

**Interview with Robert Hope  
4025 Trail Road  
Roanoke, Virginia 24012  
Telephone: 540-977-0305**

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**Interviewed by Mary Myers, Asst. Professor**  
Department of Landscape Architecture  
College of Design  
North Carolina State University  
Raleigh, NC

**Please give the correct spelling of your name and your date of birth.**

Robert A., or Allen, Hope H-O-P-E. I was born April 11<sup>th</sup> 1930

**Can you tell me your educational background and what you got your terminal degree in?**

I have a Bachelor of landscape architecture degree from Ohio State in June of 1953.

**I am trying to find out more about what people studied in landscape architecture and the humanities during their time in college because we consider the Blue Ridge parkway to be such a work of art and so sophisticated and elegant in many ways. I'm wondering did you have any special focus besides landscape architecture? Did you study philosophy or literature or art and if so how would you say they impacted your design approach or professional career?**

Landscape Architecture at Ohio State was in the engineering college. There were a lot of electives that you could take.

Art appreciation was one of them that I took. I know (of) no highway design courses that were available. All that I learned specifically about parkways was on the job training. But the art, landscape architects do have a well-rounded course in fine arts. Fine arts is the emphasis at Ohio State over engineering and I think that is true for landscape architecture courses through out the country, that You are primarily concerned with design, with fine arts, rather than just pure engineering.

**Okay, what about motivations for you to go into the profession? Was it a love of nature that prompted you to choose this particular field and stick with it? Did you have a certain philosophical bent?**

I had worked in a nursery doing some plantings, mostly field work and landscape plans during my high school days and college days. I worked my way through high school and college working for a nursery. This was during the Second World War and I liked the work. I was going on to Ohio State not knowing what curriculum I would end up in. I thought it might be a choice between landscape architecture and geology. So when I got to Ohio State I took some geology courses and the first two years of landscape architecture is just the routine preparatory courses and then in the fourth year or third year I started in some architecture and landscape architecture courses. And then I finally settled on that.

**Which dates did you work on the parkway and where, I guess, because you changed location?**

I started... my first day working out of the parkway headquarters as a landscape architect, was January the 5th 1956, out of the parkway headquarters in Roanoke and I worked until the fall of 1958. Then I was transferred to the central design office in Philadelphia, the eastern service center it was called, I think, the eastern design office. I was there about five years working on a number of projects in the eastern half of the United States, one at Gettysburg doing the design and preparation for the centennial observance of the 100 year anniversary of the battle, which was July of 1963. So then I did some work at Saratoga Battlefield. That was a revolutionary war (site). They had built a new visitor center. At Gettysburg there was a new visitor center built there ... near the high water mark of the Battle of Pickett's Charge. Richard Neutra was the architect there. And I did the landscape architecture, planting and walks. Then I did some work at Appomattox Courthouse in preparation for the 100th anniversary of the surrender at Appomattox Courthouse. Worked with historians in preparing to reconstruct the old courthouse which had burned sometime after the battle and that was all done and prepared in time for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Saratoga Springs, I guess that was just a visitor center and a tour of the battle field. And there was a number of other projects during that time. But in May 1963 I came back to the Blue Ridge Parkway as a resident landscape architect at the headquarters in Roanoke. But in February 1972 the headquarters was moved to Asheville, North Carolina. And during some of this time there was a new extension being planned of the parkway, from a point south of Asheville near Beech Gap to a point near Atlanta, Georgia. So I did a lot of reconnaissance work on that project and master planning. Of course, there were many other people involved, too. And we started having public hearings. The National Environmental Policy Act came along and so that project eventually died.

**Which dates did you work on that project?**

The law was passed in '63. A lot of preliminary work was done. There was, of course, no construction money available since Right of Way plans had not yet been prepared. But we worked all the way up until we identified lands to be

acquired by the states. We had projected alignments. And the states of North Carolina and Georgia were to acquire the lands. And the federal government would build the parkway and, of course, manage and maintain it. But we had undertaken a lot of work with the states on identifying the lands to be acquired. They were about in a position to begin acquisition, or surveys that would lead to acquisition, when it finally was halted. That was about 1976. We had some public hearings in North Carolina in '76 and after that it withered and died.

**Do you know what derailed it?**

I think there was a lot of opposition to it in North Carolina and Georgia, primarily because of the environmental impact. Much of the route conflicted with the Appalachian Trail which would require relocation. But it was over the tremendous environmental impact that it would have on the countryside. I guess most people did not recognize the benefits and compare the benefits to the impacts. Anyway they considered the impacts greater than the benefits. And so there was just too little public support. and then there was an energy crisis at the time and money was hard to come by. And we were looking at, oh, I don't know, 100 million or more. And dollars like that just were not easy to come by in the Park Service.

**After that time what did you work on, after 1976?**

Well, we were involved in preparing master plans. Of course, master plans are never finished, you know. You do a master plan this year and then a few years later you get to review it and revise it. And also we did, we called it, a land protection plan which was a plan that primarily focussed on lands that should be acquired for the parkway, to control and manage the scenery, from both sides, the total scenic view from the parkway. Of course, that would entail how far should you see? How much land should you want to control? And are there other methods of protecting the land? So it was called a land protection plan with devices designed to protect the scenic beauty of the parkway. That took a number of years.

We finally had a draft about 1980 and then on up through the eighties it was perfected and lands identified and the purpose of each, and how many acres, and justification for each one. But money was very hard to come by. There are a lot of opportunity sales. It was a willing buyer - willing seller plan from the beginning. But we did acquire a lot of lands which would eliminate private road crossings which was one of the main objectives of the land protection plan. When the parkway lands were acquired acquisition would sever an ownership, or a large farm. And a public road would be on one side and the severed land on the opposite side. So that made it necessary that there be a private road that would cross the parkway to join the two parcels together. We were in the process of trying to eliminate those private road crossings. And I think there were something like 80 or 100 of them, just from a point south of Roanoke to the state

line in Virginia. Probably over half of those were eliminated through purchase of these residual parcels.

Then in the mid eighties the Roanoke River Parkway came in sight and there was an effort by a group in Roanoke to develop a Lewis and Clarke exhibit somewhere down along the Roanoke River, near the river, and to relocate the zoo, the Roanoke Zoo on Mill mountain, to relocate it there. And I was a part of the focus group on that. Finally, they said they picked a site. And it was the Roanoke Land Fill which would be open land, unused land after the land fill was completed. Yeah, cheap land. And it was right adjacent to the river. So we finally got a letter from the zoo committee saying if they developed the land fill as a zoo could they get access to the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Of course, that was what they had in mind all along was access to the Blue Ridge Parkway. So we talked it over with the Superintendent. Finally, the Superintendent wrote them back and said, "No, no, we would not allow a direct access to the zoo, you know one facility... that it was not the purpose of the parkway to provide access to individual public projects.'

But we went on and said if there was a limited access, scenic parkway coming out of Roanoke down the river to Smith Mountain Lake, then we would provide access to that scenic parkway. Well, the next thing we knew the city manager had resigned and he was in charge of the project and there was a bill in congress to provide funding for it and it just went on and on. Finally we started planning for it. Well, the legislation was passed. Roanoke River Parkway legislation was a demonstration project. If you are familiar with the federal highway bills... there was a list, I think it was in '87, that The Transportation Act of 1987 provided funds... I can't remember numbers now, but there (were) like 121 demonstration projects that year. Number 121 was the Roanoke River Parkway. If you recall that bill was passed by congress

**Which year was that?**

'87. And it was vetoed by the president. Then there was an effort to override the veto. It went through the process through the voting and all. It failed to override by one vote but through some parliamentary maneuver they carried it over to the next day and voted again on it. And it passed, the override, passed by one vote and that one vote was Senator Terry Sanford of North Carolina. He voted to override the veto and, of course, it became law and everything passed on there. But instead of developing the parkway down the Roanoke River from the city it finally, because of funds... that would have cost something like a 100 million to get it down to smith Mountain Lake. Finally it was cut down to just a spur road off the parkway to Explore Park which made everybody happy anyway.

**And you worked on the design of that?**

Oh yes, we had a number of locations, you know. But then I came back to Roanoke then and worked on that and finished up here?

**Would you consider the design of the Roanoke River Parkway, I haven't driven it, very similar to the concepts developed during the Blue Ridge Parkway days?**

Oh yes, it has the same design character. It has one foot or so, two eleven-foot lanes instead of two ten foot lanes, you see. But it extends through scenic lands, the land fill is in there but it's all capped over and is in the process of healing. But it has three overlooks and you see mountains and fields and forests. But it is only a mile and a half long so you can't expect too much in a mile and a half, you see.

**What were the key issues for you, as a designer in dealing with the parkway? What were the most important aims you might have had? Even though you worked on a variety of things... maybe these are things that came into play with the Roanoke River parkway. (What were) your key goals, as a designer, for the design?**

With the Roanoke River Parkway I think it would be the recreational opportunities that are provided by the parkway to the local community, as well as, the national visitor to the parkway. Of course, the Explore Park is a park that has historic thoughts behind it. Its not just the Lewis and Clarke but it's the old... The foundation of it features Hofhauger farmstead and of course there are Indians and it's an opportunity to portray the pioneer flavor of the country.

But the rest of the parkway, (BRP), I think that one of the primary concerns is protecting the scenic beauty of the parkway. As time goes on there is more and more development going to occur within sight of the parkway. The one big question is how much land does the parkway need to control the use of those lands and whether or not you can encourage the local land owners to appreciate the parkway and do what's in the best interest of the parkway on their land. There are lots of opportunities for housing developments and commercial sites. And it's always a concern to manage the parkway in such a way that it protects the scenic beauty. You think, well, with a right of way that 's four or five hundred feet wide if something goes up beyond that that you don't like why, you just simply plant it up and allow it to regenerate and away it goes. That is not the answer because if that continues why, the first thing you know, between Shenadoah and the Smokies you' d just have one long forested highway and the parkway would lose its real charm and interest.

**Which section(s) of the parkway were you most associated with? Was it the Virginia section or the North Carolina section or the Roanoke area section?**

No, I don't know that I was particularly associated with any one section. The parkway, of course, was developed over a 55 year period so there's a lot of sections were complete and in use for many years before the final sections were ever completed. Of course, the final section was the Grandfather Mountain section. And it had been controversial for a number of years. The park service was trying to agree with the state on location for it. There was a high line and low line and a middle line. And it finally got to the point where after several governors had refused to condemn the right of way for it that the park service wanted. We finally decided that we can't keep going on forever, we've got to do something and decide. So the middle or compromise line was agreed to.

The high line went up at a higher elevation and went through a proposed tunnel on Pilot Ridge. And, of course, the mountain was owned by Hugh Morton, you know Grandfather Mountain... And Hugh just didn't want a tunnel. He didn't want that high line and the tunnel. But he loved these mountains and he thought it would desecrate the mountain to have a tunnel through it. And of course you can argue that point if you want. But we finally agreed on a lower line, the compromise line, which didn't go up or high but went around Pilot Ridge rather than through a tunnel. It skirted around Pilot Ridge and that was all right.

It added about a mile to the length of the parkway and the land, the terrain at this little lower elevation, had a lot more crevasses and ravines and things to cross. So that was something we had to deal with. We had to lower the design from 45 miles an hour to 35. So we lowered the speed and it was in harmony with the contours. It worked out very well. Now if you traveled the parkway, all of the other sections are 45 miles per hour speed limit but you get to Grandfather mountain and its 35. Its okay you shouldn't be going any faster than 35 anyway. Yeah, you want to see it and enjoy it. I don't think that it's ever been a problem. It worked out fine and it's a beautiful section of parkway.

And the Linn Cove Viaduct. We knew the rugged terrain at Linn Cove was there. We had no idea how to get through there with a road. There were several alternatives studied. You could bridge the whole thing or you could put some walls and smaller bridges and fills. Finally after about three or four hikes around there with everybody in the park service, (laughs), we finally reached a location. And agreed that the only way to get through here was just to bridge all these rock formations and not disturb the rocks.

And the Federal Highway engineers agreed that they didn't have the personnel to study that that they'd have to get some outside consulting firm and they advertised. And a conglomerate of Figg and Muehler and, I can't think of the Frenchman's name now, Jean Muehler, I think. They came up with the design and were give a contract to prepare proposals. They wanted to know first: Can it be done? Can you cantilever on a curvature like that without it tipping over? And they said, 'Yeah, it could be done.' So they got the contract to design it. And it was built. That's a tremendous project. It's the only one like it in the world on that

configuration. It is a precast, segmental, post stressed type of construction. And after that was finished, why, it took about two more years to finish the parkway in that area. Of course, that was late in 87 and that was the completion of the parkway.. was it 52 years, I think.

**Regarding the later designs on the parkway like the Linn Cove Viaduct, what do you think about them in terms of design as related to the older parts of the parkway? Are they true to the (original) spirit? Are they as successful in terms of the driving and scenic experience, as the older parts of the parkway? Are there things that are not so successful in your opinion about them?**

Oh yes, they are definitely just as successful as the older. You know, there is some charm and interest of the stone arch structures. You know there are elliptical arches and segmental arches of stone, with the massive ring stone that were cut. But Ed Abbuehl, he never visualized one style of bridge. He wanted a variety of bridges. They should be high quality design in and of themselves but a variety. And you travel the parkway and you will see a tremendous variety and shapes of bridges. .. They were not all intended to be stone bridges but there is a generous amount of stonework and that's great. But Linn Cove there's no way you could get any type of a stone structure through there. So it had to be a new style, a new type, of engineering to make it. I think there's stone on the abutment ends and.. But it is very very well done. But the solution at Linn Cove didn't come about until late in the design and the construction of the whole Grandfather Mountain section, you see. We kind of designed and built into a problem with our back against the wall. We had to do something to get on through.

**Right. When you were developing, working with the team, in terms of location for Grandfather Mountain and some of the other parts of the parkway, who were the members of the team? What was the process? Did you have different people from the sciences, Did you have civil engineers? Did you have just landscape architects, planners, geologists?**

Well there were several landscape architects from the park service. Gary Johnson was one of them and Bob Schreffler. But there were engineers from Federal Highway Administration. Roy Crawford, Gary Kleindienst. There were soil scientists and one bridge engineer Rex Cocroft and I think he's probably the one who sold the federal highway on that design scheme. The precast segments placed in progressive placement . There's a story about Rex and some of the engineers Federal Highway. We would meet at Grandfather Mountain and talk and look at preliminary plans. I don't know how long this process had gone on. But the outcome usually was, why, they would go back to Arlington and study it some more. Well, we'd done that two or three times.

And finally we met down there and they decided they'd go back and study it some more. So the landscape architects went home and Federal Highway

stayed on another night. They said, 'Well, you know we've done this two or three times, There's no need for us to go back to Arlington and study it some more.' They decided they would stay there until they worked it out. And Rex... that night, they were sitting around talking. Rex, he had a topo map of the area and he started circling in red the points where there were suitable footings, where it was stable enough that you could get a footing there. So he'd circle this one in red. And here's another over here. Circle that in red, another over here in red, another one there in red. Finally they decided, 'Well, there, that was the design.' They just connected the red dots with a red pencil and there's your bridge, see. So they worked it out and then they got Figg and Muehler involved.

**Do you think the original design for the Blue Ridge Parkway was ahead of its time or very much a product of its time? We talked about this before I began to record and I would love you to pursue some of those thoughts.**

Well, it was definitely ahead of its time. There was no prototype, no example anywhere in the world to go by. It was a concept. A road designed for pleasure. It was not a commercial highway. Its purpose was total enjoyment of the scenery and countryside. And you know, roads, I guess had been recognized for some time that they did have value just for pleasure driving. So that was a concept that just had never been pursued here in this country. But with the thought of connecting Shenandoah National Park with the Great Smokey Mountains National Park, this became a park to park roadway, you see. And then the thought was that along the route you would have small parks developed. So the term parkway became a term that truly fit this concept. And it was purely for pleasure and it... I don't know of anywhere else in the world where you have a highway that is designed purely for pleasure. And it was a unique concept, and parkway... It's from national park to national park but it has all these other small parks along the way.

**How do you think the physical design of the parkway makes it a pleasure drive? What are the attributes of it that give people happiness when they drive it?**

Okay, well, the outstanding scenic beauty that you see from the parkway. But there's a lot of enjoyment that comes from the configuration of the road itself and how it molds itself into the contours. Like Stan Abbott said "It lies gently on the contours". There's no massive cuts or massive fills. It truly fits the configuration of the land. And it's a curvilinear design... Curvilinear... is that there's only one or two places where you have a straightaway that's four or five hundred feet long you see. It's all curvilinear. But its gentle curves in that you have a spiral curve that leads into a curve and a spiral that leads out of it. And the curves are super-elevated curves. And you can imagine what it's like to have a super elevated curve to the right and then you transition back on a spiral and a short tangent and then another spiral into the other curve with a super elevation the other way, you see. So it's the super-elevated curves and the spiral transition that leads into

those. And, of course, you're going from a superelevated section to a full crown and then back to a superelevated curve. And it just flows. That's where the term curvilinear parkway comes to play. But it's just so easy and gentle to drive, at the speed limit. But if you want to get in trouble, you just try going way over the speed limit, and you'll be in trouble.

**Right, the design prohibits it or inhibits it.**

That's right, that's a design characteristic of the roadway itself, is speed.

**Who was responsible for the curvilinear aspect of it? I know that the landscape architects worked with civil engineers. What was the give and take in that relationship?**

Well, that was before my time. I'm not sure who all was involved in it. I had heard a story that Oscar Cozzani who was the first engineer on the parkway staff...he was a railroad engineer, designed railroad beds and railroad lines. And that's a concept that grew out of the railroad, you know, how the curves are super elevated and you have spirals. And if you're not careful, why, you'll design a railroad that the cars will upset. And there's certain speeds the railroad cars can travel on a certain section of track. And it was on that concept I think that maybe Oscar Cozzani was instrumental. But the Federal Highway, Bureau of Public Roads, engineers, you know, that's all common stuff with them. Except, you know, nowadays its everything is straight, as far... The concept for a highway now is that you go straight for as far as you can go and then when you come to something then you put a curve in, see. But that's not the way to design a highway, a parkway anyway.

**Do you think the original concept for the Blue Ridge Parkway continues to be adhered to today in the management of the parkway?**

Well, I guess the one that's probably the most subject to interpretation would be how to manage the vegetation along the parkway. Vegetation management. There are considerations that come to play nowadays that were not there when I was around. One of them is the rare and endangered species of vegetation, primarily. There are some rare plants.

I'm not sure that we understand fully how to manage some of those. And that's probably why they are being, you just simply set aside that area and don't meddle with it. Because you don't know how to manage it, you have to learn that. There were some sites where Gray's Lily was prevalent, pasture lands, primarily. They were taken out of pasture and allowed to regenerate. But I think after so many years you have to mow them again so they cannot fully return to mature vegetation. You can't allow them to go that far because that in itself would be harmful to the Gray's Lily and there may be other rare species. Then

there's wetlands. You know, a farmer worth his salt wouldn't allow a wetland on his property. He'd have to drain it you see. That's the first thing you do with a swamp, is you drain it. Oh, there were a lot of swamp draining projects along the parkway. They used to just dig swamp ditches all the time and try to drain them. Oh, but that was a mistake, you know.

**Did the parkway have a policy about that, do you think? Perhaps it changed over time. Now it seems to be more concerned about rare and endangered species. But did the parkway have an approach to the drainage of farmland? Did it encourage or discourage it? Were there problems that you are aware of with the parkway itself causing drainage onto adjacent lands.**

I know of no problems where the parkway, where the drainage that was collected from one side and through a pipe and out the other side, that caused problems to the other side. But there's a lot of cases where the parkway was the leader in the conservation movement. Primarily for scenic beauty, you know. I don't know whether you've ever seen this. (shows a copy of the spec). that's one of the... these are the plans... that talks about trying to preserve areas recognizing that a wetland did harbor certain species of wild flowers and animals that were part of the parkway and they should be preserved for public enjoyment Well, you know Mabry Mill. There was a question of Mabry Mill should be torn down. You see, the states acquired the private lands and it was their responsibility to get rid of buildings, old home sites, you know, to clean up the land before... That was part of acquisition was the disposal of old buildings. Well, they had acquired the Mabry Mill property and were in the process of destroying the mill, you see, as part of that. And nobody quite caught it except, I don't know whether it was Van Gelder or Ken McCarter or Mack Dale, somebody come along just as they were getting ready to tear the mill down and he stopped them. He had enough mind to go and stop them. You know, . that s the first thing you do is stop. And he got in touch with the superintendent and they got in touch with the state. And they said "Okay okay we'll just leave it. Okay, It 's your baby now, you look after it."

So that saved Mabry Mill. And it only came about because Mack Dale was on his way someplace to patrol that section and instead of going the one direction he thought "Well I'll just go south here. No, no, maybe I'd better go back north." And he decided to go back north just as they were getting ready.. the crew was getting ready to tear it down. If he'd made the other turn it would have been gone you see.

**In the specs that you just showed me, do you know what the dates of these are?**

Oh, why didn't they put dates on things back then? This could very well be 1938 or so. This was probably a product of, what did we say, Al Burn's? Malcolm

Bird's? one of those guys, but I don't see a date on here. But it's from the very earliest days of the parkway. When they were developing the thought of parkway land use maps and the symbols that would be associated with them, the indications for fences and bridges, all the details. It gives the plant materials list. Goes into all sort of minute detail here on how to delineate all these plants on it, see, looks like there are dozens and dozens of symbols for each plant. You know, instead of, course, there's no way you could label each plant on a map you just had to do it with a spot, a little symbol. But I don't think there's a sample of a land use map in here. You've seen land use maps.

**Yes, I was wondering about that. You mentioned that there was sensitivity... and by the way for our record, let me just mention that we are looking at the Planning and Complete Landscape Development Specification. Problem and Program Section One: Purpose of the Parkway, Chapter One, Division A, Section One, Sheet One. You mentioned that there was sensitivity even in these early specs to issues of certain species occurring in wetlands, etc. and the need to hold on to some of the forestland, etc. Do you think that this came from the landscape architects or from collaboration with other scientists within the service? Where do you think this approach came from, this wording?**

I think early on it was primarily landscape architects.. I don't know that the other scientists had gotten into that until later on, probably up into, even into the eighties. You know, I think landscape architects are...you know, they're not just pansy planters and arranging plants around the home sites. They have a lot broader understanding of natural systems than that. So I think, there was an appreciation there by the landscape architects toward preserving natural sites and vegetation.

That was one of the primary design features of the parkway, the design concerns, was to reduce the scar. You know, the scar was a great concern for the landscape architects. You wanted to build this parkway. If you scar up the whole countryside you've defeated your purpose. So you have to build the parkway, it has to be built. And the only way you can build a road is you got to cut and you have to fill, you cut and you fill, you cut and you fill. The alignment and location is a primary consideration as well. You know, cutting the least amount and filling the least amount. And you want the have the roadway as much at eye level to the countryside as you can get it. And the steeper the terrain the more difficult it is, you see.

That was one of the primary goals of land use maps, was to, I don't know, (pulls out land use map), this is Grandfather Mountain here. So you would go through this process a number of times. You would take your base maps and make sketches and show vistas. See there's a note to keep fill slope clear, there's the view line. And there's a line there that in order to keep that view line you'd have to do some clearing in here, you see. This is of course, on the down slope side.

So you'd have to clear some of this. There, if the cut itself or the fill itself took care of it there. There's a huge rock, right there, you see, that was part of the... And then you would have to do a little bit of selective clearing behind the rock. There are some more rocks there that were to be exposed so that as you traveled along... You see, that line there is the vista line and you'd try to expose a few of the rocks.

**Are these your notes?**

I think so. There were a number of people working on this section at the time. So I don't know whose the red is. But they were working under my supervision, I guess.

**Yes, I see your name on the drawings, We're looking at parkway land use maps for section 2H at various stations. Is it a ten mile stretch?**

Seven and a half miles.

**it is about 7 ½ miles in North Carolina on Grandfather Mountain Section. The date of the drawings is 4/1988 to 12/1993.**

Well, you have several years of just working prints. This is a print of the final set, the completed set, with a cover sheet. It was finished, well, a lot of the data was 1988. I guess they were finished about 1995. After I retired, I finished this set.

**They made you keep working? (laughs)**

I wanted to finish it, see. Well, I just couldn't leave the parkway without this final set of land use maps.

**That's great. That's dedication.**

But, at the same time we were planning and developing this Tanawa Trail which went from Julian Price Memorial Park all the way around Grandfather Mountain, a foot trail and tied in with Beacon Height. This became part of North Carolina's Mountains to the Sea Trail. We were aware of all that and so we were determined to develop a trail around Grandfather Mountain. Of course, there is an alternative you can go up over the summit of Grandfather Mountain too... or you can go around the parkway. To get a good alignment for the trail there were some places where it was best to go off parkway land for just a hundred feet or so, particularly in the stream hollows. So there's one there, there's one. There's one. Here's one here, Here's one. This is at Rough Ridge, we wanted to get up on Rough Ridge, tremendous rock outcropping that the trail would go through and down and so..

**Would the Park Service try to acquire those small parcels of land then?**

Yes. We had to get trail easements and so I worked up a whole scheme of those easements. And I went to Hugh Morton and had a nice conversation with him and he said "Well, I'll just donate the easements." It didn't hurt Grandfather Mountain's lands and it was beneficial to the parkway. And so he was willing to donate those easements. But the trail is protected you see and he understands, probably more than anybody, the value of, you know, legal documents that way...

Now here's a place here where we had to acquire a little piece from him and that also accommodates the trail. He said, "Well, if this is gonna be..its probably better that you pay me for that, see." So we bought that, you see, all the other easements he was happy, and it was only proper that the government pay for that one. But all the other easements were just donated easements.

**So would the trail design be part of your responsibility, as well? You said you wanted to locate the trail.**

Yes, when the parkway was being funded and built around Grandfather Mountain we knew we wanted a trail, a foot trail to connect all the overlooks and so that you could better see the countryside. But the money wasn't set aside. There was no project money identified for the trail. So the superintendent decided to take it on as a project and he convinced the Federal Highway that the foot trail was an integral part of the parkway, see. And so it was funded.

**When you talk about the Federal Highway for this project, when did they become involved with the National Park Service? Was this an outgrowth of the Public Roads?**

Well, yes. In the early days the Federal Highway or Bureau of Public Roads at that time was... there was an agreement between the Park Service and Bureau of Public Roads that stated that in all I guess most national parks the design and location is the responsibility of the park service and the landscape architecture was the responsibility of the park service. But the engineers of the Bureau of Public Roads would be responsible for the engineering of the roadways. Now the Bureau of Public Roads was not involved in highway engineering. They were just the banker for the state. The state would get federal dollars. And the federal highway administration or the Bureau of Public Roads would simply prepare standards and funnel the money to the states. And the states had the engineers that would design the roads but there was a unit that was involved in federal highways, you know, strictly federal highways or highways on federal lands So that's the Federal Highway Administration unit that I'm talking about, this unit created to deal with highways on federal lands, that's national forests and national parks. They do a lot of work around Washington DC. You know all those parkways and roads are federal highway projects.

### **How did you find them to collaborate with, to work with?**

Oh, they were great. Most of them were just right in there with the landscape architects. Whatever the landscape architect said, why that that was good enough for them and they had their engineering concerns and we knew they had to be met.

They were the administrators of the contracts, with contractors, not Park Service. The Federal Highways administered the contracts. So the contractors would deal directly with them and not the Park Service. The Park Service kind of oversaw the work. Well, the Park Service had administrative people there, too. We have a landscape architect, Al Hollister, and he works with all the Federal Highway projects all around, the Blue Ridge, the Smokies, Cape Hatteras, Natchez Trace... and every place, you know. But the primary responsibility for the contracts was the Federal Highway. And I don't know of anytime that we ever had a problem.

One time on the Route 24 bridge, down here... Roy Crawford was the Federal Highway engineer. And I was the landscape architect for the parkway and headquarters was in Roanoke. and Troitino was the stone mason. Well, they did the arched bridge stone and it was a long elliptical arch and you had to get each of those joints perfect, you know. And on an ellipse there's no two that go to the same point. Anyway, right up in the very top of the soffit there were two or three good size stone up there and you could tell they were not quite radial, just a little bit off of radial. And it took a pretty trained eye to see that.

And Roy Crawford came to me one day and he said, "You know those stones just don't look good, don't look right." And I said, "Well, see if Troitino will take them out." You had to jackhammer them out of there and clean 'em up and put 'em back. And, (laughs), just for an inch or so, you see. Well, Troitino said "No, he wasn't gonna do it. He wasn't gonna do it." So Roy come to me and wanted to know what he should do.

So I said, "Well, I'll go talk to Joe and see if we can talk him into doing it." (laughs) So I go and we meet out there. And we walk around the bridge and we talk and we talk. And I said, "Joe, you know those stones just aren't right. Now you don't want to go down in history of the Blue Ridge Parkway and that be the only bridge that has keystones that are not radial. Now do ya, Joe?" (laughs) And finally he says, "Okay, okay, okay I'll change them for you, but not for him." You see, he would change it for the landscape architect but he wouldn't do it for the engineer. (laughs)

**(Laughs) That's quite a compliment. That's great. It sounds like there was a lot of dialogue between (you)... even though the engineers were more responsible for the actual contracts. I'm assuming the landscape architects had some supervision. But maybe they were second, and if it wasn't right...**

Well, right, right. One thing you should never do is get in between the administering of the contract and the contractor. You got to stay back. You can have a part to play in that but you have to do it through certain people. You can't just do it directly. The landscape architect could never talk directly to a contractor. And generally, all such conversations, they are there any way. Everybody's there. So when it comes to making a decision, it's the Federal Highway engineer that makes the decision, you see. Now, I don't know what I would have done if Joe had refused to, (laughs), change those stones. We'd have had to go up there to do some measuring.

**Right. Would the drawings... were they not in conformance with the drawings or the specs, so you could have referred back to those?**

Well, I suppose. But I don't ever remember doing that. I don't know how much you know about stone work. The arched ring stone on these big bridges was all dimensioned masonry. Now dimensioned masonry means that every line has a dimension on it and you have a certain allowance for a joint width. And I've done ring stone details... These were large drawings with all the measurements of the ring stones on there. I don't remember who did it on that bridge. I don't think I did it. But you did have a drawing that had all those dimensions on there.

But a contractor, no way he could cut the stone to that precise dimension. You would put 10 and  $\frac{1}{4}$  inches and you know, he may hit it pretty close and he may not. Well you know, if he missed it on this one he'd have to make up for it on the next one. Or there's a slight little  $\frac{1}{8}$ <sup>th</sup> variation in the joint that he could do. But he's got to stay on track. If he starts to build up an error and get off, he's in bad trouble, you see. But there is just that little bit of leeway. And I don't know how it was on this bridge but mainly it was visible. You could see that that rock was not radial. Even though it was an elliptical arch, you see. You could tell they were in there sideways.

**How did it work with the planting contracts or specifications? I am interested in that part of it. Was that administered through the National Park Service? Maybe for your sections you didn't need to bring in additional plants but I'd like to know how it worked.**

Well, there was very little planting done on the parkway. Now you'll see in here all these specifications of plants and some of the older land use plans you see notes where there's 45 of this species, 50 of these, 100 of those and it always gives you an area through which they'll be planted. I never supervised any planting projects quite like that. Most of the landscape treatment, vegetation of the roadside was done with an ax rather than a shovel. It was the little roadside, the vistas, the little grass bays, Ed Abbuehl always used to say "Well we landscaped with an ax rather than a shovel."

But there was a period of time when you would have on a new section of parkway, if it was through terrain that really required some planting... Now the Roanoke River Parkway there was some planting done there because we wanted to revegetate some fields. And with the landfill we wanted some buffer between the landfill and the parkway. So there was some planting done there. There was two kinds of planting. There was some seedling plantings. We had a volunteer day one Saturday and I forget how many, seedlings were there. But fifty people turned up to plant seedlings. And they were given some instructions.

Most of the seedlings were Oak and White Pine and some other species. And they were given an area to plant those in. So they just planted them. Because 75 % were not going to survive anyway. But it was an effort to regenerate some fields that didn't want to remain open. But there were a few places where some larger trees, larger caliper size were planted.

Chances are, rather than plant seedlings, all you have to do to regenerate a field is to stop mowing it. If you stop mowing it, it's gonna regenerate on its own and in five or ten years its gonna be up and you'd never see the seedlings you planted anyway, see. So you're wasting your time planting seedlings, as a general rule.. Now there may be times when you want to plant some seedlings. But I don't know how successful that volunteer planting day was. I think so many of those didn't survive. And you had people planting right on top of somebody else. But it was a good day, you know. We had a great time. And there was no harm done. If you gonna do something make sure first that you're not going to do any harm. (laughs) I've never been back to see what the survival rate was. I've been afraid to do that.

**Now was Ed Abbuehl still working when you came into the Park Service?**

Oh yeah, he hired me.

**Okay, and did you overlap with him at all on projects?**

Well he was my supervisor, my boss. First him, then Art Byer was my boss for awhile. Then I went to Philadelphia and, let's see, I guess Ed Abbuehl was transferred to the Philadelphia office. But he remained in Roanoke. So most of his responsibility was, like the Georgia Extension, the Grandfather Mountain section, some of those things. He did some other areas. But Art Byer was on the parkway staff. Then in 1963 I came back to the parkway. And Art Byer, I think, he went to Philadelphia. I know Ed Abbuehl went to Philadelphia. I can't remember now just how it was. But there was a time when we kind of overlapped. But then they went in the design office.

Ed Abbuehl retired about 66. In about three years he retired. Sam Weems retired. And Art Byer got into planning. And he worked out of the Washington office. Then when the Denver office was established out there, he went to

Denver. Relocated to Denver and did a lot of projects out there. Sam Weems retired and went to Australia. And he established the National Park Service of New South Wales in Australia. And Ed Abbuehl went over there for a year and helped him. And the main thing they accomplished was the legislation for a park system, for a national park service, park system, in New South Wales.

**Now when you came you were fairly young so did you feel like you were apprenticed under Abbuehl?**

I was always an apprentice under him, always. Stan Abbott had left the parkway. He was superintendent at Colonial, you know, Williamsburg, Colonial Parkway. And that's where he retired from there. But in private practice then, he was with Carleton, in their practice for awhile. He did some planting plans for the interstates. And one of the interstates was a planting plan was for Route 64 where it crosses over Afton Mountain. And Stan Abbott did a planting plan for that. And he came down and we talked about all these things, you know to refresh his mind. He wanted to know some plants that he could use there that would help stabilize some steep slopes. I remember telling him about Indian Currant Coralberry. Do you know Indian Currant Coralberry?

**Um hum. And had you found that to be a good erosion plant?**

Oh yes. There was a lot of it native to the Peaks of Otter around the dam site down there. It was growing naturally so we spread it all around some more.

**So would you say a lot of your choices, and maybe the choices for these earlier landscape architects, for plants for erosion, bank stabilization or other purposes, came from observation, or came from reading or a combination, or from your own educational background?**

Well, yeah, now you can see a lot of those plants that are on the slopes now today. You can go up toward Peaks of Otter, for instance, and you'll see New Jersey Tea, you'll see Sweet Fern. You'll see those plants just growing naturally along the cut slope. Course, some of those cut slopes, they keep them cut. Big trees don't normally grow on those real rocky slopes. But I don't know ...

You learn those plants from things like this and from looking up in a book. When I was in Philadelphia... I was up there about five years and I spent one whole winter, just on my own time, developing a plant list of plants that are native to the Eastern United States. (shows document) I did it for my own use, you see. I researched through Rehder's manual and some other books. (*Manual of Cultivated Trees and Shrubs* by Alfred Rehder)

I'll vouch for all of those plants, they're native to the eastern United States, some place you know. The other landscape architects around the service center were

doing landscape designs, planting plans. They didn't have much information on what plants were native. They were used to nursery varieties. Well, that's not where you go. Nursery varieties are horticultural varieties. They are what grows best that's what a nurseryman will plant. And what the nurseries have available is what you have to use, you see. There are native plants that nurseries handle but you might have to use collected plants, or do something else. Of course, those are all arranged. ..there are deciduous varieties, different size groups. Then there are evergreen varieties.

**Did the Park Service have a policy on collecting? For example, if there were things used on the parkway...**

The policy was not to take plants that needed to stay where they were. You wouldn't take from one place and at the detriment of that place (and) put it somewhere else. But there is a policy and I suppose its still in effect, that only native varieties of plants are used in planting plans.

**Yeah, and the plants have to be native to that particular neighborhood or region?**

Right, right. You could stretch on out someplace and get a plant... Now, I would assume in the botanical order of things that a certain species of plant is the same here as it is anywhere else. But maybe not. Elevation may play a part in it, you see. Plants that are grown at a lower elevation you might not want to dig them up and take them up at a higher elevation and plant them. They wouldn't survive even though it's the same species as one that's growing naturally right next to it, see I don't know what it is in the botanical order of the cells of the plant that determine that.

**In the routing of the parkway, in some places it seems to go through what seem to be masses of azalea or mountain laurel. I guess those were seen as scenic experiences. Now would those have been planted areas do you think, or naturally occurring?**

No, they wouldn't have been planted. Now there may have been some rhododendron and azalea planted in certain areas. But you know the parkway extends through a number of geological formations, you know. You got the high mountains, the forested mountains north of Roanoke. On the north end you have some high mountain meadows. Then a lot of it is all forested. The adjacent landowner is the National Forest service, you see. Then you drop off the mountain in to Roanoke Valley its all private land. And you climb back up on the mountain at Adney Gap and you got the high mountain plateau That's the lived in part of the parkway., you see Its all privately owned land, farms and meadows.

Then you get on down into North Carolina and you start working your way out of that until you get back into some other high mountains. Then you go through the

Black Mountains and the Craggies and around Asheville and back up around Mt. Pisgah. Then you get into the high rugged mountain. The parkway parallels the Blue Ridge all the way down to, and its right on the crest of the Blue Ridge until you get to a point on the north side of Mount Mitchell. Then the Blue Ridge kind of veers off to the left and the parkway then starts jumping, skipping over the parallel ranges of the eastern Appalachians. The Black Mountain is, of course, one primary mountain there and then the Craggies and you get on south of Asheville and you've got the Balsams and the Plot Balsams. These are the parallel ranges of the Appalachian and the parkway is skipping over those, you see. So there's a lot of different terrains that are... I guess that terrains is the right word to use, that characterize the parkway.

**And, of course, the vegetation changes a good deal, too.**

Right, right, but that was Stan Abbott's primary term, "variety and interest." He thought the overall design objective of the parkway was this variety and interest. Had to have some interest. Now I don't know what constituted interest. He knew what it was, You know what it is. And I know what it is but I don't know how you describe it . It's interest.

**I guess (that) what you have when you drive the parkway are areas that are closed, that open up, distant views...and big swaths of plants that bloom, etc. Was there a certain ratio of interest or change or variety within a given stretch, say ten miles shouldn't be enclosed woodland on each side? Was any kind of approach to that written down or specified?**

Well, there was but I don't' know that it was orchestrated to the degree that you indicate. It was just a lot of it there and it was the skill of the landscape architect in locating the parkway in such a way so that you see all of these. And there is that variety, And you may move the alignment a little bit to get it out into some open areas or if you've been through a lot of open areas, you may skirt into some woodland. And I think there was a lot of thought given to which, if its just ridges, and the interplay of ridges, which side of the ridge do you want to be on, see. You don't want to be on the sunny side of the mountain all the way. You may want to once in a while to go on the shady side even though you are gonna have some snow to contend with. But the parkway had always been considered as a summertime road, not a winter time and you could close it anytime you want because its not necessary to have it for winter travel, year round travel.

**I have a number of questions in my mind that came out of our conversation here. Well, it sounds like there was a lot of responsibility given over to the project landscape architect in terms of their say, on their section of the road, where the road should go, in terms of west or east side of the mountain or how much variety there should be. So it was based on the individual's judgement. Is that fair in saying it was based on their individual judgement?**

Well, I guess pretty much but generally there was discussion among all the landscape architects about those kinds of things.

**Where would those discussion take place, in the office or in the field?**

Most of them was done.. there was a lot of field reconnaissance. Now you understand, In the early days of the parkway, there were no U.S. Geological Survey maps. Mapping was a major problem. You can't plan a location for a parkway without some maps, you know. The only other way is reconnaissance, field reconnaissance. And there are some sections in the location of the parkway that had no USGS maps, And you know, 1:24,000 scale, the seven and a half minute sheets, you know. They didn't come along till many years after the parkway was begun. No, they had 1:500,000 scale maps (laughs) and they were just useless. So I don't know where the process... Now don't let me drag you through something you're already familiar with.

The process was that if you had the geological survey maps, you would project a line on those maps, just the landscape architect, from reading the maps, the vegetation, field reconnaissance, you check it and you end up with a line. Once that line is field checked by you , maybe other people involved, the Federal Highway and you feel fairly comfortable with it. Those maps then are turned over to the states. The state is responsible for acquiring the land. And the states were a major player in the development of the parkway.

The two states, Virginia and North Carolina. Some states had a little keener interest than the other state. I think North Carolina had a little keener interest in the parkway than Virginia did. Because the location through Virginia was pretty cut and dried. But North Carolina it wasn't such a sure thing in fact that was a great controversy over locating the parkway. Tennessee thought that they should have a portion of the parkway. Are you familiar with that? Harley's, (Harley Jolley), up on that. Finally it was determined that the parkway would stay in North Carolina. They didn't want to go skirting' over the Roan Mountains and down.. in fact one of the senators from Tennessee was asked "Well where do you think the parkway ought to go?" And he said, "Well, right down the state line, just put it right down the state line." (laughs)

But North Carolina made their pitch on the basis of scenic beauty. I don't know, there was a great map made of the North Carolina portion which has disappeared. It was a big scroll. It was kept in a big tin about so big. It was kind of an artist's, you know, like the weather maps you see on TV, a 3-D. But it was all colored and showed the parkway location out through the Craggies and all... and North Carolina did that, And they produced this map at this great meeting and that's what secured the location in North Carolina.

Now where was I? Oh.. the process. You'd project a line and the maps would go to the state. Then the state would begin preparing surveys. They had to do land surveys. Some of the early surveys were done on plane tables. You know, plane tables. You know, it's a flat table you take it out in the field and you set this instrument up there and you take sightings on different features, and you scale them off and read the distance between the cross hairs and you plot them. And they're done rather artistically by whoever's running the plane table. And you take levels and you spot and eventually produce contours and you've got the maps. Then those maps would come back to the Park Service and the Park Service would trace them with the contours and produce what they call development plans. Have you seen the development plans? They are the long, five, six foot long sheets. They were all drawn free hand by landscape architects, for the whole parkway. Now they should have those in the archives.

**What would the development plans have been used for?**

That was used to finalize a preliminary parkway plan. That would show the land to be acquired, the alignment and there's other notes on there. They were preliminary to the land use map. Those maps were then turned over to the Federal Highway Administration and they would then use those to produce the construction drawings. They would put the curve data and the spiral data and the elevations and fine tune the thing, you see. But these development plans were graded out freehand by landscape architects. You know what I'm talking about when I say graded. Well, you got the contours. You have a location for a road and you would grade it by showing proposed contours. You'd show on there existing and proposed contours. That's what we mean by grading, You would grade the road. In other words, you'd have to know where you are vertically and maybe to do a profile. So it would be a reasonable grading. I mean within a foot or so of actual and you'd know how far up this cut slope went and how far down this fill slope went.

**And did you say that was done in the field? or back in the office?**

They were done in the office, off of the hard sheets.

**Freehand grading?**

Yeah. It was done freehand, freehand. You know, you'd trace the contours. Now the center line of the roadway, they may have used a spline line or something like that. You know a spline is, okay, you'd use a spline line to get a curvilinear and then you'd grade the cuts and the fills. So you knew what this three-dimensional picture was going to be. Now nobody but a landscape architect could understand those, well, you know engineers. But a lot of other people wouldn't know what you're looking at, if you see a proposed and an existing contour.. But those were called development plans. Oh, those are great things. You haven't run across those in the archives?

**I might have seen them, I don't have a recollection. I will be looking for them next time I go.**

Be sure to look for them. And if they're not there, you know, somebody... I want you to let me know if they're not there.

**They are probably there. I know they have a couple of storage rooms I haven't had the time to go in. They are not really organized and you basically have to pull a lot of stuff out and put it back to find what you're looking for.**

I guess the important thing is: Does the archivist have a sensitivity toward these things?

**I think she is not going to let anything go.**

Well, that's the best thing, if you don't know what it is, keep it. You know, until someday you'll find out what it is. Somebody will be able to put it in its proper place. But the important thing is to keep everything you can keep. Don't throw anything away. That's always been my motto, don't ever throw anything away. (laughs)

**Well, when you are working with projects like this you definitely don't want to.**

Well, you don't know what it is going to be, until years later.

**Or even years beyond that, when somebody like me comes along and asks "Well, why did that decision get made? Why does it look like that, physically, in the field?"**

But in doing the land use maps you'd have the construction drawings that the Federal Highway would do. Then it would go back to the states and they would do the right of way maps. They would do the final drawing for the boundary. And of course, you'd have the deed. The deed would specify each meets and bounds, and corners, and all that. So you'd have all those sources of information to check. But those development plans that were drawn freehand probably were the one source that you always went to if there was a discrepancy about something. At least that would tell you what the landscape architect had in mind, see. And it may not have turned out that way but that's what the landscape architect had in mind. It would have little features there that were supposed to be protected.

**And then the engineers would take that plan and adjust it or refine it for the contract drawings?**

Oh yes, it was a freehand map and it was a guide to the engineers to design the road, here. Here is where you're supposed to go with the road, see. And they would go back to the states. This is the land that we want you to buy. You know there was a lot of cross discussion. It may not have hit perfectly in all instances but that was about the way it would turn out.

**You mentioned that for this set of plans that you worked on, it was this set that came first and you would spend four or five years maybe before it went into final document stage?**

Well, that was just our own... we just didn't spend the time to finish it, you see. It should have been done. Usually you would do the land use maps... you might even start them when the roadway was under construction. But when the roadway was finished then you would expect them to be available to guide vegetation management. (tape runs out)

**We've been looking at the final drawings for the 2H section, dated 4-13-88. And finished off with the comment that instead of planting to bring the wood line down the slope, that probably what happened, is that the mowing simply didn't occur there.**

Yeah, this just happens to be the only set I have here at the house because I worked on it here. But there are books of them. But I...

**Sure, I'll ask Jackie, (Jackie Holt, the BRP archivist), about those.**

But, you know, roadside vegetation. You can see, there's the drainage comes down there. There's an inlet where there's no effort to make that a vista of any kind. But here there is, there's a rock there. And there's a 12 Inch tree shown there. Generally, you would identify certain plants in certain areas simply to help orient you as you were trying to find your spot. And here are some more rocks that move forward to a parking area. But this is the managed vegetation line that comes in and goes back around the overlook.

**So what was your thinking, when you were designing this? You were exposing things like the rocks and you've got parking, bays, and overlooks here. What were you intending?**

Well, overlooks were generally picked and designed when the roadway was being designed and built. So that overlook, when this map was being made, existed, you see. It was there. I guess one way of looking at it. These are what you consider to be 'as built' drawings. And they pull a lot of information and display it on one map, like the boundary. You've got the corners and the meets

and bounds and adjacent property owners. You have contours. Now it's a 25 foot contour interval but you can get a little sense of the shape.

There's Boone Fork which comes off of Grandfather Mountain and down and under the parkway. And there's a footbridge, right there. Those are excellent footbridges. Most of the footbridges, the beams were made out of laminated wood beams. And they were generally 50 -60 feet long, see. Well, you can't get those up through the woods. So they were all set with a helicopter. And they would truck them into the overlook. Then a helicopter would come pick them up, bring them up, dangle them down through the woods with a tether rope. . Somebody would get a hold of the tether rope and swing them around and maneuver them through the branches and finally end up on the piers. But that's the way all these bridges, footbridges through here were set with the beams with the helicopter. And the contractors really saved money doing it that way.

Let's see... here's another rock, a big rock here and some more vegetation. But it's primarily just a vegetation management plan. But this is what the people who are managing the parkway would need to do their work.

**I know when you got involved with the project, the approach had already been established. Is there anything you might change about the design of the parkway, if you yourself were doing such a project today, in terms of location, design, scenic experience, objectives?**

No, I've never thought of that. Never thought about doing it over again. You know, when you're going through and you're so much a part of it. There are so many people involved and you're a part of it. And you contribute to it. Now I don't know of anyplace where I had a major problem with something that was being done. If there was I think that it would have been ironed out, you know.

I do remember a couple of young student landscape architects. They were given an assignment at Mabry Mill to... I forget exactly what it was. They were to do a drawing for an expansion of the little water storage reservoir that fed the mill wheel, see. Well, This one boy, seems to me he was from Syracuse,. But he didn't think that ought to be done. He didn't think that ought to be expanded. It wasn't that it was a major impact of any kind. For some reason, if I knew what it was I would give him credit for it. But I don't remember what his reasoning was. But that wasn't the point. The point was he was a student landscape architect and it was his job to do what he was told to do, see. Draw this little expanded reservoir . Well he went on and he went on and that day passed and the next day and he finally said he wasn't gonna do it. He wasn't gonna do it.

So I went to Bentley was the chief of maintenance for the parkway and it was his money that was paying for these guys, you see. and I said "Well, I don't know what to do. He refuses to do it. " And he said "Well, the only thing I know to do

is we'll have to let him go." So we said, "Well, okay, and I'll bring him in and we'll talk to him."

So we brought him in his office. And he sat down and we decided, "Well, if you're not working on this project by 3 o'clock this afternoon you might as well pack your bag and go home." (laughs) Because, you know it was not the purpose of him to determine his projects, you see. And I don't know where he was coming from. Maybe he thought the landscape architect was God Almighty. He had the right to determine what he worked on and what he didn't. But that's never been the case. You could speak your mind and you got reasonable people you may change your mind. But when the decision is made you go on and do it. So by three o'clock he was working on it. (laughs)

**I guess that's a good ending to the story.**

**The National Park Service has changed and become more biologically or ecologically focused in some ways over, lets say the past forty years, certainly. Has that impacted any decisions related to the parkway that you can think of, or would it impact design decisions that were made in the past? Do you think that some things might have been different now?**

Well, possibly so. I can imagine there would certainly have been a lot more discussion, a lot more involvement in anything you would do now compared to what it was then. It was rather simplified. But it was still a good dialogue that was done. And nobody went off in left field and did a lot of things that shouldn't be done.

**Are you aware that Bob Marshall made a visit in 1934 to the parkway?**  
Bob Marshall?

**Robert Marshall, he was a wilderness advocate.**

Oh, in 1934. No I wasn't.

**I guess the Secretary of the Interior asked him to go up and take a look at the location.**

Oh. What did he say?

**He wasn't in agreement in terms of the location. He was concerned about the Appalachian Trail, the proximity and what he felt was the destruction of the wilderness values. It was close to Great Smokies National Park and he was very concerned about the access road into Great Smokies National Park. He didn't base his criticism on ecological values per se but more on what he called 'saving the primitive'. Maybe some of the things you ran up against in 1980's with the extension to Atlanta would follow suit with some of the concerns he had about saving a beautiful, natural zone.**

Back in those days I was intimately involved in the Georgia Extension. We had public hearings, public meetings. And there was opposition to it. I guess at the time I was all for the extension because I appreciated what parkways were and what benefit they would be to people. Looking back now I 'm kinda glad it was never built, the extension to Georgia. There were some real nice primitive areas that would have had better access from the parkway. And you have to weigh that access against the public enjoyment. I don't know what the land is like now, see . I don't know what it is. But In these public meetings, there was opposition expressed, concern about developing a parkway down through ...this would have been back on the Blue Ridge . It would have gotten back on the Blue Ridge through, down through Mt. Oglethorpe and dropped off the mountain there toward Atlanta.

But there were a number of people who came out, and I mean they were very open minded. One of them was Bill Bake. Do you know Bill Bake? There he is underneath Harley, (shows photo). We had several meetings. There was this one coalition of Georgia conservationists. And we decided to meet them at Neal's Gap on a Saturday morning. Most of them were Appalachian Trail people. And the parkway would have extended through Neal's Gap. And there's a little stone wayside inn there right in the gap. The gap is very restricted. We met there in a little kind of a little lunch room. The only lunch you had was snacks from a vending machine for the Appalachian Trail people. . And we met them there at nine o'clock in the morning. Bill Bake had arranged it. And still at three o'clock in the afternoon we were still there. You know, the vending machines had gone dry. And we just had a great time. I mean it was just real nice. Bill Bake, he lived in Georgia then. Then he relocated to Appalachian State, in Boone. And he's been there ever since, I guess.

But when we started the construction around Grandfather Mountain, the first project around Grandfather Mountain. We had agreed on the right of way and the line. . It had been on the burner for years and years. So it was not a new thing. But, I don't know whether somebody suggested it, or... I know Gary Johnson was involved in it and he may have...no maybe he and I both. Somebody wanted us to meet with Bill Bake. Bill Bake wanted to meet and look at the line. That's the way it was. He wanted to meet and look at the line.

So I guess Gary and I went out and met with him. We took him around and showed him around the whole Grandfather Mountain Section and showed him up where it was gonna go and all. He wasn't real happy with it but finally he decided this thing has gone on so long, that it was not something the Sierra Club...he represented the sierra Club, it was not something that they wanted to take on and obstruct. But he collaborated with Harley on that. He's a great photographer, you know. Done a lot of great photography. But I remember meeting him at Neal's Gap. This would have been '73 or '74, sometime way back then.

**Do you know what happened to Van Gelder? Would he still be around?**

I don't think so. I haven't heard anything about him in many years.

**Did you know him?**

I had never met him.

**Okay, so he wasn't involved. I guess he came in around the same time as Ed Abbuehl but didn't stay on as long.**

Yeah, Ed Abbuehl came in 1934. Stan Abbott in the Christmas of '33. And Stan Abbott had worked for Gilmore Clarke. You know all that story there. And Ed Abbuehl was an instructor of Stan Abbott at Syracuse, or not Syracuse, Cornell.

**One last question: What is your reaction to the way the parkway is being maintained? How do you think it ought to be maintained in the coming century? What do you think the policy should be of the National Park Service as relates to the Blue Ridge Parkway?**

Well, I don't know that it can be managed much differently than it is now. There's always choices to be made on a certain field, whether... If its an agricultural parkway, you're gonna have some agricultural activities to keep it that way. You're going to have to mow some fields, and going to have to pasture some animals.

And that is a worthy objective, in my view, to keep the rural landscape . And even an agricultural landscape, that's a worthy objective because someday... But as the economy changes and people change you don't find farmers anymore. They go to the grocery store, you see, they don't raise... There may have to be some unique way of doing that. You may have to pay somebody to pasture cattle there. Maybe the Park Service will have to get into the farming business. You know, whatever is determined to be in the best interest of the scenic beauty and the interest of the parkway.

I hate to see government getting involved in a lot of things like that. But maybe there's other ways of doing it that individuals can do it rather than the government. I think it would be a sad day when the government got into maintaining pasture land along the parkway. You know, they wouldn't maintain it for the best interest of the pasture but for the ease and economy of doing it.

But you know, trees change. Vegetation changes. You're always going to be manipulating vegetation.

I think a major problem now is keeping the vistas open where you have vegetation that is growing up and blocking a vista. There are some overlooks where the vegetation blocks the view, see. Well, if the overlook is going to serve

its purpose you are going to have to do some clearing down there. A lot of the time, all it is is Tree of Heaven that sprouted up there. Well, that needs to go. I don't know of any way to do it except (with) hand labor.

Hand labor is not productive any more. You'll see somebody wanting to do a little utility line that long. And they'll bring in a back hoe and dump trucks and all that and they'll make two sweeps with a back hoe and that's it. You can't dig it out by hand, see. Oh, I don't know... I guess there's a lot of changes like that that we can expect.

But if you still keep your sights on the overall objectives of scenic beauty, charm and interest of the countryside, some fences, you know a variety of those for display. It may be that instead of pasture we just have to mow the fields. Hire it done, or something. But it would be nice to see some animals. It's nice to see some crops, row crops, corn fields, cabbage fields. It's a live environment, ever changing.

**Well, I guess that about wraps it up unless there is something that you would like to ask me or anything I haven't asked you that you would like to talk about.**

Well, there's so many things that it takes. You're gonna have a problem. You're gonna have to boil something down into something that's manageable and understandable and has some focus to it.

**One of the questions I have, we know that there was regard for native vegetation, native flora, was there concern about native animal habitat, watershed issues that you're aware of when you were working on the Blue Ridge Parkway?**

Well, I know there was some ponds on the parkway. One, Rakes Mill Pond. You know the beaver story there? You know, beaver migrate. You know they may show up any time and take up a homestead. Well, one showed up at Rakes Mill Pond one time, right up in the flats above it, started to build a dam, you know. There was a discussion, I wasn't involved in it, there was a discussion in the ranger ranks, about what to do about those beaver. Whether to let them go or whether to relocate them or what. And time went along and we got word that there was no beaver problem anymore at Rakes Mill Pond. (laughs) Why, the ranger shot the thing you see. He just shot him and got it out of the way.

And you know Peaks of Otter, the lake there was a major discussion for many years; and it was controversial. It was the landscape architects that thought that that swamp ought to be made a lake to enhance the enjoyment of the lodge and restaurant. It was a legitimate argument. That the lodge and restaurant were supposed to be there because Mons Hotel had been there as a historic site. It had burned down. So there was an effort on the part of the Park Service to

develop accommodations at certain intervals along the parkway. Peaks of Otter was one of them and the lake was one. Well, we'd never be able to build that lake today because of the Peaks of Otter salamander, you know, an endangered species. And he has a habitat there, as well as, a couple of other places north of there.

### **Wasn't there also an elk herd there originally?**

Well, there was a transplanted elk herd there that was brought in in the 1930's and located there. So it was not... I suppose elk, at one point back in history, was native to the whole eastern part of the country here. But it hadn't been there for many, many years. But it was a small herd brought in, something like 35 animals, and dumped there at Peaks of Otter. And they survived there through the years, up until, I suppose, into the seventies.

I remember seeing many of them there. You could be up around Flat Top, Harkening Hill, round there and have one of those elk jump up and just scare you to death. It would snort and run off. And we had some trees planted in the median down on the parkway there. And they would come down in whatever their season was and rub the fuzz off their antlers and just rip the plants all to pieces.

But the herd built up and they finally one time they had a hunting season on the elk, mainly because the orchards down in the lower lands from the Peaks complained about the elk destroying their crops. But that was only one year. And then the herd kind of started dwindling down and it started getting sick. You know, the inbreeding and the disease got into them. And finally the chief ranger said, "This is just no good, we're not going to put them back." So he took it upon himself and some others and they just dispatched the elk. Cause they were sick. He went up there one time and there was one just along the road that comes down, 43 and it was just so sick it couldn't even walk. And that convinced him that the elk should go.

### **When was that?**

I would say, that was probably, well, before 1970. One time, the National Park Advisory Board... soon after they built that lodge there, The National Park Advisory Board met there. And I think Mrs. Johnson was on it and Grosvenor of the National Geographic was on it.

### **Do you mean Lady Bird Johnson?**

Yeah. And the guy from Arizona, Udall, was there. I mean there was some people there. It was just an overnight stop on this main tour they were going through there. And about five o'clock, just before daybreak, in the morning, a couple of bull elk got in a fight right out in front of the lodge, in that little field

above there. I mean, they were snorting and bellowing. And you could hear the noise and the antlers and all. I mean they were really going at it. And at breakfast that morning that was the main topic of conversation. And these people all accused the superintendent of staging that thing for their benefit. (laughs) That was just the highlight of their visit.

**Do you think it was the National Park Service that brought them in?**

No, I don't think the Park Service brought them in. I don't even think it was even Park Service land then. That land, some of it was private, some was Forest Service. No, I don't think the Park Service had anything to do with bringing them in.

There was also at the same time another herd brought into Mountain Lake over in Giles County. You know that's high mountain lake area. There was another herd brought in there. I think it has died out now, too. There was two herds in Virginia. They were both unsuccessful. Mainly because of the inbreeding. You know, elk migrate, scatter around. But it was too tight there. They couldn't get out and roam around like they need to. Now there's a lot of bear up there, a lot of bear at the Peaks. But bear somehow can maneuver around..

You were asking about design that would take into consideration wildlife. Now on the Roanoke River Parkway we did do that, you see. I don't have a plan but you see this river parkway parallels the Roanoke River down to Explorer Park. About a mile and a half. I don't know whether you're aware of it, but wildlife, every night, migrate to the river, every night. The wildlife migrate to the river. And here we were building a road in there blocking it, you see.

I don't know if any body else is aware of it or not, but I insisted on two, we called them, pedestrian underpasses. I didn't say wild life, two pedestrian underpasses. These are like two 12 foot square boxes with stone face on each side. Beautiful things. But they were intended to facilitate a hiking trail system which has not been developed yet, you see. Maybe someday somebody will do it. But they will accommodate horses and people and bikes and whatever the plan calls for. But there's two of those and there's another big bridge across the ravine there and then there's another bridge down there where a service road goes back into the land fill, where the land fill used to be. And that's an over adequate bridge. But in a mile and half you've got several opportunities for wildlife to get across and down to the river. And they use it. They are using it. Every little drain pipe is used by wildlife. Groundhogs and possum and raccoons. There's trails, little animal trails that go down and through those pipes.

**Do you think the same is true on the parkway?**

You mean on the old parkway? Well, yes there are a lot of culverts, some beautiful stone culverts along the parkway that you just never see. But they're there and some day somebody may take that on for a study.

**Where should I look for some of those beautiful stone culverts? Are there any in the Roanoke vicinity?**

Well, there are some cattle underpasses just right straight across here, right over here. You get on 460 and start south and within about a mile or so there's a couple of them there. Now those are cattle underpasses. They are not very scenic because the land goes down into them very steep. You hardly know they are there. If they were more visible there would be more attention given to the grade in and out of them.

Now there's one. My favorite one is down, and I don't know how to tell you where it is. (laughs) I used to have that in my mind. Well, let's see, I've got a map someplace here. Let's try this map. Now this is a culvert that goes, just accommodates a small stream going under the parkway. But where it comes out on the one side, on the right hand side going south. The wing wall of the box comes around and its got a curve to it and it comes around and goes and back across the stream and the water trickles over this. And it's a beautiful thing, a beautiful thing.

Now, let's see, where in the world...(looks) Well, it's... I've just lost all orientation to the parkway. I used to know all those things. It's in Virginia, this side of Rakes Mill Pond. I'd say its somewhere in the Smart View Area. I don't have any maps.

**I have some drawings outside. I mentioned, it's a planting plan, Its about ten miles of Smart View. We could look and see if that area is on there.**

It's not right at a road crossing but it's a stream comes out of the... Well there's a house on the right hand side. Now the water, I can't remember which way the water's running. I think the water is coming from the right. And that is the way you would expect it to come from.

**As you are headed south?**

So the water would trickle over this and into this little basin and then go through the pipe. Oh, it's a tremendous detail.

***\*In a later telephone conversation in February 2001, Mr. Hope mentioned that he had travelled south on the BRP looking for the culvert and located it near MP 156.***

**And that's an early section of parkway. Let me go get the drawings so we can look at them. (tape pauses)**

David Hill, he lives in Roanoke. He's a landscape architect in private practice. I guess his office is still on Campbell Avenue. Now, he was a student of mine on the parkway. He graduated from Virginia Tech. Went on to Harvard and got a Masters at Harvard. Practiced some in New Orleans and he came back and he's in private practice.

One of his projects when he was at Harvard was to develop an exhibit on the Blue Ridge Parkway, the building of the Blue Ridge Parkway. And he did it and he won first prize and he got a trip to Europe and his masters out of it. And this exhibit was featured at the National Building Museum in Washington DC. They had an opening there and my wife went up to it. And after it was there, Well it ran for quite a while in Boston at the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, or something. They wanted it and featured it for a while. Then after it finished at the National Building Museum it was brought back to Roanoke and was redone. A firm in Lynchburg, I think, made it into a travelling exhibit. So different parts can be disassembled and put up and travel around the country. This Getty Browning drawing, map I was telling you about was part of it at Harvard. But it never made it back you see. Something happened to it. It was shipped to the wrong place. Something has happened to it that it's been lost. And we don't know what happened to it.

But David Hill is someone you really ought to talk to.

**I'd like to do that.**

He's a great guy and this was a tremendous exhibit that he prepared. He did two years on the parkway in the summer time while he was a student at Tech. And he worked in Asheville one year and then he was on his own here in Virginia a second year, primarily revising land use maps. Oh, he just loved to do that. He'd take those things and go from daylight 'til dark marking up those things.

He is doing very well in private practice in Roanoke. He's on every board and every committee that comes along.

**Does the Park Service have these documents, like your list of northeastern plants and even your marked up copies would be archival.**

You mean like this set?

**Yes, for somebody like me it is so interesting to see what you were thinking about, what your perceptions were.**

This is just a set of prints of the final thing. They probably have that with signatures on it, here, which would be the only... because I sent the originals

down there... This is just kind of a preliminary print where somebody did some field work and marked on it.

**But I think those are useful, too.**

I don't know that I ever went back to see that those notes were incorporated in the final... I probably did. I mean why would I let somebody spend a whole lot of time on it and ignore it?

**They would have been walking the parkway to do this?**

Oh yes. In field checking land use maps, generally, we had a little clip board thing that was plywood with mouse traps on it. You would do a half a sheet at a time. You'd fold one of these in half. It just fit on the clipboard. You'd park your car here and walk down one side, mark it, and then come back the other side, get in your car and go down this point and get the other half of the sheet. Depending on what all you were involved in, you could do two sheets a day.

**Okay. And these would be done after things have been built, for maintaining it or for actually the design of a certain section?**

Oh no, these were done after it was built.

**I think these would be very interesting.**

You may go through that process two or three times before you finally got them finished. And if somebody else picked up to go on, they would do it over again.

**They'd have to go out themselves and look at it? And their observations might be different?**

Well, maybe somewhat. They would add to it probably. I don't know what they would change much but they would add to it.

**Well, that's great. I'm going to leave now. You've been so generous with your time.**

**(end of tape)**