

Kit Carson monument

More than a tribute to a man, the monument is a recognition of Carson's participation, leadership, and role in society's values during the territorial period of New Mexico history; a time of significant events that shaped human occupation and land use in the region.

From 1882-85, the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), a Union Veterans of the Civil War fraternal organization, lobbied Henry M. Teller, Secretary of the Interior, for permission to locate a monument that they wanted to erect in honor of Kit Carson on federal property. Once permission was obtained, GAR garnered funding to commission a sandstone obelisk and place it in front of the south entrance of the Santiago E. Campos U.S. Courthouse in Santa Fe and a dedication ceremony was held on May 30, 1885 with more than 5,000 people in attendance. Col. Wynkoop, who served with Carson during the Confederate battle in New Mexico, opened the ceremony with brief remarks. In Wynkoop's memoirs, he wrote, "Gen. Carson knew how to lead men into battle and keep them there."

The panel inscriptions on the monument reads:

"He Led The Way" [west panel]

"Kit Carson Died May 23, 1868; Age 59 years" [South panel]

"Pioneer, Pathfinder, Soldier" [East panel]

According to the National Park Service, "Christopher "Kit" Houston Carson, was born on December 24, 1809 in Madison County, Kentucky, and was the sixth of ten children. Carson received little to no formal education and remained illiterate until his death. He became an apprentice to a saddle and harness maker for two years, then joined a wagon train on its way to Santa Fe, New Mexico in 1826. He became a Mountain man and trapper, exploring the west to California and north through the Rocky Mountains, and achieving national fame as a guide for John C. Fremont. During the Mexican War, Carson served as a scout and courier, and an expert guide leading General Stephen Kearny on the safest [route](#) for the military from the New Mexico Territory to California. He became an agent for the Office of Indian Affairs for the northern New Mexico and oversaw the Ute and Jicarilla Apache until the onset of the Civil War. After the Confederates threat was eliminated in New Mexico, Carson led forces to starve into submission, capture and incarcerate the Navajo and Mescalero Apache at Bosque Redondo. After the failed internment campaign at Fort Sumner, Carson was appointed to brigadier general and took command of Fort Garland, Colorado briefly, until poor health forced him to retire. He was mustered out of service in 1867 and spent time with his children, ailing wife, and cattle ranching until his death in 1868.

After the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo 1848, Pueblo and northern Hispano communities implored the United States government to protect their property and possessions from raiding nomadic Indian tribes and the Navajo and Mescalero Apache were deemed "hostile" and "savages". During Carson's military service, he was a Union soldier who participated in battles against the Confederates at the Battle of Val Verde and at Glorieta Pass. He was then appointed lieutenant colonel to help organize the 1st New Mexico Volunteer Infantry and command over a third of five columns of troops; totaling close to 500 men, which were divided into two battalions, each made up of four companies. Most of the men that comprised the volunteer military militias were from the Pueblos of Santo Domingo, Zuni, Oribe, and Santa Clara. Spanish and Hispano descendants who lived in settlements, established by Spain during the 17th century in northern New Mexico, also enlisted in militias.

Although President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, issued September 1862, officially ended the practice of slavery, human trafficking and slave labor continued to be practiced in New Mexico until the early 1900s. Union forces pushed Confederates out of New Mexico into Texas and down the Rio Grande into Mexico.

Determined to eliminate Indian raiding in New Mexico, the United States government turned Civil War military forces from fighting Confederates in other regions to fighting staying in New Mexico and Colorado to fight the Indian Wars against Native Americans the government deemed "hostile" Indians. New Mexico Territorial Governor Calhoun issued a second proclamation on March 18, 1851, which "authorized the attack on any hostile tribe of Indians that may have entered settlements for the purpose of plunder and depredation...and directed or ordered residents to capture the property from any hostile tribe of Indians".

On October 31, 1862 Congress authorized the construction of Fort Sumner. The fort was named for General Edwin Vose Sumner who had died on March 21, 1863 while still in service. The purpose and function of the fort was to afford protection to settlers in the Pecos River valley from the Mescalero Apache, Kiowa, and Comanche, and to house captured Mescalero Apache. Despite warnings that the site was unsuitability for a large human occupation, General Carleton created a 40-square-mile (100 km²) area, known as Bosque Redondo, for the purpose of teaching the Mescalero Apache and the Navajo how to be self-sufficient modern farmers. "Bosque Redondo", means "round grove of trees," and likely referred to the location containing many cottonwood trees near the Pecos River in Fort Sumner, NM.

During fall 1862, when Navajos failed to surrender, "Kit" Carson employed the use of war tactics of "scorched earth policy" and sent forces from Fort Defiance to burn Navajos' crops, destroy their food caches, raze their hogans, poison their water supply, and shoot their horses and sheep. As the first snows fell, Carson dispatched patrols to harass Navajo bands, preventing them from hunting game or gathering wild food plants.

General Carleton's Order No. 15 which allowed Kit Carson to strike Navajos:

"For a long time past the Navajoe Indians have murdered and robbed the people of New Mexico. Last winter when eighteen of their chiefs came to Santa Fe to have a talk, they were warned, -- and were told to inform their people, -- that for these murders and robberies the tribe must be punished, unless some binding guarantees should be given that in [the] future these outrages should cease. No such guarantees have yet been given: But on the contrary, additional murders, and additional robberies have been perpetrated upon the persons and property of unoffending citizens. It is therefore ordered that Colonel CHRISTOPHER ["KIT"] CARSON, with a proper military force proceed without delay to a point in the Navajoe country known as Pueblo Colorado [now Ganado, Arizona], and there establish a defensible Depot for his supplies and Hospital; and thence to prosecute a vigorous war upon the men of this tribe until it is considered at these Head Quarters that they have been effectually punished for their long continued atrocities."

*Brigadier General, James H. Carleton,
General Order No. 15, June 15th 1863,
published in L. C. Kelly's book Navajo Roundup*

Upon learning that General Carleton intended for him to pursue the Navajos in an effort to relocate them to the Bosque Redondo reservation, Carson tendered a letter of resignation, dated February 3, 1863. Carleton refused his resignation and ordered Carson to engage in battle with the Chiricahua Apache band in the Gila Mountains of southwest New Mexico. Again, in the summer of 1863, Carson's troops destroyed Navajo crops, livestock, and homes within the Four Corners area.

On July 20, 1863 General Carlton ordered all Navajos to surrender, after that date, every Navajo would be treated as hostile and dealt with accordingly. Carlton immediately enacted a "shoot-to-kill" policy; all Mescalero men, wherever and whenever found were to be shot, with women and children taken as prisoners though unharmed. As a result of Carlton's policy, Navajos and/or Mescalero Apache who refused to surrender unconditionally were instantly killed.

Thousands of Navajo were living in fear, stricken by starvation; many children and elderly died from exposure to the cold. Hundreds were lured by promises of protection from slave raiding, clothing, blankets, food and livestock and surrendered to the military at Fort Defiance and Fort Wingate; and thousands of Navajo were living in fear, stricken by starvation; many children and elderly died from exposure to the cold during winter months of 1864 when the Navajo Long Walk began.

In a letter (printed in L. C. Kelley's book, Navajo Roundup) to Adjutant General of the Army, dated February 27, 1864, Brigadier General Lorenzo Thomas reported, "What with the Navajos I have captured and those who have surrendered, we have now over three thousand, and will, without doubt soon have the whole tribe. I do not believe they number now much over five thousand all told."

Not all of the Navajo surrendered, many evaded the U. S. Army by hiding in small groups near Navajo Mountain, the Grand Canyon, in the territory of the Chiricahua Apache, Mexico, and in parts of Utah and Colorado. General Carlton urged Victorio and the Warm Springs Apache band to surrender, but the leader declared that he'd rather die fighting rather than relocate. Believing many more Navajos would surrender if Navajo leader Manuelito agreed to relocate, Carson sent a company into Canyon de Chelly, January 1864, in search of Manuelito. Captain John Thompson cut down Navajo peach orchards during July- August 1864. (New Mexican Lives, pg.187).

The Navajo Nation believes "Kit" Carson is the man who led the "scorched earth policy," starving and incarcerating the Navajo, which was the most powerful weapon used against them. It was the final measure that broke the people into surrendering, and in doing so, brought tremendous suffering. An estimated 2,000 deaths, and unfathomable hardships were experienced by the Dine' during the period of The Long Walk.

Three years after the ending of the Civil War, the long journey back to a newly established reservation located within a portion of traditional homelands began for the Navajo on June 18, 1868. Just as the Navajo were beginning to stabilize their families and find resources to rebuild homes and crops again, New Mexico Territorial Governor Mitchell issued a proclamation, dated August 2, 1869 and September 1869, which declared Navajo and Gila Apache Indian tribes, "outlaws", and authorized citizens to kill and take the property of their enemies.

Memorial Site at Bosque Redondo

The incarceration of the Navajo and the Apache at Bosque Redondo serves as a reminder to all, that no people regardless of race, color, or beliefs, should have to face such harsh treatment as what they experienced. The families of the survivors of the Long Walk refer to this period as, “Hwééldi,” and have not forgotten the experience; their stories continue to be shared and passed down generation-to-generation.

On June 1, 1994, former Navajo Nation President Peterson Zah placed Treaty Rock, a 40,000-pound boulder from Window Rock, AZ (Navajo Nation Capitol), at the Bosque Redondo site to observe up to 1,500 Navajo people who were not able to return to their homeland and were buried in unmarked graves, and the many who were raped, tortured, killed, including women and children were taken and sold into slavery.

In 2018, the Navajo Nation issued a proclamation recognizing the 150th year anniversary of the signing of Naalstoos Sání (The Treaty of June 1, 1868 which ended Navajo incarceration at the Bosque Redondo internment camp and established the Navajo reservation), it reads:

“Whereas, we have the strength as a people to maintain these ties throughout the Hwééldi, the forced removal of Diné in the Long Walk, when our people were rounded up and forced to walk three hundred miles to be interned at Bosque Redondo. Many were tortured, raped, and killed, including women in childbirth and children. Still, we persevered. Our ceremonies persevered the Dine as a people and a culture, until the signing of Naalstoos Sání created recognition of our Sovereignty by the United States.”

Place Names & Monuments

Although some regard Carson as a hero in the West, others consider him a war criminal. Several places have been named in honor of the frontiersman: the Carson National Forest in New Mexico, a river located in Dayton, Nevada, the Kit Carson Peak, a high mountain summit, Fort Carson military base, and a town in Cheyenne County Colorado were named after him. There is a Kit Carson Road located in Taos, and a highway named after Carson in Cimarron, New Mexico that connects to Colorado. An elementary school in the South Valley of Albuquerque bears the Kit Carson name, and a school in Colorado whose town was located near the site where Kit Carson traded with the Arapahoe and Cheyenne nations.

On July 8, 2014 the Taos Town Council voted 3-1, to separate the park into two parts, keeping the name Kit Carson Memorial Park for the cemetery where Carson and his wife Josefa are buried, and removing the name from the town’s central public park. The council suggested renaming the park Red Willow as a gesture of reconciliation toward Taos Pueblo; however, Taos pueblo officials were not consulted prior to the decision about the name change. A committee of representatives from the Taos pueblo, the town government and the public were supposed to form and help choose a new name for the recreational section of the park that hosts craft fairs, concerts and ball games. The committee never formed, and as of 2021, the name of the park remains Kit Carson Memorial Park.

On September 10, 2020, the Clark County School Board in Nevada voted to rescind the name of Kit Carson Elementary School. The board expressed concerns over Carson’s role in the death of hundreds of Native Americans during the colonization of the West, as well as his leadership in the Navajo Long Walk

which forced Navajo people to walk from modern-day Arizona to New Mexico during the winter of 1864. The board renamed the elementary school after Helen Anderson Toland, who was the principal of the elementary school during the 1960s, when Las Vegas, Nevada schools were still segregated.

The American Indian Movement of Colorado pushed for years to remove the statue of Kit Carson at the top of the monument, describing his continued memorial as “erasing ‘the existence and histories of indigenous peoples and nations.’” Carson’s statue was removed (temporarily) in June 2020, as the city of Denver and the nation reckoned with history’s darker truths. In February 2024, Denver decided not to return to the Civic Center area a statue commemorating Christopher Columbus and another representing Kit Carson.

On Indigenous People’s Day, October 2022, New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham issued an [executive order](#) that rescinded four 1800s-era proclamations from former territorial governors. The 1851 proclamations issued by Gov. Calhoun directed Native residents to be excluded from official census counts and authorized militias to “pursue and attack” Indigenous New Mexicans. The 1869 proclamations issued by Gov. Mitchell and Gov. Pile declared certain Tribal nations as “outlaws” and authorized New Mexico residents to commit violence against Tribal citizens. The rescinding of territorial proclamations helped start an era of healing and reconciliation.

No record can be found of these four proclamations ever being rescinded by previous governors. While proclamations are issued at will by governors, they must be rescinded by executive order.

“It is heartening to see that we can come together and heal by respecting tribal histories on Indigenous Peoples’ Day, and I am grateful to Gov. Lujan Grisham for rescinding these proclamations,” said **Pueblo of Pojoaque Gov. Jenelle Roybal**. “For my people, this day, T’owa-ví Thaa Day in the Tewa language, is about remembering our history and our ancestors – those who were here first. I encourage every New Mexican and every citizen of Nations, Tribes and Pueblos to reflect on the values, language and culture we celebrate today.”

The governor also issued the following statement in celebration of Indigenous Peoples’ Day:

“Today, we join together with Indigenous peoples to remember and honor the rich culture and legacy of New Mexico’s first citizens. The 23 sovereign Nations, Tribes and Pueblos are an integral part of our state’s diverse culture, providing essential and unique contributions to New Mexican life and to the history of our state and country. Today we pause to remember our shared heritage and the strong friendship and respect we have built over generations. From Po’pay, born in Ohkay Owingeh, who led the first American Revolution in the great Pueblo Revolt of 1680 to the Navajo Code Talkers whose unbreakable code saved thousands of American lives in WWII, today we pause to remember our shared heritage and the strong friendship and respect we have built over generations. My administration will continue to invest in and support Indigenous communities throughout New Mexico. This year we broke ground on the Navajo Code Talker Museum to make sure future generations know the stories and courage of the Code Talkers. In Gallup, we announced funds for new wells to provide safe drinking water to remote Navajo Chapter Houses and to the greater Gallup community. Just last month, we announced the first ever tribal LEDA grant of \$2.5 million to the Taos Pueblo Heritage Center which will create over 200 new jobs and help preserve the cultural heritage of the Pueblo.”

Vandalism & Protest

After the monument to Kit Carson was vandalized on June 17, 2020 with graffiti that read, "Stolen Land," a plywood barrier was erected and video monitoring devices were installed to protect the monument. Again, the monument's plywood barrier was vandalized with splattered red paint, red hand prints, and the spray painted words, "Land Back," On October 10, 2022.

A protest was held midday in front of the Carson monument with protest banners that read, "This monument erases Indigenous Peoples History", "No Honor in Genocide", Kit Carson Mass Murderer", "KKKit Carson Mass Murderer-Human Trafficker-Rapist", "Stop Celebrating Colonialism", Replace This Monument Represent Original People", "It Matters Who We Elevate and Celebrate", No More MMIR, In Whose Honor?", "It's Time to Stop Celebrating Conquest".

The Carson monument's upper spire was partially toppled and significantly damaged by protestors who tied a wire around the monument and pulled it with a pickup truck on the night of August 30, 2023.

Federal Environmental Review & Assessment

Until 2023, the monument was still owned by GAR's successor organization, the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War. This organization conveyed the Carson monument to the General Services Administration (an agency of the federal government) who is now charged with making a decision regarding the future of the Carson monument. There was only one meeting for the public to make comments on the movement of the Carson monument and on May 9, 2024, GSA conducted a tribal consultation meeting with two northern pueblos and the two most impacted tribes of the mid 1800s: (Mescalero Apache and the Navajo Nation).

The Mescalero Apache and Dine' (Navajo) are two groups who faced greater challenges and are still recovering from the devastating impacts of slavery, forced removal from their homelands, the precarious Navajo Long Walk and incarceration at Bosque Redondo, and the hardship and human cruelty of the "scorched earth" policy enacted in 1860 and led by Carson. Due to the legacy of historical injustices, these communities have vulnerabilities and barriers to accessing aid such as water infrastructure, adequate housing, and the ability to interact with their ancestral homelands due to toxic contamination from the legacy of nuclear weaponry and militarization by the federal government.

On May 9, 2024, GSA consulted with:

- The Mescalero Apache representative who requested existing site documentation to review and noted that the monument has been disturbed, saying "It appears to be a good opportunity to interpret the history from both sides of history, those protecting their land and those trying to take it over, plus the conflicts that still exist today over monuments."
- The Navajo Nation representative who requested consultation in the form of a written document. They would like to respond to the site documentation study and the history of the site, to review as a report and said that the Navajo Nation would issue comments at the time they receive a formal document.

Hugo Gardea, a regional historic preservation official with the General Services Administration (federal agency), said the GSA agency has not yet made a decision about the future of the Carson monument however the GSA agency considered the following options:

Taking no action, an option Gardea said the agency found "unacceptable."

Retaining part or all of the monument in place, with additional historic interpretation.
Relocating the monument.
Disassembling it and putting it in storage.
Restoring it on-site.

Places suggested for possible relocation include the Bosque Redondo Memorial at Fort Sumner Historic Site, Gardea said. The Eastern New Mexico site has a monument to Navajo and Mescalero Apache people who were forcibly moved there from their homelands in a military campaign led by Carson.

The GSA completed an Environmental Assessment in November 2024 with a **preferred action** for the federal agency:

Alternative 4, “which disassembles and removes the monument from the [Santa Fe] Federal Oval, would have a minimal but beneficial effect on the urban environment, including the goals of tourism. Removal would decrease the future likelihood of vandalism on-site at this particular location”.

A public comment period was held for thirty days and closed on December 30th, 2024. GSA will take action after a 90-day review of comments and issuance of a final report.

Navajo Nation’s Resolutions

On November 18, 2021 the Navajo Nation Naabik'iyati' Committee passed legislation Bill 0213-21, sponsored by Delegate Mark Freeland; an action requesting the state of New Mexico to remove the name of Christopher “Kit” Carson from all monuments, state parks, government buildings, highways and streets within the state of New Mexico. This bill will likely be amended to include Arizona, Colorado and Utah.

From 1864 - 1868, an estimated 8,500 Navajo people endured what Freeland’s legislation described as “brutal” methods of pillaging and destroying livestock and crops which were successful. In March 1864, the Navajo people began the “Long Walk” to the military concentration camp at Bosque Redondo.

Bill 0213-21 says:

“Carson and his troops terrorized the Navajo people by burning crops, destroying homes, and slaughtering and killing livestock. While imprisoned at Fort Sumner, Navajos experienced slavery, starvation, prostitution, and disease. It is estimated that between 1864 and 1868, more than 2,000 Navajos died at Fort Sumner. Kit Carson’s troops placed the deceased’s remains in unmarked graves and prohibited Navajos from following their traditional burial practices.”

On December 12, 2024, the Navajo Nation governing council passed [Resolution 0251-24](#) “**Reaffirming the Navajo Nation’s opposition to any monument of Christopher “Kit” Carson being placed in the state of New Mexico, and specifically at Bosque Redondo, Santa Fe Cemetery, or the Carson House and Museum in Taos**”. The Navajo Nation requests the immediate removal of the name of Christopher “Kit” Carson from all government properties, including monuments, parks, highways, streets, etc. in the State of New Mexico; and cease in naming public properties using the Christopher “Kit” Carson name; and tribal consultation regarding the placement of the Carson monument.

Sources:

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2. Simmons, Marc. *Kit Carson and His Three Wives: A Family History*. University of New Mexico Press, May, 2011.
3. [Kit Carson \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](#)
4. [Letter, Captain Lafayette McLaws to Lieutenant Lucius L. Rich, December 16, 1860 | Western Waters Digital Library | J. Willard Marriott Digital Library \(utah.edu\)](#)
5. Taylor, James. *Bloody Valverde: A Civil War Battle on the Rio Grande*, February 21, 1862. University of New Mexico Press, March, 1999.
6. [Diary of Christopher Carson's Navajo Campaign, first part - UNM CSWR William G. Ritch Papers Collection - CONTENTdm Title](#)
7. Carleton's quote on Mescalero Apache. Eigen's Political and Historical Quotations
8. [Santa Fe's forgotten monument to Kit Carson | Local News | santafenewmexican.com](#)
9. [Kit Carson Elementary to be renamed after Black principal | AP News](#)
10. [Rename Kit Carson Park? | Opinion | taosnews.com](#)
11. [Delegate to request getting rid of Kit Carson's name - Navajo Times](#)
12. [Secretary Haaland Takes Action to Remove Derogatory Names from Federal Lands | U.S. Department of the Interior \(doi.gov\)](#)
13. [Vandalism damages monument to frontiersman 'Kit' Carson, who led campaigns against Native Americans | AP News](#)
14. [Kit Carson Monument Vandalized - Santa Fe Reporter](#)
15. News Article: "Federal agency quietly moves forward process for Kit Carson monument" Nicholas Gilmore, The Santa Fe New Mexican, Fri, August 30, 2024 at 8:34 PM MST
16. [Governor rescinds offensive 1800s-era proclamations from former New Mexico governors, issues statement in celebration of Indigenous Peoples' Day - Office of the Governor - Michelle Lujan Grisham](#)

For Navajo perspectives on the Long Walk:

1. Denetdale, Jennifer Nez. *Reclaiming Diné History: The Legacies of Navajo Chief Manuelito and Juanita* 3rd ed. Edition. University of Arizona Press; 3rd ed. edition (June 1, 2007).
2. Johnson, Broderick H. ed., *Navajo Stories of the Long Walk Period* (Tsaile, AZ: Diné Press, 1973), 274.
3. Carleton, James Henry. 1814-1873. To the people of New Mexico. This paper sets forth some of the principal reasons why the Navajo Indians have been located upon a reservation at the Bosque Redondo. [Catalog Record: To the people of New Mexico. This paper sets... | HathiTrust Digital Library](#)
4. Oral history stories of the Long Walk = Hwéeldi Baa Hané / by the Diné of the Eastern Region of the Navajo Reservation ; stories collected and recorded by the Title VII Bilingual Staff. Crownpoint, N.M. : Lake Valley Navajo School, 1991. [LC Catalog - Item Information \(Full Record\) \(loc.gov\)](#)
5. Bighorse. Tiana. *Bighorse the Warrior*. University of Arizona Press; Reissue edition (May 1, 1994).

6. [History » New Mexico Historic Sites \(nmhistoricsites.org\)](http://nmhistoricsites.org)
7. [150 Years After the Long Walk \(newmexicomagazine.org\)](http://newmexicomagazine.org)
8. [The Navajo Nation Treaty Proclamation.pdf \(navajonationcouncil.org\)](http://navajonationcouncil.org)
9. [Fort Sumner Historic Site/Bosque Redondo Memorial » New Mexico Historic Sites \(nmhistoricsites.org\)](http://nmhistoricsites.org)
10. [Denver's Pioneer Monument and a Legacy of Controversy | Denver Public Library Special Collections and Archives \(denverlibrary.org\)](http://denverlibrary.org)

Learn more about the culture and history of the Mescalero Apache

1. [Our Culture - Official Website of the Mescalero Apache Tribe](http://ourculture.org)
2. Navajo Nation: [History \(navajo-nsn.gov\)](http://navajo-nsn.gov)

[Interview with Oakee James - UNM CSWR American Indian Oral History Navajo Transcripts - CONTENTdm Title](#)

[Map of the route pursued in 1849 by the U.S. Troops - New Mexico Waters - CONTENTdm Title \(unm.edu\)](#)

Map of the route pursued in 1849 by the U.S. Troops under the command of Bvt. Lieut. Col. JNO. M. Washington, Governor of New Mexico in an expedition against the Navajos [sic] Indians, by James H. Simpson, 1st Lieut. T. Engrs., assisted by Mr. Edward M. Kern, constructed under the general orders of Col. J. J. Abert. Chief Topl. Engrs. Kern, Edward M. (drawn by, Santa Fe, N.M.); P.S. Duval's Steam Lith. Press, Philadelphia; Shoemaker, J. G. (engr.), Senate Ex. Doc. 1st Sess. 31st. Cong. No. 64, 1849.