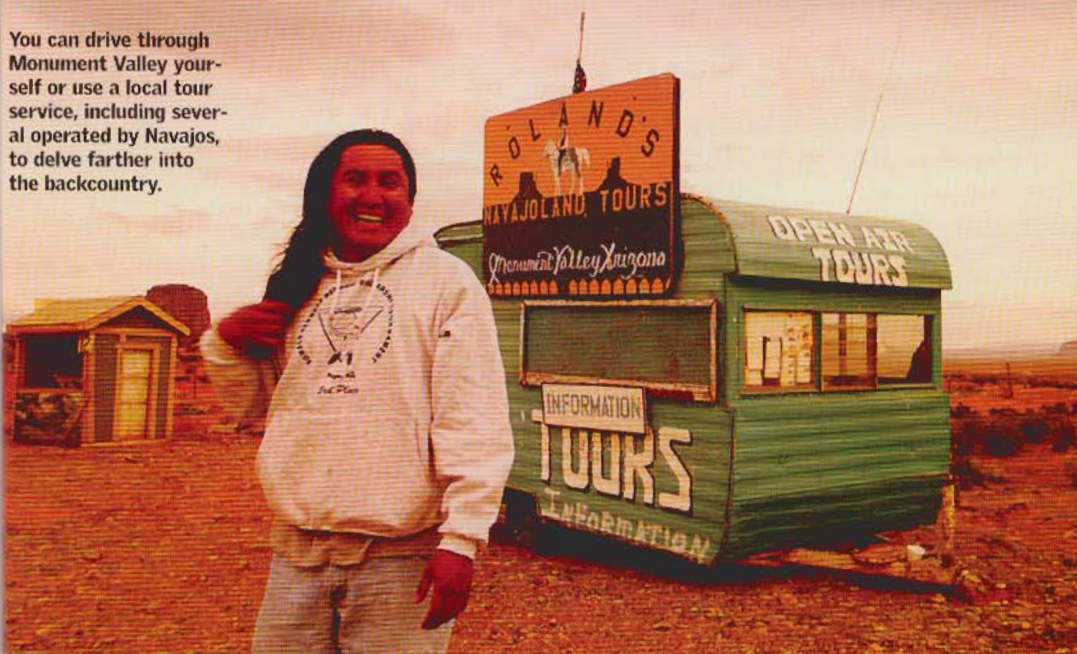


the roads less traveled

Today's congested highways leave us yearning for the (truly) open road. Here are 13 routes where you can still find it.

North Carolina's
Cherochala Skyway is
so appealing that auto-
mobile manufacturers
have used it to film
television commercials.

You can drive through Monument Valley yourself or use a local tour service, including several operated by Navajos, to delve farther into the backcountry.



Ashley River Road

SOUTH CAROLINA HIGHWAY 61 NEAR CHARLESTON, 11 MILES. State Highway 61—running between Highways 165 and 162—follows the Ashley River southeast toward Charleston along the same route as Union troops in 1865.

While remnants of the unpleasantness with the North remain along the drive in the form of Confederate earthworks at Fort Bull, most of the tree-shaded lane reflects the antebellum South.

Make a day of this short route by stopping at restored estates, which offer interpretive tours of plantation life, from the fine furnishings of the master's suite to the slaves' humble quarters.

At your first stop, Middleton Place, the rich smell of wisteria draping the winding pathways will have you quoting Faulkner. Just

down the road is Magnolia Plantation, founded in 1676, and then comes stately Drayton Hall, owned by the Drayton family for seven generations, a site of the siege of Charleston during the Revolutionary War, an event reenacted each spring.

Next, stop in at the Old St. Andrew's Parish Church built in 1706. It's said to be the oldest church in the Carolinas. Stroll its ten acres of moss-draped oaks and crumbling tombstones overlooking a creek. "We're preparing for our 300th anniversary," says administrator Mary Murray. Starting in November, the church will offer monthly celebrations of its history, with period musicians. —M.R.T.

Road Kit » www.draytonhall.org; www.magnoliaplantation.com; www.middletonplace.org; www.oldstandrews.org.

Los Caminos del Rio

ALONG THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER, 225 MILES.

Los Caminos del Rio is a stretch of roadways between Laredo, Texas, and the Gulf of Mexico running along both sides of the national border formed by the Rio Grande. This is a region of small towns, large churches, ranches, farms, and wildlife reserves seeming to belong to neither nation but to a third distinct culture whose language is Spanglish. "It's a good life, with lovely weather, pretty land, and party people," says Tex-Mex accordionist Wally Gonzales.

As you drive south from Laredo on U.S. 83, you'll pass through mesquite and prickly pear brushlands. European-style sandstone buildings dating back to the mid-19th-century line the streets of San Ygnacio, and a Spanish-style square anchors the onetime steamboat-port town of Roma, Texas; at Los Ebanos, you can cross into Mexico on one of America's last hand-drawn ferries. In Rio Grande City, spend a night at La Borde House, an 1897 Paris-inspired inn. On the Mexican side, just off Highway 2, don't miss the ghostly Guerrero Viejo, a town partially submerged beneath a reservoir in the 1950s only to resurface periodically during low water, exposing what's left of the town plaza and colonial buildings. Breeze through McAllen, hub of the Rio Grande Valley—booming, thanks to NAFTA. Continue beyond Brownsville on State Highway 4. In 23 miles, you'll run into the Gulf of Mexico at the point where the Rio Grande empties into the sea.

—John Morthland

Road Kit » See Texas Historical Commission pamphlet, "Los Caminos del Rio: Legacies of the Borderlands" and editor Mario

L. Sanchez's book and website, *A Shared Experience* (www.rice.edu/armadillo/Past/Book).

Talimena Scenic Drive

FROM MENA, ARKANSAS, TO TALIHINA, OKLAHOMA, 54 MILES.

Much of this cloud-scraping route was hacked out of forestland in the 1930s by Civilian Conservation Corps crews, using hand tools and mule-drawn plows. Today's vistas, overlooking endless parallel ridges of the Ouachita ("wash-uh-taw") Mountains, make those days seem not so long ago. Signs of civilization—highways, farms, small communities—pop up here and there, far below, but the views are mostly of trees, trees, and more trees, from horizon to horizon, along one of the most spectacular drives east of the Rockies.

As Arkansas 88 winds and climbs westward from Mena, watch for road cuts revealing warped and folded rock strata—evidence of the continental collision that formed the Ouachitas, the most extensive east-west mountain range in the United States. Higher, notice the peculiar dwarf white-oak forests stunted by harsh climatic conditions and the river-like columns of boulders known as "rock glaciers."

Stop at Queen Wilhelmina State Park, set near the crest of 2,681-foot Rich Mountain, Arkansas's second-highest mountain. It offers a lodge, restaurant, walking trails, and some of the best views along the drive, including the grand lookout from a rock bluff on the 13-mile Lovers' Leap Trail. Farther on, take in park superintendent Becky Bariola's must-see, aptly named Sunset Point Vista. "It's one of the most moving sunsets you could ever experience." —Mel White

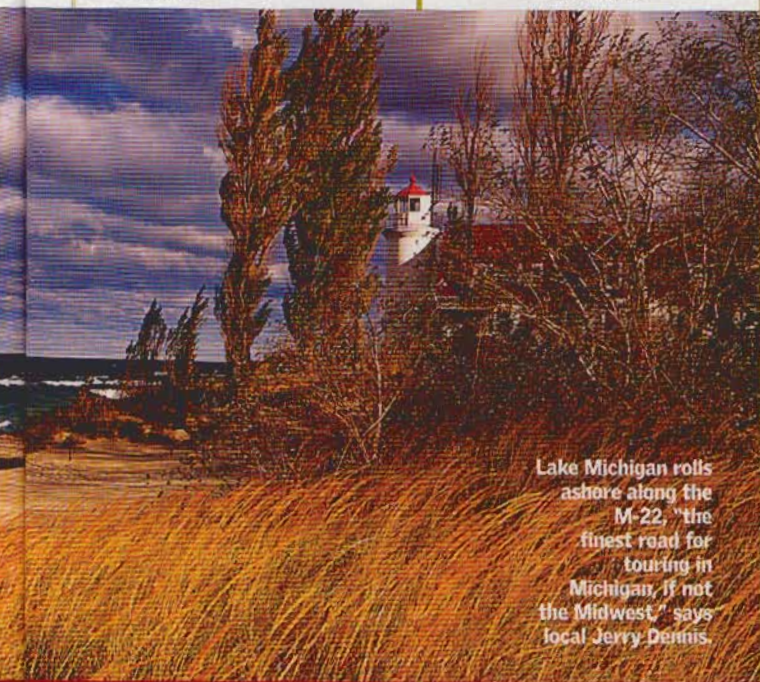
Road Kit » View a guide to the Talimena Scenic Drive at www.talimenascenicdrive.com/interpretive_guide.html. Also see www.queenwilhelmina.com.

The Dalton Highway

FROM LIVENGOOD TO PRUDHOE BAY, ALASKA, 414 MILES.

This highway, built in 1974 as the service road for the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, is not to be taken lightly. It's a mostly gravel thoroughfare often ruled by 18-wheelers. Services are few, and signs warn of everything from steep grades to avalanches. However, the signs say little of the road's chief attribute: some of North America's most dramatic scenery.

In Fairbanks, load up with spare tires and head north. This is Alaska's Interior—gently rolling hills of aspen; scrawny black spruce poking through mossy bogs; and meandering streams. Your constant companion is the 48-inch pipeline carrying oil from



Lake Michigan rolls ashore along the M-22, "the finest road for touring in Michigan, if not the Midwest," says local Jerry Dennis.

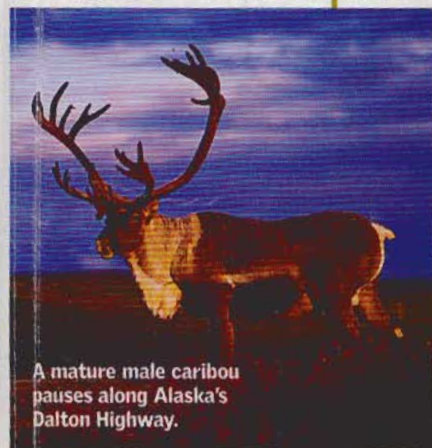
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the North Slope to Valdez. Near the Yukon River, satisfy a big appetite with big burgers at the scruffy Hotspot Café.

Moving on, watch for dramatic changes. "My favorite stretch is between the Yukon River and the Arctic Circle," says Matt Atkinson, who drives the Dalton monthly for Northern Alaska Tour Company. "You get into tundra and taiga, with evocative granite outcrops around Finger Mountain."

At mile 175, fill up your tank at the truck stop in Coldfoot, offering the last services for the next 240 miles. Then head into the Brooks Range, where sky-stabbing spires of bare rock tower over 7,000 feet. As the road drops, it skirts the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, home to caribou and the nesting ground for millions of migratory birds.

The highway ends at Prudhoe



A mature male caribou pauses along Alaska's Dalton Highway.

Bay, the largest oilfield in the U.S., and the company town of Deadhorse. Tour the oilfields and dip your feet in the Arctic Ocean. After a night's sleep in a former construction camp, you get to see it all again from the opposite direction on the long drive home.

—Carol Sturgulewski

Road Kit » See *The Milepost* travel guide (www.themilepost.com) and <http://aurora.ak.blm.gov/Dalton>.

Ghost Town Highway U.S. 24 FROM COLORADO SPRINGS TO BUENA VISTA, PLUS SIDE TRIPS, 180 MILES.

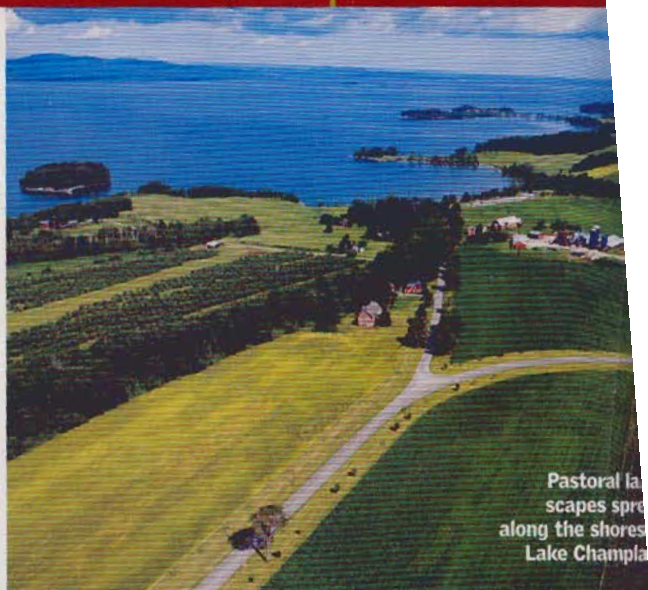
During the late 19th century, gold fever roared through Colorado, sparking instant towns. But like the mines nearby, most of the towns played out—though some still stand as ghostly reminders of the salad days. Some of the most accessible are within easy reach of U.S. 24, which also happens to be scenic. Head west from Colorado Springs past the tourist meccas of Garden of the Gods, Cave of the Winds, and Pikes Peak.

Turn left on State Highway 67 to reach Victor, which, though still inhabited, has many period buildings. Go for a stroll past the trolley depot, the Masonic Hall, and the *Victor Daily Record* newspaper office, advises Philip Varney, a ghost-town expert.

Continuing west on 24, you'll climb to Wilkerson Pass at 9,502 feet before crossing the grassy-banked Platte River at Hartsel. About 18 miles north of the crossing you'll find South Park City, a restored ghost town now operated as a museum, in Fairplay.

From there, head south on U.S. 285 to find the road to St. Elmo. Explore the town's ghostly Main Street on foot, peering into the windows of its frame buildings. "St. Elmo is a worthy destination in itself," Varney says. —M.R.T.

Road Kit » www.coloradoghosttowns.com.



Pastoral landscapes spread along the shores of Lake Champlain.

Lake Champlain Byway U.S. 2 THROUGH THE LAKE CHAMPLAIN ISLANDS, 50 MILES.

When northwestern Vermonters say they're heading "to the islands," they're referring to Lake Champlain's easygoing archipelago, little known by outsiders. Head north from Burlington on U.S. Route 7 and turn west on U.S. 2 at Milton. Just beyond Sand Bar State Park, Vermont's best swimming beach, a causeway leads to Grand Isle. Turn left on South Street, maybe picking up a bag of Mac or Empire apples at Hackett's Orchard, and then meander northward along West Shore Road as it hugs the lake and serves up views of New York's Adirondacks. Along the way stop at Snow Farm Vineyard, where proprietor Harrison Lebowitz finds the island atmosphere as conducive to tranquility as it is to a good Seyval Blanc. "Not that Vermont is a hectic place," he says, "but when you drive across the causeway from the mainland, you get a special sense of ease."

Swing back onto Route 2 via Route 314, opposite the ferry landing, and head north to cross the drawbridge into North Hero. Just ahead is misnamed City Bay—there's no city here, just the eclectically stocked Hero's Welcome store and its dockside patio, where you can enjoy a sandwich and a spectacular vista of Vermont's Green Mountains.

The next bridge takes you onto the Alburg peninsula poking into Lake Champlain from Quebec. It's a piece of U.S. terrain unconnected by land to the rest of the U.S. Continue through dairylands to Alburg village. When the main road turns sharply west toward the bridge to New York, continue straight north to one of the drowsiest border posts in North America. Here, the imaginary line separates one patch of lovely, scarcely populated countryside from another. —Bill Scheller

Road Kit » See *Best Vermont Drives*, by Kay and Bill Scheller. Also see www.champlainislands.com.

Scary Roads: Drives that Thrill and Chill

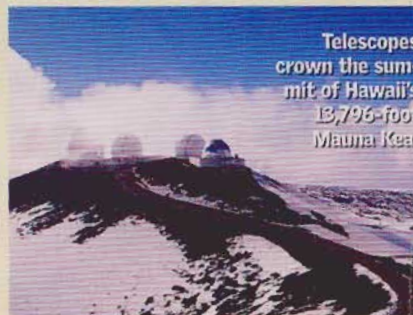
When scenery just isn't enough, seek out an element of risk.

» NEVADA'S EXTRATERRESTRIAL HIGHWAY

Escaped aliens from Area 51 are the least of your worries as you drive the 98 miles of Hwy. 375 from near Ash Springs to Warm Springs. Signs on access roads along the route, which skirts the Nellis Air Force Range, warn that trespassers may be shot. Also, when you stop to stroll interesting archaeological and geological sites, including the Mount Irish petroglyph site and Leviathan Cave, keep an eye open for unexploded ordnance. If you stumble upon a shell, as hikers have, look but don't touch. Finally, when making the side trip north of 375 to the scenic limestone spires of the Worthington Mountains Wilderness Area, beware of rain. In bad weather, access road surfaces can deteriorate from passable to treacherous, ripping the oil pan from anything but a high-clearance vehicle, stranding you 20 miles from the nearest gas station in an area with virtually no cell phone reception.

» WYOMING'S MEDICINE WHEEL PASSAGE

North of Sheridan, exit Interstate 90 onto U.S. 14 to climb the flanks of the Big Horn Mountains in one of the West's most dizzying sets of switchbacks. In spots, you feel like you'll go airborne—which is exactly what has happened to an unlucky few. At the Sand Turn Overlook, stop to watch hang glider pilots fling themselves off the mountain. At Burgess Junction, continue due west onto 14A to enter the Medicine Wheel Passage. This scenic landscape—rocky slopes and alpine meadows populated with elk and moose—is sacred ground. At 9,400 feet, find the Medicine Wheel itself, an ancient circle of stones 75 feet across with 28 radiating spokes that may align with the stars. Gaze into the center of this Native American Stonehenge; in this lonely sanctuary built by unnamed tribes for unknown reasons, you can't help but feel an overpowering sense of mystery.



Telescopes crown the summit of Hawaii's 13,796-foot Mauna Kea.

» HAWAII'S SADDLE ROAD This 55-mile asphalt path traverses the interior of the Big Island from Hilo to Waimea—and also crosses the saddle between volcanoes Mauna Loa and Mauna Kea. Only one rental car company (Harper) allows its vehicles (4WD only) on the road. From Hilo, climb to a moonscape of ancient lava fields and see views of the Pacific. "It's one of the most unusual roads anywhere," says Rodney Cambra, a former police officer. "But there have been lots of accidents." —M.R.T.