

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 2900 Tom Mays Access Road, El Paso, TX 79911 (915) 444-9100 • www.tpwd.texas.gov/franklin



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INTERPRETIVE GUIDE

FRANKLIN MOUNTAINS STATE PARK



HUMAN HISTORY

he 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, and many descendants still live in this area. 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, deep bedrock mortar pits used to grind seeds, and numerous chertharvesting sites where they chipped the rock into sharp tools.

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 between 1909 and 1915—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 typical tilted block-fault mountain range. This mountain type forms when near-vertical faults fracture a section of the Earth's crust and are pulled away from each other through tremen-



The Franklins' exposed geologic layers are important because they shed light on over 1 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.

The Franklin Mountains contains examples of all three major rock types. Metamorphic rock is seen along some of the Transmountain cut-outs in slabs of green and grey Castner Marble. The green bands were caused by algae deposits that some consider to be the oldest proof of life on earth. Igneous rock can be seen in the abundant Red Bluff Granite named for its distinctive color. Park visitors may hike to see Aztec Caves, a popular destination to see this ancient granite. Much of the lighter gray rock is limestone and other sedimentary rocks that contain thousands of marine fossils from a time when this whole area was under a shallow sea.



BIODIVERSITY

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 creosote bush 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 and the predominant vegetation is typical of the region. Notice the abundance of small cacti, agaves, thorny shrubs, low grasses, and desert wildflowers—all specially adapted to survive the rigors of desert life. However, if you look closely, you will also notice guests from adjacent ecoregions. The large southwestern barrel cactus, growing up to six feet tall on foothill slopes, is a representative of the Sonoran Desert while New Mexico

locust and Gambel oak provide a taste of the Rocky Mountains on high peaks.

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



