For such a calm area in the world, the state of West Virginia has been the source of many engineering achievements and feats. Granted, very little of them were impactful on the world as a whole, but when you learn about some of these, it can appear very impressive. There is the WVU Coliseum, which is designed to be capable of being transformed to be used for various sports and entertainment events, or the flood control dams built to protect parts of the land from being overflowed with water. However, one certain construct has also made a different kind of change on the state and the country. It simplified travel for many land travelers, and it did that very effectively. The construction of the New River Gorge Bridge was a big moment for anyone who needed to cross the New River going from north to south within West Virginia.

Before the bridge’s construction, anyone who lived even remotely from the New River Gorge could describe how hard it was to navigate around. It was about 360 miles long, and even though there were bridges that went over the New River, the closest one was usually 45 minutes away by car. You had to travel long precarious switchbacks down into the gorge, or travel long distances up or down the river. This river gorge caused many problems in the surrounding communities, so they eventually created a solution: a bridge would be constructed at what was likely the most disruptive spot in the river, designed to carry many cars across gap that was 3,030 feet long and 876 feet tall. Starting in 1973, the bridge took nearly four years to make. However, when it was finally finished, the result of the $37 million project held a record for the longest single-arch steel span in the world at that time. It created a gigantic manmade path for everyone who needed to travel over the large gap, creating a near-revolutionary shortcut, reducing at least 45 minutes of travel to just one single minute.

Not only has the New River Gorge Bridge become a big change in the area, it also became one of the state’s most famous symbols. Not only did it set a record in construction, but
an annual festival is held each year specifically for the bridge. During that day, the bridge is closed, and people can celebrate the “Bridge Day” through BASE jumping, repelling, buying from vendors, or simply enjoying the high view. This is West Virginia’s largest one-day festival. The bridge has also been chosen by the National Park Service as a part of the National Register of Historic Places, making it one of the country’s significant historic resources due to the achievement in engineering. In addition, the New River Gorge Bridge has also been chosen as the representative on the West Virginia quarter in 2006.

Clearly, the New River Gorge Bridge has evolved from being a convenient shortcut to a symbol of West Virginia. At first, there already was much rejoicing over the conclusion of its construction by the 30,000 supporters who came to the dedication. Its fame grew quickly over time. Over 26,000 vehicles now cross it every day. It’s one of the largest bridges in the country, and at the time, it was the state’s engineering marvel. It would be an understatement to call the New River Gorge Bridge a state landmark, and to be honest, it’s hard to argue against that.
Works Cited:
