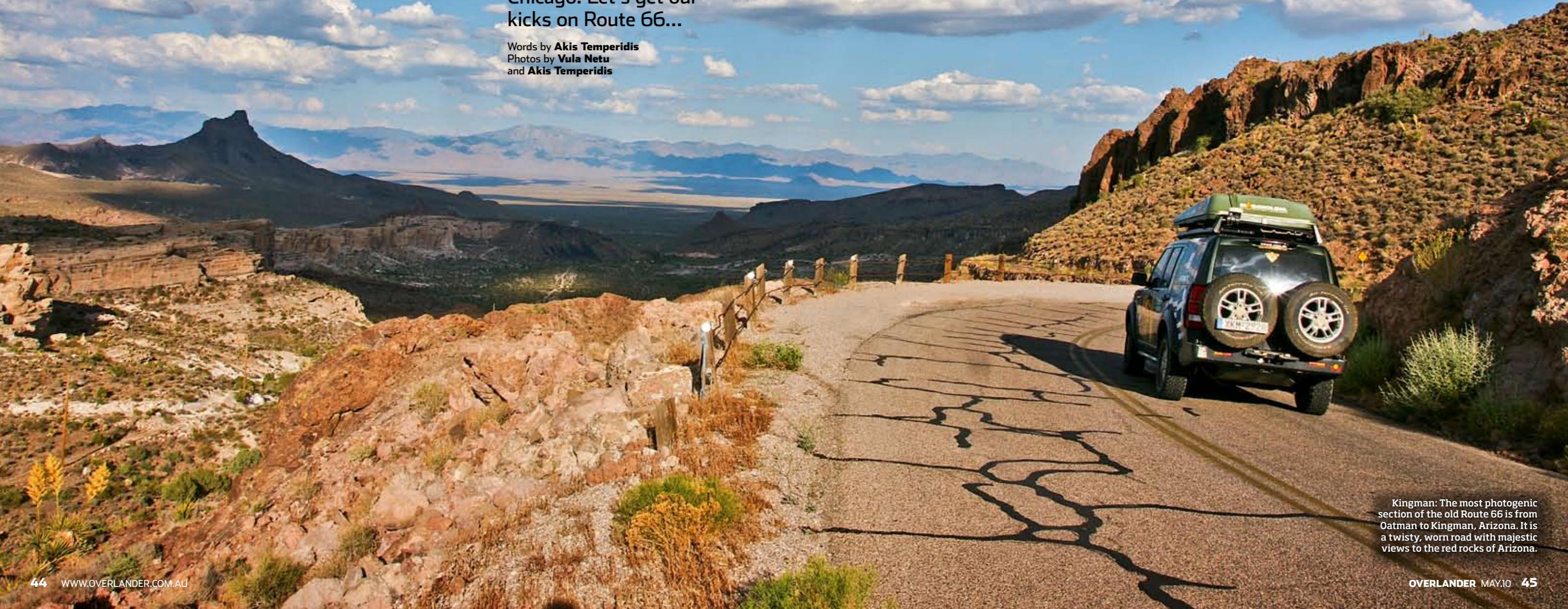


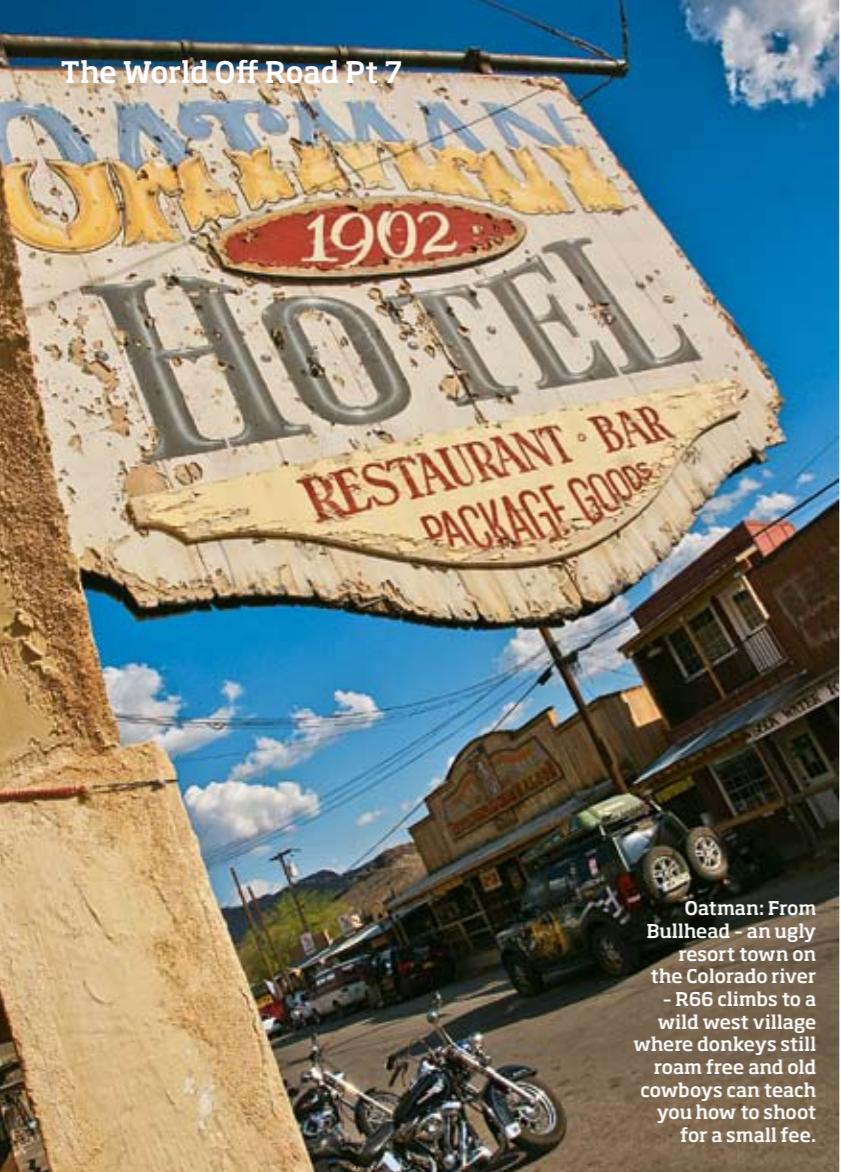
Mother Road

We discover the nostalgic side of America crossing its most 'ancient' road all the way from Los Angeles to Chicago. Let's get our kicks on Route 66...

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Photos by **Vula Netu**
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Kingman: The most photogenic section of the old Route 66 is from Oatman to Kingman, Arizona. It is a twisty, worn road with majestic views to the red rocks of Arizona.



Oatman: From Bullhead - an ugly resort town on the Colorado river - R66 climbs to a wild west village where donkeys still roam free and old cowboys can teach you how to shoot for a small fee.

There are many exciting road trips in the United States but only one is a travel destination in itself. This is Route 66. For this reason we followed this road all the way to Chicago, after we opened the container in LA and drove our Discovery after a month's break. We thought of driving up to Alaska but our route was towards Central America and this would mean a financial disaster for us. We could head directly to Mexico from California but could we miss the most celebrated, filmed and sung road of America?

So here we are, ready to get our kicks on Route 66 after an overnight in a petrol station outside San Bernardino. We are prepared to do Route 66 in the opposite way but in the best possible way. We don't want to miss an inch of the old tarmac stretch that changed the history of the US...

It's a weird fact that Route 66 became famous worldwide only after its retirement. Since 1984 Route 66 does not connect Chicago and Los Angeles any more. There is a network of modern interstate motorways, like 55, 44, 40, 15 and 10 that connect the two iconic cities. Route 66 exists for a few different reasons. Today's users are not desperados of the 30's, nor post WWII beatniks or members of the flower power generation. Some of



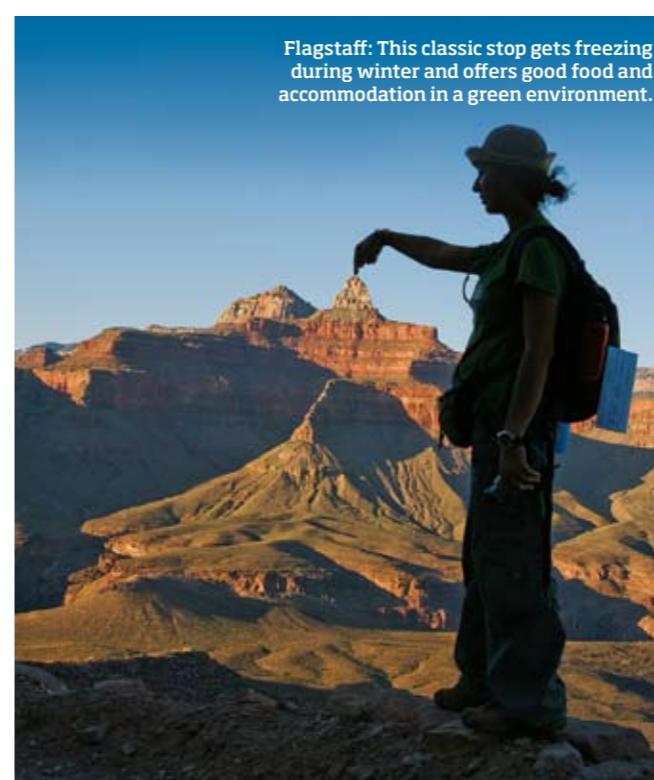
Grand Canyon: From Williams, a classic R66 stop, you can divert to the north and reach the southern rim of the Grand Canyon, the picture post card landscape of North America.



The iconic Bagdad Café in the Mojave Desert, which was used as a set for the homonymous cult movie.



Burma Shave ads revolutionized the advertising business in the 20's. Scientifically positioned signs on the road were transmitting the right message - with a philosophical touch - while you were cruising at 35 miles per hour...



Flagstaff: This classic stop gets freezing during winter and offers good food and accommodation in a green environment.

them are probably still there driving an old Chevy or a rusted VW Transporter but you can meet many more and mostly unexpected people on Route 66 today. Most visible are the born again bikers from Europe who ride rented Harley Davidsons, during their summer vacation. They look like gang members, with all these tattoos, long beards and leather jackets but they are innocent family men who are simply addicted to the legends of the road. We found some at Seligman, a fancy R66 stop in Arizona and had some fun with them. The current anthropology of Route 66 includes more heterogenic characters. You can meet new married couples from Texas in huge pick ups, retired Americans – don't call them grey nomads – in huge motorhomes, hordes of Route 66 association members on bikes or cars, or even members of specific automobile clubs who just parade on the tarmac stretches of the good old national road...

Do all these people follow Route 66 just for the breathtaking landscapes it drives through? Of course not. The road is actually a time machine. If you need to get into a simulator and live the innocent years of the American dream, follow the 66 signs and you got the feeling!

“ John Steinbeck named Route 66 the ‘Mother Road’ and ‘The Road of Second Chances’ ”



Seligman: The old section from Kingman to Seligman will remind you the animation movie *Cars*. You can buy your first memorabilia here and don't forget to taste a burger at Delgadillo's Diner.



Main Street of America

Route 66 was opened to traffic in 1926. It was the first, two lane road that connected the state of Illinois to California. It was 2448mi long, approximately 3,940km, and crossed eight states, including Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico and Arizona. In a country where private car was used as the locomotive of economic and social development (it still is!), a road of epic proportions like this changed the social map forever. Before the war, US Highway 66 – as the road was officially named – was the only path to freedom for the ‘Okies’, the victims of the depression years, in the agricultural Midwest states. California was the American dream for them and Route 66 was the only way to get there.

Grapes of Wrath, the masterpiece novel written by John Steinbeck in 1939 is the bible of that heroic generation and is still studied at modern American schools. The American writer named Route 66 ‘The Mother Road’ and ‘The Road of Second Chances’. During that era, celebrity criminals like Al Capone and Bonnie & Clyde, used Route 66 to escape from the law. After WWII, America was an absolute superpower and its main street was the best expression of hope for a better, more adventurous life. Route 66 was the mother of the new American culture. It was here that neon lights appeared first. Pop adverts, drive in cinemas, drive through restaurants, mom n' pop diners and motels were all born on Route 66. For the next few decades you could travel from the east to the west side of America in style and cheaply. Gasoline cost 17 cents per gallon and a cup of coffee only five cents. Full service petrol stations were flourishing and right next to the pump you could be served by a sexy, young waitress who would probably call



The World Off Road Pt 7

Santa Fe: We discovered an ancient section of Route 66 south of Santa Fe and it proved to be a hard 4WD challenge.



You can find plenty of vintage car museums at Santa Rosa, Clinton and other R66 hot spots.



Squirrel!!

Gallup, New Mexico:
After Flagstaff the
landscape gets arid
and the temperature
rises as the road
descends from the
Colorado plateau.

“ Route 66 was sung around the world thanks to Bobby Troup's song *Get Your Kicks on Route 66*. ”



you 'honey' as if you were her tender love. In a simple way Route 66 was becoming a living legend year by year. It became the favourite road for flashy Chevy's, nickel plated Greyhound buses and chopper bikes. The road was the backdrop of Mark Twain's novels and Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, the absolute bible of the beatnik generation. Since 1946, Route 66 was sung around the world thanks to Bobby Troup's song, *Get Your Kicks on Route 66* which was performed by many more artists, from Nat King Cole to The Rolling Stones and Depeche Mode...

Well it winds from Chicago to LA
More than two-thousand miles all the way.
Get your kicks on route sixty-six.

Well it goes through St. Louie
down to Missouri
Oklahoma City looks oh so pretty.
you'll see Amarillo, Gallup, New Mexico
Flagstaff, Arizona, don't forget Winona,
Kingsman, Barstow, San Bernardino.

Won't you get hip to this timely tip
And think you'll take that California trip.
Get your kicks on route sixty-six.

Elk City, Oklahoma:
The only reason to stop in this agricultural town are two noteworthy, outdoor museums about life in 19th century and the flourishing era of Route 66.



Uncle Sam wants peace... now!



Simple travel lyrics that everybody knows, even someone who never dreamt of crossing the US. How many times didn't we sing the same during our trip to Chicago? The song was creating images which we were trying to see alive. Amarillo is not a village as I thought it would be but a smaller Dallas. Gallup was just a truck and train station. Winona was nothing more than a useful rhyme in the song. San Bernardino is a wealthy LA suburb. Reality was in contrast to that song at every mile for us...

Back to the Future

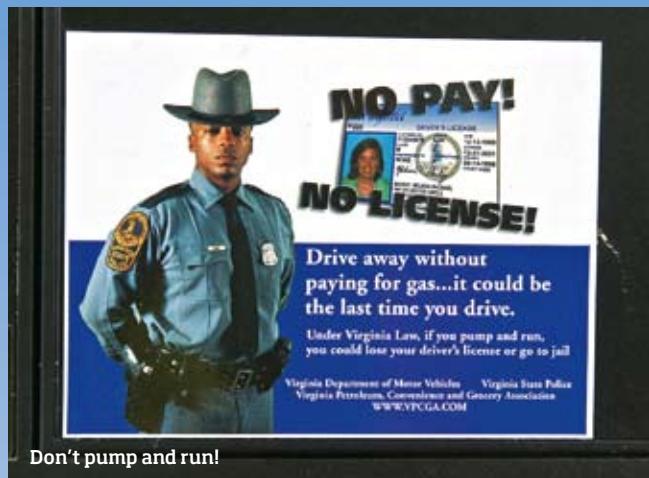
In a standardized country like the US, where endless interstate highways and thousands of interchanges dominate its environment, Route 66 is a nostalgic parenthesis. Route 66 is not a copy/paste road. High rising signs, fast food restaurants, chain motels and supermarkets still exist here but they are not as visible as little, born again enterprises that sell everything, but more than anything, the 66 brand itself.

Most of the sections of the old road were replaced since 1956 for the construction of multi-lane highways. Other sections were left unused for decades. Old motels, diners and petrol stations were shut down. There was no use for a road like Route 66 as long as the Americans could travel fast and cheap in jet planes. The American dream was all about moving fast and Route 66 was very slow by the new American standards.

As time went by, Route 66 was revived. Americans and Europeans alike started getting nostalgic and asked for the Mother Road to come back, more as an outdoor museum of beatnik culture than as a useful route from Chicago to LA. Old motels were restored and deserted petrol stations were rebuilt and converted to R66 museums. Old barns and houses were transformed into memorabilia shops, where you can find everything and anything with a 66 logo on it,

Discovery News

We were confident that our Discovery would be unscratched through this adventure until we stopped on the roadside of an empty, historic road in Mississippi, the Natchez Trace Parkway. A youngster in a Dodge Ram 1500 crashed violently into our car, moved it 7m ahead and continued for 25 more metres until it stopped in a cloud of smoke. It was a moment of fear for both of us. We felt our trip was over. The youngster had his toes broken, but we were okay, thanks to the strength of our Discovery, but our morale was down. Fortunately the insurance of the driver covered all the repair expenses. The car was towed 1000km to Land Rover in Houston and from there we were directed to the best bodyshop in town, Hanley Bros. After three months, our Discovery was as good as new again. The cost of repair exceeded \$22,000 USD and was fully covered. For us, this accident was an excellent opportunity to get a taste of life in Texas. We watched bull riding rodeos, American football matches, lived with different American and Greek families and drove a rental Toyota Camry. So we felt and looked like 'gringos' when we hit the road to Mexico...



Don't pump and run!

from a bumper sticker to a bottle of beer. Over the next few years Route 66 became a strong brand with no copyrights, so everybody here uses it to make a living. For us, this route was like a treasure hunt. We found loads of information from the internet before hitting the road and it proved to be a pleasant task to find the sections of the old tarmac among new interstates. It was worth the effort, even if we travelled for hundreds of kilometres on narrow service roads, just to get the whole feeling. After a few days we felt as if we were living in post-war America. Every town was like a movie set. Some characters are the same that starred during the peak years of the road. They are older now but they still make a living from a stretch of tarmac that crosses deserts and canyons, endless fields and remote towns. These Route 66 characters are the best part of this long trip and you know what? There will always be an old, fat waiter, a former beauty of the Mother Road, who will call you 'honey' while refilling your second cup of coffee. The Main Street of America is there and like Disneyland, Hollywood and the Statue of Liberty, will be waiting to sell you one more American dream... ☺



Chicago: We celebrated the end of our trip on Route 66 with a gyros sandwich in Greektown, not far from Shears Tower, the highest skyscraper in America.