

A Lasting Legacy

By Steven W. Hooper

Okay, name a mountain peak named in honor of a U.S. Customs officer who was not a U.S. President.

Hints:

1. The mountain range where the peak is located is completely inside a national park.
2. The mountain peak is the second highest in the entire range.
3. The U.S. Customs officer is considered the “father” of the national park where this peak is located.

Tick, tock ... time is up.

And the answer: Everett Ewing (E.E) Townsend (1871-1948) a former U.S. Customs Mounted Inspector. The peak is the 7,580-foot Townsend Point in the Chisos Mountains in Texas. These mountains are the only range entirely located within a U.S. national park.

On August 31, 1894, twenty-two-year-old U.S. Customs Mounted Inspector Everett Townsend first set eyes on the vast sparsely inhabited area of south Texas that would come to be known as “Big Bend”. The area is named for the “big bend” in the Rio Grande River that gives Texas its distinctive shape.

In search of stolen mules, Townsend ventured into the Chisos Mountains for the first time. He never forgot the overwhelming beauty and expansive vistas he discovered on that ride and vowed to preserve the region in some fashion.

It would take almost fifty years for Townsend’s dream to come true but in 1944, Big Bend National Park was created. The park protects over 801,000 acres of pristine Chihuahuas Desert and the Chisos Mountains. The mountains form an island in the desert that contains coniferous forests, springs, and alpine meadows.

Prior to his service with U.S. Customs, Townsend lied about his age and joined the Texas Rangers in 1891. In 1893 he became a U.S. Marshal and a year later, he joined U.S. Customs at Presidio, Texas. From 1900 to 1918, Townsend managed a large ranch before his election to Sheriff of Brewster County, Texas. He served three terms as Sheriff before refusing to run for a fourth term. In 1932,

Townsend was elected as a representative to the Texas State Legislature. When Big Bend National Park was opened, Townsend became the first U.S. Commissioner of the park. In all his positions, he worked tirelessly to preserve the Big Bend area.

As you enter the park, the first sign to greet visitors is one honoring Townsend as the “the father of Big Bend National Park” which cites his service with U.S. Customs as being instrumental to the establishment of the park.

Townsend died on November 19, 1948 at the age of 77. Townsend is buried at Elm Grove Cemetery in Alpine, Texas.

By the way, the mountain peak named in honor of a U.S. Customs officer who was a U.S. President is Mount Grant. The 11,285-foot mountain is named for our 18th President, Ulysses S. Grant. The peak is in the Wassuk Range in Mineral County, Nevada.

Primary Sources:

“Everett Ewing Townsend”, Find A Grave website, accessed May 07, 2021,
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<https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/townsend-everett-ewing>.

A Lasting Legacy Images

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Figure 1: Photographs of former U.S. Customs Mounted Inspector Everett Townsend who is credited with being the “father of Big Bend National Park”. Source: Find A Grave website, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/62090667/everett-ewing-townsend>.



Figure 2: Entrance sign at Big Bend National Park in south Texas which was established in 1944. The NPS description of the park reads: “From an elevation of less than 1,800 feet along the Rio Grande to nearly 8,000 feet in the Chisos Mountains, Big Bend includes massive canyons, vast

desert expanses, forested mountains, and an ever-changing river. Here you can explore one of the last remaining wild corners of the United States.”



Figure 3: Sign located at the entrances to Big Bend National Park informs visitors of the important role that Mounted Inspector E.E. Townsend played in the establishment of the park.



Figure 4: Townsend Peak located in the Chisos Mountains of Big Bend National Park. Townsend Point is the second highest peak in the range at 7,580 feet. Source Peakbagger website, <https://www.peakbagger.com/photo/p10010L.jpg>.



Figure 5: Everett Townsend's Colt pistols and Sheriff's badge which sold at auction for approximately \$26,000 in 2014. Source: icollector.com website, https://www.icollector.com/Texas-Ranger-E-E-Townsend-Colts-Sheriff-s-Badge_i18962701.