

Roadside America

Roadside America has been around since the mid-1980s, and made the transition from printed travel guide to digital road trip tool in the intervening years.

Founders Doug Kirby, Ken Smith and Mike Wilkins met in New York City in the 1980s and became friends, collaborating on an array of creative projects. Creating "Roadside America" gave them a way to share their enjoyment of quirky tourist attractions and memories of family cross-country road trips.

The trio's eclectic take on offbeat tourist attractions first appeared in 1985 as a series of on-the-road columns in the *San Francisco Examiner*. In 1986, Simon & Schuster/Fireside published their book *Roadside America (The Modern Traveler's Guide to the Wild and Wonderful World of American Tourist Attractions)*, designed by Susan and Doug Kirby. The book categorized and described their "Roadside America" -- a vacation landscape filled with unusual and amusing wonders.

In 1992 Fireside published the sequel: *New Roadside America*. The two books firmly established an amused, pop culture sensibility for little known sights and "tourist traps," and helped to inspire a cottage industry of books in the curiosity/oddball/wacky your-state-here vein.

Decades later, Doug, Ken and Mike still tour the highways — together, or with their tolerant families — and continue to uncover new marvels.

RoadsideAmerica.com

Roadside America's move from print to digital started in 1994, when Doug, Ken and Mike conducted the web's first virtual road trip. Reporting for AOL and the early online *Wired Magazine* — and with a *New York Times* reporter in the back seat — the team drove from Los Angeles to New York City, uploading daily reports, photos and videos to a growing audience.

In 1996, RoadsideAmerica.com debuted on the web as "Your Online Guide to Offbeat Tourist Attractions." Featuring hundreds of original attraction stories and photos, it quickly evolved to include an active community of "tipsters" – with contributors sending reports and photos of new discoveries. Special sections fully documented roadside phenomena: Giant Fruit and Vegetables, Transparent Women, the Roadside Pet Cemetery, monsters, and more.

By 2005, most of the now-sprawling site had been migrated into a database, easing the task of publishing and updating content. By 2006, RoadsideAmerica.com had added interactive maps, hotel locations and booking tools. In 2007, a free trip-planning tool was created by the team to help site users devise their own offbeat road trip itineraries.

RoadsideAmerica.com Mobile

At the start of 2010, RoadsideAmerica.com launched the *Roadside America App for iPhone™*, a mobile travel tool that has consistently appeared as a popular paid travel app download. In 2011, a Garmin and TomTom GPS device add-on, "Attractions and Oddities," was developed and released. In 2012, the iPhone development team launched *Roadside Presidents™*, a mobile app focusing on presidential landmarks and quirky sights.

RoadsideAmerica.com Team

Doug Kirby is publisher, editor, and creative director of RoadsideAmerica.com and one of the original authors of the *Roadside America* books. His career in creative design and communications started at Bell Labs as a cartoonist, filmmaker and multimedia producer. For AT&T he has been a creative director and the manager of Att.com. As RoadsideAmerica.com publisher and creative director, Doug directs site content and development projects, including mobile applications.

Ken Smith is a senior editor at RoadsideAmerica.com and one of the original authors of the *Roadside America* books. He is the author of the books *Raw Deal*, *Mental Hygiene*, and *Junk English 1 and 2*. Ken has written for television. He hosted the "most popular film

retrospective series ever" at Astoria's Museum of the Moving Image -- a lecture program about awkward and hilarious classroom films of the 1950s and '60s.

Susan Kirby is the marketing and business director and also an editor at RoadsideAmerica.com. She has a Master's degree in Public Relations, and has worked and consulted in public relations, online marketing and copywriting. She has also served as an officer in a tech manufacturing start-up.

Mike Wilkins is one of the original authors of the *Roadside America* books. He's written and produced films, including the Academy Award-nominated short *Birch Street Gym*, and the feature *The Independent*. A large work of art he created hangs in the Museum of American Art in Washington, DC. It's the Preamble of the US Constitution -- spelled out in vanity license plates from all 50 states.

Timeline Highlights

- **1960s-1970s:** The suburban Kirby, Wilkins and Smith families travel on their unrelated vacation driving trajectories, but the boys leave eerily similar hand smudges on their parents' car windows as they dream of attractions not yet seen....
- **1986:** *Roadside America* is published by Simon & Schuster/Fireside.
- **1992:** *New Roadside America* is published by Simon & Schuster/Fireside.
- **1994:** AOL and Wired Magazine connect Roadside America to the early web audience to deliver the first day-by-day trip journal, a "Virtual Vacation."
- **1996:** RoadsideAmerica.com launched.
- **2004:** RoadsideAmerica.com moves to dynamic, database-driven content management.

- **2009:** *Roadside America App for iPhone* available in the App Store Dec. 31, 2009.
- **2011:** "Attractions & Oddities" for GPS devices released.
- **2012:** *Roadside Presidents App for iPhone* released.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: For additional information, visit
RoadsideAmerica.com/press