



Zuni-Acoma Trail



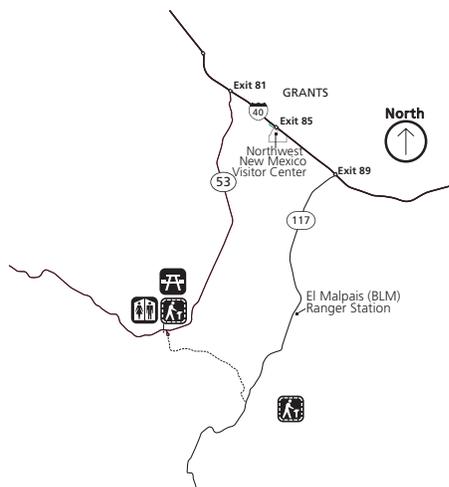
Many of the Spanish inscriptions at El Morro National Monument begin with the phrase “*paso por aqui.*” Passed by here...an indelible mark left for those who would come later. But what of El Malpais? What mark have those who passed by this land left on the landscape? Perhaps in El Malpais, it is the land that leaves an impression on those who pass by here.

Exploring the Zuni-Acoma Trail

The Zuni-Acoma Trail is one of many ancient routes that connects the pueblos of Zuni and Acoma. Many of the rock cairns and lava bridges built by the Ancestral Puebloans are still used to hike the route today.

Two state highways offer access to the Zuni-Acoma Trail. From the west, the Zuni-Acoma Trail begins on NM 53, sixteen miles south of I-40. From the east, the route begins on NM 117, fifteen miles south of I-40.

The Zuni-Acoma Trail traverses 7.5 miles of rugged lava flows. This hike may take six to seven hours one way. Please make sure you are properly prepared for this hike, and allow yourself plenty of daylight.



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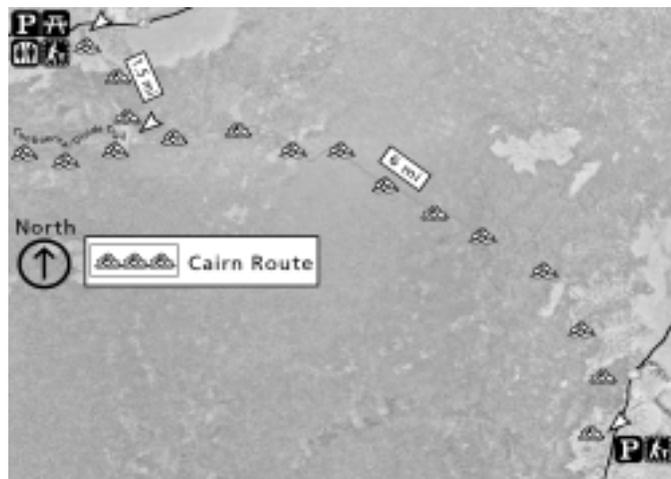
- carry plenty of water
- wear sturdy hiking shoes
- pack a snack and a first aid kit
- tell someone of your plans

Be aware of different trail markers

■ **Rock Cairns.** These piles of rock are made from the surrounding lava and can be difficult to see. Always have the next cairn in sight before leaving the one you are.

■ **Continental Divide Trail Blazes.** Most of the Zuni-Acoma Trail is also part of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, a 3100 mile-long trail from Canada to Mexico.

■ **Concrete Posts.** These posts commemorate the 1776 Dominguez-Escalante expedition. They were erected by the Bureau of Land Management in 1976 when this trail was in their jurisdiction.



Wilderness and Preservation

With two modern highways at either end of the Zuni-Acoma Trail, it is hard to envision the vast wilderness that once surrounded the lava flows. A fragment of that wilderness still exists within El Malpais National Monument and along the Zuni-Acoma Trail.

Over 85% of El Malpais is suitable for Wilderness designation. Hiking the Zuni-Acoma Trail is an unforgettable journey into this wilderness.

Please do your part to preserve this piece of geologic and cultural history:

- Do not remove or add material to the rock cairns. Remember, some of the cairns may be hundreds of years old.
- Leave all natural and cultural objects where you find them. Pottery sherds and other artifacts give clues to the past and lose their meaning when removed.
- Allow future generations to enjoy the Zuni-Acoma Trail just as you have.

Travelers Past and Present



The Zuni-Acoma Trail is part of an ancient route connecting the pueblos of Zuni and Acoma and has witnessed over 1000 years of human travel and use.

Pottery remnants found along the trail date from as early as A.D. 850 - 900, with most dating between A.D. 1050 - 1150. The Ancestral Puebloans lived in settlements along the edge of the lava flows and found the lava to be quite useful. Lava tube caves provided a reprieve from summer heat and winter winds. Ice from caves was melted, stored in pottery jars and cached for later use. Plants provided nuts, berries, wild greens and fruit for food. Lava rock and other material found on the lava was used to make tools for grinding, weaving, painting and hunting.

These early dwellers developed routes across the lava for trade and ceremonial purposes. Crevices were filled with lava boulders creating bridges to aide their travel. Rocks were piled to mark their routes across the rugged flows. The Zuni-Acoma Trail was highly used for travel between the pueblos of Zuni and Acoma. This and other routes were in use when the Spanish arrived in the 1500s.

Beginning with Columbus' 1492 voyage, Spain was at the forefront of exploration in the New World. By the 1530s, Spain had found great wealth in present day Central America and began to look northward for the treasures rumored to be there. Tales of the Seven Cities of Cibola lured Spanish expeditions north from Mexico to the Zuni region. Though they did not find the golden cities they were looking for, they continued eastward toward Acoma and the pueblos along the Rio Grande.

Although it is believed that members of Coronado's 1540 expedition passed by El Malpais, the first historic reference did not come until 1582 when Diego Perez de Luxan wrote of his travels "another four leagues in waterless malpais." While the Spanish could not take their wagons and pack animals across the lava routes made by the early dwellers, the malpais was not completely ignored. They, like the American Indians, found water trapped in the porous rock and took advantage of resting places beneath the tall ponderosa pines found on the flows.

For nearly three centuries, Spain held a tentative rule over *Nuevo Mexico* until 1821 when Mexico declared independence from Spain. While small Mexican settlements and sheep ranches appeared in the malpais region during the 1830s, Mexican rule would not last long.

In 1846 the United States Congress declared war with Mexico. The Mexican-American war ended two years later with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. New Mexico, which included present day Arizona, and the southern portions of Colorado, Utah, and Nevada, was now a United States Territory.

Anxious to learn more about their new territory, the United States Army sent several scientific expeditions to New Mexico. In 1849, after drawing the features of Chaco Canyon, Lt. James H. Simpson, of the Topographical Engineers Ninth Military Department, led his team of scientists south toward Zuni Pueblo. At El Morro they copied the inscriptions and etched the first American writings on the rock.

Further east, the lieutenant was inspired to name a huge and majestic mountain Mount Taylor, after President Zachary Taylor. While traveling past El Malpais, Lt. Simpson recorded details of the volcanic flows and noted that the soil near the igneous rock was fertile. This soil would be an advantage for ranching and agriculture during the next century.

Eventually, the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad laid ties along the northern edge of the lava flows. With the railroad came new towns, ranches, mines, lumber companies and people. The Stock Raising Homestead Act of 1916 encouraged families to move west. During the Great Depression and Dust Bowl of the 1930s, many families set up homesteads along the edge of the lava flows. They, like those who had come before, benefitted from the lava flows. Ice was harvested from caves and cinders were mined for road building operations.

The evolution of modern vehicles and paved roads in the 1930s brought a new type of traveler to El Malpais. Hikers and tourists continue to take advantage of the recreational activities in the lava flows and walk on the same pathways as the early inhabitants of the area.

The Ancient Way from Zuni to Acoma has been host to a myriad of travelers and cultures, each with their own needs, values, and ideas. The Zuni-Acoma Trail spans not only 75 miles of lava flow, but also centuries of history and use. It is a remnant of the past and yet it still holds the promise of adventure, exploration and accomplishment for modern day travelers.

Continental Divide National Scenic Trail

Extending north and south through western North America lies the Continental Divide, a fold in the earth's surface that separates the direction in which waters flow. More than twenty years have been spent building a trail along this divide from Canada to Mexico.

A portion of this National Scenic Trail shares treadway with the ancient Zuni-Acoma Trail.

Visit the El Malpais Information Center or the Northwest New Mexico Visitor Center for more information on the Continental Divide Trail.

Vanishing Treasures

Archaeologists conduct preservation activities at El Malpais National Monument through the Vanishing Treasures Program. This program was designed to protect and preserve prehistoric and historic archaeological sites.

Currently, archaeologists are designing a trail research program to gain a better understanding of the use of prehistoric trails. Trash middens, stained dirt and architectural remains give clues to whether trails were used permanently or temporarily. The removal or destruction of any artifacts is detrimental to this research.

For More Information

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