A Tale of Two Bridges - Pismo Beach CA by Patrick Tillett

This post is about side by side bridges in Pismo Beach. The coast road was the only thru-road on this part of the coast. The railroad bridge was built in 1909, and the road bridge in 1911. A little bit of history that won't be with us for much longer.

Old Coast Road Bridge

aka "The Bello Street Bridge" or "The Pismo Creek Bridge"

Railroad engineers made sure that the tracks would be laid on the most level ground possible, and take the path of least resistance. Many years later when auto roads were being constructed, they took advantage of the work that RR engineers had already done. As a result, the early roads were usually built very close to existing railroad routes. These two bridges are a good example of this.

The railroad tracks on the left, and the coastal road on the right. To those of you that have traveled on Pacific Coast Highway (Route 1), or the Hwy 101, along the coast; can you imagine using this little road?

Not much of a road now. I'm looking for some historic photos of what it looked like back then.

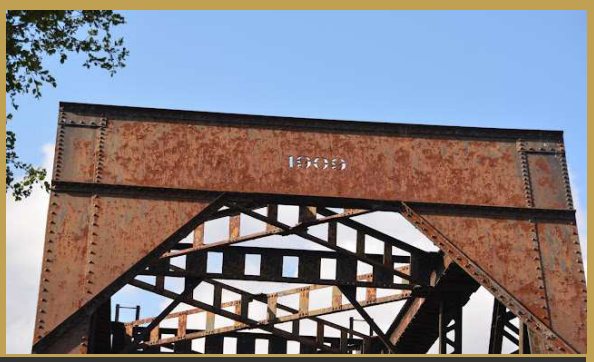
The 1911 coast road bridge

Those of you that have been around here for a long time, know that I would usually take some photos while walking across the bridge. Not this time! It is really rotting away.

It's not much of a bridge anymore, but it does make a good trellis.

If you look closely at the close up photo on the right,
you can clearly see that this bridge is going to collapse one of these days.

Old Pacific Coast Railway Bridge – Google AI (2025)



Built in 1909. This RR line is still in use.

The old Pacific Coast Railway Bridge in Pismo Beach, California, is a historic structure with a rich history tied to the development of the area's agriculture and commerce. Originally built as the Pismo Wharf in 1881, it was later replaced by a longer pier in 1924, which was subsequently rebuilt after storms in 1984. The bridge played a significant role in shipping local products to market and was a vital transportation link for the region.
Here's a more detailed look at the bridge's history:

Early Wharf (1881):

The original wharf was constructed to facilitate the shipment of agricultural products from the area, providing a more cost-effective alternative to the railroad.

Storm Damage and Rebuilding:

The wharf suffered damage from storms, including one in 1884 that took out 250 feet of the structure. It was rebuilt and extended, but further storms continued to affect its integrity.

Pier Reconstruction (1924):

A new, full-length pier was built in 1924, financed and constructed by William Woodrow Ward, who allowed public access to the pier.

Subsequent Rebuilding:

The pier was rebuilt again in 1984 after being damaged by an El Nino storm.

Present Day:
The pier, with its iconic 4-diamond design, stands today as a landmark and a testament to Pismo Beach's history. It has been upgraded with steel pilings and other improvements.