

PHOTO: ALLAN COBB AND TRAVIS SCOTT



AS RECORDED IN HIS 1889 DIARY, METHODIST CIRCUIT RIDER HAL CUNNINGHAM AND A PARTY OF EIGHT RELIED UPON LANTERN AND TORCHLIGHT TO ENTER “THE EGYPTIAN DARKNESS OF THE SUBTERRANEAN WONDER” KNOWN TODAY AS KICKAPOO CAVERN.

FROM THE TIME OF THIS FIRST WRITTEN ACCOUNT TO THE PRESENT, THE CAVES OF KICKAPOO CAVERN STATE PARK HAVE STIRRED GREAT CURIOSITY AND INTEREST. THE INTRIGUE OF THE PARK, HOWEVER, LIES AS MUCH ABOVE GROUND AS BELOW, FOR IT BOASTS EXCEPTIONAL NATURAL DIVERSITY AND A RICH HUMAN HISTORY AT EVERY LEVEL.



## INTERPRETIVE GUIDE

# KICKAPOO CAVERN STATE PARK



PHOTO: LISA HENDERSON

### TOURS

Guided flashlight tours of undeveloped Kickapoo Cavern are available on scheduled dates, through advance reservation only. Participants can see the largest “speleothem” in Texas – a natural column formation rising as tall as an eight-story building. Although the cave is now mostly dry, dripping water once played an important role in shaping this and other formations, such as icicle-like stalactites and stalagmites, rippled sheets of flowstone, and moonmilk that resembles white cream cheese.

For additional information about Kickapoo Cavern tours, birding tours and bat flight observation, contact the park at:

P.O. Box 705, Brackettville, TX 78832 • (830) 563-2342  
[www.tpwd.texas.gov/kickapoo cavern](http://www.tpwd.texas.gov/kickapoo cavern)

### FURTHER READING

Marshall Enquist, *Wildflowers of the Texas Hill Country*, Lone Star Botanical, 1989.

Mark Lockwood, *Birds of the Texas Hill Country*, University of Texas Press, 2001.

Merlin Tuttle, *Texas Bats*, Bat Conservation International, 2003.



Life's better outside.®



Proud Sponsor

© 2020 TPWD. PWD BR P4501-147D (4/20)  
In accordance with Texas State Depository Law, this publication is available at the Texas State Publications Clearinghouse and/or Texas Depository Libraries.

TPWD receives funds from the USFWS. TPWD prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, disability, age, and gender, pursuant to state and federal law. To request an accommodation or obtain information in an alternative format, please contact TPWD on a Text Telephone (TTY) at (512) 389-8915 or by Relay Texas at 7-1-1 or (800) 735-2989 or by email at [accessibility@tpwd.texas.gov](mailto:accessibility@tpwd.texas.gov). If you believe you have been discriminated against by TPWD, please contact TPWD, 4200 Smith School Road, Austin, TX 78744, or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office for Diversity and Workforce Management, 5275 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church, VA 22041.



Texas State Parks is a division of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

PHOTO: ALLAN COBB AND TRAVIS SCOTT







PHOTO: MARK LOCKWOOD

The rare Black-capped Vireo, a specialty of the Edwards Plateau, breeds at Kickapoo Cavern State Park.

## SURFACE LIFE

The park lies at a crossroads of nature, where three vastly different natural zones meet and intermingle to create a remarkable blend – a patchwork of plant and animal life. At Kickapoo, sprawling live oaks from the Edwards Plateau interplay with Chihuahuan Desert cacti and thorny shrubs of the subtropical South Texas plains. This type of mixed vegetation creates habitat for abundant and varied animal life. Birds provide one example: 240 migrant and resident species have been recorded within its boundaries, half the number that regularly occur in the entire state.

Several vulnerable species rely upon habitat that Kickapoo provides. The papershell pinyon, widespread in West Texas during the cooler and wetter Pleistocene ice age (about 10,000 years ago), clings to survival in isolated patches, dependent on moisture caught in the park's low-elevation limestone. Two endangered species call Kickapoo Cavern State Park home – Tobusch fishhook cactus and the Golden-cheeked Warbler.

## KICKAPOO CAVERN

The park's namesake cavern chronicles roughly 4 million years of nature's handiwork. Formation began when slow-moving, acidic groundwater carved passageways through 105-million-year-old Devils River limestone. As the water table eventually dropped, the passageways drained and lost their buoyant support, causing massive collapse within the cavern. The floor of Kickapoo Cavern was once its ceiling – a breakdown of jumbled limestone blocks from the collapse that measures 130 feet thick – the equivalent of a 16-level underground parking garage!

A large mound of burned rock and chipped stone near the cave shows visitation by prehistoric Native American groups. In dry periods, a small pool deep within the cavern likely provided these early visitors with life-sustaining water. Although the cavern was presumably named for the Kickapoo Indians, archeologists are unsure whether this historic tribe actually visited the cave. Historic graffiti and layers of torch soot in the depths of the cave document explorations that began around 120 years ago during the time of European settlement.



PHOTO: MARK LOCKWOOD

Papershell pinyon rely on Kickapoo Cavern State Park's unique ecological conditions to survive.

## STUART BAT CAVE



While Kickapoo Cavern supports relatively few animals, Stuart Bat Cave teems with life.

Cave swallows build mud nests just inside the cave mouth. Up to a million Mexican free-tailed bats roost deep within the cave from spring through fall. At dusk, the air comes alive with a flutter of bat wings as these flying mammals stream into the night in search of insects.

Each Mexican free-tailed bat can eat up to 75% of its body weight in insects nightly, including mosquitoes and moths. That's the equivalent of a 150-pound person gobbling up 450 quarter-pound hamburgers in a single day! The population of bats inhabiting Stuart Bat Cave could consume up to 10 tons of insects nightly – the weight of two elephants.

Stuart Bat Cave, named for the biologist who worked to protect the bats, historically provided income for people too. The Seargeant family, owners of the original ranchland that donated it to the people of Texas to become a state park, used the cave to corral sheep and goats. Guano, bat droppings, were mined from the cave until 1957. It was sold as high-quality fertilizer and an explosive agent. Now the cave is a protected home for bats and a place for visitors to marvel at their magnificence.

Mexican free-tailed bat  
Photo: Merlin B. Tuttle, Bat Conservation International