

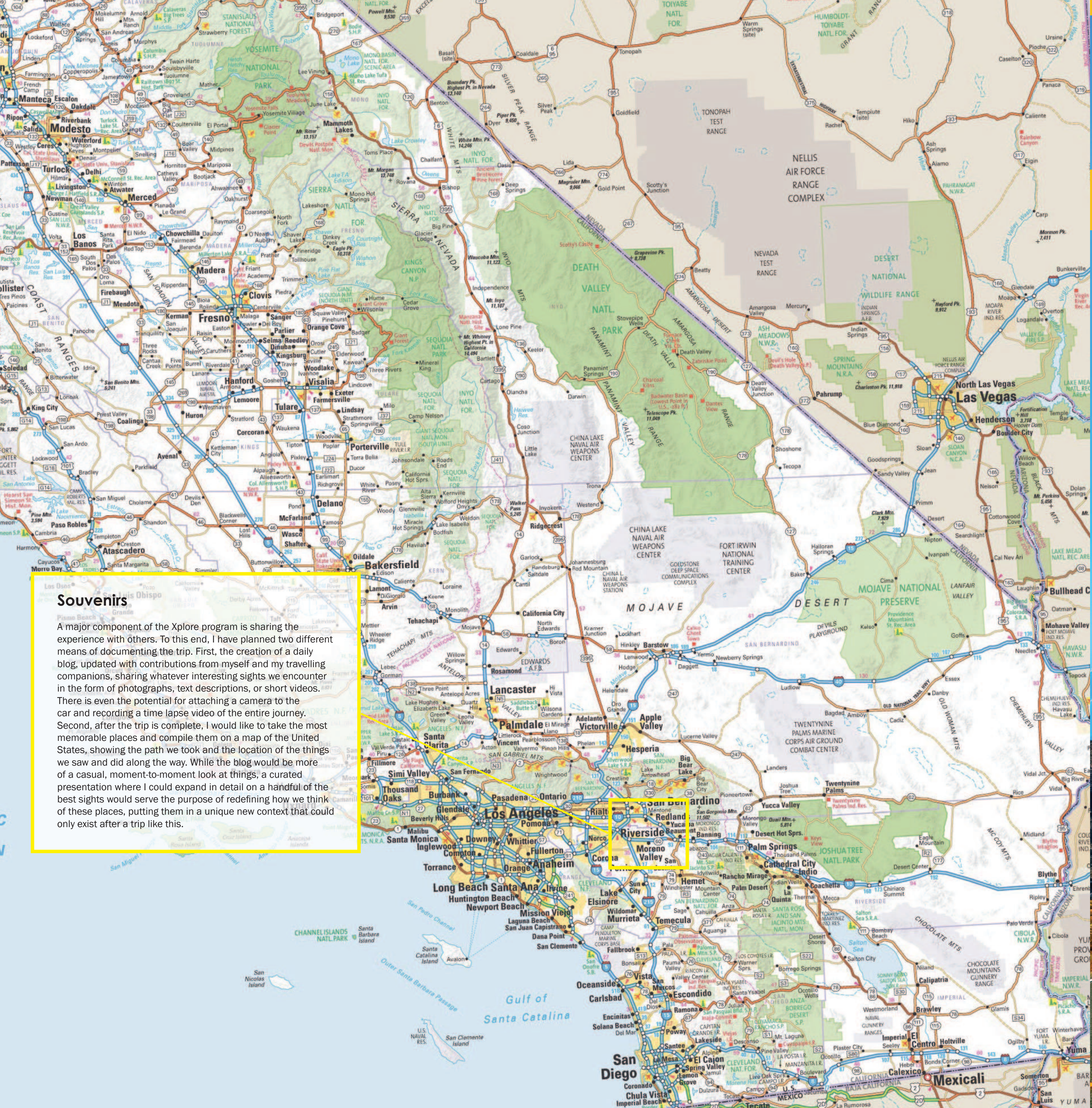
# Road Atlas

2017

XPLORE SUBMISSION

## Souvenirs

A major component of the Xplore program is sharing the experience with others. To this end, I have planned two different means of documenting the trip. First, the creation of a daily blog, updated with contributions from myself and my travelling companions, sharing whatever interesting sights we encounter in the form of photographs, text descriptions, or short videos. There is even the potential for attaching a camera to the car and recording a time lapse video of the entire journey. Second, after the trip is complete, I would like to take the most memorable places and compile them on a map of the United States, showing the path we took and the location of the things we saw and did along the way. While the blog would be more of a casual, moment-to-moment look at things, a curated presentation where I could expand in detail on a handful of the best sights would serve the purpose of redefining how we think of these places, putting them in a unique new context that could only exist after a trip like this.





## THE BIG IDEA

My proposal is a simple one—to gather a few good friends and strike out on an exploratory road trip across the United States. We will make our way from state-to-state without prior knowledge of our destination, using an objective, yet arbitrary, means of navigation to determine each stop along our journey. By looking for interesting places wherever we go, we will encounter a much more diverse and unexpected sampling of America, one not fettered by the preconceptions of destination.

Colleagues in the office have made comparisons to the academic concepts of *dérive* and the *flâneur*, both of which are used generally to describe the aimless-yet-informed exploration of built environments. Both contain an underlying philosophy that can be effectively applied to a cross-country trip.

## RAMBLING ABOUT TRIPS

I've never thought of myself as someone who loves to travel. Trying to plan out a vacation to another country, or even to another state, always results in decision paralysis as I try to determine where I should go, for how long, and what I should do when I get there. I can trace this back to my experience with family vacations as a kid; in the tradition of American tourist culture there are two established types of vacation. The first is the Checklist—a series of destinations, events, and landmarks which are mapped out, scripted with precise timing, and executed one after the other in rapid succession. Though efficient, this method limits one's experiences to things that have been planned; significant deviations from the itinerary are not generally accounted for, and even when 'free time' is blocked out it remains constrained by the inherent limits of scheduling, geographic distance, and general awareness of the surroundings. The second type of vacation is the Resort—here, a destination is decided upon as an escape from the everyday. Relaxation and novelty are emphasized in the form of recreational activities and an aesthetically pleasing setting. While less rigid than the Checklist approach, this method emphasizes leisure at the expense of cultural depth.

Within my own family, the Checklist approach dominated. This mindset carried forward to today, where I find myself somewhat disillusioned with vacations in general. These two approaches to travel illustrate my issue with the concept—I am either conducting extensive planning and research for a cultural decathlon or whiling away the hours on some tropical beach with a coconut-and-umbrella drink, neither of which feels like I'm getting the full experience of being in another place.

Moderating between the two may seem like an obvious solution, but there are still issues. Neither method places an emphasis on exploration; both involve knowing about the place you're headed before arriving, and discovery tends to be a pleasant coincidence rather than the main event. Vacations are a significant investment, after all, so who wants to risk all that time and money on something you know nothing about? This dilemma has stuck with me, and if not for the Xplore program I would most likely never have tried to plan a trip in the first place. It was not until earlier this year, when a friend called me out of the blue with an odd request, that I had an idea for a better way.

I was tasked with helping this friend plan an unexpected four day weekend. Having recently returned from a short trip, I recommended offhandedly that he take an impromptu road trip north and see how far he managed to get, figuring he might make it to Oregon. Never one for moderation, this friend proceeded to reach Canada and back, his northward trajectory halted only by lack of a passport. I have no doubt if given a few more days he would have somehow found his way to the Arctic Circle. Still, I had never considered how far a person could get and how much they could see with just a car and some spare time. In retrospect, it's nothing new; road trips as we know them have been around since the automobile. However, the idea of just picking a direction and going was a new twist (for me, at least). Even in the brief windows of time when he was not driving, he managed to accumulate an impressive number of anecdotes and pictures, passing through places I'd never even heard of within my own state. Thinking about it, this was an accessible, affordable method of travel that had the potential for actual exploration—seeing the unknown and discovering new things without breaking the bank. Once I made the connection to Xplore, I knew exactly what kind of trip I wanted to take.

# THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

## METHODOLOGY

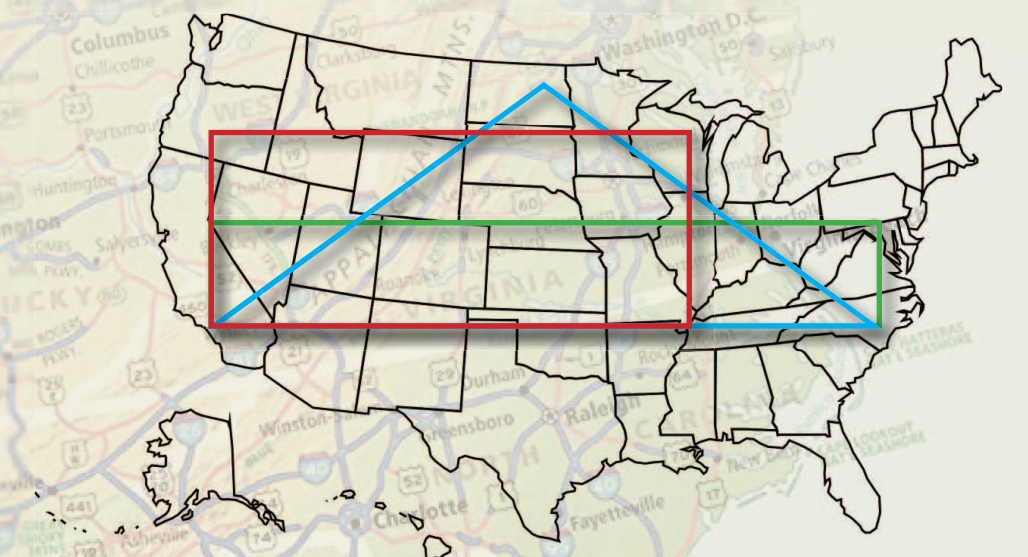
To prepare for this trip I devised several potential methods of planning our route. I knew from the offset that I did not want to select landmarks or destinations and simply connect the dots on a map; the best way to truly explore would involve picking stops arbitrarily, while charting a course that could be reasonably completed in the amount of time available. For the purposes of this proposal I have devised a primary method, as well as a few alternates, but I expect the final details will be worked out amongst my travelling companions in the final hours before the trip.

### Method #1: State-to-State (Seven Bridges of Königsberg)



This method involves random determination of the next state to be visited, while charting a course which does not cross over itself or enter the same state twice (a ruleset inspired by the famous logic puzzle noted above). This method allows for a degree of discretion in navigating within each state, and presents a more organic travel route than other methods. There is less horizontal bias than other methods, which means it would be unlikely for our route to hit the East Coast, but it explores connectivity between adjacent states much more thoroughly.

### Alt. Method #2: Geometric



### Alt. Method #3: Marathon (Point of No Return)



The simplest possible method, the only guideline here is going as far as physically possible before being forced to turn back by time constraints or reaching the furthest edge of the country (whichever happens first). While not allowing much variance, this does have the advantage of reaching the furthest corner of America, as well as allowing for some deeper exploration of certain areas by the nature of having to double back along a parallel route.

### Planning & Budget

I have done some basic calculations to assess the feasibility of this trip. Given one week of vacation time (weekends included) and attempting to maximize the amount of travel, a reasonable estimate involves about 90 hours of total driving. With at least one other person in the car, this 10-hour a day schedule could be accomplished through driving in shifts. Assuming 8 hours for sleep, this would leave around 6 hours a day for eating, exploring, and experiencing each place we stopped. Budget-wise, having controlled for fuel stops, food, accommodations, supplies, and potentially renting a vehicle, even the most conservative estimate still comes in safely under budget.