

## Cimarron Day Trip #2

### **Cimarron Area Ranches and the Maxwell Wildlife Refuge**

**Total distance:** 90 miles      **Estimated duration:** ~4 hours, depending on length of stops

Your trip begins at the east end of Cimarron where Highway 64 and State Road 58 diverge. The map provides visual clues to the Waypoints listed below (mileage is approximate). Comments and additions to Historic Markers are given in brackets.

The young country of Mexico passed a law in 1823 allowing individuals to petition the government for grants of land for the purpose of cultivation and settlement. In 1841, two Taos citizens, Carlos Beaubien and Guadalupe Miranda, were authorized to “tame” a 2,700 square mile tract of land over the mountains from Taos centered at the present site of Cimarron. With the death of his son in the Taos Indian revolt of 1847, Beaubien passed the task on to his son-in-law, Lucien Maxwell. During the early years Maxwell, along with his close friend Kit Carson, managed to build only simple dwellings, but the growing traffic on the Mountain Route of the Santa Fe Trail soon supported a small and prosperous town. Indian pacification in the region led to a local Indian Agency, which distributed grain ground at Maxwell’s water-powered gristmill. Maxwell also became the chief supplier to Fort Union to the south.

In 1867 word leaked out that gold could be found on Baldy Mountain. Several towns including Elizabethtown and Virginia City soon sprouted from its flanks. Later that year Maxwell sold a few thousand acres to a young rancher he had met the previous summer. Manley Chase and his wife Theresa had traveled from Wisconsin by way of Colorado to Cimarron and had found Maxwell a man who could be trusted. The land they bought lay along Ponil Creek, a mile north of the Cimarron River, and remains in the family today. The following year, John Dawson, who had been a “drover” and blazed a new cattle trail from West Texas to Colorado with Charles Goodnight and Oliver Loving, purchased about 24,000 acres along the Vermejo River, nine miles north of town.

After two decades of managing the grant, Maxwell, now in his 50’s, began to contemplate selling his property and retire. The discovery of gold on Baldy had been a boon to the entire region so, when approached by a group of land speculators in 1870, he acquiesced and sold the grant to the Maxwell Land Grant and Railway Company for \$1,350,000. Maxwell then bought and moved to abandoned Fort Sumner in southern New Mexico where, in 1875, he died and was buried. The land Maxwell once owned is now part of five large ranches in the area: the Chase Ranch, the WS or Vermejo Park Ranch (which has subsumed Dawson’s property), the CS Ranch owned by the family of brothers Charles and Frank Springer – Frank joined the land grant company as a lawyer in 1873), the Philmont Scout Ranch, and the UU Bar Ranch (the latter two ranches were once part of oilman Waite Phillips hunting retreat).

<u>Mileage</u>	<u>to</u>	<u>Wpt</u>	<u>Notes</u>
0		1	Begin the tour by driving north on Hwy 64 at the east end of Cimarron.
1.3		2	If the weather is nice (not rainy), turn left onto SR 204 after you cross Ponil Creek. If this road is muddy, travel can be VERY difficult.
10.7		3	For the next 4.4 miles, land on both sides of the road is part of the Chase Ranch - the Chase homestead is on the left near mile 2.5. The original dwelling was built in 1871 and comprised four large rooms. After the birth of their sixth child and a year of useless poking and prodding for more space, Theresa seized the day. In early 1879, while Manly Chase and John Dawson were on a five-week cattle drive to Texas, Theresa told the remaining hands to add four more rooms by raising the house one story, and to do it by the time her husband returned. Upon his arrival back at the ranch, much to Theresa's surprise, Manly was so delighted with his wife's assertiveness that he ordered his men to add on a new kitchen, dining room, office and two more bedrooms. Continuing past the Chase Ranch home for 8 more miles, you reach the site of the original base of the Philmont Scout Ranch, which opened in 1939 and was called Philturn Rockymountain Scoutcamp. Today, during the summer months, this section of the ranch serves as either the starting or ending point for the Scouts' 12-day backcountry adventure.
11.9		4	Turn around and drive back to Hwy 64. At the intersection, turn left (north). One mile north of the intersection are two Santa Fe Trail markers, one on each side of the highway. Stop on the shoulder past the marker on the right and look toward the south just beyond the fence line. A gentle swale, somewhat "greener" than its surroundings, identifies this portion of the Santa Fe Trail. Continue north on Hwy 64, keeping a lookout for bison, until the ghost town of Colfax is visible on the left just before rail crossing.
9.1		5	The town (and county) of Colfax is named after Schuyler Colfax, vice president under Grant from 1869-1873. Situated on a fertile plain beside a rail line next to the Rockies, the developers of Colfax had high hopes for their investment. A post office was opened in 1908 along with a hotel, school, church and store, but its proximity to the well-established coal-mining town of Dawson, as well as a lack of sufficient water led to the town's demise 25 years later. All that remains are shadows of its past, on crumbling adobe walls and in collapsing wooden rail cars.
0.5		6	Continue north from Colfax one-half mile and turn left at the sign for the Dawson Cemetery.
4.7		7	After 5 miles, you reach the two-sided historic marker for the Dawson Cemetery: <b>Dawson</b> – Dawson was established by the Phelps Dodge Corporation in 1901 to develop the region's vast coal deposits. In its heyday, it was the largest company mining town in New Mexico, with many modern amenities and a population of more than 6000. Named after John Dawson, who owned part of the historic Beaubien-Miranda land grant on

which it is located, the town was abandoned when the mines closed in 1950. **Dawson Cemetery** – This was the cemetery for the coal mining town of Dawson. Its grave markers reflect the diverse immigrant populations which came to this country seeking a better life, and which fueled American industrial development. Hundreds of identical crosses, which mark the graves of miners killed in mine accidents in 1913 and 1923, demonstrate the great sacrifices of these pioneers. [When Dawson bought his land from Maxwell, he initially paid little attention to the vast and obvious coal deposits. However, after many years of cutting and splitting logs for firewood, he tried using coal for fuel. He found it so efficient that he soon began to sell coal to neighboring ranches. This newfound wealth quickly led to litigation by the Maxwell Land Grant Company (a reorganization of the original grant purchasers), but Dawson prevailed. In 1901, when businessman C. B. Eddy bought the mineral rights for \$450,000 and started the Dawson Fuel Company, the town of Dawson was born. Phelps Dodge later bought the company from Eddy in 1905 for \$16 million. In 1902, Dawson bought land in the Yampa Valley in Colorado and moved his family there. He would soon discover that once again he was the owner of hidden but valuable coal deposits. Ten years later, at the age of 82, he and his wife Lavinia moved to Los Angeles, where he died in 1918.]

- 5.2        8     Return back to Hwy 64, turn left, and after 0.5 mile turn right on SR 505.
- 8.1        9     Eight miles down SR 505 turn left (north) on County Road A2. Continue north about 1.5 miles until you have to turn right (east), then after one mile turn back to the north on CR A5.
- 2.5        10    At this point Lake No. 12 is to your south and Lake No. 13 to your northeast. The 3,700 acre Maxwell National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1965 as a refuge for ducks, geese, cranes and other migrating birds. Hiking, boating, fishing, camping and general wildlife observation is allowed subject to seasonal restrictions.
- 1.0        11    Continue north for one mile and turn right onto CR A1; parking, camping and restroom facilities are a short distance ahead on the right.
- 3.3        12    Jog through the turns for 3.3 miles until you reach SR 445.
- 4.2        13    Turn right (south) on SR 445 and drive to the town of Maxwell where there is an entrance onto I-25.
- 6.8        14    Take I-25 south for 7 miles and leave at the SR 58 exit for Cimarron.
- 7.4        15    Drive due west on SR 58 for approximately 7 miles. Near mile marker 12 is a nice view of the Sangre de Cristo Range.
- 4.5        16    As you continue on to Cimarron, more bison might be seen on the right (north) side of the road on Vermejo Park Ranch land. On the left side, before Miami Lane, is the CS Ranch; past Miami Lane is UU Bar Ranch property; the mountains ahead are part of the Philmont Scout Ranch.
- 6.4        17    The tour ends back in Cimarron at the intersection of SR 58 and Hwy 64.



