

# FORT SELDEN

## HISTORIC SITE



El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro (The Royal Road to the Interior) was formally established by the Spanish in 1598. The Trail was 1,500 miles long and stretched from Mexico City to Ohkay Owingeh (San Juan Pueblo), where the Spanish first established a permanent settlement. Native Americans had used the route for thousands of years before the Spanish arrived and their settlements and Pueblos were scattered throughout the region. Once established, this corridor between Mexico City and northern New Mexico was traversed for centuries and is one of North America's oldest and most significant routes where trade goods, ideas, cultural heritage, faiths, and food have been shared and exchanged, shaping the region's character and identity.

Travelers on the trail included soldiers, explorers, traders, merchants, missionaries, settlers, women, children, miners, and others. Throughout its history the trail was never well defined and included many alternate routes. The journey took months. Seasonal conditions, a shifting river channel, and many obstacles made the trip challenging. The everchanging, fluid nature of the trail as it moved across vast distances made for difficult days as travelers, caravans, and herders looked for water, firewood, and wildlife. Many people walked much of the way and the carretas or wagons used on the trail created an uncomfortable ride and often broke. In the arid landscape, access to water was limited so the route generally followed the Rio Grande River. Heat, thirst, rattlesnakes, steep rocky terrain, sickness, malnutrition, and attacks by Native Americans defending the places they called home made for a dangerous journey.

Along the route, campsites called *parajes* were very important to travelers as they provided resting places for people and animals, sources of water and firewood, and game and fish for food. As you might expect, the campsites were often large and spread out over a distance along the trail in a general area to accommodate the caravans. Fort Selden was originally built on or near one of these campsites, the Paraje de Robledo.

The *Paraje de Robledo* also known as *Cruz de Robledo* was one of the most important campsites along the trail since it was one of the last places near the Rio Grande River where you could obtain water before the journey north over the dreaded *Jornada del Muerto* or the "dead man's journey." This was a 90-mile stretch of the trail where there was hardly any water, shelter, or food. *Paraje de Robledo* was like an oasis; located on a high ridge where you could see for miles. It was also close to the river and made collecting water and watering animals much easier.

The campsite was established when Don Juan de Oñate came to colonize New Mexico in 1598. One of the soldiers who, with his family, accompanied Oñate was Pedro Robledo. When Oñate's caravan reached the area we call Fort Selden, Pedro Robledo died unexpectedly. It is said that he was buried near the base of the mountains to the west which were named in his honor and are still called the Robledo Mountains. The campsite was named *Cruz de Robledo*.

In 2000, the National Park Service designated El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro a National Historic Trail. Though Fort Selden was established well after the years when El Camino Real was most significant, the trail was still used as a route through the area north to Santa Fe or south to Mexico. Fort soldiers protected travelers along its way well into the 1800s.