

Capulin Mountain

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 wildflowers.

Capulin Mountain is an extinct volcano in the northeastern corner of New Mexico, from whose summit may be seen parts of five States—New Mexico, Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. The crest of this picturesque mountain is dented by a symmetrical crater. Its slopes were built up by layers of ash and cinders. At its western base lies a jumble of rough and ragged rocks—a river of lava cooled to stone. Today, in contrast with its violent origin, the sleeping cone is lush with a green blanket of trees, shrubs, and grasses.

Rising alone above a relatively level plain, Capulin Mountain forms a conspicuous landmark. It was undoubtedly noticed by early pioneers traveling 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 settlement in the Southwest.

Geology

Capulin Mountain is one of the largest and most symmetrical of the geologically recent cinder cones in the United States. Its geo-

metrical form rises over 1,000 feet above its base to the highest point on the crater rim at an elevation of 8,215 feet above sea level. The top of the cone has an irregular rim about 1 mile in circumference and contains a crater about 415 feet deep, from the highest part of the rim.

The mountain is chiefly built of loose cinders, ash, and other rock debris of volcanic explosions. These materials were laid down by successive eruptions, probably of considerable duration. The coarse materials fell back upon the vent, piling up to form the conical mound. The fine materials and dust were carried away from the mountain by the wind. After the eruptions, vegetation gained footholds on the steep, unstable slopes, until in time they became stabilized.

The most recent geological work done during the summer of 1955 indicates that Capulin Mountain was active about 7,000 years ago. Its relative youth is attested by the high angle of the slopes; they are so steep that rock fragments frequently roll down. Other indications of the youth of the mountain are the unmodified character of the cone and its crater, and the fresh appearance of the cinders.

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 southeast. Northwest of Capulin are a number of 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.

In this great volcanic area, the lava erupted in a succession of flows. The series of eruptions were separated by long periods of inactivity. During these inactive times, erosion cut valleys and wore down portions of the old lava sheets. This action formed new channels and lower terrain over which succeeding lava flows spread. This process was repeated at least three times. The oldest lavas, which have been exposed by erosion, are found on the tops of the highest mesas. The last series of eruptions created Capulin Mountain; they were ejections mostly of cinders and ash with less lava flow than in the

preceding volcanic activity. These cinder and ash eruptions were so recent, geologically, that some of the steep-sided cinder cones in this volcanic area appear as if they had just cooled.

Trees and Flowers

The beauty of Capulin Mountain is enhanced by an abundance of vegetation. Part of the mountain is grassland, and part is forest. On the lower slopes, the trees are mostly ponderosa and pinyon pine, juniper, and mountain-mahogany. Higher up the slopes, Gambel oak, chokecherry, and squawbush extend over the crater's rim. Legend has it that the mountain was named Capulin after the Spanish word for the chokecherry.

During May, June, and July, you may expect to find a beautiful array of wildflowers, including bluebells, daisies, Indian paintbrush, and bluebonnets (lupines).

Wildlife

Deer, porcupines, squirrels, and other animals are abundant and frequently seen. Birds are numerous, adding color and music to the other pleasing aspects of this national monument. Most spectacular of these are the great golden eagles which sometimes soar

above the summit of the mountain. Continued protection has allowed these wild creatures to live here undisturbed.

Folsom Man State Monument

Not far from Capulin Mountain is the famous Folsom site where artifacts of prehistoric man definitely associated with fossil bones of extinct animals were first found. This site is preserved as Folsom Man State Monument and is about 10 miles west of the town of Folsom.

Before this discovery, man was thought to have been in North America for 2,000 years. In 1926, however, 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 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, 19 points were found. Early man

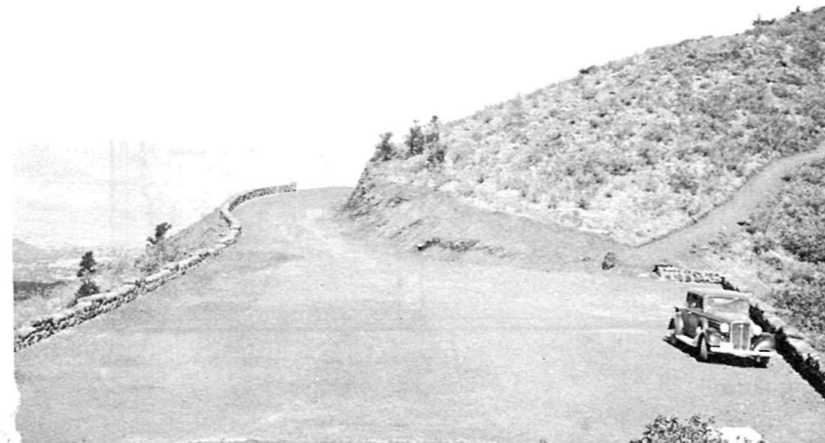


Folsom site.

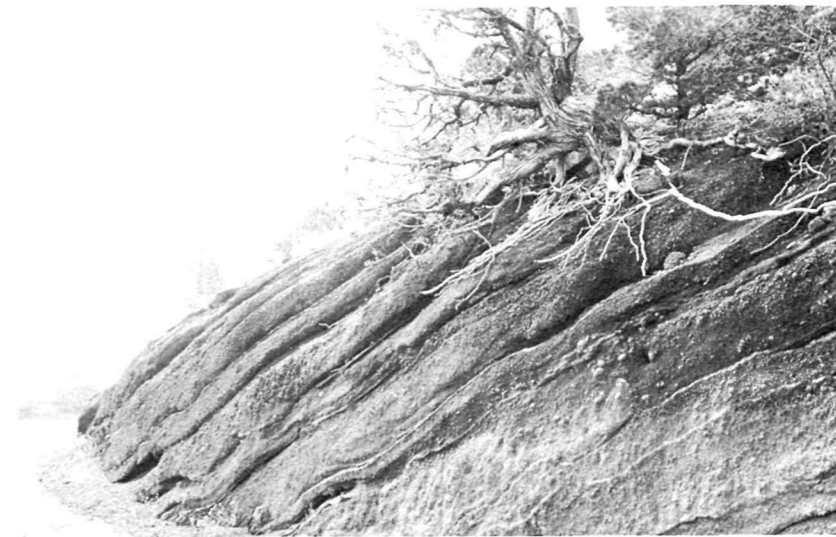
Folsom point from Folsom site.



Parking area near rim of crater.



Layers of volcanic ash exposed by the road cut.



The National Park System, of which this area is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the scenic, scientific, and historic heritage of the United States for the benefit and enjoyment of its people.

lived here because he found herds of bison in this area which he used for food and clothing. Particularly convincing is the fact that the bison skeletons are mostly complete, except for the tail bones, 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.

How To Get to Capulin Mountain

Entrance to the monument is on State Route 325 from western Oklahoma, 7 miles from the town of Folsom and 3 miles from the town of Capulin which is on U. S. 64 and 87, main artery entering New Mexico from north-western 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.

About Your Visit

The monument is accessible 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 cone, ending in a parking area on the western lip of the crater. A small shelter is located there. From the parking area, a trail leads down to the bottom of the

crater. Another, about 1 mile long, entirely circles the crater, following its rim. Along this trail, significant features are marked to correspond with numbered paragraphs in a self-guiding leaflet.

From the highest point on this rim trail, an inspiring view may be obtained of parts of New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, Kansas, and Colorado. On a clear day, Pikes Peak, nearly 200 miles to the north, may be seen.

Looking westward, the scene is particularly magnificent. The majestic, snowcapped peaks of the Sangre de Cristo Range form a mighty backdrop to the wide expanse of grass-carpeted rangeland, broken by volcanic hills and mesas.

There is a picnic area near the western base of Capulin Mountain, but no water is available. Food, lodging, and supplies must be obtained at the nearby towns of Capulin, Des Moines, and Folsom.

Administration

Capulin Mountain National Monument was established by Presidential proclamation in 1916 and now contains 680 acres. It is administered by the National Park Service of the United States Department of the Interior. A ranger, who resides in the town of Capulin, is available to provide information about the monument and its features, to enforce regulations, and to be of service. For further information, write to the Regional Director, National Park Service, Box 1728, Santa Fe, N. Mex., or to Ranger-in-Charge, Capulin Mountain National Monument, Capulin, N. Mex.

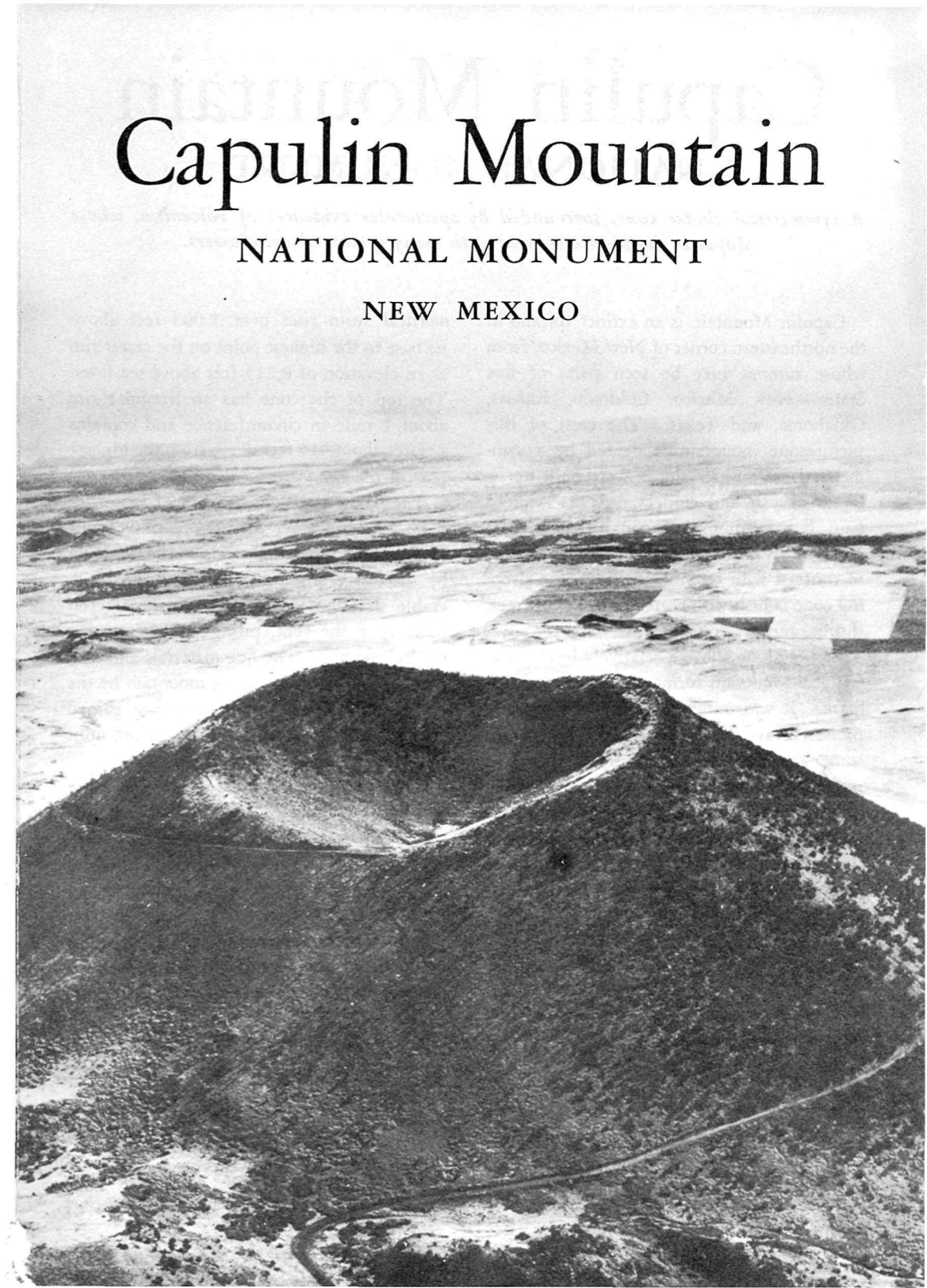
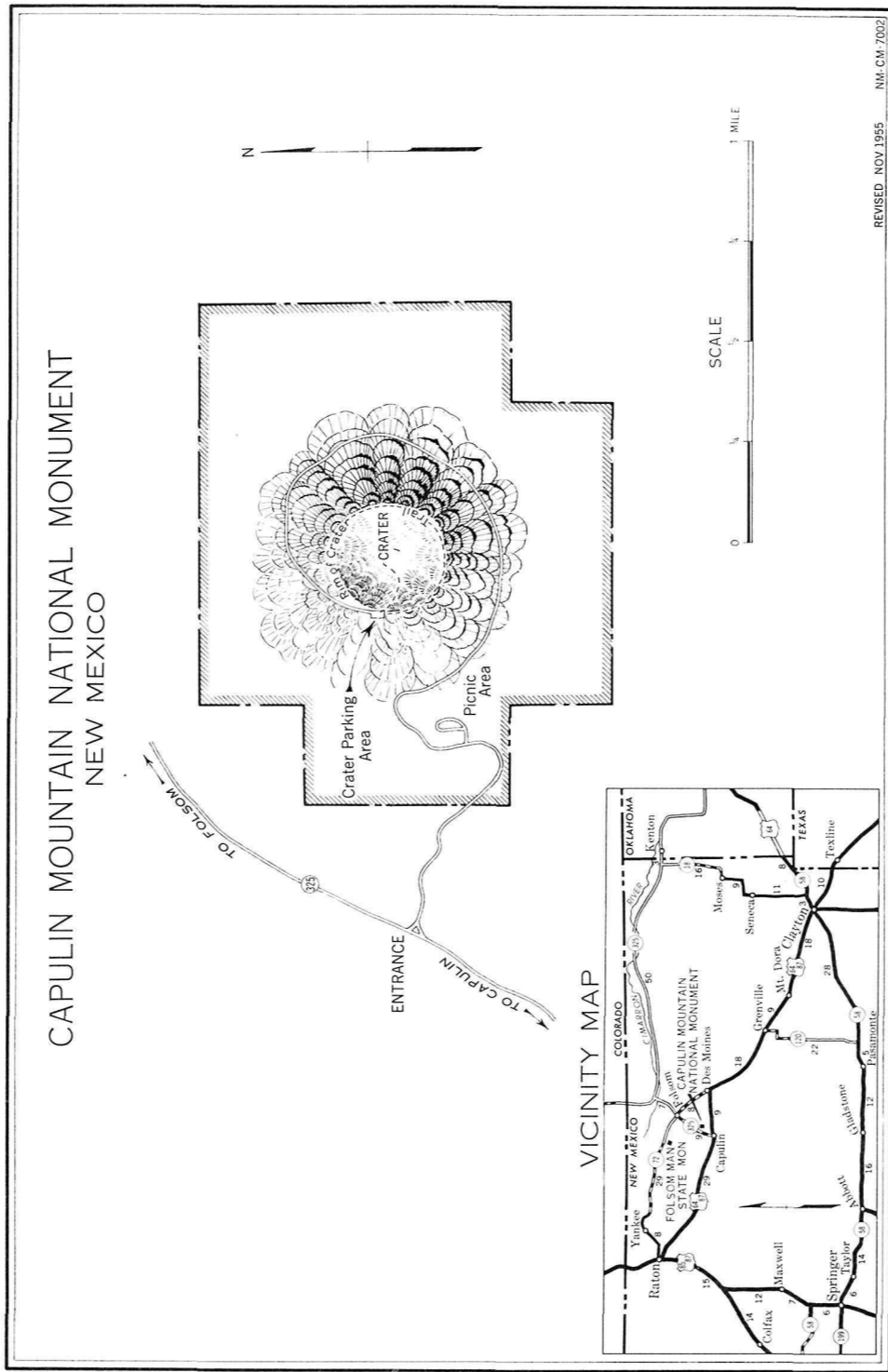


UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fred A. Seaton, Secretary

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Conrad L. Wirth, Director



Capulin Mountain

NATIONAL MONUMENT

NEW MEXICO