# **Going-to-the-Sun Road**

1933



Going-to-the-Sun Road was one of the first National Park Service (NPS) roadways specifically intended to accommodate the automobile tourist. The 51-mile road passes alongside the glacial lakes, alpine forests, and huge sheer cliffs of Glacier National Park in Montana. The road had a significant impact on road design policy throughout the National Park System and is an excellent example of the National Park

2016 photo of plowing Going-tothe-Sun Road.

Service's sensitive response to topography and scenic features. Bridges, retaining walls, and guardrails were specified to be made of native materials. Rock excavated from adjacent mountainsides during construction was used to build most of the structures alongside the road. Large blasts of explosives were not allowed since it would cause too much destruction to the landscape. As a result, only small blasts of explosives were used.

Going-to-the-Sun Road was a great feat of engineering because of the many obstacles faced by engineers and laborers during the construction of the winding road. Sheer cliffs, short construction seasons, 60-foot snowdrifts and tons of solid rock made road building across the Continental Divide a unique challenge. The road is an early example of the collaboration between NPS and the Bureau of Public Roads.



## **Contributions & Crossroads**

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

## **Going-to-the-Sun Road**



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2016 photo (left) of plowing Going-to-the-Sun Road.

*View of Weeping Wall (top) from Going-tothe-Sun Road looking west in West Glacier, Montana.* 

## **Quick Facts**

- Glacier National Park was established by Congress on May 11, 1910. At that time, only a few miles of rough wagon roads existed within the park. Park Superintendent William R. Logan wanted to build a "transmountain" road across the park.
- Congress provided the first appropriation to construct the road in 1921, which was used to begin construction at both ends of the road.
- Going-to-the-Sun Road was called "Transmountain Highway" in the early 1920s.
- Frank A. Kittredge of the BPR, a predecessor agency to the Federal Highway Administration, directed the survey for the road in 1924, mapping out 21 miles over the Continental Divide.
- Kittredge and his team of 32 men often climbed 3,000 feet each morning to get to survey sites, walking along narrow ledges and hanging over cliffs by ropes to take many of the measurements.

- In 1925, as a result of the BPR's work on the Goingto-the-Sun Road, Stephen Mather, the first director of the National Park Service, signed an agreement with the agency to supervise road construction in all national parks, thus beginning a long and constructive partnership between the FHWA and the NPS.
- NPS landscape architects, together with BPR engineers, created the specifications for the road, working to blend the road into the surrounding environment.
- Going-to-the-Sun Road was completed on July 15, 1933, after more than two decades of planning and construction.
- Sections built before 1925 were reconstructed, using New Deal public works funding, throughout the 1930s to improved standards.
- In 1938, portions of the road were paved with asphalt. Following an interruption in paving due to World War II, by the end of 1952, the road was paved in its entirety.

### **Reference and Additional Information**

https://www.nps.gov/glac/learn/news/upload/Going-to-the-Sun-Road-An-Engineering-Feat.pdf https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/publicroads/06nov/04.cfm https://www.nps.gov/nr/twhp/wwwlps/lessons/95sunroad/95sunroad.htm