

**Review: Windshield Wilderness: Cars, Roads, and Nature in
Washington's National Parks**

By David Louter

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David Louter. *Windshield Wilderness: Cars, Roads, and Nature in Washington's National Parks*. University of Washington Press, 2006. xix, 240 pp. ISBN: 0-295-98606-9 (hardcover); US\$35.00. Acid-free paper and 90 percent recycled from at least 50 percent post-consumer waste.

"Cars, not people, are the parks' greatest problem" (p. 169), so claims Louter, historian for the National Park Service in the Pacific Northwest. The book examines the radical shifts in attitudes toward automobiles in national parks using three case studies: Mount Rainer National Park, Olympic National Park, and North Cascades National Park, all in the state of Washington. Starting out in 1899 with the founding of Rainer, visitors could drive to the heart of the wilderness, but by 1938 and the founding of Olympic, scenic vistas could only be viewed from a rim road that did not penetrate the wilderness core, and by 1968 and the founding of North Cascades, wilderness was viewed from a scenic road outside of the park. The outcomes in these parks reflected similar circumstances in most national parks in the United States over the course of the twentieth century.

William Cronin's Foreword acknowledges that Louter provides two important insights: 1) "...in the middle decades of the twentieth century, the defense of roadless wilderness became an essential expression of American environmental values" and 2) "...the experience of nature in the national parks was profoundly shaped by the changing view through the windshields..." (p. xxi). As originally developed, roads in national parks seemed to be part of nature and it was possible to have a wilderness experience through the windshield. Yet, national parks came to have two separate definitions: one for roadless advocates and the other for mass culture. While early park development gave visitors the impression that roads and autos did not intrude on the natural scene, preservationists and outdoor organizations began advocating for roadless wilderness.

National parks came to incorporate a new concept: parks were ecological zones rather than landscapes of monumental scenery. Yet, park personnel and others realized that autos and roads provided both an opportunity to view beautiful parts of the country and a way to contain and direct visitors. Visitors who had a positive national park experience would also tolerate government tax dollars going to the parks. Unquestionably, park rangers

needed to come to grips with the automobile. A shift in thinking came to define national parks as the preservation of wilderness, and autos as a way of experiencing the wilderness. Roads no longer penetrated the wilderness, but went around it on a rim road. Visitors who wanted to experience wilderness in depth would need to leave their cars behind.

The book describes actions of park personnel, architects and politicians who influenced national park development. Included are some of the recent experiments in national parks such as tramways to move visitors around, films or slides to complement their experience, and relocation of lodges and campgrounds to the park's fringes. *Windshield Wilderness* is a well-researched case study of this country's struggle to protect wilderness while democratically serving those who want to visit the parks in their cars. Well referenced with a select bibliography and index, this book is recommended for environmental studies and general library collections and those interested in national parks and wilderness preservation.

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