

1694

Road Built to Peaked Hill In 1894 Seems to Have Disappeared Entirely

by Gustavus Swift Paine, Genealogist and
Cape Hi storian

About Cape Cod roads I have found many unrelated scraps. What we call the old King's Highway was extended to Wellfleet in 1717. Not long after that there was a road of a sort all the way down the Cape to Provincetown. For over a century the worst stretch was that into Provincetown along the edge of the bay. For that the stage driver carried shovels and often had his passengers help dig him out.

Then Cape Codders began putting clay on their sand roads, which were thereafter fair in dry weather. After a rain the going was hard. Of course snow made roads impassable except for crude bob-sleighs. In the early days apparently oxen could draw a cart along the sand tracks from a beach at the rate of about a mile an hour.

In 1904 J. M. Westgate, a government scientist, reported on "Reclamation of Cape Cod Sand Dunes." Incidentally he wrote: "The building of the state road across the Province land was commenced in 1894 and completed in 1901. It extends from the city (Provincetown) to the Peaked Hill life-saving station and provides an easy means of access to the heart of the dune territory. The road was not constructed

across the dunes area until the shifting sands had been brought under control. The roadbed was first graded and then covered with a layer of brush; after which it received a covering of turf-sod obtained from the adjacent woods. It is still in good condition and promises with some attention to be fairly permanent, as it is subject to but little heavy teaming. The cost of construction was about 35 cents per running foot." Would that be nearly \$2,000 a mile?

What has become of that road? Westgate was writing before the motor age. In 1949 I could discover only the faintest indications that wheels had ever been over to the abandoned Peaked Hill station. A walk over there is through some of the wildest and most lovely sand dunes on the Cape. Many remember other roads through little regions that would now satisfy anyone who craves the feeling of remote solitude. Nowadays only one's own feet provide "an easy means of access" to some of the most delightful spots in the dunes. Though I have long told my boy and his friends that I was 137 years old my last birthday — so that they will not rush me too much — I still like using my feet on Cape Cod, especially on the King's Highway, marked with red circles, through the Truro woods.



Back on Snail Road.



The Monument
from back of
Snail Road -
1965