



# Foundation Document Overview

## Fort Union National Monument

New Mexico



### Contact Information

For more information about the *Fort Union National Monument Foundation Document*, contact: [foun\\_superintendent@nps.gov](mailto:foun_superintendent@nps.gov) or (505) 425-8025 or write to: Superintendent, Fort Union National Monument, P.O. Box 127, Watrous, NM 87753

## Purpose



*The purpose of FORT UNION NATIONAL MONUMENT is to*

- *preserve the historic remains and setting of Fort Union and its inextricable link to the Santa Fe Trail, to provide for public use and education, and to interpret Fort Union's role in westward expansion in the Southwest*
- *comprehensively interpret Fort Union, encompassing the time before and after its establishment, as well as the multiple perspectives of the cultures that contributed to, and were affected by, the fort*
- *preserve the natural resources and values of Fort Union National Monument and the Santa Fe Trail, in order to maintain an authentic historical setting in which to experience them*

## Significance

Significance statements express why Fort Union National Monument 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.

- **U.S. Military Presence in the Southwest.** During its 40-year lifespan (1851–1891), Fort Union—with its garrison, depot, arsenal, and hospital—became one of the largest, most important forts that strengthened U.S. rule, presence, and influence in the American Southwest.
- **American Indian Homelands.** This area is the traditional homeland and/or hunting and gathering grounds of indigenous peoples, including the Jemez Pueblo, Pecos Pueblo, Jicarilla Apache, Navajo, Southern Ute, and other tribal nations, and it contains landmarks and sacred sites embedded in their cultures.
- **The Civil War in the Southwest.** In defense of the New Mexico Territory during the Civil War, the “Star Fort” (one of the finest remaining earthworks in the country) was constructed by New Mexico volunteers in 1861 to protect the Union defenses and military supply from Confederate invasion.



## Significance

- **Campaigns and Conflicts.** Fort Union troops participated in and supported significant military campaigns against American Indians, such as the Long Walk, Battle of Adobe Walls, Sand Creek Massacre, and others resulting in captivity, internment, massacre, and ultimate removal of tribal groups from their traditional homelands and lifeways.
- **Corridor of Change.** The Santa Fe Trail, evolving from indigenous trade routes, served as a corridor of cultural exchange for more than a millennium. In 1821, it became a major international highway between the United States and Mexico's northern frontier and by 1848, a national highway joining the U.S. to the new territory of New Mexico. During this historic period and through the life of Fort Union, the Santa Fe Trail served as a route for military movement in the Mexican-American War, Civil War, and Indian wars.
- **Economic Evolution.** The military demand for supplies at Fort Union helped change the region's economy from a barter/subsistence system to a cash-based system of supply and use.
- **Ruins, Remnants, and Architectural Legacy.** Fort Union contains the largest concentration of 19th-century adobe ruins in the United States. The architectural style of its buildings influenced the development of the New Mexico Territorial Style Architecture.
- **Step Back in Time.** The cultural landscape of Fort Union National Monument possesses a high degree of integrity as its viewshed has changed little since the fort's establishment in 1851. The natural resources and values preserved here such as unobstructed views, natural sounds, clear night skies, and short-grass prairie contribute to an authentic historic setting.

## 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.

- **Preserved remnants of Fort Union's first, second, and third forts**
  - **Stone foundations of the first Fort Union**
  - **The Civil War earthworks of the second Fort Union (Star Fort)**
  - **Stabilized adobe ruins and other remnants of the third Fort Union**
- **Santa Fe Trail wagon ruts and military roads**
- **Historic setting**
- **Archeology**
- **Living history**
- **Multicultural connections including oral and cultural traditions**
- **Museum collections/archives**

Fort Union National Monument 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.

- **Mission 66 visitor center site**
- **Research/reference library**



## Description



Fort Union National Monument protects remnants of the Southwest's largest frontier fort, including earthworks, archeological deposits, and stabilized adobe ruins. In addition, a network of Santa Fe Trail wagon ruts is still visible on the surrounding prairie.

Fort Union was established in 1851, near the junction of the Santa Fe Trail's Mountain Branch and Cimarron Cutoff. Fort Union served as a hub along this trail for the delivery of supplies and equipment to other military posts throughout the Southwest. During its 40-year history, three different forts were constructed close together. The third Fort Union functioned as a military garrison, territorial arsenal, hospital, and military supply depot for the Southwest.

In 1954, Fort Union National Monument was established as part of the national park system. The 721-acre national monument is separated into two units encompassing the sites of the three Fort Unions. The smaller unit, located west of Wolf Creek, contains the stone foundations of the first Fort Union, which was operational from 1851 to 1861, and the stabilized ruins of the third Fort Union's arsenal. East of Wolf Creek is the main unit, which contains the Star Fort earthworks of the second Fort Union, which operated from 1861 to 1862. Also included in the main unit is the third Fort Union, which was operational from 1862 to 1891. The stabilized adobe ruins of the third Fort Union are the largest and best preserved remnants of the three forts within the national monument.

Fort Union National Monument is located in Mora County, 8 miles northwest of I-25 and Watrous, New Mexico, and almost 95 road miles northeast of Santa Fe, New Mexico. The monument received 9,215 visitors in 2012.

