

# The Washington Post

## Project to show Native American link to Route 66



A car travels down historic Route 66 toward Albuquerque, N.M., on Wednesday, Nov. 19, 2014. American Indian tribes have teamed up with a tourism group and the National Park Service to highlight the histories and cultures of the more than two dozen tribes along the famous byway. (Susan Montoya Bryan/Associated Press)

By Associated Press November 19, 2014

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — Greasy diners, big-finned Cadillacs, mom-and-pop souvenir shops, dusty trading posts and the promise of the West were undoubtedly part of the recipe that made historic Route 66 — America's Mother Road — famous.

The lesser known story is that of the more than two dozen American Indian tribes scattered along the 2,400-mile byway, which stretched from Chicago to California.

Tribes are now teaming up with a tourism group and the National Park Service to tell a new story for Route 66 travelers, one that aims to detail the histories of Native American communities that saw their part of the West changed because of the road and to dispel long-held stereotypes.

Virginia Salazar-Halfmoon, who is coordinating the project for the American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association, said many foreign visitors and even some Americans expect to find Indians wearing headdresses and living in teepees when they travel along the route.

“What we would like them to know is that we are all unique nations. We have a different story and a different history with Route 66,” she said. “We’re very much wanting to share who we are with the world.”

During the next year, the plan is to create a guidebook using federal grant money that will highlight significant tribal sites along the 2,400-mile route. The book will also include stories of how communities were affected by the commerce that came along with the traffic.

Representatives from the Park Service and the American Indian Center of Chicago were among those who participated in a meeting Wednesday to kick off the project. Officials from Acoma and Zuni pueblos in New Mexico, the Cherokee Nation and several other tribes attended.

Many talked about the route's role in the federal government's Indian relocation program of the 1950s and the migration of many Indian children to boarding schools.

They also said some legs of the highway used to be traditional trading routes that were used by the Indians long before the pavement went down and the road signs went up.

"This is a great opportunity we have here," said Otis Halfmoon, a tribal liaison with the Park Service. "These stories need to be told by us, by American Indian people."

Organizers say the creation of the guidebook along with a destination website that features tribal events and eventually oral histories could lead to more economic development opportunities for communities along the route.

Lisa Snell, the owner and publisher of the Native American Times and Native Oklahoma magazine, will be spending the next year traveling the route, doing research and conducting interviews with community members for the book.

Beyond the greasy burgers and fries and family road trips, Snell said travelers "don't think about the greater story of who was here first, who walked that highway."

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