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# Oklahoma TODAY

## JIM ROSS' TOP 66 PLACES PLACES ON ROUTE 66

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Our Correspondent: Jim Ross

*(Note: Orientation is westbound for all directions)*

1. **“Chat.”** No, it isn’t gabbing with your road pals. Mounds of this stuff (mining waste in the form of small crushed rock) are visible along the roadside entering Oklahoma from Kansas —silent testaments to the days of zinc mining in the region.
2. **Murals, Quapaw.** This is the first town encountered by westbound travelers. Quapaw, (from the Quapaw Indians), has paid homage to Route 66 as well as the area’s mining heritage with several colorful wall murals on downtown buildings.
3. **Spooklight.** Leave the night vision devices at home; you will need only a bit of courage to cruise Devil’s Promenade Road for a chance to encounter the eerie ball

of bouncing light that has haunted the Quapaw region for over a century. Locals can give directions.

4. **Mickey Mantle's home, Commerce.** Known as the "Commerce Comet," Mickey Mantle once lived at 319 S. Quincy St . A museum in his honor is planned at a site on Mickey Mantle Blvd. there, aka Route 66.
  
5. **Coleman Theatre Beautiful.** This Spanish Mission Revival style masterpiece in Miami (that's My-am-uh, after the Miami Indians) was built in 1929. Recently renovated, the Coleman is once again entertaining locals and is open for tours Tuesday through Saturday and by appointment. Phone 918-540-2425.
  
6. **Sidewalk Highway.** Only 9 feet wide, this unique section of Route 66—on the National Register of Historic Places—can be driven with caution. Stay on Miami's Main St. south all the way to the T-intersection, turn right, and proceed onto the narrow road, following it roughly 3 miles (and around two sharp curves) to a junction with the main route.
  
7. **Sidewalk Highway, Part II.** After rejoining the current route (US69/US59), pass through Narcissa and continue 5 miles to a right turn at the Vo-Tech school to access the second stretch of 9-foot road. Drive it (with caution) for 3 miles to a reconnection with the main highway.
  
8. **Horse Creek Bridge , Afton .** Built in 1929 when only the prosperous owned cars, the pedestrian walkways on both sides make this historic concrete span the only one of its kind on Oklahoma Route 66.

9. **Afton Station.** Originally a D-X brand, this historic service station has been restored and converted into a Route 66 visitor stop and vintage Packard museum by owners Laurel & David Kane. Open by chance.
  
10. **Dead Man's Corner.** The name comes from a 90-degree directional change in the road between Afton and Vinita. Ruins of a former filling station still stand here, but the last remnants of an old roadside park were recently scraped clean.
  
11. **Clanton's Restaurant, Vinita.** This Route 66 eatery serves up classic road food hearty and fast. If you believe a burger's juice should run down your wrist on the first bite, pencil this one in for lunch.
  
12. **Steel Truss Bridge, Chelsea .** This 1926 "through" truss bridge spans Pryor Creek on the original route just east of town. It can be accessed (westbound) by turning left across the 4-lane immediately before the bridge on the main road.
  
13. **Mail-Order House.** In 1913, a house ordered from Sears & Roebuck was assembled at 10<sup>th</sup> & Olive in Chelsea . This beautiful 2-story structure still stands today. Look, but take care to not disturb the residents.
  
14. **Bushyhead.** I just love the name. Watch for it about five miles west of Chelsea . You can miss the whole town in the time it takes to twist the radio knob.
  
15. **Top Hat Dairy Bar, Foyil.** Great food, great atmosphere, right on 66. It's one of those places you'll be glad you didn't pass up.

- 16. Andy Payne Memorial, Foyil. Andy Payne won a race from Los Angeles to New York City in 1928 known as the Bunion Derby. The twenty-year-old part Cherokee Indian beat a brigade of world class runners to claim first place and \$25,000. Payne's statue is on Andy Payne Blvd. at the west end of town.**
  
- 17. J.M Davis Arms & Historical Museum. As if Claremore didn't already have more than its share of favorite sons and daughters with Will Rogers, Patti Page, astronaut Stuart Roosa and playwright Lynn Riggs. The J.M. Davis museum contains the largest privately held collection of guns in the world. Allow a couple of hours. Phone 918-341-5707.**
  
- 18. Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore. This one should be considered mandatory for those who have not seen it. Turn right (northwest) from Route 66 for about a mile to 1720 W. Will Rogers Blvd. Phone 918-341-0719.**
  
- 19. Blue Whale, Catoosa. Built by property owner Hugh Davis for family fun in 1970 and destined to become one of the Mother Road 's best known icons, the smiling giant whale still frolics in a pond alongside the highway. Look for it on the right (westbound) about a mile west of the "twin" steel bridges on Bird Creek.**
  
- 20. Arrowood's Trading Post. Now an automotive repair shop, Arrowood's sits across the highway from the Blue Whale. Built by Hugh Davis and his brother-in-law, Chief Wolf-Robe Hunt, Arrowood's was originally called Catoosa Indian Trading Post. It is anyone's guess how much longer the building's colorful wall paintings will remain.**

- 21. Metro Diner, Tulsa . This retro eatery at 3001 E. 11<sup>th</sup> Street near the TU campus is lavish in its nostalgic décor and generous in its servings. Their milk-shakes are guaranteed to leave your taste buds dizzy with delight.**
  
- 22. Art Deco. Downtown Tulsa contains a wealth of historic Art Deco buildings, beginning with the old Warehouse Market on Route 66 ( 11<sup>th</sup> St. ) at Elgin . Consider spending time exploring and photographing this wide array of architectural gems. For information on walking tours, phone 918-585-1201.**
  
- 23. Cyrus S. Avery Memorial Bridge , Arkansas River, Tulsa . Formerly known as the 11<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge, this 1916 Art Deco beauty is sandwiched between I-44 and its replacement on Southwest Blvd. After years of avoiding the wrecking ball, it was granted historical status and in 2004 was rededicated in honor of the “Father” of Route 66.**
  
- 24. Ollie’s Restaurant, Red Fork. Located on Route 66 at 4070 Southwest Blvd. ( Tulsa metro), Ollie’s has been serving up platters of tasty grub to roadies for years. Check out the miniature train choo-chooing around the dining room.**
  
- 25. Historic Roadway, Sapulpa . At the west edge of town, a right turn where you see an old steel truss bridge (opposite the golf course) will put you on a 3-mile loop of historic paving that was part of the Ozark Trails before becoming Route 66. It is a tad rough in places, so take it easy and enjoy a short but intriguing trip through time.**
  
- 26. More Vintage Paving. About four miles west of Kellyville (on OK66), you will cross over I-44. Continue another half-mile and then turn right to access the original route.**

**This rustic loop of roadbed drifts through an old oilfield for about a mile before reconnecting to the main highway.**

**27. Bristow. Check out the 1923 Bristow Motor Company building (originally a Ford dealership) on Main St. (Route 66). Another point of interest here is the restored train depot, which is located downtown just one block east of Main.**

**28. Depew . Original Route 66 looped through this small town's business district for two short years before it was bypassed in 1928. Buildings that date to the turn of the last century still line Main Street here, making it a great throwback to the highway's glory years.**

**29. Rock Café, Stroud. Built in 1939 of native stone, the Rock has been operated for the last nine years by owner and Route 66 enthusiast Dawn Welch, who has made it one of the road's most popular landmarks between Chicago and Los Angeles .**

**30. Lincoln Motel, Chandler. Dating to 1939, the Lincoln 's cottage-style rooms are a classic representation of motels and motor courts from the early days of family vacations. The neon sign there makes for a fine photo subject as well. For rates and reservations, phone 405-258-0200.**

**31. Old Armory, Chandler. Renovation has begun on this massive stone structure built by the WPA in the 1930s. When completed it will be home to a new Route 66 interpretive center and gift shop.**

- 32. Phillips 66 Station, Chandler. Currently undergoing restoration by its present owner, this 1930 station's motif is typical of the "neighborhood" look built by major brands of the era. Ultimately, it will serve as a Route 66 visitor stop.**
- 33. Seaba Station, Warwick. Originally Seaba Machine Shop, this landmark brick building has been carefully reconditioned by its present owners. These days it serves as a gift and antique shop. Be sure to stop in and say howdy to owner "Seaba" Sue Preston.**
- 34. Pioneer Camp Bar-B-Que, Wellston. It's on the right (westbound) as you approach the 66-B turnoff into town. Here you will find exceptional food in a vintage atmosphere. Check out the concrete totem pole near the parking lot.**
- 35. Filling Station Ruin. Look for it on the right about five miles west of Luther. Legend has it that this former Conoco station was once the site of a counterfeiting operation. Use extreme caution pulling on and off the highway here.**
- 36. Original Paving. One mile beyond the filling station ruin, where the highway curves to the right, the earlier concrete roadbed continues dead ahead. This loop of historic paving reconnects to the main highway after one mile. Watch for oncoming traffic at both ends!**
- 37. Round Barn, Arcadia . Built in 1898, Arcadia 's Round Barn today is in the upper echelon of best known highway landmarks anywhere on Route 66. On the verge of collapse, it was rescued in 1989 by a volunteer group of retirees known as "The Over the Hill Gang" and completely restored. The gift shop is nice and the loft can be booked for weddings, reunions, or even a good old-fashioned hoe-down.**

38. Hillbillee's B&B, Arcadia . Originally a motor court and service station, today it is a popular restaurant for both roadies and locals. Some of the old cabins have been restored and are now available to lodgers. Nostalgia is one thing never in short supply here. <http://www.hillbillees.com/>
39. Edmond Historical Society Museum. Just a block off the route at 431 S. Boulevard, this museum is all about local area history, including many Route 66 icons. The route through Edmond also includes WPA-built Fink Park on 2<sup>nd</sup> St., and the former Royce Café at 400 S. Broadway.
40. Owl Courts and Western Trail Trading Post, Britton. On the "Beltline Route," Owl Courts (724 W. Britton Rd.) was recently saved from the chopping block and is undergoing restoration by owner and preservationist John Dunning. John is also proprietor of the nearby Western Trail Trading Post at 9100 N. Western.
41. Tower Theater, Oklahoma City. Recently purchased for renovation, this classic movie house at 425 N.W. 23<sup>rd</sup> St. is a direct throwback to the heyday of Route 66. Browse their awesome photo gallery at: <http://www.okctower.com/index.asp>
42. Ann's Chicken Fry House. Located at 4106 N.W. 39<sup>th</sup> Expressway just east of Warr Acres, Ann's has been around so long it's a local institution. If chicken fried steak is your thing, you cannot do better. Finger licking encouraged here.
43. Overholser Bridge. Just west of Bethany, this "mixed through-truss" bridge at Lake Overholser is one of only a few its size remaining anywhere on Route 66. Built in 1924, it was closed for a time in the 1990s, but re-opened with a lower weight limit thanks to Oklahoma City officials, who heard the call of Route 66 advocates. Access it from 39<sup>th</sup> Expressway west of Council Road.

- 44. Johnnie's Grill and Sid's Diner, El Reno. Try them both, maybe one when traveling westbound and one while motoring eastbound. Whether you prefer chilidogs or onion burgers, both places serve up mouth-watering grub and have long histories as Route 66 icons.**
- 45. Original Roadbed. West of El Reno, beyond the prison, watch for the turnoff to Fort Reno. Turning here will put your nostalgic wheels on 1932 paving that stretches for 11 miles, ending at the junction with US281 Spur near I-40 Exit 108.**
- 46. Pony Bridge. Officially the William H. Murray Bridge, its nick-name comes from the 38 "pony" trusses on each side of the roadway. At  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile, this 1933 marvel is the longest of its kind anywhere on Route 66. Cruise it by taking US281 Spur from I-40 Exit 108 for about two miles, turn left at the top of the hill (easy to miss), and follow the old concrete 2-lane to the bottom of the hill and a left turn on US281. Don't pass this one up!**
- 47. More Original Roadbed. After crossing the Pony Bridge, stay the westward course and enjoy the longest stretch of original Route 66 paving in the state, ending at Weatherford (about 19 miles). Along the way you will pass the Hinton Junction (site of an old roadside park), and the ghost town of Bridgeport (see next item).**
- 48. Bridgeport. A right turn roughly three miles west of the Pony Bridge will take you into Bridgeport. Once a thriving railroad town, it was bypassed in 1933. Though some residents remain, today it is considered a genuine Oklahoma ghost town.**
- 49. Lucille's Station and Courts, Hydro. Lucille Hamons (1915-2000) became one of the route's most enduring icons during her more than 50 years in business on the**

highway she loved. The Hamons Court sign is now displayed in the Smithsonian's Museum of American History, while the station is currently undergoing renovation by preservation-minded new owners.

50. **Drive-In Theater, Weatherford.** With a checkered operating history during recent years, the 66 West Drive-In is right on the route west of town. While drive-ins are making a comeback in some areas, this is one of only a meager handful still standing on Route 66.
  
51. **Oklahoma Route 66 Museum, Clinton.** This is the only state operated museum dedicated to Route 66, and is arguably the most popular. The grounds include a fully restored Valentine Diner, and the museum has one of the best gift shops between Illinois and California. 2229 Gary Blvd. Phone 580-323-7866.
  
52. **McLain Rogers Park, Clinton.** Built by the WPA and still in use, this city-owned park has a Route 66-themed miniature golf course and a vintage neon sign over the entrance. Located on S. 10<sup>th</sup> St., it is on the original pathway of Route 66.
  
53. **Neptune Park, Clinton.** Also built by the WPA, this roadside park is a direct throwback to the heyday of Route 66. Stay with 10<sup>th</sup> St. south, which becomes Neptune, and then watch for the park (on your left) just after curving right at the old roadhouse.
  
54. **Foss.** Just north of I-40 Exit 53 at the intersection of OK44 and Route 66, this small town is a stubborn survivor of the interstate bypass. Check out the ruins of Kobe's gas station at the crossroads here as well as the old jail in the city park.

- 55. Vintage Roadbed.** Leaving Foss, follow the pristine 1931 concrete paving of old 66 westward as it drifts through the rolling countryside to I-40 Exit 50. Along the way, watch for vintage concrete right of way markers near the fence line.
- 56. Canute (I-40 Exit 47).** Route 66 here flared to four lanes through the business district. Vintage signs remain at the Cotton Boll (now a private residence) and Washita motels, and the Grotto in the Catholic cemetery at the east end of town is a popular point of interest. Canute is also home to a WPA built park.
- 57. National Route 66 and Old Town Museums, Elk City.** Bus. 40 is Route 66 through Elk City. The museum complex is at the intersection with Pioneer, on the west side of town. You'll recognize it by the giant, colorful kachina (known as "Myrtle") standing near the highway to attract visitors.
- 58. Site of Queenan's Indian Trading Post.** Heading west from Elk City, just past the junction with OK6, look for a one-level building on the right. Now a private residence, it was once a vacationer's hot spot for souvenirs and Indian jewelry. It was also the original home of "Myrtle," who now beckons to tourists at the National Route 66 Museum.
- 59. Timber Creek Bridge.** This classic 1928 through-truss bridge is another rare survivor. Tucked away below the interstate, you can access it by motoring back east on the south side service road from I-40 Exit 26.

60. Beckham County Courthouse, Sayre. Only a block east of the route (Bus.40) at Main St., this old courthouse is perhaps best known for its appearance in the film adaptation of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. Even a building can have its 15 minutes of fame.
61. Sayre City Park. This 1940 WPA project boasts a rock pool house and stone fire pits once used by early day travelers. Turn west from Bus. 40 (Route 66) at the park entrance just south of the river bridge, then left at the T-intersection with the route's original pathway.
62. Hext (I-40 Exit 14). You gotta love the name. There is an old schoolhouse here and a stretch of what once was a divided 4-lane section of Route 66.
63. Roger Miller Museum, Erick. You will find it downtown at 104 Roger Miller Blvd. (Route 66). The multiple Grammy winner known for such hits as "King of the Road" and "Dang Me," is honored here by his hometown ([www.rogermillermuseum.com/](http://www.rogermillermuseum.com/)). Erick is also home to Sheb Wolley, who became immortal with his 1958 hit, "Purple People Eater."
64. Sand Hills Curiosity Shop, Erick. Owners Harley and Annabelle Russell will entertain you with song and stories at their fun antique shop a block south of the route in the old City Meat Market building downtown. It's an experience you will not soon forget. Open by chance.
65. Vintage Roadbed. Lengthy stretches of original 2-lane 66 (the westbound lanes of the present 4-lane) enhance the drive from Erick to Texola (the last town on the route). Paved in 1931, this old concrete remains virtually unchanged.

**66. Territorial Jail, Texola. Built in 1910, this one-room stone box that can be seen only a block north of the route is a grim reminder of how primitive conditions could be during the state's early years. It remains an enduring landmark anchoring the western end of Oklahoma's Mother Road. The Texas state line is only a quarter mile west of town.**

**Sources:**

***Oklahoma Route 66 – Jim Ross***

**Oklahoma Route 66 Roadbed Documentation Project – Prepared for the Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Office by Jim Ross, Kathy Anderson, and Gary Ray Howell, 2001-2002.**

**2005-2006 *Oklahoma Route 66 Trip Guide*, published by the Oklahoma Route 66 Association.**