

Big Bend National Park
Texas

LIVING CONDITIONS

January 1958

LOCATION

Big Bend National Park is located in the heart of a semi-arid region of west Texas known as the "Big Bend Country," taking its name from the sweeping curve of the Rio Grande as it swings deep into Mexico and turns northward again, to form the international boundary separating the two countries. This location of the park lends an atmosphere of "old Mexico" to those sections bordering the Rio Grande, and accounts for the typically Mexican flora and fauna in the park, some of which are found nowhere else in the United States.

The land is rugged, comprising approximately 695,000 acres of desert scrub typical of the Southwest, in the midst of which rise the Chisos Mountains, with their rocky peaks and jagged pinnacles, forming a "biological island" of scientific rarities. Also included within the park's boundaries are three scenic canyons through which the Rio Grande has cut a meandering course for 107 miles of the park's southern boundary.

Elevations vary from 1870 to 7835 feet. Park Headquarters is at an elevation of 3820 feet. The greater portion of maintenance and operation of the park is at the lower elevations, where summer heat is very intense at times. Winter conditions are close to ideal, since there is little freezing weather.

The park is reached by either of two entrances: Persimmon Gap, on State Route 51, from Marathon; and Maverick Mountain entrance, on State Route 118, from Alpine.

Marathon, with a population of about 900, is 70 miles from Park Headquarters. Grocery stores, drug store, churches, hotel, motel, and gasoline stations are available there.

Alpine - principal shopping center - with a population of about 5000, is 100 miles from Park Headquarters. In addition to general facilities, there are doctors, dentists, theaters, a bank, hotel, motels and other facilities usually found in a town of that size. A county hospital, recently constructed, offers the best in modern equipment and facilities.

El Paso and San Antonio are major shopping centers, each about 300 miles from Park Headquarters.

HOUSING

Twenty-five attractive, modern two- and three-bedroom residences are located at Park Headquarters. Two new modern apartment units consisting of six 1-room and four 2-room apartments are available for seasonal employees or employees without families.

NEED FOR PERSONAL CAR

Since it is necessary to drive the distance of 100 miles to the shopping center, a personal automobile is a necessity, commercial transportation being unavailable. Gasoline prices average .31 per gallon both in the park and along the highways in this section of Texas.

TAXES

There is no state sales or income tax. There is a poll tax for legal residents desiring to vote in State or National elections.

RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

The nearest movie theater is 100 miles from Park Headquarters, at Alpine. Social activities are principally confined to community affairs, such as pot luck suppers, square dancing, parties sponsored by the local social club, card parties, and picnicking. A small but active Girl Scout-Brownie troop and a Cub Pack are now organized under the leadership of local personnel.

Television reception is poor to fair, although moderate reception exists when conditions are right. Radio reception is satisfactory, especially during the evenings.

Fishing is often good in the Rio Grande, where channel "cat" reach a good size. No state license is required. Hunting outside the park may be arranged with local landowners, in accordance with state laws.

WEATHER

Sunshine is our most dependable asset. Temperatures in Big Bend are comparable to other desert areas of the Southwest. Winters are mild; the summers, hot.

The average high for the Basin area is about 85 degrees in summer; the low, approximately 55 degrees; extremes in the low 100's are occasionally recorded. Temperatures are usually about 5 degrees higher at Park Headquarters than in the Basin; and 10 to 15 degrees higher at lower elevations along the Rio Grande.

There is little precipitation at any time during the year, and weather is normally very comfortable. Occasionally the "northers" that blow in may bring sudden cold spells that last a few days during the winter months, and there are sometimes unpleasant winter and spring dust storms.

All residences and apartments at Park Headquarters are electrically heated and equipped with electric range, water heater, refrigerator and air-conditioner. Because of the mild winters and long summers, the cost of electric heat is nominal if carefully used. Electricity is metered individually and paid for by payroll deduction.

Ranger quarters in the outlying districts are old structures or house trailers, with sanitation facilities, electric refrigerators, electric lights, gas ranges and gas heaters; coolers are installed in the summertime. These quarters are at distances from park headquarters specified below:

The Basin	10 miles
Boquillas	24 miles
Persimmon Gap	..	28 miles
Maverick Mt.	..	22 miles

SCHOOL FACILITIES

A modern school building is located at Park Headquarters where two teachers are normally employed for the eight grades. There is no high school in the park, the closest being in Marathon or Alpine. However, it is problematical whether board and room may be found in either community for high school students, making it necessary to send them away to a boarding school. Sul Ross State College, an excellent educational institution, is also located in Alpine.

RELIGIOUS SERVICES

We have an inter-denominational Sunday School, in charge of several ladies in the community; however, during summer months, the National Council of Churches makes available a Student Minister who conducts church services in the Basin on Sundays. There are no Roman Catholic services in the park, the nearest being located in Marathon or Alpine.

MAIL DELIVERIES

Mail is delivered to the park on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, leaving also on those days.

TELEPHONES

Telephone and radio communication is available at Park Headquarters. The outlying ranger stations, with the exception of the Basin, have radio contact only. The telephone number of the Superintendent's Office is "Big Bend National Park 2251," through the Alpine exchange.

GROCERY SUPPLIES

Although the park concessioner has available a limited supply of staple and processed foods, the bulk of food supplies must be purchased in Marathon or Alpine and transported by personal car. Folks usually find it necessary to make the trip to town at least twice a month.