



## THE DISCOVERIES TRAIL

A FAMILY OF DAY TRIP ADVENTURES IN NORTHERN NEW MEXICO

# Valley of Ice, Mountain of Fire



The **Discoveries Trail** is a family of day trip adventures in northern New Mexico.

The Valley of Ice and Mountain of Fire Trail is a day trip into the hills above Los Alamos, first taking you down into Los Alamos Canyon, then winding up the side of an ancient volcano to explore the forests, grasslands, and scenery of the Valles Grande caldera region.

Travel time is a leisurely two hours round-trip. The one-way distance is twenty miles in hilly terrain. 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



## NOTES:

1. Buy gas before you leave Los Alamos. There are no gas stations on this route.
2. Bring water—it's a dry climate!

### ● Los Alamos—Ashley Pond Park

Begin your journey to the Valley of Ice and Mountain of Fire 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 west on Central Avenue (toward the mountain range).

● At 0.3 miles, on your right, is the Aquatic Center. This indoor facility features an Olympic-size swimming pool and a smaller warm therapy pool. Visitors can use this facility (day pass entry fee).

At 0.8 miles, **turn left** at the stop light onto Diamond Drive. Go through one stop light, and **turn right** at the second stop light onto West Road. This will lead you down into Los Alamos Canyon.

### ● Omega Bridge and the Ice Rink

At 1.4 miles, in the bottom of the Canyon, pull into the parking lot. The bridge you see is Omega Bridge, connecting the town of Los Alamos to Los Alamos National Laboratory.



Ashley Pond Park



Larry H. Walkup Aquatic Center



Omega Bridge

Los Alamos Ice Rink is an outdoor rink. Imagine yourself skating on New Year's Eve under a full moon. It is actually pleasantly warm due to the canyon walls protecting you from any wind.

## ● Los Alamos Reservoir

Continue driving into the canyon (away from the bridge). At 1.7 miles, as you round the first switchback, a trail leads further into the canyon to Los Alamos Reservoir (out of your view). This reservoir is one of the water sources for the town.

## Continue driving up the hill.

## ● Los Alamos National Laboratory

At 2.4 miles, as the road turns to the right, note on your left a dead-end street and a quick view of Los Alamos National Laboratory. LANL got its start during the Manhattan Project of World War II.

<https://www.lanl.gov>

## ● Ski Hill Road

At 3.1 miles, you will pass Ski Hill Road on your right. This road leads uphill 4 miles to Pajarito Mountain Ski Area. This area has downhill and cross-country skiing, camping and summer hiking. If you want to take this side trip, there are some nice views looking east as you climb the winding road to the ski hill and Camp May.

<https://www.pajarito.ski>

[https://www.losalamosnm.us/government/departments/community\\_services/parks\\_recreation\\_and\\_open\\_spaces/parks/parks\\_in\\_los\\_alamos/camp\\_may](https://www.losalamosnm.us/government/departments/community_services/parks_recreation_and_open_spaces/parks/parks_in_los_alamos/camp_may)

## ● West Jemez Road—Views of Los Alamos National Laboratory

At 3.3 miles, **veer right** onto West Jemez Road. This road skirts the edge of Los Alamos National Laboratory. You can get glimpses of several research facilities. Do not turn into any of the Laboratory areas or take photographs along this road.

## ● Abandoned Guard Shack

At 6.3 miles (the corner of West Jemez Road and State Road 4) you will see a long-abandoned guard post for Los Alamos National Laboratory. This is now considered a historic facility.

**Turn right here** onto State Road 4 and prepare to ascend the rim of an ancient volcano. Slow down and enjoy the journey. At the top you will travel through national forests and high-mountain terrain, and along the way you will find beautiful grassy meadows on your way to several inactive volcanic domes in Valles Caldera.

## ● USDA Forest Service points of interest

Los Alamos is the eastern entry point to the numerous USDA Forest Service campgrounds in the Jemez Mountains. Camping, hiking, and interesting stops close to the road can be discovered here. The Forest Service has maps, including one for a dirt road trip (4-wheel drive required) south to Cochiti Pueblo.

On their website, you can search for information about the following:

**Las Conchas Trailhead**, for an easy scenic walk along the Jemez River.

**Jemez Falls Campground**, a scenic stop and view, with a short hike to Jemez Falls, the largest waterfall in the Jemez Mountains.

**San Diego Canyon Overlook Site**, a paved trail to see a sweeping scenic view.

**Soda Dam**, a photo opportunity at a natural area of 15 hot springs and seeps.

Note that some sites may only be open during the summer season.

[https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/santafe/about-forest/districts/?cid=fsbdev7\\_021072](https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/santafe/about-forest/districts/?cid=fsbdev7_021072)



Guard shack

PHOTO BY FRASER GOFF



## ● Valles Caldera National Preserve

At 13.4 miles, you will have crossed the rim of the volcano, and you will see your first views of the Valles Caldera National Preserve. About 1.25 million years ago, a spectacular volcanic eruption created the 13-mile wide circular depression now known as the Valles Caldera. Part of the U.S. National Park Service, the Preserve is known for its huge mountain meadows, abundant wildlife, and meandering streams. Several inactive volcanic domes are visible.

At 16.9 miles is the entrance to the Preserve. The Visitor Center is a couple miles down the road into the Preserve. You can enter the Preserve and drive to the Visitor Center for free. You'll drive through high meadows and over a stream that is pretty as a picture, and you can actually see quite a bit by doing just this.

At the Visitor Center, a free guided tour of historic cabins is available, and this should be your first activity. Program schedules vary with the seasons. If you want to explore farther into the Preserve, there is a fee. The backcountry roads close in November for the winter season, but there are still other available winter activities.

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

## ● Las Conchas Trailhead at the East Fork of the Jemez River

At 19.9 miles, on your right notice interesting rock formations. Park here, or go another 0.1 mile to the Las Conchas Trailhead parking area (small — five cars). This is a great place to stretch your legs or go for a short walk along the creek-sized Jemez River.

<https://www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/regions/southwestern/LasConchasTrail/index.shtml>

**This is the end of the Valley of Ice and Mountain of Fire Trail. From here it is a leisurely and scenic thirty-five minute drive back to Los Alamos.**

## Extending your day trip on the Jemez Mountain Trail National Scenic Byway



If you wish to continue exploring, there are an additional 35 miles (one way) that will take you through the National Forest with striking views of thousands of fallen trees, and down into the steep-cliffed and very scenic Jemez Valley.

## ● Fenton Lake State Park

At 30.1 miles is the turnoff onto Route 126, an optional ten-mile side trip to Fenton Lake. Fenton Lake is a small, peaceful lake. There is a day use fee.

Fenton Lake is one of the filming locations for the 1976 movie "The Man Who Fell To Earth". In the movie, Thomas Jerome Newton (David Bowie) plummets into the waters of Fenton Lake.

<http://www.emnrd.state.nm.us/spd/fentonlakestatepark.html>

## ● Spence Hot Spring Park (a natural primitive hot spring pool)

If you stay on Highway 4, at 31.6 miles, on your left, is Spence Hot Spring Park. This natural primitive hot spring pool is administered by the U.S. Forest Service. Park in the lot next to the road, and walk the short hike to the pool.



Fenton Lake State Park



Valles Caldera National Preserve



Las Conchas Trailhead

PHOTO BY DEAN DECKER

<http://www.jemezsprings.org/attractions/hot-springs-spas/>

### ● Do you smell the sulfur?

At 34.2 miles, roll down your windows and you may get a strong smell of sulfur (hot springs nearby!).

### ● Jemez Springs

At 37.5 miles you will arrive at the town limits of Jemez Springs. You are now entering the Jemez Valley, and 1.3 miles ahead (at 38.8 miles) is the small town, where there are shops, food, and a hot springs/spa.

<http://www.jemezsprings.org/attractions/hot-springs-spas/>

### ● Jemez Historic Site Pueblo and Mission

At 38.3 miles, on your left, is the Jemez Historic Site Pueblo and Mission. The ruins of an Indian village, a church, and a Mission date back to the 1500s and 1600s. There is also a heritage center containing exhibits. There is an entry fee for the historic site.

<https://www.newmexico.org/listing/jemez-historic-site/2219/>

<http://nmhistoricsites.org/jemez>

### ● Gilman Tunnels

Continuing on Highway 4 beyond Jemez Springs is the Guadalupe River box canyon and the Gilman Tunnels. The tunnels were part of a railroad which was used to haul timber from the Jemez. The road up to and through the tunnels is paved but very narrow.

At 47.1 miles, turn right onto Highway 485, a small and steeply descending paved road. This narrow road winds slowly past several homes.

At 51.0 miles this road becomes Forest Service Road 376.

At 52.2 miles you will arrive at a gate. (The gate is closed December 15 to April 15). If the gate is open, continue driving 0.2 miles more to get to the first tunnel. You can

drive through both tunnels. After the second tunnel is a small parking area (five cars). Just past the parking area is a place to turn around. Return the way you came.

<http://lobolife.unm.edu/the-gilman-tunnels/>

### ● Jemez Pueblo

Finally, eight miles from the turnoff to Gilman Tunnels (continuing south on Highway 4), is Jemez Pueblo. Explore the Welcome Center to learn about Towa culture and traditions. At this stop there are some beautiful red cliff scenic views.

<http://jemezpueblo.com>

### Done exploring and making your own discoveries?

When you decide to return to Los Alamos, your trip from Jemez Pueblo will be 55 miles (a little over an hour) along the peaceful and scenic New Mexico Highway 4.

**NOTE:** Buy gas before you leave Jemez Pueblo. In mountainous areas, it is always a good idea to have a full tank of gas.

You can also return to Los Alamos by driving around the northern perimeter of the Valles Caldera. This is a very pretty but lengthy trip. It is at least three hours and 150 miles.

<https://www.newmexico.org/things-to-do/scenic-byways/jemez-mountain-trail-national/>



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.



Jemez Historic Site Pueblo and Mission



Gilman Tunnels

### 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

Los Alamos County

<https://www.losalamosnm.us>

<http://wherediscoveriesaremade.com>