The road when it was less traveled

The sun. Loons glide along the lake and, as typical when traveling with the kids, usually stop to eat along the way. A pelican has a bird’s-eye view of its favorite fishing holes. And woodpeckers? They prefer to enjoy the water safely from shore.

We aren’t the only ones trying to soak in all that summer has to offer. Turtles take advantage of their waterfront real estate, jockeying for a position in the lane.

There wasn’t an orange cone in sight on this day in 1959, when Minneapolis, Richfield and Bloomington joined forces to open the Twin Cities’ first stretch of interstate: I-35W from 6th Street to 106th Street.

The honor of the ceremonial first cross was given to William “Titchy” Peden, a retired champion bicyclist who raced to be Canadian but lived in Bloomington at the time. He was called “Titchy” because of his red hair. After the ceremony, Peden made the dreams of area kids come true by leading a series of bicycle races — right down the middle of the new interstate.

That stretch of roadway had been planned since 1939. It finally saw the light of day thanks to the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, which President Dwight D. Eisenhower had signed into law. The Minnesota River bridge opened in 1961, allowing 1950s to stretch to Hwy 15 in Burnsville. But while some viewed the interstate as a sign of progress, others saw calamity.

Access to the interstate was limited and critics were unhappy that the wide stretch of concrete had isolated neighborhoods and businesses along Lake Street.

And while 35W was supposed to make traveling more efficient, gridlock was already occurring by 1969.

Today, 35W carries more than 200,000 vehicles daily, and there are usually a few orange cones in sight. But in 1959, the view was clear.

BONHAM CROSS • Star Tribune file

ABOVE, LEFT: Foto Mark Snyder

TOP: Dead salmon of St. Croix River now a slice of turtles crammed onto a 4 foot log in a backyard pond. He says he’s seen them stacked two or three turtles high.

FAR LEFT: Julie Ong of Minneapolis sports a redheaded woodpecker on the shores of Big Bass Lake near Minong, Wis.

ABOVE, LEFT: Mark Snyder of Plymouth had good luck while fishing for bugs Lake near Amnicon Falls. He says he saw turtles crammed onto a log in his backyard pond.

The bill he signed into law a decade earlier aimed to create 41,000 miles of National System of Interstate and Defense Highways that would “eliminate unsafe roads, inefficient routes, traffic jams and all of the other things that go with the way of speedy, safe transcontinental travel."

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VINTAGE MINNESOTA

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