



THE DISCOVERIES TRAIL  
A FAMILY OF DAY TRIP ADVENTURES IN NORTHERN NEW MEXICO

## Secret City Backroads

**Secret City Backroads** is 33 miles of backroad natural beauty. Starting in Los Alamos, you will head down “the Hill” to visit the ancestral Pueblo village of Tsankawi, the breathtaking Rio Grande Overlook in White Rock, and Bandelier National Monument.

Then, return to Los Alamos on the back roads, getting glimpses of Los Alamos National Laboratory, winding through Los Alamos Canyon, and then back into town along Canyon Road and historic Central Avenue, ending up where you began, at the Pond.

Travel time is about an hour. Below are suggestions of places for you to experience and make your own discoveries along the Trail. Each site below is labeled with one of the following guide symbols:



Nature



History



Arts &amp; Culture



## ● Los Alamos—Ashley Pond Park

Begin your journey of backroad discoveries at Ashley Pond Park. During the summer (June through August) free outdoor concerts are held here every Tuesday and Friday night at 7 p.m. A small roofed pavilion (The Ice House Memorial) will give you a quick history of the original Manhattan Project laboratories, which surrounded the pond during World War II.

<http://www.visitlosalamos.org>

<http://fyilosalamos.com>

<https://www.losalamosnm.us>



Your first discovery here is that the pond was named for the Los Alamos Boys Ranch School founder Ashley Pond! The students thought this was an amusing play on words, and some called it Ashley Pond pond.

Set your odometer to 0.0 miles, and head east (slightly downhill) on Central Avenue, and continue east out of Los Alamos on Trinity Drive (NM 502).

## ● Sangre de Cristo mountain view

At 1.4 miles, as you pass the Los Alamos Airport, notice the spectacular view straight ahead of the Sangre de Cristo mountain range on the eastern horizon. These mountains lie on the east side of the Rio Grande rift, and are the southernmost subrange of the Rocky Mountains, composed of Paleozoic sediments (roughly 300 million years ago) over Precambrian rocks (1.6 billion years).

## ● East Gate Guard Tower

At 2.6 miles, on your right, is the East Gate Guard Tower, built in 1948. A Badge Office was across the street, and guard booths stretched across the road.

## ● Manhattan Project Main Gate

At 2.7 miles, on your left, is a replica of the 1940s Manhattan Project Main Gate.



Ashley Pond Park

PHOTO BY DEAN DECKER



East Gate Guard Tower

PHOTO BY DEAN DECKER



Manhattan Project Main Gate Replica

PHOTO BY DEAN DECKER

## ● Pajarito Plateau

At 3.7 miles, as you descend the hill toward Anderson Overlook (3.9 miles), you will see the Sangre de Cristo mountain range, with the prominent mesas of the Bandelier Tuff (which forms the Pajarito Plateau around you) in the foreground. The line in the photograph (top right) separates the two members of the Bandelier Tuff (erupted at 1.2 and 1.6 million years ago).

## West to White Rock

At 4.9 miles, exit right onto NM Route 4 West (toward White Rock).

## ● Tsankawi

At 6.0 miles, on your left, is a dirt parking lot. Park here. Tsankawi is a detached portion of Bandelier National Monument. There is an entry fee (National Park passes are honored). If you also plan to visit the main site of Bandelier, the pass you purchase here will be good there as well. A self-guided 1.5-mile loop trail provides access to numerous un-excavated ruins, caves carved into soft tuff, and petroglyphs. The trail includes four ladders. A trail guide, available at the entrance, provides a detailed description of the area.

<https://www.nps.gov/band/planyourvisit/tsankawi.htm>



Some of the walking paths have been so heavily used over the centuries that depressions have been worn into the soft tuff rock!

## To White Rock

At 6.1 miles, continue straight through the stop light.

## ● White Rock

At 8.8 miles from Los Alamos, on NM Route 4, is White Rock. White Rock offers a great scenic overlook of the Rio Grande River. The downtown area offers groceries, gas, restaurants, lodging, and a Visitor Center.

## ● White Rock Overlook (at Overlook Park)

Just as you enter White Rock (at the light), turn left onto Rover Blvd. Then take the first left onto Meadow Lane. Observe the speed limit on Meadow Lane. Drive 0.7 miles to Overlook Park.

At 9.9 miles, turn left onto Overlook Road and drive to the very end. Park here and walk the short paved path to Overlook Point. Here you can look down over a thousand feet into the canyon to see the Rio Grande river flowing from north to south. The view is several miles long in each direction. Looking north toward Colorado, you can see Black Mesa (a place sacred to pueblo people) on San Ildefonso Pueblo land.

Head back the way you came (turn right on Meadow Lane, go to the end of the street (stop sign), turn right on Rover Blvd., and in one block turn left onto NM Route 4).

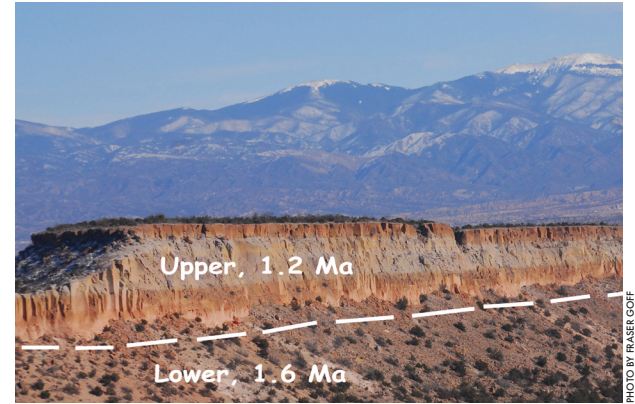
## ● White Rock Visitor Center

At 12.5 miles, the White Rock Visitor Center (on your right) offers exhibits and information on the surrounding area. During the summer (mid-May to mid-October), the Visitor Center is the starting point to visit Bandelier National Monument. Park here and board a free shuttle bus, as no cars are permitted in the park between 9am and 3pm. The shuttle runs approximately every 30 minutes. Recreational Vehicle (RV) parking is available at the Visitor Center. The White Rock Visitor Center is located at 115 State Road 4, White Rock, NM 87544 (505.672.3183)

<http://www.visitlosalamos.org/white-rock-visitor-center-opening-sept-28-offers-rv-parking-transit-to-bandelier/>

<https://www.nps.gov/band/planyourvisit/shuttle.htm>

[https://www.losalamosnm.us/government/departments/community\\_services/parks\\_recreation\\_and\\_open\\_spaces/openspaceandtrails/white\\_rock\\_canyon\\_trails](https://www.losalamosnm.us/government/departments/community_services/parks_recreation_and_open_spaces/openspaceandtrails/white_rock_canyon_trails)



View from Anderson Overlook



Path entering Tsankawi



View of the Rio Grande from White Rock Overlook

## ● Pottery Exhibit along Route 4

Within one block of the Visitor Center are six oversized (6 feet tall) pottery replicas, representing a historical progression of the pottery produced by the inhabitants of nearby San Ildefonso Pueblo. You can walk from the Visitor Center to view them. Signs at the Visitor Center and along the road explain each piece of pottery.

## Winding roads—into a canyon!

Turn right out of the Visitor Center parking lot. You will be heading slightly uphill. Stay on NM Route 4, and go straight through the stop light.

In the next five miles, you will head down into a canyon and past some incredible cliff formations. The cliff rock formation in this picture will be on your right in the bottom of the canyon.

## ● Bandelier National Monument

At 20.8 miles, after you rise out of the canyon, is the entrance road to Bandelier National Monument (on your left). Bandelier is part of the National Park System, and features cliff dwellings, petroglyphs, remnant walls of an ancestral pueblo village, and hiking trails. There is an entry fee (National Park passes are honored), and a 3.5 mile road down to the Bandelier Visitor Center. It is a great area to spend some quality time in nature.

<https://www.nps.gov/band/index.htm>

## ● The back road into Los Alamos

If you do not want to visit Bandelier at this time, continue on Route 4 West. The next six miles will gradually rise in elevation as you ascend the Pajarito Plateau, looking west to the Jemez Mountains.

At 26.8 miles, turn right onto NM Route 501. At this corner you will see a long-abandoned guard post for Los Alamos National Laboratory. Do not turn into any of the Laboratory areas or take photographs along this road.

At 29.7 miles, turn left onto West Road (to avoid a guard station for the Laboratory). You will very soon pass Ski Hill

Road on your left—this road leads to Pajarito Mountain Ski Area. Stay on West Road for just over 2 miles as you descend into Los Alamos Canyon. In the bottom of the Canyon, you will see Los Alamos Ice Rink on your right. The bridge you see in front of you is Omega Bridge, connecting the town of Los Alamos to Los Alamos National Laboratory. Follow the road uphill.

At 32.1 miles, turn left (at the stoplight) onto Diamond Drive. Go through the light at Trinity Drive, then turn right onto Canyon Road. At 33.2 miles you will be back at Ashley Pond Park!



What did you discover? Did you have an “Aha” moment? Submit your story and picture here: <http://wherediscoveriesaremade.com/contact/>

Your discovery may be added to the Discoveries Trail!

## Where to eat and stay?

Both Los Alamos and White Rock offer meals, lodging, recreational vehicle and camping facilities. The Visitor Centers, or the web, can assist you.

## Los Alamos Social media:

<http://wherediscoveriesaremade.com>

<http://fyilosalamos.com>

#PlayLosAlamos

#StayLosAlamos

## A collaborative project with:

Discoveries Action Team, Los Alamos, NM  
Dean Decker, Los Alamos, NM  
Chris Judson, Los Alamos, NM  
Los Alamos County

<https://www.losalamosnm.us>

<http://wherediscoveriesaremade.com>



White Rock Visitor Center



Cliff Rock Formations



Large Pottery on NM Route 4