

Interpretive Guide to:

PALO DURO CANYON

STATE PARK



“WELCOME TO THE GRAND CANYON OF TEXAS,” THE SECOND LARGEST CANYON IN NORTH AMERICA. PALO DURO CANYON STATE PARK CONSISTS OF 27,173 ACRES IN RANDALL AND ARMSTRONG COUNTIES. THE ORIGINAL PARKLAND 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 AND CONSTRUCT THE VISITOR CENTER, CABINS, SHELTERS, BRIDGES, TRAILS 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:

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.

Remember it is important not to disturb archeological and paleontological sites because these artifacts help researchers link us to our past. Don't Pocket the Past.

Watch for postings by the Entrance Office to see if there is a fire ban. 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.

FURTHER READING

The Red River Wars by Bret Cruse

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

Palo Duro Canyon State Park
11450 Park Road 5, Canyon, Texas 79015
(806) 488-2227 • www.tpwd.texas.gov/palodurocanyon



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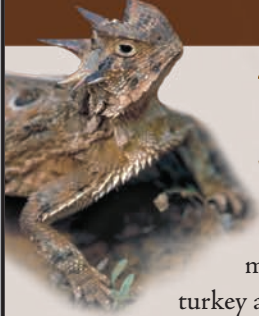
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FLORA AND FAUNA



Palo Duro has a wide variety of wildlife. The endangered Palo Duro mouse is found in only three counties in the Texas panhandle and nowhere else. Park visitors may meet mule deer, roadrunners, wild turkey and cottontails. The threatened Texas horned lizard is also found in this region. Other wildlife in the park includes white-tailed deer, coyotes, Barbary sheep (an introduced species), bobcats and raccoons. Bird watching is a popular park activity. Golden-fronted Woodpeckers, Canyon Towhees and Red-tailed Hawks are a few of the many interesting birds living in the canyon.

“Palo Duro” is Spanish for “hard wood” in reference to the Rocky Mountain Juniper trees still seen in places in the canyon. Other common tree species seen in the canyon include mesquite, red berry juniper, one seed juniper, cottonwood, willow, western soapberry and hackberry. Wildflowers and grasses also dot the canyon walls and floor. Most commonly seen are Tansy aster, Engleman daisy, Indian blanket, paperflower, Blackfoot daisy, common sunflower, sideoats gramma (official state grass), buffalo grass, sand sage, yucca, and prickly pear cactus.



THE BATTLE OF PALO DURO CANYON



Col. Ranald S. Mackenzie

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

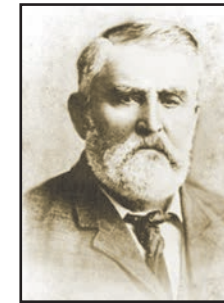
Led by Colonel Ranald S. Mackenzie, the 4th U.S. Cavalry descended a narrow zigzag trail down the south wall into the canyon and attacked the first of five encampments of Kiowa, Comanche and Cheyenne at dawn, September 24, 1874.

As the warriors attempted to set up a defense, the people fled up the canyon taking only what they could carry. The Cavalry pursued them for a distance then returned to the encampments and burned the teepees and winter food stores. The horse herd of approximately 1,400 head was captured and driven to Tule Canyon where Mackenzie had his supplies. Keeping enough horses for his troops and rewarding the Tonkawa scouts, Colonel Mackenzie ordered the remaining 1,100 shot the next day. Facing the coming winter without food or horses meant starvation. This forced the Indians to return on foot to the reservation in Fort Sill. Their traditional way of life was gone forever.



“Lone Wolf” was the Kiowa leader whose camp was the first that Colonel Mackenzie’s 4th Cavalry attacked in the early morning of September 28, 1874.

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. In 1876, Charles Goodnight and John Adair established the JA Ranch in the canyon. It provided grass, water and shelter for cattle as it had for the Southern Plains Bison herds that still roamed the area.

Goodnight allowed the shooting of the bison to make room for his cattle but his wife, Mary Ann, became concerned that the bison would become extinct. Through their efforts the bison were saved and for many years the descendants of that bison herd remained on the JA Ranch. The 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.

Palo Duro Canyon is approximately 120 miles long, 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 an ancient 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.

