Big Bend National Park

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Texas

The Paisano

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

Volume 38 Number 1 2020

J. JURADO

Picture from the Window View Trail.

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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: 9:00AM; last showing: 4:00PM.

Junior Ranger Program

Free Big Bend Junior Ranger books are available at any visitor center. Learn about the park and complete activities to earn a badge!

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. This diverse place is home to 1,500 types of plants that 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 might include trying to see the mountains, desert, and river with the following itinerary:

1) 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 that are well worth a stop. Short walks to Sam Nail Ranch and Homer Wilson Ranch as well as the Castolon Historic District will give you a glimpse into Big Bend's past.

At the end of the road is a highlight of the trip: a short walk into **Santa Elena Canyon**—one of Big Bend's most scenic spots and an easy 1.4 mile round-trip hike.

2) Visit the forested **Chisos Mountains** and 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, or lunch at the only restaurant within the park.

3) 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.

Consider spending a day in each of the three major areas of the park:

1) Visit the Chisos Basin and 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.

2) See the Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive including a short hike into Santa Elena Canyon (see suggestions for "one day").

3) Drive to **Rio Grande Village**, 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 the pool of water at **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 to backpack. For more information see page 10.

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA™

Big Bend National Park
PO Box 129
Big Bend National Park, TX
79834

To:

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.

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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 (953 miles) from Big Bend National Park.

"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).

Recent Events

The Castolon Fire

A tragic loss that quick action and hard work kept from being far worse.

The Castolon Fire

On May 22, 2019, a fire that started in Mexico the day before jumped across the Rio Grande. With strong winds, extremely high temperatures around 110°F, and very low humidity, the fire spread rapidly.

An abrupt change in wind direction with strong gusts showered embers across the Castolon Historic District, igniting the latrine building and barracks (which housed the La Harmonia Store and Visitor Center) and threatening the other buildings.

The shade structure served as a wick drawing flames into the attic. Despite valiant efforts, structural and wildland fire crews were unable to safely extinguish the fire before both buildings suffered widespread damage.

However, through their extensive efforts in extremely difficult conditions, firefighters from the park and Terlingua Fire & EMS saved the many other historic buildings and artifacts, as well as vital utilities and the nearby Cottonwood Campground. About 950 acres on both side of the river burned before the fire was fully contained 13 days later. Fortunately, there were no injuries associated with this tragic loss.

Recovery Efforts

In the days after the fire, cultural specialists sifted the debris to save many historic items, including cast iron stoves, post office box doors, keys, and the iconic La Harmonia sign that hung above the door.

What is Next?

Although damaged, Castolon remains a rich part of Big Bend's pioneer and military past.

Plans are underway for the next chapters in Castolon's history. The National Park Service is consulting with adobe experts, historic architects, and structural engineers to determine how much of these structures may be salvaged and rehabilitated.

A temporary building now houses the La Harmonia store, where visitors can purchase refreshments and park souvenirs.

A visitor contact station has opened in the Officer's Quarters building. Long term plans include renovating the historic Garlick House (to the north, behind the Magdalena House) as a permanent new location for a visitor center for Castolon.

The Big Bend Conservancy (www.bigbendconservancy.org) has established a Castolon Recovery Fund and will assist the park in designing a plan for the future of this historic site. To donate, text "Castolon" to 432-223-0102.

Stay tuned as we move forward in a way that continues to honor and share the rich history of this area.

New Exhibits and Updates

Visitor Centers and buildings across the park have had great new changes!

Visitor Centers and exhibits are updated periodically to ensure that information that we pass along to the public is relevant, useful, and in good repair. The design and custom fabrication process for these projects usually takes three years!

In the fall of 2019, new exhibits were completed and installed at Rio Grande Village Visitor Center and the Magdalena House in Castolon. Old exhibits from the Magdalena House were repurposed to use in the temporary contact station that was set up following the Castolon Fire that burned the visitor center.

Designs are already well underway for new exhibits to come to the Persimmon Gap and Chisos Basin Visitor Centers. These are expected to be installed by late 2020, so stay tuned for even more great improvements to come!

Another addition to educational materials in the park is the production of an orientation film, "Bravo y Grande." This film features the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River, a separate national park site co-managed along with Big Bend. The film is available for purchase in park bookstores.

Rio Grande Village VC

New exhibits at Rio Grande Village Visitor Center showcase the international cooperation between the United States and Mexico, with examples of changes in the river over the past century.

Additionally, hands-on exhibits including outdoor bronze sculptures and indoor discovery drawers engage a variety of ages with the diversity of life supported by the river ecosystem.

Magdalena House

Set within the house of Magdalena Silvas in the Castolon Historic District, these exhibits use the Silvas family as a lens through which to focus the story of daily life within the Castolon community.

Spanning two countries and two cultures, the community shared joys and struggles common to life in a remote area.

Fossil Discovery Exhibit

The Fossil Discovery Exihibit was awarded an Excellence in Exhibition award from the American Alliance of Museums!

Built in 2017, these exhibits continue to amaze visitors from across the globe.

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

Safety and Travel Information

J. JURADO

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.

It is illegal to destroy, deface, injure, 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. 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

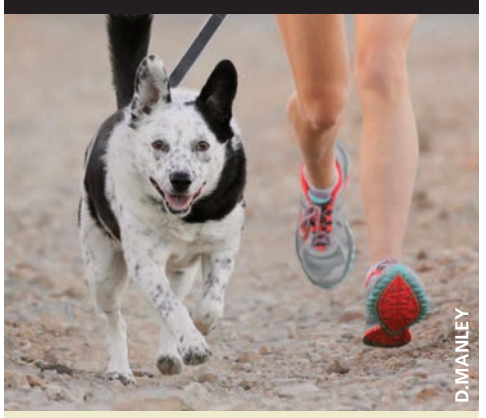
- Visitors are limited to 5 gallons of water per day when refilling large containers; please conserve water while in the park.
- Be water-wise when using the restroom; don't let faucets run unnecessarily.
- Wash only what clothing items you need.
- Fill water jugs and bottles at Rio Grande Village whenever 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


D.MANLEY

Having a pet with you may limit some of your activities and explorations in the park. Following 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

A unique part of the Big Bend experience is the opportunity to cross into rural Boquillas, Mexico.

Operating Hours

Winter Hours: Weds. to Sunday, 8am-5pm
Summer Hours: Friday to Monday, 9am-6pm

Crossing must be done during business hours when the Port of Entry is open.

General Information

The Boquillas Port of Entry is operated cooperatively by the National Park Service and U.S. Customs and Border Protection. The facility is staffed by park rangers who can assist travelers with information about visiting the area.

Required Documents

Proper documentation is required to cross. U.S. and Canadian citizens can cross with a valid passport; U.S. and Canadian citizens 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.

For complete information on other travel documents, contact Customs and Border Protection at Presidio, TX at 432-229-3349.

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 12/19). 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.

What is in town?

Boquillas features two restaurants with food that is simple, fresh, and good. A bar features pool and other games. Residents often display local handicrafts for sale, such as wire sculptures, embroidered textiles, and walking sticks.

U.S. currency is accepted in Boquillas though visitors are advised to bring smaller bills.

M. SCHULER

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 may be 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 in Boquillas, 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.

J. JURADO

The Unusual Ocotillo

Park Ranger Jimmy Duke

Big Bend is home to many unusual plants. Many of them lie unnoticed or overlooked for much of the year unless you know what to look for. The well-named Living Rock Cactus blends almost invisibly into the limestone hills around the park, but bursts into bold pink bloom in the early fall and is easily spotted then. Resurrection Ferns look like dead plants until a good rain allows them to uncoil the vibrant, deep green leaves they have been protecting in a tightly curled ball during the dry times.

However, not all of the unusual plants blend into the desert landscape and go unnoticed.

Ocotillo (pronounced "Oh-co-TEE-yo") is one of the most conspicuous plants across the park and definitely one of the oddballs in many respects. Ocotillo is also called Coachwhip or Candlewood or even Vine Cactus, despite it not being a cactus at all! It is common on gravelly slopes or flats driving to Rio Grande Village on the east side of the park or to Old Maverick Road on the west. At first glance, ocotillo looks like a large shrub that died—a cluster of drab, gray stalks covered in sharp spines, and no obvious signs of life like leaves along the branches.

This bare bones appearance is actually part of ocotillo's desert survival strategy. Plants lose most of their water through leaves during photosynthesis. Ocotillo and several other desert plants, notably the cacti, have adapted to desert life by moving the photosynthesis into their stems. The photosynthesis here is not as efficient as in typical plants, but the plants do save a lot of water and that is the principal issue for a desert dweller.

Leaves are either absent, or only produced during wet times of the year when the water losses are more affordable to the plant. Ocotillo in Big Bend will often form slender one or two inch leaves a few times per year shortly after a good rain, and then drop them after two or three weeks as drier conditions return. For those few weeks it is one of the most attractive plants in the park and a visitor favorite.

The real surprise though is in the spring when seemingly "dead stalks" of ocotillo burst into bloom. Slender clusters of bright red tubular flowers form at the ends of the stalks. In areas with abundant ocotillo plants, from a distance it can look like a red haze is hanging in the air from all the blooms! The area around Old Maverick Road is a good place to see this in late March or April.

These flowers are a favorite of carpenter bees and hummingbirds—though the hummers get much of the credit as pollinators, it's the bees that do most of the work.

Ocotillo are an odd bunch indeed, but also fascinating, beautiful, useful, hardy, and well adapted to surviving and adding to the richness of Big Bend National Park.

NPS PHOTO

Ocotillo, leafless but alive!

NPS COLLECTION

Soldiers Along the Border

Park Ranger Dan Dosedel

The rugged terrain and isolation of Big Bend National Park make it an attractive escape for the 21st-century adventurer. Many years before the Big Bend became a national park in 1944, the region's remoteness favored bandits and revolutionaries along the U. S.-Mexican border.

The Mexican Revolution in 1910-11 would engulf that country and spill over the Rio Grande into the Big Bend. Big Bend residents such as J.O. Langford, owner of the Hot Springs near Boquillas, grew nervous as banditry on both sides of the border intensified. Bandit leaders such as Chico Cano became infamous for daring raids, theft, and even murder. Until 1916, pleas by Langford and local ranchers for more federal protection were repeatedly turned down.

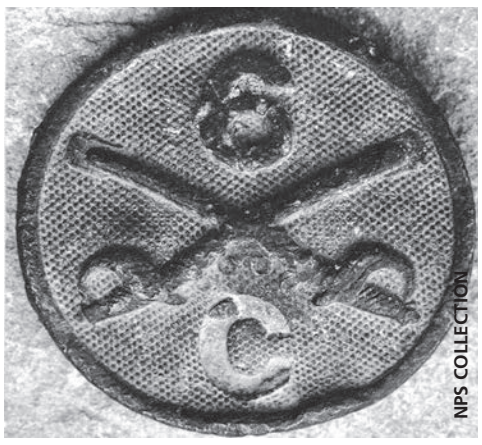
Federal intervention was eventually provoked in 1916. Following a raid on Columbus, New Mexico by Pancho Villa in March of that year, President Woodrow Wilson approved a military expedition in pursuit of Villa which would be led by General "Black Jack" Pershing. Pershing's nine-month chase of the elusive Villa in the state of Chihuahua, Villa's homeland, was unsuccessful.

In May 1916, a group of bandits raided Glenn Springs. On the east side of the Chisos, this small community was centered around a candelilla wax factory. A firefight broke out late in the evening of May 5th as the nine soldiers posted in the village were quickly overrun by the larger group of raiders. The soldiers barricaded themselves in an adobe building and bravely fought off the bandits. The raiders eventually smoked out the entrenched soldiers by setting fire to the hut's thatched ceiling. Three soldiers were killed in the battle and several more wounded. The son of the village's storekeeper was also killed. Bandits looted goods and damaged many of the factory's structures.

Military presence in the area swelled following the Glenn Springs raid. The region had a period of relative peace following the troop build-up, but the United States' entry into World War I in 1917 forced the reassignment of many army companies from the Big Bend to Europe. Bandit activity continued apace with troop withdrawal. Camp Santa Helena, now Castolon, was established as a permanent military post following the end of World War I.

Air patrols of the Rio Grande also began in the early post-war period. DeHavilland-4 (DH-4) aircraft assisted ground cavalry in the pursuit of border bandits. The Army Air Service relayed messages by dropping written messages from their airplanes to soldiers on the ground. The effectiveness of aerial patrols, along with the end of the Mexican Revolution, allowed the Big Bend to return to a period of peace by 1920.

Remnants of the Big Bend's military history remain in the park today. Foundations and other parts of the old wax factory and military encampments still stand near Glenn Springs. Camp Santa Helena in present-day Castolon has officer's quarters, tack shed, guard shacks and additional buildings to see. Park staff can provide additional information to help guide the avid history buff!



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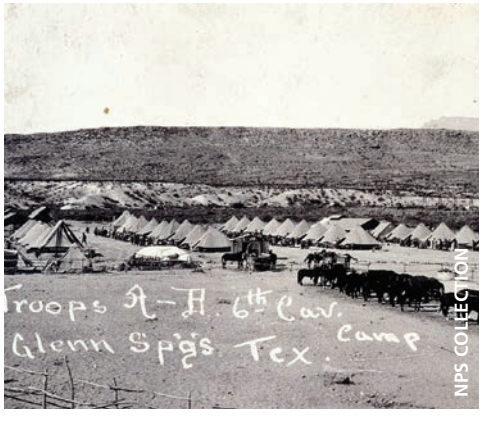
6th Cavalry uniform button



NPS COLLECTION

6th Cavalry stationed at Glenn Springs.

Conservation Values

C. BALLOU

Quick, We Need a Diversion!

Park Ranger Jennette Jurado

For most National Park visitors, the concept of "going green" is well known and already put into practice, but the park is nearing a critical need for even more help on this front.

Did you know that Big Bend National Park is one of two national parks that has an active landfill? Located along the Grapevine Hills Road, the park's landfill consists of about 15 acres fenced in to prevent bears and other wildlife from accessing the site. The park's trash truck makes bi-weekly visits to deposit and bury waste generated by park staff as well as visitors.

By current estimates, this landfill has only 3 to 5 years left before it reaches capacity. Doing everything possible to extend the life of this landfill while park management identifies other alternatives is a top priority.

How can you help? Here is where we need a diversion! Diverting trash from this landfill can be done in a variety of ways:

1) Don't generate trash

(or even generate recycling) to begin with! The best way to avoid filling bins anywhere is to first reduce, then reuse, and finally recycle.

Step one is to avoid single-use items. Bring your own refillable water bottle instead of buying bottled water. Bring a coffee thermos instead of taking a paper cup and lid from the gas station or store. Pack your food in reusable containers instead of single-use plastic bags. Bring your own cloth bags to stores to avoid needing to take a plastic or paperbag to trasnport home items.

2) Recycle whenever possible

At visitor centers, campgrounds, and most stores, you can find bins to recycle aluminum, number 1 and 2 plastics, and glass. Please remember to recycle responsibly—recycling improperly can be even worse than not recycling at all, as trash contaminates the process. Remove lids from plastic and glass containers. Rinse out sugary items to avoid attracting bees and wasps.

This all helps the process both at the collection site and in the recycling facility that the park maintenance staff operates. Once recycling is collected and sorted, it is stored until it can be driven to recycling facilities in Midland, where proceeds generated from these deliveries help offset the cost of the park's recycling program.

3) Take "pack it in, pack it out" to the next level!

Pack it in, pack it *all the way out*. If your trip generates trash, do you really want it to be left buried in this park? Please take it home with you if at all possible, so that your trash goes into your home landfill.

Plans are in the works for increasing recycling opportunities within the park, looking at landfill options outside of the park, and identifying potential grant sources to help make the park more sustainable going into the future. But we can't be successful in this endeavor without your help!

We recognize that we have room to improve ourselves. Plans are underway to improve our recycling containers and messaging, as well as to find sustainable options to manage trash or the next generations. So stay tuned for more improvements to come!

J. JURADO

Recycling bins in front of Panther Junction.

Sunrise, Sunset

J. JURADO

Searching for the Perfect Sunset

Park Ranger Jenny Swab

Where is the best place to see the sunrise or sunset? Truly, the answer is anywhere in the park! With huge horizons and dramatic scenery, it is spectacular wherever you are.

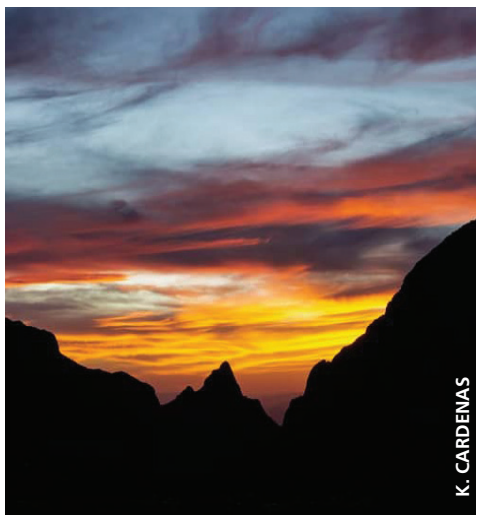
Additionally, don't forget to look behind you—as the sun rises or sets, the light on the deserts, rocks and canyons in all directions may be even more beautiful than the sun and clouds.

Suggested Easy Locations:

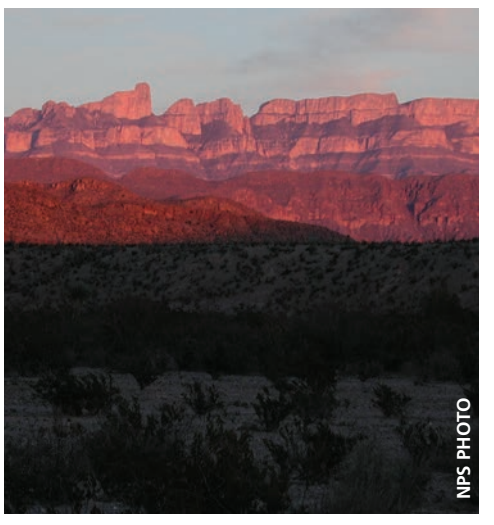
- Along Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive, stop at Sotol Vista for a western view including Santa Elena Canyon with *chiaroscuro*—both light and shadow!
- In the Chisos Basin, walk the Window View trail and sit on a bench to watch the Window frame your sunset.
- In Rio Grande Village, hike the short Nature Trail near campsite 18 for a 360 degree view!
- Climb the path up a short hill by the Fossil Exhibit and get a faraway look of hoodoos to the west.
- Stop by Mule Ears Overlook for interesting geology and great views.

More Challenging Spots:

- Get a permit for a backcountry campsite close to the South Rim. Rewards for this 14-mile backpacking trip are seeing the sunset from the top of the 2,000 foot cliff. Wake up early from camp to see sunrise too!
- Drive the Old Ore Road (4x4) for great views to the west.
- With such a large park and so many options, go out and discover your own!


K. CARDENAS

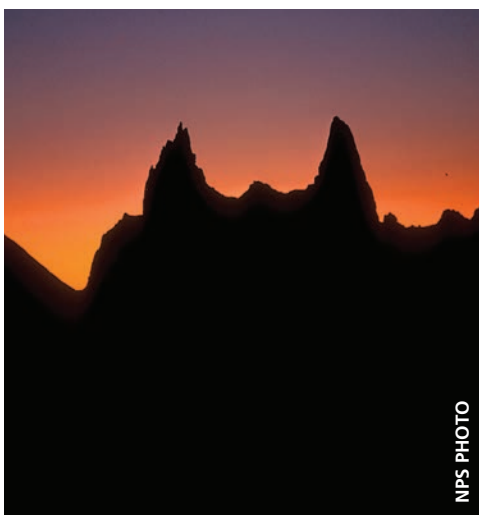
Sunset from the Window View Trail, Chisos Basin.


NPS PHOTO

Sunset on Sierra del Carmens, taken from the road.

NPS PHOTO

Sunset from Rio Grande Village Nature Trail.


NPS PHOTO

Sunset at Mule Ears Overlook.

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

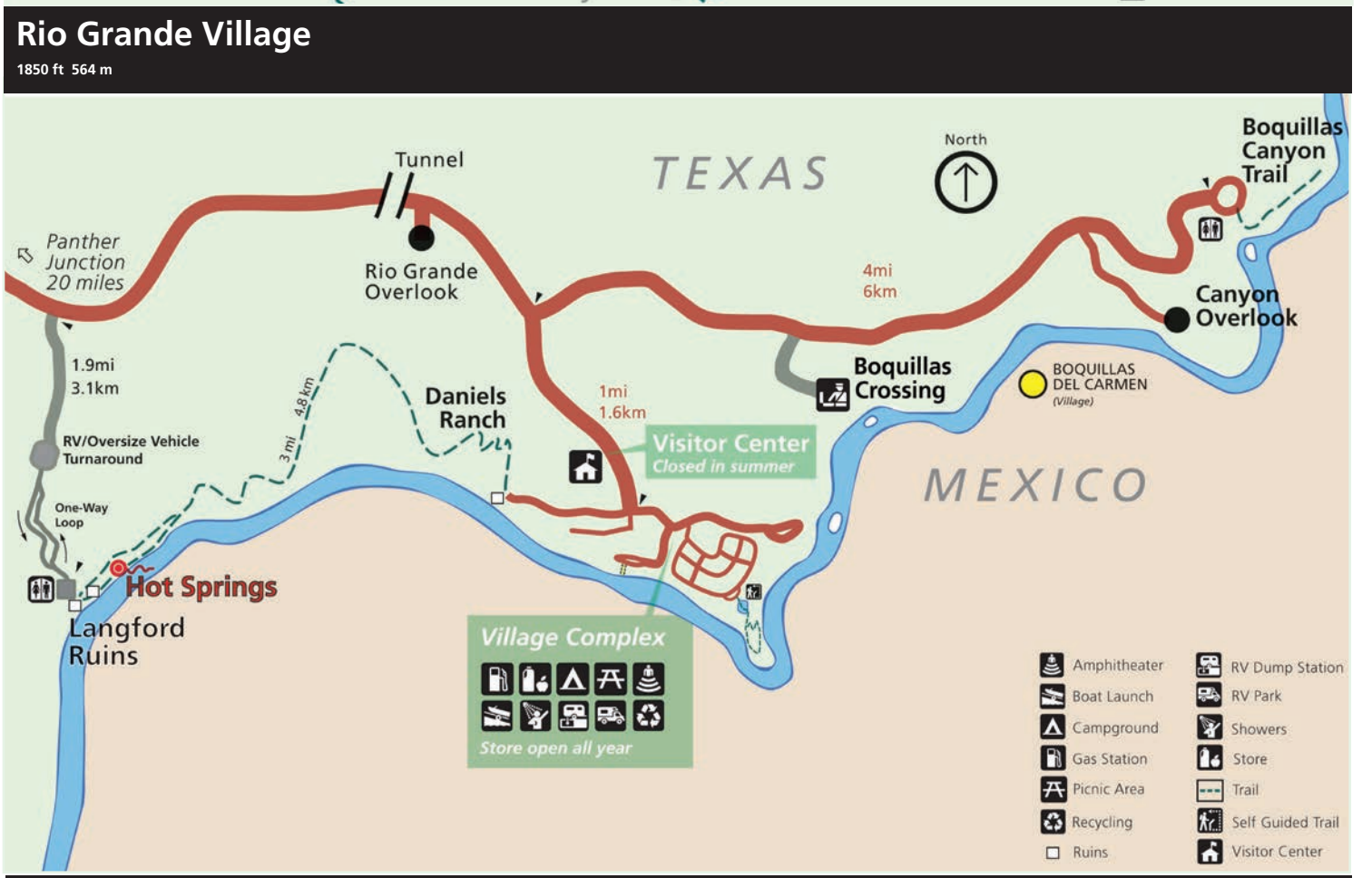
The drive to Rio Grande Village traverses ancient limestone and has marvelous vistas of the magnificent Sierra del Carmens. Along the way is the oasis at Dugout Wells, and a spur road leads to the popular Hot Springs.

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.



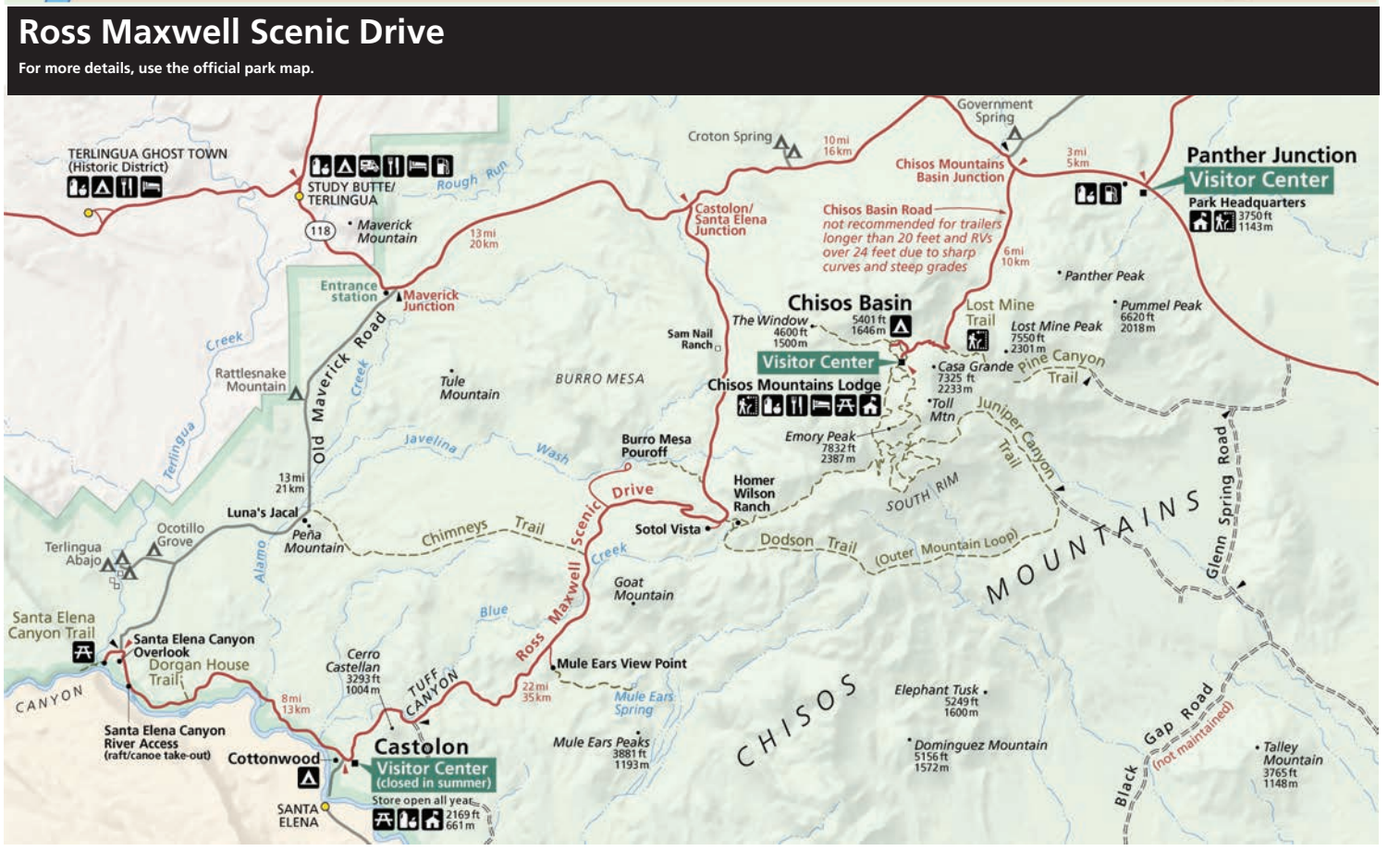
Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive

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 most suitable for high clearance vehicles and may be impassable after heavy rains. Check at a visitor center or entrance station for current conditions.

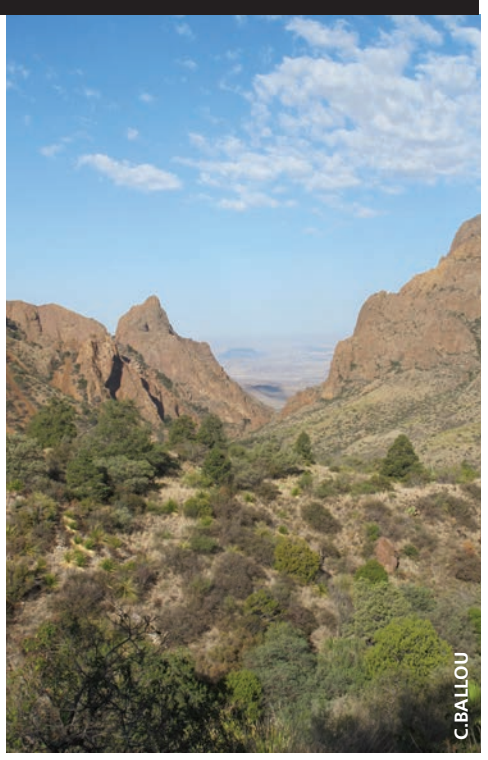


Popular Trails

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
Basin Loop	Chisos Basin Trailhead (near the Basin Store)	2/2.8	1 hour	350/107	**Moderate** Connects the Laguna Meadow and Pinnacles Trails. Nice views of the Basin area.
Emory Peak	Chisos Basin Trailhead (near the Basin Store)	11/17	7 hours	2400/789	**Strenuous** Trail leads to the highest peak in the park, with excellent views. The end of the trail involves some moderate rock scrambling.
Lost Mine	Basin Road, mile 5 (at the pass)	4.8/7.7	3 hours	1100/335	**Moderate** Excellent mountain and desert views. For a shorter hike, 1 mile up is a great view to the southeast.
South Rim	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	**Strenuous** 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.
Window	Chisos Basin Trailhead or Basin Campground	5.6/9.0 4.4/7.0	4 hours 3 hours	980/299 500/152	**Moderate** 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).
Window View	Chisos Basin Trailhead (near the Basin Store)	0.3/0.5	1/4 hour	0/0	**Easy** 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.

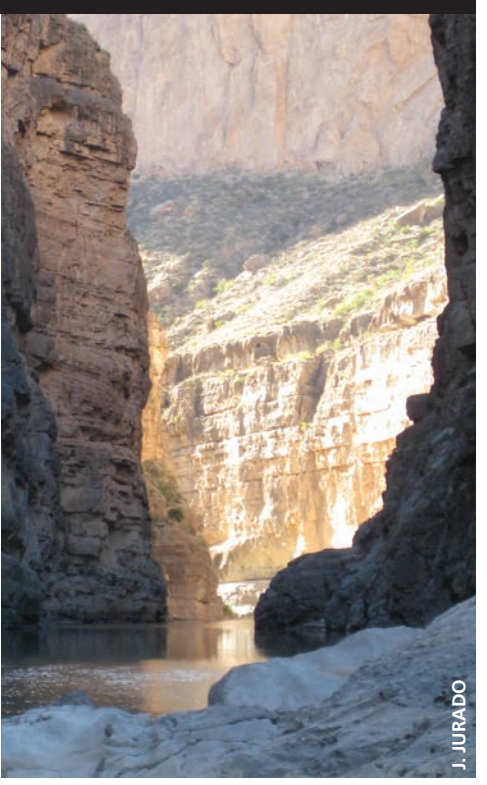
Eastside — Panther Junction and Rio Grande Village

Trail	Trailhead Location	Round Trip (mi/km)	Avg Time	Elevation (ft/m)	Description
Grapevine Hills Balanced Rock	6.4 miles down the Grapevine Hills Road	2.2/3.5	1 hour	240/73	**Easy** 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.
Chihuahuan Desert Nature Trail	Dugout Wells	0.5/0.8	1/2 hour	10/3	**Easy** Loop trail with interpretive signs on desert ecology. Look for javelina tracks and resident birds.
Hot Springs	End of Hot Springs Road (unpaved narrow road)	0.75/1.2	1/2 hour	0/0	**Easy** Walk past historic buildings to the riverside hot spring. Enjoy a soak in 105°F water. *Hot Spring is subject to flooding during rising river levels.*
Boquillas Canyon	End of Boquillas Canyon Road	1.4/2.3	1 hour	40/12	**Easy** Begins with a short climb, then descends via a sandy path to the river. Ends near a huge sand dune "slide."
Daniels Ranch to Hot Springs Trail	Daniels Ranch parking area, west of Rio Grande Village	6/10	3 hours	100/31	**Moderate** Trail from Daniels Ranch to the Hot Springs. Cliff drop-offs prevent access to the river along most of the route. No shade.
Rio Grande Village Nature Trail	Rio Grande Village, across from campsite 18	0.75/1.2	1 hour	130/40	**Easy** 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.

Westside — Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive

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



The end of Santa Elena Canyon trail.

Birds and Bird Watching

NPS PHOTO

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 450). 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 guideline 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

AUDOBON.ORG

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

B. TRESTER

Of Darkness and Solitude

Park Ranger Bob Smith

One of the foundational concepts of the national parks was the idea that solitude and wildness is a necessary component of a healthy society.

We now know that artificial light detracts heavily from the natural environment and contributes to the degradation of ecosystems wherever artificial light exists, and it is still being installed at a great rate nationwide.

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, it is a place where 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.

2020 Celestial Events

- Jan 3–4 Quadrantids Meteor Shower
- Feb 9 Super Moon
- Mar 20 Vernal Equinox
- April 22–23 Lyrids Meteor Shower
- May 6–7 Eta Aquarids Meteor Shower
- June 22 Summer Solstice
- July 5 Penumbral Lunar Eclipse
- July 28–29 Delta Aquarids Meteor Shower
- August 12–13 Perseids Meteor Shower
- September 22 Autumnal Equinox
- October 7 Draconids Meteor Shower
- October 21–22 Orionids Meteor Shower
- November 5–6 Taurids Meteor Shower
- November 17–18 Leonids Meteor Shower
- November 30 Penumbral Lunar Eclipse
- December 13–14 Geminids Meteor Shower
- December 21 Winter Solstice
- December 21–22 Ursids Meteor Shower

Partners in Conservation

C. BALLOU

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 $3.8 million in support of Big Bend projects ranging from wetlands restoration 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 $3.8 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 the design of the new exhibits at the Rio Grande Village 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. Thanks to generous donors in 2020 we will establish the Fossil Discovery Endowment, a permanent fund to provide maintenance and education services to the exhibit. This is the Conservancy's second endowment for the park—the first being the James "Buddy" Davidson Big Bend Trails Endowment, which will fund improvements, additions and interpretation for trails at the park in perpetuity.

In 2020, the Conservancy is responding to the Castolon Fire with the Castolon Recovery Fund. Contributions made to the fund will provide design services, interpretive panels, and more for the park as it strives to return permanent visitor amenities to this historic district.

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 signs, 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. 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.

A percentage of our 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, 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, 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.

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). $16 per night ($8 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: 40 sites are reservable year-round. Contact 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 or call 1-877-444-6777.

Generator Hours: 8:00AM to 11:00AM and 5:00PM to 8:00PM, in Loop 1 only.

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). $16 per night ($8 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 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). $16 per night ($8 per night with applicable pass). Flush toilets, water, picnic tables, grills, and some shade shelters. Dump station nearby.

Reservable Campsites: 60 sites are reservable November 1–April 15. Contact 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 or call 1-877-444-6777.

Generator Hours: 8:00AM to 8:00PM, in designated sites only.

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	$16.00*	Flush toilets, dump station	Self-pay station	Surrounded by rocky cliffs; many hiking trails nearby.
Cottonwood	2,169/661	24	$16.00*	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	$16.00*	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.
			* $8.00 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, and as a general rule were not designed for large RVs or trailers. 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. Permits ($10/night) are written for specific campsites.

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 ($10/night) for a specific site must be obtained prior to camping.

Wilderness Camping

Wilderness camping permits ($10/night) are available to experienced hikers intending to camp within the park's open desert areas.

River Use & Stock Permits

River Use Permits

River permits are required for visitors intending to use canoes, kayaks, rafts or other watercraft on the Rio Grande. Permits are required for both day-use (free) and overnight trips ($10/night).

USCG approved wearable PFDs are required for each person, and an extra PFD is required. Each vessel must carry an extra paddle or oar; kayaks must have an extra paddle per party.

In addition to the items listed above each overnight river camping party must carry a firepan with a 2 inch minimum rim and a system for removing solid human waste. Check the park's website or with a ranger for additional gear requirements.

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 as well as 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.

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.

Beginning in early 2020, some sites will be available for reservations 6 months in advance on Recreation.gov or by phone at 877-444-6777. Check our website at www.nps.gov/bibe for updates and more information.

- 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. WONITE

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, in part due to predator control agents.

Nearly fifty years later, in the 1980s, they began returning from Mexico—crossing the river, the harsh desert, and starting a breeding population in the Chisos. 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.

Each campsite has bear proof storage lockers for caching edibles. Hard-sided vehicles are also suitable for storing edible items. Dumpsters throughout the park are bear proof. Help us keep bears healthy and wild!

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. WONITE

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, nor is this a comprehensive list.

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. The Window View Trail is paved and fairly level. ADA campsites are available by reservation.

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 January 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

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–11:00am and 2:00pm–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 23-hour access (closed at 9am for an hour of cleaning). 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 Needed!

NPS PHOTO

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 camphost, 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 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.