



The harsh, yet beautiful terrain at Caprock Canyons is distinguished by steep escarpments, exposed red sandstones and deep, highly eroded and rugged canyons.

THE PARK WAS PURCHASED IN 1975 IN ORDER TO PRESERVE A LARGE AREA OF RUGGED CANYONS ON THE EASTERN MARGIN OF THE HIGH PLAINS AND FOR PUBLIC RECREATION IN THE SCENIC, RUGGED CANYON COUNTRY AT THE EDGE OF THE CAPROCK.

VISTAS OPEN UP ALL AROUND YOU, WITH VIBRANT RED EARTH TONES AND VEGETATION IN ALL DIFFERENT SHADES OF GREEN. EXPLORE THE PARK'S 15,313 ACRES AND EXAMINE CLIFFS AND RAVINES FOR A CLOSE-UP LOOK AT GEOLOGY IN ACTION.

CAPROCK CANYONS STATE PARK AND TRAILWAY PROVIDES A STARTLING CONTRAST TO THE FLAT PLAINS THAT MAKE UP MOST OF THE TEXAS PANHANDLE, OFFERING ADVENTURES DEEP INTO ROCKY CANYONS AND ONTO MAJESTIC RIDGES WITH BEAUTIFUL VIEWPOINTS.



In 1992, TPWD acquired a donation of 64.25 miles of a 1920s era railroad right-of-way stretching from the western trailhead at South Plains atop the Caprock Escarpment to the eastern trailhead of Estelline in the Red River Valley. The Caprock Canyons Trailway opened in 1993 as part of the national

Rails-to-Trails program converting abandoned railroad rights-of-way to hiking, biking and equestrian trails. The multi-use trail stretches through Floyd, Briscoe and Hall counties, crossing many original railroad bridges. The most impressive bridge spans more than 200 feet over often-dry Los Lingos Creek. The trailway also runs through the 742-foot-long Clarity Tunnel, one of the last active railroad tunnels in Texas and now home to a population of Mexican free-tailed bats.

Erosion is a concern because of the park's unique geology. Visitors can protect this park by hiking on designated trails and trailway users are reminded to respect the rights of neighboring private property owners.

For more information about programs, volunteering or joining the friends group, contact the park or visit our website.

Caprock Canyons State Park and Trailway  
P.O. Box 204, Quitaque, TX 79255  
(806) 455-1492 • (806) 995-3555  
[www.tpwd.texas.gov/caprockcanyons/](http://www.tpwd.texas.gov/caprockcanyons/)



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*Interpretive Guide to:*

# CAPROCK CANYONS

## STATE PARK AND TRAILWAY





## GEOLOGY IN ACTION

The rugged beauty of Caprock Canyons State Park has been created over millions of years, shaped by wind and water. The park is located along the Caprock Escarpment, a long, narrow rocky formation as high as 1,000 feet that forms a natural transition between the flat, high plains of the Llano Estacado to the west and the lower Rolling Plains to the east. Streams flowing east from the Llano Estacado flow onto the lower plains through the Caprock Escarpment, then into the Red, Brazos and Colorado rivers. With a downcutting action, tributary drainages of the Little Red River have exposed geologic layers in the park down to the Permian age Quartermaster formation, formed approximately 280-250 million years ago. These layers are commonly referred to as "red beds" because of the red coloration of their constituent shales, sandstones, siltstones and mudstones. Each of the geologic ages exposed by this headwater drainage erosion is characterized by different colorations including shades of red, orange and white. The park's steep and colorful canyons and bluffs are the breathtaking result of this powerful natural process.

The geology of the park greatly affects the flora and fauna. Most sites above the escarpment are on the High Plains and are short-grass prairie, which includes blue grama, buffalograss and sideoats grama. The canyons in the western portion of the park support several species of juniper as well as scrub oak. The bottomland sites along the Little Red River and its tributaries support tall and mid-level grasses including Indian grass, Canada wildrye and little bluestem, cottonwood trees, wild plum thickets and hackberries. The park abounds with wildflowers in the spring and has a variety of yuccas and multi-flowering cacti.



Pronghorn antelope are among the many animals found at Caprock.

## WILDLIFE OF CAPROCK

As the landscape has changed over time at Caprock Canyons, so has the wildlife. Over 12,000 years ago these lands supported now-extinct mammoth and giant bison, as well as camel and horses in a damper, cooler climate. More recently, black bears and grey wolves made their home in the region, but by the 1950s, they were forced out due to predator control by humans. Now mule and white-tailed deer, coyotes and bobcats are common with a few pronghorn antelope roaming these canyonlands. The park is also home to the Texas State Bison Herd. Small mammals such as grey fox, raccoon and jackrabbits make their home here. There is also a great diversity of reptiles with 14 species of lizards including collared lizards and over 30 species of snakes including prairie rattlesnakes. The area hosts some 175 species of birds including roadrunners, red-tailed hawks and the rarely seen Golden Eagle. Lake Theo, created by the damming of Holmes Creek, is utilized by waterfowl as a permanent water source.

## CULTURAL HERITAGE



The park's diverse resources have attracted native peoples for at least 10,000 years. The Paleoindian era Lake Theo site provides evidence for the hunting of now-extinct giant bison (*Bison antiquus*) as well as ritual practice in the form of a feature constructed of bison bone. Later cultures relied on the area's dependable food, water and lithic (stone or rock) resources and left behind extensive archaeological evidence of their activities. Historically, the Apache dominated this region until the Comanche pushed them out in the 1700s. The Comanche and allied Kiowa made these rugged canyonlands their last stronghold prior to being forced onto reservations by the U.S. Army in the 1870s.

In 1541, the Spanish explorer Coronado traveled through the region. Trade between the Spanish missions in New Mexico and the Plains Indians had been established by the early 1600s. During the 1700s, trade prospered between the Comanche and New Mexico buffalo hunters (*ciboleros*) and traders (*comancheros*). Between 1876 and 1878, buffalo were hunted to near extinction. Following the Battle of Palo Duro Canyon in 1874, cattlemen began to occupy the region. Charles Goodnight moved cattle into Palo Duro Canyon in 1876 and in 1882 he bought vast areas of land for John G. Adair, who became owner of the noted J.A. Ranch which included what is now Caprock Canyons State Park.

After witnessing the destruction of the native buffalo herds, Goodnight and his wife Mary Ann started their own herd with two calves given by Charles to his wife and eventually grew the herd to about 250 head by 1929. After Goodnight's death, the herd gradually declined in numbers until the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department began to manage the herd. Today, the bison continue their journey through history as the official Texas State Bison Herd, roaming a portion of their native range at Caprock Canyons State Park.

Mary Ann Goodnight encouraged her husband to obtain a few bison before they became extinct.

