



TEXAS
**parks &
wildlife**
THE OUTDOOR MAGAZINE OF TEXAS • JUNE 2021

CAMPING ON TWO WHEELS

Bikepacking from Arkansas to Austin — in a pandemic

BRIGHT EYES, DARK SKIES

Blankets of stars fill the night skies at these parks

MESSING AROUND IN BOATS

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THE



GREAT



OUTDOOR



SCAVENGER



HUNT



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Biking from Arkansas to Austin during a pandemic.

by Jessica Alexander

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ON THE BACK COVER: *Devil's Waterhole at Inks Lake State Park offers water fun that draws swimmers and paddlers.* 📷 Sonja Sommerfeld

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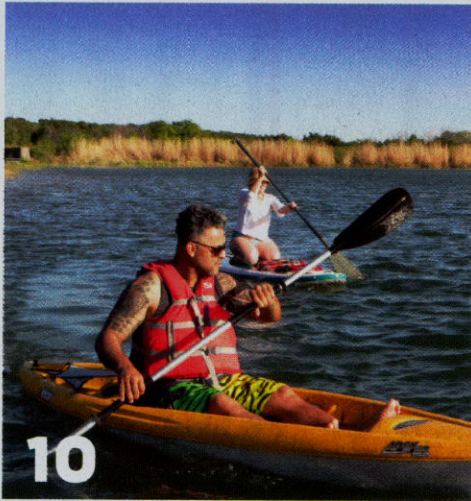


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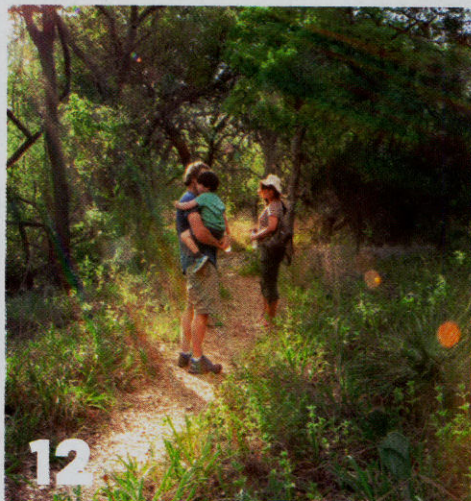
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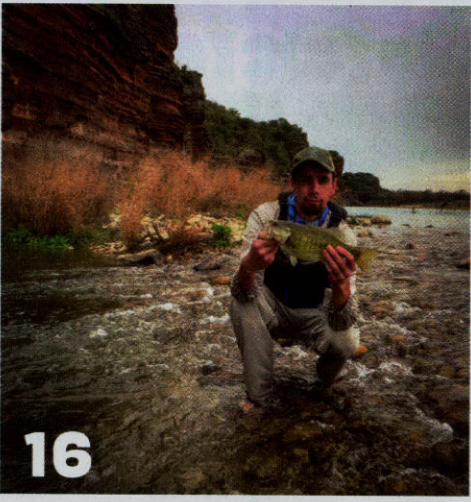
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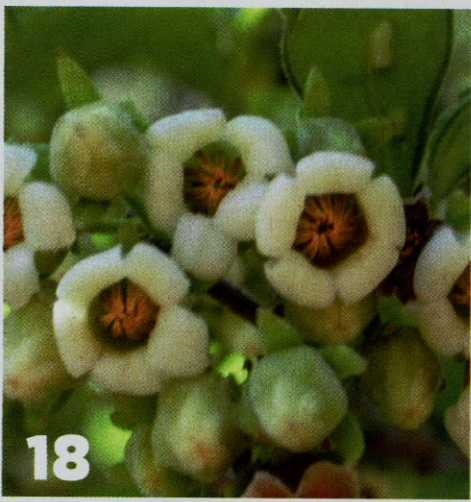
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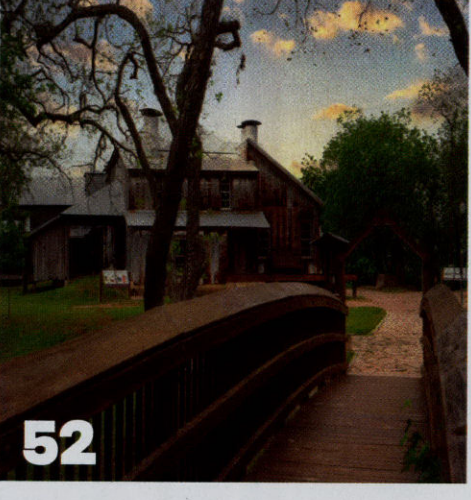
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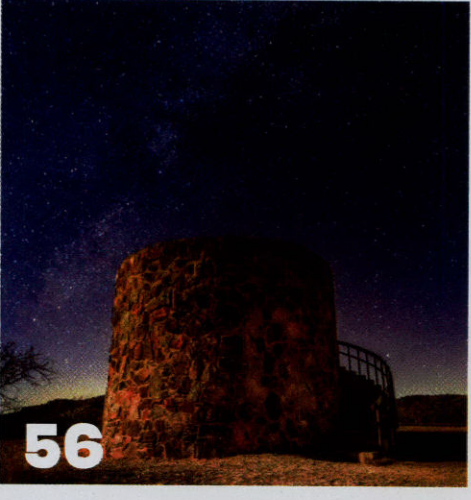
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FROM THE EDITOR

GOSH, WE'VE MISSED YOU. Our Great Outdoor Scavenger Hunt (Page 27) debuted in 2019 with these starting-gun words: "From the bayous to the prairie, the Pineywoods to Palo Duro, Big Bend to the World Birding Center, our first-ever statewide scavenger hunt starts NOW."

Basically, GOSH is a classic scavenger hunt with a twist: you don't have to find and collect an item, you just travel to a location on our list, snap a selfie and add our hashtag: #GOSH2021. Complete one entry, one section or the entire list.

We were thrilled when your participation far exceeded our wildest expectations two years ago. Readers of all ages and interests and personality types enthusiastically traveled this big state, snapping selfies in front of GOSH locations such as the Port Isabel Lighthouse (we had our own Snapchat filter here) or Old Tunnel State Park to watch a bat emergence. Some "finds" were easier than others; the hardest souls hiked out the Lighthouse Trail at Palo Duro Canyon or trekked out west to the inky, twinkly skies near an observatory to complete their list.

Art Director Nathan Adams, the mastermind behind this fun summer game, had GOSH 2.0 complete and ready to publish in

2020 when COVID changed everyone's plans. Fast-forward a crazy year and we're happy to invite you back to play with us once more. Nathan made it a bit easier for those just dipping their toes back in travel by focusing on Texas' regions instead of the entire state.

GOSH players will be the stars of our blog (tpwmag.com) and social media accounts all summer long. Will we see you posing outside one of San Antonio's missions or checking out the Lower Ghost Camp at San Angelo State Park? We can't wait to share your smiling faces in front of some of the best places in the state.

A few hardy souls like Austin photojournalist Jessica Alexander (Page 40) figured out how to travel during a pandemic — just strap your camping gear on to your bike, grab a friend, hop a train to Arkansas and ride back.

It's time for summer adventure again, and gosh, that feels fantastic!

Louie Bond
Louie Bond, Editor



IMPORTED

**It is illegal to
use non-Gulf
shrimp as bait.**



IT'S THE LAW

Only shrimp native to the Gulf of Mexico can be used as fishing bait.

Although safe for human consumption, **IMPORTED SHRIMP** can carry white-spot syndrome.



When used for bait, this virus can **WIPE OUT** native shrimp, crab and crayfish in Texas. Thanks for doing your part to preserve our crustaceans.

www.tpwd.texas.gov/baitshrimp



JAMES LASSWELL

MAIL CALL

WRITE TO US Send your letters to **Texas Parks & Wildlife magazine**
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CHASING DRAGONFLIES

I enjoyed the article by Russell Roe (“An Eye for the Dragonfly”) about dragonflies in your April 2021 edition. Before I retired, I, too, was a dragonfly chaser (and still am).

I particularly appreciated the references to Greg Lasley in the article and on Page 7 of the magazine. I considered Greg a friend. Many years ago, I found out that Greg had photographed the blue-faced ringtail, and I e-mailed him to find out where he had gotten the pictures. He directed me to a spot on the San Marcos River. I didn’t find the blue-faced ringtail, and he offered to take me there. I readily accepted and we went down to Gonzales and managed to get photos of blue-faced ringtails and other dragonflies and damselflies. He was a great naturalist and willing to share his knowledge with others.

I am headed to one of my favorite dragonfly spots: Gus Engeling Wildlife Management Area. It is one of the few spots you can find the *Sarracenia spiketail*. Our goal is to find the *S. spiketail* and take a tibia sample for John Abbott’s DNA studies. Gus Engeling is a great place for chasing dragonflies, and I hope your article will get more people interested in doing so.

JAMES LASSWELL
Stephenville

TEXAS NATURALISTS

Thank you for your “From the Editor” comments on the passing of Greg Lasley, and also your shout-out to Texas naturalists. I am a member of the Texas Master Naturalist program beginning in 2014, and I continue to enjoy the many opportunities for environmental service here in the state.

In addition to the wonderful article on dragonflies, I enjoyed Kathryn Hunter’s essay and family experience at Colorado Bend State Park.

I’ve been a fan (and subscriber) of your magazine for several years now.

JOHN SPAULDING
Dallas

A DUCK IS STUCK

We just rescued a duck from our chimney. The dog and cats became very interested in the area around our fireplace, and I could hear a bird fluttering around. I got flashlight and opened the damper. Almost immediately I saw a beak shaped like the tip of a duck beak. Soon, with kind words of encouragement, a duck head appeared, followed by one wing. Continuing with soothing words, the remainder of the duck came out. I carried it out to the backyard and let it down.

The duck walked around for a while, seemingly no worse for the experience, and soon flew off. A quick online search revealed that our visitor was a black-

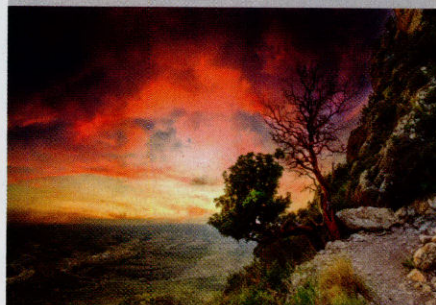
bellied whistling duck. The family wished “Henry” well as he departed.

EDDIE EDWARDS
Houston

Did you like the sculpture on our May cover?

We thought you might like to know more about it. The sculpture is in the Deep Ellum neighborhood east of downtown Dallas and is called *Walking Tall*, part of a three-piece series called *The Traveling Man*, created by Brad Oldham, Christy Coltrin and Brandon Oldenberg.

WHERE IN TEXAS?



Have you been to the top of Texas? Guadalupe Peak, the highest point in the state, is the answer to May’s *Where in Texas?* Instagrammer Texas Traveler (marcus_photo) knew the answer and offered an intriguing response: “Two of the best adventures of my life started with an overnight journey to the top of Texas.” See this month’s *Where in Texas?* on Page 58.

Admission includes Giant Pacific octopus, American alligators, *and* flight training.

 ADMIT ONE

When winds blew down a hollowed-out palm tree housing two juvenile Barn owls at a Kingsville residence, the rescued fledglings were brought immediately to the Texas State Aquarium Wildlife Rescue Center for emergency care. They were tong-fed until they could eat independently and then cared for and trained as their adult plumage grew in. After 42 days of rehabilitation—funded in part by your tickets—the owls were released into the Pollywog Pond Bird & Wildlife Sanctuary on January 5, 2021.

Your visit makes the difference!

 TEXAS STATE
AQUARIUM
W I L D L I F E
RESCUE

TexasStateAquarium.org

#SaveMoreThanMemories





STATE PARK ADVENTURES

MESSING ABOUT IN BOATS

In the opening chapter of the children's classic *The Wind in the Willows*, Water Rat paddles his boat across the river to pick up Mole, who had never been in a boat before.

"Believe me, my young friend, there is nothing — absolutely nothing — half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats," Rat observes.

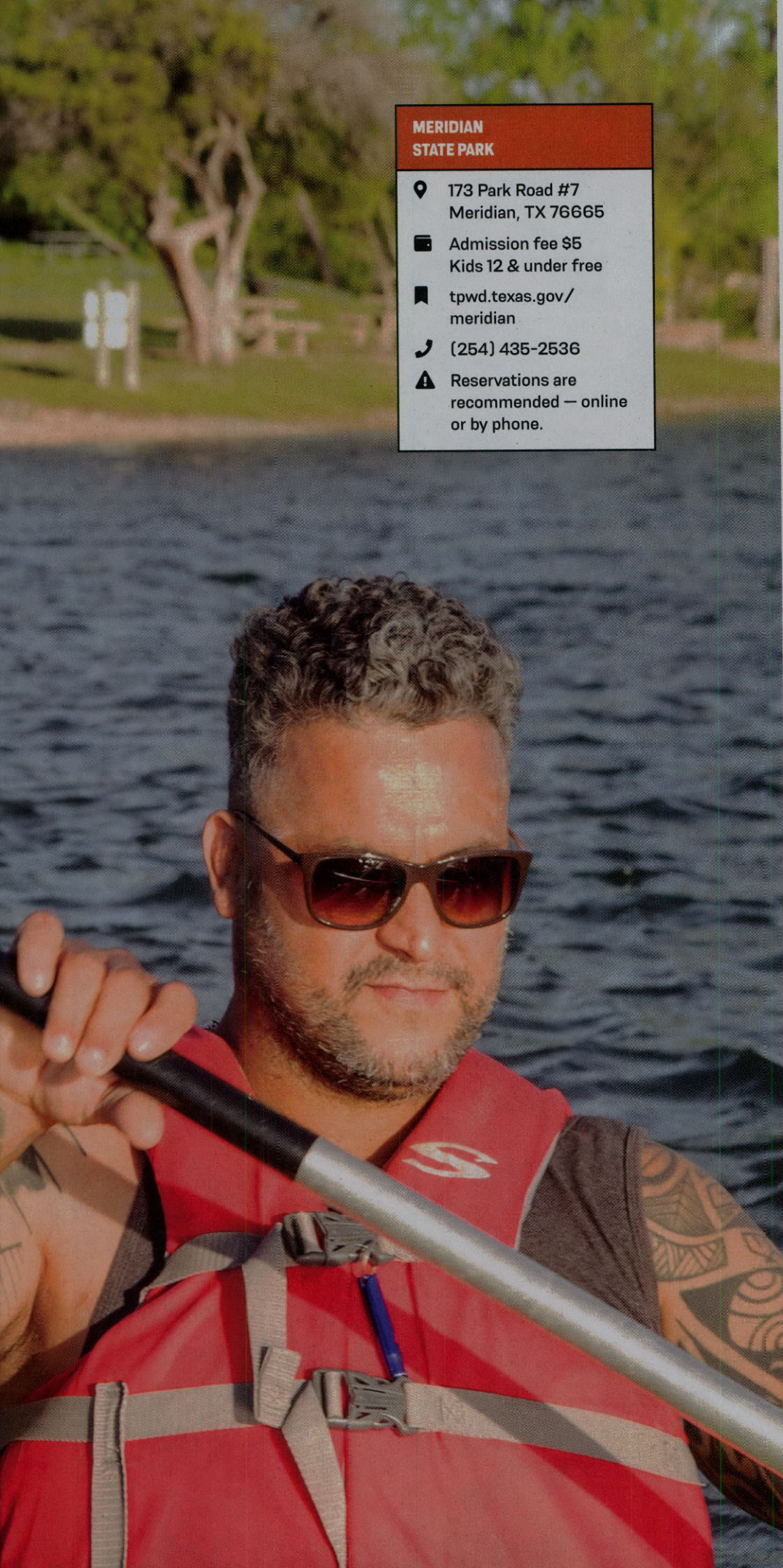
Indeed.

Meridian State Park, with 72-acre Lake Meridian at its center, provides a tranquil place to mess about in boats. It's nestled among limestone bluffs at the top of the

Hill Country west of Waco.

The no-wake lake is a manageable size, so it's possible to cover the whole body of water in an outing, with plenty of coves and bluffs to explore. The Civilian Conservation Corps created the lake in the 1930s by building a rock and earthen dam on Bee Creek. Rentals of kayaks (single and double), canoes and stand-up paddleboards are available at the park.

"It's a good area for a quiet, calm paddle," says Superintendent Steve Kimbley. "It's a great fishing lake. There are a couple of fingers of the lake you can paddle up, and a couple of CCC bridges to check out."



MERIDIAN STATE PARK

📍 173 Park Road #7
Meridian, TX 76665

📄 Admission fee \$5
Kids 12 & under free

📖 tpwd.texas.gov/meridian

☎ (254) 435-2536

⚠ Reservations are recommended — online or by phone.

From ship to shore

With 505 acres, Meridian is a small park with lots to offer.



CCC LAKESIDE BEAUTY

The CCC built the park in the 1930s, with work that includes bridges and the dam. The centerpiece of CCC work is the lakeside refectory made of cut stone.



CAMPING YOUR WAY

The park has a variety of campsites available, from primitive to full hookup, plus a few cabins and screened shelters, including shelters right on the waterfront.



HIKE AROUND THE LAKE

Explore more than 5 miles of hiking trails, including the Bosque Hiking Trail, which encircles the lake.



DISTANCE
1.2 miles (one-way)



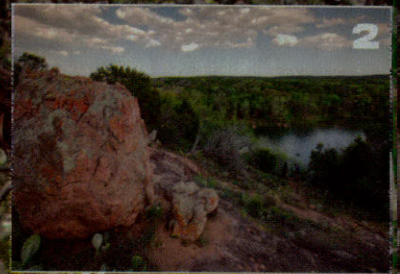
DIFFICULTY LEVEL
★★★★☆



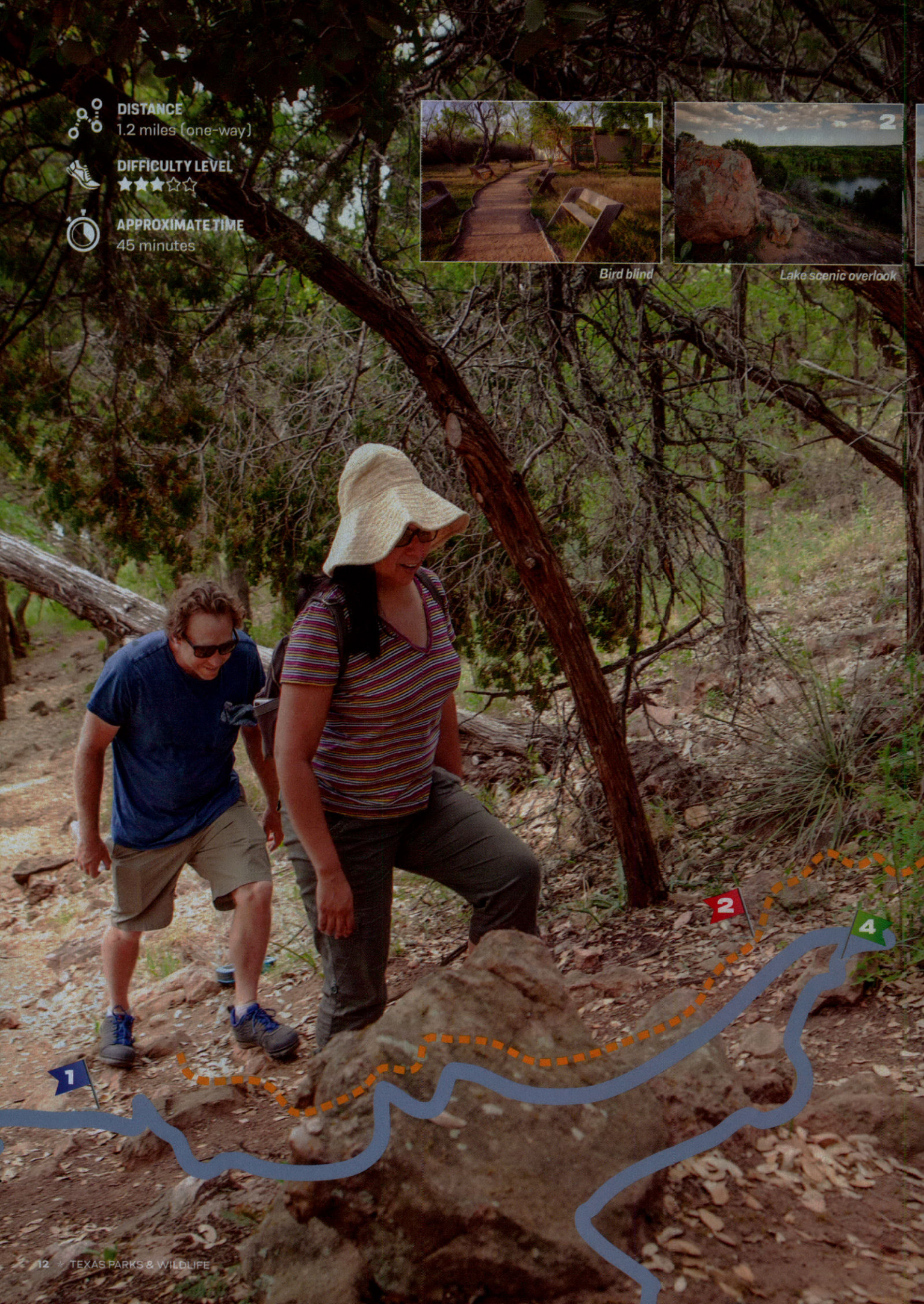
APPROXIMATE TIME
45 minutes



Bird blind



Lake scenic overlook





3

Valley Spring Creek waterfall

4

Devil's Waterhole

TAKE A HIKE

NICE GNEISS

DEVIL'S BACKBONE NATURE TRAIL AT INKS LAKE STATE PARK

Inks Lake, one of the jewels of the Highland Lakes chain, sits on the eastern edge of the Llano Uplift, the geologic heart of Texas. The region contains some of the oldest rocks in Texas; you can see them along the Devil's Backbone Nature Trail at Inks Lake State Park.

We're talking some classic rock here. But there's more than rocks. The trail features waterfalls, a wildlife viewing station, scenic views and one of the state's best swimming holes.

The Devil's Backbone Nature Trail skirts the northern shore of the rocky cove that contains Devil's Waterhole, an iconic swimming hole formed where Spring Creek meets the lake.

"This is where a lot of people spend their day — Devil's Waterhole," says park interpreter Morica Stewart as we stand at an overlook and see swimmers, paddlers and loggers.

The trail offers several beautiful vistas of the cove and lake before reaching the wildlife viewing station, a great place to see birds.

The pink rock outcrops in the park are Valley Spring gneiss (pronounced "nice"), a granite-like metamorphic rock that's likely 1 billion years old. Gneiss "islands" support unique microhabitats.

"As the rock decomposes, it creates dirt and soil for these kinds of plants," Stewart says, pointing out an array of wildflowers, grasses, forbs, mosses, lichens and ferns.

To reach the Devil's Backbone trail, start on the Devil's Waterhole Nature Trail and connect with the Valley Spring Creek Trail (total hiking distance is almost 4 miles round-trip). The Devil's Backbone trail starts along Spring Creek.

Once there, get ready to rock.



LAW ENFORCEMENT

STATE PARK POLICE CELEBRATE 50 YEARS

TPWD officers quietly keep parks and visitors safe.

Since 1971, a special group of law enforcement officers has been responsible for the safety, security and protection of the natural jewels in Texas and those who visit them.

As the blue badges of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (often confused with Texas game wardens), State Park Police quietly and humbly protect the state's natural and cultural resources through community-oriented policing and emergency response. In 2021, they celebrate a half-century of providing safe and secure environments for 10 million state park visitors annually.

State Park Police are on patrol every day along the coast, in the forests and mountains, in the desert, in cities and on the border. In basic terms, they protect the unique resources of the parks and ensure that all visitors can enjoy them safely and responsibly.

In 1971, a dozen carefully selected volunteers started the evolution to what is now the State Park Police. Today, the number has grown to approximately 140 highly trained police officers.

"Called by different names and shouldering different patches on different uniforms, the police officers of the State Parks Division have been forged by challenge and change," says State Park Police Major Doug Huggins. "The 50th anniversary is a significant milestone and the perfect time to shine a light on a vital part of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the history of the great state of Texas."

Never knowing what each day may bring, State Park Police serve with honor, dedication, heroism and even an often-welcomed sense of humor. Look for their stories of setbacks, successes and growth in our December issue and on TPWD social media.

DOUG HUGGINS CHASE FOUNTAIN | TPWD

OFF THE PAGE

TPWD 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

MAY 30-JUNE 5

Go on the job with Texas game wardens as they patrol the state.

JUNE 6-12

Discover the state by canoe or kayak on Texas paddling trails.

JUNE 13-19

Explore a variety of experiences at state parks and historic sites.



JUNE 20-26

From big bison to tiny butterflies, Texas is home to a variety of wildlife.

JUNE 27-JULY 3

Jobs at Texas Parks and Wildlife are as diverse as the people of the state.

PODCAST

Listen to *Under the Texas Sky* to explore nature, wildlife and the best of life outside. Pick up pro tips for camping, cooking and more. Download at underthetexassky.org or major podcast platforms.

BLOG

Want frequent content updates from *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine? Join us for tips to enhance your outdoor experiences! Check out our blog at tpwmag.com as we help Texans find joy in the outdoors.

ARBORETUM USES PRESCRIBED FIRE FOR GRASSLAND HEALTH

Wildlife fire team conducts controlled burn near downtown Houston.

A most unusual controlled urban burn took place inside the Interstate 610 Loop in Houston this past spring.

The Houston Fire Department and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department helped the Houston Arboretum and Nature Center conduct a prescribed burn on approximately 7 acres of the savannah area in the northeast corner of the nature sanctuary on March 25.

Planned prescribed burns safely mimic the essential natural

fire cycle and are a common land management technique for improving resiliency and diversity of native habitat. Periodic burns also mitigate the risk of destructive wildfires by reducing the “fuel load” in the designated area: dead trees, leaf litter and other flammable vegetation.

Jaime González, Houston Healthy Cities program director at the Nature Conservancy in Texas, worked for the Houston Arboretum during its first prescribed burn in 1999.

“The value of prescribed fire for grassland health was on full display the fall after we burned the meadow,” he says. “Nutrients that had been locked up in old grass thatch had been released and made available to native grasses and wildflowers, and other species that had been struggling to find light and room finally had their chance. No one could remember a more beautiful fall wildflower season.”

Prescribed fires help the Arboretum maintain its historic ecosystems, increase biodiversity and preserve Gulf Coast prairie and savannah, both endangered ecosystems essential for native wildlife. Healthy grasslands are better able to absorb and filter floodwaters. Grassland birds need fire to maintain open habitat for nesting and feeding.

For information on wildland fire management and prescribed fire, visit tpwd.texas.gov/landwater/land/wildland_fire_management/.



TPWD STAFF CHRIS SCHENCK | TPWD

STATE PARKS BRAZOS BEND SIGNS WELCOME ALL

Six languages on state park’s signage recognize area’s incredible diversity.

With the installation of new signs, visitors to Brazos Bend State Park are now welcomed to the park and urged to come back in six different languages — a reflection of the diverse population that visits the park. The park installed the new multi-lingual signs at the entrance and exit in March.

“One of the first things I noticed when I started here was the diversity of our park visitors,” says Superintendent Jim Cisneros. “I’d walk the trails and so hear many different languages — Spanish, French, Arabic, Russian.”

An influx of residents from around

the world has made Houston the most ethnically and racially diverse city in the country. Cisneros and the park wanted to acknowledge that.

Cisneros suggested installing a multi-lingual sign at the entrance to greet visitors. Staff members suggested a second, complementary sign at the exit.

Now, signs at the entrance offer a greeting of “Welcome” in six languages — English, Spanish, French, Arabic, Vietnamese and Mandarin Chinese (determined to be the most widely spoken languages in Houston). Signs in the same languages at the exit ask visitors to “Come back soon.”



TPWD STAFF SONJA SOMMERFELD | TPWD



WILDLIFE

LATE TPWD INTERN HONORED FOR WILDLIFE WORK

Agency mourns loss of shooting victim who helped collect rare bee species.

Natalia Monet Cox, a 21-year-old Huston-Tillotson University student who served as an intern for two years in TPWD's Wildlife Diversity Program, was killed in a shooting at her Austin apartment in late March.

In the summer of 2020, the Melissa (Texas) native was among the first people to collect a rare bee found only in Texas: the elusive cellophane bee (*Colletes bumelia*), a Species of Greatest Conservation Need. Her supervisor, invertebrate biologist Ross Winton, reflected on how Natalia took time to engage with a young girl during the collecting expedition and include her in conversation. It made for a special time.

The girl commented that she loved seeing a woman getting into wildlife, and the two of them got to share in being the first women to collect the bee.

"She was a joy to work with," Winton says.

In addition to her internship, Natalia earned a spot on the high-profile Urban Coyote Project research team.

"Natalia embraced her wildlife fieldwork and research projects with TPWD and the university," says Richard Heilbrun, project co-coordinator. "She dove right in and was obviously a very bright, capable student."

The project aims to provide field research experience for Huston-Tillotson University students interested in a career in wildlife.

"Natalia was curious, intrepid and ready to get her hands dirty to solve important problems," says project co-coordinator Kelly Simon. "She was a kind and an enthusiastic learner who was eager to learn more."

KELLY SIMON TPWD

WILDLIFE

SAVING THE STATE FISH

For 30 years, TPWD and partners have collaborated to restore and conserve the Guadalupe bass.

Every Texan should add this to their bucket list: catching a Guadalupe bass, the official state fish of Texas, from one of the crystalline, spring-fed rivers of the Hill Country. Guadalupe bass are found only in Central Texas, and populations are threatened by degraded habitat, altered streamflow and breeding with introduced smallmouth bass.

When the state fish was in danger of being bred out of existence, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and partners launched concerted efforts in 1991 to save the species, restoring or conserving their populations in 14 creeks and rivers. TPWD and partners conducted nearly 50 habitat restoration or preservation projects and watershed-scale management of riparian invasive



plants in eight watersheds to create favorable conditions for stocking 2.4 million genetically pure Guadalupe bass.

Restoration of this species is underway in six more rivers, as well as status assessments for another eight rivers. TPWD currently manages 23 public river-access areas that offer angling opportunities for this species, engaging fly-

fishing clubs, local conservation nonprofits and communities in the efforts to ensure that future generations of Texas anglers are able to experience this storied fish.

To learn more, read "Restoring the Guadalupe Bass" in our March 2018 issue or check out the Guadalupe Bass Restoration Initiative annual report on the TPWD website.

TIM BIRDSONG COURTESY CHRIS JOHNSON | LIVING WATERS FLY FISHING

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The stainless steel blade, bolster and pommel are exquisitely etched and would have looked great with a less ambitious handle. But the results of overachieving are stunning here. The turquoise-blue colored handle is ablaze with assorted stones like jasper, marble, sunstone, and coral that have been hand cut and inlaid in a Southwestern motif that conjures images of intricately beaded belts and moccasins.

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— R., Lacey, Washington

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FLORA FACT

FOOD OF THE GODS

Texas persimmon trees have peeling bark and dark, gooey fruit.

by Louie Bond

These twisting trees of South and Central Texas may not catch your eye during most seasons unless you are on the lookout for its lovely, peeling bark.

In midsummer, however, look for *Diospyros texana*'s marble-sized black globes of prune-like fruit. After all, that name comes from the Greek for "food for the gods."

The fruit of the Texas persimmon is not only for the gods, though, as many

types of wildlife enjoy the tree's bounty, and bees and other insects seek the pollen from its blossoms. Some studies have found that the fruit provides food for many mammals in the fall when other forage is scarce. Animals drop the large seeds (three or more in each fruit) in their scat, fertilized and ready to grow another native tree.

It takes two with Texas persimmons: only the females bear fruit, but a male must be present nearby to fertilize it.

It's a host plant for grey hairstreak and Henry's elfin caterpillars. Deer and goats browse the leaves, while birds use the tree for nesting.

We humans love the sweetly sticky fruit, though some discard the skins and the fruit's tough to eat without some seed spitting involved. Cooking makes accessing the tasty flesh easier; use the fruit in your best jam and jelly recipes (four cups juice, three cups sugar and three/four packages of pectin). Highly



© COURTESY RAY MATHEWS, LADY BIRD JOHNSON WILDFLOWER CENTER

nutritious, Texas persimmons provide fiber, vitamin B, more vitamin C than citrus fruit, minerals and antioxidants.

Native Americans found many uses for the plentiful Texas persimmon tree and fruit, also known as chapote. Before ripe, the astringent fruit was used for intestinal ailments.

The ripe fruit was used as a dye; the heartwood (only in large trees) is hard like ebony and used to make furniture and tools.

INVASIVE SPECIES

WINNING THE WAR AGAINST INVASIVES

Five years of funding put to good use against harmful aquatic plants.

After utilizing five years of enhanced legislative funding, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and its partners report significant achievements in combating invasive aquatic plants.

TPWD currently manages these plants on more than 50 water bodies around the state; 60,000 acres of giant salvinia, 6,000 acres of water hyacinth and nearly 1,000 acres of other species of aquatic plants have been treated. Nearly 1.5 million giant salvinia weevils were introduced as biological controls.

New projects to manage river and creekside invasive plants have also been implemented, offering control of problematic Arundo and saltcedar to more than 425 landowners and making great progress in restoring these habitats.

Nationwide, the annual economic impact of all invasive species in the U.S. has reached approximately \$219 billion, with global impacts estimated at over \$4 trillion.

Prevention is widely recognized as the front line in the fight.

“The ‘Clean, Drain and Dry’ campaign reminds boaters that they have the power to protect the lakes we love from invasive species,” says Brian Van Zee, TPWD Inland Fisheries regional director. “By taking these three simple steps, boaters can stop the spread.”

Science plays a key role in supporting statewide monitoring and management efforts.

For Texas to keep pace with the constant and ever-evolving problems associated with aquatic invasive species, it is critically important to continue to invest in targeted control, prevention, monitoring and research efforts.

Read the full five-year report at bit.ly/aquatic-invasives; learn more at TexasInvasives.org.

✍ KIRK MCDONNELL 📷 DAVID JALDA | DREAMSTIME.COM



Giant salvinia

CHUCK-WILL'S-WIDOW!

This Texas bird hollers its name every evening.

by Liam Wolff



COMMON NAME: Chuck-will's-widow

SCIENTIFIC NAME:
Antrostomus carolinensis

HABITAT: Pine and oak woodlands

DIET: Primarily night insects (moths, beetles and winged ants); small birds, bats

DID YOU KNOW? One alternative name for this species is "chip-fell-out-of-an-oak."

The moon rises over a clear-cut field to the east. The June heat has dissipated with the setting sun, but the humidity lingers. The evening is calm, with little noise other than the intermittent chirping of crickets and the croaking of green tree frogs in a distant pond.

Suddenly, from a patch of oak and pines to the west comes a crisp, loud cry: "Chuck-will's-widow!"

A harbinger of twilight and a welcome evening resident of many Texas woods, the chuck-will's-widow is a seldom-seen but oft-heard nightjar throughout most of Texas. Patterned like the woods it inhabits, the plumage of this foot-long bird is brown with black spots and streaks to blend in with the forest floor, where it nests, or a tree branch, where it perches to sing and rest.

The name “chuck-will’s-widow” is an onomatopoeia — a word for a sound that, when pronounced, recites the sound itself. In Texas, other such birds include the bobwhite, willet and whip-poor-will. In many places, the chuck-will’s-widow is mistakenly called a whip-poor-will.

The eastern whip-poor-will, a similar species, is an equally gifted nighttime songster. While eastern whip-poor-wills may be heard in south-central and eastern Texas during spring months, they do not breed in the state like the chuck-will’s-widow and are less abundant where the species overlap.

Chuck-will’s-widows can be encountered from March until October; they breed mostly in the eastern part of the state and can be found as far west as the Edwards Plateau and north to the eastern Panhandle. Breeding includes no fancy nest building; in fact, a chuck-will’s-widow mother will lay two eggs, or as many as four, on the bare ground in April and incubate for 20 days, protecting her clutch with her impressive camouflage plumage.

Pairs croak when disturbed during the day and fly erratically for short distances through the woods after flushing, grunting in annoyance. After October, chuck-will’s-widows join many birds in a migration to the tropics and spend colder months anywhere between the Texas Gulf Coast and South America.

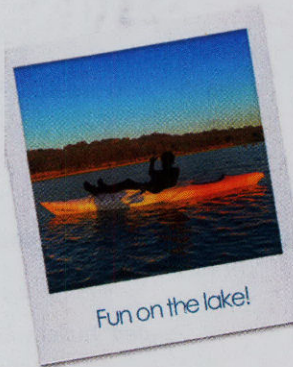
Chuck-will’s-widows and eastern whip-poor-wills are from a group of birds called nightjars, aerial insectivores that typically feed on insects on the wing at dusk and dawn. Chuck-will’s-widows feed by flying low over open areas such as woodland edges and canopy gaps and funneling insects into their massive gape using bristly feathers adjacent to the bill.

The impressive gape of nightjars led folks as far back as Aristotle to believe they fed on the udders of goats at night, causing blindness in the goats, hence the colloquial term “goatsucker.” However, goat owners in Texas need not fear nightjars; the chuck-will’s-widow diet consists of almost entirely insects and the occasional songbird or bat.

Picture your family making memories in Cedar Hill!

CEDAR HILL STATE PARK
HILLSIDE VILLAGE

Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center
HISTORIC DOWNTOWN



Hiking | Biking | Birding | Kayaking | Outdoor Shopping

Visit CEDAR HILL TX
FOLLOW US @visitcedarhilltx!

NEVER TOO EARLY TO SCAN & PLAN YOUR TRIP!

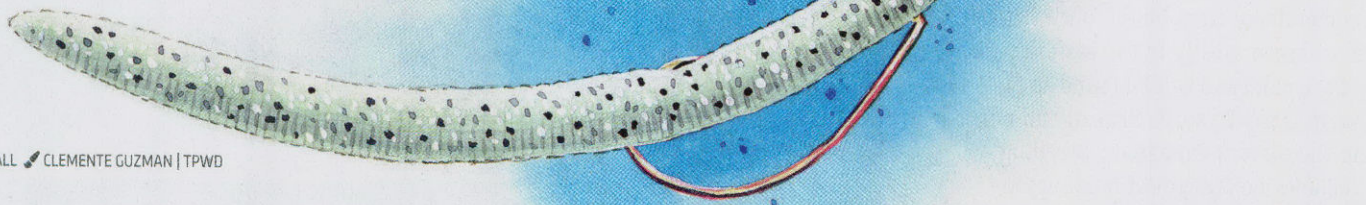
NICE CATCH

TEXAS RIGS & CAROLINA RIGS

text and photos by
Randy Brudnicki

Texas rigs and Carolina rigs are the mainstays of using soft plastic baits for bass fishing. Texas rigs allow you to present a bait into weeds and other cover with less hanging up. Carolina rigs also are less prone to snagging. Each has a place in your arsenal.

ALL  CLEMENTE GUZMAN | TPWD



"Weightless" Texas rig



Texas rig

Texas Rig

Texas rigs can be used from shallow to deep, in cover or open areas. Two ways that T-rigs are used: 1) hook and lure with no weight (above left) and 2) hook and lure with sliding weight (above right).

It is simple to rig: slide a bullet or flipping weight on your line and tie on a hook. The weight slides freely on the line, so when a bass picks up the bait, the angler feels the line move and the fish feels less pressure from a weight. As one would guess, lighter weights often are best. The less resistance the fish feels, the more apt it is to hold on to it. At times, however, a heavy weight is needed to get down to deep water or in windy conditions — making it easier to feel the weight on the bottom. The heavier weight can sometimes be fished faster to trigger a bass' reaction.



Bobber stop protects knot



"Pegged" bullet weight



"Tex-posed" hook

TIP: Because there is a heavy weight sliding up and down the line, put a rubber bobber stop between the weight and the hook. Many people use hard tungsten weights, and the bobber stop protects the knot from damage.

TIP: If fishing in heavy cover, peg the weight so it doesn't slide. If you don't peg it, when the lure comes over a limb or vegetation, the weight begins to fall, and the lure could get hung up.

TIP: With either rig, push your hook through the plastic so it comes out the opposite side and rig the point (called Tex-posed) barely covered by plastic. That requires less effort to set the hook.

Carolina Rig

The Carolina rig also uses a sliding weight, but the weight is held farther from the bait because there is a barrel swivel between the weight and lure. The main line ends at the swivel and the portion closest to the lure can be a lighter line. The advantage of this setup is the fish picks up the bait but is unlikely to feel the bullet weight. Again, the line slides through the weight. The method is especially effective on pressured fish and in deep water.



Long leader on Carolina rig



Traditional Carolina rig

TIP: If you like to use a Palomar knot, tie the swivel to the leader line first, then attach the swivel to the main line and, finally, attach the hook.

TIP: The clearer the water or the more fishing pressure an area has, the longer the leader should be.

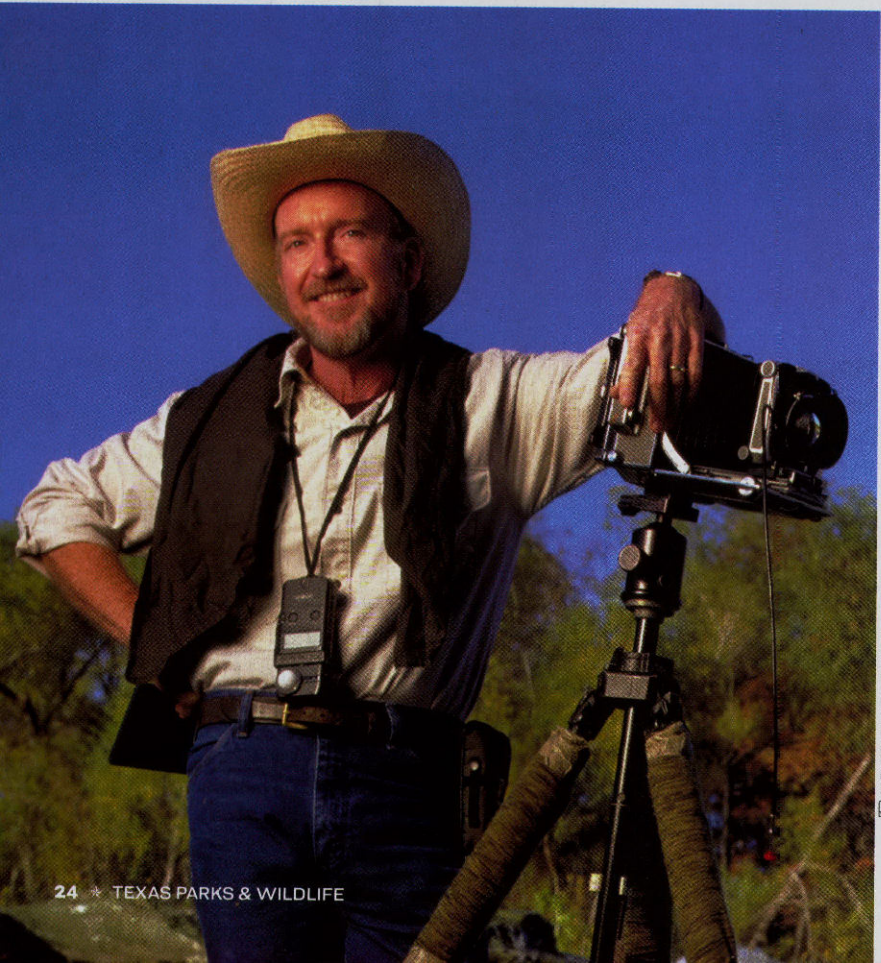


Adjustable Carolina rig

TIP: Slide a bullet weight up the main line, add a bobber stop or two and turn the setup into a modified Carolina rig; you can instantly control leader length by moving the bobber stops.



CHASE FOUNTAIN | TPWD



WYATT MCSPADEN

PICTURE THIS

THE POWER

Images have become effective

by Earl Nottingham

Twenty-five years ago, I walked through the front door of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department headquarters in Austin as a staff photographer — a welcome relief after eking out a living as a freelancer for the preceding 15 years. The new position gave me the opportunity to travel to every corner of Texas, photographing the people, places and things that define the state's great outdoors.

Walking out that same door for the last time at the end of March 2021 was bittersweet, to say the least. I was flooded with memories of the adventures and friendships I had during my time at TPWD. On my drive back home, I began to ponder the many experiences garnered from a quarter-century of visually documenting the agency's multifaceted mission, as well as the various ways photography has played a part in the public's perception of and appreciation for natural conservation and the outdoors.

Personally, I was looking for some bottom-line takeaway that could concisely define what, if any, effect my work had contributed to the agency and, ultimately, to the people of Texas. I needed a bookend.

Now, a few weeks into retirement, and after some reflection, the takeaway is clear. It wasn't about my photographic work at all but about photography itself and the power it has had, and continues to have, as a powerful advocate and ambassador for conservation.

Over time, the camera has become not only a device to take a pretty picture but also a viable tool for outreach. The predominant factor that has made it such a valuable tool is the evolution of digital technology. Gone are the days of shooting traditional film and waiting for it to be processed and scanned and laid

OF PHOTOS

tools for conservation.

out for publication. The digital image is instantaneous and easily shareable, and can be used not only in printed media but also on websites and social media, thereby extending its reach tremendously.

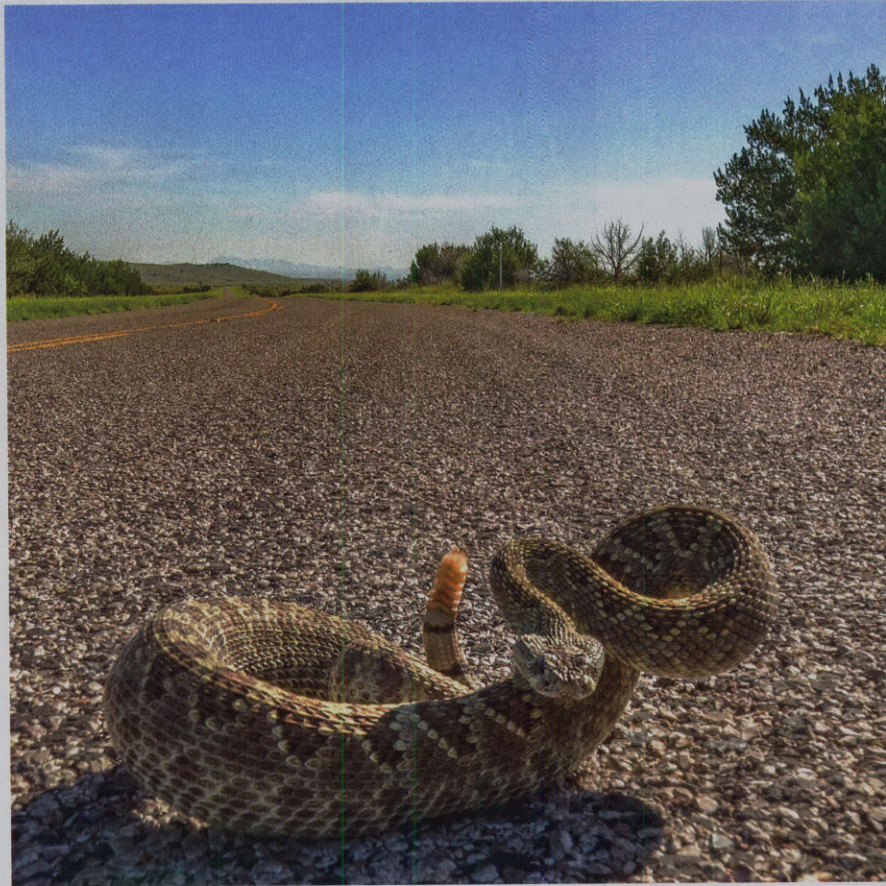
From a conservation perspective, images can connect with current outdoor lovers and with new and underserved constituents as well. The power of the photograph to influence is evidenced by the almost 350 million photos uploaded on Facebook each day, not to mention the plethora of other social media platforms.

The camera has also gradually gained its place as required outdoor gear, regardless of the activity. Whether hunting, camping, hiking or just walking in the park, a camera is there — usually in the form of a smartphone camera that can capture not only a scene but its nuances, such as a flower petal or insect closeup, adding to the enjoyment of the experience on a more intimate level.

Additionally, the amazing new sensors of digital cameras and smartphone cameras allow us to capture more “wow” scenes such as the low light of early morning, the softness of late evening or the glow of a campfire — scenes that were difficult to get with less-advanced cameras. A beautiful and memorable photograph has become the new “trophy” for many outdoor adventures.

Looking forward, there is every reason to believe that new methods and opportunities to photograph and share our love and concern for the outdoors will always be just over the next horizon. I’ve made a career of driving toward those horizons, and now I finally get to enjoy the scenery in the rear-view mirror.

This is Earl’s last column for *Texas Parks & Wildlife*. Picture This will continue as a photography column.



ALL PHOTOS BY EARL NOTTINGHAM | TPWD



TEXAS TRAILBLAZERS

A Family (Fishing) Affair

by Louie Bond

Energy ripples off Willard Franklin II like the circles that spread across the water after a fish jumps. You see, with his Four Ws Fishing Team and Four Ws Outdoors, he's on a mission to change the face of outdoor recreation to one that represents the real world.

Besides, the fish are always biting and his family's eternally ready to hit the water. After all, the Four Ws — Willard and wife Wanda and grownup kids Willard IV and Wendy — are a family fishing team based in Houston.

"When Willard IV was 1, I'd put him in his little car seat and there he would sit, holding his pole when dad fished," Willard recalls. "Wendy started at 3. When the fish were not biting, she'd start to cry. When they started biting, she would drop her pole and run."

Today the family (the kids are grown and no longer crying) is the face of Houston-area fishing, both freshwater and saltwater, but their work doesn't stop there. The Four Ws specialize in safety, diversity, inclusion, conservation and careers in the outdoors. For Willard, this includes water safety archery,

kayaking, shooting sports, hunting and boating safety. In fact, the National Safe Boating Council recently filmed the family to help promote National Safe Boating Week.

Willard III didn't fall from the tree, as his mom, Isabel, still fishes with the family, no matter the weather. They're all intensely competitive.

"We bet on the person who catches the biggest fish and the most fish," he says. "That's when the fun begins and the trash-talking starts."

The family goes on frequent outings to pursue their passion and their mission.

"Playing outdoors as a family is really the highlight of any day," Willard says. "Wanda and I both came from outdoor families; that was our parents' way of strengthening the bond in our family."

The future looks bright as Willard and the other 3Ws look to bring their way of life to any group that wants to be part of outdoor fun, particularly underserved youth and women. To sponsor the group or join in, contact Willard at fourwsfishingteam@yahoo.com.

The Great Outdoor Scavenger Hunt 2021

Tackle 30 tasks in five categories spread out across six regions of Texas. With COVID on the way out (hopefully!) GOSH returns for year two, sending *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine readers out to explore all 268,597 square miles of Texas in pursuit of family fun, silly selfies and the best Texas summer ever. Ready to GOSH?

Pick one of three different ways to play:

1. COMPLETE ONE ACTIVITY (OR MORE!) THAT PIQUES YOUR INTEREST. GOSH is a neat way for us to share a bunch of our favorite Texas summer destinations and activities. Go through and pick a few — include some you've never tried before — then hit the road and enjoy! You won't win a cash jackpot, but you'll be out having a great Texas summer. As far as we're concerned, that makes you a big winner.

2. COMPLETE EVERY GOSH ACTIVITY IN A SINGLE REGION. Prefer to stay close to home? Complete all five activities in your region and **you'll get a handsome, downloadable certificate commemorating your achievement, along with a shout-out in a future issue of *Texas Parks & Wildlife*, in which we'll salute our GOSH participants.**

Here's how to enter the contest and show you've completed each task: Every entry includes a location and a corresponding selfie. Sign up on our Facebook page or at our website (tpwmagazine.com), grab your phone or digital camera and snap a photo of yourself as described in the entry. After that, just **post it to Twitter, Instagram or the TPW magazine Facebook page with the hashtag #GOSH2021.**

For example, to "win" the Houston category, you'll need to upload five selfies total, one corresponding to each of the tasks on pages 36–37. Complete all activities in multiple regions — but not all six regions — and you'll have additional bragging rights, although the prize is the same.

3. COMPLETE ALL 30 ACTIVITIES ON THE GOSH LIST. If you complete all 30 activities (36 if you count the bonus activities) on this year's hunt and upload all corresponding selfies to social media or our online portal, you'll win the ultimate GOSH bragging rights and the admiration of the *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine staff. You'll also **win a downloadable certificate crowning you a GOSH-er par excellence, and a two-year digital subscription to *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine.** Best of all, you can forever bask in the knowledge that you've truly enjoyed the best Texas summer ever.

For complete rules and disclaimers, visit tpwmagazine.com/gosh2021, where you'll also find driving directions to sites and a link to contact us. Or download our magazine app for iOS or Android (it's free!) to take GOSH with you all summer long. Since all good things come to an end, **GOSH 2021 ends at midnight on Labor Day, Sept. 6, 2021.**

TEXT: NATHAN ADAMS
ILLUSTRATIONS: BRYAN SPEAR

#GOSH2021

LAKE MEREDITH
NATIONAL
RECREATION AREA



👉 People have been using the stone from the Alibates Flint Quarries for weapons, tools and trade across the Great Plains and Southwest for thousands of years, from Panhandle mammoth hunters of 13,000 years ago to native tribes in the 1800s. The flint, an agatized dolomite, is known for its striking colors. Check in at the visitors center or hike with a ranger down to the quarries (approximately a 2-mile hike).

📱 Snap a selfie in front of the iconic Alibates visitors center.

ALIBATES FLINT
QUARRIES
VISITOR CENTER



136

AMARILLO



THE TEX
RANDALL STATUE



👉 Texas is home to a lot of tall tales, but few are taller than Tex Randall, the 47-foot-tall, seven-ton cowboy who stands over Canyon. Built of steel and concrete in 1959, ol' Tex took quite a beating from Panhandle winds, but a 2016 makeover has him looking *good*.

📱 Snap a selfie with Tex in the background.

287



86

CAPROCK CANYONS
STATE PARK

👉 *Oh, give me a home, where the buffalo roam...* Famed cattleman Charles Goodnight and his wife, Mary Ann, started the Goodnight herd in 1878. It was one of the five foundation herds that saved bison from extinction, and the descendants of those bison now roam here as the Texas State Bison Herd.

📱 Take a selfie in front of any of the park's bison statues or sculptures.



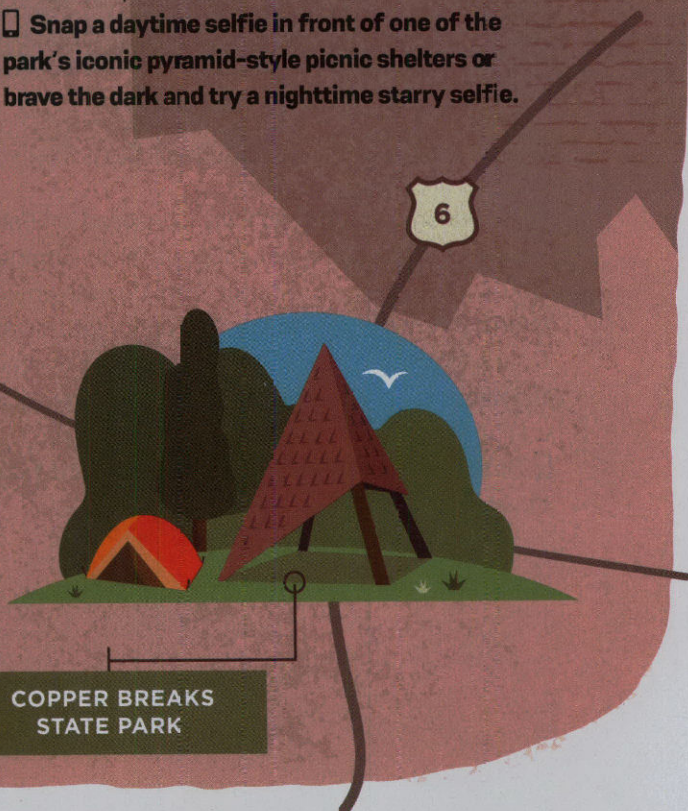
👉 The Canadian River cuts dramatic 200-foot canyons called breaks. Nestled within these breaks lies Lake Meredith, offering relief from the windswept plains above. Enjoy swimming, fishing or boating. Don't have a boat? No problem. Rent a kayak or stand-up paddleboard.

📱 **Snap a selfie with Lake Meredith (and the Panhandle plateaus) in the background.**

THE PANHANDLE REGION

👇 Far away from big cities, on the broad Texas plains once roamed by the Comanche, you'll find a stargazer's dream: Copper Breaks State Park. With an inky-black Bortle dark-sky rating of 2, the park enjoys some of the darkest skies in Texas. Enjoy the grandeur of the Milky Way the way the ancients did or play "spot the satellites." No telescope needed.

📱 **Snap a daytime selfie in front of one of the park's iconic pyramid-style picnic shelters or brave the dark and try a nighttime starry selfie.**



COPPER BREAKS STATE PARK



#GOSH2021 | PANHANDLE

Fast Facts

ALIBATES FLINT QUARRIES

📍 Alibates Road | Fritch

📄 Free admission • Free scheduled tours

LAKE MEREDITH RECREATION AREA

📍 HQ: 419 E. Broadway | Fritch

📄 Free admission

TEX RANDALL STATUE

📍 1400 N. Third Ave. | Canyon

📄 Free admission

CAPROCK CANYONS STATE PARK

📍 850 Caprock Canyon Road | Quitaque

📄 \$5 park admission

COPPER BREAKS STATE PARK

📍 777 Park Road 62 | Quanah

📄 \$3 park admission



If all this traveling has you feeling hungry, we suggest a stop at **BLUE SKY TEXAS HAMBURGERS**. For a bonus GOSH entry, snap a selfie with one of their fresh burgers or an order of hand-cut fries at locations in Abilene, Amarillo and Lubbock.



#GOSH2021 | DALLAS

Fast Facts

PENN FARM AT CEDAR HILL STATE PARK

📍 1570 W. FM 1382 | Cedar Hill

🎫 \$5-\$7 park admission

AIRFIELD FALLS CONSERVATION PARK

📍 200 Pumphrey Drive | Westworth Village

🎫 Free admission

TEXAS WOOFUS

📍 MLK Jr. Blvd., Fair Park | Dallas

🎫 Free admission

TEXAS FRESHWATER FISHERIES CENTER

📍 5550 FM 2495 | Athens

🎫 \$5.50 admission

LAKE MINERAL WELLS STATE PARK

📍 100 Park Road 71 | Mineral Wells

🎫 \$7 park admission

If you love kolaches — and who doesn't? — then the town of West is where you belong.

The **CZECH STOP BAKERY**

off Interstate 35 has been

promoting Czech heritage and

satisfying kolache cravings for

years. For a bonus GOSH entry,

snap a selfie outside the store with

a kolache of your choice.



👉 Located an hour west of Fort Worth, Mineral Wells State Park's Penitentiary Hollow is one of the few natural rock-climbing venues in North Texas. Climbers must sign a liability release before tackling rock formations such as the charmingly named *Scrambled Egg Boulder* or the *Refrigerator*. Those more inclined to watch can do so from a scenic overlook above.

📷 **Snap a photo from the scenic overlook guardrail.**

LAKE MINERAL WELLS STATE PARK

180



AIRFIELD FALLS CONSERVATION PARK

281

35W

FORT WORTH



👆 A hidden gem, Airfield Falls Conservation Park is home to the largest natural waterfall in Tarrant County. Located just minutes from downtown Fort Worth in Westworth Village, the park features parts from a McDonnell Douglas C-9 aircraft. Splash in the natural wading pools or stroll along the walking and biking trails.

📷 **Snap a selfie from the wading pool with the falls in the background.**



**TEXAS
WOOFUS**

👉 Created for the Texas Centennial Exposition of 1936, the mythical Texas Woofus combines the mane and neck of a horse, a pig body, duck wings, a turkey tail, a sheep's head — all topped off with a set of longhorns. The original statue mysteriously disappeared in the 1940s; today, you can find its 1998 replacement on the side of the Swine Building in Dallas' Fair Park.

📱 **Snap a selfie with the Woofus in the photo. Be creative!**

DALLAS

**CEDAR HILL
STATE PARK**



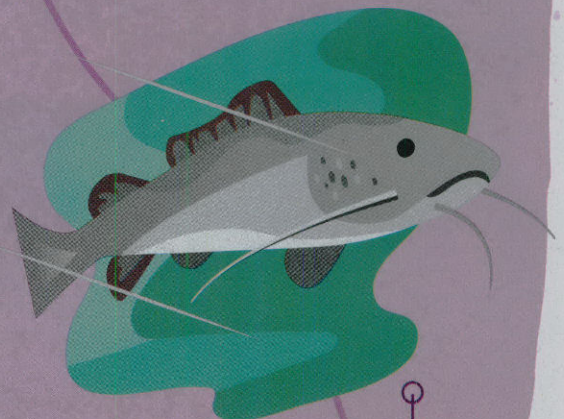
THE DALLAS AREA

👇 In Texas, a ShareLunker is a bass that weighs more than 8 pounds. Anglers dream of catching one, and the Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center Lunker Bunker helps keep that dream alive. One of five state fish hatcheries, the center produces 3 million to 4 million Florida largemouth bass fingerlings annually. The wheelchair-accessible Interpretive Wetlands Trail winds past ponds, woodlands and wildflower areas.

📱 **Take a selfie at the 26,000-gallon Dive Theater aquarium.**

👆 The Penn Farm Agricultural History Center inside Cedar Hill State Park offers a glimpse into rural life in 19th century Texas. Step back in time to when farm machinery first took the place of the horse and mule. Take a self-guided tour of the reconstructed and historic buildings and see how life changed over time.

📱 **Snap a photo in front of some vintage farm equipment or the Penn family home.**



**TEXAS FRESHWATER
FISHERIES CENTER**

➔ In 1949, the Morgan Creek Power Plant needed cooling, and nearby Colorado City needed water. Lake Colorado City was built on a tributary of the Colorado River to serve those purposes. The power plant no longer needs the lake, and the city has found other sources of water, leaving Lake Colorado City open for recreation. Take a swim or rent a kayak on site.

📱 **Wade into the lake and snap a selfie.**

➔ There are no big springs, but there are dramatic views off the 200-foot bluff and from the CCC-built loop road. Plan your visit to include at least one sunrise or sunset, or mark the calendar to take in the Fourth of July fireworks display, one of the largest in the region.

📱 **Take a selfie from the group pavilion on top of the hill.**



BIG SPRING STATE PARK

➔ Nestled among the Davis Mountains you'll find one of the only hotels operated by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Originally built in the 1930s, the white adobe walls of Indian Lodge resemble a multi-level pueblo village. Today, the lodge features 39 guest rooms, hand-carved cedar furniture, pine viga and latilla ceilings and a swimming pool. The Black Bear Restaurant offers breakfast and lunch Wednesday through Sunday, year-round.

📱 **Snap a selfie inside the courtyard at Indian Lodge.**

MIDLAND



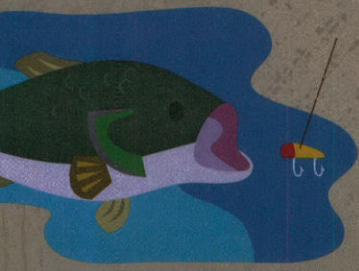
➔ Ever seen a ghost camp? Take a short hike from the River Bend Camping Area in San Angelo State Park and you'll find one. Unused and abandoned for nearly 20 years, these sites don't appear on any park maps, but you can ask the park staff for directions — *if you dare*.

📱 **Take a selfie in front of any of the Lower Ghost Camp's abandoned shelters or signage.**



DAVIS MOUNTAINS STATE PARK





LAKE COLORADO CITY STATE PARK



ABILENE STATE PARK



SAN ANGELO STATE PARK

Abilene State Park's concession building is the work of the Civilian Conservation Corps. After construction, workers discovered there wasn't enough water pressure to flush the toilets. Whoops. Their solution: build a water tower designed to blend in with other park structures. While it no longer holds water, the tower still stands as a monument to the labor, craftsmanship and ingenuity of the CCC.

Snap a selfie below the CCC water tower.

WEST TEXAS REGION



Fast Facts

ABILENE STATE PARK

150 Park Road 32 | Tuscola
\$5 park admission

LAKE COLORADO CITY STATE PARK

4582 FM 2836 | Colorado City
\$4 park admission

SAN ANGELO STATE PARK

362 S. FM 2288 | San Angelo
\$4 park admission

BIG SPRING STATE PARK

No. 1 Scenic Drive | Big Spring
Free admission

DAVIS MOUNTAINS INDIAN LODGE

16453 Park Road 3 | Fort Davis
\$6 park admission



No visit to West Texas is complete without a visit to El Paso's **CHICO'S TACOS**. For a bonus GOSH entry, snap a selfie with a single order (three tacos) or a double order (six tacos) of their legendary rolled tacos in chile sauce at any of their El Paso-area locations.



#GOSH2021 WEST TEXAS



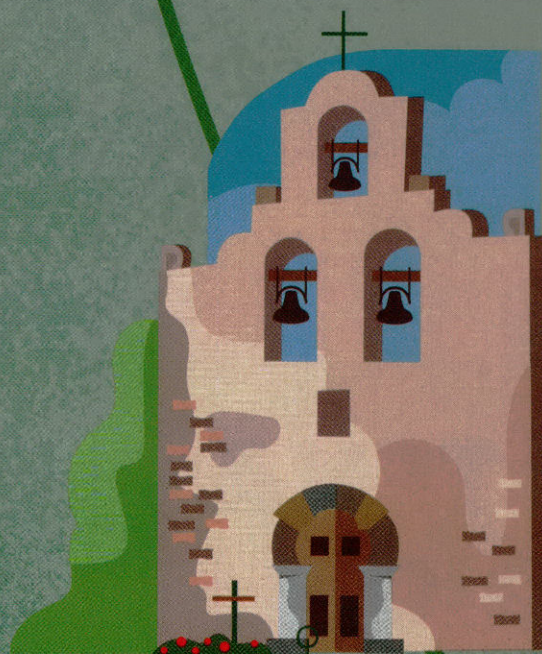
STONEHENGE II

📍 In 1989, Doug Hill gave his neighbor Al Shepperd an unused limestone slab. Shepperd propped it upright ... and then started having ideas. That's how Stonehenge II, a plaster and wire mesh replica that's almost as large as the original, wound up in a field outside Ingram (before being moved to town). For a history twister, the site also features twin 13-foot-tall Easter Island heads.

📱 Take a selfie with the 'Henge or one of the Easter Island heads.

➡ Everyone remembers the Alamo. But there are four other Spanish colonial missions along the 10-mile San Antonio Missions hike and bike trail: Concepcion, San Jose, San Juan and Espada. Along the route, see other aspects of life at the missions, including *acequias* (irrigation systems of dams, gates and canals), *labores* (agricultural fields) and the aqueduct at Mission Espada.

📱 Take a selfie in front of any of the four missions south of the Alamo on the trail.



THE MISSION TRAIL



➡ At McKinney Falls State Park, Onion Creek flows over limestone, splashing down into pools below. Tucked into East Austin, just 13 miles from the state Capitol, it's a great place to swim, fish or listen to the park's upper and lower waterfalls.

📱 Take a selfie with either of the park's waterfalls in the background.

CENTRAL TEXAS REGION



SAN ANTONIO

AUSTIN

MCKINNEY FALLS STATE PARK

183

PARK ROAD 1C SCENIC DRIVE

21



📍 Park Road 1C, a 12-mile stretch of hilly road between Bastrop and Buescher state parks, shows nature's rebirth at its finest as you cruise through old-growth areas and forested areas recovering from fire in the Lost Pines.

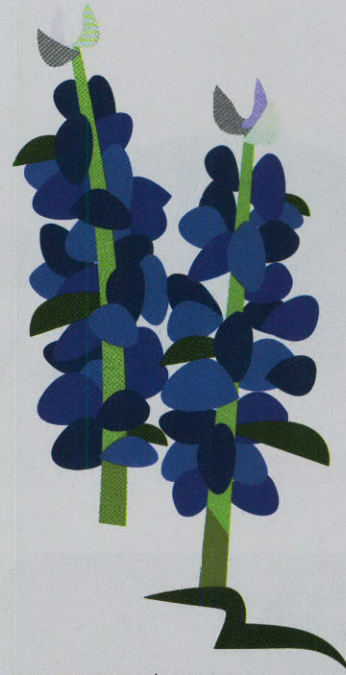
📱 **Snap a selfie in front of the Park Road 1C sign at either end of the road.**

10

PALMETTO STATE PARK

📍 Find the tropics in Central Texas at Palmetto State Park. Besides the flowing San Marcos River, the park has an artesian well, an oxbow lake and swamps. With so many water sources, Palmetto State Park is a haven for animals and plants, and a great place to swim, tube, fish, hike, bike or just study nature.

📱 **Take a selfie with the park's namesake plant, the dwarf palmetto. You'll find them growing under trees all over the park.**



#GOSH2021 | CENTRAL TEXAS

Fast Facts

SAN ANTONIO MISSIONS TRAIL

📍 San Antonio
📄 Free admission

MCKINNEY FALLS STATE PARK

📍 5808 McKinney Falls Pkwy. | Austin
📄 \$6 park admission

STONEHENGE II

📍 120 Point Theatre Road | Ingram
📄 Free admission

BASTROP, BUESCHER STATE PARKS

📍 100 Park Rd 1A | Bastrop
📍 100 Park Rd 1E | Smithville
📄 \$3-\$5 park admission

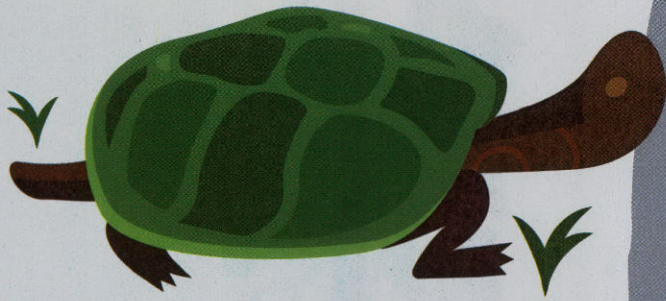
PALMETTO STATE PARK

📍 78 Park Road 11 South | Gonzales
📄 \$3 park admission

Every Hill Country visit should include a

BLUE BONNET CAFE

slice of pie at the **BLUE BONNET CAFE** in Marble Falls. For a bonus GOSH entry, snap a selfie with a slice of any of their delectable homemade pies.



#GOSH2021 | HOUSTON

Fast Facts

SPINDLETOP GLADYS CITY BOOMTOWN

📍 5550 Jimmy Simmons Blvd. | Beaumont

🎫 \$5 admission

LAKE LIVINGSTON STATE PARK

📍 300 Park Road 65 | Livingston

🎫 \$5 park admission

MOODY GARDENS

📍 1 Hope Blvd. | Galveston

🎫 \$50 - \$60 admission

BIG THICKET NATIONAL PRESERVE

📍 6102 FM 420 | Kountze

🎫 Free admission

SHELDON LAKE STATE PARK

📍 14140 Garrett Road | Houston

🎫 Free admission

Summer means ice cream, so why not stop at an old-fashioned soda fountain? **LA KING'S CONFECTIONERY** in Galveston fits the bill. For a bonus GOSH entry, snap a selfie in front of La King's hand-cranked taffy pull. And grab an ice cream while you're at it.



➡ Just an hour north of Houston you'll find one of the largest lakes in the state. While the lake is popular with anglers — it's noted for its white bass population — it's also a great place to cool off. Sit in the pineywoods shade or jump in for a swim; rent a canoe, kayak or paddleboard on the weekends.

📱 **Bring a buddy to help snap a selfie splashing water from the lake.**

LAKE LIVINGSTON STATE PARK



59



➡ The 82-foot John Jacob Observation Tower at Sheldon Lake State Park has two observation decks providing unobstructed panoramic views of the park's wetlands and prairie, the San Jacinto Monument and the downtown Houston skyline — each 15 miles away in opposite directions. Climb the stairs or take the solar-powered elevator.

📱 **Snap a selfie from either of the tower's observation decks.**



SHELDON LAKE STATE PARK



HOUSTON

➡ In Egypt, pyramids were a place for the dead. The glass pyramids of Moody Gardens, on the other hand, are teeming with life. Inside, you can explore the depths of the ocean in the aquarium pyramid or experience the wildlife of the world's tropical regions in the rainforest pyramid.

📱 **Take a selfie outside any of Moody Garden's three glass pyramids.**





➡ Nine different ecosystems converge among the hiking trails and waterways of the Big Thicket National Preserve. Towering pines dominate the landscape, and the Big Thicket is also home to four of the five types of carnivorous (meat-eating) plants found in North America.

📱 **Walk either the Sundew or Pitcher Plant trail (each 1 mile) and snap a selfie with a carnivorous plant in the background.**



BIG THICKET NATIONAL PRESERVE



BEAUMONT



SPINDLETOP



THE HOUSTON AREA

⬆ On January 10, 1901, a great gush of oil erupted 100 feet into the air from a drilling site at Spindletop Hill near Beaumont. The Lucas geyser produced about 100,000 barrels of oil a day, kicking off the Texas oil boom. Visit the replica at Spindletop — Gladys City Boomtown on the campus of Lamar University.

📱 **Snap a selfie in front of the geyser. For extra fun, time your visit with the Lucas Gusher re-enactment schedule, which uses water instead of oil.**



MOODY GARDENS

GALVESTON



LAREDO



THE REPUBLIC OF
THE RIO GRANDE
MUSEUM

👉 Since European settlers arrived in what is now Texas, the territory has been a part of six countries: Spain, France, Mexico, the Republic of Texas, the Confederate States of America and the United States. The border city of Laredo, however, was once part of a seventh: the Republic of the Rio Grande, an independent country that, in 1840, lasted 10 months. Learn more about the seven flags of Laredo and Texas at the Republic of the Rio Grande Museum.

📱 **Snap a selfie in front of the museum's seven flags, or holding a copy of the *Laredo Morning Times*, with seven flags on its banner.**



👉 One of three naturally occurring salt lakes in South Texas, La Sal del Rey (the king's salt) is a 530-acre hypersaline lake that sits above an estimated 4 million tons of salt. It's seven times saltier than the ocean. Be ready for a mile hike down to the site.

📱 **Forget footprints in the sand — try footprints in the salt. Snap a selfie of yourself and your salty steps.**



LA SAL DEL REY

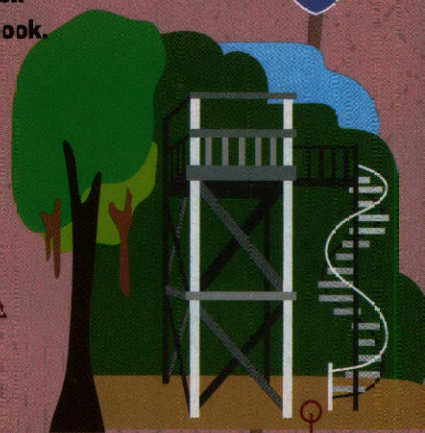
👇 The Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge is a birder's delight. Look up as you walk along the 12 miles of foot trails to see chachalacas, kingfishers, green jays and pelicans. Try the canopy walk — a rope bridge extending between two towers — and experience wildlife above, below and right next to you.

📱 **Take a selfie from any stage (base, intermediate deck or top deck) of the 40-foot open-air Tree Tower Overlook.**



SOUTH TEXAS REGION

REYNOSA



SANTA ANA
NATIONAL WILDLIFE
REFUGE



MUSTANG ISLAND STATE PARK

Who doesn't love the beach?! With more than five miles of coastline, you're sure to find room for summer fun at Mustang Island State Park.

With the Gulf in the background, take a selfie next to any of the park's wooden beach picnic shelters.



PADRE ISLAND

Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge is the U.S. half of the first binational Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network site. Together with Rancho Rincón de Anacahuatas in Mexico, the sites host more than 100,000 shorebirds annually, plus butterflies, deer, wildcats and other species that might migrate across international borders.

Snap a selfie along one of the park's wildlife watching or nature trails.

LAGUNA ATASCOSA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE



Fast Facts

REPUBLIC OF THE RIO GRANDE MUSEUM

1005 Zaragoza St. | Laredo

\$2 museum admission

MUSTANG ISLAND STATE PARK

9394 Texas Highway 361 | Corpus Christi

\$5 park admission

LA SAL DEL REY

Texas Highway 186, north of Edinburg

Free admission

SANTA ANA

3325 Green Jay Road | Alamo

\$5 vehicle parking fee

LAGUNA ATASCOSA

22688 Buena Vista Blvd. | Los Fresnos

\$3 fee per vehicle



If you're anywhere near Corpus Christi, you need to stop off at the original **WHATABURGER**. For a bonus GOSH entry, snap a selfie with an order of fries, a soft drink or a milkshake in front of the original Whataburger location.



#GOSH2021 | SOUTH TEXAS

BIKING FROM
ARKANSAS TO
AUSTIN DURING
A PANDEMIC



ADVENTURE

**ON
TWO
WHEELS**

by Jessica Alexander







“I’m sorry, you aren’t going to be able to bring your bike on the train.”

What?! Suddenly, the last six months of painstaking planning were all for nothing.

As the dread began to set in, my event-planning background kicked me into activation mode. I had already crafted a Plan B, and, for some parts of this two-week, 700-mile cycling voyage, a Plan C had also been woven into my schedule.

“I don’t understand — I called to confirm if bikes could come on the train with us if we boxed them ahead of time and paid the oversized luggage fee,” I told the clerk, trying to sound calm but tapping the counter nervously with my fingertips.

I was hoping I wouldn’t regret all the coffee I gulped down before the short downhill 3-mile bike ride from my South Austin home to the Amtrak station downtown. The actual bikepacking trip hadn’t even started and my nerves already felt frayed; it was only 9:30 a.m.

“I’m sorry,” the patient clerk told me again. “The station you plan to get off at near Hot Springs, Arkansas, is unmanned, so you can’t get off the train there with your bike. We only allow oversized luggage to be removed from the train at manned stations.”


I turned to my travel companion Valerie — an honest confidant, loyal friend, lifelong cyclist and recent 40-year-old, much like me. She had worry in her eyes and looked as defeated as I was feeling. I shook the nausea, swallowed the tightness that was stuck in my throat and realized it was time for Plan B.

“OK, so I guess we’ll start our trip at the first manned station outside of Texas, and that is...?” I inquired, feeling irritated about having to change the first four days of our trip. I had meticulously planned this trip and now I had lost control of the very start of our bike adventure.

Our clerk handed over our new tickets, loaded our bikes onto the carousel and wished us luck. With that, Valerie and I stumbled outside to a warm late-July morning and toasted to the next two weeks of living on the road through Arkansas and

JESSICA ALEXANDER



THIS PAGE  JESSICA ALEXANDER

Texas via our loaded-down bicycles.
“Next stop, Little Rock, Arkansas!”

JUST ROLL WITH THE ADVENTURE

From now on, I'll refer to the Amtrak ticketing fiasco as “the test.”

What I am now realizing, post-trip, is that every good adventure starts with at least one. Often, the test looks simply like your travel plans have been changed for you (as in this case); sometimes it's the excitement of the unknown that builds as you challenge your perceptions of trust and flexibility as a new adventure begins.

Mostly, I acknowledge these tests and the emotions that they bring to me. Over the period of a cycling trip, I am able to appreciate the complexities that exist when you experience your physical energy moving through the world at a different speed than everything else around you.

Bike travel has ultimately made me acknowledge and appreciate movement in a way I never thought possible.

With any type of travel, it's true that the first step is often the hardest, but as all travelers know, you can falter at any point in an adventure due to any myriad occurrences. For me, I think the most comforting thought when I am hundreds of miles from home is this: How I confront and handle these stress triggers is ultimately how I judge my level of travel satisfaction when I bed down at the end of the day.

GAGA OVER GEAR

The best part of planning a 700-mile bike trip was gearing myself up for two weeks of adventure through part of Arkansas and a good percentage of Texas. Through the advice of other bikepacking friends, websites such as *bikepacking.com* and local Austin bike shops The Meteor and Cycleast, I obsessed for weeks over the types of bikepacking bags I would strap to my touring bike.

I finally decided to use multiple small bags that would fit inside the frame of my knobby-tired road bike and strap down to my handlebars; Valerie opted for the more traditional pannier-and-rack setup that adds a few extra pounds of weight but also allows the rider to carry more gear.

You might think that having more space and more ways of carrying gear on a multiweek trip would be an advantage.

You would be incorrect.

As an experienced bikepacker (although I'd never embarked on a trip longer than five days before this), I'd say a big key to success is keeping your load as light as possible. That presents your biggest bikepacking challenge: how to pack everything you need to be self-sufficient in the lightest and most nimbable configuration.

Nearly every day leading up to the night before the trip, I planned and packed and repacked and then repacked again. It gets obsessive.

LITTLE ROCK TO TEXAS

The beginning of our trip in Arkansas was not devoid of challenges, tests and moments of anxiety and panic.

A few minutes before midnight, tired, hungry and definitely ready to get some much-needed sleep, we arrived at the Little Rock station. Our host James introduced himself and helped us load our bikes into the back of his SUV.

COVID-19 safety was something that the two of us had agreed to keep in the forefront of our daily travel routines. This meant masks anytime interacting with the public, anytime entering indoor spaces and, mostly, anytime we felt the need to be extra-cautious while cycling. This also meant tons of Clorox wipes and hand sanitizer to carry on our already overpacked bikes. When we had the chance, we removed our masks and welcomed the warm Arkansas air on our faces.

We all got along so well that James rode along with us to Benton the next day, just on a lark. He camped with us and, after a breakfast of instant coffee and gas station cinnamon rolls, said goodbye. As he headed back north toward air conditioning and creature comforts back in Little Rock, we veered our loaded-

Opposite page: Loaded up and ready to go, with bags hanging off the bike's frame and handlebars.

This page: Riding the train to Arkansas to begin the bike trip; Arkansas host James joined the bikepacking cyclists for the first leg of the journey.



down bikes to the south, full of hope and the driving desire to test ourselves yet again with another long summer day of adventures via our two-wheeled steeds.

Valerie's bike tire nearly exploded outside of Hope, Arkansas, but a kind local Samaritan saved her from a 20-mile walk into town on what felt like the hottest day that summer. Not much was open in many of the small towns we passed through; it felt eerie sometimes.

TEXAS TRAIL RIDING

As we rolled into Texas, already four days into our adventure, we realized the journey was actually just getting started.

My initial reason for routing us through Texarkana was the NETT, or the Northeast Texas Trail (netexastrail.org). Not yet complete, it will one day be the longest hike/bike and equestrian trail in Texas and the fourth longest in the United States at 130 miles.

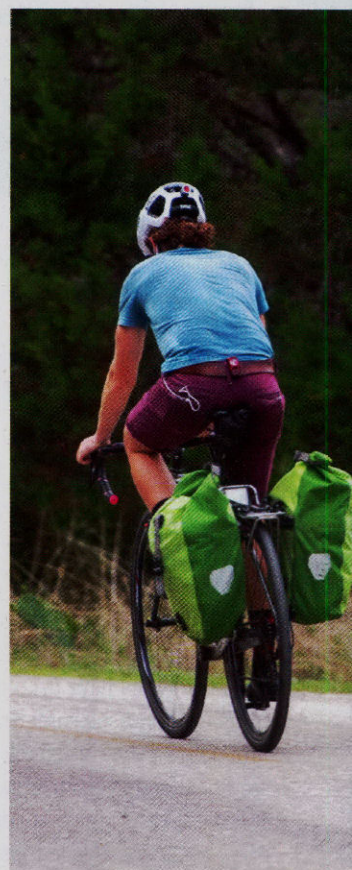
The NETT is a product of the partnership between local and statewide trail advocates and county, state and federal government agencies. A multimodal bike/pedestrian/horse trail allows a safe space away from traffic and the opportunity to enjoy non-pavement road surfaces.

New Boston was our starting point. We had an amazing picnic lunch under the town gazebo before we rode the 54 miles into Avery, where we stayed at the volunteer fire department's Hike and Bike Hostel (free for hikers and cyclists).

We rode into Paris the next day, where we slept under the miniature replica of the Eiffel Tower, then on to Wolfe City to experience more of the rugged, unfinished trail sections of the NETT. We stopped for supplies at the dollar store (my favorite stop while bikepacking) and rested for a while at the Chevron gas station in town, which happened to have a spacious



JESSICA ALEXANDER



CHASE FOUNTAIN | TPWD

outdoor seating area and provided some shade from the relentless 100-degree day.

Parking our bikes by the picnic tables, we were immediately greeted by the small gathering of locals hanging out. The group of mostly older farmers were full of questions: What are we doing, where are we going and do we really use all of that gear on our bikes?

That evening of shared conversations over Dr Pepper slushies and roller hot dogs was memorable for me. I'll always remember how kind and hospitable everyone was and how happy they were that the NETT could connect visitors with various small towns in North Texas. I fell

asleep with a smile that night knowing that there are kind people everywhere in Texas — often when and where you least expect it.

For Valerie's penultimate (next-to-last) day of the bike trip, I suggested we do something special. She told me she had never completed a metric century (100 kilometers or 62 miles) ride before. That was all I needed to hear!

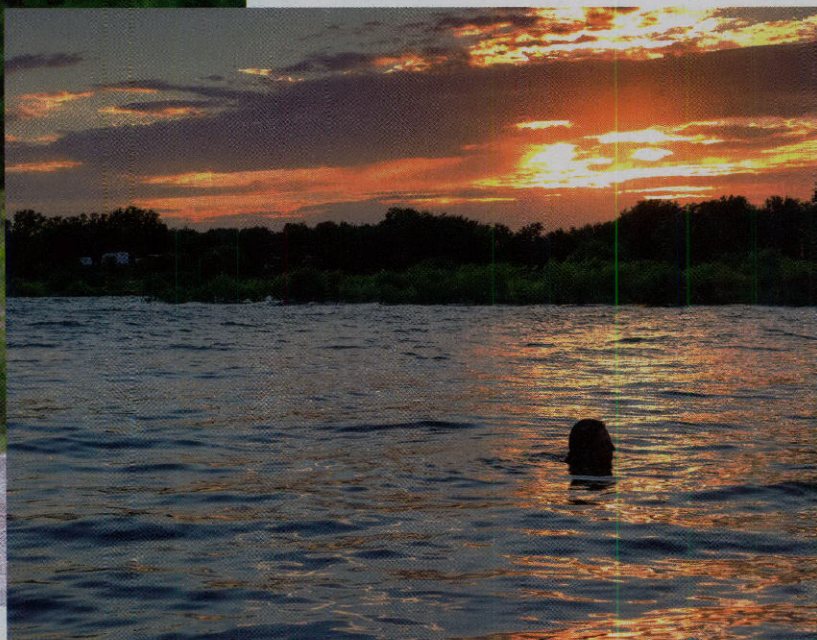
LAST SUNSET AT THE LAKE

"Let's take the scenic route!"

The scenic route for our reroute consisted mostly of gravel roads. In my gravel-riding experience, the quality



JESSICA ALEXANDER



JESSICA ALEXANDER

From left: The long approach to Lake Whitney State Park, the Northeast Texas Trail took the cyclists through Ladonia and other towns; Jessica enjoyed the company of various cycling companions on the trip; friends came out to greet and camp with Jessica near the end of her 700-mile route; sunset swims capped off many long days of riding.

of these roads can vary from some tiny pebbles over an elderly paved road to 4x4-only situations where a bike with suspension is needed for safe and comfortable riding.

The roads we ended up on were hot and hilly, with absolutely no shade. I could see Valerie was getting tired, but I knew how much it meant to her to finish her 100k riding goal for the day. I boosted her energy level with a quick stop at Sonic for a cold drink and tater tots before we made the last beautiful 7-mile trek to our stay for the night, Lake Whitney State Park.

I was beyond thrilled to finally use my State Parks Pass for the first time since

the pandemic started. I had never been to this state park, but I now have a plan to visit all of them before 2030. Once we arrived, I could see both exhaustion and elation on Valerie's face. We made it!

The sunset offered one more opportunity to make this evening memorable. We skipped down a little path that led to the lake and, without a thought, I took off my shoes and socks and jumped right into the cool water. Valerie laughed and said she didn't feel like swimming, but I convinced her the water temperature was perfect. She jumped in and we watched our last sunset together, enjoying the silence of

nature and the absolute stunning beauty of Lake Whitney.

My heart was so full that night. I was excited — but also gutted — that my trip back to Austin was almost over.

Since my return, I've realized that the best part of this trip wasn't a particular moment or experience, but the overall companionship as we enjoyed the journey together. Via bike, we got to slowly see a part of Texas that will forever be ingrained into our memories. Now we can begin to plan the next adventure.

Jessica Alexander is a photojournalist, writer, bike racer and bike Rambler based in Austin.

WRAP STAR MAKES THE A-LIST

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For these A-list bracelets we sought out the talents of our artisan Marco in Venice. For generations Marco's family has been perfecting the art of Murano glassmaking. The Murano beads in these bracelets were made using the traditional "Lavorazione a Lume" technique that is recognized and protected by UNESCO. Marco creates each bead by hand, no two are alike.

Similar gold mesh Murano bracelets are offered for over \$230. But because we like to hang out with the talent, we got a great deal on these bracelets. Consider this your backstage pass to what promises to be a sold out performance.

100% Satisfaction Guaranteed. Try the *Wrap-Around Murano Bracelets* for 30 days. If you aren't completely happy, send them back for a refund of the item price.

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A.

B.

C.

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Two legends come together for epic jewelry



B.

A.

“White Buffalo Stone is stunning with its striking black & white contrast, and to our knowledge, this is the only unique vein in the world.”

— Tony Otteson, 2019

To show exquisite details, jewelry shown is not exact size.

A RARE MEETING OF THE MINES

The American Southwest is steeped in legend. From untamed deserts to Wild West towns, its stories are as rich and mysterious as its beautiful expansive vistas. So we made the trek to two remote mines in this captivating region to join two of the Southwest’s most legendary stones into one epic collection.

First we went to the only source of the illusive White Buffalo stone in the world—the Otteson Mine located in Tonopah, Nevada. White Buffalo has a bold, captivating presence with a distinctive white background and black matrix and is named after the white buffalo—a symbol of sacred life and abundance to Native Americans.

Then we went to one of the few places on earth that produce rare, natural turquoise—the Kingman Turquoise Mine nestled in the Acerbate Mountains of Arizona. Kingman is one of the oldest and largest turquoise mines in the world. It was mined by prehistoric Native American tribes dating back over a thousand years. The beautiful, high-quality stones from this mine feature an array of green and blue shades with exquisite veining and marbled patterns.

The *Two Legends Collection* celebrates the unique and rare beauty of these legendary stones with generous cabochons of White Buffalo accented with rounds of the coveted Kingman turquoise. The antiqued silver-finished settings showcase these rare desert gems beautifully.

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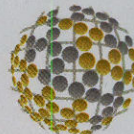
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TRAVEL

The home of the Watermelon Thump is rich in history, barbecue and parks.

LINGERING
IN

Tulsa



BY LOUIE BOND
PHOTOS BY SONJA SOMMERFELD

Today, those traveling on Interstate 10 through Texas may know Luling only as a favored Buc-ee's pit stop on the highway. But for this big-city native, Luling offered a glimpse of small-town living at its finest at an impressionable age.

Mom loved to ship me off to stay with my oldest sister during the summer, and the first such "vacation" included a trip to the nearby Luling Watermelon Thump. At 9 years old, I was fascinated by the queen and the parade and the spitting contests, but most of all, by the slow pace and friendliness of small-town life.

People ate dripping slices of melon and fanned themselves on benches, passing the time of day, while wildly laughing children ran around like it wasn't broiling hot, chunking watermelon rinds at each other. New friendships formed instantly, dissolving with pouting and tears when parents (and older sisters) dragged us reluctantly apart to leave.

I was enchanted and dreamed of such a casual life for myself one day.

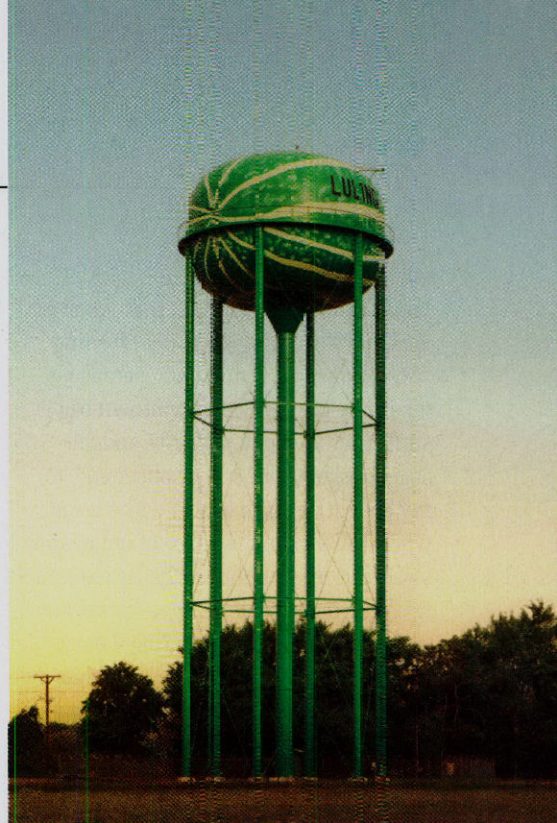
Today, Luling's the place where I turn to head to Houston, but every time I see that big watermelon water tower, I'm reminded of my childhood wonder

and long to stay a spell. I left my tiny community one county over (that love of small-town life never waned) and headed to Luling, this time to linger for a while.

The *WatermelonThump.com* website counter ticks off the days until the annual Thump. It's June 24-27 this year, after a cancellation due to the pandemic in 2020. It all started back in 1954 when a Luling principal offered up an idea to promote the Luling watermelon crop. A local high school student won a contest with a name for the event that conjures up fun: the Thump. The Thump now draws 30,000 visitors to 5,500-resident Luling each year.

How do you thump a watermelon, anyway? The name comes from the practice of hitting (thumping) the watermelon to listen to the sound for juicy ripeness.

As for the capital "T" Thump, there are too many activities to name. The newly crowned Thump Queen presides over the big parade. Other highlights of the four days of activities include a carnival, concert/dances, food booths, beer garden, children's entertainment and a marketplace. There are seed-spitting and melon-eating contests and an auction of the biggest melons, weighing in at up to 80



pounds. So much fun for the whole family.

The history of the town itself began in 1874 as a railroad stop and gathering place for cattle-driving cowboys on the Chisholm Trail. Those hooligans were so unruly that Luling became known as "the toughest town in Texas" until the drives ended in the 1880s. Luling was a quiet cotton town until oil was discovered there in 1922. By 1924, the oilfield was pumping 11 million barrels of oil annually.

To acknowledge and embrace the importance of oil to the Luling economy, the town's pumpjacks are painted with all kinds of characters, including a cow jumping over the moon and a little girl eating — what else? — watermelon.

Though the oil industry's importance has faded in this crossroads town, Luling is more vibrant than ever. Luling Main Street is a community group that seeks to revitalize Davis Street and the downtown area with parks, signage, façade design, murals, planters, decorative crosswalks and more.

The highlight of my visit to the charming shops along Davis Street begins by following my nose to the original City Market BBQ. I'm thrilled to see no long line for this legendary joint and hurry on back to the pit room to place my order.

They keep it nice and simple: brisket, ribs and sausage (hot or cold). That's it. I'm kind of woozy from burger and that amazing aroma, so it probably doesn't surprise the now wryly smiling server



From left:
Downtown Luling attracts residents and visitors; the Watermelon Thump brings the community together each June; the watermelon water tower is a Luling landmark.

when he starts asking about “pickles, bread, onion, jalapeños...” that I answer weakly, “Yes. Just give me everything.”

Good answer, it turns out, because he takes pity on me. Soon my brown bag is stuffed with smoky pork ribs and fall-apart brisket (with a huge burnt end, to my delight), a stack of soft white bread, a whole dill pickle, a big slice of onion and sweet pickles/cauliflower he let me sample from the big jar. The sausage “links” are each their own little tasty ring. I don’t often categorize barbecue as “adorable,” but these sausage bracelets fit that description.

Each of Texas’ famed barbecue places has its own customs. Try not to look like a newbie and just follow along. At City Market, you pay for your to-go meat in the back, then return to the front counter to buy sauce, beans or a few other items. For some, it’s all about the sauce, and City Market offers my favorite style, that orange vinegary kind, not too sweet.

Best of all, the price for the whole feast is about half of what I paid at an inferior place only a week earlier. Blissful, I give the half-dollar coin included in my change to the cashier to show her kids.

The San Marcos River runs through



From bottom left: City Market BBQ cooks up classic Texas barbecue; Luling turned Zedler Mill into a park for events and water fun; Palmetto State Park provides a natural getaway.



Luling and its history. Early settlers harnessed the river’s power by building several mills along it to run the community’s gristmill. The Zedler Mill is the last surviving one, built in 1874 by three men from Tennessee who added a cotton gin and water wheel (to power their machine shop) to the stone dam. It was purchased by the Zedler family and other investors in 1885; Zedler bought out his partners in 1888.

Modernizations happened through the years, but as late as the 1950s, the mill

was still turning out chicken feed for livestock and fine cornmeal for Luling’s dinner tables. But the mill shut down soon after and fell into disrepair.

Around 2002, Luling bought the property; the Zedler Mill Foundation and the city invested more than \$1.5 million to improve and restore the mill buildings in a new city park.

Today the park is a beautiful site for weddings, family and school outings and fun in the water. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and partners



put together the Zedler Mill Paddling Trail, quite gentle but with a few fun riffles along the two- to four-hour trip. Examine the inventive mill components and marvel at how they used the power of the river so effectively long ago.

Southeast of Luling, but still along the San Marcos River, lies a tropical treasure of a state park, Palmetto. After you pass the aforementioned Buc-ee's (pick up some trail snacks), drive past it a mile or two until you see the brown sign for Palmetto State Park. Roll down the

windows to enjoy the cool-down — my car thermometer dropped five degrees instantly — as the two-lane road winds under shade trees that intertwine across the top, forming a canopy.

Don't be puzzled by the signs of non-park life when you emerge from the shade — you'll soon see park signage directing you to headquarters, the fishing dock, welcoming campgrounds and a variety of trails.

The friendly folks at headquarters tell me that the park stayed busy during the pandemic, thanks in part to widely spaced campsites. On this weekday, the campsites look about two-thirds full, and two families are having a blast at the fishing pier on the 4-acre oxbow lake. I have the hiking trails mostly to myself, even though the morning's weather is sublime.

Dappled sunlight makes everything look photo-worthy, and I spend way too much time trying to capture perfect shots of turquoise-tinted dragonflies and curtains of Spanish moss. Delighted squeals interrupt my rapture, and I share a moment with a dad juggling two small children dashing down the wide, gentle path; oh, he's also got a cherubic baby secured in a backpack.

"Way to start them off young," I congratulate him.

"We're having a blast!" he replies. The kids are already dragging him off to the

next wonder they've discovered.

Riotous birdsong is Palmetto's soundtrack. The 270-acre park has attracted 240 species of birds, including an invasion of hummingbirds each spring. In the fall, look for butterflies everywhere. Fox squirrels and a variety of wildlife inhabit the park due to the presence of the river nearby.

The park is graced by the presence of Civilian Conservation Corps buildings, including a refectory made of sandstone that seems to rise out of the ground and once had a thatched palm roof. A water tower on the park's interpretive trail was unique for its time, supplying fresh water to all the campsites.

And, of course, everywhere you look are the park's namesake plants, adding a tropical feeling unlike the surrounding Texas countryside. Dwarf palmetto (*Saba' minor*) plants, from which the park gets its name, surround the park's swamp. These palmettos grow in East and Southeast Texas, as well as much of the southeastern United States. The state park boasts the westernmost stand of dwarf palmettos in the country.

I have a feeling this won't be the last time I linger in Luling rather than just passing through. After bringing home the leftover ribs and talking about the incredible parks I don't think I'll be alone. ■

BRIGHT EYES, DARK SKIES

Blankets of stars fill the night skies at these parks.

The stars at night are truly big and bright, deep in the heart of Texas. The state's darkest skies are in West Texas due to the region's low humidity and the lack of air and light pollution, though some are scattered through the Hill Country and Panhandle.

Each site has a Bortle rating, which indicates night sky clarity in regard to light pollution and sky glow. The scale ranges from 1 to 9, with lower numbers indicating darker skies.

Pick a place, pack up some lawn chairs or a blanket and get ready for an astounding night of stargazing.

BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK AND BIG BEND RANCH STATE PARK • BORTLE SCORE: 1-2

The national park was designated as an International Dark Sky Park in 2012 and has the darkest skies of any national park in the continental United States. The state park earned dark sky designation in 2018. Big Bend is one of the largest areas of protected night sky in the United States.

COPPER BREAKS STATE PARK BORTLE SCORE: 2

Named for the copper found in the area, this North Texas park offers exceptional night skies. It was designated an International Dark Sky Park in 2014, one of the earliest in Texas. Copper Breaks offers monthly star parties from April through November.

DAVIS MOUNTAINS STATE PARK (PICTURED)

BORTLE SCORE: 2

Though it has yet to be designated as a dark park, the Davis Mountains are still a perfect place to gaze at the blanket of stars above. The world-famous McDonald Observatory is nearby, and many surrounding communities have lighting ordinances in place to avoid light pollution.

ENCHANTED ROCK STATE NATURAL AREA

BORTLE SCORE: 3

Best known for its enormous pink dome, Enchanted Rock is also great for stargazing. In the Hill Country near Fredericksburg, it was designated an International Dark Sky Park in 2014, another of the earliest in Texas. The park hosts star parties and has taken steps to minimize park lighting.

DEVILS RIVER STATE NATURAL AREA

BORTLE SCORE: 2

With a pristine river flowing through it, this natural area sits next door to the middle of nowhere. Located in southwest Texas, it's one of the darkest and most ecologically fragile sites in the world. In 2019, Devils River was named an International Dark Sky Sanctuary, the first and only one in Texas.

SOUTH LLANO RIVER STATE PARK

BORTLE SCORE: 3

This 2,600-acre park stretches across the Edwards Plateau of the Hill Country, just outside Junction. In 2017, the International Dark-Sky Association designated the park as an International Dark Sky Park, making it the third Texas state park to earn the designation.

WHERE IN TEXAS?

This town is situated in the Lost Pines of Texas, a place where the historic El Camino Real crossed the Colorado River. The iconic Old Iron Bridge spans the river near downtown. The park pictured is the starting point for the El Camino Real Paddling Trail and the end point for another paddling trail.

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; or let us know on Facebook. We'll reveal the answer in a future issue.

Photo by Sonja Sommerfeld

TOOLS: iPhone 11 Pro Max, 6mm f/2, Back lens at 66mm, f/4.5 at 1/750th of a second, ISO 20





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