



THE FORMATIONS OF HUECO TANKS STATE HISTORIC SITE RISE ABOVE THE CHIHUAHUA DESERT FLOOR TO MARK AN OASIS OF NATURE AND CULTURE. DUE TO ITS GEOLOGY, RELATIVELY ABUNDANT WATER, AND UNUSUAL STRUCTURE, HUECO TANKS HAS SERVED AS A REFUGE FOR PLANTS, ANIMALS AND PEOPLE FOR OVER 10,000 YEARS. THOUSANDS OF PICTOGRAPHS LEFT BY PREHISTORIC AND HISTORIC NATIVE AMERICANS ARE TESTAMENT TO THE LIFE-SUSTAINING POWER OF HUECO TANKS.



At Hueco Tanks, visitors are surrounded by the vestiges of thousands of years of human history and millions of years of natural history. While enjoying your visit:

- Stay on trails when hiking to protect habitat and archeology.
- Leave pictographs and artifacts untouched. Doing so may help us solve the mysteries of the past.
- Respect plants, animals and geologic features, which together form the site's unique ecosystem and are protected by law.
- Properly dispose of or pack out your trash. Recycling containers are located near the Interpretive Center.

#### FURTHER READING

Kirkland, Forrest and W.W. Newcomb, Jr., *The Rock Art of Texas Indians*. Austin, University of Texas Press, 1967.

Sutherland, Kay, *Rock Paintings at Hueco Tanks State Historical Park*. Austin, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, 1995.



Hueco Tanks holds meaning for diverse groups of visitors. Hiking, picnicking, rock-climbing, camping, interpretive tours, birding and annual special events are among the available activities. The site also continues to be used for traditional Native American cultural activities and performances. Visitors should call ahead to learn more about access policies, activities and volunteer opportunities. For information, contact:

Hueco Tanks State Historic Site  
6900 Hueco Tanks Road #1, El Paso, Texas 79938  
(915) 857-1135  
[www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/hueco](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/hueco)



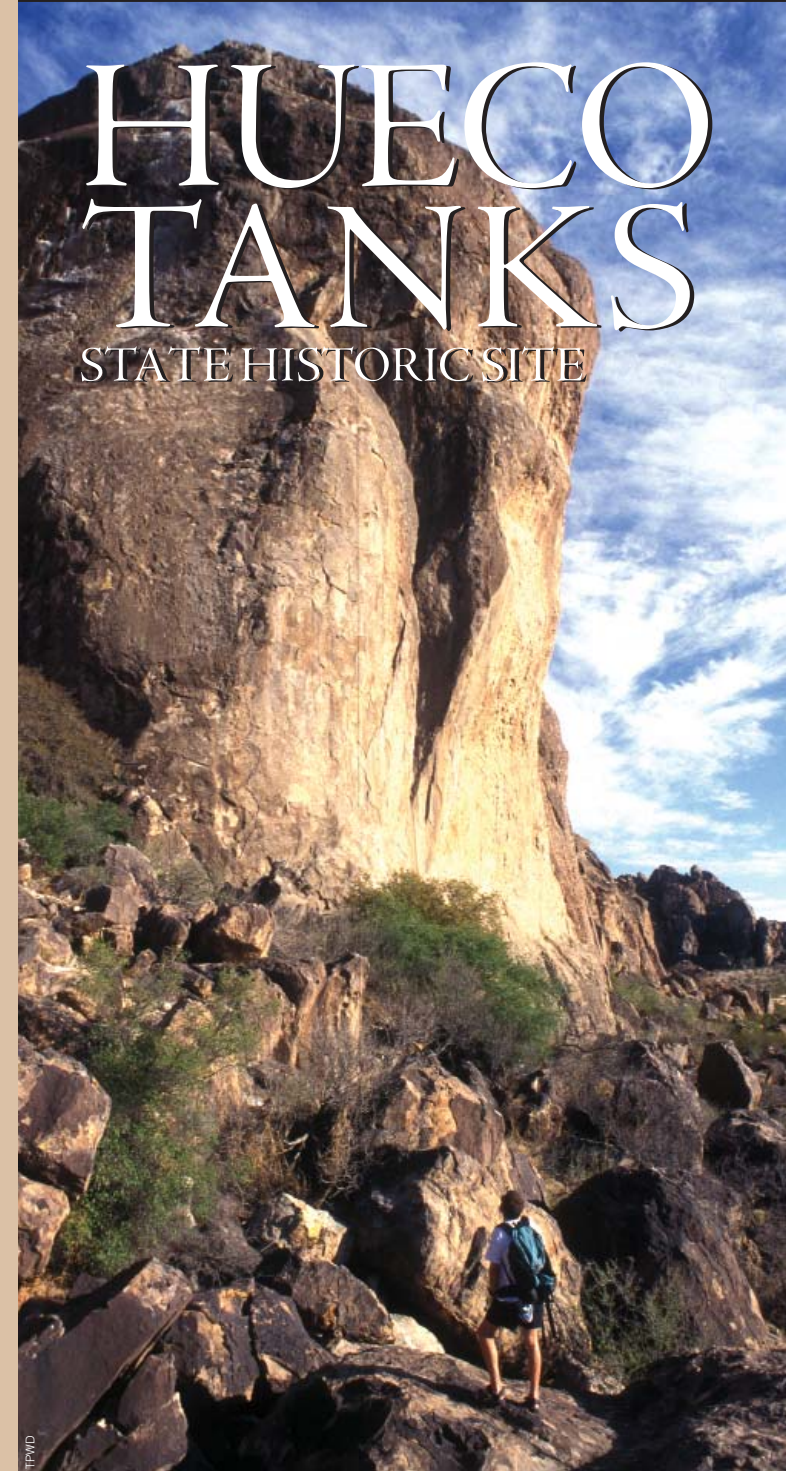
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*Interpretive Guide to:*

# HUECO TANKS

STATE HISTORIC SITE



## RAINWATER AND ROCK

The rock we see at Hueco Tanks formed beneath the earth's surface 34 million years ago, as magma pushed up into an older limestone formation and then cooled. Over millennia, weathering processes eroded the overlying limestone and sculpted the now-exposed igneous rock into its present form. Hollows (*huecos*) and fracture patterns in the massive granite-like formations capture or direct precious rainfall to establish a relatively moist environment. The rock also provides shelter, shade and pockets of fertile soil to create "microhabitats" that support a diversity of living things. Arizona white oak and rose-fruited juniper, typically found at higher elevations, thrive here. Moisture-seeking cottonwood and willow coexist with desert-adapted creosotebush and mesquite, while *huecos* and seasonal ponds support freshwater shrimp. The only known U.S. population of Erect Colubrina, a shrub of the buckthorn family, occurs in a protected alcove at Hueco Tanks.

## ARCHAIC HUNTERS AND GATHERERS

For thousands of years following the end of the Pleistocene ice age approximately 10,000 years ago, hunter-gatherers traveled across the landscape in pursuit of game. They also gathered wild plants for use as food, fiber and medicine. Today, visitors can still see the hunting scenes and the groups of geometric designs they painted on the rock.



## THE JORNADA MOGOLLON



With the advent of domesticated crops such as corn, beans and squash, people began to settle more permanently. By 1150 the Jornada Mogollon built a small cluster of pithouse structures at Hueco Tanks. Pottery shards, stone tools, bedrock mortars and prehistoric water control features provide clues about this early agricultural way of life. Animals, birds, and large-eyed figures that may represent rain or storm deities are part of the Jornada Mogollon pictograph style. The most renowned images are pictograph "masks" or face designs scattered throughout the park. Numbering more than 200, they represent the largest assemblage of painted masks in North America. These intriguing images are a direct yet cryptic communication from people of the past.

## HISTORIC PERIOD

Even after the arrival of the Spanish, Hueco Tanks remained a landmark for indigenous people and traveling newcomers. Within its rock enclosures, many satisfied their thirst and found sanctuary, although legends tell of others who arrived only to lose their lives. The Kiowa, Mescalero Apache and Tigua are among the groups of Native Americans who used Hueco Tanks historically and consider it a meaningful part of their past and present heritage. Pictographs of handprints, dancing figures, horses, weapons and human figures in European-style clothing represent important images in historic Native American lore – images that presumably represent stories of celebration, tradition, conflict and change.



Butterfield Stage with an extra backseat, which was unusual for this type of conveyance between St. Louis and San Diego.

## THE BUTTERFIELD OVERLAND MAIL

The Butterfield Overland Mail began operation in 1858 to blaze a trail between St. Louis and San Francisco. For the first time, reliable communication was possible between people separated by nearly 2,000 miles of undeveloped wilderness. Attractive water resources made Hueco Tanks the choice for a relay station until August 1859, when a southern route passing through Fort Stockton and Fort Davis became more practical.

## THE ESCONTRIAS RANCH

By 1898, Silverio Escontrias and his family had settled at Hueco Tanks and built an adobe home. For over half a century the family operated a large ranch, of which the land now known as Hueco Tanks State Historic Site was only a small part. The adventures and realities of the "real cowboy days of El Paso" are a legacy of the ranch and the Escontrias family. Patriarch Silverio Escontrias became an important community leader in El Paso County and Socorro. The adobe ranch residence now houses the Interpretive Center at Hueco Tanks.