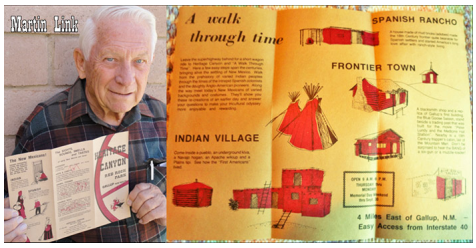
Martin Link's Heritage Canyon, An Outsider's Vision, Part One

Written by By Joe Schaller Guest Columnist
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I moved to Gallup in 1978. Coming from the Northwest, I had hopes of scenic Southwest panoramas with mesas, canyons, and rock formations. On my drive across Arizona, I began to

wonder where the scenery was. I was quite relieved and excited when I approached the spectacular cliffs of Lupton. Upon arrival in Gallup, my first impression was, "This place has tourist potential." Thirty-eight years hasn't changed my impression.

It was immediately obvious to me that our greatest tourist draw was located just east of town at Church Rock — however, easy access off the freeway was overlooked by planners. Like many outsiders of the Southwest, I was drawn to the spectacular cliffs, canyons, and vistas of Red Rock Park, described by one of our former mayors as "just a bunch of rocks."

There weren't many trails back then, but that did not stop many of us from exploring Church Rock and Pyramid Peak. The park was established in 1972 and in 1981, Park Director Martin Link — an "outsider" from Wisconsin and a Gallup resident since 1959 — created Heritage Canyon as a tourist draw to generate income.

Link put it this way: "… So the concept of a Heritage Canyon was conceived. It would be located in the canyon just behind the arena, where there were already good parking spaces, and in a controlled, but natural environment, the tourist could walk through a Native American complex [which eventually consisted of a small pueblo, Navajo hogan and Apache wikiup], a Spanish hacienda with appropriate gardens and livestock, and then a pioneer American village.

"We negotiated the purchase [for $1] of all the movie sets that had been built for the movie *Pete r Lundy and the Medicine Hat Stallion*
and had lumber trucks from NFPI transport the trading post, two pioneer log cabins, and out buildings down to the site without charge. Rehoboth Mission donated their small roadside chapel. Bob Noe, against the mayor's orders, as I found out later, came in with a crew and installed underground water and electrical systems for the project.

"Basically, we were completed enough to open to the general public in the spring of 1982. We had enough volunteers in costumes to staff all three units and published a brochure and started to publicize the project. That's when the mayor finally realized that we were going to complete the project without his, or the City Council's, active support. He had the city's finance director accuse me of misusing the funds that I had gotten in a grant for a Summer Student Employment Program, and fired me, with only one day's notice...

"Needless to say, Heritage Canyon never opened, and by now all the buildings have been destroyed."

Sadly, the Outlaw Trading Post at the RV park did not survive either.

I was quite impressed by Heritage Canyon and took several winter photos. Japanese film crews were there at the Aug. 30, 1981 grand opening for tourist promotion in Japan. It could have been a big tourist attraction if not for our headstrong and short-sighted local politicos. Indeed, it is outsiders such as Martin Link who see the incredible potential of a tourist industry centered around the spectacular Southwest panorama of the Red Rocks, which many locals take for granted as just a bunch of rocks.

Link's Heritage Canyon should be an embarrassment to the Gallup establishment, who let a golden opportunity slip away. There has been no mention of it by the local media since 1982, and very few know that Heritage Canyon even existed. After 35 years, the story needed to be told, and Martin's vision, creativity, and hard work honored.

In Part Two next week, the lost potential of the Red Rocks.

By Joe Schaller

Guest Columnist