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## Van Houten

By Devinnie Lynch

The NRA Whittington Center is the "Country's Premier Shooting Facility" and has some of the best shooting ranges around and guided hunting experiences in New Mexico.

Thousands, whether from out-of-state or in the area, flock to the Whittington Center for long-range shooting, archery, and even cowboy action shooting during the annual Santa Fe Trail Rendezvous.

The center hosts multiple events throughout the year that attracts both sportsmen and families with children.

Less known and easily accessible on the property, is a hidden gem and enchanting ghost town that offers a fascinating glimpse into the area's mining past along the Historic Santa Fe Trail.

With its rich history as an old coal camp, Van Houten, New Mexico is a must-visit destination for history enthusiasts and curious adventurers alike.



Van Houten is free to venture off via car and on foot. Ask for a map at the front gate before entering onto the property. Don't forget to stop at the Santa Fe Trail marker for a quick photo op with "The Scout" statue and covered wagon. Pull up your Google or Apple Maps to see the original wagon ruts of the grassy highway from satellite view!

As you step foot into the town, it's as if time stands still. The dilapidated buildings, weathered by years of abandonment, whisper stories of the town's former glory. Once home to over 1,500 miners and their families, this ghost town gives visitors a unique glimpse into the challenges and triumphs of a once-booming era.

Van Houten's history dates to the late 1800s when coal was discovered in the region.

As word spread about the abundance of coal, the town quickly flourished, attracting prospectors from near and far. In 1902, the coal mines became the lifeline of Van Houten, fueling the local economy and providing employment for the town's residents.

As most coal mines did, Van Houten drew in immigrants of varying races and ethnicities for work. Eventually, this led most of the miners to create their very own suburbs, which you can see labeled throughout the camp.



Additionally, visitors can walk near and into some structures to view the old relics scattered throughout the property. Still visible today, the names of the mules that hauled out the ores are etched into the former barn walls. Across the ghost town are informational signs to read about the coal camp's remnants and miner's way of life.

Walking through Van Houten, it's hard to ignore the remnants of the mining industry. The towering structure of the old mine entrance emerges as you walk along the trail, a testament to the arduous work that took place underground. Exploring the abandoned town gives a eerily rare chance to understand the eccentric atmosphere that once engulfed its residents. Take a moment to imagine the backbreaking labor that took place here and the dreams that were shattered when the mining operations ceased in 1954.

The Van Houten Exhibit sits inside the NRA Visitor Center, which houses a collection of artifacts and photographs that chronicle the town's history. From old mining tools to personal belongings of the miners, every item tells a story waiting to be discovered. The exhibit is one of the Whittington Center's highlights as visitors can connect with the town's heritage.



Visiting Van Houten is not only an opportunity to learn about history but also a chance to appreciate the beauty of the present. The NRA Whittington Center's property gives amazing views of the mountains, mesas, and the Raton-Clayton Volcanic Field. As you wander or drive through the ghost town, you'll be greeted by breathtaking vistas, rolling hills, and even catch a glimpse of our local wildlife-deer, antelope, bears, and even cougars!



Although Van Houten is no longer a thriving community, it still has the power to captivate visitors with its haunting charm.

Van Houten is sure to leave an indelible mark on your trip as you visit the ranges of the Whittington Center.

Next time you find yourself in New Mexico, make sure to venture off the beaten path and explore the echoes and wonders of Van Houten.