

# Kingman, Arizona: The heart of historic Route 66

By MARK CHESTER

"And they came into 66 from the tributary side roads, from the wagon tracks and rutted country roads. 66 is the Mother Road, the road of flight..." wrote John Steinbeck in his 1939 Pulitzer and Nobel Prize-winning novel, "The Grapes of Wrath."

As the "mother road," Route 66 has given birth to Americana phenomena. The heart of historic Route 66 is here in Kingman, 100 miles southeast of Las Vegas, where architecture from the 1900s still stands surrounded by goldmines, Native American culture, and canyon and high desert terrain.

A cowboy flavour resonates, evidenced by "no weapons" or "no firearms" signs posted on retail shops and office buildings. Wranglers wear handguns, riding ATVs rather than horses these days while working in the brush in rattlesnake country.

Route 66 opened in June 1926 as the principal highway between Chicago and Los Angeles, and was eventually paved in 1938. It is also called "The Main Street of America."

The 28-mile drive from Kingman to Oatman is a colourful blast from the past.

## PRESERVING ROUTE 66

Today, the stretch between Seligman and Oatman—Kingman is in between—obtained historic designation from the state in 1988. But curiosity about Route 66 is worldwide. The 28-mile drive from Kingman to Oatman is a colourful blast from the past.

"Dedicated to the prevention, promotion and protection of both surface and memories of this magnificent highway" is the mission of the Historic Route 66 Association of Arizona, headquartered in Kingman's Powerhouse Visitor's Center.

The organization produces its annual Fun Run the first weekend in May. "All street legal vehicles, anything with wheels" including many vintage 1950s and 1960s conveyances caravan from Seligman to Kingman the first day, and then from Kingman to Oatman on the second (approximately 80 miles in all).

## AMERICANA ON THE ROAD

Heading west on Route 66 to Oatman is a drive through cultural and topographical landscapes. There's Old 66 Classics—a lot filled with vintage Chevys, Fords, Oldsmobiles, and Buicks. Their smiling grills beckon drivers to stop and kick some tires with the manager named Hip.

Down the road is the Truck Tub truck wash, a three-bay facility dwarfing any ordinary carwash. Staffed by dedicated hand-washers on stairway ladders, they attack grime and dirt with vengeance, covering every inch of these 53-foot prairie schooners in 50 minutes for only \$57.

"Pride in your ride" is important for owner-operator Robert Campbell, who pulls in here from Interstate 140 that parallels Route 66. The interior of his cab looks like a mini NASA launch control centre with computer, GPS, light switches, buttons, and monitor.

Continuing, Route 66, also named Oatman Highway at this point, passes barren desert, a large FedEx distribution depot, flood watches named Sacramento and Secret Pass, and some new housing. There's a lot of sky, too, with the Black Mountains on the horizon.

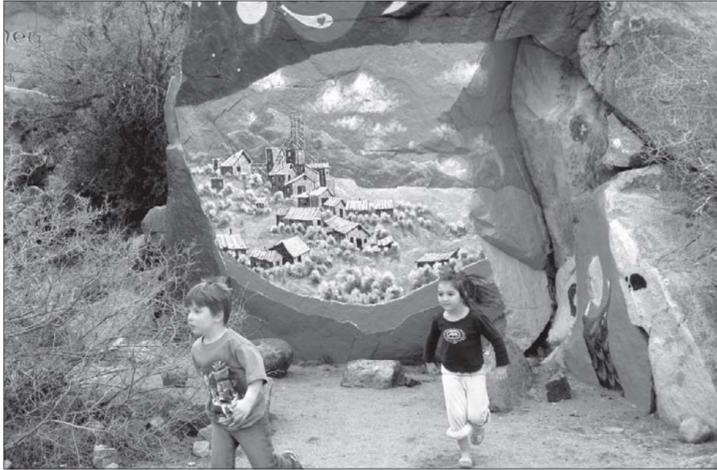
## OATMAN

Beyond Sitgreaves Pass (elevation, 3,550 feet), a warning sign reads "Burro Crossing Next 8 Miles." This is a narrow, zigzagging, downward-spiral road that conjures up images of pioneers in Conestoga wagon trains. The road, which can "break a snake's back," finally descends into Oatman.

At first impression, it looks like the movie set of Mel Brooks's "Blazing Saddles" with



"Walking Bob" Cratton, 76, keeps shop at Glory Hole Antiques in Oatman. MARK CHESTER



A rock mural near Chloride, Arizona, by artist Roy Purcell. MARK CHESTER

burros roaming freely, feeding on carrots offered by tourists. But it is very real, with 100-year-old buildings. Boardwalks on each side follow the unpaved, narrow road. Once the bus loads of visitors leave town, it is easier to see its authenticity as a goldmine boomtown.

"Walking Bob" Cratton, 76, keeps shop at Glory Hole Antiques, one of the oldest buildings at the far end. Walking Bob likes talking, too; he's ready to tell stories about his lucky quartz finds in the foothills. "I came here from Beatty, Nevada, to get my head straight and my mind clean," he says. "Two months after arriving, I'm off my meds and feeling great."

Thirty paces away is the Oatman Hotel. Its kitschy restaurant walls are stapled with dollar bills signed by patrons. Amber, a tattooed curly waitress wearing a Stetson estimates fifty thousand dollar bills cover the walls now. Upstairs are the old cowboy rooms and memorabilia. Clark Gable and Carole Lombard spent their honeymoon in Room 15 after they got hitched in Kingman in March 1939.

## FAMOUS LOCALS

Another big star with Kingman connections is actor Andy Devine (1905–1977), who moved here from Flagstaff as a youngster with his family. His name is revered: Andy Devine Road, Andy Devine apartments, the Andy Devine hamburger on the menu at Dambar



The Powerhouse Route 66 Museum houses memorabilia of the famous road. MARK CHESTER

## Steakhouse.

The Mohave Museum of History and Arts dedicates a wing to Devine filled with personal effects, letters, photographs, clothing from films, and artifacts from his television series, "Andy's Gang" where "froggy plunked the magic twanger." There's also the fringed jacket he wore as Wild Bill Hickok's sidekick, jingles P. Jones, opposite Guy Madison (Hickok). His personal saddle with boots and hat from the Rose Bowl Parade is displayed in a glass case.

## HISTORIC PROPORTIONS

Kingman developed into an important railroad transportation centre in the late 1800s as a stop on the Santa Fe line just as Route 66 was the main thoroughfare for trucks



Mr. D's Route 66 Diner features nostalgic art. MARK CHESTER



Welcome to Kingman, Arizona, heart of Route 66. MARK CHESTER

until 140 replaced it in 1984. But the tracks are still busy with nearly 90 freight trains coming through Kingman daily, some more than a mile long.

Though the art-deco depot is boarded up, other significant architectural gems on Route 66 and Beale Street operate as antique shops and food places, such as Mr. D's and the newly opened coffee house, Beale Street Brews. Father Paul Johnson converted a former chicken restaurant into Saint Michael Catholic Church on one side of Beale Street and, on the other, established his photography studio.

A walking tour of the National Registry of Historic Places lists numerous sites here, including the Brunswick Hotel (circa 1909) and the Bonelli House (1894). Also, there is



In Supai Village, mail is delivered twice a day, arriving by mule. MARK CHESTER



Helicopter service is available on a first-come, first-served basis to Supai Village. MARK CHESTER

## Other places of interest

Chloride, which dates back to the 1870s, was once a prosperous silver town boasting a population of 2,000. Today it is a low-key spot with 360 people, many of whom winter here. The cemetery is an outdoor museum of sorts in the genre of outsider or found art. Grave plots are decorated with personal objects of the deceased or other relevant objects d'art.

Reached by a primitive road heading toward the Cerbat Mountains are the rock murals by artist Roy Purcell. Purcell painted 23-metre high boulders with automobile paint in 1966, and called it "The journey: An Inward Search for Self." He and a crew returned in 2007 to give his opus a touch-up. (www.chlorideaz.com)

On Route 66 east of Kingman is Peach Springs, which sits on the edge of the Hualapai Indian Reservation. Just north from there is the 68-mile Highway 18 that ends at Hualapai Hilltop at Grand Canyon. The trailhead leads to Supai, 2,000 feet down. Helicopter service is available on a first-come, first-served basis to Supai Village, which takes less than nine minutes.

The Havasupai Baaja—"People of the Blue-Green Water"—live among the cottonwood trees and waterfalls here in this "Garden of Eden" kind of place, home to approximately 450 tribal members. Tourist accommodations include campgrounds and a lodge, a café, a store, and a post office. Mail is delivered by pack animals twice daily, which takes three hours or more down the canyon trail. (www.havasupaitribe.com)

the Arcadia Lodge (formerly a 1930s motor court), now in a state of disrepair, which symbolizes the once burgeoning travel hospitality along Route 66.

Kingman is the seat of Mohave County immortalized by its Tufa stone courthouse, surrounded by cypress trees. Kingman is quirky and eclectic, attracting newcomers in search of an affordable lifestyle.

Mark Chester of Woods Hole, MA, is a freelance photographer/writer. His new book, *Twosomes*, will be published in June with an exhibition at the Cape Cod Museum of Art (Dennis) June 18-July 10.

## Sudoku

		4	8	5				
			1					5
	9	1						
							3	
			4					
				8		6	7	
	7				4			
2								6
		6	2					

Fill in the boxes using numbers between 1 and 9 so that each column, each row, and each 3x3 square contain all nine numbers only once.

Exclusive Epoch Times puzzle by Sudoku Works. Sudoku puzzles and software at: www.SudokuWorks.com.

7	8	4	8	6	2	9	5	1
9	6	1	5	3	7	8	7	2
5	8	2	4	1	9	3	7	6
1	7	9	3	8	6	5	2	4
8	2	5	1	7	4	6	9	3
6	4	3	2	6	5	7	1	8
7	9	8	2	4	3	1	6	5
3	5	9	4	6	9	1	2	7
2	1	6	7	9	1	8	4	3

This week's solution

## The Epoch Times Geography Guru™

"Growing your geography knowledge"

Quiz #314



**NORTH AMERICAN LATITUDES:** In the heart of the North American continent, the 40th parallel runs through or forms the border of 13 American states, from California to New Jersey.

- Which seven Canadian provinces does the 50th parallel intersect?
- Which three American states does the 30th parallel intersect?

Read The Epoch Times next week for the answer!

Answer for Quiz #313

## EUROPEAN ISLES:

- Azores—PORTUGAL;
- Balearic—SPAIN;
- Cyclades—GREECE;
- Frisian—NETHERLANDS;
- Hebrides—UNITED KINGDOM