

LA BAJADA HISTORIC TRAILS AND ROADS

(El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro)

(National Old Trails Highway)

(US 66)

Approximately 1 mile East/Northeast of intersection of State Highway

16 and Indian Service Road 841

La Bajada

Santa Fe

New Mexico

HAER NM-15

~~HAER NM-15~~

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

National Park Service

U.S. Department of the Interior

1849 C Street NW

Washington, DC 20240-0001

# HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

## LA BAJADA HISTORIC TRAILS AND ROADS

HAER No. NM-15

- Location: Approximately 1 mile east/northeast of the intersection of New Mexico State Highway 16 and Indian Service Road 841, La Bajada, Santa Fe County, New Mexico.
- The site extends 600' down from a mesa top to an escarpment to the Santa Fe River. The district encompasses approximately 36 acres.
- La Bajada Historic Trails and Roads is located at latitude 35.05584, longitude - 106.2258. The coordinate represents the approximate center of the district. This coordinate was obtained on 10 March 2009 by plotting its location on the Tetilla Peak, NM USGS Digital Raster Graphic in ESRI ArcGIS 9.2. The accuracy of the coordinates is +/- 12 meters. The coordinate datum is North American Datum 1927 CONUS.
- Dates of Construction: 1598, 1860s, 1909, 1926
- Present Owner: Santa Fe National Forest, Pueblo de Cochiti and private landowners
- Present Use: Public, private and tribal lands
- Significance: La Bajada is a prominent geologic and geographic landmark in central New Mexico, and includes trail and road traces that represent major cultural changes resulting from geopolitical activity, technology, and transportation. The four historically significant road alignments built to traverse La Bajada between 1598 and 1932 follow prehistorically and historically established pathways over the mesa. The alignments are: *El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro* dating to the Spanish Colonial era (1598) and used throughout the Mexican period (1821-1848); U.S. territorial wagon roads (ca. 1860); the NM 1/National Old Trails Road highway (1909); and the original U.S. Highway 66 built as a safer alternative to the switchbacks of the earlier auto route (1926). These routes are characterized by a variety of engineering techniques that used the tools and local materials available to create retaining walls, navigable grade changes, and drainage structures.
- Historians: Hilaria Alper, Berenika Byszweski and Sarah Wentzel-Fisher, 2008

Project Information: Documentation of La Bajada Historic Trails and Roads was undertaken by the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER), part of Heritage Documentation Programs, National Park Service, Richard O'Connor, Chief. The project was conducted in conjunction with the NPS Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program, National Trails System, Michael Romero Taylor, Program Manager, and the 2008 Southwest Summer Institute for Preservation and Regionalism, Chris Wilson, Director, at the University of New Mexico (UNM) School of Architecture and Planning, Roger Schultz, Dean. Field recording and measured drawings were produced under the direction of Christopher H. Marston, assisted by Dana Lockett, HAER Architects. The documentation was produced for the course "Learning from La Bajada," led by Arnold Valdez, UNM Adjunct Assistant Research Professor, and Kaisa Barthuli, NPS Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program. The team included UNM students Jessica Gardener, Emily Stout, Lisa Roach, Justin Rein, Imran Mansuri, Basilios Papaioannou, and Carlos Martinez. Hilaria Alper, Berenika Byszewski and Sarah Wentzel-Fisher produced the historical report. Large format photography was produced by Martin Stupich. Former Chief of HAER Eric DeLony assisted with the project.

## DESCRIPTION

The cultural landscape of La Bajada Historic Trails and Roads has a rich and diverse history of human settlement, transportation, and use. There are four road alignments, two of which were placed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2005 as “Route 66 and National Old Trails Road Historic District at La Bajada.” Another feature documented in the National Register of Historic Places is “La Bajada Mesa Agricultural Site,” also known as LA 38918. It was placed in the National Register in 1983 as a restricted archaeological site. Also part of the district is the village of La Bajada. Established between 1695 and 1737 during the Spanish Colonial period, the village contains several unique historic structures as well as an *acequia* (irrigation system), the ruins of a *remuda* (horse exchange pen), and a 1926 timber bridge over the Santa Fe River. The historically significant power transmission line, known as the Bernalillo-Santa Fe Transmission Line Historic District or ZB 46KV Transmission Line crosses La Bajada and is under consideration for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. Despite the lack of many comprehensive archaeological surveys in the vicinity, thirty-five cultural resources have been documented within 1 mile of the historic road alignments, of which sixteen are prehistoric, eleven are historic, five are undetermined occupations, and two are multi-component sites (both prehistoric and historic occupations).<sup>9</sup>

The area is situated near the confluence of the Santa Fe River and the Rio Grande, in the west central portion of Santa Fe County, New Mexico. La Bajada, meaning descent in Spanish, refers to the formidable, 20-mile long basalt escarpment extending south and east from the Rio Grande valley towards the Galisteo Basin. The distance from the base of the escarpment to the mesa top is approximately 600’, and connects the lower mesa known as “La Majada Mesa” to the upper mesa known as “La Bajada Mesa.” The basalt cliffs and talus slopes that characterize this geologic feature create a natural boundary between environmental zones and two major historic cultural areas: the *Rio Abajo*, or lower river, to the south and west, and the *Rio Arriba*, or upper river, to the north and east.

There are two access routes to the area considered by this study. The northern route begins south of Santa Fe near the village of La Cienega. It passes through private property, Bureau of Land Management lands, and the Santa Fe National Forest lands on an unmarked, unmaintained dirt track that skirts Tetilla Peak. A high clearance four-wheel drive vehicle is required for this route, which puts the driver at the top of the escarpment with a view shed of La Majada Mesa, La Bajada Village and mountains to the south.

The southern access begins at I-25 40 miles north of Albuquerque and 17 miles south of Santa Fe. This route traverses La Majada Mesa and sections of Santo Domingo and Cochiti tribal lands. The following description lists features encountered from the southern access route (NOTE: the southern access is located on tribal land – not public land).

La Bajada can be seen for 20 miles when driving north on I-25. Two of the road alignments (the

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<sup>9</sup> New Mexico Cultural Resources Inventory System (NMCRIS) database, New Mexico Office of Cultural Affairs, Historic Preservation Division, Archaeological Records Management Section (accessed July 3, 2008).

National Old Trails Road Highway and Route 66) are discernible against the basalt cliff when viewed from a short distance. The flat, arrow straight dirt road that leads to La Bajada is a tribal road (not public), and remnant of the overlapping National Old Trails Road Highway and Route 66 alignments. It continues to be used as an access route to La Bajada Village and as a maintenance route to the ZB 46KV electrical transmission lines, which parallel this part of the road to the base of the escarpment.

The ZB 46KV electrical transmission line is one of the first significant, visible structures on the La Bajada escarpment. The installation of this line occurred between May and October 1929. Originating in Bernalillo, the ZB 46KV transmission line runs northwest for 3 miles across the landscape following the road alignment of the National Old Trails Road and Route 66. Three different styles of riveted-lattice, concrete-set steel poles (corner pole, single pole, and double pole or h-frame tower) elevate this section of the power line and carry it over the escarpment and on to Santa Fe. Arthur C. Wallen of Bronxville, New York and Trusco Steel of Youngstown, Ohio, patented the towers in 1932 (Patent No. 1,880,000). The towers are between 40' and 60' tall and are spaced 500' apart, which was an engineering feat in 1929. This expanded spacing was accomplished through the use of a new wire technology consisting of aluminum cable, steel reinforced (ACSR), which was lighter than the copper wire generally in use at the time. At the ends of the lines, wood poles were used. These were spaced more closely together, sometimes less than 150' apart.<sup>10</sup>

Walden Tourist Camp is another significant feature of La Bajada's cultural landscape. Located on the west side of the roadway, the camp is currently a private residence. This property consists of four adobe buildings with beige cement stucco exterior walls and flat roofs. The main residence is located at the front of the property. Two of the three buildings located to the rear of the residence have a single room plan, while the third is a linear duplex. The buildings' site suggests a tourist camp and service station lining the highway between 1925 and 1932.<sup>11</sup>

Immediately east of the Walden property is a 240' long creosote-treated timber bridge that spans the Rio Santa Fe. Dating to 1926, the bridge replaced two previous structures: a concrete ford dating to 1918 and an earlier bridge washed out by a flood. The timber bridge has nine trussed wooden piers spaced 25' apart with timber and poured concrete abutments at both ends. Laminated wood decking rests on twenty-four wooden stringers. Timber curb and a chain link guardrail attached to wood piers with pyramid-shaped caps line the edge of the bridge.<sup>12</sup>

To the southeast of the bridge is a dirt parking lot, the mouth of the Santa Fe River canyon and archaeological ruins. From this point (east of the river) the entire area is open range, and there is evidence of cattle grazing all the way to the top of the escarpment.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> David Kammer, PhD, "Bernalillo-Santa Fe Transmission Line Historic District, alternatively ZB-46 KV Transmission Line," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Draft, June 2006.

<sup>11</sup> David Kammer, PhD, "The Route 66 and National Old Trails Road Historic District at La Bajada," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, September 2002, 7.

<sup>12</sup> Kammer, "Route 66," 7.

<sup>13</sup> Santa Fe County Growth Management Department, Planning Division, "Santa Fe County, La Bajada Location Map," June 6, 2008.

Continuing northeast the unpaved road splits. Heading northwest is the old road into La Bajada Village, Camino de La Bajada, which is now a maintained dirt road. Heading southeast, the road traverses the base of the escarpment. Along this alignment is the *tanque* (holding pond) for the village's *acequia* system, and a *remuda* (horse exchange pen) ruin.

Cultivation of fields via an *acequia* system characterizes the land use in La Bajada Village, a traditional farming community. An *acequia* is a community-operated waterway used for irrigation. Long, narrow, parallel northeast-southwest fields follow the topography of the land. The *Acequia Madre* (Mother Ditch) defines the northeast edge of the irrigable fields; the Santa Fe River defines the southwest edge. A prominent secondary ditch runs through the top third of the fields, cutting each linear field into two sections. Approximately 75 percent of the fields are cultivated; 25 percent are fallow.<sup>14</sup>

Most of the village is located northeast of the *acequia* system. Historically, development in the village happened along Camino de La Bajada and the village center, although recently the village has grown further away from the village center with an orientation toward the Cochiti Tribal Boundary Road. The architecture of the village is predominantly in the regional style of adobe brick with flat timber roofs. A church was built in the village circa 1837 as part of Spanish missionary activities and was rebuilt in 1975/1976. There are three historic residences that are at least one hundred years old and approximately thirty newer buildings, that reflect a similar scale, though not necessarily traditional materials or styles. At least five of the new buildings with distinctive origins were relocated to the village from other locations such as Los Alamos, Albuquerque, and Cerrillos, and in time may be considered historically significant.<sup>15</sup>

Continuing south southeast along the base of the escarpment, the road parallels the *acequia* for approximately 700' and begins the ascent up La Bajada Mesa. The roadway has been minimally maintained since 1932. Consequently, some of the rocks used to construct retaining walls and to pave the road beds have collapsed into a rocky, rubble strewn road with deep furrows caused by erosion. The erosion has also narrowed the roadbed, which was originally designed to be 18' wide (more at the hairpin turns). In some areas, the roadbed is now less than 10' wide due to deterioration.

After passing the remains of the *remuda* to the left, the road continues at a slight incline. After approximately 1200', the road turns east and the first of eight sharp switchbacks begins. The grade averages 5 to 6 percent in this area with the road bending around boulders. Remains of rough retaining walls exist along this stretch and some evidence of an earlier east to west wagon road is visible among the boulders to the south of the roadbed. This road may date to *El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro* (Royal Road into the Interior Land) or the military wagon roads of the 1860s. The road forks after 3600'. This point marks the shift in land ownership from the Cochiti Tribe to the Santa Fe National Forest. The route to the southeast follows the 1926 Route 66 alignment; the route to the northeast follows the 1909 National Old Trails Road Highway/NM 1 alignment. The National Old Trails Road/NM 1 alignment rises on a gentle slope through a high

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<sup>14</sup> Kaisa Barthuli, "'La Bajada Village: Cultural Landscape Reconnaissance Report'" (report, Introduction to Historic Preservation and Regionalism, University of New Mexico, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> Barthuli, "La Bajada Village," 7.

desert meadow for approximately 2000' to the first switchback. One of the double pole utility towers is adjacent to the road at the northern point of this switchback. There is another sharp switchback immediately after the first, and here the basalt cliff begins to rise sharply east of the roadbed. The area is home to prehistoric petroglyphs and rock art, as well as historic inscriptions from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The alignment continues northward for about 2000', hugging the basalt walls. To the west of this section of roadbed are traces of a wagon road. More research is needed to determine the era of these tracks, which could be *El Camino Real de la Tierra Adentro* or nineteenth century wagon roads.

Three switchbacks bring the road over the steep western face of the escarpment. The road inclines as much as 17 percent on the steep, straight sections and averages 7.8 percent overall.<sup>16</sup> The roadbed averages 18' wide with extra width at the sharp corners to enable vehicles to make the turns.<sup>17</sup> This area's dry laid masonry basalt retaining walls reach a height of 20' and extend to nearly 500' long. These retaining walls are some of the best existing examples of this type of construction in the area.<sup>18</sup> The final section of this alignment runs south to the top of the escarpment where the last of the three double utility towers stands at the southwest corner and at the point where the road turns northeast to the flats of La Bajada Mesa.

A few hundred feet from the crest on the south side of the road is a concrete, stone and wood foundation ruin. Research has uncovered no information concerning its purpose. The unmaintained gravel and dirt road continues northeast over La Bajada Mesa to Santa Fe, alongside the single pole ZB 46KV electrical transmission line.

The U.S. 66/85 alignments from 1926-32 reflects substantial reductions in grade and number of switchbacks compared to its predecessor, the National Old Trails Road/NM 1. Only the 15 percent grade where the road climbs the wall of the canyon at the top of the escarpment on a relatively straight alignment compares with the steepness of the earlier alignment.<sup>19</sup>

Following this alignment from the road split (Cochiti and US Forest Service Boundary line), the Route 66 alignment turns south and the first of the switchbacks occurs within a few hundred feet. The second switchback immediately follows. There is evidence of a dynamite blast that was used to make way for this alignment. The roadway straightens and follows the rim of the escarpment that overlooks the Santa Fe River canyon. Dry laid masonry retaining walls constructed of rough ashlar coursing from basaltic rubble line portions of the roadway. The walls protect the roadway from rushing water during heavy rains.<sup>20</sup>

This section of road contains several artifacts and features that date to the 1926-32 period of use. Two signs painted on the rock face are located about 600' from the second switchback and 75' north of the roadway. One is painted orange and advertises the Santa Fe Campground, while the other, which is barely visible due to fading, promotes La Bajada Service Shop. Approximately

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<sup>16</sup> Kammer, "Route 66," 6.

<sup>17</sup> Kammer, "Route 66," 11.

<sup>18</sup> Kammer, "Route 66," 11.

<sup>19</sup> Kammer, "Route 66," 6.

<sup>20</sup> Kammer, "Route 66."

300' from the crest of this alignment is a slight curve. At the bottom of the canyon are two abandoned vehicles from the 1920s. Additional features along this stretch of road include numerous prehistoric petroglyphs as well as inscriptions from more recent travelers and residents of La Bajada Village.

At the crest, this alignment turns northeasterly for approximately 4000' where it joins with the National Old Trails Road/NM 1 alignment to Santa Fe. Evidence of prehistoric archaeological sites has been found between the two alignments on the top of the mesa.<sup>21</sup>

## ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Physiographically, La Bajada falls within the Rio Grande Subsection of the Mexican Highland Section of the Basin and Range Province.<sup>22</sup> La Bajada escarpment is the edge of an uplifted lava flow that originated in the Jemez Mountains 2 to 5 million years ago and is referred to locally as La Bajada Mesa.<sup>23</sup> The Santa Fe River carves a canyon through these volcanic deposits along the southern edge of La Bajada Mesa. The escarpment marks the physiographic boundary between two geological formations: the Santo Domingo Basin and the elevated Caja del Rio Plateau. Elevations range from 5510' at the base of the escarpment, to 6090' on top.<sup>24</sup> Tetilla Peak is a dominant land form on the mesa at a height of 7209'.

The escarpment also divides two major soil groups. The Panky-Pojoaque-Harvey Association can be found in the old alluvial fans located in the valley, which are level to hilly with deep, loam to clay soils. The Majada-Calabasas-Apache Association is on the mesa top of old basalt flows and cinder cones.<sup>25</sup> It is level to steep, deep to shallow and has loamy and very cobbly soils. Comprising the escarpment itself is the Basalt Rock Land soil designation, described as very steep slopes with basalt rock outcrops covering a majority of the ground surface. Because this land type is too rugged for domestic livestock, the abundant forage growing in this area supports a diversity of wildlife. The top of the mesa is Apache Stony Fine Sandy Loam, a well-drained soil type formed in material weathered from basalt and other volcanic debris.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> These sites include the remnants of shelters and dry farming.

<sup>22</sup> J.W. Hawley, "Physiographic Provinces and Landforms in New Mexico," in *Maps*, ed. Jerry L. Williams (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1986).

<sup>23</sup> D.A. Sawyer and S.A. Minor, "Geologic Setting of the La Bajada Constriction and Pueblo de Cochiti Area, in Cerrillos Uplift, the La Bajada Constriction, and Hydrogeologic Framework of the Santo Domingo Basin, Rio Grande Rift, New Mexico," Professional Paper 1720-A, U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Geological Survey, 2006.

<sup>24</sup> U.S. Geological Survey, "Ecoregional Gap Analysis of the Southwestern United States: The Southwest Regional Gap Analysis Project, Final Report," 1978.

<sup>25</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, "Soil Survey of Santa Fe Area, New Mexico (Santa Fe County and Part of Rio Arriba County)," Soil Conservation Service, Forest Service and U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, in cooperation with New Mexico Agricultural Experiment Station, 1975.

<sup>26</sup> USDA, "Soil Survey."

The plant association/vegetation type in the vicinity is Piñon-Juniper and Mixed Woodland.<sup>27</sup> More fine grained vegetative land cover data compiled by the Southwest Regional Gap Analysis Project shows the study area is highly diverse, with Inter-Mountain Basins Semi-Desert Grassland on top of La Bajada Mesa, Rocky Mountain Cliff and Canyon below the rim, and Southern Rocky Mountain Juniper Woodland and Savanna with patches of Inter-Mountain Basins Shale Badlands for the remainder of the descent to the Santa Fe River valley.<sup>28</sup> Plants observed during the 2008 field visit include narrowleaf yucca (*Yucca glauca*), fernleaf verbena (*Glandularia bipinnatifida*), Indian paint brush (*Castilleja integra*), Apache plume (*Fallugia oaradoxa*), perky sue (*Tetraneris argentea*), evergreen mahogany (*Cercocarpus ledifolius*), snakeweed (*Gutierrezia sarothrae*), blackfoot daisy (*Melampodium leucanthum*), threadleaf groundsel (*Senecio, flaccidus*), one-seed juniper or cyprus (*Juniperus monosperma*), fringed sage (*Artemisia fragada*), winterfat (*Krascheninnikovia lanata*), and cholla cactus (*Cylindropuntia imbricata*). A patch of honey mesquite found along the Route 66 alignment was considered a vegetative anomaly.

Climate in the vicinity of the study area is highly variable and is considered semiarid, with annual rainfall averaging 12.18” and a mean snowfall of 14”.<sup>29</sup> Most of the precipitation occurs during the summer months in the form of brief, but heavy, thunderstorms that produce severe runoff and reduce usable moisture.

## NARRATIVE HISTORY

### Prehistoric Period

In the early Archaic Period (5500 BC–AD 1), at a time when cultures were shifting from reliance on now-extinct megafauna to a broader subsistence base of smaller game and wild plant gathering, prehistoric populations utilized the top of La Bajada Mesa extensively. The area provided high quality basalt for stone-tool manufacture and a diversity of plant and animal species. Archaic sites found on the mesa top include small seasonal base camps and limited activity sites, both of which reflect a highly mobile hunter-gatherer adaptation. Large subsurface earthen ovens and a substantial increase in the number of groundstone implements have been found at sites dating to the La Bajada phase (4800–3200 BC) and San Jose phase (3000–1800 BC). The La Bajada “type-site” (the archaeological site that defines and typifies this historical phase) is located near the edge of the basalt escarpment overlooking the Rio Grande valley.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> W.A. Dick-Peddie, *New Mexico Vegetation: Past, Present and Future* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993).

<sup>28</sup> J.S. Prior-Magee, K.G. Boykin, D.F. Bradford, W.G. Kepner, J.H. Lowry, D.L. Schrupp, K.A. Thomas, and B.C. Thompson, eds., “Southwest Regional Gap Analysis Project Final Report,” U.S. Geological Survey, Gap Analysis Program, Moscow, Idaho, 2007.

<sup>29</sup> Western Regional Climate Center, “Climate Data Cochiti Dam Weather Station 1975-2007,” <http://www.wrcc.dri.edu/CLIMATEDATA.html> (accessed July 10, 2008).

<sup>30</sup> P. Hicks, “Archaeological Investigatio at the La Bajada (LA 9500) and Bajada Annex (LA 9501) Sites: 1966, 1967, and 1970,” prepared by ENMU, submitted to USFS Santa Fe National Forest, 1982.

The transition from the Archaic to the subsequent Ancestral Puebloan periods (AD 1–1600) is defined by the use of new technology, such as ceramics and the bow-and-arrow, and a shift to more formalized, permanent habitations, such as pithouse structures, and eventually above-ground multi-unit structures like pueblos. Archaeologists commonly subdivide Ancestral Puebloan settlements into separate periods based on ceramic and architectural styles.<sup>31</sup> All of the Ancestral Puebloan periods are well-represented in the La Bajada area, although site density increases with each period. A relatively early ceramic site (AD 700–1100) is located halfway down the escarpment, near the US 66/85 alignment. A short distance up Santa Fe Canyon is the prehistoric La Bajada Copper Mine (AD 900–1300). Additionally, a number of sites with artifacts dating to AD 1100–1300 are located on benches above the Santa Fe River at the base of the escarpment.

In the Middle Rio Grande Valley, the few centuries before European contact (AD 1300–1600) are often referred to as a time of “cultural florescence,” defined by a peak in population density and an elaboration of material culture.<sup>32</sup> The majority of the prehistoric petroglyphs in the area, pecked into the basalt boulders and cliffs of the La Bajada escarpment, most likely date to this time. La Bajada Ruin, a large pueblo site (AD 1100–1600) listed in the State Register of Cultural Properties (SRCP 384), is located in the Santa Fe River valley near the base of the escarpment. People who occupied this pueblo used a variety of agricultural techniques, including dryland farming, which was practiced on the mesa. La Bajada Mesa Agricultural Site (listed in both the state and national registers [SRCP 914]), is a 90-acre agricultural area consisting of grid gardens and isolated room features that are contemporaneous with the occupation of La Bajada Ruin. Cobble mulch fields are also common on the mesa top near the edge of the cliff. It is possible that the people who walked up the escarpment to tend their fields followed a route similar to the historic trail and road alignments, based on the high density of prehistoric remains at this location.

## **El Camino Real**

The late fifteenth century brought the Spanish to the Americas. In 1598, the wealthy Juan de Oñate, after receiving a contract to colonize the northern frontier, left Mexico and traveled north to establish colonies in New Mexico. Following the Rio Grande River, he established colonial outposts along *El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro* (the Royal Road to the Interior Land). This road became the lifeline for the Spanish colonists and missionaries. In the early 1600s, supply trains of heavy wooden carts pulled by mules took six months to travel from Chihuahua in Mexico to Santa Fe. After the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, the carts were discontinued and mule trains brought goods and replacement missionaries, soldiers and government officials. Upon reaching

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<sup>31</sup> A.V. Kidder, *An Introduction to the Study of Southwestern Archaeology with a Preliminary Account of the Excavations at Pecos* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1927).

<sup>32</sup> L. Cordell, “Cultural Resources Overview of the Middle Rio Grande Valley, New Mexico. USDA Forest Service, Southwest Region, Albuquerque and Bureau of Land Management,” New Mexico Land Office, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1979; F. Wendorf and E. Reed, “An Alternative Reconstruction of Northern Rio Grande Prehistory,” *El Palacio* 62 (1955).

La Bajada, the train had several options. The shortest route was the trail through *La Boca* or the mouth of the Santa Fe River, but this rocky canyon route was often flooded. The alternatives were to head eastward through the gentler slopes at Cerrillos Hills and the Galisteo Basin or attempt to scale the 600' escarpment.

The Spanish presence abruptly ended in 1680 when several colonized pueblos revolted (the Pueblo Revolt), forcing a Spanish retreat back to Mexico. They returned in 1692 to reconquer and resettle the area. In 1695, "La Majada Land Grant" was awarded to Field Captain Don Jacinto de Palaez for his efforts in reconquering New Mexico. La Bajada Village was subsequently established and first documented by the Franciscan Church in 1737.<sup>33</sup> A *paraje*, or rest stop, was established at the base of the escarpment as early as the pre-revolt colonization period. The *paraje* became a stage stop in the nineteenth century and a tourist camp and service station by 1925.

### **Military Road**

The Chihuahua to Santa Fe transportation routes of *El Camino Real* remained in use through the Mexican period, Mexican-American War, and the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, which created the Territory of New Mexico. To protect its new lands and citizens, the U.S. military was dispatched and set about improving roads, including the route on La Bajada. Several accounts survive that describe the difficult ascent and descent of the hill. In 1851, the Rev. Hiram Walter Read writes in his journal, "Today I ascended an almost impassable mountain, even for goats."<sup>34</sup> He was on his way home to Santa Fe from Algodones by horse and had likely made his way up the steep La Bajada.

By the 1860s, the U.S. military was charged with creating a route up the mesa for wagon and stage traffic. According to Capt. John G. Bourke's field notebooks of 1869, the only safe way down the hill was for all passengers to disembark the wagon or stage at the top and walk down the slope, while the driver made the journey by applying a heavy brake on the wagon and slowly leading the mules or horses. One of Bourke's stories tells of a Lieutenant O'Connor, who left his wagon at the edge of the precipice and walked down the hill, allowing his wife to drive his wagon and four mules down La Bajada alone. Safely at the bottom, he introduced his wife to their fellow travelers and invited them all for a drink.<sup>35</sup> Improvements to the road continued through the Territorial Era (1848-1912) in the form of wagon roads.

### **NM 1/National Old Trails Road**

As the twentieth century dawned, it was clear that a better commercial route was needed to

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<sup>33</sup> Barthuli, "La Bajada Village," 2.

<sup>34</sup> Rev. Hiram Walter Read, "The Reverend Hiram Walter Read, Baptist Missionary to New Mexico," *New Mexico Historical Review* 7, no. 2 (April 1942): 144-145.

<sup>35</sup> Lansing B. Bloom, ed., "Bourke on the Southwest, II," *New Mexico Historical Review* 9, no. 1 (January 1934): 50-51.

connect Santa Fe with New Mexico communities to the southwest. In 1903 and 1909, the Territorial Highway Commission appropriated funds for the most significant realignment of La Bajada to date. These changes would open the road to the automobile by reducing the road's grade from an almost impassable 28 percent to 7.5 percent.<sup>36</sup>

For the first time on this route, the use of dynamite as a means to move tons of basalt was recorded. This created the materials that would be used by Pueblo de Cochiti and prison inmate labor to build a totally new roadway. The use of convict labor proved to be so successful at reducing construction costs that inmates would be used in other New Mexico road projects throughout the early twentieth century.<sup>37</sup>

After dynamiting, the large basalt boulders were used to create dry stacked retaining walls, some of which remain today. The rubble was used to build the roadbed and construct curbs on the outside of the roadway. Gutters were dug and sometimes lined with concrete to drain the road and catch falling rocks. Iron culverts were added below the roadbed to help with drainage, but there is no evidence of them today. The standard width for roads at the time was 18', which the Highway Commission followed, allowing a little extra room at the seven hairpin turns built just below the rim of the mesa. The La Bajada section, originally part of the highway designated NM 1, was an important component of the State Highway Department's promotional efforts. The 1915 publication *Through New Mexico on the Camino Real*, for example, highlighted the engineering accomplishments on the La Bajada section.<sup>38</sup>

The automobile proved to be the catalyst for continued improvements to this road. In the 1910s, several organizations, including the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Santa Fe-Grand Canyon-Needles National Highway Association and the Good Roads Association lobbied for a transcontinental highway and improved roads. Each had its own agenda, and competing good roads associations proposed routes through Denver and Salt Lake City to San Francisco, as well as a southern route through El Paso to San Diego and a route that followed the Oregon Trail.<sup>39</sup>

At the 1913 convention of the Ocean-to-Ocean Highway Association, the Santa Fe - Grand Canyon - Needles National Highway (including La Bajada) was chosen as the link through the West (to Los Angeles). The considerable lobbying efforts by the western delegates contributed to the decision.<sup>40</sup> In June, newly elected New Mexican Governor W. C. McDonald promised to do all he could to get the road through New Mexico and maintain it.<sup>41</sup> Throughout the late 1910s and early 1920s, the state allocated annual funds for maintaining and grading La Bajada, which

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<sup>36</sup> Kammer, "Route 66," 11.

<sup>37</sup> "4th Report of the State Highway Engineer & State Engineer of NM for the 7th & 8th Fiscal Years," (1 December 1918 - 30 November 1920), 75-6.

<sup>38</sup> NM 1, also known as El Camino Real, was the backbone of the state's nascent highway system. Kammer, "Route 66," 12.

<sup>39</sup> Richard F. Weingroff, "The National Old Trails Road, Part 1: The Quest for a National Road," Federal Highway Administration, available at <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/trails.htm> (accessed July 29, 2008).

<sup>40</sup> This was the first national highway association to use the 1909 alignment of NM 1.

<sup>41</sup> Weingroff, "National Old Trails Road."

was essential since heavy summer rains regularly washed out sections of the road.<sup>42</sup>

Starting on Braddock's Road from Washington, D.C. to Cumberland, Maryland, the newly named National Old Trails Road followed the National Pike to St. Louis, then continued on the Boone Lick Road to Kansas City. Upon reaching eastern New Mexico, the road traversed the Santa Fe Trail then turned west along an approximate route of the Spanish explorers who went west to California.<sup>43</sup> The route followed the existing NM 1 over La Bajada between Santa Fe and Albuquerque. The highway was never intended to be a means of moving freight. From the start, the National Old Trails Road was promoted as a touring road to pass through historical and scenic landscapes.<sup>44</sup> The highway gained prestige in 1913, when it was proposed to Congress as an "interstate highway," and again, in 1914 when the Southern California Automobile Association mapped the entire route. In 1923, the Automobile Blue Book included the highway as only one of two New Mexico roads in its mile-by-mile road description.<sup>45</sup>

### **U.S. Highway 66/85**

As traffic increased through the early 1920s, the New Mexico State Highway Department made plans to eliminate the eight hairpin turns that caused many tourists to hire locals to drive their vehicles up and down the escarpment. The new alignment began with a contract with the penitentiary to supply inmate labor in 1924. The new route would follow the 1909 road from the base to roughly 2000' up the roadway.<sup>46</sup> At this juncture, the new road would bear north and east up La Bajada. The new alignment had lower grades, banked roadways and retaining walls. Again, the rubble from multiple picric acid charges or dynamite was used to construct the road and retaining walls. Since the new surface was more gradual and set on a sedimentary surface, the walls are lower and the construction does not exhibit the fine coursing apparent along the 1909 alignment. Dry rubble masonry walls were also added to the common alignment of the lower slope. In 1926, the project was completed when the timber bridge, which is still in use, was constructed as a replacement to the 1918 concrete ford over the Santa Fe River. The upper road project was undertaken with state funds and cost about \$5,000, while Federal Aid Project funds paid for the construction of the bridge.<sup>47</sup>

In 1926, the federal highway system was created, and this new alignment became part of two major highways: U.S. Highway 85 (a north-south route from the Canada/North Dakota border to the Mexico/New Mexico border) and U.S. Highway 66 (the soon to be legendary route from Chicago to the Pacific Ocean at Santa Monica, California). Though the road improvements brought increased traffic to La Bajada, the image of the road as challenging to vehicles and drivers remained.

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<sup>42</sup> Information gathered from *New Mexico Highway Journals* of the era.

<sup>43</sup> Kammer, "Route 66," 12.

<sup>44</sup> Weingroff, "National Old Trails Road."

<sup>45</sup> The highway was included in earlier versions of this guide. Kammer, "Route 66," 12.

<sup>46</sup> At border line on Sandoval and Santa Fe counties, also noted as the border of Pueblo de Cochiti and the Santa Fe National Forest on the map.

<sup>47</sup> Kammer, "Route 66," 13.

Another effort to improve the roadway occurred in 1926, when the Fred Harvey Indian Detours began. The director of this venture, Maj. R. Hunter Clarkson, was concerned about the turning radii of the White buses that were to be used. New Mexico Governor Arthur T. Hannett quickly decided to support this effort to enhance the state's tourist industry and ordered crews to widen the hairpin turns.<sup>48</sup>

In 1925, Herb and Wallace Walden opened a service station and later, a tourist camp, west of the Santa Fe River. They provided a variety of services, including towing and auto repair.<sup>49</sup> Along the 1926 alignment, there is a faint outline of a sign on the basalt rock face for La Bajada Service Shop. Although no records have been uncovered, this may have been an advertisement for the Walden brothers' shop. The buildings also remain from the brothers' compound, which is now a private residence. Other economic opportunities became available for local boys at La Bajada. Some were hired by motorists to drive their cars up or down the hill, while tourist camp operators hired others to hand out advertising flyers to motorists as they made their way around the turns.<sup>50</sup> On the same rock face as the Service Shop sign is another sign for the Santa Fe Campground, which was located on West San Francisco Street in Santa Fe.

In the fall of 1931, the State Highway Commission announced that a new alignment for US66/85 would be built 3 miles south of La Bajada. By the summer of 1932, the project had been completed, making the 1909 and 1924 alignments obsolete. Interstate 25, which followed the 1932 alignment, replaced Route 66 in 1970. Tourists no longer ventured on this stretch of road, and the state no longer graded and maintained either alignment.

Due to drought and the re-routing of U.S. 66/85, the Village of La Bajada was nearly abandoned in the 1940s. By the 1960s it experienced a revival with the return of descendants from some of the early colonizing families. Some original Spanish Colonial era structures remain, including the church, which was rebuilt in the 1970s.<sup>51</sup> In addition, Cochiti tribal members, whose ancestors occupied the area as early as 1225 AD, took up residence in the village.<sup>52</sup>

## **ZB 46KV Transmission Line**

Electricity was slow to come to Santa Fe. In 1891, two small generators were installed on Water Street, and in 1894, the Territory's first hydroelectric generating plant opened. Over the next ten years, efforts were made to improve electrical distribution in Santa Fe, but development was stymied by lack of a strong water supply. In contrast, electricity was first available in Albuquerque in 1882 and the power generating infrastructure grew steadily over the next twenty

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<sup>48</sup> Kammer, "Route 66."

<sup>49</sup> Kammer, "Route 66," 13-14.

<sup>50</sup> Kammer, "Route 66," 14.

<sup>51</sup> Barthuli, "La Bajada Village," 4.

<sup>52</sup> The Cochiti Tribal lands comprise 24,256 acres, which were allotted to them by the Spanish government and confirmed by United States Patent in 1864. Daniel Gibson, *Pueblos of the Rio Grande: A Visitor's Guide* (Tucson, AZ: Rio Nuevo Publishers, 2001).

years. In 1925 the Santa Fe Water and Light Company went into receivership, and New York City's Federal Light and Traction Company, which held 160 individual utility companies throughout the United States, purchased it. The holding company promised to provide more power and lower electric rates to Santa Fe. In May 1929, construction began on an electric power line from the Bernalillo to Santa Fe. Due to the rough terrain and limited water resources for mixing cement, the crews were limited to installing twenty to twenty-five tower poles per day.<sup>53</sup> Several new and unique technologies were employed on this project, including the use of riveted lattice steel towers, which provided stability at critical points along the windy, obstacle laden alignment, and of ACRS (aluminum cable steel reinforced) as a conductor.<sup>54</sup> The project was completed in October 1929. This line, known as ZB 46KV, is still in operation, with all of the steel towers intact. The current owner of the line, PNM, is currently considering decommissioning the line and removing the towers.

### Recent Interests

During the last two decades, renewed interest in La Bajada has come in several forms. In 1994, a uranium mine in the Santa Fe River canyon was reclaimed and remediated due to contamination concerns.<sup>55</sup> Several forms of recreation are promoted by clubs and websites, most notably for off road vehicle usage, touring Route 66 and hiking. Recreational vehicles accelerate the deterioration of the historic roadbed, rock walls, and petroglyphs, and have the potential to negatively impact this historic environment.<sup>58</sup>

In 2004, La Bajada Village was identified as a "High-Potential Historic Site" in *El Camino Real Tierra Adentro National Historic Trail Comprehensive Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement*.<sup>59</sup> This designation refers to sites related to the route's period of historic significance that may yield opportunities for interpretation. Criteria for inclusion include historic significance, presence of visible historic fabric, scenic quality and relative freedom from intrusion.

In 2005, the Route 66 and National Old Trails Road Historic District at La Bajada Vicinity of La Bajada Village was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.<sup>60</sup> The district includes six miles of roadway and associated structures; the 1926 timber bridge across Santa Fe River; and the Walden Tourist Camp.

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<sup>53</sup> Kammer, "Bernalillo-Santa Fe Transmission Line," 10-16.

<sup>54</sup> Arthur C. Wallen, "Method of Making Poles," US Patent No. 1,880,000, filed January 23, 1930 and Issued September 27, 1932; Kammer, "Bernalillo-Santa Fe Transmission Line," 16.

<sup>55</sup> Keith Easthouse, "Uranium Mine Site Poses Risk to Lake, Studies Say," *The New Mexican* (13 November 1994), B1.

<sup>58</sup> We Be Jeepin', "La Bajada," [http://www.webejeepin.com/Trails/New\\_Mexico/La\\_Bajada.htm](http://www.webejeepin.com/Trails/New_Mexico/La_Bajada.htm) (accessed July 14, 2008); The Route 66 Caravan, "La Bajada Hill," <http://www.cart66pf.org/66caravan/roadlog18.htm> (accessed June 17, 2008).

<sup>59</sup> *El Camino Real Tierra Adentro National Historic Trail Comprehensive Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement*. April 2004. Prepared by Long Distance Trails Group – Santa Fe, National Park Service, New Mexico State Office, Bureau of Land Management. 218.

<sup>60</sup> Kammer, "Route 66".

## **SUMMARY**

La Bajada Historic Trails and Roads is significant for its association with events that have made significant contributions to transportation and commerce in New Mexico from 1598 through 1932. The pathways that traverse this escarpment include all modes of transportation from the foot traffic of the prehistoric ancestors of the pueblo peoples who currently inhabit the area, through the Colonial and Territorial horses and wagons, to the early automobiles of the twentieth century. The traces of these roadways are characterized by a variety of creative engineering techniques that used the only tools and materials that were available (existing topography and loose rock) to create retaining walls, navigable grade changes, and drainage.

Early engravings and, later, postcards and photographs celebrated the escarpment of La Bajada and the challenges it posed to transportation. Many of these early images convey a sense of the grandeur of undisturbed open spaces, altered only by the engineering feats of modest roadways scaling the escarpment. The view shed from atop La Bajada reflects this quintessential Southwestern landscape that includes mesas, mountains and long vistas.

**APPENDIX A: HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS**



*Figure 1. Aerial view of La Bajada, showing both the 1909 and 1926 alignments, ca. 1930, facing southwest. Box 14, Folder 5, Bainbridge Bunting Photograph Collection, Pict 000-385, Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico.*



*Figure 2. Aerial image of La Bajada ,ca. 1930, view facing south. Box 16, Folder 15, Bainbridge Bunting Photograph Collection, Pict 000-385, Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico.*



*Figure 3. Cochiti Indians working on NM 1, ca. 1909. From New Mexico Territorial Engineer: Second Biennial Report of the Territorial Engineer, 1910.*



*Figure 4. Wagon trains and automobiles nearing the top of La Bajada, ca. 1920. Courtesy Palace of the Governors Archives (NMHM/DCA), negative no. 135196*



*Figure 5. New Mexico Motor Way bus on La Bajada Hill, ca. 1925. Courtesy Palace of the Governors Archives (NMHM/DCA), negative no. 031165.*



*Figure 6. HAER team members from the UNM course, "Learning from La Bajada", 2008 (left to right): Dana Lockett, Berenicka Byszewski, Imran Mansuri, Carlos Martinez, Basilios Papaioannou, Emily Stout, Justin Rein, Sarah Wentzel-Fisher, Jessica Gardener, Eric DeLony, Lisa Roach, Hilaria Alper, Arnold Valdez, Kaisa Barthuli, Christopher Marston. (Photo splice by Martin Stupich).*

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- \* The Albuquerque Public Library, Albuquerque, New Mexico
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- \* Palace of the Governors Map and Photo archives at the Chavez Library, Santa Fe, New Mexico
- \* The Albuquerque Museum, Albuquerque, New Mexico
- \* PNM, Albuquerque, New Mexico
- \* New Mexico Department of Transportation, Santa Fe, New Mexico

### **Additional Resources:**

The following are other establishments not pursued for this investigation that may provide additional information on La Bajada:

- \* The Archdiocese of Santa Fe Archives, Santa Fe, New Mexico
- \* The Library of Congress, Washington DC
- \* Santa Fe Chamber of Commerce, Santa Fe, New Mexico
- \* Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce, Albuquerque, New Mexico
- \* Historic Society of New Mexico, Santa Fe, New Mexico
- \* Santa Fe National Forest Heritage Program Archives, Santa Fe, New Mexico

The following were not reviewed by the team, but may be of interest:

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Crichton, Kyle. "Lament for La Bajada." *New Mexico* (March 1935), 17.

Davis, J. S. "Across New Mexico and Arizona." *Outing* (June 1921), 122-3.

Delaney, P. "Frontiering in an Automobile." *Outing* (November 1903), 131-5.

Fountain, Paul. *Eleven Eagles and the West*. New York: Dutton, 1906.

Harrington, E. R. "Geology of La Bajada." *New Mexico* (December 1941), 9-11.

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Peck, W.E. "Gasoline and the Prairie Schooner." *Scribner's Magazine* (August 1908), 197-03.

Powell, E. A. "Land of the Turquoise Sky." *Sunset* (January 1914), 66-79.

Pratt, Boyd, Charles D. Biebel and Dan Scurlock. Trails, "Historic Overview." Vol. 1, *Rails and Roads: the Central New Mexico East-West Transportation Corridor Regional Overview*. Prepared for New Mexico Historic Preservation Division, 1988.

"Road Log for the National Old Trails Highway." Albuquerque, NM: Albuquerque Auto Trades Association, 1925.

Terr, Jim. "Ballad of La Bajada." (Audio file). Blue Canyon Productions website, available at: <http://www.bluecanyonproductions.com.>, accessed June 10, 2008.

White, S. E. "Great Southwest." *Country Life* (1 March 1912), 43-48.

Several historical periodicals were not reviewed and may have some historical information regarding La Bajada:

\* *Better Roads*

\* *Touring Topics*

\* *Better Roads & Streets*

**Also of interest:**

Drilling Santa Fe. "La Bajada Mesa," painted by David Outhwaite, 1983-88. See <http://www.drillingsantafe.info/outhw1.jpg>, and <http://www.drillingsantafe.info/outhw2.jpg>, accessed June 17, 2008.