

Northwest New Mexico Visitor Center

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Traveling Route 66 *In Northwest New Mexico*



The Mother Road

“It goes from Chicago to LA...” as a Bobby Troup song said. Route 66 was the nation’s first all-weather highway linking the country with California. As significant in the 20th century as the transcontinental railroad was in the 19th century, Route 66 contributed to the growth and dominance of the Golden State, and allowed millions of travelers to experience the scenic beauty and human history of the western states. Even today the myths and legends of the old road still hold sway. As author Mike Wallis put it, “Route 66: it will always mean going somewhere.”

Exploring Route 66 in Northwest New Mexico

Between Albuquerque and Gallup there are many miles of the old highway that remain intact and open for travel and exploration. Travelers with a bit of extra time can still “get their kicks” and motor down the mother road, experiencing the scenery and enjoying the trading posts, vintage motels and cafes, and other nostalgic reminders of the glory days of Route 66.



The section described in this guide is illustrated on a fence next to “Kachina Country USA,” a business that sells American Indian arts and crafts in Milan, New Mexico.

A Note about This Guide

This guide is intended to orient the casual traveler with the remnants of the historic Route 66 corridor that exist between Gallup and Albuquerque in New Mexico. However, this guide is by no means comprehensive. The maps are based on research undertaken by the author of this publication, and are current as of the publication date. Still, changes do occur and are beyond the control of the author. Please consult and use detailed road maps for travel and exploration. It’s also a good idea to have a land status map if planning in-depth exploration; much of the area is a mix of Indian Nation lands, public lands (NPS, BLM, and Forest Service), and private lands.

Road Etiquette

Tread lightly along the historic corridor. Take only photographs, and only where permitted. Area pueblos (Acoma and Laguna) have restrictions on photography; please check in at pueblo visitor centers or tribal offices for information about camera permits. Respect Indian Nation lands and private property; get permission from property owners if in-depth exploration of a site is desired. Watch for livestock and animals, and slow down when passing through the small towns along the way.

A Legendary Segment of the Mother Road

“Now the highway enters upon an area of richly colored desert and mesa, upon which herds of sheep and occasionally cattle graze. The vistas stretch interminably into the distance, and the inverted turquoise bowl of the sky becomes a mingling of indescribable colors at sunset.”

-from “A Guide Book to Highway 66,” by Jack Rittenhouse, 1946

For many, this segment of Route 66 is one of the most dramatic and beautiful sections of the old road. Today, this significance is recognized by the fact that five sections of Route 66 in this guidebook are on the National Register of Historic Places: Albuquerque to Rio Puerco, Laguna to McCartys, McCartys to Grants, Milan to Continental Divide, and Iyanbito to Rehoboth (East Gallup).

Gallup to Iyanbito (Exit 16-36)

Gallup began in the 1880's as a siding on the Atlantic and Pacific railroad. The name of the town comes from the local railroad paymaster David Gallup. The town grew up around the railroad business and featured the El Navajo Hotel and a railyard. Later, its scenic location made it a destination for tourists and movie makers. Many Hollywood westerns and action movies were filmed in the area. Movie moguls developed the El Rancho Hotel which remains a centerpiece of Gallup and one of the most famous hotels along Route 66. Its lobby displays many photographs from movies and films of the golden era.

The Gallup section of Route 66 runs for ten miles, from Exit 16 to Exit 26. Along the highway, numerous trading posts, cafes, and classic motels all compete for attention. A good place to start in-depth exploration is at the Cultural Center, located in the old Santa

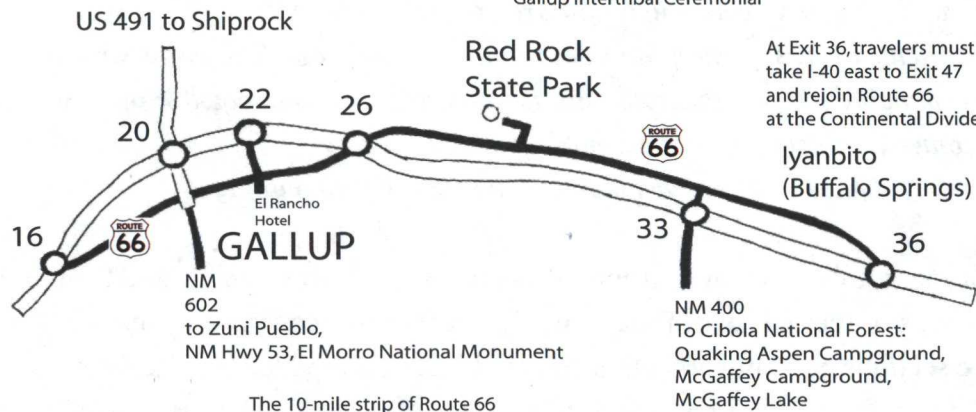
Fe Depot. The center has parking for RVs and oversized vehicles and provides easy pedestrian access to the historic downtown area. One block south of Route 66, Coal Avenue features many historic structures, including the restored El Morro Theater.

The section between Exit 26 and Exit 36 is on the National Register of Historic Places. It parallels I-40, passing through small Navajo communities and past the turnoff for Red Rock State Park. The scenic red Entrada Sandstone cliffs and mesas to the north of Gallup and Route 66 seem to beckon and invite exploration, but most of the land is Navajo land, closed to trespassing. At Red Rock State Park, hikers can enjoy trails and vistas on the red cliffs and mesas.

At Exit 36, travelers must rejoin the interstate for the trip to Continental Divide. Route 66 can again be joined at Exit 47.

Red Rock Park features hiking trails, full hookup RV camping, tent camping, and hosts the annual Gallup Intertribal Ceremonial

At Exit 36, travelers must take I-40 east to Exit 47 and rejoin Route 66 at the Continental Divide.



The 10-mile strip of Route 66 in Gallup is one of the best sections of the old highway anywhere. Enjoy the numerous vintage motels and diners, neon signs, and trading posts.

Continental Divide to Grants (Exit 47-85)

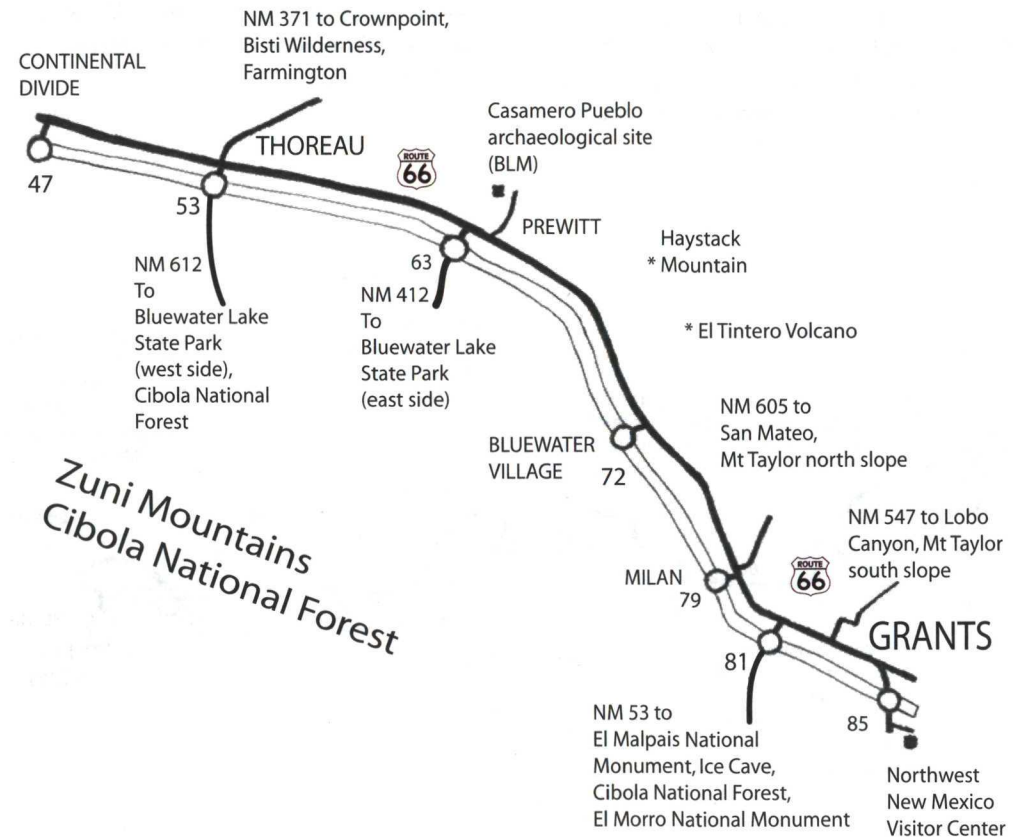
At Continental Divide, trading posts jostle for business with brilliant red Entrada Sandstone cliffs providing a splendid backdrop. This is the highest point of the road in New Mexico at 7,268 feet above sea level. Route 66 from Continental Divide to Milan is on the National Register of Historic Places.

In Thoreau, Highway 371 goes north to Crownpoint, home of the monthly Navajo rug auction. Highway 612 goes south to Bluewater Lake State Park and the Cibola National Forest.

At Prewitt, a short trip north on County Road 19 will take visitors to the ruins of Casamero Pueblo, one of many ancient towns that were once part of the Chaco system of outliers. South of the Prewitt exit, State Highway 412 takes visitors to Bluewater Lake State Park.

Between Prewitt and Bluewater Village, look for faded remnants of the Rattlesnake Trading Post and Swap Meet 66. At Bluewater Village, the road becomes a four-lane divided highway all the way into Milan.

In Milan, the old motor court that is now Kachina Country USA still has tidy cabins in a half circle. Old 66 crosses the railroad and runs through Grants as Santa Fe Avenue. In Grants, check out the vintage motels and cafes; most are on the east side of town and some feature neon signs. The uranium boom is chronicled at the New Mexico Mining Museum, on Route 66 at the center of town next to Riverwalk Park. State Highway 547 goes northeast out of Grants up onto Mount Taylor, one of the four sacred mountains of Navajo belief.



Grants to Mesita (Exit 85-117)

In Grants, Route 66 veers away from Santa Fe Avenue at the railroad overpass on the east side of town. The section from Grants to Laguna is on the National Register of Historic Places. The road runs east out of town paralleling the railroad tracks until it crosses the railroad near Exit 89. Just before Exit 89, the highway turns to the left, and runs a short distance before going under the interstate and reemerging on the south side.

At Exit 89, travelers can detour south to see the attractions of El Malpais National Monument and El Malpais National Conservation Area. Lava flows, natural arches, and big panoramic views await.

Route 66 runs along the cliffs of Acoma country; look for the beautiful Santa Maria de Acoma Church at McCartys. The road crosses the interstate at Exit 96, passes the ruins of a Whiting Brothers motel and passes through San Fidel. Look for the old White Arrow Garage in town. The road passes the Sky City Casino, and drops down a grade

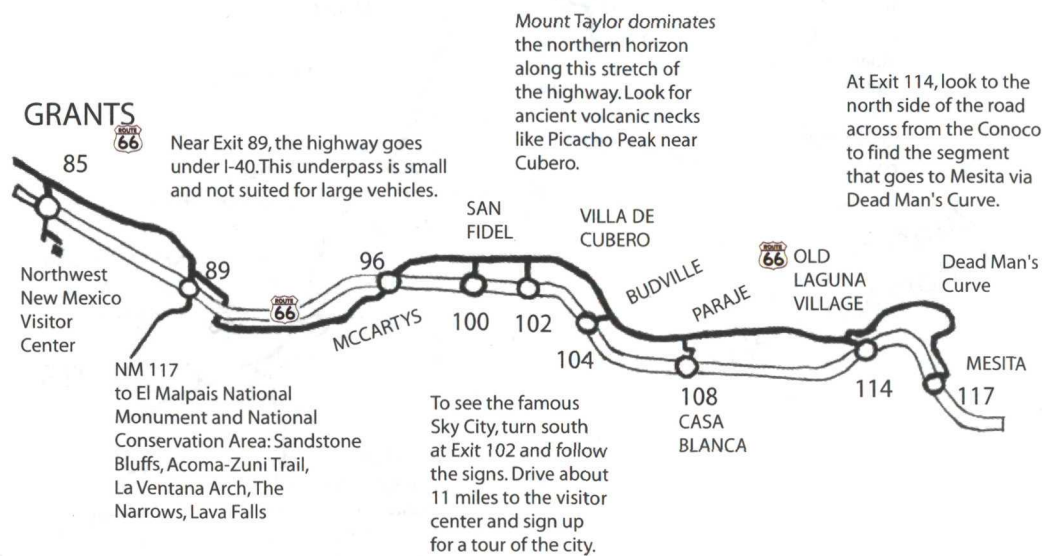
past the Villa de Cubero trading post.

A sight not to be missed is the ancient Acoma Pueblo, or Sky City. From Exit 102, follow the signs south to the new cultural center for a tour of the pueblo, the oldest continuously inhabited city in the United States.

Further down the road is Budville, where H. N. "Bud" Rice operated a wrecker service and a trading post, and served as Justice of the Peace in the local area.

Between Budville and Old Laguna Village are small Laguna communities. The road passes just to the north of Old Laguna Village, dominated by the elegant San Jose Church, a small masterpiece of ecclesiastical architecture over 300 years old.

Route 66 turns north just across from the Conoco to the east of Old Laguna Village, and descends a hill to the "Dead Man's Curve" segment.



Mesita to Albuquerque (Exit 117-167)

After rounding Dead Man's Curve, the old highway snakes around some red rocks and approaches Mesita. Less adventurous travelers may want to join the interstate for the section between Exit 117 and Exit 126. The road crosses a bridge to the east of Exit 117 and becomes a very rough and potholed old highway. Slow speed is a good idea here, along with a high clearance vehicle. At Correo, travelers must rejoin the interstate; turn north after the bridge to Exit 126.

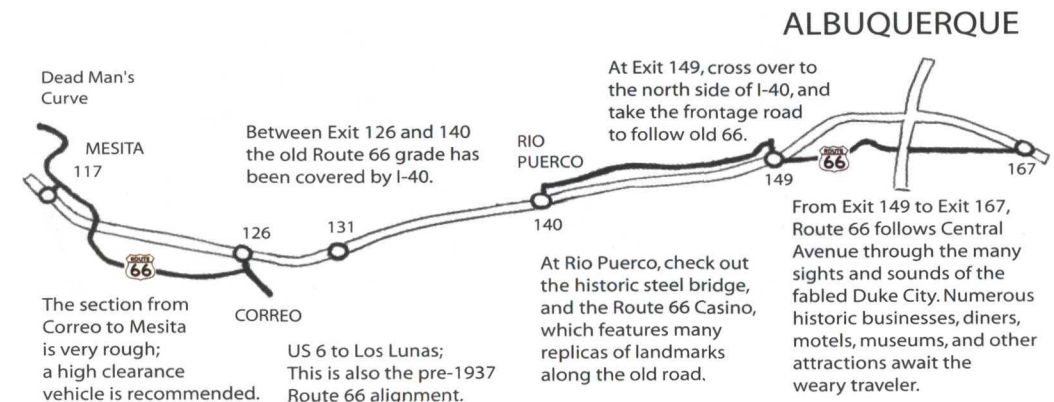
From Exit 126 to Exit 140, most of the post-1937 alignment of Route 66 is covered by the interstate. The pre-1937 Los Lunas alignment is now Highway 6. This highway is a good cutoff to go south while avoiding Albuquerque, and joins I-25 at Los Lunas.

At Exit 140, check out the Route 66 Casino, operated by the Pueblo of Laguna. Lots of Mother Road architecture and Route 66 kitsch have been faithfully recreated inside. The section from Exit 140 to Albuquerque is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Another attraction at Exit 140 is the historic steel truss bridge across the Rio Puerco; cross to the north side of the highway to see it. The frontage road on the north side of the highway continues east to Exit 149; cross to the south side, and begin the drive down Central Avenue.

The Central Avenue section of Route 66 boasts many vintage restaurants and cafes, motels and lodges, and numerous other historic and interesting structures and businesses. The highway passes Old Town, the historic core of the old Albuquerque colony, and through Downtown, which was created after the coming of the railroad. Nob Hill and the area around the university also have many historic businesses and structures that are worth taking in.

For more information, check out the numerous books, videos, maps, and DVDs that cover the history and legacy of the road.



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