Located on the Mount Hood National Forest a short drive from Portland, Oregon, Timberline Lodge is a resort destination and gateway to modern recreational opportunities ranging from basic hiking to snowboarding. Conceived in the 1930s as a public works relief project to aid unemployed Oregonians during the Great Depression, Timberline is also a living museum that houses the best of the handicraft movement and features original furniture, fixtures, and furnishings. Its early history touches on issues that foreshadowed what the U.S. Forest Service would later confront on a national level. For most visitors, though, this National Historic Landmark is simply a great place to have some fun all year round.

In 1925, the 173-mile-long Loop Road, which starts in Portland and circles Mount Hood itself, opened up Mount Hood National Forest to Portland residents seeking recreational opportunities such as hiking and skiing. The year after the road opened, the federal government set aside 83,751 acres of the national forest as a public recreation area and in doing so declared that economic activities would not be allowed to interfere with recreational pursuits.

Establishment of the recreation area brought to the fore the debate among locals and Forest Service employees about the definition of “recreational use” on a national forest. The debate reflected one that had been going on in other parts of the country and other regions of the Forest Service. In Colorado, recreation engineer Arthur Carhart had persuaded the Forest Service in 1920 to set aside the land around Trappers Lake on the White River National Forest as wilderness. Aldo Leopold had done the same in 1924 on the Gila National Forest in Arizona. In Oregon, would recreation mean solitary hiking, or winter sports carnivals with thousands of participants?
Mount Hood’s immediate popularity with locals and seasonal tourists who were clamoring for recreational facilities and overnight lodging soon ended the debate at this location. But conflict foreshadowed the national debate over wilderness that emerged after World War II.

Once the site for a lodge was selected in the mid 1930s, discussion turned to the building’s design. As Sarah Baker Munro documents in her new book, Timberline Lodge: The History, Art, and Craft of an
American Icon, an early proposal for a large, blocky structure with a tram and cableway to the summit of Mount Hood gave Forest Service leaders and the secretary of Agriculture pause. They realized they were dealing with “one of the great landmarks of the continent.”

Design efforts quickly moved toward a hotel integrated into the mountain environment. After initial plans had to be abandoned because of high per-room costs, in December 1935 the Forest Service hired Gilbert Stanley Underwood as the consulting architect. Underwood had apprenticed in Arts and Crafts architecture, which featured the use of Native designs and natural materials. Underwood’s work for the National Park Service on the Zion and Bryce Canyon lodges in Utah and the Ahwahnee Lodge in Yosemite held great appeal for Timberline’s boosters. In fact, his designs for national park lodges “became the standard for architecture on public lands.”

For Timberline Lodge, Underwood combined Rustic style with the aesthetics of the Arts and Crafts movement into an architectural style he called “environmen-
al.” Promoters, wanting to avoid the terms “rustic” and “environmental,” adopted “Cascadian” to suggest the lodge’s setting in the Cascade Mountain range and its echo of the shape of the mountain peak behind it. Working from Underwood’s general designs, the detail work fell to William I. “Tim” Turner, a Forest Service architect who had coined the term Cascadian. He led a team of Forest Service architects, each handling a different aspect of the building, and supervised the creation of detailed drawings as well as construction. All that remained to be decided in 1935 was who would fund it—and who would operate it.

With the Great Depression in full swing and money tight, it was agreed that the Forest Service would develop and landscape the roads and grounds around the proposed hotel, and the hotel construction would be handled by another agency. Promoters turned to the federal government’s newly created Works Progress Administration (WPA) for funding. Since the goal of WPA was to provide jobs for the greatest possible number of workers, the desire to build by hand made Timberline Lodge an ideal project. To secure the necessary loans, the Forest Service joined with the local booster organization, Mount Hood Development Association, to pledge the required portion of funds. In September 1935, Oregon’s WPA director, Emerson J. Griffith, submitted an application to Harry Hopkins, the federal WPA administrator, for $246,893 to build a hotel. (Three more applications for funds would eventually be filed, and the final cost of the building, road improvements, and landscaping would total nearly $1 million.) Eager to secure funding, Griffith did not tell Hopkins that working drawings had yet to be completed for the building.

WORK BEGINS

Hopkins approved funding that December for “a year-round recreational center at Timber Line on Mount Hood, including housing accommodations, roads, trails, landscaping, parking spaces, swimming tanks, toboggan and ski runs, ski jumps, tennis courts, water system, open amphitheater, barns, shelters, and a hotel of stone and wood.” When construction costs soared, however, items like the toboggan runs, ski jump, ice-skating rink, and tennis courts were never constructed. After much debate about the appropriateness of a swimming pool in a recreation area, one was built in the 1950s. Though no funding had been provided for a ski lift, Forest Service Chief Ferdinand Silcox overruled his subordinates’ protests about its appropriateness in a “wilderness” area and ordered it built in fall 1938.

The Magic Mile chairlift was the second one ever built for passengers (the first was at Sun Valley, Idaho) and was for many years the longest chairlift in the world. Passengers rode up the mountain to a stone-and-wood warming hut, which was named for Silcox, who died unexpectedly shortly before its opening in 1939. After falling into disuse and disrepair after 1962, when a new lift was built, the Silcox Hut was abandoned. The non-profit group Friends of Silcox Hut renovated it in the late 1980s and transformed it into a popular overnight stay for groups of up to twenty-four. Like Timberline Lodge, Silcox Hut is now on the National
Register of Historic Places.

Work on the lodge began in earnest on June 13, 1936, even though the plans were not actually approved until July. The year-round resort was built to accommodate 250 overnight guests and 200 diners at one time. “The structure as designed consists of two wings which radiate from a central hexagonal unit some 66 feet in diameter,” states a Forest Service document written shortly before the lodge opened. “The total overall length of the building is roughly some 360 feet, with an average depth of 38 feet for both wings. These two wings are four stories in height.” Later additions and renovations have not altered the main building significantly.

Timberline Lodge “is built of native stone, hewn timbers, and rough sawn siding, with a roof of heavy shakes.” The rock for the stone façade came from near the construction site, and the wood came from area forests. There is still some debate over the source for the six enormous hand-hewn timber columns that support the ceiling of the headhouse. Consensus was that they all came from what is now the Gifford Pinchot National Forest, but there is reason to believe that some may have come from private land in Washington adjacent to the national forest.

**ART AND CRAFT**

When work began in June, it was a race against time. Workers had to frame and roof the 15,000-square-foot building before winter set in. Fortunately, the first winter snows did not start until December that year. By then, the framing was complete and the interior finishing work well under way. Meanwhile, in Portland, craftsmen and artists were turning out the wrought-iron furnishings, wooden furniture, and textiles for rugs, draperies, and upholstery to be used throughout the lodge. Funding for them came from the Federal Art Project, which ran from 1935 to 1943 and was part of the WPA.

Oregon’s pioneer heritage provided a main theme for the Timberline Lodge furnishings. The connection was natural. Just down from the lodge are Barlow Road, the last overland segment of the Oregon Trail, and perilous Laurel Hill, the most difficult descent on the 2,200-mile trail. Pioneer themes were popular subject matter in many New Deal murals and arts around the country and were easily accepted by WPA officials for use in the lodge. Items associated with the pioneer era, like ox yokes, were incorporated into light fixtures.

Two other design elements may be found in the lodge. Native American motifs can be seen inside and out. Interestingly, the carved designs in the lintels around the lower lobby were taken from a Camp Fire Girls handbook belonging to the daughter of WPA Director Griffith, though it is believed that the Camp Fire Girls may have adapted the symbols from northern Plains Indian culture. Another element is wildlife. Inspiration was drawn from the area’s alpine region. Depictions of cougars, coyotes, owls, eagles, and other creatures can be found in panels in the main lobby, dining room, and stairway newel posts. Beavers, rabbits, squirrels, and woodchucks are incorporated into guest room fireplace andirons. Botanical watercolors of area plants hang on guest room walls.

All three themes were integrated and elaborated upon in the interior furnishings by interior designer Margery Hoffman Smith, whose vision and ideas are evident throughout the décor of the lodge. She had a hand in selecting artwork from some of Oregon’s most prominent artists of the 1930s: Darrel Austin, Clayton Sumner (C. S.) Price, Charles Heaney, and Howard Sewall (all painters or muralists); Douglas Lynch, who produced a series of carved linoleum panels; and Virginia Darcé, who did a glass mural for the Blue Ox Bar of Paul Bunyan, a popular subject in WPA art in the Northwest and a natural choice for Timberline.

Crafts for Timberline Lodge included ironwork, wood, and textiles. In 1976, Margery Hoffman Smith said of the craftsmen, “Carpenters became cabinet makers, blacksmiths became art metal workers and sewing women wound up expert drapery makers.” The work was as much about uplifting the workers and restoring their confidence and self-esteem as it was producing items. It had been hoped that craftsmen would be able to transfer their skills to commercial work after the Timberline project. But for several reasons, such as the onset of World War II, few Timberline craftspeople later made a living from their craft.

Iron- and woodworkers turned out fixtures and furniture specially designed for the lodge, all under the discriminating eye of interior designer Smith. After a visit in May 1939, State Parks Superintendent S. H. Boardman voiced his approval: “I was particularly fascinated by the interior furnishings, chairs, tables, counters, rugs, murals, spreads, tapestries—all works of art.” One contemporary Forest Service document noted how the “Handhewn seats, tables, and other furniture...give the feeling of massive simplicity appropriate to this setting.” After touring the lodge prior to its opening, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt exclaimed after seeing the textiles in a guest room, “This is the best thing I have seen. I think it is perfectly wonderful. Isn’t it possible that this might lead to a permanent arts and crafts center?”

**OPEN FOR BUSINESS**

The First Lady saw the lodge when she and President Franklin Roosevelt came to dedicate Timberline Lodge on September
28, 1937. In the president’s remarks, he mentioned future recreational benefits of the lodge but emphasized the economic value of the forests for timber, grazing, game, and water—the Forest Service’s mission. Commenting on how the project came to fruition, Roosevelt noted, “This Timberline Lodge marks a venture that was made possible by WPA emergency relief work, in order that we may test the workability of recreational facilities installed by the Government itself and operated under its complete control.”13

This last statement was mostly true. Though the government would retain control over the lodge, WPA Director Emerson Griffith and others had yet to determine who would operate it. As work continued through the winter of 1936–37 to ready the lodge for business, the Forest Service remained ambivalent about handing the keys over to a private operator. The agency’s recreation chief, Robert Marshall, had suggested that the Forest Service operate the lodge, pay prevailing wages, and include a nondiscrimination clause. Instead, the agency turned operation over to a private operator, Timberline Lodge, Inc., which the Mount Hood Development Association had hastily formed when no other prospects came through. It was a decision the Forest Service soon would regret.

The lodge officially opened in February 1938. First aid was provided to skiers by locals who formed the Mount Hood Ski Patrol, now the oldest volunteer ski patrol in the country. Rooms filled up during that first winter, but after the ski season ended, they largely sat empty because of a dearth of warm-weather recreational facilities and organized activities, a trend that continued for several years. Operated by a series of poorly funded and inadequate management companies, the lodge lost money nearly every year and was struggling when it shut down for the duration of World War II. After the war the building and ski operation suffered from continued inadequate maintenance and operation. In the early 1950s, lodge patrons took to breaking up furniture and burning it for heat because of broken windows in some of the rooms. Filth and grime coated surfaces everywhere.14 The Forest Service canceled the operating permit but had trouble evicting the company. Six weeks later, on February 17, 1955, the history of Timberline Lodge reached its nadir: the electricity was turned off because of a failure to pay the utility bill, and guests checked out of the hotel by candlelight.

Success and stability finally came under the management of Richard L. Kohnstamm, who took over two months after the lodge went dark. His management firm, R.L.K. and Company, immediately began renovations and reopened the lodge and resort in December 1955. The successful turnaround even landed the resort on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* in December 1957. As part of the renovation of the ski operations, Kohnstamm installed a new chairlift to the 7,000-foot level and eventually another lift from there to 10,000 feet. Opening up the upper portion of Mount Hood enabled Timberline Lodge to advertise itself as the first year-round ski resort in America. The continuity of races and events brightened the lodge’s financial picture. Kohnstamm’s efforts attracted skiers...
from around the world and put Timberline Lodge in the vanguard of the expanding regional and national ski industry. After renewing his permit with the Forest Service in the 1970s, Kohnstamm secured federal funds to erect a maintenance building and a three-story convention wing that won a prestigious design award. The public-private partnership was further strengthened by the creation of the nonprofit Friends of Timberline in 1975. The group spearheaded restoration of the original artwork, textiles, and wood and wrought-iron furniture and furnishings. The history of Timberline’s crafts may be explored in the Rachael Griffin Historic Exhibition Center in the lodge’s lower lobby. The center includes a model guest room and a media room where one can view a film of the history of the lodge’s construction.

Maintenance and restoration issues in the aging building are now complicated by its 1977 designation as a National Historic Landmark. The natural deterioration of the original plumbing, electrical, and heating systems, as well as the building infrastructure itself, means a never-ending list of concerns for the Forest Service and its private and nonprofit partners. Nonetheless, the vision for Timberline Lodge is rooted in its original mission. On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Timberline Lodge’s rescue by Kohnstamm, R.L.K. and Company declared that its vision “is guided by [Timberline’s] place in history, its beautiful setting, its dedication to quality recreation and hospitality, and its aspirations to continue to be a place for the ‘everyman,’ rather than to operate and promote itself as an exclusive resort.”

James G. Lewis is the editor of Forest History Today and author of The Forest Service and the Greatest Good: A Centennial History from the Forest History Society.

NOTES
2. Ibid., 40.
3. Ibid., 44.
4. Ibid., 37.
6. Ibid.
7. Munro, Timberline Lodge, 67.
8. Munro provides useful inventories of the lodge’s art, artists, furniture, fixtures, and furnishings.
9. Ibid., 92.
10. Ibid., 101.
11. The Forest Service and the Civilian Conservation Corps.
12. Munro, Timberline Lodge, 112.
13. Quoted in The Forest Service and the Civilian Conservation Corps.
15. Munro, Timberline Lodge, 112.
16. Quoted in The Forest Service and the Civilian Conservation Corps.
17. Akre, “Timberline Lodge still ruggedly beautiful at 50.”
18. Munro, Timberline Lodge, 148.
19. Ibid., 164–165.

A Hard Road to Travel: Land, Forests and People in the Upper Athabasca Region

by Murphy, Udell, Stevenson, and Peterson

People have co-existed with the land in the upper Athabasca in western Alberta, Canada, for the last 10,000 years. Its geology, topography, waters, climate, forests, and wildlife have all had a significant effect on the relationship between people and the land.

The authors trace the changing relationships between people and forests as humans first traveled through the area, then stayed to struggle, survive, and eventually flourish—first despite the forest, then in harmony with it. With extremes of temperature, drought and forest fires, deep snow, floods, muskegs, and fallen timber, it truly has been a hard road. Such a history must inform our present and future decisionmaking about resource use and sustainability.

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