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BIG NUMBERS



A.E. Crane, National Scenic Byways Online

THIS YEAR MARKS the 100th birthday of the National Park Service.

And this month marks the 39th birthday of the New River Gorge Bridge, the structural centerpiece of the New River Gorge National River, a unit of the National Park Service in southern West Virginia. It also marks the 37th annual Bridge Day, a celebration of the bridge that draws tens of thousands of spectators to watch BASE jumpers hurl themselves from the deck 876 ft above the New River, also known as the Kanawha River. (BASE jumping is the practice of parachuting or wingsuit flying from a fixed spot as opposed to an airplane; BASE stands for building, antenna, span—e.g., the New River Gorge Bridge—and earth.)

The bridge is the third-highest in the U.S., one of the 20 highest in the world and the third-longest single-span arch bridge in the world. Completed in 1977 by AISC associate member American Bridge Company (then a division of US Steel) for a total cost of \$37 million, the steel structure has a total length of 3,030 ft, with the longest span being 1,700 ft. With a total weight of 44,000 tons, the bridge is made from weathering steel, which saves an estimated \$1 million for every time the structure would need to be painted if it hadn't used weathering steel. When it opened, it cut the transit time across the gorge from 45 minutes to under a minute. The bridge was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2013.

For more on Bridge Day, which takes place October 15, visit www.officialbridgeday.com. ■