

# SUL ROSS STATE TEACHERS COLLEGE

## BULLETIN

ALPINE, TEXAS

**BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK ISSUE**

AND

**WEST TEXAS HISTORICAL AND SCIENTIFIC  
SOCIETY PUBLICATION NUMBER <sup>thirteen</sup>~~TWELVE~~**

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Alpine, Texas, June 1, 1948

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# **THE BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK**

## **DESCRIPTIVE AND HISTORICAL**

### **I. DESCRIPTIVE**

ROSS A. MAXWELL, Ph.D.

Superintendent, Big Bend National Park

### **II. SOME SCENES**

### **III. HISTORICAL**

CLIFFORD B. CASEY, Ph.D.

Professor of History, Sul Ross State Teachers College



## FOREWORD

As a Texas institution Sul Ross State Teachers College serves in a limited way the entire State, but due to its location and on account of the fact that majority of its students live in West Texas, it is interested in rendering distinct and special service to the Big Bend region of Texas. The administration and faculty of the Institution are—and have been for years—interested in the Big Bend National Park, the most dramatic and stupendous park in Texas, and one of the greatest as well as the newest of the National parks. This Park is situated in near proximity to the College and is used often by students for biological and geological field trips and for recreation.

Likewise the West Texas Historical and Scientific Society, an institution closely allied with but organically separate from the College, has had through the years the highest concern in the establishment and subsequent development of the Big Bend National Park. The growth in popularity of the Park is very pleasing to the Society.

Reciprocally, from the first the administration of the Big Bend National Park has cooperated to the highest degree both with Sul Ross College and the West Texas Historical and Scientific Society, the Superintendent of the Park having recently served as president of the latter.

The purpose of this bulletin is to acquaint the public with the present opportunities for enjoying the Big Bend National Park and to preserve in permanent form some important facts of the history of its establishment and early development. The bulletin is sent forth with confidence that the information is accurate—and adequate, within brief limits—as the authors are unusually well prepared to present the information.

T. H. ETHERIDGE, Dean  
Sul Ross State Teachers College  
June 1, 1948

## **I. DESCRIPTIVE**

### **BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK**

#### **A LAND OF CONTRASTS**

**ROSS A. MAXWELL**

Superintendent, Big Bend National Park

## BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK—A Land of Contrasts

by

Ross A. Maxwell

The Big Bend Country is a land rich in romance, legends, scenic beauty and scientific phenomena. It was traversed by the Spanish *Conquistadores*, the Indians on hunting and war treks, and was the area in which the United States Army tested the value of camel caravans in crossing the semi-arid lands of the Southwest. Mexicans and Anglo-Saxons have both taken part in settling the area. In the early days large herds of cattle moved about on a free range depending upon the location of grass and water. Cattle rustling and horse stealing were not unknown, and occasionally ranches or commissaries were raided by bandits. But perhaps the most interesting feature of all is the Rio Grande with its great bend that furnishes a name for the area, its beautiful canyons, meandering course, and clear water that has meant life or death to many—the quenching of thirst, or as a means of physical freedom on the other side (*otro lado*) of the international boundary.

The major thrills in the settling of this vast frontier have passed, but early influences remain to intrigue both the tourist and the local inhabitants. In order to preserve a portion of this area with its unique traditions and colorful scenery, the State of Texas through her progressive, public-spirited citizens appropriated \$1,500,000, with which to purchase the necessary land that was in turn deeded to the Federal Government for National Park purposes. By these actions Texas citizens made possible the preservation of a small portion of their state to be enjoyed by all people. Thus Big Bend became the twenty-seventh national park, on June 12, 1944.

One can reach this National Park by traveling any of the east-west trunk highways in Texas, but the nearest is U. S. Highway No. 90. At Marathon, Texas, (on U. S. 90, else the Southern Pacific Railway), State Highway No. 227 extends southwestward to the National Park boundary. One may also reach the park by traveling State Highway No. 118 that intersects U. S. 90 at Alpine. State Highway No. 227 is paved for forty-one miles to the park boundary. State Highway No. 118

is paved for five miles out of Alpine and a second section is under construction. All the park roads are gravel, but a grading and oiling project is under way. If one chooses to enter the park by way of State Highway 227, he will cross a semi-arid country where low ridges, plains, and arroyos are the most conspicuous topographic features and ranching the chief occupation. After traveling through about 42 miles of this type of country the highway passes through Persimmon Gap, a conspicuous notch in the Santiago Mountains.

Persimmon Gap is near the northern entrance to the park. Although the gap and the road thus far traveled are not noted for their beauty the area has an interesting historical background, for this road is along the old Comanche Trail. The Indians camped in the gap, and their rock mortars, grinding stones, broken spears, arrows, and other artifacts are common. A similar route has been followed by travelers since the area was first settled. This was also a stage route with one of the stage stations in the Gap. Later, the Texas State Highway Department erected a historical marker calling attention to this early history.

From Persimmon Gap the Park road continues southwestward for about sixty-one miles to the mouth of Santa Elena Canyon, a deep gorge cut by the Rio Grande across Mesa de Anguila. A spur of this highway (about thirty-one miles from Persimmon Gap) enters the Chisos Mountains from the northeast. A second spur (forty-eight miles from Persimmon Gap) enters Study Butte and Terlingua to join the road from Alpine. Still another spur road some twenty-five miles from Persimmon Gap leads southward to Hot Springs and Boquillas. Secondary roads branch off from this highway into various localities where scenic and scientific phenomena of interest to both the experienced scientist and the amateur may be seen.

After leaving Persimmon Gap, on the right-hand side of the highway about twelve to fifteen miles to the southwest are the Rosillos Mountains. This name means "roan" in Mexican and is derived from the roan color of the rocks found in this oval-shaped highland. Farther to the southwest are the Chisos Mountains, the most conspicuous topographic feature in the park. Mount Emory, the highest peak, has an elevation of 7,835 feet, and many of the peaks tower hundreds of feet above the surrounding lowlands.

For several miles southwest of Persimmon Gap the road

follows the western side of the Santiago Mountains. After traveling about four miles south, one will see that an intermittent stream has cut a conspicuous gorge through the range. It is called Dog Canyon, and it is said that years ago a yoke of oxen and a wagon guarded by a dog were found there. The owner of the wagon did not return. His identity and mysterious disappearance is another of the unanswered problems of the Big Bend. This canyon also has historical significance. Some maintain that the camel caravan of 1861 passed through it, while others think that the caravan passed through Persimmon Gap, remaining in the more open country because of the dangers from the Indians.

Devil's Den is about one and one-half miles south of Dog Canyon. This narrow gorge contains deep *tinajas* (water holes) that seldom are dry. It was a frequent camp site for Indians, probably the Comanches on their forays into Mexico. It is only a short distance from the old Comanche Trail, and artifacts have been collected from this area. Southward from Dog Canyon the mountain range widens and within four miles it passes into the Sierra del Carmen, locally called the Dead Horse Mountains (*Sierra del Caballo Muerto*). This series of linear ridges extends southward and in topography is virtually continuous with the Sierra del Carmen (Carmen Mountains) of Mexico. It is broken, however, by the Boquillas Canyon cut by the Rio Grande.

When you have traveled about 20 miles from Persimmon Gap you will be traveling over Tornillo Flat, an erosional plain cut by Tornillo Creek and its tributaries. This is the most arid region of the Park. During the dry season there is little vegetation except creosote bush, lechuguilla, and cacti, but following a shower the plants spring up as if by magic. In a few days they are in blossom and the desert is clothed in a robe of gorgeous colors. Normally this kind of vegetation lives only a few weeks and following the next shower new and different types of flowers appear.

From Tornillo Flat there is a nice view of the Sierra del Carmen ranges. Prominent features in the Park section are Alto Relix (high bluff) and Sue Peak. Farther south the west facing bluff of the Sierra del Carmen of Mexico is exposed. The column that represents the highest peak in the bluff is called Shot Tower, or sometimes the Boquillas Finger. This peak is an important landmark and has been used by surveyors for bearing shots when making various land surveys.

The sunset on the Sierra del Carmen is a gorgeous sight, the like of which is rarely seen in Texas. In the afternoon when there are wispy clouds in the western sky, the sunlight strikes the rocks in this range with an orange glow. As the sun sets the colors brighten to a brilliant red. After the sun disappears the colors fade for a brief period, but they are brightened again by the afterglow. Eventually, however, the colors change to pink, then bluish-gray and purple. These colors may be seen long after the light has disappeared from the other mountains when it eventually fades into the blackness of the night.

In contrast with the semi-arid scenery of Tornillo Flat, the Chisos Mountains exhibit the most spectacular mountainous scenery in the area. Some of the scenery may be enjoyed from the highway or secondary roads in and around the mountains, but the most magnificent views can be seen only on horseback or hiking trips. The Basin of this mountainous area may be reached by the Park road. There one may find overnight accommodations, gasoline, meal service, and grocery store if he wishes to visit longer and tramp into the more secluded areas. The floor of the Basin is approximately 1 mile above sea level and is surrounded by a mountain wall 1,500 to 2,000 feet in height. The most impressive view is from the South Rim. This great rim has an elevation of more than 7,000 feet and is terminated on the south by a precipitous bluff 1,000 to 2,000 feet in height. Its surface is approximately 1 mile above the Rio Grande, 16 miles to the south. From this point of vantage on a clear day one may see for a distance of at least 100 miles into Mexico and for an equal distance in the opposite direction. This panoramic view is one of the best in the United States. Shorter trips to other areas, including the views obtained from the top of Ward Mountain, the Window, the Chinese Wall, and the top of Lost Mine Peak, are well worth the time and energy required.

A trip to Big Bend National Park is not complete without taking a drive to some of the outlying areas. On this trip high spots of human interest may be seen by taking a short detour from the park area to Study Butte and Terlingua, two villages, now all but abandoned, that grew up around the quicksilver mines that were closed down during the summer of 1946. The population was largely Mexican. The adobe and rock huts in which the inhabitants lived, display interesting examples of native stone work, and Spanish-American customs were dominant.

The chief period of celebration for these people was *Cinco de Mayo* or May 5, celebrating the Mexicans' defeat of Maximilian, and is one of the few days when the mines were closed. A few days before the holiday, the houses, cemeteries, and community center were decorated. A *baile* (dance) was usually held and the villagers came in their finest costumes. The dance was held at the community center, which in this case was a small house with an outdoor concrete dance floor. Electric lights were made possible by windchargers, and the musical instruments were usually violin, guitar, and harmonica. The dance might continue throughout the following day. Although these two areas were purposely excluded from the park area because of the mineral wealth, the Spanish-American influence displayed there is certainly a part of the Big Bend Country.

Beyond Terlingua is the village of Lajitas, another Mexican village just outside the park area. This was a chief port of entry for many years, and thousands of cattle and horses were driven across the Rio Grande. The history of this village and the incidents that have taken place there would furnish material for an interesting book.

A few miles southeast of the village of Lajitas the Rio Grande enters the Santa Elena Canyon. This portion of the canyon is inaccessible by automobile, but the park road extends to the mouth of the canyon where the Rio Grande emerges from Mesa de Anguila. The river, like a giant rasp, cut through the massive rock layers in Mesa de Anguila, an uplifted block of the earth's crust, making a gorge that in some points is not more than fifty feet wide with sheer walls approximately 1,500 feet high. Santa Elena is one of three canyons of similar depths that have been cut by the Rio Grande in this area. Dr. R. T. Hill has published a classic description in *Century Magazine* of January, 1901, of his trip which is entitled *Running the Canyons of the Rio Grande*.

From the mouth of Santa Elena Canyon one may continue down the Rio Grande by way of a truck trail. This road passes through Castolon, a small settlement where there is a general store and U. S. Postoffice. Below that point the road cannot be traveled with common passenger car; only the most sturdy of light trucks or military vehicles can get through. Farther down the river was Johnson's ranch, where until 1938 the U. S. Army maintained a landing field and radio station.

Traveling from Johnson's Ranch, the trail swings away from

the river and passes through Glenn Springs, now completely abandoned but until a few years ago a thriving community. During the border trouble when Pancho Villa reigned across the river, there were two companies of soldiers stationed at Glenn Springs. When the trouble subsided all but nine of the soldiers were withdrawn. On the fatal day of May 5, 1916 (*Cinco de Mayo*), a group of bandits from across the river made the raid which is sometimes referred to as the Glenn Springs Massacre. In the battle three soldiers, a boy who lived there, and a much larger number of Mexicans were killed. The old adobe house that was used as a fort, the concession building, and the several other houses are now all in ruins.

Leaving Glenn Springs, one truck trail swings back to the river. This road passes through San Vicente, an interesting Mexican village; Hot Springs, where there used to be a U. S. Post Office and a small museum, but which now has cabins and a general store; then on down the river to Boquillas where another small Mexican settlement once existed.

A short distance down the river from Boquillas is the head of Boquillas Canyon. This canyon was cut by the Rio Grande through a mountainous belt that is about twenty miles in width. The canyon is narrow and the height and steepness of the walls are comparable to those of Santa Elena Canyon. It geographically separates the Sierra del Carmen of Texas from the Sierra del Carmen of Mexico, and its mouth is near the foot of the bluff on which the light from the setting sun so gorgeously falls. It was near this canyon that Capt. Charles Neville and his Texas Rangers came upon a band of Indians. The Rangers' ammunition was low and most of what was left was used in defeating the Indians, who took to the mountains without their horses. Although the horses were captured, Capt. Neville's party was traveling by boat and they were unable to take the animals with them. On the other hand, they could not leave them for the Indians to remount and ride in raids against the settlers. Ammunition was too precious to be wasted in killing a horse; consequently, the horses were blindfolded and knocked in the head. Since that day in January, 1863, this canyon has been called by many, "Dead Horse Canyon".

A few miles south from the mouth of Boquillas Canyon (in Mexico) is a lead-silver-zinc mine that has been intermittently operated for years. The mine is in the Sierra del Carmen range about half-way to the top of an imposing escarpment. The ore



is high-grade, but one of the problems of operation is getting the ore to a smelter. At one time the ore was transported by aerial tramway from Mexico into Texas, then hauled by burro teams and wagons to Marathon for shipment. This tramway was about seven miles in length and consisted of a rotating cable from which ore buckets were suspended. Although some of the tramway is still standing, it has not been used since about 1919. The ore is now being hauled by truck, reloaded on this side of the river, then trucked to Marathon for shipment to El Paso.

Scientists tell us that many of the scenic features in the Big Bend Country are due to geological phenomena, and surely it is one of the most interesting geological provinces in the United States. According to legend, when the Great Creator made the earth, He had a lot of rejected materials. When He had finished, He threw the refuse into one pile and made the Big Bend. At times one wonders if this may not be true, for nature has certainly done some astonishing work in this land of contrasts. The rocks are strangely mixed up, most of the strata are lopsided or standing on end, and some of the mountains are turned upside-down and piled down where they shouldn't be. Along the Rio Grande the yawning canyons are overlooked by mountain peaks that rise above the flats like giant sentinels. The Chisos Mountains, with their ghost-like peaks, guard the northern approach to the river; and the Sierra del Carmen range, overlooking the southern banks, rises as a sheer wall to heights that, when compared to the Palisades of the Hudson, make the latter look small indeed.

Some of the geological phenomena which are now exposed in the Big Bend Country were formed several hundred million years ago. One of these events was an invasion of the ocean that covered much and probably all of the Big Bend. Mud, sand, and gravel were deposited on the ocean floor and these sediments were consolidated into rock strata. Later uplifts of mountain-making proportions elevated the ocean basin, causing the water to withdraw, and then squeezed the newly formed rock into mountains. This period of mountain-making is believed to have taken place at approximately the same time that the Appalachian Mountains were formed. Erosion attacked the new mountains and later reduced them to a series of low ridges. The remnants of this ancient mountain mass are clearly outlined by the whitish strata in the ridges crossed by the highway south of Marathon.

This period of erosion was ended in the Big Bend Country by a second invasion of the ocean that eventually connected the Gulf of Mexico with the Arctic Ocean. Sediments were deposited in this second sea way, burying the ancient mountain ranges. The physical conditions that existed at that time probably did not differ greatly from those that now exist in the Gulf of Mexico, for the water was teeming with various kinds of life, some of which are the ancestors of our present shellfish. When these animals died, their shells fell to the bottom of the ocean. Many of them were probably buried alive by mud that was shifted by the waves and currents. In either case large numbers of the shells were fossilized. One fossil shell, related to our present-day clam, has been found that is 3 feet wide and 4 feet long. It is not unusual to find similar fossil shells as much as 2 feet in diameter. In addition to the fossil shellfish, fossil bones and vertebra of marine animals such as reptiles, fishes, and sharks have been collected, as have shark teeth.

Broad warping in the continent caused the main body of the ocean to withdraw, but water remained in some of the depressions, forming marshes. Dense vegetation, including types that later developed into our modern forests, clothed the surface. Around the water was a lush growth of vegetation, including ferns, mosses, canes, and water-loving trees. It was in this type of environment that the giant dinosaurs lived, roamed, fought and died. Some of them were vegetarians and were dependent for their livelihood upon the lush vegetation. Others were carnivorous and hunted down and took advantage of the less powerful animals, gorging upon their flesh. Occasionally one of these monsters ventured too far into the quagmire and was unable to get out. The bodies of these unfortunate beasts were covered with mud, and their bones and teeth petrified. Associated with the dinosaur bones one also finds petrified wood. Occasionally there are stumps of trees, their roots firmly bedded in the rock that was once the soil in which they grew. More common discoveries are portions of petrified logs, several of them fifty feet in length. One log more than ten feet in diameter has been observed.

Following the dinosaur regime the Big Bend Country was subjected to forces that twisted, bent, and crumpled the rocks. This period of deformation was not continuous, but took place in several stages. It culminated, however, with the formation of the conspicuous mountain masses now seen in the Big Bend

Country. This period of mountain building was accompanied by volcanic activity. Large masses of molten rock moved slowly upward toward the surface. Some of the masses lacked the power to reach the surface and cooled and hardened as plug-like masses. Others spread laterally, arching the strata and forming tack-head-shaped masses. Some of it cut the strata at various angles and spread laterally between the beds. Other masses reached the surface with explosive violence, throwing ash, cinders, and lava over local areas. In other localities, vents were opened and lava poured quietly over the surface.

The mountains formed during this period of deformation and volcanic activity have been the controlling force in developing the present topographic features. As erosion progressed, the forces of running water attacked the weak zones, carving canyons, arroyos, basins, and plains. This left the more resistant rock standing as castle-like peaks, high mesas with precipitous rims, and long linear ridges. These major features have been further carved into columns, spires, pinnacles, arches, and buttresses that not only add to the beauty of the country, but also remain as monuments to an area that at one time was much higher and more rugged than now.

The geological phenomena that formed the mountains and the agencies of weathering and erosion that have reduced portions of this magnificent highland have also had a direct effect upon the distribution of wildlife. The lowlands, which are erosional plains, have the most severe temperatures and least rainfall of any part of this semi-arid region. The vegetation is mostly creosote bush, mesquite, ocotillo, lechuguilla, and cacti. On the higher portions of the plains may be found sotol, candelilla (wax plant), and various shrubs and semi-shrubby plants. Along the arroyos that cross the lowlands one may see Mexican buckeye, desert willow, Apache plume, Mexican hackberry, Mexican persimmon, ash, and walnut. These types extend up the mountain slopes and grade into a belt of vegetation that is characterized by several species of live oak, piñon pine, weeping juniper, alligator-bark juniper, evergreen sumac, mountain maguey, sotol, bear grass and yucca. In the higher mountains there are communities of Arizona cypress, Douglas fir, maple, yellow pine, aspen, and madroña.

These plants are found in irregular belts that are closely related to the altitude. Yet on the other hand, there are some unique associations in this land of contrasts. The weeping juni-

per is rarely found in the United States, being characteristic of areas much farther south, but in the Chisos Mountains it is growing alongside Arizona cypress, Douglas fir, aspen, and semi-arid plants characteristic of the Southwest, like sotol, lechuguilla, and many species of cacti.

The vegetation of the Big Bend Country also had a definite influence upon the activities of the people. Naturally the greatest interests were in ranching and in the early days the herds were more numerous in the lowlands. As the grazing areas were exhausted the livestock moved to higher and rougher localities. Grazing also was restricted to areas close to water. In all cases where natural water is found there is a good geological reason for its existence, and in other areas where geological structures are less favorable water is scarce. A striking example is in the Sierra del Carmen where the vegetation is excellent but the area has not been grazed because water is not available.

Plants have guided the activities of the people in other days. During the World War I and II, as well as during the intervening period, the wax industry flourished. This wax was made from the candelilla (wax) plant that grows in the Big Bend. The wax was used chiefly for water-proofing munitions and various instruments, tools and weapons; but it is also used in the manufacture of phonograph records and sealing wax. The guayule plant that grows in the Big Bend was used during war times for making synthetic rubber, and it was an important project during the late war.

The native Mexicans use many of the plants for other purposes. Alcoholic beverages are made from the sotol and maguey plants. The blossoms from the Spanish Dagger (yucca) are used for food; fibers taken from the leaves are used for twine, and frequently even the leaves themselves are used for stronger cords, as for weaving. The needle-like points on the leaves' ends are used as awls, and in some cases they have been used to pierce the flesh following a rattlesnake bite. This causes the blood to flow freely and carry out some of the venom. Some persons believe that a poison in the dagger neutralized the venom from the snake. The broad-leaf variety is sometimes used in making baskets and sandals. The leaves from bear grass are frequently used in making baskets. The thread from the leaves is used for twine and in many cases the leaves have been used for general household purposes. In addition to the *pulque* and *tequilla*, alcoholic beverages that the natives drink which are made from

the maguey plant, the fleshy leaves when baked are edible, and the juices pressed from them make a cough syrup and poultices. Many of the ropes seen in the Southwest are made from the fiber of this plant. Sotol is also baked and eaten by the Mexicans and Indians. The uncooked leaves in the heart of the plant are sweet and tasteful when fresh, and many a rancher has saved his stock by cutting and feeding sotol during dry years.

Most of the brushes, matting, coarse twine, and ropes made in northern Mexico and certain sections in the Big Bend are from the fibers of the lechuguilla plant. Juices from the heart of the plant are quite often used by the natives as a substitute for soap or shampoo.

The catclaw blossoms, white brush, and mesquite furnish nectar for honey and grow in abundance over much of the Big Bend. These plants require little moisture and bloom even in dry seasons. The white brush is usually found in thickets along the flood plain of the arroyos. It blooms following each rain and is dependable throughout most of the year.

The mesquite is an important source of food for both man and beast. The tree frequently blooms twice a year, and in dry years it occasionally bears a succession of blossoms and beans. The bean pods can be chewed raw, but the common practice is to grind the dry beans in a *metate* (a stone mortar for grinding grain) to make flour. The flour is then soaked with water to make dough. This is dried, and although hard it is very nutritious, and forms a staple food of the Mexicans. Livestock thrives on the beans, and the wood is one of the chief sources of fuel. Gum that accumulates on the bark is occasionally used as a confection, and when placed in water the solution is used in checking diarrhea.

Ocotillo has the ability to grow when only the stem is placed in the ground. Consequently it is frequently used in building corrals, fences, and various enclosures. Occasionally two rows are placed about 6 inches apart and the space between filled with bundles of grass to form the walls of a house. They may also be used in the ceiling of a room or placed on a frame and covered to form an arbor or other shelter. Carrinzo, a large cane that grows along the Rio Grande, is also used for making shelters of various kinds.

Some forms of cacti are used in various ways. Probably the species most commonly used is the prickly pear. The plant is eaten by livestock; and although the ranchers do not regularly

practice burning off the thorns, the cattle browse on its more tender joints for roughage. Occasionally the tender joints are sought for human consumption. They may be eaten raw, or made into salads and more often into candy or jellies. The stocks of the cholla or cane cactus varieties are sometimes made into canes, napkin rings, lamp stands and various ornaments. The fruit of the petaya or strawberry cactus is edible. This fleshy mass contains many small seeds and has a tart flavor. When served with cream and sugar the taste is similar to that of the strawberry. The peyote (mescal button or devil's root) was used by certain Indians for its narcotic and delirium-producing qualities. The effects on the user are said to be similar to those produced by opium. According to legend the narcotic effects of the peyote protected the user against witches and evil spirits.

The animal life of the Big Bend is also interesting. The black bear is present in small numbers and panther are increasing. Several members of the small cat-like carnivorous animals are more numerous. Coyotes and fox are common. Two kinds of deer are present. The mule deer, locally called "blacktail", is common in the lowlands. A smaller variety, the fantail, is numerous in the Chisos Mountains. The javelina roams the flats. Beaver are present along the Rio Grande, and mountain sheep, although now exterminated, were present in the early days. The area was recently re-stocked with antelope. Three varieties of rattlesnakes are common: the diamondback, on the flats; the green rattler, in the intermediate altitudes (less common in the higher mountains); and the pink rattler, in the Chisos Mountains. A few copperheads have been collected, and many non-poisonous snakes are present.

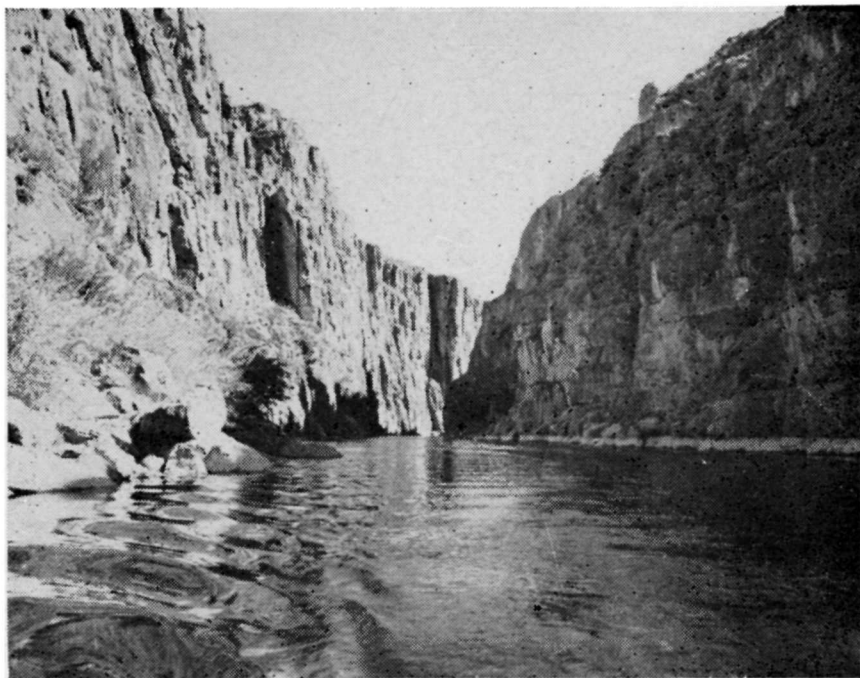
Only a few of the interesting facts of the Big Bend have been mentioned. It is land with pleasing semi-arid scenery, one of the last frontier areas, and a land where the early Spanish influence has left a tradition that is characteristic of no other area in the United States. In conclusion, the writer wishes to include the following quotation from William Ferguson's writing in the *San Antonio Express* in 1896, that gives his impressions of the Big Bend of half a century ago:

"Nowhere else have I found such a wildly weird country. The very silence is oppressive. A man grows watchful for his own safety and becomes awe-struck by nature in her lofty moods. Emotions are stirred by the grandeur and beauty of the scenery and the ever-changeable play of light and shadows. Never have

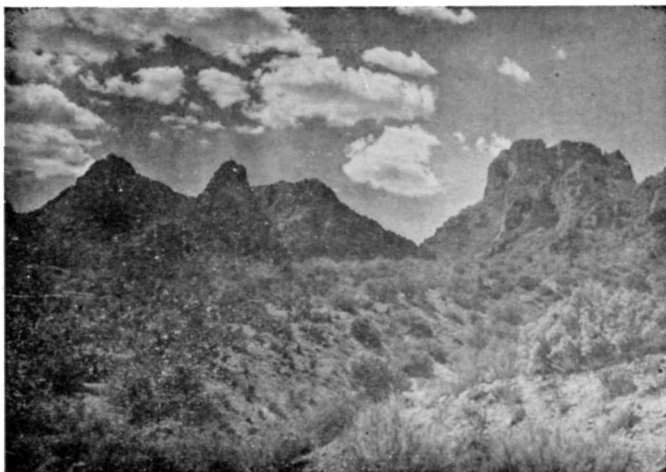
I beheld such a display of glory as falls, at sunset, on the bald head of the old Chisos Mountain, as witnessed at a distance of twenty-five miles. No painter could mix colors to justly portray it. No words can describe its splendor. First orange, then pink, then crimson, and last of all darkening purple, threw tints on the mountain's dark background and all faded insensible into neutral twilight. An old Mexican, who could neither read nor write, stood beside me. I pointed to the Chisos. His countenance lighted up. He exclaimed, 'Bonito!' It was an eloquent tribute."

## **II. SOME SCENES**





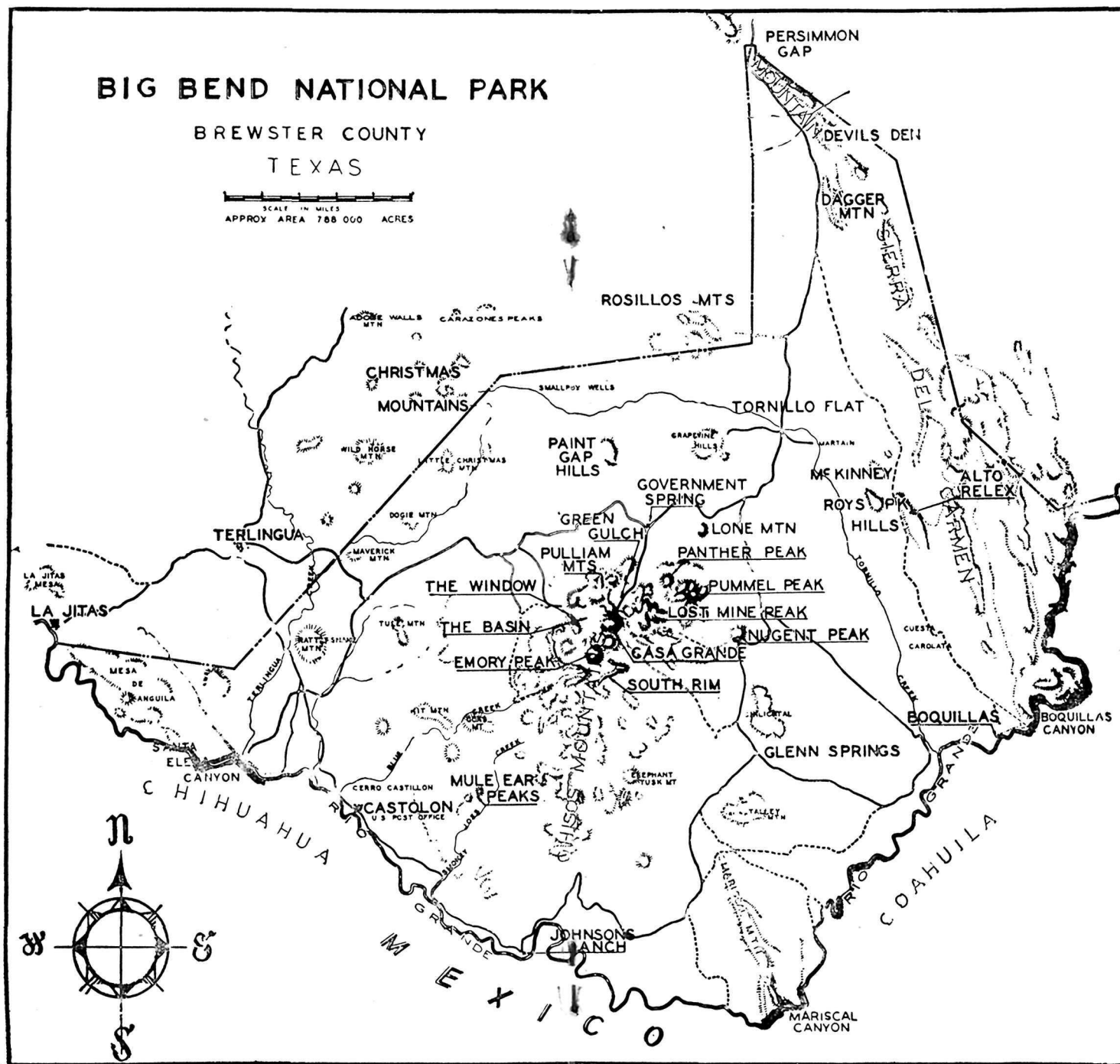
SANTA ELENA CANYON



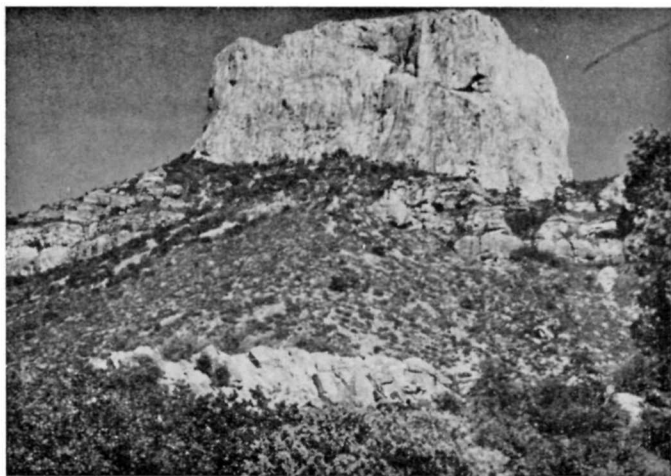
ANCIENT VOLCANOES



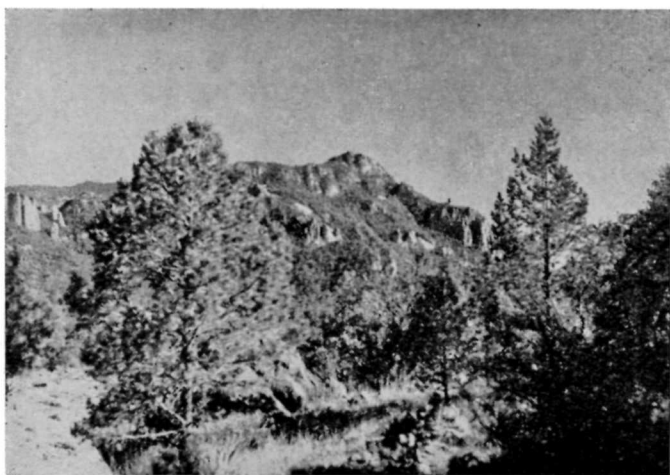
IN THE CHISOS MOUNTAINS



NATIONAL PARK SITE AT BIG BEND RICH IN TEXAS LEGENDS—Innumerable are the legends that have sifted from Texas' Big Bend area, now a proposed national park site. Many of the freak names in the area, such as Mule Ear Peak and Elephant Tusk Mountain, originated from the marked resemblance of geologic formations of animals. Here is the most all-inclusive map that has been drawn of the park area.



CASA GRANDE



A TEXAS GARDEN OF THE GODS

### **III. HISTORICAL**

#### **THE BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK**

**CLIFFORD B. CASEY**

Professor of History, Sul Ross State Teachers College

# THE BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK

by

Clifford B. Casey

## CHAPTER I

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Big Bend region of Texas, in which is located the Big Bend National Park, is a land of great contrasts. In the long processes of time it has been successively a submerged sea bed, swampy marsh land, the scene of volcanic activity, a semi-tropical forest, and a semi-arid grazing land. The soil and earth formations of the area are likewise varied: sand, clays of many types, limestone, many different volcanic deposits, and many combinations due to mixtures of the various types of soil and rock. In altitude, the area ranges from 2,000 to 7,835 feet. Within a distance of some 200 miles the Rio Grande flows across flat plains, through rolling hills, and high mountains through which the river has carved great canyons with walls that are almost perpendicular. The wildlife of the Big Bend includes the dinosaurs of early times and a great variety of reptiles, birds and animals of the present, such as the eagle, Mexican canary, three types of rattlesnakes, Rio Grande beaver, Texas peccary (wild hog), mule, white-tail and flag-tailed deer, and many types of mice, lizards, and insects. Many species are found nowhere else in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

The flora of the Big Bend like the fauna are varied and more closely allied to that of Mexico than to that of the United States.<sup>2</sup> In the area are to be found petrified remains of an ancient forest while now there are many varieties of oak, spruce, juniper, pine, wild cherry, maple, and many other trees in the mountains. On the semi-arid plains, however, there is only brush, as chaparran, cat's-claw, and other typical desert plants. In addition there are many varieties of grasses, cacti, guayule (rubber plant), candelilla (wax), lechuguilla, ocotillo, sotol, yucca, creosote plant or greasewood, and many other peculiarly named plants.

<sup>1</sup>United States Department of Interior, *The Big Bend National Park Project*. Bulletin.

<sup>2</sup>*Loc. cit.*

Primitive peoples lived in the Big Bend area for thousands of years prior to the coming of the Europeans. The first inhabitants were along the Rio Grande, and in the more fertile valleys. All that we know of these people has been derived from study of artifacts which have been preserved in the dust of the "dry" caves, and at various other sites of habitation. Baskets, cooking utensils, wooden and stone implements, matting, sandals, and other items have been found in these locations.<sup>3</sup>

These pre-history cultures of the Big Bend area were followed by the post-basket maker, the pre-pueblo, and the pueblo cultures. The last of these, the pueblo Indian culture, was evident in the region when the Spanish first entered the Big Bend in the early sixteenth century.<sup>4</sup> Soon thereafter, however, a more aggressive and troublesome type of Indian appeared in the region. The Mescalero Apache, the Kiowa and the Comanche of the plains are good examples of this group.

Just forty-three years after Columbus discovered America, in 1535, Cabeza de Vaca and three associates of the Narvaez Expedition entered the Big Bend of Texas, and spent some time with the Indians of the Rio Grande pueblos.<sup>5</sup> The Cabeza de Vaca account of the vast inland country, the "Seven Cities of Cibola", fired the Spanish imagination and provoked many expeditions. It was almost fifty years after Cabeza de Vaca, however, before the Spanish re-entered the Big Bend country. In 1580, the Rodriguez-Chamuscada missionary endeavor visited for some weeks with the pueblos of the Rio Grande.<sup>6</sup> A year later Antonio de Espejo led a relief expedition in search of the missionaries that had been left among the upper Rio Grande Indians. On this expedition Espejo traveled up the Rio Grande and on his return traversed the Big Bend region from the Pecos River to the Rio Grande at La Junta.<sup>7</sup> About a century after Espejo, 1683, Governor Cruzate of New Mexico sent an expedition under the leadership of Mendoza into the interior of what is now Texas to the aid of the Jumano Indians who resided near

<sup>3</sup>J. Charles Kelley, "Archaeological Issue," *West Texas Historical and Scientific Society Publication*, No. 10, 1940, pp. 14-15; also Clifford B. Casey, "The Trans-Pecos in Texas History," *West Texas Historical and Scientific Society Publication*, No. 5, 1933, pp. 7-9.

<sup>4</sup>A. V. Kidder, *Southwestern Archaeology*, 1924, pp. 74-77.

<sup>5</sup>A. F. Bandelier, *The Journey of Cabeza de Vaca*, 1905, pp. 148-155.

<sup>6</sup>Herbert E. Bolton, *Spanish Explorations in the Southwest*, 1916, pp. 197-280.

<sup>7</sup>Diego Perez de Luzon, *Expedition into New Mexico made by Antonio de Espejo* (Hammond-Rey), 1929, pp. 52-114.

the present San Angelo, Texas. Mendoza descended the Rio Grande from Paso del Norte to the Big Bend and then went overland to the Jumano Country. Mendoza planted a cross on the north side of the Rio Grande and claimed the Big Bend for his majesty, the King of Spain.<sup>8</sup>

Incited by the reports of Mendoza and other expeditions beyond the Rio Grande, Spain doubtless would have used the Big Bend as a passageway for the settlement of the interior of what is now Texas had it not been for reports of French activities on the Gulf Coast at about the same time. Since the Big Bend, thus, did not become the highway over which Texas was settled, Spanish activity in the region for more than one hundred and fifty years thereafter was little more than to maintain previously held territories and to hold the Indians under control.<sup>9</sup>

An occasional trapper or trader from the United States might have entered the Big Bend area prior to the Mexican War. Probably, however, Major W. H. Emory, of the International Boundary Survey Commission of the United States and Mexico in 1852, was the first Anglo-American to give a detailed account and description of the area.<sup>10</sup> About this time the region was traversed and explored by such men as Captain Jack Hays, a famous Texas Ranger, and Lieutenant Colonel Joseph E. Johnston of the United States Army. The first Anglo-American ranchmen entered the area about 1880, and thereafter the land was gradually acquired by private owners for grazing purposes. During the closing years of the nineteenth century the discovery of cinnabar ore in the lower Big Bend, the development of gold and silver mining activities south of the Rio Grande in Mexico, and the manufacture of wax from the candelilla plant early in the twentieth century caused a rapid increase in the population of the lower half of Brewster County. Quickly there appeared such centers or settlements as Boquillas, Glenn Springs, Study Butte, Lajitas, Terlingua, and Castolon. These small industrial villages, added to the agricultural communities along the valley of the Rio Grande, provided a fringe of settlements which surrounded the Chisos Mountains that towered some four thousand feet above the adjacent plains. It was this combination

<sup>8</sup>Bolton, *op. cit.*, pp. 313-343. V. J. Smith, "The Route of Mendoza," *Publication of West Texas Historical and Scientific Society*, 1928, No. 2, pp. 59-68.

<sup>9</sup>Casey, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>10</sup>W. H. Emory, *United States and Mexican Boundary Survey*, 1859, pp. 85-88.



of the quaint Spanish-speaking villages, the semi-arid lowlands, the magnificent canyons of the Rio Grande, and the majestic scenery of the Chisos Mountains which in time provoked a movement for the creation of the Big Bend into a park in order that the area might be preserved for the enjoyment of all peoples.

## CHAPTER II

### THE BIG BEND STATE PARK

In 1901, Robert T. Hill, the father of Texas geology, wrote an article for *Century Magazine*, describing a journey down the Rio Grande in the region of its "Big Bend." Doctor Hill's description of the river, its canyons, and the adjacent mountains was graphic and prompted many to become interested in the region. It was some thirty years, however, before the *Century Magazine* article bore real fruit. Early in February of 1933, during a regular session of the Texas Legislature, Representative R. M. (Bob) Wagstaff of Abilene, Texas, came to the desk of Honorable E. E. Townsend, also a member of the Texas House of Representatives. Representative Wagstaff, with a considerable show of excitement, placed before Mr. Townsend a copy of *Century Magazine*, opened at the Hill article, and said, "Say, Townsend, is this authentic? Is the Big Bend Country actually anything like this?"

Mr. Townsend replied, "Sure, it's like that, only more so. You will have to go see it for yourself before you can really appreciate what's there. No one can adequately describe it."

Wagstaff replied, "Then why don't you do something about it? If it's even half as good as this guy says it is, you've got the making of one of the grandest parks in the nation."<sup>11</sup>

This conversation between Honorable E. E. Townsend and Representative R. M. Wagstaff resulted in the introduction of House Bill 771 by Wagstaff and Townsend as co-authors, on March 2, 1933, before the regular session of the Forty-third Legislature of Texas. The bill provided for the creation of the "Texas Canyons State Park" and transferred fifteen sections of public school lands in the vicinity of the Santa Elena, Mariscal, and Boquillas Canyons to the Texas State Parks Board for park purposes.<sup>12</sup> The bill received a favorable vote by both houses of the Texas Legislature and was approved by Governor Miriam A. Ferguson, May 27, 1933.

In the meantime, the Honorable R. B. Slight, County Judge of Brewster County, Texas, in cooperation with Mr. A. F. Robinson, Secretary of the Brewster County Chamber of Commerce, was seeking the establishment of a Civilian Conservation

<sup>11</sup>Interview: E. E. Townsend, Alpine, Texas.

<sup>12</sup>Berta C. Lassiter, "International Park in West Texas' Big Bend," *West Texas Today*, Vol. 17, (Feb., 1937), p. 2.

Camp in Brewster County. On June 2, 1933, the Honorable Ewing Thomason, Representative from the sixteenth Texas district to the Congress of the United States, wrote in a letter to Mr. E. E. Townsend:

The White House has approved four camps for our Congressional District as follows: one municipal camp for El Paso; two camps in Jeff Davis County; and one camp near Big Bend Park in Brewster County.<sup>13</sup>

In a called session of the Texas Legislature September, 1933, House Bill No. 44 introduced by R. M. Wagstaff, and the House Bill No. 26 introduced by E. E. Townsend, provided for the transfer of all unsold public school lands in Brewster County south of latitude 29 degrees and 25 minutes to the State for park purposes, and for the transfer of all delinquent tax lands within the same area, which had been or might thereafter be sold for taxes, to the State for park purposes. The combined bill, with certain amendments, passed both houses of the Legislature and was approved by the Governor on October 27, 1933. This Act, instead of using the term "Canyons State Park" as in the previous Act, followed the Thomason letter and used the title "Big Bend State Park." Thus the Big Bend State Park came into being.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Ewing Thomason to E. E. Townsend, June 2, 1933.

<sup>14</sup>Ross A. Maxwell, *Summary of Events That Led to the Establishment of the Big Bend National Park*. Unpublished.

### CHAPTER III

#### DEVELOPMENT OF THE STATE PARK: SECURING THE C. C. C. CAMP

It is one thing to secure legislation for a park; it is another to develop it. A park must have roads, buildings and water. The Civilian Conservation Corps had just come into being. If a CCC Camp could be had in the area, that would be at least a partial answer to the road and building problem. Early attempts to secure a camp promised immediate success. As mentioned above, on May 30, 1933, President Roosevelt approved four camp sites in deep West Texas, one of which was to be in the Big Bend area. But disappointments aplenty were in the offing. Rumor has it that the Army, far from being enchanted by the beauty and grandeur of the Big Bend, thought rather of the loneliness and isolation of the country, and threw every stumbling block available in the way of the camp's realization. About the middle of June, when every one was looking daily for the arrival of the camp officials, came instead the heart-breaking report that the camp had been turned down by the army physicians, who gave their reason: lack of roads.<sup>15</sup>

Disappointed but no despairing, those who were vitally interested in the park, led by Mr. E. E. Townsend, explored every avenue that might lead to Washington and renewed hopes for a camp. Their efforts were rewarded by way of information from Washington that it might be possible to secure an Emergency Conservation Work Camp. That was on August 2, 1933, and applications had to be on file with the Texas Rehabilitation office by August 12th next. The application was duly filed, and there followed almost two months of anxious waiting during which time every likely wire from Austin to Washington was not only pulled, but yanked. The application ran the gauntlet of all the red tape hazards. It finally landed on the President's desk and everything looked rosy, for the President was known to be favorable. But, as is so often the case, the difficulty cropped up where it was least expected. The application stopped dead on the President's desk. No one seems to know just what happened, but it seems Robert Fechner, Director, Civilian Conservation Corps, who was quite close to the President, advised against the project on the ground that the application was not filed

<sup>15</sup>E. E. Townsend Files, Alpine, Texas.

by the proper authorities. With a heavy heart Mr. Townsend informed his constituents by letter that "It seems we have lost the camp again."<sup>16</sup>

And indeed it seemed that the last hope was gone. For the next several days an air of gloom was prevalent in Alpine and Marathon and in and around the office of E. E. Townsend in Austin. Then one day the news began circulating—none seemed to know exactly where it came from—that all was not quite lost. There was still one last chance. Mr. D. E. Colp of the Texas State Parks Board had appealed to the Attorney General for an opinion as to who would have the proper authority to file application for, and to handle, an ECW Camp for Texas. For once a rumor proved to be true. Word was received that the Attorney General had ruled that the Texas application for ECW Camps was in order and had been instigated by the proper authorities. Smiles and confidence returned, and by November of 1933 Mr. Townsend had filed application for three camps in the park area, one at Government Springs, one at Oak Springs, and one at Santa Elena Canyon.<sup>17</sup>

By March 31, 1934, tentative approval of at least one of the camps had been secured, and Colonel R. O. Whittaker, chief engineer of the State Parks Board, was in the Chisos Mountains making preliminary surveys for a suitable camp site. The site at Government Springs had to be ruled out. For one reason or another, the other two sites were turned down. The authorities seemed willing to establish a camp in either Green Gulch or the Basin, if sufficient water could be obtained. Green Gulch leads into the Chisos Mountains from the north. The Basin is a valley in the mountains, separated from Green Gulch by a high and narrow divide. A camp in Green Gulch would eliminate the building of a road into the Basin. The logical plan then was to find water in Green Gulch. It takes money to dig wells in semi-desert country. A few relief workers could be had, but not enough. There had to be some money from somewhere. There was no way to get it except from donations. The people of Alpine gave liberally; the Marathon Service Club made a donation. Enough money was scraped together to start digging. Well after well was sunk in Green Gulch with the same disappointing results: no water. Eventually it became painfully evident that no water was to be had in Green Gulch. In the meantime the meager

<sup>16</sup>E. E. Townsend to R. B. Slight, October 10, 1933.

<sup>17</sup>Tom Connally to E. E. Townsend, November 23, 1933.

funds were running short, and the patience of the camp officials was even shorter. If water was not to be found, and that soon, the camp would be located elsewhere.<sup>18</sup>

The weary and discouraged diggers were told by Dr. C. L. Baker, geologist from A. & M. College, that water was more likely across the divide in the Basin. This meant packing tools across the divide. It also meant building a road up the tortuous Green Gulch and over the divide. The money was gone and there were only two or three relief workers to be had. Jim Casner, president of the Alpine Chamber of Commerce, and E. E. Townsend, who were on the ground supervising the well digging activities, got their heads together.

"Jim," said Townsend, "if you'll go back to Alpine and start working on the Commissioners' Court to build that road, I'll get the water."

Casner agreed and departed for Alpine, cautioning Townsend to send him word the minute water was found. Townsend, with Ira H. Hector, rancher, and W. T. McClure, Vicente Molinar, Nicolas Moreno, and Andres Molinar, relief workers, began the back-breaking task of carrying the tools into the Basin. Mr. Townsend's wife, Mrs. Alice Townsend, aided the enterprise by cooking for the crew. All necessary tools were at the selected spot in the Basin by April 16. On the morning of that day at 8:50 digging was begun.

"Boys," said Townsend, "we've got to have water, and quick. If we succeed in making a well of water here, we'll call it 'Agua Pronto.'"<sup>19</sup>

A showing of water was encountered at 1:25 P.M. At 2:45 P.M. 7½ gallons of water were drawn from the well. By night water was coming in so fast that digging had to stop. "Agua Pronto" was a reality; the battle was won. The good news was relayed to Jim Casner, who had evidently been equally successful with the Commissioners' Court, for within a few days the county workers arrived with their graders and began work on the pioneer road from Green Gulch into the Basin of the Chisos Mountains.

Mr. Townsend kept a log of the well, Agua Pronto, in the lining of his hat, which is now on display in the Sul Ross College Museum.

There was now no further excuse for delay of the CCC Camp.

<sup>18</sup>D. E. Colp to Clifford B. Casey, March 14, 1935.

<sup>19</sup>E. E. Townsend, Personal Interview.

The first company arrived in Marathon on May 18, 1934, en route to the Big Bend. The camp was established just below the well mentioned above. It remained there until the road via Green Gulch into the Basin was completed. It was abandoned on December 15, 1937. Later, in 1940, the camp was re-established for the purpose of building cabins, improving trails, road maintenance, and boundary survey. This camp was abandoned March 20, 1942.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup>Maxwell, *op. cit.*

## CHAPTER IV

### THE BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK

**Efforts to secure congressional legislation.** It was understood by all who were interested in the Big Bend that the establishment of a State park was only a necessary step toward the real goal, a National Park. The next move, of course, was to secure congressional legislation. As is usually the case, that required considerable groundwork. The first step was to arouse the interest of our Texas representatives in Congress, both in the House and in the Senate.

Judge R. B. Slight of Alpine claims the honor of bringing the Big Bend's possibilities to Senator Tom Connally. Senator Connally was in this area attending some sort of a rally in Jeff Davis County. Judge Slight was introduced to the Senator, and during the course of the ensuing conversation, the Senator mentioned the fact that he would be in Alpine the next day. The judge extracted a promise from the Senator of just fifteen minutes of his time while in Alpine. Judge Slight was on hand when Connally met with a committee of the Alpine Chamber of Commerce the next morning, to remind him of that promised fifteen minutes. Connally registered impatience, but kept his promise, and went with the judge to Sul Ross College. Here the Senator was led into the Sul Ross Museum where his attention was directed to the large, beautiful oil painting of the Big Bend area. Connally's surprise and manifest interest were deeply gratifying to the judge, especially when the Senator publicly promised his support of the National Park idea.<sup>21</sup>

Just before Townsend left Austin, ending his career as State Representative, Congressman Thomason came through on his way home from Washington. He stopped in Austin and dropped by Townsend's office. Townsend immediately approached him on the idea of a National Park in the Big Bend. Thomason's interest was definitely lukewarm. Townsend invited him to stop by and take a look at the country on the way. Thomason did not want to see it, he said. He didn't have to; he knew what it was like: all the rest of West Texas. Besides, he was in a hurry, and did not have time. To all Townsend's argument Thomason remained staunchly adamant and left for El Paso frankly declaring that he had no time to waste visiting that Godforsaken Big Bend Country.

<sup>21</sup>Interview with R. B. Slight. Also *Dallas Morning News*, April 26, 1935.



But Townsend thought differently. He wrote several influential men in Brewster County, urging them to get in touch with Thomason while he was in El Paso, and insist upon his seeing the proposed park area before he went back to Washington. Thomason was so besieged by letters, phone calls, and telegrams that he finally wrote John Perkins saying: "Tell Townsend to for God's sake call off his dogs, and I'll come and look at your old park."

Thomason came; he saw, and was convinced.

We find no record as to how Senator Morris Sheppard became interested. But we do know that he worked faithfully for the project along with Senator Connally and Congressman Thomason until the desired legislation was accomplished.<sup>22</sup>

In 1934 Townsend, having been defeated for re-election to the Texas Legislature, was offered a job by Herbert Maier, Regional Director of the National Park Service. Townsend accepted the position, and, upon his arrival at Maier's office, he informed Maier of having recently had a letter from Thomason stating that the latter was about to introduce a bill in Congress which would authorize the establishment of a National Park in the Big Bend Country. Maier advised Townsend to get in touch with Thomason in a hurry, and ask him not to introduce the bill at that time. The National Park Service, under Maier's direction, was preparing a report on the Big Bend Park to submit to Secretary of Interior Harold Ickes. Maier said that it was absolutely imperative that Ickes be sold on the project before any move was made in Congress.<sup>23</sup>

Secretary Ickes, it seems, did not prove difficult to sell, and on March 1, 1935, identical bills were introduced in both houses of Congress by Senators Sheppard and Connally, and Representative Thomason to establish the Big Bend National Park in Texas, such establishing to become effective when lands of that area were deeded to the Federal Government. The bills passed both houses, and on June 20 Public Law No. 157 went into effect, authorizing the Secretary of Interior to designate boundaries within an area of approximately 1,500,000 acres in the counties of Brewster and Presidio, and to provide for the final establishment of the park, contingent upon the acquisition of the privately owned lands.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup>E. E. Townsend, Personal Interview. Also *Dallas Morning News*, April 27, 1935.

<sup>23</sup>E. E. Townsend, Personal Interview.

<sup>24</sup>Maxwell, *op. cit.*, *Dallas Morning News*, October 17, 1937.

**Acquisition of the privately owned land.** It seems that 1935 and 1936 went by with very little being done toward acquiring the privately owned land in the proposed park area. In 1937 on February 22 Representative Coke R. Stevenson introduced, in the Texas Legislature, House Bill No. 642, and a like bill was introduced in the Senate by Senator H. L. Winfield, calling for an appropriation of \$1,400,000 with which to purchase lands in the Big Bend area to be dedicated to the Federal Government for park purposes.

When the news of this bill reached Brewster County a group of interested men approached Judge Slight, seeking his aid in securing \$1,000 with which to send a lobbyist to Austin in behalf of the bill. Ever cautious, the judge wanted assurance that Governor Allred would not veto the bill. A wire to Austin brought news that Allred had promised to sign the bill if it passed. Consequently, three prominent men of Alpine were furnished with \$750 for expenses to Austin to lobby for the bill.

Meanwhile the bill had run into serious opposition. It was finally passed after having been amended to call for only \$750,000. Then Governor Allred welched on his promise and vetoed it, giving as his reason that no provision had been made to raise the money.

Hopes again hit a low level in Brewster County. But there were others in Texas interested now. The Fort Worth *Star-Telegram* ran an article on July 17, 1937, reminding the people of Texas that Virginia had raised \$1,000,000 by popular subscription with which to establish the Shenandoah National Park, and suggesting that Texas could do the same for the Bend.<sup>25</sup>

The Brewster County Chamber of Commerce under the leadership of H. W. Morelock acted immediately on the suggestion and began organizing for publicity campaigns. Meanwhile newspapers all over the State took up the cry. Governor Allred, either to salve his conscience or in an attempt to right himself with the Texas voters, on May 23, 1938, called a meeting at Austin and appointed an executive committee with the authority to set up machinery for collecting \$1,000,000 with which to buy land in the Big Bend Park area. This was the official beginning of the Big Bend Park Association.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Judge R. B. Slight, Personal Interview, Fort Worth *Star-Telegram*, July 17, 1937, Dallas *Morning News*, October 26, 1937, Alpine *Avalanche*, June 13, 1937.

<sup>26</sup>Brewster County Chamber of Commerce, Files, July 23, 1937, Clifford B. Casey Files (unpublished).

But the \$1,000,000 campaign in Texas did not prove so successful as it did in Virginia. Whether it was the fault of the campaigners or Texan parsimoniousness, we are unable to learn; but the one million dollars or any figure close to that was never raised. Meanwhile, in 1938, W. Lee O'Daniel was elected Governor of Texas. He manifested his interest in the Big Bend by leading an inspection tour of the area. Governor O'Daniel was much impressed, and never lost a chance to plug for the park with the Legislature. President Roosevelt became sufficiently interested in the park to write Governor O'Daniel a letter in which he expressed a sincere desire that the people of Texas would do something about it.<sup>27</sup>

President Roosevelt's letter was perhaps the final impetus needed to prod the Texas Legislature into action. Whether that is true or not, a bill was finally introduced by State Senator Winfield of Fort Stockton, on January 23, 1941. Known as Senate Bill No. 128, it called for an appropriation of \$1,500,000 to purchase lands for the Big Bend National Park. After an Appropriations Committee had visited the park area and reported favorably, the bill, amended and attached to General Department Bill, passed both houses on June 17, 1941, and was signed by Governor O'Daniel on July 3, 1941.<sup>28</sup>

**The Big Bend Land Department.** Now that money was actually available with which to buy the land in the park area belonging to individuals, it became necessary to set up machinery for this business. Consequently the Texas State Parks Board met at Indian Lodge, Davis Mountains State Park, on August 11, 1941. At this meeting the Big Bend Land Department was organized, and Frank D. Quinn was appointed as its administrator. On August 22, 1941, the Big Bend Park Association met in Austin and offered its services to the newly organized Land Department. On September 1, 1941, the Big Bend Land Department opened offices in Alpine with the following staff: Frank D. Quinn, Administrator; E. E. Townsend, Associate Administrator; Eugene Thompson, Chief Appraiser; A. T. Barrett, Junior Assistant Appraiser; Robert L. Cartledge, Auditor; Frederick B. Isely, Assistant Attorney General; J. Edward Johnson, Associate Counsel; and corps of stenographers and clerk

<sup>27</sup>Dallas *Morning News*, May 24, 1938, Fort Worth *Star-Telegram*, January 13, 1938.

<sup>28</sup>Maxwell, *op. cit.*

assistants. The task of acquiring the some 788,000 acres necessary to complete the Big Bend National Park had begun.<sup>29</sup>

**The Big Bend Land Department at Work.** The Land Department moved ahead with its work in spite of the fact that an injunction had been filed by State Representative A. H. King of Throckmorton, enjoining George H. Sheppard, State Comptroller, from paying out the \$1,500,000 appropriated by the Legislature for this purpose. Mr. M. R. Tillotson, Regional Director of the National Park Service, visited the offices of the Big Bend Land Department on September 18, 1941, and expressed satisfaction with its progress. On October 26, 1941, the Department announced that by November the inventory and appraisal of 5,000 tracts would be completed. By January 1, 1942, the program was so well organized that Administrator Quinn felt that he could safely resume his duties as Executive Secretary to the Texas State Parks Board in Austin. On February 4, 1942, the State Supreme Court ruled against King and his injunction suit. By August 31st of that year the work was so nearly finished that the Big Bend Land Department offices were officially closed. A small crew was kept on, however, through September. And on the 19th of that month work was actually stopped, all the proposed land except twenty sections having been acquired.<sup>30</sup>

**Park Lands Deeded to Federal Government.** The thing was done at last. In the language of E. E. Townsend, all was now over but the shouting. The "shouting" was done at the ceremonies held at Sul Ross College on September 5, 1943. There was quite a bevy of dignitaries present, the chief of which were Governor Coke Stephenson and M. R. Tillotson, Regional Director, Region Three, National Park Service. The high point in the program was reached when the former presented the latter with the deed to the lands of the Big Bend. The Big Bend National Park was no longer a dream, but a reality.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup>E. E. Townsend, Personal Files, Alpine, Texas.

<sup>31</sup>Alpine *Avalanche*, September 10, 1943; Dallas *Morning News*, September 4, 1943.

## CHAPTER V

### A PROPOSED INTERNATIONAL PARK

More than seven years prior to the actual consummation of the Big Bend National Park Project a movement had gotten under way for the creation of an international park. On February 16, 1935, Senator Morris Sheppard suggested, in a letter to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, that the proposed Big Bend National Park and a corresponding area in northern Mexico be created into an international park. President Roosevelt and Harold L. Ickes, Secretary of the Interior and Federal Administrator of Public Works, favored the idea. Soon thereafter plans were under way to secure the cooperation of the Republic of Mexico. In the years which followed several meetings were held at which plans were discussed by Commissioners representing the two countries. World War II interrupted the work of the Commission and little progress resulted.<sup>32</sup>

The idea once planted in the thinking of the peoples of the two sister Republics will, in time, bring about the creation and development of the "largest international park in the world." During July of 1947 the United States Commission for the creation of an international park met in Mexico City with the Mexican Commission and renewed discussions relative to the establishment, by Mexico, of GRAN COMBA (Big Bend) Park. The Mexican Commission indicated that they were drafting plans for the expropriation of nearly a million acres of land for public use in the states of Chihuahua and Coahuila for the Mexican half of the international park.

In addition, plans were discussed whereby the two governments would develop a cooperative program relative to park expansion, interchange of tourists, construction of international bridges, and other problems that would arise in connection with such an international project.<sup>33</sup>

It is hoped that, in the near future, the Big Bend (GRAN COMBA) International Park will be a reality. This would be a great step in the direction of international peace, and would provide an excellent laboratory for the development of international understanding, and for the demonstration of the so-called Good Neighbor policy among the nations of the Americas.

<sup>32</sup>Harold L. Ickes, Address, October 16, 1937.

<sup>33</sup>*El Paso Times*, July 20, 1947.

The Big Bend National Park under the direction of Superintendent Ross A. Maxwell is open to the public and is engaged in an active program in preparation for the time when it shall be a part of a great international park.

[This\* essay by Dr. Casey was written prior to the Federal Government's taking over the Big Bend Park, but the information is "dated" only in the sense that the present situation of the Park is the realization of the hope expressed in the paper.—T. H. E.]

