

A Vital Link



Bent's New Fort
Santa Fe National Historic Trail

The Semmens Family
Santa Fe Trail Association
National Park Service

Bent's New Fort links the continuous story of southeastern Colorado—from the development of the Santa Fe Trail, to the occupation of Bent's Old Fort, to the construction of Fort Wise, to the disintegration of human relationships following the massacre at Sand Creek in 1864. How do we know?

Archeological Studies

The landscape tells stories. Bent's New Fort was used for two distinct functions over two different decades and the effects are evident across the terrain.

The fort's earlier period (1853-1860) continued the economic function as a trading post similar to Bent's Old Fort. Freighting for the US military added another economic function. The military built forts in New Mexico and southern Colorado during the early 1850s to protect traders, settlers, and miners.

Archeological Findings

The original Bent's New Fort had 15 rooms. The absence of rooms in the southwestern area of the fort was perhaps intentional to facilitate the entry of

Santa Fe Trail traffic, such as wagons, stagecoaches, and horses. When William Bent leased the fort to the army during the construction of Fort Wise in 1860, Bent's original fort was documented in a drawing. The drawing included the military additions of a guard room and an Indian agency.

Remarkably, archeological survey and mapping of the site matched the original military map. And despite extensive collecting and looting, the study solidified Bent's New Fort as a vital link in the continuing story of southeastern Colorado and the Santa Fe Trail.



National Park Service and Cuartelejo HP Associates staff complete a test excavation in the tipi ring area at Bent's New Fort. View to the east.



These artifacts were excavated near a tipi ring located several hundred feet to the east of Bent's New Fort.

1 This piece of metal is waste scrap, which may have resulted from making an arrow point. **2** Indians sometimes used sharp-pointed horseshoe nails as awls to make holes for sewing leather and canvas. **3** Cast by Indians, the unfired .48 caliber lead ball was probably intended for use in a muzzle-loaded Indian trade rifle. **4** The flattened tin can was intentionally cut off at the bottom; the strip of can could have been used to make conical jingles that were attached to clothing.