

Title: QUIET NEVADA TOWN ON E.T. ROAD BANKING ON UFO LORE  
Type: Newspaper article  
Publication: New York Times  
Date: March 9, 1996

RACHEL, Nev. - This speck of a town is little more than a trailer park, a gas station and a diner alongside State Route 375, a 100-mile stretch of secondary road through the scrub country of southern Nevada where there are often more cows on the blacktop than cars.

Yet Rachel has become a tourist destination for finders and seekers of UFOs, prompting the state to designate the road running by here as the Extraterrestrial Highway and to order signs along the thoroughfare.

``It's kind of a tourist ploy,'' said Scott Magruder, spokesman for the Nevada Transportation Department, which gave the highway its new name after a similar effort faltered in the Legislature last year.

Many locals and visitors, however, are not so lighthearted about the subject. Seminars on flying saucers have been held here and tours frequently take to the rough side roads and barren hills to look for strange objects in the sky.

Their tales range from those who say they have seen flying saucers or have psychic contact with aliens to those who do not know what they saw but reject conventional explanations.

The highway skirts a secret military test site called Area 51. Some believers in UFOs suspect that the U.S. government is using the site to test captured alien spacecraft. But a more prosaic explanation for sightings attributed to the extraterrestrial is that they are actually flights by aircraft over the nearby Nellis Air Force Base.

Still, Glenn Campbell was intrigued enough to leave a job as a computer programmer in Boston and move to Rachel in January 1993, where he is the director of the Area 51 Research Center, which has a staff of one and operates out of a trailer surrounded by cattle skulls.

Campbell, who has written a viewer's guide to the area and sells detailed maps of the Area 51 installation, discounts most of the wilder tales but believes that advanced aircraft of extra-worldly origin may be in the possession of the government.

He is not happy, however, about the road's new name, fearing that tourists will inundate the area, unprepared either for the harsh desert or the vigilant security officers who are well known for arresting straying sightseers.

``It pulls down the credibility of the UFO movement,'' he said of the designation. ``It trivializes the serious issues here.''

But few of the other 100 folks who live here are worried about too many visitors. ``Earthlings welcome,'' says a sign at the Little A'Le' Inn, a restaurant-motel-gift shop that sells items like Extraterrestrial Highway doormats and playing cards.

Dolls of bald, doe-eyed aliens hang on the walls, along with blurry pictures of lights in the sky and the engineering plans for a flying saucer. The blueprints are based on a description by Bob Lazar, whose assertion that he worked on captured alien spacecraft at Area 51 put Rachel on the map in 1989.

On a recent afternoon, with temperatures around 30 and snow covering the mountains that flank the road, several tourists shopped for souvenirs while a group of locals bad-mouthed the federal government.

Taking part in the conversation between rounds of video poker was Chuck Clark, who said he had been interested in the subject since he saw several UFOs playing cat and mouse with jet fighters in the skies over Los Angeles in 1957.

Clark, an astronomy enthusiast who moved to Rachel after retirement and spent months camping in the hills and watching the heavens, pulled out some photos taken in the desert. One showed a dot of bright light in the night sky, another a shaft of purple light shooting into a mountain.

He said he did not have a camera on another occasion when he witnessed some type of craft going through aerial maneuvers that defied the known laws of physics.

Clark has also written a viewing guide to the area but said he did not subscribe to any one theory about UFOs. ``We might all be extraterrestrials,'' he said. ``Basically our missing link could be in the sands of a Martian desert. I don't claim it's true, but it's a possibility.''

###