

Red-hot lava raged across this ancient valley 3,900 to 60,000 years ago. Sometimes, it oozed over the land, then cooled into smooth waves of new rock called pāhoehoe (pronounced pa-HOY-hoy).

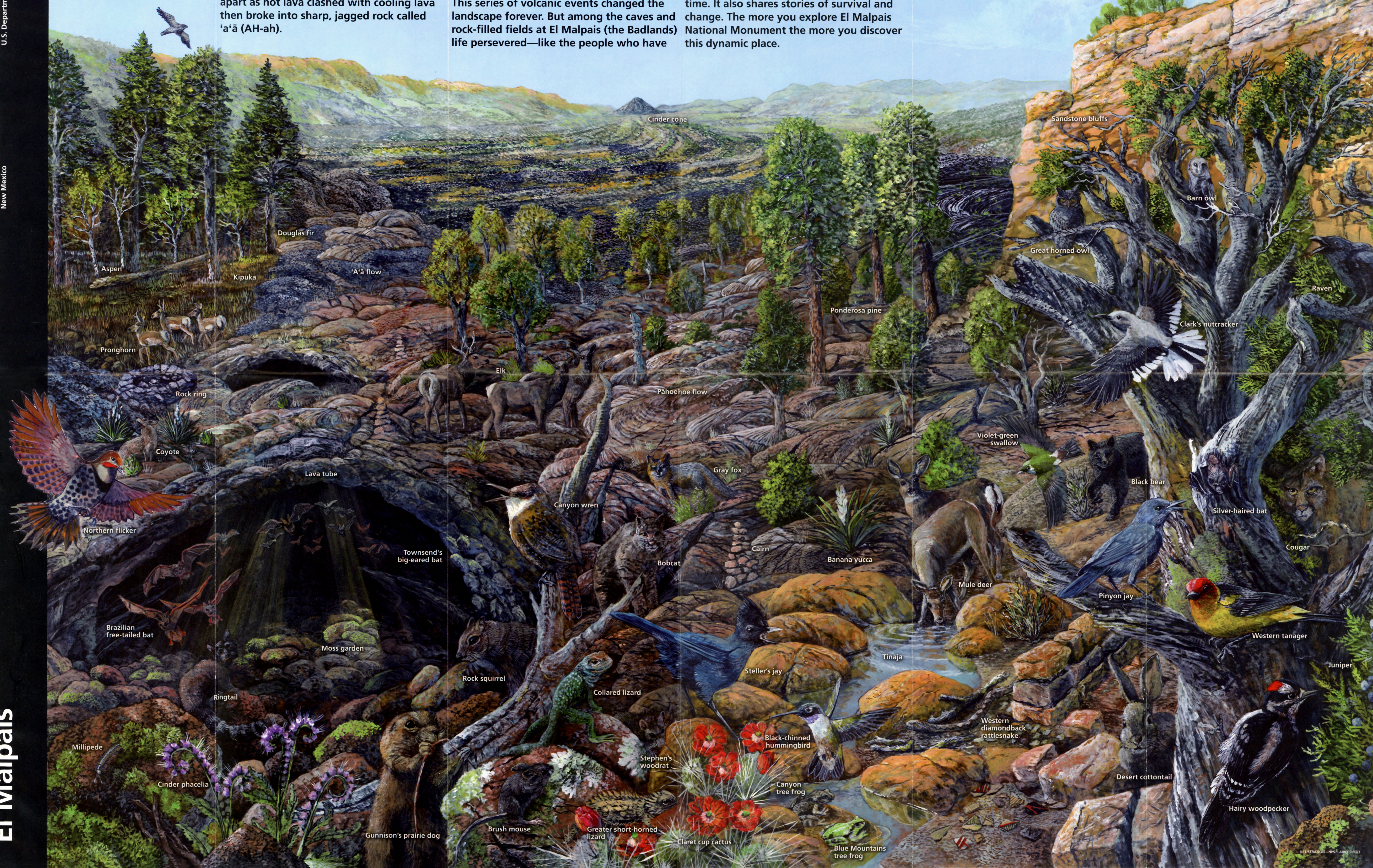
Other times, it moved so fast it tore itself apart as hot lava clashed with cooling lava then broke into sharp, jagged rock called 'a'ā (AH-ah).

In some places the outer edges of a fast-moving flow cooled and hardened while the hot lava inside drained, leaving a tube. In other places magma shot up out of a volcanic vent; cinders, rock fragments, and ash piled on the vent, creating a cone.

This series of volcanic events changed the landscape forever. But among the caves and rock-filled fields at El Malpais (the Badlands) life persevered—like the people who have

braved this land for 12,000 years and the animals and plants adapted to this volcanic-influenced environment.

From New Mexico's youngest lava flow to 200-million-year-old sandstone bluffs, El Malpais displays a vast scale of geological time. It also shares stories of survival and change. The more you explore El Malpais National Monument the more you discover this dynamic place.



Find Your Flow at El Malpais National Monument

Plan Your Visit Located south of I-40 at exit 85, the **visitor center** has exhibits, a film, a trip-planning area, a picnic area, and a bookstore. Open 9 am to 5 pm daily except Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1.

Ask at the visitor center about ranger talks and guided hikes. See the park website for details.

Driving You can access much of El Malpais by paved road. Driving NM 117 lets you explore the eastern edge of the park; NM 53 traces the northern side. Southern areas of the park, including the Chain of Craters Backcountry Byway, are unimproved dirt roads that may require four-wheel drive or high clearance or may be impassable. Stay on designated roads.

Sandstone Bluffs Overlook From sunrise to sunset, enjoy the beauty and solitude of a vast, lava flow landscape—including kipukas (vegetated “islands” of older land).

Hiking Know trail and weather conditions before you head out. Carry at least one gallon of water per person per day. Hike in tandem. Let someone else know where you plan to go and when you plan to return. **Lava rock is sharp!** Wear durable, sturdy hiking shoes. Beware of crevices and unstable rock. On primitive paths marked by cairns (rock piles) have the next cairn in sight before you continue.

- **Visitor center** Take a 0.5-mile, easy trail off the parking area to get acquainted with El Malpais.
- **El Calderon Trail** Explore the backcountry and the geologic processes that continue here. This easy-to-moderate, 4.8-mile loop leads you past lava tube caves, lava trenches, a cinder cone, and the oldest lava rock in the park. Note the effects of fire and erosion on the landscape and the species that adapted here after the flows.
- **Big Tubes Trail** Discover 10,000 years of geologic change along this 2.0-mile, cairn-

Cave Science



El Malpais is an outdoor classroom and a living laboratory. Whether a student, scientist, or visitor, you can learn about volcanic geology and the plants and wildlife of this high desert environment.

marked trail, with smaller loop options. Notice the lava wall, lava bridges and collapses, lava tube caves, or the Bandera flow with its 900-foot-high cinder cone. Expect strenuous hiking across rough 'a'à lava.

- **Lava Falls Trail** Experience lava all around you! This 1.0-mile, cairn-marked trail loops through the youngest pāhoehoe flow in the park.
- **Zuni-Acoma Trail** Follow a historic lava path used for human

travel for at least 1,000 years. Today, this rugged, 7.5-mile trail is part of the 3,100 mile long **Continental Divide National Scenic Trail**.

Caving Self-guiding access to wild, undeveloped caves at the El Calderon Trail and the Big Tubes Trail brings you up-close with lava tubes. To enter caves, you need safety gear and must have a **caving permit** (free), available at the visitor center year-round. Not all caves are open to the public. Obey all closure signs.

Cave safely; cave softly. Wear proper caving gear: sturdy shoes, kneepads, a helmet and headlamp, and a warm clothing layer. Temperatures inside the caves can dip below 45°F, even in summer. Do not touch cave features or creatures.

White-nose syndrome (WNS) is a fungal disease affecting bats. WNS is not harmful to people, but bat loss has substantial ecological effects in caves and above ground. To prevent its spread, please use new gear or gear that has only been used in non-WNS caves. Learn more at www.whitenosesyndrome.org.

Evening Activities At twilight observe a bat outflight; on your own or ranger-guided when offered (seasonal). At night stargaze or listen for nature's wild sounds.

Safety Pay attention to signs of altitude sickness like shortness of breath, headache, and dizziness. • Carry ample water. • Beware of animals that are poisonous or may strike like rattlesnakes and scorpions. • Avoid cactus spines and sharp yucca leaves. • Visit the park website for alerts and updated closures. • Pets are allowed on leash but not recommended on lava flow; the sharp rock will damage their paws. • El Malpais was a WWII bombing range; be alert for unexploded ordnance.

Regulations Firearms are prohibited in federal buildings. • Hunting is prohibited. • Law protects all park features. Do not excavate, disturb, deface, or destroy any structure, exhibit, artifact, animal, or plant. • Do not disturb or drink from tinajas; these sunken areas of a rock surface may contain water vital to plants and animals. • Practice Leave No Trace principles.

Accessibility We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to a visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check our website. The platform at Sandstone Bluffs Overlook is wheelchair-accessible.

More Information El Malpais National Monument is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. Learn more about national parks at www.nps.gov.

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