Otto Klenk was happy. Out for a Sunday drive, the middle-aged Bavarian enjoyed the landscape just outside of Munich. Yellow and green colors dominated. After passing through a thick forest, Klenk relaxed, a pipe dangling from his mouth. Having lowered his speed, he contemplated how well meadows, forests, lakes, and mountains were composed as he gazed upon them through his windshield. Klenk looked forward to a meal with his paramour and some hunting.

All of a sudden, a comfortable-looking touring car passed him. Both driver and passenger appeared strange and exotic to Klenk, the native Bavarian. His mind began to wander. More people were on the move, he recalled having read, which would lead to a new mass migration: slow and sedentary people would be pushed aside by agile, nomadic types. Not amused by the prospect, Klenk stopped his car and looked at a roadside memorial for a farmer killed as he transported hay. Another car stopped. To his great chagrin, Klenk heard Northern German voices trying to read the Bavarian inscriptions. The strangers, it would appear, were already here.

Increasingly tense, he drove off and accelerated, no longer enjoying the scenery. Klenk’s thoughts turned to work-related matters. When not maneuvering a vehicle, Klenk ran the Bavarian justice department. Adversaries such as the liberal lawyer Siegbert Geyer—a “dirty Jew” to boot—bothered him. But the pleasant, multicolored landscape calmed Klenk down. He thought of his conservative fellow party members and how simpleminded some of them were. Klenk’s car almost hit a bicyclist, which led to an exchange of tirades.1

While mountains, lakes, anti-Semitism, roads, and automobiles all existed
in Bavaria in the 1920s, Otto Klenk did not. He sprang from the pen of the writer Lion Feuchtwanger, who painted a lively tableau of Bavaria in his 1930 novel *Success*. In the book, the justice minister spends most of his professional energy hounding an insubordinate museum director. Conservative politicians, supportive clergy, and self-satisfied Bavarians populate Feuchtwanger’s book. Some of the fictitious characters bear traces of historical figures: a likeness of Adolf Hitler draws crowds in the beer halls; a fashionably ragged poet with a fondness for automobiles resembles the young Bertolt Brecht.²

Klenk’s sudden shifts of attention from scenery to politics and back presaged the intimate relationship between the two in the 1930s. Driving a car and seeing one’s surroundings, while never merely an innocent, personal act, became dramatically and overtly politicized in the 1930s. At the political level, the United States and Germany drifted apart. One remained a democracy, the other one turned into a violent dictatorship by 1933. But both made cars, driving, and the consumption of groomed autoscapes tokens of national belonging. Roadmindedness reached new levels, found powerful patrons, and resulted in extensive infrastructures. Automotive landscapes not only received the financial and administrative support of central governments; they became elements for educating the citizenry (differently defined, of course), and of ordering and displaying landscapes. The attraction of a car ride immersed in scenery, as fleeting a beauty as there ever was, was meant to contribute to a deep and permanent sense of belonging.

For decades, the reality, if not the ideology, of the parkway had been about exclusion—in the sense of excluding people without automobiles, inappropriate signage, and undesirable views. Yet, when central governments stepped in and adopted parkways on a national scale, the terms of exclusion and the meaning of these parkways changed substantially. As scenic roads became national, they grew in size and importance. They still showcased particular versions and visions of regionally understood landscapes. But their designers aspired to create new regimes of space and time. Nationally funded and orchestrated parkways were to be symbolic of modern nation-states and their increasing reach into the farthest-flung areas. As such, parkways marked territoriality. These spatial arrangements also rearranged time. While undoubtedly modern, national parkways mobilized landscapes and narratives of rural pasts integrated into twentieth-century environments of belonging and consumption.
The two most extensive parkway efforts in these two countries were the Blue Ridge Parkway in Virginia and North Carolina, and the German Alpine Road (Deutsche Alpenstraße) in Bavaria. As the purposely designed nexus between technology and landscape, they were showcases of a mobility-oriented rescaling of the driving experience. Centrally planned and often opposed by locals, these landscaped roads were grand monuments to a new form of driving and tourism. A particular form of roadmindedness emerged. While presenting locally and regionally understood landscapes, their origins, design, and management were metropolitan rather than rural. Their smooth and pleasant appearance belied conflicts, beginning with basic routing issues and not ending with signage. They were duplicitous landscapes, as the geographer Stephen Daniels would insist: their attractive features glossed over conflict, contestation, and context. Harmony, not disagreement, continues to be the basic message of these ensembles, whether seen while driving or in photographs. Upon closer examination, disagreement, not harmony, is the basic message of their history. Today, both harmony and disagreement are so entangled as to form a mangled unity.

**Roads in the Great Depression**

As public works projects, these two scenic roads emanated from crises and contingency. The Blue Ridge Parkway and the German Alpine Road had been proposed by locals but only became a reality when the Great Depression demanded visible efforts to overcome economic calamities and put people to work. The politics of the 1930s—the New Deal and Nazi economic efforts—made these roads, their extent, and amounts of funding possible. As large-scale infrastructures supervised and financed by national governments, the two parkways reflected the political systems of which they were a part: a more interventionist democracy and a centralizing dictatorship.

In the United States, New Deal policies sought to transform both the economy and the environment. The economic crisis of the early 1930s provoked stronger state action; transformationist visions abounded. Among Washington planners, it was common wisdom that better management was needed for the economy and the environment. A stronger central state supplied the institutions and the financing, millions of men provided their labor in the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), the Works Progress Administration (WPA), the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), and elsewhere; as a result, the New Deal period “perhaps more than any other in U.S. history witnessed
the transformation of public space by the federal government. More and more rivers, forests, and agricultural lands saw at least an effort by Washington, DC, to add a layer of federal intervention, supervision, or management. The Soil Conservation Service sought to convince farmers to implement different farming methods to prevent another Dust Bowl, the catastrophe that had ravaged the Great Plains. Some landscapes, such as millions of acres of what became state parks, changed owners and purpose. Through the work of CCC men, pastures and commercial forests became landscapes of recreation. The Blue Ridge Parkway is one of these landscapes that owe their existence to the New Deal.

Mobilizing landscapes and people was one of the hallmarks of Nazi Germany on its way to World War II, albeit under different auspices than in the United States. The economy recovered after the Great Depression; the regime began to prepare for a war. Unlike its American counterpart, the German economy could not rely on domestic resources and food sources alone. Under the banner of autarky, abandoned coal and iron ore mines reopened, production accelerated at existing ones, and factories and cities grew. The German counterpart to the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Reich Labor Service, worked rarely on recreational landscapes but cleared forests for roads and drained swamps, thus bringing marginal landscapes into the reach of agriculture and human settlement. Simultaneously, Hitler's regime unfolded a repertoire of infrastructural activities. Expanding transmission lines for electricity, constructing hydroelectric dams, and, not least, roadbuilding served the goals of preparing for a war of aggression, boosting industrial production, and tying a racially defined citizenry closer to its Führer.

The autobahn, as noted, was the most prominent of these projects. Its landscapes were hardly the unalloyed boon to the environment that the regime made them out to be, although a green sheen characterized the early history of the regime in general. German conservationists had placed high hopes in the new regime. In its early years, the dictatorship displayed somewhat surprising degrees of affection for natural spaces, at least on a rhetorical level. Environmentalists and some of the members of the Nazi elite became temporary bedfellows. The first nationwide conservation law was a product of this union. Hundreds of nature preserves were cataloged. Yet preservationist concerns tended to take a back seat to the goal of preparing for war. In simplified terms, Nazi environmentalism was shallow but wide.

Seen in this light, the regime’s roadways are test cases for its proclaimed
environmentalism and its transformative approach to landscapes. The German Alpine Road was designed as a scenic showpiece: the Alpine and subalpine topography of Southern Bavaria was put on a pedestal of concrete and asphalt. Both the dictatorship’s ostensive love of nature and the Nazi variant of roadmindedness came to the fore. While a few locals had suggested similar scenic infrastructures, the Alpine Road was a thoroughly urban and metropolitan project.

In comparison, the planning and construction of the Blue Ridge Parkway reflected the New Deal’s infrastructural activism and its sponsorship of car-based tourism in a more democratic system, yet with similar tensions between planners and locals. These altercations played out against the background of remoteness: Southern Bavaria and Appalachia were both regions most easily identified with social and cultural backwardness, agricultural economies, poverty, and lesser degrees of political representation. In addition, tourism emerged as an economic strategy and cultural marker for both places in the twentieth century.

**Alpine Road Proposals before 1933**

The Blue Ridge Parkway and the German Alpine Road were both elevated roads: as the most extensive scenic roads in their respective countries, they received large amounts of money and attention. They were also mountain roads, designed to capitalize on viewing opportunities from high above and to present a motorized version of mountainous communities. Although the Appalachians and Alps are quite different topographically, the approach of the designers to the heights was similar: they turned mountainous landscapes into consumable scenery.

The most obvious difference between the two mountain ranges is their height. The highest Alpine summits, situated above the timberline and covered in perpetual ice and snow, appear forbidding. The tallest peaks reach more than 13,000 feet (4,000 meters). Yet, Alpine landscapes were not devoid of humans. Permanent settlements in the valleys were long-established. As one historian put it, the Alps acted “more as a filter than a barrier” for human history, including trade and migration. Forests provided building materials and firewood for centuries, mines were common, and pastoralists built livelihoods around the environment and the seasons. During the summer, Alpine pastures became sites of transhumance. Cow’s milk became more portable and lasted longer once it was turned into cheese, using human
labor and assistance from enzymes in the form of rennet. Geological forces had shaped the mountains; humans and other animals sought to reshape them for agriculture and trade.9

In comparison, the summits of Southern Appalachia feature less extreme heights, but a series of mountain ranges of 6,000 feet (1,800 meters) and more. Native American interventions on the landscape appear light in comparison to agriculture and silviculture practiced by European settlers and their descendants. These transformations remained mostly local in scale before the nineteenth century. Timber and mining interests, and the growing involvement of the region in capitalist exchanges, remade the ridges, slopes, and valleys more systematically from then onward. By the early twentieth century, drastic deforestation marked several areas. With accelerated timber cutting came railroads and mills. Enough scenery remained, however, to support a nascent tourist industry.10

Bavaria and Appalachia both came to be viewed as exotic as they became tourist regions.11 Within Germany, cultural differences and regional allegiances have been so pronounced as to be stereotypical. The twin forces of political unification in a new Germany after 1871 and of economic integration, both domestically and globally, helped to contribute to regional senses of belonging wrapped in national outlooks. Rhinelanders, Saxons, and Swabians posited themselves as such first and as Germans second. Food, landscapes, and dress made the difference between one region and the next. Among these quasi-tribal identities, Bavaria’s sense of self provided a counterpoint to Prussian hegemony and the powerhouses of industry within Prussian borders. While Munich developed into a fair-sized city with a sizable middle class, and Northern Bavaria saw pockets of industrialization and relative wealth, Southern Bavaria apart from Munich and Augsburg remained overwhelmingly rural. The plains, with their fertile soil, supported farming communities and small towns, while the more mountainous valleys and higher elevations allowed marginal agriculture and silviculture.12

In the larger contexts of the European Alps, the mountains on Bavarian soil were neither particularly high nor particularly distinctive. The retreat of glaciers after the Late Pleistocene left a legacy of valleys and lakes, as it did elsewhere. Switzerland and Austria offered more summits at higher altitudes, and the former led Europe in establishing mountain-based tourism. Bavaria was varied enough, topographically speaking, to feature a few high points, but it contained mostly foothills and plateaus within its borders.
However, seen from the vantage point of Germany at large, the Bavarian Alps stood in sharp contrast to the large North German plains and the Central German Uplands. Bavaria was the only German state with access to this mountain range. Seen from Berlin, the center of national political power, the Alps were the periphery of an economically middling and partially poor Southern state.

Still, Bavaria’s Alps mattered greatly in the cultural imagination. While other regions provided their share of imagined backward-oriented groups struggling in the face of modernity, the image of the eternal Bavarian mountain-dweller dwarfed by peaks and accompanied by livestock resonated widely within Germany. Even though Alpine farmers rarely wore them, lederhosen and dirndl became synonymous with Southern Bavarian dress, due to the work of regionalist, folklorist clubs that focused on popularizing imagined or real peasant garb. At the same time, Alpine agriculture became increasingly integrated into national economies, with milk and milk products being some of the most obvious commodities.  

In other words, this was the ideal environment for urbanites to imagine as tranquil and unspoiled, even if humans had remade it for centuries. The result was a mental landscape of primitivism and a picture of a physical landscape of beauty, both ready for tourism. In addition, what made Southern Bavaria distinct was the infrastructural activity of a nineteenth-century admirer of this region: Ludwig II, the eccentric Bavarian king, who died in 1886. He was the consummate castle builder. Ludwig’s building frenzy fed on a political desire to imprint his legacy on the Bavarian landscape in an absolutist fashion while being bound as a constitutional monarch. Aesthetically speaking, his castles reimagined a medieval and feudal past; some buildings were to create ideal vessels for the operas of his protégé, the composer Richard Wagner. More prosaically, cabinet members and state administrators were aghast at the runaway costs of construction and the resulting millions of Goldmarks of public debt. To mitigate the expenses, administrators sometimes even prescribed faux marble instead of real stone.

After Ludwig’s demise, the state took its revenge. By opening the fantasy castles to the public, Bavaria more than recouped its missing millions. Less than six weeks after the king’s death, the Neuschwanstein, Linderhof, and Herrenchiemsee citadels were accessible to anyone able to pay the entrance fee. Immediately, guidebooks began to perpetuate stories about the “mad” king, interwoven with appreciation of the art and architecture of his build-
Sally Israel with three acquaintances in Bavarian country costume, Bad Reichenhall, ca. 1920. While on vacation, urban tourists pose for photographs in lederhosen and dirndl in a photographer’s studio against a painted background of Alpine peaks and a valley. Studios would produce postcards of these scenes that tourists could send to friends and family. While not authentic, such costumes were popular and became part of local lore. By propagating such clichés and by making the foothills of the Alps accessible, Southern Bavaria developed a tourism industry that relied heavily on urban travelers such as this group from Berlin. The spa town of Bad Reichenhall, which was more accommodating to Jewish tourists than other locations, drew the ire of anti-Semites during the interwar period. Jewish Museum Berlin, Inv.-Nr. 2005/136/19, donation of Monica Peiser
Since then, Neuschwanstein alone has attracted many millions of visitors. In the process, it created a visual legacy reaching all the way to Disneyland: reproduced as “Sleeping Beauty Castle,” it has graced the Southern California landscape since 1955. With only slight exaggeration, journalists have claimed that Neuschwanstein, “the ‘authentic’ Disneyland,” is as famous as the dome of St. Peter’s Basilica and the Egyptian pyramids.

Also distinguishing Southern Bavarian tourism are the Oberammergau passion plays, which had existed as local religious rites since the early seventeenth century. They gained prominence and visitation numbers by the late nineteenth century, when easier transportation and greater wealth helped turn them into an international spectacle. Thomas Cook, the British travel agency, organized package tours for British and American visitors as early as 1880. The combination of a performance with old Catholic roots and ease of access via modern transportation proved successful, despite discussions over the anti-Semitic aspects of the plays. Almost half a million visitors attended the 1922 performances; among the visitors at a 1934 performance was Adolf Hitler, for whom the passion plays amounted to an exercise in theatrical anti-Semitism.

Castles and passion plays, mountains and lakes, and hiking and climbing marked the history of tourism in these places. Locals in lederhosen performed for visitors whose access to the sites depended on rails and roads. The mountains themselves saw a growing web of hiking paths, signposts, and huts provided by the thriving Alpine clubs. In the interwar period, tourism spots such as Füssen or Berchtesgaden embarked on a strategy of expansion. Tourism grew in economic importance, especially in rural regions; by the early 1930s, more than three out of four residents in the town of Garmisch lived off of it.

Tourism managers, while reassured by the proximity of Southern German cities such as Munich and Augsburg, where disposable incomes grew, constantly worried about the possibility of tourists moving on to Austria or Switzerland. Bavarian mountains were not as high as the Swiss ones, its railroads were not as accommodating to sedentary tourists, and car-based tourists found Austrian and Swiss roads to be more exciting. Travel advocates responded with motorized tourist thrills, such as the cog railroad to Germany’s highest peak, the Zugspitze (9,718 feet or 2,962 meters above sea level), which was in operation by 1930. In addition to rails, building roads was another effort to prevent tourists from venturing into Austria. For ex-
ample, tourists to Neuschwanstein numbered in the tens of thousands by the mid-1920s, but the shortest way from that castle to the nearby Linderhof palace led through Austria. Tourism promoters in the nearby town of Füssen suggested a new road to Linderhof on German territory to keep visitors from straying, supported by a motoring club. Preliminary engineering studies came to naught, but competitive roadmindedness persisted.\(^{22}\)

The most extensive road proposal came from a locale close to another one of Ludwig II’s castles. On the largest island of Lake Chiemsee, an updated imitation of Versailles called Herrenchiemsee attracted tourists. The chief tourism promoter in the lakeside town of Prien popularized the idea of a new road, reaching from Bavaria’s easternmost town, Berchtesgaden, not far from Salzburg, to its westernmost large community in Lindau, on Lake Constance. The road was not to leave Bavaria for its entire length. The Prien promoter, August Knorz (1876–1935), branded it a “Bavarian Alpine Road” (Bayerische Alpenstraße). A neo-native, like many tourism advocates, Knorz had a day job as director of the Prien hospital. To further the idea of this road, Knorz launched a broad media campaign.\(^{23}\)

Significantly, Knorz was not only a tireless promoter, but also an early member of the Nazi party. He joined the party in 1929, when it attracted relatively few voters. Knorz used the party newspaper as his platform to advertise the idea of an Alpine Road. He envisioned it as an educational tool to attain “quiet enjoyment of a beautiful, German landscape among Germans.” At a time when more tourists took trips using automobiles, Knorz wanted to establish a home-based version with a nationalistic twist. In the same breath, he presented the new road as a counterpoint to attractions in Austria and Italy, enticing tourists to spend their time and money in Bavaria. Citing Mussolini’s sponsorship of the autostrada, Knorz hoped for Hitler to become the guiding spirit of this highway project.\(^{24}\) Knorz’s vision was the extreme right-wing version of roadmindedness.

With Hitler still in the wings, the Great Depression became a rallying point for the Bavarian Alpine Road. In September of 1932, Knorz convened a meeting of tourism leaders from all over Southern Bavaria as well as members of the state parliament. Importantly, participants at the meeting envisioned that only a quarter to a third of the estimated three hundred miles (five hundred kilometers) of Alpine Road would have to be built from scratch; for the most part, the new road would consist of upgrading existing local connectors. Still, Knorz insisted that only a “real Alpine road,” one at higher
altitudes, would become an attraction, and that it should not leave Bavaria at all. Again, speakers stressed the competition from Austria, in particular, the project of a road to the Großglockner summit. According to a newspaper article, the four members of the state parliament present at the meeting—conservatives, Social Democrats, and National Socialists—signaled support (but not necessarily commitment). An incipient Alpine Road lobby, made up of local and Southern Bavarian tourism supporters, had become visible. In addition, Knorz was able to stir interest among newspapers. He was an inexhaustible, single-minded promoter whose affiliation with an extremist party gave him a particular platform. Knorz described his idea as necessary and generally popular. However, not even the regional tourism association for the Chiemgau region was convinced. As its leaders argued in private, it was simply too expensive to be built in the foreseeable future. Publicly, some members of one motoring club embraced the idea.25

The conservative state government in Munich, however, remained unimpressed. In January of 1933, just before Hitler’s ascent to power in Berlin, Nazi representatives in the Bavarian state assembly put the road project on the agenda. In its budget committee, they requested that the state government adopt the Alpine Road and seek unemployment relief money from Berlin.26 Historians argue that the general attitude of the Nazis in the state assembly before 1933 was largely obstructionist and propaganda-oriented—efforts to ban kosher butchering had been some of those most visible.27 Given the generally chaotic political scene, the assembly did not pass a single law in the year before the advent of the dictatorship resulted in the shutdown of state parliaments. Embracing the Alpine Road was yet another sign of support for an unrealistic, expensive idea at a time of great economic and political turmoil.28

In addressing this idea in front of the parliamentary committee, the highest-ranking highway official in Bavaria, the civil engineer Josef Vilbig, dismissed it. He deemed it “out of the question” that Bavaria would pay for the road or use money from the Reich, given a long list of necessary road improvements elsewhere. Alois Hundhammer, a conservative politician who later became famous as cultural minister in postwar Bavaria, seconded that it was more important to focus on upgrading transport networks in other places than to build new ones.29 The Conservatives put forward a motion of their own, which requested in more general terms that Alpine roads be up-
graded for tourism and for work creation efforts.\textsuperscript{30} This was more in line with Vilbig’s vision.

The engineer had, in fact, published a comprehensive report on the conditions of Bavaria’s roads in 1925, replete with a ten-year plan for modernizing existing roads, mostly by widening lanes and paving the roads. In stark contrast to the plans for the Alpine Road, the treatise was based on year-long traffic counts; heavily traveled roads indicated a need for upgrading.\textsuperscript{31} At its heart, the question was whether roads should follow traffic or generate it. Proponents of the Alpine Road, by and large, sought to create traffic. They were motivated by economic concerns about tourist revenue and cultural arguments over a new experience of landscape. Like his counterparts in American state highway departments, however, Vilbig aimed to respond to existing needs and extrapolate from them—an engineering approach based on the assumed supremacy of numbers over politics. Notably, Vilbig had toured American roads after representing Bavaria at the International Road Congress in Washington, DC, in 1930. To be sure, Vilbig’s report was not disinterested either: he described the growth of automotive transportation as a given. At a time when just one in 390 Bavarians owned an automobile, he predicted that his state would follow the path of other, wealthier regions and countries, as if it were a law of nature.\textsuperscript{32} Vilbig’s profession, his department, and civil engineers as a whole would (and did) benefit from such highway plans, and from motorization in general; such predictions were as much a precondition to motorization as a response to it.

When the proposal for the Alpine Road was on the floor of the Bavarian state assembly in early 1933, Vilbig compared costs and benefits, concluding that it was “impossible” for the state of Bavaria to become the main sponsor of what many considered to be a “luxury project.”\textsuperscript{33} For the Nazi faction, such expert reasoning was pusillanimous. Ludwig Siebert, the subsequent governor of Bavaria, thundered that it was the “damned duty” of the state to take leadership, especially when issues with thorny interests clashed.\textsuperscript{34} Another Nazi delegate claimed that the goal of the motion was to force the state administration into showing whether or not it was willing to do “something generous” in economic matters.\textsuperscript{35} A Communist state parliamentarian supported the project, even though, in his eyes, support for tourism only benefited capitalist interests. Mockingly, he wondered whether the Nazis wanted the Alpine Road as a better connection to their fellow Fascist Mus-
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solini in Rome. Given the economic and political malaise of the late Weimar Republic, the grandiose Alpine Road was unrealistic and low on the list of priorities for a somewhat sober state government. At the same time, the Nazis embraced it as a slightly daring, modern scenic infrastructure with potential benefits for tourism and national reawakening.36

With the Nazi takeover of power in Berlin in late January of 1933, marginal projects such as the Alpine Road moved to the top of the agenda with ease. In April, the Bavarian state assembly met for the last time before its divestiture. Some of its Social Democratic members were released from prisons and the Dachau concentration camp for the occasion, only to witness a Nazi spectacle celebrating the end of democracy.37 During his self-congratulatory speech, the new Nazi governor Siebert announced that the project of the Alpine Road would come to fruition and that it had been launched by a Nazi, namely Knorz.38 In a long memorandum from the spring of that same year, Knorz indulged in references to the “racially still healthy” stock of rural Upper Bavarian residents. His main motivation for the Alpine Road was to convince tourists, both German and foreign, to spend more time in Bavaria by offering them an all-Bavarian road. Costs should matter less; above all stood the “effect on the traveler.”39

Knorz’s insistence on the landscape effects was tied to political arguments: he accused the last democratic Bavarian state government of having hid behind a stance of frugality and gave the Alpine Road project a Nazi lineage. Knorz was a member of the party, the idea had first been announced in a Nazi newspaper, and now the Führer was about to realize it. By late March, Hitler was quoted in local newspapers: the new road was not just a matter for Bavaria, but for the entire Reich, decreed the dictator. More importantly, it enjoyed his support.40

For activists such as Knorz, the Alpine Road was a political wedge and a token of his party’s activism. But it does not follow that roadbuilding was necessarily a Nazi effort. When Frankfurt’s interwar lord mayor, Ludwig Landmann (who was Jewish), championed the cause of the Hafraba interwar autobahn lobby, his support did not make the highways a Jewish issue either. Landmann, a member of the liberal German Democratic Party, saw the roads as a potential economic boon for his city.41 Knorz, however, wanted to spur touristic growth along racial lines and further his party’s cause at the same time. The Alpine Road’s origin and support rested on National Socialism.
In a dictatorial gesture, Hitler made the Alpine Road one of his pet projects in early 1933. Local tourism leaders in Southern Bavaria still doubted whether a southern route—higher up the mountains and further from established towns—was preferable. Voices from Northern Bavaria preferred a less expensive subalpine road in the valleys as late as the fall of 1933. But such concerns, based on sectionalism and economic concerns, mattered little in the new dictatorship. In a meeting with governor Siebert in September 1933, Hitler affirmed that he would give the project high priority; it had to become “something really big, a road that the world would pay attention to.” According to one newspaper, a “gigantic project” was in the works. Hitler’s new regime was here to impress, and a Brobdingnagian road in the mountains was one of the more visible signs of the dictatorial era.

Vilbig, the former critic of the project, now instructed district engineers all over Southern Bavaria to supply detailed plans. He proved to be a loyal civil servant. Like many officials, Vilbig joined the party in the spring of 1933. Interestingly, his design instructions all but did away with his former reservations and concerns about costs. Not only should the road open up the beauties of the Alps, but the road itself should have a beautiful and grandiose effect through routing, massive structures, and integration into nature. Construction and maintenance should remain “within economic limits,” but this goal was clearly incompatible with the others.

The Nazis, apparently, took the notion of uplift quite literally. An engineering study from the fall of 1933 mentions new parameters. The former nucleus of the project was to be upgraded. Instead of planning the most simple and direct connection from Füssen to Linderhof castle, the new goals were to lead the road into higher altitudes and to make it “grandiose in its own design.” For the entire route, the new plans included eight mountain passes at more than 5,200 feet (1,600 meters) above sea level and one above 6,600 feet (2,000 meters). Earlier routings had included one pass at 4,700 feet (1,430 meters). In landscape terms, the higher elevations of the Alpine Road were to create auto-touristic sights by traversing peaks that had been the province of only transhumant livestock, herdswomen and -men, and hikers.

By late October, Hitler visited a giant three-dimensional model of the Alps in the Bavarian Interior Ministry in Munich that had been made for him and Fritz Todt, the top engineer of the Third Reich and the newly appointed road czar of Germany. Blue and red threads signaled two different routes,
a shorter and a longer one.\textsuperscript{51} Planners provided choices, but the last word was to be with the Führer, “like it is with everything that happens in the new Germany,” as one newspaper put it. On its front page, a photograph of earnest men studying the mountainous landscape from above was entitled “The World Arms Itself—Adolf Hitler Creates Peaceful Achievements.”\textsuperscript{52}

Upon viewing the Alpine model, Hitler made the “opening up of all of landscape’s beauties in the nature of the Alps” the top priority of all planning efforts. Providing jobs for the unemployed was mentioned, but the main rationale for the “great, creative achievement” was a scenic, automotive, tight embrace of the German part of the Alps.\textsuperscript{53} It was not meant as a mere transportation route but as a means to produce and frame vistas for drivers. To achieve such scenic effects, Hitler desired even higher altitudes for the road and preferred the conquest—not the circumvention of—passes and
peaks. For example, Hitler wanted to move the western portion of the road in the Allgäu region up to the Hochgrat summit, with an altitude of 6,017 feet (1,834 meters) above sea level. Elevation mattered, even if Austria and Switzerland would always best their German neighbor. Although not the highest Alpine road, it would be the longest and “in its variety the most beautiful” of its kind, the newspaper assured its readers.54 A 1934 newspaper article described an Alpine Road that would traverse half a dozen peaks of more than 5,000 feet (1,500 meters); however, none of these new roads on mountain passes were ever built.55 In general guidelines from the fall of 1935, Todt stipulated that the Alpine Road was to open up the mountains. While it surmounted valleys and peaks, it should never be allowed to run roughshod over nature. Nothing less than a masterpiece worthy of Hitler’s name should be created.56

Construction on the Alpine Road began in November of 1933. Instead of the long-debated Füssen-Linderhof route, workers started blasting Alpine rocks in the very east of Bavaria, close to Berchtesgaden, and in the west, near Lindau. Although earlier promoters had thought the connection to Linderhof to be the kernel of the entire Alpine Road before the Nazi takeover, it was not built under Nazi rule or afterward.57

Rather than connecting to the Romantic dream castles of a nineteenth-century king, the Alpine Road’s first completed stretches led to the mountain redoubt of a twentieth-century dictator and his henchmen. By the summer of 1936, motorists took to the new road in the vicinity of Berchtesgaden. Its most prominent user was Hitler. The two patrons of the Alpine Road, Hitler and Todt, had more than merely propagandistic interest in the project. The autobahn, from Munich to the Austrian border, provided a quick connection to Hitler’s Alpine residence on the Obersalzberg, the site of the infamous summit with British prime minister Neville Chamberlain in 1938. The failed politics of appeasement are tied to the transformation of this mountaintop into a Nazi residential landscape with scenic surplus. Todt, the Reich’s top engineer, vacationed regularly in neighboring Ramsau, where he bought a summer residence. Both locations benefited from the new road connections offered by the autobahn and the Alpine Road.

The Nazi infrastructures transformed the Obersalzberg, but it had not been a wilderness by any means. In fact, local innkeepers had developed a thriving tourism community with some prominent guests for several years. A frequent visitor from Vienna was Sigmund Freud, who wrote portions of
The German Alpine Road. A map of the German Alpine Road with design alternatives from 1938. Elevating the road to new heights was a result of Nazi planning. Most of the planned mountain passes remained unbuilt. Map created by Caitlin Burke, based on Michahelles, A. [August], “Die Deutsche Alpenstraße,” Zeitschrift des Vereins Deutscher Ingenieure 82, no. 37 (September 10, 1938): 1067-1071
Civilization and Its Discontents during his last stay there, a few years after another guest had written parts of Mein Kampf on the mountain. 58 When Hitler and his coterie of Nazi leaders monopolized the peak with its farms and inns after 1933, locals were expropriated and the mountain became a gated, elite gathering place. Branching off from the public part of the Alpine Road, the connector to Hitler’s residence (known as the “Eagle’s Nest”) was a top priority, as Todt instructed the local engineers. 59 As Alwin Seifert put it, Todt’s goal was to offer his Führer an “outstandingly beautiful approach” to the Obersalzberg. 60 In what amounted to constructional reverence, Todt instructed local road builders to use “utmost diligence” when designing. 61 After one of Hitler’s architects presented plans for the house, Fritz Todt hiked the mountain himself and came up with general plans for a winding mountain road. It terminated just below the summit, where an elevator took guests up to the residence. 62 The roadbed was dynamited out of the mountain in just over a year. Construction continued during the winter—unusual for a mountain road—which made for particularly harsh working conditions. 63 The expensive project, which employed up to 3,500 workers, served Hitler’s representational desires.

During the Nazi era, Hitler’s mountain retreat close to Berchtesgaden was covered extensively in newspapers, both domestically and abroad. The huge window framing the Alpine panorama impressed Chamberlain as well as millions of newspaper readers and moviegoers watching newsreels. The propaganda machinery of the Third Reich took pains to portray the dictator as a benevolent leader with a mountainous redoubt. Pictures of Hitler playing with his German shepherd on the Obersalzberg were ubiquitous. The most ardent among the Hitler admirers sought to get close to Hitler by visiting the mountain. Since it was off-limits to anyone not on official business by 1937, even travelers struck with adulation for Hitler could not visit their Führer there. Responding to popular demand and to the political realignment of the Eastern Alps after the annexation of Austria, Nazi planners rearranged the eastern terminus for the Alpine Road. 64

Incorporating some formerly Austrian territory, sixteen kilometers of a new road overlooking the Obersalzberg were, in effect, a consolation prize for those who could not visit Hitler’s mountain retreat up close. Instead of climbing some German peaks and ending at the fjord-like lake called Königssee, the Alpine Road would find its end point on a mountain overlooking
valleys and the Obersalzberg. Visitors could see the Obersalzberg that they could not visit. Such a trip would make it clear “why the Führer has chosen the Berchtesgaden area for rest and recreation.” Construction on the Roßfeld part of the Alpine Road, with an elevation of 5,200 feet (1,600 meters), began in the summer of 1938, with several Austrian engineers who had gained experience on the Großglockner road supervising more than three thousand construction workers and a contingent of fifty Italian stonemasons working on stone trimmings for bridges. All but one kilometer of the Roßfeld road were finished when Germany began World War II. Two inns offered views of the Eagle’s Nest dwarfed by high Alpine mountains. With the German conquest of Europe starting in 1939, workers were drafted into the Wehrmacht and the road sat idle, except for an anti-aircraft unit stationed there during the last year of the war. Local politicians convinced the Bonn government after World War II to close the gap and complete the road. The mountainous view from the road has served the movie industry, too: the blockbusters *The Sound of Music* and *Indiana Jones* both contain scenes filmed in the vicinity of the road.

However, another scenic infrastructure remained unbuilt. As one historian explains, a proposed cable car on the Watzmann mountain, visible from the Obersalzberg, drew the ire of Alpinists and conservationists. Tourists on a Nazi pilgrimage to Hitler’s mountain resort would have provided ample customers, but the opponents were able to prevent the structure from being built. The Obersalzberg received Hitler’s imprimatur in a physical and symbolic sense, and the Alpine Road was one of the features of this transformation of a remote tourism community into a site for diplomatic gatherings and popular adulation of dictator and scenery alike.

**Celebrating the Alpine Road**

When the first stretches of the Alpine Road were opened in 1936, the regime celebrated them as well as the larger idea of the road. Knorz, who had given the road a Nazi pedigree, had died the year before. His ideas and public persistence before the Nazi takeover were overshadowed by Hitler’s patronage, the new scale of the road, and changes in design. In a guidebook for the road—now called the German Alpine Road rather than the Bavarian Alpine Road—Todt conceded the initially slow pace of construction. However, this was because the first plans had been too “timid” in their approach to the mountains. Therefore, the first construction sites served as testing
grounds to gain experience for building mountain roads. Based on these experiences, engineers could now aim higher and redesign the entire project so that they could “protrude into the heights much more boldly” than the old project. Instead of building a road which nestled closely to the mountains, by 1938 civil engineers planned a road that was more domineering, less curvy, and more predictable. The plans included stretches as high as

“Happy Summer Weeks in Southern Bavaria” (1936). In this poster, southern Bavaria has become a technified landscape populated by a tourist couple in hiking gear. The farmhouse, the church steeple with its Baroque onion dome, and the maypole featuring a swastika flag dominate the foreground. The massif in the background is adorned with a cable car and a sinuous mountain road, both leading toward the peak. Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Munich, StK 6999
5,700 feet (1,700 meters). In comparison, the average elevation on the Blue Ridge Parkway is 3,000 feet (900 meters), with the highest locations at 6,000 feet (1,800 meters). The Alpine plans called for 105 bridges, 15 tunnels, and 10 viaducts. For its Western section, a stretch of twenty-three miles (thirty-seven kilometers) at a minimum of 3,300 feet (1,000 meters) of altitude was a part of the design. Costs skyrocketed, thus postponing the completion of the road. By 1939, the German Reich’s priorities of war and European conquest meant that resources for roadbuilding were diverted to purely military purposes or those, like Hitler’s mountain resort, deemed as such.

To dt also addressed the relationship between hikers and motorists in the Alps and tried to assuage conservationists. Hikers had been upset by the dust stirred up by cars, he stated; thus, providing a modern, dust-free road would nullify these concerns. Rather, the Alpine Road would create opportunities to hike with the automobile. This was not at all what purist hikers had in mind. As the historian Rudy Koscher observes, the writer Heinrich Hauser introduced auto hiking (Autowandern) as a motorized immersion into the entire range of sensory experiences offered by landscapes. The idea of auto hiking was not a Nazi invention; Todt, however, gave it a particular Nazi twist by emphasizing Hitler’s prioritizing of this infrastructure. As far as conservation was concerned, Todt stated that the road was simply too small to upset the grandiose Alps. Still, it had to be kept free of “fairground” architecture.

Automotive hiking required drivers to slow down. While the interstate highways of the postwar era enabled a steady flow of cars and trucks at high speeds (and the speed limit on the German autobahn was dropped in the 1950s), these landscaped roads were designed to decelerate and make motorists stop repeatedly. Hairpin curves had been a feature of mountain roads for more than a century, but viewing platforms and rest areas were specifically tourist-oriented accoutrements of such scenic highways. Through the design of the road and in publications, travelers were strongly encouraged, if not educated, to pause, rest, and admire. A Nazi guidebook for the German Alpine Road admonished its readers: “You can choose to push down the throttle and to compress all of this [the Alpine world] to a few hours, as if in fast-motion. But nothing keeps you from stopping the flow of pictures and to linger at those points which you deem the most beautiful.” The reference to cinema and moving images is obvious and not novel, as seen before. While they evoke consumer choice and the quasi-directing of one’s own sce-
nic road movie, these roads, however, prescribed views. The curves of the German Alpine Road and the relatively narrow roadbed made speeding most difficult. Stopping was only possible when rest areas allowed for it or traffic was sparse. Views from the road were normed, the result of design, planning, and construction. The trip was cinematic to the extent that it allowed for wide vistas, but the experience was as choreographed as a theatrical production.

In guidebooks, motorists were reminded that the landscapes they experienced were German and essentially so; their road trips were supposed to reaffirm their belonging to an ethnic collective whose cultural values were expressed in its landscapes. In the written equivalent of a wagging index finger, Todt instructed the drivers on the Alpine Road to be “quiet, considerate in conduct, and reverential toward the grandiose nature surrounding you.” He also admonished them to thank Hitler. A breathless paean to the
A bridge spanning a valley on the German Alpine Road. Bicyclists and motorists appear to use the structure as a vantage point. Hans Fischer, *Bayern links und rechts der Alpenstraße* (Munich: Bergverlag Rudolf Rother, 1938), 49; photograph by Ernst Baumann
Roads in Place

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road in the foremost Nazi newspaper Völkischer Beobachter claimed that the workers wrested the road from the mountains to create an everlasting monument to the dictator. Guidebooks placed baroque churches right next to valleys and mountains, thus creating a seamless web of nature, technology, and culture. Drivers, however, had to meet racial criteria to qualify for rides. As noted earlier, Germans classified as Jewish were banned from driving by 1938.

Controversies over Hitler’s Project

The Alpine Road was clearly a dictatorial project. Its first stretches in Bavaria’s southeastern corner served Hitler himself. His grandiose understanding of roadmindedness ruled. In addition to the dictator, however, less powerful drivers and passengers would use the road. As conflicts between planners and locals show, the intended users were tourists, not the residents of the areas connected by the new road. It is clear that Hitler and Todt were not driven by economic concerns, took little note of local complaints, and were eager to impose their centralist, metropolitan vision of a scenic Alpine road onto the landscape and its residents. While the rulers brooked no public dissent, a few instances of disagreements have survived in the archives.

For one, the Alpine Road’s location on the ridges rather than in the valleys made it less useful for locals. Local farms would suffer as parts of their property would be taken, argued a petition signed by twenty-two residents of the Allgäu region. Business owners throughout the valley feared a loss of customers. Therefore, the locals pleaded with the authorities to upgrade the existing road in the vicinity of the town of Simmerberg rather than building a new one. No answer is to be found in the archival files. (The new road was eventually built on its southern, more mountainous alignment.) Similarly, a motoring club was rebuffed when it suggested a more utilitarian alignment of the Alpine Road close to Lindau by connecting it to a local train station. This would not have been scenic enough, decreed the Bavarian state government. A local resident’s obvious, but apt, remark that a road on higher elevations would be unusable during the winter and thus offer less practical value went unanswered. Scenic Alpine roads were and are seasonal roads, at least in part.

In the face of municipal requests, Todt defended his vision of a scenic infrastructure serving touristic visual gain, not local desires. Town leaders
from Isny in the Allgäu region hoped for a connection to the Alpine Road, lest they be cut off from future tourist traffic. Todt conceded that their request was understandable. However, only the more mountainous routing would offer the long, sustained views of the Alps that the road was designed for. Occasional and short glimpses from the car would not suffice. The German Alpine Road, decreed Todt, was not a local connector, but a German high Alpine road competing with its ilk in Switzerland, Austria, and Italy. Therefore, local desires were less important than the “rules made by landscape itself.” Todt invoked a higher authority in announcing these decisions, which were as human as any.

Locals received the message of the new priorities loud and clear. Whereas requests for roads had to display at least a semblance of economic rationality in order to please Munich officials before 1933, dictatorial realities commanded allegiance to beauty, which—in the eyes of Todt and Hitler—was enhanced by elevation: the higher the elevation, the longer and wider the views motorists could enjoy. Most of the vista-friendly locations were to be created by building motor roads across mountaintops. In one location, an existing mountain pass built in the late nineteenth century, at the apex of a former medieval salt trading road, was renamed “Adolf-Hitler-Pass” and became part of the Alpine Road plans.81

During the Nazi period, conservationists were not involved decisively in the planning of the road. The Bavarian-wide office for conservation, a semi-official advisory body, did not challenge the idea of the Alpine Road as such, but suggested building a hiking trail from Lindau to Berchtesgaden in addition to the road, since the enjoyment of nature by hikers “is severely curtailed if the path has to be shared with the dashing automobile or the popping motorcycle.” Although organized hikers did not like the idea of the Alpine Road, they did not dare protest a project endorsed by the Führer himself.83

Todt was adamant in his efforts to control the roadside personally. Based on archival files, it appears that local authorities often considered the Alpine Road an opportunity for local businesses. Todt, on the other hand, wanted to ensure that the road would repel, rather than attract, roadside development. Usually not prone to polemics, he warned a local administrator that the road would become the “bane of the entire area” if construction were allowed to proceed unchecked and without the correct aesthetic convictions in previously undeveloped areas.84 When locals close to the town of Inzell
planned to use the new road as the site of a new inn, school, church, and apartment building, Todt decreed that these buildings could only be erected on another road, not on the tourist road. Clearly, the Alpine Road was not to be a local road.

Even for the interventionist Todt, controlling every roadside building was not feasible—although the files contain several efforts by the highest-ranking engineer of the Reich to prevent large developments, such as vacation homes for the Siemens company or the dictatorship’s tourist agency, *Kraft durch Freude.* When the SS built a vacation home right next to the Alpine Road, Todt made sure that the power transmission lines would be buried underneath the road, so as not to mar the view of motorists and vacationing members of the terror squad. (It is now a youth hostel, with the same view.) Todt and the SS did not bother with the regular local permit process and handled design questions on their own. Prisoners from the Dachau concentration camp—many of them Jehovah’s Witnesses—were forced to build the access road for the hotel and were responsible for its maintenance. After the beginning of the war, it was used as a hospital for wounded SS men. Elsewhere on the Alpine Road, presumably insufficient landscaping of a single car repair shop did not escape Todt’s scrutiny. While he showed no signs of tiring from such micromanagement, he did bemoan the lack of comprehensive, foresighted planning.

In a 1937 assessment, a local conservationist subscribed to the general idea of the road as a provider of views for motorists. Therefore, it should be located not immediately adjacent to, but at some distance to landscape highlights in order to create vantage points. In one particular instance, the conservationist requested that a local lake was best enjoyed while viewing it from a distance. Road planners had situated the Alpine Road right next to the lakeside—this would be tantamount to a destruction, not an opening up of the landscape, according to the conservationist. Such voices, however, remained marginal during the planning process.

**Hiking and the Alpine Road**

Despite the claims of peaceful coexistence between hikers and motorists, tensions remained. While the Nazi newspaper, the *Völkischer Beobachter,* had categorically declared that cars and motorbikes had replaced the placid hiker, since “only a few people” still had time to travel on foot, others were not as certain. Against the advice of mountaineering organizations and
local innkeepers, the state-wide tourism agency began to push for a high-altitude hiking trail connecting Bavaria’s peaks in 1937. While such trails existed in Switzerland, Austria, and the Black Forest, Bavarian Alpinists disliked the idea because it would attract inexperienced hikers; local property owners declared the idea simply unsuitable for the Bavarian Alps. Tourism promoters, however, came up with a detailed plan to de-skill the hiking experience. All hikers would be able to use it without any danger: after each hour of hiking, a rain shelter would be available; every other hour, a shelter would provide emergency overnight accommodation; and every four hours, a mountain hut with a restaurant and bedrooms would greet tourists. leisurely hikers could thus traverse three hundred miles (five hundred kilometers) in four easy weeks. Such a predictable, almost undemanding hiking infrastructure would open up Bavaria’s mountains to more hikers with less experience. In comparison to the more austere Appalachian Trail, this path would have offered plenty of food and rest options on the trail. While the tourism promoters mentioned that the Hitler Youth and Kraft durch Freude recommended hiking as a Nazi activity, the plans remained stuck in committees. The suggested dynamiting and construction activity remained on paper. Almost half a century after the war, a named hiking trail began connecting Lindau and Berchtesgaden, but it amounts to a consecutive signage of existing trails—without the regularly appearing huts and shelters envisioned earlier. Rather than alluding to the Alpine Road, the Alpine Club remembered a trip taken by the Bavarian king Maximilian in the 1850s, whose approximate route this so-called “Maximiliansweg” has been following since 1991.

**The German Alpine Road in a European Context**

The Alpine Road, like other scenic highways, was a response to other scenic infrastructures—and an effort to surpass them. Supporters of the project did not tire in pointing out that other Alpine countries had already built or were about to build scenic highways in the mountains. According to one observer, Italy had invested hardly any money in trains and cable cars but built roads in the Dolomites and around the subalpine Lake Garda.

Although it would be difficult to know how many travelers used the Alpine Road, it is likely that its eastern sections were the most popular. One reason for increased Alpine visitation was not the attraction of the road itself, but the result of an administrative act. In May of 1933, the Nazi regime
required any German traveling to Austria to pay a fee of 1,000 Reichsmark, which made it prohibitively expensive to visit. The goal was to hurt the Austrian economy, which depended on (German) tourism to a considerable degree. Predictably, tourist visitation to Austria decreased dramatically.97

The annexation of Austria in March of 1938 did away with national borders (the exorbitant fee had been dropped three years earlier). It also led to a mountainous mobilization, since the formerly Austrian Alps were now part of a pan-German domain. The highest peak of what the Nazis called “Greater Germany” (Großdeutschland) was no longer the Zugspitze in Bavaria, but the Großglockner peak on the border of Tyrol and Carinthia. As a monument to Austria and its shrunken post–World War I Alpine territoriality, the Republic of Austria had begun to decorate the Großglockner with a High Alpine Road; it was opened in 1935, as discussed in chapter one. Hugh Merrick, the widely read author of a book on Alpine highways, recognized and reinforced the idea of the road as a national monument on par with the Swiss Jungfraujoch mountain saddle, accessible by rail since 1912. He praised it as “magnificently daring in conception, superb in execution, and positively staggering in its furnishings.” But he also averred that the new Großglockner road was marred by “an element of superb but conscious showmanship.”98 In the end, for Merrick, it amounted to “a glorious piece of window-dressing.” He abhorred the masses partaking of the Alpine scenery in buses.99 For Alwin Seifert, the main problem with the Großglockner road was the visual dominance of restaurants, huts, and snack stations which “devalued” the landscape; polemical as always, he compared it to a gold rush town.100 The road did attract many tourists, including those who did not own cars. Almost one out of ten visitors on the Großglockner Alpine Road in summer of 1939 traveled with Kraft durch Freude, presumably as passengers in the hundreds of buses climbing the road.101

The most basic reason for building the German Alpine Road—avoiding Austria and channeling tourist revenue back to Germany—became moot with the annexation of Austria. But this would not stop the planners in Berlin from pursuing the project. Rather, they sought to incorporate even higher mountain peaks in former Austria into their designs. For example, Bavaria’s westernmost city, Lindau, was to lose its connection to the German Alpine Road. Instead, the road would now lead over the Austrian Pfänder peak (3,490 feet, or 1,064 meters), right outside of the city of Bregenz and a vantage point for overlooking Lake Constance. Lindau’s lord mayor pro-
tested in vain as Todt recognized a “unique opportunity.” Territory gain, in this case, meant elevation gain, and Todt was eager to exploit it. With the beginning of World War II, all of these plans came to naught.

While the Alpine Road transformed parts of Southern Bavaria for touristic goals, it is worth noting that Nazi Germany used its most extensive and violent landscaping visions for Central and Eastern Europe. After the conquest of Poland, landscape architects, geographers, conservationists, and other planners produced detailed plans in the early 1940s to remake the environment of parts of Poland and the Soviet Union for German settlement. These imperialist projects were predicated on murdering Jews living in the area and subjugating Slavs. Murder and environmental transformation would go hand in hand with the goal of creating productive agricultural landscapes. Directly referencing Western expansion in the United States, Hitler declared that “the Volga must be our Mississippi.” These brutal plans were secret (and never carried out), but they show how the public remaking of landscapes in the case of the Alpine Road was only one outlet for the transformationist visions of Nazi Germany. The road in the mountains was to celebrate existing landscapes; the plans for the “Eastern territories,” however, rested on obliterating the landscapes and on mass murder to remake the area for German colonists.

**Transatlantic Connections**

While public proclamations stressed the German character of the Alpine Road, engineers continued to pay close attention to roads and landscaping in the United States. In addition to the usual exchanges via journal articles and conference visits, Todt hosted Arthur Casagrande, a Harvard specialist in soil mechanics, for a “brief consulting” visit in the spring of 1934. The professor’s brother Leo was working for Todt’s agency on soil mechanics as well. (Soil mechanics refers to the study of the dynamic underbody of roads.) The pace of visits to the United States by German civil engineers continued unabated. The reverse was true as well: both in 1936 and 1938, Bureau of Public Roads Chief Thomas MacDonald toured the autobahn and other German roads. Todt hosted him personally and provided a tour guide. While impressed by the scale of German roadbuilding, American engineers pointed out the mismatch between the low number of cars and the mileage of new roads. “Germany has the roads while we have the traffic,” as Michigan’s highway commissioner noted poignantly. A paper
by Gilmore Clarke on Westchester County bridges can still be found in the files of the Nazi road administration, as are publications on the 1939 World’s Fair in New York.\textsuperscript{109}

Small as it was, the Alpine Road still served as a showpiece. In 1934, the International Road Congress took place in Munich. Delegates from all over the roadbuilding world exchanged their views as they had done before in other locales; the Nazi regime was eager to present its plans and construction sites for the autobahn and the Alpine Road. In his welcoming address, Hitler’s deputy, Rudolf Hess, presented the two roads as tokens of energetic Nazi planning originating with Hitler, not as apolitical infrastructures. In turn, Todt put these roads in the context of Roman and Inca roads, thus imbuing them with an aura of imperialism. At the conference receptions, delegates indulged in 1,790 quarts (1,694 liters) of beer and 2,252 cigars.\textsuperscript{110} When the congress went on tour, seventeen hundred participants were bused all over Southern Bavaria in a single day—the organizers had to requisition buses far and wide to accommodate the crowds. Some delegates observed the new roads from a zeppelin airship.\textsuperscript{111} The construction sites for the Alpine Road and the autobahn were showpieces for the international road experts akin to the presentation of the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway at the Washington congress four years earlier.

When New Deal promoters produced a brochure on “Roadside Improvement” summing up their experiences and recommendations, Todt’s office was quick to get hold of it and have it translated. To his great chagrin, however, he realized that engineers in the field sometimes had not received copies of the translated American report.\textsuperscript{112} In the summer of 1936, Todt had to conclude that the admonishments and presentations on landscaping, whether American or German, had not been heeded at all and had no practical effect on mountain roads.\textsuperscript{113} An engineer responsible for the western part of the Alpine Road spoke of the failure of instilling landscaping ideas in younger civil engineers and contractors. Given their predilections and training, these engineers were overwhelmed by the architectural language used in such publications and struggled to translate the advice into designs. Pictures of good and bad examples without long explanations would be much more effective, he suggested.\textsuperscript{114} But no German version of Jac Gubbels emerged.

When all else failed, Todt’s heavy hand intervened. Ever the expansionist, the Third Reich’s chief engineer wanted to adorn German landscapes beyond the Alps with more scenic highways. For Todt, roadmindedness was
not limited to the Alps. Over several years, he pushed for extending an existing high-altitude tourist road in the Black Forest in his native state of Baden. Local conservationists tried to delay the project by declaring one of the summits a nature preserve. But after 1939, portions were built as a military road, given the region’s proximity to France. Tellingly, in one of the many letters exchanged with regional offices regarding the road, Todt cited American parkways as examples to emulate. Given that Hitler was to provide the German masses with affordable Volkswagens, motorists should not be excluded from the most scenic areas, Todt opined. Conservationists and hikers’ organizations could not disagree more. To no avail: Todt pointed out that “the most wonderful nature parks in America are generally traveled through only by automobile, and they are more beautiful and more lavish than our petty efforts to conserve some old tree or a tiny, limited area.” Invoking the spatial largesse of the United States, Todt claimed that mobility-based conservation under his leadership would be preferable to privileging hikers searching for solitude.\(^{115}\)

In his closed-door dealings with administrators and conservationists, Todt had to uphold his visions against the last vestiges of established bureaucracies and of civil society. Under these circumstances, the engineer held up the United States as a beacon of car-based scenery. His more general publications on the nature of technology and its role in the Third Reich, however, stressed a German-centric understanding of technology as a constructive force under Nazi auspices. While Todt was fluent in matters of American roadbuilding and parkways, his public presentations emphasized the vernacular and the national. Apparently, the chief engineer of the Nazis never visited the United States himself. According to his biographer, he had been tempted to emigrate as a young engineer, fascinated as he was by the writings of F. W. Taylor and Henry Ford, and the prospect of putting a civil engineering degree to good use in a road-friendly country.\(^{116}\)

American parkways had impressed Europeans with their wide right-of-way, which ensured control of the roadside. But even for the Alpine Road, the right-of-way was only as wide as the road and a few additional centimeters of roadside, legally speaking. Roadside control was about controlling the view for drivers and passengers. Without the American practice of purchasing the adjacent areas, some planners sought legal recourse. For Alwin Seifert, the solution was to elevate the road and roadside to the legal status of a pro-
tected area as outlined by the Nazi nature conservation law. Thus, roadside construction would be banned once the road was in place. Plans for hotels, inns, and souvenir shops would be nipped in the bud. The Nazi dictatorship had passed a fairly comprehensive conservation law in 1935, which conservationists used to protect natural monuments such as lakes and heaths, for example. If the roads and roadside did not enjoy such status, “the most severe devastation of nature” would ensue, argued the ever-alarmist Seifert. Without protection, in a few years no one would understand why the road had been built: “Our grandchildren want their mountains back from us!”

Seifert found a backer in Todt. He engaged in an extensive administrative battle with Hermann Göring, the second most powerful person in the Reich—whose purview included conservation. Todt pressed for the Alpine Road and its surroundings to receive conservation status. Lacking the legal authority to do so himself, he all but pounded the table and threatened to go alone. Göring and Todt were locking horns, while construction continued. After almost two years of wrangling, they reached an agreement in the spring of 1938. But it did not really matter. The erratic pace of construction and Todt’s interventionist managerial style—an American newspaper aptly dubbed him the “one man boss”—negated any legal procedures for the comprehensive planning that he envisioned. Overall economic priorities shifted from war preparation to war by the fall of 1939. The Alpine Road remained too enmeshed in the personality-driven politics of the Third Reich, in particular Todt’s and Hitler’s, to serve as an agent for regional planning. A short attention span does not make good policy.

**Planning the Blue Ridge Parkway**

In comparison, the planning frenzy of the New Deal in the United States was both more varied and contested. A nationwide network of interstate highways was not part of these plans. While traffic intensified in urban corridors, the most extensive new highway construction project of the 1930s was the Blue Ridge Parkway in the Appalachian Mountains. It was to be a national road, to be sure, but one that gave access to and exhibited a selective vision of rural culture, mountainous landscapes, and largely pre-industrial ensembles of humans, technology, and nature. While the federal government and its metropolitan planners were clearly at the helm, state and local interventions shaped the project’s technological landscape to some extent.
In obvious contrast to the Berlin dictatorship that tolerated no dissent, the politics of landscaping bore traces of debate and disagreement, if only behind the impressive facade of a mountain road.

While Bavarian leaders fought over new roads, tourism promoters in the American South sought to get their share of the parkway frenzy in the United States. The Appalachian highlands, remote and sparsely settled, solidified their status as middle-class vacation spots in the interwar period. In Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee, the counties around the spine of the Appalachian Mountains were among the poorer ones. Agriculture and silviculture predominated; pockets of industry existed but did not lead the economy. In the late nineteenth century, white Southern elites began to summer in the mountains, especially at resorts with springs. Higher-altitude scenery and the cooler mountain air enticed visitors. The relative gain in elevation and the multiple chains of mountain ranges in view were much celebrated.121

As was the case with other tourist destinations, two developments in the second half of the nineteenth century anchored tourism more deeply in the local economy: railroads and cultural stereotypes. In the case of Appalachia, the remote, rugged land met its match in the cliché of the mountaineer detached from civilization. A journey into western North Carolina could become a journey back in time. Tourism boosters spread such stories about the primitive locals and devoted equal energy to providing touristic infrastructures. By 1930, tourism had become the most important economic activity in the western parts of North Carolina, with Asheville as its center.122 Hotels provided comforts for travelers, and Asheville’s proximity to the highlands allowed tourists to hike or to partake of nature’s wonders in less arduous fashion.

The chain of the Appalachian Mountains was only a few dozen miles from the amenities of Asheville. The top attraction was Mt. Mitchell, at 6,684 feet (2,037 meters) the highest peak east of the Rocky Mountains, as local tourism boosters did not tire to point out. A railroad, initially intended for logging, went up the mountain as early as 1911, but its operators realized a few years later that they could profit from hauling tourists as well. By the early 1920s, the first motor road went almost to the mountaintop and attracted exactly the kind of tourists that boosters wanted: white, middle-class, mostly urban visitors willing to spend money to ascend the peak without a major physical effort.123 Remote as it appeared to outsiders, the Appalachian land-
scape was transformed for and by tourism, at least partially. Historians of the region maintain that logging had changed the face of the land most drastically up until the 1920s; afterward, tourism assumed this role. Calls for “improving” southern roads were driven as much by utilitarian transport needs—getting farmers and their goods to (mostly urban) markets—and by desires to create touristic implements and scenic driving opportunities. By the 1920s, Appalachia’s visitation industry was eager to make the switch to a car-and-road version of tourism. New or improved roads were to bring more tourists to their hotels and to sights. Roads in Appalachia tended to be poorly maintained and were local connectors rather than long-distance routes. As early as 1909, a road convention in Asheville demanded tourist-oriented roads, some of which would be located on the spine of the Appalachians. One proposal was for a “Crest of the Blue Ridge Highway.” Since more people lived in the valleys and roads tended to connect larger settlements, such proposals remained farfetched until the Great Depression.

Local elites and tourism promoters understood that their region was competing with others over urban tourists with disposable incomes from coastal Carolina locations and cities such as Richmond and Baltimore. While their brochures extolled the sylvan wonders of nature, they knew that one important aspect in this competition was infrastructure, not just in terms of accessibility, but in terms of making the infrastructure itself scenic. The scenic policies of the National Park Service and the various parkways built around the country contributed to this Appalachian roadmindedness.

When the New Deal raised the prospect of federal funding, a bold proposal for a scenic road of several hundred miles landed on the desk of Harold Ickes, Secretary of the Interior and director of the Public Works Administration (PWA). State and federal politicians from North Carolina and Virginia put forth the idea as a way to fight unemployment and stimulate tourism. They also pointed to the growing momentum for a national park in Tennessee and North Carolina, eventually known as Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The new route would connect this new national park with Shenandoah National Park in Virginia, the establishment of which began in 1925. Because the federal government did not provide money for the latter, the state of Virginia began buying up land and displacing residents. Within Shenandoah, construction of the Skyline Drive had begun under President Hoover as a relief project in 1931. This 105-mile (169-kilometer) crest highway had been suggested by locals earlier and became subsumed into the work
relief efforts of the New Deal once Roosevelt took office. The as-yet-unnamed longer scenic drive would then extend Skyline Drive all the way to Great Smoky National Park in the form of a thin ribbon.127

Given the putative connection between two national parks, the proponents branded the road as a federal project worthy of federal funding. After some political wrangling, they succeeded by November 1933. Ickes’s boss, Franklin D. Roosevelt, had embraced parkways when he was governor of New York (and even before), and saw their popular appeal and political purpose as a way to fight unemployment. Establishing national parks, even as a ribbon road, in the Eastern part of the country brought these recreational landscapes closer to urban centers and closer to becoming a reality.128

The Blue Ridge Parkway and other planned national parkways were not simply longer versions or extensions of the earlier parkways in the Northeast and Midwest. They were designed for higher speeds; traversed several different ecosystems, landscapes, and forest types; and varied in altitude. In
considerable contrast to urban and suburban parkways, their intended users were not drivers living in the vicinity of the roads, but mostly metropolitan tourists who would venture out into the countryside for short jaunts or longer vacations. As historian Timothy Davis points out, the national parkways of the New Deal exposed landscapes rather than hiding them, as some of the earlier suburban parkways had done. The management of these roads by the National Park Service was not simply a bureaucratic matter accompanied by a change in design. This federal agency commanded considerable financial, political, and administrative support during the New Deal. Even when it waned during and after the war, institutional momentum ensured that the planning, building, and maintenance of these roads would continue. In other words, the Blue Ridge Parkway demonstrates the growing imprint of the nation-state on a landscape defined as remote.

The Politics of Altitude: Routing Disputes

Conceived by some local elites, financially supported by the federal government, and planned by civil engineers and landscape architects working for the National Park Service, the Blue Ridge Parkway became truly a national project. Before surveyors went into the field to stake out the new route, however, a political conflict shaped the general routing. As in the case of the German Alpine Road, elevation was at the heart of the matter: At what altitude should the new scenic road be built? The German dictatorship solved such queries with dictatorial simplicity and by fiat. In the American case, a more deliberative and public conflict took place. It had important implications for landscapes and driving.

The basic idea of connecting Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains National Parks did not imply searching for the shortest route and an alignment that would have been easiest to build. Rather, the production of scenery instead of ease of transport was to be one of its main effects. Since the Appalachian Mountains straddled Virginia as well as North Carolina and Tennessee in this corridor, the latter two states sought to bring the southern end of the road onto their territories. They competed for federal money and an infrastructure that would bring in tourists. Meetings with and letters to politicians, newspaper articles, letters to the editor, and finally a public hearing were the main arenas of exchange. In the process, the scenic qualities of the planned parkway were contested and negotiated.

Several voices made themselves heard in this altercation. The most recog-
nizable were delegations from the states of Tennessee and North Carolina. Tennessee’s proposal was for a parkway reaching some peaks and bottoming out in some valleys, thus maintaining a variety of views to be seen from the parkway. It would terminate in Gatlinburg. In contrast, the routing preferred by North Carolina proponents placed much greater emphasis on ridge locations, which would allow for more and farther-reaching views. Their suggested route would end in Asheville. Apart from these sectionalist scenic preferences, landscape architects within and outside of the National Park Service, conservationists, hiking clubs, and public intellectuals took note and presented their suggestions. This was a national debate; scenery and driving were at stake. The well-publicized plans of the federal government for extensive federally funded parkways in the Appalachians set in motion an exchange over scenic roads, their proper extent and location, and their desirability. After the proliferation of urban and suburban parkways, their large-scale adoption by federal planners engendered criticism and calls for variety.

At the far end of the spectrum, one hiker decried “a good deal of a white elephant” and opined that “every man ought to have a job before scenic highways are constructed,” when New Deal policy included fighting unemployment through road construction. Road boosters, unsurprisingly, competed with each other in praising automotive scenery constructed by roads. Between these two poles of road denial and road embrace emerged various voices. Among the most interesting was Benton MacKaye (1879–1975), the regional planner and wilderness advocate whose most widely known legacy is that of having started the movement for the Appalachian Trail, a hiking path mostly along the crest of these mountains running from Maine to Georgia, over some 2,200 miles (3,500 kilometers). The environmental historian Paul Sutter calls him “one of the most important and imaginative thinkers of the early twentieth century” in the United States.132

MacKaye’s enthusiasm for hiking as a means of building new communities did not mean opposition to automobiles—far from it. He realized that automobiles could enable hikers to reach more remote locations than those served by railroads. But the growth of automotive traffic in the 1920s made him warier of what he called “gasoline locomotives.” Rather than hoping that automobiles would deliver the country from the evils of industrialized transportation on the railroads, MacKaye feared that they would become just as destructive unless they were tamed. As a regional planner, he envi-
sioned highways separated from urban centers, with control of the roadside and amenities for riders. A paper that he coauthored with Lewis Mumford envisioned the purgative power of cars and roads, if properly controlled and designed. Their 1931 *Harper’s Magazine* article “The Townless Highway” suggested a network of parkways connecting major urban centers. The “divorce of residence and transport” was the main goal of these proposed new types of roads.133

Roads with wide rights-of-way and without unsightly accoutrements (the hot dog stand was cited again) would bypass cities and towns rather than cut right through them. The purchase of land and its regulation would ensure high design standards. New planned communities, garden cities for the automotive age, would help to disperse dense urban environments. Finally, such roads would be safer, too, since grade crossings would be a thing of the past. To achieve these goals, the federal government would award its subsidies to the states under the 1916 Federal Aid Road Act only if new roads were to meet these requirements. Thus, the “helpless and bewildered efforts of the past” would end. Such roads, according to MacKaye, were not the opposite, but the “complement in a sense” of the Appalachian Trail.134

On a larger level, MacKaye and Mumford believed in the early 1930s that cars and roads still had the potential to positively transform society and economy. Mumford had already praised Clarke’s parkways in the New York environs for their aesthetic standards. In conjunction with the switch to electricity as a new way of distributing power, automobiles and roads, if properly managed, could help to usher in the “neotechnic” phase that Mumford envisioned. Cleaner, greener transportation technologies could supersede the dirty, industrial system of movement embodied by coal-burning railroads, which were part of the “paleotechnic” phase of “carboniferous capitalism” preceding the neotechnic in Mumford’s sequence of historical periods. Scholars have correctly identified the technological optimism and circular logic of Mumford’s thinking in the 1930s. Still, it is remarkable to realize that he thought the automobile’s powers had not been fully used, mostly because automotive infrastructures had been grafted onto older ones: “All the mistakes that had been made in the railroad-building period were made again with this new type of locomotive [the automobile],” with the exception of parkways. Such nuanced criticisms went hand in hand with the hope that “the special habitat of neotechnic civilization” would be the uplands, whose healthier environments were within easier reach because of the automobile.135
Both Mumford and MacKaye had definite ideas on the design of roads. When it came to specific locations, their stance was more reactive than assertive. In particular, MacKaye was adamant that the ridgetops of the Appalachians should be reserved for the Appalachian Trail to let hikers enjoy solitude and scenery. Therefore, Hoover’s Skyline Drive in Virginia drew MacKaye’s wrath, since a large part of it sat right on the ridgeline. His protests against this particular road went nowhere. In response, MacKaye proposed an Appalachian Intermountain Motorway encircling the area from the Adirondacks to the Great Smokies—a much longer road than the one eventually built. This motorway was to remain in the valleys for the most part, reach up to some mountain sides, and only rarely cross mountaintops. As MacKaye’s biographer reports, his efforts in convincing the Park Service to sponsor this road came to naught. In the early 1930s, MacKaye, one of the leading voices of the wilderness movement, wanted more roads, not fewer, as a response to both utilitarian highways and skyline scenic roads. For him, cars and roads needed management, not negation. MacKaye and Mumford presented their own version of roadmindedness.

The publicized plans for the Blue Ridge Parkway threw such issues into even starker relief. At stake were several hundred miles of Appalachian ridges. When he learned of North Carolina’s plans to let the parkway occupy the mountaintops, MacKaye crystallized his thoughts by distinguishing between “skyline” and “flankline” mountain roads. The latter would be just like his proposed Appalachian Intermountain Motorway. Their attraction was variety, as the road occupied different altitudes, thus allowing views both of and from the scenery. Flankline roads contrasted with skyline roads, which tended toward “monotony of view”; drivers’ views would be directed away from the range rather than to it. Even worse, skyline roads would destroy wilderness while flankline roads would leave it intact.

The historical moment for establishing a wilderness movement in the United States was planning for New Deal scenic roads, according to Sutter. A group of activists sought a new level of protection for areas without the visible imprint of humans. And this meant leaving them free from roads, which brought noise and exhaust fumes. Tellingly, the foundational meeting for the Wilderness Society took place in October 1934 at a roadside in Tennessee. Cars and wilderness were intertwined. As Sutter points out, “Wilderness preservation would have made little sense prior to the proliferation of automobiles, not only because the essence of wilderness was its resistance
to mechanized transport but also because mechanized transport was itself essential to wilderness access.” This tension was obvious to reformers like MacKaye, who imagined flankline roads as a conduit to regulate cars and roads.138

As a response to, critique of, and elaboration of parkway development, wilderness advocacy mattered, and that advocacy entered the fray over the routing of the road. Harold Ickes was the federal official with the power to choose a route favoring either North Carolina or Tennessee. He charged a committee to provide an expert report; it was chaired by one of his regional advisers and staffed by Thomas MacDonald of the Bureau of Public Roads and National Park Service director Arno Cammerer. In the political sphere, public pressure began to mount. At all these occasions, altitude was at the heart of the issue. The committee held two public hearings in 1934. Anne Whisnant, the foremost historian of the Blue Ridge Parkway, aptly concludes that these decisions over design were deeply political.139

As North Carolina’s lobbying group pointed out, locating the bulk of the road in its state would allow for a mountaintop road similar to the Skyline Drive in Virginia. The state’s chief highway engineer, R. Getty Browning, asserted that most of the route could be located above 5,000 feet (1500 meters), thus providing “the greatest amount of scenery.” Staying on the ridgertops would require less cut and fill, Browning argued, thus decreasing the cost. In more florid language, a North Carolina congressman enlisted even higher powers: “Nature has fixed where this road should be located. . . . You must take the road to the scenery, you cannot take the scenery to the road.” Referencing Europe’s most touristic mountain range, the boosters claimed that the “scenery in the Grandfather [Mountain, near Linville, North Carolina] area is Alpine in its wildness and beauty.”140

Tennessee’s scenic point, however, was about variety. Its delegation suggested a combination of the flankline and valley roads with occasional visits to mountaintops. The lower stretches would provide opportunities for camping and offer “relief” from traveling on the ridges. The state’s representatives also appealed to a sense of fairness and suggested dividing up the southern part of the parkway between North Carolina and Tennessee.141 The latter’s presentation prevailed, and the committee charged by Ickes recommended a routing split between the two states. After going into North Carolina for several miles, the road would move westward to the Unaka Mountain Range in Tennessee and continue southward to Gatlinburg, with a possible fork for
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both that city and Cherokee, North Carolina, outside Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The topography for this route would be more varied, the road alignment easier, and the scenery excellent. MacDonald, the road builder, and Cammerer, the Park Service director, were in agreement. A young landscape architect, Stanley Abbott, suggested the same route in the interests of variety and economy. He had been trained by and worked with Gilmore Clarke. The National Park Service hired him to plan the Appalachian road. Thomas Vint, the Park Service’s chief architect, described the best possible route as “essentially a mountain route utilizing ridges, mountain slopes and mountain valleys. It is not an actual skyline drive.” Abbott admitted that a ridge drive would “offer unusual views of great power and beauty” but raised the “possibility that the tourist would become tired with 500 miles of mountain scenery.” Later, he likened a series of panoramas as a “fortissimo,” and therefore not as interesting as a “fortissimo mixed with a little pianissimo.”

Abbott’s training as a landscape architect made him emphasize variety over monotony; drivers and passengers would be exposed to changing landscape features rather than mostly the view from above. Countering Browning’s assertions, the architect averred that ridgetop locations would be more expensive to build, given the gaps between ridges, and costlier to maintain. Echoing MacKaye’s concerns, Abbott noted a “lessening of the present recreational value of the wilderness areas” for a “considerable number” of people. In line with contemporaneous debates pushed by Mumford and others, Abbott’s report went even further and suggested studying a valley location that would function not only as a seasonal tourist road, but as a year-round “passenger parkway” for locals as part of a “comprehensive regional plan.” Such a combined road would have retained some of the design features of the Northeastern parkways, on which Abbott had been trained, and the Mount Vernon Memorial Parkway. As part of regional planning, it would take on the function of the townless highway that Mumford and MacKaye had proposed: a road that would contribute to refashioning settlement patterns and building new automotive-oriented garden cities. In other words, Abbott’s report was fully immersed in the debates of the day regarding wilderness, landscape, roads, and planning. Hiking groups echoed these voices, arguing that a lower-lying road would possess “superior utility and beauty.”

Given all these voices and proposals, the ultimate decision lay with Harold Ickes. The nascent wilderness lobby was delighted when Ickes requested
Robert Marshall, a forester in Ickes’s Interior Department and later a founding member of the Wilderness Society, to provide him with opinions on road development in the national parks. In the fall of 1934, Marshall toured the Southeast and compared the two routes under discussion. After weighing the advantages and disadvantages of the Tennessee and North Carolina proposals, Marshall concluded that more important than taking sides on this political battle was the “necessity of keeping the parkway out of the few important

The Blue Ridge Parkway. This map shows the Blue Ridge Parkway as built. Both North Carolina and Tennessee fought over the southern terminus for the road, with North Carolina being victorious. Map created by Caitlin Burke
primitive areas which are still left in this region” and listed three areas, in particular, to be avoided. These areas needed wilderness protection.147

No matter—the suggestions by Tennessee officials and the expert reports of MacKaye, MacDonald, Cammerer, Abbott, and Marshall went unheeded. North Carolina won the day. As Whisnant describes it, backdoor machinations and political dealing swayed Ickes and President Roosevelt more than professional testimonies. Namely, the expertise personified by North Carolina’s expansionist state highway department and its chief engineer Browning trumped those of activists such as MacKaye and of the landscape architects in the employ of the National Park Service. The Interior Department conceded that both routes appeared equal “from a scenic standpoint.” However, the main entrance to Great Smoky Mountains National Park would be Gatlinburg, and Tennessee was about to receive New Deal dollars through the Tennessee Valley Authority, which made it fair to award the southern end of the parkway to Asheville’s tourism industry, according to this view. Lobbying from the established tourist interests in Asheville was more effective than comparable Tennessee efforts. In the case of the Blue Ridge Parkway, Marshall’s request for establishing wilderness areas took a back seat.148

While the political process led to North Carolina’s victory, the “continually unfolding panorama of magnificence” envisioned by that state’s governor did not materialize quite that way. The Blue Ridge Parkway did not become a pure crestline road. For example, the various ridges of the Appalachians dip at certain points. Landscape architects and civil engineers on the ground took Ickes’s instructions to follow the crest to be a general guideline. When it came to locating the road on the ground, factors such as topography, estimated cost of construction, availability of land, and negotiations with owners mattered. “We and the engineers together just drilled and drilled, all of us, on the business of following a mountain stream for a while, then climbing up on the slope of a hill pasture, then dipping down into the open bottom lands and back into the woodlands,” recalled Abbott. The key words for him were variety through alternately concealing and revealing landscape features. About one-third of the eventual route was located in national forests, which allowed for higher elevations at no cost to the Park Service. When choosing metaphors to describe his work, Abbott spoke of painting, photography, and sculpture. In yet another reference to cinema, he compared his work to that
of the “cameraman, who shoots his subjects from many angles to heighten the drama of his film.”

Still, dozens of miles of uninterrupted ridgetop location were the result of the political disputes. As government employees, landscape architects could deviate on details, but not on general policy. Consequently, drivers’ and passengers’ views from the Blue Ridge Parkway are often directed toward valleys below them and ridges in the distance. As the landscape writer Alexander Wilson puts it, “motorists feel that they are on top of the world,” together with their car, and “in total harmony with nature.” Going southward from Shenandoah National Park, the road follows the crest of the Blue Ridge for sixty miles (97 kilometers). It then drops to its lowest elevation, 649 feet (198 meters), to traverse the James River. The parkway climbs up
again, drops, and rises gradually at river valleys and other features. Its highest point, at more than 6,000 feet (1,800 meters), is located near the peak of Balsam Mountain in North Carolina. With precision, the Blue Ridge Parkway provides automotive access to all of the areas that Marshall had asked to be left untouched by the highway. Needless to say, portions of the road are seasonal and occasionally closed because of snow and ice.151

This is not to say that all of Marshall’s interventions went unheard. A planned ridgetop road for the Great Smoky Mountains National Park never went beyond initial plans. The wilderness advocate sent several successful missives to Ickes, arguing against skyline drives. Instead, Marshall concurred with Park Service plans to build a road to Cades Cove, a broad valley flanked by mountains showing signs of logging and agriculture, and “one of the least wild sections of the park, and yet it has immensely impressive scenery.” The idea was to provide an outlet for the pressures built up by automotive tourism and its lobbies, and to reserve more “wild” areas to hikers. The majority of tourists, Marshall asserted, would receive “far more pleasure and aesthetic stimulation” from a loop parkway outside the boundaries of the park. Trees and streams next to the road “are too close to be enjoyed at 40 miles an hour” and would lose their value because of the road itself. Rather, motorists were better served by the long views, by “looking at more distant objects which go by more slowly and do not depend for their enjoyment on quiet detail.” Arboreal conditions in the park allowed for rewilding in large parts, as some 85 percent of its area had been logged by the 1930s. As a preparation for the scenic drive, residents of Cades Cove and other communities were forced out of the new park.152

Landscapes on the Blue Ridge Parkway needed restoration and presentation in the eyes of the planners. Scenery was not simply found. It was the result of design and planning after removing residents and their farms. The planners’ goal was to present “a museum of managed American countryside,” as Abbott put it.153 This museum was a 469-mile (755-kilometer) road corridor with overlooks, parking areas, and the goal of controlling the roadsides and vistas. Recent dwellings were demolished, but “pioneer” mills and cabins became part of the mutual exhibit of landscape and farming culture. Families that lived on the land were relocated, although forced resettlement on the Blue Ridge Parkway was not as “draconian” as in the Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains National Parks, according to one historian. For Shenandoah National Park, several thousand residents lost their homes. After de-
A stop sign adjacent to the Blue Ridge Parkway. Some of the tensions between local residents and the Blue Ridge Parkway arose from its classification as a scenic road, not as a regular highway. Common-carrier traffic was and is prohibited on the road, and abutting owners do not have the same rights of access as they do to regular roads. National Archives, College Park, Maryland, Special Media Archives, Still Picture Unit, 50–4916

cades of portraying the former mountain dwellers as backward, the Shenandoah Park administration since the 1990s has been responding to pressure from descendants of the dispossessed. The movie played in the main visitor center now tells a more inclusive story. A lobbying group has succeeded in building monuments to the evictions.154

The Blue Ridge Parkway embodies the tensions resulting from the juxtaposition of the attractive surface of a scenic road and the forcible removal of residents that was deemed necessary in order to fashion that road from their land. The Park Service proudly displayed eighteenth- and nineteenth-century mills to visitors, using the most recent terrestrial transportation technology of the time on smooth, pleasurably paved roads. One of the most
visited sights on the parkway was a gristmill with an overshot water wheel, Mabry Mills in Virginia. Park Service planners were chagrined to realize that it dated from the early twentieth century but pointed out that it looked much older. They razed the owner’s 1914 frame house and “replaced it with a log cabin trucked in from another county.” While planners opted for a pre-industrial appearance of the landscape, they provided a modern road transporting travelers to these imagined times and places.155

Control over the past and its narratives went hand in hand with control over views. Abbott and the other planners were keen to expand the right-of-way. Buying up land on both sides of the roadway ensured that the Park Service could control fauna and vistas by blocking undesirable views and opening up scenic ones. Initial plans to make the area of the park 1,000 feet (305 meters) wide faltered because of cost. On average, about one hundred acres per mile of road ended up being purchased by the Park Service, with
enough flexibility to gain “maximum control of the scenic picture with reasonable taking.”

Purchasing the land from private owners proved to be one of the most intricate issues for parkway officials. Some landholders were glad to sell marginal land, others were reluctant, and a few refused. Since ultimate control of the land would rest with the federal government, many locals saw the planning and construction of the parkway as an intrusion and responded with hostility. It became utterly clear to them that the road was being built for metropolitan tourists, not for them. Its legal status, as a limited-access parkway rather than a regular highway, meant that owners of abutting property had no rights of access. Intersections with regular roads were few. The Park Service’s strict policy of banning trucks and even ambulances on the parkway amounted to a regime of exclusion. Thus, the polished appearance of the road conceals decades of conflict. Such is the “duplicity of landscape,” as the geographer Stephen Daniels asserts.
Concealing and revealing belong to the repertoire of landscape architects. In the case of the Blue Ridge Parkway, they sculpted a visual narrative of an isolated population of humans working within a rugged landscape. The long, sweeping views from high above joined with the presentation of rural simplicity to produce a marked contrast to mid-twentieth-century cities and suburbs. The tourist road concealed its origins in an increasingly strong central state and in mass-produced conveyances. Instead, visitors encountered a trip back in time to a frozen past.

The road also belied its specificity as a product of political wrangling and design compromises. The landscaping of the planned parkway in the Appalachians was politicized before the first spade touched the ground. How much scenery the road should produce, how it should relate to the Appalachian Trail, and who should reap its benefits in economic, social, and cultural terms were all under debate. Activists, politicians, professionals, and boosters intervened. While planners and wilderness advocates denigrated a skyline road as either harmful or boring, the sectionalist jockeying and political battles resulted in general design parameters that preferred ridgetop locations over flanklines or valleys. Given their professional leanings, landscape architects worked to create variety. To mountain dwellers, such distinctions among urban elites mattered less. For many of them, the federal road was a scenic infrastructure without immediate local benefit. For those who lost their homes, it became a landscape of loss, if not alienation.

Like some other New Deal programs, the Blue Ridge Parkway aimed to change land use patterns. Through publications and the work of agronomists, soil conservation was taught to local farmers. On its own land, the Park Service restored worn-out lands by having Civilian Conservation Corps men rework the soil and plant seedlings. One example is Cumberland Knob, close to the border between Virginia and North Carolina, where work on the parkway began in 1935. It was remade as a landscape fit for hiking. Yet soil conservation mattered less to the National Park Service in the ensuing years, as completion of the road and tourism development became more pressing and financial restraints were growing, especially in the postwar period.\textsuperscript{158}

With increasing institutional momentum, the Park Service weathered disputes with landowners, as well as the ebbs and flows of congressional funding. It took until 1987 to finish the road. The Blue Ridge Parkway was an unmitigated success in terms of visitation numbers. By the late 1950s, some 5.5 million annual travelers spent time on the road, and it was the most
heavily visited unit of the national parks. National newspapers reported on the opening of new segments and promoted the kind of auto tourism offered by this highway. Perhaps more than any other road, this parkway has helped to turn scenic driving into an experience that would last not just for a few hours, but several days.¹⁵⁹

As the longest parkway ever built in the United States, the road stands as a monument to the gasoline-dependent exploration of landscapes. While tightly choreographed, the views from the road guide visitors to landscapes perceived as timeless and unchanging. The Blue Ridge Parkway shows the imprints of central planning during the New Deal, a disregard for local populations, and the elevation of regional scenery. Its intricate political history shows how driving and scenery were contested during the 1930s. Before he began to arbitrate these issues, Harold Ickes announced in the New York Times: “If I had my way about national parks, I would create one without a road in it. I would have it impenetrable forever to automobiles, a place where man would not try to improve upon God.”¹⁶⁰ But Ickes did not have his druthers, at least not during the New Deal. In the messy, complicated world of a liberal democracy, with tensions between states, and between states and the federal government; with popular enthusiasm for automobiles; with professional opportunities for landscape architects; with dissenting voices arguing for minority rights in the wilderness movement; and with business and economic pressures from road and car lobbies, the planning and design of the Blue Ridge Parkway bore visible traces of these tensions. Professional and political elites at the state and federal levels wrestled to reach a compromise, while local residents often received short shrift. If anything, planners saw them as impediments to creating their vision of an Appalachian touring landscape. In the end, the parkway could not assuage these tensions and different claims.

### The Longest Scenic Road

The Blue Ridge Parkway turned out to be the apex of the scenic road movement in the United States. Many drivers and lobbies appreciated, argued for, and experienced landscape-oriented rides in other countries. No other central government, however, has spent as many cultural, political, and financial resources on national parkways as America.

In contrast, the German Alpine Road was born of dictatorial simplicity. No due process, no public discussion, no fundamental questioning accompa-
nied this offshoot of the overbuilt and ostentatious autobahn program. The Alpine Road was a response to other European efforts to coax and channel car-based tourism in the mountains. But it was also more than that. It was to be a European parkway based on American models, with the goal of re-making landscapes and remaking society along racially defined consumerist lines. Alpine scenery was spun into a web of triumphalist access to a formerly remote terrain. On the ground, however, the road was never finished. After early, intense activity around Hitler’s mountain retreat on the Obersalzberg, other stretches received less attention. Ultimately, war and genocide were the regime’s main aims, not appreciation and use of scenery.

The mid-1930s were parkway moments in both countries. Local and regional plans, projects, and actual stretches of road had given these scenic infrastructures a place in the car-road system. Their utility as beacons of work-relief programs provided a rapid infusion of political willpower and money. As nationally sponsored roads, both the Blue Ridge Parkway and the German Alpine Road sought to elevate the driving experience—literally and figuratively—by choosing higher altitudes.

Such higher-level roads and the ideas behind them incorporated decades of commercial and aesthetic practices, including mechanical panoramas, observation towers, cable cars, and gondolas. Such mechanically produced and accessed vantage points were now the province of the automobile—or should be, according to tourism promoters and roadminded builders such as Browning in Raleigh, North Carolina, and Todt in Berlin, despite their ideological differences. They preferred altitudes because they could produce more scenery; looking, for them, was overlooking aided by cars and roads. Roadmindedness attained new elevations. Such a view from above also took inspiration from the new observational techniques proffered by airplanes and cinematography.

Parkway practitioners sought to align their ideas about beauty with the possibilities of experiencing landscape from a fast-moving car on curated roads. Alternating between peaks and valleys appeared to give the highest scenic return for landscape architects. Their professional rise was closely tied to parkways, especially in the United States, and they sought to plan them as carefully composed ensembles of road and surroundings. In the 1930s, they also sought to restore the roadsides to more pleasing levels. These roadminded designers incorporated highways into their expanding professional agenda.
Finally, the extent of road construction in the United States and its expected corollary in Germany provoked cries for abstinence. Hikers and, in the American case, wilderness advocates proclaimed less developed areas to be more valuable than obviously anthropogenic landscapes with new layers of roads. The point was not to set them aside for no use at all, but rather to preserve them for people with the physical fitness and time to traverse them on foot.\textsuperscript{162} Activists such as Marshall preferred bodily vigor over both professional design and over providing automotive access to the summits, but he also recognized the role of scenic roads in less sensitive locations.

The bugbears of road critics were visitors to scenic places who only left their cars briefly. Visiting Logan Pass in Montana’s Glacier National Park in 1935, the conservationist Rosalie Edge observed some motorists who stayed seated in their automobiles and several who only stepped out for a few minutes. They ignored the pleading of the park ranger to follow him on a hike to Hidden Lake, “rushing on in their enjoyment of perpetual motion.” One year later, the German conservationist Hans Schwenkel encountered a group of six young women on the summit of the Hornisgrinde, a mountain in the Black Forest. They stopped their car at an observation tower, climbed it while chatting, and briefly looked around. After exclaiming “O yes! Very nice!” in unison, the motorists drove off. Schwenkel noted that the visitors were American. He warned his fellow Germans behind the wheel: if they thought they would immerse themselves in nature by speeding through it and stopping at beautiful spots, they were not only wrong, but had adopted alien habits of recreation and consumption. Such attitudes would make Germans “Americanized.”\textsuperscript{163}

While Edge warned against an incomplete and accelerated visit on comfortable roads, Schwenkel’s diatribe branded such practices as foreign to Germany and synonymous with the most motorized and parkway-friendly country at the time.\textsuperscript{164} Both shared a disdain for effortless scenic touring. The history of these landscape treatments was entangled. In the mid-1930s, scenic roads enjoyed the blessing and resources of central governments, but also provoked counterreactions. These discordant voices in the chorus of roadmindedness would soon become louder.