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# Hidden Hill Country

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EDITOR'S  
**NOTE**



The upper Guadalupe River originates in western Kerr County.

## Preserved Paradise

I've lived in the Hill Country for five years now, yet I'm still finding new reasons to admire its grandeur on a regular basis. I love that my kids get to grow up in such a beautiful, wild landscape, and I hope their kids will have the same opportunity. As Central Texas faces rapid population growth and development, measures to conserve the beloved region are increasingly vital to its preservation. The Texas Hill Country Conservation Network (THCCN)—a partnership comprising dozens of public and private entities—released a “State of the Hill Country” report in February that outlines eight key conservation and growth metrics to mitigate the threats facing the 18-county area. (The full report can be viewed at [ourtxhillcountry.org](http://ourtxhillcountry.org).) “The Hill Country is a sensitive area,” THCCN manager John Rooney says. “We are not anti-growth, but we are for thoughtful growth that is sustainable for the particular ecosystem we’re in.”

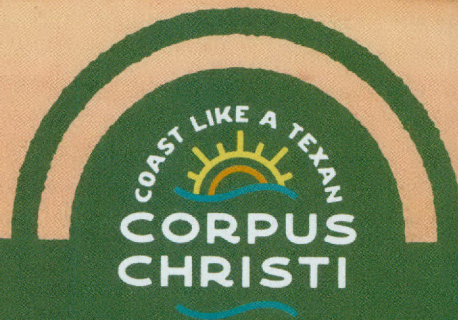
While many of the metrics focus on sustainable development for cities and counties, the report includes practical takeaways for residents and visitors. Along with emphasizing the importance of contacting elected officials to let them know land conservation issues are important to you, Rooney

says individuals can make an impact by limiting personal water usage, planting native grasses and plants, and watering in the morning or evening.

The overarching goal of the network, based on recommendations by conservation scientists, is to permanently protect 30% of the Hill Country as conservation land. Currently, 5% of the region—546,301 acres—is preserved, including privately owned land and state, city, and county parks. Reaching the 30% goal will maintain river levels, provide clean water and air, mitigate flooding, protect wildlife and plant habitats, and ensure generations to come can enjoy the scenic views and natural wonders of the area. “Texans have taken pride in stewarding these lands for generations, but now the region’s getting loved to death,” Rooney says. “So, we all have to take into account the caretaking part of loving the land.”

**EMILY ROBERTS STONE**  
EDITOR IN CHIEF

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Destinations like Gruene Hall and Enchanted Rock may get a lot of press, but these lesser-known offerings provide travelers more breathing room.

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## Family Ties

Picturesque moments emerge during family vacations at two getaways in the Hill Country.

*Photographs by Melanie Grizzel*

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## A Ripple in Still Water

While Austin's well-known natural spaces are often overcrowded, Onion Creek provides a tranquil respite.

*By Ian Dille*

*Photographs by Theresa DiMenno*

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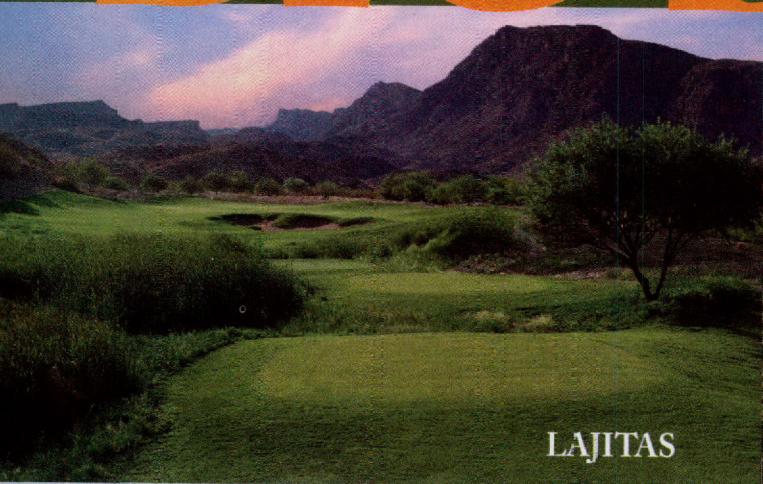
Photograph by Kenny Braun  
Shot at Skybox Cabins in Glen Rose

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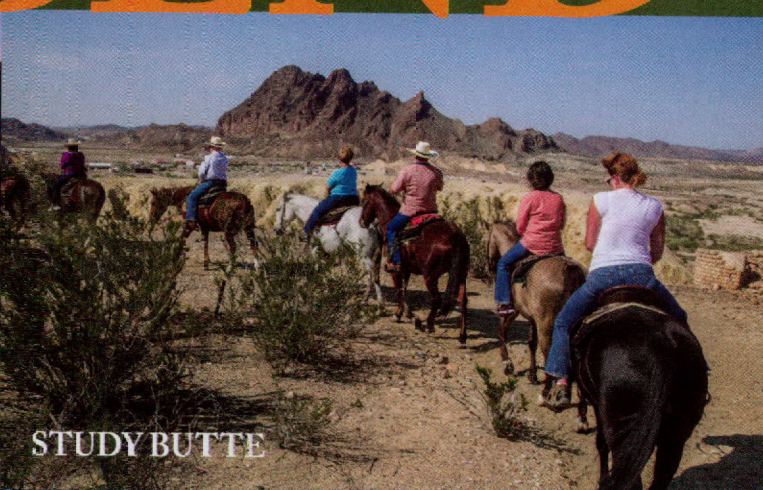
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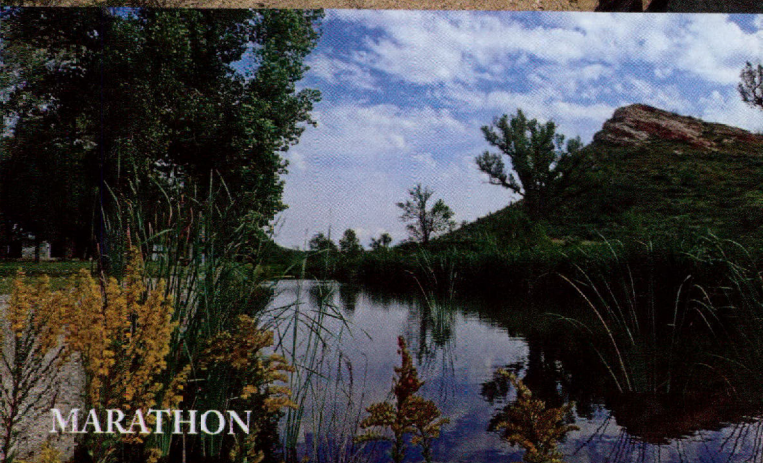
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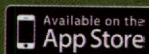


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## Behind the Story



For all its acclaim and marketability, the Texas Hill Country is difficult to define. Writer-at-large John Nova Lomax attempted to draw the upper limit of the popular travel destination in “Pushing the Boundaries” (Page 21). “I got to looking on Google Maps, and I was scanning for places that call themselves Hill Country businesses,” the Brazoria-based writer says. “I got to the Oklahoma border.” Some people Lomax spoke with define the “Hill Country” by the people who settled it. “That’s what we think of as the Hill Country: Where Germans settled, that’s the Hill Country,” he says. “Where Germans didn’t settle, that’s hilly country.” Though Lomax found no easy answer, he did come to a realization. “If all you really want is scenery and a campfire by the side of the river, that northern area has everything the southern area has,” he says. “I think that part of Texas is worth searching out, whether you consider it the Hill Country or not.”

## Featured Contributors



### Ian Dille

The Austin-based author and video producer wrote about his family’s exploration of Onion Creek during the pandemic in “A Ripple in Still Water” (Page 56). “This essay had been bubbling around my brain for more than a year,” Dille says. “Working on the piece was almost as therapeutic as the creek itself.” Dille’s work has appeared in *Outside* and *Bicycling*, and his stories have been reproduced by *This American Life*. His most recent book, *The Cyclist’s Bucket List*, was published by Penguin Random House in 2015.



### Fowzia Karimi

Karimi wrote and illustrated “An Open Palm” (Page 14) about her trip to Glen Rose during a period of grief. “I’m a very visual writer and relished the opportunity to both write and illustrate this essay,” the Denton-based artist says. Karimi’s debut novel, *Above Us the Milky Way*, received the 2020 Balcones Fiction Prize, the Foreword Reviews Editor’s Choice Prize, the WLT Fiction Discovery Prize, and the PubWest Bronze Book Design Award.

Photo: Kenny Braun (top)

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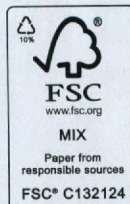
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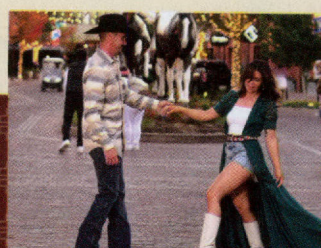
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# MERGE



I loved going on volksmarches when I was stationed in Germany. After 45 years, I still have some of the medals.

[@KatherineNobles](#)

### Thrill-Seekers

I spent much of my childhood at Six Flags and AstroWorld ["Upside-Down Smile," April]. It broke my heart when they bulldozed AstroWorld. Loved the Texas Cyclone, even in the rain.

[f](#) Bill West, Dallas

### Seeing Stars

I love those Davis Mountains and the star parties ["An Elevated Outlook," April]. I've been there several times; just awesome!

[f](#) Randy Terrell, Kerrville

### Plane on the Plains

I had the pleasure of meeting John Valentine Pliska's grandson while working for Boeing back in 1991 ["Take Off," April]. The grandson is an aerospace engineer who has been to Midland and told me there is still family there.

[i](#) @rojoraid58

### Coastal Coaster

In your April issue, the writer did not mention the roller coaster in Houston in the article "Upside-Down Smile." Yes, Houston had a roller coaster; it was a wooden roller coaster in Playland Park, which was located at 9200 S. Main St. Built in September 1940 and labeled the Skyrocket, it was known as the largest roller coaster in the South at 6,600 feet long and 110 feet high with a 90-foot drop. It operated until 1962. To this young teenager at that time, it was the most exhilarating and exciting experience I could imagine, and well worth the ride.

*Jennie Emmott Horton, Houston*

### See? Food

The pulpo picture on Page 57 looks really interesting ["Pinkalicious," April]. As a chef, I would have bet it was shrimp.

*Olivier Andreini, Montgomery*

*TH: If you noticed something fishy about the dish pictured on Page 57, we misidentified it in the caption. Rather than a pulpo (octopus) dish, this was camarones encabronados, a shrimp dish.*

### Listen Closely

What a poignant tribute Lauren Hough made to her grandfather in her story "Getaway Driver" [March]. Although I don't

think any of my grandparents experienced an interaction with anyone as famous or infamous as Bonnie and Clyde, I do wish I had paid more attention to their stories of their lives. I have lost to death or dementia all but one older relative, my favorite aunt. I intend to savor every story she has to share.

*Cris Thompson, San Antonio*

I was so excited when reading "Getaway Driver" by Lauren Hough. I am a descendant of a person mentioned in Hough's piece and am very familiar with the story she shared.

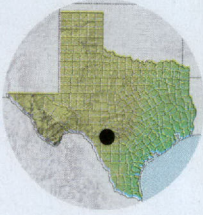
*Kate Bennett, Weatherford*



## To the Summit

More than 300,000 people visit Enchanted Rock State Natural Area each year, and a majority of them test their legs on the Summit Trail. The nearly mile-long trail climbs to the 1,823-foot peak of the park's namesake granite dome, an ancient geologic formation known as a batholith. Austin-based photographer Kenny Braun took this photo in July 2014 while hiking the Summit Trail with his daughter. Though Braun has been taking photographs at Enchanted Rock since the mid-1990s, he says each visit introduces new perspectives. "To me it looks different every time I go out there because the light is different, the weather is different," Braun says. "You could never get bored photographing all the angles out there, but in the summer-time you've got to be careful because it gets hot." Indeed, the park's average high temperature in May, 83 degrees, can feel blazing on the exposed granite.





# Concan

Generations of visitors have flocked to Concan for the Frio River and Neal's country cooking

By Heather Brand



**CHASE ROOSA** manages Neal's Dining Room, a café overlooking the Frio River in the blink-and-you'll-miss-it town of Concan.

**T**he tiny town of Concan, tucked in the rolling hills of Uvalde County, has been a summertime recreational haven since 1926, when Tom and Vida Neal built a restaurant and cottages along the banks of the Frio River. Nearly a century later, their great-grandson Chase Roosa carries on the family tradition as general manager of Neal's Dining Room. Every year, from March through Thanksgiving, Roosa greets vacationers who come for a meal after swimming and floating in the Frio's chilly spring-fed waters or hiking at Garner State Park, located 8 miles north. Long before it was a Hill Country tourist attraction, the Frio provided water for the Lipan Apache and other Texas tribes who frequented the southwestern edge of the Edwards Plateau. In the mid-19th century, Anglo settlers established ranches to raise goats, sheep, and cattle amid the rocky terrain. Today, the area still retains several ranches, but tourism drives the Concan economy.

### The Family Business

"My great-grandparents Tom and Vida Neal came out here in the 1920s to be goat ranchers. They soon realized the river could draw people from the bigger cities. Concan was not necessarily on the map as a destination before then. They built the restaurant and most of the original cabins in 1926, and the fifth generation is now working here. It's the only job I've ever had. I've lived here my whole life, except during my college days at Texas A&M. I started working here in my teens when my parents pulled me into the business. Not only is it family owned and operated, but it caters to families as well. Friends I made in childhood still come to Concan for their family vacations."

### Local Lore

"The name Concan comes from a card game from earlier times. The Lipan Apache used to camp around here, and the arrowheads on the wall at Neal's Dining Room were found in this area. My dad and I love to go arrowhead hunting. The arrowheads are 5,000 or 6,000 years old."

### Tubers' Paradise

"The biggest draw is floating the Frio. Neal's Lodges, which we sold to family friends about 10 years ago, rents out about 80 cabins, and they cater to tubers, taking shuttles up and down the river. Andy's on River Road is another local outfitter. The Frio Valley Ranch golf course is just up the river road. Garner State Park is 8 miles from Concan, and it has everything: overnight camping, cabins, dining, an ice cream shop, a candy shop, mini golf, paddle boating, hiking trails, and nightly dances in the summer. Joe Jimmy's at Neal's Lodges has a great lineup of live music every summer."

### Comfort Food

"We do a little bit of everything—mostly family recipes that have been handed down for generations. The staples are chicken-fried steak, fried chicken, hot pepper steaks, and hamburgers. We added more seating capacity about 16 or 17 years ago and built a big deck overlooking the river. Many of the tables inside the restaurant were originally built by my great-grandfather. We have hummingbird feeders by the windows, so while you're eating you can watch hummingbirds doing the same thing."

### Other Eats

"There are two other places to eat in town. One is Hippie Chic's River Shack and its sister restaurant next door, Hippies & Hops, which serves delicious pizza. They have a great outdoor atmosphere. The other is House Pasture Cattle Company, which has terrific steaks and shrimp."

### To the Bat Cave

"The Frio Bat Cave is about 5 miles away. In the summer, millions of Mexican free-tailed bats stay there. They fly out every night and fly back in every morning. When I was a child, I used to climb all through the cave, but now you have to stand outside. The Frio Bat Cave Tour leads you onto a ranch and up a hill to watch the bats fly out of the cave."

### Winging It

"Birdwatching is huge in the spring. People from all over the world come here to see birds like the golden-cheeked warbler. The Texas Hill Country is close to South Texas and the coastal plains, and the spring migration period brings a confluence of so many different varieties at one time. That's another reason why people flock here. 🐦



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# An Open Palm

A state of grief becomes a state of solace for a new Texan

By Fowzia Karimi

---

**I**

If grief is a landscape, it is a vast misty hinterland, uninhabited but full of echoes, admitting a lone traveler. The traveler searches the wilderness for her lost one. And though it is a search in vain, through an immeasurable terrain, she cannot leave the land of grief where she searches for what is missing, as if it has simply been misplaced.

I am not unfamiliar with loss. I have never evaded the dead. But for as long as I can remember, I have lived in terror of one thing: the loss of my parents. I wonder sometimes if the early deaths I experienced of loved ones to war made me more tender. My parents, my sisters, and I immigrated to the U.S. in 1980 after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The atrocities during that violent and catastrophic time were innumerable. The war clung to us in California, where we regularly received news of loved ones who had been killed. Death was an early fact and facet of my life. And my heart was always a tender organ. As a 7- and 8-year-old, I would sit for hours at the window of our house in Los Angeles looking out onto the street and waiting with anguish—legs cramping beneath me, chin sore where it rested on the windowsill—for my parents to return home from a party. I knew it could happen in an instant. I knew it could happen when I was looking away. I yearned to have them back in the safekeeping of my vision. But decades later, when my mother died slowly in front of me over months, after battling cancer for almost two years, I found my eyes had no power to keep her in the world. I was 40, and I waited at the window for death, petrified.

I wish I could say when the moment arrived I faced it with strength or grace. My mother faced the cancer, the numerous surgeries, the chemo,

and the radiation with incredible strength and profound grace. I spent those two years wearing terror like a vise around my heart. And then she was gone and the ground beneath me disappeared. If grief is a vast foggy wilderness, death is a solid steel wall, impenetrable to the gaze or the voice. Is it any wonder that the gaze turns inward after loss, that the dirge is not sung but swallowed whole to sit like an echo in the heart? This echo, this silent lament, gave muscle and rhythm to my broken heart after she died.

In the summer of 2014, on my mother's 65th birthday, her doctor told her she had two months to live. I was in the middle of packing for a move from Oakland, California, to Denton, where my partner had accepted a job at the University of North Texas. My sisters and I immediately got into our cars and onto planes

and flocked to her in Las Vegas. After her funeral, I spent five weeks looking after my father and tending to my mother's things. Though it took another two years, at the time we anticipated my dad would move back to California. I packed and cleaned. I put aside the things my dad and sisters wanted to keep. I ran my mother's brush through my hair. I drove carloads of donations to the thrift store. I scoured Vegas looking for a place that would take the wigs she'd worn through treatment. I cooked for my dad and served tea to his grieving visitors, but I smothered my own emotions. I forced myself to eat and exhausted my body each day so that when I put my head down at night my mother's absence would not choke me.

A move is usually a momentous occasion, a time of excitement,

trepidation, tumult, and wonder. I landed in DFW a sleepwalker. I don't remember the drive to Denton. I know it was October, but I remember very little of those first several months in Texas. I was home with my partner and our dog, but I had little awareness of where I lived, the people around me and with whom I interacted, the places I drove to or through. I wasn't incapable, nor did I lack momentum; I pushed hard to do, to produce, to exhaust myself. But while my body occupied one space, my heart and mind lived in the vast expanse of grief. My mother's scent was still in my nostrils. My heart, so long in terror's relentless grip, was ripe and ready to burst. Tears held in for weeks ran hotly and unceasingly at all hours, in all places, during that first year—onto my dog's head and back, in grocery store parking lots, in



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restaurant bathroom stalls, at stoplights, while I slept and dreamt, showered, ate, wrote and read, dug into the garden soil, sat in front of the television, leafed through volumes at the bookstore. It's how I came to know Texas, through a sheet of tears. I'm very familiar with loss. I've never dismissed the dead. But this was my mother.

My mother, who generated love like the sun generates light and heat, was home, was country, was the bright star in the center of our solar system. Her absence dimmed the sky and chilled the air.

The space of grief is infinite but allows only a shallow depth of field. During this raw and tender period, I'd return from the hinterland for brief moments—not by conscious choice but as if tugged on. Suddenly, the cashier across from me would come into focus,

her smile warm, her chatter bright. The red cardinal streaking against the green leaves of the oaks would awaken me to the leaves themselves, their rhythmic patterns coming into relief against a blue sky. Beads of ice adorning naked branches, the warm buzzing of wasps at the portals of their dwelling, a stranger's hand lingering on a doorknob as he held the door open for me, a neighbor's *good morning*, light and sincere—these things tugged on me and focused my attention. In momentarily returning to the world, in finding myself in a new city, a new state, I was not shocked but comforted.

My partner had arrived in Texas three months before I did. There were places he wanted to take me, meals and stories he wanted to share. He was keen to draw me out, to comfort me. I don't remember how long I'd been in Texas when we

**My mother, who generated love like the sun generates light and heat, was home, was country, was the bright star in the center of our solar system.**

made the trip to Glen Rose. It may have been two months; it may have been 10. Road trips have a way of realigning me with my romantic nature. Routine life and its restraints fall away, and I am fully awake to the changing landscape outside the car windows; the play of light on a building roof or across an unshorn farm field; the wildflowers native, planted, or renegade; the song or interview on the



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radio; the hills or the city on the horizon; the cold sandwich in my hand; the road stop at the bustling gas station or in the shade of the only clump of trees for 200 miles; the city congested at rush hour and flushed with the hue of the setting sun; the sea's dew on my skin. The road awakens me, reorients me with my true nature. This trip to Glen Rose took place not in a state of wakefulness but in a trance, a sea of mourning. For years, I recalled it as a dream. When I realized we had in fact made such a trip, I had to look up "the place with the dinosaur tracks" to figure out where we'd gone.

**Central Texas was covered** by a large shallow sea 113 million years ago. The area that is now Glen Rose sat at the edge of this ancient body of water. Dinosaurs, walking across the limey mud of

**Texas—its big expanse of sky; the land like an open palm; the close, bright sun; the warmth and kindness of strangers— comforted me.**

its tidal flats, left their tracks as evidence of their size, weight, and feeding and social habits. Their prints, and their story, were fossilized and hidden beneath layers of sediment until the early 20th century, when a flood on the Paluxy River exposed them to human eyes, the only eyes that would heed their novelty. Two very distinct print types—one made by a plant-eating sauropod, the other by a

carnivorous theropod—crisscross the riverbed. The sauropods moved in groups and protected their young by placing them in the center of their roving clusters. The sprightly, predatory theropods hunted the larger species. It's hard to wrap one's head around such an expanse of time. And yet, there they are, 113-million-year-old footprints reading like text in the limestone bed of the river. A primitive alphabet, a zoological scripture, a letter written, in two distinct fonts, by two species long extinct to one only recently arrived.

I remember seeing the footprints on that trip years ago to Dinosaur Valley State Park but hardly remember how I got to where they were. Still, the road trip to Glen Rose imprinted itself on me even through the haze of grief because it did what my partner had hoped it would do:



It comforted me. Texas—its big expanse of sky; the land like an open palm; the close, bright sun; the warmth and kindness of strangers—comforted me. In my memory of that trip, I glimpse loops and lengths of highway along which only the nearest and random objects came into focus and went out of view again as grief pulled me back into its depths, onto its own limitless highways and expanses. The town squares we drove through from Denton to Glen Rose were like islands in that sea of mourning. They were like nothing I'd experienced before in the U.S.: their colossal stone courthouses and fluttering state flags, the upright brick buildings from earlier eras housing busy eateries and bars, shop windows decorated with bright colors and local pride, nostalgia and modernity, bustle and cheer, culture and history,

all concentrated across a few blocks. I was in a new land. Texas revealed and declared itself, even as vivid pictures of my mother's face at different ages of my childhood played across my lids when I closed my eyes, even as the echo of her laugh thrilled my eardrum and drowned out the song on the radio.

I have a very long and keen memory, so it is strange for me to look back on a trip and see it through a fog, its outlines blurred. So much of my external life during that year—the life of the senses; the life of experience; the life of society, place, and time—was not recorded. What was being experienced internally was so much sharper. Images of Glen Rose flash like snapshots in my memory now. Strings of lights, lit in the bright middle of day, wrapped around leaning poles. The small stature of old buildings. A bookshop with

its stacks of old books and their beautifully set type—and the type's impression on the soft page—reminding me of my own mortality and placement in time. There was the waitress at the café who hesitated only momentarily before she realized the tea I asked for must be of the hot kind, not sweetened and with ice. I can't remember her exact words, but I'm certain they ended with "Not a problem, honey." Everywhere we went, there was the *thank you*; the *please*; the *after you, ma'am*; the *come on in*; and the *y'all have a good day*—phrases as common in Texan parlance as the native red, black, and live oaks in its landscape. And there was color! It may have been the abundance and celebration of color in Glen Rose that most urgently tugged on me and drew me out for moments. The decor

continued on Page 78

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---



**AN OVERLOOK**  
above the Paluxy  
River in Dinosaur  
Valley State Park.

# Pushing the Boundaries

The Hill Country is moving farther north as towns try to capitalize on the region's marketing cachet

By John Nova Lomax

“Just because it has hills, and it’s next to the Hill Country, does not make it *the* Hill Country,” declares George Cofran, founder and editor-in-chief of [hillcountryportal.com](http://hillcountryportal.com), a resource for the ever-widening swath of divine Texas landscape. A resident of Johnson City, a town whose Hill Country status nobody questions, Cofran grows frustrated when I point out that isolated spots to the north like Glen Rose and Meridian look every bit as Hill Country as *the* Hill Country.

“Well, so do some places in Europe,” Cofran fires back. “That doesn’t mean they’re in the Hill Country.” To Cofran, it’s worse than inaccuracy; these people want something without earning it, by simply moving the lines. He’s referring to the steady, ongoing creep of the Hill Country northward from its traditional boundaries. But why do those boundaries exist? Where, exactly, does the Hill Country begin, and where does it end?

Approaching from the south on US 83, the Hill Country presents itself dramatically. As you pass by the infamous Liquor N Guns shop on Uvalde’s north side, it’s not long before the Balcones Escarpment rises out of the pool-table-flat irrigated fields. Behind



that jagged wall lies Texas' own land of enchantment: the craggy limestone hills streaked with crystalline streams; the yawning open-mouthed bat caves; the endless s'mores and roasted hot dogs around mesquite campfires under skies blazing with billions of stars; the scooting of boots and the swooshing of skirts to Texas shuffle rhythms on longneck nights in dance halls; Jerry Jeff, Willie, Waylon, and the boys.

And it's only a little less dramatic an entry when coming from the east, though somewhat concealed by its origins in suburban Austin and San Antonio. As for the western boundary, somewhere beyond Junction or Eldorado, it's nebulous. Way out there on the edge of the Trans-Pecos, where things get more hilly than the Hill Country itself, and human settlement is scarce, what's the point of drawing a line?

But what about to the north? Here is where confusion reigns, exacerbated by marketing. As lovely as the noun Hill Country is—though it's not an official ecoregion of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD)—it's become more valuable as an adjective. With no clear line of demarcation on the northern side, some residents of the Rolling Plains and Cross Timbers ecoregions north of the Edwards Plateau are capitalizing on the Hill Country prestige and rebranding themselves as an extension of the region.

Even areas that aren't claiming to be part of the Hill Country are taking advantage of it. Penny Smith Jones is a veteran real estate copywriter in Houston, formerly the in-house scribe for Martha Turner Properties, which has since been acquired by Sotheby's. While she's never advertised Hill Country property, she's dealt with some in the Brenham and Chappell Hill areas. "I'll call that 'the gateway to the Hill Country,' but never the Hill Country," Jones says.

Ask 100 Texans to define the Hill Country borders and you will get a variety of answers, especially concerning the northern boundary. About 45 miles northwest of Waco and 70 miles south of Fort Worth, it's nobody's idea of the Hill Country. The terrain is another matter: The

# Code Talker of WWII Determined to Serve

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*Code Talker Carl Gorman tracked enemy movements on Saipan in the Marianas in June 1944.*

## After Pearl Harbor, men rushed to fight. Some lied about their age to enlist.

Many boys of 15 or 16 lied about their age so they could serve.

Carl Gorman lied to join a special group for which he was too old.

Gorman heard that the Marines wanted Navajos for "special duty."

That special duty was to become "code talkers." Anyone 30 or older would not qualify. At that time, Navajos didn't have records of their ages.

Even so, Carl knew he was over 30, but he said he was 28 so that he could join.

He was one of the original 29 Navajo Code Talkers.

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## Head For the Hills

Natural beauty, history, and culture mesh in the North Texas Hill Country.

### Dinosaur Valley State Park – Glen Rose

When river conditions are right on the Paluxy, visitors can literally walk in the petrified 13-million-year-old footsteps of dinosaurs.

1629 Park Road 59.

254-897-4588; [tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/dinosaur-valley](http://tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/dinosaur-valley)

### Billy the Kid Museum – Hico

The museum displays Old West memorabilia and supports the theory that Brushy Bill Roberts of

Hico was in fact William H.

Bonney, aka Billy the Kid.

114 N. Fecan St. 281-513-1603;

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

### Dublin Bottling Works – Dublin

The Old Doc's Soda Shop at the birthplace of Dr Pepper is closed, but the retail store remains a prime spot for cane sugar sarsaparillas and other goodies.

221 S. Patrick St. 888-398-1024;

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



#### FROM LEFT:

The water tower in Meridian; a dinosaur track in the Paluxy River.

Bosque County seat of Meridian is ringed by low, craggy, cedar-studded hills, and its High Victorian Gothic Revival courthouse is made of limestone from a local quarry like so many in the Hill Country. Road signs point the way to seven or eight wineries—those most Hill Country of establishments. And on the town's water tower, Meridian stakes its claim as the "Top of the Hill Country." It doesn't end there. Head northwest 32 miles to Skybox Cabins, a retreat featuring treehouse-type cabins in the hills adjoining Dinosaur Valley State Park in Glen Rose. The location on the website is described as "the tip top of the Texas hill country."

"I don't think you can live here and not say you are in the Hill Country," says Yvan Jayne, co-proprietor with his wife, Kristin Jayne. "It looks like it, it feels like it, you get the same allergies like you are in it. Everything here fits the stereotype of the Hill Country."

Jayne is familiar with gatekeepers like Coran. "Somebody left an angry comment on social media about us saying we are in the Hill Country a while back and I just don't get it," he says. "I bet that person lives close to Houston or Austin. What does it take away from them if we say we are in the Hill Country?"

Perhaps it's because Jayne is an immigrant—a Frenchman who came to America as an exchange student and wound up a professional rodeo cowboy. These rivalries and jealousies are hard to understand as a non-Texan. Maybe this protectiveness over what Jayne sees as an imperceptible border is something only Texans can understand.

Naturally, TPWD has scientific reasons for branding one area Edwards Plateau (the Hill Country) and others Cross Timbers and Rolling Plains. It's possible the real fault line is cultural rather than physical, suggests James Kearney, an author, assistant professor, and translator at the University of Texas at Austin who specializes in the Germans of Texas.

In the hills settled by Germans, we have the Texas Hill Country. In those that were not, we have hilly Texas country. That demographic rift has long fascinated Kearney. His dad was from Columbus, a beery, multiethnic town with Czech, German, Scottish, and Irish residents. Meanwhile, his mom was from Comanche, which was the seat of a dry county and literally 100% white Protestant. Though 230 miles apart, Kearney grew up with one foot in each place. "Comanche was just an entirely different

world than Columbus,” Kearney says.

The *Austin American–Statesman* published a map in 1930 that included what is thought to be the first reference to the Hill Country, made by area chambers of commerce. The map set the northern Hill Country boundary at the State Highway 29 border from Burnet to Menard. That border is the site where an established German settlement collided with settlers who came to Texas from the hills and mountains of Tennessee, Missouri, and Arkansas. In recent years, some of the more rigid aspects of their puritanical culture, notably those regarding prohibition of alcohol, have eroded. With the great vanishing of dry counties, wineries, music venues, and saloons have popped up everywhere, bringing the region out of its *Footloose* phase.

Like many, Wade Williams, an attorney and a part-time songwriter who grew up in one of those counties when it was dry, became fascinated with the Hill Country via the 1977 hit Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings duet, “Luckenbach, Texas (Back to the Basics of Love),” and Jerry Jeff Walker albums. In 1982, when he was 15, he and his father made a pilgrimage to Luckenbach. “My vision of what the Hill Country was came mostly from *Hondo*, *My Father* [a book about folklorist Hondo Crouch, Luckenbach’s founder] and from Jerry Jeff’s raucous ‘70s albums,” he says. “Though limestone and cedar scrub were part of it, to me it was less strictly geographical and more emotional-slash-conceptual. People drinking beer and playing guitars under live oaks by clear streams was the Hill Country to me.”

Could that cultural shift expand what we commonly think of as the Hill Country to as far north as the Dallas–Fort Worth metroplex and beyond, as in towns like Graham, Nocona, and Saint Jo, where business owners and tourism groups are promoting themselves as within “the North Texas Hill Country”? Has there been a vast other Hill Country hiding in plain sight all these years? Can having more of a good thing ever be a bad thing, especially with the hidden Hill Country getting harder and harder to find? **L**

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# Float Like a Butterfly

The Special Olympics return to Morgan's Wonderland after a two-year hiatus

By Clayton Maxwell

Upon entering Morgan's Wonderland theme park in San Antonio, visitors are welcomed by a 25-foot-tall bronze sculpture of hands reaching skyward, releasing a butterfly. It is an apt metaphor for this one-of-a-kind park that is so inclusive its owner trademarked the term "ultra-accessible" to describe it. Former homebuilder Gordon Hartman's magnum opus, Morgan's Wonderland was created to enable children and adults of all abilities to ride every ride—the ultimate in equal-opportunity fun.

Hartman envisioned the park, which opened in 2010, after witnessing how other children in a hotel pool would not play with his daughter, Morgan, because of her physical and cognitive differences. Designed by a local team of engineers, medical experts, parents, and therapists, the facility is a 25-acre spread with 25 attractions, including a Ferris wheel, a deluxe carousel, an 8-acre fishing lake stocked with bass and catfish, and a sensory play center. Other offerings include a splash park next door, a year-round camp, and a one-stop health center opening in October. Guests from all 50 states and 122 countries, with and without disabilities, have visited Morgan's Wonderland. In 2018, *Time* magazine named the splash park, called Morgan's Inspiration Island, one of "The World's 100 Greatest Places."

"For every four people who enter our welcome center, three of them don't have special needs," Hartman says. "But now everyone can play together. Out at the camp we have a challenge course where if you're in a wheelchair you can be 22 feet above ground right next to everyone else on that challenge course. We come up with new ways to do things because if we don't, we're eliminating 15% of the population."

This mentality earned Morgan's Wonderland the honor of hosting the Special Olympics Texas Summer Games, an event that draws over 3,000 athletes. This year's games, the first since 2019, run from May 12-15 and are free to attend. Because everyone deserves to take flight. For more information, visit [morganswonderland.com](http://morganswonderland.com). 🐦





# Grazed and Confused

The Hill Country's history of overgrazing sparks conservation-minded ranching

By Asher Elbein



**Livestock are a common sight** along the winding roads and rolling slopes of the Hill Country, among them the hardy, barrel-shaped forms of goats.

Spanish colonists first introduced goats to Texas in the late 1600s, and Mexican and then American settlers furthered the practice. Goats were kept on small farms for milk and meat until 1858, when Angora goats were introduced to the area and expanded across the Hill Country as the source of a booming wool and mohair trade.

The Texas sheep and goat population numbered as high as 10 million in the 1950s. Then, a terrible drought caused goat numbers to plummet. By then, livestock overgrazing had left its mark, reducing the soils of the Edwards Plateau and leaving behind eroded, picked-over landscapes with sparse vegetation.

Goats target brush, forbs, and leaves, stripping away vegetation from the hill-sides. Where goats and other livestock were run intensively—following practices pioneered in wetter Northern Europe—steep erosion, poorer water quality, and bleached hillsides ensued.

The effects of overgrazing still linger, but now, goat ranching in the Hill Country is better managed. Goats have settled into their role as helpful brush-clearers amid the stony hills and beyond.



## Know Your Goats

1

**Spanish Goats:** These goats are tough, hardy, and used both for meat and clearing brush.

2

**Angora Goats:** These woolly goats were once the backbone of the Texas goat industry for their soft mohair that added luster to fabric.

3

**Spanish/Boer Cross:** The most common breed in Texas is a cross between Spanish goats and the Boer goat imported in the 1990s.

# 65,000

Number of Angora goats remaining in the state

# 5-10

Acreage necessary to sustainably support a goat in the Hill Country

# 200-250

Weight, in pounds, of a Spanish goat buck

## Land Aid

Restoring land after overgrazing is complicated, but the first step is always the same: Let the land rest, according to Reid Redden, sheep and goat specialist with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Let the grass regrow, let the soil build back up. Good rainfall—not always a guarantee in Texas—will also help.

Then, Redden says, the next steps depend on how you want the land to look. “Everyone’s goals are going to be a little bit different, but all of us benefit from a moderate approach where we keep diversity on the landscape,” Redden says.

Hillingdon Ranch is an example of this approach. Located in Kendall County between Comfort and Fredericksburg, the ranch recognized the overgrazing problem early on. It has been sustainably running Angora goats since late 1887, largely by closely matching animals to the ecological conditions of the landscape.

Other methods include rotating livestock like goats from pasture to pasture and implementing controlled burns to manage brush. These actions support food and fiber production as well as wildlife, water quality, and carbon sequestration in the roots of brush and prairie grass.

## Get Your Goat

**Pure Luck Farm and Dairy** in Dripping Springs specializes in goat milk cheeses, including feta and chèvre. Pick up its cheeses at Austin farmers markets and shops that specialize in locally produced foods. [purelucktexas.com](http://purelucktexas.com)



Pure Luck Dairy chèvre

can book a \$15 goat walk or \$10 “goat experience,” which lets you interact with very small goats while learning about holistic goat grazing. Check the brewery’s website for bookings. [jesterkingbrewery.com](http://jesterkingbrewery.com)

**Jester King Brewery**, a 165-acre ranch and event space 18 miles from downtown Austin, is most famous for its farmhouse ales. But the brewery also has a pen full of Nigerian dwarf goats that are a big hit with visitors. You

Located in Camp Wood by the Nueces River, **Dolores**

**Unique Designs** provides custom mohair clothing for men, women, and children, sourced from local Texas goats. Owner Dolores Vernor has been designing and selling mohair clothing for 30 years, including retail, boutique, and runway designs. [doloresunique.designstx.com](http://doloresunique.designstx.com)

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# A Creek Runs Through It

Boerne's bounty of Texas-German heritage and Hill Country charm fuel a weekend of fun

By Jacqueline Knox

**T**he German immigrants who settled in the Boerne area in 1850 knew a pristine townsite when they saw one. The colonists built farms near the bank of Cibolo Creek, the spring-fed stream that anchors the town of Boerne to this day. Named for German political writer Karl Ludwig Börne, the town evolved into a health resort in the late 19th century after multiple sanitariums opened. The town's relatively high and dry Hill Country environs were thought to be beneficial to people with chronic illnesses. The railroad and agriculture also bolstered Boerne's economy, and the town's proximity to San Antonio has contributed to both a growing population and a steady stream of tourists. Boerne's German heritage is alive and well in the town's annual festivals, restaurants, and restored historic buildings lining Main Street.



At Flashback Funtiques, owner Billy Howard sells hard-to-find pop culture relics.



**San Antonio**  
30 minutes

**Austin**  
2 hours


**Dallas**  
4.5 hours

**Houston**  
3.5 hours




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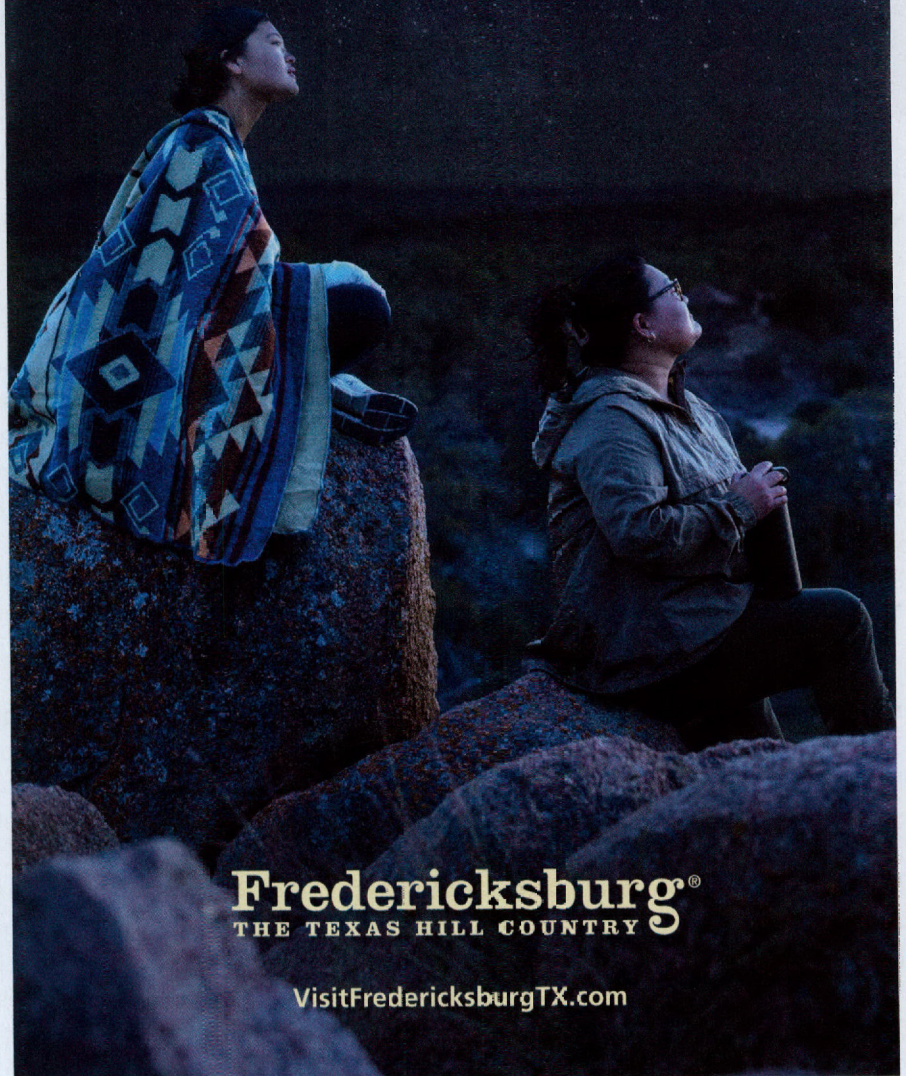
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**1 / THE KENDALL** Built as a home in 1859, The Kendall's lodging tradition began in the late 1800s when the Reec family boarded travelers. Now, The Kendall features 34 rooms, cottages, and suites—starting at \$99/night—including a restored chapel. Hotel restaurant Peggy's on the Green is a destination for refined comfort food.



**2 / MARY'S TACOS** There's always a line at this family-owned haven for breakfast tacos. Try the "Sean"—eggs, bacon, potatoes, beans, and cheese—or the "Poncho"—brisket sauteed with jalapeños, tomatoes, and onions. Both come wrapped in homemade flour tortillas. Mary's also serves lunch until 1:30 p.m., including barbacoa by the pound.



**3 / FLASHBACK FUNTIQUES** Located on Main Street, this store specializes in nostalgia, such as Big Boy statues, pinball machines, and jukeboxes. Owner Billy Howard hunts for vintage items at flea markets, car shows, and even attics, meaning you never know what treasures you'll find. With its neon lights and roadside relics, the store is hard to miss.



**4 / CIBOLO CREEK BREWING COMPANY** This local brewery creates both classic and adventurous beers, including the Boerne Blonde and Creekside IPA. Owned by two local families, Cibolo Creek is a popular place to grab a pint, order a cheeseburger, and kick it outside. During the spring and summer, catch live music on the patio.



**5 / THE DIENGER TRADING CO.** The Dienger Trading Co.'s 1884 building has housed a grocery store, restaurant, public library, and offices over the decades. Now back to its roots in food, the bistro and bakery right off Boerne's Main Plaza offers breakfast, lunch, and dinner. There's also a shop carrying clothing, décor, and gifts.



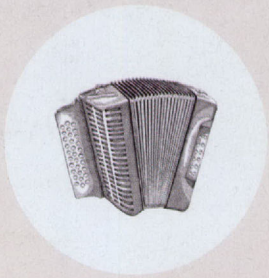
**6 / CIBOLO CENTER FOR CONSERVATION** Previously named the Cibolo Nature Center, this peaceful reserve has more than 6 miles of trails along the cypress-lined banks of Cibolo Creek. Make sure to visit the nearby Herff Farm, which has community gardens, yoga classes, and a farmers market on Saturdays.



**7 / CASCADE CAVERNS** Venture below ground at Boerne's oldest attraction to see the beauty of this living limestone cave, where formations are still growing. Guided tours explore the high ceilings of the Cathedral room and the bones of a prehistoric saber-toothed tiger and an American bison.



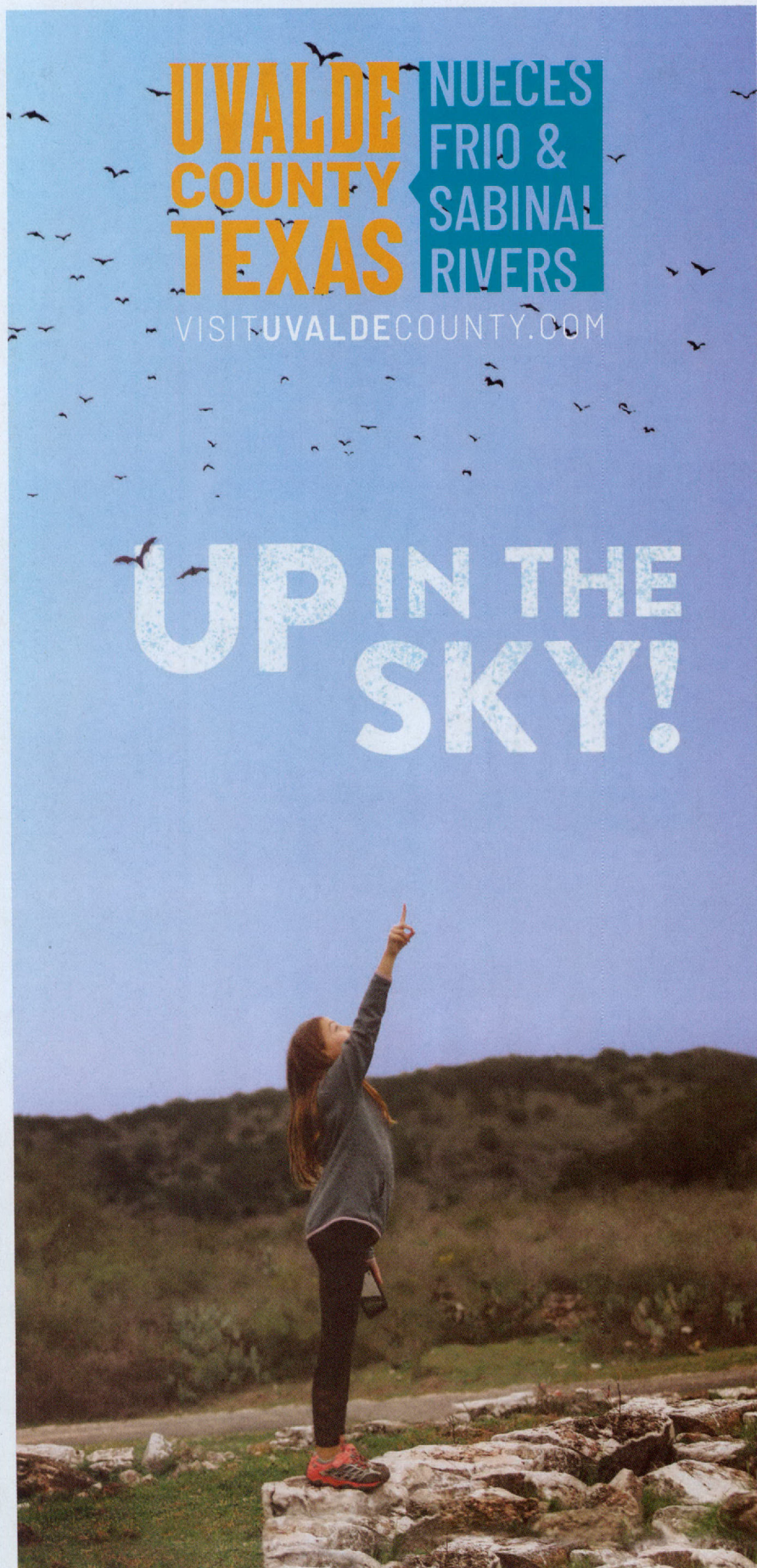
**8 / THE DODGING DUCK BREWHAUS** Named for the ubiquitous ducks on Cibolo Creek, this craft brewery serves sausages, giant pretzels, and beers that pay homage to the town's German heritage. Sit on the patio and enjoy a laugh while cars stop in the street to let the "dodging ducks" pass by. 🦆



## Old World Melodies

The Boerne Village Band bills itself as the oldest continuously running German band in the world outside of Germany itself. Organized in 1860, the band persevered through the Civil War and World Wars I and II, and sometimes featured multiple generations of musicians from the same families. More recently, the German government has donated sheet music and instruments to the band in appreciation of its commitment to German music, while the Texas House of Representatives recognized the band in 1991 with a resolution honoring it for “keeping alive German music as part of our heritage.” Now in its 162nd year, the Boerne Village Band performs a summer concert series on the town plaza and also plays events including the Kendall County Fair. [boernevillageband.com](http://boernevillageband.com)

**Top of the Hill RV Resort & Cabins**, roughly 7 miles north of downtown Boerne, offers cabins and RV camping, showers, two kitchens, swimming pool, fitness room, laundry facilities, and a general store stocked with essentials. 12 Green Cedar Road. 830-537-3666; [topofthehillrvresort.com](http://topofthehillrvresort.com)





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## PEOPLE FROM ACROSS THE WORLD

travel to Central Texas to explore the Hill Country—a surprising landscape of granite uplifts and limestone plateaus bisected by spring-fed creeks and rivers. The same forces that made the Hill Country such a beautiful place also made it relatively tough on early inhabitants, who encountered thin, rocky soils and an extreme climate prone to drought one year and flood the next. Coming from places like Appalachia and Germany, the settlers made their way in the mid-1800s by forming tightknit farming and ranching communities scattered among the hills, each with its own distinctive Texan character. As Texas has modernized, the Hill Country's topography doesn't pose the challenges it once did. Nowadays, anyone can venture to the magnificent granite batholith of Enchanted Rock or go two-stepping at Gruene Hall in New Braunfels. But along with popular destinations like these—which newcomers shouldn't miss—the Hill Country still harbors some lesser-known treasures, including destinations for dancing to live music, exploring a small town, hiking remote trails, floating a river, and motoring through this unforgettable landscape.

# DANCE HALLS

## HIDDEN SPOT: ANHALT HALL, SPRING BRANCH

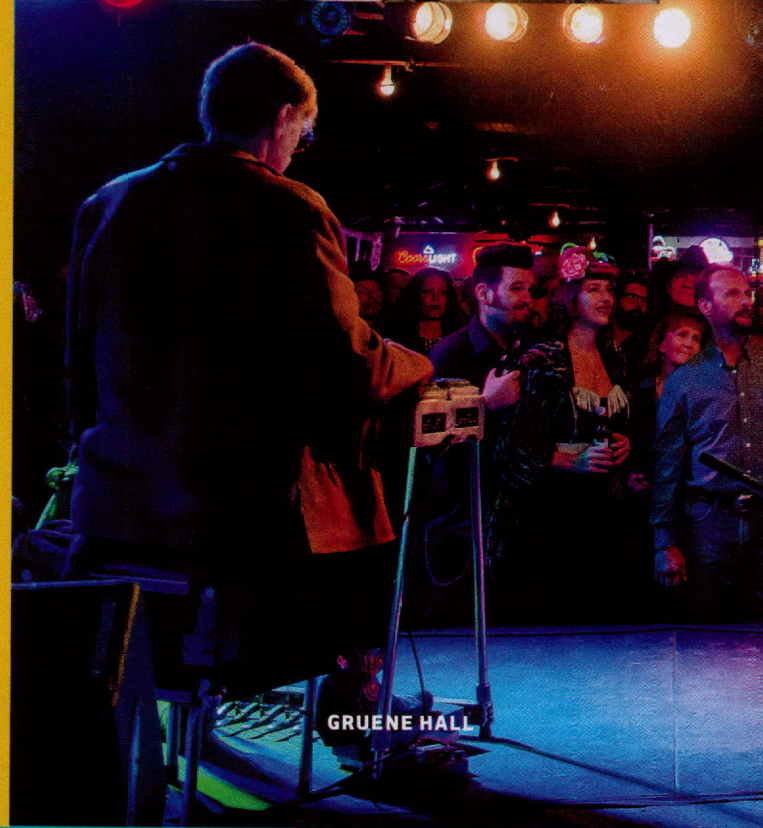
Anhalt Hall used to draw about 2,000 boot-scooters and polkaholics for its Maifest and Oktoberfest dances in the 1940s and '50s. But that number is down to about 300 for dances on the third Saturday of most

months as the old regulars have aged out, and the younger crowd flocks to hipper locales in Gruene or Luckenbach. Songs have been written about those dance halls, while Anhalt is an overlooked treasure. If anybody penned a tune about this place, a good title would be "Hardwood Heaven."

Still owned by the Germania Farmer Verein—the agricultural association that built the hall in 1879—Anhalt is as authentic

as a Texas landmark can be. Museum-quality artifacts, such as a wooden icebox, a cistern pump, and an early '900s soda bar, harken to the past. This is a place to dance like your grandparents did to the same Western swing music and maybe an occasional polka. Along with monthly dances, the hall is available for rent.

The association built the Anhalt in phases, adding the dance hall to the meeting



BY MICHAEL CORCORAN



## Classic Spot: GRUENE HALL, NEW BRAUNFELS

Major acts like George Strait, Garth Brooks, LeAnn Rimes, and Los Lobos don't play Gruene Hall for the money—the capacity is just 500—but for the experience of becoming one with the dance hall's glory. A good night anywhere else is a great night at Gruene Hall, built in 1878 by German immigrants and carefully preserved 100 years later. Gruene is popular with day-trippers on weekends, when the hall offers free daytime shows. But don't call it a tourist trap. This venue with the side-flap windows always delivers, making it a perennial favorite of diehard Texas music fans. Lest you forget that modern times stop at the entrance, the bar is cash only.

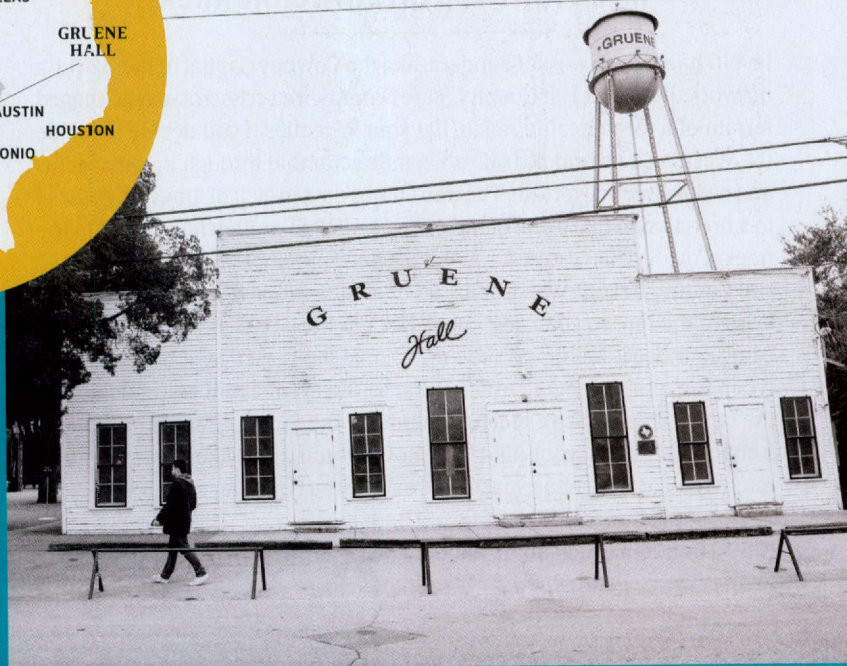
Ticket prices vary.

1281 Gruene Road, New Braunfels. 830-606-1281; [gruenehall.com](http://gruenehall.com)



hall in 1908, followed by the kitchen and dining hall in 1953. The building's exposed wooden ceiling trusses get the oohs, but the ahhs go to a smooth, sturdy dance floor, made of two layers of oak, that taunts non-dancers. Tickets for the regular dances start at \$15.

2390 Anhalt Road, Spring Branch.  
830-438-2873; [anhalthall.com](http://anhalthall.com)



# HIKING

BY PAM LEBLANC



## HIDDEN SPOT: WEST PEAK OVERLOOK TRAIL HILL COUNTRY STATE NATURAL AREA



Just 10 miles southwest of Bandera, aka the Cowboy Capital of the World, a network of trails at Hill Country State Natural Area crisscrosses the rugged terrain of a former cattle ranch. Eat your Wheaties if you decide to tackle the West Peak Overlook Trail, a 1.2-mile scramble through prickly cactus and cedar-studded terrain. The trail climbs up a stretch of limestone blocks to a broad knob that's one of the park's Twin Peaks. Benches tucked in the trees provide a place to rest your quads and contemplate the park's rugged Hill Country beauty, which spills off in all directions. The trail loops like a lasso at the top, so you can make a lap and head back down the way you came. Sunrise is an opportune time to hike the West Peak Overlook Trail, when the morning light casts a shimmering orange and gold hue across the landscape. If you're feeling ambitious, the Spring Branch Trail offers a chance to extend your hike for miles. Natural areas like this are a good reminder that wide open spaces still exist in the Lone Star State. Entry costs \$6 per adult, free for children 12 and under.

**10600 Bandera Creek Road, Bandera. 830-796-4413;**  
**[tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks](http://tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks)**





*Classic Spot:*

## **SUMMIT TRAIL ENCHANTED ROCK STATE NATURAL AREA**

It takes about 45 minutes to reach the top of the 425-foot pink granite dome at this popular park north of Fredericksburg. Along the way, you'll encounter massive slabs of granite that have peeled from the rock like an onion and fragile vernal pools, which are shallow dimples where delicate rock quillwort plants and fairy shrimp live. The panoramic view from the top of Enchanted Rock is a breathtaking perspective of the surrounding Hill Country, along with a stream of ant-like humans marching up one of the most visited destinations in the Texas State Parks system.

Enchanted Rock caps attendance at 400 vehicles per day. Reservations can be made up to one month in advance. The park recommends reservations for all visitors, and they are required for weekends, holidays, and school breaks. Entry costs \$8 per adult, free for children 12 and under.

16710 Ranch Road 965,  
Fredericksburg. 830-685-3636;  
[tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks](http://tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks)

# TUBING

BY JOE NICK PATOSKI



*Classic Spot:*

## THE MIGHTY GUADALUPE

From March through October, hundreds of thousands of Texans flock to the chilly waters of the lower Guadalupe River to tube. This method of heat relief involves plopping down in a large tire-size inner tube or other flotation device to float a portion of a 20-mile stretch of “the Guad” below Canyon Lake Dam. Two popular areas are the Horseshoe—a bend in the river near Sattler—and the run from Third Crossing to Second Crossing downriver from Sattler, which includes a long chute. Another favorite, the 3.5-mile stretch from First Crossing through Hueco Falls—one of the biggest rapids on a Hill Country river—concludes in Gruene, where restaurants and other attractions, including Gruene Hall, offer sweet repasts to end a day on the water. Tube rentals and shuttles typically cost about \$15 to \$20 per person. Find information, including a list of outfitters, on the website of the Greater New Braunfels Convention & Visitors Bureau.

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



MEDINA RIVER

**HIDDEN SPOT:**

## THE MESMERIZING MEDINA

If floating on a Texas river alongside hundreds of other people isn't your idea of quality time on the water, consider the river less-tubed: the Medina. Running 120 miles from the Edwards Plateau in Bandera County to its confluence with the San Antonio River, the Medina River's tubing sweet spot covers about 10 miles of the 27-mile stretch from Medina to Bandera. The narrow river runs shallow and swift, and as translucently pale blue-green as any other Hill Country waterway. With a limestone bottom and a handful of mild rapids, the Medina is a tame, idyllic tubing option. Alleys of towering bald cypress crowd the banks on both sides. The Medina remains close to pristine as locals and visitors appreciate its fragile beauty and have taken care not to abuse the river with litter. Neither glass bottles nor Styrofoam ice chests are allowed on the river.

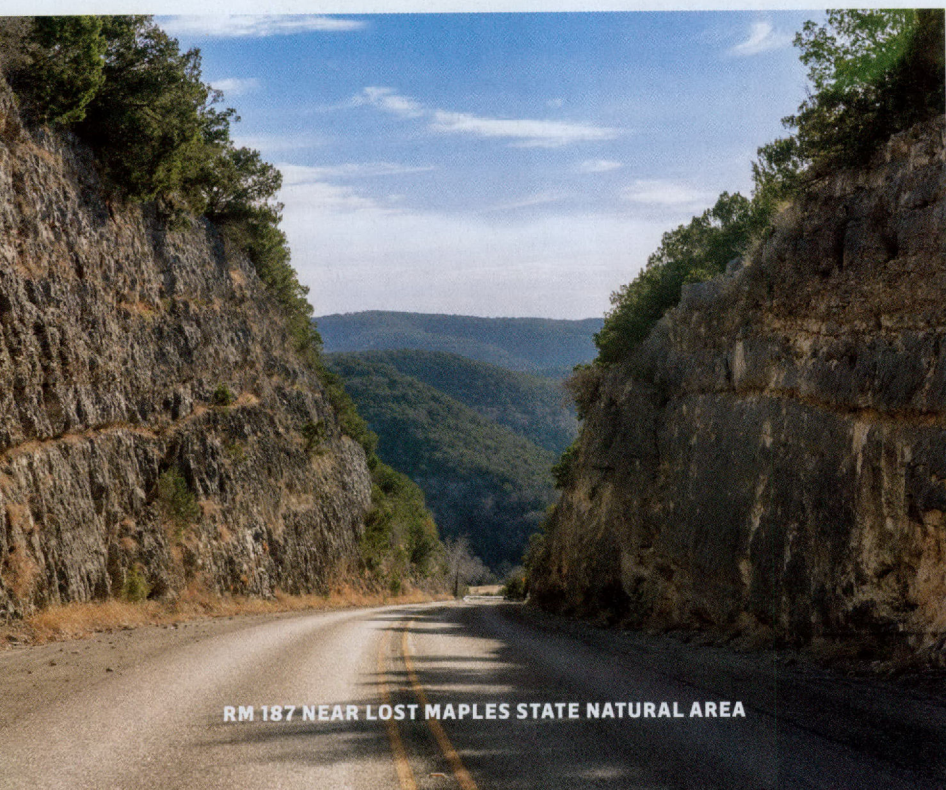
To access the Medina, tubers can take a shuttle from Bandera and get dropped off a half-mile upstream of town. A handful of lodging and outfitter companies provide shuttles and equipment rentals. The Medina River Company runs shuttles and rents tubes and kayaks. The cost is \$20 per tube ride and shuttle. For \$50 Peaceful Valley Kayak rents and shuttles kayaks on a 5-mile run and will shuttle tubers upon request during the summer months when the river's flow is adequate.

[themedinarivercompany.com](http://themedinarivercompany.com); [facebook.com/peaceful-valley-kayak-102826975334657](https://www.facebook.com/peaceful-valley-kayak-102826975334657)

## HIDDEN SPOT: CAMPS TO CANYONS

For a scenic Hill Country drive you may not have experienced before, it's best to go west, to the land less sullied. The 39-mile route between Hunt and Vanderpool—on State Highway 39 and Ranch to Market Road 187—is a two-fer. The first half begins at Schumacher's Crossing, downstream from The Hunt Store and the gateway to one of Texas' most historic recreational destinations—the upper Guadalupe River above Kerrville. You can load up on supplies, meals, and drinks at The Hunt Store, which was established in 1946 and is still the commercial center for campers and vacationers. Beyond the store, SH 39 becomes a tight, two-lane path that traces the Guadalupe upstream toward its headwaters, crossing the river several times. Along the way, the road passes historic summer camps, vacation cabins and lodges, and pastoral trophy ranches on the waterfront. On the left bank is the open-air Crider's Rodeo and Dancehall, which hosts rodeos and dances on Saturday nights between Memorial Day and Labor Day, offering a taste of the old Hill Country.

As the road gains elevation, the river shrinks and then vanishes, replaced by arroyos and dry washes that hold water during wet times. By the time the river disappears, few signs of human habitation remain. Then the drainages disappear too as the road continues climbing until reaching the rocky plains of the Edwards Plateau, about 500 feet higher than Hunt—now 20 miles in the rearview mirror. Turn left onto RM 187 and ride the plateau for 11.5 miles to the roadside picnic area on the east side of the highway. Pull over and take in the cinematic vista of the distinctive humpback hills spread out to the south and west. The road then makes an ear-popping drop down into the canyon before reaching Lost Maples State Natural Area. It's another 5 miles along the Sabinal River to Vanderpool.



RM 187 NEAR LOST MAPLES STATE NATURAL AREA

# SCENIC DRIVES

BY JOE NICK PATOSKI

## *Classic Spot:* DEVIL'S BACKBONE

For motorists who've never been to the Texas Hill Country, the 35-mile drive from San Marcos' western edge to downtown Blanco—via Ranch Road 12, Ranch Road 32, and US 281—is a fitting introduction. The road quickly lifts off the coastal flats onto the Balcones Fault, a 500-foot jump in elevation. Four miles past the Wimberley junction, two storied roadhouses, Riley's and the Devil's Backbone Tavern, both popular with cruisers, mark the beginning of the Devil's Backbone—a high limestone ridge that straddles the Blanco and Guadalupe river valleys. About a mile past the roadhouses, a picnic area on the right is worth a stop for sweeping views of the Wimberley Valley. The historic community of Fischer, about 8 miles farther on the north side of the highway, is worth a bypass too.



# SMALL TOWNS

BY JUNE NAYLOR



## *Classic Spot:* **KERRVILLE**

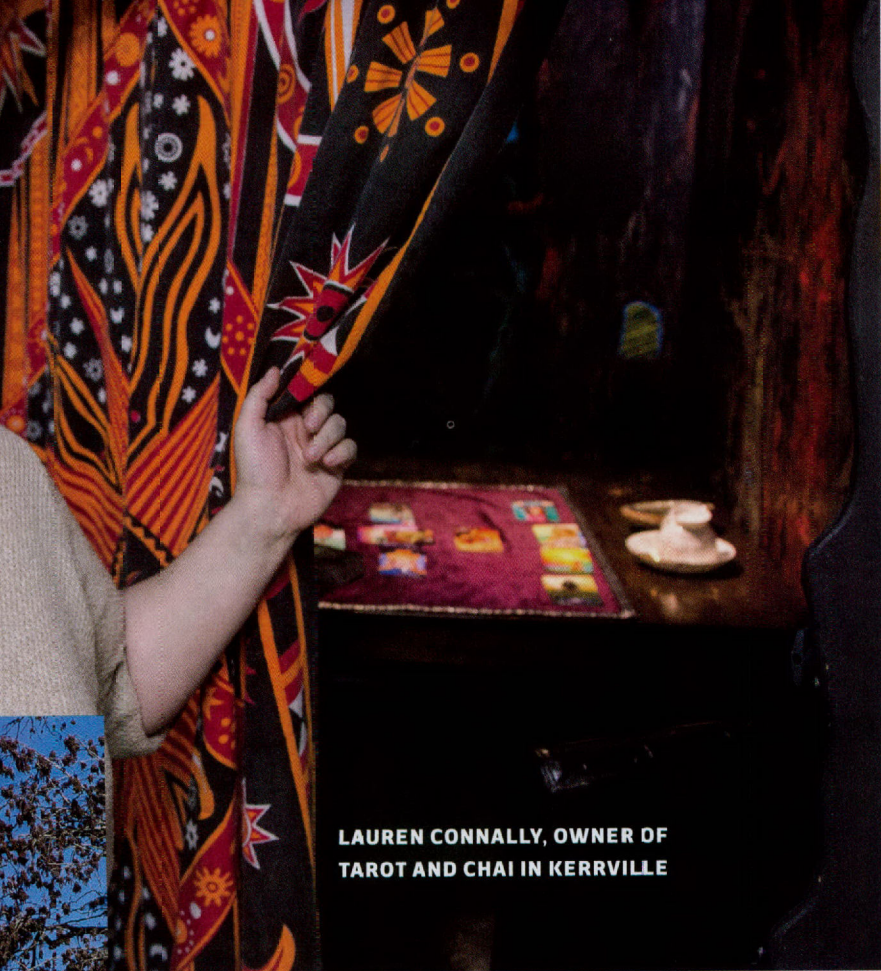
The Guadalupe River first attracted Western settlers to the Kerrville area in the mid-19th century, and the Guadalupe still anchors Kerrville's downtown of lovingly restored vintage buildings. "There's such a sense of community and serenity that comes with living in a small town like Kerrville," says Sue Schulse, a Houston transplant who opened Turtle Creek Olives and Vines with her husband, Dan Schulse, in 2019.

"It's wonderful to witness the sincerity in everyday interactions with folks here." Visitors will discover art, home décor, primo wine lists, and good food concentrated at the intersection of Water and Earl Garrett streets. Find paintings and sculptures at Rivers Edge Gallery; and exquisite china and crystal, plus antique jewelry and books, at Fitch Estate Sales. Ring the gold Champagne bell for instant service at Turtle Creek Olives and Vines—Schulse's tasting room serving vino, tapas, and charcuterie. On the patio at Grape Juice, soak up the sun while grazing on antelope nachos and wagyu burgers, then wash it all down with select wines and craft brews. For lodging, try the Western-themed Y.O. Ranch Hotel & Conference Center, starting at \$109 per night, or the Sleepy Side of Rails, a vacation rental next door to the downtown café Rails that starts at \$100 per night.

**Kerrville Visitor Center, 2108 Sidney Baker St., opens Mon–Fri 8:30 a.m.–5 p.m. and weekends for reduced hours.**

**800-221-7958; kerrvilletexascvb.com**





**LAUREN CONNALLY, OWNER OF  
TAROT AND CHAI IN KERRVILLE**

## HIDDEN SPOT: MASON

Like its famous cousin, Fredericksburg, Mason boasts 19th-century German heritage, quaint shops to explore, and interesting wine bars for downtime. But in this burg of fewer than 2,500 residents, parking spaces abound, dinner reservations aren't required, and vintners linger to chat during your tasting. Native cinnamon-colored sandstone characterizes many of the town's historic buildings and old ranching houses, as well as the 1851 military fort that gives Mason its name. Limestone architecture is also prevalent, including the Mason County Courthouse, which is now being reconstructed after a fire destroyed the building in early 2021. Residents appreciate the simple joys of community and neighborly support that abound in small-town life: "It's so much about neighbors helping neighbors with fundraisers and outreach," says Pat Hrdlicka, who runs a reservation service for local lodgings. "Mason is a town with heart." Overlooking the courthouse, Mason Square Hotel offers boutique lodging (starting at \$89) and easy access to its next-door neighbor, Murphy Creek Cellars. The latter boasts a wine list of over 130 Texas wines. A few doors down, Square Plate is a storefront café dishing up schnitzel, pot roast, and meatloaf, with terrific carrot cake for dessert. On the square's west side, Market Square offers birdbaths for the garden, stoneware plates for the dining table, and candle-making kits—along with dry-cleaning pick-up and drop-off. Next door, the refurbished 1928-era Odeon Theater shows first-run flicks on weekends and classic films on the third Wednesday of each month. Though tickets cost only \$4, the Odeon is rarely crowded. With places like Mason around the next bend, there's always more to explore hidden among the verdant Hill Country horizons.

**Mason County Chamber of Commerce and Visitor Center, 108 Fort McKavitt St., opens Mon-Fri 8 a.m.-3 p.m. 325-347-5758; [masontxccc.com](http://masontxccc.com)**



**DILLON ESTES, PITMASTER AT  
COOPER'S ORIGINAL PIT BAR-B-Q IN MASON**

# Family Ties

**IDYLIC VACATIONS ARE THE NORM IN THE  
PICTURESQUE TEXAS HILL COUNTRY**





ALBERT, TX  
EST. 1892  
ICEHOUSE & DANCEHALL

STAGE  
DANCE  
Ice House  
and Dance Hall

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MELANIE GRIZZEL

# Contentment comes easier

in the right environment. For families, that ideal setting is often far from home and its many obligations. Flashes of joy might strike, for example, when your 12-year-old builds a fort in the middle of your vacation rental, and he's so enamored by his creation that he asks you to crawl inside with him. Or, when at a Hill Country cabin, your animal-loving 5-year-old daughter's eyes widen with awe as she feeds a goat for the first time. Or, when the teenagers laugh with their dads by the firepit, s'mores in hand instead of cell phones. Or, when your 10-year-old, after a weekend by the Frio River, says, "Mom, can we stay longer?"

That's the beauty of a family weekend away, when schedules and to-do lists fade so what really matters can float to the surface. In late winter, my family and two others set out in pursuit of these simple moments of joy. We escape to rentals in the Hill Country—our children outfitted with Polaroid and disposable cameras—where we take in big Texas sunsets over limestone ridges, watch hawks catch thermals in the wide-open skies, play freely, and just be.

The Lynch family—Tisha, Brandon, and their children, Thomas, 10, and Renee, 5—retreat to a rustic cabin near Uvalde where farm animals make up for the lack of cell service. "We really needed to unplug," says Tisha, a financial analyst. "When you have small kids there is this constant pressure, always thinking about everything that needs to be done. There's something so nice about just getting away for a weekend and saying, 'Let's let go of all this structure and really just breathe and exhale and not worry so much.'"

Meanwhile, my own family heads to Albert House, a modern Scandinavian-inspired vacation rental near Fredericksburg, where we bunk with the Young family, close friends since our now 16-year-old daughters were in preschool together. For us, sharing a house translates to a jumble of wholesome amusements: kids of all ages playing monkey-in-the-middle on the trampoline, a paella-making party in the kitchen, a convergence in the hot tub while the golden retriever runs off with somebody's socks. It also means the youngest, 7-year-old Knox Young, can serenade the teenagers with his favorite song, "It's Raining Tacos," and they actually listen. Along for the fun is our exchange student from Spain, Marina Salaverría, who wants to see some real cowboys and country dancing at Albert Dance Hall, just down the road from our rental.

Sometimes, it only takes a weekend away for a different kind of magic to emerge. The open spaces and free time bring out the best in us. It's not that we don't love home, but out here without all the busyness and distractions, we get a good dose of what we all need most—quality time together. —Clayton Maxwell



## OPENING SPREAD, CLOCKWISE FROM

**CENTER:** Exploring Albert Dance Hall; Knox Young takes a self-portrait; Knox and sister Ari Young with golden retriever, George.

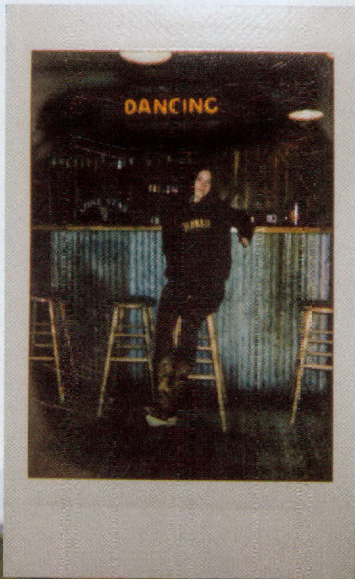
## THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP

**LEFT:** Writer Clayton Maxwell; Clayton and Marina Salaverría; Edwin Young with Marina toasting her first s'more; Clayton's son, Harry Sloan, and Knox play cornhole; group hangout in the hot tub.









## The Albert House

SLEEPS 10

7 BEDS

STONEWALL

STARTS AT \$599/NIGHT

[VRBO.COM/2627047](https://www.vrbo.com/2627047)

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:**

Marina shows off her first pair of cowboy boots; Harry spins Knox on the trampoline; Ari and Knox relax in the hot tub; Knox hams it up; approaching Albert Dance Hall; Harry splashes everyone with a cold pool plunge.



# The Chimney House on the River

SLEEPS 4

3 BEDS

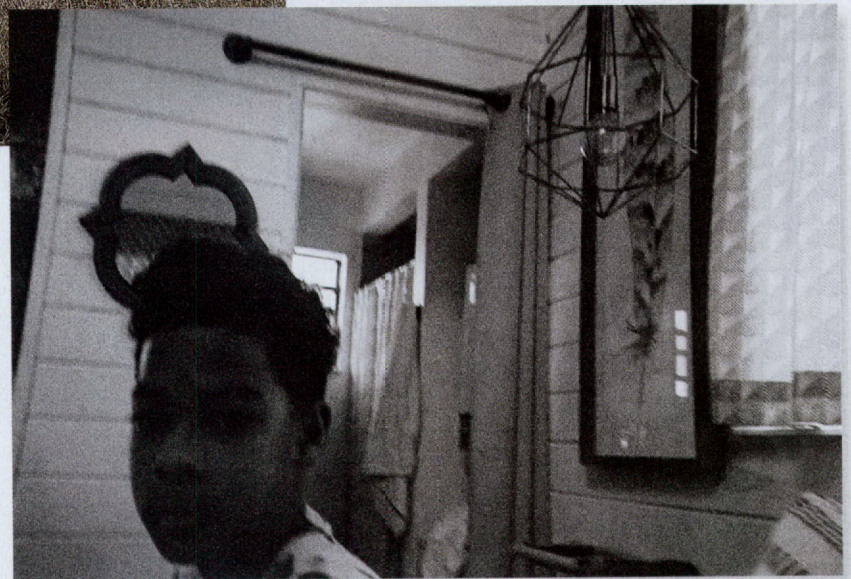
UVALDE

STARTS AT \$172/NIGHT

[AIRBNB.COM/](https://www.airbnb.com/rooms/46334369)

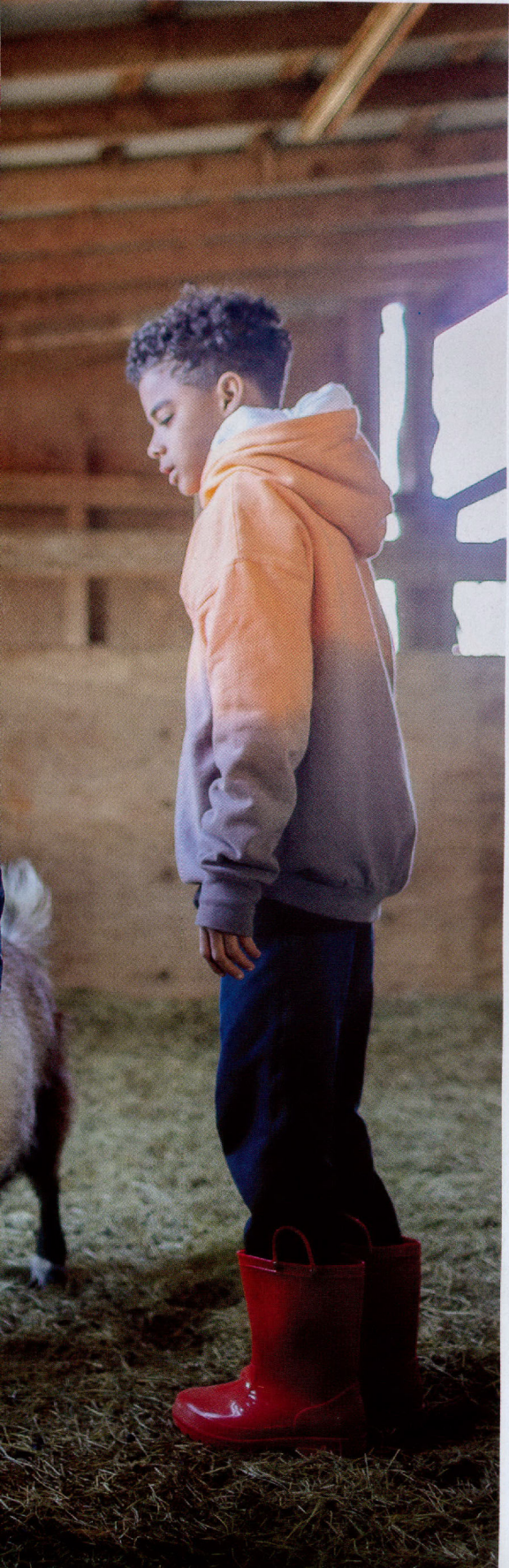
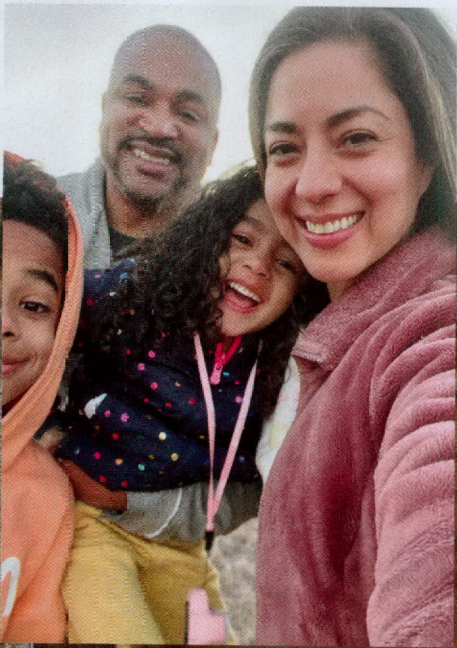
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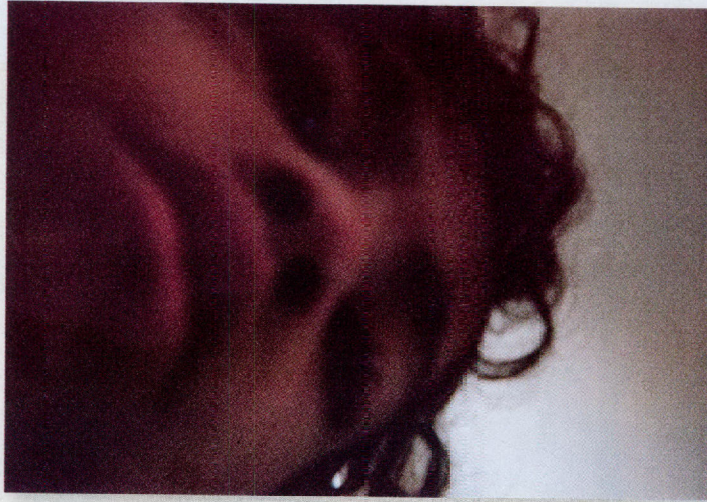
**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:**

Brandon Lynch and daughter Renee Lynch hike from the Dry Frio River to the house; Thomas Lynch jumps from the loft ladder; Thomas in a thoughtful moment; cinnamon rolls for breakfast; Renee crushes rocks outside of the Airbnb.





**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** A family selfie; Brandon, Tisha Lynch, and Renee enjoy the fire pit at dusk; Thomas plays with remote-control cars; Tisha and Renee examine the landscape; Renee feeds a goat.



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** Thomas snaps a selfie; Brandon teaches the secret to perfectly roasted marshmallows; Brandon and Thomas repair remote-control cars; Thomas and Renee begrudgingly pose for a shot in the loft; the Lynch family takes in the sunset. 🐾









# A RIPPLE IN STILL WATER

AN EXTENDED FAMILY PEELS  
BACK THE LAYERS OF ONION  
CREEK—AND THEMSELVES

BY IAN DILLE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY THERESA DIMENNO

# THE PROMISE OF AN OASIS

led us here beneath Interstate 35, where the Old San Antonio Greenbelt borders the edge of Onion Creek. It was Easter weekend in 2020, but we weren't gathering. A month into the pandemic, still unsure how to interact safely, we sought spaces mostly absent of humans.

I guided our old minivan under the freeway overpass, and we rumbled down toward the creekbed. My two kids—my son, August, and daughter, Lyla, then 6 and 3—looked bewildered in the backseats. *Where's dad taking us this time?* The concrete stanchions supporting the tall interstate bridge make an apt canvas for graffiti artists. But I'd done my due diligence researching Onion Creek, among the longest in the state and one of the most environmentally sensitive waterways in the Hill Country. I knew a potential paradise lay at the water's edge.

Walking closer, the gurgling creek eventually drowned out the sound of the vehicles overhead. From under the shadow of the overpass, we emerged onto an expansive limestone plateau, bleached white by the blazing sun. August spread his arms wide and ran toward the clear, cool water. I breathed deeply and took in the scene: cypress trees mirrored by still pools, herons plucking fish from gentle rapids, wispy clouds high in the sky.

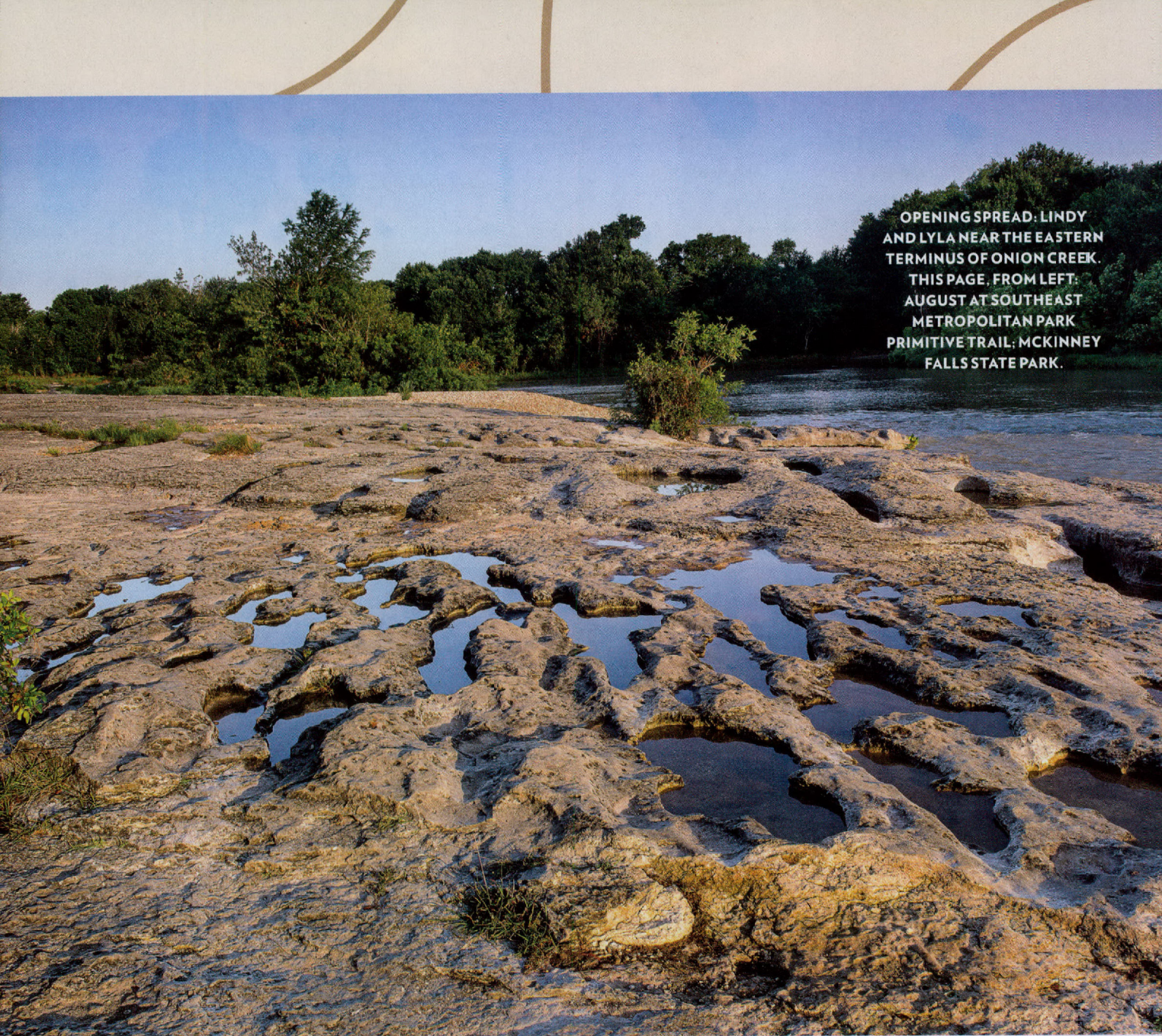
Onion Creek wasn't our first option for a retreat. Like a lot of families forced outdoors during the pandemic, my wife, Lindy, and I initially gravitated toward Austin's revered waterways. Barton Creek and Bull Creek, with their sculpted swimming holes and picture-perfect waterfalls, are most often associated with the capital city. But those green spaces quickly became overrun. We'd set up camp on a rocky beach at Bull Creek and not long after the kids had waded into the water, the 20-somethings would arrive. You'd see one crashing down the bank with a hibachi grill, waving to his friends who toted Bluetooth speakers and beer-pong tables: "Guys, over here!" Eventually the city closed the greenbelts, citing the crowds.

We sought out lesser-known spaces to splash and explore, like Blunn Creek in Travis Heights and Country Club Creek in southeast Austin. The kids would arm themselves with



nets and buckets, intent on capturing new friends. Each creek earned a nickname: Crawfish Alley and Fish Creek, then not long after the tadpole spawn, Frog Creek, Toad Creek, and Frog Creek Jr. But Onion Creek, above all others, became our sanctuary during the pandemic. And for one member of our family, it provided salvation.

**Traveling 79 miles from its headwaters** near Johnson City, Onion Creek cuts a wide, lumpy valley through the Hill Country southwest of Austin. The 20 creek miles east of Dripping Springs are some of the Hill Country's most ecologically important. Along this stretch, fissures in the limestone recharge as much as 40% of the water in the Barton Springs segment of the Edwards Aquifer. At the wide mouth of Antioch Cave, near Buda, the waters of Onion Creek form a whirlpool as they're sucked



**OPENING SPREAD: LINDY AND LYLA NEAR THE EASTERN TERMINUS OF ONION CREEK. THIS PAGE, FROM LEFT: AUGUST AT SOUTHEAST METROPOLITAN PARK PRIMITIVE TRAIL; MCKINNEY FALLS STATE PARK.**

down into the earth.

While few parks exist along this first half of Onion Creek, a variety of businesses offer access. You can dine at the upscale Tillie's Café, sleep at Sage Hill Inn & Spa, enjoy live music at Buck's Backyard, and sip cider at the Texas Keeper taproom. The YMCA's Camp Moody, just downstream from Buda, is "an educational tool, as well as place for recreation," according to Director Bret Kiester. Each summer, nearly 400 daytime campers swim, fish, and kayak in the creek while helping test the creek's water quality. "They learn about watersheds, point-source pollution versus nonpoint-source pollution, and do creek clean-ups," Kiester said. Camp Moody's staff uses Onion Creek and the bordering 85 acres as an entry point to wildlife ecologist Aldo Leopold's theories on the land ethic and our collective responsibility to the natural world.

From Buda, Onion Creek flows along the southern edge of Austin to its terminus at the Colorado River in the Blackland Prairie east of Longhorn Dam. This section of Onion Creek is shaded by a tall tree canopy and lined by more than a half-dozen city, county, and state parks: Onion Creek Park, McKinney Falls, Richard Moya, and Barkley Meadows, among others.

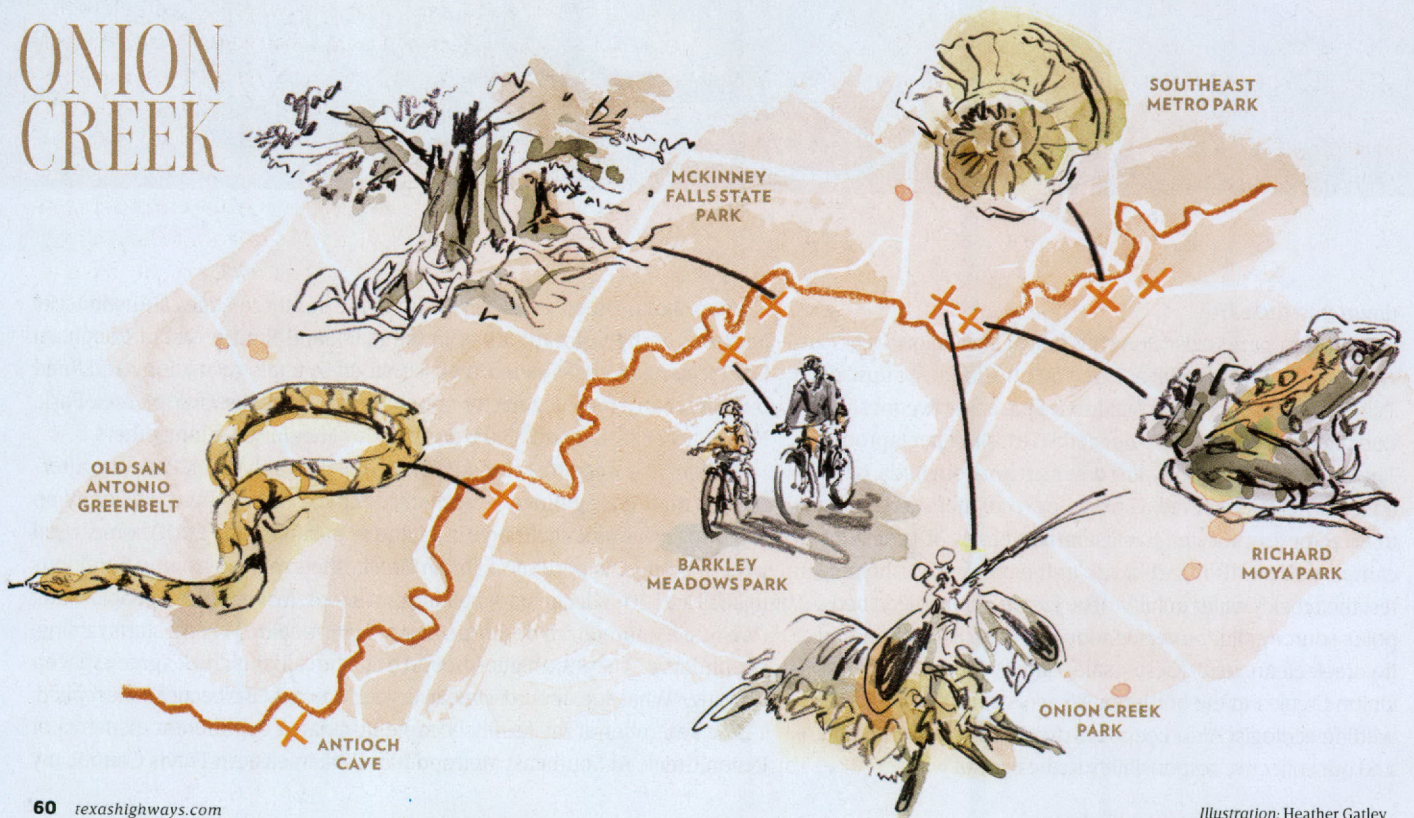
Walking the wooded, crushed granite trail in Onion Creek Park one afternoon, I met Ana Aguirre, a community activist whose three kids grew up exploring creek greenbelts here in southeast Austin. Nearly 1,000 homes used to exist along this portion of Onion Creek, she explained to me. But floods in 2013 and 2015 decimated the neighborhoods, leaving seven people dead. "We're still traumatized by those storms," Aguirre said. "When it starts raining, people leave." They find higher ground. Still, she calls this creek's green space a blessing. "What does the creek mean to you?" I asked. "Barbecues!" she replied.

Each member of my family became fascinated by different elements of Onion Creek. At Southeast Metropolitan Park in eastern Travis County, my



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: A GREAT EGRET; A TEXAS SPINY SOFTSHELL TURTLE; LYLA, THE AUTHOR, AND ROB, AND ROB.

# ONION CREEK





WHEN Lyla held up a handful of calcified snails, dating to when dinosaurs roamed the earth, we got a little glimpse of our insignificance amid the immensity of the universe.

lower a palm full of earwigs and beetles into the tank, and the toad would hop over, extend its sticky tongue, and snap the insects from his hand. Big Toader, the name our family's pandemic pet grew into, now occupies privileged space in our living room. At night, as my wife and I watch Netflix, Big Toader sometimes emits a low, seemingly satisfied croak.

**My wife's brother, Rob, first came** to Onion Creek with us in May of 2020, not long after moving into our home. A professional bassist who'd grown weary of playing wedding gigs, he'd recently been dumped by his longtime girlfriend. Amid the pain, he finally confronted his addiction to alcohol. He entered a rehabilitative center just as the pandemic set in and, six weeks later, reemerged into a silent world. He needed work, and we needed childcare. But Rob wasn't sure if he could like kids.

Lyla didn't give him much choice. She called him "Aunt Rob" (hey, she was 3) and demanded his attention. On that initial trip, we took Rob back under I-35. It was a Sunday morning, and a few other cars were parked below the bridge. Another extended family had gotten there before us and had just finished fishing in Onion Creek. As the family's kids played in a small pool, the men gutted their catch. They threw the fish entrails into the creek and let them wash downstream.

Lyla took off down the stone bank of the creek, and Rob followed. A gentle giant—6 feet, 5 inches, with long, strong fingers—Rob reached down and took Lyla's tiny hand in his. As they walked along the slick limestone creekbed, Rob motioned to me, smiling: "Take a picture." The next day, in his Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, he would share his visit to Onion Creek with the group. He explained how it awakened him to the possibilities of a world without booze. Prior to his recovery, he'd need a beer or five to start a day early, lest he find himself dry heaving from withdrawal. In sobriety, he experienced a child's wonder: August, discovering a translucent blue crawfish beneath a wide, smooth stone; Lyla, laying out to dry, unperturbed by a half-dozen sparkling dragonflies resting on her outstretched arms.

Soon, Rob was watching the kids full time. The summer sun came, but public pools remained closed. So, he would pack snacks, swim gear, and fishing tackle, then begin debating August and Lyla about the destination of their daily

wife and daughter hunted for fossils below a 100-foot cliff wall. With each rain, the cliff's clay-based soil erodes, revealing cretaceous-era treasures that tumble into Onion Creek. Lyla developed a keen eye. In unicorn-themed water shoes and a frilly swimsuit bottom, she'd reach down into the rocky creek and reveal an *Exogyra texana*, an ancient oyster the size of a melon and 60 million years old. She wasn't the creek's first amateur archeologist. In the 1930s, geology students from the University of Texas unearthed an ancient sea monster, the Onion Creek Mosasaur, now displayed in the Texas Memorial Museum in Austin. My family's discoveries weren't museum-worthy, but they still left us spellbound. When Lyla held up a handful of calcified snails, dating to when dinosaurs roamed the earth, we got a little glimpse of our insignificance amid the immensity of the universe.

August's obsession with Onion Creek revolved around living things. Quick with his net, he studied minnows and baby fry fish, lizards, turtles, and insects. A previously unknown-to-us species, the mantis shrimp, lived up to its nickname, the "thumb splitter," derived from its powerful mandibles. We henceforth left it undisturbed. Snakes, as well, got a pass. Though I don't endorse removing anything other than trash from Onion Creek, I do confess we allowed August to bring home a thumbnail-size Gulf Coast toad from Richard Moya Park. Initially, the toad was to stay at our home just a day or two, but August's affection for the amphibian proved compelling. We acquired a 10-gallon tank, and August researched toad habitats on YouTube. He'd

creek outing. An avid bass fisherman, Rob trained the kids in the art of casting. At 3, Lyla could cast, hook, and reel in sunfish without assistance. August sought largemouths, and he quickly graduated from live worms to artificial lures. My heart burst as I watched him wait for a timid creek bass to take a plastic worm, calmly tighten the line, and firmly set the hook.

Rob, too, gained invaluable skills. He deeply feared wiping a child's bottom. But inevitably Lyla had a bowel movement, and Rob's mind was opened to what he could accomplish. As happens when caring for kids, at times Rob experienced moments of anger and frustration, of being overwhelmed. But he reached for a lesson from AA—to pause. The kids came to respect Rob. When August started virtual first grade in the fall, Rob facilitated the online classes and assignments. To our collective amazement, August learned to read, add, and subtract. When August eventually went back to school in-person, Rob focused on a new career. He said he wanted to continue working with kids as a bass guitar instructor.

Rob explained to me that during his time in Onion Creek he'd come to see his addictive tendencies as being rooted in human selfishness. In nature, in education, he'd found a spiritually higher purpose. He's been sober for more than two years now.

**One tip for enjoying Onion Creek** is maintaining a cognitive dissonance to the pollutants that can accumulate there. Though the creek is regularly tested by city of Austin officials and deemed safe for swimming, it can become contaminated with debris and chemicals from roadways and golf courses during heavy rains. We often reminded August and Lyla not to play with bottles, cans, plastic bags, clothing, and other trash that sometimes litter the green space.

The abuse Onion Creek endures can sour its beauty. We often wondered about the future of Onion Creek, whether our kids' kids would fish and swim in McKinney Falls State Park. An answer may come as the result of a case currently making its way through the Texas court system.

In 2015, the city of Dripping Springs applied for and received a wastewater permit allowing for the daily discharge of up to 882,500 gallons of treated sewage into Onion Creek. If utilized at maximum capacity, treated sewage could comprise 90% of the water in Onion Creek. When released into waterways, phosphorus and nitrogen within liquid waste dissolve oxygen levels. Fish and other aquatic life die. Stinky, gunky algae thrive. It's not a family-friendly scene.

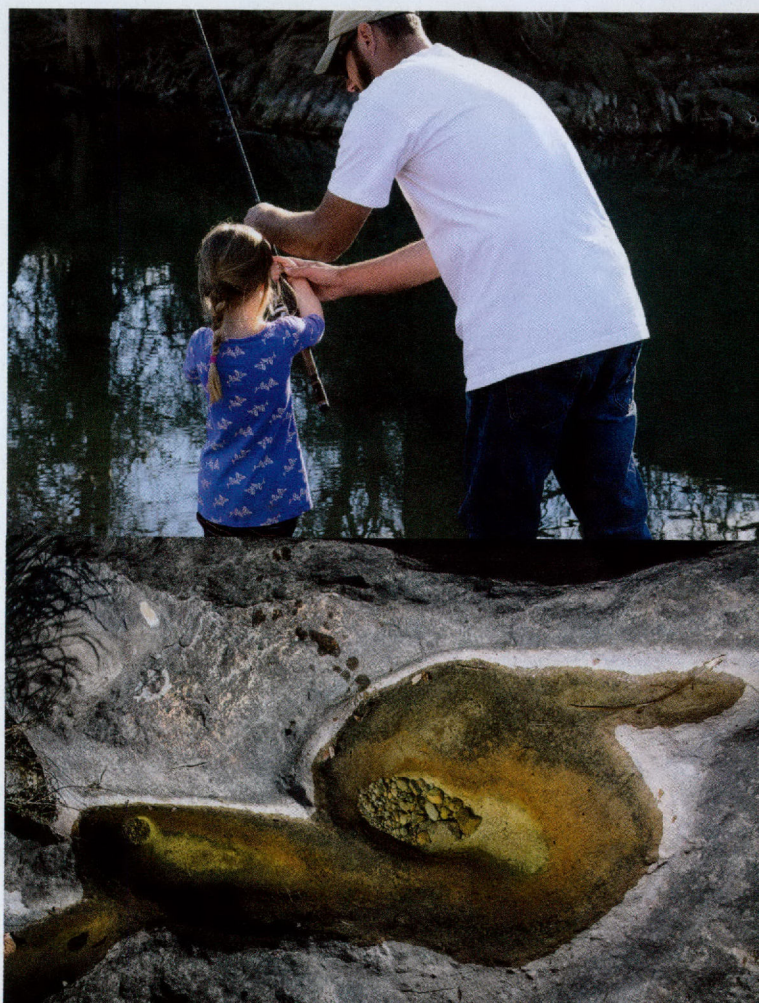
The wastewater would also threaten the water quality in the Barton Springs section of the Edwards Aquifer, which Onion Creek recharges. This led the environmental non-profit, Save Our Springs Alliance, to sue the city of Dripping Springs, aiming to strike down the permit. Kelly Davis, an attorney who represented the SOS Alliance, argued the

discharge of wastewater into Onion Creek violated the Federal Clean Water Act, a law created to protect pristine waterways. In 2020, a Texas District Court judge ruled in favor of the SOS Alliance, but Dripping Springs appealed.

"Will the city of Dripping Springs discharge effluent into Onion Creek?" I asked Bill Foulds, the mayor of Dripping Springs. "No," he said, emphatically. Foulds explained the steps the city is taking to mitigate the need to use the discharge permit: an agreement with the Driftwood Golf Course to pipe as much as 1 million gallons of treated wastewater per day from Dripping Springs for irrigation use and the construction of at least two retention ponds to hold a minimum of 25 million gallons of treated wastewater. Foulds said the city intends to eventually treat its wastewater to drinking-quality standards, as other Texas cities have done. His sincerity echoed that of Dripping Springs residents, who he said were becoming more environmentally conscious.

"There's an equity component to this, too," Davis offered, referring to the low-income, predominantly Hispanic neighborhoods like Aguirre's in southeast Austin along Onion Creek. "We don't want to think that our more well-to-do Dripping Springs neighbors are fouling that water up. It's like something from the 1800s, dumping sewage in the creek for those downstream to deal with."

It's possible this case could go to the Texas Supreme Court, Davis said.





In 2021, the Texas House passed the “Pristine Streams” bill (HB 4146), which would limit discharge into streams such as Onion Creek. However, the bill was never assigned to the Senate.

The environmental uncertainty weighed on me as the pandemic waxed and waned, even as we visited Onion Creek less as life became more normal. Then, just after this past Christmas, I contracted COVID. The rest of the family tested negative. We followed CDC guidance, and I isolated in my bedroom, fully vaccinated. I had a stuffy nose, a sore throat, and a lot of FOMO. As I lay there in bed sulking, my phone pinged with pictures from my wife.

She and the kids were at Barkley Meadows Park, down in Onion Creek. Lyla, nearly 5, gave the camera a “Who, me?” look, her shoes and pants sopping wet. “Someone fell in,” my wife wrote. August, now 8, knelt beside a wall of creek stones. He was constructing a castle, complete with mortar.

I made the pictures full screen and pinched them to zoom in and scroll around. I started to feel a little better. Whatever this crazy world throws at us, I thought, we’ll always have our memories of life in the creek. 🐸

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**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:  
ROB TEACHES Lyla HOW  
TO USE A SPINNING REEL;  
A CREEKBED IN THE OLD  
SAN ANTONIO GREENBELT;  
A MICROHABITAT IN THE  
GREENBELT.**

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**Pictured: Scott Catalena of Catalena Hatters**

# PLATES



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salumi and cheese  
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**BUFFALO MILK**  
is made into a variety of rich cheeses at OroBianco.

# Cream of the Crop

OroBianco brings the Italian tradition of water buffalo dairy to Blanco

By Laurel Miller

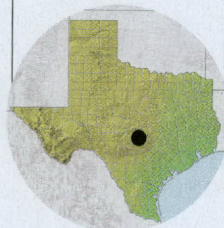
**T**exas' only water buffalo dairy was conceived, perhaps unsurprisingly, after a few drinks. In 2017, Phil Giglio was at a bar, dreaming of leaving his corporate law job in Chicago to craft artisan water buffalo cheese—a Southern Italian staple originating in Campania, where Giglio's family is from.

"Buffalo is known as 'the queen of milks,'" Giglio says. The milk's high protein and butterfat content make it efficient for cheesemaking. Particularly when it comes to fresh and soft cheeses, buffalo milk typically yields more cheese than cow or goat milk.

Two years later, the dream that started out scrawled on a cocktail napkin became reality. After moving to Texas from Chicago, Giglio reached out to Peeler Farms in

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Floresville to form a partnership after learning rancher Jason Peeler kept several water buffalo. "I'd acquired them from an acquaintance and was struggling to find a use for them," Peeler says. "It was kind of like getting stuck with a kid's Shetland pony."

Over the next three years, Giglio worked on obtaining the necessary permits and overseeing recipe development while Peeler established a top-bloodline water buffalo herd and built a milking parlor. In March 2021, Giglio opened OroBianco Italian Creamery in Blanco. The retail shop sells the company's farmstead salumi, gelato, cheese, and other buffalo milk products,

**“The Blanco location is a merger of small-town Texas and the Italian concept of slow food.”**

most of which contain ingredients sourced from the Hill Country.

“We’re very much a Hill Country company,” Giglio says. “The Blanco location is a merger of small-town Texas and the Italian concept of slow food.”

Giglio was raised on a New York farm that once belonged to his great-grandfather. In his 20s, he moved to southern Italy, which helped shape his culinary philosophy. Living in Praiano, a fishing village on the Amalfi Coast, he reveled in Italy’s relaxed food culture and *caseifici*, cheese shops peddling local offerings.

“It was probably the most pleasant period of my life, and anything that reminds me of that experience—the scent of lemons, buffalo cheese—has my heart,” he says. “I have such a connection to those things and knew that I wanted to find my way back to being around agriculture.”

Initially, Giglio planned to only produce a localized version of Campania’s famed mozzarella di bufala, and the fresh cheese’s short shelf life necessitated a proximate customer base. He chose Blanco for its burgeoning food and drink landscape, which includes Milam & Greene Whiskey, Texas Cannon Brewing Company, and Real Ale Brewing Co. and Real Spirits Distilling Company.

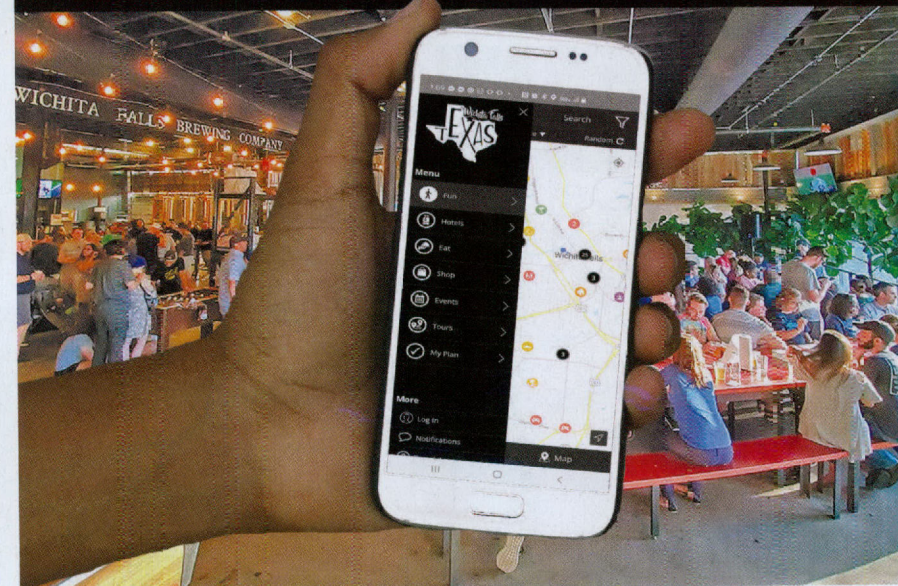
Many of OroBianco’s products, including the duck eggs used in the decadent citrus crema gelato, are derived from animals raised on Peeler’s and Giglio’s ranches. “Farmstead food production offers the ultimate quality control,” says OroBianco partner and head cheesemaker, Adam Thompson, who has his own herd of goats.

Land stewardship is equally imperative: The 200 head of water buffalo graze on rotational pastures (supplemented by seasonal forage), as do the wagyu cattle



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## Where the Buffalo Roam

Water buffalo are native to China and South and southeast Asia, where they assisted with rice cultivation because their broad hooves keep them from sinking into marshy soil. While wild numbers are in decline, two domestic subspecies—river and swamp water buffaloes—are commonly used for labor, meat, milk, and hide. Water buffalo were first introduced to southern Italy in the second century. Today, buffalo milk, cheese, and other dairy products are made in various regions of Italy, as well as parts of Eastern Europe, South America, and Asia. The mild meat, which is similar to beef but higher in protein and lower in cholesterol, is also popular.

that comprise the majority of Peeler's operation. "We're able to know what our milk and meat supply is like and scale accordingly, as well as what our livestock are eating and, most important, how they're treated," Giglio says. Buffalo require a water or mud supply in which to wallow, which allows them to cool off, prevent sunburn, and ward off insects. Sheep and Berkshire pigs also live in the pasture; the latter's diet is supplemented by the leftover whey from cheese and gelato production.

OroBianco acquired its first dairy water buffalo, with Italian genetics, from

established farms in Texarkana and New Jersey. Calves are separated from their mothers at one week old and bottle-fed milk replacer. "Hand-rearing the calves also makes for gentler, safer animals," Peeler says.

The 40 cows are milked once a day in the 17-stall milking parlor, and each animal yields approximately 5 liters of rich, creamy milk, which will in turn make 5 pounds of cheese.

"I'm throwing my goats under the bus," Thompson says, "but buffalo milk is like going from a Volkswagen to a Cadillac."



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** Peeler Farms' herd of water buffalo; OroBianco's Blanco storefront; goeey Lady Bird cheese.



Peeler admits he's still learning about water buffalo. "They're highly intelligent with very individual personalities and certain behavioral traits that differ from cattle," Peeler says. "For example, they bunch together when startled, instead of scattering the way cows do." Cattle can be picky eaters, but water buffalo are willing to ingest poor quality roughage "while still producing high quality milk," Peeler says.

For a farmstead dairy operation to be fully sustainable, it requires a purpose for retired cows and castrated calves, or steers. OroBianco's salumi program has made it possible for the company's products to come full circle. "Because Phil's background isn't in ranching, my job has been to morph his vision into reality, so that we can produce a truly local food product," Peeler says.

Peeler's ranch has its own USDA-certified packing plant, where the steers

## "I'm throwing my goats under the bus, but buffalo milk is like going from a Volkswagen to a Cadillac."

are slaughtered between 18 and 20 months of age. The meat is then sent to The Salumeria in Austin, where owners Anthony Pedonesi and Gerardo Garcia turn it into private label products like coriander-spiced pork and water buffalo cacciatore, a flavorful "hunter's style" sausage; water buffalo-fig salami; and wagyu and water buffalo bresaola (air-dried, salted meat). "We absolutely love the buffalo," Pedonesi says. "It's a

beautiful, lean red meat, which is why we mix it with pork. But we're also big fans of OroBianco and Phil's vision. His ability to bring ideas to life is inspiring."

While the mozzarella was in development, Giglio decided to focus on gelato for the shop's opening. "I was making gelato all night and practicing law by day," he says. All of the components, like nut butters and marshmallows, are made in-house for seasonal specialties like Fredericksburg peach, strawberry-stracciatella, Rocky Road, and safflower-blood orange. "On hot days, there's a line out the door," he says.

Thompson oversees all things cheese. He's relocating his goat and sheep dairy from the Rio Grande Valley to Blanco. OroBianco's four signature buffalo offerings are the ricotta-like Blanco Fresco; Bufaletta, a creamy feta marinated in Texas Hill Country olive oil; Ladybird,

find a piece of your

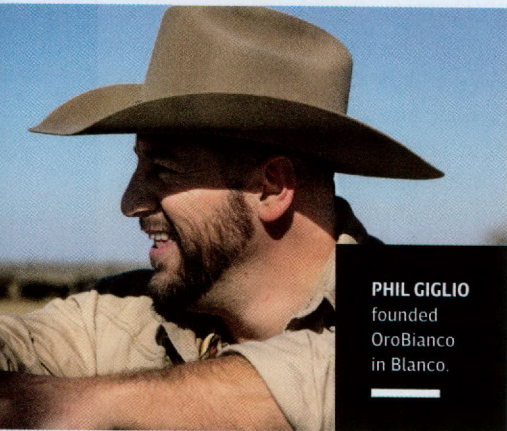
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**PHIL GIGLIO**  
founded  
OroBianco  
in Blanco.

**“Water buffalo are highly intelligent with very individual personalities.”**

a young bloomy-rind style inspired by Lombardy’s *robiola*; and Bluebonnet, a mild, fudgy blue. The latter has been a hit—a “gateway blue,” as Thompson calls it—with hints of earth and pepper. It pairs beautifully with jam and southern Italian red wines like Campania’s Aglianico, Thompson says.

Thompson also makes seasonal cheeses like buffalo *scamorza*, which in southern Italy is made with cow’s milk and smoked using straw. He collaborated with OroBianco’s retail manager and former pitmaster Dan Wright, who smokes the dense orbs of cheese over mesquite. “We’re trying to pull from southern Italy aspects that make sense in Texas,” Giglio says.

The newest addition to OroBianco’s lineup is a coffee bar located in the shop, where customers can request buffalo instead of cow’s milk. A stand-out is the thick, ultra-rich drinking chocolate. The single-origin chocolate, which variously comes from Indonesia, Madagascar, and

Vietnam, is also used in exquisite chocolate bars made in-house—the cacao beans are roasted, pulverized, and combined with dried buffalo milk.

Two retail shops will open later this year, one in Stonewall and one in Fredericksburg. The latter features a 13-seat salumi bar so customers can have an in-depth experience with the food. That experience “fosters an understanding of the true cost of agriculture and the care that goes into every step of this business,” Giglio says. “Seeing an objectively crazy idea like OroBianco come to fruition—the reception has been better than I could ever have anticipated.”

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# A Toast to History

Jester King alumni create their own territory of terroir in the Hill Country

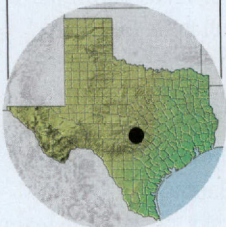
By Ruvani de Silva



**HISTORICAL**

accounts suggest alcohol was served at the site of the Nice N Easy building as far back as the 1870s.

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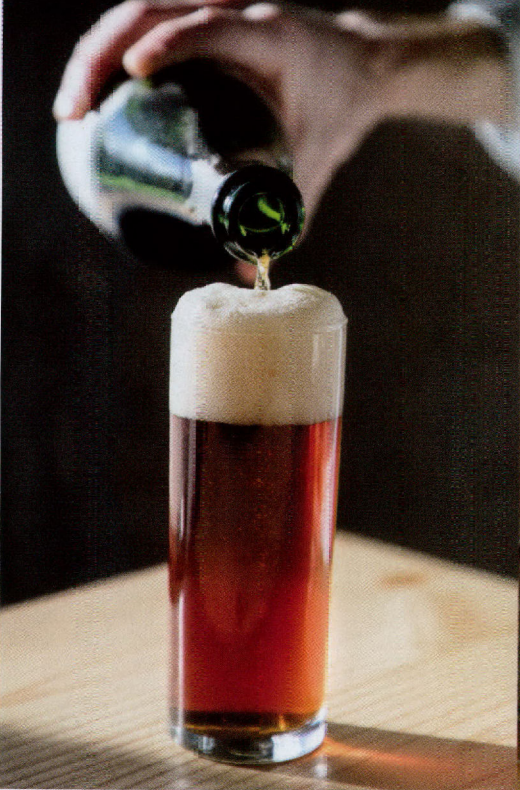


**G**unslingers weren't uncommon in the saloons of Johnson City in the early 1900s. "The realtors told us there were bullet holes, but we didn't believe them," says Garrett Crowell of Nice N Easy, a new taproom housed in one of the oldest buildings in Johnson City. "Then we took the mortar off and found that they were aiming high!"

Situated just off Johnson City's main square, the building is steeped in local legend. The current structure was built in 1917, and although tax records date the earliest liquor license on the site to 1908, there are rumors alcohol was served here as far back as the 1870s. "The stories depend on whom you ask or what you

read," Crowell says. "It was a rough part of Texas back then." There's even a tale of a 12-year-old LBJ and his friends tucking into "medicinal" wine on the premises during Prohibition.

Crowell and his partner, Adrienne Ballou, along with couple Margot and Matt Piper, bought their very own piece of Hill Country history in October 2020 and have spent over a year delicately restoring the place. They have been friends for almost a decade, having met via their roles at Jester King farmhouse brewery in Austin. Crowell was formerly head brewer, Ballou ran the fruit refermentation and barrel program, Matt was operations manager, and Margot volunteered. In 2015, Crowell and Ballou left the bustle of



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:**  
D'Hanis brick walls;  
Adrienne Ballou, Garrett  
Crowell, and Margot and  
Matt Piper; Yokefellow's  
Creekbeer saison.

Austin and moved to Johnson City, where Crowell created Yokefellow Brewing; and Ballou signed on as a winemaker at Southold Farm + Cellar and founded her own label, Lightsome Wines. They teamed with Matt and Margot, who works at an environmental nonprofit, to realize the idea of combining the pleasure of slower-paced living and sustainable, terroir-focused beer and wine production.

The quartet undertook their

renovations with care, determined to restore and preserve as many of the original features as possible. "It's been a process of undoing the Band-Aids and duct tape that have been holding the building together over the last 100 years," Matt says. Carefully peeling back layers of chipped plaster and rotten wood, the team have unveiled stunning original details, including repurposed pine shiplap and handmade terra cotta

architectural brick from D'Hanis Brick & Tile Company in San Antonio. Whether the Saltillo tile, the thin brick from Texas-based Elgin Butler, or Texas pecan slabs from Berdoll Sawmill in Cedar Creek, Nice N Easy's rehab emphasizes locally sourced materials that complement the building's original features.

"We worked off the color palette that was already here," Ballou says. "Earth, stone, red dirt, blue sky, pecan." The team

**The team calls the style “desert adjacent,” reflecting what Crowell describes as “the landscape’s long, slow transition zone from semiarid chaparral to arid desert that begins at the edge of the Hill Country.”**

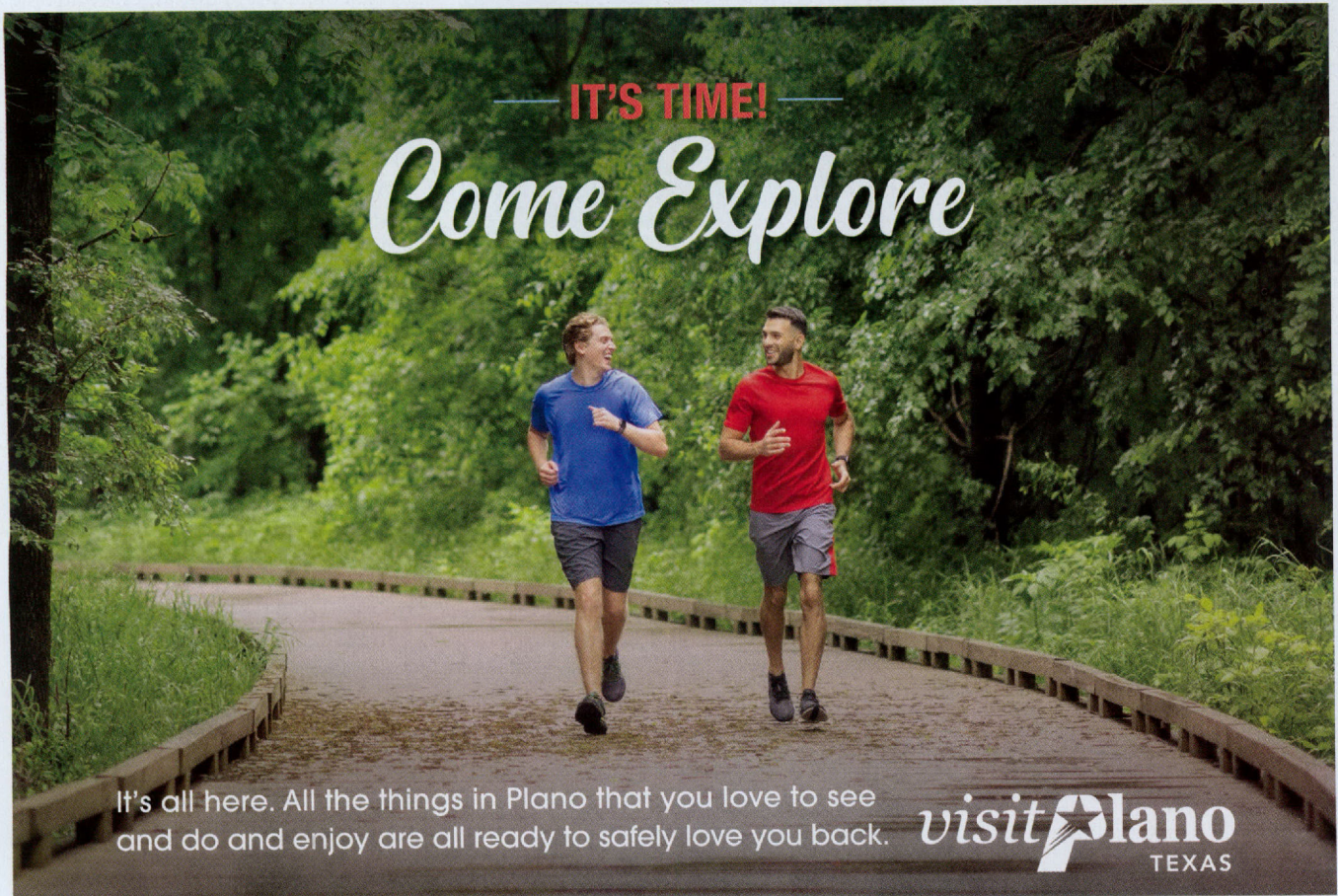
calls the style “desert adjacent,” reflecting what Crowell describes as “the landscape’s long, slow transition zone from semiarid chaparral to arid desert that begins at the edge of the Hill Country.” The result is a pared-down space with a charm both old and new.

A sense of place is at the heart of Nice N Easy. It’s apparent in Yokefellow and Lightsome’s rotating seasonal beverages. Crowell launched Yokefellow with the

goal of making “easy-drinking beers of companionship.” His sophisticated low-ABV lagers, saisons, and pale ales have found a niche in the crowded Central Texas beer market among discerning drinkers, many of whom have been eagerly awaiting a formal outlet for Crowell’s otherwise word-of-mouth offerings. Ballou founded Lightsome to showcase Texan-grown grapes including Mouvedre, Muscat Blanc, and Touriga

Nacional, filling a gap in the market for wine lovers seeking an authentic expression of terroir. With a food menu equally focused on simplicity, featuring feel-good favorites like chili dogs and Frito pie, visitors can kick back after a hike at Milton Reimers Ranch Park or Pedernales Falls State Park and taste the essence of the Hill Country.

“The community here is amazing and supportive,” says Ballou, recounting how Mark Smith, owner of Mark Smith Studio Gallery, taped encouraging notes to their door after each renovation. Smith is excited about Nice N Easy. “Their respect of the historic site and their handsome remodel are sensitive and well designed,” says Smith, who also helped the team taste test their recipes. “For months I watched them working so hard, often way into the night, and now I have my very own Cheers across the street.”



# TEXANA



**FREDERICKSBURG AND NORTHERN RAILROAD** employees ride a hand-powered cart into the tunnel, circa 1942.

## Tunnel Vision

Now home to bats, the 'Old Tunnel' recalls Fredericksburg's railroad dreams

By John Davidson

**O**ld Tunnel State Park sits on a brush-covered limestone ridge that divides the watersheds of the Guadalupe and Pedernales rivers, about halfway between Fredericksburg and Comfort. With only 16 acres and three picnic tables, the park is the smallest in the state system. Every evening from May through October, visitors perch on low wooden bleachers to watch 3 million Mexican free-tailed and cave myotis bats swarm out of the abandoned railroad tunnel, spiraling into the dusk above hills that march toward the horizon.

Near the bleachers, an unpaved trail descends a hillside to the tunnel entrance,

which looks like an ancient crypt in the limestone cliff. A sign warns visitors to stay out of the tunnel, but given the bat guano piled in the damp darkness, warnings probably aren't necessary. The tunnel recalls a time before railroads and highways sliced up the Hill Country. Until laborers hammered and blasted their way through 300 yards of limestone to build the tunnel in 1913, the people of Fredericksburg relied on ox-drawn freight wagons to deliver goods to and from San Antonio, a week's travel away. But times were changing fast.

"The railroad was the first true physical modernization of Fredericksburg," says Lacey LeBleu, a curator at the Gillespie County Historical Society. "It really connected the town to the larger world and was the first glimpse of not being so isolated. It brought Fredericksburg a little closer to the modern era and made it easier to bring in modern farming equipment, not to mention oil and gas."

As railroads stitched their way across Texas during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Fredericksburg's detachment nagged at civic leaders of the town, among the largest in the Hill Country. To do anything about it, however, railroad proponents had to get through that imposing limestone ridge known as the "Big Hill." Fredericksburg's campaign for rail began in the early 1880s. Local officials formed a committee to raise money and lobby railroad companies, says Hugh Hemphill, historian for the Texas Transportation Museum in San Antonio.

In 1886, the San Antonio & Aransas Pass Railway announced its plan to build a line into the Hill Country. Fredericksburg bid for inclusion, but after laying tracks to Comfort, just 20 miles south of Fredericksburg, the route instead veered west to Kerrville. Charles Schreiner, the influential merchant and owner of YO Ranch in Kerrville, lobbied

for his town, noting how difficult it would be to solve the problem of the Big Hill, according to an article by the late historian C.F. Eckhardt.

As it happened, just the year before, an unlikely person rolled into Fredericksburg—Temple Smith, a wealthy, educated Virginian. Smith “oozed charm and confidence,” according to a historical account in the *Fredericksburg Standard-Radio Post*. “His optimism could lift the spirits of an entire town.”

Smith had previously moved to the North Texas town of Anson to help his brother Frank, who had a dry goods store. The brothers started the first bank in Jones County. When a tornado leveled their building, they cleared off the remaining wood floor and gave a dance that lasted till dawn. Temple Smith was in San Antonio on business when he heard about Fredericksburg, a thriving German community that needed a bank.

Smith was an outsider, a man of the world, who quickly demonstrated he could get things done. He founded the Bank of Fredericksburg in 1887 and hired Alfred Giles to design it. An architect who moved to San Antonio from England when he was 20 years old, Giles designed multiple county courthouses in Texas and established a 13,000-acre ranch near Comfort, naming it Hillingdon after his family estate in England. The bank he designed still stands on Main Street—now the home of Headquarters Hats—as does the old county courthouse, now the Pioneer Memorial Library.

Smith’s arrival in Fredericksburg coincided with civic leaders’ desperation for a rail connection. He organized the Gillespie County Railroad Committee, which raised money and came up with

**“It was an unfeasible project, extraordinarily expensive, but they built it anyway.”**

Photo: Gillespie County Historical Society

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#### FREDERICKSBURG

celebrated the arrival of the first train with the Railroad Jubilee, held in November 1913.

numerous plans. Finally, more than 20 years later, in 1910, the committee hired Foster Crane, the engineer who built the Medina Dam 40 miles northwest of San Antonio, to begin work on a railroad linking Fredericksburg to San Antonio via a connection near Comfort.

As the track builders worked northward, their progress slowed at the Big Hill. A crew of 250 men, along with hundreds of oxen, mules, and horses, worked 12 hours a day, six days a week for six months to complete the 300-yard tunnel. The men earned 50 cents a day, or \$2 if they had a horse or mule, which meant the animal earned three times more than the man. Using blasting powder to break up the limestone, the crews removed 14,222 cubic yards of rubble from the site, Hemphill recounts.

On Aug. 26, 1913, the first train passed through the tunnel loaded with rails and ties to build tracks to Fredericksburg, and by the end of that October, Fredericksburg had a railroad. The town planned a huge celebration with a parade and speeches. Smith had the honor of driving the last spike. But the celebration was short-lived. The cost of tunnelling through the Big Hill had pushed the project over budget, driving the new railroad into receivership until it was reorga-

nized in 1917 as the Fredericksburg and Northern Railroad. Hemphill says.


The train made slim margins carrying passengers, the mail, agricultural products, and industrial supplies, such as pipelines for oil fields. "If you see a brick building in Fredericksburg, you know it was constructed after 1913," says Glen Treibs, a Fredericksburg historian. "Bricks, like tractors, were too heavy to be brought in on wagons."

While the railroad was an improvement over using mules to pull loads from the Comfort depot to Fredericksburg, practical problems plagued the line from the start. The train derailed frequently and rarely ran on time. San Antonio-bound passengers had to change trains in Comfort, which meant a four-hour wait at a depot there. The train had to stop each time it entered the tunnel so the flagman and brakeman could walk the tracks, carrying lanterns to check for stores that had fallen from above.

Smith died in 1926 at the age of 80, six years before his bank failed during the Great Depression. The railroad named a depot in his honor. Now a ghost town, Bankersmith is home to a dance hall and wedding venue near Grapetown. The railroad stumbled along for 29 years in total. Plans for a health resort named

Moun: Alamo with a hotel and golf course on top of the Big Hill—not far from where the state park is today—never got off the ground. Toward the end, discipline was so lax that crews would stop the train to shoot game or to fish in the creeks. The last train left Fredericksburg on July 29, 1942, and a week later, the tracks were pulled up, the steel and wood repurposed for the World War II effort.

The Germans in Fredericksburg were famously frugal and suspicious of outsiders. One has to wonder how they could have mismanaged such an important project. The Big Hill and the tunnel usually get the blame, but perhaps Smith and his contemporaries fell victim to tunnel vision. For decades they had been focused on getting a rail connection. Enthusiasm won out over logic, Hemphill reasons. "It was an unfeasible project, extraordinarily expensive, but they built it anyway," he says.

In retrospect, Fredericksburg may have been OK with no railroad. The year the train finally came to town, Henry Ford started building cars on an assembly line in Michigan. As governments got more involved in building roads, and automobiles improved by the year, the future of transportation was about to shift from railways to highways. 



## Old Tunnel State Park

The builders of the Fredericksburg and Northern Railroad couldn't have foreseen the 920-foot tunnel they blasted through a limestone hill would someday be home to millions of bats. Mexican free-tailed bats inhabit the tunnel annually during the summer months after wintering in Mexico. The size of the bat population fluctuates during the months of May through October, according to the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, because the tunnel houses a "pseudo-maternity" colony. Pregnant females use the tunnel, but pups are born elsewhere before returning as juveniles. The tunnel's bat population is largest in August and September.

Texas Parks & Wildlife acquired Old Tunnel State Park in 1991 to protect the bats. The park opens daily with free admission, but tickets are required to stay after 5 p.m. and see the bats emerge at dusk. The lower viewing area, which provides a close-up view, costs \$5 per person. The upper viewing area is further away and costs \$2 per person. Both tickets include an educational program. Tickets must be purchased in advance. [tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/old-tunnel](http://tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/old-tunnel)

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<b>D'Town BBQ Cook-Off</b>	<b>July 15-16</b>
<b>Cowboy Classic Rodeo</b>	<b>Aug. 19-20</b>
<b>Sunray Funday</b>	<b>Aug. 20</b>
<b>Texas Tumbleweed 100 Bike Ride</b>	<b>Sept. 17</b>
<b>Ears &amp; Beers Festival</b>	<b>Sept. 17</b>
<b>Museum Day</b>	<b>Sept. 24</b>
<b>Lions Club Arts &amp; Crafts Show</b>	<b>Oct. 1-2</b>
<b>Candy Cane Lane</b>	<b>Nov. 19</b>
<b>Sunray Lions Christmas Parade</b>	<b>Dec 5</b>



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## OPEN ROAD | ESSAY

continued from Page 19

of the small town—its sidewalks and shop windows adorned with turquoise and lavender metal roosters, pink and gold silk flowers, shiny blue pinwheels—stood in vivid contrast to the browns and greens of the surrounding landscape. And stood in even greater contrast against the dinosaur tracks and the millions of years that separate our infant species from their long-lived ones.

The span of time between the era of the dinosaurs and our current one is incomprehensible. Homo sapiens have been here for 300,000 years, our ancestors for 6 million. The dinosaurs that went extinct

In that span, we had moved twice, first to Texas, then from an apartment to our first house, both in Denton. I made the two moves, I planted a garden, I painted pictures and worked on my book, but I did it all outside of time. With her voice still warm in my ear, my hand continuously reaching for my phone to call her, how could I measure the time between any present moment and the last conversation I had with my mother? I could still hear her say my name, shortened and pronounced as only she did; hear her laughter as she related the most recent news in her community; hear the concern in her voice as she asked after our dog's health.

**I closed my eyes and saw it, the dark-hooded entity, straight out of a film, or a cartoon, yet present and palpable. During this past year it appeared regularly and glided down our hallways, passed through my dreams, kept vigil in the shadowy corner of my bedroom.**

65 million years ago roamed this planet for 165 million years, while the continents beneath them slowly drifted apart. Our relationship with time is one of the most intimate we have, inseparable from our experience of life, like breath, like water. We live dissolved in a solution of time. Time envelopes us, permeates our very human existence. Yet it is a slippery thing we can't grasp. The dinosaurs were. My mother was. I am. Yes, our measurement of time is bound to our experience on this planet, but whether measured in lunar or solar cycles, our clocks and calendars can't hold time. The shapeless, malleable thing expands and shrinks, speeds up and slows down, runs fluidly or dries up, much like the Paluxy River over the course of the year, which alternately exposes and covers its tracks.

Grief is full of infinite space, but it is timeless. Time continues to beat in the outer world, but within the mourner its meter is dulled. Because grief circumscribes all knowing and being, time relents, retreats. When during that first year did we make the trip to Glen Rose?

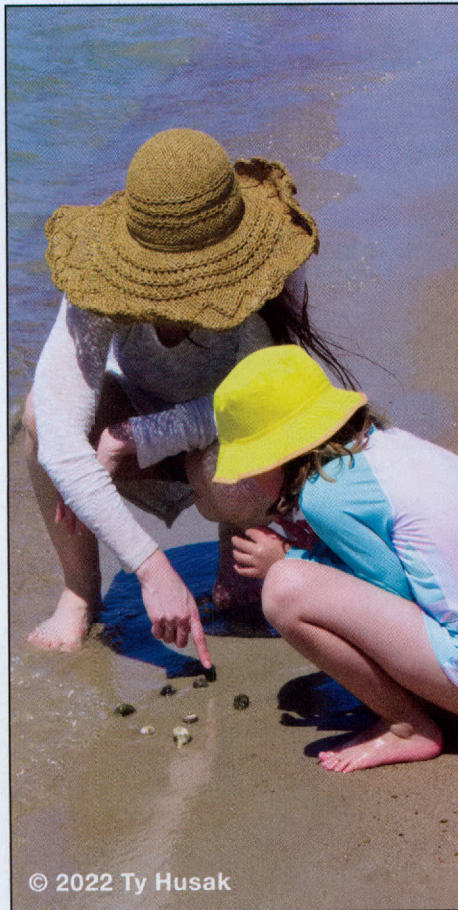
That year, I met my new home of Texas again and again, bumping into it softly, waking to it gently. I was raw and bruised, and each gentle tug let me know I was surrounded by kindness. It has been nearly eight years since my mother's passing and my move to Denton. She knew we were moving here, but she didn't live to see it happen. So, my eight years here have been motherless. But they have not lacked solace and warmth. There is something in the spirit of the state, a beautiful blend of courtesy, optimism, generosity, and pride—mirrored in its big sky and limitless landscape—that gave me the space I needed to fully grieve. Repeatedly, I was surprised by the genuine, easy kindness of Texans, from the antiques shop owner who let us bring home a pair of side tables to try out without asking for any collateral or ID; to the young jeweler and mother who invited me to her farm studio to make a pair of leather earrings and meet her family and their animals; to the neighbor one street over who returned a piece of misdelivered mail, and who has since become one of my dearest friends.



And one day I found myself able to return the warmth and lightness, happy to be among such people.

**I am familiar with death.** In making its rounds, it has often passed by my door. In late January of 2021, a year into the pandemic, in the midst of global grief, I found a tumor in my left breast. The old visitor had returned, this time entering to sit at my side, where I felt its breath on my cheek. I received the cancer diagnosis over the phone two days before the arrival of the big freeze that shut down the entire state. Time itself seemingly froze as appointments were canceled, test results lost, next steps, new doctors, uncertain. My partner and I spent our anniversary writing our wills and my advance directives while shivering under multiple blankets as we waited in frigid temperatures for the electricity to come back on. I closed my eyes and saw it, the dark-hooded entity, straight out of a film, or a cartoon, yet present and palpable. During this past year it appeared regularly and glided down our hallways, passed through my dreams, kept vigil in the shadowy corner of my bedroom.

I have just come out of the other side of a long and excruciating year of treatment, cancer-free but still suffering from the treatment's brutal assault on my body. Grateful is not a word that comes to mind often during cancer treatment, but I regularly felt grateful my journey took place here, in Texas. That at every turn I was surrounded by, and my pain cushioned by, tenderness and warmth, optimism and generosity. In midlife, life and death have met within me, my own body now a memento mori. What is time now? What have I left of it? I have moments that bloom like clusters of flowers, bright and vivid against a world that has shifted, globally and in my own life. Moments when I awake, as if from a terrible dream, to realize I made it through this past year. I made it through with strength and with grace. Moments with my partner and our dogs that linger, sweet and brimful. The dinosaurs were. I am. For a brief moment, I am. 🦕



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# Getaway to Galveston: IT'S ISLAND TIME

Whether you're a thrill-seeker, heritage buff, or beach bum, experience the charm of Galveston Island. Explore 32 miles of coast, then stroll through history in what was once known as the Wall Street of the South. It's a destination full of art, historic architecture, chic boutiques, ghost legends, and most of all – culinary inspirations for every craving. Galveston's waterfront restaurants prepare the freshest seafood caught just off the coast alongside Southern favorites and mouth-watering burgers. From there, discover the pyramids of Moody Gardens, the Galveston Island Historic Pleasure Pier and Schlitterbahn Galveston Island Waterpark. For those who want to spend the day on the Gulf, an abundance of waterways makes Galveston the ideal fishing location for top-rated deep-water sportfishing.

Find your family's next adventure on this Gulf Coast barrier island. To plan your getaway, head to [VisitGalveston.com](http://VisitGalveston.com) and be sure to order your FREE Destination Guide.



## The Tremont House

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

409.763.0300

Browse your favorite shops, grab ice cream at La King's, dine in one of the island's most popular restaurants or take in a show at The Grand 1894 Opera House — all this is just steps away from The Tremont House in Galveston.

The Tremont House, a boutique-style hotel located in the heart of The Strand Historic District, offers Galveston's only Rooftop Bar, the popular 1888 Toujouse Bar, and casual dining at Tremont Cafe. It's the perfect location for a romantic escape or girls' getaway with plenty to see and do within walking distance.

Remember, The Tremont House is in the heart of every downtown festival, so check the calendar for upcoming events on the island or monthly happenings, like Movie Night and Music Night on The Strand.

Guests enjoy an exceptional level of service and complimentary Wi-Fi at this top-rated TripAdvisor® hotel. Take advantage of their Book Ahead and Save 10% Rate. The hotel also offers discounts for AAA and AARP members.



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## San Luis Resort, Spa & Conference Center

[SanLuisResort.com](http://SanLuisResort.com)  
800.392.5937

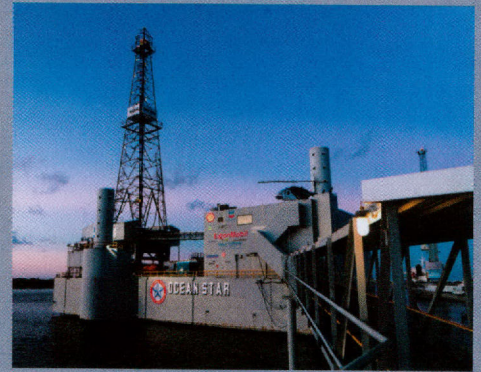
Your paradise awaits you at The San Luis Resort on Galveston Island. The opulent, 16-story hotel offers premier accommodations and amenities, breathtaking Gulf views, and unmatched personalized service. Guests can choose from an array of accommodations, including VIP floors, the elite "Club 10" and The Villas, five luxurious suites offering the relaxed charm of a secluded hideaway. Take time to relax and rejuvenate with top-shelf pampering at the Spa San Luis. Enjoy a stroll on the beach or soak up the sun with a cocktail at our trendy pool, The Cove. For added privacy, opt for a cabana, exclusively available for rental to overnight guests. In addition to sumptuous amenities, enjoy an endless variety of resort activities, events and entertainment perfect for couples, families and groups! For additional lodging on the resort, visit Hilton Galveston Island Resort and Holiday Inn Resort Galveston – On The Beach for an endless array of entertainment and activities fun for all ages.



## Galveston Island Historic Pleasure Pier

*Be adventurous at [PleasurePier.com](http://PleasurePier.com)*  
409.766.4950

Galveston Island Historic Pleasure Pier is a Gulf Coast destination featuring family-oriented attractions including 17 rides, midway games, waterfront dining and retail shops. From the extreme steel coaster, the Iron Shark to our 5D Theater Ride, kids of all ages will relish in the excitement.



## Ocean Star Offshore Drilling Rig & Museum

[OceanStarOEC.com](http://OceanStarOEC.com)  
409.766.7827

Welcome aboard!  
Embark on an industrial-strength discovery in a modern museum setting. The Ocean Star offers the opportunity to physically enter the world of the offshore industry. So much of our modern society relies on oil and things made from it. At the Ocean Star Museum learn how hydrocarbons form and what it takes to extract them from the earth—from people and processes to tools and technologies. Open seven days a week for self-guided tours, step aboard for a unique learning adventure. Discount rates are available for groups.



## Moody Mansion

[MoodyMansion.org](http://MoodyMansion.org)  
409.762.7668

Galveston's Moody Mansion at 2618 Broadway is meticulously restored and filled with original furnishings. Self-guided audio tours and premium behind-the-scenes guided tours are available. Rotating exhibits of special interest are installed throughout the year. Moody Mansion is available for events, wedding receptions and bridal photography, and offers group discounts. Open daily, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.



## Galveston Naval Museum

[GalvestonNavalMuseum.com](http://GalvestonNavalMuseum.com)  
409.770.3196

The Galveston Naval Museum is home to the USS Cavalla, one of the most accomplished World War II submarines open to the public today. The destroyer escort, USS Stewart, once the presidential escort to FDR, is the last of its class in the world. Both vessels are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Taking a self-guided tour, you'll learn how sailors and submariners lived, slept and worked together as a fighting force over the Atlantic and under the Pacific. "Climb Aboard!"



## The Grand 1894 Opera House

[TheGrand.com](http://TheGrand.com)  
409.765.1894

The Grand 1894 Opera House is proud to play an important role in Galveston Island's history. One of the few remaining theatres of its era in the Lone Star State was proclaimed "The Official Opera House of Texas" in 1993. The Grand presents major stars and high-quality touring artists in theatre, music, dance, opera and children's programming.



## Find Your Beach

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

While Seawall beaches are open year-round, the island's largest public beach parks – Stewart Beach and East Beach are open all summer long, offering a variety of special amenities.

Visitors to the beach parks can also take advantage of restrooms, showers, beach umbrella and chair rentals, volleyball courts, children's playground, snack bars and other concessions, including sandcastle building lessons, horseback riding and helicopter tours.



## Galveston Historical Foundation

[GalvestonHistory.org](http://GalvestonHistory.org)  
409.765.7834

Kick off your summer with #GalvestonHistory! Galveston Historical Foundation invites you to experience Galveston Island's incredible history this May. Held the first two weekends of May, the Galveston Historic Homes Tour invites guests into privately owned homes for the annual tour. Learn about the people, architecture, and history of these homes and their place in the island's story.

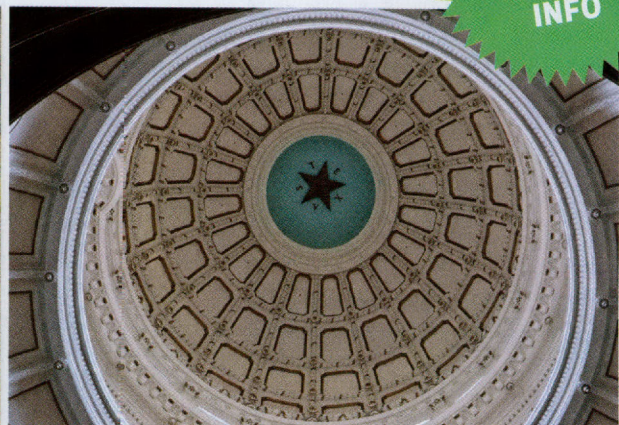
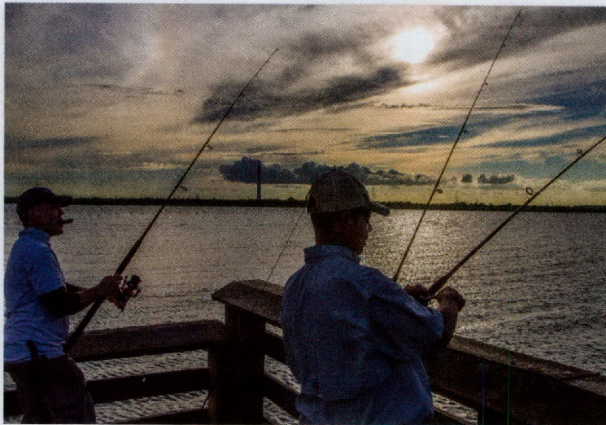
The third weekend in May celebrates the island's vintage past with the Galveston Island Beach Revue. The annual event features the world-famous bathing beauties, classic cars, live music, and more, all along historic Seawall Boulevard.

Not able to make it in May? #GalvestonHistory is ready year-round with attractions like our new Ship To Shore experience at the Galveston Historic Seaport, the beloved 1892 Bishop's Palace, and the Galveston Historic Harbor Tour and Dolphin Watch. Tickets and more information on these attractions and events are available at [www.galvestonhistory.org](http://www.galvestonhistory.org)

SAVE UP TO 40% OFF ATTRACTIONS AT [GALVESTONISLANDPASS.COM](http://GALVESTONISLANDPASS.COM)

# TRAVEL RESOURCE GUIDE

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PHOTOS: Will van Overbeek

- |  |   |   |   |
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| 2 Addison, Texas   | 22 Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Garden          | 41 Nacogdoches Convention & Visitors Bureau                     | 61 The Grand 1894 Opera House                 |
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| 14 City of Bee Cave  | 34 Hill Country Run Motorcycle Rally              | 53 Terrell Chamber of Commerce and Convention & Visitors Bureau | 73 Visit Granbury                             |
| 15 City of Harlingen Convention & Visitors Bureau              | 35 Irving Arts Center                             | 54 Texas Hill Country Trail Region                              | 74 Visit Kilgore                              |
| 16 City of Manor   | 36 Irving Convention & Visitors Bureau            | 55 Texas Historical Commission                                  | 75 Visit Lubbock                              |
| 17 City of Port Isabel   | 37 Kerrville Convention & Visitors Bureau         | 56 Texas Independence Trail Region                              | 76 Visit Marshall                             |
| 18 City of Portland  | 38 LBJ Library & Museum                           | 57 TEXAS Outdoor Musical  | 77 Visit Plano                                |
| 19 Cleburne Chamber of Commerce                                | 39 McKinney Convention & Visitors Bureau          | 58 Texas Parks & Wildlife                                       | 78 Visit Port Arthur                          |
| 20 Corsicana Convention & Visitors Center                      |   | 59 Texas Realtors   | 79 Visit The Woodlands                        |
|  |   |   | 80 Visit Tyler                                |
|  |   |   | 81 Waco Convention & Visitors Bureau          |
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|  |   |   | 83 Wichita Falls Convention & Visitors Bureau |
|  |   |   | 84 West Texas Co-op                           |

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5	13	21	29	37	45	53	61	69	77	85	93	101
6	14	22	30	38	46	54	62	70	78	86	94	102
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# EVENTS



## The Hills Are Alive

The Kerrville Folk Festival celebrates 50 years of Hill Country revelry

Since 1972, the Kerrville Folk Festival has drawn crowds to celebrate the art of songwriting. This year, the 13 days and nights of the festival feature daytime activities and nightly concerts. More than 1,500 singer-songwriters have taken the stage since the festival's inception, and this year's acts include Jackie Venson, Ray Wylie Hubbard, and Shinyribs. Around 20,000 "Kerrverts" are expected to attend the 50th anniversary festival taking place May 26–June 12 at Quiet Valley Ranch. While the event originally focused on folk music, it's evolved to encompass all songwriting, and today's performers highlight genres from blues to bluegrass, international sounds, rock, and soul.

Evening shows may be the biggest draw, but dedicated festival-goers say the heart and soul of the festival is the campground scene. Campers form micro-communities throughout the ranch and tent camp each year, according to Mary Muse, executive director of the Kerrville Folk Festival Foundation. Many people return every year to camp together. "During the day, you'll find people mingling throughout the camps playing songs, then they'll go to the stage shows at night, come back to their camps, and have jam sessions till 3 or 4 in the morning," she says.

In addition to live music activities include instrument workshops, the Grassy Hill New Folk Competition, a songwriters' school, canoe trips on the Guadalupe River, Saturday Shabbat services, and Sunday folk song services. "Whether it's your first time to visit or your 50th, everyone at the festival is greeted with 'Welcome home,'" Muse says. —Amanda Ogle

**Kerrville Folk Festival**  
May 26–June 12  
Quiet Valley Ranch,  
3876 SH 16, Kerrville.  
kerrvillefolkfestival.org

### BIG BEND COUNTRY

#### ALPINE

##### Cinco de Mayo Celebration

May 5-7

Honor the anniversary of Mexico's victory over the French Empire at the Battle of Puebla in 1862 with a parade, live music, dancing, a car show, an enchilada dinner, and the Gran Mercado on Murphy Street. Historic Murphy Street, 105 E. Murphy Ave. 432-294-2370

#### EL PASO

##### Sun City Craft Beer Festival

May 21-22

More than 50 breweries bring their beers to downtown El Paso. Along with an indoor bar and liquor garden, the event has live music from local bands, vendors, a human billiards table and other giant games, and more than 170 craft beers. El Paso Convention Center Plaza, 1 Civic Center Plaza. [suncitycraftbeerfest.com](http://suncitycraftbeerfest.com)

#### MARFA

##### Marfa Invitational

May 5-8

Part contemporary art fair, part exhibition, the Marfa Invitational provides a platform for viewing and experiencing today's leading contemporary art against the unique and historic Far West Texas backdrop. Saint George Hall, 113 E. El Paso St. [marfainvitational.com](http://marfainvitational.com)

### GULF COAST

#### CORPUS CHRISTI

##### Texas Artists:

##### Women of Abstraction

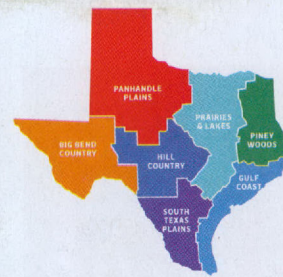
Through May 8

Seeking to expand modern abstract art, 27 artists are featured in this wide survey of work by Texas women from post-WWII to the present. Beginning with Dorothy Hood and Toni LeSelle, whose works from the 1950s and '60s exude rich color and energetic brush strokes, the exhibition moves through the decades to include work from artists who came of age in a more technological world, including Annette Lawrence, Constance Lowe, Susie Rosmarin, and Lorraine Tad.



## FREE EVENTS GUIDE

Want even more events delivered to your mailbox? Get a free subscription to the quarterly *Texas Highways Events Calendar* at [texashighways.com/eventsubscription](http://texashighways.com/eventsubscription)



Art Museum of South Texas,  
1902 N. Shoreline Blvd. 361-825-  
3500; [artmuseumofsouthtexas.org](http://artmuseumofsouthtexas.org)

### FULTON

#### Babes on the Bay

May 13-14

The 21st annual event is the largest one-day women's angler fishing tournament in the country. Participants from all over Texas and across the country come together for a weekend with live bands, vendor booths, and educational outreach. *Fulton Harbor*, 402 N. Fulton Beach Road. 361-205-0182; [babesonthebay.com](http://babesonthebay.com)

### ROCKPORT

#### Pirate Festival

May 20-22

Held in conjunction with the Rockport-Fulton Market Days, the Rockport-Fulton Pirate Festival features vendors, food, and entertainment. *Aransas County Navigation District Festival Grounds*, 110 Seabreeze Drive. 361-729-6445; [rockport-fulton.org](http://rockport-fulton.org)

### ROCKPORT

#### Wine Festival

May 28

The 26th annual festival invites guests to enjoy a variety of wines, food demonstrations, and specialty foods. Live bands and entertainment round out the day. *Texas Maritime Museum*, 1202 Navigation Circle. 361-729-1271; [texasmaritimemuseum.org](http://texasmaritimemuseum.org)

### SOUTH PADRE ISLAND

#### Run the Jailbreak

May 7

The Jailbreak Beach Escape brings thousands of runners to conquer the 5K course with 20 challenging obstacles on the sun-drenched beaches of South Padre before heading to Clayton's Beach Bar for a beach party. *Clayton's Beach Bar*, 6900 Padre Blvd. 956-761-5900; [sopadre.com](http://sopadre.com)

### STAFFORD

#### The Hunchback of Notre Dame

May 13-15, 20-22

Based on the Victor Hugo novel *Notre-Dame de Paris* and songs from Disney's animated feature film, this production showcases an Academy Award-nominated score,

as well as new songs by Alan Menken and Stephen Schwartz. *Inspiration Stage*, 12794 Fountain Lake Circle. 713-302-5329; [inspirationstage.com](http://inspirationstage.com)

### SUGAR LAND

#### Roberto Carlos in Concert

May 15

With a career that began in the 1960s, the Grammy-winning Brazilian star is known for his romantic ballads. *Smart Financial Centre at Sugar Land*, 18111 Lexington Blvd. 281-207-6278; [smartfinancialcentre.net](http://smartfinancialcentre.net)

### SURFSIDE BEACH

#### Market in the Park

May 1

Explore a variety of fresh foods and goods from various vendors in Surfside Beach. *Bird and Butterfly Trail*, 418 Parkview Road. 979-233-1531; [surfsidex.org](http://surfsidex.org)

### HILL COUNTRY

### AUSTIN

#### Oscar Muñoz: Invisibilia

Through June 5

This is the first retrospective of renowned Colombian artist Oscar Muñoz presented in the U.S. Co-organized by the Blanton Museum of Art and Phoenix Art Museum, the exhibit includes approximately 40 evocative artworks in diverse media that Muñoz has created over the last five decades. Muñoz's explores themes of memory, time, history, and knowledge through his early charcoal drawings of the late 1970s to videos produced in the present day. His hybrid artworks combine photographic processes with drawing, printmaking, installation, video, sculpture, and interactive elements. *Blanton Museum of Art*, 200 E. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. 512-471-5482; [blantonmuseum.org](http://blantonmuseum.org)

### AUSTIN

#### Terry Allen: MemWars

Through July 10

Terry Allen grew up in Lubbock in the 1950s and has lived in Santa Fe, New Mexico, for many years with his wife and frequent collaborator, actress and fellow artist

Jo Harvey Allen. Much of his work, including his songwriting, explores images and subject matter associated with the American West. His sculptural installations incorporate performance, projections, and video. *Blanton Museum of Art*, 200 E. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. 512-471-5482; [blantonmuseum.org/rotation/terry-allen](http://blantonmuseum.org/rotation/terry-allen)

### AUSTIN

#### Taste of Mexico

May 4

Since 1998, Mexic-Arte Museum's Taste of Mexico has become one of the leading Mexican-inspired culinary events of the year, with 1,200 attendees sampling dishes from 50 restaurants in the Austin area. *Mexic-Arte Museum*, 419 Congress Ave. 512-480-9373; [mexic-artemuseum.org](http://mexic-artemuseum.org)

### AUSTIN

#### Hot Luck Festival

May 26-29

Honor the soul, sweat, and DIY diversity of the food and music world. Hot Luck is an eat-with-your-fingers picnic and party experience that highlights open-pit feats of culinary know-how and live music. *Downtown Austin*. [hotluckfest.com](http://hotluckfest.com)

### AUSTIN

#### CapTex Triathlon

May 30

All levels of athletes compete in this triathlon, which includes the USA Paratriathlon National Championship. The race begins with a swim in Lady Bird Lake, and the bike course takes athletes to downtown Austin. The race concludes with a run through Butler Park and the Palmer Events Center before the post-race party at Vic Mathias Shores. *Lady Bird Lake*, *Downtown Austin*, 1200 W. Cesar Chavez St. [captextri.com](http://captextri.com)

### BANDERA

#### Memorial Day Weekend

#### Stampede Parade and Rodeos

May 27-29

Three nights of PRCA-sanctioned rodeos feature bull riding, team roping, bareback riding, and other competitions. The annual Stampede Weekend Parade takes place on Main Street on May 28. *Mansfield*

*Park*, 2886 SH 16 N. 830-460-1071; [banderaprrodeodeo.org](http://banderaprrodeodeo.org)

### FREDERICKSBURG

#### Lend Me a Tenor

Through May 15

On a historic night at the Cleveland Opera Company, world-famous tenor Tito Morelli is set to perform. Through a series of mishaps, Morelli receives a double dose of tranquilizers, causing the house manager to believe he is dead and setting off a chain reaction of slapstick and mistaken identity. *Steve W. Shepherd Theater*, 1668 S. US 87. [fredericksburgtheater.org](http://fredericksburgtheater.org)

### FREDERICKSBURG

#### 175th Anniversary

#### Closing Weekend Ceremonies

May 6-8

After a yearlong celebration of the founding of Fredericksburg 175 years ago, the festivities conclude with fireworks on Friday night, a parade on Saturday morning, and an exhibit showcasing the Meusebach-Comanche Treaty. *Various locations*. [175th.org](http://175th.org)

### FREDERICKSBURG

#### Hill Country Run Motorcycle Rally

May 6-8

Activities include Texas Hill Country rides, a cowboy breakfast, Brew and 'Que, and live music. *Luckenbach Texas*, 412 Luckenbach Town Loop. [hillcountryrun.com](http://hillcountryrun.com)

### FREDERICKSBURG

#### Texas Flower Country

#### Women's Run

May 7

Run or walk through the flower fields and vineyards of Wildseed Farms. Then, enjoy the beautiful setting and champagne, craft beer, food, massages, live music, and boutiques. Each entry includes a performance fabric race T-shirt and custom finisher medal. *Wildseed Farms*, 100 Legacy Drive. [runintexas.com](http://runintexas.com)

### FREDERICKSBURG

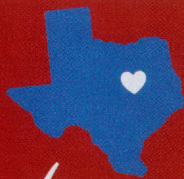
#### Hill Country Antique Tractor

#### and Engine Club Show

May 21

This annual tractor show features old tractors and farm machinery—some of it restored to operate and look as good as it did decades

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ago—along with antique gasoline and steam engines manufactured as far back as 1900. Exhibits and demonstrations are featured throughout the day.  
*Gillespie County Fairgrounds, 530 Fair Drive. [rustyiron.org](http://rustyiron.org)*

**FREDERICKSBURG**

**Crawfish Festival**  
May 27-29

Enjoy Cajun food, live music, and a kids' carnival, all sponsored by the Fredericksburg Jaycees.  
*Marktplatz, 100 block of West Main Street. [fbjaycees.com](http://fbjaycees.com)*

**HUNT**

**Crider's Rodeo and Dancehall Opening Night**  
May 28

For more than 90 years, Crider's Rodeo and Dancehall has provided rodeos, live music, and dancing along the banks of the Guadalupe River. The venue opens for summer in May. *Crider's Rodeo and Dancehall, 2301 SH 39. 830-238-4441; [cridersrandd.com](http://cridersrandd.com)*

**INGRAM**

**Drinking Habits**  
Through May 15

Accusations, mistaken identities, and romances run wild in this traditional farce. *Hill Country Arts Foundation, 120 Point Theatre Road. 830-367-5121; [hcaf.com](http://hcaf.com)*

**KERRVILLE**

**Mother and Son Dance**  
May 14

This annual event includes dinner and dancing for mothers or mother figures and their sons. *Dietert Center, 451 Guadalupe St. 830-257-7300; [kerrvilletx.gov](http://kerrvilletx.gov)*

**KERRVILLE**

**Texas Masters of Fine Art and Craft Invitational Exhibition**  
May 27-29

This exhibition features work from professional artists and craftspeople from around the state. The sale is produced and managed by the artists. *Y.O. Ranch Hotel and Conference Center, 2033 Sidney Baker St. 469-223-4162; [texasmasters.com](http://texasmasters.com)*

**KERRVILLE**

**Southwest Gourd and Fiber Fine Art Show**  
May 26-July 9

Gourd artists compete in a variety of categories at this annual show. *Kerr Arts and Cultural Center, 228 Earl Garrett St. 830-895-2911; [kacckerrville.com](http://kacckerrville.com)*

**MARBLE FALLS**

**"Howdy-Roo" Regional CASI Chili Championship and Lonestar Barbecue State Championship**  
May 7

The 50th annual chili and 27th annual barbecue championships include vendors, a silent auction, arts and crafts, and a raffle. *Lakeside Park, 305 Buena Vista Drive. 281-615-2408; [marblefalls.org](http://marblefalls.org)*

**MARBLE FALLS**

**Highland Lakes Pod Backbone Creek Chili Cookoff**  
May 8

Sample a chili cookoff with proceeds benefiting local Marble Falls charities. *Lakeside Park, 305 Buena Vista Drive. 281-615-2408; [marblefalls.org](http://marblefalls.org)*

**NEW BRAUNFELS**

**KNBT Americana Music Jam at Gruene Hall**  
May 22

Co-sponsored by Gruene Hall and KNBT 92.1 FM Radio New Braunfels, this annual celebration spotlights Americana music from exceptional artists. The event benefits a local charity. *Gruene Hall, 1281 Gruene Road. 830-629-5077; [gruenehall.com](http://gruenehall.com)*

**UVALDE**

**Cactus Jack Bull Riding**  
May 5-7

The event helps raise money to benefit local youth programs in the community. This three-day event brings families from all around to watch bull riders attempt to move up in world rankings. *Uvalde County Fairplex, 215 Veterans Lane. 830-591-9040; [cactusjackbullriding.com](http://cactusjackbullriding.com)*

**PANHANDLE PLAINS**

**ABILENE**

**1812 Overture**  
May 7

The Abilene Philharmonic plays Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*, plus other pieces such as Ravel's *Tzigane*, Chausson's *Poeme*, and Tchaikovsky's *Francesca da Rimini*. Faith Fang, the 2018 Nelda Hodges Young Artist Competition bronze medalist, plays violin, and David Itkin conducts. *Abilene Convention Center, 1100 N. Sixth St. 325-677-6710; [abilenephilharmonic.org/shows/1812-overture](http://abilenephilharmonic.org/shows/1812-overture)*

**ABILENE**

**Western Heritage Classic**  
May 12-15

This event features a rodeo, the

world's largest bit and spur show, a chuckwagon cookoff, nightly dances, an invitational ranch horse sale, a Ranch Horse Association of America working ranch horse competition, and children's rodeo events. *Taylor County Expo Center, 1700 SH 36. 325-677-4376; [westernheritageclassic.com](http://westernheritageclassic.com)*

**ABILENE**

**Waitress**  
May 29

Inspired by the film, *Waitress* tells the story of Jenna, an expert pie maker who dreams of a way out of her small town. *Abilene Convention Center, 1100 N. Sixth St. 800-869-1451; [celebrityattractions.com/shows/847/waitress/abilene/2022](http://celebrityattractions.com/shows/847/waitress/abilene/2022)*

**AMARILLO**

**Muttfest**  
May 15

Voted one of the city's top three festivals, Muttfest is the longest-running fundraiser for the Amarillo SPCA. Festivities include a reduced-cost shot clinic, music, food, vendors, and a silent auction. *Starlight Ranch Event Center, 1415 Sunrise Drive. 806-290-2883; [bigtexan.com/starlight-ranch-event-center](http://bigtexan.com/starlight-ranch-event-center)*

**LEVELLAND**

**Clovis Horse Sales**  
May 6-7

Horses for all types of riders are up for sale. Each sale has events featuring various types of horses, and events include team ropings, cow horse futurities, and ranch horse competitions. *Mallet Event Center, 2320 US 385 S. 806-894-4161; [clovishorsesales.com](http://clovishorsesales.com)*

**PINEY WOODS**

**GLADEWATER**

**Apron Strings: Ties to the Past**  
May 7

The downtown antiques district is lined with vintage aprons in various styles. *Downtown Historic District, 215 N. Main St. 903-845-5501*

**JEFFERSON**

**Train Show and Train Days**  
May 14-15

Ride an antique train while listening to a narration of the area's history playing along the journey. Each train includes a stop at the Diamond Don Gator Pit for alligator feeding. There are four in-town destinations: the Historic Jefferson Train Show, the T&P Model Train Depot, the Lonesome Dove Drive-Thru Safari and Train Ride, and the

Historic Jefferson Railway Train Ride. *Historic Jefferson Railway*, 400 E. Austin St. 903-742-2041; [diamonddonempire.com](http://diamonddonempire.com)

**PALESTINE**

**Fairy Garden Trail**

Through May 31

While exploring the 5.5 miles of driving trails in Davey Dogwood Park this spring, park the car and step onto the trails to see how many hidden fairy gardens you can find. *Davey Dogwood Park*, 4205 N. Link St. 903-723-3014; [visitpalestine.com](http://visitpalestine.com)

**PRAIRIES AND LAKES**

**BELTON**

**ASCO Spartacus Dash**

May 28

Belton's only obstacle course race is held annually at Liberty Park. The 3-mile course follows Nolan Creek and is filled with over 20 challenging obstacles designed by ASCO Equipment. Make your way through the mud pit, cargo net climb, ice bath, and zip line. There are food and drinks at the finish line. *Liberty Park*, 700 Veterans Way. 254-340-4577; [ascospartacusdash.com](http://ascospartacusdash.com)

**CELINA**

**Cajun Fest**

May 14

The largest and most popular annual event in Celina features a crawfish boil, live music near city hall, a large entertainment area for kids, a live alligator show, and food and drinks. The evening features a country concert and performance by Grammy Award-winning Cajun singer Wayne Toups. *Celina Downtown Square*, 142 N. Ohio St. 972-382-2682; [lifeincelina.tx.com](http://lifeincelina.tx.com)

**CLIFTON**

**Bosque Tour de Norway**

May 21

The annual bike rally has routes of 20, 40, 60, and 80 miles. Each distance brings bikers to the top of Texas Hill Country to ride through the historical Norse community. Cyclists ride on a combination of paved state highways and county roads. Since this is the top of the Hill Country, there are rolling hills with a few significant climbs followed by fast descents. *Clifton High School*, 1101 N. Ave. Q. 254-675-3720; [tourdenorway.com](http://tourdenorway.com)

**COLLEGE STATION**

**Remembering the Fallen**

May 25-29

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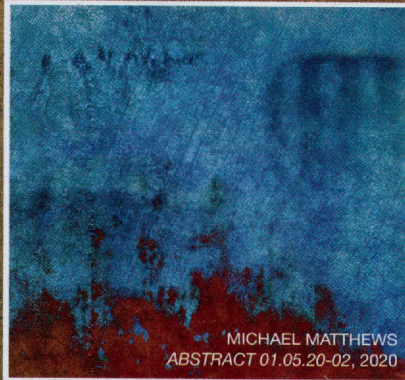
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exhibits and displays. Visit the Vietnam Heroes exhibit to see the 3,417 dog tags honoring all Texas veterans who died or were missing in action in Vietnam. The weekend ends with a 21-gun salute with 105 howitzers. *Museum of the American GI, 19124 SH 6 South. 979-690-0501; [americangimuseum.org/eventsremembering-the-fallen](http://americangimuseum.org/eventsremembering-the-fallen)*

COLUMBUS

**Magnolia Days Festival**

May 20–21

Tour several of Columbus' historical buildings; grab a photo with the Magnolia Belles on the courthouse square; shop in the vendor marketplace; enjoy live music; and sample food and beverages. Beer and wine gardens offer refreshments, and kids can enjoy the Family Fun Zone. *Downtown Columbus, 400 Spring St. 979-732-8385; [magnoliadays.org](http://magnoliadays.org)*

CORSICANA

**10-Year Celebration for 100 West**

May 28

Celebrating work by more than 100 artists and writers during their residency at 100 West in Corsicana, the 10th anniversary gala weekend includes open studios on two campus sites, art installations in two exhibit spaces with art and book retail offerings, an art auction, author talks, readings, film screenings, and a commemorative party in historic downtown Corsicana. *100 West and Samuels buildings, 100 W. Third Ave. 480-824-3015; [corsicanaresidency.org](http://corsicanaresidency.org)*

DALLAS

**Magali Reus: A Sentence in Soil**

May 14–Sept. 11

In her second major U.S. show, Dutch-born, London-based artist Magali Reus presents an installation that examines the relationships between people and objects through the distortion of common images. Reus reimagines commonly found objects and their functions to reflect the disjointed character of contemporary life. *Nasher Sculpture Center, 2001 Flora St. 214-242-5100; [nashersculpturecenter.org](http://nashersculpturecenter.org)*

DALLAS

**Lynda Benglis**

May 21–Sept. 18

Throughout her five-decade career, Lynda Benglis has created sculptures in a wide range of materials that explore the physicality of form and its effects on the viewer. *Nasher Sculpture Center, 2001 Flora St. 214-242-5100; [nashersculpturecenter.org](http://nashersculpturecenter.org)*

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**FORT WORTH**

**FOCUS: Jamal Cyrus**

Through June 26

The Houston-based artist examines forgotten, ignored, or fragmentary accounts of Black American culture, raising questions about "official" history, what is overlooked and why, and the biases held by those writing and interpreting it. Cyrus' new work examines the contributions of multi-reedist and composer Julius Hemphill (1938–1995) of Fort Worth. *Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, 3200 Darnell St. 817-738-9215; themodern.org*

**FORT WORTH**

**Women Painting Women**

May 15–Sept. 25

The exhibition features 46 female artists who choose women as subject matter in their works. This presentation includes approximately 50 evocative portraits that span the late 1960s to the present. *Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, 3200 Darnell St. 817-738-9215; themodern.org/exhibition/women-painting-women*

**FRISCO**

**National Soccer Hall of Fame Induction Weekend Concert**

May 21  
The Grammy-winning Zac Brown Band headlines the 2022 National Soccer Hall of Fame weekend. The concert takes place after the 2022 National Soccer Hall of Fame Induction ceremony. *Toyota Stadium, 9200 World Cup Way. 214-705-6700; visitfrisco.com*

**GIDDINGS**

**Charcoal Challenge Barbecue Cookoff**

May 19–21

Teams compete with their best brisket, sausage, wings, and more. The Lee County Fair is held at the same time with live music, shopping, and activities for children including the Mighty Thomas Carnival. *Firemen's Park and Lee County Fairground, 2495 US 290 West. 979-542-3455; giddingstx.com/page-1676245*

**GRAND PRAIRIE**

**Cinco de Mayo Celebration**

May 1

Celebrate the annual holiday that commemorates Mexico's victory over France at the Battle of Puebla with live music and other activities. *Traders Village, 2602 Mayfield Road. 972-647-2331; tradersvillage.com/grand-prairie*

**Memorial Day Weekend Stampede Rodeo!**  
Bandera Pro Rodeo Association  
May 27 - 29 2022

The start of the Cowboy Capital of the World's summer season filled with rodeos, cowboys, and good times outdoors in the great Texas Hill Country.  
[BanderaCowboyCapital.com](http://BanderaCowboyCapital.com) 830-796-3045

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**Kerrville Folk Festival May 26 - June 12, 2022**  
**Southwest Gourd Show - May 26 - July 9, 2022**  
**The Presley Project - August 13th, 2022**

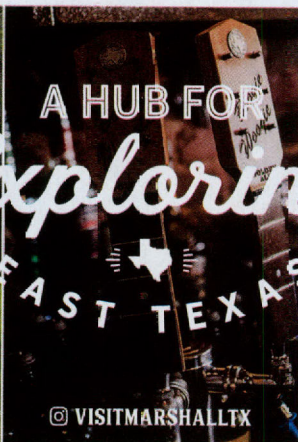
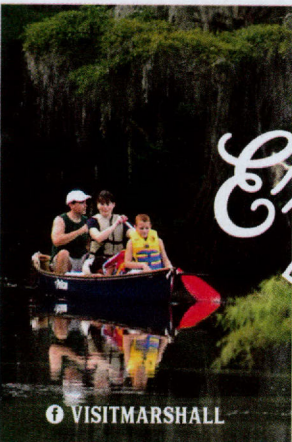


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**GRAND PRAIRIE**  
**Asian Pacific American**  
**Heritage Festival**

May 20-22, 27-29  
 Join Asia Times Square for live entertainment, food vendors, and more. *Asia Times Square*, 2625 W. Pioneer Parkway. 972-975-5100; [asiatimesquare.com](http://asiatimesquare.com)

**GREENVILLE**  
**Audie Murphy Day**

May 14  
 This annual event celebrates the life of Audie Murphy, the Hollywood actor and most decorated combat soldier of World War II, as well as military veterans and those currently serving in the U.S. military. Enjoy speakers, exhibits, and films from Murphy's successful Hollywood career. *Audie Murphy American Cotton Museum*, 600 I-30 East. 903-450-4502; [cottonmuseum.com](http://cottonmuseum.com)

**IRVING**  
**Mozart con Amore**

May 14  
 To close the *Mozart con Amore* season, guest artist and pianist Eldred Marshall plays Mozart's *Piano Concerto No. 24 in C Minor, K.491*. The orchestra also presents Mozart's *Overture to La Clemenza di Tito, K.621* and Mozart's *Symphony No. 40 in G Minor, K.550*. *Irving Arts Center*, 3333 N. MacArthur Blvd. 972-252-4800; [lascolinassymphony.org](http://lascolinassymphony.org)

**LEWISVILLE**  
**Fiesta Charra**

May 29  
 Experience a traditional charreada, an event similar to a rodeo practiced in Mexico. Admission is free. *Lewisville Rodeo Arena*, 101 Parkway Drive. 972-219-3401; [cityoflewisville.com](http://cityoflewisville.com)

**McKINNEY**  
**AT&T Byron Nelson**  
**Golf Tournament**

May 9-15  
 Watch top PGA players compete in this four-day televised event that celebrates the life and legacy of golfer Byron Nelson. *TPC Craig Ranch*, 8000 Collin McKinney Parkway. 214-943-9700; [attbyronnelson.org](http://attbyronnelson.org)

**PLANO**  
**Salt the Rim**

May 7  
 Celebrate Cinco de Mayo at this margarita tasting celebration. Enjoy salsa dancing lessons and performances by a mariachi band and flamenco dancers at this family-friendly event. Participate in the margarita tasting for \$30

and decide which downtown bar has the best margarita. *McCall Plaza*, 998 E. 15th St. 972-941-5800; [plano.gov/1040/events-shows](http://plano.gov/1040/events-shows)

#### THE COLONY

##### **Up, Up, and Away! Festival of Flight** May 7

The festival features kite flying, music, birding demonstrations, paper airplane making, and more. *Prestwick STEM Academy*, 3101 Stonefield. 972-625-1106; [thecolonytx.gov/837/up-up-away-festival-of-flight](http://thecolonytx.gov/837/up-up-away-festival-of-flight)

#### WAXAHACHIE

##### **Scarborough Renaissance Festival**

Through May 30

Enjoy jousting, birds of prey exhibitions, the Mermaid Lagoon, more than 20 stages with Renaissance entertainment, and a 125-plus-member performing company. Two hundred shops feature crafts and artisan demonstrations. There are also knighting ceremonies, combat competitions, the Grande Parade, and daily wine and beer tasting events. *Scarborough Renaissance Festival*, 2511 FM 66. 972-938-3247; [srfestival.com](http://srfestival.com)

#### SOUTH TEXAS PLAINS

#### SAN ANTONIO

##### **Wendy Red Star: A Scratch on the Earth**

Through May 8

View the work of Portland artist Wendy Red Star, an enrolled member of the Apsáalooke (Crow) Tribe. Red Star works across disciplines to explore the intersections of Native American ideologies and colonialist structures, both historically and in contemporary society. Drawing on pop culture, conceptual art strategies, and the Crow traditions within which she was raised, Red Star incorporates self-portraiture, photo-collage, and mixed media to showcase her perspective on American history. *San Antonio Museum of Art*, 200 W. Jones Ave. 210-978-8100; [samuseum.org](http://samuseum.org)

#### SAN ANTONIO

##### **The Sons of Charlie Russell: The Cowboy Artists of America**

May 27-Sept. 5

Realism defines the canon of traditional Western art. This exhibit highlights the style to tell the story of the evolution of contemporary Western art in the modern era. *The Briscoe Western Art Museum*, 210 W. Market St. 210-299-4499; [briscoemuseum.org/sons](http://briscoemuseum.org/sons)

#### DON'T SEE YOUR EVENT?

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## GATOR COUNTRY

Beaumont's *Gator Country* is the place to visit to get to know all about scaly reptiles - and even hold a baby gator. The park is home to nearly 600 alligators but the headliners are Big Al and Big Tex, the largest alligators in captivity in Texas - certified by the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department. Both gators weigh in at 1,000 pounds and almost 14 feet in length.



## OUTDOOR OPPORTUNITIES

Take in the beauty of Beaumont, Texas with a visit to our beautiful *Botanical Gardens*. A public garden located within Tyrrell Park, which includes the Warren Loose Conservatory - the second largest public garden in Texas. See camellias, modern and antique roses, bromeliads, and native plants. Also within Tyrrell Park is *Cattail Marsh*, a hidden oasis perfect for any nature lover. For a certified "Green" experience, *Shangri La Botanical Gardens & Nature Center* in nearby Orange, is a perfect place to enjoy gardens bursting with fragrance and color. Its unique wetland ecosystem offers sanctuary to plants and animals in a Platinum-Level LEED Certified atmosphere.



## INDEPENDENCE DAY

Celebrate Independence Day with fireworks, live music, food and more in downtown Beaumont at the *Event Centre*. Families will enjoy festivities and kids' activities throughout the night.  
July 4, 2022

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## THE DAYTRIPPER'S TOP 5



# Uvalde

*Full-throttle history*

BY CHET GARNER

At the crossroads where the Hill Country meets South Texas sits a charming town with a history deeper than its swimming holes. Uvalde boasts one of the most beautiful and underrated rivers in Texas—the Nueces. You could spend a whole day floating in the clear stream, but the town also offers nonaquatic amusements that introduce visitors to the influential history of the area.

### Briscoe-Garner Museum

Despite its small population, this town lays claim to two political behemoths: Dolph Briscoe and John Nance Garner. Briscoe was a rancher and banker before being elected Texas' 41st governor in 1973. Garner was a lawyer and judge turned speaker of the U.S. House and vice president in the 1930s. They share a museum in Garner's home that is filled with artifacts and stories from their rises to prominence and times in office. Learn how Garner, aka "Cactus Jack," went from living in a log cabin to occupying the second-highest office in the land. His political savvy, grizzled personality, and perpetual cigar were characteristics only Texas could dream up. Briscoe was more reserved; he let his love for art and education do the talking.

### Live Oak Gorditas

If you're looking for authentic tastes from the streets of Mexico, this is your stop. The restaurant serves gorditas—fried masa pockets that can be stuffed with everything from steak ranchero to *mollejas*, cow thymus gland or pancreas. While you may be apprehensive to try the "sweetbreads," let me assure you that they're delicious and go down extra well with guacamole and hot sauce.

### Chalk Bluff River Resort

While you could head north to the famous state park bearing Garner's name, there is a much closer piece of heaven on the Nueces River just outside of Uvalde. This private park sits below a giant rock face with a mile of river access. It's the perfect place to swim, snorkel, kayak, or feed the resident animals, including zebras, ostriches, and camels.

### DriveTanks.com

This site at Ox Ranch may be the only place in the world where visitors can drive a World War II Sherman tank and fire rounds into the side of a hill. The owners preserve an armory of historic tanks, artillery, and guns on display. Interacting with the tanks up-close is a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and it gave me a new appreciation for what life is like on the battlefield.

### Broadway 830

Walking into this eatery feels like entering a trendy urban pizza joint. But it's not a city-slicker's creation; a group of locals started the artisan pizza restaurant, with an extensive craft beer list and delicious cocktails, which was unlike anything Uvalde had seen. It sits inside a renovated industrial building just blocks from the historic downtown. Grab a seat on one of their outdoor patios and order some Parmesan-garlic chicken wings or an El Chupacabra pizza with mozzarella, pulled pork, onions, jalapeños, habanero cream, barbecue sauce, and cilantro.

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

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





# A Class of His Own

Reared in the Hill Country, Kinky Friedman introduces 'gold star kids' to the land that shaped him

By Joe Nick Patoski

**H**e's the bard of the Hill Country—a satirist, author, singer-songwriter, raconteur, and equal-opportunity offender. He's run for Texas governor, not to mention state agricultural commissioner and Kerr County justice of the peace. Kinky Friedman is a larger-than-life figure, a wise-cracking product of the land that he's lived on and loved most of his life.

Friedman grew up on Echo Hill Ranch—the summer camp between Kerrville and Medina that his parents opened in 1953—and attended the University of Texas at Austin. He then joined the Peace Corps and served in the Pacific island of Borneo, where he introduced the locals to Frisbee. Back in Austin in 1973, Friedman took part in the great progressive-country music explosion with the debut of his satirical band, Kinky Friedman and the Texas Jewboys.

Friedman's classics, such as the feminism parody "Get Your Biscuits in the Oven and Your Buns in the Bed" and "They Ain't Making Jews Like Jesus

**"It's a pointed issue—what you want to do with the remaining days of your life.**

**If you buy into that. Well, obviously, I'm 76 years old. But I read at the 78-year-old level."**



Any more," landed the band a performance at the prestigious Grand Ole Opry. He later joined Bob Dylan's Rolling Thunder Revue for two years. By the end of the '70s, Friedman had parked it in New York City, where he launched his literary career, mainly writing detective novels that starred himself as the lead character.

Friedman eventually returned to Texas and wrote a humor column for *Texas Monthly*, which set the stage for his 2006 gubernatorial campaign. He ran as an independent with the campaign slogan "How Hard Could It Be?" and garnered 12% of the vote.

Friedman now lives back on Echo Hill Ranch. The summer camp closed in 2013, but Friedman and his sister, Marcie Friedman, revived the camp last summer specifically to welcome "gold star kids"—the children of parents who either died in military service or as first responders on duty. The camp is staffed by both civilian and military volunteers, says Marcie, the volunteer camp director and a foreign service officer for the U.S. State Department. After hosting 62 children from 14

states last summer, the camp is gearing up for about double the number of campers in its second summer. "I'm just now realizing that this is maybe what I was born to do," Kinky says.

**TH:** *How did you spend the pandemic?*

**KF:** I've been doing a lot of recording, and I'm writing. I just completed an album titled *The Poet of Motel 6*. Also, me and [the late] Billy Joe Shaver have a new record out, *Live From Down Under*, with songs we recorded live in Australia about 20 years ago. This was right after Billy Joe's son and guitarist, Eddy, died. The doctor told him, "Don't go to Australia with the heart condition you have." I told him just the opposite. It was one of my last good decisions. It was the right thing to do for Billy Joe—get away from the tragedy and trauma.

**TH:** *Tell us about the changes at Echo Hill Ranch.*

**KF:** That's been the major move in my life. My parents, many years ago, had a camp here for boys and girls. It started in '53 and ran for about 60 years. It's been closed for 15 years. It's not just a place, but the dream of my parents, Tom and Min Friedman, since I was 6 years old. My sister, Marcie, and I are attempting to get this running again. The gold star program is one we're deeply involved with. We think when someone is killed in the military, their kids tend to get lost in the shuffle. We're dealing strictly with kids and strictly with fun. Later this summer, we're going to have a camp for children of Afghan refugees and other kids in need. Both programs are totally free. That's what differentiates them from some other summer camps.

**TH:** *What happened to the Utopia Animal Rescue Ranch, which was based at Echo Hill for almost 20 years?*

**KF:** Thousands of dogs came through here over the years. The problem was the place is too far for people from the cities to come by and adopt dogs. So we transferred over from being a rescue ranch into a menagerie. We have a program—not official—called canine therapy. The dogs get to come inside, they hang out with the kids, they go on the cookouts, they

do everything the kids do. We just lost my favorite, a chihuahua named Duke of Echo Hill.

**TH:** *Are you moving into full-time charity work by reviving the camp?*

**KF:** It's a pointed issue—what you want to do with the remaining days of your life. If you buy into that. Well, obviously, I'm 76 years old. But I read at the 78-year-old level. The ranch had become like an old amusement park that had fallen into disarray. But now, I think our parents' dream is coming close to being realized.

**TH:** *It's an all-volunteer effort?*

**KF:** Yes. Everyone's been great. There was a volunteer who fixed a water heater who I went over to thank. He said, "You're welcome. I'm doing it for Jesus." I told him, "I'm doing it for Moses." We went to our separate corners and been friends ever since. The people that volunteer to help us, if they're good Christians, be a good Christian. Be a good Jew. Be a good Muslim, and do things for America, and for yourself. We've been deeply inspired by these people. The staff is more inspired by the kids than the other way around. Nothing against any of the bigger programs, but "No Shrinks Allowed" here. Just fun. We want to deal with having a good time, making friends. Now of course I've gotten serious about the whole thing. I'm a Gandhi-like figure flitting through the landscape.

**TH:** *What's your first memory of the Hill Country?*

**KF:** Cowboy stars. If you come from Houston or any place like that, the stars are unusual, even more so if you're coming from outside the state. As my sister likes to say, a happy childhood is the worst possible preparation for life.

**TH:** *What's your favorite Hill Country drive?*

**KF:** My dad always felt the drive from Kerrville to Medina [on State Highway 16] was one of the most beautiful in the world. And it still is. Gorgeous, yeah.

**TH:** *What is your favorite secret Hill Country spot?*

**KF:** If things weren't changing so quickly that would be easy to answer. I can remember when "Hill Country" was a pejorative. People didn't want Hill Country anything. That wasn't so long ago. Today, you can go 10 feet in any direction on the outer fringes of Austin and San Antonio, and everything slaps "Hill Country" on it. Most of us don't want to Californize Texas if we can avoid it, but it's getting to be looking a little too late.

**TH:** *Are you an optimist or a pessimist about the future?*

**KF:** Things are changing in a good way. For instance, all the gold star kids who have joined the Echo Hill Mountain-Climbing Association, which was founded in 1953, get a card. That means you've climbed Echo Hill, the tallest in the area. Many of these kids painted stones at the summit to honor the memory of their mother or father and placed it on top of Echo Hill. You will be moved by the experience. It teaches you that the little things are really important. We've got all these kids who've lost a parent, who have never been to a sleep-away camp. We're talking about a big hole in the world that's hard to patch. We're trying to do our part. By the way, we've got a couple jobs open for you.

**TH:** *Seriously?*

**KF:** Everybody who wants to help has an invitation. You don't have to commit to anything. In charity work, money is always important. But energy and giving of yourself may be just as important. As I always like to say, time is the money of love. ♣

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Keep up with Kinky Friedman's escapades at his website, [kinkyfriedman.com](http://kinkyfriedman.com). Learn more about Echo Hill Ranch summer camp and its opportunities for gold star kids at [echohill.org](http://echohill.org).

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# VINTAGE

BY JAC DARSNEK, TRACES OF TEXAS



## Rock-Hard Labor

MARBLE FALLS, 1885

**P**lans were already in the works for a new Texas Capitol when a fire burned its predecessor in 1881. To construct the replacement—the building we know today—state officials settled on sunset red granite found in the Hill Country of Burnet County. Contractors used unpaid prison laborers, primarily African Americans, to work the quarries. This caused a major dust-up with the International Association of Granite Cutters, which directed members to boycott the project. Contractor Gustave Wilke responded by importing stoneworkers from Scotland. Federal officials found this to be a violation of the Alien Contract Labor Act and fined Wilke \$65,000, according to a 1992 article in the *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* by Scottish historian Marjory Harper. Meanwhile, conditions for the convicts were harsh: long days in the sun; a diet of cornbread, salt pork, and coffee; and no medical care. The new Capitol opened to great fanfare in 1888, but the lot of prison laborers did not improve until a series of articles by *San Antonio Light* reporter George Waverly Briggs in 1908–09 sparked reforms. **L**

Know of any fascinating vintage Texas photographs? Send copies or ideas to [tracesoftxphotos@gmail.com](mailto:tracesoftxphotos@gmail.com).



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