

Form 10-300  
(Rev. 6-72)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Type all entries complete applicable sections)

STATE: <b>New Mexico</b>
COUNTY: <b>Colfax</b>
FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY DATE

**1. NAME**

COMMON:  
**Raton Pass**

AND/OR HISTORIC:  
**(Old) Raton Pass**

**2. LOCATION**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**5 miles north of Raton**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Raton**

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:  
**1**

STATE:  
**New Mexico**

CODE:  
**35**

COUNTY:  
**Colfax**

CODE:  
**7**

**3. CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Building <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Comments <u>Railroad</u> <u>Tunnel</u>			

**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**

OWNER'S NAME:  
**Mr. Donald Berg**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**Star Route**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Trinidad**

STATE:  
**Colorado**

**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
**Colfax County Courthouse**

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Raton**

STATE:  
**New Mexico**

**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE OF SURVEY:  
**None**

DATE OF SURVEY:                     Federal     State     County     Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:                    STATE:                    CODE:

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE: **New Mexico**

COUNTY: **Colfax**

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ENTRY NUMBER

DATE

7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The route of the trail through Raton Pass has been established as follows: the trail ascended Raton Creek Canyon to the pass summit, directly over the present railroad tunnel, turned west and slightly north on the dividing ridge for about one quarter mile, then bent south again to descend along the course of Willow Creek to the present town of Raton. Railroad and highway construction have wiped out large sections of the trail remains, but on the northwesterly jog of the trail at the summit, and along Willow Creek below the summit, distinct trail remains can be found.

With the exception of railroad right-of-way and the new U.S. Route 85-87 which parallels the railroad and the old Trail, the Pass is still covered with willow and pinon trees and the smaller shrubs and ground cover. South of the summit however, various of the tributaries of Willow Creek have cut and eroded the banks along which the Trail ran.

BOUNDARIES: Due to the inadequacy of the U.S.G.S. coverage of the northern portion of the Pass in Colorado, it is necessary to refer to Map A, the composite aerial photographic map as well in the boundary description.

Beginning at the Wootton Tallgate marker (refer to Map A), proceed due east .75 miles to the eastern limit of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad right-of-way, thence south along said right-of-way to the northern entrance of the Raton Tunnel, thence east 100 yards, thence south to the southern entrance to Raton Tunnel, maintaining a constant width of 100 yards between the eastern boundary of the right-of-way and the landmark boundary. At the southern entrance of the tunnel, proceed west 100 yards to the eastern boundary of the right-of-way, thence continue south along said boundary approximately three miles to the point indicated on Map A as the junction of the early pack & foot trail and the Santa Fe Trail (Wootton Toll Road). Thence continue due west to the 7500' contour and proceed north along said contour for 1.75 miles, thence northwest in a straight line to the 7650' contour, thence north along said contour approximately .25 miles to its intersection with a branch of Willow Creek, thence due north to the State line, thence east along the State line .4 miles to a point .25 miles west of the eastern boundary of the railroad right-of-way, thence continue north to the point of origin along a line paralleling the eastern boundary of said right-of-way at a constant distance of .25 miles.

These boundaries employ the natural features of the terrain where feasible, and man made features, i.e. the railroad, when necessary. Due to the nature of travel on the trail, and subsequent developments, it has been necessary to provide sufficient latitude in the landmark boundaries to account for variations in the trail through the pass.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**3. SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |                                       |  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century            | <input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century  | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century |                                       |

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1821, 1866, 1879

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |   |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal          | <input type="checkbox"/> Education              | <input type="checkbox"/> Political                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric         | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering            | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy       | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic            | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry               | <input type="checkbox"/> Science                   | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture         | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention              | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture                 | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture        | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian       | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature             | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater                   | _____  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Military    | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Transportation | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications      | <input type="checkbox"/> Music                  |  |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation        |   |  |  |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Raton Pass was the shortest and most practicable route from the upper Arkansas Valley to New Mexico. Both as a barrier and a gateway, the Raton Mountains symbolized the Mountain Branch of the Santa Fe Trail as did no other landmark. Those who traveled this way viewed Raton Pass as the climactic challenge of the trip to Santa Fe, for ahead, under the looming cliffs of castellated Fisher's Peak, lay a tortuous, rugged trail that claimed many wagons and animals as the price of passage.

Because this way was hard, and because it was longer than the Cimarron Cutoff by a hundred miles, it was not as significant as the shorter route in the routine progress of trail development. However, at times of decision, when the course of history was being abruptly altered, the Mountain Branch, and its greatest landmark, Raton Pass, played crucial roles, most notably in Kearney's conquest of New Mexico in 1846, and the Colorado Volunteers' staunching of the Confederate invasion in 1862.

HISTORY: The first man to cross Raton Pass with wagons was Captain William Becknell in 1821, Before him there had been Indians, Conquistadores, trappers and traders, but all these had traveled on foot or with horses or mule trains. Becknell traveled west from Franklin, Missouri to Bent's Fort, Colorado, and then south through the Raton Pass. The narrow trail followed the dry rocky bed of Raton Creek on the north ascent and Old Willow Creek on the southern descent. The narrow defile was so craggy as to permit the passage of only one wagon at a time at some places, and the wagon axles were splintered and sawed by the rocks which covered the "trail."

Although Becknell "opened" Raton Pass for wagon traffic, the next year, 1822, he opened up a new route, the Cimarron Cutoff, which cut across the Cimarron Desert, south of the Mountain Trail. The hazards of the desert and the increased Indian harassment were soon judged to be less troublesome than Raton Pass and the longer Mountain Branch, and by the time of the Mexican War the Cimarron Cutoff had replaced the Mountain Branch as "the" Santa Fe Trail, and until the outbreak of the Civil War and the increased danger of Confederate as well as Indian raiding, the Mountain Branch was virtually abandoned.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

J.W. Abert, Report of Lt. J.W. Abert (Washington, 1848).  
 W.H. Emory, Notes of a Military Reconnaissance (Washington, 1847).  
 Leroy R. Hafen "Raton Pass, an Historic Highway," Colorado Magazine Vol. VII (November 1930).  
 Kenyon Riddle, Records and Maps of the Old Santa Fe Trail, revised (Stuart, Fla., 1963).  
 "The Santa Fe Trail," National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings Subtheme Report, 1963.

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			OR	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	UTM 13.544670.4096400 D	06400 D		0	0	
NE	13.546750.4096430 A	06430 A				
SE	13.546730.4090600 B	0600 B				
SW	13.544700.4090580 C	0580 C				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 1520 acres

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
Colorado	8	Las Animas	71
New Mexico	35	Colfax	7
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:  
 Richard Greenwood, Historian, Landmark Review Task Force

ORGANIZATION: Historic Sites Survey      DATE: 2/10/75

STREET AND NUMBER:  
 1100 L Street

CITY OR TOWN: Washington      STATE: D.C.      CODE: 11

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION      NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National       State       Local

Name: Landmark (NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

Designated: Dec. 14, 1980 date

Title: Boundary Certified

Date: March 7, 1979 date

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

ATTEST: [Signature] (NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS),  
 Keeper of The National Register

Date: 4/24/75

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

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INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

Raton Pass

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE New Mexico	
COUNTY Colfax	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

(Number all entries) #8 Statement of Significance Cont'd Page #2

In 1846, the Mountain Branch played a crucial part in the invasion of New Mexico by Kearney's Army of the West. Kearney's selection of the Mountain Branch was based on two major factors: one, Bent's Fort offered a convenient base of operations, closer than any other to the hostile territory, and two, the Mountain Branch was better watered than the notorious Cimarron Desert in the middle of the summer. Kearney set out from Bent's Fort on August 2, followed by a train of traders. Road crews were sent out in advance to improve the trail through the Pass as best they could. The army crossed in one day with great difficulty; in many places they were forced to raise the wagons over sharp spurs with ropes, but it was in the descent that the narrow and rocky trail wreaked the greatest havoc, and many wagons were destroyed.

After the passage of the Army of the West, the Mountain Branch was abandoned with the exception of the random caravan with business at Bent's Fort. Once again, however, with the outbreak of war, in 1860, the Mountain Branch became the more traveled route due to the vulnerability of the Cimarron Cutoff to Confederate raiders. The Trail at this time became largely a Union supply route, and armed protection of the supply trains was a necessity. In addition to the Confederate raiders, the withdrawal of Federal troops from the frontier outposts stimulated an increase in Indian attacks on the trains. Union patrols along the Mountain Branch were a routine necessity for keeping the lifeline of the Western troops. In 1862, Raton Pass further served the Union cause when it was used by the Colorado Volunteers in their rush to join the Union troops at Glorieta Pass where the Confederate invasion of the southwest was halted.

In 1865, with the close of the war, an individual approached the territorial legislatures of Colorado and New Mexico for charters to build a road from Trinidad, Colorado, to the Canadian River in New Mexico. Richens L. "Uncle Dick" Wootton plan was to build a toll road through Raton Pass, and his charters were granted without trouble. In the spring of 1866, he began the clearing, grading, blasting, and bridge building necessary to make an all year road suitable for heavy wagon and stagecoach travel out of the twenty-seven mile stretch which had been termed the worst on the entire Santa Fe Trail. Wootton's efforts were amply rewarded as traffic from New Mexico to eastern Colorado through the Pass increased heavily, and Wootton collected \$1.50 a wagon. The Barlow-Sanderson Company established a stage station at Wootton's Ranch, five miles below the summit on the northern slope and Uncle Dick became an innkeeper as well. By 1868, the advancing railhead had bypassed the Cimarron Cutoff and the tollroad received the bulk of the wagon traffic, but by 1879-80, the Santa Fe Railroad had scaled Raton Pass through a series of switchbacks, and Wootton's tollroad was crowded out, as was the San Fe Trail itself.

The railroad has since been routed under the summit of the Pass by means of a tunnel, but it still follows the route of the old Trail along Raton Creek on the north side and Willow Creek on the south. Thus, the best-preserved remains of the Trail exist on the "saddle," or summit of the Pass.