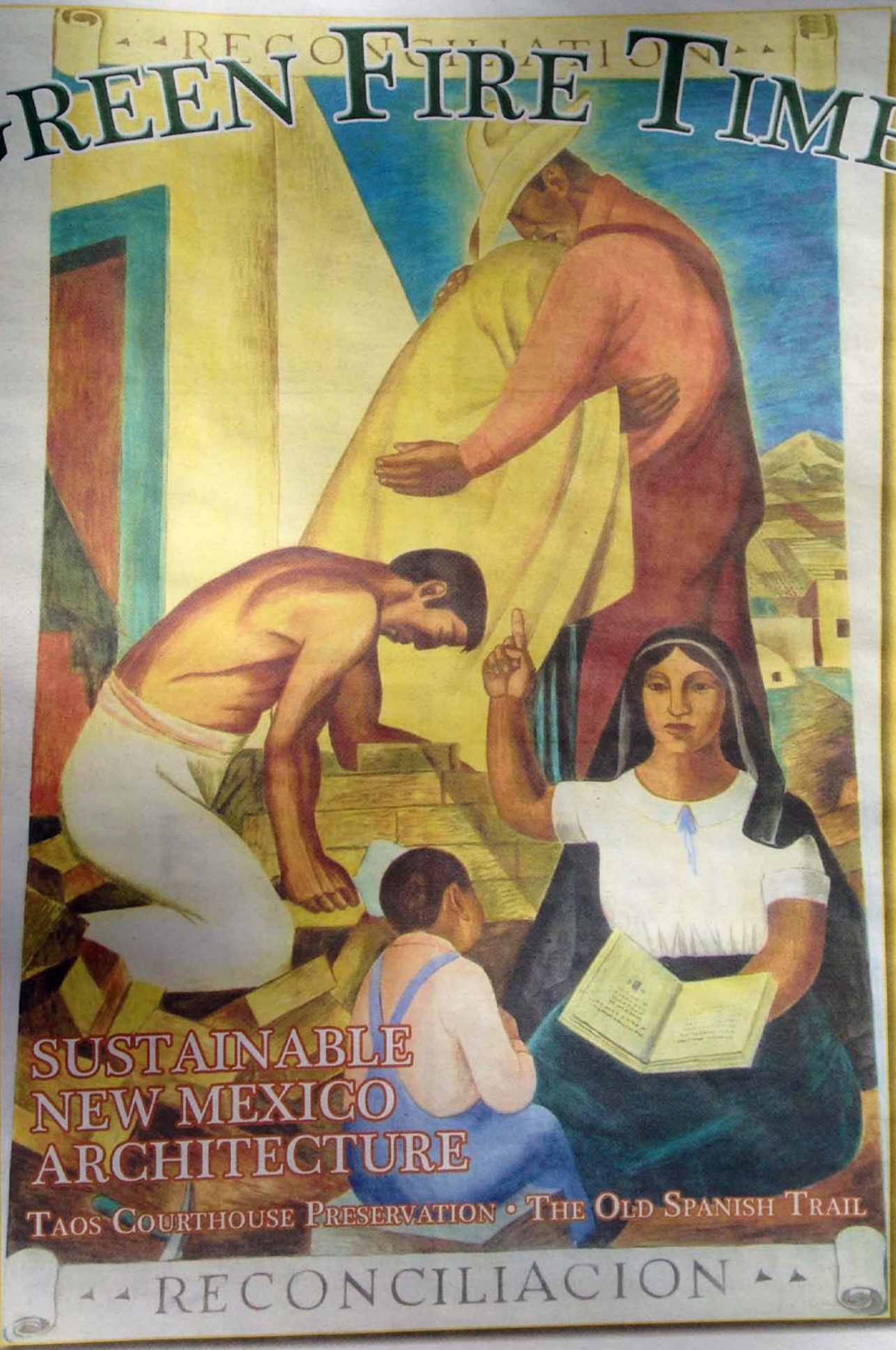
GREEN FIRE TIMES



SUSTAINABLE NEW MEXICO ARCHITECTURE

TAOS COURTHOUSE PRESERVATION • THE OLD SPANISH TRAIL

RECONCILIACION

March 2015 NORTHERN NEW MEXICO'S LARGEST CIRCULATION NEWSPAPER Vol. 7 No. 3

Vol. 7, No. 3 • March 2015
Issue No. 71

PUBLISHER
Green Fire Publishing, LLC
Skip Whitson

ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER
Barbara E. Brown

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Seth Roffman

ART DIRECTOR
Anna C. Hansen, Dakini Design

COPY EDITORS
Stephen Klinger
Susan Clair

WEBMASTER: Karen Shepherd

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
Stanley Crawford, Mark Henderson, Alejandro López, John M. Onstad, Rachel Preston Prinz, Seth Roffman, Bianca Sopoci-Belknap, Asha Stout

CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS
Anna C. Hansen, Alejandro López, Rachel Preston Prinz, Seth Roffman

PUBLISHER'S ASSISTANTS
Azlan White, Cisco Whitson-Brown

OFFICE ASSISTANTS
Franchette

ADVERTISING SALES
Skip Whitson 505.471.5177
skip@greenfiretimes.com

Anna C. Hansen 505.982.0155
dakinidesign@newmexico.com

Robyn Montoya 505.692.4477
robyn.greenfiretimes@gmail.com

Mark Schumann, 505.901.2544
m_schumann@bellsouth.net.

DISTRIBUTION
Barbara Brown, Susan Clair, Co-op Dist. Services, Nick García, Andy Otterstrom (Creative Couriers), Tony Rapatz, Wuilmer Rivera, Mark Schumann, Andrew Tafoya, Skip Whitson, John Woodie

CIRCULATION: 30,000 copies
Printed locally with 100% soy ink on 100% recycled, chlorine-free paper

GREEN FIRE TIMES
c/o The Sun Companies
P.O. Box 5588, SF, NM 87502-5588
505.471.5177 • info@greenfiretimes.com

GREEN FIRE TIMES provides useful information for community members, business people, students and visitors—anyone interested in discovering the wealth of opportunities and resources in the Southwest. In support of a more sustainable planet, topics covered range from green businesses, jobs, products, services, entrepreneurship, investing, design, building and energy—to native perspectives on history, arts & culture, ecotourism, education, sustainable agriculture, regional cuisine, water issues and the healing arts. To our publisher, a more sustainable planet also means maximizing environmental as well as personal health by minimizing consumption of meat and alcohol.

Green Fire Times is widely distributed throughout north-central New Mexico. Feedback, announcements, event listings, advertising and article submissions to be considered for publication are welcome.

GREEN FIRE TIMES

NEWS & VIEWS FROM THE SUSTAINABLE SOUTHWEST

WINNER OF THE SUSTAINABLE SANTA FE AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING EDUCATIONAL PROJECT

CONTENTS

INTERSECTIONS OF ARCHEOLOGY, ARCHITECTURE, CULTURE AND PLACE

Much of the Sustainable New Mexico Architecture focus of this edition of *Green Fire Times* was written by Rachel Preston Prinz, an architectural researcher and preservationist. Rachel loves to share her passion for discovering the *genius loci*—the "Spirit of Place." After having been a project manager in traditional architecture firms for more than 10 years, she founded the Albuquerque-based firm *Archinia*, in 2007, and its nonprofit offshoot, *Built for Life*, in 2012. Rachel has given multiple TEDx and Pecha Kucha talks on sustainability and historic preservation and is a well-regarded designer and architectural researcher. She served as a preservation commissioner in Taos and has led groundbreaking research into traditional and modern means of earth sheltering. In 2014, she launched a television project, *Built for Life*, to celebrate New Mexico's 1,000-year building tradition of no-tech sustainability.

COVER: **RECONCILIACION**
A mural by Emil Bisttram in the Taos County Courthouse **(See page 13)**

NOMINATING SITES FOR THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

The Need to Preserve Both Historic Architecture and Wilderness

RACHEL PRESTON PRINZ

We chose this place to live for a reason. Preserving some of the last pristine, northern New Mexican historic and environmental (wild) viewsheds is one way that we can preserve this beautiful and rugged place for our grandchildren.

Preserving amazing wild places and telling the story of how we evolved as a country

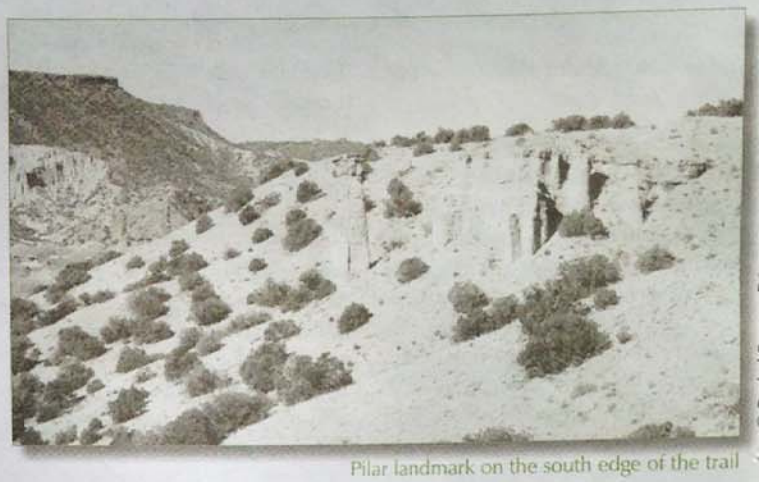
Recently, I was asked to be part of a team brought together to produce nominations of six high-potential route segments of the Old Spanish National Historical Trail (OST) for the National Register of Historic Places. Each site would be located in and approved by the State Historic Preservation Offices, Tribal Historic Preservation Offices and U.S. Department of the Interior sections—Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Forest Service and Park Service—in Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico and Utah.

What made this project unusual and challenging was that, of the entire 1,300-mile length of the OST, which is actually a network of many trails—only one location had absolute, undisputed evidence—a short series of rock steps cut into an impossibly steep canyon wall in Arizona—of the trail passing by a particular point during the period of significance. As the only architectural historian on the team, I watched as period historians and archaeologists tried and failed to document this historic trail system by traditional means.

Archaeologists, who were discovering new data that would throw the accepted history on its end, accused historians, who were retelling the old stories, of perpetuating verbal myths. They were confirming that, due to seasonal variations in water flows, flooding, drought, rockslides, trail failure and any number of other impossible-to-account-for physical phenomena, the trail was regularly bypassed, moved, modified and restored again and again. The trail started to become anathema. Battles ensued, and the more evidence we received, the more difficult it became to propose what we were putting on the register at all.

ENTER FIELDWORK.

One of the first things that became clear at the several potential sites in each state was the importance of the transportation route in the development of the West as we know it. The paths the Spanish traveled followed, in large part, along previously established routes of aboriginal American natives. After the Spanish brought their horse and mule trains, American wagon caravans, early settlers and mapping expeditions would use the trails or at least follow the path of least resistance closest to them. This was followed by the development of train and road networks in the 19th century and the interstate highways system in modern times. The transportation infrastructure often obliterated any trace of the period trail and, most often, that damage started during evolutions of the trail during the period of significance. We came to realize that the trail was a concept much more than any reality.



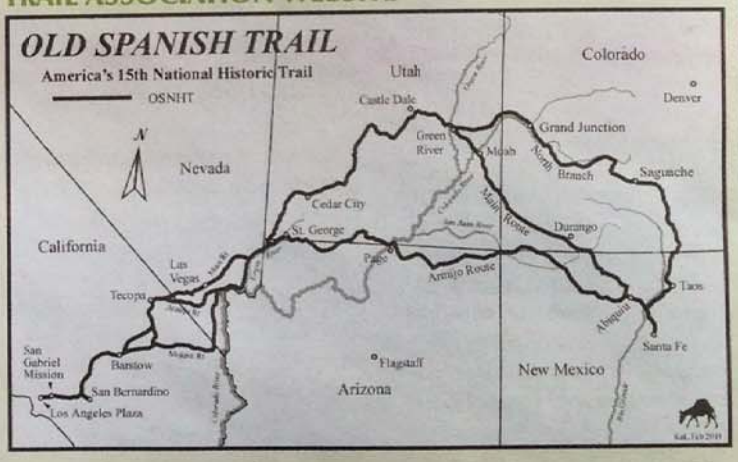
Pilar landmark on the south edge of the trail

© Rachel Preston Prinz

After hiking many miles along the traces, we also realized that the trail was a direct response to its environment. It hugged secure mountain edges, traversed slopes at specific intervals based on the use (i.e., wagons utilized easy slopes, where horses could manage much steeper sections) and traversed waterways, so that forage, camps and water could be had at regular intervals, approximately 22 miles apart, which happened to be the distance a

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22

FROM THE OLD SPANISH TRAIL ASSOCIATION WEBSITE



For traveling Mexican caravans between 1829 and 1848, the Old Spanish National Historic Trail (OST) was known as the shortest path to riches between Los Angeles and Santa Fe. It was a trail of commercial opportunity and western adventure, as well as slave trading, horse thieving and raids. The OST was established along a loose network of Indian footpaths that crossed the wide expanse of the Colorado Plateau and the Mojave Desert. With time, this newly established trade corridor attracted frontiersmen and U.S. military expeditions.

For a lucky few, the OST represented fortune. Quality woolen goods produced in New Mexico were traded for a surplus supply of horses and mules raised on California's ranchos. These valued stock animals commanded premium prices in New Mexico and the western frontier of the United States. Traders and their mule caravans typically began their annual journey from New Mexico in late fall to take advantage of low-water river crossings and cooler temperatures across the hot Mojave Desert.

The map above illustrates the variant routes that developed as merchants developed their trade with the Rocky Mountain and Mojave Desert peoples and the rancheros of coastal California. In 2002, the OST received designation as a National Historic Trail, and today it is widely known as the longest, most arduous and crooked pack-mule route in America. All who took the trail—frontiersmen and young boys with a winter to spare, a handful of hardy families moving west, military expeditions, Indian guides and conscripts—shared the adventure of a lifetime in the Southwest's rugged backcountry.

The 2,700 miles of trail that linked Santa Fe with Los Angeles pushed mule caravans to the limit. During the first week on the trail, the mules scrambled, swam, or dragged their handlers through more than a dozen river crossings. By the time the pack trains reached Los Angeles, they had crossed dune fields in California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico and Colorado, found their way around the Grand Canyon, skirted the continent's harshest deserts at Death Valley and slaked their thirst at Stinking Springs, Salt Creek, Alkali Canyon, Bitter Spring and the Inconsistent River.
Learn more about the Old Spanish Trail at www.oldspanishtrail.org/index.php

 CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

horseman could travel in a day before he and his horse needed to eat, drink and rest. In the period, the trail's location was confirmed by identifying natural landmarks, including pillars and unique rock formations, as well as canyons and passes.

We realized we were not just dealing with a thing—the trail—but were also rediscovering the trail's place, that is, everything in the landscape that was used to identify the trail, including views to and from it. The trail responded to its environment. Up, over, around—bypass cuts in the landscape were on the south and west for the most part—suggesting that those were intentionally located in the sun's path to alleviate ice issues. Trails veered off on gentler slopes where there was jagged and hard rock that might undermine the horses' and mules' footing. In other places, the trail went straight up treacherous slopes where spring floods would make the ground too soft to travel along the river. Long scratches on rocks suggested wagons had been dragged up the slope without wheels by teams of horses instead of being allowed to roll back down should an unlucky horse lose its footing. The difficulty of travel along the trail was so apparent, it was physically painful to consider as we stood together in amazement taking in all this new information. We immediately realized that we would have to include the trail's place—its landscape and its context within that landscape—in the nominations. If we didn't, all we would be protecting would be an illusion, that is, a line on a map that represented a figment of a memory of something that may have existed once upon a time. That is just not acceptable for the National Register of Historic Places.

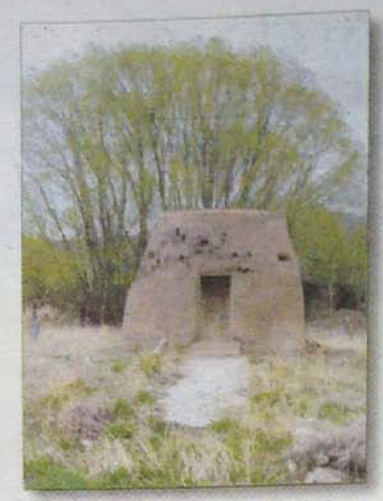
We also realized that, if we did not include the entirety of the passable area around the trail trace, it was possible that one day a developer could read that line on the map, build to its 30-foot easement—or whatever the state approved on either side of the approved trail trace—and obliterate our ability forever to conduct a responsible archaeological investigation of, say, a rediscovered camp site that was located when a lost map was found in some dusty family archive in México. If we could choose the sites selectively and protect the most significant and likely intact sections of the trail, a visitor could vicariously experience an authentic sense of travel through the roughs and wilds of the 19th-century American West. We could accomplish something truly great; we could make it real for people. We could preserve, at least in experience, another of our amazing wild places. And we could tell the story of how we evolved as a country.

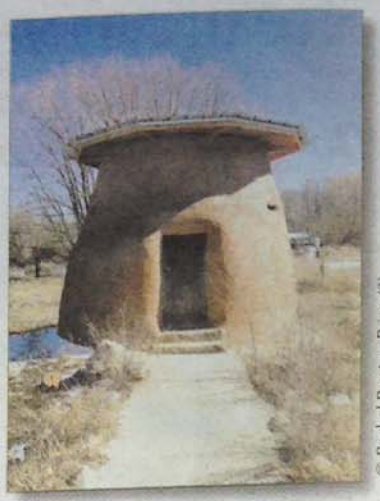
Applying This Realization in New Mexico

When I arrived home and started on the redocumentation of Taos' Historic District and the rehabilitation plan for its acequias, I couldn't stop thinking about what we'd learned in our fieldwork and realized that these projects, one linear—a water trail, if you will—and one structural—an assortment of buildings—were exactly like the trail. They were conceived in a specific place, and responded to cultural impulses and traditions as well as the physical constraints of the landscape and environment.

We realized that we would have to include the trail's context within the landscape in the nominations.

I was immediately confronted with two astonishing examples of the danger of not using the holistic way of looking at a preservation project. The first was witnessing the context destruction of the only existing intact torreón, or secure watch tower, in Taos, which had a protected area around it upon which one could not build. An extensive land-modification project on the neighboring property came right up to that protective edge, ravaging the site around the historic structure. There is no way, should it be determined that a more extensive historic site existed there, that there will be any chance of discovery through archaeology after all that earth was moved around. And, the torreón, otherwise an architectural treasure, now sits awkwardly in a site devoid of context.





© Rachel Preston Prinz (3)

A torreón restoration, before and after, on Paseo del Pueblo Norte in Taos, NM

Then, while documenting the houses along the now-famous Ledoux Street, I realized that what we know as Ledoux Street was actually an alley, which provided access to the rear of these homes during their period of significance. That is not to say that the new alignment along Ledoux Street, or the façades of the buildings as they sit now, are not significant today for new reasons; they are. But because the back door has now become the front door, many people miss the most interesting parts of the buildings. What's more, the homes on the south side of the street overlook the edge of the mesa that Historic Taos sits on, overlooking what was once the town's spring source. To see the edge of Taos from this vantage helps the visitor to understand the security of being raised above the low plain during a period in which such security measures could mean life or death; that is, it tells part of the why of these homes, not just the what. It also emphasizes the importance of access to water. And no one knows it is there. The site's context has been lost. We cannot continue to let things like this happen without documenting them, or else we lose the truth of our history. We lose context.

We see this loss of context happening all over the state, from the mandated faux-historic styles in our historic districts, which diminishes the value of the truly historic examples of those styles by obscuring them in a sea of false history, to the proposed development of the historic sanctuary at Chimayó's landscape into a resort retreat center. We even see context being lost in favor of mining development at Mount Taylor. The question is, at what cost? While the landowners can and should have the right to make their space into a profitable venture, don't we have some obligation to ask the owners to preserve and protect a context-sensitive view of the piece of cultural heritage for the future? Because once these things are lost, the truth of them is usually lost for good.

It is time to start approaching preservation in a way that treats not only the monument itself but its site, its site within a landscape, and the views afforded from various historical vantages within that landscape. That way, we can capture and protect the sense of place that gave the site a reason to exist there in the first place.

Back side of Ledoux Street, Taos, New Mexico