

# Santa Fe River Greenway Interpretive Program

Santa Fe River Greenway • Santa Fe County, New Mexico

## Project Details

**Scope:** Wayside Project, 9 panels  
**Budget:** \$ 57,500

## Project Team

**Development:** Edward Malouf;  
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**Art Direction:** Carol Lieb  
**Design & Illustration:** Edward Malouf,  
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**Image Research:** Carol Lieb  
**Printing:** Fossil Industries Inc.

For over 400 years, El Camino Real De Tierra Adentro was the major highway that linked Spanish culture of Europe to the interior of the New World. As part of the new Santa Fe River Greenway program, an ambitious landscape restoration project, our team interpreted the story of this vital transportation route and used a variety of graphic techniques to create wayside panels that resurrect a complex history for modern visitors. The program also required sensitive content development, since water rights abuses and encroaching urban development have threatened the traditional historic village of Agua Fria. To address these concerns we worked with local experts and earned the approval of the Agua Fria community.



## El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro

### Welcome to El Camino Real Park

When you cross the bridge over the Santa Fe River, you join a trail with nearly 500 years of New Mexico history! This part of the Santa Fe River Greenway follows one of North America's most famous early roads—El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro, the Royal Road to the Interior Lands. Now a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Mexico and a National Historic Trail in the U.S., the 1,600-mile international route begins in Mexico City and runs north to Santa Fe.

Today's Camino Real travelers can follow this historic trail on marked roads such as Agua Fria Street or along linked parks and community trails like this one. No matter what route you choose, the fascinating history and natural beauty of the American southwest await you along every mile.

**A Multi-Cultural World**  
 Like today's global economy, international traffic along El Camino Real changed people's lives forever. Foods, clothing, languages, religious and spiritual beliefs, architecture, music, art, and ideas about property and society all moved up and down El Camino Real in a continuing multi-cultural exchange.

**Buffalo Hides and Silver Ore**  
 Buffalo and mule deer hides, silver ore, and timber were among the many natural resources harvested in the southwest and destined for markets in Mexico City, the port of Veracruz, and the capitals of Europe.

**Horses and Metal Armor**  
 In the 1500s, Spanish newcomers advanced northward along the Rio Grande on horseback with metal swords, shields, and body armor. The introduction of horses and metal tools brought profound changes to the region.

**The Roman Catholic Church**  
 Spanish explorers and the priests who often accompanied them introduced the Roman Catholic faith to their homelands to local villages. Within the first 200 years of Spanish exploration, almost every large pueblo also had a Spanish mission nearby. The missions housed several priests and offered Christian religious services.

**Chocolate and Chile Peppers**  
 Ancestral Pueblo people knew of both cocoa beans and chile peppers—but Spanish travelers introduced new ways of using these native New World foods. The results: sweet, hot, cocoa-flavored milk, and meats and vegetables spiced with bright red peppers. Would you like your chocolate milk stirred and warmed in this 1800s-era Mexican copper chocolatera? Mmm, good!

**JORNADA DEL MUERTO**  
 About 75 miles north of El Paso, El Camino Real veered inland from the Rio Grande and led travelers across to miles of waterless desert. For unprepared travelers, including Spanish settlers fleeing the Pueblo Revolt of 1680—the harrowing trek across "Jornada del Muerto" could be a death trip.

**Maize Makes the Difference**  
 Pueblo people had been growing corn long before the Spanish arrived.

**Seeking a Road to Riches**  
 Will the trail ahead improve your health... or your wealth? Many early explorers thought El Camino Real was the path to silver and gold! Others wanted to advance Spanish culture and religion. Spanish soldiers based in Mexico began exploring the vast interior of North America in the early 1500s. They sought to claim New World riches for the King of Spain, whose favor could bring great rewards. Over the past 400 years, travelers along El Camino Real have found not only silver and gold, but a wealth of opportunities in a vast new land.

*"Your main purpose shall be the service of our Lord, the spreading of His Holy Catholic faith..."*  
 —Contract between Juan de Oñate and the Spanish government, 1598

# Approaching Santa Fe

**Santa Fe River GREENWAY**  
El Camino Real Park

For travelers heading north on El Camino Real long ago, this view held the promise of safety, relief, and comfort. Ahead was the welcoming village of Agua Fria (Cool Water) and the busy colonial capital of Santa Fe.

How does your experience on the trail compare with what travelers might have felt, seen, heard, or smelled 200 years ago?

**Digging into the Past**

To archeologists, the rolling terrain in front of you reveals traces of ancient pueblos, Spanish colonial ranchos, and more recent residences and industrial uses. Listen! Can you hear voices echoing down the years?




**Churro Sheep**  
In one trip in 1851, herders drove 30,000 head of churro sheep to market on the Camino Real. These tough Spanish sheep could survive the broiling desert heat and bitter winter cold.



**Cottonwood Tree**  
Older residents remember giant native cottonwood trees growing along the river, where their roots could reach life-giving water. New stands of cottonwoods and coyote willows have been planted along the Santa Fe River Greenway to help restore native ecosystems.



**Coyote Willow**  
Early southwestern residents used willow to weave baskets, dye clothing, make tea, and cure headaches (the bark contains salicin, an ingredient in aspirin). Today new plantings of native coyote willows discourage riverbank erosion and support the revival of native species such as the endangered southwestern willow flycatcher.



Image credits TK. Illustration: Howell Gohmert

The illustration on this panel used a lot plan from the early 30s to recreate the village of Agua Fria as it looked in its heyday as a farming community.



**Santa Fe River**

**Agua Fria: A 21st-Century Traditional Village**

The Village of Agua Fria stands as a living reminder of life along El Camino Real. Many of the adobe houses and lots across the river still belong to families whose ancestors received land grants from the Spanish crown more than 400 years ago.

Likewise, residents remember an agricultural past. Families planted orchards and gardens, raised sheep and cattle, and irrigated fields to grow corn, alfalfa, and wheat. Villagers sold produce and wool to their neighbors in more urbanized Santa Fe.

A large 1943 dam on the Santa Fe River for city drinking water ended a centuries-old way of life in Agua Fria. In 1995, residents organized to preserve their heritage—and their property and water rights—and qualify as a Traditional Historic Community.

Today Agua Fria offers peace for the general user, a traditional outdoor amenity (thermal) in the 1930s.

Like the age of automobiles, progress was common in Agua Fria. Residents Augustin, Thomas drove to work with a team of horses until at least 1920.

Over the years, community members have worked together to make their own strides for building, repairing, or expanding their houses.

**Agua Fria in 1943**  
Compare the illustration on the left before you to this drawing based on a 1943 plan. The original land lots on the left of Agua Fria River (the original main of El Camino Real) extended to the river for irrigation. After the dam, most of these lots disappeared with their original river frontage.

**Keeping Tradition Alive**  
Farming has always been important to the Agua Fria community. Family gardens and a community farm rely on irrigation for their water needs.

**Water Rights**  
Agua Fria was granted to William T. Thomson, who, in turn, seeking protection of his family, his animals, and his property, the Santa Fe River water that irrigates to use since our ancestors' (this remains a major concern).

**Agua Fria Domestic Water System**  
Agua Fria Domestic Water System is a modern water system providing clean, reliable water to the Agua Fria community.

**Logos:** Santa Fe River Greenway, Santa Fe, America's Byways.