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## The Loneliest Road in America – Highway 50, Nevada (N16C)

U.S. Highway 50 crosses Nevada's mid-section, entering the state from Utah near Baker and Great Basin National Park, and leaving Nevada in the west beyond Carson City at Lake Tahoe. It mostly follows old stagecoach, Pony Express and telegraph routes.

An article in Life Magazine in 1986 nicknamed this highway “the loneliest road in America” because it crossed mostly open country with few towns or other attractions along the way. In fact, along the 409 miles between Delta, Utah and Fallon, Nevada there are only three towns – Ely, Eureka and Austin.

Nevada's tourism industry successfully took advantage of the nickname, creating a “passport” and other gimmicks to encourage visitors to take this route across the state.

During a Nevada road trip where I explored a number of sites in central and northern Nevada, I covered all but the very ends of The Loneliest Road in America. These photos cover sites from east to west along or just off Highway 50.





Great Basin National Park near Baker, Nevada is home to Wheeler Peak. Here you will find Lehman Caves, camping, hiking trails and one of the southernmost glaciers in North America. I've camped and hiked here twice in the past. For this trip my goal was to take the scenic drive up the mountain and then hike to the base of the glacier. Unfortunately, a forest fire had closed parts of the park, derailing my plans.



Also near Baker is the BLM's Baker Archaeological Site, which preserves one of the westernmost Fremont Culture community ruins. The actual ruins aren't visible. After some excavation they have been reburied to preserve for future, more advanced research. Outlines of the pueblo have been constructed on the surface to give visitors a sense of what lies underneath. Wheeler Peak is in the background.





Ward Charcoal Ovens State Historical Park, just off Highway 50 southeast of Ely, preserves six ovens that were once used to produce charcoal for local Ward District mining operations. The park also features hiking trails and the ruins of some lime kilns.



Also southeast of Ely is Cave Lake State Park, a camping and water activities park that features Cave Lake Reservoir in a rugged setting. This natural arch stands high above the lake.



Founded as a stagecoach station along the Central Overland Route, Ely is the biggest city along The Loneliest Road in America. It's a full service town and features a couple casinos, including the Nevada Club at Hotel Nevada. It became a mining center with the creation of the Ruth Copper Pit just to the west.



The Ruth Copper Pit, a.k.a. Robinson Mine, is one of the largest open pit mines in the world. It is located at Ruth, which originated as a company town for the mine.

I took this picture from the top of the BLM's Garnet Hill. Visitors are free to search for garnets at the site – or just take in the views.





I left the highway to take Hamilton Road to the old Hamilton Ghost Town. Unfortunately, except for the sign where I turned off the highway I didn't see any more signage, so I'll give it another try someday with a better map.

It's often dry out on the open range. It's not uncommon to see pools like these along the roads to provide water for grazing cattle.



Heading west along The Loneliest Road in America, the next city you come across is Eureka. It was a major mining center – local ore is second to the Comstock Lode near Virginia City. The city peaked with about 10,000 people, but that's dropped to about 600 as local mining has faded.



The Bartine Outhouse in downtown Eureka seats five. At least it did when it was still operational. Visitors are encouraged to limit their visit to photos now.



Hickison Petroglyphs Recreation Area & Interpretive Site features camping, hiking trails and a trail that visits some petroglyph panels. What struck me was that a number of the petroglyphs, including those in the picture, reminded me of Aboriginal rock art I saw in Australia.





Built in 1863, the Gridley Store is one of the historic buildings in Austin, Nevada, the third town along The Loneliest Road in America. One of its claims to fame was the bag of flour that Reuel Gridley auctioned off to raise money for wounded Union Civil War veterans. The same bag of flour was auctioned off repeatedly, ultimately raising more than a quarter million dollars for the cause.

Mining came and went – and pops up in minor amounts now and then. Currently the town has fewer than 200 residents. But its historic sites are well-preserved, making Austin a living ghost town.



These are the ruins of one of John Butterfield's Overland Rail & Stage Company's stage stations.



These are the ruins of Overland's Cold Springs station. The ruins of a telegraph station are a short walk away. A longer hike starting across the highway leads to the Pony Express station ruins at Cold Springs.



Middlegate Station began as a stop along the Overland Stagecoach route, and it served for a short time as a Pony Express changing station. The roadhouse here serves food, sells gas and has other visitor amenities.





A few miles south of the highway is surface evidence of the Fairview Peak fault's December 1954 earthquake, which had registered a magnitude of 7.3 on the Richter Scale. The earthquake lifted the mountains an average of six feet relative to Dixie Valley, and as much as 20 feet in places.



These are the ruins of the Pony Express station at Sand Springs, about 20 miles east of Fallon.

Behind it in the distance is Sand Mountain Recreation Area. The sand originated in the dry lakebed of what was once Glacial Lake Lahontan, once one of the largest lakes in North America. The dune is up to 600 feet tall and two miles long. It is open to Off Highway Vehicles.



Further to the west is Grimes Point Archaeological Area. It features a trail that winds through an extensive petroglyphs field.



Caves and alcoves at Grimes Point were used by Native Americans in pre-Columbian times.





Lahontan State Recreation Area preserves the area around Lake Lahontan, what's left of Glacial Lake Lahontan. When the lake is full, it could be a rather impressive state park. But I did not see any standing water at the two beaches I visited on this trip.



About eight miles south of The Loneliest Road in America and Lake Lahontan is Fort Churchill State Historical Park. The fort was built in the early 1860s after skirmishes between the U.S. Army and the Paiutes and Bannocks. This was also a stop along the Overland Stagecoach route and the Pony Express Trail.



My last stop along Highway 50 on this trip was Carson City, Nevada's capital city, where I checked out the state capitol (pictured) and other government buildings.