

**KLAMATH RIVER BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION – 1965**  
**Guy Luther – District 1**

I graduated from Humboldt State with a degree in Business Administration in January of 1965. I had hoped to be an Administrative Trainee for the Federal Government, or a Junior Right -of-way agent for the California Division of Highways. I passed the written test, and was on the Federal Administrative Trainee list, waiting for an opportunity to interview. I did not pass the oral interview for the Junior Right-of-way Agent.

Desperate for a job, Myron Cramer, A Division of Highways Traffic Engineer told me that District one was giving a test for Engineering Aids. The 1964 flood had done considerable damage to highways in the District, and additional staff would be required for the repair work. I thought that an Engineering Aid position would be a good temporary job. I passed the written test, and the oral interview basically consisted of two questions: "Would you be willing to work away from the District Office in Eureka?" and "How bad do you get poison oak?"

Both Ronald Earl Johnson and I were hired as Engineering Aid 1's on April 5, 1965, provided with a vehicle, and sent to the town of Klamath, about 70-miles north of Eureka. We were assigned to Henry Zeiback, the District Representative on the Klamath River Bridge job. Nick Gust was the Resident Engineer for the new Klamath River Bridge, and Henry Zeiback was responsible for the bridge approaches, ramps, and frontage road connections. Field offices were trailers in the old Klamath maintenance station yard.

The old Klamath Bridge had been washed out in the flood, along with most of the town of Klamath. Highway 101 traffic had been ferried across the Klamath River for a few months before temporary repairs to the old bridge could be completed. The Corps of Engineers had also constructed a "pile retard" upstream of the old bridge, which was intended to prevent the buildup of debris that could destroy the newly repaired bridge.

We arrived at Klamath via the newly repaired bridge, and after a brief orientation, we got our boot camp training from Drew Irwin, an Engineering Aid II. He gave us a tour of the project, then a brief orientation on surveying and weigh scales operation. When it rained, he had us digging out a storm drain in what had been the town of Klamath before the flood. I don't know whether he was punishing us, or trying to save the State money.

Drew decided that Ron would be the weighmaster, and that I would do the materials testing for the job. I filled in for Ron for a few days on the scales, and I'm sure I got the better end of the deal. We were weighing scrapers

(earthmoving machines), loaded with "imported borrow material", a fancy name for river run gravel. We were weighing well over two hundred loads in an eight hour day, and providing a daily summary, with totals.

I didn't have anyone to train me for materials testing, but I did have the State Materials Testing Manual. From it, I learned how to do compaction tests (affectionately called pounding rat holes by field testing personnel), sieve analysis tests, sand equivalent tests, unit weight tests, and Kelly ball slump tests. I'm sure there were other tests that I have long forgotten. Our balance scales were metric, and I haven't been able to forget that there are 453.59 grams per pound. We did our calculations on Monroe mechanical calculators, hand powered by a small crank and nicknamed pepper grinders.

After a month or so, Henry Zeiback was transferred to a storm damage job in the Gasquet Canyon, and John Maxwell, who has been his assistant, took over as District Representative. Shortly after John assumed responsibility, he asked me about the results of a materials test that I took. I said the test had passed, and he asked me if I was sure that I had done the test correctly. I said that I had followed the manual, but since the test was new to me, I couldn't be certain. Then John said "we'll probably both go to jail together." John worried way too much!

Every month or two, I would get a visitor from the Materials Lab in Eureka. They would "witness" me doing a test to make sure I was doing it properly. And, they had helpful hints on the easiest way to do the tests, consistent with the Materials Testing Manual. Monte Hanson generally did the witness testing, as he had a medical condition that would not allow him to work in hot weather, and Klamath is generally cool, even in the summer.

In late summer or early fall, the person who did materials testing for the Klamath River Bridge was re-assigned to a storm damage job on Route 169 bridges, about twenty miles south-east of Klamath. As a result, I took over some of his testing duties. I was doing a unit weight or Kelly ball slump test on a concrete pour on the Klamath River bridge. I walked in to the test site on the bridge falsework, but after the pour, I couldn't get back out the way I came in. I asked, and the crew said "ride the bucket down". This was a year or so before we were even required to wear hard hats.

It seemed reasonable to me, so I climbed on the bucket. The crane equipment operator saw me get on, and made a wide swing over the Klamath river with the bucket, just to give me a thrill. If that happened today, both the engineer and the crane operator would be fired!