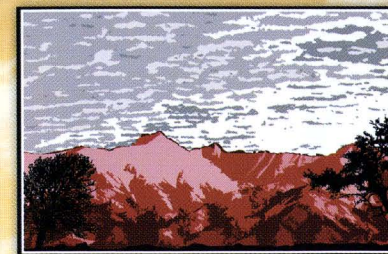


Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area



SANGRE DE CRISTO NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

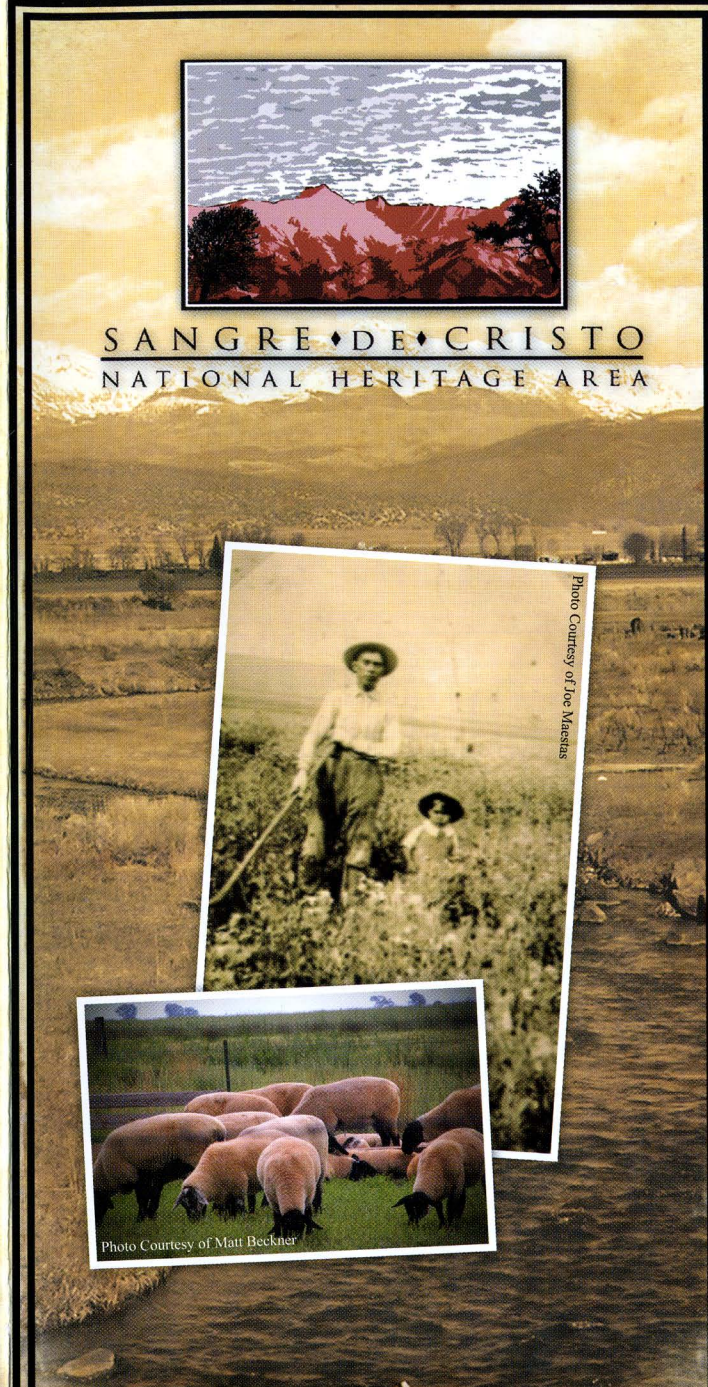


Photo Courtesy of Joe Maestas

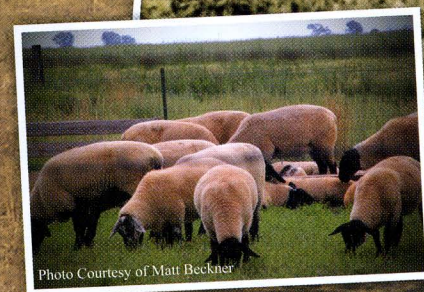


Photo Courtesy of Matt Beckner

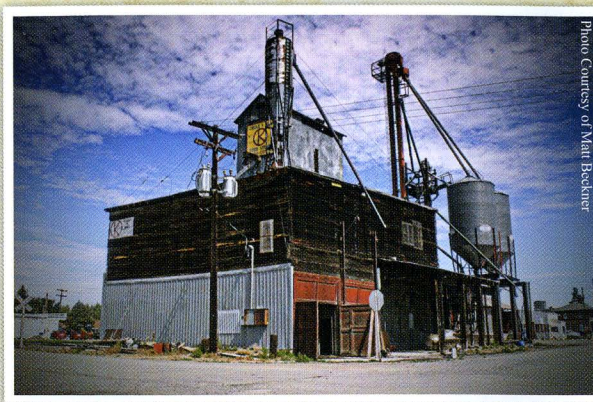


Photo Courtesy of Matt Beckner

The mission of the Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area is to promote, preserve, protect, and interpret its profound historical, religious, environmental, geographic, geologic, cultural, and linguistic resources. These efforts will contribute to the overall national story, engender a spirit of pride and self-reliance, and create a legacy in the Colorado counties of Alamosa, Conejos and Costilla.



Photo Courtesy of Kent Anderson



SANGRE DE CRISTO NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

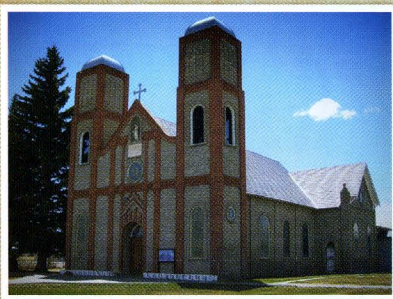
www.sdcnha.org

DISCOVER OUR HERITAGE

Discover traces of culture representing the rich heritage of the moradas, placitas, historic churches and murals. Traditions materialize through the art, weaving, and cooking practices that stretch back in time hundreds of years. The unique architecture of living quarters and plazas built of adobe surrounded by jacal fences can still be found today.

For centuries, native peoples have lived in the three counties that comprise the Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area. Mt. Blanca, rising 14,345 feet above the valley, was given the name *Sisnaajini* by the Dine (Navajo) people and is considered a sacred landmark. Evidence of Ute, Apache, Tiwa, Tewa, Comanche, Kiowa, and Arapaho tribes can be found today in petroglyphs and pictographs that narrate the stories of their culture.

Abundant natural resources of fertile soil, flowing water, dense forests, and scenic beauty such as the Great Sand Dunes and towering mountain ranges, attracted early settlers in their quest for new homes.



San Luis, the oldest town in Colorado, is home of the first irrigation ditches used by an agrarian society. The Guadalupe Land Grant and Sangre de Cristo Land Grant gave ranchers and farmers the land

they needed to raise cattle, sheep, and crops. They viewed this land as the foundation to build their communities and future generations.

Puffing their way across the San Luis Valley, the first steam engines emerged after the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad built a trestle bridge across the Rio Grande River. Waves of settlers increased and towns emerged. Families sought to make a new life for themselves, bringing their religious beliefs with them. Their traditions and cultures can still be found today in close-knit communities throughout the area. Agriculture thrived and persists today with the production of potatoes, alfalfa, lettuce and other crops.

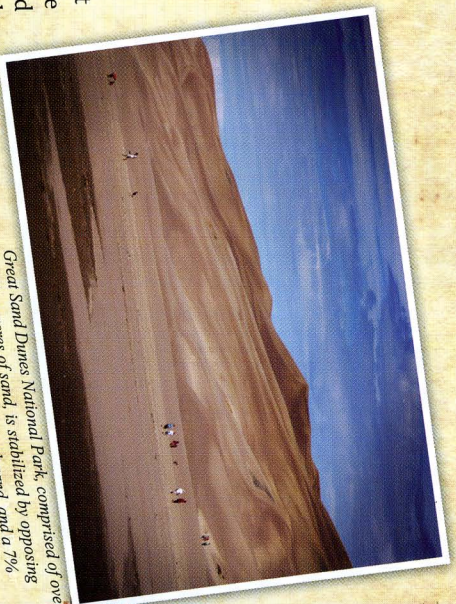
CONVERGING HERITAGE

AN ALPINE VALLEY'S WIND, WATER AND SAND DUNES

The San Luis Valley, roughly 8000 square miles, is the highest and largest alpine desert valley on the North American Continent. What makes the desert valley truly unique is its hidden waters. Below the valley are two aquifers that contain an enormous quantity of water. The aquifers feed ponds, artesian wells, springs, and lakes, vital to the abundant waterfowl and wildlife found here.

The Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve is the most phenomenal natural wonder of the area. Cresting at 750 feet above the valley floor, these are the highest dunes on the continent. The Sand Dunes are shaped and sustained by the dynamic interaction of sand, wind and water.

For many visitors, the geographic isolation of the valley and abundance of public lands provides a coveted place for exploration, adventure and solitude. The Alamosa Wildlife Refuge, and the Blanca Wetlands both offer a wide variety of outdoor activities as hiking, wildlife viewing, biking, climbing



Great Sand Dunes National Park, comprised of over 5 billion acres of sand, is stabilized by opposing wind direction, recycled creek sand, and a 7% moisture content below the desert surface.

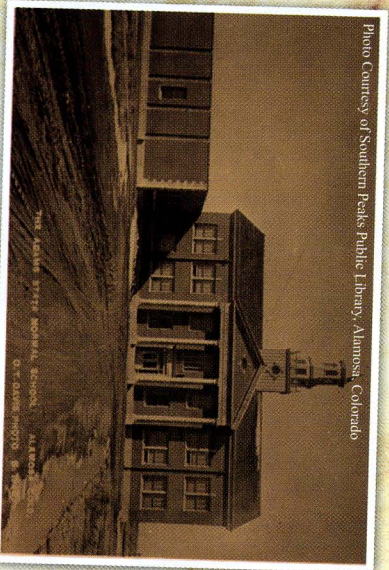


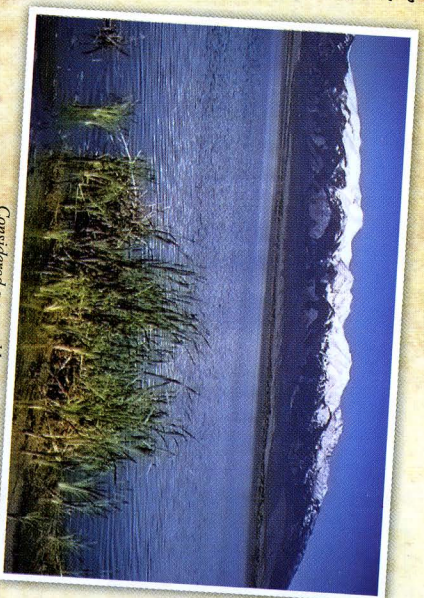
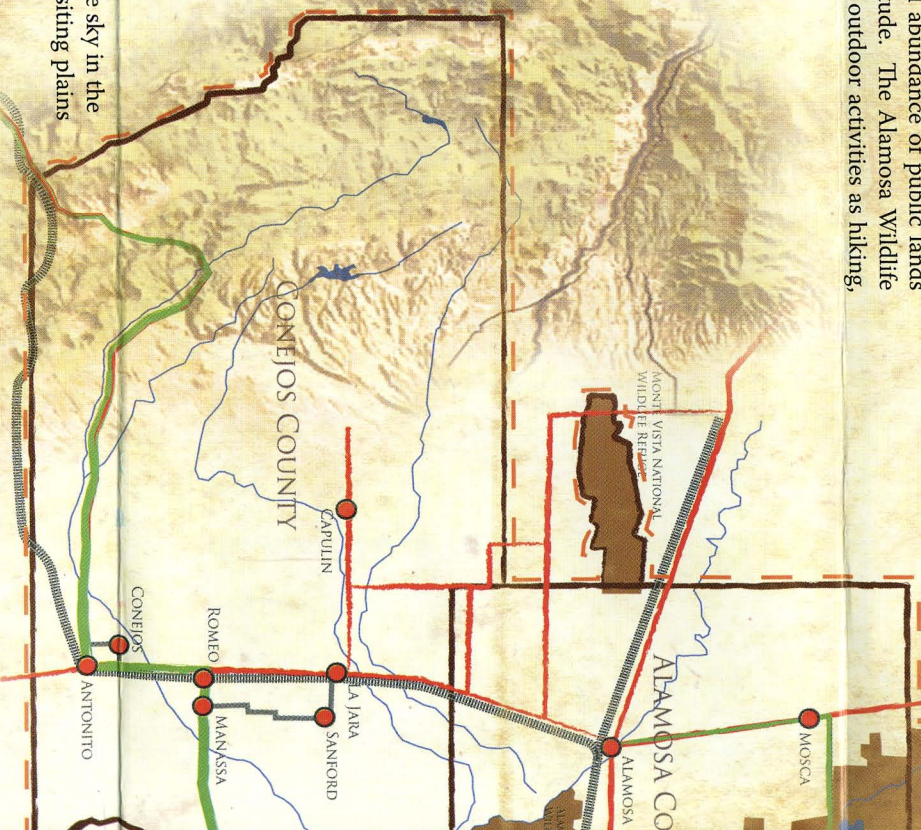
Photo Courtesy of Southern Peaks Public Library, Alamosa, Colorado
 Founded as a teachers college in 1921, Adams State Normal School characterized the perseverance of the San Luis Valley's rural communities.

LAND OF THE BLUE SKY PEOPLE

The crystalline mountain panorama and startling clarity of the sky in the San Luis Valley (and elsewhere in Colorado) so impressed visiting plains tribesman that they called the Ute the "Blue Sky People."

The Utes, the oldest continuous residents of what is now Colorado, arrived in the Sangre de Cristo region as early as 1300 A.D. and their occupation of the valley spans the late prehistoric and early historic time periods. By 1400 A.D., Native American tribes from throughout the region dwelled in the San Luis Valley. Apache and Navajo came from the north, Pueblo (Tiwa and Tewa) people from the south, Comanche, Kiowa, Cheyenne and Arapaho traversed the eastern plains; and the Ute people came from the west. From the 1600s to the mid-1800s, it was the Ute Indians that laid claim to the valley in search of game and plants.

Similar to the prehistoric cultures, neither the Utes nor other tribes established permanent settlements in the valley. For the Native American tribes, the Sangre de Cristo region was valued as a seasonal hunting ground where bands of tribes would migrate once the snow melted off the high mountain passes.



Considered a sacred landmark by the Dine (Navajo) people, Mt Blanca reflects its snow-capped peaks in the crystal blue waters of San Luis Lakes State Park.



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Railroads were crucial to the early settlement of ranches, farms, and mines in the late nineteenth century.

INTERWOVEN PEOPLES AND TRADITIONS

The Sangre de Cristo region can be described as a historic crossroad – a place where different people have converged for thousands of years. The area represents a profound historical, religious and cultural convergence that is reflected through art, food, events and celebrations. Here the traditions of Hispanics, Native American, Mormon, Amish, Japanese-American, Dutch and Anglo have intermingled and persisted. Land grants, railroads, mines and military presence entwined cultures and customs.

Large land grants laid the foundation for the settlement of the Sangre de Cristo area. Land grants made by the Mexican government in 1843 and 1844 were intended as incentives to encourage permanent settlement and increase the population and productivity of the southwest United States.

Railroads and mines were integral economic activities in the late nineteenth century after the United States government acquired control of the San Luis Valley from Mexico. Precious metals, gold and silver found in isolated pockets in the Sangre de Cristo and San Juan Mountains attracted prospectors. With miners came railroads, farms and cattle ranches.



The scant ground water proved to be a challenge for early farmers, but they soon adapted and agriculture became the sustaining foundation of the area's economy.

HISPANO CULTURE, FOLKLORE, RELIGION AND LANGUAGE

The flavor and character of Hispano culture thrives in the region. Main streets lined with murals, historic adobe churches and authentic cuisine all represent the unique Hispano stamp of the San Luis Valley.

From the earliest days of settlement, religion was a central aspect of life in the San Luis Valley. Among the historic churches is Our Lady of Guadalupe located in the town of Conejos. John Lamy, the first bishop of Santa Fe, oversaw its construction in the 1850s making it the oldest parish in Colorado.

Hispano influences can also be found in the area's music, arts, and architecture. Traditional Mexican Mariachi bands and Spanish Colonial Folk Dances are well preserved and practiced in the area. Art traditions include weaving, a craft that arose during the heyday of sheep ranching in the valley. The architecture of the area is distinct as well, showcasing the traditional adobe construction.

The Spanish language of the area's first colonialists has sustained for generations. Presently, there is a more commonly heard Spanish dialect that reveals the slow mixing of culture over time as Castilian and Mexican Spanish and, in some cases, English have all blended.



colorful dress of the Semillas de la Tierra omates with the preservation of the culture, music, of the Sangre de Cristo Heritage Area. Mariachi San Luis is a glorious example of the Hispano heritage.

SANGRE DE CRISTO NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

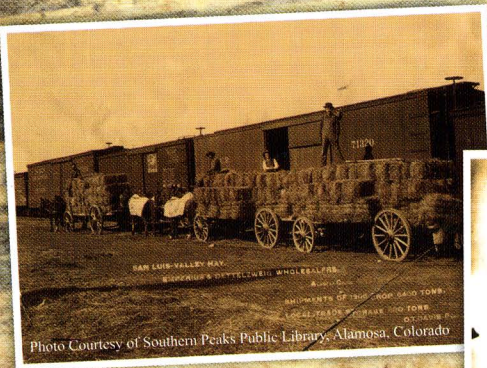
ALAMOSA COUNTY

Just two years after Colorado became a state, a narrow-gauge train loaded with expectant settlers and their belongings stopped at a protected bend in the Rio Grande shaded by a grove of cottonwoods. In 1878, Alamosa – Spanish for cottonwood grove – was founded.

Trains delivered lumber and hardware and left with agricultural products. Over the next ten years, rails were laid in all four directions and Alamosa became a veritable center of the San Luis Valley.

Once situated on the edge of Conejos County, the town of Alamosa grew until the Colorado legislature carved out 723 square miles from Conejos and Costilla Counties to form Alamosa County in March, 1913.

Although the commercial hub of the San Luis Valley, Alamosa depends heavily on the natural resources and picturesque landscapes that envelop the county. To the south east is the Alamosa Wildlife Refuge, sanctuary to a multitude of wildlife including, waterfowl, songbirds, deer and sand hill cranes. The Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve just overlaps the county to the north. Reaching heights of 750 feet above the valley floor, the dunes are one of Colorado's most surprising, and impressive sights.



COSTILLA COUNTY

Costilla County was settled by the ancestors of today's families well before Colorado became a state. Those first Hispano settlers brought with them a language and culture that still exists today, four hundred years after the Spanish first arrived in the Americas.

Located in south central Colorado, sharing its southern boundary with New Mexico, Costilla County is the location of Colorado's oldest town, San Luis, founded in 1851. The unique culture of the area is evident in the people who measure their history in multiples of generations and speak a Spanish still laced with words and phrases of ancient origins. Small, sturdy mission churches found dotting the landscape are some of the earliest structures erected in Colorado.

Experience first hand the colorful culture of the area by visiting the Shrine of the Stations of the Cross in San Luis representing the last hours of Christ's life. Or, take a step back in time at the Fort Garland Museum which was once commanded by frontiersman Kit Carson, who lived and served at the post from 1866 to 1867.

CONEJOS COUNTY

Conejos County was one of the original 17 counties created by the Colorado legislature on November 1, 1861. Although it was first called Guadalupe County it was renamed Conejos, the Spanish word for "rabbits," one week later.

Events and attractions narrate the captivating history of Conejos County. The town of Antonito is home to the Cumbres and Toltec Scenic Railroad, a narrow-gauge steam engine railroad constructed in 1880 which makes the daily trek from Antonito to Chama, New Mexico during the summer and fall.

Just north east of the town of Sanford is Pikes Stockade, the site where Zebulon Pike raised the American flag in 1807 over what was then Spanish Territory. The stockade was reconstructed using Pike's journal and is maintained by the Colorado Historic Society. Conejos, the County seat, is also home to Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Parish, the oldest parish church in Colorado. The community of Manassa hosts Pioneer Days each July celebrating the arrival of Brigham Young and the Pioneers in the Great Salt Lake Valley. The Jack Dempsey Museum, also located in Manassa, honors the "Manassa Mauler" who held the world heavyweight boxing title from 1919 to 1926.

