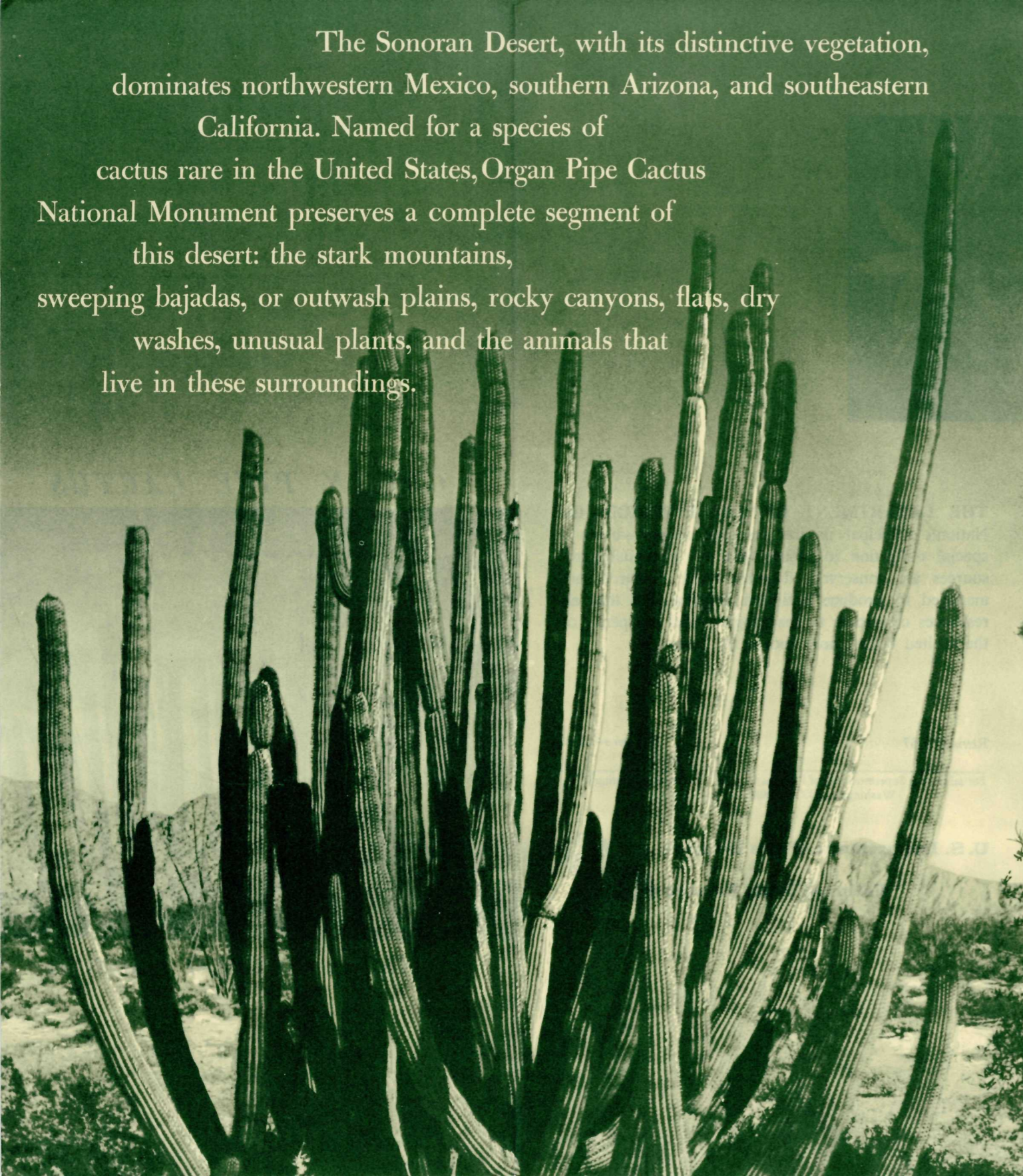


ORGAN PIPE CACTUS



NATIONAL MONUMENT • ARIZONA



The Sonoran Desert, with its distinctive vegetation, dominates northwestern Mexico, southern Arizona, and southeastern California. Named for a species of cactus rare in the United States, Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument preserves a complete segment of this desert: the stark mountains, sweeping bajadas, or outwash plains, rocky canyons, flats, dry washes, unusual plants, and the animals that live in these surroundings.

GETTING ACQUAINTED

Your first stop should be at the visitor center, 17 miles south of the monument entrance, where National Park Service personnel can help you plan your visit. Here you can study exhibits that explain the desert and describe the forms of life that it supports. Additional literature is also available at the visitor center.

Illustrated talks are given winter evenings on the natural history of the monument. Times and locations are posted in the visitor center and campground.

Scenic drives. Two graded scenic loop drives lead through the more remote and interesting sections of the monument. Both drives begin at the visitor center, where you can obtain guide booklets that will introduce the unusual plants and other features you will find along the way. The roads dip and wind, but you may drive over them at a cautious, leisurely rate with safety.

The Ajo Mountain Drive provides a series of outstanding desert views. On it, you travel close to the massive walls within the canyons of the Ajo Mountains. You'll see many species of cactus, including some of the most impressive stands of the organpipe. Average time for this 21-mile trip is 2 hours.

The Puerto Blanco Drive parallels the historic routes of the early desert travelers. It circles the colorful Puerto Blanco Mountains and skirts the northern border of Mexico. Short side roads lead to a scenic foot trail at Dripping Springs, a manmade oasis at Quitobaquito, and a display of senita cactus in Senita Basin. Allow at least half a day for this 51-mile trip.

Trails and hiking. Short foot trails lead to Bull Pasture (1½ miles) and Dripping Springs (one-quarter of a mile). The sparse, open nature of the desert vegetation, however, makes cross-country hiking possible almost anywhere within the monument. Always consult a park ranger before attempting climbs or long hikes, and check in with him when you return. He will be pleased to suggest interesting trips.

DESERT PLANTS

The Sonoran Desert is the home of many species of cactus. Some 30 species have been identified within the monument, ranging in size from the giant saguaro, which may grow to a height of 50 feet, to the tiny fish-hook mammillaria, only a few inches high.

Outstanding among these is the organpipe cactus, found—outside of Mexico—only in south-central Arizona. It is the second largest cactus in our country. One plant may produce 30 or more unbranched stems, some of which reach a height of 20 feet. It grows only in well-drained areas, mainly on the southern slopes of hills and mountains. In late May, blossoms of the organpipe cactus appear at the tips, and occasionally on the sides, of the stems. The lavender-tinged white flowers open at night and close soon after sunrise. You can see the organpipe cactus near monument headquarters and on the Ajo Mountain Drive.

The senita, which means "old one," is the rarest large cactus in the monument. The name comes from the gray, hairlike spines that grow at the tips of the larger arms. This cactus somewhat resembles the organpipe in that it branches at ground level. It differs, however, in having only a few ribs, or ridges, on the branches as well as in having the long weak spines. You can see the senita in the southwestern part of the monument along sandy washes.

Among the monument's other cactuses are several species of cholla and the barrel, hedgehog, and prickly-pear cactuses.

To think of the desert vegetation only in terms of cactuses would be to neglect a host of other unusual plants, which form an important part of the noted floral wealth of this desert. Prominent among the larger plants are the ocotillo, paloverde, mesquite, ironwood, catclaw acacia, jumpingbean sapium, crucifixion thorn, smokethorn, and elephant-tree.

After a rainy winter, smaller perennials and annuals quickly transform the desert into a veritable wildflower garden. During March and April, Mexican goldpoppy, magenta owllover, blue lupines, yellow encelia and

desert baileya, and apricot-tinged mallow cover parts of the desert with solid-colored masses and delicate, blended patterns.

After the summer rains a new though smaller crop of wildflowers appears that includes martynia, senna, and desert tobacco.

Desert plants have solved the problem of survival in an arid region in various ways, which are explained by means of exhibits in the visitor center.

AND ANIMALS

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument offers an unusual variety of habitats, each particularly favored by certain animals. From the creosotebush flats of La Abra Plain to the windswept crests of the Ajo Mountains, there are great differences in amounts of moisture, degrees of exposure, and temperature. All these influence plant and animal life. The variety of habitats accounts for the large number of animal species in this part of the desert.

For some species of birds, such as the lark bunting and the white-crowned sparrow, this is a winter home. For others, such as the white-winged dove and night-hawk, it is a summer home. The Gambel's quail and noisy cactus wren, among many others, are year-round residents. Water and shore birds that are not normally seen in the desert are attracted by the spring-fed pond at Quitobaquito. This pond contains an unusual species of fish—the desert pupfish.

Mammals, too, have become adapted to the harsh desert environment. Here, you may see the peccary (javelina), desert mule deer, pronghorn, coyote, gray fox, kangaroo rat, and other mammals.

Contrary to the popular belief that associates reptiles with the desert, snakes and lizards are not overly numerous within the monument. There is variety among the reptiles, however, which include the famous Gila monster—the only poisonous lizard native to the United States—and the desert tortoise.

For detailed information on the plants and animals

of the monument, you can purchase at the visitor center the illustrated *Natural History Handbook of Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument*, written by a National Park Service naturalist.

HISTORY

Melchior Diaz, of the Coronado Expedition, passed this way in 1540—the first European to see this strange land. A century and a half later, the intrepid Jesuit, Father Kino, established the San Marcelo Mission near the present Mexican village of Sonoyta.

Captain Diaz was the first to traverse 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 that fell by the wayside from struggling California-bound caravans during the gold rush.

In 1853-54, under terms of the Gadsden Purchase, the territory that includes the monument was acquired by the United States from Mexico.

GENERAL INFORMATION

How to reach the monument. Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument lies on the border of the United States and Mexico, 140 miles south of Phoenix and 142 miles west of Tucson. From Phoenix, take U.S. 80 to Gila Bend and then Ariz. 85 to the monument. From Tucson, take Ariz. 86 and then Ariz. 85 south.

Climate. Desert winters are mild, but occasional sub-freezing nighttime temperatures and chilly winds occur during December, January, and February. The days, however, are usually sunny and warm. Infrequent gentle rains fall during this period. Clear sky and progressively hotter days are the rule during the drought months of April, May, and June. From July through September, humid air from the Gulf of California brings occasional violent thunderstorms that account

