

Bridal Veil Falls

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On December 4, 2003, Highlanders woke up to the headline 'The day the falls fell,' telling of 150-ton rock that hit the pavement at the base of Bridal Veil Falls the day before.

But it is a new day in Highlands, and Bridal Veil Falls is once again free from debris, with a little hard work from area developer Bill Nellis, and a little dynamite from Mid-South blasting. Nellis got the idea some time ago, but everything finally came together this week – it was time or the rock to go.

"Basically, I just got sick of looking at it," he said. "I live here. I love this place. It was part of our history and I just want the road back the way it was." Nellis was referring to the road that runs under the falls, a road that for the last 3.5 years has been blockaded by the natural stone.

Since 1928, that road that went under the falls was the only road between Highlands and Franklin. But, in 1954, as Ran Shaffner notes in *Heart of the Blue Ridge*, a tragic death occurred when Harold Hunnicut, a 29-year-old from Seneca drove his car off the road and fell to his death. In 1958, the town board voted to create a by-pass. The old road remained and visitors could still drive under the falls on the old road until 45 years later when the mountain overhang dropped to the road below.

Chad Boniface, recreation manager at the Nantahala Ranger District remembers that day, though he was out of town. He recalls hearing the news, because just one week earlier, he had been on location, placing the winter barricade in that exact spot.

"In the winter time, if it warms up in the day, people didn't realize there was black ice under there, so we always put up the barricade," he said, wondering if Nellis and his crew found the remains of the barricade underneath the rock.

"We had wanted to remove that rock for some time, but it was going to cost the forest service something like \$20,000 to remove it. So, we were happy when Bill Nellis said he would take care of it, we were happy to give him permission."

Nellis also had to check with the Department of Transportation before any blasting could occur, said Boniface. "I have had everyone look at it, and it is all clear," said Nellis on Wednesday before the blasting. "I have done a lot of blasting, and I can tell you the only time you have a problem is when the rock backs up to a shelf. This is free standing rock, so there shouldn't be any problems."

David Bates with the Jackson Macon County Alliance also did not see any environmental concern. "I am kind of nostalgic about that area. I remember when you could park and really walk around," he said, adding that he was excited about the process of the road opening again.

The Chamber of Commerce and Visitor Center also spoke in favor of the rock removal.