

TO PRESERVE AND PROSPER:

Far West Texans' Struggle for Big Bend National Park  
and Economic Development

THESIS

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This study is dedicated to  
Marcy Greer,  
my wife

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## INTRODUCTION

Historically the Big Bend has been far removed from the paths of commerce and settlement. In the 1920s and 1930s, its limited population, spread across imperial-sized ranches and clustered in a few modest towns, endured stifling geographic isolation, and were beholden to the railroad, their lifeline to the outside. Automobile travel involved a long, hard journey over unimproved dirt roads to the population centers of West and Central Texas. The Big Bend, remote, underdeveloped, and largely overlooked, was tied to a bygone era. By the period between the two World Wars, it persisted as a frontier remnant whose people sought relief.

Creation of a national park in the Big Bend was the remedy many clung to during the Great Depression. Some wished to preserve the majestic beauty. Others, more pragmatic, sought to bring economic activity to a region that the twentieth century had all but bypassed. Although boosters had mounted several attempts to secure outside investment, the bid to create Big Bend National Park was the most substantial. Since funding was precarious, nothing short of an all-out effort would be required to transform hope into reality.

In the early 1930s, it was apparent to park advocates that neither the state

government nor the private sector could provide the means to diversify the area's economy. Since the days of the Apache warfare and Pancho Villa's cross-border raiding during the Mexican Revolution, the federal government had been an economic mainstay and loomed large as a source of future development. In this context, a national park seemed a natural fit. The notion took hold because grass-roots leadership persisted in its promotion. During all stages of an eight-year statewide campaign, locals lobbied, promoted, and attracted financial contributions, large and small, to the cause. While they were justifiably proud of the proposed park's aesthetic beauty and biodiversity, their principal motive was economic.

The park's natural setting--Big Bend--derives its name from the sweep of the Rio Grande in far southern Brewster and Presidio Counties. Encompassing over nine-thousand square miles, it is vaguely defined as lying south of the Davis Mountains, north of the Rio Grande, and west of the Pecos River. This vastness represents the Texas extension of the Chihuahuan Desert, an arid, mountainous region that extends from north central Mexico into the American Southwest. For the purposes of this study, however, the Big Bend will be politically defined as Brewster, Presidio, and Jeff Davis counties in far West Texas.

Although much has been written about Big Bend history generally, and the creation of the national park in particular, economic motives have not benefitted from

thorough discussion. Similarly, the remarkable efforts of residents to secure the park as part of their economic future remain unstudied. John Jameson's The Story of Big Bend National Park (1996) is an exceptional historical overview and proved consistently useful. Jameson's perspective, however, is national and only briefly covers local motives and aspirations. Ron Tyler has written several fine books about Big Bend National Park, including the official National Park Service history of the park, The Big Bend: A History of the Final Frontier (1975). Like Jameson, however, he only occasionally mentions the region's economic limitations and the desire to attract federal investment. Other recently written histories of the area, such as Clifford Casey's Mirages, Mystery and Reality: Brewster County, Texas (1972) and Kenneth Ragsdale's Quicksilver: Terlingua and the Chisos Mining Company (1976), are typically anecdotal or topical. Other less significant works are Virginia Madison, The Big Bend Country of Texas (1955) and several good county histories. They, too, overlook the region's economic needs.

This study, then, attempts to illuminate a topic previous scholarship has ignored or lightly touched: inhabitants of the Big Bend, isolated and treated with state governmental indifference, were compelled to seek federal assistance in generating economic development. When political efforts stalled, residents of Alpine and other towns launched a statewide campaign. Although this grass-roots enterprise was unsuccessful, it kept the issue alive in both Texas and Washington. Thus it was instrumental in the creation of the

national park and therefore worthy of long-awaited study.

The approach to the topic will involve four chapters. The first presents an historical overview of the region, with emphasis on economic conditions and the state government's inability to control or develop it prior to 1920, and the growing tendency toward federal reliance. The second describes various efforts to seek outside funding for regional improvement, including the initial unsuccessful legislative campaign for a national park in the Big Bend. The third details the two grass-roots campaigns after the defeat of the first legislative campaign, and the final legislative drive. The final chapter presents conclusions and reveals problems which hindered the park's success for two decades after its opening in 1944. That date, significant to the emergence of the vast Trans-Pecos Texas, represented the culmination of centuries-old forces and themes that provided a necessary background.

## CHAPTER 1

### **A Persistent Frontier:**

#### **The Big Bend to 1920**

The Big Bend of Texas has been forever synonymous with scarcity and isolation. Beginning in pre-Columbian times, aridity dictated and restricted settlement among native peoples. Early American settlers were hard-pressed to defend against marauding Indians, and remoteness and desolation hindered economic activity. During early statehood, Texas consistently lacked the resources and political will to control and develop the region, and Confederate forces in the early 1860s were woefully inadequate to the task. From the 1870s through the 1920s, the Big Bend's economic development was halting, and size, distance, and natural setting determined that the region would be beholden to the outside. Because corporate investment proved inadequate, the federal government emerged as critical to this vast, sparsely populated, little-noticed part of the American Southwest.

Historically, the Big Bend never accommodated major human activity. Instead, it was a cultural transition zone. Perhaps the first European to enter the area was the

Spaniard, Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca, who arrived in 1535. At that time, the Jumanos were the principal indigenous group. Uto-Aztecan speakers who maintained an extensive trading network, they also relied on subsistence agriculture, primarily corn, beans, squash, other vegetables, and perhaps cotton. They were not irrigators and in dry years always faced the possibility of famine. The bison herds north of the Chisos Mountains and east of the Davis Mountains provided supplemental food, but this source was limited before the introduction of the horse in the early seventeenth century. The Jumanos apparently expanded their territory from about 1000 to 1400 A.D., although subsequent climatic changes, indicated by evidence of prolonged drought, caused a cultural contraction. They maintained trading-based commerce along the Rio Grande and two of its major tributaries, the Conchos of Chihuahua and the Pecos of West Texas. The center of this activity was the concentration of farming communities at La Junta at the confluence of the Rio Grande and the Conchos. They also established sustained economic ties with the densely populated Puebloan settlements of northern New Mexico and ventured east into the Texas Hill Country. The commerce was apparently lucrative.

By the early seventeenth century, the Jumanos had become sufficiently equestrian to be called horse Indians by the Spanish. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, however, pressures from frequent Apache raids, Spanish slavers, and gradual assimilation into the Hispanic culture caused the Jumano culture to wither and gradually

fade away. The Spanish established missions at La Junta in 1683, but were forced to flee because of Jumano unrest related to the continued threat from slaving expeditions. The missions were re-established in 1715, but the Spanish were still unable to protect their Jumano charges against Apache depredations. In an effort to maintain control of the region, they located a penal colony and frontier garrison, Presidio Del Norte at La Junta in 1760. Nevertheless, Jumano numbers declined and dispersed. Some drifted south into Mexico, but the majority seem to have assimilated with their erstwhile Apache enemies.<sup>1</sup>

Among the various native inhabitants, the Apaches were perhaps best adapted to the Chihuahuan Desert. Those of the Big Bend were the Lipan and Mescalero, who arrived in the area involuntarily. The Lipan originally inhabited small settlements along rivers of north central Texas and Oklahoma. They raised corn and squash in small plots to augment their meat supply. They and their western relatives, the Mescaleros of eastern New Mexico and West Texas, dominated the southern plains during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the early eighteenth century, however, an aggressive force from the northwest wrought permanent change. The southward-moving Comanches were

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Parrott Hickerson, The Jumanos: Hunters and Traders of the South Plains (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 215-17; John Upton Terrell, Apache Chronicle (New York: World Publishing, 1972), 81; W.W. Newcomb, The Indians of Texas (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1961), 234; Cecilia Thompson, History of Marfa and Presidio County, 1535-1946 (Austin: Nortex Press, 1985), 24-25; Howard Applewhite, "La Junta de los Rios Del Norte y Conchos" Southwestern Studies, monograph 41 (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1974), 1-8.

not only more populous, but traveled in much larger bands than the Apaches. During the first half of the eighteenth century, they took a heavy toll on the Lipans and drove them from the southern plains southwest into the less desirable parts of Texas, including the Big Bend. Thus the Apaches came to dominate this arid, isolated vastness, which became their homeland, or *Apacheria*, and effectively blocked Mexican settlement in the eighteenth century and American progress in the nineteenth. They learned to live in harmony with the forbidding desert and built seasonal *rancherias*, or groupings of widely dispersed brush and wood shelters that were abandoned during the hot, dry months or when threatened by Comanches or other enemies.<sup>2</sup>

Although the Comanches, centered on the high plains of northwest Texas, war parties frequently headed southwestward along the Great Comanche War Trail, or Comanche Trace, through Big Bend into Chihuahua. In 1849, a raid almost destroyed the settlement of Presidio, and the following year marauders succeeded in driving off virtually all of the cattle in the La Junta area. These intrusions not only threatened the Apaches and Chihuahuans, but deterred Anglo-American penetration.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> John Upton Terrell, *The Plains Apache* (New York: Thomas Crowell Co., 1975), 134-36, 188-89, 192-98; James L. Haley, *Apaches: A History and Cultural Portrait* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1981), 30-36; Dan Thrapp, *The Conquest of Apacheria* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), x..

<sup>3</sup> Thompson, *Marfa and Presidio County*, 25; Applewhite, "La Junta de los Rios Del Norte y Conchos", 7-11. For a general treatment of the Comanches, see Stanley Noyes, *Los Comanches, the Horse People, 1751-1845* (Albuquerque: University of New

Shortly after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the Mexican War, westering Americans became interested in the Big Bend. The earliest Anglo inhabitant was Ben Leaton, a wagon freighter, who, in 1848, established Fort Leaton near Presidio del Norte, or more commonly, Presidio. American and Mexican settlement, like the Jumano pattern, was restricted to the Rio Grande for several years. Presidio County, created somewhat optimistically from Bexar County in 1850, remained unorganized for the next twenty-five years under the jurisdiction of El Paso County.<sup>4</sup>

By 1850, the population explosion in gold rush California demanded a transcontinental mail route. Later that decade, the San Antonio - San Diego Mail stagecoach route entered the Big Bend as it proceeded to El Paso and on to California. Because Mescalero Apaches represented a severe hindrance to the mail, a series of forts was established in the 1850s to protect this line of communication. In October of 1854, Apaches hotly contested troops building Fort Davis and remained a constant menace for the next quarter century. Later, Fort Stockton (1859) at Comanche Springs, Camp Pena Colorado (1879) near present-day Marathon, and several smaller posts completed the military defenses of the region.<sup>5</sup>

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Mexico Press, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> Thompson, Marfa and Presidio County, 258-59.

<sup>5</sup> Wayne Austerman, Sharps Rifles and Spanish Mules: The San Antonio - El Paso Mail, 1851-1881 (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1985), 59, 223-31;

Supplying these and other isolated western outposts became an immediate concern. In the early 1850s, Secretary of War Jefferson Davis went so far as to experiment with camels in addressing the need. The supply problem was partially solved with the introduction of cattle. At first, Anglo contractors purchased stock from Chihuahua and Coahuila ranchers and then sold it to quartermasters and traders from forts Stockton and Davis. At this time, the most direct link from Big Bend to the outside world was the freight trail from Chihuahua to Presidio. Therefore it was not surprising that Chihuahuans established several of the first ranches: Manuel Musquiz, for example, was the first to locate around Fort Davis. Several Anglos immediately followed suit, notably Milton Favor, the first cattle baron of the Big Bend, who bought a herd in Chihuahua by bartering with Indians in 1849. He built a fortified ranch in the Chinati Mountains, but in 1857 Apaches ran off all but thirty-two calves. From that nucleus, his livestock numbered more than 20,000 by the 1880s.<sup>6</sup>

Apaches and Comanches were obstacles to ranching, freighting, and stage-

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Alice Shipman, Taming of the Big Bend (Austin: Von Boeckman-Jones Company, 1926), 22.

<sup>6</sup> Thompson, Marfa and Presidio County, 80-86; Terry G. Jordan, Trails to Texas: Southern Roots of Western Cattle Ranching (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), 139-41; James A. Wilson, Hide and Horn in Texas: The Spread of Cattle Ranching, 1836-1900 (Boston: American Press, 1983), 32; Ron Tyler, ed., The New Handbook of Texas, 6 vols. (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1996), 2: 967, 4: 912.

coaching and posed serious problems for early ranchers. Generally, the Indian barrier thwarted any sort of development in the region, a condition that proved propitious, however. It necessitated the location of military installations, which provided some measure of protection. Of at least equal importance, they also represented federal expenditures, which became the basis for all economic progress on this vast, out-of-the-way segment of the Texas and American frontiers.

The Civil War drove the point home. Soon after its outbreak, the Union recalled its West Texas garrisons, which meant that ranching, for the most part, also ceased. As Texas Confederate units attempted to fill the defensive void and create an illusory western empire, they confronted Apache hostility, particularly attacks against couriers. In the Davis Mountains, Mescalero bands became an immediate threat, and attempts to gain their allegiance failed. After a brief occupation of Fort Davis, Confederates abandoned everything west of San Antonio to the defiant Apaches and to the California Column, the Federal unit that swept the Southwest clean of Confederate forces and briefly occupied Fort Davis. By war's end, the deserted post had been burned to the ground, and the Big Bend was undeniably part of Apacheria.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Donald Frazier, Blood and Treasure: Confederate Empire in the Southwest (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1995), 64-5, 290. See also several documents in the John Baylor folder, File 81, Box 1, Alice Shipman Collection, El Paso Public Library, El Paso, Texas.

The end of the war in 1865 did not have immediate repercussions in the region. Permanent stone buildings were erected at Fort Davis in 1867, and settlers began to return to the area. Although the Apache menace persisted, cattlemen from the Nueces River country in South Texas established several large ranches. Yet the fact remained that isolation meant that the military remained the economic pillar and principal source of cash contracts. Hand in hand with the Big Bend's wildness and remoteness was its lawlessness. In 1880, for example, the Jesse Evans gang, a large band of border outlaws, sacked the civilian settlement of Fort Davis. Some relief occurred when several military campaigns in the 1870s finally ground down the Apaches, who were forced to seek sanctuary in the remote mountains of Chihuahua or to accept confinement on the Mescalero reservation in southeastern New Mexico. The last major military efforts against the Apaches in the Big Bend occurred during Victorio's War, 1879-1881, when the defiant Warm Springs band resisted transfer to the San Carlos reservation in eastern Arizona. Colonel Benjamin Grierson strengthened the garrison at Fort Davis and campaigned actively to thwart Victorio's attempts to enter Texas.<sup>8</sup>

During and shortly after this turmoil, real progress occurred. Civil government took hold when Presidio County was finally organized in 1875, twenty-five years after its

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<sup>8</sup> Thrapp, Conquest of Apacheria, 204-06; Thompson, Marfa and Presidio County, 152, 164-65; Lucy Miller Jacobson, Jeff Davis County, Texas (Fort Davis, Texas: Fort Davis Historical Society, Inc., 1993), 97-103.

creation. It contained all of present-day Presidio, Brewster, Jeff Davis, Pecos, Reeves, and Terrell counties, and part of Val Verde. Immediately following the end of Apache warfare, the Texas and Pacific railroad entered the county and marked the beginning of substantive economic development. Fort Davis served as the county seat from 1875 to 1885, until Marfa, which sprang up in 1883 along the rail line, assumed that distinction. Rivalry and political friction between the two towns, and an influx of newcomers, caused the creation of Jeff Davis County from the northern part of Presidio in 1887, and Fort Davis again became a county seat. Also in 1887, Brewster County broke away from Presidio County; Alpine, another railroad offspring, was its political center.<sup>9</sup>

Upon its arrival on the fringe of the Big Bend area in 1882, the Texas and Pacific Railroad, a subsidiary of the Southern Pacific Railroad, became the primary conduit of economic activity into the region. Another line, which eventually merged with the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad, was added after the turn of the century. Virtually all consumer and industrial products traveled by freight car. The railroad touched off a second ranching boom, since formerly far-off markets were now accessible. Further, manufactured goods, once scarce and prohibitively expensive, became available and stimulated retail establishments and other community trappings. Railroads provided an additional benefit to the sparsely settled and cash-poor counties of the region: tax

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<sup>9</sup> Thompson, Marfa and Presidio County, 258-59.

revenues. Property taxes on railroad property soon became one of the main sources of income for Brewster and Presidio counties.<sup>10</sup>

In light of these advances, the economic future seemed brighter. Yet significant problems begged solution. Size and distance still posed obstacles to law enforcement. Cross-border rustling and Texas outlaws overwhelmed local authorities, and the law west of the Pecos was, in fact, dependent upon the Frontier Battalion of the Texas Rangers . Rangers were not only responsible for apprehending criminals and keeping the peace, they also defended the border against bandit incursions. The always-mobile Rangers stationed men where they were needed until events elsewhere demanded their reassignment. Their winter quarters were typically near the railroad, which eliminated the need for stores of winter provisions, but exposed the area near the border to bandit activity. In 1896, for example, Mexican troops chased a band of revolutionists across the Rio Grande into the Big Bend. The Governor of Chihuahua and authorities at Ojinaga sent twenty-two names to the Presidio County judge and requested that they be returned for trial. The bandits stole horses and robbed the mail before Rangers captured them in Presidio.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Clifford Casey, Mirages, Mystery and Reality: Brewster County, Texas (Seagraves, Texas: Pioneer Book Publishers, 1972), 194; S.G. Reed, A History of Texas Railroads (Houston: The St. Clair Publishing Co., 1941), 202.

<sup>11</sup> File 94, Box 1, Texas Ranger Frontier Battalion Papers, Alice Shipman Collection, El Paso Public Library. The role of the Frontier Battalion in the Big Bend is discussed in Walter Prescott Webb, The Texas Rangers: A Century of Frontier Defense (1935; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965), 406-10, 447-50.

The turn of the century did not bring many changes, although the economic situation did improve somewhat. Conditions in Mexico had stabilized, allowing a degree of law enforcement cooperation which reduced large-scale rustling operations. The Mexican army in Chihuahua even purchased large numbers of horses from Big Bend ranchers. The modest prosperity and relative tranquility encouraged some immigration into the region, where land prices were relatively cheap in comparison to other parts of the state. Many of the newcomers elected to stay in town rather than live on their isolated holdings. By 1904, Alpine's population had grown to 396, but it remained a dry, dusty, and unimproved town. Its buildings were constructed of adobe, and there was no established utility network. With 900 people, Marfa was larger, but comparably constructed. While Fort Davis remained the largest town in the area, with 1,061 inhabitants, this figure represented only half the population of the early 1880s.<sup>12</sup>

Shortly after the turn of the century, a new corporate interest, The Chisos Mining Company (CMC), began quicksilver operations in southern Brewster and Presidio counties. Although small-scale mining had occurred in the late nineteenth century, it was

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<sup>12</sup> Mildred Adams, From Darkness into Light (Seagraves, Texas: Pioneer Book Publishers, 1978), 72; The New Handbook of Texas, 1: 130, 2: 1098, 4: 503; Mrs. George Benson, interview by Leon C. Metz, transcript, 30 January, 1969, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections, Library, University of Texas at El Paso (this interview hereafter cited as Benson interview, this collection as CLS, this repository as SC/ UTEP). Mrs. Benson was a life-long resident of the Big Bend.

apparent that only a substantial infusion of outside capital could make the exploitation of mineral resources profitable. The CMC, for example, owned by Chicago industrialist Howard Perry, was by far the most extensive enterprise in the Terlingua Quicksilver Mining District. The area's largest corporate employer, the CMC was a vital economic prop. Among the Alpine and Marfa firms that benefitted from routine local expenditures were the Peters Shoe Company, Border Drug and Serum, Storey Whiteside Lumber, and Casner Motor Company. Alpine physicians routinely treated sick or injured workers.

On the other hand, all large-scale purchases, such as machinery, explosives and fuel, came from out of state and arrived by rail. In fact, the company possessed a gasoline license to procure fuels at wholesale rates and bypass the local market entirely. Likewise, the CMC dealt with such companies as San Antonio Broom Company, Houston Armature Works and several others, principally from the Chicago area. Given the frequently low profit margins of the mine, price was invariably the overriding consideration. Although the company did maintain an account at the First National Bank of Alpine for all local labor and operating expenses, outside expenditures dwarfed local outlays. Although the Terlingua Quicksilver Mining District yielded more than 130,000 flasks of mercury between 1899 and 1940, profits were not deposited in Texas. The predominantly Mexican workforce lived in company housing and largely confined purchases to a company store. Miners were not well paid, and their spending did not significantly affect the regional

economy.<sup>13</sup>

Brewster County officials, however, recognized the value of the mining district to the cash-poor region. In 1919, after the First World War caused a temporary quadrupling of the price of mercury which resulted in record profits for the mines, the commissioners' court attempted to raise the taxable value of the Chisos Mining Company's property from \$50,000 to \$200,000. The increase would have brought in an additional \$5,130.00. Company officials complained to their home office that the county had threatened to hike the figure even more, to \$500,000, in an attempt to coerce acceptance of the revised values. The CMC quickly sought a legal remedy. Several Alpine attorneys were retained as local counsel to support a team of lawyers from Chicago. The county, unprepared for such a formidable protest, agreed to retreat, and the taxable value of the mines remained roughly unchanged until their closure in 1942. The case apparently led to ill feelings between the CMC and county officials in Alpine. Shortly after the legal confrontation, Perry transferred his commercial accounts from Alpine to Marathon, where the CMC built two warehouses and an oil storage facility near the Southern Pacific tracks.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Files 1,3, and 4, Chisos Mining Company Records, SC/UTEP; Kenneth Ragsdale, Quicksilver: Terlingua and the Chisos Mining Company (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1976), 49 -52. See also James Day, "The Chisos Quicksilver Bonanza in the Big Bend of Texas", Southwestern Historical Quarterly 64 (April 1961): 427-53, and Casey, Brewster County, Texas, 160-65.

<sup>14</sup> Files 1,3, and 4, Chisos Mining Company Records, SC/UTEP; Ragsdale, Quicksilver, 49; Kenneth Ragsdale, interview by author, telephone, Austin, Texas, 2

Despite some economic uplift, the Big Bend remained an isolated frontier remnant. Its vastness dictated continued reliance on the Texas Rangers as the principal law enforcers. Sheriffs of the financially strapped counties, despite authorization to deputize citizens during crises, simply did not have sufficient manpower to police their huge jurisdictions. Since the Rangers were called in only *after* a serious criminal disturbance, the citizenry had to provide day to day self-protection and frequently enforced a swift vigilante justice. Commonly, Mexican trespassers were shot on sight and left unburied.<sup>15</sup>

The relative tranquility of the first decade of the twentieth century was shattered in late 1910, when the Mexican Revolution intruded. In the Big Bend, the entire second decade of the century was marked by violence, including large-scale bandit raids, interdiction of commerce, and a massive American military presence. In short, the period was something of a throwback to the old frontier days of Indian marauding and cavalry pursuit. Across the Rio Grande, the Coahuila-Chihuahua sector of northwestern Mexico was a hotbed of revolutionary activity. Two of the movement's principal leaders, Venustiano Carranza and Francisco "Pancho" Villa, drew primary support from those

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February, 1999.

<sup>15</sup> Clarence C. Clendenen, Blood on the Border: the United States Army and the Mexican Irregulars (London: Collier - Macmillan Ltd., 1969), 1-30. Roscoe Weaver, interview by John Moore, transcript, 3 February, 1994, Big Bend Oral History Project, CLS,SC/UTEP. Weaver was a longtime resident of West Texas and a CCC worker in the proposed Big Bend National Park area in the 1930s.

states. The two northern strongmen initially allied against Victoriano Huerta, responsible for the assassination of Francisco Madero, who replaced longtime dictator Porfirio Diaz in 1911. After Huerta's downfall in 1914, however, they became rivals for the presidency. It was during this period that the factional warfare in northern Mexico frequently spilled over the border into the Big Bend.<sup>16</sup>

Both *Villista* and *Carrancista* bands frequently launched cross-border provisioning raids. When foraging in Chihuahua proved inadequate, or was deemed too dangerous, guerrilla bands would ford the Rio Grande. The primary objective of these forays were the exposed cattle herds that grazed near the river. Since rustlers crossed and recrossed so quickly, Texas Rangers, U.S. cavalry, and ranchers were hard-pressed to provide an effective defense against them. Another troublesome element, Mexican partisans, when forced to retreat for survival, often fled to Texas and resorted to banditry. Still others were simply criminals who took advantage of the law enforcement vacuum that attended the revolution. Political instability in Mexico and increased raiding caused fear to spread across the Big Bend. Citizens who ventured out at night drove without headlights to avoid detection by Mexican bandits. Since Rangers and American cavalry units could not continuously patrol the entire border, they could not prevent widespread lawlessness.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Clendenen, Blood on the Border, 152-54.

<sup>17</sup> Benson interview; Clendenen, Blood on the Border, 281.

On May 6, 1916, Mexican raiders staged the largest of these attacks in a two-pronged assault in what is now Big Bend National Park. Apparently, both Carrancistas and Villistas participated in the invasion, possibly as retribution for General John J. Pershing's "punitive expedition" against Villa, begun in March. At Glenn Springs, in southern Brewster County, a small detachment of cavalry with fewer than ten men held off a large Mexican force, including several raiders from Texas who wore masks to conceal their identity. American casualties were three soldiers and a young boy dead and four wounded. Defenders reported that they had inflicted casualties on the Mexicans in a skirmish that lasted until 3:00 a.m. the next day, when they were forced to flee into the desert. On their way back into Mexico, raiders looted the Deemer Store at Boquillas, kidnaped the owner and his employee, and robbed an American-owned silver mine just across the border. A cavalry unit from Camp Marfa began pursuit immediately, caught up with their prey about one hundred miles into Chihuahua, and recovered the two civilians and the loot.<sup>18</sup>

The Glenn Springs Raid triggered a substantial enlargement of the U.S. military presence. President Woodrow Wilson mobilized National Guard units from Texas, New

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<sup>18</sup> Carlyle G. Raht, The Romance of the Davis Mountains and Big Bend Country (El Paso: Rahtsbooks Company, 1919), 350-58; Clendenen, Blood on the Border, 281; Casey, Brewster County, Texas, 129-34. See also Ron Tyler, The Big Bend: A History of the Last Texas Frontier (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1996).

Mexico, and Arizona, which arrived at Camp Marfa on May 19. The army quickly perceived that part of the challenge lay in overcoming the lack of roads. Engineers immediately built one from Alpine to Terlingua, since the old mining trail was unsuitable for motorized vehicles or substantial traffic of any kind. Transporting supplies, however, was still reliant on horses and mules. Even with improved roads, a train of sixty four mules still took three days to go from Marfa to forward positions at Lajitas on the Rio Grande. Later, where possible, the army started using motorized tractors that pulled eight wagons. Although the tractors could convey seven times the capacity of the mules, they could operate only along improved trails and thus were unsuitable for much of the Big Bend. The troops also established telephone communications throughout the region, thereby reducing its isolation. Several of these National Guardsmen, struck with the beauty of the area, later supported the idea of a national park in Big Bend.<sup>19</sup>

Despite the military buildup, banditry did not cease, particularly after American entry into World War I, in 1917, and the transfer of many of the National Guard units to France. During this period, the civil war heated up in northern Mexico. On November 12, 1917, Villistas attacked pro-Carranza forces in Ojinaga across from Presidio, Texas. By effectively using two American-made machine guns (reportedly manned by two American deserters), the Carrancistas repelled the first assault. On their second try, the

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<sup>19</sup> W.D. Smithers, Chronicles of the Big Bend (Austin: Madrona Press, Inc., 1976), 4-10, 21-29; Clendenen, Blood on the Border, 287.

Villistas prevailed and caused almost eight hundred opposition soldiers to seek refuge across the Rio Grande. American cavalry and Texas Rangers, disdainful of the prospect of so many potential bandits terrorizing the countryside, were waiting for them. The Mexicans were captured and marched to Marfa where they boarded trains for El Paso and, ultimately, Juarez.<sup>20</sup>

Raids continued throughout 1918; several large ranches were sacked and citizens killed. The military was more effective in its pursuit and crossed the border on numerous occasions. In 1919, after Pancho Villa's third attack on El Paso, regular air patrols along the border commenced. This tactic served three purposes: deterrence, reconnaissance, and interdiction. So as to impress the populace, the Air Corps participated in numerous air shows at Mexican towns across the Rio Grande from Big Bend. The DeHavilland biplanes were the first aircraft that most spectators had seen, at least up close. After some acrobatic flying, the pilots would demonstrate the effectiveness of their twin water-cooled machine guns firing through the propellers. Tracer rounds were fired at a line of empty oil drums, utterly devastating them. Awestruck spectators received the message. In their reconnaissance role, the planes would report suspicious movements to ground troops by means of a weighted drop bag. In terms of interdiction, planes would strafe hostile raiders with their machine guns. The Mexicans' only defense against attacking aircraft

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<sup>20</sup> Raht, Romance, 362; Benson interview.

was to hide, during which time the cavalry would be closing in upon them. The advent of aviation in Big Bend coincided with Alvaro Obregon's consolidation of power in Mexico City and the end of the Revolution's violent phase. After a decade of strife, peace returned to the Big Bend country. The Border Air Patrol, however, became a fixture for the next two decades.<sup>21</sup>

Even after the immediate threat had diminished, the military remained in West Texas and continued to bolster the regional economy. Continued reliance upon outside capital investment thwarted economic development. So too did geographic isolation, mitigated only somewhat by the railroad, but reinforced by the lack of internal roads, as well as those connecting with the outside. Stock raising, field crops, and quicksilver mining were not sufficient to hold promise of either self-sufficiency or prosperity. The region's precarious economic situation halted, and even rolled back, the population growth which had been occurring since the 1880s. Heavy reliance on a military presence during the Apache campaigns of the 1870s and 1880s and the Mexican bandit raids of the 1910s exposed the Big Bend for what it was in 1920: a stagnant frontier relic.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Smithers, Chronicles, 35-45. The standard work on the later Border Air Patrol is Kenneth Ragsdale, Wings Over the Border: Pioneer Military Aviation in the Big Bend (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984).

<sup>22</sup> Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide (Dallas: A.H. Belo and Company, 1926), 69 (hereafter cited as Texas Almanac and year).

## CHAPTER 2

### **Efforts to Secure a Future:**

#### **A College, an Observatory, a Park, 1920-1937**

After the turbulent years of the World War I era, West Texans, like the many other Americans, desired a “return to normalcy.” As other parts of the country enjoyed relative prosperity in the 1920s, people in the Big Bend sought to end the isolation that limited their participation in the nation’s robust economy and alluring cultural trends. Integration depended upon improved contact with the outside and made road-building a necessity. During the decade and a half years following the war, however, it became apparent that the state government, as in years past, lacked the resources to invest adequately in sparsely populated far West Texas. At this juncture, several individuals took it upon themselves to embark on a legislative program to create a national park in the Big Bend. Their goal was not only to preserve the beauty of the proposed parkland in southern Brewster County, but also to invite federal involvement and reap its benefits.

In the 1920s, the citizens of Big Bend appreciated that the quickest means to end

their isolation would be the construction of high quality roads into their region. At the start of the decade, however, the recently created Texas Highway Department was concentrating its initial road-building efforts in more densely populated parts of the state. This emphasis meant that the Trans-Pecos, lacking inhabitants, a substantial economic base, and political clout in Austin, was at the very bottom of the department's priorities. While the federal government was involved in highway construction during the 1920s, its principal concern was the connection of large urban centers and the facilitation of interstate commerce. Local considerations, particularly in politically impotent districts like Big Bend, did not figure in the national road-building effort.<sup>1</sup>

The absence of paved roads prevented all but the most ardent travelers from visiting the Big Bend. Although U.S. 90, the Border Highway, or Old Spanish Trail, as designated in a 1922 congressional declaration, was authorized to be paved from St. Augustine, Florida, through San Antonio, Alpine, El Paso, and on to San Diego, California, completion did not occur until November 1938. The last segment to be paved was the long, remote stretch between Marfa and Van Horn. West of Uvalde, gates were common since the road passed through large private ranches; and because it traversed large sections of open range, night driving was hazardous. Another significant limitation of the Border Highway route was the lack of service stations, repair facilities, overnight

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<sup>1</sup> Texas Almanac, 1926, 330-32, 1933, 183-84.

accommodations, and tourist amenities, particularly west of Del Rio. These factors severely limited the volume of commercial traffic on Highway 90. In the 1930s, therefore, West Texas commerce still relied on the railroads.<sup>2</sup>

General economic development was also tied to external sources of capital. The Chisos Mining Company, for example, was an out-of-state enterprise. Its predominantly Mexican workforce lived in company housing and frequented a company store, and since the miners were not well paid, their wages did not exercise a significant impact on the regional economy. By constructing roads from Alpine into southern Brewster and Presidio counties, however, mining operations did serve to open that area to the outside world.<sup>3</sup>

Stock raising was the economic backbone in the 1920s and 1930s when cattle and sheep producers contributed well over eighty percent of the agricultural income for the Big Bend. The composition of these ranches differed from the rest of the state. Although twenty-five percent of Brewster County ranches were over ten thousand acres, the

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<sup>2</sup> Old Spanish Trail Association, publication no. 76, October 1923 (San Antonio: OST Association, 1923). Mrs. Willa B. Washington, interview by author, January 25, 1997, Austin, Texas. "Bump gates" were commonly used on sheep farms where cattle guards were not appropriate. Cars would slow down, lightly bump open the spring held gate, and then drive through. Since many ranches still used latch gates, however, it would frequently be necessary for someone in the car to open and close each gate. Sometimes, long lines of traffic would cue through gates held open by an occupant of the lead car.

<sup>3</sup> Casey, Brewster County, Texas, 160-65. Ragsdale, Quicksilver, chapters. 3 and 8.

average size was well over one thousand acres and yielded considerably more than the statewide average. Per capita income was higher than the statewide average, but this fact does not reveal the significant disparity between the landowners and their employees. Assessed values and tax rates in the region were universally low, yielding relatively little revenue for the county treasury. And though the large ranchers dominated, they did not supply sufficient capital to develop a balanced economy.<sup>4</sup>

As could be expected in a desert setting that received fewer than fifteen inches of rainfall annually and frequently contended with drought, farming played only a limited role. Along the Rio Grande in Presidio County, cotton was raised for shipment to the outside world, and dry-land farming techniques allowed for the cultivation of a variety of food crops. Most of these, however, were consumed in the Big Bend in the 1920s and contributed little to economic development as was the case with several minor enterprises that had been developed by 1930. Typical of these was the candelilla wax industry. Produced from the candelilla plant and used as an industrial hardener, candelilla wax is inexpensive and has a low profit margin. Most workers were unskilled, poorly paid Mexican immigrants. Likewise, guayule rubber, derived from a native, but commercially

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<sup>4</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1930): II, pt. 2, 993.

grown shrub, never generated the revenues anticipated by farmers after the World War I.<sup>5</sup>

Petroleum exploration held out some promise and provided a meaningful attempt at regional development between 1915 and 1930. In the early 1920s, the discovery and exploitation of large oil reserves in the Permian Basin, less than 100 miles northeast of Alpine, and the subsequent prosperity of San Angelo and Midland, fueled aspirations of similar deposits in the Big Bend. As with other large projects in the region, outsiders financed the search for oil. Although test wells indicated the presence of petroleum, sufficient quantities were never found to justify continued operations. Thus, oil would not be the economic savior of the region.<sup>6</sup>

A major breakthrough occurred in 1917, when the Texas Legislature established Sul Ross Normal College in Alpine, which would prove vital to the Big Bend's economy. The institution, which opened in 1920, not only added jobs, but touched off a population increase and minor building boom. Also, as a condition of the legislative appropriation for Sul Ross Normal, Alpine had to establish water supply and sewage systems. Previously, residents relied upon windmill pumps and outhouses. Without the infusion of state construction funds, as well as annual expenditures generated by the college, it was unlikely

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<sup>5</sup> Casey, Brewster County, Texas, 60-68.

<sup>6</sup> Gus Clemens, Legacy: the Story of the Permian Basin of West Texas and Southeastern New Mexico (San Antonio: Mulberry Avenue Books, 1983) 133, 137-38; Casey, Brewster County, Texas, 69-72; *The New Handbook of Texas*, 6:146-47.

that the city could have afforded the considerable investment required to improve its infrastructure. For Alpine, the economic hub of the Big Bend, the importance of Sul Ross State Teachers College, so named in 1923, was such that one estimate held that over half the town's population was to some degree affiliated with the school in 1930.<sup>7</sup>

The president of Sul Ross State Teachers College, Horace Wilson Morelock, was enormously proud of his school and envisioned its evolution into a significant university. He also championed the economic development of Alpine and the entire Big Bend region. Born in Tennessee in 1873, he migrated to Texas in 1904 to embark upon a career in education. After a stint as head of the English department at West Texas State Normal College, in Canyon, he earned a masters degree at Harvard University. Shortly thereafter, Morelock was offered the presidency of the nascent school at Alpine. Several friends discouraged him from accepting the position, since the future of SRS seemed uncertain. Nevertheless, Morelock accepted the appointment, and, with the support of the citizens of Alpine, held off several attempts in the 1920s and 1930s to move the college to more populated locations. He also believed that highways were "landmarks of progress" and campaigned actively for their construction in the Big Bend. An astute politician and businessman, Morelock earned a reputation as an effective lobbyist and negotiator with

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<sup>7</sup> Clifford B. Casey, Sul Ross State University: The Cultural Center of Trans-Pecos Texas (Seagraves, Texas: Pioneer Book Publishers, 1976), 25-29; Casey, Brewster County, Texas, 73.

the legislature and the Board of Directors of the Texas State College System. Morelock and others hoped to offer a vision for the future.<sup>8</sup>

Morelock also played a supporting role in another example of economic development from external sources, the establishment of the McDonald Observatory in Jeff Davis County, approximately forty miles northwest of Alpine. William J. McDonald, who owned a chain of banks in northeastern Texas until his death on February 6, 1926, endowed the University of Texas with sufficient funds to build an astronomical observatory. By January of 1933, a university committee was scouting West Texas for possible locations. University president H.Y. Benedict asked Morelock to assist in finding a site. After determining the scientific criteria required, Morelock took Dr. Otto Struve, the director of the project, to a favorite picnic spot atop Mount Locke, which was selected from several other possibilities as the location for the observatory. Two factors that impeded final approval of the project were lack of both a water supply and access. The county, realizing the project's potential benefits, agreed to supply the water. After observatory proponents mounted a considerable lobbying effort, the State Highway Department consented to build a road from Fort Davis to the site. This effort represented

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<sup>8</sup> McDonald Observatory file - 1933, book III, Horace W. Morelock Papers,, Willa B. Washington personal collection, Austin, Texas (this collection hereafter cited as book no., HMP/WPC); *The New Handbook of Texas*, 4:833.

the first of Morelock's many road-building campaigns.<sup>9</sup>

The construction of a world-class observatory in the area partially fulfilled Morelock's dream to make the Big Bend an international intellectual center. He was a fervent advocate of the creation of an international park in the Big Bend. As the centerpiece of the international peace park, he envisaged a Pan-American school. This modern campus, "The Acropolis of America," would attract talented students and faculty from the entire western hemisphere who would come together in an atmosphere of learning and recreation. He stressed the value of personal contacts for what he termed "mass diplomacy." A Pan-American Library would be located on an impressive modern campus at a suitable locale in the proposed park area. Morelock obviously believed that Sul Ross State Teachers College and the town of Alpine would benefit tremendously from their proximity to his envisioned international cultural center.<sup>10</sup>

It was during this active, optimistic period that Big Bend residents began serious consideration of the economic benefits offered by a national park. The idea of a national park in the region was not new, however. In fact, in 1931 the National Park Service (NPS) had considered five areas in Texas, but rejected them as being below national park

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<sup>9</sup> McDonald Observatory file - 1933, Book III, HMP/WPC; *The New Handbook of Texas*, 4:393, 6:648.

<sup>10</sup> Notes for manuscript and an article in West Texas Today [publication information unknown], Feb., 1945, p. 20, in Book III, HMP/WPC.

standards. Not included in this survey was the area that is now Big Bend National Park. Instead, the NPS concentrated on other areas in West Texas. Although boosters would be kept waiting, the idea, and the commitment to it, remained constant. While proponents wanted to preserve the beauty of the wilderness, they viewed creation of a national park as part of larger effort to stimulate prosperity. Such an attraction would bring paved roads, tourist dollars, federal building contracts, and payroll-generated expenditures. As had been the case with earlier economic development, investment would have to be external and substantially federal.<sup>11</sup>

During these same years, West Texans also worked to attract state attention. These efforts succeeded in May of 1933 when the Texas Legislature created Texas Canyons State Park. Later that year, Governor Miriam Ferguson signed legislation which greatly expanded that park and renamed it Big Bend State Park. The act contained provisions which dedicated to the park all school lands as well as all tax delinquent lands within the its designated boundaries. A legislative appropriation compensated the school fund for its portion of the land. It was the intention of the sponsors of the bill creating Big Bend State Park, Representatives R.M. Wagstaff of Abilene and Everett E. Townsend of Alpine, to supplant the state park with a national park. To that end, Townsend wrote

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<sup>11</sup> John Jameson, The Story of Big Bend National Park (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 19-20.

numerous letters to the NPS immediately after creation of Big Bend State Park.<sup>12</sup>

Arno Cammerer, NPS director, had some reservations about the proposed park. Predominant among these was whether there would be enough contiguous federal land to establish a park. Other issues involved NPS wildlife requirements and visitor amenities such as water. The director's concerns were allayed by a preliminary wildlife survey which indicated that the area in question was of "national park caliber from a wildlife point of view." Another report concerning land acquisition indicated that private holdings in the region could be purchased for one to five dollars per acre. Cammerer was favorably impressed and gave his approval to the proposed Big Bend National Park project on May 1, 1934.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Texas Legislature, Journal of the House of Representatives of the Regular Session of the Forty-third Legislature of Texas (Austin: Texas State Printing Office, 1933), 126 (hereafter cited as House, Journal). This bill (HB771) assigned 9,600 acres along the Rio Grande to the new park. A subsequent measure, HB26 assigned 150,000 acres of public school land to the park, which also received all tax delinquent land in the vicinity (south of 29\* 25') to the park. Though respected in his home district, Townsend, an ex-Texas Ranger and former sheriff of Alpine, did not feel that he could generate sufficient support for the state park bills. Wagstaff, an attorney and experienced legislator, introduced the bills even though he had never been to the area of the proposed park. He had become enthusiastic about the Big Bend after reading an article in *Nature Magazine* in December 1930.

<sup>13</sup> Cammerer's report as quoted in Jameson, The Story of Big Bend, 27. The area under consideration for the proposed Big Bend parkland in far southern Brewster County was a zoological and geological wonderland. At the confluence of several migratory routes, Big Bend National Park has over four-hundred fifty species of birds, more than any other national park in the United States. Smaller animals include such variety as

Shortly thereafter, Cammerer authorized Herbert Maier, a regional NPS official, to head a commission to gather information for Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes. On the basis of these findings, he would determine if a request should be presented to Congress. Among other duties, Maier was charged with preliminary planning of roads, campsites, trails, and other park amenities, as well as providing preliminary guidelines for work to be performed by the Civilian Conservation Corps. In May of 1933, President Franklin Roosevelt authorized four CCC camps in West Texas, one of which was in Brewster County. Each camp of approximately two-hundred men was to receive \$18,000 for the purchase of tools and equipment. Final authorization for the camps required the approval of the War Department, specifically the Army Corps of Engineers.<sup>14</sup>

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opossums, raccoons, rattlesnakes, rabbits, hares, porcupines, skunks, armadillos, badgers, and bobcats. Among the larger herbivores are pronghorn antelope, white-tail and mule deer. At the top of the region's natural food chain are cougars, black bears, golden eagles, coyotes, and an occasional wolf. Geologically, the area's volcanic past is apparent in the numerous uplifts, formations, and the sheer mountain faces of the Chisos Mountains. The volcanic activity also caused Paleozoic era rock to protrude through more recent formations. Erosion, both wind and water, have also shaped the face of the area. The area's single greatest source of erosion is the Rio Grande, which carved several magnificent canyons along the western and southern boundaries of the Big Bend. Casey, Brewster County, Texas, 4-5.

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Representative Ewing Thomason to E.E. Townsend, 2 June 1933, wallet 29, box 12, E.E. Townsend Collection, Archives of the Big Bend, Sul Ross State University, Alpine, Texas (this collection hereafter cited as, folder, if applicable, wallet, box number, EET.)

The major hurdle to be overcome, however, was the lack of a sustainable water source within the park. Government officials indicated that if a suitable quantity was not located, the CCC camp could not be activated. The Alpine Chamber of Commerce financed, and Townsend personally supervised, the search for a well site in the Chisos Mountain Basin of the state park. After several futile attempts, Townsend's crew hit water on April 16, 1934. Acknowledging the federal deadline, the well was named Agua Pronto, the flow of which met the Corps of Engineers' minimum requirements. One month later, a camp was established in the Basin.<sup>15</sup>

Townsend and others also espoused the damming of the Rio Grande within park boundaries. The scenic loss of Santa Elena, Mariscal, or Boquillas canyons would be compensated by the generation of hydroelectric power as well as a permanent source of water for the region. Some park proponents contended that reservoirs would provide recreational activities as well. Although reservoir-building was part of the Roosevelt administration's western policy, NPS officials objected to the massive alteration of the

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<sup>15</sup> Virginia Madison, The Big Bend Country of Texas (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1955), 233; Lewis Saxton and Clifford Casey, The Life of Everett Ewing Townsend (Alpine, TX: SRSTC Bulletin, 1949). Since paper was not available, Townsend kept the drilling log of the Agua Pronto well in the lining of his hat. The Army Corps of Engineers set a requirement for a minimum output of five gallons per minute. The deadline for the CCC camp application was the end of April, 1934. Virginia Madison was a sometime secretary of Morelock while she attended SRS, and they remained friends after her graduation. She subsequently served as president of the ex-students association.

landscape, and the proposals were dropped.<sup>16</sup>

In Washington, United States Senator Morris Sheppard of Texas informally proposed a national park in the Big Bend region to President Franklin Roosevelt in 1934. If Mexico could be encouraged to create a similar park across the Rio Grande, the resulting international park complex would complement the administration's Good Neighbor Policy. Roosevelt then asked Secretary Ickes to investigate the proposal, and later that year, U.S. and Mexican officials met in El Paso to discuss the possibilities. Although an international park never materialized, it did, nonetheless, add to the allure of a park in the Big Bend.<sup>17</sup>

Ickes endorsed the Texas project and approved the Maier Commission report on February 5, 1935. The secretary's action spurred congressional drafting of legislation for

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<sup>16</sup> E.E. Townsend to Alpine (TX) Avalanche [2 June, 1933], wallet 29, box 12, EET.

<sup>17</sup> Ronnie C. Tyler, The Big Bend: A History of the Final Frontier (Washington: National Park Service, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), 196. "A History of the proposed Big Bend International Park," summarized by L.A. Garrison, Superintendent, Big Bend National Park (undated), folder 23, wallet 29, box 12, EET. During subsequent decades, the Mexican government never pressed the legislative agenda required to put the plan into motion. It also seems that funds were not available for either the acquisition of 400,000-500,000 acres of Sierra del Carmen, the Mexican part of the proposed international park in Coahuila, or to hire and train staff to manage it. In the early 1990s, the Mexican government did set aside undeveloped parkland in Coahuila across from Big Bend National Park, but ideological and political differences between U.S. and Mexican park services have precluded notions for an international park.

the creation of Big Bend National Park. On March 4, U. S. Representative Ewing Thomason of El Paso introduced House Resolution 6373 and Texas Senators Sheppard and Tom Connally of Texas co-sponsored Senate Bill 2131 authorizing the park's creation. Both measures stipulated that the government would accept title to the eight hundred thousand acres in question from the State of Texas, and the Mexican government was encouraged to dedicate seven hundred thousand acres as parkland across the river. Because absolutely no federal funds were allocated, the bill had no opposition and passed both houses without debate. According to the legislation, the federal government would accept title to the parkland only after the State of Texas had secured it. President Roosevelt signed the bill on June 20, 1935.<sup>18</sup>

The bulk of the land of the proposed national park, however, was still privately owned. And with the depression-era state treasury empty, there did not appear to be any easy way to enlist additional support from Austin. Legislative action had acquired the initial 150,000 acres of Big Bend State Park for approximately five cents per acre. Purchase of the remaining tracts would necessitate a prohibitive state expenditure. Landowners in the area of the proposed park were wary of any attempts to undervalue their land. Without cooperation between the state and local residents, the project would not become a reality. In short, observed Roger Toll, Superintendent of Yellowstone

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<sup>18</sup> *Congressional Record*, 75th Congress, 1935 Vol. 79, 3:2822.

National Park and off-season chief investigator of proposed national park sites, Brewster County residents would insist upon “fair consideration and just treatment.” “Fair consideration” in this instance would entail approximately \$1.00 per acre plus legal fees and surveys.<sup>19</sup>

Townsend and other state legislators then commenced a campaign to provide appropriations for the proposed park. They enlisted the assistance of Arno Cammerer of the NPS to emphasize the economic benefits generated by other national parks. In the Texas legislative session of 1937, Senator H.L. Winfield of Fort Stockton and Representative Allie Cauthorn of Del Rio introduced a bill providing \$1,500,000 for the state purchase of approximately 780,000 acres in the Big Bend to be deeded to the United States government. After a conference committee reduced this amount to \$750,000, both houses approved. Despite intense lobbying by park proponents, Governor James Allred vetoed the measure, citing “lack of funds” as his reason.<sup>20</sup>

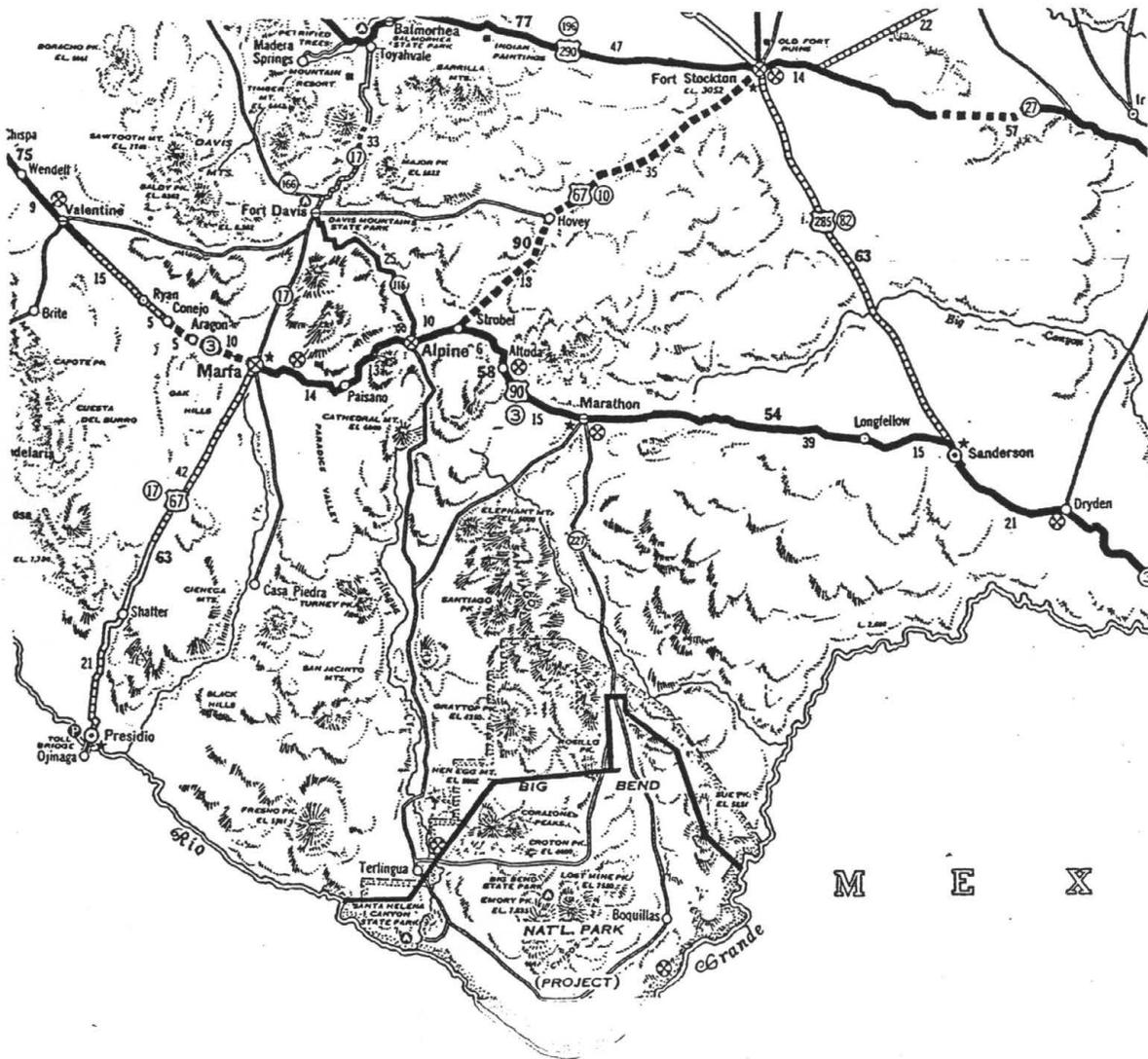
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<sup>19</sup> In HR771 and HB26 the reallocation of public school lands cost the state about five cents per acre. The seizure of lands with tax liens cost only about one cent per acre. Apparently, many people did not pay taxes on the supposedly valueless land. Roger Toll to Arno Cammerer (copy to Townsend), 3 March, 1934, folder 1, wallet 20, box 8, EET, (quotations).

<sup>20</sup> Horace W. Morelock, Mountains of the Mind (San Antonio: The Naylor Company, 1956), 158-61. Cammerer estimated that out-of-state visitors to Big Bend National Park would spend \$3,600,000 in the first year. Madison, Big Bend Country, 235. The 780,000 acres also included school lands already deeded and property previously seized for nonpayment of taxes.

Although the attempt to secure a national park in the Big Bend had failed in 1937, the area's people had cause to be optimistic. Big Bend had gained some national recognition during the first legislative campaign, and some local leaders thought that, if properly organized, a second campaign could succeed. Additionally, real progress had occurred. Sul Ross State Teachers College and the McDonald Observatory had brought both economic benefits and recognition to an area in need of both. Still, the people of the region believed that a national park would deliver much more.

# Big Bend in 1937



Texas Highway Department map of 1937

Archives of the Big Bend, Sul Ross State University, Alpine, Texas.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **An Individual, A Cause, A Park:**

#### **The Popular Subscription and Legislative Campaigns, 1937-1941**

Despite the gubernatorial veto of the state appropriations bill, many in the Big Bend remained determined to secure a national park. Proponents organized two grass-roots campaigns to publicize the national park effort, and the indefatigable Horace Morelock carried the message across the state. While his ceaseless efforts to raise funds to purchase the park site fell short, he did succeed in arousing Texas public sentiment. Morelock's determination, on behalf of a park and its attending economic development, contributed mightily to federal interest. When the Roosevelt administration lent its support, the Texas legislature got in step, approved purchase of the site, and cleared the way for creation of Big Bend National Park.

The defeat of the appropriations bill in June of 1937 seemed to close the debate. Local park advocates, however, refused to yield so easily. The day after Governor Allred's veto, Horace Morelock, president of Sul Ross State Teachers College, and his

good friend and Alpine Chamber of Commerce associate, J. E. Casner, drove to Fort Worth to meet with James R. Record, managing editor of the Star-Telegram. Morelock proposed a popular subscription plan like the one that had succeeded in Virginia, in 1935, where contributions that totaled a million dollars went toward creation of Shenendoah National Park. The generally accepted estimate of land acquisition cost for Big Bend National Park was between \$1,000,000 and \$1,500,000.<sup>1</sup>

Morelock then inquired whether the Star-Telegram would sponsor such a drive. Record was hesitant, but agreed when his visitors suggested that other newspapers be invited to participate. The Houston Post, the Dallas News, the San Antonio Express, the San Angelo Standard-Times, and the Times and Post of El Paso all cooperated. Not only did they publicize the drive, but they also printed notices of notable contributors. Because of the proposed park's international dimension, several east coast papers gave considerable space to the project. Later, during the legislative debate in 1941, the New York Times strongly advocated the creation of an international park in the Big Bend region.<sup>2</sup>

The Star-Telegram editor also stipulated that the Alpine Chamber of Commerce

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<sup>1</sup> Notes for manuscript. File 1937, Book III, HWM/WPC; Jameson, Big Bend, 36.

<sup>2</sup> Morelock, Mountains of the Mind, 163; Madison, Big Bend Country, 235; New York Times, 7 September 1941, Horace W. Morelock Scrapbook, Archives of the Big Bend, Sul Ross State University, Alpine, Texas (this collection hereafter HWM/ABB).

appoint a local committee to head the drive. Morelock assumed the chairmanship and served with Casner, owner of the General Motors dealership, and Frank McCollum, a dry goods merchant. The "Million Dollar Campaign" got underway immediately. The Local Committee, as it was called, set up a promotional fund to help underwrite operating expenses.<sup>3</sup>

Morelock began preparation of single sheet press releases for statewide distribution. They explained the value of the proposed national park, outlined the goals of the committee, and proposed a county by county plan of organization. Two thousand copies, along with an explanatory letter, were mailed to newspapers and prominent citizens across the state. Additionally, five hundred large posters describing the proposed park were sent to superintendents of schools in the largest towns. A standard lecture was included for use by teachers, who were to solicit students for funds. In San Antonio alone, where talks were given in every public school, children contributed over \$400.00 to the popular subscription campaign. A color movie, financed by two well known oil men, H. R. Smith and J. E. Molwinkle, provided vivid images of the park as well as proposed parkland across the Rio Grande in Mexico. It played to tens of thousands of

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<sup>3</sup> Notes for manuscript. File 1937, Book III, HWM/WPC; Willa Washington, interview by author, Austin, 25 January 1997. Jim Casner was Morelock's good friend and an early proponent of the park as a vehicle for economic development. He was particularly valuable associate during the promotional phase as he provided cars for visiting legislators and other dignitaries. Alpine Avalanche, July 30, 1937.

Texas school children, as well as chambers of commerce and civic organizations.

Morelock carried a copy throughout his extensive travels.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, the campaign achieved momentum under the sponsorship of the Amon Carter's *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. Dailies and weeklies throughout the state also provided fervent support through advertising, editorials, and publication of contributors whose donations exceeded one dollar. Many carried articles with headlines such as "Midland Rotarians give \$54 to park fund." Advertisements with subscription coupons attached were published in all participating papers. As contributions flowed in from throughout Texas, they were documented in small articles or weekly lists. Despite his veto of the park appropriations bill only two months earlier, Governor Allred showed his support by donating twenty dollars through Representative Allie Cauthorn of Del Rio. All high-profile donations, such as the governor's were publicized throughout the state.<sup>5</sup>

The Board of Regents for the Texas State Teachers Colleges, cognizant of the park's educational advantages, figured significantly in the campaign. They voted unanimously to allow Morelock to spend as much time as possible on the development project. While publicly he stressed the value of the national park to the entire state,

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix 1; notes for manuscript, file 1937, Book III, HMP/WPC; Madison, 236.

<sup>5</sup> Fort Worth Star-Telegram, clipping, undated, Wallet 25 (newspaper clippings), Box 9, EET; appendix 3; Alpine Avalanche, 6 August, 1937. Governor Allred later assisted with the creation of the Texas Big Bend Park Association.

another consideration was the survival of Sul Ross State Teachers College (SRS).

Previously, in 1923, the Educational Survey Committee of the Texas legislature, had recommended the closure of SRS unless the legislature approved a campus development program. During the Great Depression, the threat of closure recurred. Because of small enrollments, there was talk of relocating the school to a site that was not so geographically isolated.<sup>6</sup>

Free to pursue his dual cause, Morelock, from 1937 to 1939, traveled over twenty-six thousand miles across Texas lecturing and lobbying on behalf of the national park. By his estimate, he addressed more than eighty-four thousand high school students and faculty members in North, Central, South, and West Texas. He also held conferences with the editorial staffs of newspapers in cities and larger towns. He contacted officials of major oil companies and solicited their donations; and he gave talks to all manner of civic and educational gatherings. In one five-day period, Morelock spoke before groups in Fort

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<sup>6</sup> The Texas State Teachers College system was the administrative organization which included SRS as well as several other colleges. Tyler, Big Bend, 203; Morelock, Mountains of the Mind, 166; Casey, Sul Ross State University, 35. San Angelo had been mentioned as a possible alternative site for the college. Morelock's devotion to SRS was widely known. He was president of the college from 1923 to 1945. A large academic hall now bears his name at Sul Ross State University, so designated in 1969. He received an honorary doctorate from Trinity University in 1927. He also allowed the school mascot, Lobo the wolf, to live in his back yard at the president's house on campus. Washington interview, 25 January 1997.

Stockton, Ozona, Sonora, Junction, Menard, Brady, Brownwood, and Fort Worth!<sup>7</sup>

As he preached the park gospel, Morelock drove his own car and spent his own money. He enjoyed some financial support from the Alpine Chamber of Commerce and also received an unusual contribution to offset his travel expenses. In 1937, Bowen Motorcoach Lines of Texas, had expanded its operations and held a contest to rename the growing company. Horace Morelock Jr., nicknamed "Bus" in early childhood, submitted the winning name: "Trailways." The grand prize was in the form of scrip for travel on the new bus line, and Bus Morelock contributed his winnings to his father's cause. Horace Morelock not only utilized the scrip, but he later offered it as a prize in a series of contests to name the primary highway into the Big Bend.<sup>8</sup>

While Morelock was busy organizing the grass-roots campaign, federal influence figured in the debate. The government's position regarding acquisition of the park was strongly stated on October 16, 1937, by Harold L. Ickes, Secretary of the Interior and Federal Administrator of Public Works, at the dedication of the Buchanan and Inks Lake

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<sup>7</sup> Morelock, 166. Conspicuously absent from Morelock's travels were journeys to far East Texas, the area which later resisted legislative efforts.

<sup>8</sup> Washington interview, March 4, 1996. Bus Morelock, a very close associate of his father, was a Travis County Attorney in 1937. He then joined the FBI and was stationed in South America to monitor German naval and political activities prior to U.S. involvement in World War II. He was killed in May 1945 while commanding a destroyer escort in the South China Sea. San Angelo Standard Times, undated clipping, HWM/ABB. The Highway 67 Association sponsored the contests.

dams west of Austin. He stated that Congress and the Roosevelt administration furnished the funding for the Lower Colorado River Authority for two reasons: “to furnish employment; and ... to take part in the construction of a great conservation project which, at the same time, would be a permanently useful work.” He then added that man-made structures will not be the only monuments that will mark this era for future generations; natural areas, such as national parks, also fell within the classification of “conservation projects.” He then described the proposed Big Bend National Park in very complimentary terms.<sup>9</sup>

The Interior secretary said that aesthetic considerations alone would be grounds for a far greater expenditure than the projected \$1,500,000 acquisition cost. He chided Texans for not allocating the necessary funds and for not recognizing the immense value of a year-round national park. He pointed out that tourists annually spent freely in Wyoming and Montana while visiting Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks, despite the fact that they were accessible only a few months every year. Ickes said that he believed that an annual dividend of several million dollars could be realized from investment in the Big Bend. Ickes believed it would be worth raising ten million dollars if that amount was required to secure the park. Regarding the proposed international park, he reminded his

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<sup>9</sup> Address of Secretary of the Interior and Federal Administrator of Public Works Harold L. Ickes at the dedication of Buchanan and Inks Dams, October 16, 1937, Folder 21, Wallet 29, Box 12, EET.

audience that Texas would be only the second state in the nation to boast such a preserve within its borders. By noting that a binational commission had already been created to consider the issue, the secretary implied that Texas was impeding implementation.<sup>10</sup>

The allure of an international park, clearly appealing the President Roosevelt, added to the attraction of Big Bend National Park. As 1937 drew to a close, however, it was apparent that the current drive alone would not be able to generate sufficient revenues. After four months, only \$50,000 of the \$1,000,000 target had been realized. Without additional support, proponents were fearful that the project would wither. In an effort to keep the campaign alive, Morelock solicited the assistance of Governor James Alfred and Amon Carter, owner of the Fort Worth Star-Telegram. Telegrams were sent to one hundred prominent Texans in all parts of the state calling them to an organizational meeting of the Texas Big Bend Park Association (TBBPA) at the Driskill Hotel in Austin. The executive committee of the proposed association were selected by Morelock, Governor Alfred, Carter, and D.A. Bandeen, president of the West Texas Chamber of Commerce.<sup>11</sup>

Morelock feared that the meeting might bog down in generalities and that no definitive program would be determined. To avoid this situation, he prepared an agenda:

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Jameson, The Story of Big Bend, 37; Morelock, Mountains of the Mind, 167.

## Items

- a) That a state-wide organization, chartered under the laws of Texas, be formed.
- b) That a working fund of at least \$25,000 be raised for placing a capable and experienced agent in the field for raising funds.
- c) That a depository bank be selected, and that it be placed under bond for all funds collected.
- d) That an executive secretary be selected with designated headquarters.
- e) That an additional movie of the park be financed, for use as an advertising medium.
- f) That a small executive committee be elected to transact routine business.
- g) That all donations be routed through the Texas State Parks Board, and that they be credited its account.<sup>12</sup>

The purpose of the TBBPA was twofold: publicize the national park and raise money for its acquisition. In May 1938, organization was effected and officers elected. Carter was president, Morelock vice president. The \$25,000 working fund was pledged at the first meeting of the executive committee. On behalf of the city of Fort Worth, Carter contributed the first \$5,000 to a working fund to cover rent and other campaign-related expenses. Other executive committee members promised to raise an additional \$5,000 in each of Texas' three largest cities, Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio. Later, El Paso and San Angelo each contributed \$1,000 to the fund, and Alpine \$500.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> As found verbatim in Morelock, Mountain of the Mind, 167-168.

<sup>13</sup> Notes for manuscript, articles file, Book III, HMP/WPC.

The professional fund-raising firm of Adrian Wychgel and Associates was asked to assist with the drive. It had assisted in generating over \$2,000,000 for Mammoth Cave National Park in Kentucky and Shenandoah National Park in Virginia. Adrian Wychgel assured Governor Allred that “very little, if any, funds would have to be appropriated by the state.” Based on past performance, he predicted a successful conclusion to the campaign within six months, by November 1938. Carter and the executive committee, however, delayed renewal of the popular subscription campaign until the working fund had the \$25,000 that had been pledged. As of November, only \$15,500 had been collected.<sup>14</sup>

Meanwhile, creation of a state-wide grass-roots organization went forward. The Texas Big Bend Park Association mailed brochures to prominent citizens throughout the state. The brochures outlined formation of committees in each of the state’s twenty-one congressional districts. Directors of the TBBPA and representatives of counties within the districts would comprise these committees. Their primary function, in turn, was to organize committees in every county, which were then responsible for creating community units. These local organizations would solicit one-dollar memberships from the populace. In August 1938, the TBBPA even amended its charter so as to make donations tax

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<sup>14</sup> As quoted in Jameson, The Story of Big Bend, 39.

exempt.<sup>15</sup>

The second popular subscription campaign never got past the initial phase. Because pledges to the working fund were never completely honored, statewide efforts were permanently delayed. On the positive side, however, the prominent members of the association did add immense clout to the ongoing legislative and editorial campaigns. Newspapers throughout the state and nation remained enthusiastic supporters and continued publishing promotional materials. Although the popular subscription effort eventually failed in its overall purpose, it did keep the dream of a national park alive during the difficult years of the late 1930s and allowed the legislative bid to regain momentum.

Meanwhile, State Representative E.E. Townsend of Alpine did his part to keep the vision alive. He succeeded in convincing the National Geographic Society to write a major article about the Big Bend. He was not only the driving force of the legislative effort to pass an appropriations bill for the park, but also a supporter of the subscription campaign. As such, he sought contributions from such notables as John D. Rockefeller. Townsend had been a rancher, Texas Ranger, and Sheriff of Brewster County and was emotionally tied to the beauty of the area. Like Morelock, however, his primary motivation was economic development. He touted the national park and its potential

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<sup>15</sup> See appendix 2; Fort Worth Star-Telegram, 26 August 1938, HWM/ABB.

commerce as a “growing business as long as America rolls on wheels.” Townsend, Morelock, James Casner, and others frequently accompanied excursions of legislators, journalists, and other influential types to the area in question. These outings served to maintain the park’s public presence, as well as further the legislative efforts.<sup>16</sup>

The junkets also revealed the abysmal state of the West Texas infrastructure. Lack of paved roads in the area amplified its isolation and kept out all but the most ardent travelers. Morelock, always a strong proponent of paved roads in the region, stressed the importance of transportation to any area and used as historical precedent the Roman roads in Europe. He insisted that good roads stimulate the economy and always pay for themselves.<sup>17</sup>

Morelock enlisted prominent citizens to press the Texas Highway Commission for construction of paved roads into Trans-Pecos Texas. Given the condition of the state’s finances and the geographic isolation from the more densely populated parts of the state, it was not surprising that these requests were refused. On behalf of this cause, Morelock, from 1937 to 1941, served as president of a lobbying group called The Highway 67

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<sup>16</sup> Townsend to Arno Cammerer, Director of the National Park Service, April 4, 1938, Townsend to John D. Rockefeller, December 4, 1937, Folder 1, Wallet 22, Box 8, EET. Townsend to Winifred Camp of Abilene, April 7, 1941, Folder 1, Wallet 23, Box 8, EET (quotation). This was a standard phrase in much of Townsend’s correspondence of the period.

<sup>17</sup> Casey, Brewster County, Texas, 49-50; notes for manuscript, articles file, Book III, HMP/WPC.

Association which attempted to influence paving of the road from Alpine to Fort Stockton, from where the improved surface extended to Fort Worth and on to Minneapolis-St. Paul. Once paved, Highway 67 would serve as the primary artery into the Big Bend. In 1939, the association held a contest to name the West Texas segment of the road, and at its banquet, in Alpine's Holland Hotel, Morelock announced the winning entry: the Big Bend Trail. The State Highway Department, however, refused to pave the road past Fort Stockton.<sup>18</sup>

Always persistent, Morelock sought a new sponsor. In a letter to the Dallas Morning News, he urged the paving of Highway 67 for military purposes. Citing Mexican incursions twenty-two years earlier, as well as the expanding war in Europe, he stressed the urgency of the matter. This tactic had the desired effect. Federal defense officials concurred in the necessity of maintaining paved roads in the region, designated Highway 67 a military highway and issued a three-million-dollar "deficiency warrant" to improve the road. Although the upgrade of Highway 67 was only a small segment of the 6,375 miles of militarily strategic highways in Texas, the ramifications were apparent to citizens of Brewster and Presidio counties. A primary artery finally linked them to the rest of the

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<sup>18</sup> Alpine Avalanche, 11 November 1938; San Angelo Standard Times, 24 July 1939; newspaper clipping, unknown, HWM/ABB; Alpine Avalanche, 7 October 1938. Highway 90, called the Old Spanish Trail, ran from San Diego, California, through El Paso and Alpine to St. Augustine, Florida. The Big Bend stretch, however, was not paved until November of 1938.

state and nation.<sup>19</sup>

One immediate benefit of the newly paved road to the citizens of Alpine was the subsequent construction of a natural gas pipeline along the right of way. Prior to completion of the pipeline in 1942, this source of energy was unavailable in Brewster County, despite the proximity of the Permian Basin fields. Previously, the area's only gas was the butane which the Southern Pacific Railroad delivered in canisters.<sup>20</sup>

As president of SRS, Morelock had a special affinity for Alpine. He also viewed it as the natural economic hub of the Big Bend. Once Highway 67 was approved for paving, Alpine's location as gateway to the proposed park was substantially enhanced. On the negative side, the Regional Director of the National Park Service (NPS) and his head landscape architect favored a loop that bypassed Alpine. When he expressed his concern that this would leave Alpine "high and dry," Morelock learned that the NPS would choose a route because of its aesthetics and not its appeal to the local chamber of commerce. In the fall of 1940, Morelock commenced a campaign to influence the NPS on this matter. He contacted prominent associates in the Texas Big Bend Park Association, members of Congress, cabinet officers, and the Texas State Highway Commission to help lobby for the

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<sup>19</sup> Dallas Morning News, 11 June, 1940, HWM/ABB; Morelock to Willa B. Washington, July 31, 1940, Book III, HMP/WPC; Richard Morehead, Dewitt C. Greer: King of the Highway Builders (Austin: Eakin Press, 1984), 46.

<sup>20</sup> Alpine Avalanche, clipping, undated, HWM/ABB.

Alpine route. Ultimately, the road ran through Alpine.<sup>21</sup>

As the road issue came to resolution, the quest for park funding persisted. By early 1941, the primary focus had moved back to the state legislature. Though the popular subscription campaign had failed, it did sway popular opinion. One important difference in the new legislative effort was the fact that Governor W. Lee “Pappy” O’Daniel seemed inclined to sign pro-park legislation. In appreciation for the new governor’s early support, the Alpine Chamber of Commerce sent him a telegram signed by the chamber, Lions Club, Rotary Club, and “five hundred citizens.” President Roosevelt contacted Governor O’Daniel stressing the benefits of the park and encouraged a legislative appropriation. Furthermore, Roosevelt indicated that “it would be very gratifying to me personally” if Big Bend National Park “could be dedicated during my Administration.”<sup>22</sup>

In early 1941, a legislative bill was introduced appropriating \$1,500,000 for the procurement of all land within the boundaries of the proposed Big Bend National Park. Representative Townsend helped “hash out” the bill in the legislature. He also enlisted the

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<sup>21</sup> Morelock to H.L. Kokernot, 4 October, 1940, Book III, HMP/WPC. The route the landscape architect favored ran from Marathon through the park to Terlingua and then to Marfa. Morelock and the Alpine Chamber of Commerce wanted a road from Marathon to the park and then to Alpine.

<sup>22</sup> Alpine Avalanche, 8 July 1938 (first quotation); D.E. Hilton, The Father of Big Bend National Park: E.E. Townsend (Big Spring, Texas: Sprinkle Printing Company, 1988); Final quote as quoted in Jameson, The Story of Big Bend, 41.

help of Texan Alvin Wirtz, undersecretary of the Interior, to sway opponents of the proposal. Townsend and Representative Calvin Huffman, of Eagle Pass, separately wrote to M.R. Tillotson, NPS Director of Region III, requesting his testimony before the Legislative Appropriations Committee on March 10. Tillotson stressed the importance of Big Bend National Park as an investment, not an expenditure, and cited economic impact figures from other parks.<sup>23</sup>

The opposition began to crumble, but an East Texas contingent, headed by Representative G.C. Morris of Greenville, added a mineral rights reserve amendment to the bill. They argued that the state and the public schools should not be deprived of any subsurface wealth within the park. Debate over the mineral question continued well into May. Townsend lamented, “You should have heard them talk about the great and wonderful mines we so obligingly led them by on the March 1st trip. You would have thought Midas’ gold was a monte game in comparison to the riches in Big Bend Park.” Park proponents, however, held a strategically superior position regarding the mineral reserve clause. Director Tillotson and Townsend agreed that even if the park proponents

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<sup>23</sup> Texas Legislature, Journal of the House of Representatives of the Regular Session of the Forty-Seventh Legislature of Texas (Austin: Texas State Printing Office, 1941), 1114, Senate Bill 423 on 30 June, 1941; Townsend to Herbert Maier of the National Park Service, January 27, 1941, Townsend to U.S. Rep. R.E. Thomason, February 25, 1941, Folder 22, Box 8, Huffman to Tillotson, February 5, 1941, Folder 1, Wallet 22, Box 8, and Townsend to Tillotson, February 10, 1941, Folder 22, Box 8, EET/ABB.

in the legislature could not remove the offending clause, the National Park Service would refuse to accept title until it was expunged. This revelation caused the mineral rights amendment to be deleted, and the bill narrowly passed both houses. Governor O'Daniel, also a candidate for the United States Senate, signed the measure on June 30, 1941. The bill, in its final form, allotted \$1,500,000 for the purchase of all privately held land within the park boundaries. Big Bend National Park could now be created, although fourteen more years would elapse before it would be officially dedicated.<sup>24</sup>

The effort that produced state purchase of the proposed park site involved local, state, and federal interests--and a crusading individual. Horace Morelock's statewide lobbying kept the notion of a national park alive, before the public. It was the means to lure federal resources to his underdeveloped, isolated part of Texas and to save his beloved Sul Ross State Teachers College. When world affairs conspired to attract federal attention, a heretofore reluctant legislature responded to the continuing effort of Representative E.E. Townsend and authorized state acquisition of the proposed park area. Morelock's vision and persistence had reaped the desired reward.

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<sup>24</sup> Townsend to Nelson Lee, Secretary of the Alpine Chamber of Commerce, May 6, 1940 (quotation), Townsend to Tillotson, May 8, 1941; Tillotson to Townsend, May 12, 1941, Folder 22, Box 8, EET; Texas Legislature, Journal of the House of Representatives of the Regular Session of the Forty-Seventh Legislature of Texas (Austin: Texas State Printing Office, 1941), 1114.

## CHAPTER 4

### Acquisition and Improvement, 1941-1963

Following the legislature's approval of the appropriations bill for land acquisition in 1941, the Big Bend National Park emerged slowly. Fourteen years elapsed until the official dedication, and as late as 1960, visitation numbers were only a fraction of those anticipated in the 1930s. Two factors mitigated against immediate success. Acquisition issues in the early 1940s postponed transfer to the federal government; and once the acreage was transferred, the National Park Service (NPS) ignored its new responsibility. In fact, significant improvements were not forthcoming until the Mission 66 Plan during the Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson administrations. Only then did the park approximate the vision of its early proponents.

Actual acquisition of the property in the proposed park was initially delayed for five months because of a court injunction, initiated by State Representative A.H. King of Throckmorton. The Texas Court of Civil Appeals overturned the motion in December 1941. Immediately following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, some legislators

proposed diverting funding for all large, non-essential projects, including the Big Bend project, to the war effort. Horace Morelock spoke for many when he said, “After World War II is only a tragic memory, the American people will be greatly in need of such relief scenes as an International Peace Park will provide.” Supporters prevailed, and purchase of parkland began in earnest in the spring of 1942. Progress lagged, however, since the legislature had granted only twelve months, dating from July 1941, to acquire the acreage, and almost half of that time was spent in court.<sup>1</sup>

After legislative approval of the park appropriations bill, the State Parks Board (SPB) created the Big Bend Land Department (BBLD), headquartered in Alpine, to organize acquisition of private land within the proposed park boundaries. Eugene Thompson headed the effort and was assisted by E.E. Townsend. Frank Quinn, originally appointed to the BBLD, resigned to become executive secretary of the SPB. His duties included coordination of state and federal efforts to acquire Big Bend land. By the end of 1942, the BBLD had purchased or otherwise gained ownership of ninety-eight percent of the proposed 708,000 acres for an average price of two dollars per acre. The legislative appropriation of \$1,500,000 had been completely spent, and with the United States at war, there was little likelihood of additional funding. The legislature had committed to a strict economy program and was even curtailing appropriations necessary to the operation of

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<sup>1</sup> Jameson, The Story of Big Bend, 48-49; notes for manuscript, articles file, Book III, HMP/WPC.

numerous state agencies. In that light, the SPB considered any request for additional legislative funding as potentially disastrous to the entire state park system.<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, the remaining 13,316 acres, representing two percent of the park, was of much higher value. The single most expensive piece of privately held property was a tract of 1,715 acres along the Rio Grande at Castolon belonging to Wayne Cartledge and his son, Eugene. The Cartledges had lived on the property for decades and had improved it greatly. Extensively irrigated, it produced large yields of cotton, as well as food crops, and, in 1943, the property was valued at \$35,000. The other 11,603 acres, in several scattered tracts, appraised at a total of \$29,060.<sup>3</sup>

Newton B. Drury, NPS director, believed that the strategically placed Castolon property would have to be acquired before the park could be developed. He did, however, say that other holdings could remain in private hands for an indeterminate period without seriously affecting progress. Throughout 1943, he refused to recommend transfer of the parkland to the federal government until the state could satisfactorily address the Castolon question. He offered a possible consolation: if the state would definitively commit to the acquisition of that property, within a given period of years, he believed that

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<sup>2</sup> Frank Quinn, Texas State Parks Board, to Newton Drury, Director, National Park Service, March 25, 1943, folder 124, box 3, Robert Cartledge Collection, ABB.

<sup>3</sup> Drury to Amon Carter, March 20, 1943, folder 124, box 3, Drury to Quinn, March 25, 1943, folder 129, box 3, Drury to Quinn, April 1, 1943, folder 129, box 3, *ibid*; Willa B. Washington, interview by author, May 11, 1999, Austin, Texas.

the Interior Department might be willing to establish the park immediately.<sup>4</sup>

Private efforts to raise the cash foundered. Texans were exhorted to buy war bonds rather than support less essential projects such as Big Bend National Park, particularly since a legislative appropriation had addressed the matter. Since the state refused to consider additional expenditures during the war, the entire process of transferring the park to the federal government seemed to be stalled. A breakthrough occurred in early 1944 when the Cartledges agreed to negotiate the sale of their property at Castolon in 1949. Drury then recommended that the federal government accept the park with the understanding that the SPB would, when feasible, try to buy all remaining private land within park boundaries. This approach won acceptance. On June 6, 1944, President Roosevelt and Secretary of the Interior Ickes accepted the title, and Big Bend National Park was officially opened that July. The state legislature made an additional appropriation for land purchases in 1947, then stated that no more expenditures would be approved. In 1949, the federal government commenced on a land purchase program to procure all remaining privately held acreage within park boundaries.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Drury to Quinn, April 1, 1943, folder 129, box 3, Cartledge Collection, ABB.

<sup>5</sup> James G. Anderson, "Land Acquisition in the Big Bend National Park of Texas" (M.A. thesis, Sul Ross State College, Alpine, Texas, 1967), 87; Frank Covert, interview by author, by telephone, May 18, 1999. Mr. Covert is the nephew of Gene Cartledge. The Cartledges were reluctant to sell immediately because they perceived that their property was severely undervalued and they wished to recoup the cost of their improvements. Castolon was eventually purchased by the federal government for \$140,000 in 1957.

Land sales boosted the area's economy in two ways. First, a significant percentage of the 700,000 acres purchased in the initial stage (1942-43) was held by residents of Brewster and surrounding counties. Many of these sellers invested their proceeds locally. Second, many of them reinvested in other land in the area and caused land values to rise. The increase cannot be solely attributed to the purchase program, however, since the mere presence of the park, additional paved roads, a thriving cattle industry, and postwar inflation all served to drive up property values.<sup>6</sup>

After World War II, the park failed to attract as many visitors as anticipated and therefore generated disappointing revenues. One reason for the poor showing was probably geographic, since the Big Bend was hundreds of miles away from other tourist destinations and population centers. Another factor weighed heavily, however. Big Bend National Park was an unimproved desert wilderness setting. Without amenities, Americans would not appear in numbers sufficient to support park operations. Since Congress was still approving funds for land purchases, and since so few visitors were involved, improvements remained a low priority. After the war, Congress failed to appropriate money for improvements at the park, and thus the park concessionaire set up wooden huts with tar-paper roofs as temporary facilities. But because revenues remained

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Jameson, The Story of Big Bend, 49-50.

<sup>6</sup> Casey, Brewster County, Texas, 53.

anemic, what was supposedly temporary became permanent. Park attendance averaged only eighty thousand per year between 1950 and 1962, far short of the anticipated 250,000 or more that the optimism of the 1930s had spawned.<sup>7</sup>

Official dedication of Big Bend National Park occurred in November of 1955, but a far more important development that year was the unveiling of the Mission 66 plan to improve the country's national parks. Big Bend National Park was slated to receive \$14,000,000, which the NPS used to improve roads, trails, a modern headquarters, picnic and camping sites, and tourist accommodations, including the Chisos Mountain Lodge in the Basin. The improved facilities may be one reason that the visitation rate improved in the 1960s. Other factors may have been the growth of the wilderness and backpacking movements and the introduction of automobile air-conditioning. Most certainly, construction of the interstate highway system facilitated travel into Trans-Pecos Texas. Only in the 1970s did the annual visitation rates approach the levels anticipated two generations earlier.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the extended period of time that it took the park to attain anticipated visitation levels, the goals of early proponents were achieved. By the 1960s, the Big Bend area was no longer an empty quadrant on the map. Clearly, one of the original goals of

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<sup>7</sup> Jameson, The Story of Big Bend, 76-77.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 79.

park organizers was to gain federal assistance to improve the region's internal and connecting external roads and to boost the local economy. They recognized not only the prestige associated with a national park, but, more importantly, the desirability of federal investment in the region.

Historical antecedents had shown the impotence of Texas government in the region. The state was unable to defend or develop the region against either the Apaches in the nineteenth century or Mexican bandits in the early twentieth. Likewise, the state lacked sufficient resources to build a modern infrastructure in West Texas. Therefore, it was quite natural that the residents of Big Bend should turn to the federal government in alleviating their economic distress. They not only anticipated paved roads, but also tourist dollars, gasoline and hotel tax revenues, government paychecks, and contracts for local businesses.

Much of the credit for the park is due to E. E. Townsend, who spear-headed the initial legislative effort, establishment of the CCC camp, and federal lobbying efforts. The former Ranger represented a link between the area's past and future. A colorful figurehead for the Big Bend Park movement, Townsend frequently escorted legislators and other notables into the proposed park area. Although he was not particularly skilled as a legislator, Townsend energetically endorsed and defended what he believed to be his constituents' best interests, including the creation of Big Bend National Park.

Complications and delays arose in the 1930s because the federal government refused to contribute any money to the Big Bend National Park project and the state lacked both the resources and the political will to lend support. While the legislature deliberated the possibilities of a national park in West Texas, the federal government influenced the debate by injecting economic impact statistics from other national parks. These figures were used to show the investment value of a national park to a state's finances. Despite the best efforts of Townsend and other legislators, Governor James Allred's veto of the park appropriations bill in 1937 threatened to kill the park project entirely.

It was during this time that park supporters mounted a grass-roots to assist with funding. They originated in Alpine with assistance from the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. Horace Morelock of Sul Ross State Teachers College was particularly instrumental during this promotional phase. Morelock's dream was that Big Bend National Park would be the centerpiece of a regional academic environment. Unfortunately, the two fund drives failed to raise more than a small fraction of the purchase price of the proposed parkland. These efforts fell short predominately because of severe economic distress in Texas during the Great Depression, the fact that most Texans believed that the legislature would eventually appropriate adequate funding, and because many thought that they would probably never visit the isolated desert setting. Despite their failure, the popular subscription drives did

keep the proposed Big Bend National Park in the public eye from 1937 to 1941, during four crucial years and two legislative sessions.

In the early 1930s, it was apparent to the inhabitants of the Big Bend that the region lacked sufficient resources or infrastructure to develop a viable economy. Neither the state government nor the private sector had devoted adequate capital to diversify the area's economy. The federal government had always been an economic mainstay and was a likely source of future development, and thus the concept of a national park took hold. But more so than in other parts of the country, it was the local population that most ardently supported creation of Big Bend National Park. During all stages of their eight-year struggle, residents lobbied, promoted, and contributed money to the cause. In the final analysis, they were justifiably proud of the aesthetic beauty and biodiversity of the proposed park, but their principal motive was economic.

Appendix 1

BREWSTER COUNTY CHAMBER OF  
COMMERCE  
DOM ADAMS, PRESIDENT  
BERTA CLARK LASSITER, SECY.

REPRODUCED FROM THE  
HOLDINGS OF THE  
ARCHIVES OF THE BIG BEND

LOCAL PARK COMMITTEE  
H. W. MORELOCK, CHAIRMAN  
J. E. CASNER  
FRANK M'COLLUM

"A MILLION DOLLAR CAMPAIGN THRU POPULAR SUBSCRIPTION"  
To Purchase Land For Big Bend National Park

VALUE OF NATIONAL PARK TO TEXAS

1. A permanent source of revenue to the State, with an advertising value money could not buy.
2. The National Park Service estimates that out-of-State tourists will spend in Texas three million six hundred thousand dollars the first year the park is opened to the public.
3. Once the land is acquired and deeded to the U. S. Government, the National Park Service will develop and maintain the park at its own expense.
4. Mr. Conrad Wirth, Associate Director of National Park Service, says: "The Big Bend National Park will be one of the greatest recreational and educational ventures ever undertaken by the National Park Service."
5. The Chisos Mountains with an elevation of 8,000 feet, with picturesque scenery all its own, and with a climate equal to that in Colorado, will provide Texas with a summer vacation close home at a nominal cost.
6. The co-operative agreement between Washington and Mexico to combine the 788,000 in Texas and 400,000 acres in Mexico for an International Peace Park will further cement the friendship between the two republics and improve trade relations.

PLAN

1. Organizations should be formed in every county and town to collect at least one dollar from every citizen to be deposited in the local banks, and all checks should be made payable to "Big Bend National Park Fund."
2. The Texas State Parks Board has been designated to handle this fund, and not one cent is to be used for any other purpose than "to purchase land for the Big Bend National Park."
3. A roll of honor for all contributors should be engraved on a brass tablet in some building to be erected in the park by the National Park Service.
4. Virginians raised through popular subscription one million dollars to buy land for the Shenandoah National Park, and 694,098 tourists entered its gates the first year it was opened. Texans will do no less for her six million people.

PERSONAL LETTER

Alpine, Texas August 30, 1937

TO THE CHAIRMAN OF NATIONAL & STATE PARKS:

On the enclosed leaflet you will find some notes on national and state parks of our land, which I hope will prove useful to you in the preparation of your year's work. These notes were taken from material sent to me by Mrs. W. D. McFarlane, Chairman National and State Parks Committee, Texas Federation of Womens' Clubs, 2434 Tunlaw Road, N. W., Washington, D. C., and from materials in the office of the Brewster County Chamber of Commerce.

If, at any time, I can be of service to you, please command me.

Yours for better and more parks,

*Berta Clark Lassiter*  
Mrs. Roy C. Lassiter, Chairman  
Comm. on Nat. & State Parks, 8th District  
Texas Federation of Womens' Clubs

Notice: This material is  
from the  
(1937, 1938, 1939)

IT HAS BEEN SUGGESTED THAT THE "PARK BILL" BE AMENDED SO AS TO GIVE THE CHILDREN IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF TEXAS FREE ADMISSION TO THE PARK



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## VITA

Sam Greer was born on July 15, 1963, to John and Gerry Greer in Houston, Texas. The third of five boys, he received both private and public education before studying economics at the University of Texas at Austin. Before and after graduation, he traveled extensively around the world before becoming a property/ casualty insurance agent. After selling his partnership interest at Langham, Langston, and Dyer Insurance, he pursued other business interests until 1995, when he enrolled in the graduate History program at Southwest Texas State University. He currently teaches and performs duties as Dean of the Upper School at Kirby Hall School, a college preparatory institution in Austin, Texas.