



Name of Property: Blue Ridge Parkway

City, State: 469-mile-long linear park extending from Shenandoah National Park in Virginia to Great Smoky Mountains National Park in North Carolina

Period of Significance: 1933 – 1987

NHL Criteria: 1, 4, Exception 8

NHL Themes: II. Creating Social Institutions and Movements
4. Recreational activities
III. Expressing Cultural Values
5. Architecture, Landscape Architecture, and Urban Design
VII. Transforming the Environment
3. Protecting and Preserving the Environment

Previous Recognition: HAER NC-42 series
HABS NC-188; VA-165; VA-1406; VA-1407; VA-1507
Federal Highway Administration All American Roads: North Carolina (1996),
Virginia (2005)

National Historic Context: XVII. Landscape Architecture
XVIII. Technology (Engineering and Invention)
B. Transportation
XXXII. Conservation of Natural Resources
C. Conservation Movement Matures
10. The Great Depression and Conservation
XXXIV. Recreation
C. General Recreation
National Park Service Mission 66 Era Resources National Register of Historic
Places Multiple Property Documentation Form (2015)
National Historic Landmark Theme Study: Park Service Landscape
Architecture, 1917-1941 (1995)

NHL Significance:



- The Blue Ridge Parkway is nationally significant as the premier long-distance, scenic national parkway in America. Beginning in Virginia at Rockfish Gap, at the southern end of Skyline Drive in Shenandoah National Park, it runs for 469 miles through the Southern Appalachian Mountains and ends at the entrance to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in North Carolina. It winds along the Blue Ridge, across forested mountain slopes and settled agricultural valleys and plateaus, and then rises into some of the most rugged mountains east of the Mississippi.
- The parkway is nationally significant for its associations with the history of American parkways and the history of New Deal recreation and conservation efforts. It has its origins in more modest parkways such as those developed in the New York area in the 1910s and 1920s and the Colonial Parkway, authorized by Congress in 1930. The Blue Ridge Parkway was meant to be the prototype for what some in the 1930s envisioned as a national system of long-distance scenic parkways. Begun in 1935, the Parkway was a New Deal project of extraordinary complexity and unprecedented scope. Work on the parkway was suspended during World War II; a large commitment of federal resources in the postwar period was required for its completion.
- The parkway is further nationally significant as an exceptionally important work of design in the fields of landscape architecture and civil engineering—as a combination of scenic road and linear park, it represents a fusion of modern engineering with scenic landscape design. The Parkway’s design represents the extensive application of the NPS rustic design philosophy to road features. After World War II, it became clear that there would be no national network of long-distance, scenic parkways; and efforts were redoubled to complete the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Natchez Trace Parkway, the only two examples of the type. The Blue Ridge Parkway’s significance arises from its role as the first of its type and one of only two ever undertaken.
- The design of the Parkway was the outcome of a process of collaboration and experimentation involving landscape architects and architects in the NPS and engineers in the Bureau of Public Roads, with important contributions from others in multiple federal and state agencies plus members of other organizations and private citizens.
- Because the Parkway’s period of significance begins more than 50 years ago but does not end until 1987, NHL exception 8 must be satisfied. The Blue Ridge Parkway is of extraordinary national importance as the first and premier example of a long-distance scenic parkway. Those portions completed between 1955 and 1987 represent the culmination of this nationally important project. Further, completion of the Linn Cove Viaduct, a groundbreaking work of transportation engineering, allowed for the opening of the last 7.7-mile segment of the Parkway.

Integrity:

- The Blue Ridge Parkway retains all aspects of historic integrity (location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association) and clearly conveys its national significance as the nation’s premier long-distance scenic and recreational parkway.
- Contributing resources include 26 sites, 209 buildings, and 591 structures. The overall designed landscape is classified as one site and the 469-mile Parkway roadway as one structure.
- The road retains its original location and alignment, grade, slopes, pavement, and curbing, as well as drainage system, retaining walls, parapet guard-walls, embankments, guard-rails, and signage. intended to encourage safe and leisurely progress with frequent stops.
- Motorists continue to enjoy a sequence of views and rural landscapes, although some scenery in more urban areas has been subject to development since the 1950s. In rural areas, the decline of the family farm and suburban development have altered the character of some agricultural landscapes, while along forested stretches trees now obscure some vistas. Nevertheless, many original views are still recognizable.



- In recreation areas nearly all original trails, campgrounds, picnic areas, and park buildings have been retained with only minor alterations. Where new recreational facilities have been added, care has been taken to ensure that they conform to the design ideals primarily evolved between 1935 and 1955.

Owner of Property: National Park Service

Acreeage of Property: approximately 95,000

Origins of Nomination: A Historic Resource Study and draft nomination began through a cooperative agreement between the NPS and the University of Georgia, authored by the late Ian Firth, Professor Emeritus of Landscape Architecture in the College of Environmental Design, University of Georgia. Funding for the project came from the NPS Cultural Resource Preservation Program Base and Blue Ridge Parkway. The Public Archaeology Laboratory, Inc., completed the nomination.

Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program: This NHL nomination will provide expanded and detailed documentation to allow for interpretation to the public of the national significance of the Parkway, among the most visited units of the National Park System.

Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program: None known

Public Comments Favoring Designation (received as of August 20, 2024):

- Senator Ted Budd, U.S. Senate (North Carolina), Washington, DC

Landmarks Committee Comments:

- Expand reference to the danger, inequality, and dehumanizing experience of African American travel during the segregation era, in part by citing the recent scholarship of Mia Bay, Candacy Taylor, and William E. O'Brien.
- Suggest seeking updated review by the Eastern Band of Cherokee tribal historian regarding perspectives on land use and negotiated price.
- Introduce research potential associated with displacement of prior residents for construction of the parkway.

Landmarks Committee Recommendation:

The Committee recommends that the National Park System Advisory Board recommend to the Secretary of the Interior the designation of the Blue Ridge Parkway in Virginia and North Carolina as a National Historic Landmark, with any additions and corrections as noted by the Committee being made prior to the nomination being forwarded to the Secretary of the Interior for action.

Advisory Board Recommendation: The National Park System Advisory Board recommends to the Secretary of the Interior the designation of the Blue Ridge Parkway in Virginia and North Carolina as a National Historic Landmark.