

A HIGHWAY AS A HISTORIC RESOURCE

"Who loves this country and brought me to it. Who showed me the German Rhine and Continental Europe. Whose kindness made it possible for me to have a part in planning and constructing this great highway.

There is a time and place for every man to act his part in life's drama and to build according to his ideals.

God shaped these great mountains round about us, and lifted up those mighty domes into a region of perpetual snow.

He fashioned the gorge of the Columbia, fixed the course of the broad river, and caused the crystal streams, both small and great to leap down from the crags and sing their never ending songs of joy.

Then he planted a garden, men came and built a beautiful city close by this wonderland. To some he gave great wealth--to every man his talent--and when the time had come for men to break down the mountain barriers, construct a great highway of commerce, and utilize the beautiful, which is as useful as the useful. He set them to the task and gave to each his place.

I am thankful to God for his goodness in permitting me to have a part in building this broad thoroughfare as a frame to the beautiful picture which he created." These were the words of Samuel Lancaster, Engineer of the Columbia River Scenic Hwy. 1915

The Columbia River Highway is located at the edge of one of North America's Great Rivers. Fourteen hundred miles long, the Columbia River is the second longest river in the country. It is an extremely beautiful river and the most picturesque spots are in the Columbia River Gorge. It is a near sea-level waterway that cuts through the volcanic mountains of the Cascade range, dividing Oregon from Washington. The Columbia River Gorge extends from the rain forests near the Sandy River to the high arid plateau near the city of The Dalles. The dramatic basalt cliffs on the Oregon side rise an average of 1500-3000 feet above the mile-wide river. Ice age flooding removed the topsoil in the eastern area of the Gorge and created beautiful valleys while turning mountain streams into cascading waterfalls.

Today there are twenty-five mapped waterfalls in the Gorge, eleven which can be seen from the Columbia River Scenic Highway. The Oregon side of the Gorge has the largest collection of high waterfalls in North America. Multnomah Falls is the highest waterfall in the Gorge with a vertical drop of 620 feet and is the fourth highest waterfall in the United States.

Within the Gorge area are a variety of climatic and vegetative changes. The Cascade Range poses a barrier to the eastward movement of moist ocean air. Rainfall on the west side averages 42 inches annually, the middle section of the Gorge can receive 100-150 inches annually, and the eastern section may receive 14 inches annually.

This unusual landscape offered a challenge and opportunity to Samuel Lancaster. The proximity to the Portland Metropolitan area created opportunities for recreational uses in this unique scenic area. The best locations for building the highway were in railroad ownership--the slopes of the Gorge were unstable in many areas, not to mention the streams and deep canyons that would require special construction techniques to be used.

Prior to building the Columbia River Highway, this unique area had been traversed by log rafts or by horses, which was very dangerous, especially in the winter when the snow made the routes through the cascades impossible. Lewis and Clark, fur traders of the Hudson Bay Company, and early pioneers wrote of the dangers in navigating this area. In the 1850's, as more pioneers followed the Oregon Trail into the Willamette Valley, several portage railroads were built around the rapids. Steam navigation of the Columbia increased and the first continuous railroad through the Gorge was completed in 1882. For the next forty years, the magnificent scenery of the Columbia Gorge could only be viewed from a passenger train.

In the early 1900's, roads in most of Oregon were primitive with only a few miles of paved roads around the major cities. As the population increased, so did the number of automobiles. By 1915 there were 12,000 automobiles in Oregon. Calls for an improved road through the Columbia Gorge began in 1909, but little progress was made until railroad attorney, Samuel Hill, brought his promotional flair and enthusiasm for the "Good Road" movement to Portland.

Samuel Hill, who lived in his castle at Maryhill, Washington, was President of the American Road Builders Association. He first tried to get a highway built along the north side of the Columbia in Washington State. When the Washingtonians turned his idea down, he decided to try developing the idea in Oregon, on the south side of the Columbia River. He promoted his idea based on a highway into the Pacific Northwest that would attract more people into the region, be good for business, enhance the city's image, and create a playground for the people living in the Portland area.

Hill realized the difficulty of building a highway in the Gorge. In 1906 he invited Samuel Lancaster, a noted civil engineer with experience in highway construction, to come to the Northwest. He then took Lancaster with him to Europe to study and view the great historic highways of Switzerland, Italy, and Germany. This experience was the inspiration for Lancaster's design of the road.

Samuel Hill was able to influence many of Oregon's civic leaders, political leaders, and enthusiasts of the good roads movement, that the Columbia River Highway idea was attainable. In 1913, he chartered a train to bring the entire Oregon state legislature to his home at Maryhill, an estate that looked out over the Columbia Gorge area. As a result of that meeting, the Oregon State Highway Department was established.

Soon a Columbia Highway Association was formed that was comprised of public spirited citizens that could donate either

time, money, or expertise into planning the highway project. Before this time, this area had been considered a permanent barrier to building a road through the gorge. Benson worked with land-owners, to convince them to donate rights of way for the highway. He then purchased over 300 acres of land around Wahkeena and Multnomah Falls to donate to the City of Portland for a park. IN 1921 when the highway was completed, he constructed the Columbia Gorge Hotel near Hood River as a luxury hotel with private accommodations. On August 27, 1913 the highway promoters and the county officials met and voted to hire Samuel Lancaster as the supervising engineer for construction of the Columbia River Highway. For the next two years he directed the construction project.

When the highway promoters hired Lancaster, they found a very unusual man--an engineer with outstanding technical skills and a man with a great sensitivity to nature and the scenery around him. Before any construction began, Lancaster and his assistants traversed the wooded terrain--taking pictures, drawing blueprints, and constantly planning where the road could be constructed to be in harmony with the environment. He was a very religious man and felt his involvement was almost a mystical experience. Lancaster wanted the gorge and the beauty within it to serve as a cure for the ills of urban life.

After the survey was completed, construction began. The affects of Lancasters trip to Europe was evident in the gracefully constructed bridges. Usually designed with reinforced concrete, the bridges were of an arched design. In some areas where the instability of the land created a building problem, he designed half viaducts. In many areas of the highway, beautiful dry masonry stone walls were built by stonemasons imported from Italy especially to build the highway. Special pedestrian vantage points were incorporated in the overall design along with stone benches desgined to enjoy the view. Some of the dry masonry walls would extend 35 feet in height and 1000 feet in length. Lancaster designed these because he felt they added to the charm of the highway. Two major runnels were designed, the most significant being the Mitchell Point Tunnel, with its windows carved from rock.

On July 6, 1915, the Columbia River Highway officially opened between Portland and the City of Hood River. Although the road had been graded it was not open for traffic until July. At that time the public began to demand that the road be paved, which was a luxury. Again, Mr. Benson launched the campaign to pay for the paving, at an estimated cost of \$1,250,000. After considerable resistance, the highway was paved with a bithlithic warrenite surface.

It was a day for celebration when the highway was dedicated on June 6, 1916. Portland society went to Multnomah Falls to view an elaborate pagent that commemorated the history of the Gorge. At Crown Point, Samuel Lancaster and other promoters of the highway gave short speeches. Rose petals were scattered in the air and a special loganberry juice served as refreshment. Then at 5:00 P.M., President Woodrow Wilson touched an electric button in the White HOuse and a flag located at the top of Crown

Point in Oregon was unfurled.

The completion of the highway brought praises from all over the world. As people began to travel the highway, public recreation sites were developed. The U.S. Forest Service set aside 14,000 acres between Warrendale and Viento as a recreation area and built the first campground at Eagle Creek. Motor hotels flourished and auto camps sprung up along the highway. Sleeping on the ground and warming food on the car radiator provided a new experience for many middle class families. Soon the auto camps evolved into auto courts with cabins, kitchenettes, and carports. Gas stations were built to accommodate the vehicles that needed tires replaced. Wealthy families soon built summer homes in the Gorge. In 1918 the Vista House at Crown Point was constructed and by 1925 the lovely stone lodge at Multnomah Falls was completed.

The Columbia River Highway was so carefully designed with nature and the landscape that it became a work of art. It is a scenic roadway with a practical application. In the Pacific Northwest, there are no other scenic highways that compare to the Columbia River Highway in design engineering, age, natural setting, or historic recreation use.

Originally the highway was 73.8 miles long. Today 55 miles of the original road remain. The western 21.6 mile section and the eastern 14.6 mile section are continuous and driveable routes. The 35 mile central section now has only 19.3 miles of the original highway. The central section contains frontage road, bridges, and abandoned remnants--the only parts remaining from when a new water grade highway was constructed along the Columbia River in the 1940's.

Most of the engineering features originally built on the highway still exist. These include seventeen bridges, seven viaducts, three tunnels, long stretches of dry masonry walls, pedestrian overlooks, and rustic parapets. Seven bridges and a tunnel have been destroyed since it was built.

Since the 1940's when the new highway was built to accommodate the need for faster transportation between cities, the original scenic highway has been neglected. It wasn't until 40 years later when the National Park Service conducted a survey of the remaining sections of the highway that people were aware of the remaining resources. When the survey was completed, a group of concerned citizens working with the statewide preservation organization, began to advocate for reuse of the old highway and its associated resources. As a result of their effort, in 1983 the Scenic Hwy. was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The nomination was prepared by the Oregon Department of Transportation.

Through the citizens task force, the highway is beginning to receive the attention it deserves. Former Governor Atiyeh proclaimed the highway as his most important environment resource that he wanted to see restored. In 1983 the Oregon Department of Transportation set a policy that they were dedicated to the goal of preserving and restoring the scenic and unique character-

istics, and the historic integrity of the remaining segments of the highway to the extent practical, including use of proper displays and other processes needed to inform future generations of the significance of this masterpiece. It is recommended that whenever maintenance is required, that it be in keeping with its historic integrity. This is evident in the rock walls being reconstructed, bridge replacement parts are being recast to be like the original fragment, and metal guard rails are designed to rust so they will blend with the environment.

The citizens task force worked with the Congressional delegation to draft a section of the National Scenic Area bill that would address the preservation of the Scenic Highway. As a result of that effort, a \$2.8 million authorization for the restoration and interpretation of the highway was appropriated.

Another piece of state legislation was introduced in 1987 that provides for a citizen advisory committee to work with the State department of Transportation to assist in designing the restoration/interpretation program.

The abandoned jewel is now becoming a historic tourist resource. A special logo has been created, new directional highway signs are being installed, loop tours are being developed, and plans are being conceived that would link the 14.7 miles of abandoned highway sections together by a bike path and hiking trail which would open up many other significant recreational opportunities.

There is still a great need for printed material that would serve as a guide to visitors in the area, as well as an interpretive center that would serve as the central focus for the educational opportunities that this resource offers to the public.

To travel the highway is to return to another era, an era of auto camps and motor hotels, filling stations, general stores, and other structures prevalent in the 1920's and 1930's. It represents an opportunity not only to interpret an early engineering feat and roadside culture, but the intricacies of the highway's construction.

As President Theodore Roosevelt said: "You have in the Columbia River Highway the most remarkable engineering in the United States, which for scenic grandeur is not equaled anywhere."

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A HIGHWAY AS A HISTORIC RESOURCE

The Columbia River Scenic Highway, built over a ten-year period (1913-1922) at the beginning of the automobile age, was an engineering and civic achievement of its time. Located on the south side of the Columbia River, the area of focus begins at the Sandy River near Troutdale, Oregon and continues to Chenoweth Creek near The Dalles city limits. Within this area lie 55.0 miles of the original 73.8 mile Columbia River Scenic Highway. The western 21.6 mile section and the eastern 14.6 mile section are continuous, driveable routes on the state highway system. Most of the major engineering features originally built on the highway still exist, including seventeen bridges, seven viaducts, three tunnels, long stretches of dry masonry retaining walls, rustic parapets, and pedestrian overlooks. Before a citizens committee became involved in the preservation of the original highway and its related structures, seven original bridges and a tunnel were destroyed. When the highway was built it was praised as the world's finest scenic drive--the king of the roads! In the Pacific Northwest, there are no other scenic roadways that can compare to the Columbia River Highway in engineering design, quality, natural setting, or historic recreation use. It was responsible for opening up economic opportunity in the Northwest as the only paved major highway in 1916. The highway was a result of several leading citizens in the Portland area that believed good roads would improve business and the image of the city to others outside the Portland area. They hired Samuel C. Lancaster as engineer for the highway, whose design was related to his religious philosophy and the fact that he had traveled in Europe to study the historic roads of Switzerland, Italy, and Germany. He copied those styles when he designed and constructed a highway of the most advanced design in the Columbia Gorge. His deep respect for the natural and scenic beauty of this unique area contributed to his engineering accomplishment that was sensitive to the landscape. The combination of commercial and recreational traffic on the highway influenced the development of the Gorge, exp: Vista House was built at Crown Point in 1918, Multnomah Falls Lodge in 1925, the first U.S. Forest Service campground was built at Eagle Creek, new state parks were created, auto camps developed into motels and luxury hotels were built for the rich. In the 1940's, a new highway was built along the Columbia River to accomodate commercial traffic. The original Columbia River Highway fell into disrepair and was neglected for forty years. In 1981 an inventory by the National Park Service of the original highway and its associated resources led to a renewed committment by national, state, and local governments and citizens to restore it to its original integrity. As a result of the highway being listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1981, national and state legislation has been passed to protect the highway as a historic resource for future generations to enjoy.

La Columbia River Highway: Voie Routiere et Patrimoine Historique

La Columbia River Highway, dont la construction, au début de l'âge de l'automobile, occupa plus de dix ans (1913-1922), fut l'une des réussites de son époque, aussi bien dans le domaine social que dans celui du génie civil. Située sur la rive sud de la Columbia, la zone concernée s'étend des rives de la Sandy, près de Troutdale, Oregon, jusqu'à Chenoweth Creek, à la lisière de la commune des Dalles. A l'intérieur de cette zone se trouvent 55 des 73.8 milles originels de la Columbia River Scenic Highway. Le segment ouest, long de 21,6 milles, et le segment est, long de 14,6 milles, tous deux carrossables, sont connectés au reste du réseau routier de l'état. La plupart des ouvrages d'art originellement bâtis subsistent toujours et comprennent dix sept ponts, sept viaducs, trois tunnels, de longs pans de mur de soutènement en maçonnerie sèche, des parapets sommaires, ainsi que des passerelles pour piétons. Avant que la sauvegarde de la route originelle et de ses structures adjointes ne soit prise en charge par un comité de citoyens, sept des ponts d'origine furent détruits, ainsi qu'un tunnel. Lors de sa construction, la route fut acclamée comme la plus belle route panoramique du monde, et fut même appelée la "reine des routes." Il n'est pas, dans la région Nord-Ouest, de voie routière susceptible de rivaliser avec la Columbia River Highway pour ce qui est de sa conception, de la qualité de sa construction, de son environnement naturel, ou de ses possibilités d'usages touristiques. Seul grand axe pavé du Nord-Ouest, son existence a entraîné le développement de nombreuses activités économiques dans cette région.

Sa construction fut menée à l'initiative de plusieurs membres éminents de la communauté de la région de Portland, Oregon, lesquels pensaient qu'un réseau routier de qualité améliorerait les échanges commerciaux avec leurs voisins, ainsi que l'image de la ville auprès de ces derniers. On nomma en qualité d'ingénieur-en-chef Samuel C. Lancaster, dont les conceptions procédaient de ses croyances religieuses et de ses voyages en Europe, durant lesquels il avait étudié les routes les plus fameuses de Suisse, d'Italie et d'Allemagne. Il s'inspira de ces styles au moment de concevoir et de construire une voie routière des plus modernes dans les Gorges de la Columbia. Son profond respect pour la beauté naturelle et spectaculaire de cette région unique contribua à la réussite de son projet, qui s'intégra parfaitement au paysage. La conjugaison d'un trafic commercial et d'un trafic touristique joua un grand rôle dans le développement des Gorges. On notera par exemple la construction de Vista House à Crown Point en 1918, celle de Multnomah Falls Lodge en 1925, l'établissement du premier site de camping de l'U.S. Forest Service à Eagle Creek, la création de nouveaux parcs gérés par l'état, la transformation d'aires de stationnement en motels et la construction d'hôtels de luxe pour une clientèle plus fortunée. La Columbia River Highway cessa ensuite d'être entretenue et demeura à l'abandon durant plus de quarante ans. En 1981, un inventaire des anciens axes routiers et de leurs dépendances mené par le National Park Service aboutit à une nouvelle prise en charge de la restauration de la route en son état d'origine par des instances nationales, locales, privées et dépendant de l'état, du patrimoine destiné aux générations futures.