



The Paisano

Big Bend National Park
Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River
Visitor Guide

Volume 38 Number 1 2018



Sunrise following an ice storm.

J. JURADO

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Free Park Movie

The park's 24-minute film "Life on the Edge" is played upon request at the Panther Junction Visitor Center.

Junior Ranger Program

Free Big Bend Junior Ranger activity books are available at any visitor center. Do you have what it takes to become a Junior Ranger?



Welcome to Big Bend

Welcome to Big Bend National Park and the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River! Over 800,000 acres await your exploration and enjoyment.

From an elevation of less than 1,800 feet along the Rio Grande to nearly 8,000 feet in the Chisos Mountains, Big Bend includes massive canyons, vast desert expanses, forested mountains, and an ever-changing river. Here you can explore one of the last

remaining wild corners of the United States. From the forests of the Chisos down to the floor of the desert, over 1,500 types of plants thrive in the park and support ecosystems full of pollinators, herbivores, and other wildlife.

Take a drive along one of Big Bend's roads, or hike a scenic trail, and discover just how much diversity and life there is in this amazing desert!

What can I see if I only have...

One Day:

Big Bend is *too big* to see in a single day, but a great one-day trip to the park might include a trip down the Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive and a visit to the Chisos Mountains.

The **Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive** will give you fantastic views of the Chihuahuan Desert landscape and will lead you to the Rio Grande. There are scenic overlooks and exhibits along the way, and the short walks to Sam Nail Ranch and Homer Wilson Ranch and a visit to the Castolon Historic District will give you a glimpse into Big Bend's past.

A highlight of the trip is the short walk into **Santa Elena Canyon**—one of Big Bend's most scenic spots. Drive 8 miles west from Castolon to the end of the road. You may return to the main road by returning on the Ross Maxwell Drive or on the **Old Maverick Road**, a 13-mile gravel road linking the Ross Maxwell Drive to the Maverick Entrance. Be sure to check on road conditions first.

In the Chisos Mountains, walk the 0.3-mile **Window View Trail** to get a feel for the mountain scenery. If time allows you might consider hiking the Window Trail or Lost Mine Trail for a closer look at Big Bend's mountain landscapes. The Fossil Discovery Exhibit located 8 miles north of Panther Junction is another park highlight that could easily fit into a one-day visit.

Three Days:

With three days to spend in the park, you can explore the major roads more thoroughly and still have time for hiking. You will also have plenty of time to stop at visitor centers and the Fossil Discovery Exhibit to learn more about the park.

In the Chisos Basin area, consider hiking the **Window Trail** (6 miles round trip) or the **Lost Mine Trail** (5 miles round trip). Consult page 5 of this paper for trail descriptions of these and other popular trails in the park that you might fit into your trip. Try to experience Big Bend's wilderness as much as possible.

In addition to the Basin and Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive (see suggestions for "one day"), you can drive to **Rio Grande Village**, perhaps stopping at Dugout Wells along the way to walk the short Chihuahuan Desert Nature Trail.

The Rio Grande Village Visitor Center offers exhibits and a small theater. Walk the Rio Grande Village Nature Trail, which begins near site #18 in the campground. The bluff overlooking the Rio Grande at the end of the nature trail is a particularly beautiful spot at sunset.

The Boquillas Canyon road will take you to Boquillas Canyon. At the end of the road is the **Boquillas Canyon Trail**, which takes you to the entrance of this spectacular canyon.

A Week:

With a week or more to spend in Big Bend, endless possibilities are open to you. You'll have plenty of time to explore the roads mentioned in the previous sections, and will also have time to hike or to drive some of the "**unimproved**" **dirt roads**. For these, you'll need a high clearance or four-wheel drive vehicle; don't forget to check at the visitor centers for current road conditions. The River Road, Glenn Springs Road, Old Ore Road, and Old Maverick Road are some of the more popular backcountry routes. A visit to **Ernst Tinaja** near the south end of the Old Ore Road is a Big Bend highlight.

If you don't have high clearance or four-wheel drive, **improved dirt roads** such as Dagger Flat and Grapevine Hills will get you "off the beaten path." Hike the Chimneys Trail, Mule Ears Trail, or Grapevine Hills Trail for a closer look at the desert environment.

If you'd like to explore the Chisos Mountains, trails to Boot Canyon, Emory Peak and the South Rim offer good views of the park and take you into another world which seems far removed from the desert. There are plenty of opportunities for overnight backpacking along these trails. A backcountry use permit is required and can be obtained at any park visitor center during normal business hours. See page 6 for more information.

Big Bend National Park
PO Box 129
Big Bend National Park, TX
79834



EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA™



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Big Bend National Park
Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River

The National Park Service was established on August 25, 1916, "... to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife... and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

Authorized by Congress in 1935 and established in June 1944, Big Bend National Park preserves the most representative example of the Chihuahuan Desert ecosystem in the United States.

Park Mailing Address

Big Bend National Park PO Box 129
Big Bend National Park, TX 79834

Phone

432-477-2251

Park Websites

www.nps.gov/bibe/
www.nps.gov/rigr/

On matters relating to the Paisano:

National Park Service
Editor, The Big Bend Paisano
PO Box 129
Big Bend National Park, TX
79834
bibe_info@nps.gov



The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA™

See Our Newest Exhibit!



Big Bend National Park is known as a geologist's paradise, and visitors now have the opportunity to learn more about the area's rich geologic history and fascinating fossil discoveries at the Fossil Discovery Exhibit.

The Fossil Discovery Exhibit is a self-guided interpretive museum that illustrates the changes to Big Bend's plants and animals, and the world they lived in, through 130 million years of geologic time. Specimens from the park's remarkable fossil record and full-color artwork help to illustrate the fascinating story of Big Bend's ancient life.

The exhibit is located 8 miles north of Panther Junction on the Persimmon Gap Entrance Road (Highway 385), and is open from dawn to dusk. There is a short geology-themed trail nearby and a shaded picnic area with an assortment of fossil-themed climbing structures for children. A vault toilet is available at the site (no water is available). Cellular telephones can generally get reception at the site.



The Fossil Discovery Exhibit located 8 miles north of Panther Junction.

Getting Outdoors

With diverse habitats to explore, hundreds of miles of trails to hike and the Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River to float, outdoor recreation is truly the best way to experience Big Bend.



River Trips

With three unique river canyons and miles of remote desert scenery to explore floating the Rio Grande in Big Bend can be an unforgettable experience. Canoes, kayaks, and rafts are allowed on the river. You may bring your own equipment, or you can hire a guide service. Local outfitters provide guide service, equipment rental, and up-to-date river information and conditions.



Hiking and Backpacking

Big Bend has over 200 miles of trails in the Chisos Mountains and desert terrain, with permits available for backpacking overnight within these beautiful habitats. Many trails are easy to moderate in difficulty but visitors should always be prepared for the dangers of high temperatures and high exposure to the elements. Carry lots of water (at least 1 gallon per day is recommended) and wear a hat, sunscreen, and proper clothing.



Scenic Drives and Backcountry Roads

If you have a high-clearance or four wheel drive vehicle, Big Bend's backcountry roads call for further exploration. There are over 200 miles of dirt roads in the park. Improved dirt roads like the Dagger Flat and Grapevine Hills roads are usually in good condition and accessible to normal passenger vehicles, except following rainstorms. Unimproved dirt roads, such as the Old Maverick Road, Old Ore Road, or the River Road, generally require high-clearance vehicles and/or four wheel drive.

Border Information

The deepest channel of the Rio Grande is the international border between the United States and Mexico. Passports are not currently required for river trips, but stepping onto the Mexican bank of the river, then returning to the U.S., constitutes an illegal border crossing. U.S. Border Patrol allows for exceptions to be made under emergency situations only, i.e., scouting, portaging, or lining.

Camping Overnight

Permits are required for overnight camping in the backcountry. There are 41 campsites along the Chisos Mountains trails, ranging from one to eight miles from the trailhead. These sites are designated to help reduce impact and damage to this delicate environment. Campsites have bear-proof boxes for storing food and other items. Backcountry opportunities outside of the Chisos Mountains may be available with proper equipment and well-researched plans.

Always inspect your vehicle and check current road conditions at a visitor center before traveling any of the park's primitive roads.

Big Bend's backcountry roads also offer opportunities for primitive camping in roadside campsites. Primitive sites offer excellent views, solitude, and a flat gravel space to camp next to your vehicle. Permits are required. See the backcountry camping section located on Page 6 for information on obtaining a backcountry permit.

Birding in Big Bend

The park is designated as a Globally Important Bird Area.

Big Bend National Park is famous for its birding, with more documented species of birds visiting the park throughout the year than any other unit in the National Park System (approximately 400). The park's diverse array of habitats ranging from the riparian corridor of the Rio Grande to the forested canyons of the Chisos Mountains present an attractive stopping point for birds traveling along major migratory paths that intersect the park.

A good rule of thumb for birding in Big Bend is to seek out areas where water and vegetation are most abundant, such as the Rio Grande, the Chisos Mountains, or the desert springs, some of which are accessible by car.

Generally the most active time for birding is in the spring when many species are migrating through the park. However, with patience, birding in Big Bend is rewarding throughout the year.

The riparian corridor at Rio Grande Village

offers some of the best year-round birding in the park. Consider walking the Rio Grande Village Nature Trail or visiting the Daniel's Ranch picnic area west of the campground. A similar habitat is accessible between Cottonwood Campground and Santa Elena Canyon on the park's west side.

The piñon-oak-juniper woodlands of the Chisos Mountains and their foothills also offer accessible, year-round birding, and attract many species of birds that would not otherwise be found here. It is well worth the effort to hike into the higher elevations. During early summer you may spot the sought-after Colima Warbler, which is only found outside of Mexico in the Chisos Mountains.

Patience, a good field guide, and knowledge of where to look are the keys to locating birds in Big Bend. A checklist of birds is available for purchase at any visitor center and is a great aid in determining which species are likely to be present and the habitats where they are found.

Birding Hot Spots

Panther Junction to Rio Grande Village

- Dugout Wells—shady cottonwood trees and a windmill at this desert oasis.
- Rio Grande Village Nature Trail—a boardwalk over the pond is an excellent area for water fowl.
- Daniels Ranch Picnic Area—the cottonwood trees provide excellent shade to both resident and migrant species.

Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive

- Sam Nail Ranch—a windmill and large trees attract birds to this historic ruin.
- Blue Creek Trail—a half mile from the Homer Wilson Ranch are the Red Rocks, an area known for hummingbirds.
- Cottonwood Campground—large trees here provide a haven for birds.

Chisos Mountains

- Basin area—many mountain birds can be found around the campground and Basin developed areas.
- Boot Canyon—the nesting area of the Colima Warbler and other species.
- South Rim—this 2000' cliff is known for falcons and swifts.

Safety and Travel Information



C. BALLLOU

Protecting Yourself and the Park

Big Bend may be wild and unfamiliar country, yet it need not be dangerous. Please spend a moment reviewing these common safety considerations and resource protection guidelines.

No Collecting

It is the mission of the National Park Service to preserve all natural and cultural resources unimpaired for future generations. Taking things like geodes or arrowheads, or collecting plants or animals robs everyone of this heritage—once something is stolen, it cannot be replaced.

Please, do not destroy, deface, injure, dig, collect, or otherwise disturb park resources including plants or animals (dead or alive), fossils, rocks, or artifacts. It is a violation to possess park resources. Please, take only pictures and leave only footprints.

Driving

Drive within the speed limit (maximum of 45 mph in most areas) and watch for wildlife grazing along the roadsides, especially at night. Park roads have limited shoulders and some are steep and winding and require extra caution. Remember, too, you share the road with bicyclists and pedestrians. Pull off the road to take pictures—do not stop or pause in roadways. Please, slow down...and enjoy!

Drones/Unmanned Aircraft

Launching, landing, or operating an unmanned aircraft is prohibited in Big Bend National Park.

Heat

The dry desert heat quickly uses up the body's water reserves. Carry and drink water—at least 1 gallon per person per day. As you exercise, you lose salt and water (over a quart and a half per hour during arduous exercise). You need both to survive in this extreme environment. Reduce alcohol and caffeine intake—the diuretic effects can result in accelerated loss of body water.

Protect your body—sensitive skin burns easily. Find shade, wear sunscreen, sunglasses, and a brimmed hat. Wear long-sleeves, trousers, and proper shoes.

Hiking

Trails vary from easy and well maintained to strenuous primitive routes. Plan hikes within your ability. Avoid ridges during thunderstorms, and canyons or creek beds when flash flooding is possible. Carry a flashlight and first aid kit, and let someone know where you are going and when you expect to return. If you get hurt or lost, stay in one place to conserve water and energy. Rest in shade if you can.

Please keep your children close; don't let them run ahead on trails.

Water Conservation

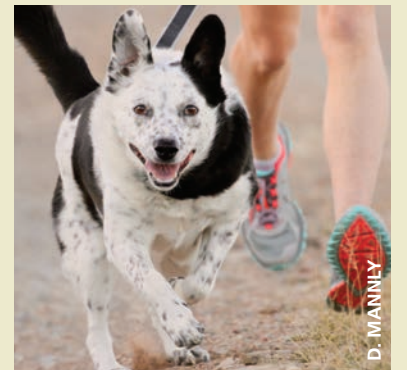
- Visitors are limited to 5 gallons of water per day and are encouraged to conserve further; please consider bringing some of your water from home.
- Be water-wise when using the restroom; don't let faucets run unnecessarily.
- Wash only what clothing items you need.
- Fill water jugs and bottles at Rio Grande Village whenever it is convenient.
- Consider topping off RV water tanks at your next destination.
- Take brief showers.
- Please report noticeable faucet or water leaks.
- Use backcountry water sources sparingly; leave backcountry springs for wildlife.

Wildlife

Observe Big Bend's wildlife from a distance. Wildlife is protected in the park; it is illegal to harass or harm wildlife. Never feed wild animals. Feeding wild animals damages their health, alters natural behaviors, and exposes them to predators and other dangers. Protect wildlife and your food by storing food and trash securely.

Venomous snakes, scorpions, spiders, and centipedes are active during warm months. Pay attention: check shoes and bedding before use and use a flashlight at night.

Pets in the Park



D. MANNLY

Having a pet with you may limit some of your activities and explorations in the park. Abiding by these pet regulations will ensure a safer, more enjoyable visit for yourselves, other park visitors, your pet, and the park's wildlife.

- Pets are not allowed on trails, off roads, or on the river. Your pet can only go where your car can go.
- Pets need to be on a leash no longer than six feet in length (or in a cage) at all times.
- You may not leave your pet unattended in vehicles if it creates a danger to the animal, or if the animal becomes a public nuisance.
- If you plan to hike someone must stay behind with the pet, or you will need to make arrangements with a kennel service. There is no kennel service in the park.
- Park regulations require that you always clean up after your pet and dispose of waste in trash receptacles.

Visiting Mexico

The Boquillas Port of Entry is open Wednesday to Sunday 9:00am-6:00pm (summer), 8:00am-5:00pm (winter).

Passport Requirement

Visiting Mexico through the park's Boquillas Crossing Port of Entry is an option for visitors possessing a valid passport. U.S. and Canadian citizens can also present a valid: U.S. Passport; Passport Card; Enhanced Driver's License; Trusted Traveler Program card (NEXUS, SENTRI or FAST); U.S. Military identification card when traveling on official orders; U.S. Merchant Mariner document when traveling in conjunction with official maritime business; or Form I-872 American Indian Card, or (when available) Enhanced Tribal Card. For complete information on travel documents visit the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative webpage.

U.S. and Canadian citizen children under the age of 16 (or under 19, if traveling with a school, religious group, or other youth group) need only present a birth certificate or other proof of citizenship. The birth certificate can be original, photocopy, or certified copy.

How do I get there?

Park at the Boquillas Crossing parking lot near Boquillas Canyon. After passing through the Port of Entry visitors are ferried across the Rio Grande on a small rowboat for a modest fee (\$5 round-trip as of 12/16). Walking across the river is permitted only at the Boquillas Crossing, but is not recommended if the river level is high.

Once across the river visitors have the option of walking to the village (1/4 mile) or paying an additional fee to ride on a burro, horse, or in a vehicle. Local guides are available. Visitors are required to check in with Mexican immigration officials upon arrival in Boquillas. Visitors planning to stay overnight in Mexico will need to apply for a temporary visa. Secure overnight parking at the Boquillas Crossing Port of Entry may be available.

U.S. currency is accepted in Boquillas though visitors are advised to bring smaller bills or rely on Boquillas vendors to provide change for their purchases. The Rio Grande Village



B. FROHBIETER

Store and the Rio Grande Visitor Center cannot make change for visitors travelling to Boquillas.

Border Merchants

Near the border, you may encounter small "souvenir stands," and Mexican Nationals may attempt to sell you their crafts. It is illegal to purchase these items. Items purchased illegally will be considered contraband and seized by officers when encountered. Port of Entry staff can answer questions about items that can be *legally* purchased and imported through the Port. By purchasing souvenirs legally, you support the citizens of Boquillas, make the river corridor safer for all visitors, and help protect the resources of this ecosystem.

Safety at the Border

Big Bend has a low incidence of crime reported. However in any remote or seldom-traveled location, it is important to consider personal safety and to secure valuables while away from your vehicle.

- Know where you are at all times and use common sense. Cell phone service may be limited in areas of the park.
- Keep valuables, including spare change, out of sight and lock your vehicle.
- Avoid travel on well-used but unofficial "social trails."
- Do not pick up hitchhikers.
- People in distress may ask for food, water, or other assistance. Report the location of the individuals to park staff or Border Patrol as soon as possible. Lack of water is a life-threatening emergency in the desert.
- Report suspicious behavior to park staff or the Border Patrol. Do not contact suspicious persons.
- Ask at the visitor center about areas where you may have concerns about traveling.

Places to Visit

Chisos Basin

A drive to the Chisos Basin is an excellent way to experience the transition between arid desert and cooler mountain habitats. As this scenic, winding road rises over two thousand feet above the desert floor, it offers vistas of the mountain peaks and the erosion-formed basin area.

Within the Chisos Basin area is a visitor center, campground, lodge, restaurant, gift shop, camp store, and miles of hiking trails.

With limited time, walk the Window View Trail for easy access to mountain vistas and a classic sunset view. If time permits, consider hiking (or backpacking) into the High Chisos to witness the towering forests of Boot Canyon or the unparalleled vistas of the South Rim.

Note: the road into the Basin is not suitable for RVs longer than 24' or trailers longer than 20'.



Rio Grande Village

The drive to Rio Grande Village traverses ancient limestone and has marvelous vistas of the magnificent Sierra del Carmens. Along the way is the oasis at Dugout Wells, and a spur road leads to the popular Hot Springs.

Continue the drive to Boquillas Canyon, where a short hike offers excellent views of the Rio Grande as it enters the canyon.

Rio Grande Village has a visitor center, campground, RV hook-ups, camp store, gas station, and picnic area.

Take a stroll (or a short drive) from the store to Daniels Ranch; this is a great area for birding. Picnic tables are near the historic ruins.

The Rio Grande Village Nature Trail crosses a wildlife viewing boardwalk, then gradually climbs the hillside, offering panoramic views of the river, Sierra del Carmens, and Crown Mountain. This is an excellent sunset vista.



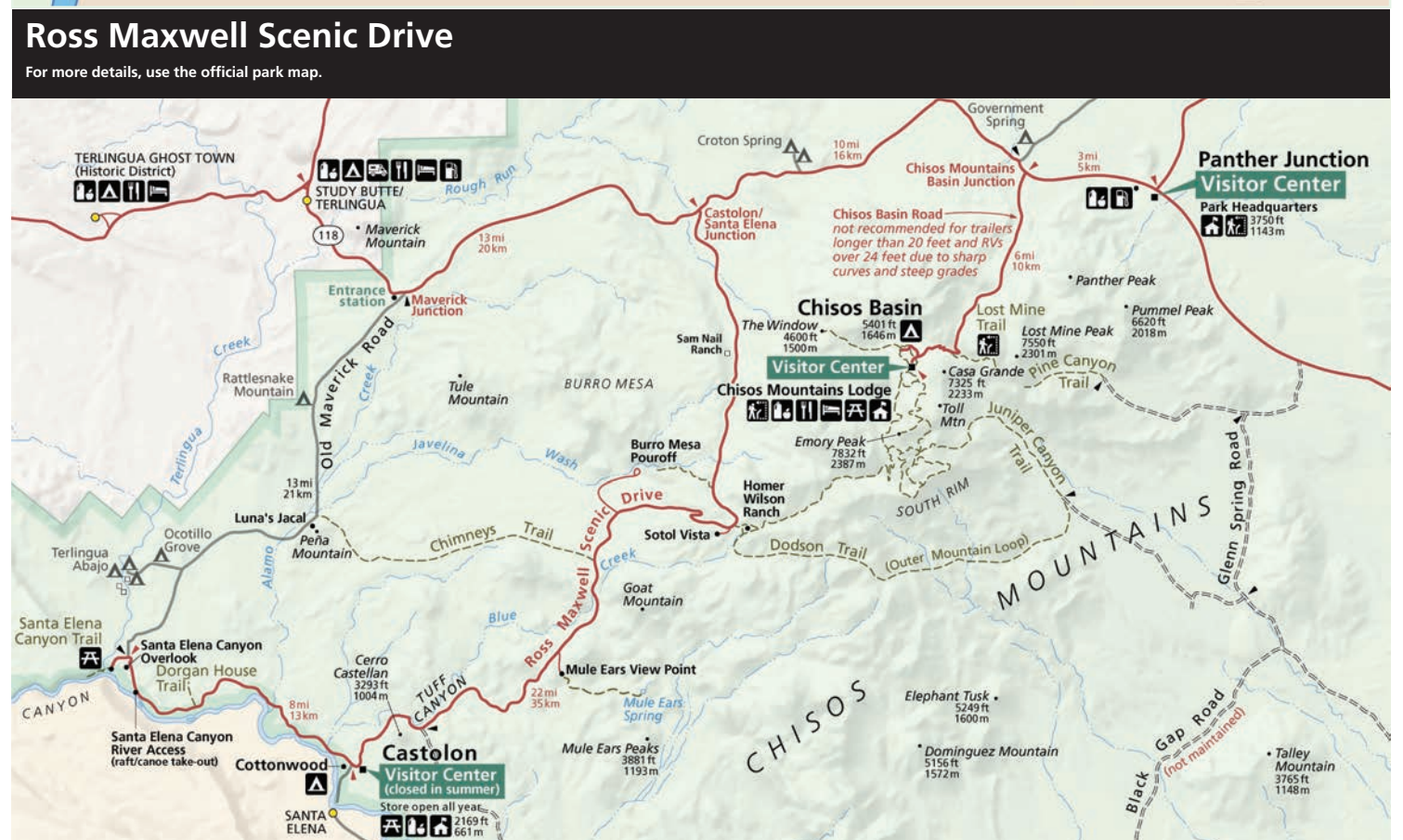
Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive

A trip along the Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive highlights the geologic splendor Big Bend is famous for and offers many scenic overlooks and exhibits along the way. Sotol Vista, Mule Ears Overlook, and Tuff Canyon are all worthwhile stops.

History is highlighted at Sam Nail Ranch, Homer Wilson (Blue Creek) Ranch, and the Castolon Historic Compound. Castolon has a visitor center, camp store, and nearby is the Cottonwood Campground.

Continue the drive to the magnificent Santa Elena Canyon, where limestone cliffs rise 1,500' above the Rio Grande. A short trail leads into the canyon.

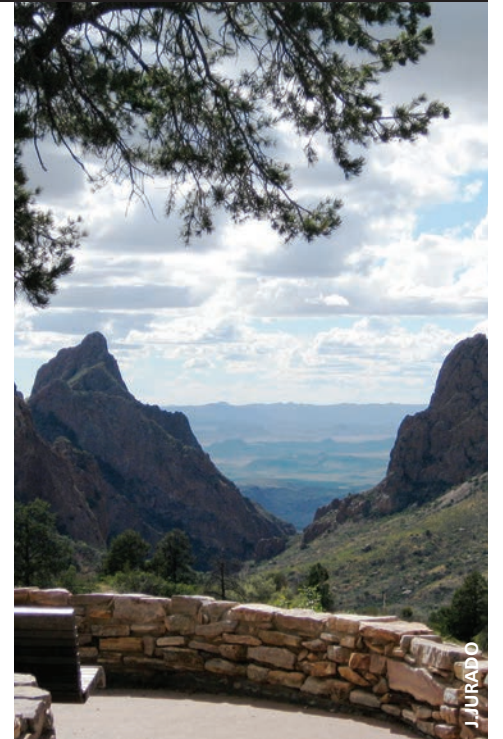
Return by the same route, or take the gravel Old Maverick Road to the western entrance of the park. This road is usually passable for most vehicles, but may be impassable after heavy rains. Check at a visitor center for current conditions.



Popular Trails

The Chisos Mountains *Smoking is prohibited on all trails in the Chisos Mountains.*

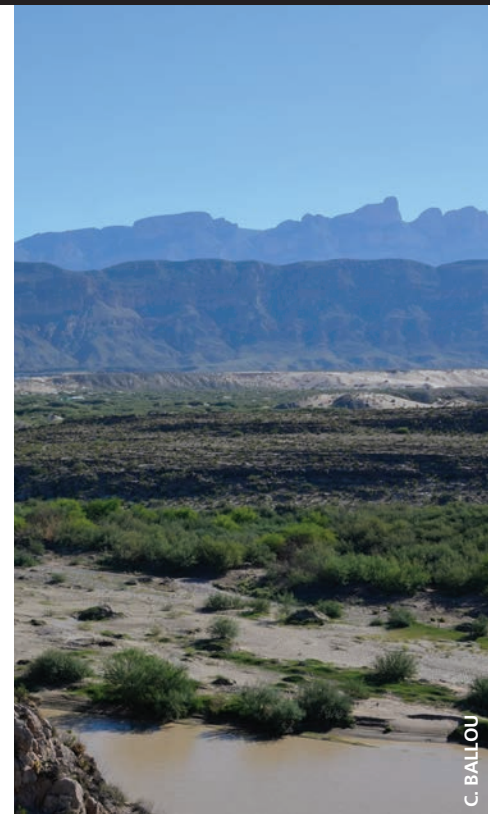
Trail	Trailhead Location	Round Trip (mi/km)	Avg Time	Elevation (ft/m)	Description
Basin Loop	Chisos Basin Trailhead (near the Basin Store)	1.8/2.6	1 hour	350/107	Moderate Connects the Laguna Meadow and Pinnacles Trails. Nice views of the Basin area.
Emory Peak	Chisos Basin Trailhead (near the Basin Store)	10.5/17	7 hours	2400/789	Strenuous Trail leads to the highest peak in the park, with excellent views. The end of the trail involves some moderate rock scrambling.
Lost Mine	Basin Road, mile 5 (at the pass)	4.8/7.7	3 hours	1100/335	Moderate Excellent mountain and desert views. For a shorter hike, 1 mile up is a great view to the southeast.
South Rim	Chisos Basin Trailhead (near the Basin Store)	12/19.4 15/24	8 hours 10 hours	2000/656 2000/656	Strenuous Trail leads to a 2000' cliff with incredible views of the desert below. Hike either the southwest rim, or add the northeast and southeast rim trails when open.
Window	Chisos Basin Trailhead or Basin Campground	5.6/9.0 4.4/7.0	4 hours 3 hours	980/299 500/152	Moderate Descends to the top of the Window pour-off. Great scenery and wildlife viewing. For a shorter hike, start from the Basin Campground (near campsite 51).
Window View	Chisos Basin Trailhead (near the Basin Store)	0.3/0.5	1/4 hour	0/0	Easy Level, paved, accessible. Great mountain views. Best place in the Basin to catch a sunset through the Window.



A viewpoint on the paved Window View Trail.

Eastside — Panther Junction and Rio Grande Village

Trail	Trailhead Location	Round Trip (mi/km)	Avg Time	Elevation (ft/m)	Description
Grapevine Hills Balanced Rock	6.4 miles down the Grapevine Hills Road	2.2/3.5	1 hour	240/73	Easy Follows a sandy wash through a boulder field. A short but steep climb near the end takes you to a large balanced rock. No shade.
Chihuahuan Desert Nature Trail	Dugout Wells	0.5/0.8	1/2 hour	10/3	Easy Loop trail with interpretive signs on desert ecology. Look for javelina tracks and resident birds.
Hot Springs	End of Hot Springs Road (unpaved narrow road)	0.75/1.2	1/2 hour	0/0	Easy Walk past historic buildings to the riverside hot spring. Enjoy a soak in 105°F water. <i>Hot Spring is subject to flooding during rising river levels.</i>
Boquillas Canyon	End of Boquillas Canyon Road	1.4/2.3	1 hour	40/12	Easy Begins with a short climb, then descends via a sandy path to the river. Ends near a huge sand dune "slide."
Daniels Ranch to Hot Springs Trail	Daniels Ranch parking area, west of Rio Grande Village	6/10	3 hours	100/31	Moderate Trail from Daniels Ranch to the Hot Springs. Cliff drop-offs prevent access to the river along most of the route. No shade.
Rio Grande Village Nature Trail	Rio Grande Village, across from campsite 18	0.75/1.2	1 hour	130/40	Easy First 300' leads to a wildlife viewing platform on a pond. Trail then climbs the hillside with views of the river and mountains. Great for birding and sunsets.



A view from the Rio Grande Village Nature Trail.

Westside — Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive

Trail	Trailhead Location	Round Trip (mi/km)	Avg Time	Elevation (ft/m)	Description
Sam Nail Ranch	Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive, mile 3	0.5/0.8	1/2 hour	10/3	Easy Well-maintained trail leads through the old ranch site. The combination of water and shade makes this an excellent birding location.
Lower Burro Mesa Pour-off	Burro Mesa Spur Road	1.0/1.6	1/2 hour	60/18	Easy Trail enters a dry wash and ends at the bottom of the dramatic Burro Mesa pour-off. A great walk for viewing geological features.
Chimneys	Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive, mile 13	4.8/7.7	2 hours	400/122	Moderate Flat and scenic desert trail to rock formations of an eroded dike. Look for Native American rock art and shelters. No shade.
Mule Ears Spring	Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive, mile 15	3.8/6.1	3 hours	20/6	Moderate Beautiful desert hike to a small spring. Spectacular geology with mountain and desert views.
Dorgan-Sublett Trail	Castolon to Santa Elena Canyon Road, near mile 5	1.0/1.6	1/2 hour	56/17	Easy This short easy trail leads to the ruins of historic farm houses owned by settlers in the early to mid-1900s.
Santa Elena Canyon	Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive, 8 miles west of Castolon	1.6/2.6	1 hour	80/26	Easy This trail crosses Terlingua Creek (usually dry) and gradually climbs up to an overlook before dropping to the river bank. Trail has some steep steps and can be very hot midday.



A view from the Santa Elena Canyon Trail.

Camping in the Park



Developed Campgrounds

Chisos Basin

The Chisos Basin Campground is surrounded by tall, rocky cliffs and conveniently located near some of the park's most spectacular and popular trails.

Open: Year-round

Details: 60 campsites (no hook-ups). \$14 per night (\$7 per night with applicable pass). Flush toilets, running water, grills, picnic tables, and dump station. Trailers over 20' and RV's over 24' are not recommended due to narrow, winding road to the Basin and small campsites in this campground.

Reservable Campsites: 26 sites are reservable from November 15–May 31. Contact www.recreation.gov, or call 1-877-444-6777.

Group Camping: 7 group campsites are available by advance reservation only. To reserve a group campsite, contact www.recreation.gov or call 1-877-444-6777.

Generator Hours: 8:00AM to 11:00AM and 5:00PM to 8:00PM.

Cottonwood

Cottonwood Campground is a quiet, shady desert oasis located between the Castolon Historic District and the scenic Santa Elena Canyon.

Open: Year-round

Details: 24 campsites (no hook-ups). \$14 per night (\$7 per night with applicable pass). Pit toilets, running water, grills, picnic tables, no dump station, no generators allowed. A small picnic area is available across from campsite #23.

Reservable Campsites: There are no reservable campsites in the Cottonwood Campground. All individual campsites are on a first come, first-served basis.

Group Camping: One group campsite is available by advance reservation only. Group campsite is walk-in tent camping only. To reserve the group campsite, contact www.recreation.gov or call 1-877-444-6777.

Generator Hours: No generators allowed.

Rio Grande Village

Set in a large grove of cottonwoods, the campground is adjacent to the Rio Grande. The RGV camp store and showers are within walking distance.

Open: Year-round

Details: 100 campsites (no hook-ups). \$14 per night (\$7 per night with applicable pass). Flush toilets, running water, picnic tables, grills, and some overhead shelters. Dump station nearby.

Reservable Campsites: 43 sites are reservable November 15–April 15. Contact www.recreation.gov or call 1-877-444-6777.

Group Camping: 4 group campsites are available by advance reservation only. Group campsites are walk-in tent camping only. Vehicle parking is restricted to an adjacent parking area. To reserve a group campsite, contact www.recreation.gov or call 1-877-444-6777.

Generator Hours: 8:00AM to 8:00PM.

Rio Grande Village RV

Open, paved lot with grassy, tree-lined edges. Adjacent to the camp store. This campground, operated by Forever Resorts, LLC, has the only full hook-ups in the park.

Open: Year-round

Details: 25 campsites. Concession-operated RV park with full hook-ups—water, electrical, and 3-inch sewer connection. \$36, double occupancy, with a \$3 additional per person charge. Periodically, a few sites may not be available for a 40' or longer RVs due to the size of the parking lot and orientation of the spaces.

Reservable Campsites: 20 sites are available by reservation, 5 are held for first come, first-served campers. Register at the Rio Grande Village store/service station, or call 1-877-386-4383, or 432-477-2293.

Developed Campgrounds at a Glance

	Elevation (ft/meters)	Sites	Nightly Fee	Facilities	Registration	Comments
Chisos Basin	5,401/1,646	60	\$14.00*	Flush toilets, dump station	Self-pay station	Surrounded by rocky cliffs; many hiking trails nearby.
Cottonwood	2,169/661	24	\$14.00*	Pit toilets, no generator use allowed	Self-pay station	In a cottonwood grove along the river. Grassy sites.
Rio Grande Village	1,850/564	100	\$14.00*	Flush toilets, dump station	Self-pay station	Along the river w/some shady sites. Laundry and showers nearby.
Rio Grande Village RV	1,850/564	25	\$36.00 and up	Full hook-ups	RGV Camp Store	Concession-operated; register at the RGV store.
			* \$7.00 with a lifetime interagency pass.	Observe posted campground quiet hours.		

Backcountry Camping and River Use

Primitive Roadside Campsites

All roadside sites are along unpaved roads. Some centrally located sites are accessible to most vehicles, however a high clearance and/or 4-wheel drive vehicle is necessary to reach those along the primitive dirt roads.

Sites offer a cleared gravel location to park your vehicle and set up a tent. There are no amenities at any backcountry campsite aside from

a large animal-proof box to store food and other items. Please plan to bring everything you need, including water, shade, chairs, and a trowel to bury human waste.

Please remember, campfires (all wood fires or ground fires) are strictly prohibited. Use cook stoves with caution. Generators are not allowed in backcountry areas, and pets must be kept on a leash within the boundaries of the camp site.

Backpacking

Big Bend National Park has over 200 miles of trails in the Chisos Mountains and desert terrain, with options for overnight backpacking within these beautiful habitats.

Chisos Mountains

There are 41 campsites along Chisos Mountains trails, ranging from one to eight miles from the trailhead. These sites are designated to

help reduce impact and damage to this delicate environment. Sites include a cleared area for a tent as well as a bear-proof storage box, which must be used to store all scented items. A permit for a specific site must be obtained prior to camping.

Wilderness Camping

Wilderness camping permits are available to experienced hikers intending to camp within the park's open desert areas.

Horse/Stock Permits

Stock permits are available for visitors who wish to ride horses in the park. All gravel roads are open to horse riders. Horses are not permitted on paved roads or the shoulders of the paved roads. Cross-country horse travel (not on some trails) is permitted throughout the park except the Chisos Mountains area. Horse use in the Chisos Mountains is limited to the Laguna Meadow, Southwest Rim to the Boot Canyon Trail Junction, and Blue Creek trails.

Backcountry riders must provide controlled overnight maintenance of their animals, including provision of commercial feed. Grazing within the park is not allowed. Check at a visitor center for additional information about stock use in the park.

Backcountry Permits



How to Obtain a Permit:

Permits are required for any overnight backcountry camping, river use, and stock use, and can be obtained at any visitor center during normal business hours. Please bring the license plate number of any vehicles involved in the permit.

- Backcountry permits are issued on a first-come, first-served basis and can be written up to one day in advance of the intended use.
- Permits can be written for up to fourteen consecutive nights from the first day of backcountry use, and can be modified but not extended.
- Backcountry use is subject to rules and regulations regarding sanitation and minimal impact practices that must be agreed to in order to obtain a permit.

Nature Notes



C. BALLOU

Panthers in the Park

By Jeannette Woerner, Park Ranger

Prowling through the tall grasses and rocky peaks, the mountain lion moves silently through the shadows. Seldom seen but often discussed, this elusive animal has lived in the Big Bend country for thousands of years. They've watched as prehistoric nomads set up camps, they've witnessed the boom and bust of 20th century ranching, and they've seen the creation of a national park. Their presence here is a mark of the wilderness that Big Bend has managed to preserve.

Like all top predators, mountain lions play a vital role in the maintenance of a diverse and sustainable ecosystem. Areas where mountain lions have been removed suffer from an overabundance of deer, which leads to overgrazing and erosion. This damage on the land destroys the habitats of other wildlife, reduces soil quality, and degrades natural biomes. Without mountain lions, the complex food web of an area can easily fall apart, which can have far-reaching and sometimes unexpected consequences on other wildlife communities.

Unfortunately, mountain lion range has been reduced severely as a result of predator control and habitat loss caused by humans. While they once roamed from coast to coast throughout the Americas, they have now been extirpated out of the eastern half of the U.S. Urban expansion is one of the top threats to mountain lions, but hunting is also a major danger. Today, mountain lion hunting is legal in most states, and Texas has no regulations or limits regarding the hunting of mountain lions. National parks such as Big Bend are the only areas in the state of Texas where this species is protected.

Of course, mountain lions have long been feared by humans—not only are they large, secretive ambush predators, they have also historically competed with humans for food sources like deer or cattle. Despite our fear, mountain lion attacks on humans are very rare. You are more likely to be struck by lightning, killed by bees, deer, or domestic dogs than to be attacked by this large cat. Here in the park, visitors come into close contact with mountain lions frequently without incident—often without even being aware of it, because lions, masters of camouflage, prefer to avoid people.

Mountain lions do not typically seek people out as prey. However, when stressed with illness or some physiological factor preventing them from gaining nutrition from their natural food source of deer and javelina, they may go after humans or domestic pets as a last resort in the face of starvation. While none of the handful of incidences in Big Bend between people and lions have resulted in human fatality, it is important to recognize that we are in mountain lion territory and to be aware of our surroundings. You should also remember what to do if you are ever approached by one. Lions are surprisingly easy to intimidate! Make loud noises, throw rocks or sticks, appear large, and act aggressive so the lion will change its mind about approaching you and scamper off instead.

The presence of mountain lions in Big Bend National Park is vital to our park's environmental well being. Though humans and mountain lions have come into conflict throughout history, it is possible to find ways for both of our species so safely coexist. Through education and conservation efforts, we can stay respectful, rather than fearful of the panthers in the park.



D. SWEETMAN

A mountain lion, also known as a panther.

Johnnie Ward

By Dawnella Petrey, Park Ranger

Have you ever looked at a vista and wondered “does it have a name” or “why is it called that?” Mountain ranges, peaks and hills have all been given titles but rarely do we ever hear the story behind the name. The same is true here in Big Bend, in particular Ward Mountain and Ward Spring. Obviously Ward must have a special meaning for two things to bear the name; but what is it? Well it all started with a young boy who set out for adventure and found himself living in wild and rugged west Texas.

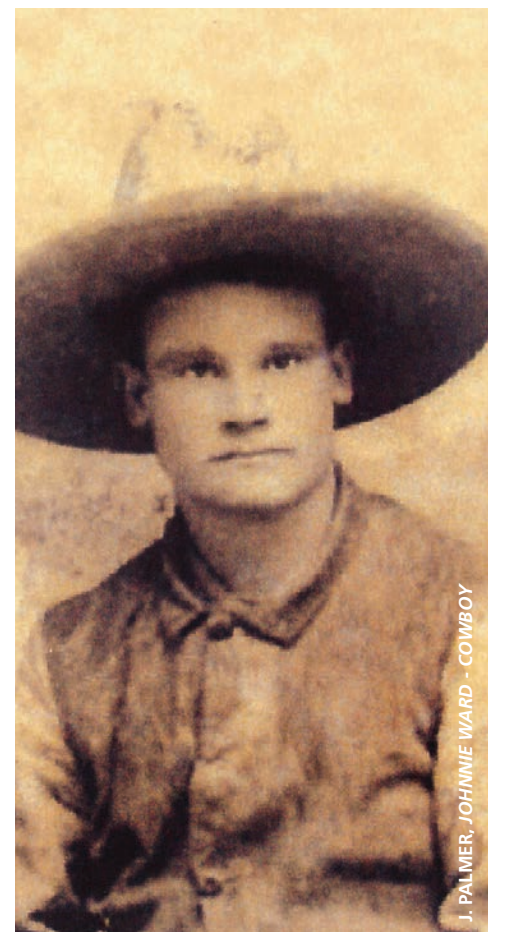
In 1884 John “Johnnie” Allen Ward and his older brother left their east Texas home with the dream of making it rich in California. They soon discovered that they did not have the funds to make it to the west coast and joined the Estado Land & Cattle Co. herding cattle to the G-4 Ranch in west Texas. The G-4 was one of the largest ranches in the area during that time and was located on the western side of the Chisos Mountains in present day Big Bend National Park. Even though Johnnie was only 15 he proved his

worth as a cowboy and earned the respect of the ranch manager. He was offered a permanent ranch hand position that he kept for the next seven years. The other cowboys took a quick liking to him and willingly passed on their skills and knowledge. They taught Johnnie things like how to live off the land, how to repair equipment, and how to control his temper.

In the winter of 1887 there were several blizzards that blanketed the land. Although this affected the year's calf drop, it also replenished the area's water sources. After the snow cleared, Johnnie discovered a new spring at the base of one of the peaks in the Chisos Mountains. The ranch manager named it Ward Spring in his honor. They began keeping cattle in the area of the newly found spring. After several attacks on the herd by a bear, Johnnie took off in pursuit of the culprit. He chased it up the peak behind Ward Spring and eventually roped and hog tied the bear. After hauling the bear back down the mountain for all to see, Johnnie sold the bear to a gentleman who had made camp with the group for the night. The man was a gypsy that sold “snake oil,” and he planned to use the bear as an attraction

for his show. These events caused quite an impression on the men, and the peak where Johnnie captured the bear became known as Ward Mountain.

In the early 1890's cattle theft became a big problem as well as overgrazing and contamination of water sources. Land owners began to put up barbed wire fences to protect their cattle and acreage and slowly the once open range began to vanish. Witnessing these changes took its toll on Johnnie, and he decided it was time to go home. During Johnnie's seven years working for the G-4 Ranch, he had grown from a young teenager into a smart dependable man. He reconnected with a childhood friend by the name of Virginia who he married in 1893. They would go on to have eight children, five boys and three girls. Johnnie began ranching in the central Texas area and became a well-known breeder of Angora goats. He continued to live the life he loved until his death on January 6, 1929. Johnnie Ward never did forget the life lessons he learned while working on the G-4 Ranch in Big Bend. Those experiences shaped him into the man that he was and continued to serve him well throughout his life.



J. PALMER, JOHNNIE WARD - COWBOY

Johnnie Ward

Big Bend Fast Facts

Size:
801,163 acres (1,252 square miles)
15th largest unit in the National Park System

Elevation:
Highest point: Emory Peak; 7,832 feet (2,387 m).
Lowest point: Rio Grande Village; 1,850 feet (564 m).

River Canyons:
Santa Elena Canyon 20 miles (32 km)
Mariscal Canyon 10 miles (16 km)
Boquillas Canyon 33 miles (53 km)
US/Mexico Border:
Shared International Border—118 miles (190 km)

Mexican States bordering the Park—2 states:
Chihuahua & Coahuila

Landmarks and Elevations:
Emory Peak 7,832 feet (2,387 m).
South Rim 7,375 feet (2,248 m).
Casa Grande Peak 7,325 feet (2,233 m).
Chisos Basin 5,401 feet (1,664 m).
Panther Junction 3,750 feet (1,143 m).
Castolon 2,169 feet (661 m).
Rio Grande Village 1,850 feet (564 m).

Flora and Fauna:
1,295 species of flora
75 species mammals

450+ species birds
56 species reptiles
11 species amphibians
38 species fish

Major Resource Issues:
Air Quality/Visibility
Rio Grande Water Quality & Quantity
Exotic Species
Theft of Park Resources

Services Inside the Park

Emergency Call 911

National Park Service

General Information 432-477-2251

Big Bend Natural History Association

Booksales & Seminars 432-477-2236

Visitor Centers

Panther Junction (Hdqtrs) 432-477-1158
 Chisos Basin 432-477-2264
 Castolon 432-477-2666
 Persimmon Gap 432-477-2393
 Rio Grande Village 432-477-2271

U.S. Post Office

Panther Junction 432-477-2238

Lodging/Restaurant

Chisos Mountains Lodge 432-477-2291
 Reservations 877-386-4383

Gas Stations

Panther Junction 432-477-2294
 Rio Grande Village 432-477-2293

Camper Stores

Rio Grande Village 432-477-2293
 Chisos Basin 432-477-2291
 Castolon 432-477-2222

Services Outside the Park

This listing of local services is a courtesy to our visitors and implies no endorsement by the National Park Service or Big Bend National Park.

Lodging

Lajitas
 Lajitas Resort 877-525-4827

Marathon

Gage Hotel 432-386-4205
 Marathon Motel 432-386-4241
 Eve's Garden 432-386-4165

Study Butte/Terlingua area

Big Bend Casitas 800-839-7238
 Big Bend Resorts 800-848-2363
 Easter Egg Valley Motel 432-371-2254
 El Dorado Motel 432-371-2111
 Longhorn Ranch Hotel 432-371-2541
 Ten Bits Ranch 866-371-3110
 Terlingua House 325-473-4400

Camping

Big Bend Resorts 800-848-2363
 Big Bend Ranch State Park 432-424-3327
 Big Bend Travel Park 432-371-2250
 B.J.'s RV Park 432-371-2259
 Heath Canyon Ranch 432-376-2235
 Longhorn Ranch 432-371-2541
 Stillwell's Trailer Camp 432-376-2244
 Study Butte RV Park 432-371-2468

Convenience Stores/Gasoline

Big Bend Resorts 800-848-2363
 Cottonwood General Store 432-371-3315
 Stillwell Store & Station 432-376-2244

Medical Services

Terlingua Fire and EMS 911
 Big Bend Medical Center 432-837-3447

Banks

Quicksilver Bank/ATM 432-371-2211

Local Outfitters

Angell Expeditions 432-229-3713
 Big Bend Overland Tours 800-848-2363
 Big Bend River Tours 800-545-4240
 Desert Sports 888-989-6900
 Far Flung Outdoor Center 800-839-7238
 Rio Aviation 432-557-9477

Horseback Riding

Big Bend Stables 800-887-4331
 Lajitas Livery 432-424-3238

Information and Services

Accessibility

All visitor centers are accessible, as are the Chisos Mountains Lodge restaurant and some motel rooms and campsites. The Window View Trail is paved and fairly level.

Camp Stores & ATMs

Forever Resorts, LLC, operates stores at Castolon, Chisos Basin, and Rio Grande Village. ATMs are available at the Chisos Basin store, Rio Grande Village store and Panther Junction service station.

Camping Limits

Visitors can stay in the park up to 14 consecutive nights, whether in a front or backcountry site, with a limit of 28 total nights in the park in a calendar year. Campers can occupy a specific site up to 14 total nights in a year. Between February 1 and April 15, visitors are limited to 14 total nights in the park.

Entrance Fees

- Single private non-commercial vehicle \$25—valid for 7 days
- Single motorcycle \$20—valid for 7 days
- Single person entry on foot or bicycle \$12 per person—valid for 7 days
- Big Bend Annual Pass \$50—valid for one year from month of purchase
- Interagency Annual Pass \$80—valid for one year from month of purchase

All other valid passes will be accepted until expired (Senior Pass, Access Pass, etc.). For commercial rates, please consult our website: www.nps.gov/bibe. Additional permits may be required.

Park Partners

Big Bend Natural History Association

The Big Bend Natural History Association (BBNHA) was established in 1956 as a private, non-profit organization. The Association's goal is to educate the public and increase understanding and appreciation of the Big Bend area and what it represents in terms of our historical and natural heritage. BBNHA champions the mission of the National Park Service in interpreting the scenic, scientific, and historic values of Big Bend, and encourages research related to those values.

The Association conducts seminars, and publishes, prints, or otherwise provides books, maps, and interpretive materials on the Big Bend region. Proceeds fund exhibits, films, interpretive programs, seminars, museum activities, and research.



www.bigbendbookstore.org

Fires Prohibited

Ground fires and wood fires are strictly prohibited throughout the park. Only gas stoves and charcoal contained in a grill may be used. Use caution with any heat source.

Gas Stations

Gasoline and diesel are available at Panther Junction and Rio Grande Village service stations. Panther Junction has propane exchange. Rio Grande Village offers propane refilling.

Junior Ranger

Kids earn a badge and have fun learning about the park by becoming a Junior Ranger. Booklets are available online and at park visitor centers.



Lodging

The Chisos Mountains Lodge, located in the Chisos Basin, includes 72 rooms, gift shop, dining room and camp store. For more information call 432-477-2291 or 877-386-4383.

Phones

Public pay phones are located outside the Chisos Mountains Lodge and Rio Grande Village Store.

Big Bend Conservancy

The Big Bend Conservancy (BBC) is a private, non-profit organization whose mission is to support, promote, and raise funds for Big Bend National Park in partnership with the National Park Service.

The BBC has funded a range of critical projects, including Rio Grande Village wetlands restoration, the purchase of video camera and editing equipment, retrofit of night sky lighting, support for construction of the Boquillas crossing station, and the Park orientation film. The BBC's latest accomplishment is the addition of the Park's \$1.4 million Fossil Discovery Exhibit completed during the BBC's 20th anniversary year.

Visit www.bigbendconservancy.org to learn how you can support Big Bend, including how to get your own Big Bend National Park license plate.



PO Box 200
 Big Bend National Park, Texas 79834
 432-477-2242
www.bigbendconservancy.org

Post Office

A full-service post office is located at the Panther Junction Headquarters, open M–F, 8am–11:30am and 12:30pm–3:00pm. A mail drop is also available at the Chisos Basin Store.

Recycling

Recycling receptacles are provided in campgrounds and near stores and visitor centers. Every bit of material recycled means one less piece buried in the park landfill. Please recycle!

Showers and Laundry

Pay showers and laundry facilities are available at the Rio Grande Village Store and have 24-hour access. Out-of-park facilities are available in Study Butte.

Visitor Centers

Panther Junction, Chisos Basin, and Persimmon Gap Visitor Centers are open year-round. Rio Grande Village and Castolon Visitor Centers are open November–April.

Wifi/Internet

Free wireless internet is available at the Panther Junction and Chisos Basin Visitor Centers, the Chisos Mountains Lodge, and the Rio Grande Village Camp Store. There are no public computer terminals.

Kennels

- Alpine Veterinary Clinic 432-837-3888
- Alpine Small Animal Clinic 432-837-5416

Volunteers in the Park

Approximately 260 volunteers contribute 50,000 hours of work every year in Big Bend National Park! Whether staffing visitor centers and campgrounds or patrolling backcountry trails, volunteers protect valuable resources and help visitors learn about, and more safely enjoy, Big Bend National Park.

While you might not notice volunteer contributions at first, look around and you'll be surprised how many volunteers you see. It is primarily volunteers who provide visitor information at campgrounds, and at four of the five visitor centers in the park. They keep the campsites, backcountry roads, and trails in pristine condition, assist with maintenance projects, and are considered the eyes and ears of the park. Please thank them for their services if you have the opportunity. For more information, contact the volunteer coordinator at 432-477-1106.



www.nps.gov/volunteer