



News Release

State of New Mexico
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Let History Guide Your Summer Road Trip in New Mexico

Santa Fe — Raton Pass Scenic Highway is historic. Built as a scenic and cultural gateway into New Mexico in 1908, it was the first highway completed in the Land of Enchantment.

A 1.5-mile stretch of the original road and related structures form the state's newest historic district, the New Mexico Historic Preservation Division, Department of Cultural Affairs has announced. The new district, recently established historic markers and heritage designations provide a guide for summer road trips routed around New Mexico's familiar and lesser known history.

Built in one year by 40 convicts from the penitentiary in Santa Fe, Raton Pass Scenic Highway predates New Mexico statehood, a long and culturally challenging road itself that was derailed several times by a nation skeptical about the territory's suitability for statehood. Community boosters proclaimed Raton, at the bottom of the pass, the "Gateway City" and worked endlessly to promote the new highway as the entry to New Mexico.

"The highway acted as both a physical and symbolic gateway, from a land of shared history and cultural norms, to a 'new country,' contrasted by its perceived foreignness," said John Murphey, a history consultant who wrote the nomination listed in the State Register of Cultural Properties this summer by the state Cultural Properties Review Committee and being considered for the National Register of Historic Places.

The highway climbs 600 feet up "Goat Hill" from town on a largely abandoned road that is asphalt in sections and gravel in others. It is accessible by passenger car and takes visitors past the landmark "RATON" sign, spelled in 18-foot high capital letters, and a "Star of Bethlehem," both built for tourism and part of the historic district. Drivers navigate steep ascents and descents made possible by double-horseshoe curves, hairpin turns and rock cuts before the road follows a high ridge into Colorado. The experience gives today's drivers a sense of what motorists encountered driving it from 1908—1942.

M.N. Mikesell, a traveling salesman, was the first man to drive the completed highway, setting out in his new Buick. He found the road in "the finest condition" save for unfinished sections with

“dangerous jump offs of several feet that made autoing very exciting,” according to the *Raton Reporter*. In the 1920s the road was improved and the paper predicted the view overlooking the city would be “talked of by thousands of tourists... the picture which spreads before them when they reach the hilltop will form one of the most delightful recollections of their trip out here.”

The highway is an historic engineering and transportation achievement and symbolizes political, state and local government forces at work. It represents a commitment to provide safe passage into New Mexico, essentially ushering the state into the era of automobile travel and related commerce. Renamed U.S. 85 in 1926, the corridor historically provided passage through the mountains for centuries until it largely was abandoned in 1942 for a less treacherous route through Trinidad and into New Mexico now used by I-25.

Before ascending Goat Hill, stop at the Raton Visitor Center off of Interstate 25 to read the Official Scenic Historic Marker about the Locomobile, credited as the first automobile driven into New Mexico via an unimproved wagon road that became Raton Pass Scenic Highway. Robert L. Dodson, of Albuquerque, and a company representative drove the vehicle, a gasoline-fueled and steam-powered car built in the U.S. from 1899–1929, from Denver to Raton in five days in 1900. According to early newspaper accounts the Locomobile was initially banned from Albuquerque streets because it scared horses.

The “First Automobile in New Mexico” historic marker began as a family story that was researched by Dodson’s great grandson Doug and his wife Vicki Sylvester, of La Jolla, California. They worked with HPD, the CPRC and researched the history through several libraries and newspapers. The couple traveled to various parts of New Mexico several times for two years to verify the history as it appears on the historic marker installed by the New Mexico Department of Transportation District 4 in 2013.

Southeastern New Mexico and the Capitan Mountains

Two new historic markers approved by the CPRC will provide users of popular Baca Campground in the Capitan Mountains some insight into why a lone, well-crafted chimney stands sentinel over a designated primitive campsite. The “Camp Raton-Baca Campground” marker gives insight into a lesser known part of New Mexico’s 20th century history, while “Lucy Leper Shaw, 1886–1974” is about the accomplished woman director of one of the most successful camps for young women during the Great Depression.

Nominated by Lincoln National Forest archaeologist Mark Gutzman, the “Raton Ranch—Baca Campground” marker resulted from his research at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. The 22-acre site was privately owned as Raton Ranch but deeded to the U.S. Forest Service in 1927. Archaeological research indicates the remote site in Baca Canyon wasn’t built on until a short-lived Civilian Conservation Corps camp went up in 1933. Named Camp Saturnino Baca for the Civil War captain and politician who sponsored the bill creating Lincoln County in the Territorial Legislature, the CCC abandoned it months after it opened, taking most of the equipment and furnishings to establish work camps for young men elsewhere in New Mexico.

About the same time, Lucy Leper Shaw and her husband, A. K., moved to New Mexico from New York City for his health. The first woman investment counsellor at Banker’s Trust Co., Mrs. Shaw was educated at the Art Institute in Chicago and Columbia University, and also worked in social services.

Dismayed at the poverty and bleak future she saw for many young women in Depression-era New Mexico, Mrs. Shaw heeded First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt's call to establish camps for young women in the same vein as the CCC camps where young men learned skills that could carry them through life.

The Shaws pieced the camp back together with surplus furniture from Fort Bayard and reassembled broken kitchen equipment. Mrs. Shaw traveled the state meeting families devastated by the 1930s economy and, after strong initial resistance from most parents, rounded-up 150 girls for the first session at her rechristened Camp Capitan in 1935.

It became one of the most successful camps in the nation for young girls and women aged 16-25. Written up in national publications, more than 2,000 girls—most of them from New Mexico— went through the camp's program in a five-and-one-half-years period. Of the approximately 90 camps established under the National Youth Administration, many ceased operating by 1937. But Lucy Shaw kept Capitan going into 1940, and much of its success was attributed to Mrs. Shaw's business acumen and her program's incorporation of Hispanic culture. Camp Capitan was one of the few of its type to operate year round and on budget.

The young women learned stenography, typing, and *colcha* embroidery. They sewed flags for every school in New Mexico and made clothing for the Carrie Tingley Hospital for Crippled Children in Hot Springs, now a veterans' hospital in Truth or Consequences. The camp was commissioned to create tin chandeliers and wall sconces in the traditional Spanish tradition for the new visitor center at White Sands National Monument, which still are in use today. And, they built the still-standing masonry chimney for the Shaws' home, since demolished, a building that doubled as the home economics classroom for the camp. In 1940, New Mexico celebrated the Cuarto Centennial of the Coronado expedition and the young women staged their interpretation of Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado*, called it "*El Mayordomo*" and performed it for more than 2,500 people in Spanish and English.

But the nation was retooling itself for war and camps like Capitan became less of a funding priority; the performance proved to be the camp's swan song. After the camp closed, Lucy Shaw became director of the NYA resident program in Phoenix. The Shaws later settled in Albuquerque where they lived the rest of their lives, and are buried at the city's Sandia Memory Gardens cemetery in the city's Northeast Heights.

Shortly after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, every Japanese railroad family in Clovis was rounded up and relocated to the Shaws camp, which reassumed the name Camp Raton and operated as an internment camp for about one year before it was abandoned for good. Access to the campground is via the intersection of U.380 and Lincoln Co. Rd. C002, also the eventual location of the two historic markers.

Travel east on the highway for about 25 miles to access N.M. 349. Near the White Oaks Cemetery is a recently installed historic marker commemorating "Susan McSween Barber 'Cattle Queen of New Mexico,' 1845—1931."

McSween and her first husband, Alexander, figured prominently in the Lincoln County War, in which he was killed. Her home was subsequently burned down by the Santa Fe Ring and she ended up nearly penniless. With her second husband, George Barber, she began the Three Rivers Ranch. Most

accounts claim she earned the cattle-queen title by amassing 1,158 acres, grazing 8,000- head of cattle and becoming one the largest landowners in the New Mexico territory. Her story factors into the 1988 movie *Young Guns* about Billy the Kid's role in the Lincoln County Wars. Susan McSween's grave is at the cemetery in White Oaks.

About 60 miles to the south on N.M. 82 is a new historic marker at the Sacramento Mountain Museum in Cloudcroft honoring the Mexican Canyon Trestle. The largest remaining wood-built trestle of the El Paso and Northeastern Railway was built as part of a 26-mile, 4,000-foot ascent to Cloudcroft that brought tourists—many of them escaping El Paso's summer heat—to what the railroad subbed "Roof Garden of the Sky." The rail line was abandoned in 1947 and the trestle left to deteriorate until momentum grew to save it some 10 years ago. The remarkable structure was restored with public funds through the efforts of Lincoln National Forest, the Village of Cloudcroft, NMDOT and HPD, and is near a viewing platform built near the highway. Much of the rail line now is used by hikers, mountain bikers and cross-country skiers.

Traveling south on nearby U.S. 54. are two restored historic markers commemorating the town Three Rivers and the Three Rivers Petroglyphs Site, one of the most concentrated arrays of petroglyphs in the Southwest. The marker mentions the estimated 21,000 images of animals, humans, plants and geometric shapes that can be viewed by the public just three miles east of the historic marker at the park. On a half-mile trail, visitors will find petroglyphs more than 1,000 years old and can admire majestic Sierra Blanca Peak rising more than 11,000 feet in the distance.

Three River's economy once was fueled by the cattle empires of Susan McSween, John Chisum and Albert Bacon Fall and the arrival of the EP&NW Railway in 1899, the same line that ascended 4,000 feet, over the Mexican Canyon Trestle and into Cloudcroft. Chisum was a business associate of Alexander McSween. Fall became the wealthiest of them all by controlling local water rights, which eventually forced many of the town's residence to move, which lead to Three River's decline. Fall's empire crumbled after his conviction in the "Teapot Dome" scandal of the early 1920s.

The southeastern New Mexico historic markers, except the two near Three Rivers, were initially researched by Gutzman with assistance from HPD and the CPRC. NMDOT District 2 was responsible for having the southeastern New Mexico markers built and installed.

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