

Rails and Other Roads

We're going on a field trip into South Dakota's past. And the first thing every traveler needs to know about our state is... it's big. Four hundred miles east to west, and more than **200** north to south.

Trains and the state of South Dakota grew up together. In the late 1800s, Americans in most of the country were linking their towns by rails. Things were different in Dakota. There weren't yet many towns to link. But wherever rails were built, new towns and farms sprang up.

In the 1890s, great **cattle** drives moved herds to Belle Fourche, one of the world's busiest cattle towns.

In the 1880s the two companies reached the **Missouri River**. About 20 years later they continued west from the river, after great bridges went up.

There was reason to worry. In the early 1900s, the United States government opened up seven hundred thousand acres of **reservation** land for settlement by outsiders.

Just a few years later, in the early 1900s, some wagon roads were built up and covered with gravel. All for an amazing new invention...the **automobile**.

So did roads. A state highway commission was formed in 1917, meaning government was going to take responsibility for roads. In the 1920s, the state came up with money to build **five** bridges across the Missouri River.

In 1923, people hopped into their cars to see something incredible between Dell Rapids and Sioux Falls. Instead of dirt or gravel, the road between those towns was hard **concrete**. A first for South Dakota.

The 1930s saw one of the world's most impressive roads built in the Black Hills. United States Senator Peter Norbeck walked a route some experts thought impossible for building roads, let alone a road that would show off the newly built **Mount Rushmore**.

Eisenhower, a General in World War Two, thought the country needed straight, extra-wide highways going clear across the United States so military equipment could be moved quickly in war time. The rest of the time, the president said, Americans could enjoy driving these superhighways. Today, we call them **Interstates**. There are two in South Dakota.

Speaking of rails, trains didn't disappear because of cars and trucks. In the late 1900s, it looked like they might. But in 1986 the Dakota, Minnesota, and Eastern railroad was formed, to haul **coal** from Wyoming, as well as South Dakota farm goods, on fast trains.

Good roads take travelers everywhere in South Dakota these days. They're used by people for fun and for business...and for exploring the state to understand it better. See you on the road!

SDPB LEARN