



LEGENDARY ROUTE 66

The Illinois Ribbon of the Mother Road

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In the Land of Lincoln, begins the path of the [Mother Road](#) near the shore of Lake Michigan. Connecting the Midwest with the golden state of [California](#), the road from [Chicago](#) originally followed State Route 4 from [Chicago](#) to East [St. Louis](#). This original piece of gravel road was built before [Route 66](#) even existed and was first called the Pontiac Trail in 1915. In 1918, [Illinois](#) began to pave the road and by the time [Route 66](#) was instituted it was entirely paved. This piece of the [Mother Road](#) was the first fully paved highway in [Illinois](#) and was quickly recognized as the shortest distance between [Chicago](#) and [St. Louis](#). By 1927, the [Route 66](#) signs were visible all along the [Illinois](#) route.



[Route 66 Cafe](#) in [Litchfield, Illinois](#),

September, 2004, Kathy Weiser.

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The route provides a rich history of [Native Americans](#), fur trappers, explorers, waterway adventures and [Chicago](#) gangsters. Not to mention, that Abraham Lincoln started his career in [Springfield](#), practicing law and stayed there until he left to serve as President of the United States during one of the worst times in U.S. history. When Lincoln was assassinated, his remains were returned to [Springfield](#)

and his tomb and former home are among the state's most visited attractions.

[Route 66](#) through [Illinois](#) provides everything from culture and sophistication, to winding roads with seemingly endless rows of corn, to small towns with numerous vintage gas stations, motor courts, and cafes.

The vintage highway generally follows Interstate-55 all the way to [St. Louis, Missouri](#), criss-crossing the interstate, and meandering into the many small towns along the route. The State of [Illinois](#) has done a very good job of posting [Route 66](#) with clearly marked signs, pointing you when the road turns in the small towns and country roads. Many of the signs include both the old and new alignments. You will notice along your journey several sections where traces of no longer travelable old alignments appear on either side of the interstate. In other places, there are portions of the original road that are gravel, but are still passable.

On January 17, 1977 the signs came down along the [Mother Road](#) in [Illinois](#), replaced by the super-highway Interstate 55. But, as we all know, this piece of [Route 66](#), as well as all of the rest, was not that easily forgotten.

Begin your journey of the [Mother Road](#) at Jackson Boulevard and Michigan Avenue in [Chicago](#) and see the many historic sites of this major municipality. Like many large cities along the [Mother Road](#), urbanization has taken over and you will have to search hard for vintage icons of the [Route 66](#) era. On your way out of [Chicago](#) you will pass through the suburb of Cicero, once a stand alone town outside of [Chicago](#) that was riddled with tunnels and hidey holes utilized by Al Capone and his gang of bootleggers.

Then travel southwest to Berwyn, where you can take a short side trip to peek at The Spindle, a 40 foot spike with 8 cars in the air at Cermak Plaza Shopping Center. Head on to [Joliet](#), where you can see the Rialto Square Theatre and Union Station. In nearby [Wilmington](#), don't miss the Gemini Giant, and in [Braidwood](#), the Polk-A-Dot Drive-In provides a peek at life size statues of James Dean, Marilyn Monroe, Elvis, and the Blues Brothers.

Along this stretch are several abandoned coal mines on your way to [Gardner](#), where you must check out the Riviera Restaurant, open since 1927, and a two cell historic jailhouse.



This 1932 Standard Oil Station now serves as a [Route 66](#) Visitor's Center in [Odell, Illinois](#),

September, 2004, Kathy Weiser.

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In [Odell](#), you can see a 1930's Sinclair station that continued to serve travelers of the [Mother Road](#) until 1975. Today it has been restored by the [Illinois Route 66](#) Association and serves as an information center. In nearby [Pontiac](#) is the Old Log Cabin Inn and Restaurant as well as a [Route 66](#) Museum housed in the old firehouse.

Further down the road at [Bloomington](#), you can still see the Cotton's Village Inn and some 15 miles beyond is the [ghost town](#) of [Funks Grove](#) where maple sirip (yes "sirip") has been made since 1881. Here you can also see an ancient general store and an old train depot. At nearby [McLean](#), you will find the Dixie Truckers Home, the first truck stop in the United States founded in 1928, and further along at [Atlanta](#), a large "muffler man" holding a giant hotdog.

[Lincoln](#) is home to the old Mill Restaurant, that started business in 1931, serving its famous schnitzel to the many travelers of [Route 66](#). Long closed, this old building is a sight to see, as well as many other historic places where Abraham Lincoln once walked. Continuing on you'll enter the small village of [Broadwell](#) where the popular Pig Hop Cafe did business for more than 40 years. You'll then pass through the historic towns of [Elkhart](#) and [Williamsville](#) before coming to [Springfield](#). Here, in the [Illinois](#) State Capitol are Lincoln's former home and tomb, and the Cozy Drive In, a [Route 66](#) icon.

From [Springfield](#), there are two alignments which are still intact today. The post-1930's four lane alignment zigs and zags over and under I-55, passing through the small towns of Glenarm, Divernon, Farmersville, and [Litchfield](#), a [Route 66](#) enthusiast's dream. [Litchfield](#) provides a number of great photo opportunities with an obvious focus on the [Mother Road](#). Check out the Ariston Café, in

business for years and still kickin'. The older pre-1930 two lane alignment resides to the west of I-55, traveling through Chatham, Auburn, Virden, Carlinville, and numerous other small towns before you the two alignments rejoin near [Staunton](#). Both paths provide a number of vintage peeks at the [Mother Road](#).

Be sure to check out [Henry's Rabbit Ranch](#) in [Staunton](#) before continuing your journey south through [Edwardsville](#) and [Mitchell](#) and on into [Missouri](#). Don't miss the Chain of Rocks Bridge before you enter the [St. Louis](#) and a whole new state of [Route 66](#) wonders.

While you're in this area a couple of great side trips can be found at [Collinsville](#), where you can see the largest catsup bottle in the world, and at [Cahokia Mounds](#), the largest archaeological site in America.

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Old [Route 66](#) west of [Mt. Olive, Illinois](#),

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[Funks Grove](#) General Store, September, 2004,

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