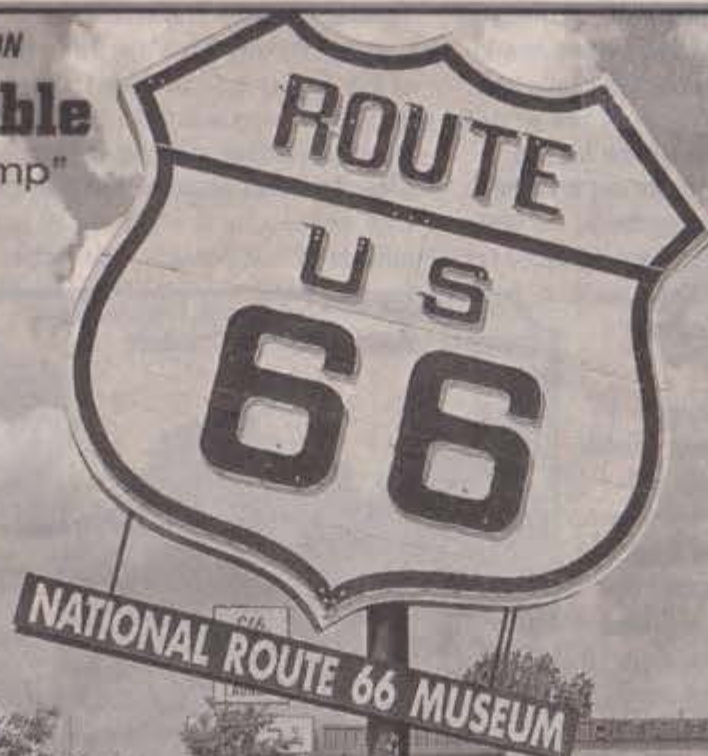


WHAT I DID ON MY SUMMER VACATION

# A Route 66 ramble

"Life begins at the off-ramp"



National Route 66 Museum sign in Elk City, Oklahoma

by Irish McKinney

The Mother Road, America's Main Street, even the Will Rogers' Highway—all of these and more have been tags attached to what was formally (and formerly) known as US 66. I say formerly because US 66 no longer exists. Commissioned in 1926 as one of the first numbered highways, it comprised a collection of small town Main Streets, farm roads, cow paths and

railroad rights of way connecting the shores of Lake Michigan to the shores of the Pacific Ocean.

The mythology of the road evolved from the dust bowl migration of the 1930s, as epitomized by John Steinbeck's family of Okies, the Joads, Bobby Troup's 1946 song about getting your kicks, the adventures of Todd, Buzz and a Corvette on television in the '60s and even the Disney/Pixar animated movie, *Cars*. Yet with all the notoriety the official life of The Road was surprisingly short lived. The beginning of the end reared its ugly head in the '50s with the establishment of the Interstate Highway System by President Eisenhower. In 1984 the last section of The Road was bypassed at Williams, Arizona, and in 1985 Route 66 was decommissioned as an official US Highway.

Flowing from right to left, The Road arises near Grant

Park in Chicago, Illinois, and traverses the Land of Lincoln to where it crosses the Mississippi River at St Louis, Missouri. It takes a leisurely stroll through the Ozarks of the "Show Me State," to Joplin where it jogs north to nip the corner of Kansas. The "Sunflower State" comprises a mere 13 miles of the Mother Road, and then you're in the rolling hills of Oklahoma. In Oklahoma the bones of what once was rise to the surface and lie beside the newborn growth of modern America. The road ran through Tulsa and Oklahoma City to Elk City, the home of the National Route 66 Museum, and border town Texola into the Texas Panhandle. The midpoint of the Panhandle, Amarillo, is not far from the self-proclaimed midpoint of The Road, Adrian, Texas, which is itself close to the New Mexico border. New Mexico allows the option of the "old" route through the mountains of Santa Fe or the "new" straight shot through the desert to Albuquerque. Gallup leads you out of New Mexico and into Arizona, where you can stand on a corner in Winslow, ride the Oak Creek Canyon from Flagstaff to Sedona, and cross the Sitgreaves Pass into Oatman before crossing the Colorado River into California, the land of milk and honey... and the end of The Mother Road, Santa Monica.

A ride down America's Main Street is just that, a trip through current history in America's heartland, a look at those things that died from our rush to progress, those that continue to live because of sheer American bullheadedness, and those born of an entrepreneurial need to fill a need. The ride

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Sign across the road from the Mid-Point Cafe in Adrian, Texas—halfway from here to there





## Summer vacation

*Continued from page 110*

asks the question, Is it the journey or the destination? What if the journey is the destination?

Our journey down The Road began at a campsite in Kankakee, Illinois, where we left the pop-up we pull behind the motorcycle so we wouldn't have to pull it

through the city. An intersection just outside of Grant Park was the starting line for our winding two-lane odyssey of discovery of America. It was very much like a Greek myth with well-marked paths to start, but we soon lost our way in Missouri.

There was heat in Oklahoma, Arizona, and California; rain in Texas

and New Mexico. While there were no monsters, there were giants (such as the Gemini Giant in Wilmington, Illinois, and the Bunyon Giant in Atlanta, Illinois.)

We bit off chunks of 250 to 350 miles per day with as much of that two-lane travel as possible. We weren't completely free of time restrictions so if we needed to pick up mileage the freeway was often right next to us. In places old Route 66 has been relegated to frontage road—good frontage road. Many times we would be cruising at close to freeway speed with the freeway right next to us and no one on our road but us. We had to pick and choose the sights we wanted to see. You can't see everything and you need to leave something for next time.

The Mother Road provides for her children. The Road is a winding smorgasbord of dining choices. If we had stopped at every recommended place to eat, we

would have weighed as much as the motorcycle and would never have finished the ride.

We spent 12 days on The Mother Road and met people from all over the world: The German couple in Winslow taking our picture along with the statue on the corner, the Croatian bikers in Kingman, the Norwegians on a motorcycle tour in Oatman, the Belgian looking for directions in Ludlow, and Zabi, the manager of the service station in Pomona, who let us change the oil on the bike. What brought these people to America, to The Road? Is it something you can see? Is it something you can hear? Or is it more like a feeling that grows the farther you ride down those old decaying highways?

In the words of Route 66 historian and voice of the sheriff in the movie *Cars*, Tom Snyder: "Life begins at the off-ramp." ↗

