



Foundation Document Overview

Coronado National Memorial

Arizona



Contact Information

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Purpose



The purpose of CORONADO NATIONAL MEMORIAL is to commemorate and interpret Francisco Vázquez de Coronado's expedition and the enduring cultural influences of 16th century Spanish colonial exploration in the Americas. The national memorial also preserves the natural and human history of the area for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.

Significance

Significance statements express why Coronado National Memorial resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- The national memorial commemorates the first major European exploration of the American Southwest by Francisco Vázquez de Coronado in 1540–1542. This expedition brought to the region profound and lasting changes in areas such as language, technology, religion, animals, agriculture, and food.
- Coronado National Memorial provides exceptional views of the San Pedro River Valley, which has served as a migratory corridor and water source for wildlife and humans for thousands of years. The Coronado Expedition may have traveled this same route in their search for the “Seven Cities of Gold.”
- On the border between the United States and Mexico, Coronado National Memorial provides a unique opportunity to reflect on the complex relationship between the United States and Mexico.
- Coronado National Memorial, though a relatively small area of the Madrean Sky Island Complex, protects exceptional biodiversity due to its location at a rare intersection of four major biomes (Sierra Madre, Rocky Mountain, Chihuahuan Desert, and Sonoran Desert).



Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Expansive Views of the Border Region.** Expansive views of the US-Mexico international border, Montezuma Canyon, the San Pedro River Valley, and San Rafael Valley allow visitors to contemplate the rugged landscape that the Coronado Expedition may have traversed nearly 500 years ago.
- **Native Flora and Fauna of the Madrean Sky Island Ecosystem.** Nestled within the heart of the Madrean Archipelago in the Huachuca Mountains, Coronado National Memorial's ecosystem is remarkably diverse for its modest size. The park supports approximately 650 species of plants, thousands of invertebrate species, and an interesting collection of mammals including several threatened and endangered species.

Coronado National Memorial contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Cultural Resources in the Park.** Coronado National Memorial protects a unique concentration of pristine Archaic-aged human occupation sites in southeast Arizona as well as archeological sites spanning early, middle, and late Archaic periods, and historic sites related to mining and ranching and the Civilian Conservation Corps.
- **Coronado Cave and Karst Topography.** Coronado Cave is one of the most widely known caves in southeast Arizona due to its open public access. The cave also houses a unique microclimate that provides a home for a diverse community of insects and small animals.



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- While Francisco Vásquez de Coronado's exploration of the remote northwest frontier of Mexico did not achieve its goal of finding the fabled Seven Cities of Gold, Coronado National Memorial commemorates the lasting impact of the expedition in what is now part of the southwestern United States.
- The expedition opened the doors to the clash of southwestern cultures. Resultant influences are still reflected and felt in southwest cultures today.
- With the establishment of the Republic of Mexico in 1821, the evolution of political and physical boundaries continually impacted the lives of many people and restricted their ability to move freely across this region. In contrast, the wildlife knows no such boundaries and inhabits the park dictated only by food supply and the seasons.
- Sweeping views from Montezuma Pass reveal a vast and variable landscape full of history and hazards that inspires visitors to imagine distant places, or people seeking their fortunes or a new life.
- Coronado National Memorial is centered at a crossroads of four major environments (the Sierra Madre, Rocky Mountain, Chihuahua Desert, and Sonora Desert), providing opportunities to explore and study a vast and richly diverse plant and animal life where unique natural processes continue despite being surrounded by centuries-old human impacts.



Description

Located along the US-Mexican border in southeast Arizona, Coronado National Memorial was established by Congress as an international memorial in 1941 and designated a national memorial in 1952. The park is the only unit of the national park system that commemorates Francisco Vasquez de Coronado's expedition throughout the American Southwest and it preserves and interprets the natural and human history of the border region. Coronado National Memorial encompasses 4,750 acres of land within the Huachuca Mountains and the San Pedro River Valley and shares 3.3 miles of its boundary with Mexico. The Coronado Expedition (1540–1542) may have entered the United States via the San Pedro River Valley, which lies immediately east of the park. While the site chosen for the park does not contain physical evidence substantiating Coronado's actual route at the present-day international boundary, the site offers visitors panoramic views of the border region, including Montezuma Canyon, the Huachuca Mountain Range, the San Pedro River Valley, and more distant areas. As intended, the park has become a place to reflect upon the lasting impacts of the Coronado Entrada and the bi-national amity and bonds that continue to link the United States and Mexico.

Visitors can enjoy the scenic drive through the park to Montezuma Pass Overlook, an observation point that offers scenic views of the San Pedro and San Rafael valleys. This area also serves as a trailhead that connects to four designated hiking trails including the Coronado Peak Trail and the southern terminus of the Arizona National Scenic Trail. Coronado Cave, which is open to visitation without a guide, can be accessed via a short trail from the park visitor center.

Coronado National Memorial is managed as part of the NPS Southeast Arizona Group (SEAZ), which also includes Chiricahua National Monument and Fort Bowie National Historic Site.

