



CAPULIN MOUNTAIN
NATIONAL MONUMENT • NEW MEXICO

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 four states—New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma 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 turbulent 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. The Fort Leavenworth branch of the Cimarron cutoff passed just east of the mountain. In the late 1800s this was a principal military freight road between Forts Union, Dodge, and Leavenworth.

The region was long the hunting ground of the Kiowa and Comanche Indians, whose resistance to the pioneers has added a vivid chapter to the history of Spanish, Mexican, and early American settlement in the Southwest.

geology

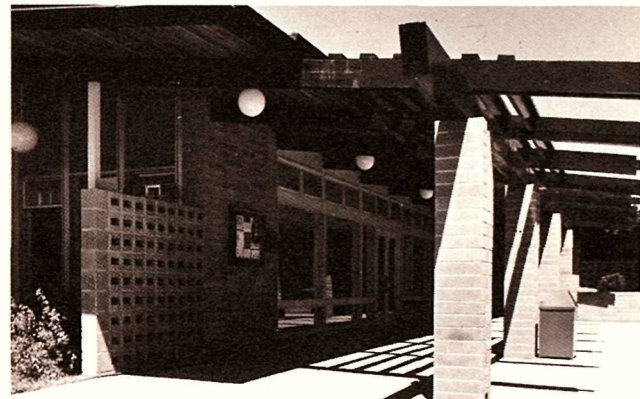
Capulin Mountain's conical form rises more than 1,000 feet above its base to the highest point on the crater rim at an elevation of 8182 feet above sea level. This irregular rim is about 1 mile in circumference, and the crater is about 415 feet in depth, as measured from the highest part of the rim.

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 prevailing winds from the southwest. After the eruptions, vegetation gained a foothold on the steep, unstable slopes, so that in time the slopes became stabilized by the dense root growth.

A recent geological study indicates that the volcano was active about 10,000 years ago. Its relative youth is attested by the steep angle of slope of the side of the mountain. Other indications of the youth of Capulin Mountain are the unmodified character of the cone and its crater and the fresh appearance of the cinders found around the mountain.



A road cut exposes layers of volcanic ash.



Make your first stop the visitor center.



The road winds up to the summit where foot trails begin.



Visitors find many kinds of plantlife along Crater Rim Trail.

The mountain is interesting not only because of its origin, but also 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 national monument in the scores of nearby volcanic hills and peaks. The largest of these is the Sierra Grande, an extinct volcano rising some 2,200 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, lava erupted in a series of flows 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 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.

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 pine, pinyon pine, and juniper. Higher up the slopes, mountain-mahogany, 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 chokecherry.

During the late spring and summer months, depending on the amount of rainfall, you may see various wildflowers in bloom. Among the most common are Indian paintbrush, wallflowers, lupine, and sunflowers.

wildlife

Deer, ground squirrels, chipmunks, and other animals live here, and may be seen. Birds are numerous, adding color and music to the other pleasing aspects of the monument. Respect the natural environment, and remember that continued protection allows these wild creatures to live here undisturbed.

You may see large numbers of lady bugs on Capulin Mountain during the summer months. At times they may actually cover portions of some of the trees and shrubs near the crater rim.

about your visit

Entrance to the monument is on N. Mex. 325, 3 miles north of the town of Capulin. From Clayton, Capulin is 54 miles west on U.S. 64/87; from Raton, 30 miles east.

The monument is accessible throughout the year; however, the road to the summit may be closed occasionally for a few days by snow.

Your first stop should be at the visitor center on your right, one-half mile after you pass the entrance. There you can learn of the awesome power of volcanoes from the striking pictures of eruptions presented in the audio-visual program, eruptions similar to those that created Capulin Mountain. Here, too, you can obtain information from park personnel on duty, from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., *Labor Day through Memorial Day. During the summer season, the visitor center is normally open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.*

At the western base of the mountain you will find water and modern restrooms in the picnic area. Food and privately run lodging and campgrounds are available in nearby towns.

trails

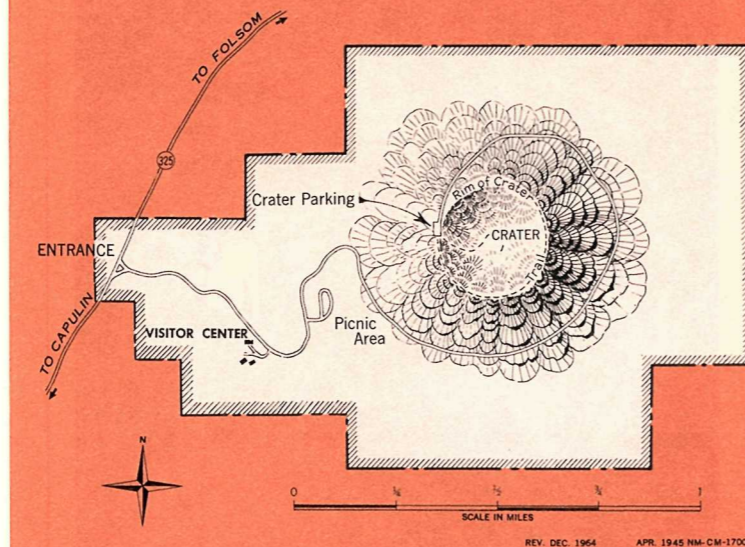
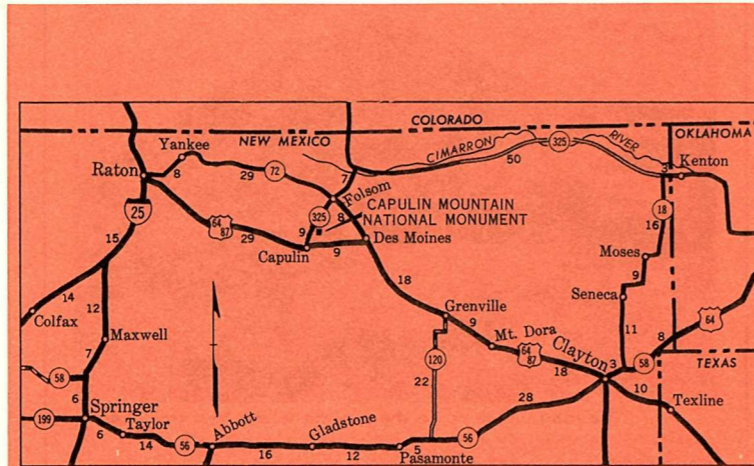
From the visitor center, the road spirals to the summit, ending in a parking area on the western rim of the crater, where there is a small shelter. The self-guiding trails begin and end here.

The unusual characteristics of Capulin Mountain are best revealed when hiking the Crater Rim Trail. 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 the place of descent to the parking area.

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

From the highest point on this trail you can see four states, and the view westward 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, especially with a bent and warped tree, twisted by the wind, in the foreground.



On Crater Rim Trail, you will find an extensive growth of plantlife—trees, shrubs, grasses, and flowers. If they are unknown to you, consult the self-guiding booklet in which some of the plants are identified.

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 Monument, is currently unmarked and inaccessible to the public.

A 0.2-mile trail begins at the parking area and leads to the bottom of the crater, providing a rare opportunity to see the inside of a volcanic mountain.

regulations

You can help preserve the monument's 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 animal or plantlife.

Use your trash bag and the trash cans that are provided.

Be alert to potential hazards at Capulin Mountain. The trails are well maintained but loose cinders on them can be hazardous, so wear rubber-soled shoes. Drive carefully on the Crater Road and be alert when backing your car in the parking lot. If you wander away from established trails, be on the lookout for rattlesnakes. Have a safe and enjoyable visit.

administration

Capulin Mountain National Monument, established on August 9, 1916, and containing 775 acres, is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is National Park Service, Capulin, NM 88414, is in immediate charge.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities for water, fish, wildlife, mineral, land, park, and recreational resources. Indian and Territorial affairs are other major concerns of America's "Department of Natural Resources." The Department works to assure the wisest choice in managing all our resources so each will make its full contribution to a better United States—now and in the future.

national park service

u.s. department of the interior

GPO 1980-341-609/100
Reprint 1980



CAPULIN MOUNTAIN NATIONAL MONUMENT • NEW MEXICO