



Big Bend National Park
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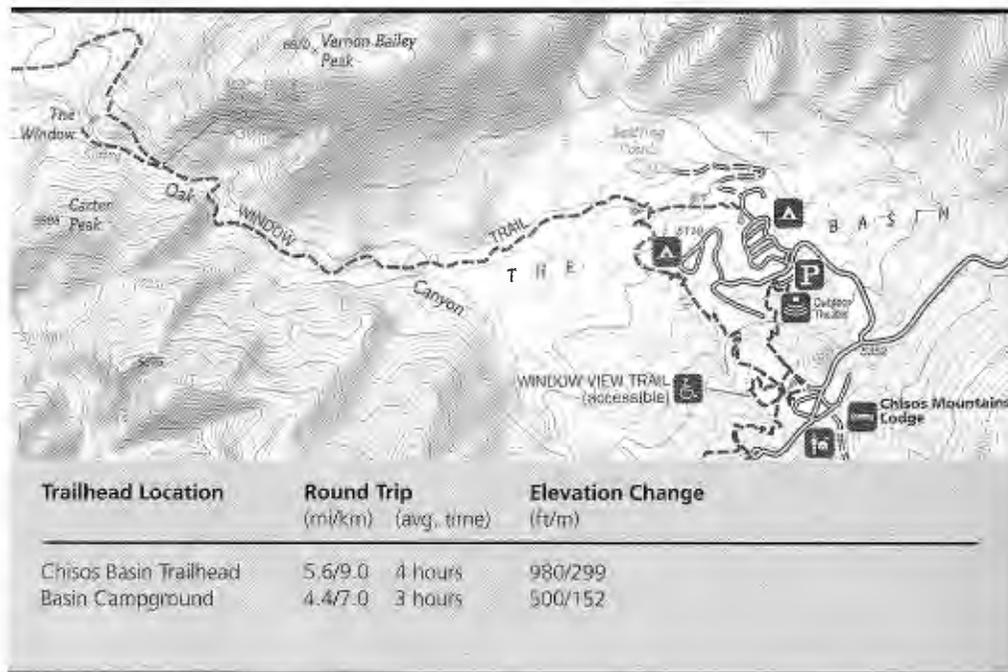
The Window Trail



\$1.00

The Window Trail

Few other trails in Big Bend National Park showcase as much diversity of habitat and scenery in such a short distance. In just over two miles, the Window Trail drops from open chaparral slopes into a shady creek bed dominated by towering cliffs. It ends at the famous "Window," a narrow slot canyon providing a glimpse of the desert far below.



Trail Basics

Of all the trails in Big Bend, the Window Trail is the most popular and is considered a must by visitors wishing to enjoy the complete Big Bend experience. Beginning at the main Chisos Basin trailhead located behind the Basin Store, the Window Trail descends 980' over 2.8 miles one way. Due to its steep descent into the Oak Creek drainage, the trail is considered to be moderately difficult and is best completed as a morning hike to beat the heat of the day. A second Window Trailhead is located near the 'No Generator' section in the Chisos Basin Campground. This access point shortens the one-way length to 2.2 miles with a descent of 500'. Parking for this lower trailhead is at the Amphitheater parking lot across from the entrance to the campground.

The Window Trail follows the Oak Creek Canyon drainage westward to the Window pour-off. Near the end of the trail a small sign marks the junction with the Oak Spring Trail, which descends to the desert. Following this side trail .25 miles will lead you to a scenic overlook above the Window with sweeping views of the mountains, desert, and Oak Creek Canyon.

Near the end of the Window Trail, stone steps skirt pools of water. The Window channels all rainwater from the Basin to the desert below, and this water forms pools in the smooth stone of the creek bed before falling 200 feet. Your hike will take you to the very top of this pour-off.

Window Trail Hiking Safety Tips:

- Always carry enough water to complete your hike – the steep return, the lack of shade, and mid-day heat can hasten the effects of dehydration. Drink at least a gallon of water a day to keep hydrated in Big Bends arid environment.

• The trail is tougher than it looks; the return climb is very steep. Know your limits and allow enough time to complete the hike.

- Due to the risk of fire, smoking is prohibited on all trails in Big Bend.

• The stone steps along the lower section of the trail leading to the pour-off can be slippery when water is present. Exercise caution on all slick surfaces.

• Wearing good hiking shoes or boots will support your feet and ankles over rough terrain; long pants and long sleeves will protect your skin from thorny shrubs and intense sunlight; and always wear a hat to shade your head and neck.

• Minimum impact hiking is encouraged – help to keep that trail clean by packing out all your trash (this includes your toilet paper!)

Wildlife Encounters:

• Big Bend is a wild national park and along the trail you may encounter a variety of wildlife. Remember that all wildlife is protected in the national park.

• Large predators such as black bears and mountain lions can be seen along the trail. Avoid behavior that may attract attention – do not allow children to run ahead on trails, avoid hiking alone or at dusk and after dark, do not jog on trails. Should you encounter a bear or a mountain lion, remain calm, enjoy the rare sighting, slowly depart the area. If a large predator is approaching you – make yourself appear large, shout, hold your ground, wave your arms, throw rocks at it!

• Snakes and other reptiles can be seen along the trail. While most snakes are harmless several species of rattlesnakes may be encountered. Snakebites are rare in Big Bend and can best be avoided by watching where you sit, step, and place your hands. Do not pick up, touch or bother snakes.

Volcanic Origins

The Chisos Basin appears at first to be the remains of a large volcanic crater. However, while all of the mountain peaks forming the rim of the Basin are of igneous origin, there apparently was no volcano in the Basin.

Current theories regarding the creation of the Chisos Mountains hold that beginning about 38 million years ago, two volcanoes to the south and east of what are now the Chisos Mountains spewed ash and lava to the surface, while a non-erupting source squeezed molten rock into the bedrock from below. After eons of erosion, the resistant rhyolite magma intrusions remain as the mountains surrounding the Window.

Ongoing research by geologists is beginning to change the way we think about the Basin. Instead of classic intrusions, the canyon walls above you may be lava domes formed at the end of an eruptive cycle. Volcanic vents in the area of Casa Grande and Toll Mountain appear to be the source for lava flows spreading over a great distance. Sampling and geochemical analysis suggest that there were two distinct magmas providing the sources of igneous rock in the high Chisos. Additional research over the next several years will further redefine what we know of the formation of the Chisos Mountains.

Ward Mountain looms to the left as you descend the Window Trail. Amon Carter Peak forms the sharp spire on the left of the Window, while Vernon Bailey Peak is the rounded dome to the right of the Window. Pulliam Bluff is the huge ridge on your right. As you hike back up the Window Trail, your view will be dominated by other mountains formed by lava flows and ash beds, such as Casa Grande, rising high over the Basin area, and Toll Mountain, just to the right, or south, of Casa Grande. Emory Peak, further to the right of Toll Mountain, also shares this geologic history; at 7,832 feet, it is the highest point in Big Bend National Park.

From Forest to Desert

After the end of the most recent glacial period, the climate gradually became warmer and drier. Fossilized evidence in packrat middens near the Rio Grande tells us that oaks and junipers grew there about 10,000 years ago. As the climate changed, these plants could survive only in the higher, cooler, and wetter parts of the mountains, leaving the lowlands to the more heat- and drought-tolerant species that we see throughout the desert today. Had you hiked to the Window 10,000 to 15,000 years ago, you might have passed through stands of quaking aspen, a tree that in Big Bend is now found only high on the slopes of Emory Peak. Your walk might have taken you through a woodland of Arizona cypress, ponderosa pine, and Douglas fir, trees whose populations in this region are now limited to the shelter of canyons high in the Chisos Mountains. These plants, and the animals that are similarly “trapped” in this mountain island by unsuitable habitat in the surrounding desert, are called “relict species.”

As you hike the Window Trail, look for some of these remnants from the past, including the Mexican drooping juniper, Mexican piñon pine, and numerous types of oaks. Other distinctive plants seen along this trail are mountain laurel, Mexican buckeye, and vauquelinia. Note the mix of mountain species with desert plants. Throughout the Chisos Mountains, it is common to see trees and cacti growing side by side, evidence of continued climatic warming.



Quaking aspen can be found on the slopes of Emory Peak.

Mountain Animals

Because it follows the wooded drainage of Oak Creek Canyon, the Window Trail provides excellent wildlife habitat. Walk quietly, and you may encounter numerous types of animals. Carmen Mountains white-tailed deer and javelina, or collared peccary, are both active throughout the day. You may also see rock squirrels scampering across the rocky slopes, or hear spotted towhees scratching in the leaf litter for insects. Listen for the descending melody of the canyon wren and the loud squawks of the cactus wren and Mexican jay. Hike in the early morning or late evening, and you may be fortunate enough to see a gray fox, ringtail, or mountain lion; look along the trail for evidence of their passing.

In the late summer and fall, you may see black bears along the Window Trail, foraging on the nuts and berries they find on oaks, madrone trees, and evergreen sumac bushes. Don't try to approach them or feed them; let them know of your presence so they can leave the area. Check at a visitor center to learn what to do if you encounter a bear.

Rusty-rumped whiptail lizards are common in the Chisos Mountains, but few people see the Texas alligator lizard, a heavy-bodied relict lizard species. Near the end of the trail, look for garter snakes in the pools of water. You may also see invertebrates such as horsehair worms and water beetles swimming in these pools. Perhaps the most commonly seen snake in the Chisos Mountains is the patchnose snake, a slender gray snake with brown stripes. The Chisos Mountains are also home to the red phase of the rock rattlesnake; this small rattler is white or gray in much of its range, but is red or maroon in this area. Hikers often see tarantulas and vinegaroons along this trail, especially in the late summer.

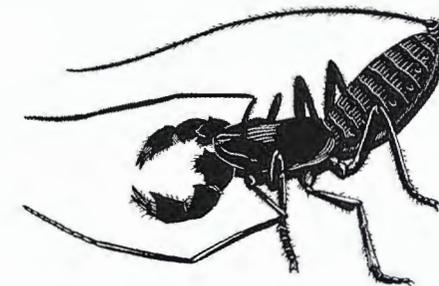
*Right: The vinegaroon (*Mastigoproctus giganteus*) resembles a scorpion, but has a long whiplike tail instead of a stinger. Non-poisonous, but produces a foul vinegar-smelling liquid when disturbed.*



At the Window — The end of the trail to the edge of the pour-off is slickrock, and can be hazardous when water is present. Use caution if you choose to approach the edge.

“The Window”

Providing one of the most famous views in the park, the Window has become a symbol of Big Bend National Park. Thousands of hikers explore this trail every year, marveling at the geology, the tranquility, the wildlife along the way, and the view of the desert seen through the Window itself. By linking mountain and lowland, forest and desert, and water and aridity, the Window Trail provides a wonderful example of the contrast and diversity found throughout Big Bend National Park.





The National Park Service was established on August 25, 1916. . . *"to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife. . . 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."*

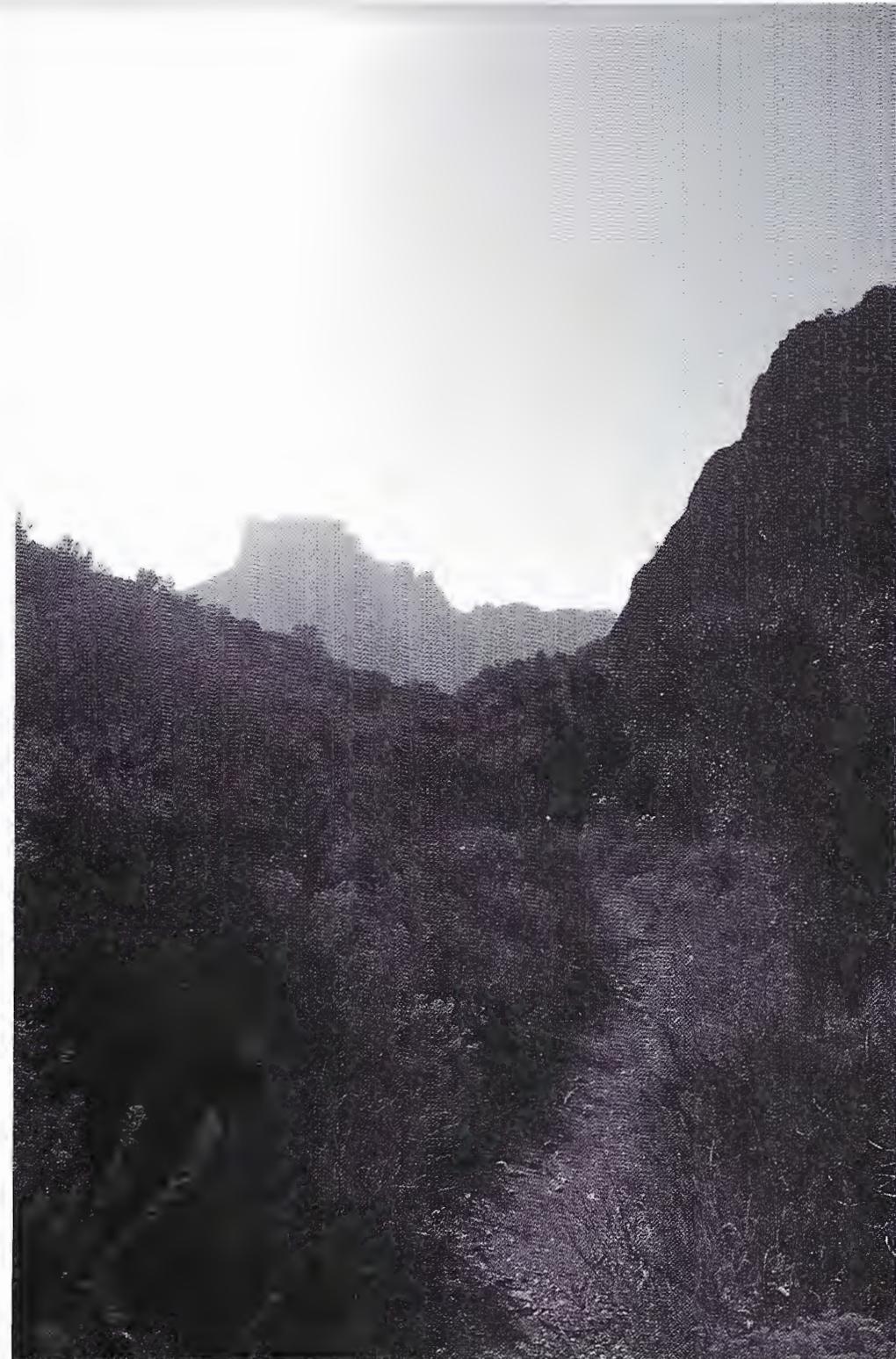
Authorized by congress in 1935, and established in June 1944, Big Bend National Park preserves the most representative example of the Chihuahuan Desert ecosystem in the United States.

As conservation educators, the park's Division of Interpretation and Visitor Services provides guided walks, talks, evening slide programs, workshops, and other educational activities as well as written materials such as this trail guide.



The Big Bend Natural History Association, established in 1956 as a private, non-profit organization, champions the mission of the National Park Service in facilitating popular interpretation of the scenic, scientific, and historic values of Big Bend and encourages research related to those values. The Association conducts seminars and publishes, prints, or otherwise provides books, maps, and interpretive materials on the Big Bend region. Proceeds fund exhibits, films, interpretive programs, seminars, museum activities, and research.

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Casa Grande looms over the Window Trail, heralding the long and often hot return hike to the Basin.