The Legends & History of Sacred Enchanted Rock

"Enchanted Rock has long been considered sacred by the indigenous of the area. The local Comanche and Tonkawa Indians revered the rock as a Holy Place and entry point into other worlds. They believed it to be protected by powerful benevolent spirits of the ancestors."

Texas Tourism Press -

Sparsely scattered across the continent are monuments, natural in origin. Some are beautiful, others bizarre; a few reach deeper than the eye or the mind to touch the human psyche. They are named holy. Enchanted Rock, which rises out of the surrounding landscape like a megalithic monument is such a place. Indeed it feels Holy and Enchanted, it is easy to see why the Natives called it Medicine Rock. It is now preserved and protected in Enchanted Rock State park. Composed of some of the oldest rock on earth, this ancient landmark began taking shape more than a billion years ago. From the earth's core, underground rivers of magma (molten rock) rose like mushrooms that cooled into rock before they surfaced. Cataclysmic changes occurred. Great mountains and oceans rose and fell. Volcanoes thrust skyward. Rampaging storms deluged the land. Massive rivers formed and slowly subsided, creating the deep canyons and valleys of the Texas Hill Country. Over the millennia, erosion worked its way down to the old rock. Finally, some 10 million years ago, Enchanted Rock emerged, eventually to stand 1,845 feet above sea level and 500 feet from base to summit, and one square mile in area. It is the second largest granite dome in the United States—the largest being Stone Mountain in Georgia. But the one in Texas is much older!
The Big Dome

Enchanted Rock is an enormous pink granite pluton or granitic batholith in the Llano Uplift approximately 15 miles (24 km) north of Fredericksburg, Texas. Enchanted Rock State Park & Nature Area, which includes Enchanted Rock and surrounding land, spans the border between Gillespie County and Llano County, south of the beautiful clear Llano River.

Enchanted Rock covers approximately 640 acres and rises approximately 500 feet above the surrounding terrain to elevation of 1,825 feet (556 m) above sea level. It is the largest such pink granite-monadnock in the United States. Enchanted Rock State Natural Area, a part of the Texas state park system, includes a whopping 1,644 acres. Enchanted Rock State Natural Area draws countless visitors to its distinctive dome of pink granite. Designated a National Natural Landmark, Enchanted Rock is an impressive geological feature with an estimated age of one billion years, making it among the oldest exposed rock in North America. Coupled with its impressive geologic history, Enchanted Rock also has an extensive archaeological history; the site figures prominently in several Indian legends. It is easy to understand why Enchanted Rock is the geologic center of Texas. From almost any place in the park you can see examples representing the whole evolution of plant life—from lichen (the slowest growing plant on earth) to mosses, to ferns, to herbaceous plants, to shrubs and finally trees. Within the park's massive acres are over five hundred species of plants. Over one hundred of these inhabit the vernal pools, weathered pits which impound soil and water on the summit of Enchanted Rock and the surrounding outcrops. The vernal pools are very delicate ecosystems, supporting a unique invertebrate, the fairy shrimp. Whether the pools appear as bare rock depressions or filled with plant life, all the pools are in a process of evolution which has required thousands of years. Avoid walking through or otherwise disturbing these areas. In their dormant state, the fairy shrimp appear as dust when the pools are dry.

Geology

Geologically Enchanted Rock and the adjacent granite domes called inselbergs-island mountains—contain amethyst, beryl, fluorite, pink feldspar, gold, silver, topaz, tourmaline, and veins of crystalline quartz. The exposed surface of Enchanted Rock is but a small portion of the Enchanted Rock batholith, the upward intrusion of granite, which occupies over one hundred square miles beneath the earth's surface. The surrounding area is variously called the Llano Uplift, the Granite Highlands, or the Central Mineral Region. The prominent granite dome is visible for many miles in the surrounding basin of the Llano Uplift. Its gentle dome gives the appearance of being the edge of a pebble of leviathan proportions extruding from the earth, in the same manner as the larger Uluru (Ayers Rock) in Australia. The rock is actually part of a segmented ridge, the surface expression of a large igneous-batholith of middle Precambrian material that intruded into earlier metamorphic schists and gneiss.

The intrusive granite of the pluton was exposed by extensive erosion of the surrounding sedimentary rock (which is primarily limestone). The rock is over one billion years old, making it the oldest such dome in America.

History

Archaeological evidence indicates human visitation at the rock going back at least 12,000 years. Folklore of local Native American tribes ascribes magical and spiritual powers to the rock (hence the name 'Enchanted Rock'). The indigenous believed the rock made them invisible and gave them access to spiritual and mystical worlds. The Tonkawa Native Americans, who inhabited the area in
the 15th and 16th century, believed that spirit lights flickered at the top of the dome, and used the area extensively for ceremonies such as vision quests and ritual dances to invoke wisdom. In particular they heard unexplained creaking and groaning sounds, which geologists attribute to the rock's night-time contraction after being heated by the sun during the day.

The name "Enchanted Rock" derives from Spanish and Anglo-Texan interpretations of such legends and related folklore; the name "Spirit Song Rock" has also been given to the formation by the Natives legends. The first well-documented explorations of this area did not begin until 1723 when the Spanish intensified their efforts to colonize Texas. During the mid-1700s, the Spaniards made several trips to the north and northwest of San Antonio, establishing a mission and presidio on the San Saba River and carrying out limited mining on Honey Creek near the Llano River. The rock has been the subject of numerous geological surveys and paintings. It was declared a National Natural Landmark in 1970. The rock was in private hands until 1978, when it was purchased by the Nature Conservatory at the behest of Lady Bird Johnson who wanted to save the area from development.

The State of Texas acquired it in 1979 and opened it as a state park in 1984 after adding facilities. That same year it was also added to the National Register of Historic Place. It is currently one of the most popular destinations for hiking and camping in central Texas. Climbing footpaths to the top of the dome is a popular activity. Technical rock climbing is very popular there as well. Visitors to Enchanted Rock enjoy numerous activities, including hiking, backpacking, technical and rock climbing, primitive camping, picnicking, birding, geological study, stargazing and nature study. In recent years it has become a mecca for New Age Spiritual seekers, believing the Rock Dome to be a vortex of spiritual power. The Park accepts one and all. Facilities include a group picnic area and pavilion.

**Hiking & Mystic Cave**

The park offers 7 miles of hiking trails, including the popular 6/10 mile Summit Trail which involves a 425-foot elevation gain hike to the top of Enchanted Rock. The 4-mile Loop Trail, a favorite among hikers and backpackers, winds around the base of Enchanted Rock. Bicycling is permitted on paved roads only. For experienced rock climbers, the park's 1,000 foot long Enchanted Rock Fissure -- one of the largest known granite caves -- promises a challenge on its steep and slippery surfaces. Along the northwest face of Enchanted Rock, near the summit is Enchanted Rock Cave. The Cave, full of mystic folklore and legend, is actually a capped crevice over 600 feet long with some 20 entrances, it is one of the largest caves formed within an inselberg mass. Although some exploration of the cave is permitted it should not be done without adequate equipment and permission is required to go beyond the entry.

The absolute darkness and vertical drops near the lower levels of the cave make it very hazardous for amateurs. Formerly the nesting place for rock and canyon wrens, and a roosting site for cave myotis and other bats. Enchanted Rock Cave is now one of the most ecologically damaged areas in the park.

**The Legends of Enchanted Rock**

Enchanted Rock, a lavender -pink granite dome in southwestern Hill Country of Texas' Llano County has long been the center of various legends. The local Comanche and Tonkawa Indians revered the rock as a Holy Place and entry point into other worlds. They believed it to be protected by powerful but benevolent spirits of ancestors. There are legends of tribes warring parties keeping a wide berth from the Rock, believing that bad fortune and even death would be bestowed upon
those who went there with bad intent. As such once a tribal member or party went there, no fighting took place. It became a place of sacred refuge. The Indian legends of the mysticism and spirit inhabitants of Enchanted Rock were bolstered by the way the rock glitters and seems to emit an iridescent glow on clear moonless nights for an hour after sunset. No doubt the wailing moans and creaking noises reported on nights and after a rainstorm on warm days added to the lore.

Scientists have since theorized that the glittering is caused either by water trapped in indentations in the rock's surface or by the moon reflecting off wet feldspar, and the creaking noises by contraction of the rock's outer surface as it cools. None the less, the sounds are there, and many a hiking party in modern days have been spooked by the moaning rock contractions that occur well into the night. Invisible Worlds

Legends say that those who spend the night on the rock can become invisible, as if they mysteriously shift into other dimensions of reality. This legend of other dimensions and invisibility was widely held by the indigenous, but one legend of this comes from the Spanish Conquistadors and Priests. According to the local San Antonio legend, a Spanish priest was said to have narrowly escaped a group of pursuing Tonkawa by climbing Enchanted Rock and vanishing. Mystified, the Tonkawa whispered that the priest had cast a magical spell and been swallowed into the mountain. The young mission priest had a different explanation. It was the mountain, he would later tell his comrades, that had cast a spell over him. According to the passed down Spanish tale, the priest eventually made his way back to the mission and told the others that he had become part of Enchanted Rock itself. "When I reached the top I wedged myself into a crevice and was soon swallowed by the rock, I fell into a cavern that had a vast tunnel system, full of the many spirits who enchant the place. I wondered around in a dark mist inside the rock for 2 days before it spit me back out" he said. The area of the Texas Hill country has many limestone caves, several open to tourist. Myths of tunnels and underground lost civilizations are also legendary in the Indian folklore and Cosmology myths of the area. Some believe the tunnels connect to the Mayan lands of the Yucatan, who have similar legends of the underground world complete with labyrinths and extraordinary Cosmology tales. The Cave atop Enchanted Rock is still open to the public, and is worth a peak. But travel in with caution and speak first to the Rangers. The Cave was undoubtedly used ceremonially by the Tonkawa and Apache, who say it connects to an ancient underground system of tunnels and cities.

El Dorado Lore and Tunnels

The Spanish had legends of a great bounty of gold, an underground El Dorado, that had been gleaned from their interaction with the Native Americans of the 16th and 17th centuries. A number of stories involve rumors of great mineral wealth to be found at Enchanted Rock. Spanish explorers believed it was one large chunk of silver bearing stone. They also sought legendary gold and silver mines nearby, and some early Texans believed that the lost "Bowie Silver Mines" and "El Dorado" were in the vicinity west of Enchanted Rock. Legends say there is a lost city below the Cave accessed thru tunnels.

Some gold has in fact been mined near Enchanted Rock, but not enough to be commercially profitable. According to an account written in 1834 the rock was reported to contain platinum ore. Another tale, given official credence when the state of Texas commemorated it with a plaque near the summit of Enchanted Rock in 1936, relates a heroic episode in the life of Capt. John Coffee Hays. Chased and cut off by the ruthless and violent Comanche raiders from his company of Texas Rangers on a surveying trip in the fall of 1841, Hays took refuge on Enchanted Rock and the Indians fled once he entered the mystic heights of Enchanted Rock, believing the area was protected by spirits.
A Place of Peace

German immigrants colonized this area beginning in 1846 and established the town of Fredericksburg which had a population of over 1000 by 1847. These early pioneers suffered the privations and hardships of frontier life but enjoyed a comparatively peaceful relationship with the Indians because of a treaty with the Comanche made in 1847 by John Meusenbach, Commissioner-General of the German Emigration Colony. The treaty was said to have been signed at Enchanted Rock, and was one of the few treaties that was never broken by either side. The German settlers said Enchanted Rock was a place of power and peace and its magic blessed the treaty. The strong German influence is still readily apparent in Fredericksburg.

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