

North Diversion Channel Trail

Mile (from the south end) 0.0

Mile (from the north end) 8.7

You're about to head north (or south) on one of Albuquerque's favorite bike trails, the Paseo del Nordeste/North Diversion Channel bike trail, which stretches 8.7 miles from the University of New Mexico to Balloon Fiesta Park near the north edge of Albuquerque. The trail starts alongside the cement-lined Campus Wash, a tributary of the North Diversion Channel which the bike trail follows from just south of Menaul Blvd. to the Balloon Fiesta Park. The North Diversion Channel and its tributaries have been designed to carry flood waters safely from the University area and almost all of the area of the city north and east of the University to the Channel's entry into the Rio Grande on Pueblo of Sandia land north of the city.

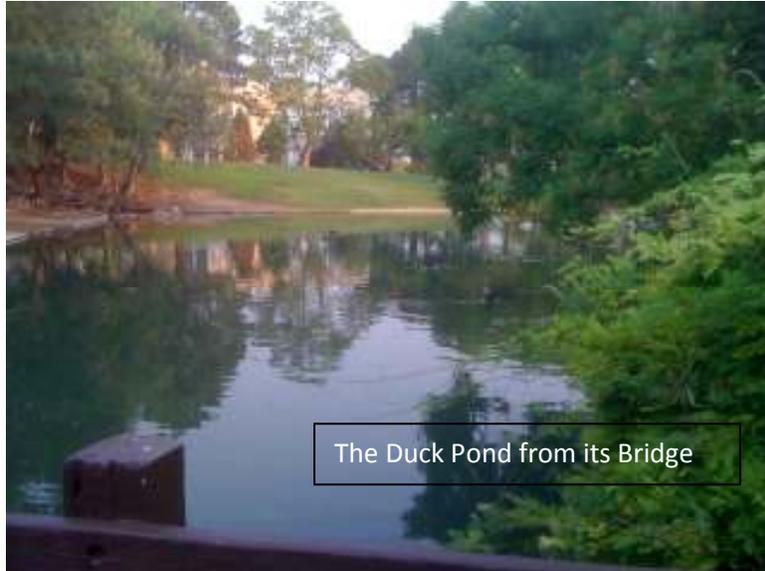
Parking to access the trail, from south to north:

- 1) University-area parking is notoriously difficult during the week, but is readily available on weekends. During the week, try the pay-parking structures at Redondo Drive and Stanford or at Yale and University. On weekends, most of the restricted lots on the north campus are available: try those off University between Tucker and Indian School. Redondo Drive, which partially encircles the campus, will often have street parking available on weekends as well.
- 2) Street parking is available east and west of the trail between Menaul Blvd. and Comanche Blvd.
- 3) The Vista del Norte community has accessible street parking; it sits to the west of the bike trail, north of Osuna, and is connected by a steep paved trail to the main NDC trail.
- 4) Balloon Fiesta Park and the Balloon Museum both have large, available parking areas.

Starting at a beloved central point on the UNM Campus, the outdoor clock at the south end of the Duck Pond, head north the pedestrian path., past the shuttle bus turnaround at the south end of this segment of Yale Blvd. University buildings are all around – here is just a sample of those of the most interest to visitors:

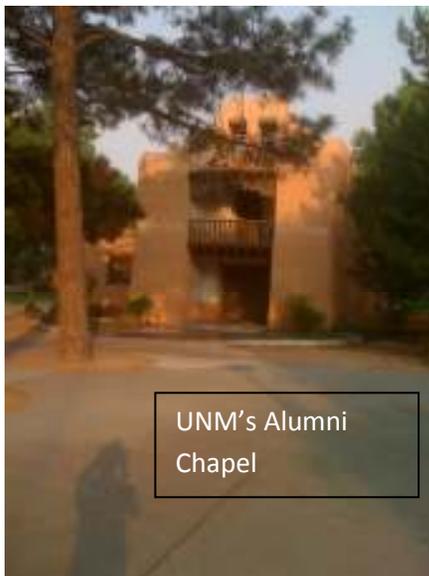


A Quiet Room in the Old Section of Zimmerman Library



The Duck Pond from its Bridge

- The Duck Pond itself was once an ugly parking lot. Now a quiet place of refuge for students and visitors, it also serves as a favored location for weddings and wedding pictures.



UNM's Alumni Chapel

- Some of those weddings occur in the jewel-like Alumni Chapel, a few hundred yards to the west of the Duck Pond. Designed by renowned New Mexico architect John Gaw Meem, its early New Mexican feel enchants the visitor.
- Slightly further west, the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology displays world-class exhibits of Southwestern and world cultural art and articles.
- To the east of the Duck Pond is the main UNM library, Zimmerman Library. The older part of the library, also designed by John Gaw Meem, features a Pueblo-style reading room with high, korbeled ceilings and large windows to the west.
- The Fine Arts Center, to the southeast of the Duck Pond, houses the UNM Art Gallery and the

Raymond Jonson Art Collection, as well as three theaters used for theatrical and musical events open to the public. The FAC is often called Popejoy Hall after the largest of the theaters.

There's lots more to see and do on the UNM campus; the university's website is www.unm.edu, and a map of the central campus is available at http://www.unm.edu/campusmap/central_campus_map.pdf.

Yale heads down the hill and crosses Lomas Blvd. at a busy traffic light; continue north. Approaching the traffic circle, you'll see on your left, across the street, a "Bike Route" sign. Follow the bike route, riding northwest. When you reach the concrete-lined channel (this is the NDC) continue along its southwest side. Behind you as you head northeast, is UNM's busy North Campus, which includes the University of

New Mexico Hospital and the university's schools of law, medicine, nursing, pharmacy and many associated clinics and research facilities. A map of these facilities can be found at http://iss.unm.edu/PCD/SM/doc/VisitorMapNorth_Numeric.pdf.

Mile (from the south end) 0.6
Mile (from the north end) 8.1

The Paseo del Nordeste Bike Trail takes off inconspicuously from behind a little utility building in a UNM parking lot, just a few feet off Tucker NE west of the flood control ditch coming from the Embudo Wash and running north below the UNM North Golf Course. To the east, you can see the bluff and some of the golf course, to the west, more parking lots. UNM buses travel this road filled with sleepy or eager students; the buses keep to the west side of the joint trail and access road.

Just 0.1 mile from here, a large pipe, part of the City of Albuquerque's storm drainage system, stretches across the channel. Storm water runoff is pumped from the City's Broadway Pump Station #31, near the Main Post Office, up to the NDC at this point. City engineers explain that this unlikely route was necessary because running such a large diameter pipe across the heavily built up Valley directly to the river would have been prohibitively expensive

UNM's North Golf Course is a truncated remnant of its former self, having succumbed to the pressure of

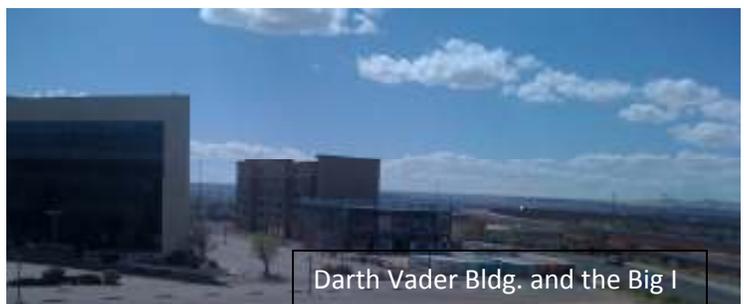


UNM Golf Course from across the NDC

many needs for space of the growing university. The Law School encroaches on its southeast corner, the Children's Psychiatric Hospital, the Ronald McDonald House (no arches here, just parents of children hospitalized at UNM Hospital), and the neurology-related MIND Institute have all eaten away at the greensward, reducing it from 18 holes to nine grassy, elm-shaded fairways. At almost any hour, runners of varying skills circle the course, ducking the occasional errant shot. The north golf course is considered by its community to be an important community facility, wanted by everyone for a variety of purposes, including by UNM for further development.

Mile 1.2
Mile 7.5

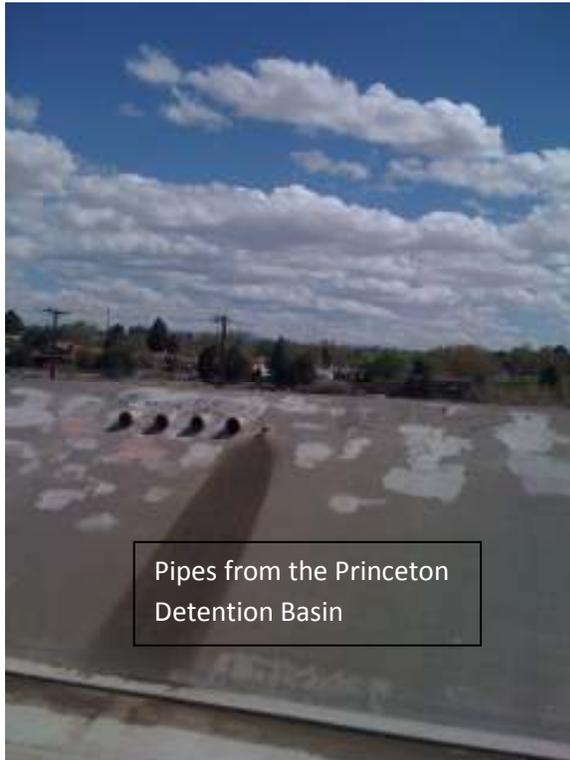
The trail crosses Indian School Road at the north end of the golf course. To the west you'll see the large



Darth Vader Bldg. and the Big I

buildings now housing UNM’s Continuing Education Department, where Albuquerqueans, not only UNM students, can study everything from calligraphy to Italian. (Check out Continuing Ed’s website at <http://dce.unm.edu/> for more information on their offerings.) You’ll soon pass a tall black glass building called by locals the “Darth Vader Building”, which is currently unoccupied. There is a short, steep paved access trail from just past the “Vader Building” to University Blvd. down below. Use of other “outlaw” trails will lead to erosion. As you swing east, you can look down on Interstate 40, some 10 lanes wide here close to the spaghetti bowl interchange called the “Big I”, as the highway’s 65-mph traffic heads west to California or east to North Carolina.

Looking at the steep embankment formed by the NDC, it becomes clear that it’s function is not only to carry water safely into the far North Valley, but also to serve as a dam, preventing local runoff from



flowing directly into the valley area immediately to the west. Impounded water is collected at various locations and pumped into the NDC. Five pipes protruding from the south wall of the NDC mark the Princeton Detention Basin, maintained by the City, which is barely visible beyond the south wall. Water accumulating in the Basin is pumped into the NDC.

The bike trail cuts under Interstate 40 in a notch cut into the NDC wall. Rumor has it that similar notches will soon cut under the next three road crossings, Menaul, Candelaria, and Comanche. Looking to the west as you come up from under the highway, you’ll see the offices of the friendly people at the Albuquerque Metropolitan Arroyo and Flood Control Authority (AMAFCA), the folks who bring you that big concrete lined arroyo that you’ll keep company with throughout this ride – and a total of 70 miles of flood

control ditches that “prevent injury or loss of life, and ...eliminate or minimize property damage.” At virtually the same point in the trail, a U-turn takes you to a spur trail heading east along Interstate-40 to Cutler Avenue, from which a combination of mostly quiet city streets and bike trails can connect you to the Paseo de las Montañas bike trail heading northeast to Tramway Blvd. add sections on Embudo



Flood at Central and First Street

AMAFCA came into being in the 1960s as a response to flooding that recurred throughout Albuquerque's earlier days. As late as 1963, large floods resulted from waters pouring off the mountains and foothills during sudden storms and impounded by the dikes corralling the Rio Grande to the

west but also keeping the floodwaters from reaching the river. The ballot issue establishing AMAFCA seemed doomed for defeat again in 1963, but an almost-providential rainstorm – 3.25 inches of rain fell overnight -- and flood ten days before the election was a fine campaign contribution. The Northeast Heights were largely open lands then, but downtown merchants and the settlements in the Valley were not happy with the floods – their votes propelled AMAFCA into existence, and the Authority's prowess at preventing flood damage has kept Albuquerqueans happy since; every one of the Authority's bond issues ever since has passed by large margins. The first 30 years of AMAFCA's history have been summarized by historian Mark A. Peterson at <http://www.amafca.org/documents/summaryhistory.pdf>, and a great deal more information is available at the Authority's home page, www.amafca.org.



Embudo Channel merges into NDC

Looking into the main channel at this point, you can see the junction with Embudo Channel, an extension of the I-40 Channel which runs down the center of the Interstate, collecting tributaries on both sides along the way (for a fine interactive map of AMAFCA's flood control facilities, go to <http://12.23.244.78/amafcapublic/>). Notice the large amounts of sediment here and elsewhere in the channel. Sediment carried down by drainage waters must be periodically cleaned out. And speaking of maintenance, it's important for cyclists to

understand that some maintenance and repair work must be done from the bike path side of the NDC. AMAFCA strives to minimize vehicle presence on the path, but sometimes it can't be avoided. When encountering vehicles on the path, please be courteous—we're able to ride here thanks to the co-operation of AMAFCA.

Mile 2.4
Mile 6.3

Shortly after leaving AMAFCA's building behind, the NDC trail crosses Menaul Blvd., named for the Menaul School, a secondary school about two miles west, formerly associated with the Presbyterian Church. Menaul was founded in 1882 to serve children coming from parts of northern and central New Mexico and southern Colorado where schools were scarce at the time. The school's website, www.menaulschool.com, tells the story of the alterations in the school's focus over time.



puncture inner tubes.

North of Menaul Blvd., the trail enters an industrial area as it passes two large, busy streets, Candelaria and Comanche. Also north of Menaul, the path is bordered on both sides by disturbed soil, an excellent environment for that bane of Southwest bicyclists, the goat head. During late summer and early fall the plants sometimes grow up on to the pavement, their sharp fruits ready to



Just north of Candelaria, painted on the east wall, are numbers showing water depth. Floodwaters in the NDC attained record flow rates on August 14, 1980, when about 7 inches of rain fell within 24 hours. AMAFCA engineers estimate that the water depth was 10 feet at this location-enough flow to carry a car or knock one off one's feet.

At Comanche, you'll see a white-painted bike, a memorial to a fallen bicyclist, Roy Sekreta, who died when hit by a motorist coming fast up the hill. Having first appeared in the US during the early years of this century, these somber reminders of cycling's hazards have since spread around the world (see www.ghostbike.org). There is a protected median here for bicyclists as the trail shifts from the west to the east side of the NDC. But be careful. Underpasses are eventually planned for Menaul, Candelaria, and Comanche.

Not long after moving to the east side of the NDC and

Mile 3.4
Mile 5.3

passing the Comanche Detention Basin and Pump Station, another flood impoundment facility, you'll come to a junction of the NDC trail and the Paseo del Nordeste trail, which heads up Hahn Arroyo east to around Pennsylvania St. and Candelaria Road.

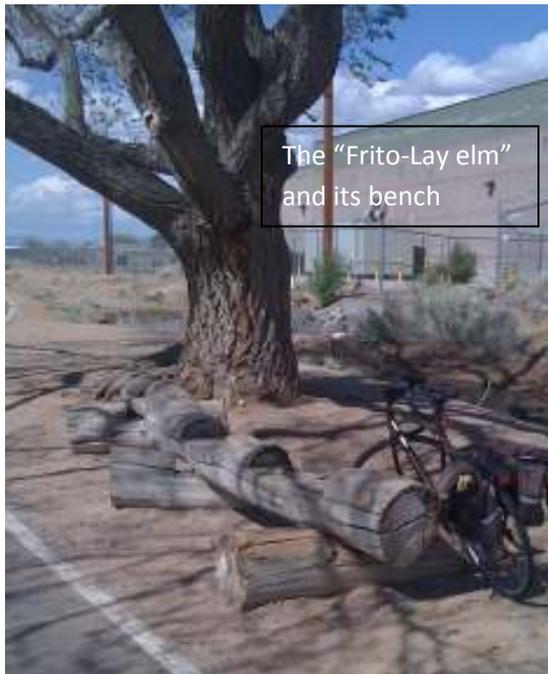


Though not obvious, the ball park just south of Comanche Rd. and east of the bike trail is linked to the Comanche Basin and serves the same purpose. This is a fine example of a dual use facility, where flood control is needed a small fraction of the time. Unfortunately, some of the park users seem unaware of the vital back up function; City officials report occasional complaints by unknowing residents demanding to know why their game was not only rained out but flooded out as well.

From this point north, the NDC trail is called the North Channel Trail. Stay left across a bridge to the west side of the NDC again to continue on the NDC trail. Not long after the crossing, you will dive under busy Montgomery Blvd. and then even busier Interstate-25 on the side of the North Diversion Channel.

Continuing north, the path presents views of heavy industrialization. While the concrete channel and the surrounding areas look bleak, some life exists here. Killdeer, small shore birds, fly into the NDC to feed on insects. The birds' distinctive, high pitched sounds are often heard before they are seen. AMAFCA staff report that coyotes travel westward from the foothills along the arroyos and concrete channels, and then down the NDC.

Near where the trail crosses busy Singer (mile 4.5), the City and AMAFCA have constructed what are called secondary environmental ponds on several side channels, just upstream from their junctions with the NDC. The ponds, often containing a substantial amount of soil and vegetation slow and filter flood water. Ducks, doves and quail nest here and raptors soar overhead. The pond at Bear Canyon Arroyo is particularly well developed with large trees and bushes. It is about .3 miles east of the NDC up the side trail. As noted on signs, visitors should stay out of these areas because they are subject to flash flooding.



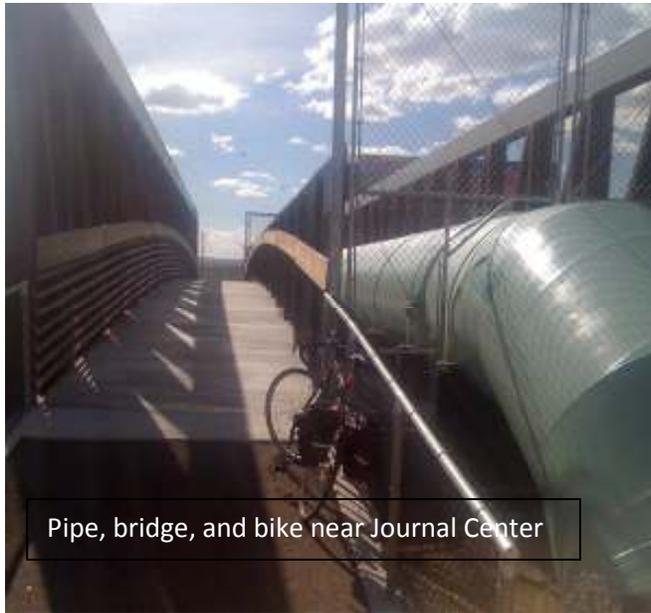
The "Frito-Lay elm" and its bench

As the trail passes above a collection of big box stores to the west and alongside a large yard selling stone to the east, a bridge takes you back to the east side of the NDC, and a series of smaller bridges conducts the trail over smaller arroyos draining parts of the city's Northeast Heights and emptying into the NDC. And then you see a tree that is not a mirage – a surprisingly large Chinese elm on the east side of the arroyo, the only tree along this trail through the desert, with a nicely fashioned, rustic log bench by its side. Shortly ahead, a bridge crosses the Bear Arroyo, leading to a short connector trail running alongside the arroyo up to Jefferson St. and Interstate-25.

Mile 5.7
Mile 3.0

Crossing back to the west side of the NDC, the trail intersects Osuna Blvd. at a traffic light before rejoining the NDC heading north. The crossing is difficult: first one must cross a bridge over the NDC from east to west, then make a right –angled turn to the west and stop at a traffic light. Head across Osuna when the light changes, turning immediately east on the bike trail, which then quickly turns back to heading north again. . Down the hill, Osuna passes another of Albuquerque’s private secondary schools, Sandia Prep, surrounded by its classrooms and sports fields (www.sandiaprep.org).

Continuing north, one can look across a large recent housing development, Vista del Norte, to the valley, the Rio Grande, and the West Mesa with its small volcanoes at the western horizon. Less than a mile north of the crossing at Osuna, a small spur from the trail descends steeply to the housing development; a short distance further along, a branch to the east over an NDC-spanning bridge leads off to meet one



Pipe, bridge, and bike near Journal Center

of the streets (Rutledge Street) in the Journal Center. New Mexico’s largest newspaper, the morning Albuquerque Journal moved away from Downtown Albuquerque in 1979 to this still-growing office and warehouse development, along with its competitor for readers and advertising, the evening Albuquerque Tribune. Like newspapers throughout the country, both papers struggled to maintain both readership and revenue, with the Tribune succumbing in 2008. The Journal boasts of its 130-year history in the Duke City, stating that it considers itself New Mexico’s “newspaper of record.” (www.abqjournal.com) Albuquerque’s T.H. Lang has been the

publisher since 1971; unlike many other city newspapers, the Journal is locally-owned. Current readers will be surprised to know that the paper was known as the Albuquerque Journal-Democrat for a few of its early years. One of the streets in the area is named after Mr. Lang; others include Masthead St. and Headline Blvd.

Mile 6.8
Mile 1.9

A short distance beyond the entrance to Journal Center, you’ll encounter two forks of the trail: to the left, you cross a railroad track and then stop at El Pueblo Road before crossing this small but busy street that parallels the much larger and much busier Paseo del Norte. Down the hill from here to the West is the North Valley and the Los Ranchos-Journal Center station of New Mexico’s commuter/visitor train, the New Mexico Railrunner [there may be an .wmv file of the beep-beep somewhere on the web or available from the Railrunner]. Several times each day, you can catch the sleek red-and-yellow Railrunner south to downtown Albuquerque and Belen or north to Bernalillo and Santa Fe. The trains are designed to carry bikes; more information and schedules are available at www.nmrailrunner.com. This bike trail to the west continues alongside Paseo del Norte and

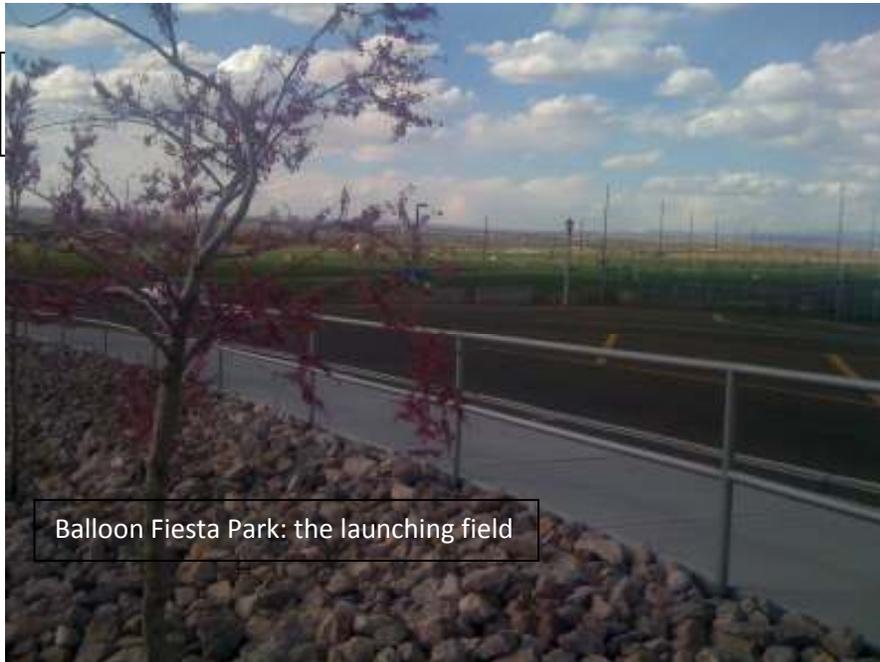
hooks up with the Paseo del Bosque Bike Trail and then continues across the Rio Grande to Albuquerque's West Side.

But to continue north, keep right to descend beneath Paseo del Norte through a notch in the NDC. Often as you head north from Paseo del Norte, you can smell the breakfast cereals and other products



of the General Mills plant, just to the west. Straight as an arrow, the NDC continues north along a route decided long ago, partly because at the time it was developed, there was little building activity in the area, and land acquisition was not expensive. Now there's much more business use of this part of the city.

You again dive under the next large east-west road, Alameda Blvd, a short mile later. Though the ride down the hill on Alameda to Second Street can be a little hair-raising, with little or no shoulder going over the train tracks, at that junction you reach a pretty bike path along Alameda that parallels all the vehicles heading over the Corrales Bridge. (The Paseo del Norte bike trail is a safer way to get to the valley.) At Rio Grande Blvd., you veer a little to the southwest to stay on the bike trail, then past the large parking lot used by kayakers, runners, skaters, walkers, and bicyclists to turn left at the north end of the Paseo del Bosque Bike Trail, or left to access the old Corrales Bridge, now dedicated to walkers and cyclists.



Balloon Fiesta Park: the launching field

But before you head toward Corrales, consider that you're near the end of the NDC Trail. You can pass under Alameda Blvd. and ride a short distance further to reach Balloon Fiesta Park. Most of the year the park looks like a giant football field, but for nine days in early October every year, it is covered with bright silky envelopes, as the fabric tops of balloons are called, for the several-story-high fanciful creations

that fill the fall sky above the city. The Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta is our city's biggest tourist draw, bringing thousands of visitors to fill every hotel and B&B for miles around. It has been said that in the past Balloon Fiesta visitors used more film than at any other single event in the world; now most use electrons instead. Read more about the Balloon Fiesta at www.balloonfiesta.com. Realize that a bicycle is ideal for visiting the Fiesta itself: the bike trail is nowhere near as crowded as the streets around the area for that week in October, and you can cross unimpeded from the bike trail into the Balloon Fiesta Park and be among the wicker baskets and envelopes and the roar of the propane flames before your street-bound fellow travelers can even find a place to park. You'll have the advantage on most days of the Fiesta, of being able to park close through Bike Valet. This popular service, provided by BikeABQ, the NM Touring Society, and the City of Albuquerque offers free (preferably with a donation) bike parking for all Balloon Fiesta participants for most morning and evening events. The service is available on the trail after it crosses the NDC, by the wrought iron fence behind the Balloon Museum at Gate 8A.





Of course, you'll have to pay your admission price like anyone else during that week, but the rest of the year you are free to enjoy the view of the Bosque and the mountains and the football-field-on-steroids in almost complete silence. Or you can visit the city's impressive Anderson - Abruzzo Albuquerque International Balloon Museum (usually we just call it the Balloon Museum and so do they: www.balloonmuseum.com) at the south end of the Park with its exhibits of the science and history of the balloons and especially of Albuquerque's part of that history. The museum is named for two prominent balloonists, "Ben Abruzzo and Maxie Anderson, two Albuquerque natives who established several ballooning firsts, such as crossing oceans and continents" (according to Wikipedia) and died in the pursuit of the sport they loved.

Mile (from the south end) 8.7

Mile (from the north end) 0.0

For now and the foreseeable future, you are at the end of this bike trail. Just north of the Balloon Fiesta Park, the North Diversion Channel heads into Sandia Pueblo land before bending to the west to dump into the Rio Grande. You can access the marshlands near the junction of the NDC and the river from Fourth Street and see many of the cattails and waterfowl that live there, but you're at the end of the line here.

Thanks to these kind people for their assistance:

Many helpful staff people at the Albuquerque Metropolitan Arroyo and Flood Control Authority, Chuck Malagodi, Paul Hyso, Barbara Baca and others in the City of Albuquerque Parks and Recreation Department, research librarians at the Main Library in Albuquerque.

Photo credits:

Albuquerque flood: JoeDesigns.com

Others by the authors.