

TEXAS HIGHWAYS--URBAN TRAILS--WWH--MALLORY

[NOTE: UNDERLINED PARTS APPEARING HERE ARE NOT ON THE PREVIOUS VERSION ALREADY SENT]

URBAN TRAILS OF TEXAS

For a relaxing break from city hustle, venture down the following urban trails...and learn about nature along the way.

Peak seasons are fall and spring, yet winter offers excellent, bug-free hiking, and summer brings youth camps and water-related activities. Weekends are typically busier than weekdays. Regulations vary, but everywhere follow the hiker's credo: Take only photographs and leave only footprints--i.e. don't disturb wildlife and pack out anything you pack in. Stay on marked trails to prevent erosion. Wear sturdy walking or hiking shoes and weather-appropriate clothing. Carry insect repellent, sunscreen, and plenty of water, plus camera and binoculars for wildlife viewing. Some sites provide take-along nature guides for plant and animal identification. For maximum eco-learning, join a trained naturalist or volunteer on a guided outing, available at most sites.

Armand Bayou Nature Center, 8500 Bay Area Boulevard, P.O. Box 58828

Houston, TX 77258 (281/474-2551; e-mail--abnc@ghgcorp.com; website--

www.ghgcorp.com/abnc/). Hours: Wed-Sat 9-5 and Sun. noon-dusk.

Admission: \$2.50 adults, \$1 seniors and children ages 5-17, free to kids under 5 and Armand Bayou members. The center includes an entry pavilion/gift shop and 600-foot boardwalk leading to the interpretive building which features exhibits, a bird blind, and a pond. All are wheelchair accessible, as is a new viewing platform overlooking a prairie environment. Other trails are primitive though rated as easy walking (not wheelchair accessible). No biking or dogs are allowed on the trails. Maps and binoculars are available at the entry pavilion.

Volunteers lead guided hikes Sat. at 11 and 2 and Sun. at 2 (no extra charge). Sat 1-4 and Sun 2-5 there's a nature demonstration in the interpretive building. One weekend per month there are additional guided wildlife observation walks at 7:30-9:30 a.m., 5-7 p.m., and 7-9 p.m. (non-members-- \$4 adults, \$2 children; members--\$2 adults, \$1 children).

Observe bayou wildlife on pontoon boat tours Sat. at 7:30-9 a.m. (\$20 non-member, \$16 members, including breakfast), 5:30-7 p.m., and 7-8:30 p.m. (\$18 non-members, \$14 members). The center also offers bayou canoe tours one Sat. per month 8-11 a.m. (ages 10 and up--\$20 non-members, \$15 members). Boats and canoes launch at nearby Bay Area Park, 7500 Bay Area Blvd. (where canoeists also set in to explore the bayou). Make tour reservations at least two days in advance.

The center's Jimmy Martyn Farm replicates a turn-of-the-century farm. Buildings are open Sat 1-4 and Sun 1-4 with guided tours and farm-life demonstrations.

Oct. 23-24 features the Creepy Crawlers Halloween Event, including night walks in the woods. Fee: \$10 non-members, \$8 members; reservations required. Nov. 7-8 brings Martyn Farm Fall Festival with music, crafts, demonstrations, wagon rides, and food. Admission: \$5 adults, \$3 children/seniors. Dec. 5 offers the Yuletide Gathering & Market, a holiday family event at Martyn Farm with crafts, hayrides, music, and gift market. Admission: free. April events include the Down on the Farm Festival, Earth Days, and garden tours of local homes. June brings Eco-Camp for kids.

Dallas Nature Center is located in southwest Dallas County near Joe Pool Lake at 7171 Mountain Creek Pkwy., Dallas 75249 (972/296-1955). From Interstate 20 take exit 458 on Mountain Creek Pkwy. and go south approximately 2.5 miles to the center. Open 7 a.m. to sunset; closed Mon. Donation booth at entrance: \$3

per vehicle or \$1 person if 10 or more. One trail and the butterfly garden trail are graveled and accessible to wheelchairs and strollers. Other trails are rated easy to difficult, ranging in length from 1/4 mile to 2.5 miles.

The center's outdoor stage, amphitheater, and pavilion host nature workshops, morning bird hikes, night hikes, hayrides, camp-outs, flower identification outings, weekend programs for children, and orienteering. Call for the fall schedule. Customized group tours are available for 10 or more with a fee of \$2-4 per person. Summer brings the Adventure Program for ages 6-11.

The center also features a native plant nursery and facilities available for private functions, including an air-conditioned meeting room with adjacent swimming pool.

Forest Ridge Preserve, open 5 a.m. until 10 p.m., is located in Austin at 8000 Capitol of Texas Hwy. North (Loop 360 N.). Admission: free. The preserve primarily protects endangered species and, secondarily, offers hiking and mountain biking. Admittance allowed only on eight miles of designated trail. Some trails are rated moderate, but most trails are difficult to very difficult; none are wheelchair accessible. Contact the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve System, 200 S. Lamar Blvd, Austin 78704 (512/480-3060).

Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge is located at 9601 Fossil Ridge Rd., Fort Worth 76135 (817/237-1111). Take Loop 820 to Texas 199 (Jacksboro Hwy.), go west four miles, and look for signs. The refuge and trails are open Mon-Sat 9-5 and Sun 12-5. Hardwicke Interpretive Center offers self-guided trail maps, as well as a gift shop, nature library, herbarium, and exhibits. (Hours: same as refuge, except closed Mon.) Admission: free. Dogs are allowed on leashes only; no bikes or jogging on trails. Wheelchair accessibility is available at the interpretive center and an adjacent short trail, plus a boardwalk to the marsh and one picnic area.

Environmental education programs are available to school groups during the week. Other groups of 10 or more can arrange for customized tours with a minimum of two weeks notice (more during spring and fall peak seasons). Weekends feature public nature programs, guided walks, and guided canoe trips on the Trinity River. The center also offers periodic learn- to-canoe classes and preschool nature awareness classes--as well as half-day summer natural history programs for ages 5-17. Some programs or events are free, others charge a fee. Call for details, schedules, and registration.

Oct. 17 from 10-4 is Nature Center Field Day, including nature programs, guided hikes (every hour 10-3), canoe tours (\$2 per person), food, and live animal programs throughout the day. In April the Friends of the Fort Worth Nature Center sponsors the annual Buffalo Boogie 10K run and two-mile walk. **Friedrich Wilderness Park** is located at 21395 Milsa, San Antonio 78256 (210/698-1057). Take Interstate 10 west past Loop 1604, exit Camp Bullis Rd., and watch for signs. Hours: Tue-Sun 8-5 (Oct.-Mar.) and 8-8 (Apr.-Sept.). Arrive at least an hour before closing. Admission: free. Wheelchair accessible on Forest Range Trail; others are rated easy to very difficult. No pets allowed. Weekday school and other group tours are available with 60-day advance notice (\$15 donation per group of 30). Guided hikes are the first Sat. each month (no fee), and public education programs are the second Sat. each month (\$2 donation). Master Naturalist classes meet once a week for ten weeks with the next session beginning the second week of March (limit 40; \$40 per person). A Night in the Park is Oct. 24 from 7-10 with programs on snakes, owls, and bats, plus star-gazing and a night hike (\$2 donation). Call for details on spring events and the week-long summer youth camp. Reservations are required on all programs.

McKelligon Canyon Park is located on the east side of Franklin Mountains at #1 McKelligon Canyon Rd. From Interstate 10 take US 54 (Patriot Fwy.) north to Fred Wilson Rd., turn left, and proceed to McKelligon Canyon Rd., then turn right and go to park entrance. Open 8:30-5:30 Oct.-April and 8:30-8:30 May-Sept. Admission: free. McKelligon Canyon Rd. ends in a loop fronted by parking lots and covered picnic areas. Explore unmarked trails leading from the picnic areas. (Once you leave the picnic areas, you're entering Franklin Mountains State Park.) Trails are rated difficult; none are wheelchair accessible. The area is primitive, so hike in pairs or more; cell phones are advisable if available.

The city park also features volleyball courts and private rental of a 450-seat rock pavilion built in the Thirties--plus the popular McKelligon Canyon Amphitheater, home to concerts and the summer pageant "Viva El Paso." Sept. 3-27 the amphitheater hosts the Shakespeare on the Rocks Festival, featuring four Shakespearean plays. Shows are 8 p.m. Thur-Sun. For reservations and park information contact McKelligon Canyon Park, Box 31340, El Paso 79931-0340 (800/915-8482 or 915/565-6900). For state park maps and program information, contact Franklin Mountains State Park, Box 200, Canutillo, TX 79835 (915/566-6441; website--www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/franklin/franklin.htm)

Rock climbers find established climbing routes located along unmarked trails in a box canyon behind McKelligon Canyon Amphitheater. Contact the state park for registration and a required backcountry permit. Fee: \$2 per person per day. For climbing maps and books (*Franklin Mountains Guidebook*, by Lowell Stevenson, \$5.95), contact Warts Army Surplus and Climbing, 4019 Van Buren Ave., El Paso 79930 (915/562-7515)

River Legacy Living Science Center is at 703 NW Green Oaks Blvd., Arlington 76006 (817/860-6752; website--www.riverlegacy.com). Take Interstate 30 to Cooper St. and go north to the center entrance.

The Living Science Center's exhibit hall features a simulated river raft ride, animals on display, gift shop, and interactive exhibits. Open Tue-Sat 9-5 and Sun 1-5, admission is \$3 adults, \$2 children 2-18. Sat. at 10 a.m. join a guided nature hike and a 2 p.m. animal presentation; free with exhibit hall admission. (Oct.-Dec. hikes go "cigar-hunting" in search of a rare fungus called the Devil's Cigar.) One Sat. each month features family activities such as night hikes, nature programs, kite-making, and magic shows. Educational programs include nature school for preschoolers and school group field trips.

Oct. 3 features Bat World from 1-4, a presentation on bats by Amanda Lollar. Oct. 23-25 (Fri-Sat 6-10 p.m. and Sun 6-9 p.m.) brings After Dark in the Park with night hikes, storytelling, animal presentations, hay rides, pumpkin decorations. Fee: \$3 per person. Ap. 17, 1999 check out the Cardboard Boat Regatta, featuring over 100 boats made of cardboard. Spring also features an Earth Day celebration. Summer activities include day camps for ages 3-12.

River Legacy Parks are located next the the science center at 701 NW Green Oaks Blvd. and are operated by the Arlington Parks & Recreation Dept., Box 231, Arlington 76004-0231 (817/459-5474 for information and 817/459-5473 for facility reservations). The parks feature pavilions, picnic areas, playgrounds, and nature trails. Hours: 5 a.m.-10 p.m. Handicapped accessible. Admission: free. Call ten days in advance for pavilion reservations (fee charged).