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Photo: Classic Beetle travels Kancamagus Highway prior to paving.
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Celebration planned for Kancamagus Anniversary

LINCOLN, N.H. - One of the most beautiful stretches of highway in the entire Northeast marks a milestone this summer and a two-day celebration is planned for the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Kancamagus Highway.

"The story of The Kancamagus Highway is one that has not really been told over the years and, as we have discovered in our research, there was never a celebration of its opening in the summer of 1959," said Jayne O'Connor, president of White Mountains Attractions in North Woodstock, which, along with the U.S. Forest Service, is coordinating a celebration of the anniversary. "It is very appropriate that, for the half century mark of this remarkable road, we do take time and celebrate it."

It will take place from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Friday, Aug. 14. From 9 a.m. to noon, there will interpretive programs at the Lincoln Woods Visitors Center, the Discovery Trail, the Pemigewasset Overlook, C.L. Graham Wangan Ground Overlook, the Albany Covered Bridge and Blackberry Crossing Campground.

>From 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Friday, there will be exhibits and historic house tours at the Russell Colbath Historic Site near the halfway point in Albany, as well as an official celebration ceremony there from 2 to 4 p.m.

Vintage cars from the era will also be a part of the observance, as a "Kruise the Kanc" Scenic Driving Tour of The Kancamagus Highway is planned for Saturday, August 15, adding an historic ambiance in a setting that is largely unchanged since the first motorists passed over the road.

Those planning to attend the festivities either day are advised to bring their own lunches and refreshments, and to fill their gas tanks, as there are no facilities between Lincoln and Conway.

Up until 1959, when The Kanc, as it is affectionately called, was officially opened, there was no direct way for motorists to go from Lincoln to Conway. To make that trip involved a lengthy journey through two notches - Franconia and Crawford - as well as the town of Bartlett and on into Conway.

On either side of the present-day highway, two roads; one out of Lincoln and the other out of Albany, were dead ends and few, aside from hardy forest rangers and loggers, had seen the wondrous panorama offered of the Pemigewasset Wilderness to the west and the Moat Mountains to the east.

By the 1930s, the White Mountain National Forest had been established and the U.S. Forest Service had money available to construct a highway that would connect Lincoln and Conway and, as it was the height of the Depression, laborers were available through the Civilian Conservation Corps.

By 1942, construction out of Lincoln was mostly completed, but work on the road out of Albany was halted during World War II.

In 1955, work pushed past The Kanc's infamous hairpin turn just shy of the Livermore town line and the 2,855-foot Kancamagus Pass. A year later, just a one-mile gap remained between the two ends of the highway and when they were finally connected, the highway was considered completed and opened, with no fanfare or celebration.

Over the next five decades, the Kancamagus Highway, named for the 17th century chief of the local Native American tribes and the mountain beside which the road passes, millions of people have driven over the famed 34-mile road through the heart of the White Mountain National Forest. With no development along its 34 1/2 -mile stretch, The Kanc offers breathtaking panoramic views, particularly from the height of land at Kancamagus Pass.

The beauty of the road earned The Kanc a designation in 1996 as a National Scenic Byway from the U.S. Department of Transportation. At the time, it was the only such designation of a road in the entire Northeast. For information on the Kancamagus Highway celebration, visit www.TheKanc.com.

White Mountains Attractions, founded in 1958, is the marketing association for the White Mountains region and its 16 attractions. For information on the White Mountains Region, visit www.VisitWhiteMountains.com, or stop at the White Mountains Visitor Center off exit 32 on Interstate 93 in North Woodstock, 800-FIND-MTS. For information on visiting the state of New Hampshire, go to www.visitnh.gov The White Mountain National Forest (WMNF) makes up more than 800,000 acres of land and designated wilderness in northern New Hampshire and western Maine. The WMNF was created in 1918, and has nearly 6 million visitors annually. For information about the WMNF, visit www.fs.fed.gov/R9/White. for information, or to register for the August 15th "Kruise the Kanc" car tour, contact Charlene Fecteau at WMWV-radio at charlene@wmwv.com or 356-8870 ext.116.