

# Petrified Forest

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



Petrified Forest National Park  
Arizona

## Route 66 America's Mainstreet



*It winds from Chicago to L.A.,  
More than two thousand miles all the way.  
Get your kicks on Route Sixty-six!*

Bobby Troup, 1946

### Echoes of the Past

Near the rim of the Painted Desert, you stand on old Route 66. The line of the roadbed and the telephone poles in front of you mark the path of the famous “Main Street of America” as it passed through Petrified Forest National Park. From Chicago to Los Angeles, this heavily traveled highway was not only a road. It stood as a symbol of opportunity, adventure, and discovery.

A trip from Middle America to the Coast could take about a week—no Interstate speeds here! For many, the journey was not just across miles, it was across cultures and lifestyles—from the most mundane to the exotic. Of course getting to your destination was important, but the trip itself was a reward. From the neon signs of one-of-a-kind

motels to burgers and chicken fried steaks served in the multitudes of restaurants, from the filling stations that served as miniature oases to gaudy tourist traps, these more than 2,200 miles of open road were magical.

Today, the road is merely a whisper through the grassland of Petrified Forest, the only national park site with a segment of the Mother Road within its boundaries. Gaze down the long road and listen. You may hear echoes of the past—echoes of Route 66.



## The Mother Road

Considered by many as the Mother of Transcontinental Highways, Route 66 is a quintessential representative of 20th century American history and culture. Commissioned in 1926, the road was unique among other highways with a catchy tune that was ideal for promotion efforts, and with a unique arcing path across the country. Renowned as the shortest all-weather route connecting the industrial Midwest to the rural southwest, it helped facilitate the unprecedented transfer of ideas, goods, and people across the country.

Traveling through Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California, it also served as a major corridor for migrating dust bowlers in the 1930s; for important WWII military functions in the 1940s; and for thousands of families in the 1950s during the emergence of “vacation culture.” Roadside architecture and businesses flourished, changing forever the history and character, and lives of the towns through which the route passed. As well, the arts played a critical role in immortalizing the road through literature, song, and film, which served to elevate the road to a phenomenal, pop-culture status which persists to this day.

Ironically, it was the popularity of automobile travel that ultimately led to the highways demise through the construction of limited-access interstates in the 1970s. With the slow, incremental opening of the interstates, travel gradually shifted away from the towns and main streets of Route 66 passed, until the highway was officially decommissioned in 1985.

However, the public demanded that the road and its history be kept alive, and preservation and tourism movements have since flourished. Almost 90 years since its birth, and nearly 30 years since its decommissioning, Route 66 remains one of the most revered, beloved, and sought out historic roads in the world.



## Rediscovering Route 66

A trace of the original alignment of Route 66 can be discovered during your visit to Petrified Forest National Park. Entering the park from the northern entrance, the first indication is a dirt road just before Tiponi Point. The old sign for the park that once graced Route 66 is nothing but rubble today and most of the roadside attractions such as Lions Farm and The Painted Desert Park—with its vista-seeking tower to climb—are just memories.

Visitors to the park will discover a jewel just off the main stretch of the Mother Road, the Painted Desert Inn, the park’s National Historic Landmark. Originally built by business man Herbert Lore, the Painted Desert Inn reflects the Pueblo Revival style of National Park architect Lyle Bennett and the designs of renowned Mary Colter of the Fred Harvey

Company. The warm pinkish brown walls protect murals painted in the late 1940s by Hopi artist Fred Kabotie in what were once the Dining Room and Lunch Room that catered to travelers. The Painted Desert Inn was an oasis along the dusty stretch of Route 66.

Continuing around the arch of the park road, featuring the spectacular views of the colorful Painted Desert, visitors discover a pullout that overlooks the alignment of Route 66, following the trace through grasses and sagebrush to the Interstate that replaced the old highway. The rusted remains of an old vehicle remind us of the heyday of America’s Main Street and the romance of the road.



Remember that archeological and historic sites are fragile. Every little artifact tells part of the story. Leave these fascinating sites for future generations to enjoy and explore. They are part of our American legacy.