

**You on the  
Street Reporter**



**Uyless Black**

**Traveling America (XIV)  
Going to the Sun Road**

## **Traveling America**

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## **XIV**

**Going to the Sun Road**

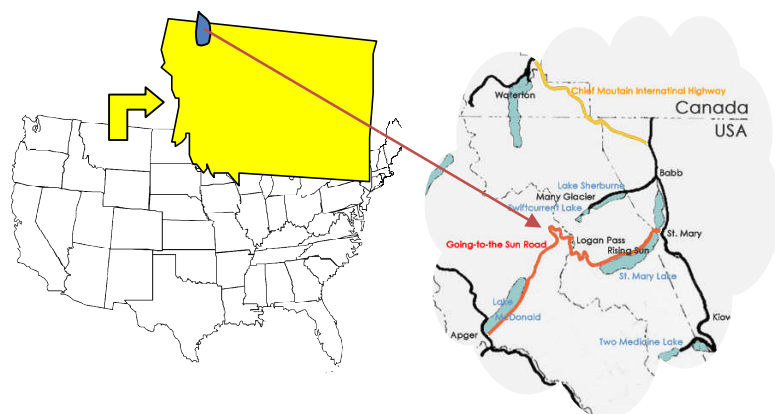
Included in this report

## Traveling America (XIV) Going to the Sun Road

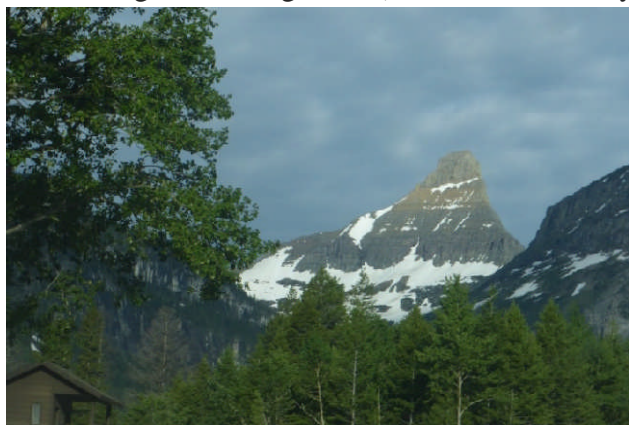
July 4, 2014

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. I have not written a Traveling America report since early last year; far too long, as they rarely contain gloomy subjects. To start this one, I wish you a happy 4<sup>th</sup> of July. In the past, I often spent this day in our Nation's Capital, celebrating America's Independence Day by watching parades and fireworks. For this holiday, my reporter team traveled to Glacier National Park, located in Montana and Alberta. The purpose of the trip was to drive the Going to the Sun Road. (See Traveling America XIII for an essay on other parts of Glacier.) A car journey of over 600 miles to traverse a road of 50 miles might seem excessive. I hope to convince you it was worth it, and encourage you to visit one of the most remarkable engineering feats of the early 1900s.

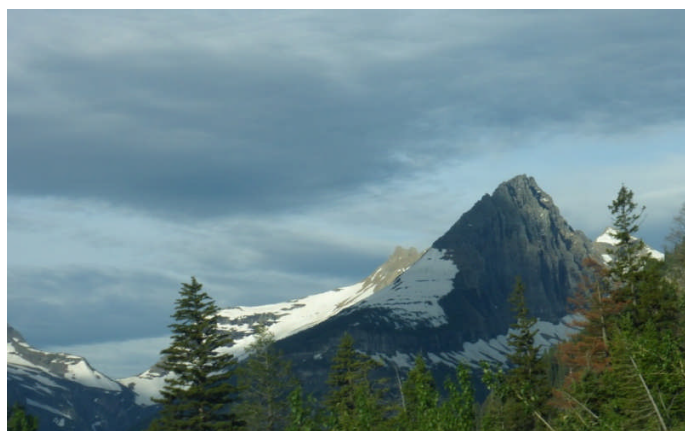
The figure below shows the location of the park (the dark blue image). The red arrow points to the location of the road, which is also depicted in red. As seen, it runs somewhat east/west from one side of the park to the other and is the only road in the North American part of Glacier that crosses the park.



The park spans about one million acres, including spectacular mountain ranges, over one hundred frigid, stunning lakes (two are over twenty miles in length). The ecosystem supports a



huge variety of plants and animals. It has been dubbed by several local chambers of commerce as "The Crown of North America's Ecosystem." Grand Canyon supporters likely do not think much of this name, not to mention Yosemite and Yellowstone enthusiasts. But Glacier supporters coined it before other special interest groups thought of taking on such an impressive title. But the moniker is apt. The photos in this report only hint at the grandeur of this national park.



Glacier was established as a national park in 1910. Construction on the Sun Road began in 1924, with most of the work completed within five years. Formal dedication ceremonies were not held until July 15, 1933. Work could be performed only during the summer months because of hazardous conditions. It took weeks for crews to remove snow. Even during the “warm” times, avalanches were common occurrences. The road builders kept

spotters posted to warn the men of possible or actual snow slides. We had intended to drive the road on July 1st, but a storm the previous week resulted in its closure. Fortunately, it was open for the July 4<sup>th</sup> holiday.



The picture to the left is an example of the architecture of the road. I was surprised that the road was wide and paved. Note the tunnel. In exceptionally difficult terrain, two of them were constructed to run through the mountains. The left side of the photograph shows a place for sightseers to safely stop their vehicles and do some leisurely viewing. As you see, the views are above average.

We got up early and were on the road shortly after 7am. I recommend you do the same, as traffic becomes heavy later in the day. I also recommend you

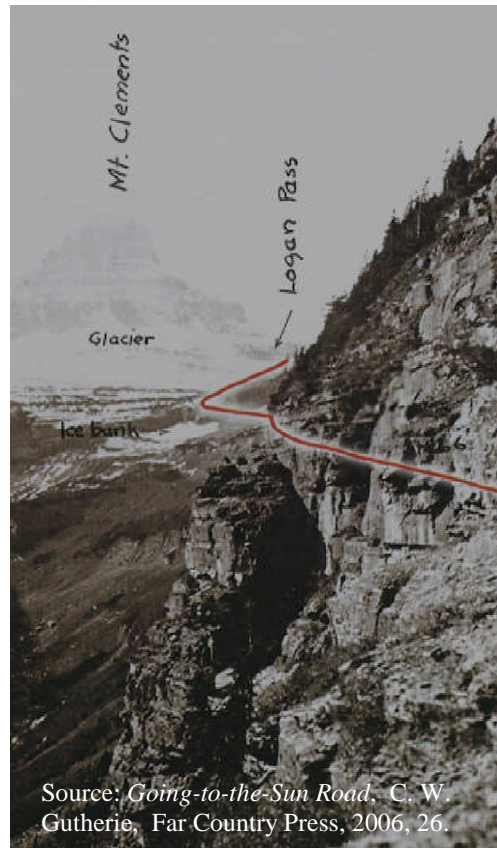
stay at the hotels in the parks or near the park entrances. I have stayed at the St. Mary Lodge and the West Glacier Lodge, and I recommend both. The restaurant at St. Mary Lodge offers some of the best-tasting trout I have eaten. On the next visit, I will stay at the lodge at Lake McDonald.

During our purposely slow two-hour drive, we saw hundreds of water run offs and scores of waterfalls. During the road construction, these water sluices became dangerous snow chutes. They remain dangerous. In 1969, five experienced climbers were buried alive in an avalanche. It took several weeks to find the bodies.

On the next page, I have inserted two more photos. The picture on the left shows the water flowing down a chute underneath a cap of snow and ice. Look at the background view in this picture. The photo on the right is sourced from *Going-to-the-Sun Road*, by C. W. Guthrie, a fine book on the subject. Mr. Guthrie annotated several National Park Service photographs, which show how daunting a task it was to build this road. The red line on the photo traces where the road was carved into the cliffs.



It is surprising that few fatalities occurred while the road was being built. I counted only three during my reading of Mr. Guthrie's book. However, injuries were common. After all, the initial surveys for the road required men to scale a vertical cliff. Of course, they had ropes tied to them, but several workers walked off the job because of its dangers.



We spent two evenings in a cabin at the St. Mary Lodge complex. As we were bringing in our luggage and dog Milli, I noticed several Harley Davidson cycles parked out front. Next to us, sitting on the porch of their cabin were the bikers. I walked over, waving to let them know I meant no harm, "Hello, we're your neighbors for the evening. We tend to get a little rowdy later in the night, usually around 3 am or so. If it gets too loud, just throw a rock or something against our cabin, and we'll simmer down."

With that warning, and with my six-pound Poodle in my other arm, I bade good day to the bikers and their mommas. They were still laughing at my formidable greeting when I closed the door to our cabin.

The cabin was next to a small creek, but one with rapids and plenty of rushing water from the spring and summer thaws. I opened the windows, turned off the air conditioning and lights, and found myself falling asleep to the music of the water and the scent of the pines.

Your on the Street Reporter