

TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE

Interpretive Guide to:

PALO DURO CANYON

STATE PARK



FLORA AND FAUNA



Palo Duro has a wide variety of wildlife. The endangered Palo Duro mouse is found only in the Red River canyon lands and nowhere else. Park visitors may

meet mule deer, roadrunners, wild turkey and cottontails. The endangered Texas horned lizard is also found in this region. Other wildlife in the park includes coyotes, barbary sheep (an introduced species), bobcats and western diamond-back rattlesnakes. Bird watching is a popular park activity. Painted buntings, canyon wrens and red-tailed hawks are a few of the many interesting birds living in the canyon. You might even catch a glimpse of some migrating bald eagles!

“Palo Duro” is Spanish for “hard wood” in reference to the Juniper trees common throughout the canyon. Other common tree species seen in the canyon include mesquite, cottonwood, salt cedar (an invasive introduced species), willow, western soapberry and hackberry. Wildflowers and grasses also dot the canyon walls and floor. Most commonly seen are Indian blanket, star thistle, sunflower, paperflower, blackfoot daisy, tansy aster, sideoats grama, buffalograss, sage brush, yucca and prickly pear cactus.



BATTLE OF PALO DURO



Col. Ranald S. Mackenzie

The decisive battle of the Red River War, 1874-1875, also known as the Buffalo War, was the final campaign against the Southern Plains Indians.

Led by Colonel Ranald S. Mackenzie, the 4th U.S. Cavalry descended a narrow zigzag trail into the canyon and attacked the first of five encampments of Comanche, Kiowa and Cheyenne at dawn, Sept. 28, 1874. In the panic that ensued, the cavalry captured over 1,400 horses and burned the teepees and winter stores. Keeping only the horses he could use, Colonel Mackenzie ordered the remaining 1,100 shot.

Although only four Indians were killed, the coming winter without food or horses meant starvation. They returned on foot to the reservation at Fort Sill, abandoning forever the life of the hunt.

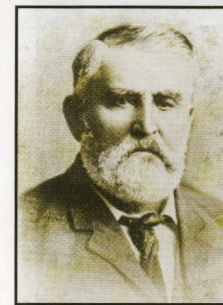


Quannah Parker

COURTESY PANHANDLE-PLAINS HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Palo Duro Canyon is approximately 120 miles long and 600 to 800 feet deep and is the second largest canyon in the United States. The canyon was formed less than 1 million years ago when the Prairie Dog Town Fork of the Red River first carved its way through the Southern High Plains. The rocks expose a geologic story which began approximately 250 million years ago, layer by layer revealing a panoramic view of magnificent color. The canyon's archeological and ethnological treasures suggest about twelve thousand years of human habitation, rising and waning as climate varied among periods of abundant moisture, aridity, and sometimes fearfully severe drought.

CHARLES GOODNIGHT

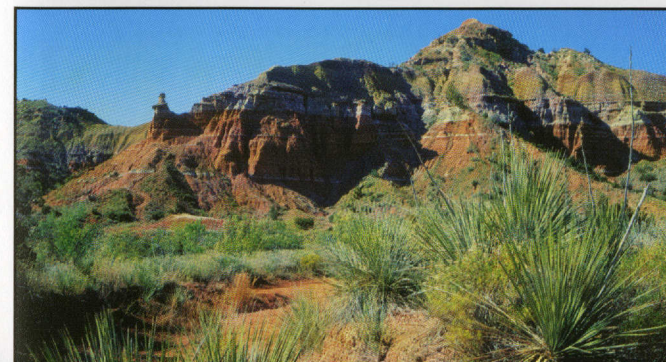


Charles Goodnight

The Red River War forced the Southern Plains tribes to surrender and return to reservations in Oklahoma. This opened the land to settlement. From 1876 to 1890 most of the canyon was part of the JA Ranch operated by Col. Charles Goodnight. After Civil War service as a Texas Ranger, Goodnight and Oliver Loving blazed the

Goodnight-Loving trail from North Central Texas up the Pecos River through New Mexico into Colorado. From 1866 to 1871 he and John Chisum trailed thousands of cattle to New Mexico. The JA Ranch reached its peak in 1885 with a total land area of over 1,325,000 acres of land and 100,000 head of cattle.

In the fall of 1878 a large group of Comanche and Kiowa left their reservation near Fort Sill, Oklahoma Territory, and headed for Texas to hunt buffalo. Heading toward traditional hunting grounds at Palo Duro Canyon they found the buffalo gone, replaced by Goodnight cattle. Hungry and disappointed, they soon began slaughtering JA cattle. Goodnight rode immediately to the Indian camp to seek a solution to the problem. He was met by Comanche Chief Quannah Parker; the two agreed to meet the next morning at the ranch house where they negotiated a treaty. In it Goodnight agreed to provide two beeves a day until buffalo were found. The treaty held until Quannah Parker led the group back to the reservation.





WELCOME TO THE "GRAND CANYON OF TEXAS." PALO DURO CANYON STATE PARK CONSISTS OF 18,438 ACRES IN RANDALL AND ARMSTRONG COUNTIES, INCLUDING THE RECENTLY PURCHASED 2,036-ACRE CAÑONCITA RANCH. THE ORIGINAL PARK LAND WAS DEEDED BY PRIVATE OWNERS IN 1933. THE CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS (CCC) SENT SEVEN COMPANIES OF YOUNG MEN AND MILITARY VETERANS TO PALO DURO CANYON FROM 1933 UNTIL 1937 TO DEVELOP ROAD ACCESS TO THE CANYON FLOOR AS WELL AS THE VISITOR CENTER, CABINS, SHELTERS AND THE PARK HEADQUARTERS. ALTHOUGH MUCH OF THE HARD WORK REMAINED TO BE DONE, PALO DURO CANYON STATE PARK OFFICIALLY OPENED ON JULY 4, 1934.



MORE INFORMATION

Palo Duro Canyon is a place where erosion shapes the land, four bioregions intersect, cultures have met and clashed and change is the only constant. While experiencing the majestic beauty, take time to appreciate the sights and sounds that have been lost in most urban settings. Allow yourself to be enriched by these natural wonders. While doing so:

1. Please clean up litter to help ensure that this natural and cultural resource continues. This helps prevent stream pollution, and keeps the scenery beautiful for other visitors. Feeding wild animals is prohibited at state parks. By not feeding the animals you help them to stay on a healthy, natural diet while also preventing animals from making contact with visitors and from digging through camp sites looking for food.
2. Also remember it is important not to disturb archeological and paleontological sites because these artifacts help researchers link us to our past.
3. Be sure to notice the Fire Risk Awareness posting by the entry gate to see if campfires are advised or banned. Wildlife and resource management will help preserve our heritage for future generations.

We are the stewards of these great lands and each have a part to play. Contact the "Partners in Palo Duro Canyon Foundation" friends group at (806) 488-2508 or ask about our volunteer programs to learn how you can help.

FURTHER READING

- The Buffalo War* by James L. Haley
- Ranald S. Mackenzie on the Texas Frontier* by Ernest Wallace
- The Story of Palo Duro Canyon* by Duane Guy
- Charles Goodnight: Pioneer Cowman* by Sybil J. O'Rear
- Charles Goodnight, Cowman and Plainsman* by J. Evetts Haley

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