

Robert Waldmire, A Talented Pantheist

Robert Waldmire (April 19, 1945 - December 16, 2009) was a long-time member of the Universal Pantheist Society. He remains well known today as an artistic visual “cartographer” for his imaginative and detailed artwork of U.S. Route 66. His trademark creations were unconventional “maps” with detailed descriptions of the famous highway - and most importantly its human and natural ecology.

One day in the early 80’s we received the first of many postcards and letters that Bob Waldmire regularly sent us telling us about his life and adventures. In a submission for our newsletter’s “What Pantheism Means to Me” feature in 1995, he wrote:



"Personally, to and for me, Pantheism justifies and warrants my existence - and the right to exist. I have long believed of man's duty and obligation to revere the *real*, the Earth underfoot to the rest of the Universe overhead. Personally, I believe it's late for man to triumph over his evil with good... but I'm less concerned with man's salvation than with saving some of his fellow creatures, particularly the great whales, the great apes, and predators and any endangered species. I am interested in Pantheism's potential to 'convert' human arrogance to human humility."

In 1992, Bob Waldmire re-opened the Hackberry General Store in the ghost town of Hackberry, Arizona as a Route 66 tourism information center and souvenir shop. The 1934 store, originally the Northside Grocery and Conoco station, had been closed and vacant since 1978 after Interstate 40 in Arizona bypassed the town (on old Route 66) and left it stranded fifteen miles away from the very different route taken by I-40. He ran the visitor center for about five years. He wrote to us then that it was intended as “a living history interpretive center” to showcase the region’s human and natural histories - the geology, plants, and animals, the indigenous people, the railroad, and of course Old Route 66. He observed, “Although the desert may appear lifeless and drab at a glance, closer observation will reveal an abundance of life and activity.” He hoped people would get off the interstate highways and explore the slow, beautiful, winding Route 66 and other back roads.

Waldmire died in 2009 at age 64 from abdominal cancer. However, his legendary 1972 Volkswagen minibus that traveled 66 for decades can still be seen at the Illinois Route 66 Hall of Fame and Museum in Pontiac, Illinois.

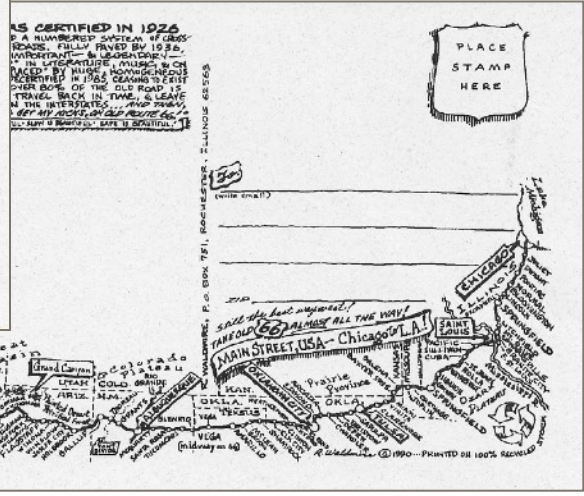
His minibus and lifestyle inspired Pixar to include a character in the 2006 Disney/Pixar animated feature film *Cars*. The minibus was originally proposed by Pixar to be named “Waldmire” but was eventually renamed “[Fillmore](http://cars.disney.com/fillmore)” as Pixar decided not to use anyone’s real name for the characters in the movie. (See <http://cars.disney.com/fillmore>)



Photo of Bob Waldmire in 2006

by [cobalt123](https://www.flickr.com/photos/cobalt123/), via Flickr

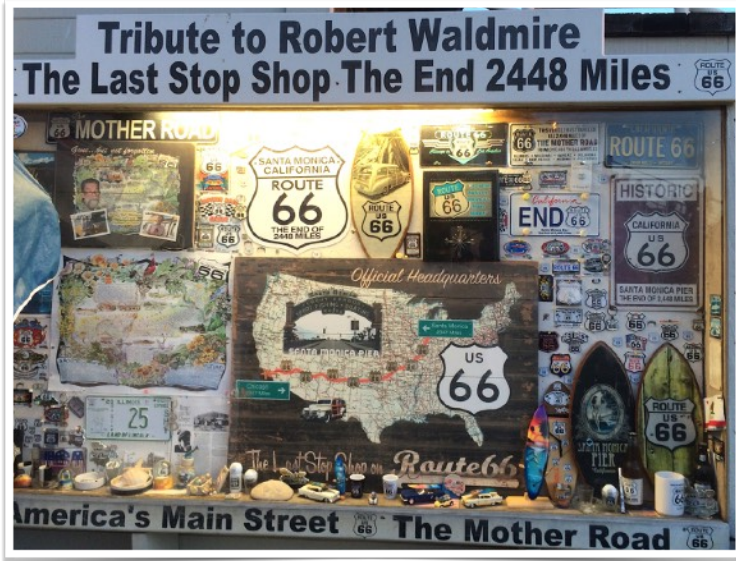




Because of the emphasis on Route 66, not many are aware of Waldmire’s pantheist connections and intense love for the natural world. Best-known for his postcards, posters, an excruciatingly detailed graphical “maps” of Route 66 and specific states and places along the route, Waldmire was an enthusiast of the concept of “bioregionalism.” For him, the people along the route were only a part of the landscape, and he often illustrated birds, trees, flowers, rocks, cliff faces, and other natural features, accompanied by detailed hand-printed text explaining in great detail the biota and geology he illustrated. It could take an hour just to read one of his 8 /12 x 14 “posters” due to the level of detail!

Last spring, I visited the western end of Route 66, sitting over the ocean at the very end of the Santa Monica Pier near Los Angeles. There, at the “last souvenir shop” on the route, an inspirational outdoor display tells of Waldmire’s adventurous and artistic life.

Waldmire’s philosophy of life - summed up in his opinion about Route 66 - is one we could all do well to remember: “Small is beautiful. Old is beautiful. Slow is beautiful. Safe is beautiful.”



Editor Harold Wood mused over Waldmire’s artwork for many years, and is pleased to finally feature some of it in Pantheist Vision. Waldmire’s intricate artwork can still be bought online and at several souvenir shops on the Mother Road. His official website, bobwaldmire.com, remains in operation and is currently being maintained by his brother Buz Waldmire.