



Cerrillos Hills State Park

In August, 2009, the New Mexico State Parks took over management of the Cerrillos Hills Historic Park. The Cerrillos Hills State Park is worth noting because it is a network of trails that have been restored expressly for equestrians, bike riders, and hikers.

The historic park became a state park as a result of the Santa Fe County Open Space bond proposal passed in 1998. It mandated that private land within the county be purchased for public use. Two parcels of land in Cerrillos were purchased at that time, and another one was added later when the Cerrillos Hills Park Coalition was formed.

The restoration of the area is impressive. It is an old mining area, with many defunct pit mines and tailings dotted throughout the landscape. Some of the pits have been made into tourist attractions, complete with kiosks to tell about some of the area's history. One pit even has a small metal bridge across it so you can look down into it safely. Not all the pit mines have been restored, however, and the literature warns that you should keep a close eye on dogs and small children so they don't fall into them. There are also some historic buildings in the park with hitching posts for your horses.

There is a five-mile network of well-marked trails covering 1,116 acres within the park. You can look online for maps and information about the area at <http://www.emnrd.state.nm.us/PRD/CerrillosHills.htm> or <http://www.cerrilloshills.org/location.html>. Now that the park is a State Park, a \$5 parking fee for all day use has been established. You can also purchase a \$40 annual parking pass by contacting the New Mexico State Parks Office at (505) 476-3355 or 1 (888) NMPARKS [667-2757].

Like many of New Mexico's wilderness areas, the cone-shaped Cerrillos Hills are the result of volcanic action, which have been the site of rich minerals such as turquoise, lead, and silver. Just off the fabled Turquoise Trail, the Cerrillos Hills were mined for all of these minerals by the Native Americans, Spanish explorers, and other inhabitants of the area.

The landscape is dotted with piñon and juniper common to northern New Mexico. In the arroyos native plants such as chamisa, Apache plume and Gambel oak are prevalent.

Views are quite spectacular: The highest viewpoint in the park is on the Mirador Trail with an elevation of 6,123 feet. From this vantage point you can see Petroglyph Hill, Galisteo Basin, La Bajada, the Sandia Mountains, the Ortiz Mountains, and the Grand Central Mountains. Hills rise at up to 6900 feet in places, but visitors are encouraged to stay off any private trails and no bushwhacking!

Driving Directions:

From downtown Santa Fe, take St. Francis Drive all the way south until you reach the freeway entrance to I-25 heading toward Albuquerque. Take I-25 until you get to the Cerrillos Road/NM 14 south turnoff, also known as the Turquoise Trail Scenic Byway. From downtown to Cerrillos is approximately 22 miles. Turn right at the sign saying "Cerrillos" and go .3 miles until you get to CR 59. Make a right hand turn. Follow this around through some barns and homes until it divides into two roads. Take the one to the right, which is the continuation of CR 59, also known as Camino Turquesa. Continue up this road about ¼ mile until you reach a parking area on the right. The parking area, if empty, should accommodate about six to ten modest sized horse trailers.

Riding directions: Not too many directions on needed on this one. Get the map at the (Where, kiosk???) and start out on the Elkins Canyon trail, the Jane Calvin Sanchez trail, or the Escalante Trail to make your initial loop.

What's nice about these trails is their proximity to Santa Fe, and the fact that you can ride here all winter. The rolling Cerrillos Hills provide a natural barrier to the wind. It is also drier, which means great footing during wet winter months.

- Trail Rating: ♦* Trail has some rocks, sand, good footing, mostly rolling terrain.
- Round trip driving time from Santa Fe: 1 ½ hours
- Riding distance round trip: 3+ miles
- Riding time 1+ hours
- Pace: Walking, trotting, galloping
- Elevation: 6,000-6900 feet
- Season: Summer, spring, fall, winter
- Trail use: horseback, bicyclists, hikers
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- Maps: Cerrillos Hills State Park map (see website). For more information, contact the New Mexico State Parks Office (505) 476-3355 or 1-888-NMPARKS (667-2757).

* Comparative difficulty of trails are rated from one, easy (♦), to four, difficult (♦♦♦♦).

Susan Smith is a writer and body worker living in Santa Fe with her husband and two grandchildren, and her two horses. She is an avid trail and endurance rider and has been collecting information on trails for many years. Some day her collection will become a book.

She welcomes contributions from readers who to share knowledge of trains they love to ride. She can be reached at susith@aol.com or (505) 983-2128.