



**NATIONAL
CONSERVATION
LANDS**

West Malpais & Hole-in-the-Wall

El Malpais National Conservation Area



Legend

- National Conservation Area
- State Highway
- Unpaved Routes
- Non-Motorized Trails
- Wilderness Area
- Wilderness Study Area



Hole-in-the-Wall

Within the West Malpais Wilderness is a 6700-acre kipuka called Hole-in-the-Wall. "Kipuka" is a Hawaiian word meaning "island of vegetation surrounded by lava flow."

Bureau of Land Management
Rio Puerco Field Office
100 Sun Ave. NE
Pan American Bldg., Suite 330
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87109
505/761-8700 or
El Malpais Ranger Station
505/280-2918
or
www.blm.gov/new-mexico

In case of emergency:
BLM Rio Puerco Law Enforcement – 505/761-8700
Immediate Emergency – 911
24-hour Federal Law Enforcement – 800/637-9152

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BLM/NM/GI-16-05-8000

Welcome to the West Malpais Wilderness/ Hole-in-the-Wall!

Looking for adventure? A hike into this rugged wilderness brings wonderful opportunities as well as challenges for the adventurous hiker.

The area is remote, far from the roars of the highways and insistent dings of technology, and a person can be free to reconnect with themselves. You'll begin to refresh as you hike through rocky areas with little vegetation and spot tracks from cougars or see skittering lizards. As you hike further into the Wilderness, you may look around you, shocked as the barren land becomes more densely vegetated.

The El Malpais National Conservation Area (NCA) contains some of the most dynamic and scenic landscape in New Mexico. El Malpais is Spanish for "the badlands," a description worthy of the area's countless volcanic eruptions which sent rivers of molten rock and flying cinders over what is now a bleak valley of three million years' worth of hardened lava. Native American settlers probably witnessed the last of the eruptions. Their former home is now a land of craters and lava tubes, cinder cones and spatter cones, ice caves and pressure ridges, and a surprising amount of vegetation.

Many varieties of trees, shrubs, mammals, reptiles, grasses, fungi and other creatures make this wilderness their home.



These life forms interact with and influence one another, in this harsh, dry environment. For example, lichen slowly breaks down rock and obtains nutrients from the stone. This process provides new soil and a toehold for new plant growth. Antelope, deer, rabbits, and squirrels forage for these plants and scarce water. Lightning-caused wildfires sweep through areas, destroying some plants, while releasing

vital nutrients for others, and opening up new niches in which life may begin anew.

As a result, species have adapted to the unique conditions here.

There is also considerable evidence of human activities in the Hole-in-the-Wall. The ancestors of today's native peoples, homesteaders and modern day ranchers have influenced this special area.

"A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain."

Wilderness Act of 1964

EL Malpais NCA lava fields and over the years, moisture and soil collected on some of the oldest lava to form this 6,000-acre park of ponderosa pine.

Near the northeast corner of the wilderness you will find yourself in a 6700-acre kipuka called Hole-in-the-Wall. "Kipuka" is a Hawaiian word meaning "island of vegetation surrounded by lava flow." This fertile ground, underlain by the 700,000-year-old North Plains lava flows is inhabited by numerous forms of life, surrounded and segregated from their original biotic communities by a sea of broken, jagged basalt.

Access

The easier, fastest, and best driving route to access the West Malpais Wilderness and Hole-in-the-Wall is from the south end of the NCA off NM 117. From NM 117, proceed northwest on CR 42 for approximately 2.1 miles. Take the right fork to the north and travel about 5 miles to where the road ends at the West Malpais Wilderness trailhead.

These areas can also be accessed from the north by turning south from NM 53

Now that this area is wilderness, it is protected for all to enjoy.

Among other opportunities in the El Malpais NCA, is the West Malpais Wilderness. Within the West Malpais Wilderness an oasis of vegetation is housed and is known as the Hole-in-the-Wall. The Hole-in-the-Wall is the largest islandlike depression in the



onto CR 42 and proceeding approximately 5.8 miles turning left (east) on the road to Big Tubes (NPS 300). From Park Road 300 take 301 off to the south. Park Road 301 forks many times but stay on it continuing to go south and east. (Be forewarned, this is one of the roughest roads in the NCA!) These roads are minimally maintained but should be marked at each junction. You should see a sign for Little Hole-in-the-Wall. Continue straight in for an additional 9 miles to the Cerro Encierro Trailhead.

Pointers and Precautions

Water is a scarce and precious resource in this arid country. You must carry with you all the water you need.

No mechanized vehicles (mountain bikes included) may be driven past the posted wilderness boundary into the wilderness.

It's safer to let someone know where you are going.

Wet weather conditions can make roads treacherous and impassable. Check with a Ranger before you attempt to drive any of the back roads within the NCA.

You can explore above and below ground lava features (but stay out of bat caves!). The West Malpais Wilderness and Hole-in-the-Wall are places for you to savor solitude, encounter some of the Earth's geologic past, and experience the solace and satisfaction that comes from exploring an area often overlooked by others.

