

1. BACKGROUND

Growing travel into the Great Smoky Mountain region had introduced a now-familiar scene of roadway congestion in the late 1930's, long before congestion created problems in other park areas. While the cross-park road from Tennessee into North Carolina through Newfound Gap received the heaviest pressure, it soon became apparent that the circulatory road system on the Tennessee side of Great Smoky Mountains National Park was also ill-qualified to handle increased recreational traffic.

General Frank Maloney, a prominent local conservationist, formulated the proposal for the construction of a scenic parkway through the Tennessee foothills. The completion of North Carolina 28 between Bryson City and Fontana on the south side of the park (see map p.28) and the choosing of the valley of the Big Pigeon River for the Interstate 40 route on the park's north side increased support for a foothill route in Tennessee which would complete a road system for encircling the park.

It was anticipated that such a route, located outside the main ridge of mountains and generally on the slopes of small secondary ridges, would provide panoramic views of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, provide access to several areas within the park, and alleviate traffic pressure on the existing road system.

General Maloney's plan became a reality when the Foothills Parkway was authorized by an Act of Congress on February 22, 1944. This Act authorized acceptance of donations of land for construction of the parkway and provided that all property acquired would become a part of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

A year later the Tennessee Legislature designated the State Department of Highways and Public Works as the agency to acquire by donation, purchase, or condemnation lands sufficient for the Federal Government to construct a scenic highway known as the "Foothills Parkway." Thus, Federal and State legislation authorized construction of the Foothills Parkway as a cooperative undertaking. The National Park Service would build and maintain the parkway in return for Tennessee's buying the rights-of-way. A companion bill, passed in 1947, authorized the State to transfer the rights-of-way to the National Park Service.

Although legislative hurdles were cleared in 1947, it was not until 1956 that the Foothills Parkway project was scheduled for construction as a part of the National Park Service's "Mission 66" program. Construction began on the first section of the parkway in 1960. About 30 parkway miles now are open to visitor travel; 5 from the northern terminus south and 25 from the southern terminus north. Construction of the intervening 46 miles will proceed as rights-of-way are acquired and as construction funds are made available.

The parkway legislation also provided for the reconstruction of a 4.2 mile section of U.S. 441 from Pigeon Forge, Tenn. into Gatlinburg, Tenn. (the Gatlinburg Spur), and for a 3.36 mile bypass around Gatlinburg into the Great Smoky Mountains National Park (the New Entrance Road). These sections are now paved and in use. The New Entrance Road is a park road open only to recreational traffic. The Gatlinburg Spur, although a limited-access road in parkway character, is used also by commercial traffic and will revert eventually to State ownership.

When completed, the Foothills Parkway will interchange with the Gatlinburg Spur and travelers will then have direct access to the interior of the park via the spur and the New Entrance Road.



Much of the parkway is constructed, as is this section along the eastern slope of Chilhowee Mountain.