

# The Pinal Pioneer Parkway in Arizona

WAYNE O. EARLEY, Landscape Supervisor  
Arizona Highway Department

Several years ago, one of Arizona's needs was recognized simultaneously with its made-to-order fulfillment. This need was for the preservation of an easily accessible portion of Arizona that had remained as the early territorial and State pioneers had found it in their struggle to develop the then new frontier. As the years have passed, they have brought an increased tempo to living, coupled with a rapidly mushrooming urbanization along major highways. Today, it is difficult to find or reach a natural landscape to enjoy which has not been scarred by power or gas line installations, "beautified" by billboards, or humanized by commercial or residential structures.

The Arizona Highway Department, in the interest of serving the communities' needs, has established a parkway dedicated to a dual purpose. One purpose is the preservation of a scenic highway for the use and enjoyment of present and future citizens. The other purpose is to express appropriately the communities' esteem, admiration, and gratitude to the pioneers of Arizona and to note the coming and passing of an era in the growth of the United States.

In searching for a location for filling these purposes, there was one that stood out as exceptionally well suited. It follows the route of one of the territory's earliest highways and is between Phoenix and Tucson, the two major population centers of the State. This area is on US 89 between Florence and Oracle Junction in Pinal County. The parkway consists of a 1,000-foot wide band 30 miles in length. Of this 30 miles, only 3 miles are not on State or Federal lands. Therefore, there will be little or no cost involved in obtaining the scenic easements necessary to give the Highway Department authority to protect these lands in their present natural state. The Highway Department has title to 400 ft of right-of-way width at the present time. It is negotiating with the State and Federal land offices for easements for the other 600 feet of parkway width. This area is one of the finest examples of Sonoran Desert available to the Arizona motorist, and many species of desert plants can be seen along this route. The parkway has been given the self-descriptive name of Pinal Pioneer Parkway (see Figs. 1, 2, and 3).

It was the Highway Department's desire and intention that this parkway be administered so as to establish a scenic parkway with a minimum of cost and inconvenience to the public. It appeared that the most desirable means of obtaining the authority necessary to preserve this area in its natural state is through the acquisition of scenic easements over those lands involved. With the scenic easement, the Highway Commission could protect the area from change or mutilation, but would not interfere with those presently-active ranching operations of the area. Those easements are presently being acquired.

Because of the length and remoteness of the parkway area, the two commercial areas, Midway and Owlhead, are not only acceptable but also desirable for their motorist service function. These areas are exempted from the parkway right-of-way and control.

To insure the protection and perpetuity of the parkway, administrative standards were adopted for such things as maintenance practices, turn-out permits, construction within the parkway limits, removal or destruction of plant material, and the development of parkway facilities. These standards should accomplish the following:



Figure 1. A temporary sign at the southern end of Parkway.



Figure 2. Large yucca are sentries for southern entrance to Parkway.

1. Protection of the beauty of the area by requiring the use of maintenance practices that are the least obvious in appearance. Such practices include weed control by mowing, stockpiling of patching material, and the opening of material pits at out-of-sight locations or other off-highway sites.

2. Prevention of destruction of the area by limiting the number of turnouts. Turnout permits will be granted only at locations no closer than one mile from a previously existing turnout.

3. Prohibition of all construction, other than that of an essential nature, necessary to protect existing developments from the elements. When such construction is shown to be essential it must be done with the most unobtrusive finish.

4. Forbidding of removal or destruction of plant material within the parkway area except where it is shown to be a hazard to humans or other plant life. Stiff penalties have been established and will be posted and enforced for violations. Parkway facilities conform to established parkway principles and should enhance the area and provide for its greater enjoyment and appreciation.



Figure 3. The roadway in higher elevations of Parkway.