

EL MORRO NATIONAL MONUMENT, NEW MEXICO

El Morro

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Rising some 200 feet above the valley floor, El Morro is a massive mesa-point of sandstone, forming a striking landmark. It was named by the Spanish conquistadors who used the place, with its large natural basin of rain and melted snow, as a camping spot in the 17th century. The Spanish word "morro" means "headland," or "bluff." These sheltered coves also served later American travelers to the West.

Many of the travelers left a record of their passage by cutting inscriptions into the soft sandstone, thus giving the landmark its other name of "Inscription Rock." Two years before the founding of Jamestown, and 15 years before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock, the first Spanish inscription was made by Don Juan de Oñate in April 1605.

But the Spaniards were not the first to record their presence. On the very top of El Morro lie ruins, still largely unexcavated, of Zuñi Indian pueblos abandoned long before the coming of the Spaniards. And carved on the rock itself are hundreds of petroglyphs left by these ancient people.

The inscriptions carved in stone at El Morro can be likened to a register of modern Indians, and the people of Spain, Mexico, and the United States. As such, it symbolizes the cultural mixture that took place in the Southwest, which today exhibits a manner of living that is highly distinctive.

The "Seven Cities of Cibola"

In the years following the conquest of Mexico, stories reached the Spaniards of seven golden cities far to the north, called Cibola. The actual basis for the rumor was simply the six villages of the Zuñi Indians, whose own words for themselves and their country today are words not unlike Cibola. The story of the seven cities was stimulated especially by the arrival in Mexico of Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, in 1536, after 8 years of wandering westward from the gulf coast of Texas, during which he heard of the pueblos of New Mexico.

In 1539, a Franciscan, Fray Marcos de Niza, traveled northward up the west coast of Mexico in search of Cibola, guided by Cabeza de Vaca's companion, the Moorish slave Estevan. Estevan traveled far ahead of Fray Marcos and was killed by the Zuñis. Word of his death reached the friar somewhere in Arizona. Historians disagree as to whether Fray Marcos himself actually reached Cibola.

The following year, Fray Marcos accompanied the famous expedition of Francisco Vasquez de Coronado, which on July 7, 1540, took Hawikuh, the first or southernmost of the six Zuñi pueblos, and spent the rest of the summer there before going eastward to the Rio Grande, probably passing El Morro on the way to Ácoma.

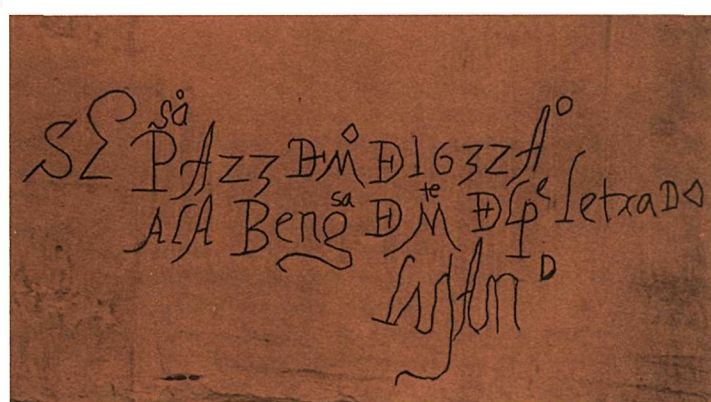
The first post-Coronado expedition, that of Chamuscado and Rodriguez in 1581, came up the Rio Grande and then traveled overland to Zuñi, passing by Ácoma and, probably, El Morro. The expedition of 1583, headed by Antonio de Espejo and Fray Francisco Beltran, also came from Ácoma to Zuñi, certainly by way of El Morro, which is mentioned in the journal of Diego Pérez de Luxán, as "El Estanque del Peñol"—The Pool by the Great Rock.

The Founding of New Mexico

In the summer of 1598, the expedition of Juan de Oñate came up the Rio Grande and founded, beside San Juan pueblo, the first Spanish settlement in New Mexico. Oñate immediately made rapid trips to all the New Mexico pueblos, going to the Zuñi and Hopi (Moqui) towns in the autumn of 1598 and passing El Morro en route. It was at El Morro that Oñate, on the way back from Hopi and Zuñi, learned of the fight at Ácoma in which 15 Spaniards were killed by the Indians.

In 1604, Oñate finally made the trip westward beyond the Hopi villages, which he had planned for 6 years, crossing western Arizona to the Colorado River and descending that stream to its mouth. On his way home in the spring, he stopped at El Morro and carved on it the earliest known inscription: "Passed by here the Adelantado Don Juan de Oñate, from the discovery of the Sea of the South, the 16th of April of 1605." The "Sea of the South" was the Gulf of California.

Within a few months a punitive expedition came to Zuñi from Sante Fe and left this inscription on El Morro: "They passed on March 23, 1632, to the avenging of the death of Father Letrado.—Lujan."

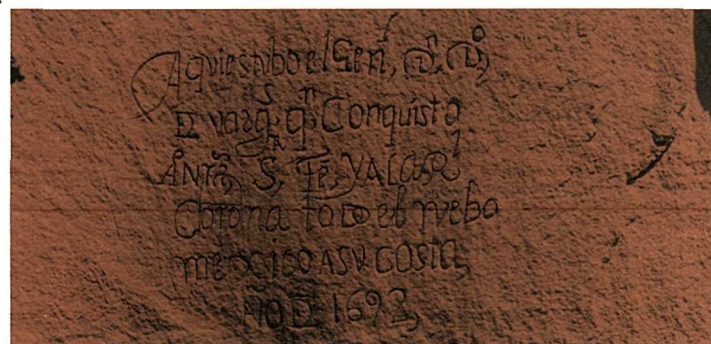


In October 1672, there was another death at Hawikuh, when raiding Apaches sacked the church and killed Fray Pedro de Ayala, who had been assigned there only 2 months before.

Rebellion and Reconquest

The final violence—and the third death—occurred at Halona (Zuñi) and was one of a group of simultaneous killings. Spasmodic native resistance to the Spanish conquistadors culminated in a plot by which, in August 1680, all the pueblos rose in revolt, killing priests and laymen at the pueblos. Fray Juan del Bal was killed at Zuñi, and the church was burned.

The first stage in the Spanish reconquest came in 1692, when Don Diego de Vargas, with a small force, visited all the pueblos and, without bloodshed, received their submission to the Spanish crown. De Vargas followed the usual route from Ácoma via El Morro to Zuñi, and on to the Hopi villages. He returned by way of Zuñi to El Morro, but on leaving El Morro he struck out southeastward for Socorro and El Paso. Perhaps it was just before taking this new route that de Vargas left his inscription on the rock: "Here was the General Don Diego de Vargas who conquered for our Holy Faith, and for the Royal Crown, all of New Mexico at his own expense, year of 1692."



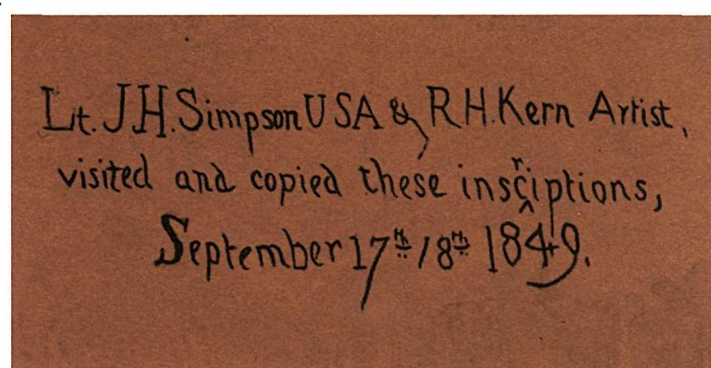
Upon actual reoccupation of New Mexico after his initial expedition, Vargas encountered resistance among the pueblos, despite their supposed submission. For several years there was strife.

The last incident of the reconquest was the unsuccessful campaign of Gov. Don Feliz Martinez against the Moqui villages in 1716. Don Feliz also left a message on El Morro as he followed the usual route, that he intended "the reduction and conquest of Moqui." But this was never accomplished.

The 18th century was a relatively quiet period in Spanish New Mexico. Travelers passed by El Morro and left their names, notably the Bishop of Durango on his way to Zuñi in 1737 on an ecclesiastical inspection in connection with his claim to authority over the New Mexico missions. The last Spanish inscription is dated 1774.

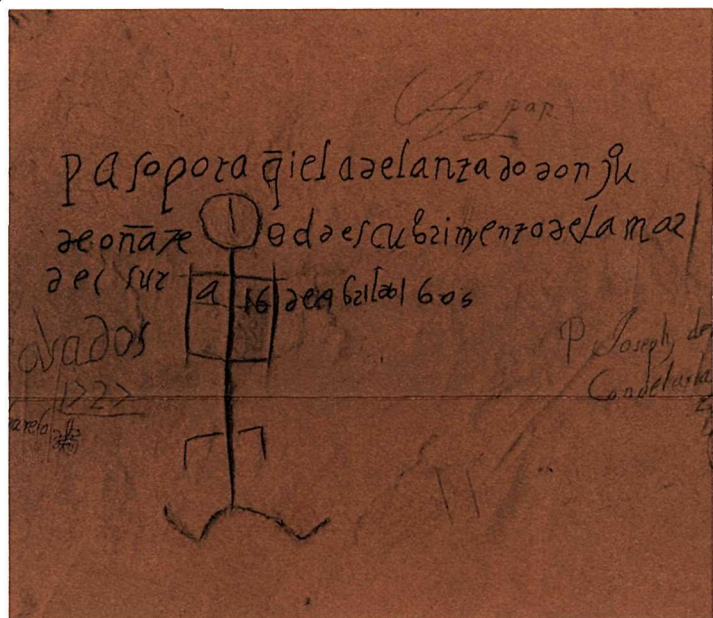
The Anglo-Americans

Soon after the occupation of Sante Fe by the army of Gen. Stephen W. Kearny in August 1846, American Army officers traveled over parts of the territory. The first of them to visit El Morro was Lt. J. H. Simpson, accompanied by the artist R. H. Kern, who copied the early inscriptions in September 1849.



After Simpson's visit, many other names, including those of emigrants, traders, Indian agents, soldiers, surveyors, and settlers, were added to the rock.

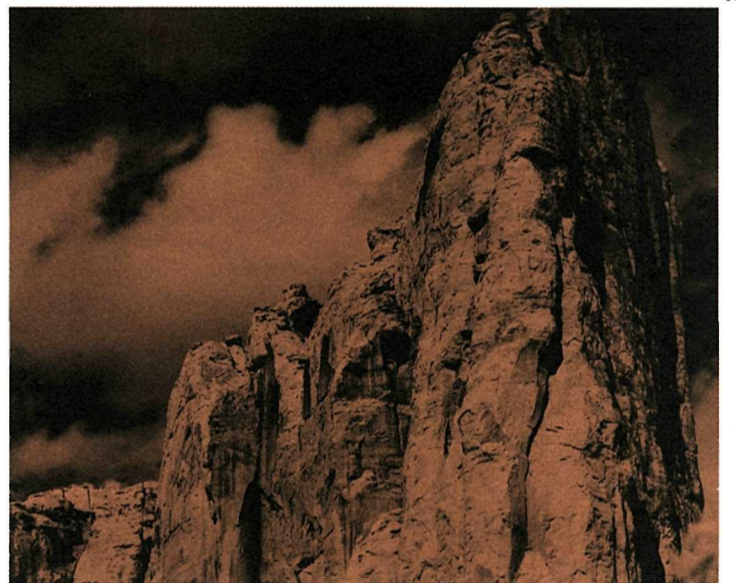
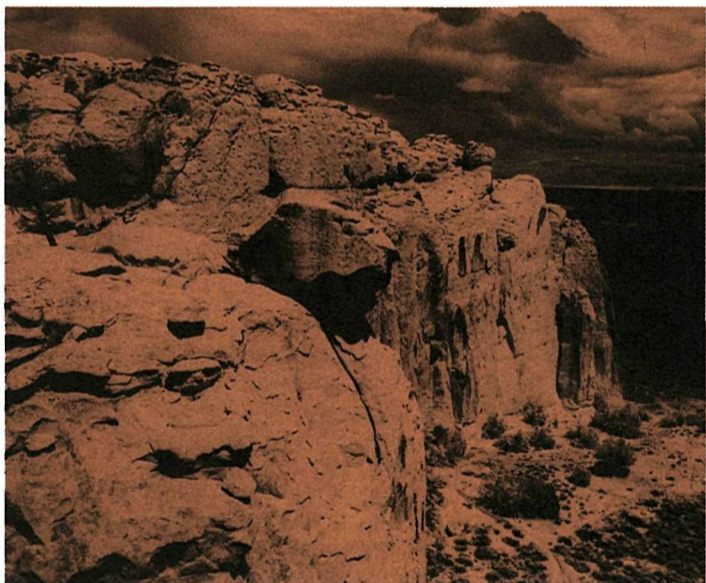
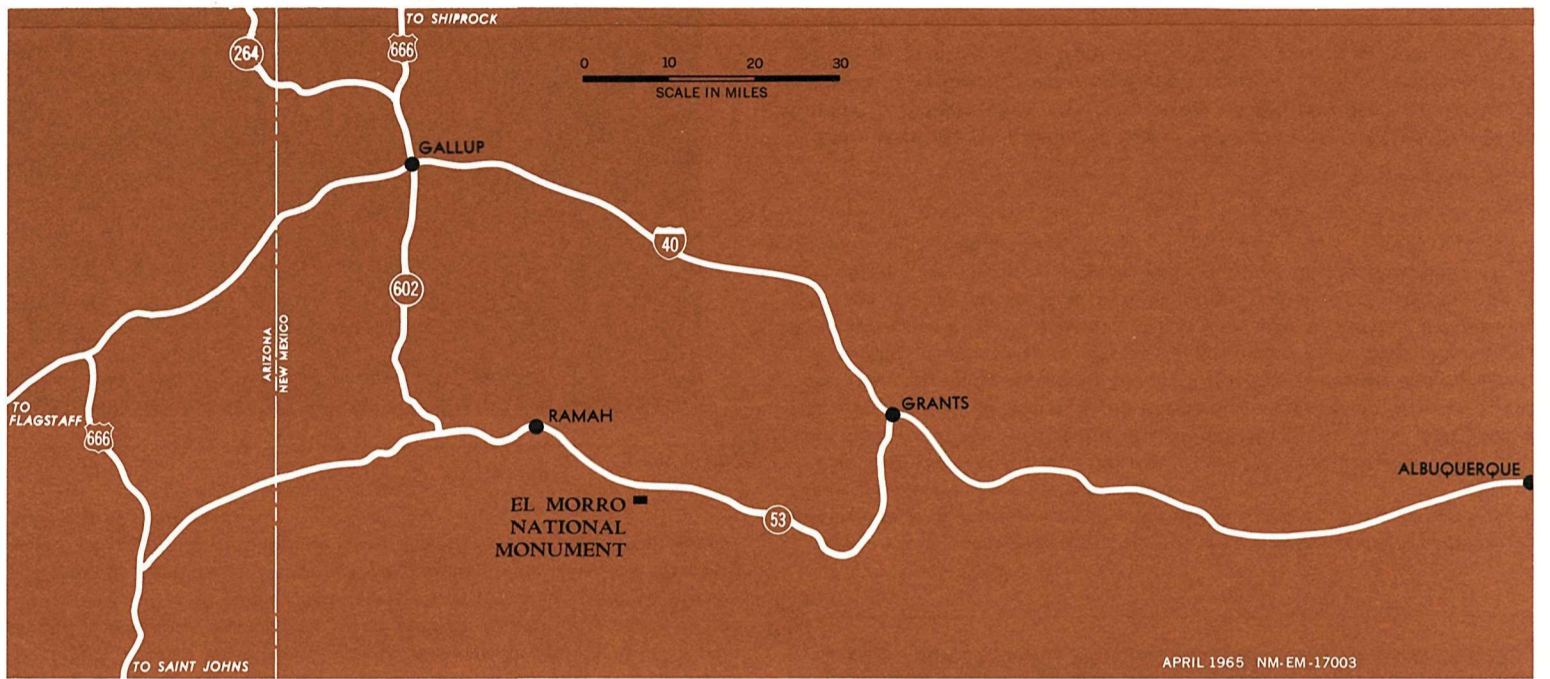
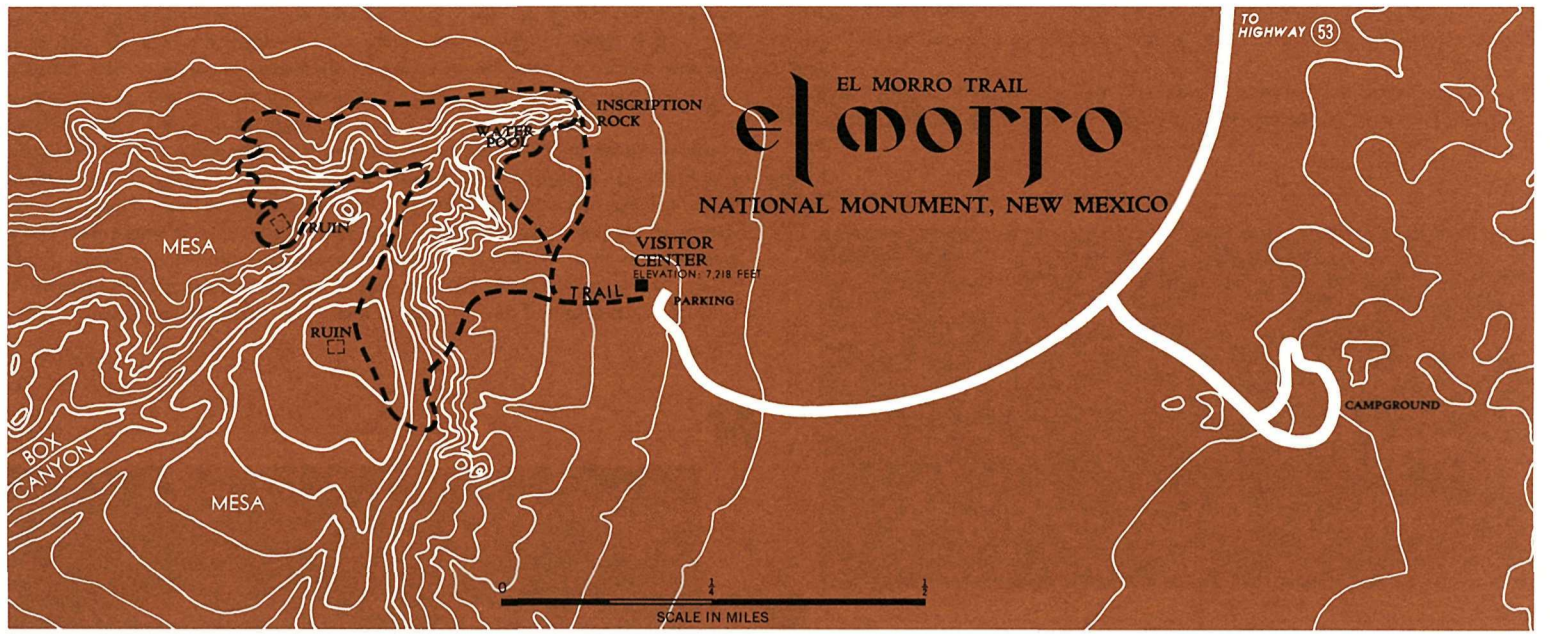
One early traveler of special interest was Lt. Edward F. Beale. In 1857, Beale's camel caravan passed El Morro en route to Zuñi and the west coast. These camels had been imported for use in the arid Southwest.



The Mission Period

In 1629, a reinforcement of the corps of friars made possible the extension of the missionary sphere to include on the east the Salinas pueblos of "Gran Quivira" (now a National Monument), Abo, and Quarai, and on the west the Zuñi and Hopi pueblos. Establishment of Franciscan missions at Hawikuh and Halona (the surviving pueblo of Zuñi), in August 1629, is commemorated by a poem carved on El Morro in praise of the strength and valor of Gov. Don Francisco Manuel de Silva Nieto, who alone made it possible to carry the faith to Zuñi, according to his statement.

Neither the Hopis nor the Zuñis took kindly to conversion. Within a few years the priest of Awatovi, the major Hopi mission, was poisoned; and the priest of Hawikuh and another friar on his way west from Zuñi were killed and scalped. The Zuñis fled for refuge to the top of Towayalane (Corn Mesa).



About Your Visit

El Morro National Monument is 58 miles southeast of Gallup via N. Mex. 602 and 53, and it is 43 miles west of Grants via N. Mex. 53. Overnight accommodations and food can be obtained at Grants and Gallup. There is a small campground and picnic area, which may be closed for short periods during inclement weather. Camping and picnic supplies are available at Ramah, 13 miles west of the park.

Your first stop should be at the visitor center. Here you may learn of the rich history of the surrounding area.

A self-guiding trail, with wayside exhibits, leads from the visitor center to and along the base of the cliff, which is filled with historic inscriptions, and on to the top of the mesa and the pueblo ruins.

SAFETY TIPS

You will be entering a scenic area preserved in its natural condition. Remain alert and remember to be careful to insure your own safety. Watch for falling rocks. You will encounter high cliffs and rough terrain; the altitude is 7200 feet, so avoid overexertion. Please maintain close control of children.

Administration

El Morro National Monument, established on December 8, 1906, and containing 1,278 acres, is administered by the National Park 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 inspiration of the people.

A superintendent, whose address is Ramah, NM 87321, is in immediate charge of the monument.

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

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