

Organ Pipe Cactus

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



National Monument
Arizona



© KATHLEEN NORRIS COOK

Exploring a Desert Landscape

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument celebrates the life and landscape of the Sonoran Desert. In this wilderness of plants, animals, and dramatic mountains-and-plains scenery, you can drive a lonely road, hike a trail, camp under a clear sky, or just soak in the warmth and beauty of the Southwest.

Planning Your Visit

Kris Eggle Visitor Center has general information, accessibility information, publications, maps, exhibits, and video presentations. Talks, guided walks, and other programs are available in winter. Scenic drives and hiking trails are nearby (see descriptions and maps). Between October and April expect sunny days in the 60s and 70s°F and occasional light rain. May through September days often exceed 105°F, and brief, violent thunderstorms occur. Nights are much cooler than days year-round.

Scenic Drives

Two scenic drives penetrate desert country. Both are winding, up-and-down graded dirt roads. Most passenger cars handle these roads easily. If driving anything larger or pulling a trailer, check with a ranger before attempting either drive. Carry emergency tools, take drinking water and extra water for your vehicle, avoid flooded areas, and never drive off the road.

- **Ajo Mountain Drive** (21 miles; 2 hours) Winds along the foothills of the Ajo Range. Desert landscapes and stands of organ pipe cactus highlight this tour. Ask for English, Spanish, or German guidebooks at the visitor center.
- **North Puerto Blanco Drive** (10 miles; 1 to 1½ hours) Enjoy a spectacular view of the Valley of the Ajo and see the Sonoran Desert's biodiversity. Organ pipe and saguaro cacti and ironwood trees abound. Picnic area at turnaround.

Walks and Hikes

Trails offer close looks at the desert's beauty. The best hiking months are October through April. Leashed pets are allowed on two trails (see trail descriptions). Otherwise, pets are not allowed on trails or in the backcountry. When hiking, take one gallon of water per person per day. Avoid overexertion and overexposure to the sun. Watch for desert plants with spines and thorns. At night use a flashlight and watch for rattlesnakes. Do not harm them; snakes are protected here. If you want to hike crosscountry, discuss your plans with a ranger.

- **Visitor Center Trail** (0.15 mile round-trip) Introduces the desert and its inhabitants. Level, paved trail is accessible to scooters and wheelchairs.
- **Campground Perimeter Trail** (1 mile round-trip) An ideal leisurely walk to start or end your day. Pets permitted.
- **Desert View Trail** (1.2 miles round-trip) Circular route leads to vistas of Sonoyta Valley and the pink granite Cubabi Mountains in Mexico. Trailside signs describe features.
- **Palo Verde Trail** (2.6 miles round-trip) Connects the campground and visitor center. Views of the Ajo Range. Pets permitted.
- **Estes Canyon-Bull Pasture Trails** (4.2 miles round-trip) Strenuous climb to a high plateau with views.
- **Victoria Mine Trail** (4.5 miles round-trip) Trail over rolling terrain leads to historic silver mine. *More information about hiking trails at Kris Eggle Visitor Center.*

Camping and Picnicking

- **Twin Peaks Campground** Open all year, first-come, first-served. Water, restrooms, showers, grills, tables, dump station, and amphitheater. Fires only in grills; wood gathering prohibited.
- **Alamo Canyon Campground** Primitive; requires permit from Kris Eggle Visitor Center. Tents, truck campers, and small vans only.

Trailers, RVs, and generators prohibited. No wood fires.

- **Picnic areas** At the visitor center and on the scenic drives. Most have tables, some have pit toilets and shade. Water only at visitor center picnic area.

Area Lodging and Services

Lukeville has food, gas, and post office. Why has food, gas, convenience stores, and RV parks. Ajo, Arizona, and Sonoyta, Mexico, have motels, food, gas, RV parks, laundries, and services.

For Your Safety

Organ Pipe Cactus shares 33 miles of international border with Mexico, which presents challenges and concerns. Your safety is your responsibility. • Always be aware of your surroundings. • Lock your unoccupied vehicle and keep valuables out of sight. • Hike with a partner. • Report unusual or suspicious incidents. • For firearms regulations see the park website www.nps.gov/orpi.

Emergencies: call 911 on the campground phone or contact a park ranger.

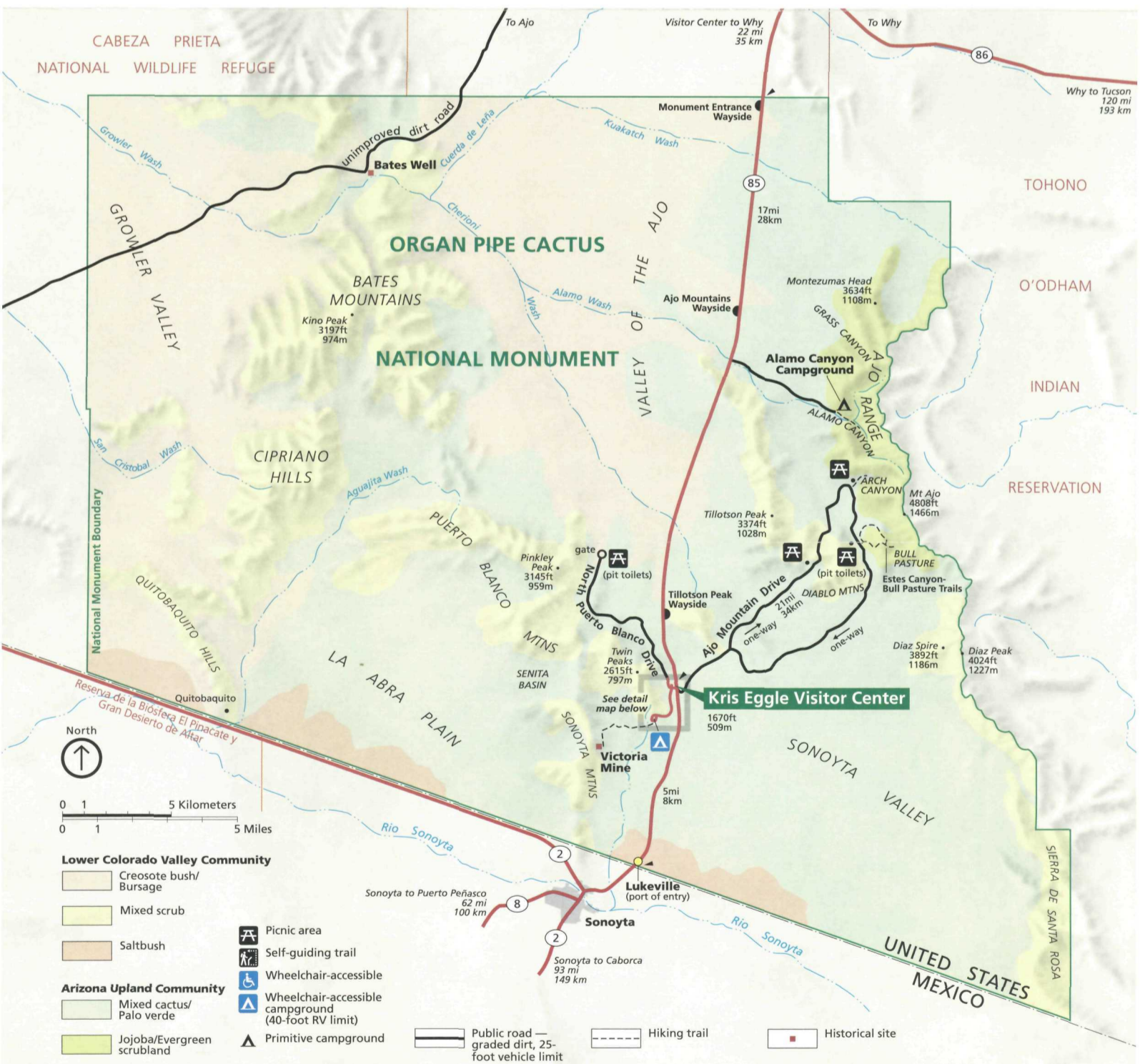
Visiting Mexico

U.S. Customs officials in Lukeville can help you with tourist cards, car permits and insurance, and information about traveling to Mexico.

More Information

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument
10 Organ Pipe Drive
Ajo, AZ 85321
520-387-6849, ext. 7302
www.nps.gov/orpi

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. Learn about national parks at www.nps.gov.



Welcome to a Green Desert

Two plant communities merge here—the Lower Colorado Valley and Arizona Upland communities. Local topography, soil, and climate determine where each grows best. In the Lower Colorado Valley Community plants have adapted to some of North America's hottest, driest climates. Widely spaced shrubs dominate miles of scenery. The Arizona Upland Community grows in wetter areas and looks rich and varied in comparison.

Some members of both communities reach their northern limits in this area. For example, organ pipe cactus, senita cactus, elephant tree, and limberbush are more typical of communities in Mexico.

Federal law prohibits collecting or disturbing plants, wildlife, rocks, or artifacts.

LOWER COLORADO VALLEY COMMUNITY
Hottest, driest part of the Sonoran Desert.

Creosote Bush/Bursage Creosote bush and bursage cover most of the valley. Mesquite and big galleta grow along washes.

Mixed Scrub Brittlebush, bursage, and foothills palo verde grow on dry alluvial slopes.

Saltbush tolerate silty, salty soil—primarily saltbush—inhabit the floodplain.

ARIZONA UPLAND COMMUNITY
Wetter part of the Sonoran Desert.

Mixed Cactus/Palo Verde Organ pipe, saguaro, prickly pear, and cholla thrive on gravelly bajadas and rocky slopes. The dominant tree is palo verde.

Jojoba/Evergreen Scrubland Jojoba, agave, rosewood, and juniper grow where rainfall is most abundant—in the canyons and higher elevations of the Ajo Range.



A Desert Full of Life

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument is a showcase for the Sonoran Desert and its many plants and animals. Desert dwellers here must live in extreme temperatures, intense sun, and little rainfall. Cacti are the most recognizable plants; 28 cactus species live here, including saguaro and organ pipe.

The organ pipe is a large cactus rarely found in the United States, although it is common in Mexico. The monument protects the bulk of its U.S. range. Like its fellow cacti and other desert inhabitants, the organ pipe is attuned to rhythms of the sun and infrequent rains. A glutton for heat and light, it grows on warmer slopes where it can absorb the most sun. This is critical in winter months when severe frosts can kill the cactus. It blooms in the heat of May, June, and July, opening lavender-white flowers after the sun sets. Other cacti bloom at night, too, but many also bloom during the day, exposing their flowers to the sun. Day or night, the summer display of cactus blooms is one of the desert's flashiest spectacles, as yellow, red, white, and pink flowers color the landscape. It is a show upstaged only by explosions of gold poppies, blue lupines, pink owl clover, and other annuals after a wet winter.

Less conspicuous than plants are the desert animals. Many, including elf owls, kangaroo

rats, jackrabbits, and most snakes are creatures of the night. During the day they hide in cactus holes, underground burrows, or other cool and shaded spots. Other animals, like bighorn sheep and most birds and lizards, prefer daylight to darkness. But these animals also seek mid-day shade, especially in summer when air temperatures can reach 118°F and ground temperatures can soar to a scorching 175°. Coyotes and javelinas are even more adaptable, active at any time of day or night that is not too hot.

To deal with the lack of water, desert animals must conserve body moisture. For example, the kangaroo rat ordinarily drinks no water and eats mostly dry food. It gets enough moisture from even the driest seeds. But its survival depends primarily on reducing water loss. The kangaroo rat's urine is highly concentrated, and its feces are almost completely dry. Through its nose the kangaroo rat even reclaims water otherwise lost in breathing.

Like other desert dwellers, humans have had to adapt or suffer the consequences. Prehistoric nomads relied on scarce springs and seeps. Later desert wanderers—Spanish explorers, missionaries, and others—sometimes entered this unforgiving environment unpre-

pared. Many followed an almost waterless route called El Camino del Diablo—the Devil's Highway—as they headed west. Some did not finish their journey. In the early 1900s ranchers and miners found and developed new water sources, allowing more people to live in this region. Today, as before, visitors learn quickly about thirst, heat, cactus, and other dangers, and find ways to safely enjoy the desert on its own terms.

As a protected area, Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument allows the Sonoran Desert life to flourish under nearly ideal wilderness conditions. In this outstanding natural preserve one of Earth's major ecosystems survives almost unspoiled. Recognizing its significance, in 1976 the United Nations designated the monument as an International Biosphere Reserve. Scientific research, including studies of human impact, continues to provide invaluable information for protecting this showcase of the Sonoran Desert.



ABUNDANT LIFE AT ORGAN PIPE

This illustration shows some of the Sonoran Desert plants and animals living in Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument.

Plants

- 1 Saguaro
- 2 Octillo
- 3 Brittlebush
- 4 Organ pipe cactus
- 5 Engelmann prickly pear
- 6 Teddybear cholla
- 7 Creosote bush
- 8 Palo verde
- 9 Saltbush
- 10 Senita cactus
- 11 Mesquite
- 12 Chainfruit cholla

Animals

- 15 White-winged dove
- 16 Gila woodpecker
- 17 Gila monster
- 18 Western diamondback rattlesnake
- 19 Desert tortoise
- 20 Javelina
- 21 Gambel's quail
- 22 Roadrunner
- 23 Cactus wren
- 24 Coyote
- 25 Red-tailed hawk

ILLUSTRATION: NPS / ROBERT HYNES