

## THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

*The main ways people used the Valles Caldera over the ages and how these traditions of use add to the significance of the preserve*

People have used the Valles Caldera for a variety of purposes and in a variety of ways for thousands of years, probably as far back as the end of the Pleistocene epoch, about 12,000 years ago. As different as the earliest visitors to the caldera may have been from the visitors of today, all of the people who have been drawn to the caldera over the millennia are no doubt united by the awe they experienced on first seeing the great valles and the pleasure that accompanies repeated encounters.

### ARCHAEOLOGY

Although the Jemez Mountains are one of the most intensively surveyed landscapes in North America and possibly the world, the Valles Caldera, privately owned until July 2000, remains a relatively blank spot on its archaeological map. Recent work commissioned by the trust, however, is beginning to

enlarge our knowledge of the caldera's human past. The main upshot of recent learning is that the preserve's archaeological past appears to be richer and more complex than most area experts had expected. From evidence of seasonal encampments of large size and great time depth (repeated use over many decades or even centuries), to obsidian "quarries"—areas of tool use and manufacture—that are kilometers long and wide, to dense concentrations of "field houses" at the extreme upper limit of agricultural potential, the caldera offers a wealth of opportunity for improving our collective understanding of the region's distant past. With this abundance comes a great responsibility. The caldera's prior status as private land protected its archaeological resources from surface disturbance and collection. In few other places does one encounter so many important

archaeological sites with their integrity so well preserved. Many of these sites have yet to be recorded, let alone evaluated. Ensuring their continued protection, while at the same time providing substantial public access to the lands of the preserve, represents a major challenge for the trust.

### TRADITIONAL USES

Native Americans have used the Valles Caldera since time immemorial for hunting; gathering medicinal plants, wild grains, and other vegetal foodstuffs; and the collection of useful materials such as obsidian. Numerous archaeological sites within the preserve give evidence of these uses, which the oral histories told by the elders of neighboring pueblos also confirm. Various types of wood gathered from the caldera yielded tool handles, baby cradles, rabbit sticks, and clubs. Grasses were cut and fashioned into baskets and brushes. Alder and other tree barks provided dyes. Minerals such as manganese and iron supplied pigment for painting ceramics. The list of such uses is very long, and even so, it only begins to suggest the significance of the preserve to neighboring tribes, because much of that significance is spiritual rather than material. According to oral tradition, neighboring pueblos have long used specific localities within the caldera for cultural and

religious purposes. In carrying out their cultural duties, these pueblos express their belief that they bear a responsibility to respect and perpetuate the vitality of the land through their religious practices.

Human use of the caldera grew still more intensive with the introduction of domestic livestock to the region. Without exception, the pueblos of northern New Mexico took up raising sheep, goats, and cattle and made tending and use of those animals an integral part of their economies. Oral history preserves the memory that the Valle Grande served as pastureland for Indian cattle, sheep, and horses. Elders from Jemez Pueblo remember that the pueblo's war captains used to be responsible for ensuring that the pueblo's horses grazed in different areas to avoid overgrazing.

The raising of domestic livestock, meanwhile, became even more central to Hispanic communities in the region, whose ranching traditions are probably the oldest, and possibly the most deeply felt, in America north of Mexico. These traditions contribute to the distinctive culture of northern New Mexico.

By the 1830s livestock production had developed in New Mexico to the point that large herds of sheep were exported annually south to Chihuahua and west to



California. Certainly by that time, the grasslands of the Valles Caldera were receiving significant use. The high mountain country, however, was contested terrain. Hispanic ranchers such as the Baca family of Peña Blanca—the same family that in 1860 would acquire title to the caldera as Baca Location No. 1—together with Indian herders from nearby pueblos were obliged to test their ability to protect their livestock from the raiding parties of other tribes, notably Navajos, who roamed the region. In many years up to and through the middle of the nineteenth century, grazing was probably successful in the remote valles of the caldera. In others,

however, hostilities may have prevented grazing of any significant scale from taking place.

Modern livestock operations began to develop rapidly in northern New Mexico after the arrival of the railroads in the late 1870s and 1880s connected the region to distant markets. The Valles Caldera and surrounding areas soon saw heavy use, and by the last decade of the nineteenth century, if not sooner, tens of thousand of sheep grazed the valles annually through the snowless part of the year. The herders who tended sheep within the valles hailed from rural communities throughout the Jemez Mountains and from other nearby

The VCNP has functioned as a working ranch for over a century.

areas. Many of them were *partidarios*—livestock sharecroppers who tended the sheep of a patron and were compensated by a share of the increase of the herd while it was in their care. Notable *patrones* in the history of the Valles Caldera included members of the Baca family, as well as Mariano Otero and his son Federico, who by 1909 had built a *dispensa*, or commissary, in the headquarters area of the ranch, from which he provided supplies to his herders. Another patron of note was Española merchant Frank Bond, who leased the grazing rights of the Baca Location from the Redondo Development Company in 1918 and ultimately acquired title to the property in 1926. During Bond’s tenure, grazing within the caldera gradually shifted from sheep to cattle, a transition that Pat Dunigan completed after he purchased the property from the Bond family in 1962. Ultimately, the Dunigan family converted the ranch to a yearling operation, receiving steers in May after snowmelt and shipping them out in September before the cycle of snowfall began again.

The powerful ties of the Hispanic villagers of the region both to the culture of ranching and to the lands of the caldera are a major reason the Valles Caldera Preservation Act instructs the trust to operate the preserve as a “working ranch.”

#### TWENTIETH-CENTURY USES

Sheep and cattle grazing dominated the use of the caldera during the past century, but they were by no means the only uses. As was briefly recounted in chapter 2, commercial logging operations gained strength after 1935, when a new road and new laws provided improved access to the Baca Location. These operations continued with growing intensity until 1972 and left a heavy imprint on the forests, soils, and watercourses of the preserve. A moderate amount of timber harvesting continued under Dunigan ownership until the family sold the property to the federal government in 2000.

The first well intended to assess the potential of the caldera for production of geothermal energy production was sunk in 1959, and since then approximately 40 wells have been drilled into the rocks and fluid reservoirs miles beneath the surface of the land. Half of these wells were drilled beginning in 1973 in an effort led by Union Oil Company, later in partnership with the Department of Energy and Public Service Company of New Mexico, to develop a geothermal plant generating at least 50 megawatts of electricity. By 1984, however, the caldera’s resource was determined to be capable of supporting only a 20-megawatt generating station, and the project was

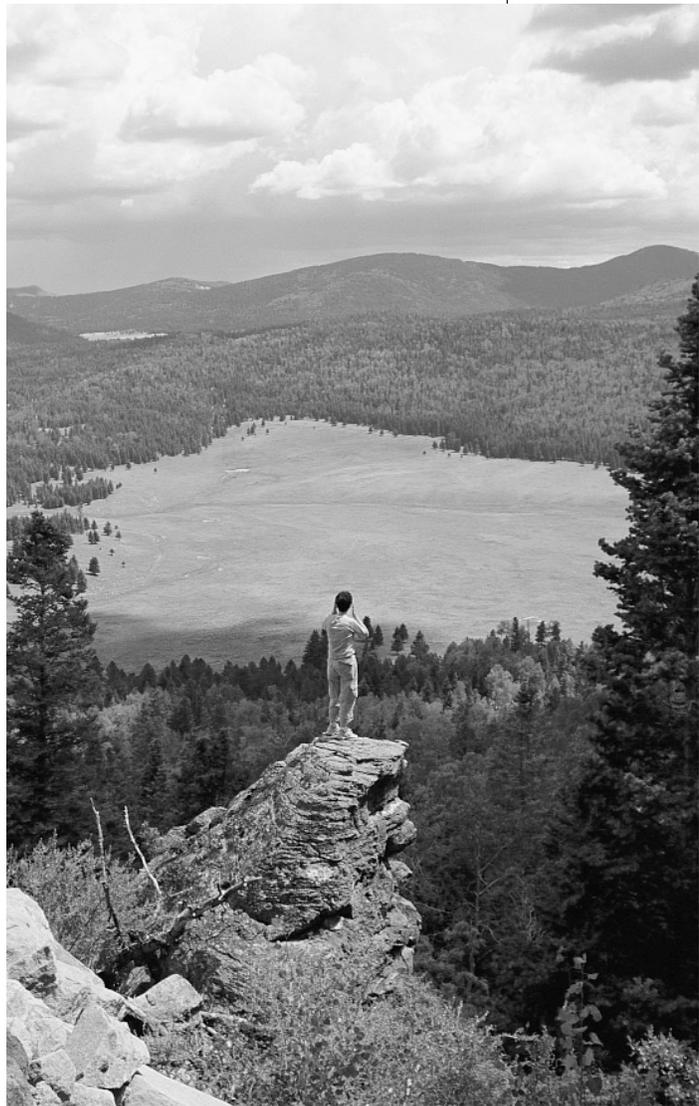
terminated. Today the leveled and cleared drill pads that mark the location of the geothermal wells remain conspicuous features of Redondo and Sulphur canyons.

Other man-made features of the landscape include gravel pits, scattered through the preserve, that yielded materials for road construction within the Baca Location and a pipeline that crosses the preserve by way of the valleys San Antonio, Toledo, and Los Posos, bringing natural gas to Los Alamos from the San Juan Basin of northwestern New Mexico.

As the elk population throughout the Jemez Mountains increased in the last decades of the twentieth century, the Dunigan family developed a vigorous and well-known trophy elk-hunting program, for which they built an eight-bedroom hunting lodge a mile north of the Baca Ranch headquarters. They also successfully attracted the interest of filmmakers and advertisers, who set their stories and products amid the stunning scenery of the caldera. Today three significant movie sets remain within the caldera, one of which was used in the production of the motion picture *The Missing* in March 2003.

#### **A LAND OF INSPIRATION**

The importance of the lands of the Valles Caldera has never been limited to the economic value of the



uses they support. As the site of the headwaters of rivers that provide life-giving water to lands downstream and as home to some of the highest prominences in a vast area, the lands of the caldera hold great cultural significance for nearby pueblos, which for centuries have been drawn to the caldera to enact pilgrimages, initiations, ritual hunts and collections, and other sacred activities. The trust bears a special



Gambel oak can be found on steep, rocky slopes at the lower elevations in the VCNP.

responsibility to respect and honor these living relationships between culturally affiliated tribes and the lands of the caldera.

The cultural landscape of the caldera continues to grow ever more complex and layered. Values have attached to it that were scarcely imagined a hundred or even a few years ago. Today its admirers value it as a refuge of biodiversity, as a remnant of the quintessential West, as a place of rare silence and night darkness, as a self-contained and

integral watershed, and as a promising arena for research, learning, and instruction. Many of these values are implicit in the designation of the caldera as a National Natural Landmark in 1975. In subsequent years the caldera's reputation and stature as a national treasure continued to grow, culminating in the enactment of the Valles Caldera Preservation Act on July 25, 2000, and the subsequent federal acquisition of the 89,000-acre preserve.

The people who come, today and tomorrow, to experience the caldera are as likely to live outside New Mexico as in the state, and many visitors will no doubt come from outside the United States. They will come for many reasons: to experience the beauty of one of the great mountain landscapes of North America; to seek spiritual renewal and inspiration; for pleasure, adventure, and economic gain; to study and to teach; for the fun of it; or just to be able to say they came. The preserve will have meaning to match all of those reasons—it will not disappoint.

## VALLES CALDERA NATIONAL PRESERVE HISTORICAL CHRONOLOGY

- 1821** Mexico gains independence from Spain. On January 16 of that year, Luís María Cabeza de Baca, for himself and his seventeen sons, petitioned the provincial deputation of Nueva Vizcaya for a tract of vacant land on the Gallinas River at the place known as Las Vegas.
- 1826** Alcalde of San Miguel del Vado delivers legal possession of the requested grant to Baca and his sons. Luís María Cabeza de Baca builds a house on the Gallinas River at the place called Loma Montosa and runs sheep on the grant.
- 1835** The town of Las Vegas receives its grant (Town of Las Vegas Grant). Tomás Baca, grandson of Luís María Cabeza de Baca, protests to Governor Armijo that the Town of Las Vegas Grant covers the same lands as the Baca Grant, but Armijo takes no action.
- 1848** The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo marks the conclusion of the war between the United States and Mexico.
- 1855** The surviving heirs of Luís María Cabeza de Baca petition New Mexico surveyor general William Pelham for confirmation of the grant. The heirs allege that the Town of Las Vegas Grant is null because it was made in the knowledge that its lands were part of the Baca Grant. Pelham conducts a hearing on the two applications.
- 1860** Surveyor General Pelham recommends to Congress that both grants be confirmed, leaving it to the courts to determine the rights of the parties. To avoid litigation, the Baca heirs offer to give up their claim, provided they get an equivalent amount of land somewhere else in New Mexico. On June 21, the U.S. confirms the Town of Las Vegas Grant and authorizes the heirs of Luís María Cabeza de Baca to select vacant lands in “square bodies, not exceeding five in number.”
- 1860** The Town of Las Vegas Grant is surveyed and determined to total 496,446.96 acres. The Baca heirs receive scrip for an equivalent amount of land. They choose five tracts of equal size. The first of these is Baca Float No. 1 or Baca Location No. 1. Over the next dozen years Tomás Baca acquires interests in the Baca Location from the other heirs, eventually assembling an interest of just over one-third of the location.
- 1876** Deputy U.S. surveyors Sawyer and McBroom survey the Baca Location, computing its area to be 99,289.27 acres. The United States delivers title to the Baca heirs.

- 1893** Joel Parker Whitney of Placer County, California, petitions for partition of the Baca Location, claiming that his brother, James G. Whitney, bought a one-third interest in the grant from the widow of Tomás Baca, the grandson of Luís María Baca, and that he (Joel Whitney) then acquired this interest, and several others, from his brother.
- 1898** In October the court enters a decree directing partition of the Baca Location and appointing commissioners to determine the feasibility of dividing the grant into parcels equal in value to the proportionate ownership interests of all heirs and other owners. In December the commissioners report that such a partition is not possible; they recommend sale of all real property and division of the proceeds.
- 1899** In January the court orders the sale of Baca Location No. 1. A special master sells the grant and distributes the proceeds to 46 owners (including two groups of heirs and including Joel Whitney, Mariano Otero, and Thomas B. Catron). Whitney's attorney, Frank W. Clancy, who is also the attorney for Otero (Valles Land Company), buys the Baca Location on the Bernalillo County courthouse steps and sells it on the same day (March 18, 1899) to Mariano Otero.
- 1902-4** Sulfur is mined on patented claims at Sulphur Springs.
- 1905** The federal government establishes the Jemez Forest Reserve (subsequently Jemez National Forest).
- 1909** The Valles Land Company sells the Baca Location to Redondo Development Company. No reservations are shown. Federico Otero, son of Mariano Otero, then leases the grazing rights to the Baca Location.
- 1912** New Mexico achieves statehood.
- 1915** Jemez and Pecos national forests are combined to form Santa Fe National Forest.
- 1916** Bandelier National Monument is created, with the U.S. Forest Service responsible for its administration.
- 1918** Federico Otero sells the grazing rights to the Baca Location to Frank Bond.
- 1921** An independent resurvey is completed to correct the survey of 1876, which was determined to have been in error. The total area of the Baca Location is computed at 99,289.39 acres.
- 1926** Redondo Development Company sells the Baca Location to George and Frank Bond. The company, however, holds back the timber rights, reserving "all timber, trees and wood and increment thereof for and during the term of 99 years."

- 1930** A resort hotel is built on a private inholding at Sulphur Springs and operated as a popular mountain retreat until it is destroyed by fire in 1977.
- 1930s** The National Park Service recognizes that the Jemez Mountains, and the Valles Caldera in particular, have special public values. There is lengthy debate over whether the area best qualifies as a National Park or National Monument.
- 1932** Administration of Bandelier National Monument is transferred from the U.S. Forest Service to the National Park Service.
- 1935** Redondo Development Company sells all “timber, trees and wood and increment thereof standing, growing, lying and being upon the Baca Location No. 1” to Robert Anderson of Ontonagon, Michigan, doing business as Firesteel Lumber Company, for \$150,000, for a term of 99 years. This action begins a chain of transfers of timber rights, which culminates in the consolidation of all timber assets in the ownership of the New Mexico Timber Company (T. P. Gallagher, president) in 1940.
- 1935** The CCC builds a road through the Valle Grande. New Mexico Timber Company begins logging operations; the company establishes a logging camp in Redondo Meadows for loggers and their families, with cabins, sheds, stables, mess hall, and school. This camp is abandoned in 1939.
- 1940s** Cattle grazing is initiated; sheep grazing is gradually phased out.
- 1945** Frank Bond dies.
- 1947** Elk from the Yellowstone area are introduced into the Jemez Mountains. About 49 head are released approximately 10 miles west of the Baca Location.
- 1960** The first exploration well is drilled within the Baca Location. The purpose of the well was to search for oil and gas; hot water is encountered instead.
- 1962-3** The Forest Service and Park Service compete to purchase the property. Various legislative proposals are introduced, but none passes. Tension is fueled by a long-standing disagreement between the two agencies on management in the Jemez Mountains. Key differences stem from the agencies’ respective missions.
- 1963** George W. Savage, trustee for Ethel Bond Huffman (widow of Franklin Bond), sells the Baca Location to interests owned by James Patrick Dunigan for \$2.5 million.
- 1964** Dunigan’s Baca Land and Cattle Company sues New Mexico Timber, Inc., and T. P. Gallagher & Co., Inc., seeking damages for timber cut in violation of applicable deeds and agreements and seeking damages for wasteful logging practices.

- 1964–65** About 58 elk from the Jackson Hole area are released near the southeast corner of Baca Location No. 1.
- 1966** The Cochiti Land Exchange is finalized. Dunigan receives land northeast of Santo Domingo Pueblo (the “La Majada” tract) in exchange for which the United States receives land along the north boundary of the Baca Location to be used for an access road.
- 1967** A right of surface use on 185 acres along the eastern boundary is sold to Los Alamos Ski Club for ski area operation.
- 1971** After protracted legal wrangling, James P. Dunigan buys the logging rights to Baca Location No. 1 from New Mexico Timber, Inc., and halts logging on the location.
- 1973** A geothermal lease is issued to Union Geothermal of California. During the next few years about 40 wells are drilled.
- 1975** The National Park Service designates Baca Location No. 1 as a National Natural Landmark.
- 1977** Baca Land and Cattle Company sells 3,076 acres in the southeast corner of the Baca Location to the United States, to be incorporated into Bandelier National Monument. This gives Bandelier control of the upper end of the Frijoles watershed.
- 1978–80** James P. Dunigan and federal agencies (Forest Service, National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service) discuss sale of the property. Reports are prepared by each agency on the property’s importance and how it could be managed.
- 1980** James Patrick Dunigan dies. Discussion on sale of the property ceases.
- 1982** Geothermal drilling ends; plans for a generating plant are scrapped and leases are relinquished.
- 1990** P.L. 101-556, the Baca Location No. 1 Land Acquisition and Study Act of 1990, is enacted, authorizing federal acquisition of approximately 36 acres in two tracts along the south boundary of the Baca Location. The act also directed the Forest Service to conduct a study of the location to assess its “scenic, geologic, recreational, timber, mineral, grazing, and other multiple use attributes” and to assess options for federal acquisition, in whole or in part. The study was completed and delivered to Congress in 1993.
- 2000** P.L. 106-248, the Valles Caldera Preservation Act, is enacted, designating 89,000 acres of the Baca Ranch as the Valles Caldera National Preserve, a unit of the National Forest System. The legislation creates the Valles Caldera Trust and charges it with responsibility for management of the preserve.