

## Trail of the Ancients

Chaco Canyon forms the centerpiece of this meandering Four Corners area byway which passes through miles of starkly beautiful scenery. In every direction, visitors feel the spirit of inhabitants from centuries past in this grand and sparsely populated corner of the state. Start at the intersection of US 550 and San Juan County Road 7950. Head south 26 miles to the Chaco visitors' center, then head further south toward Crownpoint on NM Hwy. 371. Beyond Crownpoint, the byway leaves 371 for Navajo Road 48, which dead-ends at McKinley County Road 19. Here the byway turns right and winds through sandstone buttes that could be a John Wayne western set, to ruins of Casamero Pueblo. Follow NM Hwy. 122 to Grants, and then take NM Hwy. 53 through El Malpais, "the badlands." Driving west, pass by El Morro and head on through the remarkable Zuni Pueblo. Circle back north to Gallup on NM Hwy. 62 and then on north from there to two famous trading posts, Toadlena and Two Grey Hills. Finally, follow U.S. 64 toward Farmington and on past the distinctive Shiprock to the Arizona border. Allow plenty of time to traverse this ancient land.

## Chaco Culture National Historic Park

A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Chaco Canyon functioned between 850 and 1250 A.D. as a ceremonial and trade center whose influence was felt for hundreds of miles. The Chacoan people combined pre-planned architectural designs, astronomical alignments, geometry, landscaping, and engineering to create an ancient urban center of spectacular public architecture. The undulating 2-foot thick walls, stacked thin sand-colored stones, still inspire awe. Visitors' center, and loop road with access to 6 monumental sites.

[www.nps.gov/chcu/](http://www.nps.gov/chcu/)

## Crownpoint

Tiny Crownpoint has a huge reputation for its monthly auction of Navajo rugs from area weavers. Auctions are usually held on the second Friday of each month and attract buyers from all over the world who appreciate the opportunity to buy directly from the rugs' creators. Rugs are sold at every price level. Other artisans bring their jewelry, pottery, and work for purchase during auction afternoons and evenings. Note, there is no lodging in Crownpoint except for an area for overnight RV parking. [www.crownpointrugauktion.com](http://www.crownpointrugauktion.com)

## Grants

Originally a station for the railroad to take on coal, Grants really boomed with the discovery of uranium in the area in 1950. The New Mexico Mining Museum ([www.grants.org/MiningMuseum](http://www.grants.org/MiningMuseum)) recreates a uranium mine and displays gems from mining throughout the area. The town is a stop along legendary Route 66 too. [www.grants.org](http://www.grants.org)

## El Malpais National Monument

This jagged landscape poured out of the earth over a million years. Molten lava created an eerie world of lava tubes, cinder cones, pressure ridges, and even an ice cave. El Malpais offers everything from easy drives, scenic overlooks, and short walks, to strenuous trails and rugged caving. Take your pick of many great outdoor sights and spectacles that encompass the geology, history, and culture of the region. [www.nps.gov/elma/](http://www.nps.gov/elma/)

## El Morro National Monument

El Morro ("the headland") appears suddenly on the horizon, like a grounded cruise ship. A waterhole hidden at the base of the sandstone bluff made it a popular campsite among

ancestral Puebloans and Spanish and American travelers, who carved names, dates, messages, and petroglyphs over hundreds of years. [www.nps.gov/elmo/](http://www.nps.gov/elmo/)

## **Zuni Pueblo**

The 6 original Zuni pueblos were the legendary “Cities of Gold” sought by Vasquez de Coronado. The present Pueblo was settled in 1699 and is the largest of the nineteen New Mexican Pueblos, with more than 700 square miles and a population of over 10,000. Zuni is considered the most traditional of all the New Mexican Pueblos, with a unique language, culture, and history that resulted in part from extreme geographic isolation. About 80% of Zuni families are involved in making art, including inlay silver jewelry, stone fetishes, and pottery. The murals in the Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission (guided tours available) offer insights on Zuni’s religious observances and culture. [www.zunitourism.com](http://www.zunitourism.com)

## **Gallup**

Gallup is famed for its connection to Native American culture, the old West, and its role in transporting people westward, whether by rail or Route 66. Trading companies and pawn shops line Gallup’s main streets, offering a wealth of Indian art and crafts. The annual Inter-Tribal Ceremonial celebration in mid-August is among the premier Native American events, with two parades, dances, marketplace, contest powwow, rodeo, and Native foods. Architecturally, the post office and McKinley County Courthouse are both showplaces from the WPA era, and the delightful El Rancho Hotel housed many a movie star during the heyday of western films, in particular. Photos line the hotel’s public areas. A mural honoring the legendary World War II Navajo Code Talkers can be found on South Second Street and a striking new Veteran’s Memorial and Walkway stretches in front of the old courthouse. The Rex Museum shares the town’s early coal mining history. [www.gallupnm.org/](http://www.gallupnm.org/)

## **Trading Posts**

Both Toadlena and Two Grey Hills have played an important role in Navajo weaving for over a century. Toadlena is run like an old-time trading post, supplying cash, services, and goods for about 1,500 Navajos living nearby in exchange for rugs. Two Grey Hills is one of the few remaining historic posts on the Navajo Indian Reservation, an original stone and adobe store. It remains today the primary source of authentic regional rugs known as “Two Grey Hills” style. Made of hand-spun yarn from the fleece of naturally colored local churro sheep in shades of gray, brown, black and white, they are known around the world as the finest in Navajo weaving. [www.toadlenatradingpost.com](http://www.toadlenatradingpost.com), [www.twogreyhills.com](http://www.twogreyhills.com)

## **Farmington**

Farmington is surrounded by world-class cultural treasures, magnificent landscapes, and thrilling river sports. The Navajo name for Farmington is Totah, “the meeting place of the rivers.” Two-thirds of the surface water of New Mexico flows through the town in the La Plata, Animas, and San Juan rivers. Five miles of trails along the Animas offer recreation for nature lovers and cyclists. Stop in one of the several local museums highlighting everything from fish and game to developments in electrical history to children’s activities. The namesake Farmington Museum and Visitors’ Center at Gateway Park offers exhibits about the city’s history, oil and gas industry, and a trading post reproduction, along with rotating art exhibitions. [www.farmingtonnm.org](http://www.farmingtonnm.org)

## **Aztec Ruins National Monument**

Follow ancient passageways into a distant time, when this ancestral Pueblo society had over 500 rooms. Original timbers and even fingerprints of ancient workers visible in the stucco. Reconstructed Great Kiva. [www.nps.gov/azru/](http://www.nps.gov/azru/)

## **Salmon Ruins and Heritage Park**

These 11th Century Pueblo ruins, historical buildings, and museum are located near Bloomfield, as are the Aztec Ruins above. Initial builders and occupants, referred to as the Primary occupation, were colonists from Chaco Canyon or had very close ties with the inhabitants there. [www.salmonruins.com](http://www.salmonruins.com)

## **Shiprock**

The most prominent landmark in northwest New Mexico, Shiprock rises 1,800 feet above the desert plain on the Navajo Nation. A remnant of volcanic activity millions of years ago, Shiprock plays a significant role in Navajo religion, mythology, and tradition. It too is a point of interest for rock climbers and photographers, and has been featured in several film productions and novels. Near the rock formation is the community of Shiprock, named for the landmark. It is home to the Northern Navajo Fair, the oldest and most traditional of the Nation's fairs, held every October. Shiprock too is the site of Diné College (formerly Navajo Community College), a tribally controlled college with seven other campuses across the vast Navajo Nation. [www.discovernavajo.com](http://www.discovernavajo.com)