



Apache Kid Wilderness

THE

DATIL-MOGOLLON VOLCANIC PLATEAU

THIS REGION HAS NEW MEXICO'S GREATEST wilderness array, containing not only the state's first and third largest wildernesses but also its greatest ecological diversity. The concept of setting aside land solely to protect its wildness was born here with the creation of the Gila Wilderness in 1924. In 1998, this was the setting where Mexican wolves were returned to the wild. Here was the last redoubt of grizzlies in New Mexico, and in streams here are the endangered Gila cutthroat trout. Within this region, in the Gila Wilderness, is the farthest you can get from a road in New Mexico. The Gila River is among the last free-flowing rivers in the Southwest. The human history of this area is long and fascinating, albeit often tragic, and includes prehistoric and vanished cliff-dwellers, Spanish explorers, mountain men and miners, Army troops and Chiricahua Apaches who fought many of their final battles here. Today, conflicts between the opposing views of land ownership and land use, and the clash between the New West and the Old West, continue some of those age-old battles. Nevertheless, the region is rich in beautiful hot springs—nature's way of saying, "Welcome, and be healed."

The Datil-Mogollon Volcanic Plateau is bounded on the south by Interstate 10, on the west by Arizona, on the east by the Rio Grande, and on the north by US 60. The landforms within this vast region are united by their origin—the widespread, cataclysmic volcanism that occurred throughout southwestern



New Mexico during the early Cenozoic Era (40 million to 25 million years ago). These were perhaps the greatest volcanic events ever to happen in New Mexico—and that's saying a lot, given the state's volcanic history. The lava flows, breccias, pumice, and compressed ash, as well as subsurface igneous rocks, created the Datil-Mogollon Volcanic Plateau.

While the region generally is arid, it nonetheless includes several large drainages, and the Gila Wilderness has numerous streams and springs. (Hikers still need to consider water availability in their planning.) The largest and most significant of these is the Gila River, whose watershed includes much of the vast Gila and Aldo Leopold Wildernesses. Within the Gila Wilderness the river has three named forks: East, Middle, and West. These were traditional travel routes, and much of today's wilderness hiking follows these rivers. Because these rivers run within narrow, vertical-sided canyons, hiking these routes usually requires many river crossings. The lower Gila River is particularly popular with river rafters.