

## A Ride in the Park: Remembering West Glacier and the Graham-Paige

### *From an Interview with Ray Westby*

*In 2008, the Federal Lands Highway Program celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Looking back at the past quarter century – and more – a number of retirees have shared their stories about life in the Vancouver office and in the field.*

The Graham-Paige automobile was used by the Bureau of Public Roads (BPR) (predecessor agency to FHWA) on many projects during the 1920's, 1930's and 1940's, including use in West Glacier, Montana, and Glacier National Park. During that time, an employee of the Bureau of Public Roads – **Bill Peters** – was assigned to the Portland Office and working on a project at the park.



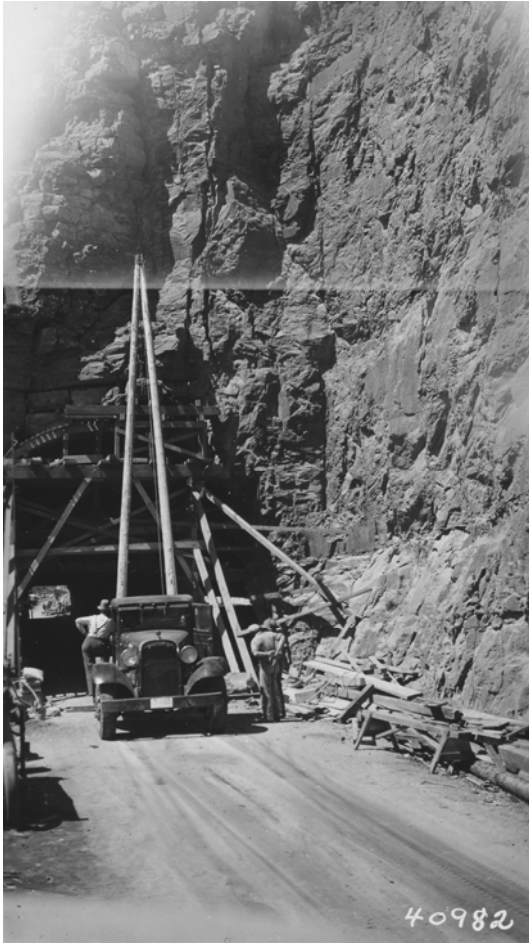
Photo from WFLHD Archives.

He befriended a boy in town and used to take him on rides in the Graham Paige while he drove around the park. That boy, **Ray Westby**, also grew up to be an employee of BPR. Ray's career spanned more than three decades. He joined BPR in 1950 and worked as project engineer on many projects in Oregon and Washington. He came into the Vancouver office in 1969 to head up the design section; and retired in 1982 as Chief, Project Development Division.

In the winter of 2008, Ray recalled those early rides with Bill Peters. "I was raised in West Glacier, Montana," he said, when it was "just a little village." He couldn't remember how he had come to meet Bill Peters, but he remembered the car. "He had one of those old cars. It had to be about 1926 or '27." What was Peters' job for BPR? The particular function wasn't something that the young boy filed away: "I don't know what he did, but he checked on something," Ray said, and he still remembers the thrill of the ride. "I was about 7 or 8, maybe 9 years old then, and he'd take me around in that old car....on these old gravel roads."

Construction began on the Going to the Sun Road in 1925, and during the July 15, 1933 dedication, the National Park Service Administrator called it the "most beautiful piece of mountain road in the world."

"I can remember when the road was opened," Ray said. "I was just a kid when they built it." At the time, he recalled, "the west side just went up to the summit. Then it was about three years later before you could come up from St. Mary's and reach the top."



Above: Going to the Sun Road. The original caption for this project photo describes it as “Station 66 looking west at East Portal showing method used of placing portal masonry stones. Derrick with “A” frame 40 feet long mounted on 4-ton truck lifting 3-ton rock into position. (8-8-41)”

Right: A 1931 Graham Paige was donated to the FHWA’s Western Federal Lands Highway Division (WFLHD) by Mr. William McBee of Albany, Oregon, in 2003. It is shown here after being restored by WFLHD employees Wade Johnson and Cal Frobig.



The Bill Peters that Ray remembers could well be William B. Peters who worked for BPR from 1919 to 1954 and was in Glacier National Park 1925 to 1928. Peters contributed a piece to FHWA’s 1976 history, *The Trailblazers*, in which he in part recalled a 1926 incident when a crew member living with his wife and toddler in a board floor tent had to chase a bear off the porch.

Although the Going to the Sun Road was long completed by the time Ray Westby came to work, maintenance, repairs, and improvements were regularly undertaken. “We’re the ones that are guilty of putting those homely guardrails in,” he said. “The Park Service was trying to try out different things that...were a lot cheaper than rock. They were terrible looking things.”

By the time Ray started at FHWA, most of the folks who had worked on the original construction were long since retired, but Ray did remember working on a crew with **Mick Moen**, who “was an inspector when they built (the Sun Road) and those rock walls.” Ray remembered, “They really had some beautiful pictures of this construction.”

*Ray Westby was interviewed at WFLHD on January 10, 2008. He worked for BPR and FHWA from 1950-1982. If you have comments about this story, or if you have stories about Ray Westby, Bill Peters, Mick Moen, West Glacier, or the Graham-Paige, please email me at [marili.reilly@fhwa.dot.gov](mailto:marili.reilly@fhwa.dot.gov).*

*-- Marili Green Reilly*