



Foundation Document Overview

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument

Arizona



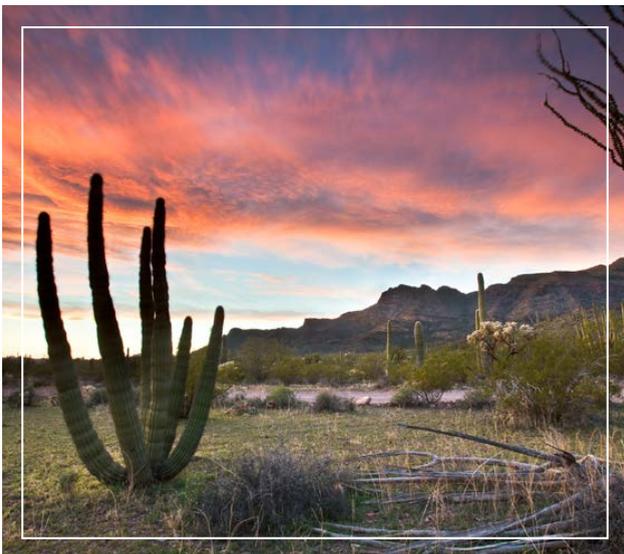
Contact Information

For more information about the *Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument Foundation Document*, contact: orpi_superintendent@nps.gov or 520-387-6849 ext. 7500 or write to:
Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, 10 Organ Pipe Drive, Ajo, AZ 85321

Purpose



ORGAN PIPE CACTUS NATIONAL MONUMENT preserves and provides for public enjoyment and scientific understanding of diverse Sonoran Desert natural resources, including the organ pipe cactus; multicultural connections and resources; and an expansive designated wilderness area.



Significance

Significance statements express why Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

1. Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument is a vast Sonoran Desert designated wilderness area that protects wilderness values, such as opportunities to experience solitude and primitive recreation, expansive vistas, and dark night skies.
2. Distinct summer and winter rainy seasons and rare freezes contribute to the stature and diversity of Sonoran Desert natural communities at Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument. This environment supports a rich assemblage of tropical desert endemic species, including a number of endangered species and the largest protected concentration of organ pipe, senita, and saguaro cactus in the United States.
3. The monument has been continuously studied since the early 1940s, serving an international role in research, conservation, and education, and has been recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a globally important biosphere reserve that is representative of the natural Sonoran Desert ecosystem.
4. For more than 15,000 years, Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument has been a place of trade, travel, and convergence, as evidenced through prehistoric and historic sites such as Quitobaquito Springs and other culturally significant features, and is still being used today.



Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Columnar Cacti, including the Organ Pipe Cactus**
- **Wilderness**
- **Quitobaquito**
- **Continuum of Human History**
- **Science and Research**



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument’s vast, tropical Sonoran Desert wilderness, and its more than 15,000 years of human history, offer unique opportunities to appreciate cultural and natural extremes—inviting us to examine our sense of place.
- The official interaction of the tri-nations (Tohono O’odham, Mexico, and the United States) and their ancestral convergence in this place attests to human resilience and our evolving relationship with dynamic landscapes.
- Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument is a globally important, Sonoran Desert living laboratory—a biosphere reserve—advancing scientific discovery and exploration that seeks to satisfy curiosity, and continually inspires us to pursue understanding.
- Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument’s sensory-immersing experiences within vistas of cacti, mountains, and changing light and shadow—even into the night—unveil stark contrasts, humbling beauty, perspective, and personal rejuvenation.



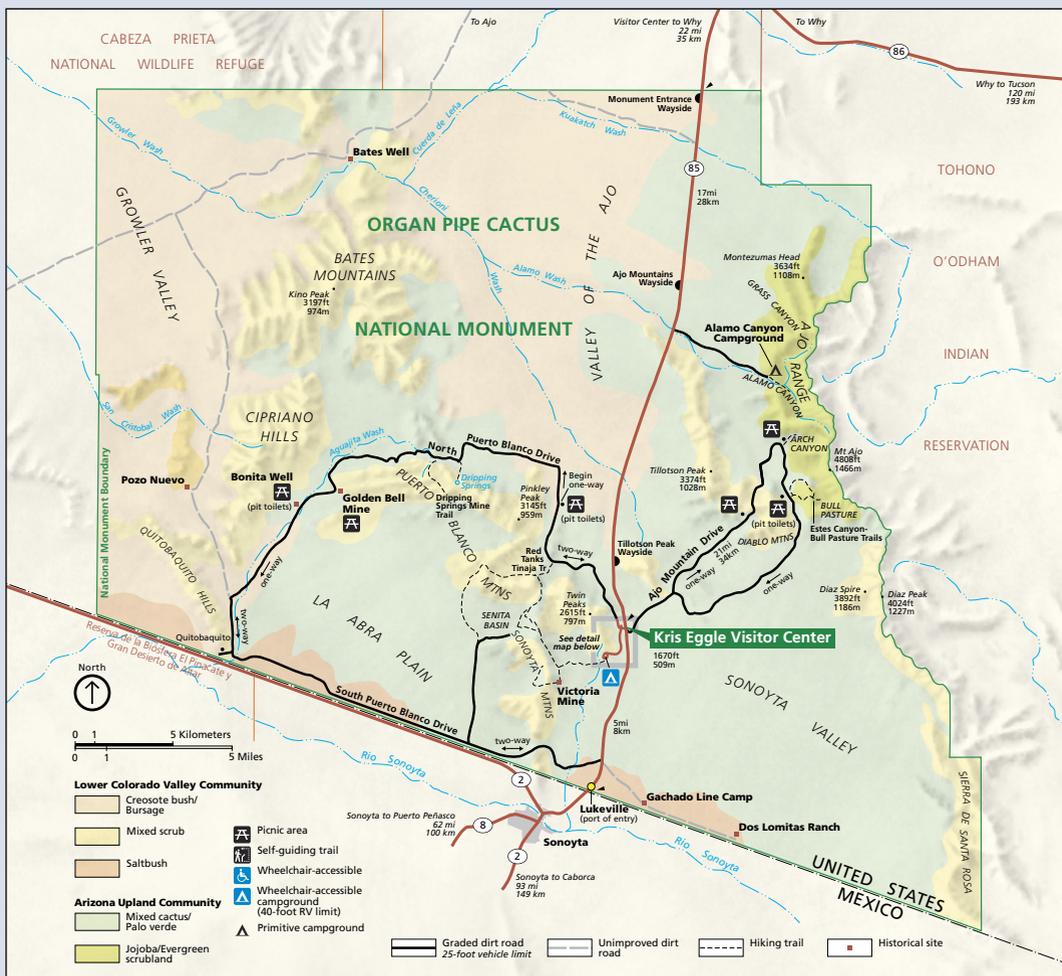
Description

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument is in southwestern Arizona, with the southern boundary of the monument comprising 30 miles of the international border between the United States and Mexico, approximately 40 miles south of Ajo. The monument was established by presidential proclamation on April 13, 1937, to preserve more than 330,000 acres and protect a representative part of the Sonoran Desert that contains organ pipe cactus (*Stenocereus thurberi*), a large, columnar cactus rarely found in the United States. Approximately 95% of the monument (about 312,600 acres) is also designated wilderness, with another 1,240 acres designated as potential wilderness.

The monument's mountains, bajadas, valleys, and washes support unique communities of Sonoran Desert life, including the critically endangered Sonoran pronghorn and the endangered lesser long-nosed bat. The monument is also home to many plants and animals that have adapted to extreme temperatures, intense sunlight, and little rainfall, including 26 species of cactus, notably the endangered acuña cactus, and a number of rare plants. Quitobaquito, a critically

important desert spring and pond system that lies just north of the Mexican border, continues to support uniquely adapted plants and animals, including the endangered Quitobaquito pufish and other species of conservation concern.

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument also has a rich 15,000-year human history, serving as an important cultural center to the local American Indians. Hohokam trade routes bisect what is now the monument, and allowed for ease of movement through the Sonoran Desert as people looked to acquire resources and trade with neighboring cultures. To the Tohono O'odham people, the fruits of saguaro and organ pipe cactus provided food during the hot Sonoran summer. The presidential proclamation for the monument provides for the continued harvesting of cactus fruits by the "Indians of the Papago Reservation," now called the Tohono O'odham Reservation. Human use continued at the site in the form of mining and ranching activities, which occurred from the late 19th and early 20th century through the 1970s. The effects of these activities can still be seen on the landscape today, as can remnant features such as prospecting holes, wells, and structures that are scattered across the monument.



In 1976, Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument was designated an international biosphere reserve by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) under the direction of the Man and the Biosphere Program. Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument is one of several protected areas that help preserve the Sonoran Desert ecosystem along the international border with Mexico, including Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Reserve (US Fish and Wildlife Service) and Sonoran Desert National Monument (Bureau of Land Management) in the United States, and El Pinacate y Gran Desierto de Altar Biosphere Reserve in Mexico. These areas collectively comprise the largest multiagency, international protected area in the Sonoran Desert Region of North America.