

THE TRAVELING GUIDE

to

Mary McCray's

Cowboy Meditation Primer

with history and definitions



Trementina Books (2018)

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Introduction to this Guide

This PDF is both a reading companion and traveler's guide to the book *Cowboy Meditation Primer*, poems about a late 1870s fictional character named Silas Cole, a heartbroken journalist who joins a cattle drive in order to learn how to be a real cowboy. He meets a cattle company traveling up the Goodnight-Loving Trail in New Mexico Territory; and not only do the cowboys give Silas a very real western adventure, they offer him a spiritual journey as well.

Each chapter of this guide is divided into locations of the territory traversed in the book's cattle drive which happens to loosely follow the famous Goodnight-Loving Trail.

The guide offers history about the time period and definitions of words mentioned in the book. Each chapter has three sections:

- Historical definitions about cowboys and New Mexico Territory
- Zen/Buddhist concepts and definitions
- Trip information for those who want to make the trek themselves including what to see and where to stay along the way.

The guide also contains maps, photos and questions to help guide you through the journey.

The Goodnight-Loving Trail

The poems in the book were based partly on the history of the Goodnight-Loving Trail, a cattle trail forged by Charles Goodnight and Oliver Loving in the late 1860s. The fictional poems follow the trail after it has been abandoned by Charles Goodnight but before train travel took over the transportation of cattle.

Many are familiar with the story of the Goodnight-Loving Trail through the Pulitzer-Prize winning novel *Lonesome Dove* (1985) by Larry McMurtry and the subsequent miniseries in 1989 starring Robert Duvall and Tommy Lee Jones. Although McMurtry denied his novel was a retelling of the Goodnight-Loving story, the book shares many plot points and character histories. The general map of their trails is also similar and those familiar with the book will recognize the story of Oliver Loving's death and burial.

Goodnight and Loving started their cattle drives in Fort Belknap, Texas. Cattle prices after the Civil War had plummeted in Texas, but prices were better in the new mining towns out west in Colorado and Wyoming. Goodnight and Loving began their trek following the [old Butterfield Overland Mail Route](#) west toward New Mexico and the Pecos River. This stretch of the trail was

perilous because it passed through Comanche Indian Country and had few resources for water. Many cattle died before reaching New Mexico.

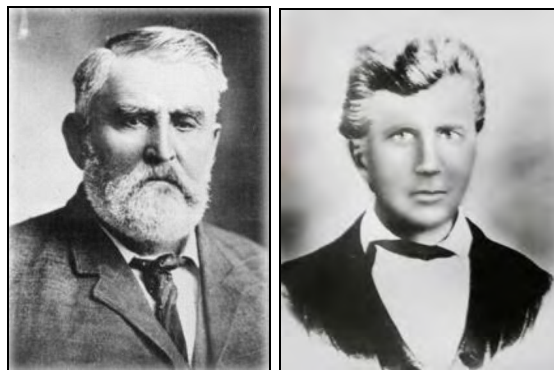
Upon reaching the Pecos River, the cattle drive headed north to Fort Sumner, one of the many forts built in New Mexico during the Civil War (1861-65) and used during the American Indian Wars in the 1870s. While at Fort Sumner, Goodnight and Loving sold their cattle to both soldiers and the over eight thousand Diné (or Navajo) Indians who were forcibly interned next door (and starving to death) at Bosque Redondo.

From Fort Sumner, the cattle drive went two ways. The earlier trail in 1866 followed the wet route or the Mountain Route of the Sante Fe Trail through central New Mexico traveling through Las Vegas, New Mexico, and up through what is now called the Raton Pass into Colorado and on to Pueblo.

However, Charles Goodnight found the toll road through the pass, then owned and operated by [Uncle Dick Wootton](#) until the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad bought him out in 1879, too expensive per head of cattle. So Goodnight scouted another trail headed north through the high plains of eastern New Mexico.

Most histories provide very little information about where in New Mexico the cattle drives traveled. The biography of Charles Goodnight, *Charles Goodnight: Cowman and Plainsman* by J. Evetts Haley, quotes Charles Goodnight as saying he stopped near Cuervo Peak and from there traveled north which would take him through what is now the Bell Ranch and Lake Conchas Dam (built 1936-9). Goodnight himself claims to have traveled up the mesa then called Goodnight Hill. There is a marker in the town of Mosquero, New Mexico, stating that the drive came through there. Goodnight also talks about resting his cows in the valley around Capulin Volcano and traveling near the river running through Folsom, New Mexico (there is a trail marker on the east side of town), and then through a pass into Colorado north of Folsom.

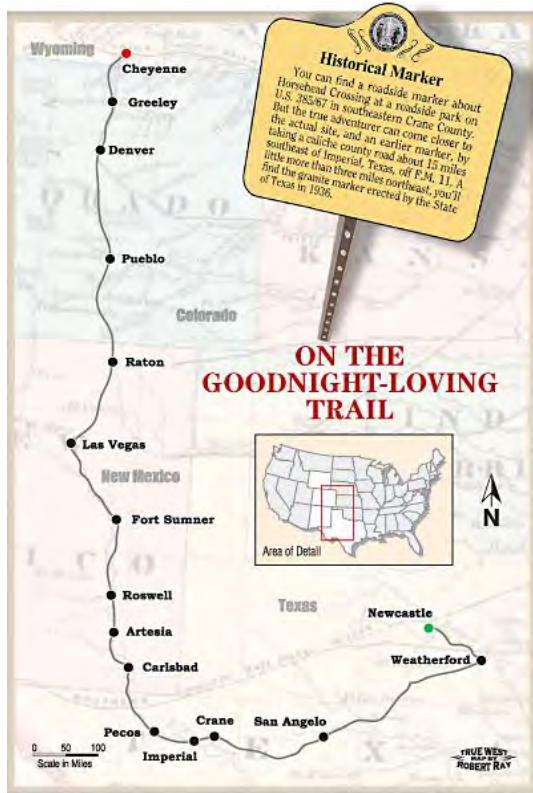
Goodnight then drove cattle over to Pueblo, Colorado, and eventually through to Denver, Colorado, and Cheyenne, Wyoming.



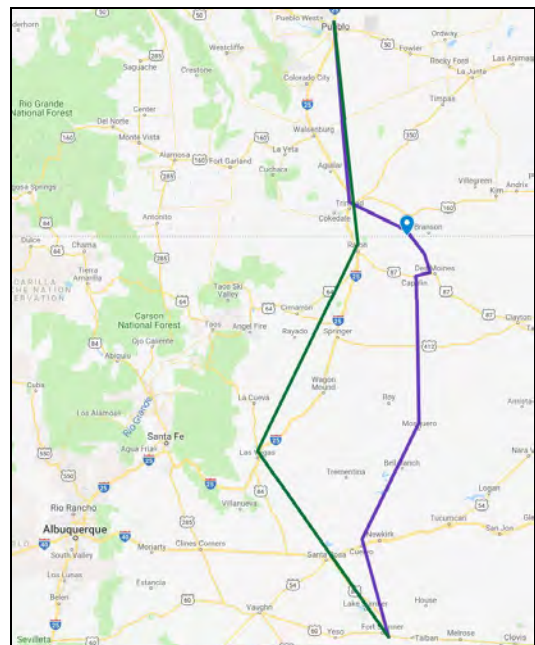
Charles Goodnight and Oliver Loving

The Trail Maps

The Goodnight-Loving Trails



The best trail map I've found for detail regarding the first 1866 trail (from the True West magazine article "[150 Years on the Goodnight-Loving Trail](#)")



My map of GNL Trails in New Mexico and Southern Colorado. Green marks the 1866 trail; purple marks the possible 1868 trail.

Driving Trip Trails

Each section of the guide contains a map. You can use these maps to drive through the locations mentioned in the book. I've also added museum locations, places to camp or recommended towns to spend the night. There are two maps:

[Topographical map](#) that you can track elevation with.

[Google map](#) that you can drive along with. This map has layers you can click on and off: (1) points of Interest, (2) the Goodnight-Loving Trails and (3) the driving trail.

1. Starting Out: The Preface

New Mexico Lessons

The Landscape

For tourists, New Mexico is known primarily for its tri-cultural living history (Indian, Hispanic and Anglo), its big blue skies with amazing cloud formations, some fishing lakes and rivers, and mountains for skiing and hiking. The poem “First Meditation” refers to these natural forms and how to conceptualize them which can be daunting for people who are used to flatter and more contained terrain.



Taos Pueblo, Taos, NM, Marc Cooper, CC, Public Domain

New Mexico is particularly good cloud country in the summer, the kind of cloud formations Charlie Brown and Linus would appreciate. You’ll see plenty of elephants and Mickey Mouse heads in various formations.

To Do

To make things interesting look for cowboy boots or Buddhas in the clouds.

The majority of Goodnight’s later trail passes through the middle of the eastern high plains known also as The Staked Plains or the Llano Estacado. The Staked Plains is one of the largest tablelands (or mesas) on the continent at an elevation of 3,000 feet. It forms the southern tip of the Western High Plains area of the Great Plains. Large escarpments or cliffs form its eastern

and western borders. The landscape looks flat from the top and feels barren and dry, which made it vulnerable to dust storms in the 1930s.

Local historian Marc Simmons has written a good article about the area: “Trail Dust: Llano Estacado a testing ground for grit” ([Santa Fe New Mexican](#)):



Cowboys on the eastern New Mexico plains, Museum of New Mexico

The Clay

The poem “Vessel” references clay. Many of New Mexico’s Pueblo tribes have a long history going back to prehistoric times of making and using pottery for functional purposes and to sell as art objects. Clay deposits often having been used for many generations are found across the state.

The clay is also a mythological cowboy term referencing death and the cold grave. A good example of this metaphor was popularized in the old ballad “The Cowboy’s Lament” or “Streets of Laredo,”

*As I walked out in the streets of Laredo,
As I walked out in Laredo one day,
I spied a young cowboy wrapped in white linen,
Wrapped in white linen as cold as the clay.*

Cowboy Lessons

The book preface begins with a quote from Mencius about people seeking the Tao far away when it doesn’t really exist far away.

Question

How do you think this applies to Silas Cole? Does it apply at all to you?

Clay & the Empty Cup

In 2006 my friend Christopher convinced me to take a ceramics class at Santa Monica Community College in Los Angeles. This was my first art class. The bowls I made there and the process of forming pottery felt very calming and spiritual, far away from the abstractions of writing and words. These experiences influenced the poem "Vessel" and my decision to give the character Coyote a fragile cup of pottery to carry around on a perilous cattle drive. The small pot to the right reminds me of the shape of cup Coyote might carry.



More importantly the idea of a bowl is an ambiguity to many potters. What is a container? Is it the edges of the cup or bowl or the inside space where substances are carried? After all what is the point of an empty cup?

Question

What matters about a bowl? Is a bowl the hard structure and the surfaces or is it the airy emptiness inside?

The fact that the poem appears in the preface of the book is important and refers to the story of the teacup and the Zen master Ryutan. Many students sought his counsel and one day a student arrived full of opinions about the dharma (or the teachings). The master suggested starting their lessons over a cup of tea. The master poured a cup of tea for the student and kept pouring until the tea started overflowing the rim and spilling onto the table. The student became upset and shouted, "Stop! The cup is filling over." The master smiled, stopped pouring and said to the student, "You are like this cup, full of ideas. You come and ask for teaching but your cup is full. I can't put anything in. Before I can teach you, you'll have to empty your cup." Read more about the ["Empty Your Cup" story](#).

Question

At the start of this journey how full is Silas Cole's cup? How full is your cup?

How to Visit

By Car

You can travel this trip in as little as one long weekend or you can spread it out over a few weeks and linger in certain locations. I've added travel time information for any schedule.

Trip Warning 1: There are about 40 miles of this route on a dirt road so your vehicle will get dusty. Have good tires and carry a cell phone. If you decide to go down into Mills Canyon you

might need 4-wheel drive. I once got stranded on one of these roads trying to find the Dorsey Mansion. My fuel pump gave out and I had to wait two hours for a AAA tow from Las Vegas, New Mexico. Speaking of which, you might want to pack a roll of toilet paper and a tub of wet wipes. Good clearance also helps (in cars and behinds).

And finally when you plan your trip visit museum websites to verify the latest information on museum hours and closings. Many rural New Mexico museums have unusual hours and closures. Many are closed Mondays or Tuesdays and some are even closed on weekends.

Our main character, Silas Cole, meets up with his cattle drive in Fort Sumner, New Mexico, 160 miles southeast of Albuquerque. If you start in Albuquerque the trip east on Highway 40 to Santa Rosa is 120 miles and will take you 1 hour and 45 minutes. The trip down to Fort Sumer is another 40 miles south on Highway 84.

You can stay in motels near Fort Sumner or you can start your visit 42 miles north in the bigger town of Santa Rosa. There you can also visit the Blue Hole, a unique natural swimming hole connected to a deep underwater cave system going down 130 feet. This is the place local desert-kids must go to learn SCUBA diving. The water is a clear blue all year round maintaining a constant temperature of 62 °F. Take a swim or dangle your feet in the water.



Take Care of Your Feet

Heed Coyote's advice to take care of your feet. The Blue Hole is a good place to start soaking your tootsies with a little deep breathing or meditation.

More Blue Hole [information](#).

Author Fun fact: Santa Rosa is the town my great-grandfather, John Gray, settled in after moving his family from Texas in a covered wagon.

Santa Rosa is also an old Route 66 town with a Route 66 Auto Museum and a few old operating route motels.

Trip Warning 2: If you decide to walk the trail or do any hiking nearby be on the lookout for rattlesnakes. Read this [guide about snake safety](#) before you head out. Also avoid prolonged exposure to the sun. Many travelers to New Mexico don't consider the tiring and dehydrating effects of the sun not to mention your exposure to skin cancer. Wear sunscreen and bring jugs of water and some snacks. Watch your gas tank meter.

Restaurants & Motels

Fort Sumner ([Trip Advisor](#))

Santa Rosa ([Trip Advisor](#))

Camping

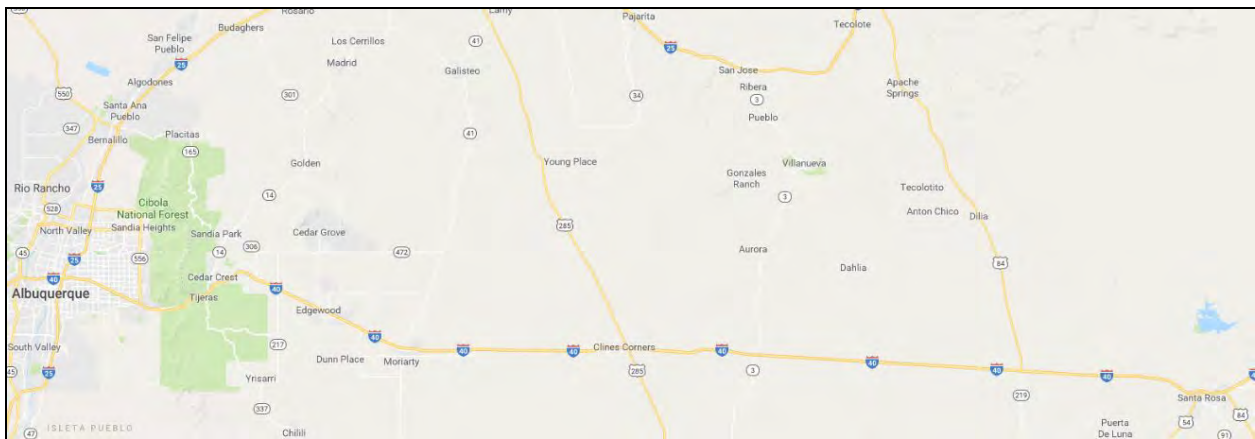
To get the full frontier experience you can also camp.

Sumner Lake State Park [website](#)

Santa Rosa Lake State Park [website](#)

Maps

Albuquerque to Santa Rosa



2. Philadelphia to Cuervo: The Art of Preparing

Cowboy Lessons

New Mexico History

You could spend a lot of time learning about New Mexico history. Here's the short version. About 100 million years ago New Mexico bordered the [Western Interior Seaway](#) which is why fish fossils and dinosaur footprints were preserved and can still be seen in the area.

Prehistoric people were living here as far back as 12,000 years ago, the earliest evidence being [Clovis Man](#), who was named after a projectile point (like an arrowhead but it can be any point of a spear, lance or other projectile weapon) discovered near Clovis, New Mexico. Clovis is also known for "the Clovis Sound" and [Norman Petty's recording studio](#) used by Buddy Holly, Roy Orbison and Waylon Jennings.

Other prehistoric sites were found in Folsom (northern New Mexico), in Sandia Cave (near Albuquerque), and Burnett Cave (near Carlsbad, New Mexico). Evidence of dinosaurs and prehistoric bison have also been found. See "The Land of Giants, Dino tracking and fossil hunting in [New Mexico's world-class prehistoric sites](#)."

Three groups of native people populated the area: Ancestral Puebloans, the Hohokam and the Mogollon. For various reasons including famine, drought, warfare and religion many of their communities were gradually abandoned. But plenty of their ruins still stand today, the flagship being [Chaco Canyon](#).

Many of those communities organized around the Rio Grande River and other rivers where [they are still living today](#). More nomadic Athapaskan groups, such as the Apache and Diné (or Navajo), arrived later.

Francisco Vasquez de Coronado and the Spanish conquistadors came in 1540 to explore the area believing they would find [seven cities of gold](#) nearby.

The Spanish lived with the pueblo and Athapaskan Indian groups for hundreds of years and many pueblo families adopted Hispanic names. During that time, New Mexico became a lonely outpost with few resources, a place cut off from both New Spain (Mexico) and old Spain. For this reason New Mexico Spanish differs notably from the Spanish currently spoken in Mexico or Spain.

Still Spain made attempts to enforce their rule of government and Catholicism in the area and disputes between the Hispanic and Indian communities led to a violent pueblo revolt in 1680.

The Spanish retreated but returned 12 years later. Mexico finally achieved Independence from Spain in 1810. The El Camino Real trail had long been the route of trade between New Mexico and Spain. However after Mexico won independence from Spain the Santa Fe trail between Santa Fe and Missouri was also established for trade between the United States and Mexico.



U.S. National Park Service map of the Santa Fe Trail

The United States at that time was rapidly expanding across the continent in successive waves of “manifest destiny” and soon Anglo (or European American) traders began to arrive in the area. After the Mexican American War from 1846 to 1848 the United States acquired a large portion of the Southwest.

The new United States property was called New Mexico Territory (which at the time included Arizona). Traders, lawyers and opportunists poured into the area from other U.S. states. New Mexico was ruled as a territorial government and remained a wild-west outpost until 1878 when the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway Company arrived. New Mexico and Arizona finally achieved statehood separately in 1912. [Read a timeline of New Mexico history.](#)

Cowboy mythology, the subject of countless cultural studies including [this one](#): “The Cowboy: America’s Contribution to the World’s Mythology,” evolved from stories of early territorial conflicts and hardships. New Mexico has as many stories of outlaw drama as any other western state if not more. Mythologies of Billy the Kid primarily take place in small New Mexico towns like Lincoln and Fort Sumner. Before he went to Tombstone, Arizona, Doc Holliday owned a pool hall in Las Vegas, New Mexico. Cimarron and Elizabethtown also saw outlaw exploits by colorful characters including rancher and gunfighter Clay Allison alone responsible for no small number of bullet holes in the tin ceiling of the St. James Hotel. The [dramas of Las Vegas, New Mexico](#), put Tombstone and Dodge City in their place.

Meanwhile much of the world has become enraptured with the mythology of the outsider cowboy. What are the roots of these cultural stories? What truths and what falsehoods do they convey?

The cowboy was essentially a lowly-paid ranch hand. He smelled bad and probably had gnarly foot blisters and no girlfriends. But the Cowboy is also an archetype of bravado and romance and plays no small part in the idea of the American Dream. Gunfights, local territorial skirmishes, cattle drive stories, dime-store novels and Western American ballads have all contributed to the spread of the cowboy mythology.

The poem “Unpacking” mentions a Philadelphia newspaper. According to the [Library of Congress](#) Philadelphia had between 33 and 44 papers (always starting and folding) between the years of 1850 and 1899. There were 60 papers in Philadelphia in the 1840s.

The poem also refers to a bosque, which is a local term for a cluster of trees, usually cottonwood groves appearing near a water source, like the Rio Grande.

Question

For poems that have one, how do the subtitles help summarize them?

The poem “Fleeting” refers to New Mexico lizards, the most predominant being the [New Mexico Whiptail](#), the official state reptile of New Mexico. If you live here you know why. This little guy is found everywhere, from your backyard to representations in local arts.



New Mexico Whiptail



Cochiti Pueblo Pottery

The poem “Fort Shadow” refers to Fort Sumner and Bosque Redondo history where the Diné (Navajo) and Mescalero and Jicarilla Apache were forcibly interned between 1863 and 1868.

Two poems in the book, “Fort Shadow” and “Indian Signals,” use [the term Diné instead of Navajo](#). Navajo is actually a derogatory word assigned to them by the Spanish. Diné is a more accurate name chosen by the tribe.

In all likelihood reporters such as Silas Cole would most likely be using the term Navajo in the 1870s. I debated modern sensibility versus historical accuracy and was concerned about a reference that might be read as out of place, historically speaking. I opted for the anachronism, hanging on the slight chance that other people in Silas' company might have been sensitive to the issue and might have had an opportunity to enlighten him. Admittedly this is a stretch but a choice that provides us with an opportunity to consider our language.



Both General James Carleton (of the poem's creepy photo) and Kit Carson helped implement the failed and harmful internment of around 9,000 Indian people. The U.S. Government attempted to teach the tribes farming but the area proved unfarmable and many people starved.

[General James Henry Carleton](#)

Further reading:

- “The Long Walk to Bosque Redondo, Officials called it a reservation but to the conquered and exiled Navajos it was a wretched prison camp” ([Smithsonian Magazine](#))
- [More information about The Long Walk.](#)
- The [Bosque Redondo Memorial website.](#)
- [The Fort Sumner National Park and Historic Site.](#)
- A good [site for information about the Diné / Navajo.](#)

The poem references the Diné internment and the Diné structure called a [hogan](#).

Kit Carson's legacy is very controversial here in New Mexico. Some consider him a hero and some consider him a murderer—it depends upon your perspective. Are you Anglo or Indian? Are you Diné or Hopi?



“Kit Carson: Hero Or Villain?” ([CBS](#)).

Near Fort Sumner you can visit the grave of William Bonney otherwise known as Billy the Kid and frontiersman Lucien Maxwell (more about him later) at the nearby Old Fort Sumner Museum site. [The museum may be closed for renovation](#) but the graves are outside.

There's also a [Billy the Kid museum](#) in the town of Fort Sumner.

Billy the Kid was shot and killed by Sheriff Pat Garrett at Fort Sumner on July 14, 1881. His most famous prison escape occurred in the nearby town of Lincoln, New Mexico, worth a visit as the entire town is literally a museum to Billy the Kid and the story of the Lincoln County War, the

violent wild-west feud of 1878-1881. It was a local trade war between dry goods competitors Alexander McSween and John Tunstall. Read more about the [Lincoln County War](#).

[More about Billy the Kid](#).

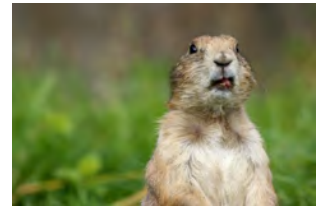
Lucien Maxwell retired and died in Fort Sumner but was instrumental in the settling of northern New Mexico where he owned a large land grant. His son, [Pete Maxwell was friends with Billy the Kid](#) and it was Pete Maxwell's house where Billy the Kid was shot and killed.



When Lucien Maxwell sold off his large and profitable land grant, this started the Colfax County War up in northern New Mexico. Read [six pages of history](#) about that war.

The poem also refers to the rattlesnake. The [prairie rattlesnake](#) is common in New Mexico. Albuquerque's Old Town has a very good [rattlesnake museum](#).

Prairie dogs also make an appearance in the poem. See lots of them at [Prairie Dog Town](#) in Lubbock, Texas, if you're ever nearby.



And there's a reference to cottonwoods.

In her essay "Slouching Towards Bethlehem" Joan Didion talks about cottonwoods and her love of the cowboy actor, John Wayne:



"...it was there, that summer of 1943 while the hot wind blew outside, that I first saw John Wayne. Saw the walk, heard the voice. Heard him tell the girl in a picture called *War of the Wildcats* that he would build her a house, "at the bend in the river where the cottonwoods grow." As it happened I did not grow up to be the kind of woman who is the heroine in a Western, and although the men I have known have had many virtues and have taken me to live in many places I have come to love, they have never been John Wayne, and they have never taken me to that bend in the river where the cottonwoods grow. Deep in that part of my heart where the artificial rain forever falls, that is still the line I wait to hear."

You don't need John Wayne to get to the bend in the river where the cottonwoods grow. Just come to New Mexico.

The poem "Shelter in the Open" references the "staked plains" (istl.org's map to the right) which is part of the eastern high plains, also known also as the [Llano Estacado](#).



Mesa is a term for an isolated flat-topped hill with steep sides. To the right is Wikipedia's image for a mesa.



The same poem references Longhorn cattle infamous for their dramatic horns and patchwork coat of colors best depicted by the University of Austin's logo for their football team.

Cattle came to America with Christopher Columbus and Spanish settlers. Ranching cows were then bred for their drought tolerance. You can [take your own cattle drive](#) with longhorns.

The poem also references a [cholla cactus](#), a scrubby cactus with tubular branches that bloom purple and yellow rubbery flowers. Cholla is the predominant cactus around the high plains area.



The award-winning novel *Bless Me Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya is a good story depicting the cultural differences between high plains ranches and Spanish farming villages. It's a coming-of-age story about a small boy and how he deals with the diverging cultures that surround them in rural 1940s New Mexico. According to Wikipedia, the book "has become the most widely read and critically acclaimed novel in the Chicano literary canon since its first publication in 1972."

[Comanche raids](#) were a big part of the *Lonesome Dove* story and Oliver Loving's eventual demise. Attacks did occur frequently against traders along the Santa Fe Trail, cattle drivers coming through with their cows, and local Hispanic villages in New Mexico. Here is a map of Comanche territory found on Pinterest which looks similar to, if a bit larger than, the map of the Staked Plains.



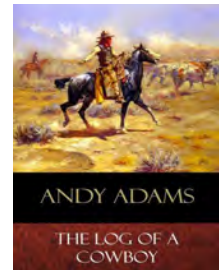
The poem "Herding Cattle" is about...herding cattle. Here is [a hilarious wikihow article](#) on how to herd cattle.

Writing these poems I came to love cowboy sayings almost as much as Buddhist and Zen sayings. What they have in common is they both can be very funny. For example, a cowboy would say, "Don't squat with your spurs on" or "Don't let your yearnings get ahead of your earnings." An old Zen master would say, "In matters of religion, most persons prefer chewing the menu to actually eating the food!" [More cowboy quotes](#).

A lariat or lasso is a loop of utility rope used by cowboys. This tool can be used as a restraint or can be thrown at a target. Cowboy's use the term roping however. To use the word lasso as a verb will expose you as a newb. This is [Lariat Larry](#) doing roping tricks (right).



The poem “Code of the Cowboy” gathered its cowboy rules primarily from the book *Log of the Cowboy* by Andy Adams depicting his career as a cowboy, possibly working for Charles Goodnight. The book is now in the public domain and [you can read it for free](#).



The poem “Lessons in Landscapes” refers to [Stendhal Syndrome](#) which many people claim to experience when they encounter southwestern landscapes, a feeling of expanse and sublime beauty that feels uncomfortable or overwhelming. I was born here but left the area when I was seven years old. I never experienced anything uncomfortable when I would visit; but I did have a handful of disorienting experiences driving around Santa Fe when I moved back to the area in 2010, primarily along Interstate 25 traveling from Santa Fe to Pecos. I experienced dizziness and panic at the thought that I might be driving through a painting. It was weird.

Stendhal Syndrome is psychosomatic. You can feel dizziness or confusion usually occurring around exposure to something personally moving and beautiful. The syndrome was first coined in the 19th century to describe physical responses to art, specifically the writer Stehdhal's response to the Basilica of Santa Croce in Florence, Italy.

The poem also references other fears of heights, death, insignificance, existence, inhospitable habitats, general suffering and open spaces.

Question

What geological features are you afraid of? What geological features make you feel safe?

The poem again references the “[ancient interior sea](#),” the seaway covering the Great Plains (and at times parts of New Mexico) 100 million years ago.

All of the paraphernalia around food and eating on a cattle drive was fascinating to me and I collected a few cookbooks on the subject: *Eating Up the Santa Fe Trail* by Sam'l P. Arnold and *The Chuckwagon Cookbook* by Byron Price. The poem “Instructions for the Cook” was based on this research on the culture of chuckwagons, an invention attributed to Charles Goodnight who allegedly invented the first chuckwagon by combining an army or freight wagon with a victorian desk.



I learned all about airtights (tin cans), Arbuckle coffee, grub recipes and etiquette around the chuckwagon chef.



Biscuits, stew and coffee

- [Humorous chuckwagon history video](#)
- [More about chuckwagons](#)
- [About cowboy coffee](#)
- [About cowboy grub](#)

Zen Lessons

The quote that begins section one is a paraphrase of Qingyuan Weixin, ““First there is a mountain, then there is no mountain, then there is,” first translated by D.T. Suzuki in *Essays in Zen Buddhism*. The quote is also referenced in Donovan’s song “[There is a Mountain](#).” The quote is particularly apropos for a Buddhist in New Mexico, where you encounter the existence (and possible non-existence) of mountains and rivers everywhere you go and are faced with not only daunting physical obstacles to cross but ideas of your own impermanence in comparison. And yet mountains and rivers are impermanent too. Even they are not as solid as they appear. And people come to these understandings in their own time, upon subsequent periods of thinking, from light reflection to deeper meditation. Usually people who have had to deal with significantly daunting life challenges have been forced to gain an understanding of impermanence the hard way through great suffering. [More about “There is a Mountain.”](#)”

The poem “A Formal Introduction to This Guide” brings up the big guru question. Interestingly, if you search “why do you need a guru?” on Google, you’ll get a handful of top page results from famous living gurus telling us why you need one. Ed and Deb Shapiro wrote an article in HuffPost that questions, “[Do you really need a guru?](#)” Famous gurus are also human beings with frailties and biases. As experienced practitioners they can be both helpful and harmful. But at the end of the day you have to make the journey by yourself.

The poem “Unpacking” is about letting go of physical stuff. Both psychologists and Zen masters have identified clutter and the weight of all our stuff as being a hindrance to mental balance and peace. Before going on his journey, our protagonist Silas Cole has to leave behind a great deal of baggage literally and figuratively.

How to [practice decluttering as meditation](#). If you have a bigger problem with stuff you can read [The Zen of Hoarding](#).

Question

What literal baggage do you need to declutter? What figurative baggage do you need to declutter?

The poem “Shelter in the Open” deals with the continual discomfort Silas Cole feels when he starts on the cattle trail. The poem references the Buddhist idea of suffering. The foundation of Buddhism is based on Four Noble Truths about human suffering.

1. Suffering exists; or to live is to suffer.
2. Suffering arises from our attachment to our wants and desires.
3. Suffering ceases when attachment to wants and desires ceases.
4. Freedom from suffering is possible by practicing the Eightfold Path.

And here we start to accumulate numeric lists. Buddhism is full of numeric lists. See the poem “Code of the Cowboy” for elaboration on this. But in the meantime, more about suffering:

- [4 Noble Truths](#)
- [The 8-fold Path](#)
- [10 Buddhist Teachers Talk About Suffering](#)

A long time after writing the poem “Fleeting,” it occurred to me this poem slightly echoed Basho’s frog poem, not in its gaps of brevity but in its “view from the ground,” its look at the timeless instant, and its meditation on a New Mexican reptile instead of a Japanese amphibian.

This is Basho’s poem, the most famous haiku:

The old pond
A frog jumps in—
The sound of the water

Scholars and translators are still discussing its impact and meaning:

- [A Generic Analysis of Basho's Frog Haiku](#)
- [32 Translations](#)
- ["A Contrarian View" on Basho's Frog Haiku](#)
- The book *One Hundred Frogs* by Hiroaki Sato

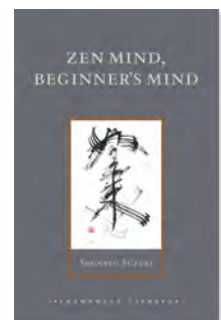
"Fort Shadow" alludes to karma, or societal karma in this case, and ghosts of the dead. From [Zen-Buddhism.net](#):

"Karma is neither a punishment nor a reward, it is simply a gigantic cosmic mirror that reflects back what you "emit"...So we reap what we sow. If I plant eggplant seeds, I will get eggplant, not cabbage. Moreover, don't we say that 'kindness attracts kindness' and that 'violence attracts violence?' Karma!"

Americans as a whole can have collective karma just as an individual person can. Warfare perpetuates karma. American Indians committed violence against intruding settlers and the American government committed more violent offences against them. Imagine the karmic debts created by some of these acts of warfare, including the Long Walk of the Navajo and the debacle of forced internment they suffered at Bosque Redondo, to which this poem refers. The ghosts in the poem allude to that karmic debt.

"Herding Cattle" refers to all the helpful guidebooks including American self-help and Zen Buddhist guidebooks. Consider all the "Zen and the Art of..." books out there including topics on Zen and motorcycle maintenance, flower arranging, writing, acting and fly fishing.

This poem also refers to the Buddhist idea of how knowledge can obstruct your knowing. Our understanding of any subject can be obstructed by what we think we already know. This can be more of an obstacle than our actual lack of knowledge in the first place.



Beginner's mind refers to approaching something with a beginner's curiosity and letting go of our previous preconceptions even if we have advanced knowledge about a subject.

Learn more about cultivating this attitude:

- The book *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* by Shunryu Suzuki
- [Zenhabits.net also has an article](#) about approaching life with beginner's mind.

Question

How does Silas Cole get in touch with his beginner's mind in the poem "Herding Cattle?" How could you approach beginner's mind in your own study?

The poem also deals with living in the moment. Disasters can happen when you're not paying attention to your present moment. Lives can be lost. But to a smaller degree many magical moments are lost in bouts of inattention.

The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment was a very popular book by Eckhart Tolle on this topic. Zenhabits.net also has good [tips for living in the moment](#).

Working meditation or labor meditation is also a concept of this poem and many of Silas Cole's assigned tasks on his journey. Work is not only inevitable in this life, but it also offers instant insight into our meditative mind. Work tasks are a fast-track to living in the moment. Any household "chore" can be done as a working meditation: washing dishes, washing a car, washing the dog, building or fixing something, gardening.

The poem also brings up the idea of [chakras](#), believed to be focus points or electromagnetic spiritual fields in the body. Chakras are referenced in various Eastern Indian and Asian meditation practices including certain types of Hinduism and Buddhism.

The poem "Code of the Cowboy" references the many Buddhist lists found in the footnotes of *The Collection Songs of Cold Mountain* translated by Red Pine. It's a bona fide Zen accounting system. You can research these on Google by searching for the list plus the word Buddhism. For example, search "5 eyes Buddhism."



Japanese Rinzai Zen master Hakuin once said, "If you want to get at the pristine truth of egolessness, you must once and for all let go of your hold and fall over the precipice!" Sound scary? You can work to face your fears and embrace impermanence. Zenthinking.net offers [a guide](#).

The poem "Lessons in Landscapes" is about dealing with your fears and anxieties about the precipice of impermanence with the use of koans. A koan is defined as a "riddle and is used in Zen Buddhism to demonstrate the inadequacy of logical reasoning and to provoke enlightenment." Some [examples of koans](#).

Question

What are the lessons described in this poem? They may seem a little abstract at first but think about them for a while.

The chuckwagon poem “Instructions for the Cook” literally refers to Zen Master Dōgen’s *Instructions to the Tensho*. The cook has been described as the most important person on a cattle drive just as the cook is considered to be the most important person in a monastery. This particular poem was inspired by the essays on Dōgen’s work in the book *Nothing is Hidden*, edited by Warner, Okumura, McRae and Leighton.

Cooking is possibly the best opportunity for a living-in-the-moment working meditation. I’m a terrible cook and I have to get myself into a very meditative state of mind to pull off even a simple fruit punch recipe. Usually the problem is I’m distracted. I make mistakes. I’m literally scatterbrained. I may as well be one-armed just like the cook in our story. Work meditations involve slowing down and clearing your head. Also, it helps me when I prepare foods that strike me as earthy and meditative or spiritually satisfying like guacamole or salsas.

Question

What foods feel meditative for you when you make them?

The poem “Making Fires” has our cowboys making fun of their own mantras and self-reliant spirituality and embracing a oneness with all things. The cowboys are feeling a moment of shared experience, humor and camaraderie like the Buddhist idea of sangha or community. It also refers to the benefits of trials and tribulations:

“We cannot know if its gold
Until we see it through the fire.”
Zen saying
(from *Zen and the Art of Falling in Love*)

Two books, *Zen and the Art of Falling in Love* and *The Prairie Traveler*, had the biggest influence on the themes and structure of *Cowboy Meditation Primer*. I remember sitting in my bedroom in Los Angeles trying to embark on online dating with a positive attitude. That experience would go on to change my life. But the books were most helpful in showing me the connection between Zen and the Wild West.

Each section of *Cowboy Meditation Primer* ends with a poem about maps or direction, containing real landmarks and landscapes on the Goodnight-Loving Trail.

The landmarks for the poem “Deciphering the Map of the Staked Plains” correspond to the land forms between Fort Sumner, New Mexico and Cuervo, New Mexico.

The section-ending poems also refer to the instruction “do not confuse the map with the territory.” The map, guide or guru is no reflection of reality. Only walking the path will show you how things really are. In these poems Silas Cole is trying to center himself in the strange new world surrounding him.

How to Visit

By Car

It's 63 miles north from Fort Sumner Historic Site to Cuervo, New Mexico, and takes about an hour to drive straight through. If you take the Puerto de Luna detour described below, it will take an extra hour.

On Highway 60, you can visit the [Billy the Kid museum](#). Be sure to check the days and hours of all museums you'd like to visit.

Heading down 272 South (or Billy the Kid Drive), you can stop at the Old Fort Sumner museum & cemetery which might be closed but you can still visit the graves of Billy the Kid and Lucien Maxwell outside.

Stop at the [Fort Sumner Historic Site and Bosque Redondo Memorial](#). There you can see the footprint of the old fort on a self-guided walking tour. Don't miss the hallway of murals by Shonto Begay at the [Bosque Redondo Memorial](#) next door.

Traveling back north up 84 North to Santa Rosa, look for some landforms Charles Goodnight mentioned about his namesake trail: Juan de Dios river and Alamogordo Creek.

As you travel north, you might also make a detour west on 91 to visit the small town of Puerto de Luna, an old Hispanic sheep-ranching town featured in Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me Ultima*.

When you get to Interstate 40, go east and stop in the ghost town Cuervo, another old sheep-trading town.

Things to look for and meditate on

Always look for coyotes. You might even see roadrunners in the area. The landscape will include lots of flatness covered with scrub brush, cholla cactus, some junipers, and bits of red oxide dirt starting around Cuervo. Lots of grama grass.

Northern New Mexico has lots of juniper trees, which are similar but more symmetrical and bush-like than their Japanese and California counterparts with their dramatically twisted trunks. They're both related to those cute little Bonsai trees.



Junipers: New Mexico, California, Bonsai

Notice the clouds, the small swells of rock, the deep cuts that flood water has made into the ground. Notice the wind. Spend some time in the wind.

To Do

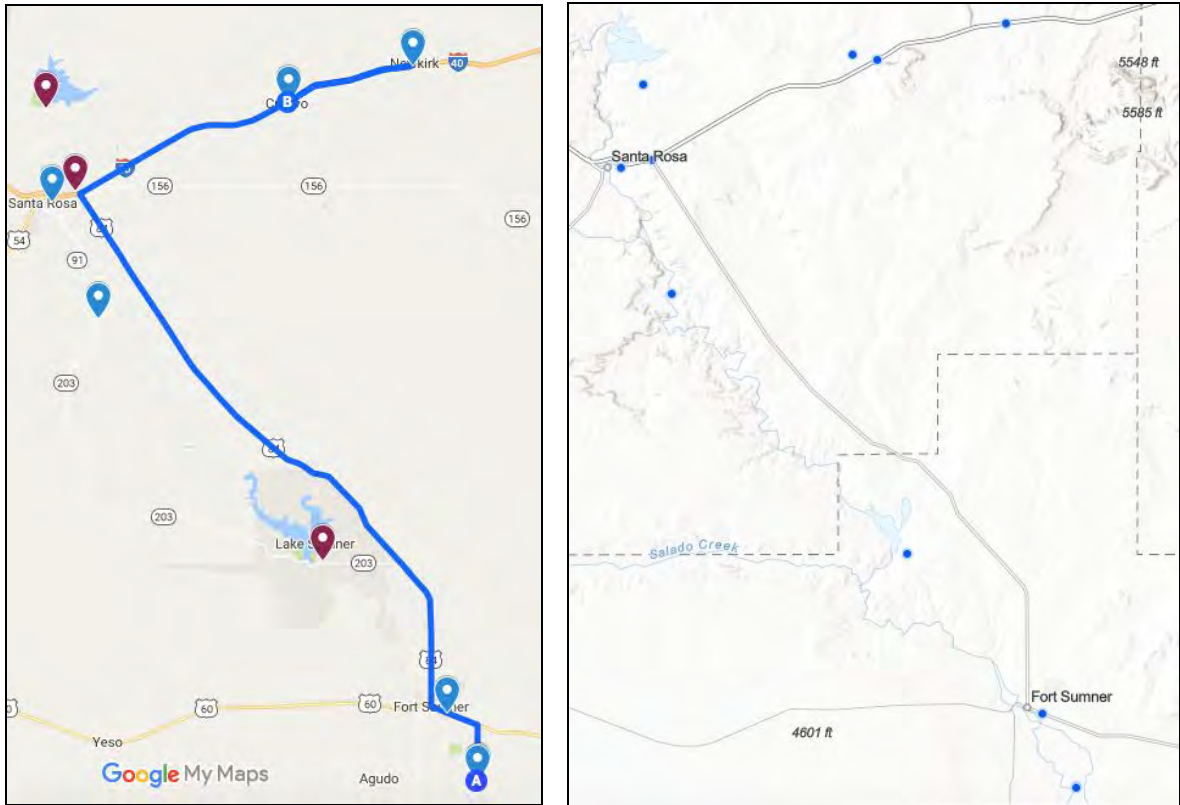
Zenart is a kind of art meditation. Online you can find mandala-styled coloring images of cows. You can search “zen cow art” on Google images and download and [zenart your own cow](#). Don’t try to color outside in the wind! Or maybe do that.



Restaurants, Motels and Camping

See information about Santa Rosa in section 2 above.

Maps and Photos Fort Sumner to Cuervo



[Google map](#) that you can drive along with. This map has layers you can click on and off: (1) points of Interest, (2) the Goodnight-Loving Trails and (3) the driving trail.

[Topographical map](#) that you can track elevation with.



Fort Sumner



Between Fort Sumner and Cuervo



Cuervo, New Mexico

Have Extra Time?

As you leave Albuquerque going east on Interstate 40, you can take a nice northern detour up Highway 14, otherwise known as the Turquoise Trail, to visit Sandia Crest and Tinkertown. You can also visit the ghost towns of Madrid and Cerrillos.

Madrid was a coal mining town that died and was recently revived with quirky shops and restaurants, including the Mine Shaft Tavern, where you can grab food, drinks and watch a live band.



Cerrillos, three miles north of Madrid, was a silver, gold and turquoise mining town. Mary's Bar is still there, the last piece of the Palace Hotel from 1884.

Between Albuquerque and Santa Rosa, you can stop in Moriarty in the month of October to experience [McCall's Haunted Farm](#), with activities both day and night.

You can also head southwest of Fort Sumner to visit the town of Lincoln and all its Billy the Kid history, the Smokey the Bear Museum and burial site in Capitan, and Fort Stanton, an 1855 Indian Wars fort and World War II internment camp. All of those sights are off Highway 380 between Socorro and Roswell.

You can also go south on Highway 285 to visit Roswell to see the UFO Alien Museum, which recently ousted the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum in Santa Fe as the most popular museum in New Mexico. Roswell also has two good art museums, the crowded but wonderful Anderson Museum and the Roswell Museum with a good collection of [Peter Hurd paintings](#).

Restaurants, Motels and Camping

If you stray this way, you can stay in Roswell ([Trip Advisor](#))

Or if you head toward Lincoln, you can camp at the [Valley of Fires Camp Site](#).

3. Cuervo to Mosquero: The Art of Arriving

Cowboy Lessons

In “Coyote’s First Story” I mention a St. Louis Shoe Factory. That was once a thing: [“The Evolution of the St. Louis Shoe Industry.”](#) In fact, the fabulous [City Museum in St. Louis](#) is in an abandoned shoe factory.

I also mention in the poem that Coyote’s family bought a homestead in Kansas. You can read more about how the [Homestead Act of 1862](#) affected Kansas. To “prove up” meant the homesteader had to fulfill obligations for receiving homestead land this cheaply. He had to live on the land for five years and make improvements to it, possibly build a house, other buildings, dig a well, generally make it a livable property.

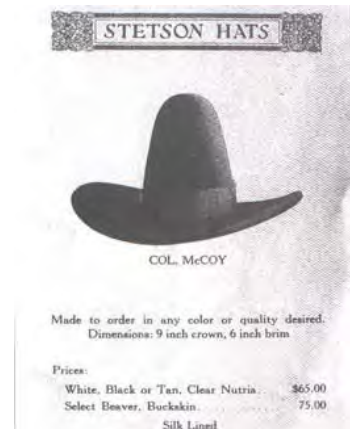
More information about the [Homestead Act](#).

Coyote’s fictional family lived near [Fort Larned](#), which is a great fort to visit because most of the buildings are still standing.

The poem “Swimming the Herd” has more cowboy sayings, favorites I mined from the book, *Cowboy Slang* by Edgar R. Potter.

“Taking Inventory” covers all the stuff cowboys carry, their paraphernalia: hats, ropes, cigarettes, outfits.

The book *I See by Your Outfit, Historic Cowboy Gear of the Northern Plains* by Tom Lindmier and Steve Mount has a good pictorial survey of cowboy costuming. *True West Magazine* also has [a good history of the “Evolution of Western Wear.”](#) And the website Cowboy Showcase has [a good glossary](#).



The poem “Calming a Stampedes” deals with the deadly situation of cows going crazy when they become frightened. [What causes a stampede?](#)

The word buttes is a reference to rock formations or landforms. Some majestic-looking rock formations are referred to as cathedrals due to their ornate and majestic profile. Most landforms are caused by tectonic plates shifting that has pushed up the earth’s surface.

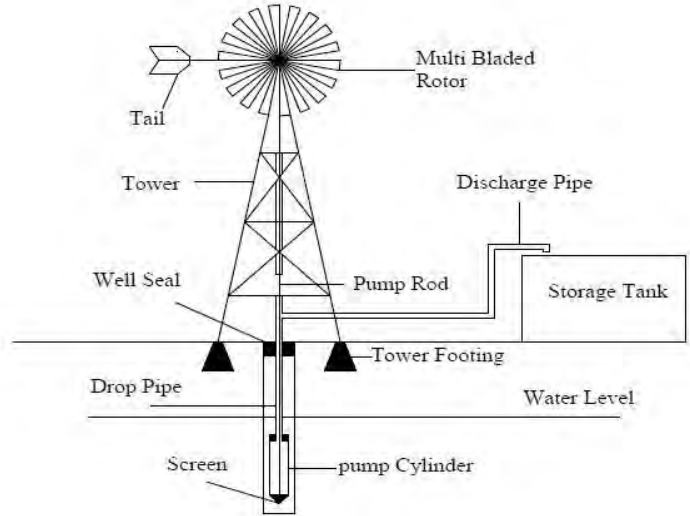
The poem “Winning at Poker” covers a game long associated with the Wild West. [Learn more about Gambling in the Old West.](#)

To Do

Bring a pack of playing cards so you can [play some poker games](#) before turning in for the night.

“Coyote’s Second Story” mentions a fallen windmill. Windmills decorate the landscape all across New Mexican ranches. Learn about [The Iconic Windmills that Made the American West](#).

To the right is a diagram of a windmill from Open Access Journals. The pump rod is sometimes called the sucker rod.



Coyote also talks tells a story about Jinny referencing her Chinese history in San Francisco, including violence and the discrimination they suffered. You can read more information about [Chinese history in San Francisco](#).

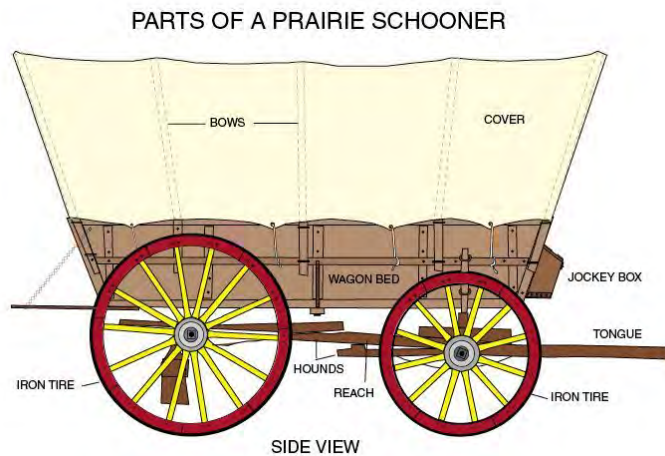
“Fording Rivers” deals with the perils of a cattle drive crossing waterways. The picture below is a closeup of the drawing “Swimming the Platte” from *Log of a Cowboy*.



“Swimming the Platte,” Andy Adams, *Log of a Cowboy*

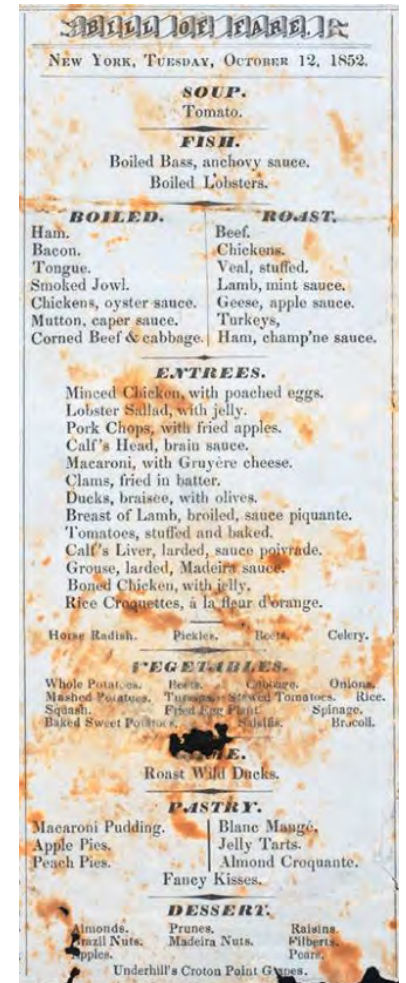
Crossing a river is a dramatic scene in the book and movie *Lonesome Dove* but the only major waterway Goodnight and Loving’s cattle would have had to cross would have been the narrow [Pecos River](#), which still could be dangerous after a big rain upstream.

“Wagon Repair & Maintenance” refers to the parts of a Conestoga wagon or prairie schooner.



In “Ornamental Radish” we see how our main character, Silas Cole, loves food. This is why he hangs around the chuckwagon all the time. He also thinks obsessively about late-1800s restaurants and train service food.

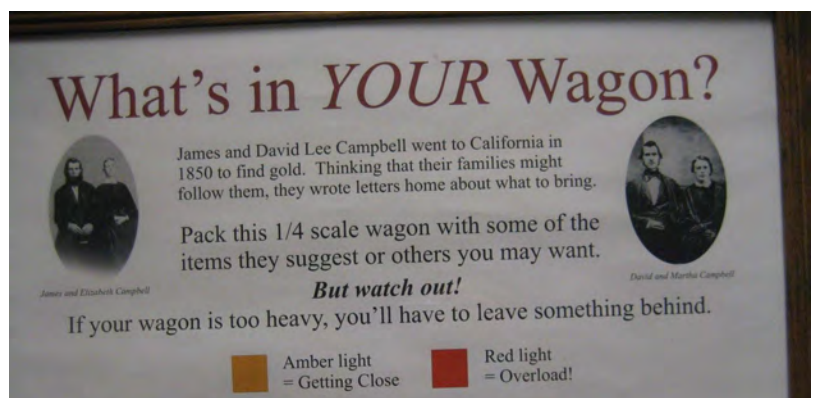
The 1852 menu to the right is from a New York City restaurant called the Irving House.



“Stores and Provisions” is another poem about stuff. The [National Frontier Trails Museum in Independence, Missouri](http://NationalFrontierTrailsMuseum.inIndependence.Missouri), has some great exhibits listing what travelers through the west would need to carry on their trips west.

Saleratus is a leveling agent in cooking. It predates what we now refer to as baking powder.

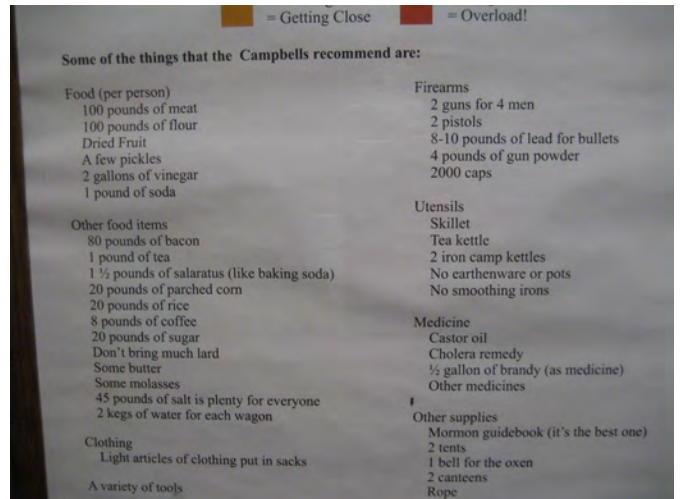
“The Map is My Guru” closes section two and references the continental escarpment plateau. The state of New Mexico is split between two cultural and geographical regions, Rio Abajo to the north means “upper river” and Rio Arriba to the south means “lower river.” Both reference the Rio Grande River which runs through New Mexico from north to south. The boundary line follows an escarpment called



La Bajada between Santa Fe and Cochiti Pueblo. Northern New Mexico is also higher in elevation, often gained by climbing big escarpments like the massive Colorado Plateau covering much of Northern Arizona and New Mexico.

Our characters pass through what is now Conchas Lake and Bell Ranch and then climb a steep escarpment or three-sided mesa where the towns of Mosquero, Solano, Roy and Mills are situated.

[Bell Ranch History.](#)
[The Building of Conchas Dam](#)



Zen Lessons

Part two begins with a quote by Oliver Loving: "Never cross a river before you reach it," practically a perfect Zen saying. Don't obsess about an event until you arrive at it, which is another way of saying live in the now.

Question

What rivers are you crossing too soon, before you've reached them? What rivers are you crossing right now?

The poem "Swimming the Herd" is about discovering sympathy for others, including animals. It's about altering your perspective and challenging common wisdom and judgements.

The mention of a gnat biting an iron bull is a reference to the saying about a mosquito biting an iron bull. I mistakenly allude to this in the poem as a folly of futility; but the phrase is really about acceptance of that futility. As Alan Watts said:

"...that's what I mean when I was explaining that when one gets to an extreme – that is to say to the point when you realize there is nothing you can do about life, nothing you can not do about life, then you're the mosquito biting the iron bull...you accepted it. And suddenly, there was a strange feeling that everything is absolutely clear. You suddenly see that there isn't a grain of dust in the whole universe that's in the wrong place."

From the lecture "The Inevitable Ecstasy (Part One)," part of the *Out of Your Mind* lecture series

Brahman is defined as ultimate reality in the Hindu religion or alternatively a Hindu priest. There is also a cow called a Brahma or a Brahma Bull.



A Brahman versus the Brahma Bull

Om is a Sanskrit syllable used as a popular mantra in Hinduism and Tibetan Buddhism.

“Coyote’s Second Story” mentions knots. Mindfulness practice, (which includes meditation), is often described as a process of loosening your knots. Coyote’s stepmother Jinny is trying to get Coyote to stop struggling because it doesn’t work and only serves to tighten his many mental knots.

“Fording Rivers” is also about letting go, relaxing into the task instead of struggling against it.

There is a saying, “We cannot see our reflection in running water. It is only in still water that we can see.” Silas experiences this in the chaos of the rushing water in “Fording Rivers.” In the beginning he cannot see the bottom of the river in all the chaos. At the end of the poem, he can see the surface of the bottom of the river.

“Wagon Repair and Maintenance” refers both to *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* and karma, which again is defined as a spiritual cause and effect. Bad or good deeds in this life can affect your future life or your life in the future. Karma is sometimes referred to as a wheel or a chain.

Like the poem “Unpacking,” the poems “Taking Inventory” and “Stores & Provisions” both refer to our survivalist, hoarding tendencies and the perils of having too much stuff.

“Calming a Stampede” is about dealing with stressful situations and living in them fully.

Question

Can you remember your last stampede? How did you live through it?

“Winning at Poker” deals with our obsession to win. There is an especially American obsession to defeat and conquer, a hyper-competitive addiction to winning that is antithetical to serenity. Tibetan Buddhist teacher Kyabgon Phakchok Rinpoche talks about [“Dealing With Your Jealous and Competitive Mind.”](#)

In “Cowboy Death Prayer” I was attempting to recreate a Buddhist death prayer as a haiku.

You might see flower arrangements on New Mexico roadsides called [Descansos](#). They are memorials to roadside accidents resulting in deaths. According to New Mexico law, “Descansos are an important part of New Mexico’s cultural heritage and it is crucial that they are protected, so long as their presence does not present a driving hazard.”



One big life lesson is acknowledging the fact that “it’s not all about you” or what *you* know. It’s sometimes about giving and listening. This is part of the poem “Ornamental Radish.” The poem also reminds me about the power of offering and receiving food in this quote:

“Dried salmon received
and oranges given in return.”
Shiki (from *Zen and the Art of Falling in Love*)

How to Visit

By Car

It’s 101 miles from Cuervo to Mosquero and will take you about two hours if you drive straight through. Visiting Conchas Lake is a five mile detour.

Charles Goodnight mentions passing Cuervo Peak northwest of town. Look for that landform before you leave Cuervo.

From Cuervo, get back on Interstate 40 and drive east and take the exit at Newkirk (about 15 minutes).

Turn left at the exit and go north on 129 until you come to a fork in the road at 104. Go west (left). You will be driving northwest around the famous Bell Ranch.

Have extra time?

Instead of going west, go east first to visit Lake Conchas Dam and State Park, which is located on the east side of Bell Ranch. Conchas Dam was built from 1936-1939 as a Depression-era public works project.

Back on 104, you will eventually come to 419. Go east (right).

Have extra time?

Instead of going east, go west a mile to visit the ghost town of [Trementina](#), my book imprint's namesake. Trementina is Spanish for pine resin and the small town has an interesting history as an out-of-the way Hispanic settlement and later a Presbyterian mission. Oddly, it's also the location of [a Scientology vault](#).

This ghost town was a mystery to many ghost-town travelers because it didn't exist on a major trail route or train route. If you want to see some interesting flagstone ruins, you can get out and crawl under the fence like an antelope and wander toward the buildings. It's private property, so wander at your own risk.

Follow 419 all around and up the mesa until you hit Highway 39.

Charles Goodnight talks about La Cinta Creek (which is on maps of this area) and Goodnight Hill (not on maps), but which might be a pass-through up the mesa.

Turn right at 39 and go southeast (right) to visit the town of Mosquero. In the center of town you will find some murals and historical signs related to the area, including the Goodnight-Loving Trail.

To Do

When you see cows, stop the car, get out and watch them. Watch them watch you. (Don't approach the cows and stay on the road. They're not your cows!) Think about how cows are both separate from and a part of you.

Things to look for and meditate on

Look for red dirt. This is iron-rich dirt. Look for abandoned adobe, wood, or rock buildings. Some of these were homestead buildings, some were older Hispanic buildings.

Question

How are abandoned buildings sad? How are they beautiful? Do thoughts about the progress of time feel scary or calming? Do they dust up your own fears of abandonment?

You'll see more juniper trees dotting the hills. Look for creeks and rockier hills and more rock formations, including mesa tops or flat rock tablet-shaped formations. Look for features or faces in the rock incline up the mesa to Mosquero. Once you get up to the high plains prairie around Mosquero and Roy, look for antelope.

The area also has a kind of rock called [caliche](#), which is dry and flat and used as part of the local dirt roads.

Restaurants, Motels and Camping

[Conchas Lake is a state park](#) with camping and some nice showers.

[La Casita Guest House](#) is a house rental in Roy.

There are sometimes restaurants in Roy and Mosquero, including the great Headquarters restaurant in Mosquero. If you see an open restaurant there, by all means stop and grab a bite and chat with the locals.

Have extra time?

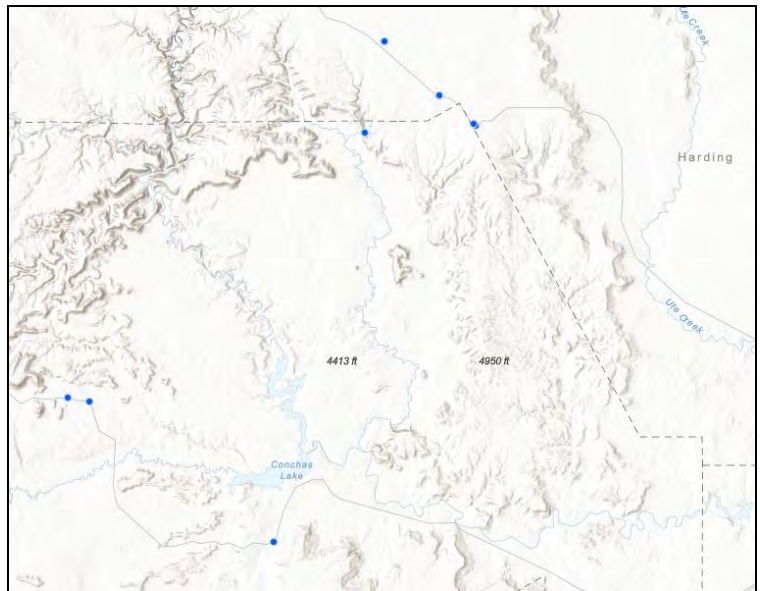
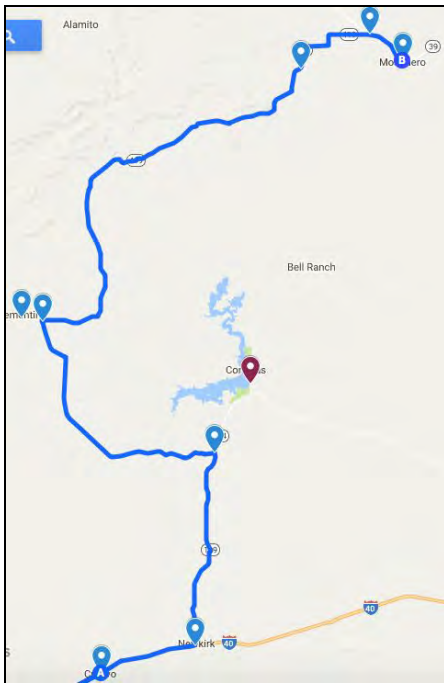
Visit Mills Canyon Campground, down a big canyon on a one-lane dirt road. Take 39 north the town of Roy. Drive north about 10 miles and turn west (left) onto Mills Canyon Road #600. Go west about 9 miles out to the campground.

It's beautiful down there but you'll need a 4-wheel drive vehicle. There's a bathroom down there but you have to truck in your own water. All that said, it's a beautiful place with ruins of Melvin Mill's massive orchard complex. He raised fruit and vegetables for the [Harvey Houses](#) of the West. Eventually an historic flood wiped out his entire fortune in 1904. He had no insurance and he subsequently died in poverty. He is an historical example of karma happening within your lifetime.

Melvin Mills is a little-known but fascinating villain in New Mexico Territorial history. He was on the wrong side of every drama he was involved in; but he gained power as a crooked lawyer, territorial representative and lackey of the nefarious [Santa Fe Ring](#).

More about [Mills Canyon Campground](#). There are beautiful hikes and rock climbing opportunities, if that's what you're in to. In fact, bouldering has become very popular there. See "[Rockin' Roy: Canyon near small town has become a bouldering hot spot.](#)" You also might see bighorn sheep down there.

Maps and Photos Cuervo to Mosquero



[Google map](#) that you can drive along with. This map has layers you can click on and off: (1) points of Interest, (2) the Goodnight-Loving Trails and (3) the driving trail.

[Topographical map](#) that you can track elevation with.



Cuervo Peak



The road toward Bell Ranch and Conchas Lake



Dirt and rock



Between Trementina and the climb to Mosquero



On the climb to Mosquero



The high plains of Harding County

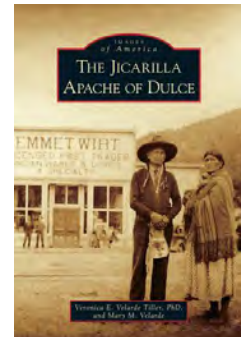
4. Mosquero to Capulin: The Art of Balancing

Cowboy Lessons

In parts of the poem “Indian Signals,” members of the cattle drive meet American Indian or Native American people. Many tourists associate New Mexico with pueblo Indian tribes. The [pueblo groups](#) have moved somewhat over the centuries but for the most part they are living in homes and communities that have existed for a very long time. In northern and eastern New Mexico, tribal communities were more nomadic and would move around from season to season, often trading with and sometimes fighting with more stationary communities.

Mobile tribes traveling through the High Plains included the Jicarilla Apache, the Comanche and sometimes the Kiowa. Oliver Loving died as a result of an attack by a band of Comanche.

And because Spain had already been a presence for so long in New Mexico (converting people to Catholicism, doing business with tribal communities, and marrying Indian families), Hispanic people in New Mexico would often be translators between anglos and people from local tribes.



Parts 3 and 4 reference archery, sand painting and “sitting lotus,” which was once referred to as “sitting Indian style” by early settlers and school kids. The term is now considered reductive.

Many people have already made the connection between Western American Indian culture and Eastern Asian culture, as I do in this book. And some have proposed that Indians are related to Asian people based on the [Bering Land Bridge Theory](#). This is a controversial theory, however, and many Native Americans believe it is only [a myth](#).

So comparing Eastern culture and Western culture is a thorny practice, but still comparisons between people from all over the world can be satisfying and feel unifying. It was hard to resist the temptation to compare Eugen Herrigel’s *Zen in the Art of Archery* with the setting of New Mexico and the [expertise of the bow and arrow found here](#). Another temptation was to compare the transitory rituals of Tibetan Buddhism’s [sand mandala ceremonies](#) with the Diné (or Navajo) healing ceremonies of [dry painting](#).



There are many differences. There are also similarities.

Cockleburs in the boot is a reference to the Catholic practice of [Mortification](#) and walking with a pebble in your shoe.



“Types of Prairie Grass” refers to the borderless, flat expanses of territory that drove some settlers to madness. The U.S. prairies are often described as the lungs of the continent. The [shortgrass prairie](#) is found in the high plains whereas [taller grasses](#) grows in Midwestern states.

“Light out for the territories” references the last line of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain, where Huck itches to become a pioneer:

"But I reckon I got to light out for the territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me, and I can't stand it. I been there before."

Many of the western states were classified as territories before they became official U.S. states and they had territorial governments, similar to Puerto Rico today.

A [haboob](#) is a dust storm. Big ones occurred frequently in the corners of Texas, Oklahoma, Colorado and New Mexico during the Dust Bowl era of the 1930s. Smaller haboobs are called dust devils. Recently I heard this joke from a relative: What are two haboobs that occur in the same place at the same time?*



“Fishhook in the jaw” refers to the prehistoric Western Interior Seaway described in Section 2 of this guide. Imprints of skeletal remains of sea animals are sometimes found in area rocks.

“Coyote’s Fourth Story” refers to mending fences, a term used to describe [fixing damaged relationships](#) but also something cowboys and ranch hands spend a lot of time doing around cow pastures. The poem also references the [mythological Indigenous character “Coyote,”](#) often characterized as a trickster, boundary crosser or spirit guide in Indian stories.

Question

How is the Coyote character Silas meets described differently from the mythological American Indian archetype?

The poem “Pistols, Bullets & the Raw Gut” is a poem about gunslingers, guns and karma and is loosely based on the Colorado town of Trinidad, where cattle trails might have passed through.

*haboobies

The term wet route refers to the Santa Fe Trail route passing through Raton Pass from Colorado near Trinidad (see section 2 of this guide with a map of the Santa Fe Trail).

The lost cities of gold refers to the [mythical Cibola](#) or the Seven Cities of Gold that supposedly existed in America. This is what [Spanish explorer Coronado went looking for in 1540](#).

In 1776, the river running along the town of Trinidad was named El Rio de las Animas Perdidas or the River of Lost Souls after [a regiment of Spanish explorers went missing](#) nearby.

[Piñon trees](#) (a variation on a pine tree) is common in northern New Mexico, especially at higher elevations.

Chuck-a-luck is [a dice game](#).

Various guns of the west are named:

- [Winchester](#)
- [Peacemaker](#) or the Colt single-action six-shooter
- [Colt Paterson](#) revolver
- [Walker](#) or Colt Walker
- [Colt Dragoon](#) revolver



Many gun enthusiasts describe the smell of gunpowder as sour. I myself have fired guns and I cannot think of any adjective to describe the smell they produce. I guess it smells to me like a smokey version of hot metal.

Question

What has your hero done? What might you need to face someday?

The poem “Littleneck Clams” describes 1800s train food. You can read more about [Dining Cars during the Golden Age of Railroading](#). Pullman refers to the maker of train cars and a style of luxurious passenger train car.

[Chokecherry](#) is a western cherry tree fruit. See some [Chokecherry recipes](#).
(picture from garndenerdy)



“First aid” covers some of the literal wounds you might suffer on a cattle drive, including fevers and contagious diseases, skin injuries and burns, poisonous bites from snakes and bugs, gunshots, broken bones, insanity and eye injuries.

“The Art of Drinking Whiskey” mentions the arrival of railroads in New Mexico, which occurred in 1879 with the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe coming down from Raton and heading toward Santa Fe.

The poem also mentions [adobes](#) and portals. Although adobe is associated with New Mexico pueblo villages, the Spanish brought this architecture to New Mexico, a style picked up from Muslim influences in Spain.

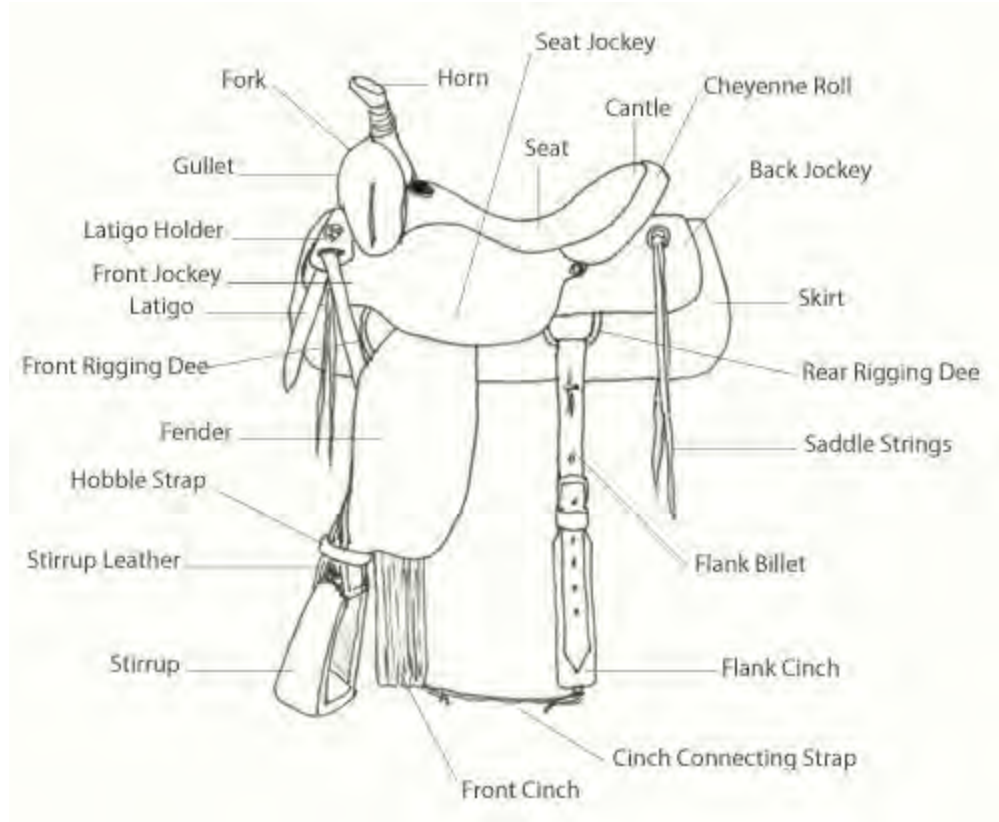
[Portals](#) (accent on the second syllable) are porches attached to adobe buildings. When anglos arrived in New Mexico, they modified existing adobes with Victorian embellishments like window trim and added covered patios or porches.



One of the oldest buildings in Santa Fe, the Palace of the Governors, with its added portal.

[More about New Mexico architecture.](#)

The poem “Comfort of a Good Saddle” refers to the parts of a horse saddle. Some saddle undersides are lined with lambswool or a soft wool used as a saddle pad or skirt. This protects the horse from the leather of the saddle. The diagram below shows the seat, horn, and fenders. The satchels are optional bags that hang to the sides. Silver [conchos](#) are still used as saddle embellishments.



The poem “Memorizing Fables” closes section three. [Antelope](#) are mentioned and are plentiful on the high plains. They are officially known as pronghorn. We still call them antelope for the same reason we call the American Bison a buffalo, because we’re stubborn and full of myths.



The pronghorn is the only surviving Pleistocene or Ice Age animal. But for some reason they can’t jump barbed wire fences and you might catch an antelope trying to wedge underneath a fence very ungracefully.

The poem also mentions the [volcanic caps](#). New Mexico has more volcanoes than any other state outside of Hawaii. The volcanoes in this poem refer to the Raton-Clayton Volcanic Field, a very large field as they go. You can drive up to [Capulin volcano](#) and walk the crater and the rim.

Zen Lessons

Part 2 begins with a quote from the Tao Te Ching: “Thirty spokes on hub but it’s the emptiness that makes the wheel work.” I can’t help but think of a wagon wheel when I read that quote. ([hansenwheel.com](#))



Emptiness is always a scary concept for most people. Nothingness, the void. You fear you will cease to exist. Cease to be you. But what does emptiness have in it for you? [What do Buddhists Mean When They Talk About Emptiness?](#)

There are two quotes from *Zen and the Art of Falling in Love* that led to my making the connection between the stories of New Mexico and Zen. The first quote led to the creation of the archery lesson in the poem “Indian Signals,”

“Time is an arrow”
Zen saying.

The other quote ties the whole book together:

“The perfect ruby we have lost,
Some say it is to the East of us,
Others to the West.”
Kabir

In “Coyote’s Third Story” a struggle of frames is referenced. [Framing](#) is the way you make sense of your reality. There are small frames and large frames. Sometimes you realize you’ve been stuck in a small frame and have not been able to see “the bigger picture” or the bigger frame. You reframe. The transition between the small frame and the larger frame can be a struggle.

“Types of Prairie Grass” deals with the transient borders between all things and [your connected place in the whole](#).

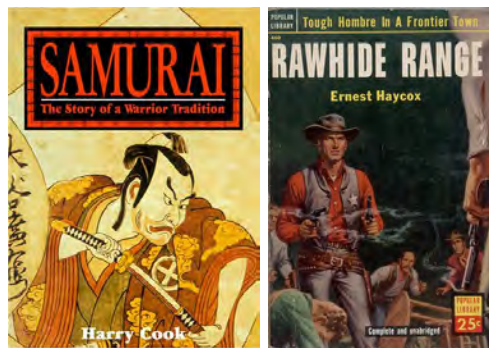
“I seem, like everything else, to be a center, a sort of vortex, at which the whole energy of the universe realizes itself. Each one of us, not only human beings but every leaf, every weed, exists in the way it does, only because everything else around it does. The individual and the universe are inseparable.”

Alan Watts

The poem also deals with learning to value what nature offers.

“Hundreds of flowers. Spring comes.
For whom do they bloom?
Zenrin Lewis (from *Zen and the Art of Falling in Love*)

The Samurai and the Gunfighter are compared in “Pistols, Bullets & the Raw Gut.” Both are the subject of pulp fiction and machismo mythology.



The poem also talks about conflict, violence and hero worship. How do these belief systems help and harm you?

[Why Did the Samurai Prefer Zen Buddhism?](#)
[Thich Nhat Hanh's advice for Dealing with Conflict.](#)

Question

What about Wild West violence is romantic? Is non-violence antithetical to an American ethos?

“First Aid” refers to both physical and spiritual healing, holy books, mantras, baptisms and other ritualistic aids. Read about [13 Yoga Mantras to Memorize](#).

“The Art of Drinking Whiskey” refers to [Japanese tea drinking ceremonies](#). Particular equipment is used and a ceremony is performed. There is a Zen bow and a cowboy tip of the cowboy hat, a kind of bow when you think about it.

In “The Comfort of a Good Saddle,” Silas is told, “Don’t look for illumination with a lighted lantern” which is a warning to recognize what you already have before you waste your time looking for it.

Question

Are you trying to be a pioneer to a place you’ve already been?



How to Visit

By Car

These directions to Capulin cover 114 miles, approximately 10 of them on dirt roads. It’ll take you at least 2 hours to drive.

From Mosquero, return back on Highway 39 northwest to the town of Roy. Roy was founded near the turn of the century to support a coal-hauling railroad route from the small town of Dawson to Tucumcari. [New Mexico Magazine recently covered the goings-on in the area](#). Also, check out Max Evans' picture book, *Hi Lo Country, Under the One-eyed Sky*, for great pictures of the scenery there.



As you drive north up 39 you'll pass through the Kiowa grasslands. When you get to Highway 56/412 take a left. This is a detour for 20 minutes over to the town of Springer, where you need to stop to view the Melvin Mills Mansion. At Summit Avenue, turn left. Then at First street turn right. The mansion is at the end of the street.

The Mills Mansion is a wonder of territorial architecture, a synthesis of multiple styles that somehow come together: an iron-crested Mansard-roof, a two-story territorial-style portal with Queen Anne touches, a house described as one of the "happier examples of a house constructed principally of adobe but whose design was primarily inspired by Anglo-American influences" (*Hacienda to Bungalow, Northern NM Houses, 1850-1912* by Angesa Lufkin Reeve).

Remember Melvin Mills was our nefarious lawyer. He once defended a serial killer named Kennedy in Elizabethtown, possibly tampered with Kennedy's jury, and vigilantes eventually killed his client. Mills used his legislative powers for revenge legislation and furthered underhanded schemes cooked up by the [Santa Fe Ring](#). Mills supported foreign corporate interests against local miners and was almost lynched before being rescued by the Cavalry. He might also have been involved in sex trafficking. At the end of his life, Mills owned a massive fruit empire which was wiped out in by karmic flood in 1904. His town namesake has since disappeared but the fruit orchard canyon still bears his name.



[New Mexico Magazine did a story about his life and Springer house](#). Here's a [New Mexico True video about the house](#). And here's [another video about the house](#).

From the building you could once see wagon trains coming by on the Santa Fe Trail, which passes between Springer and the ghost town of Abbott.



While you're in Springer, stop and visit a very good Santa Fe Trail museum there. Go back to 4th Street and go west (left) to Maxwell. Turn north (right) and go to #614 almost to 7th Street. Inside is a replica of the Dorsey Mansion, another landmark of New Mexico Territory, built by the corrupt carpetbagger from Arkansas, [Senator Stephen Dorsey](#).

Return back down Maxwell and turn east (left) on 4th street or Highway 56/412.

Have time?

If you have time, go east on 56/412 all the way to the town of Clayton and stop by the historic Elkland Hotel & Saloon. You can also drive out to Clayton Lake to see real dinosaur tracks left when the Clayton area was the coastline of the ancient Western Interior Seaway.

Not far from Springer, but before you get to Gladstone, turn North up 193 toward Farley. Make sure your cell phone has juice. Only the first ten miles of the road is paved. Thirty miles afterwards is a dirt road. The last 10-15 miles is paved again.

To Do

When you hit a patch of washboard dirt road, sing.

Turn off to see Point of Rocks on the Santa Fe Trail (look for signs). This was the site of a very violent [Indian attack in 1859 by the Jicarilla Apache against the White family](#), who were traveling down the dry branch of the Santa Fe Trail. Kit Carson was in the failed rescue party.

Charles Goodnight talked about passing Palo Blanco, which is both a nearby creek and a small mountain in the area.

Follow 193 as it winds around. It's very beautiful through here.

You can get to [Dorsey Mansion](#) this way but public tours are no longer available. The [show Scariest Places on Earth \(with Linda Blair\) visits the mansion](#).

At the junction with 64/87, go east (right) toward Capulin. Once you reach the town of Capulin, turn north (left) on 325 to the [site of the Capulin Volcano](#). You can drive up to the rim and walk down into the dormant crater at the top.

Things to Look for and Meditate On

When you drive up to the top of the mesa where the towns of Mosquero and Roy sit, you'll notice the junipers disappear and you see only flat grassland.

Consider what it means to travel through places that are off the beaten path. How does the landscape look? Through Mosquero and Roy you might see antelope, cows and big birds. Keep an eye out for volcanoes in the distance.

Dirt roads require patience. Enjoy them. Also keep an eye out for territorial-style hodge podge architecture.

Restaurants, Motels and Camping

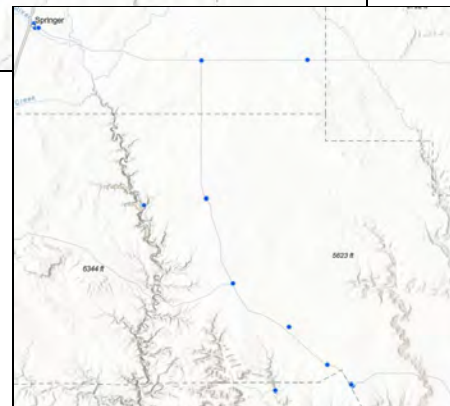
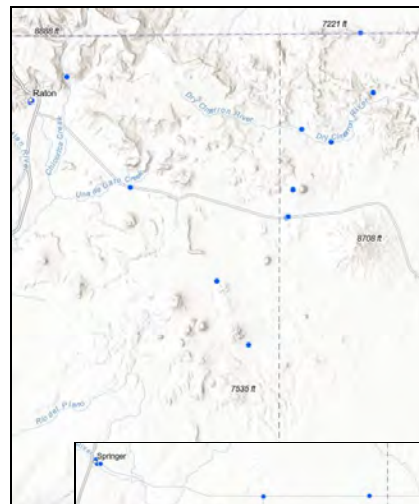
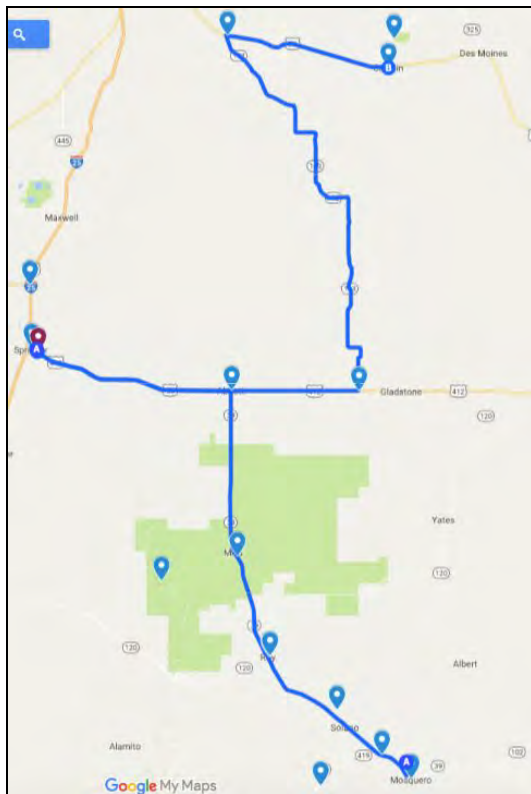
Springer Motels & Restaurants ([Trip Advisor](#))

Clayton Motels & Restaurants ([Trip Advisor](#))

Clayton Lake State Park camping [website](#)

Maps and Photos

Mosquero to Capulin

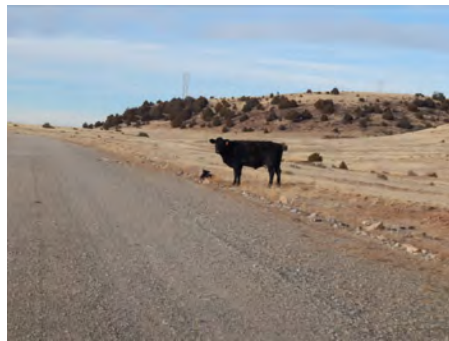


[Google map](#) that you can drive along with. This map has layers you can click on and off: (1) points of Interest, (2) the Goodnight-Loving Trails and (3) the driving trail.

[Topographical map](#) that you can track elevation with.



Roy to Abbott, ruin of a homestead (volcano in the distance)



On the way to Capulin



Capulin (Wikipedia)

5. Capulin to Pueblo: The Art of Bowling

Cowboy Lessons



Photo: National Endowment for the Humanities

“Coyote’s Fifth Story” refers to [American Dust Bowl history](#) which involved crippling drought, unsustainable farming practices and the blowing away of literally millions of tons of topsoil in large and lethal dust storms during the 1930s, primarily at the intersection of Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas and New Mexico.

The poem “Walking” takes Silas on a very interior journey of hardship and walking meditation.

“Attentively, watch your step.”

Torei Zenji (from *Zen and the Art of Falling in Love*)

Here the meditation of Zen and the realities of the southwest landscape come together with a warning about false epiphanies and snakes.

Thirst was a problem when traveling through New Mexico, a state lacking in much running water. Some cowboys would try to suck on a bullet to relieve their dry mouths. Thirst or a “heat haze” could also cause visual delusions or the sight of [mirages](#). Silas sees mirages and in part three falls into a surreal dream-state full of cowboy sayings, quotes of the day and euphemisms

for death. The [Jornada del Muerto](#) (or Journey of Death) is actually an area in southern New Mexico, a trail from Las Cruces to Socorro. The name was given to the barren stretch by [Spanish conquistadors traveling through New Mexico](#) in the 1500s.

The poem also references Carved Man of the Mountain furniture. The picture to the right is an example.

[Locoweed](#), or crazyweed, is a weed harmful to cows. At high altitudes, the plant can even cause heart failure.

The poem also refers to following a path that doesn't exist.

“Travelers,
There is no path,
Paths are made by walking.”

Antonio Machado (from *Zen and the Art of Falling in Love*)



The poem “Substitutes in the Case of Necessity” uses suggestions from historical trail guides.

Question

What do these substitute suggestions ask of you?

The poem “Dealing with Quicksand” also provides actual directions if you ever find yourself caught in a real patch of quicksand which tends to be more swampy than sandy. [Movies have given us very dramatic moments](#) of actors thrashing in the horrors of quicksand.



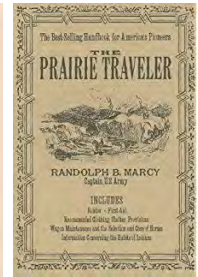
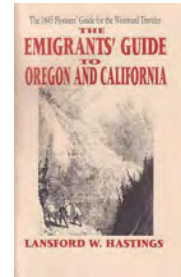
The poem “The Hastings Cutoff” was based on “Bigfoot, The Donner Party & My Arrest,” from an episode of the one-man, Off-Broadway show, *A Series of Comedic Lectures by John Lehr*, written by John Lehr and John McCray. Their telling of the story of the Donner Party focuses on the pride and stubbornness of the participants and their sustained refusal to accept defeat before it literally eats them alive. Lots of Zen lessons here.

This telling reminds me of [The Drowning Man story](#) where a man sits on a rooftop in a flood and refuses all rescue because he has faith he will be saved by God instead. You can be your own worst enemy and that's a bit depressing.

“You can never see anything worse than yourself.”

Eshin (from *Zen and the Art of Falling in Love*)

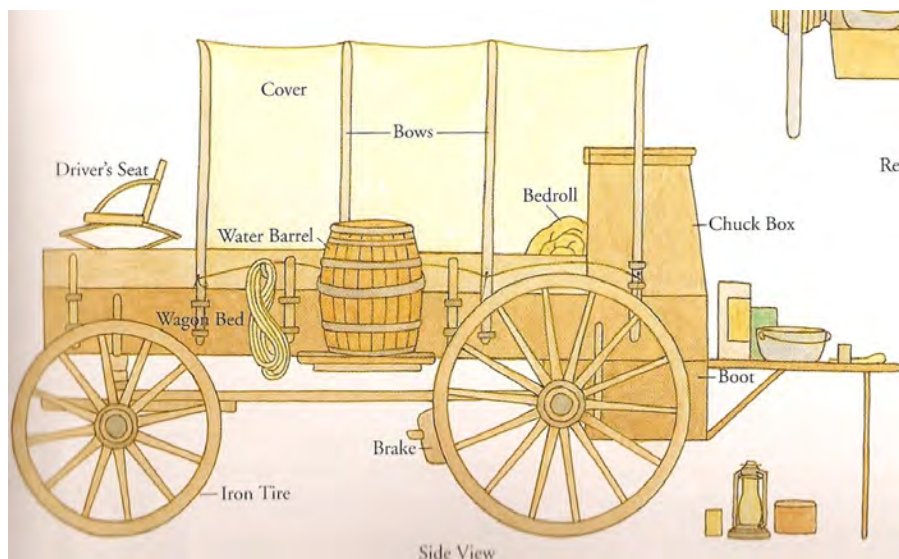
The story of the Donner Party is also the story of bad gurus, the story of a group of people bamboozled by one man's self-promotion. This man was Lansford Hastings and in 1845 he wrote a book called *The Emigrants' Guide to Oregon and California*, commonly referred to as The Hastings Guide. It was mostly bunk and wannabe-pioneers died trying to follow it. So Army Captain Randolph B. Marcy wrote a correction in 1859 called *The Prairie Traveler*. That later book influenced the structure and content of *Cowboy Meditation Primer*.



“The Year You Borrow” refers to a pueblo dance. All year round, New Mexico pueblos host ceremonial and celebratory dances. Some events are open to visitors.

“The Year You Borrow” also refers to Capulin Volcano.

“Breaking Camp” offers more detail about the physical space of a chuck wagon and items within including the chuck box cabinets and boot, the dutch oven, sourdough keg or barrel, [epsom salts](#), [quinine](#), and [blue vitriol](#).



“Walking the Cow” again draws the comparison between brahman cattle and Hindu holy men.

“Arguing with the Road” mentions the Capulin meadow or the meadow south of Capulin volcano and refers to the shrinking towns of Mosquero, Solano, Roy, Mills and Springer. Of these towns, only Mills has completely disappeared without a trace. [New Mexico is actually full of fully-abandoned ghost towns](#); a few, like Madrid or Chloride, have come back to life.



The poem more specifically refers to the town of Folsom north of Capulin volcano, the cabin town “near the low dips of floods.” The flood refers to the [flood of August 1908](#) when telephone operator Sally Rooke died at her switchboard trying to save the lives of everyone else in the town. This is also the namesake town of [Folsom Man](#). In 1893 an African American cowboy named George McJunkin was working on a nearby ranch and discovered the bones of a bison and some stone spear points. In 1926 archeologists excavated the site and found 23 extinct bison who lived over 10,000 years ago.

Folsom was also the site of train robberies and a cave hideout used by train robber [Black Jack Ketcham](#).

Zen Lessons

The section opens with the quote claiming if I’d have walked, I would not have fallen off my horse. I love that quote. It’s about making choices and the consequences of every choice, looking back and longing for the alternative choice, maybe the less complicated choice.

Question

What advice does this quote have for Silas?

“Coyote’s Fifth Story” refers to the idea that the [obstacle is the way](#), the work is the destination. The point isn’t to get past the obstacle. The obstacle is the point. Constant arriving, similarly, means there is no one point of enlightenment or destination. It is a process that is always happening for you.

The [moon](#) is a Zen Buddhist symbol for enlightenment.

The poem “Walking” is a working meditation for Silas, specifically a walking meditation and also refers to the advice in *Zen and the Art of Falling in Love* by Brenda Shoshanna. She quotes a Zen master who greets students coming into the Zendo by saying, “Pay attention to the bottom of your feet...your feet are precious.” Shoshanna goes on to explain the marvels that are our feet and how they help us attain balance and understanding in the world.

(Pixebay.com)



Washing feet is also a ritual in both [Buddhist and Christian practice](#).

“Walking” is also about letting go of the struggle to have control: should you take the reins or should you let them go? Silas also encounters koans along his journey, mysterious puzzles to solve or get tangled in.

Question

Is control a crutch for you? Why do you need it?

The poem “Substitutes in the Case of Necessity” is about making constant judgements and accepting substitutes. We are trained by hundreds of competition television programs to perfect our tastes and judgements. It’s great fun, but not very healthy. It leads us to feel dissatisfied with most everything and we are preoccupied with judging, which alienates us from other people and deprives us of worthy experiences incorrectly deemed unworthy of having.

“To separate what we like from what we dislike
Is the disease of mind.”

Sosan Ganchi Zenji (from *Zen and the Art of Falling in Love*)

“Onions,” refers to the one ingredient every recipe might need or the one ingredient every relationship might need, something fundamental, and about how cooking is, as some say, love made visible.

“To care for things makes the whole world come to life.”

Uchiyama Roshi (from *Zen and the Art of Falling in Love*)

“Dealing with Quicksand” is a good example of how struggling can make the situation worse for you. Again, you are your own worst enemy. “You are the sinkening.” There are ways to save yourself, literal instructions, that do not include thrashing around and screaming.



“The Hastings Cutoff” is a similar example of how bullheaded stubbornness can harm you in the goal you seek to attain. Sometimes, things do not work out for very good reasons. There may be danger or more suffering ahead. The poem also includes more Buddhist arithmetic. It’s also a good cautionary tale about following fake gurus.

Take the [False Guru Test](#).

“The Year You Borrow” deals again with false epiphanies and letting go of hurts from the past. And how letting go and understanding do not suddenly happen to you. You work on them every day. And every day that you can experience struggle is also a day you can experience enlightenment and joy.

“Breaking Camp” is about organizing your environment and giving everything its place. You can clear your mind by clearing your space.

There are multiple work meditations offered in “Work Meditations.” You can untie knots and tie them back up. You can sweep. You can clean pots. You can pack and unpack.

Read how [washing dishes can help](#) unload an overworked mind.

The endless knot is also [a Buddhist symbol](#).

“Walking the Cow” is another invitation not to judge those who are on different paths.



“Arguing with the Road” is about change and how it can leave you feeling abandoned and uncertain, and how change affects entire communities. [Wikihow shows you how to accept change](#).

Question

What fights should you let go of? How would the world seem if nothing ever changed?

How to Visit

By Car

This route covers 200 miles and will take you approximately 3.5 hours straight through if you take the Emery Gap route. Charles Goodnight mentions both Folsom and the Cimarron River. The Goodnight Loving Trail allegedly passed Mount Capulin from the east side. You can keep going east on 87 until you come to the town of Des Moines. Take 325 north from there to see the valleys and views the trail riders would have seen.

Or you can take 325 from Mount Capulin on the west side to the town of Folsom. From this side you get a better view of the volcanic fields.

Look around the town. There's a [small museum](#) there, not always open. Wild turkeys have been known to pass through. Picnic at [Folsom Falls](#) if you can find them. At Folsom take 456 North to 551 through the Emery Gap, a good road to pass into Colorado.

Alternatively, you can follow Charles Goodnight through Trinchera Pass by heading west on 72 and going north on A-35. But that road is often impassable when wet.

After you pass through the Emery Gap, New Mexico 551 becomes the high, flat plains of Colorado 389. Continue north to 160 and go east (right) until you get to 109. Then go north (left) to the town of La Junta. Go northeast on 194 to [Bent's Old Fort](#), a trading fort on the Santa Fe Trail. Be prepared to spend a few hours at the fort and don't miss the hidden gift shop.

Take 194 west back through La Junta from there take Highway 50 west to Pueblo, Colorado.

Things to Look for and Meditate On

Look for basalt rock formations past Folsom. Notice how the green landscape suddenly becomes flat and yellow with big open valleys. In parts you'll see more junipers and hills and in other parts you'll see cholla and cattle ranches. We saw a lot of tarantulas crawling on highway 160. Notice how the air feels and smells. As you cross over from New Mexico into Colorado, does the landscape change? How porous is the borderline?

Restaurants and Motels

Raton ([Trip Advisor](#))

La Junta ([Trip Advisor](#))

Pueblo ([Trip Advisor](#))

If you stay in Pueblo or La Junta, find a Mexican restaurant and try the distinctive Colorado red sauce which is very different from New Mexican red sauce. Don't miss the riverwalk in Pueblo.

Camping

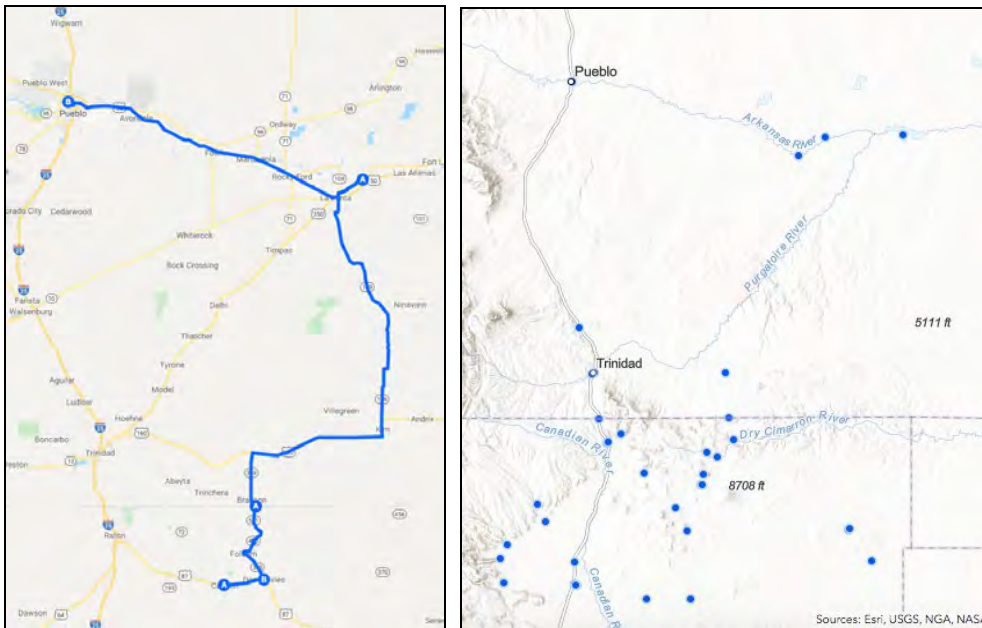
Sugarite Canyon State Park [website](#)

John Martin State Park [website](#)

Lake Pueblo State Park [website](#)

Maps and Photos

Capulin to Pueblo



[Google map](#) that you can drive along with. This map has layers you can click on and off: (1) points of Interest, (2) the Goodnight-Loving Trails and (3) the driving trail.

[Topographical map](#) that you can track elevation with.



East side of Mount Capulin



Folsom, New Mexico



Tollgate Canyon



Toward Truchas Gap

6. Pueblo to Trinidad: The Art of Suffering

Cowboy Lessons

The poem “Kneading” refers to high-altitude baking. It’s [a thing](#).

“Coyote’s Last Story” refers to how old western buildings tend to disappear over time when they’re left abandoned. There are various ways they do this: they melt into the ground (if they’re made of adobe), they slowly sink and crumble into the ground (if they’re made of stone), or they shred away in the wind (if they’re made of wood). Or some kind of combination of those.

Visit some [New Mexico ghost towns](#) or look at some [pictures](#).



The poem also refers to potsherds or [pottery sherds](#), what archaeologists call prehistoric shards of broken pottery.

In “Burning the Wagon,” the idea is proposed that the best cowboys follow the best chuckwagon cooks. This is allegedly true; but you can [learn to be a chuckwagon chef yourself](#) to find out if it’s really true.

“Descending Mountains” refers to [the Raton pass](#), the pass through the Sangre de Cristo (Blood of Christ) Mountains, part of the Rocky Mountain system in Northern New Mexico. The pass was a major toll road through the Wet Route (also known as the Mountain Route) of the Sante Fe Trail and later became the access pass for the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad.

To Do

Eat some biscuits and gravy outside. If you're vegetarian, eat some beans and biscuits instead. But get the wind in there somewhere.

Zen Lessons

This section opens with a quote from *The Prairie Traveler*, "The life of wilderness is an art."

Question

What is artful about wilderness? How could this be a Zen quote as much as a cowboy quote?

"Weather Forecasting" refers to accepting change. Forecasting also brings up the problem of all the pleasure we get from forecasting what will happen in the future and the suffering that results when we are eventually required to adjust to the reality of what really happens. Forecasts can be really helpful, until they're not. It helps us to be able to notice when they're helpful and when they're not.

In the poem "Kneading," we are reminded of the word "needing" and how we can be guided by our needs and by being afraid of needing. Needing is also part of existing as a human being in a holistic system. And yet constant needing or wanting can lead to suffering.



Question

Is Silas thinking about the future in this poem? Is this wishful thinking? Or do he and his girl eventually make up and he's describing a present situation as he looks back on his trip?

"Coyote's Last Story" again refers to [the moon, the Buddhist symbol](#) for enlightenment. Rowing can be read as another working meditation.

The first poem of the book, "Vessel," and "Coyote's Last Story" both refer to footprints which are the physical markings of a journey. They also refer to [Buddha's Footprint](#) and following a spiritual path.



To Do

Make a bare footprint in the New Mexico or Colorado dirt.

"Burning the Wagon" describes Coyote's way of grieving and moving on. It also depicts a way for the cowboys to keep walking while hungry.



“Advantages of Alternate Routes” talks about the futility of maps, the flexibility to change course, and having the willingness to change and exist with uncertainty.

“I don’t know ask the horse” is a quote from [a Buddhist story](#).

“Descending Mountains” is about dealing with obstacles and viewing them ritualistically as part of your spiritual practice.

“The Importance of Coffee at Dawn” is also about the importance of friendships and experiencing obstacles together.



“Boarding” is about the next phase of your beginner’s mind.

Questions

When will you next be needing to board a train?

Going back to the first quote in the book from *The Prairie Traveler*, who is the best guide: a guru, yourself or something else?

How to Visit

By Car

This is a short 84 mile trip that will take you a little over an hour to travel.

From Pueblo go south on Interstate 25 to Trinidad.

North of town you can stop at [the Ludlow Massacre Site](#), a forgotten but important part of American history.

Stop in Trinidad and visit the downtown area and walk over to the River of Lost Souls. This is the town featured in the poem “Pistols, Bullets & the Raw Gut.”

Things to Look for and Meditate On

Notice where the flat plains start to rise and meet the Rocky Mountains. Notice where the transition changes gradually and where it changes abruptly.

Restaurants & Motels

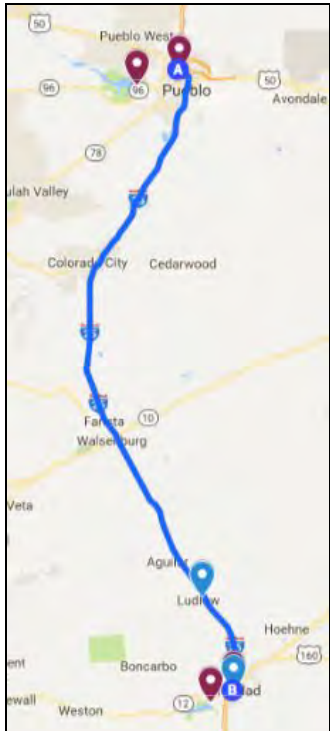
Trinidad ([Trip Advisor](#))

Camping

Trinidad State Park [website](#)

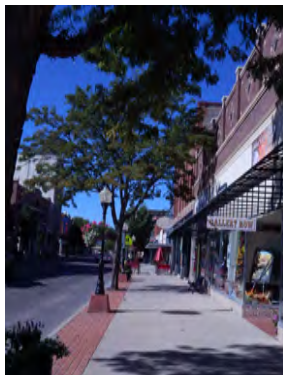
Maps and Photos

Pueblo to Trinidad



[Google map](#) that you can drive along with. This map has layers you can click on and off: (1) points of Interest, (2) the Goodnight-Loving Trails and (3) the driving trail.

[Topographical map](#) that you can track elevation with.



Trinidad today

7. Getting Back Home

That's the end of the trail for Silas but you can keep going by taking the Santa Fe Trail Mountain Route all the way back to Albuquerque.

How to Visit

By Car

You could actually spend weeks driving around northern New Mexico itself, but if you drive straight back to Albuquerque, it will take you 3.5 hours (251 miles). Here are other side trips you could take if you have time.

Raton

Go South on Interstate 25 and stop in Raton to visit the [Raton Museum](#).

Cimarron & Dawson

You can veer west on Highway 58 to visit the Wild West town of Cimarron and spend the night at the historic (and allegedly haunted) [St. James Hotel](#). Read up on all of the gunfights in the St. James including those perpetrated by famous outlaw [Clay Allison](#). His bullet holes are still up in the ceiling. The hotel hallway also has a picture of our very own Melvin Mills hanging on the wall. The hotel doesn't take dogs. But they do take ghost hunters. (Where is the justice?)



While you're in town, visit the [Aztec Mill Museum](#), eat some great ice cream at the Cimarron Art Gallery Soda Fountain and wander around Lucien Maxwell's sleepy town. Don't forget to walk through the very wabi sabi graveyard of Cimarron.

This town grew around Lucien Maxwell's house which was built in 1858. Maxwell was also connected tangentially to Billy the Kid which is why they're buried together down south at Fort Sumner (where we started). Maxwell owned [the largest Spanish land grant in the United States](#) which he sold to a British/Dutch company in 1870. This started the [Colfax County War](#) between the Baldy Mountain gold miners who were squatting there and the new owners. Maxwell had been letting them stay so he could get rich selling them dry goods.

Chef [Henri Lambert started the St. James in 1872](#). He was a French immigrant who was allegedly a cook for both Ulysses Grant and President Lincoln before coming down with gold fever and moving west.

Melvin Mills also figures here too. He had a law office in Cimarron and he supported the British/Dutch Company against the miners. He also worked to further the causes of the Santa Fe Ring and was almost lynched during the Colfax County War. At that time, it appeared he might have paid off a hitman to kill a popular Methodist preacher who was speaking out in support of the miners.

From Cimarron, if you travel northwest on 64 you will come to the [ghost town and cemetery of Dawson](#). Look for a sign near Cold Beer, New Mexico.

Dawson was a coal mining town from around 1906 to 1950. The Phelps Dodge Corporation started a dirty coal mine operation here. Roy, New Mexico, was supported by a coal train line, the Dawson railway spur of the Southern Pacific Railroad, running coal trains (and a passenger train called the Polly) from Dawson to Tucumcari. Dawson was also the site of three of the largest and deadliest coal accidents in U.S. history and its cemetery is soberingly big, although every trace of the once-booming town is now gone even from satellite images. The buildings were stripped when the coal mine closed and parts were taken to other towns like Roy. My Aunt Edna's house in Roy was actually carted over from Dawson.



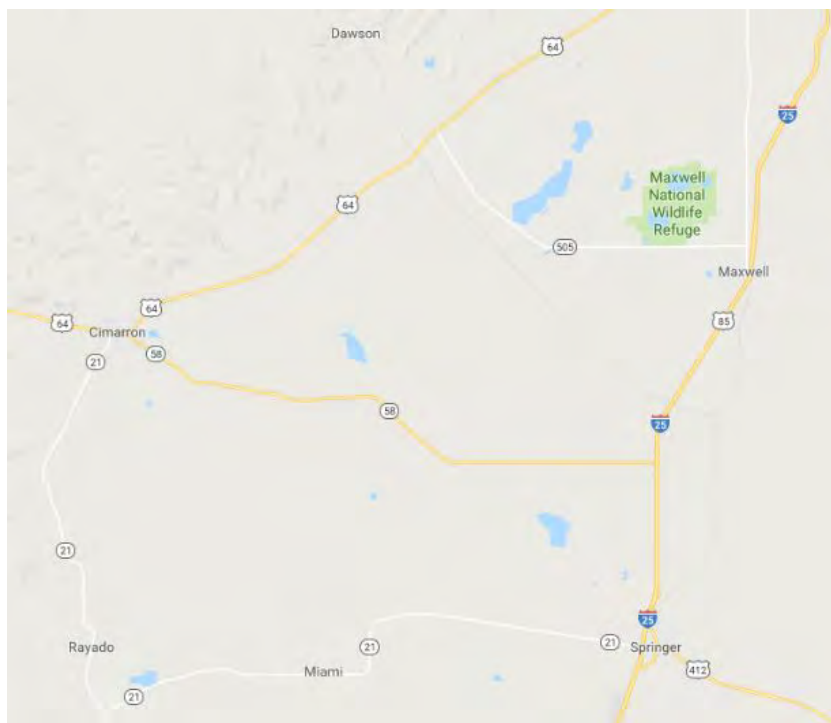
Philmont & Rayado

From Cimarron, you can go south on 21 to visit the famous [Philmont Boy Scout Ranch](#). Almost every Boy Scout has heard of Philmont. You can visit the Philmont house and museum and then continue to [Rayado](#) on the Santa Fe Trail. Rayado is another town founded by Lucien Maxwell. Maxwell convinced Kit Carson to retire there in his late 30s. You can tour [a Kit Carson museum there](#).



Maps

Cimarron/Dawson/Philmont/Rayado



The Enchanted Circle (Elizabethtown, Red River, Eagle Nest and Taos)

The Colfax County miners settled around Cimarron but also in the once-bustling village of Elizabethtown. Remember Melvin Mills? His first entry into New Mexico was to this gold mining metropolis. He defended the area's first serial killer, a story which was retold in Willa Cather's novel, *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. Melvin was accused of jury tampering and his client was eventually lynched by an angry mob led by none other than famous outlaw Clay Allison. Elizabethtown is another example of a once-vibrant community that has since disappeared almost completely.

From Interstate 25, go east on 58 toward the 38-522-64 highway loop. You could spend a whole weekend here fishing and eating well. If you stop in Taos, be sure to visit [Taos Pueblo](#), [Ranchos de Taos church](#) (one of the [most painted and photographed churches](#) of the West), the [Mabel Dodge Lujan house](#), (once owned by Dennis Hopper, now a historic hotel), the [Rio Grande Gorge](#) and the [Earthships](#). There's good fishing in [Red River](#), good skiing in Red River, [Angel Fire](#) and Taos, and good food, skiing and art hunting in Taos.





Earthships at night

Maps

Eagle Nest/Angel Fire/Taos/Red River/Elizabethtown



Wagon Mound, Fort Union, Watrous, Las Vegas, Pecos & Santa Fe

Continue to head south on Interstate 25. Turn west on 161 and head toward [Fort Union](#).

Fort Union was built in 1851 at the junction of the two branches of the Santa Fe Trail. The Mountain route (or Wet Route) was through the Raton Pass and its perils included ice and steep mountains. The Cimarron Cutoff (or the Dry Route) was shorter by 58 miles of waterless terrain and was more dangerous due to frequent Indian attacks by the Kiowa and Comanche. Fort Union provided Santa Fe Trail travelers protection from Indian raids.



The fort was also used to support Union troops during the Civil War, primarily against encroachments into New Mexico Territory from Texas Confederates on their way to Colorado to secure gold and silver mines there.

Farther south, the Civil War [battle at Glorieta Pass](#) occurred (see Pecos below), which drove back the Confederates, and some say helped turn the tide in the war.

Turn off Highway 25 at [Watrous](#), another Santa Fe Trail stop, to view the beautiful glen of trees and historic buildings.

Then you come to Las Vegas, New Mexico. Yes, Las Vegas, New Mexico, actually predates Las Vegas, Nevada. Many travelers coming down Interstate 25 get disoriented when they see signs for Las Vegas in New Mexico. But this town has a Wild West history that is [way more badass than Tombstone or Dodge City](#).

Stay at the lovely restored [Plaza Hotel](#) or the renovated [Castaneda Hotel](#), both owned and operated by Tina Mion and Allan Affeldt, who restored Winslow's lovely [La Posada](#) (the Spanish Revival masterpiece designed by architect Mary Colter).



The Plaza Hotel was originally owned by Byron T. Mills (no relation to Melvin) who allegedly haunts the hotel. You can visit his namesake saloon there, too.

[Scheduled tours](#) are also available for [Montezuma Castle](#), the Plaza Hotel and the Castaneda Hotel. Las Vegas also boasts a [Rough Rider Museum](#).



Good eats are found at [Johnny's Kitchen](#) (best Mexican food in New Mexico, IMHO) and at [Charlie's Spic and Span](#) (very large cream puffs).

Farther south on Interstate 25, stop to visit [Pecos Historic Park](#) to tour three locations: the Glorieta Pass battle site, the Pecos Indian ruins, and, if you visit on particular days (check the website), actress Greer Garson's house. The ruins were located on her property which became a national historic monument when she died. You can sit in the recreated kiva there and watch the movie she narrates. Buy the video and you can also hear Ricardo Montalban narrate the same in Spanish.



You can end your voyage in one of the many [swanky hotels of Santa Fe](#), another town full of Spanish, Mexican and New Mexican history. Visit the [Palace of the Governors and New Mexico History Museum](#) to get an overview of all that you've learned on this trip.

The [New Mexico Museum of Art](#) and the [Georgia O'Keeffe Museum](#) have good collections of local landscapes to give you interpretations of the land formations you've just traversed. Have a drink at the bar atop the historic [La Fonda Hotel](#) and then eat at [La Plazuela](#) or [Geronimo](#).



Georgia O'Keeffe, Black Mesa Landscape, New Mexico

[Meow Wolf](#) is also a popular destination for interactive art (but it gets crowded), and art buyers will want to walk up [Canyon Road](#) which has the highest concentration of art galleries outside of New York City. Sante Fe also has a world-renowned outdoor [Opera](#).

Sante Fe is about 60 miles north of Albuquerque on Interstate 25.

Maps

Wagon Mound, Fort Union, Watrous, Las Vegas, Pecos & Santa Fe



[Topographical map](#) that you can track elevation with.

[Google map](#) that you can drive along with. This map has layers you can click on and off: (1) points of Interest, (2) the Goodnight-Loving Trails and (3) the driving trail.

Further Study

I am far from an expert in Zen, Buddhism, Cowboyism or Nuevo Mexico. I am just an awestruck student in the middle of a journey. You could spend a long time, possibly a lifetime, learning more about these places, people and subjects.

Zen Books & Poetry

With Zen guides, you need to find a voice you like. Here are a few of the books that got me going...

One Bird, One Stone: 108 American Zen Stories by Sean Murphy (2002)

Zen and the Art of Falling in Love by Brenda Shoshanna (2003)

Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind by Shunryu Suzuki (1970)

Zen in the Art of Archery by Eugen Herrigel (1948)

The Way of Zen by Alan W. Watts (1999)

Introducing Buddha: A Graphic Guide by Jane Hope and Borin Van Loon (2014)

Zen For Beginners by Judith Blackstone and Zoran Josipovic (2007)

Nothing Is Hidden: Essays on Zen Master Dogen's Instructions for the Cook by Shohaku Okumura and Jisho Warner (2001)

Most books by Thich Nhat Hanh, but my favorite so far is *Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life* (1992)

Podcasts and videos of Pema Chodron: <https://pemachodronfoundation.org/videos/>

This Rented Body by Seido Ray Ronci (2006)

Voices by Antonio Porchia and W.S. Merwin (2003)

America Zen: A Gathering of Poets by Larry Smith and Ray McNiece (2004)

Zen Poems by Peter Harris (1999)

The Poetry of Zen by Sam Hamill and J.P. Seaton (2007)

One Hundred Frogs by Hiroaki Sato (1983)

Western (and New Mexico) Travel, History & Poetry

The Emigrants' Guide to Oregon and California (The Hastings Guide) (1845)

The Prairie Traveler by Randolph B. Marcy (1859)

Charles Goodnight: Cowman and Plainsman by J. Evetts (1936)

The Worst Hard Times by Timothy Egan (2006)

A Dictionary of New Mexico & Colorado Spanish by Ruben Cobos (2003)

High Plains of Northeastern New Mexico, A Guide to the Geology and Culture (2005)

Harvey Houses of New Mexico by Rosa Walston Latimer (2015)

Cowboy Slang by Edgar R. "Frosty" Potter (1971)

Roadside New Mexico, A Guide to Historic Markers by David Pike (2004)

Ghost Towns Alive by Linda G. Harris (2003)

The Log of a Cowboy by Andy Adams (1903)
The Chuckwagon Cookbook by Byron Price (2004)
Eating Up the Santa Fe Trail by Samuel P. Arnold (2001)
Max Evans' Hi Lo Country by Max Evans and Jan Haley (2004)
Navajo Long Walk by Joseph Bruchac and Shonto Begay (2002)
Spirit and Vision: Images of Ranchos de Taos Church by John L Kessell, Sandra D'Emilio, and Suzan Campbell (1987)
Sun and Saddle Leather, Including Grass Grown Trails and New Poems by Badger Clark (1915)
Songs of the Cattle Trail and Cow Camp by John A. Lomax (1919)
Place as Purpose: Poetry from the Western States edited by Martha Ronk and Paul Vangelisti (2002)
Cowboy Poetry Matters: From Abilene to the Mainstream: Contemporary Cowboy Writing edited by Robert McDowell (2000)
Mud Woman: Poems from the Clay by Nora Naranjo-Morse (1992)
The Life and Writing of Fray Angélico Chávez: A New Mexico Renaissance Man by Ellen McCracken (2009)
Adobe Odes by Pat Mora (2006)
Death Comes for the Archbishop by Willa Cather (1927)
New Mexico Poetry Renaissance edited by Sharon Niederman and Miriam Sagan (1994)
The Turquoise Trail: An Anthology of New Mexico Poetry edited by Henderson Alice Corbin (1928)
Songs from This Earth on Turtle's Back: Contemporary American Indian Poetry edited by Joseph Bruchac (1983)
Sante Fe and Taos, The Writer's Era (1916-1941) by Marta Weigle and Kyle Fiore (1994)
The Best Tent Camping, New Mexico by Monte R. Parr (2014)

History Online

[Charles Goodnight: Inventor of Food Trucks](#)

[Movies Filmed in New Mexico](#)

What to Eat in New Mexico

When you cross over the border into New Mexico, often the signs show two chile peppers, one red and one green. Chiles: it's a big deal. Any restaurant waiter will ask you if you prefer "red or green" sauce on top of your plate of food. Pick "christmas" and try them both. Since this book covers both Colorado and New Mexico, you can also compare Colorado's red chile sauce with New Mexico's style of sauce. They're different.

You might also want to try these local delicacies:

- Posole (hominy stew)
- Biscochitos (the state cookie)
- Pinon nuts or candies
- Calabacitas (a lovely triad of chile, squash and corn)

- Natillas (a traditional custard dessert served at some restaurants including La Plazuela in Santa Fe)
- Sopapillas (a fried, puffed bread served at every New Mexican restaurant and eaten with honey)
- [Green chile Cheeseburger](#) (very controversial who makes the best one in New Mexico)
- Stacked enchiladas with a fried egg on top (you may never eat a rolled one again)

[New Mexican Cuisine](#)

[8 New Mexico Foods We Wish Would Go National](#)

[25 Food Truths Only A New Mexican Would Understand](#)

Cowboy Recipes

[Sonofabitch Stew](#)

[Chuckwagon Stew](#)

[Campfire Biscuits](#)

[Beef Jerky](#)

[New Mexican Frijoles](#)

[Cowboy Coffee](#)

New Mexico Recipes

[Green chile stew](#)

[Posole](#)

[Huevos Rancheros](#)

[Calabacitas](#)

[New Mexican Wedding Cookies](#)

[Biscochitos](#)

Other trips you can take in New Mexico

Carlsbad Caverns, White Oaks, White Sands, the Very Large Array, Pie Town, the cliff dwellings at Gila, Puye and Bandelier, Los Alamos, Truchas, Chimayo, Jemez, Acoma, Zuni, Hatch, Galesteo, Villanueva, the Chama River Valley and Georgia O'Keeffe Country.

Origins of the Primer

This book began in the early 2000s as a set of poems about my family history in Texas, Oklahoma and New Mexico. The project veered far off course when I started to read books on Zen Buddhism and started writing poems about the intersections between the East and West.

The spirit of the cowboy is still a core of the book however and was inspired by my great-grandfather and grandfather, who were both cowboys and ranchers, among other jobs, in the early-to-mid 1900s.



My grandfather



My grandparents



My uncle, great-grandfather and father

I have relatives buried in cemeteries all over New Mexico, but mostly in Harding County. My great grandfather on my grandmother's side was an itinerant minister who founded Methodist churches in Oklahoma, Colorado and New Mexico, and founded the town of Terral, Oklahoma. He founded the Methodist church still standing in Roy.

My grandmother's father moved their family up from Santa Rosa to Roy in 1913 when he was hired as the station agent at the Roy railroad station where the trains passed transporting coal from Dawson to Tucumcari.

My grandfather's father moved to the nearby town of Solano in 1916 to start a ranching operation assembled from failed homesteads.

If you touch upon their footsteps, I hope you partake in a bit peaceful mindfulness and breathe some of the enchanted wind that blows across the high plains.

Enjoy your journey.



Trail riders

Have you made the trip?
Start or join a conversation
about the Goodnight-Loving Trail
at Freeforums:

<http://travel-the-trail.freeforums.net/>