

A petroglyph panel in the Organ Mountains–Desert Peaks National Monument.

SIZE
496,000
ACRES

ROCK ART SITES
50
AT LEAST

LOWEST ELEVATION
4,000
FEET

HIGHEST ELEVATION
9,000
FEET

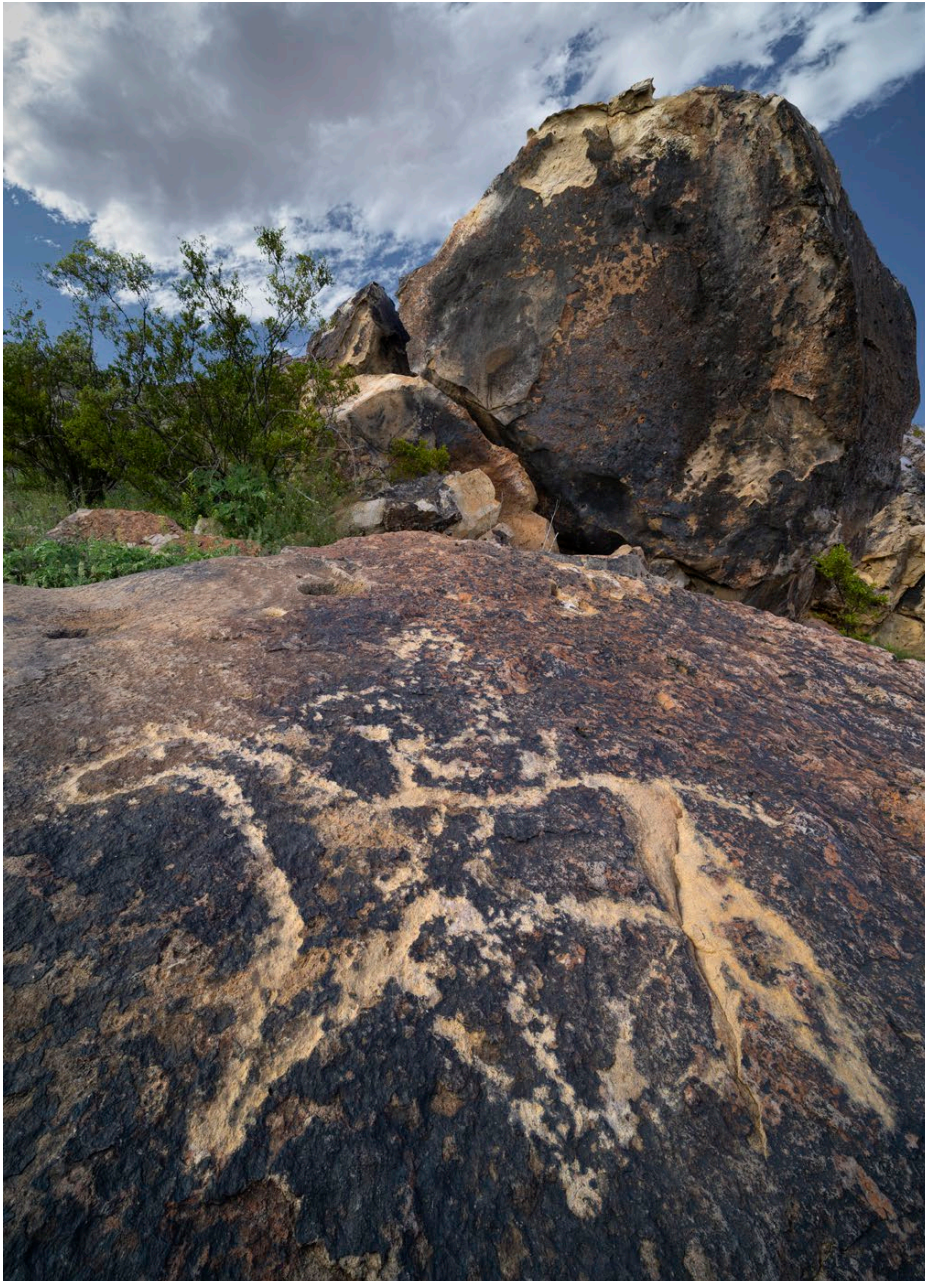


Rocks That Speak

Near Las Cruces, a hike to ancient petroglyphs ignites a writer's passion. **By David Soules**

AS WE WALKED THE SHORT DISTANCE to our destination in the Sierra de las Uvas, northwest of Las Cruces, I noticed our honored guest gently rubbing the sides of his face. Only later did I learn that anointing oneself with pollen is a common spiritual ritual of indigenous people. This unassuming act was a different type of discovery for me, a reminder that there is almost always something new to learn when I visit these places.

As our intended site came into view, our guest paused in silence and then broke into song. While the words were foreign to me, they actually may have been the least foreign element of our outing. The melody danced on the desert breeze, and the uplifting spirit of the moment lingered long after our group of elected officials, invited guests, and local advocates for outdoor conservation departed.



From top: This "newer" horse image postdates the Spanish arrival in the 1500s. Venus overlooks an iconic creature.

wildlife, and enjoy the serenity of our nearby public lands. When I learned President Barack Obama was considering declaring a large portion of the mountains in Doña Ana County a national monument, I was curious what could be documented as "historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest," as required by the Antiquities Act of 1906. And thus began my own journey and a newfound appreciation for the special character and diversity of cultural sites that reside in our own backyard. Especially its ancient rock art.

INDIGENOUS ROCK ART APPEARS ALL across New Mexico and around the world.

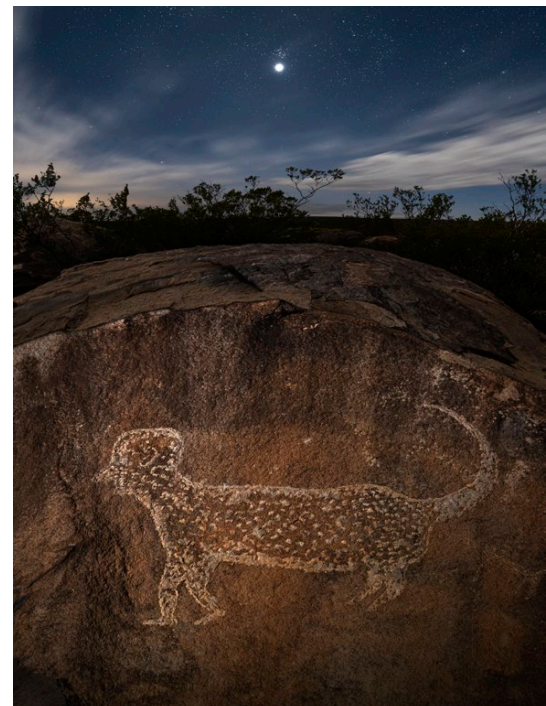
For novices hoping to experience its beauty, three exceptional places are Petroglyph National Monument, in Albuquerque; the Three Rivers Petroglyph Site, north of Alamogordo; and La Cieneguilla Petroglyphs, west of Santa Fe. After you get familiar with what to expect, some common themes

We had gathered on this day, nearly a decade ago, in a part of what was to become the Organ Mountains—Desert Peaks National Monument in 2014. Our honored guest, a member of the Kiowa nation, was on a pilgrimage to trace the migratory journeys of his people through ancestral sites across the country. This site featured a number of petroglyphs left by those who called the area home long before European people arrived.

I'm blessed to have grown up in southern

New Mexico, where an evening spent roasting hot dogs skewered on sharpened yucca stalks over a sandy arroyo campfire served as prime entertainment—and cuisine—on many a boyhood summer evening. We explored the desert in every way imaginable to a child and jumped at any opportunity for an excursion to the nearby foothills and mountains.

As the years and decades rolled by, I have enjoyed countless outings into our Chihuahuan Desert to hike and camp, search for





POWERED BY STEAM AND AWE AND WONDER.

Steal away a day on the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad. It's a 64-mile journey that zig zags through steep mountain canyons, the high desert, and lush meadows between Antonito, Colorado and Chama, New Mexico. Begin your adventure in either town. The trip includes a hearty lunch buffet and luxury motor coach shuttle back to your car. Your daily grind can't follow you into the great, unspoiled West.

BOOK NOW AT CUMBRESTOLTEC.COM 1-888-286-2737



Cumbres & Toltec
AMERICA'S MOST HISTORIC SCENIC RAILROAD



EXPLORE

▶ Renowned Alien Run Mountain Bike Trails
Ancestral Pictographs, Pueblitos & Petroglyphs
Historical Aztec Museum and Pioneer Village
Over 300 Natural Sandstone Arches
Aztec Ruins National Monument
Fly Fishing on the Quality Waters of San Juan River
Navajo Lake State Park...and more!

AZTEC

(888) 543-4629 | www.AztecNM.com



emerge in terms of where rock art occurs. But for me, nothing rivals the sense of discovery that comes with finding a site on your own.

Take serious note: These are sensitive cultural sites. Still regarded as spiritual places by nearby tribes, they can easily be desecrated by visitors who fail to recognize them as national treasures. When a rock art image is defaced, it can never be undone. Even the oils from your palm can be detrimental,

especially for pictographs, which are painted rather than pecked. As a result, the locations of many such archaeological sites are intentionally kept obscure.

In general, rock art exists where early inhabitants lived. People chose their living sites based on the availability of food, water, shelter, and perhaps defensibility. If you focus on those elements and find habitation sites, there is a fair chance that rock art is nearby.


Another fundamental requirement for rock art is a good surface, akin to an artist's canvas. Smooth rock with a sheen or "desert varnish" that reveals a different color when chipped or pecked away is common, especially in volcanic regions. Caves offered both shelter and good surfaces for art, but they are relatively rare here. I know of roughly 50 rock art sites within the Organ Mountains—Desert Peaks National Monument, and at least twice



A sun star greets these petroglyph neighbors.

that many across south-central New Mexico. A few sites are vast, like Three Rivers, with thousands of images, but most consist of a few panels, or perhaps even a single image. Large or small, each site is unquestionably unique, with a character and backdrop all its own.

Interpreting the meaning of rock art can be a field of study unto itself. The images often include geometric forms, handprints, animals, and various human forms. I both

DAVID GRIEGO DESIGNS ®

Santa Fe Goldworks

Contemporary Southwest Jewelry and Fine Diamonds



River of Love® exclusively at Santa Fe Goldworks

on the Plaza
60 E. San Francisco St. | Santa Fe, NM 87501
505.983.4562 | SantaFeGoldworks.com



SOCORRO

A great place to live, explore, learn & play.

WWW.SOCORRONM.ORG





The collage above shares a common artistic thread with a nearby image (facing page).

admire and respect that rock art bears an important cultural and spiritual significance for the indigenous people of this region—the images may speak to elements of their religious practices and origin stories or perhaps simply highlight nearby landmarks. These

days, even archaeologists hesitate to ascribe meanings to each image. I don't wish to intrude by prying into whatever private meanings they may hold for the descendants of those who created them.

I prefer to view the images as a gift—an indelible artistic record that spurs my imagination about the life and times of the artist. To that end, the local Tigua Indians of Ysleta del Sur Pueblo, the oldest permanent settlement in this area, use the name Speaking Rock as a

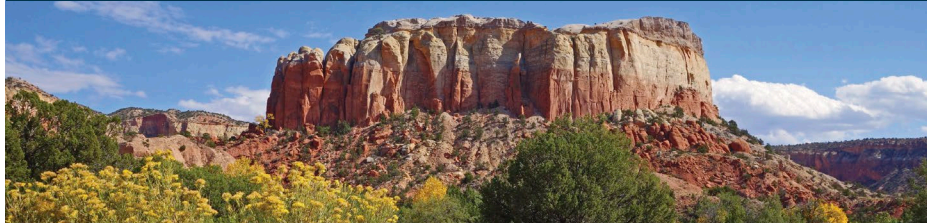
symbol of their tribe. I like to think of rock art as a bridge over the vast canyons and arroyos of time, a bridge that connects the creator of each image with those who view the art, speaking to each of us individually—much as we appreciate other art forms in our own personal ways.

As our forefathers pondered how to manage the vast frontier of the American West, one of their greatest foresights was the decision to place large tracts of land and water in the public trust, making us all stewards of those places. That's how I found myself on a hike with a Kiowa elder and other dignitaries. Together, we not only built grassroots support that led to federal recognition for and protection of the Organ Mountains–Desert Peaks area but we also enjoyed countless hours documenting the hidden jewels within its vast and varied terrain, which has seen everything from ancient peoples to Billy the Kid to Apollo astronaut training sessions.

Hitting the Peaks

The Bureau of Land Management oversees the Organ Mountains–Desert Peaks National Monument (blm.gov/visit/omdp). For a comprehensive guide to its trails, pick up the 2018 guidebook *Exploring Organ Mountains–Desert Peaks National Monument*, by Devon Fletcher with David Soules. During the summer, plan on morning adventures; afternoon temps can hit 100 degrees. Take plenty of water, let people know where you're going, and keep an eye out for rattlesnakes and other hazards. If you find examples of rock art, feel free to take photographs, but do not touch or vandalize them. Admire them as you would any culturally significant item.

MASTERS WEEK AT GHOST RANCH



The Magic Continues September 12 - 18, 2020

Mastery of Silver & Stone - Jamie Halpern

Oil & Acrylic: A Series Progression - Juliana Crownover

The Daily Stone Carver - Robin Keck

Pastel Landscape Intensive - Diane Arenberg

Drawing From Nature - Helen Byers

Falling for Poetry: Alchemy of Poetry - Joan Logghe

Mastering the Art of Environmental Portraits & Landscape - George DeLoache

Earth Vessels - Camilla Trujillo

Painting in O'Keeffe Country - Anna Koster

Writing From Antiquity - Dr. Martha Yates

Fall Writing Festival October 4 - 10, 2020


O'KEEFFE LANDSCAPE TOURS | TRAIL RIDES | MUSEUMS | HIKING | OVERNIGHT LODGING & CAMPING

GHOST RANCH



CALL 505.685.1000

GHOSTRANCH.ORG/NMM

Beyond rock art, the Organ Mountains–Desert Peaks National Monument is filled with adventures. Like an earthbound constellation, its four sections serve as an outdoor lover's cardinal directions surrounding Las Cruces. Within them, you'll find everything from volcanic landscapes to rocky peaks, narrow canyons, wildflowers, ponderosa pines, and the popular Dripping Springs Natural Area. Only by exploring them will you discover their hidden gems. But I warn you: If the rock art exploration bug afflicts you, the effects can be lasting. I celebrate that affliction, and trust that it will remain with me for many years to come. 

David Soules, a native Las Cruces, is a member of the State Game Commission and an ardent supporter of public lands. His knowledge and fondness for the lands near Las Cruces grew while he was advocating for establishment of the Organ Mountains–Desert Peaks National Monument. He has earned wrinkles, blisters, and a half century's worth of memories hiking, camping, hunting, and exploring the hills and haunts of southern New Mexico with family and friends.



Celebrate in style. [TRUE]

Chama is
NEW MEXICO *True*

Book your tickets now for the Fireworks Special steam train ride and show on July 4th in Chama. Offering visitors an authentic taste of 19th century steam railroading, this unique ride culminates with a view of one of the best fireworks displays in the state — from the train!

For Reservations: 888.286.2737, Monday – Friday, 8am – 4pm MST

chamanmm.com
Funded by Village of Chama Lodgers Tax



Rocky Mountain High

New Mexico's tallest peaks shelter alpine lakes where stunning beauty rewards intrepid hikers.

Story and photographs by Christina Selby



NUMBER OF LAKES

35
AT LEAST

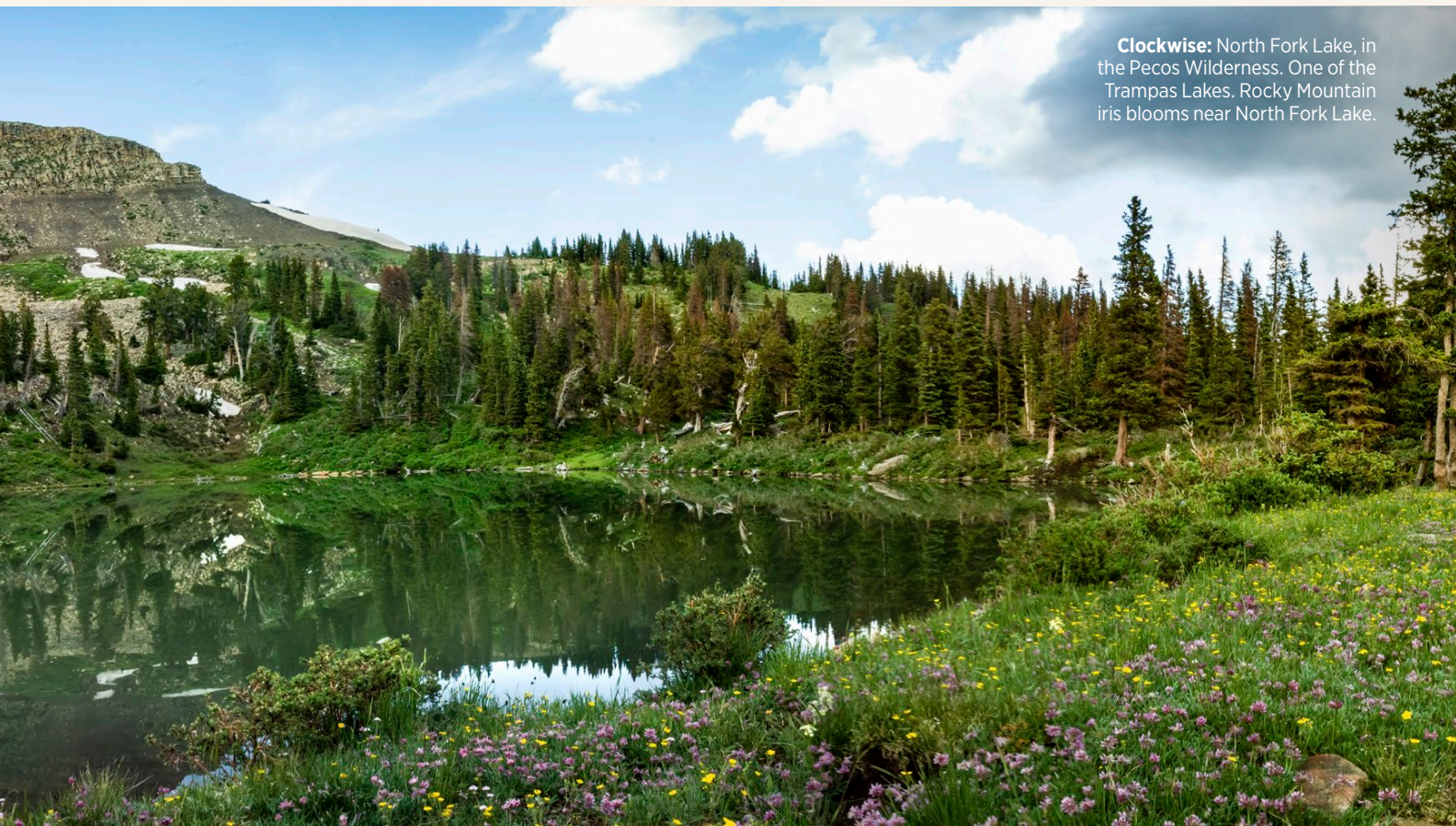
AVERAGE ELEVATION

11,200
FEET

AVERAGE DISTANCE TO A LAKE

5.5
MILES

AVERAGE TIME LAKES ARE SNOW-FREE

4
MONTHS

Clockwise: North Fork Lake, in the Pecos Wilderness. One of the Trampas Lakes. Rocky Mountain iris blooms near North Fork Lake.

I'M ON THE LAST STRETCH OF A seven-mile hike to Pecos Baldy Lake. It's the last mile and the most vertical. My thighs burn, my heart thumps, and I can hardly catch my breath. *Why am I working so hard? ... I could just sit down next to this lovely mountain stream ...* My hiking companion, Glacier, a thigh-high white dog, steps on my heels to keep me moving.

The trail finally levels out as the afternoon sun cozies up to the horizon. I pass through a field overflowing with colorful wildflowers and arrive at the lake. A deep-blue pool sparkles below East Pecos Baldy, its 12,529-foot peak still topped with a cornice of snow in July.

The view reminds me of a saying posted over my desk: "Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but the moments that take our breath away."

Two young guys have set up a backcountry camp under the pines about 300 feet away from the lake. As they approach to say hello,

my dog charges at them, barking fiercely, and then rolls over on his back for a belly scratch. So much for my protector.

They're friendly guys and tell me tales of their multiday backpack through this high country of the Pecos Wilderness, northeast of Santa Fe. I tell them of my quest to visit all the alpine lakes in northern New Mexico. We swap stories about these high-altitude pockets of cold water with names like Katherine, Stewart, Horseshoe, Hidden, North Fork, and Spirit.

In the fading light, I set up my tent and hang my bear bag in a tree. Glacier and I settle in for a night's rest. I dream of water as we drift to sleep amid absolute silence.

AS COOL REFUGES FROM DESERT HEAT, alpine lakes, with their brilliant blue water, summer wildflowers, charismatic wildlife, and relatively few visitors, are attractive destinations for any hiker willing to put in

the muscle to reach them. But these alpine environments, so essential to life in New Mexico, are rapidly changing.

More than 35 natural snow-fed lakes dot the southernmost of the Rocky Mountains before those towering peaks subside into the earth at Glorieta Pass, southeast of Santa Fe. As glaciers retreated in the last ice age, they left depressions large enough to hold a significant amount of snowmelt.

For thousands of years since, alpine lakes and high-mountain wetlands have acted as the natural "water towers" of the West. They collect and hold each year's snowmelt and release it slowly over weeks or months.

Flowing through hundreds of miles of streams and rivers, and recharging groundwater, snowmelt provides up to 90 percent of the water that New Mexicans in downstream communities use for drinking, growing food, and running industries that fuel our economy.

The latest report from the Intergovern-

mental Panel on Climate Change finds that scientists are documenting profound change in mountain ecosystems all across the globe. Less snow falls, and it melts earlier. During my hikes to alpine lakes in 2018, a year of intense drought, I witnessed water levels in some lakes drop between 20 and 80 feet.

Eighty feet.

“Alpine regions have long been talked about as incredibly sensitive and incredibly vulnerable,” says Heidi Steltzer, a professor at Fort Lewis College, in Durango, Colorado, and co-author of the mountains chapter in the IPCC report. “I would tend to say that

mountain regions are more resilient than vulnerable, but that’s a more complicated story to tell.”

Still, “we just don’t know” what the future holds, Steltzer says, as changes in New Mexico’s mountains are not well studied.

ON A CLOUDLESS SUMMER DAY, I’M approaching Jicarita Peak, near the village of Tres Ritos. I stop at the edge of Santa Barbara Ridge to catch my breath. The trail peters out into snow still covering the northern face of the mountain.

I’m not prepared. At this time of year, I expected a nearly bare ridge, but 2019 was a good snow year. I brought no traction spikes, no snowshoes, no hiking poles, no ice ax to catch me from sliding down should I slip.

As I stand there, a woman and her dog appear above me. She’s wearing short-shorts and nearly treadless tennis shoes. I watch her gingerly descend the snow, slipping here, crab-crawling on all fours there. I kick a toe hole and start up a vertical track.

We cross each other halfway up the snowfield. “I’m glad to see I’m not the only one who made bad decisions today,” she says. We laugh at our mutual unpreparedness.

A few steps later, a dark figure moves across the snow in the distance. I watch for a few minutes and realize it’s a marmot. He climbs onto a bare rock at the top, only to jump off and slide down the snow. He repeats this several times. I’m stunned. Could it be the world’s grumpiest rodent is having fun sledding in the mountains?

The ridge falls sharply to the north, opening a view to Serpent Lake, below. Taos’s Wheeler Peak, the state’s highest, at 13,161 feet, is visible on the horizon, with several Colorado fourteeners beyond. Two pikas cautiously peek out from the scree along the trail. They call to each other with loud *eeks*, making sure the other is aware of my presence. As I watch, they dart in and out of the rocks, gathering grasses and wildflowers to stockpile for winter.

These abundant but small mammals live above the tree line, where summers are cool

“Alpine regions have long been talked about as incredibly sensitive and incredibly vulnerable,” says Heidi Steltzer.

and winters are cold—or once were. Mountains are warming faster than any other ecosystem in the world. Pikas are an indicator species

for the potential impact. Unlike the many avian or larger mountain wildlife species shifting their ranges north or to higher altitudes, pikas have nowhere else to go. Their tiny legs won’t take them down these mountains and up other ones farther north. Unless we help them. Wildlife biologists are considering “assisted migration”—moving pikas to higher peaks where cooler

temperatures can help them survive.

As I ponder what it would take to catch one of these fast-moving animals, two bighorn sheep materialize to my right. They side-eye me as they saunter by, seemingly undisturbed by my presence.



The Uptake

Clustered in the Sangre de Cristos of northern New Mexico, the state’s highest peaks shelter these hike-to lakes on public lands: Bernardin, Cow, Enchanted, Goose, Heart, Hidden, Horseshoe (two of them), Indian, Johnson, José Vigil, Katherine, Lost, Lost Bear, Middle Fork (in Pecos Wilderness), Nambé, No Fish, North Fork, Pacheco, Pecos Baldy, San Leonardo, Santiago, Serpent, Spirit, Stewart, Trampas, Williams, and surely more. Several alpine lakes are accessible by car and have developed campgrounds, including Canjilon, Stinking, and Trout lakes, near Tierra Amarilla; Goose, Middle Fork, and Pioneer lakes, near Red River; La Cueva, near Sipapu; and Latir Lakes, near Questa.

SOME TRAILS TO GET YOU STARTED

Serpent Lake: About 7 miles round-trip on Trail 19; trailhead at end of FR 161.

Trampas Lakes: About 13 miles round-trip on Trail 31; trailhead at end of FR 207.

Pecos Baldy Lake: Nearly 15 miles round-trip on Beatty’s Trail 25 to Jack’s Creek Trail 257; trailhead in Jack’s Creek Campground equestrian area, at end of FR 555.

Nambé Lake: About 8.5 miles round-trip on Winsor Trail to Nambé Lake Trail 400; trailhead at Santa Fe Ski Area.

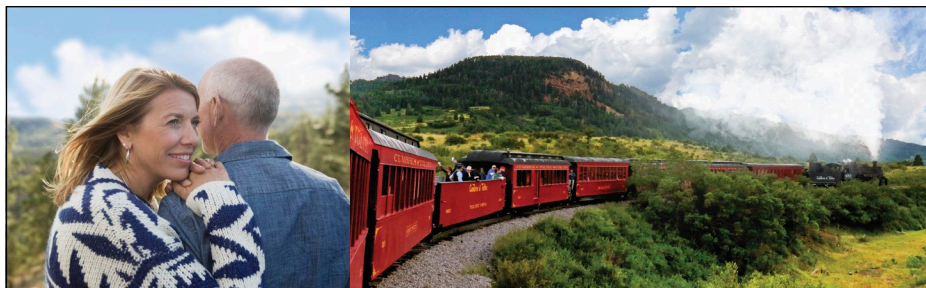


In early summer, golden banner blossoms blanket an alpine meadow near the trailhead to Serpent Lake.

They navigate the rocky terrain of the ridge with ease. After a long winter, their coats are patchy as they shed their outer layer. They graze as they go, fattening up on protein-rich plants' new growth. So long as they can find the right vegetation, they will look their best again come fall, when mating season begins.

AFTER NEARLY SEVEN MILES ON Trampas Lakes Trail 31, the route starts to level out and turn soggy, a signal that a lake is near. American bistort, marsh marigold, queen's crown, and Parry's primrose paint the path. These wildflowers thrive in high-alpine wetlands. Hundreds of pink elephant's heads decorate the marsh. I squat down to inspect the flowers closely—the parts *do* look like the large ears, long trunk, and rounded forehead of an elephant.

I finally reach the lakeshore, where the



GET OFF THE GRID. GET ON THESE RAILS.

Steal away a day on the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad. It's a 64-mile journey that zig zags through steep mountain canyons, the high desert, and lush meadows between Antonito, Colorado and Chama, New Mexico. Begin your adventure in either town. The trip includes a hearty lunch buffet and luxury motor coach shuttle back to your car. Your daily grind can't follow you into the great, unspoiled West.

BOOK NOW AT CUMBRESTOLTEC.COM | 1-888-286-2737



Cumbres & Toltec
AMERICA'S MOST HISTORIC SCENIC RAILROAD



There is a place
where the mountains speak
and the river sings.

[TRUE]

Chama is
NEW MEXICO *True*

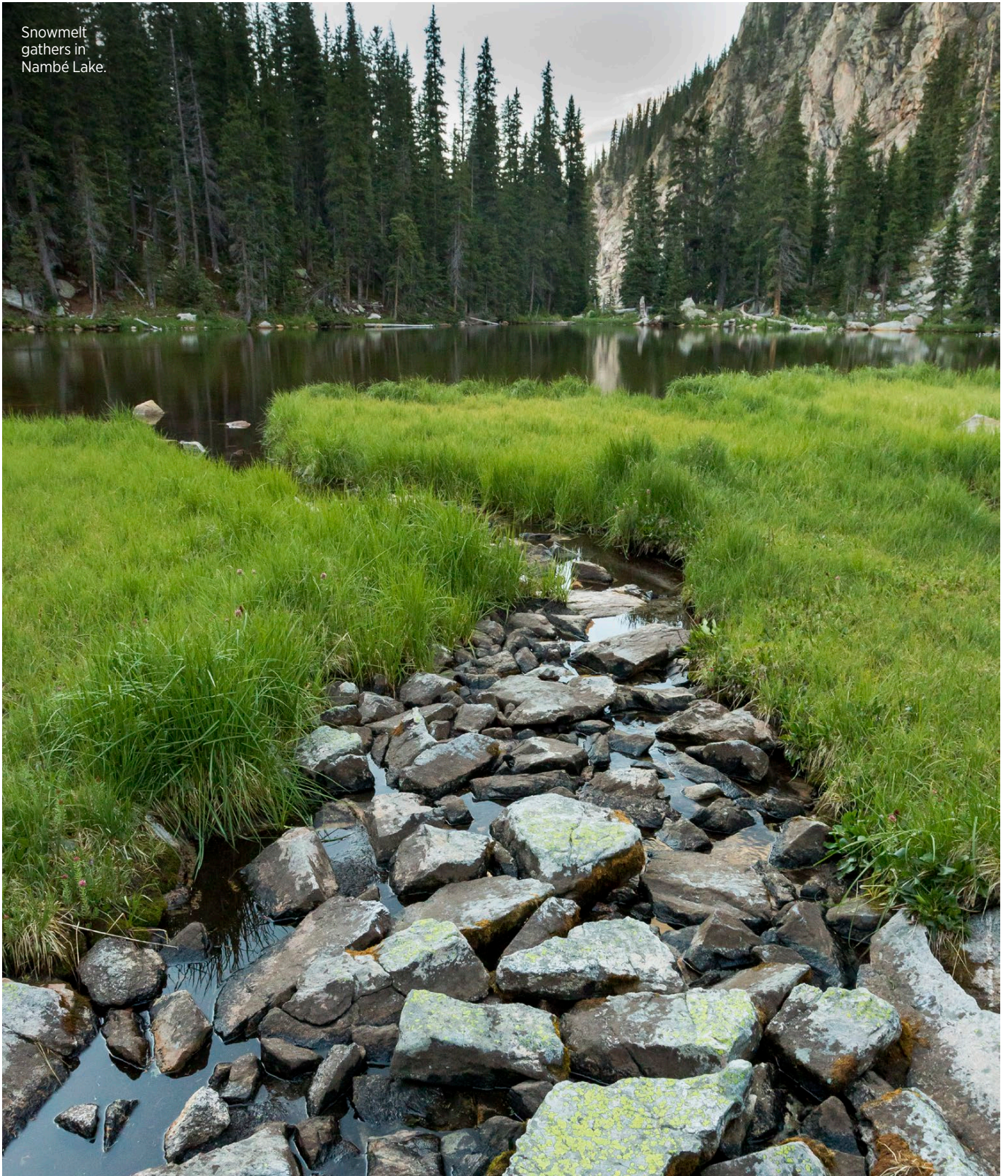
chamanmm.com

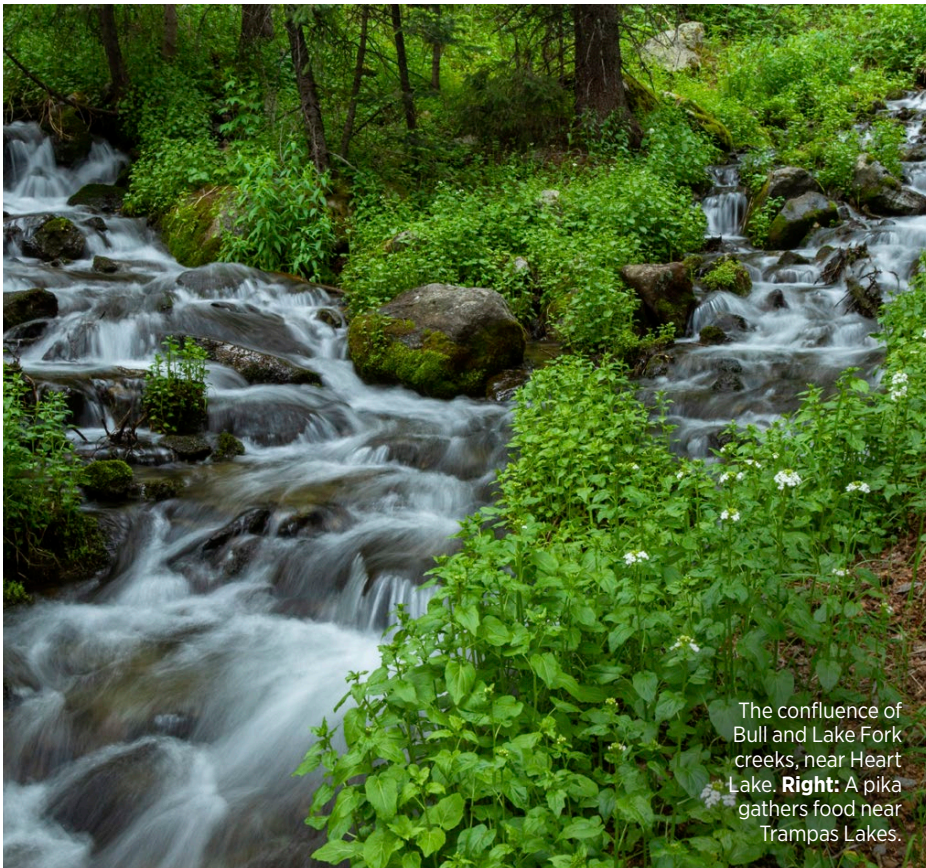


800.477.0149
575.756.2306
info@chamavalley.com
Funded by Village of Chama Lodgers Tax

photo: www.exposureandstop.com

Snowmelt
gathers in
Nambé Lake.





The confluence of Bull and Lake Fork creeks, near Heart Lake. **Right:** A pika gathers food near Trampas Lakes.

sharp granite summits of the three Truchas Peaks tower above in astonishing beauty. The lake is surrounded by the blue shade of pines and spruce. Rust-red boulders brighten up the shoreline.

Two other hikers laze about. An angler flicks a fly rod, hoping to catch native Río Grande cutthroat trout in the clear water. Each of us keeps an unspoken distance from the others to maintain the feeling of solitude we sought by walking many miles into the wilderness.

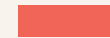
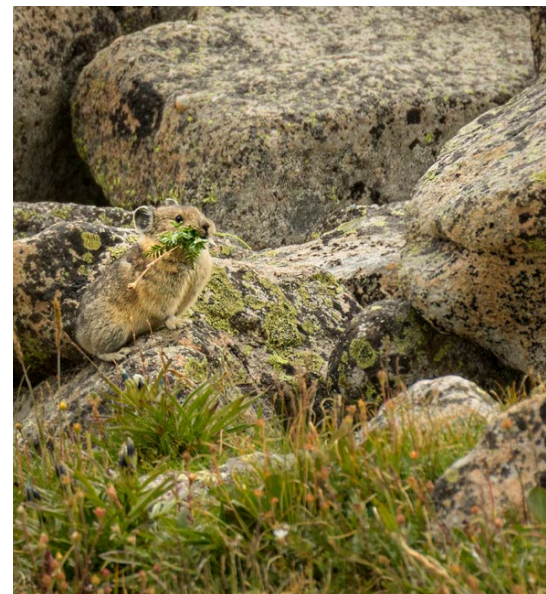
A sphinx moth flits between low-growing arctic gentian wildflowers on the talus slope. With higher temperatures in the mountains, wildflowers are abundant earlier because of early snowmelt. But the window in which they bloom is shortening. This means wildflower enthusiasts need to make adjustments to when they hike to the high country to catch the outstanding displays in New Mexico's mountains.

"Even though it's changing, it is still beautiful," says Steltzer. "If you aren't from a mountain region, you might not even notice."

TWO STEPS FORWARD, PAUSE, BREATHE, repeat. My mind locks on to this mantra and turns it over, egging me on to Heart Lake, in the Latir Peak Wilderness, near Questa, my last lake hike of the season. I fall into the hiker's zone where thoughts fade away and all that is left is slow and steady movement forward. My senses are at full attention. A breeze bends the trees, the grasses rustle, wildflowers paint the trail in bright colors, and the forest smells of the pine needles that crunch under my feet.

They say that the desert heals the soul and mountains clear the mind. Scientific research now confirms this. A walk in the woods, through a wildflower meadow, or by an alpine lake eases anxiety, stress, and depression. This is what drives my quest to see every alpine lake. Walking high into these mountains makes me feel good, even if it's a chore to get there. **NM**

Christina Selby is featured in "Storytellers," p. 8.



Hiking Tips



Alpine wildflowers grow close to the ground and in mats. Walk carefully in fragile alpine tundra environments.



Stay on the trail. User-created trails can drain, incise, and transport water and sediment away from headwater systems.



Go to the bathroom at least 200 feet from lakes, streams, and wetlands. Bag and pack out your and your dog's waste, or carry a shovel to bury it.



The National Forest Service recommends camping at least 300 feet from lakes, streams, and rivers and building no campfires, which damage soil and water quality.



The adobe-walled Cleveland Roller Mill and a peek at its interior (facing page).

POPULATION

4,521
PEOPLE

ELEVATION

7,172
FEET

TOWN OF MORA

3
PLAZAS

GRAIN MILLS STATEWIDE

200
EARLY 1900s



Grinding It Out

The Mora Valley once boasted seven wheat mills within seven miles. The three that remain (plus one wool mill) have history on their side.

By Molly Boyle

TWENTY-FIVE MILES NORTH OF LAS Vegas, a gentle giant of a building welcomes drivers to a pastoral valley where the present keeps close company with the past.

A metal waterwheel straddles the rushing spring waters of the Mora River. Beyond it, a path winds around a wonky complex of adobe buildings with faded blue shutters. Whether you walk the grounds of the La Cueva Mill in the clear light of morning, looking to the high eastern plains, or in the lengthening afternoon shadows of the surrounding mountains, the old gristmill feels like a wannabe time traveler's dream destination.

The 150-year-old former flour mill, near La Cueva Farm's raspberry fields, is more than an architectural tribute to the lasting marriage of Spanish construction and American engineering. Its metal gabled roof and earthen bricks represent the remnants of a densely grouped milling system that once nurtured a wheat-growing region known as "the bread basket of New Mexico."

Along a seven-mile stretch of the river, from La Cueva to Cleveland, three historic flour mills remain: La Cueva Mill, St. Vrain Mill, and the Cleveland Roller Mill, now a museum. Thanks to preservation efforts by local residents, this scenic drive is a journey through the little valley that, at one time, could. Its people built seven mills in as many miles, supported crops that fed people far beyond their mountain borders, and protected the resources and lifeways of a place some New Mexicans call "God's country."

These days, there's a new mill. Built in 2003, the Mora Valley Spinning Mill sits in the heart of downtown Mora, breathing new life into the tradition of local wool spinning and weaving.

"That spirit of self-sufficiency was already there before the mills," says A. Gabriel Meléndez, a Mora Valley native and a University of New Mexico distinguished professor. A vibrancy existed even before Ceran St. Vrain built the valley's oldest standing industrial mill, in 1864, to supply a \$41,000 flour con-



tract with Fort Union, Meléndez says.

"It was remarkably diverse, although on a small scale," he says. "You had Syrian and Lebanese merchants. There were Jewish merchants and Anglo-Americans and Irish soldiers. St. Vrain, coming from back east, arrives in the 1830s and intermarries with the local community."

The mix was rounded out by French priests who established Christian Brothers schools, Italian Jesuits who came from Las Vegas, and Spanish-speaking farmers, herdsman, and ranchers. The Mora Valley economy was boosted by booming wheat crops, cattle and sheep ranches, and the increasing consumer demands from nearby forts and cities like

Las Vegas, Taos, and Santa Fe.

All had reason to hail the rise of the local gristmills that processed grain from the 1860s to the 1940s. In *The Book of Archives and Other Stories from the Mora Valley, New Mexico*, Meléndez writes that a local politician gave a speech at the inauguration of the La Cueva Mill, where farmers mingled with priests and politicians, and women dressed in their Sunday best. "People of Mora County,

Above: The Mora River once powered the La Cueva Mill. **Facing page, clockwise from top left:** Merlyn Witt at the St. Vrain Mill. Its waterwheel. The interior used to bustle with wheat grinding.

here before you are the fruits of American genius," the tax assessor proclaimed, before referencing a traditional hand-grinding tool. "The metate," he said, "gives way to Yankee ingenuity."

INSIDE THE THREE-STORY ST. VRAIN MILL, TRACES of that ingenuity abound. Merlyn Witt, president of the St. Vrain Mill Preservation and Historical Foundation, points to a column on the first floor. The wood bears old scratches revealing decades of milling calculations as well as "I was here" inscriptions. "Guadalupe Romero, May 15, '96"—that's not nineteen ninety-six," Witt says. "That's the oldest one I've found."

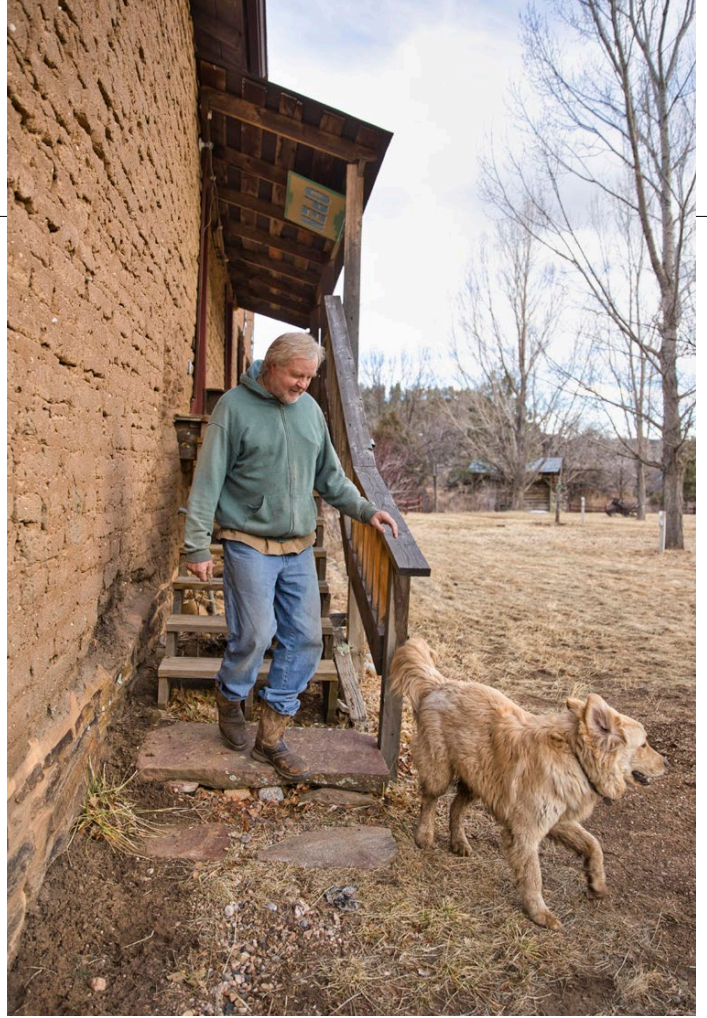
The foundation, which purchased the mill in 2015, has made considerable headway in restoring windows, gables, and the second-story loading platform. Witt says repairs to the walls are the next—and most expensive, at an estimated cost of \$125,000—task of the foundation, which plans to open the first floor

"It was remarkably diverse ... You had Syrian and Lebanese merchants. There were Jewish merchants and Anglo-Americans and Irish soldiers," says A. Gabriel Meléndez.



DESTINATIONS

Mora County





to visitors after Memorial Day. The goal is to repurpose it into the Mora Valley Heritage Center, with a meeting space, and to feature exhibits on the history of generational families in the area. In recent years, the refurbished St. Vrain has hosted quilt shows and a pop-up Christmas arts-and-crafts fair.

Vice President Betsy Bloch says there is no shortage of interest in goings-on at the mill. “People are very proud of their heritage here and they want to revive it,” she says. “If we’re here for more than 20 minutes, someone will stop and get out of their car and come in and say, ‘Oh, I’ve always wanted to go in here.’”

A few miles down NM 518, Cleveland Roller Mill Museum owner Dan Cassidy IV says that although the pandemic has closed the mill for now, he never minds the respectful

road-trippers who get out to take awestruck looks around the grounds. Cassidy’s great-grandfather Dan bought the 1890s-era mill in 1913 and ran it as a family operation into the mid-1940s, after the majority of the more than 200 mills statewide had already closed, victims of advances in milling technology and the Dust Bowl’s pummeling of farmers. (Valencia Flour Mill, in Jarales, and Navajo Pride Flour Mill, in Farmington, appear to be the only operational wheat mills left in New Mexico.)

Cassidy says his family’s mill, which became a private museum in 1989, was a 24-hour operation in the late 1920s and ’30s, producing up to 50 barrels of flour a day. With evident pride, he adds that the Cleveland Roller Mill had state-of-the-art technology for



Above: Preservationists helped save the St. Vrain Mill. **Facing page, clockwise from top left:** An old truck at the Cleveland Roller Mill. Owner Dan Cassidy IV with his dog. A window at La Cueva Mill. An exhibit at the Cleveland Roller Mill and a historical plaque at St. Vrain.

its day. “The other mills have stone-ground wheels,” he says. “They never had all this elaborate sifting machinery, so they could only do the most basic stone-ground flour. But this one could separate all the way down to white and pancake flour, to three or four different products.”

All the original machinery, bought as a

Right: A weathered Mora Valley outbuilding. **Facing page, clockwise from top left:** Pork tamales from Teresa's Tamales. Two views of mill interiors. The wool mill's shop. Theresa Olivas draws national praise for her tamale business.

turnkey operation from industrial manufacturers in Kansas and Pennsylvania, is still installed in the Cleveland Roller Mill. A few wood panels here, too, bear the traces of old production calculations. Since 1987, Cassidy has drawn musicians, craftspeople, and visitors to the Cleveland Millfest every Labor Day weekend to demonstrate the milling process and run the waterwheel. He gestures toward an old yellow Ford truck sitting outside the mill. "This mill is just like a Model T. All the new cars are much fancier, but they have the same basic engine. So does this flour mill."

OVER AT THE MORA VALLEY SPINNING MILL, mill manager Daryll Encinias explains that,



unlike the historic flour mills, "this mill has not been here forever. But the farmers and shepherders who provide our wool have been working here for a very, very long time."

The spinning mill, along with its nonprofit

weavers' gallery, Tapetes de Lana, which features work by dozens of local artisans, was sponsored by economic development grants that aimed to extend spinning and weaving traditions in the Mora Valley. Encinias says the wool mill has grown into one of the largest industrial spinners in the West. He and his team process fibers ranging from churro sheep to alpaca, yak, and camel.

Encinias walks me through the wool mill, explaining the weeklong process that transforms 100 pounds of raw churro wool into 60 pounds of cleaned and finely spun yarn for weavers. Running my hands over the ancient industrial machines and the lanolin-coated puffs of uncleaned fibers, I marvel at the little valley with the uncommonly good memory of its own history.

Meléndez writes that his homeland is filled with a *masa madre*, a regenerative yeast that sustains itself on its own traditions and stories. "Memory is powerful as a means to collect and hold things for other generations, but it is dead if the everlasting yeast of imagination fades and dries up," he explains. An industrious and imaginative hope springs eternal here—powered, it seems, by the Mora River. **NM**

MILL AROUND

Fruits of the valley. Where NM 518 and NM 442 meet, picnic benches and an adobe-walled garden on the La Cueva Mill grounds offer prime real estate for a picnic lunch. In late summer, hit the U-pick raspberry fields at the adjoining La Cueva Farm. The farm's Mill Café serves barbecue, sandwiches, and raspberry sundaes. Seasonal hours. lacuevafarm.com

Fruits of the loom. Tapetes de Lana, at the intersection of NM 518 and NM 434, serves as the unofficial welcome center to Mora. Browse yarns from the Mora Valley Spinning Mill, plus weavings, pottery, quilts, and soaps from more than 90 local makers. moravalleyspinningmill.com

Grist on the mills. Learn about the Cleveland Roller Mill Museum at clevelandrollermillmuseum.org, and the St. Vrain Mill's renovation at stvrainmill.org.

Top tamales. Even *The New York Times* couldn't resist the siren song of Teresa's Tamales, which have been rightfully famous across the Mora Valley since the 1990s. Don't miss the red-chile-and-pork masa missiles at this low-ceilinged shack right off the highway; order a day in advance for green-chile-chicken or calabacitas tamales. 3296 NM 518, Cleveland; 575-387-2754, on Facebook [@teresastamales](https://www.facebook.com/teresastamales)

Farm stay. Find off-grid serenity in the guest cabins at Los Vallecitos, a working ranch at the base of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Certified grass-fed beef and lamb are for sale here and at Los de Mora Local Growers' Cooperative, in Mora. From \$55 a night. airbnb.com

While researching mills in Mora County, Molly Boyle discovered there were once a couple of molinos (mills) upstream from where her parents live on Coyote Creek.

