

**Mountain Lion Incidents in
Big Bend National Park, 1953-2003**

Prepared for:

**Big Bend National Park
Division of Science and Resource
Management**

Prepared By:

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The following is a report of mountain lion (*Felis concolor*) incidents, including attacks and aggressive or close encounters in Big Bend National Park between 1953-2003. References for this report are: Natural History Field Observation (Form 10-257) cards filed in the Big Bend National Park Science and Resource Management Library (LIB), the Wildlife Biologists' Files (WBF), research reports from the Science and Resource Management (SCRM) library, and the Mountain Lion Database (LDB), a computer database maintained by wildlife program staff. Encounters are grouped into three categories; attacks, close encounters with contact, and close encounters without contact. An asterisk and bold type on the incident date signifies an attack that involved the death or injury to a lion and/or a human.

Mountain Lion Attacks-

***3/15/58-** A visitor hiking the Lost Mine trail, received a "superficial laceration" on her left temple when attacked by a mountain lion. Park Rangers attempted to locate the lion, but their attempts failed. (Marcus 1995, LDB, SUPT)

7/3/83- A report states a boy was "attacked" on the Laguna Meadow Trail. No further information has been found. (Packard 1991; It is possible Packard is off by one year, one day and one month from the following report.)

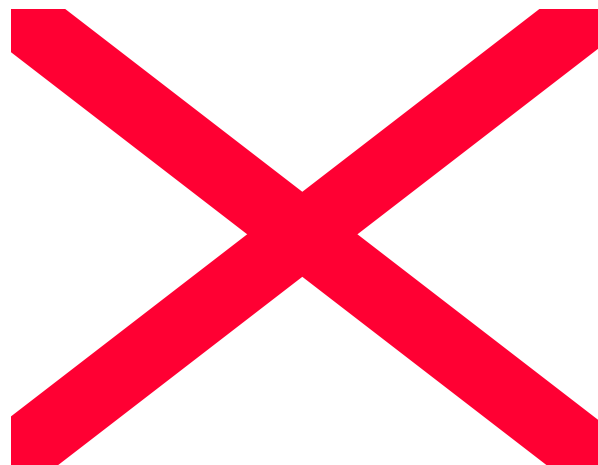
***8/2/84-** A Mother, stepfather and two boys, of ages four and eight years were hiking the Basin Loop Trail at around 6pm. The boys were well ahead of the adults when a mountain lion blocked their path. The eight-year old turned, warned the younger boy to go back, and then looked over his shoulder to see the cat in mid-air. The cat grabbed the boy, and the momentum carried both downslope from the trail. As the stepfather arrived on the scene the lion was on top of the boy and had bitten his head and clawed his shoulders. Promptly the stepfather pulled the lion from the boy and was bitten as well. Having sustained deep puncture wounds and loss of much of his scalp the boy was taken to the hospital in Alpine and later transferred to a hospital in Dallas, Texas. Later that day park staff and local hunters went out to track down the lion. After a long pursuit an 80-pound lion was shot and killed close to the scene of the attack. The lion remains were sent to a laboratory, where human hair was found in the stomach, and the brain was tested for rabies (negative). (McBride 1988, LDB, WBF)

***4/17/87-** A family of three, including a two and a half year old boy, was hiking on the Basin Loop Trail near the Laguna Meadow Trail junction when they encountered a mountain lion on the trail. The group had noticed some deer running off the trail rather quickly. The father told the family not to run when they first saw the mountain lion about 10 feet away. As the mother got more nervous she attempted to run, thus increasing the distance between her and her family, and attracting the attention of the cat. The lion chased the woman and clawed her upper thighs. The husband threw rocks and yelled and the lion backed off, though it followed at close range for a while. NPS staff, again with the assistance of a local houndsman and dogs, located and killed the cat the same day. The lion had been radio collared by park researchers and staff on January 12, 1987. (Fleming 1990, McBride 1988, Packard 1991, LDB, WBF)

***5/5/98-** A mother and her three daughters (ages six, eight and nine) were hiking the Pine Canyon Trail. Around mid-day the eight-year-old daughter asked if she might pose for a picture. It was when the group posed that they noticed a mountain lion on a large rock on the other side of the trail. The mother gathered her children behind her, and they remained close together. The mother described the cat as being about 24" high with haunches up and ready to leap. The lion displayed interest in the children, though the mother was able to keep the lion away by fending it off with a knife and by throwing rocks. She was also able to keep her children from scattering, because it seemed to her that the lion was trying to single them out. They slowly made their way down the trail into a more sparsely vegetated area when the lion finally disappeared. While fending off the lion the mother sustained a puncture wound to her hand where the lion's claw made contact. It was late in the day when she reported the incident at a park visitor center. Although NPS staff and a local houndsman with trained dogs searched for the lion the following day, they were not successful. NPS staff

believed that this lion was responsible for three other incidents, the last of which resulted in the capture and relocation of the cat. When the radio collared cat returned to its home range, it was tracked and treed by dogs on Lost Mine mountain, and killed on August 5, 1998. (LIB, LDB, WBF)

***5/13/03-** A park visitor was hiking alone on the Laguna Meadows trail, near the junction with the Basin Loop Trail when he encountered a mountain lion. After a standoff of several minutes, during which he photographed the cat, the man began to walk back down toward the trailhead. The cat followed along an adjacent ridge. Over a period of nearly 30 minutes, the cat charged him several times. Each charge was repelled by the man's aggressive yelling and rock throwing followed by another standoff, and the cat continued following the man's retreat. Although the man continued his aggressive defense the cat finally charged at him and attacked. The cat grabbed the man, sinking its claws into his right leg, and dragged him to the ground. Although on the ground, the man still had a rock in his hand and used it to hit the cat on the face, causing it to release him. He sustained puncture wounds and scratches and was sent to the Alpine Hospital emergency room, and his injuries proved not to be life-threatening. He reported the cat was emaciated and smelled of skunk (usually is a sign that they are having a hard time getting larger prey). That evening NPS staff and a local houndsman tracked the cat and shot it. The lions' paws were tested at a Texas Department of Public Safety crime lab where human blood was found under the claws. Additional corroboration came with comparison of the man's photograph of the cat and the dead lion. A professional necropsy revealed the cat to be old, in poor condition, and containing intestinal parasites. A Texas Department of Health lab rabies test produced negative results. (WBF)



Map 1: Mountain Lion Attack Locations. (Attack locations confirmed by NPS staff)

Close encounters with contact

***4/14/53-** A man had his pants cuff bitten by a mountain lion on the Lost Mine Trail. Later that day the lion was killed by the Chief Ranger. (Fleming 1983; Fleming 1990, LDB)

***6/6/56-** Park Rangers killed a lion near the Paint Gap Hills. In order to improve relations between the park and local ranchers. This particular lion had killed "many sheep" on the Gulihur Ranch. (Marcus 1995, SUPT)

6/18/60- A National Park Service burro was attacked at the Boot Spring corral during the night. The lion clawed the burro considerably about the face and legs; the Fire Safety Guard saw an adult and kitten back at the corral the following night. (Fleming 1983; Packard 1991, LDB)

***11/11/78-** A group of eight visitors were hiking up the Lost Mine Trail. The group consisted of four boys and four fathers. The boys had gotten ahead of the group when a mountain lion jumped down off a cliff near them. The boys began running down the trail in the direction their fathers. At this point one of the men got between the lion and boys and hit the lion in the face with a red parka before it walked off the trail to lay in the brush. (Fleming 1990; Packard 1991, WBF)

***11/22/78-** A family was hiking down from Laguna Meadows when their two boys who had been further along the trail from their parents saw a mountain lion. One of the boys, seven years old, screamed. The parents ran to their child and observed a large mountain lion "crouching and snarling". The father then threw a rock and hit the lion in the foot, apparently enraging it further. The family slowly attempted to move further down the trail while the lion stalked them to within 3-15 feet at times. (Fleming 1990, WBF)

***11/22/78-** A mountain lion pulled the jacket off of a young boy who was sleeping in an open tent in Laguna Meadows. Three days later signs were posted at all Basin trailheads warning of a fearless, aggressive lion and advising parents to keep children under control. (Fleming 1990, LDB)

***12/2/80-** A lion killed the Chisos District Ranger's pet while it was tied up in the yard. (Marcus 1995, SUPT)

4/4/84- A Park technician was hiking on the Laguna Meadows Trail south of the Blue Creek Junction around 7:30pm. She noticed a juvenile male lion sitting on a rock near the trail. It jumped as she passed and hit her with its shoulder, she fell to the ground. The cat continued walking north on the Laguna Meadow Trail. (Fleming 1990; Packard 1991, LIB)

***5/15/88-** A lion (M18) approached visitors while they were in the Government Springs area. Researchers arrived at the site to observe the lion, the lion jumped on their vehicle. The researchers shot it with rock salt after they noticed that it had no fear of humans. It avoided humans for a few weeks. However, after again approaching people, it was captured alive and sent to Florida where it was intended to participate in the Florida Panther captive-breeding program. It exhibited extreme aggressiveness, and was euthanized without being bred. A necropsy revealed a large tumor in the brain cavity. (Fleming 1990; McBride 1988; Packard 1991; Ruth 1991, LDB)

***3/2/90-** A visitor camped in Boulder Meadow 4 campsite spent a night in a tree because of a lion. After first chasing deer near the site, a cat approached the man in his campsite. Fearful, the man climbed a tree. The lion climbed up after him. The man kicked the lion, and decided to remain in the tree. A few minutes later, two more lions entered the campsite from the same trail while the third could be heard in the bushes. The man remained in the tree. At 11:10pm he saw a mountain lion under the tree. He screamed as loud as he could and the lion momentarily disappeared. After being distracted by a noise, he looked down to see the lion in the tree with him, the lion's head at his feet. The lion did not bare its teeth or make any noise. The man kicked the cat in the head and screamed and the lion climbed down. He climbed higher and yelled for help. He continued to hear lion whistling/chirping until 4:00 in the morning. He stayed in the tree until 7:30am, then climbed down, picked up two rocks, left all of his equipment, and hiked to the Chisos Ranger Station. It is believed that the lion was F07 (monitored lion) with her 10 month old kittens. (Packard 1991 LDB)

***6/27/90-** A visitor beat a cat with her sandal in an attempt to stop it from attacking her dog. Park researchers camped nearby came to her assistance, using a flare to scare the mountain lion away. Later it was radio-collared (M21) and relocated in the park to McKinney Springs. The cat dispersed onto the Pitcock Rosillos ranch, where it was later found dead apparently of natural causes. (Packard 1991; Ruth 1991)

1/9/98- A couple of hikers on the Lost Mine trail encountered a mountain lion, and an independent third observer reported the encounter. He stated that a 150-pound lion was stalking the couple. They turned to throw rocks when the lion looked ready to pounce. The hit the lion with a rock and he slowly moved off the trail. (WBF)

***5/24/98-** A hiker on the Pine Canyon trail reported having to fend off a lion with his "club" and rock throwing. He hit the lion in the face at one point. (LIB, LDB)

Close encounters without contact-

6/8/54- A Trail Supervisor with a mule was "accosted" by a lion while on a return trip from the South Rim. (Marcus 1995, CHRA)

8/10/57- A visitor's dog was chased in Juniper Flat by a lion. (Marcus 1995, LDB)

12/26/57- A boy (16) hiking the South Rim trail attracted the attention of two lions with an Audubon bird call. He needed to fend one off with a stick until he reached the concessions area. (Marcus 1995, SUPT)

7/3/78- Two men reported a half-grown mountain lion one-mile up on the Laguna Meadows trail. The lion crouched as they approached and followed the hikers. They reported "it seemed curious". (LIB)

11/11/78- A man and his three year old son were hiking on the Lost Mine Trail when a lion approached. The man stated that a large, tail-waving, purring lion ran toward his son. The man ran to his son's side, pushed the child behind him, and stood "face to face" with the lion until it lost interest and went back to the bushes near the trail. (WBF)

11/11/78- A visitor reported being followed at a distance of about 500 feet by a cat on the Lost Mine Trail. (LIB)

12/8/78- A mountain lion crouched on a rock watching some visitors as they passed on the trail. It followed them a short while and "didn't seem menacing". (LIB)

1/1/79- A lion was seen near the Basin campground "growling" at hikers and it approached to within six feet of a visitor at one point. (LDB)

1/10/79- A group of hikers encountered two adult mountain lions and a young kitten on the Laguna Meadow Trail in the Chisos Mountains. The group observed as a female lion approached them from behind some brush, then noticed the male in that same bush. The female approach to a distance of up to 10 feet then attended to the younger cat on the other side of the trail. (WBF)

1/12/79- A wrangler for the concessions-operated horse remuda reported throwing a rock at a mountain lion that was following within 15 feet of a trail ride on the Laguna Meadow Trail. At first, one wrangler rode his horse toward the lion to scare it but the lion stood its ground. (WBF)

1/28/79- Two visitors were ascending the Laguna Meadows Trail when they encountered a mountain lion. The men observed the lion beside the trail and began running down the switchbacks. They had gone about 100 yards when they noticed the lion was pacing them. They stopped and began throwing rocks at the lion, hitting it many times, including once in the face. The lion began snarling and pawed at the air and shortly thereafter left the area. (WBF)

2/7/79- A "Girls Adventure Trails" group from Dallas, Texas reported seeing a mountain lion in their campsite on Emory Peak. The lion visited their campsite at around 8:00pm and carried away a hiking boot. (WBF)

***2/13/79-** A concession worker reported that a lion approached her near the dormitory housing in the Chisos Basin. She reported that she threw a pack at the lion. It then circled around a bush and then went back towards her. This prompted her to run away, when she slipped and scraped her left hip. She reported the lion to lodge management. (WBF)

2/25/79- A park visitor reported "running" into a lion near the Basin Campground. The man was hiking in a wash when he saw the lion 15 feet from him. When the man tried to climb out of the canyon, the cat approached within six feet and growled two or three times. He reported that "the cat seemed ready to attack me if I made any moves towards him". The man climbed out of the canyon while being watched by the cat, but it made no further approaches. (WBF)

***3/1/79-** At 7am the owner of the horse remuda telephoned a Park Ranger about a mountain lion seen near their horse corrals. During the phone call the owner spoke with the ranger about protecting his property (horses) from depredation. At approximately 7:30am the owner called the Ranger again to explain that he had killed the cat. He stated that the cat was causing his horses to try to escape their pens and he was worried they might injure themselves. He shot the cat through the muzzle with the bullet exiting through the neck. It was later measured and weighed at park headquarters. It was a female cat, weighed 93 lbs., was in good health and had never borne offspring. It was 23" from top of shoulder and overall body length was 73". (Fleming 1990, McBride 1988, WBF)

7/25/81- During horseback riding lessons for park employees, a lion chased a mounted employee near Lone Mountain. The rider fell off the horse and lion continued after the horse. The horse was retrieved and the lion ran away after being yelled at and hit with a large rock. (Fleming 1983; Fleming 1990, LDB)

7/26/83- An adult lion walked through occupied campsite 54 in the Basin campground. About 10 feet from the camper, the lion stopped, looked at the man, and growled. (LIB, LDB)

8/6/83- A concession-operated horse group was followed by a mountain lion on the Window Trail, and visitors reported seeing one in the bushes near the trail. (LIB)

8/8/83- A couple of boys pushing a bicycle up the road from the Basin Campground to the Basin Ranger Station were followed by a mountain lion. When they picked up speed, so did the lion, until an oncoming van scared the cat away. (LIB)

5/31/84- Five visitors on the Southeast Rim encountered a "non-aggressive" cat. At one point the cat sat 6 feet away from one visitor who was making beef stew. Another camper reportedly threw rocks at the cat, and the cat chased the rocks. (LIB)

***3/25/85-** At a park residence in Panther Junction a mountain lion was found crouching over a dog inside a resident's fenced backyard. The lion released the dog when the owners came in response to their yelping dog. It was last seen pacing back and forth before disappearing. (Fleming 1990, Marcus 1995, LIB, LDB)

2/2/87- A lone visitor encountered two gray mountain lions on the switchbacks of the Laguna Meadow trail. The lions approached and circled the visitor who was making noise and talking to them. He noticed the larger one had a radio collar. Eventually the lions backed off and the visitor returned down the trail. (LIB)

2/13/87- Three mountain lions approached and two lions (gray in color) surrounded hikers near the top of Emory Peak. As the lions approached, the visitors yelled and threw rocks and slowly they backed away. One lion was wearing a radio collar. (LIB)

(Many of the following reports mention a cat growled or growling. These words appear in the lion database, library files, and in the long report forms found in the wildlife biologists files. Lions typically do not growl vocalizations would include hissing, chirping and screaming.)

4/20/88- A park resident's daughter was riding her bike when she saw a mountain lion. She said that the dark-gray cat growled and put its ears back as she passed. (LIB, LDB)

10/3/88- A lion was sighted, and "growled" from underneath a tree along the trail from the campground to the store in the Basin. (LDB)

3/19/90- A family hiking the Basin Loop trail was near the junction of the Pinnacles trail when they encountered a lion. The lion bared its teeth toward a three-year-old boy at a range of four to six feet. The mother had read the "encounters" brochure, picked up her son, stepped back a few steps and stood her ground. The daughter ran back to her father who was walking a bit behind. The lion stayed for 30-60 seconds when a hiker coming from the other direction startled it off the trail. It was still in sight when they all left. The next day a researcher and employees helped capture and collar a 61-pound male lion (M21). (Packard 1991; Ruth 1991, LDB)

7/22/90- A mountain lion in the brush near Boulder Meadow 4 "growled" at campers. (LDB)

8/6/90 - A visitor reported a "growling" lion on the Window Trail. The visitor yelled and threw rocks at it. (LIB)

3/31/91- A visitor was "growled" at on the Lost Mine/Casa Grande Trail. (LDB)

5/4/91- A lion was sighted crouched and facing visitors near the Chisos Mountains Trailhead. (LDB)

8/21/91- A visitor was "growled" at by a mountain lion at the Paint Gap # 4 Campsite. (LDB)

6/5/93- Two visitors reported a lion near the Basin Loop and Pinnacles Trail junction. They reportedly threw rocks and yelled at the lion, which was 20 feet from them. (LIB, LDB)

9/27/93- On the upper part of the Pinnacles Trail, visitors heard "growling" and a purr to their right saw the ears and eyes of a lion. The lion didn't move but the visitors left shortly thereafter. (LDB)

6/5/94- A mountain lion was seen underneath a pine tree near the Chisos Mountains Lodge. Park rangers and employees scared it off by yelling and throwing rocks. (LIB)

6/8/94- A visitor and his daughter were hiking the Lost Mine Trail when they had a run-in with a mountain lion. The man claimed that the lion was just above his daughters' shoulder when he threw rocks at it. The cat stood its ground for 30-40 seconds but eventually retreated. (LIB)

1/2/95- Four visitors were hiking up the Laguna Meadows Trail when they noticed a mountain lion. They estimated the cat's weight at 150 pounds, and around two feet high. They explained that they had backed up, and the lion approached, showing no fear. The visitors did nothing but back up and retreat. (WBF)

2/8/95- A group of three visitors observed a mountain lion in the Blue Creek Canyon area about a mile up canyon from the line-house. They stated that an adult lion "growled" at them but stayed in the thicket, as they walked on by. (WBF)

2/13/95- Two visitors reported encountering a mountain lion on the Window Trail near the Basin Campground. The report states that they retreated from the lion and that it "growled". (WBF)

10/01/96- A man and his wife had to throw rocks at a lion on the Burro Springs trail. The lion did not move when rocks were thrown. The lion then jumped across trail about twelve feet ahead of them. The lion continued about twenty feet farther, took cover and observed the man. His wife retreated to seventy feet up the trail. The man then hit the lion with a rock and he took deeper cover. (LDB)

4/26/98- A family with small children were approached by a mountain lion. The children were 5-10 feet in front of their parents when the lion lunged out at one of them. After the family yelled at it, the lion moved on. (LDB, WBF)

4/28/98- A couple with their baby in a stroller were hiking in Boot Canyon when they saw an adult mountain lion on the trail. They reported that the lion looked interested in their one year old baby. It crouched about three feet from them, they yelled at it and slowly retreated. It followed for about 15 feet until other hikers showed up and the lion disappeared. (WBF)

6/25/98- A lion followed a woman on the Lost Mine Trail, then stood its ground between two people. The lion then followed the woman down trail for 150 - 200 yards, then her companion caught up, and cat was between the two adults. The cat stood its ground between the adults despite yelling and screaming by adults, who also threw things at the cat. It finally went away, off the side of the trail. (LDB)

7/9/98- A 90 pound mountain lion approached a family with a child, age six. The lion charged the visitors, pinned its ears back and hissed at a distance of four feet. The visitors stood their ground, shouted, threw rocks and stayed close together. (WBF)

1/5/99- A park employee staying at the Boot Cabin in the Chisos Mountains reported being chased by a young lion. One of the trail-crew members had just finished running and was at Boot Springs washing off when she saw a lion nearby. The lion showed interest and crouched with its ears back and was crawling on its belly towards her. The employees' reaction was to scream, throw rocks and eventually run towards nearby co-workers. (Pers. comm. 2003, WBF)

4/4/99- A family with children ages eight, six and three were hiking in the lower Cattail Falls area when they encountered a ~100 pound adult mountain lion. They described the lion's actions as approaching them and eventually crouching down. Eventually, when the father advanced toward the lion it backed off. (WBF)

7/2/99- A mountain lion was fended off as it aggressively approached a group with kids near the Pine Canyon Trailhead. A man trying to rejoin his group noticed a lion following the group. The man shouted a warning to the adults, who turned. The cat quickly came toward the group, with general interest in a smaller child. One of the adults in the group kept the kids behind. The cat approached to within feet. A man used a camera bag to fend off the cat, hitting the cat with the bag. The other man approached and they were able to scare the cat off. (LDB)

10/13/01- A lone hiker was off-trail near the Pinnacles trail when he was yowled at by a mountain lion. The man was followed for a 10-20 minute period while throwing rocks and yelling at the cat. Eventually the cat backed off and parted ways with the man. (LDB, WBF)

10/26/02- A visitor was about 100 yards off of the Lost Mine trail sketching, when a lion circled her. The lion showed itself to her twice before moving off. She stated that she blew her whistle and yelled when the cat came within 25 feet. (LIB, LDB)

3/8/03- A group of young women reported an encounter with a mountain lion in the Colima 3 campsite. One woman reported a mountain lion had walked between her and a friend's sleeping bag. The two bags were only a foot apart. She looked up to see the lion's tail pass over her head then watched the cat pass on through the campsite and into the trees along a social trail. (WBF)

5/16/03- A park employee was walking her pet near Panther Junction when a "healthy" mountain lion crossed between her and her dog (75 lb. German Shepard), which was off leash 30 feet away. It apparently stopped near her and she yelled at it and the lion moved off. (WBF)

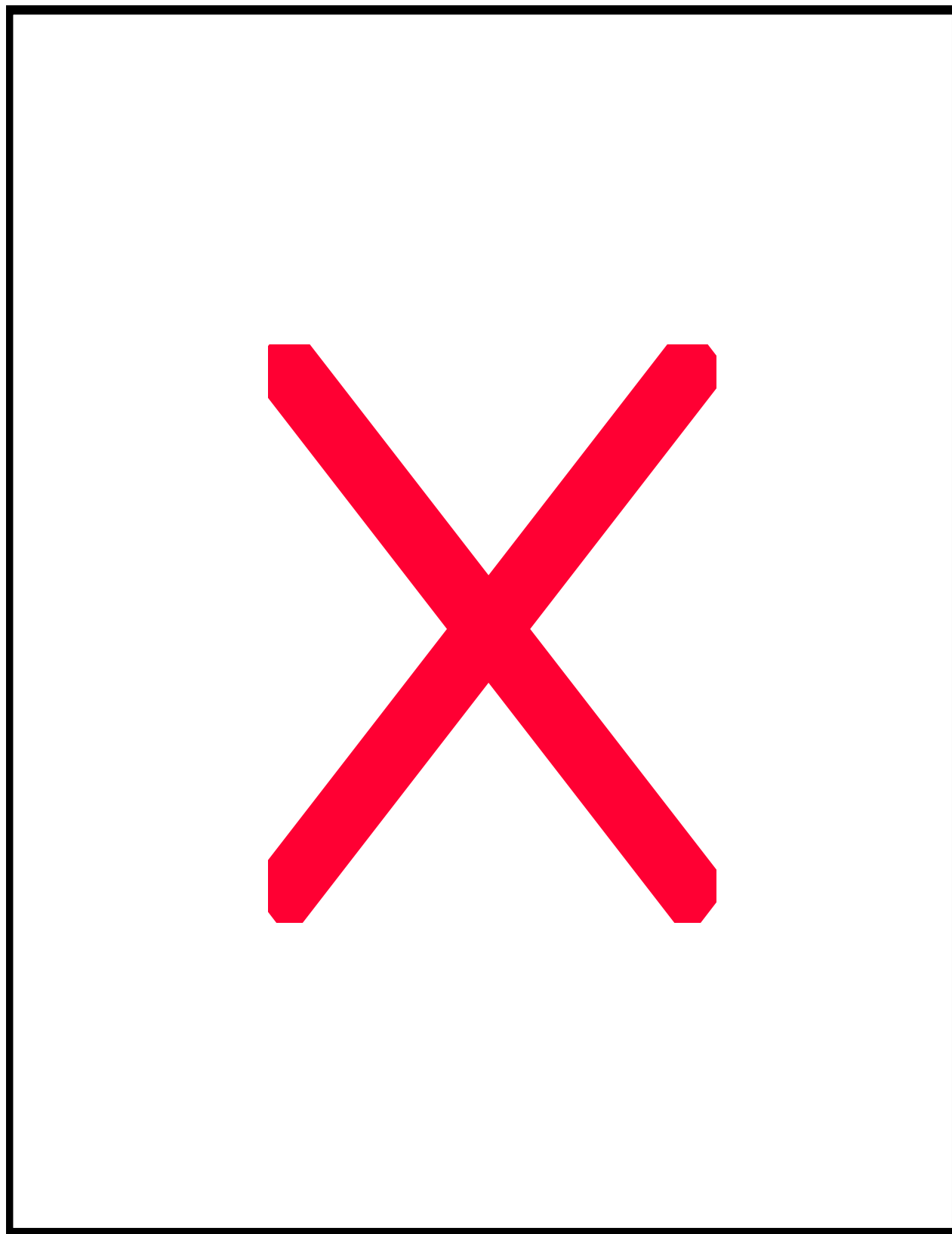
Summary:

Figure 1: Lion Deaths in Big Bend National Park as a Result of a Management Action. (Total number of lions killed may be more, though these particular incidents were the only ones found.)

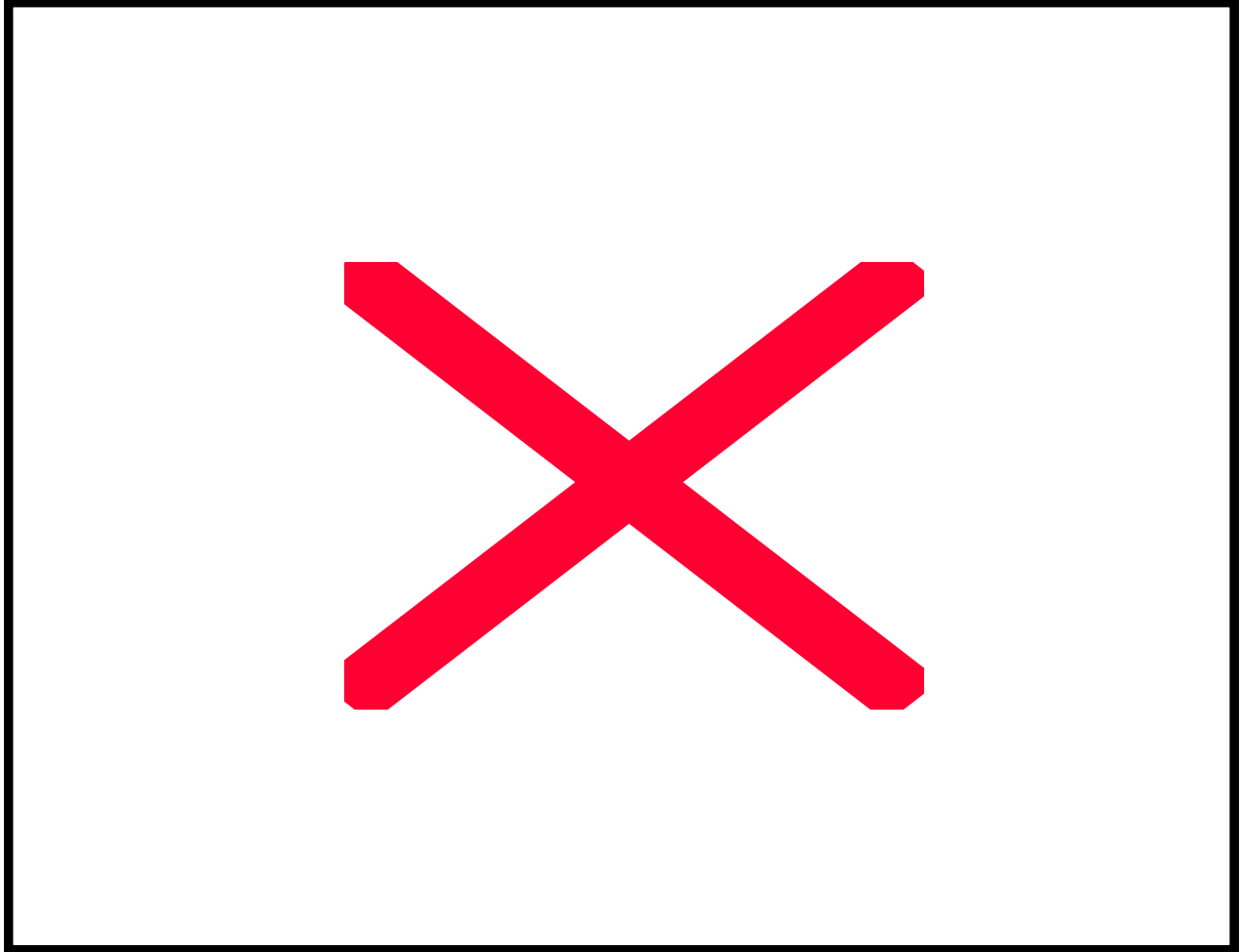
Date	Location of lion when killed	Lions Killed	Reason for killing
4/14/1953	Lost Mine trail	1	Bit Visitor's Pants
6/6/1956	Paint Gap Hills	1	Had Killed Many Sheep on Adjacent Ranch
3/1/1979	Chisos Remuda	1	Was Scaring Horses
8/2/1984	Basin Loop trail	1	Attacked Visitor
4/17/1987	Basin Loop trail	1	Attacked Visitor
5/15/1988	Government Springs	1	Exhibited Extreme Aggressiveness
8/5/1998	Lost Mine Mountain	1	Attacked Visitor
5/13/2003	Basin Loop trail	1	Attacked Visitor
9/1/2003	Total	8	

Figure 2: Location and Frequency of Lion Encounters in Big Bend National Park. (These are all reported incidents; others may have occurred but were never documented)

Location	Number of accounts	Attacks	Close w/ Contact	Close w/out Contact	Lion Deaths Resulted
Laguna Meadows Trail	9		3	6	
Basin Loop Trail	5	3		2	3
Pine Canyon Trail	3	1	1	1	1
Lost Mine Trail	11	1	3	7	1
Basin Developed Area	11		2	9	1
Boulder Meadows	2		1	1	
Government Springs	1		1		1
Boot Springs	2		1	1	
Emory Peak	2			2	
Panther Junction	4			4	
Window Trail	3			3	
South Rim	3			3	
Pinnacles Trail	3			3	
Blue Creek Trail	1			1	
Burro Springs Trail	1			1	
Cattail Falls Trail	1			1	
Colima Trail	1			1	
Paint Gap Hills	1		1		1
Totals	64	5	13	46	8



Map 2: Location of All Known Mountain Lion/Human Aggressive Contacts. (Locations confirmed by NPS Staff)



Map 3: Location of Known Mountain Lion/Human Aggressive Contacts in the Chisos Mountains.
(Locations confirmed by NPS staff)

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LDB- Lion Database, Microsoft Access program
SUPT- Superintendent Monthly Report, Big Bend National Park Archives
WBF- Wildlife Biologist's Files, Supplementary Mountain Lion Observation Report Forms