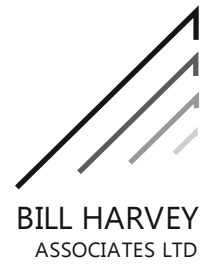




Bridge of the Month 160, December 2024

Arapanui “Swing” Bridge, New Zealand



Masonry bridges aren't common in New Zealand. In the North Island, building stone is rare and stone structures rarer. The short history of European presence in NZ also means that most bridges are relatively young. South Island has more competent stone, and I did find one masonry bridge, in central Queenstown, which I'll come back to later.

First, a cursory look at something more characteristically kiwi: a “swing” (suspension) footbridge.



The Arapanui Swing Bridge was built in the 1920s to provide access across the Waikato river for the construction of the power station of the same name. The present day Arapanui township started life as a workers' camp.



NZ swing bridges are pleasing in their simplicity and parsimony, and they tend to afford dramatic views of the gorges they cross.





The Arapanui bridge is unusual (though certainly not unique in NZ) in that it slopes quite significantly. On the east side, the approach to the bridge is cut into the cliff, and there is no tower. The suspension cable anchorage is directly into that same cliff.

On the west side of the gorge, the ground is lower, and a tower is used.

The bridge bears a plaque to David Rowell & Co. Ltd. of Westminster. I had to check that there wasn't a Westminster in New Zealand – perfectly possible but there doesn't seem to be. [David Rowell & Co. was a fabricator](#) it seems. I don't suppose there are many of those in Westminster now.



Wikipedia contributors speculate that the bridge may have been shipped to NZ as a kit. I guess the plaque is consistent with that.

I'm unclear on the development of domestic engineering capacity in New Zealand. The power station was built by Armstrong Whitworth, so it is perhaps unsurprising that this small subcontract went to another UK firm.

I don't have any shots that really show the slope. These angled views are the best I can do.



We were heading from here up to Auckland and on to South Island. Hamilton Gardens proved a delight for us all, including my sister who lived for a while in this area but had never been. Magnus particularly liked the surrealist garden, with moving trees and giant tools.

