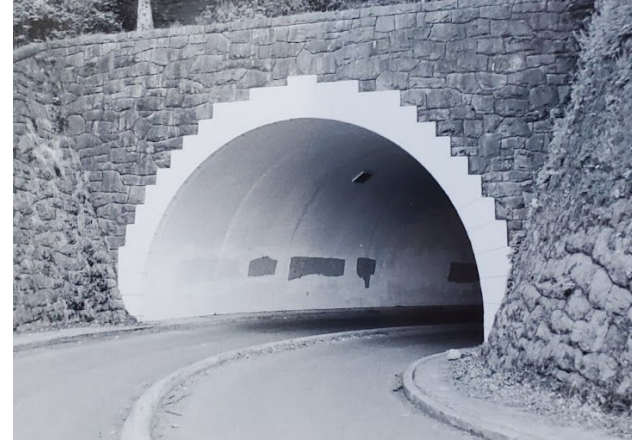
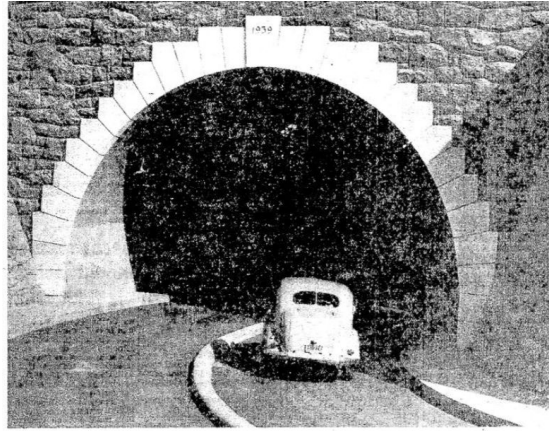
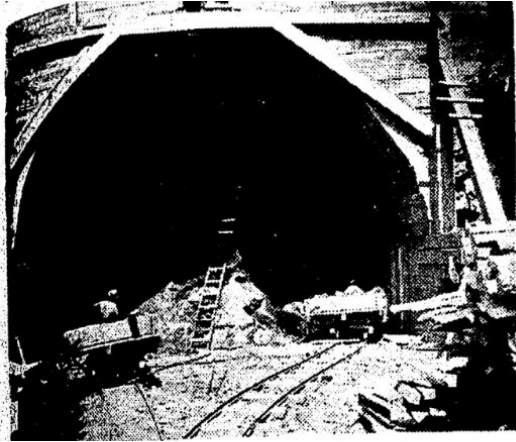


# Rocky Butte Tunnel

1934 - 1939



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**LIVING NEW DEAL**

[www.livingnewdeal.org](http://www.livingnewdeal.org)



*The Oregonian*

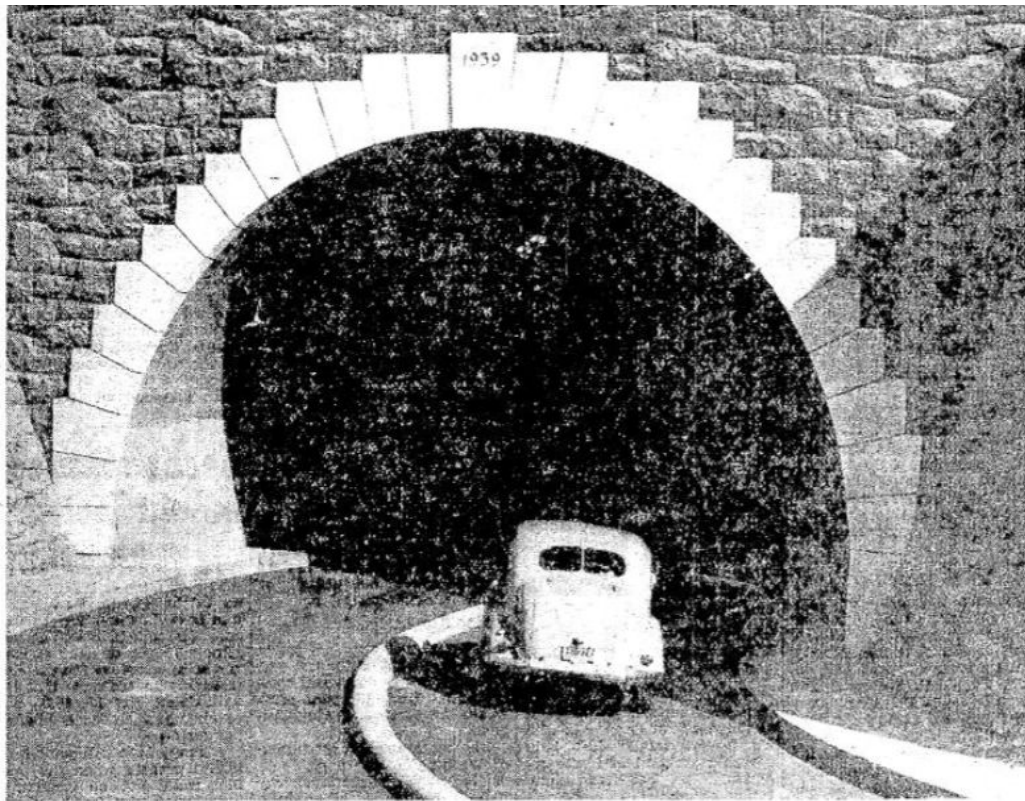


Rocky Butte  
Preservation  
Society

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The Rocky Butte Road was seen as the first promontory along Historic Columbia River Highway. The build offered both an opportunity and a challenge

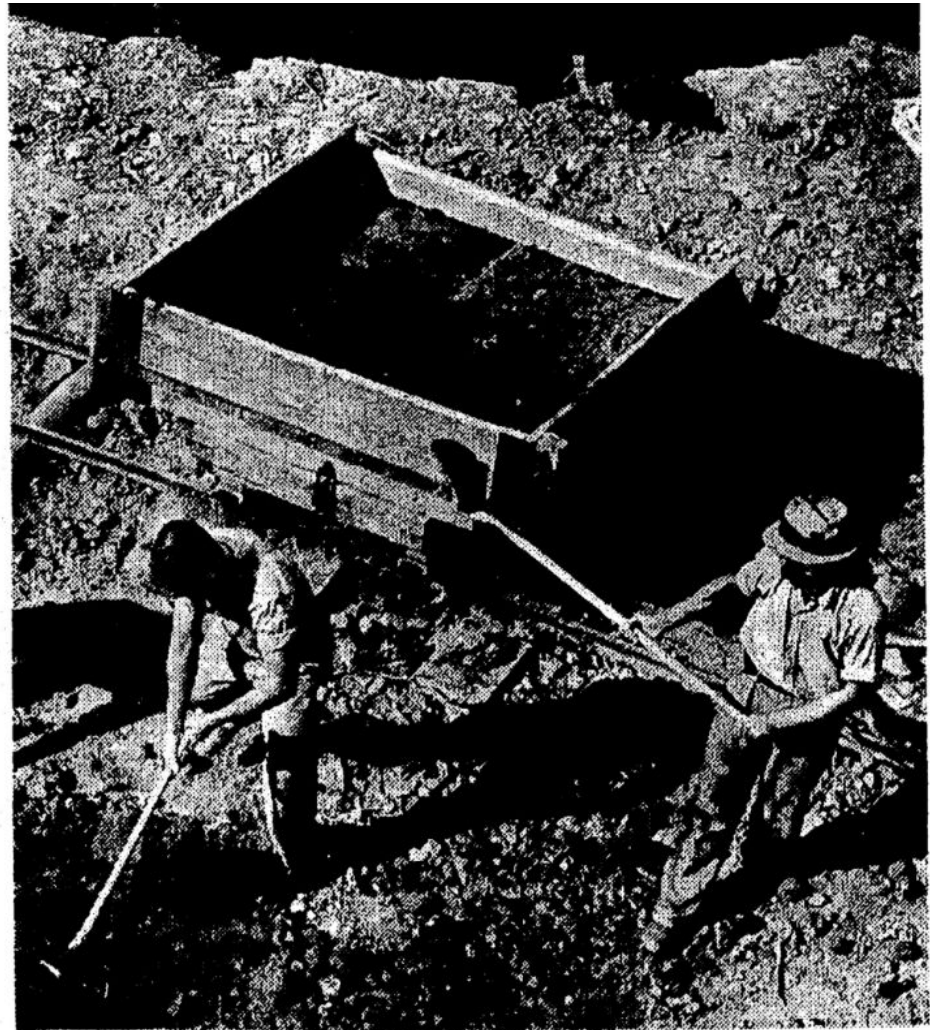
It was designed so that the road was curved to fit to the landscape, basalt, so local that it was quarried from the butte itself, was placed in stone footings at rock outcroppings to look as though the structure had “sprung from the crest itself.”



WPA construction of scenic byways, such as Rocky Butte Scenic Drive, are classified under the Recreation property type.

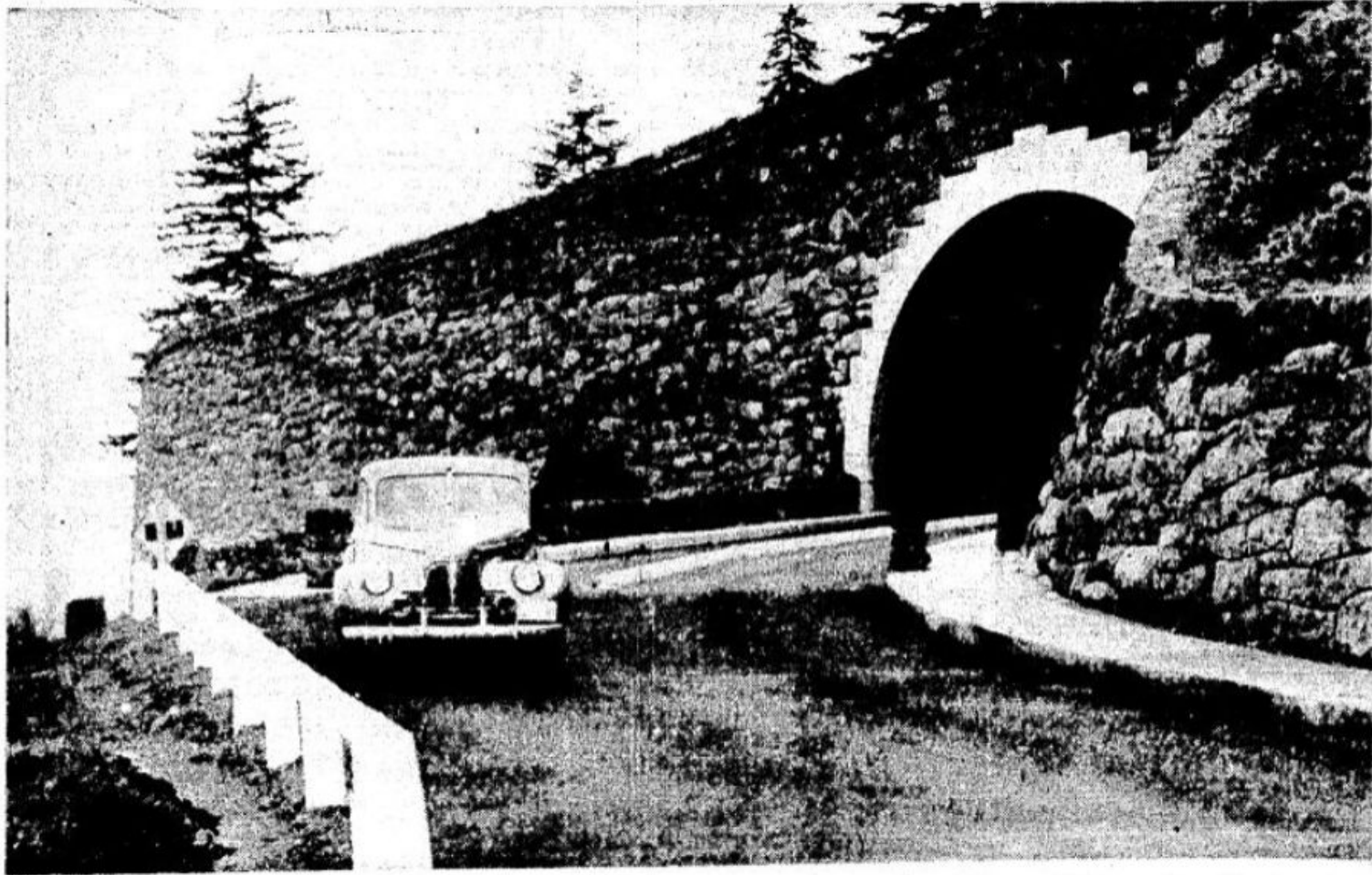
These projects followed 3 guidelines for Rustic Design:

- Use of local natural materials,
- Curvilinear lines that follow the terrain and landscape,
- Hand-crafted construction of high quality.



Craftsmanship  
was limited to  
hand tools.  
The design  
was simple,  
clear, and  
utilitarian.

The Stone  
walls are  
constructed by  
a repetitious  
pattern of  
stone and  
joinery.



Some of the masons were highly skilled in using local basaltic rock and had learned their skill in Italy before immigrating to the United States. Many were unskilled workers quickly employed, they became more skilled and the rockwork often reflected improvement in skill. Many were also employed at Timberline Lodge.

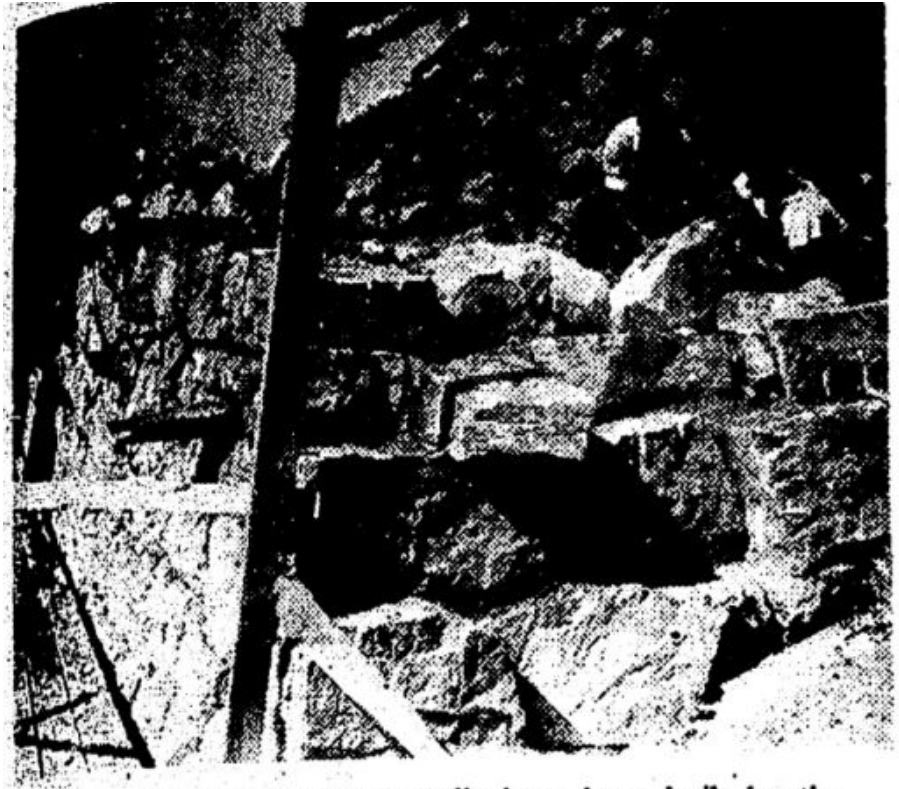
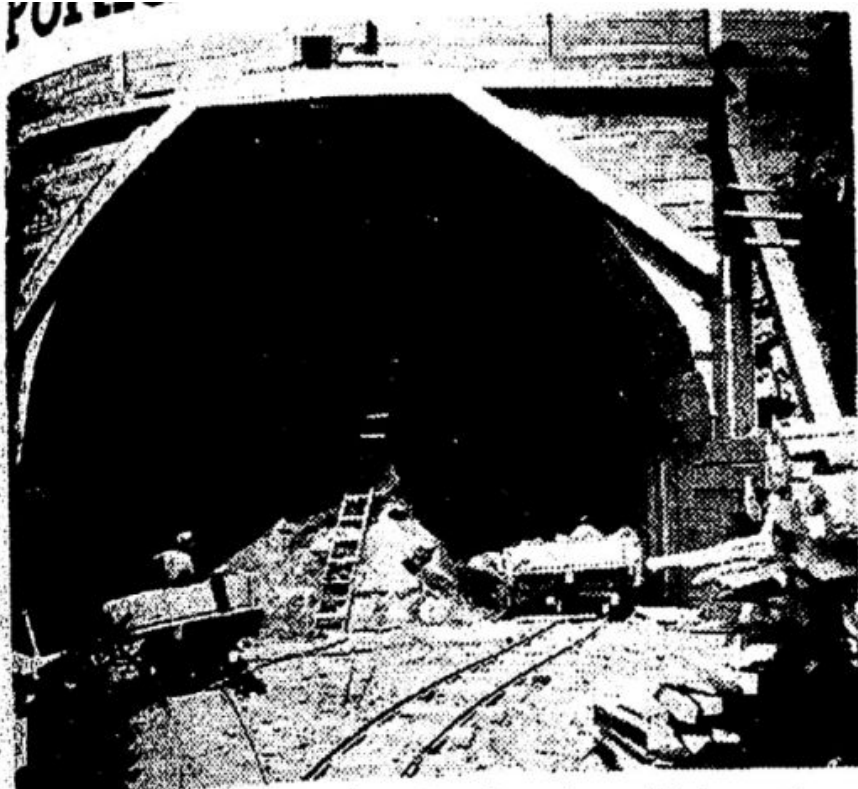


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previous rock-  
workers, WPA

"IT'S NOT EASY." Working on the Butte roads is as hard work as there is, WPA officials claim, and they say their records show an average of six cubic yards per man per day of rock moved. Typical of the 540 workers on the project is Cliff Friday, 24, of 2521 North Williams avenue, who was caught by Staff Photographer Frank Sterrett while working with a sledge hammer



The Rocky Butte Scenic Drive is representative of the northwest region and the time period in which it was built as one of the “artifacts of hard times and the auto touring age.”





## Unique engineering features:

- Key arched barrel tunnel
- 27 feet high / 34 feet wide
- 375 feet long
- Concrete-lined interior
- Path doubles back on itself to negotiate a steep 5% gradient.

Detailing of the tunnel, by A. J. Dreyer, was to be adapted in subsequent road building throughout Oregon.

## SCENIC DRIVE IS URGED

Construction of Road to Top of  
**Rocky Butte** Proposed.

Multnomah county commissioners have referred to the city planning commission the proposal to construct a scenic driveway to the top of **Rocky butte** as an emergency relief project. The proposal also calls for further improvement of Fremont-street extension. Much of the work in building the scenic drive would entail hand labor, it is pointed out, and the project is feasible for winter work.

The planning commission will consider the plan at its next meeting. Joseph A. Hill, president of Hill Military academy, has offered to donate the right of way for the drive.

## WORK ON ROAD TO START SOON

**Rocky Butte** Scenic Route  
Will Employ 200 Men

Construction work on the proposed scenic highway to the top of **Rocky butte** will be started within the next few days, it was announced yesterday by Frank Shull, chairman of the board of county commissioners.

The road, which will be built as an SERA project, will be financed with federal money, with the county paying for material used. It is estimated that from 150 to 200 men will receive work on the project.

Mr. Shull said that construction of the road, which had been recom-

## COMPANY UNION ELECTS

Twenty members of a company union at the Portland Cleaning Works have elected officers and a bargaining committee, according to L. L. Starr, proprietor of the organization. Arthur Schneider was chosen union president; Mrs. H. C. Inman, vice-president, and Gordon Mansley, secretary-treasurer. Members of the bargaining committee include Eda Allison, George De Lap, Irma Witzel and Mrs. A. E. Nickles.

mended by the board of county commissioners, had been approved by the county and state relief committees and that \$170,000 had been voted for hand labor.

Right of way was donated by Joseph A. Hill, president of Hill Military academy. The academy has also offered the county a tract of land at the summit of the butte for park purposes.

The proposed road will wind around the butte to the top, where there will be a loop circling the summit. Many community clubs and civic organizations have interested themselves in the project.



## The **Rocky Butte** Highway

The splendid view from **Rocky butte** was, until a few months ago, the privilege only of those energetic individuals—and these were mostly boys—who were sufficiently hardy and daring to climb the steep and stony trail, overgrown with brush, which mounted to the summit of that commanding eminence. Now anyone may have it for his own.

Two years have passed since three county executives—and doubtless they were puffing somewhat—climbed to the crest and, breathless, saw that breathless view for themselves, and were agreed that report had not praised it sufficiently. Thus the resolution was reached, and then and there, that such a prospect must be shared with all.

The new scenic highway, which extends from Eighty-second avenue out Fremont, skirting the cliffs of **Rocky butte** until it encircles the summit, is proof that the commissioners of Multnomah county are men of vision—quite as it may also be proof that, individually, they did not care to climb the toilsome trail again. When it was found that money would be available for a WPA project they were united in declaring that the **Rocky butte** highway plan met the requirements. And now the abbreviated but quite incomparable scenic highway has been opened to traffic.

From **Rocky butte** the city is presented in panoramic completeness—but thence, as well, are seen the peaks of Hood, St. Helens, Rainier, Adams and the Three Sisters, the vastness of the Columbia, the sweep of valley and forest, the many minor streams and lakes and the Washington towns beyond the river.

The appreciation of the public is apparent in the circumstance that several thousand automobiles visited the crest on a single day soon after the opening of the highway. Commissioners Bigelow, Shull and Taft, together with the engineers and workmen who constructed the highway, will have the gratitude—this is not an overstatement—of generations.

Oregonian September 18, 1936

## Mosquitoes

To the Editor: I notice that the city and county are going after the mosquitoes once more. I would suggest to them to investigate one of the worst breeding places, namely Fremont street southerly from Eighty-third avenue to the entrance of **Rocky Butte**.

I believe publication of this suggestion will give public-spirited people, as well as city officials, food for thought.

L. GERLINGER.

## WORKMEN PERILED BY ROCK ROLLER

Oregonian February 23, 1939

Someone either nursing a grudge or obsessed with an unusual idea of entertaining himself is sought by deputy sheriffs after he tried to roll rocks down from a 200-foot cliff at **Rocky Butte** onto men engaged in drilling and breaking rock at the new county quarry.

Deputy Sheriff Charles Wilson, summoned to the quarry, found that a youth had perched himself high up above the quarry and was getting much amusement in seeing workers scatter after he would roll big stones down toward them. He refused to desist even after the foreman warned him.

As soon as he saw the officer, the youth started scampering toward the top of the butte. Wilson made a thorough search of the area without avail.

## ROCKS DESCEND ON WPA WORKERS

Oregonian April 13, 1939

### Two Men Injured; Three Boys in Custody

Luther McElfresh, 5421 Northeast Everett street, and E. K. Richardson, 8733 Northeast Webster street, WPA workers employed on the **Rocky Butte** road project, were injured when they were struck by rocks pushed from the top of the hill by three boys, according to a report made yesterday by Deputy Sheriffs John Talley and A. C. Schirmer.

McElfresh was removed to Good Samaritan hospital, suffering broken ribs and a possibly fractured leg. Richardson suffered a fractured arm.

The three boys, aged 10, 13 and 13, respectively, were taken into custody and turned over to the juvenile court.

# Rocky Butte Improved

## Workmen Finish Tunnel Project

Completion by WPA workmen of a \$150,000 tunnel project at the south entrance to Rocky Butte park left the knoll in northeast Portland an outstanding view point with improved roadways.

WPA men finished the tunnel Thursday afternoon and the men either were laid off for an indefinite period or transferred to other projects.

The tunnel is 375 feet long and a 37-foot roadway, yet to be oiled by the county, runs through it.

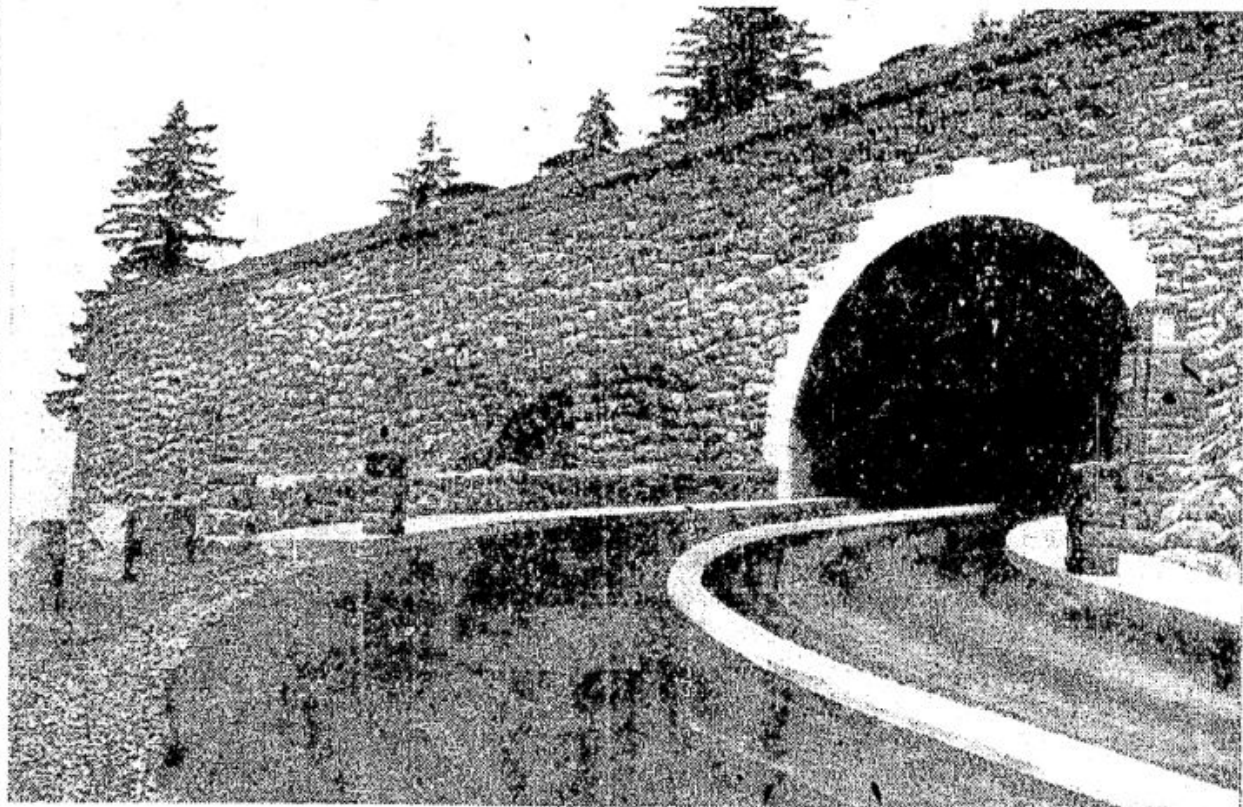
### Visibility Improved

Previous WPA projects resulted in construction of roads to the top of Rocky Butte and a stone parapet wall encircling the view point.

Visibility is unimpeded in all directions except to the south, where Mount Tabor blocks the view.

A. C. Galbraith was general superintendent and Ralph Curcio was superintendent of stone masonry on the tunnel project.

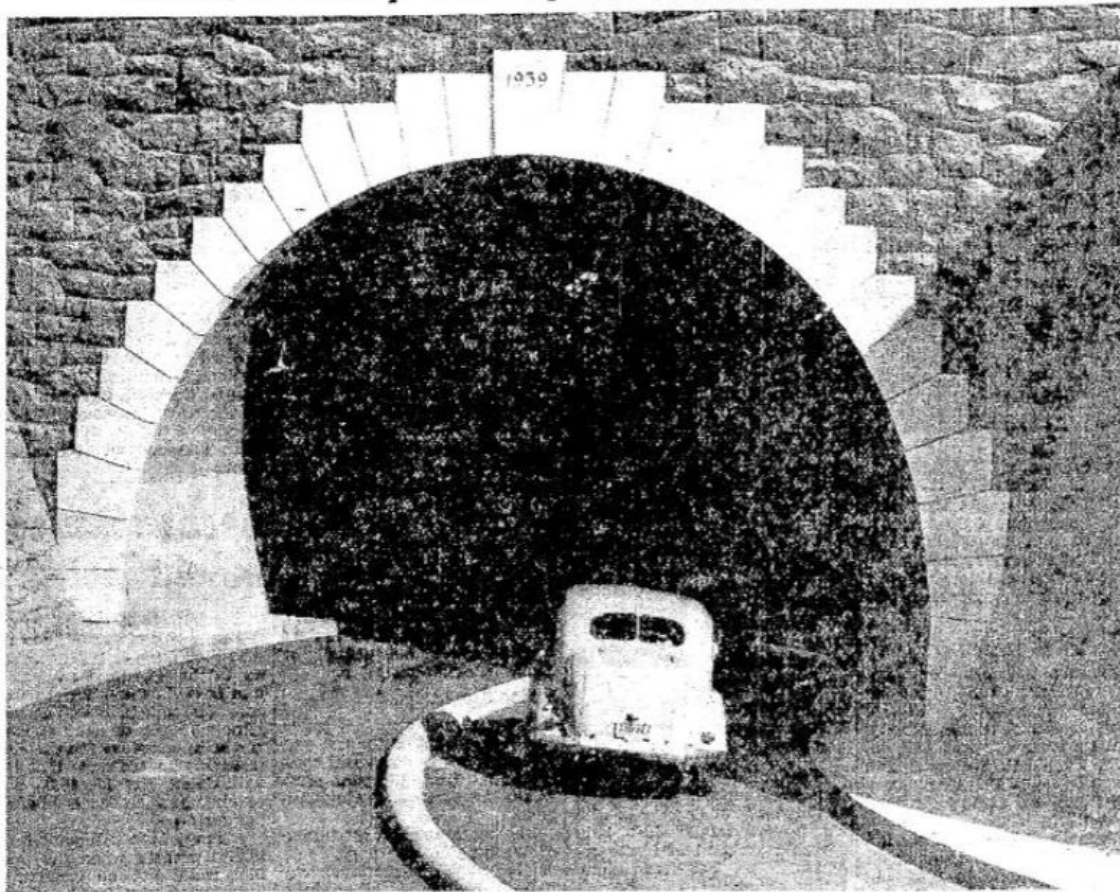
## WPA Completes Work in Rocky Butte Park



After months of labor, WPA workmen have completed the 375-foot tunnel, faced in natural stone, at the south entrance to Rocky Butte park. All work of improving the viewpoint has been completed by the federal work-relief agency.



## Tunnel, Roadway to Rocky Butte Viewpoint Dedicated



East Side Commercial club members, county and WPA officials and others interested in the transformation of **Rocky Butte** from a brush-covered hill to an attractive viewpoint of-

fering sweeping vistas of Portland and the surrounding area, participated Tuesday in dedication ceremonies of the recently completed tunnel (in photo) and south approach to summit.

## Road to Butte Dedicated

### South Approach to Viewpoint Opened

Rumors that the tunnel on the west side of **Rocky Butte** was a bomb-proof shelter, a storage depot for munitions, or a hiding place for anti-aircraft guns were definitely spiked Tuesday when the tunnel, with the road of which it is part, was dedicated to public use and enjoyment as the new south approach to the top of **Rocky Butte**.

The dedication ceremony was held under direction of the East Side Commercial club, original sponsor of the project, and marked virtual completion of the development which has been under construction since the winter of 1934, and which has given employment to thousands of WPA laborers. Materials were provided with Multnomah county road funds.

### Masonry Dominates Butte

With opening of the south road and tunnel, **Rocky Butte** emerges as an attractively developed viewpoint, reached by two roads with sweeping curves and easy grades, offering wide vistas of Portland, Vancouver, and the Columbia river. The extensive use of masonry retaining walls is a dominant feature of the development.

Chief speaker at the dedication was E. J. Griffith, WPA



# Portland's Busiest, Most Worked-on Viewpoint



**LAST WEEK** workmen were tunneling into the solid lava of Rocky Butte for the 300-foot tunnel that is being constructed to accommodate a switch-back on the new south approach road



**THOUSANDS OF FEET** of rock walls have been built by the WPA workers by hand. Many of them had no previous rock-laying experience but now are accomplished stone workers, WPA officials say



THE ROAD along the butte's south spur is being carved out and the rock used in filling in low spots in the road. Both the north approach and south approach end on Northeast Eighty-second avenue—the north at Fremont, the south at Halsey street

## Road, Tunnel To Be Opened

Oregonian September 14, 1939

Dedication of the new loop road and tunnel to the south entrance to **Rocky butte** has been set for 2 P. M. Tuesday, it was announced Wednesday by the county commissioners. The East Side Commercial club, which originally promoted the project, will have charge of the program.

The loop, built with the cooperation of the WPA, connects with the rest of the **Rocky butte** development on the top of the hill. Work on the project provided employment at times for as many as 700 men who otherwise would have been on direct relief, the commissioners said.

# WPA Puts Half-Million Into Rocky Butte

PORTLAND'S No. 2 vantage point so far as view is concerned is on top of the 607-foot lava cone, Rocky Butte. From its top the view spreads out for miles north, south, east and west, taking in the entire city, the Columbia valley and the Cascade range.

Into development of the butte, WPA, with the sponsorship of Multnomah county, has already put more than \$400,000 and expects to put at least an additional \$100,000 before the project is completed. The county provides materials and plans. Work on the butte began originally under SERA, but it wasn't until the WPA took it over in 1934 that it really progressed. Since then a road—the north approach—has been completed, and all the banks bordering the modern highway have been carefully walled.

Now WPA workers are constructing a south approach that winds up from the south side of the butte and connects with the other road at the top. Some 540 men have been working on the new road since late in May, when it was started, and it already is well along in construction. The road follows the steep west side of the butte and at one place a 300-foot tunnel is being built to enable a "comfortable turn" on a switch-back.

And while WPA workers labor on the south approach, thousands of Portlanders and Portland visitors make visits to the top of the butte for the view. WPA workers made a check over a 30-day period some time ago, and found that an average of between 4000 and 4500 people visit the viewpoint daily.

September 4, 1938

is built by the  
previous rock-  
workers, WPA



"IT'S NOT EASY." Working on the Butte roads is as hard work as there is, WPA officials claim, and they say their records show an average of six cubic yards per man per day of rock moved. Typical of the 540 workers on the project is Cliff Friday, 24, of 2521 North Williams avenue, who was caught by Staff Photographer Frank Sterrett while working with a sledge hammer



## Raffale Curcio

Requiem Mass for Raffale Curcio, a stonemason in the Portland area for 40 years, will be Thursday at 10 a.m. in St. Ignatius Church.

Mr. Curcio, who was 82, died Monday in a local hospital. He was born Dec. 13, 1890, in Italy. He moved to Portland in 1913 and worked on the Columbia River Highway and the Vista House as a stone cutter.

As a stonemason, he operated his own business for 40 years and supervised the stonework on the Rocky Butte **tunnel**.

Survivors include his wife, Mary; sons Frank and Ben; daughters Angie Price and Barbara Gallagher, all of Portland; sister, Teresa DeSimone, Sault St. Marie, Quebec, and 11 grandchildren. Interment will be at Portland Memorial Mausoleum.



## THE CURCIOS



# 'FORT' ON BUTTE NO FORT AT ALL

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Road Work Gives Birth to  
Weird Rumors

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BY GERRY WEAVER

Staff Writer, The Oregonian

Hist, comrades! Have you heard the latest spy dope on **Rocky Butte**?

Portland's mysterious rock-bound "fort" on the south side of that rocky promontory in the northeastern part of the city will be completed about mid-June, and then, enemy, look out!

It is a WPA project, sponsored by the county, and Paul C. Northrop of the county engineering staff is civilian generalissimo. Men are working day and night to complete the job.

A fine, modern road cleft in the butte's stony side winds upward to a tunnel which ambles inside the huge stone mound's interior.

## Sniper Haven Afforded

In this hideaway, the spies report, mounted anti-aircraft weapons can wheel in and out with safety and have a sniping good time with enemy invaders.

A lookout atop the project affords a sweep of the mighty Columbia river, the river gorge which leads to gigantic Bonneville dam and the new Portland-Columbia super-airport, which some day may be an operating field for the army's fighting wings.

The spies also have seen in the thick stone walls lining the outer edge of the new roadway, as well as in the points along the road which look for all the world like mere parking places, impregnable breastworks for artillery pieces.

## Officer Replies Testily

Widespread report that the project is a defense measure, a sort of aerial "Maginot Line," brought the following testy remark Saturday from a high army officer here, when approached by an inquiring reporter who tried, evidently without success, to prove he was not a nasty spy:

"Well, you wouldn't tell the world about it if it was, would you!"

A real spy would take the remark to mean the army man was keeping secrets.

The same line of questions brings smiles, however, to Engineer Northrop.

"The best story I've heard about this project to date—and we hear many—is that our tunnel is going to be used as a hangar for army airplanes," said he.

"But it's really only a scenic road, matching the development on the north side of the butte.

"No," he sighed, "it's no fort! One well-placed shot would blow the old hill to pieces!"

Boom! Another good rumor gone wrong.

# New Road Dedicated

Oregon Journal  
September 23, 1939

That mysterious new tunnel on the west side of **Rocky butte**, which stands guard at the northeast entrance to Portland, was found to contain a road, after all, and, not anti-aircraft guns, when the new boulevard up the south and west flanks of the mountain was dedicated Tuesday. The development, a WPA enterprise, completes the fine roadway system to this lookout spot from which one looks westward over a great city, eastward over the Columbia River valley, the volcanic peaks and the Cascades.

THE OREGONIAN, MONDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 1977 3M A15

## METRO/NORTHWEST

Now 'Emergency Services'

### Civil Defense survives bomb shelters

In retrospect, Kramer remembers that some federal civil defense rules were "ludicrous" and some local plans were worse.

Bonneville Dam was to have been used as a bomb shelter, he said. The highway **tunnel** on **Rocky Butte** was to have been storage, even though supplies would have been put in one traffic lane. In case of a nuclear attack, people were to have been shuffled into the Union Carbide sludge pit on N. Columbia Boulevard.

The Civil Defense emphasis was on nuclear disaster instead of natural disaster, according to Kramer. "It appeared to be a bureaucratic exercise in which we should be taking part."



## Paint Planned For Tunnel Job

White paint will be applied to brighten the interior of the four tunnels in the Multnomah County road system, Paul Northrup, county engineer, disclosed Friday. There are two tunnels on NW Cornell Road, one on W. Burnside Street and a fourth at Rocky Butte.

## Authorities Hold Boy, 15, In Attempted Rape Case

A 15-year-old boy was in custody at the county juvenile home Friday in connection with the attempted rape of a 9-year-old girl at Rocky Butte Thursday afternoon, juvenile officers reported.

Officers said the girl told them the boy took her into the woods, forced her to partially disrobe by threatening to throw her off a cliff, then attempted to rape her.

The victim and her 11-year-old sister told officers they were walking their dog on Rocky Butte near the tunnel when one of two male skateboarders approached them and initiated the incident.

Investigation of the incident was being continued Friday by the county juvenile division.

8

## WPA Stonework and Pedestrian Tunnel



Oregonian September 4, 1938



Completed in 1939 the pedestrian tunnel has an arched stone facing made of squared rubble basalt. The tunnel connected with the former Military Academy campus and travels under the roadway. The low retaining walls have sections of a flat top interrupted by stone caps. When along the roadway you will notice intervals of stone runnels which lead inlets for rainwater to drain.



The rock-faced masonry work, both dry wall and mortared, that was required to complete the project represents a quality and expenditure of hand labor that remains impressive today.

# 7 OREGON TUNNELS

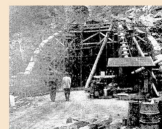
LISTED ON THE NATIONAL  
REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
WPA RUSTIC STYLE MASONRY PORTALS 1937-41



**ROCKY BUTTE**  
Portland



**BURNSIDE**  
Portland



**DENNIS L. EDWARDS**  
Formerly Sunset Tunnel  
and Wolf Creek Road  
Portland



**TOOTHROCK** Columbia  
River Gorge



**NW CORNELL #1**  
Portland



**NW CORNELL #2**  
Portland

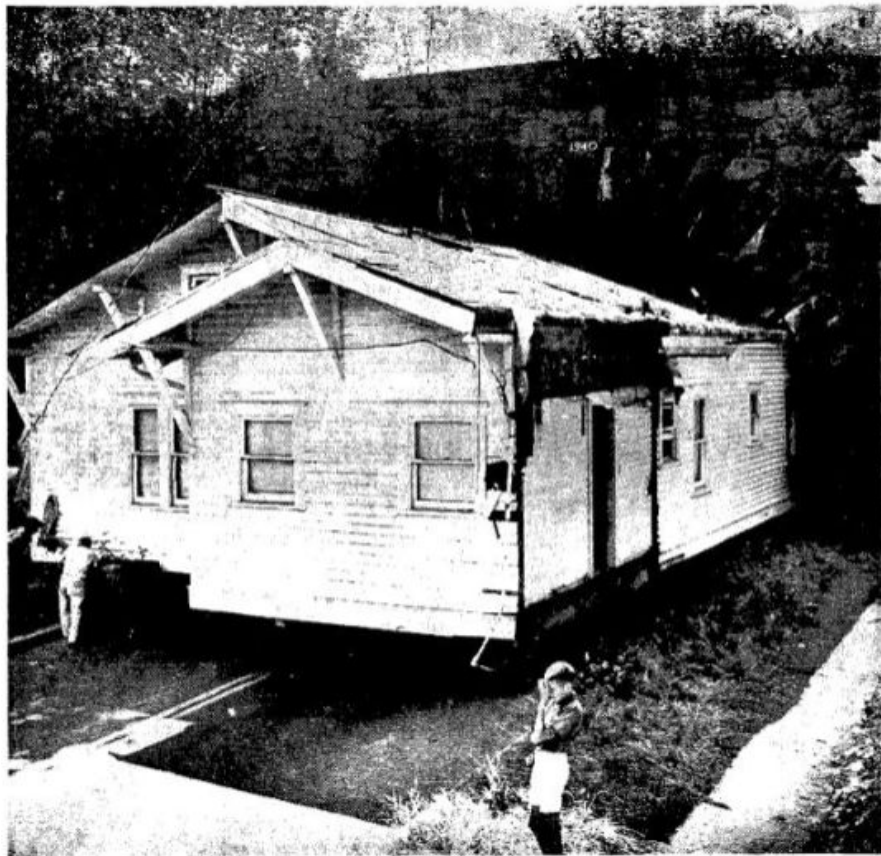


**SALT CREEK**  
Oakridge



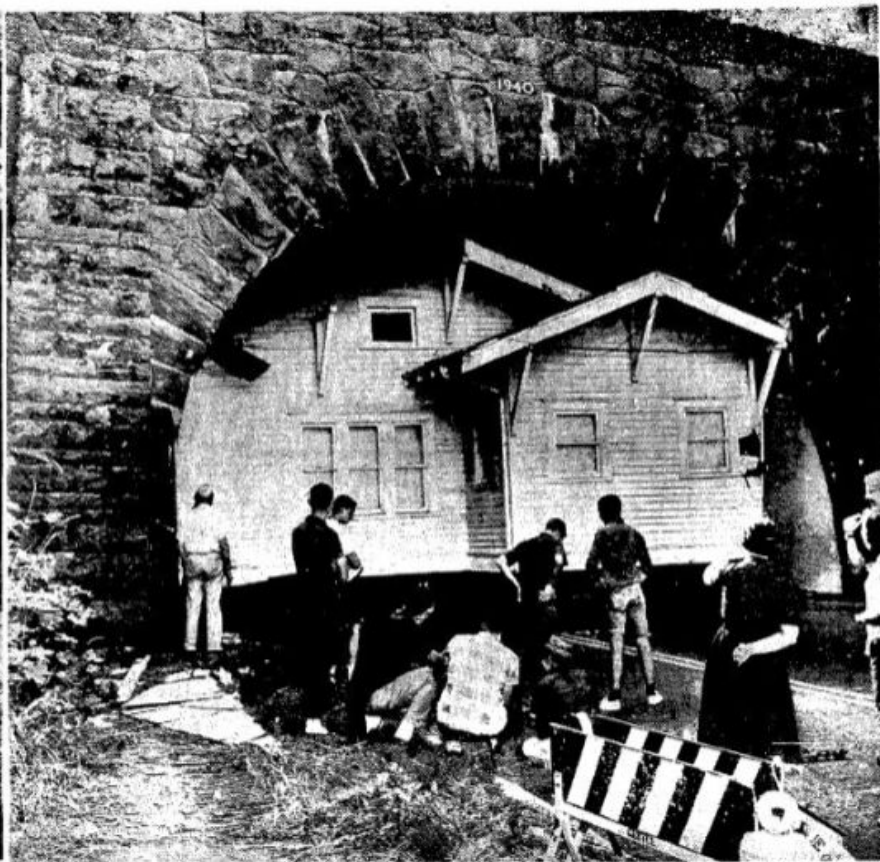
## West Burnside Tunnel

# Roving House Finds Location Fine, View Poor In Tunnel



MOST EXCLUSIVE address in town Friday was "1940 Burnside Tunnel" as movers goofed, stuck house in entrance.

After 7 hours, crews from R. E. Duggan Co. persevered, towed home, minus few boards, fixtures, through aperture.



INCHING ALONG, movers had progressed from scene at left (10:30 a.m.) to position above with house peeking

slyly from entrance of tunnel at 3 p.m. Sweaty tableau drew curious crowds as police blocked traffic.

## Movers Run Into Trouble - Not Enough Clearance



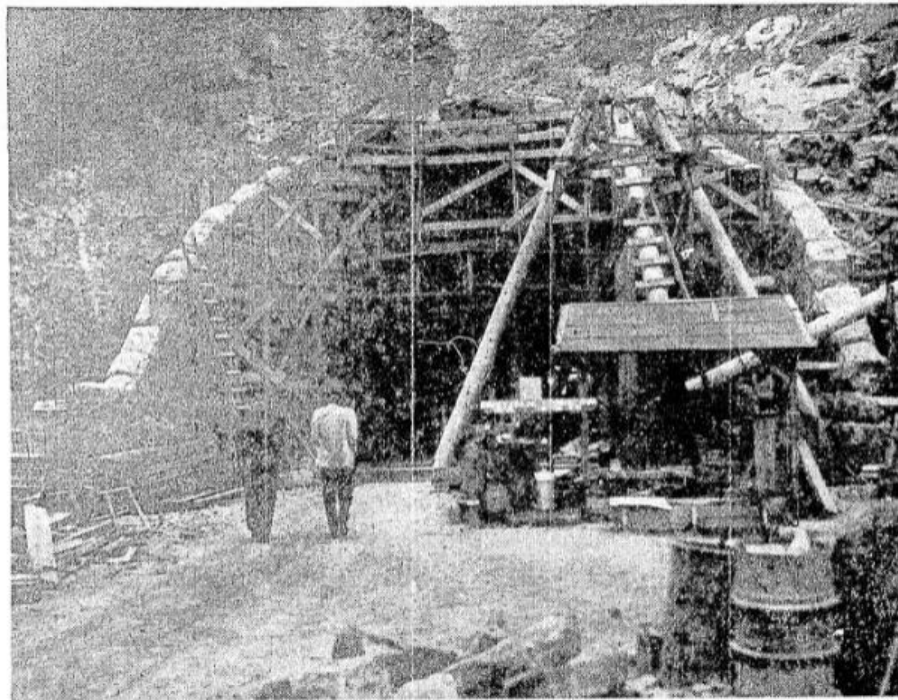
West  
Burnside  
Tunnel

BUSINESS WAS BRISK Friday for budding entrepreneur Brian Suher, 8, who set up lemonade stand at east end of Burnside Tunnel where house was stuck for about 10 hours during day. The pint-size tycoon presided at spigot while Charles E. Gannett (left), 348 SW 144th Ave., ordered a short

one. Seated with Brian is Randy Groves, 4. Lance Gannett, 3, pondered scene in Flintstone sweatshirt and sister Deborah Gannett, 18, looked on. Yes, movers tried letting out air from tires, finally pulled load through. (Staff Photo by Corvallis. More pictures on picture page)

Dennis L. Edwards Tunnel  
Sunset Tunnel

## Wilson and Wolf Creek Roads Near Completion



**WOLF CREEK** A news-picture tour by The Oregonian over uncompleted sections of the Wolf Creek and Wilson river roads Monday revealed work being rushed to meet the deadline for opening the routes, September 19. The Sunset tunnel, a 775-foot bore on Wolf creek, is ready except for stone portals. It will enable motorists to avoid sharp curves in the old road near Timber. Highway officials hope rains will not delay both projects.