



As tensions increased during the Indian Wars of the 1870s, Fort Union was vital in supplying the US Army and protecting settlers in the expanding American Southwest.
ILLUSTRATION—NPS / STEVEN LANG

The Prairie Seems Silent Now

Grass has quietly grown over the worn frontier trail. Fires no longer crackle in the officers' hearths, and ancient hunting cries trailed off long ago. What's left of Fort Union are the hushed remnants of three forts—and many telling scars on the landscape.

While you won't hear the clang of the blacksmith's hammer echoing off the mountains, you can imagine how the children of Fort Union once laughed and played here, how settlers applauded safe passage through inhospitable territory, and how buglers called to prepare Union troops for a decisive Civil War battle. Long before the American flag flew overhead, this land

was home to Texans, Mexicans, Spaniards, Jicarilla Apache, Pueblo, Ute, Comanche, Great Plains hunters, and others whose footpaths scored the earth for generations. From their journeys a valuable trade route—the Santa Fe Trail—left its historic mark. Traders and settlers from the eastern United States traveled the trail in great numbers; their wagon trains rutted the land so deeply you can still see the impressions.

The Americans brought goods, money, domesticated animals, a new language, technology, their culture, and their beliefs. But opportunities for cultural exchange at the crossroads tended to meld into social misunderstanding, resentment, and war. Today, Fort Union National Monument gives an enduring voice to the struggles, triumphs, and complexities of frontier life for the many people of a changing Southwest.

Guardians of the Trail

When the Mexican-American War ended and the US acquired the New Mexico Territory, Fort Union was established to guard American interests in the Southwest. Positioned where the Santa Fe Trail's two main branches met, Fort Union protected the trail and its travelers, supplied the US Army, and aided in subduing American Indians who fought the Anglos for invading their homeland. From 1851–91 three successive forts were built—each bigger, better, and stronger than the one before. Ultimately, Fort Union was the largest fort west of the Mississippi River.

Fort Union's baseball team, pictured in 1888, played local teams.



ARSENAL
The arsenal's workers maintained artillery weapons and leather gear, supplied Southwest forts with ammunition and weapons, and sometimes field-tested new firearms.

1821 American traders follow indigenous routes to blaze the Santa Fe Trail.
1846 With the start of the Mexican-American War, US Brig. Gen. Stephen W. Kearny governs the New Mexico Territory out of Santa Fe.
1849–50 Jicarilla Apaches and Utes threaten safe passage along the Santa Fe Trail.
July 26, 1851 Col. Edwin Vose Sumner, military governor of the New Mexico Territory, orders the construction of the first fort.
December 25, 1854 Jicarilla Apaches unite with Ute

FIRST FORT (1851–61)
The first fort establishes a US military presence in the Southwest and protects American interests like newly acquired land, settlers, and a lucrative trade route. Over the next decade soldiers patrol the region to control Indian activity and supply goods throughout the region.
June 29, 1854 Lt. George Sykes and 58 Fort Union cavalymen pursue Jicarilla Apaches in northern New Mexico Territory.

warriors and attack an Anglo settlement in Colorado.
Early 1855 Col. Thomas T. Fauntleroy leads Fort Union soldiers in a campaign against the Utes and Jicarilla Apaches.
Mid-1855 Jicarilla Apaches and Moache Utes sign peace



SECOND FORT
US soldiers at the second fort built an entrenched camp with a bombproof magazine and store house.

June 4, 1861 Maj. Henry H. Sibley, who served in New Mexico before the war, resigns his US commission to fight for the Confederacy.
April 12, 1861 The Civil War begins. Fort Union's dilapidated first fort would be "wholly unfit" against Confederate assault.
July 8, 1861 Sibley organizes a Confederate brigade to conquer the New Mexico Territory. Some New Mexico

SECOND FORT (1861–62)
To defend the US during the Civil War, Fort Union soldiers and New Mexico regiments construct a "model" star-shaped fieldwork a mile east of the first fort, which becomes an arsenal. The second fort has 28 cannon platforms and a central magazine.
Volunteers train at Fort Union under the command of Lt. Kit Carson and Ceran St. Vrain.
August 1861 Construction on the second fort begins.
July 23, 1861 Col. John R. Baylor marches into the New Mexico Territory. On August 1 he claims all land south of the 34th parallel for the Confederacy.

February 1862 Sibley's troops defeat Union soldiers under the command of Col. Edward R. S. Canby at the battle of Valverde. Confederates take Albuquerque.
March 10, 1862 Confederates take Santa Fe. Fort Union's officers are ordered not to let "cowardly" American citizens flee past the fort.
March 1862 Union forces defeat Confederate troops at the battle of Glorieta Pass near Santa Fe, ending the Confederate invasion of New Mexico.



THIRD FORT
To save money and quickly complete construction, buildings at the third fort were made of adobe and materials from the second fort.

THIRD FORT (1863–91)
As the Civil War rages on, the US hires civilians and uses its prisoners to construct a more substantial and permanent Fort Union. The third fort better supports US troops in the Southwest, secures supplies, and improves military housing. Fort Union now includes a military post, quartermaster's depot, and arsenal, each with its own commander. But over the next 30 years, the Indian wars will die down, the Santa Fe Trail will fade into the brush, and the once vital Fort Union—deemed no longer necessary—will close.

November 20, 1862 Construction begins on the third and final fort.
1862 Fort Union engineers work on the Navajo and Mescalero Apache reservation at Bosque Redondo.
1864 Some Navajo prisoners pass through Fort Union during the Long Walk to their internment camp at Bosque Redondo.
August 13, 1866 The first African American soldiers stationed at Fort Union—the 57th US Colored Infantry—arrive at the fort.

1874–75 Fort Union supplies troops and large amounts of ammunition for the Red River War against American Indians in Texas.
December 20, 1879 The 9th US Cavalry (Buffalo Soldiers), an original African American unit organized after the Civil War, arrives at Fort Union to engage in the Indian Wars.
July 1882 The Fort Union arsenal closes.
July 4, 1885 Fort Union provides supplies to Brig. Gen. George Crook as he hunts the Apache leader Geronimo.
February 12, 1891 Fort Union is ordered to close. Troops, prisoners, and stores move to Fort Wingate. The hospital closes April 20.
May 15, 1891 The last soldiers leave Fort Union.
June 28, 1954 Fort Union National Monument is established to protect and preserve this site for public access.



MILITARY POST

Fort Union provides a frontier force. Soldiers patrol the Santa Fe Trail to protect travellers from Indian attack, escort wagon trains, and accompany stagecoaches carrying US mail. Daily duties include drills, guard mounts, target practice, inspections, and other tasks to operate the post.

POST

DEPOT

QUARTERMASTER DEPOT
As the American Southwest's central supply hub, Fort Union's depot sees 30–100 wagon trains of up to 200 wagons each pass through daily. Soldiers and civilian workers, including Hispanic laborers, receive and ship thousands of tons of supplies to 46 regional posts.

The safest place in the world to bring up children.
Genevieve Collins, daughter and wife of post officers

QUARTERS AND OFFICES

FORT LIFE

Officers' wives organize social events like dances, teas, and balls. Residents play cards, horseshoes, field sports, billiards, and bowling to break up the monotony of frontier life. Kids play with dolls and marbles, ride horses, and go to school when teachers are available. Before the Civil War, enslaved people travel here with officers' families or work as servants; after the war, some work as soldiers or civilian employees.

ENLISTED BARRACKS

MECHANIC'S CORRAL

STOREHOUSES

TRANSPORTATION CORRAL

COMMISSARY

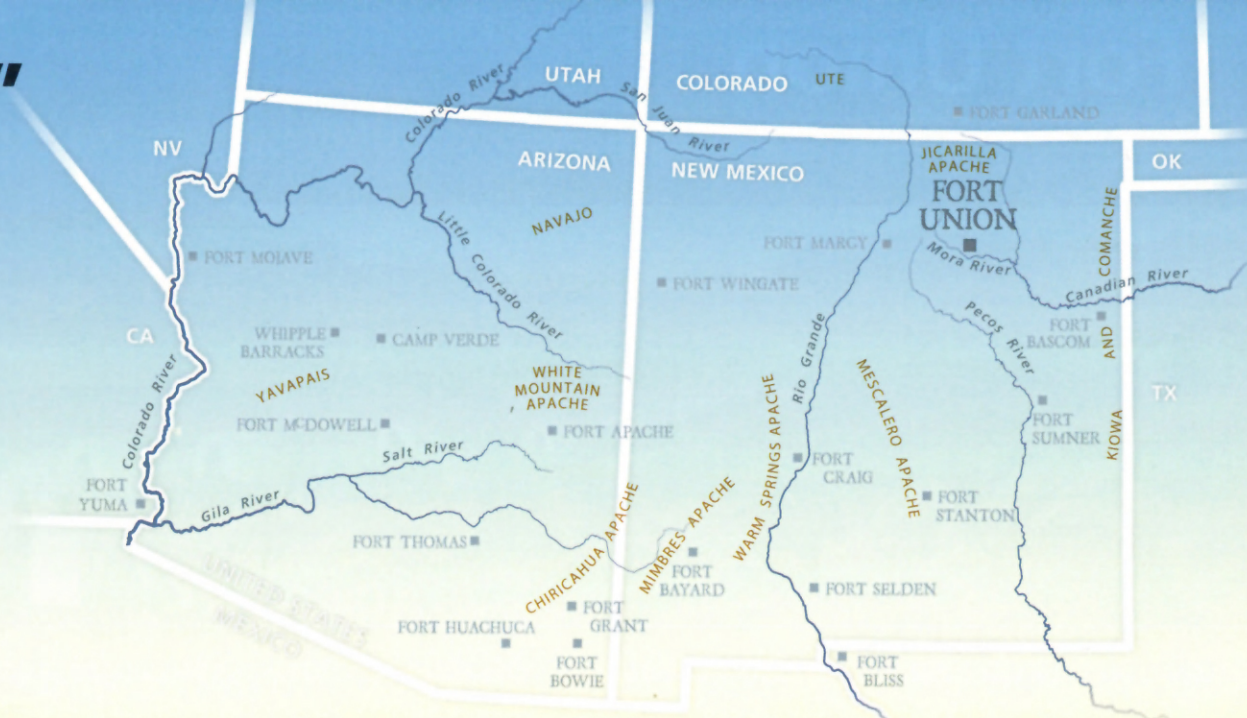
"I Will Never Forget Fort Union"

Alexander Forsyth, 1954, one of the last soldiers posted at Fort Union

With 30,000 Indians in or near the District and a native population very hostile to them and continually giving rise to quarrels, it is obvious that a permanent military force is necessary in the Territory.

George W. Getty, Commander, District of New Mexico

Indian raids intensified in the 1850s. Nearly 1,300 US soldiers in eleven outposts across the New Mexico Territory needed a military stronghold in the Southwest, an efficient supply depot for the Army, and a communication link to the states. The land Sumner chose near the Santa Fe Trail provided the water, fertile soil, and timber necessary for a US military facility. Wind, drought, smallpox, and isolation made life hard for Fort Union's residents, but despite the harsh conditions Fort Union persevered.



The US Army raised its southwestern forts amid Indian lands (present-day state lines shown).

SANGRE DE CRISTO MOUNTAINS

Ocate Crossing

TURKEY MOUNTAINS

The Three Forts



First fort, 1851-61



Second fort, 1861-62

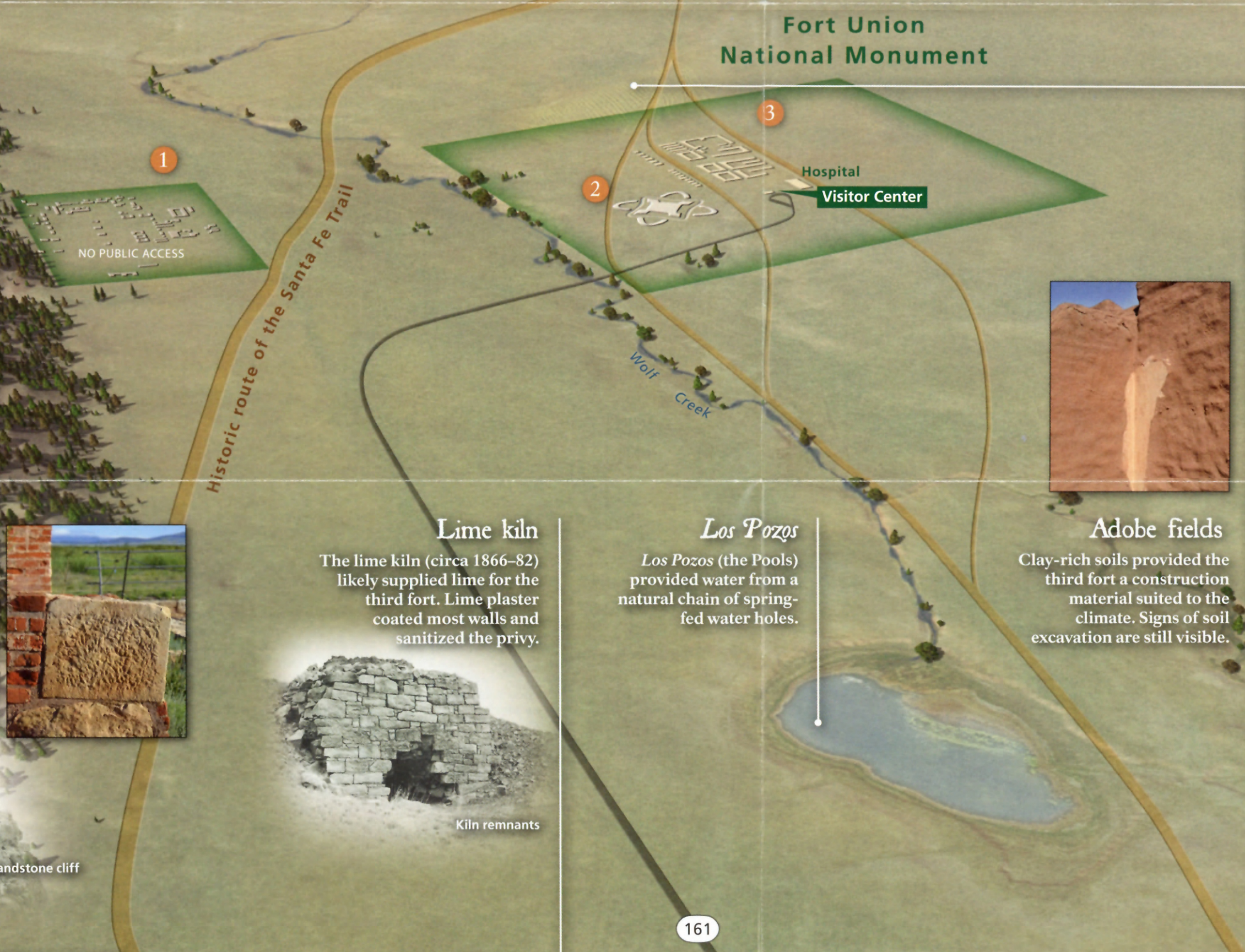


Third fort, 1863-91

Post Hospital



Fort Union's hospital provided the best soldier and civilian medical care for 500 miles.



Sandstone quarry

Sandstone from the canyon walls was used to build chimneys at the first fort then sidewalks, foundations, drainage, and the prison.



Sandstone cliff

Lime kiln

The lime kiln (circa 1866-82) likely supplied lime for the third fort. Lime plaster coated most walls and sanitized the privy.



Kiln remnants

Los Pozos

Los Pozos (the Pools) provided water from a natural chain of spring-fed water holes.



Adobe fields

Clay-rich soils provided the third fort a construction material suited to the climate. Signs of soil excavation are still visible.



Timber reserves

Wood from the Turkey Mountains provided building materials for the first fort and supplied firewood for each of the three forts.



Early visitors to Fort Union's remnants pose for a picture.

Santa Fe Trail

Americans, Hispanics, British, Mexicans, Irish, Germans, Scandinavians, French, Italians, and more passed through Fort Union along the Santa Fe Trail.

Workmen were busy tearing down the old fortification. They tore my heart down with it. Why not let the old walls stand? Around each crumbling wall, each yawning cellar hole, are gathered precious memories of young America.

Marian Sloan Russell, former resident

VISIT FORT UNION

The park is located 28 miles north of Las Vegas, NM, on I-25. Take exit 366 then proceed 8 miles west on NM 161. Open daily except Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. Hours vary seasonally. The park has picnic tables, drinking water, and restrooms. Lodging and services are available in Las Vegas.

ACCESSIBILITY We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to the visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check our website.

SAFETY While we make every effort to provide for your safety, exercise caution during your visit. • Stay on established paths. • If you encounter a rattlesnake, back away slowly, go around it, and report it to a park ranger. • Severe weather can occur anytime. • Federal law protects all natural and cultural features in the park. Do not collect or disturb objects or climb on structures. • For firearms regulations check the park website.

MORE INFORMATION
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Fort Union is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. Learn more at www.nps.gov.

National Park Foundation
Join the park community.
www.nationalparks.org

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By 1870 the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway transported supplies and troops, so the Santa Fe Trail and Fort Union became unnecessary. In 1891 the fort closed the same day as Union Gen. William T. Sherman's funeral. All military posts were ordered to wear

badges of mourning, fire 17-gun salutes every half-hour, and perform no other duties that day; still, Fort Union's soldiers left on schedule. Over time, the US Army partially demolished the fort, and much of the adobe structures melted back into the earth.

In this park living history program, US soldiers fire the cannon to honor a deceased general.

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