



In 1883, at a location about 3 miles south of Magdalena, New Mexico, the Kelly Mine opened to extract zinc ore, and in 1884 the village of Magdalena was named after nearby Magdalena Peak when its post office opened. In 1885, the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe built a branch line west from Socorro, on the AT&SF Albuquerque-El Paso mainline, to Magdalena, and extended the line the line from there a few miles south to Kelly. The AT&SF Magdalena Branch was originally intended to ship cattle from the Plains of San Agustin, which it did, but also shipped ore from the mines around Kelly.

Magdalena is known as the "Trails End" for the millions of cattle and sheep driven into town cowboy style from the west, using the historic "Stock Driveway." The Stock Driveway was used annually from 1885 through 1971. In 1916, the driveway was officially designated by law through the signing of the "Grazing Homestead Act." The 125 mile driveway extended west from Magdalena to Datil, New Mexico, then forked south toward Horse Springs and Reserve, New Mexico, and the other fork led to Springerville, Arizona. The driveway was 5 to 10 miles wide and covered 200 square miles. During the peak trailing year, 1919, cowboys drove 150,000 sheep and 21,000 cattle to the Magdalena railhead. In 1930, the Driveway was still very active and the Civilian Conservation Corp fenced the driveway and drilled a well about every ten miles. During the drives cowboys moved about 10 miles a day, and herders moved sheep about 5 miles a day. Chuck wagons and relays of horses followed behind. Trailing gave way to trucking, but the driveway remained in continual use until it was officially closed in 1971. The last train plied the AT&SF Magdalena Branch two years later in 1973.

The Magdalena Depot is listed on the National Register and serves as the Village Hall and Library. It was built in 1915 and is Santa Fe's Standard Frame Depot #3. Along the north side of the depot was a large loading dock.



The grade of the AT&SF Magdalena Branch between Socorro and Magdalena.



A culvert on of the Magdalena Branch.



A small bridge on the Magdalena Branch.



The Karl G. Jansky Very Large Array (VLA) is about 20 miles west of Magdalena on the Plains of San Agustin. The VLA is a radio astronomy observatory that has made key observations of black holes and proto-planetary disks around young stars, among many others. The observatory consists of 27 independent antennae, each of which has a dish diameter of 82 feet and weighs over 200 tons. Each antenna is located along one of the three arms of a railroad track, shaped in a "Y" configuration; each of are is 13 miles long. The tracks are used by a specially designed lifting locomotive, a "Hein's Trein," to move the massive antennas. The VLA "railroad" is obviously not connected to any other rail system.



Cattle still graze on the grasslands on the Plains of San Agustin, but today are trucked to market rather than driven by cowboys to the Magdalena railhead.