

Cimarron, New Mexico

Where the Rockies Meet the Plains!

One mile south of Highway 64 on State Road 21 lies the **Historic District** of the Village of Cimarron. Park near the St. James Hotel (No. 7 on the green pamphlet) and enjoy the self-guided walking tour of **Old Town**. It takes 30-60 minutes to see the 14 historic sites marked in front by stone pedestals; most can be reached by car. The **green pamphlet** gives more information than fits onto the brass plaque mounted atop each pedestal. The **yellow pamphlet** presents a brief history of the Village and provides background information on the historic sites, including the Santa Fe Trail, Lucien Maxwell and his 1,713,000-acre Land Grant, and the Colfax County War.

The **Santa Fe Trail** consisted of two main branches: the original route called the **Mountain Branch**, which passed through Cimarron, and the **Cimarron Cutoff**, named for the town near Dodge City, Kansas. The route of the Mountain Branch follows present-day I-25 over Raton Pass (along the railroad tracks) and parallels Hwy 64 to Cimarron, crossing in front of the Visitor Center and across the Cimarron River to Old Town. The two branches met at Fort Union, 90 miles south of Cimarron and the main fort offering protection for travelers along the Trail.

In the early 1920s, **Waite Phillips**, of the Phillips 66 Oil Company, began purchasing large tracts of land west and south of Cimarron. By the mid-1930s he had acquired over 300,000 acres and named the ranch Philmont. About 1940 he donated half the land to the Boy Scouts of America to be used as a working ranch as well as a high adventure base for Scouts. The headquarters of the Ranch is located four miles south of Cimarron on SR 21 and houses the **Philmont Museum and Seton Library**, which also serves as Philmont's Visitor Center. Nearby is the magnificent **Villa Philmonte**, built by Phillips in the late 1920s; tours may be arranged at the Philmont Museum.

Eleven miles south of Cimarron on SR 21 lies the site of **Rayado** and a reconstruction of Kit Carson's hacienda. Carson and Maxwell initially chose to settle along Rayado Creek in the late 1840s and helped man an army post there attached to Fort Union. In the mid-1850s they decided that the site of present-day Cimarron was a better location to start a town, probably because the Cimarron River was more reliable than the Rayado. Carson's hacienda is open from early June through mid-August and rests on property owned by the Scout Ranch. An historic chapel sits across the road in a stand of trees.

Traces of the Santa Fe Trail can still be seen nearby. One mile north of town along Hwy 64 is a sign noting where the Trail crossed the highway from north to south. Pull off just beyond the sign facing northbound traffic and look to the right (south). A gentle **swale** about 30 yards wide and a foot deep filled with an abundance of sunflower stalks indicates the path where several wagons rode abreast. As you drive south leaving Philmont Headquarters and begin to veer left, climbing a steep hill, look to your left about 30 yards beyond the highway and you will see a **series of ruts** where wagons descended the hill. About 13 miles south of Cimarron on SR 21, the road takes a sharp left turn just before a closed gate that opens onto a dirt road. After following SR 21 to the left (east) a few hundred yards, the road slightly slopes down. At the bottom of this gentle dip stop and look to the right (south). Erosion in the distance indicates **trail ruts** where wagons had to follow in single or double file through the narrow gap between the hills (and parallel to the dirt road on the right).

In 1880 the **railroad** arrived in Santa Fe, relegating the Trail to history. In 1906 a railroad spur arrived in Cimarron, following the Trail from Raton down Hwy 64 and continuing 15 miles further west to the small town of Ute Park. Portions of the old rail bed can still be seen beside the highway in the canyon; the rails and cars were sold around 1940 during the war. The station of the St. Louis, Rocky Mountain and Pacific Railroad was located about 100 yards east of the Cimarron Visitor Center. A large influx of people followed the arrival of the railroad and most of the stores along Ninth Street on the north side of the park date from 1906-1910; this area north of the river is referred to as **New Town**. Because newcomers preferred to live near the source of their livelihood (the railroad), Old Town remained undisturbed and looks pretty much the same as it did 150 years ago when Maxwell first settled and governed this territory. Compare Cimarron's plaza with that of Taos, Santa Fe or Albuquerque and you'll see how little things have changed here.

Before leaving town, you might also wish to visit the **cemetery** on the right off SR 21 as you head south toward Philmont. To experience Cimarron through the lives of its early inhabitants, pick up a copy of **For Good or Bad**, by historian Stephen Zimmer, available at the Cimarron Visitor Center, the Philmont Museum and other local businesses. Please check out our website: www.cimarronnm.com for more information on the Village as well as downloadable pictures, additional history and area day trips.