

Heritage Routes, Trails and Walks have become popular in the parlance of safeguarding thematically linked heritage resources across the world. Well known examples are Slave Routes to recognise and redress the inhumane exploitation of humanity in Africa to build up the wealth of the Americas and elsewhere; Silk Route as the very essence of the One Belt and One Road initiative of China based on the core historical relationships between Istanbul and Xi'an along with a web of feeder routes; and both land and maritime networks of the Spice Route, especially Muziris Heritage Project on the Kerala coast of India. Routes, Trails and Walks, are avenues to understanding the connectedness of evidence-based history; promoting heritage consciousness with an emphasis on intergenerational transmission; safeguarding sites, historical cultural landscapes and associated collections; and interpreting through various conventional and digital means the cumulative knowledge in responsible and experiential heritage tourism.

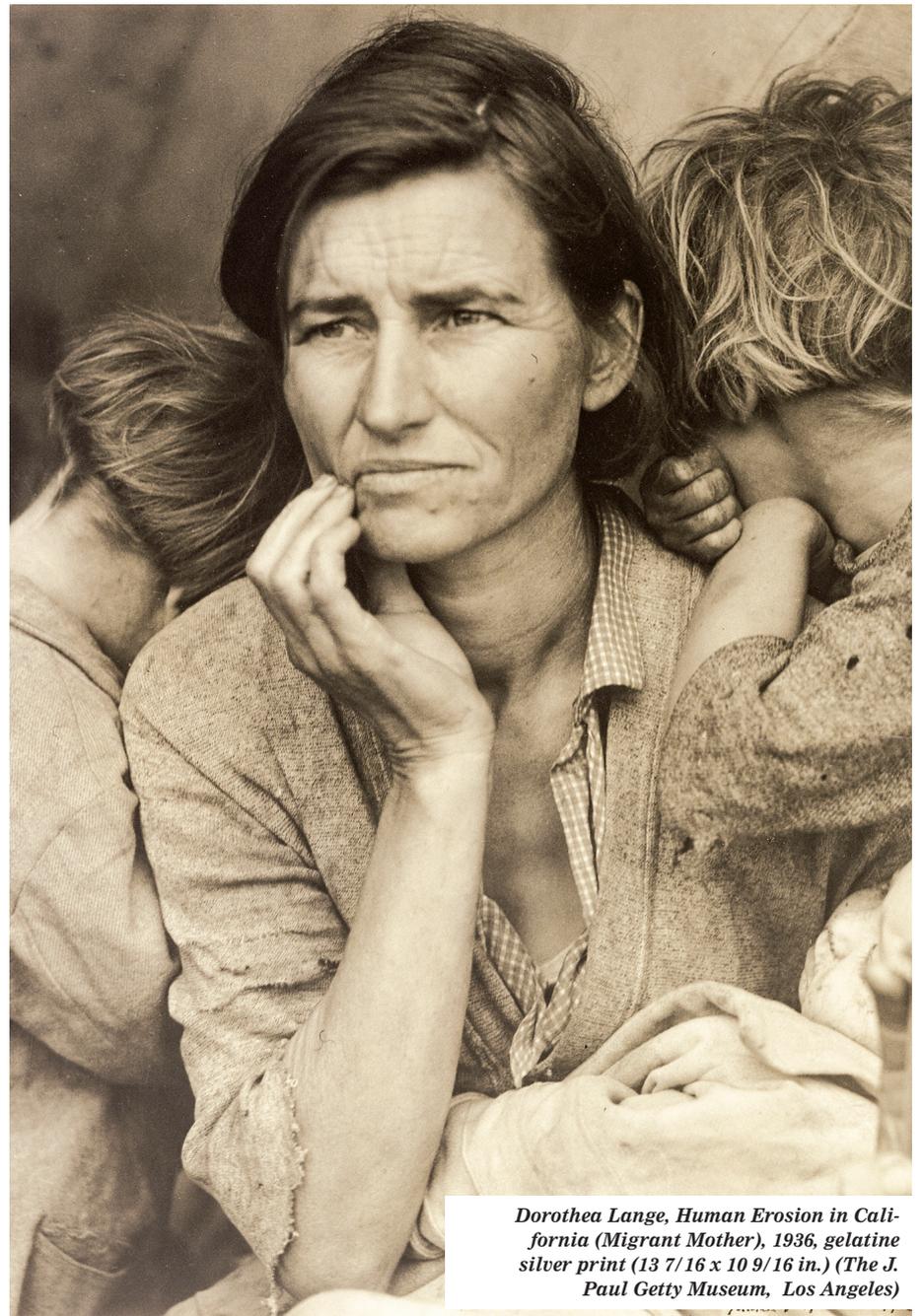
In India Buddhist trails and routes are resourced by the Department of Tourism as attractions connecting much neglected heritage sites. Most of the resources are devoted to developing appropriate infrastructure as part of the recreational spectrum. Some like Saranath and Bodhgaya are celebrated and promoted as witnesses to the footprints of the Buddha. While others such as Amaravathi and Nagarjunakonda have significant historical layers of significance from later history at the turn of the 1st Millennium AD. While a designated theme may provide the catalyst for the growth of tourism and financial benefit, which is the main goal even when the non-materialistic Buddhism is the focus, it is a complexity of factors that generate international visitation, an aspiration for most states in India.

It is sometimes useful to look at praxis elsewhere, especially a country like the USA which sustains its tourism and recreation industries largely based on its domestic visitation and consumption rather than relying on international benefits. The network of heritage routes was created in 1968 by the National Trails System Act. It includes a subcategory of trails which follow travel routes of national historical significance. The latest recognition is Route 66, an iconic and evolving piece of Americana. While about 20 Trails are largely significant for the 19th Century history, Route 66 sets a new benchmark as it is signifying the heritage values and historical narratives of the 20th Century and an evolving historical awareness. It is one of the most culturally celebrated stretches of highway in the USA. Given the road culture of the US, for generations it has become the quintessential road trip experience. It was the first all-paved U.S. Highway System. It has independent businesses. Unique roadside architecture. Landmarks and attractions that are at times quirky and kitschy. New and faster freeways meant that it started falling into disuse and decay. But recognition as of heritage value and advocated as such by the National Trust for Historic Preservation is making a difference.

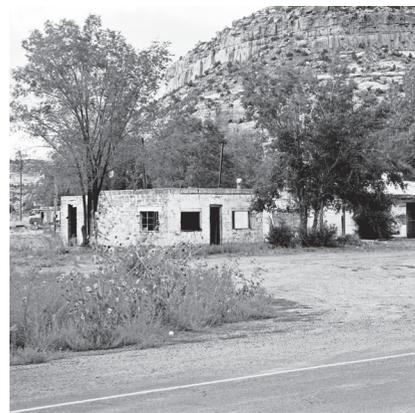
Congress is making the amendment to the National Trails System Act to designate a trail of approximately 2,400 miles extending from Chicago, Illinois, to Santa Monica, California, as the Route 66 National Historic Trail. The US National Park Service will be responsible for the presentation, interpretation and management of its heritage values. Route 66 is America's most well-known road, often referred to as the Mother Road. It was commissioned in 1926 as part of the first federal highway system. It is part of the collective American ethos. It is one of the first major interstate highways connecting East and West of the USA. Route 66 has played an essential role in American history. It provided a route for refuge during the Dustbowl from the damaged ecology and agriculture of the American and Canadian prairies during the 1930s. It acted as a strategic military route during World War II. It continues to be a favourite vacation journey for those who seek quintessential American experiences. It is a historical route. How the USA is going about to safeguard its heritage values offers valuable lessons for others. The federal government decommissioned Route 66 in 1985. Congress subsequently authorized the Route 66 Study Act in 1990. The National Park Service was directed to conduct a special resource study to present management and preservation options for the iconic historical route. The final study was released by the National Park Service in 1995. Congress later enacted Public Law in 1999, which created the Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program. It facilitated collaboration between private, non-profit and government partners to identify and prioritize Route 66 preservation needs. The preservation program was reauthorized in 2009 for a period of ten years. On 5th July 2018 the House of Representatives passed the Bill HR 801. National Historic Trail status will contribute significantly to Route 66's Centenary in 2026.

What are the benefits of heritage pathways like Route 66? These stakeholder benefits and ethical engagement need be informed by professional feasibility studies that could be assessed for their integrity. Consistent and quality signage will accompany well researched heritage interpretation. Designation for heritage visitation provides an economic impetus to historical villages, towns and communities. Economic impact assessments, both quantitative and qualitative are critical. For example, Route 66 travellers support communities along the way. It generates \$127 million annually to the U.S. economy. It could be doubled as a Historic Trail. Increased economic activities will contribute to preserve, maintain and enhance historic properties. It could preserve thousands of historic sites as visitors across the world would want to see landmarks from a bygone era. Better income opportunities coupled with heritage awareness means owners will keep the historic properties.

It is so well-researched that the contemporary tourists or more aptly visitors explore the options, facilities and quality of what is on offer using digital platforms prior to making decisions about travel, selection and participation. Due diligence in research and its presentation and interpretation; transparent social, cultural, economic and environmental impact assessments; and quality infrastructure for visitor comfort are non-negotiable to ensure sustainable development. All this could be benchmarked against the UN SDGs to which India has made an enormous commitment. Such a comprehensive approach is critical to safeguard the valuable and diverse heritage of India; ensure investment in the preservation efforts and not just 'cement and bricks' infrastructure development; to provide scope to operationalise modalities for local communities and primary stakeholder participation; and provide transparency in expenditure and benefit sharing. Most importantly be reflective, revealing and confronting through systemic and systematic audits to address capacities and capabilities to deliver. For this we need appropriate 21st Century legislations and policies. These are some of the lessons to be learnt from Route 66 history making designation.



Dorothea Lange, Human Erosion in California (Migrant Mother), 1936, gelatine silver print (13 7/16 x 10 9/16 in.) (The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles)



Jeff Brouws, Dixie, Lupton, Arizona, 1991 (printed 2013). (Courtesy of the artist and Craig Krull Gallery)



National "66" Convention & Will Rogers Memorial Celebration, 1940 (printed circa 2010). Collection of Steve Rider

NEXT WEEK

Heritage Matters will focus on the International Coalition for Sites of Conscience, New York, the only global network of historic sites, museums and memory initiatives that connect past struggles to today's movements for human rights