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Texas Road Trip (T26A)

With a planned January-February trip to Florida and Puerto Rico cancelled because a major winter storm prevented my Vegas-Miami plane from getting to Vegas, my first trip of this year was a trip out to Texas to visit family. With assorted doctor appointments to work around, I had a two-week window for making the trip work, about half of which was spent driving out there and back, mostly sticking to interstates. I did get some sightseeing in, with some time in San Antonio, Texas on the way out there, and in Oklahoma City on the way home, but not much else. (And shortly before this trip, I had to cancel next month's annual spring Utah trip because I was summoned for jury duty, and they can't tell me if they'll actually need me until the evening before my summons date. At least this was a good trip.)

I visited San Antonio once before, back in 1998, and I ended up pretty much returning to the same sites I visited on that trip. I'm interested in its historic sites and some museums, but two days was plenty to see them.

The Alamo, of course, is its most famous attraction. In Spanish colonial times, it began as Mission San Antonio de Valero, one of five Spanish missions established in the area to convert the local Native Americans to Christianity. The other four missions comprise San Antonio Missions National Historical Park, a National Park Service site. All five have been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

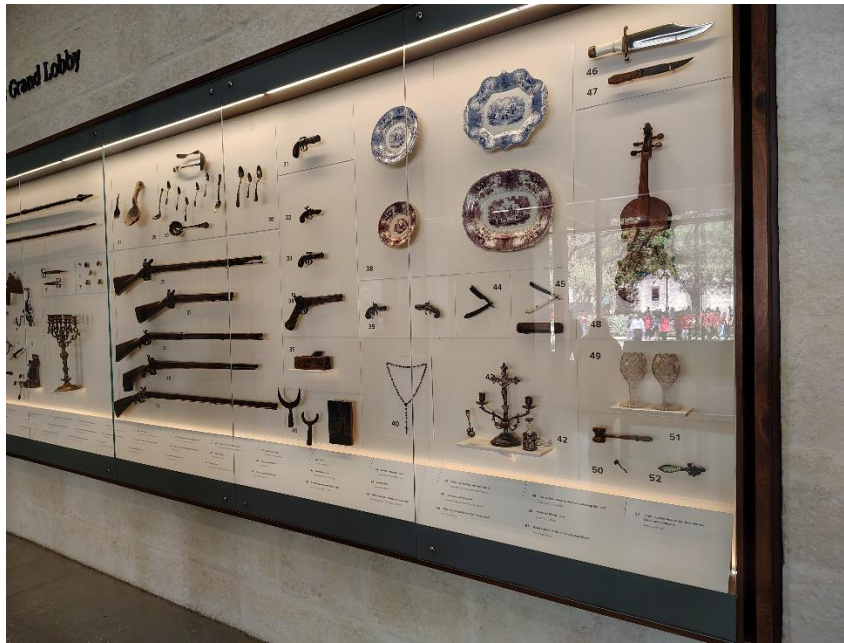
Mission San Antonio de Valero was secularized in 1793, and became a Spanish – and later Mexican – fort. The fort was surrendered to Texian soldiers in December 1835 as Texas fought for its independence, but the defenders, including Davy Crocket and co-commanders William Travis and Jim Bowie, were wiped out in the Battle of the Alamo on March 6, 1836.

“Remember the Alamo!” became a Texian rallying cry.

When the Mexican army retreated from Texas several months later, they destroyed much of the Alamo, eventually to be replaced by modern San Antonio. The old mission church and a few ruins remain.



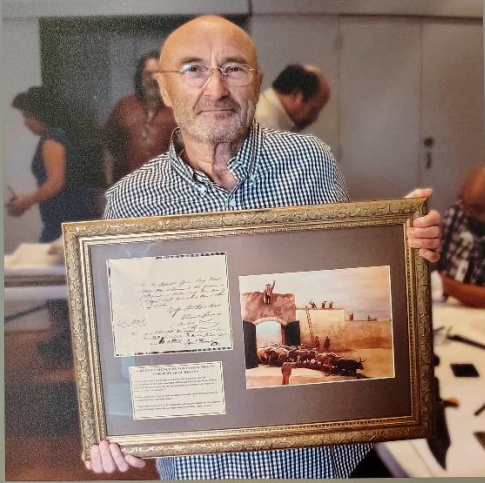
The restored mission church isn't very big, and except for some informational signs about the building there isn't that much to see inside. On a busy day, you could easily spend more time in line to get in than you do inside.



A few years ago, they added a museum next to the Alamo that tells more of its story and displays numerous artifacts from the Alamo and those associated with the battle there.



Davy Crockett was perhaps the most famous of those who fought and died at the Alamo, his story no doubt helped along by Walt Disney, who in the 1950s created the TV miniseries *Davy Crockett* and the movie *Davy Crockett: King of the Wild Frontier*, both of which featured the theme song *The Ballad of Davy Crockett*. By the end of that year, Americans had purchased more than \$300 million in Davy Crockett merchandise, from coonskin caps to lunch boxes, some of which was also displayed in the museum.

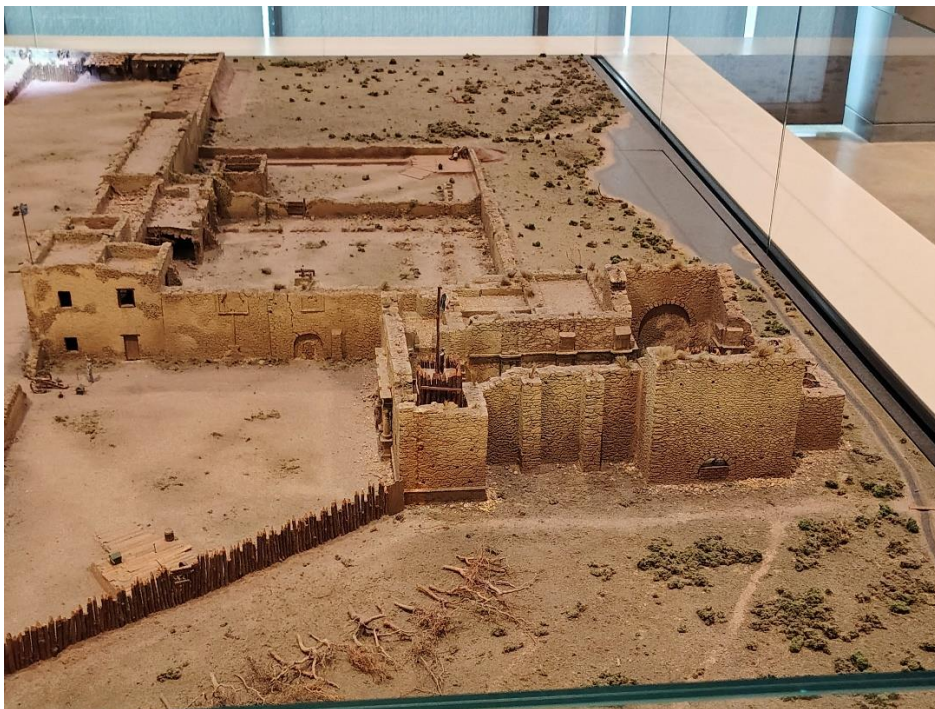


Phil Collins

Inspired by his love of Walt Disney's Davy Crockett series, musician and composer Phil Collins focused his collection around the Texas Revolution and early Texas history. Beginning with an Alamo Defender's saddle receipt, Collins has continued to amass artifacts that bring the struggle for Texas Independence to life.

Among the kids who got hooked on Davy Crockett was an English boy, Phil Collins, who would go on to become the top-selling rocker in the 1980s through his affiliation with the band Genesis and his solo career.

He used his music earnings to amass the world's largest private collection of Texas Revolution and Alamo-related artifacts, hundreds of which he eventually donated to this museum.



Collins also commissioned the creation of a diorama that depicted the Alamo on the day of the Battle of the Alamo. The old mission church which visitors tour today is the structure in the lower center right.



For Phil Collins and other 1950s kids, they learned about the Alamo through Disney's *Davy Crockett* movies and merchandising. For kids in the 1980s, it was Pee-wee Herman's quest to find his stolen bicycle in the Alamo's basement in the 1985 film *Pee-wee's Big Adventure*. The museum at the Alamo displays the bicycle that was created for the film's stunt work.

However, they don't display the bicycle in the Alamo's basement. The Alamo doesn't have a basement.

In addition to the Alamo, I visited the other four former Spanish mission sites, which varied in how much of each site had survived, although each of the mission churches are still used today.



Mission Nuestra Señora de la Purísima Concepción de Acuña a.k.a. Mission Concepción



One of the surviving frescoes at Mission Concepción



Mission San José y San Miguel de Aguayo a.k.a. Mission San José is the most intact of the missions. The grounds also include a visitor center with a museum.



Living quarters for the Native Americans at the missions were quite sparse.



Mission San Juan Capistrano a.k.a. Mission San Juan



Inside the mission church



Mission San Francisco de la Espada a.k.a. Mission Espada



Inside the mission church



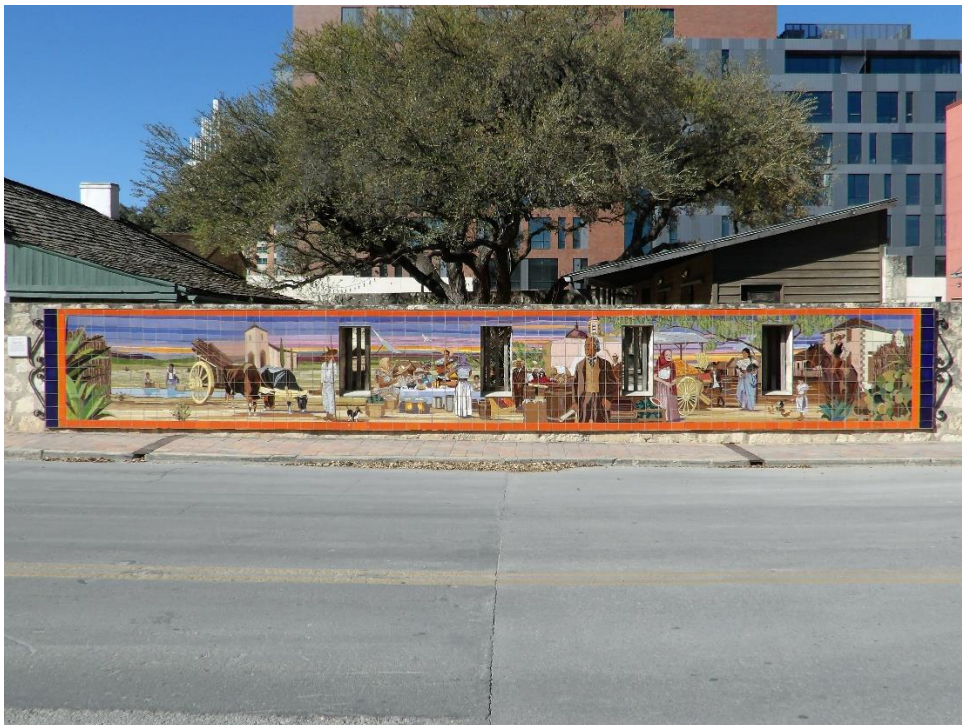
The Spanish established what would become San Antonio with settlers from the Canary Islands. This is a view of San Fernando Cathedral from Plaza de Las Islas Canarias.



This tomb on display in the entrance to the cathedral contains the remains of Davy Crockett, William Travis and Jim Bowie, who died in the Battle of the Alamo.



Casa Navarro, a Texas state historical site, was home to Jose Antonio Navarro, one of only two native-born Texans to sign the Texas Declaration of Independence.



It was once in the Tejano neighborhood of Laredito, depicted in this mural at Casa Navarro, although little survives of that neighborhood today.



The Spanish Governor's Palace, now a museum, is the last visible trace of the Presidio San Antonio de B exar from the Spanish Colonial period.



This was once the home of writer William Sidney Porter, better known as O. Henry.



A bend in the San Antonio River passes through downtown San Antonio. Lined with walkways, it is known as the San Antonio River Walk. Shops, restaurants and general downtown businesses line the walkways. You can also take a boat tour of the downtown segment of the river, giving you “scenic views” of other tourists as they walk along the River Walk and eat at these restaurants. As someone who usually enjoys a good boat tour, in two visits to San Antonio I have not figured out the appeal of these boat tours. The river itself continues south to the San Antonio Mission sites.



I enjoyed a number of works on display at the Brisco Western Art Museum, including *Sunday Riding at Mission San José*, pictured.



The 750-foot-tall Tower of the Americas was built for the 1968 World's Fair. It was the tallest observation tower in the U.S. until 1996, when the Stratosphere Tower in Las Vegas was completed.



Its Six Flags Over Texas Observation Deck provides this view of downtown San Antonio. The red arrow points to the Alamo. Given this skyline, would you guess that San Antonio is the 7th most populous city in the U.S.? Views are pretty flat in the other directions.



Tejano music is a fusion of Mexican folk styles and American pop, rock and country. A Tejano music fan fair was underway near the Tower of the Americas.



La Villita Historic Arts Village was one of San Antonio's oldest neighborhoods. Today, it features a number of restaurants and small shops.



At the Historic Market Square at the opposite end of the downtown area, live music and dancing were also featured. It was announced that the person playing the accordion was a 12-year-old local boy, no doubt the result of the lasting influence of Lawrence Welk and his music on young people.



Signs for sale at Historic Market Square

From here I headed up to exurban Dallas to visit family, and then it was on to Oklahoma.

Especially after the Supreme Court’s McGirt vs. Oklahoma decision, a great deal of the state is under tribal reservations and statistical areas governed by the 39 recognized tribes in the state. A number of these tribes maintain historical sites and cultural centers. On my drive to Oklahoma City, I stopped at three of these, starting with the Choctaw Cultural Center,



The Choctaw, like most Oklahoma tribes, started out in what is now the eastern United States – Mississippi and Alabama, in the case of the Choctaw, including the Moundville Archaeological Park in Alabama, depicted here.



I visited Moundville Archaeological Park when vacationing in Alabama in 2014.



When Choctaw families were forced to head west to Oklahoma along the Trail of Tears, many brought clay bowls like this one. It wasn't just that the bowls were functional, but because the bowls were made of earth from their homeland – they were bringing a bit of home with them.



Fort Washita Historic Site is now managed by the Chickasaw Nation. When established in 1842, it was the southwesternmost U.S. Army fort in the country. It originally served to protect the Choctaw and Chickasaw people from the Plains Indians. Later, it was used by Confederate troops during the Civil War.

On April 19, 1995, Timothy McVeigh with the help of Terry Nichols detonated a powerful bomb in a truck parked in front of Oklahoma City's Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, killing 168 people, injuring 684 others, and irreparably damaging the building, as well damaging or destroying another 324 downtown buildings. This remains the deadliest act of domestic terrorism in U.S. history.

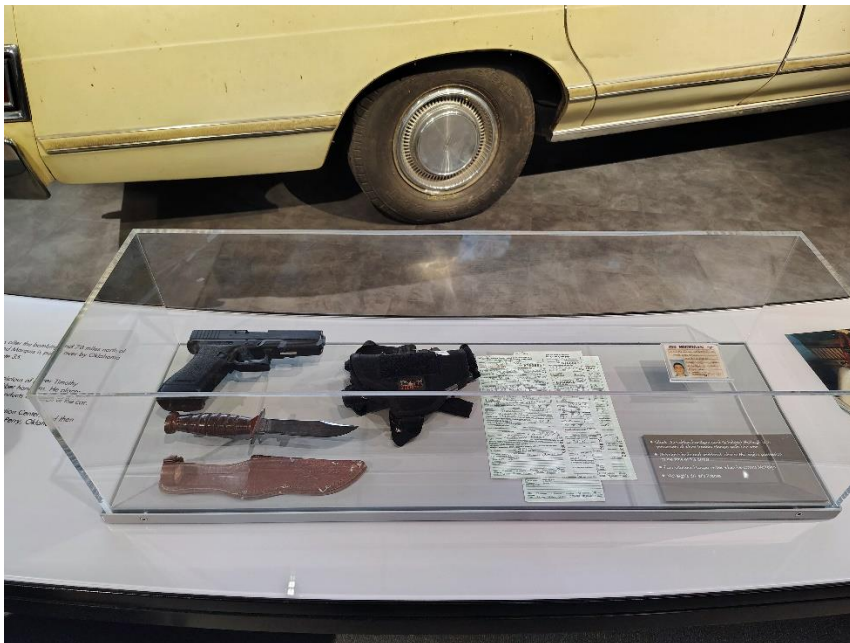
The site was razed and replaced with the Oklahoma City National Memorial, which I had visited in both 2000 and 2008. Since my last visit, a museum opened at the site which tells the story of the attack and honors those who died.



The Oklahoma City National Memorial. The grassy area in the trees to the left was the location of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. Each of the "chairs" there is inscribed with the name of one of the victims who died.



The museum walks us through the events of the day, and includes an audio recording of a hearing that was underway in the building when the bomb went off. Some of the debris recovered from the site is also on display. The museum continues with the recovery efforts.



The museum then goes on to investigation that ultimately led to the arrests and convictions of McVeigh and Nichols, including McVeigh's getaway car and weapons that he had on him at the time of his arrest.



The Gallery of Honor pays tribute to the 168 people who died, and includes their names, photos and personal items selected by the families. 19 children were killed in the attack, many of them in the building's on-site daycare.



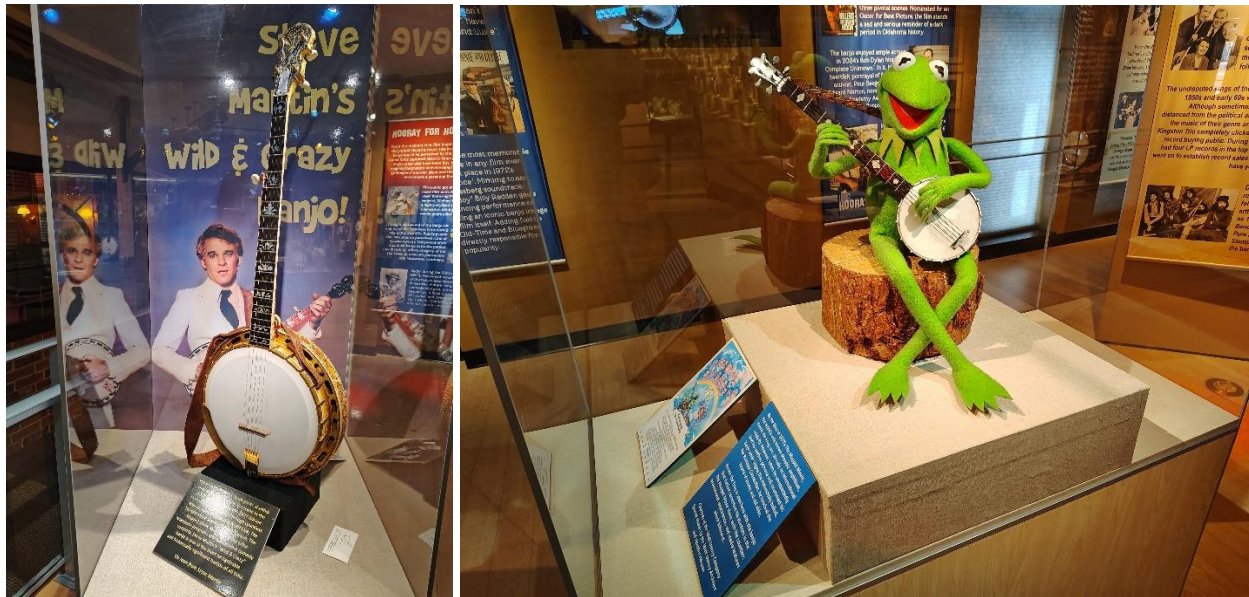
The St. Joseph Old Cathedral across the street commissioned this sculpture, *And Jesus Wept*, depicting Jesus facing away from the devastation. It was installed on the site of the church's parish house, which had been destroyed in the bombing.



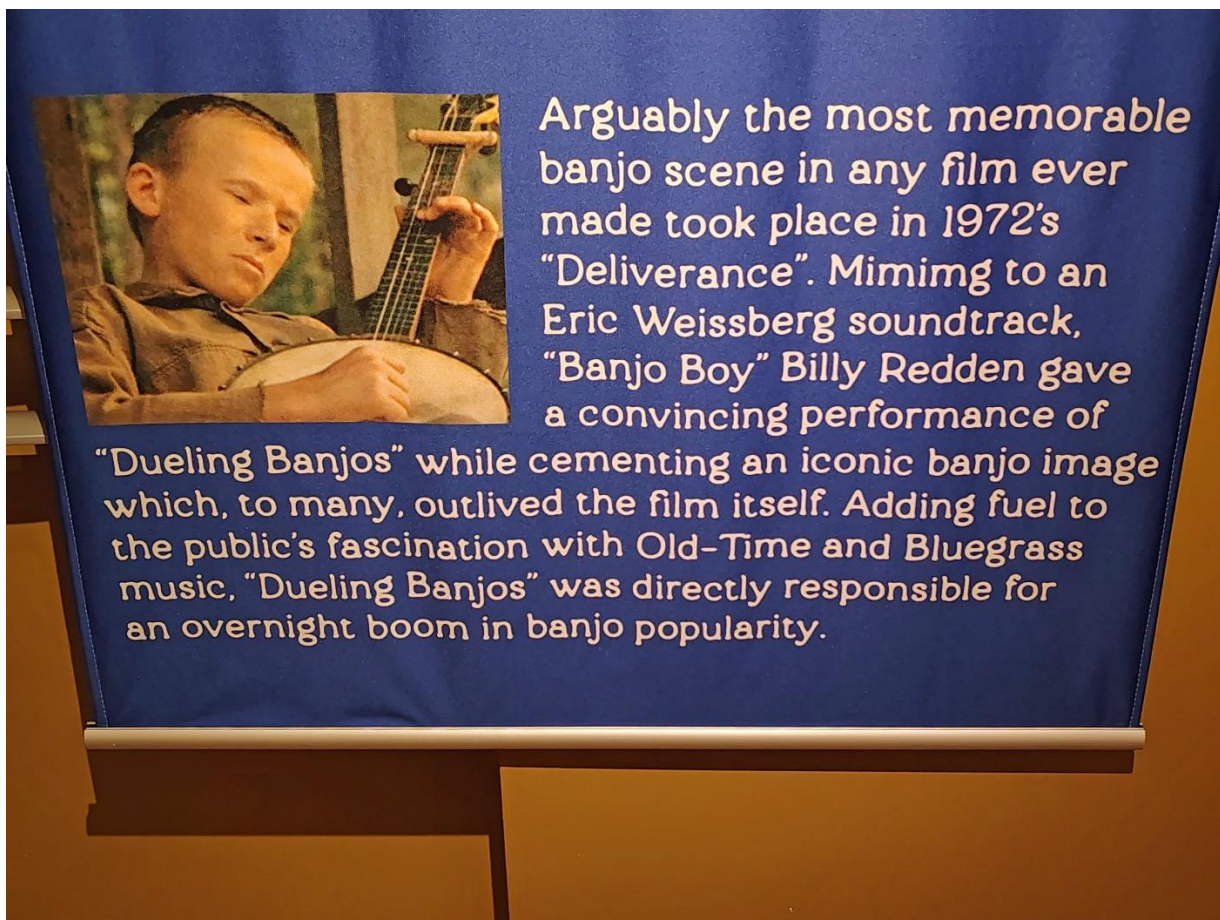
Also in downtown Oklahoma City is Bricktown, an old warehouse district that has been remade into an entertainment, dining and nightlife district. It is also home to the Chickasaw Bricktown Ballpark minor league baseball stadium and – like San Antonio’s River Walk – a canal where you can enjoy a scenic boat ride, this time passing old warehouses and people eating in canal-side restaurants.



Also in Bricktown is the American Banjo Museum, which is home to the world’s largest collection of banjos. Exhibits cover the design and construction of banjos, its role in American music and culture, and people who helped promote the banjo in contemporary culture. There is also a Hall of Fame.



Steve Martin, Kermit the Frog, Dolly Parton and Taylor Swift are among those bringing fame to the banjo.



Who can forget "Banjo Boy" Lonnie's appearance in the movie *Deliverance*. Actor Billy Redden couldn't actually play the banjo. The hands you see belonged to an actual banjo player hiding behind him.



You may have seen player pianos before. This is a player banjo, albeit “out of order” when I was there.



Oklahoma City is home to the Oklahoma National Stockyards, the world’s largest stocker-feeder cattle market. Stockyards City is the neighborhood that sprang up outside the market to provide goods, services and dining to visiting cattlemen. (Madonna’s song *Heartbreak City* kept popping into my head as I explored Stockyards City. Perhaps “Weird Al” Yankovic could do something with that.)



Tourists like me could only go in the stockyards as far as the cattle pens. Only serious cattlemen were allowed at that point. Cattlemen with boots.



Located on the edge of the stockyards, you're guaranteed some of the freshest steak anywhere at the Cattlemen's Steakhouse. In fact, they took a page from those fancy seafood restaurants that bring fresh lobster to your table for approval. At the Cattlemen's Steakhouse, they herd some cattle through the dining room to your table so that you can pick which one you want butchered for your steak.

The most direct driving route back home heads west out of Oklahoma City to Kingman, Arizona, and then northwest on Highway 93 to Las Vegas. A very boring, mostly interstate 1120-mile drive. But with a pending doctor appointment, I drove it in two days, making only one sightseeing stop along the way.



From Oklahoma City westward, Highway I-40 follows the old Route 66. Some of the towns it now passes by still retain some of their vintage Route 66 signs and roadside architecture, including the otherwise fading town of Tucumcari, New Mexico. As 2026 marks the 100th year since Route 66 was originally designated, I thought I'd stop there and photograph some of Tucumcari's Route 66 icons.

And that ended the trip.