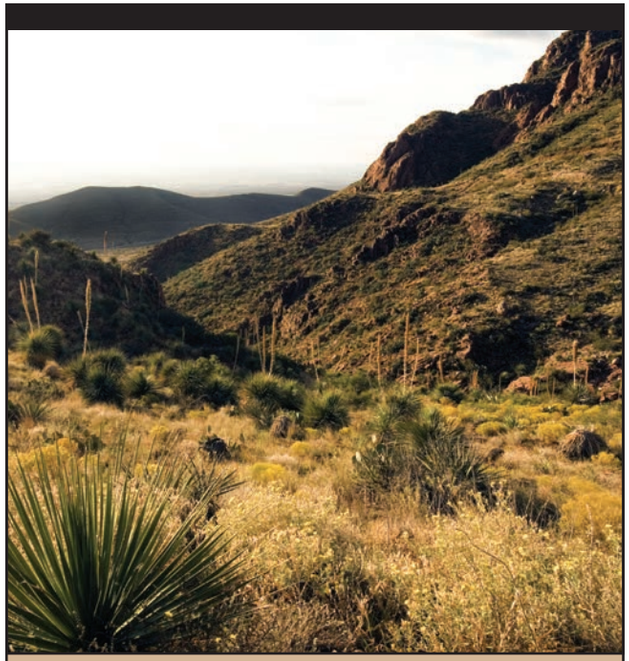

AT OVER 26,000 ACRES, FRANKLIN MOUNTAINS STATE PARK IS ONE OF THE LARGEST URBAN WILDERNESS PARKS IN THE WORLD—AN IMPORTANT PARCEL OF NATURE CONTAINING AN ENTIRE CHIHUAHUAN DESERT MOUNTAIN RANGE—ALL WITHIN THE CITY LIMITS OF EL PASO. WORLD-CLASS GEOLOGY, DIVERSE PLANTS AND ANIMALS, AND COLORFUL HUMAN HISTORY AWAIT ITS VISITORS. COME AND EXPLORE; ANSWER THE CALL OF THE MOUNTAINS!

Opportunities for mountain biking abound in the Tom Mays Unit.

A greater earless lizard soaks up the desert sun.

Located within one of the largest international border communities in the Western Hemisphere—El Paso, Texas and Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua—Franklin Mountains State Park offers many opportunities for its visitors. Escape the city and enjoy a respite in nature as you watch lizards, birds, deer and other wildlife. Soak up the desert sun amid vibrant desert wildflowers. Ponder the marvels of geologic time and the march of people and cultures who came before. Hike, bike, climb, picnic, and enjoy primitive camping. Answer the call of the mountains!

Franklin Mountains State Park
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TEXAS STATE PARKS

INTERPRETIVE GUIDE

FRANKLIN MOUNTAINS
STATE PARK

TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE

HUMAN HISTORY

The Franklin Mountains, the northern parapet of the *Paso del Norte* (Pass of the North), have long attracted a parade of people and cultures. Prehistoric inhabitants visited the mountains from approximately 12,000 years ago until their encounters with the Spanish in the late 1500s. The mountains provided most of the basic necessities of life for native peoples, including stone for tools and weapons, plants and animals for food and clothing, and infrequent springs for water. They left their mark in the form of isolated rock paintings and deep bedrock mortar pits used to grind seeds.

Beginning in the mid-1800s, resources within the park supported various ranching and mining activities. Scattered stone corrals and wire fences throughout the park evidence the struggles of early settlers who battled harsh desert conditions and even bandits in their quest to raise livestock. The ruins of a small sheep-ranching complex endure in the Hitt Canyon drainage. Mine shafts dot the east and west sides, while old gravel and quartz quarries mark the north and south.

El Paso Tin Mining and Smelting Company operated within current park boundaries during 1910 and 1911—the only tin mine in production within the continental United States.

The southwestern barrel cactus reaches the easternmost extent of its range in the Franklins.

GEOLOGY

Geologists classify the Franklins as a good example of tilted block-fault mountains. This mountain type begins to form when near-vertical faults fracture a section of the Earth's crust. Then, the landmass between the faults thrusts upward and tilts sharply under tremendous tectonic force. The resulting diagonal rock layers are easy to pick out on the mountains' eastern slopes.

The Franklins' exposed geologic layers are important because they shed light on 1.25 billion years of the past. Precambrian rock, the oldest on the planet, is found in several areas within the park. Imagine—picnickers in the Tom Mays Unit eat their sandwiches and chew their energy bars while sitting in the midst of Precambrian deposits formed when life on Earth consisted only of one-celled organisms.

Although most Franklin Mountains rock is sedimentary (deposited when the region was covered by water), visitors can see igneous rock as well. For example, the red granite bordering much of Transmountain Road formed millions of years ago from seven separate volcanic intrusions, when magma pulsed upward from deep within the earth but did not break through to the surface. Park visitors may hike to see Aztec Caves, a popular destination to see this ancient granite.

BIODIVERISTY

At first glance the Franklin Mountains may appear barren and desolate, but upon closer investigation visitors will discover a wealth of plant and animal life. The physical diversity of the mountains themselves accounts in part for this high biodiversity. Elevations range from about 4,000 to over 7,000 feet and landforms range from dry lowland *bajadas* and foothills to shaded canyons and craggy peaks. Widely differing plants and animals occupy these varied habitats. For example, desert grassland and creosotebush cover the lowlands, whereas the cooler peaks and moister canyons support dense shrubs, oak, juniper, and even an endemic snail that dates to the Pleistocene Ice Age.

The Franklin Mountains lie within the northern Chihuahuan Desert, but other geographic regions exert influence as well. Watch for the large southwestern barrel cactus, a Sonoran Desert species, growing up to 6 feet tall on foothill slopes. New Mexico locust and Gambel's oak provide a taste of the Rocky Mountains on high peaks, although the park's predominant vegetation is decidedly Chihuahuan. Notice the abundance of small cacti, succulents such as yucca, sotol and agave; thorny shrubs, low grasses and desert wildflowers—all specially adapted to survive the rigors of desert life.

Mexican gold poppies butter the park's hillsides during early spring.