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EL SOLITARIO

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

BIKE FRESNO CANYON



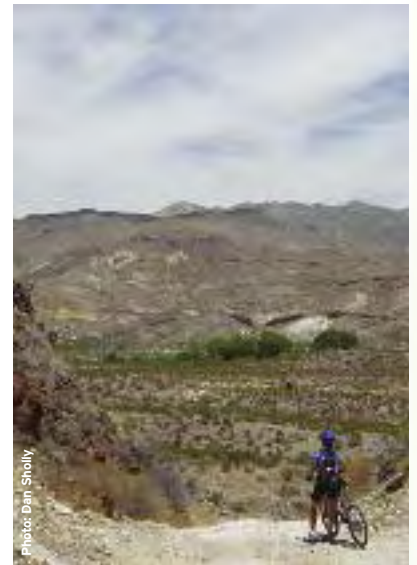
By Karen Hoffman Blizzard

Whether you're an advanced mountain biker or a physically fit novice, awesome new backcountry adventures await you in Big Bend Ranch State Park's remote Fresno Canyon! This section of the park was opened in 2009 thanks to TPWD's purchase of the Fresno Ranch inholdings with the help of The Nature Conservancy.

Depending on how much time you have, you can spend several days biking the park and use Fresno Canyon as a natural north-south corridor to connect with the Rancherias, Solitario, Contrabando and Oso Loop trails. The park's reservation system makes it easy to plan multi-day trips because you can reserve specific campsites and lodging in advance.



Top: Dan Sholly and Karen Blizzard biking through BBRSP.
Bottom: Los Portales, a cavelike eye on the flatirons of the Solitario.



View from the crest of the road leading out of Fresno Canyon

A 54-mile, two-day trip from the East Contrabando Trailhead to Saucedo and back offers a taste of Fresno Canyon and the park's incredible backcountry terrain. The old 4X4 Jeep roads, single-track spur trails, stunning scenery and cultural treasures make for great biking adventures. SAG support is highly recommended since the wayfinding signage is incomplete, and it's difficult to carry all the water needed to bike the 27 miles of rugged terrain each day.

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Bike Fresno Canyon (continued)

DAY
1

East Contrabando Trailhead to Saucedá (27 miles)

Get an early start since you'll be riding all day! You can obtain a park permit and safety information at the Barton Warnock Visitor's Center (they open at 8:00 a.m.), located at the southeast corner of the park on FM 170, about a mile from Lajitas. Then, cross the road to the small parking lot at the East Contrabando Trailhead, where you'll begin and end your ride.

The first few miles are smooth as you ride toward Fresno Canyon, into a majestic world of mountains, arroyos and springs. My biking partner, TPWD State Parks Deputy Director Dan Sholly, offered some sage advice early on, which I didn't always heed but should have: "Start slow, and taper off!" As I found out, it's super-easy to get overheated biking in the desert.

Eight miles from the trailhead, you'll move into lower Fresno Canyon with its cultural reminders of the Native Americans, explorers, ranchers and miners who came before. Along the way are junctures with historic roads that TPWD planners are retracing and converting to multiuse trails. To the right is the now-defunct Whit-Roy cinnabar mine, where you can explore the ruins and peer down the old mine shaft.

At 10.6 miles the sheltering cottonwoods of "Fresno Falls" beckon at a beautiful oasis near the convergence of Fresno Creek with Arroyo Primero. Here, the pebbly creekbed gives way to smooth, water-worn rock etched deeply by the creek. Rock shelters and bedrock mortar sites indicate

this was once a gathering place for Native Americans. Two miles further is the historic Crawford-Smith Ranch site. Motorized vehicle access from Barton Warnock Center to Crawford Smith Ranch is not permitted. SAG drivers can only reach the site by traveling state highway 170 to the west and then entering the park from the Presidio side. A 4X4 is required to get to Crawford Smith from the upper reaches of Fresno Canyon.

In upper Fresno Canyon you'll encounter some serious hills. Jutting upward to the northeast lie the brooding flatirons of El Solitario (see p. 12). Los Portales, a cavelike "eye" in the side of a flatiron, will stare you down as you bike past the west side of the Solitario rim. Check out the nearby Native American rock shelter site, "Manos Arriba" (Hands Up), with its pictographs of upward-turned handprints on the ceiling.



Photo: Karen Blizzard

Next, it's the three-mile Fresno Hill "mountain stage." Hang in there; it's worth the climb! At the top, you can speed along the last few miles to Saucedá, to settle in for the evening at the Big House and enjoy its large kitchen, dining area and screened-in porch. The Saucedá bunkhouse is a nice option if traveling with a large group.

DAY
2

Saucedá to East Contrabando Trailhead (27 miles)

Bike south out of Saucedá along Madrid Road for about six miles, and then begin a rocky descent down the back side of Madrid Hill. At about 13.8 miles is Madrid House, named for rancher Andres Madrid, who settled the area in the mid-19th century. There is a sensitive raptor nesting area nearby, which may be closed off during spring nesting seasons. It's always advisable to inquire about park closures before planning a visit.

Continue through Arroyo Primero, rejoining the trail to meet Fresno Falls and head south through Fresno Canyon. For the rest of the afternoon, retrace your path through Lower Fresno Canyon, past the mine, onto the main trail leading back to the trailhead where you started the ride.

The last eight miles are a tempting stretch of trail, but don't go too fast if it's a hot day! I made that mistake in 110 degrees, and quickly felt as if I were melting in a convection oven. When you get back to the trailhead, take some time to relax in the air-conditioning at the Barton Warnock Center and browse the book store. Chances are, you'll feel exhausted, yet fully awake. Big Bend Ranch State Park has that effect: it's unforgiving ... and unforgettable.



Photo: Karen Blizzard

Welcome to Big Bend Ranch State Park



By Rod Trevizo, Superintendent

Welcome! Thanks to the Texas Nature Conservancy and the estate of Jeanne Norsworthy, Fresno Ranch—7,000 acres of wild canyons, springs, vistas, wildlife, historical roads and additional Rio Grande frontage—now belongs to the park and to the people of Texas.

In addition to the Fresno Ranch Headquarters, the acquisition includes lower Fresno Canyon and its tributaries, with rich riparian and wetland resources, contrasting geological features and breathtaking vistas.

Fresno Canyon is open for hiking, horseback riding and mountain biking. Access requires a backcountry permit for overnight use, obtained from the Barton Warnock Center, Fort Leaton State Historical Site or the Saucedá Ranger Station. The simplest way into the area begins at the West Contrabando Trailhead and Kiosk. Trail signs will lead you into Fresno Canyon and the adjacent Contrabando Dome Trail.

Please look through this issue of *El Solitario* and check out what else is new!

IF YOU GO

Water requirements: 200 - 220 ounces of water per day while riding (the equivalent of two large Camelbacks)

Plan ahead of time: Advance planning is critical. Obtain maps and study them before going. Get your bike and gear together, arrange for guide services and SAG support, and be sure you have containers large enough to carry sufficient water. Hard-soled shoes are recommended for

walking in rocky arroyos and creekbeds. A GPS unit is helpful. **ALWAYS CARRY TWO SPARES.**

Access: Obtain a park permit from the Barton Warnock Visitor's Center in Lajitas (432-424-3327); Fort Leaton State Historic Site in Presidio (432-229-3613); or Saucedá Ranger Station inside the park (432-358-4444). Hours are 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. every day. Allow time for a mandatory orientation session (about 15 minutes). There are minimal day-use and camping fees.

Maps and trail guides: Visit the TPWD Web site (www.tpwd.state.tx.us) before going. A limited supply may be available at the park. Other online map sources include Google Earth, USGS (www.usgs.gov) and TNRIS maps (www.tnr.is.state.tx.us).

Commercial outfitters: Terlingua-based Desert Sports (432-371-2489) is the nearest outfitter and guide service. SAG and guide support are highly recommended for multi-day trips through the park. Bikes are available for rent at commercial outfitters and at the park.

Park lodging: Campsites available by advance reservation. Find campsite descriptions, photos and GPS coordinates at www.tpwd.state.tx.us/bigbendbranch. The Big House and bunkhouse at Saucedá are available by advance reservation (432-358-4444).

Lodging outside the park: Lajitas Resort and Spa (www.lajitas.com) offers 103 rooms, a restaurant, spa and pool. Chinati Hot Springs (www.chinatihot springs.com) offers sustainably designed cabins, a community kitchen, a "cool pool," and hot-spring pools.

Be Aware: For your safety and welfare

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

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

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

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

Keep children and pets under your control at all times.

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

Enjoy the outdoors with others, not alone.

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



Photo: Earl Nottingham

Western Diamondback rattlesnake

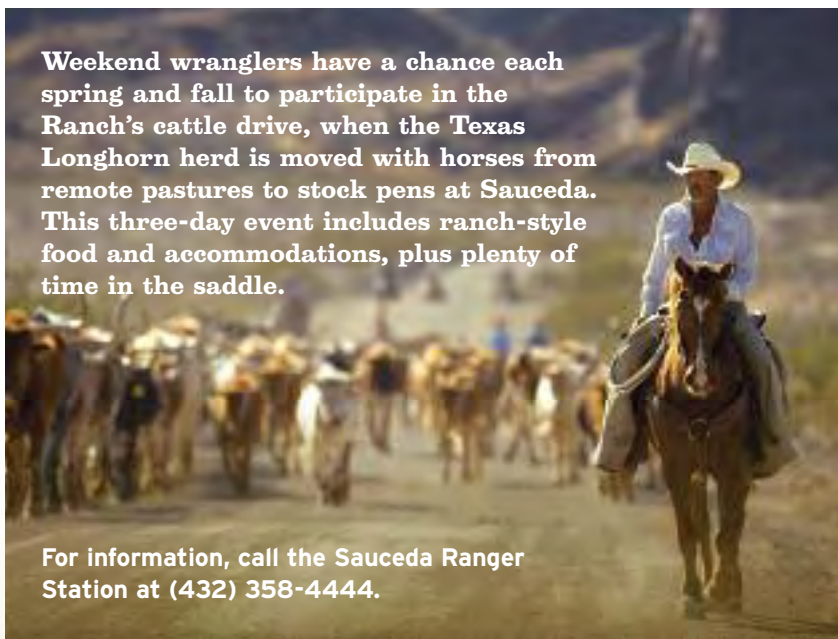


In the unlikely event that a snake bite occurs:

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

Head 'em up, move 'em out!

Weekend wranglers have a chance each spring and fall to participate in the Ranch's cattle drive, when the Texas Longhorn herd is moved with horses from remote pastures to stock pens at Saucedá. This three-day event includes ranch-style food and accommodations, plus plenty of time in the saddle.



For information, call the Saucedá Ranger Station at (432) 358-4444.



Bundy Phillips biking the Horsetrap Trail

The following is excerpted from Bundy Phillips' notes of his near-disaster in a Big Bend Ranch torrential rain and lightening storm. Bundy would say, "It's only an adventure if you survive it" — and fortunately he did. Phillips is a seasoned National Park Service ranger, now retired, with decades of backcountry biking, hiking and camping experience. His story details what can happen to even the most experienced mountain bikers in a wild place like Big Bend Ranch.

"This morning, May 22, weather pretty nice and not threatening, puffy clouds, little thunderhead buildup. Biked down toward the Las Burras Trailhead. West of Las Burras saw big, black and down funnel of rain over Presidio. The puffy clouds rapidly became black clouds, accompanied by approaching thunder and lightning. By then I was down by Las Burras Trailhead. I turned tail and headed back. Lightning and thunder popping all around the nearby peaks, very close by and over Bofecillos Mountain. Rain began ... drip, drip, drip, drip. Then I was suddenly surrounded by dozens of lightning strikes, very close.

Lightning, then immediate thunder. This storm was right on top of me. I hunkered down behind the Nopalera Trailhead concrete water trough. I left my bike in the middle of the road; no need to lie down next to a metal bike frame turned lightning rod. At first it did not seem too dangerous. Began thinking: please stop, give me a break. Very hard rain and wind, luckily no hail. I'm lying face down behind the concrete trough; water is rushing into my mouth and I'm lying in several inches of a fast-moving runoff. I'm drifting off thinking that maybe they'll find my dead carcass tomorrow, or maybe the next day. I always carry my driver's license for identification ... maybe this time it will be put to good use.

Had to get up and move; I'm getting cold. There is absolutely no place to get out of the weather,

BUNDY PHILLIPS' LAS BURRAS BICYCLE ADVENTURE

except maybe behind a creosote bush. Ha, I laugh to myself. The Nopalera Road had a foot of water, almost covering my bike. Impossible to ride in a foot of water; began pushing bike in moderate rain back up the road toward the truck. Rain is moderate. Finally, I can ride a bit. Stumble through mud, sand and rocks, mostly covered with runoff. Feels good to get back on; riding helps the circulation and I feel warmer ... but not much. All washes that cross the road are filled, most with a foot of water, some with more.

I can't believe the amount of water — it is unbelievable — and I think about the campers that checked in today, whether the roads they drove over are now flooding. I am closer to getting out ... maybe. I really don't believe that, either — crossed several washes flowing knee-deep that nearly snatched my bike out of my hands. The last few washes are flooding, so I take to the Longhorn cattle trails.

The truck! Wow, I made it back. Can't feel my fingers ... get out of wet clothes and into something dry. The storm is passing; it is beautiful now. Head back to Saucedá in 4WD through major rocks — sand and mud over the road — some flowing water up to the running boards. Crossed Levyá close to the Big House at Saucedá; looks like water was 5 to 6 feet deep. But I've made it. Lived to see another glorious day at Big Bend Ranch."



BUNDY'S TAKE - HOME MESSAGES:

1. Learn about Big Bend weather, particularly rain storms and flash floods. Ask for and follow the advice of locals;
2. Tell someone where you're going and when you'll be back;
3. Maintain your bike and take proper repair supplies;
4. Have a backup plan if the weather turns bad;
5. Try not to do anything dangerous like wading across flooding washes and creekbeds.

FEATURED TRAILS

Encino Hiking and Biking Trail



A group of middle- and high-school students meander through low hills, ocotillo forests and along ancient streambeds on the Encino Loop Trail.

The Encino Loop Trail, located in the interior of Big Bend Ranch State Park, follows an old jeep trail nearly nine miles through a remote portion of the Encino Pasture. This wide, easy-to-follow trail offers opportunities for hiking and mountain biking, birding and photography. An easy hike and a moderately strenuous mountain-biking experience, the trail offers great views of ancient lava domes, rugged mesas and colorful desert vegetation.

During the spring and early summer, look for the desert wildflowers that decorate the harsh landscape. Be alert for javelinas rooting through the lechuguilla as you listen to the songs of Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Verdin and Black-throated Sparrow. Pay close attention to the animal tracks that appear in sandy arroyo bottoms and you just might see a coyote ambling away.

The trail loop begins 1.5 miles east of the Saucedo Visitor Center at the junction of Camino a la Saucedo and La Mota Road, just past the cattle guard. The first mile of the trail follows La Mota Road, so watch carefully for vehicles. Views include the shallow hills of Leyva Canyon to the west, La Mota Mountain to the north, Fresno Peak to the east and several volcanic domes to the south. At 1.01 miles the trail leaves the road and veers to the northeast.

At two miles the trail enters hilly terrain where canyons dissect the landscape. Look for severely distorted and twisted rock outcrops — evidence of the geologic forces that have long

shaped the region. At 3.0 to 3.5 miles you will pass acres of ocotillo, a hardy plant also known as desert candle.

Papalote Encino (Encino Windmill), the largest windmill at Big Bend Ranch, comes into view at the four-mile mark. Relics from decades of ranching activities litter the ground, particularly those associated with people's attempts to harness water in the desert.

Between 4.2 and 5.0 miles the trail veers to the right and follows the main ranch road. Watch for vehicles. At 5.1 miles, enjoy an excellent view of La Posta Mountain with Fresno Peak set as a lofty backdrop. At 5.3 miles, the Encino trail leaves the road once again and continues to the right. Ahead lies a commanding view of the Llano, a slightly depressed plain that recharges the underground water supply during the rainy season. Travel along this route is fairly easy — mostly level with a slight downhill dip.

Between 6.1 and 7.5 miles the trail continues through a series of arroyos and gullies. In one of the bigger arroyos, watch for a large cluster of quartz crystals that resembles a mound of ice cubes. At 6.8 miles the country begins to open back up, and at 7.5 miles the trail changes direction to the northeast. Be careful in these areas; many arroyos are covered with loose sand and gravel.

At 8.8 miles the route intersects with La Mota Road. Turn to the left and return to the beginning of the trailhead.

MOUNTAIN BIKING

Contrabando multi-use and Horsetrap bike-and-hike

Contrabando Multi-Use Trail

25 miles

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



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

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 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 sotol, an alcoholic beverage, out of Mexico to the U.S. border, where it was delivered to bootleggers.

Horsetrap Bike-and-Hike Trail

5 miles

is easily accessible from Saucedo. Hikers will find the trail an easy five-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.



Backcountry Zone Camping



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

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

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

BIG BEND RANCH STATE PARK

FEES AND VISITOR SERVICES

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

Standard Vehicle
Campsite:
\$8 per site/day

Backcountry
Zone Camping:
\$5 per night/site

Horses:
\$2 per day/horse

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

Lodging

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

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

Airstrip

Big Bend Ranch
paved airstrip 3TE3

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

Elevation: 4240 feet
Length: 5500 feet

BBRSP's new Friends Group Compadres del Rancho Grande!



The group's objective is to assist in meeting the needs of the BBRSP complex, including the Barton Warnock Environmental Center, Big Bend Ranch State Park, Fort Leaton, and Chinati State Natural Area, through your volunteer and financial support.

Please join us today as a member or volunteer! Donations and/or contact information can be sent to :

Compadres del Rancho Grande
P.O. Box 314
601 N. State Street
Fort Davis, Texas 79734



Photo: Fresno Canyon, E. Dan Klepper

Park Information and Permits

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

Sauceda Ranger Station
Park interior
(432) 358-4444

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

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

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

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

Use Zones

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

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

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

Important: Orientation

Front Country Zone Day Use Only

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

Primitive Road or Backcountry Zone Day or Overnight Use

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

No gas, diesel or groceries available in park.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

Cell phone service in the park is unreliable and limited.

911 service is 2 to 3 hours away.

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

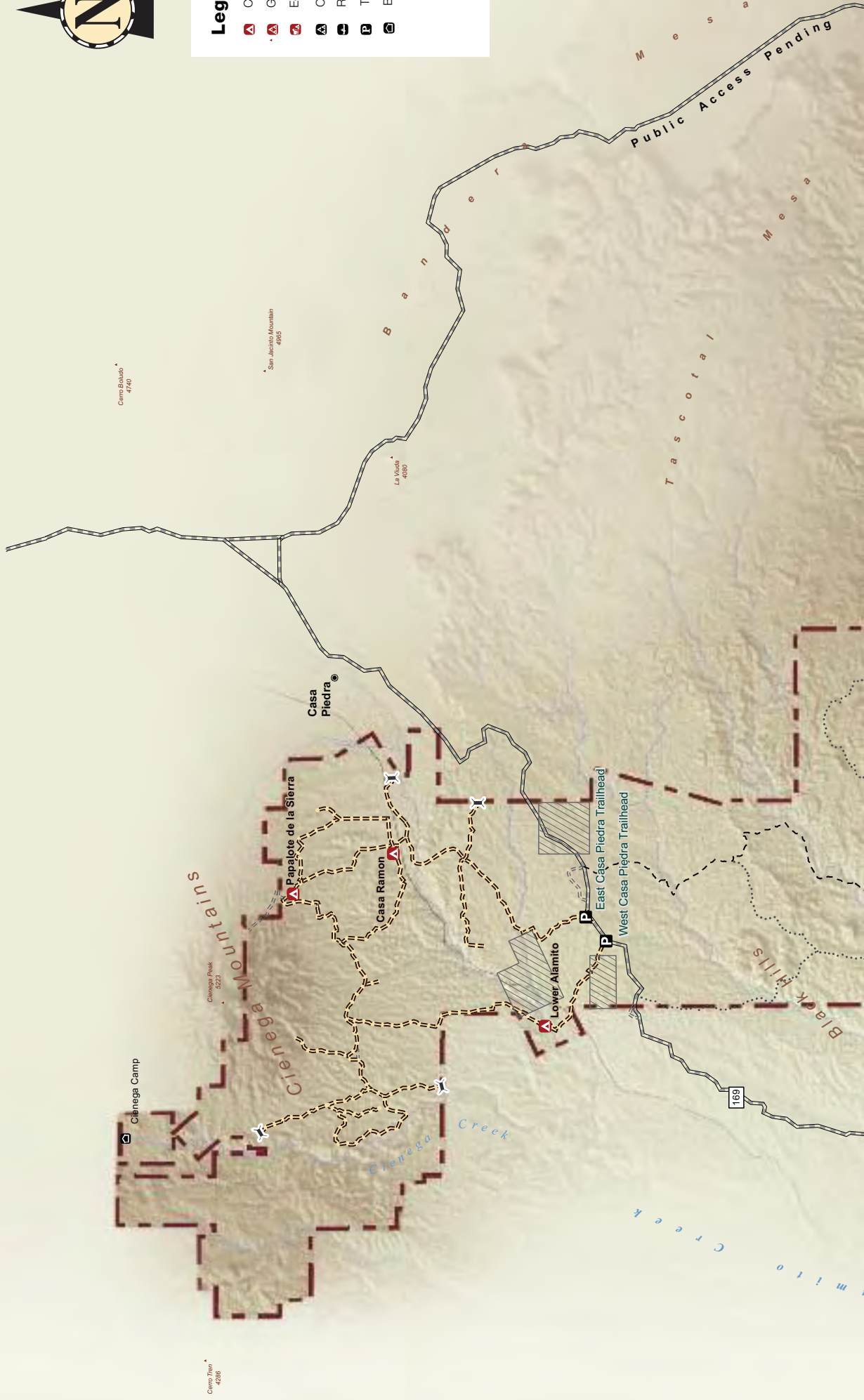


BIG BEND RANCH STATE PARK



Legend

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





Portal del Norte

Park Entrance
— Portal de Presidio

Ft. Leaton
4 miles

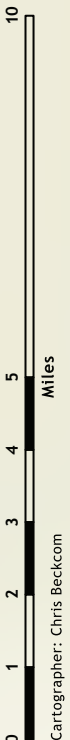
Redford

Lajitas

Disclaimer:

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

- Route or Road
- ▨ Private Property



Cartographer: Chris Beckcom

BIG BEND RANCH STATE PARK

ACCESS AND VISITOR SERVICES

Vehicle-Accessible Camping

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

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

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

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

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

Individual Campsites

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

Group Campsites

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

Equestrian Staging Campsites

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

Campsites at Campgrounds

- 3-vehicle limit

Pets

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



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

Know Your Vehicle

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

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

High clearance is considered a minimum of 8 inches.

Rules for the Road Less Traveled

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

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

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

Always carry an extra 5 gallons of water.

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

NOTE: A special-use permit is required for travel on all BBRSP roads 2WDHC and beyond.

Food and Lodging

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

Enjoy the Park (and Live to Tell About It)

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

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

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

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

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

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



Medical Services

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

Big Bend Student Art Goes International!

Artwork by 11 aspiring student artists from Presidio went on display last summer at the Saatchi Art Gallery in London, England. Presidio High School was chosen from over 1,500 schools worldwide in a competition overseen by the gallery. The artwork focused on the beauty of the Big Bend region, with particular emphasis on Big Bend Ranch State Park and Fort Leaton State Historic Site.



Presidio High School student artists at Fort Leaton State Historic Site. Front row: teacher Laurel Holman, Leo Sotelo, Adrian Madrid. Middle: Erik Zuniga, Genaro Galindo, Daisy Perez, Uriel Uranga, Mayra Moreno, Karime Baeza, Judith Pardo. Back: Zenia Sanchez, Alan Pando, Fernando Suarez.

Presidio High School art teacher Laurel Holman explained, “So often in my class the students want to paint beach scenes, cityscapes and snow-covered mountains, places that most of them have never seen or been to before. I tell them to paint what they know, to see their surroundings in a new and different way. So, this is what they did and with great success.”

A talented artist in her own right, Laurel learned about the Saatchi Gallery, which aims to provide a forum for largely unknown young international artists whose work has been rarely or never exhibited. She decided to enter her students’ work in the competition to share a little bit of Texas with the international community. “We are bringing Big Bend Ranch to the rest of the world!” she said.

Adrian Madrid, 11th grade
El Rancho Grande

“My inspiration is the lifestyle of the people around here. I paint what the people do and the West Texas landscape. I paint what I see and what I know.”

Daisy Perez, 10th grade
El Fortin at Sunset

“I was in a bad mood and I wanted to do something simple. When I finished with the fort, I felt a little better, but my mind was still cloudy ... so I drew the cloudy sky!”

Fernando Suarez, 9th grade
Becerroos

“My painting is of two baby longhorn calves (becerroos) that are out at the Big Bend Ranch. I chose this subject because it reminded me of my family and where I come from.”

Leo Sotelo, 11th grade
Texas Longhorn

“My inspiration came from my ranch in Mexico and also from the idea that this particular longhorn is still out at the Big Bend Ranch.”

Genaro Galindo, 9th grade
Playboy

“I was inspired because I love horses. This came from a photograph of a horse out at Big Bend Ranch that one of the vaqueros rides, which represents my Mexican culture.”

Karime Baeza, 11th grade
Chiles and Ajo

“I really did not know what to draw when we were given the assignment by Ms. Holman. I chose the red chiles because of my cultural influence.”

Uriel Uranga, 12th grade
Ocotillo Sunset

“Being that I am moving away soon to go to college, I will no longer have surroundings like the Big Bend. I wanted to preserve the memory of my roots.”



Know before you go

Multi-Use Trails

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

Biking

When biking, always wear a helmet and protective clothing. Carry plenty of water and two spare tires. Know your ability and limits. Bike rentals are available at Saucedo Ranger Station.

Horseback Riding

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

River Access

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

Outfitters

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

ROADS TO

A guide to “unmaintained” 4X4 high-clearance roads in Big Bend Ranch SP

“WE DON’T NEED NO STINKIN’ PAVEMENT.”

Anonymous (apologies to the screenwriters of “The Treasure of the Sierra Madre”)

By David Riskind and Dan Sholly

History – There have been trails and travel routes for people in the Big Bend for over 10,000 years. In early historic times Spanish explorers entered the region. The military scouted and blazed trails throughout the area, including the famous Echols’ Camel expedition that used Terneros Creek. Early traders first used wagons on the Chihuahua Trail, part of which traversed Alamito Creek, in what is now the northwestern area of Big Bend Ranch State Park (BBRSP). By the 1890s, ranching and mining had begun in earnest, and by the first decade of the 20th century the first motor vehicles began using the old wagon roads. Additional roads were established with the invention of the bulldozer and hardier 4X4 trucks. The roads which are now within BBRSP were constructed to support public commerce and settlement, fence building, waterline construction, livestock production, and for mineral prospecting and mining.

Today - When BBRSP was established in 1988 there were approximately 700 miles of these old “ranch and mining” roads within the park, and about 50 miles of the roads were kept opened to support public use. In 2008, the BBRSP Public Use Plan was approved. Today this



Photo: David Riskind



Photo: James King

plan allows for 153 miles of road to be used by park visitors. Of these, nearly 70 miles are unmaintained and available for those adequately prepared. **All roads in BBRSP are dirt.**

All roads are not created equal! See page 8 for descriptions of the four types of roads in BBRSP.

4WDHC – Unmaintained – These roads are not maintained except by the users. Roads are not brushed and may not be passable. Users may need to use pick and shovel to fix some sections, especially creek crossings or eroded areas. Desert pin-striping (brush scratches) is likely.

The “4WDHC – unmaintained” roads provide a different kind of opportunity for park users. There are approximately 70 miles of park roads that are not maintained, but which are available for visitors to travel at their own risk. These roads will lead visitors to less-traveled, and in most cases, very remote and beautiful desert landscapes. Unmaintained roads in BBRSP are not considered “extreme 4X4.” There is no rock crawling or rating system, and not every mile requires 4X4. These roads simply are not maintained, which means they are rougher and more difficult and challenging to travel.

Unmaintained roads of BBRSP should only be attempted by experienced 4X4 drivers, with a capable vehicle and adequate “self-rescue” equipment. These roads are not patrolled on a regular basis. You are pretty much “on your own” should you have a problem.



Photo: Mark Lockwood

SPECIAL PREPARATION HIGHLY RECOMMENDED!

Basic equipment recommendation for travel on unmaintained roads of BBRSP:

- Two well-maintained 4X4 high-clearance vehicles. It is always safer to travel in pairs.
- 6-ply tires - absolute minimum
- Two inflated spare tires
- Plenty of fuel (there is NO fuel for sale in BBRSP)
- Shovel and pick
- Rock bar
- High-lift jack-at least 48 inches
- Heavy-duty nylon recovery strap (3” wide x 20’ long - no hooks)
- 10’ chain with hooks
- Tool kit
- Abundant drinking water (at least 5 gallons extra)
- Food for at least two days
- Work gloves
- Good maps of the area
- GPS with extra batteries
- First aid kit
- 4-way lug wrench
- Air pump



Road guides available upon request.

NOWHERE

For a great “outback” roadtrip:

Roads may be overgrown with the ubiquitous white-thorn acacia or other desert shrubs, and your vehicle will be exposed to desert pin-striping. Your trusty steed will get scratched and very dirty. Those who choose to drive unmaintained BBRSP roads (Special Use Permit required) may have to fill the washout, rut or track to progress. If your four-wheel drive goes out, you may get stuck. You must use these roads ever-mindful of the consequences of your driving skill and be prepared for self-extraction.



These roads are old ranch roads for the most part. They were installed with economy of effort. They are short wheel-base roads where a high angle of attack is required. If you have a big honking front bumper or running boards, or a receiver hitch with a removable three-ball setup, be prepared to either modify your rig or get stuck in a steep, short dip. If your vehicle's exhaust tailpipe hangs low and is not up and out of the way, it is going to get rearranged! If your towing wiring harness is not stowed and secured, you'll lose it.

LOAD RANGE E TIRES are strongly recommended. If you have standard 4-ply tread/2-ply polyester sidewalls, stay home. Six-ply tires are recommended as an absolute minimum.

Bring two spares! Leave the jack that came with your vehicle at home. You'll need a high-lift jack with a bottle-jack added for good measure. Make sure you have something on your vehicle to affix your jack to. Lots of

factory or even after-market accessory bumpers are **NOT SUITABLE** for the application you will need for BBRSP roads. Best to practice at home before you get backcountry. Flats do **NOT HAPPEN** at convenient spots, and you can be sure that at BBRSP they will not happen on level ground. To change a tire you may have to jack **AND** dig and level your vehicle for safety.

Bring abundant drinking water in sturdy containers in addition to personal canteens. **Have a gallon with you at all times. Even if you do not plan to camp out, bring high-energy,**

“SHOW ME A 4X4 DRIVER WHO HAS NEVER BEEN STUCK, AND I WILL SHOW YOU A 4X4 DRIVER WHO HAS NOT BEEN DOWN MANY BAD ROADS.” Anonymous

nutritious snack foods—at least a two-day supply for everyone.

BEFORE you come to BBRSP, make sure your vehicle is in good shape mechanically. Make sure all your tires are aired fully. Stow your gear so that it does not bounce around. Strap down everything that has a sharp point.

THERE IS NO GAS OR DIESEL AVAILABLE IN THE PARK INTERIOR. Gas up and top off before you drive into BBRSP. Fuel is available at Presidio, Lajitas and Study Butte only.

Unmaintained roads available for adventure travel on BBRSP are shown on the facility maps in *El Solitario* and elsewhere at park visitor centers or information kiosks. Access to unmaintained roads will be by permit only. Check in at Warnock, Ft. Leaton or Saucedo Ranger Station to obtain a permit.

There are some ranch roads that are **NOT AVAILABLE** for public vehicular access. Park roads

open to 4WDHC vehicles are not designed for H1 or H2 Hummers — if you have one of these that you are itching to use, it is likely that it **WON'T FIT** the tread width of our ranch roads. Consequently, you may experience more roadside brush and greater exposure to road hazards.

Generally speaking, cell phone coverage in most areas at BBRSP is almost nonexistent. However, in the Cienega area—the northwest portion of the park—there is good coverage. For extra safety, a satellite phone is recommended. The only local

extraction and mechanic service is in Presidio: Rio Grande Wrecker Service. (432) 229-3312 or, after hours (432) 229-3740.

TPWD staff will do their best to assist park visitors, but it is possible that the services of a professional tow truck or mechanic may be required. That can be quite expensive.



Additional safety admonitions:

- **WEAR YOUR SEATBELT**, especially if you are in the back seat.
- When jacking your vehicle always chock your wheels.
- When making vehicle repairs on sloping terrain be especially mindful of helpers/watchers that may be down slope.
- The high-lift jack can hurt or maim you. Be careful; wear gloves. **WHEN LOWERING JACK**, consider using hammer or rock to release action.
- If your repair or extraction takes a while, and the weather is hot and sunny, consider setting a shade tarp. Mistakes are made when you overheat or are tired.
- **Always, always grip your steering wheel firmly with two hands.** This is especially important where there are steep drop-offs. A large rock or other road hazard can jerk your wheels suddenly with dire consequences.
- Bad shocks, especially in front, can make your vehicle bounce, slip and slide sideways on slopes.
- Use a spotter.
- Try very hard to avoid spinning your tires—sharp rocks cut through tires.
- **Without fail, bring a map:** ideally, a USGS 7.5 minute topo quad sheets. They can save your life. Limited copies are available for sale at Saucedo Ranger Station Trading Post.
- **Be especially mindful of the potential for flash-flooding.** Be weather wise. Intense storms can materialize very quickly.

For park emergencies call Saucedo Ranger Station at (432) 358-4444.

Note this number works only during business hours daily. For park notification after business hours call (432) 229-4913 or (432) 358-4451. 911 is the emergency number where cell coverage is available. **REMEMBER: response is usually hours away, if not a day or two.**

A River Runs By It: The River Road



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

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

Take A Break; Take a Hike

The River Road continues to boast plenty of hiking opportunities — over 60 miles of trails. The Rancherías Loop, a favorite of backpackers, requires serious

trekking through spectacular yet rough country with elevation changes of 1500 – 2000 feet. The shorter and gentler Rancherías Canyon Trail leads to a waterfall that cascades over rock ledges into a refreshing pool. Day hikers may also choose Closed Canyon, an easy three-mile round-trip trail through a tall and narrow slot canyon near the Rio Grande. Finally, the multi-use Contrabando Trail offers opportunities for hiking, mountain biking and horseback riding.

Wet a Paddle; Drop a Hook; Camp Out

Several access points provide opportunities for fishing in the Rio Grande or putting in your kayak or canoe. Bring your own, or rely on one of the local outfitters listed on page 9. Designated campgrounds and group areas provide picnic tables, fire rings and shelters



Visitors stopping at the Big Hill will find both a new interpretive exhibit and a new vista.

for day or overnight use. Be certain to keep vehicles on designated roads and parking areas to avoid becoming stuck in the flood-deposited sand.

Live and Learn

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



Want to Know More?

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

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



El Solitario: What's in a name?

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

EL SOLITARIO

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