

COURTESY OF THE NEW MEXICO TOURISM DEPARTMENT
BY JIM ORR

Experience New Mexico

Trail of the Mountain Spirits Silver City, Gila River and Lake Roberts

Larry Gore

Next, is New Mexico, rightfully called the "Land of Enchantment". Here we discover the marks left by miners, homesteaders, Indians, Spanish explorers and the mountain men of the past. Explore the Gila Cliff Dwellings that are today almost exactly as they were hundreds of years ago.

On this ride you can experience the Gila River, one of the few dam-free wild rivers remaining in the west.

You will also enjoy several crossings of the continental divide – and that always means some fun roads to ride.

The warning from the highway department sounds like a promise to motorcyclists; "The road through the Gila National Forest has many sharp turns requiring a lower driving speed."

Wahoo, Let's go!

From a starting point at Silver City, NM (altitude 6,000 feet) the route heads north for 22 miles on NM-15

to Wild Horse Mesa. The views from here are awesome; views of the valley floor and creek, the continental ridge and the Black Range to the southeast.

Another 8 miles of climbing high into the Gila National Forest, cresting on the spine of the mountains, with views that seem as if you can see forever bring you to Copperas Vista, 7,440 feet. Here the rugged Gila Wilderness and the scenic Gila River valley lie before you.

Descending from the crest of the mountains you will find that engine

Experience: New Mexico

braking on your motorcycle to be the best way to control your speed. In the valley you will ride into the tiny community of Gila Hot Springs. The three forks of the Gila River converge here as the river winds its course towards Yuma, AZ. The town does have a store and a gas station.

If you are tired, consider staying overnight and soaking in the Gila Hot Springs. The springs come out at 165 degrees and go through a series of cooling pools – so you can select the temperature that is to your liking.

Rock formations, the Gila Con-

glomerate cliffs and large cottonwoods line the river banks making this area a pure delight.

The Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument is another place that you don't want to miss. The Dwellings consist of a series of natural caves

The sun on your back
and the open road.

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used as homes by people of the Mogollon culture. Climbing through the dwellings gives one a glimpse of what life was like here some 700 years ago.

From here take NM 35 and ride to Lake Roberts. A pristine mountain lake, nestled in the pine-covered slopes of the nearby mountains. Boating and fishing available.

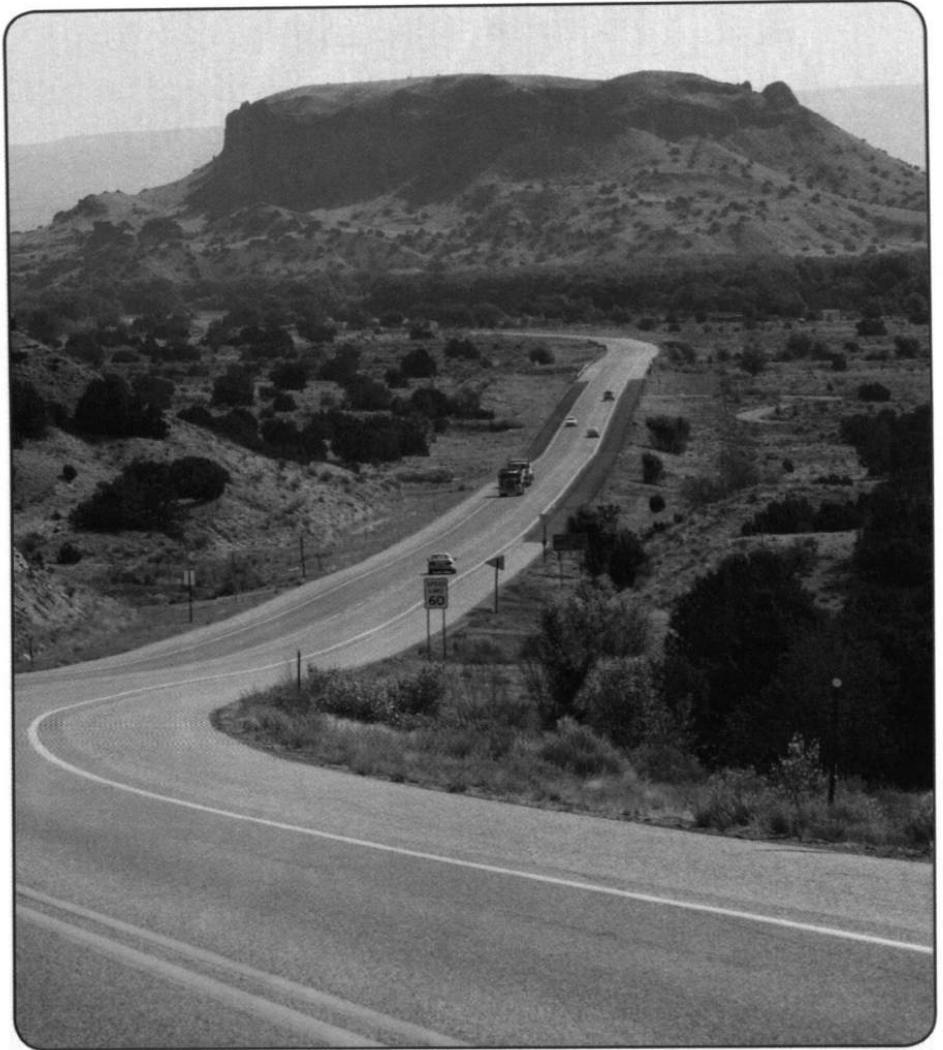
There are many cabins and lodges available for rent in the Lake Roberts area. If you have the time plan to spend a couple of days here just enjoying the peacefulness of the area. In summer as many as 10 different species of hummingbirds may be spotted in the area.

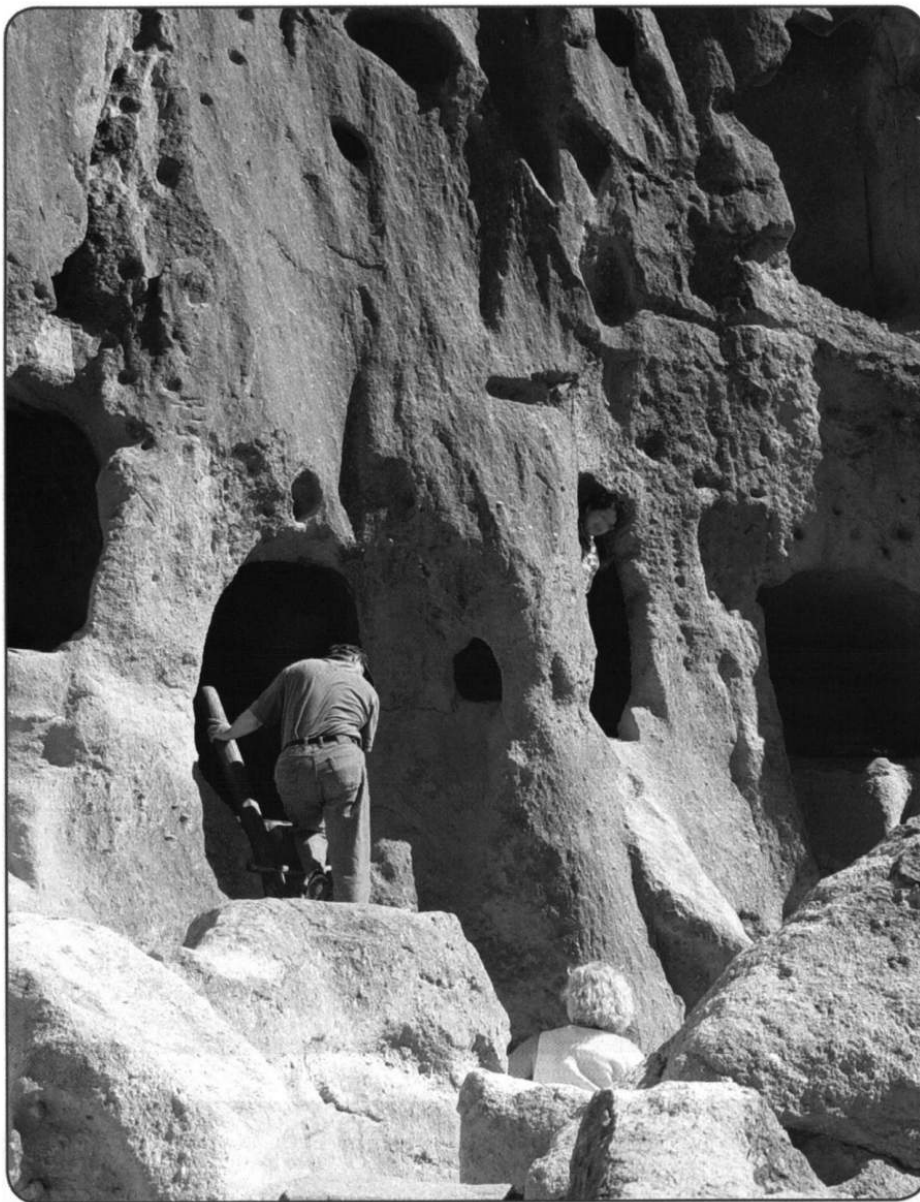
Cross the Continental Divide and stay on NM 35 to the Mimbres Valley. Here as the road parallels the Mimbres River, the ponderosa pines begin to thin and be replaced by piñons and jupiters. The ruggedness of the mountains give way to the enormous hills of the Upper Mimbres Valley.

San Lorenzo, at NM 35 and NM 152, is an old Spanish settlement. The beautiful San Lorenzo Catholic Church is a reminder of the spiritual and cultural heritage of the area.

From San Lorenzo take NM 152 west, and you can view the enormous Chino open pit copper mine. Copper has been extracted in this area since the early 18th century.

At a distance you can view the Kneeling Nun rock formation.





COURTESY NEW MEXICO TOURISM DEPARTMENT BY DAN MONAGHAN

A turn to the west on US 180 brings you to the Santa Clara and Fort Bayard junction. At Fort Bayard visit a 19th century U. S. Army post. The fort was once home to several companies of Buffalo Soldiers who were charged with halting the Apache raids on the settlers and miners.

Plan your ride right and you can be at Ft. Bayard during one of their reenactments.

The mountains of New Mexico can really be a dream trip for motorcyclists, challenging even the quality of riding Colorado. Much of the riding in New Mexico is a little more remote – and less crowded. But the roads are excellent, the people are friendly and the prices on food and lodging are very reasonable.

If the Land of Enchantment is calling you, load up, crank up and go have a great time.

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