

Geronimo Trail National Scenic Byway
Corridor Management Plan



SCENIC AND HISTORIC FEATURES



Sitting places along sidewalk, downtown Hillsboro

Overview

The GTNSB covers terrain from dry deserts to the forests, spanning many distinct life zones. Beginning at the Geronimo Springs Museum in Truth or Consequences (T or C), New Mexico, it travels west through Williamsburg and south on NM 187 following the Rio Grande. The barren peaks of the Caballo Mountains stand sentinel over the valley below, and the shimmering waters of Caballo Lake can be seen at the junction with NM 152. This portion of the Geronimo Trail overlaps the Lake Valley Back Country Byway along NM 152 as it climbs out of the river valley and through the foothills toward Hillsboro, a mining town of the 1880's, and former county seat. Hillsboro today is a picturesque blend of stately old homes, shady tree lined streets, and remnants of a former glory.



View of shops along Hwy 152, downtown Hillsboro

Hillsboro has seen an influx of new residents in the last ten years. The community has restored the old school house and created a Community Center, providing the community and Sierra County with a space for meetings, dances, art shows and monthly music events. Artists have opened up studio space and galleries in the downtown area.

As NM 152 winds up into the mountains, it passes Kingston, another mining town of the 1880's, with a reputation for wild and woolly ways and never going to sleep.



Kingston, like Hillsboro has seen an increase of new residents who are dedicated to the preservation of the community. The Percha Bank has been restored and is now a museum. It is open to the public by appointment only. Information about the history of Kingston and a walking tour map is now available online at <http://www.perchabank.com> The historic Black Range Lodge, <http://www.BlackRangeLodge.com> continues to offer a delightful stay as a bed and breakfast and hosts workshops on straw bale construction.

Percha Bank Museum, Kingston

From here the climb becomes much steeper, gaining nearly 3000 feet in altitude in the next nine miles, where it crests at Emory Pass and starts down the other side. The terrain changes from towering pines on the mountains and cliffs overshadowing the road to gentle slopes, with juniper, cedar and scrub oak, until it reaches the Mimbres River Valley at San Lorenzo where the Geronimo Trail National Scenic Byway ends and the Trail of the Mountain Spirits National Scenic Byway begins.



***View from Emory Pass
looking east***

The northwestern route of the GTNSB will again start you from the Geronimo Springs Museum where you circle back through downtown Truth or Consequences, north on Date Street then east on Third Street (Hwy 51) crossing over the Rio Grande. Heading north on Hwy 179 the Byway joins Hwy 195 and travels the southern end of Elephant Butte Lake, past the Elephant Butte State Park entrance and into the city of Elephant Butte.



Elephant Butte became an incorporated city in 1998 and has been showing steady growth and development. Landscaping and walkways have been added to enhance the visitor's experience.

Elephant Butte Lake State Park has increased visitor use by taking advantage of those years with a high and less water.

Elephant Butte Lake above Damsite Marina

The Byway travels Hwy 195 due west and heads north on Hwy 181 to Hwy 52 west. Hwy 52 travels through Cuchillo, the location of an old stage coach stop and home to the Annual Pecan Festival.

New residents in Cuchillo have acquired older buildings and restored them. The historic Cuchillo Store & Bar experienced a fire in 2000 that closed down the store. The Bar remained open until 2003 before shutting down. The new owner has plans to preserve the history of the area by restoring the building and opening a museum, a micro-brewery and a small gallery space.

The GTNSB continues on Hwy 52 to the historic mining town of Winston. The road comes to a "T" and at this point the Byway goes either left to the second historic mining town of Chloride, or right to continue on to the junction of Highways 52 and 59. The Byway continues on Hwy 59 across vast mountain meadows, shifting into beautiful forest terrain, crossing the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDNST) and ending in Beaverhead. *Hwy 52 and 59 have added three rest areas that include informational signs and restrooms.*



Rest Area in Chloride

Chloride is now an official part of the Geronimo Trail National Scenic Byway. An informational sign, restrooms and a picnic area encourage visitors to stay awhile. The Pioneer Store Museum, <http://www.pioneerstoremuseum.com> continues to draw visitors. The Monte Cristo Saloon & Dance Hall next door has been restored and is a beautiful gallery and gift store.



Historic Monte Cristo Saloon & Dance Hall is now a Gift Store & Gallery

Scenic Highlights & Natural Features of The Geronimo Trail National Scenic Byway

The drive across the Black Range from Kingston to San Lorenzo contains some of the most beautiful scenery in New Mexico. The road curves around the mountains between the tall pines and tops out at more than 8200 feet at Emory Pass. The view from Emory Pass Vista is unparalleled for its breathtaking expanse of scenery towards the east. Visibility is usually very good, and one can see the panorama of the road below, Kingston nestled in the valley, Hillsboro further in the distance and the Caballo Mountains towering over Caballo Lake 35 miles away.

Another beautiful view towards the west is the Kneeling Nun Vista at mile marker 22.5. Rising in the middle of the tableau of mountains is the landmark Kneeling Nun, so named because of its resemblance to a nun kneeling before the cathedral in atonement. This formation was a major landmark for Native American tribes, early explorers and settlers.

Other highlights of the drive include the massive rock walls of the Hillsboro box canyon west of Hillsboro. The visitor should take time to drive out to the parking area and walk on the old suspension bridge which was used for so many years to span the gorge. Looking down into the canyon, the visitor can imagine riding in a stagecoach at the bottom. One will again feel dwarfed looking up at the towering cliffs in the Devil's Backbone area, a short distance west of Iron Creek Campground. (Letters A – H correspond to the map on page 30).

The many and varied scenic and natural attractions to be enjoyed by the visitor include the following:

❖ **Emory Pass Vista (A)**

Magnificent view of mountains to the east for more than 40 miles.

❖ **Kneeling Nun Vista (B)**

Spectacular view of mountains to the west for several miles

❖ **Gila National Forest (C)**

The tree-covered peaks, including Hillsboro Peak and Sawyer's Peak, also encompass the Aldo Leopold Wilderness, the Gila Wilderness and numerous camping and hiking trails.

❖ **Hillsboro Box (D)**

Massive canyon walls with cacti and desert plants growing out of vertical cliffs.

Scenic Highlights and Natural Features (continued)

❖ **Turtleback Mountain (E)**

A peak resembling a turtle on top of the mountain overlooking the City of Truth or Consequences and the Rio Grande. This landmark was used to mark the location of the hot mineral springs. The peak is a favorite hiking destination.

❖ **Rio Grande (F)**

The fourth longest river in the U.S., the Rio Grande meanders around the town built on its banks as it moves from Elephant Butte Dam to the Caballo Reservoir.

❖ **Elephant Butte Lake (G)**

A man-made irrigation reservoir created as a result of the construction of Elephant Butte Dam. The lake is approximately 40 miles long. Summer brings a vision of boats dotting the water and campers along the shoreline. Winter features visits from migrating birds stopping for a drink on their way to their winter feeding grounds.

❖ **Caballo Lake and Mountains (H)**

Man-made reservoir created by Caballo Dam to hold water released from Elephant Butte Lake for use in generating electricity and for irrigation purposes. Barren rocky desert mountains arise on the east side of the lake. Legends speak about treasures hidden in these mountains by outlaws of bygone days.



The Rio Grande looking east

Historic Highlights & Archeological Sites of The Geronimo Trail National Scenic Byway

Geronimo Trail encompasses centuries of history in the Southwest, from Prehistoric Native American cultures through Spanish rule to the “wild west”. The Black Range Mountains of the Gila National Forest were home to many prehistoric settlements of the Mimbres-Mogollon. When the Spaniards first explored the area, it was inhabited by several tribes of Apache, including Chiricahua and Ojo Caliente. One of the most well-known early Apache leaders were Mangas Coloradas, Victorio, Cochise, Mangas and Geronimo.

The first new settlements in the area were small farming communities settled by Hispanics as early as 1850. These included Cuchillo, Monticello, Las Palomas and Chiz. These early farming settlements traded with the Apache and lived in near-harmony with them as neighbors.

Miners were the next wave of immigration into the area after gold and silver was discovered in the Black Range in the 1880’s. The communities of Hillsboro, Kingston, Lake Valley, Chloride and Winston sprang up along with several smaller towns that flourished for a few years then were abandoned when the silver market died. The population grew and a new county was formed in 1884, named Sierra. Hillsboro had the honor of being chosen as the county seat. This

beautiful little town still boasts some stately old homes along the tree-lined main street, and other historic buildings. The ruins of the original county courthouse sits on the hill above the town.

Because so much of the land was good grazing, cattle were brought in and ranches started. Ranching communities sprang up. Engle became a railroad stop and shipping point for cattle. Truth or Consequences began as a town called Hot Springs in the early 1900's as people began to come to the area to bathe in the hot mineral springs. It grew in size and population, and became the county seat in 1937, over the vehement protests of the residents of Hillsboro. (Numbers 1 – 9 correspond to the map on page 30).

Some places to visit to learn more about the early history of the area include:

- ❖ **Geronimo Springs Museum & (1)
Geronimo Trail Visitor & Interpretive Center**
Displays of early Mimbres-Mogollon pottery, Apache artifacts and culture. Hispanic heritage, ranching, mining, military, history of town and county. Fossils, rocks, geology of area, log cabin, art displays, Ralph Edwards room and memorabilia. Informational displays and brochures about the communities along the Geronimo Trail.
- ❖ **Las Palomas Plaza at Geronimo Springs (2)**
Site of original spring used by Apaches. Referred to as Sacred Healing Waters. Also used by soldiers from Ft. McRae and by early settlers .
- ❖ **Black Range Museum (3)**
Displays of early mining days in Sierra County, especially early days of Hillsboro and Kingston area. History of many early, famous mines of the area. Open by appointment only.
- ❖ **Hillsboro Historic District (4)**
Self-guided walking tour of Hillsboro with map of old town, including ruins of courthouse and jail, businesses located in historic buildings and cemetery on nearby hill.
- ❖ **Kingston Historic District (5)**
Interesting old buildings from 1880s to 1890s heyday, plus town bell cast from the ore of local mines. The old cemetery in the forested area is still in use today.
- ❖ **Percha Bank Museum (6)**
Old bank building in Kingston. Open by appointment only.
- ❖ **Winston Historic District (7)**
Old mining town from boom days with buildings dating to 1880s. Originally a mining town, it became a ranching community as well.

❖ **Pioneer Store Museum (8)**

Old ghost town of Chloride and history of days when it was a booming mining town. The “Hanging Tree” is in center of main street of town. Museum displays early mining artifacts and memorabilia.

❖ **Elephant Butte Lake State Park Visitor Center (9)**

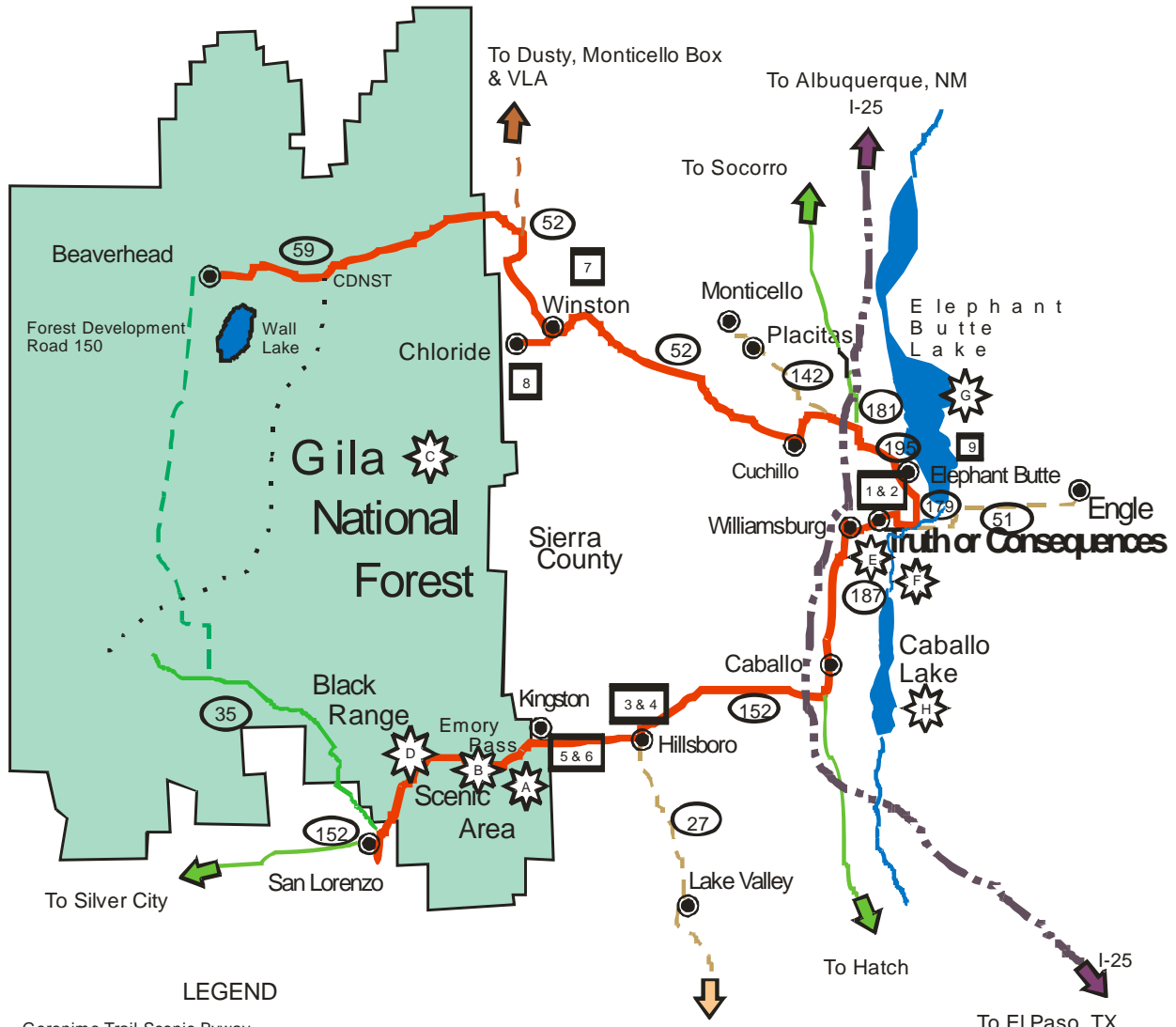
Museum displays fossils and geology of area as well as history of the area covered by the lake.



Monticello Box Canyon

Geronimo Trail National Scenic Byway

Scenic & Historic Features



LEGEND

- Geronimo Trail Scenic Byway ———
- Side Trips - - - - -
- Secondary Roads ———
- Gravel Roads - · - · -
- Interstate - · - · -
- 4-wheel Drive / High Clearance - - - - -

- ★ SCENIC**
- A Emory Pass
 - B Kneeling Nun Vista
 - C Gila National Forest
 - D Hillsboro Box
 - E Turtle Back Mt
 - F Rio Grande
 - G Elephant Butte Lake
 - H Caballo Lk & Mts

Legend

- HISTORIC**
- | | | |
|---|---------------------------------|---|
| A | Geronimo Springs Museum | 1 |
| B | Las Palomos Hot Springs | 2 |
| C | Kingston Museum | 3 |
| D | Hillsboro Historic District | 4 |
| E | Kingston Historic District | 5 |
| F | Percha Bank Museum | 6 |
| G | Winston Historic District | 7 |
| H | Pioneer Store Museum | 8 |
| | EB Lake State Park Visitor Cntr | 9 |