttered concrete to mimic the remaining stonework.



This proposal has been given listed building consent by Highland Council. The cost will be met by the trust's own funds and by a matching grant from Stratherrick & Foyers Community Trust. The work will be by a mix of voluntary and paid labour. The timing will be about a week in the summer when the river is low and concrete can gain strength overnight, allowing formwork construction and concrete placing in a daily cycle

As the area is difficult to reach, the trust will set up temporary timber steps and scaffold, probably in place by the time this article is published. Concrete will be lowered in tipping buckets using an excavator and an electric hoist, as an alternative to an expensive mobile crane.

WILL THE BRIDGE LAST?
Many of the bridges built by General Wade nearly 300 years ago have more or less collapsed, including Inverfarigaig, Fort Augustus and High Bridge at Spean Bridge At Whitebridge the risk is mainly from flood erosion, and it is interesting to look at the rainfall catchment area. Hydro schemes have helpfully intervened to take away some river peak flow, but the bridge is still left with climate change and the risk of an extreme flood.



DOES THE BRIDGE MATTER?
The bridge is crossed only by pedestrians. It was closed for three years by The Highland Council from 2008 after a pessimistic assessment by consultants, and re-opened after the trust stabilised it with grout and parapet repair. If it was not there, pedestrians would have to use the road bridge which has no pavement. The bridge has a symbolic and historical importance. It features in tourist information and in the recent Community Action Plan.

WHAT IS THE HISTORY?
After the 1707 Union of the Crowns of England and Scotland, the Jacobites led the unsuccessful 1715 Uprising to try to restore Prince Charles to the Scottish throne. In 1724 Simon Fraser, Lord Lovat wrote a long letter to King George complaining that arms had been given up by loyal clans like his to meet the 1716 Disarming Act, but rebellious clans had handed in only unusable arms bought as scrap from Holland. King George asked General Wade to investigate. His report said there were 10,000 loyal men and 12,000 armed rebels, and recommended linking existing garrisons with roads and bridges to help King George's army counter the rebels. He was immediately given the task. He commissioned a large boat called the Highland Galley to take 60 soldiers between Inverness and Fort Augustus. One of the first roads built was between Inverness and Fort William through Whitebridge in 1725. The exact location of the road is debatable (does anyone know?) passing north of Loch Ceo Glais and what is now Loch Mhor. It was considered too vulnerable to winter snow, and an alternative road was constructed in 1732 north from Whitebridge through Foyers and along the shore of Loch Ness. The bridge at Whitebridge was also built in 1732 to replace a previous ford, and is one of the best examples of a single arch of this period.

The final network of military roads in Scotland was 1100 miles, of which the latter 800 were directed by Major Caulfeild. Ironically they were used for a reverse function when the Jacobite army in 1745 marched south as far as Derby.

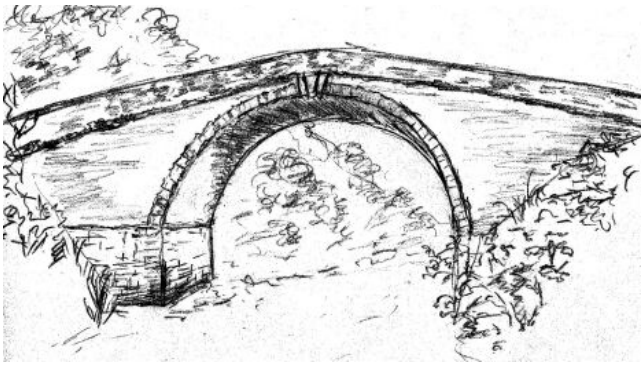
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John Townshend and Bob Main



Photo by Russell Bain

Wade Bridge of Whitebridge Trust



Repair to North West Abutment –Report

The aims and importance of the repair were set out in an article for the SFCT Spring Magazine.



Eroded abutment before repair

The work was successfully carried out on time over 8 days last June by Bob Main and John Townshend (Foyers), David Main and Dave Bradwell (Gorthleck), Ryan Jardine (Errogie) and Russell Reid (Whitebridge).

Costs within budget were met by the SFCT (£6500) plus the bridge trust's own funds, and £6000 worth of time and equipment were provided freely by the repair group including a concrete mixer from local builder Andrew Fraser, Errogie and scaffold components from Malcolm Stewart, Foyers.

The area was accessed by temporary timber steps. Concrete was lowered in a tipping bucket using an excavator and remotely controlled electric hoist, as an alternative to an expensive crane



Removing shuttering for 4th concrete pour



Finished repair

The repair has restored structural integrity to the west abutment. The intended stone effect to the concrete repairs will take a few years of weathering to look natural.

The 1732 Whitebridge Wade Bridge is one of few surviving bridges of this era.

John Townshend and Bob Main