

PLANNING YOUR VISIT

Rising above the valley floor, a massive sandstone bluff was a welcome landmark for weary travelers. Today called El Morro (or Inscription Rock), it marked what became a popular campsite.

Prehistoric Indians were the first to find the waterhole hidden at its base. After the Colorado Plateau was abandoned, people of the Anasazi culture moved into the valley. Around A.D. 1275 they began construction of two villages on top of the bluff. By the 1300s, at least 1500 people occupied the largest village, today called Atsinna.

Perhaps seeking a better environment, the Anasazi left their homes by A.D. 1400. For reasons unknown to us, they carved figures, animals, birds, and geometric designs along the cliff. Today these carvings, called petroglyphs, remind us that the Anasazi were the first to leave their mark here.

March 11, 1583, found a Spanish expedition resting by the base of the massive bluff. Noting the secluded pool, they named it "El Estanque del Penol" (the waterhole of the rock). Soon this place would become a popular campsite for the Spaniards.

In 1598, Don Juan de Onate established the first Spanish colony in what is now New Mexico. While exploring the vast territory, Onate stopped at El Morro many times. However, it wasn't until 1605 that he changed the sandstone face forever. On the 16th of April, his discovery of the southern sea was deeply engraved in the stone, recording his success for all to see.

As late as 1774 lengthy messages were carved by the Spaniards. These historic writings, with words running together and unique abbreviations, are a challenge for today's readers.

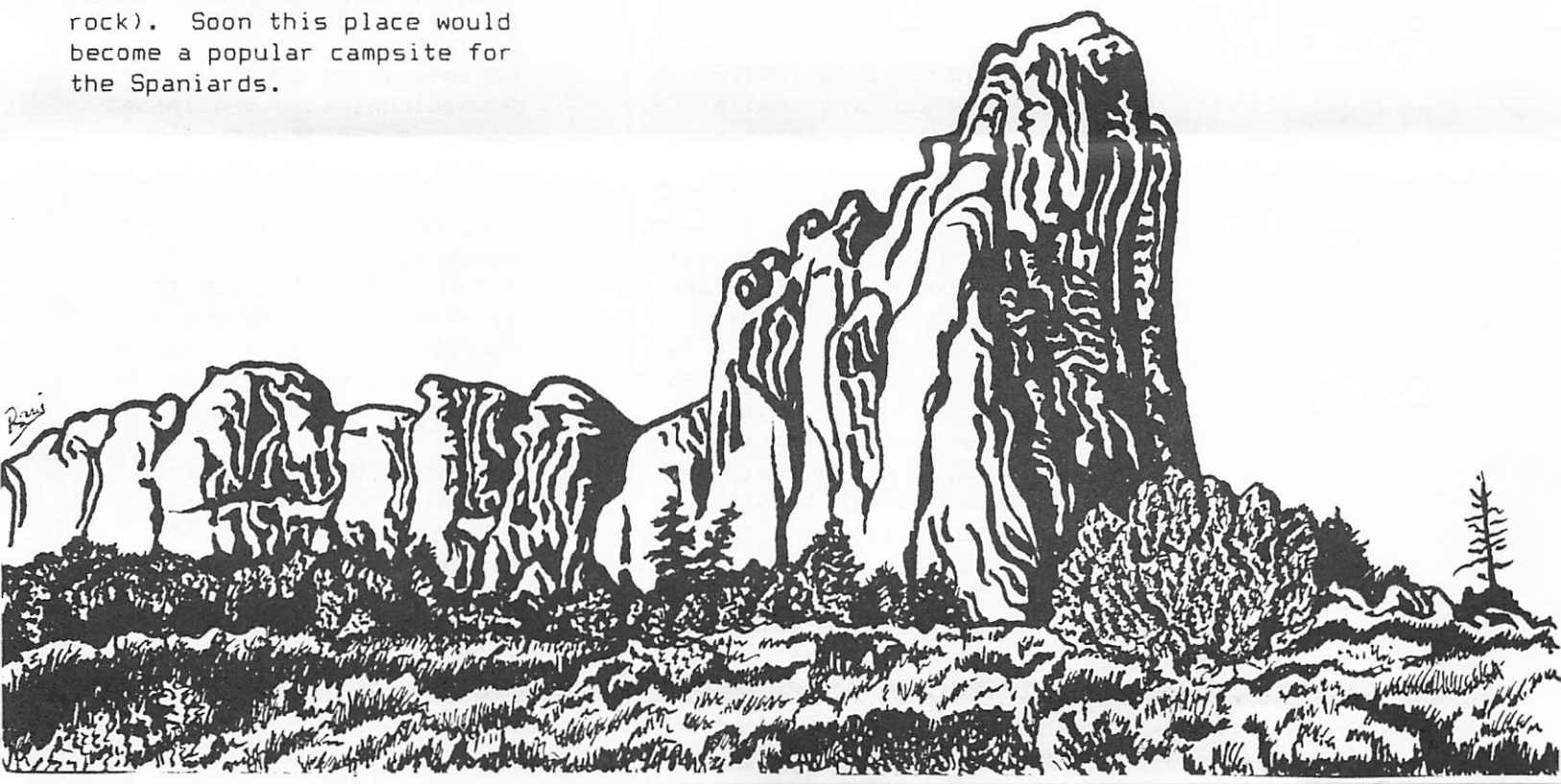
The late 1700s and early 1800s were a time of cultural and political turmoil for New Mexico. Changing from a Mexican republic to a United States territory, New Mexico played a major role in westward expansion.

U.S. military expeditions were sent to explore the new territory. In September 1849, an

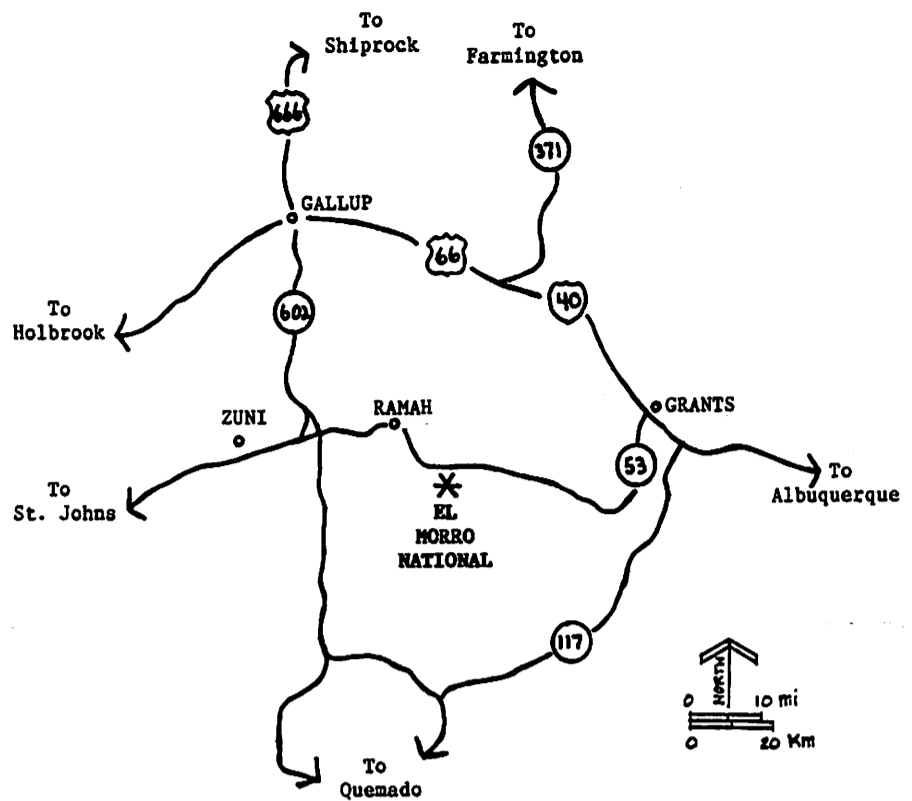
Army lieutenant and an artist made their camp at El Morro. The artist spent two days copying the petroglyphs and Spanish messages. Lieutenant J. H. Simpson and artist R. H. Kern recorded their visit, becoming the first to leave an English inscription on the bluff.

Attracted by the reliable waterhole, grass, and shelter, several military expeditions encamped here. When the trails west opened, pioneers, and, later, railroad survey crews passed by. Many left their autographs, carving their names, dates and hometowns into the stone.

Today, some visitors can trace their ancestry to names inscribed upon El Morro.



LOCATION



ACTIVITIES

VISITOR CENTER: Your visit to El Morro begins here. Rangers can answer your questions and orient you to the facilities and self-guiding trails. An entrance fee of \$1 per person up to \$3 per carload is required. Children under 17 and seniors 62 and older are free. Golden Eagle, Golden Age and Golden Access passes are issued and honored. An annual El Morro pass can be purchased for \$10.

The visitor center is open daily 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. Memorial Day through Labor Day; 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. the remainder of the year. The monument is closed on Christmas Day.

MUSEUM: Museum exhibits located in the visitor center span 700 years of human history. A video program provides an introduction to the area.

SELF-GUIDING TRAILS: Two self-guiding trails are available. Inscription Trail is a one-half mile round trip walk along a paved surface. It takes you to Inscription Rock where you can see the petroglyphs, old Spanish messages and 1800s autographs. Mesa Top Trail is a two-mile round trip hike across varied terrain. It begins with Inscription Rock and continues to the Anasazi ruins above. This trail focuses on the geology and archeology of the area. A 200-foot climb and the uneven sandstone surface make this a more strenuous hike.

Sturdy walking shoes and water are necessary.

The trails are open daily 8:00 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Memorial Day through Labor Day; 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. the remainder of the year.

PICNICKING: Picnic tables are located near the visitor center.

CAMPING: A free nine-site primitive campground operates on a first-come, first-served basis. Water is available May through October. Rangers conduct campfire programs on summer weekends.

BUS TOURS AND GROUPS: Rangers provide general history talks for organized groups. Please contact the monument in advance to make arrangements.

ACCESSIBILITY: Inscription Trail, picnic tables and one campsite are accessible to persons using wheelchairs. A wheelchair and two infant carriers can be borrowed from the visitor center.

TAKE PRIDE: Please help to preserve our past for the future. Do not touch the inscriptions or deface any surface. Do not pick up or remove any objects from the archeological sites.

INFORMATION: For further information write or call:
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