

Repairs begin on historic Merrill Bridge

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Work has finally begun on the Merrill Bridge. Vice Construction, which has a contract to do part of the repair work on the 90 year old single-lane through-truss bridge, moved equipment into place last week and began driving supplemental pilings.

Vice Construction will drive additional pilings and put in the bracing and bents to support the structure from the underside. Another firm, still to be determined, will construct supplement trusses on the top side, taking some of the weight off the existing trusses.

The construction crew has been fortunate with both the weather and the water level, according to Jimmy Vice, company owner. The Pascagoula water level at the Merrill Bridge is falling, but was at a sufficient depth to allow assembly of a barge that serves as a platform for the pile driving crane.

The barge was then floated from position to position as needed. As the river continues to fall, the barge would not have had sufficient clearance over a sandbar and the crane would have to be walked off the barge and onto the sandbar, slowing the process up considerably.

“We had about a two-day window to do this”, he said. “The crew worked through the weekend.”

The fix is limited and temporary. It will allow light traffic, such as cars and pickup trucks, to cross the Pascagoula River at Merrill rather than Hwy. 26. The plan is to build a new bridge at Merrill at some future time when funds become available. The current bridge, which is listed as a historic site, will be preserved as a tourist attraction.

The Merrill Bridge was closed to all traffic in 2012. It has taken six years to secure the roughly \$1.2 million required to make the necessary repairs. The new bridge is projected to cost about \$5 million.

It is expected the repairs can be completed and the bridge open to light traffic sometime early next year.