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## Stop 17. Sante Fe

Arrival datetime: Friday, April 26, 3:00PM  
Sites visited: Sante Fe, Bandelier National Monument  
Accommodations: El Dorado  
States traveled: New Mexico

Michael was very tired of driving, so we did not plan any stops and took highway Route 25 from Truth or Consequences to Sante Fe. It should have been very easy, but we ran into construction in Albuquerque and decided to stop for gas and lunch. Unfortunately, we chose to get gas first and lost all touch with the highway as reentry was barred by construction. We tried to take a non-highway route to Old Town but there were no signs and we ended up in Los Rancheros De Albuquerque instead. Knowing we were headed north, and thus bypassing the construction, made us decide to continue on that course. But there was no lunch to be found so we ended up back on 25.

Our next idea was to have lunch at the top of Sandia Peak. We drove about 10 miles off the highway to the Tram only to find it closed due to high winds. The only place open for lunch on the way back to the highway was the Sandia Casino, so there we went. Michael sacrificed \$5 to the slot machines, and we continued onto Sante Fe.

We wandered around town shopping, then sat in the El Dorado lobby reading the Wall Street Journal for the first time in three weeks and listening to an excellent piano player who actually played some of the tunes from the Scott Joplin tape we

had bought in New Orleans. We retired early and got up just in time for a walking tour of the city.

It was very cold. Michael had to get the car back from the valet to get some coats. Our guide was a tall blond Texan who confessed she had her license plates changed the day she moved to avoid discrimination, though it was not so bad now as it was then. We stood in the Plaza in 40° temperatures listening to our guide talk about how the wording etched into the stone statue was rephrased a few times to reflect the current culture's view of political correctness. We went into a courtyard where the Los Alamos recruits were initiated. It was lilac time. We paused at every lilac and wisteria bush to smell them. Sante Fe is a pretty city. The guide explained that all the buildings were pueblo style due to zoning ordinances. We wandered through chapels, one with a spiral staircase delivered by a mysterious carpenter in response to some nun's prayers. We saw the river.

Once released, we dove into the Plaza museum for warmth, then wandered back to all the good restaurants pointed out by our guide only to find that most of them were not open for lunch on Saturdays.

We were so tired after the walking tour that we thought we might be affected by



*Michael listening to our Tour Guide at San Miguel's Church.*



*The mysterious spiral staircase in Loretto Chapel.*

the altitude. We napped at the hotel. There was a drought and signs warned us that they would not change our towels or sheets. But there was always a maid's cart in the hallway bearing big piles of clean towels. There was also a big pile of clean towels in the fitness center.

After napping and a bit of referring work emails to the proper handlers, we ventured back outside to the Georgia O'Keefe Museum and the Museum of Fine Arts. Both were small but interesting. We shopped in front of the Fine Arts Museum, where Indians hawked silver and stone jewelry. Our tour guide had told us that very strict rules govern the Indian market. All silver must be authentic of some high quality and all stones exactly as advertised or they lose their permit to sell there. We bought a present for Michael's sister Mary, who we knew liked the stuff and who we would be visiting on the trip.

We worked out a bit and had dinner in our hotel: The Old House Restaurant. They advertised as the highest rated in the Zagat's of the Southwest and we could easily tell why. It was the first place we'd been in the Southwest that did not sacrifice flavor to hot spices. The evening entertainment in the lobby was a flamenco guitar duet and sometimes trio, so we hung out there a bit after dinner.

The next day, we gave Michael a break from driving and took an off-road jeep tour through the Jemez Mountains. However, there were 20-30 mile an hour winds so we did not go in a jeep, but instead went in an Ford Expedition. Our guide was the owner of the company, up from Phoenix to train a new guide. We were surprised to hear that, like our first

guide, he confessed that he experienced discrimination when he moved here for a few years and had gotten out because of it.

He took us to at Bandelier National Monument, to what he explained was the less popular but just as scenic Tsankawi Trail so that we saw almost no one else on our hike to the caves. He also told us we were walking the circular loop backwards so that no one would get a free tour just by following us. There were literally thousands of abandon caves, but no houses or walls that showed you the actual dwellings as there had been in Gila. Our tour companions were refreshingly civilized and we had lively intelligent conversation during the drives. Our tour guide filled any lull in the conversation

with facts and stories about the mountains.

A large part of the conversation centered on the forest fires that had swept the area and the conflicts between the fire controls programs advanced by the National Park Service and the National Forest Service. The general consensus was that the National Park Service philosophy of “touch nothing but suppress all fires” had interfered with the natural evolution of the forest. Naturally occurring fires clear out brush between large trees and allow sunlight to be shared among them so they continue to grow. Putting these fires out right away has the effect that many thin trees grow close together. When fire sweeps through forests of the first type, it moves along the ground and spares many



*A few of the caves at Bandelier National Monument.*

trees. When fire sweeps through forests of the second type, it moves from treetop to treetop and kills many trees. The National Forest Service practices more “forest management” programs that

preserve and protect the forest as a resource. This involves letting some fires burn and clearing out the burned wood if necessary.



*View of the Rio Grande from White Rock.*

Recognizing their mistake, the National Park Service had adopted a program of man-made fires a few years back. But they did it during a drought and even the National Forest Service had advised against it. The result was a fire that raged out of control and killed all plant life in acres and acres of what were not only National Park Land, but National Forest Land and many private homes as well. The National Forest service then tried to plant some grass to make sure

that they did not end up with too many small trees very close together, but the grass they planted was not indigenous to the area and it somehow prevented the trees from growing at all. Our natural response to these stories was that we hoped the bureaucrat that was accountable for the decision was fired and why didn't they just leave the forest alone? Our guide let us know that the bureaucrat was cleared of any wrongdoing because he had followed

National Park Service policy in setting the fires and that now that the land was so messed up our best hope was to let the National Forest Service try to manage it back to what it was supposed to be because it may take centuries for it to get there by itself. Both answers were disappointing.

The mountains were packed with fifty-foot-tall, twenty-inch-in-diameter ponderosa pine trees and comparatively small, frail-looking aspen. There were white and lavender wildflowers and a striking little trumpet-like red flower our guide called, "Indian Paintbrush." We stopped at a huge meadow that our guide explained was an extinct volcano crater. We could see antelope with binoculars and a coyote without them. We went off road to reach an overlook where we could see Taos and Chochiti Lake as well as

Sante Fe. Soft misty blues and blurry deep purples were visible in the distance while red jagged buttes and rolling fire-scarred hills populated the foreground. White splotches on tall peaks looked like, and may well have been, snow. Because the wind made the overlook less than comfortable, lunch was a picnic on lower ground. Our last stop was White Rock, a Rio Grand Overlook situated in a suburban neighborhood.

Back in the city, we had dinner at a restaurant where the waiters and waitresses sang Broadway tunes. They were not as talented as others we had seen on the east or west coast, but the food was very good and the wine list superb. In the morning, we went out to breakfast to a place recommended by our tour companions and also did a bit of last minute shopping.

Miles traveled: 232  
Departure datetime: Monday, April 29, 10:00AM  
Departure weather: 65° Partly Cloudy