

Villanueva State Park-New Mexico State Park Series

Virginia T. McLemore

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New Mexico Bureau of Geology & Mineral Resources
New Mexico Institute of Mining & Technology
801 Leroy Place
Socorro, NM 87801-4796

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Villanueva State Park is south of the small village of Villanueva on NM-3, approximately 23 mi southwest of Las Vegas (Fig. 1). Villanueva means new town in Spanish, but this town was already an old community when it received its name in 1890 (Pearce, 1965; Stanley, 1970; Young, 1984; Julian, 1996). The village name was derived from the name of one of the prominent families of the time, the Villanuevas (Stanley, 1970; Foster, 1984). Local families petitioned the U.S. government for a U.S. Post Office, and it is said that the petition contained more signatures from the Villanueva family; thus the town received its name in 1890. It was originally called La Cuesta (Spanish, "hill") because the village sits on top of a steeply sloping hill or *cuesta* in the Pecos Valley.

Access to the park can be reached from the south via paved roads from an exit on I-40, approximately 70 mi east of Albuquerque to NM-3 or from the north via an exit on I-25, approximately 43 mi east of Santa Fe to NM-3 (Fig. 1). The south route from I-25 takes the traveler over rolling hills and mesas to the top of Glorieta Mesa, which forms the edge of the Pecos Valley. The north route from I-25 takes the traveler along the Pecos River and passes through the small Spanish communities of Ribera, San Miguel, Pueblo, and Sena. Neither route is intended for high-speed traffic, so plan to take your time and enjoy the scenery. Once in Villanueva, look for the signs leading to the state park.

Accommodations and facilities

Villanueva State Park was established in 1967 and consists of 1,652 (Fig. 1) acres at elevations from 5,600 ft at the river to 6,250 ft on top of Glorieta Mesa. The park facilities have undergone recent renovation and maintenance. The Visitor's Center and park office, showers, and restrooms are now accessible to the handicapped via ramps. Overnight camping and picnic shelters are scattered beneath piñon and cottonwood trees along the banks of the Pecos River (Fig. 2), and are made of cement blocks and covered with adobe plaster to look like adobe houses in Villanueva (Fig. 3). Red to brown sandstone boulders (Permian Yeso Formation) are scattered throughout the park. Hornos, Pueblo Indian adobe ovens, are found in the center of the park near the remodeled Visitor's Center and park office.

The upper picnic area/camping loop road (Fig. 4) winds up the north cliff and offers spectacular overviews of the park and the Pecos River valley. The picnicking and camping shelters beneath piñon trees (El Cuervo area) are made of local red to buff Yeso

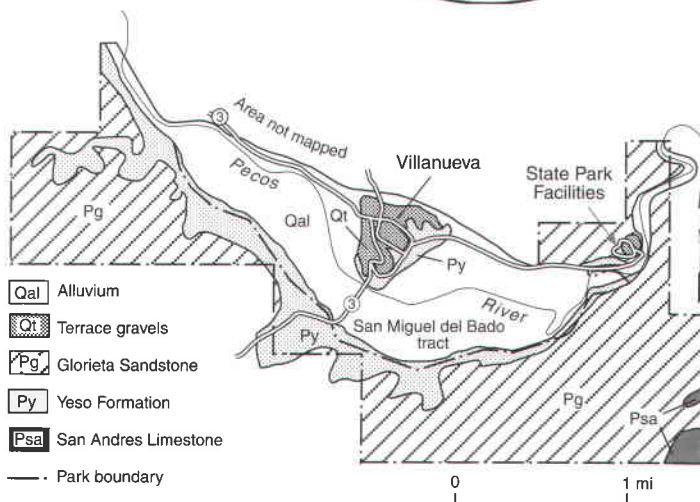
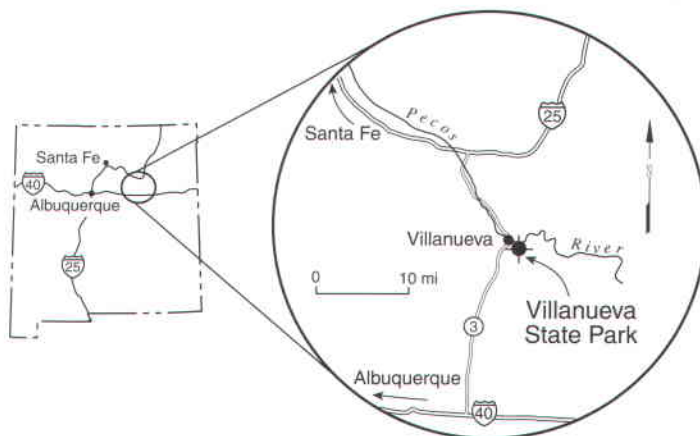


FIGURE 1—Location of Villanueva State Park and simplified geologic map of the park showing its boundaries (modified from Johnson, 1970).

sandstone cemented together (Fig. 5). This upper loop road is not recommended for trailers or large recreation vehicles. The park manager's residence and workshop are along this road (Fig. 4).



FIGURE 2—Villanueva State Park, looking at trails and picnic shelters near the Visitor's Center.



FIGURE 3—Picnic shelters patterned after adobe houses in Villanueva, surrounded by piñon and cottonwood trees. Here a rock squirrel sits on top of the wall.

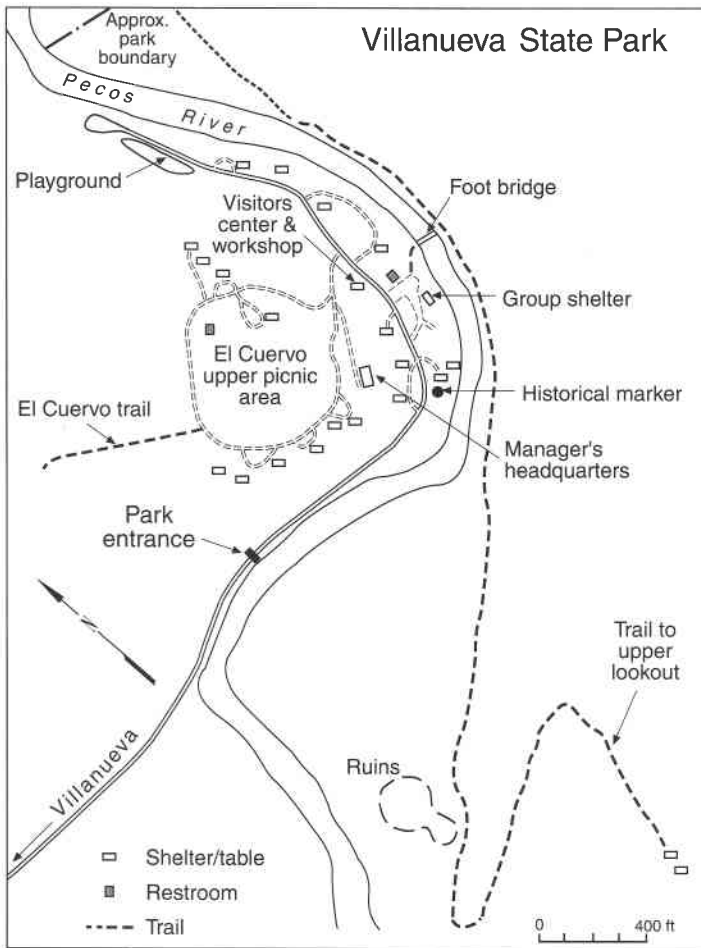


FIGURE 4—Map of the camping and picnicking facilities in the park.

Park facilities (Fig. 4) include restrooms, showers, drinking water, a playground, a group shelter, and a disposal station. The Pecos River flows through the state park (Figs. 1, 4, 6) and offers fishing (brown trout, catfish, rainbow trout), swimming, rafting, and kayaking. The Pecos River at the park is rated Class 3 for rafting and kayaking. A concrete footbridge crosses the river near the Visitor's Center (Fig. 4). Two hiking trails, totaling 3 mi, wind up each side of the canyon and offer excellent views for the more-



FIGURE 5—Rock shelters made of Yeso sandstone along the upper loop, view looking across the Pecos Valley.

TABLE 1—Birds in Villanueva State Park. How many can you find during your stay?

Bird	Where sighted
Black-headed grosbeak	_____
Rufous-sided towhee (sparrow)	_____
Canyon (brown) towhee	_____
Chipping sparrow	_____
White-crowned sparrow	_____
Red-winged blackbird	_____
Western meadowlark	_____
Brewer's blackbird	_____
Northern oriole	_____
House finch	_____
House sparrow (finch)	_____
Rufous hummingbird	_____
Mallard	_____
Turkey vulture	_____
Red-tailed hawk	_____
Band-tailed pigeon	_____
Mourning dove	_____
Great horned owl	_____
Common nighthawk	_____
Northern flicker	_____
Western flycatcher	_____
Say's phoebe (flycatcher)	_____
Western kingbird	_____
Violet-green swallow	_____
Cliff swallow	_____
Scrub jay	_____
Pinyon jay	_____
Common raven	_____
Canyon wren	_____
Western bluebird	_____
American robin	_____
Cedar waxwing	_____
Yellow warbler	_____
Western tanager	_____
Roadrunner	_____

hardy visitor. The south trail passes Spanish ruins. Easier trails follow the Pecos River (Fig. 6). The vegetation varies from juniper and piñon along the upper cliffs to mesquite and cottonwoods near the river bottom. Cholla and prickly pear cactus and yucca are also common. A variety of birds can be sighted inside the park boundaries (Table 1) and offer excellent bird watching. Rock squirrels, jackrabbits, cottontail rabbits, and chipmunks are common throughout the park.



FIGURE 6—Looking south from the bridge across the Pecos River. Foot trails follow the river. Here the cliffs are Glorieta Sandstone.

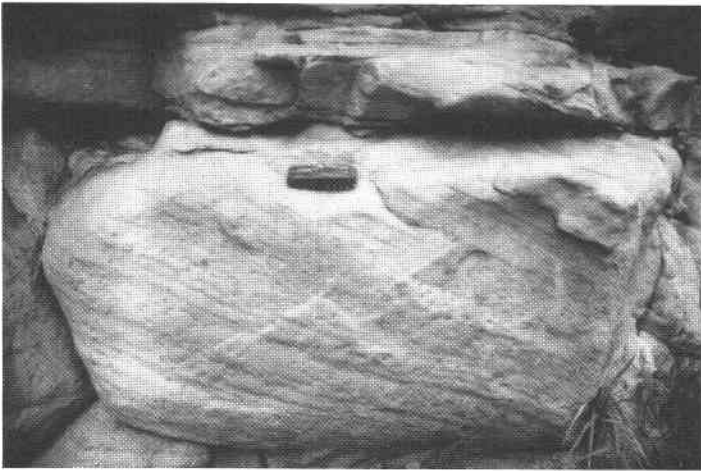


FIGURE 7—Cross-bedded sandstone along the foot trail up the cliff of Glorieta Sandstone.

History

The earliest visitors were American Indians who left their mark in the many caves and left their petroglyphs on the rocks forming the cliffs. Francisco Vásquez de Coronado and later Spanish Conquistadors passed through this area in 1541–1592; the site is marked by a historical marker in the park. San Miguel to the north is the Pecos River crossing on the Santa Fe Trail, and that town was established prior to 1794.

Unlike most northern Spanish communities, Villanueva was never a separate land grant. Instead it was part of the San Miguel del Bado Grant (St. Michael of the Crossing Place), established in 1794, and was settled by farmers who wandered into the valley looking for rich farmland in the late 1700s and early 1800s. In the 1830s, former Mexican soldiers were given farmland near Villanueva as compensation for their service. Even today, farming is the main occupation. Irrigated fields and orchards are found along the Pecos River where farmers grow chili, squash, onions, alfalfa, beans, and fruit. There is a winery north of Villanueva along NM-3.

Villanueva still maintains part of the original adobe wall that surrounded the old community and offered some protection from raiding Indians. Many of the houses faced toward the central plaza so that the solid back walls formed the outer barricade (Foster, 1984). The Texas–Santa Fe Expedition of 1841 passed through the area and members were fed and sheltered by the residents of Villanueva and San Miguel. The Texans were later captured and imprisoned by Mexican forces under Governor Manuel Armijo near San Miguel before being marched to Mexico. General Kerney entered the area in 1846 and established American control. However, Villanueva and the surrounding towns were left alone and almost forgotten for decades. Population declined at the turn of the century, and the area was by-passed by railroads and paved roads until more recent times. The road through Villanueva that connects both I-25 and I-40 was paved in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

One of several churches in Villanueva, Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, was completed in 1830 and is known today for magnificent tapestry panels hanging from the inner walls. The tapestry was completed in 1976, is 265 ft long, and consists of 41 panels, embroidered by 36 different stitchers, that depict local culture and religious and historical events.

Geology

Rocks exposed in the park are Recent, Late Pleistocene, and Permian in age (Fig. 1). The oldest rocks form the lower parts of

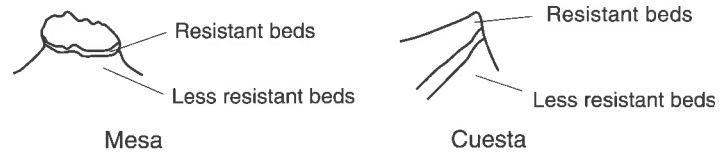


FIGURE 8—Sketch of a mesa (flat top) and a cuesta (steeply dipping).

the towering 300–500 ft high cliffs of Glorieta Mesa and were deposited during the middle to late Permian, about 268–245 million years ago. The oldest rocks, belonging to the Permian Yeso Formation, form the lower slopes below the cliffs and consist of alternating beds of red to orange, calcareous siltstone and fine- to medium-grained, calcareous quartz sandstone with local beds of dolomitic limestone up to 15 ft thick. The Yeso Formation is less than 150 ft thick at the park. The unit was deposited in coastal sabkha and eolian environments (Stanescio, 1991). The Yeso Formation overlies the older Lower Permian Sangre de Cristo Formation (exposed to the north near I-25) and is overlain by the younger Glorieta Sandstone. The upper contact of the Yeso Formation is gradational from the red to orange siltstones and sandstones to the overlying cleaner, gray Glorieta Sandstone.

Glorieta Mesa and the uppermost part of the cliffs are formed by the Glorieta Sandstone and capped by the San Andres Formation (Johnson, 1970; Anderson et al., 1995). Most of the 300–500-ft-high cliffs visible in the park are formed by the Glorieta Sandstone, which is 150 to 350 ft thick and consists of white to light-gray to brown, massive to thin-bedded, fine- to medium-grained quartz sandstone with thin interbeds of yellow to red to gray siltstone (Griggs and Hendrickson, 1951). The sandstones are typically crossbedded, indicating deposition in eolian dunes and local streams along the shoreface of the Permian sea, which extended across New Mexico at this time (Fig. 7). Some units of the Glorieta Sandstone consist of very pure quartz, suggesting deposition by sand dunes. The Glorieta Sandstone intertongues with both the underlying Yeso Formation and overlying San Andres Formation.

The San Andres Formation, the youngest of the Permian rocks, crops out locally, out of view of the valley on top of Glorieta Mesa. There, the San Andres Formation is thin, only 9–20 ft thick, and consists of gray to brown fine-grained limestone with local silty interbeds. It was deposited in marine environments of the Permian sea. Both the Glorieta Sandstone and San Andres Formation are exposed along the south route from I-40.

The Pecos River runs through the state park; the main facilities are situated at the bottom of the steep cliffs of Glorieta Mesa. Downcutting by the Pecos River during the last million years formed this picturesque valley. Villanueva and Villanueva State Park occur at natural bends in the meandering Pecos River. Upstream of Villanueva, the Pecos River flows along a broad river valley, whereas downstream of the picnic area the river incises a steep, meandering, narrow gorge. The valley floor consists of Quaternary alluvium, less than 15,000 years old, of unconsolidated gravel, sand, silt, and clay derived from eroding the nearby cliffs and subsequently deposited by the river. Pebbles of Precambrian rocks (granite, gneiss, schist) and older limestone and sandstone eroded from areas upstream, are found in the river bed. Much of the farmland is also on this alluvium. The fine-grained alluvium found in these deposits is used to make the adobe houses.

The town of Villanueva and El Cuervo picnic area in the state park rest on older alluvial stream-terrace deposits of gravel, sand, and silt. Locally, these deposits are as thick as 100 ft and are older than the floodplain deposits forming the river bottom. Current mapping by University of New Mexico students suggests that there are several levels of stream terraces along the river and they may be related to melting of glaciers at the headwaters of the Pecos River, mainly Truchas Peaks, during the Wisconsin, approximately 115,000–10,000 years ago.

Villanueva sits on a cuesta (Fig. 8) that dips steeply to the north-east and is approximately 100 ft above the river. This cuesta is capped by terrace deposits of gravel, sand, and silt that overlie steeply dipping sandstone beds of the Yeso Formation, which are poorly exposed on the slopes southeast of the village (Fig. 1). Part of the upper El Cuervo picnic area in the state park also lies on remnant stream-terrace deposits, approximately 75 ft above the river.

Summary

Villanueva State Park was established in 1967 and preserves some of the Hispanic colonial culture and atmosphere of northern New Mexico. It lies along the meandering Pecos River between towering cliffs of Yeso and Glorieta sedimentary rocks that were deposited some 268–245 million years ago. The river valley was formed by downcutting of the river through the sedimentary rocks over the last million years to form the valley of irrigated farmlands and orchards.

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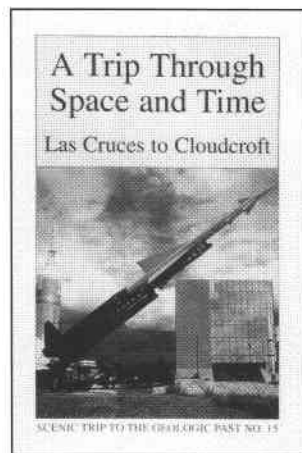
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—by Virginia T. McLemore

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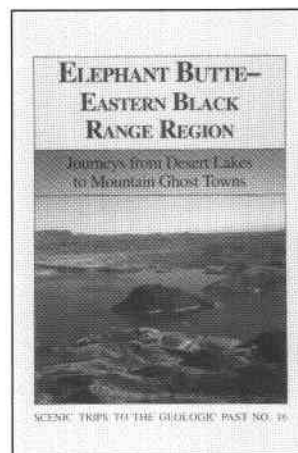
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South central New Mexico is characterized by extremes. During geologic history the area has been covered by ocean water at least six times before becoming the arid region we see today. Prehistoric hunter-gatherers crisscrossed the area for centuries before Spanish explorers arrived in the 1500s. The railroads brought

“civilization” from the east in the late 1800s, and with it local historical characters like Pat Garret, Oliver Lee, and Albert Fall, some of whom live on in legend. In the 20th century, the area has become home for White Sands Missile Range and Johnson Space Center. With elevations ranging from less than 4000 feet in the Tularosa Basin to nearly 9700 feet in the Sacramento Mountains, the seven road logs and one trail log give the traveler an exciting trip through space and time.



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