

GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK ROADS & BRIDGES,
FOOTHILLS PARKWAY
Between Chilowee and Walland and between Cosby and I-40
Gatlinburg Vicinity
Sevier County
Tennessee

HAER NO. TN-35-E

HAER
TENN
78-GAT.V
6E-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

PHOTOGRAPHS

XEROGRAPHIC COPIES OF COLOR TRANSPARENCIES

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

National Park Service
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

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GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK ROADS AND BRIDGES,
FOOTHILLS PARKWAY
HAER NO. TN-35-E

Location: Tennessee, between Chilhowee and Walland
and between Cosby and Interstate 40

Date of Construction: 1950s-60s

Type of Structure: Roadway, Bridges, and Landscape

Use: National Park Transportation System

Engineer: U.S. Bureau of Public Roads and National
Park Service

Fabricator/Builder: Various private and public contractors

Owner: U.S. Department of the Interior,
National Park Service, Great Smoky
Mountains National Park

Significance: The Foothills Parkway originated from
the federal government's decision to
locate the Blue Ridge Parkway in North
Carolina. Both North Carolina and
Tennessee lobbied for the road, and with
the announcement that the parkway would
run from Virginia to North Carolina,
came a promise that if the road proved
successful, another parkway would be
built in Tennessee. The Foothills
Parkway is the result of that promise.
Although not located within the park
boundary, the Foothills Parkway is an
important part of the transportation
system in Great Smoky Mountains National
Park, providing a scenic drive around
the Tennessee side of the park.

Project Information: Documentation was conducted during the
summer of 1996 under the co-sponsorship
of HABS/HAER, Great Smoky Mountains

National Park, the National Park Service Roads and Parkway Program and funded through the Federal Lands Highway Program. Measured drawings were produced by Edward Lupyak, field supervisor, Matthew Regnier, Karen Young, and Dorota Sikora (ICOMOS intern, Poland). The historical reports were prepared by Cornelius Maher and Michael Kelleher. See also drawings and histories on related structures: Great Smoky Mountains National Park, TN-35; Newfound Gap Road, TN-35-A; Clingmans Dome Road, TN-35-B; Little River Road, TN-35-C; Cades Cove and Laurel Creek Roads, TN-35-D; Cataloochee Valley Road, TN-35-F; Roaring Fork Motor Nature Trail, TN-35-G; Big Creek Road, TN-35-H; Northshore Road, TN-35-I; Cosby Park Road, TN-35-J; Deep Creek Road, TN-35-K; Greenbrier Road, TN-35-L; Heintooga Ridge and Balsam Mountain Roads, TN-35-M; Cataloochee Trail and Turnpike, TN-35-N; Rich Mountain Road, TN-35-O; Elkmont Road, TN-35-P; Loop Over Bridge, TN-35-Q; Smokemont Bridge, TN-35-R; Elkmont Vehicle Bridge, TN-35-S; and Luten Bridges, TN-35-T.

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Introduction

The Foothills Parkway is not a road which runs through Great Smoky Mountains National Park, rather it is a scenic parkway which travels around the Tennessee side of the park. The parkway was originally planned as a 70-mile drive from east to west, with a spur leading into the park from Pigeon Forge, Tennessee. However, only three sections of the road have been completed: the 6-mile section from Interstate 40 west to U.S. Highway 321 in Cosby, Tennessee; the 16.5-mile section from U.S. 321 in Walland, Tennessee west to U.S. 129 in Chilhowee, Tennessee; and the Gatlinburg Spur, traveling along the West Prong of the Little Pigeon River from Pigeon Forge south to Gatlinburg. This last section also has an additional bypass continuing from the edge of Gatlinburg over the hills to the west of the town into Great Smoky Mountains National Park itself.

The east section of the Foothills Parkway begins at Interstate 40, traveling through the valley of the Pigeon River. From there, the parkway travels west, climbing Green Mountain for 3 miles, where it crosses the top and descends another 3 miles into Cosby. Several overlooks along the road offer views of the

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Great Smoky Mountains and the surrounding foothills. Near the end of this part of the parkway, where the roadway makes a sharp turn just before reaching the intersection with U.S. Highway 321, a small section of the roadbed which was to have continued the parkway west to Pigeon Forge is visible.

The west section of the Foothills Parkway begins at U.S. Highway 129, climbing eastward up Chilhowee Mountain for 5 miles. Overlooks along the road offer views of the high peaks of the Great Smoky Mountains. After reaching the crest of the mountain, the parkway travels along the top for 2.5 miles to Look Rock, a developed area which includes a campground and an observation tower which offers a panoramic view of the Smokies and the surrounding foothills. The parkway then continues along the crest of Chilhowee Mountain for 6 miles, and descends 3 miles to U.S. 321. At the intersection with this road, the incomplete roadbed which was to have carried the parkway east to Pigeon Forge is visible. In fact, motorists driving east on U.S. 321 from this point can see several parts of this incomplete roadbed, including several unused bridges.

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The Gatlinburg Spur of the Foothills Parkway begins at the edge of Pigeon Forge, where the neon advertising signs of this honky-tonk tourist town end and the motorist enters a four-lane parkway through the valley of the West Prong of the Little Pigeon River. The contrast between the natural scenery along the Gatlinburg Spur and the unnatural roadside attractions in Pigeon Forge is startling.

The north and south lanes of the Gatlinburg Spur are separated by the West Prong, and the roadway winds along the banks of the stream. The northbound side of the road includes a tunnel which carries the roadway through a ridge which protrudes sharply into the river valley, making the continuation of the road without the use of the tunnel difficult. Several secondary roads intersect with the spur, and two cross-over bridges carry roads across the river between the northbound and southbound sections of the spur.

The two southbound lanes of the Gatlinburg Spur, cross from the west to east side of the West Prong 3.8 miles from the beginning of the road at Pigeon Forge. From here, the spur continues 0.2 mile before ending at the north edge of Gatlinburg.

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As the southbound lanes of the Gatlinburg Spur cross to the east side of the West Prong, there is an exit from the road. This allows motorists the opportunity to avoid the traffic in Gatlinburg by taking the Gatlinburg Bypass over the ridge which rises to the west of the this town.

The two-lane Gatlinburg Bypass climbs the ridge for 2 miles, then begins to descend into Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Two overlooks are located in this area, providing views down into Gatlinburg of the congestion and tourist attractions which are averted by this bypass.

The Gatlinburg Bypass crosses the West Prong of the Little Pigeon River at 3.5 miles. The road then continues a bit further to the intersection with the Newfound Gap Road in the park, a short distance from the Sugarlands Visitor Center.

The Origin of the Foothills Parkway

The construction of the Foothills Parkway stems directly from the decision of the federal government to locate the Blue Ridge Parkway in North Carolina rather than Tennessee. Both states lobbied for the road, and when the Department of the

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Interior announced that the Blue Ridge Parkway would run from Virginia to North Carolina, Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes stated that if the road proved to be successful, another parkway might be built in Tennessee.¹

The Foothills Parkway was authorized by Congress in February 1944, and was intended to provide a scenic drive around the north side of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, allowing motorists to view the mountains from the Tennessee foothills. On July 20 and 21, 1945, the Park Service's chief architect and other officials inspected the area from Chilhowee at the southwestern corner of the Park northeast to Pittmans Center for the site of the proposed Foothills Parkway.²

Similar to its role in the creation of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the state of Tennessee was responsible for acquiring the land on which the Foothills Parkway was to be built and turning it over to the federal government. The first section of the road this was done for was the Gatlinburg Spur. BPR

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¹ Lix, "A Short History of Great Smoky Mountains National Park," 87.

² Superintendent's Monthly Report, July 1945; GSMNP.

engineers met with Tennessee officials on May 2, 1949, to discuss the right-of-way for this part of the parkway.³ In December 1950, the local press reported that the state had secured deeds for the right-of-way for the section of the Gatlinburg Spur from Gatlinburg to Banner Bridge.⁴ However, due to delays on the part of Tennessee, the federal government did not receive the deeds for the 1.75 mile section until May 1951.⁵

Construction of the Gatlinburg Spur

Construction of the Foothills Parkway began with the Gatlinburg Spur, which would replace the old two-lane Tennessee Route 71 from Pigeon Forge to Gatlinburg with four lanes. Whereas both lanes of the old road were located on the east side of the West Prong of the Little Pigeon River, the Gatlinburg Spur would have two northbound lanes on the east side of the river and two southbound lanes on the west side.

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³ Superintendent's Monthly Report, May 1949; GSMNP.

⁴ Superintendent's Monthly Report, December 1950; GSMNP.

⁵ Superintendent's Monthly Report, May 1951; GSMNP.

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On September 26, 1951, Troitino and Brown of Asheville, North Carolina began a \$71,465 project to construct Dudley Creek Bridge, located on the southbound side. A quarry which supplied stone for the bridge was located near the site. The following day, Baskerville Builders of Knoxville, Tennessee, began construction of the West Prong Bridge, a \$157,750 project.⁶ Dudley Creek Bridge was completed on September 19, 1952,⁷ and West Prong Bridge on November 3.⁸

Construction of the Gatlinburg Spur from Gatlinburg to Banner Bridge, a \$170,327 project, was begun on September 16, 1952. Taylor Construction Company of Biltmore, South Carolina completed the project on April 30, 1954.⁹ Paving this section of the road, a \$67,610 project, was done by Hobart Greene and Sons, and completed on May 27, 1954.¹⁰

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⁶ Superintendent's Monthly Report, September 1951; GSMNP.

⁷ Superintendent's Monthly Report, September 1952; GSMNP.

⁸ Superintendent's Monthly Report, November 1952; GSMNP.

⁹ Superintendent's Monthly Report, April 1954; GSMNP.

¹⁰ Superintendent's Monthly Report, May 1954; GSMNP.

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The first section of the Foothills Parkway, the Gatlinburg Spur from the West Prong Bridge to Banner Bridge, was opened to traffic on July 14, 1953, using a temporary by-pass for access to Gatlinburg.¹¹ At Banner Bridge, where the new Gatlinburg Spur ended, the road returned to Tennessee Route 71.

Construction of the Gatlinburg Spur did not resume until April 25, 1957, when the Harrison Construction Company began work on the northbound lane from Bent Field to Caney Creek, a distance of 3.863 miles. The \$1,206,922 project included a tunnel through a ridge which protruded into the West Prong, causing the river to make a tight bend. If the road was to follow the river around this bend, it would have a dangerous sharp curve. However, a tunnel would allow the road to continue at a relatively straight alignment.¹² Excavation of the tunnel began in July,¹³ drilling was completed in December,¹⁴ and the tunnel lining was completed

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¹¹ Superintendent's Monthly Report, July 1953; GSMNP.

¹² Superintendent's Monthly Report, April 1957; GSMNP.

¹³ Superintendent's Monthly Report, July 1957; GSMNP.

¹⁴ Superintendent's Monthly Report, December 1957; GSMNP.

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on July 11, 1958.¹⁵ The tunnel portals were begun by the W.B. Dillard Construction Company on August 26,¹⁶ and completed on March 3, 1959.¹⁷

The 3.863 mile northbound lane project undertaken by the Harrison Construction Company also included a bridge at Huskey Grove, which was begun in March 1958¹⁸ and completed in September.¹⁹ The entire project was completed on October 29.²⁰

In August 1959, Garrett and Farris Construction of Knoxville began the cross-over bridges at Perrys Dam and Gum Stand, which would cross the West Prong and connect the northbound and southbound lanes of the Gatlinburg Spur.²¹ This \$216,231 project required that the old McCookville and Gum Stand bridges in Sevier County be removed and replaced by modern bridges. Work on both

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¹⁵ Superintendent's Monthly Report, July 1958; GSMNP.

¹⁶ Superintendent's Monthly Report, August 1958; GSMNP.

¹⁷ Superintendent's Monthly Report, February 1959; GSMNP.

¹⁸ Superintendent's Monthly Report, March 1958; GSMNP.

¹⁹ Superintendent's Monthly Report, September 1958; GSMNP.

²⁰ Superintendent's Monthly Report, October 1958; GSMNP.

²¹ Superintendent's Monthly Report, August 1959; GSMNP.

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bridges was completed in April 1960.²² The next bridge, the North Gatlinburg cross over bridge, a \$102,197 project, was begun by Harrison Construction Company in May 1960,²³ and completed on August 9, 1961.²⁴

A reconstruction of the southbound lane of the Gatlinburg Spur was begun by the Harrison Construction Company on September 17, 1959.²⁵ However, the project was suspended on August 25, 1961, because of slides in the Dripping Springs and Perrys Dam areas of the road. The Perrys Dam slide was still moving an average of 8" a day, and had spread onto 1.6 acres of private land adjacent to the right-of-way for the road. Geologists from the U.S. Geologic Survey (USGS) and BPR engineers arrived at the park to study the site and find a solution to the problem.²⁶

Both sides of the Gatlinburg Spur were opened to traffic on October 6, 1961. Two lanes were open in each direction except

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²² Superintendent's Monthly Report, April 1960; GSMNP.

²³ Superintendent's Monthly Report, May 1960; GSMNP.

²⁴ Superintendent's Monthly Report, July 1961; GSMNP.

²⁵ Superintendent's Monthly Report, October 1959; GSMNP.

²⁶ Superintendent's Monthly Report, August 1961; GSMNP.

between the Gum Stand and Perrys Dam bridges, where the southbound traffic was diverted onto the northbound side in order to avoid the slides.²⁷ Except for the slide area, the reconstruction project was completed on December 22, 1961. On December 26, work began on a temporary one-lane bridge around the slide at Perrys Dam Bridge.²⁸

A detour around the Perrys Dam slide was completed and opened to traffic on February 7, 1962.²⁹ The upper slide at Dripping Springs, which contained 3,600 yards of material, was eventually moved and the first section of the southbound lane from Perrys Dam Bridge to Gatlinburg opened to traffic on May 18, allowing the tunnel on the northbound side to resume two-way traffic northbound. The lower slide at Perrys Dam, which contained 9,700 yards of material, was a more difficult problem to correct. Additional asphalt was applied to the detour road

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²⁷ Superintendent's Monthly Report, October 1961; GSMNP.

²⁸ Superintendent's Monthly Report, December 1961; GSMNP.

²⁹ Superintendent's Monthly Report, February 1962; GSMNP.

around the slide, thereby allowing the remaining section of the southbound road to be opened to traffic on June 1, 1962.³⁰

Slides continued to plague the project, and on April 6 and 7, 1964, slides totaling 3,700 tons of material occurred at the Perrys Dam Bridge, temporarily closing the Gatlinburg Spur.³¹ Additional slides occurred in February 1965.³²

Jurisdiction of the Gatlinburg Spur

As originally planned, the Gatlinburg Spur was to be built by the federal government, but turned over to the state of Tennessee for administration. To facilitate this transfer, in January 1969, the Park Service sent letters to members of the Tennessee Congressional delegation, asking them to introduce legislation transferring the road to the state. Although the Park Service supported this transfer, there was also concern that

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³⁰ Superintendent's Monthly Report, May 1962; GSMNP.

³¹ Superintendent's Monthly Report, April 1964; GSMNP.

³² Superintendent's Monthly Report, February 1965; GSMNP.

Tennessee would allow the Gatlinburg Spur to be commercialized and lined with billboards.³³

House Resolution 2785, authorizing the transfer of the Gatlinburg Spur, was signed by President Nixon on August 9, 1969.³⁴ However, the Tennessee Highway Department refused to accept the road unless the Park Service made certain improvements to it, which the agency refused to carry out. As a result, jurisdiction of the Gatlinburg Spur remained under the Park Service.³⁵ Today, it is generally accepted within the agency that the Gatlinburg Spur will continue to remain under federal jurisdiction.

Construction of the Gatlinburg Bypass

Plans for construction of a bypass, leading from the end of the Gatlinburg Spur through the hills above Gatlinburg directly into Great Smoky Mountains National Park, were underway in 1961.

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³³ Staff Meeting Minutes, January 7, 1969; Box Staff Minutes; GSMNP.

³⁴ Staff meeting Minutes, September 2, 1969; Box Staff Minutes; GSMNP.

³⁵ Staff Meeting Minutes, April 2, 1973; Box Staff Minutes; GSMNP.

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This roadway would allow traffic to avoid congestion on the roads in town. However, the project was "eliminated" from the Foothills Parkway project on March 16, 1961, by the Park Service's southeast regional office.³⁶ Apparently, the Park Service wanted to place certain limitations on the use of the road by commercial traffic, which the state of Tennessee would not agree to. As a result, the Park Service decided to cancel the project rather than allow the bypass to be used inappropriately.³⁷

By 1964, an agreement was reached on the road, and the first section of the Gatlinburg Bypass, from the Gatlinburg Spur to Wiley Oakley Drive, was begun on July 14, 1964,³⁸ and completed on October 22, 1965.³⁹

In July 1965, the sections over the West Prong of the Little Pigeon River, and from Twomile Branch to the Campbell Lead Road,

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³⁶ Superintendent's Monthly Report, March 1961; GSMNP.

³⁷ Superintendent's Monthly Report, December 1960; GSMNP.

³⁸ Superintendent's Monthly Report, July 1964; GSMNP.

³⁹ Superintendent's Monthly Report, October 1965; GSMNP.

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were begun.⁴⁰ The Twomile Branch section was completed on July 19, 1967.⁴¹

Bridges over Wiley Oakley Drive and Campbell Lead Road were begun in May 1966.⁴² The full bridge project was completed on September 5, 1967.⁴³

The Bent Field interchange, a \$314,112 project, was begun by Troitino and Brown, Incorporated, of Asheville, North Carolina, in September 1966.⁴⁴ A bridge over the West Prong of the Little Pigeon River was included in this project, and was begun in October.⁴⁵ The project was completed in April 1968.⁴⁶

The Foothills Parkway From Chilhowee to Walland

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⁴⁰ Superintendent's Monthly Report, July 1965; GSMNP.

⁴¹ Staff Meeting Minutes, July 18, 1967; Box Staff Minutes; GSMNP.

⁴² Superintendent's Monthly Report, May 1966; GSMNP.

⁴³ Staff Meeting Minutes, September 5, 1967; Box Staff Minutes; GSMNP.

⁴⁴ Superintendent's Monthly Report, September 1966; GSMNP.

⁴⁵ Superintendent's Monthly Report, October 1966; GSMNP.

⁴⁶ Staff Meeting Minutes, April 16, 1968; Box Staff Minutes; GSMNP.

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A ground breaking ceremony for the main section of the Foothills Parkway, which was to run from Chilhowee at its western end to Interstate 40 in the east, was held on February 9, 1960, in Walland, Tennessee. The first part of the parkway to be built ran from Chilhowee east to Walland. The Look Rock developed area dividing the parkway into two sections, 8G to the east of Look Rock and 8H to the west. The construction of section 8G began on February 8, when the H.F. Ramsey Company of Asheville, North Carolina started a \$780,719 project to build 6.109 miles of the road from the Little River west to Station 332.⁴⁷ The project was completed on December 6, 1961.⁴⁸

The next section of the road, from Station 332 west 3.874 miles to Look Rock, a \$318,321 project, was begun by the Harrison Construction Company on August 15, 1960.⁴⁹ The project was completed on December 12, 1962.⁵⁰

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⁴⁷ Superintendent's Monthly Report, January 1960; GSMNP.

⁴⁸ Superintendent's Monthly Report, December 1961; GSMNP.

⁴⁹ Superintendent's Monthly Report, August 1960; GSMNP.

⁵⁰ Superintendent's Monthly Report, December 1962; GSMNP.

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Several land slides occurred in November 1962 on the completed section of the Foothills Parkway between Little River and Station 332, requiring the reconstruction of 6.1 miles of the road. That month, crews began moving the slides, stabilizing slopes and fills, and clearing drainage in the slide areas.⁵¹ Further slope stabilization was required in July 1964,⁵² and slide removal was again needed in May 1965.⁵³ Reconstruction of the road was completed on August 31, 1965, and the Foothills Parkway was opened from Walland to Look Rock on September 3.⁵⁴

Construction of section 8H of the Foothills Parkway, 6.857 miles from Look Rock to Chilhowee, a \$966,493 project, was begun by the Macon Construction Company, Incorporated of Franklin, North Carolina in August 1963.⁵⁵ The project was completed on June 27, 1966.⁵⁶

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⁵¹ Superintendent's Monthly Report, November 1962; GSMNP.

⁵² Superintendent's Monthly Report, July 1964; GSMNP.

⁵³ Superintendent's Monthly Report, April 1965; GSMNP.

⁵⁴ Superintendent's Monthly Report, August 1965; GSMNP.

⁵⁵ Superintendent's Monthly Report, August 1963; GSMNP.

⁵⁶ Superintendent's Monthly Report, June 1966; GSMNP.

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The largest development planned for the Foothills Parkway was at Look Rock, where a campground was to be located. In December 1962 and January 1963, test wells for water were drilled in the area. The USGS tested the wells on February 1, and found a sustained yield of 30 gallons of water per minute, which was "believed to be sufficient for the proposed campground."⁵⁷

Construction of an access road and bridge for grade separation at Look Rock began in August 1964.⁵⁸ The bridge was completed in March 1965.⁵⁹ With the completion of Foothills Parkway section 8G from Walland to Look Rock in August, the Look Rock Campground was opened on September 3, 1965.⁶⁰ Construction of an observation tower at Look Rock was begun in April 1966,⁶¹ and completed in July 1967.⁶²

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⁵⁷ Superintendent's Monthly Report, January 1963; GSMNP.

⁵⁸ Superintendent's Monthly Report, August 1964; GSMNP.

⁵⁹ Superintendent's Monthly Report, March 1965; GSMNP.

⁶⁰ Superintendent's Monthly Report, August 1965; GSMNP.

⁶¹ Superintendent's Monthly Report, May 1966; GSMNP.

⁶² Staff Meeting Minutes, August 1, 1967; Box Staff Minutes; GSMNP.

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The full section of the Foothills Parkway from Walland to Chilhowee was dedicated on June 11, 1966.⁶³ Although opened, this part of the road was surfaced with gravel only, and was not paved until 1969.⁶⁴

The Foothills Parkway From Interstate 40 to Cosby

Construction of section 8A of the Foothills Parkway, which ran for 6 miles from Interstate 40 west to Tennessee Route 32 in the town of Cosby, a \$1,615,937 project, was begun by the Ramsey Construction Company of Asheville, North Carolina in July 1964.⁶⁵

The work on the Foothills Parkway was different than that on other roads in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, as more large cuts were made in order to keep a relatively straight road alignment which was considered safer for motorists. However, these cuts created unsightly scars on the roadsides.

Contemporary photographs of the construction of the Foothills Parkway included in the superintendent's monthly reports document

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⁶³ Superintendent's Monthly Report, June 1966; GSMNP.

⁶⁴ Staff Meeting Minutes, August 19, 1969; Box Staff Minutes; GSMNP.

⁶⁵ Superintendent's Monthly Report, July 1964; GSMNP.

the effects of this modern construction method. One photograph in particular of section 8A, taken from the town of Cosby, shows several large scars where the road was cut into the south side of Green Mountain.⁶⁶ As present-day motorists travel through Cosby, some of these same scars are still visible.

In addition to scarring the roadsides, the large cuts used in the construction of the Foothills Parkway led to a number of land slides along the road, particularly on the Gatlinburg Spur, where slides were a recurring problem. In May 1965, slides on section 8A had to be cleared and the project was delayed.⁶⁷

Section 8A was opened to the public on October 8, 1969,⁶⁸ and the project was completed on October 21.⁶⁹ The following year, further slides necessitated a slope stabilization project

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⁶⁶ Superintendent's Monthly Report, April 1965; GSMNP.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Staff Meeting Minutes, September 7, 1969; Box Staff Minutes; GSMNP.

⁶⁹ Staff Meeting Minutes, November 21, 1969; Box Staff Minutes; GSMNP.

which took three months to complete.⁷⁰ Slope stabilization work continues on the road today.

The Foothills Parkway from Walland to Wear Valley

Section 8F of the Foothills Parkway, from Walland east to Carr Creek, a \$1,114,939 project, was begun by the Hobart Construction Corporation of Birmingham, Alabama, in July 1966.⁷¹ The roadbed portion of the project was completed in November⁷² and the bridges in December of 1967.⁷³ The bridge at Walland, which carried U.S. Highway 321 over the Foothills Parkway, was opened to traffic in March 1968.⁷⁴

Like other sections of the Parkway, 8F was plagued by landslides where the road was cut into the side of ridges, and in

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⁷⁰ Monthly Progress Report, November 1970; Maintenance Division Files; Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

⁷¹ Superintendent's Monthly Report, July 1966; GSMNP.

⁷² Staff Meeting Minutes, November 11, 1967; Box Staff Minutes; GSMNP.

⁷³ Staff Meeting Minutes, December 6, 1967; Box Staff Minutes; GSMNP.

⁷⁴ Staff Meeting Minutes, April 1, 1968; Box Staff Minutes; GSMNP.

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June 1970, Charles Blalock and Sons, Incorporated of Sevierville, Tennessee began a \$49,463 slope stabilization program on the incomplete road. As a result of the slide conditions, the BPR "recommended" and the Park Service "agreed that in the interest of public safety this road should not be opened to the public with the existing condition," and "any further corrective" work on the road would result in a "reoccurrence" of the slide.⁷⁵ The slope stabilization project was completed in December,⁷⁶ but no further progress was made on finishing this section of the Foothills Parkway.

Plans had been prepared for the construction of Foothills Parkway section 8E1, Wear Cove to Carr Creek, and 8E2, Carr Creek to Caylor Gap. However, in May 1968, the Park Service decided to delay the Carr Creek to Caylor Gap section of the road because of a lack of funding.⁷⁷

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⁷⁵ Monthly Progress Report, June 1970; Maintenance Division Files; GSMNP.

⁷⁶ Monthly Progress Report, September 1970; Maintenance Division Files; Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

⁷⁷ Staff Meeting Minutes, May 7, 1968; Box Staff Minutes; GSMNP.

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The lack of progress on the Foothills Parkway following the completion of the roadway and bridges on section 8F in December 1967 became a serious issue for the Park Service. Residents of eastern Tennessee, who hoped to receive an economic boost from the increase in tourism which it was believed would accompany the new road, called upon the federal government to complete the project. However, funding the project was a problem, and no further work ensued.

During an October 15, 1976, meeting of the Tennessee Great Smoky Mountains Park Commission, officials of the Tennessee state government and various eastern Tennessee civic organizations expressed their "concern over the lack of progress" on the Foothills Parkway to Great Smoky Mountains National Park staff members attending the meeting. The federal officials explained that at this time, "not continuing construction" of the road was being discussed within the Park Service.⁷⁸

Although the Park Service was considering canceling the Foothills Parkway project, Tennessee wanted the road completed

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⁷⁸ Staff Meeting Minutes, October 19, 1976; Staff Meeting Minutes; GSMNP.

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and offered to continue construction itself. As a result, in 1982 the state of Tennessee and the Department of the Interior reached an agreement in which the state, using Park Service and federal highway funding, and under the supervision of the FHWA, would build section 8E from Carr Creek to Wear Valley and section 8D from Wear Valley to the north end of the Gatlinburg Spur in Pigeon Forge, a total of 19.5 miles of roadway.⁷⁹ However, the state's plans were altered, and in August 1983, the Tennessee Department of Transportation proposed that it would complete the unpaved section 8F and construct the 9.7 miles of section 8E, thereby continuing the Foothills Parkway at least as far as Wear Valley.⁸⁰ By April 1984, the Park Service and the FHWA came to an agreement with Tennessee to let the state start building the road the following month.⁸¹

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⁷⁹ Briefing Statement, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, August 26, 1993; Foothills Parkway Vertical File; GSMNP Library.

⁸⁰ Staff Meeting Minutes, August 17, 1983; Box Staff Minutes; GSMNP.

⁸¹ Staff Meeting Minutes, April 14, 1984; Box Staff Minutes; GSMNP.

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Clearing for section 8E began in May or June 1984,⁸² and in July, Charles Blalock and Sons began construction of part of the roadbed from Wear Valley 5 miles west to Caylor Gap.⁸³ A second contractor began construction of the 4-mile section of the road from Carr Creek east to Caylor Gap in 1985. A 1.65 mile section of the road was to go through "exceedingly rugged terrain around Caylor Gap," but fears that slides even worse than those encountered during the construction of the other parts of section 8E would occur at Caylor Gap caused this area to be "deleted" from the two construction contracts, and no work was done on what became the "missing link" in the Foothills Parkway.⁸⁴

By July 1986, continued slides and the erosion of soil led the Park Service to recommend to Tennessee that work on the Foothills Parkway be halted in order "to review environmental

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⁸² Staff Meeting Minutes, June 19, 1984; Box Staff Minutes; GSMNP.

⁸³ Staff Meeting Minutes, July 17, 1985; Box Staff Minutes; GSMNP. Briefing Statement, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, August 26, 1993; Foothills Parkway Vertical File; GSMNP Library.

⁸⁴ Briefing Statement, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, August 26, 1993; Foothills Parkway Vertical File; GSMNP Library.

concerns and find a resolution to wall failures" on the road.⁸⁵

The agency was particularly concerned about pyritic material in the soil which had been exposed by the various cuts made for the road. According to the Park Service's 1994 environmental review of the Foothills Parkway, "[w]hen exposed to water and air, this material turns into sulfuric acid. All biological life of the headwaters of three streams was killed during construction."

After the project was temporarily halted in 1986 because of recurring slides, the road cuts were "left exposed with no vegetation" and erosion allowed sediment to enter streams, killing fish and insects. This led the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) to sue the Park Service, FHWA, and the Tennessee Department of Transportation, "directing the agencies to stop work and correct the water quality problems...." At the same time, the Park Service had filed for water quality permits from the TDEC to construct Foothills Parkway section 8D to Pigeon Forge. However, the "permits were

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⁸⁵ Staff Meeting Minutes, July 22, 1986; Box Staff Minutes; GSMNP.

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denied" because of the water pollution caused by the construction of section 8E.⁸⁶

The Park Service had planned to resume construction of Foothills Parkway sections 8D and 8E following the delay which began in 1986 when work was halted to correct land slides. In 1993 and 1994, new designs for the road were being drawn up to correct the slide problems encountered along the road.⁸⁷ For the rugged area at Caylor Gap, ten bridges and road sections "cantilevered out from the mountain sides" would be used in order to "minimize" damaging road cuts.⁸⁸ However, in 1993, there was concern over the environmental problems encountered in the previous work on section 8E, and the TDEC's decision not to issue a construction permit for section 8D because of water quality problems. This led the Park Service to begin the preparation of

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⁸⁶ *Environmental Impact Statement, Foothills Parkway, Section 8D, Volume 1, August 8, 1984 (draft), 3-4; Foothills Parkway Vertical File; GSMNP Library.*

⁸⁷ Staff Meeting Minutes, October 26, 1993; Box Staff Minutes; GSMNP. Staff Meeting Minutes, January 11, 1994; Box Staff Minutes; GSMNP.

⁸⁸ Briefing Statement, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, August 26, 1993; Foothills Parkway Vertical File; GSMNP Library.

an environmental impact statement for section 8D in order to
"fully assess the impacts and propose mitigation for the design"
of the road.⁸⁹

The Current State of the Foothills Parkway

At the behest of the Foothills Parkway Association and the Smoky Mountains Visitors Bureau, both of which want to see the Foothills Parkway completed, the Park Service opened the incomplete section of the road between Walland and the missing link for one weekend in 1993 and another in 1994 to allow motorists to view the fall foliage.⁹⁰ Also in 1994, Secretary of Transportation Fredrico Pena and Tennessee Senator Jim Sasser traveled over the closed section of the parkway and pledged to see it completed. When interviewed about this pledge, a Park

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⁸⁹ Briefing Statement, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, August 26, 1993; Foothills Parkway Vertical File; Library GSMNP. *Environmental Impact Statement, Foothills Parkway, Section 8D, Volume 1, August 8, 1984 (draft), 3-4; Foothills Parkway Vertical File; GSMNP Library.*

⁹⁰ "Sneak Preview A Hit," *The Daily Times* 25 October 1993, 2A. "Flocking to Foothills for Colors," *The Daily Times* 24 October 1994, 2A.

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Service official stated: "as far as I know, there isn't any money at all appropriated for completing this missing section."⁹¹

To date, the Foothills Parkway has come no closer to completion, and the Park Service appears to be in no rush to resume the project.

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⁹¹ "Missing Link: Secretary of Transportation Visits Unfinished Parkway" *The Mountain Press* 15 October 1994, 1.

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David Haas, Photographer, 1996

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BRIDGE OVER STATE ROUTE 321 ON UNOPENED SECTION OF FOOTHILLS
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FOOTHILLS
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