

U.S. 14 Chicago, Illinois, to Yellowstone National Park

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by Richard F. Weingroff

In 1925, at the request of the State highway agencies, the Secretary of Agriculture appointed the Joint Board on Interstate Highways to develop a plan for marking the Nation's interstate highways. The Joint Board, which included 21 State highway officials and three officials of the U.S. Bureau of Public Roads, met with State road officials around the country, developed standardized signs, including the original U.S. shield, identified the Nation's main interstate roads, and conceived a system for numbering them. The Joint Board completed its report on the new marking system in October 1925. Within the proposed grid of U.S. routes, the report identified U.S. 14. The original description of the route read:

From Winona, Minnesota, to New Ulm, Brookings, South Dakota, Huron, Pierre, Midland.

Much of proposed U.S. 14 (Winona to Pierre) was also known as the Black and Yellow Trail, a named trail from Chicago, Illinois, to Yellowstone National Park. The Black and Yellow Trail had been established in 1919 as a rival to the better known transcontinental Yellowstone Trail, which had been established as a regional trail in 1912 but had been extended by its supporter along a route from Boston to Seattle (resulting in the motto: "A Good Road from Plymouth Rock to Puget Sound").

The Black and Yellow Trail Association, based in Huron, South Dakota, was conceived to divert Yellowstone traffic to the cities along its line. The name signified links to the Black Hills and Yellowstone National Park.

The magazine *Good Roads for Wisconsin* took a dim view of the new trail, reflecting the State's and the magazine's general objections to "trail promoters." (In 1919, Wisconsin became the first State to number its highways.) The November 1920 issue contained an article that discussed some of the magazine's objections to the Yellowstone Trail, then added:

But this is not the entire story of the trails. Another new trail has just "swam into our ken"-the Black and Yellow Trail. This is a rival of the Yellowstone Trail. On paper it is a trail from the east gate of Yellowstone Park through Wyoming, South Dakota, and Southern Minnesota to Chicago, entering Wisconsin at La Crosse, and running through Sparta, Elroy, Reedsburg, and Baraboo to Madison. The blueprint of the trail shows it running thence through Fort Atkinson, Whitewater and Elkhorn to Highland Park and thence south into Chicago. A meeting was held at Madison on the matter recently to discuss the matter and no one from Fort Atkinson, Whitewater or Elkhorn appeared, but a representative from Janesville did, and then it was proposed to run the trail southward from Madison to Janesville and eastward to Kenosha and down to Chicago.

The trail might well be called the "Rectangular Trail." It is now proposed to run it straight north from Chicago to Kenosha on Trunk Highway No. 15, then to verge practically straight east to Janesville on Trunk Highways 50 and 20. Thence it is to run northwestward on Trunk Highway 10 to Madison and on 12 to Baraboo, when it experiences a change of heart and leaves 12 to take up No. 33 which is the direct line to La Crosse. It undergoes a change of mind at Wonewoc, however, and instead of following 33, the first route to La Crosse, turns northward on 94 to No. 21 at Hustler and then turns westward to La Crosse. This purpose of taking this long and roundabout way between Chicago and La Crosse is so obvious that it needs no comment

To lay out a trail or main route of travel and determine its layout by the willingness of cities and villages to contribute to the trail fund is fundamentally wrong. As the trail is supported by funds received from communities on the route, this is the inevitable process of trail-making. If the funds are not forthcoming the trail must be changed or it loses its means of support.

Whatever the merits of the Black and Yellow Trail, it provided a footnote to history on January 22, 1924. During a speech to the association, State Historian Doane Robinson revealed his idea of having statues of historic figures carved into the Black Hills as a tourist attraction. The result, Mount Rushmore, proved as popular as he has predicted.

The Secretary of Agriculture submitted the Joint Board's proposal to the American Association of State Highway Officials (AASHO) for consideration. His action reflected the fact that the roads were owned and operated by the States, not the Federal Government, and the States, therefore, would have to decide whether to adopt the proposal. Over the next year, AASHO acted on requests, many initiated by named trail associations, to change the routes and numbers.

In November 1926, AASHO approved the U.S. numbered highway system. U.S. 14 was retained, with the following description (spellings as in the original):

Minnesota Beginning at Winona via Rochester, Owatonna, Mankato, New Ulm, Lake Benton to the Minnesota-South Dakota State line each of Elkton.

South Dakota Beginning at the Minnesota-South Dakota State line east of Elkton via Brookings, Huron, Miller, Heighmore, Pierre, Midland to a junction with Route No. 16 south of Phillip.

The estimated distance: 599 miles.

In 1933, AASHO approved requests by the State highway agencies to extend U.S. 14 east to Chicago:

U.S. 14, ILLINOIS, WISCONSIN, MINNESOTA-U.S. 14, now terminating at Winona, Minn., is extended to Chicago, Ill., and the extension is described as follows: ILLINOIS, beginning at Chicago, on State Route 63, via Dundee, Algonquin, to an intersection with U.S. 12, east of Crystal Lake, Woodstock, Harvard, to the Illinois-Wisconsin State Line, north of Big Foot. WISCONSIN, beginning at a point on the State line between Illinois and Wisconsin, north of Big Foot, via Walworth, Delavan, Janesville, Evansville, Oregon, Madison, Green Spring, Richland Center, Beadstown, Viroqua, Westby, LaCrosse. MINNESOTA, beginning at the Wisconsin State Line, west of LaCrosse, via LaCrescent to the present eastern terminus of U.S. 14 at Winona.

The following year, U.S. 14 was extended west to Cody, Wyoming, at the entrance to Yellowstone National Park. The description of the 1,432-mile route (with point-to-point mileage) read:

Illinois Beginning at Chicago (Loop) 37, Dundee 5, Algonquin 7, Crystal Lake 8, Woodstock 12, Harvard 7.

Wisconsin Walworth 7, Darien 22, Janesville 17, Evansville 12, Oregon 11, Madison 42, Spring Green 24, Richland-Center 25, Readstown 12, Viroqua 7, Westby 27, La Cross 2.

Minnesota La Crescent 26, Winona 49, Rochester 43, Owatonna 48, Mankato 28, New Ulm 100, Lake Benton 11.

South Dakota Elkton 21, Brookings 76, Huron 45, Miller 23, Heighmore 57, Pierre 65, Midland 27, Phillip 37, Wall 11, Wasta 22, New Underwood 24, Rapid City 23, Sturgis 12, Deadwood 15, Spearfish 35

Wyoming Sundance 47, Moorcroft 28, Gillette 37, Spotted Horse 43, Ucross 30, Sheridan 17, Ranchester 7, Dayton 88, Lovell 12, Deaver 18, Powell 23, Cody.

Although this routing picked up additional mileage of the old Black and Yellow Trail, it departed significantly from the named trail, so the extension appears to reflect the availability of improved roads rather than promotional activity by

the old trail boosters.

Over the years, U.S. 14 has moved in places, following improved highways but retaining its 1934 termini, Chicago in the east and Yellowstone National Park west of Cody in the west. The most recent cumulative mileage (in 1989) is 1,546 miles.

For additional information: Miller, John E., *Looking for History on Highway 14*, Iowa State University Press, 1993. The blurb on the back page promises: "*Looking for History on Highway 14* takes readers on a tour down South Dakota's historic 'Black and Yellow Trail.' The book serves as a perfect guide for travelers interested in discovering, enjoying, and sharing the history of this Green Plains state."
