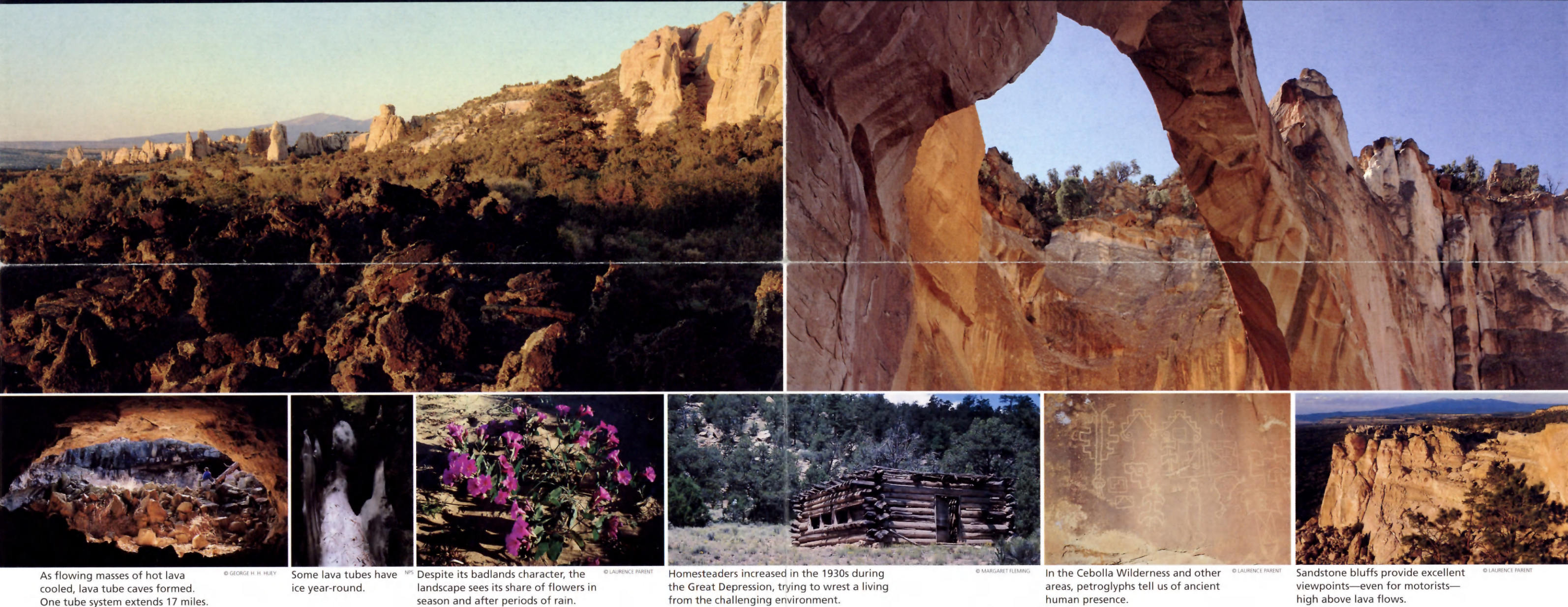




As flowing masses of hot lava cooled, lava tube caves formed. One tube system extends 17 miles.

Some lava tubes have ice year-round.

Despite its badlands character, the landscape sees its share of flowers in season and after periods of rain.

Homesteaders increased in the 1930s during the Great Depression, trying to wrest a living from the challenging environment.

In the Cebolla Wilderness and other areas, petroglyphs tell us of ancient human presence.

Sandstone bluffs provide excellent viewpoints—even for motorists—high above lava flows.

Top photographs: Jagged lava flow, left, and La Ventana Natural Arch.

Where Sharp Lava Meets Smooth Sandstone

In satellite photos of New Mexico, lava flows blanketing much of El Malpais National Monument and National Conservation Area look like a huge lake southwest of Grants. The imagery shows only dominant landscape features—lava flows, mountain ranges, mesas—that mask mysteries and wonders. El Malpais means “the badlands” in Spanish and is most commonly pronounced el-mal-pie-EES. Its volcanic features include cinder cones, a lava tube cave system extending at least 17 miles, and fragile ice caves. There is much good in these badlands; the area offers diverse natural environments and tantalizing evidence of American Indian and European history. These cultural resources are kept alive by the spiritual and physical presence of the Puebloan peoples of Acoma, Laguna, and Zuni, and the Ramah Navajo. These American Indians make their homes here and continue their traditional uses.

The malpais landscape is primal, pristine, ancient—and surprisingly modern. Here is a living remnant of the Old Southwest entering the 21st century almost as terra incognita, or unknown lands. With continuing research new knowledge is revealed. Lava that poured out of McCartys Crater created a new land surface 2,000 to 3,000 years ago. Elsewhere, ancient Douglas fir trees thrive in the midst of rugged lava terrain. The diversity of life tells a story of unique adaptation to a challenging environment. Past and present, myth and reality mix here and will continue to mix for centuries to come.

Many landscape features in El Malpais bear Hawaiian names because early scientific knowledge of volcanoes was developed in the Hawaiian islands. Kipukas are undisturbed areas that lava flows encircled but did not cover. These ecological islands of vegetation are living remnants of native plant and

animal communities. Study of these kipukas will yield benchmark information for restoring disturbed portions of El Malpais. Lava types bear Hawaiian names, too. Smooth, ropy lavas are pāhoehoe, pronounced pah-HOY-hoy. Sharp, jagged lavas that rip up all but the sturdiest hiking boots are ‘a‘ā, pronounced AH-ah. By studying active volcanoes geologists can determine how similar features formed at El Malpais.

For more than 10,000 years people have interacted with the El Malpais landscape. Peak human occupation occurred between 950 and 1350. During this time El Malpais was at the fringe of a political and economic system centered in Chaco Canyon 80 miles to the north. As participants in this system, ancient Puebloans established outlying communities along edges of the lava flows. When the Chacoan system collapsed in the late 1100s these outlying communities continued to

thrive. Although the ancestral Puebloans left El Malpais by the mid-1300s they did not disappear. They moved to the Acoma area and established a new homeland. In 1540 Coronado’s expedition encountered two major Indian pueblos—Zuni and Acoma—flanking El Malpais. When New Mexico became a US territory in 1848, Anglo explorers saw El Malpais as little more than a hindrance to travel. Anglos did not move into El Malpais in significant numbers until the Great Depression of the 1930s. Many were homesteaders or sheepherders escaping the flood of immigration to other parts of the West.

Throughout the centuries El Malpais has posed an unrelenting challenge for Indian, Spanish, and Anglo travelers. Today ancient trails serve to remind us how those who crossed this rugged landscape persevered.

People of El Malpais	Exploring El Malpais	Planning Your Visit	Safety and Regulations	More Information	
The lands of El Malpais have figured in Acoma, Laguna, Zuni, and Ramah Navajo cultures for thousands of years. Their traditional uses—gathering herbs and medicines, paying respect, and renewing ties—continue today. Protecting these lands ensures the continuation of traditions integral to this region’s cultural diversity.	Sandstone Bluffs Overlook Take an easy drive to vistas of El Malpais and surrounding country. La Ventana Natural Arch Dating to dinosaur times, this is one of New Mexico’s largest natural arches. (See photo at top right.) The Narrows Follow NM 117 between a lava flow and 500-foot-high sandstone cliffs. Enjoy scenic views along the Narrows Rim Trail. Cebolla Wilderness Look for old homesteads and petroglyphs as you hike, horseback ride, and camp in this vast forested area. Lava Falls Area Visit McCartys flow, the youngest lava flow in this region. See plants adapted to this harsh environment. Zuni-Acoma Trail This ancient trade route crosses four major lava	flows. The hike is 7.5 strenuous miles one-way over rugged lava. El Calderon Area Explore the monument’s oldest lava flow in this forested area. Do not enter caves. Big Tubes Area See some of the 10,000-year-old Bandera lava flow and its 17-mile-long tube and trench system. Do not enter caves. Chain of Craters Backcountry Byway Drive this unpaved road along a rift where lava flowed 200,000 years ago and see the 30 cinder cones left behind. West Malpais Wilderness Hike to Hole-in-the-Wall, a ponderosa pine parkland surrounded by lava. Continental Divide Trail Hike a portion of this national trail where it crosses El Malpais. Ask at visitor centers for specific information.	El Malpais Ranger Station (BLM), 9 miles south of I-40 on NM 117, is the gateway to the national conservation area. Accessibility We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information ask a ranger, call, or check our website. Camping The BLM operates Joe Skeen Campground on NM 117. It has 10 sites with grills, tables, and shade. Vault toilets. No water. Free, first-come first-served. For primitive camping in the monument, get a free permit at visitor centers. No permit needed to camp overnight in the national conservation area. Other Services Motels, camping, food, and other services are in and near Grants.	Water Carry one gallon of water per person per day in summer. Do not drink surface water. Driving Always stop at a visitor center to ask about roads that are safe for your vehicle. All vehicles must stay on designated roads; no vehicles allowed in the wilderness areas. Hiking Lava rock is sharp! Wear sturdy boots. Watch out for cactus spines and sharp yucca leaves. Hiking Routes If the route is marked by cairns (rock piles), have the next cairn in sight before leaving the one you are at. Lava Tube Caves You must have a permit to enter lava tube caves that are open to the public; entry into all others is prohibited. Inquire at El Malpais or Interagency visitor centers. Hunting and Trapping You must have the correct state license to hunt or trap in the national conservation area. Firearms Check the park website for regulations. Preservation Federal law protects historic and natural features in the park. Do not excavate, disturb, deface, or destroy any structure, exhibit, artifact, animal, or plant. Poisonous Animals Rattlesnakes and scorpions live here. Nonpoisonous bullsnakes sometimes act like rattlesnakes. If you encounter a snake, do not disturb it. As you travel El Malpais, respect private and Indian lands. Close all gates.	National Park Service 123 E. Roosevelt Ave. Grants, NM 87020 www.nps.gov/elma 505-285-4641 Bureau of Land Management PO Box 846 Grants, NM 87020 www.blm.gov/nm/elmalpais 505-280-2918 El Malpais National Monument is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. Learn more about national parks at www.nps.gov.

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Visiting El Malpais

