

Roads Designed for Pleasure A Brief History of the Origins of Scenic Driving and Automobile Touring in the United States Part II

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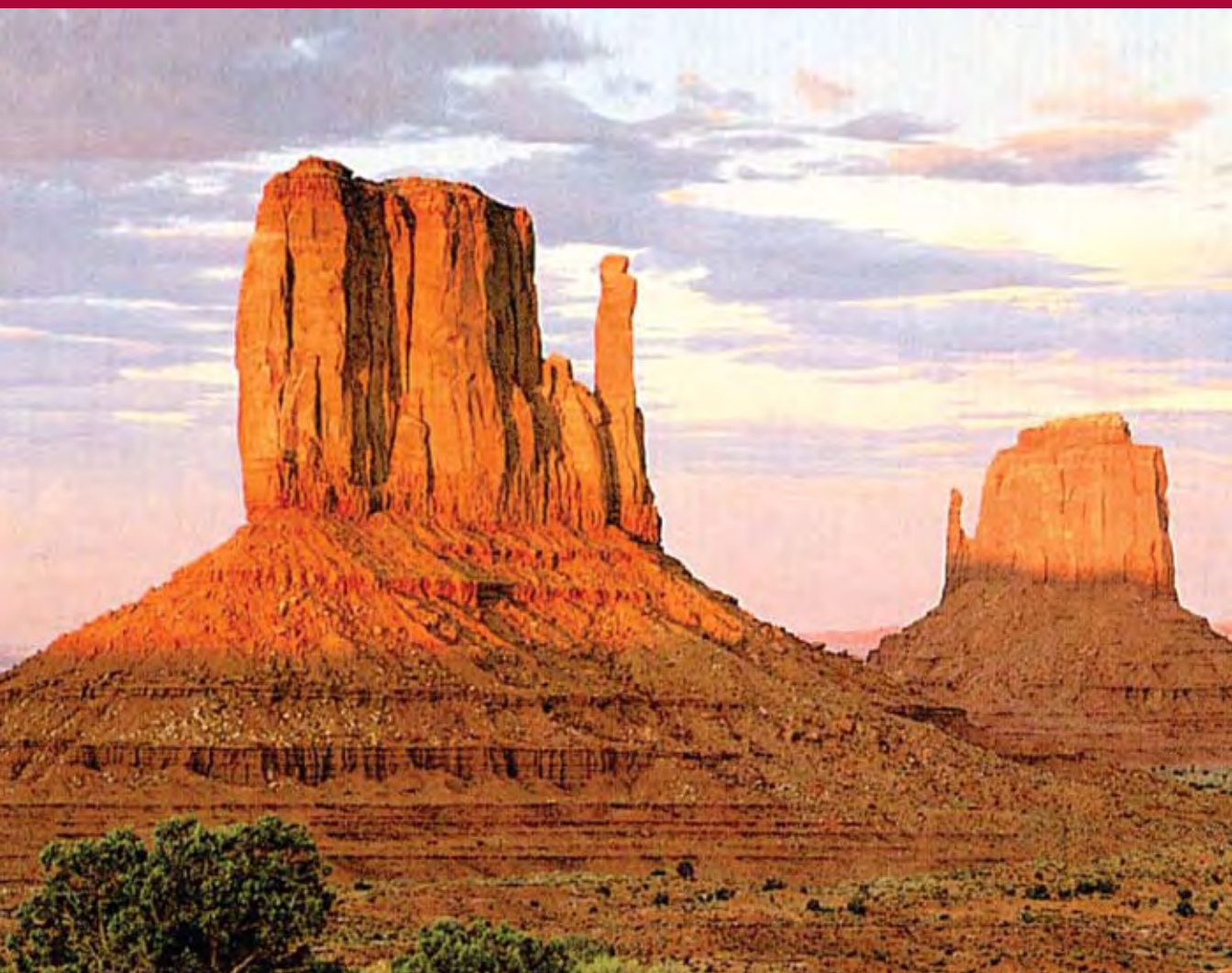
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Roads Designed for Pleasure: Part II / Becoming a Nonprofit
America's Byways and North American Indians / Byways via Bicycle

Journal

FOR AMERICA'S BYWAYS 



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ROADS DESIGNED FOR PLEASURE

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ORIGINS OF SCENIC DRIVING AND AUTOMOBILE TOURING IN THE UNITED STATES

BY PAUL DANIEL MARRIOTT

PART II

Author's Note:

In Part II of this introduction to the people, movements, technologies, and inspirations that form the basis of the American passion of driving for pleasure, you will see a number of nationally designated America's Byways® are a part of this rich history.

Introduction: The National Scenic Byways Program is the most recent accomplishment in a long history of ideas and movements designed to satisfy the innate need Americans have to explore their nation beyond the next horizon. America's Byways identify the best routes to the most interesting scenic, natural, recreational, historical, cultural, and archaeological wonders, and curiosities, that we, as an adventurous people, have always sought to discover and examine for ourselves. This article, which appears in two parts, introduces the origins of the modern byways movement by examining the history and evolution of pleasure driving in the United States. The article argues that our broad definition of byways today, based on six intrinsic qualities, is rooted in eighteenth-century origins of scenic analysis and pleasure driving that arose from a new appreciation for the natural landscape during the Age of Enlightenment. The article also shows that many of our modern highway concepts, from innovations in pavement technology to advancements in engineering, are directly tied to the design and construction of nineteenth-century pleasure drives and early twentieth-century automobile parkways—both ultimately laying the foundation for our modern interstate system and solidifying our appreciation of driving for pleasure.

THE AUTOMOBILE AGE

Continued from *Journal For America's Byways*, Volume 1, Issue I.



DRIVING FOR PLEASURE, BEACH DRIVE, ROCK CREEK PARK, WASHINGTON, DC, c. 1920. COURTESY OF LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

The automobile profoundly altered our landscape and transportation network—though the freedom and modern infrastructure brought by the motorcar was not uniformly embraced as a positive development. The *Vermont Standard* complained in April 1905 that “automobiles are already running about the streets,” and that their noise and speed was disrupting traditional traffic and order: “...even a horse that shows good sense and courage when assured by the presence of his driver and the restraint of the reins, is scarcely to be trusted alone when a big machine comes bowling past.”¹

GOOD ROADS AND THE CONSERVATION MOVEMENT

During the second half of the nineteenth century the dominance of an efficient and reliable rail network (from 1860 to 1910 total track mileage in the United States grew from 30,000 to approximately 240,000 miles) and a large canal network in the East reduced roads to little more than local networks of urban and farm-to-market routes. Long-distance roads were unimproved, unreliable, and quite often impassable. The invention of the pneumatic tire in 1885, and the unlikely advocacy of America’s bicycle riders, laid the groundwork for today’s modern automobile network through the Good Roads Movement.

The League of American Wheelmen, a bicycle organization, began advocating in the 1890s for a national network of hard-surfaced, all-weather roads suitable for the bicycle. Farmers, with poor links

to towns and without home mail delivery, saw Good Roads and the Post Office’s newly inaugurated Rural Free Delivery² program as intertwined and joined the cry sometime after 1896. Also joining the call were the growing numbers of nature-lovers, conservationists, tourists, and sightseers who were taking to the open road. In fact, the recreation and leisure users were quickly becoming some of the most active voices demanding these improvements.

Until this period, the justification for building most roads was either economic or military. The introduction of the bicycle and later the automobile, occurring almost simultaneously with a new awareness for conservation and the first national parks, was spurring Americans to take to the road and explore the countryside and wilderness.

THE CONSERVATION MOVEMENT

In 1872, Yellowstone was designated as the first National Park. While there had been earlier efforts to protect places of scenic beauty and scientific interest (notably Hot Springs Reservation in Arkansas in 1832 and the Yosemite Valley and Mariposa Grove in California in 1864 as a state park³), setting aside potentially productive/valuable land for permanent protection by the federal government at Yellowstone, solely for scenic value, was a radical and controversial concept. However, as the economic engine of the industrial revolution grew hungrier for timber and minerals, areas once considered too remote or inaccessible began to see the

impacts of massive logging and mining operations. Combined with a rapidly rising population, growing economy, easy access by rail, and the still palpable environmental ruin wrought by the Civil War, many began to question if America's natural beauty and majestic places would survive another generation.

Yellowstone's designation empowered the conservation movement and emboldened the states to take action. In rapid-fire landmark achievements, New York, in 1885, established the Niagara Falls Reservation and, in 1892, the Adirondack Forest Preserve. In 1887, the first efforts calling for the protection of the Hudson River Palisades in New Jersey from devastating quarrying operations began. In 1891, the State of Minnesota protected the headwaters of the Mississippi River at Lake Itasca,

lost. In 1900, the Palisades Interstate Park Commission of New Jersey and New York, the first bi-state park agency, was established.⁴

The achievements were breathtaking and the newly protected landscapes sublime. Getting to these places of natural beauty, recreation, and wonder, however, was difficult on the nation's developing public highways.

GOOD ROADS MOVEMENT

At the turn of the twentieth century, outside of a few urban networks and a handful of private estates, the nation's road network was deplorable. In 1909, the United States had roughly 700 miles of paved rural roads—less than ten percent of the total mileage.⁵ Pressure from the Good Roads advocates led to

...the freedom and modern infrastructure brought by the motorcar was not uniformly embraced as a positive development.

establishing the second state park in the United States (after Niagara Falls). In 1892, Massachusetts established the Metropolitan Park Commission to conserve natural and scenic locations surrounding Boston before an expanding population caused them to be forever

a groundswell of interest and a national push to accommodate the bicycle and, by the early twentieth century, the automobile. As a result, Good Road Associations and state highway departments were established in many states.



THE MODERN PAVED GOOD ROAD, PENNSYLVANIA. U.S. BUREAU OF PUBLIC ROADS. COURTESY OF NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY.

In 1891, Missouri became the first state to form a Good Roads Association. The same year the New Jersey legislature passed the State Aid Highway Act, the nation's first act authorizing the expenditure of state funds for general road building, under the auspices of the State Board of Agriculture. (In 1894, the responsibility of the act was placed under the newly created Commissioner of Public Roads.) Massachusetts had created the first highway department, the State Highway Commission, a year earlier in 1893.

Responding to the growing national movement for good roads, the U.S. Congress passed an appropriation of \$10,000 to conduct a road inquiry. To implement the authorization, the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture established the Office of Roads Inquiry (ORI) in 1893 “to make inquiries in regard to the system of road management throughout the United States.” The office responded to its charge by publishing road building technology bulletins and preparing state and national maps of good roads. In 1897, the ORI began constructing “object lesson roads”—short improved macadamized roads to demonstrate the value of good roads to the public. (Macadam is a smooth hard road surface made from graded pieces of gravel in compressed layers.) The first “object lesson road” was a 660-foot stretch near New Brunswick, New Jersey. Within a few years, the ORI would be constructing eight or nine roads a year. As many as 500 people would turn out to listen to lectures on

modern pavement and good drainage and sample a smooth ride during “good roads day” festivities at the completion of each project. In 1905, the ORI would receive congressional funding to become a permanent agency, and it was renamed the Office of Public Roads; in 1915, it was renamed the Office of Public Roads and Rural Engineering.⁶

In 1916, President Woodrow Wilson signed the first bill to establish a federally aided highway program. In order to receive this new federal funding, each state was required to establish a highway department. In 1918, the Office of Public Roads and Rural Engineering became the Bureau of Public Roads (BPR).⁷

PARKWAYS AND SCENIC ROADS

Many people saw beyond the enormous task of developing a network of paved, all-weather roads; to them, the new automobile and investment in new highway construction represented opportunities to create access to areas of scenic beauty and recreation. The automobile provided, for the first time, affordable individual and independent transportation for the middle classes. Families, once dependent on train schedules and established destinations, were free to pile in the car and set their own destinations and itineraries. Planners, landscape architects, and park managers responded to this newfound freedom by promoting and building beautifully designed scenic roads and parkways showcasing the natural beauty and wonders of the nation.

The automobile had introduced a new and larger audience to the delights of recreational driving and engaging in the natural landscape. As early as 1907 with the Bronx River Parkway and 1913 for the Columbia River Highway, roads designed for pleasure were being constructed specifically for the automobile.

BRONX RIVER PARKWAY

Designed by landscape architect Gilmore Clarke and civil engineer Jay Downer, the Bronx River Parkway in Westchester County, New York, established many of the design principles that would come to define scenic automobile roads and usher in the modern highway era. Planned and constructed between 1907 and 1923, the parkway would introduce the motoring public to such safety features as separated-grade interchanges,⁸ a grassy median between opposing traffic lanes (in some areas), the first large-scale installation of roadway lighting outside of an urban area, and the concept of limited access. Equally impressive was the parkway's serpentine alignment through the Bronx River valley. The valley, badly polluted and cluttered with commercial and industrial complexes by the end of the nineteenth century, was reclaimed and restored as a picturesque landscape complete with woodlands, meadows, and meandering paths—all alongside the newly clear waters of the Bronx River. Billboards, viewed by many as the modern menace, were prohibited. The enormity of the project, and its successful adaptation of the modern automobile, inspired a parkway movement and lured curious

engineers and landscape architects from as far as California and Germany to study the parkway's design. As a result, Germany's Autobahns, New York's Taconic State Parkway, Connecticut's Merritt Parkway, and California's Cabrillo and Arroyo Seco Parkways, along with many others, would draw a direct lineage to the innovations of the Bronx River Parkway.

After the enormous success of the Bronx River Parkway, Westchester County developed and built a comprehensive network of scenic parkways, including the Hutchinson River Parkway (1928) and the Saw Mill River Parkway (1928). Connecticut would extend the Hutchinson River Parkway as the Merritt Parkway in 1940. The Taconic State Parkway, constructed in the 1930s, extended the park corridor of the Bronx River Parkway northward via a sinuous scenic route through the countryside of the Hudson Valley. Across the Hudson River, the Palisades Interstate Parkway, running along the top of the formidable cliffs, was constructed in New Jersey and New York between 1947 and 1958. On Long Island, the Department of Public Works and the State Park Commission built the Southern State and Northern State Parkways. Combined, they represent the largest integrated parkway system in the United States.

COLUMBIA RIVER HIGHWAY

Of all the highways constructed during the Good Roads era, none could compare to the sublime Columbia River Highway (All-American Road, 1998) in Oregon. Modeled on the Axenstrasse scenic road overlooking Lake Lucerne

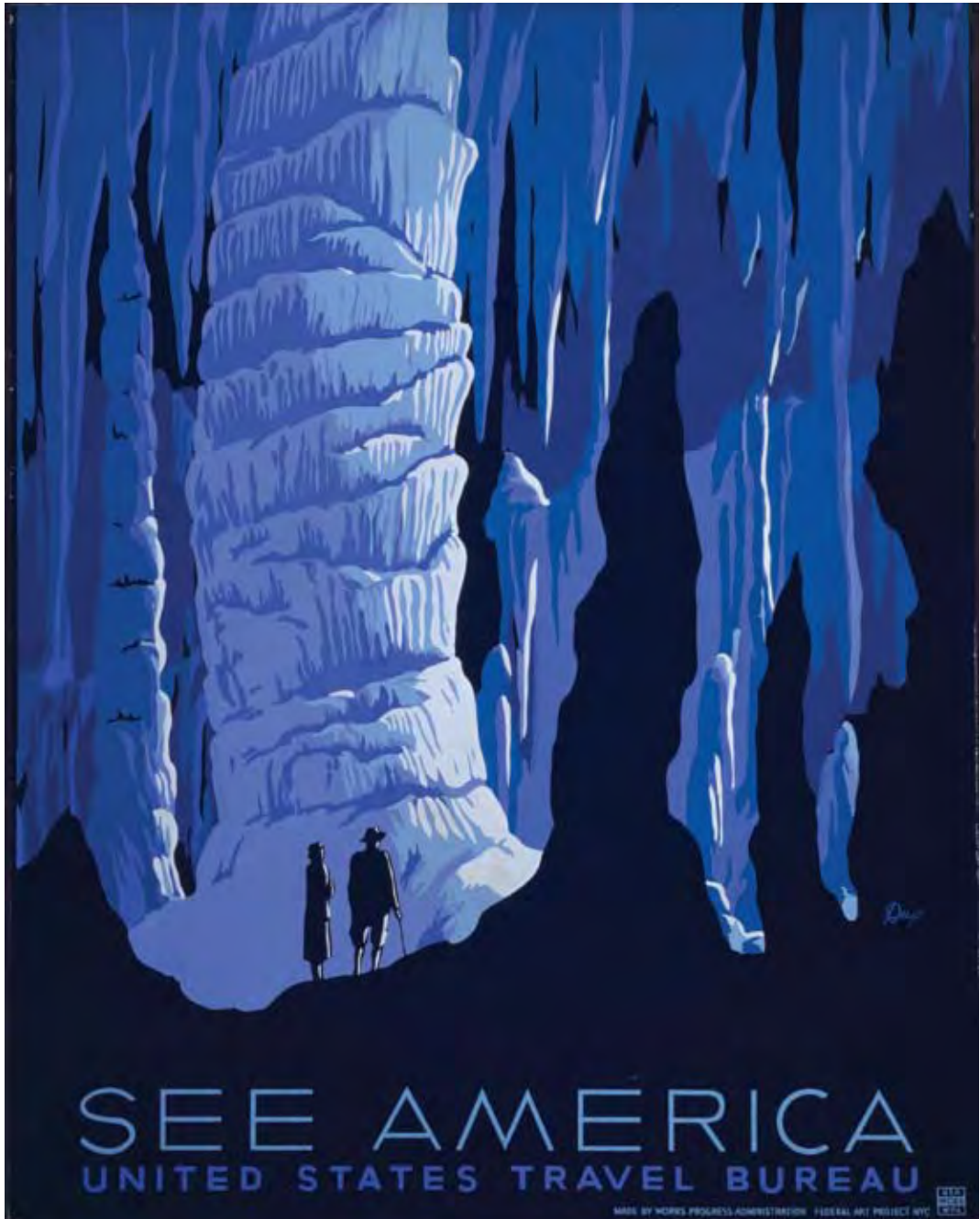
in Switzerland, the seventy-four-mile Columbia River Highway was promoted by Good Roads advocate and entrepreneur Samuel Hill. Constructed between 1913 and 1922, it earned the nickname “King of Roads,” and was widely studied by highway engineers and landscape architects (including those of the newly established National Park Service) for its exceptional design qualities. The design of the two-lane road through the Columbia River Gorge was

guided by landscape architect Samuel Lancaster who used elegant concrete bridges, stone parapet walls, and rustic tunnels to negotiate the towering basalt cliffs, ravines, and spectacular waterfalls of the area, while maintaining a maximum grade of five percent.

By the middle of the twentieth century, scenic automobile parkways would be established in national parks, scenic areas, and cities such as Washington, DC, San Diego, and Cleveland.



CONSTRUCTION BEGAN IN 1915 ON THE VISTA HOUSE, LOCATED ALONG THE COLUMBIA RIVER HIGHWAY, OREGON.
COURTESY OF LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.



THE "SEE AMERICA FIRST" campaign, begun in 1906 by the Great Northern Railway and later adopted as the "See America" campaign by the U.S. Travel Bureau, was designed to promote an alternative travel message to the growing numbers of Americans heading to Europe in search of picturesque landscapes. The campaign promoted domestic travel to the natural wonders of the United States and was quickly embraced by the motoring public. Federal Arts Project poster, c. 1935-1939. COURTESY OF LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

TOURISM AND SCENIC DRIVING

Parkways and scenic roads, which tended to focus on metropolitan areas, advanced highway beautification and engineering standards that would broadly benefit aesthetic routes. At the same time these pioneering roads were being built, many existing rural routes and attractions were being promoted to the new “automobilists” as visitor destinations. The Chicago World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893, the national “See America” tourism campaign of the United States Travel Bureau, the newly established National Park Service (1916), and highly visible restorations such as Santa Fe (begun, 1912) and Colonial Williamsburg (begun, 1928) were creating a new fascination and interest in America’s scenic wonders and historic past. Combined with the increase in prosperity and automobile ownership during the 1920s, Americans were taking to the nation’s highways and byways in search of scenic, natural, recreational, historic, cultural, and archaeological attractions.

Unlike the parkways and scenic roads specifically constructed for pleasure driving, auto trails of the early twentieth century sought out and promoted existing routes of interest. Day trips, Sunday drives, and touring excursions were promoted to the new motoring classes. Many guides and publications identified rustic and rural roads that possessed remarkable natural beauty and scenic prospects. Others identified routes along old colonial roads and turnpikes as a way to explore the historic

past. Beginning in 1902, for example, the California Federation of Women’s Clubs initiated a campaign to mark the “Mission Route” —the historic Spanish El Camino Real—by placing mission bell landmarks along the eighteenth-century corridor. In a 1914 feature article, “Along Beautiful and Historic Old Highways of Long Island,” the *New York Times* provided a detailed history of early highway politics, historic events, and a travel itinerary to explore the historic roads of the past:

The one day tripper of 1914 cannot choose a better excursion than a trip along one of these old turnpikes, with all the bright modern villages, the fertile fields, the strips of woodland that flash in a panorama along his way. And, wherever they lead, historic associations of the keenest interest to any patriotic American are sure to be found. ...Let us start out this crisp June morning to follow the old Jamaica and Jericho Turnpike, the main artery of this great old system of veins. We can do more: we can make a little side trip along the Hempstead Turnpike, a most important branch, and still be back for roast chicken with the family at dinner time.⁹

An early route marketed as a tourist destination in New York was the Rip Van Winkle Trail. Constructed primarily as a public highway between 1914 and 1921, the route followed in the footsteps of Washington Irving’s mythical figure that wandered into the Catskill Mountains and slept for twenty years. Rip Van Winkle’s fairy-tale association with the route, combined

with spectacular scenery, picturesque villages, tourist accommodations, and well-built highways—all within an easy drive of New York City—made the trail an immediate success.

*With the completion last Fall [sic] of the new road...through the picturesque Kaaterskill Cove, the Rip Van Winkle Trail will be more freely used by motorists this season. The trail embraces a series of highways extending westward from Catskill...to Stamford, where it connects with macadamized roads to Western and Central New York. ...Other places boast of horseshoe curves and the Rip Van Winkle Trail has its horseshoe curve rivaling in beauty any in the country, made possible by building walls more than a hundred feet high and bridging a waterfall. ...New York motorists making the trip may return over roads well worth seeing, either passing the Ashokan Reservoir or over the Mohican Trail, although a part of the latter road is under construction.*¹⁰

While automobile touring routes were being promoted as ideal, convenient, and even “patriotic” getaways, there still remained some logistical complications when traveling from state to state that needed to be resolved. When criticized before the American Road Congress meeting in Richmond, Virginia in 1911, for state policies requiring all vehicles traveling in New York, regardless of the owner’s home state, *to be registered in New York*, the New York Secretary of State noted in agreement:

*“...It seems to be a failure to recognize the importance of the automobile, when a tourist is confronted by the necessity of carrying with him on a tour throughout the States the license of each State he enters.... The automobile gives opportunities of seeing the country which the people have never had to such an extent before. It leads to many small interesting places which even the railroad with its great facilities had not been able to make sufficiently accessible. It enables the people to know their country better.”*¹¹

Automobile touring quickly became a favored pastime of the motoring classes, and the affordable and intrepid Model T was capable of navigating the rough roads and unexpected obstacles often encountered by the early automobilists. As the early tourism industry and visitor destinations embraced the automobile, one obvious destination remained reluctant to extend the welcome. The National Park Service, the nation’s new guardian of federally protected scenic wonders, was unsure if the noisy motorcars should be allowed to sputter and clatter through the newly designated national shrines. Many were concerned that allowing the automobile into the national parks would disrupt the tranquility and grandeur of places like the Yosemite Valley, Old Faithful, Mesa Verde’s ancient ruins, and the jagged alpine ridges of Glacier National Park.

AUTOMOBILE TOURING OUTSIDE COLORADO SPRINGS BETWEEN 1910 AND 1925. THE SIGN IN THE FOREGROUND READS “AWE-INSPIRING POINT.” COURTESY OF LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.





NATIONAL PARK ROADS

The national parks, long reliant on railroads to provide their principal access, maintained carriage drives for limited touring within the parks. As the public began pressing for automobile access to the national parks, the managers of the fledgling system weighed the values of conservation against the benefits to be gained by broader public support for the parks through wider access. Efforts to accommodate automobiles began in 1915 when the first auto route was proposed at Glacier National Park—a road and concept so controversial that Stephen Mather, the first director of the National Park Service, personally assisted with the road’s design.

With the success of the Going-to-the-Sun Road at Glacier, parkways and park roads were quickly embraced as a responsible model to showcase scenic wonders and improve visitor access. By developing strong guidelines respecting the natural environment, the National Park Service established, and maintains to this day, an ethic steadfast in roadway design and environmental excellence:

America’s National Park roads and parkways are outstanding design achievements that exemplify the harmonious integration of highway engineering and landscape architecture. The challenge of building roadways through remote and rugged terrain inspired some of the most spectacular feats in the history of American engineering, yet even in the most

demanding locations, designers went to great lengths to make sure that park roads would “lie lightly on the land,” impinging as little as possible on their natural and cultural surroundings. By designing roadways to showcase park scenery and employing graceful curves, naturalistic landscaping, and attractive rustic features, the National Park Service (NPS) created a world-renowned road system that provides access to America’s most treasured scenery while standing as remarkable social, artistic, and technological achievement in its own right.¹²

Early park routes included the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway (All-American Road, 2005¹³) to George Washington’s estate and the Colonial Parkway (All-American Road, 2005) linking Jamestown, Williamsburg, and Yorktown, Virginia. Skyline Drive in Shenandoah National Park, constructed between 1931 and 1942, revived earlier proposals for a “skyline-drive” along Virginia’s impoverished Blue Ridge Mountains to encourage economic development through automobile tourism.¹⁴ Over time, the Blue Ridge Parkway (All-American Road, 1996, North Carolina; 2005, Virginia), beginning at the southern terminus of Skyline Drive would extend almost five hundred miles south along the spine of the Blue Ridge through Virginia and North Carolina.

To understand the design and sensitivity of national park roads and parkways to the natural environment, it is essential

GOING-TO-THE-SUN ROAD, IN GLACIER NATIONAL PARK, MONTANA, WAS THE FIRST AUTOMOBILE ROAD IN A NATIONAL PARK. COURTESY OF LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

to understand the long and productive relationship between the National Park Service and the Rockefeller family during the formative days of the National Park System.

THE ROCKEFELLER FAMILY AND NATIONAL PARK ROADS

In 1924 John D. Rockefeller, Jr., took his three oldest sons to Mesa Verde, Yellowstone, and Glacier National Parks. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., had a keen attention for detail that went beyond an appreciation for scenic beauty to a deeply personal understanding of the complex relationship between the landscape and park roads—including the impact of the utilitarian and mundane highway features on sublime landscapes. He wrote to Horace Albright, then superintendent of Yellowstone National Park:

There was just one thing in the Park (Yellowstone) which marred my enjoyment of the wonderful region, and I have wondered if I might be helpful to the Park administration in improving that situation. I refer to the vast quantities of down timber and stumps which line the roadsides so frequently throughout the Park. Of course I realize that this dead material comes in part from the roadway itself, having been thrown out when the road was cut through, and also that it is due to some extent to the character of the forests which is such as to cause many trees constantly to die and fall. I know also from personal experience that it is costly to cut up and burn dead timber, down as well as standing.

It seems to me, however, that if the accumulation of dead trees and stumps

*alongside of the roads to a width of from fifty to a hundred feet from the roadside could be done away with, much of the beauty of the woods and scenery generally would be enormously improved.*¹⁵

In this same letter, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., offers to fund a pilot program to improve the roadside at Yellowstone. The successful experiment would be extended to other national parks and eventually result in National Park Service policy for the design and maintenance of roadsides in all the parks. Albright wrote to Rockefeller:

*At the risk of boring you by repetition of statements formerly made, I want to say again that I feel that the various roadside clean-up projects which you made it possible for us to carry through in the Yellowstone have done more to improve the park landscape than anything else that has been done in the history of the park. Also, we shall never forget that your undertaking this work is directly responsible for our now generally accepted policy which contemplates the clean-up of all the roadsides in all the national parks in connection with the construction of new roads or the reconstruction of old highways. I hope that this final report is acceptable to you and I hope, too, that it gives you as much happiness and satisfaction as it has given to me.*¹⁶

Roadside beautification became a significant part of the family's comprehensive view of the national parks. Albright and Rockefeller had discussed unsightly utility lines at Yellowstone early in their association. Albright wrote to him in 1924:



SHOSHONE CANYON, YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK, C. 1917, BEFORE THE UTILITY LINES WERE REMOVED.
COURTESY OF LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

Speaking of telephone lines, you will recall that many of the most beautiful sections of the Yellowstone road system were made unsightly by two pole lines, one on each side of the road. One of these lines belongs to the Government, the other to the Yellowstone Park Hotel Company. This year the Hotel Company and the National Park Service have arranged through me to rebuild in a period of three years all of the telephone lines, putting both systems on one pole line and placing this pole line in a swath cut through the timber a short distance from the roads. The first section of this new telephone system is nearing

completion. This is the section between Mammoth Hot Springs and Norris Junction, the same section that I am proposing we shall first clean up if the plan appears to you to be practicable. Already, most of the old poles on this section are down. Therefore, if you authorize the clearing up of the road sides between the headquarters and Norris Junction next year we will have an exquisitely beautiful highway for the first 20 miles toward the geysers, clear of debris and dead and down timber and likewise, clear of unsightly telephone poles and wires.¹⁷



BILLBOARDS IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA (NO DATE). ABBY ALDRICH ROCKEFELLER WAS AN EARLY ADVOCATE FOR HIGHWAY BEAUTIFICATION. COURTESY OF NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY.

Albright ultimately credits John D. Rockefeller, Jr., with a new national view toward highway beautification:

Last Sunday in one of the New York papers there was a discussion of road building, road-side improvement, etc. Among other things it was stated that during the year 1936 approximately \$7,000,000 will be expended in road-side beautification and other improvements. Whether or not you saw this article I know you must feel considerable gratification that the work you began in Yellowstone National Park in 1924 has led to national recognition of the importance of protecting and beautifying the road-sides whereas at the time you undertook the Yellowstone experiment Congress and Legislature regarded the whole idea as mere embroidery that could never be afforded.¹⁸

Horace Albright, who served as the second director of the National Park Service (1929-1933), would later work with the Palisades Interstate Park Commission and the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, both Rockefeller family interests, until his death in 1987.

ABBY ALDRICH ROCKEFELLER

In addition to notable designers and the contributions of her husband, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., toward scenic roads, drives, and parkways, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller had strong views toward scenic conservation and highway beautification as well.

A formidable advocate in her own right, Mrs. Rockefeller initiated a series of competitions in 1928 aimed at improving

the appearance of roadside stands.¹⁹ She was responding to a personal concern for highway viewsheds that were being destroyed by the sudden profusion of roadside services catering to the new automobile traveler. Often garish and almost completely unregulated, gas stations, hot dog stands, billboards, and tourist cabins were multiplying rapidly alongside the nation's highways. Mrs. Rockefeller was particularly concerned with their visual impact on the landscapes of the National Parks of the West.

In a letter to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Horace Albright, then acting Director of the National Park Service, noted:

I am enclosing the page from the magazine "California Highways and Public Works" regarding Mrs. Rockefeller's campaign to improve the architectural character of refreshment stands along public highways. ... I thought you both would be particularly interested in this recent clipping, because I think on the trip to Jackson Hole that Mrs. Rockefeller first mentioned the possibility of bettering "hot dog" stands and similar establishments through competitions such as she has since inaugurated. As I remember it, the dance hall and other unsightly structures which so greatly impaired some of the views of the Tetons were the very things that prompted Mrs. Rockefeller's plan.²⁰

John D. Rockefeller, Jr., would continue to work closely with the National Park Service and later with the Park Service and the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation on the design of the Colonial Parkway in Virginia. As a staunch parkway advocate, he was also instrumental in

securing the land to construct one of the first great modern parkways, the Palisades Interstate Parkway in New Jersey and New York.

THE MODERN PARKWAYS

The innovations created by the automobile parkway, park roads, and scenic drives provided comfortable, sustainable, and pleasant transportation in an age when the automobile was still a novelty and many Americans relied on efficient streetcars, inter-urban lines, and the railroads for their day-to-day transportation needs. At the century's midpoint, with increased automobile ownership and postwar affluence, metropolitan parkways and scenic drives soon transitioned from leisurely weekend pleasure drives to pleasant corridors leading to new suburban homes. The qualities that made for pleasurable driving—limited access, separated-grade intersections, and good engineering—also made for good commuter routes. A new class of parkways, designed with multiple lanes and higher speeds, remained loyal to the scenic and conservation principles of the older roads, while, for the first time, accommodating non-pleasure drivers and foreshadowing the interstate era.

The idea was not entirely new. Early regional planners had seen parkways, not freeways, as an attractive and viable solution to the problems of growing metropolitan populations, rising automobile ownership, and expanding suburbanization. During the 1920s, the Russell Sage Foundation sponsored the preparation of the Regional Plan

for New York. Among the plan's many recommendations was an endorsement of an extensive system of major and minor routes segregating traffic according to function on express highways, boulevards, and parkways. The plan provided studies demonstrating that parkways, above all, enhanced adjacent property values and created larger tax revenues than boulevards or highways. The plan also noted that new parkways could often be constructed for less than the cost of widening existing highways.

Parkways were emerging as the model highway design for modern automobile travel, and Horace Albright, now president of the American Planning and Civic Association, celebrated the trend in a letter to Abby Aldrich Rockefeller:

In the first Planning Broadcast on this subject issued by the American Planning and Civic Association in 1936, we called attention to the promise of freeways and parkways. The parkways of Westchester County had already become popular, but since that date three national parkways have been planned and built or are in the process of building. The parkway plan has spread rapidly. The freeway proposal is now more commonly called "limited access", and six States have passed legislation authorizing this type of highway—New York and Rhode Island in 1937 and Maine, Connecticut, California and West Virginia in 1939. Here is definite progress—progress that can be extended to the other States and that will show results in these six States as limited access highways are built.²¹

In metropolitan New York, the Regional Plan Committee devoted a significant

amount of attention to northern New Jersey. Anticipating that the area would see tremendous industrial and residential growth—foreseeing the impacts of the planned Hudson River (George Washington) Bridge—the committee specifically addressed the need to preserve the woodlands and vista points on the top of the Palisades.²² One of the plan's major recommendations was a parkway connecting metropolitan New Jersey with the Palisades Interstate Park at Bear Mountain in New York.

On July 7, 1933, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., made a gift of 700 acres of land on top of the Palisades to the Palisades Interstate Park Commission with the expressed desire to see the construction of a parkway. Rockefeller had been secretly purchasing the land in hopes that a parkway could be constructed. After World War II, design and construction of the parkway along the Palisades commenced. The design firm of Clarke and Rapuano (Gilmore Clarke and Michael Rapuano) was hired as the landscape architects for the parkway. Clarke had already worked on the Bronx River Parkway, the Westchester County Parkway System, and Skyline Drive in Virginia—he was one of the most experienced parkway landscape architects in the nation. To help oversee this work, Laurance S. Rockefeller, Rockefeller's son, was appointed a member of the Palisades Interstate Park Commission in 1939. The parkway was constructed between 1947 and 1958.

Shortly after the Palisades Interstate Parkway opened, the *New York Times* captured the changing public perception



THE COLONIAL PARKWAY TUNNEL, CONSTRUCTED IN 1941, PRESERVES THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY CHARACTER OF THE COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG RESTORATION WHILE ALLOWING MOTORISTS ALONG THE SCENIC PARKWAY ACCESS TO THE HISTORIC AREA. THE TUNNEL REPRESENTS THE PHYSICAL, AND PHILOSOPHICAL, INTERSECTION OF THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE AND THE COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG FOUNDATION—TWO ORGANIZATIONS JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER, JR., WAS DEEPLY COMMITTED TO SUPPORTING. COURTESY OF LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.



THE ARROYO SECO PARKWAY, BETWEEN DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES AND PASADENA, CALIFORNIA, OPENED IN 1940. IT COMBINED BOTH PARKWAY QUALITIES AND EMERGING FREEWAY CONCEPTS. COURTESY OF HIGHLAND PARK HERITAGE TRUST.

of the American parkway (pleasure driving evolving to commuter travel) in an article titled, “The Family Road”:

Across the river, winding its way northward along the left bank of the Hudson, is a very nice road indeed. It is called the Palisades Interstate Parkway. It begins on the New Jersey side of the George Washington Bridge, travels the top of the Palisades for a time, moves inland, rolls up and down over hills and finally reaches Bear Mountain Bridge. It has a number of uses. On the near, or New York City, end commuters take it to and from their metropolitan offices. A little farther north it crosses the New York Thruway, and thus can be used as a step in the shufflin’ off to Buffalo and the Falls. Most important still, and the reason for which it was primarily designed, is that it goes to the Bear Mountain and Harriman Parks, plus smaller Interstate parkettes scattered along the way.

In the summer, and during that part of the autumn before coldness awkwardly settles in, the Palisades Interstate Parkway is the route of the charcoal briquet, the road of the picnic hamper. There can be no statistics about how many hot dogs are lugged north from Manhattan on a given Sunday, to be charred by amateur chefs, out for a day with the family. Certainly, if placed end to end, these hot dogs would stretch the full length of the parkway which is their sponsor.²³

Other significant modern parkways of the period include the Merritt Parkway in Connecticut (National Scenic Byway, 1996) and the Baltimore-Washington Parkway in Maryland. Opened in 1940, the Merritt Parkway, constructed by the State of Connecticut, was a four-lane road within an expansive protected parkway reservation. Attractive bridges, each designed in a different architectural motif, distinguished the parkway and became a signature feature.

The Baltimore-Washington Parkway, opened in 1954, was the first limited-access, divided roadway in Maryland. Designed and constructed by the National Park Service and the Bureau of Public Roads, the parkway was intended to serve as an attractive gateway to the nation's capital at Washington, DC. Like many of the modern parkways, the Baltimore-Washington Parkway and the Merritt Parkway also served vital transportation roles in their growing metropolitan regions. Despite their attractive features and woodland settings, both roads were quickly adopted over the older, and congested, U.S. Route 1 that both routes paralleled. While scenic roads were still being designed and constructed, the concept of pleasure driving was evolving into that of a more pleasurable commute. Nowhere was this change more clearly evidenced than at the Arroyo Seco Parkway in California.

ARROYO SECO PARKWAY

The Arroyo Seco Parkway (National Scenic Byway, 2002) in Southern California opened to the motoring public in 1940. It represents a transitional period in automobile travel and highway design in which the traditional parkway concepts developed in the East were melded to the emerging California automobile culture. California Department of Roads (the predecessor to Caltrans) engineers visited the parkways of metropolitan New York to learn the latest techniques of scenic, safe, and high-speed travel. Their desire to create a scenic parkway

was undertaken in a region with the highest per capita automobile ownership in the United States—the average family in Los Angeles having two cars shortly after World War I.²⁴ The pressures to meet the intense congestion concerns of the region and construct a parkway that engineers determined would be “picturesque” created many unique and distinctive features.

The original idea for a parkway through the Arroyo, as articulated in the 1930 *Olmsted-Bartholomew Plan for the Los Angeles Region*, recommended a serpentine two-lane parkway winding among the hills, trees, parks, and usually quiet waters of the Arroyo Seco valley. By the time it was constructed, it had morphed into a six-lane quasi parkway/prototype freeway, and the waters of the Arroyo Seco were restricted to a concrete and stone channel. Nevertheless, with its comprehensive landscape program that included a primarily native plant palette and elegant modern bridges, many described the new and very modern parkway as the “hanging gardens” of Los Angeles. At the dedication ceremony, however, California Governor Culbert L. Olson declared the Arroyo Seco Parkway to be the “first freeway in the West.” The label stuck; lands recommended for park acquisition were never fully secured, and by the 1950s the road was routinely referred to as the Pasadena Freeway.

The parkway was the first six-lane parkway in the United States and, despite its lush plantings and attractive details, most drivers marveled at its speed and efficiency over its qualities as

a road designed for pleasure. *Westways Magazine* noted:

From the relatively narrow Figueroa tunnel you suddenly find yourself launched like a speedboat in a calm and spacious divided channel. Channel is the word too, for it's in the arroyo, below the level of traffic tormented streets. No brazen pedestrians nor kids riding bikes with their arms folded! No cross streets with too-bold or too-timid drivers jutting their radiators into your path. And no wonder I made it from Elysian Park to Glenarm Street in Pasadena in 10 minutes without ever edging over a conservative 45 miles an hour...²⁵

A few months before the Arroyo Seco Parkway was dedicated, a new type of road back East welcomed its first motorists. The Pennsylvania Turnpike, also opened in 1940, was the first high-speed, limited-access highway in the United States. On opening day, excited motorists lined up for miles at the toll plazas—not to experience the scenery of the Pennsylvania countryside, but to race across the state unleashing the full potential of their chrome-embellished automobiles. Mountains and valleys, the hallmarks of the nation's roads designed for pleasure, were now tunneled and filled for speed and efficiency. The public liked the efficient turnpike and sixteen years later, in 1956, President Eisenhower signed into law the Federal-Aid Highway Act establishing a National System of Interstate and Defense Highways.

EPILOGUE

Changing driving habits, explosive automobile ownership and postwar regional growth were too expansive and immediate for scenic drives and parkways to continue their dominant role in highway design in the second-half of the twentieth century. Despite the many engineering innovations and design efficiencies introduced by these roads, changing public perceptions on the role of the automobile in American life were now pressing for speed and economy over scenery and recreation. Pleasure driving would endure, but now as a relaxing pastime on secondary park roads and scenic routes. For most Americans in the close-knit suburbia of the 1950s and 60s, quaint country lanes were still not too distant for a pleasant Sunday drive. It would be another decade before mounting losses of historic roads and runaway sprawl would cause a new generation to once again reconsider the relationship of the automobile to the landscape.

Roads designed for pleasure left an indelible scenic mark on the United States and continue, to this day, as reminders challenging us to aspire to greater beauty, sensitivity, regionalism, and creativity on and along our nation's highway and byways. ★

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Notes:

¹ Peter S. Jennison, *The History of Woodstock, Vermont, 1890-1983*, (Woodstock, Vermont: Published for the Woodstock Foundation by *The Countryman Press*, 1985), p. 155.

² Rural Free Delivery (RFD) was introduced by the US Post Office in 1896.

³ Yosemite was ceded to the State of California by the U.S. Government in 1864; it was ceded back in 1890 and was designated as the second National Park.

⁴ Other noteworthy accomplishments include the Forest Reserve Act, established in 1891, which allowed the President to designate protected public reservations on federal lands; the Sierra Club, which was founded in 1892; and the National Park Service, which was established in 1916.

⁵ Ernest R. May, *War, Boom and Bust*, (New York: *Life Magazine*, 1964), p. 77.

⁶ The new title's inclusion of "rural engineering" was a reference to additional farm-related duties unrelated to roads.

⁷ The BPR would remain within the Department of Agriculture until 1939 when it was shifted to the New Deal Federal Works Agency and renamed the Public Roads Administration (PRA). The PRA was re-renamed the BPR in 1949. BPR became the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) in 1969.

⁸ The innovative separation of user types (pedestrian, carriage, and bridle path) by bridge and tunnel at Central Park is widely credited as the inspiration for the separated-grade intersection or interchange.

⁹ "Along Beautiful and Historic Old Highways of Long Island," *New York Times*, June 7, 1914. Emphasis added.

¹⁰ "Catskill Motor Trail," *New York Times*, June 11, 1922. Emphasis added.

¹¹ E. Lazansky, *A Model State Motor Vehicle Law, Papers, Addresses and Resolutions Before the American Road Congress, Richmond, Virginia, November, 1911*, (Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1912), pp. 153-154. Emphasis added.

¹² Timothy Davis, Todd A. Croteau, and Christopher H. Marston, editors, *America's National Park Roads and Parkways: Drawings from the Historic American Engineering Record*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), p. 1. Emphasis added.

¹³ The byway designation is for the George Washington Memorial Parkway; Mount Vernon Highway is the earliest constructed segment of the parkway.

¹⁴ Matthew Dalbey, *Regional Visionaries and Metropolitan Boosters*, (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), p. 98.

¹⁵ John D. Rockefeller, Jr., to Horace M. Albright, Aug. 15, 1924, in *Worthwhile Places* by Joseph W. Ernst, ed., (New York: Fordham University Press, 1991), p. 24. Emphasis added.

¹⁶ Horace M. Albright to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., March 11, 1930, in *Worthwhile Places*, by Joseph W. Ernst, ed., (New York: Fordham University Press, 1991), p. 98. Emphasis added.

¹⁷ Horace M. Albright to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Sept. 15, 1924, in *Worthwhile Places*, by Joseph W. Ernst, ed., (New York: Fordham University Press, 1991), pp. 31-32. Emphasis added.

¹⁸ Horace M. Albright to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Nov. 13, 1936, in *Worthwhile Places*, by Joseph W. Ernst, ed., (New York: Fordham University Press, 1991), pp. 162-163. Emphasis added.

¹⁹ It is interesting to note that this is a time of intense debate regarding the visual quality of roadside America. It is during this period that major oil companies, including Rockefeller's Standard Oil, introduce new designs for attractive service stations based on residential and revival architectural styles better suited to the aesthetics of the communities in which they were constructed.

²⁰ Horace M. Albright to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Sept. 27, 1928, in *Worthwhile Places*, p. 88. Emphasis added.

²¹ Horace M. Albright to Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., March 26, 1941, in *Worthwhile Places*, p. 198. Emphasis added.

²² While the rock face of the Palisades had been protected in the early twentieth century, the land on top remained in private hands and vulnerable to development.

²³ "Topics," *New York Times*, Oct. 12, 1958. Emphasis added.

²⁴ Richard Longstreth, *City Center to Regional Mall*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997), p. 14.

²⁵ John Cornell, *Westways Magazine*, Automobile Club of Southern California, 1941. Emphasis added.