

OUT OF SITE

No matter what kind of camper you are, New Mexico has a spectacular place where you can pitch a tent, park your RV, or experience the outdoors in luxury. Pack up the car, bring the s'mores, and spend a few days living your best camp life.

BY AARON GULLEY, ELIZABETH MILLER, KATE NELSON, JENNIFER C. OLSON, AND CHRISTINA SELBY

ILLUSTRATIONS BY RYAN JOHNSON



Sandstone benches on the southwest end of Abiquiú Lake make for a quiet spot for picnicking and watching the sunset.



Navigating San Pedro Parks Wilderness trails can be tricky, especially in the boggy meadow. **Right:** A Continental Divide Trail marker.



that the area's maps were woefully out of date, but were reissued last year.) We pieced together what looked like a trail, missed our spur back to the car, and effectively doubled our mileage for the day.

Still, the lure of solitude drew me back to this place that often defies its own maps. I shrugged into my backpack and, over the course of an afternoon, walked up a west-facing slope dressed for summer with lupine and Indian paintbrush, into spruce and pine forest spotted with red columbine and golden pea. My shadow stretched long over the grass when the trail leveled out at the top of the plateau, a patchwork of forests and meadows laced with streams.

Clouds spit rain, then broke open as I set up camp on a knoll overlooking a creek. I watched shreds of the storm race by in jagged layers. I lit my camp stove to heat my dinner and boil water for tea, hugging my fingers around

GILA SURE

FOLLOW THESE BACKCOUNTRY SAFETY TIPS FROM SEARCH AND RESCUE EXPERT MARC LEVESQUE.

Since 2006, Marc Levesque has been pulling people out of tough situations in the wilder stretches of New Mexico. The search-and-rescue team leader has compiled many of those stories—and advice on how to avoid being the person making that call—in a new book, *Gila Lost and Found: Search and Rescue in New Mexico* (Red Planet Press). Here he shares a few backcountry safety tips.

Be prepared: “People don’t do enough homework.” Ward off a crisis by studying trail mileage and elevation gain; checking the latest trail conditions; packing enough food, water, and safety gear; and monitoring the weather forecast, especially for the volatile conditions in the high peaks. Learn to navigate with a map and compass and leave an itinerary with someone.

Drink up: “Dehydration is very subtle. It’s insidious and very quickly impacts good thinking. People don’t understand that.”

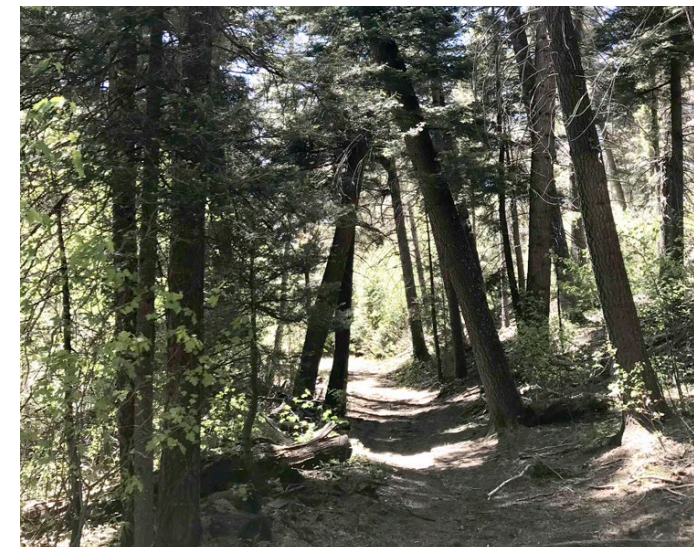
Stay connected: Cell signals drop off in the woods, so calling for help usually isn’t an option. Carrying a satellite communication device can add range to how far you can signal for help. Regardless, expect that it can take hours, or days, to arrive. —EM

the mug to soak in the spare warmth. As dark covered the pines, I crawled into my sleeping bag, my dog nested against my hip.

In the morning, I hiked into the wilderness. Water flooded the trail from the massive, boggy meadow. Frogs thrummed, and a pair of ducks launched from a pool. The trail

faded out. I turned around often, keeping my compass and map close at hand, and pressed on with the next landmark in mind.

If nothing else, I figured, I could navigate back to my car by the scent of cinnamon rolls from Bode’s Mercantile, in Abiquiú, that I’d stowed there as a post-hike reward.



COURTESY OF ELIZABETH MILLER; PREVIOUS SPREAD: JEN JUDGE

COURTESY OF ELIZABETH MILLER

CAMP CONFIDENTIAL

Best site: Trailheads ring San Pedro Parks Wilderness and vary in what, if any, amenities are available. In the backcountry, camp 200 feet from water sources and the trail. **Nearby activities:** Hiking, horseback riding, wildflowers, hunting. For trail conditions, latest maps, and fire restrictions, call the Coyote Ranger District (575-638-5526) or Cuba Ranger District (575-289-3264). **Bathrooms:** The Resumidero Campground, near the Corralitos and Vega Redondo trailheads, is a primitive campground that has seasonal, portable toilets. **Water:** Pack everything you need (and maybe a little extra, just in case). **Dogs:** Allowed on leash. **Fee:** Free. fs.usda.gov/main/santafe

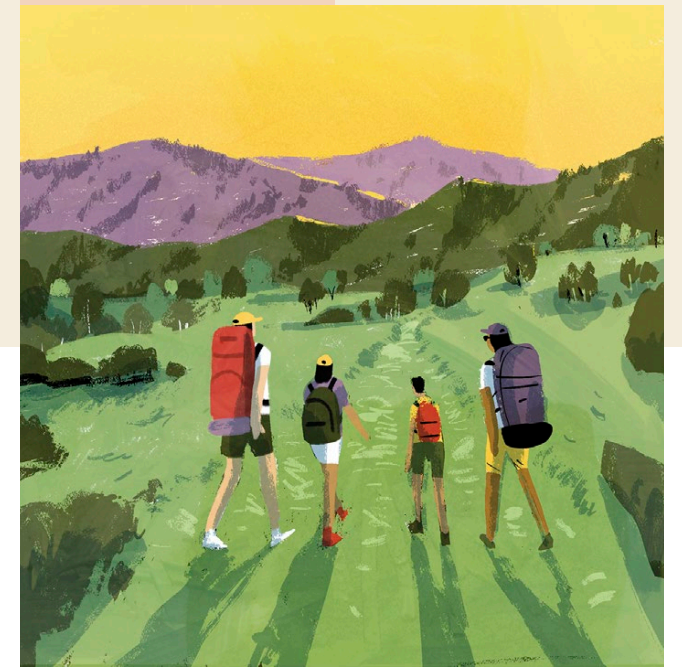
elk with more antler points than I could count. Then the trail started blinking in and out through the meadows. The map didn’t match what I experienced on the ground. A dearth of landmarks hindered navigation. (Later I learned

Heavy rain fell some days before my hike into the San Pedro Parks Wilderness, so the first miles of trail read like a registry of passersby. The elongated half moons from elk hooves and the arrowhead hearts from deer cut deep into the now dry ground. A single set of hiker footprints was left not long after the storm, each step bedeviled by the squish and slip of mud. For two days, those intermittent tracks and my dog were the closest things I had to company.

San Pedro Parks Wilderness sits in the northwestern corner of the Santa Fe National Forest, a plateau of dense pines and lush meadows that rises out of the burnished canyons around Abiquiú, Coyote, and Cuba. When Dawnyelle Smith, recreation staffer for the national forest’s Coyote Ranger District, told me this spring that she views her district as an undiscovered gem, I felt compelled to return.

On my first trip, I drove to a trailhead with a friend who was backpacking for the first time. We’d planned a one-mile hike to camp and a short loop the following day. When we arrived, near dusk, I said, “No problem. We have headlamps.” But within 15 minutes, something large cracked a branch off the trail near us. Even in the dark, I could see her eyes widen. She froze. We car camped.

The next day, we hiked corridors of golden aspens. We spotted



Site Lines

CREATE YOUR OWN CAMP IN THESE BACKCOUNTRY LOCATIONS.

Along FR 437 in the Carson National Forest near Taos, **Garcia Park** campers can spend an evening tucked in among the aspen groves, watching the sunset-pink shreds of clouds left in the sky. Thunderstorms roll through on summer afternoons, speckling the forest roads and trails that loop near here, including the 21-mile South Boundary Trail, beloved among mountain bikers for its flowy singletrack. The toughest miles are near its start, off FR 76, and in the last miles of a steep descent into Ranchos de Taos. From Garcia Park, sample the mellower middle sections, then loop back to the car for some respite. **Fee:** Free. nmmag.us/carsonnationalforest —EM

Saunter into the 46,963-acre **White Mountain Wilderness**, near Ruidoso, where summits drop dramatically 7,000 feet to the desert floor. The seven-mile loop hike up Argentina Canyon and down Big Bonito makes for a family-friendly overnight backpack. Camp in the oak forests off the 25-mile Crest Trail, which traverses the range, and relax in the wildflower-filled alpine meadows. At sunset, admire the dunes of White Sands National Park and the jagged Organ Mountains, to the west. Then rise with the sun peeking over the Great Plains to the east. On your way out, jump in Big Bonito Creek’s natural swimming holes. **Fee:** Free. nmmag.us/whitemountain —CS

Rattle down dirt roads that lace through the **Jemez Mountains** far enough and you’ll find quiet retreats with aspens and ponderosa pines, sun-filled meadows, rocky outcrops, and steep canyons. Proximity to Santa Fe and Albuquerque allows for loading up after work, driving out NM 4, then turning south onto FR 289, near Los Alamos. We hunted down a campsite within earshot of the road but out of sight of traffic, with time to soak in the late-day sun while dinner simmered on the stove. Finish with a quarter-mile hike to Jemez Falls or a soak in Jemez Springs. **Fee:** Free. fs.usda.gov/santafe —EM



HIGH POINTS

A Silver City campground elevates your outdoor experience with stellar views, an abundance of activities, and even a few creature comforts. **By Jennifer C. Olson**

I cradled my four-month-old daughter as the campfire fizzled. After our friends retreated to their campsite with their kids, my husband and I unzipped our tent and set our snoring bundle in her bassinet, where she slept through the night for the first time.

In the morning, I left her with her dad and headed for the ladies' room. Mesa Campground's bath houses—with flush toilets, porcelain sinks, and clean water—help make for a cushy weekend outdoors. In my youth, I calculated how long we'd been camping by counting the layers of sunscreen, dirt, and marshmallow on my face. With facilities like these, I might've lost track of time.

The hours melded together anyhow this weekend. Baby in the carrier, I walked next to my friend as her two- and five-year-old sons pedaled their bikes. The paved road circling Mesa Campground, near Silver City, offers views of Lake Roberts below.

With scant elevation change, the path is ideal for beginning cyclists like the ones just ahead of us. On one side, a dozen tent sites hide among piñon and juniper. Twelve RV spots and two bath houses are on the other.

Later, we loaded our friends' youngest son and my daughter into backpacks, hiked past the boat launch, and crossed the Trail of the Mountain Spirits Scenic Byway to the 1.5-mile lollipop called Purgatory Chasm. We maneuvered around vegetation and between boulders as we headed up the arroyo, traversed a ridge, and dropped into the namesake narrows. Thirty-foot walls boxed us in. Ponderosa trunks jammed into the narrowest bends of the gulch

suggested that this was a place to avoid in monsoon season.

Afterward, the adults collapsed at our site's picnic table. Other friends' children played in the meadow between our family's camp and another. My Willa did tummy time under an oak tree—our dog watching over her, with one eye on the

CAMP CONFIDENTIAL
Best sites: The two closest to the water have the best views of Lake Roberts. **Nearby activities:** Hiking, fishing, and non-motorized boating on the lake. **Bathrooms:** Two heated bath houses with flush toilets. **Water:** Available. **Dogs:** Allowed on leash. **Fee:** \$10 per night without electrical hookups; \$15 per night with electrical and water hookups. nmmag.us/mesacampground



migratory birds flitting just out of reach.

Before starting a family, my husband and I regularly visited Mesa Campground—21 twisty miles from our Pinos Altos neighborhood and an equal distance from Mimbres. Once, we arrived early enough to claim the site closest to the water. I ventured to Lake Roberts General Store, the nearest source of ice cream and beer, for a candy bar. Then I reclined facing the lake and cracked a novel. The hours I spent there showed themselves later in the form of a lingering tan line.

As a new parent, uninterrupted leisure time was a luxury now. On the second morning, I spread SPF 50 over my daughter's squishy arms, before our group headed down to the lake. While the rest of our crew fished from shore, I launched my kayak and stole a few moments for myself.

Paddling near Lake Roberts's southern shore, I glided where cranes had been resting, tracked a spider suspended over the water, and cruised past the weather station toward the dam. On my way back, I explored a cattail-ridden cove and gave fishing lines a wide berth. The boys were

DO (AND DON'T) POINTS FOLLOW THESE RULES TO HELP PROTECT THE OUTDOORS.

DO: Make a plan, then a backup plan. Public-land use skyrocketed last year, and that trend is expected to continue, so be prepared with an alternative in case your destination is full.

DON'T: Make new fire rings. Consider bringing a portable firepit instead.

DO: Douse campfires with water until the ashes are cold to the touch. Check fire restrictions (nmmfireinfo.com) for bans on fires and charcoal grills.

DON'T: Burn trash. That just leaves a mess behind for the next person.

DO: Pack out your trash—even if there are bins available. "The trash problem is huge, so you'd be doing a major service by taking it with you," says Lynn Bjorklund, a recreation team leader for the Santa Fe National Forest.

DO: Take care of your business. In heavily used camping areas, human waste is becoming an issue for people and wildlife. The long-standing recommendation is to bury it deep, but even then animals might dig it up. "The perfect solution is yet to come," Bjorklund says. In the meantime, make good use of pit toilets.

DO: Get a current map from the Bureau of Land Management, National Forest Service, or other relevant agency showing roads that are open to vehicles, or use the Avenza app's free downloadable maps.

DON'T: Leave designated roads and trails, even in off-road vehicles.

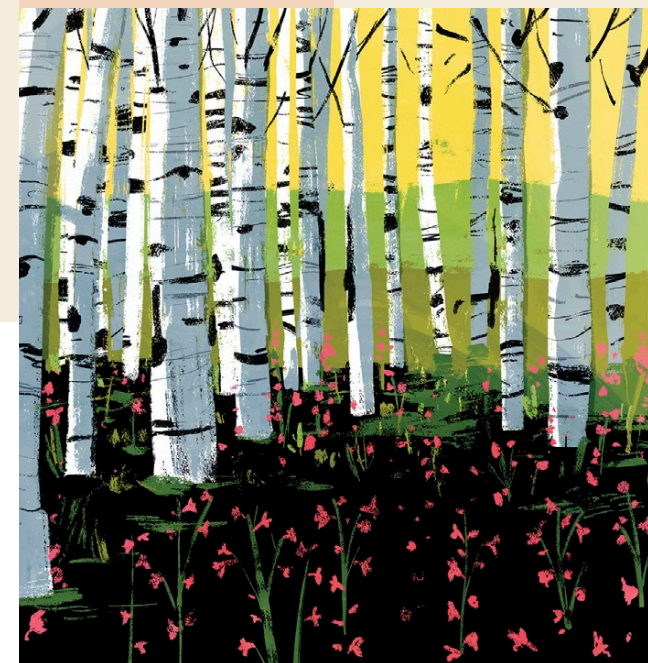
DO: Expect a ticket from law enforcement if you're caught doing so.

DO: Make a difference by following these tips. "If you like public lands, we need you to preserve them," says Mickey Figueroa, a natural-resource specialist who works in the Jemez Mountains. —EM

playing on the fillet table by then, uninterested in catching any of the prize trout stocked in this reservoir.

Around noon, we scrambled back to the campsite and packed up. Our family tarried

awhile after saying goodbye to our friends, however. The lack of cell service and the sight of clouds building over the Gila National Forest were too appealing not to relish just a little longer.



Pole Positions PITCH YOUR TENT AT THESE EXCEPTIONAL SPOTS.

Bottomless Lakes State Park, southeast of Roswell, features eight liquid jewels that attract paddlers, fishermen, swimmers, and scuba divers looking to explore the narrow but capacious lakes, which get their color from algae and other aquatic plants. Lea Lake Pavilion sits on a sandy beach with a lifeguard-staffed swimming area. Stay overnight at one of the 33 sites and catch the sunrise and sunset reflecting in the water. **Fee:** \$10 per night. nmmag.us/bottomlesslakes —JCO

Settle in for a celestial sleepover on a clear night with a new moon (there's one coming up on August 8) at North America's first International Dark Sky Sanctuary. Situated 3.5788e-6 light-minutes from any permanent artificial light source, and 1.5 hours from Silver City, **Cosmic Campground**, near Alma, offers the world's best 360-degree view of the sky, according to co-founder Al Grauer. "With the naked eye, you can see meteors, the Milky Way, planets, and star clusters the way people once did," he says. To maximize campers' nighttime viewing experience, arrive before sunset to set up camp. It'll also help ensure you snag one of six campsites and a concrete observation pad. **Fee:** Free. nmmag.us/cosmiccampground —JCO

Holy Ghost Campground, near Pecos, lies deep up a verdant, creek-lined canyon, far enough from NM 63—the main route through the Santa Fe National Forest—to be overlooked. After arriving on a late-summer afternoon, we camped at one of the 23 sites nestled between conifers and a grassy meadow, sprawled out our dinner fixings on a picnic table, and watched darkness settle. The trailhead provides access to several Pecos Wilderness highlights, including short ridge climbs to sweeping views and a more ambitious loop past Stewart Lake. "Once you get in there, your options are almost limitless," says Lynn Bjorklund, who wrote a guidebook on Pecos trails. **Fee:** \$8 per night. nmmag.us/holyghost —EM



**CAMP
GUIDE
2021**
FOR THE
family

Camper of all ages can enjoy activities on Lake Maloya, gooey s'mores, and stories by the fire at Sugarite Canyon State Park.

WILD CARDS

Sugarite Canyon State Park deals a winning hand of outdoor activities for family fun.
By Christina Selby

Lake Maloya comes into view as we descend switchbacks on the back side of Little Horse Mesa, near Ratón. The late-morning heat gives way to the cool microclimate of Segerstrom Creek, its gurgles growing louder as we reach the valley bottom. Flowering New Mexico locust trees drip shade over the trail. The muddy path slurps around our boots as we weave through a meadow brimming with wildflowers.

My younger son has opted to join me for a morning hike while the rest of our gang headed to the lake to fish. We stop to examine a pile of black bear scat showing evidence of a raid on the wax currant bushes. I check that the bear spray is still attached to my backpack. *Was this the same bear we saw cross the road to the campsite as we arrived the previous evening?* I wonder.

The trail cozies up to the lake. Butterflies in three colors sip from mud puddles. A raven screeches an alarm call from a tree branch overhead. I slow to listen as fishermen call excitedly from the shore. I look ahead on the trail, freeze mid-step, and push my son behind me. Five black toe pads on a large paw flash from a tan hind leg, followed by a long, fluffy mountain lion tail that disappears into the underbrush. We wait for the cougar to retreat and

our adrenaline to calm, then thank the raven for the warning and finish our hike.

Sugarite Canyon, with a 130-acre lake surrounded by oak and ponderosa forests and meadows, “has tons of wildlife because of all the food sources,” says Patricia Walsh, interpretive ranger for New Mexico State Parks. The result is some of the best front-country wildlife viewing in New Mexico. “Cougars live here because there are so many deer,” says Walsh. “They are very shy of people, and it’s unusual to see them. If you do see a cougar on a trail, talk or sing. It’ll help you stay calm,

CAMP CONFIDENTIAL

Best sites: With 14 sites, Lake Alice has electric and water hookups. But if you can do without, the sites are roomier and the views superb from Soda Pocket Campground’s 21 sites.

Nearby activities: Capulin Volcano National Monument and Maxwell National Wildlife Refuge. **Bathrooms:** Find a shower building with flush toilets across from the visitor center and pit toilets throughout the park. **Water:** For several years, the park has been under a “boil water advisory.” Bring enough water for your stay.

Dogs: Leashed pets allowed.

Fee: Day use, \$5 per car; tent sites, \$10 per night; RV sites, \$30 per night. nmmag.us/sugaritecanyon

and you’ll still be breathing!”

Back at our temporary village of tents and RVs in the 21-site Soda Pocket Campground, we find the rest of our party dripping wet from head to toe. Apparently my oldest son caught a fish and then proceeded to tip the canoe and dump all the kids into the lake. They bobbed around in their life jackets until the dads paddled over and rescued them. In other words, they had a great time.

Summer monsoon clouds roll up the valley, sending us into the RV for cover. After a



Photographs by CHRISTINA SELBY



couple games of I Spy and a pan of peanut butter chocolate chip cookies, any hint of rain burns away. We venture outside again, where the late-afternoon light illuminates a double rainbow under which the kids enact an epic stick-sword battle.

As the day gives way to dusk, the kids disappear into a fort they constructed in the nearby oak forest while we parents sit around a fire sip-

ping drinks. We watch several deer browse in an adjacent field of purple and yellow wildflowers. As we settle in to roast marshmallows over the fire, a few hummingbirds buzz by, attempting to sip nectar from our colored sunglasses. Owl hoots echo off the surrounding cliffs and a gray fox shimmies across the edge of our campsite. For nature lovers like us, the experience is exhilarating.

KID STUFF

FOLLOW THESE TIPS FOR CAMPING WITH THE LITTLE ONES.

Choose wisely. If it’s your first time out, start close to home, advise expert family campers Matt and Karen Holmes of the *Southwest Family Adventures* blog. “Staying closer to home gives you the chance to test out your gear and your setup without a major commitment,” says Matt.

Work up to more remote locations. Choose more developed campgrounds that match your children’s interests, whether they like active adventures such as rock climbing or a quiet stroll through the woods.

Make it comfortable. “If you need to bring your pillows and comforter off your bed at home in order to have a great night’s sleep, do it,” says Matt. “A good camping experience isn’t about learning to like suffering through roughing it.”

Plan ahead. “We knew exactly what we were going to eat and cook for each meal during our trip,” writes *ABQ Mom* blogger and newbie family camper Andrea Scarberry. “It made for smooth sailing come mealtime.”

Pack some extra fun. Bringing along an adventure pack filled with fun outdoor gear can create a welcome diversion for kids who cry boredom. For siblings, make sure each has their own pack with exactly the same stuff. Consider materials for simple projects like bark or stone rubbings and add binoculars, pencils, a notebook, a multitool, and a hiking stick. —CS



Pack ‘n’ Play

LOAD UP THE FAM FOR AN OVERNIGHT ADVENTURE.

Travel back in time to when dinosaurs ruled the eastern plains of New Mexico with a visit to **Clayton Lake State Park and Dinosaur Trackways**. Your dino-obsessed youngster will delight in walking the boardwalk, which circles 500 dinosaur footprints. “The best times to view the tracks are in the early morning or early evening before sundown, when the shadows make the tracks look more visible,” says Park Manager Mark Funk. Stay overnight at one of the 27 campsites and stargaze through the park’s telescope in the Star Point Observatory under some of the darkest skies in the nation. **Fee:** \$10–\$14 per night. nmmag.us/claytonlake —CS

Kids like options, and the Questa–Red River area dishes them up. Set up base camp at the 27-site **Columbine Campground**, where the Red River provides hours of water play for little ones. Head up the mountain to fish for brook trout at Cabresto Lake in the morning. Play for the afternoon at Red River Ski & Summer Area’s high ropes adventures and summer tubing runs. Then finish with a sunset horseback ride through the sage flats outside Questa. The ride so inspired my seven-year-old, he announced he would grow up to be a cowboy. (I didn’t tell him he was actually riding a mule.) **Fee:** \$20 per night. nmmag.us/columbinecampground —CS

Join the water party on New Mexico’s second-largest lake by reserving one of **Navajo Lake State Park’s** 228 campsites. “Many people don’t realize the sheer amount of water Navajo Lake holds,” says Park Superintendent Caleb Bellah, citing depths that reach 400 feet. “We are never subject to the water shortages other lakes suffer.” Explore 150 miles of shoreline with rentals of kayaks, paddleboards, or hydrobikes from the marina. Below the dam, the serenity of the San Juan River means you’ll likely share your fishing hole with bald eagles and ospreys. **Fee:** \$10–\$45 per night. nmmag.us/navajolake —CS



Many Riana Campground sites, nestled among piñons and junipers, feel private while offering access to hiking and good RV living.



HOME AND AWAY

Riana Campground's proximity to fantastic hiking, fishing, and much more makes it a dream base for no-frills RVers. **By Aaron Gulley**

Six years ago my wife, Jen Judge, and I bought an Airstream trailer. Her initial plan was to use it as our winter home, escaping our permanent residence in Santa Fe and heading to Arizona before the first snowfall. But we saw so many wild and wondrous places on that inaugural excursion—Organ Pipe National Monument, Salt River Canyon, the North Rim of the Grand Canyon—that we resolved to rent out our home, live full-time in the 23-foot trailer, and see the West. From summers in Idaho's Sawtooth Mountains to winters in Texas Hill Country, the Airstream became our ticket to far-flung adventures.

Then one stormy spring day, after a resupply visit to Santa Fe took longer than expected, we made Riana Campground our overnight home. About an hour north of Santa Fe, the 52-site campground overlooking Abiquiú Lake was a place we'd never considered: It was too close to home, too accessible, too common.

But on that initial stop, I was stunned by the beauty of the place and sorry we hadn't stopped in sooner.

Riana is perched atop a rocky promontory that is reflected in the lake's shimmer. On our first evening, thunderheads cast ivory streaks across the water's cobalt surface like battleships on patrol. To the south, curtains of rain played hide-and-seek with the elegant flat top of Pederal. To the north, the red mesas of Ghost Ranch brooded in the mist like great sandcastles abandoned by the gods.

Of all the inspiring places I'd camped over the years of trailering around the West, this place connected with me like no other.

Though we were only looking for a place to lay our heads for a night on that first visit, we stretched our stay to more than a week. And from that point forward, we began planning our travels to include Riana, a campground with only 15 electrical hookups and few of the amenities found in luxury RV parks. We reserved our favorite site, number 39, six



months in advance, as soon as bookings opened, for a week or more starting on opening day (April 15).

Each time we passed through New Mexico, we cajoled friends from Santa Fe who wanted to hang out in town into meeting us at Riana, with promises of grilled elk steaks, lake views, and a spray of stars. Why sleep in someone's spare bedroom when I could wake to canyon country overlooking glistening water?

Riana became a home away from home. We learned to paddle our kayaks on the Río Chama, just a few miles away, and found our favorite mountain bike ride in the state. Even after we moved back into our Santa Fe house, I'd often pull the trailer north and set up for 10 days of sun, wind, quiet,

CAMP CONFIDENTIAL

Best site: The highest in the campground, the nonelectrical number 39, offers expansive views of the lake, a feeling of total privacy, and the closest approximation of boondocking as you can get in a designated campground. **Nearby activities:** Playground, beach volleyball, fishing, swimming, and water sports on Abiquiú Lake, and fantastic hiking and mountain biking. **Bathrooms:** Basic showers, flush toilets, and a dump station. **Water:** Available. **Dogs:** Allowed on leash. **Fee:** \$12 per night; \$16 per night with electrical hookups. nmmag.us/riancampground

ROAD TRICKS

CAMPING EXPERTS STEPHANIE AND JEREMY PUGLISI UNPACK A FEW OF THEIR BEST OVERNIGHT TIPS.

Stephanie and Jeremy Puglisi spend more than 80 nights of the year in their RV. The parents of three help take the guesswork out of planning an adventure in their new guidebook, *Where Should We Camp Next?* (Sourcebooks). Here are their tips for cutting stress and ensuring a relaxing time on your next trip.

Find quiet. Consider a Sunday-through-Thursday trip to avoid weekend crowds and have an extra bit of space to yourself. "Keep in mind that campgrounds with more amenities tend to be busier as well," Jeremy says.

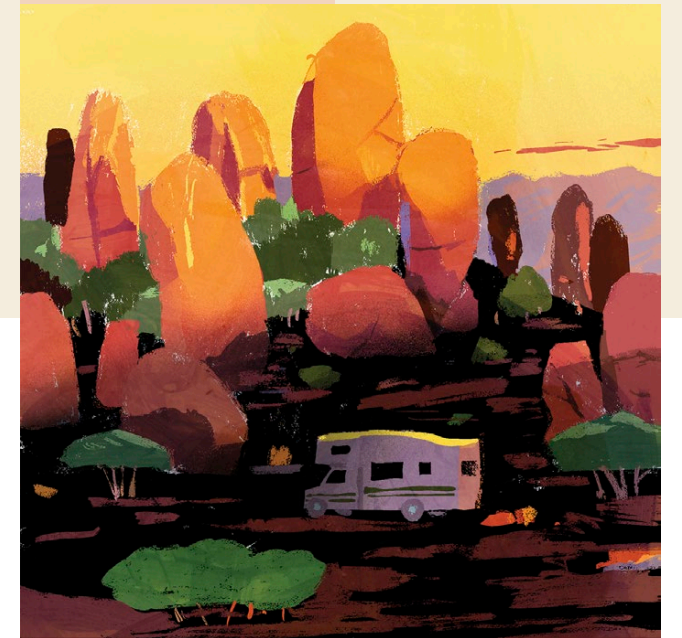
Troubleshoot ahead of time. Practice using your gear at home before showing up—ideally before dusk—at a campground. "Setup can be challenging and stressful," Jeremy says, "especially when it's hard to see and other campers are sleeping around you."

Choose a site wisely. "Create your punch list of overnighting preferences—whether that's your king bed parked at a full-hookup resort or a bivy sack in the backcountry—and find sites that are a good match," Jeremy says. "If there's a state park that's always booked, look for something more remote. And always check for cancellations: Things do open up at the last second." —JCO

and writing inspiration.

In January, Jen and I started a job that put a leash on our peripatetic lifestyle. We worked almost every day for the first five months of the year. When we finally scored a couple days off in a row, there was no hesitation about where we'd spend them.

We hitched up the Airstream and pointed toward Riana. The place worked its alchemy, as it always has. Even with temperatures in the nineties, the trails were cool in the morning, a soak in the lake cut the afternoon swelter, and the dipping evening sun turned the water to gold.



Park Places

THESE CAMPGROUNDS OFFER EVERYTHING AN RVER COULD NEED.

It's a long drive to New Mexico's most distinctive state park, on the southern end of the Gila Wilderness, but the whimsical playground of boulders at **City of Rocks** justifies the trip. The volcanic-rock fields make for a few days of interesting climbing and exploring, with campsites nestled beneath pillars and domes and tucked inside crescents of welded tuff. The perimeter trail is great for walkers and mountain bikers, and the hike to nearby Table Mountain offers a perspective on just how out-of-place this tangle of rocks is on an otherwise wide-open plain. **Fee:** \$10–\$14 per night. nmmag.us/cityofrocks —AG

The best reason to visit Carlsbad, in the southeastern corner of the state, is to see the eponymous caverns. The second-best reason may be to stay at the **Carlsbad KOA Holiday**, a family-oriented 168-site campground within striking distance of the national park. With a pool and smoked-on-site barbecue, as well as weekly campfire s'mores and movie nights, the campground is a destination unto itself. It's also surrounded by a profusion of attractions, including boating and fishing at Brantley Lake State Park, and wildlife viewing at Living Desert Zoo and Gardens State Park. **Fee:** From \$50 per night for electrical sites. koa.com/campgrounds/carlsbad —AG

For a taste of Americana, you can't do better than **Enchanted Trails RV Park and Trading Post**, a 135-site campground on the western outskirts of Albuquerque. Set along historic Route 66, the highway that came to symbolize economic growth, freedom, and opportunity, Enchanted Trails revels in that spirit with a vintage court featuring seven fully refurbished travel trailers. All but one are available for rent. And because of its views of town and the Sandias, there's no better place to watch the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta in October. Book early, though, as spots sell out fast. **Fee:** \$37 per night for full-hookup sites. enchantedtrails.com/park —AG



KitFox's 10 safari tents provide luxurious digs for you and your travel companion.



STYLE GUIDE

Camping with all the pleasures and none of the hassles? KitFox sets a new standard. **By Kate Nelson**

Google Maps provided a lovely driving tour of the Galisteo Basin Preserve but did little to help me find the New Mexico Brigadoon known as KitFox. Like that magical, mysterious village of stage and screen, KitFox eventually materialized below me, its 10 white platform tents shimmering on a piñon-juniper plain. *So that's what glamping looks like*, I thought.

I arrived a skeptic. I've no fondness for faddish words, especially the one mashing glamour with camping. I've backpacked, tent-camped, and car-camped enough to know that 1,800-thread-count sheets don't necessarily enhance a sky full of stars. Do you really need gourmet meals, live music, and over-the-top s'mores to appreciate nature?

In less than 24 hours, KitFox would convince me—gently, graciously—that, well, it doesn't hurt.

Jennifer Kolker dreamed up this bit of luxury-on-the-llano about 14 miles south of Santa Fe. Her life and business partner, Brandon Gregoire, planted the seeds when the two New Mexico natives were working in Houston after earning twin MBAs at the

University of New Mexico. They began cheffing up enough homegrown and farmers' market produce to create a secret supper club before relocating to Santa Fe and operating it as Dig & Serve. The pop-up, experiential dining events required knowing someone who knew someone to snag a ticket. You only learned where you were going 24 hours before.

Enough corporate clients and wedding planners soon heard of them to put the pop-ups on a back burner. But something was missing.

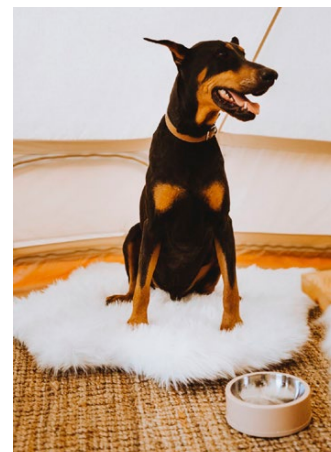
"I came back from Hous-

CAMP CONFIDENTIAL

Best site: What? They're all good! The tents can be laid out with a queen bed or two twin beds, and an extra-large king tent has a spacious deck. **Nearby activities:** Games like cornhole and s'mores around the campfire are on-site, along with a trail that tallies about two moderate miles. A bounty of easy to challenging hiking and biking trails web through the surrounding Galisteo Basin Preserve. (Download a map at galisteobasinpreserve.com/trails.) **Bathrooms:** Two outhouses. **Water:** A station with running water stands next to the outhouses for basic cleansing. Each tent has a large urn of mineral water for drinking. **Dogs:** Yes! (Kids, too.) **Fee:** From \$200 per night. staykitfox.com

ton because I missed the sky and earth and easy access to land," Kolker says. "I needed that sense of groundedness, and I wanted to be able to provide that experience. Anyone can go hiking and backpacking, but maybe you have young kids, or no time, or you're someone who's just traveling to Santa Fe for a few days. This lets you experience the land in a way you wouldn't be able to."

It took her two years to find 160 acres of private property within the preserve. The



COURTESY OF KITFOX



Meals at KitFox go far beyond standard camp fare.

pandemic stalled her 2020 opening, but this past spring, reservations rolled in. "We're booked through fall," she says.

KitFox accommodates everything from days-long retreats to bring-your-own-food overnights. I lucked into Dine in the Wild, an overnight that comes with Gregoire's apps, dinner, dessert, and a morning-after breakfast of mic-drop caliber. My safari-style tent held a queen bed, down comforter, sheepskin throw, and an iPhone charger.

I hit the walking trails twice,

read half of a novel on the deck of my tent, and marveled at how much better freshly grilled trout tastes when eaten outside. I didn't miss puzzling over a campsite, fumbling with dirty dishes, or undoing the spinal kinks rendered by blow-up mattresses.

"You changed me," I told Kolker.

"This is something that every human can appreciate and enjoy," she replied. "It's the earth. It's made for everybody. It heals everybody, too, if you give it long enough."

HOME BASE

TRY THESE IDEAS FOR BACKYARD CAMPING WITH THE KIDS—AND ENSURE THEY STICK WITH IT ALL NIGHT LONG.

Lea Reynolds, the New Mexico native and mom behind the *Wild Stoke* blog, teaches her toddler leave-no-trace principles on camping trips in their Jeep. "As a kid, I didn't realize how much there is to do in New Mexico," she says. "Families can test the waters with a fun backyard camping experience."

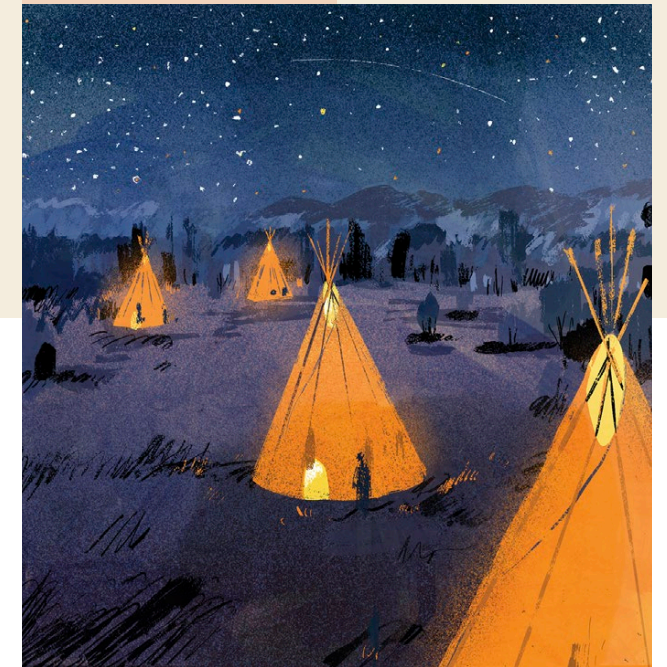
Draw up a "packing" list. Essentials include a tent and sleeping bags, camp chairs, and a grill or stove. Bonus points for hanging lanterns and string lights.

Bring toys, books, baby blankets, or stuffed animals. "Kids like what's familiar, so try to have a little bit of home," she says. Reynolds suggests nature books to guide explorations of bird species and other wildlife.

Leave electronics behind. "Replace screen time with songs and books—old-school fun that add to the camping feel," she says. Look toward the sky, and get cozy around a campfire.

Don't go indoors, even to cook. Reynolds recommends a simple menu of favorites. Her family likes to grill fresh chicharones. "And we never forget our s'mores." —JCO

COURTESY OF KITFOX



Comfortably Fun GETTING OUTDOORS DOESN'T HAVE TO MEAN ROUGHING IT.

Equal parts yoga retreat, cultural tour, and multimodal excursion, the three-day, two-night **Taos Glamping Adventure**, during the mid-August Perseids meteor shower, gets the blood and adrenaline flowing while encouraging relaxation. The itinerary includes stand-up paddleboarding on the Rio Grande, sightseeing at the Rio Grande Gorge, hiking among petroglyphs, sunrise and sunset yoga and meditation, and farm-to-table meals, complete with goodies you bake in an horno oven at Taos Pueblo. Then lay your head in a gorgeously outfitted canvas tent. **Fee:** \$1,250 per person. heritageinspirations.com/glamp —JCO

Trout Stalker Ranch's off-grid Beck and Nova cabins, in Chama, sit stylishly on 1,500 acres, with private access to the Rio Chama, a riverside bocce court, a deck, and the Roadhouse, where guests can spin records and play shuffleboard or darts. Or opt for some alone time. "Many who stay in the cabins don't go anywhere else, because it's so beautiful there," says co-owner and manager Ashlyn Perry. She encourages a guided fly-fishing experience or wildlife viewing via Trout Stalker's canoes, fat-tire bikes, or solar-powered pontoon boat. **Fee:** \$500 per night. chamatroutstalkers.com —JCO

Dancing Bear Tipi feels woody yet luxurious enough for a low-key escape. Guests of this Crow-style tepee, in the Lincoln National Forest near Cloudcroft, can whip up their own grub on the camp grill and take charge of the day's activities—or simply hang out on the deck, surrounded by ponderosa and fir trees. See the Milky Way while relaxing around the firepit, or open the smoke flaps of the 300-square-foot tepee, where a wrought-iron candle chandelier adds a big dose of romance. **Fee:** From \$95 per night. newmexicotipis.com/dancing-bear-tipi —JCO **NM**