

**The Mount Washington Auto Road:** About the time the Massachusetts Bay Colony was established in 1630, a Pilgrim on a long journey from his home base came upon some extraordinarily high mountains that 200 years later were named the Presidential Range of New Hampshire's White Mountains. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the peaks in this range were named for our first presidents, with Mount Washington being the highest. By that time, many hikers had ascended the mountain on very rugged trails, and some lost their lives. One of the most serious accidents was the death of several in an avalanche in 1855.

With rail travel making access to the cool clear air of the mountains much faster and easier, mountain resorts built up, ranging from simple guest houses to rambling frame hotels noted for their fine cuisine. These hostleries surrounded the Presidential Range. With entrepreneurial spirit running high just before the Civil War, a great hotel was planned at the very summit of Mount Washington, and descriptive drawings showed six- and eight-horse teams pulling "mountain wagons" full of happy vacationers to this luxurious place at the top. It is true that a carriage road was built up the east side of the mountain in 1861, and a basic hotel was erected there, with its patrons enduring less-than-favorable weather conditions. In 1867, from the west side came the construction of the Mt. Washington Cog Railway, with its "Jacob's Ladder" trestle having an incline of 37 degrees. From this steam-powered cog railway, still operating today after 142 years, were copied all the funicular railways in the Alps of Switzerland and Austria.

With the birth of the auto industry in the late 1890s came the challenge to drive an automobile to the top up the 1861 carriage road. George Eli Whitney tried it with his little steamer in June 1899 but got only about halfway. As most of you know, however, Freelan O. Stanley, accompanied by his wife, Flora, and promoting Locomobile steamers at the time, successfully climbed the mountain in just over two hours on August 31, 1899, the first automobile to make the climb successfully. They had driven all the way from their home in Newton, Massachusetts, in the little car, and Flora recorded all of it in her diary. F. O.'s twin brother, Francis E. Stanley, went up in 28 minutes in 1904 and followed with a climb in July 1905 of just over 22 minutes for the 8 miles. Fred Marriott and others also made records in Stanley cars on the mountain during the early years.

In September 1947, the New England Glidden Tour stopped at Glen House, at the base of the road, and "Cannon Ball" Baker was attempting a record run with a new Nash. If I recall correctly, his best time was about 25 minutes. No steamers tried to climb the mountain at that time. Edwin A. Battison of Windsor, Vermont, drove a 1902 (or '03) Stanley from his home and climbed the mountain on August 31, 1949, to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of F.O.'s initial climb, on a somewhat improved but still unpaved Motor Road. In 1961, at the request of Doug Philbrook, then owner of the road, Battison did it again with the same car, this time celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the road's first construction.

When a number of steam cars with their drivers were returning from a tour to Kingfield, Maine, in 1984, Brent Campbell with his fast Model 80 Stanley, went up late in the day with passengers Ole Vikre, Wayne Coffman, and Bob Reilly. Frank Cooke and I, both on that tour, joked with each other about trying it, but we weren't serious. Fifteen years later, however, when the Stanley Museum's Steam Car Tour celebrated the centennial of F.O.'s initial climb, Cooke and about eight other members of that tour with their cars successfully made the trip to the top and back. I think Brent Campbell has done it several times in various cars. Sue Davis, founder and president of the Stanley Museum in 1999, as well as Garrett and Norm Shanklin, made the round trip on the exact day, 100 years after August 31, 1899. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the road is nearly all paved, but for those who drive up in their modern vehicles, it is still a challenge.