

# The Legacy of Cara Madre Ranch



Brooke Gamble named her ranch Cara Madre – “*mother’s face*” in Spanish – in honor of her mother, Betty Gamble, who made the purchase of the property near Santa Rosa, NM possible.

“My mother was a conservationist and loved nature,” Brooke explained. “Years ago, she said to me, ‘rather than leave money when I die it would be wonderful if you can find a piece of land to buy, to enjoy now and to preserve for future generations.’”

In 2000, after three years of actively searching throughout the state, Brooke found the right place – nearly 5,200 acres of deeded land in Guadalupe County. “It’s a magical place – a mini grand canyon tucked away amidst the plains of eastern New Mexico,” Brooke said.

The real beauty of the gift was that prior to her death in 2012, Brooke’s mother was able to share in the joy of the land. “I would send her pictures of wildlife, the old cemetery, the artifacts we found . . . it was a wonderful experience,” Brooke added.

When Brooke first bought the property, “it was nothing but cow patties and dirt!” she laughs. About 300 cows had grazed the land bare. Her husband Bob thought the ranch wasn’t very attractive, but Brooke said, “Give it a few years to recover.” And now, with a little rain and rest from grazing, the grass is high and wildflowers abound. “The land heals if you let it,” Brooke added.

NMLC has nearly completed the due diligence for a conservation easement over the entire property at Brooke’s behest. “Although the tax benefits are a very nice perk,” Brooke acknowledged, “the reason [for the easement] was solely to preserve, in whole, a beautiful piece of land – for wildlife, for the environment, for future inhabitants of this world. My mom taught me to love nature from the get-go. Nothing moves me more than the natural world,” she added, “so how cool to be able to keep this little chunk healthy and intact.” The easement includes limited agricultural use of portions of the property, with grazing management requirements spelled out clearly at Brooke’s request.

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# Land rich in history . . .

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The property is rich with history and contains numerous pre-Columbian Native American sites as well as several relic dwellings of the early settler period which are culturally and historically important reminders of the early and continued use of the land by humans for millennia. The old San Ignacio church (circa mid 1800s) and cemetery are entirely contained within the property. Artifacts dating back to the Clovis period have been found on the ranch, and numerous archeological sites have been documented. Informal surveys by archeologists have revealed significant surface and subsurface artifacts and features associated with the Archaic period as well as other, rather peripatetic tribes such as the Comanche, who would hunt, stay awhile and move on.

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As part of the Baseline Document Report required for a conservation easement, a licensed state archeologist will formally survey and provide a report of the cultural conservation values found onsite. Meanwhile, Brooke continues to explore the property and find artifacts with histories as yet unknown.

Brooke reflected, "When I experience the quiet and stand in the vastness of the grass and sand and sky, I am in awe at the tenacity of the people who lived here before – those who built their adobe and stone homes and dry-land farmed watermelon and squash – amazed that there were enough homesteaders to build a church in this dramatic, but harsh canyon land. And they were the newcomers! When I sit at mesa's edge, and know that native peoples sat in the very same place a thousand years ago – because I just found a spear point or a mano in that very spot – I am amazed and humbled and grateful. Grateful to a mom who had a vision and grateful to have the opportunity to preserve and conserve the Cara Madre." #

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Photos: Top left & center: Remnants of the original church, circa mid-1800s, and cemetery. Bottom far left: a cistern located near an old homestead onsite. (Photos by Connor Jandreau)

Top right: Brooke on horseback overlooking the Cara Madre. Left: Pintada after a rain. Bottom right: The ranch greened up following the rains. (Photos by Kim Richardson)

