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EL SOLITARIO

TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT | SPRING 2009 | BIG BEND RANCH STATE PARK

Welcome to Big Bend Ranch State Park



By Rod Trevizo, Superintendent

Welcome to Big Bend Ranch State Park. We survived the flood of 2008 (one for the history books) and started the new year with a brand-new addition to the park. Fresno Ranch, 7,000 acres of wild canyons, springs, vistas, wildlife, historical roads and additional Rio Grande frontage, now belongs to the park and to the people of Texas.

In addition to the Fresno Ranch Headquarters, the acquisition includes lower Fresno Canyon and its tributaries, with live water, rich riparian and wetland resources, contrasting geological features and breathtaking vistas. The acreage offers overnight equestrian areas, an increase in secluded back-country hiking, camping and great mountain biking.

Thanks to the Texas Nature Conservancy and the estate of Jeanne Norsworthy, we have been able to make a significant and strategic addition to Big Bend Ranch State Park.



Sunset at Rincon Campsite

Our assessments of the natural and cultural resources are ongoing for the new addition, much of which is rugged and remote desert canyon country. Included are parts of Panther and Monilla Canyons and a key tract in the Lower Shutup on the southern flank of the

Solitario. But visitors don't have to wait until all the work is done to see this spectacular area.

Fresno Canyon is already open for hiking, horseback riding and mountain biking. Visitors should note that access to lower Fresno Canyon requires a backcountry permit for overnight use,

obtained from the Barton Warnock Center, Fort Leaton State Historical Site or the Saucedo Ranger Station.

The simplest way into the area begins at the West Contrabando Trailhead and Kiosk. Trail signs will lead you into Fresno Canyon and the adjacent Contrabando Dome Trail. Access to the BBR trail system including segments of the historic Marfa-Terlingua Freight Road is afforded after a short hike or ride. Ruins of the historic Crawford-Smith House are within 10 miles of the trailhead. Stands of cottonwood trees provide the perfect habitat for birding and cool shade for adventurous visitors on hot summer days.

Please look through this issue of *El Solitario* and check out what else is new. If you are a first-time visitor, reading *El Solitario* is a great way to familiarize yourself with Big Bend Ranch State Park. And, if you are reading this before May 2, 2009, please join us for Big Bend Ranch State Park Fiesta — a day of hiking, birding, mountain biking, special tours and events and free BBQ to celebrate the park's grand re-opening. Call the Saucedo Ranger Station at (432) 358-4444 for details.

I hope you enjoy this issue of *El Solitario*!

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FEATURED TRAILS

Contrabando multi-use & Horsetrap bike-and-hike



Views of Contrabando Waterhole and ruins from a 1890s ranch await you on the Contrabando Trail.

Contrabando Multi-Use Trail

has two trailheads, one located directly across the highway from Barton Warnock Environmental Education Center near Lajitas and a second located 7.5 miles to the west along F.M. 170. Regardless of your skill level, this 25-mile trail system offers a segment or side loop that is suitable for you — from novice to advanced. Watch for horses; this trail is open to equestrians too. Enjoy spectacular views as you encircle the red rock of Lajitas Mesa or the uplifted Contrabando Dome. Along the trail, watch for wayside exhibits that interpret the area's mining and ranching heritage.

The word “contrabando” is Spanish for “contraband.” For decades, smugglers traversed what is now known as the Contrabando region along the eastern boundary of Big Bend Ranch State Park. In the early 1900s, area ranchers sought Mexican cattle to bolster their herds; some brought animals across the border illegally to avoid custom fees. During the 1930s, huge amounts of illegally exported candelilla wax slipped across the border as well. Wax smugglers escaped heavy Mexican export

25
miles

taxes and profited from higher prices in the U.S. Then, during prohibition, mule trains brought great quantities of liquor out of Mexico to the U.S. border, where it was delivered to bootleggers.



Horsetrap Bike-and-Hike Trail

is easily accessible from Saucedo. Hikers will find the trail an easy 5-mile loop with vistas of the surrounding Chihuahuan Desert. For mountain bikers the degree of difficulty ranges from moderate to downright challenging. A 200-yard portion of the trail is sandy. Enjoy this “off the beaten path” experience as you soak up the solitude and the scenery.

5
miles

Closed Canyon Trail

The Closed Canyon Trail constitutes perhaps the most popular hike along the River Road corridor at Big Bend Ranch. The trailhead is located approximately 29 miles east of Presidio and 36 miles west of Study Butte on F.M. 170 (The River Road) between La Cuesta (The Big Hill) and the Colorado Canyon River Access. This relatively easy three-mile round-trip trail enters a slot canyon that portrays the incredible sculpting power of water and erosion. Deep inside the canyon, hikers can stretch out their arms and touch both canyon walls simultaneously while looking up at the canyon rim 150 feet above. Imagine the force required to slice through solid rock in this way!

Closed Canyon Arroyo cuts through the reddish volcanic rock of Colorado Mesa. This mesa is composed of ash flow tuffs that erupted from volcanoes in the Sierra Rica of neighboring Chihuahua, Mexico, about 30 to 28 million years ago. Around 2 million years ago, both Colorado Mesa and the Santana Bolson (the valley that the River Road follows) had become completely covered with sedimentary basin-filling rocks. As the Closed Canyon Arroyo began to cut through these softer, looser rocks and establish its course, intense erosion occurred quickly enough to completely breach the harder, underlying volcanic rock of Colorado Mesa. Thus, Closed

Canyon Arroyo became a direct tributary of the Rio Grande.

Today, the Closed Canyon Trail presents a meandering hike into a narrow, deep, high-walled canyon worn smooth by the ongoing effects of moving water and sediment. As you walk through the canyon and contemplate its geologic past, also look for one of the Big Bend's most colorful lizards. The greater southwestern earless lizard can be seen along the canyon walls performing “push-ups” to expose its blue-purple belly to potential mates. During the mating season, males sport a vivid orange throat patch and a lime green wash along the flanks. Closed Canyon is also a favorite habitat for the canyon wren. Listen for its melodic song, a descending cascade of notes, echoing throughout the canyon.

During summer it is best to avoid hiking Closed Canyon during mid-day when the sun



is directly overhead. Morning or afternoon is better because the canyon floor is shaded by its high walls. Be sure to carry plenty of water, and wear a large brimmed hat. Beware of afternoon thunderstorms; flash flooding can be a serious problem in the canyon.

To learn more about the geology of the region, pick up a copy of *Geology of Big Bend Ranch State Park* by Christopher Henry, at any of our visitor centers.



Hikers on the Closed Canyon Trail walk through a slice of geologic history.

Be Aware: For your safety and welfare

Many wonderful animals live here and play a vital role in the balance of nature. You are a guest in their home. By learning about the park's animals and observing the following tips, you can show them the respect they deserve while keeping yourself and your family safe.

Rattlesnakes are especially common at Big Bend Ranch. Watch where you put your hands and feet. Never harass or attempt to handle a rattlesnake—this is when most bites occur. Rattlesnakes are protected in the park; do them no harm.

Never feed wild animals or allow them to get human or pet food.

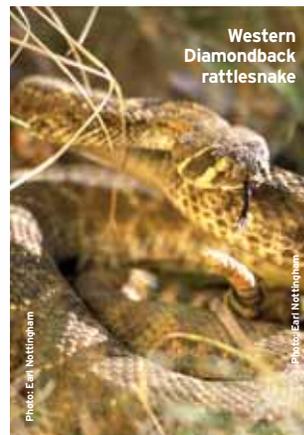
Observe wild animals and longhorn cattle from a safe distance; never approach or try to photograph them at close range.

Keep children and pets under your control at all times.

Clean up and store food and garbage immediately after meals; never keep food in your tent.

Enjoy the outdoors with others, not alone.

In the unlikely event that you encounter a black bear or mountain lion, do not run. Instead, face the animal, make noise and try to look as large as possible. Pick up small children. Back away slowly. If attacked, fight back. Report sightings to park staff immediately.



Western Diamondback rattlesnake



In the unlikely event that a snake bite occurs:

- Remove jewelry and loosen tight-fitting clothing.
- Wash the bite area with disinfectant.
- Keep the person calm and quiet.
- Limit movement if at all possible.
- Watch for symptoms of shock.
- Seek medical attention immediately.

Head 'em up, move 'em out!

Weekend wranglers have a chance each spring and fall to see cattle in the ranch's rugged and remote pastures, learn how the herd is moved with horses, and drive the park's historic Texas Longhorn Herd to stock pens at Saucedo Headquarters. Participants can take part in branding and vaccinating calves, recording lineages and experiencing the traditions of the Spanish, Mexican and Anglo-American cowboy culture.

The cattle drive is Big Bend Ranch State Park's most popular program, allowing up to 25 visitors to experience a part of the state's Western heritage. The three-day event allows



participants to learn about the park's ranching tradition, experience life as a cowboy and gain a lifetime of memories.

For information about the cattle drive, call the Big Bend Ranch State Park, Saucedo Ranger Station at (432) 358-4444.

Traditional Place Names at Big Bend Ranch

Big Bend Ranch State Park has a diverse and rich history. Much of this historical wealth is captured in traditional place names. Knowing, understanding and respecting traditional place names can help park visitors connect to the past.

Many traditional place names originate in the ranching period between the 1930s and the 1970s. Others, however, came from earlier Mexican and Anglo landowners. A few are linked to the Spanish Entrada period of the 1500s, while more can be traced to early maps or local oral traditions.

The origin of one intriguing name, "Bofecillos," first noted in the account of the U.S.-Mexico Boundary Survey of 1857, is unknown. "Bofe" is Spanish for lung. Translated literally it could mean "little lungs," which makes no sense. The original name may have been "Bosquecillos," meaning little forests, in reference to stands of trees that grow around springs and seeps.

"Madera Canyon" is just west of Fresno Canyon. "Madera" means wood in Spanish, but there is no timber within this drainage. The canyon's traditional name is "Monilla," Spanish for the native shrub known as Mexican buckeye. "Mono" means doll or monkey. And the flower of Mexican buckeye does look like a monkey or doll face. The shrub is abundant in this canyon; therefore, the name. Another nearby canyon is traditionally called "Leon," but its name has lapsed into "Panther."

The long-term goal of TPWD is to conserve as many of the traditional place names as possible. As new names are discovered they will be added to the public maps. If you know any old-timers who know this property, please put them in touch with David Riskind, Natural Resources Program Director, 4200 Smith School Road, Austin, TX 78744; or e-mail: david.riskind@tpwd.state.tx.us.

FEATURED CAMPSITES

Rincon 1 & 2



Located in the Fresno Backcountry Zone, the Rincon campsites are ideally situated close to the junctions of Arroyo Segundo in the Bofecillos Mountains and the Lower Shutup of the Solitario. Rincon 2 lies nestled against a rocky mound with superb views of the steeply eroded flatirons comprising the southwest edge of the Solitario. The surrounding grayish-white soil is broken up by dozens of colorful rainbow cactus, bayonet-edged yucca and the low-lying living rock cacti.

The view to the south is dominated by 4,400-foot Rincon Mountain and Fresno Canyon, which divides the western Solitario Rim from the Bofecillos Mountains. At the

western edge of the canyon, the multihued, eroded hoodoos of the Llano Plains emerge. What events have these ancient hoodoos witnessed? The travels of Native Americans ... freight wagons supplying the mines of Terlingua ... a stagecoach racing down the canyon. For intrepid campers who seek wide-open skies and dramatic landscapes, the Rincon campsites are a perfect choice.

What's special about these sites?

- Access to Bofecillos Mountains, the Solitario, and Fresno Canyon
- Stunning views
- Remoteness and solitude

Access: 4WD High Clearance

Getting There

Travel east from Saucedo Ranger Station to Fresno Canyon Road. (4.1 miles)

Turn right on Fresno Canyon Road, descend Fresno Hill to arroyo, then follow arroyo to spur road. (5 miles)

Bear left on spur road to campsites. (1.8 miles)

4x4
high clearance

10.9
miles

2.75
hours

GPS Coordinates, Rincon 1

UTM 13 Easting:	710764.0000
UTM Northing:	3253826.0000
Longitude DD:	-103.85830935
Latitude DD:	32.53826
Longitude DMS:	-103 51 29.9137
Latitude DMS:	29 24 31.8597

GPS Coordinates, Rincon 2

UTM 13 Easting:	611271.1143
UTM Northing:	3253679.4051
Longitude DD:	-103.85309894
Latitude DD:	29.40740101
Longitude DMS:	-103 51 11.1562
Latitude DMS:	29 24 26.6436

Backcountry Zone Camping



There are no designated campsites in the backcountry zone. Backcountry camping allows overnight visitors to select their own primitive campsite, based upon certain conditions:

- At least 1/4 mile from any other existing campsite
- At least 300 feet from water sources and prehistoric or historic cultural sites
- At least 3/4 mile from trailheads or roads

Backcountry campers may use the "cathole" method to dispose of human waste and must pack out all trash. No open fires are allowed due to resource impact; use of containerized fuel stoves is permitted. The maximum stay is 14 nights (total) and seven consecutive days in any one backcountry zone.

BIG BEND RANCH STATE PARK

FEES AND VISITOR SERVICES

Daily entry fee:
\$3 per person per day for all 13 years and older

Standard Vehicle Campsite:
\$8 per site/day

Backcountry Zone Camping:
\$5 per night/site

Horses:
\$2 per day/horse

No dump station in park.
No hook-ups in park.

Lodging

Lodging is available bunkhouse style or in the "Big House" at Saucedo. Meals are available with advance reservations.

Call (432) 358-4444 between 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. for information and reservations.

Airstrip

Big Bend Ranch paved airstrip 3TE3

103-56-11.7030 W
28-28-10.6840 N

Elevation: 4240 feet
Length: 5500 feet

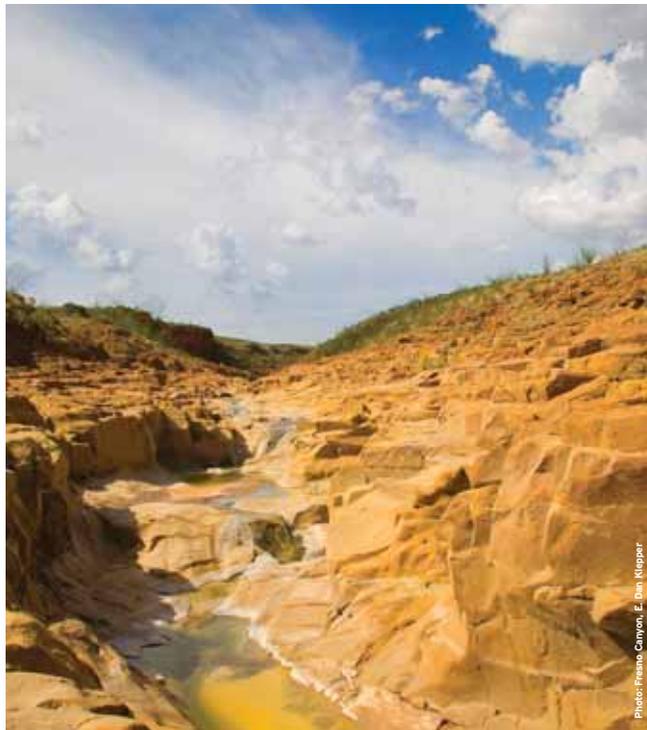


Photo: Fresno Canyon, E. Dan Klepper

Park Information and Permits

Park information and permits for day use and camping may be obtained in person from 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. daily at three locations:

Saucedo Ranger Station
Park interior
(432) 358-4444

Barton Warnock Environmental Education Center
Lajitas
(432) 424-3327

Fort Leaton State Historic Site
Presidio
(432) 229-3613

Special-use permits are required for use of Primitive Road and all camping. Day Use visitors are required to obtain a free, special-use permit for motorized use of primitive roads.

Campsite and backcountry reservations may be made in advance by calling (432) 358-4444 between 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Permits must be picked up in person.

Use Zones

Front Country Zone is defined as those lands within approximately one-quarter mile either side of the designated 2WD roads. All street-legal and licensed vehicles are permitted in this zone. Overnight use may occur only at designated campsites, with the required, special-use permit.

Primitive Road Zone is defined as lands within one-quarter mile either side of designated 4WD or 2WD high-clearance roads. Motorized vehicle access to this zone is restricted to street-legal and licensed vehicles. Overnight use may occur only at designated campsites, with the required, special-use permit.

Backcountry Zones are defined as lands that are more than one-quarter mile from publicly accessible roads. Twenty separate zones have been defined. Only non-motorized travel is permitted. Visitors are encouraged, though not required, to use designated trails and routes until they are knowledgeable and confident enough in their familiarity with the park to travel cross-country.

Important: Orientation

Front Country Zone Day Use Only

Appropriate orientation materials will be provided, depending on the visitor's intended activities and areas of interest at the park.

Primitive Road or Backcountry Zone Day or Overnight Use

The viewing or reviewing of comprehensive orientation materials and information is required. This material will introduce the park, the Chihuahuan Desert, safety, water use, vehicle requirements, land ethics, etc. Orientation is required annually.

No gas, diesel or groceries available in park.

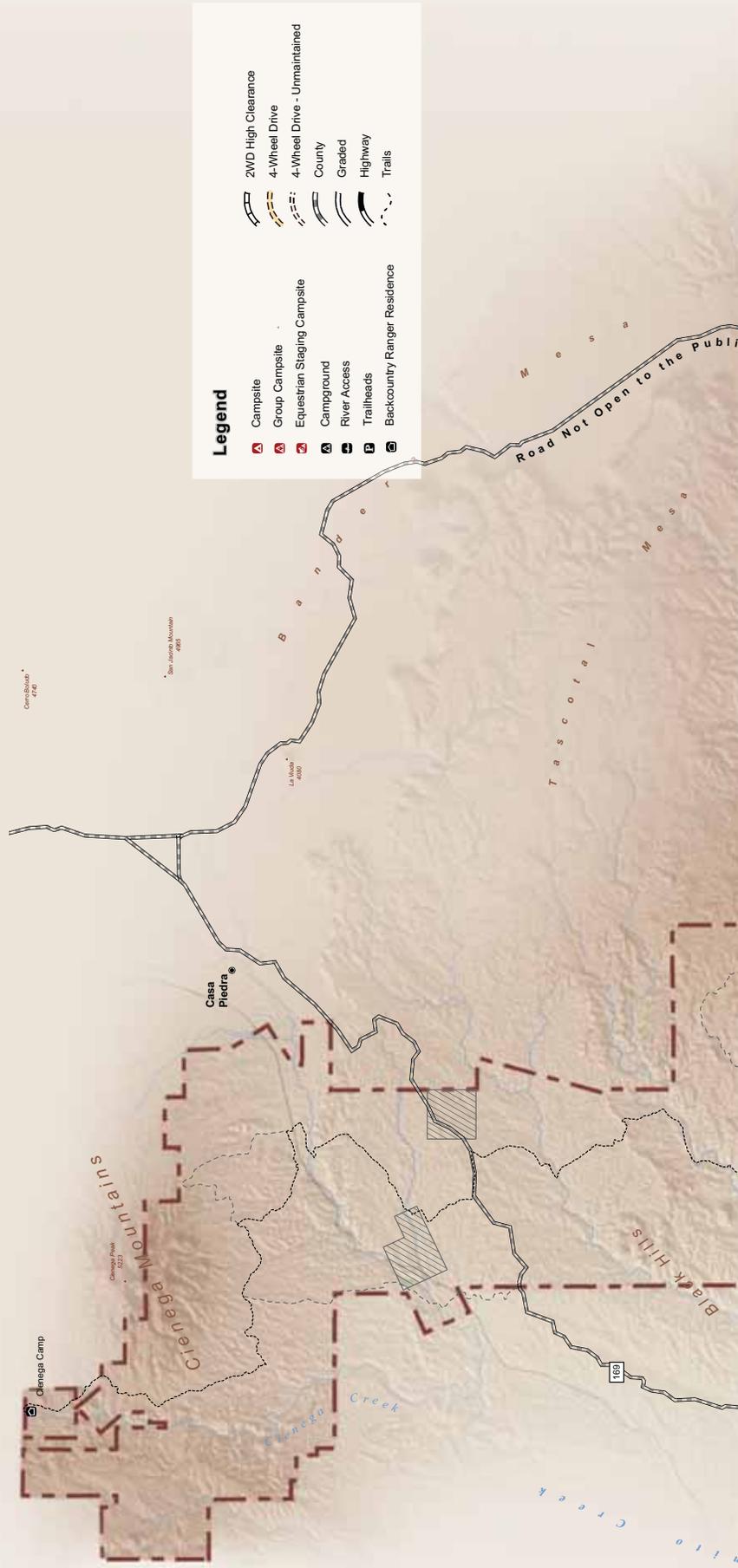
EMERGENCY SERVICES

Cell phone service in the park is unreliable and limited.

911 service is 2 to 3 hours away.

Best course of action is to call Saucedo Ranger Station at (432) 358-4444 or go to Saucedo Ranger Station; ask for help.

BIG BEND RANCH STATE PARK



BIG BEND RANCH STATE PARK

ACCESS AND VISITOR SERVICES

Vehicle-Accessible Camping

Forty-nine locations have been designated for vehicle-accessible camping. Permits are required. Each site includes a tent area, picnic table and fire ring. Some campsites are still under development and may temporarily lack some amenities.

Campers are required to place tents in designated areas only. Desert resources are fragile.

Important: All visitors are required to haul out their human waste and pack out all trash.

Portable privies are available for purchase at all permit-issuing stations.

Downed wood is critical to desert ecology. Gathering firewood is prohibited. Visitors may bring their own firewood or purchase it at Saucedo. Charcoal cooking fires and containerized fuel stoves are allowed. Ashes must be packed out or deposited in the fire ring. The maximum stay per permit is 14 nights.

Individual Campsites

- Up to 8-person occupancy
- 3-vehicle limit

Group Campsites

- Up to 12-person occupancy
- 5-vehicle limit

Equestrian Staging Campsites

- Up to 24-person occupancy
- 12-vehicle limit

Campsites at Campgrounds

- 3-vehicle limit

Pets

Pets are allowed anywhere vehicles are allowed, and within 1/4 mile of publicly accessible roads. Always keep pets on a leash and pick up after them. Never leave pets unattended or allow them to approach wild animals or longhorn cattle.



Road conditions are affected by rain and runoff and will vary widely. Check with a ranger for conditions on arrival.

Know Your Vehicle

Some roads are suitable only for high-clearance or four-wheel-drive vehicles. If you have any questions about the roads or the suitability of your vehicle, consult a park ranger.

- Two-wheel-drive (2WD): main road and some spurs that any highway-worthy vehicle, driven responsibly, can access.
- Two-wheel-drive, high-clearance (2WDHC): roads where extra clearance is required due to road conditions (rocks, steep dips, etc.).
- Four-wheel-drive (4WD): recommended where extra traction is required on steep, loose or soft ground. Includes all-wheel drive (AWD).
- Four-wheel-drive, high-clearance (4WDHC): primitive roads or routes harsher than 4WD, where passage requires vehicles with extra traction, rigid suspension and high clearance.

High clearance is considered a minimum of 8 inches.

Rules for the Road Less Traveled

Park roads are dirt and may be narrow. Speed limit is 25 mph on primary park roads. Drive slowly to keep yourself, your passengers, your vehicle and the park's animals safe.

When should 4WD be engaged? Generally speaking, once you leave the maintained road, shift from 2WD into 4WD and leave it there until returning to the maintained road. Use 4WD low before you need to negotiate any really difficult obstacles.

Take care of your tires. **On primitive roads, the number one trouble is tire failure, often sidewall punctures.** Drive slowly and watch for sharp rocks, sticks and cactus. Carry fix-a-flat, a lug wrench, hydraulic jack and tow strap. A good spare is essential; **two spares are recommended.**

Always carry an extra 5 gallons of water.

Beware of brush. The woody bushes of the desert are extremely hard and can produce nasty scratches in your vehicle's paint.

Food and Lodging

The lodge at Saucedo is a bunkhouse with a commercial kitchen. Meals are prepared and served in a common dining area. Meal service can be arranged with advance notice. Lodging is available bunkhouse style with men on one side and women on the other. The three-bedroom "Big House" sleeps eight. The Big House has a full kitchen, or meals may be taken at the Bunk House. Pets are not allowed in either. For information, rates and reservations, call (432) 358-4444 between 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.

Enjoy the Park (and Live to Tell About It)

The beauty of Big Bend Ranch lies in its rugged remoteness. You are responsible for your own personal safety while at the park. Stay alert, read posted materials and consult a ranger for advice.

Stay cool. Desert heat can kill, and sunburn is no fun. While enjoying the park, be sure to use sunscreen. Wear a long-sleeved shirt, long pants, a broad-brimmed hat and sunglasses. Avoid strenuous outdoor activities during the hottest part of the day. Always drink plenty of water.

Water is life. If you wait until you're thirsty to drink, you've waited too long. Carry and consume at least 1 gallon of water per person per day to avoid dehydration. Drinking water is available at the visitor center.

Weather the weather. In a lightning storm, seek shelter inside a building or a vehicle with a roof. Do not stand under trees or in shallow caves, and avoid high ground. Stay away from water, wire fences and metal railings, which can carry lightning from a distance.

Stay high and dry. Dry creek beds can quickly become raging torrents due to rainfall far upstream. Be cautious when hiking in streambeds. Never cross rain-swollen creeks or washes. Be aware that temperatures can fluctuate by 50 degrees per day at the park, and dress accordingly. Stay dry to prevent hypothermia.

Don't go it alone. Tell someone your plans and estimated return time. Avoid exploring alone. Cell phone service is spotty at best; do not rely upon it. Always have plenty of water and food with you.



Medical Services

Cell phone service in the park is unreliable and limited. No medical facilities are available in the park. The nearest hospital is located in Alpine, about three hours' drive from Saucedo. **In event of emergency, contact or go to Saucedo Ranger Station for help.**

Make the most of your visit

Some people have limited time to explore and sample the wonders of Big Bend Ranch State Park. The following is offered as a brief guide. Remember that orientation requirements and park entrance fees apply.



See exhibits at Barton Warnock Environmental Education Center in Lajitas.

ONE DAY

1. From Presidio headed eastward, stop at Fort Leaton State Historic Site for orientation and to visit the exhibits. Enter the park at the Portal de Presidio entry station. Continue on, stopping frequently to take in the scenery and read the interpretive waysides along the 20+ mile route. Stop at Cuevas Amarillas to check out the prehistoric rock art and bedrock mortars (grinding holes). Once at Saucedá Ranger Station, peruse the interpretive exhibits on the park's ranching heritage. Enjoy a picnic lunch under a shade tree outside the bunkhouse, then drive to the Solitario Overlook a few miles further. There you can actually see the exterior of the park's signature geologic formation.

2. If a short hike appeals to you, take either the Cinco Tinajas or Ojito Adentro trail as you are exiting the park. Both trailheads are immediately adjacent to the Saucedá road. The Ojito Adentro Trail traverses desert scrub into moist riparian woodland. This oasis-like patch of green is a particularly good spot to bird-watch. The Cinco Tinajas Trail near Saucedá is well marked; elevation change is only 200 feet and the vistas of the inner reaches of the park are breathtaking. Tinajas are naturally formed "bowls" that hold water when many other sources are dry.

3. If you are coming from Study Butte/Terlingua, stop at Barton Warnock Environmental Education Center in Lajitas for orientation

and to peruse the interpretive exhibit on the region's natural and cultural history as well as the desert gardens. Stop in the park store for a wide range of informative books, maps and pamphlets. Then, continue westward on the River Road (featured on page 12), stopping at the many pull-outs to enjoy a picnic lunch, revel in the view and check out the wayside exhibits. Near the east end of the drive, turn northward to Saucedá Ranger Station as described above, or continue on to Fort Leaton.

THREE DAYS

1. The Rancherías Loop Trail is a two-night, three-day camping and hiking experience, featured on page two. Be sure to receive orientation at Barton Warnock Center or Fort Leaton and secure a permit. The elevation changes are dramatic, but for hearty souls the hike is well worth it.

2. Receive orientation, secure your permit and choose a campsite that suits your interests and your vehicle type. Many campsites such as Los Ojitos and Fresno Vista are accessible by two-wheel drive vehicles. Others, such as Las Burras and Yedra 1 & 2, require a 4x4 vehicle with high clearance. Always check with a

ranger on road conditions. Take all your food, water and other supplies and truly get away from it all for three days of hiking and bird-watching, or simply kick back and enjoy the solitude.

3. Combine a campout with hiking and biking on the Horsetrap Hike and Bike Trail with short excursions to the interior of the Solitario in your 4x4. Parts of Horsetrap offer dramatic views of the interior of the park including the Cienega Mountains and Fresno Peak. And, of course, the Solitario is unforgettable. Many park trails are mountain-bike accessible. Check with a ranger for options.

ONE WEEK

With an entire week, you we suggest you develop your own customized itinerary from the numerous options available.

Many people spend several days camping, hiking, biking and/or horseback riding, then go to the River Road for a relaxed day excursion that might include a raft, canoe or kayak trip on the Rio Grande. You have many choices. The world is yours at Big Bend Ranch State Park!

CERTIFIED COMMERCIAL GUIDES AND OUTFITTERS

Big Bend River Tours
432-371-3033 or
800-545-4240

Desert Sports
432-371-2727 or
888-989-6900

Angell Expeditions
432-229-3713

Far Flung Outdoor Center
432-371-2489
800-839-7238

Lajitas Stables
432-371-2212
800-887-4331



Know before you go

Multi-Use Trails

Some of the park's trails are suitable for hiking only. Other trails are available for mountain bikers and equestrians also. Speak with a park ranger for details and use options. Remember to take plenty of water, regardless of your activity!

Biking

When biking, always wear a helmet and protective clothing. Know your ability and limits. Bike rentals are available at Saucedá Ranger Station.

Horseback Riding

All pack-and-saddle stock users must obtain a backcountry use permit, whether for day use or overnight. Equestrians must bring their own weed-free horse feed. All horses must have documentation of a current Coggins test.

River Access

The Rio Grande provides opportunities for rafting, kayaking, canoeing and free bank fishing. Several river access points are found along F.M. 170. Colorado Canyon includes Class II and Class III rapids — not considered dangerous under normal flow conditions.

Outfitters

Local outfitters can provide guides and assist you with equipment needs. Potential services may include nature/birding hikes, mountain biking tours, horseback rides, river trips and campouts.

NATURAL HISTORY

Send in the clones

By: Mark W. Lockwood

As strange as it may seem, there are two species of lizards found at Big Bend Ranch State Park that are 100 percent female.

There are no males in the entire population, and the females lay fertile eggs that have a full set of chromosomes in shallow burrows. This asexual method of reproduction is known as parthenogenesis. The result is that all of the offspring are essentially copies, or clones, of the mother since they have two sets of her chromosomes. These species are the result of a hybrid event between two sexually reproducing species. Why this phenomenon has occurred so frequently in this genus of lizards is poorly understood, particularly considering it is only known in one other genus of lizard. Because of the unexpected nature of this aspect of their biology, the facts of their reproduction remained undiscovered for many years. To emphasize this, one of these lizards was first discovered in 1823 but the fact that there were only females in the population was not fully understood until 1958.

These lizards belong to the genus *Aspidozelis* (formerly in *Cnemidophorus*) and are generally referred to as



Checkered Whiptail

whiptails or racerunners. One of the parthenogenic species found at Big Bend Ranch is the Checkered Whiptail (*A. tessellatus*). As the name implies they have a bold checkered pattern with a rusty coloration on the lower back and legs. They inhabit areas with scattered brush where they can forage for insects and other invertebrates in the debris found under these plants and also rest in the shade. They can be found in all areas of Big Bend Ranch including around the Saucedo and virtually any of the camp sites. These attractive lizards are fairly large as adults, up to 11 inches long including the tail. They are active throughout the day, although during the coolest part of the day they are less likely to be encountered. During the hottest part of the day they will forage in the shade of



Chihuahuan Spotted Whiptail

shrubs and move quickly across the open ground that has been super heated by the sun. In general, they are unafraid and will only run a short distance when disturbed before resuming foraging. This behavioral trait is typical of the parthenogenic species. The sexually reproducing species are, in general, far more wary and difficult to approach. The other parthenogenic species that occurs on the park is the Chihuahuan Spotted Lizard (*A. exsanguis*). This lizard is far more uncommon and only found in the upper elevation in the park.

El Solitario: What's in a name?

Spanish for hermit or loner, El Solitario is the signature landscape feature of the park. Almost 10 miles across, this collapsed and eroded volcanic dome is one of the Earth's more distinctive features as observed from space. Solitario overlook is a few miles past Saucedo Ranger Station and is accessible by 2WD vehicles. For a closer look you'll need a 2WD high-clearance vehicle. Ask a Ranger for directions and current road conditions.



Watch the birdie

Over 300 species of birds reside in Big Bend Ranch State Park! So dust off your binoculars, pick up a complimentary copy of the park's checklist, Birds of Big Bend Ranch State Park, and see what you can find. Various field guides are available for sale in the park stores at Saucedo Ranger Station, Barton Warnock Environmental Education Center and Fort Leaton State Historic Site.

Big Bend Ranch offers the opportunity for you to explore several Chihuahuan Desert habitats including grasslands, desert scrub, canyons, and riparian woodlands and thickets. The greatest diversity and abundance of birds is normally found near the numerous springs and along streams scattered around the park, as well as the Rio Grande. Large springs normally are found in association with riparian woodlands (cottonwood-willow-hackberry and shrub thickets) which provides important habitat for a number of species. One of the premier birding locations within the park is found at Ojito Adentro (wayside stop #4 along the road to Saucedo Ranger Station).

Good luck and happy birding!



Scaled Quail



Black-throated Sparrow



Zone-tailed Hawk

Crawford-Smith Ranch headquarters

The Crawford-Smith Ranch site is at the end of the Saucedo to Fresno Canyon Road. This starkly beautiful, rugged terrain holds numerous surprises and delights. Hike, bike or ride your horse. This is a very special place. Collect memories and photographs; leave or take nothing else. Enjoy! The rustle of the breeze in the cottonwoods, the songs of numerous birds and—if you choose to overnight here or nearby—the calls sounds of coyotes and night creatures provide the natural symphony.

Between 1914 and 1946 the sounds of children playing, even swimming, could be heard here. The Crawford family planted citrus and fruit orchards. Visitors traveling on the Marfa to Lajitas-Terlingua Road could enjoy the cool, pure spring water or feast on Navel oranges the size of softballs. They enjoyed lemonade from the terraced orchards on the place.

Beginnings

In 1914 James L. Crawford and his brother Guy purchased what was then known as the Fresno Ranch. They intended to make a living raising Angora goats and a few cattle, and to build a life for their families. Also, they built a candelilla wax processing plant. The wax of the candelilla plant was in high demand for waterproofing military supplies during World War I. The brothers brought their families to this location and built a ranching headquarters close to a reliable spring-fed water source. Water means life in the desert; the spring to the west coupled with flowing water in Fresno Creek made this site ideal.

The Crawfords were not the first to see the site's potential. Native Americans had for thousands of years used this area as a camp. Good water; plentiful game; protected on all sides: this part of Fresno Canyon was a perfect spot. After the Native Americans, Mexican families lived in the area and worked cattle, sheep and goats.

Glory Years

Between 1915 and 1920 the U.S. Army used the road that passed



Crawford Ranch ca. 1915
Smithers Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities
Research Center, University of Texas at Austin

in front of the Crawford Ranch as a primary supply route between the railroad and army base at Marfa, the military outposts on the Rio Grande at Lajitas, and the mines at Terlingua. Several times a week, freight wagons military convoys with supplies arrived at the ranch. It was a three-day and two-night stagecoach trip from Marfa to Lajitas. Some 35 miles a day with the two overnight stops made for a usually dusty, uncomfortable and not very pleasant trip. The Crawford Ranch was not a "stage stop" in the formal, business sense. Those were at the present town of Plata, and probably at Los Alamos or a place close to the present northern border of Big Bend Ranch State Park. After about 1920 the army had other duties. Mercury mining shifted further east, and the Fresno Canyon Road no longer served as the main commercial artery for the region. Gradually it became a user-maintained local road serving the local ranches and mines.

Ranch Life

Few would dispute that ranch life is "hard work," particularly on women, children and laborers. Fresno Ranch grew to be a very large and prosperous operation—at least part of the time. The Crawford and Smith families were practiced and accomplished ranchers, and self-reliant people. Both they and the Smiths in the 1930s planted large gardens that provided most of the fruit and vegetable needs of the owners

Old families sold out; new and hopeful entrepreneurs bought struggling ranches. ... Many turned to mining mercury, and for some that worked. The Crawfords, the Smiths and others invested heavily in mining this strategic metal. Some even made a profit; but by 1946 it was all but over.

Growing Up in Fresno

"We slept on a sleeping porch on a bed with a screen around the outside," said one woman who remembered her childhood at Crawford-Smith Ranch. When asked about her young years, she replied: "We gathered eggs in the morning, gave them to mother, picked vegetables for the supper table, and the rest of the time we could do what we wanted."

Several children remembered helping their mothers plant, care for and cut the rose garden. All remembered horseback rides with their parents. Sometimes these were for work-oriented activities. Sometimes they were fun. Universally, they recalled swimming in the ponds dammed from the springs west of the ranch headquarters.

School, ah, there's the rub! Eventually, the Smith family sent their daughters (and their aunts and other adult women) to live in Terlingua or Study Butte for schooling. Not so surprisingly, those schools were very good.

The most vivid kids' activities revolved around ranch life—participating in round-up; fishing on the Rio Grande, picnics in the backcountry, horseback rides from the ranch to the Rio Grande or from the headquarters into the "High Country"—all remembered through the soft lens of a child's past.

Where Do We Take it From Here?

Fresno is a very special place. Some would say it is the "last, best remote place in the lower 48." And they would probably be right in their thinking. Walk softly; talk in hushed voices and listen to those who have come before. There are lessons to be learned and loved here.



Crawford-Smith House today

and the families that worked the ranch, the candelilla wax factory and, later, the cinnabar mine to the south.

In Texas, ranching lore focuses mainly on cattle ranching—cowboys and vaqueros rounding up Longhorns; cattle drives, branding and such. This was not the case in this part of the Big Bend. Simply put, the land is not "cattle friendly." Even the tough-as-nails Texas Longhorn has a hard time of it in this part of the state. The animal of choice was the goat. Goats can live on almost anything, or nothing, as some say. The Crawfords, the Smiths and other Mexican and Anglo families relied on this animal. In good years, with good rain (over 12 inches a year), they saw a profit. The years from 1917 to 1920 were optimal—good rain, good grass, cheap labor, military needs. Everybody made money; everybody prospered. Then the drought of the 1920s came, followed by the Depression of the 1930s. Not good. Disaster!

A River Ran Through It: The River Road



Rio Grande vista from pullout just west of La Cuesta (Big Hill).

Despite flooding of historic proportions on the Rio Grande last September, the River Road or F.M. 170 between Lajitas and Presidio remains one of the most scenic, albeit changed, drives in all of the United States. Repeat visitors will be amazed at the river's new look. The dense stands of non-native river cane, salt cedar and Bermuda grass that once choked the river have largely been scoured away. In their place, newly-deposited gravel bars outline an unobstructed flow of water through freshly-cut channels. As you drive the River Road and take in the scenery, take a moment to also contemplate the awe-inspiring power of nature.

Take A Break; Take a Hike

The River Road continues to boast plenty of hiking opportunities — over 60 miles of trails.



Visitors stopping at the Big Hill will find both a new interpretive exhibit and a new vista. Compare to the pre-flood photo above.

The Rancherías Loop, a favorite of backpackers, requires serious trekking through spectacular yet rough country with elevation changes of 1500 - 2000 feet. The shorter and gentler Rancherías Canyon Trail leads to a waterfall that cascades over rock ledges into a refreshing pool. Day hikers may also choose Closed Canyon, an easy three-mile round-trip trail through a tall and narrow slot canyon near the Rio Grande.

Finally, the multi-use Contrabando Trail offers opportunities for hiking, mountain biking and horseback riding.

Wet a Paddle; Drop a Hook; Camp Out

Several access points provide opportunities for fishing in the Rio Grande or putting in your kayak or canoe. Bring your



own, or rely on one of the local outfitters listed on page 9. Designated campgrounds and group areas provide picnic tables, fire rings and shelters for day or overnight use. Be certain to keep vehicles on designated roads and parking areas to avoid becoming stuck in the flood-deposited sand.

Live and Learn

Be sure to watch for new interpretive waysides at several pull-offs along the River Road, including La Cuesta (Big Hill), Contrabando Movie Set, Three Dyke Hill and the Presidio Basin. Trailside interpretive exhibits also dot the Contrabando Trail, colorful vignettes from the region's past.

Want to Know More?

Before embarking, stop at either the Barton Warnock Environmental Education Center in Lajitas or Fort Leaton State Historic Site near Presidio. You can view exhibits, pick up maps and area information, and check out the latest road conditions (short detours are possible).

Take your time, and enjoy the spectacular scenery. The River Road drive is a great way to spend the day and to get an introduction to Big Bend Ranch State Park.

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PWD BR P4507-1437 (4/09)

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