

Introduction to the Denver Mountain Parks System

--from a 1913 brochure

Contrary to general belief, the Denver Mountain Parks System is not confined exclusively to the lands owned for park purposes, for road construction forms a very important factor in the general term "mountain parks." Roads built by the Park Commissioners pass between privately owned and government owned properties, as well as lands owned by the city.

The unfolding of the mountain park idea has been very rapid. The idea was first advanced by Mr. John Brisben Walker in September, 1910, when he brought it before the Chamber of Commerce. His idea was to have the city build roads in the mountains in order that the wonderful scenery be made accessible to tourists. In November, Mr. Walker explained the idea to the Real Estate Exchange and promptly the exchange appointed a committee, of which Mr. K. A. Pence was chairman, to take up the subject and learn more definitely what was proposed by Mr. Walker and what other suggestions could be secured.

Two months later the Chamber of Commerce appointed a committee, of which Mr. Warwick M. Downing was chairman, and the two committees formed an executive committee with Mr. Downing as chairman. For a year the committee worked, outlining the plans, for it was necessary for the taxpayers of the city to vote a mill levy for acquiring the parks and building roads, and to establish a tax that meant a sum of money coming in annually exclusively for the mountain parks. It was also necessary for the State Legislature to authorize the city to acquire lands outside the corporate limits for park purposes.

Mr. Frederick Law Olmsted was engaged to go over the mountains and to make such suggestions as he deemed necessary, and after he had made a thorough investigation he

recommended certain roads, the purchase of certain tracts to insure the freedom of the people for picnic grounds, the opening of bits of forest for the vistas and the purchase of certain tracts for the view afforded or for some special bit of scenery.

The central part of Mr. Olmsted's plan, however, was the construction of roads of easy grades over and around the mountains and into the valleys, connecting the various scenic points and thereby affording an easy means of reaching the then inaccessible parts of the mountains lying twelve miles from the city limits. Mr. Olmsted recommended the purchase of Genesee Mountain, comprising 840 acres, which was done at a cost of \$10,250.00, while Mr. L. M. Ralston donated 45 acres and Mr. J. N. Hess donated 15 acres.

The Park Commissioners have under consideration several tracts that will be added to the system, while it is expected that the [federal] government will grant to the city approximately 7,160 acres of land at \$1.25 per acre that will form one of the most gorgeous and rugged playgrounds in the world, to be connected with high class roads, easy of grade and therefore easy for the lightest automobile to negotiate. The 7,160 acres mentioned lies scattered over a wide area of country and embraces forests, valleys, rugged rocks, peaks, canyons and gorges, all of which will be opened by the commissioners by the construction of roads.

The acquirement of mountain parks was for the purpose of assuring perpetually to the residents of Denver the sublime scenery of the Rockies, the preservation of native forests and having for all time a pleasure ground in the mountains for the thousands of annual visitors to the city easily accessible.