The Golden Trail of Cimarron

By SIDNEY SNOOK

HIDDEN away in a New Mexico mountain pass there lies what surely must be one of the most beautiful spots in the world. It is an avenue of gold, a radiant trail leading through Cimarron Canyon to ancient and picturesque Taos. Time is an important element in the beauty of this spot. It must be mid-October when the aspen trees have turned a bright yellow. The road down through the canyon rises and falls between shimmering walls of yellow leaves. Sunlight from an astonishingly bright blue sky above, New Mexico’s famous sky, filters through in a clear stream.

There may be times when a yellow leaf is just a yellow leaf; but not these aspen leaves. Each has a glistening light as though it had been dipped in some bright eternal dew. Massed together, they form a shining golden wall on either side of the canyon. Against this luminous background are occasional patches of dark green, a green so dark it is almost black, which are scattered spruce trees. And here and there is a sharp note of the red mountain maple.

Somber words in black and white cannot capture the beauty of it; the paint brush of Taos’ own artists can come near doing it.

Taos, odd and interesting, lies at the end of this radiant trail, and what a delightful experience is the first visit there: to behold for the first time the little adobe houses which sprawl over the hillsides like happy children out in the warm sunshine; the charmingly crooked gateways; and the flaming scarlet mantles— which are peppers hung up to dry—flung across the fences. Except for the sun-baked tan of its mud streets and its adobe houses, there is no monotonous sameness about Taos. If one wants irregularly placed windows or crooked gates, vivid splotches of color on doorways or gatepost, a sky blue house, or anything else that his
own particular fancy dictates, he may have it, convention to the contrary.

Small wonder that artists find Taos a fertile field of inspiration. They love it. Indeed, talking with them for scarcely more than a few minutes, you learn for a certainty that they think it the most beautiful and delightful spot in the world. Many creations of their brush attest to their love of it. And how they resent the encroachment of so-called civilization on their beauty spot. To them it means destruction of Nature's handiwork and is branded as no less than sacrilege. Gasoline filling stations, flamboyant billboards, and hot-dog stands spell desecration. No man has the right to mar its loveliness with tourist cabins! Some of them maintain vehemently that there should be a few places in the world left untrodden by the broad boots of commercialism and that such hideous things as follow in the train of the merely practical—advertising signs, picnic parks, wire fences, and roadhouses—prostitute beauty and art. 

While there are among the artists those who hotly defend this position, there is still a hint of commonplace commercialism; but it is somehow undercurrent. The grocery stores and filling stations and curio shops designed to catch the roving tourist eye glimmer away, and the beauty and charm which belong distinctively to Taos are uppermost.