



The Nature Park News

January February March 2008

Volume 17, Issue 1

A publication of the Asombro Institute for Science Education

In This Issue:

- 2 Notes from the Director
Name the Newsletter
- 3 Bashful Bobcats
- 4 Site Development Corner
New Nature Park Hours
- 5 Calendar of Events
Beginning Astronomy Class
Education Programs
- 6 Sponsor Classroom Programs
Volunteer Opportunities
Many Thanks
Community Partners Update
- 7 New & Renewing Members
Membership Form
- 8 Map to the Park

The Nature Park News is published quarterly by the Asombro Institute for Science Education, a nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing scientific literacy by fostering an understanding of the Chihuahuan Desert. Please direct all inquiries to:

Asombro Institute
for Science Education
P.O. Box 891
Las Cruces, NM 88004
575-524-3334 (Voice)
575-523-2866 (Fax)
E-mail: cdnp@zianet.com
Web site: www.cdnp.org

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Justin Van Zee, *President*
Mary Beth Harper, *Vice President*
Mark Sechrist, *Secretary*
Donna Yargosz, *Treasurer*
Michael Ferguson, *Board Member*
Sally Hunt, *Board Member*

STAFF

Stephanie Bestelmeyer, *Ph.D., Director*
Rink Somerday, *Program Coordinator*
Paul Harper, *Site Coordinator*

New Name - Same Great Organization

At the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park annual meeting on January 17, members approved a big change for the organization. Beginning in February 2008, the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park will become the **Asombro Institute for Science Education!**

This change is the culmination of more than a year of discussions, debates, and hard work by the Board of Directors and staff. The primary impetus for the change was the desire to ensure that the name reflected the full scope of our work.

The "Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park" name was created in the mid 1990's when the primary focus of the organization was the creation of a place where people could go to learn about the desert. For this purpose, the name was perfect, and the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park name will be retained for the 960-acre site. In the last decade, however, the organization has expanded beyond the beautiful 960-acre site to become one of the leading environmental science education providers in the region.

Unfortunately, for people who do not know the organization already by reputation, the name "nature park" does not reflect this focus on science education. Many people hear the name "Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park" and instantly have a vision of a small preserve with trails and trees. This is especially problematic when we work with school administrators

or apply for funding from national sources.

In June 2007, the Board of Directors hired Vaughn Wedeen Creative from Albuquerque to assist with the development of a new name and logo. They generously donated a large portion of their normal fee for the project. Through multiple conference calls and emails, the new name and logo were selected.

The word "asombro" means "wonder" in Spanish, which is exactly what we try to engender in our program's participants. While our programs now cover a variety of



Asombro Institute
FOR SCIENCE EDUCATION

topics, from solar systems to desert animals to archaeology, they are all focused on bringing the excitement of science to those we serve. The new name is also easy to pronounce and reflects the multicultural nature of our region.

The Board and staff liked the logo because it is symbolic of desert grasses, creosotebush shrubs, growth, or a fountain of knowledge. All are perfectly appropriate symbols of the organization.

While we know that this change may come as a shock to some of our members, we want to assure you that even though the organization's name is changing, the organization's mission and energy are not. We are excited to now have a name that reflects the true scope of our work.

Notes from the Director

2007 Report

By Stephanie Bestelmeyer, Ph.D.

The four words I would use to summarize 2007 at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park are “difficult,” “frustrating,” “inspiring,” and ultimately “triumphant.”

The year started off with an energizing annual meeting in January. We entered the year with a staff of three and exciting plans for the year. We began our monthly booth at the Las Cruces Farmer’s Market, with considerable help from volunteers from the GFWC Progress Club of Las Cruces.

The first quarter of 2007 also featured the debut of two new Nature Park programs. The Real World - Real Science Program focused on providing pre- and post-field trip activities for middle school students who visited the Park so they could see that science can be done anywhere. The Academy for Young Scientists Program allows middle school students to participate in science opportunities outside of school (e.g., on weekends or during spring break).

The difficult period of the year began in February and March when vandals destroyed a section of the new rock wall around the parking area and burned two large shade ramadas.

Despite the turmoil at the site, we continued our education programs through the second quarter of the year. This included successful teacher workshops for our new Desert Teachers and

Learners Project. Las Cruces teachers learned about local topics of environmental concern like water issues, desertification, and erosion. They then used their teaching expertise and new content knowledge to put together hands-on activity stations for members of the public who attended a science night at the Park. One teacher said, “This was the best workshop I have ever attended, and I’ve been to a lot!”

Unfortunately, our frustration levels rose in June when vandals completely destroyed our restroom facility by burning the tanks under the toilets. We redoubled our efforts to prevent further damage by installing a security camera, hiring a security patrol service, and taking steps to begin locking the site during evenings.

The support from members of our community throughout this quarter was truly inspiring. We received countless phone calls and emails with words of support. Many people sent in donations earmarked specifically for rebuilding the Park. It was these incredible acts of kindness that helped the staff push through this difficult period.

Using the inspiration we received from our supporters, Nature Park staff members had a tremendous fourth quarter. We revamped our entire education program structure, and we now have class programs and field trip stations specifically tied to standards for four grade levels

(K-2nd, 3rd-5th, 6th-8th, and 9th-12th). Our crowning achievement of the year is



that our mission to provide quality education never once wavered, despite the energy and effort we had to put into site security. In fact, we reached even more students with our quality science education programs in 2007 than we had in 2006. In total, we reached 12,473 K-12 students, 1,405 teachers, and 3,238 other adults thanks to the support of our members. We were triumphant!

Even at the site, “triumphant” is a word that we feel justified in using. By the end of the year, we had purchased the new restroom facilities and hired the contractors to install it in January. Materials for the new, metal frames for the shade ramadas had been purchased, and the design for the new soil pit display signs were off to the manufacturer.

Our entire staff and Board of Directors extends our sincere thanks to all of you who helped us achieve so much and weather the difficult times in 2007. You are the reason we made it through the year feeling triumphant. We are taking this energy and running with it for 2008. Thank you!



Name the Newsletter!

This newsletter has always been a way to give our members and other supporters information about all that is happening. Now it is **your chance** to make a lasting impression on the document. We are looking for a new name for the “Nature Park News” to go along with the organization’s new umbrella name: Asombro Institute for Science Education. We know there are many creative people out there, so please send us your ideas. We will choose one to debut with the April - May - June 2008 newsletter. E-mail your idea to cdnp@zianet.com or mail it to Asombro Institute for Science Education, PO Box 891, Las Cruces, NM 88004. Please give us your name so we can acknowledge you. We look forward to hearing from you!

Bashful Bobcats

By Kevin Hanson

Southwest Regional Interpretive Ranger, New Mexico State Parks

Bobcats range from southern Canada to central Mexico and from California to Maine. They are found throughout New Mexico in river bottoms, broken and brushy country, mountainous alpine zones, and sandy deserts. While rarely seen, they are the state's most common wild felid. They have a light gray-brown pelage, with distinct dark brown or black spots covering the back and legs. The white belly fur has distinct black spots, while the backs of the ears are black with a large white spot in the center.

While its color can vary, the most distinguishing features of the bobcat are the tufted ears, facial ruff, and short tail. The tail averages six inches in adult males, five inches in adult females and is white underneath with dark bands on top.

The bobcat is twice the size of the domestic cat, but much smaller than a mountain lion. Weight and physical dimensions vary, but male bobcats average 22 pounds and may stand 18 inches at the shoulder. The head and body length is about 30 inches, not including the tail. Females average 16 pounds, with a head and body length of 27 inches, not including the tail.

Males are fertile their first year, but females do not give birth until they are two years old. Breeding occurs mostly in late winter and early spring. After 50 to 60 days, one to three kittens are born in spring or early summer. Females produce one litter a year. Kittens are born blind

and weigh four to eight ounces. The mother raises the kittens alone, nursing them for about two months before teaching them to hunt. They may remain with their mother until the fall of the next year and then disperse in search of their own home ranges.

Independent bobcats establish home ranges from ¼ to 25 square miles. Male home ranges are larger than female home ranges, usually overlapping or encompassing



Photo by Fijetland, Conrad, USFWS

several female home ranges, and occasionally overlapping those of other males. Female home ranges tend to be more exclusive and rarely overlap. Bobcats are solitary animals; males and females associate only during courtship and mating. In captivity, bobcats have lived as long as 25 years, but in the wild they survive only half as long.

Bobcats are stalking and ambush predators. They catch their prey unaware rather than chase it down. The cat is silent on approach, quick on the attack, and efficient in making the kill. They hunt at night, dawn, and dusk, when rabbits, hares, and rodents tend to be active. The bobcat's excellent night vision makes it well suited for stalking during these low light periods.

During the 2006-2007 season, 3,410 bobcats were trapped in New Mexico. The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish estimates the sustainable harvest limit for bobcats is 3,627-5,440. The felines are also hunted using specially trained dogs to track their scent. Seeking refuge in a tree, they are then shot. A quality pelt can bring \$250 and most are exported to Canada, China, and Europe for use in the luxury garment industry.

Wildlife managers insist controlled harvest provides an adequate safeguard to ensure the survival of the bobcat. Skeptics question how it is possible to kill thousands of bobcats when they are difficult to census, the impacts of harvest are poorly understood, and bobcat harvest is subject to market forces that operate independent of bobcat population dynamics and outside the wildlife manager's control. There

are reasons for concern; loss of habitat continues, the fur market is resurgent, bobcat pelt prices are rising, and trappers are venturing afield in increasing numbers.

About the Author

Kevin Hansen has worked as a wildlife biologist, park ranger, and writer throughout the United States. He has studied raptors in Oregon, alligators in Florida, and mountain lions in Arizona. He is the author of *Bobcat: Master of Survival* (Oxford University Press 2007), the most up-to-date and comprehensive book available on the natural history and management of the bobcat. Kevin currently lives in Las Cruces and works as the Southwest Regional Interpretive Ranger for New Mexico State Parks.

Site Development Corner

By Justin Van Zee

President of the Board of Directors and Chair of the Site Development Committee

It's hard to believe 2008 is here already. Even though the year is just a few weeks old, there are big changes happening at the Nature Park site.

As of January 1, the Park site has regular "open" hours, which are Tuesday to Saturday, 7:00AM to 5:00PM (see below). With new hours, controlled access and consistent security patrols, the Park site and its facilities will be protected for their intended use – science education and public enjoyment.

Our contractor began construction of the new restrooms during late January.

The new structure will be situated in front (north) of the old restrooms that were irreversibly damaged last year. The old building will be utilized for much needed storage. The existing damaged rock wall will be re-formed around the north entrance to the new restrooms.



The frame for a new shade ramada was constructed in January 2008.

Both shade ramadas that burned last year are also being replaced. This time the frames are made of steel, so they'll be around for many years to come. We're also expanding each ramada to accommodate more people. These ramadas are used heavily throughout most of the year because no other shade is yet available at the site.

Shade is also in the works for the amphitheater. Large cantilevered supports will extend over the seating area from the back side, and UV-resistant shade cloth will be attached to them.

Signs have already been ordered for the new soil pit display. Lots of hard work went into their production, and the final product will look similar to the signs along the Desert Discovery Mini Trail. Also, thanks to a grant from the Wolslager Foundation, the

Mini Trail will be paved this year, making it fully wheelchair accessible.

Thanks to lots of hard work from staff and volunteers, and generous gifts from many others, we will make 2008 a great year of progress at the Park site.

New Hours at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park

New hours at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park took effect on January 1, 2008. The Park is now open from 7:00 AM until 5:00 PM, Tuesday through Saturday as well as during other hours when Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park staff hosts education events. During these times, the main gate across the entrance road to the Nature Park will be unlocked and open.

Nature Park Hours
Tuesday - Saturday
7am - 5pm
(and during special events)



Visitors are welcome to enjoy the Park's trails and other facilities Tuesday - Saturday, 7am—5pm.

Calendar of Events

February 16 - Archaeology Day at the Nature Park sponsored by the Asombro Institute for Science Education. The event begins at 10:00 AM at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park. Fun and education for all ages. Free.

March 8 - Asombro Institute's booth at the Las Cruces Farmer's Market. Visit our booth at the popular Farmer's Market in the Downtown Mall in Las Cruces from 8:00 AM - 12:00 PM. There will be a fun science activity for kids. Free.

March 12 - Spontaneous Hybridization in Plants talk by Donovan Bailey for the Las Cruces Chapter of the Native Plant Society of New Mexico. Talk begins at 7:00 PM and will be held in the conference room of the Social Center at the Good Samaritan Village (3011 Buena Vida Circle, Las Cruces). Free.

March 15 - A Dog's Day at the Nature Park. Bring your best canine friend for a walk in the desert. Learn how to keep your pet safe on your desert adventures. The event begins at 9:00 AM at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park. Free.

April 9 - History of Chiles in New Mexico talk by Danise Coon for the Las Cruces Chapter of the Native Plant Society of New Mexico. Talk begins at 7:00 PM and will be held in the conference room of the Social Center at the Good Samaritan Village (3011 Buena Vida Circle, Las Cruces). Free.

April 12 - Asombro Institute's booth at the Las Cruces Farmer's Market. Visit our booth at the popular Farmer's Market in the Downtown Mall in Las Cruces from 8:00 AM - 12:00 PM. There will be a fun science activity for kids. Free.

April 19 - Star Gaze at the Park. Use telescopes to take a tour of the nighttime sky. The event begins at 8:00 PM at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park. Free.

Beginning Astronomy Class

The Astronomical Society of Las Cruces (ASLC) is offering a Beginning Astronomy class on Tuesday evenings beginning on February 26th, 2008. The 7-week course will cover a variety of astronomy basics such as the Moon, the Sun, eclipses, the planets, comets, meteors/asteroids, telescope basics, and much more. We will observe the night sky at most sessions using naked eye, binoculars and a variety of telescopes. One of the observing sessions will be conducted at a dark sky site (Leasburg Dam State Park) so that participants can see fainter star clusters, galaxies, and nebulae.

The course will be conducted from 7:00 to 9:00 pm at the UU Church (2000 S. Solano, Las Cruces). The cost is \$45 (\$35 for ASLC members). Class size is limited to 15 students. We highly recommend that participants purchase Terrance Dickinson's Book, *NightWatch: A Practical Guide to Viewing the Universe*, prior to the first meeting. The book is available from several booksellers including Amazon.com. For additional information or to enroll in the course, please contact ASLC's Education Chair Rich Richins (ririchin@nmsu.edu).



Education Programs

Here are the programs your donations helped us provide from October—December 2007.

Oct. 1	Mayfield High School—field trip	Nov. 8	Sunrise Elementary—field trip
Oct. 3	Central Elementary—Plant Adaptations	Nov. 9	Sunrise Elementary—field trip
Oct. 4	Valley View Elementary—Plant Adaptations	Nov. 10	Farmers' Market—Nature Park booth
Oct. 11	Great Old Broads for Wilderness—talk on the Nature Park	Nov. 14	MacArthur Elementary—animal adaptations
Oct. 13	Farmer's Market—Nature Park booth	Nov. 15	Booker T. Washington Elementary—animal adaptations
Oct. 17	MacArthur Elementary—Plant Adaptations	Nov. 16	Central Elementary—field trip
Oct. 18	Booker T. Washington Elementary—plant adaptations	Nov. 17	El Paso School District—teacher workshop
Oct. 20	Nature walk at the Nature Park	Nov. 17	Academy for Young Scientists—field trip
Oct. 24	El Paso School District—teacher workshop	Nov. 20	La Union Elementary—field trip
Oct. 26	Environmental Education Association of New Mexico—tour of the Nature Park	Dec. 5	Valley View Elementary—arthropods
Oct. 28	Environmental Education Association of New Mexico—talk about the Nature Park	Dec. 5	Central Elementary—arthropods
Oct. 30	Hermosa Heights Elementary—field trip	Dec. 6	Booker T. Washington Elementary—arthropods
Nov. 3-4	Renaissance Artsfaire—Children's Realm booth	Dec. 7	Lynn Middle School—career day
Nov. 7	Valley View Elementary—animal adaptations	Dec. 8	Farmer's Market—Nature Park booth
Nov. 7	Central Elementary—animal adaptations	Dec. 12	MacArthur Elementary—arthropods
		Dec. 12	El Paso School District—teacher workshop
		Dec. 14	Fairacres Elementary—career day
		Dec. 15	Fitness walk at the Nature Park

What Can I Do to Make a Difference?

By Mary Beth Harper, Board of Directors

As I age, I am reminded of what is really important to me and how I wish to be remembered once I am gone. Although I would like to be remembered for my competence at work and as a supportive parent, I believe more and more I really want to leave a legacy that shows I tried to make a positive difference in others' lives, even if only in a small way. So, I volunteer to cook and serve dinner to homeless people once a month. I sing joyously several times a year to give the gift of beautiful music to others. I tutor students who need help with chemistry in order to graduate from high school. And, lest you think this rambling has nothing to do with you, I serve on the Board of the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park.

I have been a Board member since 1999 because I love the desert and I worry about its future, because I am a science educator, and because I believe education often happens more easily outside the classroom than inside. Besides attending Board meetings, I have thought about what else I could do to contribute from 45 miles away in El Paso. Time is in short supply due to a full time job, and giving money for general support is important, but not specific enough for my desire to make a difference.

There is another way I have discovered I can contribute. This year, I will earmark a donation to a classroom visit by Asombro Institute staff. This will be specifically for a classroom we do not serve regularly with our other grants and programs. All I will ask in return is a note telling me which class at which school was served. I know this can make a difference for the children and teacher who experience the presentation, and it addresses my concerns about science education.

Nothing would please me more than to know I am not doing this alone or in a vacuum, so I am inviting any other Nature Park member who finds this idea appealing to join me in sponsoring a classroom visit. A donation of \$120 for this little project would provide three classes at one campus an educational experience. Even if the students do not get hooked on the excitement of science in our desert, I know they will be exposed to something that affects us all: science in the world around us. What a difference we can make in other's lives with our little gifts!



For a donation of \$120, you will bring the wonder of science to three classrooms by allowing them to receive one of the Asombro Institute's award winning classroom programs.

Volunteer Opportunities

Volunteers are the heart of our organization. If you made a resolution to help others this year, please consider joining the more than 100 people who help us each year. There are many ways you can help in the office, at the site, and during education programs. There is no minimum amount required; every hour is valued. Join us today!

For information on volunteering at the site, contact Paul (cdnp_paul@zianet.com)

For information on volunteering with education programs, contact Rink (cdnp_rink@zianet.com).

Many Thanks

Silent Auction Items

Stephanie Bestelmeyer
Paul Harper
Rink Somerday
Justin Van Zee
Donna Yargosz

Mary Kamman—easel
Jack Shaver (Jack's
Cactus) - geology
specimen
Donna Wood—arts and
crafts items

Thank you!

Albertsons' Community Partners Update

The Albertsons' Community Partners program is back! We now have new cards in the office, and we would be happy to send one to you.

For those of you who don't know about this fantastic fundraiser, here's how it works. Contact us, and we will send you a Community Partners card. Every time you shop at Albertsons, have the cashier scan the card. Albertsons donates a percentage of our supporters purchases directly to the organization. It's really that easy!

Please call the office or e-mail Paul (cdnp_paul@zianet.com) and he will get a card to you right away. Thank you again for your continuing support of this program which helps us raise more than \$5,000 each year.

New and Renewing Members

Our thanks go to these individuals, families, and organizations who became Nature Park members or renewed their memberships through the end of December. We are so grateful for your support!

Turquoise

Paul Bussan
Mary Beth Harper
Donna & Michael Yargosz

Peridot

Southwest Kettle Korn

Obsidian

Stephanie & Brandon Bestelmeyer
Angela & John Mortland
Barb & Dave Sauter
Norman Todd
Justin Van Zee

Jasper

Anonymous (2)
George Biles & Janet Frame
Arthur & Patricia Boardman
Larry Brenner
John Bunn
Doug & Laura Burkett
Clyde Day & Van Wade-Day
GFWC Progress Club of Las Cruces
Leland H. Gile
Michael Gilman
Carolyn Gressitt & John Freyermuth
Mrs. Mary Kammann

Howard & Julia Laney
Michael & Diane Lilley
Mrs. Marjorie Little
Greg & Julie Magee
Deanise Marta & Michael Allen
Tom Packard
Marion Shropshire
Dr. Barbara Starfield & Dr. Neil Holtzman
VFW Post 6917

Gypsum

Anonymous (3)
Jerry & Virginia Adams
Lathan & Nancy Baker
Leoniece Beatty
Gus & Helen Bigelow
Elizabeth & Bill Blohm
Terry & Ruth Branson
Christopher Brown & Carol Placchi
Marcia Corl
Gary & Nancy Goodger
Barbara Kauffman
Norma J Kime
Lilley Law Offices
Deb & Stacey & Allie Peters
Craig Ricketts
Bob Schooley

Tom & Paula Sechrist
Rose & Rick Sollenberger
Pete & Gail Steen
Bill & Zanah Stotz
John & Billie Stricklin
Kathryn & Eric Takeuchi
Daisan Taylor-Glass & Mark Glass
Mrs. Mary Tucker
Jim & Kathy Vorenberg
Jack Welch & Gayle Trantham
Donna A. & Ed Wood
Naida Zucker & Rich Spellenberg

Quartz

Anonymous (9)
Ronald & Ruby Aaltonen
Wynn Anderson
Mrs. Betty Arndt
Denise & Jason Barela
Benny & Judy Cole
Godfrey Crane & Johanna Benneweg
Ron & Carmen Decker
Barbara Hansen & Dan Santantonio
Paul and Susana Harper
Gregg Henry & Wenda Trevathan
Lauren Ketcham
Ruth & Jerry Lee
Mary Lessman
Lawrence Losleben
James & Joyce Mooney

Terrance Moore
Lisa & Tom Murphy
Susan Philp & Orin Heend
Earle Pittman
Patrick & Siiri Rogers
Vera & Burt Schwartz
Susan Sechrist
Mrs. Patty Shemenske
Rink Somerdoy & John Holloway
Southwest Consolidated Sportsman
Jennifer Terrazas
Geri Tillet
Donna Tubbs
Robert Vance
Molly Wilkinson
Eunice & John Zemek



17(1) Asombro Institute for Science Education
P.O. Box 891, Las Cruces, NM 88004-0891

YES! I want to support the Asombro Institute for Science Education's efforts to increase scientific literacy by fostering an understanding of the Chihuahuan Desert. All donations are welcome; the minimum donation to receive a printed copy of the newsletter is \$10. Please sign me up in the following category:

- Quartz (\$15 +) One-year subscription to the *Nature Park News*.
- Gypsum (\$50 +) One-year subscription to the *Nature Park News* and tickets to the Butterfly Flutterby.
- Jasper (\$100 +) Everything above plus and invitations to a VIP breakfast at the site.
- Obsidian (\$250 +) Everything above plus invitations to a VIP tour.
- Peridot (\$500 +) Everything above plus a limited-edition print of the Nature Park.
- Turquoise (\$1000 +) Everything above plus a custom cactus garden planter.

I would like \$_____ of this donation to go to the Asombro Institute for Science Education endowment fund.

Please make checks payable to Asombro Institute for Science Education or charge to:

Visa MasterCard Account Number: _____
 Expiration Date: _____
 Signature as it appears on card: _____

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ Zip _____ PHONE _____

E-MAIL _____ Check here if you do NOT want to be listed in Nature Park publications _____



Asombro Institute
FOR SCIENCE EDUCATION

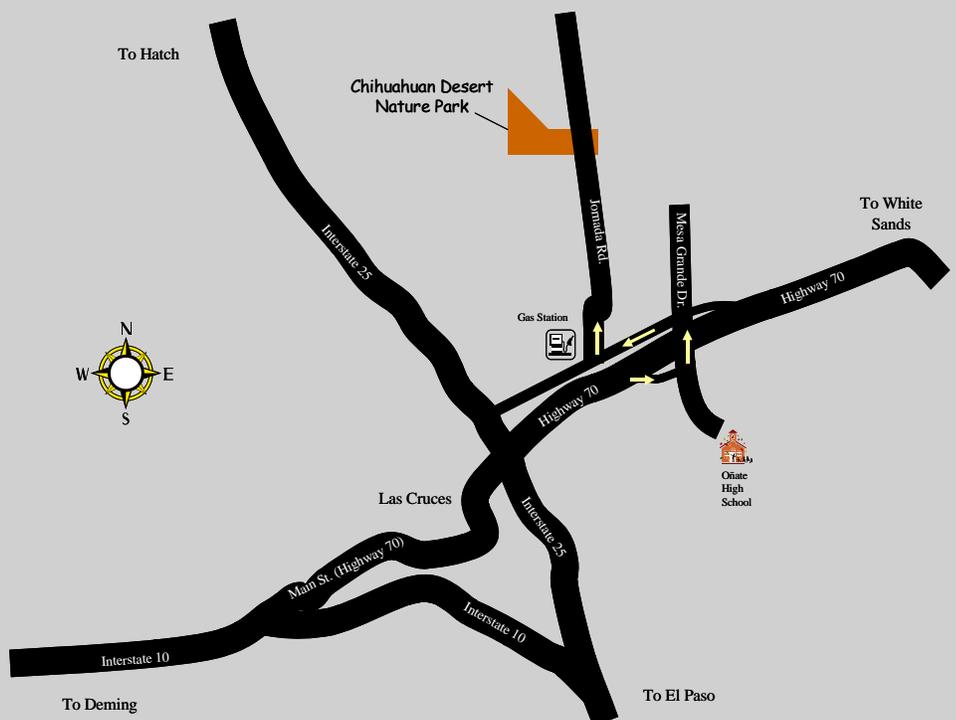
P.O. Box 891
Las Cruces, NM 88004-0891

Non-Profit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Las Cruces, NM
Permit No. 2014

© 2008 Asombro Institute for Science Education

Directions to the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park Open Tuesday - Saturday, 7AM - 5PM

- From I-25 in Las Cruces, head east on Highway 70.
- Take the Mesa Grande Drive exit (at Oñate High School).
- Make a U-turn under the highway to head west. After the U-turn, stay in the right lane.
- Turn right (north) on Jornada Road.
- Follow Jornada Road north for 6.5 miles. After approximately 1.5 miles, the road is unpaved.
- Turn left at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park sign.
- Follow the entrance road to the parking area and trailhead.



ENJOY!