



Lake Valley Back Country Byway

Click to view Area attractions and map in new window.

New Mexico had a California Gold Rush-type mining fever too. The Lake Valley byway delves deep into the heart of the mineral-rich Black Range Mountains in the south central part of the state. Start the byway west from Truth or Consequences along NM 152 to Hillsboro, then head south on NM 27. The period of major mining here spanned a century. Silver was discovered along the banks of Percha Creek in 1877, followed by a strike near Hillsboro the following year. The spectacular discovery of the Bridal Chamber claim came in 1882, with the name derived from the blinding white light cast by the huge vein of silver, the richest single body of silver ever found. In the 20th century, copper was king and remnants of the past mining activities remain visible throughout the area.

Black Range Mountains

From desert and arid grasslands to conifer forests, most of the rugged mountain range lies within the Gila National Wilderness. With the exception of the areas along NM 152, most of the range is extremely rugged and undeveloped. It was here that silver was discovered in the late 1870s, kicking off the wild mining era. Gold, copper, and other minerals have been mined here for more than a century. www.fs.usda.gov/gila

Hillsboro

As NM 152 winds west into the Black Range, the terrain gets hillier. Hillsboro nestles into the foothills along Percha Creek. The town's history is a tale ripped from the pages of a Western novel. Geronimo's Apache people once roamed the Black Range above the town, attacking it on occasion. Along with Lake Valley, the town became the center of the thriving mining district. The silver strikes produced millions of dollars of wealth, attracting merchants, saloons, and madams digging for gold, in their own fashion. The classic boom town went bust, when the price of silver took a permanent nose dive in 1893. From more than 10,000, fewer than 2,000 residents remained by the mid-1890s. Today the population numbers under 200. www.hillsboronm.org

Lake Valley

Many places in New Mexico called ghost towns are actually repopulated, at least by a few hardy folks, but Lake Valley is the real thing. The town began to die when the demand for silver decreased due in part to its being demonetized in 1893. A fire shortly after that destroyed much of the main street. Its last residents moved away in 1994. The BLM now owns Lake Valley and offers a free self-guided walking tour except on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Start at the schoolhouse museum, where artifacts from the mining heyday can be viewed. The ghost town still has its pleasures, as you hear the whispering grasses, the conversations of insects and birds, and the staccato beat of loose sheet metal flapping in the wind. www.ghosttowns.com/states/nm/lakevalley.html

BLM tour info

Phone (575) 915-5603

Nutt

The byway continues east to Nutt, where today the number of residents can be counted on one hand. Nutt was an important railhead for travelers and freight on their way to area mines. It was named for Colonel Nutt, a railroad director. The town declined when the Atchison,

Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad was extended to Lake Valley in 1884.
www.ghosttowns.com/states/nm/nutt.html