

The Spanish Town Bridge

The 2007 year old historic iron bridge in Spanish Town is getting a facelift and being strengthened - part of the preservation of Jamaica's tangible heritage

The bridge was built in 1801 and is the first one of its kind in the western hemisphere. The abutment is constructed from cut stone while the bridge is made of cast iron and it spans the Rio Cobre at the eastern end of Spanish Town. The bridge is 81 ft long and 15 ft wide. It has been closed for several years, but it clearly visible from the currently used bridge.

The construction of the Spanish Town bridge marked the birth and maturity of the industrial revolution and therefore the value and historicity of Spanish Town in world history. In 1998 World Monument Watch, an affiliate UNESCO body listed the historic iron-bridge as one of the most threatened sites in the world.

The Jamaica National Heritage Trust (JNHT) recently signed a 12 million dollar contract with Surrey Paving and Aggregate Company Ltd. to begin repair work on the bridge. The first phase of the work is expected to be completed in three months.

In her remarks, Minister of Culture, Olivia Grange told the community "You have been asking for this for years. Your parents have asked for it before you and now it is finally happening." Director of Estate Management and Business Development at the JNHT, Gavern Tate, outlined the scope of work to be done in this the first phase and noted that a critical component to the sustainability of the works would be the necessary river training and river bank protection by the NWA as the erosion of the river banks was obvious after the passage of Gustav.

Member of the Spanish Town Iron Bridge Foundation Mr. Stephen Hodges also endorsed the work to be done on the bridge and also requested the full co-operation of the community in the successful execution of the project.