

# MY TRIP TO NEW MEXICO

BY  
ROAD RABBIT



APRIL

1997

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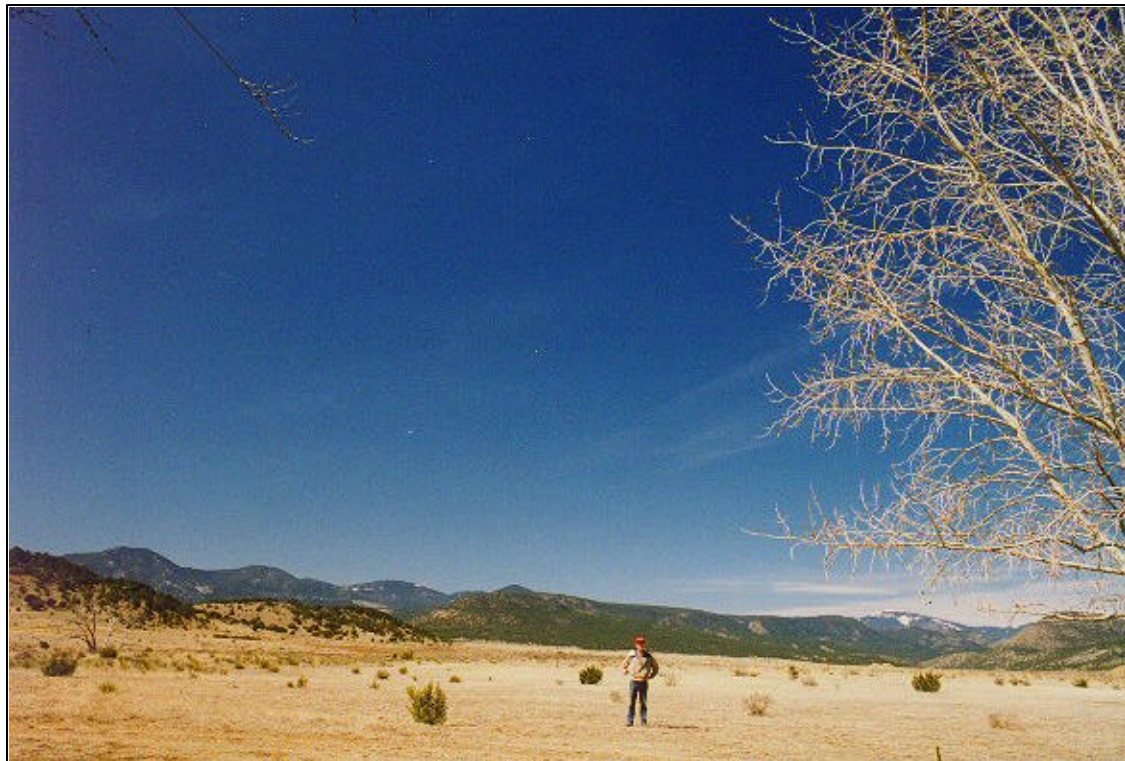


Being an account of my travels  
in words, pictures, pamphlets  
and maps, etc.

for Ms. Moore's 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Class at

Bond Mill Elementary School

in Laurel, Maryland.



The first thing I learned is that many people think New Mexico is in the country of Mexico. While that was once true, in 1912 New Mexico became the 47th state. New Mexico is the 6th largest state, almost four times the size of Maryland, but only 1.5 million people live here. It has a long and interesting history. This part of the Rocky Mountains was formed millions of years ago and is called the Sangre de Cristo Range (in Spanish this means “Blood of Christ”).



Hi Boys and Girls,  
This book of words and pictures describes all the things I saw and learned during my trip to New Mexico. Hilary’s friend Gene was my guide. Can you see me sitting on his shoulder in the picture above? He lives in the small town of Cimarron, New Mexico, next to the Rocky Mountains. The skies are blue, the grass in April is brown and the snow in the mountains is white.





One of the first things I did was go to see a huge dinosaur footprint! And not just any old dinosaur track but the only known footprint of *Tyrannosaurus Rex!!!* The footprint was discovered by a geologist several years ago very close to Cimarron and is about 70 million years old. Do you think you could have found it? Look at the picture below and see if you can find a footprint from a different type of dinosaur. (Hint: It is upside-down just below me in the picture!)



To learn more about this footprint, read the news release:

[T\\_Rex.pdf](#)

and visit these websites:

<http://esp.cr.usgs.gov/info/kt/index.html>

<http://esp.cr.usgs.gov/info/kt/footprint.html>

To download files in red, go to:

<http://www.cimarronnm.com/downloads.htm>





Even earlier than dinosaurs were lots of plants. When pressed under tons of rock for millions of years these plants turned into coal. Above you can see me next to a long coal seam. Looking down at the different layers of rock is like seeing back in time.

After the dinosaurs there were a lot of volcanoes in New Mexico. In the picture on the right you can see several of them in the distance. Just imagine how scary it would have been to see them erupt into fountains of lava!



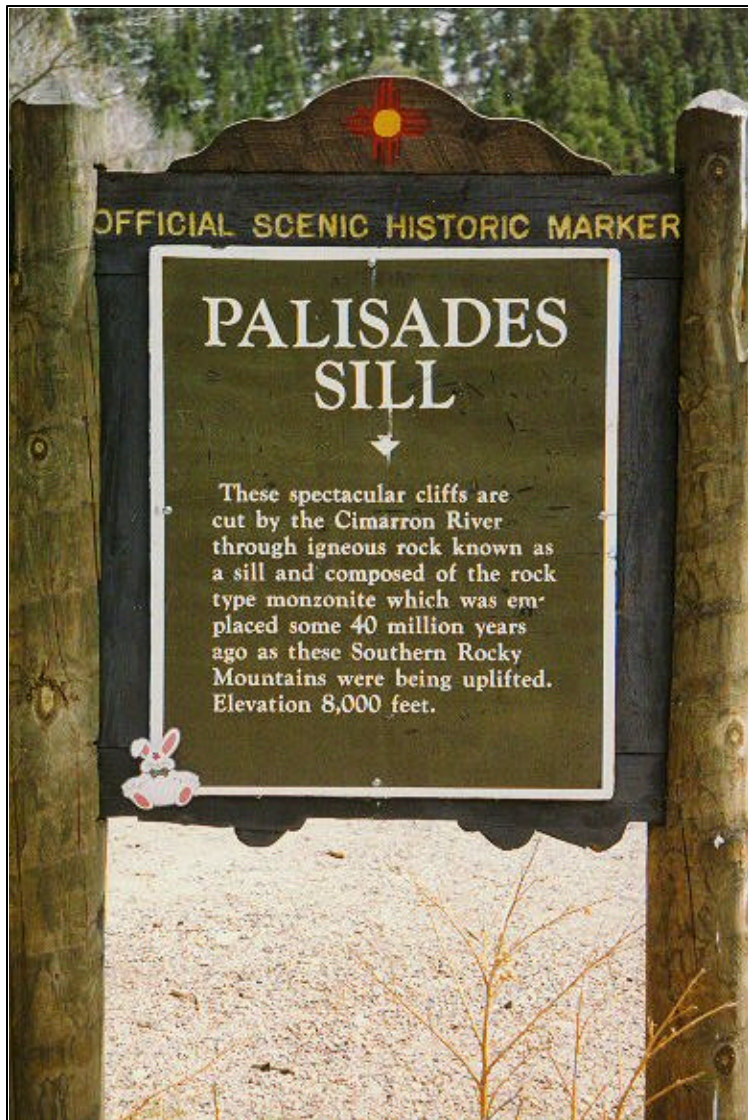
Visit the Capulin Volcano National Monument website:

<http://www.nps.gov/cavo/index.htm>

and go here to learn more about volcanoes:

<http://pubs.usgs.gov/gip/volc/cover2.html>

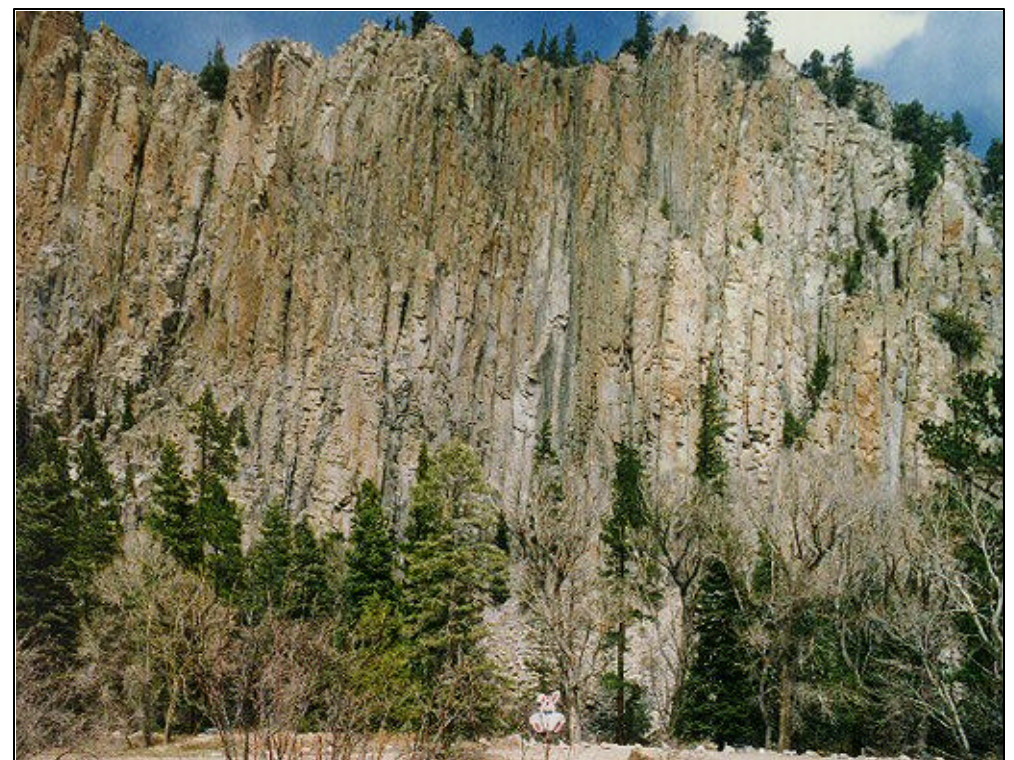
[http://www.geology.sdsu.edu/how\\_volcanoes\\_work/Home.html](http://www.geology.sdsu.edu/how_volcanoes_work/Home.html)



Other people bring their children to enjoy the beautiful scenery in a safer way. They camp beside the river and fish or hike. Many of the visitors live in large cities and come to Cimarron to enjoy the clean air and pretty trees and wild animals. It is important for people to see places where plants and animals naturally live (not just in a garden or zoo) so that they can appreciate and understand the beauty of nature. We all need to make sure that there will always be places like this to visit.



When the lava cooled it became hard and turned into rock. The Village of Cimarron lies next to a small river, the Cimarron River, and over the years this river has eroded away some of the rock to form a canyon. At different places in the canyon the walls are very steep and very high. The picture at the right shows one particular place where the walls are formed from solidified lava. Sometimes in the summer you can watch mountain climbers try to reach the top. It is fun but dangerous!



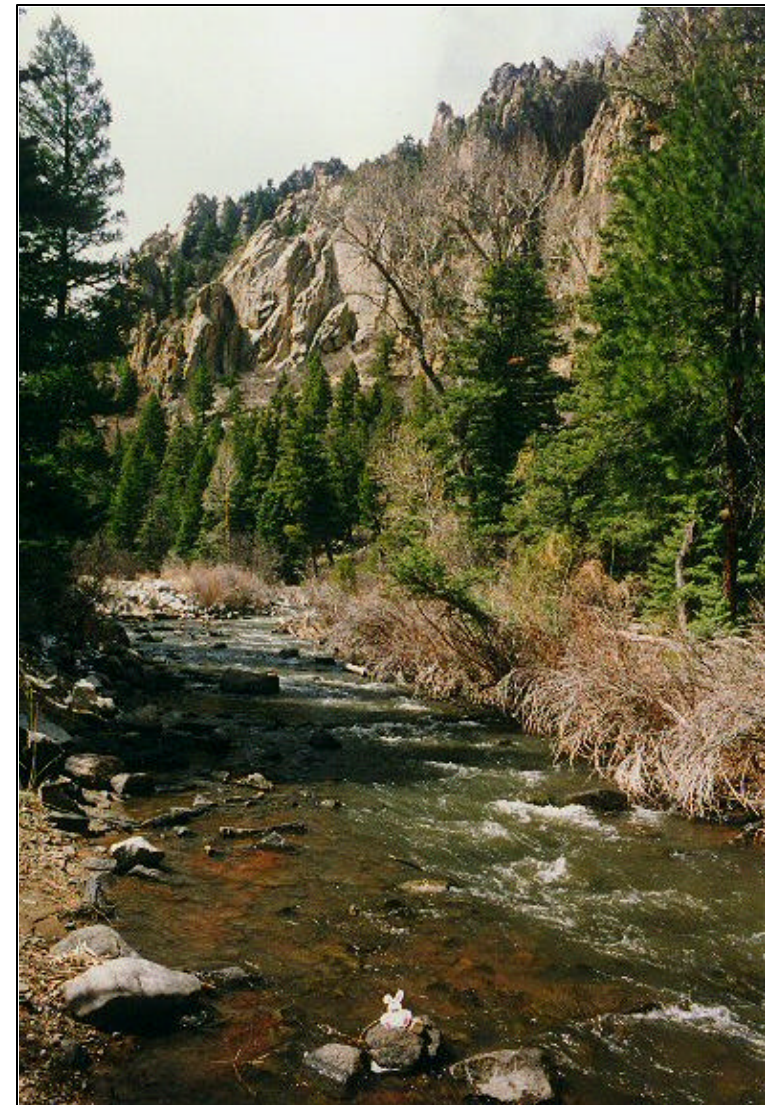


In the distance behind the lake you can see the snow-capped mountain of Wheeler Peak, the highest mountain in New Mexico at 13,161 feet. That's almost 2.5 miles above sea level! Gene told me that he has climbed it twice and the view from the top is spectacular.

In the picture below, you can see that the river is not so dangerous today. Still, while I sat on the rock to get my picture taken, a gust of wind came up and I fell into the water. Luckily, Gene pulled me out just in time!



Today the Cimarron River starts at a lake call Eagle Nest Lake (in the picture above). In 1921 a dam was built in order to control the water flow and the lake was formed. Before the dam was built the river would rush violently down the canyon and sometimes caused floods. The name of the town "Cimarron" comes from a Spanish word meaning "wild" or "unruly" like the river used to be. As we'll see later, the town was also "wild" with cowboys and Indians and outlaws!





One of the reasons that there are a lot fish in the Cimarron River is because there are also a lot of beavers. Beavers cut down the trees with their teeth (ouch!) so that the trees fall across the river and dam it up to make small ponds. These ponds are good places for fish to live and grow. Like people, beavers also like to catch and eat fish. Gene didn't know if the beavers were allowed to catch only two fish each day. I didn't see any beavers but I saw a lot of beaver ponds.



The people whose job it is to keep the Cimarron Canyon pretty are Forest Rangers who work for the U.S. Forest Service. The Cimarron River is home to a lot of fish called trout. Since many people come here to fish, the Forest Service has placed a limit of two fish each day that a person can catch. This way there will always be enough fish for everybody who visits. Since the Cimarron River is in the Rocky Mountains, there is always a lot of snow on the ground in spring.





I felt better when I went to one side of the gorge and stood on solid ground. It was so pretty to look at all the different colors and layers of rock and to watch how the shadows made interesting shapes along the canyon walls. It would be fun to come back in a million years and see how much deeper the gorge would be. Way down below I could see tiny people in big rubber rafts riding on the water. Whenever the raft would go over bumpy waves all the people would scream and laugh!



The Cimarron River is a relatively small river. Nearby there is a much bigger river called the Rio Grande. In fact, the name in Spanish means “Big River!” The Rio Grande is the third longest river in the United States and is one of the oldest. It is so old that it has carved a huge gorge or canyon 600 feet deep! I stood on a bridge over the river and looked down. It made me a little dizzy to look way down at the river at the bottom of the gorge. I guess I’m a little scared of heights.







The land near Cimarron reminded me of the song “Home on the Range” which has the line “Where the deer and the antelope play.” In the pictures on the left you can see just a few of the hundreds of deer I saw. The small deer at the bottom was a baby! Below in the distance beyond the fence are three antelope grazing. The antelope are wild and have to be on the lookout for coyotes. Their sense of smell and their hearing warn them of any danger nearby. I couldn’t get very close.





There are even buffalo near Cimarron! I only saw the one in the picture above but Gene says that almost 100 live just over the hill. Sometimes they crowd together at the fence and you can go up and touch them. I sure wish I could have done that! But even 100 buffalo is a lot less than there used to be. Just 200 years ago there were millions of buffalo roaming all over New Mexico and the West. Buffalo provided food and clothing for the Indians who lived there then.

The earliest inhabitants of Northern New Mexico, called Folsom Man, lived about 10,000 years ago and left behind arrowheads used to kill giant bison, an early cousin of the buffalo. Much more is known about the people who lived only about 1,500 years ago, the Anasazi or Ancient Puebloan Peoples. The picture below shows a valley where these early North American Indians once lived. They were a peaceful people who farmed the land and traveled great distances on roads they built.



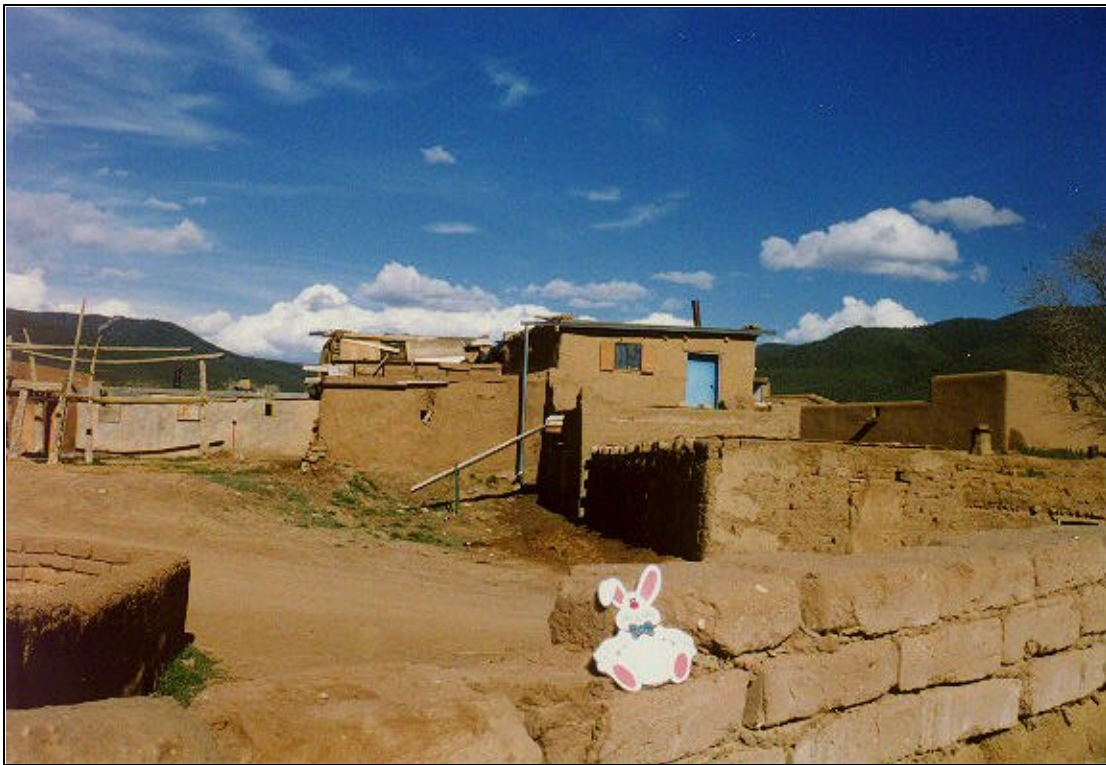


Religion was very important to the Anasazi. They worshipped the earth, the ground beneath them and dug out large round rooms called *kivas* where ceremonies were performed. The Anasazi did not write but they carved pictures on rocks to communicate ideas. These images, like the circles in the picture below, are called petroglyphs. No one is exactly sure what all the symbols mean. About 700 years ago long periods of little rain forced the Anasazi to move or die. Only ruins remain.



The picture above shows remains of a “pit house” in which early Anasazi families slept and are. In their irrigated fields they grew corn, beans, squash and cotton. With their hands they made jewelry, pottery, sandals and baskets. They gathered seed, nuts and berries in their baskets and hunted with spears and bows and arrows. They had per dogs that looked like little collies and terriers and lived in large villages called *pueblos*, a Spanish word for “town.”





What is the history of adobe? To find out, read:

[Adobe.pdf](#)

For information on the Taos Pueblo, go to the website:

<http://www.taospueblo.com/>

To learn about the Martinez Hacienda in Taos (on the next page), read:

<http://www.taohistoricmuseums.com/martinez.html>

and

[M\\_Hacienda.pdf](#)



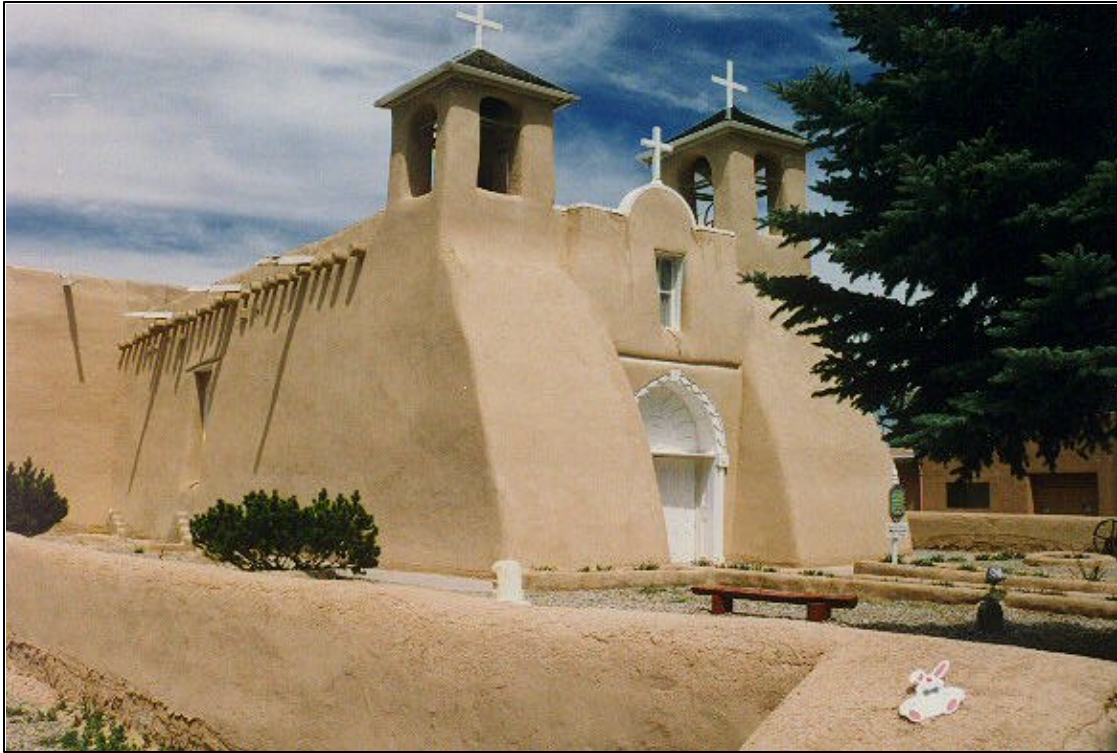
The descendants of the Anasazi are called the Pueblo Indians and live along the Rio Grande valley. The Taos Indians live in houses built of a mixture of mud and straw called *adobe*. The houses shown above are cool in the summer and warm in the winter. Doors and windows are usually painted turquoise for good luck. When the Spanish came to New Mexico in the 1500s, they built Franciscan missions and adobe churches for the Indians like that in the picture on the right.





The Spanish who colonized New Mexico also built homes made of adobe. These homes, like the one shown at the left, are called *haciendas* and were built in the form of a square with few doors and windows to the outside. This design protected the owners from bandits and Indians. In the center was an open courtyard where a small garden could be grown and chickens, pigs and cattle kept. Bread was baked in round ovens called *hornos* like those in the picture below.





The backside of the church shown below is particularly interesting. Look at the massive walls supported by round and curved piles of clay. In the clear blue New Mexican sky the church looks so clean, smooth and strong that the famous artist Georgia O'Keeffe painted it many times. The adobe architecture, curios customs and colorful clothing of the Pueblo Indians led many artists and writers like D. H. Lawrence to settle in Northern New Mexico during the 1920s and 1930s.



Most of the Catholic churches built by the Franciscan missionaries still stand and are used today. One of the prettiest is in the town of Rancho de Taos in Northern New Mexico. On Sundays many people go to church service there and on Saturdays throughout the year young people get married in it. The church is built of adobe with a roof supported by huge logs called *vigas* that cast long shadows when the sun is overhead. Many tourists visit the church to take pictures.





Until 1821 only Indians, Spanish settlers and hunters and fur trappers lived in New Mexico. In that year a man named William Becknell left his home in Missouri with a wagon train full of supplies hoping to sell them in the Mexican town of Santa Fe. The entire journey lasted 10 weeks through dangerous Indian land. He sold his goods, bought local items and returned to Missouri. The path he took became known as the Santa Fe Trail and opened the entire West to travelers.



To learn more about the Santa Fe Trail, visit any of the following sites:

<http://www.nps.gov/safe>

<http://www.santafetrail.org>

<http://www.ku.edu/heritage/research/sft>

<http://sangres.com/history/santafetrail01.htm>

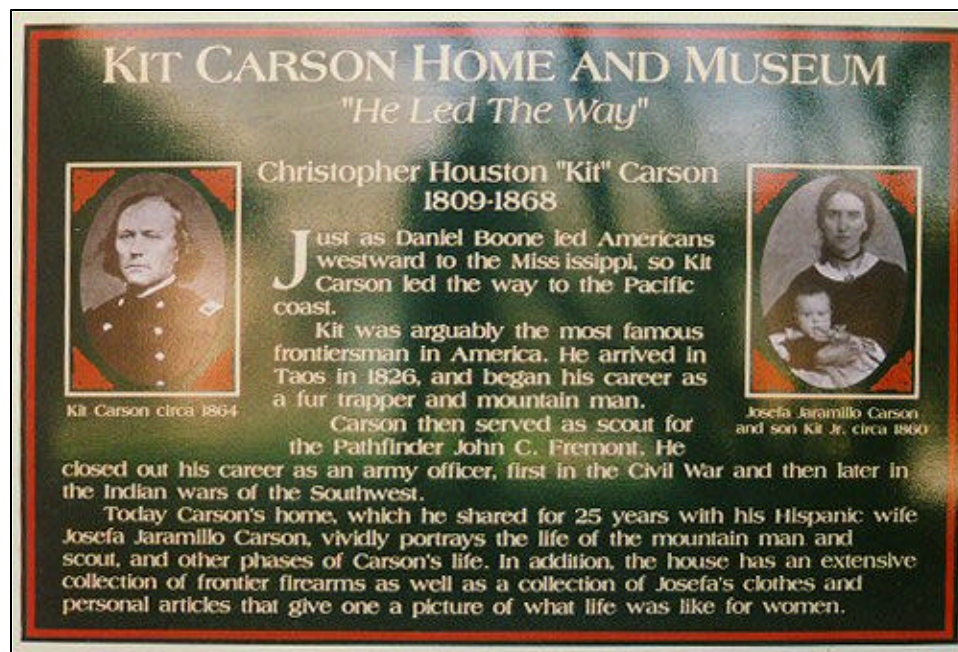
<http://www.santafetrailscenicandhistoricbyway.org>

and read

[SFTrail.pdf](#)

[SFTrailByway.pdf](#)





One of the famous characters of the Old West was Kit Carson. He came to New Mexico in 1826 by traveling in a wagon train on the Santa Fe Trail. At first Kit Carson was a fur trapper and trader, a mountain man and a scout. He then served in the Army and fought in the Civil War for the North. Later he fought against the Indians and lived in Cimarron where he was the local Indian Agent in charge of handing out grain to the neighboring Ute and Apache Indians.



Learn more about Kit Carson at:

<http://www.taosmuseums.org/kitcarson.php>

[http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/people/a\\_c/carson.htm](http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/people/a_c/carson.htm)

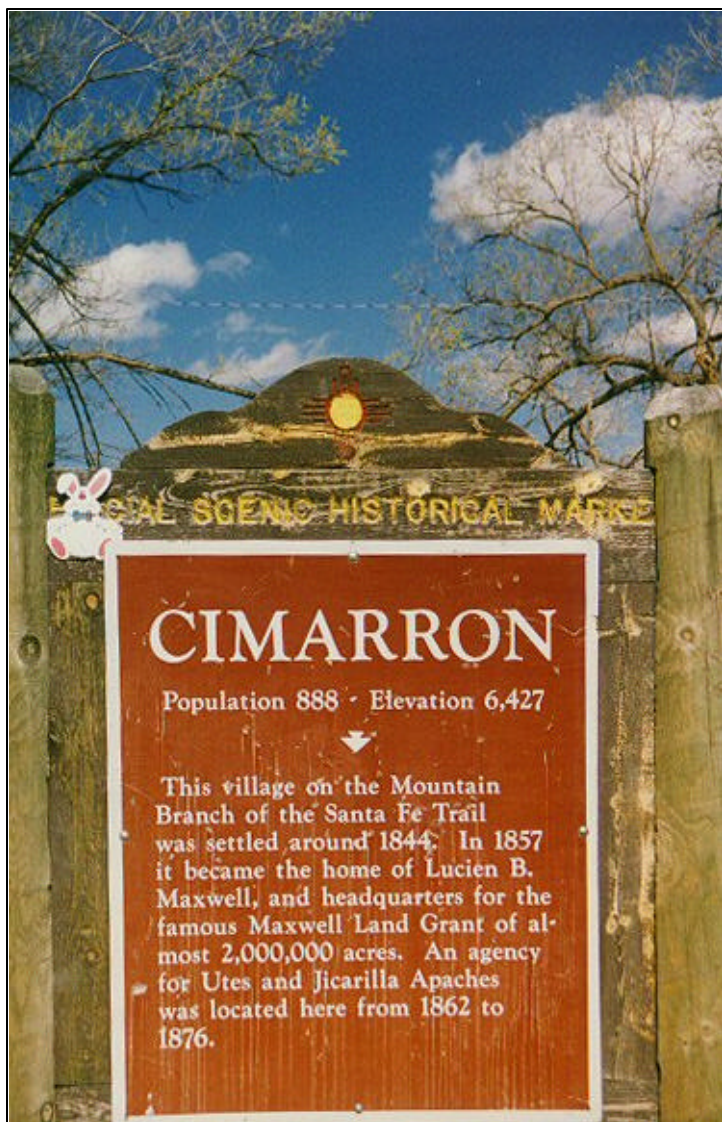
Also visit the Taos, New Mexico, websites:

<http://taoswebb.com/>

[http://www.taoschamber.com/default\\_slow.asp](http://www.taoschamber.com/default_slow.asp)







More information about Cimarron, New Mexico, can be found in the history pamphlet:

[CimarronHistory.pdf](#)

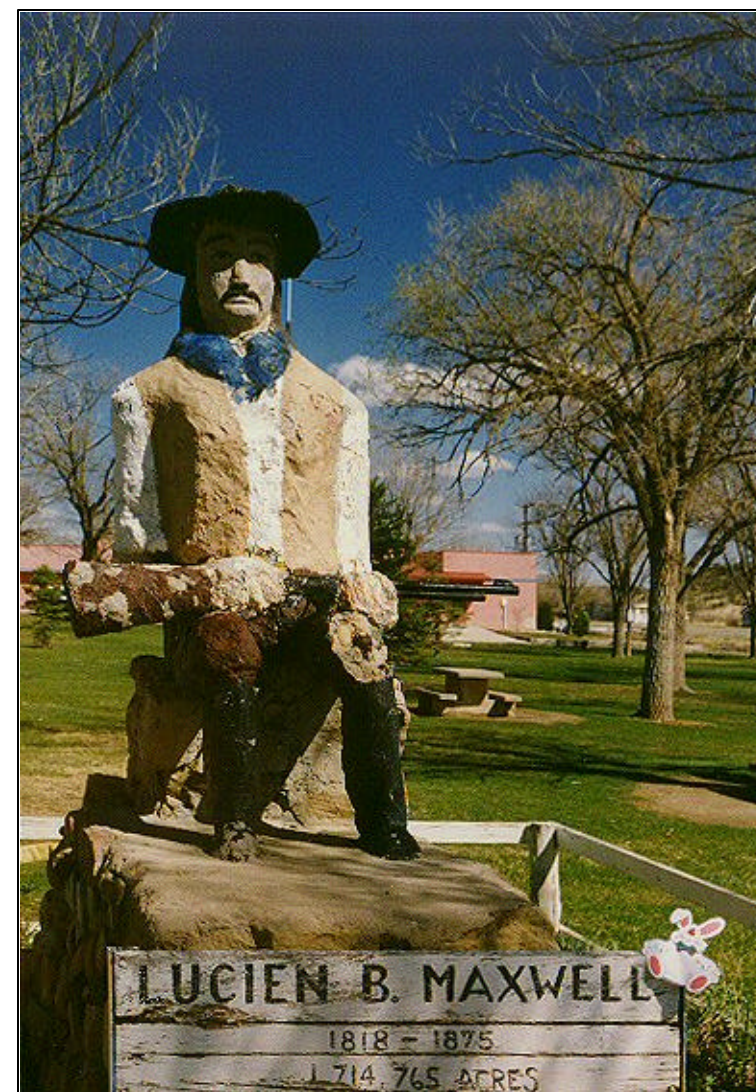
and by visiting the sites:

<http://www.cimarronnm.com>

<http://www.nenewmexico.com/index.php>



The Village of Cimarron where Gene lives is very small with only about 800 people. The area around Cimarron is mostly ranch land for raising cattle. The ranches were once part of the huge Maxwell Land Grant. This was land that was given by the government of Mexico to two men, Carlos Beaubien and Guadalupe Miranda, in 1841. Later the land was passed down to Beaubien's son-in-law Lucien Maxwell in order to improve the land and build towns and ranches.





The Old Mill that made grain for the local Indians is a museum. The jail where thieves and murderers were put 100 years ago still stands. The famous outlaw Clay Allison lived in Cimarron where he killed several people in gunfights in the hotel and spent many nights in jail. Witnesses at his trials always claimed he fired in self-defense so he was released. Even though he was a gunfighter, he always treated ladies with respect. One day he drank too much liquor, fell off a wagon and died!



For more information on Old Town, read the pamphlet describing the Walking Tour in Cimarron:

[CimarronWalkingTour.pdf](#)

To imagine what a 1944 Christmas was like in Cimarron, read

[CimarronChristmas.pdf](#)





In the canyon along the Cimarron River I went inside a cave. It was dark and wet and cold. When I turned on a small flashlight lot of little bugs swarmed all around me. It was pretty uncomfortable but I had a feeling what it was like for some of the early miners.

I also saw a lot of rabbit racks in the snow that weren't mine. Gene says that there are a lot of rabbits around. One type is called the snowshoe hare and is all white for camouflage. Can you find me in the picture?



In 1866 gold was discovered on Baldy Mountain near Cimarron (the snow-capped mountain at the right in the above photograph). Thousands of people came to the Sangre de Cristo Mountains to “get rich quick.” Towns like Cimarron and nearby Elizabethtown and Virginia City swelled with prospectors and merchants selling goods. While some people did get rich, most didn't or died in gunfights with outlaws and Indians. For a time Cimarron was a dangerous Wild West town!



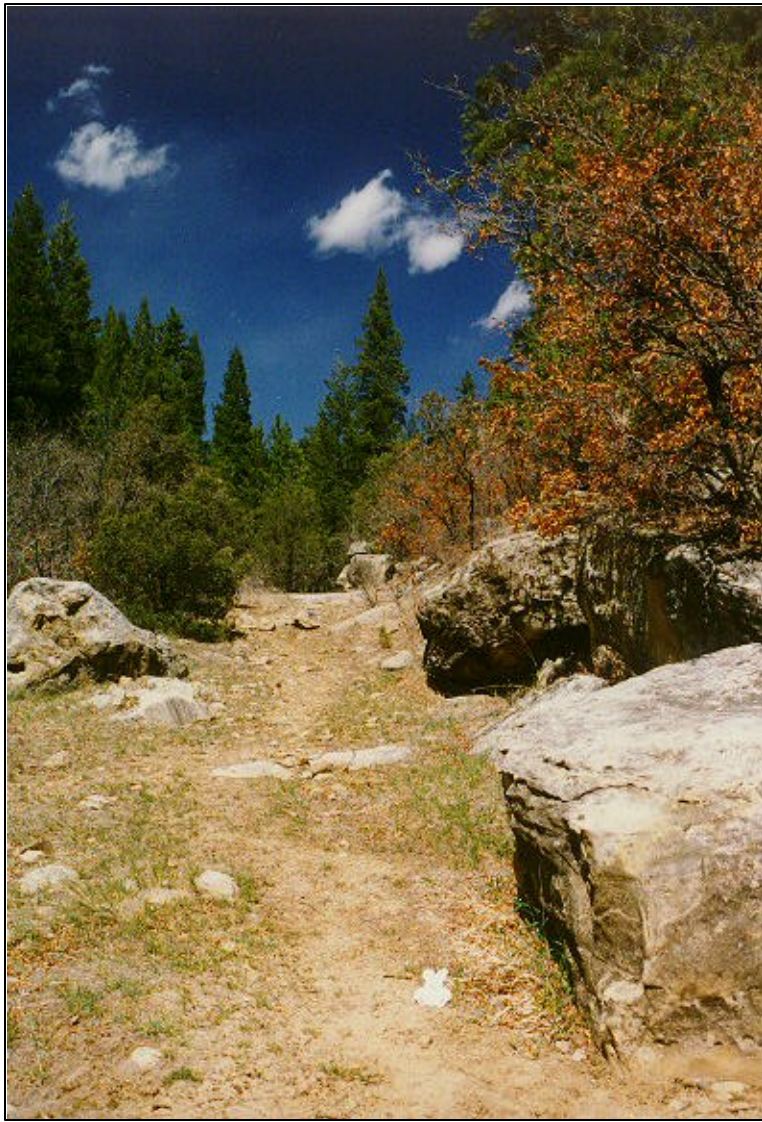


Usually there are not a lot people in Cimarron. However, in the summer over 20,000 kids and parents come to visit. Why? Four miles south of town lies the Philmont Scout Ranch, home to the National Boy Scouts of America High Adventure Base. Boy Scouts from all over the world come to learn to hike and camp safely in the mountains. The Ranch was a gift to the Boy Scouts from Oklahoma oil baron Waite Phillips (Phillips 66) in 1938 and 1941 and totals over 137,000 acres.



When the miners ran out of money to search for gold, they left their belongings behind and went somewhere else. If enough people left a town it became a “ghost town” like the town of Colfax in the photograph above. There really aren’t any ghosts but it is scary to be in a town where nobody lives and just the wind makes sounds. The building in the background is an old railroad boxcar. Since there are few trees in many parts of New Mexico, railroad cars made convenient buildings.





More information on the Philmont Scout Ranch can be found at:

<http://www.scouting.org/philmont/main.shtml>



Boy Scouts hike along canyon trails such as that shown above. This canyon is called bear canyon and many Scouts have seen bears searching for food. The campers stay in the backcountry for 10 days and learn to pitch tents, hang food from bear cables at night to keep it out of reach of bears, and carry heavy backpacks for more than 50 miles. They get tired and sore but it is good exercise and a lot of fun. Many trails cross streams over bridges like that in the photograph at the right.



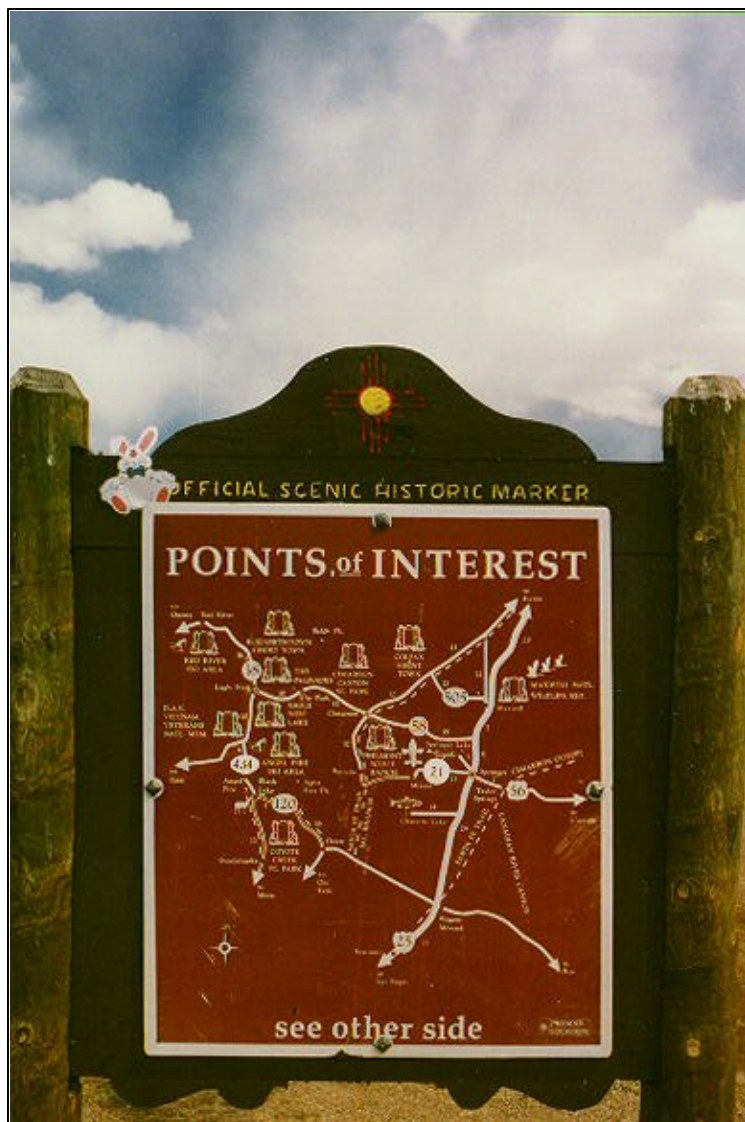


The Scouts can use burros to help them carry their packs from one camp to another. At one camp they might learn about the history of the area, shoot a black powder rifle like the early hunters, or climb a tall tree to cut off branches to make railroad ties. At another camp they could pan for gold, enter an old mine, go horseback riding, or milk a cow. The end of most trips takes Scouts along the famous Tooth of Time Ridge trail (below). See the mountain that looks like a giant tooth?



Cimarron is in the County of Colfax,  
<http://nenewmexico.com/counties/colfax>  
named after Schuyler Colfax, the vice president of the United States from 1869-1873 during the first term of President Grant:  
<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=C000626>





Want to know more about Cimarron and Northern New Mexico?

The following pages provide documents and suggest web links that contain additional information on the history of the Village and the area.



Whew! Well, I hope you all learned a lot about the exciting and wonderful things I saw during my trip to New Mexico. Dinosaurs and mountains, outlaws and Indians, gold mines and river gorges! It certainly is different in the West where the sky is so big and so blue and the land is so large. I understand why so many people go there for vacations. But I found out that with so many things to do and see it is hard to relax. I think I'll do that when I get back home!

Road  Rabbit



Information on the geology of the Palisades Sill and Cimarron Canyon State Park can be found here:

<http://geoinfo.nmt.edu/tour/stateparks/cimarron/home.htm>

with a description and map of the State Park given below:

[CimarronCanyon.pdf](#)

[CimarronCanyonMap.pdf](#)

The importance of Folsom Man can be found here:

<http://folsommuseum.netfirms.com/folsomman.htm>

Among the numerous sites devoted to Anasazi culture is:

<http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/cultural/northamerica/anasazi.html>



The ghost town of Colfax, New Mexico, is located 12 miles north of Cimarron along Highway 64:

<http://www.ghosttowns.com/states/nm/colfax.html>

Also near Cimarron is the former coal-mining town of Dawson and its cemetery, 5 miles northwest of Colfax:

<http://www.ghosttowns.com/states/nm/dawson.html>



In addition to the Philmont Scout Ranch, other large ranches near Cimarron are the CS Cattle Company:

[http://www.cscattle.com/t.ranch\\_history.html](http://www.cscattle.com/t.ranch_history.html)

and the Vermejo Park (or WS) Ranch:

[WSRanch.pdf](#)

[VermejoPark.pdf](#)

<http://www.vermejoparkranch.com/History.php>



The oldest ranch in the area is the Chase Ranch:

<http://archives.nmsu.edu/rghc/colctns/MS/Chase.html>

Finally, Fort Union and Pecos National Monuments are historical sites located south of Cimarron along Interstate 25:

<http://www.nps.gov/foun>

<http://www.nps.gov/peco>