

YAKIMA PARK HIGHWAY  
(White River Road)  
Between Mather Memorial Parkway and Yakima Park  
Longmire Vicinity  
Pierce County  
Washington

HAER No. WA-126

HAER  
WASH  
27-LONG.V,  
26-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

YAKIMA PARK HIGHWAY  
(White River Road)  
Mount Rainier National Park  
HAER No. WA-126

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27-LONG.V  
26-

I. INTRODUCTION

Location: Between Mather Memorial Highway and Yakima Park (Sunrise), Pierce County, Washington.  
Quads: White River Park, Wash. Sunrise, Wash.  
UTMs: East end: Mather Memorial Parkway 10/611600/5176780  
West end: Yakima Park 10/603500/5196600

Date of Construction: 1927-1931

Designer: Bureau of Public Roads

Owner: Mount Rainier National Park, National Park Service

Use: Park highway

Significance: The Yakima Park Highway provided access to the high mountain meadows at Yakima Park on the northeast flank of Mount Rainier and fostered the development of the Sunrise area.

Project Information: Documentation of the White River Road is part of the Mount Rainier National Park Roads and Bridges Recording Project, conducted in summer 1992 by the Historic American Engineering Record.

Richard H. Quin, Historian, 1992

## II. HISTORY

This is one in a series of reports prepared for the Mount Rainier National Park Roads and Bridges Recording Project. HAER No. WA-35, MOUNT RAINIER NATIONAL PARK ROADS AND BRIDGES, contains an overview history of the park roads.

### Yakima Park Highway

Yakima Park, a region of high mountain meadows on the northeast flank of Mount Rainier, became one of Mount Rainier National Park's principal attractions upon completion of the new Yakima Park Highway in 1933. The National Park Service built the new road to open up the region and by providing another principle tourist destination point, to reduce congestion at Paradise Valley, the principal development in the park. With the aid of the park concessionaire, the Rainier National Park Company, the Park Service established the Sunrise development at Yakima Park.

Although the park highway was largely new construction, part of its lower section followed the general route of an early wagon road. The Mount Rainier Mining Company, a private concern, constructed this road from the Greenwater area past the first White River Ranger Station to Glacier Basin in between 1914 and 1916. Total mileage in the park was about 12 miles. The company built the road to serve its mining claims near the headwaters of the White River. The "White River Road" followed the general water grade of the river, ranging from 2½ percent in the lower section and 13½ percent at the extreme upper end. However, only two short sections of the road exceeded 11 percent. The road was built to fairly good standards as far as the 4,400' contour (about .4 mile above the present White River Campground); from this point, it continued as a rough "wagon trail" up to cross the northern edge of the Emmons Glacier, along the moraine to the edge of timber at 5,300', and finally climbed to a sawmill site on the Inter Fork at 5,709'.<sup>1</sup>

A park ranger described the road in 1915 as well constructed. The single track road was 12' wide between ditches. Bridges and culverts were 16' wide and substantial. He reported that the company was planning to relocate the upper 3 miles of the road to a new alignment on the north bank of the river. Much of the road had been surfaced by 1916, and the company was operating an auto truck over it. Road expenditures by 1916 totalled \$38,500. The company used wagons and pack horses to ship ore to Enumclaw; from where they were forwarded to the Guggenheim Smelter in Tacoma; the copper and silver ore assayed at \$60 a ton. The road was sometimes called the "Storbo Road" after the company's general manager, Peter Storbo.<sup>2</sup>

In his 1916 annual report, Park Supervisor Dewitt L. Reaburn suggested that the planned completion of the McClellan Pass Highway to the ranger station in 1917 would create a strong demand from tourists and park visitors to use the road.<sup>3</sup> This new highway, which later became the Mather Memorial Parkway [HAER No. WA-125], would connect with the mining road near the park's northern boundary.

In 1916, the National Park Service began providing funds for the maintenance of the lower 3 miles of the mining road inside the park boundaries. Visitors apparently were able to use this section. Crews began widening this part of the road to 14' and laying a gravel surface. Between 1 July 1917 and September 1919, the Park Service spent \$12,990.76 on the road, and the Mount Rainier Mining Company spent another \$38,500 on improvements.<sup>4</sup>

The road was closed by washouts and slides in 1919 and did not open during the season. The company's lack of funds prevented the repair of the road. This

same year, the McClellan Pass Highway was completed and surfaced from the Pacific Highway at Auburn via Enumclaw to the Dalles, a distance of 19 miles. The state legislature appropriated money to improve the remaining 10 miles between the Dalles and the White River ranger station. Park Superintendent Roger W. Toll suggested that the completion of the road in 1920 would induce large numbers of people to visit this section of the park, and called for improvements of the sections of the road within the park boundaries.<sup>5</sup> By this point, preliminary considerations were being made to extending the road as a park highway up the east flank of Mount Rainier. Much of the interest can be traced to earlier proposals for a "round the mountain" circuit road, with the White River Road serving as a connecting link.

Superintendent Toll proposed the high meadow of "Summer Land" as a replacement for the terminus of the road at Glacier Basin. National Park Service Chief Civil Engineer George E. Goodwin, however, argued strongly against the proposal. He felt that Glacier Basin could be an important link in a north side or "Round-the-Mountain" road. After inspecting a park map, he felt a good route could be obtained from Carbon River passing Crest Falls, Windy Gap, Vernal Falls, the snout of the Winthrop Glacier, Garda Falls, Berkeley Park and Frozen Lake before dropping to the road's end at Glacier Basin. In his opinion, "Summer Land" was not nearly so suitable as a link for the connecting road,<sup>6</sup> which was never built anyway.

Asahel Curtis visited Glacier Basin in 1920 and described the road in a letter to the president of the Rainier National Park Company. The first 2 miles inside the park were graveled; the second 2 miles crossed a glacial moraine, and needed graveling, and the last 4 miles needed widening, grading and graveling. Much of the roadbed was surfaced with cobblestones 2"-6" in diameter. For the last two miles, the road climbed steeply on a grade of about 13 percent. The last mile along the Inter Fork was washed out in places and rockslides had already half closed it.<sup>7</sup>

Considerable work was done on the existing road in 1922, including the construction of 200' of rock-filled timber cribbing to keep the river off the road. Acting Park Superintendent C. L. Nelson reported that only 4 miles of road was in condition for automobile travel, but noted that public demand for the extension of the road was "evidenced by the number of cars which try to get over the rock-strewn wagon tracks beyond our surfacing."<sup>8</sup>

The new Naches Highway (as the McClellan Pass Highway was renamed) did not open to the park boundary until 1923, but immediately proved extremely popular. Acting Superintendent Nelson reported in June that 210 more cars and 1,105 more people entered at White River than through the Nisqually entrance, and stated that the staff were "literally overwhelmed" on that side of the park. In July, 646 more cars arrived at White River than had entered the entire year before.<sup>9</sup> The reason, of course, was that the area was much closer by road to the Puget Sound cities.

By this time, motorists could travel 6½ miles over the road to a public camp ground on White River. Beginning in about 1920, the government began making improvements and repairs as far as the campground, but as the road was located along the side of the river bed, each year's high water caused considerable damage.<sup>10</sup> More flooding in February 1924 caused some \$3,000 of damage to the road. Park superintendent Owen A. Tomlinson suggested that, since the road ran roughly on the same level with the river, it be relocated to a bench over the river. He urged immediate attention to the matter, as public interest in the area was continually increasing.<sup>11</sup>

The highway bridge across White River just outside the park was ordered closed by the state in October 1924. The bridge's pier, which had been damaged in

the February flood, was further weakened by high water in October. Park Superintendent O.A. Tomlinson reported that extensive repairs or a new bridge would be required to place the road back in service. Closure of the bridge prevented travel to the White River entrance. Although the structure was outside the park boundaries, park rangers, cooperating with the state highway patrol, repaired the bridge in June 1925 in order to allow traffic to reach the park.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the constant repairs to the roadbed and the installation of some river bank cribbing, Superintendent Tomlinson complained that the road was in poor condition. In his July report, he described the continual maintenance the park was forced to devote to the road.

No sooner is one rough place repaired than others, worse, are worn. By the time a second or third dangerously rutted section is repaired the first work must be done over. The worst feature of it all is the gradual deterioration of the old road despite all the work done and expenditures made, giving the impression to visitors that we either do not know how to maintain roads or else we are not cognizant of the needs.<sup>13</sup>

By the late 1920s, increasing public demand for highway development in the eastern part of Mount Rainier National Park was triggered by the plans by the State of Washington for the completion of the Naches Pass Highway. Citizens of the eastern part of the state, many of whom lived in site of the mountain, had to travel far to the north through Snoqualmie Pass and on through Seattle and Tacoma, or south along the Columbia River, in order to reach the park entrances on the western side. The planned extension of the Naches Pass Highway east over Chinook Pass would lure many more visitors to the park from the east, and many of these would be interested in a trip to the Glacier Basin area. Accordingly, the National Park Service stepped up its plans to improve the White River Road.

In his 1923 annual report, Park Superintendent Owen A. Tomlinson again advocated the survey and construction of a road to Yakima Park or Summerland, and the construction of a connecting road between the terminus and Carbon River.<sup>14</sup> From this point, planning focused on a road to Yakima Park, rather than Glacier Basin.

Tomlinson explained the rationale for the choice of the Yakima Park area in a November 1924 letter to the Enumclaw Commercial Club. He stated that neither the White River Campground nor any area along the existing road was suitable for a hotel or other development.

The only location suitable for development is in Yakima Park, an alpine meadow about two and a half miles long by a half to three quarters wide lying at an elevation of about 6,200 feet. This meadow, or park commands sweeping views of the north side of Mount Rainier and the Cascade Range. It is within easy access of many points of interest on Mount Rainier and the various ranges and alpine parks on the north side.<sup>15</sup>

The Superintendent calculated it would require about 10 miles of new road to provide access to Yakima Park, and that the total cost would be between \$450,000 and \$500,000.<sup>16</sup>

After assuming the responsibility for major park road projects, the Bureau of Public Roads conducted a location survey for a new road from the Naches Pass Highway to Yakima Park in 1925. The survey was conducted under the charge of BPR Associate Highway Engineer C. R. Short. The proposed road would leave the

state highway near the crossing of Deadwood Creek, then follow the south bank of the White River about 5 miles to the area of the Wonderland Trail crossing. From this point, it would swing back northeast along the side of the mountain to a point a mile east of Yakima Park Creek, then would loop back west to follow Sunrise Ridge to Yakima Park. The line avoided the flood-prone river bottoms. The road would rise from 3,675' at the state road to 6,450' at Yakima Park, making the latter the highest point accessible by road in the park.<sup>17</sup>

A 2-acre site at what was then the park boundary was suggested for an entrance station and entry arch. With a little clearing of the trees, a splendid view could be obtained of Mount Rainier.<sup>18</sup> This site was adopted for the new White River entrance and ranger station; it just lay inside the park boundary, the eastern addition not being made until 1931.

Yakima Park was chosen as the proposed terminus because it was judged to have the most beautiful view of Mount Rainier from any place in the park. The scenic views of the mountain and the massive Emmons Glacier (largest in the conterminous United States) were accented by lush fields of alpine flowers. A large hotel and spacious campgrounds were recommended for the area. The surveyors suggested that Yakima Park could be developed for winter sports, as winter snowfall was considerably less than that at Paradise and the road could be kept open much of the year.<sup>19</sup> To the chagrin of the Park Service, the Rainier National Park Company never constructed the hotel. Evidently, the road was also never maintained for winter travel.

The surveyors contended that the entire route from the state road to Yakima Park would be "an ideal steam shovel job, insuring a low bid price for construction." Very little solid rock would be encountered. However, much of the final section of the road above White River would require a steady 6 percent grade, and at least 2½ miles of the road would have to be constructed on benches in the glacial debris.<sup>20</sup> A total of 14.4 miles of road would be constructed inside the Mount Rainier National Park boundaries; another 1.3 miles to the west would have to be built in the Rainier National Forest.<sup>21</sup> [The latter section was added to the park in 1931.] The National Park Service approved the new plans road in 1926.

The concept of a continuous automobile road around the mountain was still under consideration, and the survey report noted that the road would probably eventually be extended on through the Elysian Fields section to a meeting with the Carbon River Road.<sup>22</sup>

The White River Bridge at the park entrance was badly damaged by floods on 15-16 October 1926. The span was replaced with a three-span 162' structure with an 8' wide plank deck. Two rock filled wooden cribs supported the center spans. The structure was completed on 30 June 1927. A number of new timber cribs, new culverts, and new stretches of fill were also constructed, and three miles of the road were resurfaced. Total costs of the repairs and improvements was \$6,322.45.<sup>23</sup>

The old road was rapidly deteriorating. Heavy rains in 1926 destroyed long sections on the upper part. National Park Service Associate Landscape Architect Ernest A. Davidson reported that where the road had been built in old river channels, it had washed away so severely as to leave no trace. A year later, Davidson described the mining company's repairs:

The new road . . . was as expected. The grade is heavy, road hardly more than a first class trail, but compares well with his [Storbo's] other roads and is probably all that could be expected. He has failed to burn his clearings. Location of road near the

bed of the stream rather than high on the hillside (as was considered) seems by far the better place. From a distance it seems much the same as river bed.<sup>24</sup>

Construction of the new road began in 1927, with a contract being let for the first section, from the White River crossing 2 miles up the grade towards Yakima Park. The contract was awarded in August to A. C. Goerig of Seattle on the basis of his low bid of \$116,580. Goerig began work on 26 August with the clearing and grubbing for this section of the road. Gas shovels, cars on tracks hauled by a caterpillar tractor, and miscellaneous other equipment was used for this phase of the project. The road was then graded and covered with crushed rock. This contract was completed in September 1928.<sup>25</sup>

In June 1928, the State of Washington changed its alignment for a section of the Chinook Pass route, forcing the Bureau of Public Roads to revise its 1925 survey line. The new line was to the park's advantage, as it alleviated the need for three sharp curves and allowed for a more favorable crossing of Klickitat Creek. The contract for the section between the White River crossing and the park's east boundary line was awarded to A. C. Goerig on 19 August 1928 on the basis of his low bid of \$60,555. Work did not begin until 31 May 1929.<sup>26</sup> A contract for an additional mile of road between the east boundary line and the new state road was let in the fall of 1928.<sup>27</sup>

In July, the Bureau of Public Roads awarded the contract for the construction of the section between the White River crossing and the park's east boundary to Lidral Construction Company for \$153,102.<sup>28</sup> That same month, a contract for the construction of a bridge over the White River was awarded to J. D. Tobin of Portland, Oregon. Tobin had submitted the low bid of \$33,345.<sup>29</sup>

Also in July 1928, a party of fifteen, led by Park Service Director Stephen T. Mather, made an inspection tour of Yakima Park and determined the final locations for the planned new hotel and other developments. Participating in the tour were NPS Landscape Engineer Thomas C. Vint, Park Superintendent O. A. Tomlinson, Henry A. Rhodes, President of the Rainier National Park Company, and Asahel Curtis, chairman of the park advisory board.<sup>30</sup>

The clearing work for the White River-Park Boundary section was subcontracted to a gang of fourteen Russian men, who completed their work in good order for \$7.40 a day. Stumps were loosened by blasting, then pulled out by gas shovel and burned with the other slash on the right-of-way. The burning was done under supervision of a representative of the Rainier National Forest. Necessary excavation work was done with gas shovels, two caterpillars, and a heavy blade machine. As part of the project, a wye with the new state highway route was constructed on a high fill. This phase was completed on 18 October 1929.<sup>31</sup> The stretch was surfaced with gravel in 1932 at a cost of \$71,635.81.<sup>32</sup>

In April 1929, the park received plans for a checking station and outbuilding for the new White River entrance.<sup>33</sup> Like the original station at the Nisqually Entrance, the new structure was a characteristic "rustic style" structure sided with logs and featuring an overhanging entry porch. The structure now serves as a ranger station, and entrance fees are collected from a small booth in an island in the middle of the road.

Contractor Tobin completed the new White River Bridge [HAER No. WA-53] on 19 July 1929, two months ahead of schedule.<sup>34</sup> The wide-span stone-faced reinforced concrete arch structure was inspected that month by National Park Service Director Horace M. Albright who was visiting the park, and was accepted. Superintendent Tomlinson called it "one of the finest structures in the Northwest" and observed it had already attracted a great deal of

attention.<sup>35</sup>

Bids for the clearing, grading and preliminary construction of the remaining section between White River and Yakima Park were received at the Portland office of the Bureau of Public Roads on 4 September 1929. The contract was awarded to Goerig for his low bid of \$126,960. The contract was signed by the Secretary of the Interior on 16 September, and Goerig began work on 3 October. Operations were closed down by winter weather on 9 November and resumed on 7 July 1930.<sup>36</sup>

Goerig's clearing work was done with horse teams, which pulled trees and brush into windrows at the lower stake line. This method proved very satisfactory, and in subsequent grading work, very few rocks passed through the windrows. The arrangement prevented damage to the natural surface features on the very steep hillsides below. A foot trail, about 2' wide, was built over the entire length of the project with hand tools and some light charges of explosive. This was followed by excavation with a small gas "pioneer" shovel. Material from the excavation was hauled east to sidehill fills. As no strong perennial streams crossed the section, only corrugated pipe was laid for drainage of snowmelt. The clearing and grading work on the section was completed on 10 October 1930.<sup>37</sup> The contractor completed the laying of the base course of crushed rock at the end of September 1930. All of his surfacing work was complete in November, with the exception of the stockpiling of some 200 cubic yards of top crushed rock.<sup>38</sup> Goerig's crew also constructed a small stone-faced reinforced concrete girder bridge [HAER No. WA-49] across Dry Creek (Deadwood Creek) under the contract. Total cost of this section, including BPR engineering fees, was \$151,465.22.<sup>39</sup>

BPR Chief Engineering Inspection Superintendent W. T. Utz described the final approaches to Yakima Park on this section and the many pleasures it afforded to the visitor:

At Sta. 246 the highway makes a "hair-pin" turn to the west following the south slope of Sunrise Ridge a distance of two and one-fourth miles. It is along this drive that the full majesty of that is Mount Rainier's first confronts and awes the visitor. The many-glaciered monarch gradually disappears from view behind fir-clad hills as the road nears the next "switchback" or turn, Station 125.

After making the turn, this time to the northeast, the road gradually ascends on a 5% grade, the same slope of Sunrise Ridge, a distance of 1 1/8 miles to the top of the ridge, Sta. 55 (elev. 6120). Even the most jaded, scenery-weary tourist cannot help but be thrilled by the magnificent panorama that greets the eye from this third and last "hair-pin" turn, snow-clad peaks in all directions: Mt. Rainier to the southwest, Mt. Adams to the south, Mt. Baker to the north, and Crystal Mountain to the east, while to the right and just below the turn are several emerald lakes nestling in a flower-strewn mountain meadow and almost surrounded by stately evergreens. A few yodelers are all that is lacking in order to complete this alpine setting, but so enthralling a view certainly merits a pause before continuing along the south side of Sunrise Ridge into Yakima Park. The distance from this point [Sunrise Point] to the south center of Yakima Park is about 2 1/2 miles (on a 2.8% grade). The elevation is 6385 feet, end of highway.<sup>40</sup>

Utz justified the use of the hair-pin curves, stating that they were "wide and well superelevated, and add to rather than detract from the pleasures of the



trip as every precaution has been made to preserve all natural beauties." Still, about a mile and a quarter of the road had to be benched into glacial debris averaging 25% rock, requiring some heavy excavation.<sup>41</sup>

The contract for the construction of a bridge across Fryingpan Creek [HAER No. WA-54] was awarded to A. F. Berni of Portland, Oregon on 16 July 1930. Although both reinforced concrete and stone-faced concrete spans had been considered for this crossing, an uncommon three-hinged steel arch girder bridge with stone-faced abutments was finally adopted. Berni began work at the end of the month and completed the structure in July 1931.<sup>42</sup>

Also in July 1930, J. F. Ward, Inc. of Seattle was awarded the \$28,615 contract for the construction of a stone-faced reinforced concrete spandrel arch bridge across Klickitat Creek [HAER No. WA-50]. Ward began work almost immediately, and the structure was completed in October.<sup>43</sup> A "rustic style" log stringer bridge was also built over Shaw Creek but was later replaced with a steel girder and reinforced concrete deck bridge.

A large parking area at the end of the new road was constructed with force account crews by the National Park Service in 1930. The work was done with a rented small power shovel, and surfaced with materials from A. C. Goerig's rock crusher near the White River Bridge. The work started in July and was suspended by cold weather in October. At this point, the 300-car lot was complete except for the construction of traffic islands, curbs, and a rock garden in front of the government building (the blockhouse). Cost of the project was \$13,600. The parking area was expanded by another 600' in 1931.<sup>44</sup>

By this point, the midwestern stockholders of the Mount Rainier Mining Company had leveled numerous complaints against the company officers. In 1930, manager Storbo and another officer, Orton E. Goodwin, were indicted for mail fraud in connection with the promotion of stock sales in the enterprise. The two were convicted and sentenced, at which point the company fell apart. It was disenfranchised in 1932 for failure to pay state taxes, and its assets were sold that year at a sheriff's sale for only \$500. The new owner failed to maintain the developments, including the old road.<sup>45</sup>

As the new Yakima Park Highway was approaching completion, a park ranger, Flavius J. George, made friends with the road crew and asked them to attach a team of four mules to his truck and drag him to the end of the road. They did so, and his vehicle was the first to "drive" to Yakima Park. George later recounted that Superintendent Tomlinson and the Chief Park Ranger were much angered, having themselves hoped to take the first vehicle up the road.<sup>46</sup>

In his 1930 annual report, Park Superintendent Tomlinson reported that the White River Road and the developments at Yakima Park should be ready for visitor use by July 1931, and predicted a "flood of visitors." A preview caravan of 500 members of the press in the company of new National Park Service Director Horace M. Albright visited the site on 20 July 1930.<sup>47</sup>

Almost all work on the new road was completed in November 1930, and the road was scheduled to open for visitors in the following summer season. Surfacing work and the construction of guard rails on the upper 5.3 miles was still underway by contractor John Strom & Company.<sup>48</sup> Strom was supposed to have completed the surfacing work in time for the road to open by 1 July 1931, but by the end of June did not even have his crushing plant in place. He completed his work two weeks later. The final cost of the surfacing work for this upper section was \$208,665.93.<sup>49</sup>

The new "Yakima Park Highway" was finally opened to Sunrise on 15 July 1931. The new development was again inspected by Park Service Director Albright and

his party on the 17th. The road immediately proved popular with tourists, and the new facilities and parking areas were soon congested.<sup>50</sup> For the next several seasons, more visitors made the trip to Sunrise than to Paradise.

Superintendent Tomlinson praised the close cooperation between the Bureau of Public Roads and the National Park Service Landscape Engineering Division, and hailed the new road for the care with which it was constructed through the park landscape:

The new White River Highway to the Sunrise Area typifies the best in National Park Service Landscaping and Engineering. Well-planned, and constructed with reference to the best natural features of the district through which it passes, it brings out the best of scenic values, at the same time disturbing but little the natural beauty of the country. Bridge work and masonry is made of natural rock along the roadway, harmonizing completely with the landscape; roadsides are cleaned, and in many cases natural growth is already obscuring the scars made necessary by construction.<sup>51</sup>

Three subsidiary roads at Sunrise were completed in 1931. These were a 1,050' road to serve the power house, a 900' road to the central camp ground, and 902' road to a picnic area. The roads were constructed in fairly rough fashion, with no attempt being made to follow state or Bureau of Public Roads standards except on width. Landscape features, however, were protected. The three roads were surfaced with very thin layers of gravel.<sup>52</sup>

On account of settling, part of the rock wall at Sunrise Point had to be reconstructed in 1932. The work was done by park force account.<sup>53</sup> Rockslides covered 12 of the 16 miles of road in 1933. Crews using a gas shovel and two dump trucks removed approximately 12,000 cubic yards of material.<sup>54</sup> Some additional landscaping work was done over the winter. This involved additional clearing along the road, reducing slopes in deep cuts, and additions to fill sections of the road.<sup>55</sup> The highway was resurfaced with crushed gravel in 1934 under a \$ 63,702,000 contract assigned to Joalin McAlister of Spokane, Washington.<sup>56</sup>

Use of the new road sharply increased following the completion of the Mather Memorial Highway over Chinook Pass in 1932. By 1934, as many as 1,200 cars were using the road on summer weekends.<sup>57</sup> Yakima Park, or Sunrise, had become one of the most popular destinations in Mount Rainier National Park.

Camp N.P.5 of the Emergency Conservation Works (a division of the Civilian Conservation Corps public relief agency) was established in 1933 on the Mather Memorial Highway. Workers from the camp did much work on the White River Road, stabilizing slopes and performing roadside cleanup of debris.<sup>58</sup>

The earlier construction projects had provided a road with a standard width of 24', shoulder-to-shoulder, and surfaced with 8" of gravel. The road was subsequently widened at sharp curves, and special developments or parking were provided at the wye with the state highway, at the checking station (now White River Ranger Station and Entrance), at Sunrise Point, and at Yakima Park. With this work complete, a contract was awarded on 19 September 1934 for surfacing the road with bituminous asphalt. The low bid of \$78,450.00 submitted by Babler Brothers of Portland, Oregon, was accepted. The firm began work on 19 August 1935 and completed operations on 26 September.<sup>59</sup>

More sloping work was done in 1935 and 1936, along with the removal of minor slides. Some 36,104 cubic yards of material was moved by a gas shovel and seven dump trucks. Antone Erickson, a laborer on the project, was mortally

wounded when his leg was caught beneath the shovel and crushed. He was taken to the hospital at Enumclaw where his leg was amputated, but he died from shock the following morning.<sup>60</sup>

In July 1936, crews started work on an experimental rock retaining wall about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles above the White River Bridge. The structure was a breast wall, and was located about eight feet above road level to prevent rocks from rolling out onto the road. The 12' x 250' wall cost \$7,000, or about \$9 per yard.<sup>61</sup>

Continuing rock slides forced the Park Service to allocate more funds for slide removal and slope stabilization work in 1937 and 1938. Another section of retaining wall was constructed above White River and steep bank slopes were reduced further in places.<sup>62</sup>

A stone marker was erected at the wye with Highway 410 in 1940. The ashlar cut granite marker was originally signed "Mount Rainier National Park--Yakima Park" in cut metal letters, but was later resigned with a wooden sign to designate the Mather Memorial Highway. However, original metal directional signs and arrows to Seattle and Yakima remain on the pedestal base facing the White River Road. A sum of \$5,000 had been designated for the marker in 1935, but it was not constructed until 1940. The sign was designed by the National Park Service Branch of Plans and Design.<sup>63</sup>

The uppermost section of the road in the Yakima Park area was resurfaced with a bituminous treatment between 1940 and 1942. Rock for the base course came from ditches and slides below Yakima Park in the vicinity of Dege Peak. Two small portable crushers, a power shovel, two dump trucks and two graders were used for the project. Once the 1" base course was laid, the road was covered with 60 percent fines and a bituminous oil treatment. A total of 2.4 miles was treated, including part of the road to the powerhouse and campground.<sup>64</sup>

In 1940, Ole Oakland, a stockholder in the old mining company, secured permission to work on the claims in Glacier Basin. In July 1946, Oakland and some fellow investors in the old company reorganized it. The new Mount Rainier Mining Company (the old name was retained) was capitalized with 300,000 shares at 30¢ per share. In 1953, the company was granted authority to reconstruct its road into Glacier Basin, although the park administration had hoped to prevent further development in the area. The company rejected an offer of \$10,000 for its properties, holding out for the sum of \$252,000. The company was seeking a Defense Minerals Administration loan for development of its holdings. The park filed no objection, hoping the necessary investigation would prove the mineral values negligible.<sup>65</sup>

The mining company engaged Seattle contractor Russ Boe to rebuild the upper part of the old mine service road. It was graded 10' wide, and represented fair work, though it had a number wet spots. Culverts had been made from old hot-water heaters, with their ends cut out and welded together. Park Ranger William J. Butler reported that the road had followed the alignment well, and that the bulldozing had caused little damage. The company rejected another offer for its holdings in 1973, and remained the last private inholding in Mount Rainier National Park.<sup>66</sup>

A new prestressed concrete bridge was constructed over Shaw Creek on the park road in the summer and early fall of 1957. The work was done by contractors J. E. Collins & Company and R. C. James & Son. Work on the bridge was completed on 17 September 1957, and the structure was accepted by the National Park Service nine days later.<sup>67</sup>

The White River Road was never opened for winter travel as the original surveyors had suggested, and the Sunrise area never became another winter

sports area. Nevertheless, for the summer and early fall seasons, the road receives heavy use, as the road provides access not only to Sunrise but to the White River Campground and to a number of the park trails, including the famous Wonderland Trail. The scenery along the road is nothing short of spectacular, and any drive along the route is a memorable experience.

#### Description

The Yakima Park Highway replaced the old White River Road constructed in 1914-16 by the Mount Rainier Mining Company. The old road ran for much of its course on a low bench not much higher than the river bed. Over the next decade, park maintenance crews found themselves battling the ever-shifting glacial river, resorting to the construction of rock-filled timber revetments along the river banks, relocation of sections of the road, and other measures, while still being forced to make periodic extensive repairs following major floods.

In its effort to provide another major park destination as an alternate to Paradise Valley, which was becoming severely overcrowded, the National Park Service in the mid-1920s made plans to establish a major new development at Yakima Park. To alleviate the flooding problems on the White River Road and to provide access to Yakima Park, the Park Service engaged the Bureau of Public Roads to design and build the new Yakima Park Highway between the "McClellan Pass Highway," then under construction (now the Mather Memorial Parkway) and Yakima Park.

The Yakima Park Highway leaves the Mather Memorial Parkway 3 miles north of Cayuse Pass. The junction was once marked by a 1940 cut stone marker which has since been relettered to designate the Mather Memorial Parkway. The wye, located at 3,686' elevation, is located 2 miles north of the old road junction, and the lower part of the old White River Road has been abandoned. The Yakima Park Highway runs southeast, crossing Deadwood Creek on the "Dry Creek Bridge" half a mile from the parkway and the stone-faced Klickitat Creek Bridge half a mile further. At the mile and a quarter point, the White River Entrance (elev. 3,480') is reached. This location marked the park boundary until Mount Rainier National Park was extended east to the Cascade crest in 1931. The 1931 "rustic style" log entrance station features an integral porte-cochere and a modern entrance "baby booth" kiosk in the center of the road. An Emergency Conservation Works camp was once located here; the mess hall survives as a support structure for the White River ranger station.

The Yakima Park Highway continues southwest, crossing Shaw Creek in the third mile on a 1957 reinforced concrete slab and steel girder structure, a replacement for the original rustic log stringer span. A mile further, the road makes a sweeping curve across the Fryingspan Creek Bridge. This unusual three-hinged arch bridge spans the rocky, frequently-shifting streambed of this turbulent mountain creek issuing from the Fryingspan Glacier above. From the crossing, the highway runs north and then northeast a mile further to the White River Bridge, an elegant stone-faced reinforced concrete structure built in the "rustic style" like most other park bridges of the day.

The road turns sharply to the west at the bridge. From the structure's northwest end, the old White River Road continues as a wide gravel road northwest another mile along the northeast side of the river to the White River Campground. From here, the old mining road continues as a trail to the subalpine parkland of Glacier Basin, where the mining claims were once prosecuted. Glacier Basin is located at the foot of the massive Emmons Glacier, and is the starting-off point for summit climbers following the northeast routes.

The Yakima Park Highway begins to climb steeply from the White River crossing at 3,940' elevation. Now running east and northeast, the road runs along the south side of Sunrise Ridge for three miles; near the end of this stretch, Yakima Creek passes under the road in a 6' x 6' reinforced concrete box culvert with masonry head and wing walls. At elevation 5,100', the road makes a hard switchback turn to the west. In making the turn, the motorist is presented with a splendid view of the icy fastness of Mount Rainier. The road continues 2 1/4 miles, then swings sharply back to the northeast. The road climbs the final leg to Sunrise Point, where it makes a final hard turn to the east and Yakima Park.

Parking areas are provided at the Owyhigh Lakes trailhead, at the Fryingpan Creek Bridge (the connecting trailhead for the Summerland meadows on the Wonderland Trail), and Sunrise Point. The Sunrise Point parking area is located at the top of the last switchback on Sunrise Ridge, and offers the aforementioned fine views. The parking area is bounded by low parapet walls; cars park on a paved area inside the curve.

Yakima Park lies astride the saddle between Burroughs Mountain (7,828') and Sourdough Ridge (7,017') at an elevation of about 6,400'. The rolling meadows are punctuated by clumps of subalpine fir and are carpeted in mountain wildflowers. Several small lakes are located on the fringe of the park; one of these, Frozen Lake, has a year-round snow bank on one side. Four miles distant across the valley is the mammoth Emmons Glacier extending down from the summit of Mount Rainier. Wild game is very common in the area, and many visitors are treated to sights of large herds of deer, elk and mountain goats, and occasionally bears and other game.

The Sunrise development is the highest point reached by the park road system, lying nearly 1000' higher than Paradise Valley. The area is popular with summer visitors (Yakima Park is less than two hours from Seattle), and on some weekends the parking lots at the end of the road are completely full. The road is open from late June until late autumn.

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ADDENDUM TO  
YAKIMA PARK HIGHWAY  
(White River Road) Mount Rainier National Park  
Between Mather Memorial Parkway and Yakima Park  
Packwood Vicinity  
Lewis County  
Washington

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YAKIMA PARK HIGHWAY  
(White River Road)  
Mount Rainier National Park Roads and Bridges  
Between Mather Memorial Parkway and Yakima Park  
Packwood vicinity  
Lewis County  
Washington

HAER No. WA-126

Jet Lowe, photographer, summer 1992

- WA-126-1 VIEW OF WHITE RIVER VALLEY FACING SOUTHWEST
- WA-126-2 ROCK WORK AT SUNRISE POINT TURN; MOUNT RAINIER IN  
BACKGROUND; VIEW FACING SOUTHWEST
- WA-126-3 SUNRISE POINT PARKING AREA, FACING SOUTH
- WA-126-4 ROADWAY BETWEEN SUNRISE POINT AND YAKIMA PARK FACING WEST;  
MOUNT RAINIER IN BACKGROUND
- WA-126-5 VIEW OF WHITE RIVER VALLEY FROM ROAD, FACING SOUTHWEST
- WA-126-6 YAKIMA PARK, FACING SOUTHEAST, SHOWING SUNRISE LODGE AND LOG  
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WA-126-7 (CT)           VIEW OF WHITE RIVER VALLEY FACING SOUTHWEST



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