

MINI MYSTERY

GUTHRIE EDMOND REGIONAL AIRPORT



# Point of View

Giant arrows around Oklahoma and beyond spotlight a fascinating chapter in the history of flight.

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**HIDING IN PLAIN** sight, massive arrows—about fifty to seventy feet long and made of concrete—lie across the country, slowly succumbing to the ravages of time. Until recently, these mysterious indicators had gone largely unnoticed, perhaps because they can best be seen from above. To decipher where the arrows pointed, for whom, and why they were built in the first place requires a little time travel.

A century ago, the written word still was the main method of

communication, but letters took days or even months to send and receive. Air mail was a promising, quicker alternative to ground delivery, but human flight was in its youth. Planes often had only a handful of instruments, and pilots navigated from the cockpit by looking for familiar landmarks below. There were no air navigation charts yet, and flights were limited to daylight hours.

Enter the world's first civilian ground-based navigational system: the **Transcontinental Air Mail Route**. This visionary infrastructure project crisscrossed the country, pointing the way from one airport to the next, adding emergency landing fields along the way. Hundreds of sites were built and equipped with giant yellow arrows.

*For a complete map of the Transcontinental Air Mail Route markers in Oklahoma, visit [thesurveystation.com/map-of-ngs-airway-beacons](https://thesurveystation.com/map-of-ngs-airway-beacons).*

According to a 1927 Department of Commerce Lighthouse Service bulletin, small buildings adjacent to the arrows had

⚡ **Though it has stood for decades in the Oklahoma wind and rain, the Air Mail station in Guthrie remains a beacon of the past.**

wayfinding information printed on the roof and acted as powerhouses to operate searchlight beacons mounted on fifty-foot windmill-type towers.

This innovative network of 1,500 beacons transformed flight and mail delivery until improved instrument panels, radar, and radio communication technologies made the system obsolete. Historical records indicate that approximately twenty-two stations were built in the state, many of which were located along what would later become interstates 40, 44, and 35. Though sites in Love, Murray, Comanche, Jackson, Lincoln, Beckham, Ottawa, Mayes, Tulsa, Kay, Logan, Noble, Osage, Alfalfa, Woods, and Woodward counties are in various states of decline, they stand as reminders of how ingenuity and an eye toward progress propelled the nation into a new era of connectivity. 