



## Trail of the Mountain Spirits National Scenic Byway

*Click to view Area attractions and map in new window.*

The 93-mile National Scenic Byway winds around the southwest corner of New Mexico, back and forth across the forested Continental Divide, through the country's first national wilderness area, the Gila, and past ancient cliff dwellings. Long known locally as The Inner Loop, especially among bicycle race fans, the byway serves as the route for the grueling annual Tour of the Gila race. It's just as fun for travel by car or motorcycle, or biking on your own, and offers a wealth of year-round birding options. The byway crosses six climatic zones and a broad swath of the Old West territory made famous by the daring exploits of Native Americans, Buffalo Soldiers, frontier families and scurrilous outlaws. You can't help but be touched by the spirits of those that have passed before you. Start and end in San Lorenzo, in the heart of the Mimbres Valley, at the junction of state roads 152 and 35.

### Mimbres Valley

The Mimbres people lived here almost a thousand years ago and remain an enigma. Archeologists can only speculate about their beginnings (perhaps evolved from Mogollon culture), and especially about their ultimate fate. Graceful Mimbrenño pottery is the most famous artifact of the culture. Pottery often depicted geometric designs, daily routines, or animals—cranes, turkeys, fish, hummingbirds, even mosquitoes. On feast days the usually quiet valley community of San Lorenzo overflows with pilgrims walking to the small miracle room tucked into the local church. Watch for the cutoff to Bear Canyon Lake, a little gem offering fishing and other recreation, and a picturesque, intermittent waterfall.

[www.mimbrenos.com](http://www.mimbrenos.com)

### Continental Divide

The byway crosses twice over the mountainous hydrological divide that separates watersheds that drain into the Pacific Ocean from those that drain into the Atlantic. A portion of the Continental Divide Trail, stretching from Canada to Mexico, travels through this area.

[www.cdtrail.org](http://www.cdtrail.org)

### Southwest New Mexico Birding Trail

The byway overlaps with this Audubon-designated trail for birders through the Gila too. Some 337 species of birds have been found at the 8 stops along the byway.

[www.oldwestcountry.com](http://www.oldwestcountry.com)

### Lake Roberts

Further north, in the Sapillo Valley, find "the Emerald of the Gila Forest." A high-country 73-acre jewel, Lake Roberts was created by damming a creek in the 1960s. Camp, hike, or fish for trout, bass, and plump catfish. Nearby general store. [www.lakeroberts.com](http://www.lakeroberts.com)

### Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument

Turn north to head toward this extraordinary site. Examine the homes and lives of the Mogollon people who lived here from the 1280's through the early 1300's. Mogollon culture may have evolved from the Anasazi and/or the Hohokam. Though the cliff dwelling site is small compared to Mesa Verde National Park and Bandolier National Monument, the dwellings hold their own in impressiveness. North on NM Hwy. 15, off of NM Hwy. 35.

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

## **Pinos Altos**

Nestled in ponderosa pines, historic Pinos Altos sits at the south end of the byway along Route 15, north of Silver City. You can still see ruins of old mines and appreciate a quaint museum dedicated to the original miners of the 1800's. While you meander around the vintage Western downtown, take the time to check out The Buckhorn Saloon and the Opera House, known for its entertaining melodramas, across the road. Plenty of camping nearby.

**[www.pinosaltos.org](http://www.pinosaltos.org)**