

**The following is an excerpt from the book Roadtripping USA
by Let's Go Publications**

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LIFE ON THE ROAD

Roadtrip Attitude

What is it that makes a roadtrip different from average, ordinary vacation? Like the car and open road, the roadtrip has acquired a specific meaning; the type of roadtrip ingrained in American tradition revolves around the journey and experience of travel itself. As Robert Pirsig, author of *Zen and Motorcycle Maintenance* mused "To live only for some future goal is shallow. It's the sides of the mountain which sustain life, not the top. Here's where things grow."

At one extreme, a roadtrip can be a marathon, a test of endurance, a major undertaking. Visiting all of one sort of thing is a popular way of planning out a trip -- taking a tour of America's mystery spots, hitting up all of the missions in California, or visiting all of the lighthouses on the East Coast, for example. Event-based trips are also popular -- baseball roadtrips from one stadium to the next are an American tradition, as are "follow your favorite band on tour" roadtrips. Every year people make pilgrimages to large gatherings such as Shakespeare festivals or to watch battles put on by the Society for Creative Anachronism. Fair game, too, are historical tours, such as the Lewis and Clark Trail, and any sort of funky place-name themed trip, like setting out to see both Truth or Consequences, New Mexico and Love, Ohio.

At the other end of the spectrum, a roadtrip can evolve without a concrete goal, only a vague direction and desire for knowledge and experience. The exploration of a specific region or historic two-lane highway is a good way to start out, as is following one of the cardinal directions. This kind of trip, more digressive and languorous, revolves around discovering the lives and culture of the people who live along the way -- seeing every historical site, stopping at every diner, mingling at every bar. This is the sort of back-road wandering made famous by Jack Kerouac and William Least Heat-Moon. In *Blue Highways: A Journey into America*, Least Heat-Moon separates the classic roadtrip into two types of experience: the epic roadtrip and the lyrical roadtrip. An epic roadtrip embodies the spirit of adventure, while the a lyrical roadtrip is a journey of personal exploration, the best sort of trip for solo travelers.

Roadtrip Traditions

FRIENDS. From Bonnie and Clyde to Thelma and Louise, roadtrippers traditionally travel in pairs; roadtrip culture is oriented around the experience of a shared journey. Picking the right friend or friends to bring along requires care, but a trusty companion in the front seat makes the miles go by faster. Bringing a friend also means you have an extra navigator -- unless your travel companion of choice, like John Steinbeck's, happens to be a dog.

WHO TO TAKE ALONG:

The Adventurer: Adventurers are outgoing and are not afraid to deviate from prearranged plans to see a sight that a complete stranger recommended to them. They are not embarrassed to engage in long conversations with people they've never met before and find out where the locals hang out. The adventure's motto is: "Sure, sounds like fun."

The Navigator: These godsend couldn't get lost if you blindfolded them and left them the middle of the forest. They have lodestones in their foreheads, know how to read maps, and yet are not overconfident in their abilities; they know when to ask for directions. The navigator's motto is: "Regardless of whether this feels like the right off-ramp let's make sure just in case."

The Optimist: These positive individuals somehow know how to make changing a tire in the snow on the New Jersey turnpike feel like a rousing good time. They take adversity with grain of salt and keep the big picture in mind. The optimist's motto is: "Good thing the radiator overheated, otherwise we would never have seen this sunrise."

RITUALS. Miles of uninterrupted cornfields have inspired an extensive collection of **road games** to eliminate that persistent "are we there yet?" Favorites include I Spy, Twenty Questions, Road Bingo, and the License Plate Game, in which the first player to identify license plates from all fifty states wins. For some ideas, check out www.liveandlearn.com/cargame.html.

There is also a repertoire of **roadtrip superstition**. Details vary by region, but standards include holding your breath while driving past graveyards, across state lines, or through tunnels, making wishes when you see a haywagon or at the end of a tunnel, and raising your feet while crossing bridges or railroad tracks. Another common ritual is the "punchbuggy" game, in which the first person to see a Volkswagen Beetle shouts "punchbuggy!" and punches the ceiling or (in a more risky version) the arm of the person next to him or her. Variations of this classic, taken very seriously by the finest of roadtrippers, include shouting "p-diddle" or extending the ritual to include pink cars, limousines, or cars with one headlight.

ROAD ETIQUETTE

A growing concentration of rushed drivers on America's highways means road etiquette is increasingly important. Unfortunately, road rage incidents are no myth.

Tailgating, gratuitous **horn-honking**, driving with **high beams** on when approaching other cars, **eye contact** with aggressive drivers, and **obscene language and gestures** are all road taboos. On highways with two or more lanes, the left-hand lane (the "fast lane") is for passing, and on any road, it is standard politeness to let faster cars pass. One of the most offensive gestures in the US is extending the middle finger of your left hand. Also known as "giving someone the finger," this gesture is considered not only rude, but obscene.

Because roadtrips mean long times in small spaces, certain standards of car etiquette should probably be established before you go. Communication is essential with getting along with people, as is flexibility. Share, because other people like candy too, and when all else fails, just chill out -- take a few breaths, close your eyes, lean back, and feel the wind in your hair.

ROADFOOD

Today, most Interstates and many highways are lined with fast-food joints, but the

real richness and variety of American roadfood can best be found at local, non-chain ice-cream parlors, hot dog stands, barbecue pits, delis, and diners.

Diners have historically been places where entire communities congregate to enjoy a homestyle meal in a comfortable atmosphere. The first roadside diner, however, was little more than a horse-drawn wagon in 1872. Later diners included the slick, streamlined eateries of the 30s and the Colonial/Mediterranean restaurants in the 60s and 70s. The classic diner, a modular, factory-made structure, still appears along many roadsides, and usually promises warm (if greasy) food, considerate service, and a piping hot cup of coffee.

Regional Treats

With a little extra attention and a discerning eye, a roadtripper can experience a variety of flavor, ranging from the spicy green chilies of New Mexico to the sweetness of New England maple syrup. Finding such regional delights at their peak quality can end up the highlight of any roadtrip.

NORTHEAST. America's English settlers first landed in the Northeast, combining their staples of meats and vegetables with uniquely American foodstuffs such as turkey, maple syrup, clams, lobster, cranberries, and corn. The results yielded such treasures as Boston brown bread, **Indian pudding**, New England **clam chowder**, and Maine **boiled lobster**. The shellfish are second to none.

SOUTHEAST. Be prepared for some good ol' down-home cookin'. Fried chicken, biscuits, grits, collard greens, and sweet potato pie are some of the highlights of Southeastern cuisine. **Virginia ham** is widely renowned, and ham biscuits provide a savory supplement to lunch and dinner dishes. In addition to the famed collection of animal by-products that make up "**soul food**" -- pig's knuckles and ears, hog maws, and chitterlings (boiled or fried pig intestines) among others -- Southern cuisine has a strong African and West Indian influence in its sauces and spices.

LOUISIANA. Chefs in New Orleans are among the country's best, and **creole** or **Cajun** cooking tantalizes the taste buds. Smothered crawfish, fried catfish, **jambalaya** (rice cooked with ham, sausage, shrimp, and herbs), and **gumbo** (a thick stew with okra, meat, and vegetables) are delicacies. The faint of taste buds beware: spicy Cajun and creole cooking can fry the mouth.

TEXAS. From juicy tenderloins to luscious baby back ribs to whole pig roasts, Texans like to slow cook their meats over an open fire, flavoring the meat with the smoke from the burning mesquite or hickory. Eat at any of the state's many **BBQ** joints, though, and they'll tell you that the real secrets in the tangy sauce. For those in the mood for something ethnic, enchiladas, burritos, and fajitas are scrumptious **Tex-Mex** options.

MIDWEST. Drawing on the Scandinavian and German roots of area settlers, Midwest cuisine is hearty, simple, and plentiful. The Scandinavian influence brings **lefse** (potato bread) and the indomitable **lutefisk** (fish jellied through a process of soaking in lye). Breads include German Stollen and Swedish Limpa Rye, complementing an assortment of meats, cheeses, soups, and relishes.

CALIFORNIA. Fresh fruits and vegetables are grown throughout California and the Central Valley; avocado and citrus fruits are trademark favorites. Southern California

has more Mexican influences, while the long coastline allows for excellent seafood throughout the state. California is also home to the spiritual mother of all road stops, **In-N-Out** Burger, where you can get a simple and cheap 50s-style burger that has been nowhere near a microwave, heat lamp, or freezer. Do you want a malt with that double-double?

SOUTHWEST. The Mexican staples of corn, flour, and chilies are the basic components of Southwestern grub. Salsa made from tomatoes, chilies, and **tomatillos** adds a spicy note to nearly all dishes, especially cheese- and chicken-filled quesadillas and ground beef tacos. In most Southwest roadfood stops, you can get **green chile**, a spicy extra, on pretty much anything you want.

CANADA. Canadian specialties vary by region. Newfoundland boasts the food with rather unusual names, including **bangbelly** (salt pork in a spiced bun,) **toutons** (salt pork with white raisin bread), **figgy duff** (a raisin pudding), and **Jigg's Dinner** (a large meal prepared in a pot containing salt beef, cabbage, turnips, carrots and potatoes). Smoked salmon is a favorite in British Columbia, and Quebec is well known for its **maple syrup** (served on everything from pancakes to omelettes to meats) and varieties of **poutine**, a tasty combination of french fries, cheese curds, and a thick, dark gravy sauce.

MEXICO. Cuisine in the Puebla region is often topped by the regional specialty, **mole Poblano**, a thick, sweet chocolate sauce served over chicken and turkey. Along with this is served **camotes**, a sweet potato dessert. In Oaxaca, travelers drink coffee *a la olla* (slow cooked with sugar and cinnamon) alongside dishes topped with the local *mole Oaxaqueno*, another sweet *mole* variant cooked with bananas. Foods from the Yucatan are Mayan influenced and consist of meats baked in banana leaves covered by fruit-based sauces.

ROADTRIP CULTURE

Literature

"Afoot and light-hearted, I take to the open road . . . From this hour, freedom!"
--Wait Whitman, 1856

The roadtrip that you are about to embark on is the stuff of poetry. The journey along the open road in search of a new life, new experiences, and a new understanding of America has fueled the creativity of authors before the first Model T rolled off the assembly line, and generations of writers and poets have found life on the road an incisive place to mount a critique against the fast-paced consumer culture of America.

FICTION

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884) by Mark Twain. A carefree lad's misadventures typify the American roadtrip spirit.

Grapes of Wrath (1939) by John Steinbeck. A Depression-era journey westward.

Lolita (1955) by Vladimir Nabokov. The famous and controversial social critique of American culture, telling the story of Humbert Humbert and his tragic love.

On the Road (1957) and just about everything else written by Jack Kerouac. A Beatnik's odyssey and the seminal text of road literature.

The Getaway (1958) by Jim Thompson. Two bank robbers flee across the country and cut a violent swath across America.

Rabbit Run (1960) by John Updike. The story of Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom's running from his former life and search for new meaning.

Travels with Charley: In Search of America (1962) by John Steinbeck. A veteran writer takes to the road with his dog (Charley) to rediscover his homeland.

In Cold Blood (1966) by Truman Capote. An analysis of a crime and the mystery as to why two men would drive over 400 miles to kill four people who they did not know.

Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance (1974) by Robert Pirsig. A critique of modern Western values set on a cross-country roadtrip.

Another Roadside Attraction (1971) by Tom Robbins. The story of comedic genius and 1960s counterculture recounting how a troupe of camies come into the possession of the embalmed body of Jesus Christ. Also check out the classic story of the hitchhiking smalltown girl in *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*.

Blue Highways: A Journey into America (1983) by William Least Heat-Moon. A trip through the backroads of small-town America.

Road Fewer (1991) by Tim Cahill. The documentation of an attempt to travel from Tierra del Fuego to the tip of Alaska in 25 1/2 days.

Interstate (1995) by Steven Dixon. The telling and retelling of a father's search for the perpetrators of a seemingly random act of road violence.

Amnesia Moon (1995) by Jonathan Lethem. The post-apocalyptic journey of a boy named Chaos.

Dharma Girl (1996) by Chelsea Cain. A memoir of the the author's move from Southern California to Iowa.

American Gods (2001) by Neil Gaiman. The story of a dark, brooding man named Shadow and his involvement with the battle between the old gods of mythology and the new American Gods.

NON-FICTION & POETRY

A Hoosier Holiday (1916) by Theodore Dreiser. A precursor to the "road novel," this non-fiction work documents a roadtrip Dreiser took with fellow artist Franklin Booth.

The Air-Conditioned Nightmare (1947) by Henry Miller. A non-fiction account of Henry Miller's 1940-1941 journey through America and his criticism of American culture.

Out West (1987) by Dayton Duncan. The account of a man and his Volkswagon trip westward, following the trail of Lewis and Clark.

The Lost Continent: Travels in Small Town America (1990) by Bill Bryson. A search across 38 states for the essence of small-town life.

American Nomad (1997) by Steve Erickson. The non-fiction account of Erickson's continued road journey after covering the 1996 presidential election for *Rolling Stone*.

Songs for the Open Road: Poems of Travel and Adventure (1999) by The American Poetry & Literacy Project. Collection of 80 poems by 50 British and American poets, about travel and journeys.

Driving Visions (2002) by David Laderman. Discusses the cultural roots of the Road Movie and analyzes its role in literary tradition.

Ridge Route: The Road That United California (2002) by Harrison Irving Scott. An in-depth look at highway construction over the grapevine.

Roadtrip Nation (2003) by Mike Marriner and Nathan Gebhard. A "guide to discovering your path in life," this book focuses on the carpe diem spirit of the roadtrip and explores how you can apply it to your daily life and career.

RV Traveling Tales: Women's Journeys on the Open Road (2003) edited by Jamie Hall & Alice Zyetz. An anthology of women writers and their experiences living on the road.

FILM

Counterculture, existential, visionary, or just slapstick, classic road movies tell the story of rebels, outlaws, and nomads. If you want to learn just about everything there is to know about the genre, David Laderman explores film's fascination with the road in his in-depth study, *Driving Visions*, describing the genre's "Modernist Engine" in its use of technology as a liberating force and exploring how the film conventions of the road have changed with American culture over the decades.

MOVIES

The Wild One (1954): Marlon Brando and his motorcycle gang, rebelling against whatever you got, terrorize a town and disrupt a motorcycle race.

Bonnie and Clyde (1967): The world's most notorious and romanticized bank robbers, played by Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway, drive across the Midwest robbing banks during the Great Depression.

Easy Rider (1969): Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper play two nonconforming bikers searching for America on motorcycle trek from L.A. to New Orleans.

Two-Lane Blacktop (1971): James Taylor and Dennis Wilson, as "The Driver" and "The Mechanic," drag race their way across the US.

The Blues Brothers (1980): On a mission from God Jake and Elwood Blues find themselves amongst hundreds of wrecked cars, 106 miles from Chicago, with full tank of gas, half a pack of cigarettes, in the dark wearing sunglasses.

National Lampoon's Vacation (1983): The now-classic Griswold family summer vacation journey to Wally World.

(Sesame Street Presents) Follow That Bird (1985): Big Bird, forlorn and feeling like he does not belong searches for himself out on the road.

Pee-Wee's Big Adventure (1985): Pee Wee, a loner and a rebel, goes on a cross-country quest to find his stolen bicycle in the basement of the Alamo.

My Own Private Idaho (1991): Gus Van Sant directs this gay interpretation of Henry IV, in which River Phoenix and Keanu Reeves search across the country and across the Atlantic for maternal support.

Highway to Hell (1992): in a retelling of the Orpheus myth, Las Vegas newlyweds have to go to hell and bargain with Satan.

Wild Wheels (1992): Directed by Harold Blank, a documentary on car art in America.

Natural Born Killers (1994): Mickey and Mallory drive Route 666 in this postmortem tale of murder and mayhem.

To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar (1995): Three drag queens drive from New York to Hollywood in an old Cadillac that breaks down in small-town America.

Boys on the Side (1995): An unlikely trio of women drive across the country to L.A. and find common bonds with each other.

Road Trip (2000): Four college students take off cross-country to retrieve a mistakenly mailed incriminating video tape.

Rat Race (2001): A modern *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*.

Y tu Mamá También (2001): Two amorous teenage boys, ditched by their girlfriends, travel by car through Mexico with an older woman in search of a hidden beach.

Crossroads (2002): Starring Britney Spears, a heartbreaking *Künstlerroman* telling the tale of three best friends striving to realize themselves as human beings and as musical artists.

Horatio's Drive: America's First Road Trip (2003): Directed by Ken Burns, the story of the Horatio Jack, America's first roadtripper.

MUSIC

Traveling music has been around since bards have been writing and singing ballads,

and oral poetry of travel dates back beyond Homer. In America, there is a strong folk tradition of travel songs, with artists such as Woodie Guthrie singing Kerouacian tunes about rambling through the dust bowl and living the itinerant life. Distinct from the folk ballad is the "hot rod song" of the early 60s and bands like the Beach Boys or Jan and Dean, primarily about the appeal of fast cars and flashy lifestyles.

THE OLD SCHOOL (PRE-1977)

The Allman Brothers, "Ramblin' Man"

Blue Oyster Cult, "The Last Days of May"

Canned Heat, "On the Road Again"

Jim Croce, "I Got a Name"

Deep Purple, "Highway Star"

The Doobie Brothers, "Rockin' Down the Highway"

The Doors, "Roadhouse Blues"

Anything by **Bob Dylan**

Woody Guthrie, "Hard Travelin'"

Jimi Hendrix, "Crosstown Traffic"

Don McLean, "American Pie"

Willie Nelson, "On the Road Again"

Lynyrd Skynyrd, "End of the Road"

Bob Seger & the Silver Bullet Band, "Against the Wind"

Bruce Springsteen, "Born to Run"

James Taylor, "Traveling Star"

Bobby Troup, "Route 66"

Tom Waits, "The Ballad of Big Joe and Phantom 309"

THE NEW SCHOOL (POST-1977)

AC/DC, "Highway to Hell"

Audioslave, "I am the Highway"

The Apples in Stereo, "Signal in the Sky"

Cake, "The Distance"

Sheryl Crow, "Everyday is a Winding Road"

Depeche Mode, "Behind the Wheel"

Eve 6, "Open Road Song"

Fastball, "The Way"

Sammy Hagar, "I Can't Drive 55"

Judas Priest, "Heading Out To The Highway"

Modest Mouse, "Head South"

Tom Petty, "Travelin'"

Red Hot Chill Peppers, "Road Trippin'"

Song, "The Hard Road"

Stone Temple Pilots, "Interstate Love Song"

System of a Down, "Highway Song"

George Thorogood and the Destroyers, "Gear Jammer"

U2, "Where the Streets Have No Name"

ON THE WEB

These roadside culture websites list all the funky stuff we know you really want to see along the way. After all, no roadtrip is truly complete without a visit to the two-headed calf of Ft. Cody, NE.

www.driveinmovie.com. The drive-in is not quite a thing of the past; this site lists places where you can still enjoy the big screen from the comfort of your car.

www.roadfood.com. Lists and reviews a variety of roadside eateries, all presumably serving homestyle, greasy, classic American roadtrip food.

www.roadsideamerica.com. A guide to "offbeat tourist attractions," classic American kitsch, and just plain weirdness.

www.wlra.us. This site is entirely devoted to the world's largest roadside attractions, such as the world's largest ball of twine, the world's largest cow skull, and the world's largest watermelon. Who knew?

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