

GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK ROADS & BRIDGES,
GREENBRIER ROAD
Between U.S. Route 321 and Greenbrier Cove
Gatlinburg Vicinity
Sevier County
Tennessee

HAER NO. TN-35-L

HAER
TENN
78-GAT.V.
6L-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

PHOTOGRAPHS

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

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Location: Great Smoky Mountains National Park,
Tennessee, between U.S. Route 321 and
Greenbrier Cove

Date of Construction: ca. 1870 (improvement construction by
NPS, 1930s-60s)

Use: Roadway, Bridges, and Landscapes

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 transportation system of Great Smoky
Mountains National Park is
representative of NPS park road design
and landscape planning throughout the
country. Much of the construction work,
like that of Greenbrier Road, was
undertaken by the Civilian Conservation
Corps during the 1930s.

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; Foothills Parkway, TN-35-E; 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; 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.

Introduction

The Greenbrier Road is a short 4-mile spur, paved for its first mile and dirt thereafter, which follows the west bank of the Little Pigeon River into Greenbrier Cove. Beginning at U.S. Highway 321 on the park boundary, the road travels south into the park past two parking areas, which allow visitors to swim and fish in the river. Further along the road are two picnic areas.

A spur road leaves the Greenbrier Road after 3 miles and crosses the Little Pigeon River via a wood bridge. From here, the spur travels east along the Middle Prong of the Little Pigeon River for 1.5 miles, where a hiking trail continues for 4 miles to scenic Ramsay Cascades.

After 3.5 miles as a two-way road, the Greenbrier Road enters a large on-way loop which serves as a traffic turn-around. The one-way road continues for another 0.5 mile to a gate where the section of the road which is open to automobiles ends. From here, motorists must continue around the loop back to the two-way section of the road. However, hikers can continue on the old road for 1-mile to Porters Flat, where two trails begin.

Greenbrier Road

White settlers arrived in Greenbrier Cove in the period after the Civil War. Using the relatively level ground along the Little Pigeon River and its tributaries, these settlers built a number of rough wagon roads through the area, many of which are still visible. By the turn of the century, approximately twenty-six families lived in Greenbrier Cove, enough to support a school which was located on the site of the present-day ranger station. In 1925, two residents built the Greenbrier Hotel at the junction of Porters Creek and the Middle Prong.¹

As was the case with the other communities in what is today Great Smoky Mountains National Park, this land was bought by the state and turned over to the federal government. The first improvements to the roads in Greenbrier Cove for the new park were begun by the CCC in the summer of 1933. The enrollees improved 3.5 miles of the main road through Greenbrier, making it "an all-weather road." This work led an engineer participating

¹ Inventory and Inspection Report, U.S. Bureau of Public Roads, 1950; Roads Vertical File; GSMNP Library. Defoe, *Hiking Trails of the Smokies*, 460.

in the project to comment: "It is quite a new experience to negotiate the three and a half miles in high gear."²

The September 1933 Superintendent's Monthly Report for the park listed an authorized road project from the park boundary into Greenbrier Cove for \$68,000, which meant that this road project was probably larger than the others undertaken by the CCC at this time.³ In December, construction began on a timber bridge over the Little Pigeon River and road up the "Left Fork." It was hoped that the road could be continued to the mouth of Ramsay Prong.⁴ In January 1934, the enrollees built three timber bridges on Greenbrier Road.⁵ Following construction of Greenbrier Road, in 1938, the Park Service reported to visitors that the road was "covered with crushed rock" and is "not recommended for the inexperienced or nervous driver."⁶

² Superintendent's Monthly Report, August 1933; GSMNP.

³ Superintendent's Monthly Report, September 1933; GSMNP.

⁴ Superintendent's Monthly Report, December 1933; GSMNP.

⁵ Superintendent's Monthly Report, January 1934; GSMNP.

⁶ "General Information Regarding Great Smoky Mountains National Park" in Superintendent's Monthly Report, April 1938; GSMNP.

In addition to the Greenbrier Road, the CCC's work included construction of a truck trail over the old wagon road along the Middle Prong, to provide access to a Park Service lookout tower on Greenbrier Pinnacle, as well as conversion of the wagon road along Porters Creek into a hiking trail.⁷ The Middle Prong truck trail, which was only open to hikers and Park Service vehicles, was opened to public motor vehicle use on June 15, 1966, to give visitors better access to Ramsay Cascades.⁸ In contrast to this expansion of public roads in Greenbrier Cove, the upper section of the Greenbrier Road was closed to vehicles and converted to a trail in February 1976, shortening the road to Porters Flat.⁹

Several bridges on the Greenbrier Road and the spur road along the Middle Prong were rebuilt in 1981 and 1982 as part of a larger project to rebuild thirteen bridges in the park.¹⁰ In January 1982, the bridge at the Greenbrier Ranger Station was

⁷ Defoe, *Hiking Trails of the Smokies*, 461 & 475.

⁸ Superintendent's Monthly Report, June 1966; GSMNP.

⁹ Staff Meeting Minutes, February 17, 1976; Box Staff Minutes; GSMNP.

¹⁰ Staff Meeting Minutes, September 15, 1981; Box Staff Minutes; GSMNP.

under construction,¹¹ and work began on the Middle Prong bridges in June, which required closing the road for twelve to fourteen weeks.¹² All work on the thirteen bridge project was completed on February 16, 1983.¹³ Another bridge project in 1983 and 1984 included the upper bridge on the Greenbrier Road, which was rebuilt in June 1984.¹⁴

¹¹ Staff Meeting Minutes, February 23, 1982; Box Staff Minutes; GSMNP.

¹² Staff Meeting Minutes, June 20, 1982; Box Staff Minutes; GSMNP.

¹³ Staff Meeting Minutes, January 18, 1983; Box Staff Minutes; GSMNP.

¹⁴ Staff Meeting Minutes, June 19, 1984; Box Staff Minutes; GSMNP.

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David Haas, Photographer, 1996

TN-35-L-1	SMALL STEEL GIRDER BRIDGE WITH WOODEN RAILING LOOKING WSW.
TN-35-L-2	TIMBER FOOTBRIDGE LOOKING W.



H.A.E.R. No. TN-35-L-1

