



Battle finally won for scenic byway designation

By Tom Dixon

Promoters of Highway 70 have battled record snowpack, a landslide and forest fires in the last couple years. They finally got their proposal in front of the Wyoming Transportation Commission last week, and the highway officially has a new name: The Battle Pass Scenic Byway.

"We've been ready for a long time," John Farr, chairman of the Battle Pass Scenic Byway Committee, said. "It wasn't dragged out, it was just problems statewide and sloughage up on the hill and everything else."

The pass was named for a historic battle between American Indians and fur trappers in 1841, just five years after the Battle of the Alamo.

White fur trappers were overwhelmed and the few survivors had to flee a couple hundred miles away to Fort Bridger, according to Farr.

"That's a long, tough piece of country," Farr said.

The 28-mile section of Highway 70 passes by the scene of that iconic battle, between Bridger Peak and Battle Lake, climbs to nearly 10,000 feet over Battle Pass in the Sierra Madres, crosses the Continental Divide Trail and runs near the Encampment River wilderness and Hog Park Reservoir.

"This designation says this is a unique part of the world," Talbot Hauffe, WYDOT scenic byway coordinator, said. "We

think it's worth driving. You're going to see places and views that are uncommon."

Along the way, travelers can see fall colors in Aspen Alley and visit the remnants of past mining and timbering communities, including those near Ferris-Haggerty Mine, once among the largest copper mines in the world.

The rich history of the area is told in the area's two museums - one in Encampment and the other in Savery. Combined with the 60 miles of breathtaking scenery, geologic wonders, wildlife and wildflowers between Baggs and Encampment, naming Highway 70 the state's 16th scenic byway was an easy choice. The highway was even designed with the scenic byway requirements in mind.

"When it was built in 1994, it was built to be a scenic byway, it has the turnouts and everything there, they just never finished the paperwork," Farr said. "This is one of the few scenic byways that has all six requirements instead of just being scenic and one other thing. This has the smelter site on it, wildlife, a major geologic formation where two plates came together and welded together. There is an ancient Indian battle site that is very unique, so we have all of that."

With the scenic byway designation in hand, Farr said Highway 70 advocates can start applying for grants to help update

some signs and add others with information about everything from the beetle-killed trees to the old tramway.

Farr expects the scenic byway designation to draw some attention and, hopefully, bring a few more visitors to the area.

"It really appeals to people. The scenic byway program was set up to be an enhancement to tourism, to get people off the interstate and see more of the country," Farr said. "I'm not expecting a huge increase but ... if it goes up 15 percent, it will help a lot of businesses, and no one will even notice the increase in traffic."

New scenic byways earn hundreds of stories in magazines and papers across the country, Farr added.

For people who do not make a trip to Wyoming specifically to visit Highway 70, seeing that label on new maps will tell them the road is worth a side trip.

"A lot of people have never been too far off the road, and they'd ask, 'Is it safe? Is it paved all the way?'," Farr said. "Whatever we can do to tell the story of this highway is really great."

Farr hopes people learn about that story through the two area museums, both of which incorporate historic buildings into exhibits and as displays themselves.

"It's one of the things that made this route particularly attractive," Farr said. "They are within an hour of each other, and they are very different."