

Capulin Mountain

National Monument
New Mexico

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



A wildflower display creates a vision of beauty.

A mule deer wanders through the snow.

Ladybugs give this plant a different look.

The porcupine blends well with the tree.



The Mountain Tells Its Story

Just yesterday, on the clock of geological time, the scene before you would have been one of fire, ash, glowing lava, and ear-shattering explosions, for Capulin Mountain is the cone of a volcano that was active only about 10,000 years ago. This mountain represents the last stage of a great period of volcanism that had begun about 2 million years earlier. Evidence of this activity can be seen in the scores of nearby volcanic hills and peaks. The largest of these is the Sierra Grande, an extinct volcano rising some 670 meters (2,200 feet) above the surrounding plain, about 16 kilometers (10 miles) to the southeast. And northwest of Capulin are a number of mesas that are capped with lava, the three largest of which are Barella, Raton, and Johnson mesas.

In this great volcanic arena, lava erupted in three flows, each separated by long periods

of inactivity. The last series of eruptions created Capulin Mountain, whose conical form rises more than 305 meters (1,000 feet) above its base to 2,494 meters (8,182 feet) above sea level. The mountain consists chiefly of loose cinders, ash, and other rock debris. These materials were spewed out by successive eruptions and fell back upon the vent, piling up to form the conical mound.

The symmetry of Capulin Mountain was preserved because lava did not flow from the main crater but from secondary vents located at the western base of the cone. After the eruptions ceased, vegetation gained a foothold on the steep, unstable slopes, and in time the mountain became stabilized as the dense root growth and the forces of nature changed the volcanic matter into soil. The great variety and abundance of vegetation on the mountain today lends it a special

beauty. Part of the mountain is grassland and part, forest, consisting of pinyon pine, ponderosa pine, and juniper. Throughout the park, shrubs such as mountain mahogany, chokecherry, Gambel oak, and squawbush are also found. Legend has it that the mountain was named "Capulin" (Cah-poo-LEEN) after the Spanish word for chokecherry. By walking Capulin's trails, you can become acquainted with the plant and animal life. Besides the flora and fauna, you can see four states on a clear day from the highest point on the Crater Rim Trail.

What the future holds for Capulin is uncertain, for scientists classify any volcano less than 25,000 years old as geologically recent and potentially active. Whether Capulin will revert to its old ways and erupt again is unknown.

General Park Information

Your first stop should be at the visitor center 1 kilometer (0.6 miles) from the park entrance. Here you can learn of the immense power of volcanoes from the audiovisual program on eruptions similar to those that created Capulin Mountain. Here, too, park personnel can answer your questions about volcanoes and the area. The restrooms in the visitor center are accessible to the handicapped. The visitor center is open 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 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

A 60-meter (200-foot)

trail behind the visitor center with plaques describing plants and volcanic phenomena was especially designed for handicapped persons. At the western base of the mountain, just beyond the visitor center, you will find water and modern restrooms in the picnic area. Campgrounds are located in Capulin, Folsom, and Raton. Food and beverages are available in Capulin, Folsom, Des Moines, and Raton. Overnight accommodations can be found in Des Moines, Raton, and Clayton, New Mexico, and Trinidad, Colorado.

Besides the lure of the volcanic cone, plant and animal life can offer dazzling seasonal shows that will enhance your time here. During the late spring and early

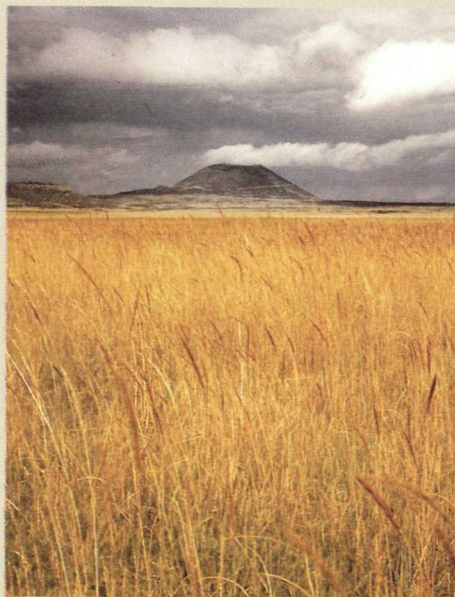
summer, depending on the rainfall, wildflowers present a colorful mosaic among the cinders and other vegetation. Prominent in the wildflower display are cone-flowers, lupine, golden pea, paintbrush, penstemon, verbena, and sunflower.

For the birdwatcher, spring brings a variety of songbirds: warblers, black-headed grosbeaks, bluebirds, chipping sparrows, gold finches, and other species. Their songs fill the air at dawn and dusk.

Regulations and Safety

You can help preserve the park's beauty and natural features by observing a few regulations. It is unlawful to

remove or disturb any geologic specimens, to use or display firearms, or to destroy, injure, or disturb any animal or plant. 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 can make them hazardous, so wear rubber-soled shoes when hiking. Visitors with known heart and respiratory conditions should use caution while walking at this high elevation. Stay on established trails, be on the lookout for rattlesnakes. If you see a snake, remain calm, retreat slowly, and report the sighting to a park ranger.



Capulin Mountain

National Monument
New Mexico

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

A Walk into a Volcano

Have you ever wanted to walk into a volcano? Well, Capulin Mountain is one of the few places in the world where you can do that. A 3-kilometer (2-mile) road spirals to the summit, ending at a parking area, where two self-guiding trails begin. One trail, 0.3 kilometers (0.2 miles) long, goes down to the bottom of the crater to the vent and gives you an unusual opportunity to see the inside of a volcanic mountain. The second is the Crater Rim Trail, 1.6 kilometers (1 mile) long, a self-guiding path that follows the rim all the way around. The trail begins with a

moderate climb, but once on the rim you will find the going fairly easy until you begin the descent to the parking lot. From the trail, you can also look out over the land through which the Cimarron Cut-Off of the Santa Fe Trail passed. During the late-19th century, wagon trains bound for Fort Union traveled this route. 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 rangeland, broken by volcanic hills and mesas. Be sure to hike both trails. It's not

often that you can walk so brazenly in a volcano.

Located near Capulin Mountain is the famous Folsom site where artifacts of prehistoric man were first found associated with the fossil bones of extinct animals. The site was excavated in 1928 and 1929 by the Denver Museum of Natural History. It is on private property and is closed to the public.

Getting to the Park

Capulin Mountain National Monument is located in extreme northeastern New Mexico. Entrance to the park is from New Mexico 325, 5 kilometers (3 miles) north of the town of Capulin. Capulin is 93 kilometers (58 miles) west of Clayton on U.S. 64 and 87 and is 48 kilometers (30 miles) east of Raton and I-25.

The park is open and accessible the year around. The road to the summit, however, may be closed occasionally for a few days each winter by snow.

Administration

Capulin Mountain National Monument,

established on August 9, 1916, and containing 358 hectares (775 acres), is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Capulin, NM 88414, is in charge.

Lava Flows

Besides the major roads, the map shows the extent of the lava flows that this volcano produced. From the ground it is hard to tell the area covered by the lava, so the positions have been plotted on this map. As you can see, the flows go considerably beyond the park boundaries. You can get an idea of their size when you remember that the park is just slightly larger than 2.6 square kilometers (1 square mile).

