



Peninsular Railway & Lumbermen's Museum

**THE TWO LARGE STEEL BRIDGES OF THE  
SIMPSON LOGGING COMPANY**

**This announcement appeared in the October 14 1927, edition of the  
Mason county Journal**

“SIMPSON LOG. COMPANY LET BIG CONTRACT” branch will extend 18 miles into the Olympics.

In advance preparation for opening to Shelton a large body of timber in the upper Skokomish regions of the Olympic mountains the Simpson logging Company has let the first of several contracts for building an eighteen mile branch of the Peninsular Railroad. The successful bidder for the first section was the Allen-Goven Company, recently incorporated for the purpose of carrying through this particular contract and for future operations. The contractors have already started work on their winter job which includes much rock work and heavy construction found as the foothills are reached. A large shipment of heavy machinery and tools passed through town last week, including two power shovels and camps are being built and crews assemble to rush the work for completion early next summer.

## VANCE CREEK BRANCH

The new branch leaves the Peninsular Railway near lake Newatzel and runs northerly towards Vance Creek at the head of the Skokomish Valley but takes a different route than the old feeders used when the section was first logged and keeping higher in the hills. A considerable body of timber will be opened by the first section which can be logged while the remainder of the railroad as planned is being completed or , which is expected to be two or more years off. Either a new camp will be added to the operation of the Simpson Company or one of the present camps located on the line , likely the former.as the company is gradually expanding in its log production with each year.

The entire line will extend some eighteen miles into the Olympic region and after crossing Vance creek will turn eastwards towards Hood Canal and cross the South Fork of the Skokomish river into the district between the forks where the largest body of timber owned by the Simpson Company is located. It is said that the timber ahead of the branch alone is sufficient for thirty years of operation.

## **TWO LONG STEEL SPANS**

When the branch is fully completed it is expected that a total cost of about three-quarters of a million dollars which gives some idea of the magnitude of the projects undertaken by a logging concern for a branch line. While passing thru very rough and rocky country and largely “up and down” more than half the cost will be due to two long and high steel spans crossing the two streams referred to. The main span across Vance creek gulch will be 400-foot arch steel arch, with two approach truss spans making and another feet or a total of 800 feet of steel bridge. The South Fork bridge will be somewhat smaller. But both will be about 400 feet above the stream bed.

The Vance Creek bridge will be the first but because of its now inaccessible location the heavy materials cannot be taken in or the work carried on until the Allen-Govan contract is completed and track laid, but it is expected that this, as well the first bridge for which contract has not yet been given, can be finished within the next year after which either contracts can be let in order. This news is of particular interest to Shelton as it means the bringing here of a new and large body of timber within reach and out of governments ownership, and thus adds another considerable span of life of the logging and milling operations of which this generation is not likely to see finished.

## TWO LONG STEEL SPANS

The contract for the two big spans was let out to the American Bridge Company of Chicago and the steel was fabricated at the company mill in Trenton New Jersey. By March of 1929 the first of the two spans, the Vance Creek Bridge has been complete. The work of designing , fabrication and erecting was so perfect that the arch connected at the contact center within less than a half an inch.

The new bridge is 346 feet above Vance creek bottom and 827 feet long with its center span of 422 feet. The grade of three miles long had already been completed and as soon as rail is laid on it, construction of the second span over the South Fork of the Skokomish River would be started.

The second span was completed by September 1929 and stood 365feet over the river bed. However the main arch span was just 366 feet long. This bridge remained in service until 1947 when the upper part of the branch was abandoned. The bridge was planked over for truck use and the road was latter turned over to the U. S. Forest service who put modern concrete deck on the bridge.. Today there is easy access to the bridge for those wishing to drive over it. In the mean time, thanks to a contract with Simpson and the U. S. Forest Service, the Vance Creek bridge remained in operation until 1985 when it was abandoned. By the early 1980's, the bridge was recorded in the *Guinness Book of Structures* as the highest railroad bridge in North America.

Note: the Vance Creek bridge is not open to the public and is on private property.



Final touches are being made to the completed Vance Creek Bridge in 1929.

*Photo by W.S. Heckman, Ziegler's Studio and Camera shop*





*The First canyon to be crossed by the new branch line in 1928 was Vance Creek. The bridge is well under construction this Photo.*

*Photo by W.S. Heckman, Ziegler's Studio and Camera shop*







*Engine number 1201 crossing  
Vance Creek Bridge 12-8-1966*

*Photo by Pete Replinger*





*Engine number  
1200, currently in  
the PRLM collec-  
tion, crossing  
Vance Creek Bridge  
12-31-1964  
Photo by Pete  
Replinger*





*Engine number #3.  
a 2-8-2 Mikado  
type, crossing  
Vance Creek in  
March of 1956.*

*Photos by John  
Larison*



The second canyon to be crossed on the new branch line was the South Fork of the Skokomish River that was quite a bit shorter but somewhat higher than the Vance creek bridge. It was constructed in 1929 and is shown here with a train load of poles pulled by 2-8-2 #1.





Another view of the South Fork of the Skokomish River bridge and a load of poles behind 2-8-2T #12





This map shows the branch built by the Simpson Logging Company in 1928-1929. The bridge over the South Fork of the Skokomish River was located just one-half mile north of Camp 3. *Map by Dale Jost M.D.*

