

Blue Ridge Parkway

1933-1940s, 1966, 1987



The Blue Ridge Parkway was built to connect Shenandoah National Park to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and runs along the Blue Ridge Mountains. It has been the most visited unit of the National Park System almost every year since 1946, and it is often referred to as “America’s Favorite Drive.” Approximately 50 percent of the parkway was completed by the 1950s by private contractors and a variety of New Deal public works programs such as the Works Progress Administration (WPA), the Emergency Relief Administration (ERA), and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). Construction of the parkway was completed in 1966 with the exception of a 7.7-mile stretch that included the Linn Cove Viaduct around Grandfather Mountain, which was completed in 1987. The construction of the parkway created many jobs in the region, particularly during the Great Depression.

A family in the mid-1900s stops by an overlook to enjoy the scenery.

The Linn Cove Viaduct was an example of National Park System construction sensitive to environmental needs. A traditional cut-and-fill road would have caused substantial damage to Grandfather Mountain. The viaduct was constructed by placing 153 segments, weighing 50 tons each, from the top-down to minimize disturbance to the natural environment, eliminating the need for a pioneer road and heavy equipment on the ground. The only trees cut were those directly beneath the superstructure.



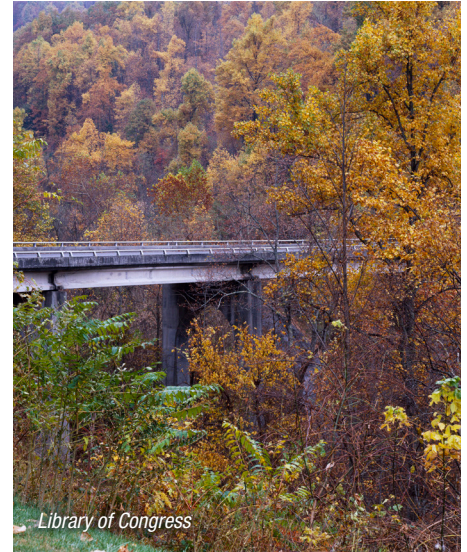
U.S. Department of Transportation
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Our National Road System’s Impact on the U.S. Economy and Way of Life

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Linn Cove Viaduct (left) was the first precast concrete segmental structure to be built with the progressive placement erection method in the United States. It contains nearly every type of highway construction within its length. With its superelevation of up to 10 degrees and its tight horizontal and spiral curves, it was the most complicated bridge of its type built up to that time.

Autumn on the Blue Ridge Parkway in North Carolina (top).

Quick Facts

- When President Franklin D. Roosevelt visited the newly constructed Skyline Drive in Virginia in 1933, then-U.S. Senator Harry Byrd of Virginia suggested to the president the road should be extended to connect with the recently established Great Smoky Mountains National Park. On November 24, 1933, Interior Secretary Harold Ickes approved this “park-to-park” highway as a public works project.
- Stanley Abbott, a New York landscape architect, was hired to oversee the project. He had a vision of a chain of parks and recreational areas with preserved viewsheds for the parkway.
- When World War II began, approximately 170 miles were open to travel and another 160 miles were under construction. By the early 1950s, only half of the 469-mile Blue Ridge Parkway was completed.
- In the mid-1950s, the National Park Service launched a 10-year development program, called Mission 66, to mark the 50th anniversary of the agency’s creation. The plan included an accelerated effort to complete construction of the parkway by 1966.
- All of the parkway’s construction with the exception of 7.7 miles at Grandfather Mountain was completed by 1966.
- The final segment of the Blue Ridge Parkway, which included the historic Linn Cove Viaduct around Grandfather Mountain, was completed in 1987. National Park Service landscape architects and Federal Highway Administration engineers agreed the road should be elevated, or bridged, where possible to eliminate massive cuts and fills and disruption to the environment.
- The bridge design and construction method developed resulted in one of the most complicated concrete bridges ever built, snaking around boulder-strewn Linn Cove in a sweeping “S” curve.

Reference and Additional Information

<https://www.nps.gov/blri/index.htm>

<https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/byways/byways/2280>