

# Santa Fe Trail, 1821-1880



You can see Red River Peak, the mountain in this painting by Ronald Kil, by looking north.

## Traveling the Trail

Unlike the emigrant trails that took travelers west to Utah, Oregon, and California, the Santa Fe Trail mainly handled commercial traffic moving east and west. When new Mexico became a territory of the United States in 1850 after the Mexican-American War, trade barriers were removed and traffic increased.

A variety of travelers headed west—traders seeking a change in fortune, Civil War veterans looking for a new start on life, and gold seekers heading for California. As with the travelers' oxen, wagon, supplies, and trade goods, firearms were a necessary item for the arduous journey.

## Take a Side Trip: Nearby Santa Fe Trail Sites



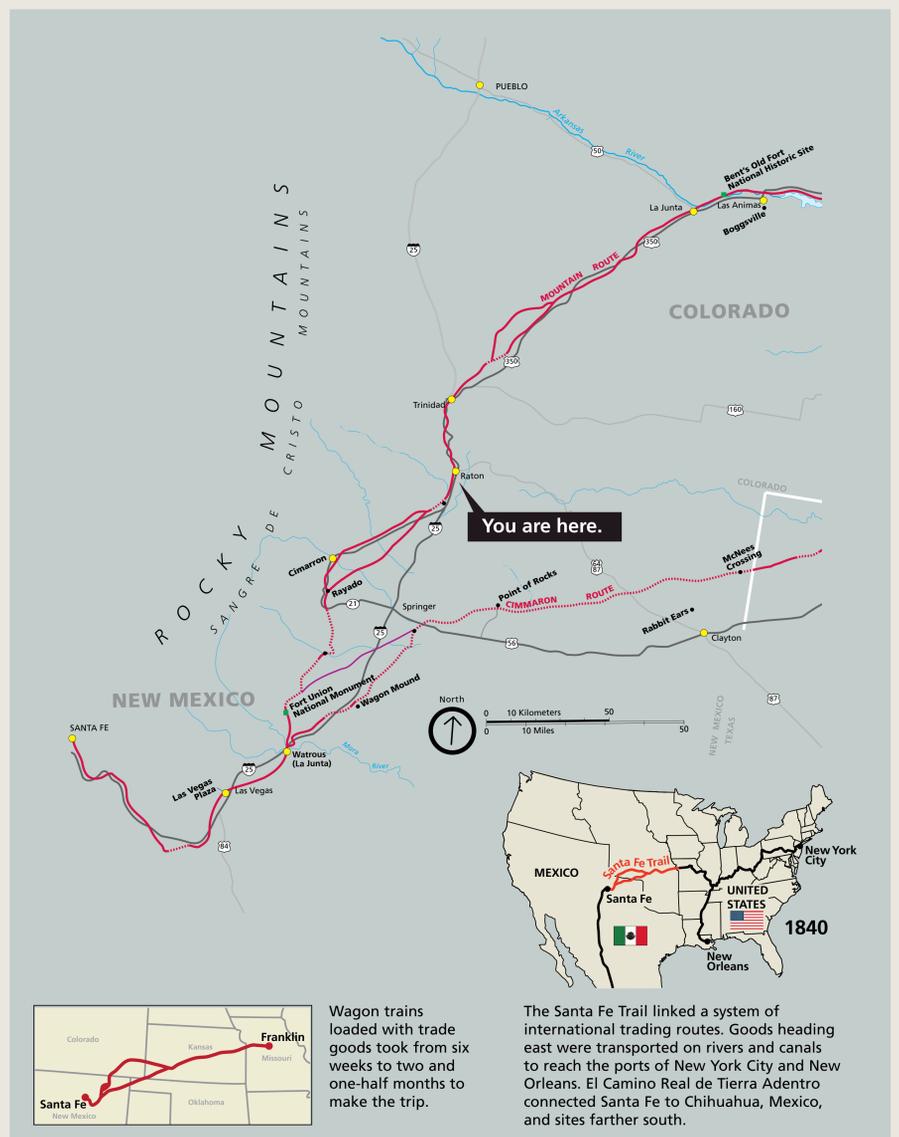
**Cimarron**  
Cimarron was an important stop for wagon trains on the Mountain Route. Many buildings, such as the courthouse, jail, stagecoach office, and a gambling house, still remain from that era. The town is located on Highway 64.



**Fort Union**  
Fort Union protected the western end of the trail and maintained well-supplied warehouses for both military units and private caravans reaching the fort from the east. Follow the signs off I-25 east of Las Vegas, New Mexico.



**Point of Rocks**  
Used as a landmark for traders heading west, Point of Rocks had a fine spring. This outcropping was a popular campsite for various Indian buffalo hunting parties and Santa Fe Trail caravans. Follow the signs off Highway 56 east of Springer.



## Santa Fe Trail Timeline

- 1821 Mexico gains independence from Spain. William Becknell makes his first successful trade trip into New Mexico from Missouri.
- 1825 US government survey of the Santa Fe Trail.
- 1834 Bent's Old Fort completed.
- 1846 War declared between US and Mexico.
- 1850 New Mexico becomes a territory of the US.
- 1851 Fort Union established to protect trail commerce.
- 1861 Civil War begins; ends in 1865.
- 1880 Railroad arrives in Santa Fe and the Santa Fe Trail is abandoned.



**Boggville Historic Site**  
Boggville is about two miles south of Las Animas on Colorado 101. This small community was a stage stop on the Santa Fe Trail.



**Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site**  
Bent's Old Fort is north of the Arkansas River, eight miles east of La Junta on Colorado 194. Although accounts describe the fort as a castle on the plains, for most trail traders it was more truck stop than palace—a place to resupply and rest.