

Villanueva--New Mexico State Park series

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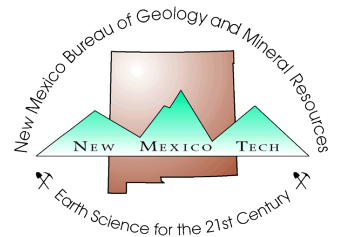
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Near the small village of Villanueva in San Miguel County is one of New Mexico's newest state parks, Villanueva. This park is intended to preserve some of the colonial atmosphere of the area. The camping and picnic shelters are plastered with brown adobe, like the houses of the village. The drinking fountains are beehive shaped, resembling the traditional outdoor ovens of the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico.

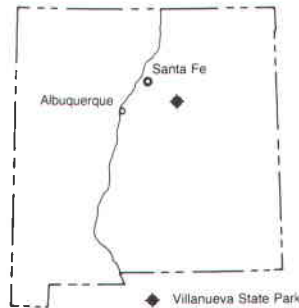
Location

The park is reached via NM-3, which begins at a well-marked exit off I-25, 43 mi southeast of Santa Fe, or 23 mi southwest of Las Vegas. NM-3 winds southward 14 mi along the Pecos River, passing through the villages of Ribera, San Miguel, Pueblo, and Sena. San Miguel (San Miguel del Bado or St. Michael of the Crossing Place) was the place on the Santa Fe trail where early travelers forded the Pecos River.

At the edge of the village of Villanueva, NM-3 turns sharply westward. Motorists bound for the park should follow the signs and continue south 1.5 mi along the access road. Villanueva is also accessible from the south because NM-3 intersects I-40 70 mi east of Albuquerque near the village of Palma. This 25-mi section of NM-3 is a light-duty gravel road.

Accommodations and facilities

Facilities available at the park include sheltered tables, a large group shelter, campsites, grills, and sanitary facilities. Drinking water is available at campsites, at the large, centrally located, modern bath house, and at the well-equipped playground. Supplies and gasoline are available at several stores in the village. A drive-in restaurant is located on the access road to the park. Campsites and picnic spots are well distributed throughout



the 2,584-acre park and are shaded by piñon and huge cottonwood trees.

Recreation

The most popular recreational activities in the park include fishing in the Pecos River and hiking. The climate is usually mild throughout the year; the average January temperature is a few degrees above freezing, and the average July temperature is about 80 degrees F. Precipitation averages approximately 16 inches per year, the greatest part from thunderstorms during July and August.

The Pecos River, in and above Villanueva State Park, is stocked with rainbow trout during the winter months by the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. Brown trout and catfish also are taken.

A number of hiking trails that wind up and down the mesas adjacent to the river have been provided. The vegetation observed along these trails ranges widely; juniper and piñon trees grow in scattered patches in the higher and more rugged parts and mesquite and cottonwood trees grow near the river. Cholla cactus and several species of prickly pear are abundant locally; yucca plants are scattered throughout the area. Road runners and jack rabbits are frequently seen along these hiking trails.

Physiography and geology

Elevations in the park range from approximately 5,600 ft at the river to more than 6,000 ft on the mesas. The valley of the Pecos River was cut in the Glorieta Mesa at the park during relatively recent geologic time. Nearly vertical 400-ft cliffs resulted from this down-cutting by the river. The Glorieta Mesa is moderately dissected in places and is characterized by gentle slopes.

The Glorieta Mesa was formed by sediments laid down about 230 million yrs ago, during Permian time. These rocks have been designated the San Andres Formation, and they have been divided into three members in the park: the Glorieta Sandstone Member at the base, a thin middle limestone member, and an upper silty member.

The Glorieta Sandstone Member forms the resistant cap rock that covers most of Glorieta Mesa in the southwest part of San Miguel County. This member, approximately 150 to more than 200 ft in thickness, is a massive to thin-bedded, fine-grained quartzitic sandstone containing some thin beds of yellow to red clay and silt. The sandstone is white to light gray on a fresh surface, but brown on a weathered surface. The middle limestone member covers a considerable area on Glorieta Mesa and varies in thickness from 20 ft on the west slope to approximately 30 ft on the east slope. The upper silty member, consisting of dark-red shale and siltstone, extends along the eastern margin of the mesa. South of Villanueva, it is exposed on the flank of the mesa. This member thickens south-eastward, ranging in thickness from 75 to 150 ft. In the southwest part of the county, the beds that compose the Glorieta Mesa are uplifted in a broad, nearly flat-topped arch; they have an axis trending slightly west of north.

History

One and one-half mi north of the park is the village of Villanueva. Established by early



A park drinking fountain, resembling the traditional outdoor ovens of the Pueblo Indians, is shown above. The Glorieta Mesa, entrenched by the Pecos River, is apparent at the right side of the photograph.

settlers in the 1790's, it is situated on a high bluff overlooking the meandering Pecos River. The community is part of the vast San Miguel del Bado grant that was chartered by the Spanish Crown in 1794. Established at a time when Indian attacks were routine, Villanueva is one of the last New Mexican villages that still has part of the high wall that once surrounded it completely. These types of outposts or placitas (little plaza or little city) were built with the houses facing inward on a central plaza, so that the solid back wall formed a stout barricade. Long bypassed by railroad and highway, Villanueva has retained much of its original Spanish-colonial charm. The beautifully maintained mission church in the village dates back to 1818.



Above the river, on both sides, are vertical cliffs, containing many caves that show signs of prehistoric Indian occupancy. Old stone walls and crumbling adobe huts are reminders of the sheep-raising days of the past.

The name villanueva, meaning "new village," dates back to the establishment of the post office in Villanueva in 1890. Prior to that time, the village was called Cuesta or La Cuesta. In 1890, when the inhabitants of Cuesta petitioned the United States government to establish a post office, two large families lived in the area: the Aragon and the Villanuevas. The petition contained more signatures from the Villanueva family, hence the name of the village.

—Roy Foster

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continued from page 25

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