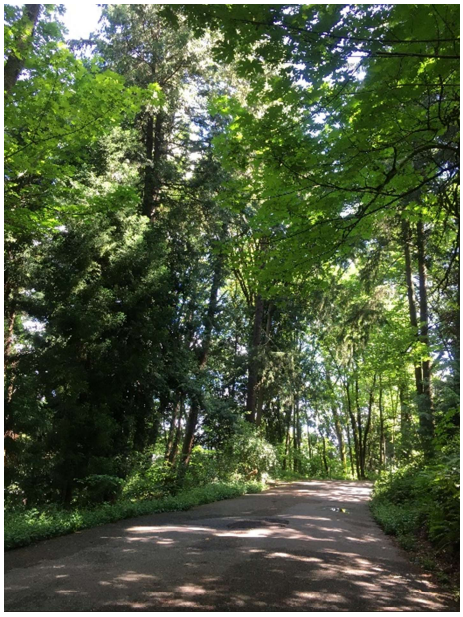
Self-Guided Walking Tour Recounting the History of

Interlaken Boulevard and Park



Olmsted

Friends of Seattle's Olmsted Parks

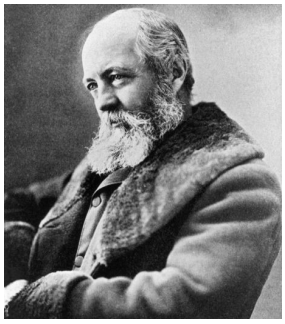
Interlaken Self-Guided Walking Tour

Route Summary:
This walk will take you down a wooded trail through Interlaken Park to reach Interlaken Blvd. The route then travels east along the boulevard to 24th Ave., then backtracks to follow the boulevard in the other direction, to Bagley Viewpoint near the park's west end. From there, you will return along Interlaken and take Interlaken Drive back up the hill to the starting point. The tour includes 13 stops with historical information. The walk is about 3 miles long and may take roughly 2 hours to complete.

Please note: Walking directions are in *italics*, and numbered stops are underlined. A route map is provided at the end that keys into each numbered stop. Historical information is in plain type. If you are already familiar with the Olmsted story and their work in Seattle, you might skip the General Introduction immediately below and begin at the row of asterisks.

General Introduction to the Olmsteds
The Olmsted Name

Seattle's system of parks and boulevards is based on plans and recommendations developed by the Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architecture firm of Brookline, MA. John Charles Olmsted first visited the city and produced the report in 1903 at the invitation of Seattle's Board of Park Commissioners.



By the early 1900's, the Olmsted name was nationally renowned for having designed city and regional parks, park systems, neighborhoods, college campuses, private residence gardens, and world exposition fairgrounds. Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., (shown at left) is generally considered the "father of landscape architecture" for his work on Central Park in NYC and the Emerald Chain necklace of parks in Boston. He also produced a report on Yosemite that helped establish that land as our first national park.

John Charles Olmsted (shown at left), the senior Olmsted's nephew and later his adopted son, and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. ("Rick," shown at right), the senior Olmsted's biological son, each joined the design practice in the late 1800's. The senior Frederick Olmsted retired in the 1890's, eventually leading to the firm being re-organized and renamed as the Olmsted Brothers. The Olmsted firm in its several iterations would ultimately last for over 100 years, producing more than 150,000 drawings for more than 5,000 projects all around North America.

The Olmsted Legacy in Seattle

The late 1890's brought the Yukon gold rush and, with it, exponential growth and rapid development in Seattle. Civic leaders recognized new urgency to set aside and protect land for public use as parks, but they struggled on how to move this goal forward. It wasn't until 1902 that a newly re-formed Board of Park Commissioners determined to seek out the Olmsted firm to develop a comprehensively planned park system that could be implemented immediately or over the next 100 years. And though, at the time,

the population was about 81,000, the civic leaders wanted a system that could meet the needs of a city of 500,000 people (for comparison, the estimated 2020 population is now 783,000).

John Charles Olmsted and his assistant, Percy Jones, arrived in Seattle on April 30, 1903, and during May and June they explored the city by carriage, boat, and foot. They studied the terrain, views to natural features, and patterns of current land ownership and use. They looked for suitable locations for playgrounds, parks and connecting boulevards that distributed recreational opportunities throughout the city as much as possible. Following initial input and discussions with local leaders, the firm submitted its recommendations report in July, and it was adopted in November of that year.

The firm then worked on designing and improving a number of the individual parks in the plan. In 1907 the Olmsted Brothers firm was again hired to write a supplemental plan because the City had expanded its boundaries. JCO worked on this while he was also working on the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition grounds at the University of Washington. The Olmsted Brothers firm ultimately developed design drawings for 20 Seattle parks and boulevards and consulted on dozens more. They also designed numerous residential landscapes in the Seattle area during that period.

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Start *the tour in the grassy area immediately north of the intersection of 19th Ave E and E Galer Street, by the entrance to Interlaken Drive.*

Stop 1.

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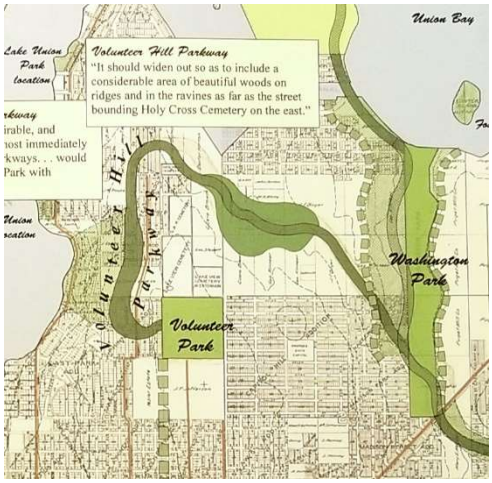

John Charles Olmsted's 1903 report included a recommendation for a "Volunteer Hill Parkway," which would have connected Volunteer Park to the Arboretum and Lake Washington Boulevard. Though this green connection was never fully realized, a portion of it was developed as Interlaken Boulevard. By 1906, plans were in the works to extend the boulevard westward to a point near our current-day Roanoke Park. We'll discuss the background and evolution of this route further as you make your way along the boulevard.

This location was once the terminus for a trolley line along 19th Avenue, which by 1900 connected passengers to trails, benches and picnic areas within the wooded slopes. The trails ultimately

connected to Washington Park. In 1940, the trolley was replaced with a bus coach, and the turnaround was created to accommodate the bus.

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Locate the trailhead by the sign kiosk, and take the trail into the woods. At the first fork, by the sycamore tree, turn right and continue along this path, pausing enroute to consider your immediate surroundings.

Stop 2.

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John Charles Olmsted often preserved a site's natural contours and character in his site design, resulting in a plan with subtly engineered elements that closely fitted into their surroundings (Seattle's Schmitz Park, shown at right, is one example). This was consistent with Olmsted's goal to highlight a sense of the site's "genius of place" – the qualities of a site unique to that place. And, it brought a person into the midst of a largely natural, wilder setting within the city environment.

Designing landscapes to create a sense of being immersed in, and enveloped by, nature began with the senior Olmsted. Before Olmsted's practice, designed landscapes were more typically considered and manipulated for pictorial effect, or organized to a recognizable geometry and order. Though nature's beauty was to be admired, it was done so distantly, as a view from a train window, say, or across a pond. In contrast, Olmsted designed parks where one could experience being surrounded by nature (example at left is the "Ramble" in Central Park). He began practicing during the height of the Romantic period when musicians, poets and philosophers were deeply inspired by and expressive of natural qualities and also carried the message that humans are part of nature, not separate from it. Olmsted's philosophy is certainly in line with these ideas, as he believed in healthful benefits to be gained from being in the natural world. As he once wrote:

> "It is one great purpose of the Park to supply to the hundreds of thousands of tired workers, who have no opportunity to spend their summers in the country, a specimen of God's handiwork that shall be to them, inexpensively, what a month or two in the White Mountains or the Adirondacks is, at great cost, to those in easier circumstances."

Although his main point was that public parks should provide relief for all city residents, the form of that relief was "God's handiwork," i.e., nature.

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Continue along the trail as it winds downhill through the ravine, stopping where the trail ends at Interlaken Boulevard.

Stop 3.

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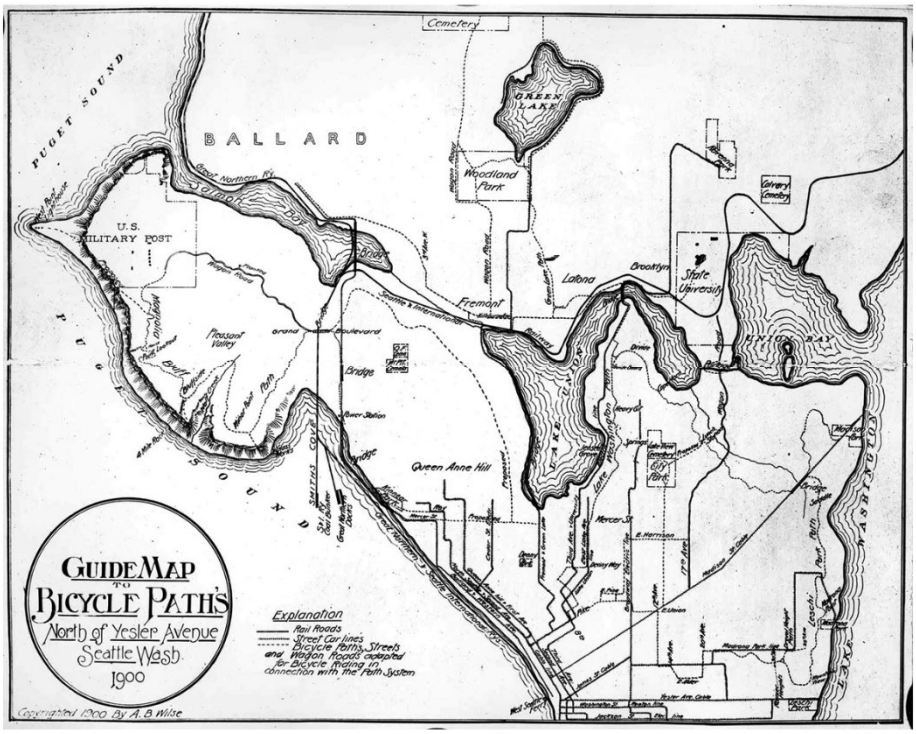
Though this is called Interlaken Boulevard, it is more typical of a "parkway" in the Olmsted practice. John Charles defined boulevards as "formal city pleasure drives with decorative turf strips and shade trees," while parkways would be located where "adjoining or included local scenery or distant views are more important."



Before Olmsted's 1903 plan, a popular bicycle trail already wound its way through these woods. Improved design of bicycles in the late 1800's led to a "bike boom" in Seattle, where roughly one in five residents owned bikes. There were problems, however, with riding bikes on streets that were often paved with wood planks, as the gaps between planks were hazardous for the narrow tires. So around 1890, Assistant City Engineer George F. Cotterill walked around the city and developed a 25-mile system of bike paths.

This section of boulevard generally retraces the route of Cotterill's path, which John Charles called the Lake Union Bicycle path. In laying out the western portion of this roadway, Olmsted recommended some modifications to make easier turns, but the City never actually hired the Olmsted Brothers to design the route or lay out the roadway. Instead, the City did it "on the cheap," keeping the roadway only ~20' wide. In 1909, John Charles wrote of his concern: "In Interlaken Park the smallness of the appropriation for grading led to the adoption of the excessively narrow width of 20 feet for the driveway and to quicker and sharper turns than can be regarded as desirable for a permanent park drive that will be so much used, especially by automobiles. . . ."

Though this road was built to accommodate cars, the stretch between 19th and 21st is now closed to automobiles and is used primarily by bicyclists and pedestrians, and so converting to its original use.

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Turn right to walk along this section of Interlaken Boulevard until it intersects with 21st Ave. The intersection is marked with wooden bollards and a kiosk – this is the eastern boundary of Interlaken Park.

Stop 4.

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Note the new trail connection on the north side of the intersection. This trail and stair connect to Boyer Avenue and were improved in recent years to better accommodate strollers and bicycles.

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Continue heading eastward on Interlaken, taking care to watch for cars, until reaching 24th Ave.

Stop 5.

At this point, you might either cross 24th and continue along Interlaken Boulevard to where it ends at Lake Washington Boulevard, just inside Washington Park Arboretum, or you might turn around here. In either case, eventually retrace your steps to re-enter Interlaken Park, after noting the following:

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You'll notice the right-of-way (ROW) here by 24th is configured atypically. The ROW for Interlaken is quite wide here and includes extensive lawn on both sides, reaching to the distant sidewalk on the north side and the driveway access the lane to the south. If you follow the boulevard as far as 26th, you'll

encounter a narrow bridge. According to Don Sherwood, this concrete bridge was built in 1912 to replace an earlier structure with low clearance. As the gully running underneath became increasingly used by cars, a bridge with clearance "ample for modern trucks and moving vans" was required.

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Retracing your steps into Interlaken Park, continue past the curve in the road where you first entered the boulevard from the trail and pause along the next stretch of roadway, where you will spot some large cisterns near the road's edge.

Stop 6.

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Notice that a lot of replanting has been done in this area. Invasives are being removed and young native plants planted to establish a more balanced ecosystem here. This is the work of Friends of Interlaken with support by the Seattle Parks Dept.

The Olmsted Brothers were interested in maintaining a sense of the natural woodland environment even while introducing new planting. James Dawson, an associate under John Charles and later a partner in the firm, suggested in a 1909 letter to the Parks Dept. that "the general effect of the planting along these slopes be kept as natural looking as possible and, therefore, I have mentioned in the plant list below only such plants as have more or less a natural effect and will harmonize with the native growth of the vicinity. . . ." He also advised that

> "[i]n the planting of the steep slopes the varieties should be kept pretty much in large masses rather than in too much of a mixture, in order to get the best effect. Where the masses are quite large, however, it would be well to introduce irregular clumps of another variety of vine, or preferably clumps of low growing shrubs, in order to give the planting character and avoid any chance of a monotonous effect."

The firm was concerned, however, about the stability of the steep slopes.

"The steep slopes caused by the grading of the drive are, in most instances, bare of any vegetation, and as long as they remain so, are not only extremely ugly but are subject to washouts which are apt to cause considerable damage. Some of the slopes that have been planted for a number of years and have had the benefit of a shady exposure and have been subject to considerable moisture, have been covered naturally by ferns, native vines and mosses. In such instances the slopes are in good condition and should not be disturbed."

Where slopes were exposed, the Olmsted Brothers suggested vigorous plants to help hold the soil in place. Unfortunately, many of these plants turned out to be quite invasive in this environment.

"Most of the vines and practically all of the shrubs mentioned below have a way of sending numerous roots down into the soil, which has a tendency to hold the bank together and keep it from washing. . . . I think the English Ivy, the large leaf Periwinkle, the Japanese honeysuckle and native forms and climbing and wild bush roses, should be used in great quantities."

Today, this forest, except for restoration efforts, would consist primarily of deciduous trees and non-native invasive understory.

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Continue westward along the boulevard for quite a ways, to the intersection with 19th Ave E and Interlaken Drive.

Stop 7.

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In the days of Cotterill's bike trail system, one trail came down the slope from Volunteer Park (at that time a cemetery) to join with the trail that ran along the slope roughly where the Boulevard runs today. At this juncture was a popular lunch stop, called the "Halfway House."

This section of 19th Ave E was built several years after the boulevard and park were established. The City Council approved a plat with this ROW in 1927, to connect vehicles with Boyer Ave. The Park Board objected on the basis of hazard, steep slope and detracting from the beauty of a fine drive, but it was built anyway.

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Continue westward along the boulevard (which now includes cars) past the intersection with Interlaken Drive and to the next ravine. A large boulder with an imbedded metal plaque should be visible on the south side of the roadway.

Stop 8.

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Five acres of Interlaken Park were set aside in 1913 to honor Louisa Boren Denny, and this monument was erected in 1915 by the Pioneer Association. She was the first unmarried white woman to come to Seattle, being one of the Pioneer Party along with her future husband, David Denny. Theirs was the first wedding in the new City in 1853.

Louisa and David Denny gave property to the City in 1884 to create Seattle's first public park, Denny Park. This also led to the founding of the Seattle Park Department.

Boren Park extends uphill in a narrow swath from this point to Olin Place and Boren Viewpoint with a magnificent view of Lake Washington and the Cascade Mountains.

This ravine is one of three locations where rustic bridges were initially built along the boulevard. All three bridges within the park have been removed and replaced with culverts and fill, as that was cheaper to build and easier to maintain. The bridge at this location was replaced in 1934; one further west and close to Seattle Prep was replaced in 1920; and one further east of this point was replaced in 1936.

A 1986 recommendations report for Seattle Parks suggested building balustrades in these locations to echo some of the effect of the earlier bridges, but they were never built.

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Continue along the boulevard for several yards until you come to a retaining wall on your left.

Stop 9.

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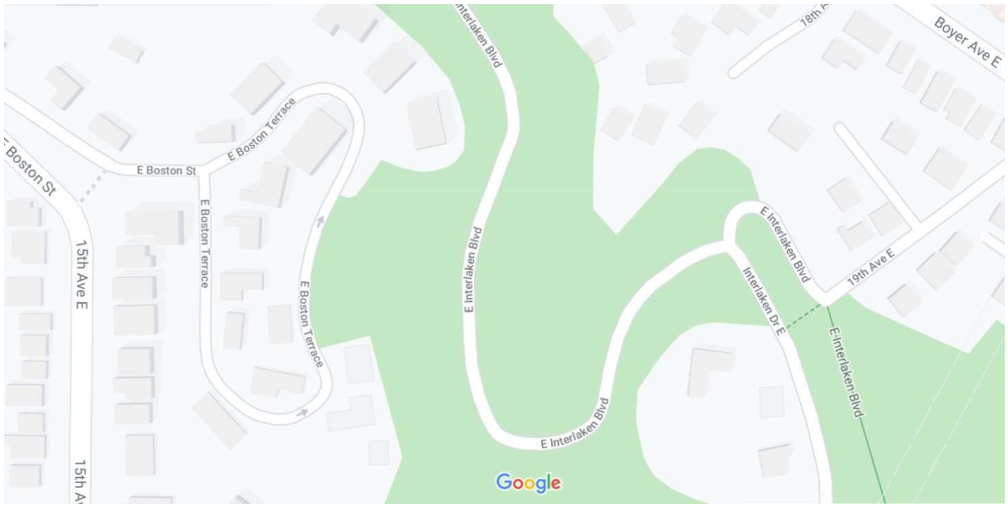
This portion of the park has been plagued with earth slides, aggravated in part by homesites built just uphill of the park. These developments from an earlier time changed the slope gradient and drainage patterns. The Olmsted Brothers referred to this area in 1903 as "liable to slides".

There was a particularly horrific accident involving a landslide in the winter of 1942. The family home of dentist George Grapp, built on fill on Boston Terrace, slid down the slope in the middle of the night. George was hospitalized and his wife, Ruth, was buried and died under more than two feet of mud. Their daughter, Patricia, 18 years old at the time, was buried up to her neck in mud but managed to be rescued. The Seattle Times (12/1/42) reported that the family home "disintegrated completely and was strewn over a wide area on the slope and in the ravine. No corners or any walls of the structure remained joined."



The home was built on fill over a former gully along Boston Terrace. The area of the subdivision was once a popular picnic grounds before it was developed with houses. The neighborhood was built in 1927, but the plat was not recorded, suggesting that building and grading plans were never approved by the City. The streets and utilities were privately built. In 1945, the residents requested "annexation" to the city, and the Building Dept. bought the three "gully lots" for $1 each to prevent another tragedy.

Olmsted was dismayed at how this roadway was constructed, stating that "[t]here has been what seems to me to be a most undesirable omission of a walk paralleling. . . the drives. My experience in parks elsewhere leaves me without the slightest doubt that [a walkway] is essential for the pleasure and convenience of both drivers and pedestrians."

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Continue heading west along the boulevard and around the next turn. Ahead at the following turn you'll see a compound mailbox and the top of a driveway along the north side of the road. Pause here.

Stop 10.

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Here you see an interesting anomaly in the middle of this park. In 1903, the land along these slopes was owned by many people, and holdings and tracts were not yet subdivided into lots. Olmsted advised immediate acquisition of the land "to ward off ill-advised attempts to subdivide the ridges and ravines." Land condemnations and purchases began in 1905 and continued until 1970, with a total of 27

transactions overall. This driveway access likely indicates how some private properties were accessed prior to the City's purchase of this area and perhaps is still the only means of access for these homes.

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Continue westward along Interlaken to the end of the boulevard at Delmar Drive. Turn a slight left onto Delmar, cross the street at the crosswalk, and continue west on Delmar across the SR 520 overpass, to a small parking lot with lawn, a bench and a plaque. This is Bagley Viewpoint. Though the view these days may be largely obscured due to vegetation on the slope, there are plans to create a lid over SR 520 and, with it, a far larger park that will someday give greater opportunity for recreation and distant views. It is worth the extra walk to this point just to start envisioning the changes that will occur.

Stop 11.

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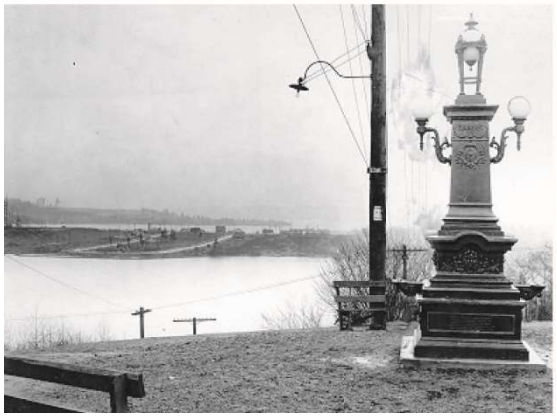
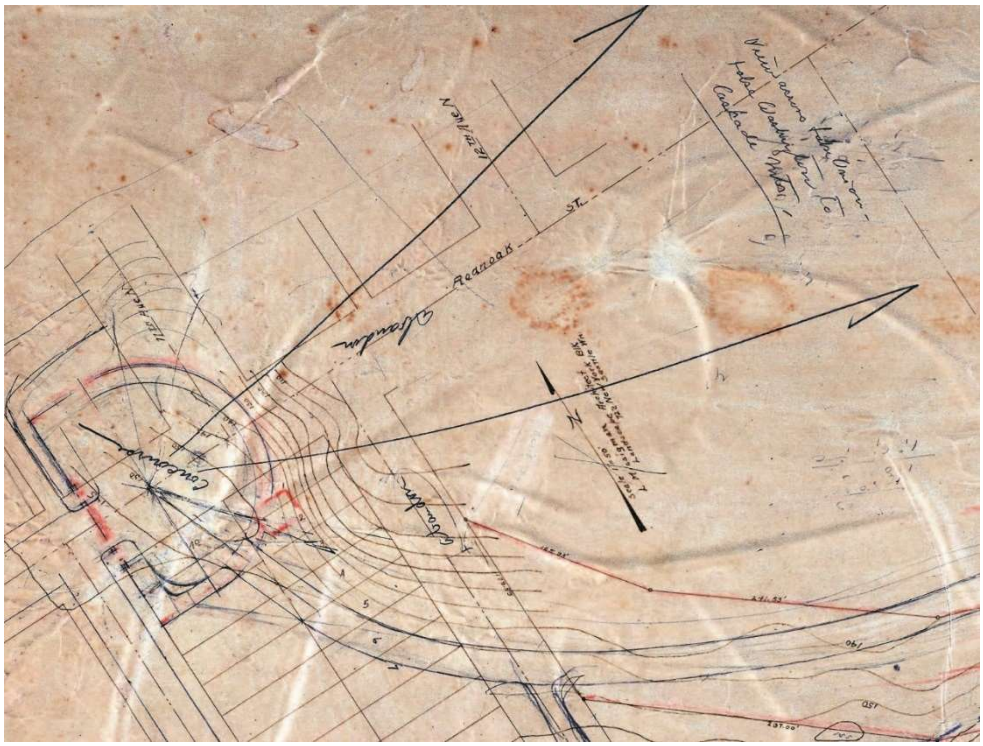


Bagley Viewpoint is dedicated to the memory of Dr. H.B. Bagley. In 1916, the overlook was given a memorial light and drinking fountain. This was also the original west entry point for Interlaken Boulevard, until construction of the Evergreen Floating Bridge (SR 520) in 1966 cut off this section from the park.

The Olmsted Brothers' original concept for the boulevard took this route even further. As mentioned at the start of this tour, John Charles conceived of a "Volunteer Hill Parkway" that would have connected Lake Washington Boulevard to Volunteer Park. Olmsted recommended continuing the parkway northwest from this point to wrap around the north end of the Capitol Hill promontory (at today's Roanoke Park) and continue along the top of the western bluff overlooking Lake Union, eventually connecting to Volunteer Park through the neighborhood west of the park.



A drawing from 1908, however, suggests that this larger scheme had been abandoned. Instead, Olmsted envisioned a semicircular concourse as the western terminus for the boulevard. This termination point would include "walks, entrance gates, shelters, etc., including the steep slope down to Portage Bay." The Park Board's 1909 report, meanwhile, envisioned Roanoke Park as part of this concourse, but those plans also changed. The concept of

the concourse was partially realized with the creation of Bagley Viewpoint. With the construction of SR520 in the 1960's, however, much of the steep slope and native terrain in this area was taken out.

But we can anticipate great changes happening in this area. With current improvements in the works for SR 520, a new lid and park is being proposed that would extend southwest from Bagley Viewpoint, across Delmar Drive and up to 10th and Miller. The adjacency of this park, with its scenic and pedestrian-activated qualities, we hope will strengthen the connection between Interlaken and Bagley and provide a more satisfying terminus for Interlaken Boulevard.

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From this point, retrace your path eastward to the intersection of Interlaken Boulevard and Delmar Drive. Above you to the south is Seattle Preparatory School.

Stop 12.

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The grounds of Seattle Preparatory School once housed Adelphia College (shown at left) and, before that, Holy Cross Cemetery. The cemetery received burials from 1885 until 1905, when it was ordered closed by the City due to the wet site making it unsuitable. The remains were moved to Calvary Cemetery, northeast of University Village. The cemetery site was purchased by a local Swedish Baptist Church, which opened Adelphia College in 1905. When Adelphia was closed in 1919, a wealthy Seattle Catholic, T. C. McHugh, purchased the site and donated it to Seattle College (now Seattle University). This area housed the Seattle College High School, which, in 1933, became Seattle Preparatory School and has remained so since.

When this parkway route was first planned in 1903, Olmsted described this part of the route thus:

> "In approaching the wooded ravine about a quarter mile north of the improved part of the Capitol Hill Addition, it should widen out so as to include a considerable area of beautiful woods on ridges and in the ravines as far as the street bounding Holy Cross Cemetery on the east (11th Ave). This widening is desirable, not only to preserve the woods in these ravines, but also because the land is so exceedingly broken and steep that it would cost more than it would be worth to properly fit it for occupation by dwellings."

By the time this section of roadway was to be built, however, the 10-acre Adelphia College site already covered this area, which created complications. A straightforward route for the boulevard would mean bisecting the school property. In a 1908 letter to Park Commissioner Frink, John Charles argued for the boulevard, stating that:

"In crossing the Adelphia College property as you propose, we fail to see how you would injure their property for future building sites, as by far the best location for future buildings is on the upper level. . . . The rest of Adelphia College property is ill adapted for college purposes, on account of its steepness in grade and its limited area. . . . The Parkway, however, to be practical and attractive, has inevitably got to pass through the Adelphia property. It does cut the property in two, and this does not improve it a particle for college purposes."

All the same, by 1940 (and perhaps as early as 1913), part of the school campus had expanded to the downhill side of the boulevard. This was later taken out with the development of 520 and the floating bridge.

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Continue retracing your steps along the Boulevard, all the way to the intersection with Interlaken Drive. Take Interlaken Drive up the hill and around a couple of bends, until you arrive at the front of the Seattle Hebrew Academy.

Stop 13.

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The Roman Catholic Sisters of the Sacred Heart built a convent and day school in Interlaken Park in 1909. They named it Convent of the Sacred Heart-Forest Ridge. The sisters picked the site for its remoteness from the "wickedness" of Seattle. At first, developer John E. Boyer would not sell the land as a school, and the sisters engaged in a bit of subterfuge by having a Mr. Guidicelli make a straw purchase. When Boyer learned of the high quality planned for the school, however, he consented to the sale.

The new school was named Forest Ridge because of its location. The building featured "a columned entrance portal, Neoclassical balustrades, ornate curved stepped false front gables, and oriel windows" – all visible from the roadside today.

The Sisters of the Sacred Heart operated the school until 1971, when they moved to larger quarters in Bellevue. The Seattle Country Day School took up residence at Forest Ridge until 1973, when it was purchased by the Seattle Hebrew Academy.

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This concludes our tour! To reach your starting location, simply continue up Interlaken Drive to the intersection with Galer and 19th. We hope you enjoyed this self-guided version of our tour!


Montlake Park
East Montlake Park
Roanoke Park
Bagley Viewpoint
Adelphia College/ Seattle Prep
Montlake Playfield
MONTLAKE
WSDOT Peninsula
Washington Park Arboretum UW Botanic...
Residences
Retaining Wall
Louisa Boren Plaque
Interlaken Boulevard at 19th Ave Ext.
Interlaken Park
Plant Restoration Area
Interlaken Boulevard at 21st Ave
Sam's Pet & Home Services
Interlaken Boulevard
Interlaken Boulevard at 24th Ave
Boren Park
Bridge over Ravine at 26th Ave
Woodland Trail
19th & Galer
15th Ave E
24th Ave E
Boyer Ave E
Lake Washington Blvd E
E Boston St