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To reach Santa Fe from Cloudcroft, we looped down south to Las Cruces to avoid detours, then headed north. The loop itself is quite a detour of 80 New Mexico miles plus an excess of 1000 to 1500 feet per mile to cover dips and compensate for the gales of wind rocking the car off course.

Out of state motorists observe the speed limits. The locals, however, drive the way they drove 30 years ago in the days of racing across the desert on narrow roads, pressing the accelerator so hard that bugs splattering on the windshield splashed into the right-of-way. (One reporter covering New Mexico for the *Livestock Weekly* used to slow down to 75 for towns to hold an average of 90 on the straight-aways.)

Station wagons filled with kids need the most sympathy. Billboards stand too far apart to catch attention. Aren't any roadside desert animals to break the monotony. The coyotes have killed off the jackrabbits and antelopes. After boys are on the verge of becoming punch drunk from fighting, funny books and car games expire before the combatants have rested. (The best remedy for scuffling among brothers is before departing cut a strip of one-inch tape long enough to tie each boy's elbow to his rib cage. Ninety percent of the inter-sibling battles start from one boy elbowing his seat mate.)

At Las Cruces, we headed north on Interstate 25 toward Santa Fe. My partner drove and I scanned the mountains, aiming my mind's eye to the San Andreas Range. On the other side of the mountains, I was afraid to look across the White Sands Missile Range. I'm unsure, but I think a herder was accused of being nosy, glassing the missile site for

wolves a federal agency allegedly released without holding a local hearing. (I never have used *allegedly* before. How well do you think the word replaces the truth that the "Feds" did turn wolves onto the White Sands?)

But I was studying the San Andreas Mountains hoping to see the pass where the western writer Eugene Manlove Rhodes ranched and was buried. In case you missed reading him, he wrote short stories and magazine serials for *The Saturday Evening Post* in the 1930s. He'd been a cowboy – a horse wrangler on a big New Mexico outfit at 14. One story is that he saved soap coupons to buy his first saddle. Another version is he that saved the coupons from cigarette papers discarded around camp and the bunkhouse to order books. I prefer the latter image of Mr. Rhodes shaded up, herding the remuda, and reading English literature.

I already knew the country from Mr. Rhodes' vivid description in the "Paso Por Aqui" story. I thought once I spotted the two old windmills the hero took as a mark to locate an Indian road, dodge a posse and save the strength of his horse, *Miel*. Last I'd heard, his stories were collectors' items. One more fleeting thought of Mr. Rhodes returned while passing by a small town below Albuquerque. It was from J. Frank Dobie's tribute to him: "His sense of justice was so strong, he refused to ever return to one New Mexico town after a man was stomped to death in front of the post office."

Fiesta Weekend was on in Santa Fe, yet rooms at the inn where we stayed off an obscure side street were empty. (Note, this was before the September 11 tragedy.) The Spanish family running the place blamed an over-expansion of hotels and the addition of lodging out at the casino the

Indians own north of town. It was a shock to check in and find the parking garage empty.

The city certainly was full. Down the narrow sidewalk passing the inn, young men in black coats covering white shirts escorted beautiful girls wearing their first dancing shoes. All were in a rush to join the swirling crowds of street dancers and to later be refreshed in the food booths. We made a stab at circling the plaza, but it doesn't take much of a crowd to turn back a citizen of Mertzon. The only free space was around the blue-coated policemen guarding the blocked streets. Well, there was plenty of room by a bar right outside the barrier, hosting a blaring hard rock band and harboring a dozen or more motorcycles parked on the front lot.

Road fatigue combined with altitude sickness forestalled making the bishop's Sunday morning parade to the cathedral, the only part of the Fiesta dignified enough for a graybeard. I thought I'd recovered until I tried to revive the fire in the fireplace and discovered I didn't have the wind to spark a flame. I was strong enough by lunch to sit in the garden behind the inn and look at Mr. Rhodes' sentences. Be a pleasure to read his words out loud someday.