



**FANTASTICAL:** The trail opens onto an amphitheater of whimsical hoodoos capped by boulders. Some are as tall as 90 feet. Kasha-Katwe means "white cliffs" in the Keresan language of the Pueblo.

# A magical mystery trail

Take a hike through New Mexico's Tent Rocks

By *Melissa Ward Aguilar*  
HOUSTON CHRONICLE

**N**eed proof of nature's whimsey? Check out Kasha-Katwe Tent Rocks National Monument near Santa Fe, N.M., on the Pueblo de Cochiti.

This three-mile trail is home to some of the most magical rock formations in the Southwest.

Volcanos that erupted more than 6 million years ago blanketed the area with pumice, ash and tuff sediment 1,000 feet deep. Explosions from the nearby Jemez volcanic field planted rock boulders on top of the ash. As the softer sediment wore away, the resulting rock formations that dot the canyon look like tepees with boulders placed precariously on top. Some of these "hoodoos" have lost their protective caprocks.

The trail winds through a canyon so narrow in places that two people can't squeeze through at once. It opens onto an amphitheater filled with a cluster of whimsical tent rocks. They look like a band of aliens who have landed in the junipers and manzanita bushes. But the colors saturate the scene. Canyon walls of soft shades of pink and gray contrast with the dark evergreen foliage and the ever-changing sky.

The kids on the trail must have thought they were at an amusement park. They played in the



sand, scampered over boulders and played hide and seek in the narrow canyon's crevices.

You can take the Cave Loop shortcut back to the trailhead, but you would miss the spectacular vista from the mesa at the end of Canyon Trail. It's worth the climb. The year-round park closes at 5 p.m. in winter months, so get there early enough to spend time surveying the Rio Grande Valley and the Sangre de Cristo, Jemez and Sandia mountain ranges. We stayed so long soaking in that panoramic view that we had to run down the path and through the canyon to make it out by closing time.

## Details

The national monument includes 4,645 acres. It's 40 miles southwest of Santa Fe and 55 miles northeast of Albuquerque off Interstate 25. The park is open year-round. Admission: \$5 per car.



**LANDSCAPE:** The Canyon Trail is dotted with ponderosa pines, piñon and manzanita bushes.



From left, Patagonia Capilene, \$50, REI; Arcteryx Delta Zip Pullover, \$119, and Arcteryx Gamma Jacket, \$275, Sun & Ski Sports



Kleen Kanteen bottle, left, \$20, North Face Recon day pack, \$85, Marmot Power Stretch gloves, \$27, Sun & Ski Sports

# ile on the layers

ort on the trail is all about layering. When you are hiking in the mountains, you can predict the changes in weather you'll encounter. s a good recipe for a day hike, whether you are in the mountains of New Mexico, Big or the Sam Houston National Forest: A base layer of soft Capilene, followed by a layer ice and topped with a water-resistant layer. (Some Marmot and The North Face jackets ine the latter two, which can be zipped apart.) Wear pants that are durable yet flexible. eft of your water-resistant jacket should be determined by the temperatures you are ting. Don't forget your gloves, hat, sunglasses, water bottles, Luna bars, first-aid kit, ra, Smart Wool sox and comfortable, broken-in hiking boots. Plus a daypack that's just ough to carry these items and the layers you decide to shed while hiking.

— MELISSA WARD AGUILAR



Asolo leather Gore-Tex hiking boots in Chestnut, \$230, and Smartwool Adrenaline Hiking socks, \$16.95, **Whole Earth Provision Co.**

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