



A SENSE OF WONDER SURROUNDS THE PINK GRANITE DOMES OF ENCHANTED ROCK STATE NATURAL AREA. IF YOU CLIMB TO THE TOP OF THE ROCK, RISING 425 FEET, YOU'LL BE TREATED TO A PANORAMIC VIEW OF THE TEXAS HILL COUNTRY. YET IF YOU PEER CLOSER, YOU'LL FIND A LIVING WORLD OF LICHENS, FAIRY SHRIMP, AND MOSS BENEATH YOUR FEET. LIKE THE PEOPLE BEFORE US, YOU TOO CAN EXPLORE AND FIND THE EVER-CHANGING MAGIC HERE.



DO YOUR PART!

Thousands of people flock to Enchanted Rock each year for adventure. It takes all of us to care for this place and we need your help! Do your part by following Leave No Trace® principles when you visit:

- ✦ Hike only on designated trails and bare granite rock. Stay out of closed areas.
- ✦ Pets are permitted only on the Loop Trail and in the camping and day use picnic areas.
- ✦ Keep your park clean by picking up your trash and recycling when possible.
- ✦ Preserve the park for future generations by leaving plants, animals, artifacts, and fossils where you find them.

Join the Friends of Enchanted Rock State Natural Area, a non-profit group that supports the park through donations, service, programs, and park store merchandise.

Enchanted Rock State Natural Area
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INTERPRETIVE GUIDE

ENCHANTED ROCK

STATE NATURAL AREA





GRANITE DOMES AND LAYERS

At first glance, Enchanted Rock looks solid and durable. The rock and surrounding domes are made of Town Mountain granite, a hard, igneous rock. But forces of change are active here and nothing is permanent. Weathering and erosion created the landscape you see today, and it's still changing!



One billion years ago, this granite was part of a large pool of magma, or hot liquid rock, perhaps seven miles below the earth's surface. It pushed up into the rock above in some places, then cooled and hardened very slowly, turning into granite. Over time, the surface rock and soil wore away. Those pushed-up areas are the domes you see in the park: Enchanted Rock, Little Rock, Turkey Peak and others.

Enchanted Rock and the other domes are exfoliation domes. They have layers like an onion. After the rock and soil on top wear away, the granite expands ever so slightly because there is less weight bearing down on it. That expansion causes the dome to split into curved sections. As the outer layer of rock breaks into smaller pieces and slides off, the next layer begins to peel away from the dome. This is a process that continues today.



WONDERFUL WATER SNAKES

If you like fishing, you have something in common with plain-bellied water snakes. These non-venomous reptiles like to congregate in and near Sandy Creek. Extra-sharp teeth help them grasp slippery fish, a main part of their diet. Because plain-bellied water snakes are dark colored and live near water, many folks confuse them for the venomous cottonmouth. No matter the snake species, it's always best to study them from a distance. Look for plain-bellied water snakes during the day, either in the creek or on nearby rocks or sandbars.

ISLANDS OF LIFE IN A SEA OF ROCK

Weathering and erosion not only change the rock—these forces also create tiny habitats. Water gathers in shallow craters in the granite called vernal pools or weathering pits. Even though they might look like just puddles, these pools are filled with life.

Each vernal pool begins as a depression in the rock where water, soil, and other debris collect. This creates a place for algae spores to germinate. Algae are a food source for microscopic animals called zooplankton. As the seasonal pools dry out, the algae and zooplankton die or go dormant. This adds organic matter to the bottom of the pools—making it possible for larger plants and animals to live there.

You might see vegetation, like bluestem grass, yucca, or even live oak trees thriving in vernal pools. Some plants, like rock quillwort and granite flatsedge, don't grow anywhere else in the natural area. Wildlife rely on the pools, too. Fairy shrimp are tiny freshwater crustaceans that live in vernal pools. Their eggs can survive hot summers on the rock surface, even when the water dries up!



On Enchanted Rock and the other domes, you can discover vernal pools in every part of the life cycle, from shallow depressions to thriving wetlands to islands of vegetations in a sea of granite. Life is fragile here—one step into a pool can negatively impact it forever.

TAPESTRY OF STARS

Do you ever gaze up at the night sky and wonder if other people see it the same way? The dark night sky here has been the nighttime backdrop for people stretching back 12,000 years. The prehistoric people who traveled through this area used the stars for navigation and storytelling, like we still do today.

The stars aren't timeless, though. Because of a wobble in Earth's axis, the star we see as the North Star was different for people who lived here thousands of years ago. Right now, our axis is aligned with Polaris, a star in the constellation Ursa Minor. As recently as 3,000 years ago, our north pole pointed toward Thuban, in the constellation Draco. Other stars have exploded, formed, faded, or brightened over the centuries. Just like Enchanted Rock itself, the sky above us is always changing.

Native American groups saw the sky in its natural, undiluted state. Even with the advent of electricity and the growth of lighted cities, the settlers who came later would have still seen a dark sky, though it would not have been quite as pristine. Now, our night sky is dark but it's getting brighter as cities and towns grow more quickly. Enchanted Rock works to protect the night sky as an International Dark Sky Park. This means that our view of the stars, nebulae, clusters, and planets is better here than in surroundings areas. We protect the darkness by removing unnecessary lights and using lighting fixtures that are warm-toned and point toward the ground.

