



The Trail Yesterday

El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro is the earliest Euro-American trade route in the United States. Tying Spain's colonial capital at Mexico City to its northern frontier in distant New Mexico, the route spans three centuries, two countries, and 1,600 miles. El Camino Real was blazed atop a network of footpaths that connected Mexico's ancient cultures with the equally ancient cultures of the interior West.

El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro began in Mexico City. As the "Royal Road of the Interior Lands," the frontier wagon road brought Spanish colonists into today's New Mexico.

Once travelers crossed the arid lands above Ciudad Chihuahua, they followed the wide Rio Grande Valley north into New Mexico. Many of the historic *parajes* (campsites) and early settlements created by the Spanish colonists became today's modern cities in the Rio Grande Valley. In the United States, the trail stretched from the El Paso area in Texas, through Las Cruces, Socorro, Belen, Albuquerque, and Santa Fe to Ohkay Owingeh (San Juan Pueblo), the first Spanish capital in New Mexico. In Mexico, the historic road runs through Chihuahua, Durango, Zacatecas, San Luis Potosi, Aguascalientes, Guanajuato, and Querétaro to Mexico City.

The Trail Today

The trail corridor nurtures a lively exchange of ideas, customs, and language between Mexico and the American Southwest. Recognition as an international historic trail commemorates a shared cultural and geographic heritage. It helps eliminate cultural barriers and enriches the lives of people living along El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro.

Added to the National Trails System in October 2000 by the U.S. Congress, El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro National Historic Trail extends 404 miles from El Paso, Texas, to Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo, New Mexico. Visit some of the places featured here to experience the trail today.



The historic route of El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro

Tomé Hill
This distinctive conical hill has served as a natural landmark for travelers from prehistoric times into the present. Petroglyphs carved into its flanks and crosses at the top attest to its significance for Indian peoples and Catholic pilgrims alike.



Mesilla Plaza
Mesilla, New Mexico, began its life as a part of Mexico, a new community established for Mexican citizens who found themselves on the U.S. side of the border following the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1846. Those same settlers found themselves back in the U.S. again after the Gadsden Purchase of 1853. The new town became a commercial crossroads for the Mesilla Valley. The Butterfield Overland Stage stop was one block from the Plaza, and travelers on El Camino Real could stop in Mesilla on their way to Chihuahua and Santa Fe.

Fort Craig National Historic Site
Fort Craig is the largest of eight U.S. forts built along El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro during New Mexico's Territorial Period. Between 1854 and 1884, Fort Craig was home to Buffalo Soldiers of the 9th Cavalry and 38th and 125th Infantry, the predominantly Hispanic New Mexico Volunteers and New Mexico Militia, and historic figures including Kit Carson, Rafael Chacón and Captain Jack Crawford.



Fort Selden State Monument
Fort Selden was established in 1865 to protect settlers and travelers in the Mesilla Valley. Built on the banks of the Rio Grande just north of the traditional *parajes* of Doña Ana and Robledo, this adobe fort housed units of the U.S. Army's infantry and cavalry. The fort remained active until 1891, five years after Geronimo's capture and six years after the railroad had taken over El Camino Real's role in commercial freight and transport.



4,000 BP
Archaic pit house village is established at edge of the Rio Grande, now in Keystone Park. Prehistoric occupation of Rio Grande Valley dates back to at least 12,000 years ago.

The rough trail jolted the nails loose from wagons and carriages. Hundreds of cobbler's nails, farmer's nails, and upholstery nails tell the story of El Camino Real.

Keystone Heritage Park
Keystone Heritage Park, El Paso, Texas, preserves a remnant of the rich riverine environment of the Rio Grande. The Archaic pit house settlement, where small bands foraged for wild plants and animals in the rich marshlands adjacent to the Rio Grande, is 4,000 years old.

1521
Aztec ruler Moctezuma II surrenders Tenochtitlán to Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés. Mexico City is established on the site of the Aztec capital.

1540
Francisco Vasquez de Coronado and his army of 1,100 camp near the Tiwa pueblo of Kuaua.

Coronado State Monument/ Kuaua Pueblo
When Francisco Vásquez de Coronado arrived at Kuaua Pueblo in 1540, he was leading an expeditionary force of 300 soldiers and 800 Indian allies on a march to locate the fabled Seven Cities of Cibola. Instead of the golden city they expected, the Spanish found a thriving multistory adobe pueblo with more than a thousand villagers.

1598
Juan de Oñate leads first Spanish colonists up the Rio Grande along El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro. The caravan starts with 83 laden carts. By the six month journey's end, only 61 carts remain with the column of 129 soldiers, their families, and thousands of stock animals. The column traveled as fast as a pig could trot.



1608-1610
Villa de Santa Fe is established, relocating the Spanish capital from San Juan de los Caballeros, on Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo lands.

Palace of the Governors
This modest, single-story adobe is the oldest continuously occupied governmental building in the U.S. Construction began in 1610. Over the years the Palace has been converted to an Indian Pueblo, housed Spanish and Mexican governors, and served as a Territorial Capitol. Since 1909 the Palace has been the heart of New Mexico's State Museum system. The Palace sits on the north side of the Santa Fe Plaza.



1643-1662
Spanish ranches and villages are established along El Camino Real north of Isleta Pueblo, including Pajarito and Atrisco, independent communities now within the greater Albuquerque area.

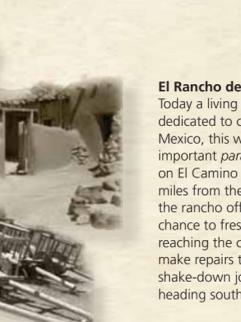


1670
German trader Bernardo Gruber dies on the Jornada del Muerto, fleeing jail at Sandia Pueblo and the Spanish Inquisition.

1680
On the night of August 10, 1680, nearly two dozen Pueblos revolt over the Spanish practices of extracting tribute, forcing conversion to Catholicism, and brutally suppressing Native religion. This act of resistance against European colonists regains the Pueblos their homeland for 12 years.



1680
The Tomé grant is settled after the Rio Grande shifts west, creating an inner valley branch of El Camino Real through the Tomé Plaza.



1760
Still a rough camp in 1760, the *paraje* of Doña Ana is settled as a town in the 1840s.

1789
San Elizario is established as a military presidio to protect citizens of El Paso del Norte from Apache attacks.

El Rancho de las Golondrinas
Today a living history museum dedicated to colonial New Mexico, this was once an important *paraje*, or campsite, on El Camino Real. About 15 miles from the Santa Fe Plaza, the rancho offered travelers a chance to freshen up before reaching the capital city or to make repairs to gear following a shake-down journey on the trail heading south.



1807
U.S. Lieutenant Zebulon Pike illegally enters Spanish territory while exploring the West. Pike is captured and taken down El Camino Real to Mexico City.

1821
Mexico is freed from Spain. Santa Fe Trail opens with the arrival of William Becknell's trading party from Missouri. El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro becomes known as the "Chihuahua Trail" for traders moving goods through Santa Fe from the eastern U.S.



1846
Missouri volunteers under Colonel Alexander W. Doniphan defeat a Mexican unit at the Battle of Bracitos, go on to take El Paso del Norte and march into Chihuahua.

1848
Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo establishes American control over about half of Mexico's lands, including the lands traversed by El Camino Real north of El Paso del Norte.

1850
New Mexico becomes an incorporated, organized territory of the U.S. on September 9, 1850.

1853
American-Mexican border is redefined through the Gadsden Purchase, which brought a strip of land from Texas to California into American hands, 29,142,400 acres for \$10 million.

1862
Battle of Valverde, first major battle of the Civil War in the Southwest, takes place north of Fort Craig, February 1862.

1865
Fort Selden is established to control the Mesilla Valley.

1878
The region's first operational railroad, the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway, enters New Mexico Territory by way of Raton Pass; the rails reach El Paso, Texas, in 1881.

1909
New Mexico Territorial Highway Commission appropriates funds to re-engineer La Bajada section of El Camino Real for automobile traffic.

1912
New Mexico achieves statehood; State Highway 1 incorporates many sections of El Camino Real.

1926
U.S. Route 66 is built over parts of El Camino Real, including the steep descent known as La Bajada.

1935
New Mexico's roadside historic markers begin to tell the trail's history. In 1992 many of the 82 El Camino Real markers are installed as part of the Columbus Quincentenary Commemorations.

2000
El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro is added to the National Trails System on October 13, 2000.

2003
El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro Trail Association is formed.