



Joseph City, Ariz., May 17, 2012



Helendale, Calif., November 19, 2011

BY ELROND LAWRENCE/PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

IN 1926, TWO EVENTS MARKED the beginning of a beautiful friendship. On November 11, a committee of federal and state highway officials commissioned U.S. Highway 66 from Chicago to Los Angeles. Spanning eight states, the newly christened highway united a patchwork of existing roads that included the National Old Trails route, assorted other trails, and countless unnamed dirt roads. Three days later, on November 14, the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway inaugurated the *Chief*, an extra fare, all-Pullman luxury train that quickly became the railroad's new flagship between the same two cities.

Both events were milestones in American transportation history. Few realized at the time how Santa Fe and

Route 66 would become icons of travel, and how the developments of November 1926 would set in motion a relationship that would continue for nine decades.

Their shared mystique was formed in the southwest states of California, Arizona, and New Mexico, where the two are constant companions for more than 800 miles. Each has experienced a rise, fall and rebirth. Route 66 — famously called “The Mother Road” in John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* — was decommissioned in 1985, not long after the final section was bypassed by Interstate 40. The Santa Fe, which built across the Southwest into California in the 1880s, passed into history in 1995 when it merged with Burlington Northern to create the BNSF Railway.

November 11, 2016, will mark the 90th anniversary of Route 66. More than 80 percent of the old road can still be driven, a tribute to the preservation movement that saved the highway in the 1980s and 1990s and has since worked tirelessly to raise public awareness and save landmarks. International tourism has largely fueled the revival, as overseas visitors crisscross the highway in pursuit of the mythic American road trip. It’s hard to pass through many of the small towns without being bombarded by signs and storefronts plastered with the iconic twin sixes.

Yet the story is far from over. Change has been constant to both Route 66 and the former Santa Fe. Historic sites continue to be saved and lost.

Festivals and car shows bearing the Route 66 name take place year after year. Websites, social media, and books celebrate every aspect of the highway, its cultural and historical importance, and its relationship to the cities and towns of the Southwest and Midwest states.

And what of the highway’s companion railroad? Some 21 years after the merger, the contemporary BNSF Railway is one of America’s most successful railroads, although its history and trackside character are being replaced by progress and a sea of orange-and-black General Electric locomotives. If you know where to look, the Santa Fe legacy can be found along the system, defiantly resisting time. A funny thing happened with the renaissance of Route 66 — fans of the

highway realized the railroad is part of the Mother Road experience, every bit as important as neon and motor courts. Communities and preservation groups alike are working together to preserve Santa Fe’s history in California, Arizona, and New Mexico, in the Southwest towns where their shared legacy is strongest.

It’s easy to get consumed shooting the nonstop train parade on BNSF’s “Transcon,” but the best Route 66 Railway safari makes time to savor the entire experience. Frame a train with a quirky road sign. Stay in a historic motel far from the interstate (by the tracks, if you’re lucky). Grab a burger at a neon diner. Many layers of history — and fun — await you.



Kingman Canyon, Ariz., May 30, 1993



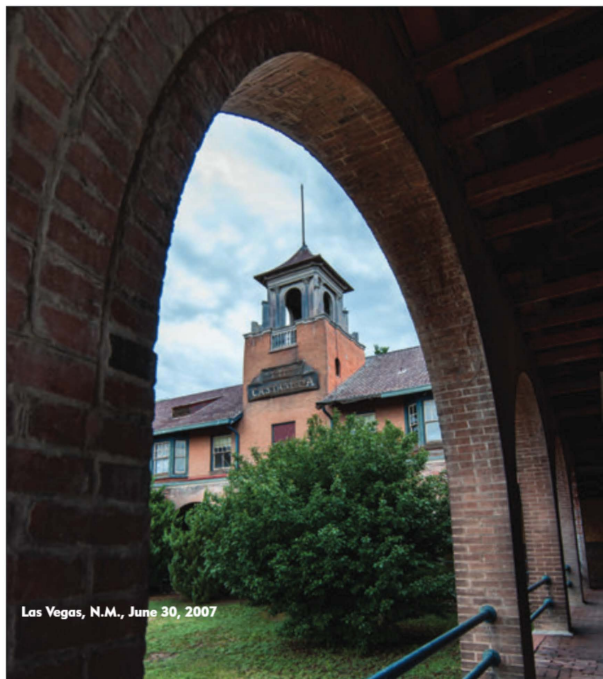
Essex, Calif., February 29, 2016

SNAPSHOTS FROM THE ROAD

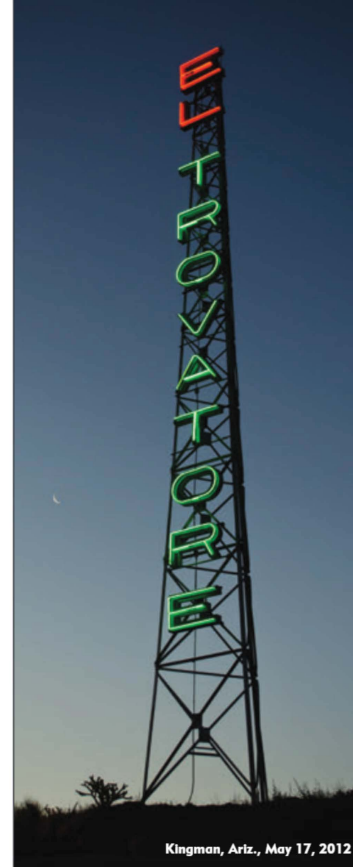
"Bring your cameras" cries a non-politically correct billboard in Defiance, N.M., within sight of old 66 and the busy Transcon. How could you not bring a camera? GEVOs and Tier 4 diesels are only part of the story; around the next curve lies a wigwam motel, a fiberglass jackrabbit, a dusty town, or a scenic canyon. When in doubt, take the picture — one never knows when today's "same old" landmark will become tomorrow's treasured history.

Survivors dot today's Route 66 roadmap. Few dreamed the El Trovatore motel in Kingman, Ariz., would ever relight its 100-foot neon tower, but amazingly the iconic tower blazed back to life in 2012. That year Sam and Monica Frisher restored the battered motor court, one of Kingman's few pre-World War II motels, located on a stony bluff with stunning views of the Hualapai Mountains to the east. Those views are once again available with the added bonus of BNSF trains rolling through the cut below.

El Trovatore mirrors the comeback story of countless Route 66 and Santa Fe landmarks. Vintage motels, tourist



Las Vegas, N.M., June 30, 2007



Kingman, Ariz., May 17, 2012



Two Guns, Ariz., June 27, 2007



Park Moabi, Calif., June 27, 2007



Defiance, N.M., July 2, 2007



Flagstaff, Ariz., November 12, 2005



Amboy, Calif., May 19, 2012

SAME ROUTES, DIFFERENT WORLDS

A Route 66 safari brings opportunity for amazing visual diversity. Driving west from Albuquerque, the highway and railroad encounter red mesas, deserts, mountains, forests, faded towns, big cities, and finally the Pacific. Looking down from Flagstaff's Mars Hill in 2005 we see Route 66 in a bustling downtown, paralleled by passing long BNSF intermodal trains.

Less than a day's drive away — but worlds apart — we find restored Santa Fe 4-8-4 No. 3751 steaming past Roy's Café in "downtown" Amboy, Calif., in the Mojave Desert. The classic Baldwin is returning from a May 2012 excursion to the Grand Canyon and it's easy to imagine that the caravan of photographers chasing 3751 far outnumber the population of Amboy. In a sly touch of class, the steam excursion is employing Amtrak heritage unit No. 66 to serve as one of two diesel helpers.



Congress, Ariz., May 18, 2012

Los Angeles, April 27, 2016



Angelenos freedom from traffic misery. Over nine decades, Route 66 and its companion railroad have been reinvented to keep pace with changing times and that evolution continues today. Happily, their shared history is charming a new generation of travelers. The Santa Fe legacy lives, 21 years after BNSF, in sun-baked diesels that power locals through the Los Angeles basin.

The railway's legacy has also been etched in the consciousness of a Route 66 road trip. Old trackside signals have joined locomotives and depots on display, even serving as props beside history-spanning murals in towns like Winslow. Even when the last Warbonnet is painted into orange and black, the Route 66 Railway will survive thanks to those who preserve its mystique. 📍

Los Angeles, September 20, 2008



Published by the Los Angeles Railroad Heritage Foundation, Elrond Lawrence's revised and expanded edition of Route 66 Railway will be released in late 2016.



Winslow, Ariz., September 11, 2009

PROGRESS AND LEGACY

From 1926 to 1936, Route 66 and the Santa Fe Railway crossed paths in Los Angeles, where North Broadway crossed over the railroad's Second District alongside the Los Angeles River. The crossing lost its "66" designation when a newer alignment was built; in 1994 Santa Fe retired its Pasadena Subdivision and sold it to Los Angeles Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) for its long-planned Gold Line light rail. Today you can stand on the historic overpass and watch a constant parade of Metrolink and Metro trains, the latter carried by a new bridge in the space where *Super Chiefs* and *El Capitans* once reigned. In early 2016, Metrolink began leasing a fleet of BNSF AC440CWs as protection over concerns about derailing cab cars; on April 27, we're treated to the unlikely sight of BNSF 5644 rolling under the North Broadway bridge, reconnecting a 90-year relationship.

It's easy to mourn the loss of Santa Fe and the historic highway system, but progress can also be exciting — for six decades, Route 66 motorists had no rail alternative when journeying through



Santa Monica, Calif., December 15, 2015

Los Angeles to Santa Monica, the road's western terminus at the Pacific Ocean. But on May 20, 2016, Metro opened its expanded 15-mile Expo Line to Santa Monica, built on the bones of Pacific Electric's Santa Monica Air Line and ending just blocks from the famed Santa Monica Pier. Metro's burgeoning network is bringing welcome relief to Los Angeles' overwhelmed freeway system; just as Route 66 and California's love affair with automobiles signaled freedom, Metro trains are bringing



Amboy, Calif., August 14, 2004