



BIG BEND

NATIONAL PARK . . . Texas

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

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BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK is a land of contrasts. Abrupt and conspicuous mountain belts are surrounded by a semi-arid region with rocky slopes and colorful lowlands. Many of the broad arid valleys are cut by arroyos and washes, exposing deeper strata of brightly colored clay and rock. The southern boundary of the park is the Rio Grande which for 107 miles winds through the hills and the lowlands. Three spectacular canyons in great mountain uplifts have been cut by this meandering and historic stream. Romantic interest is high, due to the proximity of Old Mexico, just across the Rio Grande, where the people with their history and legends of the country trace directly back to the period of a common colonization and government.

Located directly on the international boundary, Big Bend National Park typifies the scenery, the flora, and the fauna of Mexico more than it does that of better known parts of the United States. From almost any section of the park the view to the south is dominated by the rugged Sierra del Carmen, Fronteriza, and other spectacular mountain ranges in Old Mexico.

The park derives its name from its location in that portion of Texas where the Rio Grande, forming the boundary between the United States and Mexico, makes a great U-shaped bend in its course. It contains approximately 692,304 acres of land.

HISTORY IS COLORFUL

The history of Big Bend National Park may be divided into five periods—Indian (historic and prehistoric), Spanish, Mexican, the Texas Republic, and the United States. Archeological finds indicate that the area has been inhabited by man for centuries. Perishable remains such as baskets and sandals have been found in dry caves and rock shelters. Open campsites are near water and are indicated by flint-spalls, chips, rejects, cores, metates and manos (grinding stones), burned stone, and ashy materials.

The Spanish conquistadors and missionaries were active in the Big Bend area. They record that the Apache Indians were living in Big Bend when the first white men arrived. Several hostile encounters took place, and one battle is believed to have been fought in the Chisos Mountains.

The Comanches, famous fighting Indians of the Great Plains, traveled through Big Bend on forays as far south as Durango in Central Mexico. The Comanche Trail passed through the middle of the park area.

With the passing of the Spanish and Mexican regimes, exploration, conquest, and development were continued by United States and Texas officials. In 1853, Maj. W. H. Emory completed the boundary survey for the United States Boundary Commission. Captain Neville, leading a party of Texas Rangers, defeated a band of Indians near the head of Boquillas Canyon in January 1863. Dr. Robert T. Hill completed his exploratory boat trip down the Rio Grande in 1899, during the course of which he passed through the three main canyons in what is now the park.

Establishment of Big Bend National Park was authorized by act of Congress, approved June 20, 1935. Its accomplishment was made possible through the foresighted and generous action of the State of Texas in appropriating \$1,500,000 for the purchase of necessary lands, which were then deeded to the Federal Government. The park was actually established on June 12, 1944.

NATURAL FEATURES

Plant life is most unusual because of the curious mixture of the plants of Old Mexico and those commonly found in the United States in these latitudes. Four general types of plant communities are found. The desert "scrub," consisting mainly of creosotebush, yucca, lechuguilla, ocotillo, and various types of cacti, is characteristic of the lowlands. One of these plants is the giant dagger, which blooms spectacularly in the spring. On the lower mountain slopes are found communities of Mexican pinyon pine and

juniper, including the rare and strange drooping juniper. In the higher areas of the Chisos Mountains the canyons contain small but vigorous groups of ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir, Arizona cypress, and quaking aspen. Along the Rio Grande and near occasional mountain springs, plants requiring more water are found. These include the Palmer cottonwood, which does not occur outside of this general region of the United States, and cane or large reeds very similar to bamboo in appearance.

All plants within the park are now fully protected, but many species found here were formerly used by the local population for various day-to-day living aids and are still so used by the people across the Rio Grande in Mexico. They brew fiery alcoholic drinks from the sotol and the maguey or century plant. Leaf fibers from many of the yucca family plants are a substitute for twine and are used for local manufacture of a very strong rope. Floor mats and baskets are also made from them. Mesquite is an important part of life in the whole region. The beans are ground to make bread, or may be fed to livestock, and the wood is important for posts or fuel.

Inside mouth of Santa Elena Canyon



Generally, the peculiar ecology of the park presents a challenge to the student and a stimulating story to the park visitor with an interest in natural science.

Animal life, also fully protected in the park, varies greatly in type and habitat. The wild hog, or Texas peccary (javelina), which ranges the foothills and slopes surrounding the Chisos Mountains, is one of the unusual animals. Some other large mammals, which are present but not frequently seen, are the Mexican black bear and mountain lion, in the Chisos Mountains, and beaver along the Rio Grande. Deer are abundant, especially the white-tail or "flagtail," and mule deer are often seen by visitors in the more isolated sections.

In addition to large numbers of more common varieties of birds, such rare species as the Colima warbler and aplomado falcon are present. Orioles, tanagers, cardinals, hummingbirds, and other brilliant-plumaged songsters brighten the groves of cottonwoods along the Rio Grande and the wooded canyons of the Chisos Mountains.

The geological story is read in the rocks themselves. In certain localities the rock

layers are highly folded, tilted, and shattered. Some layers are standing on end, most are lopsided, and a few large sections of rock have been turned upside down and piled where it seems they should not be. Yawning canyons carved across slowly uplifted mountain ranges show the erosive action of the Rio Grande through the ages.

Many of the rock layers exposed in the area were deposited as sand, mud, and limy mud on the floors of ancient seas, which long ago spread over this region. These sea deposits have been consolidated into rock. In certain places the sea water was teeming with various forms of life. Their fossilized remains are now preserved in the rocks.

Forces within the earth's interior caused the elevation of the newly formed rocks, with an accompanying withdrawal of the sea. Mountain ranges were formed along the lines of greatest strain. Rapid erosion of the new mountains and corresponding deposition in the lowlands produced the extensive slope and valley deposits. Locally, there were swamps in and around which developed a dense growth of ancient vegetation. It was in this environment

Facilities in the Chisos Mountains Basin



that the dinosaurs lived, fought, and died; that giant trees were petrified; and that coal deposits were formed.

Later, further uplift accompanied by volcanic activity made the picture very complex. Some of the larger volcanic masses pushed slowly toward the surface and cooled underground, later to be uncovered by erosion. Others burst forth with explosive violence and spread ash and lava over the surrounding terrain.

Erosion is the most recent chapter in the geological story. Its activity has excavated the canyons, formed the cliffs, columns, spires, and buttresses, and left exposed layers of rock with a wide variety of color tones. These topographic features, enhanced by the changing play of light and shadows, augment the scenic and recreational attractions of the park.

INTERPRETIVE SERVICE

The area at present has no park naturalist; however, during the evenings of the summer months when visitors are numerous, illustrated talks are given by the rangers. Information service is available at park headquarters or at any of the outlying ranger stations. Self-directing trail markers are designed and placed for your convenience.

SUGGESTED TRIPS

Short improved trails lead directly from the main roads into the mouths of Boquillas and Santa Elena Canyons. In the latter gorge, visitors obtain spectacular views of the nearly vertical cliffs which rise 1,500 feet above the Rio Grande. In the Chisos Mountains, self-guiding foot trails make hiking to Lost Mine Peak and the Window an interesting experience. Horseback trips to the South Rim and other points of interest are recommended.



Looking back on Casa Grande from trail to South Rim

SEASONS

The park is open the year round and lies in the same latitude as Daytona Beach, Fla., and Hermosillo, Sonora, Mexico. The climate is usually dry and sunny all year; and the fall, winter, and spring seasons are particularly attractive along the Rio Grande. During the summer, temperatures in the Chisos Mountains are cool, although at that time the surrounding desert plain and the Rio Grande region are hot.

Desert flowers and cacti bloom in the late spring; summer rains bring the peak of growth and blossoms for most vegetation in mid-summer; and the mountain area trees are particularly attractive in their late fall coloring.

HOW TO REACH THE PARK

Two approach roads connect with U. S. 90. State Highway 227 from Marathon is paved to park headquarters, 68 miles, and

the Chisos Mountains Basin, 78 miles. The 81 miles of State Highway 118 from Alpine to the west park entrance is expected to be completely paved by the end of 1953; the remaining 24 miles to the park headquarters is paved except for a section of 7 miles. The Southern Pacific provides rail access to Alpine and Marathon.

ACCOMMODATIONS AND SERVICES

Big Bend National Park is appreciated most by those who enjoy roughing it. The principal development is in the Chisos Mountains Basin at an elevation of 5,400 feet. Accommodations are limited, however, and reservations for cabins should be made well in advance, particularly during the heavy travel season in the summer. This may be done by writing National Park Concessions, Inc., Big Bend National Park, Tex. Meal service is avail-

able, and limited groceries, gasoline, and usual service station accessories also may be obtained here.

Camping is encouraged during the summer season, and three campsites are available at present. Campers should bring their own food, bedding, and tents. It is also advisable to have a gasoline stove or coke burner, as fuel is not always available.

At Hot Springs, on the park's southeastern boundary adjacent to the Rio Grande, are limited accommodations. Here gasoline and a restricted choice of staples may be purchased. Reservations may be made by writing to Peter Koch, Hot Springs Route, Marathon, Tex.

Hotels, restaurants, and auto courts may be found in Alpine and Marathon. Visitors to the area should fill their gasoline tanks before leaving U. S. 90.

Saddle horses, pack animals, and guide service are available in the Chisos Moun-

Boquillas Village, Mexico, from Big Bend National Park



tains Basin area for short and full-day trips. Arrangements can be made for pack trips.

Photographic services, which include conducted field trips for photographers and a photo school, as well as supplies, are maintained in the Chisos Mountains Basin area during the summer.

ROADS AND TRAILS

Some of the park roads are paved; the balance are gravel-surfaced and well-maintained. Dips are frequent, and motorists are cautioned regarding wash-outs and running water during and immediately following a storm. The rainy season is usually during July, August, and September. Primary trails originate in the Chisos Mountains Basin.

ADMINISTRATION

Big Bend National Park is administered by the National Park Service of the United States Department of the Interior. Inquiries and communications should be addressed to the Superintendent, Big Bend National Park, Tex.

PLEASE HELP US PROTECT THIS PARK

Park regulations are designed for the protection of the natural beauties and scenery, as well as for the comfort and convenience of visitors. Park rangers are employed to help and advise visitors, as well as to enforce regulations. When in doubt, ask a ranger. A complete copy of park rules and regulations is available upon request. The following synopsis is for convenient reference and general guidance of visitors.

Preservation of Natural Features.—Destruction, injury, defacement, removal, or disturbance of any tree, flower, fruit,

vegetation, rock, or wildlife is not permitted. Hunting and use of firearms or fireworks are not permitted.

Camping.—Please be careful with fire. Camp only in designated areas. Keep your camp area clean and dispose of all trash that will burn in a fireplace. Deposit noninflammable refuse in garbage cans. Light fires only in designated places and extinguish completely before leaving camp even for temporary absence. **KNOW YOUR FIRE IS OUT!**

Disorderly conduct.—Proper conduct is required of visitors in consideration of others who are entitled to the fullest possible enjoyment of the park.

Pets.—If you are carrying a dog, cat, or other pet, you may take it into and through the park provided it is at all times kept confined within the car or on leash. Pets are not permitted in public buildings or on the trails.

Automobiles.—Vehicles must be equipped with good brakes, a horn, and lights. Careful driving is required to protect yourself and others. Observe the rules of the road; keep to the right; do not pass or park on curves. Driving from or parking off of designated roads is not permitted.

Trails.—Before attempting more difficult trails, seek advice as to routes and distances. Smoking is not permitted on trails, except in designated places.

Fishing.—Fishing is permitted in the Rio Grande; however, the waters of Santa Elena, Boquillas, and Mariscal Canyons are closed to fishing. No privately owned boat, canoe, raft, or other floating craft shall be placed or operated upon the Rio Grande in Big Bend National Park. Apply to the nearest park ranger for general fishing regulations.

Deliberate infraction of park regulations may bring penalty of fine or imprisonment or both.



BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK TEXAS

LEGEND

- Park Boundary
- Improved Roads
- Unimproved Roads
- Ranger Station

Scale 2 4 6 8 10 Mi.

