



THE 2020 WESTERN NATIONAL MEET

Alamosa, Colorado

September 21 –24, 2020

Save the dates for the Centennial State
Hosted by the Hi-Country Regional
Group

“This is the one that you **will** remember”



Alamosa, Colorado (located well away from the big city noise, traffic, and the messy complexities of the front range --- Ft. Collins, Denver, and Colorado Springs) will be the headquarters city for the meet. Situated near the southern end of the San Luis Valley, which is a high and semi-arid plain (but now an important irrigated farming area), it is surrounded by scenic mountains to the north, east, and west. Big city in services but small town in feel, Alamosa has all the amenities that you will need, expect, and enjoy, as well as much, much more. Located on the Rio Grande River and originally settled as a railroad community, it retains a lot of train flavor and activity, while also exuding a comfortable community feel. This will be small city America at its best. Naturally, the National Meet will have all the basics that you have come to expect from such a gathering: judging and the concourse, seminars, the President’s meeting, the Foundation report, a swap meet, door prizes, “welcome-in” activities, a driving tour (which you definitely won’t want to miss), raffle prizes, as well as a “banquet” and awards festivities. As you might expect, we will introduce our own “western flavor twist” to make things more interesting.

But there’s more --- specifically, all the great things that you will want to see, do, experience, and visit, either as part of the meet, or as part of a slightly extended visit. Seriously consider the possibility of spending some additional vacation time in the valley --- you will not regret it. Imagine being able to comfortably drive on the kind of lightly traveled roads your vintage vehicle was designed for, with beautiful and scenic panoramic views appearing thru the windshield to delight you. As noted, the San Luis Valley is surrounded by mountains --- The Sangre de Christo range (including five 14,000 ft. peaks) to the east, and the Cochetopa “hills” (the peaks here are only 13,000 ft. high), as well as the Continental Divide, to the west. So, you might ask, what is there to see and do in our part of the world? Consider the following listing, which is just a brief outline of some of the things possible.

- In the immediate vicinity of Alamosa is the Los Caminos Antiguos Scenic and Historic Byway. This is the “Ancient Road” followed by the in-

trepid Spanish explorers, when they first visited what is now Colorado, in the early 1500's. And they definitely left their mark on the area. The Spanish were in this part of the country long before the Pilgrims splashed ashore at Plymouth in 1620. The "Road" (which is --- in part --- an element of the driving tour we will be following on Thursday) goes north from Alamosa to Mosca, then east to the great sand dunes, south to Fort Garland, and San Luis, west to Manassa, and then south again to Antonio and eventually Cumbres Pass. Lots of history here! Many interesting sites are along the road (a turquoise mine anyone?), including many historic Catholic churches, as well as the oldest parish (Antonio) in Colorado --- founded way before the U.S. was even a country. San Isadoro Church in Las Mesitas, Our Lady of Guadalupe in Conejos, All Saints Chapel (at the top of San Pedro Mesa) and the Stations of the Cross Shrine in San Luis are just some of the historic churches in the area. As you can readily discern, the long-standing Spanish influence is very strong in this area, which is part of the attractiveness. Plan to drive the Los Caminos Antiguos, either as part of the meet tour, independently, or perhaps both. Plan to stop often and absorb the history.

- A major attraction, which we plan to visit, is Great Sand Dunes National Park, located about 35 miles from Alamosa. What --- you did not realize that Colorado is home to some very big and serious sand dunes? We are, and we have them! Imagine a massive dune field (40 square miles in size), ever changing and ever shifting when the wind blows, with the tallest dunes 750 ft. high. Visually impressive, especially with 14,000 ft. mountains in the background, and a small stream at the foot of the dunes, just to provide a bit of contrast. This is definitely a "must see". And if you want to do a bit of hiking in the dunes, you certainly can do so. Even slide down the dune face if you like. This is absolutely not "a look but don't touch" situation.
- How about a visit to historic Fort Garland, a western frontier military post, where the legendary Col. Kit Carson was in command of the troops. The Fort was established in 1858 --- when Native American tribal units living in the area were pushing back against increasingly active settlement pressure. Walk the parade grounds, then visit the adobe buildings. A very interesting on-site museum focuses on the life and times of the Fort, and the environment in which it existed.
- Manassa was the home of heavyweight boxing champion (1919) Jack Dempsey. Naturally, there is an interpretive museum dealing with his

life and times, as well as his restored home.

- Did you know there is a thriving Amish community in the south end of the San Luis Valley? There is, and the buggy warning signs announce its presence. Small businesses, as well as a particularly luscious bake shop that you might want to visit, are situated here.
- Also located at the south end of the Valley is the small town of Antonito, which is the Colorado terminus of the coal fired, steam powered Cumbres and Toltec (narrow gage) Scenic Railroad. Visiting the railroad, which runs 64 miles from Antonito, Colorado to Chama, New Mexico, is like a trip back to the 1880's. Riding the Cumbres and Toltec is great fun (fantastic and varied scenery, viewed from authentic vintage equipment), as well as feeling like a step back in time to a very different era. The trip is essentially an all-day adventure, so think of riding either before or after the meet. You will not be disappointed, and you will fondly remember the great time you had. If you are a steam train fan, this is a must do!
- Don't have a day to spend riding the train? Instead imagine driving down to Antonito (about 28 miles south of Alamosa) in the morning for the steam engine startup and train departure, which is normally scheduled for 10 am. It is quite the sight and experience, the likes of which you will not readily see elsewhere, so get there early and enjoy. There are no fences to keep you at a distance, thus you can get close-up and reasonably personal with the big steam engine, as it sits in the yard, quietly running, waiting to depart. But always be careful and fully follow crew orders and directions. Talking to the crew before they get ready to depart is also a possibility. The actual departure is a sight to behold. Heavy industrial machinery of this kind is very impressive, and absolutely from another time. It is a gritty industrial activity, the kind of which you just don't see much anymore.
- For a railroad experience of another kind, consider a ride on the Rio Grande Scenic Railroad, which is headquartered in Alamosa. The Rio Grande Railroad uses '50's vintage cars and equipment, carrying excursion passengers from Alamosa, thru the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, and then on to the small, historic town of La Veta. This trip ends with the train and passengers returning to Alamosa. The railroad also has a large stock of vintage '50's equipment awaiting refurbishment. This equipment is stockpiled on trackage just south of the downtown area, and can be informally viewed from adjacent parking areas.
- Have you been to a real (but vintage) drive-in movie theater recently? It is possible in the San Luis Valley, and not far from Alamosa. It oper-

ates just like you remember, complete with speakers hanging on the car window, and a snack bar in the center of the action. They may even have vintage films playing, but the normal fare is usually current flicks. Think about this experience as yet another trip back in time.

- Are you interested in seeing, holding (yes?), and making friends with hi-country alligators? It can be done --- we've got the pictures to prove it. So exactly what is a hi-country alligator you might ask? Well, just a normal kind of alligator, but located in high and arid Colorado, rather than tropical Florida. The San Luis Valley has them at the Alligator Farm. Besides entertaining the turistas, they really do serious work to earn their keep. And there are other kinds of reptiles here as well. You'll just have to visit the farm to find out what this is all about.
- Got creaky old bones as well as the usual aches and pains? Do you go "snap, crackle, and pop" in the morning? Alamosa is definitely the place you will want to be. There are four natural hot springs in the Valley that will be glad to help you out with warm and soothing mineral water. And one of these hot springs is actually located very close-by, just on the north edge of Alamosa. Plan a visit to take a dip. You will feel better.
- Don't even ask about the UFO's

These are just some of the things you can visit, experience, and enjoy in Alamosa and vicinity. Cast a wider geographical net, and there are lots more things to capture your interest. How about a visit to the Town of Creede, and its nationally acclaimed Creede Repertory Theatre? Remember C.W. McCall, and Wolf Creek Pass? There really is such a place, and it's not all that far away, and it does have a tunnel. But the feed store in downtown Pagosa Springs is a rather long way from the top of the pass! You will have to remember the song to get the picture.

As the meet gets closer, we'll be glad to supply a more complete (and updated) listing of possible activities and adventures. The 2020 Western National meet will be a happening that you do not want to miss, one that you definitely will not forget, and one that will (enjoyably) linger in your heart and memory. Come and spend some quality time in Alamosa with The HI-Country Regional Group, the hosts for the 2020 Western National Meet. Then stick around for a bit longer and delight in more vacation/adventure time.

And, most importantly, remember to save the dates! Put them on your calendar right now --- Monday, September 21 thru Thursday, September 24, 2020. Or better yet, sign up now. And don't forget the extra time to explore! You will need it.