



Puerta Chilicote Trailhead and the Fresno West Rim

Some of the best hiking at Big Bend Ranch State Park awaits you only 20 minutes from Saucedo Ranger Station and is easily accessible by 2-wheel drive vehicle. So, what are you waiting for – hit the trail!

To reach Puerta Chilicote Trailhead from Saucedo: drive east for approximately 2.7 miles, turn right onto the Llano Loop, then continue another 1.7 miles and turn left, following the “Puerta Chilicote Trailhead” signs. Two parking areas are available: the first for vehicles that are unable to cross a small arroyo (one mile from the trailhead), and the second at the trailhead itself.

Puerta Chilicote Trailhead is a major gateway to inspiring views in a rich historical context. From here, Mexicano Falls Trailhead and Chorro Vista Trailhead are about a half-day’s hike away (or accessible by 4-wheel drive high clearance vehicle). Check with park staff for further information and planning advice, and to make arrangements for a possible overnight stay at Chorro Vista Campsite or in the backcountry (special permit required).

For a grand day hike, take the Chilicote trailhead to the West Rim Overlook. On this relatively short and easy hike of 2.5 miles one way you will traverse typical desert scrub vegetation (creosotebush, ocotillo, whitethorn acacia, and several species of cacti). The terrain is gently rolling with 2 short canyon descents/climbs. This trek pays huge dividends at the end when you can overlook Fresno Canyon and the Flatirons of the Solitario. On the return, stop at Chilicote Spring for a cool and shady respite, but don’t wander too far from the trail and watch for poison ivy.

For another great day hike, take the Chilicote Loop that encircles Cerro Chilicote. It is best made in a counterclockwise fashion. You will hike through old fences that were established in the early ranching era and then through arroyos and back towards Chilicote Spring. For the more adventurous, there are multiple overnight hikes that can be staged in this area. **Be certain to take the Exploration Map, available at Saucedo Ranger Station, Ft. Leaton State Historic Site, and Barton Warnock Visitor Center.** If you venture off the Fresno Rim, the trails into Arroyo Primero or Fresno Canyon are steep with elevation changes of over 1000’! Confer with park staff about the following options:

- Old Government Road - Lower Shutup Trailhead
- Manos Arriba
- Fresno Canyon-Arroyo Mexicano to box canyon below Mexicano Falls
- Los Portales - Burnt Camp Trailhead
- Chorro Vista to Madrid Falls Overlook
- Mexicano Falls Trailhead to Crawford-Smith House or Crawford-Smith Overlook

Wherever you go, realize that the landscape is dynamic – constantly changing as geological processes work. For example, Cerro Chilicote is a remnant of Tertiary lava flows that occurred millions of years ago and the distinctive yellow rock layer along Arroyo Mexicano is an even older volcanic unit exposed by erosion. The Fresno Rim itself is the topographic expression of the eastern limit of volcanic activity centered in the Bofecillos Highlands. Around 27 million years ago multiple lava flows moved eastward,-each stacking on top of the preceding ones. These flows were interspersed with deposits of volcanic ash to form a rock known as tuff. Between eruptions, erosion exposed and altered the lava and tuff layers to form good aquifers or water-bearing zones.

These aquifers feed numerous springs and seeps (marked by cottonwoods), such as Chilicote Spring. The presence of surface water allowed extensive sheep and goat ranching operations in the West Rim area. There may have been up to three adobe ranch structures here, most notably Howard’s Ranch. Scattered rock walls, fences, stone corrals, and lambing sites (*chiqueras*) are the only remnants of early ranching. Extensive ruins of the Crawford-Smith Ranch and Madrid House, however, remain in Fresno Canyon and Arroyo Primero.

Looking eastward from Puerta Chilicote Trailhead, the flank of the Solitario punctuates the eastern skyline. Again, geologic construction and destruction are at play. At about 35 Ma, magma pushed up from below, causing the overlying rock to be lifted into a dome-shaped structure. During the final stage of dome construction, some of the magma reached the surface and erupted as ash, but only in a small area. The feature you see today is the result of erosion or the tearing down of the uplifted dome. The less resistant rocks have been removed to expose the older, more resistant limestones – the dramatic Flatirons – that ring the core.

Fresno Canyon marks the contact between volcanic rocks to the west and sedimentary rocks to the east and southeast. In this contact zone, the down-cutting of Fresno Creek was focused and intensified to form Fresno Canyon. To the south, the terrain opens into the area called Contrabando Lowlands. The major tributaries of Arroyo Primero and Arroyo Mexicano flow in from the west through deep canyons to join Fresno Creek. Contrabando Creek joins from the east.

SAFETY MATTERS!

Don’t go it alone. Tell someone your plans and estimated return time. Avoid hiking alone. Cell phone service is virtually non-existent; do not rely upon it.

Water is life. If you’ve waited until you’re thirsty to drink, you’ve waited too long. Carry and consume at least 1 quart of water for each hour on the trail (1 gallon per day, minimum) to avoid dehydration.

Be aware of wildlife.

- If you encounter a mountain lion, do not run. Face the animal, make noise and try to look as large as possible. Pick up small children. Back away slowly. If attacked, fight back. Report sightings to park staff immediately.
- To prevent venomous snake bites, watch where you put your hands and feet. Never harass or attempt to handle a snake. In the unlikely event you are bitten: remove jewelry and loosen clothing; wash the bite area with disinfectant; keep calm and quiet; limit movement as much as possible; seek medical attention immediately.

Keep cool. Desert heat can kill, and sunburn is no fun. Be sure to use sunscreen. Wear a long sleeved shirt, long pants, a broad-brimmed hat and sunglasses. Avoid strenuous hiking during the hottest part of the day.

Weather the weather. Temperatures can fluctuate by 50 degrees per day; dress accordingly. In a lightning storm, do not stand under trees or in shallow caves, and avoid high ground. Stay away from water, wire fences and metal railings, which can carry lightning from a distance. Keep dry to prevent hypothermia.

Stay high and dry. Flash flooding can occur; especially Arroyo Mexicano. Any dry creek bed can quickly become a raging torrent due to rainfall far upstream. Never cross rain-swollen streams.

Fancy your footwork. Good hiking boots are essential in rough terrain. Do not hike in tennis shoes or sandals. This is not the place to try out new boots!

Be ready for emergencies. Carry a first aid kit, extra water and high-energy snack foods. Remember that 9-1-1 service is 2 – 3 hours away. Your best course of action is to seek help at Saucedo Ranger Station. Do not rely on cell phones.

MIND YOUR MANNERS

Please be respectful of other trail users as well as the park’s natural and cultural resources by observing the following.

- Practice “leave no trace” skills and ethics.** Pack out everything that you pack in.
- Leave everything exactly as you find it.** Plants, animals, artifacts and archeological features are protected by law and should not be damaged, disturbed or collected.
- Enjoy your pets elsewhere.** Pets are not allowed on trails, even on-leash, for their own safety and to protect wildlife.
- Keep Wildlife Wild.** Never feed wild animals or allow them to get human food. Observe animals from a safe distance.