



Big Bend Ranch SP pullout map
Pages 6 – 7

Weekend wranglers carry on Big Bend's ranching tradition
Page 3

Watch the birdie
Page 11



EL SOLITARIO

TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT | FALL 2007 | BIG BEND RANCH STATE PARK

Hike features spectacular panoramic views

Cinco Tinajas Trail is a short 30-minute stroll from Saucedo. The round-trip hike of less than 2 miles has an elevation change of less than 200 feet. At the end of the mile-long trail lies a close-up view of the tinajas. And there's more. The canyon rim overlooking the Cinco Tinajas provides incredible panoramas of the far reaches of the park.

Tinajas are desert water basins carved in bedrock by the erosive force of sand, gravels, cobbles and larger stones suspended in rushing water. Many tinajas, including these, hold water even in the driest of times. Knowing the location of one of these natural water basins was, and is, knowledge that could save a person's life.

Cinco Tinajas lies in a narrow slot canyon that contains a tributary of Leyva Creek. Almost all rain falling onto the upland area around Saucedo drains into this slot of dense volcanic rock, concentrating a powerful erosive force on a fault or crack in the lava. Over millions of years the erosion formed five (cinco) interconnecting pools.

Continued on page 2



Aerial view of Solitario looking north-northeast. The lower outer rim's upside-down V's are the famous "Flatirons."

A sense of place

El Solitario: What's In a Name?

by David Riskind

El Solitario is the signature landscape feature of Big Bend Ranch State Park. Almost 10 miles across and nearly symmetrical, this collapsed and eroded structural dome straddles the Brewster-Presidio County line in the eastern portion of the park. Early explorers of the region noted its distinctive shape even

before airplanes or aerial images were available. It is one of Earth's more distinctive features as observed from space. The name is Spanish for hermit or loner.

About 36 million years ago molten rock called magma from deep in the Earth pushed upward and displaced thousands of feet of overlying rock. This activity created a blister or dome-shaped bulge on the Earth's surface. Over millions of years, erosion collapsed the dome's older

rocks. Subsequent volcanic activity further removed overlying rock, collapsed some of the lava chamber and formed a small caldera in the central south-east Solitario. Early geologic studies erroneously suggested that the Solitario was either a large volcano or a meteor impact crater.

The Solitario, as we see it today, emerged about 2 million years ago when the ancient Rio Grande began cutting its now

Continued on page 10

Table of contents

Featured Trails.....	2	Access and Visitor Services.....	8
Be Aware.....	3	What To Do While You're Here.....	9
Featured Campsites.....	4	Featured Activity.....	10
Fees and Visitor Services.....	5	Archeology, History and Culture.....	11
Big Bend Ranch Map.....	6	Regional Director's Welcome.....	12

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 FM 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 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 Hiking 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.

Hike features spectacular panoramic views

<continued from Page 1>



At the mouth of Cinco Tinajas canyon is a scenic 15 foot drop into the main Leyva Creek drainage. A .7-mile hike over the ridge and upstream in the creek bed leads to a pour-off. Do not attempt this during a rainstorm or under threat of rain!

A short two-tenths of a mile walk over the crest of the ridge to the rim of the slot canyon reveals the Cinco Tinajas with their life-giving water.

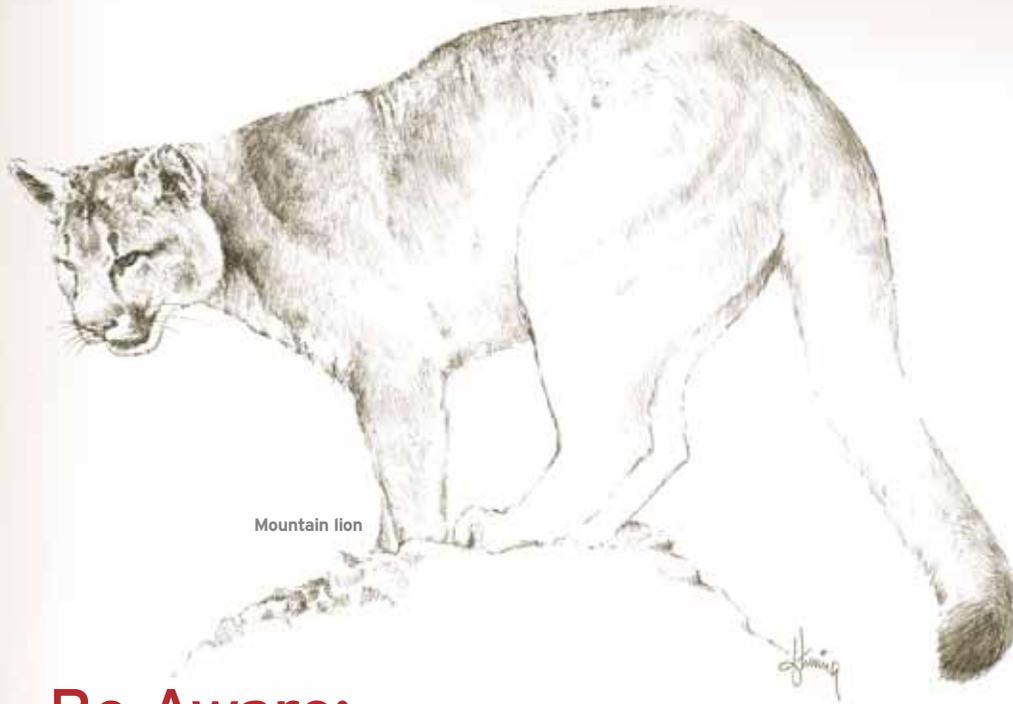
Backtrack to the canyon rim for panoramic views of a

large part of the park. The Bofecillos highlands, of which Saucedo is a part, form much of the center of the park. La Mota is the flat-topped mountain lying almost due North. The Cienega Mountains that form parts of the park's northern boundary lie in the distance, north-northwest of La Mota.

Fresno Peak, the high point of the Southwest rim of the Solitario is visible to the east-southeast. On clear days the Chisos Mountains in Big Bend National Park are visible beyond Fresno. The conical mountain to the south-southwest is Oso Peak. Finally, a bit further to the west is Sierra Rica in the Mexican state of Chihuahua. It is seldom such a short hike can reveal so many incredible vistas.



Hike with others and wear a hat and appropriate footwear when hiking Cinco Tinajas or any Big Bend Ranch trail.



Mountain lion

Be Aware: You're in wildlife country

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

In the unlikely event that a 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 April and October 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 call the Big Bend Ranch State Park administrative office at (432) 229-3416 or the Saucedo Headquarters at (432) 358-4444.



Featured Campsites: Pila Montoya Dos y Tres



For thousands of years, human populations utilized and lived in Fresno Canyon, located on the eastern edge of the park. Native American rock art sites and historic ruins dot the landscape of this eye-appealing canyon.

Surrounded by ancient lava beds, scenic campsites are located adjacent to the historic

Marfa-Terlingua Road. These campsites are designated primitive car camping sites. They are located in the Upper Fresno Zone near their namesake, Pila Montoya, a rock water tank found 8 miles east of Saucedo.

Each campsite has a picnic table, a fire ring, and at least two tent pads, and can support eight people. A maximum of three cars is allowed in the parking area. If a secluded atmosphere is on your agenda, these sites are perfect for you. Some say that you can still hear the horses and mules of the stagecoach and freight wagons struggling up the steep incline of the old freight road as it climbs out of Fresno Canyon.

What's special about these sites?

- Silence and solitude
- Adjacent to historic Marfa-Terlingua freight road
- Great launching points for day hikes along the road, upper Fresno Canyon and the nearby surrounding peaks
- Excellent stargazing

The campsites are protected from strong winds by rocky outcroppings, but maintain an open, spacious feeling. Common plants are ocotillo, cholla, prickly pear and other cacti, mariola and desert grasses.

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.

Getting There

Travel east from Saucedo on the 2WD all-access road. Turn right onto Pila Montoya Road and continue 100 yards to Pila Montoya 1. Access to Pila Montoya 2 and 3 are accessible by high-clearance 2WD vehicle.

Distances

Saucedo to Pila Montoya Road	7.7 miles
Pila Montoya to Pila Montoya 2	1.0 miles
Pila Montoya to Pila Montoya 3	1.4 miles

GPS Coordinates (NAD83)

Site	UTM13 Easting	UTM13 Northing	Longitude DD	Latitude DD	Longitude DMS	Latitude DMS
Pila Montoya 2	610427.540	3263474.333	-103.86080	29.49594	-103 51 38.89	29 29 45.39
Pila Montoya 3	610558.200	3263093.233	-103.85949	29.49249	-103 51 34.18	29 29 32.96

Big Bend Ranch State Park Fees and visitor services

Daily entry fee:
\$3 per person per
day for all over 13
years old

Vehicle Campsite:
\$8 per site/day
up to 8 persons

Backcountry
Zone Camping:
\$5 per night/site

Horses:
\$2 per day/horse

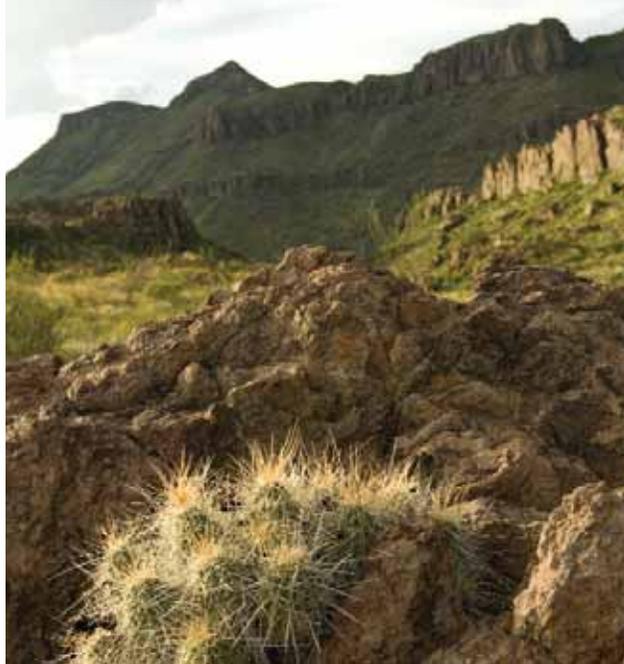


Lodging

Lodging is available bunkhouse style or in the "Big House" at Sauceda. Meals are available with advance reservations. Call (432) 229-3416 between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 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 am - 5:00 pm daily at four locations:

Big Bend Ranch State
Park Administrative Office
Presidio
432-229-3416

Fort Leaton State
Historic Site
Presidio
432-229-3613

Barton Warnock Environmental
Education Center
Lajitas
432-424-3327

Sauceda
park interior
432-358-4444

Permits are required for use of Primitive Road and Front Country Campsites and for Backcountry Zone Camping. Day Use visitors are required to obtain a free permit for motorized entry into the Primitive Road Zone.

Campsite and backcountry reservations may be made in advance by calling (432) 229-3416 between 8:00 am and 5:00 pm. 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 locations.

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 and must have at least four functional wheels. Overnight use may occur only at designated campsites.

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 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

Big Bend Ranch
State Park Peace Officer
(432) 229-3416

Presidio County Sheriff's Office
(432) 229-3764

Presidio County
Emergency Dispatcher
(432) 729-4308 or 911

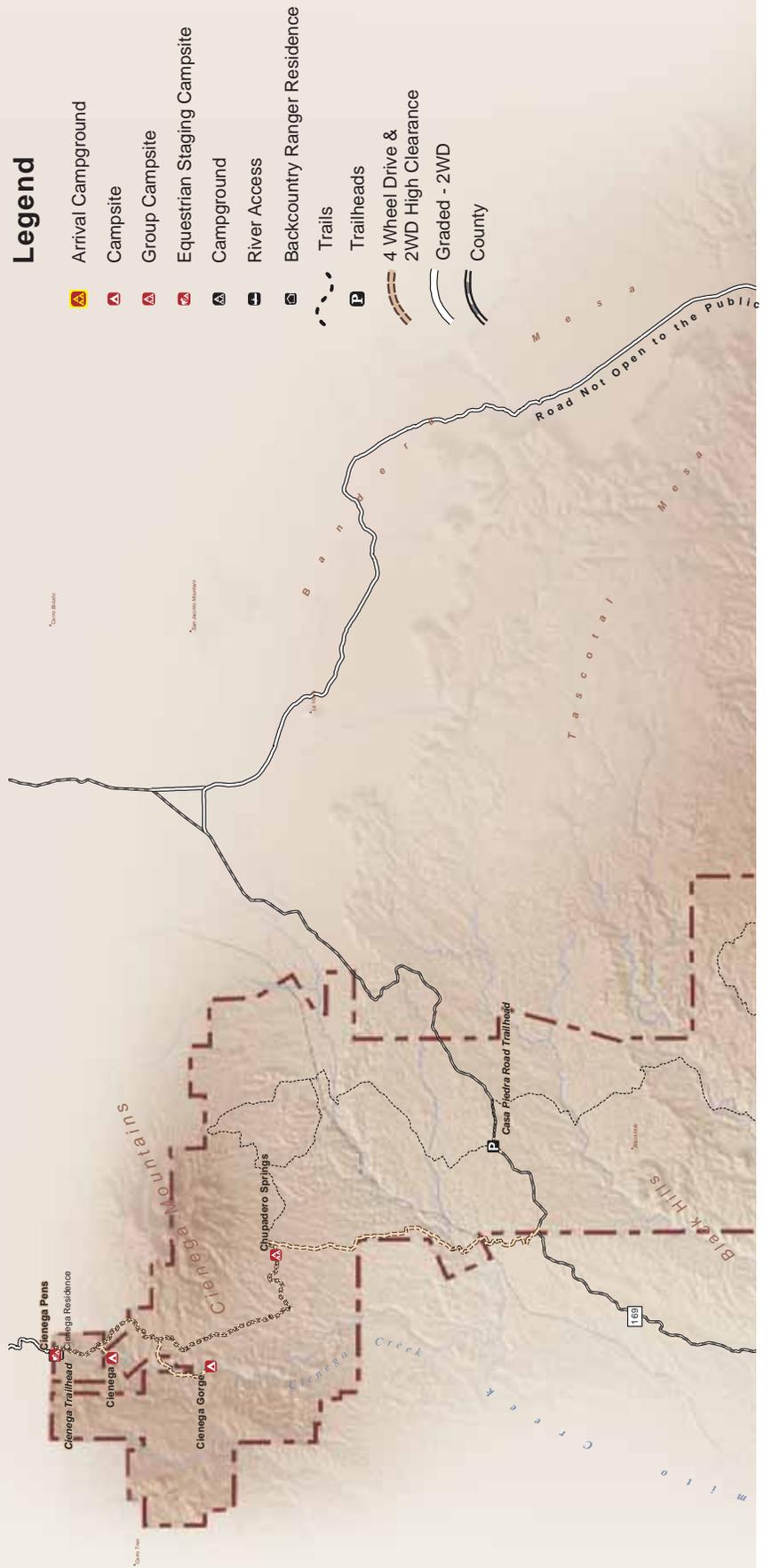
Terlingua Medics
(432) 371-2222

Department Public
Safety/Highway Patrol
(432) 229-3768

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



BIG BEND RANCH STATE PARK



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. 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

- Up to 8 person occupancy
- 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 run-off 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 where any highway worthy vehicle, driven responsibly, can access.
- Two-wheel-drive, high-clearance (2WDHC): roads where extra clearance is required due to road conditions (obstacles, 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 required vehicles with extra traction, rigid suspension and high clearance.

High clearance is considered a minimum of eight inches.

Rules for the Road Less Traveled

Park speed limit is 25 mph. 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 contains a commercial kitchen and a bunkhouse. Meals are prepared and served in a common dining area. Meal service can be arranged with advance notice. Lodging is available bunkhouse style—men on one side and women on the other. The three-bedroom "Big House" sleeps 8. 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) 229-3416 between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 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 Ranch. 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.

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

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 three hours drive from Saucedo. Local Emergency Medical Services are:

Terlingua Medics: (432) 371-2222 | Presidio EMS: (432) 729-4308

EMERGENCY DIAL 911



What to do while you're here

Hiking and Biking

Trails provide the only means of accessing many areas within Big Bend Ranch State Park, and allow visitors an intimate rapport with the outdoors. Ultimately the park will boast 65 routes comprising 236 miles of interconnected trails. The system strives to capture the spirit of the land by offering trails that are scenic and educational, and offers varying levels of accessibility and challenge to people of all ages and abilities.

Due to rough terrain some of the park's trails are suitable for hiking only. Other trails available to for mountain bikers and equestrians as well. Refer to the park map or speak with a ranger for details. If you do not have a bike, rentals are available at the Saucedo Visitor Center or through local outfitters. When biking, always wear a helmet. Carry plenty of water and wear appropriate, protective clothing. Most importantly, have fun!



Horseback Riding



Horseback represents another way to view and appreciate Big Bend Ranch. So saddle up and explore almost 300,000 acres in the Chihuahuan Desert. Equestrian activities are allowed in all areas of the park unless specifically excluded. 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.

Rock Watching

The primary attraction of the Big Bend country is its scenery, and here, scenery is geology. The mountains, canyons, plateaus, rivers and waterfalls are all the direct result from geologic processes of mountain building, volcanism, rock formation, subsequent faulting, folding, weathering and

erosion. Geology and resultant landforms ultimately determine where and how the region's plants, animals and humans live. So as you soak up the scenery, remember that you are looking far back into geologic time — a long chronicle of earth history.

River Access

The Rio Grande/Rio Bravo corridor is an easily accessible area of the park for day use, including rafting, canoeing and free bank fishing. Several river access points are found within the park along FM-170. Colorado Canyon includes Class II and Class III rapids. This section of the river is not considered dangerous under normal flow conditions. The walls of Colorado Canyon,



unlike the limestone canyons of Big Bend National Park and the Lower Canyons, are entirely of igneous rock. Raft trips may be arranged through local outfitters in Terlingua and Study Butte.

Commercially Guided Tours and Outfitters

Bend Ranch State Park can promote public access for those individuals apprehensive of such a primitive site or who may be looking for a recreational experience that they are unable to facilitate themselves. Potential services may include: equestrian trips, river rafting, mountain bike tours, campouts, nature/birding hikes and art and photography classes.

Certified Commercial Guides for Big Bend Ranch State Park are:

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

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

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



Vermilion flycatcher

Featured Activity:

Watch the birdie

A sense of place

<continued from page 1>

famous canyons. Volcanism, weathering, erosive rains, runoff and groundwater moving through the Shutups, Fresno Creek, Terlingua Creek and Contrabando Creek combined to expose and shape the landforms that park visitors see today. Eons of erosion exposed some of the Earth's most ancient rocks including shales, sandstones and cherts in Solitario's core.

On first impression, the Solitario's interior seems to be an unremarkable terrain of low rolling hills covered by desert grasslands and scrub. But the exposed geologic history reveals one of the most remarkable accounts of our planet's past that can be seen in one place. These rocks are deformed, uplifted and eroded remains of the Ouachita Mountains, which predate the Rockies. Massive limestones that were seafloor deposits were uplifted during the Rocky Mounting building period of Earth's history. These deposits now form the Solitario's outer rings. The entire southwest quadrant of the Solitario has steeply inclined inverted V-shaped rocks called "flat irons." Viewing them from the south or west at sunset is a breath-taking experience. Hiking through this world-class geologic landmark is truly a walk through time.

There are several places in the park to experience the full visual impact of the Solitario. Solitario Overlook is a few miles past Saucedo and is accessible by 2WD vehicles. Fresno Overlook on FM 170 between Lajitas and the Tepee Picnic area offers a great view in late afternoon. For a closer look you'll need a 4WD high clearance vehicle, to reach the Mexicano Trailhead. A short hike will give you spectacular Solitario vistas. The interior of the Solitario can be accessed via a 4WD high clearance road to the Tres Papalotes Trailhead. Hikes, some substantial, can then be made to all points of the interior.

Over 300 species of birds reside in Big Bend Ranch State Park

by Mark Lockwood

Big Bend Ranch State Park offers the opportunity to explore 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. Large springs normally are found in association with riparian woodlands (cottonwood-willow-hackberry and shrub thickets).

One of the premier birding locations within the park is found at Ojito Adentro (wayside stop #4). The trail from the parking area traverses through desert scrub into riparian woodland. The song of the Bell's Vireo is a common sound of the thickets along arroyos and in the understory of riparian habitats and can hardly be missed between early March and September. In the spring and summer watch for the Zone-tailed Hawk, Vermilion Flycatcher, Summer Tanager, Blue Grosbeak and Varied Bunting. Canyon, Bewick's and

Rock Wrens are present year-round and a wide variety of sparrows can be found here in winter. This area can be very productive during migration (late March through mid-May and late August through mid-October) when flycatchers, warblers and tanagers can be common. Migration in West Texas is not as spectacular as farther east, but surprises can be found. Some of the more interesting finds at Ojito Adentro include Painted Redstart and a variety of eastern warblers.

A walk along a dry arroyo in well-developed desert scrub will reveal a different group of birds. Say's Phoebe, Verdin, Curve-billed and Crissal Thrashers, and Black-tailed Gnatcatcher join more Bell's Vireos in this habitat. An easily accessible place to find these birds is along the arroyo that passes along the west side of the Saucedo headquarters complex. Two of the most abundant birds on Big Bend Ranch can be encountered almost anywhere. They are the Scaled Quail and Black-throated Sparrow. Keep an eye out for them as you travel along the park's many roads. Be sure to pick up a copy of the park's bird checklist, Birds of Big Bend Ranch State Park, to record your sightings.



Black-throated sparrow



Zone-tailed hawk



Scaled quail

Archeology, History and Culture: Those who came before



Ancient Native American pictographs in Leyva Canyon.

by Tim Roberts

Native Americans have inhabited or passed through the area of Big Bend Ranch for about 11,000 years. Like those who came later, they were attracted to the area by the many water sources, including the Rio Grande and over 100 free-flowing springs. The artifacts they left behind tell stories of hardship and survival in this sometimes hospitable but often relentless land. The lives of these people are reflected in the hundreds of prehistoric camps, villages, cooking stations and rock art sites that dot Big Bend Ranch. The variety of pictographs (rock paintings) and petroglyphs (rock etchings or carvings) illustrate the amazing diversity of these peoples.

Prehistoric images, illustrated in one of several

styles, include human or human-like figures, animals, apparent insects, tally marks, double zigzags, hourglass chains and star patterns. Historic images include human figures on horses, longhorn cattle, Spanish saddles and crosses. Cuevas Amarillas, which features rock paintings, can be seen along the main park road in the interior of the state park. Many others will require a keen eye and sense of adventure to discover.

Only a few early historic sites have yet been discovered at the park. However, archeologists have identified a number of sites dating to the later part of the 19th century and first half of the 20th century including ruins of stagecoach way stations and ranches. Others are the remains of mining ventures, or candellilla wax-rendering operations.



The ruins of wax-rendering and mining operations can be seen in the eastern portion of the park. Ranching and Native American sites are scattered across the park. You will be able to see and read more about these sites as you hike, bike or ride along the park's numerous trails. Remember, please respect the park's history and the heritage of those who came before. Leave all ruins and artifacts as you found them.

Lights, Camera, Action!

What, a movie set in the middle of the desert? It's true! The scenic grandeur and cultural flavor of the Rio Grande corridor at Big Bend Ranch has long inspired artistic expression, including filmmaking. About 5 miles west of Barton Warnock Environmental Education Center along FM 170 you will see what looks like a quaint 1800s village perched on the banks of Rio Grande. This "village" is actually a movie set dating to 1985. Have you seen any of the five films or the award-winning music video that were shot here?

- Uphill All the Way (1985)
- Rio Diablo (1993)
- Gambler V: Playing for Keeps (1994)
- Streets of Laredo (1995)
- Dead Man's Walk (1996)
- My Maria, music video (1995)

Want to Know More?

The park stores at Saucedo Headquarters and Barton Warnock Environmental Education Center have a well-rounded selection of books that delve into the region's geology, plants, animals, culture and history. Included are children's books, memoirs, cookbooks and field guides. Check out the offerings and find a book that's right for you. Perhaps one of the following?



- *The Three Little Javelinas* by Susan Lowell
- *Geology of Big Bend Ranch State Park* by Christopher D. Henry
- *Chronicles of the Big Bend* by W. D. Smithers
- *The Texas Outback: Ranching on the Last Frontier* by Bill Wright
- *The Wind that Swept Mexico* by Anita Brenner
- *The Buffalo Soldiers* by William Leckie
- *Quicksilver* by Kenneth Ragsdale

Regional Director's Welcome



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

by Mike O. Hill
Regional Director

Welcome to the first issue of *El Solitario*, the newspaper dedicated to providing you with timely and accurate information about Big Bend Ranch State Park. In these pages, you will find a map showing trails and campsite locations. You will also find information about featured places to go and things to do. There is a section describing the upcoming special programs in the park and some good advice about how to prepare and how to safely and responsibly enjoy your trip.

We will run a feature article in each issue about special places in the park. This issue's feature is about the paper's namesake, the Solitario. The real life Solitario is so big that the best way to see its amazing concentric rings is from the air! From the ground it almost feels like you're in a circular fortress;



a fortress of biological diversity and geological amazement.

It's fitting that the first feature is about such a big place, because Big Bend Ranch State Park itself is so large. At just under 300,000 acres it is the largest state park in Texas. In fact, Big Bend Ranch State Park is about half the total state park acreage in the Texas State Parks system. From the northern boundary on Cienega Creek going straight south to the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo it is just under 22 miles. At its widest point east to west it is about 29 miles. The Rio Grande/Rio Bravo comprises about 25 miles of the park's southern boundary. When you put it into miles, it doesn't sound very big. In the city or in suburbia most folks drive about that far or farther just to get to work. Here at Big Bend Ranch, these miles are deceiving. It takes a pretty long time just to go a mile in this park.

On many of the four-wheel-drive roads, going much faster

than 2 or 3 miles per hour presents a threat to your personal safety and your vehicle. We encourage you to take the desert on its own terms and at its own pace. Part of what makes Big Bend Ranch State Park such a special place is that it encourages, almost demands, that you slow down. Slowing down for a few hours or a few days is probably a good thing, for our health and for our spirit. Slowing down helps visitors to Big Bend Ranch see all the subtleties and nuances that make the Chihuahuan Desert such a fascinating place.

There's the river corridor where in the midst of a desert, you can feel the humidity rise, and hear the insect chorus crescendo the closer you get to the river itself. In the Bofecillos highlands, after an exciting but slow-moving tour through fantastic red rock formations, you come to the edge of a jaw-dropping canyon. The canyons themselves, and their exposed layered rock foundations, from patriotic Oso, with its red rock on top of white rock, which in turn is on top of blue, yes blue, and where the main thing you hear is just ... the breeze. In the Terneros and Alamito Creek lowlands you can really feel the sun on your skin, and each creek bank is a ribbon of green and shade. From high on Cienega Mountain, you see most of the Park, the Chinati Mountains to the west and to the south, a big chunk of equally impressive mountains in Mexico.

This is big country; sparsely populated. Yet people have lived here for about 11,000 years. Just about anywhere

there is free-flowing water, someone, at sometime, has either lived or camped. So, as you explore, think about trying to live here with only the tools, shelter and food that the desert provided. If you chance upon one of those spots, please be respectful of the people who were here before and leave things as you found them.

The Chihuahuan Desert is a mystical, magical place but is also unforgiving. Elsewhere in this issue are tips, advice, and some rules for exploring this place responsibly and safely. This advice, and healthy doses of humility and common sense, can help you get acquainted with the desert and have some great stories to tell when you get home.

We hope this inaugural issue of *El Solitario* is informative, educational and entertaining. We hope your visit to Big Bend Ranch State Park is exciting and enjoyable. It's a long way to get here and a long way to any help so please be careful while you are here. Mainly, though, think of this place as a Thanksgiving Dinner for the senses. You can't possibly eat the whole thing at one sitting, so plan on coming back to the table to nibble a little of this and a little of that, over and over. The difference between Thanksgiving Dinner and the Park is that eventually the dinner is gone. With your help and support, Big Bend Ranch State Park will be here forever. And the good part is, the menu keeps changing ... if you're going slowly enough to notice.

EL SOLITARIO

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