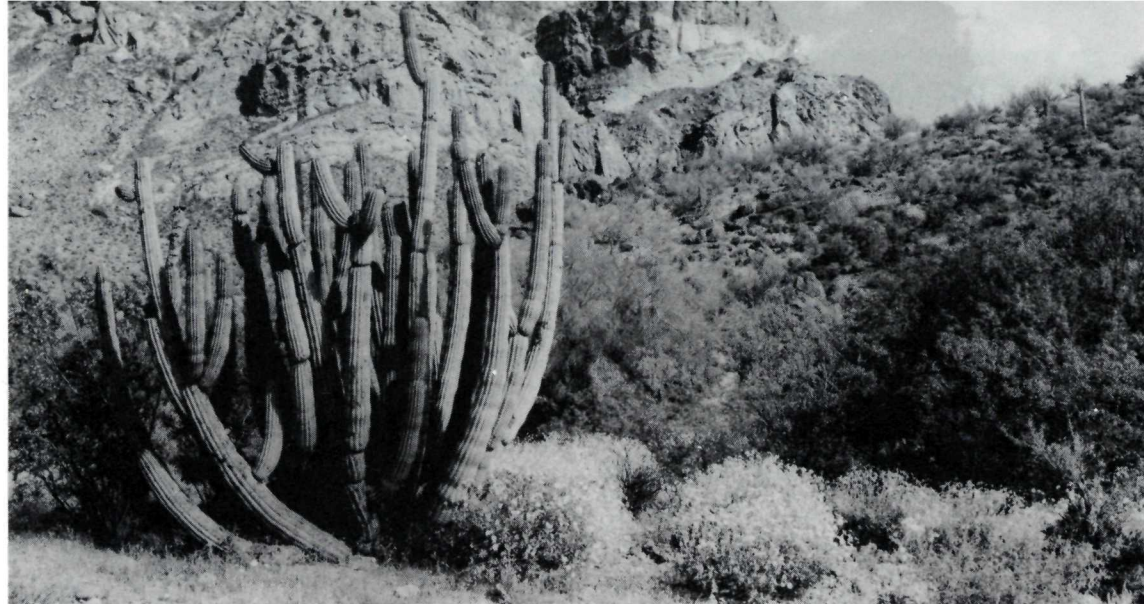


# Organ Pipe Cactus

NATIONAL MONUMENT  
ARIZONA



Organ Pipe Cactus, with its varying desert plantlife and rocky cliffs, was established to protect rare vegetation and animal life.

This park, named for a species of cactus rare in the United States, protects and preserves desert plants, animals, and natural features in a segment of the Sonoran Desert landscape that stretches from northwestern Mexico to southeastern California. Stark mountains, sweeping outwash plains, rocky canyons, creosotebush flats, and dry washes typify this beautiful but seemingly harsh land.

The geologic landscape upon which this arid natural community thrives is part of the Basin and Range physiographic province. The valleys and basins of the park were not formed by stream cutting or glaciation. Rather, the process began with fracturing of layers of volcanic rock and tremendous pressures thrusting up extensive blocks of rock creating sharp, staggered ridges with deep troughs in between. Then summer thunderstorm-caused erosion left a series of rock and gravel fans around canyon mouths filling in those troughs. Eventually those fans joined, forming continuous apron or sloping outwash plains called bajadas.

## WHERE DESERTS CONVERGE

The plant-defined extensions of three deserts meet in this place: the upland Arizona Succulent Desert from the east, the central Gulf Coast phase of the Sonoran Desert from the south, and the California Microphyll Desert from the west. These deserts not only meet but tend to intermingle. Although the descriptions below delineate the vegetation of each distinct desert, you'll often see typical plants of two different deserts growing nearly side-by-side.

The *upland Arizona Succulent Desert* extends throughout the eastern half of the park. Stately stands of saguaro, organpipe and prickly pear cactus, chain-fruit and teddybear cholla, and agave populate this type of desert. These succulent plants specifically populate the upper bajadas and the foothills leading into the Ajos, the Puerto Blancos, and the eastern slopes of the Bates Mountains. Such desert trees as ironwood, palo verde, and mesquite serve as "nurse

trees" for young succulents. This plant community also supports significant concentrations of wildlife. The Ajo Mountain Drive provides access to typical plants of this biotic community.

The *Central Gulf Coast phase of the Sonoran Desert* stretches northward from Mexico's Gulf of California coast into northern Sonora where it meets the upland Arizona Succulent Desert as it reaches south of the border into Mexico. This desert phase contains a plant community of bizarre and distinctive plants: the boojum and elephant tree, the cardon and senita cactus along with the organpipe. Only the senita and organpipe cactus, and the elephant tree extend their ranges across the international boundary and enter the park. You can find good examples of the elephant tree and senita cactus in the Senita Basin, reached from a short side road off the Puerto Blanco Drive in the extreme southern part of the park.

The *California Microphyll Desert*, named for the small-leaved plants which typify this plant community, extends from the west. Creosotebush and bur-sage comprise 80 percent of this biotic community, which can be seen on the extreme west side of the park west of the Bates Mountains and the Cipriano and Quitobaquito Hills.

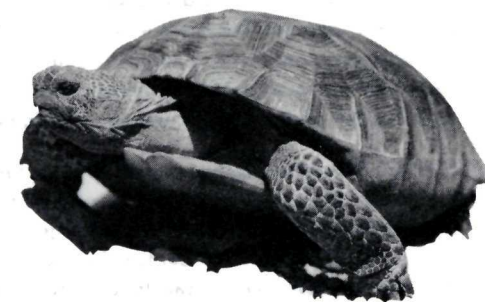
## ANCIENT PEOPLES AND MODERN MAN

The park contains a human history nearly as rich as its natural history. Stone implements, pottery fragments, and remains of ancient campsites offer evidence of prehistoric cultures as much as 12,000 years old. Within historic times, Quitobaquito Springs served as a major watering place for the Sand Papagos.

For about 300 years, beginning in the mid 1500s, various Spanish explorers, missionaries, and colonizers moved back and forth through this segment of desert. Noted among them were Melchior Diaz, who in 1540 was en route to the Colorado River; Father Eusebio Kino, who founded Mission San Marcelo near Sonoita, Senora, in 1701; Father Garces on his way from Magdalena to the mouth of the Gila River in 1772; and Juan Bautista De Anza's expedition seeking to open a road into California from northwest Mexico in 1774. Padre Kino made famous the most well-known of

these routes across a nearly waterless stretch of Sonoran Desert from Sonoita and Quitobaquito to present-day Yuma. Garces and De Anza also later used the route, and floods of California-bound gold-seekers doggedly traveled it from 1849 to 1860. Heat, thirst, and bandits exacted such a heavy toll in human and animal lives that the route earned a new name, *Camino del Diablo* —the Devil's Highway.

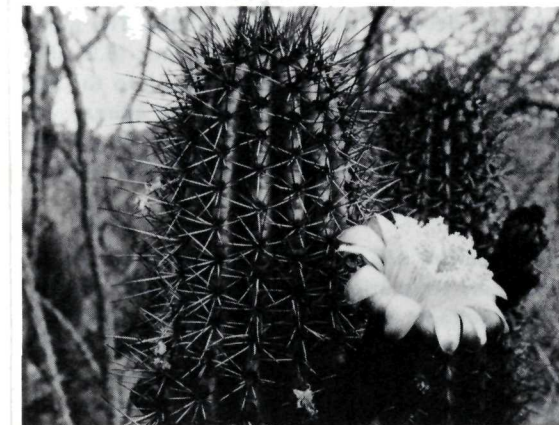
Through the late 1800s and early 1900s mining and ranching developed, with special adaptations to this desert environment. In ranching, for instance, cattle roundups in this rugged desert are nearly impossible, so mesquite and ironwood corals with unique one-way gates enclosing the few precious water tanks answer the same needs. Buildings and structures of these unusual mining and ranching operations exist along the Puerto Blanco Drive and the *Camino de dos Republicas* (the Highway of the Two Republics).



Many desert mammals and reptiles escape the heat by hunting only at night. An exception is the desert tortoise, which forages for plants during the day.

## SEASONS

Winter days are usually sunny and warm, though infrequent gentle rains, occasional sub-freezing nighttime temperatures, and chilly winds occur during December, January, and February. Clear skies and progressively hotter days are the rule during April, May, and June. From July through September, humid air from the Gulf of Mexico occasionally brings violent thunderstorms that account for about one-half of the 24 centimeters (9.5 inches) of annual rainfall. Temperatures from about 35° to 40° C (95° to 105° F) are common in the summer. Although winds may be expected any time of the year, duststorms are mild and rare.



In May and June, the organpipe cactus produces pink lavender blossoms that open after dark and close soon after sunrise.

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## HOW TO REACH THE PARK

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument lies on the border of the United States and Mexico, 225 kilometers (140 miles) south of Phoenix via U.S. 80 and Arizona 85, and 229 kilometers (142 miles) west of Tucson via Arizona 86 and Arizona 85. Access to the park from Mexico is via Mexico Route 2 from the west and Mexico Routes 2 and 8 from the South.

## ADMINISTRATION

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, established on April 13, 1937, and containing 1,336 square kilometers (516 square miles) is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Box 38, Ajo, AZ 85321, is in immediate charge.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

National Park Service  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

## HOW TO SEE THE PARK

Your first stop should be the visitor center, 27 kilometers (17 miles) south of the park entrance, where National Park Service personnel can help you plan your visit. Here you can obtain literature and study exhibits that explain the desert and describe the forms of life it supports.

**INTERPRETIVE SERVICES.** Illustrated talks on the history and natural aspects of the area are given often during the winter and less frequently during the spring and fall. A variety of talks, conducted walks, and other special programs are also offered. Times and locations of all interpretive services are posted in the visitor center and at the campground.

**SCENIC DRIVES.** Two graded scenic loop drives lead through the more remote and interesting sections of the park. Both drives begin at the visitor center, where you can obtain guide booklets that will introduce unusual plants and other features you will find along the way. The roads dip and wind, but you may drive safely over them by traveling at a cautious, leisurely pace. Both drives have one-way portions to consider before entering; see map for one-way and two-way traffic systems.

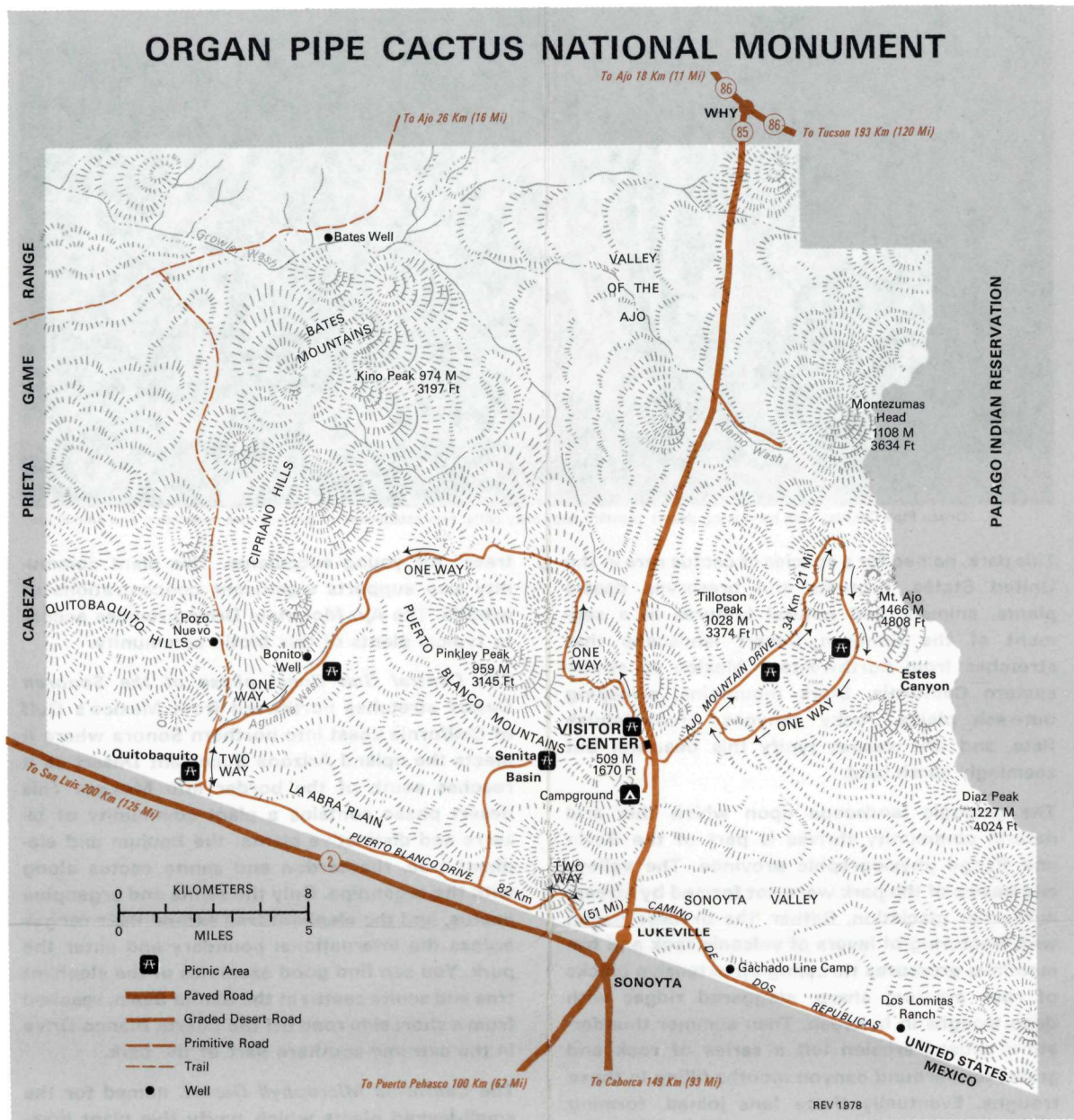
*The Ajo Mountain Drive* provides a series of outstanding desert views. You travel close to the massive walls within the canyons of the Ajo Mountains and see many species of cactus, including some of the more impressive stands of the organpipe. Average time for this one-way, 34-kilometer (21-mile) trip is 2 hours.

*The Puerto Blanco Drive* parallels historic routes of early desert travelers as it circles the colorful Puerto Blanco Mountains and skirts the northern border of Mexico. Short side roads lead to a man-made oasis at Quitobaquito and a display of senita cactus in Senita Basin. Allow at least one-half day for this 82-kilometer (51-mile) trip.

**TRAILS AND HIKING.** The trail encircling the campground provides a leisurely and pleasant after-dinner walk of about 1.6 kilometers (1 mile). For those who want a longer walk, there is the 2.4-kilometer (1.5-mile) trail between the campground and the visitor center.

The Desert View Nature Trail, a 1.6-kilometer (1-mile) self-guiding trail with leaflet, leads from the campground to a nearby ridge overlooking the surrounding desert of the Sonoyta Valley. The more strenuous Estes Canyon Trail system (5.5 kilometers or 3.4 miles round trip) leads into the Ajo Mountains, an area rich in plant and animal life. This trail, or portions of it, may be closed for the protection of wildlife. Check locally before entering.

**Cross-country hiking.** The sparse, open nature of the desert vegetation makes cross-country hiking possible almost anywhere in the park. Park rangers can suggest trips based on their personal knowledge of the area and your interests. Always register and obtain a permit at the visitor center before attempting climbs or long hikes. Check back in when you return. Please observe the rules on your permit.



**PHOTOGRAPHIC TIPS.** The high temperatures and extreme heat of the desert can drastically affect the photographs you take. Keep cameras and extra film in the shade and as cool as possible; direct sun rays with their intense heat can destroy film. Intense reflected desert light during the heat of the day can fool you and cause over-exposed pictures. You'll be able to take photographs with the best contrasts in the morning and late afternoon. During the summer, the best time for pictures is further restricted to early morning and early evening. Check at the visitor center for more help and tips.

**VIEWING WILDLIFE.** Inhabitants of this desert have made many adaptations to conserve adequate body moisture and regulate body temperature. These adaptations have caused two distinct communities—those living things that can be seen only in the coolness of night (nocturnal) and those that are visible during daylight hours (diurnal). Kit foxes, ringtailed cats, kangaroo rats, bobcats, and most snakes are nocturnal creatures. Even the delicate blossoms of the organpipe, saguaro, and night-blooming-cereus open only in the cooler night air and deteriorate in daytime heat. Diurnal dwellers, such as the javelina, rodents, white-

throated wood rats, bighorn, and most lizards, confine their activity mostly to early morning or late evening. The best place to look for the Sonoran pronghorn is along the park's western boundary in the California Microphyll Desert. Unlike other creatures, the adaptable coyote and desert tortoise, with its ability to convert and store water in its body, can be seen both day and night.

Birdlife thrives in the park. Birders have observed 35 permanent residents, including the cactus wrens, roadrunners, Gambel's quail, phainopeplas and curvedbill thrashers, and more than 260 migratory visitors, including orioles, most hummingbirds, warblers, and ducks. You'll be most likely to see great varieties of birdlife around wooded washes and water sources.

## ACCOMMODATIONS AND FACILITIES

There is a 208-site campground 2.4 kilometers (1.5 miles) south of the visitor center. Campers' mail should be addressed: General Delivery, Lukeville, AZ 85341. A motel, trailer park, campground, post office, grocery store, cafe, and service station are in Lukeville, 8 kilometers (5 miles) south. Similar facilities are at Why and Ajo to the north, and Sonoyta, Mexico, to the south.

## TRAVELING IN MEXICO

There is free access into Sonoyta and westward on Mexico Route 2. However, if you continue into the interior or go to Puerto Penasco, you must have a tourist permit and a car entry permit, both of which may be obtained from Mexican officials at the border. It is advisable to purchase Mexican auto insurance available at the border. To get a tourist permit, you must have proof of citizenship (birth certificate), and to get a car permit, you will need your automobile registration. To re-enter the United States with pets, you must carry proof of valid pet vaccinations. Transportation of firearms into Mexico is a violation of Mexican law.

## FOR SAFETY'S SAKE

To fully enjoy the desert, please take these precautions:

**Prepare for driving desert roads.** Be sure your car is serviced and tuned. Check your tires (including the spare) to make sure the air pressure is high enough. Hot, dry weather can deplete your radiator and battery water, so check them both frequently. Carry a shovel and 4 or 5 liters (a gallon or so) of extra water. In case of emergency during extremely hot weather, stay with your vehicle. If water is flowing across the road, do not try to drive through it. Wait until the water goes down—usually this takes about an hour. During the summer storm season (July and August), check at the visitor center for possible park road closures. When driving at night, be alert for wildlife and cattle on the roads.

**Beware of the cactus!** The spines of these plants and many other trees and shrubs give them natural protection, but they can cause you painful injury.

**Be prepared for desert walking.** For protection from the sun, rough terrain, and weather, you should have a hat and wear clothing and shoes that are comfortable and sturdy. Carry enough fresh drinking water (4 liters or 1 gallon per day per person). At night, walk carefully and use a flashlight to look for rattlesnakes in your path; six species are found in the park. Snakes play an important role in desert ecology and should not be harmed. Poisonous creatures such as rattlers and Gila monsters are rare, but if you see one, observe it quietly from a safe distance and report its location to a ranger.

## REGULATIONS

To help preserve this magnificent outdoor museum:

Leave all rocks, minerals, plants, wood, and Indian and historic artifacts just as you find them.

Do not molest wild animals, and observe them from a safe distance.

Camp only in the designated campground.

Do not burn native woods; such fires are prohibited.

Drive only on established roads and turnouts.

Place all your trash in litter cans.