

*Interpretive Guide to:*

# SEMINOLE CANYON

STATE PARK AND  
HISTORIC SITE



TO EXPERIENCE THE WONDER OF SEMINOLE CANYON IS TO STEP FAR BACK IN TIME TO THE ERA WHEN DINOSAURS ROAMED ... WHEN ICE AGE HUNTERS PURSUED BIG GAME WITH STONE-TIPPED SPEARS ... WHEN PREHISTORIC ARTISANS ADORNED ROCK SHELTERS WITH ELABORATE MURAL-SIZED PAINTINGS ... WHEN PIONEERS ATTEMPTED TO TAME THE LAND WITH RAIL, BARBED WIRE AND WINDMILL. COME. LOOK. LISTEN. SEMINOLE CANYON HAS MANY STORIES TO TELL.



## SEMINOLE-NEGRO INDIAN SCOUTS

Seminole Canyon received its name in honor of the U.S. Army's Seminole-Negro Indian Scouts, garrisoned at Fort Clark. The scouts protected the West Texas frontier from marauding Apache and Comanche bands between 1872 and 1914. Known for their exceptional cunning and toughness, no scout was ever wounded or killed in combat, and four earned the prestigious Medal of Honor.

Access into Seminole and Presa canyons is restricted to guided tours. For tour schedules please contact:

Seminole Canyon State Park and Historic Site  
P. O. Box 820, Comstock, TX 78837  
(432) 292-4464 • [www.tpwd.texas.gov/seminolecanyon](http://www.tpwd.texas.gov/seminolecanyon)

## FURTHER READING

*Rock Art of the Lower Pecos* by Carolyn E. Boyd

*The Rock Art of Texas Indians* by W.W. Newcomb, Jr.  
(paintings by Forrest Kirkland)

*Pecos River Rock Art* by Jim Zintgraff and Solveig Turpin



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"THE MAKER OF PEACE" BY BILL WORRELL

## A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

Seminole Canyon is still being created – deepened and widened year after year. The erosive forces of rain and flood continue to expose rock deposited up to 100 million years ago, during the Age of Dinosaurs. Ancient inland seas repeatedly flooded the landscape and then withdrew, laying down alternate bands of clay from the land and lime from the ocean. This process resulted in the layer cake of rock sequences visible today.

During the Pleistocene ice age (12,000 – 10,000 years ago), the region's temperate climate supported lush vegetation that included pine, juniper and oak woodlands in the canyons and luxuriant grasslands on the uplands. Ice Age hunters pursued now-extinct species of elephant, camel, bison and horse across the plains.

By 7,000 years ago, the ever-drying landscape resembled that of today. A new culture emerged in this changed environment. The Archaic people lived in the dry rock-shelters that line the canyon walls and subsisted on many of the same arid-adapted plants and small animal species that inhabit the park today.

The park's semiarid landscape represents a mixture of species from the Edwards Plateau, the Chihuahuan Desert and the South Texas Plains.



Pictographs of the Lower Pecos River Style adorn the canyon.

## PREHISTORIC ROCK ART

The past inhabitants of Seminole Canyon left their mark in several ways, most notably through rock paintings called pictographs. The park contains some of the most outstanding examples not only in Texas, but in the world. Extensive pictographs of the Lower Pecos River Style, attributed to the Middle Archaic period of 4,000 years ago, adorn rock-shelters throughout its canyons. These and pictographs from other periods give park visitors a visual link to the canyon dwellers of the past.

Of course, art supply stores did not exist hundreds or thousands of years ago. Early artisans obtained everything they needed from nature – variously colored minerals for paint pigments, animal fats and urine for binders, shells or flat rocks for palettes, and fibrous plant leaves for brushes. The canyon walls themselves served as blank canvas.

Why did the canyons' past inhabitants produce pictographs? Scientists do not always agree. Recent research into the meaning of Lower Pecos River Style murals suggests that the images may communicate important elements of the culture's belief system, such as shamanic journeys to the land of the dead and a symbolic relationship between deer and peyote, a hallucinogenic cactus.

## RAILROADERS AND RANCHERS



The Southern Pacific, the nation's second transcontinental railroad when completed in 1883, crossed what is now park property. Sections of old rail bed still line the park's landscape. The Southern Pacific served to unite the east and west coasts and established an important route for commerce and settlement.

Bustling but short-lived tent cities that included facilities like stores, restaurants, and saloons housed railroad workers nearby. A large baking oven from one of these sites, constructed of locally-quarried limestone, stands re-constructed at the park today where it recalls the hard work and sacrifice of early railroad workers.

With the railroad came a ranching boom. Sheep, goat and cattle producers could more easily ship livestock to markets, and the new technology of the day – barbed wire and windmills – allowed them to fence their ranches and provide all-important water for stock. Seminole Canyon was part of the Lower Pecos stock industry from the early 1880s until it became a state park in 1973. Although livestock no longer roam within park boundaries, ranching remains a vitally important activity within the area.

Railroad crew, 1885

