MacDonald & Mack Architects is currently providing architectural services to the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT) for the restoration of fifteen roadside walls, wayside rests, commemorative markers, and scenic overlooks built by the Minnesota Department of Highways as Works Progress Administration projects along the Great River Road – National Scenic Byway of the Mississippi River.

The Camp Ripley entrance walls is the largest of these projects completed to date and was built in phases, from 1934 to 1942. The walls stretch over 8,000 feet, and were dry-laid of locally-quarried granite. The walls are dotted with both machine gun nests/towers at regular intervals and gate structures at four entrances constructed of wet-laid stone.

Over time, car impacts, settlement, site alterations, and other factors had damaged numerous sections of the walls. All areas had been rebuilt, but not with proper dry-laid techniques, so many of these portions were visually inconsistent with the rest of the intact walls; they also had a structural problems and a shorter lifespan of construction than the original portions. In addition to the deterioration, the sheer size of the project made this a challenging undertaking. We conducted a meticulous conditions assessment of all elements and made recommendations for restoration, including rebuilding areas that had been rebuilt improperly (this time using guidelines and techniques in keeping with the historic construction), removing the non-original mortar, cleaning stains, and removing debris. This project required skilled masons both locally and nationally to achieve the complete restoration. Camp Ripley took the opportunity to use the construction project as a teaching tool to learn how to maintain their walls from the restoration masons.