

Backstory: Blue Ridge Parkway



The Blue Ridge Parkway, also known as “America’s Favorite Drive” is one of the most visited facets of the National Park System and has been consistently since 1946. Some 15 million visitors drive along

portions of the 469 mile-long parkway every year. The Blue Ridge Parkway is administered by the National Park Service as a park and while it may not look like a traditional park in size and scope, it is managed like any other National Park site. (Above image: Parkway visitors taking photos at an overlook circa 1980s)

Originally called the “Appalachian Scenic Highway,” the Blue Ridge Parkway’s origins can be traced back to a visit by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to Skyline Drive in Virginia in 1933. Senator Harry Byrd of Virginia suggested to FDR that a roadway should be constructed linking Shenandoah National Park to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Interior Secretary Harold Ickes approved the idea of this parkway on November 24, 1933. Ickes approved a budget of \$16 million and hired New York landscape architect, Stanley Abbott, to oversee this creative parkway plan. Abbott’s dream was for the Parkway to consist of well-preserved viewsheds as well as an abundance of recreation areas and a chain of parks was thankfully fully realized. (Right image: People enjoying a view of Grandfather Mountain circa 1970s, Image below: President Jimmy Carter circa 1980 holding an image of the Linn Cove Viaduct)

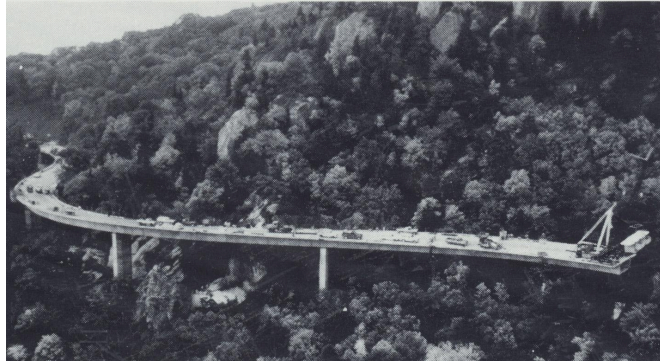


The Blue Ridge Parkway would come to be known as one of many great accomplishments created through FDR’s New Deal program, which provided work to many during the Great Depression. Approximately 50% of the Parkway was constructed

by private contractors and New Deal workers from the Works Progress Administration (WPA), the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), and the Emergency Relief Administration (ERA). Constructing the Parkway was an arduous task. Workers dealt with extreme weather, shoddy mountain roads that equipment was not



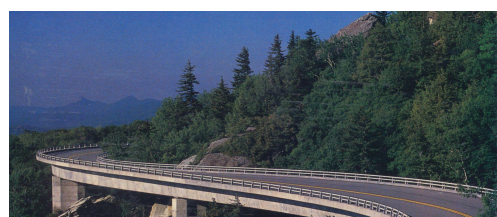
always possible to transport on, as well as wildlife and reluctant landowners. Despite everything, construction progressed at a steady pace until America entered World War II in 1941. Funds were then diverted from the Parkway's construction (and many other projects and programs) to the war effort. Construction was slow in the 1950s leading to the National Park Service director, Conrad Wirth to propose "Mission 66" in 1955 with the goal of the project being to complete the Blue Ridge Parkway in ten years to coincide with the Park Service's 50th anniversary. Mission 66 was largely successful and by 1966 the Parkway was nearly complete - the last section being what would become the Linn Cove Viaduct and other portions along a 7.7 mile stretch around Grandfather Mountain. In order to be as environmentally conscious as possible and to diminish damage to Grandfather Mountain during construction of this section of the Parkway the Linn Cove Viaduct was constructed by placing 153 different segments (each weighing 50 tons) from the top-down. The only trees that needed to be cut for this engineering marvel were those that were growing underneath this section of road. Due to the unique construction of the Viaduct this section of Grandfather Mountain was spared any heavy disturbance and the beautiful "S"-shaped section of road gives those riding along it a spectacular view of the beautiful Blue Ridge. Completed in 1987, the Linn Cove Viaduct is not only an amazing feat for



environmental concerns but it is also internationally recognized as one of the most intricate and complicated concrete bridges ever to be built. (Above image: Construction of the Linn Cove Viaduct circa 1980s, Left image: The completed Viaduct as seen from afar, Image below: The Linn Cove Viaduct's unique "S"-shape can be seen in this photo)

While it may seem a given to many today that the Parkway go through Blowing Rock, this was surprisingly not the original

plan. Thanks to intense lobbying by Grover Robbins and a consultant for the construction of the Blue Ridge Parkway, R. Getty Browning, federal officials were convinced to reroute the planned parkway route from Tennessee to instead go through North Carolina. This reroute would benefit the town of Blowing Rock (and the state of North Carolina) enormously and has been a driving force in shaping the town that we know and love today. The Parkway provided jobs for many Appalachian folk who were out of work during the Great Depression and enormously boosted tourism to the area. Milepost 294 and milepost 297 are both located within the greater Blowing Rock area and are home to two of the most visited



attractions on the Blue Ridge Parkway, Moses Cone Memorial Park and Julian Price Memorial Park respectively. Blowing Rock without the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Blue Ridge Parkway without Blowing Rock would just not be the same. The two are intricately woven together in both history and geography with the Parkway opening up Blowing Rock to millions upon millions of visitors who might otherwise not have stumbled upon our marvelous mountain town.