

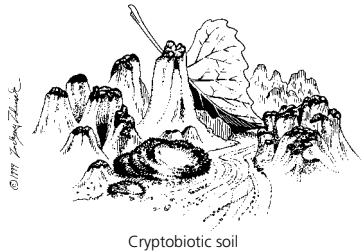


## Sandstone Bluffs



Sandstone Bluffs overlooks millions of years of geologic history, from the 200-million year-old sandstone formed by ancient seas, to the 3000 year-old lava that borders the bluffs. From here, however, you see more than just rocks; you see a land that is part of the cultural history of the many people who have lived, and who continue to live alongside this land of volcanoes and sandstone.

### Exploring Sandstone Bluffs



Cryptobiotic soil

Sandstone Bluffs offers an accessible viewing point of the lava flows and lands surrounding El Malpais. While no developed trails exist, you are free to explore the area on your own. Be careful along the steep drop-offs and watch for loose rocks.

After rainfalls, the potholes, or *tinajas*, fill with water and create temporary miniature ecosystems. Fairy shrimp, tadpole shrimp, spadefoot toad tadpoles and water insects find homes in these tiny oases. Look for these small animals after summer rains fill the shallow depressions. The *tinajas* atop of the bluffs undoubtedly supplied people with water as well.

Exploring the area around Sandstone Bluffs, you may encounter archaeological sites and other evidence of early inhabitants of this area. Remember that not only are these sites and artifacts important to understanding the history of those who once lived here, but they are also protected by law. Once an item is removed, it loses its significance and can never be regained. Please help us preserve our shared heritage by not removing or damaging anything you may find.

### The Archeological Resources Protection Act

All archaeological sites, including those at El Malpais, are protected by the Antiquities Act of 1906 and the Archeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 (ARPA).

ARPA, which became a public law in 1979, provides for criminal and civil penalties, plus a reward for information that leads to a conviction. Please notify a ranger if you discover any illegal activity.

Along the base of the bluffs, you'll find small sandstone arches, an abandoned homestead, and if you are lucky, petroglyphs. There are no trails to the base so you must find your own way down.

Be careful where you step, however. Look around for knobby black crust on the ground. This is called cryptobiotic soil. Cryptobiotic soil is a living community of cyanobacteria (blue-green algae), soil lichens, mosses, green algae, microfungi, and bacteria. This crust keeps loose soil from eroding, but one step can wipe out hundreds of years of growth and allows for wind and water to carry the sand away.

### Exploring Sandstone Bluffs

- carry plenty of water
- wear sturdy hiking shoes
- pack food and a first aid kit
- tell someone of your plans

Technical climbing is not allowed anywhere within El Malpais National Monument.

Sandstone Bluffs is open from sunrise to sunset.

Remember that removing even small archaeological items, including pottery sherds and arrowheads, is against the law.

If convicted of an ARPA violation, you could face criminal fines and/or civil penalties and jail time.

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## A Cultural Landscape

As you look across the lava flows, you are not only looking at a land rich in geological history, but also at a land rich in cultural history. American Indian, Spanish and Anglo cultures are all a part of the history of this place. From the Puebloan cultures who settled along the lava edges over 1000 years ago, to the Dust Bowl era homesteaders who came here in the 1930s, humans have had a long relationship with this land.

Around A.D. 800, ancestors of today's Pueblo people started building small settlements along the edges of the lava flows. When the Spanish explorers arrived in the 1500s, these settlements were no longer inhabited. However, the significance of this land to the

American Indians is evident in the creation stories that have been handed down from one generation to the next. These stories help to tell how the lava flows came to be, as well as explain important life lessons.

The Pueblos of Zuni, Acoma, and Laguna as well as the Ramah Navajo all hold close ties to El Malpais and consider it not only an important part of their history, but also an integral part of their culture. Certain plants may be gathered for traditional uses and certain ceremonies may be held in the malpais. If you come across anyone holding a ceremony, please do not disturb them.

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## Naming the Landscape

Although the American Indians had names for the formations long before the first Europeans arrived, most of the volcanic craters, peaks and land formations that you see from Sandstone Bluffs also bear Hispanic and Anglo names. Evidence of the first Spanish explorers can be seen in the name of El Malpais itself. Meaning the "bad lands," this term was given to any volcanic area. Gallo Peak is



To the people of Acoma, Gallo Peak is known as Ram Peak. The elevation at the peak is 8,664 feet.

Spanish for "rooster." The "cerro" before many of the crater names means "hill" in Spanish. Mt. Taylor was named for the 12th American President, Zachary Taylor.

The photos below show Gallo Peak and Mt. Taylor, the two most prominent peaks as seen from Sandstone Bluffs.



Mt. Taylor has names in at least nine different languages. To the Navajo it is Tsoodzil, meaning the Blue Bead Mountain. To the Acoma it is Kaweshtima, where the Rainmaker of the North lives. The elevation at the peak is 11,301 feet.

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## Garrett Homestead and the Vanishing Treasures Program

Located along the gravel road to Sandstone Bluffs Overlook, the Garrett Homestead was built between 1935 and 1937. Many of the homesteading families of El Malpais were victims of the Dust Bowl and Great Depression who traveled to this area to begin new lives in the American West.

Homesteading in this area was no easy task. Homesteaders had to make \$800 worth of improvements and live on the land for seven of twelve months for three years before the land was theirs. Many families did not make it and moved to more developed areas, such as Grants, in order to make a living.

The Garrett Homestead consists of a residential structure with standing architecture and ruins of several outbuildings.

Beginning in 2001, El Malpais National Monument's Vanishing Treasures Program began historic preservation activities at the homestead. From documenting the structure, to repointing mortar joints and annual assessments of the site, their efforts ensure that this chapter of the American experience is not forgotten.

### Exploring Garrett Homestead

- leave everything where you find it
- do not stand or sit on the walls as they are very fragile

For more information on the Vanishing Treasures Program of the National Park Service, visit the web site at: [www.cr.nps.gov/aad/vt/vt.htm](http://www.cr.nps.gov/aad/vt/vt.htm).

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## For More Information

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Printed with funds from  
Western National Parks Association.  
[www.wnpa.org](http://www.wnpa.org)