

# Guadalupe Mountains

Guadalupe Mountains National Park  
Texas

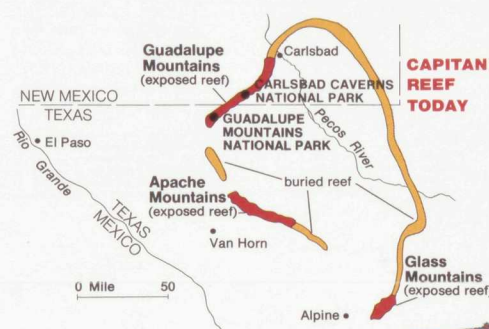
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Official Map and Guide



Magnificent desolation: A view of the Guadalupe Mountains. Victor J. Kaplenk

Guadalupe Mountains National Park preserves the rugged spirit and remote wilderness of the American West. Here, in the ancient Guadalupe Mountains that tower so majestically into the Texas sky, a visitor can delight in grand views, diverse landscapes, and small pleasures.



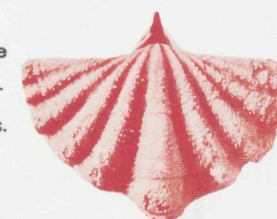
The Guadalupe Mountains are part of one of the finest examples of an ancient marine fossil reef on Earth. Geologists come here from around the world to marvel at this extraordinary natural phenomenon, which formed approximately 250 million

years ago in the geologic period known as the Permian. During this time a vast tropical ocean full of various forms of life covered portions of Texas and New Mexico. Over millions of years, calcareous sponges and algae combined with other lime-secreting marine

organisms and vast quantities of lime that precipitated directly from the seawater to form the 400-mile-long, horseshoe-shaped Capitan Reef. Eventually the sea evaporated, the reef subsided, and a thick blanket of sediments and mineral salts

buried the reef. The reef was entombed for millions of years until a mountain-building uplift in this region exposed a part of the fossil reef in the Guadalupe Mountains. Thus, the Guadalupe, which formed as an ancient reef complex, today tower above the Texas

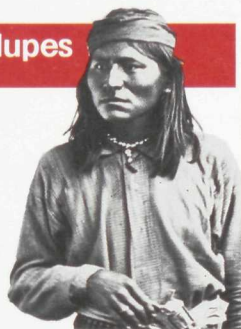
desert. Other parts of the reef are exposed in two other mountain ranges—the Apache Mountains and the Glass Mountains.



Brachiopod fossil of the Guadalupe Mountains  
Smithsonian Institution

## Man in the Guadalupe

Apache Indians, west-bound pioneers, explorers, stagecoach drivers, U.S. Army troops, ranchers, and conservationists are all part of the colorful history of the Guadalupe Mountains. Until the mid-1800s these remote highlands were the exclusive domain of the Mescalero Apaches, who hunted and camped here. Later came explorers and pioneers, who welcomed the imposing sight of the Guadalupe peaks rising boldly out of the Texas desert not only as an important landmark but also for the water and shelter the mountains provided. But cultures conflicted and the



Mescalero Apache  
Museum of New Mexico

The present-day ruins of the Pinery stagecoach station are a reminder of this historic service.

In the years that followed, some ranching operations developed. One ranch, in McKittrick Canyon, was built in the 1930s by



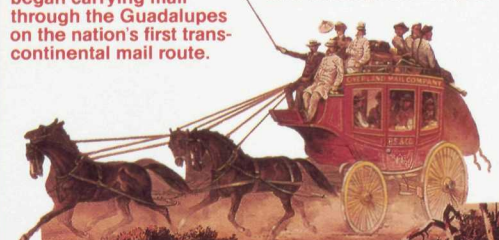
Williams Ranch  
Cathy J. Rudy

Apaches did not welcome the intrusion of new people into their domain. In 1849 the U.S. Army began a campaign against them that was to last three decades. The Guadalupe became the Apaches' only sanctuary from the soldiers and a staging ground for their own attacks. By 1880 the last of the Apaches had been driven out of the Guadalupe.

Wallace Pratt, a brilliant petroleum geologist who was charmed by the rugged beauty of the Guadalupe. In 1959 Pratt donated his land to the National Park Service so it could be preserved and enjoyed by others. Additional land was later purchased from J.C. Hunter, and in 1972 Guadalupe Mountains National Park was created by an act of Congress.

Amidst this conflict, Butterfield stagecoaches began carrying mail through the Guadalupe on the nation's first trans-continental mail route.

The Butterfield Stage  
Denver Public Library, Western History Dept.



## The Desert

The bloom of a cactus flower . . . the thunder-and-light show of a summer storm . . . the quick movement of a coyote in the distance . . . a lizard basking in the warming morning sun . . .

At the foot of the Guadalupe Mountains lie the sparsely populated plains of the Chihuahuan Desert. Only a small portion of this desert is actually preserved within the park, but this vast arid realm dominates views from the mountains. The Chihuahuan Desert receives between 10 and 20 inches of rain a year; in the summer, temperatures rise to 90°F and above. Although it can



Claret-cup cactus  
Tom Algire

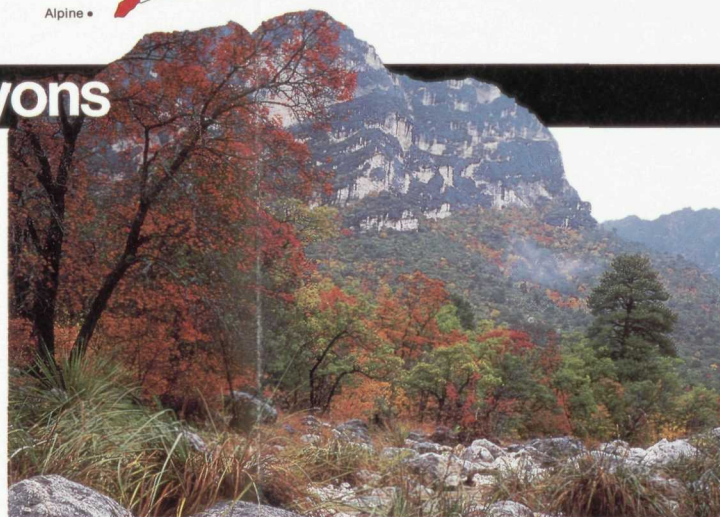
look barren at first glance, the desert is full of life. Many of the Chihuahuan Desert's most common plants and animals are found in the park. Agaves, prickly pear cacti, walking-stick chollas, yuccas, and sotol are abundant, and lizards, snakes, kangaroo rats, coyotes, and mule deer are seen frequently. Adaptation to this demanding environment is the key to survival.

The collared lizard is one of many animals that has adapted to the demanding conditions of the Chihuahuan Desert. Like many other reptiles, it escapes the mid-day heat by concentrating most of its daily activities in the cooler morning and evening hours. Snakes and many mammals commonly move about only at night.



## The Canyons

Fall colors brighten McKittrick Canyon each year. Maple, walnut, ash, oak, and chokecherry trees grow here and in other shaded canyons of the park where moisture is plentiful.



Tom Algire

The reflection of tall trees in a sparkling pool . . . rugged walls of rock towering to the sky . . . a mule deer browsing quietly at the edge of a patch of woods . . . brightly colored fall leaves rustling in the wind . . .



On a hike through the twisting gorge of McKittrick Canyon you can witness a transition from desert to forest. Near the mouth of the canyon, desert plants and animals predominate. As you travel further along, the canyon narrows and its walls loom higher. Lush vegetation abounds in this cool, moist setting. Along spring-fed McKittrick Creek deciduous trees, wildflowers, and ferns grow. Further up canyon, the first few trees of the highlands—pines and firs—appear. Animals dwelling in these upper reaches of the canyons are those typical of Southwest woodlands and forests.

Moderate temperatures and protection from the sun and wind provided by the high cliff walls nurture this canyon community. McKittrick Canyon also has a feature no other canyon in the park has—a perennial spring-fed stream. Grey oak, velvet ash, bigtooth maple, and other shade trees border the clear creek, and mule deer drink from its pools. In late October and early November, the trees' foliage turns brilliant reds, yellows, and oranges, creating a scene reminiscent of more northern woods. McKittrick Canyon exudes a lushness that is rarely found in this part of Texas.

Among the trees found in the canyons is the rare and picturesque Texas madrone. It is easily identified by its smooth, reddish-colored bark and evergreen leaves. Clusters of white flowers appear in early spring. In autumn, brilliant red berry-like fruits ripen, providing food for many birds.



Robert and Linda Mitchell

Mule deer  
Hiram L. Parent



## The Highlands

The solitude of a mountaintop pine-fir forest . . . the bugle of a bull elk in autumn . . . sweeping views from rocky 8,000-foot-high peaks . . . the stealthy prowl of a mountain lion . . .

In the mountain highcountry of the Guadalupe thrives a dense forest of ponderosa pine, southwestern white pine, Douglas-fir, and aspen. This predominantly coniferous forest is a relic of ancient times about 15,000 years ago when the prevailing climate throughout Texas was cooler and moister. As the climate warmed, fragments of this forest survived in the higher elevations of some southern mountains such as the Guadalupe. The forest is especially lush in the Bowl, a 2-mile-wide depression atop the Guadalupe Mountains. Throughout this highland wilderness roam elk, mule deer, raccoons, wild turkeys, vultures, mountain lions, and black bears.



Elk range throughout the highcountry and down into the canyons and lower slopes of the Guadalupe. An estimated 50 to 70 elk inhabit the park. The present-day herd grew from groups of animals brought from Wyoming and South Dakota in the 1920s. The native population, which probably was never very large, was driven to extinction in the early 1900s by the encroachment of man and other human activity. Elk within the park are protected from all but natural predators such as the mountain lion (shown below). Robert P. Carr

El Capitan, a park landmark  
Jim Bones





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## Safety and Regulations

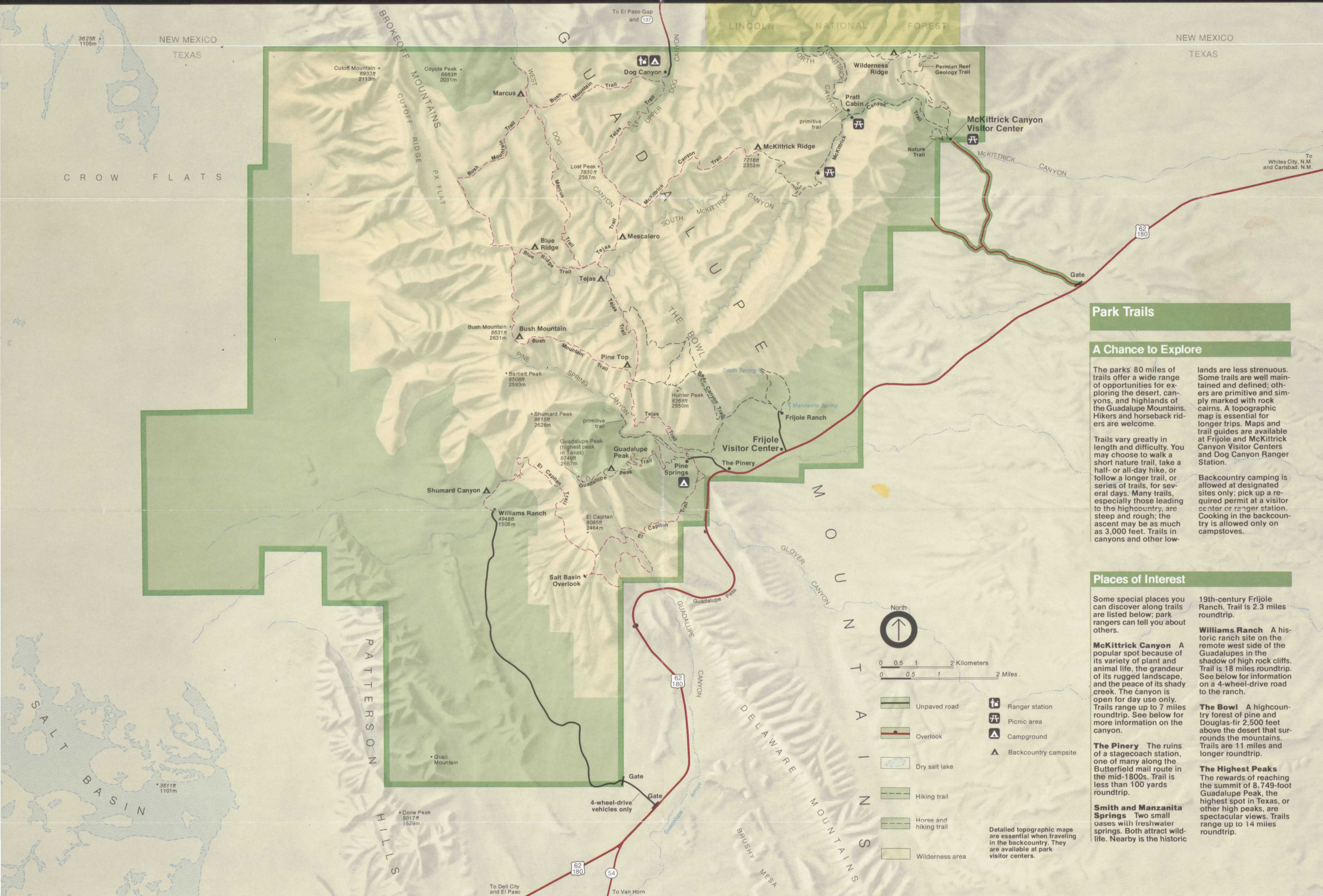
Sudden changes in the weather are common in the park. High winds up to 60 to 80 miles per hour—or higher—can occur in the mountains and are particularly prevalent in the spring. Thunderstorms occur most often in late summer, bringing

with them the danger of lightning; avoid exposed open areas during a storm. Hikers and other backcountry travelers should carry one gallon of water per person per day and stay on trails. Climbing cliffs is dangerous; the rock is unsta-

ble and considered unsafe even for technical climbers. All plants, animals, fossils, and other natural and historical objects are protected; do not damage or remove them. Pets must always be leashed. They are not allowed on trails or in the

backcountry. Beware of cacti, rattlesnakes, scorpions, and desert centipedes.

Western diamondback rattlesnake



## Park Trails

### A Chance to Explore

The park's 80 miles of trails offer a wide range of opportunities for exploring the desert, canyons, and highlands of the Guadalupe Mountains. Hikers and horseback riders are welcome.

Trails vary greatly in length and difficulty. You may choose to walk a short nature trail, take a half- or all-day hike, or follow a longer trail, for several days. Many trails, especially those leading to the highcountry, are steep and rough; the ascent may be as much as 3,000 feet. Trails in canyons and other low-

lands are less strenuous. Some trails are well maintained and defined; others are primitive and simply marked with rock cairns. A topographic map is essential for longer trips. Maps and trail guides are available at Frijole and McKittrick Canyon Visitor Centers and Dog Canyon Ranger Station.

Backcountry camping is allowed at designated sites only; pick up a required permit at a visitor center or ranger station. Cooking in the backcountry is allowed only on campstoves.

## Places of Interest

Some special places you can discover along trails are listed below; park rangers can tell you about others.

**McKittrick Canyon** A popular spot because of its variety of plant and animal life, the grandeur of its rugged landscape, and the peace of its shady creek. The canyon is open for day use only. Trails range up to 7 miles roundtrip. See below for more information on the canyon.

**The Pinery** The ruins of a stagecoach station, one of many along the Butterfield mail route in the mid-1800s. Trail is less than 100 yards roundtrip.

**Smith and Manzanita Springs** Two small oases with freshwater springs. Both attract wildlife. Nearby is the historic

19th-century Frijole Ranch. Trail is 2.3 miles roundtrip.

**Williams Ranch** A historic ranch site on the remote west side of the Guadalupe in the shadow of high rock cliffs. Trail is 18 miles roundtrip. See below for information on a 4-wheel-drive road to the ranch.

**The Bowl** A highcountry forest of pine and Douglas-fir 2,500 feet above the desert that surrounds the mountains. Trails are 11 miles and longer roundtrip.

**The Highest Peaks** The rewards of reaching the summit of 8,749-foot Guadalupe Peak, the highest spot in Texas, or other high peaks, are spectacular views. Trails range up to 14 miles roundtrip.

## Visitor Centers

Information on Guadalupe Mountains National Park is available at park visitor centers. Frijole Visitor Center has brochures, books, trail guides, maps, exhibits, a slide program, schedules of ranger-guided walks, talks, and other park activities, and rangers who can assist you in planning your visit. The center, which is open daily, also has restrooms and drinking water. Information, restrooms, and drinking water are also available at McKittrick Canyon Visitor Center and at Dog Canyon Ranger Station. For more information, write: Guadalupe Mountains National Park, 3225 National Parks Highway, Carlsbad, NM 88220; or call (915) 828-3251.

## McKittrick Canyon

One of the park's most popular areas is McKittrick Canyon. In the canyon you can hike a trail, enjoy a variety of plants and wildlife, and picnic beneath the

One of many flowering plants that you may see in the Guadalupe Mountains is the yucca. Yuccas, like all other plants and animals in the park, are protected. Do not disturb or injure them.

Michael Allender



canyon's high cliffs. In autumn, you can enjoy the spectacular fall colors. Picnic areas have tables, but no water; fires are permitted only in campstoves. The canyon is open only during daylight hours. The access road is closed at the entrance from U.S. Highway 62-180 each night.

**Camping** Camping is permitted all year on a first-come, first-served basis at Pine Springs and Dog Canyon Campgrounds. Both have sites for tents and recreational vehicles, as well as water, handicap-accessible restrooms, and tables. Charcoal grills are provided at Dog Canyon; at Pine Springs, only campstoves are allowed. Camping fees are charged at Pine Springs but not at Dog Canyon. Backcountry camping is allowed; see "A Chance to Explore" above.

Camper at Pine Springs Campground can enjoy an impressive view of the Guadalupe Mountains without leaving their campsite. Nearby trails lead to the highcountry. Rangers give evening programs at the campfire circle daily in the summer and less frequently during the rest of the year.



## Four-Wheel-Drive Trips

The 7-mile road to historical Williams Ranch is open only to 4-wheel-drive vehicles. (See description of the site above under "Places of Interest".) Persons wanting to travel this road must obtain a key to the entrance gates at the Frijole Visitor Center.

## Accommodations and Services

The park does not have lodging, food, or gasoline. Gasoline and limited groceries are available along U.S. Highway 62-180 near the park. White's City and Carlsbad, New Mexico, 35 and 55 miles respectively to the northeast, have motels, campgrounds, restaurants, stores, and gasoline. Dell City, Texas, 45 miles west of the park, has restaurants, gasoline, and stores. Van Horn, Texas, 75 miles south of the park on State Highway 54, and El Paso, Texas, 110 miles west of the park on U.S. Highway 62-180, have full services.

Many hundreds of fossils of ancient marine plants and animals have been found in the Guadalupe. If you find a fossil, enjoy studying it but leave it where you find it. Geologists use fossils to piece together the history of the ancient Capitan Reef.

