



Mission 66 and Colter Bay



After World War II, Americans began flocking to national parks and monuments eager to explore their country's natural and cultural icons. Visitation rose from 3.5 million in 1931 to 30 million by 1948. During the war, park maintenance and construction projects were low priority. By the 1950s, officials recognized the need to repair and modernize park infrastructure conceiving of a ten-year plan called Mission 66.

Mission 66

Congress approved almost one billion dollars for Mission 66 culminating with the 1966 golden anniversary of the National Park Service.

Architecture shifted from traditional rustic park facilities built by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and brought in modern designs. High demand and limited budget promoted the use of inexpensive modern materials such as concrete, steel and glass.

Visitors complained of overcrowding, a lack of overnight accommodations and of the need for information. Mission 66 envisioned visitors would

experience the same basic amenities wherever they traveled including a "visitor center."

Visitor centers housed both visitor and administrative facilities improving interpretation and stimulating public interest in parks. Common floor plans and similar elements such as an information desk, displays and an auditorium brought familiarity to visitors. Now a lasting symbol of Park Service Modern style, these structures had a low profile blending with, not dominating the landscape.

Jackson Lake Lodge and Colter Bay

As the National Park Service formulated Mission 66 plans, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. hired architect Gilbert Stanley Underwood to design the Jackson Lake Lodge on a bluff overlooking Jackson Lake. The lodge opened in 1955 the first modern structure in Grand Teton National Park. Some welcomed the "artful blend of comfortable modern with western" while others decried the "slab sided concrete abomination." Five miles north of the lodge, the Grand Teton National Park and Rockefeller chose an old CCC camp at Colter Bay to expand visitor services and provide access to Jackson Lake.

At Colter Bay, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. built a small general store, a gas station, boat marina, two restaurants and the first recreational vehicle (RV)

campground in a national park. His company moved historic log cabins from abandoned dude ranches for use as rental cabins, and constructed employee housing.

Soon a "Mission 66" sign welcomed visitors to the rapidly expanding Colter Bay area. In 1956, the park broke ground for one of the first Mission 66 visitor centers. The center opened in 1958 featuring a vaulted ceiling with 11-foot tall picture windows offering visitors a stunning view of the Teton Range towering above Jackson Lake. The stunning view belied the building's low profile that took advantage of the site's slope to elevate the view. Other new facilities included an outdoor amphitheater, a 350-unit campground, park housing and maintenance areas.

Mission 66 Accomplishments

Throughout the national park system, Mission 66 program funded:

- 2,767 miles of new and rebuilt roads
- 936 miles of new and rebuilt trails
- 49,797 parking spaces
- 575 campgrounds with 17,782 campsites
- 742 picnic areas with 12,393 sites

- 535 water and 521 sewer systems
- 458 rehabilitated historic buildings
- 1,239 park housing structures
- 584 new restrooms
- 50 boat marinas
- 114 visitor centers
- 82 campfire circles and amphitheatres

The Legacy

In Grand Teton National Park, the Mission 66 program funded two new visitor centers, Moose and Colter Bay, in addition to the park's outer highway (U.S. 26, 89, 191).

The park opened the Craig Thomas Discovery and Visitor Center in 2007 to replace the Moose Visitor Center, but the Mission 66 building is still in use. The Colter Bay Visitor Center has undergone many changes over the decades but

still anchors interpretive services in the northern part of the park.

Mission 66 revolutionized visitor services throughout the National Park Service. Many of those structures still fulfill their original design, but some have been replaced by the new wave of visitor centers. As you travel, reflect on the information and services you receive at these iconic places.

Mission 66 Visitor Centers

