



Roaming Rocky Podcast Script Opening Trail Ridge Road

(elk bugling)

(Narrator) Opening Trail Ridge Road

(sounds of snowplow in the background throughout the video)

(Narrator) First open in 1932, Trail Ridge Road is the highest continuous paved road in the United States. Trail Ridge Road is 48 miles in length; 11 miles is above treeline at 11,500 feet. The road reaches its highest point at the elevation of 12,183 feet above sea level.

The opening process begins around mid-April, with completion the Friday before Memorial Day to get ready for the summer. Being a Colorado Scenic Byway and All American Road, Trail Ridge is one of a kind.

Park Service employee and snowplow driver Sue O'Connor knows the ropes on Trail Ridge Road.

(Sue O'Connor) Okay, we're on Trail Ridge Road and we are moving snow. We're doing our spring opening and I am just one person of many that are involved. It's a big team that opens this road. Mechanics are a real big part of it. We have some great operators and we have some fantastic pieces of equipment. It takes a lot of patience, a lot of diesel, and the best mechanics this side of Denver for sure, because we do have a lot of breakdowns.

(Interviewer) Can you tell just us about what process you have been going through just this year to open the road. Well, we had some weekend storms that kind of beat us back a few miles at a time. And we had to reopen the same stretch of road, you know, over and over again, which is pretty common in the spring. And of course, it doesn't take a lot of snow to make a drift such as this. A few inches and 40 miles an hour winds, you've got a drift of snow. Drifts on Trail Ridge can build with the slightest wind.

(Narrator) The changing weather and poor visibility is a constant factor while clearing the road. Fatigue is always an ongoing challenge for the operators. It takes long hours to complete a section or roadway.

Snow poles placed along the roadway help guide the operators, and show the path that needs to be cleared. Clearing Trail Ridge Road is slow going, and safety is priority one. The snow has to be cleared one bite at a time, while always being in contact with your coworkers and keeping safety in mind. Working together the job gets done. The snowpack and drifts can reach up to 40 feet in height in some areas.

At an elevation of 11,796 feet and well beyond treeline, is the Alpine Visitor Center. The visitor center is secluded by winter's wrath and pounded by winds reaching up to of 100 miles per hour. The entire visitor center area is commonly enveloped by up to 30 feet of snow.

(Chuck Stalker) We got up here to the visitor center store parking lot within the last couple of days. There's probably 70 per cent of average winter as far as the snow depth goes. Should be pretty easy, hopefully, if all the equipment keeps running and the weather stays good. It should just take us a handful of days to get this area open.

(Narrator) Working at the top of world has its rewards, what an office with a view!

Thanks to the men and women of Rocky Mountain National Park, who brave extreme conditions, long hours, and

countless dangers to open the highest continuous paved road in the United States.

Trail Ridge Road is the common bond between Estes Park, east of the Continental Divide, and Grand Lake, west of the Continental Divide. Every spring opening a ceremonial ribbon cutting and reunion takes place at the top to once again signify friendship across the Rockies, and to kick off the start of the summer season here at Rocky Mountain National Park.

(music in the background)

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Park information is available at 970-586-1206 or on-line at www.nps.gov/romo

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