

FOLLOW UP VISIT

# Experience history



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The new interpretive plaza at the parking lot just north of Bent's Old Fort gleams in the early morning sunlight. A pole-built structure, it has a special concrete base, benches and six interpretive signs with special features for children.

## Visit the plaza, hike the trail

A new interpretive plaza and "Trading Territory" hiking trail were unveiled at Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site, eight miles east of La Junta, on Monday morning. The trail leaves the plaza at the fort's parking lot, surrounds a cattail-lined wetland and comes back to the "castle on the plains" through the cottonwood trees lining the banks of the Arkansas River. Both projects were completed because a host of agencies, both private and public, contributed funding and the National Park Service, which operates national historic sites like Bent's Old Fort, contributed funds from entrance fees at other, larger parks across the nation. People can visit the fort and hike the trail daily from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Guided tours of the fort are offered at 9:30 and 11 a.m. and 1 and 2:30 p.m. each day. Self-guided tours and a 20-minute orientation film are available inside the fort any time during operating hours.

### What's new:

Interpretive Plaza and 1.75-mile "Trading Territory" hiking trail. Situated under the pole-built structure are six interpretive signs entitled "Welcome to Borderland," "An Adobe Outpost," "A Babel-tongued

Multitude," "No Fur, No Fort," "Mountain Men to Merchants" and "A Cast of Colorful Characters." Eight more interpretive signs are situated along the trail. All signs have special features to help children understand the fort.

### Important facts to know:

Bent's Old Fort operated from 1833 to 1849 before it was destroyed by its chief builder, William Bent, who was in business with his brother, Charles, and Ceran St. Vrain. Later in the 19th century, it was used as a stage stop after Bent abandoned it. But the fort lay abandoned and weather diminished the adobe and wood structure until the National Park Service reconstructed the fort, reopening it in 1976. Actually, Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site will turn 50 years old next year. The act of Congress to preserve it as an historic site was approved in 1960. Next year also, the National Park Service celebrates its centennial.

### Who helped pay:

Colorado Preservation Inc. (a private, nonprofit agency), the State Historic Fund and the National Park Service all contributed funding to build the plaza and trail. Most of the work was completed by the fort's employees. The trail and plaza, signs and other features, including benches, together cost about \$235,000.

### It's better because:

Visitors can walk to areas they've only been able to view before from the ramparts of the fort, including the wetland northeast of the fort that attracts songbirds, deer and other wildlife, and the cottonwood groves along the Arkansas River.