

New Mexico / El Morro NM

El Morro

DISTANCE: 2.3 miles

ELEVATION GAIN: 350 feet

ROUTE TYPE: Loop

Overview

El Morro is more of a hill or bluff than it is a true mountain, but it is one of the most interesting summits in New Mexico. Its name means "The Castle" in Spanish. Despite its small nature, it is my favorite summit that I have climbed in that state. Not only is the peak scenic with towers cliffs and big pine trees growing out of solid rock, but it has much historical significance as well. There are ancient Anasazi ruins and petroglyphs as well as many signatures of explorers dating back to at least 1604 (16 years before the pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock!).

The rock itself is quite colorful and the vegetation and pools of water make an interesting site and its stand alone nature has been a beacon to travelers for hundreds or thousands of years. The views from the summit stretch for many miles. Looking straight up the face of El Morro.

Getting There

El Morro is located on State Highway 53 about 43 miles south and west from Grants or take Highway 602 south from Gallup before turning east on State Highway 53 and heading to El Morro.

These are the lower cliffs of El Morro not far from the trailhead.

Route Overview

This summit isn't that big, so the loop route over the top is only 2.3 miles long. You can still spend much time here viewing the cliffs, petroglyphs, ruins and enjoying the views from the summit. The NPS claims the trail is strenuous, but there is only very minor scrambling and anyone that can walk should be able to handle it.

The trail over the summit of El Morro is marked with rock cairns.

Red Tape

There is a small entrance fee to enter the national monument. Make sure to borrow the interpretive map that explains the signatures and other features of the peak.

Obviously, don't add any modern signatures to the rocks at El Morro.

El Morro has been a landmark for hundreds or thousands of years. There are many ancient petroglyphs and explorer's signatures hundreds of years old. This one is from 1692.

Camping

There is a nice campground near the trailhead. See below for information: