

= Pierce Stocking Scenic Drive =

The Pierce Stocking Scenic Drive is a scenic route within Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore , in western Northern Michigan in the United States . The roadway , with its " scenic vistas and gentle curves " , is located off state highway M @-@ 109 between Empire and Glen Arbor . It runs for 7 @. @ 4 miles (11 @. @ 9 km) through forest and dunes areas , providing access to scenic overlooks of the Lake Michigan shoreline and the surrounding park land . Interpretive markers along the roadway are keyed to the National Park Service 's printed guide to the drive . Over 80 @, @ 000 vehicles make the trip , in addition to bicyclists , hikers and skiers who use the road each year .

The road was built in the 1960s and finished in 1967 by Pierce Stocking . A lumberman with road @-@ building experience , he wanted to share the beauty of the area with others . He operated the facility until his death in 1976 ; afterwards it was purchased by the National Park Service and added to the park . In the 1980s , a two @-@ year program reconstructed the roadway and added a number of features for visiting tourists . In 2011 , the morning show Good Morning America named the Sleeping Bear Dunes , and Pierce Stocking Drive , as the " Most Beautiful Place in America " after a viewer poll on its website ; publicity since the award has increased traffic along the roadway .

= = Route description = =

The road is a 7 @. @ 4 @-@ mile (11 @. @ 9 km) loop that can be driven or bicycled . Hiking the roadway is permitted , but not encouraged because of the traffic . The roadway starts at an entrance off M @-@ 109 (DH Day Highway) south of Glen Lake . There is a parking lot inside the entrance for visitors who wish to bike or hike the road . From there , the drive continues as a two @-@ way road to the entrance gate before turning northward as a one @-@ way road . There are 12 numbered locations along the road that are listed in the drive 's interpretive brochure . The first of these is a covered bridge . After this point , the drive ascends a steep hill to an overlook of Glen Lake . The area around this location includes " heavily forested areas , sand plains and scrub growth among the rock outcrops " . The next stop is the Dune Overlook and Picnic Mountain picnic area . From this vantage point , tourists can view both North and South Manitou islands , also part of the park , as well as Pyramid Point and Sleeping Bear Bay . As the drive approaches this stop and the fourth , the Cottonwood Trail , it emerges from the forest into the sandy dune area next to Lake Michigan . Several more stops are noted in the guide before Pierce Stocking Scenic Drive heads back inland through the beech and maple forest .

The roadway turns back to the shore and two overlooks next to the lake . Overlook 9 is next to the bluff on Lake Michigan , 450 feet (140 m) above the water , and overlook 10 is for views of the Sleeping Bear Dune . From overlook 9 , visitors can see Platte Bay some nine miles (14 @. @ 5 km) to the south on a clear day . These two locations are considered especially hazardous because of the heights involved . In 2002 , the Detroit Free Press noted that a half @-@ dozen visitors have to be rescued by paramedics at these two overlooks after falls . The community of Glen Arbor has a special off @-@ road vehicle to effect rescues from the base of the cliffs . The penultimate stop along the drive is the North Bar Overlook and Picnic Area , which provides vistas of North Bar Lake . After this stop , the drive descends into maple and pine forests before coming back to the starting point . This area follows an old logging road under the forest canopy . The drive has been called " the best way to see Lake Michigan from top of the dune elevations " , and " one of the nation 's most fascinating landscapes " .

A Park Pass fee is required for using the Pierce Stocking Scenic Drive (except for Golden Age Passport / Senior Pass holders) . A free interpretive guide for the scenic drive is available at the visitor center in Empire , Michigan , or at the entrance gate . The road is open to cars generally from the middle of April into November . During the operating season , the road is open starting at 9 : 00 a.m. until 30 minutes after sunset . After late December , the drive is used as a cross @-@ country ski trail . The park service combines the unplowed roadway with the Shauger Hill Trail to form an eight @-@ mile (13 km) system of trails of various ratings . The speed limit on the Pierce Stocking Scenic Drive is 20 mph (32 km / h) . In 2008 , there were 82 @, @ 527 vehicles that circled the

drive , a 4 @. @ 7 % increase over the previous year .

= = History = =

The road is named after Pierce Stocking , who spent his youth working as a Michigan lumberman and used to walk the bluffs above Lake Michigan near Empire . As a lumberman he had experience building roads . Stocking began building a road to the top of the dunes in the difficult terrain around the early 1960s . According to National Geographic , Stocking was " so awed by the beauty of the dunes that ... he built the road in order to share them with visitors . " The road was originally known as the Sleeping Bear Dunes Park when he first opened it to the public in 1967 . He operated the scenic drive until his death in 1976 , charging \$ 2 per car (equivalent to \$ 8 @. @ 32 in 2015) at the end .

The area around the roadway became part of the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore when the park was created in 1970 , and the road became part of the park itself in 1977 when purchased by the park service . The name was later changed to Pierce Stocking Scenic Drive in honor of the man . Starting in 1984 , the National Park Service reconstructed the drive . It was paved for the first time , and a bicycle lane was added . The service also moved the entrance to the road and built the observation platforms . An original section of the road was closed because it was susceptible to drifting sands from the dunes . Stocking built the covered bridge , but the " NPS has maintained it and increased its vertical clearance to 13 feet 6 inches [4 @. @ 11 m] . " The renovations to the drive were completed in 1986 .

In August 2011 , the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore was named by Good Morning America as the " Most Beautiful Place in America " ; the designation came after a social media campaign to capitalize on the show 's website poll . Since the park was awarded the title , attendance has increased . Pierce Stocking Scenic Drive , featured in the morning show 's broadcast , had 0 @. @ 25 @- @ mile @- @ long (0 @. @ 40 km) lines of cars waiting to get onto the drive on September 3 , 2011 , an uncommon sight for a day in September .

= = Points of interest = =

The entire roadway is in Glen Arbor Township , Leelanau County .