

OUR 29TH YEAR

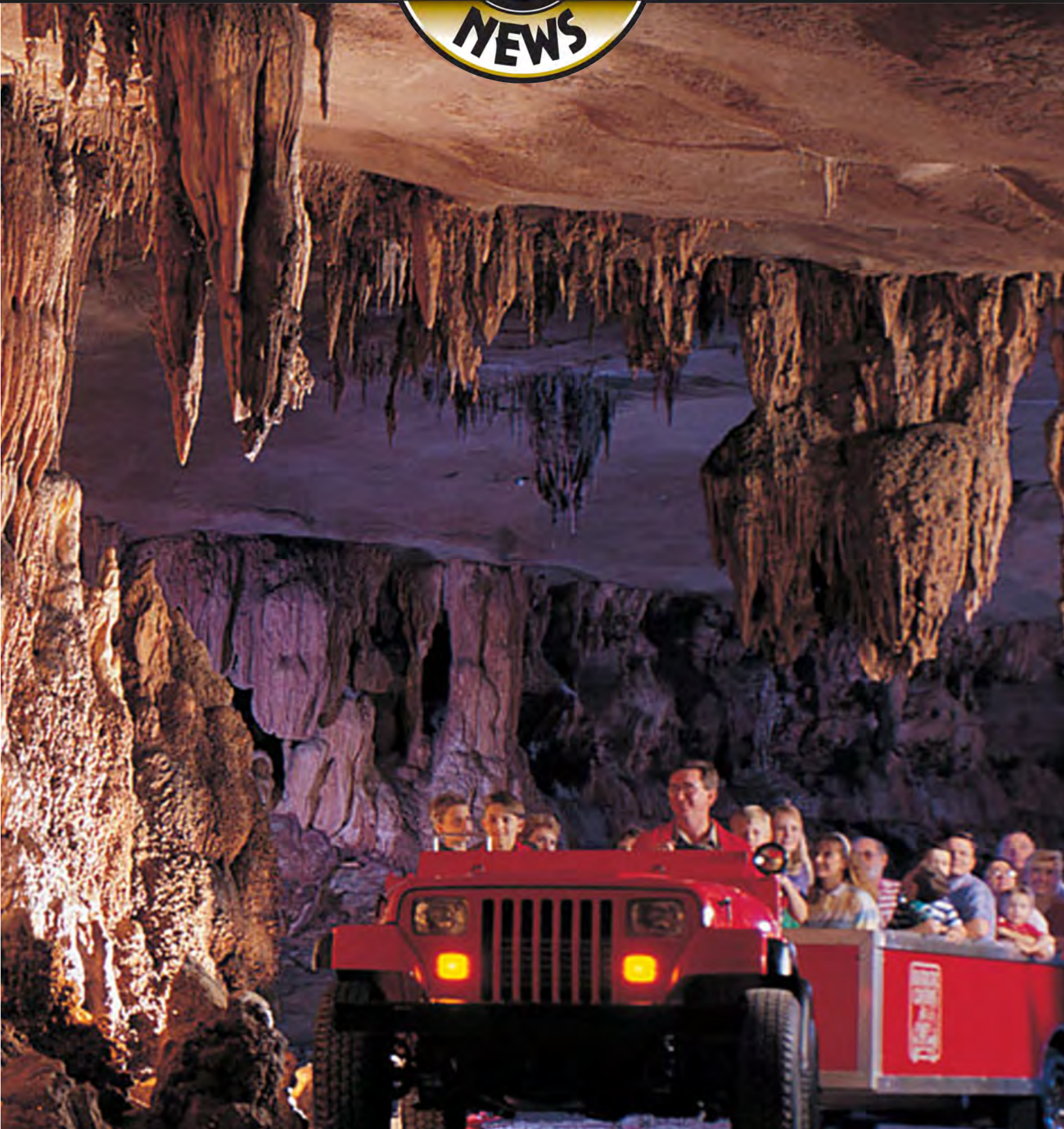


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Contents:

Ad For Old 66 Family Restaurant.....3
Time Travel On New Mexico’s Dirt 66.....4
Dollar General Stores Vs Route 66.....12
Route 66 Tourist Caverns - Part 3.....23
Route 66 Q & A..... 40

On the cover:

Missouri is known as the “Cave State” and nine of the state’s tourist caves are near Route 66. We have been covering these unique caves in this magazine, and this issue includes the last four. Pictured here is one of the Jeep-drawn trams taking tourists through Fantastic Caverns outside of Springfield.

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DIRECTOR’S NOTES

By David Knudson, Executive Director

Well, the World Health Organization has declared an end to the COVID global health emergency. In response, we have seen an increase in orders from overseas. Definitely, good news for everyone. Fortunately, nearly all Route 66 businesses weathered the storm.

Frank Gifford starts us off with his *Time Travel on New Mexico’s Dirt 66* where he resurrects a piece of the Route which has been mostly forgotten and declared dead. These are the stretches that I personally enjoy driving the most. There’s a certain fascination to deserted landscapes left alone to deteriorate

Kip Welborn explains in *Dollar General Stores Vs Route 66* how the giant retailer is moving into small town America, slashing prices and in so doing, driving out the long established mom and pop operations. This David and Goliath scenario is not new. *Sears* and *Walmart* have been accused of this for years. But this is more pervasive because they target very small towns like Kingsley, Iowa with a population of 1,400 which has been too small for *Walmart*. Although, it looks like *Walmart* is, in fact, coming after *Dollar General* (in more ways than one) by opening smaller stores known as *Neighborhood Markets*. All of this does little to contribute to the nostalgic atmosphere of the Route.

Route 66 Tourist Caverns - Part 3 covers the last four caverns in our series of nine. When I was a boy traveling in the car on vacation with my parents, roadside attractions were the rage. It was shortly after WWII and new cars were abundant so attractions sprung up to capture the tourist dollar—huge animals, motorcycles racing around a giant barrel, mystery spots and, of course, creepy caves that were guaranteed to chill you in sights and temperature.

I’ve been wanting to do a Route 66 Q & A article for a long time. Although some of the questions we’re asked now are the same today as they were nearly 30 years ago like “How long does it take to drive the Route?”, others are much different like “Where can I see real movie stars?” 📸

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TIME TRAVEL ON NEW MEXICO'S DIRT 66

*Story by Frank Gifford of www.rt66pix.com.
Images provided by the author.*

It might seem that only the wind goes through here now, but that's not completely true. There's also a school bus, mail carrier and occasional pick-up truck. And every so often, stray tourists in a SUV or Mustang who churn up dirt and briefly recreate the Dust Bowl. Otherwise, it's true: Only the wind goes through here now.

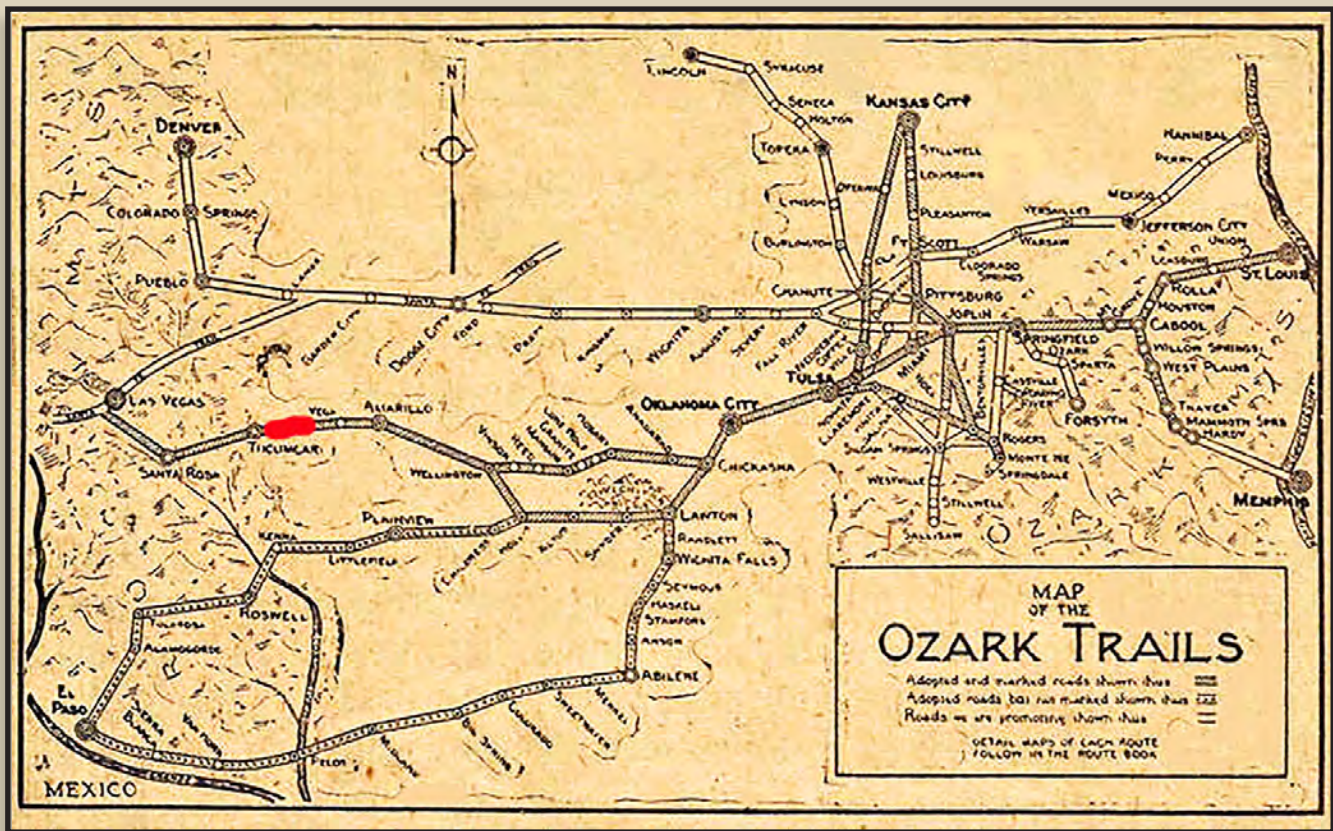
Typical Route 66 travelers leave I-40 at Texas Exit 0 to briefly sample Glenrio. Then they circle right back onto the westbound superslab, hit the cruise control, and aim it.

Very few venture straight ahead from "downtown" Glenrio past the end of old pavement onto dirt and stone of Quay County, New Mexico, and so they miss the original Mother Road era. And the Named (or Promotional) Roads era before it, when this was part of the Ozark Trails.

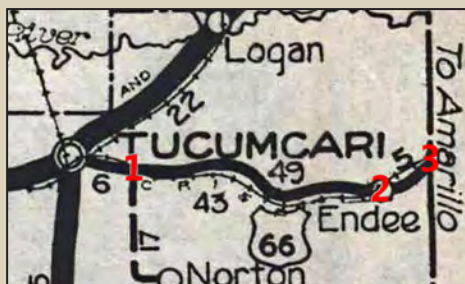
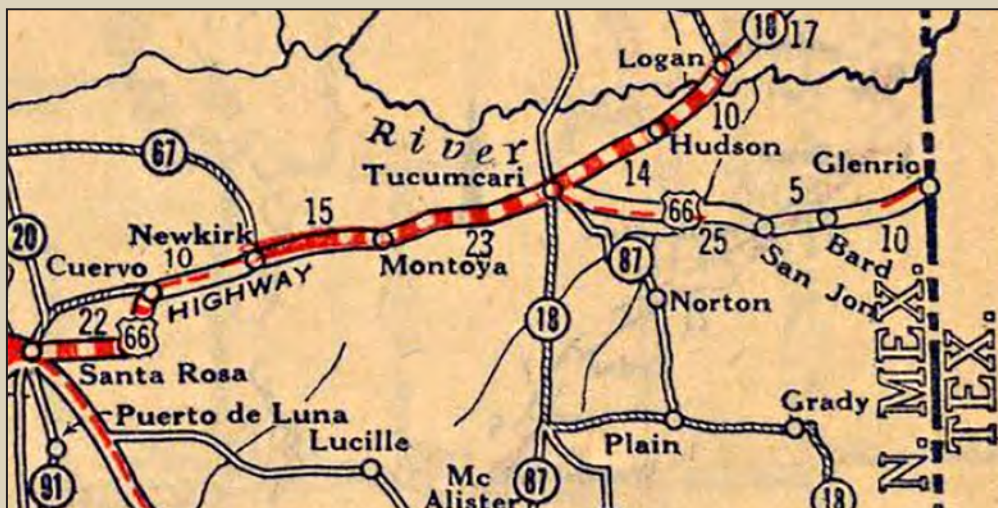
Too bad, because this stretch is being changed forever.

Near the eastern end of Dirt 66 in Glenrio, a marijuana dispensary and "consumption patio" are being constructed on land that once held the canopied 1925-era Broyles Mobil gas station. It was demolished, the old wood was fed into a bonfire and went up in smoke. Near the western end in San Jon, a streamline moderne 1936 gas station design, a Teague Texaco, has vanished. This had a green energy retrofit—a mature tree growing where Fire Chief and Sky Chief pumps used to rule.

But it's in between, the 14.0 miles without pavement, where the serious changes are underway—with more to come. Narrow wooden bridges with nearly a century of history are being bypassed, greatly changing the nature of Dirt 66. These 1930-era structures are essentially a single-lane now, with a low eight-ton weight limit.



"All roads lead to Monte Ne, Arkansas" was highway hucksterism, but it did get Model-T owners thinking about maybe driving somewhere unfamiliar. This 1913 map, possibly the Ozark Trails group's first, contributed a little something to eventual road development. Dirt 66 is highlighted in red.



MAP EXPLANATION

	PAVED ROADS	} THRU ROUTES	
	IMPROVED ROADS		
	GRADED ROADS		
	DIRT OR POOR ROADS		
	PAVED ROADS	} SECONDARY OR MAIN CONNECTING ROADS	
	IMPROVED OR GRADED		
	DIRT OR POOR ROADS		
	MILEAGES SHOWN ON THRU ROUTES		STATE HIGHWAYS
	PRINCIPAL CITIES		U.S. INTER-STATE HIGHWAYS

The three railroad grade crossings highlighted on this 1927 official New Mexico map include one right at the state line in Glenrio.



The Broyles Mobil gas station, built around 1925 had a made-from-scratch wooden canopy. It was still intact in this image taken around 2000 but collapsed in this decade. The building has been razed for a marijuana business, legal in NM but not a few feet away in TX.

But much heavier trucks venture out here when I-40 is closed by accidents or snowstorms.

Quay County Road Superintendent Larry Moore says this happens "all the time" and when trucks cross, the old bridges are "rocking."

To handle these sudden bursts of heavy traffic, conventional two-lane reinforced concrete bridges are being installed next to the wooden ones. As they are built, driving across the old bridges—physically linking us to experiences of past generations—will no longer be possible. The wooden structures will be blocked to traffic, and open to pedestrians only. The first new bridge is already in place near the San Jon end of Dirt 66 and work is underway on a second nearby.

Modern bridges will eventually bypass all

the wooden structures, forever changing Dirt 66 into a patchwork, with obvious new alignments spliced-in. But for a little while longer, most of this historic route can be driven, experienced and photographed as it was.

Boldly going onto Dirt 66 launches a half-hour adventure to an earlier landscape and mindset, when the easy and classy way to travel was by train on the parallel Rock Island Railroad.

Back to when brand-new US Highway 66 was more aspirational than actual. Before The Grapes of Wrath, before the Okies and Arkies made their exodus through here. When dirt, gravel and mud frequently ruled between towns, and wooden bridges spanned dry washes or arroyos.



This "Teague Texaco" named after industrial designer Walter Dorwin Teague was a widely-known symbol of the 30s, used in more than 10,000 stations nationwide. This one was left stranded, out of sight and out of luck, when I-40 was built along the northern edge of San Jon. It has since been demolished.

Before this route was anything at all it was a crude path, barely enough to get the railroad built right after 1900. Then in 1913 it was added to the Ozark Trails, a promotional concoction typical of the time, designed to funnel early motorists to a long-forgotten resort in Monte Ne, Arkansas. It was shameless boosterism, and still just dirt, but it did spark interest in improving roads and possibly—someday—traveling without being chained to a railroad timetable. Today in

widely scattered areas, we cherish driving on remaining narrow "first-generation" Route 66 pavement engineered for Model-T and Model-A Fords. But being old doesn't necessarily make the surface original. The road dates from 1926, but it wasn't fully paved with concrete, asphalt or brick from Chicago to Santa Monica until 1938. In the meantime, a dozen dusty years in places, we made do with dirt, mud and wood.



New construction is underway on Dirt 66. Traffic will be forced onto parallel alignments with modern bridges. 1930-era wooden structures eventually will be blocked to all but pedestrians.

This near-desert segment recalls what early long-distance motorists frequently confronted (and why so many took the train).

As old maps show, long stretches out here were still "natural" or "earthen" with the first grading underway—raising the surface by scooping out ditches and perhaps adding gravel. Where it could not be avoided, a few spots even got wooden bridges.

The shift from unofficial Ozark Trails to official US Highway 66 likely meant nothing here right at first—the same primitive road still ran along the same crude path, often near the tracks. And it's doubtful whether Quay County locals making trips into town much cared about the new numbered system. In places it took years even for new metal highway signs to go up.

But increasing road and train traffic made railroad grade-crossings very dangerous and that required immediate fixing. Vehicle registrations almost tripled during the 1920s, and roads were

nowhere near adequate. New Mexico with its limited population and tax base trailed states where paving was in place. And this woeful stretch even lagged other nearby roads that had at least been worked on.



The abandoned Rock Island Railroad grade looks down on Route 66. This was a busy travel corridor from 1930 until the early 50s.

An official 1927 state map shows Route 66 inherited three railroad grade-crossings between Tucumcari and the Texas line.

Not a good thing when passenger trains could be steaming faster than 40 MPH on an embankment well above the surrounding land. Crossing tracks could mean navigating two turns and a steep hump. If grading was bad, a vehicle could get hung up.

In 1930-31 came the first road improvement, a much-needed realignment completely north of the railroad. It is this grade we know today as Dirt 66, now that worn-out pavement has largely been dug up. Technically most of this is second generation and it's nearly a century old.

Wooden bridges with their rusty steel cables are a modified rail design dating back to the Transcontinental Railroad of the 1860s. Huge round pilings support massive square beams. Bridge decks use boards layered at 90-degree angles much like plywood. (Small wooden bridges also survive on Rt 66 through the California desert.)

In the early 1950s, washouts and threats from increasingly-heavy trucks doomed this



The 1930-era bridges used railroad construction techniques and hardware to connect heavy timbers. The deck has alternating layers much like plywood.



The westbound entrance to "Slaughter Lane" just after Glenrio with I-40 in the distance. This was way too narrow and inadequate for heavy traffic after World War II.



Wooden pilings, installed not long after 1900, now stand as Stonehenge-type monuments to a way of life and travel long-vanquished. Trains were the easy and classy way to travel back when Rt 66 (in the distance) was still a primitive dusty road in many places.

In the early 1950s, washouts and threats from increasingly-heavy trucks doomed this lonely but busy segment from Glenrio to San Jon. The old road was stabilized and kept open mainly for access to remote ranches. All other traffic was shifted to new but narrow two-lane construction just after Glenrio. (This 50s road is fenced off but still visible curving right with the pavement—it was used until I-40 was built.)

For the rest of us, going straight ahead onto Dirt 66 can recall 20+ grim but defining years of the Great Depression, Dust Bowl,

World War II, Japanese-American internment, Jim Crow, Iron Curtain, Korean War and McCarthyism. In places nothing later than 1950 visually intrudes out here! You're yanked back several generations, and everything in your field of vision is stuck in hard times.

The Great Depression never lifted, Dust Bowl winds are ready to howl again, and your new vehicle is suddenly a wheezing 14-year-old Hudson with patched tires. Take a phone snapshot with a black-and-white filter and it looks like the 1930s or 40s.

While this alignment lasted, it was filled with cars, trucks, buses, passenger and freight trains. Novelist John Steinbeck passed over these same wooden bridges while researching *The Grapes of Wrath*. His Joad family and real Great Depression migrants suffered through, bound for a promised land of pavement, palm trees, plenty of work...and plenty of plenty.

But first they had to endure plenty of stretches like this. *The Grapes of Wrath* film shows the Joad's overloaded jalopy leaving pavement and crossing back onto dirt and gravel at the Arizona state line in Lupton. The novel came out in 1939, the film early in 1940, just months after Route 66 was completely paved.

Mid-century was the peak out here. World War II with its gasoline and tire rationing, and 35 MPH "Victory Speed" was history, and the economy was booming. New vehicle sales hit a record 6.5 million in 1950 helped by sleek post-war designs. Total registrations had nearly doubled in two decades. Big changes were

coming even to remote places like Quay County, New Mexico...meaning there would be winners and losers.

One complete loser was the railroad. It got here first, and got out last. The Rock Island (Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific) built through from Amarillo as the 1900s began. It served Glenrio straddling the state line, then Endee, Bard and San Jon, New Mexico. The two middle places, now barely noticeable, were ranching outposts with combined track space for loading 21 wooden cattle cars. Animals scrounged up enough to graze on locally until the train took them to real meals at a feedlot. And one final trip to the packinghouse.

The Rock Island ran four trains a day through here by mid-century, with steam and later diesel-electric locomotives sometimes outpacing cars on the narrow pavement.

It's hard to imagine now, but both Glenrio and San Jon had train depots with daily passenger and freight service. The Rock Island connected with the Southern Pacific in Tucumcari, a railroad town that would later develop a secondary income stream from motorists.

Billboards pitched Route 66 drivers on Tucumcari Tonite! Railroads delivered on the promise of California Tomorrow! But that advantage of speed and convenience would quickly erode. Better roads, especially the spreading Interstates from 1956 onward, meant cars and trucks could make much faster time, leaving the rail system at a disadvantage except for commodities...like cows. And beginning in 1958, airlines with new 707 jet service took away the long-haul passenger business.

Railroads rightsized and downsized, then tried it again. They abandoned unprofitable tracks and cut passenger service, but for many of them nothing worked. In 1980 after more than a decade of losses, the Rock Island declared bankruptcy and walked away. Scrappers got the metal, nobody wanted the ties, pilings or dirt, and so they remain for photo-ops, history lessons,



This modern high-visibility convenience store once had a big Shell sign aimed at I-40. It had everything except customers, and has been closed for more than a decade.



A Chevron carcass frames a trashed Texaco in the distance. Taggers here are so desperate they have taken to painting illegally-discarded truck tires. The New Mexico state line and arch are at far left.



Even the tire proclaims: Exit 0.

and (if you're so inclined) metaphors.

The railroad embankment offers several vantage points above Dirt 66 looking down on wooden Great Depression-era bridges. Stop, turn off your engine, and hear history in the wind. Imagine what this must have been like generations ago when the world was still black-and-white. Recall the serious words of comedian Bill Maher: "If you think you have it tough, read history books."

There never were many people along this stretch and there are far fewer now.

In the 1910 Census, Quay County, New Mexico had 4.5-times the population of another hot, dry and lonesome place: Clark County, Nevada—home to Las Vegas.

You might have bet on Quay, figuring the odds heavily favored a 4.5-to-1 head start. But that count turned out to be the all-time peak. Since New Mexico's statehood in 1912, the county's population has fallen by 40%. Homesteaders quickly discovered how unyielding and unrewarding this land could be, even before the Dust Bowl. Today, most of Quay County has only 1.2 people per square mile.

Tucumcari, the county seat with restored neon signs and barely over 5,000 people, must seem like a big city to folks living out here. (You'll probably feel the same way after Dirt 66!) Hard to believe, but it's the largest place between Amarillo and Albuquerque (or Santa Fe): 285 miles.

At both ends of Dirt 66, an Interstate connection to the modern world hasn't helped much, if at all. Hard times returned decades ago and remained. But this time is different from the Great Depression because everybody else seems to be doing well, zooming by at 75 MPH.

San Jon on the western end of Dirt 66 used a misguided state "Anti-Bypassing Law" to prevent the final New Mexico section of I-40 from being built. It held traffic hostage for years on narrow overloaded two-lane early-50s pavement. Eventually, after the stretch became known as Slaughter Lane, highway planners caved and shifted their planned alignment several miles south—right to the edge of town. Yet San Jon's



This ruin still exists on the north side of Dirt 66. Here it gets its close-up in lovely pre-dawn light. Desperate taggers have since used it as a canvas.



A long-abandoned building and business near the middle of Dirt 66.



This remnant from a long-abandoned tourist court (motel) is the only well-known image from Dirt 66. The "authorized" sign was refreshed by some joker years ago. Vandals have hit the front and other side.



Rock Island trestle remnants framed by wooden construction on a 1930-era Route 66 bridge.

population has since plunged by almost half, and one of the two convenience stores with gas pumps at the lone I-40 interchange has given up. It was named "Winners."

Glenrio at prophetic TX Exit 0 has fared even worse, if that's possible. Highly misleading official signs claim the former town has an "I-40 Business Loop." But there's only one interchange, so you must create the loop yourself with a U-turn! Must be fun in a giant RV towing a car. There are no businesses either, so the signs are wrong on both counts. Even the state of Texas rejected Glenrio. The I-40 Welcome Center is in Amarillo—76 miles east.

On the north side of Exit 0, across the Interstate, Chevron and Texaco stations both conceded defeat and closed decades ago.

Their abandoned and trashed ruins are now Unwelcome Centers for Glenrio. This high-visibility and high-vandalism location has land enough to accommodate several gas stations plus McDonald's, Subway, Dunkin' Donuts, Starbucks, Applebee's, Cracker Barrel, Super 8, Hampton Inn, Love's Travel Stop and a Pilot Travel Center. But they're not here.

The mass-marketers of fuel, food and lodging (and potential franchisees) have taken a pass, every last one of them. They realize almost no potential customers or—equally important—potential employees live nearby, and all business has to come from the Interstate. This limited need

is met by a single location four-miles west: Russell's Travel Center at NM Exit 369 with fuel and food, and the come-on of a free car museum.

Along 100+ miles of I-40 (and Rt 66) between Amarillo and Tucumcari there are no McDonald's. Along 250+ miles between Amarillo and Edgewood NM there are no Starbucks or Walmarts. Their business models don't work out here.

Would two expensive interchanges and a resulting I-40 Business Loop along Route 66 have helped San Jon? Land sits vacant at the lone interchange. Would a real Business Loop have made any difference in Glenrio? Plenty of land here too, but even the state didn't want it. Interstate speeds, passing lanes, cruise control, larger gas tanks, and modern chain motels with new toll-free reservation numbers made both places irrelevant. Or, if you prefer: "roadkill."

American life accelerated on the Interstates, leaving low speed limits, narrow old pavement, and ordinary small-town businesses behind. Amarillo and Albuquerque had been six or seven hours apart, but I-40 cut it to less than four-hours. For those needing to stop more frequently there were rest areas and travel centers. Little towns were bypassed and discovered that few outsiders needed or missed them. Although these places were still on pavement, they got left...in the dust. 🚗



Frank Gifford has photographed Route 66 and other American roads for more than 20-years. His site www.rt66pix.com is viewed in 175 countries. He was the afternoon news anchor at KRLD 50-years ago.



DOLLAR GENERAL STORES VS ROUTE 66

Story by Kip Welborn. Images provided by the author.

Taking that California trip down Route 66 creates fond reminders of traveling the Mother Road, especially as you pass Stuckey's locations open and deserted, the Blue Whale and Jack Rabbit Trading Posts. Taking that California trip also creates questions as you pass through the many smaller towns you find along Route 66, starting with wondering what it was like when those towns were able to hold on to a completely independent life all their own.

I look at my hometown, Bloomfield, Missouri, down in the Missouri "Bootheel", halfway between St. Louis, MO and Memphis, TN.

As late as the late 1970's, you could walk down mainstreet Bloomfield, and find Charlie Christian's Liquor Store, where you could buy a six pack AND a nice pair of Levis, and Corbins' mens store, where you could buy the kind of suit you'd be proud to wear

anywhere. Next to Corbins was Kinser Jewelers, where Edgar Kinser worked his magic with every type of timepiece; Western Auto, where mom and dad bought me more than one bicycle and many more than one bicycle tire; Nicken's Pharmacy, where Cecil Vincent brought you your medication with a little humor attached; Dwight's Hardware and Pepper Bakery, a place my cousin Jeff Conner from Suburban Boston—the place where Dunkin Donuts was born—would pine for during summer vacations. And at lunch you'd likely find yourself at Hester's Café, where you could feast on some of the best fried chicken you would find anywhere 5 days a week, and treat yourself to some great fried fish on Saturday's.

Bloomfield had (literally) twin brothers Delmer and Elmer Underwood, who ran the Phillips 66 Station during the day.

They went home to their identical homes at night to spend the evening with



Mainstreet Bloomfield, MO my hometown circa 1977- June Welborn

their wives, who happened to be sisters that ran a beauty shop together. Bloomfield also had a bona fide general store, Bucks, where you could buy everything from shoes to groceries, to clothes to curtain material. There was the Briney and Welborn law offices, a firm established by my dad and my



Bank of Bloomfield, mainstreet Bloomfield- June Welborn

uncle Kip over 70 years ago, a firm my brother Briney keeps going successfully to this day. And Bloomfield has the old courthouse, the county seat of Stoddard County, MO, in the middle of the town square that is the definition of what a building means to a town. Mainstreet Bloomfield was the place where my brother and dad still did their Christmas shopping well into the 1970's. It was the place where I bought the new Hot Wheel's when they first came out at the U Save Mart, and it was the place where I bought my first pocket knife at Maupin's variety store.

I was in what was left of downtown Bloomfield a few months ago in the new courthouse building which housed the sheriff's office and various government offices.

The old courthouse is largely abandoned. Mainstreet consisted of a law office, an insurance company, a hairdresser and a construction company located in what was the Stoddard County Bank and Trust Company. This is a beautiful building that did not deserve this fate.

On that trip, I happened to walk into

what was the Bank of Bloomfield, another beautiful building. There, a group was holding a rummage sale, right in front of the old bank vault. It was a sad metaphor for the decline of what was once a very vibrant community. Gone are the businesses that made Main Street Bloomfield a mainstreet, except for the Briney and Welborn law offices, which is now located on mainstreet just south of the shell of what was downtown Bloomfield.

The old Stoddard County Courthouse is getting its old clock restored by a company out of Cape Girardeau, and that bell ringing will hopefully remind people when the day begins and ends.

Maybe the sound of the bell will remind someone of the days when Joe Welborn and his in town rival Elvis Mooney would battle each other in the courtroom of the Stoddard County Courthouse. On summer days when the windows were open and the suitcoats were off, crowds would congregate to hear the legal jousting.

Unfortunately, other than that, most of what is left of the businesses in Bloomfield, like many of the towns you find along Route 66, have left mainstreet and have congregated along the road designed to get you around downtown, in Bloomfield's case, State Highway 25. Now, if you follow Highway 25 around Bloomfield, you will find the town's healthcare unit, a counseling center, a flea market, the Food Giant grocery store, the Great Southern Bank, the Town Pharmacy, two convenience stores, and a DOLLAR GENERAL STORE.

The Dollar General Store is a chain that has, in recent years, grown like a weed in rural America and along Route 66. Today, if you get in a car, start your engine and point your vehicle east or west down Route 66, it

will not take long before you pass the yellow “Dollar General” store sign. Some Dollar General Stores you will find in the middle of nowhere, some you will find stuck in the middle of a strip mall on a busy urban street. In some situations, Dollar General has been a salvation, a revitalization of communities that had nothing else.



Christian's Store, downtown Bloomfield.

However, Dollar General Stores have also created detriments in locations across rural and urban America, including towns and cities along Route 66.

This is a store that claims interest in its patrons, but it is also a store that gives new meaning to the term profit motive, moving in to places no store would tread and eeking out a profit at the expense of those who have limited choices and less in their pocketbooks

The Dollar General Store chain was founded by James Turner and his son Cal Turner, Jr. (Cal Jr.). James' father, Luther Turner, according to Cal Turner, Jr.'s book on the Dollar General Stores, essentially utilized his third grade education and what he learned from “everyone that was smarter than he was”, to save monies from his tobacco business to purchase what would become Turner's Bargain Store on South Court

Street in Scottsville, KY. While the store would last only a short time, into the early 20's, it allowed James L. Turner. to dive into and come to understand the retail world. James Turner would become a traveling dry goods salesman before he adopted a new vocation: that being buying and liquidating bankrupt General Stores.



Buck's Store, downtown Bloomfield- Sue Welborn.

Prior to the Depression, The Metropolitan Insurance Company had lent a considerable amount of money to farmers.

Farmers began experiencing problems prior to the Great Depression but the Depression brought declining grain prices, declining land values and defaulting loans. The Metropolitan Life insurance Company eked their revenge on these poor farmers for their defaults by foreclosing on them en masse. And Metropolitan Life Insurance would paint the barn on the property red to memorialize their new acquisition. Turner and others swooped in and took advantage of the misery that the general stores had endured because of the Great Depression, and the monies collected were the seeds that would be used by Turner to build an empire.

James Turner. and Cal Turner, Jr.

utilized the monies from buying and liquidating bankrupt general stores to open J.T. Turner and Sons in Scottsville, KY. in October of 1939. J.T. Turner and Sons was a wholesale business, selling to independent retailers in Kentucky and Tennessee. Their business was substantial, earning \$65,000.00 profit in their first year. However, especially



Bloomfield Bank and Trust Company, downtown Bloomfield.

after World War II, according to Turner's book about "His Father's Business", markets were flooded with goods that James Turner purchased because they were cheap.

After purchasing these goods, he discovered that no one would buy them to sell them at retail.

James, Sr., who understood retail sales better, knew that he could sell these goods but knew that he would have to sell them at a lower price than other retailers. As such, in 1940, the Turners would partner with local

businessmen and would open retail stores in rural southern communities. The first store was opened in Albany, Kentucky, called Albany Dry Goods. From there, Turner, with the merchandise that he accumulated,



Bloomfield Bank and Trust Company, downtown Bloomfield.

broadened his horizons, sensing that there could be a store where the product he was selling could be sold for a dollar 365 days a year.



James and Cal Turner Jr. Vanderbilt.edu

James Turner decided to utilize his store in Springfield, KY, a failed junior department store, as his litmus test, turning it into his first Dollar General Store. The name he came up with for his new store combined

the import of emphasizing the “Dollar” and the trust people had in their “General Store.” Hence he called his new store the Dollar General Store. This store was so popular from the day that it opened that there were store attendees regulating the number of people in the store to control crowds. Turner would subsequently open a store in Memphis where, in 1955, there were 1.1 million dollars in sales in the first 10 months of operation. These successes led James Turner to turn all of his stores into Dollar General Stores.

Dollar General would continue to grow and in 1968 would take its place on the New York Stock Exchange. Dollar General would open a store in Dexter, MO, 6 miles south of my hometown, back in the early 1970’s, after Cal Turner Jr., became CEO of Dollar General Stores. I remember going there and buying a wastebasket that you could fold up, and, as I transferred to Dexter High School in ninth grade, I bought my Dexter Bearcats jacket there.

Luther Turner had laid down commandments for Dollar General Stores to live by years before Cal, Jr. took over.

1) Thou shall not acquire sick companies, 2) Thou shall not own a company plane, 3) Thou shall not deal with a New York or Chicago Bank and 4) thou shall not have more than one warehouse. As Cal, Jr. indicated in the book “we broke them all” and then some, including Cal Jr’s brother, Steve, being fired from the company, and James Turner being removed from the Board (though he was eventually put back). The turmoil resulted in a scaling back of operations, with stores like the one in Dexter, MO being closed. However, other stores held their own and by 2002, when Cal, Jr. retired, Dollar General Stores had grown to 6,000 stores and 4 Billion in sales.

Commencing in 2015, after Cal Turner, Jr. had been retired for a few years and Todd Vasos had taken over as CEO of Dollar General Stores, the chain began to expand on a massive scale. In 2013 there were 11,000 Dollar General Stores. By 2019 there were 16,000. Much of this growth happened after 2015, after which Dollar General Stores started expanding by about 1000 stores a year. Between 2019 and 2023 the number ballooned from 16000 to 18,979. Projections are to break 20000 this year.



The first Dollar General store opened as J.L. Turner And Son Wholesale on June 1, 1955 in Scottsville, KY. No item cost more than a dollar. - Mashed.com

That growth can be seen when cruising Route 66.

Michael Wallis once said that Route 66 is a mirror that reflects what is going on in the nation. Today you are hard pressed to find a town with a zip code along Route 66, at least in Missouri—which has 600 Dollar General Stores alone—that doesn’t have a Dollar General Store. On a recent trip, Quinn and I took between Pacific and Lebanon, MO, we counted the number of Dollar General outlets that we passed. We passed 12. I remember coming up on Stanton, MO—the closest town to Meramec Caverns—which has a gas station, the sometimes open Jesse James Wax Museum, a post office and not much else. I can't recall an actual store ever being in

operation there before or now, and as such I was surprised when I rolled over a hill and there was a brand new Dollar General Store in Stanton, MO with several cars in front.

Dollar General's prevalence along Route 66 and throughout rural America is an essential component of the company's overall strategy, a strategy that has made Dollar General Stores one of this country's biggest retailers.

While many stores have experienced declines in recent years as a result of everything from online shopping to inflation, in 2018 Dollar General Stores celebrated its 29th consecutive year of growth and that growth has continued to this day. And it's the largely rural communities along Route 66 and the rest of rural America that the Dollar General Store chain has to thank.

Dollar General Stores' growth is a result of the chain's tapping into an asset base that many other chain stores have forgotten and through which much of Route 66 passes, and that asset base is rural America, particularly lower income rural America. According to an NPR article, 70 percent of Dollar General Stores can be found in communities of 20,000 people or less. While you may have to travel 20 miles to find the nearest Walmart or grocery store, you may only have to travel 5-7 miles anywhere in the 48 states where Dollar General Stores has established itself to find a Dollar General Store.

I am not going to say that Dollar General Stores do not have their occasional positive place in rural or urban America. Along Route 66, there are towns where there may have been a grocery store 50 years ago but nothing since. In places like Stanton, Missouri, for example, there hasn't been anything resembling a grocery store or a store of any kind since Route 66 was

decertified. For towns like this, the Dollar General Stores provide retail accessibility that they have not seen in some time.

Some towns have engaged in letter writing campaigns to bring Dollar General Stores to their communities.

In some towns it is more than just a store; it is a point to congregate that has brought people together that have not been brought together ever. An NPR article talks about a Dollar General Store being built in



As of March 28, 2023, Dollar General operates 18,774 stores - vanderbilt.edu.

Cawker City, KA, population 450. The town lost its lone grocery store years ago, The Dollar General Store, therefore, became not only a place to buy food and retail items, it became a social center. "The Cawker City Mall", where you could go and see your friends and people from other communities.

However, Dollar General Stores also bring to rural America, including communities on Route 66, substandard goods, limited options, and a business plan where Dollar General Stores saturate rural areas, making it difficult for old businesses to stay in business and for new stores to open. Dollar General Stores also sell products that evoke memories from days of Route 66, selling products with the brands of once popular, even historic, items that all we have left is their name.

left is their name.

According to a series of articles on the mashed.com website, when Dollar General Stores move into every town with a zip code, they traditionally set up shop in pole barn style buildings that are between 7,000 and 8,500 square feet. The small sized buildings (which Dollar General Stores rent; they don't own their own buildings) allows Dollar General Stores to operate for a much lower costs than that of the retailers, and allows them to operate with a much smaller staff, around 8-9 people. And in their day by day operations Dollar General Stores tend to have less people than that working in a given store at a given time.

Shelves are in narrow aisles allowing for more merchandise to be sold.

More merchandise is also sold because the merchandise comes in smaller packages. This is also a critical reason why Dollar General Stores sell their merchandise at lower prices: While you are paying less for an item, part of the reason for that is that you are getting less for the item that you pay for. Customers may, in fact, be paying more for what they buy because they are spending their money on smaller items.

And, irrespective of the smaller package sizes, the lower prices are good for the demographic that Dollar General Stores are catering to. Dollar General Stores target

households with a combined income of \$40,000.00 per year as their base customer, and target customers in rural areas with a lure that they don't get much of: Convenience. Before the Stanton Dollar General store opened, residents had to drive to Sullivan or St. Clair. Now, there is a Dollar General Store in their backyard to run in, get something and leave. And in light of the fact that there is, on the average, one of these



A sale at an early Dollar General store in the 1950s.

stores every 5 to 7 miles, it is virtually impossible not to find one that is not "around the corner".

And with that convenience comes reliance, as shoppers will go to a Dollar General store for literally everything because everything at a Dollar General Store is convenient and affordable, and this includes food supplies. Part of Dollar General

Store's strategy is to place their stores in "food deserts", where there is not a place to buy food nearby. As such, people came to rely on this convenient stop in their own backyard for everything, including foodstuffs for their nutritional needs and to otherwise feed their families.

The problem is that most of what Dollar General sells has no connection to healthy eating habits.

Some of what a Dollar General Store sells is what you might buy if you went into any grocery store. However you would

purchase those items at that grocery store along with fruits, vegetables, and other more nutritional items. Dollar General Stores do not afford you with that luxury as, with rare exception, you will find no fresh fruits or vegetables at a Dollar General Store.

Unfortunately, when you shop there, you will find preprocessed items and stuff that was not meant to constitute a diet. But unfortunately

in the name of convenience and reliance, people will walk into a Dollar General Store and, in their mind, will find a three course meal to feed their family.

And once you get past the foodstuffs, Dollar General Stores sell everything from toiletries to clothes to toys to electronics to items that defy description.

You will often find homage to the Missouri Tigers or Oklahoma Sooners or the sports team of any state where the Dollar General is located. You will also find plenty of camo, an homage to the military and other groups peculiar to the rural community all in an effort to bring in customers.

And then there are those items like Quinn and I discovered when we stopped at the Dollar General Store on Route 66 in Villa Ridge, MO on Route 66 in January of this year. Among the items that we found perusing the aisles were a few items, the significance of which took me back. Among

the Vivitar Wireless Ear Plugs, the Ray-O-Vac USB Cords and the Panasonic batteries, the “item” that I found in the deluge of “quality” offerings at this Dollar General Store that really struck me was a Bell and Howell ice scraper. I admit that I purchased it, and it is a fine ice scraper; however, every time I look at it I think there is something really wrong about the fact that the name BELL AND

HOWELL has been emblazoned onto an ICE SCRAPER.

When I think of Bell and Howell, I think about the company that created the film projector that my parents used to show the stories of my life for decades, and a slide projector that reminded us of how Kodachrome produced the nice bright colors. Bell and Howell took all of the memories

that my mom created with her CineKodak magazine 8 movie camera and the slides created by the multitude of Instamatic cameras that she ran through, and emblazoned them onto the big (6 by 6) home movie screen.

My mom documented on film and Instamatic camera the story of our lives.

Bell and Howell projected those memories onto that “big” screen, memories that I will never forget.

It is a sad statement that the names of products that served us so well for so long are sold off to be emblazoned on any product that



Today's Dollar General store - Amanda La Fluer, Wikimedia Commons

products that served us so well for so long are sold off to be emblazoned on any product that pays a buck for it. I collect Elgin wristwatches. These watches were once some of the best watches made in this country. The father of Elgin Baylor, Elgin Baylor being one of the greatest professional basketball players of all time and a member of the NBA Hall of Fame, named his son after his Elgin wristwatch “because (the watch) was steady, dependable and on time, qualities he wanted to—and did—pass on to his son”. The name of this wonderful timepiece is now “emblazoned” on a wide variety of



A leader in the motion picture industry, now ice scapers?

products, including watches that are, in terms of quality, Elgin in name only....and available at your local Dollar General Store!

And the massive influx of Dollar General Stores into urban and rural communities, along Route 66 and across the country, have compromised any and all grocers and mercantile stores in those communities.

The Institute of Local Self Reliance (ILSR) has been fighting since 1974 to fight corporate influx into communities and to build economies based on local priorities. And one of the Institute's focuses has been on the impact of Dollar Stores, particularly the Dollar General Store. According to a report from the Institute, “when dollar store chains open, it almost always cuts into the sales of local businesses. Dollar stores utilize their hefty market muscle to outsell and outlast any competitive business, making it virtually impossible for alternative businesses to successfully compete.”

According to ILSR, most mercantile stores operate on a razor thin profit margin, and profit is required for survival. As such, the influx of Dollar General Stores takes enough profit away to ensure that grocers and other mercantile establishments are unable to generate sufficient revenue to survive much less compete. As such, in many towns, particularly rural communities where there are limited choices, Dollar General

Stores will put groceries and mercantile stores out of business. Despite smaller product sizes and limited food choices, Dollar General Stores will provide

convenience, which will create reliance on that convenience and what they sell, which will result in consumers choosing Dollar General Stores over other alternatives.

Dollar General Stores don't just edge out existing grocery stores; they also make it much less likely that a new grocery store will open in the same neighborhood.

And when a town or neighborhood has more than one Dollar General store, the odds are even greater that a new grocery store would not be able to survive there. According to an article from the Michigan School of Economics, communities where you have independent businesses tend to rely upon each other for survival. However, when a corporate source like Dollar General Stores moves in, the revenue generated does not funnel out into the community as much as it funnels back to the corporate headquarters and out of the community. When you have a Dollar General Store that makes its presence felt in literally every community on Route 66, the

revenue that Dollar General Stores sucks out of the community makes it difficult for the rest of the mercantile community to sustain itself. That can spell doom for other businesses in a community based on reliance on each other.

However, as reported by the ILSR, some towns are fighting back. An alderman in Tulsa, OK, for example, noticed that her ward was inundated with Dollar General Stores and other Dollar Stores (Family Dollar and Dollar Tree), and what few stores that offered alternatives had been pushed out of business.

The alderman came up with a proposal that there could not be a Dollar Store within 5,280 feet of another Dollar Store. As part of the ordinance, the Tulsa City Council agreed to provide incentives to grocery stores that offer fresh meat, fruits and vegetables." This kind of legislation will not work everywhere, but it is a start towards figuring out how to give other businesses a chance and to limit the influx of Dollar General Stores into rural and urban communities on Route 66 and elsewhere.

However, at the end of the day, the issue with curbing the influx of Dollar General Stores in rural areas will, unfortunately, not translate into a SOLUTION to the disappearance of the Mainstreet of Rural America.

Unfortunately, the towns where Dollar General stores have swooped into, that once had a Pepper's Bakery, a Charlie Christian's

Liquor Store, a Corbins, a Buck's Store, in many cases do not have an alternative or do not have the prospect of a store opening up to take Dollar General Store's place.

There are so many reasons why Dollar General Stores are a detriment to every community where they hang their yellow block letter sign.



Bell and Howell, once a major corporation, suffered significantly. The 72-acre McCormick Blvd. headquarters was sold off in 1986 after the last vestiges of the B&H audio-visual department were dissolved.

Dollar General's stock and practices have made people reliant on substandard, unhealthy products, and Dollar General Stores induce people into believing that they are getting a better deal, one worth avoiding the extra miles that it takes to get to better

alternatives, because they sell smaller packages but at cheaper prices. And they suck the life out of existing, viable businesses and bring little economically to the communities that they swoop into. Unfortunately, while these problems would be remedied by limiting Dollar General's presence in rural areas, the only way that rural areas will see a return of their part of the Mainstreet of America will require inspiration, resources, and a public that, because of those resources and that inspiration, are willing to forget about the "big box" stores a few miles down the road and shop on THEIR mainstreet.

Maybe, we should take heed of the lesson that the Dollar General Store actually taught us.

That a town like Stanton, MO, with a population of 366, and nothing else other than a convenience store/gas station and what is left of an intersection that once had

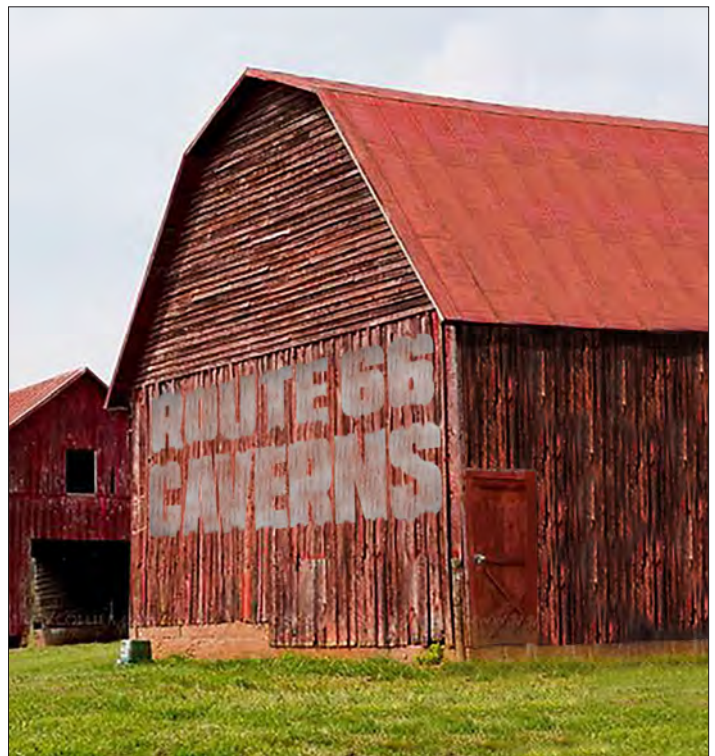
several tourist traps, can have a store that is constantly doing business and constantly has customers from the opening till closing. No, Dollar General Stores do not provide what the public needs, but if they can build it, and bring in customers, why can't somebody else.

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Kip Welborn is a founding member of Friends of the Mother Road, Inc., a nonprofit corporation dedicated to preservation and rehabilitation along Route 66. He is also a member of the Route 66 Association of Missouri, and has cochaired the Missouri Association's Motor Tour for the past several years. He has written a book "Things To Look Out For On Route 66 In St. Louis" (which is available at friendsofthemotherroad.org for \$12.25, shipping included), and cruises the Mother Road with his wife Quinn and his daughter Natalie Kay.



ROUTE 66 TOURIST CAVERNS PART THREE

Story by David Knudson. Images provided by the author.

A lot has happened this last quarter as far as Route 66 tourist caverns go. We were supposed to have Part Three of the series in the last issue but hours for the caverns were fluxuating so much we didn't want to encourage readers to visit them. I suspect little was lost though because people just weren't traveling much, anyway. Then we discovered two more caverns that had apparently reopened—Smallin Civil War Cave and Crystal Cave, both in Missouri the "Cave State".

Two quarters ago, we ended with The Apache Death Cave (4) in Arizona (Vol. 28 #3). Now, we're in Missouri and moving East to Fantastic Caverns (5).

FANTASTIC CAVERNS (5)

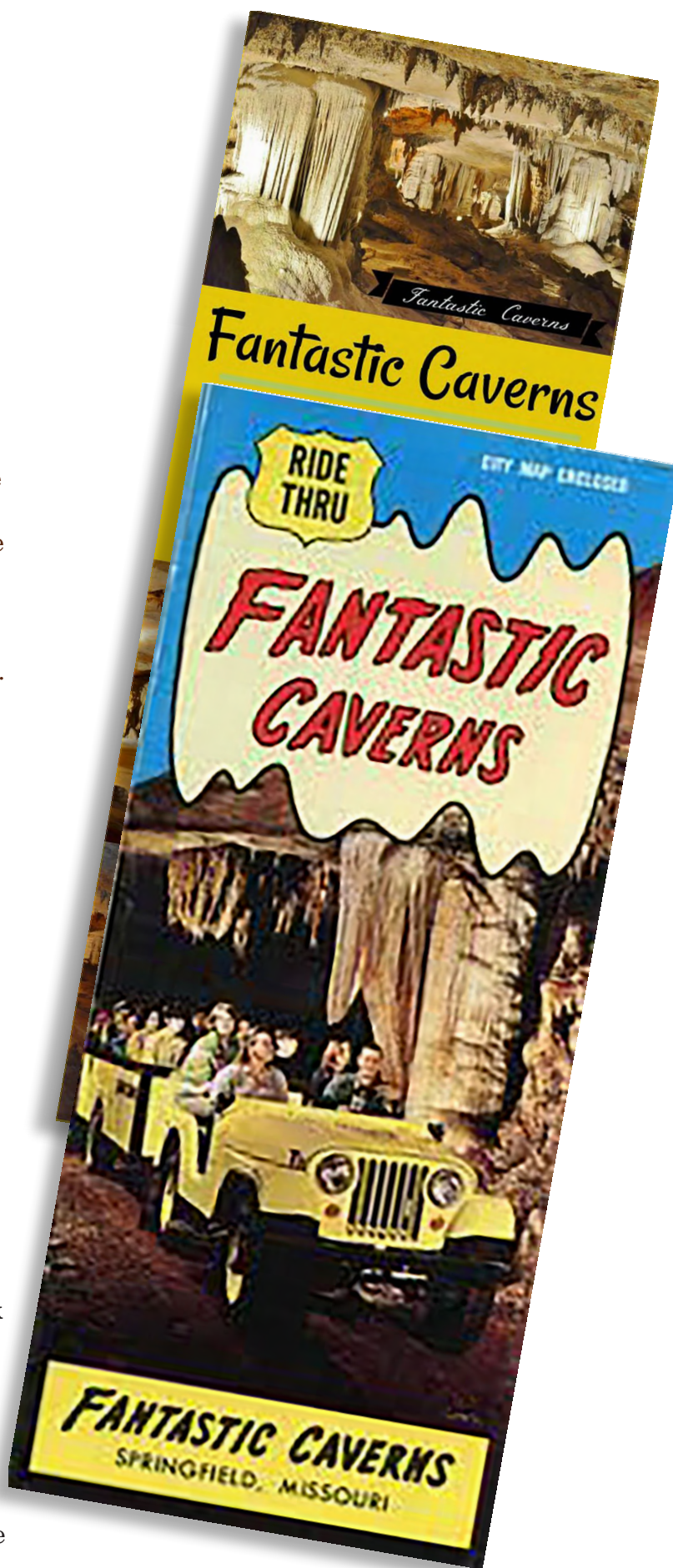
8 miles northwest of Springfield, MO
on Hwy. 125

Missouri is called the Cave State because it boasts about 6,300 registered caves, most of them in the Ozarks in the southern half of the state.

In December of 1866, a farmer named John Knox was hunting on his property northwest of Springfield, Missouri when his dog chased a rabbit into a hole and didn't come back. Knox dug out the hole and discovered the dog trapped on a ledge inside a large cavern.

As he rescued the dog, he was awe-struck by the cavern's imposing size. So much so, he decided to open it to the public as a tourist attraction.

Knox named the caverns Knox Cave and set admission at fifty cents, but women could get in free. Taking advantage of the free admission, twelve adventurous ladies from the





Early transportation through the Caverns.

Springfield Women's Athletic Club visited the cave on February 27, 1867. Equipped with ropes and ladders, inched their way through passages, lighted only by the flickering lamps they carried. Popular legend says that these women comprised the very first exploratory party of the caverns.

Knox Cave remained a minor attraction until 1887, when it was purchased by a group of investors led by A. H. Rogers. He renamed the place Percy Cave after his deceased son.

Rogers installed electric lights in the cave and began heavily promoting it as a resort. He sold it to J. W. Haun who ran it for ten years, until his death in 1900. During most of Haun's tenure, the cave was open only during warm months and only two days a week except by special arrangement.

After Haun's death, the Percy Cave property was turned into a goat ranch; the incarnation existed for the next ten years.

In 1911, J. W. Crow bought the property and tried to grow mushrooms inside

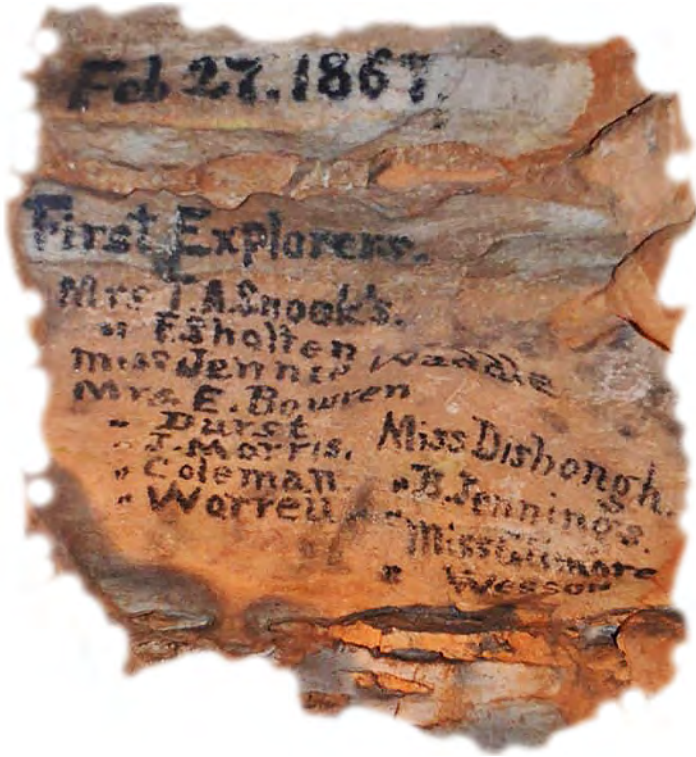
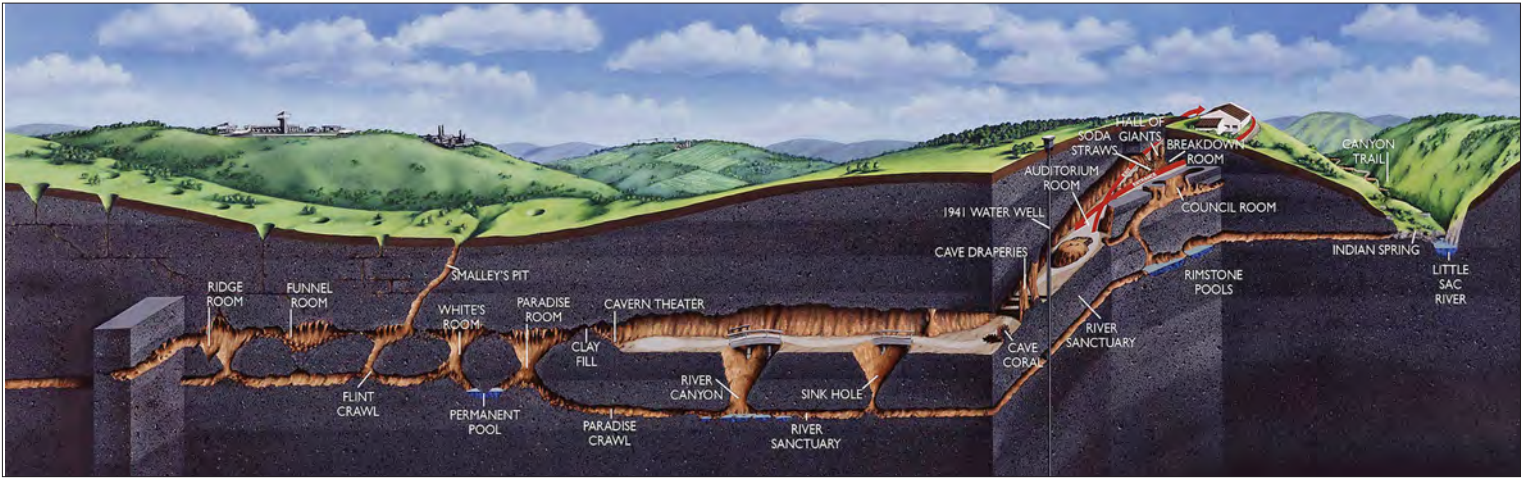
the cave. He soon abandoned the plan and converted it back into a tourist resort featuring picnicking, camping, fishing, music, and dancing.

In keeping with many early Route 66 promotional efforts, Crow put forth a bizarre story about an albino bull inside the cave which was malarky. The tale did little to revive the cave's flagging business.

In 1920, Crow offered to give part of the property to the state government for a fish hatchery, but instead Sequiota Park in south Springfield was selected for the site.

During the Prohibition and Depression eras, the cave was sometimes used as an underground speak-easy and gambling hall.

The cave was first called Fantastic Caverns in 1951 when two men, one of whom was affiliated with Bridal Cave at Camdenton, purchased it and promoted it both as a tourist attraction and as a bomb shelter during America's cold war with Russia.



Top moving clockwise: cutaway of the extensive cavern complex; flyer from Farmarama which the caverns hosted during the 1950s and 1960s: live audiences came to see the show which was nationally broadcast on NBC radio stations; twelve adventurous ladies from the Springfield Women's Athletic Club visited the Caverns on February 27th 1867 scrawling their names on the Cavern wall.



It hosted live music concerts during the 1950s and 1960s. Live audiences came to see the “Farmarama” show, which was nationally broadcast on NBC radio stations from the cavern’s largest room. Many of the biggest country western names of the time played at Farmarama

In 1960, the cave was purchased by the Trimble family, who also owned the Shepherd of the Hills Farm near Branson. In the late sixties, propane-powered, Jeep-drawn trams were introduced, and Fantastic Caverns soon grew into the very popular tourist destination that it is today.

Since 1966, the Campbell family managed the property and in 1992, they purchased it.

Today, visitors experience the cave on a 1-mile tram tour making it comfortable for everyone, including those individuals with physical limitations, parents with small children and seniors.

This is an all-weather attraction—the temperature inside the cave remains at 60 degrees—warm in the winter and cool in the summer.

Admission Prices:

General Admission Adult:	\$30.00
General Admission Child: (Age 6-12)	\$17.00
Children 5 and Under:	Free with Parent
Adult Group Rate:	\$22.50
Child Group Rate: (Age 12 & under)	\$7.00
Adult Season Pass	\$35.00
Child Season Pass	\$22.00

Fantastic Caverns is open 362 days a year, with operating hours of 8:00 am to dusk throughout the year except Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Eve & Christmas Day.

Departures occur every 20-30 minutes throughout the day and the all-riding cave experience lasts about an hour.

The last departure of the day leaves the visitor center one hour before closing.

Website: <https://fantasticcaverns.com>

Phone: 417-833-2010

Fax: 417-833-2042

E-mail: info@fantasticcaverns.com

4872 N Farm Rd 125

Springfield, MO 65803



Early advertising flyer.



SMALLIN CIVIL WAR CAVE (6)

From Strafford on Rt 66 take 125 south about 11 miles to Cody. Then west around 3 miles to Hwy. NN then south down approximately 11 miles to the cave.

The Midwestern drought reduced and eliminated many lakes and rivers. In so doing, the Smallin Civil War Cave was uncovered for the first time in decades.

Smallin Cave was the first documented cave in the Ozarks, documented in 1818 by explorer Henry Rowe Schoolcraft. It is obvious that the cave was used for Civil War related activities and was occupied by the Osage and Cherokee tribes also.

Tours:

Regular, one-hour guided tours travel one-half mile. Trails are wheelchair and stroller friendly; no stairs, just gradual inclines.

Students will never forget this exciting, expedition. Their visit will often include sightings of bats, salamanders, and the rare bristly cave crayfish.

Wild cave tours are offered by reservation only: a two-hour, one-mile underground adventure off the beaten path, lit only by the headlamp on your helmet. During this tour, you walk through at least two feet of 54-degree water and traverse rugged terrain; lace-up shoes, headlamps, and helmets are required for this tour; age 12 and older only; younger than 18 must be accompanied by parent. Helmets and headlamps can be rented. Minimum of four persons.

Civil War Lantern Tours are offered in the fall. Join the group around the campfire for an evening of southern food, storytelling and a lantern-light trip through the cave. Reservations are required.

Osage Trading Post:

Affordably priced souvenirs for as little as \$0.50, and a lot of historical and educational merchandise. Along the way to the gift shop, visit the "Sidewalk Museum".

Address: 3575 N Smallin Rd, Ozark, MO 65721

Phone: (417) 551-4545 (call for prices)

Hours: Mar - Dec Mon - Sat: 9:30 - 5:00

Sun: 1:00 - 5:00

Jan-Feb (Contact us for hours)

Website: <https://smallincave.com/>

E-mail: info@smallincave.com



Left: Advertising window sticker for cars that tourists displayed to show (brag about) all the places they'd been. Below: Page in the 1923 National Geographic magazine featuring the cave.



448

THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE



Photograph by Robert Eagby

THE ENTRANCE TO SMALLEN'S CAVE, IN THE OZARKS
The large angular rocks on the floor of the cave have fallen from the ceiling, where the strata are horizontal. Weathering has greatly increased the size of the entrance.

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC 1923



CRYSTAL CAVE (7)

North up from Springfield, MO on N State Hwy H approximately 5 miles.

The first recorded owners of Crystal Cave were William A. Wallace, followed by William Jenkins in 1882. Neither of the men made an attempt to develop the cave commercially. But, the third owner, Alfred Mann, did. The cave was officially opened to the public in 1893, making Crystal Cave the second commercial show cave in Missouri after Mark Twain Cave in Hannibal.

The cave then went through a series of owners ending up with the current owners in 1921—the Dole family who made a lot of additions.

Mini-Golf Course: A challenging 9-hole indoor course featuring obstacles and vintage animatronics placed around the course.

Gift Shop: The shop offers curios, old-time games, magic tricks, minerals and gems, hats and shirts, vintage collectibles, plushies and more.

Penny Arcade: Here you try your hand at a dozen restored vintage arcade machines such as “Test Your Strength,” “See Your Future,” “Shake Hands with Uncle Sam,” “The Claw Machine,” “See An Old Time Movie,” and “Shoot a Pistol.”

Gemstone Mining & Fossil Digging: Gemstone panning. You’re guaranteed to find gemstones, fossils, and other artifacts, three sections of pay-dirt: The Prospector, Emerald Strike, and The Mother Lode. Each includes an identification card and keeper bag, allowing participants to identify and take home the treasures they discover.

Train Ride: Trains aren’t just for children. Begin your adventure by boarding the train and enjoying the narrated ride around the historic property. Learn fun facts and historical tidbits about the cave and the families who have owned it. Keep your eyes open for wildlife.

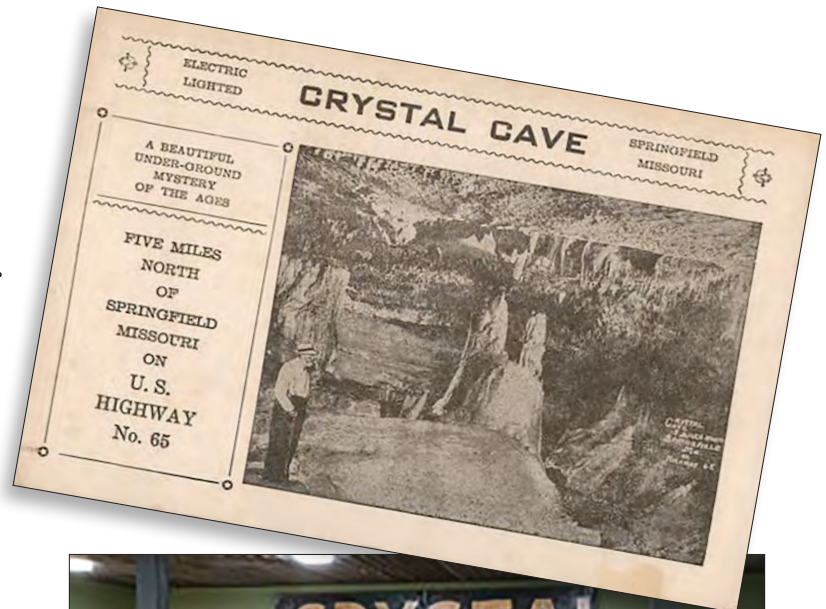
Address: 7126 N Crystal Cave Lane
Springfield, MO 65803

Phone: (417) 815-CAVE (2283)

Hours: Wednesday - Sunday: 10am - 5pm
Year Round (Closed Mondays & Tuesdays. Also closed on Easter, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day.)

Website: <https://visitcrystalcave.com/>

E-mail: info@visitcrystalcave.com





ONANDAGA CAVE (8)

Approximately 5 miles south on Hwy H from Route 66 to the village of Leasburg, Missouri, then continue another 5 miles south to Onandaga Cave State Park.

Each of the Route 66 tourist caves have similar yet distinctly different histories. Typically, research produces quite a few differences in a cave's history. For example, most reports indicate that Charles Christopher discovered Onandaga Cave in 1886. Others suggest that Daniel Boone may have discovered it in 1798.

Here is a synopsis of the history stated on the Onandaga Cave website:

1850 - George and Statirah Cresswell settled on the Meramec River, near Saranac Springs and built a mill.

1881 - A flood destroyed the Cresswell's mill so they sold the property to William Henry Rollosion Davis, who built a new mill at Davis Spring.

1886 - While examining the spring's outlet on the millpond, a local resident, Charles Christopher, saw that a large body of water was inside. He and two friends, John Eaton and Mitis Horine, took a small boat into the cave to explore. Christopher and Eaton went into partnership and acquired the land that was over the cave. Soon, they began development of their "Mammoth Cave of Missouri".

1897 - Christopher and Eaton had difficulty deciding whether to develop the cave for tours or as a mine. Cave mineral deposits or "cave onyx" were in demand for building stone. The cave was surveyed for mining purposes, but tours were given also.

1899 - The property was sold to the firm of Bothe & Rathermann, a St. Louis group headed by George Bothe, Sr.

1902 - Eaton then sold his holdings to Eugene Hunt Benoist of the Indian Creek Land Co. on May 7, 1902. Christopher sold to the Bothe group, whose intent was to mine the cave.

Next, Bothe and Philip Franck formed a

company for the purpose of mining the cave. Some test mining was done, but considering the cave's small entrance and a drop in "cave onyx" prices they decided it made mining unprofitable. So, the cave was opened as a tourist attraction.

1904 - A name for the cave was chosen from the names of three Indian tribes. Onandaga means "People of the Mountain."

1910 - Bothe sold the property to his niece, Catharine Weinborg.

1913 - Weinborg leased the cave to Bob Bradford, who eventually bought it, or so he thought.

1930 - Dr. Mook, who had leased the Benoist property for a doctor's resort, got word from Ed Houser and Edward Myers of Cuba, MO that about one-half of Onandaga Cave was under Dr. Mook's land. With his brother, Robert Lee Mook, serving as manager of Missouri Caverns, Inc., Dr. Mook had a tunnel dug into Onandaga Cave and Bradford and his tours were told to stop trespassing.

1932 - Missouri Caverns opened as the first electrically lighted Missouri Ozarks cave. (The stone ruins to the east of and below State Road H, just up from the current visitor center parking lot, are the former Missouri Caverns buildings.)

1934 - Senatorial candidate Harry S Truman and the Democrats had a picnic and tour of Missouri Caverns. On the same day, the Republicans toured Onandaga Cave. They met at the fence and an underground political debate ensued.

1935 - On May 7, the Missouri Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Mooks and the Indian Creek Land Co. This brought little comfort to Mook, who had died in November of 1934.

1938 - Bradford had a walkout exit from the cave dug. (This is the entrance which is still used today.) Prior to this, tourists went in and out by boat through an opening at the spring; after this, they boated in and walked out.

Legal problems at Missouri Caverns

plus the decrease in tourism during World War II caused it to be closed. Cathedral Cave also closed at this time, and with the death of Bradford, Onondaga Cave's future was shaky.

1945 - Mary Bradford sold out to the Barnard Hospital. For the first time, Onondaga Cave had only a single owner. Charles Rice, a director of the hospital, gained control of Onondaga Cave, Missouri Caverns and Cathedral Cave. Freed of the problems that had plagued Bradford, he hired Al Bryan as manager and began improvements.

1953 - The Rice estate sold the property to Lester B. Dill and Lyman Riley. Dill had been in the cave business since he was a boy. He had operated both Fisher and Mushroom caves at Meramec State Park and developed Saltpetre Cave into Meramec Caverns.

1967 - Riley sold his interest in the cave to Dill.

1970 - Congress had approved a dam on the Meramec River near Pacific in 1938 for flood control. However, in 1943, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers decided to relocate the dam upstream near Meramec State Park. At a public hearing in 1949, Riley was one of those who spoke in favor of the dam, believing that tourism would increase and improve the local economy. The new plan was authorized by Congress in 1967; it included the Meramec Dam and 30 others within the Meramec Basin.

1973 - Dill joined the opposition after it was determined that the lake would actually flood up to 80 percent of Onondaga Cave.

1975 - Dill briefly reopened Cathedral Cave under the name of its old competitor, Missouri Caverns. New trails and electric lights were installed. This operation was unsuccessful, and the cave closed again shortly thereafter. Vandals eventually destroyed the lighting system and visitor building.

1978 - Although not binding, a public referendum was held on the issue on Aug. 8 and 64 percent of the voters opposed the dam.

The deauthorization bill was signed into law on Dec. 19, 1981.

1980 - In another twist of fate, Dill died on Aug. 13 at the age of 81, one and one-half years before the dam deauthorization.

1981 - With the aid of The Nature Conservancy and the cooperation of the Dill estate, Onondaga Cave became a state park, dedicated to the memory of Dill.

Park Amenities and Activities

Camping

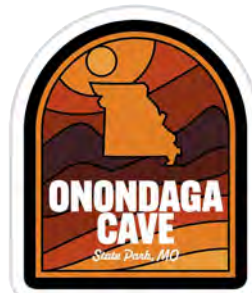
Onondaga offers a campground with reservable basic, electric, and family sites. The campground has a store, amphitheater, and playground.

Water Activities

Fishing is allowed in the Meramec River or in the Blue Heron Millpond. The park has a boat/ canoe ramp, but no rentals are available within the park. There are areas people use for swimming in the adjacent Meramec River, however it is at your own risk.

Visitor's Center

The Visitor's Center has exhibits about the natural and cultural history of caves in the area. There is also a gift shop, restrooms, and the place to purchase tickets for the cave tour.



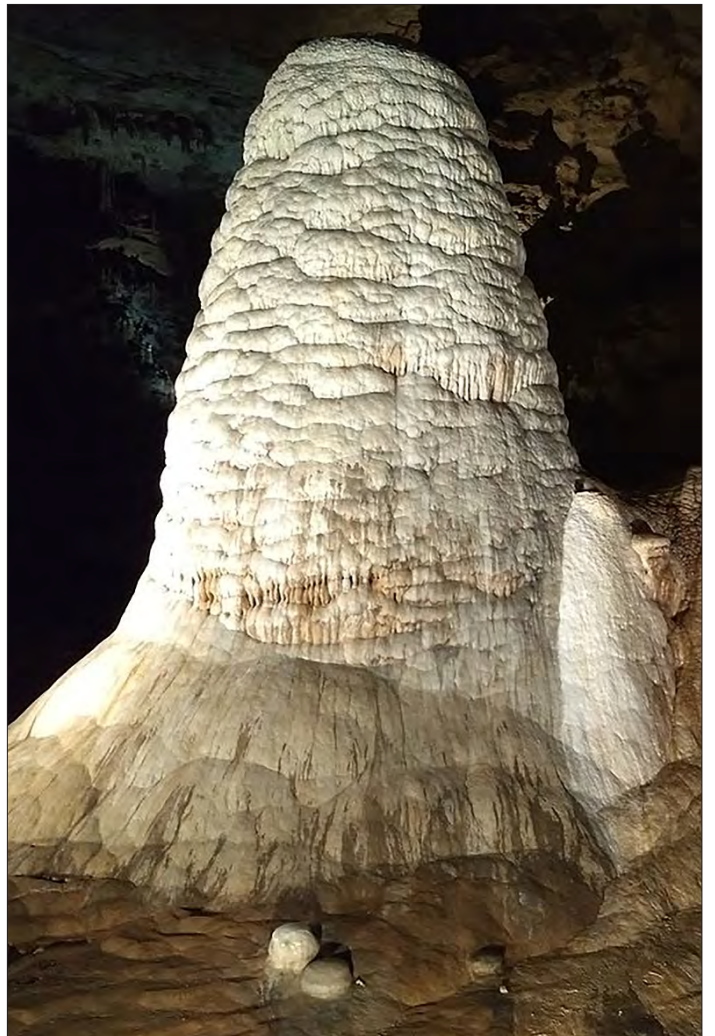
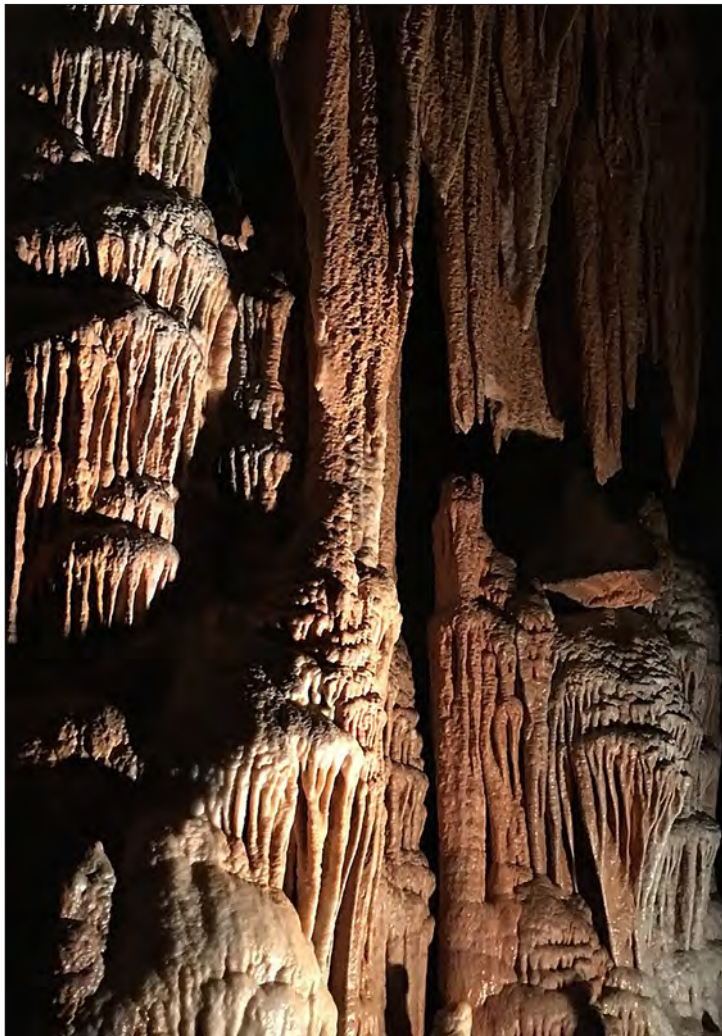
Public tours are offered April 1 through the close of business on September 15 at scheduled times throughout the day, depending on the season and available staffing.

Address: 7556 Missouri H, Leasburg, MO

Phone: (573) 245-6576

Website:

<https://mostateparks.com/park/onondaga-cave-state-park>





MERAMEC CAVERNS (9)

This is the last article in a series of 9 about Route 66 tourist caves.

From the Route 66 town of Stanton, take Highway W 3.5 miles south down to the cave entrance.

Having been in the advertising business most of my life, I have been impressed with the exploits of Lester Dill, owner of Meramec Caverns between 1930s and the 1980s.

It is said that he invented the bumper sticker. While people were parked in the caverns' parking lot enjoying the underground scenery, he and his "bumper sign boys" would put Meramec stickers on the cars. He said everyone enjoyed it because they got free souvenirs. I wonder if everyone really did.

Dill's other notable marketing venture was painting Meramec ads on barns in 14 states. He would paint the entire barn at no cost to the owner as payment for the ad.

I think it is rather safe to say Meramec is the most famous cave on the Mother Road. It is the largest commercial cave in a state that boasts almost 6,400 caves, 26 of which are commercial. An estimated 150,000 people visit the attraction, annually.

The history of Meramec Caverns is quite straightforward compared to the preceding Route 66 caverns I've covered here.

The published histories of the others were a grab bag of conflicting statements. So I'm wondering if Lester Dill, the astute marketer, edited and controlled the output, making sure it stayed relatively truthful or at least consistent.

In 1720, a small group of men including Philipp Renault a French explorer, and an Osage Indian guide were in a small boat on the Meramec River when they came upon a gaping 50 feet wide, 20 feet high hole in a bluff. The Indians had told Renault of a

gigantic hole in the earth his people would use for refuge when they were caught in extreme weather. The guide also claimed that "veins of glittering yellow metal" covered the walls of the cave. Of course Renault thought this must be gold.

The men had inadvertently discovered the largest cave west of the Mississippi. But, it wasn't gold that lined its walls, it was saltpeter.

Saltpeter, or potassium nitrate, was an important ingredient in the manufacturing of gunpowder at that time. Renault's discovery began the Meramec Mining Company which embarked on 144 years of saltpeter mining.

Many disputes for control of the cave and its precious mineral would follow the discovery.

Then in 1864, Confederate troops destroyed a Union-held gunpowder facility inside of the cave which brought an end to saltpeter mining in Meramec Caverns.

In the 1890's, people from the neighboring town of Stanton, held "cave parties" during summer months to avoid the stifling heat outside. Meramec Caverns was especially popular for these types of events because of a very large room just 300 feet inside the cave entrance. The room was large enough to accommodate big crowds, as well as a 50-foot by 50-foot dance floor and became known as the "Ballroom".

In 1898 Charles Ruepple purchased Meramec Caverns, then known as Saltpeter Cave. Ruepple headed a dance committee along with other men from Stanton who continued the cave parties with dancing through 1900.

Lester Dill began his cave promotion days with a small cave in Meramec State Park, known as Fisher's Cave. Although Dill enjoyed working on Fisher's Cave, he wanted more, and in 1933 he approached Charles Ruepple about the prospect of purchasing his cave. Mr. Dill's sole interest was to develop it into a show cave that would be entertainment for the public. Charles was reluctant at first,

but eventually agreed to sell the cave to Dill who immediately changed the name from Saltpeter Cave to Meramec Caverns and began promoting it and offering cave tours to the public.

In that same year, Dill made a significant discovery.

While inspecting a portion of the cave, he noticed a small crevice in one of the cave walls. Climbing up to the crevice, he felt a small, cool breeze flowing through the opening. He shouted into the hole in hopes of getting an echo back from the other side. When the echoes of his shouts returned, he knew immediately there was more cave beyond the wall.

Among the numerous formations found in what are now called the “upperlevels”, Les stumbled across what would become the cave's most prized possession now known as the “Stage Curtain”.

Standing nearly 70 feet tall, Dill built his show cave around it, and named the room the “Theater Room”.

In the summer of 1941, Missouri was in a severe drought. At that time, the main level of Meramec Caverns seemed to 'dead end' at a wall with a small pool of water spilling out below. As a result of the drop in the water table, the pool of water below the wall receded nearly six inches and allowed a cool breeze to issue out. Dill was alerted to this by a guide. Dill bravely elected to go under the wall and under and through the water, to see what was on the other side. Once past the wall, he discovered even more cave. It was here, he found the artifacts said to be traceable to the outlaw Jesse James earning it the name “Jesse James Hideout”.

After the discovery of 1941 and the addition of an opened lower level room in 1947, uncovering miles of new passages, Meramec Caverns was complete.

Another marketing ploy took place in 1960 when billboard space was rented in the

caverns making the claim this was the only underground billboard in the world.

In the summer of 1972, Meramec Caverns provided the cave settings for Tom Sawyer, a musical film which was released to theaters the following year. An episode of Lassie was also filmed here.

Facilities include: a gift shop, a sluice, picnic areas, a candy store, a restaurant, a motel, a campground, canoe and raft rentals, Jesse James Wax Museum and a zipline.

Address: 1135 Hwy W, Sullivan, MO

Hours: 9AM -6PM Open every day except Christmas and Thanksgiving

Phone: (573) 468-2283

Website: <https://www.americascave.com/>

Admission: \$27.00





The cave's most prized possession is known as the "Stage Curtain". Standing nearly 70 feet tall, Lester Dill built his show cave around it, and named the room the "Theatre Room".





ROUTE 66 Q&A:

Answers by knowledgeable enthusiasts.

For years after the Federation was founded, it was just about the only source for answers to Route 66 questions. Today, there are many other sources, not the least of which is the internet. Of course, not all of the answers are accurate. But the questions remain pretty much the same. These are not technical questions like “How far is it from Chicago to Rolla?”. They are answers to questions you might have about traveling the Route. If you are a seasoned 66 traveler these are strictly ho hum. If not, they may prove to be helpful.

Q: How do I find the best places to stay and eat on Route 66?

A: It used to be a little easier to find places to stay and eat along the Route when the Federation published the “Route 66 Dining & Lodging Guide.” But, you can still find reliable and current suggestions in the “Guided 66 Tour” book, the “EZ GUIDE For Travelers” and the “Route 66 Road Trip” book. Although more and more people simply use the internet. For example, you may want to find a place for lunch on the Route in Tulsa. Just enter into your search engine “Route 66 Tulsa, Oklahoma restaurants” and you’ll get a nice selection, and Trip Advisor will also give you current reviews. You can do the same thing searching for places to stay.

Q: What is the best time of year to travel on Route 66?

A: Typically, you will find the most comfortable weather in Spring and Fall. The “high season” is Summer when most people have their vacations and school is out. But it can be quite hot, particularly in the deserts. You can run into rain nearly any time and any place. But, chances are good, you’ll drive out of

it. Winter can be hazardous with snow and ice. Yet, many retirees, whose time is flexible, prefer it because prices are often lower and there are fewer people. If you are considering traveling the Route in Winter, allow extra time in case you are snowed in. A Winter bonus is the snow scenes, particularly in the mountains.

Q: Should I make reservations in advance at hotels or motels along the Route?

A: If you are particularly interested in staying at a particular place on a particular date, definitely make reservations—even if it is off season—because groups can fill a facility at any time. But, if you’re traveling without a planned schedule, you’ll have to take your chances. Usually, if a place is full, something else in the town will be available. Many innkeepers will even call around for you if they are full.

Q: I will not be able to travel the entire length of the Route this time. What portion would you recommend?

A: It depends on your interests. The Mother Road is blessed with a wide range of sights and interests. The states that have the most original sites are Illinois and Missouri. So, if you’re looking for roadside Americana, those are your states. Although there’s plenty to see in all eight states. Many travelers, particularly from other countries, are interested in Native Americans. Along the Route, the states populated by the most Native Americans are Oklahoma and New Mexico. If you’re looking for cowboys—Texas, California and Oklahoma have the most.

Q: Where are the most natural scenic sites?

A: Many believe Arizona’s Sonoran and

California's Mojave deserts are scenic while most consider the Route's mountain ranges to be the most awe-inspiring. These can also be found in Arizona and California.

Q: Should I take my RV on Route 66?

A: You certainly can take your RV if you like. But you will miss a lot of the personality of the Route if you stay and eat in your RV. Route 66 was, first and foremost, a commercial highway that provided a means to get across country, and in so doing, it also provided places for its travelers to stop and eat. Some of the most iconic sites are early motels and restaurants. If you stick to your RV, you will miss out on these. There are areas on the old road that are difficult for RVs to handle and several low bridges. These are pointed out in the EZ66 GUIDE For Travelers.

Q: How long does it take to travel the entire Route?

A: The only answer is "It depends." Do you want to spend a day in Santa Fe? Do you want to go up to the Grand Canyon? Do you want to stop at the Route 66 museums? You get the point. To give you some parameters though; we suggest you figure an average of 200 miles a day. Recently, we got an e-mail from a lady stating "I made the whole road in less than 5 days." Aside from being dangerous, we can't imagine she saw much of anything.

Q: If I bypass major cities, I'll avoid a lot of traffic but will I miss a lot of interesting sites?

A: To begin with, consider time. Figure at least 2-3 hours per city. Weekends will usually take less. Yes, there is plenty to see along the Route in the cities. Some more than others.

Q: I only have time to drive the Route, comfortably, one way. So I'm considering renting a car in Chicago, driving it to the end

and dropping it off then flying home. What rental company should I use?

A: Some people are interested in driving a classic car on the Route. Sources for classic car rentals are varied and vague. If you are considering renting, we suggest you rent a current vehicle from a known rental company.

The best thing to do regarding rental cars is to go to the websites of the major international car rental agencies (Budget, Dollar, Thrifty, Avis, Hertz, etc.) and compare. Avoid small, local agencies.

Rates are very erratic and change regularly. Contrary to popular belief, no one agency is always cheaper than the others, except some of the locals. Everything depends on when and where you will be traveling, your departure and arrival points, how long you will be gone and what type of vehicle you would like, and frankly, how much they want your business at the moment.

Q: Many travelers from other countries ask - "If I brave the Los Angeles traffic, what's my chance of seeing a live movie star?"

A: Well, not as difficult as you might think. But, it may take a little exploring and extra time. Your first choice should be walking down Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills. It's where stars of all eras hope to be seen. Other sources are trendy restaurants - old standbys include *Spago* and *Musso & Frank*. New trendies include *Catch LA* and *Cecconi's West Hollywood*.

Dating back to 1925, a year before 66 was commissioned, is *Formosa* on Route 66 (Santa Monica Blvd.) in the middle of where the early major movie studios were and are. It's still popular with the stars.

