

The Colonial King's Bridge of Panama: Practicalities in its conservation and maintenance

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Abstract

The King's bridge or puente del Rey is located in the original settlement of Panama city, today known as Panama Viejo. Panama was the first Spanish city in the American Pacific, founded in 1519 over a small fishermen's village. The city was designed surrounded by rivers to the east and west, and the Pacific Ocean to the south. Therefore, the main entrances were two bridges. The most important one, the King's Bridge, is a great masonry construction that is representative of colonial times, built between 1619 and 1634.

In 1671, a pirate army attacked and plundered Old Panama. The city was reduced to ruins and parts of it were used as a source of cut stone quarry for the building of the new settlement located in "Ancón". The King's bridge remained in use until the 20th century. With the densification and growth of the metropolis, puente del Rey started to suffer the neglect and lack of maintenance, until the end of the 20th century.

After several reports of the state of conservation of the bridge, it can be said that its structure per se is in good conditions, but the río Abajo - the river flowing underneath its vault - has a greater volume than it had in the past when the bridge was built. In addition, every time there's a flood, its waters carry a lot of solid debris.

At the beginning of 2005, a mayor consolidation project of the bridge took place and the maintenance and surveying continues until today. This works have ensured its mechanical stability, but not the problems it may present in the future due to the río Abajo (the river itself).

The purpose of this presentation will be to portray the history, the construction and the consolidation and maintenance works done to protect and conserve puente del Rey or the King's bridge.



Images: left, archaeological site of Panama Viejo; right, the King's bridge of the archaeological site of Panama Viejo