

## Palo Duro Canyon Facts:

- Known as "Texas' Grand Canyon."
- Palo Duro Canyon State Park consists of more than 29,000 acres in Armstrong and Randall Counties, south of Amarillo in the Texas Panhandle. Only the Grand Canyon in Arizona is larger.
- Officially opened on July 4, 1934.
- Man has inhabited Palo Duro Canyon for approximately 12,000 years.
- The Clovis and Folsom people first resided in the canyon and hunted large herds of mammoth and giant bison.
- Later on, other cultures such as the Apaches, Comanches, and Kiowas utilized the canyon's abundant resources.
- Early Spanish Explorers are believed to have discovered the area and dubbed the canyon "Palo Duro" which is Spanish for "hard wood" in reference to the abundant mesquite and juniper trees.
- An American did not officially discover the canyon until 1852 when Captain Marcy ventured into the area while searching for the headwaters of the Red River.
- In 1874, Palo Duro Canyon was a battle site during the Red River Wars.
- From 1876 until 1890, most of the canyon belonged to the J.A. Ranch and was operated by Col. Charles Goodnight.
- Cañoncita Ranch added to Palo Duro Canyon State Park. Texas Parks and Wildlife has purchased 2,036 acres adjacent to Palo Duro Canyon State Park along the park's southern boundary.
- Park activities include camping, horseback riding, hiking, nature study, bird watching, mountain biking, and scenic drives. There are also wagon rides and campfire breakfasts.
- Palo Duro Canyon features the Pioneer Amphitheater where the Official Play of the State of Texas has run for more than 40 seasons in in beautiful Palo Duro Canyon State Park.
- There are many other activities in the region, including [Caprock Canyons State Park](#), Storyland Zoo for Children, Nielsen Memorial Museum, [Lake Meredith National Recreation Area](#), [Alibates Flint Quarries National Monument](#), Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, West Texas A&M University, Wildcat Bluff Nature Center, and [Buffalo Lake National Wildlife Refuge](#).

### Natural Features:

- Palo Duro Canyon is located on the southern high plains, an area called El Llano Estacado or "staked plains."
- The rim of the canyon is considered part of the short grass prairie while the elevated moisture of the canyon floor supports a greater diversity of plants including some medium and tall grass species along with shrubs and trees.
- Common plant species include sideoats grama, big bluestem, Indian blanket, star thistle, fragrant sumac, mesquite, and cottonwood trees.
- Several juniper species are also common.
- Palo Duro Canyon contains many species of wildlife including the rare Texas Horned Lizard, and Palo Duro Mouse.

- Other species include wild turkey, white tail and mule deer, Barbary sheep, coyotes, cottontail rabbits, roadrunners, and western diamondback rattlesnakes.
- On the canyon rim, longhorn steers which are a part of the official Texas State Longhorn Herd, may be viewed from the main road.

**Geology:**

- The canyon is approximately 120 miles long, 20 miles wide, and 800 feet deep.
- Extending from Canyon to Silverton, Palo Duro Canyon was formed primarily by water erosion from the Prairie Dog Town Fork of the Red River, which began to carve the canyon less than one million years ago.
- The slopes of the canyon reveal the colorful natural history of the area.
- Dating back 250 million years, the oldest layers of rock, Cloud Chief Gypsum, can only be seen in a few areas in the canyon.
- The next oldest and most prominent layer of rock is the Quartermaster Formation which can be seen with its distinctive red claystone/sandstone and white layers of gypsum.
- The Tecovas Formation is located directly above the Quartermaster and is composed of yellow, gray, and lavender mudstone and sandstone.
- Together with the Quartermaster, they form the colorful triangular slopes called Spanish Skirts.
- Above the Tecovas, the Trujillo and Ogallala formations can be viewed.
- The Ogallala is composed of sand, silt, clay, and limestone, which compose the hard caprock.

**Weather:**

- Average annual rainfall is 20.6 inches.
- Temperatures range from 19 degrees in January to 92 degrees in July.
- Elevation is 3676 ft.