D. H Lawrence Ranch Overview

Q. What is the D.H. Lawrence Ranch?
A. The D.H. Lawrence Ranch, also known as the Kiowa Ranch, is located in San Cristobal, New Mexico, approximately 20 miles north of Taos. Situated on Lobo Mountain and comprising 160 acres, it is located at 8,500 feet. Under the 1955 Last Will and Testament of D.H. Lawrence’s widow Frieda, it was entrusted to the University of New Mexico (UNM) for the purpose of creating a public memorial to the world-renowned writer.

Q. What is the D.H. Lawrence Ranch Alliance?
A. The non-profit D.H. Lawrence Ranch Alliance, a project of the Taos Community Foundation, is a group of local citizens and admirers of D.H. Lawrence’s work, who believe that the Ranch should be preserved as a memorial to his legacy as a writer, historical figure, and cultural magnet.

The Alliance includes members of the local Pueblo, Hispanic, and Anglo communities. It is supported and sponsored by the Taos Community Foundation, a local philanthropic organization. Members of the Friends of D.H. Lawrence, an international literary association are involved, along with local landowners and business people.

Regrettably, for the past five years the Ranch has been closed to public access (unless special permission is received from the UNM-Albuquerque campus). The Alliance wishes to reverse this situation, and make the Ranch publicly accessible on a regular schedule. The Alliance has offered to develop a docent program with local volunteers, and it has raised money ($30,000) for the repair of the memorial structures. We have approached the UNM administration with proposals toward opening the Ranch to the public on a regular basis as soon as possible.

Q. What are the goals of the D.H. Lawrence Ranch Alliance?
A. The goals of the D.H.L.R. Alliance are

- To make the Ranch accessible to the public on a regularly-scheduled basis
- To develop educational programs, such as volunteer docents, to communicate the legacy of D.H. Lawrence for visitors
- To preserve the historic buildings and Memorial site for future generations
- To make the Ranch a Taos “destination” for visitors, thereby supporting the local economy
- To involve the local community in the management and operation of the Ranch, in cooperation with the University of New Mexico

Q. Why does The Lawrence Ranch matter to the community/region/state?
A. The Taos community has a rich artistic, cultural, and historical legacy. It is the home of many diverse communities that contribute to this richness. D. H. Lawrence and his circle — Mabel Dodge Luhan, Georgia O’Keeffe, Lady Dorothy Brett, and others — formed an important part of this cultural stream. Along with Taos’ museums, galleries, and historical structures, the D. H. Lawrence Ranch is a living representation of that legacy. According to the Taos tourist office, it is one of the most sought-after
sites for visitors, second only to Taos Pueblo. It could be an important economic asset and tourist draw for the Taos community.

But today, no historical marker or even traffic sign indicates the location of the Ranch. Gates and barriers prevent access. A distant UNM office in Albuquerque controls all access.

Q. What exactly are the terms of Frieda’s Last Will and Testament?

A. Frieda Lawrence’s 1955 Will gave the Ranch and its property (about 160 acres) “to an organization to be created and sponsored by the University of New Mexico, providing they succeed in making a perpetual D.H. Lawrence Memorial or Foundation.” For many years, UNM used the Ranch constructively for educational, cultural and recreational purposes. Moreover, it was open to the public during regular visiting hours. Educational material available at the Ranch explained the historical significance of the Memorial structures. However, since at least 2008, the Ranch has been inaccessible to the general public.

Q. Why did Frieda create the Memorial site?

Frieda Lawrence understood early on the public’s interest in her husband’s legacy. Frieda remarked in 1939 that the stream of visitors – "thousands of people" – certainly "must want to come pretty badly" to take such a road, frequently impassable in heavy rains or snow (Memoirs and Correspondence, 273).

Lawrence Ranch Road eventually opens out onto the cluster of rustic cabins with sloping pasture land in the foreground and tree-covered hills in the background. The peaceful frontier ambience remains an integral part of the property’s charm. As Frieda once said of the wilderness setting, it contains "something special" that "doesn’t seem to change, as if nothing could tame it" (Memoirs and Correspondence, 379). Her intent was to preserve the Memorial property as a public trust.

Q. What parts of the Ranch are considered the “Memorial” site and listed on National Register of Historic Places?

A. The Lawrence Ranch District as listed on the National Register of Historic Places comprises approximately 10 percent of the whole property (16 acres): the historical buildings include the Lawrence Memorial; Lawrence Cabin; painter Dorothy Brett’s Cabin; and several other structures.

Other noteworthy features listed on the Register include the “Lawrence Tree,” made famous in Georgia O’Keeffe’s paintings; the corral and stable adjoining the alfalfa field; ruins of a traditional horno (oven).

Surrounding this core are an additional 144 acres of relatively undeveloped forest land providing spectacular views of the desert and mountains. Very old trails across the property are used seasonally by Pueblo Indians for sacred purposes. The property is bounded by the Carson National Forest and privately-owned land in the San Cristobal foothills. The ranch became a site of aesthetic and literary pilgrimage after Lawrence’s remains were placed in a hilltop shrine in 1935.
Q. Who was D.H. Lawrence, and what is his relation to New Mexico?

A. D.H. Lawrence is widely recognized as one of the greatest writers – certainly one of the most important – of the twentieth century. E.M. Foster in an obituary, described him as “The greatest imaginative novelist of our generation.” While the English-born writer only spent a total of eleven months during his three visits to New Mexico, the state made a notable impression on him. He wrote:

“I think New Mexico was the greatest experience I ever had from the outside world. It certainly changed me forever. It was New Mexico that liberated me from the present era of civilization, the great era of material and mechanical development. The moment I saw the brilliant, proud morning shine high up over the deserts of Santa Fe, something stood still in my soul…”

Lawrence is perhaps best known today as a novelist and the author of *Sons and Lovers, The Rainbow, Women in Love*, and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. However, many are also aware of Lawrence’s extraordinary achievements in other artistic forms, such as poetry, the short story, drama, travel writing, philosophy, journalism, painting, literary criticism and letter writing. Besides being an author, Lawrence was also an artist. Nine of the Lawrence oils have been on display in the La Fonda Hotel in Taos since shortly after his death.

Lawrence and Frieda along with the painter Lady Dorothy Brett, who was the Earl of Esher’s daughter, came to Taos at the invitation of Mabel Dodge Luhan. They moved to the ranch in May 1924 and spent five months there. During the summer, Lawrence completed his short novel *St. Mawr*, in which he celebrates the special quality and landscape of the Kiowa Ranch. Lawrence also wrote his biblical drama, “David” and parts of “The Plumed Serpent” during his last visit to the ranch (April-Sept. 1925). New Mexico also figures prominently in other essays and stories such as “The Woman Who Rode Away.”

Q. What is the significance of the D.H. Lawrence Memorial buildings?

A. The Lawrence Memorial (built by Frieda’s third husband Angelo Ravagli in 1934) is constructed of wood, cement and adobe bricks. To the left, on the north wall, is mounted a framed copy of Lawrence’s cremation documents issued in Marseilles, France, and a guestbook registry going back many years.

Frieda had Lawrence’s ashes mixed into the cement of the heavy altar for permanence. This rectangular cement block features Lawrence’s initials on the front and is decorated with leaves and sunflowers. It is topped by an altar niche containing a statuette of a phoenix, appropriately rising from the funeral ashes. Dorothy Brett is known to have contributed to the interior decor of the memorial shrine, including the window over the altar.

Facing west, the memorial site offers an especially fine view at sunset. This choice spot is near the ranch’s high point and was where, “in past summer nights,” Lawrence and Frieda “had slept out of doors under the pines” (*Memoirs and Correspondence*, 133). Frieda likened the quaint building to the temple of Isis which “faced the splendid sun of winter” in Lawrence’s story, *The Man Who Died* (41).

A line from the story’s Lawrentian character reads, “I saw the temple like a pale flower on the coast, and would rest among the trees of the precincts, if the lady of the goddess permits” (52). Particularly in fall, when the aspens are in full color, the view from the memorial is one of the most spectacular in the upper Rio Grande region.