

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.

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.

Railroad arrives in Santa Fe and

the Santa Fe Trail is abandoned.

1880

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.



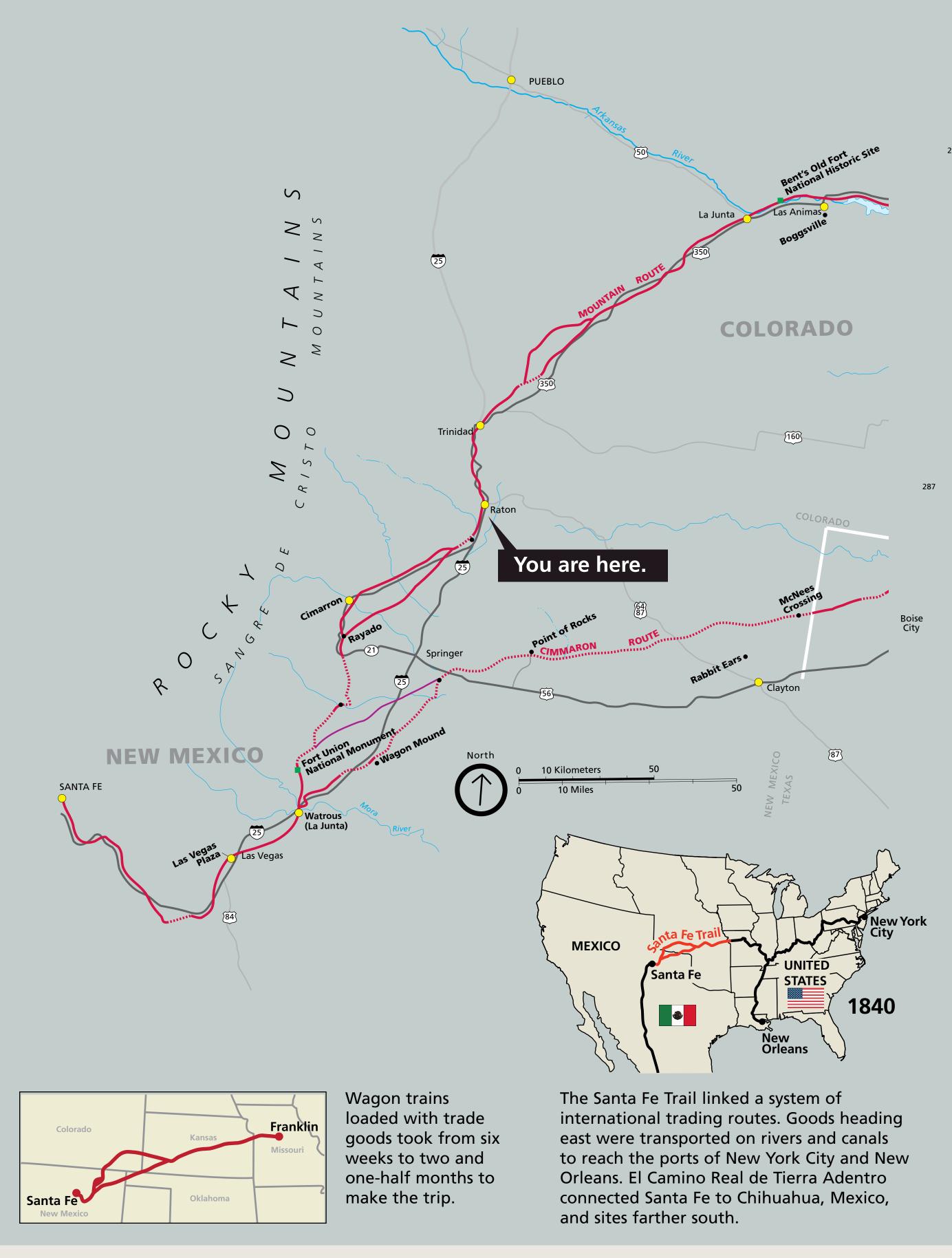
Fort Union

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.





Boggsville Historic Site
Boggsville 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.