

Organ Pipe Cactus

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



National Monument
Arizona



© KATHLEEN NORRIS COOK

Explore a Desert Landscape

Come celebrate the life and landscape of the Sonoran Desert at Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument. Explore this wilderness of animals, plants, and dramatic basin-and-range scenery. Drive a solitary road, hike a backcountry trail, camp under a clear sky, or take in the warmth and beauty of the Southwest.

Plan Your Visit The Kris Eggle Visitor Center has information, publications, exhibits, video presentations, and maps. In winter ranger-led talks and other programs are available. Scenic drives and hiking trails are nearby (*maps and descriptions below*). **May–September** Brief, violent thunderstorms occur. Temperatures often exceed 110°F. **October–April** Expect sunny days, 60s and 70s°F, and occasional light rain. **Year-round** Nights are much cooler than days.

Area Services Lukeville has a convenience store, gas, and post office. Why has gas, food, convenience stores, and RV parks. Sonoyta, Mexico, and Ajo have motels, laundries, food, gas, and services; Ajo also has RV parks.

Scenic Drives Two scenic drives wind up and down the park's graded gravel roads. Most roads are suitable for passenger cars; some require high-clearance or four-wheel-drive. Vehicles over 25 feet long are prohibited on scenic drives. Check at the visitor center for up-to-date information. • Take emergency tools, drinking water, and extra water for your vehicle. • Avoid flooded areas. • Never drive off the road.

Ajo Mountain Drive (21 miles; 2–3 hours) Winding along the Ajo Range foothills, this route highlights desert landscapes and stands of organ pipe cactus. English and foreign language guides are available at the visitor center.

Puerto Blanco Drive (41 miles; 3–4 hours) Enjoy expansive views as the road circles the Puerto Blanco Mountains. Scenery includes senita, organ pipe, and saguaro cacti. This drive accesses Quitobaquito Spring's desert oasis.

Walking and Hiking Trails Enjoy hiking crosscountry in the open desert. Follow trails into the heart of the desert wilderness for breathtaking views and vistas. **The Kris Eggle Visitor Center has trail guides and information.** • Discuss your planned route with a ranger. • Recommended hiking months are October–April. • When hiking, take one gallon of water per person per day. • Avoid overexertion and overexposure to the sun. • Watch for desert plants with spines and thorns. • Use a flashlight at night. • Watch for rattlesnakes. Do not harm them; snakes are protected here. • Leashed pets are allowed on the Visitor Center Trail, Palo Verde Trail, and Campground Perimeter Trail. Pets prohibited on other trails and backcountry.

Visitor Center Trail (0.15 mile roundtrip) Learn about the desert and its plants on this wheelchair- and scooter-accessible trail.

Campground Perimeter Trail (0.9 mile roundtrip) Stroll here to start or end your day.

Desert View Trail (1.1 miles roundtrip) Follow this circular route for vistas of Sonoyta Valley and the pink granite Cubabi Mountains in Mexico. Trailside signs describe features.

Palo Verde Trail (2.6 miles roundtrip) Enjoy views of the Ajo Range on this trail connecting the campground and visitor center.

Estes Canyon-Bull Pasture Trails (3.7 miles roundtrip) Take this strenuous climb to a high plateau with views.

Victoria Mine Trail (4.4 miles roundtrip) Hike rolling terrain to a historic silver mine.

Puerto Blanco Mountains-Senita Basin Trail Complex Hike this series of trails based on historic roads that connected mines in the Puerto Blanco Mountains.

Alamo Canyon (1.8 miles roundtrip) Follow an old dirt road to a historic ranch house and corral. This trail follows an impressive wash and is great for birding.

Camping
Twin Peaks Campground Open year-round. Water, restrooms, showers, grills, tables, dump station, and amphitheater. Fires are allowed only in grills. Wood-gathering is prohibited. Visit www.nps.gov/orpi/planyourvisit/twin-peaks.htm for more information.

Alamo Canyon Campground Primitive. First-come, first-served; self-register at the campground. Tents, truck campers, and small vans only are allowed. Trailers, motorhomes, wood fires, and generators are prohibited.

Backcountry Camping Allowed in select areas of the park. A required permit is available at the visitor center.

Picnic areas Located at the visitor center and along scenic drives, some picnic areas have pit toilets and shade. Drinking water is available only at the visitor center.

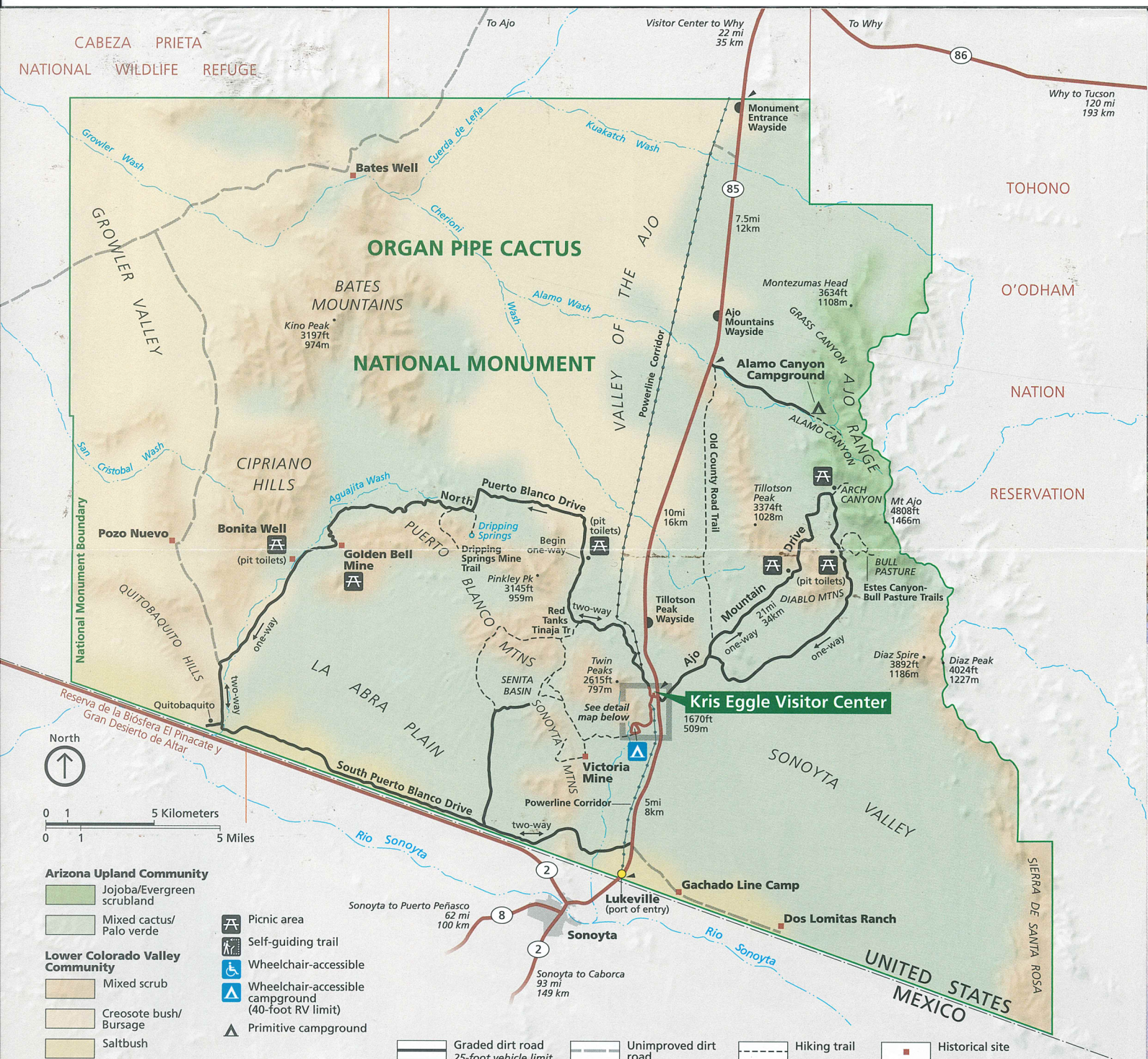
For Your Safety Organ Pipe Cactus shares 31 miles of international border with Mexico. • Always be aware of your surroundings. • Lock your unoccupied vehicle; keep valuables out of sight. • Hike with a partner. • Report unusual or suspicious incidents. • For firearms and other regulations check the park website.

Emergencies call 911

Accessibility We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to the visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check our website.

More Information
Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument
10 Organ Pipe Dr.
Ajo, AZ 85321
520-387-6849
www.nps.gov/orpi

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. Learn about national parks at www.nps.gov.



Welcome to a Green Desert

Two plant communities merge here—the Lower Colorado Valley and Arizona Upland. Local topography, soil, and climate determine where each grows best.

Lower Colorado Valley plants have adapted to some of North America's hottest, driest climates. Widely spaced shrubs dominate miles of scenery. Arizona Upland plants grow in wetter areas. They look rich and varied in comparison.

Some members of both plant communities reach their northern limits in this area. For example, organ pipe cactus, senita cactus, elephant tree, and limberbush are more typical of communities in Mexico.

Federal law prohibits collecting or disturbing plants, wildlife, rocks, or artifacts.

LOWER COLORADO VALLEY COMMUNITY
Hottest, driest part of the Sonoran Desert

Mixed Scrub Bursage, brittlebush, and foothills palo verde grow on dry volcanic slopes.

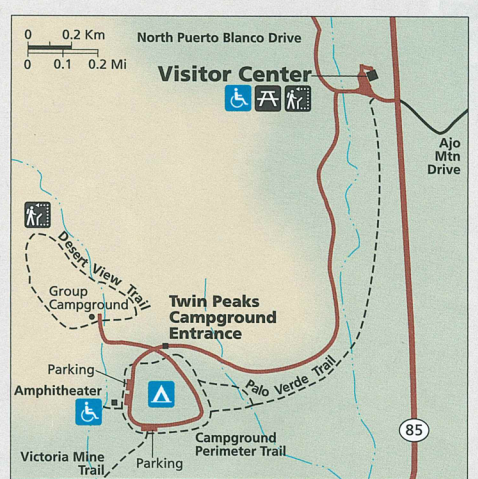
Bursage/Creosote Bush Bursage and creosote bush cover most of the valley. Mesquite and big galleta grow along washes.

Saltbush Plants that tolerate silty, salty soil—primarily saltbush—inhabit the floodplain.

ARIZONA UPLAND COMMUNITY
Wetter part of the Sonoran Desert

Evergreen Scrubland/Jojoba Jojoba, agave, rosewood, and juniper grow where rainfall is most abundant—in the canyons and the higher elevations of the Ajo Range.

Mixed Cactus/Palo Verde Organ pipe, saguaro, prickly pear, and cholla thrive on gravelly bajadas and rocky slopes. Palo verde is the dominant tree.



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A Desert Full of Life

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument is a showcase for the Sonoran Desert and its many plants and animals. Desert dwellers here must live in extreme temperatures, intense sun, and little rainfall. Cacti are the most recognizable plants; 28 cactus species live here, including saguaro and organ pipe.

The organ pipe is a large cactus rarely found in the United States, although it is common in Mexico. The monument protects the bulk of its US range. Like its fellow cacti and other desert inhabitants, the organ pipe is attuned to rhythms of the sun and infrequent rains. A glutton for heat and light, it grows on warmer slopes where it can absorb the most sun. This is critical in winter months when severe frosts can kill the cactus. It blooms in the heat of May, June, and July, opening lavender-white flowers after the sun sets. Other cacti bloom at night, too, but many also bloom during the day, exposing their flowers to the sun. Day or night, the summer display of cactus blooms is one of the desert's flashiest spectacles, as yellow, red, white, and pink flowers color the landscape. It is a show staged only by explosions of gold poppies, blue lupines, pink owl clover, and other annuals after a wet winter.

Less conspicuous than plants are the desert animals. Many, including elf owls, kangaroo

rats, jackrabbits, and most snakes, are creatures of the night. During the day they hide in cactus holes, underground burrows, or other cool and shaded spots. Other animals, like bighorn sheep and most birds and lizards, prefer daylight to darkness. But these animals also seek mid-day shade, especially in summer when air temperatures can reach 118°F and ground temperatures can soar to a scorching 175°. Coyotes and javelinas are even more adaptable, active at any time of day or night that is not too hot.

To deal with the lack of water, desert animals must conserve body moisture. For example, the kangaroo rat ordinarily drinks no water and eats mostly dry food. It gets enough moisture from even the driest seeds. But its survival depends primarily on reducing water loss. The kangaroo rat's urine is highly concentrated, and its feces are almost completely dry. Through its nose the kangaroo rat even reclaims water otherwise lost in breathing.

Like other desert dwellers, humans have had to adapt or suffer the consequences. Prehistoric nomads relied on scarce springs and seeps. Later desert wanderers—Spanish explorers, missionaries, and others—sometimes entered this unforgiving environment unpre-

pared. Many followed an almost waterless route called El Camino del Diablo—the Devil's Highway—as they headed west. Some did not finish their journey. In the early 1900s ranchers and miners found and developed new water sources, allowing more people to live in this region. Today, as before, visitors learn quickly about thirst, heat, cactus, and other dangers, and find ways to safely enjoy the desert on its own terms.

As a protected area, Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument allows the Sonoran Desert life to flourish under nearly ideal wilderness conditions. In this outstanding natural preserve one of Earth's major ecosystems survives almost unspoiled. Recognizing its significance, in 1976 the United Nations designated the monument as an International Biosphere Reserve. Scientific research, including studies of human impact, continues to provide invaluable information for protecting this showcase of the Sonoran Desert.



ABUNDANT LIFE AT ORGAN PIPE

This illustration shows some of the Sonoran Desert plants and animals living in Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument.

Plants

- 1 Saguaro
- 2 Ocotillo
- 3 Brittlebush
- 4 Organ pipe cactus
- 5 Engelmann prickly pear
- 6 Teddybear cholla
- 7 Creosote bush
- 8 Palo verde
- 9 Saltbush
- 10 Senita cactus
- 11 Mesquite
- 12 Chainfruit cholla

Animals

- 13 Gold poppies
- 14 Elephant tree
- 15 White-winged dove
- 16 Gila woodpecker
- 17 Gila monster
- 18 Western diamondback rattlesnake
- 19 Desert tortoise
- 20 Javelina
- 21 Gambel's quail
- 22 Roadrunner
- 23 Cactus wren
- 24 Coyote
- 25 Red-tailed hawk

ILLUSTRATION: NPS / ROBERT HYNES