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A Driving Tour and Brief Guide to Mora and the Santa Fe Trail *(To be used in conjunction with the Santa Fe Trail National Scenic Byway Guide)*

The Santa Fe Trail was one of commerce, conquest, military supply and travel, opening the area in 1821 to legal trade between the United States and Mexico. It was a 2-way international highway, benefitting both American and Mexican traders and merchants. It was one of the most significant features of the settling of the West and had a significant influence on the Mora Valley and the area which is now Mora County. While it traversed the breadth of Mora County from Northeast to Southwest, the biggest influence came from the presence of Fort Union in the eastern part of the County. Fort Union not only provided protection for the merchant and military wagon trains on the Santa Fe Trail, it was the central supply depot for almost all of the other forts in the Territory. As such, it created a huge demand for hay, flour, grain, and livestock that drove the area's economy for decades.

Traces of the Santa Fe Trail are plentiful in Mora County today, but now as then, the most significant part of Santa Fe Trail in Mora County is near Fort Union National Monument. Visitors to the area can, in a single day, firsthand some of the remainders of one the most significant pieces of American history and, with only a little imagination required, relive some of the Santa Fe Trail experience. This guide describes a day trip from Mora to Watrous to Ft Union to Wagon Mound and back to Mora.

- 1. Mora and the Mora Valley:** Today Mora is a small town in the heart of the Mora Valley, but in the 1800's, Mora was a prosperous town and the Mora Valley was known as the "bread basket" of New Mexico. Fort Union's demand for supplies of all types drove the Mora economy and one of the results was the building of a dozen or so mills in the area for grinding wheat to be sold for flour to Fort Union. The St. Vrain Mill in Mora is one of the few remaining buildings of that era. It was built in 1864 by Ceran St. Vrain, a prominent Santa Fe trail wagon master and trader, and later entrepreneur. It was one of the most significant sources of supplies used by Ft Union. It operated until 1922. It is on the National Register of Historic Places. The St. Vrain Mill is located on Highway 434 just a few hundred yards north of the intersection of Highways 518 and 434 in Mora. It is closed to the public but can be viewed from a short distance. The St Vrain Mill Preservation and Historical Foundation currently owns the Mill and is undertaking its restoration. More information on both the Mill and the Foundation is at www.stvrainmill.org.

Another mill near Mora is worth a visit. Even though it was built after the Santa Fe Trail was no longer in use, the Cleveland Roller Mill has an extensive photo collection tracing Mora's history back to the mid 1800's. It is located near mile marker 31 on Highway 518, a few miles

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west of Mora. It is open to the public only on weekends from Memorial Day through Labor Day, 10 AM to 3 PM. More information is at: http://www.angelfire.com/folk/roller_mill

2. Salman Ranch: A few miles east of Mora at La Cueva is the Salman Ranch. The ranch had its origins in the early 1800's and by the 1860's, the Romero family had added a grist mill, a mercantile building, and the San Rafael Mission Church. These buildings still stand and are the key elements of the La Cueva National Historic site. During the mid-1800's, as many as 60 horse and ox drawn wagons were stationed at the ranch and transported supplies to Fort Union and other outposts in the area. Website is: <http://www.salmanraspberryranch.com>

3. To Watrous: From Salman Ranch take Route 518 south about three miles to Buena Vista and turn left onto Highway 161. This stretch of road is part of the Santa Fe Trail National Scenic By-way. From mile marker 2 on to about mile marker 17 "dramatic wagon trail swales and ravines" are visible on the north side of the road. Midway between mile marker 14 and 15 an unmarked County road goes a little over a mile to the site of the settlement of Loma Parda. It earned a notorious reputation as the "entertainment center" for Fort Union troops, and admittedly others, but being an easy horseback ride from Fort Union, it owed its then prosperity to the Fort. At mile marker 19 the road passes a few hundred yards southwest of the site of Fort Barclay built where the Mountain Route crossed the Mora River. Route 161 continues through the town of Watrous and leads directly to Ft Union National Monument.

4. Ft Union: From Watrous, it is an eight mile drive to Fort Union National Monument. Plan at least two hours for your Ft. Union visit, more if you are a Santa Fe Trail buff. The area around Fort Union offers pristine, extensive displays of Santa Fe Trail ruts. Operating hours are 8 AM to 6 PM from Memorial Day through Labor Day and 8 AM through 4 PM the rest of the year. Telephone number for information is (505) 425-8025. More information is available on the National Park Service website: www.nps.gov/foun.

5. Wagon Mound: Wagon Mound is 20 miles north on I-25 and part of the Santa Fe Trail By-way. Wagon Mound's claim to fame is just that - the "mountain" that is shaped like a Conestoga wagon similar to those that travelled the Santa Fe Trail. It was a landmark seen by travelers of the high plains, especially those on the Santa Fe Trail's Cimarron Cutoff. It was a dramatic confirmation that Fort Union, and safety, was just a few miles further on. Today, Wagon Mound is no longer the thriving town it was in the 1800's, but the Santa Clara Church and the Santa Clara Cemetery at the base of the wagon mound are worth a visit.

6. Back to Mora: While the destination is Mora, the drive can take you back a hundred and fifty years and an experience of what historians call a "sense of place". From Wagon Mound, take Highway 120 to Ocate, approximately 20 miles. The Santa Fe Trail crossed this road between mile marker 25 and 26, although the trace is not as dramatic as on Route 161. For several miles leading up to the crossing point, there is literally nothing to see but high plains range land. Without the road and the fences, the landscape you are seeing is the same as travelers saw as they made their way to Santa Fe. At Ocate, turn left on Highway 442. This will take you back to La Cueva and the Salman Ranch. Going straight ahead on Highway 120 at Ocate takes you to Angel Fire, but there are several miles of unpaved road that can make it difficult for regular cars in bad weather.

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Prepared by the Mora Valley Chamber of Commerce with editing and review
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