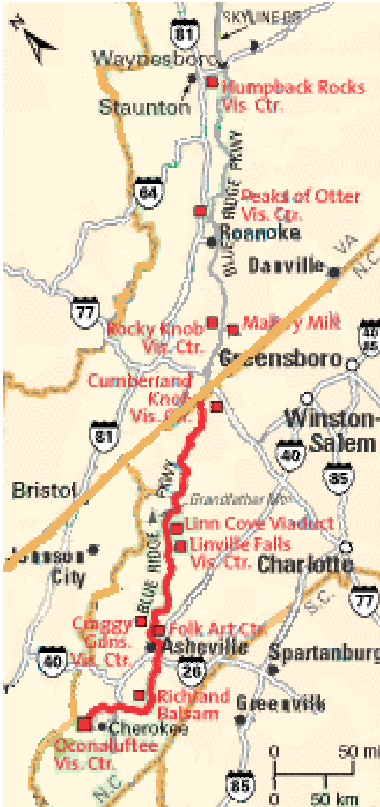


The Gift of the Blue Ridge Parkway



Our extraordinary state contains many natural gifts. From its pearl necklace of barrier islands known as the Outer Banks to the hazy peaks of the Appalachian Mountains, North Carolina is full of beauty. It is no wonder that in 1935 ground was broken for the Blue Ridge Parkway. This 469-mile road crests the mountains from Virginia through a large portion of North Carolina.

The parkway is a lush ribbon of road slicing through rock and forest. Its history is full of amazing engineering feats, inspired vision, and some nasty political fights.

So, what is the Blue Ridge Parkway and how did it come to be? A parkway is a road that crosses an area of natural beauty and is wider than a regular thoroughfare. It does not allow billboards or have many intersections so travelers can drive leisurely and appreciate the scenery. The speed limit is moderate.

How the parkway came to be is much more complicated. It began in 1933 when a group of southern politicians had the idea that a road crossing the Appalachians would bring many fine gifts to many good people. The first gift would be to bring new transportation access to people living in the mountains, allowing them to improve their economic conditions. The second gift would be to share the loveliness of the Appalachians with all Americans. The third gift would be to employ many people on the construction project. The 1930s was the time of the Great Depression and hundreds of thousands of people were without work.

This idea was not easy to implement, however, because people from Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee couldn't agree on the path of the parkway, its cost, and how to build it. Many congressmen, government officials, businessmen, and even President Franklin D. Roosevelt had different ideas on the best way to provide for the residents of the mountains and Americans needing jobs.

The argument lasted for fifteen years. North Carolina and Tennessee both felt the parkway should cut through their "neck of the mountains." The solution of that disagreement gave most of the Blue Ridge Parkway to North Carolina, much to the distress of the state of Tennessee.

Today, when we drive the parkway in its autumn glory or look at a meadow of beautiful April wildflowers, we don't have to think of such political matters. We only have to open

our eyes, take in the grandeur of the highlands, and thank those politicians back in the 1930s for their vision of cutting a parkway through solid rock!