



U.S. ARMY **CASTNER RANGE**  
NATIONAL MONUMENT

## Fact Sheet



# Cultural Resources of Castner Range National Monument

Castner Range National Monument (Monument), encompassing 6,672 acres in El Paso, Texas, is a richly layered cultural landscape containing evidence of continuous Indigenous habitation for more than 8,000 years, ceremonial practices, and interregional trade spanning thousands of years. Cultural resource investigations have documented more than 40 culturally significant sites within the Monument, showcasing the long-standing presence of Tribal Nations in the area. Many of these sites, including the Castner Range Archaeological District, the Northgate Site, and the Fusselman Canyon Rock Art District, are listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

The Fusselman Canyon Rock Art District features pictographs from about 1350 A.D., including animal footprints, geometric motifs, a human handprint, and a bird's head. Their placement suggests ceremonial significance, and similarities with Hueco Tanks and northern Mexico indicate cultural exchange among Indigenous groups.

The Castner Annex Range Dam Site is a testament to the long-standing cultural significance

of the region. With fire-cracked rock middens and a variety of ceramics, the site reflects over a thousand years of Indigenous occupation, spanning from 250 A.D. to approximately 1500 A.D.

Evidence uncovered throughout the Monument indicates occupation and use by ancestral Puebloan and Apache peoples, with materials dating from 900 B.C. to A.D. 1500. Artifacts such as roasting pits, ceramic fragments, arrow shaft straighteners, and bedrock mortars indicate that this land served both subsistence and ceremonial purposes. One site includes rock shelters and a shallow cave, where ceremonial practices likely occurred. The geographic distribution of cultural materials

supports the interpretation of Castner Range as a long-term settlement and spiritual landscape.

Tribal Nations including the Mescalero Apache, Ysleta del Sur Pueblo, Comanche Nation of Oklahoma, Fort Sill Chiricahua Warm Springs Apache of Oklahoma, White Mountain Apache of Arizona, Pueblo of

Isleta, and Kiowa Indian Tribe of Oklahoma identify the Monument as a landscape with many sacred sites.



*Rock shelter on Castner Range National Monument. Photo from U.S. Army. "Picture cave and other rock art sites on Fort Bliss." Fort Bliss Historic and Natural Resources (2012): 85-154.*

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These groups have ancestral connections to the land, which they continue to honor through cultural practices. The area's designation as a National Monument ensures their ability to access these sacred sites for spiritual and ceremonial uses, including the collection of plants for medicine and food in accordance with traditional practices.



*Slimleaf bean on Castner Range. Photo from U.S. Army "Archeological and Historical Background Study of Castner Range, Fort Bliss Military Installation, El Paso County, Texas" (2016): 17-18.*

The slimleaf bean (*Phaseolus angustissimus*) is a drought-resistant and nutritious cultigen harvested by Native Americans, both historically and in modern times. It's considered an ancestor of many modern beans and thrives in areas with water runoff, even lying dormant during droughts to reappear in rainy seasons. Its presence often indicates areas with a rich history of cultural activity.

The melon loco (*Apodanthera undulata*) provided prehistoric people with food (seeds) and materials for utensils, containers, and rattles (dried gourds). The roots were used for salves and as a laxative.

More recently, the Franklin Mountains Poppies Preservation Celebration, held annually at the City of El Paso Museum of Archaeology, honors the landscape, flora, fauna, and human connection to the area, featuring performances by the Ysleta Pueblo del Sur Youth Dancers.

Castner Range National Monument safeguards Indigenous history, tradition, and identity. As more areas become accessible after environmental remediation, they offer opportunities for study and preservation. The Monument's protected status reinforces its value not only as a natural preserve but as a living archive of Indigenous history, tradition, and cultural identity.



*Melon loco, a type of gourd. Photo from U.S. Army "Archeological and Historical Background Study of Castner Range, Fort Bliss Military Installation, El Paso County, Texas" (2016): 17-18.*