



ANDREW YOOL

still works in progress. Owned by the Ripley's Believe It or Not! Museum, the Missouri ball measures 12.6 meters in circumference.

### Car culture

Two of the best known auto-themed attractions in the United States are Cadillac Ranch in Amarillo, Texas, and Carhenge near Alliance, Nebraska.

Cadillac Ranch—conceived as a tribute to America's most famous luxury automobile—is a tongue-in-cheek art installation of vintage Cadillacs dating from 1949 to 1963, featuring cars lined up in a row with their front ends buried in the ground. The cars' back ends, with tail fins pointing at the sky, form a permanent salute to America's automotive heritage. Visitors are encouraged to

Left: Carhenge, a replica of England's Stonehenge, in Nebraska.  
Right: The Fremont Troll in Seattle, Washington state.

much-loved Fremont Troll lurks beneath the Aurora Bridge, gripping a real Volkswagen Beetle car in one enormous hand. In Klamath, California, the Trees of Mystery site contains a number of unusual tree formations, and its entrance is guarded by statues of the mythical lumberjack Paul Bunyan, who stands nearly 15 meters high, and Bunyan's sidekick, Babe the Blue Ox. Bunyan's mechanical right hand offers a sluggish wave and his



KELLY CLINE

children. Huge fiberglass replicas of prehistoric beasts, some locked in mortal combat, populate the forested grounds. Not all the creatures are dinosaurs, however; a towering cobra, an outsized praying mantis, a shark and a model of King Kong are part of the mix. The park's loopy "dawn of time" effect is heightened by a caveman diorama, located indoors. A diorama is a scene replicated in three dimensions by placing objects in front of a painted background, as in the Gandhi Smriti in New Delhi.

An architectural folly known as the Haines Shoe House, located in Hellam, Pennsylvania, is a classic of roadside Americana. A 7.6-meter edifice that looks like a gigantic work boot, the house was built in

# Roadside Curiosities

Offbeat attractions provide alternatives to mainstream tourist fare.

By LAUREN MONSEN

The lure of the open road is a favorite theme in U.S. popular culture. Immortalized in literature, music and film, the so-called Great American Road Trip is a rite of passage for American youth seeking adventure and is also a popular vacation choice for families. Traversing the United States by car is an invitation to supplement—or ditch—the standard tourist agenda and seek out some of the country's most treasured oddities: quirky local attractions that offer a glimpse at America's lighter side. These curiosities can be found in every state, and opinions vary as to which ones are worth a visit. In the interest of offering some guidance to novelty seekers, here is a brief survey of unconventional U.S. attractions.

### Great balls of twine

No fewer than four contenders vie for the title of the world's largest ball of twine, an object that delights visitors with

its utter pointlessness.

The oldest contender—located in Darwin, Minnesota—is billed as the largest such object ever constructed by a single person. Francis A. Johnson began wrapping twine into a ball in the early 1950s and continued until his death in 1989. Measuring 12 meters in circumference and weighing 7,900 kilograms, Johnson's ball of twine has become a source of civic pride; townspeople celebrate Twine Ball Day every August.

Frank Stoeber, of Cawker City, Kansas, regarded Johnson's ball as a challenge and decided to start his own. He died in 1974 before surpassing Johnson's record, but every August, a Twine-a-thon is held where people add more twine to the ball.



ORLIN WAGNER © AP/WIDE

Its supporters rank it as the world's largest and heaviest ball of sisal twine, weighing almost 8,165 kilograms and measuring 12 meters in circumference.

The third contender—in Lake Nebagamon, Wisconsin—is the project of James Frank Kotera, who started wrapping his twine ball in 1979. He continues to work on it, and by his estimation, the ball weighs 8,700 kilograms, which would make it the heaviest ball of twine ever. Kotera's ball sits in an open-air enclosure on its creator's front lawn; it has a smaller companion, Junior, made of yarn.

Not to be outdone, the town of Branson, Missouri, boasts its own ball of twine, allegedly certified by the Guinness Book of World Records as the "world's largest," although this distinction might be fleeting, since the Kansas and Wisconsin balls are

A visitor walks around one of the world's largest balls of twine, weighing more than 8,000 kilograms, in Cawker City, Kansas.

bring cans of spray paint to decorate the "sculptures."

Carhenge is a sly replica of England's Stonehenge (a prehistoric burial ground marked by a circular setting of large, vertical stones), but in place of the stones that define the English prototype, its modern-day twin is constructed of 38 vintage American cars arranged in a circle. The cars have been spray-painted a uniform gray, mimicking the color of natural stone, and the entire structure sits in the middle of a grassy plain. With the addition of other automobile sculptures nearby, the site is now known as the Car Art Reserve.

### Curious critters and more

Popular landmarks across the United States often include giant statues representing real or imaginary figures. In Seattle, Washington state, the ugly but



Statues of Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox at Klamath, California.

"voice" (courtesy of a loudspeaker in his breast pocket) cheerfully greets visitors and answers their questions.

Dinosaur theme parks can be found coast to coast, but Dinosaur Land in White Post, Virginia, is a particular favorite of

1948 as an advertising gimmick by Mahlon N. Haines, who owned shoe stores in Maryland and Pennsylvania. The three-bedroom Shoe House features stained-glass windows with a shoe motif. Haines initially used the house as guest quarters for the elderly couples and newlyweds whom he invited for weekend visits. As part of this promotional stunt, he gave free pairs of shoes to his guests. Today, the Haines Shoe House is a museum; a shoe-shaped doghouse sits in the backyard.

Besides offering great photo opportunities, these roadside attractions serve as a reminder to plan for some wonderfully weird detours when embarking on a road trip in the United States.

Lauren Monsen is an America.gov staff writer.

Please share your views on this article. Write to editorspan@state.gov