

Cimarron, New Mexico

Where the West is Still Wild!

One mile south of Highway 64 on State Road 21 lies the **Historic District** of the Village of Cimarron. Park near the St. James Hotel (No. 7 on the green pamphlet) and enjoy the self-guided walking tour of **Old Town**. It takes 30-60 minutes to see the 14 historic sites marked in front by stone pedestals; most can be reached by car. The **green pamphlet** gives more information than fits onto the brass plaque mounted atop each pedestal. The **yellow pamphlet** presents a brief history of the Village and provides background information on the historic sites, including the Santa Fe Trail, Lucien Maxwell and his 1,714,765-acre Land Grant, and the Colfax County War.

The **Santa Fe Trail** consisted of two main branches: the original route called the **Mountain Branch**, which passed through Cimarron, and the **Cimarron Cutoff**, named for the town near Dodge City, Kansas. The route of the Mountain Branch follows present-day I-25 over Raton Pass (along the railroad tracks) and parallels Hwy 64 to Cimarron, crossing in front of the Visitor Center and across the Cimarron River to Old Town. The two branches met at Fort Union, 90 miles south of Cimarron and the main fort offering protection for travelers along the Trail.

In the early 1920s, **Waite Phillips**, of the Phillips 66 Oil Company, began purchasing large tracts of land west and south of Cimarron. By the mid-1930s he had acquired over 300,000 acres and named the ranch Philmont. About 1940 he donated half the land to the Boy Scouts of America to be used as a working ranch as well as a high adventure base for Scouts. The headquarters of the Ranch is located four miles south of Cimarron on SR 21 and houses the **Philmont Museum and Seton Library**, which also serves as Philmont's Visitor Center. Nearby is the magnificent **Villa Philmonte**, built by Phillips in the late 1920s; tours may be arranged at the Philmont Museum.

Eleven miles south of Cimarron on SR 21 lies the site of **Rayado** and a reconstruction of Kit Carson's hacienda. Carson and Maxwell initially chose to settle along Rayado Creek in the late 1840s and helped man an army post there attached to Fort Union. In the mid-1850s they decided that the site of present-day Cimarron was a better location to start a town, probably because the Cimarron River was more reliable than the Rayado. Carson's hacienda is open from early June through mid-August and rests on property owned by the Scout Ranch. An historic chapel sits across the road in a stand of trees.

Traces of the Santa Fe Trail can still be seen nearby. One mile north of town along Hwy 64 is a sign noting where the Trail crossed the highway from north to south. Pull off just beyond the sign facing northbound traffic and look to the right (south). A gentle **swale** about 30 yards wide and a foot deep filled with an abundance of sunflower stalks indicates the path where several wagons rode abreast. As you drive south leaving Philmont Headquarters and begin to veer left at the five mile marker, climbing a steep hill, look to your left about 30 yards east of the highway and you will see a **series of ruts** where wagons climbed the hill. About 13 miles south of Cimarron on SR 21, the road takes a sharp left turn just before a closed gate that opens onto a dirt road. After following SR 21 to the left (east) a few hundred yards, the road slightly slopes down. At the bottom of this gentle dip stop and look to the right (south). Erosion in the distance indicates **trail ruts** where wagons had to follow in single or double file through the narrow gap between the hills (and parallel to the dirt road on the right).

In 1880 the **railroad** arrived in Santa Fe, relegating the Trail to history. In 1906 a railroad spur arrived in Cimarron, following the Trail from Raton down Hwy 64 and continuing 15 miles further west to the small town of Ute Park. Portions of the old rail bed can still be seen beside the highway in the canyon; the rails and cars were sold around 1940 during the war. The station of the St. Louis, Rocky Mountain and Pacific Railroad was located about 100 yards east of the Cimarron Visitor Center. A large influx of people followed the arrival of the railroad and most of the stores along Ninth Street on the north side of the park date from 1906-1910; this area north of the river is referred to as **New Town**. Because newcomers preferred to live near the source of their livelihood (the railroad), Old Town remained undisturbed and looks pretty much the same as it did 150 years ago when Maxwell first settled and governed this territory. Compare Cimarron's plaza with that of Taos, Santa Fe or Albuquerque and you'll see how little things have changed here.

Before leaving town, you might also wish to visit the **cemetery** on the right off SR 21 as you head south toward Philmont. To experience Cimarron through the lives of its early inhabitants, pick up a copy of **For Good or Bad**, by historian Stephen Zimmer, available at the Cimarron Visitor Center, the Philmont Museum and other local businesses. Please check out our website: www.cimarronnm.com for more information on the Village as well as downloadable pictures, additional history and area day trips.

Cimarron-Taos-Santa Fe Tour

In or near Cimarron, SEE:

- 1) The Walking Tour of Old Town (1857) including the St. James Hotel, Aztec Mill and Old Jail
- 2) Shops along 9th Street in New Town (1906)
- 3) Philmont Scout Ranch including Museum, tour of the Villa (10:30 and 2:30 M-F), and Rayado
- 4) Santa Fe Trail Ruts (1 mile north on Highway 64, and 5 and 13 miles south on State Road 21)
- 5) Ghost towns of Dawson (cemetery only) and Colfax along Highway 64 north
- 6) Buffalo and pronghorn antelope along Highway 64 north or State Road 58 east
- 7) Capulin National Monument east of Raton
- 8) Additional Day Trips out of Cimarron (download at <http://www.cimarronnm.com/>)

DRIVE through Cimarron Canyon to Eagle Nest (along Highway 64 west)

- 1) Palisades rock formation in Cimarron Canyon State Park
- 2) Clear Creek Trail (trail head at mile marker 292, ~1 hour easy hike to a small waterfall)

DRIVE the Enchanted Circle from Eagle Nest to Taos, turning EITHER:

- 1) South at Eagle Nest past the Angel Fire turnoff and over Palo Flechado Pass, **OR**
- 2) North at Eagle Nest by the ghost town of Elizabethtown and over Bobcat Pass to Red River, then to Questa, including the Wild River Recreation Area north of Questa.

In Taos, SEE:

- 1) Rio Grande Gorge Bridge seven miles west along Highway 64
- 2) Taos Pueblo (enter by the Shell gas station on Highway 64)
- 3) Old Town Plaza including Kit Carson Home, museums and galleries
- 4) Martinez Hacienda (adobe home built 1804, now a museum) and Millicent Rogers Museum
- 5) San Francisco de Assisi Church in Ranchos de Taos (~5 miles south of the Plaza)

DRIVE from Taos to Pojoaque (Nambe, 13 mi. north of Santa Fe) along the “Low” and “High” Roads:

Take Highway 68 (the Low Road) south to State Road 75 and then left through Dixon, **then** Along State Road 75 past Picuris Pueblo to State Road 76 (turn before reaching Peñasco), **then** Follow State Road 76 (the High Road) past churches in Trampas, Truchas, and (turn onto State Road 98) Chimayo, **then** Turn onto State Road 503 and turn onto Highway 285 at Pojoaque.

DRIVE from Pojoaque to White Rock, Bandelier National Monument and Santa Fe

Turn off Highway 285 onto State Road 502 (one exit south of State Road 503), **then** Drive to the intersection with State Road 4 and turn left toward White Rock, **then** At the White Rock traffic light turn left and follow the signs indicating the “Overlook,” **then** Return from the Overlook to State Road 4 and drive to Bandelier National Monument, **then** Return to State Road 4 and **EITHER**:

- 1) Follow scenic State Road 4 to Bernalillo north of Albuquerque, then take Interstate 25 north to Santa Fe, **OR**
- 2) Follow State Road 4 and drive into Los Alamos, visit the Bradbury Science Museum, and return via State Road 502 to Highway 285 at Pojoaque, and then south to Santa Fe.