

NORTHEAST *New Mexico*

SANTA FE TRAIL TOUR

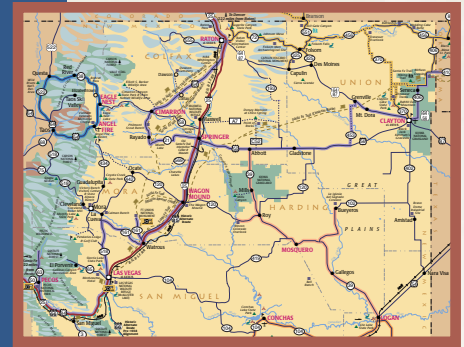
Glimpse the pioneer experience of nineteenth century America along this national and historic byway.

Length: 480 Miles (772 Kilometers)

Duration: 4 Days, 4 Nights (Raton to Las Vegas)

3 Days, 3 Nights (Clayton to Las Vegas)

Elevation: 5,050 feet (1,768 meters) to 7,834 feet (2,389 meters)



Mention the Santa Fe Trail and watch a history enthusiast get misty-eyed as the mind conjures up a caravan of freight wagons headed west across an endless, rolling, grassy prairie. After all these years, its name still stirs the emotions and evokes the pioneer spirit.

When William Becknell left Franklin, Missouri, in 1821, he and his men headed west. Near present-day **Las Vegas**, New Mexico, the six men ran into Capitan Don Pedro Ignacio Gallego and a company of 400 dragoons. Instead of claspng them in irons, Gallego urged them to take their trade goods to Santa Fe. American traders, once forbidden in isolationist Spain's interior colony, were welcome. Only weeks earlier, impoverished Mexico had won its independence and was eager to trade with the U.S.

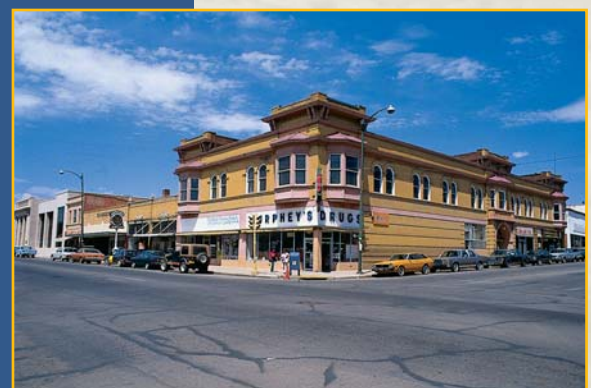
Arriving in Santa Fe, Becknell sold his wares and returned to Missouri, his pack animals laden with silver coins. Word quickly spread about the lucrative trail, and a new era of prosperity was born.

The trail brought ever-increasing supplies of scarce goods west, as well as a new people, a new language, and new skills and customs. Trail traffic peaked at 5,000 freight wagons in 1866. When the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad reached New Mexico in 1879, the trail passed into history.

Today travelers young and old can still visit remnants of the trail amid the cattle ranches of northeast New Mexico and along the **Santa Fe Trail-New Mexico National Scenic Byway**.

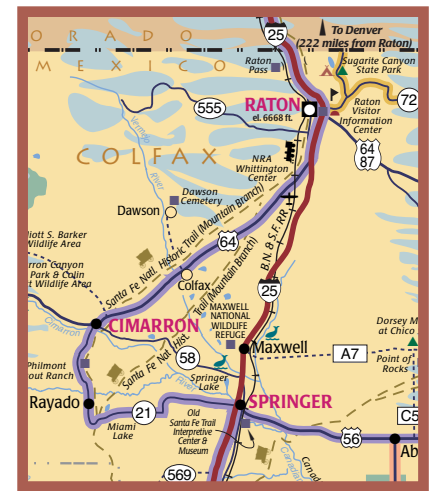
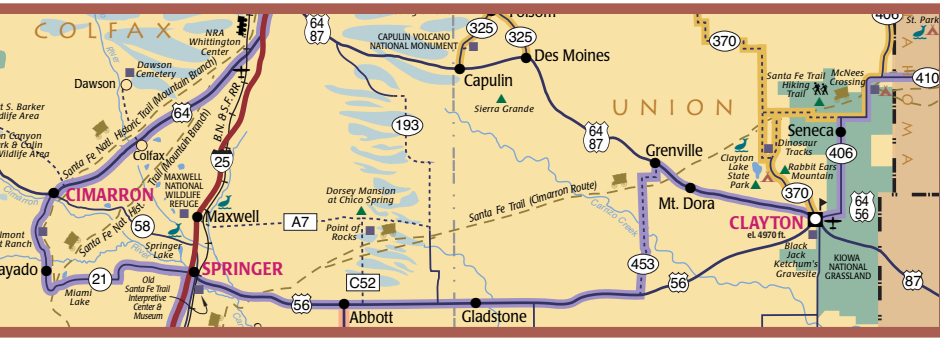


Office Quarters,
Fort Union National Monument / Mike Pitel



Crockett Block, Las Vegas

CIMARRON ROUTE, CLAYTON TO SPRINGER



From the city of **Clayton**, drive northeast to one of the most remarkable places on the entire trail, remote **McNees Crossing**, where a white historical marker and a trail cut down in the embankment of **Corrupa Creek** await. That's where Pawnee Indians killed young Missouri traders Robert McNees and Daniel Munro, in 1828. Southwest of McNees, walk a three-mile (five km) segment of the trail in a portion of the wild **Kiowa National Grasslands**.

Returning to Clayton, note **Rabbit Ears Mountain**, a trail landmark. Northwest, note **Mount Dora** and nearby **Round Mound** (today Mount Clayton), two other trail landmarks.

Point of Rocks is another remarkable trail campsite. Long popular among Plains Indian buffalo hunters (note several teepee rings), the Point of Rocks spring-fed campsite was dangerous, as 10 unidentified grave sites attest. The nearby two-story, gargoyle-accented **Dorsey Mansion**, built in 1878-86, was once the lavish ranch home of dreamer-schemer Stephen W. Dorsey, a onetime U.S. Senator. Unfortunately, the mansion is currently closed to visitors.

After lunch in the town of Springer, tour the **Old Santa Fe Trail Interpretive Center & Museum**. End the day at the 1878 **Mills' Mansion** which, when renovations are complete, will house the **Colfax County War/Mills' Canyon Museum**.

MOUNTAIN ROUTE, RATON & CIMARRON TO SPRINGER

South of Trinidad, Colorado, ascend **Raton Pass**. In 1866-79, Richard L. "Uncle Dick" Wootton operated a prosperous toll road on its north slope. The first cattle drive northbound on the **Goodnight-Loving Trail** also crested the pass in 1867.

In **Raton**, amble among 25 preserved historic buildings on First and Second Streets. Visit the **Raton Museum** (note land baron Lucien Maxwell's massive silver candle holders), the **Wells Fargo Building**, and the restored **Shuler Theater**, built in 1915.

Southwest, pass the Les Davis family's vast cattle ranch. If it seems familiar, smile. The ranch was a backdrop for Marlboro Country, where those memorable ads were shot for television and magazines in the 1960s.

Step back in time in **Old Cimarron**. Start in the antiques-laden **St. James Hotel**, built in 1872-80 by Henri Lambert, a former field cook for Gen. Ulysses S. Grant and White House chef for President Lincoln. Several men were shot and killed in Lambert's saloon; note the 26 bullet holes in the bar's pressed-tin ceiling, now the adobe hotel's elegant dining room.

Among its many guests (some of whom still haunt the place) were Lambert's longtime friend, William "Buffalo Bill" Cody, who hired the nearby Ute Indians for his earliest Wild West Shows; artist

Isaac Allen Grave, Point of Rocks Ranch



Dorsey Mansion / Ron Weathers



Lucien Maxwell House



Frederic Remington, who sketched in the nearby hills; and author Zane Grey, who soaked up the locale for his 1929 novel "Fighting Caravans."

After lunch in Cimarron, walk to Old Cimarron's tiny plaza and well (where trail caravans once stopped), and the adjacent site of land baron Lucien Maxwell's palatial 1864 adobe home, hotel, saloon, and dance hall. Maxwell began purchasing the surrounding land, the ancestral home of the Jicarilla Apaches, in the late 1840s. It grew into the 1.7 million-acre Maxwell Land Grant, a tract twice the size of Rhode Island. Maxwell sold his \$35,245 in land purchases for \$1,350,000 in 1870. Three blocks west of the hotel, visit the **Old Mill Museum, Maxwell's Aztec Mill** (1864-70), which provided flour for Fort Union.

Farther south awaits a tour of Tulsa oil baron Waite Phillips's elegant, Spanish Mediterranean-style former summer home, the **Villa Philmonte**, built in 1926. It's the headquarters of **Philmont Scout Ranch**, his 127,215-acre gift to Scouting in 1938 and 1941. Also visit the nearby **Ernest Thompson Seton Memorial Museum & Library**; Seton helped found Scouting.

In the trail hamlet of **Rayado**, settled in 1848 by Maxwell and his lifelong friend, famed frontiersman Kit Carson, are Maxwell's restored adobe home and the nearby **Kit Carson Home & Museum**.

Afterward, either return to supper and overnight in Cimarron, or, after touring the **St. James Hotel**, drive directly to Springer's **Old Santa Fe Trail Interpretive Center & Museum**.

CONTINUATION OF TRAIL, SPRINGER TO LAS VEGAS

From a distance, note the trail landmark of **Wagon Mound**. Beneath its silhouette, which resembles a westbound, ox-drawn wagon, trail caravans camped.

Northwest of the hamlet of **Watrous** is **Fort Union National Monument**. Trail ruts abound in the surrounding hills and pastures and past the fort's impressive adobe

ruins. Both a supply depot for the forts in Arizona and New Mexico Territories and a military fort, Fort Union (1851-91) garrisoned troops that guarded trail traffic and also helped thwart an invading force of Texas Confederates at the pivotal 1862 Civil War battle of **Glorieta Pass**, southeast of Santa Fe.

Afterward, pass Watrous's most impressive residence, the bastion-like home and mercantile of trail merchant Sam Watrous (built in 1849); it's the headquarters of the **Doolittle Ranch**. If time permits, visit three mills in the **Mora Valley**; they once provided flour for Fort Union. Otherwise, head for the Victorian city of Las Vegas.

Settled in 1835, **Las Vegas**, once the biggest, wealthiest, and most influential city in New Mexico, consists of **Old Town** and **New Town**. Uptown is Old Town, where several Spanish merchants who prospered from trail commerce, lived. Overlooking its tree-lined, grassy plaza is the fully restored **Plaza Hotel**, built in 1882. Its 36



Aztec Mill Museum



Villa Philmonte



Fort Union National Monument



Civil War Battle Reenactment, Glorieta Battlefield





San Miguel Del Vado



Pecos National Historical Park

antiques-laden rooms await above its restaurant and saloon. Nearby is **Bridge Street**, where shops and galleries in restored Victorian buildings cascade to the **Gallinas River**. Downtown is where most of railroad-era **New Town's** Victorian commercial buildings lie. The nearby neighborhoods boast tree-shaded streets and hundreds of Victorian homes.

Spend two nights in Las Vegas. There are walking tours of its nine historic districts brimming with 918 homes and buildings on the National Register. See the territorial exhibits in the **City of Las Vegas Museum**. Its Rough Rider Collection commemorates Teddy Roosevelt's 1898 Spanish-American War regiment, whose soldiers came mostly from New Mexico.

South of Las Vegas, note the **Piedra Lumbre campsite** where Gallego's soldiers ran into the Becknell party in 1821. It's in **Kearny's Gap** (a wealth of deep trail ruts).

Farther south awaits the trail Village of **Tecolote**, settled in 1824. Facing its tiny plaza is the restored adobe church of **Nuestra Senora de los Delores**, built in 1840.

Farther west are the **Pecos River** trail crossings at the Villages of **San Jose Del Vado** (settled in 1803), and

San Miguel Del Vado (circa 1794). In tiny San Jose are vestiges of the original quadrangular village. Down river is the whitewashed adobe church of San Miguel, built in 1805. Next to its front steps is the church tower's bell, cast in Ohio and freighted across the trail.

Farther west, the massive ruin of the 17th Century Spanish mission of **Nuestra Senora de los Angeles de Porciuncula**, rises like a set stone in beautiful **Pecos National Historical Park**, once the **Forked Lightning Ranch** of actress Greer Garson. The adjacent mounds are the remains of **Pecos Pueblo**, a bustling village that bristled with 400 warriors when the Spanish explorer Coronado encountered it in 1541. Trail traffic camped beneath the ruins, a trail landmark.

Gas, food, and lodging abound in Clayton, Raton, Cimarron, and Las Vegas; Springer has gas, food, and limited lodging. For group rates, restaurants, lodging and museums, and annual events, contact the Raton, Cimarron, Clayton/Union County, Springer, or Las Vegas /San Miguel County Chambers of Commerce.

Text, tour information and photos above by Michael E. Pitel.

NORTHEAST NEW MEXICO CONTACTS

For groups rates, lodging, restaurants and museums, plus annual events and other activities, contact:

Cimarron Chamber of Commerce

888-376-2417 or 575-376-2417
www.cimarronnm.com
cimarronnm@gmail.com

Clayton / Union County Chamber of Commerce

800-390-7858 or 575-374-9253
www.claytonnewmexico.org
cuchamber@plateautel.net

Fort Union National Monument

505-425-8025
www.nps.gov/foun

Las Vegas / San Miguel Chamber of Commerce

800-832-5947 or 575-425-8631
www.lasvegasnewmexico.com
lvexec@qwestoffice.net

Las Vegas Citizens Committee for Historic Preservation & Santa Fe Interpretive Center

505-425-8803
www.lasvegasnmcchp.com
cid@desertgate.com

Pecos National Historical Park

505-757-6414
www.nps.gov/peco

Raton Chamber & Tourist Information Center

800-638-6161 or 575-445-3689
www.raton.info
ratonchamber@bacavalley.com

Santa Fe National Historic Trail

505-988-6888
www.nps.gov/safe

