

Wachusett Dam

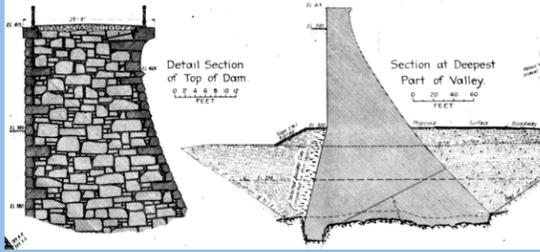
DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION
DIVISION OF WATER SUPPLY PROTECTION



Hold the Water

The south branch of the Nashua River was dammed to create the Wachusett Reservoir, the largest in the world at the time.

Excavation for the Wachusett Dam began in October of 1900, and construction continued for five years.



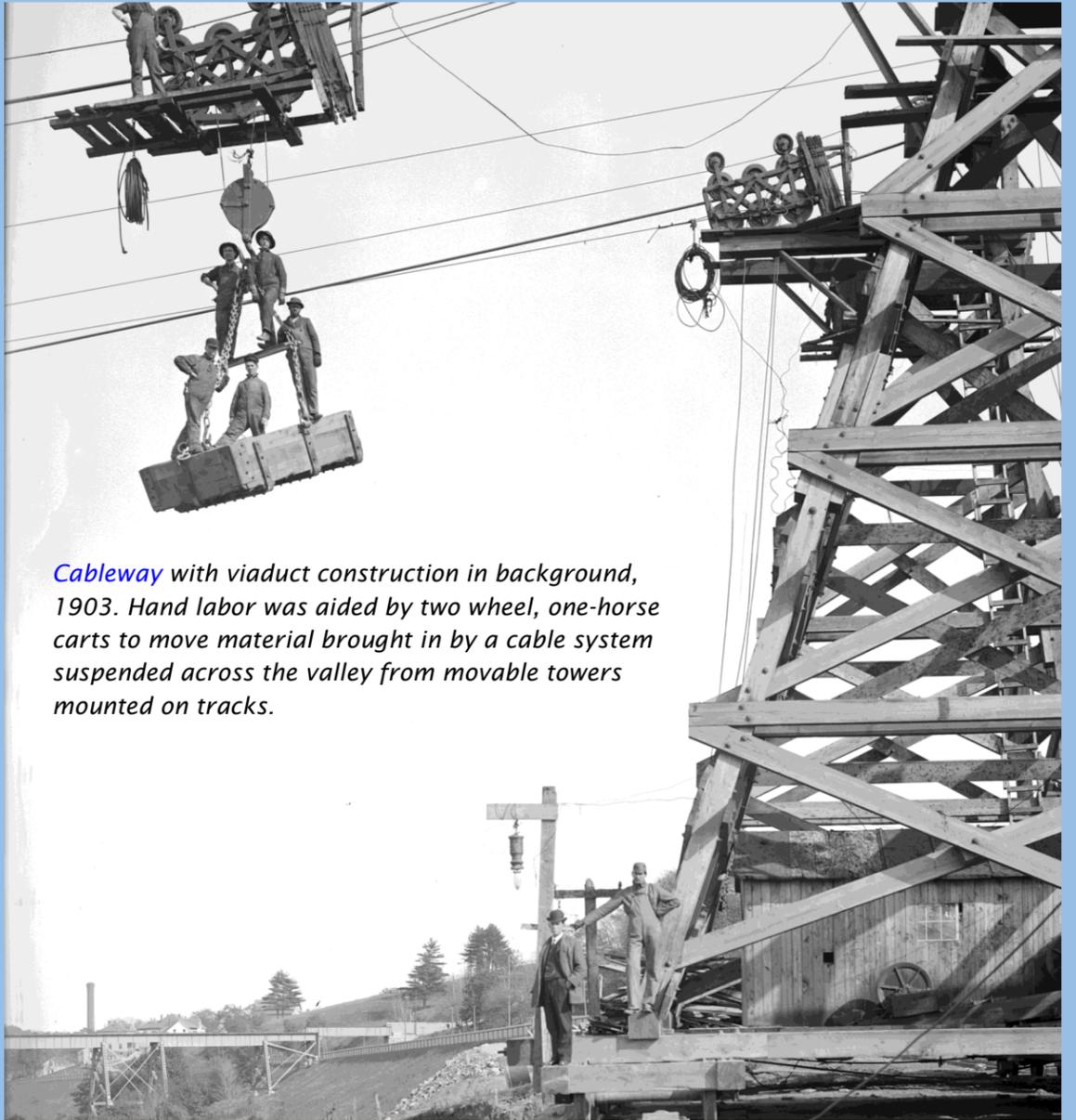
World's Largest

The **Wachusett Dam** maintains the honor of being the largest hand built gravity dam in the world. Constructed of granite masonry, the dam stretches 944' across.

- First stone laid: 1901
- Last stone laid: 1905
- Elevation: 415' above sea level
- Height of dam: 115' above ground
112' below ground
- Length of spillway: 452', excess water discharges to Nashua River
- Maximum thickness:
185' at bottom,
22.5' at top
- Height to top of dam above full reservoir level: 20'
- East flight of stairs: 187 steps
- West flight of stairs: 177 steps

Stone by Stone

Laborers worked year-round, primarily with hand tools, to build the dam. Earth work preparing the upper edges of the reservoir floor continued for about two years after completion of the dam.



Cableway with viaduct construction in background, 1903. Hand labor was aided by two wheel, one-horse carts to move material brought in by a cable system suspended across the valley from movable towers mounted on tracks.



Photo Above: News of this engineering feat was heard worldwide. The Panama Canal Commission, looking for advice on their construction project, toured the completed dam site on Sept. 27, 1905.

Photo Below: Workers lived in "commissaries" or encampments, comprised of sod huts for sleeping and crude wooden dining halls.



Photo Below: Wachusett Dam, from the northeast, with viaduct and highway bridge, Jun. 1, 1905.

Over six miles of existing railroad was re-routed to 4.5 miles of new track, including a new 1,100 foot rock tunnel adjacent to a 917 foot long steel viaduct. This viaduct would carry trains 133 feet in the air across the Nashua River next to the new dam. The viaduct is now gone, but the supporting stonework can still be seen today below in the river.

