



GREAT BIRDING PROJECTS



An approach to bird-related editing, education, tourism, and marketing

21 February 2017

Roads, Roads, Roads ***- lessons from the National Park Service***

As 2016 closed, so ended the year-long celebration of the National Park Service's centennial. The event was marked by activities at the parks themselves as well as by park Friend's Groups, conservation and preservation organizations, park concessionaires, cooperating associations, environmental educators, and big and small companies, connecting with the mission of the National Park Service. Public service announcements (PSAs) abounded in print, audio, and video format.

Among publications that made a debut last year was *National Park Roads: A Legacy in the American Landscape* by Timothy Davis (University of Virginia Press, 2016). At first glance, you might think the book is just another slightly oversized "coffee-table book" full of impressive photos of the scenic roads through our National Parks. While the Davis book is certainly a collection of beautiful historic photos, it is also much more.

Beyond the classic size, the pretty cover, and the assortment of captivating photos, this book offers a deep look into the surprising and unique quality and history of National Park roads, roads targeted at bringing the public to scenic and wonderful locations, but simultaneously challenged by the obligation to preserve the character of these very same places.

A mixture of enthusiasm and apprehension has always been part of the reception of automobiles in National Parks, and this book carefully addresses this apparent conflict. Instead of arguing for the primacy of a particular view, the book shows how road development responded to practical concerns, evolving technology, social practice, wilderness advocates, and cultural demands over many decades.

Some readers may want to pay special attention to the "Golden Age" of National Park road-building, the period that stretched between the two World Wars, and was uniquely





CCC workers at Great Smoky Mountains National Park: NPS Archives

punctuated by the work of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in the 1930s. With the current national interest in "infrastructure investment," there should be a place to examine a time in the past when major government-directed investment went into the very building of conservation, where roads were a part, but certainly not all, of the picture.

After the expected slowdown of road-building in National Parks during WWII, there was a burst of activity in post-war growth. By the mid-1950s, it was apparent that sizable investment in NPS infrastructure was needed. And the

connection between car travel, road building, and park visitation reached a particular high-point with the Baby Boom generation's childhood years. As Davis points out, this was a time when "many parents considered national park vacations to be an essential component of an appropriate upbringing."

All the while, a Park Service eagerness to embrace the automobile posed a potential threat to the parks and to their use by future generations of Americans. Was the increase of access of these places, actually spoiling them? Did a "good roads movement," in the words of Aldo Leopold, become a "good roads mania"? Or was the strong pushback against the NPS injunction, "for the benefit and enjoyment of all," at heart a misanthropic and elitist resistance?

Although it may not have been intended as such, the debates swirled around a voluminous report, *Mission 66 for the National Park System*, a 10-year program that was expected to address dramatically expanding park visitation by 1966, in time for the golden anniversary of the NPS. (Mission 66 projects started in 1956 and ended in 1966. During those 10 years, more than \$1 billion was spent on infrastructure and other improvements in the parks, including roads.)

By the golden anniversary of the NPS, in 1966, it was clear that there were both tourism interests desiring to see roads improved as well as conservationists who wished to maintain the status quo, or even remove access features. Some proponents had concluded that "rationing the tourists" made more sense than expanding the roadways. The passage of The Wilderness Act in 1964 had put to rest parts of these arguments, but only parts. By the late 1960s and early 1970s some further solutions arose with alternative transportation programs, looking beyond auto-oriented solutions (e.g., trams, shuttle-buses, and bikes). Still, by the 1990s, many visitors were spending fewer than three hours in the parks, at even some of the most famous parks, especially if the visitors found difficulty in securing parking spots.

New problems had arisen, and some managers, planners, and dedicated landscape architects longed for the days in the '50s and '60s when lengthy family visitation was viewed almost as a rite of passage. By 2009, a survey revealed that simple scenic driving in parks remained the most popular recreational activity, outpacing hiking, backpacking, and other non-motorized activities.

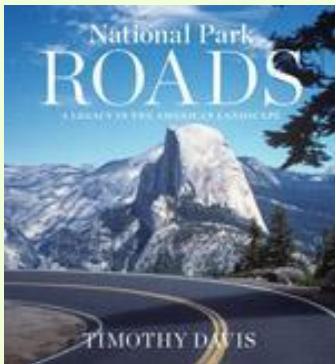
At the same time, the NPS discovered the need to overcome social barriers to access. As the U.S. becomes increasingly diverse, the call to provide for broader access has taken on

additional connotations - whether this involves roads or not. Curiously, this concern goes at least as far back as the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission (ORRRC), created in the late 1950s. In response to the reality of having most National Parks away from urban centers, the ORRRC wished to address the "crisis of recreation" by developing facilities in or near major cities.

In the last months of the Obama Administration, a little-appreciated piece of bipartisan legislation was passed by Congress and signed by the President on December 8. The Outdoor Recreation Jobs and Economic Impact Act of 2016, or REC Act, directs the Department of Commerce to enter into a joint memorandum with the Department of Agriculture and the Department of the Interior to conduct an assessment and analysis of the outdoor recreation economy of the United States and the effects attributable to it on the overall U.S. economy. The data will be collected and analyzed through the highly-respected Bureau of Economic Analysis at the Department of Commerce.

With an astounding \$646 billion attributed to annual outdoor consumer spending, the potential is great, and a credible defense of the outdoors and public lands could be broad. Some players, such as the Outdoor Industry Association, are in a good position to deliver a powerful message, connected to jobs, prosperity, vacation time, and quality experiences.

The implications go beyond roads or even the parks. There are lessons for National Wildlife Refuges, National Forests, BLM lands, and state and county parks and wildlife properties with their mandate to provide quality outdoor experiences to an increasingly preoccupied American public.



In fact, Tim Davis posits this issue very well at the beginning of his book, and his comments can be expanded to consider access beyond the world of National Parks: "For many people, what they see from the road *is* the national park experience... but for some people, simply knowing roads are present compromises parks' ability to function as escapes from modern civilization." But Davis also adds at the end of his book that "Despite several highly publicized debates, decisions about the balance between preservation and access almost always favored the former."

Indeed, this is the way it should be, and looking through *National Park Roads: A Legacy in the American Landscape* should provide background and context for continued discussion for the right balance today for both land managers and advocates and a way to view creatively combining preservation and access.

~ by PJB

Words to Consider:

"Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wilderness is a necessity; and that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life."

- John Muir (1838-1914)

1917 Feeder-poster Copy Available



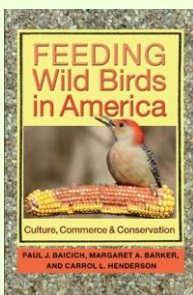
Early in 1917, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, through the Bureau of Biological Survey, offered a winter bird-feeding poster, making the case for what were considered "useful birds" that "more than pay for their keep." This poster showed methods of attraction, foods, and results of feeding birds in winter. Instructions on the poster were included, in the words of an announcement in the magazine *Bird-Lore* at the time, "to enable anyone to establish feeding stations." *The Feed the Birds this Winter* poster, shown in the small image to the left, was to be the first in a long line of federally sponsored poster promotions to advocate bird feeding.

The background story on the poster is further explained in *Feeding Wild Birds in America: Culture, Commerce & Conservation*, described below.

You can get a wonderful reproduction of this poster (12" X 18") on quality stock and suitable for framing for \$7. Send a check to:
 Paul J. Baicich
 P.O. Box 404
 Oxon Hill, MD 20750

The price also covers postage and handling, but please add \$0.35 for taxes if you live in Maryland!

On the History of Backyard Bird Feeding



The authors of *Feeding Wild Birds in America: Culture, Commerce & Conservation* (Paul Baicich, Margaret Barker, and Carrol Henderson) continue to line up talks, interviews, and book-signings with bird and garden clubs, nature centers, festivals, parks and refuges, and stores for 2017. For these sorts of activities, and more information, please contact [Margaret Barker](#).

The presentations cover a wide range of bird-feeding history topics, linked with practical lessons for today. For example, they can address the following:

- Why extremely popular **hemp seed** lost favor as a birdseed. (And the possibility of it being on the verge of a comeback!)
- The origins of **black-oil sunflower seed**. (And the involvement of what could be considered Cold War agricultural espionage.)
- How **hummingbird nectar and feeders** came to be. (And the efforts to devise "just the right sugar-formula.")
- How the plastic **tube-feeder** was invented. (And its connection to modern-art design.)
- Why **coconuts** became the foundation for many feeder designs in the past. (And how the source goes back to the end of the 19th century.)
- How **nyjer seed** came to America as a backyard birdseed. (And how it has been used in south Asia.)

A FEW CONTACTS AND SUGGESTIONS

- If you want to order a supply of the book for your own store, nature center, or organization, contact [David Neel](#) at Texas A&M University Press: 979-458-3988
- For talks, book signings, festivals, interviews, etc. please contact [Margaret Barker](#).
- To order an individual copy of the book, use this [order-form](#).

GBP Bulletin Archives

Great Birding Projects is a vehicle to promote a creative approach to bird-related editing, education, tourism, and marketing. GBP functions as a bridge to an innovative engagement between people and birds. You can access all previous issues of the *GBP* bulletin on the GBP website [here](#).

