

# Big Thicket National Park and Preserve

Quietly nestled in the southeast corner of Texas is an area where 10 unique ecosystems converge. In the 1820's the settlers who stumbled upon this overgrown area quickly discovered that the woods were so thick with vegetation that they would be unable to pass and therefore they had to divert their routes to the south or north of the woods. Fittingly they called this area the "The Big Thicket." Though these settlers gave the woods their name, the Indians had long been using the area for hunting bear and bathing in the healing waters of current-day Sour Lake. The Indians weren't the only group of people who relied on the Big Thicket. As Texas became home to many new inhabitants, people quickly began to realize that they could use the woods to hide from the law or society.

History has it that outlaws would hide in the Big Thicket because the law enforcement of the day would not venture into the dark and dense woods. During the Civil War many Confederate deserters hid out in this area to avoid the search parties of the Confederate Army, trading honey to locals in exchange for the supplies they needed. When the Confederate Army learned of the deserters' location, fires were set to run these men out for their eventual capture. After the Civil War came to an end, stories of shady inhabitants of the woods continued. Many locals share tales of ghost lights that seem to appear on an isolated road located in the Big Thicket.

Originally called the Bragg Road, this mysterious lane, shrouded with a dense canopy of trees, is located in the heart of the Big Thicket. In the 1940's mysterious lights began to appear, often through dense fog, and as time went by the lights seemed to appear more frequently. Many attribute the sightings to the increasing number of cars passing through the woods at night with

their headlights peaking through the frequent fog, but others believe these lights could be the ghosts of outlaws, or perhaps signals from a new bride who mysteriously died in the Bragg Hotel. These dense woods evoke mystery and foreboding for many people, but for wildlife this area again becoming a safe haven.

The Big Thicket is home to ten converging ecosystems - delicate orchids grow next to hardy cacti, with an astonishing variety of other plants nearby. This unique area was threatened by lumber operations and encroaching development, and in 1928 the last southern black bear was killed. The National Park Service recognized the unique qualities of the area and established the Big Thicket National Preserve in 1974. Today the Big Thicket is recovering and unique inhabitants such as carnivorous plants and a wide range of animals can be found in the woods. An occasional black bear has been spotted in recent years; a hopeful sign that this gentle plant-eater may extend its range from Louisiana back into Texas. The Big Thicket's captivating scenery and mysterious legends make this location in Texas a truly remarkable National Preserve, rich in its history and unique biodiversity.

## Source(s):

<http://www.nps.gov/bith>

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