

## RACHEL

Rachel has been dubbed the nation's "UFO capital" for the many sightings reported on Highway 375 near here. Most residents profess no experience with UFOs, but many visitors are convinced that the U.S. government is testing alien spacecraft just beyond the mountains that overlook this tiny desert town.

Rachel is the closest settlement to "Area 51," the super-secret government facility where many high-tech aircraft have been tested. The U-2 spy plane, SR-71 Blackbird and F-117A stealth fighter were flown from this secret base, which is located on restricted military land at Groom dry lake about 25 miles south of Rachel. "You can't get there from here," the locals say when visitors ask about Area 51, and no one seems to know for sure what is being tested there now.

Some say flying saucers are the reason for all the secrecy. In 1988, a scientist named Bob Lazar came forward on Las Vegas TV to say that he had worked with extraterrestrial spacecraft at a secret underground facility near Area 51. He also claimed that he and his friends had watched the saucers perform from Highway 375 near Rachel. Soon, scores of city folk were parked along this remote highway trying to glimpse the alleged alien craft. Since Area 51 itself was off-limits, visitors came to Rachel for supplies and advice, and residents were surprised to find their town become the center of worldwide attention.

Visitors in search of dramatic lights in the sky are almost never disappointed because Highway 375 is also the scene of many air combat exercises. Military jets often engage in mock dogfights overhead, and Rachel gets enough sonic booms to make any weekday seem like the Fourth of July. Flares dropped by jets can make convincing "UFOs," as do satellites and meteors in the crystal clear desert skies. Rachel residents themselves are divided about the UFO claims, but all agree that the many visiting journalists and TV crews have certainly put this town on the map.

Rachel was founded not for UFOs but for mining, which is all but gone now. Farming and ranching employ some of the 100 residents, and others work for the local bar or gas station. The town is composed mostly of mobile homes surrounded by a huge desert valley. It is place that some visitors would regard as "the middle of nowhere," but Rachel residents call it the center of the universe.

G.C. (for Lincoln County phone book) April 11, 1995