

Cimarron Day Trip #4

Cimarron Canyon, Taos and the Enchanted Circle

Total distance: 135 miles **Estimated duration:** ~8 hours, depending on length of stops

Your trip begins at the west end of Cimarron on Highway 64. The map provides visual clues to the Waypoints listed below (mileage is approximate). Comments and additions to Historic Markers are given in brackets.

A two-sided marker across Highway 64 from the Visitor's Center reads:

Black Jack's Hideout – In Turkey Creek Canyon near here, the outlaw gang of Thomas “Black Jack” Ketchum had one of its hideouts. After a train robbery in July 1899, a posse surprised the gang at the hideout. The outlaws scattered after a bloody battle and the Ketchum gang was broken up. [During the shootout, Black Jack's brother Sam was wounded and later captured. He died shortly thereafter in prison from the infected wound.]

Colfax County War – For twenty years after the 1869 sale of the Maxwell Land Grant, homesteaders, ranchers, and miners fought the new owners for control of this enormous region. The resulting murders and general breakdown of law and order led to the removal from office, in 1878, of Territorial Governor Samuel B. Axtell. [Lew Wallace, the author of *Ben Hur*, replaced Axtell as governor of the Territory of New Mexico.]

Mileage to Wpt Notes

0	1	Begin the tour by driving west on Highway 64.
3.6	2	On your right, as you pass the sign indicating the property line for the Philmont Scout Ranch, is Turkey Creek Canyon, the site of Black Jack Ketchum's hideout and one of the drop-off points for Scouts as they begin their 10-day hike. An historic marker at mile marker 305 reads: Cimarron Canyon – You are now at the Great Plains-Rocky Mountain boundary. The Cimarron Range, one of the easternmost ranges of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains in this part of New Mexico. Elevation 6,800 feet.
8.1	3	Continue west on Hwy 64 through Cimarron Canyon to the town of Ute Park. Both sides of the canyon are Philmont property – at mile marker 300, Scouts cross a small bridge on your left, pass below the highway, and hike up Bear Canyon on your right. As you enter Ute Park, look on your right toward the peaks of Baldy Mountain to the north and Touch-Me-Not to its south, each over 12,000 feet elevation. Late in 1866 three miners discovered gold on Baldy and by the following Spring the race for riches was on. For the next five years, new settlements like Baldy Town, Virginia City and Elizabethtown were hotbeds of activity – and then the gold played out.

- 1.4 4 As you leave Ute Park, there is an historic marker on your right: **Cimarron Canyon State Park** – This high mountain park is part of a state wildlife area and is managed by the New Mexico State Park Division in cooperation with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. Trout fishing is excellent in the Cimarron River, and the park offers fine opportunities for backcountry hiking and wildlife viewing. The crenellated rock formations known as the Palisades is popular with rock climbers. [At the turnout is a spring that provides cool, drinkable water year round.] Two miles past the spring is another turnout: **Palisades Sill** – These spectacular cliffs are cut by the Cimarron River through igneous rock known as a sill and composed of the rock type monzonite which was emplaced some 40 million years ago as these Southern Rocky Mountains were being uplifted. Elevation 8,000 feet.
- 3.7 5 At mile marker 292 is a sign for the trail head for Clear Creek Trail. It was here, on Sept. 14, 1875, that the body of Rev. F. J. Tolby was discovered, precipitating the bloody Colfax County War. After the Maxwell Land Grant was sold to a group of speculators in 1870, the new owners entertained a number of get-rich schemes, from selling off the vast lumber supplies, to coal and gold mining, to bringing in a railroad line. Soon, with the help of politicians in Santa Fe, the landowners began to displace settlers. This didn't sit well with Tolby and his outspokenness in defense of the poor soon brought things to a head. Serving the parish of Cimarron, Tolby was also responsible for the mission at Elizabethtown and it was during one of his trips there that he was ambushed. His death, as well as those of several other townspeople, led to a change of government in Santa Fe three years later. Tolby is buried in the cemetery in Cimarron. [Clear Creek Trail is an easy hike where a waterfall can be seen 3/4 to one hour upstream.]
- 4.5 6 Continue west on Hwy 64. As you leave the Cimarron Canyon State Park, on your right is the parking lot for the Tolby Campground. Just after this on your left is the parking area, horse corrals, and trailhead for the Tolby Creek Trail. This trail is longer and more strenuous than the Clear Creek Trail but after 2.5-3 hours the trail opens out onto a vast and magnificent meadow ringed by ponderosa pine and aspen (elevation 9,500 feet). From the trail parking area one can see Eagle Nest Dam to the southwest. The dam was built by Charles Springer between 1918 and 1920 to provide ranchland east of Cimarron with a reliable water supply. In 2004 the dam and reservoir (Eagle Nest Lake) were purchased by the state for use as a state park. At the top of the hill is an historic marker: **Eagle Nest Lake** – This is one of the finest rainbow trout waters in New Mexico. The Lake is [was] privately owned and a permit is required to fish. Water impounded in Eagle Nest Lake provides irrigation for a farming area 50 miles east of this point. The reservoir has a capacity of 78,800 acre-feet and the altitude is 8,218 feet.

- [The usually-snowcapped mountain in the distance is Wheeler Peak, the highest point in New Mexico at 13,161 feet.]
- 2.1 7 Descend down the hill into the town of Eagle Nest. Highway 64 meets the Enchanted Circle Scenic Byway at the intersection with SR 38. At this point one can drive north to Red River along SR 38, from there to Questa, Taos, and back to Eagle Nest, or one can reverse this, going first south to Taos, then on to Questa, Red River and Eagle Nest. We take the former route.
- 5.0 8 Turn right (north) on SR 38 toward Red River. Eight miles on your left (west) are the remains of the once prosperous gold mining town of Elizabethtown with Baldy Mountain looming above to its east:
Elizabethtown – The discovery of gold on Baldy Mountain in 1866 brought such a rush of fortune seekers to the Moreno Valley that “E-town” became a roaring mining camp almost overnight. Because of water and transportation problems, and a decline in ore quality, it had become virtually a ghost town by 1875. [Due to the popularity of Moreno Valley, the town is slowly being restored and hosts a museum displaying artifacts from its historic past.]
- 7.7 9 Continue north on SR 38 to the top of Bobcat Pass, elevation 9,820 feet.
- 4.3 10 Descend from Bobcat Pass into the town of Red River. At 8,693 feet, it is the highest town in New Mexico and, like E-town, owes its existence to gold mining in the area. Also like E-town, Red River had become a ghost town by the 1920s, but today is well established as a resort town, offering skiing in the winter and fishing and hiking in the summer.
- 5.1 11 Five miles down from Red River is a huge molybdenum mine, with its mountains of tailings; molybdenum is used in making high-strength steel. The mine was opened in 1923 by the Molybdenum Corporation of America (Molycorp).
- 6.6 12 Continue on to the town of Questa, from the Spanish word “cuesta” meaning slope or ridge. Until 1883, when a post office was opened here, the town was called San Antonio del Rio Colorado. Turn left (south) on SR 522 toward Taos (rhymes with “house”).
- 20.1 13 South of Questa, at the intersection of SR 522 and County Road B 009, is an historic marker that reads: **Lawrence Ranch** – The Kiowa Ranch, home of novelist D. H. Lawrence and his wife Frieda in 1924-25, was given to them by Mabel Dodge Luhan. Frieda continued to live at the ranch after his death, and later married Angelo Ravagli. In 1934 they built a shrine for Lawrence’s ashes. Aldous Huxley was among the many visitors to the ranch. [There is a pine tree next to the ranch building that was made famous in a painting by Georgia O’Keeffe in which the artist portrayed the tree in a view looking along its trunk and up at its branches.] Continue south along SR 522 until you come to a traffic light. Turn right (west) on Hwy 64.
- 7.7 14 Seven miles west of Taos, Hwy 64 crosses the gorge of the Rio Grande River in a spectacular setting: **Rio Grande Gorge Bridge** – Second highest bridge on the National Highway System, rises 650 feet above the stream of

the Rio Grande. Dedicated Sept. 10, 1965, it is a lasting monument to the untiring efforts of Governor Jack M. Campbell and the citizens of Northern New Mexico to open this scenic area to the public.

Twenty miles south of Taos is another historic marker: **Rio Grande Gorge** – The Rio Grande cut this spectacular gorge through layers of basalt, a volcanic rock that erupted between 2 and 5 million years ago. This basalt was highly fluid and flowed many miles. The enormous landslide blocks downstream were caused by undercutting when the river was much larger during the Pleistocene glacial age. [The Rio Grande River lies in a rift valley, bordered by two parallel faults or cracks in the Earth’s crust. Similar rifts are responsible for the Red Sea, the Gulf of California and the Dead Sea. Over the past 30 million years, movement along the fault lines have deepened the rift to almost 5 miles, but steady deposits of volcanic lava and rock from weathered mountains have filled nearly all of the valley.]

- 11.2 15 Return to the intersection of Hwy 64 with SR 522 and turn right (south) on Hwy 64 to Taos. Then turn left just beyond the Allsup gas station.
- 2.0 16 The Taos Pueblo Indian Reservation is ahead: **Pueblo of Taos** – Parts of Taos were occupied when Hernando de Alvarado visited here in 1540. Taos served as the headquarters from which Popè, of San Juan Pueblo, organized the Pueblo Revolt in 1680. In 1846, the pueblo was a refuge for Hispanics and Indians resisting the annexation of New Mexico by the United States.
- 4.7 17 After visiting the pueblo, return back to Hwy 64 and head south to Taos. **Taos** – The Spanish community of Taos developed two miles southwest of Taos Pueblo. It later served as a supply base for the “Mountain Men,” and was the home of Kit Carson, who is buried here. Governor Charles Bent was killed here in the anti-U.S. insurrection of 1847. In the early 1900’s, Taos developed as a colony for artists and writers. Elevation 6,938 feet. On your left is: **Kit Carson Memorial State Park Cemetery** – In 1868, Christopher “Kit” Carson, the legendary guide, scout, soldier, and trapper, died in Fort Lyons, Colorado. The next year, his body and that of his wife Josefa were brought home to Taos. Others buried here include soldiers killed in the 1847 rebellion protesting U.S. annexation of New Mexico. A short distance beyond the park, at the second traffic light and on your right, is: **Taos Plaza: End of Camino Real** – Spanish settlers lived in the Taos Valley before the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, but the town of Fernández de Taos was not founded until the 1790’s. The Camino Real, or King’s Highway, from Mexico City reached its end in this plaza and in nearby Taos Pueblo. [The Camino Real is more often translated as “The Royal Road.”] Since 1915, when six artists formed the Taos Society of Artists in response to the bright skies, luminous landscapes and colorful indigenous culture, Taos has been known as an artist’s colony. The large number of galleries attests to these endearing and enduring qualities of the town.

Two miles southwest of the Plaza along SR 240 is the Martinez Hacienda, a restored homestead from 1804. The structure, typical of the period and decorated with simple furnishings, offers a glimpse into the lifestyle and culture of early Taoseños.

- 6.0 18 Return to Hwy 64/68 and head south to the neighboring village of Ranchos de Taos with its magnificent church: **San Francisco de Asis Church** – This Mission Church is one of the oldest churches in America dedicated to San Francisco de Asis. It was constructed between 1813 and 1815 under the direction of the Franciscan Fray José Benito Pereyro. It is an outstanding example of adobe mission architecture. This Church continues to this day to be a place of worship and an integral part of the community. [This structure is often cited as the most photographed church in the U.S.]
- 1.8 19 Return north on SR 68 to its intersection with the Cañon-West-Bypass and turn right (east). The Taos Visitor’s Center is on the southeast corner.
- 2.1 20 Drive toward the mountains until the Bypass intersects Hwy 64 and turn right: **Taos Canyon** – In 1692, after having been driven from New Mexico by the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, the Spanish began to reestablish their rule. In one of the last battles of the reconquest, in September 1696, Governor Diego de Vargas defeated the Indians of Taos Pueblo at nearby Taos Canyon.
- 15.0 21 Taos Canyon is home to many artists who also have studios that are open to the public. Continue east on Hwy 64 until the road reaches the top of the pass: **Palo Flechado Pass** – Palo Flechado (tree pierced with arrows) was a pass much used by the Indians, Spaniards, and Anglos traveling from the plains by way of the Cimarron River (called La Flecha – the arrow – in 1719). The Flecha de Palo Indians (Apache band) in 1706 inhabited the plains east of the mountains. [Elevation 9,107 feet.]
- 3.7 22 Continue down the east side of the pass and into Moreno Valley. At the traffic light, the road to the right goes to the resort town of Angel Fire. A short distance ahead on the left (west) side of Hwy 64 is: **Vietnam Veterans National Memorial** – The Chapel was opened in 1968 by Dr. Victor Westphall in memory of his son and all other U.S. personnel killed in the fighting in Vietnam. It was first dedicated as the Vietnam Veterans Peace and Brotherhood Chapel, and on May 30, 1983, it was rededicated as DAV Vietnam Veterans National Memorial.
Continue north on Hwy 64 past the marker: **Wheeler Peak** – Across Moreno Valley stands Wheeler Peak, 13,161 feet, highest peak in New Mexico. Rocks of Wheeler Peak and the Taos Range are highly resistant granite and gneisses of Precambrian age. Moreno Valley is underlain by soft sandstones and shales which are covered by stream and glacial deposits. Placer gold was mined at Elizabethtown north of here during the 1860s.
- 8.5 23 Drive north and then east on Hwy 64 to Eagle Nest and back through Cimarron Canyon to Cimarron, where the tour ends.

