

**Tin Lizzies of ABQ**  
**Raton-Clayton Regional Tour**  
**September 18-22, 2019**  
**Additional Information on 12 Topics**

**(1) Dry Cimarron River and Santa Fe Trail Cimarron Cut-Off:**

The **Dry Cimarron River**: The river courses across NE New Mexico, the Oklahoma Panhandle, Colorado & Kansas to join the Arkansas River near Tulsa, OK. The headwaters of the river start in Johnson Mesa near Folsom in northeastern NM. We will be driving our Ts over Johnson Mesa, visiting Folsom and nearby Folsom Falls. The name Cimarron derives from the Spanish, *Rio de los Carneros Cimarrón*, River of the Feral Sheep. In New Mexico & OK, the river is known as the **Dry Cimarron River**. The “Dry Cimarron Scenic Byway” follows the river from Folsom to the OK border and we will be driving a major section of the byway between Raton and Folsom NM on NM-72 and NM-426. See link Below for more information. The name Dry Cimarron River in NE NM and western OK.

**Santa Fe Trail Routes**: One branch of the 900-mile-long Santa Fe Trail (1822-1880) that ran between Franklin, MO and Santa Fe, NM was known as the **Cimarron-Cutoff or Crossing**. Near Garden City, KS the main trail spits into the **Mountain-Branch** that passed through Trinidad CO and Raton Pass in NM. The **Cutoff-Branch** followed the valley of the **Dry Cimarron River** in NE New Mexico. This **Cutoff Branch** was considered “hazardous” mainly due to lack of water and raiding Indians. The **Cutoff-Branch** was also 100 miles shorter than the Mountain Branch and shortened the travel time by 10 days. The **Dry Cimarron River** was a main source of water for travelers on the Santa Fe Trail while crossing the Cimarron Desert. The two Santa Fe Trail branches joined at Ft. Union, NM and from Watrous, NM the two branches continued south to Santa Fe. We will view Santa Fe Trail wagon ruts preserved in the grasslands on private land north of Clayton. We will cross the **Cimarron Cutoff** route numerous time during our driving tour in the area.

**Note**: The **Dry Cimarron River** is not to be confused with the other **Cimarron River** that is wetter and flows entirely in New Mexico, known as the *La Flecha or Semarone*. Its headwaters are in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains near Philmont Scout Ranch and feeds into Eagle Nest Lake and then into the Canadian River below the city of Springer, NM. The water from this Cimarron River is primarily used for irrigation.

**(2) Raton, NM**: Raton is the county seat of Colfax County and sits at 6,680’ at the base of Raton Pass. The Mountain Branch of the Santa Fe Trail came across Raton Pass which was improved in 1846 by Gnl. Stephen Watts Kearny. The stop on the Santa Fe Trail was called Willow Springs that was a source of good water. A toll road was built in 1865 that improved the Santa Fe Trail road over Raton Pass. The town-site was originally settled in 1871 as a livestock watering place. In the mean time, the Santa Fe Railroad constructed tracks over Raton Pass with the first locomotive arriving in Raton in 1878. A new city named Raton (Spanish mouse “for local geologic features in the area (Raton Pass & Raton Ridge) that were inhabited by mice and other rodents. Raton townsite was purchased by the railroad from the Maxwell Land Grant Co. in 1880 and grew quickly as a center for the railroad. The railroad fueled the development of coal mining and camps in the area bringing in good and bad characters. A number of buildings from the 1880s still survive in Raton in the Historic District. By the turn of the century the coal mines employed more than 2,000 men and Raton had a population of 3,500. This was a prosperous time for the town and many elegant buildings were built, including the Shuler Theater (1913) a combination of city hall and municipal auditorium that we will visit. By the 1960s, coal

mining was finished. Since WWII, Raton has survived mainly on tourism. The La Mesa Racetrack closed in 1992. The downtown became a Registered Historic District in 1977 and contains 95 significant building. The Raton Museum, which we will visit, features well organized history-related exhibits as well as a remarkable WPA art collection. In 2009, Raton was designated as an Arts & Cultural District and many building have preserved. Numerous art galleries, antique shops, cafes. We will have our Tour Welcome Events in the Historic Downtown main street area.

- (3) **Sugarite Canyon State Park & Coal Camp:** Sugarite (pronounced “Sugar-eet”) was originally the name of a coal mining camp (1910-1941) and the former site of the town is now a state park. Only ruins of the town site remain however, the Visitor Center is in the original town post office. We will make a stop at there during our Thursday driving tour. Currently, the area is Sugarite Canyon State Park that contains reservoirs that provide water to Raton as well as camping, fishing and hiking trails.
- (4) **Yankee Canyon & Johnson Mesa:** The mesa is a prominent geologic feature (high plateau) near Raton that is about 14 miles long (E-W) and about 2 miles wide (N-S). NM-72 traverses the mesa E to W and is part of the “Dry Cimarron Byway”. Yankee Canyon on NM-72 is a landscape of grassy meadows dotted by oak, juniper & pines. The mesa is the source of the Dry Cimarron River (see above). Currently, the top of the mesa is a lush grassland where local cattle graze during the summer months as well as volcanic activity. The stone church, St. John’s Methodist Episcopal church (1897) on the mesa is still active with services and events still being held there. Currently, no one lives full time on the mesa due to long and cold winters and many descendants of original settlers still live in Raton.
- (5) **Folsom & Folsom Man Archeology Site:** This small village located in Union Co. NM is historically important and was the location of stockyards where cattle were shipped on the railroad. Local outlaws and train robbers plagued the town. Homesteaders moved in and attempted to farm but was unsuccessful due to lack of water. However, in 1908, a flash flood occurred taking away much of the town but uncovered the bison bones in a nearby arroyo. Archeological study of the Folsom points and bones has ultimately placed man in the region dating back 10,000 years! The Folsom Museum (est. 1966) that we will visit and have a picnic lunch is located in the former Doherty Mercantile building and Doherty descendants still live in the area. Nearby Folsom Falls is a spring-fed waterfall on the Dry Cimarron River near Folsom.
- (6) **Capulin National Monument:** U.S. National Monument (est. 1916) that protects an extinct cinder cone volcano part of the Raton-Clayton Volcanic Field. The visitor center features exhibits about the area geology and history and is daily 8-5 daily (575) 278-2201. The name *capulin* comes from a type of choke cherry native to North America. The high point of the cinder cone has views to 5 states. The Volcano Road however is currently closed as of mid-August, 2019 due to wash out of the road by recent rains. There are several hiking trails around the base of the volcano.
- (7) **Eklund Historic Hotel & Luna Theater, Clayton:** Located at 15 Main St the hotel was built in the 1890s. The Luna Theater is located across the street from the hotel (2-6 Main St) and was built in 1915-16. The building is Mission/Spanish Revival architecture and continues to show movies. The theater was built by Morris Herzstein (See Herzstein

Museum below), who owned a mercantile following a fire. Both the hotel and the theater are listed on the National Register of Historic places.

**(8) Clayton Lake State Park:** Located 12 miles North of the town of Clayton. Landscape is rolling grasslands, volcanic rocks & sandstone bluffs. This was a stopover point for travelers on the Cimarron Cutoff of the Santa Fe Trail. There picnic site and viewing of one of the most extensive dinosaur track ways in North America. We will visit the park for a picnic lunch during the Tour on Saturday.

**(9) Clayton, NM:** Clayton is the county seat of Union County, New Mexico with a population of around 3,000 inhabitants. History of the town starts mainly at the time of the Santa Fe Trail and the Cimarron Cutoff that passed nearby Rabbit Ear Mountain to guide them. Cattle & sheep ranchers moved in followed by the railroad. The actual town was established in 1880 as a livestock shipping center. It is located only 10 miles from TX and 11 miles from OK panhandle. The town still is a ranching and farming community. Both the Eklund Hotel and the Luna Theater are significant historical buildings in the community. See 7 above. The Herzstein Memorial Museum hold many artifacts of the community and volunteers are often at the museum as guides. A highlight of the museum in our opinion is the exhibit relating to Raymond Huff, the Superintendent of Clayton high school who used WPA workers from the community to build the school and furnish it. A video segment from "The Dust Bowl" by Ken Burns is referenced below. Clayton was the site of a major dust storm in May, 1937 that was one of the worst to ever hit the SW area of the dust bowl. The dust storm lasted for hours and was followed by hail and causing severe damage to the town and surrounding farm land.

**(10) The Dust Bowl:** Between 1932 and 1941, an area of 100,000,000 acres centered in the Oklahoma panhandle and encompassing land in the adjoining states of Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, New Mexico and Texas was labeled the **Dust Bowl**. This area is often referred to as the Southern Plains and joins the greater Midwest plains stretching from the Mexican border to the plains of Alberta and Saskatchewan in Canada. The area is primarily west of the 100<sup>th</sup> meridian and varies in elevation from 2500 ft. - 6000 ft. in the west. The area is semiarid and receives less than 20 inches of moisture yearly. Records over the past 250 years show that the area is prone to droughts, is extremely windy and can experience cold winters with driving snowstorms. The vegetation in this area was primarily short and long grass prairie which supported the vast buffalo herds which roamed this area for thousands of years.

In 1862 congress enacted the Homestead Act which offered settlers 160 acres (65hectares). As a result, many flocked to the Midwest to secure their land, build a house and start a small farm. Many experienced drought, harsh winters and frozen livestock. Some turned to farming wheat and in 1904, 640 additional acres were granted in western Nebraska under the Kincaid Act. In 1909, 320 more acres were included by the Enlarged Homestead Act. Large tracts of land could be managed with the large steam traction and at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> c, large gas-powered tractors. Farmers plowed up the long grass prairie which had existed in the area since the Pleistocene. The prairie had supported megafauna and in recent times millions of Bison. Through the 1920's favorable conditions existed for excellent harvests of wheat.

However, things changed in the summer of 1930. Over the next 10 years, rainfall decreased did not return until 1941. The top soil was not anchored because of the deep plowing of the prairie grasses. Prices of wheat fell dramatically in 1931, so it wasn't profitable to plant anything. In some areas of the "dust bowl" there was a drought of 8

years or longer and summer temperatures set heat records. What happened was a combination of weather changes including extraordinary winds, heat and the horrifying dust storms. Tim Egan's book-**The Worst Hard Time** is an excellent read about the Dust Bowl years.

**(11) Kiowa & Rita Blanca National Grasslands:** A region of short grass prairie (230,000 acres) within NM, TX & OK that is made up of small parcels intermingled with privately owned tracts. Following the Dust Bowl disaster in the late 1930s and early 1940s, the Federal Government purchased and restored the damaged lands. In 1960 the National Forest Service took over administration-now part of the Cibola National Forest. Our main interest in the Tour will be a small section of the Grasslands where wagon ruts from the Cimarron Cutoff can still be seen at a Forest Service Interpretive Site.

**(12) Santa Fe Trail Ruts:** There are a number of sites along the 1,200 mile Santa Fe Trail (1821-1880) where thousands of wagons carved ruts deep into the prairie. We will visit one viewing site north of Clayton where ruts on private land can be viewed. There are also ruts visible at nearby McNeas crossing and around Ft. Union.

#### References:

- (1) Dry Cimarron Scenic Byway: <https://www.legendsofamerica.com/nm-drycimarron/>
- (2) Clayton & vicinity: <https://www.claytonnm.org/drycimarrontour>
- (3) Capulin National Monument: <https://www.nps.gov/cavo/index.htm>
- (4) Folsom: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folsom,\\_New\\_Mexico](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folsom,_New_Mexico)  
Cimarron Route of the Santa Fe Trail in New Mexico: <https://www.legendsofamerica.com/nm-cimarronroute/>.
- (5) Clayton High School Superintendent, Raymond Huff: <https://www.njtvonline.org/programs/the-dust-bowl/dust-bowl-mr-huff/>
- (6) Santa Fe Trail Interpretive Site (Kiowa National Grasslands)  
<https://www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/cibola/recreation/recarea/?recid=64166&actid=119>  
USGS Aerial Photographs: <http://www.santafetrailresearch.com/spacepix/Our-space-link-page.html>
- (7) Egan, T (2006). *The Worst Hard Time-the untold story of those who survived the Great American Dust Bowl*. Boston (MA), New York(NY): First Mariner Books, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- (8) Meltzer, D (2009). *First Peoples in a New World-colonizing ice age America*. Berkeley, Los Angeles (CA), London: University of California Press.
- (9) Harper, JV, Signor, JR. (2010). *Santa Fe's Raton Pass*. Midwest City(OK): The Santa Fe Railway Historical and Modeling Society Inc.
- (10) Veltri, P, Walsh, PH (2018). *Images of America-Sugarite Coal Camp*. Charleston(SC): Arcadia Publishing.

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