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The breathtaking beauty of Big Bend National Park, as seen here in a photograph by David Locke, is one of many topics considered in the exhibition, 'Journey Into Big Bend,' on view beginning April 22 at the Bullock Texas State History Museum. (Photo courtesy David Locke)

Bullock Museum offers rare view of Big Bend National Park's beauty, heritage

Multi-faceted history revealed in fossils, photographs and artifacts

April 19, 2016 (AUSTIN, TX) — In its newest exhibition, the Bullock Texas State History Museum invites visitors on an expedition into the timelessness of Big Bend National Park through stories, artifacts and photographs that connect people to this treasured Texas park. "Journey Into Big Bend" opens Friday, April 22 in honor of the 100th anniversary of the formation of the National Park Service and highlights the state's first national park formed in 1944 in the Big Bend region of West Texas. Stunning photography, artifacts and reflections of those who have studied, protected, explored and come to love this vast and valued ecosystem are featured in this Bullock Museum-produced exhibition.

"To celebrate the history and magnitude of Big Bend, we have created an exhibition that highlights the park's natural beauty while providing a glimpse into the stories behind the park," Bullock Museum Director Dr. Victoria Ramirez said. "New research, rare artifacts and interviews offer a unique glimpse into one of Texas's most treasured landscapes from both historical and modern perspectives."

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the formation of the National Park Service (NPS), the U.S. federal agency charged with the care of the country's national parks for more than 275 million visitors a year. There are more than 400 parks across the country, and Big Bend was the first park, and the largest to date, designated in Texas.

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Covering more than 800,000 acres, Big Bend NP is the largest protected area of Chihuahuan Desert topography and ecology in the United States. Comprised of river, desert and mountain habitats, the park is home to a diversity of flora and fauna and includes natural features such as waterfalls, canyons, rock formations, deserts and wildlife — much of which has been widely photographed.

"Journey Into Big Bend" combines this stunning photography with archaeological finds, contemporary artifacts and oral histories from those who have personal connections to the park and the region.

Fossil casts, field notes, dental picks, cameras and other items familiar to archaeologists are included in the exhibition as they relate to paleontological research conducted over the past 50 years. Two of the largest fossils of their kind in existence were found in the region — a 65-million-year-old flying reptile and a giant crocodile that would have measured nearly 50-feet long. Rare casts of these will be on view in the exhibition, along with personal artifacts and photographs of the people who have contributed to the region's archaeological and scientific knowledge.

"The region also is steeped in human history — both ancient and contemporary," Ramirez said. "While this exhibition explores the splendor of the natural landscape, it also offers insight into Big Bend's importance in Native American, Spanish colonial, and Texan cultural histories."

Ancient artifacts, such as an arrow, a digging stick, a rabbit-hunting stick and an ornamental painted pebble, all dating to 700 CE or earlier, provide evidence for the earliest human inhabitation of this part of Texas.

Through interviews with Mescalero Apache elder Freddie Kaydahzinne, visitors can learn more about the region when it was a stronghold of the Apache people, allowing them to discover, for example, the spiritual significance of the Chisos Mountains in their history and culture.

Household tools and essential ranch equipment illustrate the experiences of those Texans who managed and worked the land in the region in the late 1800s and early 1900s, and whose descendants later would sell land to create the park.

A present-day view of Big Bend NP is presented through stories and artifacts related to those who currently protect and preserve this unique landscape. "Journey Into Big Bend" shows visitors the passion and commitment of people such as Mike Boren, executive director of the Big Bend Natural History Association, and Park Superintendent Cindy Ott-Jones, who work daily to foster an appreciation of the landscape and its wildlife and to preserve it for future generations.

"Big Bend NP is both a state and national treasure," Ramirez said. "The work of those who protect the park and educate its visitors is critical to preserving Texas history."

For more than 100 years, photographers have traveled to Big Bend to capture its natural beauty. The work of photographer David Locke, who is profiled in the exhibition, and numerous others whose photographs are included, provides museum visitors with a panoramic snapshot of the quintessential spirit and majesty of Big Bend NP.

In February, the Bullock Museum launched *Texas Through Your Lens* a photography project to invite those who have visited the park to have their own photographs considered for inclusion in the exhibition. Six photographs were selected for the first round and will be on view beginning April 22. The photography project continues through July 18, 2016 and selections will rotate on view in the exhibition. Find out more at <http://bit.ly/ThroughYourLensBigBend>.

"Journey Into Big Bend" will be on view through September 18, 2016 in the third-floor Rotunda Gallery at the Bullock Museum. For more information and tickets, visit TheStoryofTexas.com.

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MEDIA Images and Assets: <http://bit.ly/JourneyIntoBigBend>

About the Bullock Museum

The Bullock Texas State History Museum, located at 1800 N. Congress Ave. in downtown Austin, includes three floors of galleries, IMAX® and multisensory theaters, a café and museum store. The Museum collaborates with more than 700 museums, libraries, archives, and individuals to display original historical artifacts and host exhibitions that illuminate and celebrate Texas history and culture. For more, visit TheStoryofTexas.com or call (512) 936-8746.

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