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National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
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Concrete Interstate Tipis of South Dakota Multiple Property Listing
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E. Statement of Historic Contexts

NOTE: The terms “tipi,” “tepee,” and “teepee” are used interchangeably in both historical and popular documents. For consistency, the term “tipi” will be used in this document unless an alternate spelling is quoted directly.

NOTE: The interstate tipis are not true tipis. They are concrete structures that imitate lodgepoles, or the lodgepoles framing the tipi structure. The lodgepoles interlock in a similar spiral fashion, as would a real tipi. An exact imitation of tipis would also have included smoke flap poles and covering. However, they have historically been referred to as tipis. This document will continue that tradition.

List of Safety Rest Areas with Concrete Tipis in South Dakota

Rest Area Location	Year completed	Comments (according to 1988 study)
Spearfish: I-90	1977	Eastbound only
Wasta: I-90	1968	Eastbound and Westbound
Chamberlain: I-90	1976	Eastbound and West
Salem: I-90	1968	East and Westbound
Valley Springs (MN Border): I-90	1973	Eastbound only
Junction City (Vermillion): I-29	1979	Northbound and Southbound
Glacial Lakes (New Effington): I-29	1978	Southbound only

Introduction

Between 1968 and 1979, nine concrete tipis were constructed at safety rest areas in South Dakota. Seven were constructed on Interstate 90 running east to west and two on Interstate 29 running north to south. The tipis were designed to meet the aesthetic requirements of the federal highway program which encouraged states to promote regional cultural or historical themes at the safety rest areas.

South Dakota architect Walt Whitwam designed the tipis. In 2005, the United States Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, placed the tipis on their “Final List of Nationally and Exceptionally Significant Features of the Federal Highway

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Interstate System.” The tipis were the only features credited solely with cultural/aesthetic significance. Most features on the list were credited with engineering significance. There were 15 states with no exceptionally or nationally significant properties on the list.

Interstates and Safety Rest Areas

The Interstate System was created in 1956 as the Dwight D. Eisenhower National System of Interstate and Defense Highways.¹ In 1938, the Federal Highway Act initiated a study for the construction of three east/west and three north/south superhighways funded by tolls. The report showed the toll system was not feasible, however, and instead advocated a 26,700-mile toll free interregional highway network.² In 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed the National Interregional Highway Committee which suggested a 33,900-mile system in their 1944 report *Interregional Highways*.³

The Federal Highway Act of 1944 called for the construction of a National System of Interstate Highways. The Department of Defense reviewed the proposal and established routes; however, the project was not funded until 1952. In that year, the Federal-Aid Highway Act authorized a mere \$25 million for fiscal years 1954 and 1955.⁴ Funding increased in 1956 with the passage of the Federal Highway Act of 1956 which created the Highway Revenue Act. This act channeled revenue from the Federal gas and motor-vehicle use taxes to the Highway Trust Fund, making the program self-financing.⁵ By adding the words “and Defense” to the name of the system, the program became an essential component for national security.

The interstate was built with uniform construction standards to include a minimum of four 12-foot wide travel lanes designed for speeds of 50 to 70 miles per hour. A minimum of 10 feet was set for highway shoulders. Today, the system includes 46,787 miles of highway and the responsibility for maintenance and operation rests with the states.⁶ The routes are named with one- and two-digit numbers with north/south routes

¹ “FHWA Route Log and Finder List,” Federal Highway Administration, accessed May 22, 2014, <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/reports/routefinder/>.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

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having odd numbers and east/west routes assigned even numbers.⁷ The lowest numbers are located in the west for north/south routes and south for east/west routes.⁸ Thus in South Dakota, I-29 runs north/south and I-90 east/west. South Dakota also has one radial and one spur route; I-229 goes around the south and east sides of Sioux Falls and I-190 spurs into Rapid City.⁹

The decision on where to locate the interstates in South Dakota was a political fight. It was logical to build the east/west interstate (I-90) along Highway 16 which ran from South Dakota's largest city, Sioux Falls, to the Black Hills, which had become a major tourist attraction since the carving of Mount Rushmore. Despite *Pierre Capital Journal* publisher Robert B. Hipple's efforts to locate the interstate farther north along Highway 14, the chosen route left South Dakota's capital city, Pierre, as one of only four state capitals not to be connected to the Interstate System.¹⁰

The north/south interstate's (I-29) route was more disputed, as initial plans located it in western Minnesota. South Dakota Senators Francis Case and Karl Mundt used their influence as members of the Public Works and Appropriations Committees to make sure I-29 went through eastern South Dakota.¹¹ In 1960, the first segment of I-90 was opened, connecting South Dakota to Minnesota. The first section of I-29, connecting Sioux City, Iowa, and Sioux Falls, opened in 1962.¹² The last stretch of interstate was completed on I-29 in Roberts County in 1983.¹³

Safety Rest Areas

Rest areas were located along regular highways before the construction of the interstate system. As the interstates became a reality, the South Dakota Department of Transportation researched the usage of existing facilities. A 1962 study investigated five roadside parks (none of which are in existence today) and discovered that most people

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ "FHWA Route Log and Finder List, Table 3: Interstate Routes," Federal Highway Administration, accessed May 22, 2014, <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/reports/routefinder/table3.cfm>.

¹⁰ Herbert S. Schell and John E. Miller. *History of South Dakota: Fourth Edition, Revised*. (Pierre: SD, South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2004), 332.

¹¹ Ibid, 333.

¹² Ibid, 333.

¹³ "History of South Dakota's Interstate System." (Pierre: SD, South Dakota Department of Transportation Publication) South Dakota Department of Transportation Archives Library.

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stopped at a rest area to eat or use the bathroom.¹⁴ The rest areas to be constructed during this period were built to meet these demands. The same results were found in a 1967 study of the Beresford rest areas along I-29, which showed that most visitors used the bathroom or picnic tables.¹⁵ Most visitors did not see the need to provide camping areas or other amenities.¹⁶

The standardized interstate and roadside had one adverse effect – boredom.¹⁷ Function and not visual quality prevailed in roadside planning, which created a tiring, monotonous stretch of highway in areas devoid of naturally scenic landscapes. A *Saturday Evening Post* editorial declared in 1958 that “One of the major hazards of modern driving, especially long straight-aways, is fatigue resulting from plain boredom. Psychologists call it ‘highway hypnosis’.”¹⁸ To counter this phenomenon, the interstate highway system incorporated a series of regularly spaced Safety Rest Areas for driver convenience.

By the late 1960s, it was a priority nationwide to develop sufficient rest areas. On the interstates, these “Safety Rest Areas” (SRAs) were viewed as a public asset whose responsibility for development lay with the state.¹⁹ These new attempts to comfort travelers were a giant leap from the rustic roadside parks of the prewar period. Instead, they were thoroughly modern sites with flushing toilets, running water, travel information, picnic tables (often accompanied by barbeque grills), shelters, walking paths, and, in some states, playground equipment.²⁰ SRAs were built with motorists’ comfort in mind. They are areas where motorists could use the bathroom, take a walk to wake up, and then get back on the road. Commercial ventures (with the exception of limited vending machines) were banned so that motorists would not feel pressured to make a purchase after using the facilities.

¹⁴ “South Dakota Roadside Park Study,” South Dakota Department of Highways: Research and Planning Division, 1962, 36.

¹⁵ C.P. Jorgenson and William T. Voss, and Dean B. Nielson, “Interstate Highway 29 Rest Area Usage Survey Beresford Rest Area: Planning Report 1968,” South Dakota Department of Highway: Research and Planning Division, 1968, 5.

¹⁶ Ibid, 25.

¹⁷ Jackle, 140-141.

¹⁸ “More Roadside Rest Areas Needed to Meet Driver Fatigue” *Saturday Evening Post*, 17 May 1958 (10).

¹⁹ <http://www.restareshistory.org/history.html> Accessed June 22, 2014.

²⁰ Ibid.

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Surveys undertaken by state transportation departments demonstrated that the public demanded these facilities. As a result, transportation engineers began to realize the opportunity in using modern roadside facilities as a positive reflection on their state and its citizens.²¹ Providing a positive image became even more important to state interstate planners as they realized that the system would bypass most towns and that primary local contact between some tourists and the state would occur at SRAs.²²

Early SRAs were to be funded on the same federal/state funding basis as the rest of the highway system, with the federal government responsible for the majority of expenditures and state governments in charge of implementation and planning.²³ In 1959, just one year after the American Association of State Highway Officials issued standard guidelines for SRA development, federal funding was significantly reduced. The Bureau of Public Roads (forerunner of the Federal Highway Administration) notified state governments that federal contributions would be limited to land, construction of acceleration and deceleration lanes, and parking areas.²⁴ Buildings, structures, and all other amenities would be delayed or built exclusively with state funds.²⁵

SRA construction continued on in this direction until the Highway Beautification Act of 1965 reenergized development.²⁶ Under this legislation, each state was required to submit master plans for SRA development. More importantly, the Act also reinstated funding to provide for help in construction of all features related to SRAs.²⁷ This effort attempted to parallel a nationwide effort to make the roadside more attractive.

Architects and designers were charged with developing plans that embodied the historical and cultural identity of each state. Regional imagery such as oil rigs, tipis, and windmills were used to reflect the architectural traditions or indigenous people's heritage.²⁸ Robert Jacobsen of the Nebraska Department of Transportation summarized SRA design theory in 1968 as:

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

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“Each safety rest area is considered individually to enable its development to reflect and express dominant topographical, historical, archaeological, geological, architectural, or biographical features in the area’s proximity. Since the rest room building and informational center has the highest usage, this facility is sited to be immediately recognizable and available to the motorist.”²⁹

As a result, SRAs emerged as unique and colorful expressions of regional flavor and modern architectural design.³⁰ SRAs successfully created a context of place via “unique and whimsical” designs and the use of regionally significant characteristics.³¹ Architecture was an important element in creating the ambiance of the site, which strove to be relaxing yet engaging.³² It was standard to design sites in a cohesive manner, but designers also felt free to take certain liberties melding regional and modern themes.³³ Exaggerated regional symbols, some approaching monumental architecture, were executed at some SRAs where their significance became more sculptural than functional.

South Dakota Concrete Tipis at SRAs

Variety from state to state is one of the trademarks of SRA architecture. Some are modest with basic materials while others are more innovative in their design and use materials that express a local theme. The toilet building is the centerpiece of the design context and typically anchors the visual theme of the SRA.³⁴ Other structures and features typically complimented that theme, but not always. Sometimes the complimentary structures became the most recognizable feature.

South Dakota’s concrete tipis are iconic features that have come to define the state. They are one of the most recognizable symbols associated with travel across the state and some of the most photographed SRA features in the nation. The tipis are recognized for their artistic qualities and the image they evoke regarding the state’s cultural heritage.

In fact, the tipis are so popular that they often overshadow other elements of the SRA, of which they are an intricate part. Nationwide, SRAs were designed in seven broad

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ <http://www.restareahistory.org>

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ <http://www.restareahistory.org/Architecture.html>

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categories of form and style: Basic Traditional, Modern, Regional, Rustic/Regional Modern, Combined Forms, Free Forms, and 1970s Funk/Revival. South Dakota SRAs designed with concrete tipis are classified as Regional themed. The use of regional characteristics is one of the most prolific categories nationwide.³⁵

Sioux Falls, SD, architect Ward Whitwam (b.1923) designed the concrete tipis and the SRAs that housed them. Whitwam is a Watertown native with deep roots in the state. His family homesteaded in South Dakota when it was still Dakota Territory. Whitwam eventually settled in Sioux Falls where he continues (2014) an active practice. Other notable Whitwam designed buildings include Krall Clinic in Mitchell; and St. John's Lutheran Church, Club David, Fire Station #6, Naused Residence, Whitwam Residence, and Ward Whitwam Architect's Office, all in Sioux Falls.

Whitwam recalled his involvement in SRA design in 2014 commenting, "I got the rest stop job because the director, John E. Olson, of the South Dakota Highway Department lived in Sioux Falls and was a member of our church and he asked me if I'd take the job."³⁶ Whitwam accepted Olson's offer and created a proposal for SRAs that would meet the United States Department of Transportation's (USDOT) guidelines, which encouraged designs that reflected the unique history of each state.

Whitwam's original design was a building covered with earth to reflect the sod houses and dugouts of the early settlers. He contrasted that Euro-American settlement theme with concrete tipis to reflect the Sioux Indians, who were the most recent American Indians living in what would become South Dakota during the settlement period.

Whitwam created a model of his ideas and presented it to the State Highway Commission. "They took one look at it. They loved it. I'll tell ya, once in awhile you kind of get tears in your eyes. I floated. I don't even remember the rest of the meeting. They loved it."³⁷

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Personal Correspondence, Ward Whitwam 24 June 2014.

³⁷ "Along the interstate stand sources of light" undated *Rapid City Journal* article. Ward Whitwam biographical file, South Dakota State Archives.

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Whitwam's model presented to South Dakota State Highways Commission
(photo courtesy Ward Whitwam)

The Tipi in South Dakota

It's not known when indigenous people built the first real tipis. Some scholars suggest the practice goes back as far as 5,000 years.³⁸ One theory suggests the tipi arrived on the northern plains around 1600 CE after being introduced by the Cree.³⁹ Spanish explorers first record tipis in the mid-1500s on the southern plains when they encountered groups whom historians think were Apache.⁴⁰ Explores Francisco Vasquez de Coronado and Don Juan de Onate both give accounts of encountering buffalo hunters living in buffalo

³⁸ PetetNabokov. *Native American Architecture*. (New York: NY, Oxford University Press, 1988), 150.

³⁹ Ibid, 150.

⁴⁰ Reginald and Gladys Laubin. *The Indian Tipi: Its History, Construction and Use*. (Norman: OK, University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), 4.

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skin tents.⁴¹

Migratory hunters, fishermen and pastoral people – those who kept moving or made seasonal journeys to survive – needed light, movable dwellings.⁴² This lifestyle matched the culture of many tribes on both the northern and southern plains during the contact period with Europeans in the 1500s. From these historical records, as well as oral traditions, historians believe that period of the 1600s-1700s was a time of great migrations and diffusion amongst the tribes.⁴³ It is suggested that this is when the conical style tipi became prevalent on the northern plains.

Tipis varied from tribe to tribe on the northern plains. For example, early tipis of the Lakota (Sioux), Cheyenne, Arapahoe, and Assiniboine used a three-pole foundation, which allowed enemies, like the Crow, to discern friendly or hostile villages by the arrangement of the poles.⁴⁴ Later, four-pole tipis became more common with northern tribes.⁴⁵

A Sioux tipi is not a symmetrical cone, but is always tilted to be steeper at the back, with the smoke hole extending down the more gently sloping side or front of the tent.⁴⁶ Two smoke flaps are supported by two exterior, movable poles.⁴⁷ The poles required regular replacement because of damage during dragging, so trips to the Black Hills to cut poles were common.⁴⁸ Both more permanent camp tipis and smaller travel tipis were used, though 15 feet was a typical diameter.⁴⁹

Whitwam's concrete tipis did not attempt to be an exact replica of a Sioux tipi. Both the earthen buildings and tipis at the SRAs were references to historic themes, but not copies. As Whitwam explained:

“In architecture everything has scale and everything has to be a composition. You make

⁴¹ Ibid, 4-5.

⁴² Ibid, 3.

⁴³ Ibid, 13.

⁴⁴ Larry Belitz. *The Buffalo Hyde Tipi of the Sioux*. (Sioux Falls: SD, Pine Hill Press, 2006) 35.

⁴⁵ Nabokov, 153.

⁴⁶ Laubin, 3-4.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 4.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 19.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 19-20.

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a low building, it needs something high to set it off – a flagpole – well yes, but what a chance to show history with a tall Native American tepee. Granted it isn't really an exact tepee but just a part of a monument to our past.”⁵⁰

Whitwam's first two SRAs (1968) were built in Wasta in eastern Pennington County and Salem in McCook County on I-90. The concrete tipis were built with eight pre-stressed concrete lodgepoles, each weighing 6½ tons, that were cast in Sioux Falls.⁵¹ Dilly Construction of Rapid City erected the tipis. Bob Dilly, owner of the firm, commented that it took considerable engineering to construct the tipis.⁵² Each lodgepole was notched and inlaid with a steel plate where it intersects with another pole. At this point, the poles were welded together.⁵³ The base of the tipis was 35' in diameter with a 3' opening at the top.⁵⁴ Decorations on lodgepoles and in the cement sidewalk around the tipis consisted of isosceles triangles which form a pattern of thunderbirds.⁵⁵ At night, the tipis were illuminated with spotlights.⁵⁶ Dilly estimated the cost of the Wasta SRAs at \$225,000.⁵⁷

The dual rest areas in Wasta were the first SRAs in South Dakota and were widely touted in the Department of Highways Publicity Office (forerunner to the Department of Tourism). The SRA was staffed during the summer and received compliments from tourists. Later that fall, identical SRAs were opened near the Salem exit. These were the only SRA's planned at the time, but they proved so popular that the idea was expanded.

More SRAs with concrete tipis were built at Spearfish (1977), Valley Springs (1973), and Chamberlain (1976) on I-90. On I-29, they were built near New Effington (1979) and Junction City (1979). Other rest areas were constructed on both interstates, but not in Whitwam's design. SRAs are located 37 to 67 miles apart in South Dakota, but average 45-mile intervals.

⁵⁰ Personal Correspondence, Ward Whitwam, 24 June 2014.

⁵¹ “Safety Rest Areas Have Sioux Motif.” *Rapid City Journal* 8 March 1968.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ “South Dakota's Tipi Rest Areas.” South Dakota Department of Tourism file. South Dakota State Archives, 197.

⁵⁶ “South Dakota's Tipi Rest Areas.” South Dakota Department of Tourism file. South Dakota State Archives, 197.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

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Tourism of Concrete Tipis

The American West has existed as a tourist attraction arguably since Lewis and Clark explored the Louisiana Purchase in 1804-1806. As railroads opened up the West to Eastern travelers, the demand for and market of American Indian culture increased. Public and private museums scrambled to document and collect artifacts to display in the east, which only heightened the public's thirst.⁵⁸

South Dakota has always relied on its American Indian heritage as a tourist asset. In the pre-automobile age, though, tourism across South Dakota's wide expanses was largely limited to rail travel and wealthier tourists. The explosion of automobile ownership in the 1920s and Calvin Coolidge's decision to spend the summer of 1927 in the Black Hills propelled South Dakota into the national spotlight as a tourist destination. South Dakota began a characteristic Western pattern of marketing its historic, scenic, and mythic past.⁵⁹

Cultural tourism took off in the Black Hills. In the 1930s, Rapid City businessman Alex Duhammel employed Nick Black Elk and other traditional Lakota people to demonstrate ceremonies, dance, and talk about the old ways to tourists. Black Elk and others set up a traditional tipi village at Sitting Bull Caverns during the summers.⁶⁰ Frank Lockhard owned a resort in Dark Canyon outside of Rapid City that reenacted an 1857 killing of settlers in northwest Iowa by Dakotas.⁶¹ Celebrations - like Deadwood's Days of '76 - also frequently employed American Indians in pageantry and reenactments for tourists.⁶²

These events were conscious efforts to promote American Indian heritage as tourist attractions by individuals. It wouldn't be until the postwar period that the state began marketing its Old West image on behalf of individual businesses. The state's

⁵⁸ David H. Thomas. *Skull Wars: Kennewick Man, Archeology, and the Battle for Native American Identity*. (New York: NY, University of Kansas Press, 1998), 140.

⁵⁹ Hal K. Rothman. *Devil's Bargain: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West*. (Lawrence: KA, University of Kansas Press, 1998), 33.

⁶⁰ Michael Bedeau. *Granite Faces and Concrete Critters: Automobile Tourism in the Badlands and Black Hills of South Dakota*. (Vermillion: SD, South Dakota State Historical Preservation Center, 1994), 17.

⁶¹ Suzanne Julin. *A Marvelous Hundred Square Miles: Black Hills Tourism 1880-1941*. (Pierre: SD, South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2009) 144-145.

⁶² *Ibid*, 144-145.

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Department of Highways Publicity Office embraced the cultural tourism possibilities and incorporated that theme into its promotional material.

Architects also adopted American Indian themes into their work where appropriate. Sioux Falls architect Harold Spitznagel incorporated an eclectic mix of traditional, Art Deco, and American Indian motifs in his interiors at Sylvan Lake Lodge in the Black Hills.⁶³ Mitchell's Corn Palace frequently incorporated American Indian themed panels. Commercial architecture, such as tourist camps and motels, embraced motifs and imagery of a variety of Old West themes.

When SRAs came to fruition in South Dakota in the 1960s, general tourism was booming. Whitwam's design fit this growing trend perfectly and paid homage to an iconic feature of the northern plains.

Concrete Tipis as Art

Whitwam and the Department of Highways could not have predicted that the tipis would become singled out as folk art or a roadside attraction. Exaggerated statues or structures that depict people, animals, or objects are known as roadside giants. These structures can be associated with other buildings or structures. The majority of these objects are located along or directly adjacent to the roadside, often contributing to the surrounding aesthetics or theme of associated buildings.

Roadside giants act like a giant display sign, signaling to all passersby the services available. Businesses would use roadside giants to convey their services, such as a diner with a huge coffee cup or donut shop with a huge donut. These objects were used because they were easily recognizable and could convey the business to those who may not speak English.

Roadside giant proliferation began around 1920, as automobile ownership exploded across America.⁶⁴ The size of roadside giants increased as cars went faster. It was much more difficult to read signs at high speeds, so easily identifiable giants were substituted. Businesses erected windmills, milk bottles, dinosaurs, birds, fish, bowling pins, tipis, and other objects in increasing numbers.

⁶³ Bedeau, 30.

⁶⁴ Brain and Sarah Butko. *Roadside Giants*. (Mechanicsburg: PA, Stackpole Books, 2005), 2.

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Roadside giants were also erected as tourist attractions, especially in places like Wisconsin Dells, WI; the Black Hills of, SD; and Myrtle Beach, FL, where there was already an established tourist industry.⁶⁵ Towns also began using roadside giants to help put themselves on the map. Minnesotans built several examples such as Willie the Walleye in Baudette, Paul Bunyan in Akeley, and The World's Largest Loon in Vergas. Both private businesses and communities contributed to the construction of these oversized tourist structures.

South Dakota also contains several roadside giants including Dinosaur Park in Rapid City, Flintstone Park in Custer, the Wall Dinosaur, Al's Oasis Buffalo in Chamberlain, a large pheasant in Huron, Chef Louis Bull in Mitchell, Dinosaur in Creston, Milbank Windmill, President Heads in Hermosa and Muffler Man in Rapid City.

The construction of roadside giants in the postwar years declined as highways became wider.⁶⁶ The interstate system also redirected tourist traffic and standardized the roadside. Highway beautification acts in the 1960s also reduced vernacular elements of the roadside.⁶⁷

South Dakota's concrete interstate tipis have become a distinct element of the roadside. Although they weren't designed specifically to attract tourists like a commercial business, they've become the most recognizable features of the state's rest areas that serve a vital tourist function. They are synonymous with tourism and promote the history of the state much like a commercial roadside giant promotes goods and services.

Like many roadside giants, the tipis are considered folk art. Folk art comprises a wide spectrum of disciplines. Weaving, music, basketry, whittling, painting, sculpture, and so on all exemplify folk art depending on when and how they were created. Unlike academic styles and movements, folk art cannot be placed in neat boundaries or attributed to specific schools. It's often considered working class art and it may never have been intended as art during its creation.

Signs, carved figures, toys, and earthenware are examples of how everyday items become folk art. Over time, the craftsmanship displayed in those items or what they

⁶⁵ Ibid, 3.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 4.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 7.

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came to visually represent achieved recognition and became valued for artistic merit. The tipis, in a sense, parallel this progression. Originally designed to serve tourists and promote the state, they are increasingly recognized as works of art in their own right.

F. Associated Property Types

Nine concrete interstate tipis were built 1968-1979 on Interstates 90 and 29 throughout South Dakota. The tipis are one-of-kind structures found only at safety rest areas located at Wasta (1968), Salem (1968), Spearfish (1977) and Chamberlain (1976) on I-90. On I-29, they were built near New Effington (1979) and Junction City (1979).

Description

The construction of the tipis was standardized. They are constructed with eight concrete poles. Each pole weighs 6½ tons and is rectilinear in form. The poles are spaced equidistantly and are attached at the top with steel plates. The base of the tipis is 35' in diameter. There is a 3' opening where the lodgepoles converge. The tipis are 56' tall. Some have lights mounted on their base. Geometric motifs are carved in some lodgepoles.

Significance

South Dakota's Interstate Tipis are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and C. Their level of significance is statewide. However, their significance is better described as regional as the tipis pay tribute not only to South Dakota, but also to indigenous peoples of the northern and southern Plains, the American West, and Canada.

The tipis are eligible under Criterion A under **Entertainment/Recreation** for their contribution to promoting tourism. South Dakota's American Indian heritage has drawn visitors since before statehood. The interstate tipis both honor and continue this long-standing tradition.

The tipis are also eligible under Criterion A under **Transportation** for their cultural and aesthetic contribution to the interstate highway program. As of 2005, the Federal Highway Administration has not determined any other similar rest area structures as nationally or exceptionally significant. South Dakota's tipis have been identified as some of the most significant SRA features of the national system.

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The tipis are eligible under Criterion C as works of **Art**. The 56-foot tall tipis convey similar aesthetics as sculpture and are recognized for their artistic contribution to Safety Rest Areas and the surrounding landscape.

Registration Requirements

Because of the standardized nature and similar condition of the tipis, registration requirements are the same for all nine tipis. All have been determined significant under Criterion A for **Recreation/Entertainment** and **Transportation**. They have also been determined eligible under Criterion C for **Art**.

The tipis have excellent integrity and have not been altered since their dates of construction (1968-1979). Although the tipis have not been altered, other features of the SRAs, primarily visitors' centers/toilet buildings, have been altered over the years. The SRAs were so successful that smaller visitors' center/toilet buildings were expanded over the years and the site layout changed to reflect alteration. Whitwam commented on the Salem and Wasta SRAs, "It wasn't too long when we all realized that they were too small and we had to do another larger one. I had one urinal and one stool for men and just two stools for the women. Plus a very small information area and the same for the janitor space."⁶⁸ The additions and expansion were compatible to the other features of the SRAs, but the changes make the entire SRAs sites not eligible at this time (2014). Future evaluations will look at SRA eligibility.

The tipis are eligible for the artistic and tourism contribution they have made to the state. Although the tipis were designed as only one feature of the designed landscape, they individually stand out and overshadow the other thematic features of the SRA. This MPL nominates only the tipis. Boundaries include only the area of the tipis. The boundary is an imaginary line extending five feet out from the tipis base and running the circumference of the tipi.

Criteria Consideration G: Properties That Have Achieved Significance Within the Past Fifty Years

The Concrete Interstate Tipis of South Dakota (constructed 1968-79) meet the Criteria Consideration G because of their exceptional importance. In 2005, the United States Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, studied the entire

⁶⁸ Personal correspondence, Ward Whitwam 2 July 2014.

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national interstate system and placed the tips on their “Final List of Nationally and Exceptionally Significant Features of the Federal Highway Interstate System.”⁶⁹ The tips were the only features credited solely with cultural/aesthetic significance.⁷⁰ Through this extensive evaluation, they were determined eligible for the National Register as having achieved significance within the past fifty years.

The *National Register Bulletin* “How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation” states that “‘exceptional importance’ does not require that the property be of national significance. It is a measure of a property’s importance within the appropriate historic context, whether the scale of that context is Local, State, or National.”⁷¹ The tips have been evaluated as exceptionally important within the interstate transportation system.

The evaluation of the Interstate System took place in 2005 when the Advisory Council for Historic Preservation adopted the “Section 106 Exemption Regarding Effects to the Interstate Highway System.”⁷² This study exempted the majority of the 46,700 miles of Interstate System from consideration as a historic property under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Also the “Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users” includes a proposition that exempts the bulk of the Interstate System from consideration as a historic resource under Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act.⁷³ Excluded from these exemptions are elements – like the concrete tips – that are exceptional in some way or meet a national level of significance under the National Register criteria.⁷⁴

The vast majority of features determined eligible in the study (111) were for Engineering significance – primarily bridges and tunnels. The next highest category of significance was Social History with 21 properties. These are properties often related to an event, such as a bridge that withstood the 1980 eruption of Mount Saint Helens or a stretch of interstate that revitalized an area. The remaining 16 areas of significance identified in the report were few in number.

⁶⁹ www.environment.fhwa.dot.gov/histpres/highways_list.asp.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ United States Department of Interior National Park Service Cultural Resources. “National Register Bulletin: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation,” 42.

⁷² http://www.environment.fhwa.dot.gov/histpress/highways_lists.asp. Accessed 20 September 2014.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

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Only three properties were identified as having a similar cultural or aesthetic significance besides the tipis in South Dakota. The Vietnam Veteran’s rest area on Interstate 89 in Vermont was determined to have cultural significance. It houses a museum with memorials. The “Welcome to Ohio Arch” on Interstate 70, which carries welcome and goodbye signs, was determined to have aesthetic significance. The Cayahoga River bridges on Interstate 80 in Ohio were determined to have aesthetic significance because their contextual design matches the historic features of the valley.

Several properties younger than 50 years were identified as nationally or exceptionally significant in the study.⁷⁵ For example, the Luling-Destrehan Bridge in Louisiana was built in 1983 and determined exceptionally significant. Likewise, properties built before the Interstate System yet incorporated into the system at a later date were also significant.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

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G. Geographical Data

The nine tipis are located at:

Interstate 90 Tipis – Seven Tipis

1 Tipi near Spearfish (Northern Hills Rest Area), Lawrence County

2 Tipis near Wasta (Cheyenne River Rest Area), Pennington County

1 Tipi near Chamberlain (Lewis and Clark Rest Area), Brule County

2 Tipis near Salem (Salem Rest Area), McCook County

1 Tipi near Valley Springs (Valley Springs Rest Area), Minnehaha County

Interstate 29 Tipis – Two Tipis

1 Tipi near New Effington (Glacial Lakes Rest Area), Roberts County

1 Tipi near Junction City (Homestead Rest Area), Union County

H. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

The purpose of this study is to document the concrete tipis located along Interstates 90 and 29 in South Dakota. To this end, a comprehensive literature search and records review was conducted in a wide range of source materials including monographs, academic and popular articles, South Dakota Department of Transportation reports and studies, newspapers articles, South Dakota Department of Tourism files at the South Dakota State Archives, online resources of the United States Federal Highway Administration, and personal correspondence with the architect.

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Historic context research addressed the following questions:

- How have the interstate tipis become significant to the image of the state?
- What artistic contributions have the tipis made to South Dakota’s roadside?
- Why are the tipis excellent examples of SRA architecture?
- Where are safety rest areas with tipis located?
- Who was responsible for designing and building the tipis?

Preliminary research in State Highway Commission (later Department of Transportation) records indicated which SRAs were constructed with concrete interstate tipis. A survey was conducted to verify their existence and evaluate the SRAs as a resource. Once all the tipis were verified to exist and it was determined that other features at SRAs, primarily toilet/visitor center buildings, had typically been altered and expanded over the years it was confirmed by the South Dakota SHPO that only the tipis retained eligibility. This determination paralleled the Federal Highway Administration’s (FHWA) recommendation that evaluated the entire interstate system features for National Register eligibility. Of all the interstate resources in South Dakota, only the tipis have been determined eligible as of 2014.

The SHPO has been surveying and documenting roadside resources through a variety of activities. Surveys have not been specific to the roadside itself, but information recorded in multiple countywide surveys, surveys from Section 106 undertakings, and occasional SHPO staff surveys have documented several roadside resources. After queries to the SHPO’s historic sites database, few comparable resources to the concrete tipis are known to exist, though other roadside properties such as tourist parks, tourist camps, motels, drive-in movie theaters, roadside giants, and gas stations have been determined eligible and sometimes listed on the National Register.

Properties that were determined eligible or listed on the National Register were often significant under Criterion A for Recreation/Entertainment for the role they played in tourism. The Log Cabin Camp in Hot Springs and the Wagon Wheel Resort along Interstate 90 near Piedmont are examples of properties listed for their tourism significance. The giant concrete dinosaurs located along Rapid City’s Skyline Drive are listed on the National Register under Criterion C for Art. The dinosaurs also reflect the paleontological history of the Black Hills. The tipis were compared to these and other resources for eligibility.

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Very little history on roadside features in South Dakota has been published. General information on the pertinent issues to this study – such as history, architecture, tourism – do exist but largely address the larger themes of automobile proliferation, physical highway growth (how many miles laid, etc), and the main tourism-driven sites like the Black Hills, Badlands, and Glacial Lakes region. They also comment on the tourist-driven activities such as sightseeing nature, hunting and fishing, gambling, and history-related sightseeing. History related specifically to the roadside, architecture, or art is limited.

This study evaluated all the tipis under Criteria A and C for the National Register. Art, Transportation, and Recreation/Entertainment were determined to be the primary areas of significance. An evaluation of architect Ward Whitwam under Criterion B was not undertaken. Whitwam is still a living, practicing architect. SHPO determined that although he is considered a significant architect in South Dakota, only with the passage of time and the completion of his life works could this be evaluated. Primary significance for these relatively recent structures (1968-1979) was also determined not be archeological. Therefore, Criterion D was not evaluated.

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