

# Big Bend

National Park  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

## Hiking and Backpacking



### INTRODUCTION

Big Bend National Park is a hiker's paradise containing the largest expanse of roadless public lands in Texas. More than 150 miles of trails offer opportunities for day hikes or backpacking trips.

Elevations range from 1,800 feet at the eastern end of Boquillas Canyon to 7,825 feet atop Emory Peak in the Chisos Mountains. These elevation changes produce an exceptional variety of plants, animals, and scenic vistas.

### THE BACKCOUNTRY

**Chisos Mountains:** Because they receive more precipitation than the rest of the park, the Chisos are often referred to as a temperate island in a desert sea. Since the Chisos are the most popular hiking area in Big Bend National Park, designated campsites help reduce damage to this delicate environment.

**Desert:** The scenery varies widely, ranging from the Rio Grande floodplain to arid badlands to sotol grasslands to rugged volcanic

peaks. The desert provides virtually any backcountry experience sought by a hiker. Some areas are often used; others, more isolated, are seldom used and reflect a true wilderness setting.

**Mesa de Anguila and Deadhorse Mountains:** The most remote areas of Big Bend National Park, these magnificent limestone uplifts are best left to experienced backpackers. In the oven of summer they are particularly dangerous.

### TRAILS

About 30 miles of park trails are developed and heavily used. These include short nature trails and the trails in the Chisos Mountains. Most other trails are primitive, difficult to follow, and in some instances no more than a route up a dry wash.

Due to the complex topography and vague trails, detailed 7.5 minute topographic maps and a compass

are necessary for most hikes.

All overnight backpackers must obtain a free Backcountry Use Permit. Permits are issued in person only on a first come, first served basis up to one day in advance of departure. Permits for the high Chisos designated campsites are available at the Basin Ranger Station. Maximum group size is 15.

### WATER

The dry desert air quickly uses up the body's water reserves. We recommend that you carry a minimum of one gallon of water per person per day in the summer, slightly less in the winter. For half-day hikes, carry at least 2 quarts per person.

Springs and tinajas (depressions in rock where water collects) are unreliable and may be unsafe to drink. Springs are rare in the desert and wildlife depend on them. Please carry enough water to supply your own needs.

### WEATHER

Annual precipitation is just under 10 inches in most of the park, but in wet years may exceed 30 inches in the mountains. Typically, winter and spring are dry seasons; the rains usually begin in June and last into the fall.

Summer brings hot days and warm nights. Dramatic afternoon lightning storms with high winds are common and come on quickly. Heavy downpours may result in flash floods.

Winter days may be sunny and warm, but the nights tend to be cold. Winter storms can blow in suddenly with plummeting temperatures and rain or snow.

The weather in Big Bend, hot or cold, injures and kills more hikers than any other factor. Come well prepared because weather changes can be dramatic and unexpected.



## BACKCOUNTRY RULES

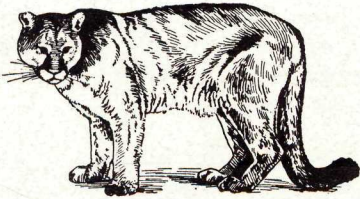
### Do...

- Get a permit for overnight back-packing.
- Leave all natural, prehistoric, and historic features undisturbed.
- Carry plenty of drinking water -- at least 1 gallon per person per day.
- Pack out all your litter -- that includes cigarette butts, toilet paper, and sanitary items.
- Bury human waste 6 to 8 inches deep, well away from camp and any water source.
- Camp at least 100 yards from any water source -- being too close may frighten away wildlife and damage fragile vegetation.
- Prepare for emergencies -- bring the essentials: first aid kit, compass, topo map, extra food and water, knife, flashlight, rain gear, and spare clothing.
- Notify friends or family of your itinerary -- they can contact the park if you fail to return.
- Fill out a Solo Hiker Form if back-packing alone in a remote area.

### Don't...

- Build a fire -- if you need to cook, use a backpacker's stove.
- Bring your pets -- pets may frighten away wildlife and are not permitted anywhere off established roadways. There is no kennel in or near the park.
- Camp in a dry wash -- they may flood even after the smallest rain shower, or rain somewhere else you didn't see.
- Smoke while travelling -- if you do smoke, stop where you can't start a fire, and be sure to pack out the butts.
- Cut switchbacks -- it starts erosion that destroys trails.
- Bring guns into the backcountry - they're prohibited.
- Rock climb without appropriate gear, adequate preparation, and knowledge of the area; even then the rock is generally unstable in the park and may be dangerous.

## MOUNTAIN LIONS AND BLACK BEARS



About two dozen mountain lions live in Big Bend National Park. Also called panther, cougar, or puma, mountain lions are most often seen in the Chisos Mountains. Lion attacks on humans are rare, yet two have occurred since 1984. If you encounter an aggressive lion, hold your ground, wave your arms, throw stones, and shout. Never run.

You are unlikely to encounter a black bear while hiking, although recent reports indicate a small population may live in the Chisos year around. As you hike, pay close attention to the path ahead. Survey the landscape for wildlife. Keep a clean camp. If you encounter a bear, give it plenty of room. Report all mountain lion and black bear sightings to a Ranger.

## CLOSED AREAS

Parts of the backcountry are closed to overnight camping:

- Within 1/2 mile of any developed area, road, the Mariscal Mine, or Hot Springs.
- Within 100 yards of any trail, historical structure, archaeological site, water source, dry wash, or cliff edge.
- Pine Canyon Research Natural Area.
- On Burro Mesa above 3,400 feet elevation.
- The north half of the Chisos Mountains, the Basin, and the area around Oak Spring.

- Within 500 yards of any tinaja on the Mesa de Anguila.

To protect the peregrine falcon, an endangered species, the following areas of the park are closed to all use from February 1 until July 15:

- Casa Grande above 6,600 feet.
- The top 300 feet of Vernon Bailey and Pulliam Peaks and the ridge between them.
- Areas near other peregrine nesting locations may also be closed, such as the Santa Elena Canyon Trail, the canyon rims, and the Southeast Rim.

## HIKING GUIDES AND MAPS

The Big Bend Natural History Association stocks a complete selection of maps and backcountry literature aimed at helping you plan your backpacking adventure. For a sales catalog or to place an order, contact:

Big Bend Natural History Association  
P.O. Box 68  
Big Bend National Park, Texas 79834  
(915) 477-2236.

With this brochure, a map, and the booklet "Hiker's Guide To Trails Of Big Bend National Park" in hand,

you will be well on your way to safely enjoying the wilds of Big Bend.