

"The squawks died out plenty fast when everybody saw the club bounce into the black."

Drawing by Stevenson; Copyright The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.

THE UGLINESS AROUND US

... BILLBOARD DEPARTMENT

The obliteration of our "Land of Enchantment" continues. More and still more highway billboards sprout with each new season. Yet no improvement in visually appealing or even acceptable graphics is evident. The stark beauty of our arid lowlands is less and less visible to the tourist; soon billboards will obscure even the highest mountains. This wanton desecration must be stopped.

We have not changed our opinion that billboards do serve a function for the stranger in our state. They do inform the traveler of the services which the forthcoming town has to offer—but they perform this service at the expense of the tourist's visual sensibilities.

It seems to us that a reasonable substitute must be offered. We suggest a well-planned and well-designed booklet which offers the billboard advertiser space to present his wares or services to a prospective tourist. This booklet might be sponsored by the state Department of Development and contracted out to a private advertising agency for promotion and publication. It

would then be distributed free at our ports of entry, by the national automobile clubs, and at restaurants and motels within the state. Such a booklet could give information to tourists on topics like scenic routes, historical landmarks, campgrounds, dates and locations of fiestas, Indian dances and rodeos. The cost of the publication would be covered by the space sold to the present buyers of billboard space. The tourist, on the other hand, would be able to refer to this booklet frequently as he passed through the state and he would also be able actually to see our enchanting landscape. Furthermore, the new knowledge of interesting places and events within New Mexico might persuade him to spend an extra day or two here.

We believe that the end result of the blighting spread of billboards eventually will be the public's violent reaction. This may well result in the complete banning of billboards, first on new inter-state highways and finally on all state roads. But we may have to wait for this until the billboard mess has become so blatant as to obscure the landscape completely. A more positive and a more immediate solution might be the substitute which we have just suggested.

We realize that the billboard owners will oppose any restrictions upon their industry. They have always resisted attempts to zone billboards or control their size or format. It seems obvious that the industry will not improve itself but will instead attempt to gain its ends by continued influencing of the legislature. But does an industry serve the needs of humanity when it imposes itself upon us in such loud, garish and ugly ways?

The time is fast approaching when any defense that providers of billboards might make to perpetuate themselves will fall upon the deafest of ears. The lobby will ultimately be defeated.

In the past we have defended the need for some of the information which the billboard does present. On occasion we have found a motel or a cafe as a result of a billboard outside of a community. We do not mind a few billboards as we approach a town but we do not like an entire landscape marred and scarred by garish billboard graphics. Nor is there any place at all for the ubiquitous boor; the liquor, cigarette or automobile ads that desecrate our highways from coast to coast. A well-designed booklet would provide all of the information about local establishments that is necessary and in a more convenient form.

It must also be stressed that an improved port-of-entry system would be a necessary part of this idea. But this in itself (an improved port-of-entry system) could be of immense benefit to the state in any case. Tourists could be welcomed with a cup of coffee at a comfortable spot just inside the state line. They could be warned of the effects of high altitudes upon their sea level reactions before they proceeded along our highways. The booklet described above would also be a part of this welcome. And just think of the reaction of an American tourist when he is informed that he is about to experience a state whose great natural beauty is not impaired by intrusive billboards.

—J. Conron/B. Bunting

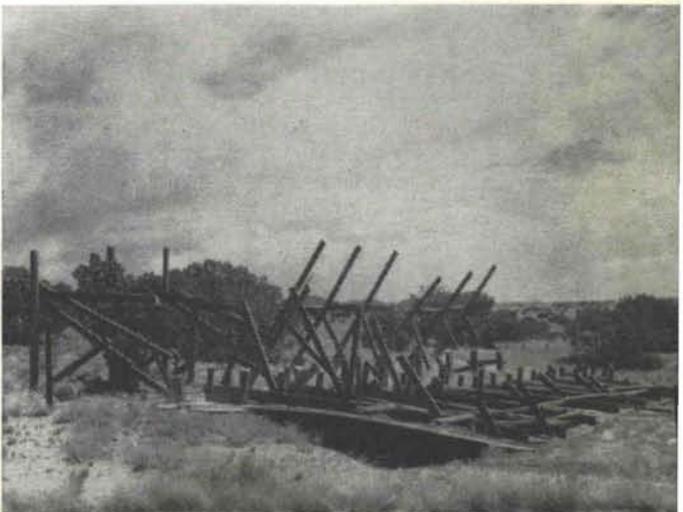


Loud fronts and ugly backs line both sides of Route 66 just East of Albuquerque.



There were three billboards within this view, but the "Vigilantes" rode again.

Through the night they rode with saw and axe. A billboard lies dead in their wake.





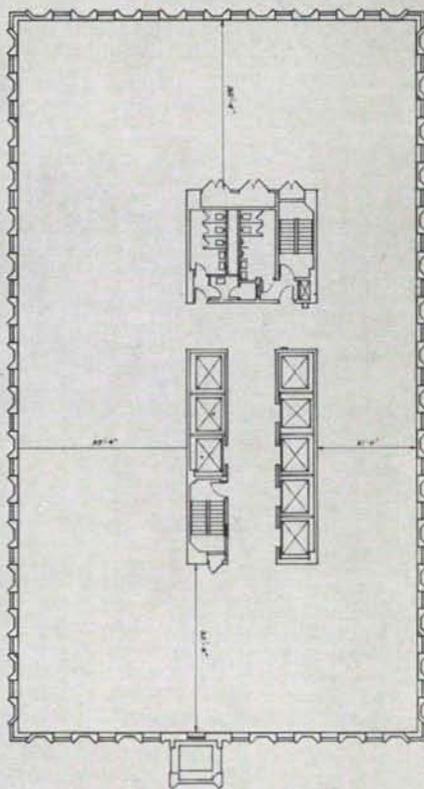
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