

INTERPRETATION

“JOURNEY’S END”  
INTERPRETIVE PROJECT

Santa Fe Trail National Scenic Byway

NEW MEXICO

2 0 0 7 S C E N I C B Y W A Y A W A R D W I N N E R f o r  
I N T E R P R E T A T I O N



Telling America’s story of westward expansion with its inherent physical movement is difficult because of the limited resources visitors can see. Many places struggle with how to interpret this story. The Santa Fe Trail National Scenic Byway has taken a major step toward providing an innovative example of how to interpret and also visualize this story with the “Journey’s End” project.

**INNOVATION IN VISUAL INTERPRETATION**

Through the “Journey’s End” Interpretive Project, a life-sized bronze sculpture stands near the end of the Santa Fe Trail, offering a dimensional visual anchor for both the trail itself and the story it tells. The sculpture depicts a covered wagon pulled by mules, bogged down as it nears the Santa Fe Plaza. This moment in time illustrates a diverse range of human experiences: riders helping each other and the mules, a boy and a dog greeting the wagon, and an American Indian woman observing from a distance. In addition to the monument itself, the interpretation includes embedded fiberglass signs, an audio recording, and a brochure.

**LEADERSHIP THROUGH PARTNERSHIP**

While this project offers an amazing example of innovation in byway interpretation, it also offers a major lesson in partnerships. The project was first conceived by the city of Santa Fe’s Art in Public Places Committee, and carried out together with the Santa Fe National Scenic Byway Alliance. This organizational and project connection between history and the arts ensured that scenic byway advocates could gain knowledge of public art experience (and vice versa). It also accessed a readymade process for citizen involvement. A citizens committee was appointed to identify the appropriate site. Then an artist selection committee was formed to review artists’ proposals. These committees included neighborhood and Santa Fe Trail representatives, along with art professionals and others.

**COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT DRIVES SUCCESS**

During the design phase, the project team hosted a public event to invite citizens to meet the artist, Reynaldo Rivera, and see preliminary sculpture proposals. With widespread public support in place, the artist finalized the project. This support continued once the sculpture and other interpretive materials were installed. Perhaps the best summary of the acceptance of this work is a quote from Santa Fe Mayor David Cross: “This sculpture is probably our most visited piece of public art. Even before the landscaping was completed, tour buses were stopping to show the sculpture and talk about Santa Fe Trail history. The popularity of the site required adding a city bus stop.”

“Journey’s End” breaks new ground for historical interpretation, allowing the visitor to visualize a critical story in American history. It also provides an innovative model as a collaborative option for interpretation.

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