

## TEXAS HIGHWAYS--SPEAKING...--. FRANKLIN MOUNTAIN LETTERS--MALLORY

During the Sixties, looking at El Paso's Mt. Franklin approximated looking into a bowl of alphabet soup. At least seven gigantic letters dotted its slopes, each representing the first letter of a local high school's name--"A" for Austin, "B" for Bowie, "C" for Cathedral, "E" for El Paso, "I" for Irvin, and "J" for Jefferson.

It all began in 1923 when students from the Texas College of Mines and Metalurgy (now the University of Texas at El Paso), laid out rocks on the mountainside in the shape of a gigantic "M." They used brooms to whitewash the rocks so the letter would be visible for miles. Then students from El Paso High clamored to lay out their "E." Over the years, teenagers from numerous high schools (sometimes freshmen undergoing initiation) followed suit, placing letters within eye-shot of their campuses. Some letters spanned 50 yards or more in length.

During hotly contested football games, some students even climbed Mt. Franklin, homemade coal-oil lanterns in hand, to outline their schools' letters in flames. Mountainside competition got so fierce that during the Forties or Fifties, Austin High and El Paso High actually dynamited each other's letters.

The El Paso School Board stepped in, reported the *El Paso Herald Post* in March of 1966, and adopted a policy to "restore the natural beauty" of the mountain. A city beautification program of the Women's Department of the local Chamber of Commerce had prompted the action.

Today, several miles before you reach El Paso, you still can see gigantic letters--"A," "E," "I," and "J"--gleaming from Mt. Franklin. The well-lettered mountainside also boasts a huge star, measuring 459 feet by 278 feet, which glows with 459 lights mounted on tall poles. The El Paso Electric Company first

laid out a star on the mountain in the early Forties. After World War II, the star was lit annually during Christmas and for the last couple of years has been lit nightly.

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