

Rules & Regulations

Fees: \$5 per vehicle. Day use only. Pay at the A.B. Cox Visitor Center from 8 am to 5 pm. Outside of these times, fees can be paid at the self-pay stations.

Fires: Do not cut or gather firewood. Use only grills provided at picnic sites. Portable charcoal grills and camp stoves are acceptable, but should be placed on a picnic table or on bare ground near table. Do not build ground fires.

Graffiti: Do not write on tables, trees, rocks, historical structures, or any other objects in this area, so that we can enjoy the natural beauty together.

Firearms: Firearms are allowed, but they are to not be discharged or taken into the Visitor Center. Fireworks, hunting, and trapping are prohibited.

Artifacts: Do not dig for or take historical artifacts.

Directions

The Dripping Springs Natural Area is located 10 miles east of Las Cruces, on the west side of the Organ Mountains. From Exit 1 on Interstate 25, take University Avenue/Dripping Springs Road east to the end.

Gate Hours

Winter : 8am to Sunset

Summer : 7am to Sunset

Bureau of Land Management
Las Cruces District Office
1800 Marquess St
Las Cruces, NM 88005
575-525-4300
Visitor Center : 575-522-1219
or
www.blm.gov/new-mexico

In case of emergency:
Immediate Emergency – 911
BLM 24-hour Dispatch – 1-800-637-9152

BLM/NM/PL-20/008+1711



**NATIONAL
CONSERVATION
LANDS**

Dripping Springs Natural Area

Organ Mountains—Desert Peaks
National Monument



La Cueva

La Cueva (the cave) is the light tan colored volcanic tuft below the A.B. Cox Visitor Center. The use of this cave started in archaic times around 5000 B.C. by the Jornada Mogollon, who were probably drawn to the area by water. They left behind rock art and grinding holes.

Excavations uncovered information about the ceramic sherds, worked sherds, manos, stone scrapers, and several projectile points. These excavations were carried out by Dr. Donald Lehmer through the University of Arizona in the 1940s and Thomas O'Laughlin in the 1970s through the Centennial Museum at the University of Texas at El Paso.

La Cueva had been used as a hideout and once had a stone wall at the entrance. Unfortunately, in the past, looters, pot hunters, and unknowing visitors have stolen archaeological artifacts from La Cueva. Please do not take any artifacts; it is a crime to do so and robs us of our history.



Dripping Springs

At the end of the Dripping Springs Trail are historical ruins from days gone by. Colonel Eugene Van Patten applied for a homestead and funded the construction of these buildings in the late 1800s. He was a noted figure in Las Cruces and had many stories to tell to the guests of his Dripping Springs Mountain Camp. Some of those stories would have included his time as a conductor on the Butterfield Overland Mail Coach Stage Line to his time fighting outlaws as a sheriff of Doña Ana County.

After his time in the Confederate States Army, where he had served as captain in the Battle of Val Verde against General Kit Carson, Van Patten moved to Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico. Van Patten, who spoke fluent Spanish, met his wife, Benita Madrid Vargas, the daughter of a Piro Indian cacique, or tribal leader, there.

For decades, his mountain camp and associated buildings thrived. Eventually, through business deals gone sour, he fell into bankruptcy and sold the land to Dr. Nathan Boyd. Van Patten lived out the rest of his days with his daughter, Emilia Ascarate, in her home located in the Mesquite Historic District in Las Cruces.

The Hermit

"Agostini attracts followers with his eremitic life."

– David G. Thomas

Giovanni Maria Agostini, the Hermit, lived a very eventful life that involved trekking across Europe, South America, Mexico and Central America, the Caribbean, the United States of America, and Canada. He embarked on his wandering in service of being a spiritual teacher and starting spiritual communities. On the Hermit's journey to New Mexico he befriended Manuel Romero, nephew to a wealthy merchant, Miguel Romero. Soon after he departed for Southern New Mexico, he established a residency in La Cueva. Friends in Mesilla worried for his safety with roving thieves in the area. The Hermit comforted his friends by building a fire every Friday evening to signal he was alive. If there was no fire, he had either become severely ill or nefarious activity had occurred at La Cueva.



Soledad House

On Friday, April 30, 1869, no Friday night fire appeared. Friends promptly trekked up to La Cueva, where they found Agostini's body in night clothes and no shoes, violently murdered. Shepherders took Agostini's body to Mesilla, where a burial Mass – reportedly attended by nearly all in town – was held at San Albino Church. Agostini was laid to rest in the Mesilla Cemetery. The burial was paid for by Sheriff Mariano Barela, and his headstone was quarried from the surrounding rock at La Cueva and inscribed by Colonel Fountain.

Though a number of theories rose up at the time of Agostini's death, there remains no clear evidence as to what led to his apparently violent death. For that reason, the case officially remains an unsolved murder. The Hermit left a wealth of legends from a lifestyle that still fascinates many. What do you think happened to The Hermit?

Source: Giovanni Maria de Agostini Wonder of the Century. The Astonishing Wonder Traveler Who Was a Hermit. David G. Thomas, 2014. First edition. Mesilla Valley History Series, Vol.2.



Family hikes the Dripping Springs Natural Area

Know Before You Go


Dripping Springs Natural Area is a window into the past! While this is an amazing place to learn about history and view amazing scenery, you also need to be prepared. Here are a few tips to help you have an enjoyable visit!

- Let someone know where you are going. Register at the A.B. Cox Visitor Center before heading down the trail.
- Wear proper clothing. A good pair of walking or hiking shoes is recommended. Carry a jacket even in the summer.
- Bring proper gear. If staying out overnight, bring a warm enough sleeping bag.
- Check the weather. Be prepared for drastic changes in the weather. Summer days can bring intense heat, while summer night temperatures can dip to freezing. There could even be flash floods in the low-lying areas.
- Know your limits. Don't attempt hikes or rides that are beyond your ability. If possible, avoid exploring alone.
- Drink plenty of water. Since the body loses fluids quickly in a desert environment, carry plenty of water and high energy snacks.
- Leave wildlife alone. Be alert and observe all snakes and wildlife from a safe distance.

Dripping Springs through History


5,000 B.C.

Estimated occupation of La Cueva begins by the Jornada Mogollon.




1866

The Hermit makes La Cueva his home.




1869

On April 30, 1869, Giovanni Agostini is discovered dead at La Cueva.




1870

Colonel Eugene Van Patten purchases land and creates "The Dripping Springs Mountain Camp" near Las Cruces, New Mexico.



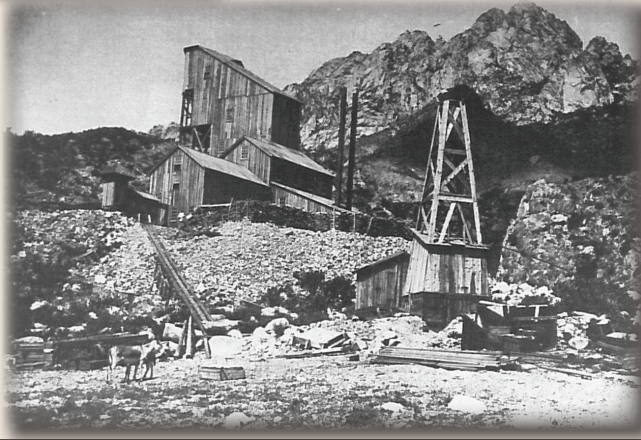
1884

Emelia Van Patten, Colonel Van Patten's first daughter, marries Santiago Ascartes. They homestead the area that will later become the Cox ranch. Emelia was one of the founding members of Women's Improvement Association or W.I.A. The W.I.A undertook many community projects in Las Cruces, including the development of Pioneer Woman's Park.



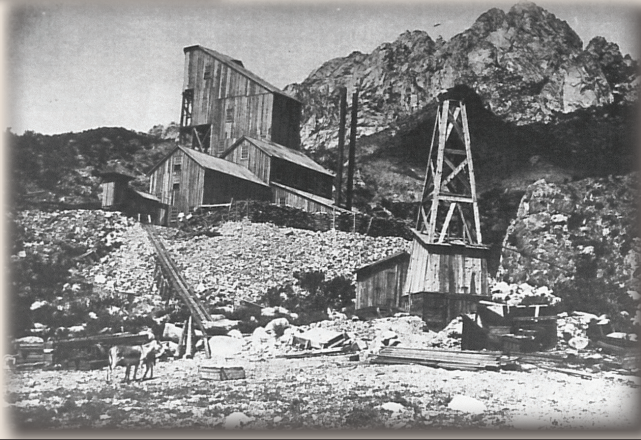
1896

Albert J. Fountain, a prominent figure in the Lincoln County War, was murdered on the east side of the Organ Mountains. Van Patten led a large posse to investigate. The bodies of Fountain and that of his eight year old son, Henry, were never found.




1879-1907

The Modoc mining camp is established at the mouth of Fillmore Canyon. It produced lead, silver, and some copper.




1940

Excavation of La Cueva by Dr. Donald Lehmar through the University of Arizona.



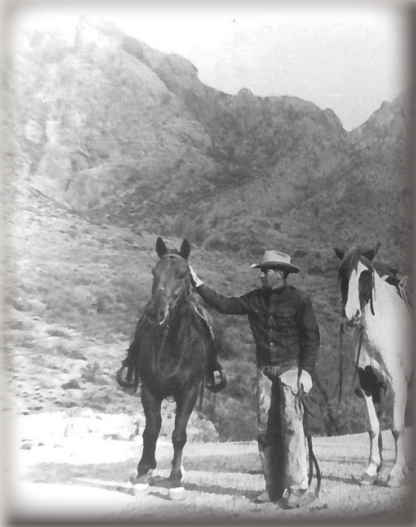
1936-1939

Franklin Hayner bought the ranch from a Mr. and Mrs. Ascartes in the late 1930s. The Hayners added the building that is now the visitor center and a swimming pool.




1950

Albert Bascom (A.B.) Cox & Florence Cox acquire the Van Patten, Boyd, and Hayner properties and nearby surrounding lands to operate a successful ranch.




1920

The mountain camp is sold to Dr. T.C. Sexton from Las Cruces.




1917

Dr. Nathan Boyd purchases the Dripping Springs Mountain Camp.




1907

New Mexico State University students held picnics out at Old Van Patten's.




1970

2nd excavation of La Cueva by Thomas O'Laughlin through the Centennial Museum in El Paso.




1975

A.B. Cox passes away. Ranching life continues.




1988

The Cox Family sells a portion of the land to the Nature Conservancy. The land is later transferred to the BLM and is established as the Dripping Springs Natural Area (DSNA).




1990

Organ Mountain National Conservation Area creates the trail and platform with volunteers at La Cueva.



2014

Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument, which includes Dripping Springs Natural Area is designated a national monument.



The written history of Dripping Springs focuses on the prominent history of Van Patten and a few others, but there are many other untold stories. Color photos by C.Selby and vintage photos from the Rio Grande Historical Collection.