

Adventures in New Mexico

The Labyrinth at Ghost Ranch & Other Special Sites *by Danielle Hope Hier*

Ped or green? The waitress from the Abiquiu Inn asked me. I had just returned from Ghost Ranch, the 21,000-acre education and retreat center made famous by artist Georgia O'Keefe. Fortunately, I was prepped by two friends and long-time residents of New Mexico, so it was easy for me to answer confidently, "Christmas."

For those of you who are not familiar with what one of my traveling companions described as "the most commonly asked question in New Mexico," the red or green question refers to which of the chile pepper sauces you'd like atop your southwestern dish. That day, I went all out, ordering Chile Rancheros, spicy green chile peppers stuffed with cheese and topped with an equally spicy green and red sauce.

That first day of June was particularly special for me. Halfway through my adventures in New Mexico, I was taken to Ghost Ranch followed by the Ojo Caliente mineral springs.

Ghost Ranch offers extensive hiking trails, education workshops on everything from art and music to paleontology and archeology, as well as bed and breakfast provisions for travelers on retreat. Ghost Ranch can also boast of being one of the

top 10 dinosaur fossil beds in the world and, as of the mid-90s, of launching the Wetland Project, an ongoing effort to make the Ranch as environmentally conscious as possible.

Oddly enough, what fascinated me the most about my visit to the Ranch was the labyrinth inspired by the model in Chartres Cathedral in France, built by a team of volunteers in 1998. The half-mile cyclical path turned out to be a longer and much more rewarding process than I first anticipated. I have always described myself as a "healthy skeptic," rarely believing or disbelieving in anything without trying it out for myself. So, I followed the suggestions outlined on a placard just outside the labyrinth. It suggested either: walking freely and being guided, setting an intention, asking a question, or just humming a chant, song, or poem that holds special meaning for you. I formed and held a question in my mind that needed answering and did my best to keep that intention until I had made it to the center.

The labyrinth is deceptively small, and I assumed it would be a 10-second journey to the center; yet every time I neared the center, the path would lead away. Imme-

diately, I was filled with what many people experience when the universe doesn't provide an immediate answer to one's question: doubt.

Did I do something wrong? I didn't think it was possible to make a wrong turn. Is it a trick? After all, there were footstones that lead directly to the center, and perhaps the only true answer to the puzzle was to step off the outlined sandy path and follow the stone path instead.

Just as I was about to become frustrated and lose focus on my question, I reached the center, marked with several large boulders adorned with objects left by people who had also walked the path: coins, feathers, a casino chip, a lighter.... I couldn't help but wonder if the latter two were one person's desire to quit gambling and the other to give up smoking.

I took a moment of reflection before spiraling outward. Once again, the mischievous labyrinth lead me in what appeared to be the wrong way, as it circled me around the center, but I'm just stubborn enough to not accept defeat. Calling it bluff, I followed the path. Sure enough, it led me out of the circle, but not before the answer to my question hit me with such



Ojo Caliente mineral springs

clarity that I couldn't help grinning from ear to ear.

Not only did I get the answer to my question; I also learned that I am anxious, impatient, and ever-so-slightly stubborn. As a very spiritual Korean meditation master and friend used to say to me, laughing, "It's good to know yourself."

Following lunch, we headed for the mineral springs of Ojo Caliente.

"Salud Per Aqua," the sign at the spa read. "Health through water." Surprisingly, one of the four healthy springs was the Arsenic Spring, 103 degrees and believed to be beneficial for relieving arthritis, skin conditions, and stomach conditions. The 109-degree Iron Spring cleanses the blood, the Soda Spring benefits the digestive tract, and the Lithia Spring serves as a naturally occurring anti-depressant.

Finally, the mud pool offers a place to rinse off the special clay mixture designed to remove toxins from the body when allowed to sun dry on the skin, while the mineral water-filled pool provided space for a relaxing cool swim.

The resort also offers yoga and "woga" (water yoga), massage therapy, a vegan restaurant, and an extensive gift shop. I was also pleasantly surprised to learn that their "stewardship for sustainability" initiative includes a geothermal heating system, energy and water conservation system, as well as a unique microbiological water treatment process.

Between Ghost Ranch and Ojo Caliente, all I can tell you is that when I retired that evening, I felt mentally, physically, and spiritually renewed, with a warm glow inside... Or maybe that was just from the arsenic. Wink.

More information about Ghost Ranch can be learned by visiting www.ghostranch.org or by calling 505-685-4333. More information about Ojo Caliente Resort & Spa can be gained by visiting www.ojocalientesprings.com or by calling 800-222-9162.

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