

Operation Coyote

By Stuart Brown



Nevada Governor Bob Miller must have been dizzied by close encounters with movie people from 20th Century Fox who were eager to promote their summer UFO-invasion thriller *Independence Day* which was actually filmed in Utah and California. This minor detail didn't deter the

governor when he proclaimed little-traveled Route 375 to be the Extraterrestrial Highway. The state's presumed reward for this bold act: a new tourist destination.

Between the allure of bathing in the radiant light emanating from the movie folks, and the chance to camp out with good friends on rocky hillsides that might still harbor the odd bit of radioactive fallout from bomb tests conducted upwind in years past, I couldn't miss the ET Highway dedication.

Plus, I love a good convoy, and it's not that often that you get to be part of a real government-approved one.

Packed with media types who toil on the entertainment beat, the ET Highway convoy was a rolling photo opportunity that set forth from a parking lot in Las Vegas for the 150-mile drive to the fabled hamlet of Rachel, where wind, tents, and sandwiches awaited invitees to the ceremony. The event's centerpiece was the unveiling of the new, official, copyrighted ET Highway signs which sport a pair of hovering flying saucers.

My trusty Civic was tucked into fifth place near the head of the convoy as we descended from craggy Hancock Summit into the austere Tikaboo Valley about 30 miles south of Rachel. A few dozens cars and a big Greyhound-style charter bus stretched out for miles behind. At the head of the pack was a red convertible piloted by Agent X, a man from Alaska who frequently commutes to the area in search of airborne wonders.

I could see that Agent X had his left-turn signal on, pointing in the same direction as the arrow on a bright yellow sign stuck into the dirt by the roadside. The sign bore an ET Highway logo. Good organization, some convoyees may have thought, even as they were being abducted en masse under the sinister workings of Operation Coyote.

Agent X turned left. The three cars in front of me turned left, and so did I. In the rear-view mirror I saw clouds of choking dust envelop the rest of the convoy as it departed Route 375 for the wide, unpaved road heading across a high-desert plain and into a range of mountains. Even the big bus was lumbering along, swaying with the bumps. I knew, but I don't think many other people did, that we were headed straight for.....

AREA 51, THE FAMOUS GROOM LAKE SECRET AIR BASE!

Where did that yellow sign that sent us here come from? And what were the cammo dudes, those squads of armed security guys in their Jeep Cherokees, thinking about the stampede of entertainment reporters that was headed their way? What a problem! The plan unfolding in my head involved pulling over to the side of the road before we got to the guard shack that lay a few miles ahead. You are under arrest once you get to the shack, which is on the wrong side of the security perimeter surrounding the base.

Then through the dust ahead, I could see the lead car taking a sharp right-turn onto a dusty road that doubled back toward Route 375. Another one of those yellow signs pointed the way. Like a great serpent, the entire convoy made its way around the bend. The cammo dudes must have been relieved. A Nevada State Police car barreling toward us at breakneck speed through the dust confirmed that a convoy-abduction radio alert had been issued. Two more cop cars blasted past as we forged ahead into Rachel on the soon-to-be ET Highway. In the parking area in downtown Rachel, a rich coating of beige dust distinguished vehicles that arrived via convoy from those that stayed on the blacktop.

The stars of Independence Day, Bill Pullman and the very tall Jeff Goldblum, worked the crowd and posed in front of the signs as Nevada tourism officials explained that prospective visitors can call 1-800-NEVADA-8 to get an ET Highway Experience package complete with map and travel info.

Governor Miller has gotten himself into a peculiarly impolitic position with this ET Highway promotion. Military bases are important to Nevada's economy. When agencies like the CIA, Air Force, and the former Atomic Energy Commission came out here in the mid-1950's, it was with the intention of being left alone with their nuclear bombs and spy planes. The Air Force can't be grateful to the state for beckoning legions of binocular-toting seekers itching to know what goes on out at Groom Lake. Asked about this, Miller replied, "We're not encouraging people to do anything but use the highway."

Getting back to Operation Coyote. Discreet inquiries yielded a tip: Think back to those Roadrunner cartoons where that troublemaker, Wile E. Coyote, puts up fake road signs in an attempt to divert his feathered nemesis.... Well, it seems that...a subversive element appears to have somehow exploited mankind's tendency to follow leaders, even when they go off the beaten path....

The mass abduction may have served as a valuable training exercise for the cammo dudes. Next, they could face busloads of Japanese tourists!

[return to main menu](#)

[back to top](#)