

**Sabino Canyon
Open Space:**
An Interpretive Guide



Located east of Albuquerque in the Manzanita Mountains, the 116-acre Sabino Canyon Open Space was purchased by Bernalillo County in October 1999 with mill levy funds from a 1998 referendum. Nearby residents had encouraged its purchase to prevent further residential development.

Sabino Canyon Open Space is managed by the Bernalillo County Parks & Recreation Department, in partnership with local citizens and groups.

The property ranges in elevation from 7,000 to 7,200 feet and is located on the northern plateau of the Manzano Mountain Range, south of Cedro Peak Campground, about seven miles south of Tijeras and about 25 miles southeast of Albuquerque.



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Bernalillo County Open Space and Partners

Sabino Canyon Open Space—An Interpretive Guide

This interpretive guide was developed in partnership with the National Park Service and the East Mountain Historical Society. This guide is meant to provide the reader with general background for Sabino Canyon Open Space, including the history and overview of the natural resources. With this guide, visitors may gain a deeper appreciation for the property, enriching their experience while exploring Sabino Canyon.



Bernalillo County Open Space

The vision of Open Space is to become a dynamic network of properties with important natural or cultural resources managed to benefit people, plants and wildlife by protecting or enhancing view sheds, water resources, wildlife habitat, cultural/historic sites and prime agricultural land; and providing environmental education and resource-based recreation.

Bernalillo County owns 11 properties that total more than 1,000 acres spread throughout the County. Each property is significant and offers unique opportunities to the public. To learn more about Bernalillo County volunteer and programming opportunities, and to become a steward of Sabino Canyon, visit the web site at www.bernco.gov/openspace or call (505) 314-0398.



The National Park Service

Support for this publication is provided through National Park Service Challenge Cost Share Grant and the Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program. The Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program (RTCA) is the community assistance arm of the National Park Service. RTCA supports community-led natural resource conservation and outdoor recreation projects. RTCA staff provide technical assistance to communities so they can conserve rivers, preserve open space, and develop trails and greenways.



**EAST
MOUNTAIN
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY**



East Mountain Historical Society

The East Mountain Historical Society (EMHS) is a group dedicated to preserving and documenting local history of the Sandia, Manzano, and Manzanita Mountain towns and villages east of Albuquerque, including portions of Route 66 and the historic Turquoise Trail. EMHS has partnered with Bernalillo County Open Space by assisting with interpretive signs and materials, including the publication of this book. For more information about this organization, visit its web site at <http://eastmountainhistory.org>.

History of Sabino Canyon Open Space

Bernalillo County's 116-acre Sabino Canyon Open Space has a quiet history. Its meadows, now traversed by hiking paths, were once planted in pinto beans for the village of Sabino.



The village, after which the nearby Sabino Canyon is named, historically received little mention in newspaper articles and usually was identified in the context of nearby Cedro, located to the west on



Cedro Creek, of which Sabino Canyon is a tributary. Yet Sabino was a community in its own right up until the mid-1940s, when it still had a small school, a store and a community water hole along an old wagon trail.

The history of Sabino is one of farming and hardship, drought and abandonment, then resurrection as a village where dances were held and hundreds of silver foxes were raised for fur coats until the market dried up during the Great Depression.

Today, Sabino Canyon Open Space lies just below the village site and includes the ruins of the Riedmont Fur Farm. One of the few large-scale sources of local employment in its day, it was owned by A. I. Riedling, a man whose name was synonymous in Albuquerque with the sale of musical instruments. Later, the ranch became the mountain getaway and writing retreat of a world-famous cardiovascular surgeon.



Aside from a scattering of modern-day residences along a nearby gated road, Sabino Canyon Open Space today lies quiet and peaceful—a place of wind-rustled sagebrush and dusty junipers, grass meadows and mule deer trails, prickly pear and rock-and-duff slopes.



Early History of the Village of Sabino

The earliest evidence of human activity in Sabino Canyon dates back to 1600, when the ancestors of pueblo culture traveled through the area to reach the Rio Grande Valley.



The village of Ojo Sabino was settled on land from which the last of the Navajos and Mescalero Apaches were forced in the mid-1860s. Originally named *Rancho del Ojo del Sabino*, the village was founded in the 1870s by a

small number of Hispano-Catholic families. Today, little of the village remains other than the outlines of a few stone foundations, rusty cans and scattered shards of purpling glass.

Before its founding, Hispanic families in the mountains east of Albuquerque were confined by fear in such nearby towns as Tijeras and San Antonio, whose walled plazas kept them somewhat defensible in the event of Native American raids or attacks. By 1865, with the Navajos and Apaches gone, residents of the villages of San Antonio, Tijeras, and Carnuel began venturing out into the surrounding areas, founding smaller settlements in more remote locations among the creek-sides and wooded slopes of the Manzano Mountains.

In 1868, Teodoro Griego founded just such a settlement, Cedro, about two miles southwest of the future site of Ojo Sabino. The same resources that drew Griego to Cedro attracted others to settle nearby Ojo Sabino and the bean-farming village of Juan Tomás, about three miles further east.



At the time of the 1870 census, no record was made for Ojo Sabino, and most, if not all, of the people who would become its first documented residents were living in Tijeras. The name Ojo Sabino first appears in public records in 1875, with the April 26 birth record of Francisco Sanches in *Rancho del Ojo del Sabino*, which, loosely translated, means Camp at Sabino Spring.

Ojo is Spanish for “eye,” or “natural spring,” and Sabino’s spring was likely the reason for its founding.

Sabino means dwarf cedar juniper, but also is used to describe junipers in general, which grow abundantly throughout the area and would have provided firewood, juniper berries, and construction material. Similarly, *Cedro* (which means cedar, or juniper) took its name from the area’s abundant evergreen trees.



The spring at Ojo Sabino, which sat on the north side of what would eventually be known as Sabino Canyon, was vital for both survival and irrigation in this high desert locale. The uninhabited openness of the area made it suitable for grazing livestock and for farming. The site was also important politically, as it was located within the southeast boundary of the then-90,000-acre Cañon de Carnué land grant, parceled out by the Spanish government to settlers of the Manzano and Sandia Mountains about 1817.



By the 1880 census, enough people had settled in Ojo Sabino—or Ojo *del* Sabino—that the tiny village received its own page in the U.S. census book. Its 26 residents were of seven interrelated Hispano-Catholic families, with at least four of the seven families having moved after 1870 from the village of Tijeras, down the rough wagon road that would later become New Mexico Highway 10 (New Mexico 337 today).

An 1893 map of the Cañon de Carnué land grant shows at least seven buildings in Ojo Sabino, and indicates 30 families in the area.

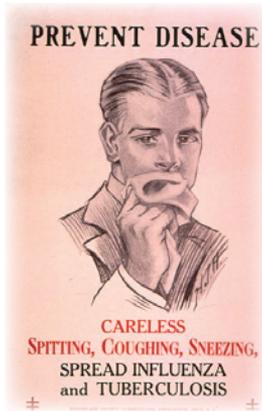
But by the 1900 census, the town had faded dramatically. Ojo Sabino received no mention in the census, and records for the town's 1880 inhabitants show at least six relocated to the nearby Sandia Mountain villages of Tijeras and San Antonio. Most notable among the emigrants was Jose de la Cruz Gonzales, the town's patriarch, who moved to Tijeras with his wife. Jose's son, Manuel Gonzales, left as well, settling in San Antonio with his wife and a household of eight. By 1910, still others had gone—with at least seven more Ojo Sabino residents settling in Tijeras.



Three events likely contributed to this exodus. Employment opportunities were better in Tijeras and Albuquerque, both of which were growing. Ojo Sabino was excluded from the Cañon de Carnué land grant in 1901 when

the grant's boundaries were dramatically shrunk from 90,000 to 2,000 acres by government surveyors. And most importantly, severe drought affected the area between 1895 and 1904, which could have dried up the area's spring.

As the spring waned, the *Ojo* faded from Ojo Sabino's name as well. (Similarly, the community of Ojo Sedillo, about five miles northeast of Sabino, became simply Sedillo.) For some time, Ojo Sabino disappeared from area maps altogether, but returned in the 1930s as Sabino.



During this time, thousands of tuberculosis victims in search of a dry climate arrived in central New Mexico and Albuquerque, bringing an influx of white, English-speaking newcomers to the mountains east of the city. Just as they changed the ethnic and linguistic character of Albuquerque, they influenced changes in the towns of the Manzano and Sandia Mountains, and probably brought about the change in the name to simply Sabino.

Lewis McComb, who lived in Sabino in 1929, attended first grade in the nearby Sabino schoolhouse, and says one teacher taught about 20 students in grades 1 through 8, including his two older sisters. Lifelong mountain resident Marie Herrera Dresser of Carnuel remembers that in the early 1940s, Sabino still had the school and a store, and that the village played host to community dances and performances of traditional Christmas plays – or *Pastorelas*, but she says these eventually disappeared around 1946.

Today, the village site overlooks the meadows of Sabino Canyon Open Space, just as the village once overlooked its bean fields. Fragments of thick-glass Coca-Cola bottles and rusted cans scraps hint at Sabino's final years, and suggest Sabino may have been used as an occasional camp, even after its apparent demise as a village.

Riedmont Fur Farm

About a half-mile northwest of Sabino lie the remains of the Riedmont Fur Farm, where Alexander Ignatius Riedling raised foxes for their pelts.

During Riedmont Fur Farm's peak in the late 1920s and early 1930s, at least 300 and perhaps as many as 500 silver

foxes were raised. The Depression, however, left even well-to-do Americans unable to spend money on such luxuries as fur coats and stoles, and after Riedling's death in 1932, rabbits and possibly minks were raised until each of their market values also crashed.

The site of the fur farm, like Ojo Sabino, was once part of the Cañon de Carnué land grant. With its meadow, view of Cedro Peak, and relative isolation, Riedling may have seen it as an ideal place to make a small dream a reality.



Born in Austria in 1880, Riedling was privately schooled in Vienna and often traveled with his father, who at one point brought him to the United States. At 17, Riedling moved on his own to Pennsylvania, where he worked for the Lester Piano Company. In 1906 he married Lillah Volquarts in Wisconsin, and a daughter, Ruth, was born. In time, the Riedlings moved to Denver, where Riedling worked for the Baldwin Piano Company, and in 1916 he transferred to Albuquerque's Baldwin store at 221 West Central Avenue.

By 1918, Riedling was store manager and by 1920, the Baldwin Piano Company had become A.I. Riedling Music Co., proud home of “Everything Musical.” With Riedling as namesake and owner, company advertisements in Albuquerque’s phonebooks and newspapers grew

larger, more numerous, and boasted more musical wares with each year.

By 1922, Riedling offered “Victrolas and Victor Records,” and by

1928 he had begun carrying radio equipment. A 1931 phonebook ad touted an unusual new item—“MAJESTIC REFRIGERATORS”.

The 1931 phonebook also was the first to advertise another Riedling venture—the fur farm near Sabino Canyon. “Riedmont Fur Farms,” the entry read. “A I Riedling prop breeders of silver foxes 304 W Central av.” Riedling, it seems, ran the farm’s business side out of his music store.

At the Sabino farm, valuable silver foxes were raised in individual dens built in 1929 by local carpenter Paul William McComb, who lived in a small house on the farm with his wife, a son and two



daughters. McComb’s son Lewis, who was 6 at the time, remembers that foxes were kept in seclusion and were so skittish that Riedling and his farm manager checked up on the foxes’ activities by



viewing them through binoculars from the perch of the farm's water tower. Because the animals would refuse to eat if they smelled a stranger's scent, feeding was done only by the farm manager, who lived on the premises with his wife, and occasionally McComb.



The foxes were fed horse meat to which supplements were added, and the farm had a corral (to hold the horses until butchering time), a cold storage area and a meat grinder. Most of the horses came from Isleta Pueblo, where they were rounded up and brought to the mountain by truck.

The farm had power and lights provided by an on-site Delco Light Plant, which were commonly used in rural areas in the 1920s and 1930s. Usually, a gas-or-kerosene-powered generator would run for a few hours, generating electricity that was stored in a stand of sixteen large glass batteries and used later, usually for lighting at night.

The fur farm still appears in the 1932 phonebook, but is gone in 1933. In June 1932, Riedling was stricken with paralysis as the result of a stroke, and in January 1933, at the age of 53, he died at the fur farm.

A newspaper article three years later on the occasion of Lillah Riedling's remarriage stated that she still resided at Riedmont. Lewis McComb says rabbits were raised there after Mr. Riedling's death.

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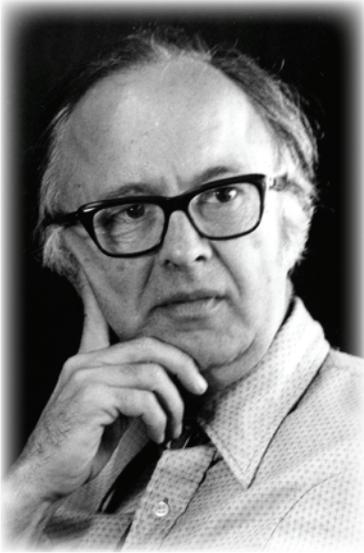
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Later Years: A Mountain Getaway



Years later, the ranch was inhabited again for a short while by a famous cardiovascular surgeon, Dr. W. Sterling Edwards, inventor of the world's first synthetic artery. Originally from Alabama, Edwards practiced surgery in three states before developing his historic device, described in his 1957 book, *Plastic Arterial Grafts*.

Twelve years later, in 1969, Edwards and his family moved to Albuquerque, where Edwards joined the staff of the University of New Mexico's Department of Surgery, and later distinguished himself as department head. Edwards bought the remains of the old Riedmont Fur Farm in 1971.

In *What Does My Life Mean?*, his 2000 autobiography, Edwards wrote that he wanted to develop on the property a clinic to help middle and modest income people lower their blood pressure through proper diet and exercise. But the cost estimates of such a venture proved too great and Edwards rented clinic space in Albuquerque instead. The farm, then, became a mountain getaway for Edwards and his family. It was there that Edwards likely researched and wrote the biography *Alexis Carrel: Visionary Surgeon*, about a doctor who worked with famed aviator Charles Lindbergh to create devices that would allow organs to stay alive outside the body. Edwards' book was published in 1974. Lindbergh himself wrote the book's foreword.

Sabino's Recreational Opportunities



Today, Cibola National Forest partially abuts the northern boundary of Sabino Canyon OS and entirely borders the property to the west. The eastern and southern boundaries adjoin private residential development.

Several wildlife species enjoy Sabino's favorable habitat conditions, including mule deer, black bear and the occasional rattlesnake. It is not uncommon to find mule deer bedded in the juniper during summer months or traveling to and from water sources, typically between July and October.

The combination of riparian, piñon-juniper, and grassland meadows is a haven for a rich diversity of bird life, both raptors and songbirds. This scenic place can be enjoyed by the public at large by hiking along a single-track two-mile loop trail, complete with outdoor furnishings and interpretive signs that correspond with this guide.



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