

THE SOURCE
The High Country

IN ORDER that the character of the country through which the Rio Grande flows may be easily understood, three major divisions are presented here, designated as THE SOURCE, MIDSTREAM, and THE BORDER.

THE SOURCE contains the part of the Rio Grande from its very beginning to the southern end of the San Luis Valley where it enters the Rio Grande Canyon in northern New Mexico.

The High Country of THE SOURCE, where the river rises, covers a vast portion of the eastern slope of the Continental Divide in the San Juan Mountains of southern Colorado. From the soaring peaks of these mountains, the High Country and the Upland Valley gradually diminish in elevation through a distance of eighty miles, as fold after fold of forest-covered mountains drop down to the great inter-mountain park - The San Luis Valley.

Augmenting the first small flow of the Rio Grande, countless snow-fed brooks, emerging from secluded valleys, join the river, quickly increasing its volume as it rushes down its first descent. Thick, deep forests of spruce, fir and aspen retard the melting snow in spring, holding back moisture to be released gradually as the season advances. As the main river valley deepens and widens, so do those adjoining, whose confluent streams ever increase the flow, as the Rio Grande grows from brook to stream, from stream to river.

Emerging from this depth of mountain masses, the river enters the San Luis Valley at an elevation of seventy-five hundred feet. This park-like, level valley, containing an area the size of the state of Massachusetts, is bounded on the west by the main range of the Rocky Mountains, and on the north and east by a long, high

Insert #1
spur, the Sangre de Cristo Range. This spur, beginning in the northwestern corner of the valley where it stems from the Continental Divide, runs east for approximately eighty miles, forming the valley's northern boundary. Turning south, this magnificent range of high mountain peaks, extends more than two hundred miles terminating just beyond Santa Fe, New Mexico. Once the home of countless herds of bison and other large animals, the San Luis Valley is now an area of extensive farms. Its northern portion is watered by many artesian wells in addition to small streams from the surrounding mountains; ~~and~~ its central and southern part is irrigated by water from the Rio Grande.

all ready set
~~Flowing out into the center of the San Luis Valley, the Rio Grande turns south just beyond the town of Alamosa, Crossing the Colorado-New Mexico line some thirty miles below, and continuing through the sparsely settled lower end of the valley, the river reaches the low, volcanic hills where it cuts its way into the great gorge, and the MIDSTREAM portion of the river begins.~~