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Bob Watson Photography

Reflecting The Spirit of Nature

NATURE - LANDSCAPES - WILDLIFE

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EL MALPAIS NATIONAL MONUMENT, NEW MEXICO

(Click On Any Featured Image To Enlarge)

Lava Field Sunset at El Mapais National Monument, New Mexico

Sunset over one of the numerous red buttes at El Mapais National Monument, New Mexico

Image For Illustration Only

During my visit to New Mexico, I explored and photographed at one of our country's most unique National Monuments. I had never heard of El Malpais National Monument ("El Malpais") before my pre-trip research of New Mexico. El Malpais was established as a National Monument in 1987 to protect significant geological, ecological, cultural, scenic, scientific and wilderness

resources surrounding the Zuni-Bandera Volcanic Field. Located in western New Mexico, it's approx. 180 sq. miles in size. Its name comes from the Spanish term Malpais which refers to rugged "badlands" or "bad country", typically formed from past volcanic activity.

El Malpais is sometimes referred to as the Land of Frozen Fire, offering extremely diverse and dramatic volcanic landscape, including ancient, as well as historically recent, lava flows, cinder cones, craters, lave tube caves and sandstone bluffs. This volcanic landscape was sculpted by a series of eruptions over the past 60,000 years and as recent a 1,200 years ago, containing some of longest and youngest lava flows on our continent. Its unique geological features, and particularly the lava tube caves, provide stable temperatures, protection, and proximity to water, for the critical roosting habitat of diverse bat species.

Significant to the area also, is the El Malpais National Conservation Area ("NCA") which is adjacent to the El Malpais monument. This is managed by the Bureau of Land Management and includes additional dramatic sandstone cliffs, canyons and craters. The entire area provides many opportunities for photography, hiking, camping and wildlife viewing.

Beautiful sandstone bluffs and buttes are scattered throughout the monument. The sunset image in Featured Photograph No. 1 was shot from atop one of these bluffs overlooking lava fields. It was, however, difficult to photograph the lava fields. Thus, I included a 3rd image of lava for illustration purposes only. I thought it was unique how the vegetation managed to abundantly survive through the tiniest of cracks in the lava.

While this may be seen by many as a desolate environment, Puebloan Cultures such as Acoma, Laguna and Zuni have been adapting, interacting and living in the El Malpais area for more than 10,000 years. The cultural resources of their ancestors are kept alive by the spiritual and physical presence of contemporary Native American tribes today.

I thoroughly enjoyed my visit to El Malpais and found the beauty of the entire area incredibly unique, and the solitude of its wilderness wonderful and refreshing.

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Off)

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