Form No. 10-306 (Rev. 10-74)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

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SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC
Trail Ridge Road
AND/OR COMMON

LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
Rocky Mountain National Park — N/A NOT FOR PUBLICATION
CITY, TOWN — CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
Estes Park — X VICINITY OF — Fourth/Third

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
Colorado	08	Larimer/Grand	069/049

CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
__DISTRICT	X PUBLIC	__OCCUPIED	__AGRICULTURE	__MUSEUM
__BUILDING(S)	__PRIVATE	X UNOCCUPIED	__COMMERCIAL	__PARK
X STRUCTURE	__BOTH	__WORK IN PROGRESS	__EDUCATIONAL	__PRIVATE RESIDENCE
__SITE	**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**	**ACCESSIBLE**	__ENTERTAINMENT	__RELIGIOUS
__OBJECT	__IN PROCESS	__YES: RESTRICTED	__GOVERNMENT	__SCIENTIFIC
	__BEING CONSIDERED	X YES: UNRESTRICTED	__INDUSTRIAL	X TRANSPORTATION
		__NO	__MILITARY	__OTHER:

AGENCY

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: *(If applicable)*
National Park Service
STREET & NUMBER
655 Parfet Street
CITY, TOWN — STATE
Denver — N/A VICINITY OF — Colorado

LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Subject site within the boundaries of Rocky Mountain National Park, created from the public lands by Act of Congress, January 26, 1915.
STREET & NUMBER
CITY, TOWN — STATE

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
None
DATE
N/A — N/A FEDERAL __STATE __COUNTY __LOCAL
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS
N/A
CITY, TOWN — STATE
N/A — N/A

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
_EXCELLENT	_DETERIORATED	_UNALTERED	X ORIGINAL SITE
X GOOD	_RUINS	X ALTERED	_MOVED DATE_____
_FAIR	_UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Trail Ridge Road, the highest continuous highway in the United States, extends 37.9 miles through Rocky Mountain National Park from Deer Ridge Junction to the southwestern boundary of the park some 2 miles northwest of Grand Lake.

From Deer Ridge Junction, the road passes first through an area of ponderosa pine and then gently descends to Hidden Valley Creek which it parallels for nearly two miles, offering various interesting views of beaver activities, dams, and lodges. The road turns back and ascends through forests, first aspen then lodgepole pine, to Many Parks Curve at 3.6 miles.

The road turns about a rock spire at Many Parks Curve and then sweeps around the end of Upper Hidden Valley, through a forest predominantly Englemann spruce and subalpine fir, to Rainbow Curve at 7.6 miles. From this point there is an exceptional panoramic view extending from Horseshoe Park, 2,000 feet below, to the high plains of eastern Colorado. At Rainbow Curve the road turns back to the southwest, runs briefly along a knife edge between Hidden Valley and Hanging Valley, passes through the fascinating area of treeline, and emerges onto the tundra.

The road clings to the brink of Forest Canyon and, at 10.4 miles, reaches Forest Canyon Overlook. For the next eight miles, the road traverses a high, tundra-covered peneplain, climaxed by the High Point at 14.8 miles, 12,183 ft. above sea level. Throughout this portion of the road, one gets excellent views of Mt. Ida and the Gorge Lakes as the Never Summer Range comes into view to the west.

The road descends past Fall River Pass (elevation 11,797 ft.) at 16.9 miles and leaves the tundra behind, entering a superb spruce fir forest, at 18 1/2 miles. Still descending, the road offers intermittent views to Specimen Mountain and the Cache la Poudre River, passes Poudre Lakes, and comes to the Continental Divide at Milner Pass (elevation 10,750 ft.) at 20.2 miles.

From Milner Pass the road reveals views to Mt. Ida and the fire-killed timber on the slopes of Jackstraw Mountain and comes to Farview Curve at 23.6 miles. The next four miles of the road descends swiftly into the Colorado Valley along a series of tight switchbacks, turning alternately from views of the meadows of the Colorado Valley to the rugged slopes of the Never Summer Range.

After the road reaches the bottom of the Colorado Valley at Phantom Valley, the route sweeps along the Colorado River in broad curves which plunge through forests of lodgepole pine and aspen, emerging occasionally from the forest to circumscribe open meadows in which deer and elk are frequently seen in proper time and season.

At 37.2 miles the road passes the West Unit Office of Rocky Mountain National Park and finally crosses the park boundary at 37.9 miles.

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Although the two-lane, 22-foot road was originally surfaced in gravel, as soon as the roadbed settled an asphalt surface was put in place and stone guard walls were installed. The road is usually closed by snow from about October 15 to June 1. Frequent freezing and thawing necessitates continuous maintenance. Cyclical maintenance will continue on the road, and such maintenance of the surface and drainage systems may require the use of modern materials.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
__PREHISTORIC	__ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	__COMMUNITY PLANNING	__LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	__RELIGION	
__1400-1499	__ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	__CONSERVATION	__LAW	__SCIENCE	
__1500-1599	__AGRICULTURE	__ECONOMICS	__LITERATURE	__SCULPTURE	
__1600-1699	__ARCHITECTURE	__EDUCATION	__MILITARY	__SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
__1700-1799	__ART	X ENGINEERING	__MUSIC	__THEATER	
__1800-1899	__COMMERCE	__EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	__PHILOSOPHY	X TRANSPORTATION-Park Development	
X 1900-	__COMMUNICATIONS	__INDUSTRY	__POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	__OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		__INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES 1926-1941 BUILDER/ARCHITECT S.A. Wallace, Roger Toll, et. al.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Trail Ridge Road has national, state, and local significance as an engineering feat--the highest continuous highway in the United States--and for its role in the development of national park highways.

The first article of the first issue of the earliest version of the Estes Park Trail (June 15, 1912), published by J.Y. Munson, was an editorial urging the construction of a transmountain road west from Estes Park. For a time it appeared that the road, once over Chapin Pass, might turn down the Cache la Poudre (to the considerable benefit of Fort Collins), but in the autumn of 1912 the County Commissioners of Grand County rode over the Divide, entertained some of the leading citizens of Estes Park, and the western terminus of the road was set at Grand Lake.

In late July of 1913 the "convict camp" was established in Horseshoe Park and a crew of 38 men began work on the Fall River Road. Construction continued, first by convict labor and then by contract, until finally on September 14, 1920, the Superintendent of Rocky Mountain National Park drove from Estes Park to Grand Lake, thence to Denver, and back to Estes Park, "thus completing the loop which has been the utlimate goal of the builders of the Fall River Road."

Even before the completion of the Fall River Road, repairs and reconstruction were begun, but the Superintendent's reports of his efforts to clear the road of snow each spring are especially heart-rending. Every conceivable device was used to open the road by the time of the arrival of the first tour buses--men with shovels, various mechanical devices (tractors, scrapers, a steam shovel, and finally an early rotary-type snowplow), and explosives (which were set in places of snow accumulation in the autumn and detonated in the spring).

By the middle of the 1920s it was apparent that the Fall River Road was less than satisfactory, and in 1926 the National Park Service began the search for an alternative route--one which would provide moderate grades, gentle curves, few places of heavy snow accumulation and, most important of all, unparalleled views of spectacular scenery.

For a time the building of this road would be held up in a jurisdictional controversy between the Federal government and the State of Colorado. The roads in the park had been built either by the State or local authorities before the park had been created and there was a dispute as to whether or not they were still owned by their creators or had, in fact, passed under the control of the Federal government. This dispute was settled in October of 1928 and the last bureaucratic blockage to the new road was removed.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

(See continuation sheet)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 918.78

UTM REFERENCES

(See continuation sheet for UTM References)

	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
A				B			
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Those lands between lines 100 feet on each side of, and parallel to, the centerline of Trail Ridge Road, starting at Deer Ridge Junction (Point A on the Estes Park Quadrangle) and ending at the Park Boundary north of Grand Lake (Point M on the Grand Lake Quadrangle).

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
Colorado	08	Larimer	~~069~~ 069
Colorado	08	Grand	049

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

D. Ferrel Atkins, Ranger Technician

ORGANIZATION: National Park Service

DATE: July 25, 1983

STREET & NUMBER: Rocky Mountain National Park

TELEPHONE: (303) 586-2371

CITY OR TOWN: Estes Park

STATE: Colorado

12 CERTIFICATION OF NOMINATION

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

YES XX NO ____ NONE ____

Barbara Sudler

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

In compliance with Executive Order 11593, I hereby nominate this property to the National Register, certifying that the State Historic Preservation Officer has been allowed 90 days in which to present the nomination to the State Review Board and to evaluate its significance. The evaluated level of significance is ✓ National ____ State ____ Local.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE Edwin C. Bearss

TITLE Chief Historian, National Parks Service DATE Oct. 1, 1984

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I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

/ Beth Grosvenor DATE 11/14/84

for DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST: DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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The Trail Ridge Road helped to bring about a new philosophy in National Park road building. Along with other roads in Yellowstone, Glacier, Yosemite, and the Grand Canyon, the public demand for easier access to its National Parks was becoming as important as the need to maintain the pristine wilderness.

> . . .The building of Trail Ridge Road catered to a perceived public demand, combining a desire to promote the Park with "improvements." In this era, preservation of the area took a back seat to publicity, and . . .forced the Park Service to compromise its ideals in order to accommodate an ever-demanding public.

The right of the public to see its National Parks with as little hindrance as possible would be the force behind not only Trail Ridge, but Going-to-the-Sun, Wawona, Tioga, Cape Royal, and other spectacular roads built in the National Parks.

In the summer of 1926 S.A. Wallace of the Bureau of Public Roads came to the park to locate the new road. The park was particularly fortunate for at that time, expertise in the location of mountain roads was vested in the western railroads, and Wallace had recently come to the Bureau of Public Roads from the Santa Fe Railroad. Wallace, Park Superintendent Roger Toll, and National Park Service Landscape Architect Howard Baker engaged in an extensive reconnaissance, and almost immediately the search narrowed to Trail Ridge, a feature deriving its name from the Ute Trail which traverses its entire length. Used from time immemorial, the trail was traveled by both Ute and Arapahoe Indians to cross from Middle Park, through Estes Park where game was particularly abundant, to the high plains lying to the east of the Front Range. So steep was the trail that in places the women had to remove the children from their backs and urge them to toddle along the trail, and so they called the route the taieonbaa--The Child's Trail, or The Place Where the Children Walked.

With the route determined, the final location survey was begun in the fall of 1926, extended through the winter so snow accumulation could be observed, and completed in 1927. According to Wallace, "The location was made on a basis of 5% ruling grade with short stretches up to 7% and minimum radius curves of 100 feet are used for open and 200 feet for blind curves. The amount of elevation to overcome 3,400 feet, made the conditions such that it was necessary to make the location on maximum grade for practically the entire length of the project. As a whole the general alignment is good and the desired direction well maintained." By contrast, the Fall River Road had short stretches of 16% grade, and long stretches of 10 and 12% grade.

By no means insensitive to the scenery, Wallace wrote, "The surveyed route via Trail Ridge is one of unsurpassed mountain scenery, high mountains, deep canyons, many lakes and perpetual snow, alpine flower gardens and wooded areas all combining to make a trip over it to be never forgotten."

Section 1-B of the road, the section from Fall River Pass to Deer Ridge Junction, was

preadvertised in the fall of 1928 so contractors could inspect the site in winter if they wished. The project was then formally advertised on August 29, 1929, in the Rocky Mountain News and the Salt Lake Tribune. Bids were opened on September 3, 1929, and the low bidder--for $393,674.60--was W.A. Colt and Son of Las Animas, Colorado. The contract was officially awarded on September 20, 1929, and signed by the Secretary of the Interior on October 4, 1929.

Even before the contract was signed by the Secretary of the Interior--on September 28, 1929--the contractor established a temporary camp at station 950 and began clearing the route. By October 12 a gas shovel--one of the first instances of use of a gas shovel for road construction according to Daniel C. Harrington of the Bureau of Public Roads--had been moved to the site and started west from Deer Ridge Junction. A second shovel arrived in February 1930 and by March 15, 1930, the lead shovel had advanced to station 732.

A third shovel arrived in the spring of 1930 and began work at station 770 on April 7. A fourth shovel was taken to the top of the road and, starting east from Fall River Pass on June 14, had reached the point now called the Rock Cut by August 15. A fifth shovel was moved to the upper section of the road on August 18 and worked there until October when both shovels were brought down to the lower part of the project. By the end of 1930 clearing was 75% complete, excavation from station 993 to 520 was 40% complete, and excavation from station 0 to 257 was 40% complete. With 66% of the alloted time used, the work was 69% complete.

Work resumed in the spring of 1931 despite very bad weather in June, and the pioneer route was completed by August. By the end of 1931, 94% of the work had been finished.

Great care was used throughout the construction to protect the natural features:

> At the toe of the long slopes, logs were placed in such a manner that all material could be retained within the limits of the staked area. When logs were not available, a windrow of large rocks was used for this purpose. Even with these precautions, there were times when some of the heavier boulders would get beyond this point. However, the contractor moved the most conspicuous of this material back into the slopes . . . . Log cribbing was used to very good advantage in the protection of natural rock pinnacles. This was particularly true around station 255--Monument Ridge (now called the Rock Cut)--where it was very important to preserve the natural beauty of these rocks.

There never was an official dedication of the road, and its first unheralded use in early summer was by occasional tourists who were permitted to use the route "as soon as reasonably safe." The Estes Park Trail, on July 15, 1932, using the journalistic fervor of a booster club supporter, announced that "Tommorow. . .the internationally famed Trail Ridge Road. . . will be open to the public travel."

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By August 1, 1932, the eastern section of the road was ready for inspection by Clyde E. Learned, accompanied by Project Engineer W.L. Lafferty, Park Superintendent Edmund Rogers, and Landscape Architect Howard Baker. The work was found satisfactory, except for small details, and clearance for the final payment was given on October 12, 1932. The total cost of the project was $482,602.13, including all engineering expenses.

Section 1-C of the road, the segment from Fall River Pass to Phantom Valley, was pre-advertised in 1929 and formally advertised on August 4, 1930, in the Rocky Mountain News. On the five bids, the lowest--by T.W. Lawler of Butte, Montana, for $437,138.30--was approved by the Secretary of the Interior on September 18, 1930.

Lawler arranged housing for his men at the Phantom Valley Ranch and on October 8, 1930, began clearing the route. Before winter stopped work, the route had been cleared from Phantom Valley at station 574+50 to station 135. The contractor brought in two shovels in the third week of October and began grading, going up from Phantom Valley with one shovel and down from Farview Curve with the other. In the meantime, two construction camps were established, one near the lower end of the project and the other at station 247 near Poudre Lakes.

As soon as the Fall River Road was opened in the spring of 1931, two additional shovels were brought up from Lyons and a portable camp was established at Fall River Pass to facilitate work at that end of the project. Work also continued below Farview Curve, and by the end of the summer the project was 75% complete.

Efforts were made, similar to those on the east side, to protect natural features: "On steep slopes, log cribbing, hand laid rock walls, and trenches were used to protect trees and other landscape features outside the staked area. "

Despite very difficult slides between stations 400 and 436--just below Farview Curve--the lower 4 miles was opened to traffic on August 23, 1932, and the upper section was completed and accepted for travel on August 28. Final inspection of the project was made on September 27, 1932, by Clyde E. Learned of the Bureau of Public Roads, Project Engineers W.L. Lafferty and Robert Coffey, Park Superintendent Edmond Rogers, and Landscape Architect Howard Baker.

Robert Coffey, in his Construction Report, summarized the situation as follows:

> The construction of this section eliminated ten miles of narrow crooked road with excessive grades and reduces the snow hazard to a minimum. It also completes a modern highway over the Pass on a transcontinental highway. This leaves one section of 12 miles, extending from this section to Grand Lake, which should be constructed at an early date, to complete the highway within the park on the western slope.

Over the next few years various improvements were made to the road between Deer Ridge Junction and Phantom Valley, some by National Park Service personnel, some by CCC employees and some by contract. The most obvious additions were a bituminous surface, masonry guard walls, rock facing on the most errosive slopes, and metal cribbing in slide areas below Farview Curve.

Since the road down the Colorado Valley was serviceable, the pace of construction slowed once the road was completed to Phantom Valley. The contract for grading section 1-D-1, the 8 miles to the road extending south from Phantom Valley, was awarded on November 18, 1933, and the work was completed in July of 1936. The contract for bituminous surfacing was awarded on October 26, 1937 and the work was completed July 19, 1939.

The construction of section 1-D-2, the remaining 2.765 miles to the park boundary, is not well documented. The Superintendent's Annual Report of 1936 states that funds for the grading of this section had been "allocated," but nothing seems to have happened--probably as a result of difficulties connected with the acquisition of right-of-way from inholders. The contract for clearing and grading was preadvertised in fiscal year 1940, and the work was completed on September 15, 1941. Surfacing of the road was delayed by World War II, but eventually the work was resumed and the contract for bituminous surfacing was let on May 29, 1949. With the completion of the surfacing on October 10, 1949, W.L. Lafferty of the Bureau of Public Roads wrote, "This improvement completes the entire Fall River Highway route to the standard of a graded, drained and surfaced highway."

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Estes Park Quadrangle:

A 13 448 191 4470 700
B 13 446 961 4471 347

Trail Ridge quadrangle:

C 13 444 941 4471 347
D 13 443 722 4472 239
E 13 439 707 4471 637
F 13 436 372 4474 661

Fall River Pan Quadrangle:

G 13 436 372 4474 661
H 13 436 000 4476 793
I 13 429 181 4472 198
J 13 327 621 4469 518

Grand Lake Quadrangle:

K 13 427 621 4469 518
L 13 428 525 4461 960
M 13 428 765 4456 351