

Jemez Mountains Access

Participating in a Boy Scout event at the local Izaak Walton League Park in Ames, Iowa I was walking single file with nearly a hundred other boys on the levee at the edge of a man-made lake. A fisherman's dog, after ignoring the forty or so boys ahead of me, suddenly lunged, growling and snapping. Later I was told that the attack must have been my fault because, "they can smell your fear".

For your own safety: make no sudden movements, speak in a low calm voice, control your fear.

Driving to a residency at Mission Street Arts in Jemez Springs, New Mexico we followed signs towards our destination and turned into a very substantial and imposing series of military checkpoints blocking our path. Concerned that we were inadvertently trespassing upon Los Alamos National Laboratory and possibly violating federal laws, I inquired at the checkpoint and was assured that yes, this was indeed the proper path towards the village, though the next mile and a half was on LANL territory. I showed my ID and was instructed to drive straight through without stopping or turning off onto side streets like Bikini Atoll Road or Oppenheimer Drive, or to take any photos of the installation.

LANL, now off-limits to all but those with official business and security clearance, was created as Project Y for the Manhattan Project and displaced the Los Alamos Ranch School for Boys, two-dozen ranches of multi-generational Hispanic homesteaders, and sacred lands of the Ancestral Pueblo people of the Pajarito Plateau. The former residents of the land would only be allowed to return if hired as official support staff for the Project.

Continuing on, we passed the Valles Caldera National Preserve, described on their website:

A Diverse Landscape Born from an Explosive Past.

About 1.25 million years ago, a spectacular volcanic eruption created the 13-mile wide circular depression now known as the Valles Caldera. The preserve is known for its huge mountain meadows, abundant wildlife, and meandering streams. The area also preserves the homeland of ancestral native peoples and embraces a rich ranching history.¹

As a former altar boy it isn't the smell of incense and burning candles that invokes the sacred, rather it is the smell of hiking in the Intermountain West - the pine, juniper, sage and other flora - that transports me to a sense of the sublime. These scents trigger a reminiscence of so many paths followed through glorious trails that provided such awe and wonder. These are the places that give me such a complete sense of place, a place where I feel I am home.

Valles Caldera is one of the largest young super volcanoes in the world though it is far less notorious than its sister in Yellowstone that is periodically featured in alarmist articles in response to increases in seismic activity that alert us to the potential devastating effects of a volcanic eruption of a caldera of its size.

The Valles Caldera eruption was responsible for the unique geological formations, rocks and minerals and plentiful geothermal phenomena that create the hot springs from which the village of Jemez Springs derives its name. Walking along the Jemez River one may literally sniff them out; the acrid smell of sulphur reveals a hot spring is nearby. Hot springs have been acclaimed for their healing and spiritual properties by many peoples for millennia.

The smell of sulphur is also the smell of the brimstone that fiery preachers warned were the wages of sin and eternal damnation.

Preachers such as Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield were referred to as "fire-and-brimstone preachers" during the First Great Awakening of the 1730s and 1740s. Edwards' "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" remains among the best-known sermons from this period. Reports of one occasion when Edwards preached it said that many of the audience burst out weeping, and others cried out in anguish or even fainted.²

O sinner! Consider the fearful danger you are in: 'tis a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit, full of the fire of wrath, that you are held over in the hand of that God, whose wrath is provoked and incensed as much against you as against many of the damned in hell; you hang by a slender thread, with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it, and ready every moment to singe it, and burn it asunder; and you have no interest in any mediator, and nothing to lay hold of to save yourself, nothing to keep off the flames of wrath, nothing of your own, nothing that you ever have done, nothing that you can do, to induce God to spare you one moment.³

Striving to create the Philosopher's Stone in order to transmute base metals into gold, a metaphor for the quest to uncover and nurture the sacred to become Christ-like and achieve personal immortality, alchemists classified sulfur, along with mercury and salt as one of the 'three primes':

Sulphur, also known as brimstone, is the active male counterpart to mercury's passive female representation. In antiquity, it was used as traditional medicine in places ranging from China to Egypt to Europe. . . . Sulphur represents properties such as dryness, heat, and masculinity. In alchemy, it could also represent evaporation, expansion, and dissolution. In terms of the human body, it represented the soul. In terms of the tria prima, sulfur was seen as the middling element connecting salt (high) and mercury (low).⁴

Akin to the fabled Philosopher's Stone, some appear to believe the brimstone and fire of geothermal activity has blessed their spa waters with healing properties found at medieval shrines dedicated to saints. Various commercial hot spring spas throughout the country promote the health benefits with claims that include:

- Boosting Blood Circulation
- Reducing Stress and Promoting Sleep
- Relieving Pain
- Treating Skin Infections
- Detoxification
- Boosting Immune Systems
- Burning Calories
- Combating Nasal Congestion

The current website at Hot Springs National Park in Arkansas encourages ingestion: Drinking the hot springs water is perfectly normal, even encouraged. Go ahead, "quaff the elixir," as they used to say in the heyday of the spa. Thousands of visitors highly endorse the good quality of the hot springs water and fill bottles to take home.⁵

It is not recommended to drink hot springs water from Jemez Springs however, as it contains arsenic and lithium.

I have no idea whether the smell of sulphur holds any special significance to the Jemez or Ancestral Pueblo people as there is no mention of it in the materials provided at the Pueblo of Jemez website⁶, the Walatowa Visitor Center, or the Jemez Historic Site featuring ruins of the ancient village of Gisewa and the San José de los Jemez mission that literally built walls atop Gisewa structures in the Spanish Franciscans effort to supplant Native beliefs.

Guests are welcomed to specific places and events but there are limits upon where one may roam and what may be photographed. Some of the rules of etiquette for guests presented on the Pueblo of Jemez website:

- Do not drive through residential areas in village
- New Mexico Pueblos are not "living museums" or theme parks, but are residential communities. Like any other community, these Pueblos are homes and should be respected as such.
- No photographs, visual/audio recording, or sketching allowed. No unauthorized publication of information regarding Pueblo activities especially during feast days.
- Do not climb walls or other structures. Some are several hundred years old and damage easily. Please do not pick up or remove any artifacts or objects.
- Pueblo Kivas and graveyards are not to be entered by visitors.

Purchasing a hiking pass at the Visitor Center allows one to take photos while walking the Red Rocks Trail. The trail is clearly designated by rocks lining the path and there are signs reminding the tourist to not stray into other areas. At the Jemez Historic Site I was

surprised that we were allowed to descend into a kiva though there were signs imploring guests to not take photos inside the kiva or of the artifacts in one display case in the museum. Occasional small signs appeal to visitors' sense of self-preservation by noting the danger of rattlesnakes or crumbling walls if one strays off the path.

Clearly, restrictions (stay on path; don't take photos) at these historic and cultural sites are necessary to protect the valuable resources, perceived sacred history and privacy of its inhabitants. While similar to those imposed while passing through Los Alamos, the rationale for these restrictions are polar opposites and, rather than being enforced by armed guards and possible criminal prosecution, the Pueblo of Jemez and Historic Site guidelines are dependent upon the honor system.

The National Laboratory is zealously defending secrets involved in developing ever more powerful devices of catastrophic devastation while signs along Red Rock Trail implore the visitor to not scramble off-trail as the cliffs are deemed sacred by the People. The LANL restrictions protect the god-like power Dr. Oppenheimer claimed for the U.S. military over other nations when observing the first atomic detonation, "Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds." The Pueblo restrictions strive to defend the private, sacred culture and land as an act of resistance against those who would destroy their world.

Georges Bataille claimed that religious taboos exist so, through the transgression of these taboos one may enter the sacred and, for a short time become "like water in water". He further observed that waste of resources is the primary taboo of capitalism ("waste not, want not"); excess capital must be re-invested to create more capital to enable the Invisible Hand to guide humanity towards the greater good. He proposes that wasteful use of resources is the only remaining manner that members of capitalist societies may break taboo in an effort to enter the sacred. And, he notes, war is by far the most massive waste of resources ever imagined.⁷

The 2022 U.S. military budget is \$782 billion. The U.S. stockpile of nuclear warheads was at 3,750 as of September 2020, according to [a Biden] administration document. This number captures active and inactive warheads, but not the roughly 2,000 retired warheads awaiting dismantlement.⁸ In spite of this massive stockpile of nuclear arms the LANL's charter is to continue to develop and improve upon our weapons of mass destruction. The Los Alamos lab's funding would jump to about \$4.6 billion from this year's \$3.5 billion under the U.S. Energy Department's early budget requests for the 2023 fiscal year.⁹

This expenditure upon weapons that we can't ever use as the effect would be more planet ending than all of the super volcanoes massively erupting at once seems completely M.A.D., not only for the mutually assured destruction but for the colossal waste of resources. Unlike the massive destructive power of volcanic eruptions that

create beautiful, life-sustaining meadows and healing waters, there is no life-sustaining aftermath of nuclear weapons.

Peter Arnett, Wolf Blitzer and other television war correspondents responded to videos of smart bombs and missiles exploding during the Shock and Awe campaign of Operation Iraqi Freedom, at a cost of \$812.4 Billion,¹⁰ with a breathless excitement that I usually attribute to religious ecstasy. Perhaps Bataille provides the only explanation; that this ongoing transgression of the taboo of wasting precious resources is that it is a desperate attempt to enter the sacred and become like water in water.

At the inception of the Manhattan Project, Jemez Springs was being seriously considered as the site of the National Laboratory. With a different decision, access to this area would be restricted to those with security clearances. The hikes in the Jemez National Recreation Area, with all their sublime smells of pine, juniper, sage, and other plants, would be off-limits. The Walatowa Visitor Center would no longer welcome guests to hike the Red Rocks Trail as the Pueblo of Jemez would likely have been covered with government buildings and surrounded by security. The village of Jemez Springs and all the surrounding hot springs would be available only to official personnel.

The smell of sulphur is that of eternal damnation as well as the healing properties of hot springs. I wonder, is the smell of nuclear warfare the smell of fear?

For your own safety: make no sudden movements, speak in a low calm voice, control your fear.

Paul Zmolek, April, 2022

¹ <https://www.nps.gov/vall/index.htm>

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fire_and_brimstone

³ http://www.emersonkent.com/speeches/sinners_in_the_hands_of_an_angry_god.htm

⁴ <https://blog.prepscholar.com/alchemy-symbols>

⁵ <https://www.nps.gov/hosp/planyourvisit/thermal-springs.htm>

⁶ <https://www.jemezpuablo.org/>

⁷ See Bataille's *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, Mary Dalwood, 1986, City Lights Books and *The Accursed Share: An Essay On General Economy. Volume I: Consumption*, Robert Hurley, 1988, Zone Books.

⁸ <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2021-11/news/us-discloses-nuclear-stockpile-numbers>

⁹ https://www.santafenewmexican.com/news/local_news/lanl-would-get-over-1b-bump-in-proposed-budget/article_c5879bf0-bffa-11ec-a6a5-cba1800640c6.html

¹⁰ <https://militaryhistorynow.com/2013/04/03/2632/>