



- [About Us](#)
- [Work with Us](#)

[Sign up / sign in](#)

- [Places](#)
- [prev](#) [next](#)

Santa Ana Chapitiro, Mexico

[Temple of Santa Muerte](#)

24 Jul 2015

New York, New York

[Nicholas Roerich Museum](#)

24 Jul 2015

Los Angeles, California

[Air Hollywood](#)

24 Jul 2015

Boston, Massachusetts

[Brook Farm](#)

23 Jul 2015

- [Articles](#)
- [prev](#) [next](#)

[FOUND: A Four-Legged Fossil That Might Be a Snake](#)

24 Jul 2015

[What It Was Like to Seek Asylum in Medieval England](#)

24 Jul 2015

[How To Escape A Building By Dropping Through a Fabric Esophagus](#)

24 Jul 2015

[The Strangely Successful History of People Mailing Themselves in Boxes](#)

24 Jul 2015

- [Events](#)
- [prev](#) [next](#)

[Obscura Society Philly: The Quick and the Deadly](#)

[July 25, 2015](#)

[Obscura Society LA: Vintage Car Cruise](#)

[July 26, 2015](#)

[Obscura Society LA: Pasadena's Portals](#)

[July 30, 2015](#)

[Obscura Society NY: Medical Photography](#)

[July 30, 2015](#)

- [Send a tip](#)
- [Sign in](#) or [Sign up](#) to add a place, save your favorite entries, create a map of places you've visited, and more!
- [Random Place](#)

Close your eyes and spin the globe.

what: near:

[escape week](#)

The Obsessively Detailed Map of American Literature's Most Epic Road Trips



[Click To Start Exploring](#)

I am a freak for the American road trip. And I'm not alone, as some of this country's best writers have taken a shot at describing that quintessentially American experience. "There is no such knowledge of the nation as comes of traveling in it, of seeing eye to eye its vast extent, its various and teeming wealth, and, above all, its purpose-full

people," the newspaper editor Samuel Bowles wrote 150 years ago in [Across the Continent, arguably the first true American road-trip book](#).

The above map is the result of a painstaking and admittedly quixotic effort to catalog the country as it has been described in the American road-tripping literature. It includes every place-name reference in 12 books about cross-country travel, from Mark Twain's *Roughing It* (1872) to Cheryl Strayed's *Wild* (2012), and maps the authors' routes on top of one another. You can track an individual writer's descriptions of the landscape as they traveled across it, or you can zoom in to see how different authors have written about the same place at different times.

Most interestingly of all, for me at least, you can ruminate about what those differences say about American travel, American writing, American history.

A word to close readers: I hand-typed most of these 1,500-plus entries and located their coordinates as best I could. Some were difficult to track down. I beg forbearance if you, a hermit in the mountains of Wyoming, find that I have pinned Mark Twain's reference to Horse Creek in a place where it could not have been, or if you, a denizen of what Tom Wolfe rather unkindly called "the Rat lands" of Mexico, find my estimation of the precise location of Chicalote, Aguascalientes, somewhat inexact.

To be included, a book needed to have a narrative arc matching the chronological and geographical arc of the trip it chronicles. It needed to be non-fictional, or, as in the case of *On the Road*, at least told in the first-person. To anticipate a few objections: *Lolita's* road-trip passages are scattered and defiant of cartographical order; *The Grapes of Wrath's* are brief compared to the sections about poverty and persecution in California; the length of the trip in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is short in the geographical sense even if it is prodigiously vast in every other; and yes, *The Dharma Bums* is *On the Road's* equal in every respect, and if you want to map the place-name references in all of Kerouac's books, I salute you.

These passed the test:

[Wild](#), Cheryl Strayed. 2012. After a series of personal crises, the author hits the Pacific Crest Trail and walks from Southern California to Portland. Self-actualization ensues.

[The Cruise of the Rolling Junk](#), F. Scott Fitzgerald. 1934. Scott and Zelda's wacky adventures along the muddy, unkept roads of the mid-Atlantic and the South, as they drive from Connecticut to her hometown of Montgomery, Alabama.

[Rolling Nowhere: Riding the Rails With America's Hoboes](#), Ted Conover. 1984. Conover, our most accomplished method journalist, studies with a merciful lack of sentimentality a subculture of transients that has long been mourned and romanticized more than it has been loved or even tolerated.

[A Walk Across America](#), Peter Jenkins. 1979. Jenkins and his dog Cooper hoof it to New Orleans from upstate New York; along the way they encounter poverty, racism, hippies, illness, hateful cops and—at least for one of them—violent vehicular death. Oh, and in Mobile, Alabama, God.

[Cross Country: Fifteen Years and 90,000 Miles on the Roads and Interstates of America with Lewis and Clark](#), Robert Sullivan. 2006. As much a free-association history of the American road trip as the chronicle of one in particular, Sullivan's book is rare in that it documents a time-restricted straight-shot across the continent, interstates and chain-motels and all. Abandon nostalgia, all ye who enter here.

[The Lost Continent](#), Bill Bryson. 1989. A sneering account of this exile's return from abroad and his re-acquaintance with his native country. Bryson seems to be reminded on almost every page of why he chose to leave it, and we of why we let him.

[Blue Highways: A Journey into America](#), William Least Heat Moon. 1982. Not less critical of America and Americans than Bryson but more interestingly so, the author takes his van on the road for three months after separating from his wife and sticks only to smaller highways while avoiding the cities. He has long debates about local history and current affairs with people on the road and pays especial attention to quirky place-names—a traveler after my own heart.

[On the Road](#), Jack Kerouac. 1957. Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty search for bop, kicks, speed and the night.

[Roughing It](#), Mark Twain. 1872. Twain's book about his journey west by stagecoach a decade earlier is a incredible account of transcontinental travel before the railroad made it infinitely easier; his sections about the early Mormons in Salt Lake City, the mining settlements in Nevada and the pre-Americanized Sandwich Islands—aka, Hawaii—are also well worth the read.

[Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance](#), Robert Pirsig. 1974. The author and his son ride by motorcycle to California; Profound Philosophical Ruminations ensue. Very 1970s.

[Travels with Charley](#), John Steinbeck. 1962. The aging novelist, his black-poodle pooch and Rocinante, the customized van named after Don Quixote's horse, light out for the territories; Charley discovers redwoods, which depress him; Steinbeck discovers that you can't go home again.

[The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test](#), Tom Wolfe. 1968. Ken Kesey and the highly-acidic Merry Pranksters take the bus Further across the country to "tootle" its citizens out of lethargy. Neal Cassady rides again.

*Update, 7/22: An earlier version of the story had the wrong publication dates for *Blue Highways* and *The Lost Continent*.

[Share Tweet](#)

Related Articles

[There's an Escape Release in Car Trunks Due to One Woman Kidnapped and Locked in Hers](#)

['I Am a Notably Good Sleeper': A Cultural History of Snoozing Through Incredible Events](#)

[The Story Behind the World's Most 'Elite' Computer Escape Key](#)

Enjoying this article?

Subscribe to get biweekly updates on the world's hidden wonders.

Atlas Places Near You

More from Atlas Obscura

[FOUND: A Four-Legged Fossil That Might Be a Snake](#)

[What It Was Like to Seek Asylum in Medieval England](#)

[How To Escape A Building By Dropping Through a Fabric Esophagus](#)

[The Strangely Successful History of People Mailing Themselves in Boxes](#)

More from Zergnet

[The Easter Egg Hidden In The Tesla Model S](#)

[7 'Back to the Future' Gadgets That Are Real In 2015](#)

[The Camera That Will Make You Forget Your Smartphone](#)

[7 Reasons You Should Quit Facebook in 2015](#)

[Like Us on Facebook](#)

[See Our Collection of Curious Facts](#)

X

[See Our Collection of Curious Facts](#)

[Autoblog.com](#)

[Mashable.com](#)

[About.com](#)

[Mensjournal.com](#)

[About.com](#)

[Mensjournal.com](#)

[About.com](#)

[Mensjournal.com](#)

[About.com](#)

[Mensjournal.com](#)

[About.com](#)

[Mensjournal.com](#)

[About.com](#)

[Mensjournal.com](#)

[About.com](#)

[Mensjournal.com](#)

[About.com](#)

[Mensjournal.com](#)

[About.com](#)

[Mensjournal.com](#)

[About.com](#)

[Mensjournal.com](#)

[About.com](#)

[Mensjournal.com](#)

[About.com](#)

[Mensjournal.com](#)

[About.com](#)

[Mensjournal.com](#)

[About.com](#)

[Mensjournal.com](#)

[About.com](#)

[Mensjournal.com](#)

[About.com](#)

[Mensjournal.com](#)

[About.com](#)

[Mensjournal.com](#)

[About.com](#)

[Mensjournal.com](#)

[About.com](#)

[Mensjournal.com](#)

[About.com](#)

[Mensjournal.com](#)

[About.com](#)

[Mensjournal.com](#)

[About.com](#)

[Mensjournal.com](#)

[About.com](#)

[Mensjournal.com](#)

[About.com](#)

[Mensjournal.com](#)

[About.com](#)

[Mensjournal.com](#)

COMPONENTS of the
FOREVERTRON'S =
70-PIECE
BIRD BAND and ORCHESTRA



Share:
[Tweet](#)
[Refresh](#)

This is what we believe:

01. There is something **new** under the sun, every day, all over the world.
02. Around the corner is something that will **surprise** the hell out of you.
03. Atlas Obscura is for people who still believe in **discovery**.

Our Popular Destinations:

[Connecticut](#) [Estonia](#) [Indonesia](#) [Tokyo](#) [Pennsylvania](#) [Toronto](#) [Minnesota](#) [Sweden](#)

- [Home](#)
- [About / Contact](#)
- [FAQ](#)
- [Join our team / Internships](#)
- [Terms of Use](#)
- [Privacy Policy](#)

© 2015 Atlas Obscura. All rights reserved.

[View Mobile Site](#)

close

Sign In

or [Sign Up](#)
[Sign in with](#)
[Facebook](#)

or
Email
Password

[Forgot your password?](#)

Remember me

close

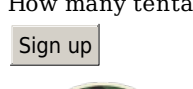
Sign Up

already have an account?

[Sign In](#)
[Sign up with](#)
[Facebook](#)

or
Email
Password

How many tentacles does an octopus have?



×

Get Our Weekly Wonders in Your Inbox

Strange, unusual and wondrous tales and locales, handpicked by our editors, straight to your inbox. Guaranteed to awe and amaze.

Not a traditional road trip book where the driver is behind the wheel on the open road, but rather Mike decided to hitchhike across the country from San Francisco to Cape Fear, North Carolina, which would be challenging in and of itself. But Mike decided to do it without so much as a penny. He would have to rely on the goodwill and help of complete strangers on the open road in order to find rides, eat, and have a place to sleep.Â The Obsessively Detailed Map of American Literatureâ€™s Most Epic Road Trips. Books to Inspire the Ultimate American Road Trip. The 9 Best Road Trip Books from Adventure Journal. Road Trip!