

El Malpais

National Monument
U.S. Department of the Interior

The Zuni-Acoma Trail



ROCK CAIRN

AN ANCIENT TRAIL

This trail across the lava is part of an old Indian trail connecting the pueblos of Acoma and Zuni, already ancient when Europeans first arrived. Some pottery found along the trail is almost as old as the lava, and Zuni and Acoma traditions tell of the fiery birth of these rocks. This trail may be a thousand years old.

You will cross lava "bridges" built by the ancestral Zuni and

Acoma, such as the one over the lava crack to the right of the exhibits at the trailhead.

Many of the present rock cairns were built long before Europeans arrived. We have not changed them. To protect this special place, **please do not disturb artifacts or the pristine terrain. It's the law; it's also a legacy for our children and grandchildren.**

THE TRAILHEAD

The Zuni-Acoma Trail begins on State Highway 53, 16 miles south of I-40, 1 1/2 miles into the park from the northern monument boundary sign. To help us find out what our

visitors need and want in this new park, please get a free backcountry permit from a park ranger or at the El Malpais Information Center in Grants.

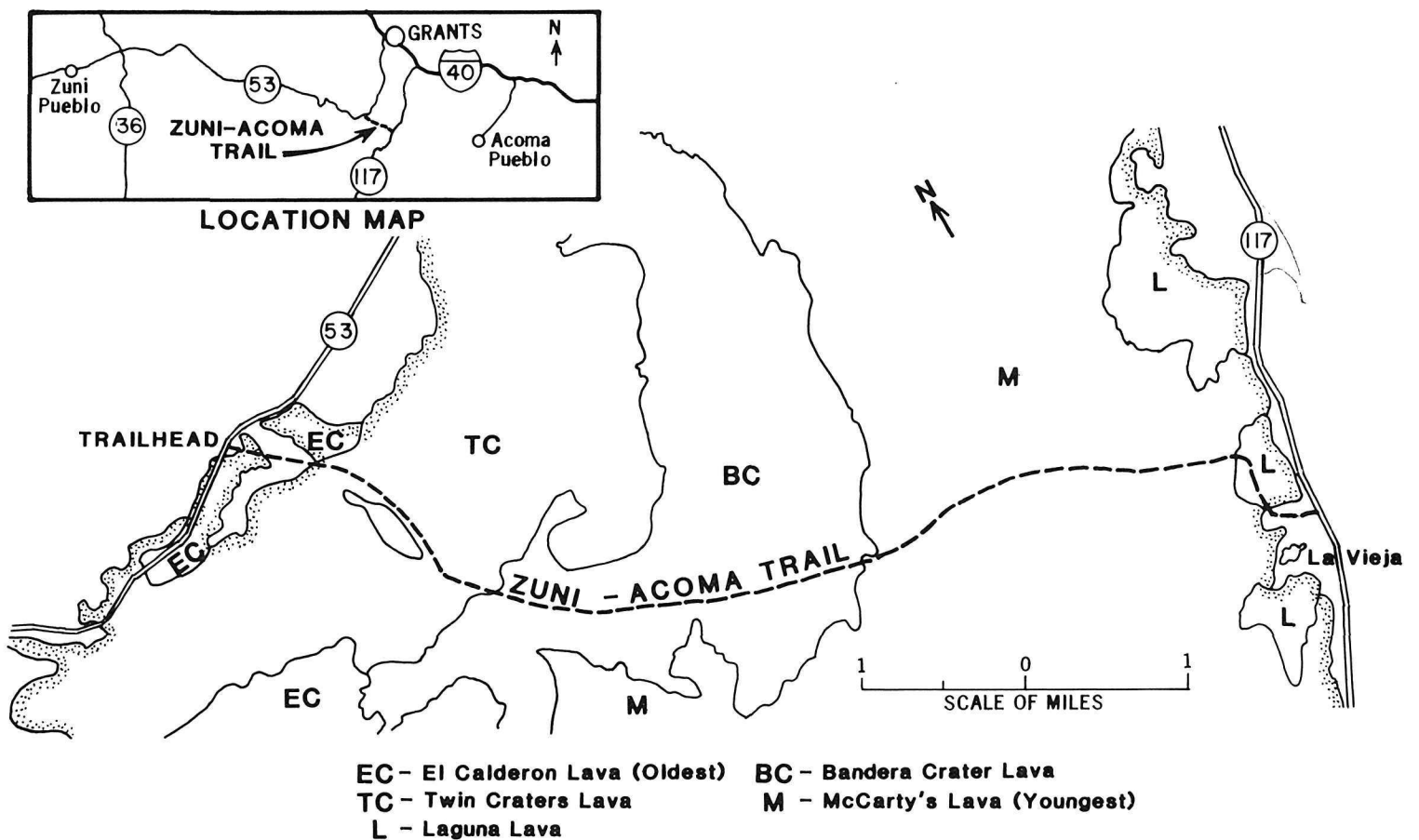
FOR YOUR SAFETY, PLEASE -

THIS IS A RUGGED TRAIL. It is 7 miles across, and takes about 6-7 hours to hike one-way. Carry plenty of water, and you'll want a hat. It is hot out there in summer, and the black lava stores heat. Wear sturdy hiking boots, as most of

the time you are walking on uneven lava. You should not hike this trail alone. It is marked with rock cairns, but they can be hard to see. You may have to stand at one cairn while your partner looks for the next one.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Bureau of Land Management/
National Park Service
El Malpais Information Center
620 E. Santa Fe Street,
Grants, New Mexico 87020
Telephone (505) 285-5406



THE ANCIENT LANDSCAPE

The valley was not always filled with lava. Perhaps only a million years ago, short as geologists count time, this was a typical valley, carved into sandstones and limestones laid down about 260 million years ago. A stream probably ran through it. Then over several centuries lava broke through the earth's crust and emptied into the valley, to cool and harden into the rugged flows you see today.

As you step onto the trail, the first lava is the earliest that emptied into the valley. It came from El Calderon, the cinder cone 4 miles west. Though you walk on it only at the beginning of the trail, this flow underlies most of the other lava you will see.

Soon you cross onto younger lava, with less plant life and less weathering. It came from Twin Craters, 7 miles north-west near Bandera Crater. Geologists call this chunky lava aa (pronounced ah-ah), a term used in Hawaii, where this kind of lava is common. In the middle of this flow you walk past a limestone "island" the Acomas call Encerrito, (surrounded).

About 2 1/2 miles out you cross onto even younger lava, the Bandera Flow from Bandera Crater itself. This flow has the most extensive lava tubes in the El Malpais.

About a mile farther you step onto the youngest lava in the valley, the McCarty Flow, which started about 8 miles southwest and flowed north. It is only 700-1000 years old. This *pahoehoe* (pa-hoy-hoy), "ropey lava," has many sinkholes and much less vegetation.

Just before you reach State Road 117, you cross down onto the older, underlying Laguna Flow, erupted from the volcano called Hoya de Cibola, about 14 miles west of this area.

Finally across, you stand once again on ancient sandstones on the other side. In a memorable hike, you've crossed lava flows that wound over and around one another, filling this valley with fire and smoke in each spectacular episode.