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Photo © Tim Fitzharris

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Photo © Rolf Nussbaumer.

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Photo © Tim Fitzharris

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Photo by Earl Nottingham/TPWD



# TEXAS

THE OUTDOOR MAGAZINE OF TEXAS

MARCH 2009, VOL. 67, NO. 3

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# In the Field

## TERRI FRENCH

graduated from Oakland University with a degree in journalism and writes about "Haiku Hikes" in this issue. Terri has also written articles on haiku for *Caracian Organic Gardener* and *GreenPrints* magazines. She is soon to have one of her original haiku published in *Lilliput Review's 1st Annual Basho Haiku Challenge* chapbook, a collection of winning haiku. She and her husband live in Huntsville,



Alabama. They have four teenagers and three cats and unwind by hiking the hills and biking the trails near their home. Terri believes haiku is not so much created as discovered. "There are thousands of haiku floating in ponds and lodged in the branches of trees," she says. "They are everywhere in nature, just waiting to be seen, heard, touched, smelled, tasted, written down and shared."

## ANN RABER

lives in Austin with two cats and two dogs, but worked in Sri Lanka over the winter as a reporter for local and U.S. outlets. Ann got involved in backpacking while doing wilderness therapy as a mental health counselor. She became a hiking enthusiast and has now completed backcountry trips in Washington, Colorado, Alaska, Canada, Hawaii, Texas and Thailand. Ann works occasionally as a climbing guide in Central Texas, mostly at Enchanted Rock State Natural Area. A freelance writer and reporter for about three years, Ann also does a weekly radio segment for KPFT in Houston about Texas politics. She writes this month's Skill Builder on ultralight hiking, on page 18.



## DIANA KUNDE

grew up in rural southern Pennsylvania and often ran to a nearby creek to track the progress of the wildflowers that lined its banks. A freelancer retired from the *Dallas Morning News*, Diana says she's come full circle as a volunteer at the Molly Hollar Wildscape, helping to plant and maintain a native landscape. "Molly and her crew have created a place of beauty and inspired people to conserve water and support wildlife by planting native flowers and trees," Diana says. Diana also admires Molly Hollar's unique ability to inspire volunteers. Learn more about Molly Hollar in this month's Legend, Lore & Legacy on page 50.



# AT ISSUE

FROM THE PEN OF CARTER P. SMITH

**Texas' woods and waters fell silent recently** as hunters, anglers and outdoor enthusiasts across the state mourned the passing of one of Texas' most ardent conservationists and outdoorsmen. Texas Parks and Wildlife Commissioner John Parker died peacefully at his home in Lufkin in late January. At 73 years of age, he left this earth, and his beloved Pineywoods, way too soon.

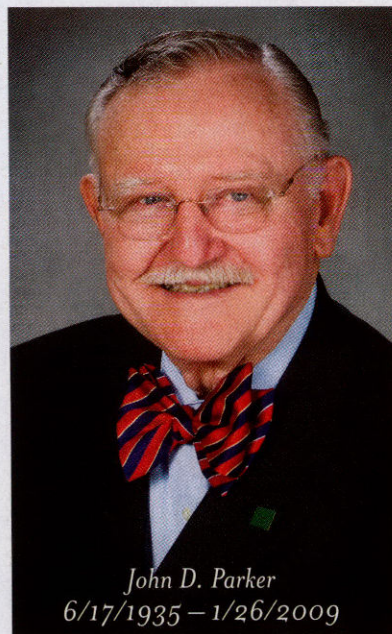
For all those who knew Commissioner Parker, they will most assuredly attest that there was nothing peaceful about the way he approached matters pertaining to hooks, bullets, fish, game, state parks and the future of our outdoor heritage. His passion for such things was legendary. His work ethic on their behalf was without bounds. His commitment to conservation was beyond reproach. And, his patience for those who did not value the future of our state's lands and waters was razor thin.

I first had the pleasure of meeting John Parker when I was being considered for the position of executive director at this agency. His reputation for curiosity and lively discourse preceded him, and I soon found myself enmeshed in a wide ranging, nearly four-hour dinner conversation about the future of our youth, the state of our gulf fisheries, the decline of our grassland birds, the inadequacies of conservation funding, and the virtues of state parks. He ended the evening with an impromptu pop quiz of my knowledge of the history of the menhaden fishery, a gift of three books he thought I should read post-haste, and a homework assignment to study up on the bottomlands of the Neches River.

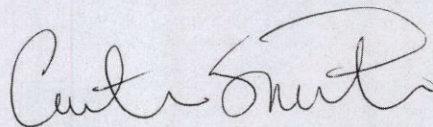
It was vintage John Parker, and I chuckle every time I think about it.

"Commissioner Parker" as those of us on staff called him, or "Parker," as most others did, never tired nor shied away from his responsibilities as a commissioner. There was no issue too big or too small for John. There was no "bad time" to engage him in a conversation about a matter involving the department. If it involved his beloved out of doors, the youth of Texas, or the future of funding for state parks, he was right in the middle of it. As he saw it, his job was to serve the needs, interests and well being of the hunters, fishermen and park users of Texas, and he did just that every waking minute of every single day. If he didn't think you were committed to the same, God help you.

John Parker served the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department as a commissioner with distinction and dedication for six years. The lands, waters, fish, wildlife, parks and outdoor enthusiasts he served are much better off because of it. On behalf of all of us at the department, I offer my most sincere thanks.



John D. Parker  
6/17/1935 - 1/26/2009



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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**To manage and conserve the natural and cultural resources of Texas and to provide hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation opportunities for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.**



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# MAIL CALL

PICKS, PANS AND PROBES FROM OUR READERS

## FOREWORD

**Economic doldrums getting you down?** We hear you. We feel your pain. Seriously. Ow! That hurts. This month's cover story, "30 Cheap Trips," attempts to soothe your aching psyche by supplying inexpensive places to get out and enjoy nature. Sometimes all you need is an afternoon at a nearby state park or botanical garden to get your mind back to the happy place.

And March is a great time to get outside and see the show. Flowers are blooming, babies are hatching, birds are migrating, owls are hooting, lizards are head-bobbing, and the air smells like apple pie (that last one occurs near pie shops, mostly).

If you want to greatly enhance the nature show around your own home, March is also an excellent time to get started on a wildscape. On the TPWD Web site ([www.tpwd.state.tx.us/wildscapes](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/wildscapes)), you can find tons of information on the best plants to choose to attract various creatures, great and small, to your yard. You'll also find useful tips for which types of vegetation to plant in your ecoregion. I've learned the hard way that many plants that thrive in my parents' garden in Houston can't survive in Austin. It may also have something to do with my complete lack of skill as a gardener. But generally speaking, all plants have a better shot at survival if they're native to your area.

For inspiration, I strongly recommend taking a look at the blog of one of our regular contributors, Sheryl Smith-Rodgers. Now, first let me say I'm not normally a big fan of blogs. When the blog phenomenon first appeared on the scene a few years ago, most of them seemed to be focused largely on rambling, whining and demonstrating that there really is a need for professional editors in this world.

Sheryl's blog ([www.sherylsmithrogers.com](http://www.sherylsmithrogers.com)), on the other hand, is well written, entertaining and chock-full of interesting tidbits about the flora and fauna inhabiting her wildscape. In a recent entry, she wrote about rehabilitating a bee: "I dashed back inside the house and found a container of honey in the kitchen. I mixed a tad with some water in the lid of a water bottle. Using a toothpick, I applied some to the stem where the bee sat. Right away, it began to sip! In fact, for several minutes the bee drank the liquid while I snapped photos. Finally, it began to wash itself like a cat ..."

From birds to blooms to Sheryl's personal favorite — spiders — there's always something new to see in her Central Texas yard. When an insect or bird appears in her garden that she can't identify, Sheryl kicks into journalist mode and figures out what it is. It's info-tainment at its best.

Life is just waiting to happen in your own little slice of Texas. All it needs is a little nudge from you. So get on out there and get your hands dirty. It's cheap and it's fun.

*Robert Macias*

ROBERT MACIAS  
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

## LETTERS

### CARSON CAUSED UNDUE ALARM

With reference to E. Dan Klepper's article ("Deadly Silence," January 2009), I would like to make some observations regarding Rachel Carson's book, *Silent Spring*.

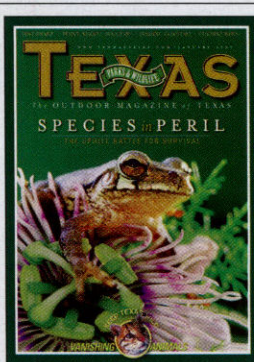
Carson was one of the first environmental extremists to write books based on conjecture, with no proven facts, and

caused much alarm in the "do-good" society. Al Gore probably will not be the last. It was never proven that robins died from eating earthworms where DDT was sprayed, and never proven that the eggs or hatchlings of golden or bald eagles were damaged from DDT. She probably had some willing companions in chemical companies who were more than glad to rid the industry of a single product that would destroy most unwanted insects.

In essence, the demise of DDT caused the proliferation of mosquitoes and fire ants across much of the country. It caused the renewed infestation of the Southern pine beetle, and millions of acres

of pine timber have been destroyed since. It has almost eliminated quail and meadowlarks from southeast Texas due to the heavy infestation of fire ants. It has caused hundreds of cases of West Nile virus along coastal areas, since no chemicals on today's market will completely destroy mosquitoes and the larvae. DDT was developed by the army during WWII to kill malaria-bearing mosquitoes. So we may or may not have saved a few birds by banning it. The real loss is in third world countries where millions of people have died from malaria and continue to die on a daily basis.

JIM STAGG  
Ranchland



In essence, the demise of DDT caused the proliferation of mosquitoes and fire ants across much of the country. It caused the renewed infestation of the Southern pine beetle, and millions of acres of pine timber have been destroyed since.

Jim Stagg  
Ranchland

# MAIL CALL

## IN DEFENSE OF PESTICIDES

**T**exas Parks & Wildlife magazine has done its readers a huge disservice by including E. Dan Klepper's review of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* ("Deadly Silence") in the January 2009 issue. The article, which is heavy on advocacy and antiquated issues like DDT and is short on science in general, is very misleading and inaccurate on many points. TPWD and *TP&W* magazine should be balanced in the business of educating the public on following product labels and exercising safe use of EPA-approved products to prevent or minimize impacts on the environment and Texas wildlife, instead of advocating abolishing products that help feed the world, prevent disease and improve the human condition worldwide.

MIKE MCMURRY  
Elgin

*TPWD RESPONDS: "Deadly Silence" was a book review of a classic work of environmental literature. It was not (nor was it intended to be) an indictment of modern pesticide practices.*

## GUESSAZ' WORDS OF WISDOM

**I**read with interest the article on Oscar Guessaz ("Guessaz Who?" January 2009) and his contributions to our enjoyment of Texas wildlife resources. He "believed that all hunters should have a license, with revenue from the program earmarked exclusively to protect game and assure its propagation."

I seem to recall that, fortunately, this eminently sensible program came to pass, then unfortunately, the revenues later came out of the program and into the general fund. How sad.

DAVID M. HERRING  
Rockport

## Sound off for "Mail Call!"

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We reserve the right to edit letters for length and clarity.

## FRIENDLY, HISTORIC COMFORT

**M**y wife and I have visited Comfort many times. Your article by Elaine Robbins ("Quiet Comfort," January 2009) is one of the best I've ever read on Comfort. It has some interesting facts that were new to me. I particularly enjoyed the reference to the differences in the German immigrants who settled the Llano valley, the Pedernales valley and the Guadalupe valley. Comfort is very much like Boerne was 15 to 20 years ago—a friendly, historic Hill Country town surrounded by farms and ranches. We are still friendly and historic!

TERRY AND JANIS TOPHAM  
Boerne

## HELP SAVE PURPLE MARTINS

**I**love Sheryl Smith-Rodgers' features, and February's article on purple martins ("Purple People Lovers") was no exception. We're lucky to have a couple of spectacular purple martin roosts in Dallas, but one commercial real estate company thinks differently. Every year around July, we fight the same battle not to have the birds sprayed with a chemical when they come in to roost

around sunset. Help fight the cause for these birds—you can be their advocate so that they don't suffer the same fate as the now-extinct passenger pigeon. For more information, go to [www.purplemartin.org](http://www.purplemartin.org) and see how you can get involved.

SANDY SCHRIEVER  
Dallas

## WRONG NIGHT-BLOOMING CEREUS

**T**he only thing that's worse than a taxonomist is a plant that's misidentified in print. In the "Parting Shot" of the February 2009 issue, the photograph is beautiful, and the cactus is obviously blooming at night and is sometimes called by the common name "night-blooming cereus," but the cactus is not a *Peniocereus greggii*. The cactus is actually a typical specimen of *Acanthocereus tetragonus*, which is sometimes also called night-blooming cereus, and is common in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas. However, *Peniocereus greggii* does not occur in South Texas.

MARTIN TERRY  
Alpine

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# SCOUT

NEWS AND VIEWS IN THE TEXAS OUTDOORS

## HAIKU HIKES

*Slow down, observe and write at Government Canyon.*

### Poet, educator and master naturalist

Mobi Warren began leading monthly "haiku hikes" a year ago at the Government Canyon State Natural Area in San Antonio. Her goal is to offer visitors an experience that combines immersion in the natural world with a creative writing experience.

The leisurely 3- to 4-mile hikes are walked in silence so participants can become more in tune with nature. An appreciation for and reverence of nature and man's interdependent relationship with the environment is essential to writing the short Japanese poetic form known as haiku.

In Japanese, the verse traditionally consists of a single vertical line of 17 sounds called *on*. In English, haiku typically appears in three lines, often with a short-long-short pattern of 17 or fewer syllables. Japanese haiku is considered incomplete without the seasonal reference called *kiigo*.

In today's fast-paced world the intricacies of nature and the subtleties of the changing seasons are often overlooked. "I talk about allowing oneself to slow down, to open one's senses to the tiny, fleeting sounds, sights, scents, and textures that we ordinarily miss," says Warren.

During the hikes, 15-minute "writing stops" are signaled with the ringing of a small bell. The hike culminates at the picturesque Bluff Spurs overlook for a final writing session. Individuals then share their haiku, like this one written by Warren.

*In a cup of rock  
a dung beetle  
naps*

"I like to think that every haiku written and shared on these hikes helps weave us back into a healthier, more intimate relationship to the natural world," says Warren, "and that the experience, by restoring our spirits, strengthens our resolve to restore

and protect the environment."

Besides writing haiku, Michael Dylar Welch, longtime vice president of the Haiku Society of America, enjoys nature photography and hiking. These two haiku by Welch were inspired while on the trail.

*A red berry on the trail  
I look up  
to the chickadee's songwriter*

*first on the trail—  
the pull of the spider's strand  
across my face*

The next time you visit a park, walk in silence and really observe your surroundings. That rock, leaf, squirrel or toad just might inspire a haiku.

For more information, visit [www.friendsofsc.org/schedule.html](http://www.friendsofsc.org/schedule.html) or [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/governmentcanyon](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/governmentcanyon). ★

—Terri L. French

Aspiring poets find inspiration in the sounds, scents and scenic beauty of Government Canyon State Natural Area.



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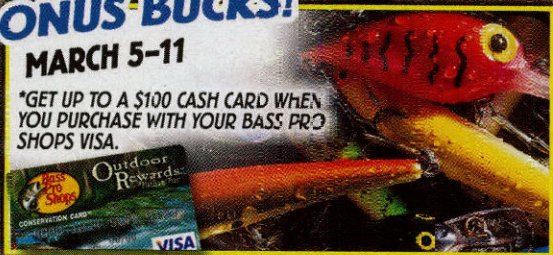
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#### March 1 – 8:

Saving the endangered ocelot; hummingbird photographers; deer economics at the High Lonesome Ranch; Meridian State Park; Neches River bottomlands.

#### March 8 – 15:

Pecos River rock art; floating Village Creek State Park; learning 'natural' communication skills; Stumberg Ranch; Port Aransas sunset.

#### March 15 – 22:

TPWD employees hit by Hurricane Ike;

Seguin's concrete house; leading the way in conservation; the science of deer; animal babies.

#### March 22 – 29:

Discover our newest artificial reef; getting started as a certified diver; artificial reef fish.

#### March 29 – Apr. 5:

Weekend at Garner State Park; environmentally friendly golf course; shifting sands at Monahans Sandhills State Park; frontier history; Texas shorebirds.



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# Texas Redbud

Besides offering a springtime explosion of color, redbuds provide a place for caterpillars to hang.

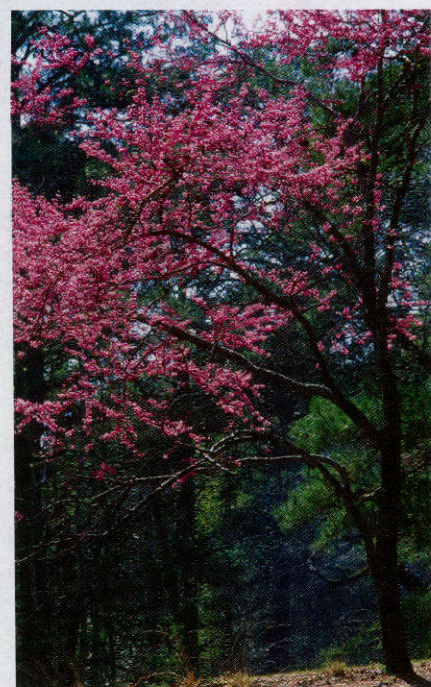


For more than a decade, Judy Ratzlaff drove past the state's champion Texas redbud (*Cercis canadensis* var. *texensis*) on her way home. Every March, the huge tree — whose 39-foot crown spread shaded most of a fenced yard in Willow Park west of Fort Worth — burst into a lavender work of art.

"It was breathtaking," Ratzlaff recalls. "It looked like a weeping willow because the limbs touched the ground. And the flowers stayed on forever." Sadly, though, high winds in 2007 caused the tree to split, and the owners cut the champion down.

No matter their size, nearly all Texas redbuds turn spectacular come spring. On nature's cue, their winter bare branches transform into pastels of pink, rose, purple or white flowers. Developing leaf buds soon open into glossy, heart-shaped foliage. While the Central Texas variety prefers dry limestone hills, its relative — the eastern redbud — thrives in rich soils near streams.

Numerous bird species eat redbud legumes, which appear in the late spring but may last till fall. Henry's elfin (*Gellyphrys henrici*) — a gossamer-wing butterfly — selects redbuds as caterpillar host plants. Humans have found uses for the tree, too. Some pickle the acidic flowers



Texas redbuds present a showy display of pink blossoms in early spring.

for salads; in Mexico they're fried. Fluid extracted from redbud bark has been used as an astringent as well as a treatment for dysentery.

*Cercis siliquastrum* — a redbud that's native to southern Europe — is also called the Judas tree. According to ancient lore, the tree's white flowers turned red with blood or shame after Judas Iscariot betrayed Christ and hung himself from its branches. ★

— Sheryl Smith-Poggers



# Earwig Oddities

While they won't lay eggs in your brain, earwigs do have the odd habit of licking their babies' eggs.

**When out gardening** this spring, don't be too quick to smash any earwigs (*Euborellia annulipes*) you uncover in the soil. Why spare the life of a creepy little creature with formidable pinchers? She may be someone's mom.

Seriously, female earwigs — like some lynx and wolf spiders — pay close attention to their brood. In an underground chamber, an earwig lays and protects 20 or more eggs. She even continually licks the eggs, though biologists aren't sure why. After hatching, a female earwig stays with her young until their first molt. Then they're on their own.

That said, earwigs — despite their scary looks — pose no threat to humans. They scavenge at night for insects, algae, fungi and decaying matter. By day, they hide in moist places beneath rocks, boards and leaf litter. They may get into homes seeking the moisture they crave.

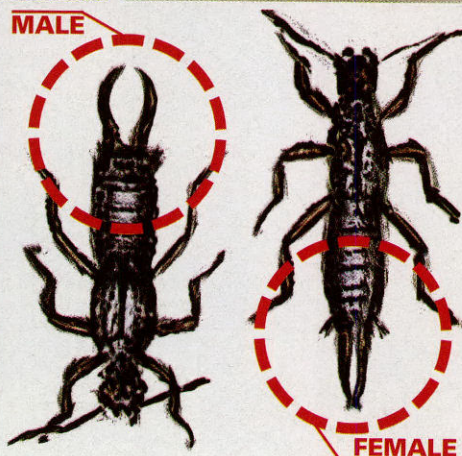
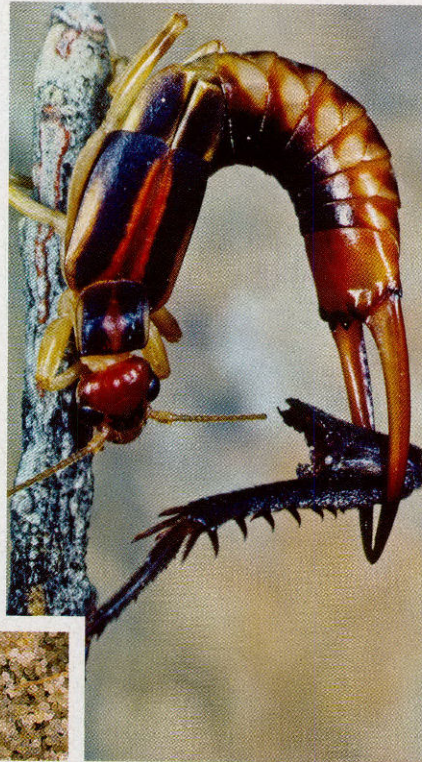
What about those pinchers? Earwigs — which as adults measure 1/2 to 1 inch long — use them like forceps to defend their nests and capture prey. You might get a slight pinch from an earwig, but that's all. Unlike spider fangs, an earwig's pinchers cannot inject venom. Tip: An up-close look at pinchers will determine an earwig's gender (male for-

ceps are longer and more curved).

Historically, earwigs were so named by early Anglo-Saxons who slept on the floor and sometimes discovered "earwiggas" (ear beetles) in their ears upon waking. Contrary to urban legend, earwig mothers have never burrowed into someone's brains and laid eggs. That's what dirt is for! ☆

— Sheryl Smith-Rodgers

**No need to worry — earwigs won't burrow into your brain while you sleep!**



LEFT © BILL JOHNSON; TOP RIGHT © ROBERT & LINDA MITCHELL

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# Texana Tales

Hear the history of a town that was once called Santa Anna.



Deer graze at Lake Texana, located halfway between Houston and Corpus Christi.

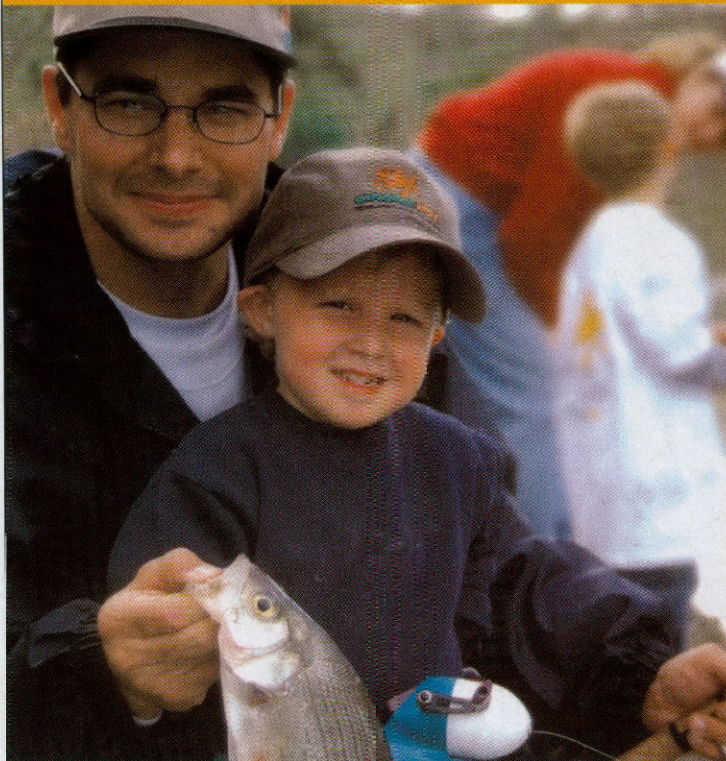
**Nothing remains of Texana**, once an inland port near present-day Edna. But if events had taken a different turn for the town's early settlers, Texans might have celebrated their Independence Day in July, not March.

"They drafted their own declaration of independence from Mexico in July 1935," explains Cindy Baker, an interpretive ranger at Lake Texana State Park. "Major McNutt from Texana was to carry the document to San Felipe, but Mexican soldiers intercepted him so he destroyed it."

Want to hear more fascinating history about Texana? Join Baker when she gives a Texas Independence Day program, set for Saturday, March 7, at 10 a.m. at the park's amphitheater. A coloring craft for kids follows at 2 p.m.

During her presentation, Baker will share old photographs and vintage maps as she tells the story of Tex-

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An aerial view of Lake Texana State Park (above). A young American alligator can be found at the nature center.



ana, established in 1832 and originally called Santa Anna. “The founders were part of Stephen F. Austin’s original 300 colonists, and they named the town after Mexico’s popular politician,” she says. “But when Santa Anna became a dictator, residents changed their town’s name to Texana.”

Several more unfortunate events (like being bypassed by the railroad) turned Texana into a ghost town by 1884. Today, Lake Texana — an 11,000-acre reservoir completed in 1979 — bears the town’s name as does the 575-acre state park.

After the history program’s done, check out wildlife exhibits at the nearby nature center. Enclosed habitats house such native critters as an ornate box turtle, a rough green snake and a young American alligator. Baker also gives weekly nature programs. Check out the park’s online calendar for dates and details.

If you enjoy fishing, then pack some fishing gear and head for the lake. Most anglers find crappie as well as channel and flathead catfish. Visitors also swim, sail, jet ski, water ski and paddle in Lake Texana. Watch out for resident

American alligators that inhabit the park’s coves.

Park facilities include picnic sites, campgrounds, lighted fishing piers, a boat ramp, playgrounds and a group picnic pavilion. Along the 1.5-mile Texana Nature Trail, hikers may spot white-tailed deer, rabbits and armadillos. More than 220 bird species have been spotted in the park.

Lake Texana State Park is located 5.5 miles east of Edna on Texas 111. For more information, call 361-782-5718 or visit <[www.tpwd.state.tx.us/laketexana](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/laketexana)>.★

—Sheryl Smith-Rodgers

## NEW SPORTS TECHNOLOGY

# New lure’s catch rate may be too high for some tournaments.

**Out-fishes other bait 19 to 4 in one contest.**

**Uses aerospace technology to mimic a real fish.**

ORLANDO, FL— A small company in Connecticut has developed a new lure that mimics the motion of a real fish so realistically eight professionals couldn’t tell the difference between it and a live shad when it “swam” toward them on retrieval. The design eliminates wobbling, angled swimming and other unnatural motions that problem other hard bait lures. It swims upright and appears to propel itself with its tail.

Curiously, the company may have designed it too well. Tournament fishermen who have used it said it’s possible officials will not allow it in contests where live bait is prohibited. They claim it swims more realistically than anything they have ever seen. If so, that would hurt the company’s promotional efforts. Winning tournaments is an important part of marketing a new lure.

Fish would probably prefer to see it restricted. I watched eight veteran fishermen test the new lure (called The KickTail®) on a lake outside Orlando FL for about four hours. Four used the KickTail and four used a com-

bination of their favorite lures and shiners (live bait). The four using the KickTail caught 41 fish versus 14 for the other four. In one boat the KickTail won 19 to 4. The KickTail also caught bigger fish, which suggests it triggers larger, less aggressive fish to strike.

The KickTail’s magic comes from a patented technology that breaks the tail into five segments. As water rushes by on retrieval, a little-known principle called aeronautical flutter causes the tail to wag left and right, as if the lure were propelling itself with its tail.

Unlike other hard baits, the head remains stationary—only the tail wags. A company spokesman told me this.

“Marine biologists will tell you that the more a lure swims like a real fish, the more fish it will catch. Well, the only live thing the KickTail doesn’t do is breathe. It’s always swimming wild and free. Fish can’t stand it. We’ve seen fish that have just eaten go for the KickTail. It’s like having another potato chip.”

Whether you fish for fun or profit, if you want a near 3 to 1 advantage, I would order now before the KickTail becomes known. The company even guarantees a refund, if you don’t catch more fish and return the lures with-



Swims with its tail.

**New lure swims like a real fish--nearly triples catch in Florida contest.**

in 30 days. There are three versions: a floater, a diver and a “dying shad” with a weed guard. Each lure costs \$9.95 and you must order at least two. There is also a “Super 10-Pack” with additional colors for only \$79.95, a savings of almost \$20.00. S/h is only \$7.00 no matter how many you order.

To order call 1-800-873-4415 (Ask for item # kts), or click [www.ngcsports.com/gear](http://www.ngcsports.com/gear) anytime or day or send a check or M.O. (or cc number and exp. date) to NGC Sports (Dept. KT-1520) 60 Church Street, Yalesville, CT 06492. CT add sales tax. The KickTail is four inches long and works in salt and fresh water.

KTE-8H © NGC Worldwide, Inc. 2009 Dept. KT-1520



# Paddling the Guad

*Biologist captures the magic of a beloved river.*

**Wayne H. McAlister**, biologist and retired environmental education specialist who penned the informative and entertaining *Life on Matagorda Island* (Texas A&M University Press), has created another fact-filled adventure for Texas readers. His recently published *Paddling the Guadalupe* is a 300-plus-page love letter encapsulating McAlister's 40-year romance with a canoe and the Guadalupe River. *Paddling* should please historians, water critter buffs and literati alike with its deep research of the Hill Country past, endless minutiae of riverine entomology and a purling of phrasework that could only have arisen from the heart of a poet.

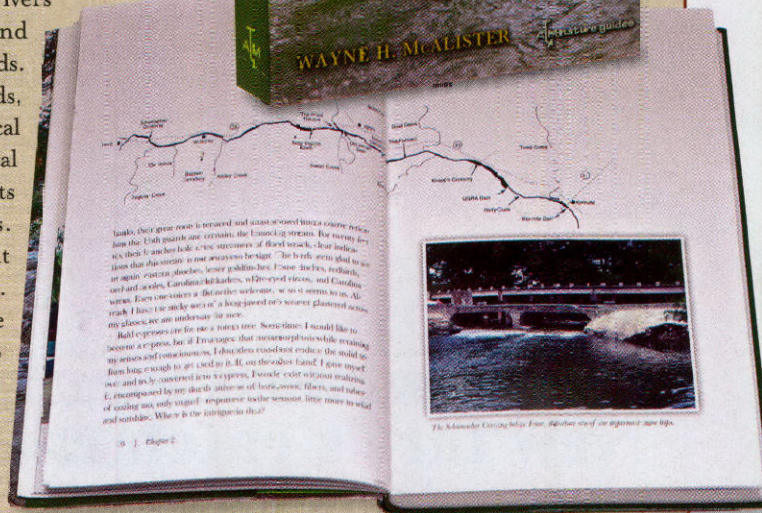
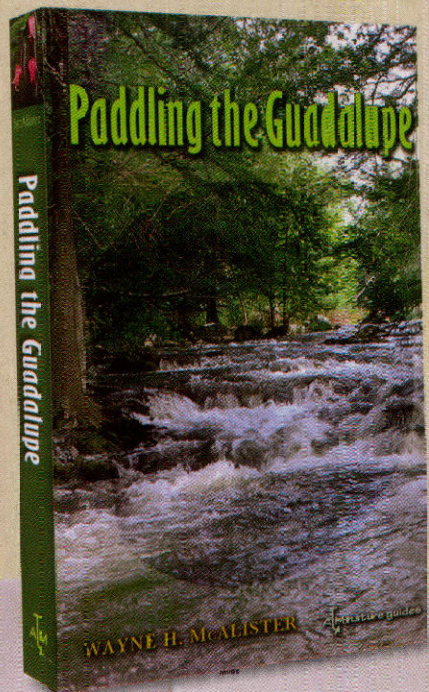
"My notebook is filled with trivia that evoke vivid memories," McAlister writes of his river sojourns. "It is early and we are traveling directly into the sun. Everything ahead is edged in dazzling red light. A flaming gossamer banner of spiderweb streams from Martha's hat, and undulates and snaps in ethereal silence directly in front of my nose. I am running blindly, directly into the liquid fire of dawn, with the blazing lash in my face and each paddle stroke emitting a shower of sparks. I feel the hand of Icarus on my shoulder, the tug of Phlegethon from below. Then we make the bend, the sun swings behind me and the entire world takes on a reduced radiance."

The occasional paddler who has canoed or kayaked the dawn can relate, if not to the classic references then to the transcendent rature of morning light on water. But

McAlister has made a life of following the river's muse, and in this volume, he explains through anecdote and analysis just exactly why.

"One of my first revelations was how provincial my knowledge of the river really was. I could speak with authority about the suck holes, pecan bottoms, wildlife, and river folks past and present, but for no more than a mile up and downstream of my house. Yet rivers have beginnings and midsections and ends. They have watersheds, tributaries, geological histories, hydrological constraints, and lots of human stories. Books helped, but still left large gaps. To comprehend the Guadalupe River, to get a real feel for the whole river, I needed to go out and consort with it; with all of it."

Gratefully, McAlister did not leave his own muse at home before embarking on his many canoe trips down the Guadalupe. Just as in his Matagorda narrative, McAlister's wife Martha appears as the stalwart, narrating life's adventures with an omnipresent voice that consistently reels mere mortals back down to earth where we belong.



"A woman ahead of us is pole fishing for channel cats," McAlister recalls. "As we pass she is baiting her hook. I idly ask her if she is using stink bait."

Naw. Hit don't stay on the hook good 'nuff. This here's a mix'a chickens guts'n garlic.' Out of earshot Martha commented that if that concoction did not qualify as 'stink bait,' she did not want to get close to the real thing."

Spending time with *Paddling the Guadalupe* is almost as good as taking to the river course directly, while avoiding all the exhausting portages. Readers enjoy a wealth of side trips into the river's cultural and natural history while the McAlisters do all the actual heavy lifting. Praise be to these Guadalupe paddlers for capturing the magic of a beloved river and delivering it directly into the hands of Texans. Paddle on! ☆

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# Bearable Lightness

*Ultralight packing allows you to hike longer and go further.*

*"To equip a pedestrian with shelter, bedding, utensils, food, and other necessities, in a pack so light and small that he can carry it without overstrain, is really a fine art." — Horace Kephart, *Camping and Woodcraft*, 1917*

**"Ultralight" might conjure** images of arriving at your destination in a rickety, one-man flying machine, but the

term in this case refers to how much you carry as opposed to the mode of transport. Actually, ultralight isn't a new approach to outdoor gear, but rather a return to the original aspiration of every outdoorsperson: to bring what we need on our own strength and move with ease.

Whether you favor multi-day excursions, day hikes or rafting trips, ultra-

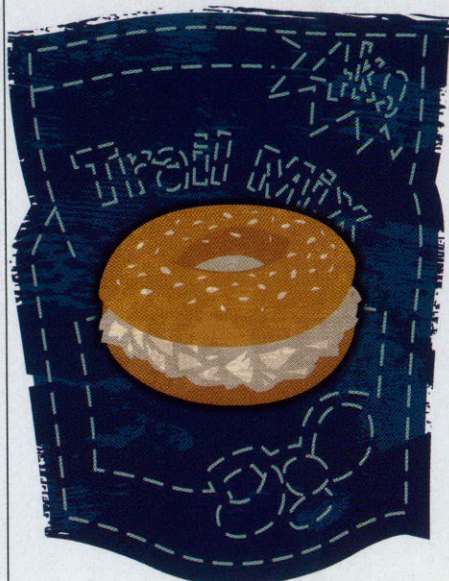
light can enhance the experience by saving your strength and energy, giving you more time to explore once camp is set up. Going ultralight also makes longer trails accessible to small children, hesitant city folks and longtime outdoor enthusiasts who've been sidelined by injuries. Many women have found that ultralight equipment and techniques have given them independence in the backcountry.

When we consider our basic needs, we find plenty of ounces and pounds to be shed, saving us energy and time on the trail or river.

## Food

Joe Gervais is a backcountry guide based in Arizona. He sees a lot of campers hauling around food that never gets eaten. "Someone always has the proverbial 10-pound bag of trail mix."


Gervais and others swear by what they call "the heartiest lightweight meal available." A vacuum-packed single serving of tuna, a packet of mayo, and a bagel. The variety of flavors and the mix of carbohydrates and protein make it perfect for a day on the trail. "Plus," he added, "there's just something about eating a tuna sandwich with mayonnaise out in the middle of nowhere that's just, well, it's magnificent."



ILLUSTRATIONS © MATT LEBARRE





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- Sunrise
- Swim
- Discover
- Parasail
- Fish
- Hike
- Surf
- Sandcastle
- Birdwatching
- Play
- Snorkel
- Eat
- Turtles
- Sunset



## be yourself

in a place you really want to be.

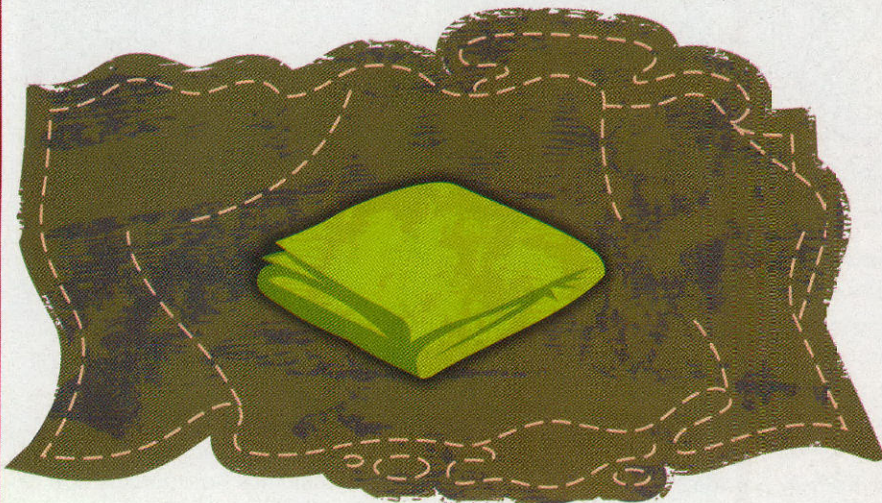
## Water

As specialty water bottle manufacturers fill the shelves with new indestructible canisters it's refreshing to learn that some of the heartiest hikers in the country recommend carrying water in a reused plastic soda bottle. Impressively sturdy (there are stories of one intrepid 2 liter putting in over five years of service), an empty soda bottle adds less than 2 ounces to your pack. Contrast that with the hard plastic canisters, or aluminum models, which contribute almost half a pound bone-dry.



## Shelter

As Gervais pointed out, "the best rain layer is no rain." Instead of a rain jacket, a good option is the hiking umbrella. At 10 ounces, these large domes are designed to withstand scraping branches and heavy gusts. With neutral colors as well as brighter options, the umbrella also functions as portable shade, camouflage or even aerial identification (you never know).



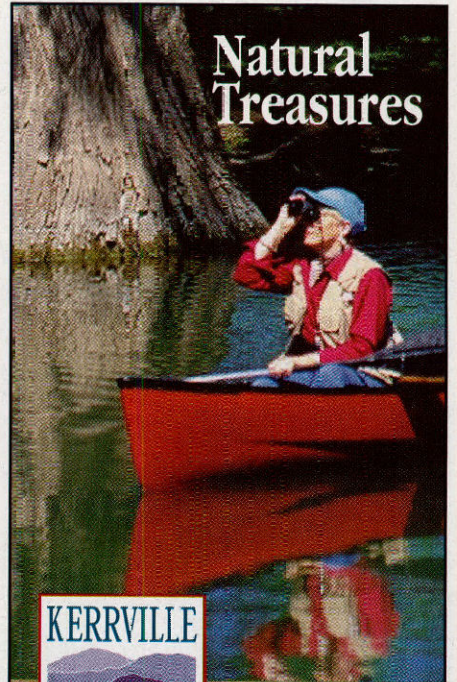
## Fun

For a swim or a float trip leave the bath and beach towels at home and opt for a pack towel. Aside from being enormous, a cotton towel takes on up to ten times its weight in water. In contrast, a microfiber pack towel folds up small (3.5 by 5 inches) and weighs almost nothing, but pushes water off, even if it's wet. These towels dry off in the breeze before mildew has a chance.

Want to get even deeper into ultralight? Set your pack on a digital scale and look for excess ounces. *The Complete Walker IV*, an updated edition of Colin Fletcher's classic meditation and manual on hiking, describes the classic weight-shedding methods.

By investing in a few pieces of specialized lightweight gear and revising what you bring along, you can enjoy your time outdoors more, for longer and with more of the people you love. ★

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# 3 Days in the Field / By Larry Bozka

DESTINATION: GONZALES

TRAVEL TIME FROM:

AUSTIN – 1 hour / BROWNSVILLE – 4.5 hours / DALLAS – 4.25 hours / HOUSTON – 2.25 hours  
SAN ANTONIO – 1.25 hours / LUBBOCK – 7.5 hours / EL PASO – 10.25 hours

## Come and Take It



*Gonzales oozes history, but you can also find good food and uncrowded fishing holes.*



A disagreement over the "Come and Take It" cannon sparked the first battle of the Texas Revolution at Gonzales in 1835.

I was busy acquiring a fourth-grade education when I first heard the tale of the "Come and Take It" cannon. Before covering the Alamo, Mrs. Casey thought it necessary that we first learn what happened in the frontier town of Gonzales on October 2, 1835.

In the late 1820s, Comanche and Tonkawa Indian tribes began to retaliate against immigrants who had been allocated property by land impresario Greene DeWitt. To help provide

security for DeWitt's expanding colony, slated to eventually include some 400 families, in 1831 the Mexican government provided the settlers a 6-pound cannon.

Bad idea.

For the Mexicans, anyway.

DeWitt's outpost was the first Anglo-American settlement west of the Colorado River. It was situated on some prime real estate, the beautifully fertile bottomlands near the junction of

the San Marcos and Guadalupe Rivers. DeWitt named it Gonzales in honor of Don Rafael Gonzales, provisional governor of Texas and Coahuila, Mexico.

For various reasons, increased taxation and Mexican government regulations certainly among them, DeWitt's colonists grew rebellious. Whispers of revolution were discreetly circulated. Some settlers were so brash as to suggest that Texas declare independence. Word of the dissension filtered south. Recognizing the pending threat of an uprising, in 1835 Mexican officials demanded that the cannon be unconditionally returned.

Five Mexican soldiers arrived at the colony to carry out the order. DeWitt's group refused to surrender the artillery piece, prompting Mexican authorities in San Antonio to dispatch roughly 100 mounted soldiers with orders to forcefully "take" it.

On Sept. 29, 1835, after burying the cannon in the peach orchard of Gonzales resident George W. Davis, 18 renegade colonists hid inside a river ferry and awaited the troops' arrival. Immortalized as "The Old Eighteen," they delayed the soldiers for several days by telling them that Gonzales mayor, or "alcalde," Andrew Ponton was away on business. The next day, Texian soldier Joseph D. Clements presented the dragoons' commanding

officer, a lieutenant named Castaneda, a not-so-subtle message. "I cannot, nor do I desire, to deliver up the cannon. Only through force will we yield."

The cannon was unearthed and hastily fitted atop a broad, wooden-wheeled ox wagon as a group of local women scrambled to design and sew a battle flag. Emblazoned with a single star and a black replica of the cannon on a white background, it was inscribed with a bluntly defiant challenge.

"Come and Take It!"

The Mexican soldiers attempted to do just that. Despite the fact that they faced a modest force of only 50 or so mounted Texians, they famously failed. The firing of the Gonzales cannon on October 2, 1835, ignited the fuse of the Texas Revolution with a thundering and politically volatile roar of powder-propelled chain and metal.

That's all history, and only a scant overview of it at that. However, it's by no means forgotten — not around these parts, anyway.

"Travel stories" don't usually delve deep into historical details. However, in the case of Gonzales, to ignore the town's history is to virtually deny its existence. Since my wife, Liz, and I arrived here, everything we have seen and done traces back to the chain of events that the locals proudly call "The Lexington of Texas."

Barbara Hand, director of the Gonzales Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture, assured me we'd have plenty to cover. Looking back, I'm glad I didn't argue the point. In this small rural town, nestled approximately halfway between Houston and San Antonio off Interstate 10, there has been surprisingly much to see and do since we arrived on Friday.

The Best Western Regency Inn off East Sarah Dewitt Drive, a major Gonzales artery, has been our undercover headquarters of sorts. Maintaining an under-the-radar profile, we've had everything we need to keep the remote office and photo studio running full-tilt. Altogether, that's emblematic of this entire area. Modern amenities abound. But all the same, most everything is enveloped with an undeniable aura of history.

Coming into town, we stopped to visit my old friend Egon Barthels. Tall, personable and thin as a fresh willow limb, Barthels is a lifelong broadcasting pro with a faintly discernible Czech accent and a disarming knack for storytelling. He's also a savvy businessman.

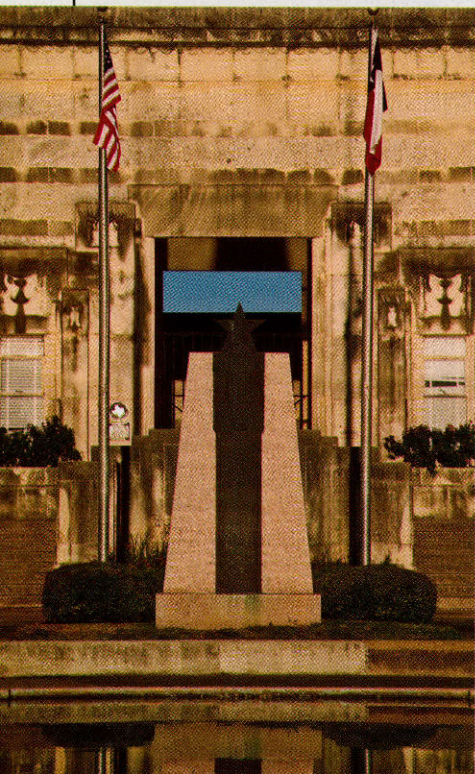
Barthels is program director for Gonzales radio station 1450KCTI AM. He's been tasked with blending the old and the new, retaining the flavor of the 61-year-old station's Bohemian ethnicity while ushering it into the future with special events and a brand-new Web site for online listening. KCTI's studios shelter a vast and well-preserved collection of music, especially polka, etched into the vinyl of thousands of 33-1/3-, 48- and even 78-rpm records.

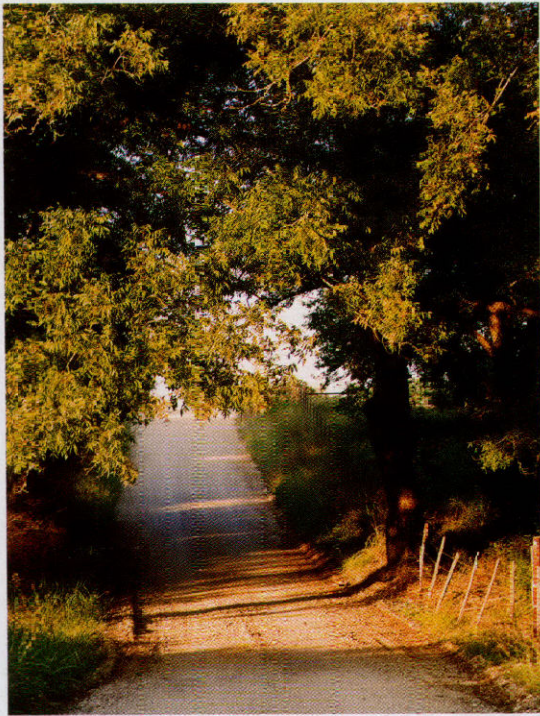
Between the recommendations of Barthels and Hand, both of whom obviously adore the town, Liz and I booked an almost-nonstop three-day itinerary.

We met Gonzales historian and tour guide Leon Netardus after visiting with Barthels.



(Clockwise from left) Closeup of the cannon muzzle; Texas Heroes Monument; Gonzales Museum.





(Clockwise from top left) Country roads wind through rich bottomland; Belle Oaks Inn; a spire on the Houston House.

importance of their town's ornate 1800s-era architecture. The sum of their efforts now presents one of the most impressive architectural preservation projects in the state. Old homes are at the soul of the Gonzales zeitgeist.

*Historic Homes of Gonzales*, an 80-page spiral-bound volume by author Paul Frenzel shows and profiles over five dozen 1800s-era Gonzales homes. (Like Netardus' book, *Historic Homes of Gonzales* is available through the Gonzales Chamber of Commerce.) From quaint Queen Anne-style cottages to castle-like Victorian mansions, the homes that punctuate Gonzales' "Driving Tour" are ruggedly magnificent, priceless not only for their historic and visual appeal but also because they are so remarkably well-preserved and maintained.

The pointed spires of the J.D. Houston House, completed in 1898, the sharp Gothic angles of the Judge T.H. Spooner House of 1875 and the soaring ivory columns of the Belle Oaks Inn (built in 1912, and today a popular bed-and-breakfast) all hark back to the rich and early roots of South Central Texas. These homes were built by wealthy people, mostly ranchers. Alongside, however, lived a rugged clan of hardscrabble settlers whose long-ago existence is splendidly preserved and portrayed via the Gonzales Pioneer Village Living History Center.

It's here where the first weekend of every October the townspeople host the Come and Take It Festival. Throughout the year, Pioneer Village visitors have the opportunity to see 1800s Texas precisely as it was, unvarnished and real. Among the site's 10 buildings are an 1860s blacksmith shop, the 1830s Greenwood Cabin, the 1870s Hamon Church, and the 1880s St. Andrew Street House, where we found gift shop operator and village docent Linda Kuenzler busily entertaining children with a wooden "Jacob's Ladder." It was great to see a toy made of sticks — not one with a joystick — so completely capture those kids' attention.

Netardus' passion for his hometown — again a near-universal trait among Gonzales residents — is potently contagious. Blue-eyed and white-haired, wearing a pink-and-black "I Love Gonzales" button pinned to a pressed denim vest, the affable Netardus is Gonzales' unofficial Man About Town. He knows the area's 49 square blocks amid seven public squares (still true today to the 1832 survey) as well as anyone, and has spent years unveiling and chronicling the town's history and folklore.

Netardus is the author of *Ghosts of Gonzales*. Only 36 pages long, the staple-bound paperback is precisely what the title implies, replete with allusions to "Friendly Gonzales Ghosts," "Residential Ghosts" and even "Rural Rogues and Ghosts." As Netardus shuttled us about town, he followed a directional sequence of green-and-white "Driving Tour" signs that make it almost effortless for curious travelers to see some of Texas' most intriguing architecture (and yes, most all of the homes look like they may well house a ghostly apparition or two).

Gonzales' city leaders long ago recognized the value and signif-

Architecture and history keep the Gonzales train on track, but quality food keeps it energized. We sampled a bit of all of it—the homemade tortillas and delicate shrimp enchiladas of the locally owned Mr. Taco Mexican restaurant, slabs of sauce-covered ribs at the more urban-oriented Doc's Roadhouse, the sandwiches and home-style delicacies of the Gonzales Food Market and even the kolaches, artisan breads and specialty pastries of Sweet Irene Bakeshop. Every one of these places has its regulars, longtime locals, but for passers-through like us, they're precious-ly unique finds.

The same can be said for Palmetto State Park. If you were to blindfold a person and drive him into the lush undergrowth of the 270-acre park, it's likely he'd be clueless as to his whereabouts.

Studded with dense clusters of dwarf palmettos, the park's namesake plant species, shaded by a moss-draped canopy of ancient live oak trees, Palmetto State Park is Texas' own version of a subtropical jungle. At the end of the park's entrance road the landscape vividly plummets into the water-carved vista of the San Marcos River.

Gonzales residents are just fine with the fact that Palmetto State Park and its glittering waters are so rarely visited. Year-round, they quietly go about camping and hiking inside the park's untamed boundaries. With very little competition for quality spots, area anglers have long enjoyed catching largemouth bass, catfish and several species of sunfish from the river and a small, 4-acre oxbow lake that it feeds.

Palmetto State Park hosts over 200 recorded species of birds, among them a wandering flock of Rio Grande turkeys that casually strutted across Park Road 11 as Liz and I turned in off U.S. 183.

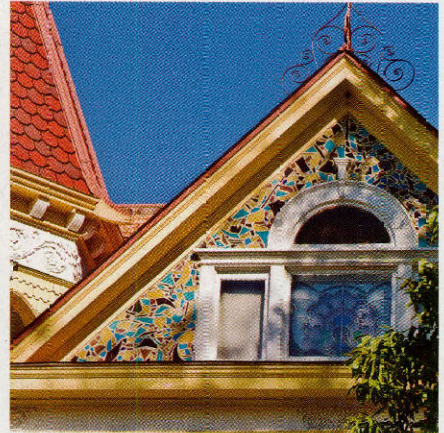
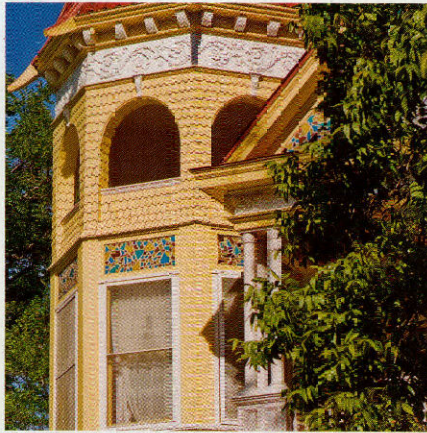
For this and much more the people of Gonzales are understandably proud. Perhaps nowhere is that pride more patently manifested than at the Gonzales Memorial Museum. It's the shrine that holds the centerpiece of my grade-school Texas history inspiration.

The cannon.

"No," a visitor corrects me. "The 'Come and Take It' cannon."

I sized up its coppery bronze barrel, the medieval-looking cart upon which it rests and its thick, solid oak wheels, and thought back to my school days. As a 10-year-old boy I visualized the Come and Take It cannon as colossal weapon, an intimidating piece of ordnance that immediately upon sight would command awe and respect in the eyes of viewers.

Looking at it today, it wasn't nearly as large as I envisioned. But I revisited it while driving back east on I-10, especially the part about "awe and respect," and realized with a smile that the diminutive cannon was indeed every bit as awesome as I first imagined.



(Top) J.B. Kennard House; (middle row) the T. H. Spooner House; (right) the San Marcos River at Palmetto State Park.



Perhaps it's not a reaction everyone will feel. Maybe it has more impact on Texans, or at least those who at some point in their education studied Texas history. Given what that cannon did with a single but immortal shot to advance the cause of freedom, there's unquestionably something special about passing the reflection porch, monument and plaques, entering the Gonzales Memorial Museum and absorbing the solemn intensity of the battle cannon's legacy.

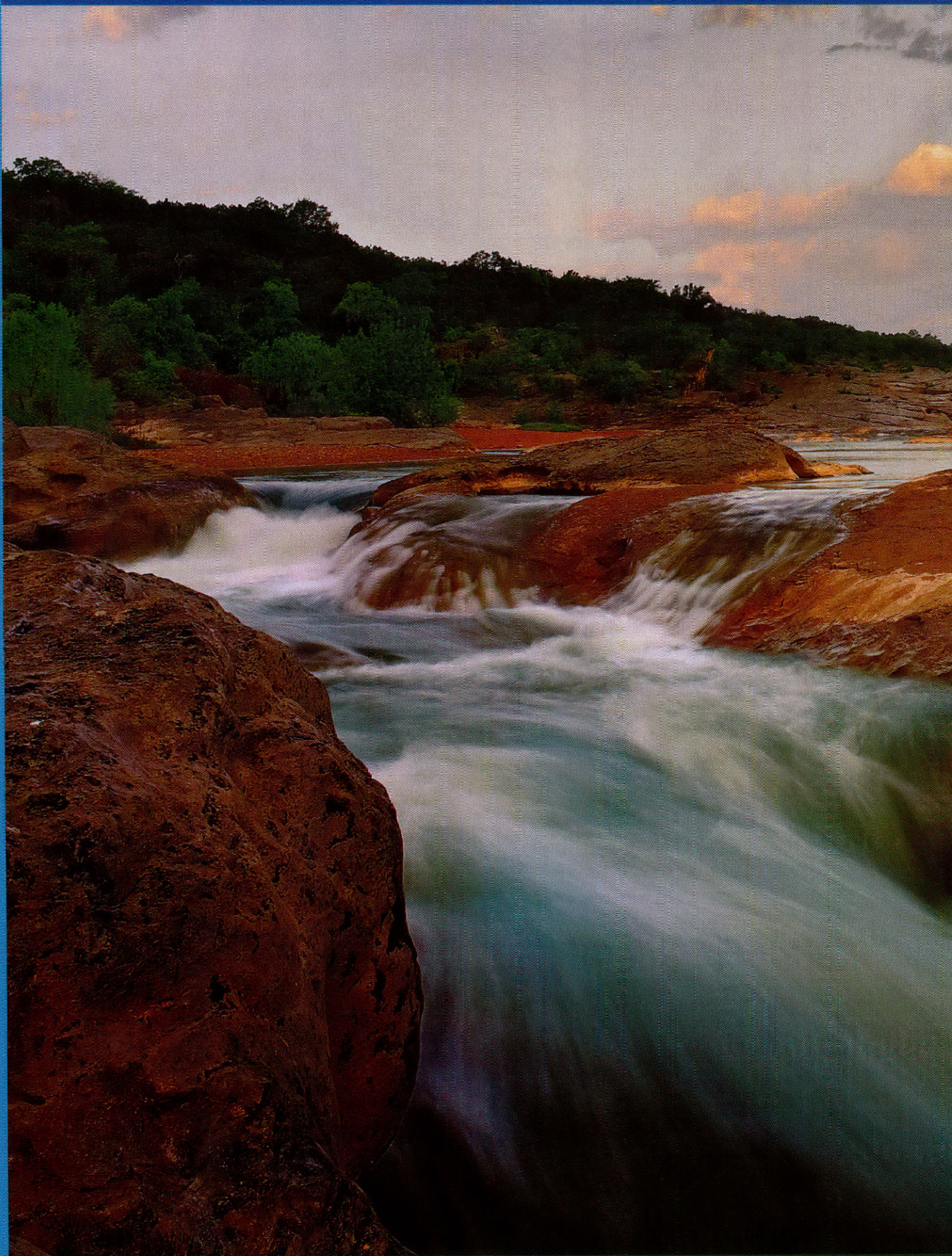
The sensation is there, always.

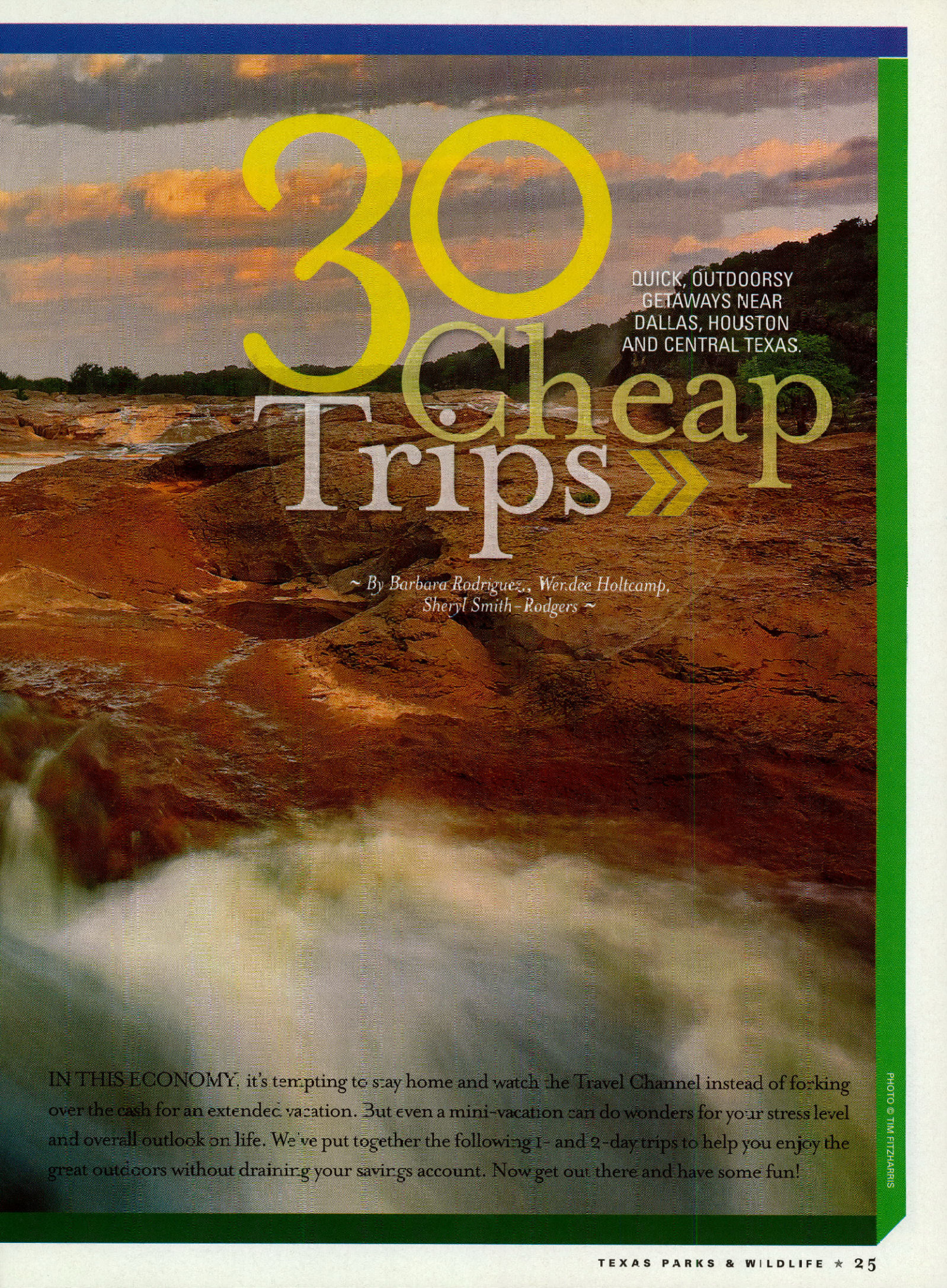
But if you want it, you still have to come and take it. ★

#### DETAILS

- Gonzales Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture (888-672-1095, [www.gonzalestexas.com](http://www.gonzalestexas.com))
- Palmetto State Park (830-672-3266, [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/palmetto](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/palmetto))
- Gonzales Pioneer Village (830-672-2157, [www.gonzalespioneer village.com](http://www.gonzalespioneer village.com))







# 30 Cheap Trips»

QUICK, OUTDOORSY  
GETAWAYS NEAR  
DALLAS, HOUSTON  
AND CENTRAL TEXAS.

~ By *Barbara Rodriguez, Wer-dee Holtcamp,  
Sheryl Smith-Rodgers* ~

IN THIS ECONOMY, it's tempting to stay home and watch the Travel Channel instead of forking over the cash for an extended vacation. But even a mini-vacation can do wonders for your stress level and overall outlook on life. We've put together the following 1- and 2-day trips to help you enjoy the great outdoors without draining your savings account. Now get out there and have some fun!

PHOTO © TIM FITZHARRIS



2  
»



**Hike, bike, horse around**

Fort Richardson State Park and Historic Site features rolling prairie with beauty for sit-and-muse sorts, as well as rock outcroppings and creeks for high-energy types. The 10-mile Lost Creek Trailway invites hikers, bikers and horses to the reservoir for seasonal swimming. A tank full of hungry bass (sometimes trout) makes beginner anglers look like seasoned pros. Tent sites are appealing, or reserve a screened shelter. Eat barbecue at the Jacksboro Dairyland Drive-In, where ribs arrive with damp washcloths. (A half-mile south of Jacksboro on Hwy. 281, \$3/13-up day use; camping fees vary. For information on fort tours, call 940-567-3506 or visit [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/fortrichardson](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/fortrichardson))

— BR

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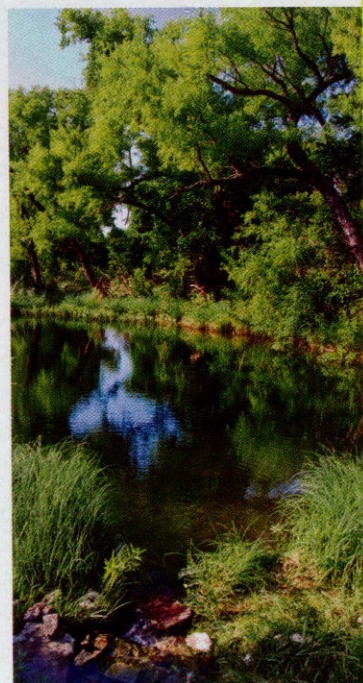


**Meditate among the gardens**

IF YOU HAVEN'T BEEN to the Dallas Arboretum since your cousin's wedding, you'll find new muses in the 66 acres of themed gardens. The "water-on-water" pool in the Women's Council Garden may do your mental health more good than months of yoga — for a lot less money. To the east, a garden sloping to White Rock Lake fea-

tures stone alcoves cozy enough for meditation, if not courtship. Rewarding rambling in all seasons make this a destination garden, but the Southern Garden's wisteria is Gatsby worthy in the spring, and autumn's mums are no quiet delight. Get a two-for punch by heading over to White Rock Lake for a picnic, fishing and

a 9-mile stroll/bike around the lake. Hike up the spillway through a nature reserve for the cat's meow in birding. (8525 Garland Road, southeast side of White Rock Lake, 214-515-6500; \$9.50/adults, \$6/ages 3-12, \$5 parking, [www.dallasarboretum.org](http://www.dallasarboretum.org). White Rock Lake, 8300 East Lawther Drive, free admission) — BR

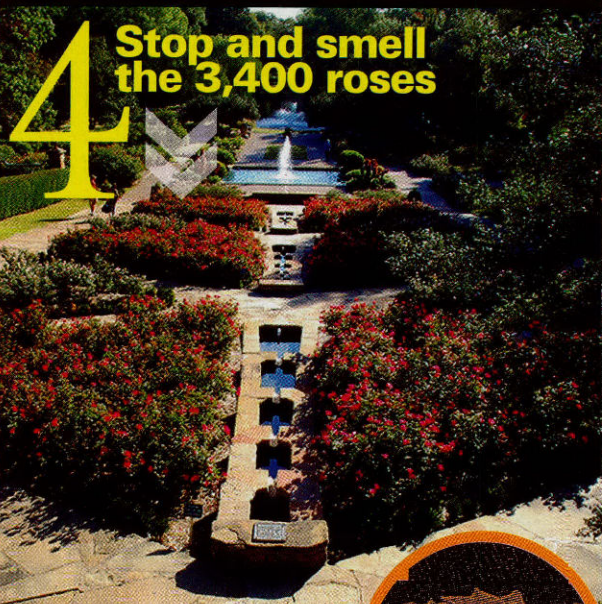


LEFT © LAURENCE PARENT; RIGHT © LARRY DITTO

WEATHERFORD'S BEST KNOWN for its 100-year-old flea market (retro boots to live chickens), but don't miss a visit to the Chandor Gardens. The homeplace of '30s portraitist Douglas Chandor was lavishly landscaped over two decades by the artist. Chinese tradition meets English formality there. Look for a Chinese fountain born of chunks of tile, glass and old Coke bottles. Try the cobbler at the Weatherford Downtown Café or lunch at the Chicken Scratch Bistro, both on the square. The flea market is a killer in the heat, but spring and fall are glorious. (Trade Days, Friday–Sunday, before the first Monday. Exit 409 from I-20, north to Santa Fe Drive, downtown, free, \$3/parking. Chandor Gardens, 711 W. Lee Ave., April thru 3rd weekend of November, 9 a.m. – 3 p.m. Saturdays, 1 p.m. – 5 p.m. Sundays, or by appt. \$5/adults, free/12-under, 817-613-1700, www.chandorgardens.com) — BR



## 4 Stop and smell the 3,400 roses



FOR MANY, the high point of Texas' oldest botanic garden is the Sunken Rose Garden built by the WPA. The roses are beloved by brides and picnickers alike, but the interactive Texas Native Forest Boardwalk, a fine outdoor learning environment, is a bustling family favorite. Kids crawl through logs, listen to samplings of bird calls, and try the whisper tube. The boardwalk connects the north and south ends of the 109 acres of themed plantings. The Japanese Garden is quietly elegant except for the showboating koi, who are hardly shy as they flirt for fish food. Rose drama is greatest in late April and October; burnished foliage is showy in autumn; Japanese maples are spectacular in the late fall. Across University, in Trinity Park, a miniature train whistles along the river and parallels 2 miles of hike/bike trails. Explore the 19th-century structures in the Log Cabin Village just south, across from the stellar Fort Worth Zoo. (3320 Botanic Garden Blvd. at University Dr., just north of I-30, 817-871-7686. General gardens free. Japanese Gardens: adults/\$3.50, 4-up/\$2, www.fwb.org. Log Cabin Village, 2100 Log Cabin Village Lane, 817-392-5881, \$3.50/adults; \$3/17-under) — BR

## 5 Lions, tigers & cougars, oh my!

FEW FOLKS KNOW that there are 52 big cats lazing away their retirement on a ranch outside Bridgeport. Visit and contribute to the costs of rehabilitating amazing animals rescued from ill-informed rock stars and truckers who think a putty tat is a putty tat. Interns at the Center for Animal Research and Education enlighten you to each beast's personality, background and general care. Fun facts are plentiful — there's no such thing as a black panther (they're actually leopards with rosettes in the deep shadows of the fur); the more testosterone, the blacker a lion's mane; chuffing is as close to purring as a big cat (lion, tiger) gets — but the joy is the up-close and personal view of a tiger's canines; an

arctic leopard's furry paws; or the bright eyes of a cougar sizing you up. Speaking of lunch, stop in for the blue plate special in town at Gail's "Best Food in Texas" Plan ahead and detour through Boyd to visit the International Exotic Animal Sanctuary, where you'll see lions and tigers and, yes, bears — even a serval and a caracal. Follow Hwy 114 through Boyd, continue towards Bridgeport; turn left onto FM 2123 for 1.5 miles; right on CR 3422, CARE is on the left; Saturdays and Sundays 10:30 a.m. – 5 p.m.; Monday – Friday by appointment. Suggested donation \$10/adult, \$5/child, www.bigcatcare.org. To visit the IEAS, see www.bigcat.org for tour information or call 940-433-5091) — BR

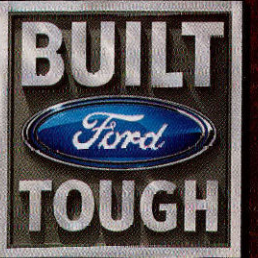
**ALL-NEW '09 F-150**

**MAN, TRAILERS ARE LIKE**

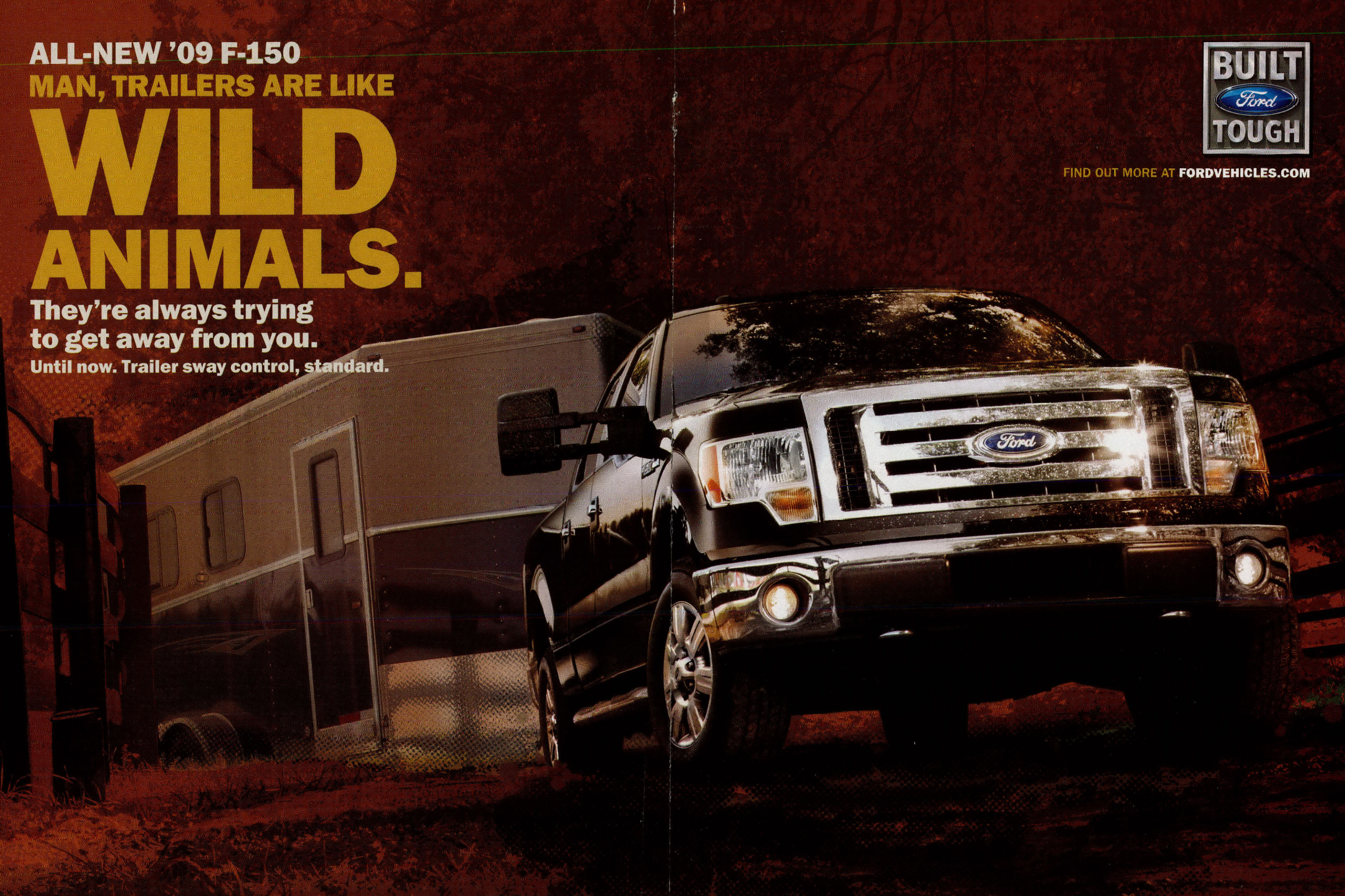
# **WILD ANIMALS.**

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**Until now. Trailer sway control, standard.**



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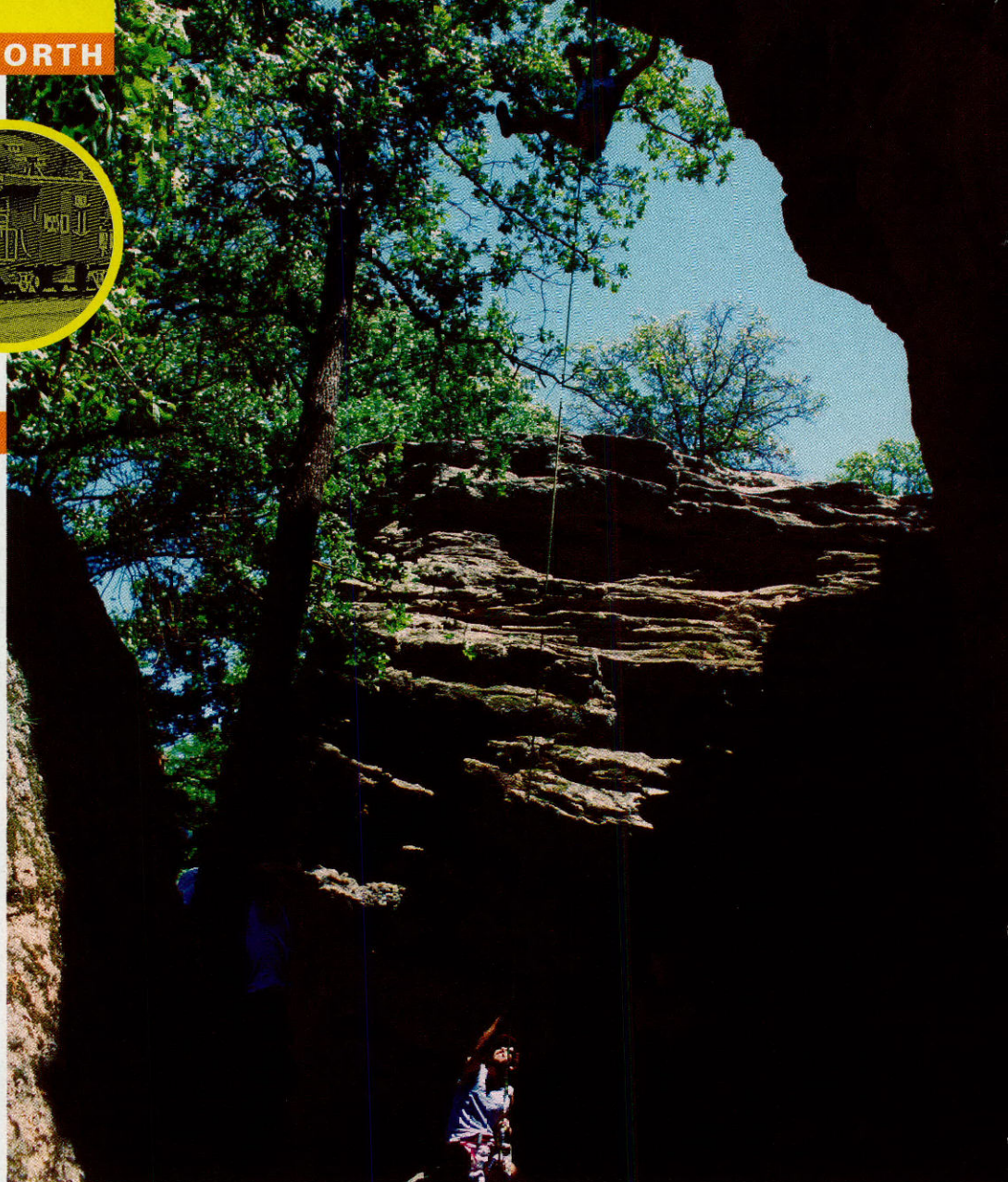


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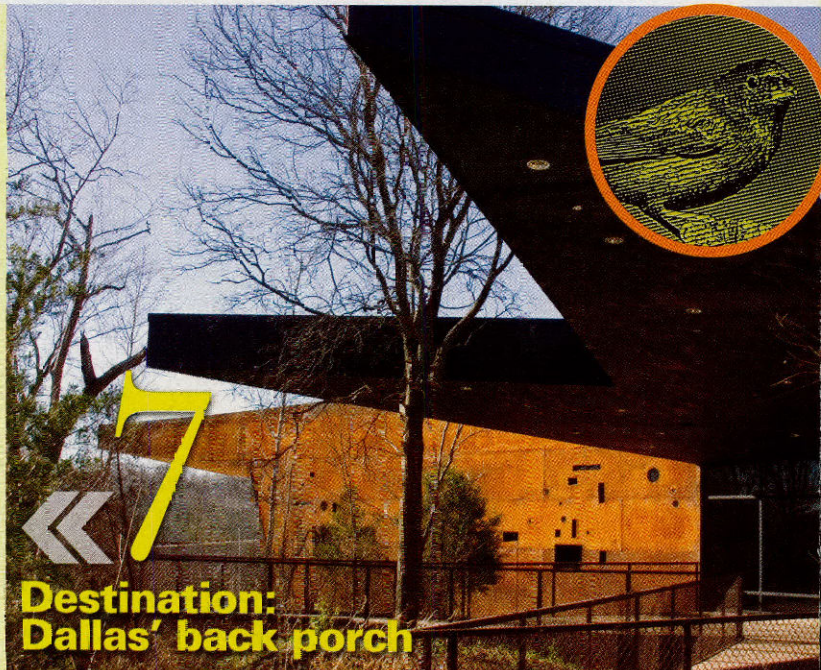


## The attraction of rappelling

The screened shelters set atop stone slabs stair-stepping into Rock Creek make the best stand-in for a shaded summer lake house. Great fishing, quiet no-wake boating (rentals available) and serious rock climbing make Lake Mineral Wells State Park and Trailway a compelling hideaway that is both retro (camp store) fun and enthusiast-worthy (equestrian trails and horse camping). The funky antique stores minutes away in downtown Mineral Wells are a happy diversion on the way to Woody's, a Quonset hut west of town where you'll find some of the best burgers and biker watching in the state. (Lake Mineral Wells State Park, 100 Park Road 71, Mineral Wells, TX 76067. \$5/age 13-up day use, camping fees vary, [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/lakemineralwells](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/lakemineralwells). Climbers and rappellers must check in at headquarters.) — BR



A little-heralded, brand-new escape minutes from downtown, the 120 acres of the Trinity River Audubon Center facility are the ideal urban retreat. Slackers indulge in Internet surfing with great views (coffee and wireless access available). More motivated? Go for the hiking trails, the stellar birding and a seductive introduction to the 6,000-acre Great Trinity Forest, the largest forest within a city's limits. Visitors to this impressive urban backyard will find the center's 21,000-square-foot, bird-shaped interpretive center to be much like a welcoming back porch. Hands-on features beguile children and adults alike, while the soaring architecture provides an inviting space that's cool, even on a 90-degree afternoon. Water features, fossil digs and seasonal exhibits and classes are bonuses. Individual and family memberships (\$60-\$90) get you in for a year and include a newsletter and store discount. Think of it as the ultimate country club for the conservation minded — at \$5 a month. (6500 South Loop 12, Dallas, TX 75217, 214-370-9735, [www.trinityriveraudubon.org](http://www.trinityriveraudubon.org)) — BR



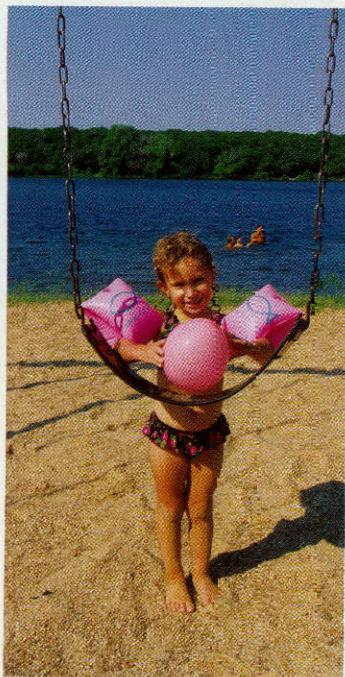
7  
Destination:  
Dallas' back porch

8



## A touch of the Pacific Northwest

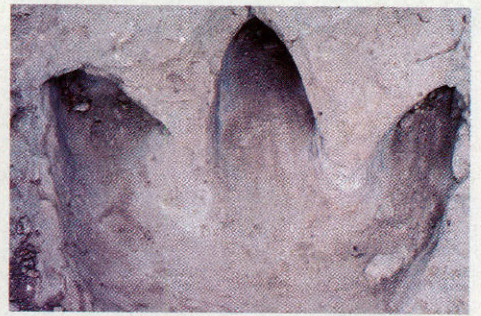
IN SPRING AND SUMMER, Meridian State Park's elevated trails and cliffs smack of the Pacific Northwest. In winter, perching on a boulder in the cloistered crush of cedar above the lake regenerates the spirit. In the spring you have a chance of spotting the endangered golden-cheeked warbler. Primitive camping is spectacular, or rent a screened shelter — the farthest flung of the waterside cabins offers fishing just steps away from the campfire. Little Springs Trail intersects Little Forest Trail and crosses the park's looping central drive (ideal for biking and jogging) before climbing to Bee Ridge, a spectacular scenic overlook of the lake in its limestone cauldron. (Meridian State Park, 173 Park Road #7, Meridian, TX 76665, 254-435-2535, \$5/13-up day use, camping fees vary, [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/meridian](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/meridian)) — BR



9

## Dinosaurs & apple cheeks

FOR A WEEKEND of doing little more than sitting pretty alongside the Paluxy, check into the one-time Dr. Snyder's Drugless Sanitarium, re-born as the Inn on the River. It's an all-season getaway (with gourmet dining) guaranteed to put the apples back in your cheeks. Anglers get a line on the Paluxy's mossy-backed bass, then swap fish tales over burgers in the clubhouse at Tres Rios, a 1920s YWCA camp operated as an old-fashioned fishing retreat. Drive out to Fossil Rim (three miles south on U.S.



Highway 67) for a tour through an exotic wildlife sanctuary or track prehistoric behemoths at Dinosaur Valley State Park. Pack the binoculars for spring migration of the golden-cheeked warbler and the black-capped vireo. (Dinosaur Valley State Park, \$5/age 13-up day use, camping fees vary, [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/dinosaurvalley](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/dinosaurvalley); Inn on the River, 800-575-2101, [www.innontheriver.com](http://www.innontheriver.com); Tres Rios, 2322 County Road 312, Glen Rose, 254-897-4253, [www.tresrioscamping.com](http://www.tresrioscamping.com)) — BR

GO FOR THE DRAMATIC LONESOME DOVE vistas and the town square — the largest in the U.S. — away for the drive-in, one of few left in Texas. Rent a cottage at the 1,000-acre Hockaday Ranch or stay long enough to toast the scenery from the deck of the Wildcatter Ranch Steakhouse. Find big adventure on a scenic stretch of the Brazos or plan a picnic at Fort Belknap (reason enough is the vast grape arbor, but the eccentric museum is intriguing, too). With some inside skinny (ask at the Wildcatter) you can visit the graves of the real life "Sons of Katie Elder," the Marlow brothers. Plan ahead to see the National Champion live oak — the time-worn giant is broken, but unbowed at 48 feet tall and 357 inches around. Bluebonnets and painted buntings flash in spring. Off-season fall/winter rates make the plush cabins at the Wildcatter a steal. Year-round bring your fishing pole to wrangle monster catfish (or trout stocked in the river during the winter). (Hockaday Ranch Guesthouse, 940-549-0087, [www.grahamguests.com](http://www.grahamguests.com); Wildcatter Ranch, 6062 Hwy. 16 South, 940-549-3500, 888-462-9277, [www.hockadayranch.com](http://www.hockadayranch.com); Rochelle's Canoe Rental & Shuttle Service, Farm Road #4 at Brazos River, 940-659-3341, 940-659-2581. Fort Belknap, 11 miles northwest of Graham on FM 61, 940-846-3222. National Live Oak Champion, Atwood Ranch, by appointment only, 940-549-4446, 940-549-6510) — BR

## Historic trees, big steaks, bigger adventures

10



# I1

## Forest wilderness camping



JUST NORTHEAST OF HOUSTON lies the 5,000-acre Lake Houston Park, with dense bottomland hardwood forest and fantastic opportunities for birdwatching, hiking and horseback riding. Just a short walk to Peach Creek, with sandy and river-rock beaches to explore, and depending on water level, to canoe or kayak. Peach Creek flows into the San Jacinto River, which connects to Lake Houston outside the park boundaries. The park also has a wonderful nature center with snakes, amphibians, insects and educational exhibits. Ownership of the park transferred from TPWD to the City of Houston in 2006. The park has two cottages that sleep 12 or 26 guests in bunkbeds, as well as 24 tent campsites, one group campsite with six tent pads, and one equestrian campsite. ([www.houstontx.gov/parks/lakehoustonpark.html](http://www.houstontx.gov/parks/lakehoustonpark.html), 281-354-6881) — WH

SAM RAYBURN RESERVOIR, a 114,500-acre lake nestled in the Big Thicket of East Texas, is renowned for its trophy largemouth bass and a great spot for a weekend boating or fishing getaway. Jackson Hill Park and Marina is a pet-friendly private park on the reservoir, with its own sandy beach, private pavilion, RV and tent campsites and fishermen's

cabins (\$75 for 4 people). Just outside of Houston, this fun place to stay regularly hosts live music, campfire karaoke and everything you need for fishing, including cleaning station, scales, sinks and banners. Spot bald eagles, and enjoy Cajun country cooking at the Marina Lodge. ([www.jacksonhill.us](http://www.jacksonhill.us), 936-872-9266) — WH

# I3

## Crockett fishing fun



IN THE ROLLING HILLS and pineywoods of East Texas lies the virtually undiscovered Crockett Family Resort on Houston County Lake — an impoundment of Little Elkhart Creek stocked with trophy largemouth bass. An inexpensive getaway for fishing enthusiasts, Crockett Family Resort has all manner of fun family activities including shuffleboard, a

miniature golf course, horseshoes, paddleboats, volleyball, and swimming in a pool or the lake. A clubhouse and pavilion can be rented, and the resort also has a grocery, bait shop and restaurant. Cabins rent for \$99-\$125, or you can pitch a tent or hook up your RV. ([www.crockettresort.com](http://www.crockettresort.com), 936-544-8466) — WH

FISH © GRADY ALLEN; OTHERS BY TPWD

# I2

## Pet-friendly park on Lake Sam Rayburn



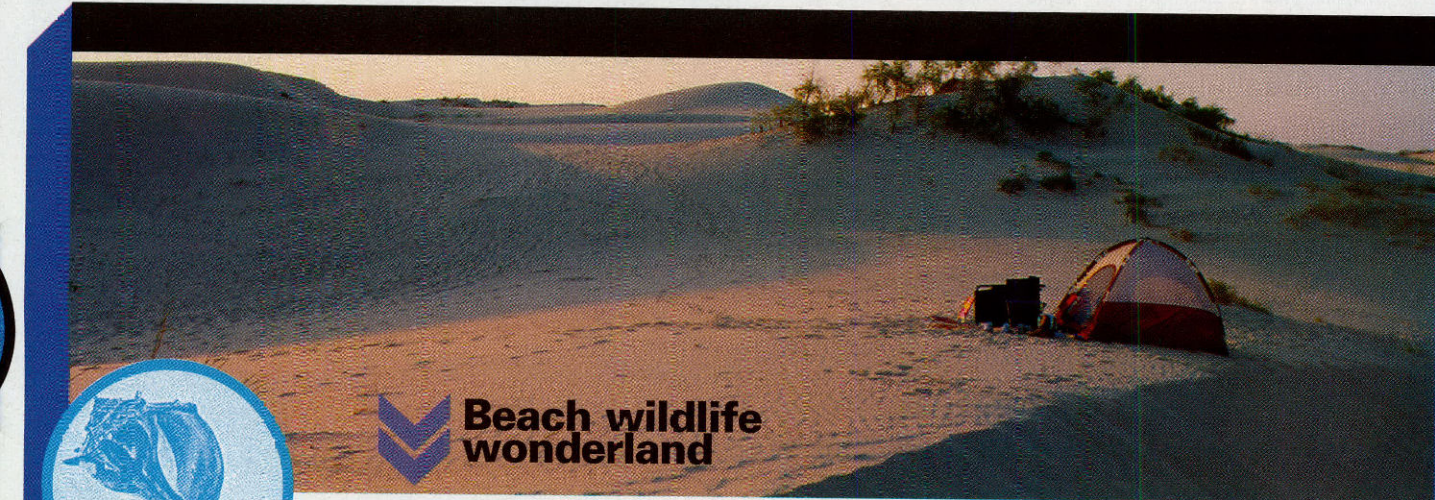




# 14

## Lake escape

LOCATED NEAR the ghost town of Swartwout, Lake Livingston State Park lies on the 90,000-acre reservoir Lake Livingston, a great restful place for boating, paddlesports or fishing for crappie, perch, bass and catfish. The park has an outdoor swimming pool, a playground, a group pavilion and nearly 7 miles of trails for hiking, horseback riding and mountain biking. Stay in one of 10 screen shelters or one of the many campsites with and without RV hookups. On April 4-5, 2009, the park offers a Texas Outdoor Family Workshop designed to teach families new to camping how to set up a tent, cook outdoors and basic fishing techniques. ([www.tpwd.state.tx.us/lakelivingston](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/lakelivingston), 936-365-2201) — WH



## 15 Beach wildlife wonderland

LOOKING FOR A GREAT BEACH destination that avoided Hurricane Ike's fury? Matagorda Island Wildlife Management Area offers 38 miles of wild beach to explore. Access to the island is by private boat or charter boat only. No motorized vehicles are allowed on the

island. The beaches offer some of the best shelling in Texas. The island provides habitat for endangered Aplomado falcons, often seen on the island hunting in pairs. It also is home to endangered Texas horned lizards and other threatened or endangered species. American alli-

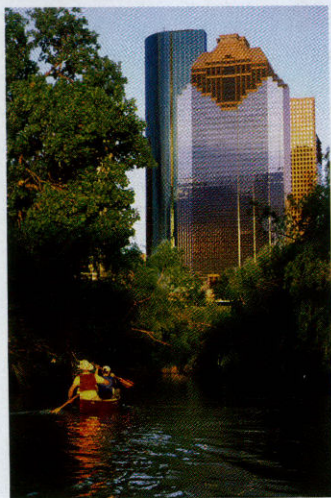
gators live in the coastal marsh, and a historic lighthouse stands at the north end of the island. Campers (fees apply) must portage in their own drinking water, as no facilities exist, only primitive camping. ([www.tpwd.state.tx.us/matagorda\\_island](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/matagorda_island), 979-244-7697) — WH

TOP BY TPWD; BOTTOM COURTESY TPWD



# I6

Nature on the bayou



SEE A LITTLE NATURE in the heart of the Bayou City. Houston was founded in 1836 near the confluence of Buffalo Bayou and White Oak Bayou at downtown's Allen's Landing. What better way to spend a day-long getaway than visiting this historic and ecological jewel? Buffalo Bayou Partnership offers historical hiking tours along Allen's Landing with docents from Greater Houston Preservation Alliance. BBP also coordinates pontoon boat tours as well as 5-hour canoe and 3-hour kayaking trips regularly. After the end of your canoe or kayak trip, go on a tour of Houston's bat bridge along Waugh Drive, by taking a 1 1/2-hour pontoon boat tour, which begins 45 minutes before dusk. BBP also sponsors a free annual Kids Day along Buffalo Bayou every June, which includes bayou boat rides, wetland hikes, scavenger hunts, wildflower planting, fishing lessons, skateboarding demos, music and lots of other exciting and educational activities. ([www.buffalobayou.org/](http://www.buffalobayou.org/), 713-752-0314) — WH

LEFT © JIM OLIVE; TOP RIGHT © LAURENCE PARENT; BOTTOM RIGHT BY CHASE A. FOUNTAIN/TRWD



# I7

## Go tribal in the Big Thicket

VISIT THE ALABAMA-COUSHATTA INDIAN RESERVATION in the dense woods of the Big Thicket, between Livingston and Woodville. During summer months they offer the Beyond the Sundown outdoor show and host an annual Pow-Wow during the first weekend of June. Colorful dances in full regalia are sure to delight people of all ages! You can camp at the reservation itself, which has a restaurant, as well as a fishing and swimming lake, or just visit for the day. The reservation closes from December through February. ([www.alabama-coushatta.com](http://www.alabama-coushatta.com); 936-563-1100) — WH



DESPITE ITS NAME, the Duck Farm in Liberty isn't named for ducks or for farming, says owner Barbara Lange. Instead, the name means **Discovering, Understanding Creativity and Knowledge for a Farm Alternative Restoration Model**. At \$65 per night for a private room and a delicious homestyle breakfast, this spot is a bargain for nature lovers. Set on 100 acres, Charles and Barbara opened their land to those seeking a country getaway in 2004. The ecoresort has a labyrinth maze and a peaceful meditation garden. The Langes have restored native plants and trees throughout the property and have a lovely pond — with ducks! The ecoresort also has a cabin which sleeps up to 10 people (\$130 for 4, \$25 per extra person). ([duckfarm.org](http://duckfarm.org), 936-587-4325) — WH

# I8

Eco-friendly escape



# 19



## Gator-watch and stargaze



TOP BY CHASE A. FOUNTAIN/TPWD; BOTTOM © LAURENCE PARENT

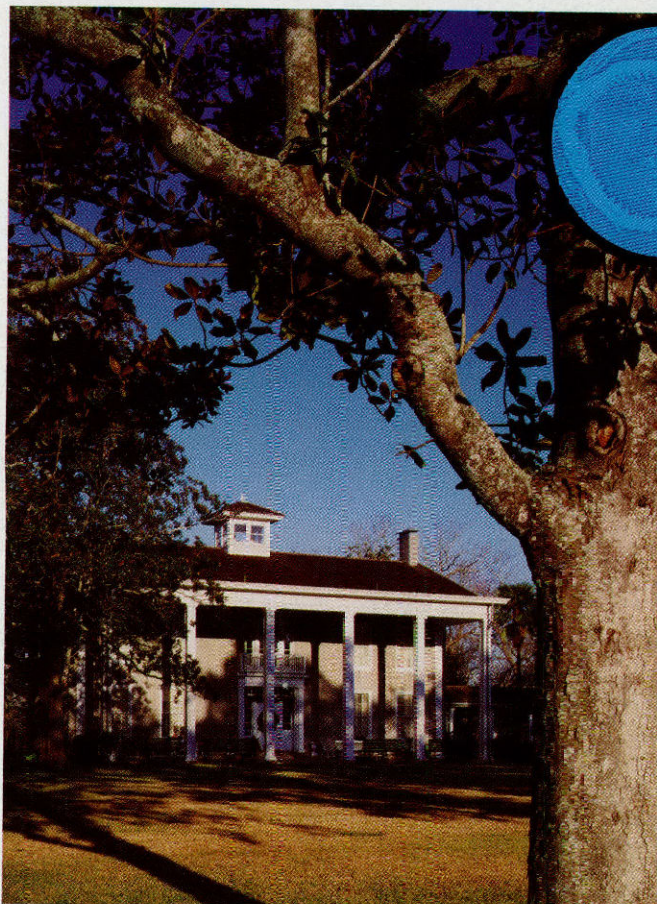
The 5,000-acre Brazos Bend State Park, just southwest of Houston, with its ancient coastal live oaks and almost guaranteed alligator sightings, is a must-visit spot. Fish at six lakes within the park (three have piers); go on one of the free interpretive hikes offered on the weekends. The park's nature center has an aquarium, a touch table, live snakes and a hands-on alligator discovery area. Stop by the George Observatory, where they offer "Saturdays at the George," a \$10 program with telescope viewing, stargazing and educational programs. The park has screened shelters, campsites with water and electricity and also primitive sites. On April 25 - 26, this park offers a Texas Outdoor Family Workshop. (Brazos Bend, [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/brazosbend](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/brazosbend), 979-553-5101); (George Observatory, [www.hmns.org/see\\_do/george\\_observatory.asp](http://www.hmns.org/see_do/george_observatory.asp), 281-242-3055)

— WH



# 20

## Hoggs, history and sharks



IF YOU LOVE HISTORY, visit the Varner-Hogg Plantation State Historic Site, 50 miles south of Houston in West Columbia. The plantation, which sits on the banks of Varner Creek, was first owned by Martin Varner, a member of Stephen F. Austin's Old Three Hundred colonists. Former Texas Governor James Hogg bought the property in 1902, and his daughter Ima Hogg donated the plantation to the state in 1957. Guided tours of the two-story Greek revival plantation house, built in 1835, are offered Tuesday through

Sundays. While in the area, stop at the wonderful Sea Center Texas aquarium in Lake Jackson, just a few miles away. Sea Center has aquaria displaying native Texas aquatic animals and ecosystems, including marsh, jetty and reef and open gulf. See a nurse shark, snapper and moray eel. The center also has a touch tank for kids and tours of the fish hatchery. (Sea Center Texas, [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/seacenter](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/seacenter), 979-345-4656. Varner Hogg, [www.thc.state.tx.us/hsites/hs\\_varner.aspx](http://www.thc.state.tx.us/hsites/hs_varner.aspx), 979-292-0100)

— WH



# 21

## Explore a sunken garden

BRING A BOOK or a sketchpad. You'll want to linger at the Japanese Tea Garden (free), a tropical oasis sculpted from an old rock quarry in San Antonio's Brackenridge Park. Shaded walkways meander past thousands of plants. Stone bridges cross the koi-filled pond. Nearby Witte Museum offers free admission Tuesdays from 3–8 p.m. South of downtown, more than 7 miles of nature trails crisscross the 624-acre Mitchell Lake Audubon Center (\$2 fee, 8 to 4 weekends or by appointment). Great place to birdwatch, with more than 300 species. (Japanese Tea Garden, [www.sanantonio.gov/sapar](http://www.sanantonio.gov/sapar), 210-207-3053. Mitchell Lake Audubon Center, [www.tx.audubon.org/Mitchell.html](http://www.tx.audubon.org/Mitchell.html), 210-628-1639) — SSR



# 22

## Let's go fly a kite



REMEMBER FLYING A KITE? Be a kid again and head for Austin's annual Zilker Park Kite Festival (free), set to sail Sunday, March 1. In a morning workshop, learn how to make your own kite. Any breezy day's great for kite flying at Zilker. Admission's free to the nearby Zilker Botanical Garden (\$3 fee per car weekends). Allow plenty of time for strolling through the garden's different areas planted with roses, cacti, natives, herbs and more. Cheap sweet treat: frozen custard at Sandy's Hamburgers on Barton Springs. Burn off those calories with a bike ride on the paved trail at McKinney Falls State Park (\$4 fee). (Zilker Kite Festival, [www.zilkerkitefestival.com](http://www.zilkerkitefestival.com), 512-448-5483. Zilker Botanical Garden, [www.zilkerbotanicalgarden.org](http://www.zilkerbotanicalgarden.org), 512-477-8672. McKinney Falls State Park, [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/mckinneyfalls](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/mckinneyfalls), 512-243-1643) — SSR



THINK AQUATIC FOR A DAY. Visit the A.E. Wood Fish Hatchery in San Marcos and find out how biologists rear sportfish for stocking Texas waters. For instance, spawning eggs for striped bass requires round-the-clock work in April. Free tours 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. weekdays. At the San Marcos National Fish Hatchery and Technology Center, see how biologists raise Texas blind salamanders, fountain darters and other endangered species that inhabit the Edwards Aquifer. Free tours 7:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. week-

days (call ahead). Wrap up with a visit to the Aquarena Center, which encircles Spring Lake and natural springs that feed the San Marcos River. Admission's free to aquarium exhibits and the Floating Wetlands boardwalk. (A.E. Wood Fish Hatchery, [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/fishboat/fish/management/hatcheries/aewood.phtml](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/fishboat/fish/management/hatcheries/aewood.phtml), 512-353-0572. San Marcos Hatchery, [www.fws.gov/southwest/fisheries](http://www.fws.gov/southwest/fisheries), 512-353-0011. Aquarena Center, [www.aquarena.txstate.edu](http://www.aquarena.txstate.edu), 512-245-7570)

— SSR



# 23

Discover underwater wonders



GET THEE to the Old Tunnel Wildlife Management Area (day-use free), a well-kept secret southeast of Fredericksburg. Back roads off U.S. 290 wind past rolling hills, old German homesteads, and ancient stone fences. The WMA's hilltop deck — built for bat watching — offers stunning views. (Mexican free-tailed bats inhabit the abandoned train tunnel April through October. Fees for up-close viewing.) Mosey along the

half-mile hiking trail, occasionally studded with stone markers that identify such natives as Texas sotol, cedar elms, frostweeds and twist leaf yucca. From the timber footbridge, see bats flitting inside the dark tunnel. Burgers at nearby Alamo Spring Cafe are big enough to share. (Old Tunnel WMA, [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/hunt/wma/wildlife\\_management/old\\_tunnel\\_wma/bats\\_of\\_otwma,830-990-2659](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/hunt/wma/wildlife_management/old_tunnel_wma/bats_of_otwma,830-990-2659))

— SSR

# Hike a favorite bat roost

# 24



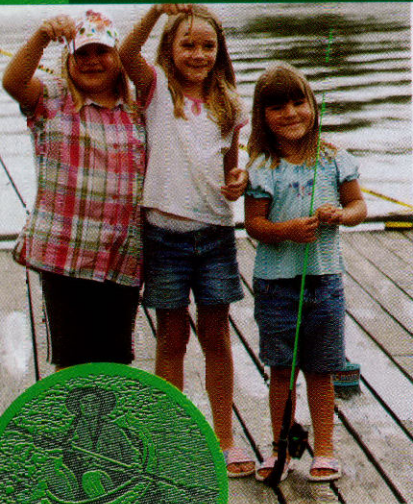
# Bop over to Blanco State Park

# 25

NO ONE HURRIES IN BLANCO, where you'll find just one traffic light. Soak up the slow pace with a stroll around the square. Then tour the historic courthouse (free, Tuesday — Saturday 10 – 3), built in 1886 and now used as a community center. Four bucks gets you into Blanco State Park, where you can hike the Caswell Nature Trail, relax under the cypress trees, or float in the Blanco River (tube rentals \$5 each all day). Enjoy free interpretive programs, such as Second Saturday nature walks. Cheap eats: legendary cream pie at the Blanco Bowling Club and Cafe. No joke — meringues measure 5 inches tall. Or more. (Blanco State Park, [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/blanco](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/blanco), 830-833-4333) — SSR

TOP RIGHT AND LOWER RIGHT © CAROLYN WHITESIDE BOTTOM © LAURENCE PARENT

## CENTRAL TEXAS



**GRAB SOME KIDS**, then holler, "Field trip!" Every month, Inks Lake State Park hosts lots of educational and fun things to do. Most are free (\$5 entry fee). Learn about spring wildflowers, native animals, edible plants, and more on one-hour hikes. Or join a more strenuous, three-hour hike and see the park's remote areas. Guided, two-hour canoe tours to Devil's Waterhole paddle past wooded banks and granite outcroppings (nominal fee covers canoe, paddles and life jacket). Most Saturday evenings, kids can learn how to fish with a park ranger (poles and bait provided). Check out the park's online activity calendar for more fun stuff to do. (Inks Lake State Park, [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/inks](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/inks), 512-793-2223) — SSR

**26**   
**Join a canoe adventure on Inks Lake**



**The tropics are closer than you think**

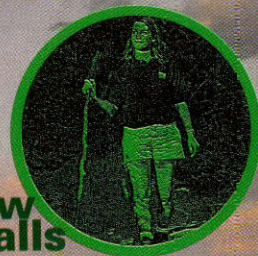
**27** 

**PACK UP** the camping gear and snooze beneath the starry skies at Pedernales Falls State Park (\$5 entry, \$20 campsite). Prefer absolute quiet? Hike 2 miles to a primitive camping area (\$10). From a scenic overlook, view the park's Pedernales Falls, a magnificent geological formation of stair-stepped limestone. Better yet, hike down the rock staircase and explore the falls (no

swimming or wading). Hike the nature trail from the main camping area, and you'll glimpse Twin Falls, surrounded by lush vegetation and spilling into blue-green water. Bring binoculars and head for the enclosed bird-viewing station, with feeders and a drip bath. (Pedernales Falls State Park, [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/pedernalesfalls](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/pedernalesfalls), 830-868-7304)

— SSR

**28**   
**Follow the falls**




TOP BY CHASE A. FOUNTAIN; LEFT © LAURENCE PARENT; RIGHT © LARRY DITTO

**EVER LONGED TO TREK** through a jungle? Then head for Palmetto State Park (\$3 entry), so named for the dwarf palmettos that fan the park's swamp. Densely vegetated and boggy, Palmetto Trail could pass for the tropics. Watch for the natives: wild turkeys, raccoons, white-tailed deer and armadillos. More than 240 bird species have been spotted in the park. Rent a paddleboat (\$10 per hour) or canoe (\$8 per hour), then cruise Oxbow Lake. Take a lunch break in nearby Gonzales and enjoy some smoked barbecue at the Gonzales Food Market. Then tour the Gonzales Memorial Museum (free, Tuesday – Saturday 10 – noon, 1 – 5 p.m., Sunday 1 – 5 p.m.), which honors Texans who died at the Alamo. (Palmetto State Park, [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/palmetto](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/palmetto), 330-672-3266. Gonzales Chamber of Commerce, [www.gonzalestexas.com](http://www.gonzalestexas.com), 830-672-6532) — SSR



**WILD ABOUT WILDFLOWERS?** Cruise the Willow City Loop, a back road in Gillespie County renowned for its spectacular scenery and spring flowers. Note: Property along the 13-mile route is privately owned; stay on road only. At the Lyndon B. Johnson State Park and Historic Site (free), picnic beneath pecan trees by the Pedernales River. A nature trail winds past fenced pastures containing longhorns, white-tailed deer and American bison. At the Sauer-Beckmann Farmstead, park interpreters portray life on a Hill Country farm in 1918. Take a bus tour to the LBJ Ranch (nominal fee) or get a free driving permit to park at the Texas White House. (Lyndon B. Johnson State Park, [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/lyndonbjohnson](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/lyndonbjohnson), 830-644-2252. Lyndon B. Johnson National Historical Park, [www.nps.gov/lyjo](http://www.nps.gov/lyjo), 830-868-7128)

— SSR

**30**   
**Have a bloomin' good time**

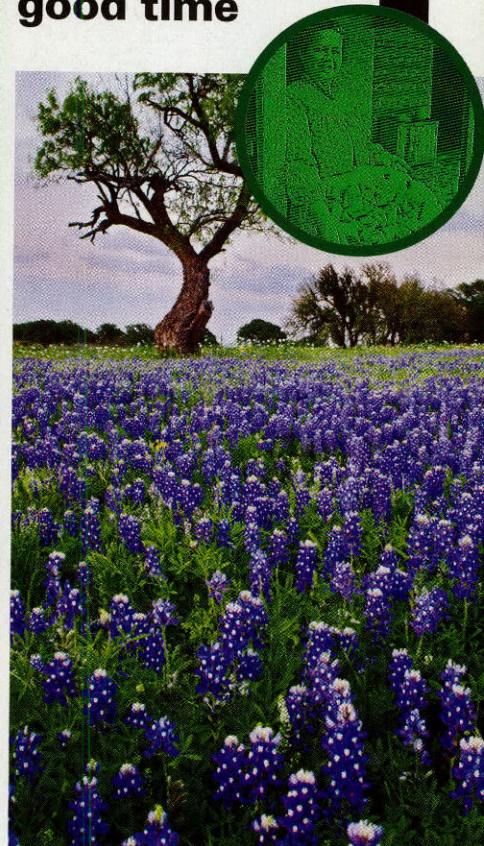
BOOK A RUSTIC CABIN at Bastrop State Park (\$80 – \$200), then meander through the pineywoods. Don't miss Saturday morning hikes, led by a master naturalist who tells about Bastrop's Lost Pines, the park's endangered Houston toad and more. Check the online activity calendar for occasional Sunday hikes that spotlight wildflowers or birds. What a deal — rent a kayak or canoe for \$5 an hour. Also, visit nearby McKinney Roughs Nature Park (\$3 adults, \$1 seniors, 13 and under free). Along more than 18 miles of nature trails, watch out for the natives, including Texas spiny lizards, gray foxes and scissor-tailed flycatchers. (Bastrop State Park, [www.tpwd.state.us/bastrop](http://www.tpwd.state.us/bastrop), 512-321-2101. McKinney Roughs Nature Park, [www.lcra.org/parks](http://www.lcra.org/parks), 512-303-5073) — SSR



**Lose yourself in the Lost Pines**

**29**

LEFT © LAURENCE PARENT; RIGHT © LARRY DITTO



# Bad, Bad BONFIN

Monsters from the  
age of dinosaurs still  
lurk in Texas waters.

By Larry D. Hodge







**T**HE ATTACK USUALLY COMES UNEXPECTEDLY, its suddenness exceeded only by its viciousness. An angler threading a spinner bait through vegetation in shallow water is often the victim. The only warning may be a long V streaking across the water, followed by an explosive, slashing strike and a line-breaking, rod-busting battle.

Anglers, allow me to introduce you to *Amia calva*, generally known as the bowfin but also by — as befits its almost mystical status — an astounding variety of common names: Dogfish. Beaverfish. Blackfish. Choupic. Cypress trout. Grinnel. Lawyer. Mudfish. Poisson-castor. Scaled ling. Shoepike. Speckled cat.

The bowfin isn't really a trout, but it does date from the Jurassic period of the Mesozoic Era, a time when dinosaurs ruled the land and many-toothed terrors ruled the water. The bowfin was one of the latter, and while *Tyrannosaurus rex* and its ilk came and went, the bowfin somehow survived. All the other members of the family Amiidae went extinct, but bowfins can still be found in the

eastern half of North America from Canada to Florida to East Texas.

Occasionally, and usually much to the surprise of the angler, bowfins can be found on the end of a fishing line — and they are never happy about being there. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Inland Fisheries biologist Richard Ott of Tyler had a typical experience.

"I caught one that weighed about 8 pounds on a cane pole while fishing for crappie," he says. "I chased it around the boat several times before it totally smashed the pole on the gunwale. I ended the event by hand-lining what was left and pulling the fish aboard. That was as irritated a fish as I have ever handled."

While many bowfin catches are accidental, some people target them. TPWD Inland Fisheries Division Director Phil Durocher waxes nostalgic about fishing for bowfins as a kid growing up in Louisiana.

"My brother and I would walk atop a pipeline across the swamp to a fishing and camping spot," he recalls. "One time I looked down and spotted a huge bowfin beneath the pipeline. She was as big around as a watermelon. I rigged my cane pole with a crawdad and bobber and spent half an hour bouncing it up and down in front of her before she bit."

To appreciate what happened next, you have to understand that Durocher was not fishing with an ordinary cane pole.

"You got the biggest one you could find," he says, making a circle with thumb and forefinger as big as a quarter. "You cut the small end off and tied on strong line and a big hook." In effect, Durocher was fishing with a vaulting pole and clothesline, but even then he underestimated his quarry.

"When she took the bait I reared back to set the hook — they have a very bony mouth — and broke the pole in two. It's

It's easy to tell if the fish on the end of your line is a bowfin. The name is a clue. The fish has a single, continuous dorsal (top) fin that runs from the middle of its body almost to the tail.



Above: Though commonly found in shallow, weedy areas, bowfin can be found in many places. Below: A 22-inch, 5-pound bowfin.



BOAT PHOTO BY TPWD; OTHERS COURTESY BOWFINANGLERS.COM

not easy to break a cane pole. We stood there and watched her go across the swamp, the bobber coming to the top every now and then.”

The bobber proved to be the key. The two bailed off the pipeline, chased the bobber down and used their other pole to snag the line, finally landing the fish, which became the basis of several meals.

“Clean them immediately, cut the meat into thin strips and fry it crisp,” Durocher says. Otherwise you’ll understand why one of the common names of the bowfin is cottonfish. Walleye it’s not.

It’s easy to tell if the fish on the end of your line is a bowfin. The name is a clue. The fish has a single, continuous dorsal (top) fin that runs from the middle of its body almost to the tail. While the round body has scales, the head does not. The back is a mottled olive green, shading to lighter green on the belly. Males tend to have a black spot near the base of the tail, and during the spring spawning season they turn spectacular shades of green, turquoise and yellow. Despite the lack of respect they get from anglers, they are one of the prettiest native fish in Texas.

And scariest, too. Don’t forget that mouthful of teeth.

## LOOKING FOR BOWFIN

Despite the fact that many people have never heard of them or seen one, bowfins are widely distributed in East Texas and they’ve been there a long, long time.

“I think one of the neatest things about bowfins is the fact that they are an archaic relic that coexisted with the dinosaurs and have remained basically unchanged since,” says Craig Bonds, TPWD’s regional director for Inland Fisheries in East Texas. “Like gars, bowfin can ‘gulp’ air utilizing a lung-like air bladder that is connected to the fish’s pharynx. This large bladder can be used as a breathing organ to supplement the gills and is definitely advantageous to the bowfin in swamps, sloughs and backwater areas where dissolved oxygen is limited.”

The bowfin’s Texas range includes the Red, San Jacinto and Sabine river basins, as well as the lower reaches of the Trinity, Brazos and Colorado rivers. And although they are commonly associated with shallow, weedy areas with submerged timber, bowfin are where you find them, says Charles Meyer of New Lenox, Illinois,



Top left: The angler who caught this 30-inch bowfin described the fight as “fierce.” Top right: A 9-pound, 14-ounce bowfin catch ready for display Bottom: This bowfin was caught using a 3-inch-long young carp.

founder of the Web site [www.bowfinanglers.com](http://www.bowfinanglers.com).

“While fishing for shortnose gar in an Illinois river, my inline spinner was hit by a freight train,” he says. “At first I thought it was a large catfish, but then it leaped clear of the water, and in that instant I knew that was no cat. Fighting this fish, I was grinning from ear to ear. I finally landed it, and what do you know — the fish was also grinning from ear to ear. A big round head, a large smiling mouth — it reminded me of Charlie Brown. With fangs.”

Until that moment, what Meyer knew about bowfins was what he’d read — that they live in dark, dank swamps befitting cousins of the monster from the Black Lagoon.

“But I had stumbled across my first one in a fresh, free-flowing stream in a pool below the rapids,” Meyer marvels. “He had been hugging the boulders or the far shoreline, an opportunist waiting for an easy meal. He wasn’t a big one, maybe 4 pounds, but the way he fought was astounding. I was thinking 15-pound cat, or maybe a foul-hooked monster carp. He was irritated that his snack was fighting back, and he rose to the challenge. What a fight! My hands were shaking.”

Meyer was hooked, too — on fishing for bowfins, or “finning,” as the sport’s aficionados say.

**Despite the lack of respect they get from anglers, they are one of the prettiest native fish in Texas.**

**Bowfins are an archaic relic that coexisted with the dinosaurs and have remained basically unchanged since.**

"I love fishing for the sport of it, and bowfins are great sport," he says. "Most times you'll think you have the new state record bass on the line. Upstream, downstream, on the bottom, 2 feet in the air — a bowfin will go anywhere to beat you. Headshaking is common, as is charging the boat or bank while you are cranking like a madman to keep a taut line. Young, aggressive males will hammer the bait and run; a Big Mama may just park, pick it up and chew, with barely perceptible line twitches your only clue. Take up the slack, give a couple of fast cranks and then hang on!"

I go looking for my first bowfin on the Neches

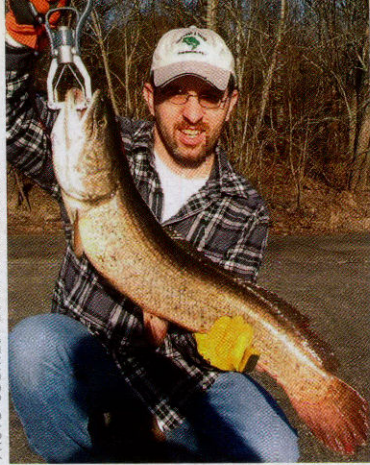


PHOTO COURTESY BOWFINANGLERS.COM

Left: This 35-inch-long bowfin felt like "a small tractor" on the line of this angler.

River above Lake Palestine. A few hundred yards downstream from the put-in, I find what I am looking for: a backwater area with tangles of vegetation and fallen timber so thick it is difficult to force the kayak through. It's just the sort of place I think a fugitive from extinction might hide, a place

anglers avoid because they know a submerged log is going to eat their favorite lure. Finners know that log may have fins, gills and a rotten attitude.

I'm totally unprepared for what happens. As my spinner bait sails toward splashdown, a flash of yellow catches my eye — then as abruptly as it appears, disappears. A few strokes of the paddle moves the kayak deeper into the tangle of fallen branches and solves the mystery. Peeking from a hole on the underside of a snag is a bright-eyed prothonotary warbler, the first I've seen outside the pages of a birding guidebook.

Gazing at the masses of floating vegetation lushly greening the river, savoring the quietness of a place where motors dare not go, admiring one of the prettiest birds I've ever seen, I begin to form a different opinion of bowfins. Maybe they are a pre-historic monster. Maybe they are fanged Charlie Browns with a Pigpen reputation and a Lucy disposition. But they also live in places where I, too, like to be.

I look at my reflection in the water. What stares back at me looks like it might be a cartoon character. Or maybe a finner.

Time will tell. ★



Bowfin fossil, Eocene Epoch

PHOTO © NEN LUCAS/SHUTTERSTOCK UNLIMITED

## FINNING IN TEXAS

ONCE YOU'VE LANDED your first bowfin, you'll discover that taking it off the hook can be as exciting and challenging as catching it.

"Use a stout leather glove, wetted, to get a good grip behind the gill plates," advises Charles Meyer. "Once in a while you'll get one that puts up no fight at all — until you have him in hand. Don't fall

for it. A 'fin will play possum and thrash around when you least expect it."

In keeping with their prehistoric heritage, bowfins will try to eat anything that doesn't eat them first. They will take cut bait, live bait or lures, though they prefer natural local food. Spinner baits seem to be a favorite of Texas finners, though more than one warned me

that "the spinner bait will be damaged." A stout rod and reel with braided line and possibly a metal leader will bring more fish to hand. Circle hooks, which catch in the corners of the fish's mouth, require only steady pressure to set.

The Texas state record bowfin is a 17.65-pound giant caught in 1993 from

Lake Fork by Brenda Walsh. Bowfin are not classified as a gamefish in Texas, so there are no limits. All you need to pursue them is a fishing license and the nerve to use it.

For more information on bowfins and photos and stories of other people's catches, go to [www.bowfinanglers.com](http://www.bowfinanglers.com).



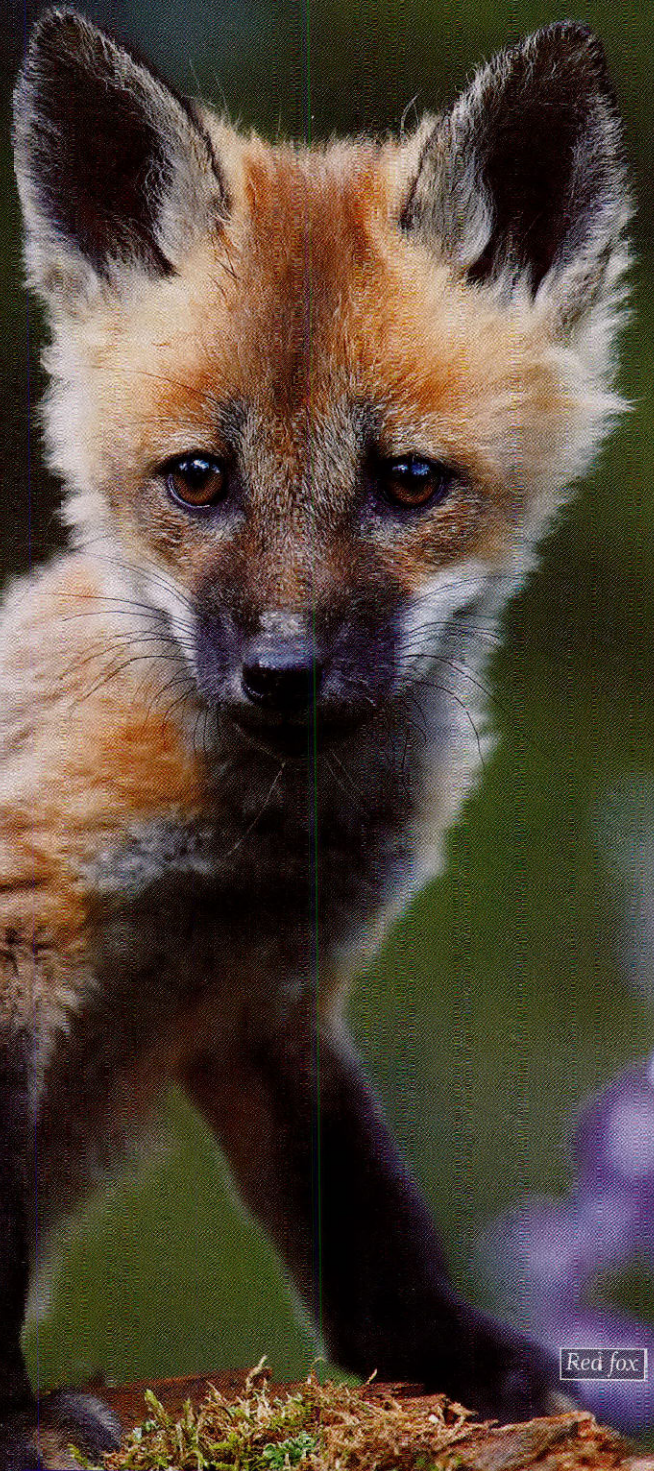
ILLUSTRATION BY TAND

**Keep**

# Texas Wild

## NATURE'S NURSERY

Is being 'adorable' a survival instinct?



Red fox

### »LOOK BUT DON'T TOUCH!

THERE'S ALMOST NO ONE ON THIS PLANET so grumpy that they don't smile when they see a baby animal. Those over-sized eyes, those wobbly legs, that soft curly fur - they're hard to resist! When you think about it, that is nature's plan. Babies are cute so we will gladly provide them with whatever they need. But when it comes to wild animal babies, it is best to look, but not touch. Their animal parents can provide everything the babies need.

WWW.TPW MAGAZINE.COM

# » MAMA'S BOYS (AND GIRLS!)

## » Pocket pampered

Opossums are the only marsupials in North America. Marsupials have a pouch like kangaroos. Baby opossums are blind and only as large as honeybees when they are born. They crawl up to their mother's pouch and stay there for three months. After that, they climb out and cling to their mother's fur for a few weeks until they fall off and start looking for food on their own.

PHOTO © TRICK & NORA ROWERSKAC PRODUCTIONS



## » Polliwogs, wrigglers and squealers

There are special names for babies in the animal world. You've heard of puppies and kittens and cubs — those are also names for animal babies other than dogs and cats and bears. Here's a list of some baby animal names you may not know.



DEER: FAWN

PHOTO © BILL DIRAKER/ROA PHOTO



DOLPHIN: CALF, PUP



MOSQUITO: WRIGGLER

PHOTO © DOUG FERRINE/SEA.PICS.COM

## » Pretty in pink

The state mammal of Texas is the nine-banded armadillo, an animal that wears a suit of armor. Baby armadillos are pink and always come in sets of four, always identical. Baby armadillos have soft shells that feel like human fingernails. The shells harden as the animal grows.

PHOTO © HEIDI & HANS-JUERGEN KOCH/MINDEN PICTURES



## » Hitching a ride

Striped bark scorpions have litters of a few dozen babies who are born live. The young climb up to the mother's back and ride her like a bus until the first molt. The babies will then molt, or shed their outer covering, six more times before they mature. These scorpions grow up to be only an inch or two long, but their sting can be quite painful.

PHOTO © BILL DRAKER/ROLENPCOM



SKUNK: KIT, KITTEN



PHOTO © TOM & PAT LEESON

EAGLE: EAGLET



PHOTO © ROLF NUSSBAUMER

FISH: FINGERLING, FRY

## » More baby animal names

- ALLIGATOR: HATCHLING
- BAT: PUP
- BEAVER: KIT, PUP
- CLAM: LITTLENECK
- FROG: POLLIWOG, TADPOLE
- GOAT: KID
- HAWK: EYAS, BRANCHER
- HEDGEHOG: PIGLET, PUP
- MOUSE: KITTEN, PINKIE
- OPOSSUM: JOEY
- OWL: OWLET, HOWLET
- QUAIL: CHEEPER, SQUEALER
- SNAKE: SNAKELET
- TURTLE: HATCHLING



PHOTO © BILL DEATY

## » Orphan babies

Have you ever found a baby bird or squirrel that has fallen out of the nest? Or discovered a fawn lying alone in the woods? Do you wonder if their mother has abandoned them? Of course, you want to help them, but the right way to help them is usually by doing nothing. Their chance of survival is much better in the wild. Many times a doe will leave her fawn to find food, and will come back soon. Sometimes the bird or squirrel mother is nearby, watching and waiting for you to leave so she can rescue her fallen baby.



# Spike's Activity Page



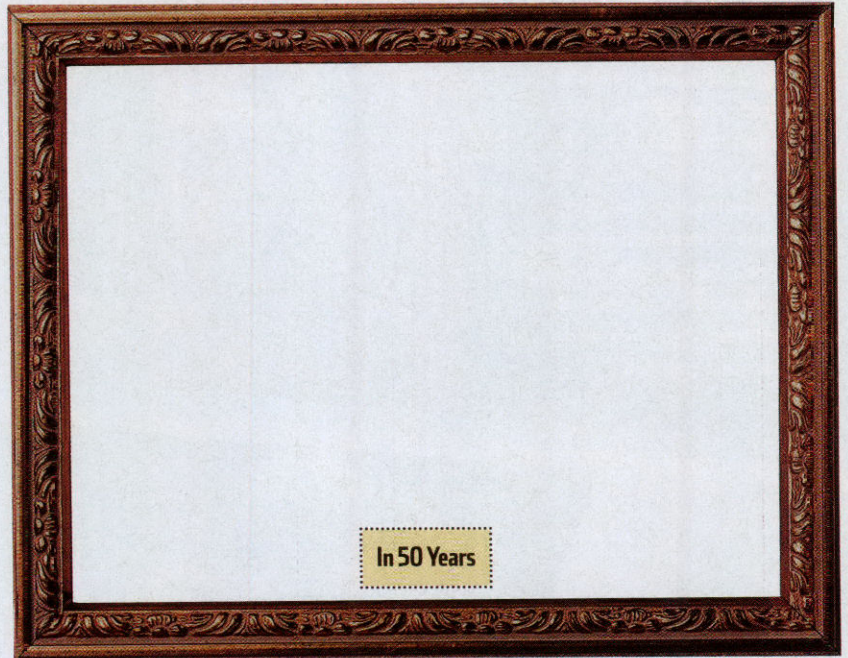
## >> WILD ART



Now



In 10 Years



In 50 Years

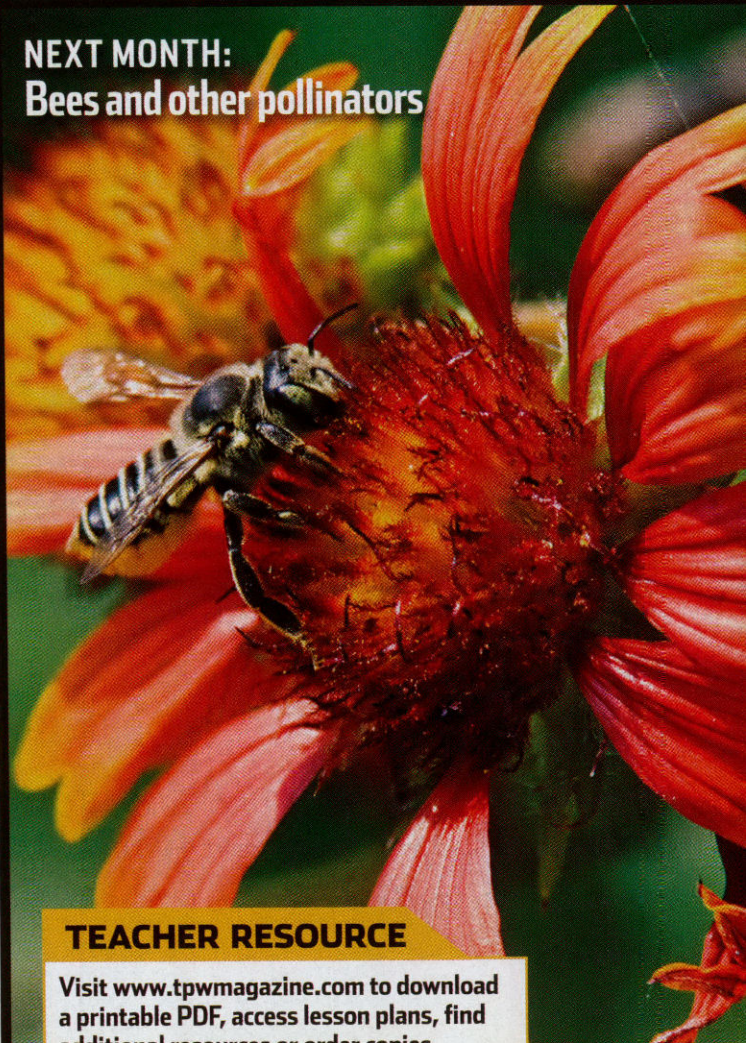
Some animals, like frogs, can change quite a bit from the time that they are born to when they are fully grown adults—and so do we! Find a picture of yourself as a baby, and compare it to a picture of yourself now. How have you changed? What do you think you'll look like in five years? In 10 years? In 50 years? Draw a picture of what you will look like in 50 years.

## >> KEEPING IT WILD

Celebrate marsupials (animals that carry their babies in a pouch, like opossums, see page 42). Hold a "Pocket Days" filled with pocket activities you make up yourself. Pretend you are a marsupial mother. Create a special baby to carry in your pocket during the day.



## NEXT MONTH: Bees and other pollinators



## >> WILD MATH



For many animals, taking care of babies is a full-time job! While in the nest, black-capped vireo babies are fed almost constantly by both their mother and father. If it takes the father 15 minutes to find food and return to the nest, how many trips would he make between 7 a.m. and 8 p.m.?

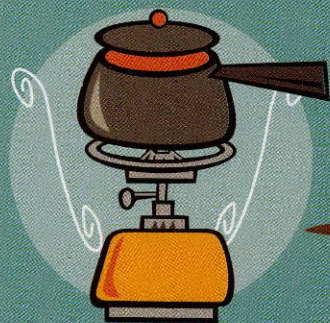
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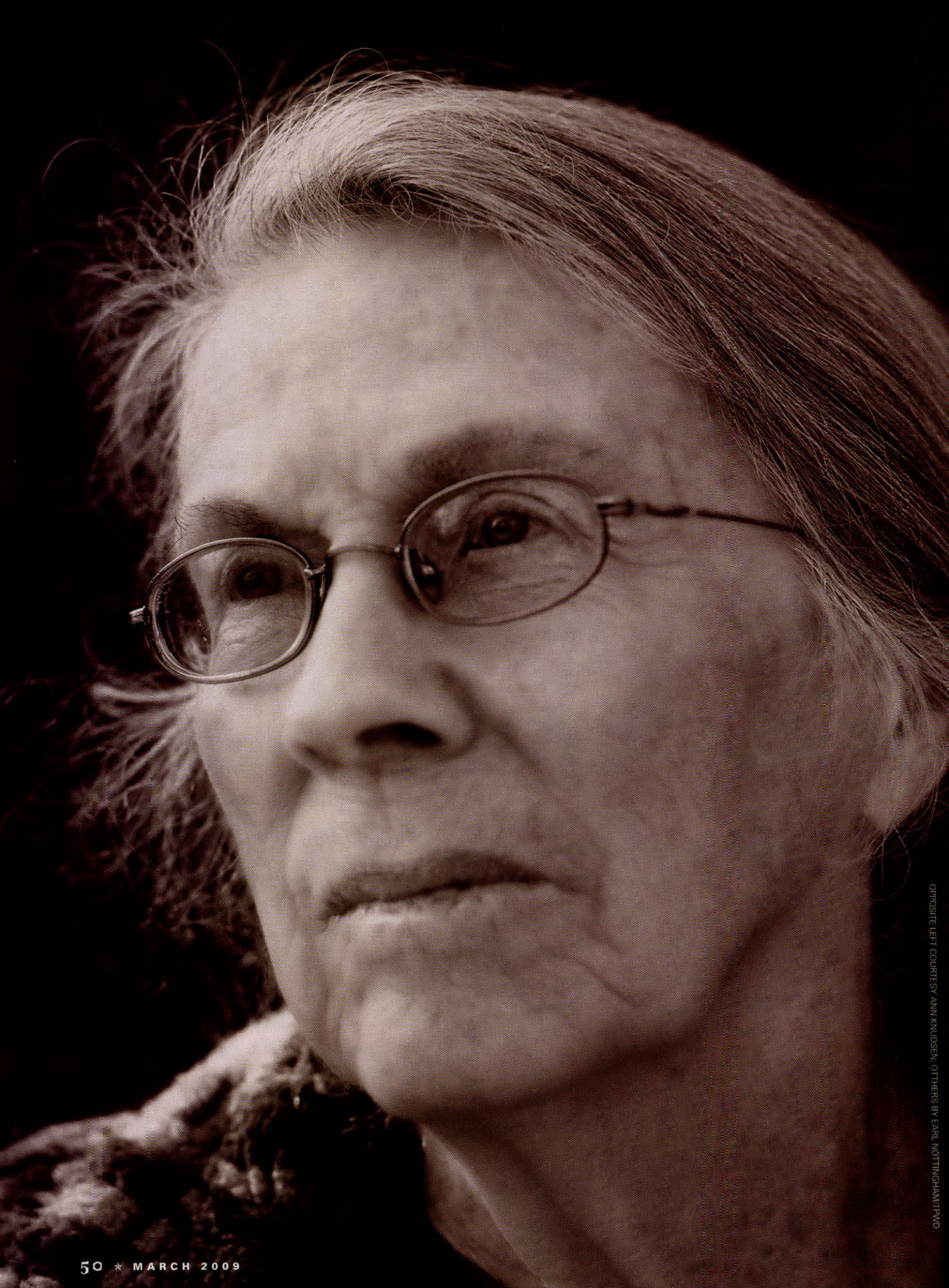


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OPPOSITE LEFT COURTESY ANN KNUDSEN; OTHERS BY EARL NOTTINGHAM/TPWD



# Wildscape Molly

*Aided by a knack for gentle arm twisting, Molly Hollar helped build a wildscape that grew into a community.*

BY DIANA KUNDE

**I**t was Molly Hollar's 80th birthday, and about 30 party guests waited expectantly for her to open her present.

The surprise was a \$1,000 gift certificate — for rocks: not the sparkly kind, the big boulder kind. They have since become stepping-stones and seating places along a small stream at the four-acre wildscape that bears Hollar's name in Arlington's Veterans Park.

Not the usual gift for an 80-year-old woman, but then Molly Hollar is not your usual 80-year-old. Visitors to Veterans Park, on Arlington's west side, will see her most afternoons and many mornings — sometimes watering newly planted native shrubs and flowers, sometimes directing volunteer crews, always engaging passersby in hopes of spreading the native landscape gospel.

"I used to say that if I were a millionaire, I'd buy some land, create a natural habitat, and invite people over. I feel so fortunate now that we have this," she said on a recent sunny fall afternoon, sitting under one of the native post oaks that grace the Molly Hollar Wildscape, named for her by the city of Arlington in 2005.

It wasn't always so. In 1994, the lush butterfly garden at the wildscape entrance was hard-packed clay with a little Bermuda grass.

Environmental activist Julia Burgen had revived the Arlington Conservation Council that year after what she viewed as the disastrous destruction of some native trees. Hollar was a founding member of the reborn nonprofit.

Burgen spotted a public service advertisement in the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department was inviting applications for wildscape grants.

"I said, 'That really rings my bell,'" said Hollar. Soon, she was chairing the task force that would go after the grant. The

ACC joined with the Arlington Organic Garden Club to apply for a \$3,000 grant and raise matching contributions.

They got the grant — enough to launch a half-acre wildscape in Veterans Park that consisted of a wildflower meadow and a small pond under some trees, with a bench.

"At first we thought we'd made a poor choice," Hollar said. "The topsoil had been scraped away. When we tried to till it, our rototiller bounced off. So we got a bigger one, and it bounced off, too."

Fourteen years of compost later, "you can dig it with a trowel." As we walked through on that October day, I disturbed several monarch butterflies. The butterfly garden in fall is a color portrait of red salvia greggii, yellow zexmenia and blue mistflower and mealy blue sage, among other flowers.

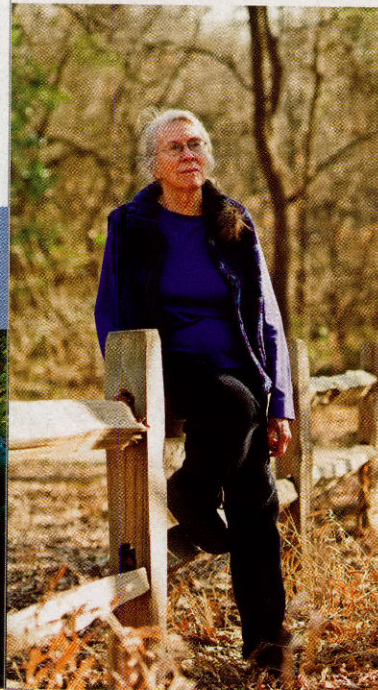
In spring, there's pink primrose and deep crimson winecup added to the mix, along with coral honeysuckle and prairie rose climbing the rustic wooden arches that beckon visitors.

But this small area was just the beginning.

Veterans Park includes post oak woodland, part of the Eastern Cross Timbers that covered this area of North Texas before it became packed with homes and shopping centers.

(continued on page 55)

Molly Hollar created a four-acre wildscape in Arlington's Veterans Park with volunteers and donations.



**"I USED TO SAY THAT IF I WERE A MILLIONAIRE, I'D BUY SOME LAND, CREATE A NATURAL HABITAT, AND INVITE PEOPLE OVER. I FEEL SO FORTUNATE NOW THAT WE HAVE THIS."**

—Molly Hollar

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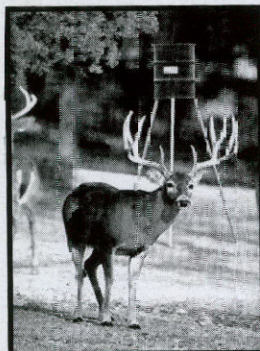
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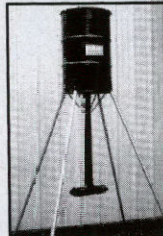
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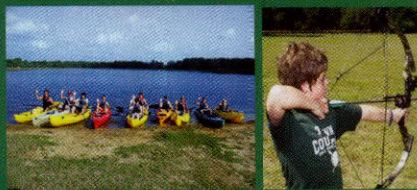
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Hollar and her team applied for, and got, several grants from U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to add a rolling, nearly three-acre patch of woods to the wildscape. The Environmental Protection Agency provided a grant for the riparian (located on the bank of a natural waterway) area that lines the wildscape's small stream.

Northrop Grumman weighed in with a \$100,000 grant in 2000 that provided a pavilion nestled in the woods, educational kiosks and much of the "hardscape" that makes the wildscape accessible and inviting to visitors. The Native Plant Society of Texas and Arlington Parks & Recreation have also given grants over the years.

"When we began, we never envisioned it growing too much," Hollar said. "We now have all the ecosystems — a small riparian corridor, a mini-prairie, a woodland and a seasonal wetland. We've had amazing support."

When I remarked that she'd been in large part responsible, Hollar's reply was characteristic: "I'd like to claim that, but it seems that things seem to just drop out of the sky."

In fact, Hollar has a unique charisma and gentle way that makes things happen, say those who know her.

One is John M. Davis, conservation outreach coordinator for TPWD, who first met Molly in the fall of 1994, shortly after the wildscape's grant award. He was a newly assigned urban biologist.

"My boss at the time had put me in charge of our extensive slide collection. I had just organized it when he came to me and said that Molly Hollar would be coming in and taking whatever slides she wanted. I privately thought, well, we'll see about that."

"Within about five minutes, I let her take whatever she wanted," he said. "Molly can give you the gentlest armlock I've ever felt."

Wildscape volunteer Rosalie Rogers described Hollar this way: "I had a grandmother who had a marvelous way of making each of her grandchildren feel like the very favorite. Molly has a special capacity to make everyone feel — if not her favorite — very special and valued."

Others mention her hard work example. The divorced mother of six children, Hollar has 10 grandchildren and "two greats." For the last 14 years, in addition to her family, the wildscape and related environmental pursuits like the Texas Master Naturalist program have consumed her life.

"She's so dedicated. She basically lives here. I think she's a great lady," said Josephine Keeney, an active volunteer who heads the wildscape's greenhouse project as well as supervising its butterfly garden.

"When we ran out of grants, we began to propagate our own plants. We started on my back porch with a mini-greenhouse we made for less than \$100," Hollar said. Later the Arlington Parks Department offered greenhouse space at Randol Mill Park, and the wildscape's volunteers began propagating literally thousands of native plants. Many are sold at fall and spring plant sales.

The plant sales educate about the beauty and environmental benefits of native plants, which require much less water than typical landscaping and provide food for native butterflies and birds. And they raise money for the wildscape —

about \$5,000 last fall, Keeney said.

What's left gets planted in the wildscape, and Hollar estimated that will be about 1,000 plants and small trees during the fall and winter of 2008-09. Volunteers last October were planting in the wildscape's newest land area, dubbed "the erosion area."

Dotted with trees, the roughly one-acre area is at the foot of a slope. Arlington Parks personnel planted deep-rooted inland sea oats and Canada wild rye at the advice of noted native landscape architect Rosa Finsley, a friend and advisor to the wildscape. Volunteers under Molly's direction are filling in areas along the paths with eye-catching native plants.

"This is a good alternative to St. Augustine (a water-thirsty, popular lawn grass)," said Hollar, gesturing at a carpet of frogfruit and golden groundsel, both native groundcovers. Yet another new area in the wildscape showcases native plants with extremely low water needs, even for natives.

Ultimately, the value of a wildscape lies not just in the peace and beauty it provides — but also in its educational impact. Besides casual park visitors, the Molly Hollar Wildscape has played host to Boy Scout troops, school and community groups and garden clubs. An annual Walk on the Wildside day for participating elementary schools introduces children to butterfly cocoons, bird nests and ecological concepts.

This summer, Hollar said, wildscape volunteers will assist in a parks department summer camp inspired by the No Child Left Inside movement and now funded in partnership with TPWD. The program seeks to reacquaint today's housebound children with the outdoors.

"I think the impact of the wildscape is huge," said John Dycus, a retired *Star-Telegram* journalist who serves with Hollar on the ACC board. "It's a living model for what so many areas around the country can be — should be, arguably."

Davis of TPWD notes that you can't look at acreage when measuring the impact of a wildscape. "The real purpose is to cultivate responsible humans, and so the impact of that four acres goes well beyond four acres of habitat."

"I can comfortably say that of all the wildscape projects I've been part of, this is the most successful — its growth in size, its awards and subsequent grants, and the number of people who have dedicated a part of their lives to it. It's a success in all those terms."

And how, ultimately, do you measure the impact of an individual? For volunteer Rosalie Rogers, Hollar's impact has been on "both my yard and on me, personally. Molly even thanks telemarketers for doing their job! I have let that kind of attitude inspire me and shape some of my behavior."

One recent Tuesday morning, Hollar and the wildscape's volunteer program were influencing tiny, three-year-old Celeste Lopez, who was helping her mother, Stacey Lopez, plant and looking for roly-poly bugs. "I love to dig. I love flowers," said Celeste.

This Halloween, said her mother, Celeste was a butterfly. ☆

# PARTING SHOT

A blooming redbud tree in the fog above the Blanco River near Wimberley. Photographer Laurence Parent had previously taken photos of this tree in full sun, but when the fog rolled in one morning, he knew this would be a special shot.

**IMAGE SPECS:**

Toho 4x5 field camera, 300mm  
Nikkor lens, f/32 at 1 second, Fuji  
Velvia 50 film.



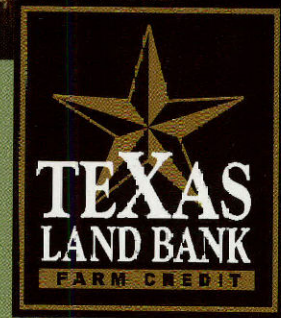


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