

The Enchanted Circle

Eagle Nest, Taos, Questa, Red River

Distance from Casa del Gavilan: Starting at Casa del Gavilan
Length of drive: Approximately 150 miles – 3-4 hours plus stops
Elevation change: from 7,000 to 9,820 feet
Points of interest: Scenic drive through the mountains of northern New Mexico with numerous stops along the way.
Required documents: None
Open year round, but snow is common in the mountains during the winter and spring months. Caution is urged during rainy weather as the road can be slippery.
For more information see: <https://enchantedcircle.org/>



From: <https://enchantedcircle.org/>

New Mexico has long been known as The Land of Enchantment, so it's only fitting that this designated scenic byway be called the Enchanted Circle. Explore the picturesque 83-mile loop through mountains, valleys, mesa and national forestland—all unique to Northern New Mexico—plus multiple enchanting community destinations full of fun activities and annual events. The Enchanted Circle is centered around Wheeler Peak at 13,159 feet, the highest point in the state. Culture and outdoor recreation are abundant around the Enchanted Circle, so hit the road and get ready to discover what makes this region so captivating.

The Enchanted Circle is perhaps the best way to get to know the varied land, people, and cultures of northern New Mexico in a single road trip. From the rugged peaks and steep canyons of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains to the playful ski town of Red River to the art and cultural blend of Taos, this spectacular tour offers something for everyone. During your drive, take the time to stop at a few of the sites noted below, or find a few interesting stops on your own. Take a few minutes every now and then to get out of the car and immerse yourself in what this unique part of the country has to offer. Whether it's a spectacular view, a quiet art gallery, or a craftsman's workshop, your trip around The Enchanted Circle can leave you with a sense of peace and adventure that will last long after your return. In the quote below, "Blue Highways" refers to the less-traveled highways which are often depicted on maps in the color blue.

"A rule of the blue road: Be careful going in search of adventure—it's ridiculously easy to find."

— William Least Heat-Moon, *Blue Highways: A Journey into America*

To reach the Enchanted Circle, which begins 40 miles from the Casa del Gavilan, turn left leaving the Casa. In Cimarron, turn left at the stop sign and follow Highway 64 into Cimarron Canyon toward Eagle Nest and Taos. Four miles from Cimarron you'll see a sign "Entering Philmont Scout Ranch". During the summer months, you may see some of the 20,000+ Scouts that participate in 10-day high adventure treks in the wilds of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Philmont began in 1937 with a donation of land in Ponil Canyon (northwest of Cimarron) by Oklahoma oilman Waite Phillips, followed by a much larger donation of land several years later which included the land on both sides of Highway 64. Today, Philmont comprises just over 140,000 acres, nearly 220 square miles. It's roughly 20 miles north to south and 10 miles east to west. The famous ranch has hosted over one million scouts in its many years of operation. As you travel through Cimarron Canyon, you'll see remnants of the 2018 "Ute Park Fire" on both sides of the highway. This fire burned nearly 37,000 acres, mostly on Philmont property, to the very outskirts of Cimarron before it was contained. The cause of the fire has never been determined. The Ute Park Fire has had a devastating effect on the area. With the loss of trees and vegetation on the mountains, heavy summer rains create enormous flash floods that wash down the mountains into Cimarron Canyon. One of the largest of these flood areas routinely washes down through the middle of the town of Ute Park. During summer months, Highway 64 is occasionally closed for a few hours during flash flood warnings, or to clean the dirt and rock off the highway after a flash flood has passed.

As you come into Ute Park on the left, you'll see the "Dick and Mary Cabela Sustainable Use Area at Cimarroncita". This storied ranch, originally named "Cimarroncita", began as a girls' camp dating back to 1931. It was later expanded to include boys at a nearby camp beginning in 1946. After many years of summer programs, the camp closed in 1995. The property is currently owned by the Boy Scouts of America in cooperation with the Cabela Family Foundation, and provides programs for conservation and hunting safety, as well as Philmont's backcountry and family programs.

Philmont's boundary ends just past Cimarroncita as you come into the small town of Ute Park. While the railroad that long ago ran to Cimarron would continue far to the west, Ute Park is as far as it ever reached. Once a hub for logging and mining in the area, this small town is now home to many vacation residences neatly tucked in the surrounding mountains. The 2018 Ute Park fire began behind the town on the south (left) side and burned through Cimarroncita Ranch. The fire destroyed a dozen old buildings in Cimarroncita that were scheduled to be torn down but the main lodge was saved. Not a single building in the town of Ute Park was damaged and no serious injuries or deaths resulted from the Ute Park Fire.

Passing through Ute Park, the highway quickly enters Cimarron Canyon State Park – a long, narrow park that follows the river along each side of the highway. This amazing park boasts excellent fishing for stocked rainbow and brown trout on the Cimarron River, hiking on several trails as well as camping and other outdoor activities.

Three miles from Ute Park, "The Palisades" come into commanding view on the right side of the highway, although if you have your visor down you could miss it. This spectacular rock formation was created 30 million years ago when dacite – a form of high-silica lava – rose up from far below the Earth's surface and spread out horizontally between existing layers of rock to form a "sill". The rock layers above the sill, as well as the rock along the Cimarron River, eroded away over time leaving the formation standing on its own, towering high above the bottom of the canyon. Cracks formed during cooling, as well as millions of years of winter freeze/thaw cycles, result in the appearance of vertical towers. Feel free to park at the bottom of the Palisades and spend some time admiring the scenery along the river. There is a \$5 per vehicle day-pass that can be purchased at several areas along the park if you want to spend more than a few minutes parked along the highway. The oldest rocks of the area, between 1.4 and 1.9 billion years old, are west of the Palisades. Interestingly, no rocks between 1.6 billion and 600 million years ago – a period of a billion years – exist in the area. There was either very little rock formation during this time or the rocks formed and were eroded away before the formation of the sedimentary layers of the Paleozoic Era began to form 570 million years ago. For geologists, this is like trying to solve a mystery novel with a quarter of the pages torn out near the end of the book when the most dramatic activity occurs.

A mile-and-a-half past The Palisades, on the left side of the highway, is the Clear Creek Trail. Of the three trails in Cimarron Canyon State Park, the Clear Creek Trail – a mile and three quarters each way with a 700 foot climb – is the most popular. The parking area for this trail is at mile marker 292. The trail begins at a sign at the end of the guard rail 250 feet north of the parking area. Trail guides are available at the Casa for some of the Cimarron Canyon State Park trails.

Five miles further up Cimarron Canyon from The Palisades, at the west end of Cimarron Canyon State Park, is the Tolby Day Use Area on the right. In this area is a large parking lot, the Tolby Campground, toilets, and the Park office. If you haven't stopped for a stretch yet this might be a good time to enjoy a few minutes along the banks of the Cimarron River. Across the highway from the Tolby Creek Day Use Area and Campground is the trailhead for the Tolby Creek Trail. Both the Tolby Day Use Area and the Tolby Creek Trail are free of charge for day-use so no day pass is required.

Leaving the Tolby Day Use Area, look to the left and you may get a glimpse of the Eagle Nest Dam far up Cimarron Canyon. Completed in 1918 by Native American workers from the Taos Pueblo, the dam was named for the eagles that nest in the area. The nearby town of Eagle Nest was originally named Therma (Greek for "hot"), but was later changed to Eagle Nest – after the nearby dam – in the 1930s, apparently to pay homage to the town's biggest tourist attraction. The concrete dam, 140 feet high and 400 feet wide, wedged between the granite walls of the canyon, is considered the largest privately built dam in the United States. The dam was originally constructed and owned by the CS Ranch but has since become property of the State of New Mexico. The original dam-keepers' house can be seen below the dam. The dam provides important economic benefits to the area by controlling flood waters and irrigation and creating Eagle Nest Lake for fishing, boating, and other recreational activities.

One more mile, and a tight hair-pin turn, will bring you to the top of Cimarron Canyon and open up a spectacular view into the Moreno Valley overlooking the 2,200-acre Eagle Nest Lake from an elevation of nearly 8,500 feet. Across the

valley to the front is Wheeler Peak, the highest point in New Mexico at 13,167 feet, along with adjoining peaks of similar elevations. Far to the south (left) is the Angel Fire Ski Area. Shift your car into a lower gear to keep from overheating your brakes during the downhill drive into the village of Eagle Nest. During the descent, while you're carefully watching the road, your passengers can look down to the left to see the ruins of the once elegant Eagle Nest Lodge. This once-luxurious hotel was built around 1930 by Walter Gant – an oilman from Oklahoma. When completed the main house boasted 12 luxury guest rooms, restaurant, bar, coffee shop, lounge, and a three-sided fireplace. A fish pond, stables, and corrals were near the main lodge, with a caretaker's house nearby. Later, an annex added five second-floor studio units with private bathrooms and kitchens, complete with parking underneath. Bill and Hazel (20 years Bill's junior) Tyer ran the lodge for many years until it closed in 1944 during World War II never to reopen to guests. The Lodge was used as a family vacation resort through the late 1970s. In the years since, the old lodge has suffered deterioration, vandalism, and several fires. It is unlikely the lodge can ever be rebuilt to its original grandeur on the shores of Eagle Nest Lake.

At the bottom of the descent, the highway brings you into the village of Eagle Nest. Behind to your right is Baldy Mountain marking the northwest corner of Philmont Scout Ranch at 12,441 feet. South of Baldy Mountain is Touch Me Not Mountain. This now quiet little village high in the Moreno Valley was infamous for illegal gambling from the 1920s through a major crackdown in the late 1940s. Shops and restaurants line the main street of this quaint little tourist town. The Shell gas station at the traffic light at the intersection of Highway 38 is a good place to stop for cold drinks, munchies, and restrooms.

At this point you've joined the Enchanted Circle. The drive can be done either clockwise or counterclockwise. Driving the route in a clockwise direction may give you more time to spend in gallery and shops in Taos earlier in the day and leave you enough time for dinner in Red River before returning to the Casa. After passing through Eagle Nest, the road turns south toward the Angel Fire Ski Area.

Nine miles past Eagle Nest on the right side of the road are the sweeping white curves of the chapel at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial designed by architect Ted Luna, formerly of Santa Fe. The following information is from: <https://www.vietnamveteransmemorial.org/>

The Memorial was originally known as the Vietnam Veterans Peace and Brotherhood Chapel and had its origins in a battle near Con Thien, South Vietnam in which 17 men lost their lives. Among the men was David Westphall, son of Victor and Jeanne Westphall. Thanks to their vision and determination the memorial exists today to honor not only these 17 Marines but all members of America's Armed Forces. The purpose of the David Westphall Veterans Foundation is to honor America's veterans and members of its military forces by memorializing the sacrifices they have made and by recognizing the sense of duty and the courage they have displayed as they answered their country's call to arms.

Back on the highway another mile will bring you to the traffic light at the intersection that marks what once was the town of Aqua Fria (Cold Water). To the left is the Angel Fire airport – at 8,380 feet the 4th highest airport in the United States. Turning left at the traffic light will take you to the town and ski area at Angel Fire if you want to make a short detour. If you don't want to visit Angel Fire, proceed straight through the light.

In 1954, Roy and George LeBus of Wichita Falls, Texas, purchased the 9,000-acre Monte Verde Ranch on the southern end of the Moreno Valley. A few years later, they added another 14,000 acres purchased from the Maxwell Land Grant Company. In the mid-1960s development of the Angel Fire Ski Resort began. Legend has it the name came from the term Kit Carson coined referring to the the alpenglow that was once common in the area. Today the resort area offers all manner of skiing and winter sports as well as summer activities such as golf, zipline, tennis, boat rentals, and more.

Just past the turnoff for Angel Fire, on the right, is Roadrunner Tours. They are one of the best horseback riding stables in the area and highly recommended for rides in the adjoining Carson National Forest. Beyond Roadrunner Tours, the highway starts up the mountain and into the Carson National Forest. As the road makes a sharp hairpin turn to the right, straight ahead is a parking area for the Elliott Barker Trail – a 5-1/2 loop trail in the Carson National Forest. The trail has

about 1,000 feet of climb and is listed as “moderate”. You will want a trail map or GPS as several trails cross it, making it difficult to follow unless you know the route. No fees or permits are required to hike the trail.

Two miles after starting the climb out of the Morena Valley, you’ll come to the top of Palo Flechado Pass at an elevation of 9,109 feet. At the top of the pass is parking area for the trailhead to the Palo Flechado Pass trail which runs many miles to the south of the pass. This pass was used by Taos, Apache, Kiowa, and Comanche long before the arrival of the Spanish to travel between Taos and the eastern plains along the Cimarron River. Palo Flechado in Spanish means “tree shot with arrows”. Local lore says the name comes from a tradition of Taos Pueblo Indians shooting arrows into a tree at the pass following a successful buffalo hunt on the eastern plains.

Over the pass, the highway starts a long downhill grade all the way down Taos Canyon into the town of Taos. Put the car into low gear again to save on the brakes. The closer you get to Taos, the more artisan and craftsman studios you’ll see along the road. Once into Taos, the streets get narrow and the traffic gets heavy. It can be a difficult town to drive through but it’s worth a visit all the same. Remain on Highway 64 and you’ll come into Taos on Kit Carson Road. At the stop light on Paseo del Pueblo, the main north-south route through Taos, proceed straight through the intersection into the Taos Plaza and park in the plaza. If you can’t find a parking space in the plaza, proceed straight through the plaza and out the other side. Turn right onto Cam De La Placita, then take the first left into the public parking area. Many interesting galleries, shops, restaurants, and historical sites are around the Plaza and also in the first block surrounding the Plaza. There is far too much to do, see, and experience in Taos to include in this document so you may want to check out taos.org prior to your visit to plan what you’d like to do while you’re in the area.

Taos is a unique collection of cultures. From the origins of the Taos Native American Pueblo between 1,000 and 1,450 AD to the Spanish, Mexicans, and Americans that came later, the cultures – and counter-cultures – have each left their mark on this (mostly) sleepy little northern New Mexico town nestled snugly between the Sangre de Cristo mountains and the Rio Grande rift. The Taos Society of Artists, founded in 1915, has left a long-lasting impression on New Mexico in general and Taos in particular. While the galleries and shops are the most common destinations in Taos, the Taos Pueblo just north of town is well worth a visit. Recognized as one of the oldest continually inhabited communities within the United States, the Taos Pueblo is open at specified days and times for visitors. Many of the residents sell their pottery, crafts, and artwork from their homes, which makes for a special remembrance of your visit. There is an admission fee for the Pueblo of \$16 per adult and \$14 for students. There may also be additional fees for parking and cameras. To reach the Pueblo, drive north on Paseo del Pueblo Norte one-half mile from the Plaza. Stay right of the Allsup’s as the main road bears to the left. Proceed another two miles to the Pueblo.

When you’re done exploring Taos to your heart’s content, head north on Paseo del Pueblo Norte. A few miles will take you out of most of the traffic and get you back into the quiet New Mexico countryside on Highway 522. Five miles north of the Taos Plaza, Highway 64 turns left at the traffic light. If you don’t mind adding a few more miles to your adventure, turn left onto Highway 64 and head west. Eight miles ahead is the breathtaking Rio Grande Gorge Bridge. At 650 feet above the river, the steel deck bridge is one of the highest bridges in the United States. This was the original “bridge to nowhere” as when it was being built in the mid-1960s, no funding was available to complete the highway on the west side of the Rio Grande Gorge. Cross the bridge and park on the left side to get out and walk across the bridge for a real thrill.

Continue north on Highway 522 to Questa – 24 miles north of Taos. The town of Questa was originally named San Antonio del Rio Colorado by its Hispanic residents. Since that name was too long for the US Postal Service, the US Postmaster changed the name to Questa. It was supposed to be “Cuesta”, which in Spanish means “Ridge”. Founded in 1842, Questa is one of the string of small villages scattered up the Rio Grande from Mexico into southern Colorado. The town’s website states: *“A rough and remote location, it was vulnerable to raids by Ute natives for generations. The Spanish Frontier heritage is still palpable.”*

In Questa, turn right onto Highway 38 toward Red River. The Questa Ranger Office for the Carson National Forest is just outside of Questa on the right. Past the Ranger office are a few campgrounds with toilets along the highway. As you

head east toward the town of Red River, you'll be in the narrow, deep canyon alongside Red River. Keep an eye out for Bighorn Sheep along the highway. They were reintroduced to the area in the early 1990s and aren't the least bit bashful about hanging out along the highway and showing off for the tourists. The enormous piles of mine tailings you'll see on the north (left) side of the highway are from the Molybdenum mine – referred to simply as “Moly” for those whose tongues get tied tripping over the vowels. Molybdenum is a steel additive used to create high-strength, lightweight steel used for products such as wheelchairs and mountain bikes.

The molybdenum ore exists in unusually high concentrations in the area. More importantly, the molybdenum disulfide at this unique site exists in veins rather than as low-grade ore diluted throughout the rock. The slippery substance which oozes from the rocks was originally thought to be graphite and was used to grease wagon wheels. It wasn't until 1916, when prospector Jimmy Fay had a sample analyzed, that the molybdenum was recognized. Even though the substance exists in veins, rather than looking for a needle in a haystack it's more like looking for a cup of flour in a haystack. Huge amounts of rock need to be removed, crushed, and processed to get at the ore. Molybdenum has been mined here since the early 1920s and has left 100 million tons of tailings behind an earthen dam in addition to over 300 million tons of waste rock and lagoons of acidic sludge. While the mine, which is primarily an open pit over a quarter of a mile deep, has brought a lot of on again/off again economic benefit to the area, it's obviously been hard on both the landscape and the environment. The mine was closed permanently in 2014 but the scars on the land will last forever.

Five miles past the Moly mine, you'll come into the town of Red River. The deep canyon through which you've been driving, as well as the town of Red River, lay along the southern edge of the Questa Caldera (volcano crater) which is at least 9 miles across. The immense caldera, formed about 25 million years ago when an active volcano, centered on what is now Latir Peak, blew up then collapsed. The high ridge on the north side of the canyon is composed of densely welded Amalia Tuff (volcanic ash fused together by extreme heat) which was explosively ejected from the Questa Caldera.

While much of the barren area is the result of mining activity, most of the scars on the canyon walls have formed from a natural source. Rock beneath these scarred areas was crushed due to the immense geologic pressure. Water heated by volcanic activity from deep in the Earth dissolved minerals from the rock and was then pushed to the surface through these fissures, depositing minerals as the water cooled at the surface. As these minerals were exposed to air and rain over the millennia, the minerals decomposed and stained the rocky outcrops yellow. Floods carry this loose rubble down the mountainside into Red River Canyon in the form of mud flows with a consistency similar to wet cement. The highway through Red River Canyon is occasionally closed during heavy rains in the summer months to clear mud and rock flows from the highway.

Originally named River City, Red River is the highest town in New Mexico at 8,750 feet - depending upon just how one defines “town”. Red River began as a mining town in the late 1800s primarily to serve the many gold, silver, and copper mines in the area. The mining boom lasted from 1895 to 1905 by which time Red River had 3,000 residents, 15 saloons, four hotels, two newspapers, a hospital and a sawmill. After 1905, the mining became uneconomical and the town quickly turned to more of a ghost town with hundreds of abandoned mines and cabins in the mountains surrounding the town. In the early 1930s, Red River began its transformation into a recreational destination. It's now a very popular destination for visitors from New Mexico, Oklahoma, and especially Texas for winter skiing and to escape the summer heat. It's also a popular destination for the annual Memorial Day motorcycle rally and other events. Numerous restaurants, shops, and other tourist activities are available along the main street. If you're interested in a summer chairlift ride the Platinum Chair Lift, which runs up the Face by the Lift House, is a great way to see the sights from an elevation of 10,350 feet. The chair lift ride is a sightseer's delight, from the breath-taking view of the surrounding peaks, including Wheeler, New Mexico's highest at 13,161 feet, to the wonders of Colorado to the north. Four-wheel drive vehicles can be rented at numerous locations to explore the old mining roads that surround the town. Horseback riding is available on the east end of town.

As you head east out of Red River, follow Highway 38 to the left. The highway winds up a steep climb four miles to Bobcat Pass at 9,820 feet – the highest point of this tour. Bobcat Pass Wilderness Adventures (bobcatpass.com) offers 2-hour off-road-vehicle tours, horseback riding, and Cowboy evenings. From here, it's an hour back to the Casa del Gavilan.

Leaving Bobcat Pass, it's another long downhill run through the northern end of the Morena Valley back to the town of Eagle Nest. Eight miles south of Bobcat Pass, you'll find a sign for the ghost town of Elizabethtown on the right side of the highway. A museum and what's left of the town can be toured when the museum is open. The following information is from newmexiconoman.com/Elizabethtown:

The Birth of Elizabethtown

The convergence of miners on the Moreno valley in 1867 was dramatic. Hundreds of prospectors streamed into the area within a matter of months. Captain Moore arrived with a plan that went beyond mining. Furthermore, he had business partners to help him bring his plan to fruition. They established Elizabethtown immediately upon arrival in 1867, surveying and platting the town with wide streets and separate zones for residential and commercial development. They sold lots at prices ranging from \$800 to \$1200. Five stores opened for business the first summer, including a general store owned by Captain Moore and his brother. They provided supplies and staples to miners. Cabins, houses, and additional businesses sprouted up around the General Store immediately. Elizabethtown became New Mexico's first incorporated town. They named the community after Captain Moore's 4-year old daughter, Elizabeth Catherine Moore. Locals called it "E-Town." Later, Elizabeth married a local fellow and became the town's first school teacher. Throughout the town's changing fortunes over the years, she never left. She is still there, buried in the town cemetery.

Gold Mining Boom Town

Elizabethtown's heyday was short-lived and intense. The post office opened early in the summer of 1868. There were 3,000 men working gold claims within one year. Prospectors built cabins on top of, or adjacent to, their mines. The prospectors who chose to live in town had a lengthy commute to work, trekking up the valley to Baldy Mountain. The sawmill cranked out lumber for commercial buildings and private homes. Elizabethtown had about 100 buildings, including a couple of hotels, five stores, seven saloons, a brewery, three dance halls, two churches, a school, a flour depot, and a drugstore by 1869. The saloons boasted dance floors, gaming tables, and bars that were 100-200 feet long. Like most boom towns, dancing, dining and drinking were the primary forms of entertainment. The red-light district encompassed several cabins, with numerous women plying their trade in second floor rooms connected to the saloons. However, there were enough families in the community in late 1869 to warrant building a school and a Protestant church. The community established the Catholic parish shortly thereafter. Additionally, the abundance of capital from the mines attracted settlers from Texas. They brought herds of cattle, establishing ranching as a principal industry in the area. Though it is cold in the winter, it is outstanding grazing land from spring through fall.

Peak Prosperity in Elizabethtown

The town grew to over 7,000 residents at its peak of prosperity in 1870. The territorial legislature created a new county, naming it after Vice-President Schuyler Colfax and designated Elizabethtown as the Colfax County seat. E-Town reigned as one of New Mexico's most important towns in the region for about five years. Unfortunately, mining productivity began to diminish dramatically and, to further complicate things, Lucien Maxwell sold his land to new investors in 1870. The new owners were not sympathetic to existing inhabitants.

Waning Fortunes in Elizabethtown

The gold fever broke when mining costs started to out-weigh the volume of ore produced. The population dwindled. There were 100 residents remaining by 1872. The state legislature moved the county seat to Cimarron. The gold rush was over by 1875 when the Colfax County War enflamed hostility across the area, with fatal clashes between settlers and representatives of the grant owners. This put more pressure on the remaining population in Elizabethtown. Locals moved out of the area or to nearby communities. Once the [Colfax County War](#) was resolved with the Supreme Court ruling in 1888, there was a brief mining revival in Elizabethtown during the 1890s. It was short and frenetic. Miners extracted \$5 million in gold in a 12-month period. The population of the town was up to 3,000 at one point.

Brief Mining Revival

The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad advanced its track from Trinidad, Colorado, into New Mexico. The ability to transport ore long distances and commence dredging operations made mining operations financially feasible again. The Oro Dredging Company erected a monstrous dredge, christened "the Eleanor" in 1901. The

massive pieces for the dredge were hauled from the train station at Springer across mountain roads and streams. The dredging company built a dam three miles from Elizabethtown and hauled the biggest pieces on a large boat. The dredge began production in August, 1901. The machine handled up to four thousand cubic yards of dirt a day. Eleanor paid for herself in the first year, clearing \$100,000 net profit. Furthermore, Eleanor produced one-quarter of all the gold found in New Mexico in 1902. The town became a musical hot spot in the Moreno valley during the turn of the 19th century. People traveled miles over rugged mountain roads to attend the Saturday Night dances. Locals replaced wagons with sleds during the winter but they always found a way to show up for the revelry. Participants were on their best behavior, clad in their "Sunday best." However, appearances could be deceiving.

Fire of 1903

Compared to the lawless years of 1868-1890, Elizabethtown was settling into a groove, a sane and civil community of hard-working folks. Unfortunately, a fire broke out in a defective flue in Remsberg store.

Raton Range

September 3, 1902

"A Colfax county gold mining town was almost wiped out by fire Tuesday. Only one business institution is left standing. Remsberg & Co. are the heavy losers. The fire originated from an unknown source, possibly from a defective flue. The fire started on Tuesday afternoon about 2:15 p.m. in the hall used for entertainment on the second floor of the Remsberg store building and thirty minutes after the discovery of the fire, the building and all it contained except about \$700 or \$800 worth of dry goods were totally destroyed.

...The flames spread to the Mutz Hotel, a two-story building adjoining. From there the fire spread to Harry Brainard's place, then to Remsberg's, Gottlieb & Iufelder's General Store. Across the street in the next block, the Moreno Hotel caught fire from flying embers and in one hour and fifteen minutes from the time of the discovery of the fire, all the buildings mentioned were reduced to ashes. The only mercantile establishment left in town is the store of Herman Froelick."

The Mutz Hotel was rebuilt in stone after the fire, but Elizabethtown never recovered.

The dredging operation died in 1905. The owner mortgaged Eleanor to get money for a similar venture in Colorado. Unfortunately, Eleanor wasn't profitable the following year and the owner declared bankruptcy. He left Eleanor to rust. She sank into the sands of Moreno Creek long ago. By 1917, Elizabethtown was on its last gasp. The mines were going belly up. There were no jobs and no money. The remaining residents abandoned their homes, because they couldn't sell them. The post office closed permanently in 1931. Though gold mining continued on Baldy Mountain until World War II, it wasn't profitable due to the shortage of water for hydraulic placer mining. In total, the Moreno Valley produced 5 million dollars in gold in 75 years, most of it in the first 40 years.

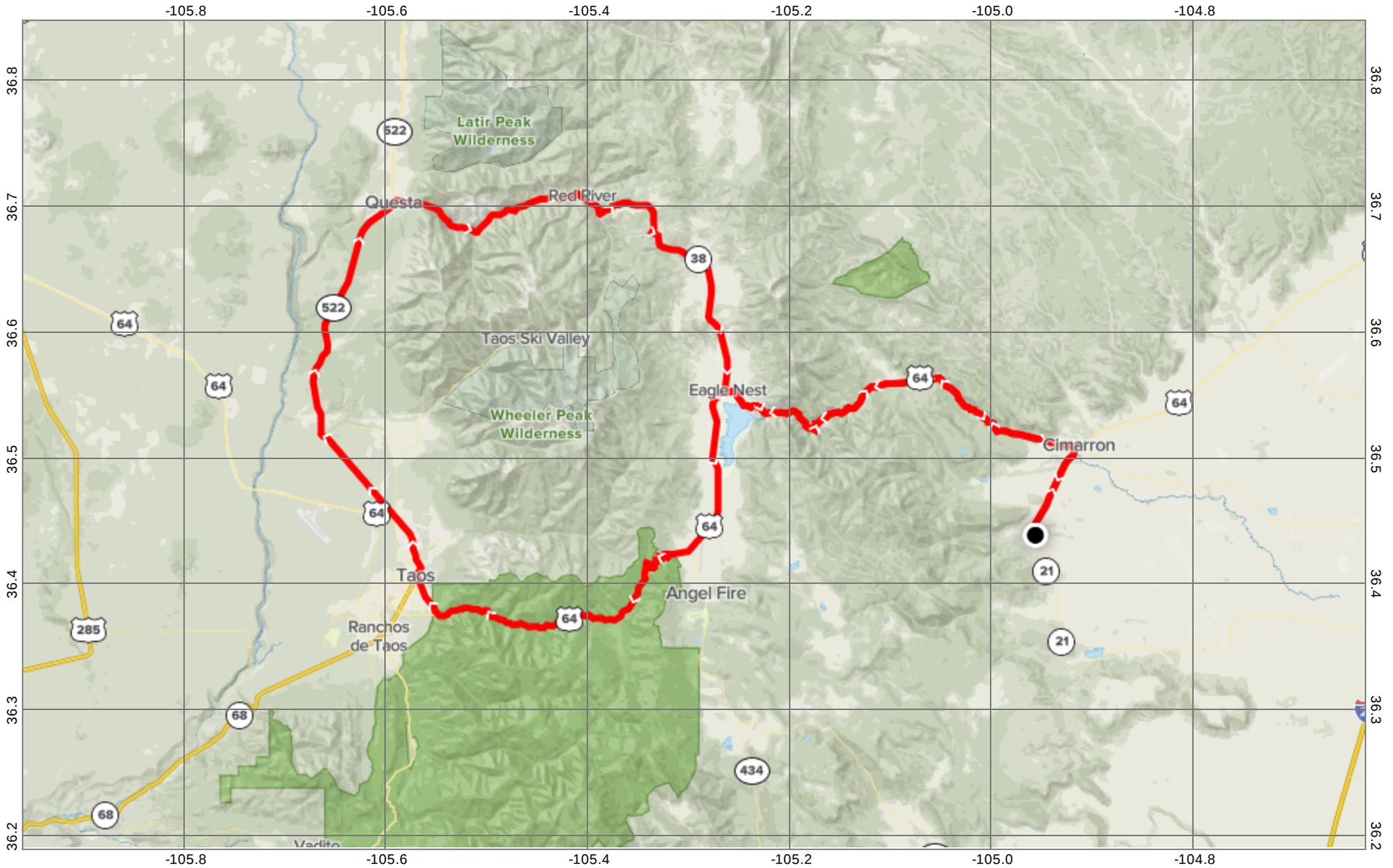
There would be more to see in Elizabethtown but campers accidentally burned down the Mutz Hotel and the Catholic Church. Additionally, the school building was sold as salvage in 1956. The land on the west side of Baldy Mountain was purchased and donated to Philmont Scout Ranch in 1962. What does remain is mostly on private land; however, the land owners have recently launched E-Tours, ATV/4WD, or horseback exploration of over 8000 acres.

Departing Elizabethtown turn right and continue south on Highway 38. Five miles will bring you back to the town of Eagle Nest. Just before arriving at Angel Fire, you'll find the Comanche Creek Brewery on the right. They brew a variety of beers "by utilizing the pristine mountain waters of the Sangre de Cristo mountains". Their phone number is 575-377-2337. Arriving in Eagle Nest, a left turn at the traffic light will return you to Cimarron. From Eagle Nest to the Casa is about a 40 minute drive.

For a more technical, in-depth guide to the geology and additional history of the Enchanted Circle see:

<https://geoinfo.nmt.edu/publications/guides/scenictrips/downloads/2/Scenic%20Trip%2002%20Reprint.pdf>

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