

Nevada's Highway 50: The Loneliest Road in America

Nevada's Highway 50 runs across the state, east-west, through the Great Basin, which encompasses most of the state. This desert road, though definitely lonely, has a lot going for it. It meanders through an ancient lake bed, climbs over several mountain passes, follows the old Pony Express route, used to be part of the Lincoln Highway, and is a link to the state's only national park.

It was actually *Life* magazine, in the mid-1980s, that christened the 285 miles of asphalt from Fernley to Ely (which is most of the Nevada highway) as "The Loneliest Road in America." Nevada residents recognized a good thing when they saw it and ran with the idea. Local residents came up with the "Highway 50 Survival Kit" to promote attractions and services along the route. The State Legislature even authorized highway road signs boasting of the title. As it turned out, the efforts didn't help much—it's still a lonely black ribbon through a bleak landscape— but it *does* add to the road's character! *And*, it can add character and color to part of your Small Towns collection—or part of your Famous Places collection—or part of your Highway Signs collection (as Pete Varvis, CA, used to collect).

How about a "Loneliest Road Town Collection?" Many of the towns along Highway 50 got their start as mining boom towns. As the mines dried up—so did many of the towns. Look for covers from Delta, Ely, Eureka, Austin, Fallon, and Fernley (all Nevada towns). If you could find a cover from each, it might just make a unique and interesting display (hint, hint), not to mention a nice little aside to your main Small Towns collection.

How about a "Loneliest Road Famous Places Collection?" Highway 50 passes through, and by, some really interesting spots. Entering from the Utah side, you go right by the Great Basin National Park (which has a grove of 3,000-4,000 year-old bristlecone pines and Nevada's only glacier!). Next, there's Ward Charcoal Ovens Historic State Park (six 30-foot-high kilns built in 1876 to provide charcoal for the smelter of the Ward Mining District). On the other side of the road, there's Cave Lake State Park. About mid-state, there's the Hickison Petroglyph Recreation Area (great rock art). The Sand Mountain Recreation Area features a 600-foot high sand dune, all that's left of the beaches of ancient Lake Lahontan. Next, the Fallon Naval Air Station, where "Top Gun" pilots come to train. Walking along the petroglyph trail at Grimes Point Archaeological Area, you can unfortunately see how the graffiti of modern-day louts is gradually defacing the ancient Indian art.

And, if you collect highway signs, as Pete did, those Highway 50 covers take on a new meaning when you know their background and location—standing forlornly out there on this often deserted road! Again, worthy, perhaps, of a showcase of their own!

All in all, here's a road that calls out to collectors and travelers alike. All you Texans might think about taking Highway 50 as you pack up and head out to this year's AMCAL in California. Stop and see the sights—and ask for those covers! Perhaps you could one day boast that *you* travelled "The Loneliest Road in America."

[Note: At the last second, I couldn't find the Highway 50 cover I was going to run with this. Anyone have a scan he can send me?!]

