



MUSEUM of
NORTHERN
ARIZONA

Nancy Wiechec
Marketing Specialist
(928) 774-5211 or (928) 679-0171
nwiechec@musnaz.org

3101 N FORT VALLEY RD | FLAGSTAFF AZ 86001

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE | Oct. 16, 2025

Images available upon request.

‘Wagon Road to Mother Road’ exhibit journeys through transformative era of road travel

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. — Journey through America’s transformative era of road travel in “Wagon Road to Mother Road,” opening Nov. 16 at the Museum of Northern Arizona.

The exhibition traces the evolution of travel in northern Arizona from the Beale Wagon Road to Route 66 and reveals its deep imprint on landscapes, communities and highway heritage. It coincides with the Route 66 Centennial, marking 100 years since the highway’s designation on Nov. 11, 1926.

"Each new mode of travel along this route affected the settlement that has become Flagstaff, the territory that has become Arizona, and the nation that is the United States," observes exhibit curator David Purcell, MNA supervisory archaeologist and historian.

"With improved roads, the Southwest became a place to go for its own sake, instead of just a crossing to endure."

Purcell and other writers detail Route 66's enduring legacy in the 2025 issue of the museum's Plateau journal, which accompanies the exhibition.

Based on the museum’s archaeological surveys in Petrified Forest National Park, the exhibition uncovers Route 66’s wilder side—stories of revelry, hardship, and tragedy revealed through tens of thousands of discarded objects that challenge the highway’s more nostalgic image.

"The story of Route 66 is written in trash that speaks to lazy habits, mechanical failures, and the lives lost in car crashes," Purcell writes in Plateau.

In fact, the road through Arizona and New Mexico in the mid-1900s was hazardous and heavily traveled. High speeds, poorly maintained sections, and unprepared motorists resulted in many fatal crashes on the route, earning it the moniker “Bloody 66.”

The exhibit highlights vintage artifacts, maps, music and memorabilia that bring the legendary road to life. Featured items include a 1931 Ford Model A pickup, a hand-painted Route 66 map, and mid-century Phillips 66 gas pump. Liquor bottles, soda bottles, and oil cans uncovered by MNA archaeologists will also be on display.

"Wagon Road to Mother Road" runs Nov. 16, 2025, through Oct. 26, 2026, in the museum's Waddell Gallery. Museum of Northern Arizona members are invited to an opening reception for the exhibit Nov. 15 at 3 p.m.



MUSEUM *of* NORTHERN ARIZONA

3101 N FORT VALLEY RD | FLAGSTAFF AZ 86001

About the Museum of Northern Arizona

Founded in 1928, the Museum of Northern Arizona (MNA) preserves and celebrates the natural and cultural heritage of the Colorado Plateau. Through its exhibitions, educational programs, research, and community events, the museum fosters a deeper understanding of the region's art, science, and people. Located near the foot of the San Francisco Peaks at 3101 N Fort Valley Road in Flagstaff, the museum is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., with extended hours until 7 p.m. on Thursdays.

For information about current exhibitions and programs, visit <https://musnaz.org>.