HOBART’S FLOATING BRIDGE

Location: Demolished. Formerly across the Derwent River at Hobart

Owner: State Government.

Markers and interpretation panels are located at each end of the bridge site.

The Bridge
The two lane floating bridge operated from 1943 until 1964. It consisted of 24 reinforced concrete pontoons joined into two half arches, and a lift span for ships near the western shore.

The Hobart Bridge Company was authorised by parliament to build the bridge and charge tolls. Entrepreneur Stan Barnett floated the company, attracting local investors. The Public Works Department designed the bridge under the leadership of Chief Engineer Allen Knight (later Sir Allen) who was responsible for the concept. Allen Knight went to the USA in 1937 to study lift spans.

The Timms Bridge Construction Company won the contract in 1938 and set up its works area on Pavilion Point at the western end of the bridge. The outer lift span tower foundation was excavated inside two caissons down to a depth of 37 metres, and formed the western abutment for the floating pontoons. The pontoons were launched into the river and towed across the Geilston Bay to be joined up.

Heritage Significance
- A traditional bridge would require multiple piers extending down through 30 metres of water and 30 metres of mud to support its deck. The floating bridge avoided this unaffordable cost.
- Floating bridges elsewhere were straight and required a series of anchors to keep them on line. But tests in the mud proved anchors unreliable. The arch shape required only attachment to the shore at each end, a brilliant solution.
- Eastern shore residents had greatly improved access to shops, jobs and hospitals in Hobart.
- Despite periodic storm damage, the bridge served for 21 years during which the eastern shore population rose from 5000 to 30,000.

Last day before removal 16 August 1964. Tasman Bridge at left.

Note:
Interpretation panels on next page
Interpretation Panels and Markers

The Floating Bridge 1943–1964

Before the floating bridge opened, people wanting to cross the River Derwent had to wait for a ferry or drive as far north as Bridgewater. Once the bridge was opened, people could cross at any time of the night or day.

The bridge was in constant demand, especially during winter months when the river could be too rough for ferries. It was a vital link, allowing people and goods to move between the eastern and western sides of the Derwent Valley.

The bridge was designed to be easily moved to different locations, allowing it to be used in different parts of the Derwent Valley. It was a marvel of engineering, and its construction was a testament to the skills of the workers involved.

The bridge was a symbol of progress and a reminder of the ingenuity of the people who built it. It is a testament to the engineering skills of the time, and a reminder of the importance of infrastructure in connecting communities.