



Sunspot Scenic Byway

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Beginning at Cloudcroft, this 16-mile ribbon of asphalt winds south along the Sacramento Mountains. It ends in Sunspot, an apt name for a village with two famed national telescope observatories. To reinforce its connection to research of the heavens, the byway is designated NM Hwy. 6563, the light wavelength in Angstroms used by scientists to find active areas on the sun. Most visitors return via the same route to Cloudcroft, but it is possible to continue on south through the Lincoln National Forest to the small ranching community of Timberon.

Sunspot Visitor Center and Museum

A collaboration among the Apache Point Observatory, National Solar Laboratory, and the U.S. Forest Service, the center explains much about the workings of both observatories nearby. Guided tours available during the summer. nsosp.nso.edu/pr/visitors_center.html

Apache Point Observatory

Access to the telescopes and buildings is restricted but visitors are welcome to stroll the grounds. The desert skies of the area offer low humidity, low dust, and very dark skies for observing the galaxies and nebulae of deep space. www.apo.nmsu.edu/

National Solar Observatory

The observatory's Big Dome contains two telescopes. One allows astronomers to study the sun's corona by creating an artificial eclipse with a disk blocking the brilliant sun. The other telescope observes transient solar events like flares that eject particles that can reach Earth, causing the Aurora Borealis and disrupting radio communications. www.nso.edu/

White Sands National Monument

Rising from the heart of the Tularosa Basin far below the lofty heights of the byway is one of the world's natural wonders, 275 square miles of glistening sand dunes. The monument preserves a major portion of this, the world's largest gypsum dune field, along with the plants and animals that have successfully adapted to its constantly changing environment. Full moon nights and guided full moon hikes can be especially memorable. www.nps.gov/whsa/