

Tours offer beauty, surprise and a drive in the country

By TIM KELLER — For the Comet | Posted: Thursday, May 7, 2015 12:00 am

RATON – One of the region’s most unique annual events returns this weekend when Folsom Museum sponsors its guided Dry Cimarron History Tour, beginning at the museum in downtown Folsom and continuing all day until it reaches the Kenton Museum at the far end of the Dry Cimarron River across the state line in the Oklahoma panhandle.

Visitors may drive their own cars or jump into someone else’s for a daylong exploration that includes good dirt roads and a bit of not-so-good ranch road. The tour begins at 8 a.m. Saturday, May 9, at Folsom Museum, located at the intersection of state roads 325 and 456. If Folsom had a downtown, this would be the spot. It’s 39 miles east of Raton, about 45 minutes via Hwy 64/87, or longer via the picturesque Hwy 72.

Before jumping into the car or truck, there’s usually enough time to tour the museum—which shouldn’t be missed. Located in the old Doherty Mercantile Co. general store, it contains a wealth of geological and historical displays right alongside many of the original contents of the general store, including its scales, cash register, and walk-in safe. Out the front window looms Capulin Volcano.

A long snaking line of cars follows a guide car to dozens of points of interest, including geological wonders, Native American burial sites, Santa Fe Trail sites, and visits to multiple working ranches. The museum provides a great free lunch at one of the ranches. The tour reaches its end in Kenton, Oklahoma, in late afternoon. After touring Kenton and its museum, participants can use good maps or challenge their GPS systems to find a good way home. They should also be sure to start their morning with a full tank of gas.

The Folsom Museum provides its tours free of charge to the public, but it relies on fundraisers and donations to support a museum that is run entirely by community volunteers. As a result, donations for its



A tour of Folsom Museum is included in both the May 9 Dry Cimarron History Tour and the May 16 Folsom Archaeological Site Tour.

When the museum moved into the old Doherty Mercantile Co. general store in the 1960s, it brought in some new items but left most of the old items right where they were.

tours are gratefully accepted. Folsom's population usually hovers around 75, depending on who's off to college. The town's gorgeous location and fascinating history make it a favorite stop of travelers.

Saturday, May 16, Folsom Museum offers its annual tours of the "Folsom Man" Archaeological Site, with tours of 3-4 hours leaving the museum at 8 a.m. and 1 p.m. A lunch at the museum will serve both tour groups at noon. The archaeological site is where local black cowboy George McJunkin discovered evidence of early human occupation in North American as he inspected his fences after a 1908 flash flood killed 15 people while largely wiping out the then-burgeoning town of Folsom. The flood had washed away a creek bank, revealing the remains of a giant prehistoric bison—now held by the Smithsonian Institution—and there was a human-made arrow point still lodged in one of the bison's bones.

Because the archaeological site can be reached only by crossing a large private ranch, the public can see the site only through Folsom Museum's annual tours. An archaeologist will be on hand to share the site's history and answer questions.

Reservations are requested for both the May 9 Dry Cimarron History Tour and the May 16 Folsom Archaeological Site Tours. Information and reservations are available at Folsom Museum, (575) 278-2122 or email folsommuseum@folsomvillage.com. Another invaluable information source is Folsom's impressive website, folsomvillage.com.