

## North Diversion Channel (NDC) Trail

**Miles (from the south end) 0.0**

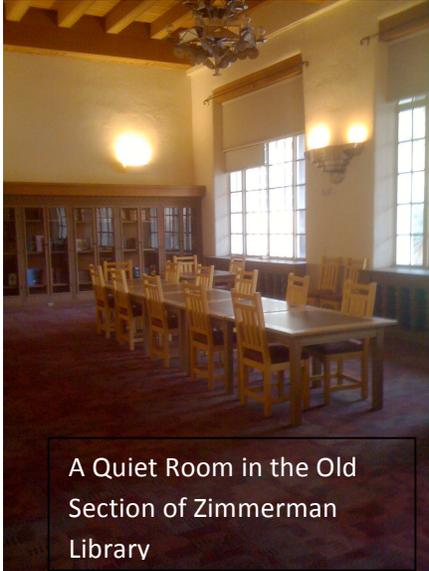
**Miles (from the north end) 8.7**

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 route crosses part of the University of New Mexico's Main Campus and most of its North Campus before joining the paved bike trail proper, which starts alongside the cement-lined Campus Wash. The Campus Wash is 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 floodwaters 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 on 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:

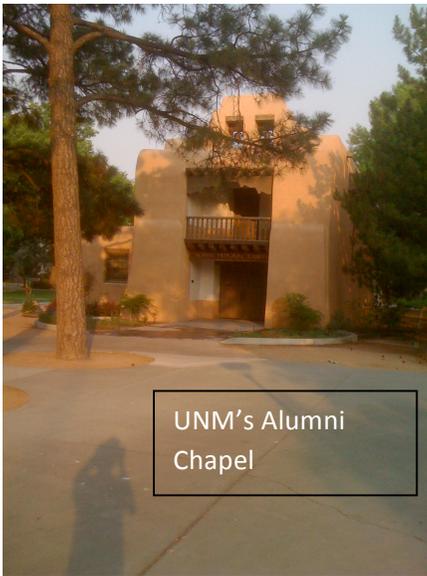


A Quiet Room in the Old Section of Zimmerman Library



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 artifacts.
- 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, corbeled ceilings, murals, 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](http://www.unm.edu), and a map of the central campus is available at <https://mmuf.unm.edu/regional-conference/unm-campus-map.pdf>.

Yale heads north 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 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 the area can be found at [https://fm.unm.edu/assets/documents/campus-maps/visitormapnorth\\_numeric.pdf](https://fm.unm.edu/assets/documents/campus-maps/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 off Tucker Avenue, just a few feet 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



for space of the growing university. The Law School encroaches on its southeast corner, the Children's Psychiatric Hospital, the Ronald McDonald House (no golden 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.

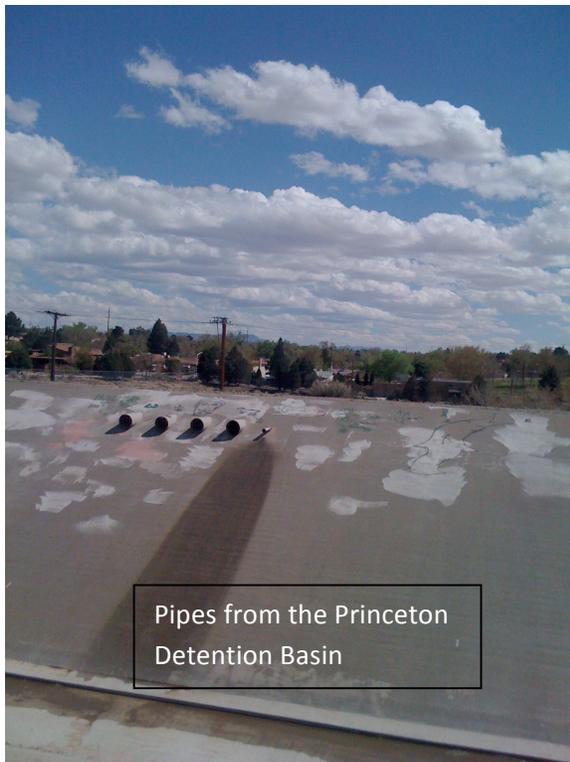
**Mile 1.2**

**Mile 7.5**

The trail crosses Indian School Road at the north end of the golf course. This is the last street-level crossing on the trail all the way to Balloon Fiesta Park; since 2012, the City has completed notch underpasses beneath all of the previously perilous arterials:

Menaul, Candelaria, Comanche, Singer, Osuna, Paseo del Norte, and Alameda, leaving access to these streets (except Paseo) by way of side-trails, but keeping bicyclists and pedestrians safe off the streets. To the west you'll see the large 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://ce.unm.edu/> for more information on their offerings.) You'll soon pass a tall triangular building previously called by locals the "Darth Vader Building" when it was black. Now, sheathed in green instead of black, it has been taken over by the university. 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, but be careful if you take this descent; there are often sand and gravel that have washed down onto the trail. As you swing east, you can look down on Interstate 40 as it articulates with Interstate 25, 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.; I-25 is a portion of the Pan-American Highway, which stretches from Prudhoe Bay, **Alaska**, to Ushuaia, Argentina!

Looking at the steep embankment formed by the NDC, it becomes clear that its 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. A housing development and Netherwood park lie beyond the NDC.

The bike trail cuts under Interstate 40 in a notch cut into the NDC wall. 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 to your west takes you to a spur trail heading east along Interstate-40 to Cutler Avenue (see the I-40 Bike Trail description), 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.



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 corraling the Rio Grande to the

west but also keeping the floodwaters from reaching the river. The ballot issue establishing AMAFCA seemed doomed for defeat 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 safe 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](http://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://www.amafca.org/maps-2/>). 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 occasionally 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 and many other places along flood control arroyos in Albuquerque thanks to AMAFCA.

**Mile 2.4**  
**Mile 6.3**

Shortly after leaving AMAFCA's building behind, the NDC trail crosses under 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.org](http://www.menaulschool.org) tells the story of the alterations in the school's focus over time.



ready to puncture inner tubes. Stay on the trail!

North of Menaul Blvd., the trail enters an industrial area as it passes under 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 goathead. During late summer and early fall the plants sometimes grow up on to the pavement, their sharp fruits



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 (usually we get just a little more than that in the average year!). 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, there once was 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 so-called "ghost bikes", somber reminders of cycling's hazards have since spread around the world (see <http://grist.org/living/the-story-of-ghost-bikes-how-a-bike-memorial-in-st-louis-sparked-a-global-movement/>) The underpass will now take you safely below the site of Mr. Sekreta's fatal accident, but there's a ghost bike west down the hill on Comanche.

A well-paved section of trail now takes you from the Comanche bike underpass along the west side

**Mile 3.4**  
**Mile 5.3**



of the NDC to a bridge over the channel. A right turn here would take you to the Paseo del Nordeste trail (also called the Hahn Arroyo Trail), which heads up Hahn Arroyo east to around Pennsylvania St. and Candelaria Road. Though not obvious, the ballpark just south of Comanche Rd. and east of the bike trail is linked to the Comanche Basin and serves the same purpose – impounding possible floodwaters. 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.

After passing the bike bridge to the Paseo del Nordeste, you will dive under busy Montgomery Blvd. and then even busier Interstate-25 on the west side of the North Diversion Channel.

Continuing north after crossing under I-25 and over the NDC, 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 under active Singer Blvd. (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 floodwater. 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 0.3 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.

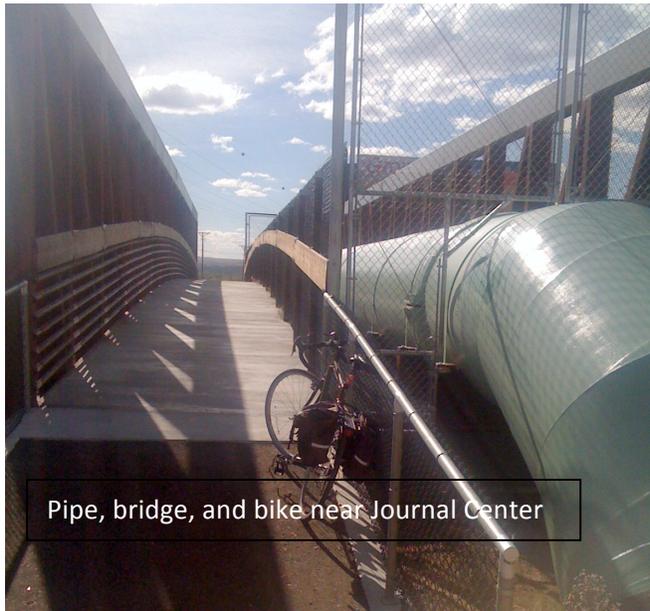


As the trail passes above a collection of big box stores to the west and alongside a large yard selling stone to the east, a bridge takes you back to the east side of the NDC, and a series of smaller bridges conducts the trail over smaller arroyos draining parts of the city’s Northeast Heights and emptying into the NDC. And then you see a tree that is not a mirage – a surprisingly large Siberian elm on the east side of the arroyo, one of the only trees 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 trail running alongside the arroyo up to Jefferson St. , Interstate-25, a pedestrian/bicycle bridge over I-25 and the Arroyo del Oso Trail.

**Mile 5.7**  
**Mile 3.0**

Crossing back to the west side of the NDC, the trail immediately ducks under Osuna Blvd. where a difficult crossing of this busy street was previously necessary. Down the hill, Osuna passes another of Albuquerque's private secondary schools, Sandia Prep, surrounded by its classrooms and sports fields ([www.sandiaprep.org](http://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

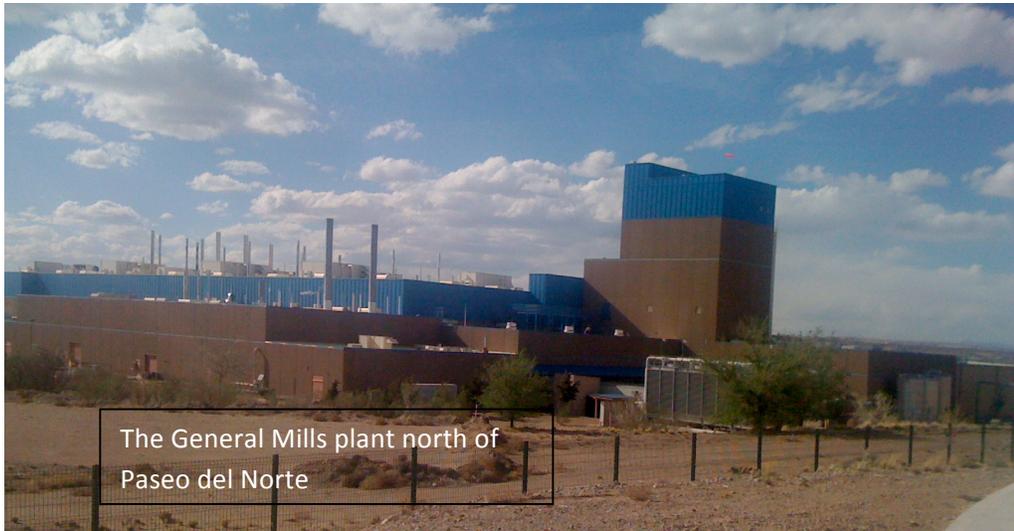
of the streets (Rutledge Street) in the Journal Center. New Mexico's largest newspaper, the morning *Albuquerque Journal* moved away from Downtown Albuquerque in 1979 to this still-growing office and warehouse development, along with its competitor for readers and advertising, the evening *Albuquerque 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](http://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 often car-filled street that parallels the much larger and much

busier Paseo del Norte (not to be confused with the Paseo del Nordeste, the bike route that you passed several miles ago). Down the hill from here to the West are the North Valley and the Los Ranchos-Journal Center station of New Mexico's commuter/visitor train, the New Mexico Railrunner. Several times each day, you can catch the sleek red-and-yellow-painted Railrunner south to downtown Albuquerque and Belen or north to Bernalillo and Santa Fe. The trains are designed to carry bikes, and they do; more information and schedules are available at [www.nmrailrunner.com](http://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. To the east, a mildly perilous series of road-crossings take you along the Paseo del Norte/South Domingo Baca Bike Trail (see Northeast Trails

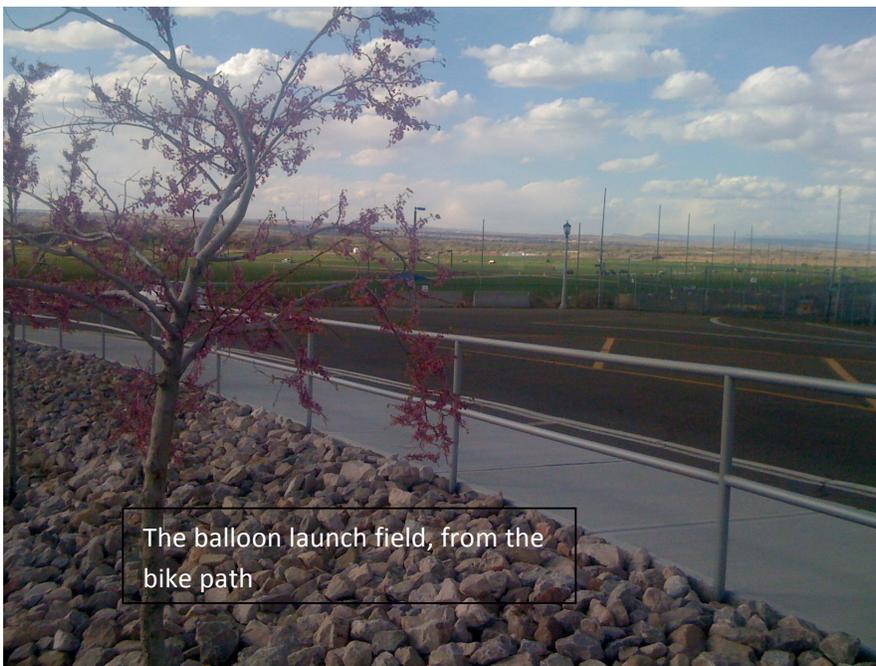


The General Mills plant north of Paseo del Norte

for a description of the route) as far as Tramway Blvd.

But to continue north, keep right to descend beneath Paseo del Norte through another 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.



The balloon launch field, from the bike path

You again dive under the next large east-west road, Alameda Blvd, a short mile later. You can ride down the hill on the bike path on the south side of heavily-trafficked Alameda Blvd. When the Alameda bike path reaches Fourth Street, you cross to a pretty bike path along Alameda that parallels all the vehicles heading over the Corrales Bridge. If you're heading west this way, you veer a little to the southwest at Rio Grande Blvd. 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 right to access the old Corrales Bridge, now dedicated to walkers and cyclists.

**Mile 8.2**  
**Mile 0.5**

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 and is used

for soccer tournaments, jousting exhibitions and even the 2018 World Boomerang championships, 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 and

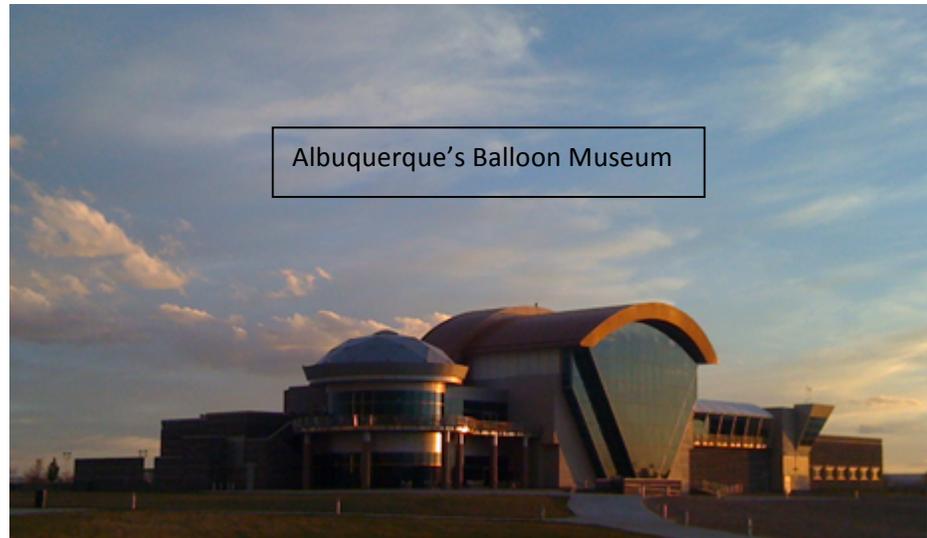
hundreds of balloonists, who fill every hotel and B&B for miles around. It has been said that in the past Balloon Fiesta visitors used more film than at any other single event in the world; now most use electrons instead. Read more about the Balloon Fiesta at

[www.balloonfiesta.com](http://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 viewers of most morning and evening events who have arrived on two wheels. The service is available on the trail after it crosses the NDC, by the wrought iron fence behind the Balloon Museum.

The Balloon Museum itself, or more completely, the Anderson-Abruzzo International Balloon Museum, built in 2005, features soaring architecture designed and engineered by the Albuquerque firm of Gerald A. Martin Ltd. and houses numerous exhibits related to the flight of balloons over the last few centuries. Many events take place at the museum; on a recent morning during the week, we saw hordes of preschool children watch the controlled ascension of a small balloon and then settle in for story time. The city-owned museum is named for two Albuquerque balloon aeronauts, Ben Abruzzo and Maxie Anderson, both of whom died in aviation-related accidents. We must hasten to say that the Balloon Fiesta is carefully controlled by its local sponsors and by the Federal Aviation Administration, and usually passes off without dangerous incidents. To that end, visitors are occasionally disappointed when balloons fail to take off due to uncertain weather, but as weather usually does in Albuquerque, it's usually beautiful the next day.



Albuquerque's Balloon Museum

As of this writing, the trail ends here. In the future, the city hopes to add a bicycle connection going further north to Roy Avenue. The short trail addition would be one of the last segments of the 50-Mile Bike Loop envisioned by 2009-2017 Albuquerque Mayor Richard Berry.



**Mile (from the south end) 8.7**  
**Mile (from the north end) 0.0**

For now, though, 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, James Lewis, Barbara Baca and others, past and present, in the City of Albuquerque Parks and Recreation Department, research librarians at the Main Library and Special Collections Library in Albuquerque.

Photo credits:

Albuquerque flood: JoeDesigns.com

Others by the authors. Revised May 4, 2020.