

# EXPERIENCE THE REAL BIG BEND

*A Texas Naturalist Adventure*

**March 29 – April 4, 2010**

*Host*

**The Heard Natural Science Museum & Wildlife Sanctuary**

*Leader*

**Roger Sanderson, Heard Museum Wildlife Biologist  
& Director of Botanical Gardens**

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## **Testimonials**

“Compatible group, very knowledgeable leader made the hikes fun and you learned about plants, insects, and history of the area at the same time”

“The trip was well planned and organized. The leader was very knowledgeable in photography, plants, birds, and animals and was very pleasant in his interactions with group members.”

“First trip to Big Bend. Great hiking. Good info on ecology.”

“Natural beauty of the area was awesome. My first trip to the area and just the scenery was awesome. Peak floral timing.”

“Excellent accommodations – food was great – social activities enjoyable. Glad hikes were such that you could stop at your limit.”

“The leader was so knowledgeable and explained and identified locations, plants, formations, and was extremely patient with us. Travel arrangements were appreciated.

“Not only was the experience of being physically in Big Bend (for the first time) incredible, but the added depth of the information provided to us by our trip leader ... made the visit unlike anything we could have hoped for on our own.”

Roger was friendly, knowledgeable, and accessible. Scenery was wonderful and I felt we were taken to the best places. Loved the local flavor of Terlingua and Lajitas.”

## **Travel Itinerary**

### **Wednesday, March 29**

#### ***Dallas to Big Bend National Park***

Summary:

- Early morning flight to Midland
- Lunch in Midland/Odessa (only meal not included in the trip).
- Visit Panther Junction visitor center, bookshop and desert garden
- Check in at the Chisos Mountains Lodge
- Group park orientation/dinner in the restaurant

The first leg of your journey begins with an early morning flight from Dallas Love Field airport to Midland. Roger will meet the group at the airport and after lunch in Midland, the group will leave for Big Bend National Park. Upon entering the park we will stop in Panther Junction. The visitor center has a wonderful bookstore and a desert garden to familiarize you with the unusual flora of the Big Bend region and the Chihuahuan Desert. Our accommodations will be at the Chisos Mountains Lodge (elevation 5,300 ft.) in the heart of the Chisos Mountains, within the 800,000-acre park. You will have time to get settled in your room before a dinner/orientation meeting led by Roger Sanderson, Heard Naturalist. Roger will explain some of the sights and terrain in store for the group and discuss some of the flora and fauna to be seen as well as the desert biology and geology. Prepare yourself for some of the most beautiful mountain sunsets, the best star-gazing opportunities, and the most awesome desert environment you've ever seen – or been immersed in!

### **Thursday, April 1**

#### ***Big Bend National Park: Lost Mine, Rio Grande Village & Ernst Tinaja***

Summary:

- Early breakfast in the restaurant (usually a buffet)
- 8:00 A.M. departure by bus for the Lost Mine trailhead
- Hike to an incredible view (2.4 miles, 1,000' elevation gain) and eat boxed lunch around noon
- Spend the afternoon exploring Rio Grande Village with its boardwalk through a swampy desert oasis followed by a trip to view the curious rock formations of Ernst Tinaja. If time permits, a brief visit to the historic Hot Springs area will be made.

- Dinner at the restaurant

After an early morning breakfast at the Chisos Mountains Lodge, we will get our first taste of the Big Bend Country with a hike up the Lost Mine Trail. This trail and the surrounding desert are our best chances to get a glimpse of a black bear or mountain lion during our tour of the park. We will ascend gradually 2.4 miles through juniper, pinyon pine and oak forest along the base of Casa Grande Peak. While this hike does involve a significant gain in elevation, it is a fairly easy trail to walk. It was built in the early 1940s by the Civilian Conservation Corps and is well-crafted and maintained. The views at the end of the trail are well worth the climb. The Lost Mine Trail offers some of the most scenic vistas in the park with excellent looks at Juniper Canyon, Pine Canyon, Casa Grande Peak, and the Sierra del Carmen Mountains in Mexico. If you want to make some spectacular landscape photos, this is the hike! After lunch and our return hike (downhill, this time), we will board the van to drive to Rio Grande Village for an ice cream break at the store and some good birding under the cottonwood trees. After a brief visit to the desert “wetlands”, we are off to another must see attraction on the east side of the park (that most folks never see) – Ernst Tinaja. . The Old Ore Road to Ernst Tinaja is very rough, but our van can take it! “Tinaja” means large earthen jar in Spanish and refers to the basin-shaped depressions in the rock. These and other curiously beautiful rock formations are what make this site such a draw for photographers and nature lovers. If time permits, the historic Hot Springs, site of J.O. Langford's family homestead and health spa (1909-42), will make an interesting stop on our way back to the lodge for dinner.

## **Friday, April 2**

### ***Big Bend National Park: Upper Burro Mesa, Terlingua Ghost Town, La Kiva***

#### Summary:

- Early breakfast in the restaurant (usually a buffet)
- 8:30 A.M. departure by bus for Burro Mesa
- Hike to the pour off (1.8 miles, 525' elevation loss) and eat boxed lunch around noon
- Briefly return to the lodge
- Afternoon visit to Barton Warnock Environmental Center, then to the Terlingua Ghost Town
- Dinner at the Starlight Theater and the photogenic graveyard
- Stop by La Kiva for drinks before returning to the lodge

A hearty early morning breakfast will prepare everyone for the hiking adventure ahead! Our hike at Burro Mesa will take us down a series of dry arroyos leading through the diverse, fascinating Big Bend geology. This trail offers the roughest terrain we will hike on this trip. There is no formal trail (but the washes are easy to follow), so in several places we will encounter boulders and rock formations we must navigate. There is no serious climbing involved, but a certain amount of agility and/or teamwork may be needed to conquer a couple of the trail obstacles. If you have the will, we promise you can do this hike and that it's well worth the effort, offering many rewards. This trail is a Heard staff favorite. As we approach the end of our hike, the canyon walls to either side will climb higher and higher, hung with unusual desert plants clinging to the sheer rock faces. The hike culminates in a spectacular cathedral-like dome where the pour-off drops to the desert nearly 100 feet below. There is exciting geology to photograph all along this trail, but the pour off is truly exceptional. We'll picnic on boxed lunches at the top of the pour off before hiking back out. After a brief stop at the Lodge to freshen up, we will visit the Barton Warnock Environmental Education Center. Dinner will be at the famous Starlight Theater

in Terlingua with time afterwards for photos in the graveyard. Before returning to the lodge, a short stop at the unique La Kiva (The Cave) bar and restaurant will top off the day!

## **Saturday, April 3**

### ***Big Bend National Park: Cattail Falls & Sam Nail Ranch & Grapevine Hills***

Summary:

- Early breakfast in the restaurant (usually a buffet)
- 8:30 A.M. departure by bus for Cattail Falls
- Hike to the falls (2.5 miles, elevation gain unknown, but slight) and eat boxed lunch around noon
- Van will depart late afternoon for an **optional** hike in the Grapevine Hills (2.0 miles round trip) or you may spend the afternoon exploring part of the Window Trail or relaxing around the lodge

After an early morning breakfast at the Chisos Mountains Lodge, we will head for Cattail Falls. A delicate habitat purposely not mentioned on the maps, we are lucky to be able to visit this unique environment! Opportunities abound to view many species of wildlife typical of the Big Bend area and the surrounding desert landscape. Javelinas, jackrabbits, roadrunners, elf owls and horned lizards are just a few of the animals we might encounter as we explore this very special area in the park. We will be hiking at a leisurely pace, 2.5 miles to lunch at the falls, a shady oasis of Big Tooth Maples that border the cool waters from the falls and pools below. It will be an excellent place to watch and listen for approaching wildlife while enjoying our lunch and exploring the area around the pool for photos to make. Blue-throated Hummingbirds, Black Phoebes and other western birds are commonly seen at the falls, as well as many beautiful wildflowers such as Salvias, Columbines and Orchids. The hike has one moderate climb up a series of steps and a small amount of boulder-climbing to reach the falls, but is otherwise relatively flat. After lunch and our return hike, we will briefly explore Sam Nail Ranch and then drive back to the lodge. For the more adventurous, a trip to the fascinating Grapevine Hills is offered or several trails including the Window Trail are within walking distance for a short hike while others may prefer to just relax taking in the sights.

## **Sunday, April 4**

### ***Persimmon Gap & Marathon***

Summary:

- Early breakfast at the lodge restaurant (usually a buffet)
- 8:30 A.M. departure by bus for Persimmon Gap
- Hike the Persimmon Gap Draw trail (1 mile one-way, 290' elevation gain)
- Eat lunch and visit shops in Marathon
- Drive to Midland for our return flight to Dallas Love Field

You won't be ready to leave, but following an early breakfast, the group will board the van for the final day of sightseeing and photography. Depending on the time of our departure flight, we should be able to squeeze in a short walk before leaving the park. Our destination will be Persimmon Gap at the very far northern boundary of the park. A short hike will take us up Persimmon Gap Draw to a saddle between Persimmon Peak and an unnamed peak. The gravel wash is easy to follow, with only a 290' gain in elevation, but the trail is blocked by a dry 70-foot waterfall (dry). Hikers must negotiate an unmaintained path that leads around the right side of this obstacle. At a second, smaller pouroff, we will encounter the oldest exposed rocks in the park, which are seen only in this location. The sedimentary rocks of the Tesnus, Maravillas and Caballos Formations seen here are over 250 million years old. When we reach the end of our trail, our view will include the rangeland northeast of the park and the distant Christmas Mountains 25 miles to the southwest. This is a very lightly-used trail,

offering sights few visitors ever see. We will be in Marathon, 80 miles north of the park, around lunch time. Here we will stop for a simple lunch (included in the trip) with a little time to shop in Marathon, enjoying several unique galleries, rock shops, a book store, etc. With our bellies full and our souvenir purchases in hand, we will make the final leg of the journey to Midland and our return flight to Dallas Love Field on Southwest Airlines.

**Note:** The *Big Bend Photo Frenzy*, a reunion of all attendees, is held about a month after the trip. This is a fun fellowship giving everyone a chance to show off their best photos, reminisce and renew friendships!

## Cost & Reservations

The member cost for this fully escorted tour is \$1,400 per person based on double occupancy and includes ground transportation, lodging for four nights, park entrance fees and meals except for noon Wednesday. The museum will cover the cost of all tips and gratuities. The member cost for a single traveler with a private room is \$1,600. For non-members, the tour cost is \$1,500 (double occupancy) or \$1,700 (single occupancy). While the Heard Museum will make flight arrangements, travelers are responsible for the cost of airfare to Midland (currently around \$130 round trip). **Add \$100 to all reservations made after February 20.**

**Registration deadline is March 10.** To make your reservation, contact Steffanie Mann at 972-562-5566 ext. 237. A \$725 early deposit per person will hold your place. Late Deposits (after Feb. 20) will be \$825. Final payment is due on or before March 10, 2007. Refunds will not be available after March 10. Mail your deposit to the Heard Natural Science Museum and Wildlife Sanctuary, 1 Nature Place, McKinney, TX 75069, Attn: Big Bend Trip. The trip will fill up quickly so get your reservation in soon!

## Get to Know the Leader

### Roger “Snake Man” Sanderson

#### *Your Naturalist and Environmental Guide*

**Experience:** Roger has led several previous trips to Big Bend during his 8 years as Wildlife Biologist at the Heard and was recently promoted to Director of Botanical Gardens. Usually known as “the Snake Man” by local youths, he has been doing snake programs for Boy Scouts for more than 18 years and teaches the Reptile Study Merit Badge at the Boy Scout National Jamboree in Virginia. His huge live, native Texas snake collection is one of the best in the state and was used to create the Heard’s widely acclaimed *Rat Snakes to Rattlers* exhibit and the following exhibit *Venomous Snakes of Texas*. Both Roger and his wife are active birders, traveling widely to view new or unusual species. In 2007 and 2008 they were selected to be part of the Cornell University search team for the Ivory Bill Woodpecker in Arkansas. Roger is on the board of our local Prairie & Timbers Audubon Society and the Texas Herpetological Society. He and his wife are also active members of the Dallas Paleontology Society. Insects, too, are a favorite subject! He has been collecting butterflies and moths since the third grade and did research on gall insects at A & M. Despite his vast background in animals, Roger’s greatest expertise is in plants. He was Assistant Director of the Dallas Civic Garden Center (now Texas Discovery Gardens) for 5 ½ years until forming his own landscape company which he still operates part time. Roger had a weekly column for several years in the Dallas Morning News on plants and continues to write articles about nature in several publications.

**Education:** Roger did his undergraduate work at U.T.Austin majoring in Zoology with a minor in Botany and did his graduate work at Texas A&M in horticulture. These diverse institutions gave him a unique perspective on nature—as well as a heck-of-a sense of humor!

# General Information

## October Weather

78 degrees average maximum and 53 degrees average minimum. Temperatures along the Rio Grande will sometimes run 5-10 degrees higher. Sunshine is abundant year round. Relative humidity is usually quite low.

## Hiking in the Big Bend

While most of our travelers are active people accustomed to walking, we must remind you that a hike in Big Bend National Park is nothing like a walk in a park or natural area in Dallas. The terrain is often rough and rocky, most of the vegetation is thorny, and there are sometimes boulders and other obstacles in the trail which must be dealt with. Most people will find at least one of the planned hikes somewhat challenging. This being said, most people of good health and fitness, of any age, will be able to handle the hikes. We generally move at a pretty slow pace, stopping to view various wildflowers, rock formations, birds, and other wildlife, so you needn't worry about "keeping up with the group." If you have the will, we will do anything in our power to help you down the trail and see that you enjoy your experience in the fascinating Chihuahuan Desert.

## Items to Pack

- Hat, sunglasses and sunscreen
- Remember your medications
- Binoculars, if you have them
- Camera and film
- Travel alarm clock
- Flashlight
- Fanny pack or day pack
- Water bottle(s)
- You will **need** a good sturdy pair of **hiking boots**. If they are new, break them in before the trip.
- Some people like to have a collapsible hiking stick. You will not be able to carry this on the plane, however. Make sure it gets checked or is packed in your suitcase.

## Clothing

Long-sleeved shirts over a t-shirt will work best; layers will allow you to adapt to the changing weather. **Jeans** or sturdy pants are recommended (no shorts). Please bring extra pairs of socks. You will also need a sweater, a windbreaker and a good pair of **hiking boots**. ***Athletic shoes are not a good choice.***

## Special Request

Please be on time for all departures. The trip is tightly scheduled in order to see and enjoy as much of the Big Bend as possible. Above all, bring along your sense of adventure and plan to have the time of your life!

## Terms

The Heard Natural Science Museum & Wildlife Sanctuary is responsible for arrangements, including payments to suppliers, described in the itinerary of this trip.

The Heard Natural Science Museum & Wildlife Sanctuary has no responsibility for delays; delayed departures and arrivals; loss, damage or injury to persons or property; mechanical defects, failure or negligence in connection with any accommodations, transportation or other services; for substitutions of hotel or other common carrier beyond their

control and for any additional expense incurred thereby. Acceptance of these terms by the traveler is indicated by his or her registration.