Constructing the Blue Ridge Parkway: Stages, Scenes, and Spectacles

David M. Downer
Department of Geography, East Carolina University

The purpose of this paper is to uncover and read the representational images found in one of the least studied and most utilized units of the National Park Service, the Blue Ridge Parkway. Using archival records, and landscape interpretation, my intent is to understand the meanings embodied in this "spectacular" built form – spectacular not only in regard to the extent of the transformation achieved by the Resident Architect on the project, Stanley Abbott, but also the priority given to the gaze of the automobile tourist. This is a landscape intended for visual consumption, and as such it presents itself as a series of scenes signifying "mountain culture." In order to "read" the Blue Ridge Parkway I examine first of all the construction process, and the ideals expressed by Abbott concerning the form and function of the parkway. Then, I categorize the types of landscapes produced, noting how each reflects and re-presents to the viewer a particular vision of people and place.

Begun in the 1930s as part of the effort to relieve the economic ills of the Great Depression, the design of the Blue Ridge Parkway was due in large part to the inspiration of one man, Stanley Abbott, the Resident Landscape Architect for the project. Abbott was the creative force behind many of the images that make the Parkway famous today. By placing carefully chosen cultural artifacts in carefully designed physical settings, Abbott sculpted a landscape that was to signify an insular, self-sufficient, pioneer, Appalachian culture. Designed as roadside scenery, such a landscape not only buttressed existing stereotypes concerning the "character" of the region and its inhabitants, it also reinforced certain ideals concerning the place of the American auto tourist (Figure 1).

In reading the cultural geography of the parkway, I begin by summarizing the primary physical and social characteristics of the Blue Ridge region prior to the construction of the parkway, noting the increasing dominance of tourism over the local economy. Next, I turn to the people and events leading to the construction of the Blue Ridge Parkway, with a particular emphasis upon the contentious debate concerning the actual route: Would the parkway pass through Asheville, North Carolina, or not? Then, I address the idealized landscapes that constitute the parkway; the hand of the landscape architect is evident, if not in scene, at least in the historical record of the alterations made to the "natural" view. Much of the empirical data used is derived from the correspondence and reports of Abbott and his staff, located at the National Park Service headquarters of the Blue Ridge Parkway in Asheville, North Carolina. Within this archive the various phases in which the Blue Ridge Parkway was conceptualized and constructed are detailed in narrative form. In studying these records, it is possible to uncover not only the reasoning behind the design of the parkway, but, more importantly, the *meanings* assigned to elements of the Parkway landscape. Moreover, my own reading of the landscape, carried out over a period of several months, will further draw out the ideological character of this built form.

The Blue Ridge Region

Bounded to the east by the Piedmont and to the west by the Ridge and Valley, the Blue Ridge extends some 550 miles from south central Pennsylvania to northeastern Georgia. The eastern boundary of the region is the Blue Ridge frontal scarp, which reaches its maximum elevation of approximately 4,000 feet near Blowing Rock, North Carolina. It is the sharp and rapid rise of the scarp from the adjacent Piedmont to the east and the valleys of the Ridge and Valley area to the west which provide the Blue Ridge with its breathtaking long-range, panoramic views.

Those who settled in the Blue Ridge were primarily of Scotch-Irish descent, and they utilized a synthesis of indigenous American, Scottish, and Irish agricultural

techniques (Raitz and Ulack, 1984). They: adopted the Indian technique of girdling and burning trees; planted maize, an Indian crop, using Indian planting techniques; and preferred to make fresh clearings in their forest land or move to new land when productivity fell. Open-range livestock grazing on free woodland pastures was a Celtic tradition that was carried, and adapted, to the Blue Ridge forests. In many areas of the Blue Ridge and Plateaus these slash-and-burn and brush-fallow farming techniques survived well into the twentieth century.

Historically, the major economic occupation in the region has been agriculture and much of the produce was sold and consumed locally. The poor soils and steep slopes of these mountainous regions were not conducive to the extensive and large-scale commercial agricultural production which characterized the piedmont region to the east. The only cash crop to be exported for profit from the North Carolina and Virginia Blue Ridge is Burley tobacco. Other primary activities have, however, been significant in the growth of the region. One of the first extractive industries to make inroads to the region was commercial cutting of timber for lumber and other wood products. The Scottish Carolina Land and Lumber Company began logging in 1885 in east Tennessee and western North Carolina (Raitz and Ulack, 1984). Production reached a peak in the region between 1900 and 1915, after which deforestation and erosion caused a significant decline in production. One of the major reasons for the rapid expansion of this industry around the turn of the century was the introduction of steam engines to the region. This brought railroads that carried stream-powered mills right to the raw materials and efficiently transported the product to markets outside the region. Today, mills in the piedmont region, such as High Point, North Carolina, are again producing wood products, in this case mainly furniture, from timber grown in the Blue Ridge, for export to national and international markets.

The one resource that the Blue Ridge region holds in abundance is scenery. As early as the 1790s residents of the coastal and piedmont regions were paying seasonal visits to the mountain highlands. The Carolina Blue Ridge's high elevations meant cooler temperatures in the sweltering summer months, and the early visitors to this region were the wealthy and elite of society who could afford to build second homes and retreats. Developers, quick to realize that accessibility to the mountains meant more potential visitors, promoted the construction of roads and trails in the region. They also began buying large tracts of land for the establishment of resort towns. One such pair were Samuel Kelsey and Charles Hutchinson who, in 1875, selected a 1,440 acre site for their resort to be called Highlands. They selected the site by drawing two straight lines on a map, one from Chicago to Savannah, Georgia, and one from New York to New Orleans. They reasoned that a resort placed at the intersection of the two lines would not only be in the heart of the Carolina Blue Ridge, but would be midway between north and south and would attract visitors from both regions (Raitz and Ulack, 1984).

From these early beginnings, recreational development and resort expansion continued throughout the region, extending along the Blue Ride to the north and south. Much of the contemporary potential for economic growth is still thought to rest squarely on the shoulders of the tourist industry. Thus, we return to the central argument that guides this paper. Within this historical context, the Blue Ridge Parkway was conceived of as a centerpiece for recreation in the area, and was constructed as a mosaic of mythologized images of local history and culture; these images have since become the touchstone for subsequent developments in the tourism industry. Abbott's mythologized roadside landscape has become perhaps the single most influential force in determining how tourists view highland people and culture.

Constructing the Blue Ridge Parkway

The actual construction of the 469-mile long Blue Ridge Parkway in North Carolina and Virginia took place in the early 1930s as a make-work project associated with depression-era New Deal relief programs. Initially conceived simply as a park-to-park

connector between the Shenandoah National Park and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the Blue Ridge Parkway became a national park in its own right and was placed under the protection of the National Park Service. While the historical record details that the Parkway itself was begun in the 1930s, the factors leading to its construction reach back to the early years of the twentieth century, beginning with state-level attempts at similar construction projects. Gradually, interest expanded to the point where federally funded programs such as the parkway came under consideration.

Long before any federal parkway programs were implemented, someone dreamed of a scenic road project in the mountains of North Carolina and began the work of making it a reality. Called the Crest of the Blue Ridge Highway, its developer was Colonel Joseph Hyde Pratt, the head of the North Carolina Geological and Economic Survey. He understood the impact the new automobile would have on travel: "If properly catered to, the new machine could do much to promote tourism and the economic growth of North Carolina." (cited in Jolley, 1969, p.12) With this in mind he drew up plans for, and began promoting, the construction of a 350 mile-long scenic highway along the summit of the Ridge. His plans also called for a series of hotels extending from Marion, Virginia, to Tallulah Falls, Georgia. At a meeting of the North Carolina Good Roads Association on August 1, 1912, Pratt reported that the route had been surveyed and that construction on one section had begun a month previously in July, 1912. A portion of the highway between Altapass and Pineola, less than 50 miles long, was actually completed before the project was abandoned with the onset of World War I. A large part of the Blue Ridge Parkway, as it stands today through that region, closely follows the route of this first effort.

Meanwhile, at the federal level, it was not until the late 1920s that legislation was enacted that would facilitate the funding of similar road projects. Although the Blue Ridge Parkway is now seen as a benchmark for rural, recreational, commercial free travel, it was not the first attempt at "parkway" style construction by the federal government. The first legislation to provide precedent for such an entity was enacted May 23, 1928, providing for the establishment of the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway. In response to increasing amounts of recreational travel further federal parkway legislation, enacted in 1930, provided for the acquisition, establishment and development of the George Washington Memorial Parkway, and the Colonial National Parkway. The latter parkway was to connect Jamestown, Williamsburg and Yorktown, Virginia, with a right-of-way not exceeding five hundred feet in width.

Much of the impetus for the federal funding of such large-scale projects, however, came as a by-product of the New Deal. In June of 1933, as an anti-depression measure, the National Industrial Recovery Act was passed, empowering the Public Works Administrator to prepare a comprehensive program of works that would include construction, repair and improvement of public highways and parkways (*US Statutes at Large*). The Blue Ridge Parkway was a product of that program.[1]

With funding for the project secured, work began on laying the route of the proposed scenic highway. This was easier said than done, however, as each community lying between the Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains National Parks wanted to

[1] When interest in these federal park-to-park memorial highways arose in the 1920s and 30s, the most ostentatious and grand construction plan suggested was introduced by a Congressman from Kentucky, Maurice H. Thatcher. He proposed a system of highways that would connect several federal parks beginning in Washington, DC, and forming a great loop through important sites in Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky, and West Virginia. While this project never gained the endorsements it needed to succeed because of its massive scale and prohibitive costs, this initial push toward supporting a proposal of this nature, as well as the smaller projects that were accepted, was instrumental in laying the groundwork for the future effort to build the Blue Ridge Parkway.

secure a portion of the Parkway for itself. When word reached the governors of North Carolina and Tennessee that the project had been approved, lobbying began in earnest. Each state brought all its political weight to bear on the Secretary of the Interior, Harold Ickes. Secretary Ickes, aided by a commission assigned to inspect the various proposed routes, was responsible for making the final decision regarding the placement of the parkway. Very early in the process Secretary Ickes established that the northern section of the route would pass through Virginia and into North Carolina. The route south from Skyline Drive, Virginia, to Blowing Rock, North Carolina, was nearly set by the summer of 1934 (Swaim, 1986). The point of contention, however, became the placement of the road after it had traversed the northern section of the Tar Heel State. The North Carolinians, and especially the civic and political leaders in Asheville, North Carolina, proposed placing the southern portion of the road entirely in western North Carolina. Those in Tennessee, however, proposed that the road take a turn to the west at Linville, North Carolina, and proceed from there through eastern Tennessee to the western entrance of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park at Gatlinburg, Tennessee. As can be seen from Map 1, this route would ensure about half of the southern section of the parkway to both Tennessee and North Carolina, arguably an equitable decision. The delegation from Tennessee argued that all they were seeking was half of the proposed southern mileage.

The merits of both plans were debated in two formal meetings before Secretary Ickes by the state delegations in Baltimore, Maryland, on February 5-7, 1934, and in Washington, DC, on September 18, 1934. The commission, in a June 8th report to Secretary Ickes, subsequently recommended that the Tennessee route be adopted. Then, in August of 1934, the Forestry Director, at the request of Secretary Ickes, conducted a second survey of both proposed routes and submitted his findings. The Forestry Director recommended that the Secretary should lean in the direction of the Asheville, North Carolina, route. Secretary Ickes delayed his decision until November 10, 1934, at which time he sent identical letters to the Governors of North Carolina and Tennessee informing them of the following: the parkway would pass south from Linville, through Asheville, North Carolina, and into the eastern boundary of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. In his letter he gave a number of reasons for his decision, including the fact that: the North Carolina route would only have to bridge three streams, whereas the Tennessee route had to cross seven rivers; National Forests in North Carolina along the proposed path eliminated some of the problems of acquiring rights of way; and running the road through Tennessee would divert ninety percent of the tourist traffic out of North Carolina, ruining the long established tourist trade in the Asheville, North Carolina area. Last but not least, Tennessee was already receiving millions of dollars of federal money in the form of the Tennessee Valley Authority. Ickes concluded that, "... it is so clear that the equities in this controversy are with North Carolina that my findings must be to that effect..." (Ickes to Ehringhaus, 1934).

With the routing finalized and the survey work completed, construction began on the first sections of the Parkway in North Carolina on August 24, 1935 and in Virginia on February 29, 1936. Construction was continuous, except for a break during the war years (1942-1944), until the project was completed in the 1980s. Today, well over twenty million people a year drive the Blue Ridge Parkway.

The creation and management of this massive project was the job of Resident Landscape Architect Stanley Abbott and his army of 2,500 Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) workers. In order to achieve the desired landscape, Abbott implemented innovative programs that were designed to improve the overall condition of the environment. Abbott was appointed to the position of Resident Landscape Architect on December 27, 1933, just a week after the Public Works Administration had appropriated the first four million dollars for construction. He was further promoted in 1937, and named acting superintendent of the Parkway. By all accounts, Stanley Abbott was given a virtual blank check and clean slate with which to design and construct the Parkway. To some it appears that, "Abbott

was basically handed the general route and told, "There - design and build a parkway"." (Swaim, 1986, p.41). Thus, the principles guiding his design are of paramount importance in any attempt to study the representations found in the landscape of the Parkway, for it was his guiding vision that formed, propagated, and legitimized the images we see today.

Apprenticed in the Westchester County, New York, Parks Department, Stanley Abbott was one of the first generation to learn and benefit from the substantial successes made in urban park design by the Olmsteads in Boston, and administrators such as Robert Moses in New York (Gignoux, 1986). The idea of bounded linear parks within cities, called greenways, were the precursors to the Westchester County parkways that Abbott helped to design. Two of the most fundamental differences between the parkways of Westchester and the Blue Ridge were the specific nature of the setting, and its intended function. The Blue Ridge Parkway was to be located in the mountains, and designed for recreation (Sunday drivers, if you will). Creating this idyllic rural landscape, therefore, was not as simple as merely taking the ideas from Westchester and transferring them south to the mountains of Virginia and North Carolina. No project of this magnitude had ever been attempted before, through this type of rugged terrain, and for this specific purpose. Thus, from the beginning, Abbott's job was largely one of spectacular vision as well as trial and error.

Blue Ridge Landscapes

Abbott's task was to interpret what he saw in the existing landscape and design the Parkway in such as way as to preserve what he felt were the best elements of that landscape. With that purpose in mind he proposed six functions of the Blue Ridge Parkway (Abbott, 1936, p.3):

1. To provide a through scenic and recreational route between the Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains National Parks, a distance of approximately 500 miles, or perhaps equally important destinations such as Roanoke or Asheville, or in connection with major state highways, distant points North and South, such as New York or Pennsylvania to Southern States;

2. To make available scenic beauty and recreational facilities for those who live near enough to make single day or week-end trips along the Parkway or to its parks;

3. To present a cross section of the development of the Blue Ridge Parkway and some insight into the problems of the pioneers with their "long rifles" who first penetrated this area, as well as the problems and life of their descendants;

4. To reveal to all the scenic grandeur of the "Eastern Divide," with the highest mountains east of the Rockies;

5. To preserve scenic and historic features of the area through which the Parkway passes;

6. To provide a sanctuary for wildlife, and by restoration of proper environment, protection, education, and stocking in cooperation with State and Federal agencies, to bring back some of the wildlife that has long since disappeared from much of this area.

In these six "ideals" we see the underlying assumptions concerning people and place that Abbott proceeded to build into the parkway landscape. First, there is the idea that everything needs to be "open to view" from the car, which is thus defined as the center of everything. The car provides action and movement while the landscape remains the passive, static focus of attention. Second, "man" and "nature" must remain separate, each within their own space. Furthermore, the spaces of "nature" and "culture" within the Parkway boundaries must both be conserved, albeit separately. Third, the state and its representatives are presumed to be natural architects, planners and keepers of these spaces. This view of the state as the obvious choice for this task provides the needed justification for the control of people and place, residents and drivers alike.

In landscaping each mile of the Blue Ridge Parkway, Abbott embodied these

discourses in built form; constructing, in the process, a myth. As a framework for the following analysis, I have categorized the landscapes that constitute the Blue Ridge Parkway into three types: "treescapes," "agriscapes," and "culturescapes." I argue that within Abbott's scheme, these ideal types were to display distinct meanings regarding people and place. Treescapes include those areas in which no human habitation or interference can be observed. Agriscapes are those areas in which humans have adapted the land for their use, either as farmland or pasture. Similarly, culturescapes are areas of human influence in which the site has been inhabited and, as such, has gained cultural significance through the changes that were made. In addition to this classification, one cannot escape the fact that this project was built specifically for one type of user, the automobile tourist. This analysis, therefore, must include an assessment of how the Parkway landscapes were built with this purpose in mind, as well as how the car impacts the view being seen by the tourist. This view, or "carscape," combines the three "-scapes" noted above into a montage of images, seen from the road and understood by the tourist only as a continual series of scenes. In sum, I read the Parkway to be a place of contrast between the insular, self-sufficient inhabitants and the mobile tourists. It serves, therefore, to facilitate and sustain two fundamental myths, that of Appalachia as "past," and that of the car as "present."

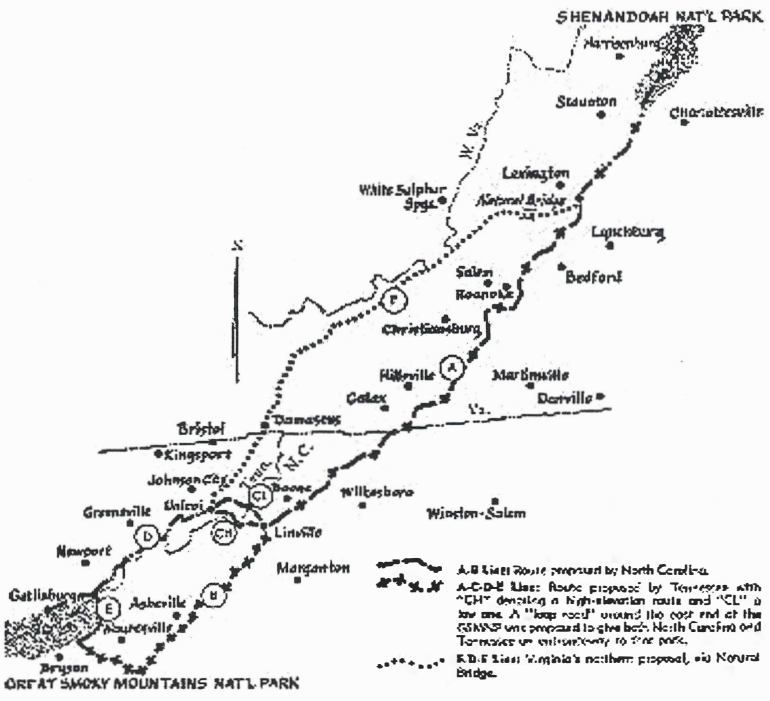
Treescapes

The deliberate and extensive construction of the parkway was such that to define it as "nature" is highly questionable: a more accurate definition may be that of "contrived wilderness vistas." In order to present a picture that adequately represented wild, unrestrained, vibrant, "nature," careful sculpting of the environment was required. Live trees were replanted, dead trees were removed, and brush cleared (see Figures 2 and 3). for a before and after shot of part of the new parkway). Along the immediate borders of the route, Abbott ordered the clearing of this debris such that the "natural beauty" of the woods that had been previously hidden could become visible from the road. Abbott (1938, p.5) also noticed that, "beautiful vistas to the distance, glimpses into the woods ... are often revealed by a slight cutting under judicious supervision." Thus, we see that areas were not only to be restored to their former, natural beauty by the removal of "unsightly debris," but in certain areas, nature also required a helping hand via replanting to allow for a more penetrating view from the road. In a 1936 report, *Planning the Complete Landscape Development*, Abbott formulated minutely detailed instructions for work crews as to which trees, shrubs and pastures were to be altered and which were to be left alone. In one chapter on plant spacing, he advised the workers to,

> ...notice how unkempt laurel and rhododendron ... appear where they have developed naturally in too close relation to each other ... by Selective Cutting we have reduced the struggle for survival by eliminating weak and diseased trees, and by the process of thinning the remaining plants, the desired composition has been developed (1936, p.5).

Thus, nature itself was not considered sufficiently capable of creating an aesthetically pleasing display through natural selection, or "survival of the fittest;" it was left to the Parkway workers to create the desired composition.

Significantly, Abbott specified that, despite the necessity for cleanup of the route, after the work was completed there should not be the *appearance* of cleanup. Crews were thus advised to leave, "three or four dead or den trees per acre [that] will give a normal character to the woods, and when they fall at a later date, will provide wildlife shelter and food, as well as the decaying vegetation necessary for continuance of normal woods growth" (Abbott, 1936. p.4). Additionally, instructions permitted the uprooting or cutting off of stumps left from previous lumber activities. However, "interesting" stumps that were weathered, rotting, moss-covered or hollow were not to be removed or in any way damaged, as they provided natural character. Abbott did not want to produce a visibly sterilized area:



Map 1. Alternative Routes of The Blue Ridge Parkway (Source: Jolley, 1969, p. 14).

Figure 1(Source: Jolley, 1969, p. 35).

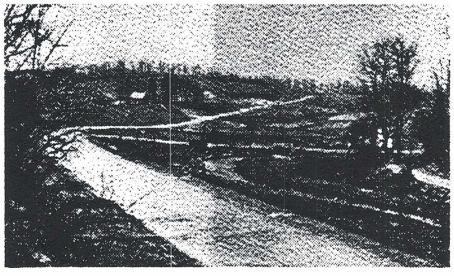


Figure 2. Before (Source: Abbott, 1987, p. 14).

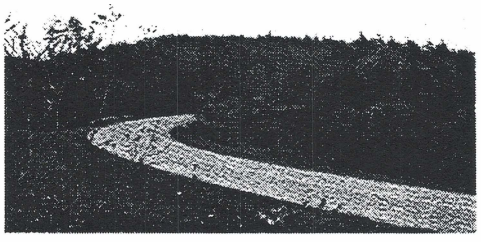


Figure 3. After (Source: Abbott, 1987, p. 14)

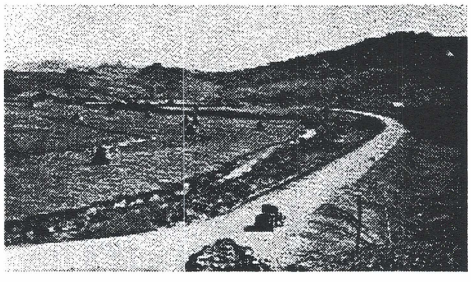


Figure 4. Ideal Agriscape (Source: Abbott, 1987, p. 14)

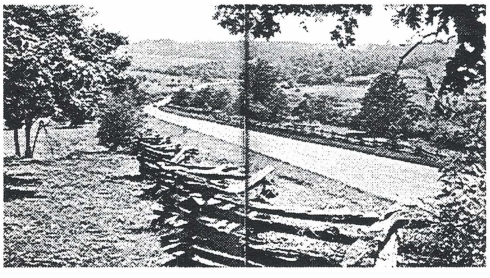


Figure 5. Ideal Agriscape (Source: Abbott, 1987, p. 14).

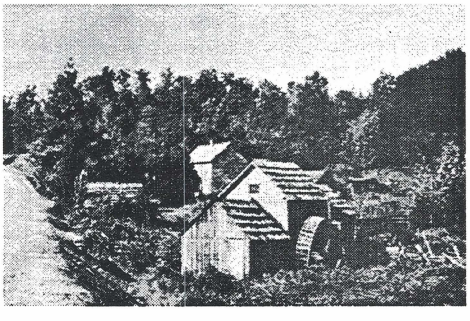


Figure 6. Mabry Mill "before" (Source: Noblitt, 1994, p.397).

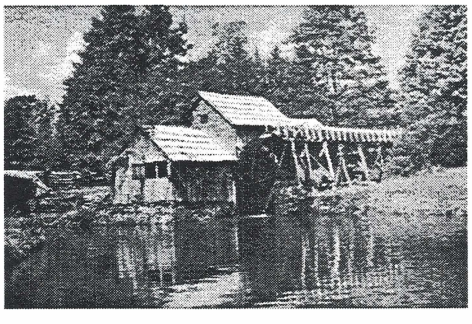


Figure 7. Mabry Mill "after" (Source: Noblitt, 1994, p.397).

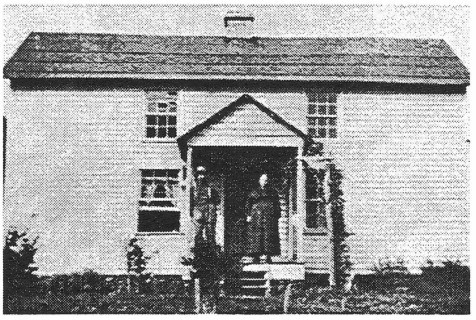


Figure 8. Ed Mabry and Wife – Original House (Source: Noblitt, 1994, p.399).

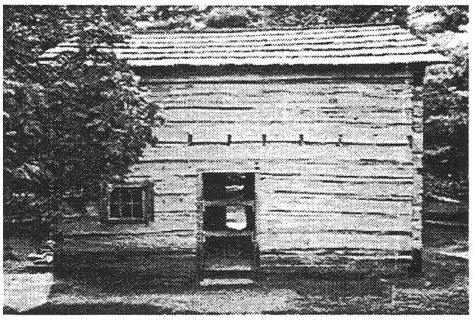


Figure 9. The "Authentic" Substitute (Source: Noblitt, 1994, p.401).

Figure 10. Waystation with Picnic Tables (Source: Jolley, 1969, p.11).

Figure 11. Blacksmithing at Mabry Mill, and Figure 12. Weaving at Brinegar Cabin (Source: Jolley, 1969, p.125).

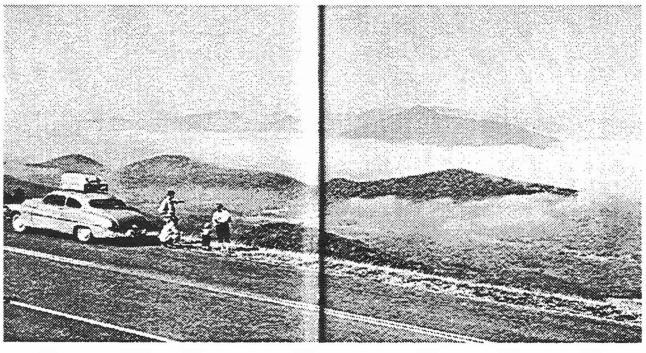


Figure 13. A Carscape (Source: Jolley, 1969, p. 12)

> The general thought was to clean up these areas, and unfortunately the term, 'Cleanup of Woods and Fields,' was adopted to describe the work done. The intent of these specifications was apparently misunderstoodthrough the use of the word 'Cleanup'... Henceforth, the title, 'Preliminary Improvement of Woods,' shall be used in describing the work (Abbott, 1936, p.2).

In making this change, Abbott hoped to avoid confusing the work crews. For Abbott, whilst the landscape required organization the visible separation of "man" and "nature" must be maintained, else the myth of pristine wilderness would be destroyed.

Agriscapes

Pastures and agricultural lands were also assessed as to their restorative potential and proposed use following rejuvenation. Abbott implemented a project whereby lands that were owned by the Park Service along the borders of the road that had previously been used for agriculture or as pastures were restored and then leased back to residents in the area. The lease rate was set a $1 per acre per year, the stipulation being that the use of the land conform to the standards set by the Park Service. In a 1940 memorandum Abbott stated that:

> A careful Parkway landscape including seeding, sodding, and reforestation and rehabilitation of worn out pastures and fields should not only stabilize and beautify Parkway lands, but inspire better care of land throughout the mountains. As part of the landscape program, ... a program of mountain farm demonstration has been initiated on many farms facing the Blue Ridge Parkway. From these not only should a much needed sense of better farm management be spread among farmers in the Blue Ridge, but as well the lesson in land conservation be made apparent to the hundreds of thousands who will annually drive the Parkway providing an audience for the demonstrational work. As part of this program many acres of rehabilitated Parkway pastures and fields will be leased back to the nearby farmer at a nominal rental, thus reducing Parkway maintenance costs while at the same time preserving the panoramic views across the open fields which the Parkway location affords (p.2).

Abbott hoped that these land management practices, once proven effective, would find their way into the general population and work to eradicate the "destructive" practices of past generations. To this end, extensive soil improvements were carried out on all pasture and agricultural lands according to a specified schedule (see Figures 4 and 5 as idealized agriscapes). Lime, fertilizers and seeds were spread to reclaim lands that were deemed useful. Other marginal property, such as steep hillslopes, or areas which need not remain open as pasture in order to preserve the view, were assisted by the addition of lime, topsoil and wildflower seeds to aid the regeneration of natural plant succession. The significance of these improvements, however, lay not in the material well being of the residents, but in their demonstrational value; such scenes were constructed for the visual consumption of the driver, conveying, it was hoped, "an atmosphere of original mountain habitation" (Borresen, 1941, p.1).

Culturescapes

Fortunately for Abbott, the native residents took slightly better care of their homes than their fields. Along the length of the Parkway there are examples of mountain handicraft and craftsmanship in the form of log structures ranging from homes to barns to water-powered mills. For Abbott, these structures were not to be just carefully preserved relics, but also, importantly, staged scenes for the auto tourist:

> At present the Parkway is based on scenic view only, and after traveling more than 400 miles on what appears to be the top of the world, some little diversion will be restful. The country through which it travels is rich in folklore... [The residents']

> struggle for existence, and their ingenious efforts to create small comforts of life have left a trail of handicraft which in simplicity and often crudity have proven to be both artistic and useful. The story can best be told by recreating some of these features which are now fast disappearing, namely recreating the home handicraft (Borresen, 1940, p.1).

It was up to the engineers and landscapers of the Parkway to determine which of these structures were to be restored and preserved, or merely stabilized and left closed, to be seen from the road only as stage props. Five structures situated immediately along the route were seen to be ideal for restoration and preservation, namely the Trail Cabin, the Orlene Puckett Cabin, the Martin Brinegar Cabin, the Caudill Cabin, and the Mabry Mill (Abbott, 1941). Three of these structures are described below.

The Trail Family Cabin, built in the 1880s, is situated at a recreation area near an overlook known as the Smart View. The cabin and site were considered too picturesque to remain as fixtures only. It was suggested that the house be completely restored and made into a habitable home because, "... the man who built this home was an artist at heart and appreciated the beauty of these mountains.... The primitive grandeur that appears before the visitor is hard to describe" (Borresen, 1940, p.2). During the rebuilding of this structure it was found that much of the timber had to be replaced because of its age. The original logs were used as templates to recreate the cabin as closely as possible. In order to complete the picture it was suggested that, "... an old wood sled or at least two or three wheels, etc. from an old wagon should be leaned against outside walls or nearby trees" (Hieb, 1941, p.2).

The location and construction of the Caudill Cabin made it, according to Abbott (1946), one of the finest examples of pioneer cabins along the Blue Ridge Parkway. From an existing overlook at Wildcat Rocks, the tourist looks down a vertical distance of nearly 2,500 feet at a cabin surrounded on three sides by steep mountains. According to the architect of the site, "It is doubtful if a similar example of a pioneer cabin exists which so dramatically illustrates the extreme isolation of the mountain folk. Paradoxically, the cabin can be seen by many people" (Abbott, 1946, p.1). With the development of The Bluffs recreation area, a foot trail of about one mile, tourists were able to reach the cabin itself. In order to prepare the site for tourist viewing, improvements were needed. Abbott (1946, p.2) noted that the,

> ... clearing has reforested chiefly with yellow poplar...[that] in vicinity of cabin should be cleared, leaving large trees, which evidently were left standing when [the] cabin was built, and fruit trees. This clearing is necessary for fire protection and better visibility of the cabin from Wildcat Rocks. It would restore the picture.

This "picture" of mountain life was important to the myth that Abbott was trying to create. This cabin, in this setting, was to signify isolation, independence, and backwardness; in sum, a lost culture in need of illumination.

The final structure on the list, Mabry Mill, has become the showplace of the Parkway. It did not, however, start out this way. Many of the initial impressions of the mill site were disappointing. Borresen, for example, noted that, "The building is not very old, dating perhaps between 1900-1920" (1940, p.2). He did, however, see some promise: "From a distance, the mill has some striking features, particularly the three different roof lines. The building is well weathered and appears much older than it is. It is ideally located some sixty feet from the Parkway, with space for a parking area readily available." In addition to the mill house, the site contained a small log blacksmith shop, a large, well preserved log barn, and the miller's house, a modern clapboard frame structure:

> In this compact group of buildings we have an exhibit of the home, workshop, tools and creations of a twentieth century jack of all trades whose skills enabled his community to retain a large measure of unity and self sufficiency far into the

> heyday of the mail order house and the automobile (Hieb, 1941, p.3).

A dam was added near the front of the mill, collecting the wheel spill, which provided a reflecting pool that enhanced the mill's photogenic qualities for the tourists (Figures 6 and 7). Despite numerous recommendations to the contrary (Hieb, 1941; Borresen, 1941), Abbott ordered Ed Mabry's hand built house dismantled and removed from the site, ostensibly to provide room for parking. In its place, a one room log cabin was trucked in from a site nearby and set in place of the original house (Figures 8 and 9). Others who have studied the handling of the site suggest that the Mabry house was removed because the clapboards appeared incongruous with the rest of the Parkway's pioneer image (Noblitt, 1994). In addition, Parkway officials removed the kerosene engine that Mabry had used to power the mill, and rebuilt the overshot waterwheel that had been inoperable for a number of years prior to acquisition of the site. In promoting the myth of the insular, self-sufficient pioneer, all traces of "outside" influence were removed. According to a Park service report, the alterations made to the mill were so extensive that the natural and cultural landscape now bears only a passing resemblance to the original scene (Noblitt, 1994).

In these three examples we see the overriding presumption that "history" is to be considered a generic "past," such that the age of a building is not as important as having the proper *representation* of age and character. Following the decision on which structures to preserve, efforts revolved around how to make those chosen look as authentic as possible. To this end, alterations were made to the structures themselves, as well as to the surrounding areas. Props were added and, for character, locals were brought in to demonstrate and sell "traditional" mountain culture to the tourist.

Carscapes

We have seen how control was exerted over the scenes that presented themselves to the tourist. The discussion will now turn to the ways in which the tourist was controlled. One of the most simple methods of control adopted by the designers was to determine where and how often tourists driving the Parkway were able to leave the road and exit their cars. Abbott thought that the Parkway would be a, "road-type which will invite leisurely driving and frequent stops for a period of hours or of days by the vacationer. It is unquestionably desirable, therefore, to set aside certain worthwhile areas at which the motorist may stop and to provide facilities..." (1934, p.1).

Waystations were constructed at intervals along the route and ranged from elaborate lakeside resorts with lodges, to campgrounds, to simple turnouts with picnic tables (Figure 10). Even at these roadside parks, the myth of a traditional Blue Ridge culture was sustained. Many of the larger areas had concessions and gift shops in which mountain handicrafts were demonstrated (see Figures 11 and 12). These crafts, as well as "such products as sourwood honey, sorghum molasses, wild fruits and herbs – collection and production of which were fostered through the 'hill culture' educational program – were to be readily available to the tourist. Thus, through education program itself, the natives were to be "taught" their own culture.

As a complement to the waystations, it was determined that gas and service stations would be needed along the route at roughly 20 to 25 mile intervals. This was a troubling problem for the designers who wanted to avoid strip development along the roads that intersected the Parkway. Abbott thought that:

> It is beyond question that these things will spring up in the nondescript fashion of ribbon development along the ordinary highway unless definite measures are taken to provide for them on government property. Since the protective effect of the Parkway right of way will break down at each intersection with a public road, it is desirable to locate stations in such a manner as to discourage competition by such private enterprises. Attractively designed to fit their special environs and

use these units would add greatly to the enjoyment of the Parkway (1934, p.4).

In addition to the control exercised over the visitor outside the car at the side of the road, the view from inside the car was similarly a mediated experience. The road itself, although a path into the park environs, acted as a mediating influence. The car and its inhabitants, as an extension of the "present" and the "city" were not allowed to intermingle with "nature" and the "past;" they were kept separate by the shoulders of the road. Conversely, this mobility provided the traveler with an altogether different experience from the traditional park visit. Similar to the changing scenes on the stage throughout a play, the scenes out the car window changed with each passing curve in the road (Figure 13). These panoramic views were, and are, part of the dynamic travel process in which the distance traveled becomes a metaphor for passing time. As Wilson suggests, "The ... car is a metaphor for progress. It is always moving ahead – although the effect is the opposite, as if the landscape were moving past us, into the ... shadows of history" (1992, p.34). To the tourist in the car, it becomes almost a sacred practice to be able to penetrate nature by driving through it; to sanctify nature by keeping it separate. Within the comfort of the private world of the car one can view the outside regardless of the circumstances or season. Heat, rain or wind are no longer factors to deter the tourist, and seasons are marked not by change in weather and temperature but by the sights to be seen: June is the time for rhododendron blooms, Fall is the changing of the foliage, and Winter becomes a snowy wonderland.

Conclusion

It is unusual to see any project of this size, especially when it involves the federal government, placed so much under the control of one individual. Yet Stanley Abbott was given virtual free reign in his designs and control over a workforce that at times numbered in excess of 2,500 men. It is this fact that gives the Parkway its unique status within the cultural landscape. It is unlikely that the singular vision of one individual will have such a profound impact on a regional landscape and its inhabitants again. Not only was Abbott responsible for the creation of what is now the most visited park in the nation, his vision was responsible for the course of the future expansion and near monopoly that tourism now enjoys in the region. Residents and businesses along the Parkway had few options and little recourse other than to adopt the mythological representations of mountain culture and natural vistas created by Abbott. They had to promote them as the "true" history of the region in order to survive, both economically and culturally, and to encourage the increasing number of outsiders that growth in tourism demanded.

References

Abbott, S. (1946) *Memorandum for the Regional Director, Region I*, Record Group 5, Series 46, National Park Service Archives, Asheville NC.

—— (1941) *Memorandum for the Regional Director, Region I*, Record Group 5, Series 46, National Park Service Archives, Asheville NC.

—— (1940) *Memorandum for Mr. Vint*, Record Group 5, Series 18, National Park Service Archives, Asheville NC.

—— (1936) *Planning the Complete Landscape Development - The Problem and the Program*, National Park Service Archives, Asheville, NC.

—— (1934) *The Appalachian National Parkway - Recreation and Service Areas*, Record Group 7, Series 39, National Park Service Archives, Asheville NC.

Borresen, T. (1941) *Inspection Report Blue Ridge Parkway, Old Log Cabins and Other Old Structures Along the Parkway*, National Park Service Library, Asheville NC.

—— (1940) *Report on Mountain Culture and Handicraft, Blue Ridge Parkway*, Record Group 5, Series 46, National Park Service Archives, Asheville NC.

Gignoux, L. (1986) "Stanley Abbott and the Design of the Blue Ridge Parkway," in Buxton, B. and Beatty, S., eds. *Blue Ridge Parkway-Agent of Transition: Proceedings of the BRP Golden Anniversary Conference.* Boone, NC: Appalachian Consortium Press.

Hieb, D. (1941) *Report of a Trip to Investigate Historic Sites and Buildings Along the Blue Ridge Parkway*, Record Group 5 Series 46, National Park Service Archives, Asheville NC

Ickes to Ehringhaus, November 10, 1934 in Record Group 48, National Park Service Archives, Asheville NC.

Noblitt, P. (1994) "The Blue Ridge Parkway and Myths of the Pioneer," *Appalachian Journal* 21.4: 394-408

Raitz, K. and Ulack, R. (1984) *Appalachia - A Regional Geography: Land, People and Development.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Swaim, D. (1986) "Stanley Abbott and the Design of the Blue Ridge Parkway," in Buxton, B. and Beatty, S., eds. Blue Ridge Parkway-Agent of Transition: Proceedings of the BRP Golden Anniversary Conference. Boone, NC: Appalachian Consortium Press.

U.S. Federal Land Committee (1942) *Public Works and Rural Land Use: Report of the Land Committee to the National Resources Planning Board*, Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

Wilson, A. (1992) *The Culture of Nature: North American Landscape from Disney to the Exxon Valdese.* Cambridge, MA: Blackwell