

Sacred Skies

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Exploring cultural connections along the "Loneliest Highway in America"

Nevada is the state best known for bright lights and parties that never end... Not as well-known, however, is that Nevada also has some of the darkest skies in the country. Why is that? Nevada ranks as the 7th largest state, yet 42nd in terms of population density across the United States. Nevada boasts 300 named mountain ranges and the most peaks over 10,000 feet than any other state. With minimum effort, anyone can experience Nevada's dark night skies.



Milky Way as seen from Austin Summit, U.S. Highway 50, Nevada

As a resident of this state for the last 35 years and an avid night sky photographer I can vouch for the possibilities. If you want desert themed images, they can be found in the valleys throughout the state, especially in the south. If alpine settings are more to your liking, they are available with a little effort in any one of the many mountain ranges. My favorite dark sky route is Highway 50. Running through the central part of the state, the route is 400 miles long and has been designated "The Loneliest Highway" for good reason. There are 17 mountain passes ranging from 4,600 to 7,726 feet above sea level. I have collected images on many of these passes and it is as simple as pulling off the road and setting up your cameras. The attached images will give you an idea of what you might find.



Petroglyphs at Grimes Point, Nevada

A particular favorite is Grimes Point, about 90 minutes east of Reno. It is a petroglyph site and gives testimony to the Native People who have been stewards of this land for thousands of years. Tribal elders tell creation stories from this area that make the experience of the night sky richer and more meaningful. You can feel the spiritual connection as the Milky Way travels across the sky. They have names for each location that go back thousands of years. I cannot think of a more powerful human experience where one can enjoy the magic of the night sky with a people who have been present for so long, and continue to be, stewards of that place.

The following links will aid you in your journey across Nevada. Many do not mention night skies specifically as they are not yet known as destinations for dark skies, but this I believe, will change with the growing interest in astro-tourism and astro-photography. Great Basin National Park is the exception, only a few miles south of Highway 50 near the eastern border of the state, it is an International Dark-Sky Park, with a calendar of dark sky viewing programs noted on the website.

- travelnevada.com
- travelnevada.com/road-trips/loneliest-road-in-america/
- travelnevada.com/?s=Starriest+Sky+route
- nps.gov/grba/index.htm



U.S. Highway 50 in Nevada

Photo Credit: Creative Commons, Davemeistermoab



Night sky over

Hwy 50 near Grimes Point, Nevada

All photos taken by Larry Burton, unless otherwise noted. For a few basic techniques in night sky photography, see Larry Burton's webinar, "[A Dark Sky Primer](#)," a presentation for the American Indian Alaskan Native Tourism Association's (AIANTA) Webinar Series. recorded May 9, 2023.



U.S. Highway

50, the Loneliest Road In America, Photo Credit: Paula Krugerud

Learn More

- [Travel Nevada](#)
- [Loneliest Road in America](#)
- [American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association \(AIANTA\)](#)