

# Guadalupe Mountains

Guadalupe Mountains National Park  
Texas

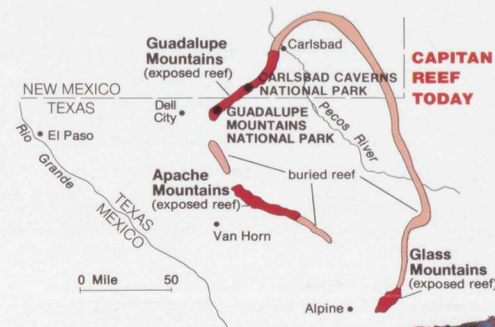
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

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 visit from around the world to marvel at this extraordinary natural phenomenon,

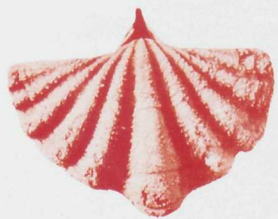
which formed about 250 million years ago. During this time a vast tropical ocean covered portions of Texas and New Mexico. Over millions of years, calcareous sponges, algae, and other lime-secreting marine organisms, along

with lime precipitated from the seawater, built up to form the 400-mile-long, horseshoe-shaped Capitan Reef.

Eventually the sea evaporated. As the reef subsided, it was buried in a thick blanket of sediments

and mineral salts. The reef was entombed for millions of years until a mountain-building uplift exposed part of it. This ancient reef complex now towers above the Texas desert in the Guadalupe Moun-

tains. Other parts of the reef are exposed in the Apache Mountains and the Glass Mountains.



Brachiopod fossil of the Guadalupe Mountains  
Smithsonian Institution

## Guadalupe Peoples

Nde (Mescalero Apaches), westward-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 Nde, 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



Nde (Mescalero Apache)  
Museum of New Mexico

The ruins of the Pinery stagecoach station are a reminder of this service.

In the years that followed, ranches developed around the Guadalupe. Wallace Pratt, a petroleum geologist charmed by the



Williams Ranch Cathy J. Rudy

and the Nde 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 only sanctuary from the soldiers and a staging ground for their own attacks. By 1880 the last of the Nde had been driven out of the Guadalupe.

Amidst this conflict, Butterfield stagecoaches began carrying mail through the Guadalupe on the nation's first transcontinental 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 howl of a coyote at dusk . . . a lizard basking in the warm morning sun. . . .

Surrounding the Guadalupe Mountains are the sparsely populated plains of the Chihuahuan Desert. This vast arid realm extends south for hundreds of miles into Mexico. 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 look barren at first glance, the desert is full of life. Many of



Claret-cup cactus Tom Algire

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, coyotes, and mule deer are seen frequently. Adaptation to this demanding environment is the key to survival.

Like many other reptiles, the collared lizard escapes the midday heat by concentrating most of its daily activities in the cooler morning and evening hours. Snakes and many mammals move about more frequently at night.



## The Canyons

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



Tom Algire



On a hike through the twisting gorge of McKittrick Canyon you can see the transition from desert to forest.

The reflection of tall trees in a sparkling pool . . . rugged walls of rock sheltering a streamside woodland . . . a mule deer browsing quietly at the edge of a patch of woods . . . brightly colored autumn leaves rustling in the wind. . . .

The deep, sheer-sided canyons of the Guadalupe Mountains shelter an impressive diversity of plants and animals. This variety of life is displayed in its greatest splendor in McKittrick Canyon, which has been described as "the most beautiful spot in Texas." Lying as it does between the desert below and the highlands above, McKittrick, like other canyons, has a mix of life that is part desert, part canyon woodland, and part highland forest. Prickly pear cacti, agaves, willows, ferns, Texas madrones, Texas walnuts, alligator junipers, and ponderosa pines all grow in the canyon. Wildlife includes jackrabbits, coyotes, porcupines, grey foxes, mule deer, mountain lions, and elk.

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

Robert and Linda Mitchell



Moderate temperatures and protection from the sun and wind provided by the high cliffs nurture this canyon community. McKittrick Canyon's unique, spring-fed stream is bordered by grey oak, velvet ash, and bigtooth maple. Mule deer drink from its pools. In late October and early November the foliage turns to brilliant reds, yellows, and oranges, creating a scene reminiscent of more northern woods. McKittrick Canyon exudes a lushness that is rare in this part of Texas.

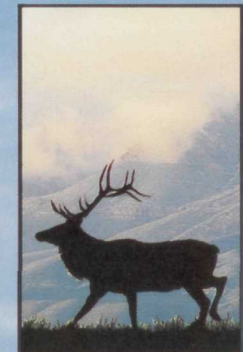
Mule deer  
Hiram L. Parent



## 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 . . . tracks that tell of a mountain lion's passing. . . .

In the mountain highcountry of the Guadalupe thrives a dense forest of ponderosa pine, southwestern white pine, Douglas-fir, and aspen. This conifer forest is a relic of 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 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, black bears, golden eagles, and peregrine falcons.



Robert P. Carr

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 herd grew from groups of animals brought from Wyoming and South Dakota in the 1920s. The original population, which probably was never very large, was hunted to extinction in the early 1900s.

Mountain Lion  
Robert P. Carr

El Capitan  
Jim Bones





# Guadalupe Mountains

## Safety and Regulations

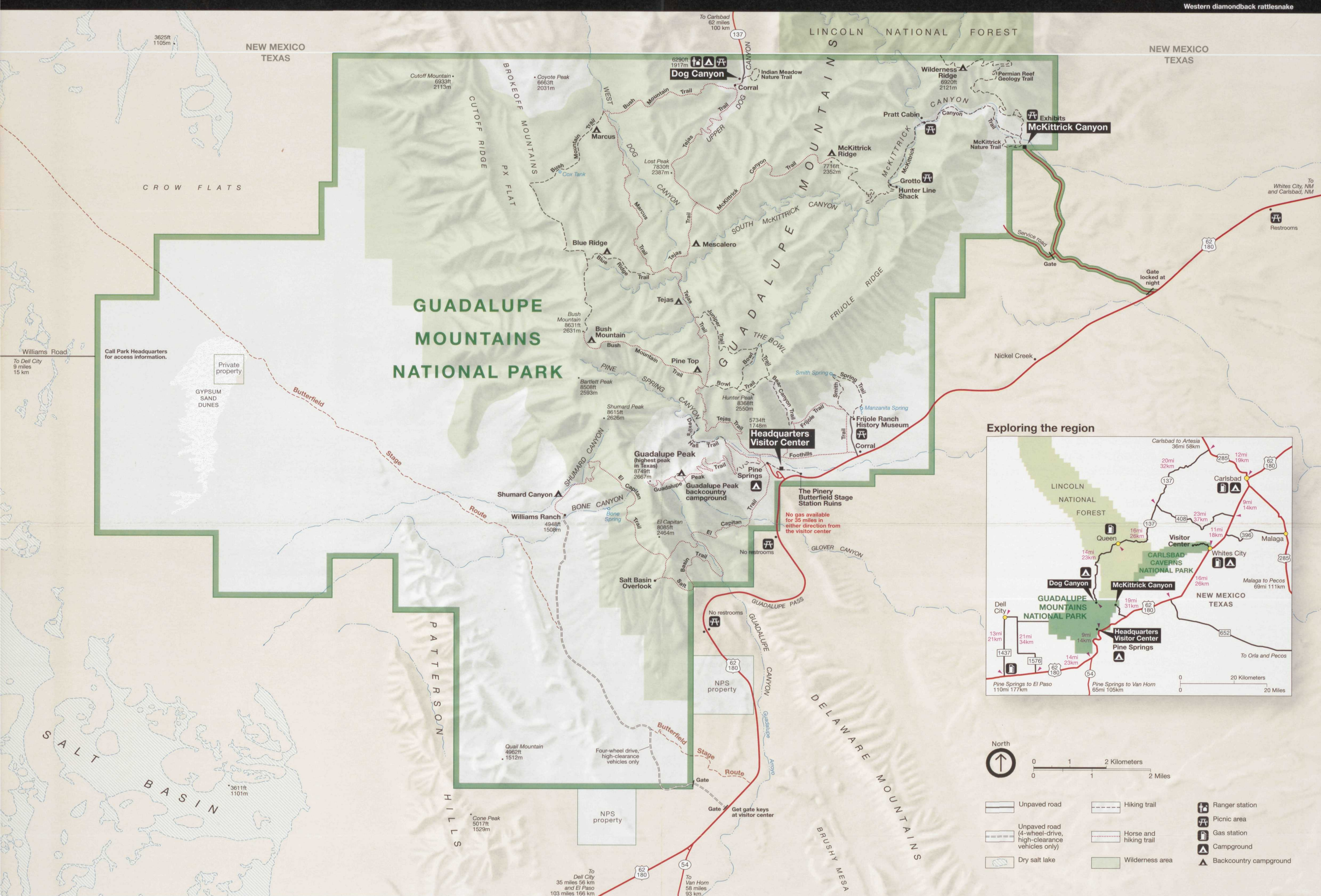
Sudden weather changes are common. High winds are prevalent in the spring. Thunderstorms with lightning are frequent in the summer. Avoid exposed open areas during storms.

Hikers should carry one gallon of water per person per day. Stay on trails. Climbing cliffs is dangerous; the rock is unstable. A permit is required for all technical climbing.

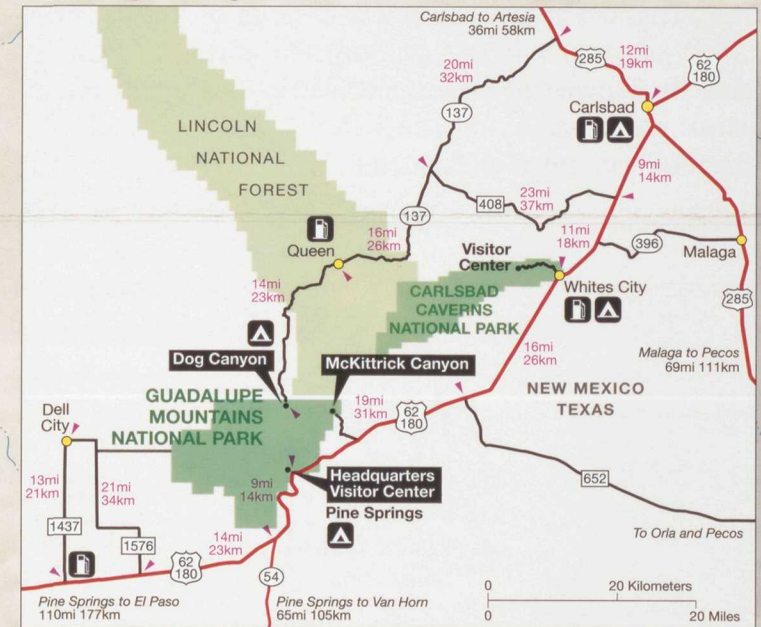
Watch for cacti, rattlesnakes, scorpions, and desert centipedes. All park features are protected by law. Do not deface or remove natural or historic objects. Do not pick wildflowers or other plants or feed or

molest wildlife. Wood and charcoal fires are prohibited. Campstoves are allowed. Pets must be leashed at all times and are not allowed on trails.

Western diamondback rattlesnake



## Exploring the region



## Planning Your Visit

The park is located in west Texas on U.S. 62/180, 110 miles east of El Paso and 55 miles southwest of Carlsbad, New Mexico. The nearest food, lodging, and gasoline services are 35 miles northeast on U.S. 62/180 at Whites City.

The Headquarters Visitor Center at Pine Springs, open daily except December 25, has restrooms, drinking water, brochures, books, trail guides, maps, exhibits, a slide program, and activity schedules. Information, restrooms, and drinking water are also available at Dog Canyon and McKittrick Canyon.

## Activities

**Backpacking** There are 10 backcountry campgrounds; a free permit is required, available at the Headquarters Visitor Center or Dog Canyon. No

water is available in the backcountry. Cooking is allowed only on campstoves. Pets are prohibited.

**Camping** Camping is available year-round on a first-come, first-served basis at Pine Springs and Dog Canyon campgrounds. Both have water, fully accessible restrooms, tables, and sites for tents and recreational vehicles (no dump station). Fee.

**Frijole Ranch History Museum** Learn about the people who have lived in and around the Guadalupe Mountains. The site includes a springhouse, milkhouse, schoolhouse, bunkhouse, and barn. Free of charge; open intermittently.

**The Pinery** Here are the ruins of a stagecoach station, one of many along the Butterfield overland mail route in the mid-1800s. Ruins may be



reached directly off U.S. 62/180, or by paved trail from the Headquarters Visitor Center; the 0.7-mile round-trip trail is wheelchair accessible.

**Williams Ranch 4-wheel-Drive Trip** The 7-mile road to historic Williams Ranch is open only to 4-wheel-drive vehicles. The road partially follows the historic Butterfield route and leads to a remote ranch site in the shadow of the mountain's western escarpment. To visit, borrow a key to the entrance gates at the Headquarters Visitor Center.

## Park Trails

The park's 80 miles of trails offer a wide range of opportunities for exploring. Hikers and horseback riders are welcome; 60 percent of the park trails are open to horse use. Trails vary greatly in length and difficulty. Trails leading to the highcountry are

steep and rough; the ascent may be as much as 3,000 feet. Desert and canyon trails are less strenuous. Pets and bikes are prohibited on trails or in the backcountry.

**McKittrick Canyon** Hike this trail for its variety of plant and animal life, the grandeur of its landscape, and the peace of its shady creek. Historic Pratt Cabin lies 2.3 miles into the canyon. Stay on the trail and out of the fragile stream. The gate to the area is locked at night.

**Smith and Manzanita Springs** These two oases attract birds and other wildlife. The 2.3-mile Smith Spring Trail starts at the Frijole Ranch museum.

**Guadalupe Peak** Spectacular views reward those who reach the summit of 8,749-foot Guadalupe Peak, the highest in Texas. The trail is 8.4 miles round-trip from the Pine Springs trailhead.

**The Bowl** This is a highcountry forest of pine and Douglas fir 2,500 feet above the surrounding desert. The shortest trail is 9 miles round-trip.

## More Information

Guadalupe Mountains National Park is part of the National Park System, one of more than 380 parks that are examples of our nation's cultural and natural heritage. For information write: Guadalupe Mountains National Park, HC 60, Box 400, Salt Flat, TX 79847-9400; call 915-828-3251; FAX 915-828-3269; e-mail gumo\_superintendent@nps.gov; or visit [www.nps.gov/gumo](http://www.nps.gov/gumo).