

The Cross on the Hill



The view from the cross atop Mogote Hill, courtesy of Forgotten Southern Colorado

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If you're ever going through the San Luis Valley, and you're on Highway 17 heading west into New Mexico, you come to the charming village of Mogote. It's a rambling settlement with the Conejos River running through it, cottonwoods, and small shops, homes and fields. As the road dogs around and it clears a patch of cottonwoods, you find yourself looking at a hill with a cliff face. And as you get closer to you, you'll notice an unassuming, manmade structure on top of the hill.

It's a simple cross. It wouldn't look out of place on top of a church, but the hill overlooking the small valley isn't a church.

I remember seeing it long ago as a child, I'd be going with my father and usually someone else up into the mountains and seeing the cross. I remember the first time asking about it, and the answer was that a man was struck by lightning on top of the mountain, and the cross marks where he died.

Unfortunately, that wasn't the correct answer.

Others speculated that it was a leftover from the Penetities. Also, the wrong answer.

The correct answer goes back to 1912.

The canyon forms a natural chimney of sorts, and warmer air from the valley floor can move up it and be channeled so that it helps in the creation of thunderheads. These storms are where hail form, and in 1911, the farmers that lived near the mouth of the canyon were on the receiving end of a hailstorm that can only be described as "Epic." Some accounts included the words "Demonic in nature."

When it was over, the crops in the fields were destroyed. When you're a farmer who relies on your crops to pay the bills, feed the family, and in general, just survive, and they've just been wiped out, then you've got a big problem.

The following year, and after some serious praying, Carlos Martinez took out the ultimate insurance policy and erected the cross on the hill.

Since the day it was put up, there has been no hail damage to the crops.



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The cross does have a personal touchstone to me. Some might know that I went into the U.S. army as an old man (age 29 – damn near tripped over my cane on the 12 mile road march). This old dog spent several months getting in shape so he could run with the young pups. My test to ensure I was ready was to climb the hill up to the cross.

I was due to report to Ft. McClellan, Alabama on the 21st of February. On January 31st, I climbed the hill. The area is wild, and in the summertime there's more than a few snakes around. I didn't care to run into one, and doing the run in winter avoided a close encounter of the worse kind.

I ran a game trail made by deer and assorted other wild animals, and inside of ten minutes I'd reached the top. I stood at the top of the windswept hill and admired the view, and thanked God that I was ready.

Today, over a hundred years after it was erected, the cross still stands guard over the fields and homes of the people who live in the area. Look for it if you're ever in the area.

Special Thanks to Robert Ruybalid and his excellent Facebook site "[Forgotten Southern Colorado](#)" for the story of the cross and the picture.



The view heading west on Highway 17. The cross is located under the arrow. Sorry, camera resolution from Google Maps doesn't show it well.