

# Bridges at Dingmans Ferry

Delaware Water Gap  
National Recreation Area  
National Park Service  
Pennsylvania/New Jersey



## Dingmans Ferry

When Andrew Dingman came over from New York State in 1735, he established a ferry across the Delaware River. Since that time until this day, there always has been either a ferry or a bridge to cross the river at this site.

For more than a century, Andrew Dingman and his descendants operated the ferry without competition. Then in 1836, the newly-formed *Dingmans Choice and Delaware Bridge Company* built the first bridge over the river here.

## Bridge and Ferry

In those days, a bridge consisted simply of a roadbed made of planks resting on pilings placed in the riverbed. This bridge lasted until 1847 when high waters washed away a bridge upstream at Milford PA and crashed the debris into Dingmans Bridge. Some 200 passenger pigeons owned by Andrew Dingman, III were roosting on the bridge and were swept away, never to be recovered.

And so the ferry went back into service again, this time for 37 years. Meanwhile, in 1868, the post office decided to open an office in the village of Dingmans Choice, but not finding the town name appropriate, chose the name *Dingmans Ferry*.

The ferry was brought back into service for three years until a second bridge was built in 1850. But on September 24, 1863, the newspapers reported:

### **BRIDGE GONE !**

*The bridge at Dingmans, over the Delaware River, yielded to the winds what the water had vainly tried to accomplish, and went over during the heavy gust of wind on last Friday afternoon. The structure, or a large portion of it, went floating down the river in gallant style; where it brought up is not known to us.*



Horse and carriage get a ride across to Dingmans Ferry in 1896. The bridge abutment on the New Jersey side held the wooden bridge that was lost in 1863.



## Crossing Today

Around 1900, the Perkins brothers, owners of the Horsehead Bridge Company, purchased the franchise for the bridge at a tax sale.

Dingmans Ferry Bridge is one of the very few privately-owned tollbridges in the country, and belongs to the members of what is still called the *Dingmans Choice and Delaware Bridge Company*. The owners are all descendants of the original settlers, and some of even work as toll collectors.

The brothers had on their hands the remains of a single-track iron railroad bridge built in 1889 which had been wrecked by a severe flood at Muncie on the Susquehanna. The Perkins transported three of the five trusses, built of pin-hung wrought-iron members, to this site and assembled them on newly constructed piers, retaining and raising the original embankments six feet.

Every year after Labor Day, the bridge closes for more than a week to allow engineers to inspect the bridge from the tops of the trusses to the underwater foundations, and to perform any necessary maintenance and repairs. So the bridge is safe to cross -- it rumbles with the traffic because the floorboards are held in place with anchor plates and collar nails, *not* because it is falling apart!

This fourth bridge is the bridge which you here see at Dingmans Ferry today.