

Destruction of historic covered bridge leaves 'a hole in people's hearts'

Fire considered suspicious, Quebec provincial police say

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Quebec provincial police are investigating after a nearly century-old covered bridge in Low, Que., burned down Saturday night. Police and firefighters were called to chemin du lac Pike around 6 p.m. Saturday, where they found the Kelly bridge completely engulfed in flames. They battled the fire but could not save the wooden structure. While no one was hurt, the fire is considered suspicious, the Sûreté du Québec told Radio-Canada.



Quebec provincial police say the fire is considered suspicious. (Maureen McEvoy)

Drivers face detour

The 27-metre bridge was built in the 1920s and refurbished in 1997 after the roof collapsed under the weight of snow, according to local heritage associations.

"It's a part of Low's history that's gone [up] in smoke," said Coun. Ghyslain Robert, who saw the fire destroy the treasured landmark. Robert said the municipality now is looking to other levels of government to help get the bridge back up and the road reopened. The destruction of the bridge, which crossed a local creek, has left drivers with an approximately 15-minute detour. Robert said it could possibly take a year or more to get the tendering process and construction completed.



Coun. Ghyslain Robert says it will likely take a while to fix the link where the bridge was. (Radio-Canada)

'It'll be sorely missed'

"It's terrible. It's just a grey smoking ruin now," said Maureen McEvoy, who lives near the bridge and crossed it just hours before it burned down.

McEvoy said the bridge was a cool, shady spot to rest when she rode ponies as a kid. "It's going to be terribly impractical to not be able to use the full road," she said. "But it's also just devastating personally to many of us who have known and loved it all this time."

She hoped the bridge would be rebuilt with timber frames to honour both the logging history of the community and the era the bridge was first erected.

"It was honoured and respected and appreciated. It was on the home page for the municipality of Low," said McEvoy. "It'll be sorely missed."



This aerial photos shows the Kelly bridge in Low, Que., before it burned down on Jan. 19, 2019. (Submitted by Peter Wall)

Still burning Sunday

The fire also damaged a cable connected to the bridge, said Bell Canada, disrupting phone service to eight customers and leaving McEvoy without use of her landline.

Fire crews were back on the scene Sunday because there was still wood burning, and they wanted to ensure the fire didn't travel into the treeline.

"It was like watching a ship go down. It was really, really sad to watch," said Nick Tilgner, a firefighter with the Low Fire Department.

"It's going to leave a hole in people's hearts for a long time," said Tilgner. It's not the first time a covered bridge has burned in the region. In 2016 [the Brabant-Philippe covered pedestrian bridge was gutted by fire.](#)

- [Rebuilt after 2011 arson, Gatineau bridge again gutted by fire](#)

The covered bridge in nearby Wakefield was also destroyed by fire in 1984. It was later rebuilt.

Low, Que., is approximately 50 kilometres northwest of Ottawa.