



# The Paisano

Big Bend National Park  
Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River  
Visitor Guide

Volume 42 Number 1 2025

On rare occasions, the Northern Lights turn the Big Bend sky pink. (Image by L. Nowell)

## More Inside...

Safety .....	2
Visiting Mexico .....	3
Things to Do .....	3-4
Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River .....	5
Day Hikes .....	7
Big Bend News.....	8
Nonprofit Park Partners .....	9
Camping and River Use.....	10
Wildlife.....	11
Information and Services.....	12

## Get the Latest News on Construction Projects:



## Superintendent's Welcome

Welcome to Big Bend National Park! We have put this guide together to help you plan a great trip to the park and to make your trip as safe and informative as possible. Please help us keep the park landfill from filling up too fast by using the recycling bins throughout the park. You can also help by taking your trash outside the park whenever you can. The park is huge and there is so much to do here but don't get in a hurry! Please slow down, the maximum speed limit in the park is 45 miles per hour so take in the breathtaking vastness of Big Bend, and I hope that you have a memorable, safe and wonderful time here!

Superintendent Anjna O'Connor

# What Can I See if I Only Have...

## One Day:

Big Bend is too big to see in a single day, but for a taste of the park and what it has to offer, visit the mountains, desert, and river with the following itinerary:

1) The **Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive** offers fantastic views of the Chihuahuan Desert landscape as you wind your way to the Rio Grande at Santa Elena Canyon.

Scenic overlooks and exhibits along the way are well worth a stop. Short walks through **Sam Nail Ranch**, **Homer Wilson Ranch**, and the **Castolon Historic District** allow a glimpse into Big Bend's past.

At the end of the scenic drive, take the short walk to the river and into **Santa Elena Canyon**—one of Big Bend's most scenic spots and an easy to moderate 1.4 mile round-trip hike.

2) Visit the forested **Chisos Mountains** and walk the 0.3-mile **Window View Trail** to get a feel for the mountain scenery. If time allows, hike the **Window Trail** or **Lost Mine Trail** for a look at Big Bend's mountain landscapes.

3) The **Fossil Discovery Exhibit**, located 8 miles north of Panther Junction, is another highlight that could easily fit into a one-day visit.

## Three Days:

With three days to spend in the park, explore the major roads, do some hiking, and **join a park ranger** for a guided walk, talk, or evening program to learn more about Big Bend National Park.

Consider spending a day in each of the three major areas of the park:

1) Visit the **Chisos Basin** and hike the **Window Trail** (5.6 miles round trip) or the **Lost Mine Trail** (4.8 miles round trip). Consult page 7 for trail descriptions of these and other popular trails in the park. Try to experience Big Bend's back country as much as possible.

2) Explore the **Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive** and hike into **Santa Elena Canyon** (see "one-day" suggestions).

3) Drive to **Rio Grande Village**, stopping at **Dugout Wells** to walk the half-mile **Chihuahuan Desert Nature Trail**.

The **Rio Grande Village Visitor Center** offers park information and interpretive exhibits.

Walk the **Rio Grande Village Nature Trail**. The bluff overlooking the Rio Grande at the end of the nature trail is a particularly beautiful spot at sunset.

The **Boquillas Canyon Trail** takes you into this spectacular canyon.

## A Week:

With a week or more to spend in Big Bend, endless possibilities are open to you. You have plenty of time to explore the roads and hike or drive some of the "unimproved" dirt roads. For these, you'll need a high-clearance or four-wheel drive vehicle; don't forget to check at a visitor center for current road conditions.

The **River Road**, **Glenn Springs Road**, **Old Ore Road**, and **Old Maverick Road** are some of the more popular backcountry routes. A visit to the pool of water at **Ernst Tinaja** near the south end of the Old Ore Road is a Big Bend highlight.

If you have a high-clearance vehicle, improved dirt roads such as **Dagger Flat** and **Grapevine Hills** will get you "off the beaten path." Hike the **Chimneys**, **Mule Ears**, or **Grapevine Hills** trails for a closer look at the desert environment.

If you'd like to explore the **Chisos Mountains**, trails to **Boot Canyon**, **Emory Peak**, and the **South Rim** offer good views of the park and take you into a world that seems far removed from the desert.

There are plenty of opportunities for overnight backpacking along these trails. A backcountry-use permit is required to backpack and camp overnight.







National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
Big Bend National Park  
Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River

The National Park Service was established on August 25, 1916, "... to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life... and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

Authorized by Congress in 1935 and established in June 1944, Big Bend National Park preserves the most representative example of the Chihuahuan Desert ecosystem in the United States.

**Park Mailing Address**

Big Bend National Park  
PO Box 129  
Big Bend National Park, TX 79834

**Phone**

432-477-2251

**Park Websites**

www.nps.gov/bibe  
www.nps.gov/rigr

**On matters relating to the Paisano:**

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The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

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Big Bend may be wild and unfamiliar country, but it need not be dangerous. Please review these guidelines for safety and resource protection.

**No Collecting**

The mission of the National Park Service is to preserve all natural and cultural resources unimpaired for future generations. Taking rocks, artifacts, plants, or animals robs everyone of this heritage—once something is stolen, it cannot be replaced.

It is unlawful (and rude) to destroy, deface, injure, collect, or otherwise disturb park resources, including plants or animals (dead or alive), fossils, rocks, and artifacts. It is a violation to possess park resources. Please, take only pictures and leave only footprints.

**Driving**

Drive within the speed limit (45 mph in most areas) and watch for wildlife along the roadsides, especially at night. Park roads have narrow shoulders and some roads are steep and winding. Share the road with bicyclists and pedestrians. Pull off the road to take pictures—do not stop or pause in roadways. Please, slow down...and enjoy!

**Drones/Unmanned Aircraft**

Launching, landing, or operating an unmanned aircraft is prohibited in Big Bend National Park.

**Heat**

The dry desert heat quickly uses up the body's water reserves. Carry and drink water—at least 1 gallon per person per day. As you exercise, you lose salt and water (over a quart and a half per hour during arduous exercise). You need both to survive in this extreme environment. Reduce alcohol and caffeine intake—the diuretic effects accelerate loss of body water.

Protect your body—sensitive skin burns easily. Find shade, wear sunscreen, sunglasses, and a brimmed hat. Wear long-sleeves, long pants, and sturdy shoes.

**Hiking**

Trails vary from easy and well-maintained to strenuous, primitive routes. Plan hikes within your ability. Avoid ridges during thunderstorms and canyons or creek beds when flash flooding is possible. Carry a flashlight and first aid kit, and let someone know where you are going and when you expect to return. If you get hurt or lost, stay in one place to conserve water and energy. Rest in shade if you can.

Please keep your children close; don't let them run ahead on trails.

**Water Conservation**

- Visitors are limited to 5 gallons of water per day when refilling containers; please conserve water while in the park.
- Don't let faucets run unnecessarily.
- Wash only what clothing items you need.
- Fill water jugs and bottles at Rio Grande Village whenever possible.
- Consider topping off RV water tanks outside the park.
- Take brief showers.
- Please report water leaks in park facilities to a ranger.
- Use backcountry water sources sparingly; leave backcountry springs for wildlife.

**Wildlife**

Observe Big Bend's wildlife from a distance. Wildlife is protected in the park; it is illegal to harass or harm wildlife. Never feed wild animals. Feeding wild animals damages their health, alters natural behaviors, and exposes them to predators and other dangers. Protect wildlife and your food by storing food and trash securely.

Venomous snakes, scorpions, spiders, and centipedes are active during warm months. Pay attention: check shoes and bedding before use and use a flashlight at night.

**Big Bend National Park's Pack Mule Team**

A behind the scenes look at Big Bend's hardest workers

As you hike deep into the backcountry of Big Bend National Park, you might be lucky enough to encounter some friendly faces- the park's pack mule team! There are currently eight mules in the team: Dolly, Compa, Freebee, Peggy, Tommy, Hank, Rufus, and Pepper. Don't forget Comanche, the horse, and Gavin Monson, the mule team manager and packer.

The team moves thousands of pounds of research equipment, waste from the Chisos Mountains composting toilets, and tools and equipment for backcountry operations. They also assist in emergency situations. Pack mule teams are a great example of wilderness management using nonmechanized equipment within the backcountry of Big Bend National Park.

This is not an easy task! A typical pack-day is between 10 to 13 hours. The day consists of 3 to 4 hours of prep time, 4 hours of riding into the Chisos Mountains, and 3 to 4 hours of unloading at the end of the day.

"When you're packing, your brain is going a million miles a minute on what's going on, what's going to scare the mules, how they interact with each other, with people, etc.," says Gavin. "I must think for 10 different brains, not to mention the time it takes to pull these operations off alone."

The mule team lineup is not in a random order. Mules are intelligent animals with unique personalities that must be taken into consideration. Some get along better than others in the lineup.

"One of the coolest things about my work is understanding the psychology of the animals," says Gavin. "I spend hours every day watching them, their ears, body language, how they interact, and it helps decide what order in the pack line each mule will be in."

We feel so lucky to have such hard-working, and dedicated animals as part of the staff here. Next time you're out on the trails keep an eye out for Big Bend's hardest workers, and make sure to say hello!

Ranger Jason Gablaski





# Things to Do

## Birding Hot Spots

### Panther Junction to Rio Grande Village

- Dugout Wells—shady cottonwood trees and a windmill at this desert oasis.
- Rio Grande Village Nature Trail—a boardwalk over the pond is an excellent area for waterfowl.
- Daniels Ranch Picnic Area—the cottonwood trees provide excellent habitat to both resident and migrant bird species.

### Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive

- Sam Nail Ranch—a windmill and large trees attract birds to this historic ruin.
- Blue Creek Trail—a half mile from the Homer Wilson Ranch are the Red Rocks, an area known for Lucifer Hummingbirds.
- Cottonwood Campground—large trees here provide a haven for birds.

### Chisos Mountains

- Basin area—many mountain birds can be found around the campground and developed areas.
- Boot Canyon—the nesting area of the Colima Warbler and other species.
- South Rim—this 2000' cliff is known for falcons and swifts.

## Birding in Big Bend

The park is recognized as a Globally Significant Bird Area.

Big Bend National Park is famous for its birding, with more documented species of birds visiting the park throughout the year than any other unit in the National Park System (approximately 450 species). The diverse array of habitats, ranging from the riparian corridor of the Rio Grande to the forested canyons of the Chisos Mountains, present an attractive stopping point for birds traveling along major migratory paths that intersect the park.

A good guideline for birding in Big Bend is to seek out areas where water and vegetation are most abundant, such as the Rio Grande, the Chisos Mountains, or desert springs, some of which are accessible by car.

Generally the most active time for birding is in the spring when many species are migrating through the park. However, with patience, birding in Big Bend can be rewarding throughout the year.

The riparian corridor at Rio Grande Village offers some of the best year-round birding in the park. Consider walking the Rio Grande

Village Nature Trail or visiting the Daniels Ranch picnic area west of the campground. A similar habitat is accessible between Cottonwood Campground and Santa Elena Canyon on the park's west side.

The piñon-oak-juniper woodlands of the Chisos Mountains and their foothills also offer accessible, year-round birding and attract many species of birds that would not otherwise be found here. It is well worth the effort to hike into the higher elevations. During early summer you may spot the sought-after Colima Warbler, which is only found outside of Mexico in the Chisos Mountains.

Patience, a good field guide, and knowledge of where to look are the keys to locating birds in Big Bend. A checklist of birds is available for purchase at any visitor center and is a great aid in determining which species are likely to be present and the habitats where they are found.



## The Colima Warbler



One of the most sought-after bird species in Big Bend is the Colima Warbler, a type of New World warbler found primarily in the Sierra Madre of Mexico. A small population nests in the higher elevations of the Chisos Mountains beginning in early summer. Finding one is the tricky part! Visitors hoping to spot a Colima Warbler usually have to make the strenuous, 9-mile round-trip hike to the bird's main habitat in Boot Canyon. Occasionally they are spotted closer to the trailhead on the upper portions of the Pinnacles Trail. Good luck!

## Visiting Mexico

A unique part of the Big Bend experience is crossing into rural Boquillas del Carmen, Mexico.

### Operating Hours

Winter Hours: Wednesday to Sunday, 9am–4pm  
Summer Hours: Friday to Monday, 9am–4pm

*Days and hours of operation are subject to change.*

A visit to Mexico is permitted through the Port of Entry during business hours. There is no other legal access to Mexico within Big Bend National Park. The Port of Entry is a pedestrian crossing only.

### General Information

The Boquillas Port of Entry is operated cooperatively by the National Park Service and U.S. Customs and Border Protection. The facility is staffed by park rangers who can assist travelers with information about visiting the area.

### Required Documents

At the time of publication, U.S. and Canadian citizens (of any age) must present a valid passport to enter Mexico and re-enter the United States. Visitors from countries other than the U.S. or Canada must call Customs and Border Protection at Presidio, TX (432-229-3349) for current required travel documents.

### How do I get there?

Park at the Boquillas Crossing parking lot. Pass through the Port of Entry and take a small rowboat across the Rio Grande for a modest fee (\$5 round-trip as of 12/23).

Wading across the Rio Grande is permitted only at Boquillas Crossing, but is not recommended if the river level is high.

Once across the river, walk to the village (1/2 mile) or pay an additional fee to ride on a burro, horse, or in a vehicle. Local guides are available. Visitors are required to check in with Mexican immigration officials upon arrival in Boquillas.

### What is in town?

Boquillas features two restaurants with food that is simple, fresh, and good. A bar features pool and other games. Residents often display wire sculptures, embroidered textiles, walking sticks, and other handicrafts for sale.

U.S. currency is accepted in Boquillas. Visitors are advised to bring smaller bills.

### Border Merchants

Near the border, you may encounter small “souvenir stands” and Mexican nationals wanting to sell you their crafts. **It is illegal to purchase these items in the park.** Items purchased illegally are considered contraband and may be seized by law enforcement officers.

Port of Entry staff can answer questions about items that can be legally purchased in Mexico and imported through the Port. By purchasing souvenirs in Boquillas, you support the citizens of Boquillas, make the river corridor safer for all visitors, and help protect the resources of this ecosystem.



The village of Boquillas del Carmen, Mexico.

## Safety On the Border

Big Bend has a low incidence of crime reported. However, in any remote or seldom-traveled location, it is important to consider personal safety and to secure valuables while away from your vehicle.

- Know where you are at all times and use common sense. Cell phone service is limited or non-existent in many areas of the park.
- Keep valuables, including spare change, out of sight and locked in your vehicle.
- Avoid travel on well-used but unofficial “social trails.”
- Do not pick up hitchhikers.
- People in distress may ask for food, water, or other assistance. Report the location of the individuals to park or Border Patrol staff as soon as possible. Lack of water is a life-threatening emergency in the desert.
- Report suspicious behavior to park staff or Border Patrol. Do not contact suspicious persons.
- Ask at the visitor center about areas where you may have concerns about traveling.



# Things to Do



C. HOYT

## Photographing Big Bend

Big Bend's night skies, vast landscapes, and tiny wildflowers offer opportunities for every photographer. Read on for some advice from three camera-obsessed park rangers.

### Cathryn Hoyt, Park Ranger

#### What type of photographer are you?

I photograph desert details. I love tiny butterflies, flowers, and tracks in the mud. I have to force myself to step back and photograph landscapes!

#### What advice do you have for photographing Big Bend?

Because I'm so detail-oriented, I have a system to photograph a place. I look for three types of shots: a wide-angle view to put the place in context, a medium-view that brings the viewer closer to the action, and a bunch of details. At Sam Nail Ranch, I might photograph the oasis with the windmill as my wide-angle, then a closer view of the windmill itself, and finally some detail shots such as a cardinal sipping water or faded paint on the windmill blade. I want my photographs to tell the story of these places.

### Marshall Minor, Fee Technician

#### What type of photographer are you?

I consider myself a documentary, landscape, and skyscape photographer. I really enjoy research, writing descriptions, and capturing the ever-changing land and sky here!

#### What advice do you have for photographing Big Bend?

Knowing your equipment and theory are some of the best things you can do for yourself as a photographer. Our cameras are to us what an instrument is to a musician. In the same way a well-rounded musician is comfortable playing from sheet music or improvising, having a baseline foundation of technical knowledge will ultimately make you more flexible as a photographer. Understanding your tools and technique allows you to execute a planned shot while also enabling you to react to the unexpected moments of beauty here in Big Bend!

### Laren Nowell, Park Ranger

#### What type of photographer are you?

I'm a landscape, nature, street and astrophotography photographer. Each type lets me connect with the world in a unique way.

#### What advice do you have for photographing Big Bend?

Get off the beaten path and experience the splendid isolation that makes Big Bend so special. Shoot in the early morning or evening to avoid the harsh midday light, and don't be afraid to shoot at night—the dark skies here are some of the best in the world. Most importantly, learn from your mistakes, enjoy your time, and embrace the learning process. For me, photography is more than just a creative outlet—it's been my therapy since leaving the military. There's nothing quite like being out there with my camera, surrounded by the incredible landscape.



L. NOWELL



M. MINOR

## The Five Best...

We asked park rangers about their favorite river trips, wheelchair-accessible trails, and places to see (and photograph!) the stars. Here are their suggestions.



### Accessible Trails

**Fossil Discovery Exhibit.** The covered, open-air exhibit is fully accessible by wheelchair. Open during daylight hours.

**Window View Trail.** This 0.3 mile paved loop trail offers excellent views of the mountains surrounding the Chisos Basin. Two benches are perfect for sunset viewing.

**Panther Path.** This paved path near the Panther Junction Visitor Center provides an introduction to native plants of the Chihuahuan Desert.

**RGV Nature Trail.** The first 100 yards of this trail are wheelchair accessible as it follows a boardwalk through a spring-fed wetland. Birds, fish, turtles, and other animals are often seen in the pond and surrounding vegetation.

**Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive.** Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive highlights the geology of Big Bend and offers many scenic overlooks and exhibits with paved parking. Cottonwood Campground has shaded picnic tables and is a birding hotspot in the park.



### River Trips

**Santa Elena Boomerang.** Paddle upstream, then float back down to your point of entry. Ideal at flow rates from 200 cfs to 100 cfs.

**Santa Elena.** The most popular overnight or 3-day float trip. Includes a Class IV rapid at certain water levels. 300 to 600 cfs is great for open boats such as kayaks or canoes. Over 600 cfs is appropriate for rafts.

**Mariscal Canyon.** A challenge to get to, but well worth the effort! At only 10-miles long, Mariscal is the shortest canyon in the park. If water is flowing above 300 cfs, the canyon can be floated in a day.

**Boquillas Canyon.** For the less experienced paddler wanting a taste of adventure, Boquillas Canyon is a 33-mile, 3-day float. The rapids only rate up to Class II.

**Lower Canyons.** The Lower Canyons make up the heart of the Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River. Experienced boaters can indulge in a true wilderness experience while paddling 83 miles over the course of this 7 to 10 day trip.



### Places to Stargaze

**Fossil Discovery Exhibit** Walk up the hill next to the pavilion for a higher vantage point with views of the desert, mountains and night sky.

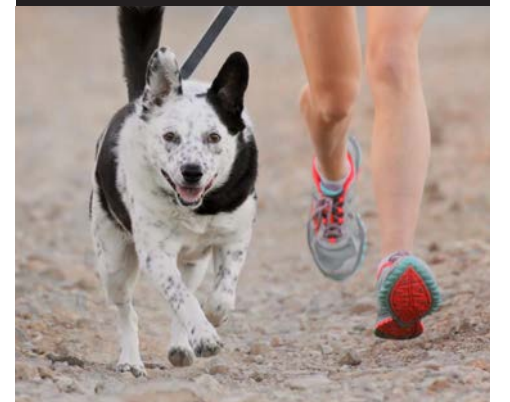
**Sotol Vista.** Watch the stars move over the desert and Santa Elena Canyon from this scenic overlook.

**Dugout Wells.** This desert oasis offers ample opportunities for astrophotographers to combine iconic features of the Big Bend landscape.

**Rio Grande Village Nature Trail.** The stars at night are even bigger and brighter at the border! Hike up the hillside for stunning 360-degree views of mountains silhouetted against a backdrop of stars.

**Roads Less Traveled.** Those with a 4x4 high clearance vehicle can access even more remote areas of the park for spectacular night skies. Try camping at Fresno, Elephant Tusk, or any of the new sites on Old Maverick Road for photo-worthy night skies.

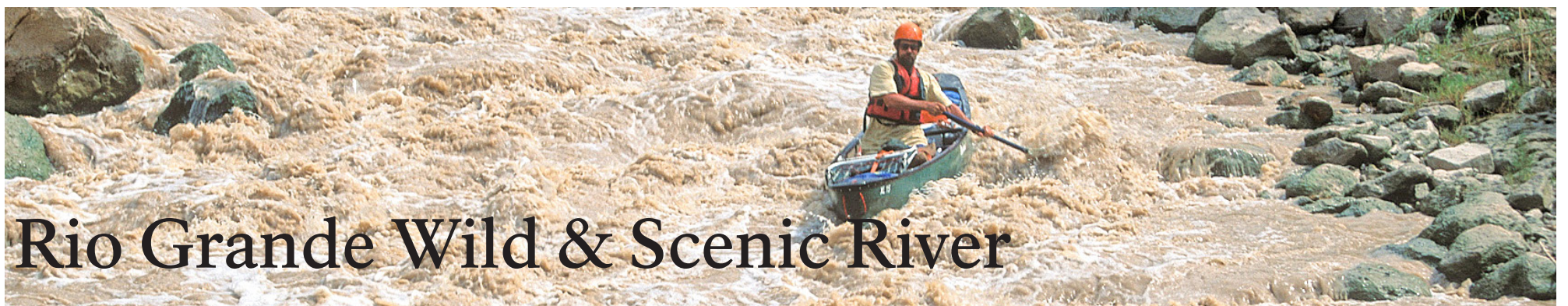
### Pets in the Park



Having a pet with you may limit some of your explorations in the park. Following these pet regulations will ensure a safer, more enjoyable visit for yourselves, other park visitors, your pet, and the park's wildlife.

- Pets are not allowed on trails, off roads, or on the river. Your pet can only go where your car can go.
- Pets must be on a leash no longer than six feet in length (or in a crate) at all times.
- You may not leave your pet unattended in vehicles if it creates a danger to the animal or if the animal becomes a public nuisance.
- If you plan to hike, someone must stay behind with the pet, or you will need to kennel your pet. The Alpine Veterinary Clinic (432-837-3888) and the Alpine Small Animal Clinic (432-837-5416) offer these services.
- Park regulations require that you always clean up after your pet and dispose of waste in trash receptacles.





# Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River

## Two Parks In One

Did you know a trip to Big Bend also gives you access to the Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River?

In 1968, Congress passed the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to protect free-flowing rivers with “outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife historic, cultural, or other similar values.”

The Rio Grande, as it flows around the “big bend,” ticks all of those boxes. The river provides vital habitat for plants and animals and offers dramatic scenery, spectacular geology, and thrilling recreational opportunities for those that crave adventure.

On November 10, 1978, Congress officially recognized the value of a free-flowing Rio Grande by designating a 200 mile stretch of the river the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River. This National Park System unit is managed with Big Bend National Park.

### Visiting the Wild & Scenic River

Have you stood on the riverbank at Rio Grande Village? Dipped your toe in the river at the Hot Springs or hiked along the Boquillas Canyon Trail? If so, you have enjoyed a portion of the wild Rio Grande.

The Wild and Scenic designation starts just above the big bend of the Rio Grande and

flows north-east beyond the park boundaries to the Terrell-Val Verde county line in Texas.

While dipping your toe in counts as a visit to the Wild & Scenic River, the best way to truly experience the Rio Grande is to float it.

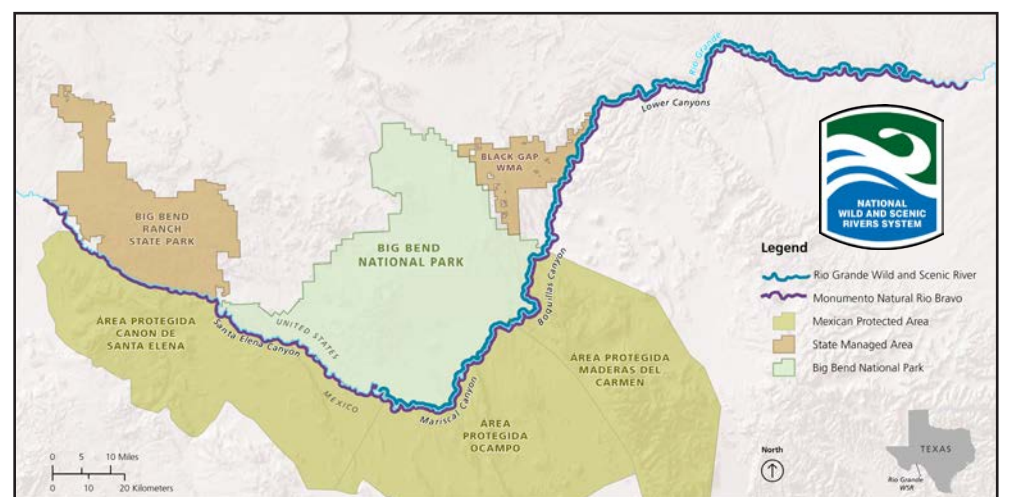
### Floating the Rio

A 1 to 2 day float trip through remote Mariscal Canyon, or a 2 to 3 day trip through Boquillas Canyon offers opportunities to run rapids, or drift at the whim of the river current. You can explore a small portion of the Wild & Scenic River in less than a day by floating through Hot Springs Canyon.

The Lower Canyons between Heath Canyon and Dryden, downstream from Big Bend National Park, make up the heart of the Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River.

Wild and isolated, the canyons provide solitude and an outstanding wilderness experience. There are no facilities and access is limited due to rough terrain and the constraints of floating through private land. The arduous 83-mile trip takes 6 to 7 days. Extensive experience and preparation are essential when planning a float through the Lower Canyons.

All river trips require planning, equipment, some experience, and a permit. Consult a river guide book and check with a park ranger for current conditions before embarking on a river trip. Permits are required for all float trips and may be obtained at visitor centers in Big Bend National Park up to seven days in advance.



The Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River extends 200 miles from the Chihuahua-Coahuila (Mexico) state line to the Terrell-Val Verde county (Texas) line.

## River Safety

Our River Rangers share 9 tips on how to make your trip safe and memorable (in a good way).

### Tie Down Your Boat

In summer, flash floods can come at any time even if it is not actively raining here in Big Bend, and winds in the canyons can reach very high speeds. Either of these can result in lost equipment and vessels. Keep an eye on the weather forecast for the surrounding area—not just the park—and keep everything secured on higher ground to avoid it being lost.

### Know Your Limits

If you do get caught in those strong winds, paddling against them can lead to your trip hitting a stand still or with you being blown up stream. Know when to float and when to stay put and hunker down.

### Stick To Your Plan

Once you have your permit, please keep to that itinerary. Don't change your trip's duration, put ins, or take outs. If something were to occur and you need assistance, rangers will use itinerary information from the permit to locate you. Any variations from that plan can cause delays.

### Be Prepared To Portage

When you reach a section of river that looks rough or difficult to pass through, pull off to the side and look at it. Sometimes carrying your vessel a little way along the shore may be the best way to proceed safely.

### Have Extra Supplies In Good Condition

Bring layers, waterproof clothing, a set of camp clothes to change into after a day of paddling, basic first aid supplies, and an extra day's rations of food and water. Make

sure everything is functional and in good condition—a life vest can only take so much damage before it stops being a life vest.

### Don't Rely on Digital

Cell service on the river is spotty at best. Don't rely on digital maps or downloaded material. The Big Bend Natural History Association sells laminated river guides filled with detailed maps just in case something happens to your phone and you can't access your digital material. It's also good to bring other methods of communication such as a satellite phone or inReach device.

### Avoid Littering

Leave No Trace is essential for all outdoor expeditions. Our river volunteers remove gallons of trash on every float trip they take. This waste causes environmental and ecological damage and also poses a risk to other boaters. Objects such as errant fishhooks can get caught up in river cane and cause damage to guests and vessels alike.

### Watch for Critters

The river ecosystem is home to animals like raccoons and rodents that would love to help themselves to your food. Make sure all food is secured where you can see it and get to it easily.

### Time

Don't plan river trips down to the minute or hour, as unexpected events always occur. Give yourself more time than you need, and enough time to enjoy the trip!



Safety and common sense come first. A loaded canoe is carefully lined through a rocky section of the river.



For the prepared, a Big Bend river trip can be a relaxing adventure!

Park Ranger M. Dolan



# Places to Visit

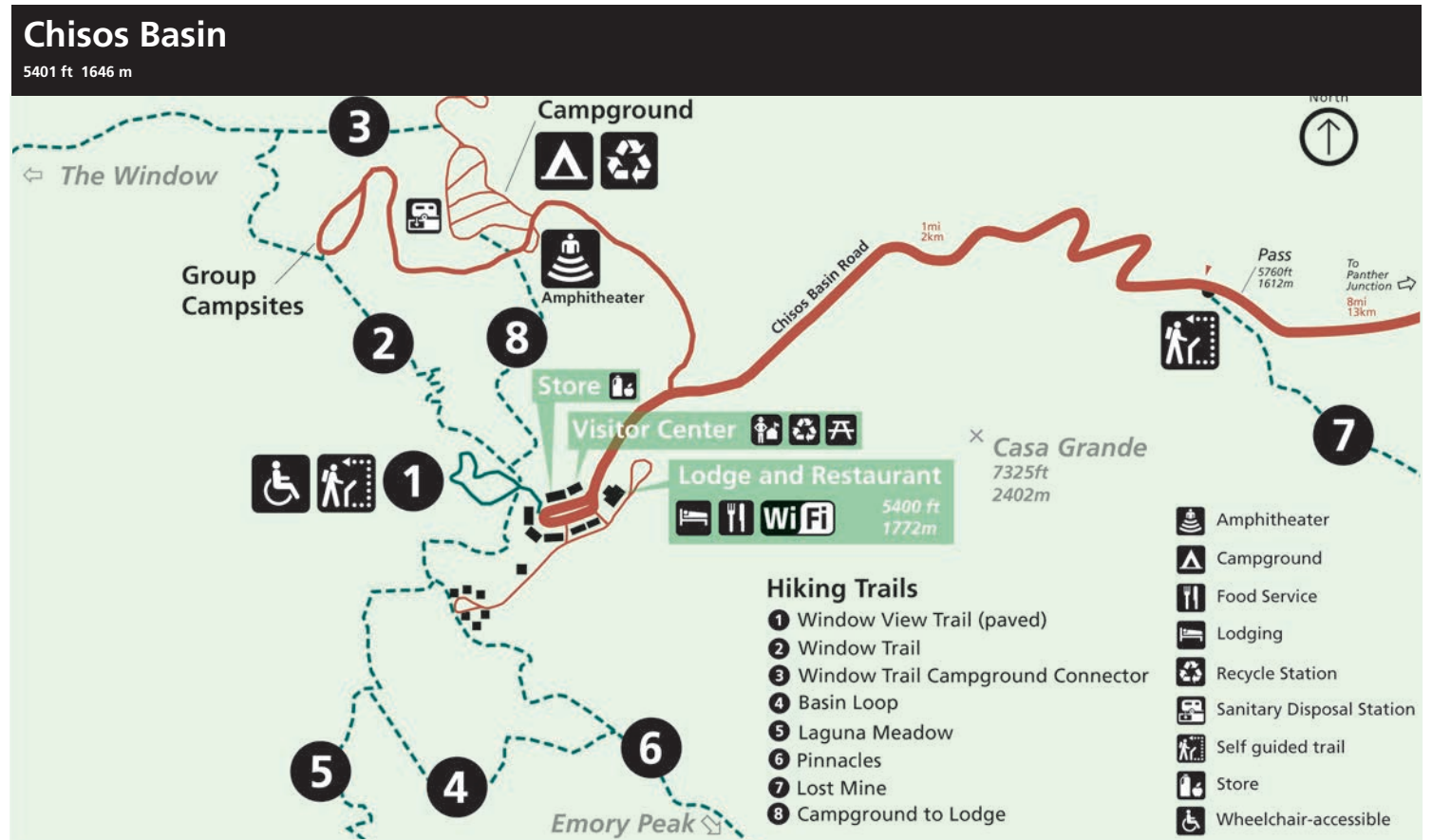
## Chisos Basin

A drive to the Chisos Basin is an excellent way to experience the transition between arid desert and cooler mountain habitats. As this scenic, winding road rises over two thousand feet above the desert floor, it offers vistas of the mountain peaks and the erosion-formed basin area.

Within the Chisos Basin area is a visitor center, campground, lodge, restaurant, gift shop, camp store, and miles of hiking trails.

With limited time, walk the Window View Trail for easy access to mountain vistas and a classic sunset view. If time permits, consider hiking (or backpacking) into the High Chisos to witness the forested slopes of the Pinnacles Trail or the unparalleled vistas of the South Rim.

**Note:** The road into the Basin is not suitable for RVs longer than 24 feet or trailers longer than 20 feet.



## Rio Grande Village

The drive to Rio Grande Village traverses limestone from a Cretaceous sea and has magnificent vistas of the Sierra del Carmens. Along the way is the oasis at Dugout Wells, and a spur road that leads to the popular Hot Springs Historic District.

Continue the drive to Boquillas Canyon where a short hike follows the Rio Grande as it flows into the canyon.

Rio Grande Village has a visitor center, campground, RV hook-ups, camp store, gas station, and picnic area.

Take a stroll (or a short drive) from the store to Daniels Ranch; this is a great area for birding. Picnic tables are near the historic ruins.

The Rio Grande Village Nature Trail follows a wildlife-viewing boardwalk, then gradually climbs the hillside, offering panoramic views of the river, Sierra del Carmens, and Crown Mountain. This is an excellent sunset vista.



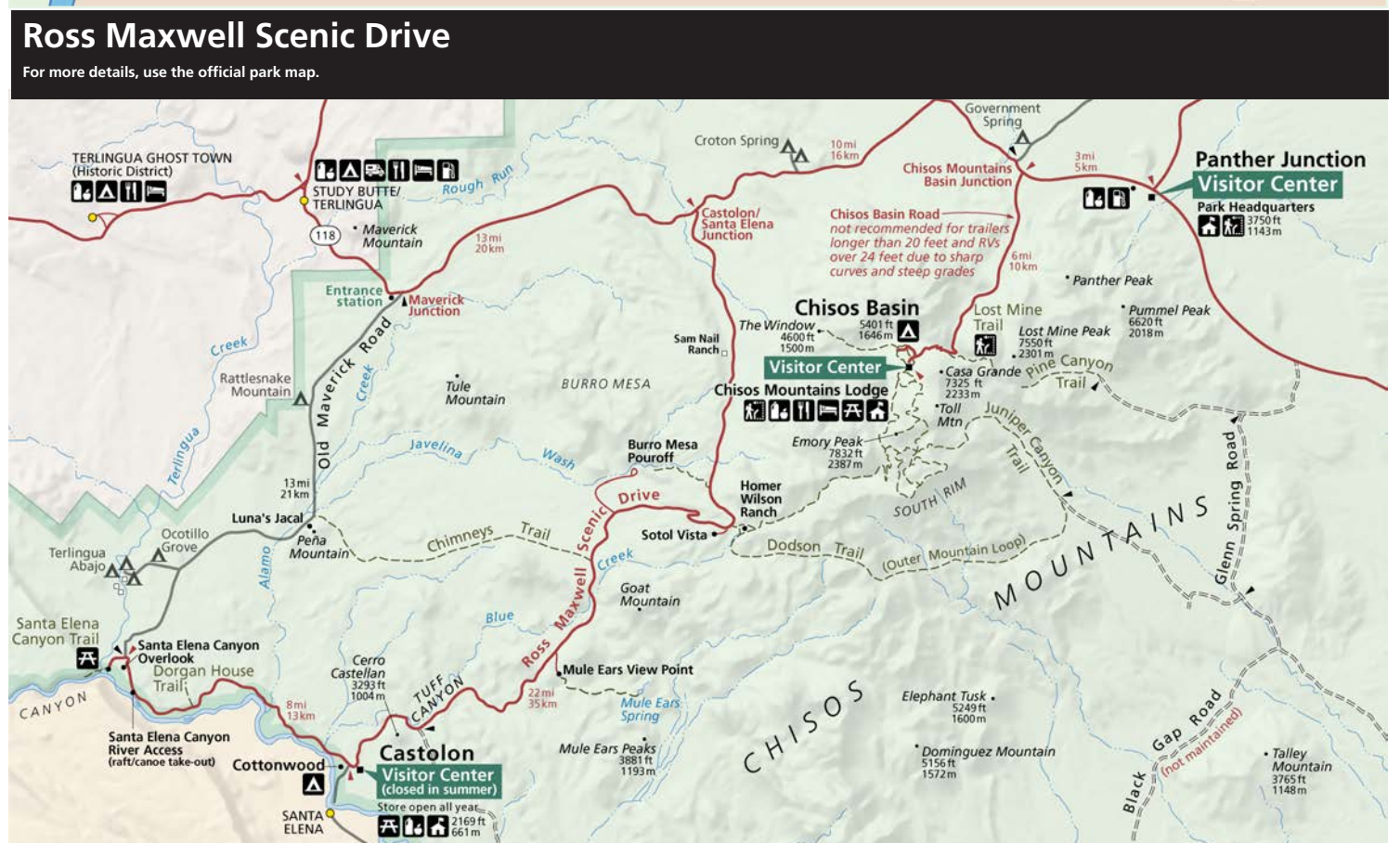
## Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive

A trip along the Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive highlights the geologic splendor Big Bend is famous for and offers many scenic overlooks and exhibits along the way. Sotol Vista and Mule Ears Overlook are worthwhile stops.

History is highlighted at Sam Nail Ranch, Homer Wilson (Blue Creek) Ranch, and the Castolon Historic District. Castolon has a visitor center and camp store. Nearby is the Cottonwood Campground.

Continue the drive to the magnificent Santa Elena Canyon, where limestone cliffs rise 1,500' above the Rio Grande. A short trail leads into the canyon. If the river is high, you may have to wade across Terlingua Creek to access the trail.

Return by the same route, or drive Old Maverick Road to the western entrance of the park. Old Maverick is most suitable for high-clearance vehicles and may be impassable after heavy rains. Check at a visitor center or entrance station for current conditions.

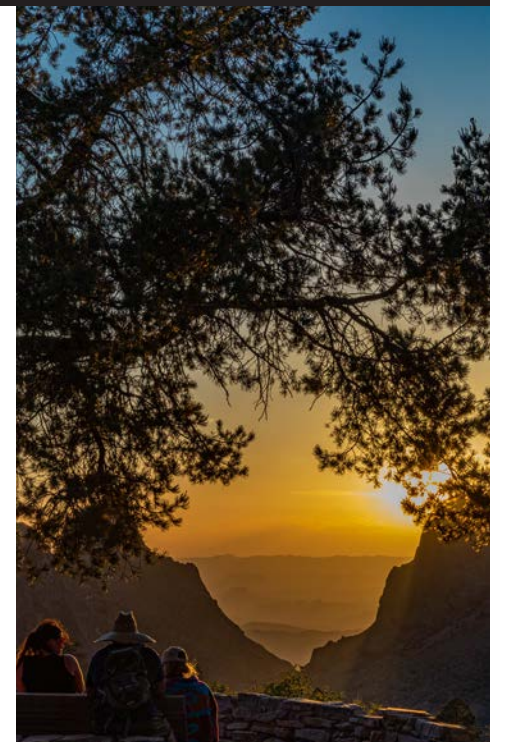




# Popular Trails

## The Chisos Mountains *Smoking is prohibited on all trails in the Chisos Mountains.*

Trail	Trailhead Location	Round Trip (mi/km)	Avg Time	Elevation (ft/m)	Description
<b>Basin Loop</b>	Chisos Basin Trailhead (near the Basin Store)	1.9/3.1	1 hour	280/85	<b>Moderate</b> Connects the Laguna Meadow and Pinnacles Trails. Nice views of the Basin area.
<b>Emory Peak</b>	Chisos Basin Trailhead (near the Basin Store)	10/16.1	7 hours	2470/753	<b>Strenuous</b> Trail leads to the highest peak in the park, with excellent views. The end of the trail involves some challenging rock scrambling. Use caution on the climb down.
<b>Lost Mine</b>	Basin Road, mile 5 (at the pass)	4.8/7.7	3 hours	1100/335	<b>Moderate</b> Excellent mountain and desert views. For a shorter hike, 1 mile up is a great view to the southeast.
<b>South Rim</b>	Chisos Basin Trailhead (near the Basin Store)	12/19.3 (14/22.5 with the East Rim Trail included)	8 hours 10 hours	2000/610 2120/646	<b>Strenuous</b> Trail leads to a 2000' cliff with incredible views of the desert below. Hike either the southwest rim, or add the northeast and southeast rim trails when open.
<b>Window</b>	Chisos Basin Trailhead or Basin Campground	5.6/9.0 4.7/7.6	4 hours 3 hours	971/296 775/236	<b>Moderate</b> Descends to the top of the Window pour-off. Great scenery and wildlife viewing. For a shorter hike, start from the Basin Campground (near campsite 51).
<b>Window View</b>	Chisos Basin Trailhead (near the Basin Store)	0.3/0.5	1/4 hour	20/6	<b>Easy</b> Level, paved, accessible. Great mountain views. Best place in the Basin to catch a sunset through the Window.



Sunset on the Window View Trail.

## Eastside — Panther Junction and Rio Grande Village

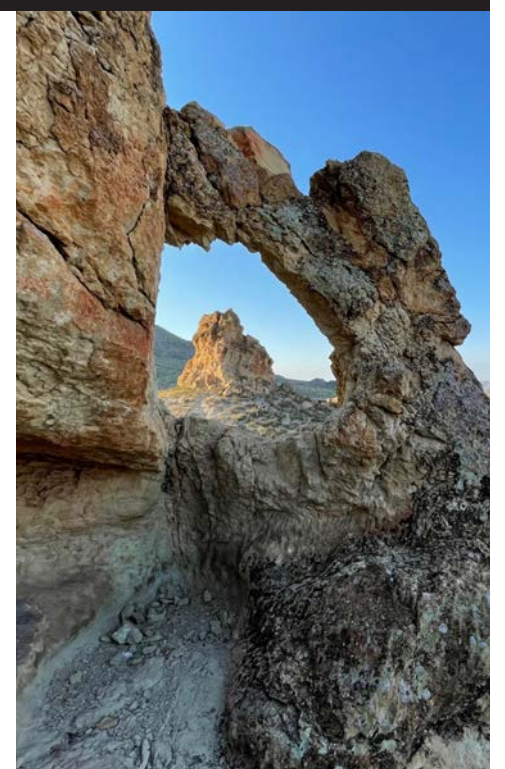
Trail	Trailhead Location	Round Trip (mi/km)	Avg Time	Elevation (ft/m)	Description
<b>Grapevine Hills</b> Balanced Rock	6.4 miles down the Grapevine Hills Road	2.2/3.5	1 hour	80/24	<b>Moderate</b> Follows a sandy wash through a boulder field. A steep, rocky climb near the end takes you to a large balanced rock. No shade.
<b>Lone Mountain</b>	Access road 1 mile north of Panther Junction	2.7/4.3	1.5 hours	200/61	<b>Easy</b> A relatively level loop trail with extraordinary views of the mountains.
<b>Chihuahuan Desert Nature Trail</b>	Dugout Wells	0.5/0.8	1/2 hour	10/3.5	<b>Easy</b> Loop trail with interpretive signs on desert ecology. Look for javelina tracks and resident birds.
<b>Hot Springs</b>	End of Hot Springs Road (unpaved narrow road)	0.5/0.8	1/2 hour	10/3.5	<b>Easy</b> Walk past historic buildings to the riverside hot spring. Enjoy a soak in 105°F water. <i>Hot Spring is subject to flooding during rising river levels and may not be accessible.</i>
<b>Boquillas Canyon</b>	End of Boquillas Canyon Road	1.4/2.2	1 hour	102/31	<b>Easy</b> Begins with a short climb, then descends via a sandy path to the river.
<b>Rio Grande Village Nature Trail</b>	Rio Grande Village, across from campsite 18. Park at the RGV Amphitheater parking lot.	0.75/1.2	1 hour	80/24	<b>Easy</b> First 300' leads to a wildlife viewing platform on a pond. Trail then climbs the hillside with views of the river and mountains. Great for birding and sunsets.



The Hot Springs at sunrise.

## Westside — Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive

Trail	Trailhead Location	Round Trip (mi/km)	Avg Time	Elevation (ft/m)	Description
<b>Sam Nail Ranch</b>	Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive, mile 3	0.5/0.8	1/2 hour	20/6	<b>Easy</b> Well-maintained trail leads through the old ranch site. The combination of water and shade makes this an excellent birding location.
<b>Lower Burro Mesa Pour-off</b>	Burro Mesa Spur Road	1.0/1.6	1/2 hour	120/37	<b>Easy</b> Trail enters a dry wash and ends at the bottom of the dramatic Burro Mesa pour-off. A great walk for viewing geological features.
<b>Chimneys</b>	Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive, mile 13	4.8/7.7	2 hours	400/122	<b>Moderate</b> Flat and scenic desert trail to rock formations of an eroded dike. Look for Native American rock art and shelters. No shade.
<b>Mule Ears Spring</b>	Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive, mile 15	3.8/6.1	3 hours	880/268	<b>Moderate</b> Beautiful desert hike to a small spring. Spectacular geology with mountain and desert views.
<b>Dorgan-Sublett Trail</b>	Castolon to Santa Elena Canyon Road, near mile 5	0.8/1.3	1/2 hour	60/18	<b>Easy</b> This short easy trail leads to the ruins of historic farm houses owned by settlers in the early to mid-1900s.
<b>Santa Elena Canyon</b>	Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive, 8 miles west of Castolon	1.6/2.6	1 hour	80/24	<b>Easy</b> This trail crosses Terlingua Creek (usually dry) and gradually climbs up to an overlook before dropping to the river bank. Trail has some steep steps and can be very hot midday.



Hole in the rock along the Chimney's Trail.





# Big Bend News

## Chisos Basin Construction Projects: COMING SOON!

Major improvements to visitor services and infrastructure are on the horizon.

Thanks to funding from the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA), construction work on significant improvements to the Chisos Basin area of the park is expected to begin May 2025 and continue for approximately two years. As work begins, the Chisos Basin area will be closed to visitor entry. This includes the Basin Road, lodging units, Basin Campground, restaurant, NPS visitor center, camper store, and trails within the Basin area. This work will ONLY affect the Chisos Basin area of Big Bend National Park. As major components are completed, park managers will assess which areas can be safely reopened to regular public access.

### Pardon Our Dust

Construction crews will be demolishing the main Chisos Basin Lodge building and constructing a new Lodge within the footprint of the original building. This improved facility will include a new dining room, lobby, convenience store, restrooms, and outdoor terraces. Simultaneously, the network of old inefficient water lines, storage tanks, hydrants, and water treatment systems will be replaced throughout the entire Chisos Basin area, to include the

campground, hotel units, visitor center, public restrooms, employee housing and historic cottages. More efficient fixtures will also be installed in buildings throughout the system, including the kitchen, motel units and restrooms. A rainwater harvesting system has been designed to substantially reduce the Basin area's overall water demand.

Closure of the Basin during demolition and construction of the new Lodge makes this an ideal time to also address additional improvements for visitor access and safety. This includes upgrades to bring infrastructure up to ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) specifications, as well as efforts to streamline and improve the overall efficiency and appearance of the area for the visiting public.

Planned upgrades include expanding the restrooms at the Visitor Center, new Visitor Center exhibits and trailhead kiosk, demolishing the current Camper Store, and providing electric vehicle charging stations in the main parking lot. Pathways connecting the Motel units and Visitor Center to the new Lodge will be reconfigured to provide

a more cohesive system of accessible paths between all major public facilities within the Basin.

This work represents one of the most significant improvements to park infrastructure and visitor services in the park's history. The current Chisos Mountains Lodge has served generations of park visitors but maintaining the building is no longer sustainable. In addition, burgeoning Big Bend visitation has far surpassed the kitchen and dining service capabilities of the facility. Future visitors will enjoy a well-engineered facility that meets high standards for energy, water, and operational efficiency to better serve the visitors of today and tomorrow.

GAOA is part of a concentrated effort to address deferred maintenance and repair

needs in national parks throughout the country. Supported by revenue from energy development, GAOA provides the NPS with up to \$1.3 billion per year for five years to make significant enhancements in national parks to ensure their preservation and provide opportunities for recreation, education, and enjoyment for current and future visitors.

Ranger Tom VandenBerg



*Big Bend National Park will remain OPEN year-round with over 800,000 acres of canyons, desert, historic sites, diverse wildlife, scenic drives, backcountry roads, and over 150 miles of hiking trails to enjoy.*

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Why is the Lodge being rebuilt?

Constructed in 1964, the Lodge is an important part of the park's history. Unfortunately, the Lodge was built on clay soils and soon suffered as the foundation moved and settled. Over the years, the settling caused significant damage to the foundation, roof, walls, windows, and building systems. Engineering studies established that repairing the failing foundation would require the complete removal of all walls and major features of the Lodge. The best option was to build a new building within the same footprint—a well-engineered facility that fits the landscape and meets high standards for energy, water, and operational efficiency.

### How long will the Chisos Basin area be closed?

Work is scheduled to begin May, 2025 and continue for approximately 2 years. As major components are completed, park managers will assess which areas may be safely reopened to regular public access.

### Will I be able to drive to the Chisos Basin?

No, when construction begins, the Chisos Basin Road will be closed at the bottom of the hill. There will be no visitor access to the Chisos Basin developed area. This includes the store, restaurant, lodge, visitor center, and campground.

### Will I still be able to hike trails in the Chisos Mountains?

When construction begins, the road to the Chisos Basin will be closed. Trails that begin in the Chisos Basin will not be accessible (including the Lost Mine Trail and Window Trail). High Chisos Trails will still be accessible from trails that originate outside the Chisos Basin (Juniper Canyon Trail or Blue Creek Trail). This adds considerable distance and elevation to any hike into the high Chisos areas.

### Will I be able to overnight backpack in the Chisos Mountains?

Yes. The high Chisos area trails (South Rim, East Rim, Colima, Boot Canyon) and their designated campsites will be accessible from trails that originate outside the Chisos Basin (Blue Creek Trail or Juniper Canyon Trail). A backcountry permit is required.

### When the restaurant is closed, where can I eat?

The camper stores at Panther Junction, Rio Grande Village, and Castolon offer limited food, snacks, and drinks. The park concessioner, Aramark is exploring options for food trucks at Panther Junction & Rio Grande Village. There are restaurants and a small grocery store in nearby Terlingua/Study Butte.

### Where can I stay when the Chisos Basin area is closed?

The NPS operates developed campgrounds at Rio Grande Village and Cottonwood Campgrounds. There is also an RV Park operated by Aramark in Rio Grande Village. Remote backcountry camping is an option as is lodging and camping available in nearby gateway communities such as Terlingua, Study Butte, Lajitas, Alpine and Marathon.

### When the Chisos Basin is closed, what else can I do?

There are almost limitless opportunities. Big Bend National Park remains open year-round 24/7. Visitors come from around the world for desert exploration, camping, scenic drives, hiking, backpacking, birdwatching, river trips, visiting Boquillas, Mexico, and enjoying the beauty and history of West Texas.

### Where can I find the most up-to-date information on the construction projects?

Regular updates, FAQ, artist renderings, construction photos, and the latest status on visitor access and services in the Chisos Basin will be posted on Big Bend National Park social media, and at:

<https://www.nps.gov/bibe/planyourvisit/chisos-basin-access>.







# Nonprofit Partners

## Big Bend Conservancy

Committed to supporting and preserving Big Bend National Park and the Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River.

Since its inception in 1996, Big Bend Conservancy (BBC) has raised over \$5 million for projects and programs at Big Bend National Park. Focused on ensuring conservation while providing support for exceptional visitor experiences, BBC is focused on a variety of projects, from preservation of historic architecture, provision of supplies for the park's Search and Rescue team, supporting Big Bend's efforts in sustainability, and everything in between.

In 2016, BBC funded the \$1.5 million Fossil Discovery Exhibit, showcasing Big Bend's incredible fossil landscape in an award-winning green building designed to complement its natural surroundings.

Recently, BBC has focused on acquiring over 3000 acres of land west of the park's boundary – a riparian habitat housing yellow-billed cuckoos, gray hawks, and an endangered silvery minnow. This acreage also includes historic ruins and heritage homesteads and is rich with significant fossil resources. BBC is working with

the US Congress to pass legislation to adjust the boundary of Big Bend National Park, ensuring this beautiful landscape is conserved for generations to come.

Thanks to a partnership with National Park Foundation, Subaru of America, and the National Park Conservation Association, BBC helps champion the park's improvements in sustainability – upgrading on-site recycling efforts and landfill offset.

Do your part to keep our park pristine by utilizing the park-wide recycling bins and packing out your landfill trash when you can!

### Join Us!

Interested in making a positive impact at your favorite park? Join BBC! To become involved with the Big Bend Conservancy, make a donation, contribute toward an honorarium bench, or learn more about events hosted by the Conservancy, visit [www.bigbendconservancy.org](http://www.bigbendconservancy.org), email [director@bigbendconservancy.org](mailto:director@bigbendconservancy.org), or call 512.529.1149



Terlingua Creek badlands—part of the over 3,000 acres bordering the park's western boundary that was recently purchased by the Big Bend Conservancy. With approval from Congress, this land will become part of Big Bend National Park.



Display your Big Bend pride with a license plate from the Big Bend Conservancy!

## Big Bend Natural History Association

Looking forward to a future of growth and possibilities.

It's been a busy year around Big Bend with growing visitation and multiple upcoming park projects. Big Bend Natural History Association isn't getting left out of the excitement either! While we've continued our focus on supporting the national park through the sales of books and educational materials, we are also exploring new avenues to engage with park visitors to continue our mission.

BBNHA has assisted with the funding of several projects and programs within Big Bend National Park. New trail signage,

publishing of the *Paisano* newspaper, food for the Volunteers-In-Parks events, and special visitor programs are just some of the ways we have supported the National Park this past year.

One of our favorite programs is the Junior Ranger program. There is nothing more rewarding than watching the joy of young visitors as they excitedly share what they've learned about Big Bend with the park's interpretive rangers. It truly is the core of our mission to support education and appreciation of Big Bend National Park; who

better to do that with than future generations of National Park supporters? It has been our pleasure to fund a major revision of the Junior Ranger activity booklet this year as well as the pencils and badges that are handed out to kids of all ages.

As we look forward to the upcoming year, we are excited to continue working hard to aid Big Bend National Park in new ways. Some of our organization's current goals include new bookstore offerings, revamping our website to be more modern and mobile device friendly, and focusing on building relationships with current members as well as reaching a new audience. You can also look for us on our Facebook and Instagram pages where we will be sharing new bookstore items as well as information about upcoming events such as the return of our Pioneer Reunion, park staff profiles, and more about our growing membership program.

Members are the backbone of our organization, and your support is key to allowing us to continue assisting the park service with important programs. Being a member not only means providing financial support to our beloved park, but it also means benefits for our members. When new members join the Big Bend Natural History Association, they not only receive a 10% discount at our bookstores and webstore, but they receive similar discounts at more than 400 cooperating non-profit organizations at national parks across the United States.

We invite you to become a member of the Big Bend Natural History Association in any of our bookstores or online at [www.bbnha.org](http://www.bbnha.org). With your help, we can continue our mission to educate the public to a better understanding and appreciation of the Big Bend area and what it represents in terms of our historical and natural heritage.



The Big Bend Natural History Association supports the park in many ways: paying for signage, hosting programs and meetings, as well as supporting our Junior Ranger and Artist in the Park programs.



**BBNHA members receive a 10% discount on bookstore and online purchases.**

*Your membership also qualifies you for discounts at over 400 nonprofit stores on public lands throughout the nation.*

For a complete listing of participating organizations, visit: [www.publiclandsalliance.org](http://www.publiclandsalliance.org)







# Camping in the Park

## Developed Campgrounds

Campgrounds include amenities such as flush or vault toilets, running water, grills, picnic tables, animal-proof storage boxes, and hosts on duty.

### Chisos Basin

The Chisos Basin Campground is surrounded by tall, rocky cliffs and is conveniently located near some of the park's most spectacular and popular trails.

Due to the terrain, campsite size, and road access, this campground is not suitable for trailers over 20 feet and RVs over 24 feet. No hook-ups available.

**Open:** Year-round

**Getting a Site:** Campsites are available by reservation only. Two-thirds of the sites are reservable 6 months in advance; 1/3 are reservable 14 days in advance.

**Group Camping:** Seven tent-only group campsites are available for groups of at least 9 and up to 20 people. Group sites are by reservation only and cost \$40 to \$60 nightly.

**Make a Reservation:** [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov) or 877-444-6777

### Cottonwood

Cottonwood Campground is a quiet, shady desert oasis located between Castolon Historic District and Santa Elena Canyon. A picnic area under the shade of mesquite trees is available for day use.

There are no hookups, no dump station, and generator use is not permitted.

**Open:** November 1 through April 30.

**Getting a Site:** Campsites are available by reservation only. Reservations can be made up to 14 days in advance.

**Group Camping:** One group campsite is available for 9 to 25 people. The site is a tent-only, walk-in campsite. The group site is available by reservation only and costs \$60 nightly.

**Make a Reservation:** [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov) or 877-444-6777

### Rio Grande Village

The largest campground in Big Bend; it can accommodate large RVs or trailers. There are no hookups, but generators can be used in some sites during designated hours.

A dump station is nearby. Coin-operated showers and laundry are located at the RGV store.

**Open:** Year-round although limited in the summer (May through October).

**Getting a Site:** Sites are by reservation only. Two-thirds of the sites are reservable 6 months in advance; 1/3 are reservable 14 days in advance.

**Group Camping:** Four tent-only group campsites are available for groups of 9 to 40 people. The group sites are available by reservation only and cost \$60 to \$100 nightly.

**Make a Reservation:** [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov) or 877-444-6777.

### Rio Grande Village RV

A privately-run campground operated by Aramark. This campground has the only full hook-ups in the park. The campground is an open, paved lot with grassy, tree-lined edges. Located adjacent to the camp store.

Twenty-five sites, most with full hook-ups including water, electrical, and sewage. Nearby amenities include coin-operated showers and laundry (call for availability). Free, public WIFI at the RGV campstore. WIFI does not reach any campsites.

**Open:** Year-round

**Make a Reservation:** Call 855-765-1324 to make reservations before coming to the park.

Developed Campgrounds at a Glance						
	Elevation (ft/meters)	Sites	Nightly Fee	Facilities	Reservations	Comments
Chisos Basin	5,401/1,646	60	\$16.00*	Flush toilets, dump station	<a href="http://www.recreation.gov">www.recreation.gov</a>	Sites are not level; only some have shade.
Cottonwood	2,169/661	30	\$16.00*	Vault toilets, no generator use allowed	<a href="http://www.recreation.gov">www.recreation.gov</a>	In a cottonwood grove along the river. Partial shade.
Rio Grande Village	1,850/564	100	\$16.00*	Flush toilets, dump station	<a href="http://www.recreation.gov">www.recreation.gov</a>	Great birding area, near RGV Nature Trail.
Rio Grande Village RV	1,850/564	25	\$42.00 and up	Privately operated, full hook-ups	855-765-1324	Only place in park with full hook-ups, check-in at the RGV store.
			* \$8.00 with an Interagency Senior or Access Pass	Observe posted campground quiet hours.		

## Backcountry Permits



Camper enjoying a backcountry campsite.

### How to Obtain a Permit:

Permits are required for any overnight backcountry camping, river use, or stock use, and can be obtained from the Panther Junction and Chisos Basin visitor centers.

Some sites are available for reservations six months in advance on [Recreation.gov](http://Recreation.gov) or by phone at 877-444-6777. Check our website at [www.nps.gov/bibe](http://www.nps.gov/bibe) for more information.

- Permits can be written for up to fourteen consecutive nights from the first day of backcountry use.
- Backcountry use is subject to rules and regulations regarding sanitation and minimal impact practices that must be agreed to in order to obtain a permit.

## Backcountry Camping and River Use

If you're after solitude, dark skies, or a river trip, consider backcountry camping.

### Primitive Roadside Sites

All roadside campsites are along unpaved roads, and as a general rule are not designed for large RVs or trailers. Some centrally located sites are accessible to most vehicles; however, a high-clearance and/or 4-wheel-drive vehicle is necessary to reach those along the primitive dirt roads.

Sites are \$10/night. Some sites can be reserved online at [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov) up to six months in advance. Permits for all other sites are written on a first-come, first-served basis at Panther Junction Visitor Center.

Sites offer a cleared gravel pad to park your vehicle and set up a tent. The only amenity at a backcountry campsite is a large animal-proof box to store food and other items. Please plan to bring everything you need, including water, shade, chairs, and a trowel to bury human waste. Pack toilet paper out as trash—do not burn or bury it. Better yet, bring a self-contained, portable camp toilet.

Please remember, campfires (all wood fires or ground fires) are strictly prohibited. Use cook stoves with caution. Generators are not allowed in backcountry areas, and pets must be kept on a leash within the boundaries of the campsite.

### Backpacking

Do you dream of carrying everything with you as you hike to a beautiful campsite? Big Bend National Park has over 200 miles of trails in the Chisos Mountains and the lower desert with numerous options for multi-day backpacking trips.

**Chisos Mountains:** Forty-one campsites—ranging from 1 to 8 miles from the trailhead—dot the high Chisos Mountains. These sites help reduce impact and damage to this delicate environment.

Sites include a cleared area for a tent as well as a bear-proof storage box. It's important to use this box to store all scented items when camping. There are several composting toilets in the Chisos backcountry.

Most sites are reservable up to six months in advance on [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov). A few sites are available on a first-come, first-served basis at Panther Junction Visitor Center.

**Desert Backpacking:** Experienced hikers wanting to camp in the park's open desert areas can obtain a camping permit (\$10/night) from the Panther Junction Visitor Center the day before, or the day of, your first night in the backcountry.

### River Use & Stock Permits

**River Use Permits:** Permits are required for anyone using canoes, kayaks, rafts, or other watercraft on the Rio Grande. Day-use permits are free. Permits for overnight use are \$10/night and can be written up to 7 days in advance.

To obtain a permit, you must have a Coast Guard-approved lifejacket for each person, an extra lifejacket, and an extra paddle. If going on an overnight trip, you will also need a fire pan and a system for removing human waste. Check the park's website or talk to a ranger for additional gear requirements.

**Horse/Stock Permits:** You must have a stock permit if you wish to ride your horse in the park. All gravel roads are open to riders. Horses are not permitted on paved roads or the shoulders of paved roads. Horse use in the Chisos Mountains is limited to Laguna Meadow, South Rim to the Boot Canyon Trail junction, and Blue Creek trails.

Grazing is not allowed in the park. Stock must not roam free; hobble or tie them. Check the park website for more information about stock use in the park.



# Keep Wildlife Wild



## Black Bears

The return of black bears to Big Bend is a success story for both bears and the park. Originally native to the Chisos Mountains, bears disappeared from this area by the 1940s, in part, due to predator control agents.

Nearly fifty years later, in the 1980s, bears returned from Mexico—crossing the river and the harsh desert to start breeding in the Chisos Mountains. Today, wildlife biologists estimate that there are around 20 to 30 black bears in the park.

A black bear's normal diet consists largely of nuts, fruits, sotol, and yucca hearts. They will also eat small mammals, reptiles, and carrion. Bears normally avoid humans but can become aggressive if they learn to take food from human sources.

Each campsite has bear-proof storage lockers for storing edibles. Hard-sided vehicles are also suitable for storing food and things that smell. Help us keep bears healthy and wild!



## Mountain Lions

Solitary and secretive, the mountain lion is Big Bend's top predator and is vital in maintaining the park's biological diversity. Mountain lions live throughout the park—from mountain to desert. Biologists estimate a stable population of about two dozen lions.

Everywhere in Big Bend, you are in the territory of at least one mountain lion. Within their territories, mountain lions help keep both deer and javelina populations within the limits of their food resources.

Each year, visitors report around 130 mountain lion sightings in Big Bend National Park. Over half are seen along roadways but encounters also occur on trails.

To protect yourself (and the mountain lions), be aware of your surroundings and avoid hiking alone or at dusk and dawn. Watch your children closely. Never let them run ahead of you as they may look like prey to a hungry mountain lion.



## Javelina

Also known as collared peccaries, javelinas (pronounced hav-uh-LEE-nuhs) are only found in the U.S. in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona.

They are covered with black, bristly hairs and weigh between 40 to 60 lbs. They usually travel in bands that consist of 10 to 25 individuals. Javelinas have a highly developed sense of smell but poor vision.

Physically, they resemble pigs, but are not closely related. Javelinas eat prickly pear

cactus, grasses, mesquite beans, piñon nuts, fruits, berries, and seeds.

Every year, campers report campsites being raided by javelinas. Although not normally aggressive, they can be when food is involved. Protect yourself and the javelina by storing all food inside a vehicle or in the food storage lockers provided at the campsites. Do not leave coolers or food boxes unattended at any time.



## Coyotes

Nothing in Big Bend speaks of wilderness more than the song of a coyote. Their vocalizations range from yips to mournful howls. Their narrow-set, yellow eyes and long snout may seem intimidating, but in general, coyotes do not bother humans.

Coyotes range over the entire United States. These highly adapted members of the canine family are omnivores, dining on small mammals, reptiles, and insects.

Coyotes will also eat berries and other vegetation when meat is unavailable. Carrion is an important food source in winter.

Coyotes are typically solitary but will hunt in small groups when individuals converge in areas where food is plentiful. They will work cooperatively, either chasing an animal in relays to tire it or waiting in ambush. Unlike wolves, coyotes do not form lasting packs.



## Rattlesnakes

Four species of rattlesnakes live in Big Bend National Park—the western diamondback, black-tailed, Mojave, and rock rattlesnakes.

This often-feared reptile is beneficial to the environment, eating mice, rats, and other small animals.

Perhaps surprising, rattlesnakes are not a top predator. They themselves are often a meal for roadrunners, skunks, coyotes, and even other snakes. The western coachwhip is a notorious rattlesnake predator.

The buzz of a rattlesnake is an unmistakable sound that will stop you in your tracks. Rattlesnakes use this warning when they perceive a threat. Continue toward them and you risk provoking a self-defense bite.

A few rattlesnake bites have occurred in Big Bend. If bitten, contact a ranger promptly, as permanent damage can occur within 12 hours of a bite. If possible, note which species bit you. This is important for treatment.



## Wild Animal Encounters

For many people, the chance to see a bear or mountain lion in the natural environment is an amazing opportunity.

However, one must always remember that we are entering their home, their territory. As such, we need to respect wildlife and know what to do if we encounter a wild predator:

- **Do not run** but back away to get out of range of the perceived threat.
- If you feel threatened, try to look large, wave your arms, throw rocks or sticks.
- If attacked, fight back.
- Watch children closely and never let them run ahead or lag behind.
- Report bear or mountain lion sightings or encounters to a park ranger as soon as possible.

To help preserve healthy environments for both visitors and predators, please remember:

- Never leave food or trash unattended, as bears and other wildlife easily develop a taste for human food.
- Never feed wildlife since no park animal is tame, and feeding leads to aggressive future behavior.
- Never approach wildlife and always keep a safe distance.

## Please Help

### At the Lodge

- Leave nothing outside your room, on the balcony, or on the porch.

### In Developed Campgrounds

- Store food, beverages, toiletries, pet food, and dishes in the bear-proof storage locker provided at your site.
- Keep your campsite clean. Take trash and food scraps to a dumpster.
- Dump liquids in restroom utility sinks, not on the ground.
- Ice chests and coolers are not bear-proof; store them in your vehicle.

### In the Backcountry

- Never leave packs or food unattended. Carry everything with you or store in a bear-proof locker.
- Avoid carrying smelly food and toiletries.
- Carry out all trash, including fruit peels, cigarette butts, and left-over food and cooking grease.

### Cyclists

- Use food storage lockers when provided.



## Services Inside the Park

### Emergency Call 911

#### National Park Service

General Information 432-477-2251

#### Big Bend Natural History Association

Booksales & Seminars 432-477-2236

#### Visitor Centers

Panther Junction (Hdqtrs) 432-477-1158  
 Chisos Basin 432-477-2264  
 Castolon 432-477-2666  
 Persimmon Gap 432-477-2393  
 Rio Grande Village 432-477-2271

#### U.S. Post Office

Panther Junction 325-244-2404

#### Lodging/Restaurant

Chisos Mountains Lodge 432-477-2291

#### Gas Stations

Panther Junction 432-477-2294  
 Rio Grande Village 432-477-2293

#### Camper Stores

Rio Grande Village 432-477-2293  
 Chisos Basin 432-477-2291  
 Castolon 432-477-2222

## Services Outside the Park

*These listings are not an endorsement by the National Park Service or Big Bend National Park, nor is this a comprehensive list.*

### GUIDES/OUTFITTERS

#### River Trips

Angell Expeditions 432-384-2008  
 Big Bend Boating & Hiking 469-607-9869  
 Big Bend River Tours 800-545-4240  
 Desert Sports 432-371-2727  
 Far Flung Outdoor Center 432-371-2633  
 Far West Texas Outfitters 432-229-2054  
 Go Big Bend 432-386-5635  
 Hidden Dagger Adventures 512-788-1707  
 WILD Adventure Outfitters 432-247-3262

#### Vehicle Tours

Angell Expeditions 432-384-2008  
 Big Bend Overland Tours- Big Bend Station 432-371-3382  
 Far Flung Outdoor Center 432-371-2633  
 Get Lost Tours 432-371-3301  
 Go Big Bend 432-386-5635  
 Hidden Dagger Adventures 512-788-1707  
 Lucky Sun Jeep Tours 817-965-6143  
 West Texas Adventure Co. 915-231-8526

#### Backpacking/Hiking

Angell Expeditions 432-384-2008  
 Big Bend Boating & Hiking 469-607-9869  
 Explore Big Bend 432-245-0072  
 Far West Texas Outfitters 432-229-2054  
 Get Lost Tours 432-371-3301  
 Hidden Dagger Adventures 512-788-1707  
 Lucky Sun Jeep Tours 817-965-6143  
 WILD Adventure Outfitters 432-247-3262

#### Bike/Mountain Biking

Angell Expeditions 432-384-2008  
 Desert Sports 432-371-2727

#### Horseback Riding

Big Bend Stables 800-887-4331  
 Lajitas Livery 800-887-4331

### GENERAL SERVICES

#### Convenience Stores/Gasoline

Big Bend Station 800-848-2363  
 Cottonwood General Store 432-371-3315  
 Stillwell Store & Station 432-376-2244

#### Medical Services

Terlingua Fire & EMS 911  
 Big Bend Medical Center 432-837-3447

#### Banks

West Texas National/ATM 432-371-2211



### Accessibility

All visitor centers are accessible, as are the Chisos Mountains Lodge restaurant and some motel rooms. The Window View Trail and the Rio Grande Village Nature Trail boardwalk are wheelchair accessible. ADA campsites are available by reservation.

### Entrance Fees (valid for 7 days)

- Private, non-commercial vehicle \$30
- Motorcycle \$25
- Individual entering without vehicle (bicyclist, etc.) \$15 per person
- Big Bend Annual Pass \$55

All Interagency passes are sold and accepted at Big Bend. Inquire at a visitor center or entrance station for more information.

### Visitor Centers

Panther Junction and Chisos Basin Visitor Centers are open year-round. Rio Grande Village, Persimmon Gap, and Castolon visitor centers are open November–April.

Passport stamps and Junior Ranger booklets are available at park visitor centers.

### Lodging

The Chisos Mountains Lodge, located in the Chisos Basin, includes 72 rooms, gift shop, restaurant, and camp store. For more information call 432-477-2291.

### Post Office

A full-service post office is located at Panther Junction, open M–F, 8:30am–11:00am and 12:00pm–3:00pm. A mail drop is also available at the Chisos Basin Store.

### Camp Stores & ATMs

Aramark operates stores at Castolon, Chisos Basin, Panther Junction, and Rio Grande Village. ATMs are available at the Chisos Basin store, Rio Grande Village store, and Panther Junction service station.

### Gas Stations

Gasoline and diesel are available at Panther Junction and Rio Grande Village service stations. Rio Grande Village offers propane refilling on weekdays only. Call 432-477-2293 for an appointment.

### Showers and Laundry

Coin-operated showers and laundry facilities are available at the Rio Grande Village Store and have 23-hour access (closed for 1 hour after store opens for cleaning). Out-of-park facilities are available in Study Butte.

### Phones

Cell phone service is available in the Chisos Basin and Panther Junction but is sporadic. A public pay phone is located outside the Chisos Mountains Lodge. There is no cell phone coverage at Rio Grande Village.

### Wi-Fi/Internet

Free wireless internet is available at the Panther Junction and Chisos Basin visitor centers, the Chisos Mountains Lodge, and the Rio Grande Village Camp Store.

### Recycling

Recycling bins are provided in campgrounds and near stores and visitor centers. Please help us divert trash from our landfill by recycling!

### Camp Rules

- Visitors can stay in the park up to 14 consecutive nights.
- Each site has people, tent, and vehicle limits. Make sure your group fits.
- If in a campground, do not leave your site unoccupied. If leaving for the day, leave something in your site so we know you plan to return.
- Generators are only permitted in specific campground sites for specific, limited hours. Do not ever use generators in backcountry sites.

### Fires Prohibited

Ground fires and wood fires are prohibited throughout the park. Gas stoves and charcoal contained in a grill may be used in campgrounds and designated roadside campsites only. **Do not smoke on trails.** Smoking is allowed in paved areas, campsites without vegetation, and park roads.

Can't find what you're looking for? The website has the answer: [www.nps.gov/bibe](http://www.nps.gov/bibe)

## Volunteers Make the Difference

Big Bend National Park depends on dedicated volunteers to perform many duties throughout the year. Are you ready to volunteer?

Don and Karen Richardson are on their 10th year of volunteering at Big Bend National Park but have been visiting all the way back to childhood. They first came to Big Bend as a couple in 2013 with plans to stay 2 days, but quickly realized they needed more time. They decided to fill out a volunteer application and became campground hosts at Rio Grande Village in 2014.

They have also volunteered up in the Chisos Basin Campground and Visitor Center. But their favorite volunteer position is their current one: Backcountry Patrol.

“Our job is to drive River Road, Glen Springs (including Pine Canyon and Juniper Canyon), Old Ore, and two of the paved roads,” says Karen. “We check and clean the backcountry campsites, check permits, and give directions or help as needed to our visitors. We love the 4-wheel drive roads because no matter how many times we drive them, they never get old. We see them in different seasons, at different times, and in different weather conditions. Along the way we talk with people from all over the world and have seen acquaintances become lifelong friends.”

“There really are no words to express our wonder and awe at this place called Big Bend. It’s why we keep coming back. And our first view of the Carmen’s, dressed in red at sunset, welcomes us home each year.”



### How Can YOU Get Involved?

Are you interested in volunteering at Big Bend National Park? Here are some things to keep in mind before submitting an application:

**Time Commitment:** Volunteers should be able to stay for at least 3 to 6 months.

**Housing:** Volunteers need to bring an RV or trailer. The park will provide an RV site, electricity, water, and reimburse propane expenses.

**Work Schedule:** Volunteers work 32 hours per week and may work weekends and holidays.

**Interested?** Most volunteer positions include training, references, and an extensive background check.

For current volunteer opportunities, check [www.volunteer.gov](http://www.volunteer.gov) or call 432-477-1195.