FIELD GUIDE

TO THE AMERICAN ROAD TRIP

Produced by the Los Angeles Urban Rangers for
Interstate: the American Road Trip (2006)
DEAR INTERSTATE TRAVELER,

In light of the ever-increasing standardization of the American landscape (the Interstate Highway System – begun in 1956 and characterized by consistent speeds, straightened corridors, limited access points, and repetitive models of urban development and architectural design – is emblematic), the Los Angeles Urban Rangers believe sharpened observational skills are necessary for reading 21st century roadside geographies and the local embedded within the seemingly homogenous.

Our customizable Interstate Road Trip Specialist Field Kit, including this Field Guide to the American Road Trip, is intended to facilitate meaningful explorations of the space between the beginning and ending points of your journey and to provide basic observational tools with which to dissect the landscape along the way. Drawing upon the tradition of early topographic expeditions as well as longstanding geographic field practices, it includes devices for orientation, measurement, collection, framing, and documentation. The carefully designed series of workbook activities aids budding Interstate Road Trip Specialists in transforming their cars into mobile viewpoints, building journey-based archives, and passing late-night hours on the road.

When initiated precisely half a century ago, the Interstate Highway System was heralded as the greatest public works project the world had ever seen – an expansive network of automotive veins that would literally unite the forty-eight contiguous states. We encourage you to use these tools to draw your own conclusions about this broad and influential infrastructure and its effect on our understanding of space throughout the mythic road trip.

We hope to cross paths with you someday on the Interstate Trail!

Rangers Sara Daleiden and Emily Scott

"Together, the united forces of our communication and transportation systems are dynamic elements in the very name we bear – United States. Without them, we would be a mere alliance of many separate parts."

– President Dwight D. Eisenhower, February 22, 1955
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INSTRUCTIONS: Maps are visual representations of space, usually translating the three-dimensional into a two-dimensional surface for the purpose of navigation, orientation and/or acquisition. The following maps are provided to supplement your road atlas (with its specific and limited layers of information) in order to give you a broader sense of where you are.

“Maps work by serving interests. Because these interests select what from the vast storehouse of knowledge about the earth the map will represent, these interests are embodied in the map as presences and absences. Every map shows this... but not that, and every map shows what it shows in this way... but not the other. Not only is this inescapable but it is precisely because of this interested selectivity – the choice of a word or sign or aspect of the world to make a point – that the map is enabled to work.”

SATELLITE COMPOSITE OF LANDFORMS

Source: National Atlas of the United States of America
SATELLITE COMPOSITE OF NIGHT LIGHTS

Source: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
COUNTY BY COUNTY ELECTION RESULTS (2004)

Source: Michael Gastner, Cosma Shalizi and Mark Newman, University of Michigan
TERRITORIAL ACQUISITIONS

Source: National Atlas of the United States of America
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<td>Atlantic Coastal Pine Barrens</td>
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RIVERS AND LAKES

Source: National Atlas of the United States of America
INSTRUCTIONS: Now use the outline of the U.S. below to generate your own maps as you go!
INSTRUCTIONS: Map the intricacies of your car (trusty steed, partner in crime, home on wheels, techno exo-skeleton, mobile viewpoint, jumbo suitcase) as it traverses the Interstate Trail. How does your knowledge of its anatomy and character change as you sink further into the saddle?
INSTRUCTIONS: Capture the view outside within the frame of your windshield. And remember to keep your portable windshield handy for out-of-car exploration and composition making!
Relationship between focusing distance, angle of vision and distance of foreground detail at speeds of 40 mph, 50 mph and 60 mph.

Source: Christopher Tunnard and Bemis Pushkarer, *Man Made America: Chaos or Control?* (1963)
Relationship between windshield, visual field and speed.

If we reduce the visual field of the freeway to 45 degrees, which corresponds to a speed of 60 miles an hour, the proportions change as follows.

Source: Christopher Tunnard and Bemis Pushkarer, *Man Made America: Chaos or Control?* (1963)
COLOR MATCH THE AMERICAN LANDSCAPE

INSTRUCTIONS: Is the mountain you’re looking at Rosemary, Tennessee Haze, or Woodland Mystery? How about the shade of the afternoon clouds or the suburban rooftops beyond the roadside retaining wall? Use your color swatch of the American landscape to identify the hues within your field of view and expand your color vocabulary.

Greenescape
Kodiak
Basil
Appalachian Trail
Sage Green
FIELD OBSERVATION LOG

INSTRUCTIONS: Activate your inner geographer and record field observations on this customizable grid. Question sets are provided to suggest possible focus points – mix and match or create your own categories. Write selected questions in left column and label diagonals across the top with your designated breakdowns (time slots, states, driving v. stopping, days of week). Translate the rambling details of your road trip into an idiosyncratic archive!

ROAD

- Number of lanes
- Speed limit
- Actual speed
- Traffic density
- Frequency police cars
- Distance between exits
- Median type(s)
- Roadside barriers
- Roadside landscaping
- Electric lines
- Billboards (#, size, distance from road)
- Favorite/least favorite billboard
- Art (sculpture, mural, graffiti)

BODY

- Foods consumed
- Foods craved
- Frequency food consumption
- Liquid intake
- Trash generated
- Hours of sleep
- Fatigue (scale 1-10)
- Awareness night/day
- Modes of exercise
- Time spent exercising
- Bathroom breaks (#, location)
- Clothing worn
- Posture in car

CULTURE

- Place names
- Radio stations (#, type)
- Architectural style(s)
- Development patterns
- Cultural/historical themes
- Cars (local v. non-local)
- Car types
- Gas prices
- Motel prices

- Towns
  - Distance from road
  - “Authenticity” (scale 1-10)
  - Local attractions
  - Local dress
  - Body types
  - Accents
  - Ethnic groups (#, type)
  - Significant architecture
  - Availability wireless internet

ENVIRONMENT

- Temperature
- Weather
- Wind
- Topography
- Vistas
- Public lands (#, type)
- Ecoregion(s)
- Vegetation types
- Animals: dead
- Animals: alive
- Windshield bugs (#, type)
- Landscape colors (use color swatch)
- Building colors (use color swatch)
- Horizon colors (use color swatch)
| Date: ____________________________________________ |
| Field observer(s): _________________________________ |
| Stretch of road: ___________________________________ |
| Start/end times: ___________________________________ |

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PHOTOGRAPHIC SCAVENGER HUNTS

INSTRUCTIONS: Cruise past tourist traps and wayside photo points for these hunts. Instead, use your camera to document thresholds, spatial sensations, and stereotypic landscapes. Capture the intangible and elusive…explode the scenic viewpoint!

THRESHOLDS (between)

- city & non-city
- west & east
- one state & next
- one landscape & next
- roadside & non-roadside
- population & vacancy

SPATIAL SENSATIONS

- sublime
- nostalgic
- expansive
- iconic
- authentic
- melancholic
- claustraphic
- futuristic
- spectacular

STEREOTYPIC LANDSCAPES

- west coast
- cowboy & indian desert
- enchanted forest
- blue grass hills
- rolling prairie
- midwestern cornfield
- southern bayou
- rugged mountains
SPECIMEN COLLECTION

INSTRUCTIONS: A seductive array of containers and tools (envelopes, ziplocs, vials, test tubes, jars, eye dropper, tweezers) as well as a customizable labeling system are provided for the collection and study of field samples (ground-based nature specimen, plastic gas station paraphernalia, relic from favorite childhood monument). Such souvenirs, or pieces of place, not only hold the potential to spark storytelling down the road, but also to function as a material record of your cross-country expedition.

LABEL SET #1: FILL IN THE BLANKS

Collector(s): __________________________________
Date/time: ____________________________________
Road and milepost: ____________________________
Distance from car: _____________________________
Notes: _______________________________________  
_______________________________________

LABEL SET #2: SELECT FROM WORD SET

SOUVENIR
MIDWEST
INSTRUCTIONS: Tired of predictable roadside exchanges, the same old “so, where ya from”? Want to tune in to local and tourist cultures? Use these interview questions to learn more about fellow Americans and road travelers alike, transforming rest areas and truck stops into havens for cultural exchange!

QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWER

• Where are you?
• Time of day?
• Are there many people around?
• Who looks easiest to talk to?
• Is it easy to identify an interview target?
• How did you pick them out of the crowd?
• Would you describe the people around you as looking like you do?
• Are you comfortable here?

QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWEES

Tourists
• How far from here do you live?
• Have you ever been here before?
• Do you road trip often? If so, why?
• What is your most memorable road trip and why?
• Do you prefer to travel by interstate or other roadways, and why?
• When en route, what is your focus and what tends to pass by?
• Do you miss home?
• What are your favorite ways to pass time in the car?
• What did you just eat?
• If older than 60: Do you remember travel in the US before the Interstate system was built? If so, how do you think it has changed the nature of road travel?

Locals
• Have you lived here for long?
• What do you think is unique about this area?
• In ____ amount of time, what do you think I should see here?
• How close are we to the main part of town?
• Where are the majority of travelers you meet here visiting from? Do most stay overnight or pass through?
• Where do most locals vacation?
• Do you like to take road trips? If so, where do you like to go?
• If older than 60: Did you live here before the Interstate was built? If so, do you think the place changed as a result of its construction?
ROAD LIBS

INSTRUCTIONS: Pass the hours with this medley of road libs. Have your partner, unknowing of the excerpt at hand, supply a series of words to fill in the blanks. Read aloud and have a hearty laugh!

ROAD LIB 1: Dwight D. Eisenhower, remarks from Cadillac Square, Michigan (October 29, 1954)

We are pushing ahead with a great _________ program, a

_________ program that will take this Nation out of its

2. NOUN

_________ shackles of secondary roads all over this country

3. ADJECTIVE

and give us the types of highways that we need for this great

mass of ____________. It will be a nation of great

4. NOUN

__________, but will be more than that: it will be a nation that is

5. NOUN

going ahead every day. With Americans being _________ to

6. VERB

us — with our population increasing at five every minute, the

expanding horizon is one that staggers the ____________.  

7. NOUN
The shortness and verdure of ____________ gave the plain the 
1. NOUN appearance throughout it's whole extent of _________________ 
2. ADJECTIVE bowling-green in fine order. [...] this scenery already 

____________________________ was still farther heightened by 
3. THREE ADJECTIVES immense herds of ________________________________ 
4. THREE ANIMALS which we saw in every direction feeding on the hills and plains. 

[...] I think I can safely ___________________ the assertion that the 
5. VERB __________________________ of this ____________________ 
6. ADJECTIVE 7. REPEAT ONE ANIMAL is equal if not superior to that of the finest blooded 

________________________. 
8. NOUN
O ___________________________ for spacious skies,
1. ADJECTIVE
For ___________________________ waves of grain,
2. COLOR
For ___________________________ mountain majesties
3. SECOND COLOR
Above the ___________________________ plain!
4. ADJECTIVE
America! America! God shed his grace on thee
And crown thy ___________________________ with brotherhood
5. NOUN
From ___________________________ to shining
6. PLACE NAME
__________________________!
7. PLACE NAME

O beautiful for pilgrim ___________________________
8. BODY PART
Whose ___________________________, impassioned stress
9. ADJECTIVE
A thoroughfare for freedom beat
Across the wilderness! America! America!
God mend thine every ___________________________,
10. NOUN
Confirm thy soul in self-control, Thy liberty in law!

ROAD LIB 3: Katharine L. Bates, America, the Beautiful! (1913)
Off across the wide ________________ sweeps
the breezes of the fall,

Where the haze of ________________ summer
sort o' lingers over all;

Ev'ry bronco is ________________ in the
_______________________ autumn air,

And the yippin' of their riders is resoundin' everywhere. [...] 

There's a smell of fryin' ________________ as it
sizzles in the pan,

And the boys'll soon be lined up at the mess-box to a man;

And the ________________ 'll be a-clatter, for the
__________ 's b'ilin' hot,

While the slapjacks that are ________________
are a-going to hit the spot.
So in America when the sun goes down and I sit on the old broken-down river pier watching the long, long skies over _____________ and sense all that raw land that rolls in one unbelievable huge bulge over the _______________,
1. AMERICAN STATE
and all that road going, all the people dreaming in the immensity of it, and in Iowa I know by now the children must be crying in the land where they let the children cry, and at night the _________________ 'll be out, and don't you know that God is _________________ ? The evening star must be drooping and shedding her sparkler dims on the prairie, which is just before the coming of _________________
5. ADJECTIVE
night that blesses the earth, darkens all rivers, cups the peaks and folds the final shore in, and nobody, nobody knows what's going to happen to anybody besides the forlorn rags of growing old, I think of ________________
6. NAME OF LOVED ONE
I even think of Old _________________ the father we never found, I think of ________________.
7. REPEAT NAME OF LOVED ONE
8. REPEAT NAME OF LOVED ONE
INTERSTATE TRIVIA QUIZ

INSTRUCTIONS: Test your Interstate know-how and discover fun new facts!

1. Which US president is credited with establishing the Interstate Highway System?

2. When was the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act, also known as Federal Aid Highway Act of ____, passed?

3. The U.S. Interstate Highway System was modeled after which European road system?

4. How many tons of concrete make up an average mile of Interstate?

5. What three colors are represented on the shield-shaped Interstate sign?

6. North-South Interstates are denoted by even or odd numbers? How about East-West?

7. Do the numbers of North-South Interstates increase or decrease as one moves from the West to East Coast?

8. Do the numbers of East-West Interstates increase or decrease as one moves from north to south?

9. Interstates comprise what percentage of our nation’s roads?

10. What percentage of national road travel is carried out on Interstates?

11. What percentage of total truck miles is traveled on Interstates?

12. What is the longest Interstate and what is its stretch?

13. What is the shortest Interstate and what is its stretch?

14. Which state has the most Interstate miles and how many?

15. Which state has the largest number of Interstate routes and how many?

16. Which Interstate was the most expensive to build and how much did it cost?

17. Which Interstate goes through the most states and how many states?

18. Which five state capitals are not served by the Interstate system?

19. Approximately how many rest areas exist along the Interstate system?

20. What is the oldest Interstate segment?

21. How many bridges are part of the US Interstate Highway System?

22. How many miles did Americans travel on the Interstate system in 2000?

ANSWER

Source: Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), U.S. Department of Transportation
AAA
In 1902, 23,000 cars and 17 million horses were in operation in the United States. Yet, fifty small auto clubs had been formed by motoring enthusiasts across the country. Nine banded together to create a national motoring organization and founded the American Automobile Association (AAA) in March of 1902. For over a century, AAA has dedicated itself to “the future of vehicle motor transportation through support of adequate highways and elimination of burdensome taxes and restrictions” and to providing member services to make “car ownership and travel a more pleasurable experience.”

ARCHIVE
Noun: A collection of documents such as letters, official papers, photographs, or recorded material, kept for their historical interest; Verb: To store a document in an archive.

ATLAS
1) A Titan who for his part in the Titans’ revolt against the gods is forced by Zeus to support the heavens on his shoulders; 2) One who bears a heavy burden; 3) A bound collection of maps often including illustrations, informative tables, or textual matter.

BIogeography
The study of the geographical distribution of plants and animals.

BIOME
A division of the world’s vegetation that corresponds to a particular climate and is characterized by certain types of plants and animals. There are seventeen major biomes worldwide. Terrestrial biomes in the contiguous United States include temperate shrub lands, desert, temperate grassland, temperate forest, and boreal forest.

CONCRETE
A generic term for paving on modern highways, concrete is composed of tiny stones bound by an agent – either cement or something petroleum based. There are two major subtypes: Portland Cement Concrete (PCC) and Asphaltic Concrete (AC). Portland Cement Concrete is the white, durable substance, made from gypsum, that is commonly known as just “concrete.” This form of cement originated in Portland, England. Of the two types, Portland Cement is the more durable, but it is also far more expensive. Asphaltic Concrete is the black substance based on either macadam or a petroleum based substance - it is also known as “armac” (tar macadam).
CONCRETE SLABS
Sections of highway are made of parallel slabs of concrete that usually correspond with the lanes on the road. Concrete is divided into square or rectangular segments to accommodate its expansion and contraction due to changes in weather. This prevents cracking and potholes. From the driver's point of view, a two lane concrete road has one line down the middle, which delineates the two slabs.

DAYLIGHTING
Early state highways in California were built to conform to the terrain, a construction method that both reduced the highway grade and cut costs. Unfortunately, the result was dangerous blind hairpin turns. By the early 1920s, road-building technology advanced to the point where the need for such substandard designs was eliminated, yet many older highways still had them. Daylighting was the process of taking away enough of a hillside to add visibility to sharp turns, making them safe.

ECOREGION
A large area of land or water that contains a geographically distinct assemblage of natural communities that (a) share a large majority of their species and ecological dynamics; (b) share similar environmental conditions, and; (c) interact ecologically in ways that are critical for their long-term persistence.

GEOGRAPHY
Literally = “earth” + “writing”; 1) The study of all the physical features of the earth's surface, including its climate and the distribution of plant, animal, and human life; 2) The physical features of a place or region; 3) The arrangement of the different parts of a building, city, or other place; 4) The way that something is arranged and the relationships between its different elements.

INTERSTATE HIGHWAY SYSTEM
The largest single publics works project in history, this system was conceived to overcome the shortcomings of the U.S. Highway System, and was first proposed in 1947 as a 40,000 mile system of highways. While most of the present highways were designated in 1947, it was not until 1956, with the passage of the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 that they received a funding mechanism. (Previously, federal highways had been funded by a 50/50 funding mechanism; the states were required to match federal spending dollar for dollar. This new mechanism called for the federal government to pay for 90% of the construction costs, with the states matching only 10%.) President Eisenhower championed this system, hence their title as the “Eisenhower Interstate Highway System.” It is said that Eisenhower was so impressed by the German autobahns that he wanted a similar system of highways in the United States that would allow for better military mobilization and promote better interstate commerce. He listed five problems, in particular,
INTERSTATE HIGHWAY SYSTEM (continued)
that the Interstate Highway System was intended to improve/overcome: the annual death and injury toll, the waste of billions of dollars in detours and traffic jams, the clogging of the nations courts with highway related suits, the inefficiency in the transportation of goods, and the appalling inadequacies to meet the demands of catastrophe or defense should an atomic war come.

HIGHWAY TYPES
• Conventional Highway: Varying in width from two lanes to eight, conventional highways generally top out at four. They look and feel like a normal street, complete with stop signs, signals, and full access from businesses and residences.

* Expressway: On the East Coast, an expressway is the catchall term for a grade separated limited access highway. In California, an expressway is simply a limited access highway; essentially a freeway with grade intersections, but divided and built to freeway standards. Many current freeways were originally constructed as expressways in the 1940s and early 1950s and had grade separated interchanges added later.

* Freeway: Generally, a freeway is a grade separated divided highway designed for high speeds. Contrary to popular belief, a freeway is not a highway “free” from tolls. “Free”-way instead refers to a legislative definition passed by the California Legislature in 1939, which provided for a highway that would be free of encroaching properties and has controlled access. At the time, this was very controversial since property owners next to the road could have no rights of direct access.

* Interstate Highway: Interstates are highways that go through more than one state. This term is most often associated with the Interstate Highway System, but they are not the only interstate highways. An interstate highway also refers to the US highways and state highways that maintain a route number through more than one state. The earliest interstate highways include the National Road and Lincoln Highway, both of which traversed many states. In short, interstate highways are highways that go through more than one state; the Interstate Highway System is just one set of highways that matches this definition (denoted by a red, white, and blue shield and with limited access points).

• Turnpike: A road for the use of which tolls are collected. The first engineered and planned road in the United States was the Lancaster Turnpike, a privately constructed toll road built between 1793 and 1795. Connecting Philadelphia and Lancaster in Pennsylvania, its 62-mile length had a maximum grade of 7 percent and was surfaced with broken stone and gravel.
JERSEY CURB
The piece of concrete that separates traffic lanes and acts as a bridge rail. Originally developed in New Jersey along the Turnpike in the late 1950s and 1960s, the value of such a barrier for preventing accidents was immediately obvious and the present form appeared in the mid-1960s. By the end of the 1970s, it was used for all bridge rails and for dividing urban freeways. Efforts have been made to soften its stark appearance with decorations ranging from a groove on the outside part of the bridge rail to elaborate designs, some of which hark back to the days of the “mission style” concrete guardrails.

LANDFORM
A natural physical feature of the earth’s surface, for example, a gorge, butte, or plain; the form or shape of the land.

LOCAL
Adjective: 1) Relating to, situated in, or providing a service for a particular area; 2) Typical of, or only found in, a particular area; 3) Not covering a wide area or the whole country; Noun: Somebody who lives in a particular area, was born there, or has lived there for a long time.

MEDIAN STRIP
A paved or planted strip dividing a highway into lanes according to direction of travel.

MILEPOST
A post indicating the distance in miles from or to a given point, and/or a post placed a mile from a similar post. All Interstate routes are mile-posted beginning at the most westerly or southerly point. The beginning point is milepost 0. If the first interchange on the route is located between milepost 4.0 and 5.0, it is numbered as Interchange #4. The next interchange, if located at milepost 8.7, would be numbered as Interchange #8, etc. With this system the motorist can easily determine the location and distance to a desired interchange.

NATIONAL ROAD
This was the first federally funded road built in the United States. At its peak it went from Cumberland, MD to Vandalia, IL – a distance of 591 miles. Construction had started in the late 1700s but by the early to mid-1800s interest waned in favor of the railroads. During its time, it proved that people over vast distances could be united and was a model upon which later highways were based. Today, it is part of US 40 and many of its structures, especially stone bridges, remain in use.
PIioneer
1) A person or group that is the first to do something or that is a forerunner in creating or developing something new; 2) Somebody who goes into previously uncharted or unclaimed territory with the purpose of exploring it and possibly colonizing and settling it; 3) A foot soldier whose duties include going ahead of the main company to pave the way for them by building roads, ditches, bridges, and other constructions; 4) The first species of plant or animal to begin living in a previously unoccupied site.

SOUVENIR
Something bought or kept as a reminder of a particular place or occasion.

TOPOGRAPHY
1) The study and mapping of the features on the surface of the land, including natural features such as mountains and constructed features such as highways and railroads; 2) The features on the surface of a particular area of land; 3) A study or detailed description of the various features of any object or entity and the relationships between them.

U.S. HIGHWAY SYSTEM
This refers to the system of highways that preceded the Interstate Highway System and that is marked by black and white shields. It was established in 1925 and was the world’s first countrywide system of uniformly numbered highways.

Sources:
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