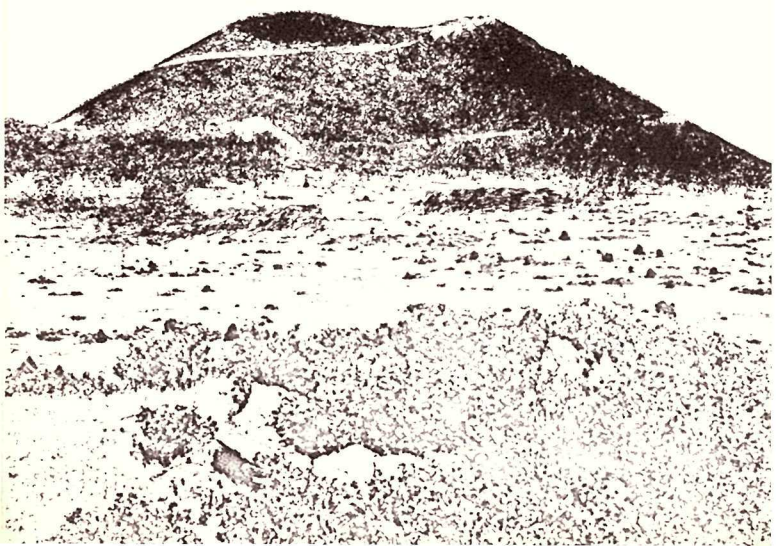


Capulin Mountain

NATIONAL MONUMENT • New Mexico





Rising alone above a relatively level plain in northeastern New Mexico is Capulin Mountain, the cone of an extinct volcano. From the highest point of its crater rim, you can see parts of five States—New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Colorado.

Jutting out from the western base of this picturesque mountain is a jumble of rough and ragged rocks—a river of lava cooled to stone. The cone's steep ash-and-cinder slopes rise above this jumble to culminate in the crater rim. Though quiet now, the earth once vented itself in violent eruptions here. Today, in contrast with evidences of its violent origin, most of the cone is lush with a green blanket of trees, shrubs, and grasses.

Capulin Mountain is a conspicuous landmark, and it was undoubtedly noticed by early pioneers traveling the Cimarron Cutoff of the famous Santa Fe Trail, which passed some 30 miles to the east and south. From the mountain, you can still see the ruts of an alternate branch of the Cimarron Cutoff, about a mile to the east. This route later became a principal freight road between Fort Union, Fort Dodge, and Fort Leavenworth.

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 conical form rises more than 1,000 feet above its base to the highest point on the crater rim at an elevation of 8,215 feet above sea level. This irregular rim is about 1 mile in circumference, and the crater is about 415 feet in depth, as measured from the highest part of the rim.

The mountain consists chiefly of loose cinders, ash, and other rock debris of volcanic explosions. These materials were spewed out 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 a foothold on the steep, unstable slopes, so that in time the slopes became stabilized.

The most recent geological study, made during the summer of 1955, indicates that the volcano was active about 7,000 years ago. Its relative youth is attested by the high angle of the slopes of the mountain—they are so steep that rock fragments frequently roll down. Other indications of its youth 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 that are capped with black lava, the three largest of which 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 parts 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 nearby, bare, 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, chokecherry, Gambel oak, 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 are frequently seen. Birds are numerous, adding color and music to the other pleasing aspects of the monument. Most spectacular are the great golden eagles. Continued protection has allowed these wild creatures to live here undisturbed.

Trails

The unusual characteristics of Capulin Mountain are perhaps best revealed along the Crater Rim Trail, which begins and ends at the parking area. Your visit will be more enjoyable if you take this 1-mile walk. There is a moderate climb at the start of the trail, but once on the rim you will find fairly easy going until, after circling the crater, you reach again the place of descent to the starting point.

Your understanding of the area, too, will be increased if you use one of the self-guiding leaflets, which may be obtained in the shelter at the parking area. These leaflets contain numbered paragraphs that explain the most significant features found along the trail—the features are marked with corresponding numbers.

From the highest point on the trail you can see five States; and westward the view is particularly magnificent. The majestic, snowcapped peaks of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains form a mighty backdrop to the wide expanse of grass-carpeted rangeland, broken by volcanic hills and mesas. The exhilarating views make ideal photographic subjects; and the bent and warped trees, twisted by the wind, offer interesting foregrounds.

Along the trail, you will find an extensive growth of plantlife—trees, shrubs, grasses, and flowers. If the plants are strange to you, consult your self-guiding leaflet, for there the plants are identified and described.

At Post 22, there is a view of the country around the famous Folsom site, where artifacts of prehistoric man were first found associated with fossil bones of extinct animals. This site, preserved as Folsom Man State Park, is about 10 miles west of the town of Folsom, N. Mex.

Another trail, less scenic, provides you with the rare opportunity to see a volcanic mountain from the inside out. The trail begins at the parking area and leads down to the bottom of the crater.

Volcanic bombs. During explosive eruptions of the volcano, masses of very hot plastic magmatic material were tossed high into the air; the bombs were formed, in flight, from the cooling masses.



About Your Visit

Entrance to the monument is on N. Mex. 325. It is 7 miles from the town of Folsom, 3 miles from the town of Capulin (which is on U.S. 64 and 87), and 29 miles from Raton.

The monument is accessible throughout the year; however, the road to the summit may be closed for a few days by snow. You may visit the monument before sunrise or remain until after sunset.

Your first stop should be at the new visitor center on your right after you pass the entrance. There you can learn of the awesome power of volcanoes from the striking pictures of eruptions presented in the audiovisual program, eruptions similar to those that created Capulin Mountain. Here, too, you can obtain information from the park ranger on duty, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The road spirals to the summit, ending in a parking area on the western lip of the crater, where there is a small shelter. The trails begin and end here.

At the western base of the mountain you will find water and modern restrooms in the picnic area. Food and lodging are available in nearby towns. From late afternoon until 9 a.m. the following day, the picnic area is open as a campground—one-night use only. The Federal Recreation Area Permit will admit the driver and passengers of a private automobile, or the purchaser regardless of mode of travel. Individual one-night permits can also be purchased.

You can help preserve the monument's scenic beauty and natural features by observing a few regulations, such as those which make it unlawful to remove or disturb any geologic specimens, to use or display firearms, and to destroy, injure, or disturb, any form of animal or plant life.

Remember to use your trash bag and the trash cans that have been provided.

Administration

Capulin Mountain National Monument, established on August 9, 1916, contains 775 acres. It is administered by the National Parks Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.

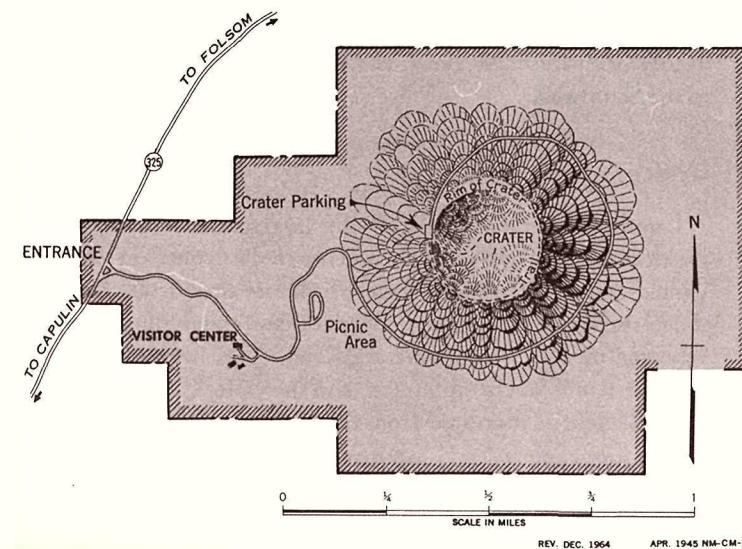
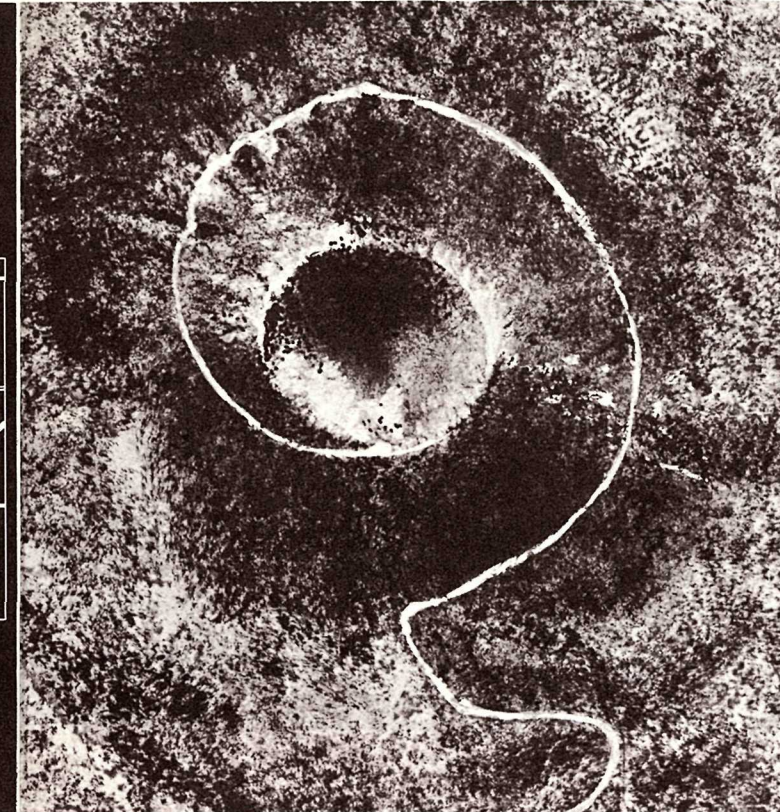
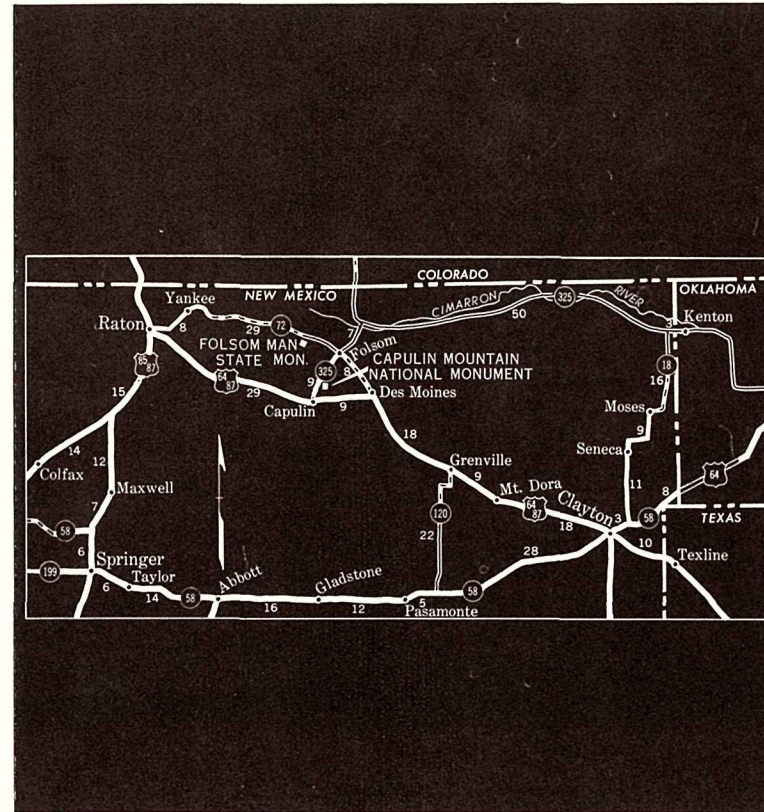
The National Park System, of which this area is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the scenic, scientific, and historic heritage of the United States for the benefit and enjoyment of its people.

A superintendent, whose address is Capulin, N. Mex., 88414, is in immediate charge of the monument.

THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR—the Nation's principal natural resource agency—bears a special obligation to assure that our expendable resources are conserved, that our renewable resources are managed to produce optimum benefits, and that all resources contribute their full measure to the progress and prosperity of the United States—now and in the future.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



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