

# Capulin

M O U N T A I N



NATIONAL MONUMENT  
*New Mexico*

# Capulin Mountain

## NATIONAL MONUMENT

*A symmetrical cinder cone, surrounded by spectacular evidences of volcanism, whose slopes in spring are colored with many species of native wildflowers.*

EVEN in the Southwest, with its generous political divisions and its great unbroken expanses of earth and sky, it is extremely unusual to find a point of vantage from which one may see portions of five different States in a single panorama. Yet such a unique point is the summit of Capulin Mountain in the northeastern corner of New Mexico, from which parts of the adjoining States of Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas may be seen. This picturesque mountain is an extinct volcano, the crest of which is dented by a symmetrical crater. Its tree-clad slopes are composed of layers of ash and cinders and at its western base lies a jumble of rough and ragged rocks—a molten-lava river cooled to stone. Today, in contrast with its violent origin, the sleeping cone is lush with a green blanket of shrubs and grasses.

### GEOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION AND HISTORY

Capulin Mountain is considered one of the largest and most symmetrical of the recent cinder cones in the United States. Its geometrical form rises almost 800 feet above its base,

which has an elevation of 7,423 feet to the highest point on the crater rim measuring 8,215 feet above sea level. The apex of the cone is slightly truncated and contains a crater 1,450 feet in diameter and 415 feet in depth below the highest part of the rim. The mountain is composed chiefly of loose cinders, ashes, and other ejected materials. These were accumulated during an explosive eruption, probably of considerable duration and exhibiting varying degrees of violence. The coarser ejected materials fell back upon the vent, piling up to form the conical mound, the finer materials and the dust being carried by the wind to more remote localities. As time passed, action became less frequent and less violent until it finally ceased. Vegetation gained a foothold on the steep, unstable slope as though to hide the evidence of mighty forces which spent themselves in a wild orgy of violence.

Although no reliable method for measuring the age of Capulin Mountain has been discovered, it is considered to be very youthful, geologically speaking. This is attested by the high angle of the slopes which are so steep that rock fragments are continually rolling down the sides. Other indications of youth are the unmodified character of the cone and its crater and the slight weathering of the cinders of which it is composed.

The mountain is interesting not only because of its origin, but because it represents the last stages of a great period of volcanic activity

which was widespread throughout western North and South America. Evidences of this older and more intense activity can be seen from the mountain in the scores of other nearby volcanic hills and peaks. The largest of these is the Sierra Grande, an extinct volcano rising some 4,000 feet above the surrounding plain, about 10 miles to the northeast. Northwest of Capulin are a number of flat mesas, capped with black lava. The three largest are Barella, Raton, and Johnson Mesas. Fishers Peak, south of Trinidad, Colo., is on a similar mesa, and the Spanish Peaks, northwest of Trinidad, are a pair of extinct volcanoes.

The lava was erupted in a succession of flows. The periods of eruption were separated by long lapses during which erosion and weathering of the surface developed valleys and probably cut away portions of the older lava sheets forming new channels and lower terrain over which the succeeding lava spread. This process was repeated at least three times. The oldest lavas, therefore, are found on the tops of the highest mesas. The last eruption, of which Capulin Mountain is representative, was characterized by the ejection of cinders and ash rather than of lava as in the preceding periods. This action was so recent that the steep-sided cinder cones appear as if they had just cooled.

Symmetrical and spectacular in shape and

size, the mountain rises alone above a relatively level plain, thus forming a noticeable landmark, which it undoubtedly was to the early pioneers traveling both branches of the famous Santa Fe Trail, some 30 miles to the west and south. This region was long the hunting ground of the Kiowa and Comanche Indians whose resistance to the encroachments of the white man has added a vivid chapter to the history of Spanish, Mexican, and early American adventure in the Southwest.

#### PLANT AND ANIMAL LIFE

The beauty of Capulin Mountain is enhanced by an abundance of the vegetation characteristic of the region, partly grassland and partly ponderosa pine, piñon pine, and juniper forest, together with an abundance of mountain-mahogany and some Gambel oak, chokecherry, and squawbush, which extends to the crater's rim. Legend has it that the mountain was named Capulin after the Spanish word for the chokecherry tree.

During the months of May, June, and July, the visitor may expect to find a beautiful array of wild flowers, including bluebells, daisies, Indian paintbrush, bluebonnets (lupines), and many others.

Deer, porcupines, squirrels, and other forms of animal life are abundant and frequently seen. Birds are numerous, adding Nature's color and music to the other pleasing aspects of this national monument. Most spectacular of these are the great Golden Eagles which are sometimes seen soaring above the summit of the mountain. Continued protection has made the wild creatures trustful of man, hence carrying on their activities of life undisturbed by visitors who greatly enjoy watching them.

#### FOLSOM SITE NEARBY

Extremely significant archeological values, although not in the national monument, have been found in this vicinity. Not far off is the famous Folsom site, where the culture of prehistoric man definitely associated with the fossil bones of extinct animals was first found. Before this find the advent of man in North America was thought to date back not earlier than a thousand years or so before the beginning of the Christian era. In 1926, however, a discovery was made which proved that man had lived here for a far longer time. In that year, a field party from the Colorado Museum of Natural History, excavating fossil bison bones at this site, found a finely chipped stone projectile point. During the summer of 1927, another field party from



*Folsom Quarry.*

*Left: Comanche point. Right: Folsom point.*



*Parking area near rim of crater.*



*Layers of volcanic ash exposed by the road cut.*



the Colorado Museum discovered four additional points, all seemingly associated with the fossil bones of extinct bison. When the fifth point was found, before it was completely uncovered, archeologists were invited to see the find in place. Dr. Barnum Brown, heading an American Museum of Natural History field party in 1928, found additional projectile points associated with the bones. In all, nineteen points were found. Early man, as a hunter, inhabited the area in very ancient times because of the existence of food in the form of herds of bison. Particularly convincing is the fact that the bison skeletons are mostly complete, except for the tailbones, which are missing in every case. Evidently the ancient hunters skinned the beasts on the spot after killing them with stone lance points and in skinning "the tail goes with the hide."

The Folsom point is a long, thin, well-flaked blade, with concave base and distinctive longitudinal grooves on each side. Now well-known, the type is found chiefly in the high plains of New Mexico, Colorado, and Nebraska. This original site is about 10 miles west of the village of Folsom, which can be seen from Capulin Mountain.

### GENERAL INFORMATION AND FACILITIES

Because of its several unusual geological features worthy of preservation for the enjoyment and study of persons interested in the outstanding manifestations of natural forces, Capulin Mountain was proclaimed a national monument by President Woodrow Wilson on August 9, 1916. The boundaries, which include the cinder cone and its immediate surroundings, take in approximately 680 acres.

Entrance to the monument is on U. S. Highway No. 64 from western Oklahoma, 7 miles from the town of Folsom and 3 miles from Capulin which is the junction of U. S. Highways Nos. 64 and 87, main artery entering New Mexico from northwestern Texas, via Clayton.

It is 29 miles from the modern little city of Raton, metropolis of northeastern New Mexico and gateway to south-central Colorado.

This location makes the monument accessible to visitors throughout the entire year, except on rare occasions when the road to the summit of the mountain may be closed for a few days by heavy snow. This road, which approaches the mountain from the west, spirals the cinder cone in a counterclockwise direction terminating at a commodious parking area on the western lip of the crater. From this point a trail leads downward to the bottom of the crater, and another, approximately 1 mile in length, entirely circles the crater, following its rim. From the highest point on this trail an amazing and inspiring view may be obtained of portions of New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, Kansas, and Colorado. On a clear day Pikes Peak, nearly 200 miles to the north, may be seen. The outlook to the west is particularly magnificent, the majestic eternally snow-capped peaks of the Sangre de Cristo Range forming a mighty backdrop to the wide expanse of grass-carpeted rangeland, broken by volcanic hills and basalt-capped mesas.

Although picnic facilities are provided near the western base of Capulin Mountain, there is no water on the monument nor is it possible to obtain food, lodging, or supplies. However, these items are available at the nearby towns of Capulin and Folsom.

### ADMINISTRATION

Administered by the National Park Service, Department of the Interior, Capulin Mountain National Monument has no resident superintendent. A part-time superintendent resides in the nearby town of Capulin, where he is available to provide information regarding the national monument and its features, to enforce regulations, and to be of as much service as possible. For further information, write to the Acting Superintendent, Capulin Mountain National Monument, Capulin, N. Mex.

