



Big Bend Ranch SP pullout map
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Check out what to do while you're at Big Bend Ranch SP
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Trail of the treasures
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EL SOLITARIO

TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT | FALL 2008 | BIG BEND RANCH STATE PARK



Photo: © E. Dan Klepper

As seen from Rancherias Loop Trail, an afternoon dust storm brews in the horizon at Big Bend Ranch State Park.

Welcome to Big Bend Ranch SP

In my 26-year career with Texas Parks and Wildlife Department



Rod Trevizo, Superintendent

I have never seen so many positive changes occur so quickly at Big Bend Ranch State Park. My staff and I have been working diligently to implement our terrific new Public Use Plan. Because of our efforts new doors have opened in the park where

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Bring two spares

By: W. Phil Hewitt

You can drive from Maine to San Diego across the United States and you don't even need a road map. You might need to know a little rudimentary seventh-grade geography, like Florida is "down there"; the Mississippi River comes before you get to the Rockies. But you really don't need to know much more, except where to stash your credit card to keep your tank filled.

And admittedly, going across America you'll be rewarded

with your share of sunsets and sunrises (if you're up early). You might, if you get off the interstate system, find some pretty neat diners, local festivals and interesting old buildings nestled in small towns.

But if you come to Big Bend Ranch State Park, you'll need more than a credit card. Well, you'll need that card to get you there, 'cause it is a long ways from just about everywhere. It is over 500 miles and twelve hours from Austin. And if you're coming from Houston,

the best advice is: "Start early, keep the wheels turning. You're going to be on the road a long day."

If you're going to "The Ranch," as many park staff call it, you better bring your map(s), your big hat, your tough hiking boots, a compass or a GPS unit (and know how to use them), plenty of water and food. Fill your tank before coming in; there is no fuel of any kind in all of those 300,000-plus acres. Oh, and bring two spares.

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FEATURED TRAIL

Rancherías Loop Trail

Words of Caution: This trail requires some very strenuous walking and is not for the novice, casual stroller/hiker. The elevation changes are between 1,500 and 2,000 feet. It is wise to carry a map, compass and water according to the usual desert protocol. Dress appropriately and follow all the rules of backcountry hiking and camping. Most of the trail is clearly marked but some parts are not. A backcountry permit is **REQUIRED**. The following narrative assumes a starting point at the eastern trailhead. Simply reverse the directions, times, etc., if coming in from the west.



Intrepid hikers from Boy Scout Troop 17 of South Austin traverse the Rancherías Loop Trail.

Elevation Change: 1,500 to 2,000 feet

Geography Description: a moderate to steep and sometimes rough hike through the remote canyon country of the Bofecillos Mountains.

19
miles

3
days

2
nights

East Rancherías Trailhead to Acebuches Canyon

Follow the trail heading east up the slope through a small saddle, then into Panther Creek. Turn up the first major canyon heading northwest. If you've started in the morning, the sun will be behind you, illuminating the red rock canyon walls. At the head of this canyon you'll notice the recent rock slides contrasting with the darker talus slopes.

At the head of the canyon the trail turns northerly up Acebuches Canyon. The word literally means wild-olive. This canyon was a major corridor for the movement of livestock from the Rio Grande to higher elevations. Notice the seep spring in the canyon. It does not generally provide surface water, but the large cottonwoods and willows indicate that water is not far below the surface.

Past the seep and through a fence, the trail takes a sharp northeasterly turn. When the canyon turns northward, take the right fork. The switchback

trail takes you out of the canyon to a point just east where a 50-foot pour-off marks where Canyon Santana intersects Acebuches Canyon. Follow the trail along the rim above the canyon. You'll notice several fence lines indicating that somebody worked very diligently to manage livestock in this rough country.

The saddle-dividing Acebuches from Panther Canyon is a suggested camping area.

Head of Acebuches Canyon to Rancherías Spring

From the saddle the trail descends west down into Panther Canyon. From the trail you can see the spring and the adobe of the Reza family homestead. At least eight family members lived in the complex, raising goats and growing vegetables in small plots known as temporales, which were irrigated by seasonal rainfall. Their cash income came from selling goats, goat cheese and vegetables to people in Polvo



(Redford). To increase available water they used temporary brush dams to divert rain water runoff to their plots. The house is unstable, so please do not enter. The smaller structure was the family kitchen.

The trail through Panther Canyon in this area is well marked. Parts of it constituted the main supply route taken by the Reza family between Lajitas and Polvo early in the 20th century. As you pass a rock fence, look for a landmark boulder known as La Fecha. There is an inscription dated 1934 on its north face. After a sharp incline the trail drops back into Panther Canyon upstream from a shelter cave used by Native Americans and, more recently by goatherds. As with all historic and cultural sites, leave objects and artifacts as they are.

The trail joins, then follows a Jeep road to the north arm of Rancherías Canyon. The spring was and continues to be critical to the well-being of humans and wildlife. So, please be sensitive to its preservation. And, as usual, no camping close to the spring. Javelina, mule deer, migratory and resident birds use the spring as an important water source. The historic settlement of Rancherías, populated in the early 20th century, is located nearby.

Rancherías Spring to West Rancherías Trailhead

On this part of the trail you're finally going downhill. The elevation change is over 1,300 feet down, back toward the Rio

Grande. Most of the trail in this section is well marked. There are a number of interesting historical artifacts along the route between the spring and the western trailhead.

There are a number of rock fences along the way, evidence from the days when the region was rangeland for thousands of sheep. You'll notice the abundance of ocotillo, acacia and mariola. Because sheep will not eat these particular desert plants, and because the desert recovers slowly from overgrazing on what once were lush grasslands, these species continue to dominate. Climbing out of Rancherías Canyon you're on top of Lower Mesa de Guale. The mesa is named for Guadalupe Carrasco, whose descendents still live in the Redford-Presidio area.

The distinctive southern peak rising from the Lower Mesa is known as Sierra de la Guitarra. From above it is shaped like a guitar with the neck pointing south.

Tapado (Oso) Canyon forms the western edge of Mesa de Guale. At 1,000 feet deep it is one of the largest chasms in the Bofecillos Mountains. Its widest point is 2 miles.

At the southern end of the mesa there is a water trough with the name "Cryspin Reza" written on one side. Reza was a master rock worker who supervised the construction of many water troughs, storage tanks (pilas), stone dams and rock fences during the 1930s and 1940s.

From the mesa to the trail head is only 3 miles, but the way down is very steep, so watch your step. The dominant geologic feature across the Rio Grande is the 8,000-foot Sierra Rica Volcano.

The last part of your hike is really on a rough ranch road that was built to provide the ranch hands a quick way from the interior of Big Bend Ranch to the Rio Grande.

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



Photo: Earl Nottingham

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.

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.

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.

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.



Western Diamondback rattlesnake

Photo: Earl Nottingham

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.

Welcome to Big Bend Ranch SP

<continued from page 1>

limited access once pre-dominated. These new opportunities include over 50 primitive campsites across 100 miles of rough terrain, overnight equestrian areas for horseback riders, an increase in secluded back-country hiking and camping, improved 4 x 4 roads, and access on foot and four-wheel drive vehicle to pristine canyons and breathtaking vistas.

One of my favorite new hikes within the park is the Mexicano Falls Overlook.

Access to the trailhead requires a rugged, four-wheel drive ride before you trek on foot across the ocotillo-studded desert to the edge of Arroyo Segundo. There you can gaze down at the stunning, fern-covered pour-off of Mexicano Falls. Another favorite and a traditional Big Bend Ranch hike is the Ojito Adentro trail. It's a short trek off the main road with plenty of birdlife and a beautiful spring. Cottonwood trees provide optimum bird habitat and some nice cool shade for hikers on hot summer days. While birds are the main attraction along the trail, the abundance of plant life and year-round water makes it difficult to believe that you are hiking in a desert. This is just one of the short day hikes found at this vast and unique park, the largest in Texas. I invite you to come and explore its landscapes, remote campsites, canyons and fantastic trail system, now available to the people of Texas and visitors from around the world.

Please take a moment to peruse this third issue of *El Solitario* and familiarize yourself with Big Bend Ranch State Park. And, if you are reading this before Oct. 18, join us for the Big Bend Ranch State Park Fiesta – a day of hiking, birding, mountain biking, music and free BBQ to celebrate the park's grand re-opening. Call (432) 358-4444 for details.

I hope you make Big Bend Ranch State Park your choice destination for big outdoor fun – Texas style!

FEATURED CAMPSITES

Los Ojitos Campsite

It's early afternoon and you are sitting on the elevated terrace near a spring called Los Ojitos. You feel the coolness of shadowing clouds as they pass overhead and listen to the quiet of the desert when suddenly you hear the buzzing of numerous insects and the plaintive song of the verdin. In the distance near the large cottonwoods, the sound of the mourning doves echoes along the face of the cliff protecting the southern edge of Los Ojitos Campsite.

Located within minutes of the Saucedá Ranger Station, the Los Ojitos Campsite is perched on an elevated terrace with a 180 degree view to the north and west of a broken and rugged landscape. The sunsets are stunning and as the shadows lengthen over the cottonwoods ringing the spring, the land is transformed from

shades of brown and green to pastel hues of mauve, pink and orange. As darkness comes and the day cools, try something new: stop the conversation and listen. Just listen.

A short walk down the old ranch road puts you in the spring of Los Ojitos. Nearby are cottonwood galleries and wildlife-watching opportunities galore. Los Ojitos offers something for the entire family. It is perfect for bird watching, astronomy, nature photography, painting, sketching wild animal tracks near the spring, or simply listening to the sounds of nature.

What's special about this site?

- Conveniently close to Saucedá Ranger Station
- Easy access for most two-wheel drive vehicles
- Beautiful views in any direction
- Great night sky

Getting There

At the Saucedá Ranger Station turn right and travel west on Camino a la Saucedá. Turn left on Los Ojitos Road.



From Saucedá Ranger Station

Saucedá Ranger Station to Los Ojitos Road 0.6 miles
Los Ojitos Road to Campsite 0.6 miles

1.2 miles
7 minutes

Access: Most 2WD Vehicles

GPS Coordinates

UTM 13 Easting: 599548.9675
UTM Northing: 3260032.0401

Longitude DD: -103.97332776
Latitude DD: 29.46579298

Longitude DMS: -103 58 23.9799
Latitude DMS: 29 27 56.8547

Las Burras 1

It's cool outside and the previous night's moisture has made the outside of your tent damp. The hue of the early morning sky has a tint of orange while the long puffy clouds still wear a suit of dull gray. At the same time, the warm coffee feels good against your hands as you hear the pretty song of the canyon wren – a cascading series of clear whistles, falling and slowing down in echoes against the dark walls of the surrounding canyon. You find yourself at Las Burras 1 campsite, located deep in the Bofecillos backcountry zone.

Found among large igneous boulders and against a beautiful yet rugged mountain, the Las Burras 1 campsite has a protected picnic table with a fire ring and three ideally situated tent pads. According to a long-time field ranger, Las Burras 1 offers “a postcard

picture around every bend.” Wildlife is abundant and the nearby plants shower the area with dozens of colors from yellows to blues.

What's special about this site?

- Situated between Oso and Tapado Canyons
- Dark night skies
- Excellent photography opportunities
- Centrally located between the Nopalera and Bofecillos Trailheads



Getting There

From Saucedá Ranger Station, travel 6 miles west on Camino a la Saucedá to the Agua Adentro livestock pens. Look for Las Burras/West Oso Loop Road. Turn south onto West Oso Loop Road, pass through the gate and engage 4WD. Travel 1 mile. Turn right on Las Burras Road and travel 3 miles to Las Burras 1. Approximate driving time: 1 hour 17 minutes.

From Portal de Presidio, travel 10 miles east on Camino a la Saucedá to the Agua Adentro livestock pens. Look for Las Burras/West Oso Loop Road. Turn south onto West Oso Loop Road, pass through the gate and engage 4WD. Travel 1 mile. Turn right on Las Burras Road and travel approximately 3 miles to Las Burras 1. Approximate driving time: 1 hour 40 minutes.

GPS Coordinates

UTM 13 Easting: 592047.4354
UTM Northing: 3256599.1018

Longitude DD: -104.05097200
Latitude DD: 29.43538800

Longitude DMS: -104 3 3.4992
Latitude DMS: 29 26 7.3968

Access: 4WD High Clearance

From Saucedá Ranger Station

Saucedá Ranger Station to Agua Adentro pens 6 miles
West Oso Loop Road to Las Burras Road 1 miles
Las Burras Road to Las Burras 1 Campsite 3 miles

10 miles
75 minutes

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

Lodging

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

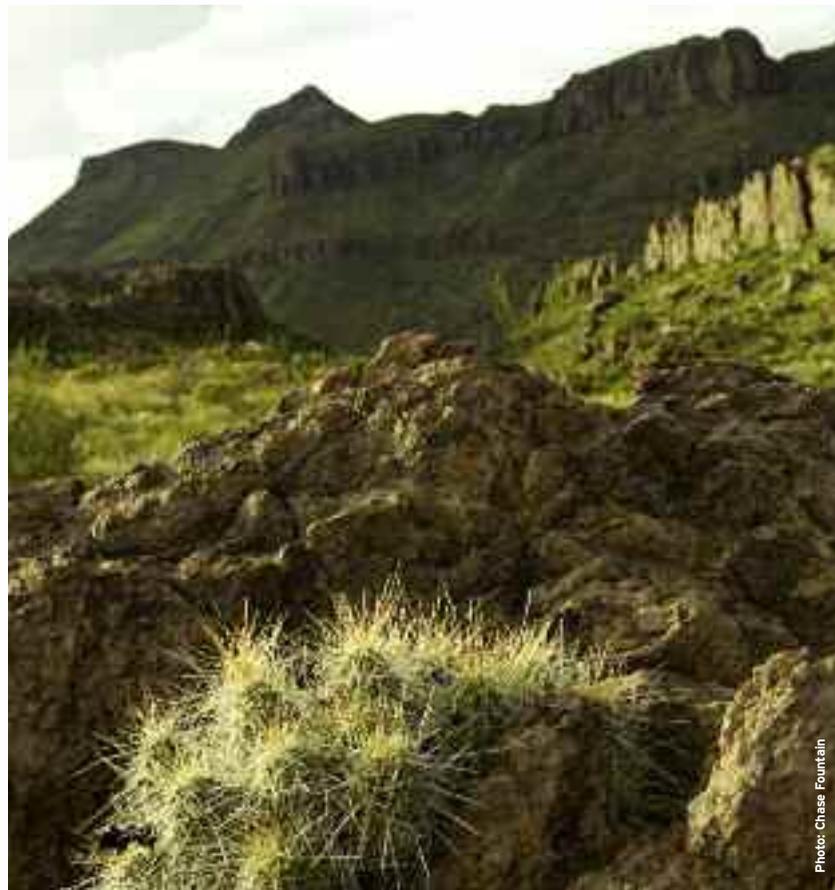
Call (432) 358-4444 between 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. for information and reservations.

Airstrip

Big Bend Ranch
paved airstrip 3TE3

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

Elevation: 4240 feet
Length: 5500 feet



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 that must have at least four functional wheels. 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.**

**Cell phone service in
the park is very
limited and unreliable.
Don't count on it!**

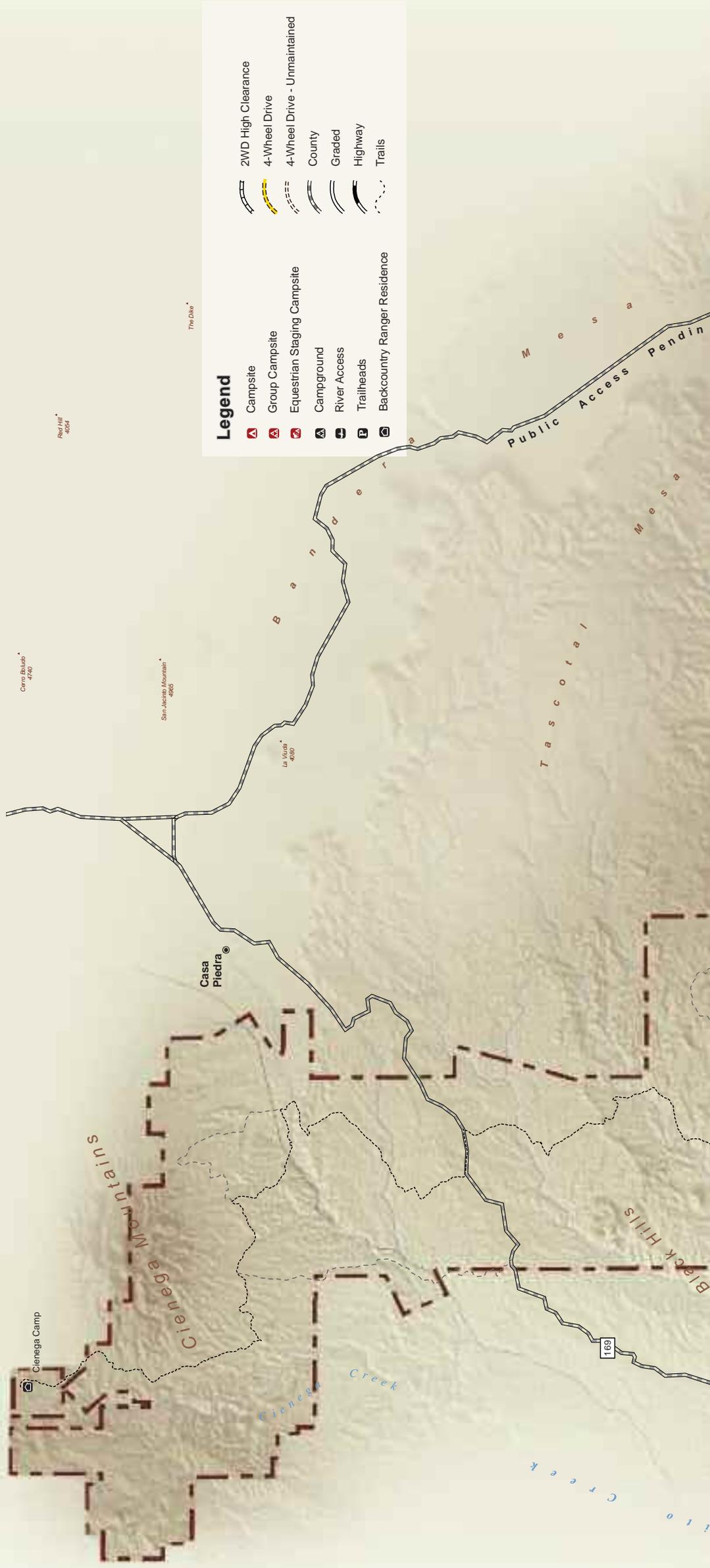
EMERGENCY DIAL 911

Towing

Alpine (432) 837-1150
Presidio (432) 229-3312

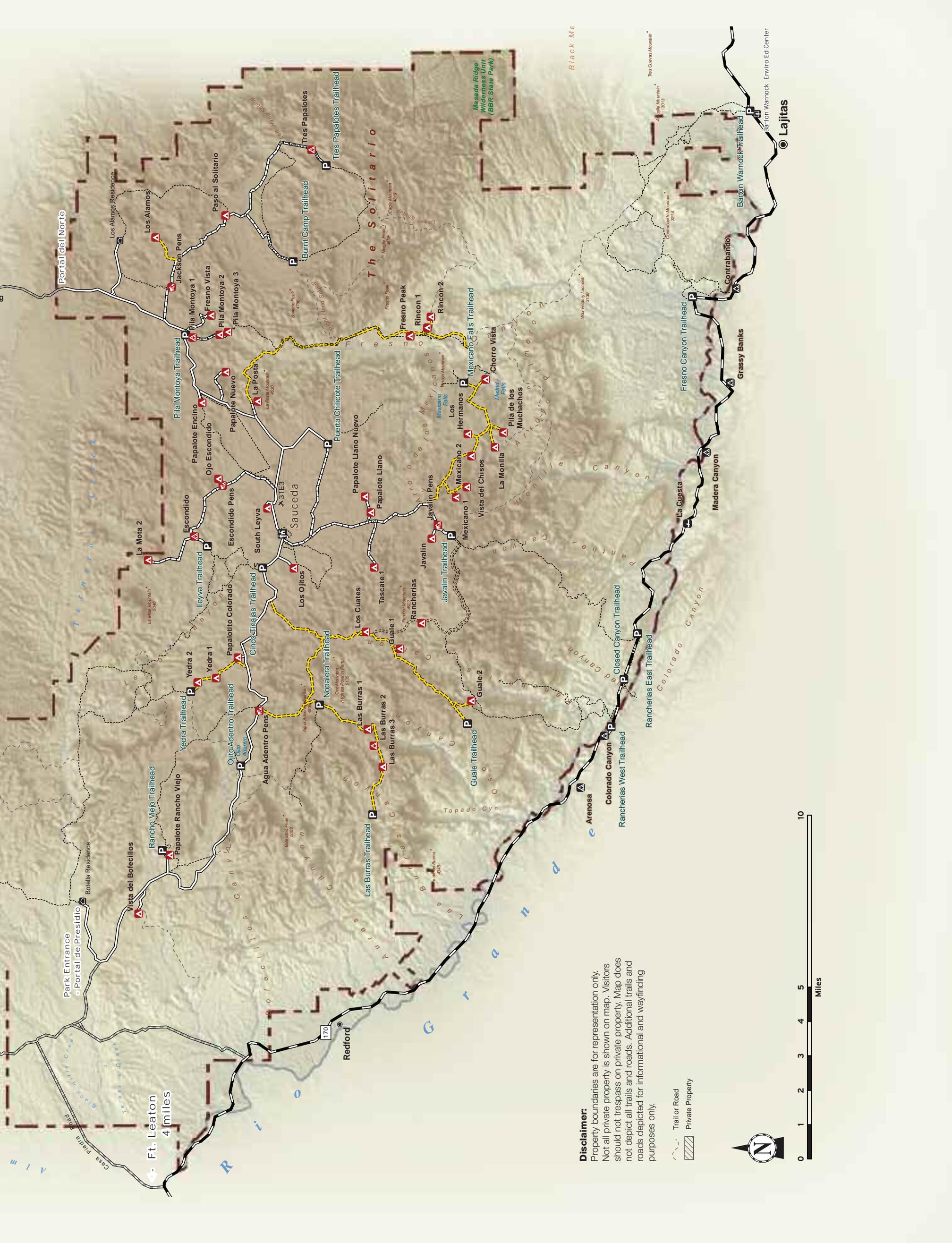


BIG BEND RANCH STATE PARK



Legend

- Campsite
- Group Campsite
- Equestrian Staging Campsite
- Campground
- River Access
- Trailheads
- Backcountry Ranger Residence
- 2WD High Clearance
- 4-Wheel Drive
- 4-Wheel Drive - Unmaintained
- County
- Graded
- Highway
- Trails



Disclaimer:

Property boundaries are for representation only. Not all private property is shown on map. Visitors should not trespass on private property. Map does not depict all trails and roads. Additional trails and roads depicted for informational and wayfinding purposes only.

-  Trail or Road
-  Private Property



Ft. Leaton
4 miles

Park Entrance
Portal de Presidio

Redford

Black Me

The Solitario

Portal del Norte

Lajitas

Los Alamos Residence

Los Alamos

Jackson Pens

Pila Montoya 1

Fresno Vista

Pila Montoya 2

Pila Montoya 3

Burnt Camp Trailhead

Tres Papalotes

Tres Papalotes Trailhead

Puerta Chilicote Trailhead

Papalote Liano Nuevo

Papalote Liano

Javalin Pens

Mexicano 1

Vista del Chisos

Mexicano 2

Hermanos

Los Hermanos

Mexicano Falls Trailhead

Chorro Vista

Pila de los Muchachos

La Monilla

Javalin Trailhead

Javalin

Rancherías

Los Cuates

Tascate 1

Los Ojitos

Sauceda

La Mota 2

Escondido

Papalote Encino

Ojo Escondido

Papalote Nuevo

La Posta

South Leyva

Escondido Pens

Leyva Trailhead

Papalote Colorado

Cinco Linajas Trailhead

Los Ojitos

Nopalera Trailhead

Las Burras 1

Las Burras 2

Las Burras 3

Guale 1

Guale 2

Guale Trailhead

Rancherías East Trailhead

Colorado Canyon

Rancherías West Trailhead

Arenosa

Closed Canyon Trailhead

Pila Cuesta

Madera Canyon

Grassy Banks

Contrabando

Barton Warnock Trailhead

Barton Warnock Enviro Ed Center

Botella Residence

Vista del Bofecillos

Rancho Viejo Trailhead

Papalote Rancho Viejo

Yedra Trailhead

Yedra 1

Yedra 2

Ojito Adentro Trailhead

Agua Adentro Pens

Las Burras Trailhead

Tapado Cyn.

Colorado Canyon

Black Hills

BIG BEND RANCH STATE PARK

ACCESS AND VISITOR SERVICES

Vehicle-Accessible Camping

Fifty-five 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 Saucedá. 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 Saucedá 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.

EMERGENCY DIAL 911



Medical Services

Note: Cell phone service in the park is unreliable and limited. No medical facilities are available within the park. The nearest hospital is located in Alpine, approximately a three hours' drive from Saucedá. **In the event of a medical emergency, dial 911.**

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, 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

D Guiding Service (Hunting)
210-667-9620

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 FM170. 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 a couple of species of lizards found at Big Bend Ranch State Park that are 100% 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 *Aspidoscelis* (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. tesselatus*). 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 4WD high-clearance vehicle. Ask a Ranger for directions and current road conditions.

Bring two spares

<continued from page 1>

There are rocks on some of those roads that can turn an 8- or 10-ply studded off-road tire into lots of air connected by slivers of rubber and steel belts.

And most important of all, bring your sense of adventure and wonder. Big Bend Ranch State Park is a place of large spaces, of incredible sunsets, long shadows, sunrises that will change the way you think about the color yellow forever. It is a place where clouds, sky, desert, canyon, mesa and high country prairie all come together in a spectacular scene that will make your tongue hang out in amazement. It is a place where, if you want to get lost, not see another soul for a week, you can do it. If you like searching out Native American rock art, this is your place. If you like wondering how in the world people ever thought they could make a living in a place like this, you can do that too. The place is dotted with the ruins of past homesteads, water troughs, shearing pens and miles and miles of fence. If you have an interest in hydrology, in windmill systems that pumped water miles across gullies, canyons, up slopes and down canyon walls, this is your place!

But most of all, Big Bend Ranch State Park is a place where when you look up during the day, you don't see jet contrails streaking across the sky. It is so far off the air routes that such a sighting is rare. And, at night, at night – remember when you were a kid and you could actually look up and see the Milky Way? You can do that at Big Bend Ranch. If astronomy is your thing, this is your place. Bring your star charts and your telescope.

In some ways this is a simpler place than where you come from; in other ways Big Bend Ranch State Park will test what you're made of. It is a land of large vistas, small views and intimate portraits. It is one of those last best places. Come. Enjoy. Leave refreshed and renewed. Take a little piece of Big Bend Ranch along with you – deeply embedded in your heart and soul.



The Rock Art of Big Bend Ranch State Park – A Reflection on Culture History



Ancient Native American pictographs in Big Bend Ranch State Park. Please treat these sites with the sensitivity that they deserve. Please do not touch the pictographs or spray liquids on them, which may accelerate fading.

By: Timothy E. Roberts

Though early Spanish explorers to the Big Bend referred to the region as *el despoblado*, meaning uninhabited or deserted, the region has in fact been continuously inhabited or visited by various cultural groups for over 10,000 years. Native

Americans lived in the region for most of that time. Beginning with the arrival of shipwrecked Spaniard Alvaro Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, his companion Estebanico and a band of pack traders in 1535, Spanish, Mexican, and Euro-American populations also settled and traveled across the Big Bend.

While evidence of the more recent occupants of the Big Bend is readily visible in the structural remains, art, and everyday items these people left behind, evidence of the earlier Native American inhabitants is somewhat more difficult for visitors to recognize. Perhaps some of the more obvious cultural features that reflect the diversity of Native American groups that inhabited or traveled through the region — and their ways of life — are the rock art panels that dot the landscape. Twenty-nine such sites, most of which are

pictograph (rock painting) sites, are presently known on Big Bend Ranch State Park. Other sites contain petroglyphs, images that are etched or abraded into the rock.

Several rock-art styles and a variety of figures are represented within the state park, including curvilinear (wavy) and rectilinear (zig-zag) abstract images that could date at least as far back as 5,000 years ago, during what is known as the Early Archaic period. These images are painted in a variety of colors, including red, yellow, black and white, or are occasionally abraded into the rock surface. Subsequent pictographs begin to include anthropomorphic (animal and human-like) figures, and are frequently painted only in red or only in black. Some of these rock paintings could date to the Late Archaic period, beginning about 3,000 years ago, while others date to the Late Prehistoric, beginning about 1,400 years ago and ending with the arrival of the Spanish. More recent pictographs date to the early Historic period, beginning in 1535. Among the Historic period pictographs at Big Bend Ranch State Park are numerous figures of riders on



horses, one of which depicts an early Spanish saddle.

While some of the rock-art sites may be visited by park visitors without a guide, other sites are especially sensitive and are accessible by way of staff-led tours. When visiting these sites, please treat them with the sensitivity that they deserve so that others may enjoy them in the future. Please do not touch the images or spray liquids on them to make them easier to see; pigments in the rock paintings are affected by the oils on your skin, and moistening the images can cause accelerated fading. And, of course, do not deface the rock art or remove artifacts from these sites. With every occurrence of such vandalism, a piece of irreplaceable history is lost to all of us.



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.



Scaled Quail



Black-throated Sparrow



Zone-tailed Hawk

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!

Trail of treasures: The River Road



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

The River Road, or FM 170 between Lajitas and Presidio, has been labeled as one of the most scenic drives in all of the United States. But it is not a journey to be hurried. The road is a roller-coaster of 20 mile per hour turns, steep grades and numerous ups and downs. Take time to enjoy the trip through millions of years of geologic time. A kaleidoscope of natural wonders awaits on this Trail of Treasures.

Before embarking on your River Road adventure, stop at either the Barton Warnock Environmental Education Center in Lajitas or Ft. Leaton State Historic Site near Presidio. You can pick up maps and receive information on what not to miss on the drive.

The pullout just west of La Cuesta (Big Hill) offers a spectacular view of the Rio Grande as it cuts its way through the surrounding Chihuahuan Desert. The rest stop is 500 hundred feet above the river. It's a favorite stop for those wishing to watch an incredible sunrise or sunset.



Hikers are dwarfed by the high walls of Closed Canyon.

Take A Break Take a Hike

If you're interested in taking a hike, there's plenty of opportunity on the River Road—over 60 miles of trails. The Rancherias Loop Trail, a favorite with backpackers, is profiled on page two of this issue of *El Solitario*.

Day hikers have several opportunities. Closed Canyon, between La Cuesta and the Colorado Canyon River access, is an easy three-mile round-trip trail through a slot canyon



Ruins at Contrabando Waterhole as seen from the Contrabando Trail.

near the Rio Grande. There are some points where hikers can stretch out their arms and touch both canyon walls. The canyon is home to one of the region's most colorful lizards. The greater southwestern earless lizard can sometimes be seen performing "push-ups" to expose his purple belly.

The Rancherias Canyon Trail leads to a waterfall that cascades over rock ledges into a refreshing pool of water. Take along a snack and enjoy the views along the way. Remember, the desert animals rely on this water; it is not for bathing.

The multi-use Contrabando Trail is available for hiking, mountain-biking and horseback riding. Interpreted sites along



Rafters enjoy the Rio Grande.

the way include a candelilla wax camp, ruins of an historic homestead from the late 1800s, and relics from the region's cinnabar mining days.

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. Three designated campgrounds provide picnic tables and shelters for day use or overnight camping. Two designated group camping areas can support large groups.

Want to Know More?

Stop at Ft. Leaton near Presidio to learn more about the history and culture of the area during the 1800s when Big Bend truly was the Wild West. Or, to learn more about archeology and the natural history of the area, spend a morning or afternoon at the Warnock Center near Lajitas.

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

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Regional Director
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**Big Bend Ranch State Park
Sauceda Ranger Station**
P.O. Box 2319
Presidio, Texas 79845
Fax (432) 358-4679
Phone (432) 358-4444

General Superintendent Office
HCR 70, Box 375
Terlingua, Texas 79852
Fax (432) 424-3404
Phone (432) 424-3341

**Barton Warnock Environmental
Education Center**
HCR 70, Box 375
Terlingua, Texas 79852
Fax (432) 424-3404
Phone (432) 424-3327

Fort Leaton State Historic Site
PO Box 2439
Presidio, Texas 79845
Fax (432) 229-4814
Phone (432) 229-3613

**Texas Parks and Wildlife
Department Headquarters**
4200 Smith School Road
Austin, Texas 78744
(512) 389-4800
(800) 792-1112
www.tpwd.state.tx.us

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