



## Palo Duro Facts

- Name comes from the Spanish meaning “hard wood.”
- Known as “The Grand Canyon of Texas.”
- Was formed by the Prairie Dog Town Fork of the Red River
- The canyon is 120 miles long and reaches it’s greatest width at 32 miles.

*A view of the Lighthouse you can see when hiking the rim to the backside of the Lighthouse formation.*

# Escape to the Lighthouse

By Andrew Garay

I am often trapped in this assignment-filled, concreted academic prison we all refer to as West Texas A&M University. It is not that I am downgrading the pursuit of a higher education for my career through a means of group projects, lectures, quizzes, and exams, but sometimes I just have to run away and go to my natural-born element of the outdoors. In this case, the best place for me to escape from WTAMU is to hike Palo Duro Canyon.

Located only 10 miles away from WTAMU, Palo Duro Canyon is the second largest canyon in the nation. With almost 30,000 acres of state park land, the canyon offers a place for students who grew up and love the outdoor lifestyle a chance to get back in their element. Different

activities available are hiking, camping, horseback riding, bike riding, seeing the play *Texas* and various other state park activities. For wildlife enthusiasts, there are white-tailed deer, mule deer, wild hogs, aoudad sheep, coyotes, bobcats, turkeys, and numerous other species of animals to

watch. The convenience of Palo Duro Canyon greatly appeals to me because I grew up hunting, camping, and exploring God’s great outdoors. I was raised in Gatesville, Texas, and the geography is way more wildlife abundant in my home county than the flat farm fields of the Texas Panhandle. Since my freshman semester in the fall of 2010, I have probably been to the Canyon close to a dozen times. Visiting the canyon regularly helps me

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get back into my wildlife-friendly element. I always like to hike to remote places in hopes of viewing wildlife not often seen by regular visitors. I have been fortunate enough to watch several groups of deer through my binoculars, but I am very anxious to see a big aoudad ram, a unique exotic species found in the Palo Duro.

One of the most well known attractions of the Palo Duro is the Lighthouse rock formation. This is a special place to visit in the Canyon that can only be accomplished by a three-mile-long hike. The trail stays on the canyon floor and travels around the base of Capital Peak, which can be seen from the paved road prior to hiking the trail. After the three mile long flat hike, you are able to climb up the steep trail to the flat mesa of the

Lighthouse. I have hiked to the Lighthouse on the main trail three times. Although this is relaxing, I like to have a little more adventure in my hikes. So twice I have started off of the main trail and hiked through the park the back way to the Lighthouse, that does not have a designated trail. My friends and I simply go over the top of Capital Peak and walk on top of the rim of the canyon to the back of the Lighthouse an enter the mesa from a higher elevation. This offers more excitement because we are exploring territory not common to the general public and seeing new sites that can’t be seen from the canyon floor. It is somewhat exhausting climbing over the top of Capital Peak, but once you reach the rim of the canyon it is worth the exercise.

Being in the outdoors is my element, not the classroom or an office. I would go crazy here at WTAMU if I did not have the chance to meditate in the environment Palo Duro Canyon offers. The canyon is a convenient place where I can go visit when I am frustrated with assignments, confused with

career decisions, or simply just need some quiet time in God’s great outdoors. For these reasons and many more, I will continue to regularly visit the nation’s second largest canyon only 15 minutes away from my driveway while attending West Texas A&M University.

*A lone tree growing on the rim of the canyon.*

