

January 7, 2020

You can't can now get there from here

There's a pretty river that runs through the Nora Springs, IA. The Shell Rock River meanders down the western part of town, chopping it quite neatly in two, with about one-third on the west side and two-thirds on the east. In the northwest corner of town, an old dam once served a mill that's long gone. But the dam and the mill pond still create a lovely spot that gives the town some of its charm.

Other than a "rickety" bridge that was removed about 100 years ago, there has never been a convenient way to conveniently walk from one side of town to the other. With only two bridges way in the south end of town, it was a long walk or bike ride to school while mixing with the traffic along Highway 122.

That all changed in December, 2018 when the new footbridge, designed by WHKS, was opened, crossing the dam and the river and connecting the two parts of the town.



The bridge was a labor of love for the whole town. Spearheaded by the Parks and Recreation Board, a portion of the project was funded by the local Adams Family Foundation, an endowment established by a successful real estate developer who grew up in the town. The remainder of the project was financed by nearly 70 public and private donations, as well as grants from local and state foundations.

The old dam was, from an engineering viewpoint, the worst possible location for the bridge. But from an aesthetic or romantic perspective, it couldn't be better. Standing above the rushing water, watching the lights reflect on the pond, casting your line to the exact spot where the bass gather, taking an evening jog or walk along the park trails, these are what make life so much better.

Because of the location, the engineers had to work a little harder. Two, 180-foot prefabricated steel trusses were lifted into place after footings and foundations were set on both shores and on a gravel island in the center of the river. The two bridge sections meet at a circular lookout point that provides dramatic views upstream to the pond and downstream to the spillway and the river as it winds its way south and east.



The Shell Rock River is also notorious for its powerful spring floods. Flooding initially delayed construction of the bridge for almost a year. Then, after the two bridge sections were in place, three separate floods threatened to delay the bridge opening yet again. But the bridge is built to stand up to just about anything the river can throw at it and Nora Springs residents will be enjoying their walks, bike rides and trail runs for many years to come.

