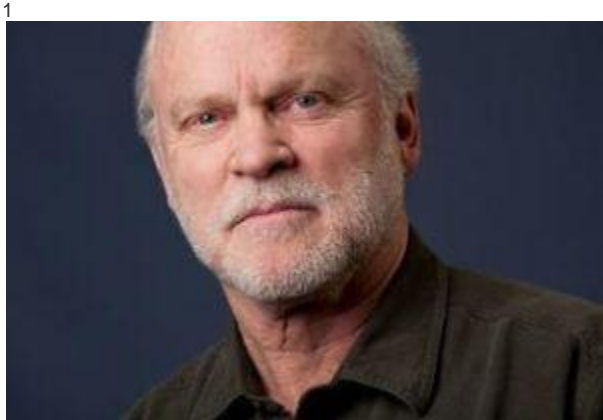


# Reader View: Act boldly to preserve Lawrence's legacy



Earl James

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By **Earl James** |

The story (“D.H. Lawrence Ranch could reopen amid efforts in Taos,” Nov. 16) that D.H. Lawrence’s Ranch north of Taos might be reopened to the public for educational tours is a welcome sign. The University of New Mexico, to which the ranch was bequeathed by Lawrence’s widow, might rethink the management of this iconic, early 20th-century site where a vital, challenging writer experienced deep spiritual revitalization in the landscape and cultures of Northern New Mexico.

I first visited the Lawrence Ranch in 1973, when studying Lawrence’s work with James Cowan, founder and director of the D.H. Lawrence Review at the University of Arkansas. I drove to New Mexico during spring break that year. I still recall the inspiration I felt as a young man visiting a site where a giant of early 20th-century culture lived and worked. When peering into the small, rustic cabin where Lawrence wrote some of his later works, I thought about how he gave all to his writing, accumulating little material wealth, living simply so he could pursue his dream of speaking out for the human spirit in a time of increased industrialization and suppression of individuality.

While his novels, poems, paintings and literary criticism will always hold the central value of his life, to be able to walk the same ground, see the same forested lands and look into his small cabin allows the power of his writing to sink into body and soul, and connects one to that champion of what is human against the forces that would turn all life into a salable commodity. We need touchstones to remarkable spirits like Lawrence’s that celebrate human lives lived intensely.

Lawrence’s Ranch, if handled properly by UNM and interested citizens around the globe, can make a comeback, can once again refresh and revitalize the world-weary with its story, and in the process contribute to the revitalization of the local economy. If there is any doubt

as to the attraction power of a Lawrence historic site, one only need consult the University of Nottingham's D.H. Lawrence Heritage Center and Birthplace Museum, so popular that tours must be booked well in advance.

Perhaps it's time for UNM to consider entering into a joint management agreement with, for example, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Taos-based Friends of D.H. Lawrence and the National Park Service. Additionally, the scholarly D.H. Lawrence Society of North America has recently expressed interest in contributing to a long-range preservation and interpretation planning process for the ranch.

The timing for assisting UNM in fulfilling its obligation seems just right, since one of Northern New Mexico's own, Dr. Estevan Rael-Galvez, former state historian and chairman of the New Mexico Cultural Properties Committee, is now senior vice president of historic sites at the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

I urge UNM to think boldly about the power of Lawrence's legacy in New Mexico, and to reach out to potential allies with the specialized knowledge and experience required to manage and promote this valuable historic site. Much needs to be done to honor Lawrence's legacy in New Mexico and to preserve the ranch's key buildings and landscape views from deterioration.

This could be New Mexico's last chance to do so.

*Earl James is a Santa Fe area writer whose novel, Bella Coola: The Rainforest Brought Them Home, received a 2013 Nautilus Silver Award. From 1977 to 1986, he was executive director of the National Trust's Washington D.C.-area historic house museums. Contact [www.earldjames.com](http://www.earldjames.com).*