



A Brief History of US Route 89

Until the middle of the 1920's, interstate roads in America were created by private booster groups and given names such as the Lincoln Highway, the Old Spanish Trail and the National Old Trails Road. As traffic increased with over ten million cars registered, state highway officials asked the federal government for help in replacing this confusing and unregulated system with a standard method of designating highways. The result was a numbering system for interstate highways announced in 1925.

The plan was simple in concept but required numerous compromises in execution. East-west roads were given even numbers, north-south roads were given odd numbers. Transcontinental east-west routes had numbers ending in zero with U.S. 2 in the north to avoid a U.S. 0. Main north-south routes ended in one starting in the east. Other multi-state routes were fitted within the resulting grid.

In the 1925 plan from the US Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Public Roads (BPR), US 89 was a minor route connecting Thistle, Utah, and Flagstaff, Arizona.

The BPR plan was turned over to the American Association of State Highway Officials (AASHO) for revision and approval. Over the next two years, numerous meetings were held and compromises reached to produce the final U.S. numbered highway system in November of 1927. The total mileage of selected roads was 96,626.

US 89 had grown to 917 miles beginning in Spanish Fork, Utah and ending at the Mexican border at Nogales, Arizona.

In 1934, US 89 became a border to border route when it was extended to the crossing station at Piegan, Montana. The total length was 1685 miles.

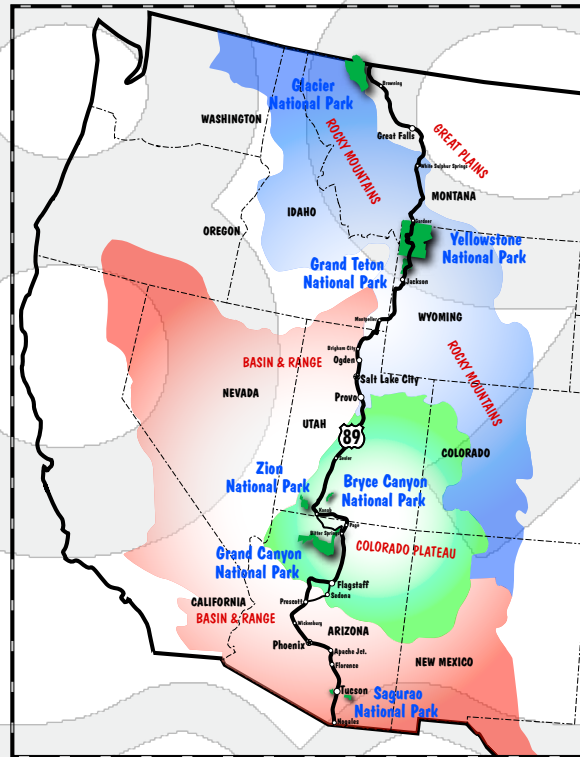
From 1940 to 1992 an alternate scenic route, US 89A, was designated between Prescott and Flagstaff, Arizona, running through the Verde Valley and Sedona.

Construction of Glen Canyon Dam on the Colorado River in northern Arizona began in 1956. With the completion of a bridge in 1959, US 89 was rerouted from Bitter Springs to Page and across southern Utah to Kanab. The original route which crossed the Colorado at Marble Canyon, was designated as an alternative. It is now officially US 89A crossing the Kaibab Plateau north of the Grand Canyon.

In 1992, the section of US Route 89 from Nogales to Flagstaff, Arizona, was decommissioned as a Federal Highway. It was replaced by the following numbered routes: Interstate 19, Nogales to Tucson; AZ 77, Tucson to Oracle Junction; AZ 79, Oracle Junction to Florence Junction; US 60, Florence Junction to Wickenburg; AZ 89, Wickenburg to Ash Fork; and Interstate 40, Ash Fork to Flagstaff.

By visiting the twenty National Parks and Monuments on US Route 89, a traveler can see a cross-section of the North American continent. There are the glacier topped mountains of the Rockies, the geysers of Yellowstone, the red and pink and white cliffs of the Colorado Plateau, the mile-deep Grand Canyon, and the green desert of wide valleys ringed by jagged mountains. The history of the West is also revealed along the road from Native American cultures to Spanish exploration to fur trappers and miner and cowboys, to Mormon pioneers and, finally, the growth of great American cities.

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