

SANTA FE - ALBUQUERQUE - TAOS

OCTOBER 2008

**THE NEW STONE AGE**

ROCK JOCKS ON SANDIA

**ONLY BY HORSEBACK**

TRAIL RIDES WITH TRUE GRIT

**FINDING THE SOURCE**

ONE MAN'S PATH TO YOGA

**ROMANCING THE 'FE**

DATING TIPS FROM RUBY PERU

**HARRY'S ROADHOUSE**

HARD CORE BIKER HARRY

local flavor

# Romancing the 'Fe

## Welcome to Romancing the 'Fe,

a new column where, each issue, I will take you along on a romantic date. I'll be trying out new and unusual Santa Fe-area dating ideas for you and rating each one as to its seductive powers for:

- a) a first date
- b) a date for lovers
- c) a double or group date

I'll also give suggestions for easily extending the date (a bonus round!) and amping up the romance of the date (secret weapons!).

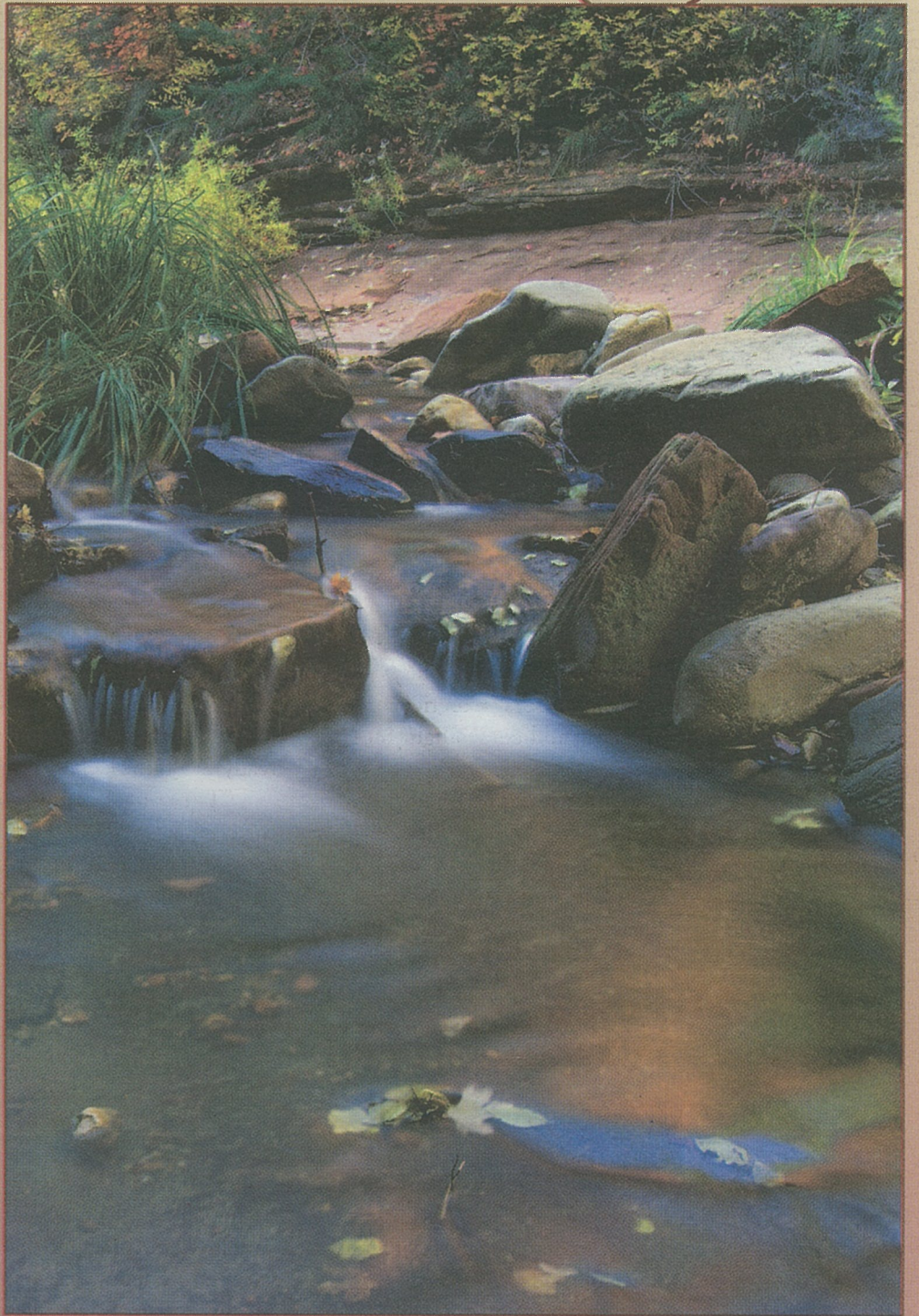
Now, a warning for you first-daters out there. I have always marveled, and not in a good way, at the Santa Fe tradition of the "hiking date." See, when I go on a first date with a guy I barely know, I don't really want to be alone in the woods with him. I mean there are so many reasons why this is logical. But upon polling numerous single Santa Feans, I have actually found that the hiking date as a first date is a very popular experience. Go figure. Even so, this hike is so far away from town and down such a long, rock-strewn dirt road bordered with rusty vehicular detritus and broken-down old shacks, that if your date doesn't know you well, the drive may fill her or him with a slight sense of foreboding, which is maybe not the best way to start a hike deep into the woods with a relative stranger. So, for a first date, I give this maybe two out of five kisses. But for an established couple this adventurous multi-faceted date with snuggling option is a five-kiss bonanza.

First date: two out of five

Established couple: five out of five

Group hike: five out of five

In honor of this being *localflavor's* outdoor sports issue, I have decided to explore a super-romantic hiking date . . . with some tantalizing surprises. Upon asking numerous friends and acquaintances for the most romantic hike around these parts, I have pinpointed the ultimate spot which is known as The Rio en Medio



hike. Now, with the few extras I added in to boost the romance factor, I think any of my readers out there can duplicate the five-star romance rating of this date with very little effort. We begin our date with me, Ruby Peru, and my date, who we shall call . . . Panda.

Panda and I have been together for about a year and a half now, so we are established snugglers. We have, in fact, considered setting up an international snuggle-olympics just so we could win every event. So naturally, I had to take the idea of a rough-and-ready hiking date and try to figure out how to work snuggling into the equation. But don't worry if you and your date are not at the snuggling stage, you can edit the bonus feature out of the hike. Then, if things are going well, you will also have an opportunity to continue on to the exciting "cherry on top" stage and extend an incredibly pleasant afternoon right on into the evening.

story by RUBY PERU  
photo by RON ADCOCK

When I told Panda what hike we were going on, he declared, "Oh yeah! That's the hike where Cougar Dan got his name!" It wasn't until it was too late to back out that he told me why.

Panda wasn't allowed to look inside the daypack because of a certain surprise I had stowed away in there, but he very chivalrously offered to carry it anyway. So on that good note, the two of us set out along the dirt road at the trail head, which very shortly led to the marked trail, 163, branching off to the right. For a full 50 to 60 minutes, this hike parallels a babbling brook that meanders through pretty dense stands of oak and chokecherries. We loped along under this canopy of green, enjoying the yellow flowers that are in profusion this time of year. Butterflies literally flitted and flapped around our heads as we hopped from one stepping-stone to another at the many stream crossings. At the end of this trail, a 20-foot waterfall drops like a shimmering curtain through a narrow canyon into a shallow pool. I mean, I'm trying to think how you could possibly get a more romantic outdoorsy experience, unless maybe tame birds that would come alight on your finger or something.

A half an hour into the hike we came to an intersection where a sign indicated "Rio en Medio" on the right, paralleling the stream, and "179" to the left, crossing the stream. We stood there indecisively. This could have been a "path less traveled" moment, except that both paths were pretty well traveled. Panda didn't seem concerned. He just said, "I think we're getting pretty close to the place where Cougar Dan got his name." Foolishly, I was so preoccupied with choosing a path that I didn't listen.

It turns out that both trails actually converge about ten minutes later. If you cross the stream though, you have the option of branching off to the left for an extended hike on what is called the La Junta circuit. Also on the left side are a couple of lush camping spots with established fire circles. They are very tempting and very romantically tucked in amongst the towering evergreens.

We continued along the Rio en Medio trail and eventually came to a place where it climbs up a steep rocky slope, but it also branches off to the left and, again, crosses the stream. To get to the waterfall, we crossed over the stream and walked a little way down the trail, then found ourselves basically in the stream itself, hopping from rock to rock. Then there it was. The waterfall!

We sat on rocks and gaped at the splendor of it all. We took off our shoes and waded in the cool clear pool. We even braved getting wet to explore the open cavern behind the falls itself. Then my

carefree mood turned ponderous when Panda said, "Yep, this is the spot where Cougar Dan got his name." So finally I asked him to tell me the story.

The story goes that Dan (then just ordinary Dan) hiked to this waterfall alone, and just as he was getting ready to leave, he looked up and there was a cougar sitting right in the trail. Dan stood there trying to look casual, but suddenly realized that he was not only at a beautiful place of unparalleled splendor, but also a boxed-in dead end. The cougar looked kinda hungry . . . but eventually Dan's overwhelming charisma frightened the big cat away. (That's the way Dan told it.) And that's how just-plain Dan became Cougar Dan.

I looked left. I looked right. I looked up to the tops of the rocky outcroppings surrounding us, expecting to find a large predatory beast getting ready to pounce. Nothing.

"The cougar could be just around the corner," suggested Panda.

I remembered the surprise in the daypack and snapped out of it. I told Panda I had a better surprise for him than any old cougar. Panda found this hard to believe, but he would soon admit to being wrong.

We started hiking back along the trail, and about ten minutes later I spied a secluded grove of trees. I zipped open the daypack and pulled out one of my two new purchases: "slap straps." Sounds kinky, I know. Folded into a tiny little stuff sack of their own, this very simple hammock-hanging mechanism consists of two heavy-duty seven-foot strips of nylon webbing with some loops sewn into them at about six-inch intervals. They are each designed to loop around a tree and make hanging a hammock a breeze, which is exactly what they do.

"Why not use an ordinary length of rope?" you ask. Because, my friends, the object of the game is romance. We don't want to get into carrying lots of tangled-up rope around. It's heavy and bulky and awkward and besides, if this were a first date and you brought all

## >> DIRECTIONS

We begin with a drive out to Tesuque. Panda and I went the Bishop's Lodge Road (aka 590) route for the lovely views and the dreamy conversations we could have about tree-shaded horse properties we might buy in our wildest dreams. For expedience you could also take 285 (aka St. Francis Road) north out of Santa Fe to the Village of Tesuque exit and go right at the exit, which also puts you on 590. Either way, you will continue on 590 about five minutes until you get to 592, where there is a sign for Encantado resort. You will take a right there. Watch out, this intersection is where state troopers hang out all day and pick off speeders like ripe apricots. Follow route 592 3.5 miles to a stop sign, where you will see a sign directing you to turn left for Rio en Medio. Turn left there; you won't have any other choice. This is still 592. Follow it all the way to the end. It goes through the little village of Rio en Medio, becoming dirt for about 3/4 mile at the end and dead ends at the trailhead. It is a twenty minute drive from Tesuque to the trailhead.

## >> CHECK LIST

A couple of little details made it all come off smoothly.

### Timing:

We left the house at 2:30 p.m., got to the trailhead about 3:15, hiked until 4:15, snuggled until 5:15, hiked back until 6:15 or so, then there was the twenty-minute drive to Tesuque. I had made reservations at El Nido for 7, so we were a little early. Also, we brought along a couple of clean shirts and nicer shoes in the car, to change into for the restaurant.

### Warnings:

This time of year there are numerous bees in certain areas of this trail. There is also a lot of ivy. Could be poison ivy, I don't know. I didn't exactly experiment with it. Also, nothing ruins a romantic afternoon more than getting stopped by a state trooper so do yourself a favor, and don't speed in Tesuque.

### Attire:

The weather is pretty much the same as in Santa Fe, so this time of year, a t-shirt and long pants are fine for most folks. This is a good place to wear your all-terrain sandals, because of the numerous stream crossings.

### Terrain:

It's very gently uphill all the way to the falls, but an easy hike overall.

### More Information:

You can learn much more about this hike and the La Junta circuit option from the really well organized and easy to read, "Day Hikes in the Santa Fe Area, 6th Edition" by the Sierra Club, available at Garcia Street Books. The book states that if you go up the rocky slope at the end of the main path, you will go on to see even more waterfalls upstream.