

Big KEV's Bridge, Drinking Horse Mountain

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If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them. -Henry David Thoreau

A community's need for a link between several local organizations was the impetus for the Kevin Mundy Memorial Bridge. After a decade of effort, the Gallatin Valley Land Trust successfully secured an easement on private land and established the trail at Drinking Horse Mountain. The need for a pedestrian crossing

to connect this site with the existing trail system was the opportunity to create a bridge to serve as access, but it also presented itself as an advantageous location for an outdoor classroom and education center for both the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Fish Hatchery and the Montana Outdoor Science School, both being situated adjacent to the new trail and bridge site. Poised between a riparian zone and mountain base, the clear span bridge was designed to serve as a focal and nodal point for passive and active education and recreation. This unique addition to Bozeman, Montana's strong outdoor heritage provides a nexus



where walkers meet hikers, where students meet to discuss ecology, where children explore, and where individuals loiter to enjoy conversation or the sounds of tumbling water. The bridge is easily accessible from the trailhead, yet secluded enough to create a destination and unique discovery. The view up and upstream from one of the "classroom" areas exposes the high, dry, mountainous environment and wildlife corridors concealed by thick vegetation from many other vantage points. Looking downstream from the other "classroom", the focus is the braided riparian zones with the Gallatin Valley beyond.



The bridge is two halves comprised of two opposing shed trusses, each with a higher and lower part. The moment frame, accentuated by powder-coated orange steel in contrast to the wood and rusted metal used on the rest of the bridge, joins the two wood halves together, forming the connection between the low and high halves. The bridge is open in this wide middle section that serves as the flexible and collective "meeting space" allowing for a higher level of experience beyond standard handicap accessibility. This space is critical to the both the functional and structural success of the bridge: By eliminating the tension rods in the center bay of the truss and relying on a moment frame to carry the loads at that point, the special opportunities and desired uses for the bridge became realized. Thus, the ability to move through the trusses at this point created a central gathering space bisected by the path running through it.



It is a unique eddy for pause that became the heart of the structure. Open bays allow for easy and universal access to the perimeter railing as well as intimacy with the water. Designed with ample seating,

the bridge offers dynamic shelter to contemplate the art of the structure, the nature of its place, and the memorialized young man for which it is named.



From various perspectives, including the winding approaches and outlooks high along the mountainous trail, the dynamic form suggests a fluid connection between the distinct landscape conditions flanking Bridger Creek. The poetry of this form is derived from the straight lines that, when connected, create a ribbon-like roof. The hyperbolic nature of the roof structure unifies and defines both the program and the special qualities of the structure.



Embodying a design+build praxis in a very principal manner, the structure fondly known as Big Kev's Bridge at Drinking Horse Mountain provocatively links the efforts of a local land trust, the educational needs of a school and government agency, and the remembrance of one with the greater Bozeman community.

