

The Indian Detours

In 1926, businessman Ford Harvey launched an all-expense auto tour featuring inhabited Indian pueblos, ruins and scenic points of interest. The tours whisked intrepid travelers away from the Santa Fe railroad depot in distinctly marked Harvey cars and coaches, and took them on the journey of a lifetime.

In an article published in the New York Times Magazine that same year, Francis McMullen wrote, "Tourists have invaded the Indian country of the Southwest. Over roads once ridden by the conquistadors, the sightseeing busses now honk their way; and into even the remote fastnesses of the Pueblos penetrate these curious city folk. They seek no longer the gold sought of old by Spanish cavalier or Yankee sourdough, but merely the sight of a real live Indian in his feathers and paint..."

*– Image of Indian Detours map found in Harvey Company publications 1926
Courtesy University Libraries,
University of New Mexico*

ROUTE 66 AND THE MYTH OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN

There are hundreds of American Indian tribes in the U.S. with distinct languages, traditions, ceremonies and regalia. Yet, popular culture, including Route 66 marketing, has perpetuated a monolithic view of the American Indian. Motorists on Route 66 in western Oklahoma pass signs for the Cherokee Trading Post depicting (presumably) a Cherokee. Except this "Cherokee" wears a Plains Indian-style war bonnet that Cherokees do not. On the Route in Arizona, a "Navajo" trading post boasts the "World's Largest Teepee" (made of sheet metal). Navajos' traditional dwellings are hoghans, not tipis. These marketing images depicting American Indian homes and clothing are likely due to how Indians have been depicted in Hollywood movies. Many Western films and TV shows feature these kind of Plains Indian images.

There are many other examples along the Route, including a chain of Historic "Wigwam Motels", or "Wigwam Villages," built between 1933 and 1950 on Historic Route 66 by a Kentucky-based



Fred Harvey's Indian Detours

In 1931, Pueblo Indians were employed by the Fred Harvey Company's Indian Detours as tour guides. They were often outfitted in "uniforms" of feathers and buckskins reminiscent of the dress of the Plains tribes.

– Photo courtesy Library of Congress



entrepreneur. Originally, there were seven roadside sleepover spots, each featuring a small village of tipi structures. Three of these survive today—two on Route 66. One is in Holbrook, Arizona and the other is in San Bernardino, California. A historic San Bernardino property brochure offers “a complete guest room in a peculiar fashion of actual wigwam units.” The problem is a traditional wigwam is not a tipi; it is a grass or birchbark covered hut also called a wickiup, used by nomadic Indians of the western and southwestern United States and by tribes from the Midwest.

The romance of Route 66 was created, in part, by marketing the Hollywood version of American Indians. Travelers were given the stereotypical images they were accustomed to seeing in films to lure them into buying postcards and souvenirs, taking photos with wooden Indians, staying the night in a “wigwam” and spending a little extra time and money on their journey west. It is important to shed light on these stereotypes and understand that, in fact, there are dozens of fascinating tribal cultures along Route 66 with their own distinct and beautiful traditions.



Cultural Misappropriation

In this photo, scientist Albert Einstein visits Hopi House, part of the Fred Harvey concession at the Grand Canyon. He's wearing Plains Indian headdress and holding a Plains style pipe.

*– Photo by El Tovar Studios
Courtesy Museum of Northern Arizona Photo Archives*

DID YOU KNOW?



Hollywood has made more than 4,000 films about Native people; more than 100 years of movies inaccurately shaping and defining how American Indians are seen by the world.

“Everybody knows about Indians. They think about ‘Dances with Wolves’ or ‘A Man Called Horse’ or something like that. But these things are wrong. These things are just cinema.”

*– Otis Halfmoon, Nez Perce,
Tribal Liaison, Retired
National Trails Program*

DID YOU KNOW?

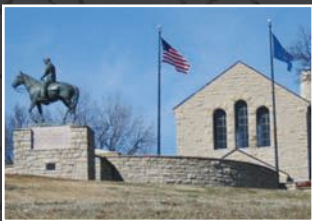


Will Rogers

Route 66 is also known as the Will Rogers Highway, after the popular Cherokee actor and comedian. A plaque was dedicated to Will Rogers in 1952 at a point near the end of Route 66, where Santa Monica Boulevard comes to an end at Palisades Park, just above Santa Monica State Beach and the Pacific Ocean.

The plaque reads:

"Will Rogers Highway, dedicated 1952 to Will Rogers, Humorist, World Traveler, Good Neighbor. This Main Street of America, Highway 66 was the first road he traveled in a career that led him straight to the hearts of his countrymen."



Will Rogers Museum

The Will Rogers Museum is located off of Route 66 at 1720 W. Will Rogers Blvd. in Claremore, Oklahoma. For more information visit online: www.willrogers.com



OKLAHOMA

A journey down Route 66 in Oklahoma offers motorists the widest diversity of American Indian cultures in one state. 392 miles of Route 66 pass through Oklahoma, and those miles traverse the jurisdictions of tribes who originally lived in the Ohio River basin, the Great Lakes region, the Southeastern woodlands, the Great Plains and the desert Southwest.

Today, Oklahoma is home to 39 federally-recognized American Indian tribes and the longest drivable stretch of Route 66 in the nation. The highway enters the northeastern corner of the state and angles southwest toward Texas—passing through many tribal jurisdictions and exposing travelers to a rich diversity of American Indian culture.

The word “Oklahoma” was created combining two Choctaw words, “ukla” meaning person and “humá” meaning red. It was first used in the Reconstruction Treaty of 1866 following the Civil War to describe the consolidation of Indian Territory tribes under one intertribal council.

Unlike other states where American Indian tribes reside, Oklahoma does not contain reservations (although a few tribes maintain their reservations were never dissolved). Instead, traditional tribal lands are divided into jurisdictions that are shared with the state and non-tribal citizens.

For a look at an historic Route 66 attraction, venture east of Foyil, Oklahoma, about 4 miles on HWY 28 to Ed Galloway’s Totem Pole Park. According to a National Park Service article, Galloway became interested in Native Americans and found inspiration in postcards and National Geographic magazines.

However well meaning, Galloway’s totem poles are an example of misappropriating American Indian culture to create a tourist attraction.

For more information about Totem Pole Park, visit http://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/route66/galloways_totem_pole_park_foyil.html



Totem Pole Park