FALL RIVER ROAD
Rocky Mountain National Park
Between Estes Park and Fall River Pass
Estes Park vicinity
Larimer County
Colorado

HAER No. CO-73

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

FALL RIVER ROAD
Rocky Mountain National Park
HAER NO. CO-73

Location: Between Horseshoe Park and Fall River Pass
Rocky Mountain National Park
Larimer County, Colorado
USGS Quad: Trail Ridge, Colorado
UTMs: Fall River Pass 13/444450/4473720
Endovalley 13/443000/4474040

Date of Construction: 1913-1920

Original Owner: State of Colorado; Larimer and Grand counties

Present Owner: National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior

Original Use: Eastern segment of transmontane road connecting Estes Park and Grand Lake.

Present Use: The road is a one-way-up motor nature trail which also provides access to backcountry trails.

Significance: Fall River Road was the first road to cross the Continental Divide in the Rocky Mountain National Park. It provided a connection from Estes Park over Fall River Pass descending to the towns of Estes Park and Grand Lake.

Project Information: Documentation of the Fall River Road is part of the Rocky Mountain National Park Roads Recording Project, conducted during summer 1993 under the co-sponsorship of HABS/HAER and Rocky Mountain National Park.

Richard H. Quin, HAER Historian, September 1993

II. HISTORY

The first transmontane road constructed in Rocky Mountain National Park, the Fall River Road provided a connection between Estes Park on the eastern slope and Grand Lake on the west side of the park. The road was constructed between 1913 and 1920 by the State of Colorado and the two counties, Larimer and Grand, through which it crossed. The Fall River Roads was the principal road across the park until the completion of the Trail Ridge Road in the 1930s. The new highway followed the old road's route on the western side. The nine-mile eastern segment, between Endovalley and Fall River Pass, remained in until it was closed by rockslides in the 1950s. This section reopened in 1968 as a one-way motor road. The historic road was widened over the years but never paved, and the restored segment offers motorists an experience similar to those of the first over-the-road travelers in the park.

The Fall River Road roughly follows the route of an historic trail long used by native peoples crossing the Front Range at the Fall River Pass. In 1914, several elderly Arapahoe Indians were brought to Estes Park to revisit the area and to help identify old landmarks. They recognized the park trail over Fall River as their *ethebaw*, the "Dog Trail," claiming that it had been so-called because they had used dogs to pull their travois over the pass, especially under snowy conditions. Early hunters and trappers, mistaking the infrequently used route as a game trail, improved the old path so that their horses could get through.[1]

Railway companies investigated possible routes over the Fall River Pass in the early 1880s. In 1881, the "Denver, Utah and Pacific," in reality the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe, conducted a survey for a route through Estes Park over Fall River Pass and the Continental Divide at Milner Pass. The Denver and Salt Lake Western Railroad Company surveyed another line over Milner Pass, but following the Cache de Poudre River up from Fort Collins instead of the Fall River. Neither of these lines were adopted; in 1903, the Denver, Northwestern and Pacific Railway Company

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[1] William C. Ramaley, "Fall River: Oldest Road Opens Today, "*The Estes Park* [CO] *Trail-Gazette*, 13 July 1973, 1; Mary Lyons Cairn, Grand Lake: The Pioneers (Denver, CO: The World Press, 1946), 71.

constructed the first over-mountain line in the area over Rollins Pass south of the present park boundaries.[2]

In May 1905, the core of the area that became Rocky Mountain National Park was set aside as a forest reserve, when President Theodore Roosevelt extended the boundaries of Wyoming's Medicine Bow Forest Reserve south into the Colorado Rockies.[3] The forest reserves had been transferred from Interior Department jurisdiction to the United States Department of Agriculture three years earlier. In 1907, they were renamed "National Forests." The Colorado section, including the country to either side of Fall River Pass, was designated the Colorado National Forest in 1910. The U.S. Forest Service reconstructed the old trail over the Fall River Pass.

By the late nineteenth century, numerous tourists were visiting the central Rockies now encompassed within the national park; however, access remained difficult and there was no communication between the two main centers, Estes Park and Grand Lake, except by means of rough foot or pack trails. By the early twentieth century, local boosters began clamoring for improvements. In 1911, a road up the Fall River and across the Continental Divide was discussed by area residents. The first issue of the *Estes Park Trail*, dated 15 June 1912, called for the construction of a "Continental Road" across the mountains from Estes Park. The article suggested that only fourteen miles of road would be required, and all could be constructed below timberline. In July, the paper recommended a route up the Fall River and across to Chambers Lake on the Cache la Poudre River.[4] Such a route would be entirely located in Larimer County, and would not cross the divide. This road would have presented Fort Collins as a new

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[2] Ramaley, 1. The railway line, now part of the Union Pacific, today delves under the pass through the 1927 Moffat Tunnel.

[3] Patricia M. Fazio, "Cragged Crusade: The Fight for Rocky Mountain National Park, 1909-15" (MSS thesis, n.d.), 50-50A.

[4] Glenn Kaye, *Trail Ridge* (Estes Park, CO: Rocky Mountain Nature Association, 1982), 2; T. Ferrell Atkins, Ranger/Historian, Rocky Mountain National Park, "Fall River Road: Historical Background," Fall River Road file, RMNPHC.

entrance to the park, a notion then supported by the Larimer County commissioners.

However, the scenic opportunities and economic incentive of a transmontane route proved more appealing, and in June 1913, the *Trail* reported that the commissioners of Larimer County had entered into an agreement with the Colorado state highway department to construct a road over Fall River Pass, connecting Estes Park and Grand Lake.[5] Grand County was to help construct the connecting road on the west side of the range. When completed, the road would serve as a link of a scenic loop through the Rockies from Denver. The tourists would return over the Berthoud Pass Highway to the south.

Work began in late summer 1913. Early construction was carried out by convict labor. The convicts, dispatched from the Colorado State Penitentiary at Canon City, were quartered in cabins and tents on the south side of the road in upper Horseshoe Park, near the shore of present Fan Lake.[6] On 9 August 1913, the *Estes Park Trail* noted that the convicts had arrived and started construction.

> The convict crew, which arrived in Estes Park Saturday, is now engaged in the preliminary work on the Fall River Road. There are 38 workmen in camp, which is located in Horseshoe Park at the foot of the canyon. Whether the road will be completed in time for the next season depends largely on the opportunities for road building this winter.[7]

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[5] Atkins, "Fall River Road"; F. Ross, Holland, Jr., *Rocky Mountain National Park: Historical Background Data* (Denver, CO: National Park Service, Office of History and Historic Architecture, March 1971), 51.

[6] Marie Mayer, *Forest Canyon Pass, Rocky Mountain National Park, Larimer County, Colorado: A High Altitude Survey* (Denver: Denver Chapter, Colorado Archeology Society, 30 June 1989), 205. The convict cabins are no longer extant, but a small interpretive marker at the roadside indicates their location.

[7] Quoted in Atkins, "Fall River Road: Historical Background."

Such a prediction proved wildly optimistic, as it would be another seven years before the road was completed.

Later in the month, the Larimer County road viewers or inspectors, Pieter Hondius and Dr. H. E. James, accompanied by the county commissioners, inspected the proposed road route as far west as Poudre Lakes. The road was to follow the Fall River and the Forest Service trail for the first seven miles, at which point it would diverge to cross the lower Chapin Pass. They reckoned the cost of construction of the road at $25,000.[8]

Colorado Governor Elias M. Ammons inspected the road in June 1914 and expressed enthusiasm about its scenic wonders. He reported that the convicts were at work "in hard rock near the transcontinental divide," drilling rock with air compressors. This account conflicts with other reports, which all indicate the convicts worked only on the lower section of the road. He also reported that five miles of road had been completed, although actual progress apparently measured less than half this distance.[9]

In July, project superintendent Tom Lancaster reported that he had sent five inmates back to the penitentiary but had received ten new ones, and expected another ten to press on with the work. The convicts were served a "big chicken dinner" on the Fourth of July. The road work moved rather slowly, and by the end of the 1914 season had only progressed as far as Horseshoe Falls, a distance of about a mile.[10]

Visitors continued to travel the existing section of road during construction operations, and an Estes Park tourist newsletter urged motorists to refrain from asking questions of the convicts, as it held up their work.[11] The convicts only worked for about a year on the project when unspecified complaints brought about

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[8] *Estes Park* [CO] *Trail*, 16 August 1913.

[9] "Gov. Ammons Praises the Fall River Road," *Estes Park* [CO] *Alikasai*, 25 July 1914, 1.

[10] Ibid.; *Estes Park* [CO] *Trail*, 4 July 1914.

[11] Holland, 52.

their replacement by contractors engaged by Larimer and Grand counties.

Rocky Mountain National Park was established in 1915. At this point, the road extended approximately two miles into the park. On the west side of the park, Grand County had reconstructed a portion of the old Lulu City wagon road as a county road extending about the same distance north from Grand Lake along the North Fork of the Grand River. The county's road was described as excellent, at least sixteen feet wide with a controlling grade of less than one percent. Park officials pushed for the completion of the proposed connecting road up Fall River and across the divide. By the end of 1915, the road work had reached scenic Chasm Falls, one mile above Endovalley.[12]

Acting Park Supervisor C. R. Trowbridge, sent by the Department of the Interior to organize the new national park, reported on the construction in his 1915 annual report. He stated that the section of road built by convict labor was in fair condition, but was entirely too narrow in some sections, being only eight or ten feet in width. The road climbed above Chasm Falls on a steep twelve percent grade, and the second switchback above was so narrow that vehicles could not make the turn without a "see-saw" movement, a dangerous maneuver as there was no wall or railing to prevent a car from going over the cliff. Trowbridge reported that the work was being remedied by cutting back 8' into the bank, enabling a car to make the turn, and that a contract was being awarded for the construction of a masonry retaining wall at the point. He also indicated that no culverts had been installed on the lower portion of the road, and urged that they be provided as soon as possible.[13]

Trowbridge recommended against any immediate construction until a full survey had been made of the remaining work. The only work the Park Service performed on the road in 1915 was to construct a

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[12] Ibid.; Trowbridge, Supervisor's Annual Report, 1915, 6.

[13] C.R. Trowbridge, Acting Supervisor, Rocky Mountain National Park, Supervisor's Annual Report, 1915, 3-4.

stone retaining wall on the dangerous second switchback at a cost of $181.40 and another wall for $65.00.[14]

The requested survey of the road was completed in 1916 by the U.S. Geological Survey. According to the report, 16.13 miles remained to be constructed. Supervisor Trowbridge reported the three miles of road constructed in 1915 needed dragging and surfacing in many places. Parts of the roadbed and accompanying stone embankments had been destroyed by washouts during the spring thaws. In his 1916 report, he indicated that he had been instructed to consider the road a state road until it was completed, and to expend no federal funds on its maintenance. As the state seemed unwilling to provide the labor, he recommended two men and a team be employed over the summer to place the road in passable condition. The needed gutters had been installed on the lower section.[15]

Park administrators soon had to decide the final layout of the road in the area above timberline, which had not yet been reached by the construction crews. The route had been planned to follow the old Forest Service trail for much of the distance. The planners originally intended for the road to cross the lower Chapin Pass, instead of following the trail over the Fall River Pass. Trees were felled for a right-of-way through Chapin Pass; however, following an inspection of the two possible routes by new Park Superintendent L. C. Way in September 1917, the general consensus was that the road should climb to the higher and more scenic Fall River Pass.[16]

In August 1918, a party of 21 from the Denver Civic and Commercial Association traveled over the road to inspect the two possible routes. The party was unanimous in support of the upper route. The State Highway Commission, however, insisted that the Fall River Pass route would cost an additional $50,000 to construct. Superintendent Way insisted that the park had no

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[14] Idem, Rocky Mountain National Park, Supervisor's Monthly Report, September 1915, 1; Supervisor's Monthly Report, October 1915, 1.

[15] Idem, Supervisor's Annual Report, 1916, 3-4.

[16] Ibid.; L.C. Way, Superintendent, Rocky Mountain National Park, Superintendent's Monthly Report, September 1917, 2.

preference, but wanted the road completed across the divide as soon as possible.[17]

Enos A. Mills, who had been one of the chief boosters of the national park, strenuously urged adoption of the "Highline" route over Fall River Pass, arguing that the road's chief scenic advantage would be the splendid views from the top of the range. Mills traveled to Washington at his own expense, and the *Denver Post* attributed Interior Secretary Franklin Lane's order to construct the high line route to Mills' efforts.[18]

In 1918, the construction work was being carried out by a Japanese-American contractor, the Hokasona Construction Company. This firm made little progress, and in May arrangements were made to turn over the work to Hokasona's foreman, N. I. Jacobson. Jacobson had charge of the work on the east side of the road; Richard W. McQueary was contractor for work on the western segment. The right of way had been cleared as far as Poudre Lakes, and surfacing work was underway on a 1 1/2 mile section.[19]

In June 1918, Colorado State Highway Commissioner T. J. Ehrhart announced the road would be opened the following summer, provided that the "present labor and financial stress be not further accentuated." Evidently, such problems persisted, as the opening of the road was delayed until 1920. One factor was the increasing cost of the road. The state's 1916 estimate of $20,391 proved inadequate, and with costs running at about $5,000 to the mile, by 1918 the cost estimate had risen to about $30,000. Total cost of the road in 1918 was estimated at $150,000, of which $91,922 had already been spent.[20]

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[17] Way, Superintendent's Monthly Report, August 1918, 5.

[18] "Highway Commission Appropriates $90,000 for Fall River Road," *The Denver Post*, undated clipping (1918), 23.

[19] Mayer, 199; Way, Superintendent's Monthly Report, May 1918, 4; Superintendent's Monthly Report, July 1918, 3; "Park Officials Hope to Extend Tourist Season," *The Denver Times*, 23 September 1920.

[20] "Fall River Road to Open Next Summer; Will Loop Scenic Wonders of Colorado," *The Denver Times*, 26 June 1918, 12.

The state engineers insisted on the relocation of seven miles of road along the Grand River north of Grand Lake, as high waters from the river covered the old road each spring with a "thick, sticky sediment." The right-of-way would be relocated to the side of the canyon, rather than following the river bottom lands.

Long before the Fall River Road was completed, the park's first motor vehicle fatality occurred on the road on 22 August 1918. A Ford automobile driven by the Rev. E. F. Kimmelahue of Monmouth, Illinois, veered off the road on a switchback above the 13-mile marker, landing bottom up on the roadway below. Mrs. Kimmelahue, their two sons, and Mrs. C. W. Woods were all killed. Superintendent Way reported that the stretch of road was not considered dangerous by other drivers.[21]

A "metallic circuit telephone line" was strung along the road, with telephones installed every five miles. In 1918, this line extended west fourteen miles from the Mill Creek Ranger Station. Plans were to extend the line to Grand Lake over Milner Pass upon completion of the road.[22]

In June 1919, *The Denver Post* reported that contractor McQueary, constructing sections near Grand Lake and Poudre Lake, complained of labor shortages despite paying "the highest wages ever paid for road work in Colorado." Contractor Jacobson, working near timberline on the eastern segment, also was seeking more workers. Superintendent Way reported that Jacobson had fifty men at work on his contract, and McQueary about sixty. McQueary's crews lived in temporary tent camps, which were periodically relocated as the road work progressed.[23]

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[21] Way, Superintendent's Annual Report, 1919, 42.

[22] Mayer, 199. Several rotting telephone poles and associated wire and hardware were located in a 1987 archaeological survey at Forest Canyon Pass.

[23] "State to Rush Work on Fall River Highway," *Denver Post*, 10 June 1919; Way, Superintendent's Monthly Report, June 1919, 3. A 1989 archaeological survey located the site of what was likely one of McQueary's camps near the Forest Canyon Pass. The tents were erected on stone foundations, which survived. A relic phone line was located near the site. Artifacts recovered included a door from a cast-iron stove, ash pits and coal, crockery, buttons and safety pins, tobacco cans, and beverage and medicine bottle

Most of the work was done with hand tools: shovels, picks, and augers. Clearing would be done with axes and saws, and grubbing (pulling stumps) with horses or mules. Explosives, probably blasting powder, were employed, but this required much difficult drilling before charges could be placed. Horse teams pulling scrapers and drags were used for some work, and appear in historic construction photographs. Some early tractors or stream shovels could have been on the project, but the sketchy accounts in contemporary reports provide little information on construction equipment.

The 1919 work carried the road to within 5,000' of Fall River Pass on the east side, and another 19,100' was completed on the western slope. The contractors estimated the work would be finished on 15 July 1920.[24] It would not be.

In early September 1920, engineer James Maloney reported to state highway commission chairman Elmer E. Sommers that with the small crew engaged on the job and the approach of winter, the completion of the road could not be expected in 1920. Outraged at the prospect of further delays, Sommers immediately dispatched additional crews and the road was completed later in the month.[25]

On 14 September 1920, contractor McQueary and Superintendent Way piloted their vehicles over the entire length of the road from Grand Lake to Estes Park. A week and a half later, the road was formally opened to public travel. A dedication ceremony was conducted by Park Service officials only, much to the chagrin of the State of Colorado, which had funded the route, and to contractor McQueary, who maintained that he had proposed the

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fragments. The survey also located a quarry in a pegmatite dike near Forest Canyon Pass. This quarry may have been used in the construction of the old Fall River Road; the site and quarry were used in the 1933-34 surfacing of the Trail Ridge Road. Materials would have been transported with trucks, tractors, or perhaps teams and wagons. (Mayer, 137-39, 165.)

[24] Way, Superintendent's Annual Report, 1919, 12-13.

[25] "Sommers Pushes Efforts to Finish Fall River Road," *The Denver Post*, 4 September 1920.

connecting road between Estes Park and Grand Lake.[26]

For the first time, an east-west route across the park was available. Superintendent Way reported that the road was in generally good condition, though the section along the North Fork of the Grand River was plagued with "deplorable" mudholes. However, plans were already being made to relocate this segment.[27]

As the road neared completion, work began on an entrance station at the park's eastern boundary. The land for the structure was donated by Dr. and Mrs. H. E. James and funds for its construction were provided by Frank Woodward. Construction started in March 1920 and the new gateway was complete by the opening of the road in September. This splendid "rustic style" entrance station, designed by Park Ranger Babcock, consisted of two log cabins to either side joined by a rustic timber portal over the road.[28]

With the completion of the road, the Park Service began promoting its scenic beauties. A 1920 general information circular described the attractions of "the most interesting motor trip in the park."

> The new road extends from Estes Park on the eastern slope to Grand Lake on the western slope and crosses the Continental Divide through Milner Pass and at one point reaches an elevation of 11,797 feet above sea level. From east to west the road follows up Fall River Canyon passing through Horseshoe Park and comes within easy walking distance of Horseshoe and Chasm Falls and Iceberg Lake. Before passing through Milner Pass beautiful Poudre Lakes are passed, then descending the west slope the road follows down the Grand River valley.

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[26] Way, Superintendent's Annual Report, 1920, 12-14; Mayer, 199.

[27] Ibid., 12-14.

[28] Atkins, "Fall River Entrance," Fall River Entrance file, Rocky Mountain National Park Historical Collection [RMNPHC].

> The passage from dense forests to timberline and above it is here a matter of minutes. The ascent is inspiring, and the conquering of the Divide with the view beyond of the superlative valley of the Poudre River, of the magnificent sheep-haunted heights of Specimen Mountain, and the beginning of the Forest Canyon, is highly dramatic.[29]

The circular advertised the road as a link in the "Denver to Denver Circle Trip." After passing over the road, motorists were urged to return via the Berthoud Pass south of Granby, allowing for two crossings of the Continental Divide. This made for a 225 mile trip, about forty of which were within Rocky Mountain National Park.[30]

A trip across the new road was quite an adventure. Motorists encountered sixteen switchbacks, some with radii so tight that cars had to back up in order to negotiate the hairpin curves. The grade reached 16 percent in some places. Many cars of the day lacked the horsepower to make it over the road. On account of gravity-feed fuel systems and low gear ratios, some motorists had to climb the road in reverse. Still, more than 30,000 vehicles traveled the Fall River Road in its first full season.[31]

Between the creation of the park in 1915 and the close of fiscal year 1923, the federal government spent $38,853 on road construction in Rocky Mountain National Park. All but $1,500 of this sum had been spent on the Fall River Road. In comparison, the Colorado State Highway Department had spent $261,997.79 on

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[29] U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *General Information Regarding Rocky Mountain National Park, Season of* 1920 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1920), 17.

[30] Ibid., 17-18.

[31] Kaye, 2; Mayer, 199; Toll, "Rocky Mountain National Park," press release, 1922, attached to Superintendent's Annual Report, 1922.

Fall River Road construction alone. The total cost of the road was $300,350.79.[32]

William Currence, a miner, was arrested in 1920 for fencing off a section of the Fall River Road and charging automobile tourists for camping and the use of the road. He also claimed possession of a number of mining claims in the park which were discovered to have been rendered void by the U.S. Land Office. "Miner Bill" admitted he had been an inmate at an insane asylum.[33] Currence's rough log cabin below Chapin Pass was a roadside curiosity for many years.

Early Repair and Improvements

The transmontane road was now open, but it was a steep and narrow road, crudely constructed and unsurfaced. Motorists were using the road in heavy numbers, and many encountered problems negotiating the sharp switchbacks and severe grades. The park administration would soon found itself saddled with a maintenance nightmare. A considerable part of the park's limited budget would have to be devoted to repairs, ranging from minor maintenance like filling potholes to reconstructing entire sections wiped out by rockslides and floods. The road climbed a steep and shaded valley where snow piled up deep enough to hide the roadside telephone poles, and regular snowslides and occasional avalanches created havoc. Clearing the road each spring would be a herculean effort. Some sections of the road needed immediate improvement.

The improvement work began in 1921, when the second, tenth and eleventh switchback curves were widened to permit the passage of large busses without reversing. Several dry-laid retaining walls had given way and were repaired. Park crews were kept busy most of the summer filling mudholes, the chief impediment to travel.[34]

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[32] Preliminary HAER report on the Fall River Road, revised draft (Denver, CO: National Park Service, Rocky Mountain Regional Office, 1993), 3.

[33] "Man is Arrested in Rocky Mt. Park for Breaking Rules," unidentified newspaper clipping, 1920.

[34] Way, Superintendent's Monthly Report, July 1922, 6; Roger W. Toll, Superintendent, Rocky Mountain National Park, Superintendent's Annual Report, 1922, 10.

The Fall River Road had not been turned over to the National Park Service and was still considered a state and county road. This status would remain until the "cede jurisdiction" controversy was resolved in 1929. (See the overview history, HAER No. CO-78, pages 22-23.) Despite the lack of jurisdiction, the park did carry out considerable maintenance work on the road, although federal regulations generally forbade expenditure of government funds on routes not under federal government control. In February 1922, the state of Colorado reimbursed the Park Service $2,000 for work done on the western part of the Fall River Road, and promised another $2,000 in further payments. These funds were budgeted by the park for snow removal and road improvements, although they proved entirely inadequate for the required work.[35]

Early maintenance of the road was carried out largely by crews employed by R.W. McQueary, under contract with the Park Service but administratively attached to the state highway department. McQueary, one of the contractors in the road's original construction, assisted park maintenance crews working out of Horseshoe Park, Poudre Lake, and the old "engineer's camp" near timberline. McQueary's forces cleared snow from the new road in the spring of 1922 in addition to the other maintenance work. The crews installed twenty-seven new metal culverts along the road, cleared away rock and mud slides, and widened more switchbacks. The telephone line along the right-of-way was completed in August 1922. McQueary's forces withdrew from the work in September.[36] The park superintendent reported on the work as it progressed.

> We found that the switchbacks are being widened and safety retaining walls built so that there will be little danger of an unruly car plunging over a bank and

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[35] Toll, Superintendent's Monthly Report, February 1922, 5.

[36] Idem, Superintendent's Annual Report, 1922, 11, 15; Superintendent's Monthly Report, May 1922, 5; Superintendent's Monthly Report, July 1922, 7; Superintendent's Monthly Report, September 1922, 5.

> the widening will permit all cars to make the curves without being compelled to back up.[37]

In April 1923, Superintendent Roger W. Toll summarized planned improvement work on the Fall River Road in his monthly report on park conditions and operations. Curves on either side of the entrance would be widened and the curve west of the gateway would be cut down, a double track road would be constructed from a point on the road 2.3 miles west of Estes Park straight to the small bridge across Fall River, a double curve on the hill near the fish hatchery would be eliminated, several retaining walls would be constructed; and, a number of new culverts would be installed.[38]

A major rainstorm in July 1923 washed out the surfacing on five or six miles of the road on the eastern slope, wiping out several stretches of retaining walls, and covering much of the remainder of the road with immense boulders and debris. Although the road was reopened within a week, it remained in need of major repairs at the end of the season. Superintendent Toll urged construction of bridges rather than new culverts over two of the washes so water and debris could more easily pass under the road.[39]

Parts of four more retaining walls collapsed in the autumn. The road was widened at these points and the walls were replaced with gravity slopes. Two more walls failed over the winter; one was replaced with a masonry wall, and the other location, Farview Curve southwest of Milner Pass, was widened. More metal culverts were installed to improve drainage.[40]

New standard metal signs were placed at various road forks and cross roads in the summer of 1923. Milepost markers were also

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[37] Quoted in Lloyd K. Musselman, *Rocky Mountain National Park: Administrative History*, 1915-1965 (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, Office of History and Historic Architecture, Eastern Service Center, July 1971), 84.

[38] Toll, Superintendent's Monthly Report, April 1923, 4.

[39] Idem, Superintendent's Annual Report, 1923, 7d.

[40] Idem, Superintendent's Annual Report, 1924, 3, 5.

installed.[41] (These have been replaced over the years, but the Fall River Road is today the only park road with the mileage posted.)

Park crews replaced the bridge across Fall River in Horseshoe Park with a new log bridge in the spring of 1924. Planks from the old structure were used for flooring in the nearby road camp. In June, road crews began work on the replacement of a 50′ length of retaining wall below "Indian Head Rock" (near Milner Pass) which had collapsed over the winter season. A new access road was constructed to the Aspenglen Campground; this spur required construction of a new bridge across the Fall River and a smaller 8′ culvert across an unnamed stream. That fall, R. W. McQueary began grading a new road to the "End-o-Valley Camp Grounds," recently purchased by the park from Mrs. Minnie E. March.[42]

Pumps were installed along the roadway in the fall of 1924 for the purpose of diverting spring runoff from the roadsides, thus saving as much of the roadway surface as possible. This system must not have proved effective, as subsequent reports make no further mention of pumps being employed.[43]

Considerable improvements were made in the 1925 season. A new bridge with a 24′ span was constructed over Fall River near the Fish Hatchery. It replaced a smaller timber structure which sometimes failed to carry high water loads. Constructed on a 30° skew, the bridge had masonry abutments, wing walls and guard rails, while the concrete slab deck was supported by seven steel I-beams. Superintendent Toll called it the "first bridge of a permanent nature to be constructed in this park." A parking area was constructed at Chasm Falls so motorists could visit the falls without blocking traffic. Water brakes or check dams, called "thank-you-mams," were constructed at several points along the road so as to reduce the usual washouts, and the Endovalley

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[41] Idem, Superintendent's Monthly Report, July 1923, 10.

[42] Idem, Superintendent's Monthly Report, May 1924, 4; Superintendent's Monthly Report, June 1924, 3, 7; Superintendent's Monthly Report, July 1924, 8; Superintendent's Monthly Report, October 1924, 4; Superintendent's Monthly Report, November 1924, 4; Superintendent's Monthly Report, May 1925, 4..

[43] Idem, Superintendent's Monthly Report, September 1924, 7.

Campground access road was completed. The park also constructed a log mess house at Willow Park below Fall River Pass to accommodate workers engaged in road maintenance and snow removal; until this time, they were forced to live in tents, often pitched directly on the snow. The new mess house (now a patrol cabin) is of double saddle-notched log construction, topped by an overhanging cedar shingle roof with exposed log rafters. Construction was also begun on a stone bunk house just below the pass. A rock crusher was installed at the upper end of Horseshoe Park to provide materials for the subsequent surfacing the road.[44]

Two more bad curves above and below Chiquita Creek continued to present problems as these sections were not wide enough for vehicles to pass and the sharp curves did not allow approaching cars to see one another. In the spring of 1925, the sharp rock points at the two curves were cut back, allowing for clear two-way travel and eliminating the danger of collision. The Chiquita Creek Bridge was widened in conjunction with the work.[45]

Snow Removal Operations

Due to the high altitude of the road and the narrow sidehill cuts along the climb, the road would be covered in winter with depths of snow at times exceeding 40'. Near the upper part of the road, a large drift called "Old Faithful" would cover the road to its greatest depth. In many years, the snow here would completely cover the 16' telegraph poles that ran along the road. A lower drift, the "Fan Slide," also caused heavy drifting. Clearing the road was a major feat. Due to a lack of power equipment, in the early years the road was largely cleared with hand labor and horse teams. The *Estes Park Trail* described snow removal operations in 1924.

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[44] Idem, Superintendent Annual Report, 1925, 11-13; Superintendent's Monthly Report, October 1924, 5; Superintendent's Monthly Report, September 1925, 6; Toll to Stephen T. Mather, Director, National Park Service, 14 September 1925, attached to Ibid.; "Attractive Road Camp Building Erected Near Fall River Pass," *Estes Park* [CO] *Trail*, 25 September 1925, 1.

[45] Toll, Superintendent's Monthly Report, May 1925, 5.

> This road is cleared principally with hand labor. Shovel gangs make a trench through the drifts half a dozen feet wide, leaving the bottom thirty inches of snow to protect the road from washing during subsequent melting. Horses in harness are then driven through the passageway until they become accustomed to the footing. Then a four-horse team draws a light wagon through. Within a few days melting has usually made it possible to go through with a wagon of supplies for workers farther up the pass...
>
> Conditions under which the men work are most severe. Rubber boots and dark glasses are provided for them, but camp conditions are poor. The clothing of the workers gets wet every day and because of the lack of fuel and continuing storms great difficulty is experienced in drying it at night. Many of the men work day after day in wet garments. . . Winds are terrific, tearing the tents in which the crew eat and sleep and they have to be firmly anchored to prevent them from blowing away entirely.

Some workers became snow blind after working a single day without sunglasses. Many of the men smeared their faces with grease paint or charcoal, and some wore dark veils, but even these precautions sometimes did not prevent them from suffering from badly blistered faces.[46]

The park administration had great trouble in keeping men at work under such conditions. Many workers would leave after only a day or two, and at times a dozen or more men would give up the job and leave together. The park offered a bonus of fifty cents a day to workers who remained until the road was opened, but this proved an insufficient incentive for many workers.[47]

In 1925, the crews tried a novel experiment in snow removal. Due to the construction of the road, deep drifts would pile up in the cuts, and work crews would labor most of the spring to cut open the road. In October 1924, crews placed thirteen boxes of

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[46] Chauncey H. Vivian, "Fighting Snow in the Passes of the Rockies," *Estes Park* [CO] *Trail*, 5 December 1924, 3.

[47] Ibid..

dynamite, weighing 650 pounds, at the point where the deepest drift would accumulate. The boxes, placed at 20' intervals, were connected to a hollow, TNT-filled lead fuse, a new product called Cordeau, produced by I.E. Dupont de Nemours & Co. The Cordeau fuse was then attached to a 25' high snow pole and made watertight. On the following first of June, the public was invited to witness the detonation. The dynamite was set off in a single explosion, creating a 300' trench, 15' wide and 6' deep; this removed about 1,000 cubic yards of snow at once. The road crews also employed a stream shovel, horse teams, and men with shovels. The dynamite was probably a factor in the early opening of the road thirteen days later, six days earlier than usual.[48]

Other ideas for snow removal included the use of blow torches, kerosene flares, and carbide lamps. However, computations showed that these methods would be very slow and would not result in any cost savings. Snow sheds were too expensive and would block many of the scenic views, and snow fences would not stand up to the high winds. In 1924, Superintendent Toll decided that specially designed steam shovels were required, and he sought to procure such equipment when funds became available. Substantial housing at several points along the road would be constructed to provide for the workers.[49]

A large steam shovel was acquired in 1925 and that May it was used in snow removal work on the road. As the park had need for a shovel for regular road work, a combination machine was ordered. This was a caterpillar type tractor with a 1 1/2-yard blade for snow removal work and 3/4-cubic yard blade for moving dirt. The steam shovel had to clear a path about 14'-15' in width so that the cab would have room to swing. Accordingly, a considerably larger quantity of snow was removed than had been handled by men working by hand. This did have an advantage, in

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[48] "T.N.T. Ribbon Laid on Fall River Road to Blast Snow in Spring," *Estes Park* [CO] *Trail*, 24 October 1924, 5; "Public is Invited to Reserved Seats Sunday When Dynamite Will Clear Fall River Road of Snowdrifts," *Estes Park* [CO] *Trail*, 22 May 1925, 1; Toll, Superintendent's Annual Report, 1925, 11.

[49] Vivian, 5.

that the roadbed dried off much faster and the road could be opened earlier in the season.[50]

Dynamite was used again in snow removal operations in 1926. This time, post hole augers were used to dig holes down to the road level, then these were loaded with 25 to 50 pounds of dynamite, tamped down, and wired in series of about twelve holes to a charge. These were then exploded electrically, leaving a V-shaped trench through the snowbank. Men with shovels then finished clearing away the snow. This system was used on the major slide under Mount Chapin; the rest of the road was cleared with hand tools.[51]

A "Snow-Go" rotary plow was sent to the park in April 1931 for a demonstration. The machine was dispatched to the Fall River Road, where it generally served well. However, all old snow deeper than 45" had to be shot first with dynamite in order to loosen it sufficiently for it to fall into the opening of the machine.[52]

Periodic Maintenance

Following the westward relocation of the park boundaries in June 1926, the Fall River Entrance station was relocated to Horseshoe Park near the junction with the Highdrive. The gateway and gate houses were dismantled and reerected at the new entrance.[53]

More masonry retaining walls on the road collapsed and had to be replaced in 1927. Park crews also cleared away major mudslides. Another 100' of masonry retaining wall, about thirteen miles

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[50] "The National Park Service Will Open Fall River Road With Large Steam Shovel," *Estes Park* [CO] *Trail*, 15 May 1924, 1; Toll, Superintendent's Monthly Report, May 1926, 4.

[51] Toll, "Snow Slides on the Fall River Road," memorandum to the *Estes Park* [CO] *Trail*, 26 May 1926, in Publicity folder No. 1, RMNPHC.

[52] Edmund B. Rogers, Superintendent, Rocky Mountain National Park, Superintendent's Monthly Report, April 1931, 3.

[53] Toll, Superintendent's Monthly Report, September 1926, 2.

above Grand Lake, collapsed early in 1928. Park Ranger Fred McLaren and Ralph McQueary's crews reconstructed the wall in June. In July, park crews eliminated two sharp curves on the eastern side of the road, at the 7.5 and 10.5 mile marks, improving the road alignment and reducing the possibility of accidents.[54] Clearly, maintenance demands were increasing on this most important of the park roads, and before long, an alternate route came under consideration.

The long timber trestle on a section above timberline west of Fall River Pass was replaced with a rock and dirt fill embankment in August 1928. The trestle had been constructed across a low swampy meadow in order to hasten construction, and had always been intended as a temporary measure; however, it remained in use until this time. Drainage for the new embankment was provided by a 30" corrugated metal pipe culvert.[55]

Yet another retaining wall section, which had not collapsed but was described as "treacherous," was replaced in the spring of 1929. It was located across from the Endovalley campground. Park crews widened the road for a distance of 700', sufficient to allow cars to pass. Although plans were being made to abandon most of the Fall River Road, the park intended to maintain this lower section to allow cars to reach Chasm Falls, one of the more popular sites.[56]

In August 1929, work got underway to replace a dilapidated bridge over Onahu Creek on the western side of the road, approximately six miles north of Grand Lake. The park was allotted $4,000 for a replacement span.[57]

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[54] Thomas J. Allen, Jr., Acting Superintendent/Superintendent, Rocky Mountain National Park, Superintendent's Monthly Report, June 1928, 4; Toll, Superintendent's Annual Report, 1927, 7 Superintendent's Monthly Report, July 1928, 2.

[55] Idem, Superintendent's Monthly Report, August 1928, 2.

[56] Rogers, Superintendent's Monthly Report, April 1929, 1.

[57] Rogers, Superintendent's Monthly Report, August 1929, 3.

One thousand feet of road between Chasm Falls and Endovalley Campground was widened by park forces in the spring and summer of 1931. The work reduced the steep grade and widened several of the last narrow curves. This project was carried out because a decision had been reached to maintain the road at least as far as Chasm Falls.[58]

Under terms of the park's $445,000 three-year road program announced in 1926 (see overview, pages 23-25), a sum of $40,000 was allocated for widening the west side of the road between Milner Pass and the park's west entrance. The road would be widened to at least 20 feet in order to allow automobiles to pass. Another $20,000 was allowed for construction of new bridges between Grand Lake and Milner Pass.[59]

A program of roadside cleanup was carried out in the summer of 1930 on the twelve miles between the Grand Lake Ranger Station and Phantom Valley Ranch. This work involved slope stabilization and planting of native vegetation on old road scars. Park Superintendent Edmund Rogers reported that the work considerably improved the appearance of the road.[60]

Planned Replacement of the Road

Due to the steep grades, sharp curves, and severe winter snow conditions, the National Park Service began considerations for the reconstruction or replacement of the road only a few years after it was completed. Late in 1925, a survey crew under the direction of park resident engineer George Gregory completed a survey of the road route between Milner Pass and the Kawuneechee Valley. The section between Fall River Pass and Milner Pass was half complete before winter snows set in, delaying the work until the following year. Bridge site surveys had been conducted at Fall River, Timber Creek and Onahu Creek. Nathan W. Morgan, the

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[58] Idem, Superintendent's Monthly Report, April 1931, 3.

[59] Toll, "Road Work in Rocky Mountain National Park," *Colorado Highways*, January 1926.

[60] Rogers, Superintendent's Annual Report, 1930, 11; Superintendent's Monthly Report, June 1930, 3.

NPS Engineering Division's chief bridge engineer, was in the park in September to assist in the evaluation of the bridge sites.[61]

Soon after the survey was completed, the Bureau of Public Roads took over the major road construction in the national parks. The survey data from the field notes was sent to NPS Acting Chief Civil Engineer Bert H. Burrell in Portland, Oregon who then transmitted it to the District Engineer Junius W. Johnson of the Bureau of Public Roads.[62] The Bureau of Public Roads, however, undertook its own survey.

The BPR survey, completed in 1927 by a BPR survey crew under the direction of Stephen A. Wallace, recommended constructing a new road along Trail Ridge, rather than reconstructing the old Fall River Road. The old road had difficult grades of up to 16 percent and tight curves with 20' radii. The survey indicated that the grade could not be lessened to less than 10 percent or 11 percent, and that curves could not be widened to more than 30' radii. (By contrast, a ruling grade of 5 percent and open curves with 100' radii could be obtained on Trail Ridge). The steepness of the old road meant that surfacing materials washed off quickly, and the narrow road collected snow drifts as deep as 25'. The report offered a summary of the objections to the old route:

> The amount of traffic moving over the present road is subject to serious congestion on account of the narrow road, on which autos cannot pass, and the steep grades that cause operation troubles. On account of the narrow road, steep grades and short turns, it is not a pleasure to drive over this road, and being near the bottom of a canyon most of the scenery is hidden from view.[63]

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[61] Allen, Superintendent's Monthly Report, September 1925, 7-8.

[62] Idem, Superintendent's Monthly Report, January 1926, 2; Toll, Superintendent's Monthly Report, February 1926, 2.

[63] S.A. Wallace, Chief of Survey, "Report on Surveys, Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado" (XXXX: United States Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Public Roads, District No. 3, 1927), 2-3.

Another problem, not stated in the report, was that the road was scaring many tourists. A ranger often had to be stationed at the switchbacks to drive the frightened motorists through this section.[64]

The National Park Service accepted the BPR recommendations for a new route, and funds were allotted from the 1927 road budget to pay for the first construction on the Trail Ridge Road [HAER No. CO-31]. Park planners intended to abandon the Fall River Road following completion of the new mountain highway. The proposal to close the road was criticized by landscape architect Charles W. Eliott, II. In a 1930 report on "landscape problems" in Rocky Mountain National Park, Elliott urged that the road be retained.

> It is understood that it is now the intention of the park officials to permanently close and abandon two sections of the present Fall River Road upon completion of the Trail Ridge Road. To the author of this report, not knowing the details of the situation nor the cost of upkeep, it seems a great pity to abandon a road which has so many and varied attractions and which could apparently be used with reasonable safety as a one-way up road from both ends, to connect with the new road.[65]

In the end, a compromise was reached, and the eastern segment of the Fall River Road was retained as a one-way uphill scenic drive. The Kawuneechee Valley segment on the west side remained in use until the mid-1930s when this section was relocated. The central section, from Fall River Pass down to the Phantom Valley Ranch area, was abandoned when the Trail Ridge Road was completed.

The major portion of the new Trail Ridge Road was constructed between 1929 and 1932, and the central part of the road was abandoned and partially obliterated. (Some parts are now segments of the park trail system.) The eastern section of the road between Endovalley and the Fall River Pass remained in use as a one-way scenic road.

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[64] Musselman, 90.

[65] Charles W. Elliott II, "Landscape Problems in and About the Rocky Mountain National Park," 3 July 1930, 15. RMNPHC.

Superintendent Rogers announced that the Fall River Road would be closed between Chasm Falls and Fall River Pass in 1933. He indicated a lack of funds as the reason. However, the park was seemingly able to find the money as the road reopened to travel on 15 July.[66]

On 25 August 1933, the Bureau of Public Roads advertised Project 1-A-2, Fall River Highway Grading, a two-mile grading project extending from the entrance station down to the park boundary near Estes Park. The BPR estimated the contract would cost $40,000. Bids were opened on 12 September and Everly & Allison of Albuquerque, New Mexico, already engaged in a surfacing contract on the Trail Ridge Road, was awarded the contract.[67]

Clearing began on 9 October and grading and shoulder dressing work began a week later. Photographs attached to the park superintendent's monthly report show that the grading was done with blades pulled by horse teams. All clearing and a large part of the grading was completed by late November, and crews had placed most of the new culverts. As the contractor's surfacing project on the Trail Ridge Road was nearing completion, equipment was transferred from the other work and better progress was made.[68]

The grading project was completed late in April 1934 and was inspected by BPR District Engineer Clyde E. Learned on the 28th. Formal acceptance by the Park Service came three days later. Minor sections of the old road no longer in use were obliterated under the same contract. An 800' section of rock retaining wall near Willow Park collapsed in 1934 and had to be replaced by day labor.[69]

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[66] Rogers, Superintendent's Monthly Report, May 1933, 4; Superintendent's Monthly Report, June 1933, 4.

[67] Idem, Superintendent's Monthly Report, August 1933, 10; Superintendent's Monthly Report, September 1933, 7.

[68] Idem, Superintendent's Monthly Report, October 1933, 7; Superintendent's Monthly Report, November 1933, 5.

[69] Idem, Superintendent's Annual Report, 1934, 15, 17; Superintendent's Monthly Report, May 1934, 2, 5.

In April 1934, the BPR completed planning for a subsequent surfacing contract for the same section. It was decided that the existing borrow pit at station 770 on section 1-B would not supply sufficient material for the crusher; however, a new pit was located at station 97 on section 1-A-2 and no delays were encountered. The project was advertised twice and in July the project was awarded to the Steamboat Springs Transfer Company of Steamboat Springs, Colorado, on the basis of the firm's low bid of $18,150. The company completed laying the required base course surface in September.[70]

Another 900 cubic yards of retaining wall along the road collapsed over the winter of 1933-34, and the following summer a crew of sixty men was assigned to reconstruct this section. The crew also removed some 700 cubic yards of overhanging and eroded slope above the road.[71]

The lower two miles of road between the new park boundary and the river crossing in Horseshoe Park were reconstructed in 1934 by contractors Everly & Allison who submitted the low bid of $30,978.30. Operations began in October 1933 and were completed on 30 April 1934. The new section avoided a steep grade on Cascade Hill and eliminated a sharp curve. The *Estes Park Trail* described the new segment as "level as a floor" and told readers "it will be a revelation to you after traveling the old corduroy road which followed the same approximate route." The Fall River Entrance Station was relocated again to the present location in Hondius Park.[72]

Old sections of the Fall River Road were obliterated by Emergency Conservation Works personnel in the 1930s. The work consisted of

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[70] Idem, Superintendent's Monthly Report, June 1934, 6; Superintendent's Monthly Report, September 1934, 6.

[71] Idem, Superintendent's Monthly Report, June 1934, 5.

[72] Robert N. Coffey, Chief Engineering Inspector-Superintendent, Bureau of Public Roads, "Final Construction Report (1933-34) on Fall River Highway (High Drive--East Entrance), NR-1-A2 Grading, Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado" (Denver, CO: Bureau of Public Roads, 18 May 1935), 1-7; "Fall River Road Project Complete," *Estes Park* [CO] *Trail*, 2 February 1934, 2.

pulling up the old shoulders, flattening and rounding slopes, and placing sod in the more conspicuous places. Old switchbacks between Farview Curve and Phantom Valley were obliterated in 1933. Crews restored the old section of the road between timberline and Poudre Lake in 1936. (Actually, this route of the old road is still quite evident, and now serves as a backcountry trail). Crews also obliterated a lower section of the old road in Horseshoe Park.[73]

The Roaring River Bridge was replaced in 1942 with a fine "rustic style" bridge, a true log stringer span with log pylon abutments and masonry wing walls. Architectural plans for the 25' structure, prepared by the NPS Landscape Architecture Division in 1932, show that 20" diameter log stringers were laid crosswise over long 22" logs laid across the abutments. The stringers were topped by a 4" thick wooden deck. The guardrail was a rustic log balustrade.[74]

Dangerous conditions, probably exacerbated by deferred maintenance during World War II, forced the park to close the old Fall River Road for much of 1950. The road was repaired late in the season and reopened to travel. More masonry walls were damaged by flash floods in October 1951. In 1953, park maintenance crews improved the drainage along the road between the Roaring River Bridge and Endovalley Campground, an area periodically flooded by the spring run-off. New culverts were installed and part of the road was raised on new fill.[75]

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[73] Rogers, Superintendent's Monthly Report, August 1933, 7; Allen, Superintendent's Annual Report, 1936, 10.

[74] National Park Service, Landscape Architecture Division, "Architectural Plans, Roaring River Bridge Betterment, Fall River Road, Rocky Mountain National Park," construction drawing 3029, 15 April 1932. Denver Service Center, Technical Information Center files. This fine bridge was replaced in 1981.

[75] David H. Canfield, Superintendent, Rocky Mountain National Park, Superintendent's Annual Report, 1950, 5; "Old Fall River Road Closed; Oiling Jobs Hampered by Rains," *Estes Park* [CO] *Trail*, 10 August 1951, 14; Francis D. LaNoue, Acting Superintendent, Rocky Mountain National Park, Acting Superintendent's Monthly Report, February 1953, 2; Acting Superintendent's Monthly Report, March 1953, 2.

Abandonment

On 30 July 1953, a major rockslide 3.5 miles above Chasm Falls closed the road. Approximately 1,200 feet of roadway washed out above the slide area, and park officials estimated it would require about 1,400 square yards of rock walls or steel cribbing the hold the roadway.[76]

Constant repairs and upkeep work led the Park Service to a decision to close the Fall River Road above Chasm Falls. The upper section of the old road was converted to a trail in 1953. The section of road through Horseshoe Park, from the east entrance to Chasm Falls, remained in use. This section was reconstructed in the fall of 1959 under a $33,400 contract awarded to Carl V. Hill.[77]

In the late 1950s, business interests in Estes Park began pushing for the reconstruction of the Fall River Road as an "all weather highway" in order to boost the local winter economy. The National Park Service officials opposed the plan, as such reconstruction would cause horrendous scarring where the road would have to switchback from side to side of the Fall River Valley.

In 1961, the park considered closing the road at Endovalley and constructing a trailhead parking area for visitors who wished to hike to Chasm Falls. This was considered a cheaper alternative than widening the road up to Chasm Falls to better facilitate two-way traffic.[78] This proposal was not adopted.

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[76] LaNoue, Acting Superintendent's Monthly Report, July 1953, 3.

[77] Holland, 52; James V. Lloyd, Superintendent, Rocky Mountain National Park, Superintendent's Monthly Report, October 1959, 12.

[78] Allyn F. Hanks, Superintendent, Rocky Mountain National Park, Superintendent's Monthly Report, September 1961, 12.

Reopening the Road

The Estes Park business interests continued to clamor for an all-weather highway across the mountains. In the summer of 1967, Park Service Director George Hartzog ordered the old road cleared and reopened as a motor nature trail, hoping this compromise would suit the Estes Park boosters. Although this was not what the business interests intended, the motor nature road would prove a popular attraction. Extensive repairs were carried out in order to reopen the road. In the reconstruction of the collapsed section of road below Willow Park, large gabions (wire-bound baskets filled with stone) were employed to stabilize the slope. The Fall River Road reopened in 1968, again as a one-way road uphill.[79] For a while it was considered a "motor nature trail," and a mimeographed pamphlet on road highlights was available for visitors.

The 1920 "rustic style" entrance station at the gateway to the road was replaced in 1961 as part of the Mission 66 program with new "baby booth" kiosks at a cost of $14,973.[80] The new entrance has none of the character of the original log gateway. The park is planning construction of a new entrance complex.

In the early part of the 1979 summer season, part of the road slid away, forcing its closure. Repairs were effected over the next two months by park crews and the road was reopened in August at a cost of about $30,000. A number of new gabions were set in place to prevent slippage of roadway slopes.[81]

The Roaring River Bridge was replaced in the spring of 1981 with a new 22' 6" pre-cast concrete structure at a cost of $42,000. Plans and specifications for the structure were prepared by

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[79] Atkins, "Note on the Fall River Road/The All Weather Road," 19 August 1981, Fall River Road file, RMNPHC.

[80] Hanks, Superintendent's Annual Report, 1961, 8.

[81] Chester L. Brooks, Superintendent, Rocky Mountain National Park, Superintendent's Annual Report, 1979, 16-17.

Ronald Cotten and Ralph Hopper of the Maintenance staff and the structure was built by park crews.[82]

In July 1981, heavy rains swept away more than 100' of the Fall River Road below Willow Park. Several visitors' cars were trapped by the washouts but no injuries occurred on the road. Restoration work began that fall. The road was cut further into the slope and the upslope was reinforced by 4,800 cubic yards of stone-filled gabions set by a park crane. Cost of the repairs was $114,104. New culverts and catch basins were installed to improve drainage. In 1982, deteriorating crib and dry walls along the road were replaced by park crews. Some 2,000' of wall was repaired at a cost of $29,913.05.[83]

On 15 July 1982, the Lawn Lake Dam on the Roaring River gave way, flooding the river drainage, Horseshoe Park, Aspenglen, and much of downtown Estes Park. Two fatalities occurred, both within the park. A massive alluvial fan of immense boulders buried a 4,500' stretch of the Fall River Road with approximately one million cubic yards of debris, and the two-year old Roaring River Bridge was swept away.[84]

To reconstruct the road through the segment, an bulldozer was used to clear a road through the boulders. Some blasting was required. About 1,400 cubic yards of new fill was brought in to provide a stable base. Following construction of the new Roaring River Bridge, the road was surfaced in October 1984 and placed back in service. Cost of the road repairs was $305,151.24.[85]

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[82] "Completion Report 1520-7605-405, Replace Roaring River Bridge," 22 May 1981. Rocky Mountain National Park [ROMO] Maintenance files.

[83] Brooks, Superintendent's Annual Report, 1981, 2-3; Superintendent's Annual Report, 1982, 20; "Completion Report 1520-0002-291, Repair Old Fall River Road, 12 April 1983; "Completion Report 1520-0065-293, Repair Fall Crib Walls on Old Fall River Road," 12 April 1983. ROMO Maintenance files.

[84] Brooks, Superintendent's Annual Report, 1982, 1, 20.

[85] "Completion Report 1520-7607-634, Alluvial Fan Road and Bridge," 6 February 1985. ROMO Maintenance files.

Although it no longer is the main transmontane route across the Rocky Mountain National Park, the eastern section of the old Fall River Road remains a popular scenic drive. Unpaved and little altered since its original construction, the road offers visitors an experience not unlike that shared by early motorists. For its significance in park and Colorado transportation history, the road has been listed in the National Register of Historic Places by the National Park Service.

DESCRIPTION

The principal surviving section of the old road extends nine miles from the Endovalley picnic area to Fall River Pass. The section of the road running east from Endovalley through Horseshoe Park to the Fall River Entrance has been reconstructed several times and is a modern paved road bearing little resemblance to the original route.

The paved, two-way section of the road begins in the upper reaches of Horseshoe Park at an elevation of 8,000'. The gently rolling meadows to either side of Fall River are support grasses and sagebrush, and are ringed by forests of lodgepole and ponderosa pine. Quaking aspen grows in wet places and some slide areas.

Less than a mile above the junction with the Trail Ridge Road, the road crosses a field of boulders, the alluvial fan formed by the 1982 Lawn Lake Dam flood. In the midst of the debris, the road crosses Roaring River on a replacement steel girder and reinforced concrete deck bridge with timber guard rails. To the south of the road, the alluvial fan partially blocked the Fall River, creating Fan Lake. The convict cabins site is marked by a small wayside marker. Two miles from the road junction, the Fall River Road reaches the former Endovalley Campground, now a picnic area. Beyond this point, only one-way uphill traffic is permitted.

The old nine-mile section of road between Endovalley and Fall River Pass remains an unpaved road, constructed largely on the original line and switchbacks, though sections were later rebuilt as noted above. The segment begins in a dense mixed forest just north of the picnic area; it generally keeps to the north side of the valley for the next several miles. This segment of the road is mileposted, with mile 0 at Endovalley. Chiquita Creek is crossed just under a mile above Endovalley; the gorge to the left is a classic example of a glacial "hanging valley." Half a mile farther above, Chasm Falls, one of the most popular attractions

on the road, is reached. This leaping waterfall of the Fall River is reached by a short trail leading from a roadside parking area.

By about the second mile of the road, the visitor passes from the montane forest zone to the subalpine forest. Engleman spruce and Subalpine fir are now the most common trees. The clearing at the 3.2 mile mark was the site occupied by William "Miner Bill" Currence before his removal from the park. Above this site, the road crosses some snow slide runs.

At 4.3 miles, the "Fan Slide" periodically covers the road through late spring. A tenth of a mile further is the gully which carries "Old Faithful," which once covered the road every afternoon for thirteen days in a row. Another, less "reliable" avalanche swath is passed at the 5 mile point.[86]

"Canyoncito," the "Little Canyon" of the Fall River, is passed two-tenths of a mile further on, and the open expanses of Willow Park are reached at 6.1 miles. A 1925 "rustic style" log mess house from the road camp (now a ranger patrol cabin) and an accompanying stable are located in the meadow. In the winter, the snow depth is sometimes 20' deep on the curve.

The Chapin Creek Trailhead is reached at mile 7.1. Not far beyond, the forest is left behind and the road enters the open alpine tundra. The site of the "Big Drift" is crossed just below the Alpine Visitor Center, at the end of the road at mile 9. Here the road reaches its high point of 11,796' and a junction with the Trail Ridge Road.

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[86] "The Old Fall River Road," pamphlet, 1968. RMNPHC.

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Photos 1-7: Arnold Thallheimer, photographer, August 1985
Photos 8-14: Brian C. Grogan, photographer, August 1993

CO-73-1 FALL RIVER ROAD TURNOUT IN HORSESHOE PARK, FACING SOUTHWEST

CO-73-2 START OF FALL RIVER ROAD AT ENDOVALLEY, FACING WEST (UPHILL)

CO-73-3 FALL RIVER ROAD AND GABIONS, FACING WEST

CO-73-4 FALL RIVER ROAD AND GABIONS, FACING WEST

CO-73-5 SWITCHBACK, FACING WEST

CO-73-6 FALL RIVER ROAD PANORAMA, WITH ESTES PARK IN BACKGROUND, FACING EAST

CO-77-7 VIEW FROM NEAR FALL RIVER PASS, FACING WEST, WITH FINAL APPROACH OF ROAD

CO-73-8 "BIGHORN CROSSING" IN HORSESHOE PARK, FACING WEST

CO-73-9 VIEW FROM MANY PARKS CURVE (ON TRAIL RIDGE ROAD) OF HORSESHOE PARK, SHOWING FALL RIVER ROAD FAINTLY AT LEFT AT BASE OF SHEEP MOUNTAIN AND CROSSING ALLUVIAL FAN FROM LAWN LAKE FLOOD

CO-73-10 FALL RIVER ROAD ROUTE ACROSS ALLUVIAL FAN FROM LAWN LAKE FLOOD; ROARING RIVER VISIBLE AT UPPER RIGHT

CO-73-11 SWITCHBACK, FACING EAST

CO-73-12 SWITCHBACK, FACING WEST. FALL RIVER PASS IN BACKGROUND

CO-73-13 GABION WALLS BELOW WILLOW PARK, FACING WEST

C0-73-14 VIEW FROM TUNDRA CURVES (ON TRAIL RIDGE ROAD) SHOWING FALL RIVER ROAD RISING FROM BENEATH CHAPIN PASS (AT EXTREME RIGHT) TO FALL RIVER PASS (FAR LEFT).

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All color xeroxes were made from a duplicate color transparency.

Brian C. Grogan, photographer, July 1993.

CO-73-15 SWITCHBACK, FACING WEST. FALL RIVER PASS IN BACKGROUND.

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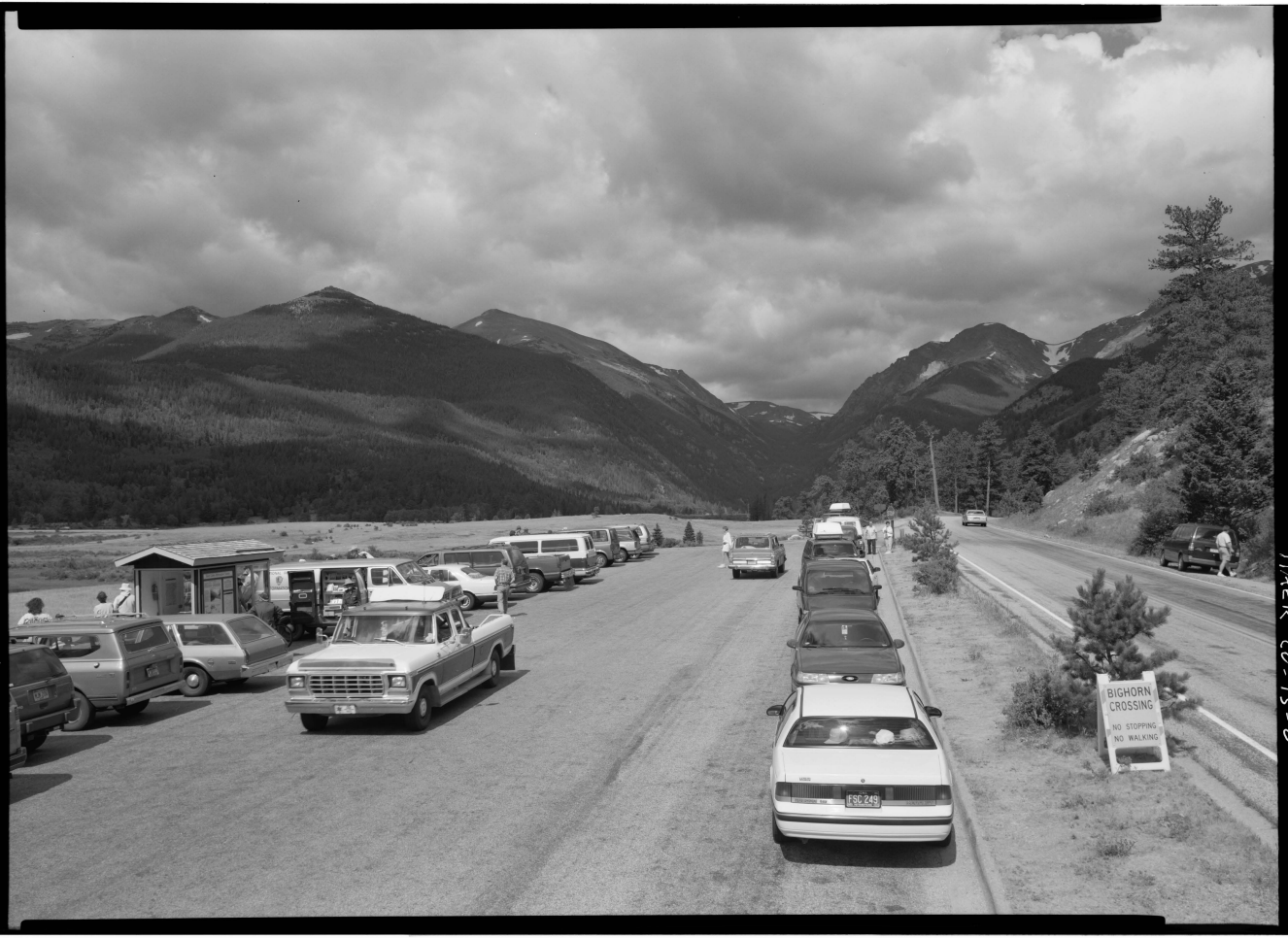

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