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A Road Not Taken  
By Frank Bryan

In 1935 the federal government proposed to purchase a right of way 1000 feet wide through the green mountains and build a grand highway on it. Extending from Massachusetts to Canada, the huge majority of the blacktop laid would be just below the crest-line of the mountains, above the 2500-foot level – land that Vermont now precludes from development. It would be called the Green Mountain Parkway.

If built, it would have changed Vermont profoundly and forever.

In a special fall session of the legislature the state voted a close and tentative yes – but with a catch. Let the people have the final say. Let them decide in a statewide referendum held in their town meetings in the spring.

Triggered was one of the most intense statewide policy debates in the state's history.

And America was watching. What would Vermont do? Would it bow to the great Depression and (as was touted by the supporters of the proposal) bring Vermont into the 20th Century by infusing the state with a huge economic stimulus? Or would those conservatives in their tiny hill farms and little villages on the backside of nowhere continue their silly attachment to the past and cling to the solitude of their mountains? What was it going to be -- development or protectionism?

In March of 1936 in their town meetings assembled about six of every ten Vermonters voted nay. As the late Ralph Nading Hill put it, Vermont decided that its mountains "would not be hitched together."

These were not wealthy people voting no. Compared to us they lived hard lives. But because of them when we look into the mist of a summer's twilight, we see not the darting beams of speeding headlights high in the gloom of our precious mountaintops. We are content with the dance of fireflies in the lowland meadows of our dearest dreams.