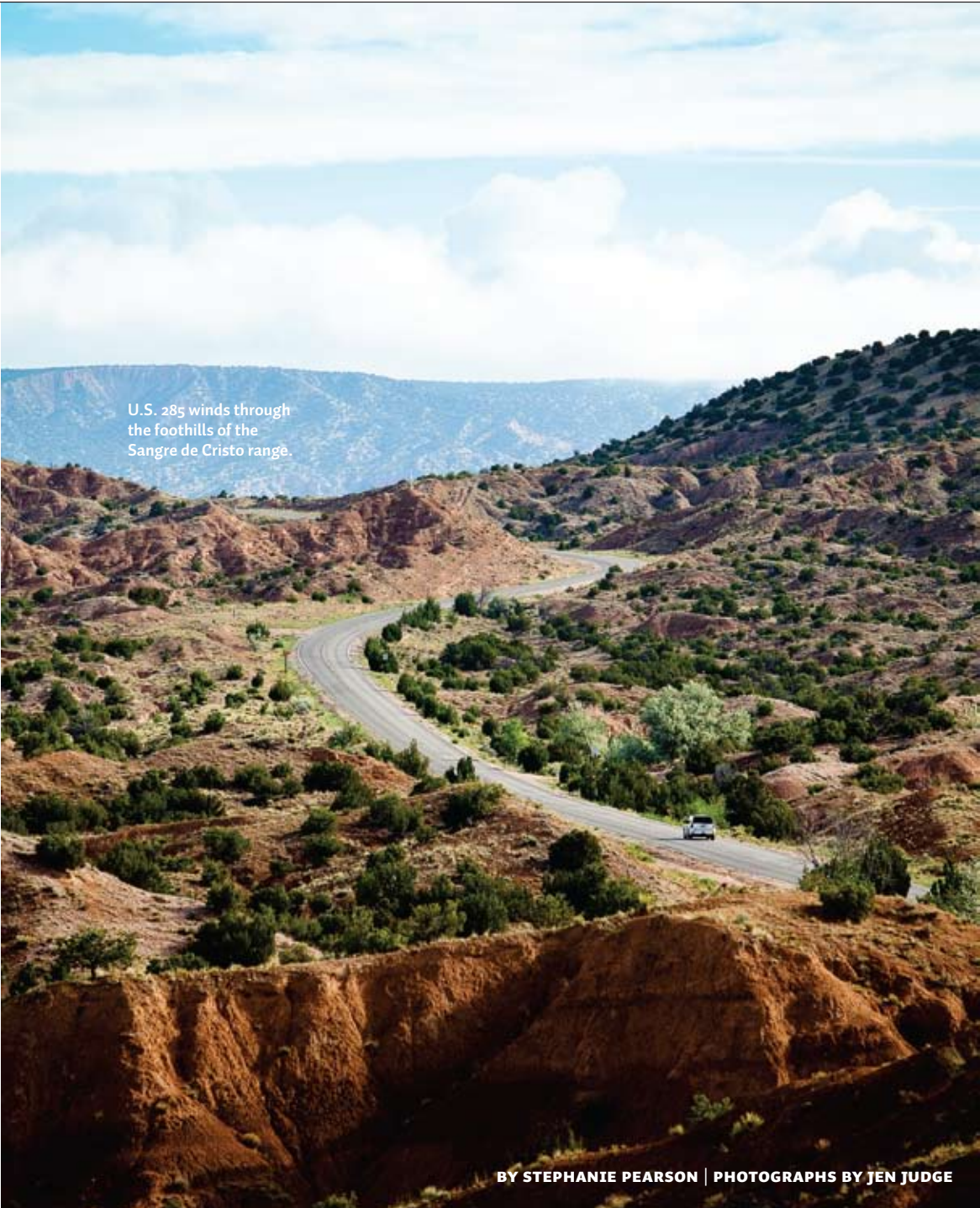


Southwest weekend

Inside Undiscovered backroads outside Santa Fe » Mini getaways around Phoenix » New hiking and biking trails in New Mexico »



U.S. 285 winds through the foothills of the Sangre de Cristo range.

BY STEPHANIE PEARSON | PHOTOGRAPHS BY JEN JUDGE

New Mexico road trip

Sangre de Cristo Mountains

Why go now: The trees have leafed out, the lilacs and lupines are in bloom, and the rivers are humming. **Off the beaten path:** Unlike the scenic but well-traveled Enchanted Circle loop, this road trip takes you on undiscovered backroads and through the high mesas and plains at the southern end of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. **Odometer:** 225 miles **It's not just about the wildflowers:** April through May is the best time to catch bright yellow cholla cactus fruit and cottonwoods at their greenest. **Town to brake for:** Las Vegas (no, not that Las Vegas). There are more than 900 historic buildings in this quirky burg. **Road food:** Fuel up on blue-corn enchiladas at Charlie's Spic & Span Bakery & Café (\$; 715 Douglas Ave., Las Vegas; 505/426-1921). **Or stop for a picnic:** At Storrie Lake State Park, a 1,100-acre manmade lake. While it clogs up with motorboats in summer, it's quiet now. \$5 per vehicle; State 518, 4 miles north of Las Vegas; 505/425-7278.

Explore more on page 32 »

Southwest Day trip

1. Your own personal park

Coyote Creek State Park (\$5 per vehicle; off State 434, Guadalupeita; 575/387-2328) is a little-known 462-acre gem of meadows and conifer forests high up in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Its clear, silt-free creek makes it a hot spot for early-season trout fishing. Hike the steep 1.5-mile loop through the pines at the north end of the park or fish the creek from a field of lupine. If your skills are rusty, book a guide from Taos's **Tailwater Gallery & Fly Shop** (\$350 for two, including lunch; tailwatergallery.com).

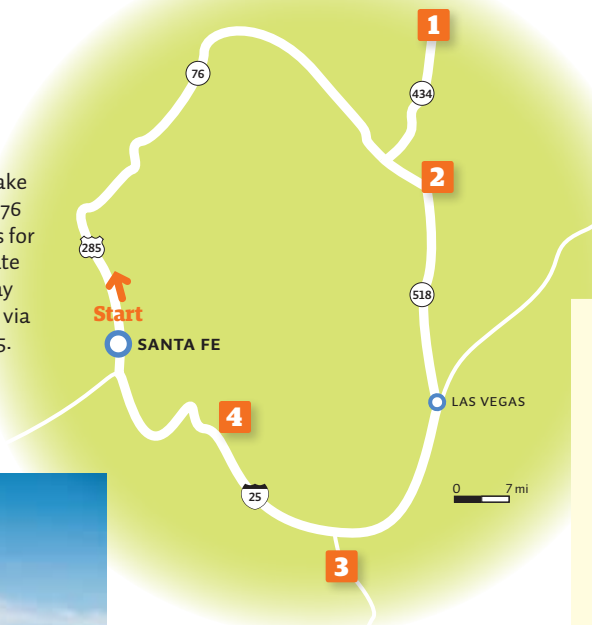


2. Berry stop

A trip to the **Salman Ranch Store** feels a bit like wandering into Oleson's general store in *Little House on the Prairie*. Part of Salman Raspberry Ranch, the store puts those berries in just about everything—fudge bars, chocolate candy, and on the Raspberry Ranch T-shirt (\$15; each year, it sports a new rendering of the ranch by a local artist and has become something of a collector's item). *Junction of State 518 and State 442, La Cueva; 866/281-1515.*

The loop

From Santa Fe, take U.S. 285 to State 76 and look for signs for Coyote Creek State Park, your halfway point. Head back via State 518 and I-25.



Pull off for the night

If you want to make it a weekend, book a room at the **Plaza Hotel** in Las Vegas. The historic hotel, right on Old Town Plaza, is the grande dame of the town: It starred as a location in *No Country for Old Men*. From \$129, including breakfast; plazahotel-nm.com

4. Wildflowers, a sneak preview

New Mexico wildflowers don't peak until the monsoon season in July, but there's an early show at **Pecos National Historical Park**. Cholla, purple verbena, and miniature daisies sprout up around the remnants of a 1700s adobe mission that overlooks Glorieta Creek. \$3; State 63, 2 miles south of Pecos; 505/757-7200.



3. Want some art with your burger?



La Risa Cafe is worth the side trip to Ribera, an old railroad town turned artists' community. Go for burgers and burritos—the cafe is a favorite of locals like abstract expressionist Eugene Newmann. Afterward, take in the town's Spanish colonial architecture. \$; 200 State 3, Ribera; 575/421-3883.

 **SHARE YOUR WEEKEND FINDS.** Have a favorite drive? Roadside food stop? Email your suggestions to wgeditor@sunset.com