

## I-40 Bike Trail

You may not travel the entire Interstate-40 bike trail and route; after all, by definition, it accompanies noisy Interstate 40 for most of the highway's route from California to North Carolina, and within Albuquerque the accompanying bike trail goes from Unser to Tramway. But just as the Interstate highway gives you a slice of the United States, so also does the Albuquerque segment give you an interesting section through the sprawling city, some of its neighborhoods, and some of its large collection of public art. At present, segments of bike trail interspersed with connecting city streets make up the route to make for a single 17.7 mile trip from end to end; eventually, the city hopes to make it a complete trail.

Parking along the trail:

- Not available at the west end, but nearby streets including the south end of Tarrington Dr., Laurelwood Parkway near Hanover Rd., the east end of Hanover Rd., 72<sup>nd</sup> St. near Iliff Rd., 68<sup>th</sup> St. and Iliff Rd., Yarbrough Pl. and 64<sup>th</sup> St., Juniper Rd. near Estancia Dr., and the east end of Miami Rd.; all have curb parking and are connected by a gate or by short spur trails to the I-40 Trail.
- The big-box stores at Ouray and Coors have acres of parking.
- Parking lot at west end of Gabaldon Place NW
- Parking lots in Coronado Park (2<sup>nd</sup> St. south of I-40) and Santa Barbara-Martineztown Park (Edith Blvd. south of I-40)
- Parking lots in front of the big box stores on Cutler Avenue NE between San Mateo Blvd. and Washington St.
- Parking lots in Jerry Cline Park, Louisiana Blvd. south of I-40.
- Parking lot of largely-abandoned Winrock Center, between Louisiana Blvd. and Pennsylvania Blvd. north of I-40.
- Parking lots in Los Altos Park, between Lomas Blvd. and I-40, west of Eubank Blvd.
- Parking lots in Singing Arrow Park and at Singing Arrow Community Center, a few blocks SW of the east end of the trail on Rachel Rd. SE.
- Few parking spots in La Luz de Amistad Park, just east of the end of the trail; many more in the Park-and-Ride just west of Tramway on Wenonah.

Both ends of the trail are available by the Rapid Ride bus system, the west end at Unser and Central on the Red Line, Route 766; the east end on Tramway just south of Central on the Green Line, Route 777. All the large "caterpillar-like" buses have racks for three bikes; the smaller, less rapid Route 66 buses go from end to end of Central, and have two-bike racks.



0.0 Miles from Unser and I-40

17.7 Miles from Tramway and I-40

If heading east, you start this ride about two-thirds of the way up Nine Mile Hill, or the Barranca de Juan de Perea, named after an

early settler. Begin at Unser, north and east of its intersection with I-40. The Unser bike trail, on the

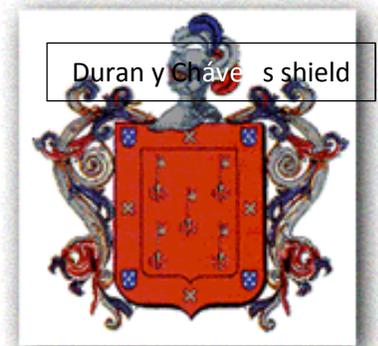


east side of that street, curves directly into the I-40 Bike Trail; a small spur off this curve connects to the street, just north of the I-40 off-ramp. Head down the hill on the bike trail, surrounded by some native plants, housing developments to the north, and a ditch, faced with lava, between you and the Interstate highway to the south.

The first several miles of this trail are part of the Atrisco Land Grant, originally made by the King of Spain to Don Fernando Duran y Chávez II in 1692. Duran y Chávez was a Spanish soldier who accompanied Don

Diego de Vargas on his successful reconquest of what is now New Mexico from the Pueblo tribes, which had retaken it from the Spanish in the Pueblo Revolt of 1680.

Settlement on the Atrisco Land Grant began in 1703; most of the early homes were built along the Rio Grande southeast of where you are now. Subsistence farming along the river, growing chile, corn, squash, wheat, and beans also occurred largely along the river, while grazing sheep and cattle moved uphill into the fields and canyons on the eastern part of the land grant, which by 1760, served as home for some 200 people.



Rights to the land, eventually encompassing about 83,000 acres, passed into the hands of the Spanish settlers living on it. Heirs of those settlers formed a corporation to manage the land in 1967 – the Westland Development Corp., which in turn sold its interest in the land to SunCal Corporation in 2006. Four years later, the SunCal subsidiary was bankrupt; its interest in the former Atrisco Land Grant was became a holding of a creditor of SunCal, a subsidiary of Barclay Bank. Now tract homes cover much of the eastern part of the former land grant; the future of the undeveloped portion of the grant lands is not clear, but is being planned by the Board of Trustees of the new township of Atrisco-Grant Merced, authorized by the New Mexico Legislature in 2011. You'll find more about the Atrisco Land Grant and the much more recent Atrisco Grant-Merced township in our write-up of the Unser/Mariposa/Riverview Trail and in Joseph Sánchez's 2008 book "Between Two Rivers."

Two small spurs to the north from the trail allow access to Laurelwood Parkway (0.5 mile) and 72<sup>nd</sup> Street (0.7 mile) respectively. Within the ditch to the south, look carefully for sculptures of oxidized steel representing coyotes, dogs, and fish (swimming upstream).

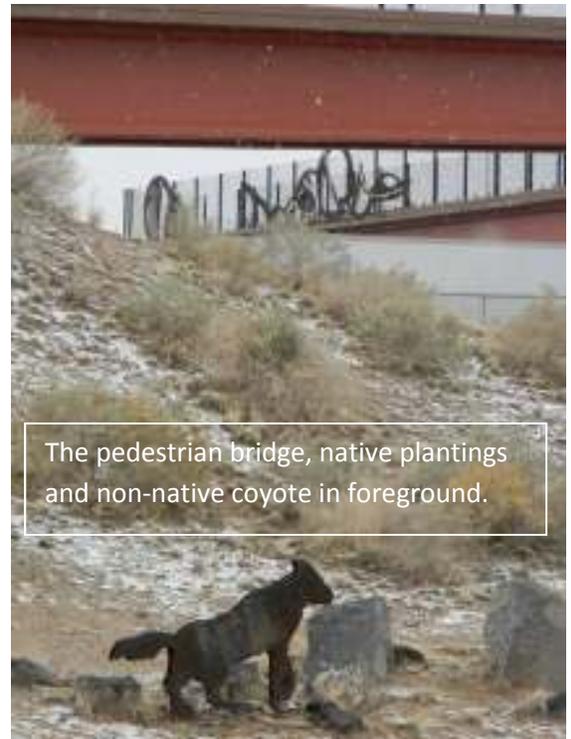
At 1.0 miles, you pass a large pedestrian/bicycle bridge that crosses Interstate-40, heading toward Hancock Road and West Mesa High School. The bridge has long approach ramps on both sides; its sides are decorated with circles and lines in a pattern that the artist, Karen Yank, found evoked New Mexico. A stylized windmill, sister of another a mile or so ahead, indicates the ranching uses of this

land before small homes invaded in the late twentieth century.



The I-40 Cowpoke

At 1.4 miles, the trail is diverted to the north for a short distance to avoid a fall into a large collecting basin for water coming down the flood control ditch. Most of the time, this basin is empty, but the low spot is wet enough that grasses and even cattails flourish there. Continue



The pedestrian bridge, native plantings and non-native coyote in foreground.

east on the bike trail until it begins to curve north alongside Coors Road's approach ramp to Interstate 40. As you begin this curve, you'll pass the second windmill; beside it stands a steel sculpture of a cowboy, complete with hat and rope.

2.1 Miles from Unser and I-40  
15.6 Miles from Tramway and I-40

At 2.1 miles, you reach Ouray Rd. as it is about to pass under Coors Road. Cross under the overpass using the sidewalk, and cross the busy frontage road on the east side carefully. The sidewalk east of that road doubles

as the bike trail past several large box stores before reaching the beginning of the Gail Ryba Memorial Bridge at 2.4 miles. The sign for this bridge sits at the spot where a small sign also directs you west to Miami Road, with its connections to Alamogordo Drive, heading north near the escarpment, and, crossing a second pedestrian bridge over I-40, also displaying Ms. Yank's sculpture, to Atrisco Drive and the Pat Hurley Park area to the south. But if you stay on the I-40

bike trail, you'll pass under the pedestrian bridge in a minute or two.

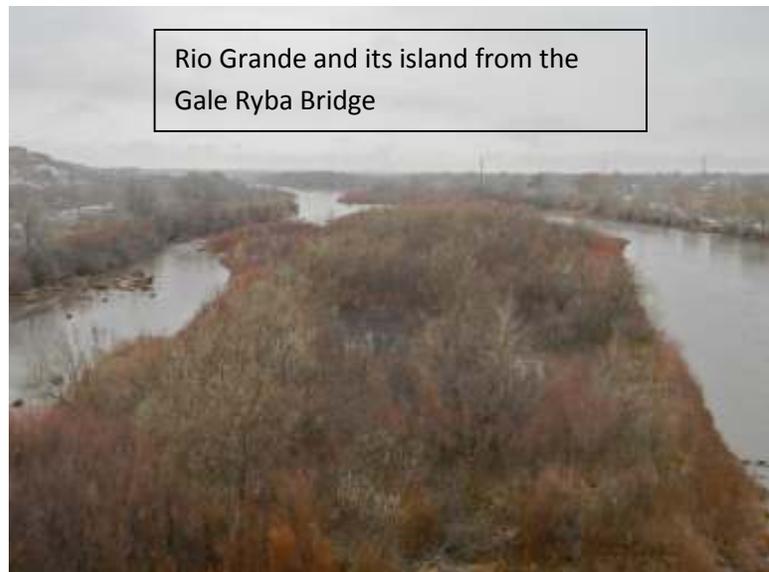


Gail Ryba was a bicycling advocate and Ph.D. fuel cell researcher at Sandia National Labs, whose career in both

arenas was cut short by cancer in 2010, shortly before the bridge named after her was built across the Rio Grande. She formed and chaired a number of groups advocating for bicycles and bicycling, including Greater Albuquerque SpokesPeople (now BikeABQ) and the Bicycle Coalition of New Mexico. Dr. Ryba's bridge was built alongside I-40 as it crosses the river and has many pleasant and architectural details: several viewing areas where you can stop and look out over the Rio Grande, archways festooned with three-dimensional depictions of river animals, such as a turtle, a frog and a heron, bronze animal tracks and plant leaves set into the concrete roadway, and oxidized steel cottonwood leaves set in the mesh of the fencing along both sides. The Rio Grande is not always muy grande, but it has a long history of importance to all the peoples who have lived along its shores. At many times of the year, it is possible to travel the river by kayak or canoe, to see the cottonwoods and other trees along its shores, to fish in its waters, and to enjoy a peaceful paddle in the middle of a large city. Truly, "a river flows through it," and that river, in large measure, makes Albuquerque what it is. Here on this bridge it isn't so very peaceful with traffic rushing past on I-40 a few feet away, but the view is beautiful, looking down at the river and the large island in its middle at this point.

Some have commented that the bridge surface is somewhat rough; this probably saves some riders heading downhill from west to east from plowing into the fence when the trail makes a 90 degree turn to the left at the bottom of the hill.

After the turn and the switchback down to ground level, you cross the gravel road that accompanies the irrigation ditch on the east side of the river. The ditch-side road is suitable for runners and mountain bikes, but not suggested for road bikes. Mountain bikers may also enjoy the trails that wind through the trees by the Bosque, going both north and south between the river and the irrigation ditch.



Rio Grande and its island from the Gale Ryba Bridge



East end of Ryba Bridge

Just to your south, at 3.2 miles, you reach the junction of the I-40 Trail with the Paseo del Bosque. Stop at this junction and then turn south, passing under I-40 (the route we take in getting from one end of the I-40 Trail to the other crosses under the freeway four times and over it three times), and turn east along I-40, leaving the Bosque Trail behind. But north on the Bosque Trail, you would find pleasant level riding to the Rio

Grande Nature Center two miles north and the Albuquerque Aquarium and Botanical Garden, a mile to the south.

Continuing east along the south side of I-40, the trail crosses Gabaldon Road at 3.6 miles. Gabaldon Road connects the two parts of the old Los Duranes community, split by the Interstate when it came through in 1962, disrupting the acequias (irrigation ditches) in the community and the agricultural patterns dependent upon them.

Los Duranes was settled in the mid-1700s and was a close-knit agricultural part of the *Villa de Alburquerque*, now bounded on three sides by other parts of the city of Albuquerque (according to Albuquerque author Rudolfo Anaya the first “r” was dropped by an Alburquerque train stationmaster in the mid-1900s), and on the fourth side by the Rio Grande.

A few hundred yards ahead, the bike trail hooks sharply to the right, ending up at Aspen Avenue at 4.3 miles. Just before reaching Aspen, a sign advises you that the trail comes to a temporary stop here, and that one should continue east for “1120 feet” to where it takes up again alongside I-40 just east of Rio Grande Boulevard. Turn east on Aspen and then north on heavily-trafficked Rio Grande to reach the bike trail again on the south side of I-40. (If you’re traveling east to west, the turn off Aspen is inconspicuous; look for a small paved trail heading initially north at a 90 degree angle off Aspen, currently unsigned.)

Continue east on the I-40 bike trail, past the nicely planted banks along I-40 and the tall, controversial Albuquerque tricentennial (1706-2006)



One of the tricentennial towers

pillars on the southeast and northwest corners of the intersection, decorated with what appears to be a replica of New Mexican tin work. The trail is right against the wall of raised I-40 at this point; a section of the wall is decorated with a flowing ceramic mosaic. At 5.1 miles, you will cross 12<sup>th</sup> Street. Under the underpass and a short distance

5.1 Miles from Unser and I-40  
12.6 Miles from Tramway and I-40

further north is the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center.



The Indian Pueblo Cultural Center plaza

The IPCC sits on land at the west end of a tract formerly occupied by the Albuquerque Indian School, founded in 1881 and abandoned almost precisely a century later. This boarding school

attracted students largely from Albuquerque's pueblos, many of which had their own schools by the time the school closed. After demolition of the last buildings of the school, the land came into the possession of the All Indian Pueblo Council, which is made up of representatives of each of the 19 New Mexico pueblo tribes.

The IPCC consists of a large, two-storied vaguely kiva-like building designed by well-known Albuquerque architect Harvey Hoshour surrounding a grassy plaza used for demonstration Indian dances. The building features a museum devoted to Pueblo Indian life of the past and present, and a large sales area, where remarkable Indian art, mostly but not entirely of New Mexican origin, can be found. For more information, go to [www.indianpueblo.org](http://www.indianpueblo.org).

Continuing east on the bike trail, you arrive first at 8<sup>th</sup> Street – a quick two blocks to the south is a railroad siding where volunteers are lovingly restoring an old engine – and then at 6<sup>th</sup> Street (5.7 miles), the end of this segment of the Trail alongside Coronado Park. The City plans eventually to make a connection between this trail with trails further east beyond the Big-I, Albuquerque's affectionate (?) name for the spaghetti bowl of connections between Interstate-40 and I-25, but at this point you must use city streets to connect you to the next segment. The Big-I is a veritable Guinness Book of New Mexico records: the impressive interchange was finished in 2002 as the most expensive public works project ever done in this state, costing more than one fourth of \$1 billion, occupying more than 100 acres, consuming some 12.5 million pounds of steel and iron, and serving more than 300,000 vehicles per day. Originally left un-landscaped to save money, the Big I was often called the Big I-sore as the huge swatch of city collected trash and weeds, but a tasteful, water-wise and appropriate landscaping

job began several years later and has been completed to near-unanimous approbation.



Turn north under I-40 on 6<sup>th</sup> Street, then east on Cutler Ave. Turn south for half a block on 4<sup>th</sup> Street and then east again in an industrial area on Arvada Ave.

At First Street, turn east on Indian School Road, past Broadway to Edith

Blvd., where you turn south (6.7 miles). Just beyond this junction is the green grass and trees of Albuquerque's largest collection of cemeteries. On Edith in a few blocks, you'll pass the baseball field and playground equipment of Santa Barbara-Martineztown Park; shortly afterwards, turn east on Odelia Road. Head up the hill; before you cross above Interstate-25, you'll pass "Bulldog City" (Albuquerque High School) and the pretty baseball parks at Vietnam Veterans Memorial Park. East of the freeway,

you'll go by the swooping St. Paul's Lutheran Church and, beyond it to the south, some of the newer buildings on the UNM Medical School campus before arriving at University Blvd. at 7.8 miles.

8.0 Miles from Unser and I-40

9.7 Miles from Tramway and I-40

At University, past the light the roadway is called Indian School Blvd. again; continue 0.2 miles to the top of a rise to where the Paseo del Nordeste Trail crosses; turn left here (and see the NDC Trail Guide for more information on this short segment). The high-line trail gives you a large-scale view of the highway interchange to your west and the Sandia Mountains to the east. You cross under I-40 in an underpass cut into the edge of the North Diversion Channel; just beyond it, adjacent to the offices of the Albuquerque Metropolitan Arroyo and Flood Control Authority (AMAFCA) (9.0 miles), you make a U-turn back to the south to get on the I-40 Trail again, going east. AMAFCA – a heroic organization to Albuquerque bicyclists – has placed a bike pump here at this junction for your use.



This segment of the I-40 Trail is short and runs between Interstate-40 to the south and the Embudo Channel to the north. Just past the Carlisle Blvd. underpass, the trail passes between two hotels (one sporting one of Albuquerque's only waterparks) and reaches an end at Cutler Road at 9.8 miles. Continue east on Cutler, passing the multi-hued, modernistic Whitener Building and the Social Security Administration and State Human Services Department offices on the way past Washington Street and on past a large shopping center, only partly occupied at this writing, to busy San Mateo Boulevard. At the light cross San Mateo (10.5 miles) carefully in the crosswalk on the north side of Cutler, and go up on the sidewalk straight ahead, past a tiny park. After half a block of sidewalk, you're back on Cutler again. Between here and your next turn – a south in three blocks on Palomas Drive, you'll pass three alternative schools, each interesting in a different way: Freedom High, New Futures High, and the eCADEMY Alternative School (see their websites at <http://www.aps.edu/schools/schools/freedom-high-school>, <http://www.aps.edu/schools/schools/new-futures-high-school>, and <http://www.aps.edu/schools/schools/ecademy> respectively).

10.5 Miles from Unser and I-40  
7.2 Miles from Tramway and I-40

Palomas Drive comes to a stop sign in a block, leading directly to the Alvarado pedestrian/bike bridge back over I-40. At the other end of the bridge, take a sharp east turn on Alvarado Place, following it around its curve and then turn east again on Indian School (again). Indian School curves twice as well, first to the right, then to the left, before it reaches San Pedro Drive. Directly across San Pedro (11.5 miles), there is one of the shortest segments of bike trail you're likely to see anywhere, curving maybe thirty feet from San Pedro to meet Zimmerman Avenue. Take either the little bike trail or the street, and then continue east on Zimmerman until you reach a stop sign. Take a left around the car-barriers there at the end of Dakota St., and you're on a bike trail that curves to the east around a dog park (for a canine view of the park, check out <http://www.petroglyphsnm.org/pawspiles/pawspiles2.html>) and a portion of the Tom Bolack Urban Forest. The other part of the Urban Forest lies just west of Carlisle Blvd., also on the south side of I-40.



Tom Bolack

Tom Bolack was a colorful New Mexican known in a variety of capacities: when we first saw him as New Mexico State Fair attendees in the 1980s, we knew the formidable-looking, wheelchair-bound white-haired man as a farmer and rancher and former politician from Farmington, NM – the man whose magnificent vegetables filled an entire display case in the Agriculture Building at the State Fair every year. We knew that he had been governor of New Mexico; Wikipedia tells us that indeed he was, ascending from the post of lieutenant governor for the last 32 days of the term of Governor Edwin Mechem, who resigned in 1962 to be appointed to the US Senate. Bolack also was owner of the minor league Albuquerque Dukes baseball team in the '50s and '60s.

The bike trail curves to head east along the interstate, passing under Louisiana Blvd. at 12.2 miles. As you emerge from the tunnel under Louisiana, you come face to face with a tennis court, one of several in pleasant Jerry Cline Park, which also features a walking/running trail and playground equipment. Skirting the northern edge of the park, you climb up the approach ramp to another bridge across I-40, this time heading north to the back side of the ghost of a large shopping center, Winrock Center.

Beyond Winrock, the trail, Paseo de las Montañas, crosses Pennsylvania Street (12.8), the edges of which are a good north-south bike route. Turn south at Moon Street (13.9 miles). Beyond Constitution, Moon splits around Grant Middle School. Keep to the left here around the large school and grassy playground on Easterday Drive. Cross Lomas Blvd. at the light, passing along a largely-abandoned road just north of I-40 adjoining one of Albuquerque's skate parks, a part of Los Altos Park. Here you cross yet another bridge (14.8 miles) over I-40 – your last on this tour. The Los Altos Municipal Golf Course is just beyond the

14.8 Miles from Unser and I-40  
2.9 Miles from Tramway and I-40



"Catching air" in Los Altos Skatepark



*Two of Albuquerque's less than stellar attractions are seen in this photo from the I-40 Trail near Juan Tabo: trash and the hated goathead. Goathead, or Tribulus terrestris, flourishes in Albuquerque at the end of summer, especially after rain, in disturbed soil, such as the edges of bike paths. Its seed, when dried, gives it its name; shaped like a goat's head complete with horns, it is indeed a tribulus, a spikey weapon. Steer clear of it or your bike's tubes are likely to spring leaks.*

*And please pick up your trash.*



bridge. When the golf course is open, a gate allows you to enter or to head south on the driveway through the course to Copper Avenue. For now, continue east between the golf course and the interstate highway.

The bike trail crosses under Eubank Blvd. at 15.4 miles. At 16.0 miles you'll see a pedestrian/bike bridge over I-40, connecting Morris and Elizabeth Streets south of I-40 with Tomasita St. north of where you are.

At 16.5 miles, you pass Juan Tabo Blvd. through an underpass. Both north and south of Juan Tabo, you can often see many prairie dogs running amongst their holes. In late summer you'll also have the chance to get to know the goathead (see side bar) – hopefully not too intimately.

17.7 Miles from Unser and I-40  
0.0 Miles from Tramway and I-40

Passing behind some of East Central Avenue's many motels and trailer parks, you arrive at the end of the trail at 17.7 miles,

where the trail along the south side of the Interstate reaches Tramway Boulevard and the end of the I-40 Trail. You've crossed this sprawling city or the eastern 17.7 miles of it, passing some of the best and some of the, well, most tawdry scenes to be found in Albuquerque.

People have been staying in this area for many years, long before Interstate 40. Research done by University of New Mexico archaeologist Linda Cordell and others (see her book "Tijeras Canyon: Analyses of the Past") established that settlement in Tijeras Canyon has been nearly constant since at least 1200 AD, with Pueblo and Apache tribes preceding Spanish settlers. The Apaches made temporary camps in the canyon, perhaps as far west as this now-busy intersection, and it was their raids that led to abandonment of the first Hispanic settlements in the canyon at Carnuel or Carnué, a few miles east of Tramway.

From here you can head south to the Tijeras Arroyo and Four Hills Village or north along the Tramway Trail (see that trail's description).

Or, a bicyclist can head up what used to be US-66 into Tijeras Canyon, which divides the Sandias to the north from the Manzanos to the south. Slightly more than 3 miles east of Tramway (just past the 3-mile mark and the remains of the Mountain Lodge motel, take Monticello Drive north to the parking lot for the lovely Three Gun Springs Trail and the Hawkwatch Trail. The village of Tijeras lies seven miles east of Tramway and Central along old US-66, now NM-333. From Tijeras, you can head north to Cedar Crest and eventually the crest of the Sandias themselves, or south to Cedro Peak's

excellent mountain bike trails, the villages of Chilili, Manzano, Tajiique, Torreon, and Manzano, and the wonderful ruins comprising the Salinas Pueblo Missions National Monument. And, of course, far beyond Tijeras to the east are Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Tennessee and North Carolina on Interstate-40 and Missouri and Chicago on the route of "The Mother Road," U.S. 66.

Photos by the authors or thanks to several websites including

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/abqpublicart/page13/>, <http://www.atriscolandgrant.com/>,

<http://www.businessinsider.com/craziest-intersections-in-the-world-2011-3?op=1>,

<http://www.mrwnm.com/projects/big-I-landscape.htm>, [milb.com](http://www.milb.com).

Thanks to Jesus Anzures, Ed Boles, Joe Sabatini, Beverly Schoonover, Diane Souder, and numerous Albuquerque Bernalillo County librarians for a great deal of helpful information.