

*From Salt Lake City to Sacramento
Via
The Loneliest Road in America*



May 2018

Molly and Bob Hillery

Nevada, May 2018

Monday May 14

We had stayed at the airport Marriott overnight so we got the 6:45 shuttle to the airport for our 8:40 flight to Salt Lake City. The flight was on time and we had a good breakfast on board, before arriving in Salt Lake a little before 11am. We picked up the rental car and went straight to the nearby Courtyard where we were able to check in.

About noon we went to a local Starbucks and then I went for a 2 ½ mile walk around the trucking warehouses that populate this western edge of the city close to the airport. Molly did some knitting and we both had naps before going into the city for dinner at Spencer's steak house. We have eaten there several times previously and always enjoyed the food and service – as we did tonight.

Tuesday May 15

We were up shortly after 6:30 and went to a local Perkins for breakfast. After checking out of the hotel we drove to downtown and spent some time on Temple Square before setting off for Delta, Utah.



*Always Beautiful
Temple Square*



Instead of driving south on I-15, we went about 30 miles west on I-80 before turning south on two lane roads. Basically we were traveling in the other side of the mountain range just to the west of Salt Lake City and missed the urban area south of the city.

The roads were quiet and had good surfaces so the speed limit was generally 65 MPH but the scenery was varied and pleasant. We went through typical desert, with scrub and little else; cattle ranches, a few well fertilized green areas; and, once over a 6400 feet elevation pass, a large number of trees. The weather was beautiful; still relatively cool (about 60F most of the way) but generally blue skies with fluffy white clouds.



Part of our route was on a section of the Lincoln Highway, the first US Transcontinental Road and at another spot we crossed over the Pony Express Route. No matter what the vegetation or the history along the route, the entire day we were in view of mountains – in almost every direction, it seemed – and many were still white-capped. Altogether it was a very nice 200 miles drive.

We arrived in Delta, Utah, and checked into the Days Inn around 3pm. I went for a restaurant scouting walk. We settled on the Red Rabbit Grill where

we had a decent meal – no alcohol served as seems to be the norm in this town.



We were now on ***US Route 50 –The Loneliest Road!***

Wednesday May 16

We checked out of our hotel before 8am and went to McDonald's for breakfast. Then we set off west on US Route 50 towards the Nevada border, about 80 miles away. Shortly after crossing into Nevada, we turned south for a few miles to visit the Great Basin National Park. We were now in the Great Basin, an area that covers some parts of six states and an area in which all the water that collects actually stays in the basin. No rivers lead water from here to the Pacific, Gulf or Atlantic Oceans – it simply dries up within the basin or stays in one of a few lakes. This, of course, destroys the myth that is connected with the Continental Divide, which says that water on the west of the Divide ends up in the Pacific and water on the east goes to the Atlantic or Gulf. The Basin is a vast area and reaches north into Oregon and just across the Mexican border and from eastern California well into Utah.

The National Park has a small Visitor Center which describes the Great Basin in more detail and also provides a paved road to the 10,000 feet elevation for some panoramic views of at least the Nevada portion of the Basin. Unfortunately, we were just a little early in the season and the road was closed at the 9000 feet level, but we were able to get some super views, particularly of the snow-covered mountains from an elevation only recently cleared of snow itself.



The Great Basin National Park

From the National Park, we traveled further west on the “Loneliest Road” as far as Eureka for our next overnight stop. We were traveling most of the way across huge valleys (10 to 30 miles or more across) at an elevation of 5500 to 6000 feet, broken only by climbs to 7500 feet plus to cross a pass in one of the dozen or more mountain ranges that cross the state in a north-south direction. The scenery was very similar to that we experienced yesterday but with far fewer towns, villages or any other signs of life. The biggest man-made feature was the Ruth Copper mine, said to be one of the biggest pits in the world – but even here we didn’t see much to suggest any habitation.



Once again, the drive was magnificent and – despite being desert – has an immense variety of rock formations, colors and even vegetation, such that the ride was never boring.



Not just the Loneliest Road - but Historic

We arrived in Eureka about 2pm (now Pacific Time) and I had chance for a walk around the town before we prepared for dinner. The town has a number of very old buildings (many now semi-dilapidated, sadly) and provides a tour map describing each as it is and, more importantly, as it was. There is also a small museum. On our visit here as we drove the length of US 50 from Sacramento to Cincinnati several years ago, we did the tour and went inside the museum, both of which were very interesting.

Tonight we ate at the Owl Club Steakhouse – an institution in town – and had a very good meal.

Thursday May 17

We had breakfast in the hotel and were on the road by about 9am. We were still on US Route 50 and today we would follow it all the way to Carson City on the western edge of Nevada. The terrain was very much like that of the past two days but we were generally headed “downhill” from the 6500 foot elevation of Eureka to something less than 5000 feet at Carson.

Obviously it wasn't a steady downhill run and we climbed to several passes that were almost 8000 feet high as we crossed several more of the mountain chains of Nevada. The weather was still very pleasant although it was generally a little more cloudy than the past two days.



We had lunch in the town of Fallon, but about 70 miles earlier we had stopped at a site that had been a stagecoach station in the 1800s. The remains of the buildings are still there and there are good informative plaques about the life of those whose job it was to ready horses for a changeover as the stage arrived. There were no accommodations for the travelers; it was merely a station where horses could be housed and readied for work.

Just across the road was an information board about a Pony Express station that had existed about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile away – so both forms of early transportation were

commemorated here. In fact, the Pony Express “depot” had moved into the stagecoach buildings towards the end of its brief (18 month) existence. Again, this was a horse changing station with no overnight accommodation – except for the poor soul who lived there!

Finally, there was information about the transcontinental telegraph line that had also passed along this stretch of US50. It's interesting that all three forms of communication were snuffed out in rapid succession as the railroad cut travel and postage times dramatically.

We took a slight detour from US50 to visit the old gold mining town of Virginia City. This and a couple of neighboring towns had been at the heart of the Nevada gold and silver rush from 1850 and the Comstock Mines still hold records for the amount of precious metal recovered – into the billions of dollars' worth. The town is now a tourist trap and seemed to us a little seedier than on a previous visit. It does,

however, have some marvelous buildings (the two churches are magnificent) as well as the “cowboy” frontages and wooden sidewalk of the main street.



*Historic
Virginia
City,
home to
Nevada's
Gold and
Silver Rush*



From Virginia City it was only about 30 minutes' drive (past dozens of reminders of the Gold Rush days) to our hotel in Carson City. We checked into the Courtyard, I went for a short walk and later we went to Duke's Steakhouse in the Casino next door to the hotel. It was an excellent steak dinner and very reasonably priced.

Friday May 18

We had breakfast at a local iHop and then set off for Sacramento. We went down the Nevada side of the mountain range for about 30 miles before turning west up a long winding road to about 7500 feet before meeting Route 50 again at Stateline in Lake Tahoe. Here we had a coffee before completing the very pleasant drive to Sacramento.

In the evening we met Cyndi, Christopher and Sammy for dinner at Anthony's Italian restaurant, quite close to our hotel.

Saturday May 19



We were up before 7am and had a coffee at Starbucks before heading out to the roller skating rink where Samantha had her lesson (with partner) and then a couple of hours of group lessons and free skating. We met Christopher for lunch, after which Cyndi had to leave for a work engagement.

We spent some time with Christopher and Sammy at their home, mostly playing TV games before Molly and I returned to the hotel for a bit of relaxation before dinner. Again it was just Sammy and Christopher but we had a very pleasant time at On the Border.

Sunday May 20

We had a light breakfast at Starbucks, I went for a 4 mile walk and we met Christopher and family at 11am for brunch at iHop. In the afternoon we watched videos and photos of various piano and skating activities of Sammy and showed our pictures from Cyprus and Greece.

In the evening we had dinner with the entire family (plus Cyndi's cousin Tim) at the Clam Jumper in downtown Sacramento, rounding out a very pleasant weekend in the California capital.

Monday May 21

We were up before 7am and checked out before eight to get to Sammy's school for her fifth grade end-of-year musical, "Vacation to Mars". Sammy was a mechanic on the space ship for the journey and had a song and dance routine with another mechanic, as well as being in the chorus for all the other songs. It



was very entertaining and we were glad that we were able to delay our departure a little to catch the show. We then said our farewells, had a leisurely breakfast at iHop and then set off on the 400+ mile drive to Elko, Nevada.



It was an easy drive on I-80 all the way with speed limits up to 80 mph, so the cruise control got a workout on the relatively quiet road, once we were out of the city. After crossing the border into Nevada near Reno we had periods of heavy rain and very strong winds all the way to our destination. It wasn't a complete washout as there were periods of dry roads but there were storms along the entire route. We made one stop for coffee in Sparks (near Reno) but other than that we kept going and reached our hotel shortly after 5:30, seven hours after leaving Sacramento.

We dined tonight at Luciano's Italian Restaurant and enjoyed the meal, as we have on at least two previous occasions.

Tuesday May 22

We had breakfast at a nearby McDonald's, filled the car and then set out for the remaining 220 miles to Salt Lake City to return the car and catch our 5pm flight to Cincinnati. We had showers on and off for the entire journey to SLC but the scenery was fantastic, nevertheless.

We had about 2 hours in the Sky Club before our flight and were in Cincinnati to pick up our car about 10:30pm after a very enjoyable "short break".

