United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form.* If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

DRAFT

historic name Durgan Bridge

other names/site number Courthouse Bridge, Nevada Street Bridge

2. Location

street & number Nevada Street n/a not for publication

city or town Downieville n/a vicinity

state California code CA county Sierra code 091 zip code 95936

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide __local

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official Date

Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

___ entered in the National Register

___ determined eligible for the National Register

___ determined not eligible for the National Register

___ removed from the National Register

___ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

	private
x	public - Local
	public - State
	public - Federal

Category of Property
(Check only **one** box.)

	building(s)
	district
	site
x	structure
	object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
		buildings
		district
		site
1	0	structure
		object
1	0	**Total**

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

Historic Highway Bridges in California MPS

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Transportation: Road related

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Transportation: Road related

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

One lane steel, rigid connected Pratt though truss

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation:

walls:

roof:

other: Steel structure

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with **a summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

Summary Paragraph

The Durgan Bridge, built in 1938 across the North Yuba River, is a rare surviving example of a one lane, rigid connected Pratt through truss span. Designed to carry local traffic on Nevada Street over the North Yuba River, the single lane bridge continues to carry automobile traffic on its one lane (11 foot, 10 inch) roadway since its construction in 1938.

Narrative Description

The Durgan Bridge is a 140 foot long through Pratt truss bridge constructed of riveted steel I-beams, running north-south on Nevada Street. The portal struts are reinforced with riveted diagonal bracing of steel I-beams, and each vertical truss is reinforced at the top with diagonal bracing of riveted steel L-brackets. Top lateral bracing of steel L-brackets are located between the struts along the top chord. On each end of the bridge is a builder's plate reading "Judson Pacific Co., San Francisco, 1938." The bridge is supported on steel stringers, with a roadway deck of poured concrete. The bridge is supported by two rectangular piers of poured concrete, backed by concrete abutments. A four-foot concrete pedestrian walkway is located on the eastern side of the roadway. On either side of the roadway deck are guardrails of steel L-brackets supported by steel I-beams, with chain-link fence affixed to the inside of the guardrails. A water pipe runs along the lower chord on the western side of the bridge.

The Durgan Bridge carries automotive and pedestrian traffic over the Downie River connecting Nevada Street in the community of Downieville. While once common throughout California, a relatively small number of rigid connected Pratt through truss bridges survive today within the state. Rarer yet are single-lane bridges still in use carrying automotive traffic.

The Durgan Bridge was built by the Judson Pacific Company, built to replace a bridge destroyed months earlier by flood.

Until the 1920s, metal truss bridges faced little competition from other bridge types. The metal trusses were stronger and more rigid than wooden bridges, and they were fire resistant. Due to competition among dozens of bridge firms then in operation and standardization of bridge designs, metal truss bridges were relatively inexpensive and easy to construct. Steel beam technology and reinforced concrete technology had not yet fully developed, so that metal truss bridges were the best way to span great distances. Concrete arches and beams would eventually supplant metal truss bridges as common waterway crossings.In the latter half of the twentieth century, very few truss bridges would be built. Because the existing truss bridges were often built for traffic either before or in the early stages of fossil-fuel-powered vehicles, many have become too narrow or unable to carry modern loads. In addition, their many exposed metal parts result in corrosion problems, further weakening them. As a result, metal truss bridges, once ubiquitous, are now becoming a rarity on the landscape.

Integrity

The bridge has maintained a high degree of integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. All major features of the bridge appear intact and original when compared to a historic photo of the site.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- [x] A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- [ ] B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- [ ] C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- [ ] D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Community planning and development
of Downieville

Period of Significance

1938

Significant Dates

Criteria Considerations
(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- [ ] A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- [ ] B removed from its original location.
- [ ] C a birthplace or grave.
- [ ] D a cemetery.
- [ ] E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- [ ] F a commemorative property.
- [ ] G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Significant Person
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Judson Pacific Company, contractor
Taylor, George, County Engineer, designer

Period of Significance (justification)

The period of significance is 1938, the year of the bridge's construction

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

None

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

The Durgan Bridge, built in 1938 across the South Yuba River, is eligible for the National Register under Criterion A at the local level of significance for its association with the development of the Sierra County community of Downieville in response to a 1937 flood that destroyed its predecessor. The period of significance for the property is 1938, the year of the bridge's construction. The property is nominated under the Historic Highway Bridges in California MPS as an example of the Truss Bridge property type.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Criterion A: Community planning and development of Downieville

Like many communities, the geography surrounding the community of Downieville would be tied closely to its founding, development, and continued existence. Situated at the confluence of two deep mountain canyons carrying two significant rivers, the community was forced to straddle these rivers to exist in this location of heavy gold deposits. This location required the construction of two bridges in order for the community to exist. Two more bridges were later constructed to allow connection of the growing community across the river. In each instance, a single lane bridge was viewed as all that was necessary to supply the community with its necessary traffic system. While each bridge has been replaced multiple times due to flood, fire, or collapse, in each instance the successor bridges that now date from between 1910 and 1938 continue to represent the type, style, design, and capacity of bridges that have served this community for 161 years.

The Durgan Bridge and its companion bridges limit this community, like the geography that surrounds it, to a rural and slow pace evocative of 19th century California. This one lane structure in a community with no traffic lights, limits traffic to a certain pace not seen in any other California community.

Since the establishment of this community in 1848, bridges were important infrastructure to this community due to the nature of the geography of Downieville. As gold brought settlers to the area, rivers were the source of that precious metal and there was an early interest on the part of settlers to live near those waterways. Additionally, little flat ground was to be found in the area adjacent the confluence of the North Yuba and Downie Rivers, forcing the location of any community that developed to be adjacent both rivers. The community first known as "The Forks" soon became Downieville, after Scottish born early settler William Downie. As the community developed on different 'flats' adjacent each side of each rivers, Zumwalt, Durgan, Jersey, and Washington District, a number of bridges were built and replaced as needed since that time. While this application nominates the Durgan Bridge, it is one of four single lane bridges that remain in this community, with three still in use for vehicular traffic. Today, these four bridges together, a single lane each in every instance, reflect and portray a style and pace of travel of an earlier era of California. The Durgan Bridge was built by Judson Pacific Company of San Franciscoand designed by county surveyor George F. Taylor. Steel truss bridges were rare by the late 1930s, but its use on this site was dictated by a natural disaster that destroyed a more modern style of bridge, as well as the Durgan Bridge's immediate predecessor.

The 1937 Downieville Flood

In 1937, Downieville had a total of five bridges. The easternmost (and farthest upstream on the Downie River) was the Hospital Bridge, originally called the Downieville Steel Bridge (due to its status as the town's first steel truss bridge) constructed in 1908. Next was the Hansen Bridge, a Pratt pony truss bridge completed in 1936. Third was a concrete arch bridge constructed by the State of California to carry traffic on Highway 49. Just downstream of the highway bridge was the Jersey Bridge, a wooden bridge constructed in 1875, and the Durgan Bridge, just downstream of where the Downie River met the Yuba, constructed in 1881. Aside from the highway bridge, all were constructed as single-lane bridges by the county government.

On December 10, 1937, major storms sent a torrent of water through Downieville via both rivers. Nearly ten years had passed since the last high water, and an enormous amount of debris was swept into the river by the storm. State highway crews, aware of the storm's danger, stood by to clear debris from the bridges, but as the river rose to the point where the highway bridge's arches were underwater, clearing debris became impossible. The storm passed mostly under the Hospital Bridge and damaged the footings of the Hansen Bridge. The Highway 49 concrete arch bridge, unlike the truss bridges, had several pillars that extended into the river, and once road crews could no longer reach the bridge, debris collected on the piers and blocked the passage of water through the arches. The temporary dam brought the water level high enough to send the river through the streets of Downieville, lifting homes from their foundations and sending them floating downstream. The highway bridge could not withstand the pressure of the water and debris for long, and collapsed

after approximately 30 minutes. The catastrophic break-through of water and debris caused more damage to the buildings of Downieville, and utterly destroyed the two wooden bridges downstream from the highway bridge, the Jersey and Durgan Bridges.

With Downieville devastated by the flood and cut off from the rest of the state, several groups responded immediately to the community's crisis. The American Red Cross was mobilized to provide food, clothing and bedding. A California Conservation Corps camp was established to clear flood debris in the wake of the storm. The Lord Shoto Douglas Chapter of E Clampus Vitus declared a proclamation of emergency and mobilized their membership to assist the citizens of Downieville, providing food and material assistance, and obtaining the name of every child in Downieville and delivering each a Christmas present.

Bridge design in the 20th century, and selection of bridge types, was influenced by "City Beautiful" design. In 1909, Charles Mulford Robinson reported that the city of Los Angeles should substitute more aesthetically pleasing concrete arch bridges for the utilitarian but unattractive truss bridges used at river crossings. California Highway Commission designers like Harlan D. Miller and his successor Charles E. Andrew both insisted that California highway bridges should be beautiful as well as practical, following Robinson's dictates regarding bridge materials. Their work established the tradition of the concrete highway bridge in California. When the California Division of Highways constructed their bridge across the Downie River in 1936, they followed this tradition. Many of these California bridges still stand today. Examples span the state, from Los Angeles' network of concrete river crossings and the Diestelhorst Bridge in Redding. Unfortunately, the aesthetics of the Highway 49 bridge did not match up to the force of the 1937 flood, with disastrous consequences for the mountain community.

When Sierra County officials selected designs to replace the Jersey and Durgan Bridge in 1938, county engineer George Taylor designed two steel truss bridges, rather than concrete spans, to replace the wooden bridges. Both bridges were constructed by the Judson Pacific company of San Francisco, who specialized in truss bridge construction well after most California engineering firms had abandoned truss bridge design for more contemporary styles. Taylor also chose to repair the damaged Hansen Bridge and retain the Hospital Bridge, whose unfashionable steel trusses had survived the disastrous 1937 flood. By the end of 1938, the town of Downieville was again connected by its four traditional single-lane bridges, all of steel truss design. The California Division of Highways rerouted Highway 49 temporarily over the Jersey Bridge as a temporary expedient until a new highway bridge could be constructed to replace the fallen 1936 bridge. As of 2012, no replacement bridge has been constructed, and the temporary expedient of the Jersey Bridge still carries Highway 49 through the city. Like its neighbor the Jersey Bridge, the Durgan Bridge was constructed by the Judson Pacific Company using a steel truss design, a decision made in part due to the survival of the Hospital and Jersey Bridges and the catastrophic failure of the concrete arch bridge that destroyed its predecessor.

Developmental history/additional historic context information (if appropriate)

Since the establishment of this community in 1848, bridges were to be important infrastructure to this community due to the nature of the geography of Downieville. As gold brought settlers to the area, rivers were the source of that precious metal and there was an early interest on the part of settlers to live near those waterways. Additionally, little flat ground was found in the area adjacent the confluence of the North Yuba and Downie Rivers, forcing the location of any community that developed to be adjacent both rivers. The community first known as "The Forks" soon became Downieville, after Scottish born and early settler William Downie. As the community developed on different 'flats' adjacent each side of each rivers, Zumwalt, Durgan, Jersey, and Washington District, a number of bridges were early built and have been maintained (built, destroyed, rebuilt) since that time.

Of the four historic bridges in Downieville, the Durgan Bridge was the site of what is arguably Downieville's most infamous historic event. The July 5, 1851 lynching of the Spanish woman known to history as Juanita was the only recorded lynching of a woman in California's history. While the bridge from which Juanita was hanged was destroyed by flood, local historians believe that the current Durgan Bridge's 1851 predecessor was the same location as the hanging. The first Durgan Bridge was built in 1851 by local businessman James Durgan for whom the flat was named, built as a pedestrian foot bridge. Later in 1851 Durgan widened the bridge for wagon traffic. The Durgan and Jersey Bridges are the principal bridge crossings of Downieville. Previous Durgan Bridges were destroyed by floods in 1852, 1861, 1881, and again in 1937, followed by the still-extant Durgan Bridge constructed in 1938.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

Lutes, Virginia, "The Great Flood of 1937, Downieville, California," *The Sierran*, Volume XXXVI, Number 1, Winter 2008.
Sinnott, James J., *Downieville, Gold town on the Yuba,* 1972
Sinnott, James J., *A General History of Sierra County,* 1978
North Fork of Yuba River (Nevada Street) Bridge Improvement Report, JRP Historical Construction Services, Feb 2001
National Geographic, "Guide to Small Town Escapes"

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

____preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
____previously listed in the National Register
____previously determined eligible by the National Register
____designated a National Historic Landmark
____recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #_____
____recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
____recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

____State Historic Preservation Office
____Other State agency
____Federal agency
__x__Local government
____University
____Other
Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

UTM References
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1	10	686472	4381129	3			
2				4			

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Bridge structure spanning the North Yuba River and connecting Nevada Street, Downieville, Sierra County, California.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The property boundary is limited to bridge structure and its approaches.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Lee Adams, Supervisor, District One

organization County of Sierra date 2 February 2012

street & number PO Drawer D telephone 530.289.3295

city or town Downieville state CA 95936

e-mail hangman@sierracounty.ws

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

  A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.

- **Continuation Sheets**

- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property:
City or Vicinity:
County: State:
Photographer:
Date Photographed:
Description of Photograph(s) and number:
1 of ___.

Property Owner:

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name County of Sierra (Tim H. Beals, Director of Transportation)

street & number PO Box 98 telephone 530.289.3201

city or town Downieville state CA 95936

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Name of Property Sierra County, California
County and State Historic Highway Bridges in California MPD
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation Page 1

Figure Log

Figure 1: Site Map showing nominated property and other Downieville bridges
Figure 2: Historic photo of damaged highway bridge, 1937
Figure 3: Historic photo of damaged highway bridge, 1937
Figure 4: Historic photo of Durgan Bridge, date unknown

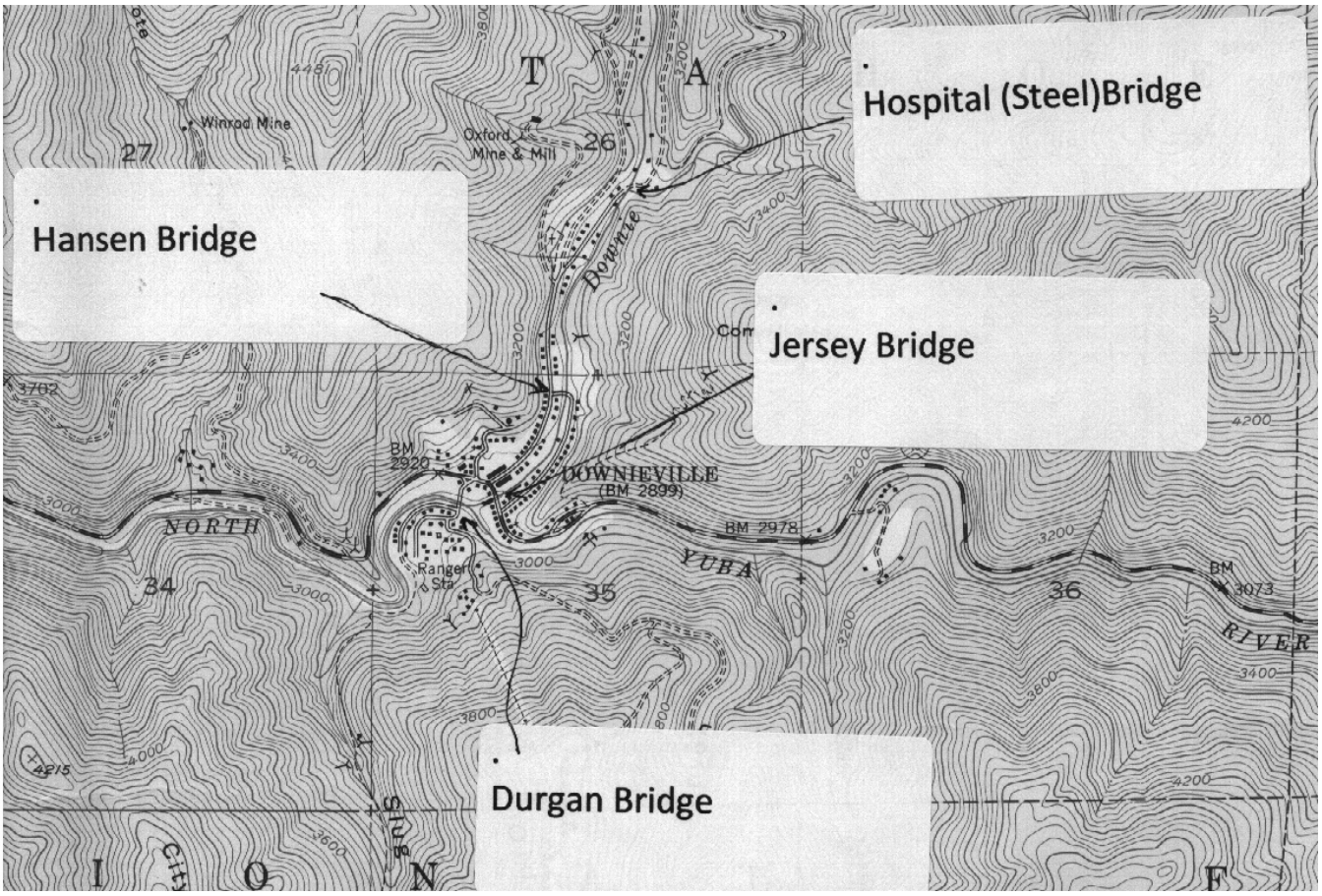

Figure 1. **Downieville Site Map**

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Figure 2. **Historic photo of damaged highway bridge, 1937**

Figure 3. **Historic photo of damaged highway bridge, 1937**

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National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Historic photo of Durgan Bridge, date unknown