NEW MEXICO

LAND OF ENCHANTMENT *Became a state January 6, 1912 (47th)*

New Mexico is a land of deserts, flat-topped mesas and snowy mountains, where Pueblo, Navajo, Apache and Spanish traditions run deep. Its capital, Santa Fe, was founded in 1610 and is the oldest state capital.



Older Than Mexico

It sounds as if New Mexico was named for the country next door. It was not. Spanish explorers who traveled up the Rio Grande in 1581 called the land Nuevo México. They named it after the Valley of Mexico, the home of the Aztecs to the south. The country called Mexico did not exist yet.



The Great Houses of Chaco

Starting in the mid-800s, Ancestral Puebloan people built great houses in Chaco Canyon. These were stone buildings several stories high with hundreds of rooms. The builders lined up walls with the sun, the moon and the points of the compass. Roads tied the canyon to more than 150 other great houses. Today's Pueblo peoples are among their descendants.



Red or Green?

New Mexico has an official state question: Red or green? It asks which chile sauce you want on your food. Both colors come from the same plant. Green chiles are picked early, and red ones are left to ripen. People who want both answer Christmas. The village of Hatch started a chile festival in 1971. It is held on Labor Day weekend.



Sand as White as Snow

White Sands is the largest field of gypsum dunes on Earth, about 275 square miles. Gypsum is a soft white mineral. Rain usually dissolves it and rivers carry it off to the sea. Here the valley has no outlet, so the gypsum stays. It dried into crystals, and wind broke the crystals into fine white sand.



One Giant Telescope

On a high New Mexico plain, 27 dish antennas stand in the shape of a Y. Each dish is 82 feet across. They collect radio waves from space, and their signals are combined so the dishes act as one giant telescope. The arms of the Y are up to 13 miles long, and the dishes ride railroad tracks to new spots.



The Real Smokey Bear

Smokey Bear began as a poster bear who warned people about forest fires. In 1950, after a wildfire in the Capitan Mountains, firefighters found a black bear cub that had climbed a tree to escape. Its paws and back legs were burned. The cub was nursed back to health, named Smokey and flown to the National Zoo in Washington, D.C.

BY THE NUMBERS

Population	About 2.1 million (36th most)
Size	About 122,000 square miles (5th largest)
Highest point	Wheeler Peak, 13,167 feet
Counties	33
Neighbors	Arizona, Colorado, Oklahoma, Texas, Utah at one corner, and Mexico to the south

DID YOU KNOW?

- Santa Fe sits about 7,000 feet above sea level, higher than any other state capital.
- On summer evenings, hundreds of thousands of bats spiral out of Carlsbad Caverns.
- Footprints at White Sands show that people walked there more than 20,000 years ago.
- Albuquerque's Balloon Fiesta began in 1972 with just 13 balloons.

FIND IT ON THE MAP

1. What is New Mexico's largest city?
2. Which city is closest to Shiprock?
3. How many giant dishes make up the Very Large Array?

Answers: 1. Albuquerque 2. Farmington 3. 27