



COURTESY OF TOM ARMER

Start Wars of the Roses Tree is one of the Medallion Trees located in the Sandia Mountains. The Wars of the Roses started in 1455, the same year the tree is thought to have germinated. For those who wish to see some of these Medallion Trees in person, New Mexico Wild will be offering a pair of hikes on the Faulty Trail on Friday, July 25, and Saturday, July 26, in conjunction with the Old-Growth Forest Network.

HISTORY AND A HIKE

The Sandia's mysterious
Medallion Trees
mark world events
— New Mexico Wild
can help you find them

BY TRISTEN CRITCHFIELD
FOR THE JOURNAL

There's a certain mystique that accompanies the trails of the Sandia Mountains.

During a hike in these areas, one might encounter what is known as a Medallion Tree, each of which is marked with a brass tag that lists its germination date and a corresponding historical event. There are believed to be more than 80 of these very large trees — if not more — throughout the Sandia wilderness.

The exact origin of these medallions remains a mystery. While they were positioned to cover a hole in the trees where a core sample was taken to determine their age, it's unclear exactly who was responsible for providing the complimentary history lesson.

"That's the million-dollar question," Bjorn Fredrickson, New Mexico Wilderness Alliance (New Mexico Wild) conservation director, said. "It's sort of a mystery, which I think is one of the neat things about it."

"... I've seen some reference to this could have been a project started in the Civilian Conservation Corps era ... It's just like this neat little project, but



Boston Massacre Tree is one of the Medallion Trees located in the Sandia Mountains. The Boston Massacre happened in 1770, the same year the tree is thought to have germinated.

(it) has that sort of mysterious twist to it. Even the number of medallions out there is unknown."

For those who wish to see some of these Medallion Trees in person, New Mexico Wild

SANDIA MEDALLION TREES HIKE

WHEN: 2-4 p.m. Friday, July 25, (3 miles), and 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, July 26 (6-7 miles)

WHERE: Cienega Canyon Trail at the Cienega Picnic Area, off New Mexico 526 in Tijeras, near Cedar Crest

HOW MUCH: \$5 day pass per vehicle

REGISTRATION: nmwild.org

See **MEDALLION** >> **F2**



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MEDALLION >>

From **PAGE 1**

will be offering a pair of hikes on the Faulty Trail on Friday, July 25, and Saturday, July 26, in conjunction with the Old-Growth Forest Network. New Mexico Wild is a nonprofit organization "dedicated to the protection, restoration and continued enjoyment of New Mexico's wildlands and wilderness areas," while the Old-Growth Forest Network has a mission to "locate and designate at least one protected forest in every county in the United States that can sustain a native forest."

The oldest Medallion Tree dates back to 1371, with a tag revealing that was the same year when Robert II was crowned King of Scotland. Still others commemorate milestones like the French and Indian War (1757), the first performance of Hamlet (1601), the first balloon flight (1783) and the first University of New Mexico classes (1892), to name a few.

It's unknown exactly how many Medallion Trees the group will encounter on the New Mexico Wild-led hikes, though the greatest concentration is believed to be in the vicinity of the Faulty Trail. Others can be found on La Luz, South Crest Trail and North Mystery Trail.

"We've designed it with the sense of adventure," Fredrickson said of the hikes. "We're not intending to have every single one of these mapped out and we're going to lead people there. It's like, let's get out (and) let's all look for these."

The Friday hike will be approximately three miles and lasts two hours, while the Saturday offering is about twice the length and timeframe. This will provide options for the various demographics — including different ages and fitness levels — who might want to attend. The event will be led by members of New Mexico Wild and Old-Growth Forest Network. Fredrickson said the goal is to have someone from the Sandia Ranger District and Friends

of the Sandia Mountains in attendance to discuss some of the work that is being done in the area.

Each hike will be capped at 25 people, but if interest is high enough, there is the potential to make the Medallion Tree Hike a recurring event. While the notion of the treasure hunt in the woods is appealing, it's about far more than that.

"The Medallion Trees are a wonderful effort, and we're kind of piggybacking on that to raise awareness of this old growth forest in the Sandias and just people understanding that our forests are really critical in terms of the climate change context. And they have played an outsized role of forests in terms of carbon sequestration," Fredrickson said.

"They suck in much more carbon than younger forests. So in terms of climate change, adaptation, mitigation — they're critically important. There's very little old growth forest left in the country. They play an outsized role in protecting biodiversity and species."