

VISITOR'S GUIDE TO FORT UNION

Fort Union National Monument is one of the newest areas of the National Park System, having been established in the spring of 1956. In years to come, the Park Service hopes to do much preservation and restoration work here, as well as provide a museum with exhibits of the frontier period.

For the present, if you will walk the circuit of the ruins (about one-half mile) and read the description herein, you will get a good idea of the layout of the Fort and of the military operation here. As you walk, please keep in mind the following:

1. Fort Union is an outdoor museum, belonging to all the people of the United States. Do not remove or disturb anything that you see here.
2. The walls of the ruins are unstable. Until the Park Service is able to make repairs, these walls are dangerous. Observe the "DANGER" signs; do not climb onto any wall.
3. In summer there are occasionally rattlesnakes in ruins. You are advised to keep out of tall grass, weeds, and rubble piles near the walls. For safety, stay on the path.

ENJOY YOURSELVES If you have questions, come to the headquarters and ask a Park Ranger.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

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THE TRAIL THROUGH THE RUINS

As you walk along the path, you will find signs labeling many of the rooms and buildings. At each sign, you may refer to a corresponding paragraph of this text for a more complete explanation.

Company Barracks: This is one of four identical buildings which housed most of the permanent garrison of the Fort. Each of these barracks measured 150 feet along the back wall, with two L's each 120 feet long enclosing a court in the center. This building accommodated about 100 men, or one company of infantry by 1800 standards; sleeping quarters were in the main section, with offices and supply rooms in one L, messhall and kitchen in the other.

Company Barracks - Corral Beyond: A long row of rooms here probably furnished quarters for a company or troop of cavalry, the horses being stabled in sheds in the corral alongside. A similar long barracks once existed beside the far corral.

Well: In the center of each barracks court was a well. There seems to be some doubt that all of these were actually dug deep enough to reach water; it is possible that some of them were cisterns, filled by collection of rainwater from the roofs. Oldtimers say, however, that they remember seeing wells over 100 ft. in depth at various places in the Fort.

Laundresses' Quarters: In those days before washing machines, the Fort's laundry was done by soldiers' wives who lived in the small rooms along the east side of this street. To be employed here, a woman was obliged to show a marriage certificate as evidence of her status as wife to some soldier of the garrison!

Military Prison: This cell-block was formerly enclosed by an adobe outer building; most of the adobe walls are gone, but the stone cells are as sound as ever. In fact, they would still be escape-proof if the iron doors were to be replaced. This was a Territorial Prison, used for civilian as well as military wrongdoers.

Post Guardhouse: Here was the headquarters of the military guard, from which the Sergeant and Corporals of the Guard operated the periodic posting and relief of sentries around the Fort. It may be presumed that the ceremonies of guard mount were held in the street here each afternoon.

Company Messhall: Here no doubt were voiced the soldiers' traditional complaints about the "chow" -- and you may be sure the ration was not particularly appealing in Civil War days! Local residents can remember seeing long brestle tables remaining in these messhalls some years after the Fort was abandoned in 1891.

Company Kitchen: This room is not much bigger than a kitchen in an average home today, and seems quite small for preparing meals for 100 men. As yet, nothing has been found out about the stoves or other equipment used by the cooks. The small room at the very end of the L was for ration storage.

Post Bakery: The remains of a large brick oven are to be seen. It is presumed that bread for the entire garrison was baked here daily.

Leaving Troop Area - Entering Supply Depot: This broad street separates the garrison area of the fort from the Quartermaster Depot. The supply services at Fort Union were on a large scale, and were in charge of a Quartermaster Officer who was frequently of higher rank than the Officer commanding the troops on the main post. Outlying forts as far away as Fort Defiance in Arizona were supplied from this depot.

Transportation Corral: All this northeast corner of the Fort was taken up with horse stables, wagon sheds, corncribs, haystacks, water troughs, feed racks, and other equipment necessary to run the huge freighting business which the Army carried on.

Teamsters' Quarters: The civilian wagon drivers who hauled freight under Army contract stayed here when they passed through, and took their meals in a messhall just to the north.

Shops Quadrangle: Here was the bustling center of a large repair and maintenance activity, mostly concerned with keeping the supply wagons rolling. Wheelwrights, blacksmiths, and carpenters occupied the shops on three sides, mending the damage from thousands of miles of rough trails. These craftsmen were mainly all civilians employed by the Quartermaster.

Mechanics' Quarters: This set of rooms contained dining room, kitchen, pantry, and bedrooms for carpenters, blacksmiths, wheelwrights, and other skilled civilian employees.

Water Tank and Pump Site: In the center of the court a water storage tank once stood; this was the center of fire fighting operations. In the 1870's underground water mains were laid to most of the buildings, and a pump here by the tank forced water through the mains to fire hydrants. In spite of these precautions, damaging fires did occur. The original depth of the well here is not known.

Telegraph Office: The telegraph line came down the valley beside the Santa Fe Trail from Raton; the wire arrived here in 1867 and was completed through to Santa Fe in 1868, linking New Mexico's capital with Denver and points east.

Quartermaster Storehouses: The five large buildings making up this northeast corner of the Depot provided warehouse and storage space for all the many items of military supply. Most of these supplies were hauled here over the trail, from Missouri in the first years, later from railheads in Kansas and Colorado. Grain for the livestock was one of the most bulky and costly items to be hauled in.

The walls of these buildings are in unsafe condition; entry into this area is forbidden until the structures can be repaired.

Commissary Storehouse: The large cellar here was presumably used for storage of perishable supplies. Records show that just after the Civil War a million pounds of bacon was auctioned off at Fort Union - perhaps from this very basement.

Cistern: This brick and plaster reservoir once had a domed brick roof. It was filled by runoff of water from the storehouse roofs.

Clerks' Quarters: This end building was evidently a dormitory for personnel of the Depot, either civilian or military.

Commissary Office: In this building was transacted the business of keeping the Army fed.

Office of the Quartermaster: The paper work connected with the supply depot was handled in this building. The large volume of quartermaster business required a number of clerks, who had quarters in a house down the row. Here also was the headquarters of the officers who commanded the Depot.

Quartermaster Officers' Quarters: The three homes here housed the officers of the Depot staff. Probably the one behind this sign was the home of the Depot Commander - it has a small cellar to distinguish it. The tree still living here is a Broad-leaf cottonwood; at one time a row of these trees was planted the full length of the parade ground.

Officers' Quarters: The nine dwellings in this row housed the officers of the troop garrison and their families. The center building, slightly larger, was the Post Commander's home. These houses, with their cool front porches and high ceilings, were quite elegant in their day. The design, with its flat roofs and brick copings, began the New Mexico Territorial style of architecture, which is widely seen around the state today. Notice from here the ruins of the first Fort Union (built in 1851) which are visible near the west edge of the valley, about a mile distant.

Hydrant: Many hydrant connections were tapped onto the water mains all around the Fort, but unfortunately all of the hydrants themselves were taken away before the establishment of the monument.

Home of the Commanding Officer: This house is larger than the other quarters and is furnished with a small cellar. The homes along this row were first occupied in 1865 or 1866.

Site of the Original Flagpole: Photographs of the Fort in 1866 show a tall flagpole here. It was probably moved later, because old local residents remember the stub of a large pole standing down at the south end of the parade ground.

Fortification: The path to the right leads about 300 yards to the remains of the earthworks or star redoubt, built in 1861 when the Confederates were threatening to take Fort Union in their march from Texas.