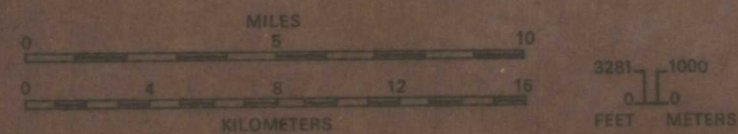
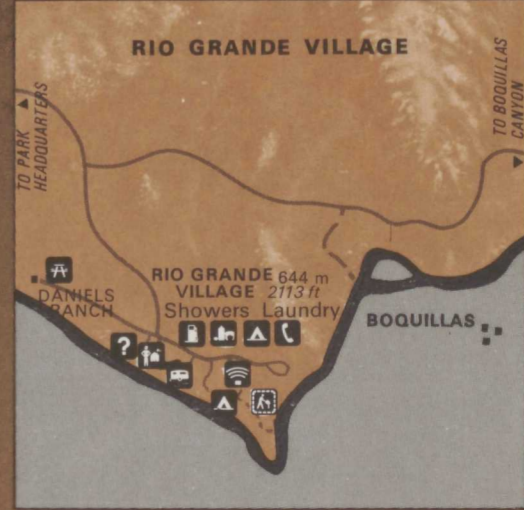


# BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK



- Ranger Station
- Historic Structures
- Trailer Sites
- Telephone
- Stable
- Information
- Picnic Area
- Grocery Store
- Lodging
- Campground
- Gas
- Amphitheater
- Post Office
- Nature Trail
- Paved Road
- Primitive Dirt Road
- Interpretive Auto Trail

**PRIMITIVE ROADS**  
Check with park ranger before entry  
Patrolled at infrequent intervals  
Often closed in summer and during stormy weather.  
The International Boundary is in the center of the Rio Grande.



# big bend

**FOR YOUR SAFETY**  
Big Bend can be hazardous to those unfamiliar with the back country of southern Texas. Note the specific precautions listed on the inside of the folder.

**HOW TO REACH THE PARK**  
From San Antonio, it is 410 miles to park headquarters at Panther Junction via U.S. 90 to Marathon and south via U.S. 385. From El Paso, it is 323 miles to Panther Junction via Int. 10 to Van Horn, U.S. 90 to Alpine, and south via Tex. 118; and it is 353 miles via U.S. 67 to Presidio and Texas Ranch Road 170—the "Camino del Rio."

Trains and transcontinental buses stop at Alpine and Marathon, but there is now no regular public transportation from these towns to or through the park. Automobiles can be rented at Alpine.

**ADMINISTRATION**  
Big Bend National Park is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Big Bend National Park, TX 79834, is in immediate charge.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR



This huge park within the great curve of the Rio Grande is more suggestive of northern Mexico than the United States. Expanses of desert sweep away to remote horizons; mountain ranges rise abruptly above arid flatlands; steep-walled canyons and green, ribbonlike stretches of plants define the river course.

Here you can see well-preserved remains of animals that lived many millions of years ago, smell the aroma of creosotebushes, hear the calls of unusual birds, and sense the lingering echo of a Comanche war whoop. But the real character of this country is not immediately apparent until you have stayed awhile; then you may begin to feel its mood.

#### SPRING ARRIVES EARLY

Winter is nippy in the mountains and comfortably warm during the day in the lowlands. Once or twice a year snow falls in the mountains.

Spring weather arrives early with a slow succession of bloom beginning in late February and reaching the mountain heights in May. Some desert plants bloom throughout the year.

Midsummer temperatures in the desert and river valley are likely to hover above 100° during the day. This is the best time of year to go to the mountains. In The Basin (5,400-foot elevation) daytime temperatures average a comfortable 85°, and nights are cool.

Autumn sunshine and air are usually gentle and warm.

#### THE NATURALIST PROGRAM

Park naturalists, aided by park rangers, provide interpretive services to help you understand the geology, plants, animals, and history of Big Bend National Park. Natural history publications are sold at park headquarters.

Evening illustrated talks are given at dusk at the amphitheater in The Basin in summer and at Rio Grande Village and park headquarters the rest of the year. Consult bulletin boards for the schedule and for special programs at other locations.

Self-guided nature trails are at Rio Grande Village, Santa Elena Canyon, park headquarters, and the Lost Mine Trail. Roadside exhibits and markers will also help you to understand and enjoy the park.

#### ACCOMMODATIONS AND SERVICES

*Overnight lodging* is available at Chisos Mountains Lodge in The Basin. There are accommodations for more than 150 guests. Motel-type units and cottages (with electricity) are of three types: stone-and-adobe cottages with terraces and private baths, modern multiple units, and two-unit frame cottages near central restroom and shower facilities.

*Reservations* should be made; write to National Park Concessions, Inc., Big Bend National Park, TX 79834.

*Food service* in the lodge coffeeshop is from 7 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. The main dining room is open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner; hours vary with the season. Box lunches and sandwiches are available.

*Campgrounds*, at The Basin and Rio Grande Village, include water and comfort stations. Electricity and fuel (other than charcoal sold by the concessioner) are not available. Pay showers for campers are at Rio Grande Village only, where laundry facilities are also located. Camping reservations may be made for large groups but not for individual families.

Picnic tables are available at Rio Grande Village, Dugout Wells, Santa Elena Canyon, The Basin, and Persimmon Gap.

*Trailer parks*. Small trailer parks with utility hook-ups are at Rio Grande Village and at the Panther Junction service station. At Rio Grande Village, trailers must use all hookups. Visitors wishing to take trailers into The Basin campground should first consult a park ranger. Because of very sharp turns, trailers longer than 20 feet are not allowed in The Basin.

*Stores*. Groceries, cold drinks, camping supplies, and film may be purchased at The Basin, Rio Grande Village, Castolon, and Panther Junction. The Chisos Mountains Lodge has a gift shop.

*Service stations*. Minor automobile repair service and gasoline may be obtained at The Basin and Panther Junction; gasoline is also available at Castolon—(unleaded only) and Rio Grande Village. Unleaded gasoline is also at Panther Junction and Rio Grande Village. Check your gasoline and water supply before leaving U.S. 90.

*Communications*. Public telephones are at park headquarters, Persimmon Gap, The Basin, Rio Grande Village, Panther Junction service station, and The Basin campground. Post office services are available, with mail service five times a week. Mail should be addressed in care of General Delivery, Big Bend National Park, TX 79834.

*Saddle horses*. Arrangements can be made for saddle horses, pack animals, and guides at the Chisos remuda.

#### PRECAUTIONS

The rugged character of Big Bend's mountain and desert areas creates a sense of adventure. Hazards do exist, but most of them can be anticipated and avoided.

Check with a park ranger before traveling any of the primitive roads.

Rock in the park is very unstable and unsafe, and is not recommended for climbing.

High water is a threat during the rainy season (July through September). Dips in the roadways are numerous, and, to avoid stalling your motor, drive slowly and do not splash through them at high speed. Avoid fast-running water, and be watchful for washouts during and after a storm.

Floating and boating the Rio Grande is extremely hazardous. A permit is required.

When driving at night, be alert for wildlife on the roads. Deer in particular may be blinded by lights.

Beware the cactus! These plants and many trees and shrubs are well armed with spines that can inflict painful injury. Wear stout shoes and tough clothing while you are hiking. If you go out at night, walk carefully, carry a flashlight, and do not venture far.

Carry drinking water on the trail and in the desert. While hiking, climb slowly and enjoy the views and the things around you. Remember, there is a considerable change in altitude from the desert (1,800 feet) to The Basin (5,400 feet), and your endurance is likely to be reduced at higher elevations.

The park's poisonous reptiles—four species of rattlesnakes and the copperhead—are seldom



about during the day. But stay on the trails after dark, carry a flashlight, and keep away from bushes and damp areas.

Tarantulas will not bite you unless you annoy them. Nor should the occasional scorpion alarm you; it is not a deadly species, though a sting should receive prompt attention. There are no poisonous lizards in Big Bend, but lizards may bite when molested.

There are no doctors or nurses in the park. The closest hospital is in Alpine, 108 miles from the park headquarters at Panther Junction. Carry your own first-aid supplies, including tweezers to extract cactus spines. In the event of accident or emergency, notify the nearest park ranger or park headquarters immediately.

PLEASE—WHAT YOU PACK IN, PACK OUT!

#### REGULATIONS

*Driving*. Park roads are not high-speed highways—they are designed for enjoyment of the scenery. Maximum speed is 45 mph; observe posted speed limits. Do not pass or park on curves; take the numerous road dips slowly. Motorized vehicles are restricted to park roadways; they are prohibited on all trails.

*Trails*. Stay on the trails. A shortcut, even by one person, can mar the appearance of that area and cause a destructive rockslide. Smoking is not allowed while traveling on the trails. Please carry out all refuse.

*Camping* is limited to campgrounds, except for back-country camping which is by permit only.

*Fires*. No wood fires or ground fires allowed in the park. Charcoal fires are allowed, but only in the Chisos Basin campground, and Rio Grande Village and Castolon campgrounds.

*Natural features*. Disturbing wildlife, rocks, trees, cactuses, or other plants is not allowed.

*Fishing* licenses are not required. Information can be obtained from a park ranger.

*Firearms*. Use or display of firearms is prohibited.

*Pets* must be kept on leash at all times; they are not permitted on trails or in public buildings.

*Swimming* can be dangerous and is prohibited.

#### HOW TO SEE THE PARK

Available in the administration building at Panther Junction are a number of useful publications about the park. The *Park Road Guide*, *Guide to the Backcountry Roads and The River*, and *Hiker's Guide* contain descriptions of points of interest along automobile routes and major trails.

In summer, your trip to Santa Elena Canyon (43 miles from headquarters) should be made in early morning, for sunlight strikes the canyon walls for only 1 or 2 hours after sunrise, supplying just the right light for picture-taking; soon thereafter the walls are in shadow. The canyon is likely to be hot in summer at midday. In winter, sunshine enters the canyon only at sunset.

The high, sheer walls seem to overhang the winding river. To sense its awesome immensity and to



Santa Elena Canyon of the Rio Grande is at the far western end of the park. This area of outstanding river and rock-wall scenery can be reached by auto, and enjoyed by walking the river trail, about one mile.

feel its solitude you should walk into Santa Elena Canyon. A foot trail crosses Terlingua Creek to the base of the cliff on the United States side and leads upward to a panoramic overlook. From there the trail goes about three-quarters of a mile along the river.

The picnic area at Santa Elena Canyon, providing shade and water, is a pleasant place to eat lunch. On the way back, you may want to visit historic Castolon or make a side trip to Terlingua, a ghost town whose period of quicksilver-mining prosperity lasted from 1900 to 1946. Today only a few families live in Terlingua, near the ruins of a store, a church, a school, and many adobe houses.

*Boquillas Canyon*, cut through the Sierra del Carmen by the Rio Grande, is the longest (25 miles) of Big Bend's famous gorges. It is 25 miles by paved road from park headquarters.

In the evening the sun seems to set fire to the face of the Sierra del Carmen; across the river the Mexican village of Boquillas glistens with golden light.

The path into the canyon is steeply uphill at first, and then it descends gently; part of the way it is shaded by the walls. This canyon, wider than Santa Elena, imparts a sense of grandeur. Near the mouth of the canyon is a large sand slide; you can reach its top in less than one-half hour. The view, from a little wind-hollowed cave, is worth the struggle.

*Lost Mine Trail*, a round trip of about 4 miles, begins at Panther Pass, on the Basin road. Be sure to carry water. A self-guiding leaflet, available at the trailhead, names plants and identifies lookout points along the way. From the overlook at the head of Juniper Canyon, you will be able to see many miles into Mexico. But the most breathtaking sight along the trail awaits you atop Lost Mine Ridge; from there you can see the park spread out all around you.

The 14-mile horseback trip to the *South Rim* is a real adventure. Sturdy mountain horses will carry you along forest trails, sometimes in and out of the rocky bed of a trickling stream, sometimes across a stretch of mountain meadow. Just as you think you are never going to get to the top, the sky suddenly appears all around you and you are looking at an incredible panorama. Spread out before you are a large part of Texas and an even larger slice of Mexico, with the Rio Grande marking the boundary.

The trail to the South Rim can be hiked, too; but it is strenuous, and not for novices.

Other shorter trails lead out of The Basin.

*Primitive Roads*. After you have visited Big Bend's major attractions you may want to further explore

#### "UP HERE WITH NO ONE BUT THE WIND"

"I take a lunch and a sweater and walk up the steady steep grade to 7,835-foot Emory Peak, the highest point in the park. The sights and smells are familiar. Water glistens on a hard, black vertical cliff that rises abruptly from the trail. There are brown rotting deciduous leaves on the earth, and the trail is canopied by piñon pine, juniper, and madrone. There are also scattered Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine in the mountains (though I don't see any), remnants from a cooler, wetter time when evergreen forests blanketed lower elevations in the Southwest.

"I spend a long time on top, two hours or more. It is a mysterious place—silent, windy, sunny, vegetated by a peculiar combination of drooping juniper, oak, pricklypear, moss, and century plants. The red-and-white rocks are splintered from repeated lightning strikes. From this elevated position, five thousand feet above the surrounding desert floor, I can see two hundred miles in every direction; the big park now looks small.

"The very peak of the mountain is split by an eighty-foot crevice into two enormous slabs of lichen-covered red rock. I sit at the base of this crevice for a half-hour, looking off into the sun and the blue mountains of Mexico. Five feet in front of me, the southwest face of the peak falls off in a sheer, five-hundred-foot drop. The wind blows from that direction, and as I sit here a scream comes from below. A falcon? A fox killing a rabbit? Perhaps the Apache chieftain Alsate trying to scare me off? The last is what I choose to believe.

"This is the place to meditate, up here with no one but the wind and the spirits of the old people—the Chisos, Apaches, and Comanches. I am reminded of the fact that the desert has been the favored location of the mystics. This is probably because the powerful heat and stillness, the starkness of the landscape, drives your vision and thought inside your own head. But that kind of meditation would be different from that which would take place up here, where your soul flies out to meet the wind and floats above the landscape. For a moment I think that if I were to throw myself off the cliff, truly and unquestioningly believing to be buoyed up, then I would be, and would be carried safely out across the Chihuahuan Desert. But finally, and denying the wisdom of Jonathan Livingston Seagull, I choose a more conservative approach and walk back down the mountain.

"On the way down I notice fresh coyote and javelina tracks and, in Boulder Meadows, see two small deer on the trail. We stand facing each other for a few moments; then the animals turn and trot off stiffly, arching long, white tails that seem twice as long due to their white rumps. It occurs to me that these are not the common mule deer, which abound in the foothills, but are Carmen whitetails, a subspecies found nowhere else in the nation. Perhaps like the Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine, they are a relic from an earlier time, moving up into the Chisos as the moisture retreated from the desert. I like this thought: these animals are direct descendants from those that were here when these mountains were young. They have seen the climate change, have witnessed three comings of man—red man, on foot, ten thousand years ago; the dark-skinned conquistador, on horseback, in the sixteenth century; and now the white man, in a house trailer.

"I remain in the basin until the sun sets, watching the western walls change from dark red to dark blue to black, sliced by the bright V of the window that looks out to the west and the setting sun. After dark I drive down to Panther Junction with the car window open, listening to the coyotes and watching for mule deer crossing the road. The sky is clear, the stars are brilliant."

Reprinted from "Big Bend" by Jack Hope in *Audubon*, the magazine of the National Audubon Society. © 1973

