

**Order of the Arrow
Camping Guide
Part 7**

**State Parks
and
Other Areas
In
Texas**

Balmorhea State Park

Balmorhea State park lies under the shade of cottonwoods and willows. Its Spanish-tiled buildings fringing a canal system and the world's largest spring-fed swimming pool, swimming, snorkeling and diving are the highlights of this park. There are many species of fish in the pool. The facilities include a modern bathhouse with showers, picnic sites and tent sites. Water is available. The park lies four miles west of the town of Balmorhea on US 290. Take Interstate 10 west past Fort Stockton to US Highway 290. There is a fee for swimming and camping. For further information call 915-375-2370.

Davis Mountain State Park

Davis Mountain State Park is reached via Interstate 10, from El Paso, TX to Kent, TX. Turn off on Hwy. 118 and travel south to the park, 13 miles past the McDonald Observatory. There is a developed campsite with a small, rocky stream running through the campsite. Terrain is mountainous, desert, and a stream. Astronomy, star and constellation viewing is available at observatory. No open fires are permitted. However, prepared fire pits, latrines and potable water, restrooms and showers available. Tents is designated areas only, carry out all trash. Sights of interest near the park are: Old Fort Davis and Mc Donald Observatory. Old Fort Davis was established in 1854. Call and make reservations at 915-426-3337. Fees

FORT DAVIS: "From Fort Davis the rest of Texas is all downhill." Nestling comfortably at 5,000 feet in the Davis Mountains, it has the distinction of being the highest town in the state, with Hwy. 118 being "the highest paved road east of the Rocky Mountains. " Fort Davis National Historic Site offers a 1854 restored fort, visitor center, museum, self-guided tours, hiking trails, nature trails and a picnic grove. For further information contact the Chamber of Commerce at 1-800-524-3015.

McDONALD OBSERVATORY: McDonald Observatory is located at an elevation of 6,800 feet in the heart of the Davis Mountains of West Texas. Observatory tours, star parties, solar viewing all take place on the 107-inch telescope. Reservations are required approximately six months in advance. There is an admission fee. For further information call 915-426-3640.

Hueco Tanks State Historical Park

Hueco Tanks State Historical Park is 30 miles east of El Paso, TX on US Highway 180/62, then 8 miles north on FM 2775. Water is a scarcity in this part of west Texas, and this park's 860 acres preserve one of the area's few natural watering places. Used for about 10,000 years, these rock basins or huecos collected rainwater, attracting both humans and animals. Some 5,000 pictographs, a legacy of the succeeding cultures which once lived here, are found throughout the park. The ruins of a 19th century stage coach station and abandoned ranch buildings exist here. Other highlights include caves and rock shelters, the distinctive oak and juniper trees, rare for this desert environment, and the shrimp that occur seasonally in the water basins. Park facilities include picnic sites with shaded shelters, campsites with utilities, restrooms and showers. There is an entrance fee and a required orientation.

Hiking in the Franklin Mountains

The four hikes listed below are all in the Franklin Mountains. The time required for these hikes is extremely variable depending on sight seeing and rest stops. All hikes require hikers who are in good physical condition. Water is not available, so you must carry your own.

COTTONWOOD SPRINGS: This hike is both exciting by novice and enjoyable for the veteran hiker. Start in the eastern most corner of Tom Mays Park, on the west side of North Franklin Mountain, North of Trans Mountain Road. Hackberry trees and desert willow lead the way to a spring that runs year round. 2-4 Hours

WHISPERING SPRINGS: Another easy, but invigorating hike. Start at the large scenic canyon that extends north from Trans Mountain on the east side of the range. Ash trees are on the left. Wild chinaberry trees are also along the trail. In the winter, the springs will run all the way back down to the ash trees. The end of the canyon offers a great reward, grapevines adorning the walls of the canyon, and two large cottonwood trees that provide a lush picnic shade. 2-4 hours.

UPPER TRANS MOUNTAIN: Extending into the beautiful valley that stretches south from just east of Smuggler's Pass, this leisurely hike is a delight. 1-3 hours.

SOUTH FRANKLIN CLIMB: The favorite of most hikers. Beginners should attempt this hike with an experienced hiker who can maintain the proper direction on a myriad of paths. Occasional rock climbing is required. Start at the Trans Mountain observation point just west of Smuggler's Pass. Finish on the east side at McKelligon Canyon. Remember to arrange a rendezvous, or leave a vehicle waiting at the finish. You skirt the popular "thumb" on the west side nearing the summit. The trail climbs to within about 100 yards of the South Franklin Peak, but hikers can scramble to the top without difficulty. 4-6 hours.