

August 2012

The history of Highway 71 through Bella Vista goes back many years. In 1915, when the Bakers of Bentonville created Lake Bella Vista, there were no roads going north from Bentonville, just some rough trails with two streams (McKissic Creek and Sugar Creek) that were almost impossible to ford. By 1921, following the purchase of Bella Vista by the Linebargers in 1917, a graded county road connected Bentonville with the Missouri line. That road was first paved in 1929 (the same year the road between Rogers and Bentonville was paved).

In 1926, US 71 was created in name but took a much different route than it does today, going west out of Bentonville toward Gravette and from there north to the state line. The county road that went from Bentonville to the state line through Bella Vista was named Highway 100. Using today's streets and golf courses as landmarks, Highway 100 came north past Lake Bella Vista, went east at Cunningham Corner to cross Sugar Creek and follow the bluffs north of hole #6 on Berksdale Golf Course, then north to Kingsland Road, west alongside Sugar Creek by hole #4 on Kingswood Golf Course, then north and east to cross a low water bridge on Pinyon (now spelled Pinion) Branch Creek below the Lake Ann dam. The highway then curved back west, down below the Town Center Fire Station, then north by the creek to skirt the hill where Town Center is located now. In 1941, the first cut was made in the hill, where the southbound lanes of Highway 71 at Town Center are now, and the highway was relocated to go through that cut. To go west, one had to travel Tanyard Hollow Road, which took off from Highway 100, crossing Sugar Creek, and going past what is now the intersection of Chelsea and 340. The road then turned south, going through the valley now filled by Lake Windsor. One would come out in the area where today Chelsea Drive makes its southern loop, and turn right to go west to Hiwasse (or go past the Miller community south into Bentonville). For many years, Bella Vista consisted of just Lake Bella Vista and the surrounding property. The area north of the lake, stretching to the state line, consisted mostly of farms. Farmers on the east side of Highway 100, unless they went further south, could get to the highway only by using the one-lane road across the Lake Bella Vista dam (which remained open to traffic until 1998 when the Dartmoor bridge was completed), or going west through Pinyon Hollow valley, later filled by Lake Ann. Farmers north of where Town Center now stands had no through road east of the highway between Pinyon Hollow and the state line.

Highway 71 was realigned to replace Highway 100, probably in the 1950's. In 1978, more of the hill at Town Center was dug out, and 71 was widened to four lanes. The 340 overpass was built at the same time (following the initial construction of 340 in 1966). Going south, the bypass of Highway 71 from Bentonville to Fayetteville was completed in 1988, and then renamed Interstate 540 in 1999, after the rest of 540 was built going south from Fayetteville. To the north, the section of highway from Bentonville to the Missouri state line is still designated as 71.

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*Pictures and map courtesy of Bella Vista Historical Museum.*

*Picture 1: 1957 map of Northwest Arkansas*



*Picture 2:*

*Old Highway 100 looking north, on the west side of Lake Bella Vista*

