

Generals Highway Roads and Bridges

Sequoia National Park, California

1875
The Giant Forest first visited and named by John Muir

1886
Kaweah Colony organized, and construction of the Colony Mill Road began

1890
Sequoia became second National Park in the country

1903
U.S. Army completed extension of Colony Mill Road to Giant Forest

1907-1910
Mt. Whitney Power Co. constructed wagon road to Hospital Rock

1913
Automobiles first authorized to enter the Park

1925-1926
Generals Highway completed and dedicated to the Giant Forest

1926
NPS agreement with Bureau of Public Roads

1935
Completion and dedication of the Generals Highway to General Grant National Park

1993
HAER team documents the Generals Highway

Early Park Roads

Sequoia was designated a national park on September 25, 1890. The early military superintendents of the park soon discovered that only two wagon roads entered the park boundaries; the Mineral King and Colony Mill roads. These two roads, although steep, prone to winter washout, and narrow, remained the primary roads into the park until the opening of the Generals Highway in 1926. The Mineral King Wagon and Toll Road, built in 1879, provided an access route into the new park, as it connected the foothill commun-

nity of Three Rivers with the mountain mining community of Mineral King. The Colony Mill Road was begun by the socialist Kaweah Colony in 1886 as a link to its land claims in the Giant Forest area and a nearby mill. The colonists' road was only completed to their mill site, 8.7 miles below the Giant Forest.

The need for improved roads in Sequoia was apparent to the park's early managers, as a route was desperately needed to reach the highly desirable Giant Forest grove of Big Trees. For many years a lack of funding prohibited road improvements within the park. Finally, in 1900 the park received its first appropriations for road work, and the extension of the Colony Mill Road to the Giant Forest was completed in 1903.

The Mount Whitney Power Company or "Elk Park" Road was the third major road to enter the park prior to the construction of the Generals Highway. The power company was granted a right-of-way under a special use permit with the Department of the Interior, allowing for the construction of flumes, ditches, etc. within the park. Under this agreement the power company constructed a wagon road along the Middle Fork Canyon to Hospital Rock. Anticipating completion of this new road, the Army began construction of a road down from Giant Forest to connect with the power company road at Hospital Rock. However, the "Smith Grade," begun in 1909, was only completed from Camp Sequoia at Commissary Curve to Eleven Range Point, and never reached Hospital Rock.

The Generals Highway

After World War I, the park's system of wagon roads was recognized to be inadequate for the many automobiles entering the park, and under the supervision of National Park Service Director Stephen T. Mather a new road was surveyed to provide auto access to the Giant Forest. The Peters Survey, completed in 1919, first identified the route that would become the Generals Highway. The new road would connect the existing Mt. Whitney Power Company route at Hospital Rock with the Giant Forest by way of a switchback ascent on Deer

Ridge. The original design specified a one-way road to the forest utilizing the Colony Mill route as the exit. Construction of the one-way highway began in 1921, but by 1923 a decision was made to widen the new route to a two-way road. The Colony Mill Road was closed to visitor use following the completion of the Generals Highway to Giant Forest in 1926.

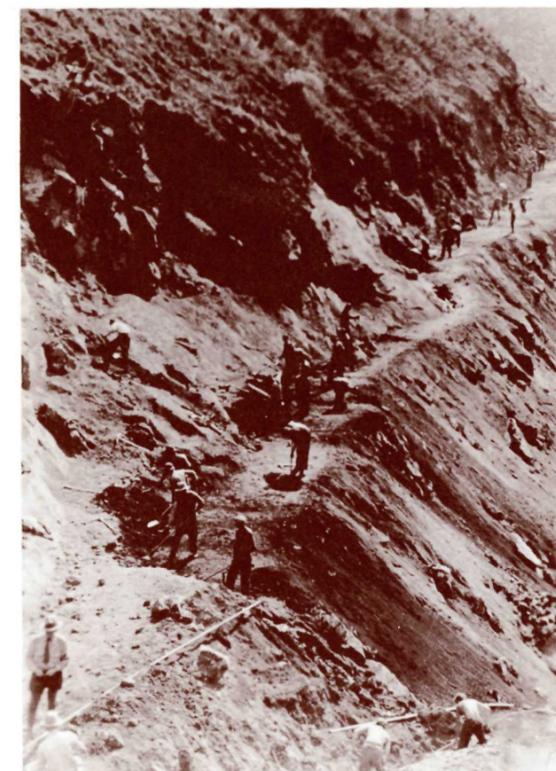
The highway's extension from Giant Forest Village to the northern park boundary and on to General Grant National Park was begun by the Bureau of Public Roads in 1926. The National Park Service and the Bureau of Public Roads signed a joint agreement in January 1926 for the survey, construction, and improvement of major roads within national parks and monuments. Under this agreement, the Bureau of Public Roads supervised the extension of the highway from the Giant Forest Village to the park's northern boundary at Lost Grove,



Just before the cutting of the General Noble Tree in 1892 for display at the Chicago World's Fair.

the construction of two bridges, many culverts, the reconstruction of the road below Hospital Rock, and the paving of the entire highway.

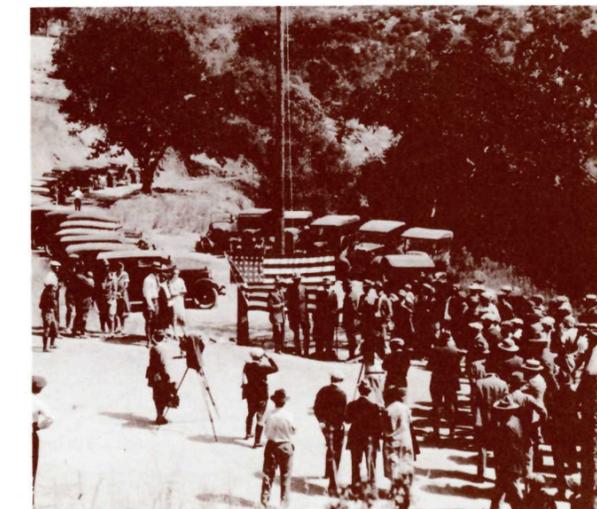
The northern section of the Generals Highway was dedicated on June 23, 1935, offering a one-day scenic loop connecting two of the largest sequoia trees, the General Sherman Tree in Sequoia National Park and the General Grant Tree in General Grant National Park (now part of Kings Canyon NP). The linking of the two "General" trees gave the highway its official name.



Civilian Conservation Corps enrollees working on road construction in Sequoia.

National Park Service Rustic Roads

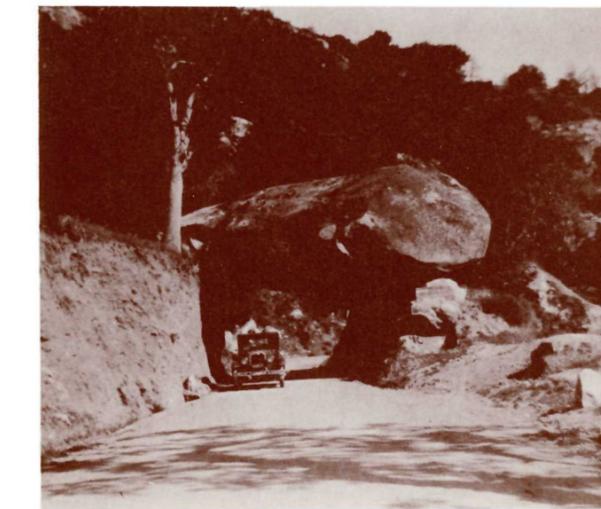
Park roads in both design and purpose are unlike most state and federal highways found outside park boundaries. The primary purpose of park roads is to provide access to the scenic and cultural wonders "preserved" within, while altering the existing landscape as little as possible. Park roads are not required to be the quickest and most direct route, and therefore can follow a path dictated by scenic and historic interest rather than topography. Under the supervision of landscape architects, the design and construction of Generals Highway from 1921 through 1935 followed strict guidelines in order to ensure the preservation of the natural landscape. Restrictions on the construction of roads included limiting blasting (difficult in rocky mountain terrain), selecting quarry and borrow sites that were not in view of the road and would not harm the landscape, the careful disposal of rock and other fill materials, avoidance of unnecessary cutting of trees and vegetation, and placement of construction camps in areas that could easily be restored.



1925 ceremonies dedicating the Generals Highway to the Giant Forest.

The CCC

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), a program of the Emergency Conservation Works Act, was one of the New Deal programs initiated under President Franklin D. Roosevelt during the Great Depression. The CCC provided work for unemployed young men through federal agencies, such as the Department of the Interior. The CCC played an important role in many state and national parks. In Sequoia National Park, the corps established ten camps between 1933 and 1942, contributing extensively to the development of Generals Highway. CCC enrollees improved conditions along the highway through the removal of fallen trees and boulders, eradication of construction scars, rounding and revegetation of slopes, and widening the road to eliminate blind curves. The CCC constructed much of the stonework located on the Generals Highway including gutters, culverts, guardwalls and retaining walls. The CCC also carved rustic signs for the highway including the Ash Mountain entrance sign (1936) and the northern park boundary sign (1937).



Tunnel Rock, excavated by the CCC in 1934, has been a popular roadside feature of the highway.

The "Four Guardsmen" prior to the construction of the second lane between the four Big Trees in 1938.