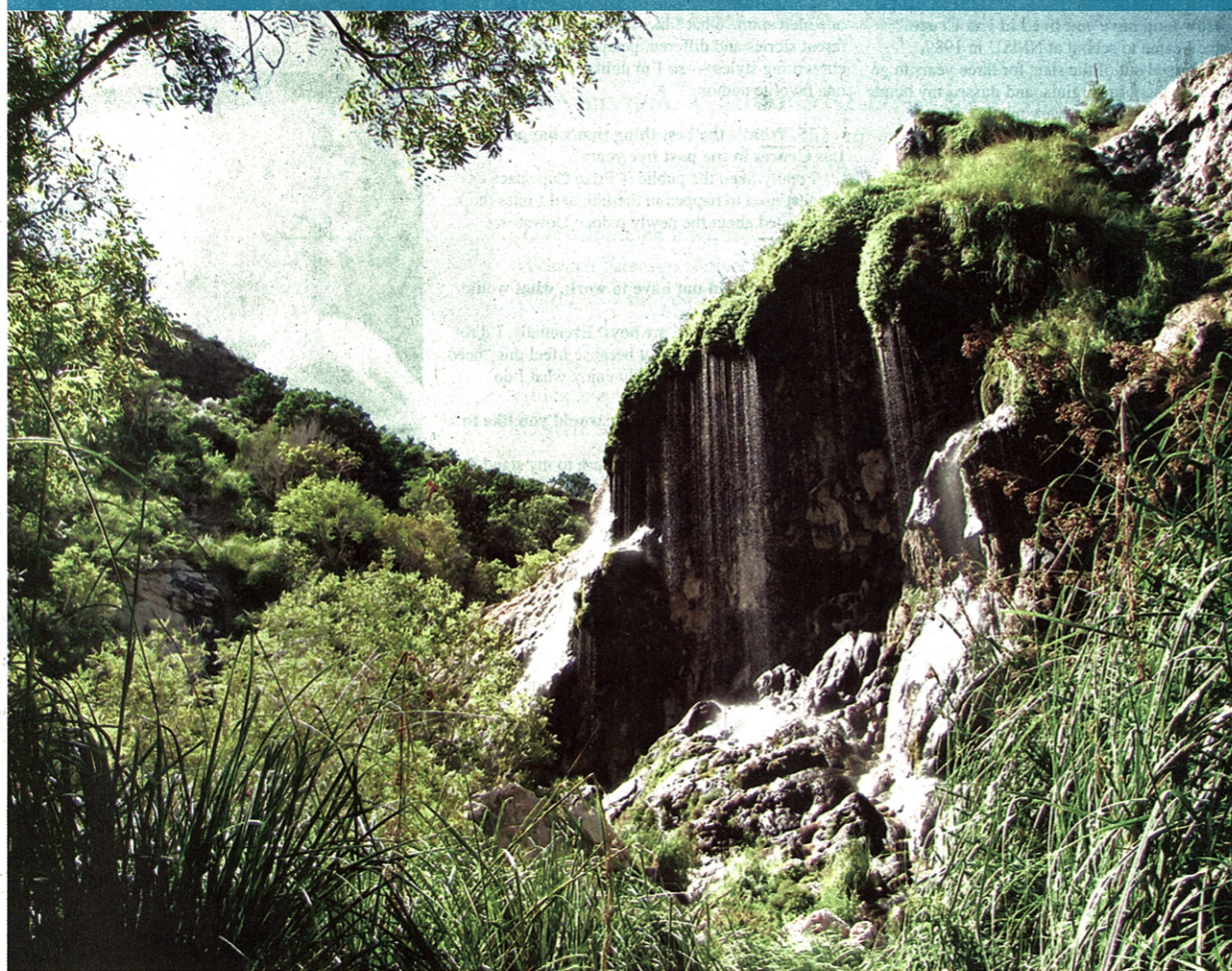


# Diversions

## More than caverns await near Carlsbad

By David Salcido  
For My Las Cruces



Depending on the time of the year, the falls can be either a roaring torrent or a lazy trickle.

**If you go:**  
**Where:** Sitting Bull Falls Recreation Area is located about 50 miles southwest of Carlsbad. To get there from Las Cruces, take US-180 East approximately 150 miles. Turn left at County Road 408 (about 10 miles east of White's City, the turn-off for Carlsbad Caverns) for approximately 20 miles, left on NM-137/Queens Highway for approximately three miles, right on County Road 409/Sitting Bull Falls Road for approximately 8 miles.  
**When:** Open year round. April 1 to Sept. 30, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Oct. 1 to March 31, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Gate closes 30 minutes before closing time.

them and you'll discover that the sheer cliffs surrounding the area are remnants of an ancient reef complex dating back approximately 250 million years, when the entire area was covered by an inland sea. You'll also find that hidden directly beneath your feet are a series of magnificent wild caves, which

attract scientists and spelunkers from around the world.

The hike to the falls, itself, is a light one and can barely be considered a hike at all, unless you want to climb the rough, step-like trail to the top of the falls. Even that is likely to leave only the most out-of-shape visitor winded. Either way, reaching the area where the waters cascade down from sheer rock cliffs into natural, moss-covered pools is a real treat, especially if visited on a week day, when the area is much less crowded. It's also probably best to plan around the rainy seasons, in early spring or early fall. Remember, this is a desert and like most desert waterfalls, this one is dependent on the rain to live up to its potential. Many a traveler has been disappointed to find only a trickle if visited during the drier months.

Another thing to keep in mind is that the area around Sitting Bull Falls is designated as "cougar country," not so much for the lipsticked variety as for the big cats who are natural residents of the area. Read the signs and heed their warnings, just as you would in any natural area, and everything should be fine. Prepare a picnic lunch in advance and spend the day enjoying one of the rare wonders of this enchanting state; a literal oasis of lush riparian vegetation



Cool lagoons and sparkling pools surround the area.

and dancing waters shimmering in warm desert air — a diamond in the rough for those willing to take the road less-

traveled.  
David Salcido is a freelance writer based in Las Cruces. He

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# Diversions

'GILA' continued from page 18

wildlife here is not to be trifled with. You're likely to catch a glimpse of elk, deer, antelope, bighorn sheep and even wild turkey, but the wise adventurer keeps his eyes peeled for the other "critters," such as black bear and mountain lions. Oh, don't worry, they want to avoid you as much as you want to avoid them, but respect their home while you're visiting. There's plenty of space for everyone. Where will you go from here? Within easy driving distance are the Gila Cliff Dwellings, Castle Rock, the Catwalk, Frisco Hot Springs and Cooney's Tomb, to name just a few. All you need is a map and the willingness to open yourself up to the awe and wonderment that can only be found here on the edge of civilization, where nature is truly king.

David Salcido is theater manager for the Rio Grande Theatre, and is freelance writer based in Las Cruces.



Hours of contemplation can be experienced on the edge of the mountain, overlooking the forest below.

David Salcido photo



The bronze plaque, erected by friends of the legendary mountain man, Ben Lilly, marks the spot.

David Salcido photo



The historic Pinos Altos Opera House is a visual reminder that history still lives on the edge of the Gila National Forest.

David Salcido photo

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