

Pueblo La Cieneguilla & La Cieneguilla Petroglyphs

The valley of La Cienega includes the historic communities of La Cieneguilla and the villages of La Cienega. The Spanish name, “cienega” means “marsh”, or land that contains natural springs forming wetlands. Located on the I-25 frontage road in La Cienega, adjacent to El Rancho de las Golondrinas, is a 35-acre rare natural marsh, the Leonora Curtin Wetland Preserve. Natural springs are rare in the arid Southwest regions; where they exist there is a great diversity of plants that provides sustenance for wildlife.

Acequias within La Cienega help restore aquifers and create riparian areas for wildlife. The La Cienega Acequia, located on Las Golondrinas’ land, is a community shared irrigation ditch used to irrigate fields and animal ranches. This acequia has been active since 1715, and listed on the New Mexico’s Register of Historic Places. According to the repository of the Library of Congress, states the significance of La Cienega Acequia as:

“One of the best preserved acequia systems in New Mexico. An irrigation feature dating to Spanish colonial settlement in the seventeenth century, acequias were constructed to divert water for use in irrigating agricultural fields and pastures. Acequias shaped the surrounding landscape, contributing not only to the physical layout of the villages but to community life and regional identity. La Cienega Acequia remains in operation along relatively unchanged alignments, and contains several traditional water control devices such as dams, checks, and flumes. It remains essential to the local agricultural economy and landscape.”

A historical marker along the road entering La Cieneguilla reads, “This community is one of the earliest Spanish and Grants in the United States. Originally, the site was a Keres Village, until surrounding land was granted to Francisco Anaya de Almazan by the Spanish government prior to 1680. The grant was resettled following the reconquest of New Mexico in 1693 and has been continuously occupied since then. Nearby is the Spanish period Capilla de San Antonio.”

Human occupation of the La Cienega area dates back three thousand years, until it was abandoned by the Keres Indians in the early 1600s. The “Sanchez site,” located within the area, is a group of Spanish settlements inhabited the area in 1630, until the Pueblo Revolt of 1680. Francisco Anaya de Almazan was the original Spanish land grantee of a tract of land in La Cienega. In 1693, Don Diego de Vargas estimated the Almazan land grant to be over three thousand acres.

Population growth in the area did not occur until Almazan sold the grant in 1743. The area had been a frequent stopping point on the Camino Real de Tierra Adentro. In 1795, twenty-five families were provided with land along the Rio Grande at Cieneguilla. During the 19th century the area was used for farming and ranching, then affordable housing became available within the city of Santa Fe and those that commuted for employment relocated.

Presently, 40 percent of the area is owned and managed by the Bureau of Land Management. In 1998, a survey was mailed to community residents regarding a proposed planning area. Responses from the survey included concerns about water resource management, noise from the airport, dogs running loose, poorly maintained roads, too much traffic, car driving too fast on local roads, poor garbage

service, sewer treatment plant impacts on local water resources, and over development in the area which has traditionally been agricultural.

La Cieneguilla Pueblo

The La Cieneguilla Pueblo is located within the La Cieneguilla Land Grant. There are at least 30 small and large room blocks with up to 1000 above-ground rooms along, two kivas, and ceramics indicate ancestral pueblo occupation. Archeological evidence shows pueblo village occupation between AD 1300 and the mid-AD 1400s, then from the late AD 1400s to the arrival of the Spanish mid-1500s.

The San Antonio de Cieneguilla chapel, built in AD 1820, is located west of the pueblo village site, and is not used for regular Sunday services, although it is attended on the Feast Day of San Antonio, June 13th. A multi-structure site, consisting of surface room blocks and pit structures constructed of basalt blocks, is still visible on top of the mesa along with possible prehistoric foot trails.

Thousands of petroglyphs are present within the area, with the majority of rock art appearing on the basalt cliff just below the mesa's edge and along the escarpment above La Cienega Creek. In 1991, a survey conducted by Jose Villegas and Jeff Nelson recorded over 4,400 images within a kilometer and a half. Bird images were the most common with 1,385 counted. Prehistoric images include animal figures, human figures, geometric shapes, handprints, corn plants, and possible landscape features.

The petroglyph site, being in such close proximity to the capital city of Santa Fe, has subjected it to increased risk of destruction. Modern graffiti has also left its mark at the site, as well as destructive practices such as the ongoing use of the area as a target practice and gun range. Rock art has been shot at with ammunition and paint balls, and spray-painted graffiti defacement has occurred.

In 2013, A La Cieneguilla landowner cut into a prehistoric ruin by accident, while trenching for a septic tank with a backhoe and leveling the property, prior to putting in a double-wide mobile home on the property. In a letter to Attorney General Gary King and county Growth Management Department Director Penny Ellis-Green, retired National Park Service archaeologist Phillip Young noted the damage to the prehistoric site saying, "[The land owner] destroyed at least four intact rooms of a prehistoric room block, displaced hundreds, perhaps thousands, of artifacts from their original context." Santa Fe County officials could not have stopped the damage by the landowner because the remnant of the former pueblo is located on private land.

In 2018, the La Cieneguilla Petroglyphs site was nominated as a property that should be designated under the National Register of Historic Places. As of 2022, the application is still pending and the BLM has not closed access to hiking, motorized vehicles to prevent erosion, or the gun range to the public as it has with other petroglyph sites to protect them within the Galisteo Basin. Protecting the La Cieneguilla Petroglyph site for future research, and as a historically and culturally significant part of the surrounding indigenous communities and New Mexico history is imperative.

On Feb 1, 2022, the All Pueblo Council of Governors released a statement condemning vandalism of the La Cieneguilla petroglyphs that occurred in early January, 2022.

"The recent desecration of petroglyphs in the Caja del Rio weighs heavy on the hearts of all Pueblo people throughout New Mexico and Texas. The act is nothing short of violence against our ongoing cultural connection and our spirits who reside on the

landscape. The area has "suffered from years of mismanagement" which has led to "irreversible harm" to their history and culture. The persistent threat to Pueblo artifacts and land highlights the "moral and legal requirements" for consultation and co-management with pueblos and tribes of cultural areas like the Caja del Rio." —Council chairman and former Tesuque Pueblo Gov. Mark Mitchell

Sources:

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8. [Visitor Information: Leonora Curtin Wetland Preserve – Santa Fe Botanical Garden](http://santa-fe-botanical-garden.org)
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2. [Kokopelli images - Hubbard Museum of the American West - CONTENTdm Title \(unm.edu\)](http://www.hubbardmuseum.org)