

Welcome to the historic mining town of Lake Valley, New Mexico

The mining town of Lake Valley was founded in 1878 after silver was discovered. Almost overnight, the small frontier town blossomed into a major settlement with a population of 4,000 people. Today, silver mining has played out and all that remains is a ghost town. The Bureau of Land Management has restored the schoolhouse and chapel. The restored schoolhouse provides a glimpse of what schooling in a rural area was like in the early 20th century. Please feel free to come in and visit with our site hosts and check out news articles, photos, and other history of Lake Valley. The other buildings in the town site have been stabilized to slow further deterioration. There is a self-guided, interpretive walking tour that can be found on the inside of this brochure. Please feel free to take your time exploring the history of Lake Valley.

LOCATION / ACCESS

Go west of Caballo Lake on NM 152, then south on NM 27; or from NM 26 at the town of Nutt, travel north on NM 27 for about 12 miles.

SEASON/HOURS

Open year round from 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. Closed Tuesday and Wednesday.

FEES

None

ACTIVITIES

Scenic driving, watchable wildlife, picnicking, historic interpretation, hiking



Visitors Please Note:

- Lake Valley is open for day use only. Lake Valley is free and open to the public. Donations are welcome. Please park your vehicle at the schoolhouse.
- Portions of Lake Valley are on private property. Please respect the owner's property rights by not trespassing. Stay on the roads and trails; do not enter buildings; and do not cross fences.
- Collection of artifacts, unauthorized digging within an archaeological site, and destruction of historical resources on public land is prohibited by law. Please, no artifact collection or metal detecting.
- Trail guides for the self-guided walking tour are available at the schoolhouse. For visitor safety and protection of the historic resources, please stay on established roads and trails. Lake Valley is notorious for rattlesnakes!
- For the protection of your pets from other animals, snakes, and cuts from stepping on sharp objects, please keep them on a leash and on the established roads and trails.
- No camping is permitted.
- Discharge of firearms is prohibited.

For more information, please contact:
Bureau of Land Management
Las Cruces District Office
1800 Marquess Street
Las Cruces, NM 88005
(575) 525-4300

To report unauthorized activity/concerns call
1-800-637-9152
BLM/NM/GI-22/002+1220

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U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

Lake Valley Historic Townsite Self - Guided Walking Tour



New Mexico State University Library, Archives and Special Collections.

Step Back in time....

This self-guided tour begins and ends at the Schoolhouse. It is about three-quarters of a mile, and takes 45 minutes to an hour when walking at a leisurely pace.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN, PLEASE TAKE NOTE:

As you walk through Lake Valley, you will see several structures, many foundations and partial ruins, and an abundance of artifacts, such as glass, metal, and ceramic pieces. These are the material remains that archaeologists study to understand and interpret the history of historic sites, such as Lake Valley. These are also the things which make Lake Valley so interesting. Please do not damage any building remnants or remove artifacts from the premises.

To begin your self-guided tour, walk south from the Schoolhouse, following the trail markers. As you proceed, notice that you can see the fenced Lake Valley cemetery on the hill across the paved highway.

When you reach the dirt road, turn to your right and walk toward the old stone store. Your path now is approximately where Main Street was in downtown Lake Valley from about 1882 to 1895.

In 1895, the Main Street business district burned to the ground. Supposedly, the fire was accidentally started behind one of the many saloons by an inebriated patron. The buildings were closely spaced, and once one building was ablaze, there was no stopping the inferno from engulfing the entire business district. Virtually all that remains are the foundations that you see off to the sides of the road and pieces of twisted, melted bottle glass.

The business district was never rebuilt or replaced. Lake Valley was first a silver mining town. In 1893, President Grover Cleveland replaced silver as the monetary standard, in favor of gold. Silver prices plunged overnight. Thus, by the time Lake Valley burned in 1895, it had largely been abandoned due to the silver depression.

The impressive stone building **(1)** occupied the northwest corner of Main and Railroad, as shown on the 1893 and 1902 maps of Lake Valley. On the 1893 map, it is noted to be a school. In 1902, it is labeled as a saloon. Later, it became a general store and gas station.

Turn to your right here and follow the dirt road once known as Railroad Avenue. On your left (before you reach the gate), you will see some crumbling adobe walls **(2)**. These are believed to be the remnants of the Christian Endeavor building. The Christian Endeavor Society was a non-denominational religious organization active around the turn of the century. They raised money for the "new" adobe Schoolhouse at a Fourth of July picnic.

The Hispanic residents of Lake Valley, who lived in a part of town called "Chihuahuita" (little Chihuahua), are said to have held their own Catholic services at different homes on a rotating basis.

Chihuahuita is believed to have been located in the area that is now on the other side of the highway. It constituted almost a separate community from the rest of Lake Valley. The Mexican immigrants who lived there worked in the mines and for the ranches. When the mines folded, most of the residents moved on to California and other destinations.

The next building **(3)** is the former residence of Mrs. Blanche Nowlin, born Blanche Wilson in Kingston, NM. She married Mr. Slim Nowlin, who became the railroad superintendent for Lake Valley. Mrs. Nowlin became the local dealer for Continental Oil Company (Conoco) in 1920. After her husband's untimely death in 1937, she stayed in Lake Valley. Mrs. Nowlin lived in this house until her death in 1982, and is fondly remembered by all who knew her.

In her later years, Mrs. Nowlin's only neighbors were Pedro and Savina Martinez. They resided next door in Lake Valley's old Bella Hotel **(4)** until August of 1994. Mr. Martinez arrived in Lake Valley in approximately 1904, as a mere child of two years. He attended school in Lake Valley and worked in various occupations. Having been a resident of Lake Valley for some 90 years, he was a wealth of knowledge about the history of the town.

Both the Nowlin and Martinez homes are on private property. Please view them only from the road.

Next you will come to a small adobe structure on your left **(5)**. This building was originally a home, but was later used as an Episcopalian chapel, known as Saint Columba. (It was one of the stops on the circuit of Preacher Lewis, the subject of a book by Las Cruces author Lee Priestly). It was built in approximately 1920.

Continuing up Railroad Avenue, you will come to the water towers **(6)** on your left and the railroad coal sorter on your right **(7)**. From the coal sorter, look ahead (past the fence) and you will see the notch in the hillside where the train came through. It passed the coal sorter, then traveled to the right of the water towers, and on up to the depot and the mines.

Walk back toward the adobe Schoolhouse. The adobe home on the corner opposite the Martinez House **(8)** was once occupied by Lake Valley Justice of the Peace Judge Keil. He presided over the coroner's jury for a now mostly forgotten incident in New Mexico history known as the Lake Valley War. The "War" occurred south of Lake Valley in 1921. A long-standing dispute over a water well culminated in a shoot-out that took the lives of several cowboys. As you walk toward the Schoolhouse, you will be in the approximate location of what was "Keil Avenue."

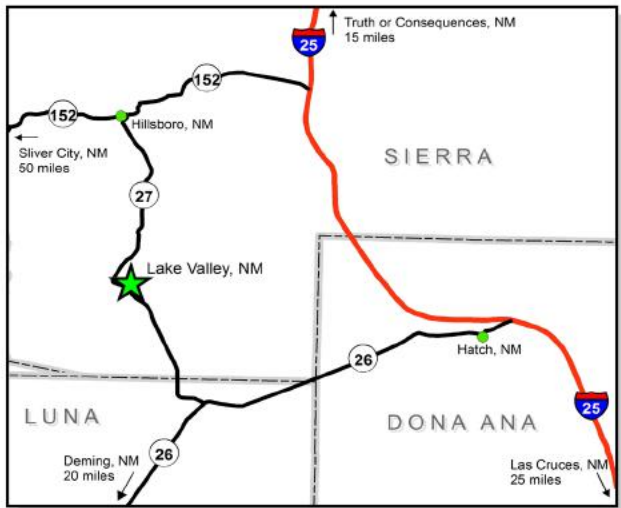
It was Mrs. Nowlin's habit to start each morning with a brisk walk to Lizard Mountain (Monument Peak). It is the hill to the east, with two large rock outcrops on top. The one to the right resembles a lizard.

Proceeding toward the Schoolhouse, the old house and garage **(9)** on your right was occupied by Mr. Martinez and family from 1930 to 1960. Prior to that, it was the home/office of Dr. W.G. Beals, a highly respected physician. He was remembered by longtime resident, Mr. Carlton McGregor, as having a "fast-stepping horse." He was the only doctor for the area, in a time when doctors still made house calls.

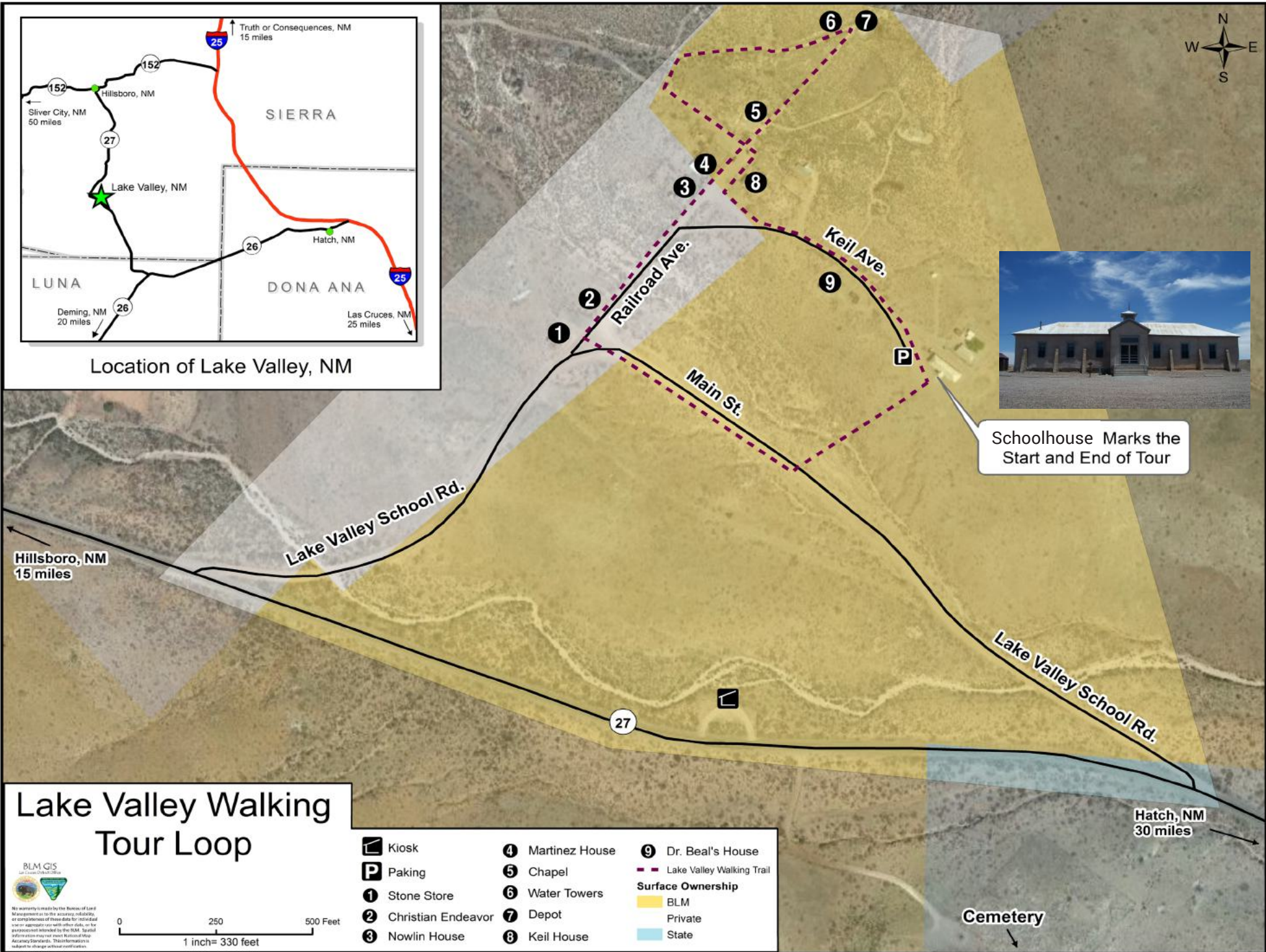
The adobe Schoolhouse was originally built in 1904. The entrance was on the west end, and the exterior walls were bare adobe. In about 1920 or 1921, the size of the Schoolhouse was doubled, and the entrance was moved to the south side. The entrance foyer once held a water fountain, and a bell once hung in the cupola. The cement covering and buttresses were added around 1960 to stabilize the building, probably saving it until more permanent repairs could be made. Although in some cases, you can see that the building actually moved away from the buttresses rather than being supported by them.

The BLM has undertaken a project to stabilize the Schoolhouse and other Lake Valley buildings, and hopes to have all buildings open for public viewing.

Thank you for taking the time to stop and enjoy this piece of Sierra County's and America's past.



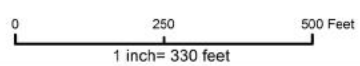
Location of Lake Valley, NM



Schoolhouse Marks the Start and End of Tour

Lake Valley Walking Tour Loop

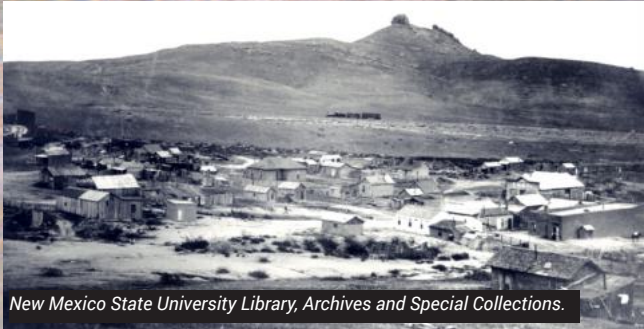
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|-----------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| Kiosk | 4 Martinez House | 9 Dr. Beal's House |
| Paking | 5 Chapel | Lake Valley Walking Trail |
| 1 Stone Store | 6 Water Towers | Surface Ownership |
| 2 Christian Endeavor | 7 Depot | BLM |
| 3 Nowlin House | 8 Keil House | Private |
| | | State |

Hatch, NM
30 miles

Cemetery



New Mexico State University Library, Archives and Special Collections.

From the humble present conditions of Lake Valley, one would hardly imagine that it had such a colorful past. But prior to the turn of the century, Lake Valley was a booming mining town.

Silver was first found in Lake Valley in 1878, but it wasn't until 1882 that the big discovery was made. That was the year the Bridal Chamber was discovered. Silver ore was found just 40 feet from the surface. A single piece of silver from the mine was displayed at the World Exposition held in Denver in 1882. It was valued at \$7,000, at a time when silver was selling for about \$1 an ounce.

Established by financier Whitaker Wright, the Lake Valley Mines were controlled by the Sierra Grande Mining Company. Naïve eastern investors flocked to invest their money in the western silver and gold mines (one of the more famous stockholders in the Sierra Grande Mining Company was Walt Whitman, who owned 200 shares). Wright went on to speculative ventures all over the globe. His endeavors were always tainted by accusations that he habitually misled investors. He finally created a world-wide sensation by swallowing cyanide in a London courtroom to avoid going to prison for fraud.

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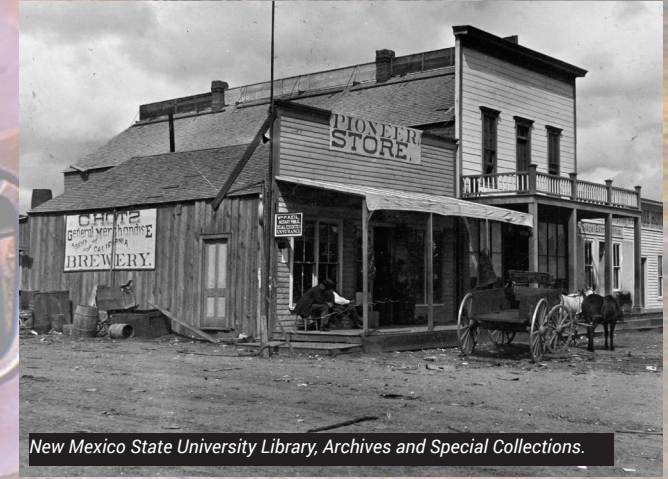
In 1884, the railroad was extended to Lake Valley. It was a typical mining town, with plenty of saloons, open around the clock. The town had a reputation for "lawlessness," as did most other western mining towns. A gunfighter named Jim Courtright, also known as "Longhair Jim," was hired as Town Marshal in 1882, and quickly brought things to order.

Lake Valley was a sister city to Hillsboro and Kingston, two mining towns a few miles to the north. The three towns were linked by the Lake Valley, Hillsboro and Kingston State and Express Line. The stage ran daily from the railhead at Lake Valley to the mining camps to the north. It was run by one Sadie Orchard, also proprietress of the Kingston brothel.

All this prosperity took a down turn in 1893, when silver was devalued. Hillsboro was somewhat spared the fate of Kingston and Lake Valley, in that its economy was based more on gold than silver. To make matters worse for Lake Valley, most of Main Street burned to the ground in 1895. A few settlers who had put down roots in Lake Valley stayed on into the twentieth century. The others drifted away to try to make their fortunes elsewhere.



Photo by L.Phillips



New Mexico State University Library, Archives and Special Collections.

There have been brief periods of revival for Lake Valley, in the 1920s and again during the World War II era and into the 1950s, when the area was mined for manganese ore. The little adobe chapel was used for church services as recently as the 1970's. A few hardy souls stuck with Lake Valley, long after its heyday. Mrs. Blanch Nowlin was a resident from 1908, until her death in 1982. Pedro and Savina Martinez lived there until 1994. Mr. Martinez was a resident for some 90 years.

To save this significant historic resource, the Bureau of Land Management instituted a program to protect the area. This includes stabilization of some of the structures and having volunteer site stewards reside on site.



Photo by L.Phillips