

TEXAS HIGHWAYS MAGAZINE

# TEXAS HIGHWAYS™

THE TRAVEL MAGAZINE OF TEXAS

## UNPLUGGED

THE TRAVEL MAGAZINE OF TEXAS

NOVEMBER 2018 | VOL. 65 | ISSUE 11

NOVEMBER 2018

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TEXAS HIGHWAYS MAGAZINE

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EDITOR'S  
**NOTE**

## Travel, Uninterrupted

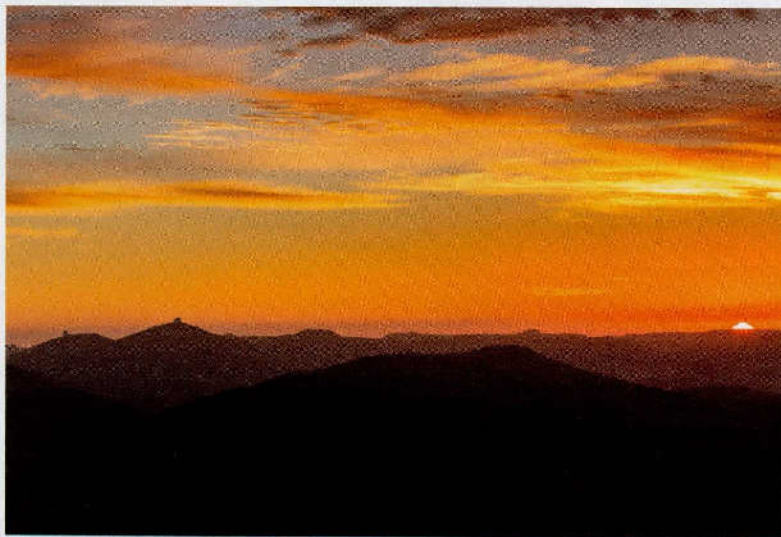
**M**y clearest memories of travel from my childhood tend to recall the simple moments. The start of vacation was always the same—my dad carrying me out to my grandparents' motor home before dawn and settling me into the bed above the cab. When I woke up, we'd be well on our way, and I'd relish watching the road unfold in front of me from my new vantage point. Other highlights come back to me in blurs: collecting pine cones with my brother, playing cards with my mom, and listening to my dad's scary stories before we drifted off to sleep each night.

Now as a parent striving to foster a love of travel in my own kids, I worry about them missing out on some of the simpler pleasures. While useful, technology can rob us of being in the moment; there's always something more "interesting" to look at on whatever device we have on hand. So during a family vacation to the Davis Mountains in August, I challenged myself to unplug. I deleted all social media apps from my phone and resolved not to look at any of the pictures I took until I got home, just like the old days when you had to remember to take the roll of film rattling around the bottom of your purse to the store and then wait a few more days to get it developed.

**Travel is about allowing ourselves the freedom to live in the moment.**

---

I was surprised at how much those small changes helped me stay in the present and appreciate the details—seeing my 3-year-old's eyes light up anytime he spotted a train along our route; watching my daughter chase a bird around a fountain while we waited for a dinner table; enjoying the sunset from atop Skyline Drive in Davis Mountains State Park without obsessing over pictures. Because traveling isn't about coming home with the perfect collection of photos; it's about experiencing something new, connecting with our loved ones, and allowing ourselves the freedom to live in the moment.



The Skyline Drive Trail winds through 4.5-miles of Davis Mountains' valleys and ridges.

### OUR NEW LOOK:

Special thanks to our reader advisory group—Troy Johnson, Stirling Kelso, Sharon Parry, Roy Smithers, Deb Taylor, and Maggie Walsh—for providing valuable feedback about our redesign debuting with this issue. We'd love to hear your thoughts as well.

Send us an email at [letters@texashighways.com](mailto:letters@texashighways.com).

*Emily R Stone*

**EMILY ROBERTS STONE**  
EXECUTIVE EDITOR



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# NOVEMBER

**A MOMENT OF  
QUIET REFLECTION**  
approaching Guadalupe  
Peak at sunrise. Page 48.

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## Lost in the Valley

Eschewing GPS for a paper map, writer Clayton Maxwell and photographer Kenny Braun set out on a tech-free adventure to the Rio Grande Valley and discover the rewards of unplugged travel.

*By Clayton Maxwell  
Photographs by Kenny Braun*

40

## The Isles of Texas

They might not be in the Caribbean, but these Texas islands, nestled in lakes and rivers, provide the adventurous traveler another version of paradise.

*By Wes Ferguson*

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## Five-Peak Week

Come along as we embark on a weeklong road trip to hike five West Texas peaks, a journey rich with soaring heights and new insights.

*By Matt Joyce  
Photographs by Brandon Jakobeit*



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# NOVEMBER

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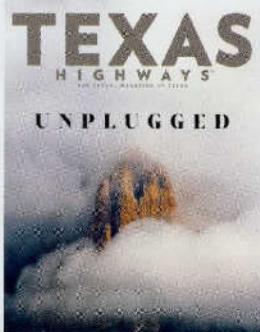
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Monarch butterflies make a spectacular landing in Texas on their migration route

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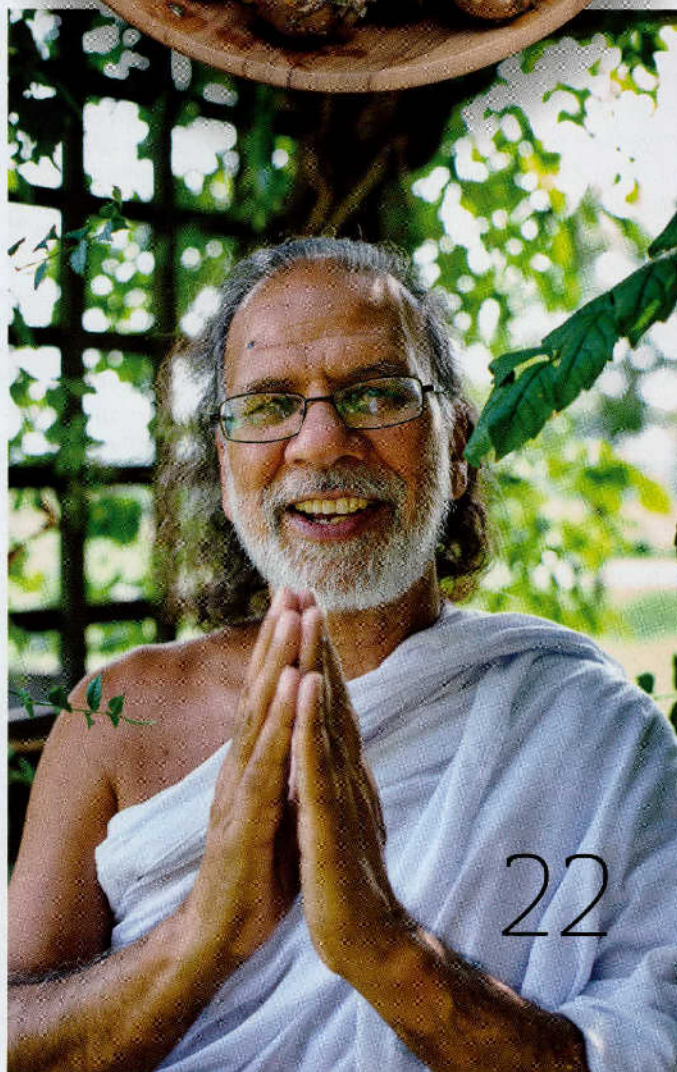
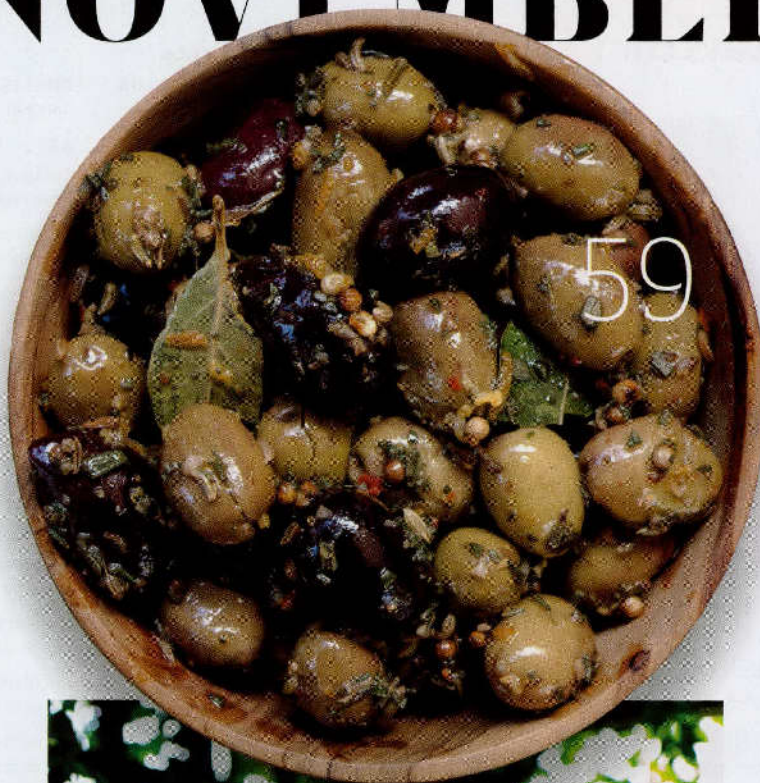
Getaway

Three days in Gonzales, "the birthplace of Texas freedom"



### ON THE COVER

El Capitan, Guadalupe Mountains  
Photo by Darren Huski



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A look back at the "Law West of the Pecos"

Visit [texashighways.com](http://texashighways.com) for more content and events.



## Behind the Story

During their tech-free road trip for “Lost in the Valley” (Page 30), writer Clayton Maxwell and photographer Kenny Braun—who mostly used film on this assignment—encountered some characters. One particular experience at the Rex Diner in McAllen made an impression on Maxwell. “After our chorizo and egg tacos, Kenny ran back to the car for his Hasselblad [camera], but we weren’t sure photography would be welcome,” she says. “But folks began pulling us aside to ask to have their photos taken. Even the organ player, Victor Chapa [above], who was cranking out tunes all morning, wanted to pose. So Kenny got busy shooting portraits. We have since printed some of the photographs, and I returned to Rex in October to hand-deliver them.” **To see outtakes from the feature, follow us on Instagram @texashighways.**

## Featured Contributors



### Sarah Bird

The Austin-based writer makes her first appearance in *Texas Highways* with an essay about the Paisano Ranch (Page 12), a writers’ retreat in the Hill Country. The award-winning author and screenwriter released her 10th novel, *Daughter of a Daughter of a Queen*, this fall. The story is based on the life of Cathy Williams, the only woman to serve with the buffalo soldiers. Visit [texashighways.com](http://texashighways.com) for a Q&A with Bird on her book.



### Michael Hoinski

*Texas Highways’* new editor-at-large interviewed former first lady Laura Bush (Page 87) at Prairie Chapel Ranch in Crawford. A few weeks later he received a thoughtful thank-you note—his first ever in a long line of subjects. Hoinski also wrote about Greenberg Smoked Turkeys (Page 66), a famed holiday tradition in the state and across the country. Visit [texashighways.com](http://texashighways.com) for a recipe roundup to make your Thanksgiving truly Texan.

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**RIVER BEND**

OK, so maybe it's not a real river bend, but it is a beautiful view of a river bend in the heart of The Woodlands, Texas. It is a beautiful view of a river bend in the heart of The Woodlands, Texas. It is a beautiful view of a river bend in the heart of The Woodlands, Texas.

I would travel to Brownwood for the day just to eat at Underwood's!  
Mary Salazar, San Antonio

## Extra Credit

Your article about Junction and the Llano River ["Junction on the Fly," October] stated "in an effort to restore the native population, the Texas Legislature named the Guadalupe bass the official state fish." The process of designating a state fish started in the late 1980s when a third-grade class in Decatur discovered that Alaska had a state fish, and they wondered why Texas did not. They chose the Guadalupe bass because it was threatened, only found in Texas, and they thought it could be saved. Rep. Ric Williamson instructed them on the legislative process, and they supported his resolution to name the Guadalupe bass the state fish, which was endorsed by the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department. The students wrote letters and spoke in front of the House Environmental Affairs Committee, and they traveled to Austin when Governor Bill

Clemens signed legislation designating Texas' official state fish in 1989.  
Shirley Watson, Decatur

## Courthouses Bucket List

In April 2017, I started a project to visit all 254 county courthouses in Texas. So far, I've been to seven of the 10 on your list ["County Cornerstones," September] and 110 total. I like the charm of the small towns as opposed to the urban ones. I always try to dine at a local restaurant on the square. Shelby County probably should have an asterisk because the building featured is not the working county courthouse, which is in a building two blocks away.

Stuart Schroeder, The Woodlands  
TH: The Shelby County Commissioners Court no longer meets at the county's 1885 courthouse, but the building still houses the Shelby County Veterans Office. The county also offers tours of the historic building. For information, call Sherry Riley at 936-598-6530.

## Endorsing the Eclectic

Your article about Brenham ["Beyond Blue Bell and Bluebonnets," September] listed several good restaurants. I would add the Funky Art Café, which has an eclectic menu of dishes that are very good. We live just outside of Brenham, and it's our favorite restaurant.

Tom Scanio, Brenham  
TH: The Funky Art Café, 202 W. Commerce St., opens Mon-Fri 11 a.m.-2 p.m. and Sat 11 a.m.-3 p.m. 979-836-5220; funkyartcafe.com

## We want to hear from you!

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## Range Roving

Rising from the Chihuahuan Desert north of Van Horn, the Guadalupe Mountains crest at the four highest elevations in the state—Guadalupe Peak, Bush Mountain, Shumard Peak, and Bartlett Peak. Though slightly shorter, El Capitan stands out as a distinctive limestone cliff towering some 3,000 feet above the road—making it a popular stop for photographers. The range contains some spectacular geological features, including part of the fossilized Capitan Reef, much of which can be seen within Guadalupe Mountains National Park.





# San Felipe

Local roots run deep for the mayor of this historic Texas town

By Clayton Maxwell



**SAN FELIPE MAYOR BOBBY BYARS** checks out the \$12.5 million San Felipe de Austin Museum, which opened at the state historic site in April.



## TOWN TRIVIA



POPULATION:

800



NUMBER OF STOPLIGHTS:

zero



YEAR FOUNDED:

1824



NEAREST CITY:

Houston,  
48 miles



MARQUEE EVENT:

The Father of Texas Celebration (Nov. 3), an annual festival honoring Stephen F. Austin's birthday with historically themed activities.

[facebook.com/sanfelipedeastin](https://facebook.com/sanfelipedeastin)



MAP IT:

San Felipe de Austin State Historic Site, 220 Second St.

**S**an Felipe, the hub of Stephen F. Austin's original colony, may be the most historically significant Texas town you've never heard of. But that's understandable: In 1836, residents burned San Felipe to the ground to keep it from the hands of the advancing Mexican army after the fall of the Alamo. The entire town—homes, taverns, one of the earliest print shops in Texas—was left in ashes, and few of its citizens returned.

One important settler did return, however: Celia Allen, a freed slave who worked at her former owners' bakery. Now, more than 180 years later, Allen's great, great, great grandson Bobby Byars is the mayor of San Felipe—a position he's held for 18 years. A lifelong resident, Byars helped lobby the state to construct a new museum at San Felipe de Austin State Historic Site. The museum, which opened in April, tells the history of San Felipe through videos, interactive maps, and artifacts, along with stories of early residents like Allen and William B. Travis. We asked Byars to give us a tour of his hometown.

### Deep Roots

"You can read about Celia Allen over in the museum. She worked in the San Felipe bakery for two partners. She was given her freedom by one of the partners, but the other one decided that no, she wasn't going to get her freedom. So, the one partner hired William Travis, who we know was her attorney, and they were able to grant her freedom. Celia had a daughter named Ann. They called her Free Ann because she was the first one in the family, as I understand, to be born free. I'm a direct descendant of Celia and Free Ann. I'm really proud of that."

### Historical Hub

"We were the actual first capital of Texas. It might not have ever changed if we wouldn't have burned the town down in the Runaway Scrape of 1836. But Stephen F. Austin settled here, and he's the one who really got this town on the map."

### Country Charm


"This is still the country, and people know you and look out for you. We grew up with a closeness in the neighborhood that's really special. And still today, if I

go fishing and catch a bunch of fish, I'm going to give locals some of the fish because I know them. It's just a totally different atmosphere. You can go sit out in your yard at night, and it's so quiet."

### Local Eats

"In San Felipe proper, there isn't a restaurant. I'm actually in the process of opening up a little takeout barbecue place right now, Bobby B's Barbecue, and it should be open this fall. We'll do it all—brisket, ribs, chicken. No advertising, just word of mouth. Down here, if your food's good, you won't have to worry about it. It's right off of I-10 on FM 1458. I'm mainly doing it because I love to cook."

### Bound to the Brazos

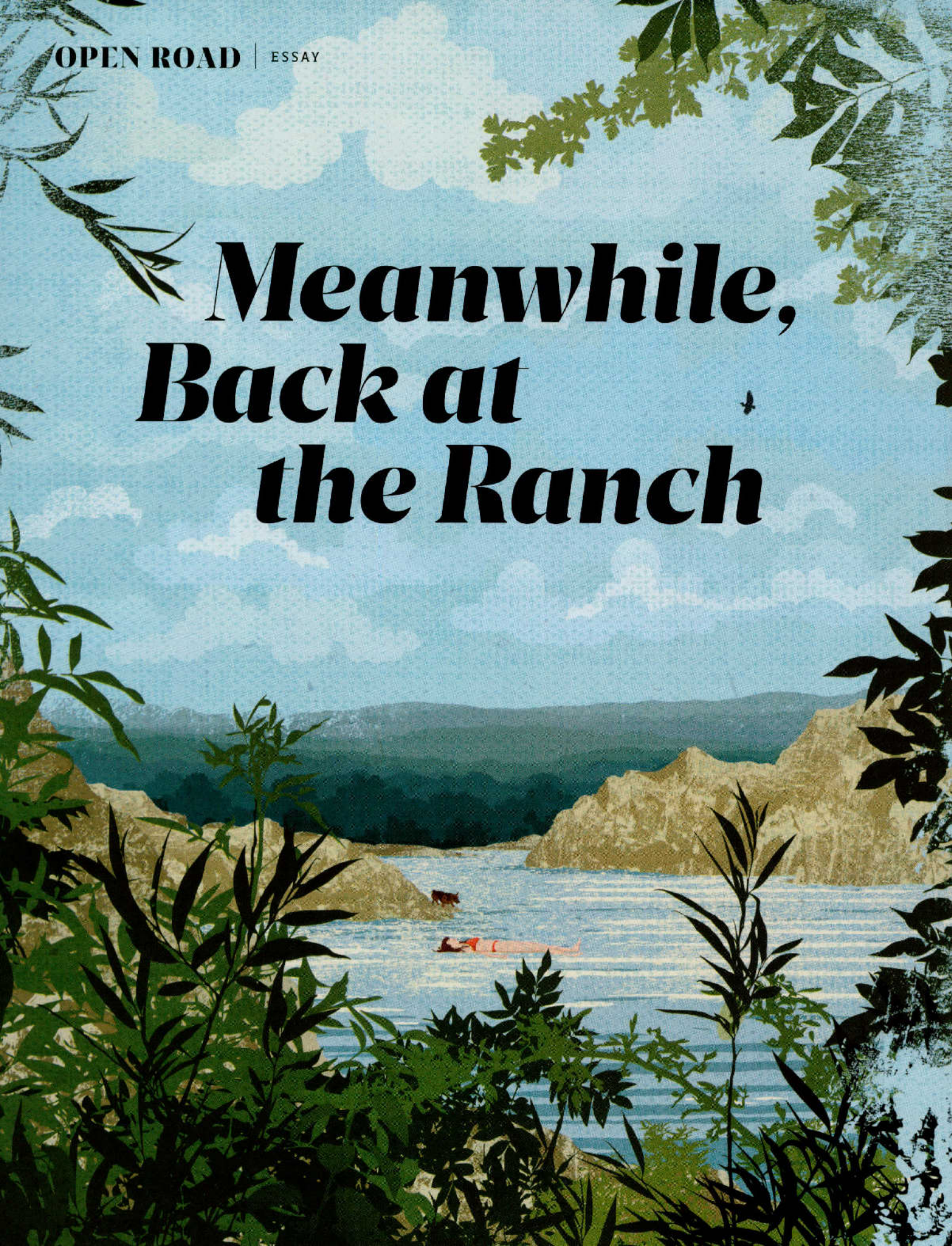
"I live on the river. It's usually just kind of a meandering river, slow and lazy. We grew up in Stephen F. Austin State Park along the river. It used to have a big swimming pool down in there, but the Brazos destroyed it over 20 years ago. Anyone can fish in the state park or where the bridges cross the river. Catfish, bass, a bit of everything—the best-eating fish in the world comes out of the river." 

### WHAT DID YOU SAY?

San Fuhleelay, San Phillip, San Phillipee—  
Byars says any will do.

OPEN ROAD | ESSAY

# *Meanwhile, Back at the Ranch*



At Paisano Ranch, the spirit of  
J. Frank Dobie—and the muses—abide

By Sarah Bird

**M**

My personal slice of Texas paradise lies 14 miles southwest of Austin, tucked into the idyllic canyon that cradles an immaculate stretch of Barton Creek. The Paisano Ranch is a 245-acre retreat owned by the University of Texas at Austin, and it has been awarding fellowships to a few select writers every year since 1967. My lucky number came up in 2010 when I spent three blissful summer months nestled in this sanctuary.

I'm returning because, well, who wouldn't want to return to paradise? Given the chance, I'm certain that Eve would have been rethinking the whole apple thing if it meant more time in Eden. But I have another reason for wanting to go back, besides my deep desire to plunge once again into a swimming hole so soul-rejuvenating that my husband and I call it liquid Xanax. I still have an obligation to fulfill: When I lived on the ranch eight years ago, I made a promise to a ghost I encountered there, and I need to tell her that I have kept it.

The summer solstice, when pagans once celebrated the power of light over darkness, seems the perfect time for the mystical encounter I have in mind. My husband, George

Jones—not the dipsomaniacal, lawn mower-riding, no-show legend—and I set out in the most un-ranch-like vehicle imaginable, a sage-green Prius. A torrential rainstorm has swept through, leaving the sky lushly upholstered with soft gray clouds. The downpour has both dropped temperatures to unseasonable lows and raised our hopes that our favorite swimming hole will be full.

We hum south on MoPac. In the backseat is our faithful dog, True. Though True would be recognized as a cow dog in his ancestral Wales, where his stumpy-legged sort had been bred to herd cattle, here in Texas he's just a borderline foo-foo, fluffy-butt corgi. No matter, all of us are ranch veterans, car and dog included, and, now, eight years later, we are on our way to see how much Paisano we still have left in our souls.

The ranch's guiding spirit and most famous occupant was the first great supporter of Texas letters, J. Frank Dobie. He was a folklorist, professor, columnist, author, recipient of the Medal of Freedom, celebrator of the open range, and savior of the Longhorn—a breed he immortalized in one of his most popular books, *The Longhorns*. Dobie and his wife/writing assistant, Bertha McKee Dobie, bought the ranch in 1959. Dobie didn't purchase his country spread as a place to work, but rather as a retreat.

Dobie christened his "country place" Paisano, not just because it meant roadrunner in Spanish, but also for its other meaning, "compatriot." Dobie opened Paisano to friends near and far. On long nights sweetened by the melodious calls of chuck-will's-widows and night-hawks, Dobie and his pals would gather on the "gallery," the long, stone porch running the length of the front of the house, and discuss life, literature, and the layers in between.

After Dobie died in 1964, his friends throughout Texas sought a way to honor their compatriot. A conversation between Bertha and two of her husband's friends, Frank H. Wardlaw, director of the University of Texas Press; and Lon Tinkle, a book critic and professor at Southern Methodist University, spawned the idea that the best way to remember Dobie would be to purchase Paisano and use it as a writer's retreat. Funds were raised, and the operation was turned over to UT, which facilitates the writing program.

In 1967, the university established a fellowship program designed "to stimulate creative endeavor in the arts by making it possible for a person to work without distractions." During the early years, a few photographers and painters were granted fellowships. In 1986, two fellowships were designated: the Ralph A. Johnston Memorial Fellowship, designed for writers with some publishing and critical success, and the Jesse H. Jones Writing Fellowship for writers at the start of their careers. With all the solitude they could desire and enough funding to forget financial cares—at least for a few months—residents are only required to do that which all writers dream of having unencumbered time to do: write.

The list of fellows is an illustrious one. It includes a cornerstone of

The spot has the otherworldly feel of a grotto, shaded as it is by an enormous cottonwood arching over to meet the limestone bluff on the opposite bank.

Chicana literature, Sandra Cisneros (*The House on Mango Street*); National Book Critics Circle Award winner Ben Fountain (*Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk*); bestselling author Stephen Harrigan (*The Gates of the Alamo*); National Book Foundation honoree ZZ Packer (*Drinking Coffee Elsewhere*); and Pulitzer finalist Philipp Meyer (*The Son*). Altogether the fellows have produced more than 100 books of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, as well as numerous feature films, PBS documentaries, and prestige television series.

As George, True, and I head south on MoPac, construction slows our progress to a crawl. George and I—as is required by law of all old-time Austinites—bitch about how bad the traffic has gotten. Soon enough, though, we are zipping along nearly deserted roads that still qualify as country. We turn off at, let's call it Branding Iron Trail so as not to zero in too precisely on the location of this writers' sanctuary, and traffic all but disappears. The only creature we encounter for miles is a fiberglass Longhorn that gazes forlornly at us from the yard of a ranchette. The eyes of Dobie are upon us.

A few seconds later, True's nose begins twitching, his foxy ears perk up even higher, and, whining expectantly, he paws at the window button. We are at the exact spot where, back in our ranch days, True had always signaled that tantalizing odors, more feral than fiberglass and undetectable to the suburban human nose, had invaded the car and it was time to let that wild wind blow free. We lower all the windows. True scrambles up on his stumpy corgi legs to poke his nose out the window. Panting with the sort of doggie excitement that looks like a gigantic grin, eyes slitted in bliss, he hoovers up all the

delicious, uncivilized smells and howls a low-pitched, growling song of return.

The pavement ends at a 12-foot-long gate of rusted pipe with a stylized road-runner scampering across the sign reading "Paisano." Without a word, I slip back into the routine we'd perfected years ago and hop out of the car, grab the heavy chain and lock that are holding the gate closed, dial in the combination, sweep the gate open, and allow George to enter, before locking out the world behind us. Once parked, True, who's not as springy as he once was, waits to be lifted out. The instant we are on private land, the three of us are simultaneously overtaken by every Texan's God-given right to sprinkle the thirsty land. As I squat beside True, who is lifting a leg on the rusty gate post, the pagan sun of this summer solstice bursts through the clouds and cuts diamond-sharp shadows across our faces just to remind us who truly owns this state. At that moment, I could not have felt more like a cowgirl if I had been clamping a pigging string between my teeth while doping calves for screwworm.

As the road winds down for a mile and a half through the canyon along Barton Creek, the cedar and scrub oak thicken, occasionally rising into a canopy above the road we're crawling along now, mindful of ruts and thankful that it's not washed out. The ranch's sentinels, several towering limestone bluffs, rise up to greet us, a spectacular background for all the greenery.

At the wheel, George puts on a burst of speed, anxious to reach what was, for us, the heart of Paisano: Barton Creek. "You think it's running?" he asks.

"It has to be," I answer, certain that the recent deluge will have sent the creek flowing over the low-water crossing that had kept us trapped a couple of

times during our previous stay. Not that we minded. Getting "creeked-in," being stranded, is a badge of honor among former fellows.

"It's not flowing," I moan when we reach the narrow passage across a disappointingly low and ominously stagnant creek. This does not bode well for our cherished swimming hole. We stop and strain for a glimpse of the pristine pool where we'd enjoyed the finest moments of every day we'd spent at Paisano. But weeds now choke the creek, blocking our view of the swimming hole. What water we can see is an unmoving brackish yellow. It appears there will be no swim.

Wilted with disappointment, we drive on to the ranch house. If we are to believe the *Handbook of Texas*, and I see no reason not to, the cabin made of hand-hewn cedar that still remains at the heart of the six-room ranch house was built by the property's second owners in the 1860s. Handsomely remodeled in 2010, the Dobies' long front porch remains intact. In his fluffy-butted way, True wiggle-waddles across the length of the gallery, pausing to shoot a glance back at me that I anthropomorphize into the question, "Do you remember?"

I do. The three of us had celebrated our first night at the ranch in 2010 with a swim followed by a cocktail on the gallery. Dive-bombing hummingbirds had already found the feeders we'd hung, and the liquid trilling of canyon wrens filled the air. As night and a sweet alcoholic buzz descended upon us, I settled in, deeply contented, only to be jerked into high alert by the loudest, most booming roar I had ever heard.

"It's only the old lion," George said, reminding me of the stories we'd heard about the retired giant cat that resided at the Austin Zoo on the far side of the sound-amplifying canyon.

I relaxed, but at the next roar True levitated and shot me an accusing look that demanded, "Hey, you with the prehensile grip and car keys, do something! Now!" After much futile comforting, True, trembling with each roar, bee-lined into the house and refused to emerge. He'd

As Cathy and her achievement as the first woman to enlist in the peacetime U.S. military went unrecognized, I increasingly felt the burden of an obligation left unfulfilled.



done what he could to save us, and if we humans were stupid enough to ignore his warning, we deserved to be a lion's amuse-bouche.

But it's high noon now, the ancient lion long gone to that Serengeti in the sky, and the only sounds to be heard are the peaceable gabbling of a mother turkey, out of sight in the underbrush, talking to her chicks.

"Walkie?" I ask True. Of the three of us, True had gloried most in our time at the ranch, adopting the leash-free, country-dog life and never looking back. Our daily walk to the ruins of a cabin, built by German settlers circa 1836, had been the highlight of our day. Now, though, eight years older and starting to slow down, he answers by plopping down in the deep shade beneath what I'd thought of as Bertha's fig tree. I know better than to invite George along. Being the true Texas boy he is, his DNA is encoded to embrace the wonder of air conditioning and shun the folly of so much as a short stroll in the blistering sun.

It's better that I go alone anyway: I've got a reckoning with a ghost.

Strolling to what remains of the tall log cabin takes less than half an hour. When I turn off the main road onto a heavily wooded path, first years, then decades, fall away. It's so quiet that a blue jay's piercing call, *jeer!*, startles me. A moment later, the reverie that most often overtook me on this path settles in. Once again I am transported back in time, and I imagine myself to be the bride of the German pioneer who built the cabin. And now, following her new husband along this silent stretch, she is about to behold the home that has been built for her in the middle of such vast loneliness.

At the cabin, I bat away a web spun by a shockingly large spider and, stepping gingerly since many of the floorboards are either rotted or missing entirely, I walk into the small main room that once contained so many lives. I touch the expertly chiseled and chinked logs and try to imagine raising a family in this confined space, so far from friends, so close to enemies. During the Civil War, Southern

marauders ravaged the anti-slavery German settlers, and as late as 1869, Comanches took scalps along Barton Creek.

Imagining the fears and loneliness of a woman surrounded by deadly foes affected me strongly. This fed directly into the novel I worked on during my residence at Paisano, *Above the East China Sea*, the story of young women, past and present, caught up in their country's deadliest conflicts. Still, it wasn't that young German wife of my fancy who made the deepest impression on me. No, she only prepared me to meet again the ghost who, in 2010, had been haunting me for 30 years: Cathy Williams.

At a Juneteenth rodeo in 1979, I first heard the incredible story of Cathy Williams, the only woman to ever serve with the Buffalo Soldiers, the legendary African American regiments formed after the Civil War. At that time, I was doing research for a photo book about what I referred to affectionately as "mutant rodeos," those magnificent hybrids of mainstream-meets-every-subculture-in-Texas. I photographed prison, police, kid's, Mexican-American, old-timer's, women's, and gay rodeos. But my favorite of them all were African American rodeos.

Though this American heroine, largely unknown until recently, seized my imagination from the first moment I heard her name, I pushed the story away for a long time. As Cathy and her achievement as the first woman to enlist in the peacetime U.S. military went unrecognized for the decades that followed, I increasingly felt the burden of an obligation left unfulfilled.

I am moving away from the shaded path and tramping Paisano's more remote stretches when that obligation to Cathy comes back to me with a vengeance. I begin to sweat hard enough to imagine how brutal it would have been for a woman, disguised in the heavy cotton and metal uniform of an infantry soldier, to march across this endless state. I feel as if Cathy has not only returned, but has inhabited me.

She reminds me that she is still waiting to take her rightful place in history. Why, she asks, I continued on page 86

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# DRIVE



**SOAKING IN VIEWS**  
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in rain-filled Madera  
Canyon following a hike  
to Mount Livermore.

# Treks Across Time

Lose yourself on history-packed trails in the Davis Mountains

By E. Dan Klepper



#### DAVIS MOUNTAINS

The second-highest range in Texas extends 60 miles across Jeff Davis County.

The Davis Mountains have long attracted people seeking respite from the surrounding deserts of West Texas. Delivered as magma from volcanic activity some 35 million years ago, the mountains harbor patches of “sky island” known for relatively moist forested hillsides, cooler temperatures, and spartan beauty. To explore the Davis range’s cultural past and natural marvels, head to the highest town in Texas—Fort Davis, at 5,050 feet—and hit the trail. Or better yet, hit three trails.

#### Cattle Country

The Madera Canyon Trail traverses former ranchland now part of the Nature Conservancy’s 33,000-acre Davis Mountains Preserve. Twenty-four miles northwest of Fort Davis on State Highway 118, the 2.4-mile loop crosses Madera Creek before splitting: The right fork delivers a vista of the Davis Mountains’ profile including Mount Livermore, the highest point in the region; the left fork descends to the creek and Chico Tank, which holds water seasonally (a draw for wildlife, especially birds) thanks to a dam built of native rock in the early 20th century. Keep an eye out for coveys of Montezuma quail with their striking black and white head markings.

Water is the lifeblood of the Davis Mountains, and the range captures



#### A SIGNAL MIRROR

reflects the sun’s rays on top of Mount Livermore, where two locals discovered a cache of arrowheads in 1895.

plenty as it forces westerly winds to rise, cool, and condense; the mountains' annual rainfall nearly doubles that of the surrounding desert. Pioneer ranchers recognized these beneficial conditions and, by the end of the 19th century, the number of cattle in the Davis Mountains exceeded the human population 43 to 1. But the 20th century brought a changing world as cities grew, rural populations shrank, and overgrazing contributed to the slow, steady decline of ranching in the Davis Mountains.

*The Madera Canyon Trail starts and ends at the Lawrence E. Wood picnic area on State Highway 118. It is free and open daily from sunup to sundown.*

### Cavalry Days

As American settlers streamed into the frontier, the United States established military forts to confront and guard against the Native Americans who originally called West Texas home. The Fort Davis National Historic Site preserves an 1854 cavalry post that protected settlers, mail coaches, and wagon trains traveling between San Antonio and El Paso until 1891. The fort's location, at the mouth of a box canyon, proved to be an advantageous site for staging defenses.

The North Ridge trail system gives hikers a bird's-eye view of the fort and the 24 roofed buildings that remain, including five that have been restored to their 1880s condition. One trailhead starts from the Hospital Canyon Trail behind the restored fort hospital and travels through native trees and grasses beneath the protective natural palisades of the canyon. It then ascends to the ridge where it becomes the North

**Water is the lifeblood of the Davis range, where the annual rainfall nearly doubles that of the surrounding desert.**

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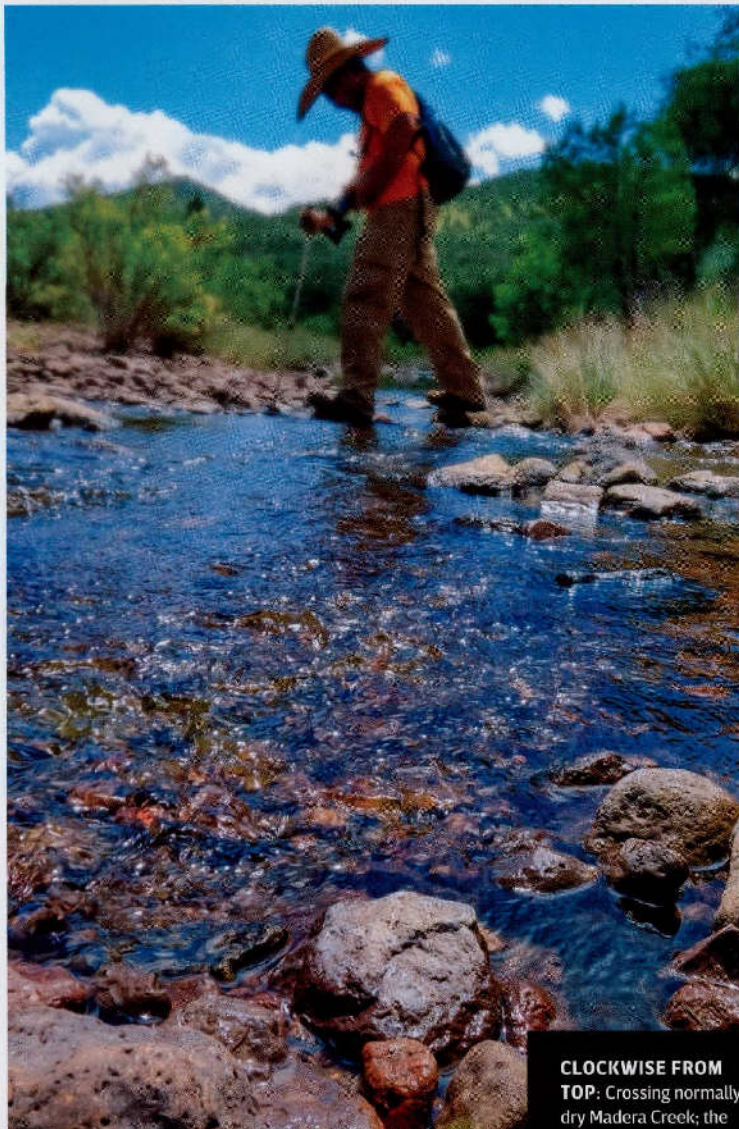
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BRADY - THE COUNTY OF TEXAS

**Hunters Appreciation**  
**November 17**

**Christmas in the Heart**  
**December 15**



Ridge Trail. The left fork links to Davis Mountains State Park, while the right fork follows the North Ridge Trail to a short detour and an overlook with a comprehensive view of the historic site. The hike is approximately 1.5 miles each way.

*The North Ridge Trail system and Fort Davis National Historic Site are open daily 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Entry \$20 per vehicle or \$10 for visitors 16 and older. 101 Lt. Flipper Drive, Fort Davis; 432-426-3224; nps.gov/foda*

### **Livermore Cache**

Summiting Mount Livermore, the highest point in the Davis Mountains, recalls the Livermore culture, a foraging society that occupied this range from approximately 800 to 1300 A.D. before disappearing from the historic record.

The 8,378-foot summit, also known as Baldy Peak, provides a 360-degree view of the surrounding range. It's also the location of one of the most unique archeological finds in the state. In September 1895, locals Charles Janes and Tom Merrill climbed Livermore before pausing to rest along its narrow, ledge-like summit. Noticing a cairn of stacked rocks on the peak, the two assumed they had discovered a

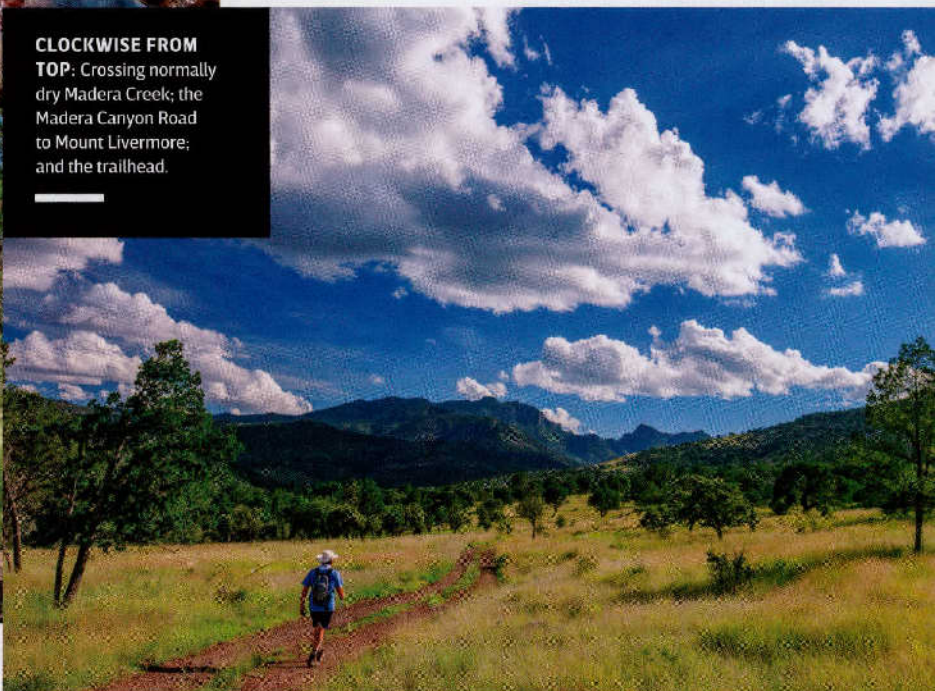
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### **MOUNTAINS MAJESTY**

Follow us on Instagram @texashighways or visit [texashighways.com](http://texashighways.com) to see more of E. Dan Klepper's photos of Davis Mountains trails.

---

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** Crossing normally dry Madera Creek; the Madera Canyon Road to Mount Livermore; and the trailhead.




Native American burial mound and dismantled the stack. But instead of a body, the rock cairn concealed a collection of rare arrowheads—slender flint points in hues from milky white to terra cotta red with distinct wavy ridging along their sides. The young men pocketed several points and took them to Charles' mother, Susan Janes, who had developed an interest in local Native American history. After viewing the cache herself, Susan theorized the collection was ceremonial rather than utilitarian—a ritual offering.

The trailhead to Mount Livermore begins at the "Cat Tank Turnoff" along Madera Canyon Road, negotiable only in a high-clearance vehicle. The 6.2-mile, round-trip trail follows the old road 1.8 miles up to Bridge Gap, where the Limpia Chute Trail then navigates a well-marked series of switchbacks through a forest of Texas madrone, gray oak, alligator juniper, and some of Texas' few stands of ponderosa pine. After 1.3 miles (and another 1,000 feet of elevation), the trail arrives at the base of Baldy Peak and the Livermore Summit Trail. Loose rocks, an exposed climb, sheer drops, and a vertical trail characterize the short, steep climb to the top.

It's a strenuous hike, but the reward is unequalled. On a clear day, you can spot the Guadalupe Mountains and the unmistakable face of El Capitan 130 miles to the north. The view is also timeless. It turns out that Susan Janes was correct: Subsequent research confirmed the Livermore cache was a ceremonial offering, a ritual symbol of whatever spiritual quest these early Davis Mountains inhabitants were pursuing.

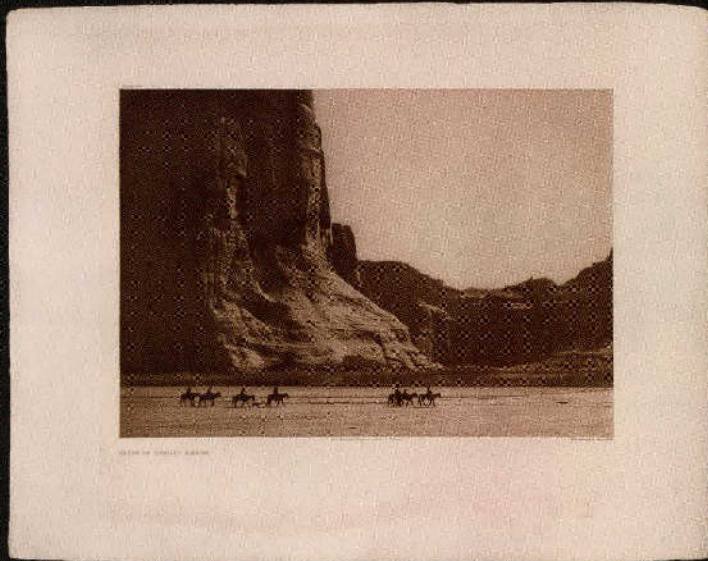
Today, the Livermore people and their culture are extinct, and their ritual cache has been placed in the Museum of the Big Bend in Alpine. But their view of the world survives.

*The Mount Livermore trail opens several times per year when the Nature Conservancy holds public days at its Davis Mountains Preserve. 432-426-2390; nature.org* 

# Lasting Impressions

*The Work of Edward S. Curtis*

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# A Quiet Place

Searching for the silent treatment at Siddhayatan Spiritual Retreat Center

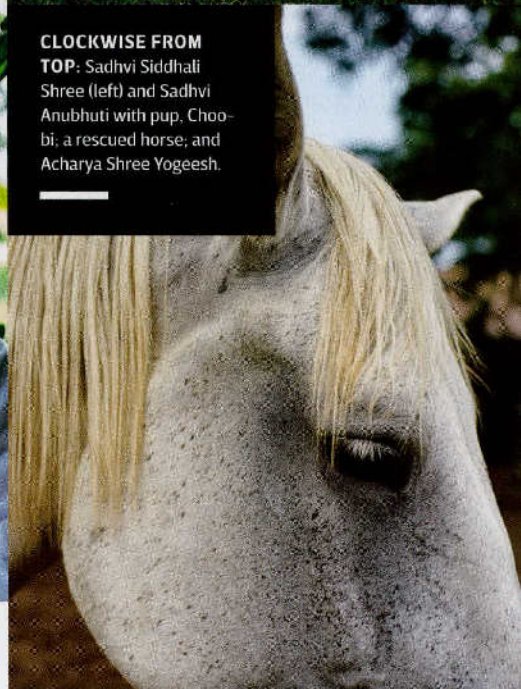
By Kimya Kavehkar

“**H**ill My name is Kimya. I’m being silent. Thank you for understanding.” The note, jotted on a sheet of paper, was my way of explaining to the folks in the cafeteria why I only smiled, nodded, and bowed when they greeted me.

In an attempt to quiet my mind and turn my attention inward, I’d come to the small town of Windom, an hour and a half northeast of Dallas, for a 36-hour silent retreat. Over a dinner of white rice, lentil curry, and homemade yogurt, my fellow retreaters at the Siddhayatan Spiritual Retreat Center, a Jain ashram, smiled knowingly as I folded my handwritten greeting into a square and tucked it into my pocket. “Oh, I did that for half a day once,” said Carmen, a 37-year-old mom from Saskatchewan, Canada, a devotee who’d come to the ashram to help out with a kids’ camp the following week. “It’s so hard if you’re a chatter like me.”

I smiled wide, pointed at myself, and nodded. Carmen responded with a wink. “You’re a chatter, too? Doesn’t seem like it.”

Silence is common at Siddhayatan, but there are a variety of other retreats at the ashram, or monastery, that range



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** Sadhvi Siddhali Shree (left) and Sadhvi Anubhuti with pup, Choo-bi; a rescued horse; and Acharya Shree Yogeesh.

**SIDDHAYATAN SPIRITUAL RETREAT CENTER**  
 9985 E. State Highway 56, Windom; 903-487-0717; siddhayatan.org



from fasting and yoga to addiction and PTSD healing—all with a spiritual but not dogmatic bent. The ashram’s founder, Acharya Shree Yogeesh, dresses in an unadorned white robe as he teaches courses on meditation, delivers lectures, and leads twice-daily mantra chanting. He seems kind, but aloof, as one might imagine of a mildly YouTube famous spiritual leader (he has more than 70,000 subscribers). His videos, podcasts, and books draw devotees and curious soul-searchers from around the world to the 200-acre site, which opened in 2008. And while I don’t practice Jainism, an ancient Indian religion, the principles Acharya Shree advocates are mostly tough to find fault with: nonviolence, health and well-being, and compassion.



Jainism is just one belief system that practices silence as a way to connect more deeply with higher powers, to achieve deeper meditations, and to contemplate more clearly. In a busy, digital-reliant life, I'd been feeling like I had no time for personal reflection. My go-go ways weren't allowing me to actually evaluate how things were going, how my life could be improved, and what I actually wanted. So I figured a good dose of silence would eliminate distractions and force me to face the tough questions.

There's very little to distract one at Siddhayatan. Golden grass covers a rolling landscape that is mostly empty save for several artificial ponds, and the architecture is exceedingly modest. Acharya Shree showed me to my private room in a shared dormitory: A twin-size bed with a dark-green quilt was pushed against one wall, and a nightstand and lamp stood beneath a small window. There weren't many furnishings beyond that. But the point of an ashram is to live with as much humility as possible, like monks would.

Surprisingly, I didn't find it too difficult to be silent. It took the pressure off initiating and continuing conversations, but I did carry around a notebook and pen. If I had a burning question or extreme desire to express something, I wrote it down. After dinner on my first night, I followed Michael, a former professional musician, to the animal sanctuary in the back of the property where goats, sheep, rams, mules, donkeys, horses, pigs, peacocks, and one cow live. Michael takes care of the animals and lives at the ashram full-time. He chatted with me sporadically on the eight-minute walk there, and I responded

**Time passed slowly, but boredom can be good for you. It allows the mind to wander and enhances creative energy.**

#### ASHRAM ACCOMMODATIONS

Prices for retreats vary; standard accommodations, which includes meals, range from \$75 to \$125 per night.

with thumbs up, thumbs down, and more abstract forms of sign language and animated facial expressions. I tried very hard not to coo at the donkey who rubbed against my arm with his long velveteen ears.

The only time I wasn't silent was during the mantra chanting, which happens before breakfast and dinner. In an effort to get the full experience I stumbled through the Sanskrit songs, which mostly have to do with increasing spiritual well-being and overcoming obstacles—which I'm all on board for.

Aside from the chants and the delicious vegetarian breakfasts, lunches, and dinners (the dairy products, from yogurt to mozzarella, all come from the cow in the animal sanctuary that is milked twice a day), my schedule was wide open to do as I pleased. Other types of retreats might have more rigorous class schedules depending on their needs, but I spent my time reading, journaling, constructing a puzzle, napping, and walking around the property, with one yoga class thrown in for good measure. Phones aren't forbidden, but they are discouraged; every time I started to pick up mine by habit, I sighed and put it back down.

Time passed slowly on the porch as I sat on mismatched patio furniture and gazed beyond the iron fence and past the tree line, the cicadas' hums approaching crescendo. But boredom is good for you. It allows the mind to wander; it enhances creative energy. It was exactly the spiritual awakening I needed—the desire to pick up a pen and put it to paper (not for work) and take pleasure in the innate. Sometimes you travel to see something new; sometimes you travel to see yourself again. 🐼



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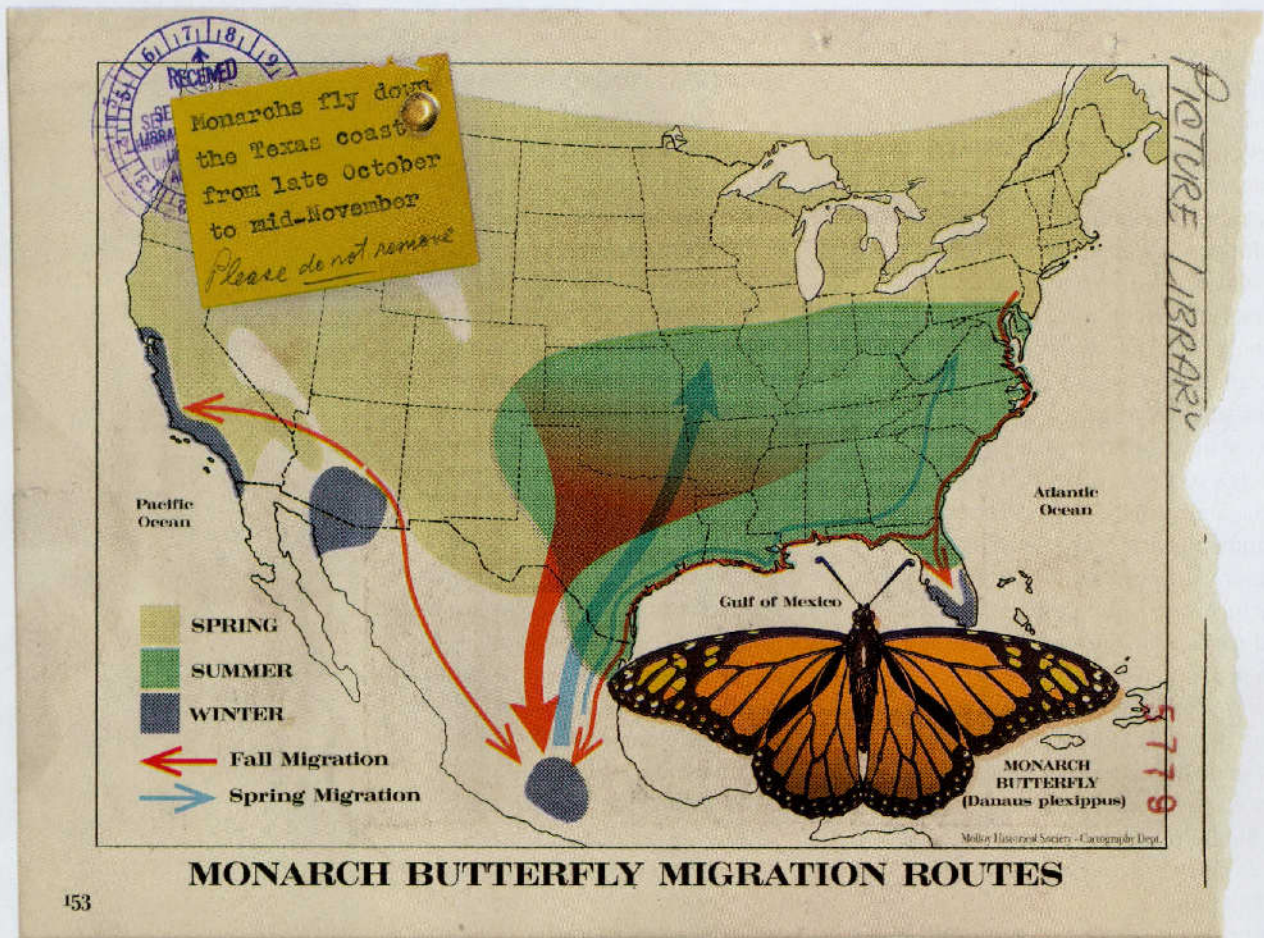
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# The Great Migration

November ushers in a monarch-viewing bonanza along the Texas Coast

By Susan L. Ebert

**E**arly one morning on Trinity Bay, the autumn sky began to glisten. Myriad monarchs unfurled in clouds from the shoreline, fluttering overhead, some landing on our boat, on our fishing rods, and even on me and my husband. We watched, enchanted, as they danced ever-southward, propelled by a light north wind and their biological imperative.

Although monarchs heading south through Texas earlier in the fall primarily follow a migration route known

as the central flyway, some of the most spectacular viewing arrives later, as the final wave of migrators flutters in more concentrated numbers along the coastal flyway. (The central flyway is more dispersed, stretching from Wichita Falls to Eagle Pass in a 300-mile swath.)

From about the third week of October through mid-November, these colorful creatures festoon our coastline. They feed on nectar-rich plants and roost in black-white-and-orange clumps numbering into the thousands—clinging to salt cedars and cattails along the coastal prairies, dunes, and beaches—only to sail aloft once the morning dew evaporates from their wings.

Known as the “super generation,” these butterflies are the fourth- or fifth-generation descendants of monarchs that made the same southward journey the previous year. Unlike earlier generations that mated and laid eggs as they followed milkweed farther and farther north throughout the spring and summer—each cycle living for only about a month—the super generation suspends its ability to reproduce so all of its energy can fuel a 2,000-mile pilgrimage to wintering grounds in the oyamel firs of Mexico, where it hibernates in the very same forests as its great-great-grandparents. In the spring, this same super generation migrates northward to northern Mexico and the southern United States, where it reproduces and expires, beginning the cycle anew.


Sadly, many won't make the journey: According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, monarch populations east of the Rocky Mountains

### TEXAS BUTTERFLY FESTIVAL

Participate in workshops, field trips, and other activities during the Nov. 3-6 event at the **National Butterfly Center**, 3333 Butterfly Park Drive, Mission. 956-583-5400; [texasbutterflyfestival.com](http://texasbutterflyfestival.com)

have declined by roughly 80 percent over the past few decades due to factors including habitat loss and the widespread use of herbicides that eradicate milkweeds, the only plants on which monarchs lay eggs and their larvae feed. While milkweeds remain crucial to the species' survival, the availability of nectar-producing plants in the fall determines whether the super generation can survive long enough to fly to its wintering grounds and return to lay eggs in the spring. "It's a concern, and it has the public's attention," says Mike Quinn, an entomologist and director of Texas Monarch Watch.

To catch the coastal monarch wave, he says, timing is key. Quinn suggests tracking recent sightings via the Journey North website at [maps.journeynorth.org](http://maps.journeynorth.org) or signing up for email notifications from Monarch Watch, a national organization. "The monarchs will cluster near the water's edge and on points of land that jut southward," he says. Coastal national wildlife refuges such as Anahuac, Aransas, Laguna Atascosa, and McFaddin, and coastal state parks such as Goose Island are good bets, as is the Lower Colorado River Authority's Matagorda Bay Nature Park. Depending upon the weather and food availability, the monarchs may stay for several days or vanish that morning.

November in Texas brings sublime camping weather and bay fishing, so a hop down to the coast to send off the monarch (which is, after all, the official state insect) seems like hitting the trifecta. "It may not have the sheer numbers of the central flyway migration," Quinn says. "Still, it can be spectacular." 



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# Come and Take It In

Texas history and pride combine in Gonzales

By Michael Corcoran

**W**hen you're known as "the birthplace of Texas freedom," you have a lot to live up to. Gonzales doesn't disappoint, celebrating its past like Austin does its live music scene. This town of 7,628 has the only state-designated Texas History Museum District, plus there's a Pioneer Village of cabins, blacksmith shops, a barn, a church, and a smokehouse that embodies the 1800s. A few miles outside of town, a monument marks the site of the battlefield where the first shots of the Texas Revolution were fired in 1835. The actual cannon is on display at the Gonzales Memorial Museum; flags depicting it with the defiant "Come and Take It!" slogan, which taunted Mexican troops, are omnipresent reminders that Gonzales might as well be nicknamed the "Live Texas History Capital of the World."

"It's stuck in time," says Suzanne Kittel, who moved to Gonzales from Austin in 1997 to fix up an old house and found the slow pace to her liking. That her prominent antiques store is called Discovery, not Nostalgia, underlines an exploratory Gonzales mindset.

Gonzales is Paris in the '20s for Texas history buffs. But with its beautiful old buildings and neighborhoods of Victorian houses, Gonzales is also charming to those who didn't drive two hours for a history lesson—it can also be a place to make some history of your own.



**Austin**  
1.25 hours

**San Antonio**  
1.25 hours

**Houston**  
2.5 hours

**Dallas**  
4 hours



## Friday

**4 P.M.**  
**Downtown Digs**

If Gonzales native and supermodel Jerry Hall brings hubby Rupert Murdoch to visit her hometown, there are two wonderful downtown hotels to choose from: the 1926 Alcalde Hotel (where Bonnie and Clyde once hid out from authorities and Elvis Presley from teenyboppers) and the 14-room Dilworth Inn, which opened in 2015 in a former bank overlooking one of Gonzales' two town squares. With a desk in every room, the Dilworth feels like a writer's hotel, especially in its three windowless interior rooms.



**5:30 P.M.**  
**Taste of Gonzales**

Although it's home to one of Tyson Foods' Texas headquarters, which employs about 100 at its chicken feed mill and hatchery, Gonzales doesn't have a signature fried-chicken joint. But you will find delicious, cheap Tex-Mex at Matamoros Taco Hut, where every good dish starts with giant homemade tortillas.



**7 P.M.**  
**Let's Go to the Picture Show**

That the past is the present in this county seat is evident at the 1947-built Lynn Theater, which reopened in 2012. The theater shows first-run films using the same digital projectors as big-city multiplexes. But after watching the latest blockbuster here, you step out into a town square dedicated more than 100 years ago, not a mall parking lot.

# Saturday



**9 A.M.**  
**Living History**

The best way to begin a day in G-Town (no one calls it that, lesson No. 1), is to go straight to jail. Seriously. The Visitors Center is at the old county jailhouse, built in 1885-87 by noted architect Eugene T. Heiner. There, you can pick up two guides: One details three walking tours, with information on each building, while the other is a driving tour that takes in residential



**STAY**



**EAT & DRINK**



**SHOP**



**EXPLORE**

Annual Holly Jolly Weekend (first weekend of December)

# Sugar Plum Market

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wonders. Even if you're guided by apps and don't need no stinking brochures, the hauntingly restored, 18-cell Gonzales County Jail Museum is a must. Every aspect of vintage imprisonment is on display, from early fingerprinting and facial ID stations to some of the confiscated "shanks" and other weapons of yesteryear. Farmer-turned-folk-hero Gregorio Cortez is the jail's most famous former resident (1901), but it's the unknown inmates who carved their names into every inch of the cellblock walls that are especially intriguing. Mind yourself, or they'll lock you in the dungeon! Just kidding; that's part of the fun.

**NOON**  
**Where's the Beef?**

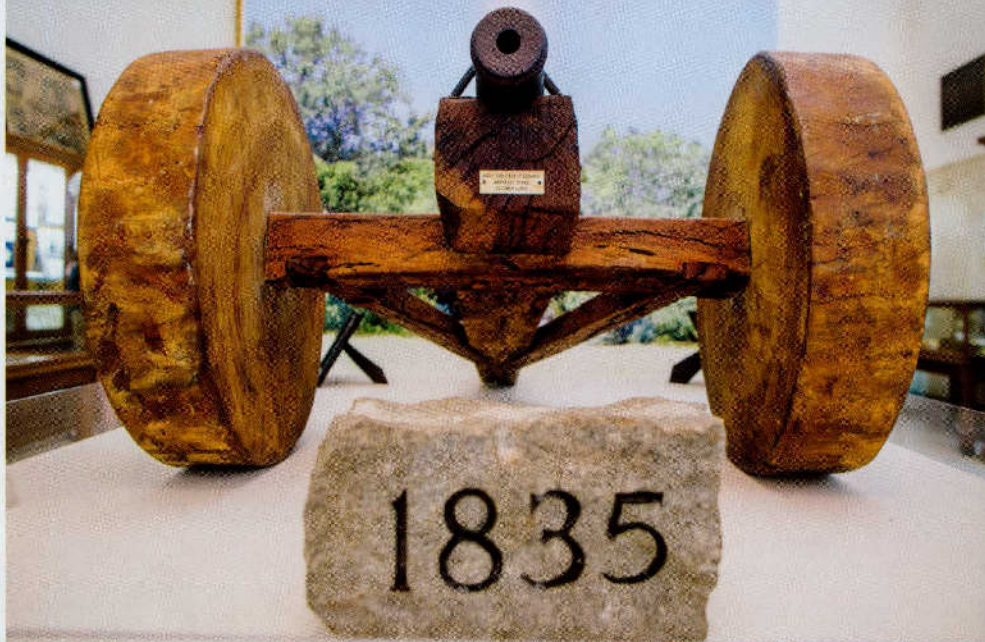
At the Cow Palace diner, you can have a good cheeseburger while listening to the mooing of next month's menu. On Saturdays, the adjoining Gonzales Livestock Market auctions off cows and other farm animals. It's a scene right out of an old cowboy movie, which adds to the diner's old-timey feel. The best burgers in town are at Guerra's Grill, whose walls are covered with framed family portraits, but the Palace is a pure Texas hoot.

**2 P.M.**  
**Treasure Hunting**

As the "most historic community" in Texas, Gonzales is a natural for antiques stores, which range from the well-curated "architectural antiques" of Discovery, to the delightful, dusty clutter of Emporium, where you have to

**CAMP OUT**

**Lake Wood Recreation Area**—488 acres on the shores of Lake Wood and the Guadalupe River—offers 16 multiuse sites with full hookups, 16 tent sites, and 5 acres for primitive camping. 830-672-2779; [gbra.org/lakewood](http://gbra.org/lakewood)



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** The cannon that fired the first shots of the Texas Revolution in 1835 is on display at the Gonzales Memorial Museum; former inmates carved into cell block walls at the old county jailhouse; downtown's historic architecture comes to life with colorful murals; Discovery's Suzanne Kittel fills her shop with gems.



dig for your treasures. Occupying four adjacent buildings, Discovery salvages longleaf pine lumber, stained-glass windows, ornate doorknobs and hinges, and especially doors from the late 1800s. It's like a museum where you can buy what's on display. Angels & Outlaws, a "highway gypsy chic" boutique, sells a more approachable collection of ponchos, Native American-inspired jewelry, and the like.



7 P.M.

### Down-Home Date Night

The Running M Bar & Grill gives downtown a date-night component you won't find in many towns this size. Featuring overachieving pub grub and live music out back, it's rivaled only by the more raucous Come and Take It Bar & Grill as Gonzo's hottest Saturday nightspot.

## Sunday



10 A.M.

### Building Blocks

Although Gonzales was founded in 1825, Sam Houston ordered the townspeople to burn it down during the Texas Revolution of 1836, lest it be used as a base for oncoming Mexican troops. The town was spectacularly rebuilt in the late 1800s by noted architects, including J. Riely Gordon, who designed the Gonzales County Courthouse, and San Antonio's Atlee Ayres. But if you'd rather explore the great outdoors, head 10 miles northwest to Palmetto State Park for hiking, fishing, and canoeing on the San Marcos River. With dwarf palmettos lining the boardwalk trails, there's no more tropical-looking place in Texas. **L**

Visitor Center, Chamber of Commerce & Agriculture, 414 Saint Lawrence St. 830-672-6532 or 888-672-1095; gonzaletx.travel

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## Big Spring's Comanche Trail Festival of Lights



*"...1,250,000 lights and then we stopped counting"*

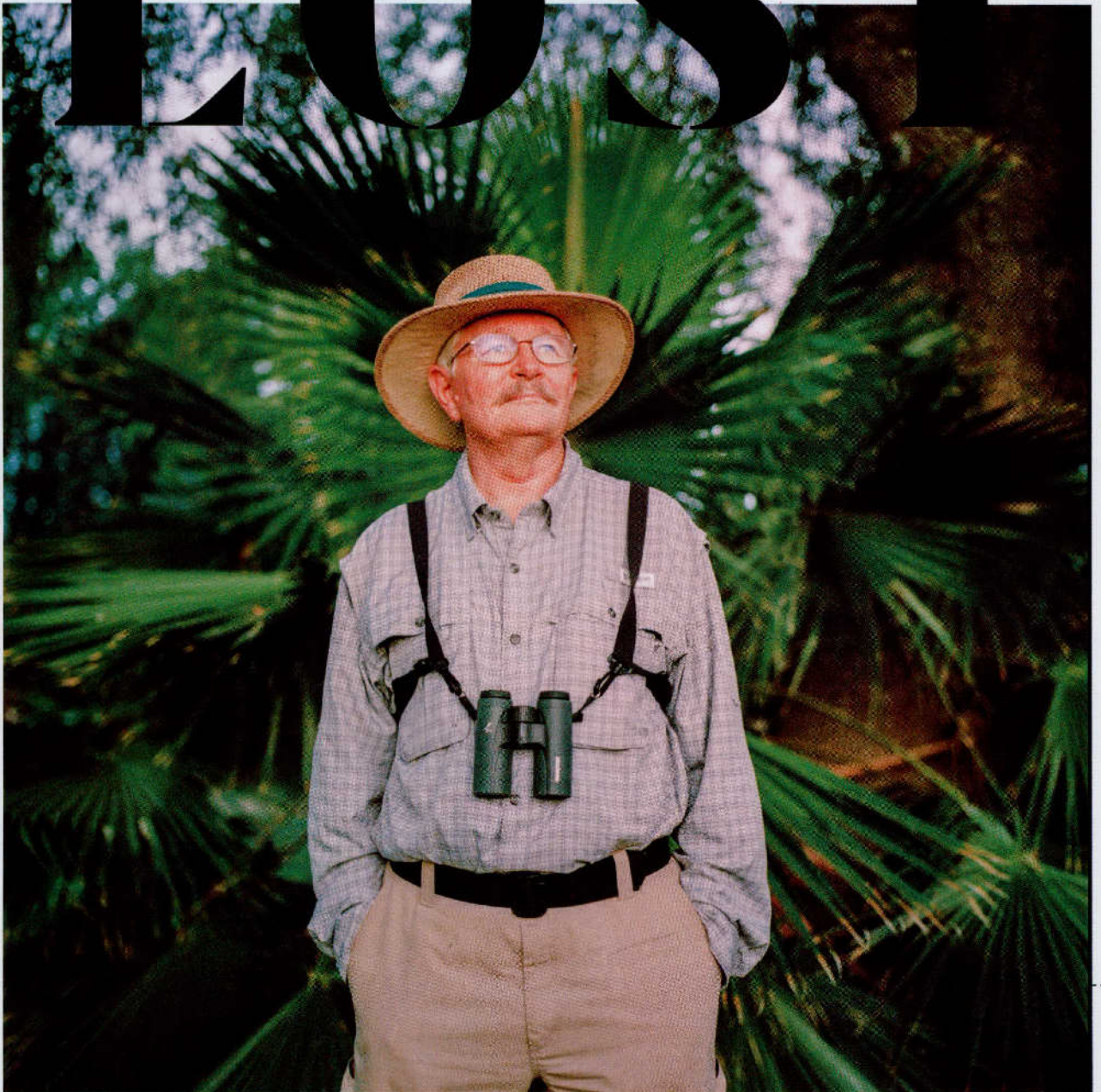
**First Sunday in December thru  
December 25th**



[www.visitbigspring.com](http://www.visitbigspring.com)

An unplugged travel challenge through the Rio Grande Valley  
leads to unexpected detours and rewards

# LOST







# IN THE VALLEY

BY CLAYTON MAXWELL  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY KENNY BRAUN



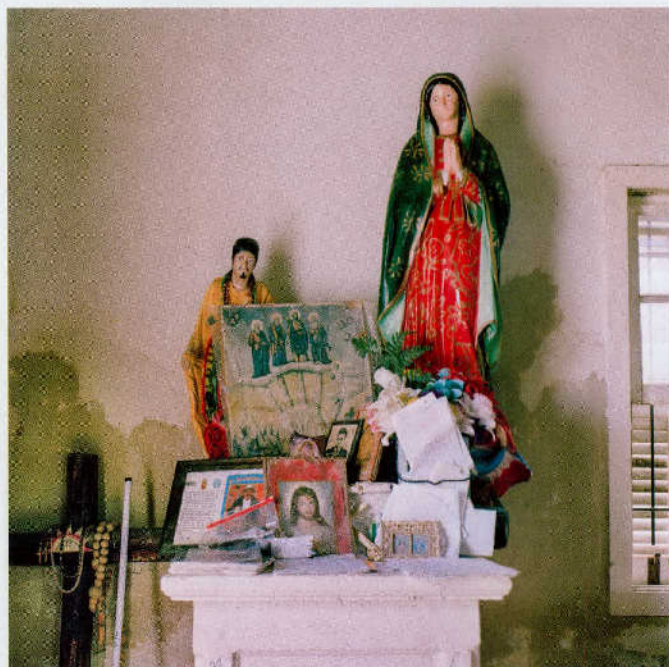
# WE ARE LOST.

After U-turns on the edges of grapefruit groves, repeated pull-overs to study our Rio Grande Valley street guide, and a precarious three-point turn on the narrow levee road where a border patrol truck blocks our path, we are *really* lost. Like so many wanderers before us, we are searching for La Lomita Mission, which a local history buff named Frank told me about at an Edinburg bar the night before. “Just travel the Old Military Highway that goes along the Rio Grande,” Frank said. What Frank didn’t say was that Military Highway, much like the river it runs along, is a trickster that stops, starts, and twists in unexpected ways.

But “unexpected ways” is what this four-day road trip through the Valley is all about. I’ve powered off my iPhone, forgoing the comforts of GPS for that old-school wonder, the paper map. A tech-free road trip feels radical when most of the cartographic knowledge you’ve had for about the last eight years has been contained on a 3-by-5-inch phone screen. What would it be like to get to know the Rio Grande Valley—a place I’d never been—the old-fashioned way: by talking with real people and unfolding a map? Social media, web searches, and GPS can only take you so far—the best part of the story is often the one you get from that guy who happens to be sitting next to you at the bar.

Which, I admit, is why we are lost. Frank, the friendly history lover I met at Edinburg’s Cubby Hole bar, gave vague directions, and now my fingers are itching to dig out my cast-off phone from the bottom of my purse. Frank had told me about Father Pierre Kéralum, the most esteemed of the roaming French Oblate missionaries of the mid-1800s who traveled on horseback to communities along the Rio Grande to baptize, wed, and preach. In 1872, however, Kéralum set off on the cattle trails to minister to the many Catholic ranch hands who worked this wild land. He vanished, and his dry bones were found 10 years later, still clutching his religious relics. Sometimes getting lost is perilous business.

But unlike Father Kéralum—and many other souls who’ve lost their way in this valley—I’m wandering under low-risk conditions. I’ve got an air-conditioned car, plenty of water, and most importantly, my co-pilot Kenny Braun, a photographer who can do handy things like judge direction by the



**OPENING SPREAD:** Keith Hackland of the Alamo Inn and the main street in downtown Weslaco. **THIS SPREAD,** FROM LEFT: Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge in Hidalgo County; shrine at La Lomita Mission Chapel; La Lomita Mission Chapel.

way the clouds are moving. Kenny, also stripped of his usual digital conveniences, is shooting this trip with film. Relying on his old Hasselblad and Holga film cameras means he’s extra-tuned in to the sky and light, useful when trying to find your way. It also helps to have two pairs of eyes—one to read the map and the other to spot things on the road, like the barely visible sign we just passed that says “La Lomita Mission Park.”

We found it! But as we pull into this unassuming park, doubt creeps in. I don’t see a mission like the grand ones I’ve visited in San Antonio and Goliad but rather a one-room white adobe chapel. When I step out of the car to investigate, I’m hit with a smell so sweet and familiar I get a



**A tech-free road trip feels radical when most of the cartographic knowledge you've had for the last eight years has been contained on a 3-by-5-inch phone screen.**

rush. Summer rain. Fresh, reviving, summer rain. The clouds Kenny had been reading to steer us here have opened and are bathing the Valley in raindrops. We run for cover up a small hill, or *lomita*, and into the open door of the chapel. Dozens of lit candles, animated and flickering from the breeze of the rain shower, welcome us. We've found it—a sacred space tucked away in *El Valle*—pilgrim's gold.

We are the only ones here. Yet, because of the spiral notebooks stacked on a side altar overflowing with people's prayers and wishes, I don't feel alone. While the rain softly thrums on the chapel roof, I pore through the many handwritten messages—a girl tells her grandmother how she misses her, a man asks for peace for our country, and a mother prays for health and happiness for her children—all notes that I could have written, too.

Once the rain stops, I examine the historical markers outside. They explain that the original adobe chapel dates to 1865, and this little park, where devotees still gather yearly to honor Father Kéralum, was built for the 1976 U.S. bicentennial to preserve the area's history “for future generations,” it says, “lest we forget our humble beginnings.” Remembering our humble beginnings—now that's something worth musing upon in a chapel on a hill in the middle of the Rio Grande Valley.

I also very much want to muse upon tacos. A fellow writer and McAllen resident, Daniel Blue Tyx, had told me about Rex Café & Bakery, a classic eatery that opened in 1947 and won't pop up on TripAdvisor. “Go early on a weekend morning,” he said. “It's hopping.” What an understatement. Daniel did not mention that Victor Chapa, an organist, would be there cranking out *rancheras* and *corridos* at 7:30 a.m., or that this landmark of Latino culture would be so packed that we'd be lucky to find a seat at the counter. But we do, and it is there at the counter over chorizo and egg tacos that I meet Anselmo, a man in his 80s with a thin black mustache who asks me if I am a truck driver. “No, I'm a travel writer,” I say. “A missionary?” Anselmo asks. It must be hard to hear over the buzz of conversation and organ music. “No, I'm a writer from Austin,” I say. “Oh, I love Austin—that's where I turned my life around,” he replies.

Anselmo's ensuing story of redemption is interrupted by El Mambo, a stylish fellow in a fedora who approaches to ask if Kenny—now conspicuously toting his camera gear—would please take a picture of him and his wife. While Kenny sets up his tripod at their table, El Mambo says to me, “This is good, you



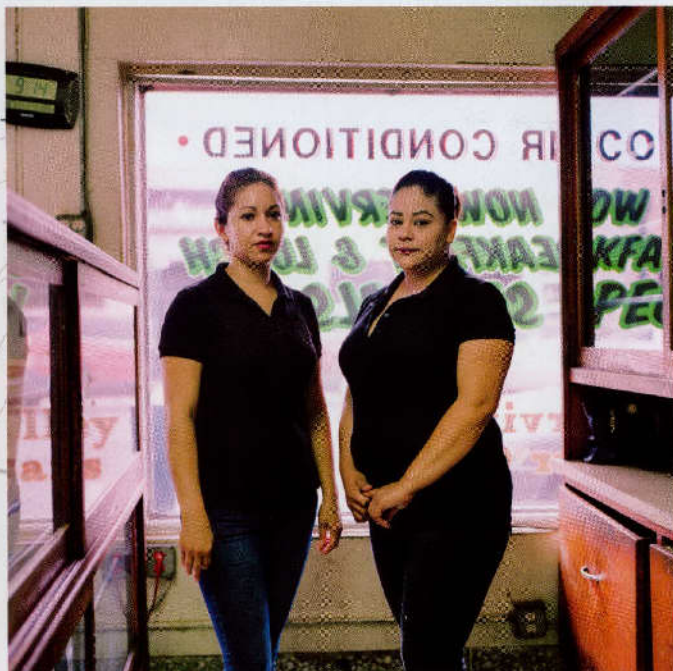
CLOCKWISE, FROM LEFT: Rosaries at Hierberia Crystal in McAllen; waitresses at Rex Café & Bakery; El Rey Theater in McAllen; “El Mambo,” a patron at the Rex Café; the Echo Hotel and Conference Center in Edinburg.

coming here. Not many outsiders know *El Valle*. This is how we can understand each other. *Somos familia*,” at which point the organist kicks off into one of my favorite songs, “De Colores.”

I'm giddy from so much kinship—and good coffee—and it's not even 10 a.m. yet. And though the genuine bonhomie here makes me want to linger, Kenny and I say our farewells. We want to make the big *pulga*, or flea market, in Alamo before it gets too crowded. As we head for the door, Anselmo stops me to say, “You know, I want to tell you, my wife died two years ago. We were together 53 years. I still miss her very much.” My heart cracks a little. The grieving, the hopeful, the friendly guys in fedoras—they all come for breakfast and camaraderie at Rex. No surprise, it's far more satisfying than checking my Facebook page.

We never make it to the *pulga* in Alamo. Instead we end up in Hierberia Crystal, a shop across from Rex that sells candles, incense, and other mystical goodies, where we meet Pablo, a spiritual healer from Zacatecas, Mexico. Pablo, with

**Call it slow travel. Call it digital detox.  
People pay to go to “black hole” resorts  
where they must turn in their cell phones.**



his wry grin, is worth missing the flea market for. Thirty minutes and 40 tarot cards later, I am fortified with a fresh arsenal of self-knowledge—for example, according to Pablo, I have a tall angel with high cheekbones looking after me. (Hello, Grandmother!)

Thanks to the folks we've met so far along the way, we've found our groove, which soon takes us to the Echo Hotel and Conference Center in Edinburg, a formerly grand '50s-era time capsule that gives you coupons for their \$1 breakfast and a free drink at the bar. In hopes of using the latter one night, we follow the thumping merengue beats to the bar, appropriately named the Tropicana Lounge.

As soon as we pay our \$5 cover we are immersed in a fascinating Friday night world unfamiliar to me, where mustachioed men in black cowboy hats move ladies in short, sequined dresses across the floor, and the Tejano accordion players make their own kind of magic out of polka riffs. As we sit at the bar marveling at the music and dancers and talking to a Minnesota truck driver in town to pick up a load of Mexican watermelons, I have the sensation that, even though I am still in the state where I've lived my whole life, I am visiting a very different, very friendly country—one I really like.

But our tech-free days in the Rio Grande Valley aren't always such an easy flow of human connection. I face moments

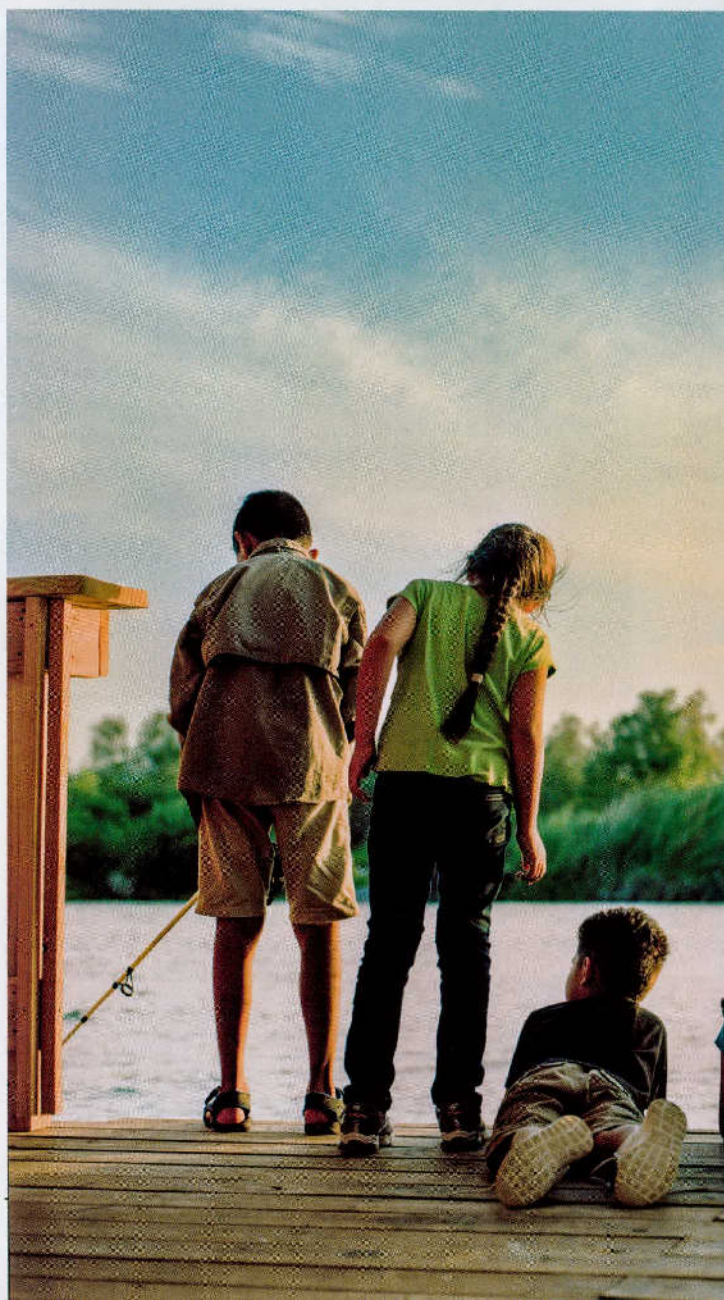
of traveler's *weltschmerz*—the German compound word for “world weariness.” Every so often we walk empty streets seeking a sign of life—or a fresh lime margarita—and find nothing. Hints of *weltschmerz* kick in when driving up and down highways 83 and 281, long stretches of strip malls and big box stores. Kenny reminds me that the groundbreaking 1970s photographer William Eggleston once said that you could take a good picture of anything. I wonder if even Eggleston would find inspiration at the chain restaurants on the 83 feeder road.

For a minute there, a smidge of *weltschmerz* hangs over our dinner at the Riverside Club on the Rio Grande in Mission. It's hot, and a pontoon boat, The Riverside Dreamer, sits deserted at the dock below. Even the kids fishing off the pier come up empty-handed. But suddenly a large group of locals appears and boards the boat, a captain yells “all aboard!” and The Riverside Dreamer is chugging down the Rio Grande as the evening sun sets the scene aglow. A microsecond later, screams of glee fill the air. The kids have caught two catfish at the same time. Kenny grabs the Hasselblad. “See, if you wait long enough,” he says, “something always happens.”

He's right. A walk down the palm-lined but empty main street of Weslaco finds us soon in the midst of a hopping art opening at the Weslaco Museum, where I meet Gabriel Salazar, a petite, smiling artist who is known for his sweeping landscape paintings of the lush Rio Grande Valley. Cheerful ladies hand us punch and remind me to wear more sunscreen. And, happily, the very smart museum director, Sara Walker, a Boston native, tells us where to find the best fresh lime margarita in the area—Arturo's, a restaurant off the expressway in Weslaco we would visit more than once.

In all of these adventures, Kenny and I are pretty much the lone visitors from northern lands. As far as I can tell, there are no other tourists dancing at the Tropicana, eating tacos at Rex, or getting their cards read by Pablo. There is however, one very big exception: the thousands of people from across the globe who fly in each year, binoculars in tow. Birders.

“This is the best birding in the country,” says Mary Beth Stowe, Alamo Inn's veteran birding guide, a former Californian who moved here for the birds and affordable lifestyle. Mary Beth is showing us our suites at the inn, a bird-centric lodging that invites you into an unfamiliar world where people rise before dawn, carry spotting scopes, and tuck their pant legs into their socks to avoid bug bites. The inn is owned by Keith Hackland, a naturalist, birder, and native of South Africa who did a year abroad here as a high school student in the 1960s. Thirty years later and single, without the aid of social media, Keith tracked down his former high school sweetheart, a third-generation Valley resident named Audrey. Now married, Keith and Audrey are key players in the birding and community life of the “Republic of the Rio Grande;” they also have a very outspoken pet goose named Guardian who protects the



LEFT: Mary Beth Stowe, Alamo Inn birding guide at the Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge.  
BELOW: Kids fishing on a dock at the Riverside Club in Mission on the Rio Grande.

## Los Fiestas del Valle

**Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival**, NOVEMBER, HARLINGEN  
Birders flock to the center of the RGV for guided field trips, educational seminars, and social events. [rgvbf.org](http://rgvbf.org)

**Charro Days Fiesta**  
FEBRUARY-MARCH, BROWNSVILLE  
The biggest celebration in the Valley brings together the sister-cities of Brownsville and Matamoros, Mexico, to celebrate the border's distinct bicultural heritage. [charrodaysfiesta.com](http://charrodaysfiesta.com)

**Fiesta de Palmas**  
SEPTEMBER, MCALLEN  
The annual folklife festival celebrates the city's blended international culture with live music, dance performances, diverse cuisine, and cultural activities. [palmfest.com](http://palmfest.com)

inn—and thankfully doesn't honk at night.

Before dawn one morning, Mary Beth takes Kenny and me on a birding tour of the nearby Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge. Looking through her scope at a yellow-crowned night heron, I see his orange eyes and the long white plumes of his crown with such sharp clarity it's as if I were sitting on the branch next to him. Mary Beth, who birds by ear more than sight, recites the names as she hears them: Altamira orioles, great kiskadees, green jay. By the end of our outing, we've spotted 60 different species—amazing to me but a meager showing, Mary Beth reports, compared to other times of year.

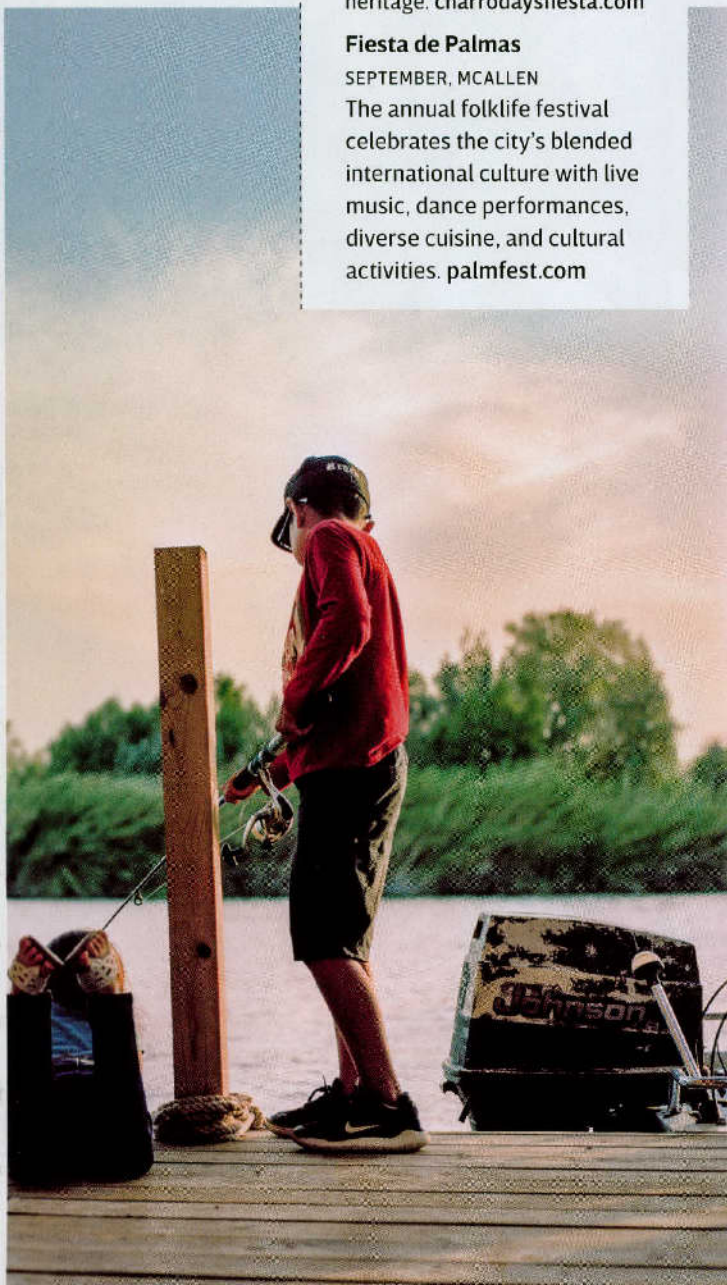
As we head for the woods in search of chachalacas, the goofy chicken-like cackler ubiquitous in the RGV, Mary Beth receives a rare-bird alert from her birding app. An elusive Mexican violetear hummingbird has just been spotted at the Quinta Mazatlan nature center in McAllen. Mary Beth, in her 51 years of birding, has never seen a Mexican violetear—this is a “life bird” for her. We take off in hot pursuit. When we arrive at the bougainvillea-draped grounds of Quinta Mazatlan—a former private estate turned nature preserve—a few birders are clustered around a patch of trees. The violetear—a 4.5-inch sparkly green and blue-hued marvel—has vanished, and they are awaiting its return. Mary Beth and I also sit down and wait.


Suddenly, the little critter buzzes up, and the group of waiting birders erupts into a flurry of gasps, gestures, and pointed cameras. Sharing telescopes and binoculars, we all get a solid look at the violetear; we high-five each other, some hug; a few tears are shed. To witness a group of people so genuinely happy about this small creature is an antidote to all of the *weltschmerz* of the world, at least for that moment.

Sometimes you have to sit and wait and see what happens. Other times you might need to respond to a rare-bird alert. These birders have it right—the apps and devices can enhance the experience, but not if they dominate it. Because if you're too absorbed in your gadgets, you'll definitely miss the Mexican violetear—which, I must say, is a high I'll never forget, especially the way it scratched its purple ear floof with its foot. Who knew a hummingbird could scratch its own ear?

Call it slow travel. Call it digital detox. People pay to go to “black hole” resorts where they must turn in their cell phones. Kenny and I just drove down to the Valley, got unplugged, and got lost, connecting with some real characters along the way and with each other. The go-with-the-flow road map approach is much better when good company's along for the ride. As the birders' high-fives at Quinta Mazatlan attest, the thrill is diminished if it's yours alone. To find a tiny candle-lit church in the middle of nowhere during a summer rain shower is cool, but it's far cooler if a friend helped you find it.

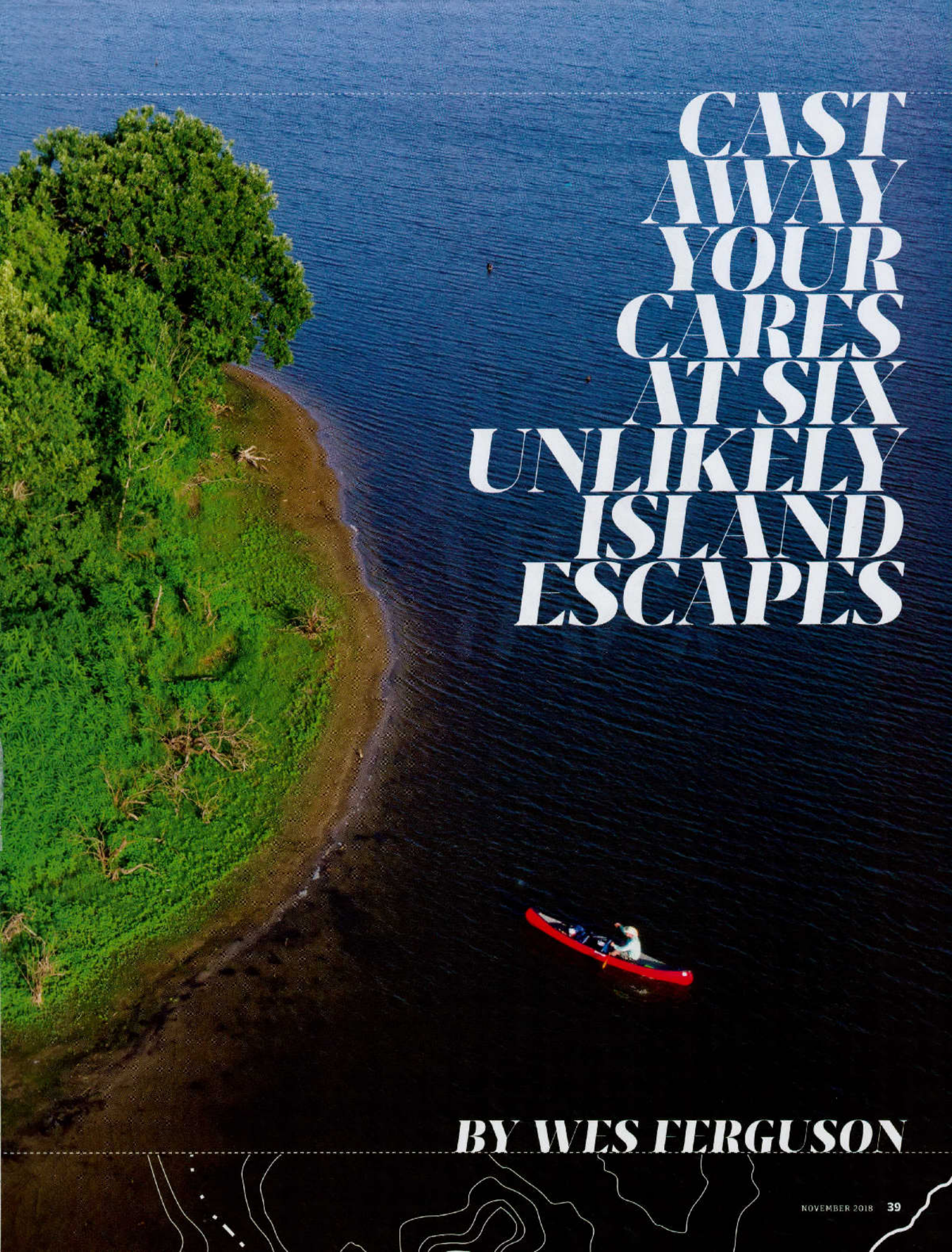
I'll admit, I was happy to turn my phone back on for the drive home. But, unlike just a few days prior, I didn't feel like I needed it anymore. **L**



An aerial photograph of a body of water, likely a lake or reservoir, with a small island in the center. The island is covered in lush green vegetation and features a prominent, dead, bleached tree. The water is a deep blue color. The top of the image has a white topographic map overlay. The title 'THE ISLES OF TEXAS' is printed in large, white, serif capital letters across the middle of the image.

# THE ISLES OF TEXAS



An aerial photograph of a small, lush green island with a sandy beach. A person is paddling a red kayak on the dark blue water in the lower right. The background is a vast expanse of blue water. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

# CAST AWAY YOUR CARES AT SIX UNLIKELY ISLAND ESCAPES

**BY WES FERGUSON**

# NO ONE LIVED ON THE ISLAND. AS FAR AS WE KNEW,

it didn't even have a name—just a spit of green on the choppy waters of a Piney Woods lake. Even still, it beckoned. A few friends and I approached by boat and motored through a gap in the hardwoods at the island's edge. Nosing ashore, we gathered fishing poles and camping gear and spilled onto dry ground, over a big fallen log, and into the shadows of the forest.

Mature pines towered above, a blanket of their accumulated straw giving softly underfoot. To widen our path, I hacked at thorny greenbrier with a machete until we came to a small clearing where we stopped to look around. Long-downed limbs would provide ample firewood. Gaps in the forest allowed glimpses of water. There were no signs of other humans. It was perfect.

We'd come to this water-rimmed refuge—on a privately owned reservoir near our East Texas hometown—in lieu of a bachelor party last fall to camp, fish, and indulge the groom's lifelong fascination with islands. Not any island in particular; more the idea of them. In Texas, the barrier isles along the coast deserve most of our attention. It's hard to beat the sandy beaches of South Padre or a night on the town in Galveston. But islands dot inland rivers and lakes, as well. Many are owned by the state of Texas—and, by extension, all of us—awaiting visitors who will seek them out. And most will not.

"It takes a person who is pretty hardy to pack enough gear and want to do it," says Melissa Parker, a river conservationist who



helped establish the state's paddling trail system. Parker's kids aren't so interested in roughing it on islands, though. "The idea of staying out overnight is troublesome to them," she says. "They'd rather have a campground. I think it sounds fun. I just haven't found anyone who shares the idea with me."

No point inviting Bob Spain, a canoe instructor and renowned competitive paddler who is also Parker's retired colleague from the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department. "I suppose I have not paid as much attention to the islands and always looked for the best and fastest channel around them,"

says Spain, who nevertheless documents a few in

his book, *Bob Spain's Canoeing Guide and Favorite Texas Paddling Trails*. In the book, published in April, he zips around a wide island in the Big Thicket and skirts smaller isles on the Guadalupe River near Spring Branch. On Austin's Lady Bird Lake, he passes Snake Island, a green dot shown in photos and online videos to be outfitted by visitors with a picnic table, fire pit, rope swing, and even knitted décor on one of the trees. No sign of the isle's name—sake, though surely they slither just out of sight.

"Islands will always be places we project onto," writes Judith Schalansky, the German author and designer of *Pocket Atlas of Remote Islands*. Their inaccessibility is part of their allure, the crossing over water a literal rite of passage—the more remote, the more deserted, the better. And Texans have options: From my experience, you can pitch a tent on the mud, sand, and weeds of islands in East Texas rivers: string up a hammock between bald cypress trees on a crescent-shaped gravel bar on a Hill Country stream; and lug your gear across the wooden footbridge at Martin Creek Lake State Park near Tatum to spend a night among the pines on an island ringed by a short hiking trail.

Islands also emerge from the flow of Texas history. In 1896, Judge Roy Bean, the rascally saloonkeeper and self-proclaimed "Law West of the Pecos," organized a national prizefight on a sandbar island of the Rio Grande, just beyond the jurisdiction of Texas, which had outlawed professional boxing the year before.

Although sometimes difficult to access, small islands can offer respite on Texas' rivers and lakes. Previous spread: a Lake O' the Pines island.

Upriver, near El Paso, the infamous Hole in the Wall saloon and gambling den once operated in defiance of Prohibition on Cordova Island, inadvertently created when the United States and Mexico rechanneled the flood-prone Rio Grande. And some of San Antonio's oldest families have island roots. Not far from the River Walk in the heart of downtown, Main Plaza was once known as Plaza de las Islas for 56 settlers from the Canary Islands who, in 1731, established the first civil government in Texas.

Those early Texans were escaping famine when they emigrated from the Canary Islands. Last fall, my friends and I were escaping life's demands, if only for a day or two, when we got a big fire going and watched the sun set over our island campsite. A cold front blew in that night, driving us one by one to our hammocks strung among the trees. Early the next morning, we roamed farther onto the island, where the air was cool and still. With such heavy forest canopy blocking the sky, there was hardly any undergrowth to impede us, a rare experience in our part of East Texas.

We came upon the relic of a dirt road hollowed into the hillside by years of use. It had been abandoned when the lake was built several decades ago, if not earlier. Kicking around the pine straw, we turned up some antiquated glass bottles and a few rusted beer cans, the old kind with the flat tops you punched with a church key. Nearby, a hunter had left a deer stand in one of the pines.

No man is an island, the poet John Donne famously wrote. We are, all of us, "a piece of the continent, a part of the main." It occurred to me now that he was right, even here. Others had come before, and more would follow. Searching, they'd find this nameless island, or one like it, and linger for a while in solitude and rest. Before long, they'd realize the main was calling them home.

**IT'S HARD TO BEAT THE SANDY BEACHES OF THE TEXAS COAST, BUT THE ISLANDS DOTTING INLAND WATERS ALSO AWAIT THOSE WHO WILL SEEK THEM OUT.**



## READY FOR AN ISLAND CAMPOUT?

**Not so fast:** It's a little more complicated than scouting a prime spot and declaring, "Water on this side, water on that side, pitch a tent," says Robert Sweeney, the general counsel of the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, who offers his personal opinion as an attorney specializing in real estate, river use, and environmental issues.

**Lake islands** are usually managed by the entity that also manages the lake or reservoir. Some, like the Sabine River Authority, are fine with short-term camping on islands. Others, like the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (administrator of Sam Rayburn, Lake O' the Pines, and Lake Whitney, to name a few) are not. The Corps does allow visitors to access and fish from islands day or night, though. Find out who manages the lake and learn the rules.

**Major rivers**, like the Brazos and Colorado, are generally fair game for island camping. An exception: Islands created when the waterway floods or changes course still belong to the original property owner. If you want to camp, keep an eye out for sandbars and gravel bars that have built up naturally over time.

**Smaller streams** are probably off limits for public camping on islands. "If you have questions," Sweeney says, "consult with the local game warden, the county sheriff, or the Texas General Land Office, and know your rights before you go." Once there, don't litter—and keep an eye on the weather. "If the river comes up or there's a thunderstorm," Sweeney says, "it may turn into a pretty miserable time even if you're ready for it." Or just another day in paradise.

# LAKE O' THE PINES

JARRING INDUSTRIAL SOUNDS OF A NEARBY STEEL PLANT clank and echo across the forest islands that dot the upper reaches of this Army Corps of Engineers reservoir north of Longview and west of Jefferson. Like Caddo Lake downstream, Lake O' the Pines is part of Big Cypress Bayou, a tributary of the Red River. You can stroll, picnic, hunt, and fish from the islands day or night, but the corps does not allow camping on them (instead, opt for well-kept sites on the main shore).

► The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' lake office, at 2669 FM 726 in Jefferson, opens Mon-Fri 8 a.m.-4:45 p.m. 903-665-2336; [swf-wc.usace.army.mil/lakeopines](http://swf-wc.usace.army.mil/lakeopines)





# JAMES RIVER CROSSING

THE SHORT AND WINDING JAMES RIVER meets the larger Llano 8 miles south of Mason. Here, the confluence of these two Hill Country waterways forms a 20-acre gravel island that just so happens to be one of the only spots in Texas where you can legally drive a motor vehicle on a state-owned riverbed. "That's where most people park and hang out," says Michelle Roper, a caretaker for an RV park located on a river bank across from the island. "They swim and kayak and fish. It's pretty peaceful out here." In warmer months, willow trees provide much-needed shade, and in late December, anglers and naturalists gather to celebrate the release of rainbow trout.

► Dos Rios RV Park offers cabins, Airstreams, RV spots, and kayak rentals next to James River Island, where primitive camping is free to the public. 4500 Dos Rios Trail, Mason. 325-347-1713; dosriosrvpark.com.



# GREER ISLAND

IN THE SWELTERING SUMMER OF 1969, Fort Worth grew feverish with rumors of a beastly half-man, half-goat who attacked cars, tossed tires, and generally terrorized the human visitors on this 40-acre island of Lake Worth. More than 100 witnesses claimed to have seen the 7-foot-tall beast, with its “head like a man, ears like a goat, a back like a dragon, one horn, and scales,” *The Associated Press* reported. Men showed up with guns to hunt the creature. The police got involved, too. Nearly half a century later, cars are no longer allowed on Greer Island—which is still connected to the mainland via a levee—but a 1.5-mile hiking trail offers birding, picnics, and leisurely strolls where the monster was said to lurk.

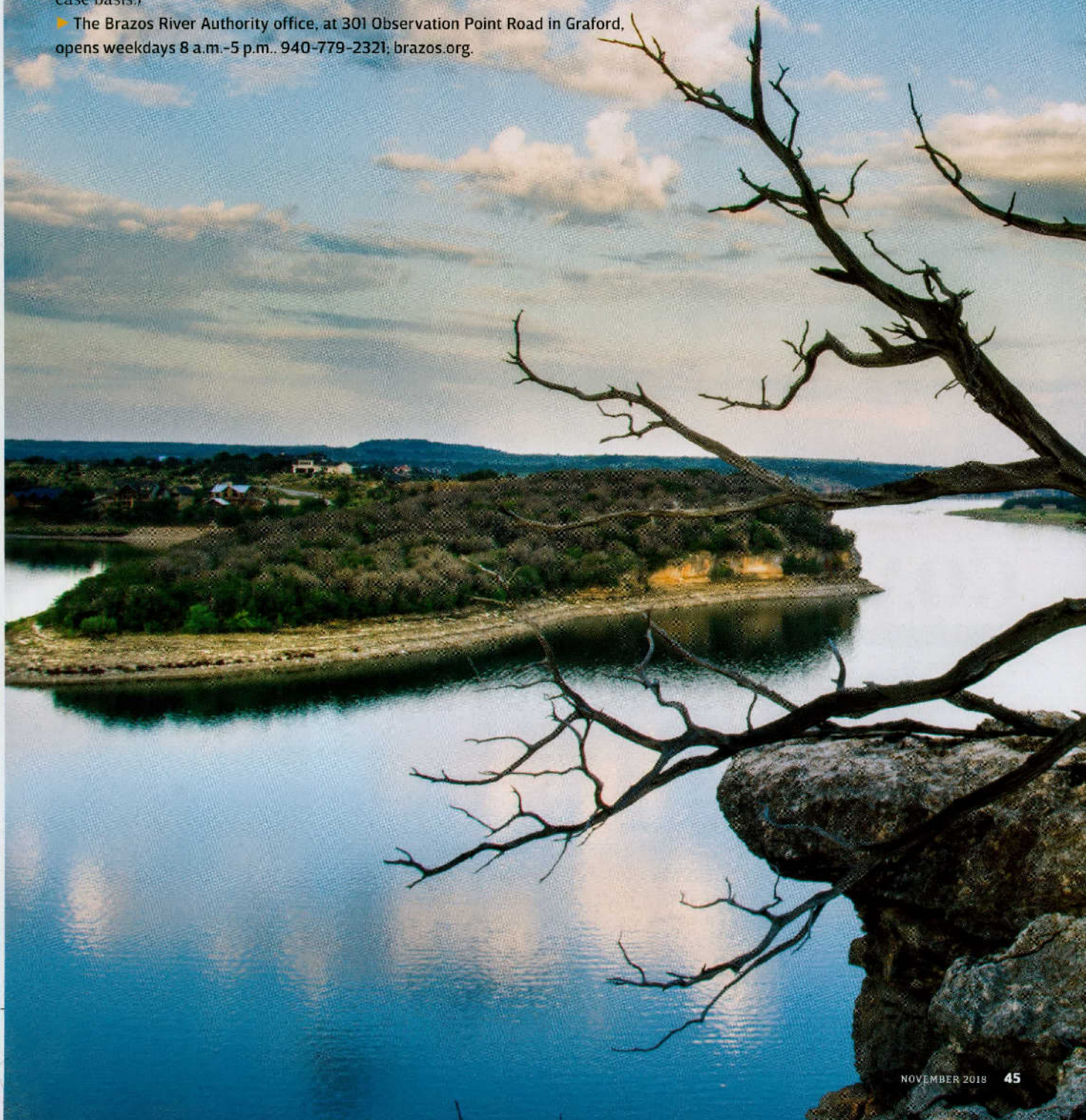
► The Greer Island Trail is part of the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge at 9601 Fossil Ridge Road. 817-392-7410; [fwnaturecenter.org](http://fwnaturecenter.org)



# DEVIL'S ISLAND

**THIS DEVILISHLY ROCKY 7-ACRE OUTCROP** forms one half of Hell's Gate, a famously dramatic break in the cliffs at Possum Kingdom Lake. The damming of the Brazos River cast Devil's Island off the mainland in 1941. While the island's upper elevations are fenced to prevent daredevils from diving from its perilous heights, seekers of divine views may request a gate key from the Brazos River Authority nearby. (Access is granted on a case-by-case basis.)

► The Brazos River Authority office, at 301 Observation Point Road in Graford, opens weekdays 8 a.m.-5 p.m.. 940-779-2321; [brazos.org](http://brazos.org).





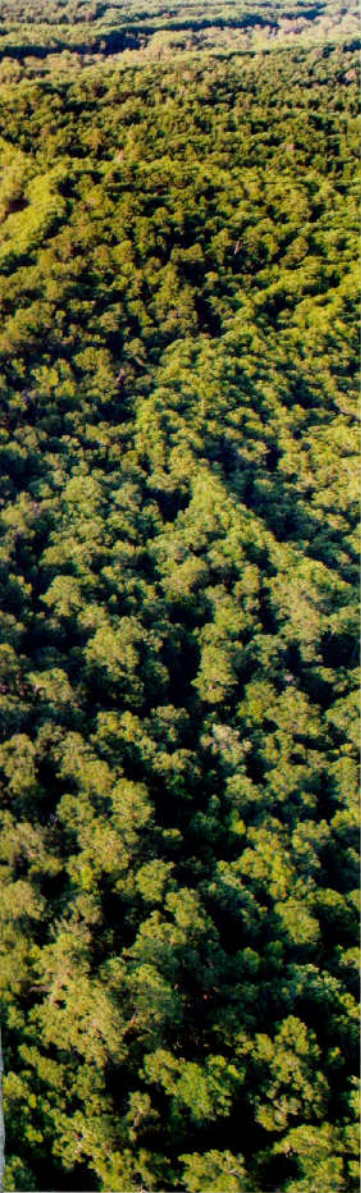
# GOAT ISLAND

THE WORST MENACE AT CADDO LAKE'S GOAT ISLAND ISN'T A GOATMAN—it's an invasive weed called giant salvinia. In recent years, salvinia had grown so thick it blocked paddlers from public campsites on the western edge of the 300-acre island. "The salvinia has given us a reprieve this year," says Vanessa Neace, a biologist for the state wildlife management area that maintains the site. A cold snap last winter killed back the noxious plant, and the release of salvinia-munching weevils took care of much of the rest. Finding Goat Island is still no pleasure cruise, though. "You have to travel through some very thick swamp and find a way to get through the bald cypress knees to get to the island," Neace says. "It seems really far out there, but it's not." Overcup oaks, pines, and farkleberry shrubs shade the island, but don't expect creature comforts like bathrooms or drinking water. "It's primitive," Neace says. "There's nothing but trees. Might be a fire ring here and there. But it's a very beautiful spot."

► To paddle to Goat Island, start from the Caddo Lake Wildlife Management Area boat launch on FR Camp Road, not far from State Highway 43 in Karnack. An annual \$12 permit is required for public use of the wildlife area. 903-679-9817; [tpwd.texas.gov/wma](http://tpwd.texas.gov/wma)







# BASTROP ISLANDS

SEVERAL ISLES OF GRAVEL AND SILT MOUND UP IN THE COLORADO as it flows away from Austin and toward Bastrop. At 9 acres, so-called Boy Scout Island is particularly popular for paddling breaks and overnight campouts. But why the abundance of islands here? Look to the dams in Austin, just upstream. “When you dam up a river, the flow drops,” explains Melissa Parker, a river conservationist for the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department. “The Colorado near Bastrop doesn’t have enough flow to flush the sediment”—the main ingredient in Texas’ river islands.

► River outfitters in Bastrop provide overnight paddle trips with island camping on the Colorado River. Rising Phoenix Adventures Tours and Events, 1409 Chestnut St.; 512-677-2305; risingphoenixadventures.com. Bastrop River Co., 601 Chestnut St., Ste. F; 512-321-4661; bastropriverco.com. 🐾





**Five—**

BY MATT JOYCE

**Peak**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRANDON JAKOBEIT

**Week**

Franklin Mountains State Park



**AN EPIC ROAD TRIP  
TO HIKE THE HEIGHTS OF  
WEST TEXAS**

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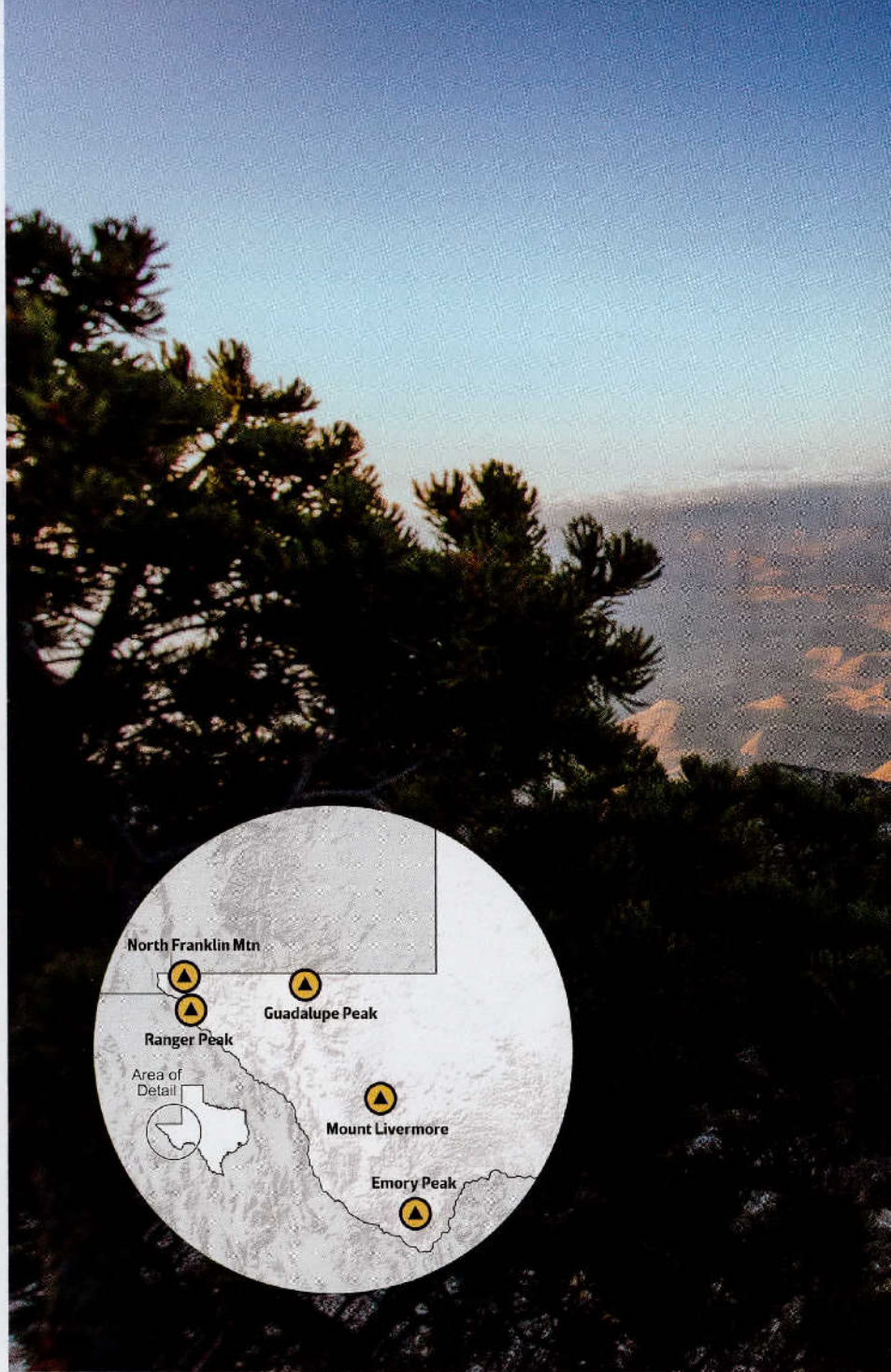
# A mile or two

into my hike to the top of Mount Livermore in the Davis Mountains, I stepped to the side of the trail as two speedsters overtook me on the uphill slope. "I guess that's where we're headed," I said, nodding to a rocky outcrop on the horizon far above. "Nope," one of them responded. "Baldy Peak is beyond that—you can't see it yet."

Ah yes, another false peak. After a week of hiking West Texas trails, my perspective was still acclimating to the vast expanses of mountain wilderness. Even when a goal appeared to be impossibly distant—switchbacks on a far-off hillside like an ant trail; mountain peaks shining like flecks of quartz against marble-blue skies—I'd found a deceptively simple strategy for success: Put one foot in front of the other.

This deliberate approach evolved from a harebrained scheme to hike as many West Texas peaks as possible in one week. Motivated by the arrival of spring and the allure of the mountains, I'd charted a six-day road trip from Austin to summit Guadalupe Peak, North Franklin Peak, Ranger Peak, Emory Peak, and Mount Livermore (capped by Baldy Peak). In between hikes, I aimed to eat well and revel in the spectacular scenery of a Chihuahuan Desert road trip. Anything worth doing is worth overdoing, right?

As the week progressed, however, my frenzied agenda turned into a lesson in slowing down. These mountains had much to teach me, but it wouldn't come easy.



## Guadalupe Peak


As dawn broke over Guadalupe Mountains National Park, clouds blanketed the desert basin to the south and east like a sea swirling in shades of blue and gray. At least that's how it looked

from the top of 8,751-foot Guadalupe Peak. With *Texas Highways* Photo Editor Brandon Jakobeit, I'd logged a day of hard driving and spent the night at a trailside campsite to experience sunrise at the highest point in Texas.

The sun ascending over Hunter Peak to the east, elephantine mountain shadows lumbered across the arid plateaus to the west, and a cascade of ranges brightened toward New Mexico to the north. I signed the mountaintop registry located



## TUESDAY

 *Guadalupe Peak,*  
*Guadalupe Mountains*  
*National Park*  
915-828-3251;  
[nps.gov/gumo](http://nps.gov/gumo)

**Summit:** 8,751 feet

**Elevation Gain:** 2,906  
feet from the Pine  
Springs Trailhead

**Distance Round Trip:**  
8.4 miles

**Memorable Meal:**

A simple post-hike  
sack lunch with a cold  
Gatorade in the shade  
of a piñon pine at the  
Pine Springs Trailhead

in a small metal box, bundled myself against the brisk wind, and snapped photos of El Capitan below.

The 1,000-foot limestone face on the range's southern edge—which the Spanish likened to a captain leading his troops—may be the park's most distinctive feature. But the formation looks completely different from above, like the bottom of a hoof thrust upward by a subterranean beast kicking through the earth's crust.

El Capitan and the peaks, canyons, and

spires of the Guadalupe are remnants of an ancient reef that formed in a long-ago sea. The fossilized reef later uplifted, and over millions of years, thick layers of marine sediment and salts eroded into surrounding basins that are now hotbeds of energy production.

The Guadalupe hover above the desert floor by some 3,000 feet, resulting in a cooler and wetter climate that supports forests of piñon pine, gray oak, and Douglas fir that have survived since the last ice

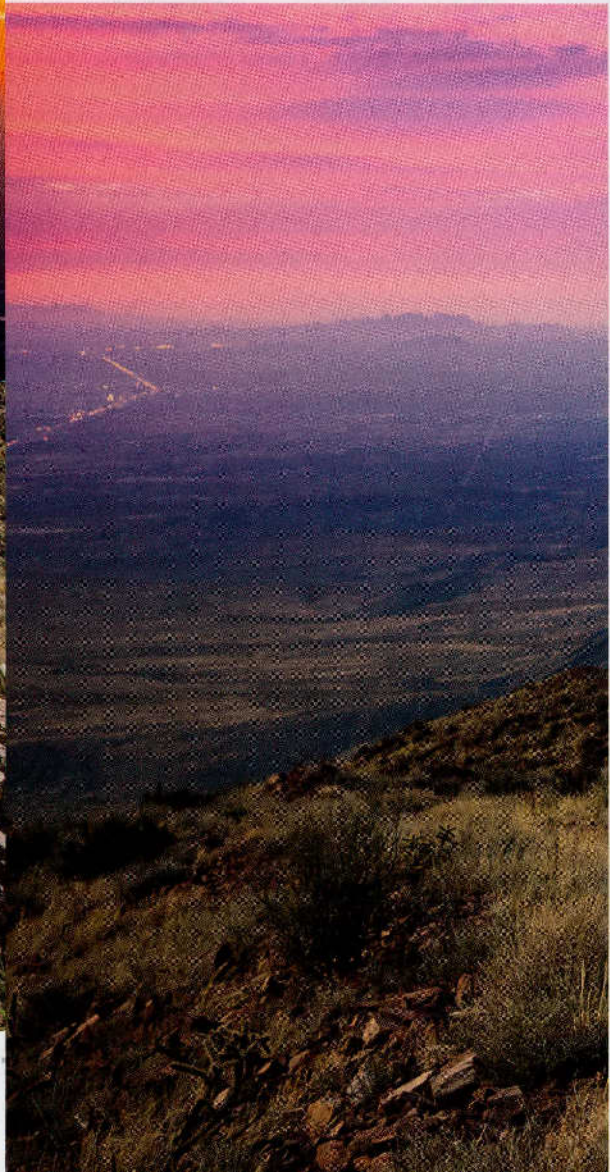
age. We camped at about 8,100 feet in a grassy meadow shaded by pines and firs. But those trees did little to block the wind gusts, which hummed with a crescendo until smacking the tent. Our visit coincided with relatively calm winds: The day before, gusts reached 56 miles per hour, and a few days later, 77 mph.

Such extreme winds would have made summiting Guadalupe Peak impossible. The trip had started with a stroke of good luck.



# North Franklin Peak

After leaving the Guadalupe Mountains and driving to El Paso, Day 3 of the trip started with a morning ride on Franklin Mountains State Park's Wyler Aerial Tramway. The park has since closed the gondola ride to Ranger Peak (elevation 5,632 feet), but a 0.9-mile hike up the Directissimo Trail provides the same close-up look at the range's bands of orangeish igneous



rock and a dazzling overview of El Paso—from sprawling Fort Bliss to the UTEP Sun Bowl, and from the concrete channel of the Rio Grande to the neighborhoods of the Sierra Juarez foothills in Mexico.

Later in the afternoon, we hiked to North Franklin Peak—the highest point in the Franklin Mountains at 7,192 feet—to catch the sunset. Our guide, park Superintendent Cesar Mendez, led us on an 8-mile round trip that partly followed an old dirt road, a remnant of a 1970s effort to develop a mountain resort community.

“The bulldozing of this road created such a conspicuous destruction that it ignited the community in terms of, ‘Hey, we’re going to lose the mountains if we don’t do anything about it,’” Mendez said,

recounting the park’s establishment in 1979. “It was a blessing in disguise. Otherwise, development could have crept up the mountain slowly without anyone noticing until it was too late.”

Most of the trail navigates exposed Chihuahuan Desert hillsides of burnt orange, burgundy, and brown granite and rhyolite rock. We saw Southwestern barrel cactus, a Sonoran Desert species that occurs no farther east than El Paso; the ubiquitous creosote bush, which smells like rainfall when you rub your hand on its leaves; and prickly pear cactus, the “ultimate desert survivor,” as Mendez called it.

We made it to the top of North Franklin in time to watch the setting sun light the evening’s wispy clouds into brilliant

yellow melting across the desert. Mountains on every horizon—including the Sierra Juarez in Mexico and the Organ and Potrillo mountains of New Mexico—faded into darkness as city lights emerged below. On a moonless night, the park’s 40-square-mile block of wilderness looks like a chunk of obsidian crashing through El Paso’s windowpane of twinkling lights.

“Climbing peaks never gets old,” Mendez reflected. “You enjoy the magnificent views, and it makes you feel alive. It’s just something that really boosts not only your body but also your spirit, your mind. You breathe clean air here, and you see how little we are in this world, how little we are in this universe, but how influential we can be also.”

## WEDNESDAY

 Ranger Peak, Franklin Mountains State Park  
915-566-6441;  
tpwd.texas.gov  
**Summit:** 5,632 feet  
**Elevation Gain:**  
940 feet from the Wyler Aerial Tramway parking lot.  
**Distance Round Trip:**  
1.8 miles

 North Franklin Peak, Franklin Mountains State Park  
**Summit:** 7,192 feet  
**Elevation Gain:** 2,142 feet from the Cottonwood Trail System trailhead  
**Distance Round Trip:**  
8 miles  
**Memorable Meal:**  
In El Paso, the L&J Café’s combo enchilada plate with red and green sauces



# Emory Peak

---

**Fifteen minutes** was about all I could stomach at the top of Emory Peak, a craggy ridge towering above Big Bend National Park. Perched at 7,825 feet—the highest point in the Chisos Mountains—my nerves spun at the thought of climbing back down the stack of exposed boulders I had ascended with hands and feet to reach the peak.

But this view merited savoring: the forested Chisos range rolling into the arid Chihuahuan desert; rocky outcrops bulging like sleeping javelinas from the yellow desert floor; the green ribbon of the Rio Grande snaking from a tiny notch in the cliffs of Mesa de Anguilla.

“There is no better viewpoint, day or night,” remarked Raymond Skiles, Big Bend National Park’s wildlife biologist. “It’s inspirational to see how big all of this is, particularly in a wild state.”

On Day 5 of the trip, we met Skiles at the Chisos Basin and hiked the Pinnacle Trail into a forested refuge. Trees are a highlight of this hike—piñon pine, Chisos hophornbean, alligator juniper, aspen, and Texas madrones all persist from the wetter and cooler days of the last ice age. It’s a fragile environment, Skiles said, one that’s strained by the drying and warming of the climate over the past 8,000 years. In 2011, 30 percent of the range’s trees died when a severe freeze coincided with the worst drought on record.

But the natural world is resilient. After being killed off by early settlers, black bears made their way back to the Chisos in the mid-1980s, and in 1988, for the first time in decades, a mother bear had a litter of cubs in the park. We didn’t see any of the park’s population of about 30 bears, but we did see the distinctive track of a mountain lion, another elusive predator.

Skiles, a West Texas native, has been studying Big Bend’s flora and fauna as a


park biologist for 31 years. Early in his career, he worked in parks from California to the East Coast, but as the vista from Emory Peak reinforced, he found his calling in the diversity of the Big Bend.

“We’ve got the river and majestic canyons and open areas, and we’ve got the desert and mountains,” he said. “For a biologist, all those come with their own diversity of species and issues and challenges. So, from both a personal appreciation of the park and a career opportunity that is the furthest thing from boring, I’ve just loved every day out here.”





## FRIDAY

 Emory Peak, Big Bend National Park  
432-477-2251;  
[nps.gov/bibe](http://nps.gov/bibe)

**Summit:** 7,825 feet

**Elevation Gain:**  
2,424 feet from the  
Chisos Basin

**Distance Round Trip:**  
10.5 miles

**Memorable Meal:**  
In Terlingua, a rib-eye  
steak at the Starlight  
Theatre





# Mount Livermore

**On the trip's sixth and final day**, luck struck again: An overnight cold front dropped temperatures and dispersed a dust storm that had been obscuring the Davis Mountains' sun for two days. I'd scheduled the entire week around hiking Mount Livermore—the highest summit in the Davis Mountains—on this particular Saturday because it was one of the occasional dates the Nature Conservancy opens its 33,000-acre Davis Mountains Preserve to the public.

After checking in, we drove 30 slow minutes over a rough road to the trailhead, accompanied only by a few wild turkeys, white-tailed deer, and javelina foraging in the crisp morning light. We strapped on our packs and embarked up the trail to reach the base of the mountain's Baldy Peak, an igneous rock intrusion that rises like a shark's fin.

I eyed my route and scrambled up the final 150 feet of talus slope and exposed ridge without slowing down—I didn't want to allow myself a chance to freak out. From the top, I could see the Chisos Mountains down in Big Bend, a U.S. Customs and Border Patrol surveillance blimp floating like a UFO between Marfa and Valentine, and two sparkling domes on Mount Locke about 9 miles away—telescopes of the McDonald Observatory.


Heading downhill, the trail bore signs of wild life—the distinctive scat of coyotes and ringtail cats—among shards of volcanic rock. I took my time getting to the trailhead, where the car waited for the seven-hour drive back to Austin.

My legs and back were weary from hiking 33 miles in six days, but my mind felt as if I was just getting started. It's like the adage about raising children—the days can last forever but the years fly by. Hiking methodically up and down these mountains, I had begun to appreciate the imperceptible changes of the landscape over time—sediment gradually eroding to reveal a sheer cliff; lichen growing across bone-dry rock; the sun drifting from one horizon to the other.

Now it was time to speed back home. I wouldn't soon forget the rewards of my five-peak week, though—not hurtling from park to park or topping mountains, but the moments of reflection and discovery that emerged from walking for miles as the trail unfolded before me. No peak was impossibly distant, not if hiked step by step.



## SATURDAY

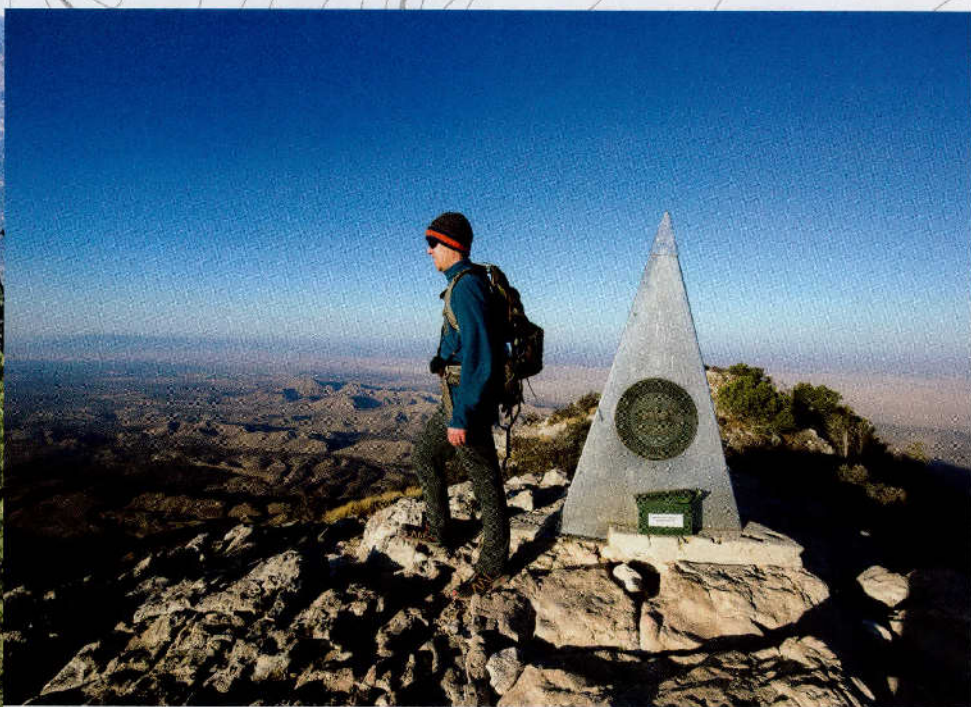
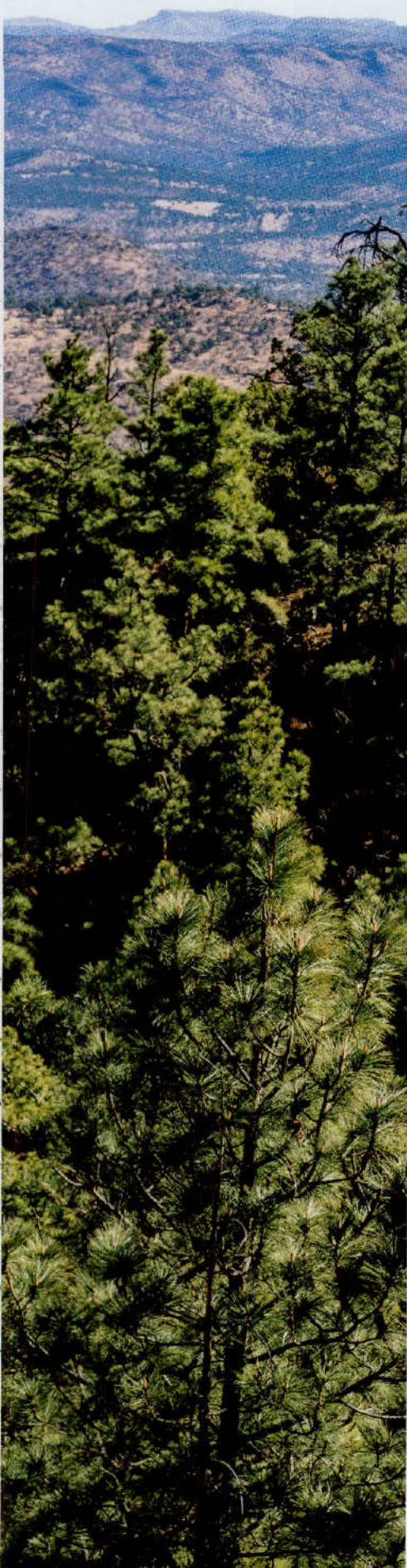
 **Mount Livermore, Davis Mountains Preserve**  
The preserve opens to the public about seven days per year. The drive to the trailhead requires a high-clearance vehicle. 432-426-2390; nature.org

**Summit:** 8,378 feet

**Elevation Gain:**  
1,800 feet from Madera Canyon Road

**Distance Round Trip:**  
6.2 miles

**Memorable Meals:**  
In Fort Davis, breakfast tacos and coffee at the Stone Village Market; a cheeseburger at the Blue Mountain Bistro



## Weathering Heights

Mountain peaks and dizzying heights go hand in hand. I had a hard time shaking this worry from my mind as I planned a trip to summit some of West Texas' tallest mountains.

I knew these hikes wouldn't involve any technical climbing with ropes and equipment, but nevertheless, I've been a chicken about heights for as long as I can remember. As a kid, I crawled across an elevated deck inside Battleship Texas, petrified by the downward view through levels of grated floors. As a teen at summer camp on Inks Lake, I tried to hide in the back of the line as my cabin mates took turns rappelling down a 40-foot wall. More recently, at the Perot Museum of Nature and Science in Dallas, my children giggled with curiosity when I swayed with unease on a grated

floor revealing a five-story drop below.

Before departing for my trip, I called Michael Telch, a University of Texas professor of psychology and psychiatry, to try to better understand the anxiety toying with my psyche when heights are at play. Telch, who founded UT's Laboratory for the Study of Anxiety Disorders, explained that people with phobias perceive a threat in an exaggerated way, causing a false-alarm panic that mobilizes our instinctual fight or flight reactions—the heart rate jumps, blood courses to the organs, respiration quickens, muscles tense.

But, Telch noted, "People with a clinical fear of heights don't usually go on major hikes."

It was a simple point that gave me pause. I knew I would be encountering heights, but I wanted to go anyway—evidence that my fear of heights is manageable.

The reality of scary heights hit twice during the

trip: when scrambling up a steep stack of boulders to reach the top of Emory Peak in Big Bend National Park, and when navigating a slippery talus slope and steep ledges to get to the top of Mount Livermore in the Davis Mountains. Both scrambles required stretching my legs and arms to reach crevices and ledges in the rock—within a few feet of thousand-foot precipices.

In both cases I felt plenty of nerves, but they were outweighed by the sense of accomplishment I felt when I made it back down safely.

"This is exactly what we do in treatment; we have people do things like this to overcome their fears," Telch said. "So you might find that your experience of this trip will actually reduce your phobia of heights even more."

I think it worked. And I feel reasonably confident I could do it again. Not sure about those see-through floors, though. **L**



A



E



B



C



D



F



G

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# PLATES



**AT SANDY OAKS  
OLIVE ORCHARD IN  
ELMENDORF**, olives  
marinated in vinegar,  
herbs, and spices  
anchor the antipasto tray.



**THE SETTING AT SANDY OAKS** Olive Orchard, with room for horses and cattle to roam, recalls owner Sandra Winokur's childhood in Texas.

# Branching Out

Near San Antonio, a Mediterranean staple flourishes

By Jen Hamilton Hernández

**SANDY OAKS OLIVE ORCHARD**  
25195 Mathis Road,  
Elmendorf,  
210-621-0044;  
sandyoaks.com



**W**hen most people travel, they might come home with photos and a souvenir T-shirt, or maybe some housewares or local art. Sandra Winokur brought back an entire olive orchard.

Visits to Italy in 1994 and Spain in '99 inspired Winokur to recreate that Mediterranean setting in her home state, just south of San Antonio. After living in Manhattan for 14 years, taking art classes and illustrating children's books, she had returned to Texas to help take care of family. "I'm a sixth-generation Texan, and most of my folks ranched, so certainly I wanted to have cattle, but I also wanted to do something else," she says. "It seemed to me that olives could be a good crop for Texas. That was based on spending time in a number

## RECIPE

### Lemon Olive Oil Cake

Using Sandy Oaks' olive oil in this simple recipe keeps the cake moist, while the limoncello, an Italian lemon liqueur, gives it a little kick.

#### INGREDIENTS

- 2 c. all-purpose flour
- ½ tsp. baking powder
- ½ tsp. baking soda
- pinch of salt
- 3 eggs
- 3 c. sugar
- lemon zest
- 1 c. Sandy Oaks extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 ½ c. milk
- 1 T. limoncello

#### DIRECTIONS

- 1 Beat eggs, then mix in oil, sugar, milk, and limoncello. In a separate bowl, mix dry ingredients.
- 2 Add dry ingredients to wet and incorporate until blended.
- 3 Add mixture to a greased 9×13 pan and bake at 325 F for 45 minutes.

Serves 10-12



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## Cook & Craft

Sandy Oaks Olive Orchard hosts regular workshops to educate visitors about the versatility of the olive tree and to encourage using more natural ingredients and products. To RSVP for an upcoming class or get more information, call 210-621-0044.

### Two Holiday Cakes Workshop Nov. 10

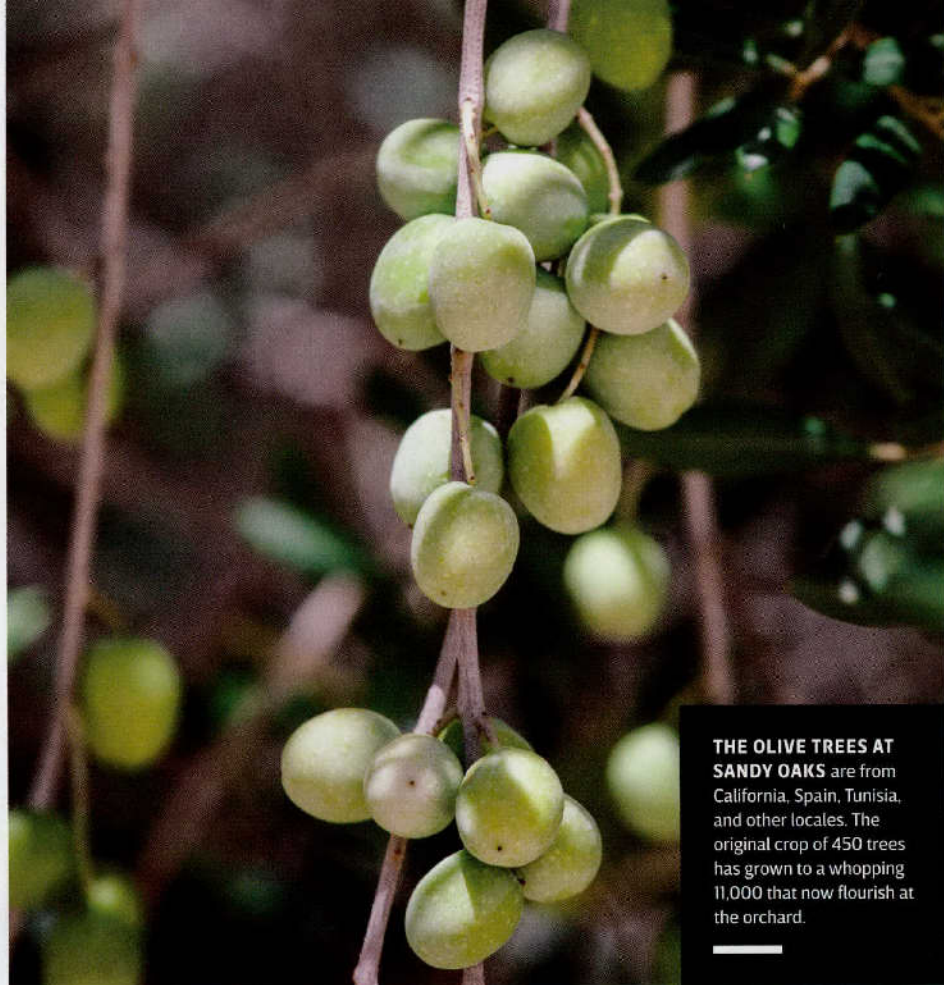
In this course, attendees learn how to decorate a Yule Log and how to bake a King Solomon's Cake, two traditional holiday treats. \$15

### Jelly and Jam Workshop December

Guest instructor Connie Sheppard teaches guests how to make unusual jams and jellies for holiday gifting. Date TBD. Free

### From the Kitchen to the Spa Jan. 12

This class showcases the many useful products that can be crafted from olive oil. Guests make and take home a vinaigrette, a metal polish, and a bath oil. \$20



**THE OLIVE TREES AT SANDY OAKS** are from California, Spain, Tunisia, and other locales. The original crop of 450 trees has grown to a whopping 11,000 that now flourish at the orchard.

of places that, when I visited orchards there, reminded me of Texas."

And while there are about a dozen olive orchards in the state today, there were skeptics when Winokur began experimenting with different species of olive trees on her property in the late 1990s.

To prepare for the opening of her orchard, Winokur conducted research and networked with others in Texas who were planting olive trees. A Texas A&M study from the 1930s that she found online during her exploration seemed discouraging—it concluded that olive trees wouldn't produce in the drought-prone state. Winokur decided to continue testing anyway through trial and error, evaluating 38 different varieties from regions with climates similar to South Texas.

Winokur first purchased olive trees from Egypt, where she had toured orchards and learned propagation techniques first-hand. "I ordered 1,000 trees, and they ended up at Heathrow [airport] on the dock for 10 days," she says. "Then I ordered another 1,000 and routed them through Amsterdam. Those came

beautifully within two to three days, but olive trees have knotted roots, so when customs agents looked at them without using a microscope they decided they had nematodes—or roundworms—and fumigated the whole lot. At that point, I ordered trees from California."

Twenty years later, those California trees, along with trees from Spain and Tunisia, now flourish at Sandy Oaks Olive Orchard, which in addition to making olive oil for retail and wholesale purposes, serves as an educational getaway that emphasizes the benefits of natural ingredients. On Saturdays at 11:30 a.m., just after opening the orchard, Winokur gives visitors a tour of the property and shares an overview of the olive industry in Texas. She also instructs the crowd on how to store olive oil properly.

**"It seemed to me that olives could be a good crop for Texas."**



## TOURS

**Sandy Oaks Olive Orchard** opens Wed-Sat 11 a.m.-3 p.m. with weekly orchard tours Sat 11:30 a.m.

A former elementary school teacher and college professor, Winokur is still an educator at heart and enjoys passing along her knowledge.

Winokur is also an artist who studied collage and pastel at the Art Institute of Chicago and printmaking in Tuscany. At Sandy Oaks, she has created an orchard straight from a landscape painting, with a long, olive tree-lined private drive, a patio studded with fresh herbs growing in rustic pots, large oak trees providing shade, and cattle grazing in the field, which in turn has made it a popular venue for weddings and photo shoots.

When the tour concludes, visitors can taste the fruits of Winokur's labor with lunch at the restaurant, just inside the gift shop. The menu offers an anti-pasto appetizer with meat, cheese, and, of course, olives; soups such as tomato basil with jalapeño cornbread; and entrées including paninis and sandwiches. On the sweeter side are limoncello cake with whipped cream and strawberry sauce as well as gelato.

After the meal, a peek in the gift shop reveals tables laden with displays of edible items and body products made from olives grown on the property. Highlights include olive-leaf tea (Winokur emphasizes being a zero-waste operation, so the tea uses an often-discarded part of the plant), brined olives, olive oil, tapenade, and olive bread; and hand-made skincare and beauty products, including salve, soaps, body lotion, body oil, body butter, hair and beard oil, and bug spray.

But the real stars are outside the gift shop: rows and rows of drought-tolerant olive trees to take home and create your own Mediterranean oasis. Winokur is happy to tell you how. 🐼

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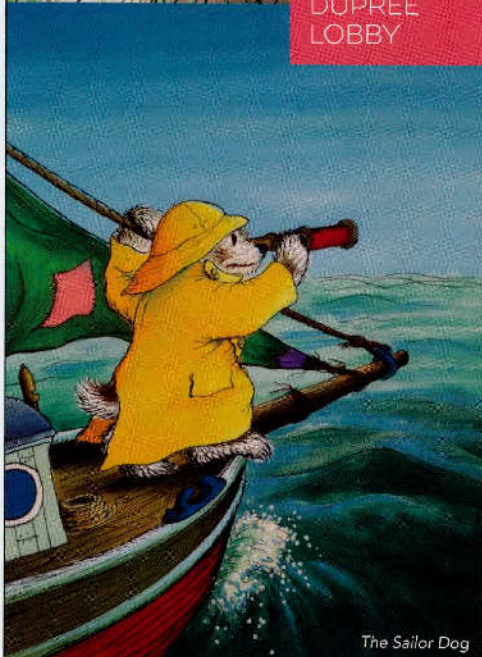
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# A Little Bit Country

After 20 years as executive chef at Rough Creek Lodge, Gerard Thompson knows what Texans want

By June Naylor

**ROUGH CREEK LODGE**  
5165 County Road 2013,  
Glen Rose,  
800-864-4705;  
roughcreek.com



**G**erard Thompson wields a large, sharp knife with one hand and carries a wooden stand holding a cured hog's leg in the other. He moves quickly to greet tables of newcomers and regular guests at Rough Creek Lodge. Thompson, the lodge's executive chef, shaves off paper-thin slices of prosciutto from the ample pig trotter and hands them out as appetizers.

"Hey! How's it going? I'm just making the rounds with my little piggy here," he says with a chuckle, gesturing to the leg under his arm and explaining that it's come from a red wattle hog sourced from a nearby Erath County farm. Soon, he takes over serving duties and delivers a hefty charcuterie board of sausage and other meats cured in-house, along with toasted focaccia and assorted items from fresh mozzarella to tart vegetable chowchow. After dropping off the spread, he jumps behind the bar to assist the busy bartender. "What can I get you?" he asks one of the thirsty patrons waiting on a cocktail. Moments later, he's off to the kitchen again to help a server deliver a series of dishes to a large party.

Thompson simply does whatever needs doing—regardless of his title. It's just one of the things that endears him to patrons and colleagues and has cemented his reputation at Rough Creek Lodge, an 11,000-acre luxury ranch near Glen Rose. When he came to the resort 20 years ago from the elite San Ysidro Ranch in Santa Barbara, California, he had a more formal vision, with strict ideas about the dishes he would offer. Headliners would be high-quality meats and dishes like foie gras, sushi-grade tuna, Alaskan halibut, and antelope—strange suggestions for a restaurant in a rural setting two decades ago.

"You know what we served the other day? Frito pie!" he says with a laugh. "And guess what? It's the most popular thing we offered at lunch all week. I never would have believed that 20 years ago."

Frito pie isn't the only popular, if humble, mainstay he wouldn't have considered at the start of his tenure. "A guest suggested we serve biscuits and gravy, and I thought, 'That's crazy.' But I did it, and

## PEACHY KEEN

Peach dishes on Rough Creek Lodge's menu have especially local roots.

Years ago, a pastry chef asked if she could take peach pits from work to plant at her home. Eventually she began bringing in buckets of what Chef Gerard Thompson calls "the most unbelievable peaches." They show up in a salad with goat cheese and pecans, as well as a Texan version of peach melba.

now it's a permanent feature," Thompson says. "Shows you what I know." Heck, he even admits that the simple chocolate sheet cake offered on the dessert menu pleases guests to no end.


Finding ease and wisdom in giving guests what they want wasn't a stretch, however. Since opening in early 1998, Rough Creek made a name for its exceptional service, with staff coming from places like Dallas' Mansion on Turtle Creek. Offering the best of everything, from elegant guest rooms and superior massages and facials at the spa to luxury versions of experiences like shooting clay and horseback riding, it's got an upscale price tag, usually costing upwards of \$300 nightly, depending on the season. It's the kind of place that CEOs rent out for weekend get-togethers. And while it's posh in its amenities, jeans and boots are standard wear at the resort, as at the restaurant, which is open to the public.

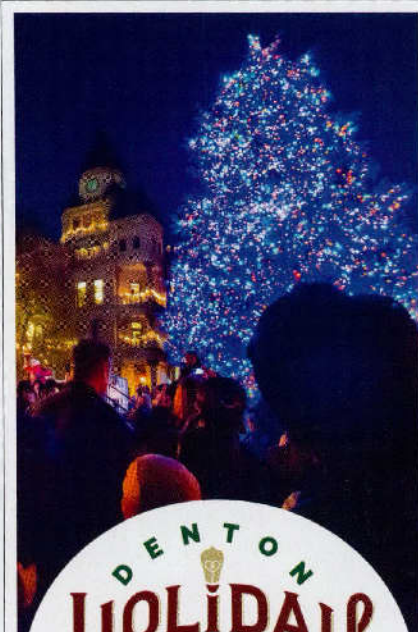
Frito pie notwithstanding, menu selections tend toward the exquisite. Every day, there's smoked salmon ordered from a favorite Southern California purveyor who knows her fishermen by name. Dinner

options usually include pheasant, duck, and beef tenderloin, and accents range from wilted beet greens and shaved black truffles to rutabaga puree. Inspirations change daily according to supplies—many of which are shipped via FedEx to the remote locale—and the whims of Thompson and his team.

Assimilated to Lone Star tastes, Thompson enjoys blending Texas and Southern ideas into his refined dishes. Oak-grilled Texas quail, for instance, sits next to charred poblano grits, while a T-bone pork chop soaked in bourbon and molasses takes on a side of braised black-eyed peas.

The process of finding this sweet spot has defined Thompson's journey since landing in Texas: from discovering—and adapting—comfort food and mentoring young cooks to cultivating relationships with farmers and purveyors and spending time with guests. Great chefs have both a visible and invisible touch that goes beyond ingredients, silverware, and service. It cuts directly to the ethos, making dining at places like Rough Creek Lodge much more than just a great meal.

"And it's only taken me 20 years to figure it all out," Thompson says, laughing. 



Friday  
NOVEMBER 30<sup>TH</sup>

5:30 - 9:30 pm

HISTORIC  
COURTHOUSE-ON-  
THE-SQUARE

[dentonholidaylighting.com](http://dentonholidaylighting.com)



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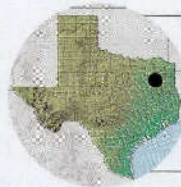
**LEFT:** Rough Creek Lodge's Chef Gerard Thompson.

**RIGHT:** Thompson slices prosciutto from a pig leg.

# Up in Smoke

How a mail-order turkey became a Texas holiday tradition

By Michael Hoinski



**GREENBERG SMOKED TURKEYS**  
221 McMurrey Drive, Tyler,  
903-595-0725; gobblegobble.com



**IN ORDER TO MAKE  
THE 200,000 TURKEYS**  
ordered each year,  
Greenberg's staff of 14  
swells to nearly 200  
during the holiday season.

**S**am Greenberg, the third-generation owner of Greenberg Smoked Turkeys, can pinpoint the day his bird became the word: Nov. 11, 2003. Oprah Winfrey's people had called. The famed talk show host wanted to feature Greenberg turkeys on her annual—and very influential—gift-giving episode, "Oprah's Favorite Things."

"The die was already cast as to how many turkeys we were going to sell that season," Sam says. "A 42-second thing of her talking about our turkeys sold us out in a matter of weeks."

But Greenbergs were a holiday tradition among Texans way before Oprah came along. It started in the early 1900s, when Sam's grandfather emigrated from Poland to Tyler with a spice rub from his grandmother. He used it to smoke turkey and other poultry for the community out of his dairy barn. Operations ratcheted

up in the '40s after a Dallas man who was a relative of a Tyler resident placed an order for six turkeys. Sam's father, Zelick, who had taken over the family business, was up for the challenge of shipping them 100 miles. He gathered old boxes from the local candy store and packaged the turkeys in straw and sent them by train. The mail-order business was born.


"My dad was a jack of all trades," Sam says. "If he could make a few dollars doing it, he did it."

The turkeys are not organic, not free range, not heritage breeds, not insert latest trend here. They're just prepackaged birds, like one would find in the grocery store. They're sourced from Minnesota and range from a six-pounder to a 15-pounder.

What makes Greenberg turkeys special is the preparation. The birds endure a four-day cleaning, cooking, and packaging process that includes a full day of

hanging from hooks in a brick smoke-house lit with hickory. They come out with their skin shriveled, looking almost black and nearly inedible, but that cleverly creates a natural wrapper for the moisture therein. The smell is seep-into-the-clothes smoky. Sam prefers to eat his with just mayonnaise.

**"The die was already cast as to how many turkeys we were going to sell that season. A 42-second thing of [Oprah] talking about our turkeys sold us out in a matter of weeks."**



# HAVE THE WURST TIME in New Braunfels.

Help us toast to beautiful autumn weather. You'll enjoy live entertainment every day of the week — including WURSTFEST, our annual 10-day salute to sausage! Come find good cheer... in New Braunfels.

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**New Braunfels**  
PLAYINNEWBRAUNFELS.COM

**GREENBERG TURKEYS** get their famous almost-black color from being hung and smoked with hickory in a brick smokehouse for 14 hours.



**Want to feast on a smoked turkey of your own?**

Prices start at around \$35 for a 6-pound bird (feeds 12 to 18) and go up to \$80 for 15 pounds (feeds 30 to 45). It's best to place your order the first week of October, but you can order as late as the Monday before Thanksgiving and still get your turkey on time. If you prefer to buy your bird in person, stop by the shop in Tyler, open 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day during the peak holiday season. If you miss out, don't panic: you can order a turkey most of the year at [gobblegobble.com](http://gobblegobble.com). It'll take one to two days to ship, and it's recommended that you gobble it up within six to eight days.



"I was making a sandwich one day," he recounts, "and I said, 'Forget the bread. Who needs bread?' Give me a mayonnaise jar and a knife, and I'll go after it."

Even terrible cooks can prepare a tasty Greenberg. They arrive ready to eat by the time the UPS driver delivers them. Otherwise, put them in the fridge promptly and when ready to eat, just allow them to reach room temperature. No cooking required.

The busy season runs from early October until Christmastime. A staff of 14 full-time, year-round employees swells to nearly 200. Turkeys are sold on-site during that period seven days a week (allow a 20- to 30-minute wait the Monday and Tuesday before Thanksgiving), but most clients order online, or return customers can place an order through a mailer

sent the day after Columbus Day. Of the 200,000 turkeys ordered per year, half are shipped in state and the rest throughout the country.

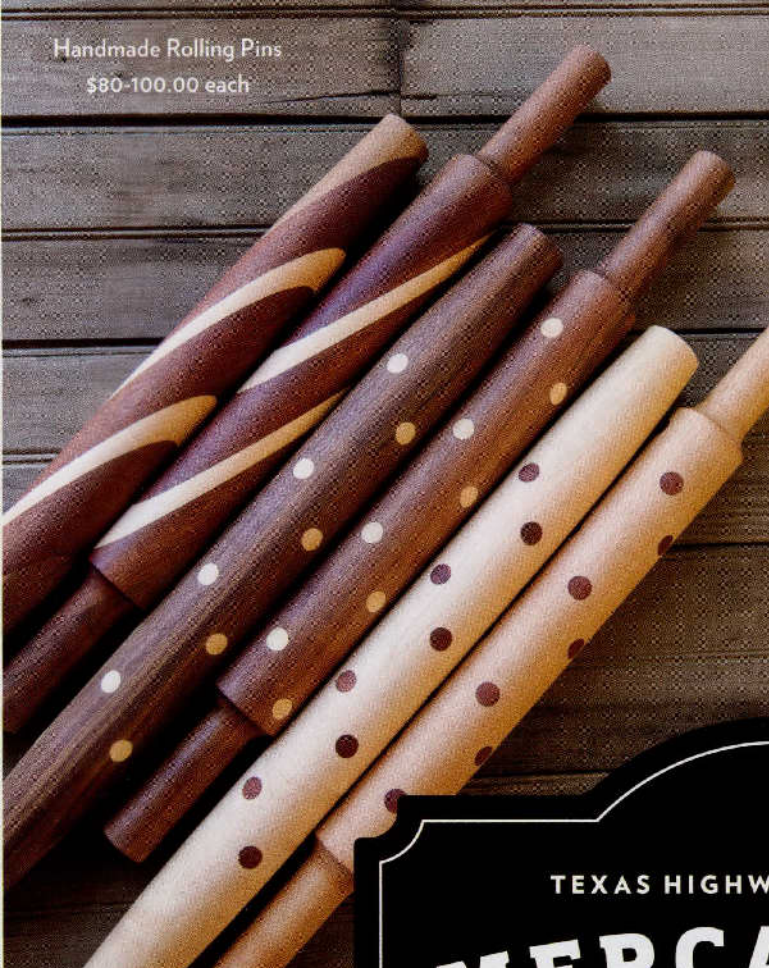
"We have a lot of people that do the trifecta," Sam says of his clientele's holiday spread. "They'll get our turkey, they fry one, and they bake one—and they'll put 'em all out."

Challenge accepted. 🍗

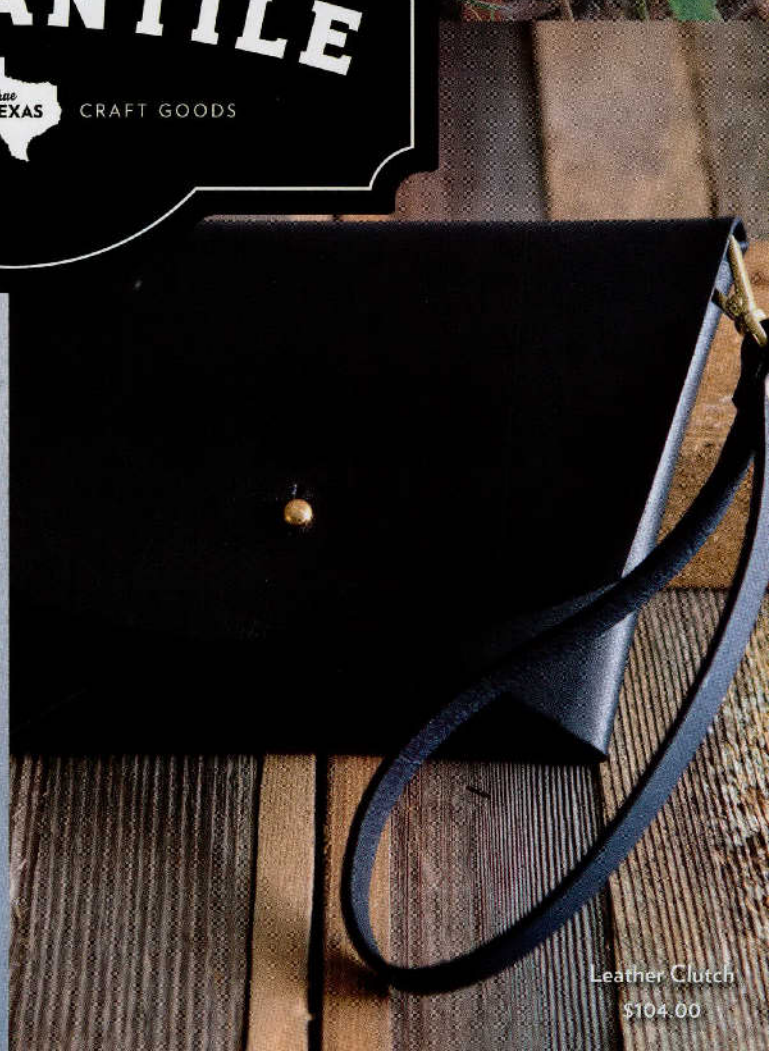
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**Waited too long to place an order for your Thanksgiving celebration?**  
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Or use the order form in this issue  
on page 64.

B



C



D



E



✦  
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Jewelry**

**A.** Sea Breeze Pendant \$26.95 *Made in Lorena by Margrit Co. 37939* **B.** Stackable Rings \$55.00 *Designed by Nelle & Lizzy 37931*

**C.** Embroidered Necklace \$36.00 *Made in Mission by Cinco Wildflowers 37924*

**D.** Beaded Bracelet \$24.00 *Made in Dallas by Chickeeboom 37938*

**E.** Argentine Earrings \$24.95 *Made in Lorena by Margrit Co. 37941*



✪  
**For Him**



F



G



H



I



J



K

**F.** Cowboy Print \$45-\$100.00 *Created in-Houston by Rainy Day Illustrations 32235*

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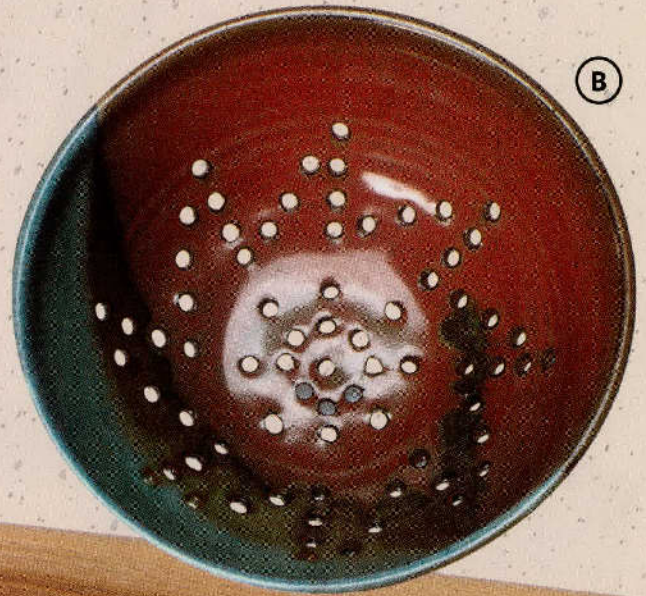
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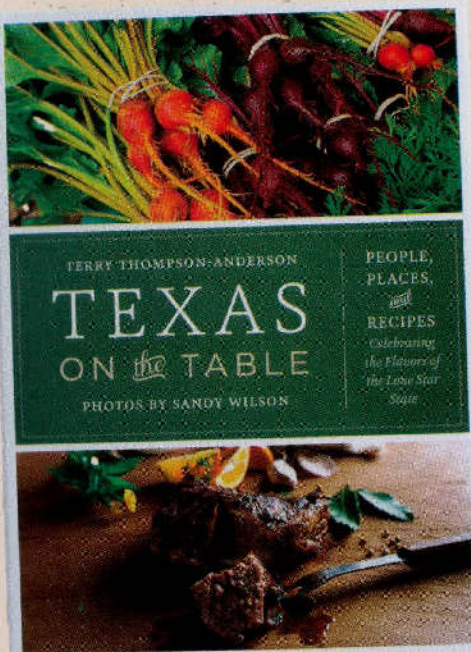
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Or use the order form in this issue  
 on page 64.



(B)

  
**For the  
 Kitchen**



(D)



(C)

**A.** True Texas Hero Mugs \$99.00 for set of 4 or \$32.00 each. *Made in Austin by Rhino Clayworks*

**B.** Berry Bowl and Saucer \$56.00 *Made in Cove by ClayThings Pottery 37863*

**C.** True Texas Serving Board \$80.00 *Made by Waco Woodworks 40019*

**D.** Texas on the Table \$45.00 36139

# TEXANA



**A LONGHORN FROM THE STATE'S OFFICIAL HERD** grazes near 19th-century ruins at Fort Griffin State Historic Site.

## Historic Stock

Home on the Texas range, where the Longhorn and bison play

By Andy Rhodes

**"This is an ideal spot for them because it was historically on the Great Western Cattle Trail, so there's a direct connection with the trail drivers coming through."**

**A**n up-close visit with a Longhorn or bison can be humbling. The animals' large chestnut-brown eyes reveal a complex blend of wild animal and domesticated stock. It's hard to know whether they're plotting an aggressive charge or happily anticipating a bucket of feed.

These iconic creatures still roam the Lone Star State thanks to efforts by legendary Texans nearly 100 years ago. Now, some Longhorns and bison are protected as legislatively designated official state herds, ensuring future generations of Texans will get to experience these noble beasts.

The Official State of Texas Longhorn Herd resides at Fort Griffin State Historic Site, about 15 miles north of Albany, where you can get nose-to-nose with the cattle (through a fence) and learn how folklorist J. Frank Dobie helped



**THE OFFICIAL STATE OF TEXAS BISON HERD**  
resides at Caprock  
Canyons State Park.



preserve the breed in the 1920s. The Official State of Texas Bison Herd lives at Caprock Canyons State Park in Quitaque, southeast of Amarillo. Roaming freely throughout the park, the bison are descendants of those saved from hunters by Charles and Mary Ann Goodnight in the late 1800s.

Fort Griffin became the Longhorns' permanent home in 1948, and though smaller numbers of the official herd reside at state parks in San Angelo, Copper Breaks, Palo Duro Canyon, and Johnson City, Herd Manager Will Cradduck can't imagine them living anywhere else. This part of the state—the aptly named Big Country—provides the cattle with room to roam on rolling hills among the mesquite and oak trees, not far from the preserved ruins of a 19th-century frontier cavalry post.

"This is an ideal spot for them because it was historically on the Great Western Cattle Trail, so there's a direct connection with the trail drivers coming through here with Longhorns," Cradduck says. "The site is big enough that they have plenty of room to eat and stay fit. It's their natural environment, so it's really a great place for them."

Texas Longhorns originated from Spanish cattle. Christopher Columbus first brought them to North America around 1500 to Santo Domingo Island (now the Dominican Republic); they were later introduced to the mainland as Spanish mis-

sionaries and pioneers settled in present-day southern Texas and northern Mexico. Cradduck says the bulls were imposing creatures capable of fighting a bear, which the Spanish would occasionally arrange as a spectator sport and wagering event.

Over time, some Spanish cattle escaped to the back country, where they grew into resilient feral beasts. In the 1870s, as Americans developed a taste for beef, vaqueros and cowboys rounded up more than 6 million cattle from the wilds of South Texas for trail drives to northern markets.

“Longhorns are considered one of the state’s first major natural resources to make money for people,” Cradduck says. “They played an important role in helping Texas economically recover after the Civil War by making the ranching industry what it is today.”

By the late 1800s, the Longhorn era was coming to a close. The advent of barbed-wire property lines impeded trail drives, and railroads made herding animals across vast distances obsolete.

Decades later, several prominent Texans—including Dobie, an author and folklorist, and Sid Richardson, a Fort Worth oil man—recognized the Longhorns’ fading significance. Working with a range inspector named Graves Peeler, they began scouring ranches in Texas and northern Mexico to find authentic Longhorns remaining from the cattle-drive era.

“Longhorns really are living history,” Cradduck says. “They’re not just a representation of what was here hundreds of years ago—they are what was here. It’s almost like Jurassic Park or a natural history museum, but instead of looking at bones or imagining creatures from the past, you’re looking at the real thing.”

**“Longhorns really are living history. They’re not just a representation of what was here hundreds of years ago—they are what was here.”**

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## Home on the Range

### Caprock Canyons State Park,

at 850 Caprock Canyons State Park Road in Quitaque, is home to the Official State of Texas Bison Herd. In September, the park hosts its annual Bison Fest in downtown Quitaque, featuring live country music and an arts and crafts fair. Proceeds benefit the bison herd. 806-455-1492; [tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/caprock-canyons](http://tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/caprock-canyons).

### Fort Griffin State Historic Site,

at 1701 US 283 in Albany, is home to part of the Official State of Texas Longhorn Herd. March through October, the site offers a *Horns and Tales Longhorn Program* at 2 p.m. Saturdays. The site also offers the program by appointment throughout the year. 325-762-3592; [visitfortgriffin.com](http://visitfortgriffin.com).

**THE SOUTHERN PLAINS BISON HERD** dropped to 32 animals before a breeding program rebuilt it.

There are around 200 mature Longhorns in the state's official herd, with about 100 calves raised annually. The animals live about 20 to 25 years, and mature bulls can grow to 1,300 pounds or heavier. A cow, which weighs about 700 pounds, can have as many as 18 calves in her lifetime.

Craddock says the main misconception about Longhorns is that they're aggressive or unintelligent. They're smarter than other cattle breeds, he says, but they can be stubborn.

"The only way to get a Longhorn to do something is to make them think it's their idea," he says. "I usually leave a gate open and walk away—they'll think I forgot about it, so they'll look around like they're getting away with something and walk right on through it. You can almost see the smiles on their faces."

### Bullish on Heritage

About 200 miles to the northwest at Caprock Canyons State Park, the state's

official bison herd numbers around 200 and has added about 45 calves this year, a number that grows annually. Their crescent-shaped horns emerge from plush brown heads, almost inviting you to reach out and pet them. Resist the temptation.

"We occasionally have to remind people that this isn't a zoo—you need to keep some distance from the bison and give them respect," says Don Beard, superintendent and herd manager at the state park. "But it's pretty exciting to experience something as cool as free-range bison. Where else can you go and get caught in a bison jam?"

Beard says the herd has driven an increase in visitors to the remote park, which offers a picturesque natural habitat along the Caprock Escarpment's rugged red sandstone canyon walls. When the bison made their free-ranging debut in 2011, Caprock Canyons averaged 36,000 visitors annually; in 2017, nearly 110,000 entered the gates.

Bison have been in the area for at least

10,000 years, although the ancient variety were twice the size of today's animals and brandished horns spanning 7 feet. For hundreds of years, bison co-existed with native groups—Apache, Kiowa, and Comanche depended on them for food, clothing, and shelter—by using the surrounding Caprock Escarpment as protection from harsh weather and enemies.

Everything changed when American hunters flooded the Great Southern Plains in the mid-1870s. The completion of the transcontinental railroad allowed daily shipment of hundreds of hides to Eastern markets. Within a few years, the hunters had slaughtered almost all of the bison. By 1878, at the urging of his wife, Goodnight gathered a group of bison from the Caprock Canyons area and preserved them on the JA Ranch, the sprawling Panhandle cattle operation named for his business partner, Englishman John Adair.

Molly (as Mary Ann Goodnight was commonly known) requested the state designate the animals as an official herd in 1914. The movement gained traction in the 1930s in reaction to a local resident's disturbing proposal to hold "one last bison hunt to finally kill 'em all off for good," Beard says. Although the herd's formation was approved, the state Legislature never allocated funding.

In the mid 1990s, the Southern Plains bison herd had declined to 32 animals, mostly on JA Ranch. Around that time, the ranch asked the State of Texas to help gather the bison and genetically authenticate their ancestry, which set in motion plans to keep them at Caprock Canyons.

To diversify the herd's offspring, Texas scientists researched connections to the original herd, including several animals at Yellowstone National Park, and found a near-perfect match at a New Mexico ranch owned by media mogul Ted Turner. A

#### BISON OR BUFFALO?

While they're often called buffalo, "bison" is the correct term for the animals native to North America.

Buffalo are indigenous to South Asia and Africa.

decade later, the breeding program proved successful enough to secure the herd's protection and residence in the Panhandle, a plan envisioned by Molly Goodnight more than a century ago.

"This is a state park—it's owned by the people of Texas, and our job is to maintain the property so Texans can enjoy their resources," Beard says. "I call it the Yellowstone of Texas. I see so many smiles on people's faces out here. It's just something people never thought they'd ever experience—seeing bison roaming free in Texas is really an amazing thing." ■



## VISIT San Saba

At the top of the Texas Hill Country awaits an unassuming town nestled on the banks of a tranquil river. Texan to the core, small, but mighty; good-natured with Texas-sized hospitality. It's a place to shake off city stress - a place for reconnecting to the good life. While your day away over good wine and better conversation. Spend your morning lingering over that last chapter on a picnic blanket. Swing your special someone on the dance floor. Stop and smell the leather, nevermind the flowers. Be incredibly productive doing absolutely nothing except marveling in the richness of experiences. It's a place to reconnect with the cheer of the yuletide season, celebrating among friendly faces, more than a million twinkling lights and Texas-sized Christmas spirit. It's a place to explore endless possibilities, a place to sip, savor, shop and sleep in comfort. It's San Saba, ripe with the elusive charms of open spaces and slower paces.

Join us in San Saba for the holidays! Our Christmas Extravaganza Light Display runs from Thanksgiving through the New Year (free, open at dark). Then on December 8, we hold our annual Sip and Stroll, Santa's Workshop, Lighted Christmas Parade and concerts - it's Christmas tidings for the whole family!

Visit San Saba, where you'll find more than you imagined.

[www.visitsansabatexas.com](http://www.visitsansabatexas.com)

# EVENTS



## Arts & Culture

### CENTRAL TEXAS

#### Austin

##### Austin Powwow

Nov. 3

With some 30,000 attendees, this event is one of the largest single-day powwows in the country. The event brings together approximately 80 tribes—from Texas of course, but also South Carolina, Oklahoma, the Dakotas, Canada, and Central America—to celebrate their different tribal heritages and histories. *Travis County Expo Center, 7311 Decker Lane. 512-371-0628; austinpowwow.net*

#### Austin

##### East Austin Studio Tour

Nov. 10-11, 17-18

More than 70 eastside art studios and galleries open their doors for the public's viewing and purchasing pleasure during this biannual event. *Various locations. 512-939-6665; east.bigmedium.org*

#### Hondo, New Braunfels, Blanco, and Stonewall

##### Texas Dance Hall Tour

Nov. 1-4

Ray Benson and his band Asleep at the Wheel take guests on a tour of four dance halls in the Hill Country: Gruene Dance Hall, Quihi Dance Hall, Twin Sisters Dance Hall, and Albert Ice House. Think of it as a "land cruise" with ports of call being several of the state's historic dance halls.



featuring a range of notable Western swing, country, and Texas artists. *Various locations. 512-444-9885 ext. 702; texasdancehalltour.com*

#### Kerrville

##### Texas Furniture Makers Show

Nov. 1-29

This 19th annual juried exhibit features the work of some of Texas' finest custom furniture makers. *Kerr Arts and Cultural Center, 228 Earl Garrett St. 830-895-2911; kacckerrville.com*

#### Round Top

##### Houston Chamber Ringers

Nov. 17

Known throughout the U.S. for their precision, expressive artistry, and sense of fun they bring to their performances, this professional handbell ensemble heads to the picturesque Round Top Festival Institute with a musical repertoire ranging from Claude Debussy and Georges Bizet to Willie Nelson. *248 Jaster Road. 979-249-3129; festivalhill.org*

#### Salado

##### Scottish Gathering and Highland Games

Nov. 9-11

Heralding all things Scottish, this landmark event is the oldest Scottish festival in Texas. The three-day event includes the skirl of bagpipes, Highland dancing, the caber toss and other Scottish athletics, Kirkin' o' the Tartans, Bonniest Knees Contest, pet parade, live Celtic music, shopping, food, and the largest gathering of Scottish Clan tents in Texas. *Salado Civic Center, 601 N. Main St. 254-947-5232; saladoscottishfestival.com*

#### San Marcos

##### Sacred Springs Powwow

Nov. 17-18

The sounds of Native American drums lead visitors to "experience Mother Earth's heartbeat" near the



## The Simple Life

A few miles north of Waco, an agrarian and artisan community welcomes visitors for a taste of a bygone era at its annual Homestead Fair

By Jane Kellogg Murray

You might think you've stepped into another era when you drive up to the 510-acre community of nearly 1,000 people on the Brazos River at Homestead Heritage. Members of the community drive modern vehicles and use technology, but they adopt plain dress and traditional values and strive to master the skills of self-sufficiency—a lifestyle that draws thousands of tourists every year. At the 31st annual Homestead Fair, held on the weekend after Thanksgiving, you can learn how to milk a cow, lend a hand at an old-fashioned timber frame barn raising, and watch a master craftsman fashion a fine Windsor chair straight from a rough log. Each day in the craft pavilion, you'll find a wide variety of ongoing homestead craft demonstrations—pottery, quilting, weaving, broom-making, basket-weaving, leatherwork, and more. Learn how to make your own holiday gifts, or purchase one of these specialty items on-site. Sip on hand-pressed apple cider, snack on cheeses aged in Homestead's own climate-controlled cheese cave, and take a horse-drawn hayride around the farm, which houses numerous structures built before the American Revolution, including a water-powered gristmill.

#### HOMESTEAD FAIR

Nov. 23-24, 9 a.m.-9 p.m.  
Homestead Heritage, 608 Dry Creek Road, Waco.  
254-754-9600;  
[homesteadfair.com](http://homesteadfair.com)



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headwaters of the San Marcos River. The event features more than 100 dancers in vibrant regalia along with Native American history presentations. Taste favorite dishes like fry bread, and shop for handmade goods. *Meadows Center, 201 San Marcos Springs Drive. 512-393-3310; sspowwow.com*

#### SOUTH TEXAS / GULF COAST

##### Houston

###### Via Colori

Nov. 17-18

Some 25,000 attendees watch as more than 200 Texan and international artists colorize the streets using pastel chalks at this annual event. Proceeds benefit The Center for Hearing and Speech, a Houston-based organization that helps children with hearing loss learn to listen, speak, and read. *Downtown City Hall, 901 Bagsby St. 713-523-3633; centerhearingandspeech.org/via-colori*

#### WEST TEXAS

##### El Paso

###### Carol Burnett

Nov. 4

With a new Netflix special coming out, the award-winning actress, comedian, best-selling author, and San Antonio native heads out on tour with a stop in El Paso for "An Evening of Laughter and Reflection." The tour continues at Dallas' Winspear Opera House on Nov. 11, and Houston's Jones Hall on Nov. 13. *Plaza Theatre, 125 W. Mills Ave. 915-231-1100; elpasolive.com*

## Fairs & Festivals

#### CENTRAL TEXAS

##### New Braunfels

###### Heirloom Rubber Stamp and Paper Arts Festival

Nov. 9-10

Discover a wide variety of stamping, card-making, scrapbooking, and other paper arts products in a spacious atmosphere. *New Braunfels Civic/Convention Center, 375 S. Castell Ave. 541-574-8000; heirloompro.com*

#### NORTH TEXAS

##### Ennis

###### Lantern Fest

Nov. 10

Before sundown, enjoy food, live music, a stage show, face painting, s'mores, balloon artists, and more. Then, when the time is just right, the night sky lights up with hopes and dreams. *Texas Motorplex, 7500 US 287. dallas.thelanternfest.com*

##### Fort Worth

###### Lone Star Film Festival

Nov. 7-11

Hosted by the Lone Star Film Society, a year-round series of programs culminates in a five-day celebration of cinema. *Sundance Square. 817-924-6000; lonestarfilmfestival.com*



#### EAST TEXAS

##### Kilgore

###### Reel East Texas Film Festival

Nov. 15-18

A festival hosted by filmmakers for filmmakers, RETFF brings together audiences, filmmakers, and film industry representatives in celebration of artistic and independent spirit. *Various locations. 214-793-8736; reeleasttexas.com*

#### SOUTH TEXAS / GULF COAST

##### George West

###### Storyfest

Nov. 2-4

Hear professional storytellers, cowboy poets, ghost stories, and live music in the Storytelling Capital of Texas. The tales are accompanied by living history exhibits, arts and crafts vendors, food booths, a classic car show, a

motorcycle show, a children's area, and more. Stick around for Sacred Stories on Sunday morning. *Live Oak County Courthouse Square, 301 Houston St. 361-449-2481; georgeweststoryfest.org*

##### Houston

###### Cinema Arts Festival

Nov. 8-12

This festival includes a multitude of narrative and documentary films, an interactive video installation gallery, live multimedia performances, panel discussions, Meet the Makers workshops, and free outdoor screenings. In its relatively short history, the festival has brought notable guest artists such as Tilda Swinton, Isabella Rossellini, Shirley MacLaine, Richard Linklater, Ethan Hawke, and Robert Redford. *Various locations. 713-429-0420; hcaft18.org*

##### Houston

###### International Quilt Festival

Nov. 8-11

The largest quilt show in the U.S. features more than 1,500 quilts on display, and 1,000 booths selling antique and contemporary quilts along with fabric, patterns, books, sewing machines, crafts, and jewelry, plus more than 500 classes for all skill levels. *713-781-6864; quilts.com*

##### Kingsville

###### Ranch Hand Festival

Nov. 16-18

City slickers and old ranch hands alike celebrate Texas ranching heritage at this annual event in Kingsville and on King Ranch—the largest ranch in the Lone Star State. Downtown gets festive Friday evening by lighting the Christmas tree followed by a street dance. On Saturday morning, King Ranch serves up the Ranch Hand Breakfast—a hearty cowboy and cowgirl breakfast fit for a hard day's work, served outdoors—plus team-roping demonstrations, storytelling, music, birdwatching tours, and wildlife tours. *Downtown Kingsville and King Ranch, 2205 W. SH 141. ranchhandfestival.com; king-ranch.com*

##### Mission

###### Texas Butterfly Festival

Nov. 3-6

During peak butterfly migration

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season, the National Butterfly Center invites aspiring naturalists of all ages to learn more about butterflies and their natural garden habitats. Enjoy kids' activities and expert-led educational field trips. 3333 Butterfly Park Drive. 956-583-5400; [texasbutterflyfestival.com](http://texasbutterflyfestival.com)

**Rockport**

**Rockport Film Festival**

Nov. 1-4  
Celebrating independent cinema on the Texas Coast, the festival showcases shorts, features, documentaries, animations, and student films from Texas and beyond. 361-729-5519; [rockportfilmfestival.com](http://rockportfilmfestival.com)

**South Padre Island**

**FAM Fest**

Nov. 16-18  
This inaugural film, art, and music festival features children's art activities, live music, food, and more. Watch films and documentaries all weekend; attend workshops and panels with award-winning filmmakers; and shop paintings, sculptures, and jewelry. Various locations. 800-767-2373; [sopadre.com](http://sopadre.com)

**Food & Drink**

**CENTRAL TEXAS**

**New Braunfels Wurstfest**

Nov. 2-11  
Attendees can find a variety of entertainment, food, and fun in Landa Park in addition to special events throughout New Braunfels and Comal County. Various locations. 830-625-9167; [wurstfest.com](http://wurstfest.com)

**EAST TEXAS**

**Henderson Heritage Syrup Festival**

Nov. 10  
See how syrup was made in the olden days, with mules powering the operation. Then, take a hayride shuttle to historic downtown to meet local folk artists, and enjoy more than 250 shopping vendors, live music, antique and classic cars, cloggers and square dancers, a children's area, pony rides, and a melodrama. Heritage Square and Depot Museum, 514 N. High St. 866-650-5529; [visithendersontx.com](http://visithendersontx.com)

**SOUTH TEXAS / GULF COAST**

**Edna**

**Texana Chili Spill**

Nov. 8-10  
The 18th annual event starts on Thursday with a veterans ceremony, appreciation dinner, and fireworks display. It continues with a cookoff on Friday and Saturday that includes salsa, sausage, margarita, Dutch oven, chili, gumbo, and bean competitions. The activities include a kid's zone, horseshoe and washer tournament, and vendors. Brackenridge Recreation Complex Main Event Center, 284 Brackenridge Parkway. 361-782-5229; [texanachillispill.com](http://texanachillispill.com)

**WEST TEXAS**

**Terlingua International Chili Championships**

Oct. 31-Nov. 3  
Every year for more than half a century, this former mining outpost has hosted up to 20,000 chiliheads vying to help crown the year's best chili. The original cook-off splintered into two festivals in 1983, held con-

currently on the same weekend, just a few miles apart, so now—in addition to arguing about who makes the best bowl of chili—attendees can argue about which cookoff is better. Regular attendees get in the spirit all week long by camping in tents and RVs, and enjoying live music nightly. Rancho CASI de los Chisos, 80 Mariposa Mine Road. [casichili.net](http://casichili.net). The Terlingua Store, 23101 FM 170. [abowlfred.com](http://abowlfred.com)

**History & Heritage**

**CENTRAL TEXAS**

**Austin**

**Veterans Day Parade**

Nov. 11  
This year's parade sets off from the Congress Avenue Bridge and ends at the Capitol. The Austin Children's Choir performs patriotic songs preceding a ceremony, which includes a speech by Major General John F. Nichols, Adjutant General of Texas. This year marks the 100th anniversary of the armistice agreement ending WWI. [austinveteransparade.org](http://austinveteransparade.org)

**MUST SEE.**

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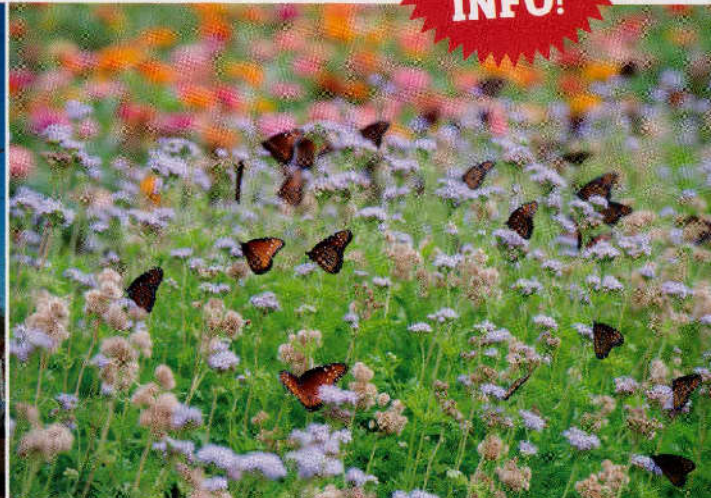
Experience the stories of honor and sacrifice our country demonstrated during a war that encompassed the world. From the Admiral Nimitz museum, an engaging exhibition honoring the man who led more than two-million brave men and women to victory in WWII, to the Japanese Garden of Peace dedicated by his former enemies, to the world-class George H.W. Bush Gallery that provides an interactive view of the magnitude and the strategy of the war, this experience is simply not to be missed.

[PacificWarMuseum.org](http://PacificWarMuseum.org)



# TRAVEL RESOURCE GUIDE

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- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| 1 Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau                         | 28 Denton Convention & Visitors Bureau            | 54 Port Aransas and Mustang Island Chamber of Commerce |
| 2 Andrews Chamber of Commerce and Convention & Visitors Bureau | 29 Downtown Bryan Association                     | 55 Rockport-Fulton Area Chamber of Commerce            |
| 3 Art Museum of Southeast Texas                                | 30 Dripping Springs Visitors Bureau               | 56 San Angelo Chamber of Commerce                      |
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| 5 Bastrop County Tourism                                       | 32 George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum | 58 Sand 'n Sea Properties                              |
| 6 Beaumont Convention & Visitors Bureau                        | 33 Glen Rose Convention & Visitors Bureau         | 59 Seguin Convention & Visitors Bureau                 |
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| 8 The Brauntex Performing Arts Theatre Association, Inc.       | 35 Greater New Braunfels Chamber of Commerce      | 61 Stark Cultural Venues                               |
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| 23 The Colony Convention & Visitors Bureau                     | 50 National Museum of the Pacific War             | 76 Visit Tyler   |
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| 26 Dallas Arboretum  | 53 Paris CVB/Lamar County Chamber of Commerce     | 79 West Texas Co-op                                    |
| 27 Denison Chamber of Commerce                                 |   |  |

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**DON'T SEE YOUR EVENT?**

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**Fredericksburg**

**Fort Martin Scott Treaty Day**

Nov. 10

Find living history re-enactors, pioneer crafts, chuckwagon food, Old West shootouts, storytellers, musicians, and hands-on activities for kids at Fort Martin Scott, the first U.S. military post to be established on the western frontier of Texas. 1606 E. Main St. 830-217-3200; [ftmartinsscott.org](http://ftmartinsscott.org)

**Fredericksburg**

**Veterans Day Parade and Concert**

Nov. 11

This Main Street parade features marching bands, vintage vehicles and equipment, and a flyover, followed by a WWI-era music concert. Marktplatz, 126 W. Main St. 830-997-3758; [visitfredericksburgtx.com](http://visitfredericksburgtx.com)

**NORTH TEXAS**

**Cleburne**

**Pioneer Days**

Nov. 16-17

A celebration of Western and Texas history, the 15th annual free event features cowboys and

Native Americans in full regalia, Ghosts of Buzzard Flats gunfighters, Terry's Texas Rangers Civil War Re-encampment, pioneers, historic buildings, food trucks, arts and craft vendors, and kids' games. *Chisholm Trail Outdoor Museum*, 101 Chisholm Trail. 817-648-4633; [jcchisholmtrail.com](http://jcchisholmtrail.com)

**Edgewood**

**Heritage Festival**

Nov. 10

Celebrate the heritage of rural life and community sharing through family-friendly activities such as a big classic car show, a vintage tractor show, more than 20 heritage structures from the 1900s, carnival food, children's activities and rides, live music, a dog show, and Santa. *Heritage Park Museum of East Texas*, 103 E. Elm St. 903-896-1940; [edgewoodheritagefestival.com](http://edgewoodheritagefestival.com)

**Waxahachie**

**Veterans Weekend and WWII**

Nov. 9-11

Re-enactors from across the state of Texas set up camp and act out

battles from WWII. *Downtown*. 469-309-4040; [waxahachiecvb.com](http://waxahachiecvb.com)

**EAST TEXAS**

**Milam**

**Settlers Days**

Nov. 16-17

This annual celebration focuses on early Texas with a quilt show, historical re-enactments, an 1800s log home, vendors, a petting zoo, a chili cookoff, and more. *El Camino Park*, intersection of SH 21 and SH 87. 409-625-4876; [milamsettlersday.org](http://milamsettlersday.org)

**Nacogdoches**

**Nine Flags Festival**

Nov. 15-Dec. 31

The six flags of Texas are well known, but in Nacogdoches—the oldest town in Texas—three more flags found their way into the history books. For more than two decades, the city has paid homage to its rebellious history with festivities to kick off the holiday season, including a parade and an installation of more than 3 million lights downtown. *Various locations*. 936-564-7351; [visitnacogdoches.org](http://visitnacogdoches.org)

**SOUTH TEXAS / GULF COAST**

**Santa Fe**

**Heritage Festival**

Nov. 10-11

This year's two-day event will include a kid zone with all-day ride passes; mutton bustin', barrel racing, and other rodeo activities; a hometown dance; a display on the history of Santa Fe; an Old Smokey cookoff; craft and food vendors; the city's child safety fair and 40th anniversary celebration; a Veterans Day celebration; and loads of hometown hospitality. *Runge Park*, 4605 Peck Ave. 409-925-8558; [santafetexaschamber.com](http://santafetexaschamber.com)

**Seasonal Celebrations**

**CENTRAL TEXAS**

**Austin**

**Mini Market**

Nov. 4

This one-day holiday pop-up shop features a curated group of more than 30 vendors dedicated to par-



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ents and their kids. The market will be kid-friendly, but not kid-focused. *South Congress Hotel, 1603 S. Congress Ave. lovechildmag.com/mini-market*

#### **Bastrop**

##### **Lost Pines Christmas**

Nov. 24-Dec. 23

From an old-fashioned Main Street Christmas to a dazzling nighttime holiday parade, food and wine events, and activities for the entire family, Bastrop shares the season during this monthlong holiday event. *Various locations downtown. lostpineschristmas.com*

#### **Cedar Park**

##### **North Pole Flyer**

Nov. 17-18, 24-25, Dec. 1

Children of all ages can enjoy this two-hour steam train excursion featuring Santa and Mrs. Claus, storytelling, a Christmas sing-along, hot cocoa, cookies, and other surprise entertainment along the ride. *Austin Steam Train Association, 401 E. Whitestone Blvd., Suite C-100. 512-402-3830; austinsteamtrain.org*

#### **Comfort**

##### **Christmas in Comfort**

Nov. 24

An arts and crafts festival lines several blocks in the historic district of Comfort for Christmas shopping. Other essentials include food vendors, live musical entertainment, and activities for the kids. A nighttime lighted parade is followed by fireworks. *Downtown. 830-995-3131; comfort-texas.com*

#### **Fredericksburg**

##### **Lighting of the Community**

##### **Christmas Tree and German**

##### **Pyramid**

Nov. 23

Capture the spirit and celebration of Christmas through rich German heritage with refreshments, caroling, and the annual countdown to flipping the switch. *Marktplatz, 126 W. Main St. 830-997-6523; visitfredericksburgtx.com*

#### **Fredericksburg**

##### **Eisbahn Outdoor Ice Skating**

Nov. 23-Jan. 7

Benefiting the Heritage School, the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, and the Boys and Girls Club of Fredericksburg, this annual seasonal outdoor ice-skating event transforms Marktplatz into frozen fun. *Marktplatz, 126 W. Main St. 830-997-6597; skateinfred.com*

#### **Fredericksburg**

##### **The Peddler Show**

Nov. 23-25

One of Texas' favorite holiday arts and crafts shows celebrates 40 years. *Gillespie County Fairgrounds, 530 Fair Drive. 800-775-2774; peddlershow.com*

#### **Georgetown**

##### **Lighting of the Square**

Nov. 23

This annual event kicks off the magic of the holiday season with the Austin Carolers, cookies and hot chocolate, and a countdown as Santa flips on the holiday lights. *Downtown. 800-436-8696; visitgeorgetown.com*

#### **Gruene**

##### **Holidays in Gruene**

Nov. 13-Jan. 1

Stroll through Gruene Historic District this holiday season for activities including photos with Cowboy Kringle (Gruene's own brand of Santa), a holiday shopping market, and the 10th annual turkey trot on Thanksgiving morning. *Various locations. 830-515-1914; holidayingruene.com*

#### **Llano**

##### **Starry Starry Nights Lighted**

##### **Christmas Park**

Nov. 23-Dec. 31

Attendees can sip hot chocolate and stroll along the Llano River while enjoying all of the displays that light up the park. *Badu Park, 300 Legion Drive. 325-247-5354; llanostarrystarrynights.com*

#### **Marble Falls**

##### **Walkway of Lights**

Nov. 16-Jan. 1

Celebrate the holidays with more than 2 million lights, 400 beautiful sculptures, photos with Santa, and more. *Lakeside Park, 305 Buena Vista Drive. 830-693-2815; marblefalls.org*

#### **New Braunfels**

##### **Weihnachtsmarkt**

Nov. 16-18

This German-style Christmas market with a Texas twist features a wide array of retail merchants, artisans, and authors at the largest fundraiser for the Sophienburg Museum & Archives. *New Braunfels Civic/Convention Center, 375 S. Castell Ave. 830-629-1572; sophienburg.com/event/weihnachtsmarkt*

#### **San Antonio**

##### **Ford Holiday River Parade**

Nov. 23

The 38th annual event is a San Antonio tradition that kicks off

## THE DAYTRIPPER'S TOP 5

# Bellville

The land where Texas began

BY CHET GARNER



There's something special about small towns and the folks who live there. You can do things in the country that aren't possible in the big city, like build castles, throw fireballs, and hang out in jail (on purpose). All of these things and more lured me to Bellville for a day trip unlike any other.

### 1 Newman's Castle

The owner of Newman's Bakery downtown, Mike Newman is a baker by day and a king by night in a castle he's been building for 20 years—complete with moat, drawbridge, and giant trebuchet. Visitors can explore the dungeon and chapel, and they can fight imaginary dragons from the top of the bell tower. There is no better de-stresser than flinging stones from a medieval catapult. *504 E. Main St. 979-865-9804; newmanscastle.com*

### 2 Austin County Jail Museum

Active until 1982, this jail is one you'd want to visit. Inside this imposing 1896 structure is a museum that tells the story of how Texas and this county began. Learn about Bellville's founders, Thomas and James Bell, who were part of Stephen F. Austin's "Old 300" colony and donated the land for the town of Bellville after the burning of San Felipe de Austin. Snap a photo behind bars—hopefully the door will reopen when you try to leave. *36 S. Bell St. 713-385-7141*

### 3 Bellville Meat Market

Traditional meat markets are rare these days, but this one is going strong. Step inside and you'll find butchers ready to cut your steak for dinner, and a barbecue counter serving up traditional Texas-style 'cue. The sausage reigns supreme, with 28 varieties of hand-tied links. I opted for the baked potato piled high with sweet chipotle smoked sausage, cheese, and homemade barbecue sauce. I think I'm still recovering from my glorious food coma. *36 S. Front St. 979-865-5782; bellvillemeatmarket.com*

### 4 Phenix Knives

Talented bladesmith "Cowboy" Szymanski spends countless hours molding metal into works of art that can slice anything from a tomato to deerhide. Set inside a historic building that's been a blacksmith shop for more than a century, Cowboy gives tours that put visitors so close, they can feel the heat from his 3,000-degree fire. His passion is contagious, so be prepared to buy a knife. *305 E. Main St. 713-724-6813; phenixknives.com*

### 5 The Hill

When you think of an old-school burger joint, chances are it looks like The Hill. Established in 1952 as a walk-up burger stand, the owners have since walled off a small checkered dining room. While the nostalgia may draw a crowd, it's the classic cheeseburgers that have made this restaurant an institution. Dive into a double-bacon cheeseburger with chili-cheese tots. You won't regret it. *758 W. Main St. 979-865-3607; thehillrestaurant.com*

Whether you follow my footsteps or forge your own path,  
I hope to see you on the road.

Chet Garner is the host of *The Daytripper*® travel show on PBS. To view the Bellville episode visit [thedaytripper.com](http://thedaytripper.com). Follow along on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter @chetripper.

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the lighting of the River Walk and the holiday season. The parade features 28 illuminated floats under 100,000 lights, which remain on the trees and are turned on at sundown every day until shortly after New Year's Day. *San Antonio River Walk. thesanantonioriverwalk.com/events*

**Stonewall**  
**Holiday Cookie Decorating and German Traditions**  
Nov. 24

Attendees can observe and learn German holiday traditions of the early 1900s—such as cookie decorating, wreath making, tree decorating, and candle making—at the Sauer-Beckmann Living History Farm. *Lyndon B. Johnson State Park & Historic Site, 199 Park Road 52. 830-644-2252; tpwd.state.tx.us/state-parks/lyndon-b-johnson*

**Wimberley**  
**Winter Wonderland**  
Nov. 16-17

A wonderland of Thanksgiving and Christmas décor, including trees, wreaths, and centerpieces created by local artists, sets the mood for this event featuring holiday music, refreshments, and a visit with Santa. *Wimberley Community Center, 14068 RR 12. 512-847-2201; wimberley.org*

**NORTH TEXAS**

**Addison**  
**Vitruvian Lights—A Magical Night of Lights**  
Nov. 23

Addison Mayor Joe Chow flips the switch to more than 1.5 million sparkling LED lights for the holidays. The lights remain on every evening until the end of the year, and every Saturday guests can enjoy the same entertainment as the opening ceremony: live music, photos with Santa, an elf balloon artist, gourmet food trucks, desserts, and retail booths for gift browsing. *Vitruvian Park, 3699 Vitruvian Way, 972-716-3574; visitaddison.com or vitruvianpark.com*

**Arlington**  
**Enchant: The World's Largest Christmas Light Maze**  
Nov. 23-Dec. 30

Festivities include ice skating, lighted Christmas mazes and displays inside the Texas Rangers ballpark, winter-themed drinks, a vendor village, and visits with Santa. *Globe Life Park, 1000 Ballpark Way, 866-760-8324; enchantchristmas.com*

**Dallas**  
**The 12 Days of Christmas**  
Nov. 9-Dec. 31

A dozen elaborately decorated Victorian-style gazebos are on display for the final year at the Dallas Arboretum, where they each depict a day in the beloved Christmas carol. Each gazebo is extravagantly decorated on all sides, with mechanical parts and festive music to bring the characters to life. *The Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Garden, 8525 Garland Road. 214-515-6615; dallasarboretum.org*

**Dallas**  
**Dallas Zoo Lights**  
Nov. 15-Jan. 5

After the animals head in for the evening, the park transforms into a winter wonderland, with nearly a million twinkling lights illuminating the night sky. *dallaszoo.com/zoollights 469-554-7500*

**Fort Worth**  
**GM Financial Parade of Lights**  
Nov. 18

More than 100 highly illuminated parade floats kick off the holiday season in style around Sundance Square. *Downtown. 817-336-2787; fortworthparadeoflights.org*

**McKinney**  
**Home for the Holidays**  
Nov. 23-25

Thanksgiving weekend marks the 37th year for this hometown Christmas celebration with family activities, food, and entertainment in the 14-block area of McKinney's 165-year-old downtown. *972-547-2660; mckinneytexas.org*

**Plano**  
**Christmas Market**  
Nov. 17-18

Find handmade gifts; jewelry and clothing; and candles, soaps, salsas, jams, nuts, and dips for gifts or holiday parties. *Carpenter Park Recreation Center, 6701 Coit Road. 972-941-7250; visitplano.com*

**EAST TEXAS**

**Palestine**  
**Grinch's Lair**  
Nov. 23-Dec. 23

The Who's Who of Whoville greets attendees at the Texas Jail House, where Mr. Grinch offers tours through his Texas Jail House dwelling. *Historic Anderson County Jail, 704 Avenue A. 903-373-8158; texasjailhouse.com*

**Palestine**  
**Polar Express Train Ride**  
Nov. 17-Dec. 27

The historic steam train makes its magical round-trip journey from the Palestine Depot to the North Pole, with Santa, caroling, hot cocoa, treats, and gifts. *Texas State Railroad Depot, 789 Park Road 70. 855-632-7729; texasstaterailroad.net*

**SOUTH TEXAS / GULF COAST**

**Aransas Pass**  
**Christmas by the Bay**  
Nov. 10-11

This shopping event brings in vendors from across the state to offer clothing, gifts, jewelry, gourmet food, Texas handmade items, home and holiday décor, candles, accessories, and more. *Aransas Pass Civic Center, 700 W. Wheeler Ave. 888-225-3427; texasmarketguide.com*

**Galveston**  
**Winter Wonder Island**  
Nov. 17-Jan. 12

Galveston transforms into a "Winter Wonder Island" with its annual holiday events, including Ice Land, Festival of Lights, and Dickens on the Strand. *Various locations. galveston.com/holidaymagic*

**Houston**  
**The Ultimate Christmas Show (Abridged)**  
Nov. 7-Dec. 23

It's the annual holiday Variety Show and Christmas Pageant at St. Everybody's Non-Denominational Universalist Church—"where all faiths are welcome because we'll believe anything!" There's just one problem: None of the scheduled performers have arrived. Now it's up to three quick-witted church members to perform the entire pageant by themselves. This slapstick performance bursts with fun as these clowns celebrate all the best holiday traditions—at once. *Stages Repertory Theatre, 3201 Allen Parkway, Suite 101. 713-527-0123; stages theatre.com*

**Houston**  
**Nutcracker Market**  
Nov. 8-11

The 38th annual event, one of the biggest holiday shopping markets in Texas, is a one-stop giant pop-up shop featuring hundreds of merchants from across the country showcasing items for everyone, including home décor, gourmet food, apparel, accessories, toys, and gifts. *NRG*

Center, 1 NRG Park, 713-535-3231; nrgpark.com or houstonballet.org

#### Houston

##### Midtown Mistletoe Market

Nov. 16-17

This holiday market features contemporary crafts, fine foods, and original artwork, plus a holiday movie night, a pet photo shoot, breakfast in the park, and an interactive holiday card. *Midtown Park, 2811 Travis St. 713-526-7577; midtownhouston.com*

#### Sugar Land

##### Sugar Land Holiday Lights

Nov. 23-Jan. 1

More than 2.5 million lights take over Constellation Field with Santa, food, holiday music, and games. *1 Stadium Drive. 281-240-4487; sugarlandholidaylights.com*

#### WEST TEXAS

#### Colorado City

##### Holiday Palooza

Nov. 17-18

A collection of arts, crafts,

antiques, sports memorabilia, home décor, candles, repurposed items, and food vendors gather at the 23,000-square-foot Railhead Building. *First and Elm streets. 325-728-3403; coloradocitychamberofcommerce.com*

#### El Paso

##### A Christmas Fair

Nov. 2-4

This annual market has officially kicked off the holiday season in El Paso for the past 45 years. More than 220 merchants welcome some 15,000 shoppers. *Judson F. Williams Convention Center, 1 Civic Center Plaza. jlep.org/a-christmas-fair*

#### El Paso

##### WinterFest

Nov. 15-Jan. 1

Downtown comes to life with festive lights, food, holiday shopping, festivities, a life-size inflatable snow globe, and an outdoor ice-skating rink near the Plaza Theatre. *Downtown Arts Festival Plaza. winterfestep.com*

### Want more? View the Texas Highways Events Calendar at [texashighways.com/events](http://texashighways.com/events).

For a free printed copy of an even more detailed, quarterly schedule of events, go to [texashighways.com/freepubs](http://texashighways.com/freepubs); write to Texas Highways Events Calendar, P.O. Box 149249, Austin, TX 78714-9249; or call 800-452-9292 from anywhere in the U.S. or Canada, between 8 a.m.-6 p.m. Central.

For Texas travel questions, call 800-452-9292 to reach a TxDOT Travel Information Center, where a professional travel counselor will provide routing assistance, advise you of road conditions, and send you free brochures (including the official Texas State Travel Guide, the Texas Official Travel Map, and the quarterly Texas Highways Events Calendar).

To submit event information, visit [texashighways.com/submitevent](http://texashighways.com/submitevent).

#### Listing deadlines:

Spring (March, April, May): Dec. 1  
Summer (June, July, Aug.): March 1  
Fall (Sept., Oct., Nov.): June 1  
Winter (Dec., Jan., Feb.): Sept. 1

## DEBORAH LUSTER

### Passion Play



Deborah Luster, *Leveller "Black" Tolliver (Judas)*, 2013, toned silver gelatin print, 50 x 40 inches, Loan Courtesy of the Artist and Jack Shainman Gallery

ON VIEW

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does the entire world know the name of Annie Oakley, who was famous for what? Shooting over her shoulder using a mirror? Cathy is not impressed and demands to know when she will be recognized.

Eight years ago, I promised Cathy I would one day tell her story. And now, as I hike back to the ranch house where George and True wait, my mind quiets. Call it a writer's overactive imagination or schizoid affective disorder, but I feel Cathy's presence again as surely as if she is marching beside me. I give her the news that the historical novel I've created from the very limited documentation available about her life and service has just been published: *Daughter of a Daughter of a Queen*.

Freed, I hurry back to the house. By the time I reach the low-water crossing, however, I am soaked in both sweat and a futile desire for the magical swimming

hole of the past. I am about to speed up the hill when True, clearly in thrall to a genetic imperative to herd, emerges from the undergrowth to deliver a series of git-along-little-dogie faux-nips to my heels. He corrals me, the straggler, then guides me to—of all places—the swimming hole. Following his joyous yips, I crash through the snarl of greenery to find George, dipping as skinny as a good Texas boy is required to, in “our” nearly brimming swimming hole.

I plunge in. The spot has the otherworldly feel of a grotto, shaded as it is by an enormous cottonwood arching over to nearly meet the limestone bluff on the opposite bank. The cool, chest-high water is so clear that every glittering scale on a pair of smallish bream is visible as they nibble at our toes planted on the limestone bed.

Liquid Xanax, indeed, this pocket of Barton Creek still has that same narcotizing effect. Arms outstretched, I float on

my back, staring up into Dobie's boundless sky. As I think of the 99 other fellows who, inspired by Dobie's embracing spirit, have sheltered beneath this same patch of sky, a surprising sense of kinship comes over me. High overhead, a vulture cuts its inky calligraphy into the endless blue. For a second, I swear that bird traces the name “Cathy Williams” across the sky. But, of course, I'm imagining that—liquid Xanax!—and, of course, the vulture is gone when I look again. I drift down the creek, honored to be a member of Dobie's harmonic community of professional isolates, my obligation fulfilled at last.

*Sarah Bird's 10th novel, Daughter of a Daughter of a Queen, was published by St. Martin's Press in September. Also, True would like the record to indicate that at no point was he scared of any lion. There was a nip in the air; that's why he was trembling.* ♣



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# Texas Forever

Laura Bush's post-White House life of family, nature, and letters

By Michael Hoinski

**O**n a warm summer morning, former First Lady Laura Bush walked among the butterflies in the garden behind her dogtrot-style vacation house on Prairie Chapel Ranch in Crawford. The likes of former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and U2 singer Bono have ventured on these grounds before, but on this July day viceroys and queens were the VIPs. They flitted about as Bush interpreted the landscape. There's antelope horns milkweed, she said. There's gaillardia. There's basket-flower, and there's a gourd. "This one's called purple mist, or blue mist," she said. "If you want butterflies, then plant this."

Ten years removed from the White House, Bush is not entirely out of politics. In June, she wrote an op-ed for *The Washington Post* in which she decried the separation of children from their parents at the border. But these days Bush primarily directs her efforts into the preservation and promotion of the environment, continuing the legacy of her predecessor, Lady Bird Johnson. Through *Texan by Nature*,

**"I think it's really good just to be outside for mental health, but I also think it makes you more imaginative."**

a nonprofit she co-founded in 2011, Bush convenes businesses and environmental groups on projects that benefit our natural state.

Born in Midland and now living in Dallas, Bush was in Crawford to celebrate her husband's 72nd birthday. As the former president mountain biked with wounded warriors, Mrs. Bush continued through the garden and into the newly built studio where her husband paints. Works-in-progress abounded, including paintings of the Bushes' grandchildren and prairie landscapes with cacti and wildflowers. There was also a painting of Mrs. Bush. "It's not very good," she said, jokingly. "He knows I don't really like it."

**Q:** *Why do y'all like spending time here?*

**A:** George loves to ride his bike here. He has 43 miles of bike trails—interesting, that's his number as president. It's just being outside, which we love. I mean, everyone does, really. There's no research that proves that people feel better when they're outside, but we all sort of know it intuitively. Even if you can look out a window in your office, you're happier than in your cubicle.

**Q:** *Why is it important to appreciate the outdoors?*

**A:** This generation is outside less than any generation ever in the history of man. There are just so many reasons to be inside. We're on screens, we're on computers, we're watching Netflix. When George and I were growing up, your mother said, "Go outside," and then she'd sit on the back porch and call you in for dinner. I think it's really good just to be outside for mental health, but I also think it makes you more imaginative. I remember building ranches with mesquite beans for cattle in Midland, but of course they were just in the sand and dirt. It was just a way to play.

**Q:** *What is the strategy of Texan by Nature?*

**A:** There are a number of corporations that have large campuses, maybe of 140 acres or more, and we've

encouraged them to plant the plants that pollinators need, like the antelope horns milkweed, which monarch butterflies are dependent upon for their migration up north for the summer and then back down to Mexico for the winter. So, our idea is to work with corporations to get more acreage planted in natives. But we want to talk with everybody. We want congregations to make sure they have native plants in their churchyards. We have beautiful wildlife that depends on native plants.

**Q:** *Aren't corporations supposed to be enemies of the environment?*

**A:** I think that's more of a stereotype that corporations are greedy and wouldn't care. But the fact is they do, and they're made up of people who do. We did a project with BAE Systems outside of Austin and gave them the "Monarch Wrangler" designation because they planted milkweed. Then the people that work there became really interested, and now they're even keeping bees. If we don't have bees, we wouldn't have food, we wouldn't have agriculture. They're so central to our life, and people don't know it really.

**Q:** *How did your family cultivate your love of nature?*

**A:** As an only child growing up in West Texas, I spent summers with my grandparents in Canutillo, a little town barely outside of El Paso, right by the Rio Grande. I helped my grandma for hours in her garden. She grew flowers in the center of stray recycled tires. She taught me how to keep asparagus, yuccas, ocotillos, and pomegranate trees thriving in the harshest conditions. In Midland, I learned to love the outdoors from my mother, who if she was not reading, could be found outside. My mother

is a self-taught naturalist who remembers the name of every wildflower and is passionate about birds. Her fascination with bird watching began when I was 10 and she volunteered to be my Girl Scouts leader, which involved helping us earn our bird badge. We would sit Indian-style with binoculars and wait for birds to swoop by. She's 98 and in Midland still.

**Q:** *What does Lady Bird Johnson mean to you?*

**A:** She means a lot to me, and I knew her. She opened the [current version of the] Wildflower Center when George was governor. We hosted the luncheon for the opening on the lawn of the Governor's Mansion, and we went to the gala that night. I've always been inspired by her. A lot of people thought, "Isn't that sweet? The little first lady likes wildflowers." But in fact she was really the beginning of the conservation movement and the whole idea of using native plants in the landscape.

**Q:** *As you've traveled around Texas, which cities have stood out as dynamic?*

**A:** Well, Austin, of course, is the most. But I've lived all over the state. I've lived in Houston. George and I had a lake house in East Texas, by Athens. My grandmother lived in El Paso. My other grandmother lived in Lubbock. I really have lived in every part of the state. Besides, being first lady of the state really gave me a chance to see Texas in a way that most other people haven't because it's so big. Fort Worth has done really well. There's a lot of money there. There are museums. El Paso is doing great right now. Austin has gotten so huge, even though it sort of wanted to stay a sleepy little capital.

**Q:** *You are a former librarian and co-founder of the Texas Book Festival. What have you been reading?*

**A:** I don't know that I recommend these but I became totally fascinated with these books by Simon Sebag Montefiore about Joseph Stalin. I read

*Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* first and then *Young Stalin* next, and then the book by Timothy Snyder called *Bloodlands*, about Stalin and Hitler. I couldn't put them down. [Stalin and Hitler] just were so horrible that every time you read about them, you read something else horrible that they did. But it was interesting. I always read on the iPad. It's so great to be able to download a book in 35 seconds—read a good review and download a book.

**Q:** *How did the tradition of regular hiking excursions with your childhood friends get started?*

**A:** Thirty years ago, for our 40th birthdays, we decided to do a Grand Canyon river trip, where we floated on the Colorado River and then camped out on the floor and hiked out the South Rim. We did that again when George was president. The mothers all took our daughters—Barbara didn't go because she was in South Africa, but Jenna went with me. And, of course, my friends and I were old by then. The daughters hiked out in four hours, and the old mothers trudged out in seven hours. At one point I thought, this is going to be so embarrassing if the first lady has to be carried out on a gurney. But we made it. We've been to Sequoia, Yosemite, Big Bend, Zion, Denali, the Appalachian Trail. We do a lot of laughing. We read poetry. We've collected the poems that we like best and put them in a book.

**Q:** *In all of your worldly travels, what have you observed that makes Texas unique?*

**A:** I think our best characteristics are that we're tough and we're independent. We're a state with very little public land, and people like that. I think when people own their own land, that makes them better stewards of it. ■

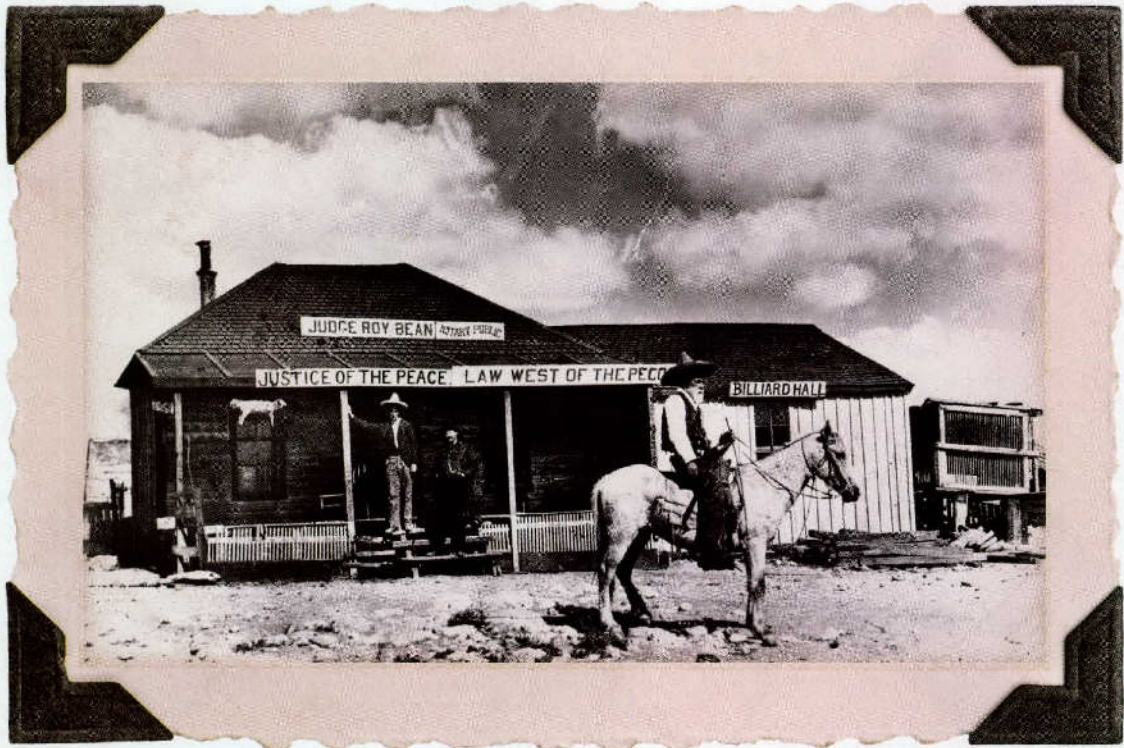
**INVESTING IN NATURE**

Learn more about Laura Bush's **Texan by Nature** conservation effort at [texanbynature.org](http://texanbynature.org).

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# VINTAGE



## The Law of the Land

CIRCA 1900

**P**erched on a dusty ridge overlooking the Rio Grande, the tiny town of Langtry lies in the thick of the Lower Pecos Canyonlands, about 60 miles west of Del Rio. Langtry sprang up in 1882 as a railroad camp during the construction of the Southern Pacific line. Among the profiteers following the railroad was Roy Bean, a tent-saloon operator who became Langtry's justice of the peace. The grizzled Bean—pictured ahorseback in this undated photo—relished the position, branding himself the “Law West of the Pecos.” Holding court at his Jersey Lilly Saloon, Bean built a reputation as a cantankerous and opportunistic arbiter, once fining a corpse \$40 for carrying a concealed weapon. The Judge Roy Bean Visitor Center (a Texas Department of Transportation Travel Information Center) preserves Bean's 122-year-old wooden saloon and his adobe home, along with historical artifacts such as Bean's intricately carved walking stick. On Nov. 1, the visitor center celebrates its 50th anniversary with historical exhibits and children's activities. **L**



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