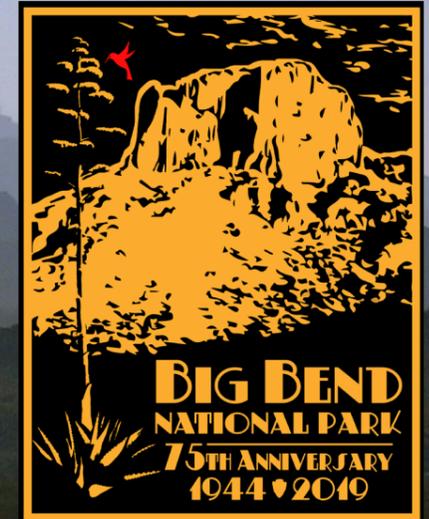




# The Paisano

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

Volume 37 Number 1 2019



B. TRESTER

The Mule Ears, found along the Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive.

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## Free Park Movie

The park's 24-minute film "Life on the Edge" is played every thirty minutes at the Panther Junction Visitor Center. First showing: 9:30AM; last showing: 4:00PM.

## 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 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. Check the latest schedule and **join a park ranger** for a guided walk, talk, or evening program to learn more about your park. 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 7 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 park information and interpretive exhibits. Walk the **Rio Grande Village Nature Trail**. The bluff overlooking the Rio Grande at the end of the nature trail is a particularly beautiful spot at sunset.

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 10.

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/](http://www.nps.gov/bibe/)  
[www.nps.gov/rigr/](http://www.nps.gov/rigr/)

#### On matters relating to the Paisano:

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

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA™

## Looking for this?



Horseshoe Bend, 953 miles drive from Big Bend.

Have you seen this picture? Odds are you were searching the internet for images of Big Bend National Park. This, unfortunately, is not a picture of a rock formation in Big Bend.

This scenic vista is the "Horseshoe Bend" located on the Colorado River, 5 miles downstream from the Glen Canyon Dam, and approximately 14.5 hours drive from Big Bend National Park (953 miles on the fastest route).

#### "Where can I see the Big Bend?"

Everywhere you look! The "Big Bend" region of Texas is named for the 90 degree turn in the course of the Rio Grande near the southern tip of the park. It is not visible from trails or overlooks. If you're looking for dramatic river scenery in Big Bend, there are overlooks and hiking trails at any of the three major canyons located in the park: Santa Elena Canyon, Boquillas Canyon, and Mariscal Canyon (high-clearance vehicles required for Mariscal Canyon; strenuous trail, avoid in summer).



J. JURADO

# 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 the best way to experience Big Bend.



M. LAVENDER

## 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.



C. BALLOU

## 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 exposure to the elements. Carry lots of water (at least 1 gallon per person per day is recommended) and wear a hat, sunscreen, and proper clothing.



C. BALLOU

## 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 the park's primitive roads. Vehicles must remain on established roadways. **Off-road driving is prohibited.**

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 page 10 for information on obtaining a backcountry permit.

# The Fossil Discovery Exhibit

Learn about fascinating fossil finds at the park's newest exhibit.

At the Fossil Discovery Exhibit visitors can experience the changes to Big Bend's plants and animals and the world they lived in, through 130 million years of geologic time. Specimens from Big Bend's remarkable fossil record and full-color artwork help to illustrate the fascinating story of Big Bend's ancient life.

The story begins at a time when a broad, shallow sea covered Big Bend and much of Texas, leaving behind a fossil record that includes mosasaurs (swimming reptiles), predatory fish, sharks, and numerous "sea shell" fossils, such as clams, oysters, snails, and sea urchins.

As the ancient sea receded, Big Bend became a swampy, coastal environment, much like the coast of Texas today but inhabited by dinosaurs and giant alligators.

Later, the coastline moved farther to the east, and Big Bend was crossed by rivers and forests, where dinosaurs roamed and giant pterosaurs soared overhead.

After the extinction of the dinosaurs, mammals flourished, including those whose bones were found just a stone's throw from the Fossil Discovery Exhibit.

Located 8 miles north of Panther Junction on the Persimmon Gap Entrance Road (Highway 385), the Fossil Discovery Exhibit is a self-guided interpretive experience. The exhibit is open from dawn to dusk. A shaded picnic area is nearby, and it has an assortment of fossil-themed climbing structures for children. A vault toilet is available at the site (no water is available). Cellular telephones generally can get reception at the site.

The Fossil Discovery Exhibit is the most significant addition to Big Bend National Park's visitor services system in the past 50 years. Thanks to the generosity of individuals, corporations, and foundations across the state in an effort led by the Big Bend Conservancy, this \$1.4 million exhibit will give park visitors the opportunity to meet the past right where actual fossils were found.

## How to Get There



C. DUNN

The Fossil Discovery Exhibit is located 8 miles north of Panther Junction on the road towards Persimmon Gap (HWY 385). It is open from dawn to dusk.

**Parking for large RVs and trailers is not available at the Fossil Discovery Exhibit.**



# Safety and Travel Information



## Protecting Yourself and the Park

Big Bend may be wild and unfamiliar country, but it need not be dangerous. Please review 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, and 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 when refilling large containers; please conserve water while in the park.
- 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



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, 8am-5pm (winter); Friday to Monday, 9am-6pm (summer).

### 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 08/18). 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



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 is limited or non-existent in many 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.

# Giving Back to the Park



D. LOMBARDI

## The Big Bend Volunteer Experience

Park Ranger Jimmy Duke

The special appeal and allure of Big Bend National Park draws visitors from all over the United States and around the world. Many visitors soon realize that the park is so large and diverse, and there are so many hidden gems scattered around, that one trip is not enough if you want to really know the park and see it all. You may be one of those visitors, and may have found yourself thinking, “I wish I could be out here for a few months and really get to know the park – it must be so great to live and work here.” Well, maybe you can, and yes it is pretty great living out here!

One way to extend your time in Big Bend and get to know the park better than most is by volunteering. Big Bend is an enthusiastic participant in the National Park Service Volunteers In Parks (VIP) Program.

VIPs perform a variety of important and interesting jobs for Big Bend that current full-time staffing levels cannot support. VIPs are the primary staff in four of the five park visitor centers for example, and provide visitors with advice on what to see in the park, on backcountry road and trail conditions, collect entrance fees and write backcountry permits.

VIPs are also campground hosts in the park’s three developed campgrounds at Rio Grande Village, the Chisos Basin and Cottonwood. They are often the first line of contact for park visitors and monitor and clean the campgrounds throughout the day, and encourage timely fee payment from guests. Backcountry VIPs patrol and clean backcountry roads/campsites and some hike the trails of the High Chisos to encourage compliance with park rules and regulations. VIPs with the Park’s Science and Resource Management division assist with many ongoing research projects in archaeology, cultural history, and ecological restoration within Big Bend; often by being the field

person for the scientist trapped in the office by other demands.

VIPs in Big Bend typically work 12 week stints at three days per week in their assigned role, and a fourth day in uniform hiking trails or roaming the park as frontline contacts for visitors. That leaves three days per week completely free for hiking, camping and exploring, and honestly that fourth work day is mostly a “free day” of exploring – just do it in your uniform. In exchange for this, the Park provides you a place to live with free utilities and generally the only expenses most VIPs have are for food, gas, and entertainment.

Many of our VIPs are “senior teenagers” looking for an active and productive lifestyle, but we also have many younger college age VIPs looking to add experience to already competitive resumes. Having your own RV as a housing option provides the park more flexibility in placing you, but it is not a requirement for the VIP program. The only true requirement is a sense of adventure and the desire to volunteer!



NPS PHOTO

Look for this patch to find NPS volunteers in the park!

## Miracle Cures



C. BALLOU

## History, Health, and Hot Water

Park Ranger Jeannette Woerner

The hot springs of Big Bend have long been a focal point for tourists and travelers in the desert. But these hot mineral waters represent more than just a destination for visitors to the National Park. For J.O. Langford and his family, they represented health, business and home. And for several decades in the early 20th century, the hot springs were also the center of a desert community.

In 1909, J.O. Langford was sitting in the lobby of the Alpine Hotel when he overheard someone discussing the miraculous healing properties of the hot springs in the Big Bend country. Another person might have been skeptical of claims that the mineral water could cure any disease, but Langford had been ill since contracting malaria as a child, and had been looking for relief from his pains and sickness ever since. In fact, he was so interested in these springs that he immediately set out to purchase the land

surrounding them, down in a remote, lonely country that he’d never even laid eyes on.

Langford set out two weeks later with his pregnant wife Bessie and their young daughter Lovie, and traveled for ten days before finally reaching their new home on the Rio Grande. Regaining his health was a priority, so as soon as they arrived, Langford began his treatment: For 21 days, he drank and bathed in the mineral water of the spring, which at its source reaches 105 degrees, and soon he felt healthier and stronger than ever. Langford recognized the value of the springs and he immediately set up a business. He built a bathhouse and developed his land into a desert health resort. Word-of-mouth recommendations soon brought people from across the country to find health at the springs, and many claimed to have been cured of skin diseases, rheumatism, stomach troubles, and chronic pain.

Unfortunately, border troubles related to the Mexican Revolution forced the Langfords to abandon their home not long after they had built it. Bands of raiders terrorizing small

villages throughout Mexico were pushing further north and crossing the Rio Grande, and many people in the area fled to less turbulent territory. The Langfords moved to El Paso, where they lived for 14 years.

They were finally able to return in 1927. The increasing availability of automobiles and improved roads meant more people were able to come and bathe in the springs. Langford rebuilt his bathhouse and added a store, post office, and motor court to accommodate the growing number of visitors. Because the Hot Springs had the closest post office for many miles, the area became a major center for the widespread community of farmers and homesteaders. People traveled for almost a hundred miles on either side of the border to retrieve their mail from the Hot Springs Post Office, and brought with them many things to sell and trade at the community market that soon developed there. The mailman even built himself a small house to live in part of the week during his frequent trips down from Alpine.

Langford and his family lived and prospered

in the Hot Springs area until 1942, at which time he sold the land to the state of Texas. The purchase was made in hopes of one day protecting the area, and two years later, Big Bend National Park was established.

While the buildings have been abandoned since the 1950s, they still stand as a reminder of the community they once supported. To this day, you can visit the remains of the general store and motor court. A walk just a quarter mile down the river will bring you to what is left of the main bathhouse, and you too can relax and soak in what J.O. Langford and many other West Texans considered to be healing waters.



C. BALLOU

The historic post office at the Langford Hot Springs.

# Conservation Values

C. BALLOU

## Protecting Life, Large and Small

Park Ranger Christina Rinas

It is well known that Big Bend is located within the biologically diverse Chihuahuan Desert, but did you know that this park is home to plants and wildlife known only to this particular area? Species that are confined to a particular locality or region are known as endemics. Three species in particular, one fish and two plants, are not only endemic to the Chihuahuan Desert, but in the United States are only known in Big Bend National Park!

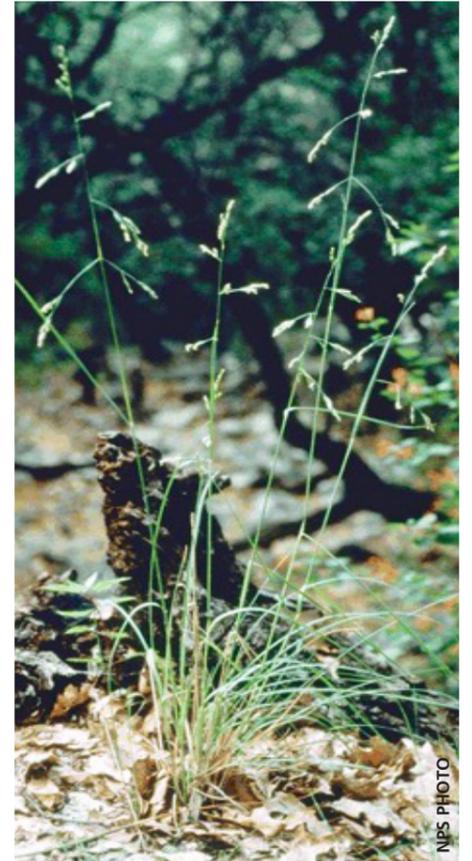
The endangered Big Bend gambusia fish (*Gambusia gagei*), no more than two inches in length, is currently only known to inhabit four ponds at Rio Grande Village. In fact, you could literally draw a 400 yard radius around this fish's known habitat! This fish is thought to have lived along the Rio Grande since at least the last ice-age where they adapted to feeding on invertebrates in warm

spring pools and associated wetland habitats. In the 1950s, due to loss of habitat and population declines, biologists saved the five known remaining Big Bend gambusia fish. Breeding was successful, and now the entire population are descendants of these original five fish! Suitable Big Bend gambusia fish habitat exists in other locations along the Rio Grande in the US and Mexico, but further studies are needed to determine whether the fish is found at these locations.

While wildlife is one of the main attractions of national parks, plants are an important component also. The Chihuahuan Desert has some of the richest variety of flora of the world's deserts, with many notable species occurring here in the park. Among these, the Chisos Mountains are home to the only surviving population of the grass Guadalupe fescue (*Festuca ligulata*), known in the United States! This grass was once known in Guadalupe Mountains National Park, but hasn't been observed for several years. The only other place Guadalupe fescue is known to grow is at one location in Mexico. Less than 200 plants have been identified in the

park, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service has listed this grass as an endangered species. A second plant, the Chisos hedgehog cactus (*Echinocereus chisoensis* var. *chisoensis*), is currently listed as threatened by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. These cacti are found in grasslands and shrublands within the park, and may have been more extensive prior to the ranching era. Although comparable habitat exists in Mexico, no populations of this cactus have yet been located anywhere else. Further studies are needed to improve our management and understanding of these special plants.

Why worry about a tiny fish or one species of grass, which, if it were to disappear would hardly be noticed by most people? Protecting and valuing all species, even the smallest or weakest among us, reflects who we are as a society. Endemic species, in particular, are particularly susceptible to extinction because of their limited range and specific habitat requirements. These species are part of the amazing diversity and beauty that inspires people to travel from all over the world to visit this unique National Park.



Guadalupe fescue, an endangered species.

## Building Big Bend

## The Legacy of the Civilian Conservation Corps

Park Ranger Tracey Coe

Picture it: A steamy summer morning in Big Bend. The year is 1934. Reveille has just sounded on a bugle, and a company of young men, already sweating from the heat in their tar paper huts, start to rise. They pull on their blue jean dungarees, load themselves into one-and-a-half ton trucks, and make the steep drive out of the Chisos Basin, stopping twice to pour water on the vehicles' struggling radiators.

Arriving at their destination in Green Gulch, they began their day of road building under the hot desert sun using only pick axes and shovels. These young men grew up in the midst of the worst economic and man-made environmental disasters in American history and yet, here they were, building hope in the form of a park.

A decade of unchecked spending and a stock market crash along with generations of poor farming and deforestation practices left the 1930s with a wasted land and a wasted youth. In an effort to "heal the man, heal the land," Franklin Roosevelt created the Civilian Conservation Corps. The idea was so popular that within two months, more than 250,000 unemployed men aged 18-25 were shipped around the country, a mobilization feat that has never been matched.

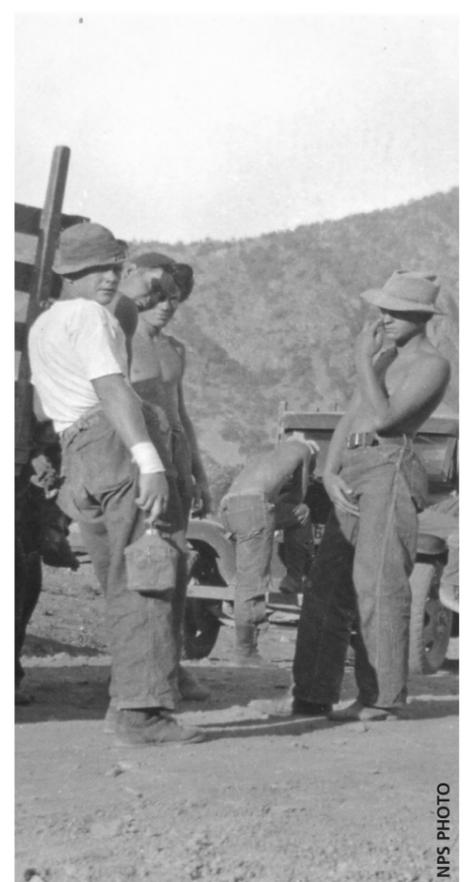
Workers received 30 dollars a month for their labor, 25 of which had to be sent back to help their families. It didn't seem like much, but for the first time in their adult lives these young men had bellies filled with food and days filled with purpose.

Big Bend National Park was one of the many benefactors of these young men. In 1934, Big Bend was a state park that was mostly inaccessible to the lay person. The Chisos Mountains were a four hour drive up a dirt road from Marathon and the primitive route up into the Basin could defeat even the most rugged of trucks. The very idea of having a CCC camp stationed in Big Bend was turned down by the Army twice because of the

remote location. The locals, however, were persistent about the wonders of the area and even pitched in with digging to find a water source in the Basin that would support a camp. The Army finally relented and CCC Company 1855 arrived in 1934.

The incredible efforts of the CCC helped Big Bend gain national attention, eventually leading to the establishment of a national park in 1944. Every time we drive into the Basin, hike the Lost Mine Trail, or stay in one of the stone cottages we are experiencing their legacy. Nationwide the CCC was responsible for planting 3 billion trees, saving 20 million acres of soil from erosion, and creating facilities at hundreds of state and national parks.

As the war in Europe progressed, more and more funds were directed at national defense. The bombing of Pearl Harbor marked the end of an era. The CCC officially ended in June of 1942, but it sparked a generation of environmentalists and outdoor enthusiasts. Many of the men would go on to fight in WWII, serving with a renewed sense of pride in the country that they rebuilt.



CCC workers in Big Bend.

# Places to Visit

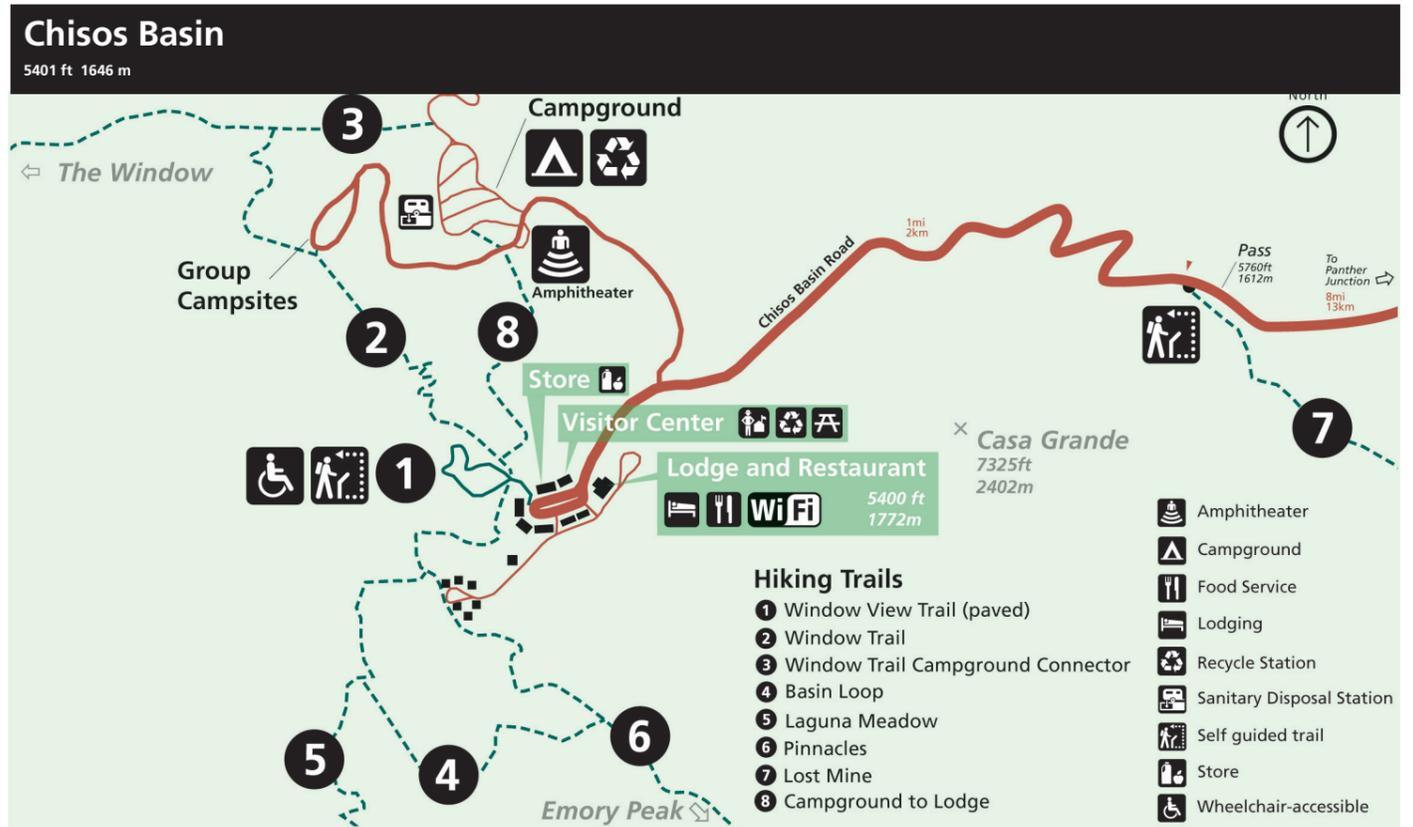
## Chisos Basin

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.



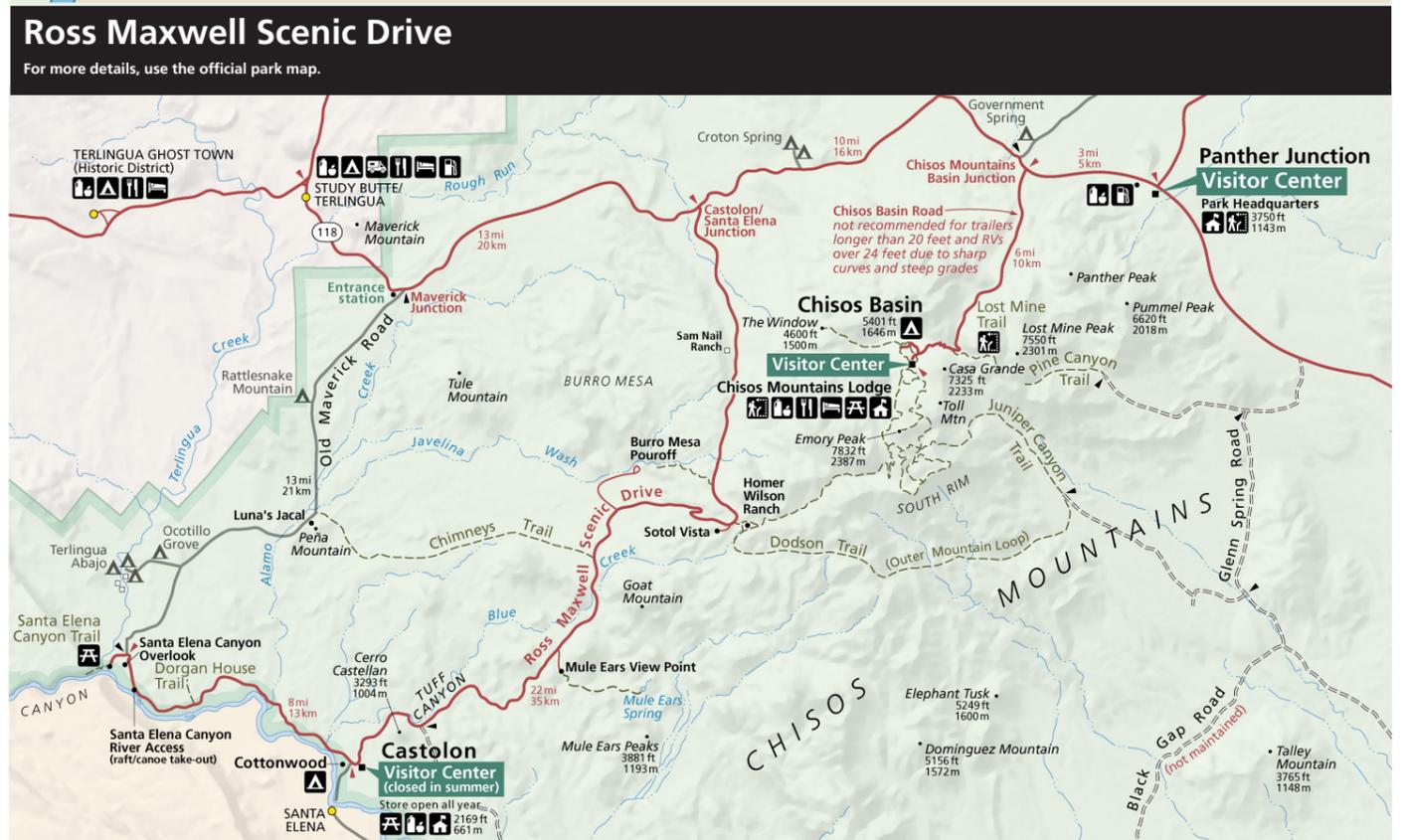
## Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive

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.

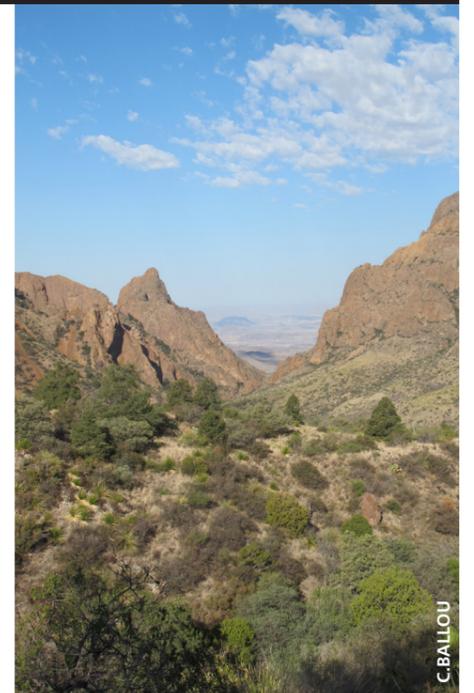
Return by the same route, or take the gravel Old Maverick Road to the western entrance of the park. This road is usually passable for most vehicles, but may be impassable after heavy rains. Check at a visitor center or entrance station for current conditions.



# 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
<b>Basin Loop</b>	Chisos Basin Trailhead (near the Basin Store)	1.8/2.6	1 hour	350/107	<b>Moderate</b> Connects the Laguna Meadow and Pinnacles Trails. Nice views of the Basin area.
<b>Emory Peak</b>	Chisos Basin Trailhead (near the Basin Store)	10.5/17	7 hours	2400/789	<b>Strenuous</b> Trail leads to the highest peak in the park, with excellent views. The end of the trail involves some moderate rock scrambling.
<b>Lost Mine</b>	Basin Road, mile 5 (at the pass)	4.8/7.7	3 hours	1100/335	<b>Moderate</b> Excellent mountain and desert views. For a shorter hike, 1 mile up is a great view to the southeast.
<b>South Rim</b>	Chisos Basin Trailhead (near the Basin Store)	12/19.4 (15/24 with the East Rim Trail included)	8 hours 10 hours	2000/656 2000/656	<b>Strenuous</b> 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.
<b>Window</b>	Chisos Basin Trailhead or Basin Campground	5.6/9.0 4.4/7.0	4 hours 3 hours	980/299 500/152	<b>Moderate</b> 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).
<b>Window View</b>	Chisos Basin Trailhead (near the Basin Store)	0.3/0.5	1/4 hour	0/0	<b>Easy</b> Level, paved, accessible. Great mountain views. Best place in the Basin to catch a sunset through the Window.

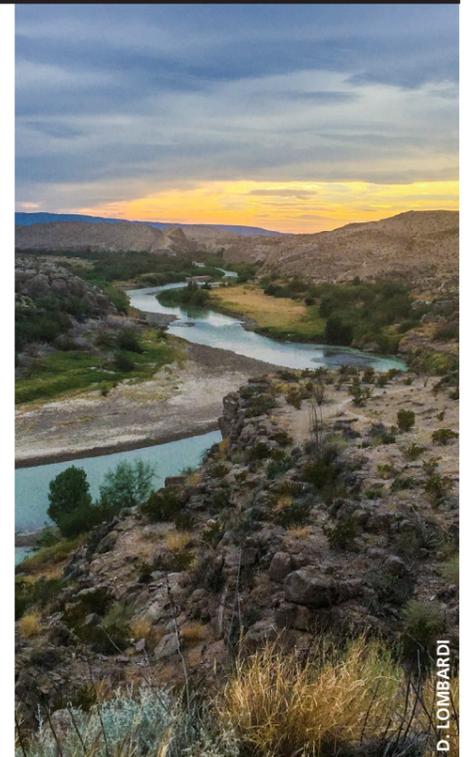


A scenic view on the Basin Loop Trail.

C. BALLOU

## Eastside — Panther Junction and Rio Grande Village

Trail	Trailhead Location	Round Trip (mi/km)	Avg Time	Elevation (ft/m)	Description
<b>Grapevine Hills</b> Balanced Rock	6.4 miles down the Grapevine Hills Road	2.2/3.5	1 hour	240/73	<b>Easy</b> 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.
<b>Chihuahuan Desert Nature Trail</b>	Dugout Wells	0.5/0.8	1/2 hour	10/3	<b>Easy</b> Loop trail with interpretive signs on desert ecology. Look for javelina tracks and resident birds.
<b>Hot Springs</b>	End of Hot Springs Road (unpaved narrow road)	0.75/1.2	1/2 hour	0/0	<b>Easy</b> 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>
<b>Boquillas Canyon</b>	End of Boquillas Canyon Road	1.4/2.3	1 hour	40/12	<b>Easy</b> Begins with a short climb, then descends via a sandy path to the river. Ends near a huge sand dune "slide."
<b>Daniels Ranch to Hot Springs Trail</b>	Daniels Ranch parking area, west of Rio Grande Village	6/10	3 hours	100/31	<b>Moderate</b> Trail from Daniels Ranch to the Hot Springs. Cliff drop-offs prevent access to the river along most of the route. No shade.
<b>Rio Grande Village Nature Trail</b>	Rio Grande Village, across from campsite 18	0.75/1.2	1 hour	130/40	<b>Easy</b> 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.

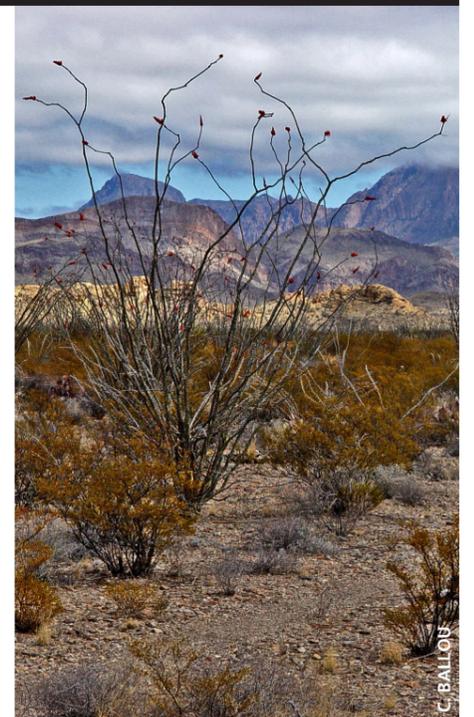


A view from the Daniels Ranch to Hot Springs Trail.

D. LOMBARDI

## Westside — Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive

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

C. BALLOU

# Birds and Bird Watching



## 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—windmills 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 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.

## Birding in Big Bend

The park is recognized as a Globally Significant 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.

## The Colima Warbler



One of the most sought-after bird species in Big Bend is the Colima warbler, a type of New World warbler found primarily in the Sierra Madre mountains of Mexico, though a small population nests in the higher elevations of the Chisos Mountains beginning in early summer. Finding one is the tricky part! Visitors hoping to spot a Colima warbler usually have to make the strenuous, 9-mile round-trip hike to the bird's main habitat in Boot Canyon, though occasionally they are spotted closer to the trailhead on the upper portions of the Pinnacles Trail. Good luck!

# Night Skies



## Of Darkness and Solitude

Park Ranger Bob Smith

One of the foundational concepts of the national parks, and the National Park Service, which was created in 1916 to care for the parks, was the idea that solitude and wildness is a necessary component of a healthy society. We now know that artificial light that was and still is being installed at a great rate, detracts heavily from the natural environment and contributes to the degradation of ecosystems wherever artificial light exists. As the Park Service grew in the early 20th century, most parks and monuments that were being added to the system were in the western United States, and for the most part wild and dark, unfettered by artificial light. There were many writers, commentators and thinkers at the time that believed that preserving nature, to be used by man as a place of refreshment

and rejuvenation, a link to days past, was necessary for a balanced civilization. These thoughts and ideas gave rise to the National Park Service.

As man has continued to “light the night” with ever increasing vigor, places like Big Bend, and other wild parks become even more important as *Oases of Darkness*, which can give those that desire to escape the bounds of the city or civilization, a place to revert to a time when nature was part of the human existence. Parks like Big Bend preserve not only darkness for the benefit of people, more importantly, they allow flora and fauna to thrive in environments that each and every species evolved to exist in—cycles of light and dark, varying in length only by the seasons, for millions of years.

Resource scientists, through extensive research, have found that both plants and animals are having increasing difficulty adapting to artificial light. In some species,

migration and reproductive cycles are disturbed by this light. Predator and prey relationships are altered as nocturnal adaptations are interrupted or made difficult by this same human caused element. Yet the amount of artificial light continues to expand. Every day. Seemingly without end. What will be the ramifications for the future?

Big Bend National Park is one of the darkest places in the lower 48 states. As such, is a place that nature exists on terms nature decided many eons ago. It is also a place of solitude, where people can recapture a part of themselves that in many cases has been suppressed by careers, distance, time, or anything that keeps them from being in nature. Solitude and darkness as a component of wildness, wildness as a space for reflection. Solitude and darkness can be a fearful place, but when met with a mindset of potential, can be a place to soothe the soul, and the very reason the national parks were created.

## 2019 Celestial Events

- Jan 3–4 Quadrantids Meteor Shower
- Jan 21 Total Lunar Eclipse
- Mar 20 Vernal Equinox
- April 22–23 Lyrids Meteor Shower
- May 6–7 Eta Aquarids Meteor Shower
- June 20 Summer Solstice
- July 2 Total Solar Eclipse
- July 28–29 Delta Aquarids Meteor Shower
- August 12–13 Perseids Meteor Shower
- August 27 Conjunction of Jupiter and Venus
- September 23 Autumnal Equinox
- October 8 Draconids Meteor Shower
- October 21–22 Orionids Meteor Shower
- November 5–6 Taurids Meteor Shower
- November 17–18 Leonids Meteor Shower
- December 13–14 Geminids Meteor Shower
- December 21 Winter Solstice
- December 21–22 Ursids Meteor Shower



## Protecting Our Legacy

From the earliest days of America's national parks, motivated citizens and partner organizations have played vital roles in their development, support, and promotion. Private citizens donated portions of what would become Muir Woods National Monument and Acadia National Park as early as 1906. These were the first of many parks established or enlarged by philanthropy. Donated artifacts enriched park stories in visitor centers and museums, fundraising campaigns improved visitor facilities, restored treasured icons, and matching gifts increased the impact of programs.

Big Bend has long enjoyed the strong support of partners who tirelessly assist the park in many ways. To enhance your visit, the non-profit Big Bend Natural History Association provides a wealth of high quality educational items through their bookstores located at all Big Bend Visitor Centers. Proceeds support park interpretive and educational programs. Since 1996, the Big Bend Conservancy has raised over \$3.6 million in support of Big Bend projects ranging from wildlife research to the award-winning Fossil Discovery Exhibit.

## Big Bend Conservancy

The Big Bend Conservancy's mission is to promote, protect and raise funds for Big Bend National Park and the Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River. Since its founding in 1996, the Big Bend Conservancy has raised over \$3.6 million for projects in both Park units. Between license plate sales, foundations and private donors we have provided a new orientation film, student fellowships, restored more than 55 acres of wetlands and opened the Fossil Discovery Exhibit. Your support directly aids Big Bend National Park in providing the best experience for visitors.

Big Bend Conservancy works with supporters across the state and beyond

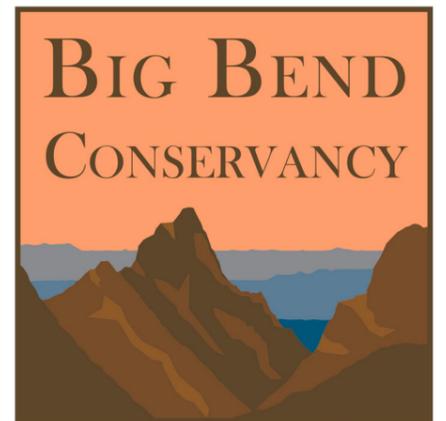
to improve the visitor experience. Our contributions have touched almost every visitor to the park in the last five years. In addition to funding the orientation film, we also paid for new exhibits at Panther Junction Visitor Center.

In 2016 we opened the Fossil Discovery Exhibit, a \$1.5 million exhibit that was the park's first new interpretive addition in decades. This award-winning exhibit melds the best of park interpretation and education with a green building designed to blend into the land as it ages. The Conservancy has continued these improvements by funding the design of new exhibits at the Rio Grande Village Visitor Center.

This year the Conservancy answered the call to provide a permanent fund for the park's

trail system. Thanks to the contributions of many across the state, the Conservancy has established the Trails Endowment in celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the National Trails System Act, which will fund improvements, additions and interpretation for trails at Big Bend in perpetuity. This is the single most important, lasting gift we can give to the park.

One of the most significant sources of funds for the Conservancy is the Big Bend license plate. Since 1997 thousands of Texans have contributed more than \$900,000 to trail signage, visitor center improvements and more by purchasing their license plate. Purchase your own Big Bend license plate at: <http://www.bigbendfriends.org/support/license-plates>.



A Texas Big Bend license plate is a great way to support your park.

## Big Bend Natural History Association

On a blazing-hot June afternoon in 1956, five Texas businessmen met in the lobby of the Holland Hotel in Alpine and devised an ambitious plan to raise money to build a staff research library for what was then the second-newest national park, Big Bend. They formed the non-profit Big Bend Natural History Association to sell books and maps, named themselves its first Board of Directors, and resolved to return to the Holland annually to oversee their great philanthropic venture. At the end of their first full year in business, they decided that an annual meeting was not immediately necessary, because their revenues had amounted to a grand total of \$14 in sales and a \$25 donation.

However, being Texans, they didn't give up. Big Bend Natural History Association (BBNHA) slowly expanded into small-scale publishing of park maps and guides, and as new visitor centers were constructed, bookstores were included in the blueprints. Today, BBNHA is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that operates five bookstores in Big Bend National Park, one at Amistad

National Recreation Area, and [www.bigbendbookstore.org](http://www.bigbendbookstore.org). BBNHA has donated nearly \$2.5M to Big Bend National Park, Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River, and Amistad NRA.

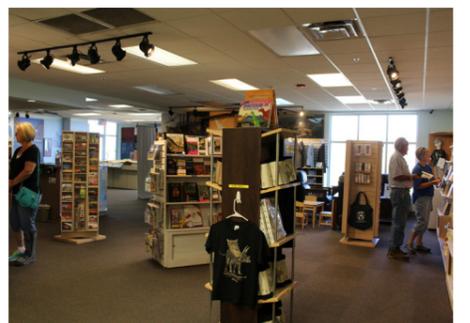
BBNHA's primary mission is to provide portable educational material to the visiting public in hopes that an educated public will love and support the parks and help preserve them for future generations. We carry popular and hard-to-find books about a wide variety of historical and scientific topics, detailed guides and maps, and a smattering of collectibles to help you remember your visits or to give to friends and family to share your experience in these special places.

We're aided in this mission by our more than 800 members. The membership premium is the yearly park calendar with photos by a select local professional photographer and narratives by park personnel. Members are eligible for discounts at all BBNHA outlets and over 400 other non-profit bookstores on public lands. If you'd like to join us in our educational mission, we invite you to become a member at the Panther Junction bookstore or [www.bigbendbookstore.org](http://www.bigbendbookstore.org).

Profits are used to support the educational and research efforts of the parks we serve, and also to provide for purchases that can't be made with government funds—for example, meals for search and rescue operations and volunteer appreciation socials. A small sample of the programs recently funded with BBNHA donations includes:

- Junior Ranger books and badges for more than 1000 children per year
- A daypack and park study kit for every 4th grader in the Terlingua and San Vicente schools
- Artists-in-Residence, including two of the NPS's first Veteran Artist-in-Residence participants
- Administrative support for the otherwise independently funded ActiVets program for wounded Afghanistan and Iraq war veterans
- Support for a series of new interpretive trailhead signs
- Grant-writing services for a film commemorating the establishment of the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River

Oh, and that staff library that started the ball rolling back in 1956? It was finally completed in 1998—just 42 short years later!



The BBNHA bookstore at the Panther Junction Visitor Center offers books, maps, and souvenirs.

## How can I join a partner organization?

For more information about the Big Bend Natural History Association, inquire at the Panther Junction Visitor Center, visit [www.bigbendbookstore.org](http://www.bigbendbookstore.org), or contact 432-477-2236.

To find out how to become involved with the Big Bend Conservancy, to make a donation, or to learn more about the events we host in the park and across the state, visit [www.bigbendconservancy.org](http://www.bigbendconservancy.org), or contact 432-207-2202.



BBNHA members receive a 15% discount on bookstore purchases. This discount is honored at cooperating park bookstores nationwide.

# Camping in the Park



A view from the Rio Grande Village campground.

J. JURADO

## 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](http://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](http://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](http://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 shade shelters. Dump station nearby.

**Reservable Campsites:** 43 sites are reservable November 15–April 15. Contact [www.recreation.gov](http://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](http://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 an Interagency Senior or Access Pass	Observe posted campground quiet hours.		

## Backcountry Camping and River Use

### Primitive Roadside Campsites

All roadside campsites 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



A typical backcountry roadside campsite.

J. JURADO

### How to Obtain a Permit:

Permits are required for any overnight backcountry camping, river use, and stock use, and can be obtained from the Panther Junction and Chisos Basin Visitor Centers. 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.

# Keeping Wildlife Wild



R. WONNIE

## Black Bears

The return of black bears to Big Bend is a success story for both bears and the park. Originally native to the Chisos Mountains, they disappeared from this area by the 1940s. Nearly fifty years later, in the 1980s, they began returning from Mexico. Today, wildlife biologists estimate a black bear population of around 20 to 30 black bears.

A black bear's normal diet consists largely of nuts, fruits, sotol and yucca hearts, but also includes small mammals, reptiles, and carrion. Bears normally avoid humans, but can become aggressive if they learn to take food from human sources.

The developed campgrounds, High Chisos backpacking sites, and primitive roadside campsites have bear proof storage lockers for caching edibles. Hard-sided vehicles are also suitable for storing edible items. Dumpsters throughout the park are bear proof as well.



J. JURADO

## Mountain Lions

Solitary and secretive, the mountain lion is Big Bend's top predator and is vital in maintaining the park's biological diversity. Mountain lions live throughout the park from mountain to desert, and biologists estimate a stable population of about two dozen lions.

Everywhere in Big Bend, you are in the territory of at least one lion. Within their territories, lions help balance herbivores

and vegetation. Research shows these large predators help keep both deer and javelina populations within the limits of their food resources.

Each year visitors report around 130 lion sightings in Big Bend National Park. Over half are seen along roadways, but encounters also occur along trails. Your best plan of action is to be aware of your surroundings and avoid hiking alone or at dusk and dawn. Also, watch your children closely; never let them run ahead of you.



R. WONNIE

## Javelinas

For many visitors, seeing a javelina (pronounced hav-uh-LEE-nuh) is a new experience. Also known as collared peccaries, these animals are only found in the U.S. in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona.

They are covered with black, bristly hairs and weigh between 40–60 lbs. They usually travel in groups called bands that consist of 10–25 individuals. Javelinas have a highly developed sense of smell, but poor vision.

Physically, they resemble pigs, but are not closely related. A javelina's diet includes prickly pear cactus, grasses, mesquite beans, piñon nuts, fruits, berries, and seeds.

Every year reports document campsites raided by javelinas. Although not normally aggressive, they can be when food is involved. Protect yourselves and the javelina by storing all food inside a vehicle or in the food storage lockers provided in the campgrounds. Do not leave coolers or food boxes unattended at any time.



J. JURADO

## Coyotes

Nothing in Big Bend speaks of wilderness more than the song of a coyote. Their various vocalizations from yips to howls let you know you are in the presence of an iconic figure. Their narrow-set, yellow eyes and long snout may seem intimidating, but in general, coyotes do not bother human beings.

Coyotes range over the entire United States. These highly adapted members of the

canine family are omnivores, dining on small mammals, reptiles, and insects. Coyotes will also eat berries and other vegetation when meat is unavailable. Carrion is an important food source in winter.

Coyotes are typically solitary, but will hunt in small groups when individuals converge in areas where food is plentiful. They will work cooperatively, either chasing an animal in relays to tire it or waiting in ambush. However, unlike wolves, they do not form lasting packs.



M. YARBROUGH

## Rattlesnakes

Four species of rattlesnakes live in Big Bend National Park—the Western Diamondback, Black-tailed, Mojave, and Rock rattlesnakes.

This often-feared reptile is beneficial to the environment, eating mice, rats, and other small animals—many of which are pests or spread disease.

Perhaps surprising, rattlesnakes are not a top predator, sometimes becoming the meal

of roadrunners, skunks, coyotes, and even other snakes, such as the western coachwhip.

The buzz of a rattlesnake is an unmistakable sound that will stop you in your tracks. And this is a good thing, as rattlesnakes use this sound as a warning when they perceive a threat; continue toward them, and you risk provoking a self-defensive bite. A few bites have occurred in Big Bend. If bitten, contact a ranger promptly, as permanent damage can occur within 12 hours of a bite.



J. JURADO

## Wild Animal Encounters

For many people, the chance to see a bear or mountain lion in the natural environment is an amazing opportunity. However, one must always remember that we are entering their home, their territory. As such, we need to respect wildlife and know what to do if we encounter a wild predator:

- Do not run, but back away to get out of range of the perceived threat.
- If you feel threatened, try to look large, wave your arms, throw rocks or sticks.
- If attacked, fight back.
- Watch children closely and never let them run ahead or lag behind.
- Report bear or mountain lion sightings or encounters to a park ranger as soon as possible.

To help preserve healthy environments for both visitors and predators, please remember:

- Never leave food or trash unattended, as bears and other wildlife readily habituate.
- Never feed wildlife since no park animal is tame, and feeding leads to aggressive future behavior.
- Never approach wildlife and always keep a safe distance.

## Please Help

### At the Lodge

- Leave nothing outside your room, on the balcony, or on the porch.

### In Developed Campgrounds

- Store food, beverages, toiletries, pet food, and dishes in the bear-proof storage locker provided at your site.
- Keep your campsite clean. Take trash and food scraps to a dumpster.
- Dump liquids in restroom utility sinks, not on the ground.
- Ice chests and coolers are not bear-proof; store them in your vehicle.

### In the Backcountry

- Never leave packs or food unattended. Carry everything with you or store in a bear-proof locker.
- Avoid carrying odorous food and toiletries.
- Carry out all trash, including orange peels, cigarette butts, and left-over food and cooking grease.

### Cyclists

- Use food storage lockers when provided.

## 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

*These listings are not an 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 Boating & Hiking Company 469-607-9869  
 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 (valid for 7 days)

- Private, non-commercial vehicle \$30
- Motorcycle \$25
- Individual entering without vehicle (bicyclist, etc.) \$15 per person
- Big Bend Annual Pass \$55

All Interagency passes are sold and accepted at Big Bend. Inquire at a visitor center or entrance station for more information.

For commercial rates, please consult our website: [www.nps.gov/bibe](http://www.nps.gov/bibe)

## 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

Cell phone service is available in the Chisos Basin, but is sporadic or unavailable throughout the park. Public pay phones are located outside the Chisos Mountains Lodge and Rio Grande Village Store.

## 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 and Chisos Basin Visitor Centers are open year-round. Rio Grande Village, Persimmon Gap, 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 Make the Difference

Big Bend National Park depends on dedicated volunteers to perform many duties throughout the year. 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.

Volunteers are sought for the positions of camp host, visitor center host, maintenance, or even working for the park's social media team. 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.

## How can I get involved?

Are you interested in volunteering at Big Bend National Park? Here are some things to keep in mind before submitting an application:

- Volunteers should be committed to staying at least three months. There may be free government housing available, however the park usually prefers volunteers to bring an RV or trailer.
- In exchange for an RV site, electricity, water, and reimbursed propane expenses, volunteers are required to work 32 hours a week.

- Most volunteer positions require training, references, and a background check. Training is provided unless otherwise noted.
- Volunteers may be required to work weekends and holidays.

For more information, contact the volunteer coordinator at 432-477-1106.

