

Michigan's newest byway

LAST SUMMER, a 184-mile stretch of the West Michigan Pike, from St. Joseph to Silver Lake, became the state's latest Pure Michigan Byway. The Michigan Beach-towns Association, which represents more than a dozen shoreline communities, collaborated with Travel Michigan and the Michigan Department of Transportation to develop the route.

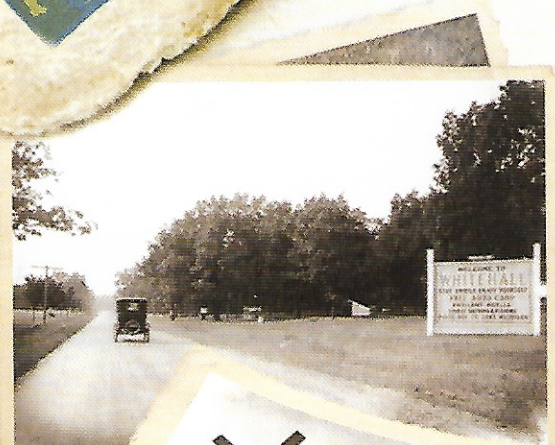
"As the route that opened tourism for West Michigan back in the early 1900s, we are delighted that today's travelers can recreate that experience," says Sally Laukitis, executive director of the Holland Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, a member of MBA. "While each of our communities has changed with the times, the West Michigan Pike designation offers visitors a glimpse of the past while enjoying the roadways and amenities of today."

First established in 1993 under the "Michigan Heritage Route" program to identify and

promote state trunklines with distinctive scenic, cultural or historic attributes, these byways recently were reorganized to align with the award-winning Pure Michigan campaign. There are more than 20 routes in six distinct categories currently designated throughout the state (michiganhighways.org).

In 2010, the State Historic Preservation office erected a Michigan Historic Marker recognizing the West Michigan Pike in New Buffalo, the southern-most city along the full 400-mile route. The following year, award-winning authors M. Christine Byron and Thomas Wilson released their "Vintage Views Along the West Michigan Pike: From Sand Trails to U.S. 31," which gives an historical account of the century-old route.

Construction of the West Michigan Pike first began in 1911, bringing Chica-goans to the shoreline communities of West Michigan to enjoy the natural beauty and small-town charm. It was one of the nation's first tourist roads, taking more than a decade to complete. Early on, the



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Pike was designated as one of the first state trunklines (M-11); was incorporated into the nation’s first federal highway system; was widened and rerouted as a superhighway; and became the first continuous hard-surface road along the Lake Michigan shore.

Over its 100-year history, the route — in part or as a whole — has been known as or affiliated with several different names, including the Dixie Highway, Blue Star Memorial Highway, Red Arrow Highway, US-31 and the Lake Michigan Circle Tour.

— Dianna Stampfler

WEST MICHIGAN PIKE HIGHLIGHTS:

- 116 State Register of Historic Places
- 86 State Historic Markers
- 46 National Register of Historic Places
- 35 historic lighthouses
- 8 Michigan State Parks
- 2 National Historic Landmarks (Muskegon)
- Two operating cross-lake ferry services (Lake Express in Muskegon and SS Badger in Ludington)
- 1 National Lakeshore (Sleeping Bear Dunes)
- 1 historic cairn named in honor of Hugh Gray, founding president of West Michigan Tourist Association off US-31 near Kewadin in Antrim County
- The state’s only Dark Sky Park (Headlands, near Mackinaw City)
- The southern connection of a modern marvel: the five mile Mackinac Bridge (opened in 1957)