



CHAPTER NINE

Lying Lightly on the Land

"We pioneered a new road up to Glacier Point in Yosemite. The old road was too rugged and too dangerous for automobiles. It was more of a trail than a road. There wasn't any pavement and the gradients were severe. The National Park people said it had to go."

"The public would follow any road into the wilderness, so long as it was paved," was the belief of Stephen Mather, the first director of the National Park Service (NPS), and his goal was to make the parks accessible to the people. However, the NPS also was adamant that those roads must "lie lightly on the land." In other words, road design must consider aesthetics and maintain harmony with the surroundings. There was no sense getting people into the parks if the scenery they came for was desecrated.

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From 1924 to 1933, the NPS and the Bureau of Public Roads (BPR) undertook the building of such a motor road—and not on easy terrain but over the mountains of Glacier National Park in Montana. Today the spectacular 52-mile Going-to-the-Sun Road hugs mountainsides, passes glacial lakes and arctic tundra, and crosses the Continental

Going-to-the-Sun Road in Glacier National Park is a tribute to civil engineering and to aesthetics.