

(Oct. 1990)

FILE COPY

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

1. NAME OF PROPERTY **The Route 66 and National Old Trails Road Historic District at La Bajada**

HISTORIC NAME: New Mexico State Highway 1, El Camion Real highway

OTHER NAME/SITE NUMBER: La Bajada Hill

2. LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER: App. 0.5 miles northeast of north terminus of New Mexico State Highway 16 (Santa Fe National Forest, partial owner)

NOT FOR PUBLICATION: N/A

CITY OR TOWN: N/A

VICINITY: La Bajada Village

STATE: New Mexico

CODE: NM

COUNTY: Santa Fe

CODE: 049

ZIP CODE: 87041

3. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official

Date

State Historic Preservation Officer

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

entered in the National Register
 See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register
 See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register

removed from the National Register

other (explain):

5. CLASSIFICATION

OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY: Public-Federal; private

CATEGORY OF PROPERTY: District

| NUMBER OF RESOURCES WITHIN PROPERTY: | CONTRIBUTING | NONCONTRIBUTING |
|---|---------------------|------------------------|
| | 4 | 0 BUILDINGS |
| | 0 | 0 SITES |
| | 2 | 0 STRUCTURES |
| | 1 | 0 OBJECTS |
| | 7 | 0 TOTAL |

NUMBER OF CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES PREVIOUSLY LISTED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER: 0

NAME OF RELATED MULTIPLE PROPERTY LISTING: *The Historic and Architectural Resources of Route 66 through New Mexico*

6. FUNCTION OR USE

HISTORIC FUNCTIONS: TRANSPORTATION: road-related (vehicular)
DOMESTIC: hotel (motel)
COMMERCE/TRADE: specialty store (service station)

CURRENT FUNCTIONS:
RECREATION AND CULTURE: outdoor recreation
DOMESTIC: multiple dwelling

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: OTHER: Southwest Vernacular

MATERIALS: FOUNDATION: STONE; CONCRETE
WALLS: STONE; STUCCO
ROOF: ASPHALT
OTHER: WOOD

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION (see continuation sheets 7-5 through 7-10).

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

APPLICABLE NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA

- A** PROPERTY IS ASSOCIATED WITH EVENTS THAT HAVE MADE A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO THE BROAD PATTERNS OF OUR HISTORY.
- B** PROPERTY IS ASSOCIATED WITH THE LIVES OF PERSONS SIGNIFICANT IN OUR PAST.
- C** PROPERTY EMBODIES THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF A TYPE, PERIOD, OR METHOD OF CONSTRUCTION OR REPRESENTS THE WORK OF A MASTER, OR POSSESSES HIGH ARTISTIC VALUE, OR REPRESENTS A SIGNIFICANT AND DISTINGUISHABLE ENTITY WHOSE COMPONENTS LACK INDIVIDUAL DISTINCTION.
- D** PROPERTY HAS YIELDED, OR IS LIKELY TO YIELD, INFORMATION IMPORTANT IN PREHISTORY OR HISTORY.

CRITERIA CONSIDERATIONS: N/A

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE: TRANSPORTATION; ENGINEERING

PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE: 1909-1931

SIGNIFICANT DATES: 1909; 1924; 1925; 1926; 1931

SIGNIFICANT PERSON: N/A

CULTURAL AFFILIATION: N/A

ARCHITECT/BUILDER: Territorial Highway Commission, builder of 1909 road; New Mexico State Highway Department, builder of 1924 highway

NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (see continuation sheets 8-11 through 8-17).

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

BIBLIOGRAPHY (see continuation sheet 9-18).

PREVIOUS DOCUMENTATION ON FILE (NPS): N/A

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

PRIMARY LOCATION OF ADDITIONAL DATA:

- State historic preservation office (*Historic Preservation Division, Office of Cultural Affairs*)
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository:

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF PROPERTY: approximately 36 acres

| UTM REFERENCES | Zone | Easting | Northing | Zone | Easting | Northing |
|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------|---------|----------|
| | 1. 13 | 392216 | 3937569 | 3. 13 | 388985 | 3935415 |
| | 2. 13 | 389716 | 3935821 | 4. 13 | 389371 | 3934684 |
| | 5. 13 | 388517 | 3934643 | 6. 13 | 386993 | 3934480 |
| | 7. 13 | 386807 | 3934693 | | | |

(see attached U.S.G.S. quad map)

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION (see continuation sheet 10-19)

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION (see continuation sheet 10-19)

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE: David Kammer, Ph.D., with assistance from HPD staff

ORGANIZATION: Consulting historian

DATE: September 2002

STREET & NUMBER: 521 Aliso Drive NE

TELEPHONE: (505) 266-0586

CITY OR TOWN: Albuquerque

STATE: NM

ZIP CODE: 87108

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

CONTINUATION SHEETS

MAPS (see attached *Tetilla Peak* 7.5-minute series U.S.G.S. quad map)

PHOTOGRAPHS (see continuation sheet Photo-20 through Photo-21)

ADDITIONAL ITEMS N/A

PROPERTY OWNER

NAME: U.S.D.A, United States Forest Service, Santa Fe National Forest

STREET & NUMBER: 1474 Rodeo Road

TELEPHONE: (505) 438-7840

CITY OR TOWN: Santa Fe

STATE: NM

ZIP CODE: 87505

NAME: Pueblo of Cochiti

STREET & NUMBER: P.O. Box 70

TELEPHONE: (505) 465-2244

CITY OR TOWN: Cochiti Pueblo

STATE: NM

ZIP CODE: 87072

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Route 66 and National Old Trails Road Historic District at La Bajada
Vicinity of La Bajada Village, Santa Fe County, New Mexico

DESCRIPTION

The Route 66 Historic and National Old Trails Road Historic District at La Bajada,¹ consists of approximately 6.0 miles of rubble and gravel roadway that comprised a U.S. 66 alignment between 1926 and 1931 and an alignment of the National Old Trails Highway and New Mexico State Highway 1 prior to the creation of the federal highway system in 1926 (see Figure 7-1). The essentially linear district lies on a northeast-southwest axis and is approximately 4.5 miles in length along the more southeasterly former U.S. 66 alignment. The additional 1.5 miles represents the earlier highway alignment that descended the same 600 ft. escarpment with a series of hairpin turns about a half mile northwest of the U.S. 66 alignment. The two roadways join about 200 ft. above the base of the escarpment, sharing the same alignment as they complete the descent to the mesa below. There the gravel road crosses the Rio Santa Fe on a timber bridge and extends approximately a half-mile to the county line at which point the historic alignment has recently been paved. In addition to the linear roadway site, the district's resources include two structures, the bridge and masonry retaining walls; four buildings, consisting of a former residence, tourist camp at the base of the escarpment; and one object consisting of a campground advertisement sign painted on the basalt wall of the upper escarpment. The district is approximately 36 acres in size and is located within the Santa Fe National Forest and Cochiti Indian Reservation. The numerous hairpin turns, cross-section template, and masonry retaining walls, and timber bridge, as well as the former tourist camp and campground advertisement retain a high degree of integrity and imbue the district with a strong feeling of early automobile travel in rural New Mexico. This feeling is enhanced by the spectacular vista of the Rio Grande Valley and the Jemez, Sandia and Sangre de Cristo Mountain ranges apparent from the roadway.

La Bajada, meaning descent in Spanish, is a notable geologic feature consisting of a black volcanic escarpment extending more than 20 miles south and east from the Rio Grande to the Galisteo Basin. The flat grasslands lining the foot of La Bajada comprise La Majada, or shepherd's camp, Mesa, while the grassland plateau above La Bajada is referred to as La Bajada Mesa with Tetilla Peak, a sharp conical formation located above the rim about three miles to the northwest, the principal landmark. The northern boundary of the district is located where the unified roadway crosses into the Santa Fe National Forest, proceeding almost two miles across La Bajada Mesa before forking (see Photo 1). There, the 1909 of New Mexico State Highway 1 (NM 1) alignment heads on a straight southwesterly line an additional half-mile to reach the rim (see Photo 2).

The 1924 alignment heads south southwesterly about two-thirds of a mile to the rim of the escarpment lining the north side of Santa Fe Canyon, or *Cañon de Las Bocas*, as the Spanish named it to denote its broad opening at the foot of La Bajada (see Photo 4). About 200 yards below the rim, an orange sign stating "Santa Fe

¹ Although the period of significance includes the development of New Mexico State Highway 1, El Camino highway, the name *The Route 66 Historic and National Old Trails Road Historic District at La Bajada* was selected to reflect how the road was commonly referred to during the period.

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Campground” and dating to the period of significance is painted on a basalt escarpment about 25 yards north of the roadway (see Photo 5). In sharp contrast to the flat grasslands above and below the 1.5-mile escarpment section of the district, the dark basalt cliffs of the upper escarpment represent the flow from volcanic vents that capped earlier sedimentary formations. This hard caprock, which in some instances has collapsed on the weaker sedimentary formations below, accounting for the basalt deposits on the lower slopes, denotes the steepest sections of the roadway.

Inclined as much as 17% on the 1909 alignment, with an average grade of 7.8%, the road’s gravel bed rests on basalt rubble fills with basalt retaining walls² marking areas of cut and fill as well as occasional hairpin turns bounded by steep dropoffs (see Photo 2). Extending above these walls a rubble curbing lines much of the roadway (see Photo 3). At turns large boulders surmount the curb. As striking as the steep dropoffs at the alignment’s hairpin turns is the solid basalt rock into which sections of the road were cut. As a result of the widespread use of cut and fill to create a shelf along the precipice for the roadway, some of the dry masonry retaining walls (contributing) reach heights of approximately 20 ft. and consist of rough ashlar coursing. Also evident are eroded ruts of earlier wagon roads dating to the military’s efforts to improve roads during the 19th century. Indicative of the efforts to improve on the earlier alignment, the 1924 realignment, which became U.S. 66 in 1926, reflects substantial reductions in grade and in the number of hairpin turns. Only the 15% grade on the relatively straight alignment as the road climbs the wall of the canyon at the top of the escarpment compares with the steepness of the earlier alignment. In addition to a straighter alignment, the average grade was reduced from 7.8% to 5.5% (*NMHJ* Jan. 1924:10).

Lying below the basalt cap is the more gently sloped lower escarpment consisting of lightly colored sandstone and clay cliffs whose deposits continue to supply nearby Cochiti potters with material for their craft. Because of the weight of the basalt cap and its resulting collapse on the sedimentary formation below, the line of demarcation between the contrasting strata is somewhat obscured with large basalt boulders as well as basalt talus extending below the caprock. As a result, even on the lower, broader slopes, the roadway’s dry retaining walls and curbing consist predominantly of basalt. In contrast to the striking cuts into solid basalt rock evident near the rim and the substantial ashlar retaining walls supporting the grade as it hugs vertical basalt cliffs, the cut and fill and resulting retaining walls shaping the switchbacks on the lower roadway consist primarily of rubble. About halfway down the sedimentary section of the hill, the two alignments converge (see Photo 6).

Early picture postcards frequently depicted the dramatic roadway at La Bajada, generally portraying the expansive vistas offered from the top of the hill, as it was popularly called (see figure 7-2). Less popular, but perhaps more informative regarding the escarpment’s landscape, were views from La Majada Mesa looking northeast. Not only do they offer the striking geological contrast between the upper and lower portions of the escarpment, they also reveal the striking vegetative contrasts apparent in an arid land with little riparian relief.

² Because of the extensive presence of masonry walls along the alignments of the 1909 and 1924 highways, the masonry walls are counted as one contributing structure.

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This contrast is particularly evident at the mouth of Santa Fe Canyon, or Cañon de las Bocas, as the opening of the narrow defile eroded by the Rio Santa Fe was historically known. Although types of vegetation have changed over the last century so that exotics such as Russian Olive, Siberian elm and Tamarisk are mixed with indigenous cottonwood, the verdant riparian area lining the base of the escarpment remains notable even after years of prolonged drought in the region (see Photo 7).

Paralleling the river along its north bank is an irrigation ditch, or *acequia*, that irrigates the long-lot fields of the residents of San Miguel de la Bajada, a small village lying west of the roadway. Crossing the acequia at a culvert³, the road crosses a second culvert marking the former alignment of the acequia and then crosses the Rio Santa Fe over an approximately 240 ft. long creosote-treated timber bridge (see Photo 8). Typical of the economical and easily expandable and repairable timber trestle bridges favored in New Mexico in the 1920s, the bridge has nine trussed wood piers spaced at 25 ft. and timber and poured concrete abutments at both ends. The laminated wood deck resting on wood stringers is 24'-wide and lined with a timber curb and a chain link guardrail attached to wood piers with pyramid-shaped caps typical of the period of construction.

South of the bridge and to the west of the built-up gravel roadway is a residence with three buildings to the rear (contributing). Of adobe construction with flat roofs and parapets, the buildings are one story and have a beige cement-stucco facing (see Photo 9). Windows include wood casement and 2/2 double-hung wood sash and symmetrically flank the principal entry in each building. Two of the three buildings located to the rear of the residence have a single room plan, and the third is a linear duplex. Sharing a common axis at the rear of the residence, they suggest the complex's function as a tourist camp and service station lining the highway between 1925 and 1932.

After the 1924 alignment of the roadway was replaced in 1932 by a new alignment three miles to the southeast, approximately where the I-25 alignment now ascends La Bajada, the roadways within the district exhibit little change other than natural deterioration. Though less pronounced than in early picture postcards, the scars marking the road alignments along the face of the escarpment remain evident from the base of La Bajada. A gas pipeline laid below the gravel of the upper section of the 1924 alignment is evident at only two points, and the timber bridge is largely unaltered. The residence of the former tourist camp is now a private residence, although no evidence of the former gas pumps remains, and the cabin units, now vacant and used for storage, are deteriorating but retain their historic plans and general appearance. As a result, the resources within the district retain a high degree of integrity, conveying a strong feeling of the early automobile travel experience at what was once regarded as the most significant highway engineering feat in New Mexico.

³ Both roadways contain a number of small, corrugated metal pipe culverts. Because these structures are small and do not reveal any engineered elements, such as concrete headwalls or wingwalls, and often obscured by downslope erosion, they were not counted as a resource.

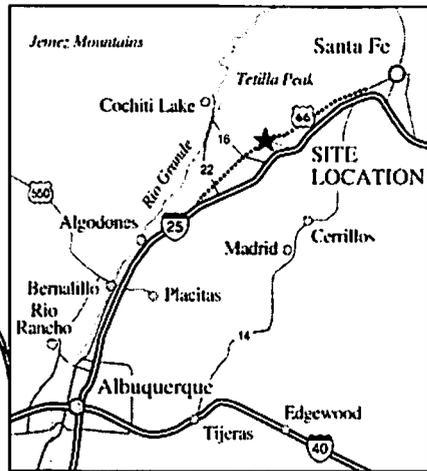
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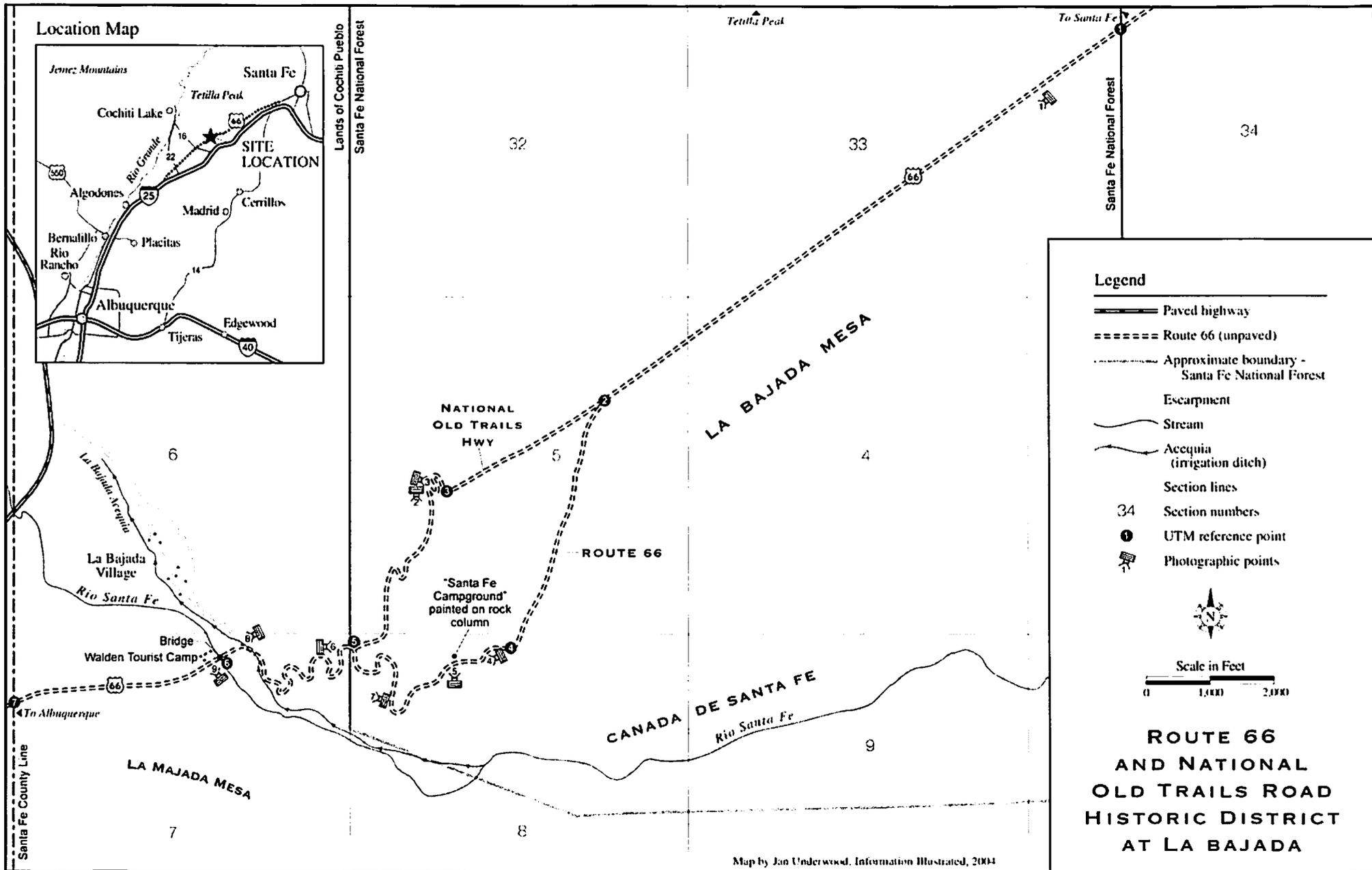
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Figure 7-1 District Map (see reverse)

Location Map

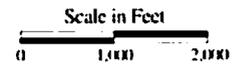


Lands of Cochiti Pueblo
Santa Fe National Forest



Legend

- Paved highway
- Route 66 (unpaved)
- Approximate boundary - Santa Fe National Forest
- Escarpment
- Stream
- Accquia (irrigation ditch)
- Section lines
- 34 Section numbers
- UTM reference point
- Photographic points



**ROUTE 66
AND NATIONAL
OLD TRAILS ROAD
HISTORIC DISTRICT
AT LA BAJADA**

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Figure 7-2 Postcard of the National Old Trails Road Highway at La Bajada Hill (undated)



LA BAJADA HILL, NEAR SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO.

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

Dating to Spanish settlement in New Mexico and the Camino Real, until 1931 the escarpment at La Bajada posed a formidable challenge to the development of a transportation network along the Rio Grande Valley. During the territorial period attempts to cut a roadway up the escarpment resulted in a series of wagon road alignments, the evidence of which remains today. In 1909 with the coming of the automobile, the Territorial Highway Commission undertook a project to improve the alignment. With its cuts into the solid basalt caprock and dry masonry retaining walls, the project was heralded as an engineering wonder along New Mexico's Scenic Highway that soon became a part of the National Old Trails Road Ocean-to-Ocean Highway. In 1924, the road was realigned along the upper slopes of the escarpment, again with much publicity regarding its engineering feats. With the creation of the federal highway system in 1926, this improved roadway became a part of the U.S. 66 and 85 alignment. That same year construction crews widened some of the hairpin turns to accommodate the buses of the newly created Fred Harvey Indian Detours. They also installed a timber bridge to replace a concrete ford across the Rio Santa Fe at the foot of the escarpment near where a rural tourist camp and service station had opened the previous year. The alignment remained a part of the highway system until 1931 when a new alignment was completed along a gentler slope three miles to the south. With its high degree of integrity, the historic district is eligible at the state level under Criterion A for its role in the rise of early automobile travel in New Mexico. The district is also eligible at the state level under Criterion C for its historic alignments reflecting siting, design and engineering practices and materials common in road and bridge construction during the period of significance.

A prominent landmark since pre-historic times, the volcanic-capped escarpment known as La Bajada presented a formidable barrier to north-south movement that the Spanish colonists first encountered as they sought to establish the El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro (the Royal Road to the Interior Land) in the late 16th century. During the colonial period as caravans and settlers traveled the Rio Grande corridor, many attempted to scale the 600 ft. high barrier by following a trail up the rocky, flood-prone gorge of the Rio Santa Fe, the only canyon bisecting the escarpment. Others bypassed it by following the Rio Galisteo eastward along the foot of La Bajada and climbing it just west of the Cerrillos Hills; still others traveled even farther east, opting for the gentler ascent offered at the western edge of the Galisteo Basin. So significant was La Bajada that the escarpment served to divide New Mexico into two distinct regions: the Rio Arriba or upper river, and Rio Abajo or lower river. Even today, this geographic feature functions as a significant cultural, environmental, and historical line of demarcation within New Mexico's historic Rio Grande corridor.

During the colonial period as trade developed within the region, the canyon route from its mouth, or *boca*, to the village of La Cienega at the head of the canyon was the principal trade route between the colonial capital at Santa Fe and Santo Domingo Pueblo. Given the canyon's susceptibility to flooding and the subsequent boulders strewn along the trail, however, an alternative trail gradually developed, extending southeastward from the village of Cienguilla across La Bajada Mesa to the steep escarpment where travelers carefully descended the

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sheer precipice. It was this route that Zebulon Pike followed after being captured by Spanish soldiers in 1807 before spending the night at the village of La Bajada. Following the American conquest of New Mexico in 1846, the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848, and the creation of the New Mexico Territory in 1850, the military undertook some road improvements. While more attention at first was given to improving a roadway several miles to the southeast, in the 1860s the army worked to open the mesa road to wagon traffic. An account of the descent by Lt. Bourke in 1869 describes the volcanic caprock as “an overhanging vertical wall” and the escarpment as a “sheer precipice of five hundred” feet (Marshall: 12). “The only orthodox way of going down La Bajada in those days” concluded Bourke, was for stage passengers to alight and make the descent on foot while the stage descended with its brake locked.

Efforts to improve the road increased during the late territorial period as the potential for automobile travel became apparent and pressure increased to improve the road from Santo Domingo to Santa Fe for the shipment of fresh produce. The Territorial Highway Commission appropriated funds in 1903 and then again in 1909 to open the road to automobile traffic. Using laborers from nearby Cochiti Pueblo as well as penitentiary inmates, who lived in temporary camps near the project site, engineers dynamited the solid basalt rock, using the resulting large rocks to fashion roughly coursed retaining walls (see Figure 8-1). Laborers then used the rubble to build up the roadbed and construct a curb along the outside of the roadway. Along the inside, they dug a gutter that they sometimes lined with concrete to drain the road and to catch falling rocks. In some instances, iron culverts were placed below the rubble bed and extended slightly away from the retaining walls to facilitate drainage. The template consisted of an 18-foot wide bed, standard for road construction during that period, with little additional width at the seven hairpins appearing in the section just below the rim. Some of the district’s best remaining examples of these dry masonry walls appear along the basalt section of this 1909 alignment.

Completion of the project resulted in the reduction of the former wagon road’s grade of 28% to 7.5% (*Second Biennial Report*, 1910:183). It prompted state officials to conclude that the practice of using convict labor offered the territory a means of reducing road construction costs, a practice that reappeared at La Bajada 15 years later when the project to improve the alignment occurred. It also led the Territorial Engineer to conclude that Rio Grande Valley farmers would experience greater success in getting their produce to market, a conclusion that was underscored with a 121% increase in traffic at La Bajada in the months following the project’s completion.

Perhaps the most significant consequence of the completion of the roadway, however, was the increase in automobile tourism. As discussed in the historic context, the 1910s were marked by a popularization of the automobile in which groups led by the nationwide Good Roads Association lobbied both state and federal government for an improved network of roadways. While it wasn’t until 1926 that a federal highway system was initially designated, as in other states a numbered state highway system developed, emerging shortly after statehood in New Mexico. Accompanying these state systems was the emergence of several hundred intra and inter-regional private highway associations. These organizations were comprised of boosters, many who were merchants along prospective routes, who sold log, or guidebooks promoting their routes and roadside

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businesses.

In New Mexico, the main highway was NM 1 extending from Raton at the Colorado border to Anthony near the Texas border at El Paso. Essentially a linking together of the state's two best-known historic roadways, the Camino Real and the Santa Fe Trail, the roadway was the subject of the first promotional effort of the State Highway Department when it printed a booklet entitled *Through New Mexico on the Camino Real* (NMSHC 1915). Published in 1915, it provided images of the new state's main highway. Designed, in part, to entice motorists travelling to the Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Diego to visit New Mexico, the booklet sought to reassure motorists about the quality of the state's main highway, including its primary engineering feat, the road at La Bajada. Describing the work of the penitentiary inmates and Cochiti workers as "having moved a considerable amount of rock by hand and constructed stone retaining walls at every hairpin turn," the booklet termed the turns as some of "the most dramatic engineering accomplishments" undertaken by the State Highway Commission.

Further contributing to the significance of the highway at La Bajada was its inclusion as part of the alignment of the National Old Trails Highway. Regarded as one of the most important of the many privately designated highways developing across the nation in the decades preceding the creation of the federal highway system, the National Old Trails Ocean to Ocean Highway Association, as its full title read, represented a splicing together of historic trails associated with the westward movement. Extending from Maryland's Cumberland Turnpike and following the National Pike to the Mississippi River, it followed the Boone Lick Road across Missouri to Kansas City, where it then followed the Santa Fe Trail southwestward. In New Mexico it turned west following the approximate route of Spanish exploration westward to southern California. In the early days of automobile tourism, it was one of the most significant roads to cross New Mexico. Several state leaders actively promoted it, including Col. D.K.B. Sellers, mayor of Albuquerque, and Ralph Emerson Twitchell, a leading historian and booster during the late territorial and early statehood periods.

First conceived in 1907 as the Missouri Trails Association and promoted by the Daughters of the American Revolution to memorialize western pioneers as well as to promote the ongoing a national healing pertinent to the Civil War, in April 1912, the highway was renamed to encompass its transcontinental character. It gained additional prestige in 1913 when it was proposed in Congress as an "interstate highway," and in 1914 when the Southern California Automobile Association decided to map the route, erecting markers along the way. Its standing was further enhanced in 1923 when the *Automobile Blue Book*, the most prestigious guide book for motorists, included the highway as only one of two crossing New Mexico in its mile-by-mile road description section. Even after the designation of the federally numbered highway system in 1926, the organization boosting the National Old Trails Highway continued, with Harry Truman, during his tenure as junior senator from Missouri, serving as its president and proclaiming that traveling it offered Americans an opportunity to learn history (Truman).

Addressing the road at La Bajada, the *Log Book for the National Old Trails Highway*, described it as "wide

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enough for two cars to pass easily anywhere, with a volcanic rock wall on the outside” and as “absolutely safe for the most timid driver” (*Log Book*: 19). Referring to the recently completed realignment descending the escarpment along the wall of Santa Fe Canyon before resuming the original alignment about a mile downhill, the log book entry also included a brief description prepared by James A. French, the State Highway Engineer since statehood. Seeking to reassure drivers, French listed the lower grades, banked roadway and retaining walls, and elimination of seven hairpin turns as evidence of an improved road. Characterizing the drive as one of “safety and beauty,” he nevertheless informed readers that despite its reputation, the old road had also been relatively safe, that “even the danger of the old road was largely mythical.”

Despite French’s reassurance about the older alignment, engineers and the public alike recognized that the numerous hairpin turns with short turning radii and steep grades necessitating that some cars back up the hill to compensate for the era’s primitive fuel pumps required improvements. In 1924, French again engaged the penitentiary to supply inmates, and plans were made to realign the roadway along the upper portions of the escarpment.

While federal and state monies had been used to improve sections of the road above and below the escarpment, the highway department itself undertook the realignment, estimating that it would cost about \$5,000 (*NMHJ* Feb. 1924:19). Accompanied by a crew from the Fox Film Company, engineers detonated multiple charges of picric acid to blast cuts along the escarpment facing Santa Fe Canyon. Sufficiently removed from the earlier alignment, the blasting caused only a five-minute delay in traffic flow. Working with the rubble from the blast, crews installed corrugated metal culverts as they constructed retaining walls. Descending along a more gradual grade set more on a sedimentary surface than on the solid rock of the earlier alignment, none of these walls are of the height nor do they exhibit the coursing apparent in the earlier retaining walls. Along the common alignment remaining on the lower slopes, workers installed dry rubble masonry guard walls with a one-foot by two and one-half foot cross-section. Less than two years later, the road improvement project at La Bajada was completed when the timber bridge at the foot of the escarpment was constructed to replace a concrete ford laid in 1918 to replace an earlier timber bridge that had been washed out in a flood. Unlike the escarpment projects, the bridge was partially constructed with federal money provided under the federal government’s Federal Aid Project (FAP) and designated FAP 88-C (*New Mexico* Oct. 1931:10).

With the improved highway, traffic increased. Although the highway department had begun conducting traffic counts a few years earlier, its specific categories and locations sometimes varied so that precise comparisons are sometimes difficult. Despite this obstacle to comparative analysis, the overall figures pertinent to La Bajada show that the average daily traffic count rose from 617 in 1927, the year following the completion of the bridge and realignment projects, to 1,068 in 1928 and 1,565 in 1930. With the increased traffic and the lingering image of La Bajada as a challenging roadway for vehicles and drivers, a service station and small tourist court appeared at the base of the hill, much as similar facilities appeared near other geographical obstacles located along highways in New Mexico.

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Vicinity of La Bajada Village, Santa Fe County, New Mexico

In 1925, Herb and Wallace Walden opened a small tourist camp and service station located west of the concrete ford across the Rio Santa Fe. With the realignment of the road and anticipated completion of the timber bridge, the site, a former stagecoach stop, was ideal for a roadside business. From there the brothers used their Dodge truck to rescue overheated vehicles and to tow Pickwick buses up the hill while passengers rode in the truck to give it additional weight for the pull. As with other rural service stations, they also constructed a series of small cabins behind their residence, arranging them in a line similar to the spatial organization of other rural cabins. Mary Montoya Walden, who had been born at the village of La Bajada in 1911 and married Herb Walden later recalled that the hairpin turns at La Bajada offered other economic opportunities as well (Ripp: B-1). Motorists sometimes hired local drivers to negotiate the hill, and tourist camp operators in Santa Fe dispatched boys to hand out camp flyers as motorists slowly wound their way around the turns. The painted advertisement for the Santa Fe Campground located along Francisco Street in the late 1920s recalls those advertising efforts.

Even with the improvements brought with the realignment and new bridge, the roadway at La Bajada continued to be regarded as an obstacle. When the Fred Harvey Company initiated the Indian Detours in 1926 and the new venture's director, Major R. Hunter Clarkson, approached New Mexico Governor Arthur T. Hannett about the detour's itineraries and their suitability for the White buses, Clarkson anticipated using on some excursions, Hannett quickly sought to support this effort at bolstering the state's growing tourist industry by ordering highway crews to widen the hairpin turns. A year later, however, an editorial in the *New Mexico Highway Journal* proclaimed that "The jinx at La Bajada must be overcome or tourist travel will be reduced to a minimum on the old trail" (in Carter: 3). Acknowledging that even improving its turns could never entirely "offset stage-fright or careless driving," the editorial concluded that the best way to advertise the hill was as a "beautiful stretch of scenic highway."

Thus, it was with little surprise that in the fall of 1931 the State Highway Commission announced that it was completing construction of a "broad, safe, permanent highway connecting Santa Fe and Albuquerque (*New Mexico*, October, 1931:8). Dividing the project into multiple units under FAP 88, it had designated the hill section FAP 88-F and shifted the alignment three miles south of the former roadway. Augmenting the traditional road construction equipment of fresnos, wagons and teams with gasoline-powered shovels, air-compressors, several 2 and 6-yard end dump trucks, and Caterpillar tractors, crews cut and filled a new alignment located approximately where the I-25 alignment now ascends La Bajada. Grades were reduced from an average of 5% to 1.4% with the maximum grade at 6%. By late summer, the project was complete, and the 1924 alignment had become obsolete. Over the next few years, further changes occurred as U.S. 66 was realigned to pass through Albuquerque on an east-west axis in 1937, leaving only U.S. 85 aligned on the Albuquerque-Santa Fe highway.

While some writers lamented the closing of the old roadway, yearning for the adventure it had offered, most motorists were pleased with the new roadway. By 1936, the new roadway carried an average of 2,173 vehicles, a number that would have made travel along the older alignment even more precarious. In the decades since its closing, some of the land included within the district has changed ownership so that all of it now lies within the Santa Fe National Forest and Cochiti Indian Reservation. For Cochiti tribal members the old highway alignment

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recalls their ancestors' contribution to early road construction in New Mexico. Aware of the significance of the old alignment, the Santa Fe National Forest maintains its portion of the land for multiple uses, including hiking and recreation.

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Figure 8-1

Cochiti Indians Working on NM 1 Circa 1909



Cochiti Indians working on Santa Fe-Albuquerque Road.

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GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Verbal Boundary Description

The historic district is linear with the exception of the rectilinear one-acre parcel historically associated with the former Walden tourist camp and the Santa Fe campground sign at which point the district boundary extends 15 yards north of the linear district boundary to include the sign and its viewshed. The linear district consists of a corridor extending 40 feet on either side of the road's centerline, a minimum width used by the New Mexico State Highway Department during the 1920s. The 1909 and 1924 roads are delineated on the accompanying U.S.G.S. Tetilla Peak Quadrangle 7.5-minute series topographic map.

The following UTM reference points represent boundaries of the district. The northeast boundary is formed where the former New Mexico State Highway 1, National Old Trails Highway and U.S. 66 alignment cross the Santa Fe National Forest boundary at UTM Reference #1. (North of this point the former road continues for a short, eventually dispersing into a series of rutted dirt roads diverging from the original alignment of the highway.) The boundary follows the roadway southwest approximately 1.8 miles to UTM Reference #2. The linear district boundary then follows two lines, the 1909 alignment proceeding southwest approximately 0.5 miles to Reference #3 and then south-southwest 0.8 miles to Reference #5. The 1922 alignment proceeds south 0.7 miles to Reference #4, briefly extending 15 yards north to include the sign, and then 0.8 miles west to Reference #5, where it rejoins the 1909 alignment. The single alignment then proceeds 0.6 miles west to Reference #6 where it crosses the Rio Santa Fe and then continues west 0.8 miles, expanding to include the one acre parcel of the former Walden tourist camp, to where the district ends at the Santa Fe-Sandoval County line, Reference #7.

Verbal Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the entire parcel historically associated with the La Bajada section of New Mexico State Highway 1, National Old Trails and U.S. 66 alignments at La Bajada as well as the parcels historically associated with the former Walden tourist camp and the Santa Fe Campground signage.

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PHOTOGRAPHS

Route 66 and National Old Trails Road Historic District at La Bajada

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John W. Murphey (photos 1-6); April 2001

David Kammer (photos 7-9); March 2001

Negatives on file with Historic Preservation Division, New Mexico Office of Cultural Affairs

Photo 1 of 9

Roadway at district's northeastern boundary

Facing southwest

Photo 2 of 9

Roadway descent, 1909 alignment

Facing south

Photo 3 of 9

Retaining wall, 1909 alignment

Facing east

Photo 4 of 9

1924/Route 66 alignment

Facing southwest

Photo 5 of 9

Sign on basalt rock

Facing north

Photo 6 of 9

Junction of National Old Trails alignment (L) and Route 66 (R)

Facing east

Photo 7 of 9

La Bajada bridge and bosque

Facing west

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Photo 8 of 9
La Bajada Bridge
Facing west

Photo 9 of 9
Former Walden tourist cabins
Facing north