



A Guide to the National Road (The Road and American Culture)

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This companion volume to The National Road is a traveler's guide to the nation's first federally funded highway. Combining a wealth of historical and geographical information, A Guide to the National Road takes readers on a seven-hundred-mile journey through America's heartland, from the Chesapeake Bay to the Mississippi River.

Although the National Road as legislated by Congress in 1808 officially began in Cumberland, Maryland, a crucial stretch of highway linking that town with the port of Baltimore was hastily added as construction on the Road began. A Guide to the National Road therefore begins the journey in downtown Baltimore -- just a few blocks north of what is now Oriole Park at Camden Yards -- and follows the Road westward as it parallels old U.S. 40 and the newer, faster -- but far less interesting -- Interstates 70 and 68.

With chapter-length vignettes on each of the road's seven segments, the Guide traces the road through such landmark Maryland towns as New Market, in which every building is on the National Historic Register, and Frederick, where, legend has it, Barbara Fritchie issued her famous challenge to Confederate General Stonewall Jackson. After following Boonsboro Pike -- the first macadam road in the United States -- the Road crosses the five-arch Wilson Bridge, built in 1819 (and recently renovated with money originally set aside for its demolition). Farther west, the Road passes Fort Necessity Battlefield in Pennsylvania, where George Washington ordered his men to bury the slain General Braddock beneath the Road itself, running wagons over the gravesite to conceal it from the Indians he feared might mutilate the body. (The grave has since been moved.)

Past motor courts and historic courthouses, abandoned gas stations and eighteenth- and nineteenth-century farms, streetcar diners and drive-in movies, miniature golf courses, restaurants, and century-old buildings that have seen a dozen uses, the National Road offers the serious traveler a rich and rewarding experience that is literally bypassed by the millions each year who drive the Interstate.

A Guide to the National Road describes a trip from east to west -- the direction in which the road was built -- but is carefully cross-referenced for use in either direction. Richly illustrated with more than 300 maps and photographs, this comprehensive, authoritative, and friendly guide leads us down a trail blazed by Native American hunting parties and settlers' Conestoga wagons, mounted cavalry and Model-T Fords, on a journey into our nation's past.

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