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THE OUTDOOR MAGAZINE OF TEXAS • JAN/FEB 2020

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Archeologists uncover the  
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# JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2020

VOLUME 78 • NUMBER 1

Author Kathryn Hunter and husband Jack Mott, participants in the Palo Duro archeological field school, review the park's trail map before proceeding to their designated site.

EARL NOTTINGHAM / TPWD

## 24

### Blaze a Trail

TPWD offers land and water routes for every interest and skill level.

by Russell Roe

## 32

### Boots on the Ground, Hands in the Dirt

Archeological field school uncovers the past at Palo Duro Canyon.

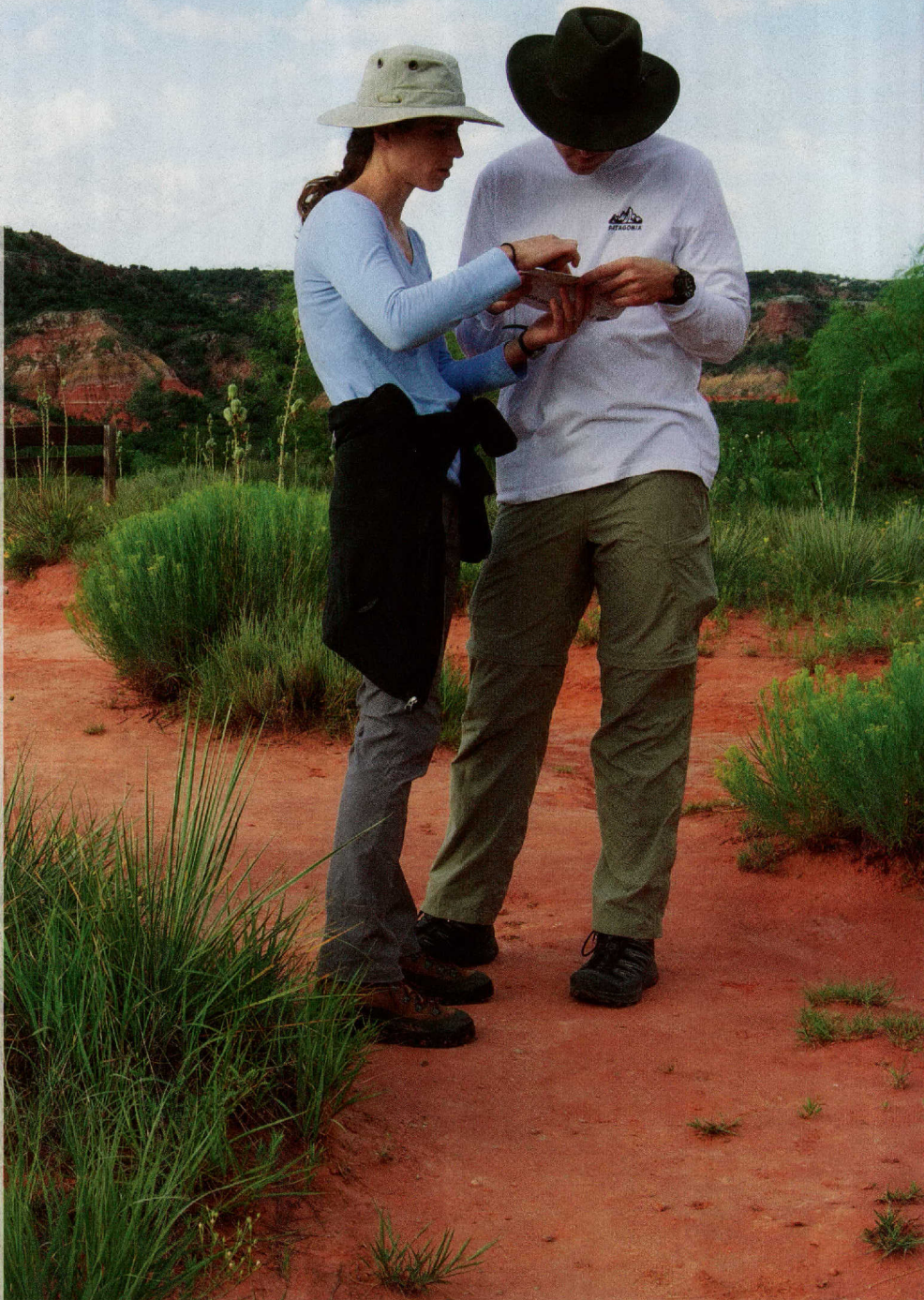
by Kathryn Hunter


## 38


### Peak Performance

Tackling your first mountain trek takes preparation, especially if it's Texas' tallest.

by Julia B. Jones



**ON THE COVER:** Hikers take a break on their way up Guadalupe Peak.  Chase Fountain / TPWD

**BACK COVER:** A roadrunner finds a rocky perch at Palo Duro Canyon.  Earl Nottingham / TPWD

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# RESOLUTION: *Play Outside More!*



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8

MAIL CALL



10

TRAIL MIX

Start the new year right with a **First Day Hike**; Monahans Sandhills gets its own **video game**; up to **3 billion birds** lost in the past 50 years; **huisache tree** boasts golden blooms; exploring the trails of **Mother Neff State Park**; look up in the sky at **South Padre Island Kite Fest**; is that a **turtle** or a **tortoise**; **Billy Sandifer Big Shell Cleanup** celebrates 25 years.

TPWD

18

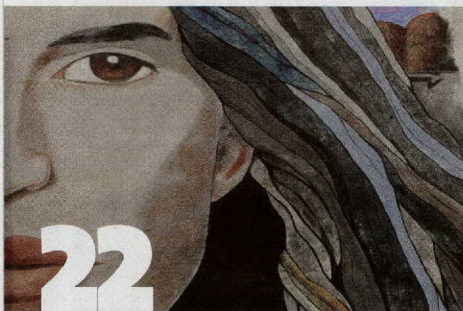
WILD THING

**Bobcats** are adapting to urban areas.  
By Mary Schmidt

20

PICTURE THIS

Have you updated your camera's **firmware** recently?  
By Earl Nottingham



CHASE FOUNTAIN / TPWD

WILD WOMEN

East Texas Angels: **Angelina** and **Maxine Johnston**.  
By Louie Bond

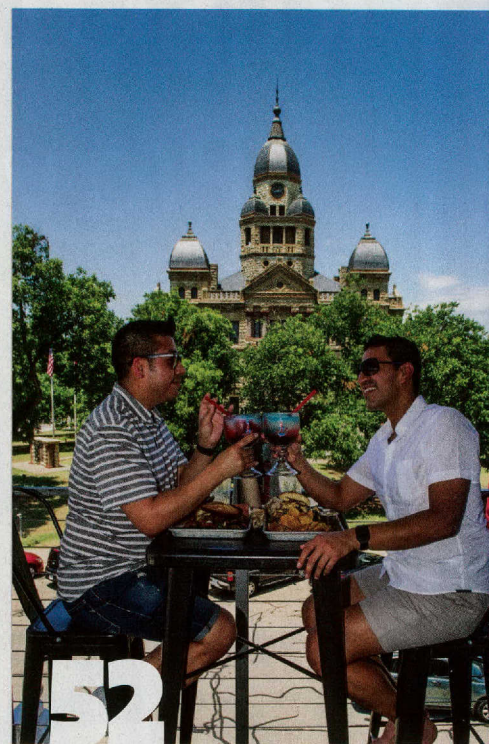


16

NICE CATCH

**Winter fishing** has its rewards.  
By Randy Brudnicki

TPWD



52

CHASE FOUNTAIN / TPWD

TRAVEL

**Denton** is a college town with a syncopated beat.  
By Russell Roe

56

WANDERLIST

Marked by CCC structures, our **first state parks** endure for the ages.  
By Julia B. Jones

58

WHERE IN TEXAS?

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Greg Abbott

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## FROM THE EDITOR

**HAPPY NEW YEAR** to our family of readers! We are here only because of your love for Texas land and water and your belief that this magazine can help inspire everyone to enjoy our natural blessings. Thank you from the bottom of our nature-loving hearts. We do our best to fulfill our mission each issue.

And so, every January we bring you the results of our annual self-evaluation embedded in the products of our overactive imaginations, aka “new stuff” for the new year.

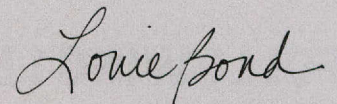
First on the list is Wild Women, dreamed up when we realized that the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment (granting women the right to vote) is happening in 2020. What better way to honor this historic milestone than to salute 20 Wild Women of Texas Conservation? We started with a long list of amazing, accomplished women and — after spirited debate — narrowed it down to 20 throughout Texas history. This month we begin with the obvious starting point, Angelina, who is paired with her modern Big Thicket counterpart, Maxine “Micky” Johnston.

What did we learn along the way? For one thing, it’s difficult to find accounts of remarkable Texas women, and, most particularly, those of color. We surmise that there were many early women botanists, perhaps not formally trained, but who


helped their communities use local plants for medicinal and other purposes. I’m sure there were early teachers, early wildlife rescuers and early land/water conservationists who weren’t lauded in publications discoverable by modern researchers. Maybe this series will help others uncover and publish those missing accounts of Texas history. We’d love to hear from you if you have such stories to share.

Read Managing Editor Russell Roe’s fine feature (Page 24) on the trails of TPWD and you’ll find our inspiration for a new monthly department, Take a Hike (Page 14). You’ve all become fans of Russell’s adventures, so we want him to share the details of our favorite trails as we feature one each month. He’ll get to do a lot of hiking, with a bit of paddling and cycling thrown in for a change of pace.

Thanks for believing in us. We hope you’ll enjoy all the treats we will unfold for you during 2020.



Louie Bond, Editor



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Love, El Paso

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CHASE FOUNTAIN / TPWD

## FOLLOWING LEOPOLD'S FOOTSTEPS

I'm always fascinated by conservation success stories, particularly ones developed through the convergence of appreciation and understanding. Your article "Early Morning Vista" (November 2019) was a welcomed joy and surprise.

Before reading your article, I was not aware that there was a Texas Leopold Conservation Award. Its importance is certainly obvious, and we should all applaud the Sand County Foundation for its efforts.

Oh, and hats off to David Killam and David Kitner. Those two seem to be deeply embedded in Aldo Leopold's footsteps.

**NICHOLAS SOLLITTO**  
Garland

### CAMPING ON TOP OF A CAR

"Camping Elevated" (October 2019) brings back memories from the early '80s — our Subaru wagon with the "Air Camper" cartop tent on the roof. It was built near Indianapolis.

On the positive side, dust in campgrounds usually goes no more than five feet high, and critters and insects are usually near ground level, too. Up there, we had a better breeze, a better view and a lot more privacy. We also had almost every person in the park come and visit us.

On the negative side, the cartop tent changes the center of gravity on small vehicles and trailers, and the cartop tent is difficult to put on the roof or take off, unless you have friends or a block and tackle attached to a tree limb.

It was a simple way to camp, and in these days of RVs, I miss those days.

**DONALD N. WRIGHT**  
Garland

### HE SAVED THE PALMS

Your Flora Fact in the October 2019 issue ("Texas Palms") was very good but a bit too short, and it left out who began the drive to save the sabal palm — Robert Runyon.

Robert Runyon was my grandfather, and if it were not for his efforts, there would be none of these palms left.

Thank you. I know it was a short article, but this should have been noted.

**MADELEINE GILBERT SPANGLER**  
Alpharetta, Georgia

## WHERE IN TEXAS?



*The community around it is gone, but Calera Chapel, also known as Mission Mary, remains standing, located a few miles west of Balmorhea State Park. The small adobe chapel (pictured in December's Where in Texas?) was built for the people of Calera in the early 1900s, but by the middle of the century, it sat empty. In the early 2000s, the Calera Foundation was formed with the purpose of renovating the church, and the chapel reopened in 2003, attracting spiritual seekers, couples getting married and photographers drawn to the simple chapel that takes on the colors of the desert sun. Reader Richard C. Robinson recognized the spot and says he plans to put it on a "to-do list for a future trip back out to Big Bend." Reader Buddy Richter is a regular visitor to Balmorhea State Park and says he makes it a point to visit the chapel when he's there.*



# ATTENTION VOLUNTEERS!

25TH ANNUAL

*Billy Sandifer*

# BIG SHELL BEACH CLEANUP

## FRIENDS OF PADRE

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**PADRE ISLAND  
NATIONAL SEASHORE  
February 29, 2020**



The cleanup is set for February 29, 2020. Volunteers will meet at the Malaquite Pavilion on the Padre Island National Seashore no later than 8 am. Entrance fees to the park will be waived for volunteers. Four wheel drive vehicles and trailers are needed! Those without a 4x4 are welcome and will be given transportation to and from the work area. This is a rain or shine event and will not be rescheduled. Refreshments will be available in the work area and a FREE lunch will be provided at the conclusion of the event. Commemorative T-shirts will also be given away while supplies last. Long pants and sturdy footwear is recommended. Please do not pick up broken glass or flammable items. Report all hazardous items to event staff or park personnel.

Please come join us in making this the best Billy Sandifer Big Shell Beach Cleanup ever!



Friends of Padre

PARK SPOTLIGHT

## Start the New Year Right with a First Day Hike

**A**fter a treat-filled holiday season, many overstuffed Texans are going to kick off the New Year by trying to keep that resolution to be healthier.

We're here to help. Strap on some comfortable shoes and head to a Texas state park this New Year's Day for one of the many First Day Hikes happening around the state, from the Pineywoods to the Panhandle to the Rio Grande Valley. State parks are the perfect place to kick-start your journey toward a healthier lifestyle while surrounded by the beauty of nature.

These "hikes" are not as tough as they sound and vary from standard walks in the park for those just starting their path toward fitness to more strenuous hikes for experienced hikers. Guided programs include strolls on scenic trails, polar plunges and short treks with four-legged family members.

Several Texas state parks are also offering midnight New Year's Eve hikes for anyone who wants to ring in the New Year under the stars.

Last year, close to 4,000 people hiked, biked and paddled their way into 2019 at 124 events hosted statewide at 77 Texas state parks throughout the day. Texas had the fourth-highest participation in the country with the largest number of parks hosting an



event. Park visitors in Texas trekked a total of 7,086 miles on Jan. 1.

**MOTHER NEFF STATE PARK**, near Waco, had the most participants with 393 visitors taking part in the four First Day Hikes held that day.

Several parks had more than 100 people participate in a single event. One event at **CEDAR HILL STATE PARK** found 275 visitors traversing the trails.

Nationally, 1,276 guided First Day Hikes

SONJA SOMMERFELD / TPWD

PARK SPOTLIGHT

## Arcade Game Created for

**C**an video games happily coexist with outdoor recreation? At Monahans Sandhills State Park, the answer is yes. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department exhibit shop has constructed and installed a Nintendo-inspired '80s-style arcade game to connect the heart and minds of visitors to the resources of the state park.

Monahans Sandhills State Park encompasses nearly 4,000 acres of sand dunes and sandhills, an ecosystem unlike any other in Texas, with surprising diversity.

The video game educates visitors on one of the unique geologic features of the park — perched water tables, which provide water for wildlife.

"The water tables are why this whole place is populated and has been since prehistory," says Dana Younger, exhibits manager for Texas state parks. "It can be a complicated thing to talk about, so we created a video game to give kids and adults an idea of why this area is out there."

In the game, the player becomes a cloud





© CESAR MENDEZ / TPWD

were offered on Jan. 1, 2019, from Alaska to Florida; park rangers hiked with more than 73,000 participants covering more than 151,000 miles. This was a record number of hikers and events and included international

participation from Canada, where seven hikes attracted 185 attendees.

Look for a First Day Hike near you on the state park event page: [tpwd.texas.gov/calendar](http://tpwd.texas.gov/calendar).

# Monahans

that needs to transform into a thundercloud to provide rain to plants, wildlife and the perched water tables. There are many obstacles in the game that can prevent the player from releasing rain. The rainwater accumulation is set to reflect the actual 12 inches of rain the area receives yearly. Educational blurbs guide the way through the three-level game.

People can easily take what they learn about the perched water tables, trees and wildlife seen in the game and translate it to

what is right before their eyes at the park. The game is simple for kids and appeals to the nostalgia for '80s arcade machines.

This first-of-its-kind project sparked a lot of fun for the exhibit shop staff. Todd Weinzierl, an avid gamer and graphic designer, designed the game; Stephen Garrett, interpretive planner for the project, wrote the game content; Tom Lamm, shop fabricator, created the vintage arcade cabinet; and Eric Ray, lead interpretive planner, figured out the controllers.



## On TV

Winner of 30 Emmy Awards, our television series is broadcast throughout Texas on local PBS affiliates. Also available on YouTube and PBS Online. [tpwd.texas.gov/tv](http://tpwd.texas.gov/tv)

### JANUARY 5-11

Game warden disaster response; farm heritage; repairing a rookery.

### JANUARY 12-18

San Angelo trail troubadour; skimmer research; Caprock prairie dogs.

### JANUARY 19-25

Game of gobblers; Hill Country camp for kids; reclaiming the Colorado River.

### JANUARY 26 - FEBRUARY 1

Hunting memories; El Paso envoy; river access team; coastal fish stocking.

### FEBRUARY 2-8

Tracing El Camino Real; map man; Kickapoo Cavern; Guadalupe River.



### FEBRUARY 9-15 ↑

Grassland sparrows; Fort Boggy; wildlife selfies; birds at breakfast.

### FEBRUARY 16-22

Lions of West Texas; saving green sea turtles; Bastrop State Park rebound.

### FEBRUARY 23-29

A hundred-mile hike; wildlife partnerships; Lake Bob Sandlin.

## On the Podcast



Our podcast takes listeners to the great Texas outdoors. Find episodes on Guadalupe bass, turkeys, pollinators and more. New episodes return in April. Download at [underthetexas.org](http://underthetexas.org) or major podcast platforms.

## CONSERVATION

# Lost: 3 Billion Birds

**I**n September 2019, the journal *Science* announced the loss of billions of birds over the past half-century in North America, and the news spread fast, reaching a new generation of concerned citizens. For conservationists, the information wasn't new, but rather a painful reminder that we need to make conservation a priority.

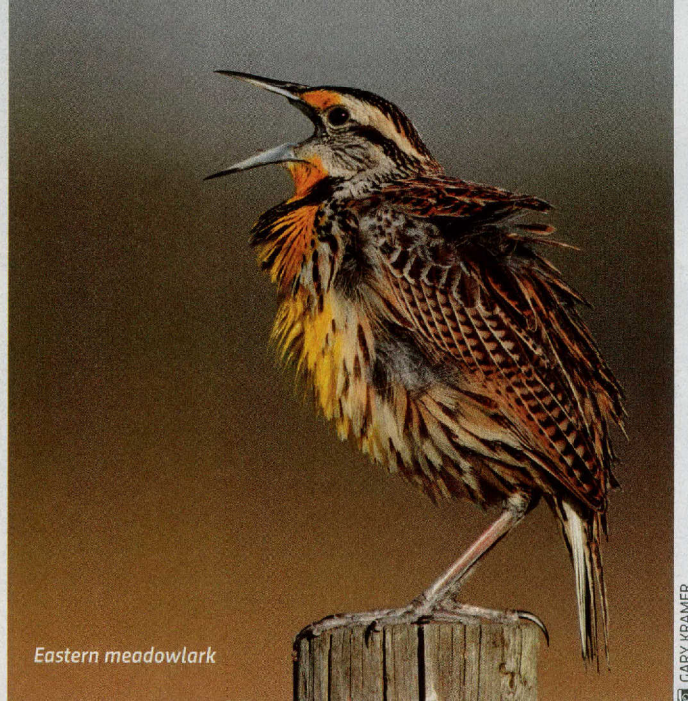
What caught the public's attention was the authors' quantification of the decline — approximately 3 billion birds in 50 years, a staggering number. These declines are due to a multitude of threats and dangers, including collisions with windows and encounters with free-ranging house cats, but none more noteworthy than the conversion of habitat to human uses.

The longest, steepest decline can be found in our nation's grassland birds, the result of a global decline in natural plant communities (bird habitats).

Stated simply, humans have destroyed important habitats that birds and other critters call home.

In Val Lehmann's 1941 monograph *Attwater's Prairie Chicken: Its Life History and Management*, he observed that, by 1937, the original 6 million acres of prairie habitat in Texas and southwest Louisiana suitable for Attwater's prairie-chickens had been drained, leveled and converted, leaving less than a half-million acres of suitable prairie habitat. The result? Prairie-chicken numbers dropped from 1 million to only 8,700 — half of which were in just two Texas counties.

Prairie habitats also support other grassland birds whose numbers have plummeted, like the northern bobwhite, eastern meadowlark, loggerhead shrike, Henslow's sparrow, Sprague's pipit and northern harrier. Prairies are also crucial



Eastern meadowlark

GARY KRAMER

for many types of waterfowl and numerous other plants and animals.

The most important way to shift the tide of bird loss is to restore native habitats. Protecting open space, utilizing thoughtful urban development, planting backyard native wildscapes, controlling invasive species and converting pastures back to native grasses are ways to accomplish this goal.

One new hope on the horizon

is the Restoring America's Wildlife Act. Passage would mean more than \$50 million in new funds each year for Texas wildlife, transforming efforts to conserve and restore more than 1,300 species of concern in Texas, the majority of which are at-risk, nongame fish and wildlife.

Learn more about this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to protect our wildlife at [tpwd.texas.gov/about/recovering-americas-wildlife-act](http://tpwd.texas.gov/about/recovering-americas-wildlife-act).



STEPHANIE C. BRUNDAGE / LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

## FLORA: NATIVE POLLINATOR PLANTS

# Golden Blooms of the Huisache

**O**ne of the earliest bloomers each spring is the huisache tree, piercing the dull winter palette with its masses of golden blooms. Each yellow fluffball smells as good as it looks, offering an all-senses invitation to spring from February through April. It's native to South Texas and Mexico.

Also commonly known as sweet acacia, this fountain-shaped tree can reach heights of 20 feet; it is considered a large shrub or small tree. Huisache grows in a variety of soils, but does best on the heavier, wetter clays and clay loams from the Rio Grande plains to Big Bend National Park.

Another secondary name of the huisache helps provide a much-needed pronunciation guide: weesatch. Huisache attracts birds, butterflies and hummingbirds and needs little water to grow, perfect for Texas.

Though you may be lured by the huisache's fragrance and beauty, beware: the branches are armed with 2-inch spikes. The common name, huisache, is derived from Nahuatl and means "many thorns." It is sometimes called needlebush.

In southern Europe this species is extensively planted for the flowers, which are processed into a perfume ingredient called "cassie." Those flowers are surrounded by sensitive, gray-green leaflets that look like tiny mimosa leaves. The seeds (huisache is a legume, a member of the pea family) come in a 2- to 3-inch plump, green pod that darkens to black. The resin of the acacia is used to produce gum arabic, a natural stabilizer and thickening agent in food.

You may recognize in huisache the characteristics of other Texas acacias, such as mesquite trees, catclaw and the thornless fern acacia.

# MAKING IT LAST



## Protecting Wild Things and Wild Places

Seeing the Texas State Bison herd on a snowy day at Caprock Canyon State Park is a true bucket-list experience. We're working to ensure wildlife and wide-open spaces are here for future generations. **#MakingItLast**



Life's better outside.®

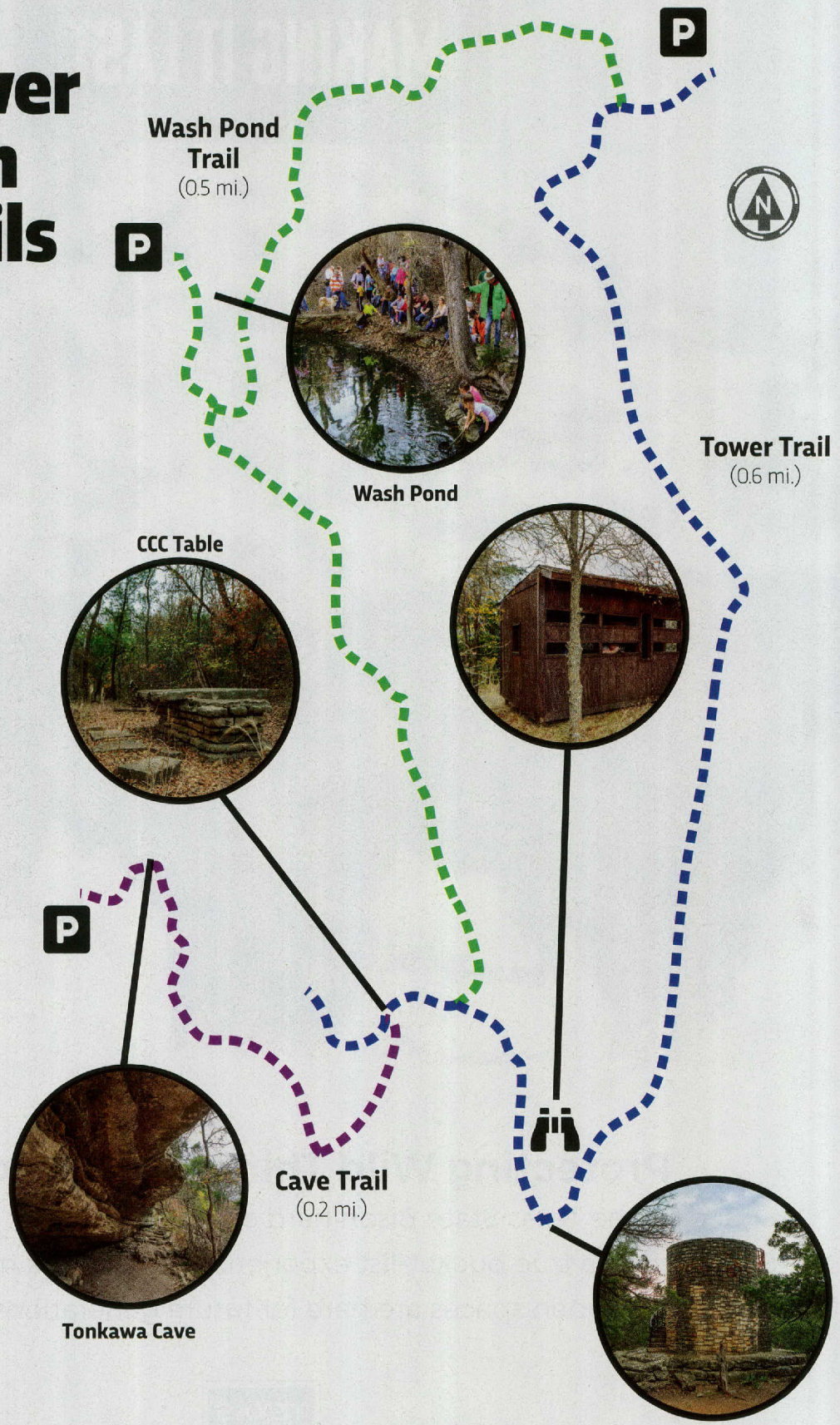
TAKE A HIKE

# Cave, Tower and Wash Pond Trails

Mother Neff State Park

**F**or the first hike in our new monthly hike feature, we've chosen Mother Neff State Park, our first state park. People have been coming to this special place, along the shaded banks of the Leon River, for thousands of years. The spot has an important role in Texas state park history. Isabella Neff donated 6 acres of family land to the state for use as a park, and her son, Gov. Pat Neff, took that land and inspiration to create the state park system. Thanks, Ma!

The Tower, Cave and Wash Pond trails form a sort of loop taking you to many of the park's main attractions, including a cave and structures built by the Civilian Conservation Corps. Oak and juniper woodlands line the Tower Trail to the CCC-built rock tower, with a stone spiral staircase to the top. Interpretive signs along the way explain the notable plants of the area. There's a bird blind, too, just a short distance from the tower. Continuing down the trail into the ravine, hikers will find a CCC-built picnic table. From here, follow the Cave Trail to see a rock shelter formerly inhabited by Native Americans. Backtrack on the Cave Trail to meet the Wash Pond Trail, which follows the creek to a natural basin expanded by the CCC. From there, it's a short hike back to the trailhead.



**DISTANCE:**  
1.5 Miles



**DIFFICULTY LEVEL:**  
★★★★☆



**APPROXIMATE TIME:**  
1 hour

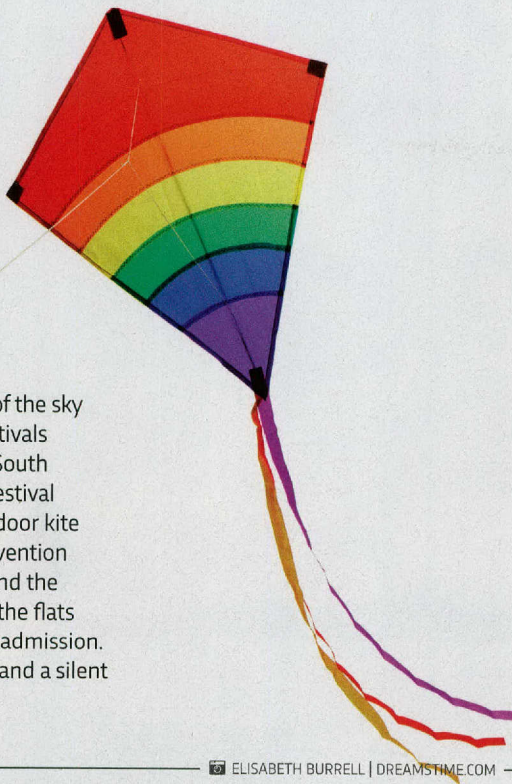
CCC Rock Tower

ALL © EARL NOTTINGHAM / TPWD

GET OUT

## South Padre Kite Fest

All eyes will be on the colors of the sky as one of the biggest kite festivals in the country descends on South Padre Island in late January. The festival kicks off Thursday, Jan. 30, with indoor kite performances (\$6) at the SPI Convention Center in the evening. The kites, and the excitement, move outdoors onto the flats for Friday and Saturday, with free admission. There's a banquet Saturday night and a silent auction. [www.spikitefest.com](http://www.spikitefest.com)



ELISABETH BURRELL | DREAMSTIME.COM

WILDLIFE

## TORTOISE OR TURTLE?

Tortoises and turtles do look alike and share some traits. Both are reptiles from the Chelonian family, shielded by a shell and generally reclusive and shy. So, how can we tell them apart?



TORTOISE



TURTLE

Large, domed shell	Flat, streamlined shell
Heavy shell	Light shell
Short, sturdy feet with bent legs	Webbed feet with long claws
Hatchlings move to burrow right away	Hatchlings stay in nest three to four months
Lifespan is 80–150 years	Lifespan is 20–40 years
Oldest recorded was 326	Oldest recorded was 86
Land-based	Aquatic

L-R: MESQUITE53, VITERS8 | BOTH DREAMSTIME.COM



AUGS SERVICES

GET OUT

## Sandifer Big Shell Cleanup Silver Anniversary

Join the 25th annual Billy Sandifer Big Shell Cleanup on Saturday, Feb. 29, to help clean up an important stretch of Texas coast. Each year, hundreds of volunteers spend the day removing trash from the Big Shell portion of the Padre Island National Seashore near Corpus Christi. Organized by the Friends of Padre, a local group of anglers and other supporters of the park, the event needs working volunteers, four-wheel-drive vehicles and flatbed trailers for hauling trash out of the work area. Walking volunteers are welcomed; those without four-wheel-drive vehicles will be afforded transportation to and from the work area.

Volunteers can enjoy a free lunch after the event; commemorative T-shirts are available. The park entrance fee will be waived for the cleanup, which will take place rain or shine.

Sandifer, a Vietnam War veteran, came home troubled and sick and sought peace and health on the beach, guiding fishing, shelling and birding trips. Nicknamed "the Padre of Padre Island," he became a leading protector of Padre Island and its wildlife until his death in 2018.

Sandifer's work lives on as 9,925 volunteers have removed 2.9 million pounds of trash from this wild stretch of remote beach over the years of the cleanup. Join this year's volunteers and make a difference. More information on [friendsofpadre.com](http://friendsofpadre.com) or on Facebook.



NICE CATCH

# Cold Fish

Wintertime, and the fishing's still fun.

By Randy Brudnicki

**I**t's winter, after all, so expect it to be cold. But winter's only sporadic in Texas — there are plenty of nice days that are surprisingly warm. Pick and choose your days, if you can, so you're ready to fish whenever you see a few warm days in a row approaching.



CHASE FOUNTAIN / TPWD

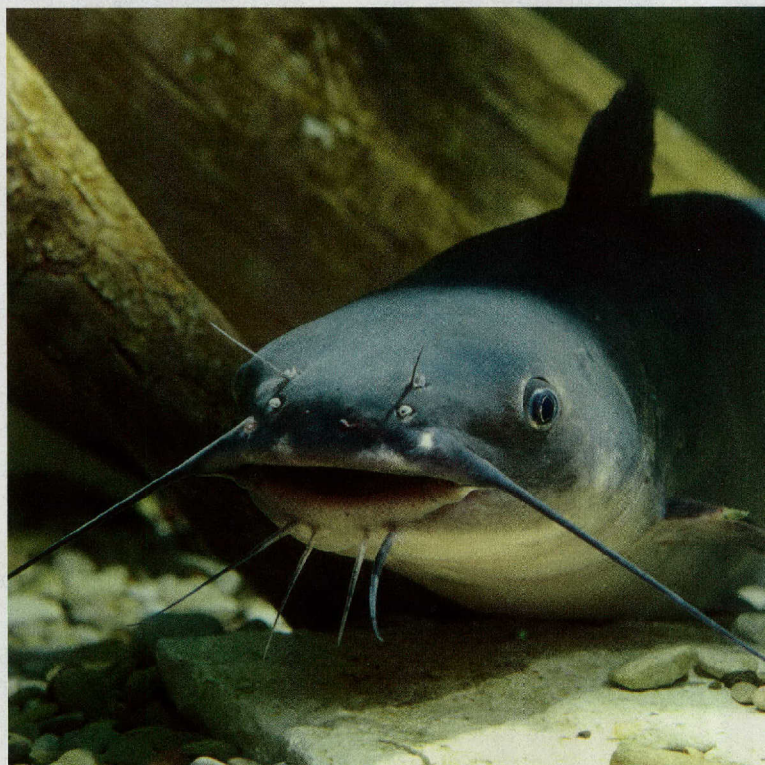
## LOWER COAST • BLACK DRUM

In late winter, starting in February, black drum school up for spawning. Much like the "runs" of some freshwater fish (think white bass), large "bull" drum gather in the deeper bays or channels and begin moving around jetties and passes. They may spawn almost anywhere, but they hang around areas accessible to anglers now.

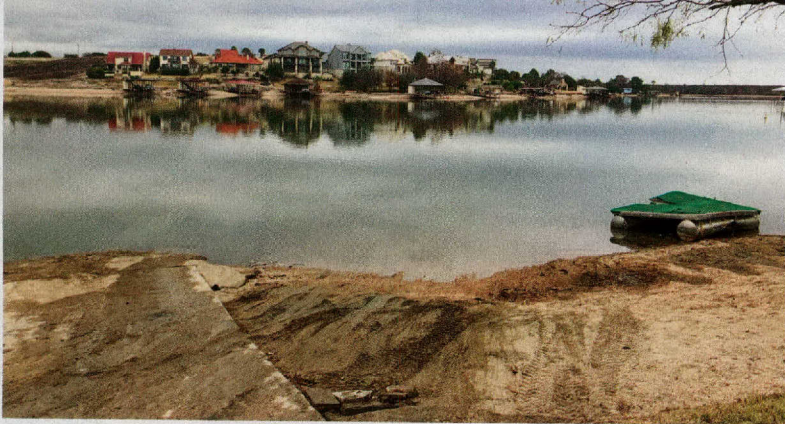
The drum can get big — up to 40 pounds. Don't expect an acrobatic display of jumping. The fight is more like tussling with a bulldog on the other end of a tug-of-war. Most people use a medium saltwater rod, but if you get into a school of large fish, you may want to have a heavy backup rod and gear.

Black drum feed by smell, so it's best to use natural selections such as cut bait or aged, peeled Gulf shrimp. Fish right on the bottom. If there is a current, use enough weight to keep your offering down. A circle hook is highly recommended because it hooks up solid and yet is easy to remove. Black drum have a slot limit, so be sure you're able to unhook and release a fish quickly. The fish on the lower end of the slot are usually better eating than the really large fish.

For this time of year, concentrate your efforts from Corpus Christi southward. The Laguna Madre provides plenty of access and action.







© RANDY BRUDNICKI / TPWD

### LAKE LBJ • LARGEMOUTH BASS

January to February is a big transition time on Lake LBJ. Normally, March is considered a good fishing time in Texas, but LBJ bass fishing begins sooner. By February, areas of the lake can warm considerably because of the warm water discharge from the power plant near Horseshoe Bay. Water temperatures in Horseshoe Bay and surrounding coves warm quickly into the 60-degree range, so bass are in a pre-spawn mode now.

A word of caution: In January-February 2019 LCRA lowered the water level by 4 feet to allow property owners to work on their docks and boat houses following the flood from the previous fall; LCRA plans to lower it again in January-February 2020. Lower water levels limit the launching options, but it's still possible to launch and fish very successfully. It's also a good time to explore the lake and look for likely future fishing spots when the water level returns to normal.

You should find shallow fish with moving baits such as crankbaits, spinner baits or chatter baits. Follow the shoreline contour and cast your bait out in front of the boat. Try to find water temperatures in the upper 50s to low 60s to improve your chance of success; stay in the lower part of the lake this time of year.

Many docks normally good for fishing are going to be out of the water now. However, the steeper shorelines have docks in deep water; those will still be in play at this water level. With the lower lake level, spend some time graphing for brush piles because they can be easier to fish with jigs/craw trailers or Texas-rigged worms now. You'll know where they are when the water comes back up.

If none of these techniques are working, go to the dam area and fish a drop-shot rig with a small shad-shaped plastic bait or plastic worm.



© EARL NOTTINGHAM / TPWD

### RICHLAND CHAMBERS • BLUE CATFISH

Set your sights on big blue cats this winter. Catfish can be anywhere, but try narrowing your starting point to the timber along the Richland Creek channel. Try fishing on the bottom in water depths of 25 feet. Some days the cats may be shallower than that, but 25 feet is a good place to start.

"If the sun is up and the water is warming on a cold winter day, shallow water is preferred because the bait move in and the blue cats are more active," says John Tibbs, Inland Fisheries District 2B supervisor. "It is not uncommon to catch 'blues' in 3 feet of water on a big flat. The key is following the bait."

Try a 5/0 to 8/0 circle hook using a Carolina rig, about 18 inches below a swivel; place a sliding weight above the swivel. The size of the weight is determined by the strength of the wind. A half-ounce weight (or larger) should be used. With a circle hook, don't set the hook, but rather let the rod load, then lift it and begin reeling. Bait choices for blue cats include "cut shad, carp or buffalo," Tibbs says, "and winter blue cat anglers look for concentrations of shad."

Richland Chambers Reservoir has a 30- to 45-inch slot on blue catfish. Anglers can keep 25 total blues — none between 30 and 45 inches and only one over 45 inches.



© LARRY HODGE / TPWD

### LAKE FORK • CRAPPIE

January is a tough time to catch bass on Lake Fork, so crappie fishermen take over the water. During winter months, most crappie anglers concentrate their efforts in deeper water (25-35 feet or deeper) on the lower end of the lake. Use your graph to find humps with fish stacked on them. Crappie follow the shad as they try to escape the cold surface layer of water by going deep.

Jake Norman, TPWD fisheries biologist, offers some unique tips: "I would suggest searching the long tapering points in those same areas. Some of these popular points may extend several hundred yards to over a half mile into the lake before they dump into the main river channel (45+ feet). Brush on these points can be beneficial, but definitely not necessary. I almost prefer a featureless, slow tapering point; the crappie will stack up on them like a dinner plate, and there are very few snags/hang-ups to deal with. Also, water temps can really influence the bite, and the colder they get the better. When the water temps remain in the mid-to lower 50s a lot of the baitfish, and subsequently the crappie, will suspend off the bottom and are more challenging to catch. When water temps dip into the 40s almost everything will be pinned to the bottom and you can 'deadstick' a crappie jig to your limit of fish pretty quickly."

Ultralight rods and reels are a blast to use for crappie fishing. Be aware, though — sometimes a big bass will take your crappie offering. Big bass and light line sometimes don't have a good outcome for the crappie angler. (Did you know? The state record largemouth bass was caught by a crappie angler in January 1992.)

WILD THING

# City Cats

Bobcats are adapting to urban areas.

By Mary Schmidt



**T**he city might seem to be an unlikely place for a bobcat, but wild cats are learning to adapt to the rapidly changing landscapes of Texas — even in the heart of Dallas-Fort Worth, one of the biggest metropolitan areas in the state.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department biologist Richard Heilbrun and other researchers studied bobcats in Dallas-Fort Worth to learn more about how and why these animals are interacting with urban landscapes.

Heilbrun's research, published in 2019, reveals a high density of bobcats in metropolitan areas despite the assumption that subdivisions and roads would serve as habitat barriers. Heilbrun says the animals strongly prefer wild food as opposed to pet food (or pets) and will typically hide in the woods to stay out of sight.

Yet because our urban environment can support the bobcat's needs, they remain in

our neighborhoods.

"Our urban areas are not 100 percent concrete," Heilbrun says. "There is nature all amongst where we work and where we play."

Heilbrun points out that bobcats aren't necessarily moving into people's neighborhoods — people are moving into the bobcat's neighborhood.

In the study, traps were set out around the urban matrix. Once a cat was fitted with a satellite collar, it was released back into the wild. The collar tracked the movement of the animal, and after about 10 months to a year, it fell off. Scientists then studied the data to understand the elusive carnivore's presence in urban landscapes. They found that bobcats heavily used creeks and the Trinity River corridor. The home-range size was found to be smaller for urban bobcats than for those in other areas.

Heilbrun is hoping the research on bobcats and additional research on other urban

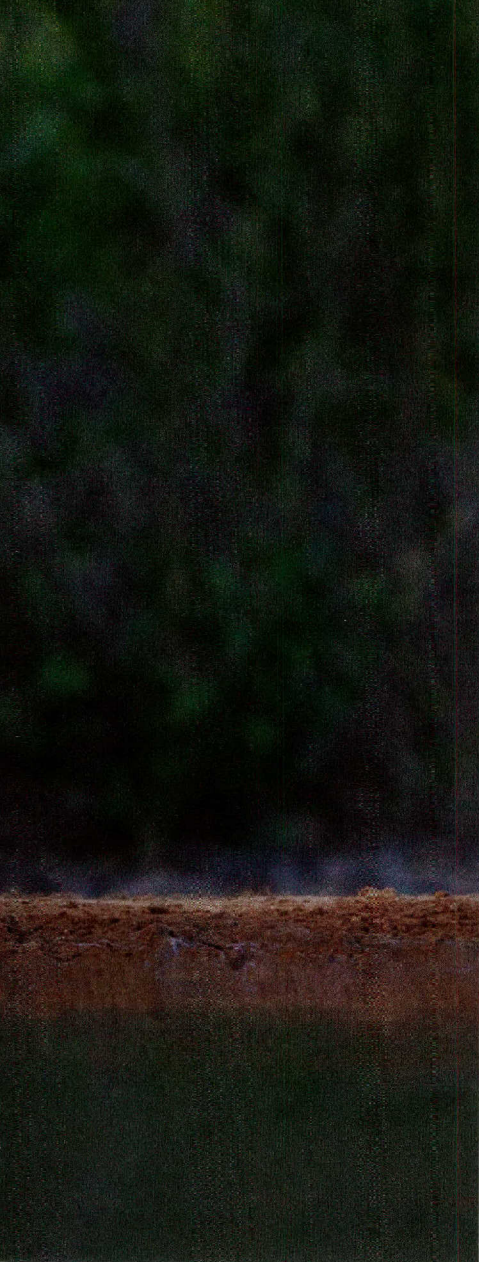
carnivores will raise awareness for managing our wildlife environments and illustrate the importance of green space in urban areas. Instead of fearing the animals, residents need to protect wild creatures.

"All of our information points to the need to understand our wildlife and maintain the wild places within our communities," Heilbrun says.

So, what is this cat that lurks beyond our backyards during the night?

Bobcats can grow to be twice the size of a domestic feline. Males weigh an average of 26 pounds, and females an average of 20 pounds. Named for their short tails, bobcats average 25 to 35 inches in length.

Bobcats are very adaptive felines with highly developed physical capabilities. They inhabit the widest range of the Texas wild cats, with the highest concentration in the South Texas Brush Country. Biologists recognize two subspecies of bobcats in



LARRY DITTO

Texas — the desert bobcat in the western and northwestern parts of the state, and the Texas bobcat that occupies the rest of the state.

Bobcats are making homes in small towns and suburbs, realizing there is plenty to eat in these areas. Hei cron and his team collected bobcats that had been killed by cars and examined what was inside their stomachs. In one cat, they found 23 rats. In addition to rodents, bobcats feed on other small animals such as rabbits and birds. They will also hunt deer, porcupines and skunks.

Like most cats, bobcats are agile animals. They often use lookout trees to survey their territory. They prefer to restrict much of their activity to nighttime, and their excellent eyesight allows them to see the slightest movement in low-light conditions. While you aren't likely to see these secretive felines, they may very well be on the prowl in the creeks or woods of your city.

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#### PICTURE THIS

## Everything's Up to Date

Firmware updates will keep your camera operating properly.

by Earl Nottingham

Sometimes it seems that working with a digital camera is more like operating a computer. With an oftentimes confusing mixture of controls and menu settings, today's digital cameras contain circuit boards, processors and batteries that have replaced the gears, springs and analog dials of their mechanically operated ancestors of yesteryear.

Like a computer, the digital camera operates with a combination of electronic hardware as well as software, working in concert "under the hood" to perform basic functions such as focus and exposure control once the shutter button is pressed. The software in charge of controlling the functions of the camera is known as firmware and is similar to a computer or smartphone's operating system. In fact, all of the options you see in the camera's menu are controlled by the firmware. What makes it "firm" is that it is embedded in the microprocessor chips that give commands to all the device's operations; its nonvolatile memory means that it remains there even when the camera is turned off. Importantly, firmware can be easily updated by you, the user.

Please send questions and comments to Earl at [earl.nottingham@tpwd.texas.gov](mailto:earl.nottingham@tpwd.texas.gov). For more tips on outdoor photography, visit the magazine's photography page at [www.tpwdmagazine.com/photography](http://www.tpwdmagazine.com/photography).

Camera makers release periodic firmware updates for a wide range of reasons. Sometimes, updates are used to bring new features to older models. This could be a new color profile, an expanded ISO setting or advanced video functionality, among other things. Manufacturers also typically use these to provide better compatibility with lenses and other accessories that were released after the camera first came to market.

While many updates are required for the proper operation of the camera, you will also find minor updates for things like additional language options for menus. Those can be disregarded. Also, newer cameras will have more frequent updates than older models as bugs and feature requests are reported by users. It is recommended to check for any new updates immediately upon the purchase of a new camera since the firmware that came with the camera from the factory may not be the latest and greatest. Subsequently, you might want to check every three to six months for updates.

Luckily, firmware update procedures are somewhat standardized among camera makers and are relatively easy to install. Here's how:

- First, **visit the "Support" webpage** of your particular camera's brand and model to see if updates are available.
- **Check your current firmware version** in the camera's menu options and compare the version number against the current release available on the manufacturer's website.
- If a newer version is shown, **check the release notes** to see if it includes any updates that are important to the operation of the camera and your particular shooting needs.
- If so, **follow the instructions** of how to download the update file and install it in the camera. Typically, it's a matter of downloading a small file from the manufacturer's website, copying it to the memory card from your camera and then letting the firmware update feature in your menu recognize that file and then prompt you to complete the installation.

Bear in mind that not all digital cameras are capable of firmware updating. Normally, it's the midrange to more full-featured models that can be updated, so check your owner's manual or manufacturer's website to see if your model is a candidate for updates.

Just as you would periodically take your car in for a tuneup to keep it running smoothly, consider firmware updates to keep your camera purring.



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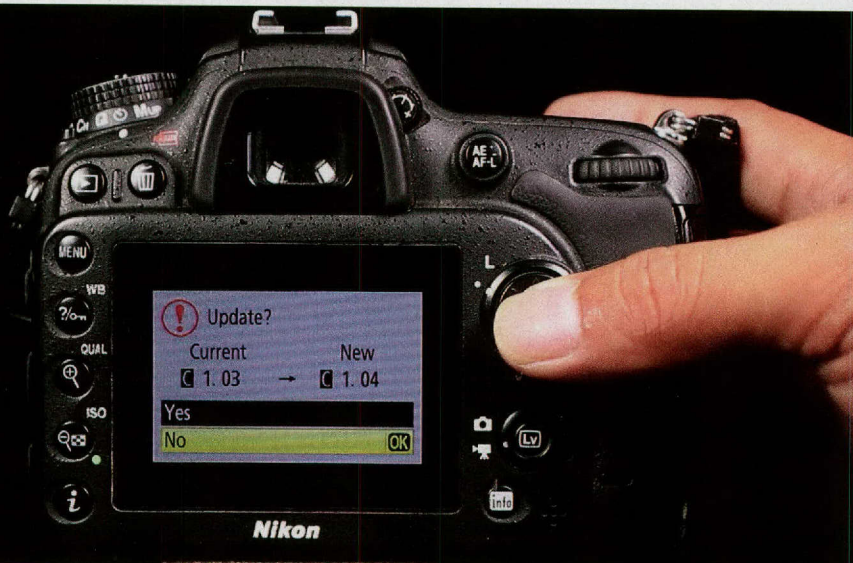
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# East Texas Angels: Angelina and Maxine Johnston

By Louie Bond



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*In the beginning of the world there was only one woman, and this woman had two daughters. – Hasinai creation story*

## THE LITTLE TEJAS ANGEL

Any recounting of Texas women's contributions to conservation has only one possible point of origin: Angelina. She's known by simply one name, like a modern diva, but her fame comes from humbler roots and nobler causes. Today, her name (certainly not the name her mother gave her at birth) graces a county, a river and a national forest, and conjures up an almost dreamlike legend of friendship between welcoming native people and those who arrived seeking to share that homeland.

Angelina was a park ranger before parks existed, an interpreter of not only language but also the land. Angelina

shared knowledge of natural resources, wildlife, weather and danger with those foreign to the deep woods of her homeland.

More than 300 years ago, the young Caddo woman grew up among the matriarchal Hasinai tribes in the woods of East Texas. The oldest women ran the homes and had authority over the men in the family; even mighty warriors and chiefs had to submit to the will of the women in their homes. She was headstrong and intelligent, free to learn and lead.

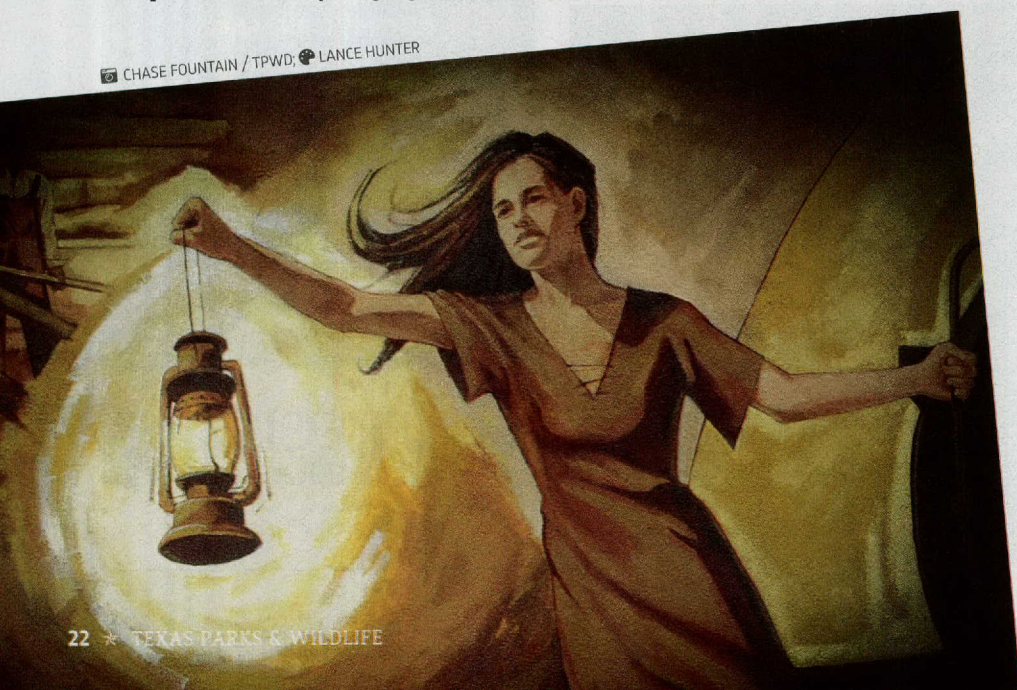
We first meet young Angelina, a daughter of the Hasinai, as Spain establishes the first East Texas mission, Nuestro Padre San Francisco de los Tejas, around the turn of the 18th century. Father Damian Massanet reportedly met an "Indian maiden with a bright intellect and possessing striking personal appearance" who wanted to learn his language, though he didn't write of her in his journal.

With little to no documentation of these early encounters, it is unclear where or how young Angelina — nicknamed "the little Angel" by the missionaries — learned to speak Spanish. Some say she picked it up earlier in her life in Coahuila; some say that she was taught by Massanet and the other Spaniards.

Young Angelina was inspired by the story of the Lady in Blue, a legend passed down by the Hasinai, who lived the Neches and Angelina River valleys, where the longleaf pines grew tall. The Jumano Indians said a woman dressed in blue appeared to them in 1629 and spoke to them in their own language. The Lady in Blue, believed to be

**Angelina, depicted in a Lufkin mural, served as an interpreter and guide for Spanish priests and French explorers.**

CHASE FOUNTAIN / TPWD, LANCE HUNTER



Spanish Conceptionist nun María de Jesús de Ágreda, told them about Christianity and instructed them to be baptized by the Franciscan missionaries.

It's said that Angelina's people who lived along the riverbank greeted the Spaniards with shouts of "*Tayshas!*" (meaning friend or ally) while weeping for joy, as was their custom. The missionaries were touched by their kindness and repeated the greeting back to them and other tribes, pronouncing it *tey-has*. That early greeting morphed into Tejas, and later, Texas.

While Angelina became skilled in their language, the missionaries could not master the tongue of the Hasinai, so Angelina's talents as a translator were crucial for success in the area. However, the Spaniards did not respect the native culture and religion and eventually were kicked off the Caddo lands.

Angelina's people didn't lose their faith in strangers, however, and continued to welcome those who came there, especially the French. The Hasinai believed the French came to trade, not conquer or convert the natives; in fact, some members of Robert La Salle's crew stayed behind to live with the friendly tribe. From these new residents of her village, Angelina added another language, French, to her considerable skills.

Needless to say, the Spanish and French were at odds about settling East Texas, so the Spanish returned there to set up more missions around 1715, including Mission Nuestra Señora de la Purísima de la Concepción. Angelina aided a new group of priests with interpretation. They wrote of her: "a sagacious woman, baptized and learned of the Spanish and Tejas languages."

No matter the tale, Angelina is always portrayed as bold and fearless, bright and friendly, sensitive and caring, welcoming to strangers. In one common tale, a wounded French officer (who may have been abandoned) stumbles into her village, and Angelina tends to him. When he recovers under her care, she sends two of her children to guide him through (what is now known as) the Big Thicket to Natchitoches, Louisiana. He later married a Tejas-born Spanish woman and established a large trading fort.

There are a few later accounts of Angelina, taken from the diaries of explorers and missionaries from 1716-21. She is described as a wise leader of her people.

The welcoming nature and interpretive skills of Angelina paved the way for the emigration and Anglo settlement of Texas, which remained heavily influenced by the Spanish Catholic culture for many years. Perhaps that is why only one county in Texas is named for a woman: Angelina.

## **GODMOTHER OF THE BIG THICKET**

Fast-forward to modern times in East Texas, and we find young Maxine Johnston, or Mickey. As a high school student, she wrote a paper on the folklore of the Big Thicket and was hooked for life on preserving the area. Perhaps it was the spell of Angelina, the Hasinai guide who welcomed the Spaniards and French to the area, that captured her imagination. After all, Angelina herself had been inspired by the Lady in Blue to help others on this sacred land.

Whatever was set in motion that day had staying power, as Johnston's work earned her the nickname "the Godmother of the Big Thicket." But as a teenager, she chose a rather nontraditional



COURTESY OF LAMAR UNIVERSITY

**Maxine Johnston, a librarian at Lamar University, worked tirelessly for the protection of the biologically diverse Big Thicket in East Texas.**

path for a budding conservationist. She first became a conservator of knowledge and books, a librarian.

Born in Arkansas and university educated in Texas, Johnston joined Lamar University's Mary and John Gray Library in 1955, becoming director in 1980. During her tenure there, she created an archive documenting many aspects of the Big Thicket in 25 collections.

It was Johnston's personal work on that preservation that elevated her to conservation hero status. She and like-minded folks created the Big Thicket Association in 1964; she served as president twice. Unlike a stereotypical librarian, Johnston had a bubbly, irrepressible personality and she used that charm to persuade politicians and opponents to help her efforts to preserve the Big Thicket. Johnston and her colleagues built a broad coalition to press for legislation to create a national park. Ultimately, President Gerald Ford signed a law in 1974 to establish the Big Thicket National Preserve, the first of its kind in the national park system.

Johnston, now 90 and recently spotted with purple hair at a tree planting event, credits "eternal vigilance" as the key to her success.

"OK, so you don't win one battle," she says. "Start over again and see if you can win on the next round. Try and preserve what's unique and important about our world, whether it's out there in the woods or on our library shelves."

*In honor of the ratification of the 19th amendment 100 years ago, we'll spotlight 20 Wild Women of Texas Conservation during 2020.*



COLONEH TRAIL AT HUNTSVILLE STATE PARK





CHECK OUT "TAKE A HIKE,"  
OUR NEW MONTHLY TRAIL  
SPOTLIGHT, ON PAGE 14

**TPWD offers land  
and water routes  
for every interest  
and skill level.**

# Active TRAIL

When Brownsville city leaders went looking for something that would increase the health of the city's residents, provide overall community benefits and boost economic opportunities, they found their solution in an unexpected place: trails. The resulting Active Plan envisions a 428-mile network of cycling, walking and paddling trails in the Rio Grande Valley.

When Colleen Simpson took over as parks director in Port Aransas, one of her top priorities was trails. The city's birding and nature sites existed independently of each other, and Simpson wanted to connect them. Her new parks master plan, approved last spring, calls for an interconnected system of hike-and-bike trails to link the parks.

Trails take us places. They connect us. They let us experience nature. They put sweat on our brow and a smile on our face.

Trails contain the wisdom of those who walked before us.

**by Russell Roe**



SONJA SOMMERFELD / TPWD

**“TRAILS ARE ALL ABOUT CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH NATURE, AND TEXAS IS LUCKY TO HAVE SO MANY DIFFERENT KINDS TO CHOOSE FROM.”**

“Trails have shaped our bodies, sculpted our landscapes and transformed our cultures,” Robert Moor writes in the book *On Trails*. “In the maze of the modern world, the wisdom of trails is as essential as ever.”

Like ants and elephants, we create trails to guide our journeys, transmit messages and make sense of the world — reducing our infinite choices to a single path, carved out of the dirt.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department operates the most extensive and diverse system of trails in the state, with a variety of trails catering not only to hikers, but also paddlers, cyclists, horseback riders, wildlife watchers and history buffs.

TPWD trails take us by foot through pine forests, by bike down Hill Country canyons, by horse through rugged West Texas mountains, by car down the coast to chase migrating songbirds and by kayak through mangrove-filled estuaries.

“Trails are all about connecting people with nature, and Texas is lucky to have so many different kinds to choose from,” says Shelly Plante, nature tourism director for TPWD. “From wildlife viewing and paddling trails to mountain biking and equestrian trails, there are countless options to explore in our state. To make it easy for folks to discover their next trail, we’ve put together programs and resources for all interests and abilities.”

Rangers lead hikes on Texas state park trails every weekend, including January’s kickoff First Day Hikes (see Page 10). TPWD’s paddling trail program has expanded access to water recreation across the state. Its Great Texas Wildlife Trails have become a model for driving tours in other states.

“By creating trail networks and sharing that information through maps and programs, we hope to make it easier to find the best places to visit in Texas,” Plante says.



C LOOP TRAIL AT TYLER STATE PARK

## LET'S HIKE

Every year my family camps with a group of other families at Colorado Bend State Park. And every year we hike the **SPICEWOOD SPRINGS TRAIL**, a path that follows the enchanting Spicewood Springs Creek up a canyon. Crystal-clear pools and cascading waterfalls mark the way up the rocky path. We always get our feet a little wet as we hop from rock to rock on the multiple creek crossings. We can't get enough of the spring-fed creek as it tumbles down the travertine limestone formations on its way to the Colorado River. There's a nice swimming hole at the mouth of the canyon, and a certain teenage member of our group always insists on jumping in, no matter the weather.

We've done the **GORMAN FALLS TRAIL** (the park's most popular) and others in the park, but this is the one we keep coming back to. I think it's one of the best little hikes in Central Texas.

If I were to list my family's favorite state park trails, they'd probably be Colorado Bend's Spicewood Springs Trail, Enchanted Rock's **SUMMIT TRAIL** and Big Bend Ranch's **CLOSED CANYON TRAIL**.

The spring-fed waterfalls, big granite dome and narrow slot canyon on those trails are just a few of the scenic attractions that can be found on state park trails. Park trails range from short nature hikes to full-day treks through a park's most remote stretches.

For a hike through East Texas pines, try Tyler State Park's 1-mile **WHISPERING PINES TRAIL**, built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s, or the more ambitious 6.8-mile **CHINQUAPIN TRAIL** around Huntsville State Park's Lake Raven.

For Hill Country beauty, the **EAST TRAIL** at Lost Maples State Natural Area follows the Sabinal River with its bigtooth maple and bald cypress trees before heading uphill with spectacular views into the valleys below. Garner's **OLD BALDY TRAIL** is a longtime favorite that rewards hikers with a bird's-eye view of the Frio River canyon.

For West Texas grandeur, Franklin Mountains offers treks to **AZTEC CAVES** or to the summits of El Paso's highest mountains. At Seminole Canyon, hikes take visitors to ancient pictographs and historic railroad artifacts.

Go to [texasstateparks.org/hiking](https://texasstateparks.org/hiking) for information.

CHASE FOUNTAIN / TFWO

## LET'S PADDLE

TPWD started its paddling trails program after coastal conservation scientist Bill Harvey got lost in the Lighthouse Lakes section of Redfish Bay near Port Aransas in the late 1990s. He had been kayaking by himself, and when the sun went down, he couldn't find his way out of the maze-like, mangrove-filled estuary.

"It's got great fishing, and it's really beautiful," Harvey says. "I figured if we could map it, it would get a lot of use."

He was right.

The development of the early coastal paddling trails coincided with the boom in kayak fishing, and coastal paddling hasn't been the same since.

Paddling trails are designated sections of waterways with a start point and an end point. Signs and maps provide information about length, trip highlights and paddler experience needed. After the **LIGHTHOUSE LAKES PADDLING TRAIL** launched in 1999, the paddling trail program moved inland in 2006 with the opening of the **LULING-ZEDLER MILL PADDLING TRAIL** in Luling. Paddling trails can now be found on dozens of Texas rivers, lakes and bays. The **SABINE SANDBAR PADDLING TRAIL** opened in fall 2019 to become the 78th Texas paddling trail.

"We're trying to increase public access to waterways in Texas while also making it very easy for a new paddler or a family," Plante says. "By designating these manageable stretches of river, lake and bay as paddling trails, we've made these more accessible trips for people who maybe aren't as comfortable on the water yet. We want to take some of the mystery out of being on the water."

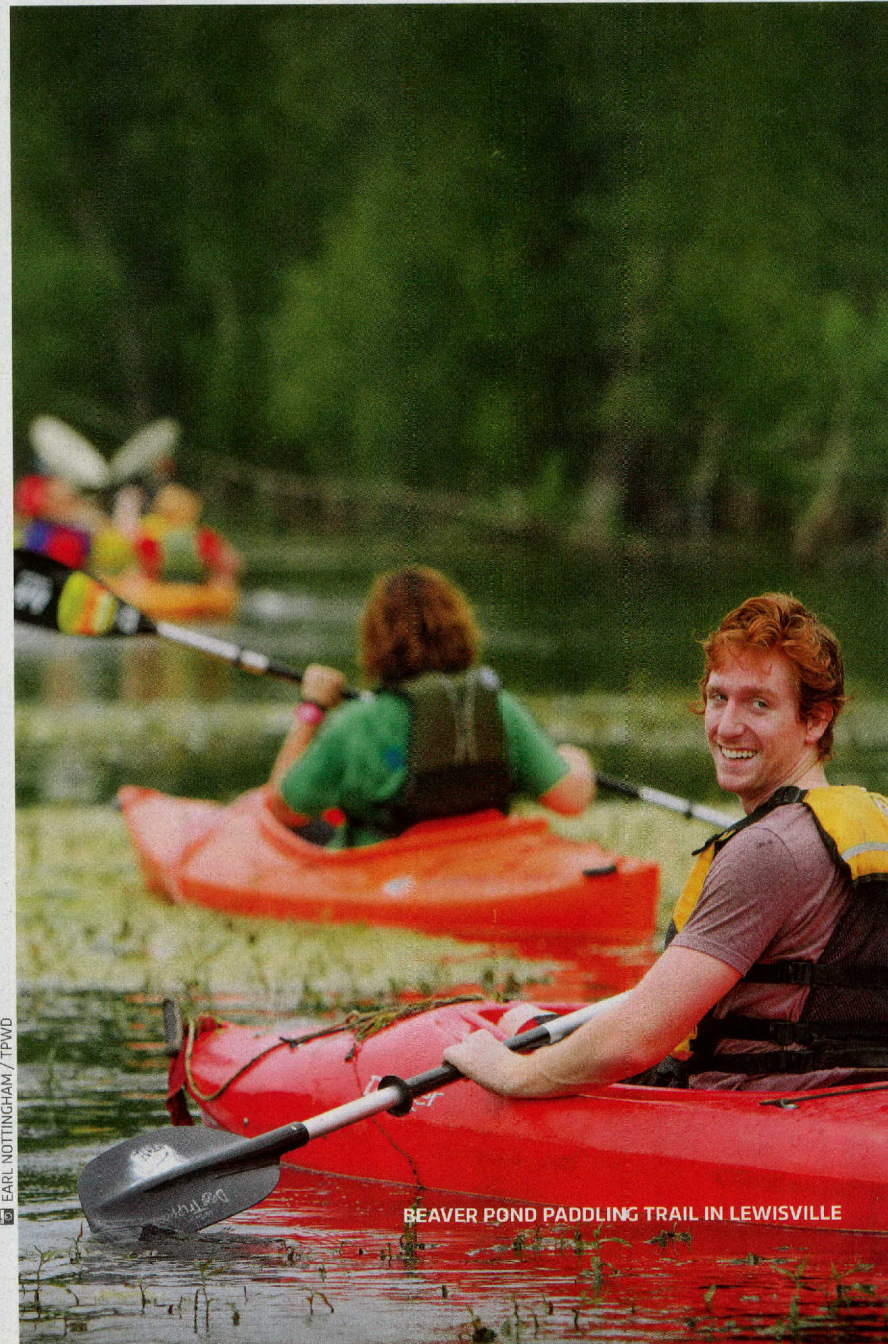
Texas isn't exactly known for its whitewater, but the **UPPER GUADALUPE-NICHOL'S LANDING PADDLING TRAIL** contains several rapids for a rollicking ride down the Guadalupe River. The **GOLIAD PADDLING TRAIL**, the first paddling trail to include a state park, takes kayakers and canoeists down the San Antonio River to one of Texas' most historic sites. In Houston, the **BUFFALO BAYOU PADDLING TRAIL** juxtaposes views of wildlife and downtown. And the **WALNUT SLOUGH PADDLING TRAIL** at Martin Dies Jr. State Park encircles an island in the Big Thicket.

Go to [tpwd.texas.gov/paddlingtrails](http://tpwd.texas.gov/paddlingtrails) for more information.



SONIA SOMMERFELD / TPWD

WALNUT SLOUGH PADDLING TRAIL  
AT MARTIN DIES JR. STATE PARK



EARL NOTTINGHAM / TPWD

BEAVER POND PADDLING TRAIL IN LEWISVILLE



LADY BIRD JOHNSON WILDFLOWER CENTER ON THE HEART OF TEXAS EAST WILDLIFE TRAIL

CHASE FOUNTAIN / TPWD

### LET'S DRIVE

If you're a big birder, a dragonfly devotee, a bat booster or any kind of wildlife watcher, the Great Texas Wildlife Trails will help you see the wild side of Texas. The program's nine driving trails contain wildlife hot spots across the entire state.

The wildlife trail maps include publicly accessible sites such as state parks and city preserves, with descriptions of what can be seen at each place. In the Rio Grande Valley, the **SANTA ANA LOOP** of the **GREAT TEXAS COASTAL BIRDING TRAIL** includes Quinta Mazatlan, which promises chachalacas, great kiskadees and green jays. (Other stops on the loop include the Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, the Edinburg Scenic Wetlands and the McAllen Botanical Garden.)

At the Gene Howe Wildlife Management Area, which is a stop on the **CANADIAN BREAKS LOOP** of the **PANHANDLE PLAINS WILDLIFE TRAIL**, prairie dogs are a top attraction along with wild turkeys, Mississippi kites

and grassland birds. On the Texas coast this time of year, boat tours to Aransas National Wildlife Refuge — listed as a stop on the **ARANSAS LOOP** of the **GREAT TEXAS COASTAL BIRDING TRAIL** — offer a chance to see endangered whooping cranes, North America's largest bird.

"The beauty of a Great Texas Wildlife Trail is that it packages all the wildlife viewing sites in an area to make them easier to find," Plante says. "You might go to visit a state park but then stay to visit the other stops on the trail."

The idea to group wildlife sites into a wildlife driving trail was hatched at TPWD in 1996 with three birding trails along the coast. Texas now has wildlife driving trails across the state. Other states have embraced the idea as well.

"We were the first ones to have wildlife trails," Plante says. "At that time, no other state had one. Now, over 40 states have birding or wildlife trails based on the Texas model."

Go to [tpwd.texas.gov/wildlifetrails](http://tpwd.texas.gov/wildlifetrails) for more information and to order maps.

**“OVER 40 STATES HAVE BIRDING OR WILDLIFE TRAILS BASED ON THE TEXAS MODEL.”**



PALO DURO CANYON STATE PARK

EARL NOTTINGHAM / TPWD



MCKINNEY FALLS STATE PARK

CHASE FOUNTAIN / TPWD

### LET'S BIKE

Mountain biker Chris Podzemny loves the feeling of zipping around corners, down straightaways and over rocks in the canyon country of **PALO DURO CANYON STATE PARK**.

"I love cycling, and I love being in nature," he says. And at Palo Duro, he appreciates "the wildlife, geology and history of the canyon."

His passion for riding led him to give back to the park by building trails.

"We have some of the best trails in the state of Texas in Palo Duro Canyon," he says. "The red clay soil makes for incredibly fast, smooth, flowy trails. Then as you climb the canyon walls on our trails, there's plenty of challenge, too."

State parks give mountain bikers some of the best places to ride trails in Texas.

**BIG BEND RANCH STATE PARK** offers 200-plus miles of remote desert trails, including a route deemed an "Epic" ride by the International Mountain Biking Association.

In North Texas, **CEDAR HILL STATE PARK** and **RAY ROBERTS LAKE STATE PARK** provide adventure for mountain bikers of varying skill levels. **TYLER STATE PARK**'s trails include hills and loops through Pineywoods terrain. The rails-to-trails pathways at **LAKE MINERAL WELLS** and **CAPROCK CANYONS** are options for longer, smoother rides.

Go to [texasstateparks.org/biking](http://texasstateparks.org/biking) to learn more.



### LET'S RIDE

If you long for the cowboy days of yore, you can live out your dream on a state park equestrian trail. Some parks feature equestrian-only trails; at others, horseback riders share the trails with hikers and mountain bikers. In addition, several parks offer equestrian campsites.

You can ride through rugged terrain at **DAVIS MOUNTAINS STATE PARK** with scenic views of mountains and valleys. On the other side of the state, **SEA RIM STATE PARK** offers miles of shoreline where horses can gallop on the beach.

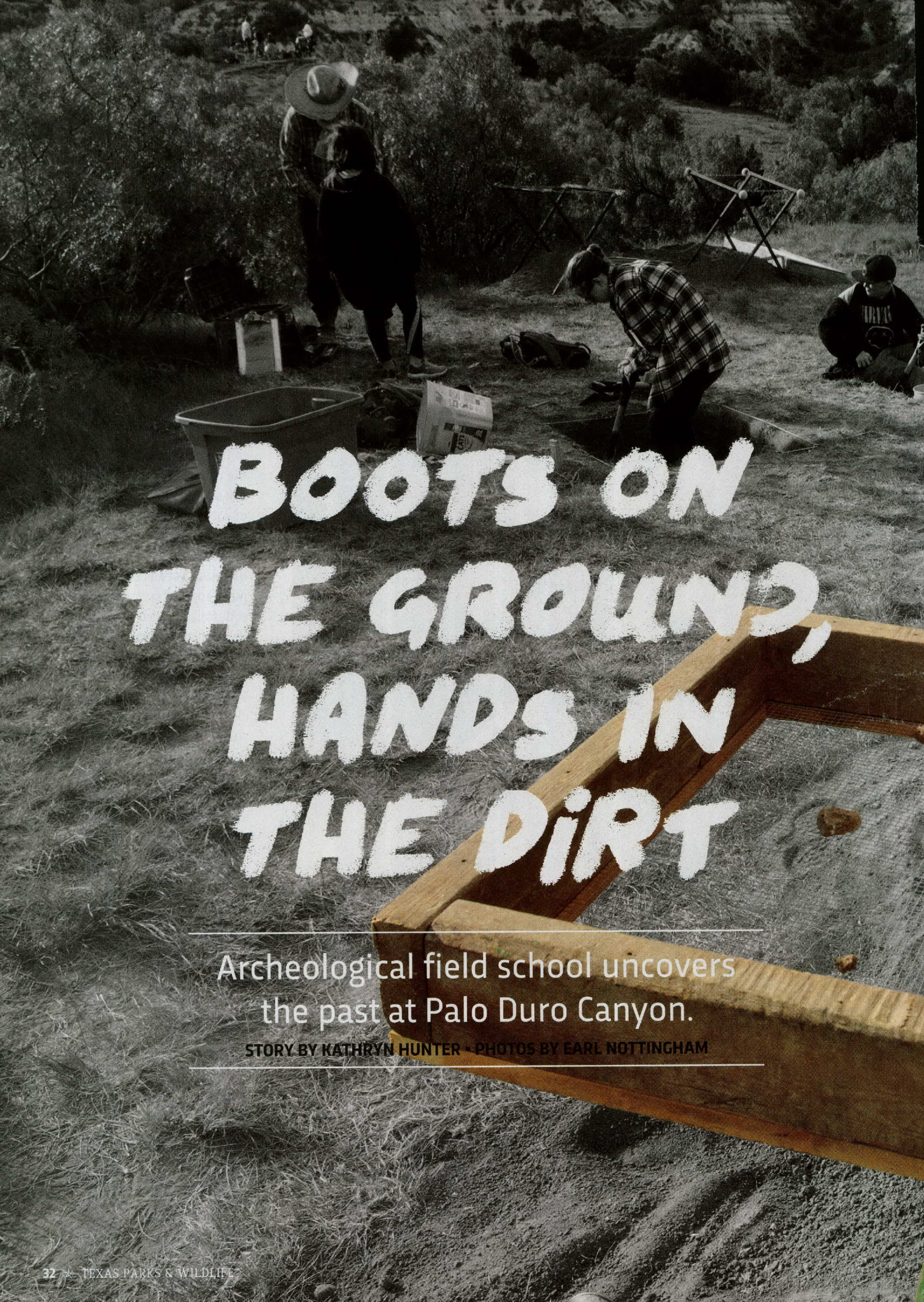
**HILL COUNTRY STATE NATURAL AREA** is one of the most popular state parks for equestrians, with its canyons, scenic plateaus and tranquil creek bottoms near Bandera, the "Cowboy Capital of the World." For a real taste of old Texas, take a ride at **FORT RICHARDSON**, with its fort structures and 9-mile **LOST CREEK RESERVOIR STATE TRAILWAY**, or **SAN ANGELO STATE PARK**, with its 50 miles of multiuse trails and longhorns from the official state herd.

**COOPER LAKE STATE PARK** offers equestrian riding and camping in North Texas.

"We have over 10 miles of equestrian trails," says Steve Killian, Cooper Lake complex superintendent. "They wind through the post oak forest, and there's a good bit of up and down with occasional glimpses of Cooper Lake. Plus, the equestrian campground is located right at the trailhead."

*Russell Roe serves as managing editor and resident trails guru at Texas Parks & Wildlife magazine.*

EARL NOTTINGHAM / TPWD



# BOOTS ON THE GROUND, HANDS IN THE DIRT

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Archeological field school uncovers  
the past at Palo Duro Canyon.

STORY BY KATHRYN HUNTER • PHOTOS BY EARL NOTTINGHAM

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TEXAS ARCHEOLOGICAL SOCIETY  
2019 TAS Field School  
Paleo-Indian Culture - Randall County  
Christy Pepper  
The Woodlands, Texas

**T**he shortgrass prairie of the Texas Panhandle, with its unbroken horizon, is like the bottom of the ocean; the endless blue sky above is the water. Then that smooth, exposed seafloor falls away into the depths of a magical, rust-red canyonland where crumbling walls are laced with veins of sparkling white gypsum, boulders perch on thin columns of soil like castle spires, and quiet rivers flow beneath the shade of cottonwood trees. Palo Duro Canyon, a sanctuary of the ages, holds the secrets of thousands of years of human habitation.

In June, as first-time participants of the Texas Archeological Society Field School, my husband Jack and I discover that rich past in a boots-on-the-ground, eight-day research and training program.

#### WHY WE'RE HERE

Walking into Palo Duro's Mack Dick Pavilion, TAS headquarters for the week, is like stumbling into the middle of a family reunion. The TAS has held an annual field school in varying locations since 1962. Many of the 342 people here — an eclectic mix of professional archeologists and hobbyists, all volunteers — have been coming for years, some for decades.

Tony Lyle, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department cultural resources coordinator and TAS member, has brought his family for the first time to participate.

"My wife and daughters have seen me go, and I tell them stories they don't really understand," Tony says. "They think I'm just camping and doing archeology all day, but now



they've seen all this." He points out the camaraderie, the connections.

In what he calls a "once-in-a-lifetime thing," Tony is heading up the field school's operations alongside principal investigator Kevin Hanselka, a Texas Department of Transportation archeologist here in a volunteer capacity. Kevin applied for and received the Texas Antiquities Permit required by law for archeological projects on public land from the Texas Historical Commission.

Most TAS field schools are held on private land. The field school at Palo Duro Canyon State Park, like the last on public land in 2012 at Devils River State Natural Area, is focused largely on pedestrian survey, or identifying archeological sites by surface evidence and minimal "shovel testing."

Tony explains that before the field school got underway, only 41 archeological sites, most identified in the 1950s and '70s, were known on Palo Duro's 27,128 acres. In a landscape so steeped in history, from ancient Native American cultures to Charles Goodnight's JA Ranch and the Civilian Conservation Corps, this number was obviously too low. The TAS surveys and limited excavations are designed to answer two important questions: In this popular, iconic state park, what evidence remains of the people who came before us? What's the best way to preserve it?

### WALK IN THE PARK

Just after sunrise we gather in our small crews, a motley army in hats and hiking boots, and spread out across the park until the workday's end at 1 p.m.

Archeological surveying, I decide, is just hiking with purpose. Straight-line transects in this jungle of cactus and hip-high basket-flower aren't possible, so the half-dozen members of our crew wander, loosely scattered, and call out if we see anything.

That, of course, is the hard part for Jack and me — deciding whether a something is anything. Our eyes are untrained for the subtle prehistoric features we're looking for, such as stone tools, rock art, mortars, fire-cracked rocks and debitage (discarded materials when stone tools like

dart points are made). We train our knowledge through error as much as anything else, querying the more experienced members of our crew.

Crew chiefs, whether on survey or excavation, are the bosses, lead teachers and poor souls who do the mountain of paperwork involved in recording anything we find. Our crew chief, University of North Texas professor Johnny Byers, has us gently shovel and brush dirt away from what's likely a CCC-built picnic table and outdoor hearth, and I later find what looks like a stone bench with poured concrete on top. Johnny explains that TPWD had known such



*Above: Bones of prehistoric mammals, such as bison, are found beneath the compact layers of Palo Duro's soil. Left: 1-by-1-meter squares are carefully excavated to uncover artifacts or other features.*

CCC construction could be in the park but not where; these 1930s features, lost to time and the surrounding vegetation, have been rediscovered.

In addition to prehistoric artifacts, other crews find two of 10,000 coins dropped by airplane in a series of publicity stunts from 1949–51 in the park — if the coin's number ended in seven, the finder was eligible for prizes like a trip to Cuba, a diamond ring and registered quarter horses.

(The coins are no longer redeemable, unfortunately.)

In our survey sector, we pass through a known prehistoric site high on a ridge. At Palo Duro, the landscape is so dynamic and erosional that all that's thought to remain from 10,000–15,000 years of human habitation is a roughly 3,000-year archeological record. Though I know the land I walk is very different, when we find scattered deposits of chert flakes — polished and bright as jewels in their shades of deep red and pink, bright white or creamy gray — I feel exhilarated at the thought that those early people knapping their blades and points from stone were here. This was their world.

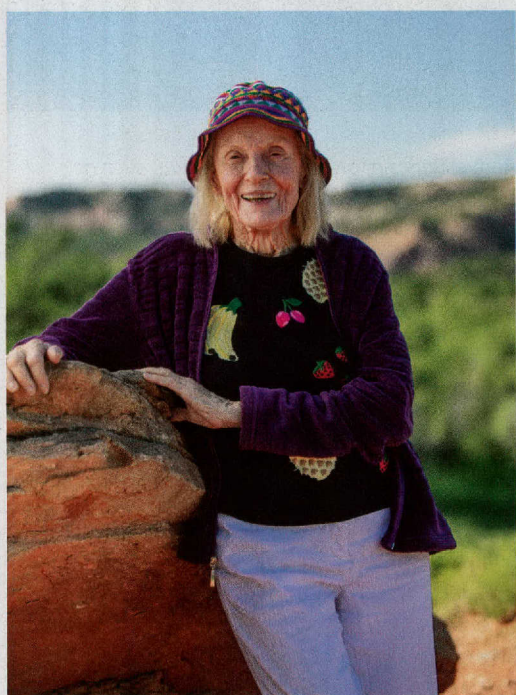
### WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR TIME

"This woman has done everything." That's what I'd heard about Ona B. Reed, 94, who apologizes for her hearing and her memory, though to me she seems bright as a new penny. Something's shining in her eyes that the years haven't touched.

During World War II, Ona B. built airplanes, a real-life "Rosie the Riveter." Later, she earned her pilot's license

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*Ona B. Reed, 94, takes a break from working in the archeology lab. Participants head out to locations that have been identified as archeologically significant.*



and took to the skies herself. She made the *Guinness Book of World Records* for the longest time between first and last parachute jump (50 years). A great-great-grandmother now and real-estate broker, she rides a Goldwing 1500 trike, owns an antique airplane and has traveled the world to far-flung places like Egypt and Easter Island.

I find her working in the field school's indoor archeology lab, where artifacts are cleaned, categorized and stored before they continue on to the TPWD archeology lab in Austin. In the past, Ona B. says her favorite assignment was survey; I understand what she'd loved about it. I think of the varied treasures I'd seen while staring so closely at the ground: flowers and caterpillars, tiny scorpions the length of a fingernail, strange fossils, my first-ever horned toad.

Ona B. got involved with TAS in 1968, inspired by a cancer diagnosis to seek more from life; this field school is her 48th — it would have been 50, she says, if it hadn't been for a cancellation one year and that fact that she was in the hospital for another. She's been an archeology steward with the Texas Historical Commission since 1992.

I note that she has many hobbies, and Ona B. laughs.

"Yes, I do. It's selfish, but I've done what I wanted, what I thought would be worthwhile, as long as it didn't

hurt anybody else," she says. "I've tried not to waste my time."

At field school, I meet precocious first-graders, purple-haired college students, 30- and 40-somethings like Jack and me, but I think I learn the most from these gray-haired long-timers, their stories full of the unexpected twists and turns of life.

For two days, Jack and I work under excavation crew chiefs Barbara Chadwick, 70, and Glynn Osburn, 79. After attending her first field school, Barbara went back to college in her 50s for a degree in anthropology and became a teacher. Glynn never pursued a formal degree in archeology but has been involved with TAS since 1991, when his 13-year-old daughter Tiffany saw a newspaper article about a field school and asked if they could go. Twenty-nine consecutive field schools later (11 serving as chair of the TAS field school committee), Glynn is still here, and Tiffany, a professional archeologist working for the Texas Historical Commission, is current chair of the field school committee.

### HANDS IN THE DIRT

Excavation isn't so much digging as it is a precise filing at the dirt, centimeter by centimeter, to uncover preserved artifacts below. By contrast, the limitation of objects exposed on the surface is that they've often



been eroded out of context relative to other materials, and thus lack integrity for most scientific purposes, including dating.

At the five excavation sites at Palo Duro, 1-by-1-meter squares are plotted with the help of a compass, nails, tape measures and string. Trowels are used to gently scrape out the dirt, which is then put in buckets and pushed through wire screens to check for small objects we might have missed.

The TAS youth program, the largest of the excavation sites this year, is on private rangeland known as the Little Sunday Site, considered the “type site” for the late Archaic period in this area. Discovered by archeologist Jack Hughes in 1954, it’s being excavated for the very first time. Children ages 7 to 14, with the help of parents and mentors, dig as carefully and professionally as the adults do.

Doug Boyd, a professional archeologist, has been youth program director for 18 years.

“This is a great age for kids because they’re interested in a lot of things; if you can expose them to this, they’ll be interested for a lifetime,” Doug says. “I’ve met kids who went to one field school 20 years before, but now they still keep up with archeology in the news.”

For all ages, the teaching component of TAS is as important as the research.

I think of how much I’ve learned here — not just about archeology but also biology, botany, geology, hydrology. How rocks break in fire. What people ate and how they lived. The now-extinct animals that once roamed here. And how history isn’t a dead thing, how deeply it matters.

In the interior of the park, one of the excavation sites shows evidence of at least four different periods of occupation. I talk with Holly Houghten, tribal historic preservation officer for the Mescalero Apache tribe, as she digs along with her husband, Arden Comanche, a tribal medicine man and cultural adviser, and Jacob Daukei, deputy preservation officer. Holly is tasked with the preservation and protection of cultural resources on tribal lands and also consults with government agencies to protect



cultural resources of interest to the tribe on Apache traditional homelands.

Knowledge of the past is important for the tribe, Holly says, especially for the young people. Archeological investigations offer an opportunity to tell a complete, and sometimes very different, story.

At a battle site she worked on in New Mexico, written military records said soldiers had attacked up a canyon and the Apache had run away. Houghton says that based on rifle cartridges and other artifacts, it was determined the Apache had actually snuck behind the military and attacked them from the rear.

“It was the military that fled,” Holly says. “It wasn’t the Apache.”

### GOODBYE

On Thursday evening, TAS holds a public archeology fair with the help of area museums, historical organizations and regional archeological societies; the tables cover everything from fire-starting and flint-knapping to historical hand tools and artifact identification.

This is the day when our trip feels as if it’s coming to an end. Our life of sleeping in a tent, waking up in the dark to go to breakfast, gathering with now-familiar faces to tromp through thorns or dig in the dirt, it was over. I never expected it to feel so bittersweet.

A heavy storm rolls in that night, a firework show of lightning and cannonballs of thunder rolling

*Artifacts found during the Palo Duro field school are brought into the archeology lab to be sorted, cleaned, classified and stored.*

through the draws. We meet in the morning, bedraggled, to hear that most of the crews won’t go out.

When Johnny tells me, “It’s just sad,” I know that he’s not talking about the last day’s cancellations but the close of another family reunion.

By the last day of field work, the field school has surveyed 2,088 acres, identified 33 new sites, found 65 features and recorded 50 isolated finds. The collaborative efforts using collected data will likely continue for years; artifacts will be identified and researched, materials will be dated, scholarly papers will be written.

There are people who will come after us, too, somewhere down the road — archeologists, perhaps more than anyone, understand that they’re following in someone else’s footsteps and that others will follow in theirs.

The 2020 TAS Field School will be held on a private ranch in Kerrville the second week of June, with new questions to ask and to answer, holes to dig, acres to cover, starry night skies and lizards and artifacts waiting patiently to be found. Another worthwhile adventure.

*Kathryn Hunter is an Austin writer who previously wrote about the Gault archeological site.*

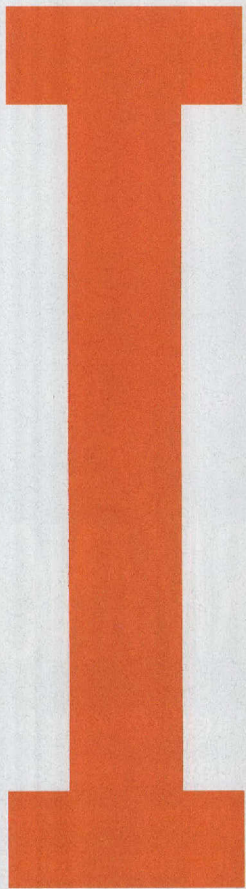




# PEAK PERFORMANCE

Tackling your first mountain trek takes preparation, especially if it's Texas' tallest.

**by Julia B. Jones**  
Photos by Chase Fountain



have never climbed a mountain, but this metaphorically resonant activity has always appealed to me. Believe me, as an outdoor novice, such a feat can seem daunting. From the bottom looking up, the task of ascending a mountain seems nearly impossible. I want to see just how impossible it actually is.

This is the story of my attempt to reach the top of Texas' highest peak in the middle of summer. If you're as brave (or maybe as foolish) as I am, I hope you'll come along for the hike.

#### THE PRACTICE HIKE

I was told the best way to prepare for a hike is to hike, so after a couple of weeks of gym visits, my fiancé, Jack, and I decide to set off walking.

We awake at 6:20 a.m., trying to prepare for the early start we'll eventually need on Guadalupe Peak to avoid the scorching West Texas heat. In my tired daze — early mornings have never been my strong suit — I struggle to figure out how to secure my 2-liter water pack into my backpack. By the time we're fed and ready, it's nearing 8 a.m. and already 80 degrees.

I chose the trail — River Place Nature Trails' Canyons route in hilly Northwest Austin — based on reviews claiming it's a great practice hike for those seeking to summit Guadalupe Peak. If you hike the trail

out and back twice, it's just under 10 miles with 2,600 feet of elevation gain, while the Guadalupe Peak Trail is 8.5 miles round-trip with about 3,000 feet of elevation gain. A woman I meet at the Canyons trailhead tells me she uses it as a training ground for her trips to the Alps, where she's hiked more than 100 miles.

While my aspirations — and my planned trek — don't ascend *that* high, we set off heartened by her assurance, ready for the mostly downhill first segment to the turnaround point, 2.45 miles away,

**The Guadalupe Peak Trail is 8.5 miles round-trip with about 3,000 feet of elevation gain.**





then back uphill to our starting point. In the first mile, there's a bench overlooking the Hill Country with a gorgeous view of the trees, perhaps the highest point of the trail. Then it descends rapidly toward the creek, which we cross with the help of a metal chain handrail running across a few trees. The trail is well-constructed; making our way to the turnaround point is fairly easy. But then, we have to turn around and face the 900 feet of uphill that we had so casually walked down.

We break more often than I'd like to admit, but we make it up in pretty good time, probably due to the promise we made to ourselves about food at the halfway point.

As we sit and eat, the sun comes out from behind the clouds, delivering that feels-like-100-degrees heat. We begin to understand why hikers wear breathable fabric; as thrifty college students, we'd decided to wear normal T-shirts instead of "more expensive" fabrics, but it turns out \$10 will get you a decent breathable shirt.

*The Guadalupe Mountains (above) rise high above the desert floor. Julia Jones and Jack Pliska (left) make their way up the Guadalupe Peak Trail.*

Our sticky shirts aren't comfortable, but we can't give up only halfway through, so we drag our sweaty selves back onto the trail for Round 2. For how exhausted we were on the way back to the trailhead the first time, we're doing astonishingly well, keeping pace with our first trip down and back, save for the last mile of uphill, which stops me in my tracks. Whew.

With the longest hike of my life now complete, I feel better prepared for what comes next but also more worried. Even if I buy the right clothes and wear sunscreen, how will I fare on an open path in the sizzling West Texas July heat?

Three days before leaving for the mountains, I go over last-minute preparations with *TP&W* magazine Managing Editor Russell Roe, whose mountain climbing articles inspired me. He tells me to fill out a hiking checklist to make sure I have all the materials I'll need. He makes sure I'm planning on bringing enough water.

Then he tells me, rather somberly, "I may have gone on a few more practice hikes." Great.

### AT THE MOUNTAIN

The drive to Guadalupe Mountains is long, giving me ample time to reconsider this choice. As we pass into West Texas, I start to panic every time I check the temperature on the car — the area around the mountains is often over 100 degrees — and think with some dread about 4 miles of uphill hiking in the desert heat.

We approach the base of the Guadalupe Mountains, and the temperature nearly drops 5 degrees when we get to the first lookout point. It continues to drop even more as the sun begins to go down, eventually settling at a comfortable 70-something.

Magazine photographer Chase Fountain suggests we set up camp at the Pine Springs Campground, a short walk from the trailhead, and set out the next morning. I don't tell him I've never camped. Jack and I try to recall my grandfather's tent-pitching advice,



and after a few mistakes we get our temporary home to stand on its own. After a dinner of salad and tuna, I settle into the tent with my copy of *Into the Wild* (maybe an inappropriate choice for the occasion, but hindsight is 20/20) and drift off to sleep. A great night's sleep it was not, but I'm sure my anticipation would've kept me up, even at a five-star hotel.

### CLIMB TIME

My alarm sounds at 5:30; I wake with an uneasy groan. I'm covered in goosebumps the second I crawl out of my sleeping bag, probably from a mixture of cold and anticipation, while Jack complains about a bug bite he'd gotten on his ankle a day before. We eat our breakfast, mine of soup and Jack's of tuna, and head to the trail where Chase has been patiently waiting for us slowpokes. Our plan was to leave before sunlight, but setting off at 6:30 means there's a

gentle light on the path, rendering our headlamps useless.

Looking up at what we're about to climb, I can't help but feel the same sentiment I felt when I pitched the story: from the bottom, the top looks unreachable. I know I've been preparing, but the label "strenuous" on the trail marker concerns me, not least because "strenuous" is subjective. And I also think about all of the things I haven't planned for — like what if we run into a rattlesnake, or a mountain lion, or any of the other things listed on the hiker safety guide they have available at the trailhead?

Russell had told me the first mile is steepest with frequent switchbacks, and he was right. Some other hikers start tiring around what is probably the quarter-mile mark, and I'm happy they want to stop so often. The view is phenomenal, even from the first half-mile: The sun turns the horizon red, but dark clouds keep it from spreading



light for a little while longer. When the light does break through the clouds, it looks like aliens casting beams down to abduct people miles away from us, which doesn't sound beautiful, but it is. Rain wasn't in the weather forecast, but the clouds don't seem to care.

The terrain changes rather rapidly after the first mile and a half, and it continues to change the entire way up. It goes from rocky to forested to rocky again, looking at times more like a hill than a mountain. At different elevations along the way are ponderosa pines, oaks and the distinctive Texas madrones with red bark and sinewy branches. Early on, we pass a smaller mountain, speckled with trees on one side while the other is covered in brush. This place is far more mountainous than images had led me to expect. The mountains are not all rocky like the range's signature El Capitan, but instead are rich in vegetation and wildlife.

**I also think about all of the things I haven't planned for — like what if we run into a rattlesnake, or a mountain lion, or any of the other things listed on the hiker safety guide they have available at the trailhead?**

*Julia and Jack settle down in their tent at the Pine Springs Campground (left) and, later, take a moment to enjoy the sunrise (above).*



The temperature, which started off a bit chilly, becomes even cooler as we continue up, and I'm grateful for it after all that climbing. Jack and I wonder the same question aloud a dozen times, reminding me of my younger self's constant pleas of "Are we there yet?" on family outings.

"Is that the summit?" Each time, it isn't.

A single raindrop hits my arm when we reach the forested part of the trail, an omen I'm not ready to acknowledge. The National Park Service recommends getting to the lowest possible elevation during a storm, and we're doing the opposite. The sprinkling subsides quickly, though, so we continue on.

"Hey Jack, is that where a bug bit

you yesterday?" Chase asks. We stop to look, and the bite on his ankle doesn't look great. The area sports three different colors; none are normal skin tone. We decide we'll dress the wound once we get to the summit, just a little over a mile away. (We had just passed the Guadalupe Peak Campground, a primitive site 3 miles up.) Chase jokes that as long as a red line doesn't start up the leg, he'll be fine.

The last mile is gorgeous — the higher elevation makes looking down similar to looking out the window of an airplane. The parking lot near the trailhead looks the size of a quarter against the vast spread of earth below. A bridge connects two parts of the trail, seemingly hanging in thin air

over the cliff below.

Less than a quarter mile away, we reach a point where the trail ahead seems dubious. There's a minor fork in the path; one way climbs up and the other descends slightly. We head toward the uphill section, but the steep rock ahead seems a little too unworn to be the official path. Jack and I pause, thinking we should turn back and go the less steep route, but Chase advises us to carry on.

We follow it, off-roading the last bit of the hike until we see the metal pyramid that tops the peak. I scramble up first (it is my story, after all!) and bask in the foreboding storm clouds. I am the highest person in the state of Texas. We made it.

## DOWNHILL RACER

Then the rain starts up again, this time colder and crueler. Although we'd just arrived, we decide it's safer to seek lower elevation, so we leave the summit behind and start down the now-slick rocks we had just climbed up. I pull on a raincoat I'd left in the bag in case of emergency, and the warmth is welcome after a rain-fueled temperature drop. The rain stops within the first few switchbacks, and I slip for the first time, but definitely not the last.

We stop to clean and bandage Jack's bug bite, and it looks better at first. Chase walks ahead of us, and as I trail behind Jack (I'm very slow going downhill), I notice a red mark on his lower leg near the bandage. We stop, and I'm able to trace a red line from the bandage to the inside of his knee.

"We should hurry," I suggest, a little worried.

Jack and I catch up with Chase and let him know we're taking the lead. We book it down the mountain to the ranger station. The sun is finally making itself known, and we're sweating. The trekking poles now come in handy on the way down — there's far less strain on my knees, and we make it down in good time. Once we're at the bottom, we look up for Chase, who's nowhere to be seen. We realize that he's got the car keys. Oops.

We have to make do with what we have, so I grab some ice from the campsite and hold it to Jack's leg, which he now says is cramping pretty badly, whether from this health issue or the 8-mile hike we'd just completed. Chase catches up and we drive to park headquarters, where they advise us to go to a clinic and get it checked out. (We do, and, long story short, he's fine.)

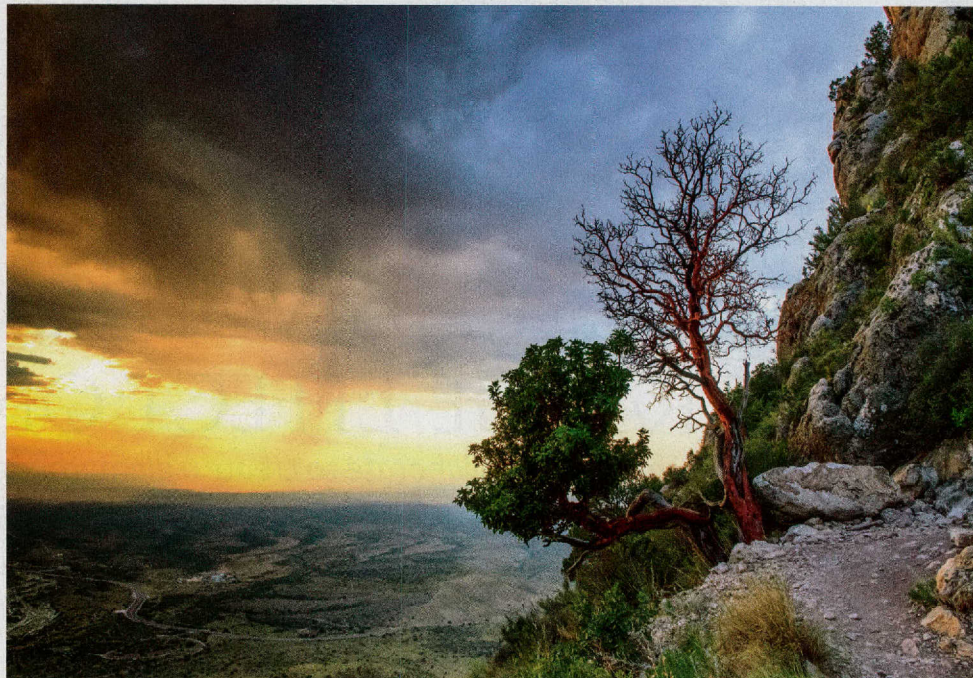
It was a grand, dramatic way to end a day hike, and as we sit down to hearty plates of chicken-fried steak at RJ's Grill in Van Horn, we're able to enjoy ourselves, reflecting on a climb well done.

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*Julia B. Jones is a University of Texas student and former Texas Parks & Wildlife magazine intern.*



*A bridge connects two sections of the trail near the Guadalupe Peak summit (opposite page); a silver pyramid marks the summit (and top selfie spot); a Texas madrone tree (below) grows along the trail.*



## On second thought, I'd...



### EAT MORE.

We each burned more than 3,000 calories on that hike, so tuna packets didn't cut it. Bring more high-energy snacks.



### GET ACTUAL HIKING SHOES.

I wore a six-year-old pair of tennis shoes with worn-out treads, and slipping got old after a while.



### BRING ANTIBIOTIC OINTMENT.

You never know when a bug bite can turn deadly (or at least a bit infected).



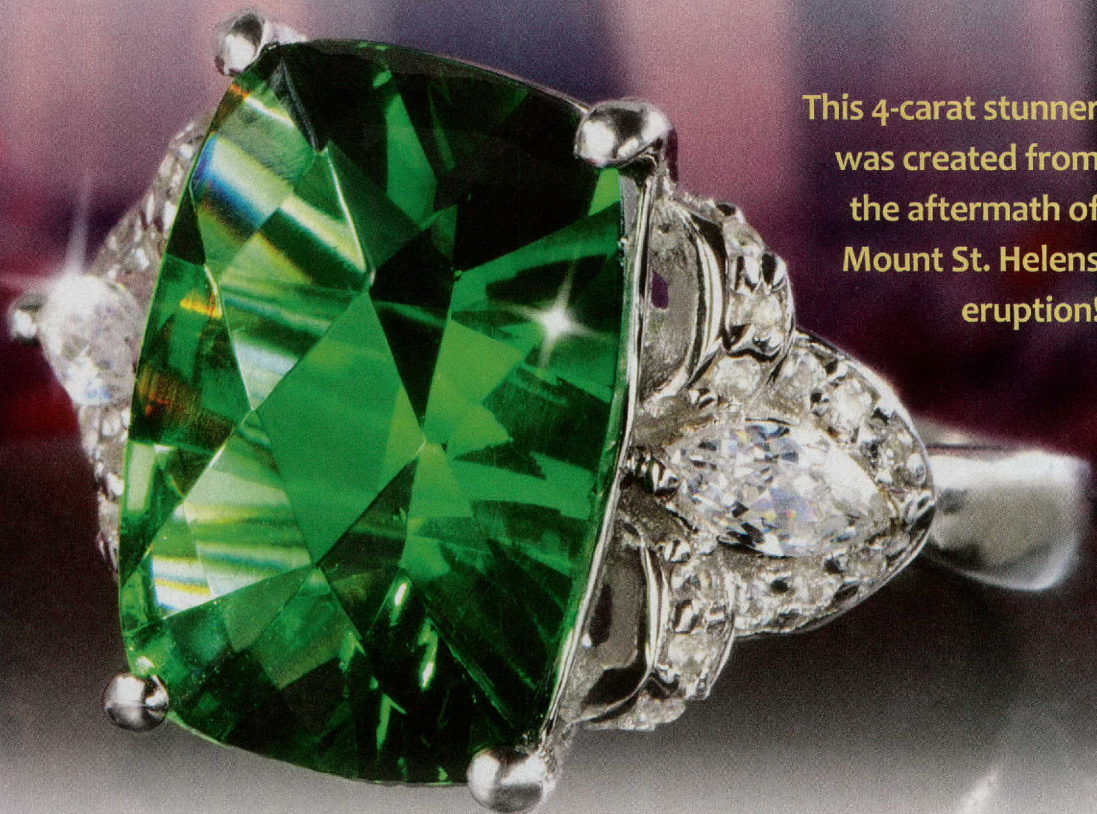
### WRITE AN ENTRY ATOP THE PEAK.

I spent so much time reading others' stories, I didn't write my own. Good thing I work at a magazine.

What our clients are saying about Stauer Helenite jewelry:

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This 4-carat stunner was created from the aftermath of Mount St. Helens eruption!

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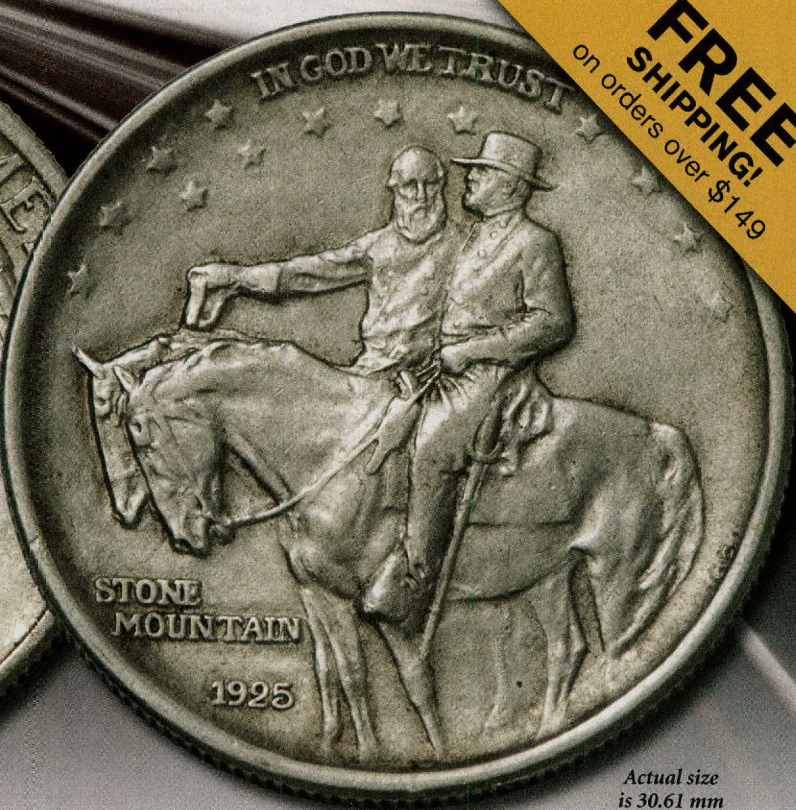
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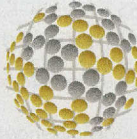
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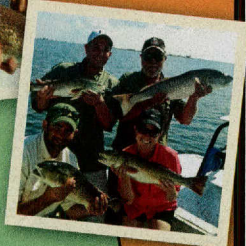


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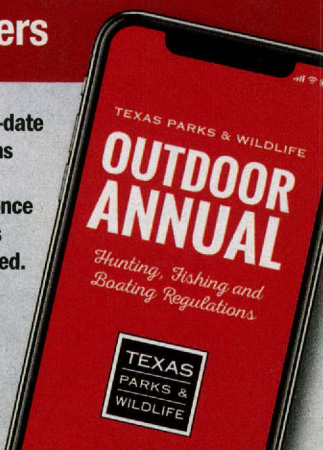
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[WhoopingCraneFestival.com](http://WhoopingCraneFestival.com) • [VisitPortAransas.com](http://VisitPortAransas.com)



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Galveston Island Nature Tourism Council  
[GalvestonFeatherFest.com](http://GalvestonFeatherFest.com)



## BALCONES SONGBIRD FESTIVAL

APRIL 24 – 26, 2020

Celebrating its 20th year, the Balcones Songbird Festival is a celebration of nature through a collection of interpretive events to experience both birds and their habitat. Balcones has been designated an Important Bird Area by the National Audubon Society. Save the date and join us in April to experience the best of Texas Hill Country birding!



Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge  
[BalconesSongbirdFestival.org](http://BalconesSongbirdFestival.org)

**All That Jazz:**  
Denton's  
a college  
town with a  
syncopated beat.

by Russell Roe

**I**t's not every day that you see somebody walking down the street carrying a tuba, but it's exactly the kind of thing you might see in Denton, home of the prestigious University of North Texas College of Music.

Katelyn Steffen is walking down UNT's Chestnut Street on the way to band practice with her sousaphone wrapped around her torso, looking like a one-woman marching band.

"I had a pep rally and then a lab, and I didn't have time to drop off my tuba before band

practice," says Katelyn, a UNT student.

The presence of 37,000-student UNT and 15,000-student Texas Woman's University means Denton maintains a youthful, and musical, energy.

"There are unique qualities to this town," Ken Currin,

one of my old college friends from UNT, tells me over lunch at the Juicy Pig, one of the three restaurants he owns in town. "It's a university town. That's what always separated it from other places. Your neighbor might be a psychology professor."

These days, Denton thrives as a college town, a music hub and a county seat with an active downtown square. With its location on the outer edges of the sprawling Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, it's able to maintain some small-town qualities.

Denton has certainly grown since I went to school at

# DENTON



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UNT in the 1980s, but what I consider “essential Denton” — the central area containing the universities and downtown — has maintained its character. I am happy to revisit it with my girlfriend Heather, guided by old friends and longtime Dentonites Ken and Carey Currin.

Our first stop is the downtown courthouse, an eye-catching Romanesque building constructed in 1896 that certainly stands as one of Texas’ finest courthouses.

“Everybody thinks they have the best courthouse — so do we,” says Gretel L’Heureux of the Denton

County Office of History and Culture. “Old ones like this are hard to beat.”

We climb the stairs to the dome and take in the expansive views of Denton — north, south, east and west.

“This is the heart of the city and the heart of the county and the center of this historical district,” says Greg Smith of the Texas Historical Commission as we stand on the courthouse’s viewing deck. Smith is here for a State Board of Review meeting considering National Register nominations.

Downstairs in the museum, we soak up local history as we examine the “40 for 40” exhibit displaying 40 artifacts for the 40 years of the courthouse museum’s operation. The exhibit tells the story of the county through items such as the old Schmitz Furniture Store cash register and a signed guitar from the Eli Young Band, which formed while its members went to UNT.

We meet up with Ken after the tour at the grave of John B. Denton on the courthouse lawn. Ken says the courthouse grounds serve as the city’s gathering place, with people hanging out here on benches and the lawn most nights of the week and for special events. The restaurants, bars and other businesses around the square make it a happening place.

That night, we have dinner at Tex Tapas in a revitalized area a couple of blocks off the square. The crispy feta, seared Brussels sprouts and green curry meatballs prove to be favorites.

After dinner, we shift next door to Steve’s Wine Bar,



KUHLKEN PHOTOGRAPHY

where a local jazz combo supplies live music.

Denton is known for its music, and it is particularly known for its jazz. UNT was the first university in the country to offer a jazz studies degree, and its One O’Clock Lab Band has earned multiple Grammy nominations and toured the world. Denton and UNT have produced an impressive slate of musicians, including Brave Combo, Norah Jones, Michael Martin Murphey and Pat Boone.

Later, we poke our heads into Dan’s Silverleaf, the premier live music club in town. Tonight’s band is Wood and Wire, an Austin-based Americana band.

Denton often draws comparisons to Austin, both

*The Denton County Courthouse (left) serves as a focal point and gathering place for Denton. The University of North Texas (above) is known for its music program.*





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KUHLKEN PHOTOGRAPHY



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being college towns with music scenes.

"We're a smaller version of what used to be cool about Austin," Ken says. "We used to be a town full of people who wanted to move to Austin. Now they don't. We even get people who have moved here from Austin."

The next morning, we head off to Ray Roberts Lake State Park, nestled on the shores of Ray Roberts Lake just northeast of town. The park's main Isle du Bois Unit, which opened in 1993, features camping, hiking, boating, fishing and mountain biking. We are here for a "forest bathing" hike.

"The idea of forest bathing,

or *shinrin-yoku*, is to connect to nature," says park ranger Rick "Ranger Rick" Torres. "Slow down and be mindful. Use your senses. What do I smell? What do I hear?"

We start on a short hike down a park trail lined with pine trees.

Ranger Rick stops at a patch of beebalm. He takes a leaf and breaks it up in his hand so we can smell its minty aroma.

He encourages us to squat down and feel the sandy soil beneath our feet. Digging in with our hands, the sand feels much cooler just a few inches below the surface.

Having covered smell and touch, Ranger Rick turns to hearing.

**This page:** The O'Neil Ford-designed Little Chapel in the Woods is a popular spot for weddings; "Ranger Rick" Torres finishes leading a sensory-filled "forest bathing" hike at Ray Roberts Lake State Park; the Old Alton Bridge harbors an eerie ghost tale.

**Opposite page:** The University of North Texas brings a steady stream of college kids to town.

"Open your ears," he says. "What do you hear?"

"Birds," says one park-goer. "Insects," says another.

"Those are the sounds of nature," Ranger Rick says.

He goes on to point out the fractal patterns found in the spiral of a pine cone, the varieties of green we see in the plants around us and the different textures of tree trunks. We munch on the purple berries of the beautyberry bush.

It all opens our eyes to the many ways nature can be experienced. Our hourlong hike has been a smorgasbord for the senses.

"If you take time to connect with nature, it really

nourishes your mind, body and soul,” Ranger Rick says.

We brought along our bikes so we can hit the Ray Roberts Greenbelt Corridor Trail, and that’s where we go next.

The 21-mile (out and back) trail runs from the Ray Roberts Dam to Lake Lewisville along the heavily wooded banks of the Elm Fork of the Trinity River. The day’s 97-degree temperature takes its toll as the sun beats down on us, but the shaded portions of the trail provide relief. The crushed limestone trail is flat, scenic and easy enough for all skill levels (the lower half of the trail has been closed because of flood damage).

After the ride, we head back to town for an evening of ghostly adventures — a downtown ghost tour followed by a visit to the Old Alton Bridge, otherwise known as Goatman’s Bridge.

Shelly Tucker meets us at the courthouse square for her “Ghosts of Denton” tour.

As we walk around the square, she regales us with stories of actors, gamblers and others who met untimely deaths, experienced ethereal events or otherwise stood face to face with the unexplained.

“I dig for the history behind the mystery,” she says.

Afterward, we stop for dinner at the popular LSA Burger, where the inviting rooftop deck offers an elevated view of the square.

The second part of our spooky double-header takes us to the Old Alton Bridge, a historic iron truss bridge that’s home to one of Denton’s legendary ghost tales. We approach it with a

sense of dread.

The bridge was built in 1884 over Hickory Creek. The ghostly legend concerns a successful African-American goat farmer who is said to have been lynched on the bridge by the Ku Klux Klan. According to the tale, when the Klan went below the bridge to make sure the goat farmer was dead, the noose was empty, and the farmer’s body was nowhere to be found. Over the years, numerous sightings of ghost-like figures have been reported.

As we walk toward the bridge on a dark Saturday night, we realize we didn’t bring flashlights. My spine tingles as we walk across the bridge, trying to imagine the sinister deeds of the past.

Other visitors arrive with flashlights, and the lights reflect off the multitudes of spider webs covering the bridge overhead. So many spiders! I think I was happier not knowing about all the spiders. One big spider drops

down and almost lands on a guy’s head. Yikes! We don’t see the Goatman, but we decide we’ve had enough and head back to Denton.

The next morning, we decide to make one last stop, at the Little Chapel in the Woods, designed by renowned architect O’Neil Ford. Situated on the TWU campus, the chapel is one of the most popular places to get married in town and remains a place of architectural significance.

As we explore the gardens nearby, I point out some beautyberries to Heather and jokingly suggest they could be our breakfast, just as they had been a snack the previous day at Ray Roberts. She declines, not caring for the taste, and suggests instead the flower of the Turk’s cap plant next to it. I tear off one of the red flowers and pop it in my mouth.

The flower’s taste is much like our taste of Denton has been — sweet, surprising and satisfying.

#### **MORE INFO:**

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**RAY ROBERTS LAKE STATE PARK**  
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## TEXAS' OLDEST STATE PARKS

State parks underwent a major expansion in the 1930s, and the parks acquired in that period remain the historic heart of Texas' state park system. They were built by the skilled labor of the Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps. Mother Neff and a handful of historic sites came first, but these five state parks are some of the oldest in the system.

by **Julia B. Jones**

### ABILENE STATE PARK

Opened in mid-1934, Abilene State Park was built by CCC workers along the wooded banks of Elm Creek. The park offers many opportunities for recreation, including swimming in a pool made by the CCC, spending a night in a yurt, walking along nature trails and paddling or fishing at Lake Abilene. Abilene was chosen for a state park because of its growing urban population, its role as a leading city of West Texas and its location along major highways.



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### BLANCO STATE PARK

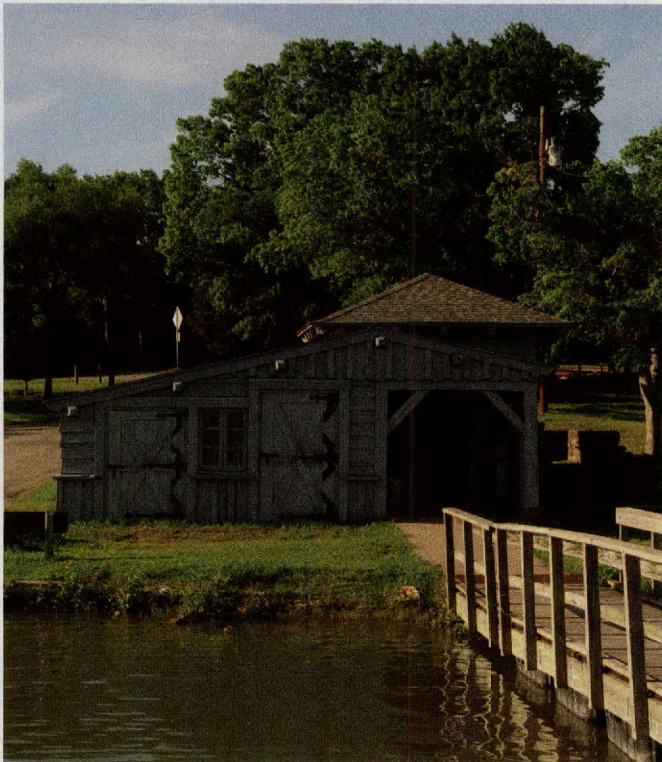
Blanco was one of the first four state parks to receive help from the CCC, whose members arrived in 1933 and worked for 11 months to establish the park along the Blanco River. They built dams, picnic areas, roads, bridges and other facilities that allowed traveling families to stop and swim or enjoy nature for a bit.



EARL NOTTINGHAM / TPWD

### LAKE CORPUS CHRISTI STATE PARK

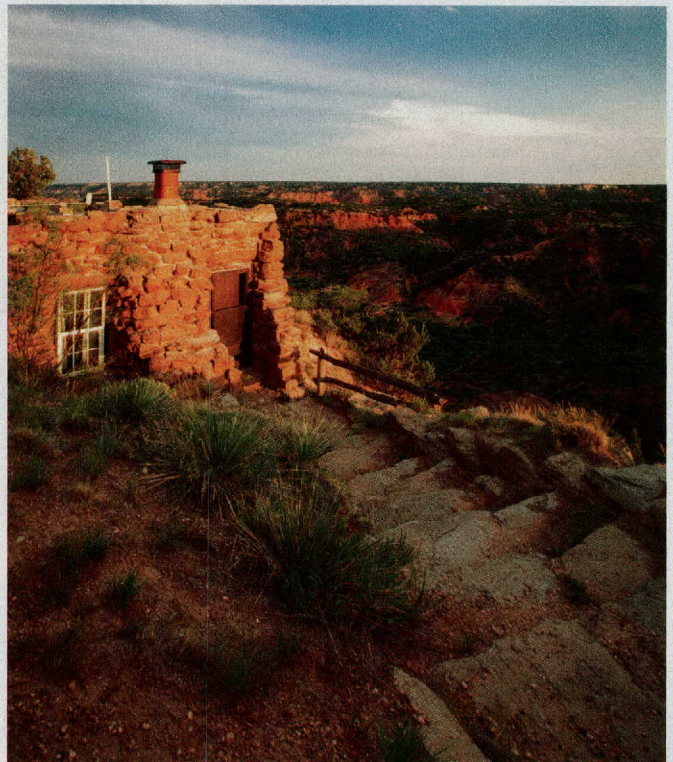
Opened in 1934, the park has offered lakeside activities for the past 80 years. Fishing and birding are popular here. Of the handful of buildings built by the CCC, only the refectory (nicknamed “the Castle”) remains, made of local caliche cast in blocks to look like cut limestone.



CHASE FOUNTAIN / TPWD

### BONHAM STATE PARK

Bonham donated the land for the state park in 1933, and the park opened in 1936 after work was completed by the CCC. It boasts a lake where guests can swim, boat and fish. The park exemplifies the CCC park formula — an earthen dam impounding a small lake, a refectory and landscape features for the purposes of erosion control and public recreation. Bonham contains four examples of the CCC “rustic” style: the boathouse, dance pavilion, concession building (now park headquarters) and water tower.



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### PALO DURO CANYON STATE PARK

Palo Duro opened as a state park in 1934 after being considered as a possible national park. CCC workers built trails, cabins, a lodge (now the visitor center) and the winding road that takes visitors into the canyon. The CCC used local stone and wood for building materials to complement the natural surroundings. The park has expanded its original holdings to now cover 28,000 acres.

# Where in Texas?

TRAVEL

This trail and road follow the ridgeline above a West Texas state park to an overlook that has views to the town below. The road and rock overlook were built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s.

If you recognize this site, send us a note at *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine, 4200 Smith School Road, Austin, TX 78744 (write "Where in Texas?" on the envelope); email us at [magazine@tpwd.texas.gov](mailto:magazine@tpwd.texas.gov); or let us know on Facebook. We'll reveal the answer in a future issue.

Photo by Pierce Ingram

**TOOLS:** Canon EOS 5D Mark IV camera, EF 24-105mm f/4L IS USM lens, f/10 at 1/400 seconds, ISO 500.



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