

Loneliest road in America comes of age

By Marilyn Newton, Nevada

The view of Highway 50 looking west toward the waning sun gives insight into why AAA once warned motorists “not to drive there unless they’re confident of their survival skills.”

Photo by: David Braun

It was 30 years ago, in July 1986, that *Life* magazine used the term “The Loneliest Road in America” to describe the stretch of Highway 50—more commonly known as Highway 50—from Fernley to Ely across central Nevada. AAA even advised against traveling the highway, claiming there was nothing to see. For those who were crazy enough to travel that lonely road anyway, they were advised to carry survival gear such as water and cold-weather clothes.

Is the Loneliest Road in America really as bad as *Life* magazine claimed?

The moniker could easily have been a slap in face, but savvy state officials adopted the phrase and turned it into something positive. The state created a survival passport that same year, which travelers could get stamped at locations along Highway 50 and redeem for a certificate.

Suddenly, the loneliest road wasn’t so lonely as people sought bragging rights to “I Survived the Loneliest Road in America.”

Tourism numbers began to climb and are continuing to do so, and the passport program continues to this day. The state’s response became a help to the economy of the towns along Highway 50.

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