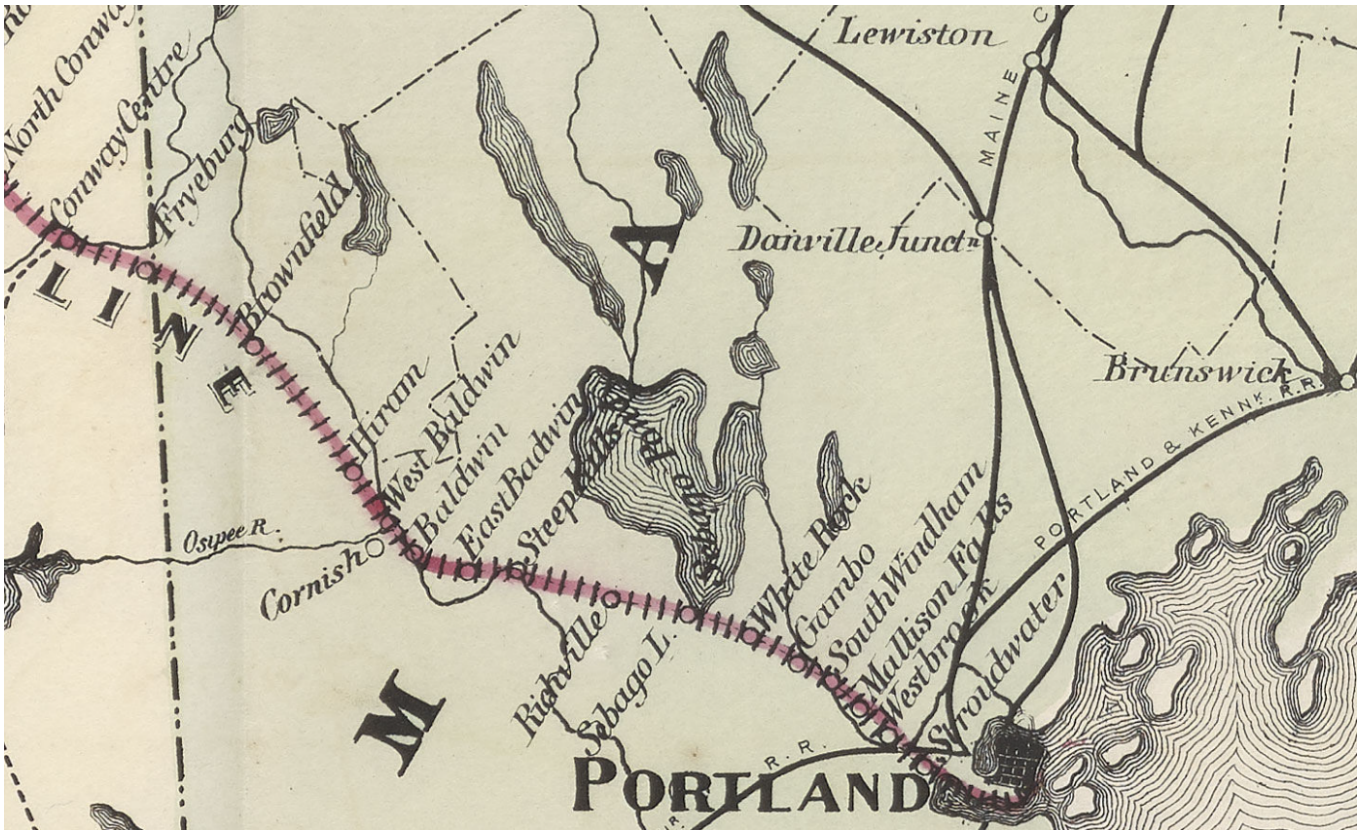
MOUNTAIN DIVISION STONE RAILROAD CULVERTS

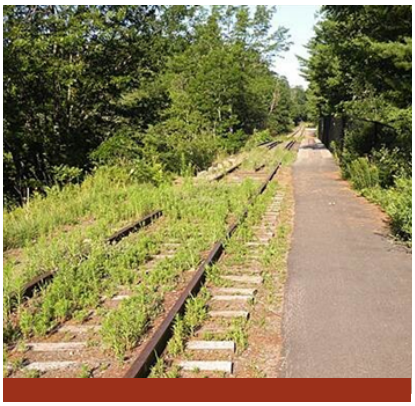
c. 1875 | Westbrook & Windham

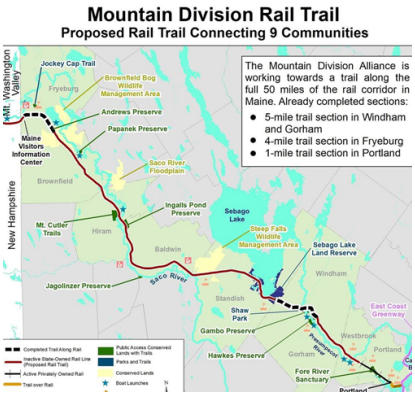


The Mountain Division name came to be in the early years of the 20th century when the railroad served as the main mode of transportation for summer visitors. Grand Victorian hotels like the Bay of Naples Inn and the cooling waters of Sebago Lake attracted people escaping the heat and oppressive air of the cities. Prior to that time, the Mountain Division was known as the Portland & Ogdensburg Railroad, chartered in Maine in 1867 with construction starting in 1869. By the early part of the 20th century, the expanding Maine Central Railroad absorbed the P&O between Portland and St. Johnsbury, Vermont. Passenger service on the scenic run ended in 1958, and freight trains stopped rolling after Pan Am Railways acquired it in the 1980s.

Stone culverts along the Mountain Division line are of two primary styles, arched culverts and boxed culverts. Arched culverts, in both function and appearance, are small stone arch bridges while box culverts have vertical stone walls that support a large stone slab that spans the opening width.

Inactivity along the railroad corridor has led to deteriorating condition of many of the historic stone culverts that span tributaries to the Presumpscot River. Local and statewide interest in restoration of the Mountain Division led MaineDOT in 2007 to evaluate the condition and potential passenger and freight rail uses of the 50 mile Mountain Division rail line in southern and western Maine.





The study identified several stone box and arch culverts on the lower sections of the rail line in need of repair, cleaning and debris removal. These culverts include:

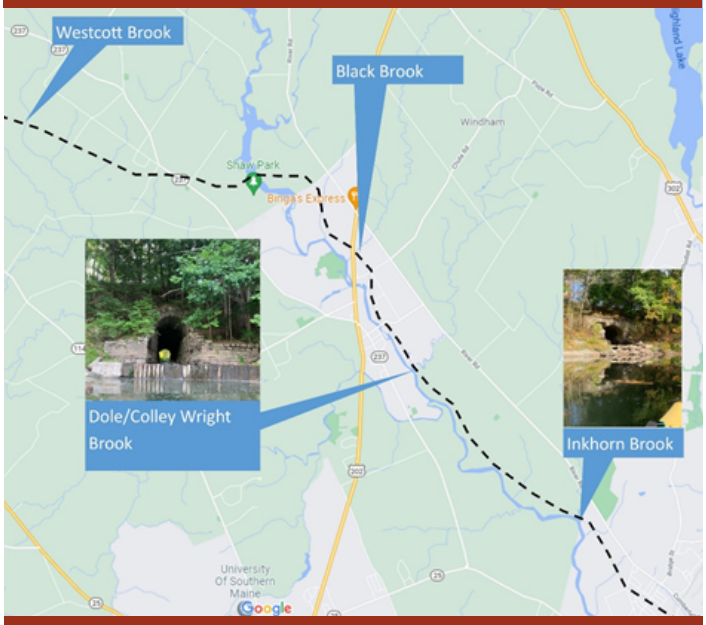
- Mile 7.34, a stone arch culvert (1875) over Inkhorn Brook (Windham)
- Mile 9.7 a stone box culvert (1875) over Dole Brook/Colley Brook (Windham)
- Mile 22.12 a stone arch culvert (1875) over Black Brook (South Windham)

MaineDOT solicited $28.5 million in funding for Mountain Division restoration through the TIGER program but funding was not awarded. Subsequently, the Maine Legislature appropriated $4M in state bond funds to initiate an upgrade of the rail line itself, but additional funds are needed. Complicating maintenance of the stone culverts between South Windham and Westbrook is the current sales transaction of Pan Am, owner of the Portland to Windham portion of the railroad corridor, to CSX.

Stone culverts are some of the earliest and hardiest of transportation infrastructure developed and were in common use until the early twentieth century. Representing early engineering throughout Maine's landscape, these unassuming structures are often overlooked. The remaining box and arch culverts along the Mountain Division line contribute to our understanding of the late-twentieth century development of this area and the engineering techniques employed.

With State and local interest in the restoration of the Mountain Division line as an economic driver for western Maine, the 2007 study estimated the upgrade to cost $31.4 million. Long-range plans, supported by the Mountain Division Alliance, call for a continuous 50-mile trail from Portland to New Hampshire along the Mountain Division corridor in collaboration with the nine communities along the line. A feasibility study for this concept is currently being conducted by Maine Department of Transportation, Department of Economic and Community Development and the Governor's Office of Policy, Innovation and the Future.

Funding for this particular corridor is not imminent. In the meantime, the stone culverts between South Windham and Westbrook continue to deteriorate. Survey work is desperately needed to identify the current condition of these culverts and the work necessary to stabilize and regularly maintain each. Regional advocacy is critical to ensuring that future rail and recreational use of the corridor and river incorporate these culverts while supporting environmental and economic improvements.



Photos of culverts at Inkhorn Brook (above, right) and Dole/Colley Write Brook (below, right) in 2021. Courtesy Michael Shaughnessy.