

Turning onto the NF600, the road through Lamoille Canyon, is like driving in the barren and desolate desert landscape of Nevada and magically finding yourself in the lush and verdant Himalaya. The change in topography and scenery is like night and day.

The icing on the cake is that NF (denoting National Forest) 600, running from the town of Lamoille to the car park at the trailhead for the hike up to Lamoille Lake, is a lovely 19km-long ribbon of tar lazily draped around undulating canyon cliff sides. There are short straights stitched together by stretched out 'S' bends. It was an opportunity too hard to resist, because over the past couple of

days I had stuck to speed limits like the most obedient child in the classroom, often slotting this very capable BMW 328i into cruise control for 400km at a stretch – the distance from Delhi to Ajmer.

It was 4.55am and I was on the NF600, feeling like a kid locked inside a candy store. Dawn was breaking as I slipped the Beemer into 'Sports' mode, effectively transforming it from librarian to Lara Croft. Needless to say, I drove through the canyon on the more exciting side of the speed limit. The combination of steering feel, the suspension dynamics – with traction control turned off – and the 2.0-litre, 240hp engine had me grinning like a loon. I was at the wheel of

the 'ultimate driving machine' on a mouth-watering road. And I was all by myself.

Not exactly, as it turned out, because as I was pulling into the parking lot, happily sniffing the smell of burning rubber, one of the deputy sheriffs of Elko County pulled up behind me. "Bollocks! Here comes the ticket," I thought. But he seemed more interested in what I was doing here so early in the morning. I explained that I wanted to get to the lake to photograph it before the wind started up and the sun became too harsh. Deputy Sean Murphy turned out to be quite the outdoors photographer, and soon he was pointing out routes that I should take up to the lake

and showing me photographs he had taken and videos he had cut during his summer treks and winter snowmobiling safaris. After wishing me good luck he started off, stopped a few feet ahead, backed up and said, "Go easy on the drive back! Okay?"

"Yes sir," I replied sheepishly and he drove off. But the tips that he'd given me made that four-hour hike up to the Dollar Lakes and the Lamoille Lake one of the most memorable highlights of my week-long road trip in Nevada.

WHAT HAPPENS IN VEGAS

I had landed in glitzy Las Vegas a few days before, after a hectic conference in New Orleans. This city with everything standing →

BEEMED ACROSS THE DESERT

Braving the blazing sun, glaciers and gun-toting locals, **Rishad Saam Mehta** finds some of the best roads the state of Nevada has to offer in a BMW 328i.

PHOTOGRAPHY RISHAD SAAM MEHTA

'The deputy sheriff ignored the smell of rubber emanating from my BMW's scorching tyres.'

← in the middle of nothing was the perfect way to wind down. Especially since I had tickets to *The Beatles LOVE* by Cirque Du Soleil being performed at The Mirage. Having grown up listening to The Beatles, this audio-visual treat of imaginative props, strobe lights and superbly synchronised acrobatics was a delight, particularly since it was played in loud high fidelity.

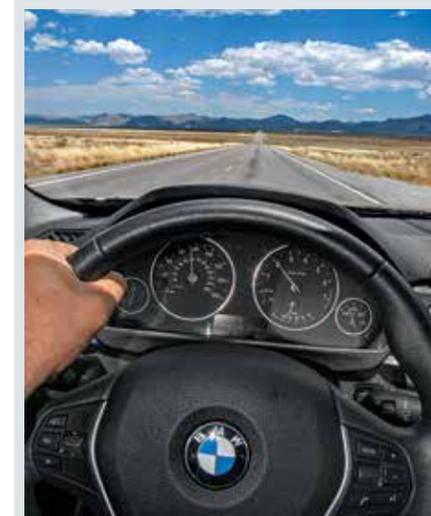
If you ever see this show, try to spot Shamanth, a Telugu boy from Hyderabad who learnt street-style dancing by watching YouTube videos and then scored a job in the Cirque Du Soleil troupe (hint: 'Here Comes the Sun').

Leaving behind the blackjack, the neon lights and the crazy cocktails, I drove towards Red Rock Canyon – not too much of a detour from Ely, where I was heading for the evening. The temperature was a searing 45deg Celsius and even though Red Rock Canyon has 19 hiking trails ranging from one to four hours and over 2,000 rock-climbing routes, I couldn't do either because it was just too hot. Instead, I drove the 21km scenic route that has 10 places where I could stop and appreciate the unique geography of the Mojave Desert. At one such viewpoint, known as Lost Creek, there is a road leading off the scenic drive called the Rocky Gap Road. It's meant for 4x4 drivers who want to put their →



Lamoille Lake is just 50km from Elko. The drive to reach it is simply out of this world.

ROUTE 50: THE LONELIEST ROAD IN AMERICA



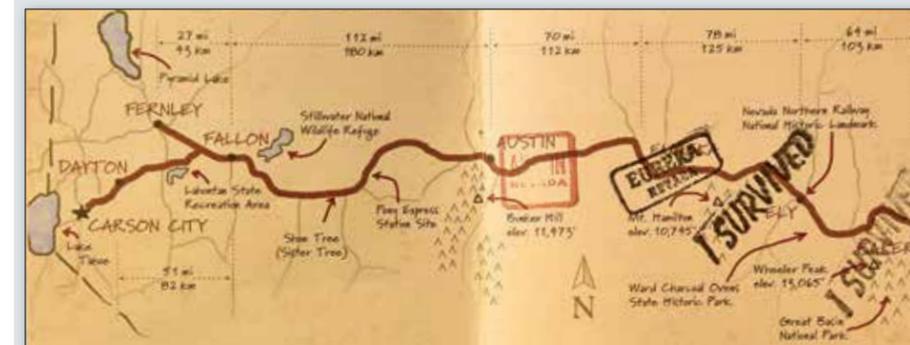
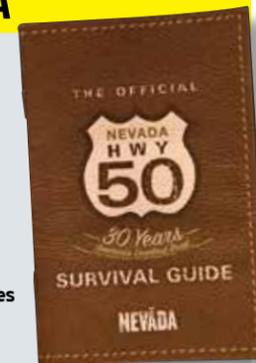
ROUTE 66 MAY wear the mantle of being the most iconic road stretching across America, but entire stretches of it are missing. The unassuming Route 50, constructed in 1926, stretches across North America from the Ocean City, Maryland on the Atlantic to Sacramento in California, just a stone's throw from the Pacific. All 4830km of it, running across 12 states and the District of Columbia, are driveable.

The highway's 483km that runs through

Nevada from Ely westwards to Carson City is called the 'Loneliest Road in America'. It used to be one of the lawless sections of the Pony Express Route on which wiry young men rode carrying mail, risking their lives every day during the gold rush era of the 19th century. In fact, the requirements were 'Young, skinny, wiry fellow not over 18. Must be expert rider willing to risk death daily... Orphans preferred.'

Today what you need is cruise control and catchy music as you coast past the little towns of Eureka, Austin and Fallon, which were populous mining and ranching towns of yesteryear and still have a lot of history by way of period architecture, unusual museums and atmospheric saloons.

This road through the desert may seem featureless but there are interesting sites to visit, such as the Hickison Petroglyphs Interpretive Site between Austin and Eureka – where you can see petroglyphs or rock art that goes back into hallowed antiquity and was etched by people living here 12,000 years ago.



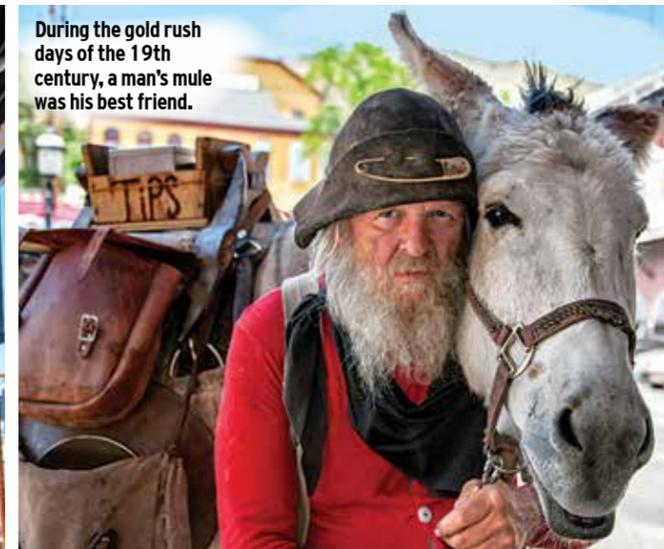
Although it's no longer the high-risk road it used to be, Nevada's US-50 still justifies its 'lonely' tag.



Just 26km from Las Vegas, Red Rock is an excellent area to escape the canned air of the city's casinos.



Gunfights and lost fortunes were common in Virginia City, whose gold built San Francisco.



During the gold rush days of the 19th century, a man's mule was his best friend.



This prehistoric site lies on US-50 between Austin and Eureka in Nevada.



'Great Basin has a cool alpine climate even in the middle of Nevada's harsh summer.'

← off-roading skills to the test. Since I was driving a low-slung sedan that was in pristine condition (and I wanted to keep it that way), I stuck to the road I was on.

About 480km north, on US-93 from Red Rock to Ely, I caught my first glimpse of the high desert landscape that spreads across most

of Nevada. Arid, stark and desolate are adjectives that often sprang to my mind.

Ely, the county seat of White Pine County, was developed as a Stage Coach Station on the Pony Express and the Central Overland Route during the days of the Wild West. Its boom came when copper was discovered around here in 1906. Today, it is a quiet little town that sits on US-50, the loneliest road in America.

About 33km from Ely is Cave Lake State Park. A few years ago, the imaginative warden of this park decided that his ward wasn't getting enough attention and adulation, and so he went around the neighbourhood asking for old bathtubs and declared that

Cave Lake would hold annual bathtub races.

Today, the annual bathtub races are immensely popular as locals in funny costumes race unwieldy bathtubs across Cave Lake, comically struggling to keep them afloat. Next year's race will be held on June 24, should you want to take part.

Hearing me complain about how agonisingly hot it was, the waitress at the Cellblock Steakhouse – where you actually sit in old jail cells to dine on the choicest cuts of meat – asked me if I'd like to go and stomp around on some glaciers. This is how I found out about the Great Basin National Park, the only national park entirely within Nevada. In fact, the scintillating

scene she described told of alpine forests with bristlecone pines and lakes ringed with glaciers that feed them. It seemed a world away from this baker's oven – and it was just an hour away. The next morning I drove off from Ely at 4.45am and 103km later I parked at the Bristlecones and Alpine Lakes Trailhead at Great Basin.

I had been treated to a picture-postcard sunrise along the way, just as the road started to snake into the Great Basin Mountain Range. It took me another hour to hike up to two pretty alpine lakes called Stella and Teresa. And I did get to stomp on the glaciers that fed them. Another magical experience. In another hour, I would be on my way to Reno on US-50 and the →



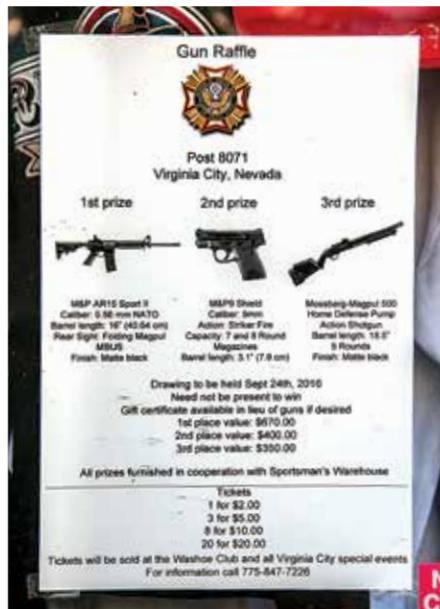
High temperatures played havoc with tyre pressures.



Love burgers? You'll love Nevada's multiple offerings.

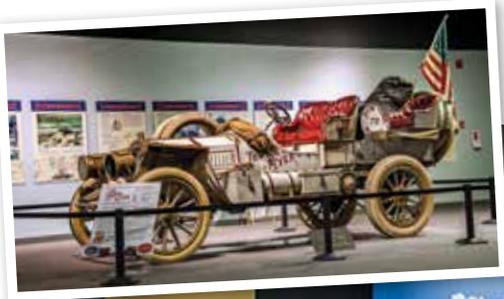
PLANNING YOUR NEVADA ROAD TRIP

- I flew Etihad Airways into Los Angeles and out of San Francisco. This is the best choice of airline in terms of cost, comfort and convenience, especially since US Immigration and Customs pre-clearance is done in Abu Dhabi and all you have to do once you land is collect your bags and walk out. (www.etihad.com)
- Sixt Rent a Car has a mouth-watering fleet and great deals on fun-to-drive American muscle cars such as the Dodge Charger Road and Track, the Mustang GT, and on German models such as Beemers and Mercs. Booking and paying for your car in advance gives you the best deals. A credit card and a driver's licence in English, with the name of the person renting the car is also required. Fancier cars such as the Corvette might require two credit cards. (www.sixt.com)
- These websites are great resources to plan your Nevada road trip: www.travelnevada.in, www.nps.gov/grba/planyourvisit/the-great-basin.htm
- Buy tickets for *The Beatles LOVE* at www.cirquedusoleil.com/beatles-love



Being a pro-gun state, raffles like these are common. Highway signs are often used for target practice.





Mouth-watering metal at the National Automobile Museum in Reno. (Inset) The Thomas Flyer.



'Roads to Lamoille, Great Basin and Virginia City are fun to drive on. So hire a good car!'

← temperature would be soaring again, but right now here I was shivering in the cold and standing on ice.

PETROLHEAD HEAVEN

Reno celebrates the delight that is one of mankind's greatest joys: the motor car. The National Automobile Museum is an absolute delight to explore and its four galleries can keep any petrolhead occupied for an entire day. Not only are the cars plentiful (they span more than a century), they are also in immaculate condition with mirror-like chrome and paintwork

polished to a gloss. The information placards for each car make for very interesting reading: Frank Sinatra's 1961 Italian Ghia, the 1912 Rambler 73-4CC Cross Country that featured in *Titanic*, Elvis Presley's 1973 Cadillac Eldorado and the 1907 Thomas Flyer that won the 1908 New York to Paris race are all here to ogle at and admire.

Virginia City, which is just 40km from Reno, is another attraction worth a visit because it gives a glimpse into life as it was during the Wild West gold and silver mining days. But, for me, the highlight was the journey there on Nevada State Road NV-341. The last 24km of the route from Reno to Virginia City is a twisty mountain road which is absolute motoring nirvana. Of course, it helps if you're driving a car that enhances the experience, so you can understand

why I was in my element.

Virginia City itself is a collection of museums (one dedicated to a certain American novelist who arrived here as Samuel Langhorne Clemens and left as Mark Twain) and souvenir shops and saloons with imaginative names like 'Bucket of Blood'. The story goes that after a particularly violent gunfight here, a bucket of blood was mopped off the floor.

For the best and imaginative Bloody Mary ever (spiked with your choice of stinking garlic vodka or bacon vodka) you should head to the Red Dog Saloon. In some ways, Nevada is still the Wild West, with a law that allows people to openly carry arms. In fact, I saw a flyer in Virginia City advertising a raffle



Remember the car that was swung onto the ship during the opening scenes of *Titanic*? The Rambler is that car.

draw where the prizes were a semi-automatic rifle, a 9mm pistol and a pump action shotgun. It was time to beat a hasty retreat.

The next day was my last in the US, and on my early morning drive from Reno to San Francisco Airport, I recounted my adventures over the past few days. Nevada had filled my week with delightful drives, surprising scenery, fantastic food and very friendly and helpful – if sometimes quirky – locals. **AI**

ROAD TIPS |



Always carry enough water in the car. Drinks that replenish isotonic salts, such as Gatorade, are a good idea, too. Also carry snacks such as energy bars if you're planning to walk at stops along the way.



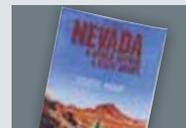
Carry cash for fuel because non-US credit cards are not accepted in Nevada service stations. However, non-US credit cards tend to work fine in hotels, shops and restaurants.



If you're visiting in summer, hiking from pre-dawn to 10am is ideal, as after that heatstroke is a real risk. Informing someone, even your hotel's concierge, about where you're going is a good idea.



Keep a day aside for the Great Basin National Park – it is a fantastic place if you enjoy the mountains; try to camp there for a night or two. The same goes for Lamoille Canyon too.



As long as you have a smartphone with data, or have downloaded maps in advance, Google Maps will guide you. But always carry a detailed road map in the glovebox as it will enhance your trip.



Don't play with rattlesnakes. They are not toys, contrary to what their name suggests. During a hike or a walk, always stay on the trail and camp at designated campsites only.



Definitely have a meal at the Atlantis Steakhouse in the Atlantis Casino Resort and Spa. And try local brews on a day when you're not driving. Craft beer is really big in Nevada.