LYING LIGHTLY ON THE LAND
BUILDING AMERICA'S NATIONAL PARK ROADS AND PARKWAYS

NATIONAL BUILDING MUSEUM
Millions of visitors tour America's national parks every year, but few pause to consider how, when, or why the roads that they travel on were built. Lying lightly on the land and serving the unique functions of park roads—demonstrating the social, technological, and environmental factors involved in their design and encouraging informed debate about the future of America's park roads and parkways.

Lightly on the Land... and Access

Touring Yellowstone National Park, early 1920s.

Photo: National Park Service

Car camping in Yosemite National Park, early 1920s.

Photo: National Park Service

Entracing the Automobile

Tour buses in Mount Rainier National Park, early 1920s.

Photo: National Park Service

Embracing the Automobile

Old Fall River Road, Rocky Mountain National Park.

National Park Foundation Collection, Montana Historical Society

Early motor tourists stopping to enjoy the view on the Going-to-the-Sun Road, Glacier National Park, 1932.

Photo: Glacier National Park

The Golden Age of Park Road Development

Among the outstanding projects of the era were the entrance roads into Yosemite National Park. Photo: National Park Service

In order to accommodate the influx of motorists traveling the rough and rugged park roads, landscape architects from the National Park Service in order to build a more scenic and picturesque landscape along with improved roadways, trail systems, and parking facilities. The National Park Service collaborated with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to develop a system of scenic drives that connected the major visitor centers and attractions.

The Golden Age of Park Road Development: Stretching the Limits

This collaborative effort produced roads that were designed as linear parks, providing miles of carefully maintained recreational features. The Blue Ridge and Natchez Trace Parkway systems were designed as linear parks surrounding attractively landscaped corridors along existing highways. The George Washington Memorial Parkway, established during this period, provides a model for today's urban parkways, such as the George Washington Memorial Parkway in Virginia, which function largely as commuter routes but often include picnic areas and scenic vistas.

Parkway systems are an important element of the National Park System, designed to provide access to and enjoyment of the nation's most scenic and notable natural and cultural resources. These systems are designed to minimize the visual impact of road construction, harmonize with the natural and cultural landscapes they pass through, and provide an enjoyable experience for visitors. As threats to the peace and safety of visitors increased, however, park managers had to make difficult decisions about how to balance the desire to make parks more accessible to the public, which was driven by the automobile, with the need to protect the sensitive environments they are designed to showcase and protect.
Trouble in Paradise

National Park Service gradually reoriented highway improvements. By the late 1960s, the park landscapes, facilities would intrude as little as possible on and continue to ensure that new roads and promote alternative modes of transportation, actively opposed road development, and the constituency between environmentalists, who building. These competing concerns threatened At the same time, an increased interest in designed to upgrade park facilities and expand widespread public demand, the National Park vacationers demanded more and better roads overwinding facilities designed for the modest numbers of motorists into the national parks, its policies to limit additional road construction, tourist industry, which continued to push for wilderness preservation and ecological principles opposing demands to minimize the impact of road development, as park managers face ever-landscape design, civil engineering, and cultural increasing visitation, pressure to upgrade park system. At the same time, impressive new engi­environmental sensitivity to construct park roads and preserving scenic resources and making them development. In Yellowstone, environmentalists are protesting improvement to the park's road are pushing for road construction while federal land managers would prefer to minimize further land managers would prefer to minimize further road development and preservation decisions.

There will always be a variety of opinions and protect. Lying "lie lightly on the land."

TIMOTHY DAVIS, Guest Curator

America's national parks remains a constant challenge. Satisfying the broad array of people who use the resources they are designed to showcase and convenient access to the parks while ensur­office, are guided by the desire to provide safe and accessible by automobile. The National Park Service and its road-building partner, the Federal Administration of the U.S. Department of Transportation the Federal Lands Highway Office, Federal Highway has been provided by Funding for Lying Lightly on the Land: Building America's parkways and park roads.

The exhibition is organized by the National Building Museum and the Federal Lands Highway Office. In collaboration with Museum Chief Curator Joseph Rosa, the exhibition is curated by Timothy Davis, who has worked on HAER'S roads with assistance from the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER), a division of the National Park Service, and the Historic American Engineering Record. Additional support has been provided by the National Park Service and its road-building partner, the Federal Administration of the U.S. Department of Transportation the Federal Lands Highway Office, Federal Highway has been provided by Funding for Lying Lightly on the Land: Building America's parkways and park roads.

The opening reception was sponsored by Guest Services, Inc. and the Recreation Vehicle Industry Association.