



Copy referred to Blair, G.C. : By Region One 9/9/51

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

In reply refer to:

Act	Info	File
Superintendent	9/8/51	9/8
Asst. Dir.	9/8/51	9/8
Resident		
Region		
Chief		
Assistant		
File		

September 5, 1950

Hon. Robert L. Doughton
House of Representatives
Washington 25, D. C.

Dear Congressman Doughton:

In compliance with Mr. Mackin's telephonic request that this Service look into the matter of the origin of the idea for the construction of the Blue Ridge Parkway in North Carolina and Virginia, there is quoted below a statement prepared by Mr. Robert E. Young, Chief, Historical Investigations Branch, History Division, of this Service:

"The question of whether any one individual is solely responsible for advancing the original idea for the beginning of any particular project is always subject to controversy, and it would be particularly so in the case of the proposal to build a scenic parkway between the Great Smoky Mountains and Shenandoah National Parks. It appears entirely probable that the particular proposal for the undertaking of this project, which actually bore fruit and resulted in the beginning of construction of the present Parkway, may be said to date from the early emergency days of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's first administration. On the other hand, detailed research may reveal that a proposal to build a scenic parkway in the Blue Ridge mountains may have been presented much earlier in connection with the proposals to establish national parks in the Southern Appalachians, which our own detailed researches have established as dating back to 1879 in North Carolina and to the early 1920's in Virginia. In addition, it should be pointed out that it is entirely possible that the general idea of connecting these new eastern national parks by a scenic highway may have been, in part, an outgrowth of the park-to-park, highway movement which

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Stephen T. Mather sponsored during his administration as the first Director of the Service. To establish the connection of these earlier and general background proposals with the proposal successfully advanced in 1933 for the creation of a mountain parkway between the Great Smoky Mountains and Shenandoah National Parks would require long and extended research."

I understand that the request for this information was based upon an inquiry sent to you by an Asheville, North Carolina, newspaper. While, as Mr. Young states, it would require long and extended research to establish the connection of the earlier and general background proposals with the proposal successfully advanced in 1933 for the creation of a mountain parkway between the Great Smoky Mountains and Shenandoah National Parks, it is hoped that this information will enable you to reply to the inquiry received by you.

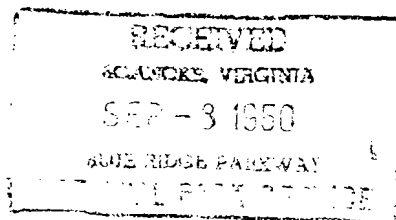
With best regards,

Sincerely yours,

HILLORY A. TOLSON

Hillory A. Tolson
Acting Director

Copy to: Reg. Dir., Region One (2)



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF HIGHWAYS

April 27, 1951.

Mr. B. F. Moomaw, President,
Blue Ridge Parkway Associated Chambers of Commerce,
108 Kirk Avenue, S. W.,
Roanoke 1, Virginia.

Dear Ben:

This refers to your letter of April 26 regarding the beginnings of the Blue Ridge Parkway project. I am not sure that I know all about this. The Honorable George Radcliffe was chairman of the regional PWA Advisory Committee. Soon afterwards he was U.S. Senator from Maryland.

In addition to our PWA Committee, Bob Preston, you and I, I recall the following as being present with Governor Pollard at the luncheon: Colonel Hodges and Morton Wallerstein along with Major Fleming, now General Fleming, Executive Officer of PWA, and I believe a gentleman from Maryland with Senator Radcliffe. So far as I can now recall, Senator Byrd was not at the luncheon that day. I believe the possibility of the Parkway was discussed at the luncheon and Senator Radcliffe took considerable interest in it. I also believe that Willis Robertson and Senator Byrd probably approached the matter with the President when they had him at a CCC Camp in the Shenandoah Park.

A little later my office was requested to prepare an estimate of cost and the method of financing. Still a bit later officials in Tennessee and North Carolina were contacted. Then Senator Byrd called a meeting in the Senate Office Building in Washington and discussed the project with representatives of all three states. It was then decided to ask for the project as a Federal Highway rather than as a joint State-Federal proposition or as a toll road. Still later probably Senator Radcliffe got the President to have Secretary Ickes make the initial allocation of five or six million to the project.

I shall be glad to be put straight on any details where I have gone astray. If I can be of further service kindly let me know.

With warm regards and every good wish,

Sincerely yours,

J. A. Anderson
J. A. Anderson, Commissioner.

1:s.

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The Roanoke Times
9/11/51

LETTERS TO EDITOR

The Reader Speaks

Senator Byrd Given Credit For First Suggesting To President Roosevelt Building Of Blue Ridge Parkway To Peaks Of Otter.

I have just read with a good deal of interest the editorial in Saturday's Times entitled "Lift Up Thine Eyes Unto the Hills."

You say in this editorial that, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt paid his first visit to the Shenandoah National Park, "someone in the party" suggested the possibility of a mountain drive or parkway connecting the Shenandoah National Park in Virginia with the Great Smoky National Park in North Carolina and Tennessee. I happen to know that this "someone" was Senator Harry F. Byrd who was at that time on more friendly terms with President Roosevelt than he was in later years. While Senator Byrd was Governor of Virginia, he paid me a visit at my home in Bedford, and I took him up to the Peaks of Otter. He was so impressed with the beauty of the scenery there that his suggestion to the President was "Why not extend it down to the Peaks of Otter?" The President of course had to be told about the Peaks of Otter, which Senator Byrd proceeded to do.

When Senator Byrd's suggestion was made public, the representatives from North Carolina and Tennessee got on the bandwagon with the idea of pushing it through to the Great Smoky Mountains. Governor Pollard appointed a committee of five to promote this project, consisting of Powell Glass and myself and three other gentlemen, one of whom was connected with the Roanoke Times at that time. A meeting was held in Washington, consisting of this committee, representatives from the Park Service, the Bureau of Public Roads and the Forest Service, and senators and congressmen from the three states involved. We suggested a plan which had been worked out by General Anderson, the State Highway Commissioner, who was then connected with V. M. I., to build this road as a toll road with a view of having

it pay for itself. The enthusiasm at the meeting was so strong that it was decided to build it not as a toll road but out of public funds. I remember very distinctly asking Senator Byrd as we came out of the meeting if he thought he could get Congress to appropriate the money for this project, which at that time was estimated at \$16,000,000. He said it would not be necessary for Congress to make any appropriation, that the President had turned over to Secretary Ickes many millions of dollars to be used in putting unemployed back to work, the idea being to spend ourselves into prosperity. Senator Byrd and one of the senators from North Carolina called on Secretary Ickes and he O. K.'d the expenditure of the necessary money, estimated at that time, to complete the project.

There were many details in connection with the promotion of this project which I of course have not included in this letter, but I do feel very strongly that Senator Byrd is entitled to more credit for the building of this Parkway than any other one person.

HUNTER MILLER
Richmond, Va., Sept. 10, 1951.

* * *

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Box 54, Folder 7

BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY
P. O. Box 1710
Roanoke 8, Virginia

November 10, 1953

Hon. Harry F. Byrd
United States Senate
Washington, D.C.

Dear Senator Byrd:

We are trying to compile a history of the Blue Ridge Parkway and will appreciate any assistance you can give us in this undertaking.

A number of versions, none supported by any evidence, have come down to us about its beginning. One of these is that during the first visit of President Roosevelt to Shenandoah National Park in 1933 you suggested to him that the Skyline Drive be extended to Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Another account has it that the suggestion was made by a representative of the National Park Service on this same inspection. Still another version is offered by Mr. Theodore E. Straus of Baltimore who was at that time with the Public Works Administration and who claims the Parkway is his idea, that he proposed it during a luncheon at the Executive Mansion in September 1933 following a meeting of the League of Virginia Municipalities. We believe you were also present at the luncheon.

It seems more reasonable to us that the inspection of the Skyline Drive suggested the possibility of a road connecting Shenandoah and Great Smokies, but we have no evidence that this is so. If we could establish the dates of the inspection and luncheon, it might be helpful. Do you have any correspondence or notes which might assist us?

According to the best information we have it was immediately after the luncheon that you were requested by Governor Pollard to head up a Virginia Committee and at the same time Governor Pollard communicated with the Governors of North Carolina and Tennessee about the project. We believe the thinking at that time was to build the Parkway as a joint Federal-State project or toll road and that it was not until after a meeting called by you in the Senate Office Building in Washington which was attended by representatives from the three States involved and their representatives in Congress that it was decided the road should be built as a Federal highway. Was a recommendation prepared as a result of this meeting and if so to whom was it presented? We assume the meeting occurred prior to November 18, 1933 when Mr. Ickes notified Director

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Commerer of the National Park Service that the President had approved the proposed Parkway on the basis that the three States would defray costs of location surveys and acquire and deed to the United States rights-of-way for the Parkway.

As you can see we have just made a start on this job, but you like Kilroy seem to have been everywhere before us and we would appreciate your help in getting the history underway.

Sincerely,

Sam P. Weems
Superintendent

In duplicate

EUGENE D. MILLIKIN, COLO., CHAIRMAN

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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

President amplified the picture. He said he would like to see the road begin at the Canadian border in Vermont and sweep down through the Green Mountains, through the Berkshires and to the Blue Ridge, joining the Senator's project. This would be a great thing, a great thing for the interior life of our people. There shouldn't be a billboard in sight . . . ".

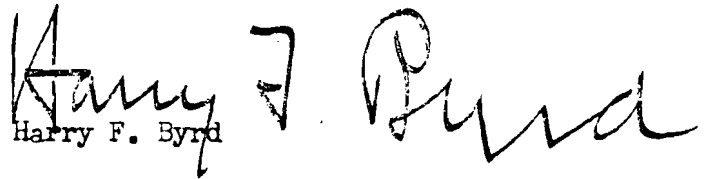
I do not recall the meeting referred to by Mr. Straus.

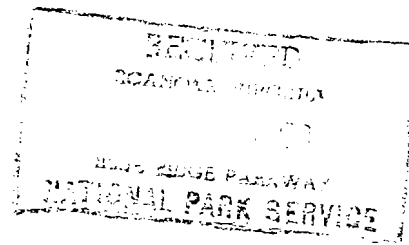
As Chairman of the Committee on the right-of-way, I received the active and enthusiastic cooperation from the governors of the three states, and in a very short time this right-of-way was secured over entirely new territory where no road then existed, and the deeds were duly transferred to the Federal Government.

I feel certain my recollection is correct, but, if you would desire me to go over my correspondence, I will do so. However, this would be quite a job, as it dates back to 1933, and all of my correspondence is filed away in the Senate Office Building.

With best wishes, I am

Faithfully yours,


Harry F. Byrd



Hunter Miller
Box 1395
Richmond, Virginia

December 10, 1953

Mr. Sam P. Weems, Superintendent
Blue Ridge Parkway
Box 1710
Roanoke 8, Virginia

Dear Sam:

Senator Byrd has forwarded to me your letter of November tenth, advising that you are trying to compile a history of the Blue Ridge Parkway, and asking Senator Byrd for any assistance he can give in this undertaking, together with copy of his reply.

My very distinct recollection about this project is that, when Senator Byrd rode with President Roosevelt over at least a part of the Skyline Drive for the first time, the President was so impressed with it that Senator Byrd made the suggestion that it be extended further south. My recollection is that Senator Byrd first suggested taking it down to the Peaks of Otter, as I had recently shown him the Peaks; and then the people from North Carolina and Tennessee got on the bandwagon and asked that it come through to the Great Smoky Mountains. Senator Byrd may be right in that his first suggestion was that it be continued through to the Great Smoky Mountains. It may be that Mr. Theodore E. Straus or some representative of the National Park Service conceived the idea, but certainly so far as the public is concerned Senator Byrd was the first one to make the suggestion to the President about extending the Skyline Drive south, and he was responsible for the first sixteen million allocated for this project.

After the suggestion was made, Governor Pollard appointed a committee composed of Powell Glass of Lynchburg and a gentleman connected with the Roanoke Times, then living in Salem, both of whom are now dead, and myself; there were two other members, one of whom may have been Jay Johns of Charlottesville.

General James A. Anderson, a professor at V. M. I., had at that time been loaned to the Federal Government and was in charge of the P. W. A. office in Richmond. He and his office force had worked out three methods whereby this Parkway might be constructed: first, that it be built as a toll road, the cost of same to be amortized by the tolls collected; second, that it be built as a joint State and Federal project; and, third, that it be a Federal project entirely.

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December 10, 1953
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At the request of our committee, Senator Byrd arranged a meeting in Washington to consider this project. At that meeting there were representatives from the three states, Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee, Mr. Cammerer, then the head of the National Park Service, the head of the Bureau of Public Roads, and the head of the Forest Service. It will be recalled that a lot of this highway passed through a considerable amount of the National Forest which had already been acquired by the Federal government. Senator Byrd presided at that meeting. When General Anderson stated that he had these three plans worked out, Senator Byrd said, "You may put the first two under the table, and we will consider only the last one." There was a great deal of enthusiasm from all parties concerned, and it was unanimously agreed by that group that the Parkway be built at the expense of the Federal government.

When we left that meeting, I recall saying to Senator Byrd, with whom I happened to be walking, "Harry, do you think you can get Congress to appropriate sixteen million dollars for this project?" to which he replied, "We don't have to ask Congress for anything. The President has already authorized Secretary Ickes to spend many millions of dollars to put the unemployed back to work, and this project should come under that head." As I further recall it, Senator Byrd went that same day to Secretary Ickes' office and Secretary Ickes agreed and did O.K. the expenditure of the sixteen million dollars to complete this project; I believe it was forty thousand dollars a mile.

The condition was that the three states through which this highway would pass would furnish the rights of way. This of course took some time and, before the work got well under way, the cost of construction pyramided so rapidly that the sixteen million was not nearly enough to complete the project, and what has been expended since that time has been appropriated by Congress from time to time.

There have been several efforts made to prove that persons other than Senator Byrd are responsible for the beginning of this project. Some time ago it was proposed by representatives from North Carolina--in fact, I believe a bill was introduced--that the name of the Blue Ridge Parkway be changed to Daughton Parkway. It was said at that time that Congressman Daughton from North Carolina was primarily responsible for the building of this highway. I took the matter up with Senator Byrd and was prepared to publish a statement to correct that, but in the meantime Congressman Daughton asked that the bill be withdrawn, and Senator Byrd advised that we not push the matter further.

I can readily understand Senator Byrd's failure to recall the suggestion that it might be built as a toll road, as this was not really discussed at the meeting, although General Anderson and his force had spent some time working out the plan whereby that might be done. I might add that I have just discussed this with General Anderson, who is now the

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Virginia State Highway Commissioner, and his recollection fully coincides with mine.

The General Assembly of Virginia, on March 12, 1936, passed an act authorizing the State Highway Department to acquire the rights of way, by gift, purchase, condemnation, or otherwise. This act is published in the Acts of the Virginia Assembly of 1936, page 279. I was a member of the Senate at that time and assisted in getting this bill passed. If you care to see this act, it can no doubt be found in almost any attorney's office in Roanoke. You will notice that this act refers to the Shenandoah Great Smoky Mountains National Parkway. I don't recall when or by whom the name was changed to the Blue Ridge Parkway, but I think it was done by the National Park Service.

If I can give you any further information, please don't hesitate to call on me.

Very sincerely yours,


Hunter Miller.

cc Honorable Harry F. Byrd
cc General James A. Anderson

