

Granite Gap

Watchable Wildlife Site 75

Many highway travelers in southwest New Mexico pass right by Granite Gap and don't even know it's there.

In that part of the Bootheel, the land seems to go on for miles, one indistinguishable from another. However, at a point 11 miles south of Interstate 10 and west of two-lane blacktop NM80, some rock formations can be glimpsed at a distance.

Secluded Scenic Beauty

Seemingly insignificant when viewed from the road, up close these rock formations are a world unto themselves -- 1,750 acres of boulders, ridges, and scenic beauty rising precipitously from the surrounding plains. At this secluded spot, spectacular granite and limestone uplifts, ridges, and rocks rise up to encircle this bowl of land near the Arizona border. The site is officially designated as a "low saddle" of the Peloncillo Mountains; on the northwest horizon, Granite Peak rises above the gap, while the Peloncillo Mountain range continues south.

Granite Gap's vegetative types are as widely varying as its rock formations. Since this site is an excellent example of Chihuahuan Desert, visitors should be sure to look for flowering ocotillo, a variety of cactus species, and spring wildflowers in season. Many botanists concur that this area has a higher cactus diversity than any other area in New Mexico.

Wildlife Viewing

Granite Gap is definitely an early spring/late fall wildlife viewing site, due to its summer temperature extremes. There is excellent viewing of a variety of lizards and other reptiles, including Mojave, western diamondback, and black-tailed rattlesnakes. An observant, quiet hiker may even spot the rare Gila monster, resident in this area.

The site affords very good viewing of birdlife, including the curve-billed and Bendire's thrasher, black-throated sparrow, cactus and rock wren, northern mockingbird, verdin, greater roadrunner, hummingbird species, Gambel's quail, and northern harrier, spring through fall.

A small herd of desert bighorn sheep inhabit Granite Gap. Mule deer, ringtail, coyote, and javelina are also frequently seen here. The latter are so common, that camping and campsites must be carefully monitored by site supervisor Bureau of Land Management during javelina season.

Critical Environmental Concern

A part of their Mimbres Management Plan, Granite Gap is designated by the BLM as an "Area of Critical Environmental Concern" (ACEC) for its biological and scenic beauty. Access to Granite Gap limited to designated roads and trails, and absolutely closed to any mineral or oil development. The site meets the BLM's designated ACEC relevance criteria because of the state-listed endangered species living there; its diverse cactus community; its prime habitat for desert bighorn sheep; and its scenic values.

Directions

In the New Mexico Bootheel, go 15 miles west of Lordsburg on Interstate 10 and take Exit 5 (Road Forks). Drive south on NM80 and turn right after 11 miles onto an unmarked dirt track. At the entrance, there will be a wire gate between two wooden posts -- be sure to close gate after entering property. Take the left fork, go about a half mile along the sandy road, and park near the first large rock cluster. Do not drive past the cut in the rocks. Road is impassable in wet weather. Warning -- bring water! The nearest gas station and water source is at Road Forks 11 miles to the north. Granite Gap is management by the BLM from their Las Cruces office, (505) 525-4341.