

The Saucedo Nature Trail is an easy 0.9 mile hike that loops the Saucedo complex just to the south. It passes through country typical of this part of the Chihuahuan Desert, comprised of remnant desert plains grassland interspersed with desert shrubs and succulents. The trail traverses a ridge composed of lava like that found in the Bofecillos Mountains to the west. It is mostly exposed rock and does not have a maintained tread.

There are signs along the route that identify some of the most common plants you will see elsewhere during your visit to the Big Bend. From the top of the hill you can enjoy the park's best views of La Mota Mountain and the historic Saucedo complex.



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LECHUGUILLA (*Agave lechuguilla*): the marker species of the Chihuahuan Desert. The spines (aka “shin-daggers”) are very sharp and the leaves are very tough and fibrous. Historically the leaves have been used to make basketry and sandals and the points used as needles. The plants flower once, and then die.

NIPPLE CACTUS (*Mammillaria heyderi*): a flat-topped hemispheric cactus that grows at the base of large rocks or narrow crevices. There are two species of this plant that bloom March through May. Flowers usually circle around new growth starting in the middle.

OCOTILLO (*Fouquieria splendens*): the only member of its family living in our area. Its closest relative is the boojum tree of Baja, Mexico. The plants stems are completely covered with spines.

RAINBOW CACTUS (*Echinocereus dasyacanthus*): a small, cylindrical cactus found in dry, rocky areas. Its flowers are bright yellow with greenish throats. They can grow as a single cactus or in dense clumps. They get their name from alternating pink and white bands that create a rainbow-like appearance.

SOTOL (*Dasyilirion species*): a member of the lily family, and a relative of asparagus. This succulent shrub sports a trunk up to three feet long, growing erect or reclining. The shiny, green, fibrous leaves grow up to 30 inches by 1 inch wide. The margins have sharp protective spines.

WHITEBRUSH, BEE BRUSH (*Aloysia gratissima*): a tall, narrow shrub with sharp tips. A favorite among bees and butterflies, it produces fragrant, white flowers in the spring, summer and fall.



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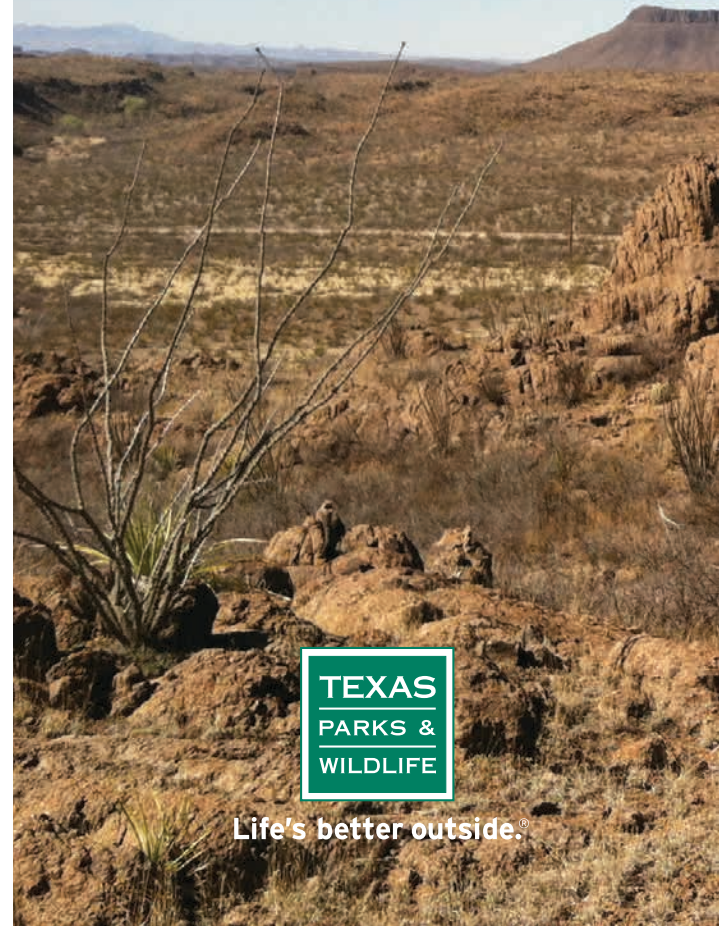
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Saucedo Nature Trail



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COMMON PLANTS OF THE CHIHUAHUAN DESERT

CANE CHOLLA (*Opuntia imbricata*): a tall cactus comprised of cylindrical jointed stems covered in spines and glochids. Cane cholla can grow large and usually exist with the low grasses and forbs that are abundant in disturbed soils.

CATCLAW ACACIA (*Acacia greggii*): most common where its roots have access to deep water. These shrubs are armed with sharp, recurved prickles that give them the name, "catclaw." The fruit is flat, twisted and 2–6 inches long, containing several hard, dark brown seeds.

CATCLAW MIMOSA (*Mimosa biuncifera*): a thicket-forming shrub also with catclaw-shaped prickles. Plants typically reach 3–6 feet tall. Flowers are globose (ball-like) and occur in late spring to mid-summer. Seeds usually turn red in the fall.

CHRISTMAS CHOLLA, TASAJILLO (*Opuntia leptocaulis*): named for its bright red fruits that ripen around December. Its spines are very thin, long, and barbed.

CLARET CUP (*Echinocereus coccineus*): one of Texas' most beloved cacti. It's an early bloomer and is often the first sign of color you'll see here in the spring, with bright red cup-like flowers.

CREOSOTE BUSH (*Larrea tridentata*): an evergreen shrub with resinous, dark-green leaves. The flowers have five yellow petals. It has a distinctive odor that is released during rains. Creosote resins possess many medicinal properties including anti-inflammatory, anti-bacterial, and anti-viral activity.

GUAYACAN (*Guaiacum angustifolium*): an evergreen shrub with stout, stubby, gnarled branches, tiny, densely-crowded dark green leaves, and bluish-purple flowers. It is related to the creosote bush and grows throughout the park.

HONEY MESQUITE (*Prosopis glandulosa*): over 200 plant and animal species depend on the mesquite tree for survival and reproduction. Mesquite pods are high in protein and sugar and historically have been used as a source of food.



DIRECTIONS

From the main Saucedo Ranger Station entrance, the trailhead is located across the driveway a short distance to the west of the bunk house and east of the fence. Look for the "Nature Trail" sign marking the trailhead (see map).

Be mindful of wildlife such as javelina and rattlesnakes and bring plenty of water. Please, no pets on the trail.

Once underway you'll pass over a berm, go through an opening in the fence, and cross a flat sandy area populated mostly by creosote bush and mesquite. The trail gradually curves eastward and takes you up the side of the hill. Follow the path and rock cairns (stacked rocks) to find your way.

Along the top, the trail is mostly level and the historic Saucedo complex is readily visible. To the north you can see La Mota Mountain, a distinctive landmark.

The descent takes you down the north side of the ridge. The climb down is the most difficult part of the hike so be careful and watch your footing. Look for cairns to lead you down. The trail ends at a sign posted along the main road. Turn west (left) to go back to the Ranger Station.

CONTINUED ON THE BACK PANEL