

*The Senita Cactus.*

**HELP PROTECT YOUR MONUMENT**

This is a magnificent outdoor museum which preserves an outstanding section of the Sonoran desert. Because it belongs to future generations as much as it does to us, we have the obligation to pass it on to others in its natural and unspoiled condition. To help accomplish this, we ask that you:

Leave all rocks, minerals, animals, plants, wood, and Indian remains just as you find them;

Camp only in designated campgrounds;

Drive only on established roads and turn-outs.

**ADMINISTRATION**

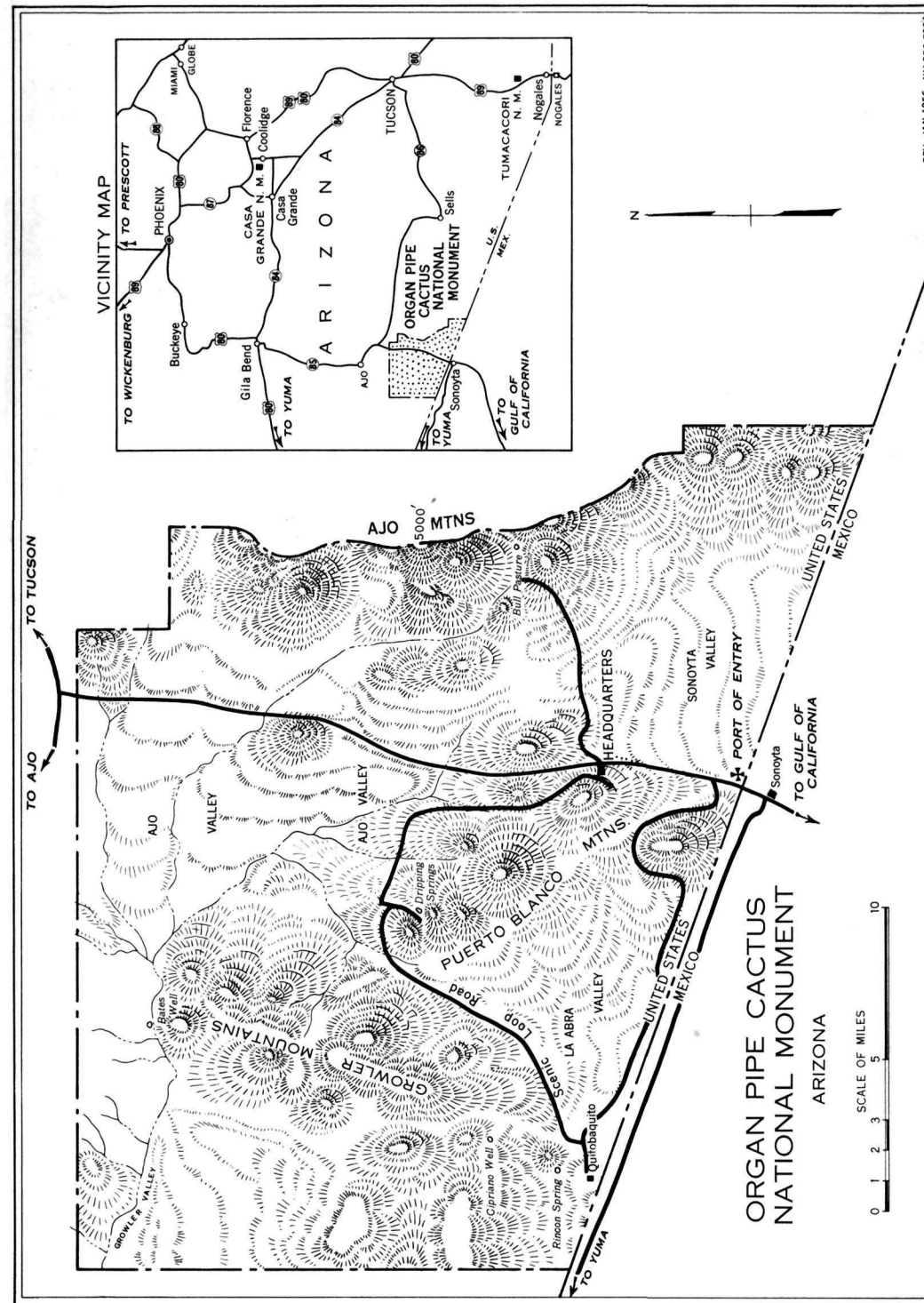
Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument was established by Presidential proclamation in 1937 and now has over 328,000 acres of Federal lands. It is administered by the National Park Service of the United States Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is P. O. Box 38, Ajo, Ariz., is in immediate charge.



UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Douglas McKay, *Secretary*

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, Conrad L. Wirth, *Director*

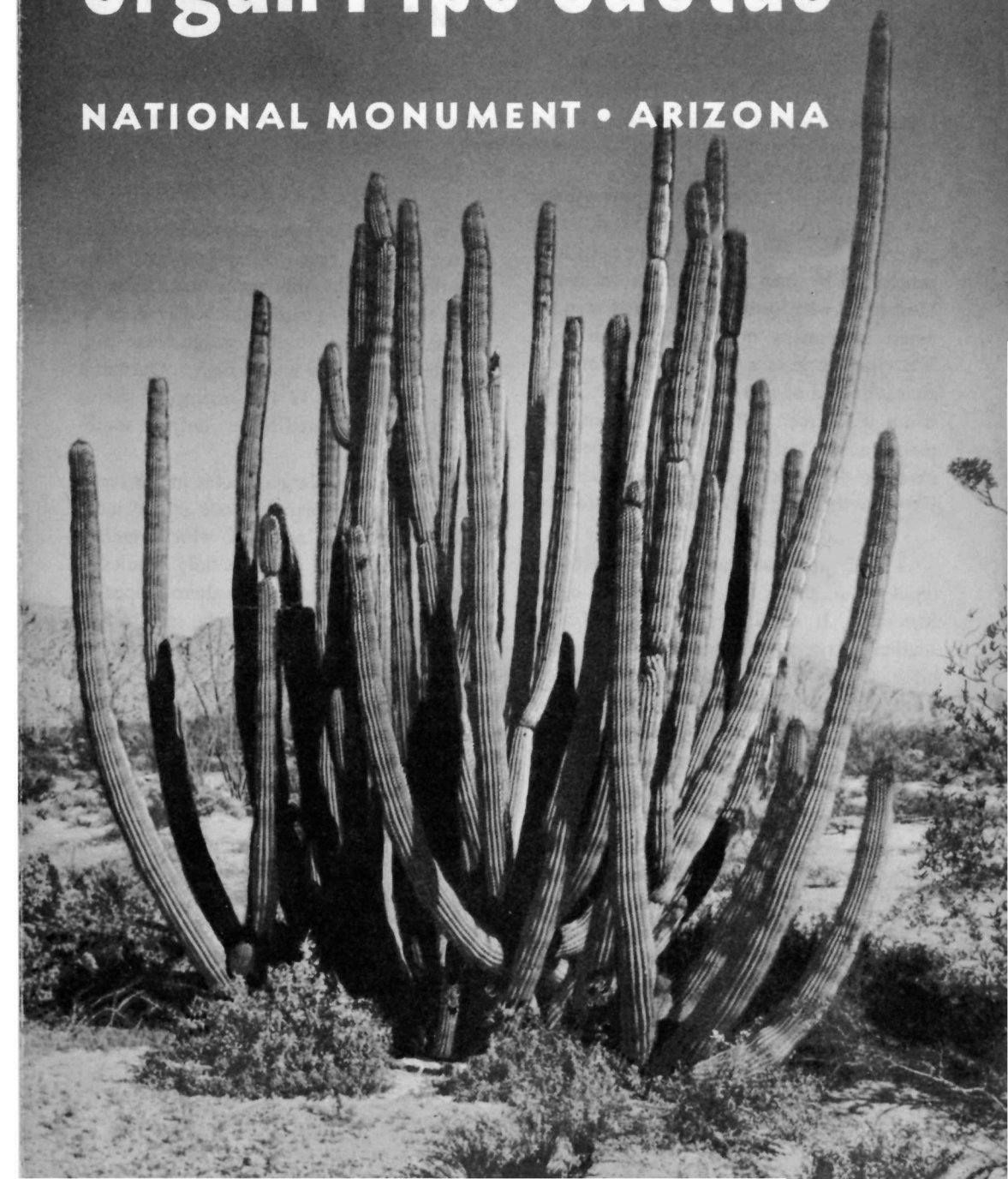


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# Organ Pipe Cactus

NATIONAL MONUMENT • ARIZONA





# Organ Pipe Cactus

## NATIONAL MONUMENT



*Magnificent natural expanse of desert, with its plants and animals, some occurring nowhere else in this country*

The deserts of the world constitute a major part of the earth's land area, yet because they are arid and forbidding, they have been little penetrated by man except in recent years. Most of us who have not previously seen the desert have many misconceptions about it. We visualize it as a tractless waste of sand almost devoid of plant or animal life. This is not at all true. Of course, plant and animal life has had to specialize to meet the exacting demands of an arid environment; but, nonetheless a great variety of life does exist there.

One of the most unusual and interesting types of desert in the United States is the Sonoran. It dominates northern Mexico, southern Arizona, and southeastern California. Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument was established in order to preserve a part of this remarkable landscape in its natural state for the people of the United States.

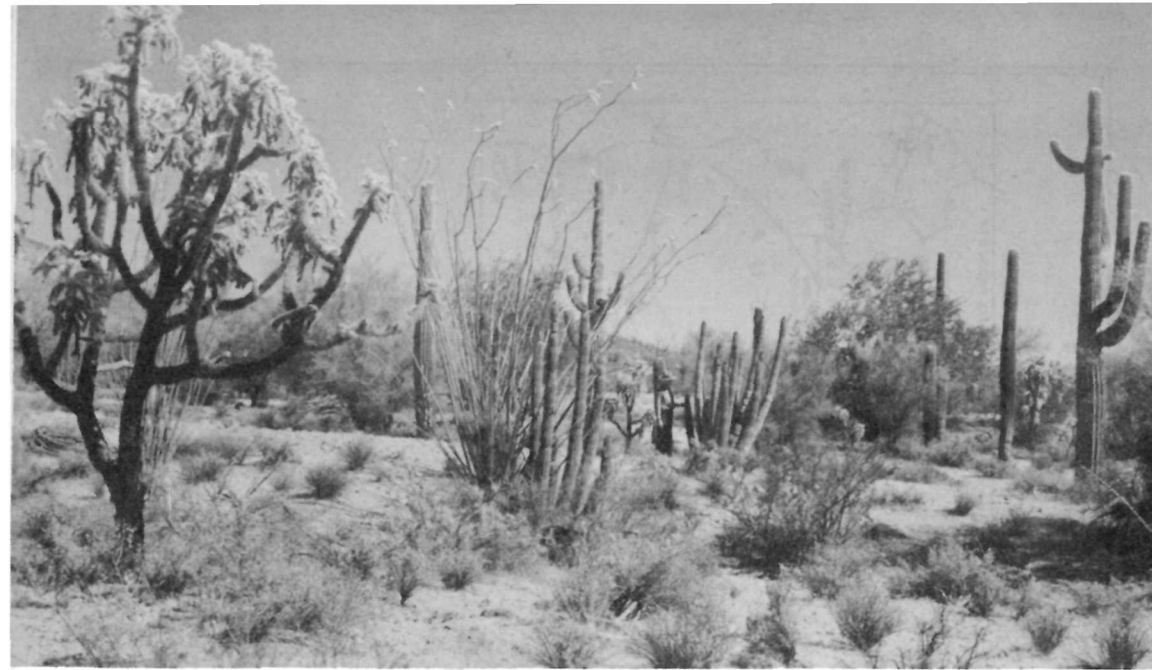
Although named after the unusual and interesting organpipe cactus, the monument portrays a complete segment of desert landscape. It preserves the wild beauty of the desert mountains, the vast stretches of the surrounding bajadas (outwash plains), the variety and grotesqueness of the desert vegetation, and the wildlife adapted to it.

### DESERT PLANT LIFE

The Sonoran type desert is the home of the cactus family. Some 30 species have been identified within the monument, ranging from the giant saguaro, which may grow to 50 feet in height to the insignificant pin-cushion, only a few inches high. Outstanding among these is the organpipe cactus found, in the United States, only in south-central Arizona.

It is the second largest cactus in our country. One plant may produce 30 or more unbranched arms, some of which reach a height of 20 feet. It grows only in suitable locations, mainly on the southern slopes of hills and mountains. It can be seen to best advantage near monument headquarters and on the Ajo Mountain Drive. In late May blossoms of the organpipe cactus appear at the branch tips and occasionally on the sides of the stems. The lavender-tinged white flowers open at night and close soon after sunrise the next morning.

The senita, which means "old one," is the rarest cactus in the monument. It somewhat resembles the organpipe in that it branches at ground level. It differs in having only a few ribs or ridges on the branches, and also in having long, weak spines at the tips of the



*A Display of Desert Vegetation.*

larger branches. The senita is found in the southwestern part of the monument along the sandy washes that drain into Mexico. Also in the monument are several species of cholla, barrel, hedgehog, and pricklypear cactuses; each in its own particular habitat.

To think of the desert vegetation only in terms of cactuses would be to neglect a host of other interesting plants. This desert is noted for the wealth of its Sonoran plant life, not just for the amount of vegetation, but also, for the great variety. Among the more interesting larger plants are the ocotillo, palo-verde, mesquite, desert ironwood, catclaw, Mexican-jumpingbean, crucifixion-thorn, smoke tree, and elephant tree. It is the smaller perennials and annuals that, following a wet winter season, quickly transform the desert into a veritable flower garden.

During March and April, parts of the desert are carpeted with masses of wildflowers of different hues. Golden desert poppy, magenta owllover, blue lupines, yellow

encelia, and desert marigold, and apricot-tinged mallow occur in solid colors or blended in a delicate pattern.

The cactuses and small perennials and annuals have solved the problem of survival in an arid climate in various ways. The study of these desert plants is fascinating and intriguing.

### ANIMAL LIFE

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument offers an unusual variety of habitat, each particularly suited to some form of animal life. From the moist fern-clad cliffs at Dripping Springs and the rocky stream banks at Alamo Canyon to the dusty creosotebush flats of La Abra Plain, and from the sandy washes of the Sonoyta Hills to the windswept crests of the Ajo Mountains, there are great differences in moisture, exposure, and temperature conditions. All these have bearing on the plant and animal life. These varied habitats account in a measure for the biological wealth of this part of the desert.

Many forms of animal life take advantage of the food and cover provided by the great abundance and variety of plants here. For some species of birds, such as the lark bunting and the gambel sparrow, this is a winter home. For others, of which the white-winged dove and the pyrrhuloxia are examples, it is a summer home. Many, such as the gambel quail and the noisy cactus wren, are year-round residents. A great many water and shore birds not normally seen in the desert are attracted by the spring-fed pond at Quitobaquito. This desert pond contains a unique species of fish—the Pursey minnow.

A few of the more interesting mammals are the peccary (wild pig), deer, antelope, coyote, fox, and kangaroo rat. Contrary to popular belief which associates reptiles with the desert, snakes and lizards are not numerous here. However, there is a variety of reptiles, including the colorful Gila monster and desert tortoise.

### HISTORY

Although only recently developed by American enterprise, this isolated corner of the Southwest was the scene of considerable activity in the early Spanish period. Melchior Diaz, of the Coronado expedition, passed this way in 1540—the first white man to see this strange land. A century and a half later the intrepid Jesuit, Father Kino, established the San Marcel Mission at what is now the nearby Mexican village of Sonoyta.

Father Kino first traversed the route between Sonoyta and Yuma, a route so arduous and devoid of watering places that it later became known as El Camino del Diablo, literally, the Devil's Road. Generations later, in 1849, this route was marked by the bleached bones of men and beasts of burden which fell by the wayside from the struggling California-bound caravans during the historic gold rush. The spring at Quitobaquito,

which lies in the southwestern corner of the monument, was one of the principal watering places along the camino.

In 1853, under terms of the Gadsden Purchase, this territory was acquired by the United States.

### LOCATION

The monument is on the Mexican border, 150 miles south of Phoenix via U. S. 80 and State Route 85, and 150 miles west of Tucson via State Routes 86 and 85.

### FACILITIES

Facilities within the monument are limited to a free campground near headquarters and a service station at Lukeville, 5 miles south of headquarters. Meals, supplies, and overnight accommodations are available in Ajo, 35 miles north of headquarters.

In order to preserve natural conditions, no wood gathering is permitted. Campers should carry camp stoves and fuel.

### WHAT TO SEE AND DO

Two graded scenic drives from headquarters provide access to some of the more remote and interesting sections of the monument. The 40-mile loop road will take you to Dripping Springs, the historic pond at Quitobaquito, and through the area where the senita cactus grows. The Ajo Mountain Drive enables you to see spectacular stands of organpipe cactus, saguaro, ocotillo, and other desert vegetation, and leads to the base of the scenic Ajo Mountains. This drive is 18 miles round trip, and is self-guiding by means of a descriptive booklet which may be obtained at headquarters. Ask a park ranger for information about some of the interesting hikes and other drives available.

During the winter, the monument staff presents a series of illustrated evening programs and campfire talks.

The National Park System, of which this area is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the scenic, scientific, and historic heritage of the United States for the benefit and enjoyment of its people.