



A Short Primer on Route 66

"We do not take a trip - a trip takes us."

-John Steinbeck

Route 66 begins its meandering path through the United States in Chicago, Illinois on the shores of lake Michigan. The highway ends just west of Los Angeles,



California at the Santa Monica Pier on the shores of the Pacific Ocean. No other roadway in the United States has captivated America like Route 66. First opened in 1926, the highway was the symbol of opportunity for hundreds of thousands of Americans. By connecting Main Streets in small towns from Chicago to Los Angeles, Route 66 provided hope and prosperity. The road gave farmers and merchants

in once-isolated communities the opportunity to transport goods throughout the United States.

Dust Bowl Days

During the Great Depression, hundreds of thousands of farm families, displaced from the Dust Bowl, made their way west along Route 66 to California.

What was the Dust Bowl?

The Dust Bowl, was a period of severe dust storms in the Midwest. Intense drought and over-farming killed most of the crops, and the unanchored soil turned to dust, which the winds blew away in huge clouds that blackened the sky. These billows of dust sometimes called "black blizzards" traveled as far as the East Coast, striking New York City. On the prairies of the Midwest, visibility was often reduced to less than three feet. By 1940, more than 2.5 million people had fled along Route 66 to escape the Dust Bowl. To the families that traveled west, Route 66 symbolized the "road to opportunity."



A Short Primer on Route 66 (continued)

The End of the Road

In 1956, President Eisenhower passed the Federal Aid Highway Act, which would provide funds for an interstate designed to accommodate future traffic projections - in effect rendering Route 66 obsolete. By 1970, two modern four-lane highways between Chicago and St. Louis had absorbed the section of Route 66 linking towns from St. Louis to Oklahoma City.



In the late 1980's a group of people from local, State, and Federal agencies began a campaign to preserve and commemorate the historic highway. As part of these efforts, many historic sites on Route 66 have been listed in the National Register of Historic Places. In 1990, the United States Congress passed the Route 66 Study Act, recognizing that Route 66 had “become a symbol of the American people’s heritage of travel and their legacy of seeking a better life.”

Route 66 allows travelers to share the spirit of the highway, a spirit that lives in the people, places, and stories. By bypassing the interstate and taking things a little slower, today’s travelers can still experience a remarkable journey traveling through time on Route 66.



For discussion:

- Have you travelled on Route 66?
- Share stories of family car trips.
- What was the best part of your travels?



Route 66 - Geography Quiz

Route 66 was introduced to America in the summer of 1926, becoming one of the nation's principal east-west arteries. However, by 1970, nearly all segments of the original Route 66 were bypassed by a modern, four-lane highway.

Test your geography knowledge with these questions about the original route of Route 66:

1. Route 66 crosses the San Andreas Fault in which state?
2. Route 66 passes through this "Sunflower state" for a segment that is only 13 miles long. Which state is this?
3. The longest stretch of the route is in this state, and is 392 miles long.
4. Approximately how long is Route 66?
5. It crosses the Arkansas River in this city in Oklahoma.
6. It crosses the Mojave Desert in this state.
7. Route 66 starts in this Windy City.
8. The Route ends on a pier in this city.
9. Petrified Forest National Park is along the route in this state.

Answers

- | | |
|---------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. California | 5. Tulsa, Oklahoma |
| 2. Kansas | 4. 2,278 miles long |
| 3. New Mexico | 9. Arizona |
| 6. California | 8. Santa Monica, California |
| 7. Chicago | |





Road Trip Post Cards

- 1: Print this page on card stock.
- 2: Color in the illustrations.
- 3: Cut the cards out.
- 4: Send a message to those who can't visit right now. A lovely way to stay in touch!



california arizona
new mexico texas
oklahoma
kansas
missouri
illinois

