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TEXAS

PARKS & WILDLIFE

The OUTDOOR MAGAZINE of TEXAS

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BIG BEND

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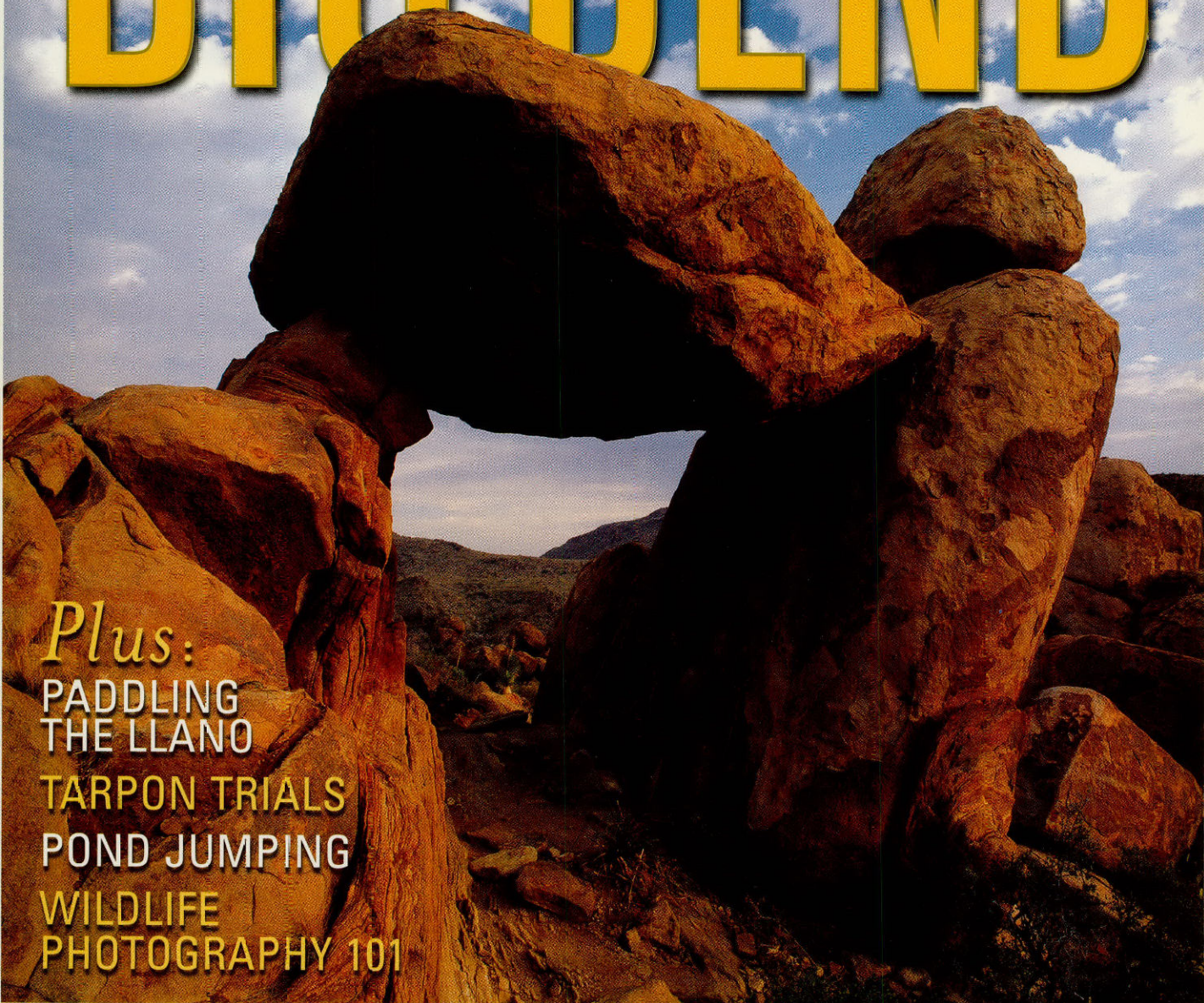
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You'll find a link to the magazine's Web site (and special subscription offers) on the TPWD home page.

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Previous page: Big Bend vista. Photo © James Evans. This page: Chisos Mountains, South Rim at first light. Photo © Laurence Parent.

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The OUTDOOR MAGAZINE of TEXAS

AUGUST 2005, VOL. 63, NO. 8

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Robyn Gammill Copy Editor
Jennifer McCutchen Editorial Assistant

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS:

Larry Bozka, Saltwater; Henry Chappell, Hunting; Larry D. Hodge, Freshwater

CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS:

Grady Allen, Wyman Meinzer, Earl Nottingham and David J. Sams

EDITORIAL OFFICES:

3000 South IH 35, Suite 120, Austin, Texas 78704
Phone: (512) 912-7000 Fax: (512) 707-1913
E-mail: magazine@tpwd.state.tx.us

ADVERTISING SALES OFFICES:

STONEWALLACE COMMUNICATIONS, INC.:
3000 S. IH 35, Suite 120, Austin, Texas 78704
Fax: (512) 707-1913
Jim Stone, Advertising Director (512) 912-7007,
E-mail: jim.stone@tpwd.state.tx.us;
Leigh Anne Way, Outdoor Marketplace Manager, (512) 912-7003,
E-mail: leighanne.way@tpwd.state.tx.us
Alexis Kirk, Advertising Assistant

THE NOYD GROUP:

2145 Crooks Ave., Suite 10, Troy, Michigan 48084
Fax: (248) 637-6452
Ron Noyd, Automotive Category (248) 643-7240;
E-mail: rnoyd@attglobal.net

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In the Field

MARSHA RAPPAPORT

writes about tarpon breeding along the Texas coast in this issue. She also is the author of the cultural autobiography *The Secret Life of A Black Trophy Wife*, and has written *Book of Fears—Poetry*. She works as the grants manager for a Galveston-area nonprofit, and continues to support her artistic interests as a talk show host of *Building the Gulf Coast* for KPFT, 90.1 FM in Houston. She was the owner, publisher and a reporter for *The Galveston Journal* and talk show host for *Building Galveston County* on KGBC for 10 years. Now, she is an often-published writer with credits that include the *Houston Chronicle's Texas Magazine*, *Texas Parks and Wildlife*, *Texas Highways* magazine, *Houston* magazine, *Chicago* magazine and *Harper's*. She has been an Artist-In-Residence, teaching poetry and literature for The Texas Commission on the Arts and other organizations.



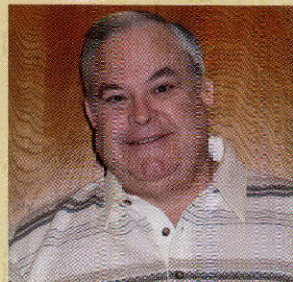
EILEEN MATTEI

currently lives in Farmington and writes freelance travel and business articles for several local and regional publications. She settled in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas after a 20-year business career as a fish farmer in Oklahoma, Cameroon and Mexico. Over the years, she has been teamed up with internationally recognized nature photographer Larry Ditto on several articles for *Texas Highways* about the South Texas region. In this issue, she once again partners with Ditto. (Turn to page 30.) "Watching people at work and learning why they love what they do fascinates me. With Larry on this story, it meant taking notes while bumping down ranch roads, combing burrs off my socks and sitting still in a photo blind with sweat dripping off my chin. I had a wonderful time."



TERRY ERWIN

who wrote the Scout article on hunter education, became interested in the subject when, as a physician's assistant for a general surgeon, he witnessed the injuries caused by hunting-related shooting accidents. He and his field staff of five now facilitate training more than 30,000 students in hunter education with the help of 2,900 instructors. Based on the results they've achieved, their work is paying off. As Erwin explains, "Last year Texas saw its lowest number of recorded hunting incidents since 1966 with 29, but that's still way too many, so we will continue to teach and try to lower the numbers even more." Even so, hunting is getting safer because of hunter education. Erwin now serves on the Texas Youth Hunting Advisory Board and as president of the International Hunter Education Association.



AT ISSUE

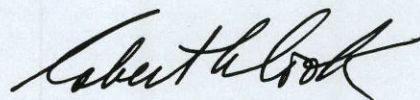
FROM THE PEN OF ROBERT L. COOK

Sometimes we use words like conservation, restoration, management and preservation as if they were interchangeable, but they do not mean the same thing at all. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and state fish and wildlife agencies across the nation are much more about conservation, restoration and management than we are about preservation. First, we are almost entirely funded by hunters and fishermen. Second, the world is changing; there are more demands on our natural resources every day; there are more people to provide for every day. We believe that in most cases involving fish and wildlife and their habitats, that you have to do more than just "preserve" something. You must have a goal, know what you want the habitat to look like and that you have to make things happen on the ground to achieve that goal. Fortunately, most Texans, especially private landowners, are also "action-oriented" and are willing to commit resources and to work hard to conserve, restore and manage our state's fish and wildlife. As a result of hard work and action on the ground, individual species are conserved, and preserved, and the overall health and diversity of the habitat is improved.

For example, in 1905, after a decade of extensive exploration and field work, naturalist Vernon Bailey and his team of scientists reported in their *Biological Survey of Texas* that only about 500 wild desert bighorn sheep remained in far West Texas. Legal hunting of the desert bighorn had been banned in 1903. Bailey reported that habitat degradation, illegal hunting, predation by mountain lions and competition with domestic sheep and goats were depleting the resource. Naturalists estimated that, at its peak, there may have been as many as 1500 wild sheep in the region's rugged mountains. By the late 1940s, the population bottomed out and the last native wild sheep in Texas was observed in October 1958. In the 1960s, TPWD and landowners in the region initiated a cooperative effort to restore the desert bighorn sheep, and to properly manage bighorn habitat. Over the next 30 years, wild desert bighorn sheep were donated to the Texas restoration effort by the states of Nevada, Arizona and Utah, and by the nation of Mexico. The Texas Bighorn Society, a group of hard-working, private conservationists and hunters, funded the construction and operation of brood-pen facilities on the TPWD Sierra Diablo and Black Gap Wildlife Management Areas. Thanks to C.G. Johnson's generous donation of Elephant Mountain Wildlife Area, we now have a natural brood facility and no longer have to raise sheep in captivity. The Texas Bighorn Society, concerned landowners and TPWD cooperated in the construction of watering facilities for bighorns and other wildlife species, and worked together to improve habitat conditions for wild sheep throughout the region.

As a result of these cooperative efforts and four decades of hard work, the current population of wild desert bighorns in Texas is pushing 800. Since 1988, through a carefully controlled hunting permit program, West Texas landowners and TPWD have allowed hunters to harvest 45 rams from this population. The result is a unique outdoor experience that also generates hundreds of thousands of dollars that have been used to improve habitat for this magnificent species. This success did not happen because we acquired something, locked it up and saved it. It happened because a lot of people worked hard, improved habitat, eliminated problems and took some chances.

*Fortunately,
most Texans, especially
private landowners, are
also "action-oriented"
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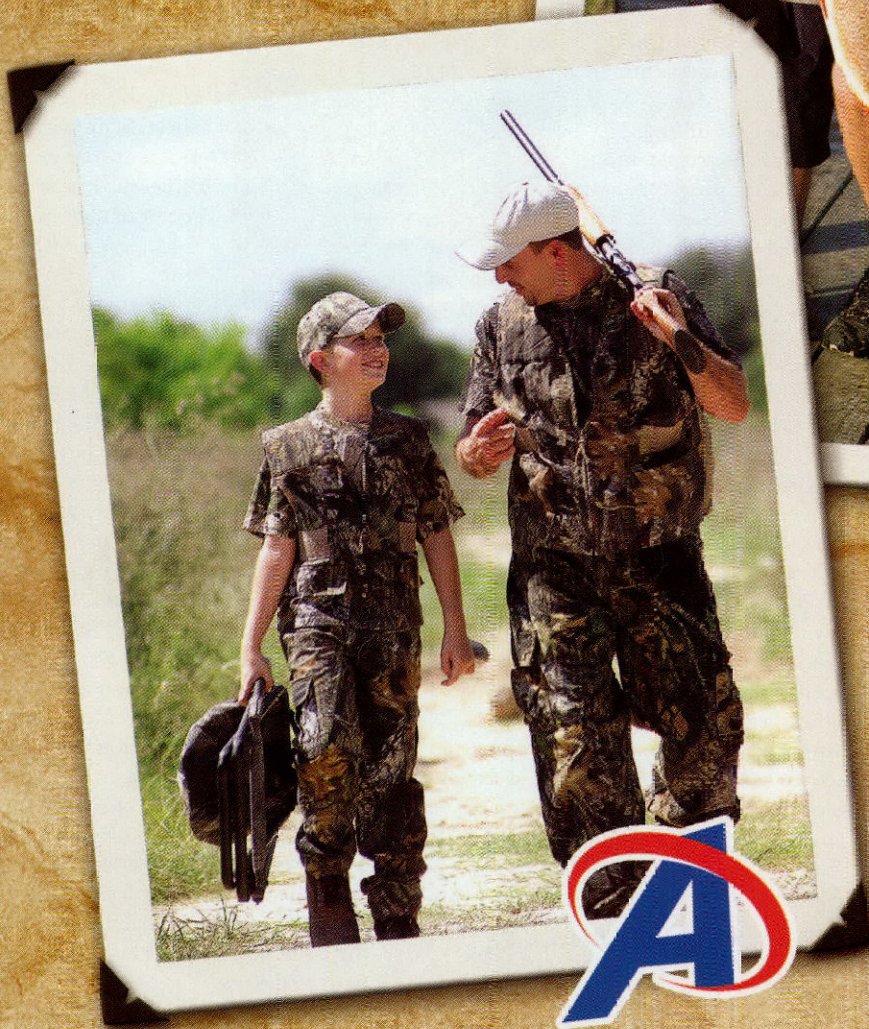
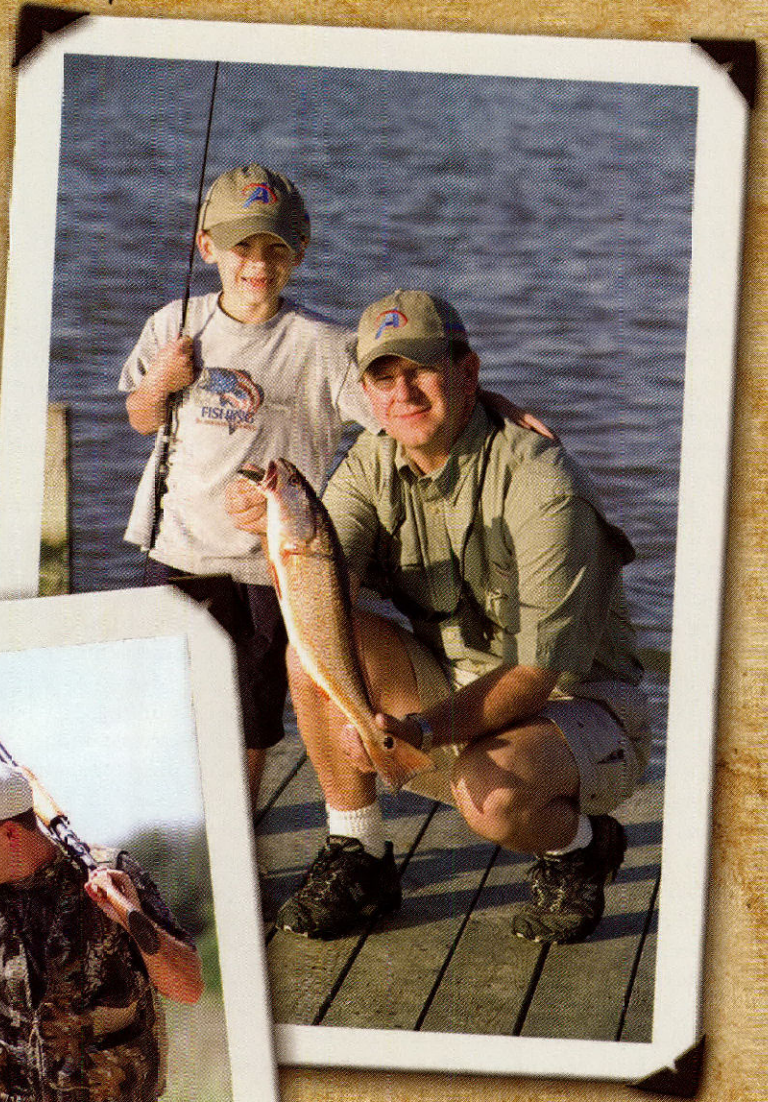


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MAIL CALL

PICKS, PANS AND PROBES FROM OUR READERS

FOREWORD

About the time this issue hits your mailbox, temperatures will be hovering around triple digits. My office was so hot yesterday afternoon, I thought, 'I can't wait for fall.' I was daydreaming about a cool, fall afternoon hunt. You know the day — that day when there is a slight northern chill and you have to cinch up your jacket a little tighter. It helped me forget the heat outside and inside.

Then I remembered it's time to renew my license. This year I plan to get out more (of course, I say that every year; but more often than not, life just gets in the way) so I am buying a Super Combo license. Then I learned that when new licenses go on sale beginning August 15, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department will have a new opportunity for everyone who purchases a Super Combo license.

This year, every person who purchases a Super Combo license by December 31, 2005, will automatically be registered in a drawing for a \$1,000 gift card good for a shopping spree at Academy Sports and Outdoors. How cool is that! Best of all, a total of 10 gift cards will be given away; and, Toyota is throwing in a Texas State Parks Pass for each winner.

The drawings for the \$1,000 gift cards and park passes are held every two weeks; and the earlier you get your Super Combo license, the more chances you have to win because your name stays in the drawing until all 10 prizes have been awarded. You can also enter online at <www.tpwd.state.tx.us/drawings> or pick up an entry form at any TPWD Law Enforcement office, and get detailed information on the official rules. Of course, no purchase is necessary to enter the drawing.

As a TPWD employee I'm not eligible for the drawing, but it sure would come in handy. Anyone who has seen me shoot knows that \$1,000 would barely cover my outlay for quail and dove loads for the season. That doesn't mean I harvest lots of birds, it only means I have a lot of fun trying.

Finally, as I thought about this great offer, I couldn't help but think how much of a bargain fishing and hunting licenses really are. It is very inexpensive compared to many entertainment and recreational options, and the health benefits are often overlooked. Hunting is the original extreme sport. It can be physically demanding and sure gets me into shape in a hurry. I'd much rather be working on an exercise routine in the field than in the gym.

Randy Brudnicki

RANDY BRUDNICKI
PUBLISHER

LETTERS

TURTLES ON THE HIGHWAY

As a charter member and past president of the Lubbock Turtle and Tortoise Society in Lubbock, I particularly appreciated your article (in the June Scout section) titled "Where Did All the Box Turtles Go?" I still see



I still see many box turtles in and around my ranch in Dickens County. However, that may be because, through the years, whenever I see a turtle on the highway, I pick it up and release it somewhere near the center of the ranch.

*Carl Andersen
Dickens*

many box turtles in and around my ranch in Dickens County.

However, that may be because, through the years, whenever I see a turtle on the highway, I pick it up and release it somewhere near the center of the ranch.

I love the magazine. Keep up the good work.

CARL ANDERSEN
Dickens

TURTLE TALES

I read "Where Did All the Box Turtles Go?" in your June 2005 issue and want to report that grackles

have been responsible for removing young turtles from my yard. We have had box turtles in our yard for about 40 years, and we now have four mature turtles and one that is one year old. We have had populations of as many as 25 to 30 turtles in the past, but haven't had that many for several years.

CARL CHILDERS
Lubbock

THE TITANIC BY ANY NAME

In your June issue of *Texas Parks & Wildlife*, you had an excellent article on the Battleship Texas. I have only one issue to discuss.

On page 33, the engines of the Texas are compared to those of the "HMS Titanic." My limited knowledge of sea-faring has me believing that HMS (which stands for His or Her Majesty's Ship) is a designation for warships of

MAIL CALL

the Royal Navy. A search of the Web has given me information that the Titanic was commissioned to carry mail as well as passengers, and bore the designation RMS (Royal Mail Ship).

Again, the article was so good I almost feel guilty bringing this up.

ALBERT E. SWARTS
Houston

AUTHOR TOM BEHRENS RESPONDS:

Thanks for your letter, and please don't feel guilty pointing out the naming inconsistency for the Titanic.

You are correct in regards to your question regarding the misuse of the title HMS for the Titanic. The correct name should be RMS Titanic, but looking through a large amount of literature reveals that a lot of people have used HMS in referring to the ship. Barry Ward, the curator and historian at the Battleship TEXAS, received his information from Titanic.com. He recommends trying online Wikipedia for information on HMS, SS, or RMS. As it turns out, SS stands for steam ship, which he claims could be used as the title for Titanic also.

Now that you've brought up the issue of whether the Titanic was a mail ship or not, I have another interesting tidbit for you. Even though it was labeled a mail ship, the Titanic was not carrying any mail on its ill-fated maiden voyage. Thanks for your interesting comment.

BALMORHEA MEMORIES

The June issue's Mail Call letter (and photograph) about the cavalry encampment at Balmorhea brought back some memories that I'd like to share.

My stepfather served in Troop E of the 12th Cavalry at Fort Ringgold in Rio Grande City in the late 1920s until 1941 and he took part in that long ride.

There were three regular Army border

forts, along with troops at Fort Bliss, that made up the 2nd Squadron of the 12th Cavalry. Those forts were Fort Brown in Brownsville, Fort Ringgold and Fort McIntosh in Laredo. The troops from all three forts participated in the Balmorhea maneuvers and were part of the encampment in the photograph.

The troops from Fort Brown made the first leg to Fort Ringgold. Then the E and F troops joined them for the sec-

ond leg of the overland journey to Laredo. Finally, all the cavalry troops continued on horseback to Balmorhea.

That was probably the last journey they made on horseback because it is my understanding that all the troops were transferred to Fort Bliss in 1941 and became part of the 1st Cavalry Division, Mechanized.

AUSTIN L. ROBERTS
North Fichland Hills

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SCOUT

NEWS AND VIEWS IN THE TEXAS OUTDOORS

ROCKSPRINGS GOES BATTY

"Highest, driest" location in the Texas Hill Country taps into nature tourism market.

Doff your cap to the tenacious folks of Rocksprings, Texas, population 1,285.

The Edwards County sea has seen its share of tragedies, starting with the 1927 tornado that killed 74 and leveled most of the town's buildings. Then came the Great Depression. The county's ranching economy picked up steam later in the 20th century with the growing production of mohair, produced from Angora goats that thrived amid the rocky rangeland at the extreme western edge of the Edwards Plateau.

By the end of the century, the mohair market had collapsed. The end of federal subsidies, a dwindling domestic market and the carving up of many of the county's larger ranches took a serious toll on the area economy. Civic leaders knew something had to be done lest Rocksprings become a ghost town.

"Project 2000" was launched to take inventory of where the town was going, its assets and what might be done to stimulate the

local economy. Public meetings led to the conclusion that the townspeople should pour their energies and resources into a hole in the ground — the Devil's Sinkhole, a natural geologic wonder just beyond the city limits. Tourism linked to the Devil's Sinkhole State Natural Area and its large Brazilian free-tailed bat population seemed the obvious answer, though not everyone agreed.

"There were some nonbelievers in our community who didn't think it was going to work," recalls County Judge Nick Gallegos. "But down the road, volunteers and the volunteer spirit proved them wrong."

Citizens voted for a half-cent sales tax to fund the Edwards County Economic Development Board, which went to work with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to increase controlled access to the tourist draw. The rest, as they say, is history.

Almost 1,700 people a year now travel to the remote town to take a guided tour of Devil's Sinkhole State Natural Area conducted by the Devil's Sinkhole Society. The nonprofit organization staffs the Rocksprings Visitor Center on the town square, where sinkhole tours originate. Volunteers lead the tours and staff the visitor center.

August and September offer some of the year's best bat viewing opportunities at Devil's Sinkhole State Natural Area near Rocksprings.

Tourists from throughout the state pay \$10 (admission for children 4 to 11 is \$6) Wednesday through Sunday evenings to take the 20-minute trip on a new, air-conditioned bus to Devil's Sinkhole to watch the spectacular emergence of several million bats. Bat flights begin in April and last through October. August and September offer some of the best viewing, when the bats emerge earlier in the evening and in



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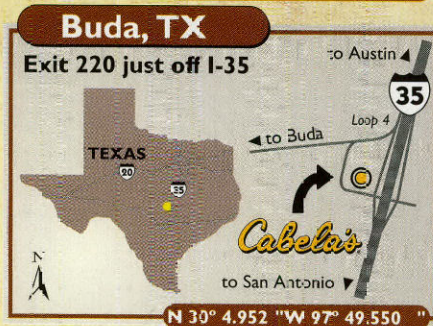
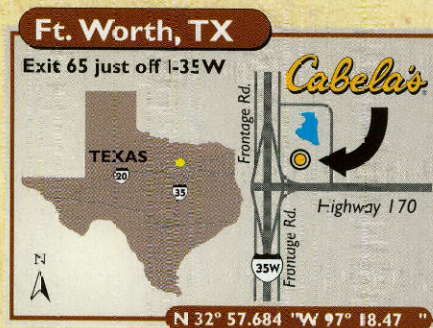
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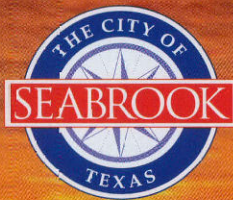
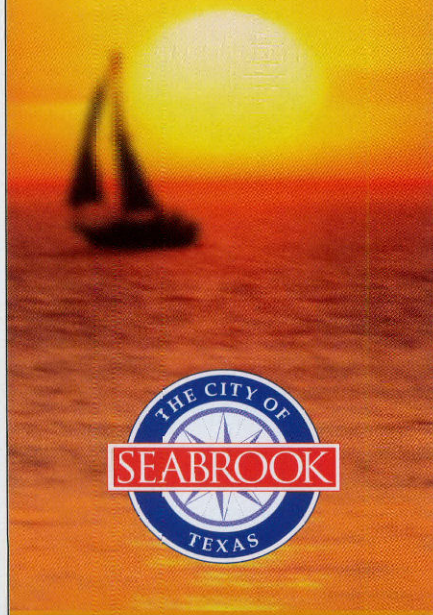
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Photo: Jason Hoopes Design: Kelly Hibler

larger numbers, says the Devil's Sinkhole Society's Ben Banahan, a retired Mississippi doctor who's an outspoken ambassador for the town and the sinkhole.

Since the visitor center opened in 2001, the state natural area has seen a number of improvements. In 2002, TPWD installed a wheelchair-accessible viewing platform that extends just beyond the edge of the 45- to 55-foot opening of the collapsed limestone pit. Peering into the gaping hole, visitors can see 140 feet to the top of a breakdown mountain and beyond into an amazing subterranean world of trees and shrubs, scoured limestone walls, boulders and a black void, below which lie several deep, clear-water lakes.

"It used to be that the only way to peer into the sinkhole was to get on your belly and crawl to the edge of the overhang," says Randy Rosales, manager of the state natural area. "That was dangerous, so we built a more accessible metal platform."

Reservations for bat flight observations can be made through the Devil's Sinkhole Society by calling (830) 683-BATS or by visiting the Rocksprings Visitors Center, on the southwest corner of the town square.

For more information on Devil's Sinkhole, visit www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/sinkhole/ or www.devilssinkhole-tx.com ★

—Rob McCorkle

Silent Killers

Volunteers help remove thousands of abandoned crab traps from Texas bays.



Balanced atop the forward deck of his airboat, his cap turned backward to the wind, Mark Hall looks like an ancient mariner about to launch a harpoon.

In his right hand he holds a long steel probe with a U-shaped curve at the end. Just off the bow of the drifting boat rests a long-abandoned crab trap.

Hall leans forward, shoves the hook deep inside the chicken wire mesh of the half-submerged trap and pulls. As he lifts it into the boat, a smelly blend of olive-green algae and chocolate-colored mud

Clockwise from above left: Abandoned crab traps pose a menace; An average of 26 crabs end up in each trap; High-riding airboats provide access to shallow traps.

oozes onto the galvanized deck.

The car wash will do some serious business this evening.

Tens of thousands of crab traps lie derelict and abandoned in Texas bay systems. This one, in all likelihood, was carried here by a storm. Were it not for Hall's airboat, we'd have never been able to

PHOTOS © LARRY BOZKA

access it. The gumbo bottom of this isolated flat is about as firm as half-melted butter.

The thumb-size stone crab that crawls out of the enclosure is a pitiful little thing. Hall picks it up gently. He's rewarded with a hard pinch on the finger.

"Good thing they handed out gloves at the ramp," he says with a grin.

The determined crustacean, like the trap he just exited, is not prone to releasing prisoners. Abandoned crab traps are perpetual killers. A crab enters a trap, and once it has eaten the food that attracted it, eventually dies. It, in turn, attracts yet another creature, which perpetuates an endless cycle of death.

Most of the crabs captured in bay traps are blue crabs. A much smaller percentage, including our lively little visitor, which Hall finally pries free and releases into Green's Lake, near West Galveston Bay, are stone crabs. All are susceptible to year-round capture, with the single exception of the annual 10-day period, beginning the third Friday of February, when the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department orders commercial crabbers to pick up all of their gear so that abandoned traps can be removed from the water.

During this year's effort, from Sabine Lake to the Lower Laguna Madre, 234 volunteers working from 78 different vessels removed a grand total of 2,509 crab traps. In 2004, 3,571 traps were taken out. In 2003, 3,838 were removed, and in 2002, when the program first began, a whopping 8,070 crab traps were extracted from coastal bays, flats and estuaries.

Art Morris, a TPWD fishery outreach specialist based in Corpus Christi, spearheads the annual Crab Trap Removal Program.

"The number of crab traps removed is progressively going down," Morris says. "That's good news. It means, in essence, that the program is working. We always get some great volunteers, folks who don't mind working hard, spending their own money and getting their boats really dirty."

Sponsors provide everything from food and drinks for workers to rubber gloves and specially made retrieval hooks like the one used by Hall.

This year, the state of Louisiana joined the program. Research conducted in the Bayou State indicates that a single derelict trap annually catches and kills approximately 26 blue crabs. Such traps can remain in the water, undetected but deadly, for 10 years or more.

"We survey the contents and condition of the traps," Morris says. "We also record what's in them ... along with blue and stone crabs, some 30 different species. Sixty-two percent of the catch is blue crabs; stone crabs come in number two with 19 percent; then sheepshead follow at 7 percent. The remaining 12 percent includes, among other species, various species of hermit crabs, red drum, spotted seatrout, flounder, black drum, gray snapper, Atlantic croaker and, rarely, diamondback terrapins."

More than half (57 percent) of the traps removed are still in fishable condition after pickup. Most, however, go to

the nearest landfill, although some are melted down and recycled by participating sponsors.

Since the program's inception, 1,593 volunteers have joined TPWD staffers to remove a total of 18,008 derelict crab traps from Texas coastal waters.

At 26 blue crabs per trap each year, that's approximately 468,208 blue crabs still swimming in Texas saltwater that would otherwise be dead.

For that, a tank of gas and a half-hour stint at the car wash seem a mighty small price to pay. ★

—Larry Bozka

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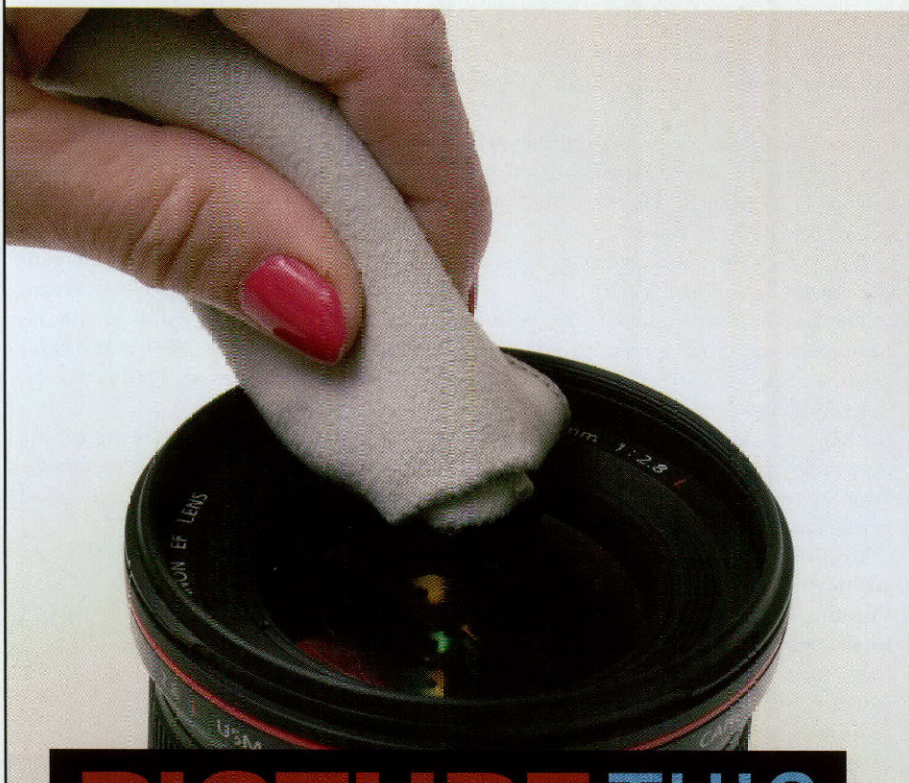
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PICTURE THIS

Our chief photographer shares his insights.

The Basics of Lens Cleaning

It's one of the most basic yet overlooked aspects of taking a good photograph — a clean lens. So often, it's easy to get caught up in the details of taking a picture (f-stops, shutter speeds, composition, lighting etc.) and fail to notice the fingerprints or other materials that may be residing on the surfaces of the lens and filters, just waiting to ruin an otherwise beautiful photo.

At a minimum, a dirty lens or filter will degrade image quality by lowering contrast, imparting an overall muddy look to the image. At worst, it can produce unwanted light flare, especially noticeable in strongly backlit scenes — it's similar to looking through the dirty windshield of a car into the setting sun.

The clearing of any lens surface should be given the same care that you would use in cleaning the cornea of your eye. Using the following gentle and progressive cleaning sequence will help ensure that your lenses will be crystal clear without scratching the delicate optical coatings.

First, use canned air or a bulb type blower to remove any loose sand or grit

from the lens. Using a cloth or tissue first will only grind in any abrasive particles.

Next, use a soft camel-hair brush, the edge of a lens tissue or special lens-cleaning cloth to gently “whisk” away any particles that were not removed by blowing with air. Caution: Use only tissues and cloths made for optics. Never use paper towels or clothing.

Finally, using a new lens tissue or unused portion of the cleaning cloth, gently wipe any fingerprints or smudges from the surface. In most cases, stubborn spots can be removed by the moisture of a soft breath onto the lens, followed by wiping with a tissue or cloth. Avoid using liquid lens cleaners as they have a tendency to work their way into and dissolve the cement that holds the lens elements solidly in place.

And if you use interchangeable lenses, you might also check out the rear elements. They are notorious for getting fingerprints on them when the lenses are changed.

—Earl Nottingham

PHOTO BY EARL NOTTINGHAM

Hunter Education Deferral Successful

Class deferrals allow more flexible scheduling for college students and military personnel.



The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department began offering a new hunter education deferral program in September 2004. The program allows a person 17 or older, who has not completed a hunter education course, to defer completion until August 31 of that same license year. In the first year, more than 10,000 deferrals were issued.

Hunters who are 17 or older are eligible to purchase a one-time deferral. A hunter with a deferral must be accompanied (within range of normal voice communication) by another licensed hunter 17 years of age or older who has: 1) completed hunter education, or 2) is otherwise exempt (born before September 2, 1971). Proof of certification or the deferral must be on a person while hunting. A person who has been convicted or has received deferred adjudication for violation of the mandatory hunter education requirement is prohibited from purchasing a deferral. Hunters who complete the course prior to the deferral's expiration receive a \$5 discount off the course fee.

The Texas hunter education effort began as a voluntary program in 1972 and became mandatory in 1988, requiring hunters born on or after September 2, 1971, to pass the course. Under the mandatory program, those under 17 can hunt in the presence of a licensed adult hunter or pass the course if they wish to hunt alone. A licensed adult hunter must accompany any hunter under 12.

More than 685,000 individuals have been certified in hunter education in the Lone Star State. The courses include a minimum of 10 hours of classroom time and hands-on activities over a minimum of two days. The classes can alternatively be taken through home study or online, followed by a one-day, hands-on hunter

skills session. Most courses are taught by volunteer instructors, who are trained and certified by TPWD hunter education staff.

Hunting is markedly safer because of hunter education. Hunting incident rates have been cut in half since the 1950s and '60s. All 50 states and 10 Canadian provinces require hunter education of some or all age groups hunting within

their jurisdictions. Hunter education certification in Texas complies with other state and provincial requirements. Certification is also good for life.

Both student and instructor courses are scheduled throughout the year and throughout the state. For information, visit <www.tpwd.state.tx.us/edu> or call (800) 792-1112, ext. 4999. ★

—Terry Erwin



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Don't Hesitate — Hydrate

Good old water, plus carbs and electrolytes, can help you beat the heat.

For 30 years, Dr. John Ivy, the chair of the Department of Kinesiology and Health Education at the University of Texas at Austin, has been working to understand the machine that is the human body. Generally, Ivy works with burnt-orange Longhorns and elite athletes, such as competitive weightlifters, but anybody planning even a modest outdoor adventure would do well to heed the good doctor's advice. In short, clearing away the thickets of fad diets and advertising hype, Ivy's approach to eating and drinking suits active Texans.

Whether you plan an afternoon nature walk or a weekend hike across the desert, Ivy cautions that the first thing to do before heading out is to check the weather. In Texas, where temps have reached a record 120 degrees Fahrenheit twice in the past century, the primary nutritional concern for anyone outside is staying hydrated. "Temperatures in the low 90s and above will cause you to lose fluid quite rapidly," Ivy explains, adding that high humidity levels increase the amount of sweat, making fluid replacement crucial.

In order to beat the heat, Ivy says, it's not enough just to drink a little water, but you must make sure you find a beverage that contains fuel in the form of carbohydrates, helpful salts

known as electrolytes and a little protein if you're pursuing vigorous activities. "For the average person, fruit juices are just fine," says Ivy. "But for hard hiking or mountain biking, the best sports drinks to look for have both carbohydrates and

In order to beat the heat, Ivy says, it's not enough just to drink a little water, but you must make sure you find a beverage that contains fuel in the form of carbohydrates, helpful salts known as electrolytes and a little protein if you're pursuing vigorous activities. "For the average person, fruit juices are just fine," says Ivy.

protein." In addition to providing fuel, research shows that the presence of carbohydrates helps the body absorb liquids more efficiently, while protein helps revitalize muscle.

Beyond what to drink, when you drink is crucial. Thirty minutes before heading out, Ivy suggests drinking a pint of something with electrolytes. Carrying a beverage and vigilantly swallowing a couple of mouthfuls of liquid for every 20 minutes of activity will help keep you

hydrated. If you become dehydrated, initially you'll likely experience only mild discomfort, but sooner or later thirst can diminish your performance — making it hard to pedal your bike or, in extreme cases, even cast a lure — while in the long run dehydration can be deadly.

You can live a lot longer without food than without drink, but meals are obviously an important part of outdoor nutrition. Ivy is quick to point out that most diets, such as the wildly popular Atkins, have little to do with athletic performance, but are designed with weight loss in mind. In his most recent book, *The Performance Zone* (2004), Ivy seeks to point out healthy nutritional options for weekend warriors and pro athletes alike. Ivy is emphatic that active sports require plenty of calories, with an emphasis on carbohydrates.

As with hydration, timing for eating is crucial: Ivy recommends eating something as soon as exercise is over. And while carbs are central, protein and even fat are also part of Ivy's dietary prescription — sports bars, jerky, nuts and fruit top his list. Like your car after a long drive, your body needs to refuel, so instead of worrying about calories, just enjoy. ★

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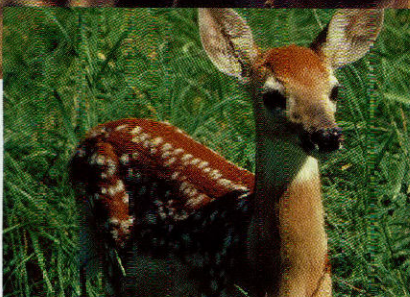
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Folding Knives

From the classic Swiss Army knife to blades designed for the U.S. Special Forces, "folders" offer something for everyone.

Top-quality folding knives with high-test steel blades are fast-opening, compact and safer to carry than fixed-blade knives of the same size.

Traditional Folders

Want a very functional pocketknife for everyday use? The **Swiss Army Knife**, first introduced in the late 19th century, remains one of the most popular folding knives in the world. The smallest is the **Classic**, a keychain version only 2-1/4 inches long when closed, with a stainless blade, nail file, screwdriver, scissors, tweezers and a plastic toothpick. Wide assortments of other models have job-specific tools like the **Angler**, which is 3-1/2 inches closed, and comes with most of the features needed by anglers. (\$16, Classic SD. \$42.95, Angler. Victorinox Swiss Army, (800) 243-4032, <www.swissarmy.com>)

Another impressive knife is the 8-1/2 inch **Puma Prince**, handmade in Germany with a natural stag handle and solid brass bolsters. The blades are individually tested for a Rockwell hardness of 57-59. With excellent balance in the hand, this long and graceful clip-point knife has a deeply hollow-ground blade and locking back safety. It is best carried in a belt case because of its 5-inch closed size. It is also available in smaller models of the same design. (\$119.95, Puma Prince. \$29.95, Leather Belt Case, Coast Cutlery, (800) 426-5858, <www.coastcutlery.com>)

Contemporary Designs

The liner-locking folders are the easiest type to open and close with one hand. Using the thumb-operated safety feature, these folding knives are ideal for field use. One excellent example is the hefty 420HC stainless **Buck Folding Alpha Hunter** with an ultrasmooth mechanism and nonslip rubber handle-slabs that are easy to grip even when they're wet. The sturdy 3-1/2 inch blade will accomplish most any task, including field dressing big game and fish with its guthook blade. A smaller, pocket-size version is the **Buck Alpha Dorado**, with a stout 2 1/2 inch ATS-34 blade, a contoured frame and laminated rosewood scales. Both of these are excellent choices for everyday use and outdoor service. (\$70, Folding Alpha Hunter #278BK. \$78, Alpha Dorado #271. Buck Knives, (800) 326-2825, <www.buckknives.com>)

A blend of contemporary liner-lock form and function with traditional elegance can be found in the new **Browning Eclipse Knife**. This Italian-made, black-blade beauty is very light, razor-sharp and is

fitted with fine European stag handle scales. Constructed of high-grade steel coated in scratch-resistant black Teflon, it carries the laser-engraved signature of John M. Browning and comes in a compact leather case with a special belt loop that can be attached or removed with a snap. (\$156, Eclipse #092, Browning, (800) 333-3288, <www.browning.com>)

A larger, liner-lock tactical design is the **CRKT Desert Cruiser**, which is a great new military/survival knife made for use by the U.S. Special forces. It has all the advantages of a fixed blade, but is compact and safer to carry in the folded position. The handle is deeply textured for a positive grip and has a strong, multiposition side-clip for snapping on to a pack, belt or pocket. (\$79.99, Desert Cruiser, Columbia River Knife & Tool, (800) 891-3100, <www.crkt.com>)

As easy as folding knives are to carry, they're even easier to lose. To prevent loss, you might consider some sort of lanyard attachment. The handy **Scientific Anglers Magnetic Net Release** for knives and accessories has a coiled cord and magnetic connection for easy removal and reattachment. It is good insurance for keeping tabs on your favorite folder in the field. (\$34.95, Magnetic Net Release # 014836, 3M Scientific Anglers, (888) 364-3577 <www.3m.com/us/home_leisure/scianglers>) ★

Above: The Swiss Army Classic; below, from top: Puma Prince; Buck Folding Alpha Hunter; Buck Alpha Dorado; Browning Eclipse Knife; Columbia River Knife & Tool Desert Cruiser.



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3 Days in the Field / By Barbara Rodriguez

DESTINATION: JEFFERSON

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HOUSTON — 3.75 hours / SAN ANTONIO — 6.75 hours / LUBBOCK — 8 hours

Of Ghosts and Gators

Moss-draped cypresses, swamp shacks and haunted hotels add to the eerie appeal of Jefferson.

The lessons won in three days' exploring in and around Jefferson are sure: the family who (ghost) walks together stays (close) together; fried catfish is fried catfish is fried catfish, not; and the Caddo Lake you imagine you know today is not the lake you will meet tomorrow. All of which is to say, the once-bustling river port of Jefferson and the East Texas wetlands that surround it are not been-there-done-that destinations. You just never know what you might discover — or what, from gators to specters, might discover you.

DAY 1

In a notably damp, warm spring, the wildflowers are garden-club showy. The cool pools of bluebonnets around Fort Worth soon give way to a mottled orange and yellow palette of Indian paintbrush and buttercups, and further east, the most spectacular swaths of scarlet red clover blooms I've ever seen. Close to Jefferson, bright white dogwood blossoms and heavy swags of wisteria bade a scented Southern welcome.

We arrive at the Marion County seat late in the day — there's just enough time to settle in before a sunset cruise on a paddle wheeler. Although Caddo Lake State Park in nearby Karnack offers cozy cabins built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the '30s, Jefferson's sobriquet (one of many) as the Bed & Breakfast Capital of Texas makes headquartering at an inn appealing. This is not a decision made lightly; dozens of early 19th-century structures have been painstakingly restored and opened to guests.


I settle on Pride House because it claims the title of first bed & breakfast in Texas. Also, owners Sandy and Dave Reisenauer welcome children, including spirited (and I mean that in the nicest possible way) 7-year-old boys. The 12-foot ceilings and king-sized beds offer a scale of comfort demanded by a large, slightly cranky, post-knee-surgery husband (and I mean that just the way it sounds). Built by a lumberman in 1889, the inn has a groaning-sideboard tradition of belt-busting breakfasts and decadent afternoon dessert buffets. That you eat often and well at the Pride House (pack clothes with elastic waistbands) is but one reason it is popular; the family-reunion-friendly accommodations are another. Rooms of all shapes and sizes answer

lots of druthers, but the "Dependency" (former servant quarters) offers a fishing cabin atmosphere with nooks, crannies, a pot-bellied stove and balconies enough to please the most extended of families.

However, even the fancier digs of the main house stand up to romping. Impossible as it sounds, the steep stairs of the gingerbread confection didn't even creak during a session of pajama bobsledding, such is the cement-like property of time-hardened, first-growth cypress. This house, built by sawmill owner G.W. Brown, boasts a triple-layer construction — 100,000 board feet of lumber. We won't see such wood again. The old-growth cypress was quickly exhausted by early settlers.

Elliott and Jurgen scuffle for possession of a hamper filled with the delicacies of a French picnic intended for the cruise we may miss if the skirmishing doesn't end ("Don't let dad take the sausages!" Elliott wails). Winding across the Big Cypress Bayou toward Caddo — Texas's only natural lake — Jurgen rhapsodizes over the undulating scenery's similarities to the Alt Rhineland. It is one of the few times I've known a local landscape to draw so much praise; usually there are questions about snakes first. I see the similarities to Germany in the dark hollows of the mixed forest of loblolly, sweet gum, oak and sassafras. Near the dock of the Caddo Lake Steamboat Co., however, our European vision dissolves into a mist that's pure bayou. The technicolor vista blinks into sepia. The bald cypresses — yet to fringe out this spring — line up along a narrow backwater like hoary, humped-back wizards cloaked in silver capes of Spanish moss.

The stillness of the ancient landscape is disrupted only by the



The distinctive white blooms of dogwood decorate Caddo Lake State Park, not far from Jefferson, in spring.



huff and puff of the Graceful Ghost's steaming engine. Captain Jim McMillen and his wife, Lexie, a former Mississippi riverboat captain, offer a variety of tours; but the twilight chuffing of the Graceful Ghost is as restorative as a trip to a spa. Babies are quickly lulled to sleep. The menfolk find their way below deck to inspect the engine and the women curl up in blankets as the pilots spin tales about the area's history, flora and fauna. From the upper deck (ranks of padded seats) and below (rocking chairs) the view is primordial. Nutria paddle silently by as herons swoop across water the color of steeping tea. Seldom deeper than a few feet, the shallow lake's water changes character from season to season. In the winter, it is window-glass clear as vegetation dies off and settles; in the summer, any water that isn't heavily traveled is carpeted in the shady greens of spatterdock, duckweed and hyacinth.

We nibble croissants and digest the story of the Big Raft — the fate of the behemoth Red River log jam is modern Jefferson's Genesis, its equivalent of the Big Bang. Miles in circumference, the faraway jam swelled connected waterways enough that by the 1840s, Big Cypress Creek invited serious navigation. A steady stream of steamboats from Shreveport and New Orleans soon made Jefferson's port the commercial center of Northeast Texas. But in 1873, engineers blew the raft to bits — along with Jefferson's big-city dreams. The destruction of the raft was equal to pulling the plug on Cypress Bayou. The waterways drained away, and railways to Marshall and Dallas subsequently replaced the riverboats. By 1885, Jefferson's population, by some reports in the tens of thousands during its heyday, shrank closer to today's figure of 2,100

TOP LEFT: The murky depths of Caddo Lake create a mysterious, swampy setting; TOP RIGHT: Jefferson, Texas, thrives on its historic architecture and picturesque past; ABOVE RIGHT: Lake of the Pines; and ABOVE LEFT: Spanish moss festoons the forest of Caddo Lake.




DAY 2

Jefferson has been saluted as outstanding in Texas for many things: first gas streetlights, most ghosts, one of the first breweries. I'd like to nominate it for the state's Quirkiest Street Plan. In 1842, founders Allen Urquhart and Daniel Alley (who should be ashamed of themselves in perpetuity) came to loggerheads over the town's street plan. Call it a compromise, but each simply preceded each to his own preference. Urquhart laid out his side of town along the bayou, with streets at right angles to Big Cypress Creek. Alley's parcel has streets running toward the points of the compass. The collision of visions created the city's unusual V-shaped layout. It's a monument to pigheadedness that, until you figure it out, can be disorienting.

Jefferson's streets are clear sailing compared to the maze of 26,800 acres of interconnected waterways, bayous, sloughs, oxbows, channels, islands and cypress thickets that make up Caddo Lake. The next morning we were back in the water, but this time mere inches above it. The chuffing of a steamboat and its historically romantic perspective is beguiling, but a Co Devil boat is where the water meets the moat. We set out early with guide John Winn, a Huck-Finn-cum-Peter-Par-cum-wood-elf character who grew up exploring the backwaters on paddle power, claiming the moldering duck blinds camouflaged among the elephant-footed cypress as clubhouses and hideouts. In this area, they're grandfathered under the auspices of TPWD's management system (which also allows annual public hunting of deer, turkey and feral hogs by permit). Once the blinds go, they're gone forever. But for now, the few remaining, silvered with age and swaddled in moss, offer a glimpse into another time and a unique vantage point of a stellar native habitat for wood duck. Winn knows the swamp shacks as well as he knows every beaver dam, alligator hole, heron nest and fallen tree. What looks trackless and inscrutable to us (and to the scores of kayakers and canoeists

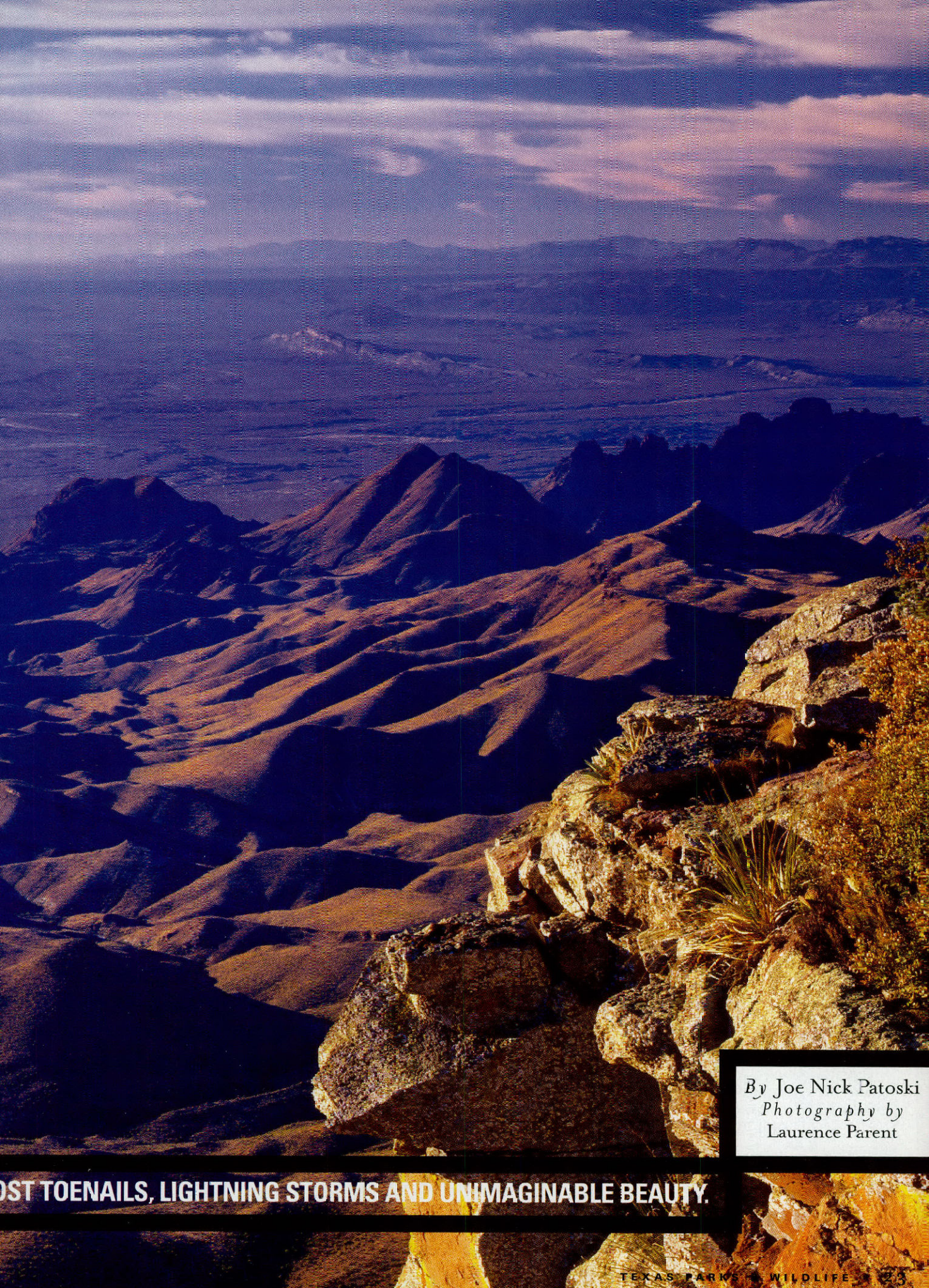
(continued on page 63)

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**THE
ULTIMATE
BIG BEND
HIKE**

SIX DAYS AND 70 MILES OF ACHING BACKS, OOZING BLISTER



By Joe Nick Patoski
Photography by
Laurence Parent

OST TOENAILS, LIGHTNING STORMS AND UNIMAGINABLE BEAUTY.

THERE ARE HIKES, AND THERE ARE BLISTER-POPPING, BACK-BREAKING, TOE-THROBBING, MIND-BENDING HIKES. HIKING ACROSS THE BIG BEND FALLS INTO THE LATTER CATEGORY. THAT BECAME CLEAR ONCE FIVE OTHER REASONABLY SANE, ABLE AND PHYSICALLY FIT ADULTS AND I SET A COURSE ACROSS 70 MILES OF EMPTY DESERT, RUGGED MOUNTAINS AND STEEP CANYONS, CARRYING OUR TENTS, SLEEPING BAGS, FOOD AND WATER ON OUR BACKS FOR SIX DAYS AND FIVE NIGHTS.

Only a handful of people have attempted to transect the bend where the Rio Grande makes its grand detour through three majestic canyons in extreme Southwest Texas on the way to the Gulf of Mexico. One of those people, Craig Pedersen, told me about his solo trek. When Laurence Parent, the photographer with whom I collaborated on the book *Texas Mountains*, proposed it, I couldn't resist. We both thought we knew Big Bend pretty well, having hiked the South Rim and the desert and floated its canyons.

But walk across it?

That was a new one. Maybe that's because the Chihuahuan desert isn't the most user-friendly terrain on earth, limiting long hikes to winter months, and only with considerable planning, support and desire.

Why not?

With a combined million and a half acres of public lands among Big Bend National Park, Big Bend Ranch State Park and Black Gap Wildlife Management Area, the Big Bend is the only region of Texas where you can actually contemplate a journey like this. I'd witnessed as Laurence scaled Mount Livermore and scooted around the Chinatis like a mountain goat while carrying 60 pounds of equipment on his back, so I knew he could do it. I figured I could, too. Six years ago I completed an eight-day, three-canyon crossing in Mexico's Copper Canyon complex, though Tarahumara Indian porters and several burros accompanied us on that hike.

Laurence plotted a 70-mile route from Rio Grande Village, near the terminus of the paved road in the southeastern part of the national park, to Lajitas, the gated resort at the national park's western boundary. We each rounded up two friends to accompany us, and hired Desert Sports, the Terlingua outfitter, to provide shuttles and water drops.

The night before departing, we met Raymond Skiles, a national park wildlife biologist, who'd hiked from Adams Ranch, east of the national park, to Lajitas solo, only he hiked over the Chisos Mountains instead of skirting the range,





Above left: Traversing the open country between Hot Springs and Glenn Springs; Below left: Another shot of the trek between Hot Springs and Glenn Springs with the Sierra del Carmens looming in the distance; Above: The rusting hulk of a vehicle — an artifact of a lost cause — abandoned decades ago near Glenn Springs.

as we were planning. He offered advice on where to camp on the Dodson Trail and climb the Mesa de Anguila and plenty of encouragement. At least he didn't think we were crazy like everyone else seemed to.

On March 2, Laurence, Shelly Seymour and Jeff Whittington, my two friends from Dallas, and I hit the trail under the cottonwoods of Rio Grande Village around 11 a.m., carrying small day packs for 3 miles to the Hot Springs, where our shuttle driver, Rick Willing, met us with our big backpacks. From there we bushwhacked across the desert towards Glenn Springs. Everyone was able; conditions were perfect, though Laurence complained he was coming down with a cold. The sun stayed behind a cover of high clouds most of the day keeping daytime temperatures in the 70s, and it didn't rain.

No rain was important. Several long miles were through bentonite, a spongy, absorbent clay formed from volcanic ash that turns to mush when wet. It hadn't rained in a couple weeks, but I was certain if it had rained one day more recently than it actually had, we would have gotten bogged down in the soil.

We didn't see another soul after Hot Springs, though we did cross a well-worn path of footprints northbound from San Vicente, Mexico. But there was still plenty to see. The low desert was in early spring bloom, awash with tiny white and pink bicolor mustard, yellow composites among the prickly pear, ocotillo, dagger, pitaya and candelilla, with bursts of Big Bend bluebonnets that perfumed the air.

The foothills of the Chisos and familiar landmarks such as Mule Ears Peak and Elephant Tusk appeared to be another world away.

Geographic weirdness was everywhere. Grasslands alternated with expanses of nothing but rock, sand and gravel. Fist-chunks of burnt wood littered one quarter-mile, as if a pit cooker had just turned over, only this wood was petrified. Some ridges were so devoid of vegetation and so violently uplifted by geological forces that their tilted layers resembled marble swirls. Wildlife sighting was limited to Jeff spooking a giant jackrabbit, Laurence spotting a coyote, Shelly tracking a hawk and a swarm of bees buzzing past. No black bear or mountain lion. I

kept focusing on Rick's advice: "Hydrate, hydrate, hydrate. A gallon a day, minimum." I kept drinking even when I wasn't thirsty.

We finally reached Glenn Springs just after sunset, almost making camp in a cemetery until Shelly recognized the crude wooden crosses and cairns — remnants from the early 20th-century village that was raided by bandits in 1916. We ate and talked, Jeff admitting he almost "bonked" that afternoon. "I would've thrown up while we were resting on that big rock, but all I had in my stomach was Starbursts." That prompted me to eat all my freeze-dried dinner to carb up, even if I wasn't that hungry. Falling asleep was easy.

The second day's hike was 12 miles with

WILDLIFE SIGHTING WAS LIMITED TO JEFF SPOOKING A GIANT JACKRABBIT, LAURENCE SPOTTING A COYOTE, SHELLY TRACKING A HAWK AND A SWARM OF BEES BUZZING PAST.

a 2,000-foot gain in elevation. After following the Glenn Springs and Juniper Canyon Trail dirt roads into the grasslands, we met Rick, who delivered water, and Keri Thomas and Elizabeth Comer, two friends of Laurence's. Keri had climbed Pico de Orizaba, the 18,000-foot volcano in Mexico, with Laurence the previous year. Elizabeth ran marathons. Like Jeff, they were both 34. Unlike Jeff and the rest of us, neither had been to Big Bend.

Progress slowed on the Dodson Trail, part of the Outer Mountain Loop, due to the steep ascent. By late afternoon, we passed behind Elephant Tusk, the landmark peak that appeared so achingly distant the day before.

We stumbled into camp by Fresno Creek in Fresno Canyon, a tiny trickle in a tight crevice in the sparse woodlands beneath the South Rim of the Chisos, less than an hour before sunset. We enjoyed supper within earshot of running water and gazed upon stars like nowhere else. Elizabeth lost one of her big toenails. Laurence complained of blisters. Carrying all that photo gear was having an effect. I developed saddle sores on my hipbones. My clothes were getting funky and my hair matted, but I slept so well that I was busted the next morning, along with Shelly, for snoring.

Day Three began with sunlight playing off the South Rim and the dulcet tones of Elizabeth's voice, "Yea, it's fresh underwear day."

We started late in the morning with a steep, 500-foot ascent to the highest point of our trip, a mile above sea level. Jeff sprinted ahead of the rest of us so he could pause in solitude and get what he calls "epiphanies." So far, he'd had one and a half, he reported.

At the saddle of the Chisos, we could see where we'd been and where we were going, from the Del Carmens to the Mesa de



BEFORE YOU GO

First, ask yourself many, many times, Do I really want to do this? If the answer is "Yes," then get busy.

Planning is critical in pulling off an extended hike like this. As Laurence put it so eloquently at the end of his four-page to-do list, "You guys are going to owe me one. Setting up all this has been a huge task." Well, we owe him. And so do you, if you've read this far. Don't attempt a long-distance hike like this without an experienced leader.

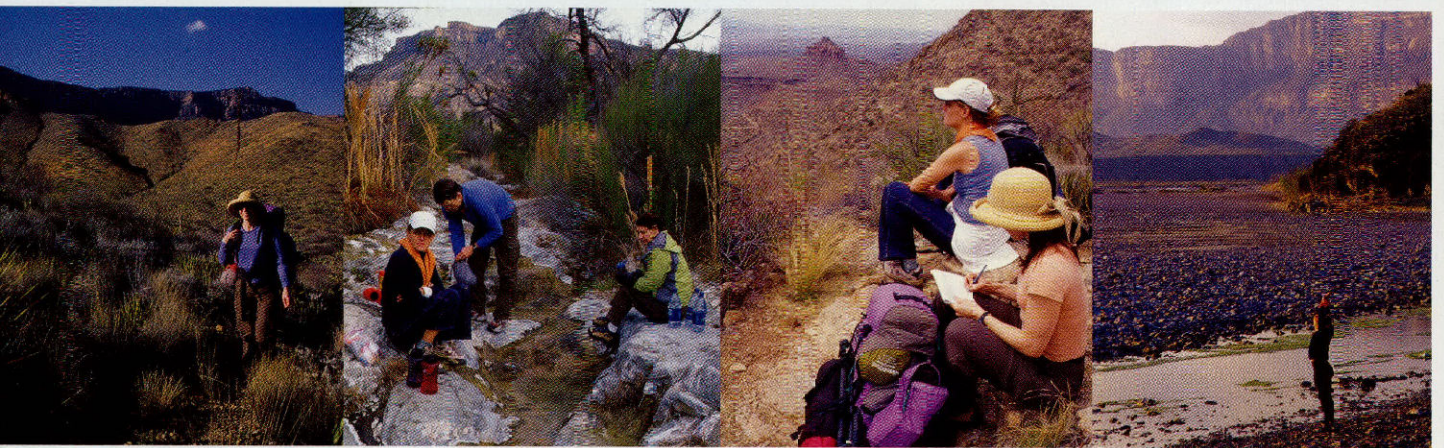
Make sure to have the proper backpack, hiking footwear, sleeping bag, sleeping pad, hat, clothing, tools, stoves, filters, medicines, personal items,

flashlight, rain gear, sunblock, to let pacer, poop shovel, food and water — the lighter, the better. Walter Wakefield of Whole Earth Provision Company, loaned me his pack, sleeping bag and pad, and they made a huge difference in my hiking and camping comfort, and helped keep the weight on my back to around 40 pounds. The wild card is water. A gallon of water a day is recommended on the trail. One gallon equals eight pounds. You do the math.

To lighten the load, it's well worth the expense of hiring an outfitter to provide support. Desert Sports in Terlingua (www.desertsportstx.com) charged us \$400 for the shuttle drop-off and pickup and two

water drops in between. They'll customize hike support and even cook hot meals and set up camp like a river trip.

Backpacking permits must be obtained in advance at a ranger station in the national park, and Big Bend State Ranch headquarters at Fort Leaton, east of Presidio, or the Barton Warnock Environmental Education Center near Lajitas. Entrance fee at the national park is \$15 per vehicle per week or \$5 per person per week. Backcountry camping permits are free. State park entrance fee is \$3 per person, with an \$8 camping fee for one to four persons.



Opposite page, top: Taking a rest on the Glenn Springs Road between Hot Springs and Glenn Springs; opposite page, bottom: Chilcotil Mountain, above Glenn Springs, in last light; Above, top: the old cemetery at Glenn Springs at first light; Above, from left: The Dodson Trail through the Chisos Mountains; purifying water from Fresno Creek; Taking a rest along the Dodson Trail; Along Terlingua Creek at dawn

Anguila. It was difficult comprehending how far we'd already walked. Near its end, we veered off Blue Creek Trail and bush-whacked through high desert. We were an hour late to Ross Maxwell Drive, the paved road where Rick Willing waited with another water, food and underwear swap, and the weather forecast — 20 percent chance of rain today, 50 percent tomorrow, which explained the overcast skies and refreshingly cool breezes.

Fresno Creek had been a camper's delight. The lunar surface beneath the Chimneys, the landmark cluster of small pointed pinnacles where we made camp on day three, was creepy. No breeze, an impenetrable darkness brought on by thick cloud cover, the way wolf spiders' eyes glowed when a flashlight shined their way, the story Jeff told during dinner about camel spiders in the Sahara that ate their victims' flesh and the sounds of little things scurrying around my sleeping bag prompted me to crawl into Shelly's tent, until I crawled out again minutes later because my nose was so stuffed up from a lingering cold. Somewhere near dawn, I crawled back in after the rain started.

The flesh on two of Laurence's toes had become infected and oozed pus. My lower back and right hip throbbed. Elizabeth's toes were getting torn up too. Jeff said he had picked up my lingering head cold. Now it was raining. Did we dare go back? No way. We donned rain ponchos and pressed on. The rain was enough to draw the fresh scent from creosote — the perfume of the Chihuahuan desert — but ceased within the hour.

As we left camp, Laurence pointed out some petroglyphs near the base of the southernmost pinnacle. The first 5 miles below the Chimneys was a pleasant stroll through low desert, including several washes thick with Big Bend bluebonnets. The last 5 miles were mostly along Old Maverick Road, the dirt road shortcut to Santa Elena Canyon from the park's west entrance.

We made a final water/food/underwear/socks/trash exchange at Shelly's SUV parked by Terlingua Abaja, and made camp on a grassy bank of Terlingua Creek. Santa Elena Canyon was behind us, less than 2 miles away. Its 1,500-foot vertical west wall was the one we were supposed to climb the next day.

Day Five: The flesh on the bottom of three of Laurence's toes had been rubbed raw. There was a 30 percent chance of rain. I wondered about Keri and Elizabeth's resolve, especially after observing Keri shave her legs the night before. We could declare victory, celebrate what we



achieved, and ride back to Terlingua in Shelly's SUV.

"What's the prognosis?" I asked Laurence, who was staring at his feet.

"Go for it."

He was hurting, but he was too proud to bag it now.

We skirted the base of the mesa for 3 miles, picking our way through grassy plains and around ridges of bentonite, looking for an old, unused pack route up the canyon wall that Raymond Skiles told us about. Keri was nearing heat exhaustion to the point that Laurence proposed blowing off climbing the mesa and cutting across the flats towards Terlingua until Shelly spotted a cairn that marked the way up.

It took a little under an hour to scale the front wall, with considerable difficulty. On top, we discovered several more walls beyond. It was a terribly long slog. Almost every day of the trip someone would ask late in the afternoon, "How much farther?" The reply was always, "Oh, 'bout a mile, mile and a half." This time it wasn't funny.

"Today's been a bitch, y'all," Laurence declared as we finally dropped backpacks on a rolling plain near Tinaja Lujan. We'd covered 8 miles in seven and a half hours.

"I was getting demoralized," Shelly admitted. "I'm freaking exhausted and want to get it over with," Jeff said. Elizabeth was busy applying moleskin to her feet. Keri was exhausted. I didn't move for 30 minutes after I dropped my pack, I was so tired.

Thunderstorms lit up the night sky as I fell asleep. When I heard a loud clap, I dragged my sleeping bag into Shelly's tent. Lightning flashed, thunder cracked and rain came down hard for close to an hour.

At daybreak, the air had a pristine scent. "I'm glad we're alive," Laurence muttered as he emerged from his tent. "That lightning was less than a mile away. We'd pitched our tents close enough to each other that if one had been hit, all of us would have fried, with no one left to do CPR." Elizabeth said she had a dream that we'd taken too much water from the tinaja and were being punished by the storms.

We were exhilarated. The views from the top were stunning. We could see the Sentinel marking the entrance to Santa Elena Canyon, the Rio Grande,

the village of San Carlos 12 miles into Mexico, mountains in every direction. The walk down the mesa was positively chatty.

We paused at the last, great sweeping vista before our final 1,000-foot descent to Lajitas. The end of the trail was a golf course. The unnatural green of heavily irrigated grasses prompted grumbles and proposals to turn around. A golf course resort was no place to end a rugged adventure. "I'm feeling post-partum," Shelly said on our final few hundred yards towards the course maintenance building. I saw a Coke can tossed among the creosote. This time I didn't bother picking it up.

Jim Carrico, the former superintendent of Big Bend National Park and project manager of planning for Big Bend Ranch State Park, picked us up. In his four and a half years as national park super, he said he knew of only two parties who'd hiked across the Big Bend like we did. As for the golf course, he laughed. "People like you and me just don't understand golf and jets."

Somewhere on the drive back to Desert Sports, I saw myself in a mirror for the first time. The greasy hair and stubbly beard were not a pretty sight.

I fetched my car and drove Jeff back to his vehicle at Rio Grande Village, our starting point. The hour drive gave us time to ruminate on what we'd done, punctuated with several "We did that?" epiphanies, along with a full view of Santa Elena and the Mesa de Anguila sloping towards Lajitas. From the road, it looked as flat and smooth as a baby's bottom. We knew better.

The shower back in Terlingua was delicious. For the rest of the evening, I took great pleasure in answering Terlingua friends and acquaintances when they inevitably asked, "What are you doing out here?"

Laurence's feet finally healed, though he had a head cold for two more weeks. Jeff said he had flu-like symptoms for three weeks once he got home. Elizabeth, Keri and Shelly had their complaints. My lower back required some manipulation to get right and still acts up now and then. Despite all that, we've all said we'd do it again. Walking across the Big Bend will do that, to a few souls at least. ★



OTHER GREAT BIG BEND HIKES

There's a whole lot more hiking to do in the Big Bend besides a monster six-day crossing. I started hiking slow and short in the national park, doing the hike to the Window on the Chisos Basin first, then Lost Mine Trail, which is the shortest route to big views in the Basin; and finally a hike up to the South Rim, the really big view from the top of the mountains, an all-day, 12-mile (minimum) roundtrip from the Chisos Basin trailhead.

The desert has loads of great short hikes, notably the under-2-mile roundtrips into Santa Elena Canyon and Boquillas Canyons; the 3/4-mile walk from the parking area to the ruins of J.O. Langford's Hot Springs Resort; and longer treks along the Marufa Vege, Grapevine Hills, around Mariscal Canyon and the Outer Mountain Loop including Juniper Canyon.

My favorite trek in Big Bend Ranch State Park was the 17-mile walk out of the Solitaro, the ancient volcanic caldera 9 miles in diameter, through the Lower Shut Up towards Lajitas. I did it with four other folks in a single day; others prefer taking a more leisurely pace over two or three days. It helped having Jim Carrico with our group, because he knew where to look for remnants of bridge trestles of the road built for General Pershing in the 1910s so he could chase Pancho Villa in Mexico.

Two excellent short hikes in the interior of Big Bend Ranch are to Ojito Acentro and Cinco Tinajas. Each is under 2 miles roundtrip and easily accessed from the gravel main road. Ojito Acentro leads to a waterfall draped with maidenhair ferns. Cinco Tinajas is five pristine pools among a huge pile of boulders; the first half of the trail is wheelchair accessible. The best short hike from River Road is the 3.4-mile roundtrip into Closed Canyon, a cool refuge of a tight slot canyon near the Rio Grande, with the trailhead just beyond the asphalt of FM 170.

The River Road is also the trailhead for the 19-mile Rancherías Loop Trail, the longest improved trail on the ranch, which requires one or two nights on the trail, and the 9.6-mile roundtrip Rancherías Canyon Trail with a sublime waterfall at the end of the path.

Hikes to two other seasonal waterfalls, Mexicano Falls and Madrid Falls, require a guide. Check with state park personnel in advance.

And if you're looking for something longer and more challenging, there's always the prospect of combining a crossing of the national park with a crossing of the state park. Now that's a monster hike.

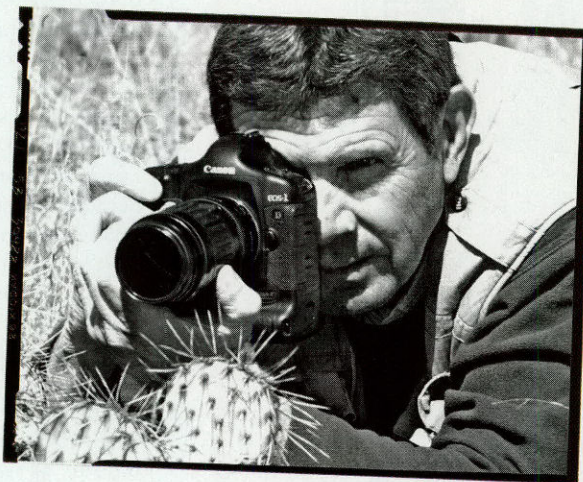
Clockwise from top left: Camp near Terlingua Creek at dawn; On Mesa de Anguila at Tinaja Lujan; Crossing a ranching-era dam on Mesa de Anguila; Opposite page, middle; Looking toward Mexico from Mesa de Anguila, between tinajas Lujan and Blanca; Left: The Lajitas Golf Course, end of the trail.



15

GT-100-3 KODAK

A day
in the life of
an award-winning
nature photographer.



STALKING A WILDLIFE STALKER

*By Eileen Mattei
Photography by
Larry Ditto*

LEFT: Face-to-face with a western ribbon snake as it emerges from hiding. ABOVE: Based in South Texas, photographer Larry Ditto spends his life waiting for exactly the right moment.

PHOTO OF LARRY DITTO © PAUL DENNAN

The radio is predicting over 100 degrees and little-to-no wind for the thorny brushland just north of the Rio Grande in Starr County. “This is going to be the best day yet,” wildlife photographer Larry Ditto tells me. Photographers have different standards for beautiful days, yet look at the results: startling, beautiful shots that grace magazines and calendars.

How do nature photographers get those pictures? One way to find out, I thought, was to look over Larry Ditto’s shoulder while he snapped dozens of rolls of film. Not really look over his shoulder, because he’s 6 feet 8 inches tall, and I’m not, but by watching him take wildlife photographs and listening to him talk about the techniques and tricks he has honed over 30-some years.

That’s why, before first light, we are opening and closing gates on Roel Ramirez’s ranch in Starr County. Dawn reveals a prickly landscape of mesquite, cactus and ebony as Larry eases his Chevy pickup over narrow tracks, startling quail families and deer nibbling breakfast. “Earliest light is better,” he says, grateful for the cloud bank that gives a few extra minutes for sunrise shots.

He halts where a mockingbird is fussing on top of a well-sited yucca and prepares the scene, removing dead branches, hoping a male painted bunting will reappear. Larry swings the tripod legs in front of him, like a metal detector probing a mine field. “This ranch has so much tall grass I don’t walk anywhere but on the trail because of snakes,” he says before he sets a Canon digital camera on the carbon fiber tripod with the sun at his back.

“You gain a sense of intimacy with a green background instead of the horizon,” he points out, his sage green shirt blending into the background. “Nearly everything will go to the highest bush.” After almost 20 minutes and no bunting, we move on. “This time of year some birds have already gone off their territory. Once it gets past April, people don’t come down to photograph the Valley because they think it’s too hot, but they miss the two best months of spring migration. You see more mammals in May, when they’re feeding their young.”

Summer midday will bring a white-hot light unsuitable for much nature photography, so Larry plans to take insect pictures then. But first he is checking portable blinds and waterholes, alert for changes in animal activity at the spots he has found most productive. Concerned about disturbing a rare Chihuahuan raven on her nest, Larry drives on. “It’s so hot, if I scare her off she might



PHOTOS AT LEFT, FROM TOP: A common raccoon searching for food; a male painted bunting perched on yucca seed pods; a pipevine swallowtail. BOTTOM OF PAGE, FROM LEFT: A crested caracara atop a dead Texas ebony; a paper wasp supported by water surface tension; Gulf Coast toad at sunrise; giant swallowtail butterfly on black brush blooms. ABOVE RIGHT: Grass and thorn scrub in Starr County.





not get back to shade the eggs." When a javelina dashes across the road, we stop and peer into the brush. "When a critter has the option of going into thin brush or thick, the critter's always going to head to the thick brush."

The Fort Worth native has two rules: Always double tap; don't take just one frame. And always take a shot when you see it; don't wait because you think the opportunity will be there five seconds later. "Murphy's Law works overtime in nature photography. Nearly every day, nine out of 10 chances are lost because of wind, clouds, freaky events. When everything finally falls into place, the battery pack goes."

Murphy's Law is operating at the ranch's main waterhole. "Six cows are right on top of my blind," he mutters. "Cows like to eat blinds." Frustrated, he calls the rancher on his cell phone: "Cows are leaking through a bad fence." Wildlife photographers can be a great help to a ranch manager, reporting torn fences poaching or illegal activity since the photographer is usually hiding himself and sees things other folks don't get to see.

After herding the cattle out, we shift the blind, a homemade

frame of inch-and-a-quarter PVC pipe draped with burlap. Wildlife come to a water hole into the wind, so the blind sits on the water's edge with the wind at its back door.

At a permanent blind, Larry begins pulling weeds out of a puddle. "You have to be a bit of a gardener and tweak Mother Nature," he admits. "The birds coming in are so small they could be obstructed, and the grass in front limits the possibility of a reflection shot." A blind creates a setting the photographer can control by providing food, water and judiciously trimmed branches.

Thin camouflage cloth covers the camera ports of the blind, which is 6 feet high — too tall and blocking the morning sun. Larry opens two large padded bags and sorts through his Canon lenses (500 mm, 300 mm, 100-300 mm, 28-85 mm, and 20-35 mm wide-angle), close-up lenses, teleconverters and extender lenses, camera bodies and battery packs. "I use fill flash a lot because it gives a bit of extra light and brings up color in low light situations like this. You have to have a twinkle in the eye. It adds life, vitality. That's what editors and viewers look for, even if they don't know it." Wildlife photos that show action, or multiple animals or a behavioral trait are





RIGHT: white-tailed buck (center) and does drinking. OPPOSITE PAGE: Texas horned lizard. BOTTOM OF PAGE, FROM LEFT: White-tailed deer at attention; Texas tortoise; vermilion flycatcher.

more appealing. "Even with a deer drinking, I try for a reflection or early morning light or a twist of the head to make it a winner." An elevated flash, not directly from the camera, prevents unnatural eye colors.

By 9 a.m., the hum of cicadas and buzzing of bees has become audible, so Larry positions the tripod in front of thistles and snips away dead twigs and leaves, setting the scene. For bee shots, he uses a 300 mm lens with a close-up lens screwed to the front, but for butterflies, the close-up lens is replaced by a 1.4 teleconverter. "They give me magnification without having to buy any one lens."

I welcome a puff of breeze, but Larry frowns. Breezes are bad, making leaves shake and forcing butterflies to orient themselves into the east wind. Accustomed to working alone, Larry talks to the uncooperative butterflies, "Come this way a little more. Okay, turn to me." But the giant swallowtail and the gulf fritillary pay no attention to his directions. One butterfly lands on the underside of a flower. Does the butterfly want to be in the shade, Larry wonders, or is it trying to drink a remnant of moisture?

With what seems like endless patience, Larry coaxes an assassin bug onto a twig so he can center it on a sprig of old man's beard in front of the camera. "I'm starting to lose patience," he says so softly that I wonder if he's joking. He's been known to chill an insect to slow it for a photograph. Although bug photos themselves are not big sellers, Larry is photographing these insects for the Valley Land Fund Photo Contest.

"Shooting tons of film is the key to winning photo contests," he says. "Most winning photos are taken on live vegetation and come at the end of a lot of hard work. Look at what contest judges' magazines publish to know what shots they favor."

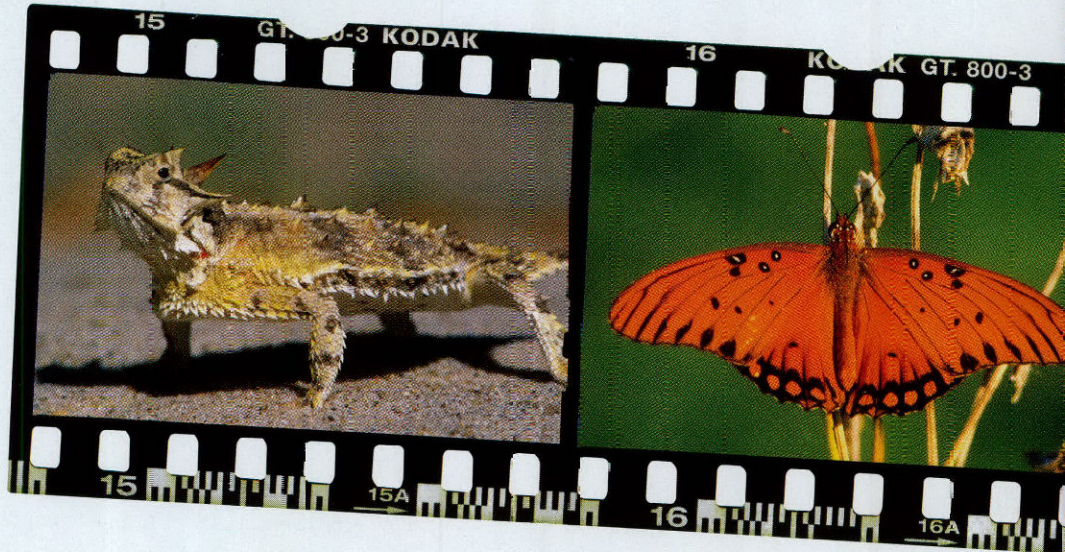
During a midday break, Larry, 59, admits he often forgets to eat when he's working. Chowing down on a tuna snack pack, the Texas A&M University graduate recalls joining the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in 1971. His assignments moved him, his wife Glenda and two children first to Texas wildlife refuges, then on to stations in New Mexico, Oregon and North Carolina, ending with 10 years as project leader at Santa Ana Wildlife Refuge in the Valley before his







ABOVE, FROM LEFT: Crimson patch butterfly on a mesquite flower; Mexican ground squirrel with a blooming prickly pear cactus; white-tailed doe and yearling buck at a water hole. RIGHT: Texas horned lizard. FAR RIGHT: Gulf fritillary sunning on a plant stem.



retirement in 1999.

While working in Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, Larry started marketing his photographs and sold his first photos — of aquatic wildflowers — to *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine.

About 18 months ago, he bought his first digital camera, a Canon EOS 10-D, followed by an EOS 1-D Mark II, which shoots eight to nine frames per second. His Canon film cameras rarely leave their shelf nowadays. On an exceptional day, Larry used to shoot 15 to 20 rolls of film. Now he often snaps twice that many digital shots on an outing and checks their quality in the field.

"When you're trying to get action and behavior, digital gives a faster shutter speed with a sharper image. My digital at ISO 400 produces photos comparable to ISO 50 film. For me, Canon's got the edge on its image stabilization systems with gyros, and it has a quieter auto focus." Going digital cost him approximately \$5,000, even though the lenses and many accessories are interchangeable with his film cameras. Theoretically, a digital camera pays for itself in six months by eliminating the cost of buying and processing film. But the new cameras forced him to upgrade his PhotoShop software and acquire a faster computer with a bigger hard drive.

"You process the raw digital image to recapture the color and sharpness you saw and that requires long hours at the computer, maybe 50 percent of my time now," says Larry, who often works six days a week on his photography. The Rio Grande Valley, where he knows birds' and mammals' habitats and habits and where he has access to ranches and refuges, is his preferred patch. "You can

travel internationally for a handful of great photographs or you can maximize your time by setting up the water and feed for a scene and come out ahead."

By mid-afternoon, we settle in the blind at the big water hole, which is too shaded to be the best of all possible water holes, but its established vegetation makes wildlife feel safer.

Clothespins hold the camouflage cloth in place around the camera lens placed inside the blind so the coyotes, javelinas and birds won't sense movement. With no breeze, our shirts turn dark with sweat, and I reach for my water bottle and package of fig bars, which crackle in the drowsy stillness. Another lesson: put snacks in zip-lock bags to eliminate loud cellophane rattles. We take turns nodding off. Two ladder-backed woodpeckers land directly in front of the blind. What a shot! Larry's dozing, so I tap his leg, but it's too late.

"Sitting in a blind is not for everyone, but it improves your chances of a good shot, more than driving around," he says before slipping from the blind to photograph a granddaddy bullfrog on the opposite bank. Kneeling down to focus, he tells me "You're not a good photographer if you're not wearing out the knees of your jeans and elbows of your shirts. You need to get down on level with the animals. It's an eye-to-eye thing."

Finally I can look over his shoulder, and the framed shot is a winner — in focus, good light, a good specimen, a little good luck and lots of hard work. ★

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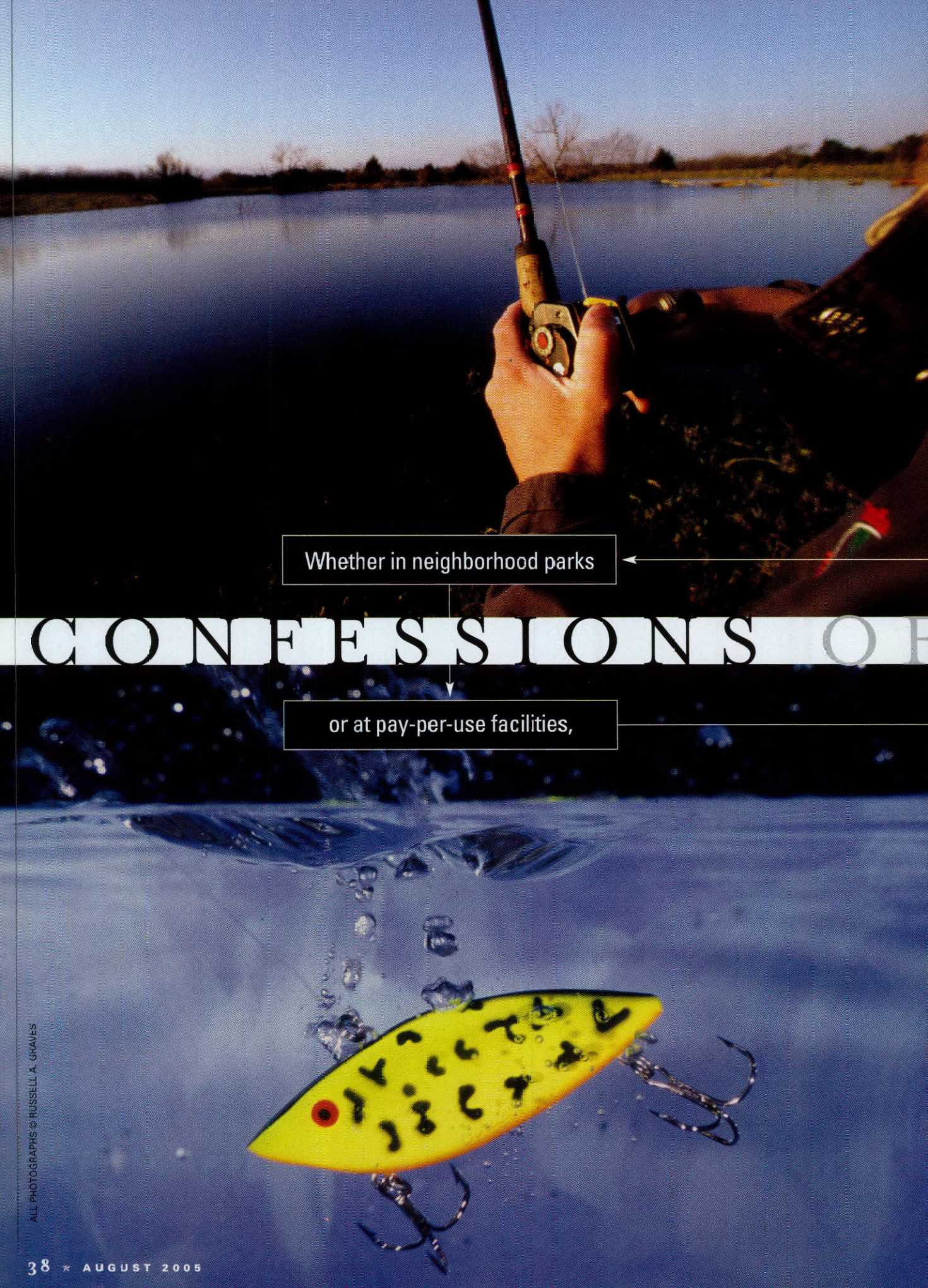
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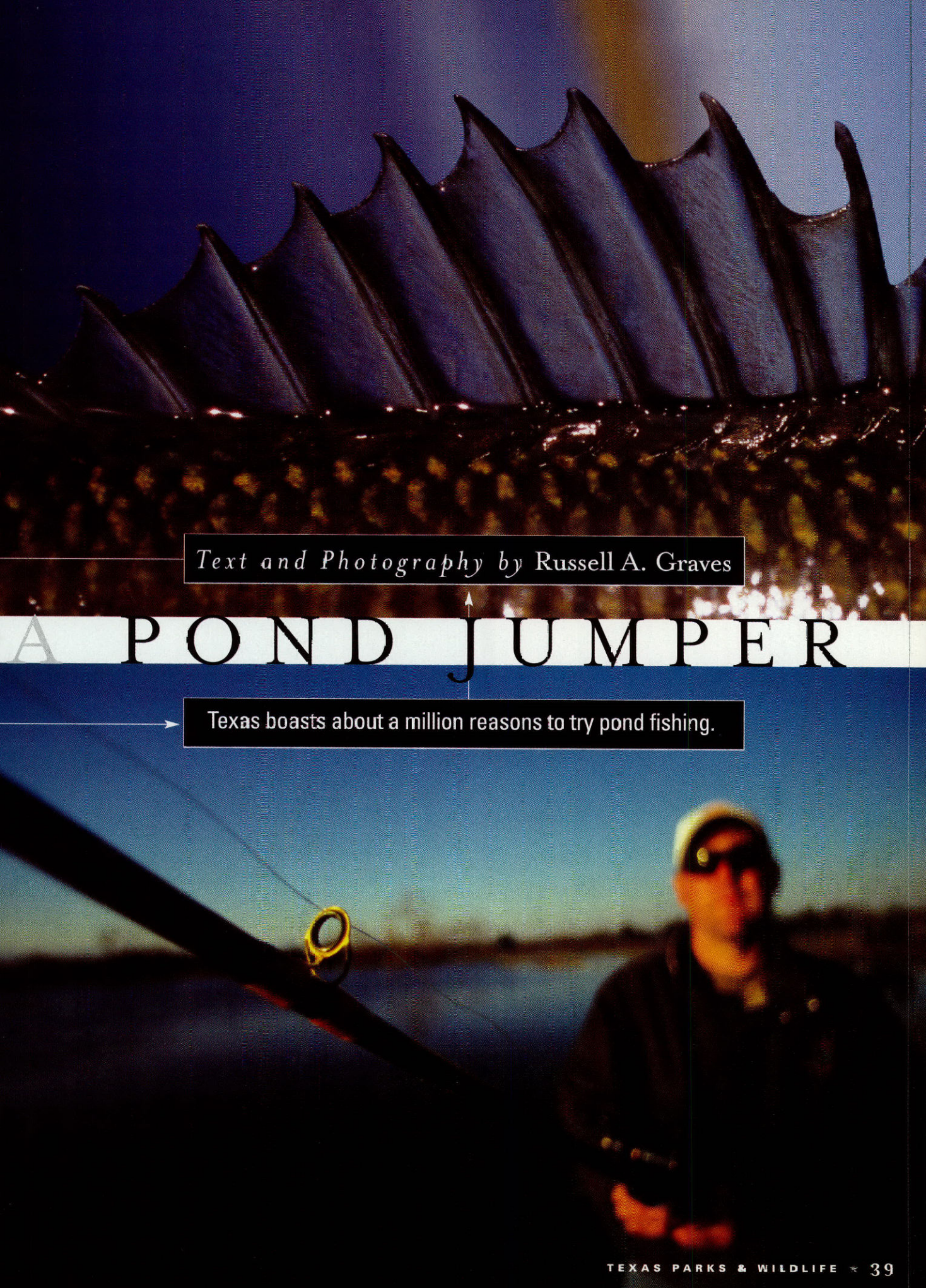




Whether in neighborhood parks ←

CONFESSIONS OF

or at pay-per-use facilities,



Text and Photography by Russell A. Graves

A POND JUMPER

Texas boasts about a million reasons to try pond fishing.

HALF THE FUN IS
KNOWING YOU'VE GOT
THE WORLD TO YOURSELF
AND THE DAY IS YOUR
BLANK CANVAS.



I can't remember what exactly got me addicted to pond fishing. I can come up with a litany of reasons, but none stands out as the primary rationale for my passion.



WHEN YOU'RE SITTING BY THE WATER,
TIME SPREADS OUT AND STRETCHES INTO
ONE, LONG PERFECT MOMENT.

Maybe the tug of a tight line first piqued my attention. Perhaps it was the way I felt when I first saw a bass explode from summer's still waters and spank a Hula Popper with incomprehensible quickness. On the other hand, maybe, just maybe, I subscribe to Kevin Costner's explanation of why his Field of Dreams grew from a cornfield: All the cosmic tumblers clicked into place to create magic.

This morning, I stand on the western side of a pond I've fished every year from the time I was eight. The pond is only 200 yards from my parents' front door, and I've followed the same path through the pasture to the pond for so many years, I'm surprised that my feet haven't worn a rut slicing through the blackland prairie.

Nearby, my lifelong friend Garry casts a 6-inch soft plastic bait that looks like a thick, rigid worm; but when it is twitched at the end of monofilament, it dodges and darts like a wounded baitfish. My brother William casts a double-bladed chartreuse spinner bait that is usually effective for bass on this 2-acre farm pond. I cast a chartreuse lipless crankbait that's spotted black and stirs up some audible commotion as it wiggles through the clear water. As we fish, we speak in short, inarticulate sentences branded with a perfect mix of braggadocio, machismo and trash talk. We catch a few fish, but the chance to tease each other is what makes our trips fun.

Soon the fishing slows, and an hour of angling nirvana comes to an end. We contemplate going to another nearby impoundment, and then another and another — we call it “pond jumping.” Growing up in the country, pond access was never much of a problem, as my family maintained good relations with neighboring landowners. Therefore, it's not unusual for us to fish a half-dozen ponds in the course of a morning. If the fish stopped biting at one



THE FIRST FISH OF THE DAY.

pond, they'd surely bite at another.

I've never been much of a lake angler, but I do enjoy the challenge of fishing farm impoundments. Sometimes, though, the challenge becomes too tough and I can't get the fish to bite at all. In an attempt to learn more about my favorite fishing holes and how to overcome inevitable lulls in fishing action, I visit with a couple of seasoned pond angling experts in the hope of unlocking secrets that I've never contemplated before.

Approaching the Pond

"The first thing I do is try to figure out the age of the pond," says Bob Lusk. Lusk, a fisheries biologist and owner of Pond Boss, a pond construction and management consultation service, runs his company from Sadler, Texas, and boasts clients nationwide.

"If the pond is older than three years, I always look for cover around the edges of the pond. A pond that's been stocked three to five years ago is starting to produce mature fish, and bass tend to move towards the edge of cover to snatch baitfish as they emerge from the cover." Lusk explains that because of large-mouth bass' predatory nature, they'll often hang out, motionless, next to cover as they wait to stalk or ambush baitfish. Therefore, according to Lusk, identify the cover when you first approach the pond.

Rodney Gibson agrees with Lusk's assessment of sizing up a farm pond upon initial contact. In his professional career, Gibson is the director of pharmacy operations for a North Texas

hospital, but in his spare time, he is a devoted pond angler who often guides clients on private fisheries in northeast Texas.

"Besides cover, I also take into account the particular time of year. If it's spring, fish will be near the bank in shallow water spawning and feeding. During the summer, fish will be on the bank at night and in the low-light hours, but they go to deep channels during the day." Gibson says that because fish are cold-blooded creatures, understanding their sensitivity to water temperature is paramount. Autumn often finds fish hanging out around drop-offs where shallow water transitions to deeper water. In the winter, fish stay in deeper water and are less apt to feed aggressively.

"I look for the areas that will match the depth that I think the fish are doing for that time of year and then look for cover," Gibson continues. "If I'm fishing a farm pond I have never seen before, I go to the dam and fish it thoroughly before fishing any other area, as big fish need deep water close to feel safe and the dam is usually the deepest part of the pond."

The Go-To Lure

Gibson and Lusk both agree that someone interested in fishing farm ponds needn't invest a great deal of money on a tackle box full of lures. In fact, they both agree that you only need a handful of artificial baits to be successful.

"My number one choice for lures is a small white or chartreuse spinnerbait," confides Gibson. He says that in clear water, he'll opt for the white bait while stained or muddy water calls for the chartreuse spinner. Gibson says he likes spinnerbaits because they are virtually weedless and work well during most of the year. He avoids using spinnerbaits heavier than 3/8 ounce because he postulates that most pond bass are accustomed to seeing small bait fish. Larger lures, Gibson contends, may be counterproductive and actually scare fish.

As a rule he says that the warmer the water, the faster he reels. "When the water is cold, I reel just fast enough to keep the blades turning and try to elicit an impulse strike. As the water warms, I reel faster so that the reflective flash of the blades resembles an injured baitfish."

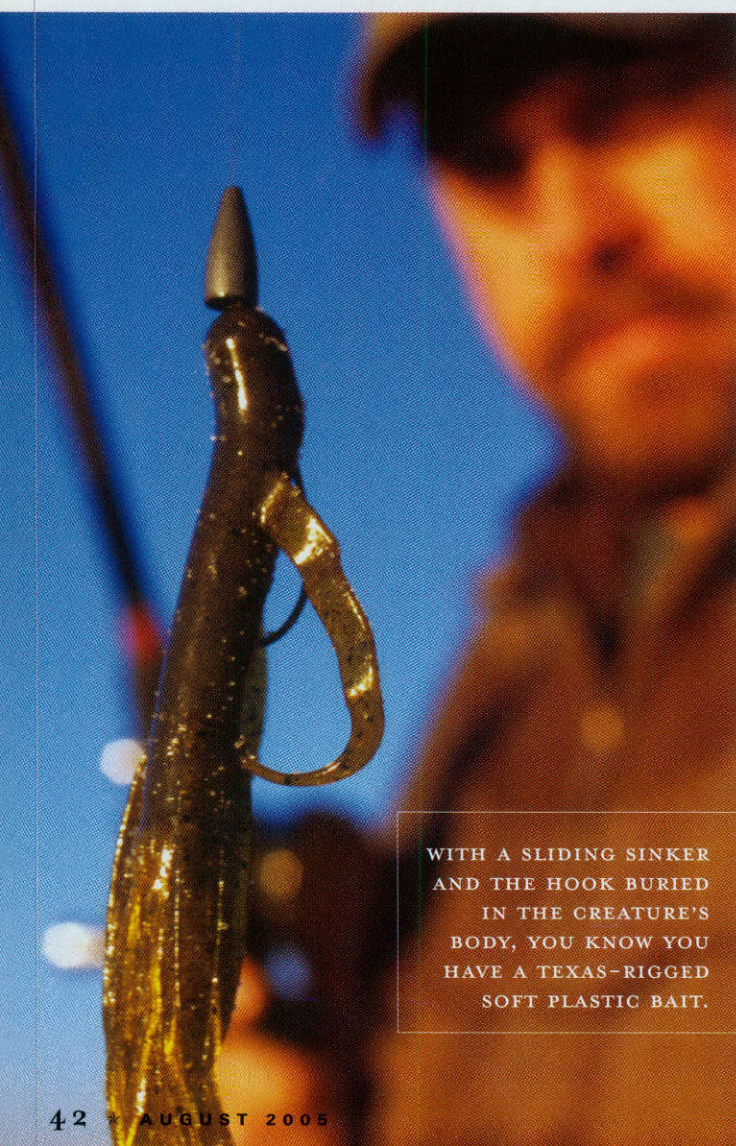
Lusk agrees with Gibson in that a spinnerbait is hard to beat for catching bass in farm ponds. "Spinnerbaits do work well. I typically cast spinnerbaits parallel to aquatic plants and reel the bait along the dividing line between the plants and open water." Lusk says to look for cover and work the bait around it. Finding bass in open water, say, in the pond's middle, Lusk says, is rare.

Aside from spinnerbaits, both agree that soft plastic baits are a good alternative and work extremely well in situations where heavy vegetation is a problem. Various hook riggings such as the Texas and Carolina rigs work well under a variety of conditions. Gibson says he likes to rig a worm in a weedless configuration and work it without a weight, on top of moss. He says that if you work the light bait on top of moss or grass cover, bass can sense the bait's motion and attack it with intensity.

Stock Pond Strategies

Planning a stock pond strategy is easy. Both Lusk and Gibson advise a thorough study of the pond's structure and water color for starters and then work thoroughly along areas of cover where the fish will most likely be. Lusk says that since most Texas ponds are stocked with largemouth bass, finding their haunts and attracting the fish with a well placed lure is simple.

"For starters, I like to toss a spinner near the grass beds or submerged trees and work it parallel to the shore," Lusk advises.



WITH A SLIDING SINKER
AND THE HOOK BURIED
IN THE CREATURE'S
BODY, YOU KNOW YOU
HAVE A TEXAS-RIGGED
SOFT PLASTIC BAIT.

Friendly Waters

Looking for a stock pond fishing hotspot but don't know where to start? Don't fret. Granted, something like 94 percent of Texas land is privately owned but small-water fishing spots are still available. According to Texas Cooperative Extension Wildlife Specialist Billy Higginbotham, more than one million private lakes and ponds exist in Texas with a total surface acreage in excess of half a million acres.

"Fishing private ponds is like hunting on private land: you own the land, lease it or have a friend or family member that owns or leases it," says Higginbotham. "There are private companies that lease fishing rights on private lands. Some places sell memberships, so an individ-

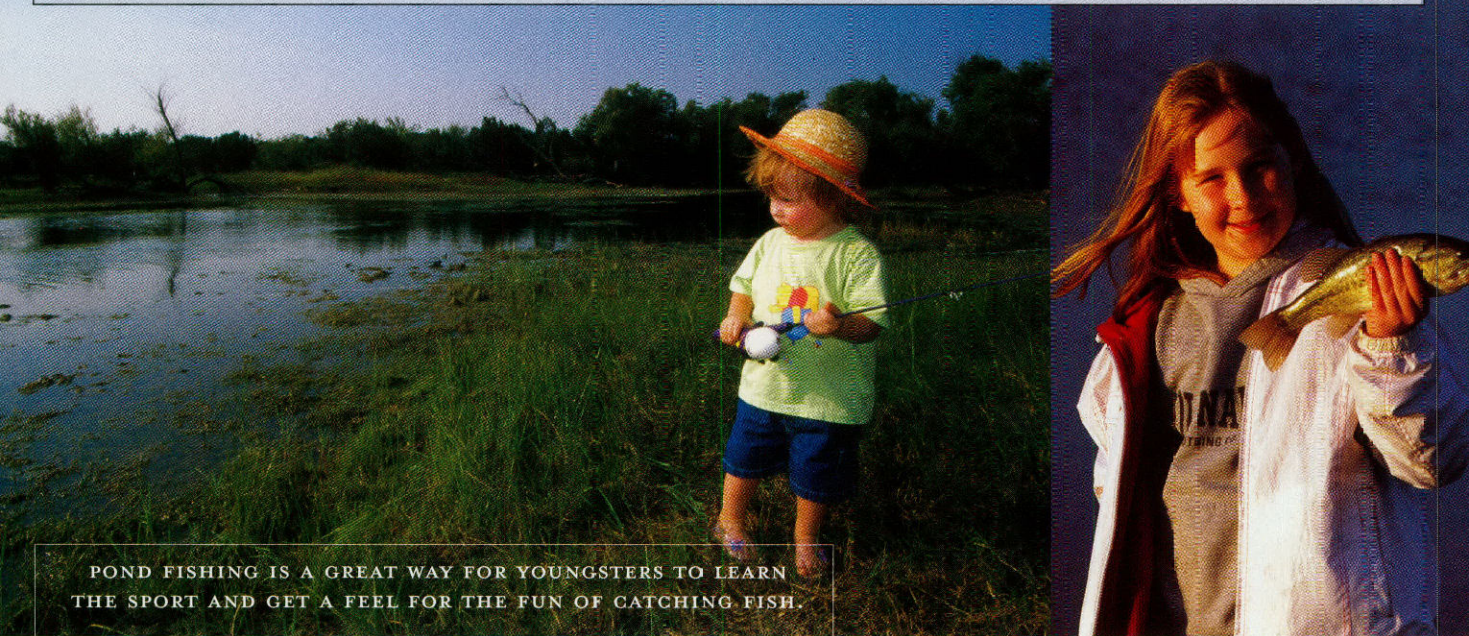
ual can gain access to private waters. There are also a few private lakes that offer access on a daily fee basis, and most of those are guided." To find private pond leasing opportunities, check with the county's agricultural extension service for information on farm pond leases in the area. To view an alphabetical listing of contact information for all extension offices by county, visit: <county-tx.tamu.edu/>.

If you are looking for local opportunities for small lake fishing but don't want to struggle with private land access, Texas is full of small public lakes. TPWD maintains a listing of about 600 public lakes that range in size from less than an acre to 75 acres. These lakes and ponds lie within a city's limits, in a public park,

national forest or within the boundaries of a state park. For example, the LBJ National Grasslands near Decatur boasts 13 lakes covering more than 210 acres. That's a lot of fishing opportunities only half an hour from Fort Worth.

Each year, TPWD stocks many of the public lakes with channel catfish and rainbow trout. Thankfully, stock pond tactics can be employed on these public waters. Be aware, though, that localized harvest limits and all applicable state fishing laws still apply on the public water.

For a full listing of Community Fishing Lakes sorted by geographical region, check out the TPWD Web site at <www.tpwd.state.tx.us/fish/infish/cflist/>.



POND FISHING IS A GREAT WAY FOR YOUNGSTERS TO LEARN THE SPORT AND GET A FEEL FOR THE FUN OF CATCHING FISH.

"Since ponds have a low volume of water compared to a lake, weather has much more of an effect on pond fish. Therefore, keep that in mind when tossing a lure." Lusk explains that in warm weather, bass move into shallow water but move to deeper water as shallow water cools off, so you should toss your lure accordingly. As a rule, in the morning, fish may hang off of cover near a drop-off, but as shallow water flats warm through the day, bass will move into those areas and hunt for baitfish.

What if the fish don't bite? According to Lusk, cast the same lure in the same area about 15 times. If you don't get a strike, change tactics by fishing deeper or shallower water or by switching lures. "If a spinnerbait isn't getting much action, I'll switch to a soft plastic bait and fish it slowly towards deep water. In our surveys, we almost always find a few bass along a pond's dam near the edge of a drop-off." Lusk reminds me that most all stock ponds are heavily stocked and underfished. Consequently, most of the bass you're liable to catch are in the 10- to 12-inch range. He says that these bass are easy to catch and add lots of excitement for anglers who aren't interested in the size of the fish as much as they are in the size of the angling experience. If the bass still don't bite, he advises switching to a tiny spinnerbait or jig and to hook panfish such as bluegills.

Gibson adds that a common tactic he employs when fishing

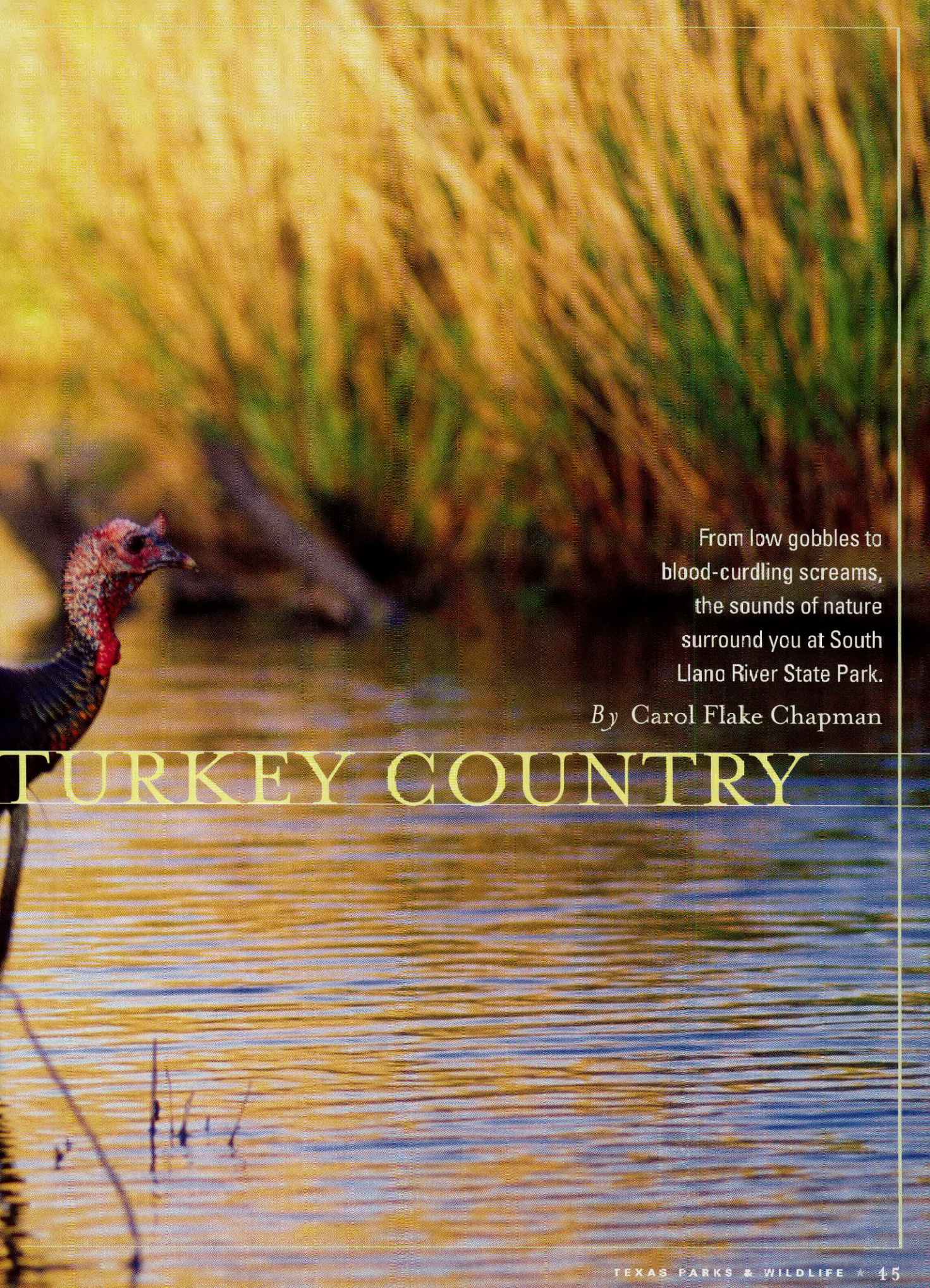
farm ponds is to stay quiet. It's his contention that bass recognize foreign noises such as people talking, and they spook away from the shore into deeper water. He also says that paying attention to what you are doing is one of the best pieces of advice he can give to a pond angler. "If you catch a fish, remember what kind of lure you are using, your retrieval depth and speed, your lure presentation and where you caught the fish. Because prime feeding areas are fairly limited in a stock pond, chances are that fish will be stacked up in good cover. So when you catch a fish, throw your lure in the same area and present it to the fish in the same way again. Chances are you'll get another strike."

I think both Lusk's and Gibson's advice is paying off. Soon after I toss a spinnerbait, it flops into the water next to a fallen willow limb, and I feel the tell-tale vibration of a strike. Hooked on my lure, a fish pulls heavy on the fishing line, and it bends the rod over in a scimitar arc. I don't yet know how big the fish is, but it has a prize fighter's spirit and tries its best to swim back to the submerged haunt.

Once I land the fish, I realize it is modestly sized — only a couple of pounds. However, I take Gibson's advice and pitch the lure back into the cover. As the bait sinks, my mind drifts for a second and visions of a 10-pound bass creep in. "If you cast it, they will come," I think. The cosmic tumblers are clicking again. ★



PADDLING *through*



From low gobbles to
blood-curdling screams,
the sounds of nature
surround you at South
Llano River State Park.

By Carol Flake Chapman

TURKEY COUNTRY

As a paddler still in the learning stages, I approach rivers something like dance

partners, gingerly trying to anticipate their rhythms and quirks. Some have tango temperaments, ready to dip or dunk you, while others can spin you around in a jitterbug frenzy. The South Llano, though, seemed the most relaxed and reassuring of partners, as we put in our kayaks about 10 miles upstream from South Llano River State Park. Its serene turquoise waters are fed from hundreds of springs along this central portion of the Edwards Plateau, and its flow stays fairly constant even during hot, dry summers. On this warm, bright day, the South Llano looked cool and inviting, and I could hardly wait to test the waters. This was going to be a long, slow glide, I thought, with some occasional quicksteps to keep us on our toes. What's more, stands of tall pecans and sycamores on the riverbanks promised some welcome shade along part of

knee-high grasses here in Kimble County made good hunting grounds for Comanches and hideouts for outlaws and desperadoes. And now they make the perfect getaway for folks like us, looking for peace and quiet and some unscheduled encounters with wildlife.

Even though I was lulled by the soothing murmur of South Llano's gentle current, I still found myself jumping a little when I heard rustling in the bushes along the bank. I began listening hard, not only to anticipate the river's modest rock-garden rapids that required a little more attention from my paddle, but also to try to figure out what might be hidden away in the brush. When you're exploring a new place in the wild by water, I've learned, you tend to hear a lot more things than you can see, and your imagination can get carried away.

lands. Hundreds of Rio Grande turkeys start converging on the area around South Llano State Park and the adjacent Walter Buck State Wildlife Management Area in early fall, and areas of the park and WMA are closed off to visitors from October through March in order to keep from disturbing their roosting grounds.

Long before I saw or heard a turkey, though, I heard a blood-curdling noise from somewhere on the bank above us. It sounded almost human, though I had never heard anything quite like it. Later, when I tried to reproduce the unearthly shriek for the benefit of a volunteer at South Llano State Park, he shook his head knowingly. "That would have been an axis deer," he said, referring to the large spotted Asian deer that inhabit game ranches in the Hill Country and have wandered into the environs of the park and WMA. "They sound like someone is being murdered," he said.

Around another bend, we heard another kind of shriek, this one coming from a high branch drooping from a tree high above. As we got closer, I peered up through my binoculars to get my first-ever glimpse of a Cooper's hawk. And when my eyes got adjusted to the shade beneath the tree, I could see several turkeys retreating from the bank, their heads and necks looking surprisingly bright blue, almost jewel-like, as the shafts of sunlight glinted on them. I could hear their distinctive soft clucks, and then they seemed to simply melt away into the brush as though they were being erased from the picture by a divine hand. Now you see them, now you don't. Clearly, turkeys, like outlaws and desperadoes, know a thing or two about discreetly disappearing.

Unless you get lucky, encounters with wildlife tend to be "quick and chancy," as poet Gary Snyder put it, sometimes not much more than hearing "a call, a cough in the dark," or sensing a shadow in the shrubs. "You can go about learning the names of things and doing inventories of trees, bushes and flowers," wrote Snyder. "But nature often just flits by and is not easily seen in a hard, clear light."

After about five hours of paddling, broken up by a couple of refreshing dips in



the way. Because of the peculiar tilt of this part of the plateau, we were actually heading northeast, toward the town of Junction, where the North and South Llano rivers meet to form the Llano, which winds its way eastward. Despite its arid mesas and rocky uplifts, Kimble County is known as the Land of the Living Waters. With so many springs, creeks, washes and rivulets contributing to its major rivers, Kimble boasts more miles of moving water than any other county in Texas. And yet, though we were still technically in the Hill Country, there is a rugged, untamed feel to this countryside that makes you feel as though you're actually in West Texas, where water can seem as precious as gold. In the old days, the abundance of cool, fresh water, tall trees and

There were plenty of great blue herons that revealed themselves, first by an annoyed call and then by a great flapping of wings. There was the constant plop and splash of turtles as they slid into the water. There was even a loud snort announcing the presence of a javelina, which quickly trotted away before I could get a good look. But I was really hoping to spot some of the wild turkeys that favor the South Llano bottom-

1. Kayaking and canoeing are popular on the South Llano River; 2. Tom turkeys strut during the spring mating season; 3. Turkeys roost in the tall trees along the river; 4. It's not uncommon for turkeys and other creatures to make themselves at home in the park; 5. White-tailed deer are regular visitors; 6. The timeless pleasure of sharing a plunge into the spring-fed river; 7. Tubing on the South Llano is perfect for a lazy summer day. Photos 1 and 6 © Lance Varnell; Photos 2 and 3 © Grady Allen; Photo 4 © Mike Searles; Photo 5 © Rolf Nussbaumer/KAC Productions; Photo 7 by Eari Nottingham.



deeper stretches of the river and a leisurely snack on a small island in the middle of the river, we reached the edge of South Llano River State Park. We debarked in front of a small dam, where swimmers from the park were putting in their tubes for a leisurely spin down a segment of the 2-mile stretch of river that winds through the park. The timing of our excursion was just about perfect for a lightly seasoned paddler, and I found myself wishing I had chosen the South Llano as my introduction to white-water, instead of the roaring torrents of upper Barton Creek, swollen earlier in the summer by unusual amounts of rain, which had left me totally exhausted. The South Llano is an ideal river for learners and day-dreamers and folks who aren't in a big hurry. After my immersion in the South Llano, I still had plenty of energy left to explore the park.

The timing was good, too, for spotting



more turkeys. They were strutting by the dozens under towering pecan trees and through the tall grasses and patches of prickly pear in the fields lying between the river, a small oxbow lake and the park campground. As I tried to zero in with my binoculars on a group of turkeys, I would find that there were white-tailed deer there, too, hidden in the background, which would announce their presence with indignant snorts. Compared to the axis deer, with their deafening early warning signals, the white-tailed deer were remarkably subtle, I thought.

Other animals presented themselves through sound, too, and I looked up to figure out what sort of woodpecker was tapping

on a tall pecan. As far as I could tell, referring to a checklist of birds at South Llano River State Park, it appeared to be a ladder-backed woodpecker, a bird that I see every now and then in my neighborhood west of Austin. But then I spotted another woodpecker, one I hadn't seen before, and which I finally identified, with the help of Park Superintendent Wayne Haley, as a golden-fronted woodpecker.

Despite its relatively small size, South Llano River State Park is a great place for wildlife encounters. Though the park itself is just over 500 acres, the adjacent Walter Buck State Wildlife Management Area encompasses another 2,000 or so acres, and many of the WMA trails are generally available to park visitors from April through September. Birders had begun to station themselves at the three enclosed birdwatching blinds located around the park, though the best times for serious birders come in October and April, when more than a hundred species of migrating birds pass through the area. Large flocks of sandhill cranes swoop over the park in the fall, and an assortment of ducks, from buffleheads to ruddy ducks, make seasonal appearances.

There are plenty of birds that prefer to stay a while, though, at South Llano, just like some of the campers who make them-

to tell of my experiences earlier that day. I thought enviously of a photo I had seen at park headquarters of an enormous catfish that had been caught in the South Llano. As we talked, deer were grazing not far from the circle of light, and Durward described the comings and goings of skunks that like to wander through the area but that so far had not scented up the place. One of the animals had even stopped briefly beneath the bench I was sitting on, said Durward, who had been reposing there at the time.

The Rutlands particularly enjoy watching the turkeys, they said, which put on quite a show during mating season in the spring. Once, they had even seen what appeared to be a gang fight between two groups of turkeys that had stationed themselves in fields across the park road from each other. "They were hollering at each other like they had chosen sides," said Durward. After some loud gobbling, the two groups charged each other and met somewhere in the middle of the road, resulting in some confused scuffling. "They raised a lot of dust," he said.

I imagined that Walter S. Buck Jr. would have enjoyed that scene. Buck, who donated the land for the park and WMA, first came to the South Llano as a child in 1910 with his family aboard a horse-pulled hack. By then, says Wyatt, Kimble County had

THIS AREA, I WAS TOLD BY LOCAL HISTORIAN FREDERICA WYATT, IS KNOWN AS THE "FRONT PORCH OF THE WEST" — A TITLE THAT SUGGESTS BOTH THE COZINESS AND WILDNESS THAT VISITORS DISCOVER HERE.

selves at home. I enjoyed watching the antics of dozens of pyrrhuloxia, which I thought at first were cardinals that must have been dipped in paint remover. During a sudden heavy downpour, as the rain pounded on the tin roof of the blind, the mottled red and grey birds flitted up to the branches of a nearby cedar and availed themselves of heaven's fountain to wash and preen.

At the campground, enjoying the newly freshened air after the rain, were Wanda and Durward Rutland of San Angelo, who had settled in for a couple of months as park hosts, just as they have nearly every year for the past 11 years. I sat on a bench they had placed in front of their RV and chatted with them, feeling as though things hadn't changed so much since settlers first arrived in this area in their covered wagons, circling them around the fire for comfort and safety. This area, I was told by local historian Frederica Wyatt, is known as the "Front Porch of the West" — a title that suggests both the coziness and wildness that visitors discover here. It also suggests the possibilities of yarn-spinning around the campfire, and I found myself wishing I had a taller tale

calmed down a bit from the days of Comanche raids and outlaws. Buck, who inherited the land from his father, was particularly proud of the pecan trees and wild turkeys that thrived on the range and bottomlands on his ranch, and he wanted to make sure the turkeys would always have a safe place to roost. "He was a conservationist," said Wyatt. "He wanted the people of Texas to have a connection to the land and the wildlife, like he did." Buck, who never married, was known to tell folks that the land was his "one great love."

The next morning, as I walked beneath the tall pecans on my way to the river, the mist was rising from the small oxbow lake, where a couple of young raccoons had come down to drink and poke around for breakfast. Out in the fields, I could see groups of turkeys busy foraging, their heads poking up and down curiously like snakes when they heard an intrusive noise. Down by the river, a great blue heron soared across to the other bank. It's little wonder, I thought, that turkeys keep coming home here to roost and that people, too, keep returning here to watch them. ★



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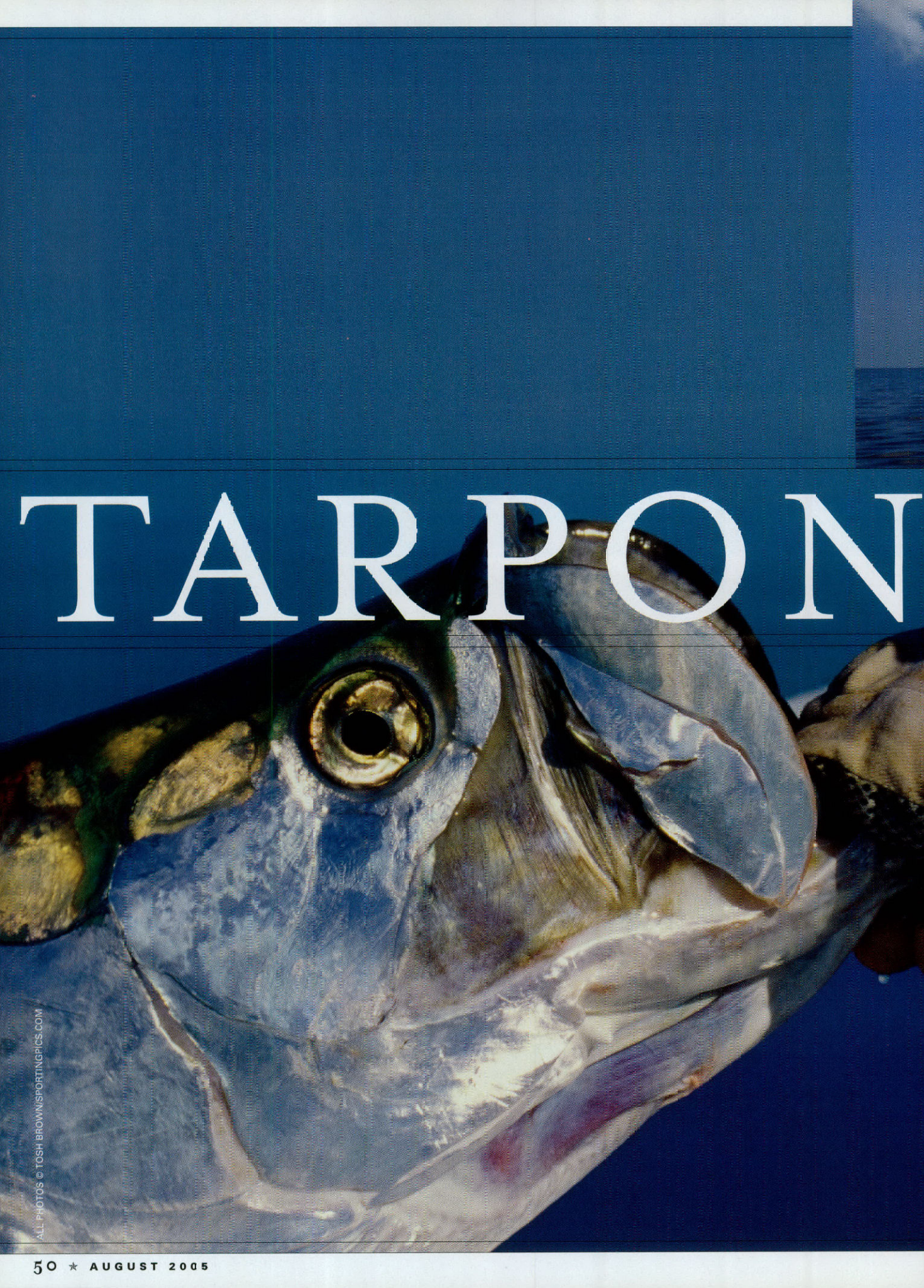
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TARPON

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While the potential benefits of stocking the popular sport fish along the Texas coast are huge, so are the obstacles.

TRIALS

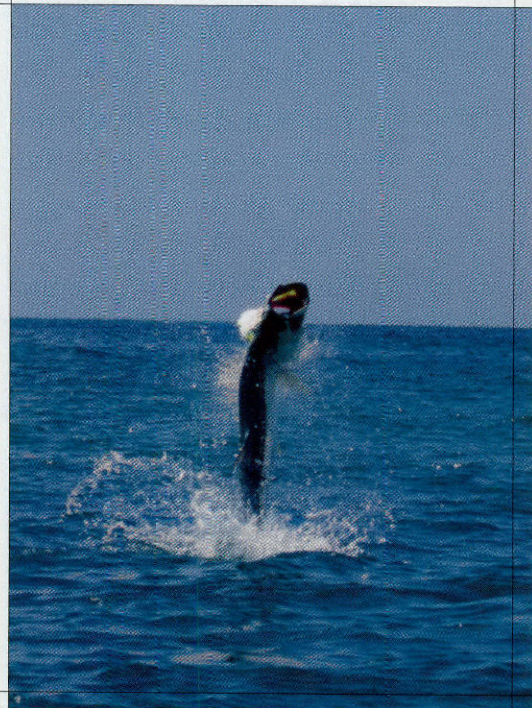
By Marsha Wilson Rappaport
Photography by Tosh Brown

In 1937, just as the fires of War World II were being ignited in Europe, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt checked into the historic Tarpon Inn at Port Aransas for a few days of fishing. At the time, locals boasted you could “almost walk across the surf on the silver backs” of tarpon. While that was certainly an exaggeration even then, there’s no doubt that the fish were once much more plentiful along the Texas coast than they are today.

“There are still tarpon in Mexican and Texas waters, but nothing like the numbers seen prior to the 1950s,” says Ivonne Blandon, a biologist currently working on tarpon research at the Coastal Conservation Association/Central Power and Light Marine Development Center in Corpus Christi. The center combines the efforts of the CCA with American Electric Power and TPWD. The center is investigating the feasibility of a tarpon breeding program similar to its successful reef fish and seatrout stocking programs. A healthy tarpon population along the Texas coast could garner millions of sport-fishing dollars.

Renowned for its fight, the tarpon has a cult-like following. “This is a very powerful animal. It fights to the end and, in some cases, will even kill itself rather than be taken,” says David Abrego, facility director at Sea Center Texas in Lake Jackson, where six tarpon are kept in large tanks for research purposes.

Known for their aerial acrobatics when hooked, tarpon are easily excited, sometimes to their detriment. During a violent electrical storm in Lake Jackson, Abrego says, one 4-foot-long fish jumped about 11 feet to escape the holding tank.



"He hit the top of the tank with such force that it dislodged and destroyed a light fixture embedded in a metal shell," says Abrego, pointing to the fixture. "The tarpon died from the force of impact."

Their appearance matches their legendary bad attitude. Growing up to 8 feet in length, this Goliath is mostly silver with dark blue or greenish-black shading along its back. It has a distinctive jaw that seems bent upward in a permanent frown. The average tarpon in U.S. waters weighs between 40 and 60 pounds. But some devotees are willing to spend thousands of dollars to chase their prey as far away as Sierra Leone, Africa, hoping to land the few that can weigh well over 200 pounds.

While the redfish and seatrout stocking programs are undoubtedly successful, that success may be difficult to replicate with tarpon.

"We began our redfish program in 1981 and our spotted seatrout program in 1983," says Abrego. Those programs have stocked more than 450 million red drum and 44 million spotted seatrout fingerlings into Texas' coastal bays.

The red drum have been stocked into all Texas bays, while only Sabine, Galveston, Upper and Lower Laguna Madre bays have been stocked with spotted seatrout.

A survey released by TPWD in February 2005 confirmed that anglers are responding to improved conditions. About 2,000 new anglers a month have bought saltwater fishing licenses during the past seven years. Moreover, their enthusiasm has paid off handsomely — anglers are catching more fish. Landings increased along the entire coast in 2003-04. Redfish landings increased 31 percent and spotted seatrout landings increased 11 percent.

In an effort to build a similarly robust program for tarpon, Blandon, a native of Panama and currently associate professor of marine biology and fisheries at the University of Miami, has organized and participated in a number of symposia on tarpon in the United States and Mexico. She admits that remarkably little is known about the species and much work remains to be done.

"High-tech tagging methods currently being used may tell us a lot about this species," says Blandon. "For two consecutive years, research conducted by a Florida researcher, Jerry Ault, involved tagging tarpon in Mexico, Florida and Louisiana."

"Some tarpon tagged in Veracruz and other parts of Mexico travel along the Texas coast to the mouth of the Mississippi to feed, and others travel from Florida to Louisiana," says Blandon.

Duncan MacKenzie, an associate professor in the department of biology at Texas A&M University, confirms that the desire to increase the number of tarpon through breeding has been hampered by unexpected obstacles.

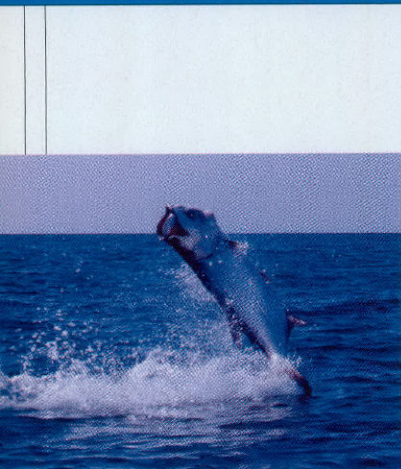
"There is no way to externally sex tarpon," says MacKenzie. "The solution to this question will obviously be critical for the development of captive breeding programs."

MacKenzie has been active in several studies dedicated to solving that one vital piece of the puzzle. In one study, researchers took blood samples from the Sea Center tarpon and measured reproductive hormones such as estrogen and testosterone.

"But unfortunately, all of the fish had some testosterone and none had estrogen," says MacKenzie.

Another tricky issue: No one knows exactly where tarpon spawn or what the optimum conditions are for tarpon spawning.

The tarpon has a cult-like following. "This is a very powerful animal. It fig



Researchers in Nigeria have had some success spawning tarpon in outdoor ponds, says Blandon, and efforts are underway to determine how to repeat that success in Texas.

“Nobody has ever seen a fertilized tarpon egg!” adds MacKenzie.

Blandon also notes that, beyond spawning, the tarpon have a unique, almost prehistoric, larval stage that must be able to survive a “long and complex metamorphosis.” In the wild, the eel-like larval stage lasts up to 60 days, a period in which the larvae are particularly vulnerable to predators. Tarpon grow slowly, requiring a minimum of six to seven years (some require as many as 13 years) to reach sexual maturity — and some live for as long as 80 years.

Given these challenges, why would it benefit Texas to breed this biologically finicky fish? Well, take a look at the numbers. In 2001, retail sales related to saltwater fishing totaled \$622,204,552, and there were 13,322 jobs supported by saltwater angling, leading to a total economic impact of more than \$1 billion for the Texas economy. And while the average saltwater angler spends only about \$80 per day on fishing-related expenses, consider the fact that some Texans currently are willing to spend upwards of \$600 a day in hopes of hooking just one tarpon.

Fishing guide James Trimble caught his first tarpon in 1989 — it was a life-altering experience. “In 1988, there was a big freeze that killed a lot of fish,” he explains. “We were having a tough time making a living.”

They went up toward the Houston Ship Channel to look for fish and ran into a huge school of tarpon in the bay.

“We didn’t land them — we didn’t catch them — but we made

them jump!” says Trimble.

From that point forward, he and his partners shifted their focus to tarpon. With seven boats, they’ve caught from 100 to 500 fish in some years while chasing tarpon in the bay and near-shore Gulf waters during the peak months between June and October.

Compared to other game fish, however, the population of tarpon in the bay is minuscule and may well be continuing its downhill slide.

“I believe that the decline in Texas tarpon is telling us something important, perhaps about the impact of over-fishing, coastal development or pollution on wild fish populations,” says Mackenzie. “I think research on wild tarpon is critical now to try to establish why populations have declined.”

Both MacKenzie and Blandon agree that a best-case scenario would involve working with Mexico to conserve the species in our shared waters.

In the meantime, guides such as Trimble will continue to cater to a small but devoted group of tarpon enthusiasts.

“They’re extremely hard to catch,” he says. “Their mouth is extremely bony. Hooks don’t penetrate that bone. So they’re very hard to hook.”

“You can find them. You can literally see thousands of them — you can hit them on the top of the head. You can sit there and look at them all day long and never hook them!”

For most of us, that kind of dedication to catching one kind of fish might seem a bit extreme. But for Trimble, who makes his living sharing his passion with fellow tarpon fanatics, the thrill of the chase is worth the hours of frustration. ★

the end and, in some cases, will even kill itself rather than be taken.”



Sail Ribs and Tailbones

More than simply an ingenious water pump, the windmill remains an elegant memento of simpler times.

By E. Dan Klepper

The afternoon heat reaches 102 degrees as I recline beneath the shelter of my tent's mesh awning. After a week on the edge of the Chihuahuan Desert, I have concluded that the only activity a living creature can endure in this place is motionless rest in shade. I hear the call of an anhinga, the water turkey, somewhere above me. But I don't bother spotting it because to do so would require that I move. Instead, I remain in torpor and listen to the bird's eerie call beat against the swelter.

Yesterday, thin clouds gathered in the northwestern sky and drew a veil across the sun. When I woke from my afternoon nap, the recurring boom I had heard in my dreams emanated from a storm cloud the size of Texas, as if the entire state had evaporated then condensed above the remains. However, its great distance from my camp muffled the thunder, and its lightning struck only the faraway horizon. I avoided preparing for the pos-

sible onslaught, confident it was moving very slowly or perhaps not in my direction at all.

But after reading a few chapters from a book on predators, I decided to go ahead and prepare the camp for turbulent weather in case I was wrong about the storm's speed and direction. The sonic boom of earlier seemed to be growing progressively louder if not in real volume then at least in my imagination. I gathered my books and papers from inside my large and leaky tent and loaded the rain-sensitive paraphernalia into my truck. I covered the camp kitchen and my mountain bike with a silver tarp and anchored the corners with rocks. I secured the tent window flaps with their tie-downs and removed the poles holding the awning aloft and lowered the mesh to the ground. With my precautions complete, I sat down to continue reading just in time to hear a distant windmill's bitter complaint as it turned achingly, and decisively, against the gale.

Wind is one of the most powerful and destructive forces in an arid environment. Often, the only windbreaks in the desert are man-made and hold up for just a few generations before submitting to the elements. Desert winds, clear of obstructions, strip soil and desiccate vegetation. The whirlwind, a frequent manifestation of this turbulence, relishes the hot and dry con-



ditions of the desert and actually requires them in order to form. Despite its harmless appearance, a whirlwind can achieve winds up to 90 miles per hour; enough power to detach a roof, collapse a building and permanently damage the wheel of a windmill or even bring one down. But desert winds can also facilitate life, assisting the same windmill to pump precious water up from hundreds of feet underground and quench an otherwise parched country.

Texans have always expressed a particular fondness for old windmills like the one that began to keel above my campsite. Windmills are the desert's handmaidens and signal the possibility of life in landscapes seemingly barren of comfort or overwhelmed by isolation. Their integration into the Texas profile is so complete that it is difficult to imagine the land having ever been without them. But windmills only arrived in the state around 150 years ago, introduced and made useful by good old German and Dutch ingenuity.

The first Texas windmills were employed by European immigrants to grind corn and other grains just as they were used in the old country. But the traditional gristmill was expensive to build and labor-intensive to manufacture and operate. Timbers had to be fashioned into shafts and gears, the blades needed to be stretched with large canvas sails, and it was necessary to wrestle the heavy grinding stones into place. Once engaged, the mill was in danger of running afoul, often reaching excessive speeds that damaged the wooden parts or caused them to catch fire from the friction created by their movements. In addition to a lack of speed control, the mill could not respond to changes in wind direction. Therefore, it was necessary for the miller to reposition the sails whenever the wind shifted.

But just as the gristmill was being introduced to Texas, ingenuity was hard at work elsewhere in the country. Connecticut mechanic Daniel Halladay was busy creating a simple and relatively labor-free solution to accessing water in the remote countryside. He modified the wheel of a gristmill by making it a true radiating wheel of slats, added a tail and then attached a basic engine comprised of a fly wheel and a shaft. The entire system was mounted on a tower with four legs so that it could be positioned directly over a water well.

The design was so simple and successful that it was to change very little over the following century, and Texas, above all states, became its biggest fan. Hundreds of windmills were installed by

WINDMILLS ARE THE DESERT'S HANDMAIDENS AND SIGNAL THE POSSIBILITY OF LIFE IN LANDSCAPES SEEMINGLY BARREN OF COMFORT OR OVERWHELMED BY ISOLATION.

the railroads and Texas ranchers throughout the state by the late 1800s. Upon the turn of the 20th century, the famous XIT Ranch alone employed 335 windmills across its vast acreage. At one time, the ranch even boasted having the world's tallest windmill, a wooden monster at 132 feet high. It was ultimately toppled and destroyed by, naturally, the wind.

Simplicity and ease of operation allow the windmill to work endless hours over the span of several human lifetimes. Sometimes a windmill will rest for a day, or remain dormant through a decade, then respond and perform with certainty when reenlisted. A windmill requires very little in return for this lifelong dedication.

The secret of a windmill's success is its point-blank mecha-

nism. Wind pushes against the tail, or vane, and positions the wheel so that it faces the prevailing winds. Wind power then turns a set of angled fan blades, or sails, that comprise the wheel. This spinning motion rotates a gear assembly and the rotary motion is converted to a reciprocating motion as it lifts and lowers sucker rods, connected end to end, that are attached to the assembly. The number of rod sections required is determined by the depth of the water well. The rods fit inside a pipe that runs down the vertical shaft, or pipe casing, of the well and the bottom end of this casing is submerged beneath the surface of the water table. Fitted inside the subterranean end of this pipe is a valve, often made of brass. Attached to the end of the final sucker rod is another valve just like it, and both valves open and close as the rods are forced down or tugged up the pipe by the reciprocating motion. The suction created in the valve exchange eventually draws the water up the pipe to the surface.

To hear a windmill's valve system working, press an ear against the drop pipe and listen. The stutter of water through the brass on the upstroke recalls the sound of nostrils preparing to snore. The downstroke echoes the drone of August insects settling into memory. It is the song of sleep and dreams.

Sometimes it's difficult to coax a windmill back into service after it has been allowed to stand in disrepair for long periods of time. However, a dormant windmill may be strong-armed into action with nothing more than a release of the brake lever or, if particularly stubborn, a fist-sized rock and a good pounding. If the brake (or windlass) of a windmill has been released and the blades are turning but no water appears, it is possible that debris has lodged in the valves, preventing them from functioning properly. Hammering the pipe just above the casing will cause the deep end of the pipe and rods to shudder, typically vibrating the obstruction loose, and allow the valves to open and close as designed.

Despite a windmill's fortitude, something eventually gives up — the gaskets wither and tear, the check valve sticks or hobbles, the gear teeth wear smooth, or the wooden sucker rods split. Occasionally, the well simply runs dry. On this day, unlike any other when the rods would have been pulled or the valve retooled, the vaquero laments "*papalote no está bueno*," and the windmill's brake lever is engaged with purpose one last time.

The pulling of a windmill brake makes a lazy sound and often requires the body's full weight to lower the lever, drawing the brake cable taut and folding the vane and its tailbone flush against the wheel. Without the aid of the vane to respond to wind direction or the blades to drive the mill, the rods and valves cease to upstroke water, and the windmill's use comes to an end. But, unlike most simple machines, a windmill begins a life of its own once our dependence on it ceases. It luxuriates in periods of long, contemplative pauses or, if broken free of the brake cable, it explodes in whim-driven zeal. Relieved of its labor, with blades at rest or free to swing, a windmill will finally sing with the full voice of the wind.

Which is what I heard from this particular windmill as the storm overpowered the valley and swallowed my campsite. Sand shotgunned sideways and the temperature dropped 11 degrees. Lightning struck the ridges and split black willows in the limestone draws. Heavy rain and sluggish hail pelted the roof of my truck as I sheltered in its confines, hunkered down and helpless as I watched my tent blow away. I glanced out the windshield as lightning illuminated the windmill. The blades spun with dizzying speed, but the tailbone groaned routinely, turning the wheel callously and careworn into the maelstrom. ★

(continued from page 57)

CORPUS CHRISTI: KEDT-FM 90.3 / 5:33 p.m.; KFTX-FM 97.5 / between 5 – 6 a.m.; KVRT-FM 90.7 / 5:33 p.m.; KLUX-FM 89.5 / throughout the day

CROCKETT: KIVY-AM 1290 / 8:20 a.m., KIVY-FM 92.7 / 8:15 a.m.

DIMMITT: KDHN-AM 1470 / 10:30 a.m.

EAGLE PASS: KINL-FM 92.7 / 3:30 p.m.

EASTLAND: KEAS-AM 1590 / 5:50 a.m., 5:50 p.m.; KATX-FM 97.7 / 5:50 a.m., 5:50 p.m.

EDNA: KGUL-FM 96.1 / 7:10 a.m.

EL CAMPO: KULP-AM 1390 / 2:36 p.m.

EL PASO: KTEP-FM 88.5 / 12:15 p.m. Thurs.

FAIRFIELD: KNES-FM 99.1 / Sat. mornings

FLORESVILLE: KWCB-FM 89.7 / 1:30 p.m.

FORT STOCKTON: KFST-AM 860 / 7:10 a.m.; KFST-FM 94.3 / 7:10 a.m.

GAINESVILLE: KGAF-AM 1580 / 10 a.m.

GRANBURY: KPIR-AM 1420 / 4:20 p.m.

GREENVILLE: KGVL-AM 1400 / 8:10 a.m.

HARLINGEN: KMBH-FM 88.9 / 4:58 p.m.; KHID-FM 88.1 / 4:58 p.m.

HENDERSON: KZQX-FM 104.7 / 10:20 a.m., 4:20 p.m.

HEREFORD: KPAN-AM 860 / 2:50 p.m.; KPAN-FM 106.3 / 2:50 p.m.

HILLSBORO: KHBR-AM 1560 / 9:30 a.m.

HOUSTON: KILT-AM 610 / between 4 a.m. and 7 a.m. Thur-Sun.

HUNTSVILLE: KSHU-FM 90.5 / throughout the day

JACKSONVILLE: KEBE-AM 1400 / 7:15 a.m.

JUNCTION: KMBL-AM 1450 / 6:40 a.m., 3:30 p.m.; KOOK-FM 93.5 / 10:20 a.m., 3:30 p.m.

KERRVILLE: KRNH-FM 92.3 / 5:31 a.m., 12:57 p.m., 7:35 p.m.; KERV-AM 1230 / 7:54 a.m., 11:42 p.m., 6:42 p.m.; KRVL-FM 94.3 / 5:4 a.m., 11:42 p.m., 6:42 p.m.

KILGORE: KZQX-FM 105.3 / 10:20 a.m., 4:20 p.m.

LA GRANGE: KBUK-FM 104.9 / 12:30 p.m.; KVLG-AM 1300 / 12:30 p.m.

LAKE CHEROKEE: KZQX-FM 104.7 / 10:20 a.m., 4:20 p.m.

LAMPASAS: KACQ-FM 101.9 / 8:25 a.m.; KCYL-AM 1450 / 8:25 a.m.

LAREDO: KHOY-FM 88.1 / throughout the day

LEVELLAND: KIVT-AM 1230 / 12:30 p.m.

LLANO: KITV-FM 102.9 / 5:15 a.m.; 1:15 p.m.; 3:15 p.m.; 9:15 p.m.

LONGVIEW: KZQZ-FM 101.9 / 10:20 a.m.; 4:20 p.m.

LUBBOCK: KJTV-AM 950 / overnights

LUFKIN: KUEZ-FM 100.1 / 12:15 p.m.; KYBI-FM 101.9 / 12:15 p.m.

MADISONVILLE: KMVL-AM 1220 / 7:45 a.m.; KMVL-FM 100.5 / 7:45 a.m.

MARSHALL: KCUL-FM 92.3 / 6:12 a.m.; KMHT-FM 103.9 / 6:25 a.m.; KMHT-AM

1450 / 6:25 a.m.

MASON: KOTY-FM 95.7 / throughout the day

MESQUITE: KEOM-FM 88.5 / 8:15 a.m., 2:30 p.m., 8:30 p.m. Mon.-Thu.; 8:15 a.m., 2:30 p.m. Fri.

MEXIA: KRQX-AM 1590 / 3:15 p.m.; KYCX-FM 104.9 / 3:15 p.m.

MINEOLA: KMOO-FM 99.9 / 5:15 p.m.

MONAHANS: KLBO-AM 1330 / between 8-9 a.m. and 1-3 p.m.

NACOGDOCHES: KSAU-FM 90.1 / 2:45 p.m.

NEW BRAUNFELS: KGNB-AM 1420 / 5:55 a.m.

ODESSA: KCRS-AM 550 / 6:15 a.m., 5:50 p.m.; KOCV-FM 91.3 / 6:49 a.m.

PECOS: KIUN-AM 1400 / 10:30 a.m.

PLAINVIEW: KVOP-AM 1090 / 9:50 a.m.

ROCKDALE: KRXT-FM 98.5 / 5:04 a.m., 8:45 p.m.

SAN ANGELO: KGKL-AM 960 / 6:32 a.m., 6:58 p.m.

SAN ANTONIO: KSTX-FM 89.1 / 9:04 p.m.

SEGUIN: KWED-AM 1580 / 7:55 a.m.

SONORA: KHOS-FM 92.1 / 10:15 a.m.; KYXX-FM 94.3 / 10:15 a.m.

SULPHUR SPRINGS: KSST-AM 1230 / 2:50 a.m., 11:50 a.m.

SWEETWATER: KXOX-FM 96.7 / 8:30 a.m.; KXOX-AM 1240 / 8:30 a.m.

TEMPLE: KTEM-AM 1400 / 10:20 a.m.

TEXARKANA: KTXK-FM 91.5 / 2:04 p.m.

VICTORIA: KTXN-FM 98.7 / 6:50 a.m.; KZAM-FM 104.7 / 7:10 a.m.; KGUL-FM 96.1 / 7:10 a.m.

WACO: KBBW-AM 1010 / throughout the day

WICHITA FALLS: KWFS-AM 1290 / 6:15 a.m., 7:45 a.m.

WOODVILLE: KWUD-AM 1490 / throughout the day

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SIGHTS AND SOUNDS

THE FRONT LINE OF NEWS AND VIEWS



T E L E V I S I O N

LOOK FOR THESE STORIES IN THE COMING WEEKS:

July 31 – Aug. 7:

Buffalo Soldiers; booming snow goose populations threaten their habitat; Big Bend geology; jetty fishing; Colorado Bend State Park.

Aug. 7 – 14:

The coyote photographer; birds and bikes at San Angelo State Park; water for Corpus Christi; embracing bats; Texas skies; trail builders at Enchanted Rock.

Aug. 14 – 21:

The bat caves of Texas; nesting bald eagles; fishing safety tips; hidden springs of Big Bend; Fort Parker State Park.

Aug. 21 – 28:

Alligators rule at Brazos Bend State Park; arch-eology of the San Jacinto Battleground; under-water in the Pedernales; shooting sports; prepare game in the field.

Aug. 28 – Sept. 4:

Reserve a camp site by phone or computer; basic birding for beginners; frontier history in today's schools; Cooper Lake State Park; creepy crawlies.



Take a tour of the best bat caves in Texas. Watch the week of Aug. 14 - 21.

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www.tpwd.state.tx.us/tv

AMARILLO: KACV, Ch. 2 / Wed. 12:30 p.m.

AUSTIN: KLRU, Ch. 18 / Sun. 9 a.m. / Mon. 12:30 p.m.; KLRU2, Cable Ch. 20 / Tues. 11 p.m.

BRYAN-COLLEGE STATION: KAMU, Ch. 15 / Thurs. 7 p.m. / Sun. 5 p.m., 10:30 p.m.

CORPUS CHRISTI: KEDT, Ch. 16 / Sun. 11 a.m. / Fri. 11:30 p.m.

DALLAS-FORT WORTH: KERA, Ch. 13 / Sat. 8 a.m. (airs October – March)

Also serving Abilene, Denton, Longview, Marshall, San Angelo, Texarkana, Tyler, Wichita Falls, Sherman

EL PASO: KCOS, Ch. 13 / Sat. 3 p.m.

(rotates with other programs; check listings)

HARLINGEN: KMBH, Ch. 60 / Sun. 5 p.m.

Also serving McAllen, Mission, Brownsville

HOUSTON: KUHT, Ch. 8 / Sat. 3 p.m. / Fri. 1 p.m.

Also serving Beaumont/Port Arthur, Galveston, Texas City, Victoria

KILLEEN: KNCT, Ch. 46 / Sun. 5 p.m.

Also serving Temple

LUBBOCK: KTXT, Ch. 5 / Sat. 10 a.m.

ODESSA-MIDLAND: KOCV, Ch. 36 / Sat. 5 p.m.

SAN ANTONIO & LAREDO: KLRN, Ch. 9 / Friday noon, Sunday 1:30 p.m.

WACO: KWBU, Ch. 34 / Sat. 3 p.m.

Check local listings. Times and dates are subject to change, especially during PBS membership drives.



R A D I O

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ABILENE: KACU-FM 89.7 / 7 a.m., 1:43 p.m., 6 p.m.; KWKC-AM 1340 / 6:30 a.m.

ALPINE: KSRU-AM 1670 / 2 p.m. MWF; KVLF-AM 1240 / 6:30 a.m.; KALP-FM 92.7 / 6:30 a.m.

AMARILLO: KACV-FM 89.9 / 9:20 a.m.

ATLANTA: KPYN-AM 900 / 7:30 a.m.

AUSTIN: KWNX-AM 1260 and KZNX-AM 1530 / Sun. 9:20 a.m.

AUSTIN AMERICAN-STATESMAN'S INSIDE LINE: (512) 416-5700 category 6287 (NATR)

BEAUMONT: KLVI-AM 560 / 5:20 a.m.

BEDFORD: KMCE, K-Meadow, Meadow Creek Elementary / throughout the day

BIG SPRING: KBST-AM 1490 / 10:50 a.m.; KBST-FM 95.7 / 10:50 a.m.

BONHAM: KFYN-AM 1420 / 10:10 a.m. KFYZ-FM 98.3 / 10:10 a.m.

BRADY: KNEL-AM 1490 / 7:20 a.m.; KNEL-FM 95.3 / 7:20 a.m.

BRYAN: KZNE-AM 1150 / 5:40 p.m.

CANTON: KVCI-AM 1510 / 8:20 a.m.

CANYON: KWTS-FM 91.1 / throughout the day

CARTHAGE: KGAS-AM 1590 / throughout the day; KGAS-FM 104.3 / throughout the day

CENTER: KDET-AM 930 / 5:20 p.m.; KQSI-FM 92.5 / 5:20 p.m.

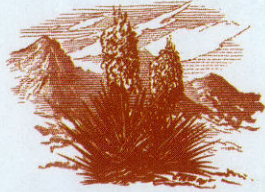
CISCO: KCER-FM 105.9 / 12:00 p.m.

COMMERCE: KETR-FM 88.9 / 10:15 a.m.

(continued on page 56)

GETAWAYS

FROM BIG BEND TO THE BIG THICKET AND THE RED TO THE RIO GRANDE



BIG BEND COUNTRY

AUGUST: Desert Garden Tours, Barton Warnock Environmental Education Center, Terlingua, by reservation only, (432) 424-3327

AUGUST: Hiking Tours, Hueco Tanks SHS, El Paso, every Wednesday through Sunday, reservations required, (915) 849-6684

AUGUST: Pictograph Tours, Hueco Tanks SHS, El Paso, Wednesday through Sunday, reservations, (915) 849-6684

AUGUST: Texas Camel Treks, Monahans Sandhills SP, Monahans, half day and overnight treks available, e-mail or call for dates and info, info@texascamelcorps.com, (866) 6CAMELS

AUGUST: Fate Bell Cave Dwelling, Seminole Canyon SP&HS, Comstock, every Wednesday through Sunday, tours are subject to cancellation, (432) 292-4464

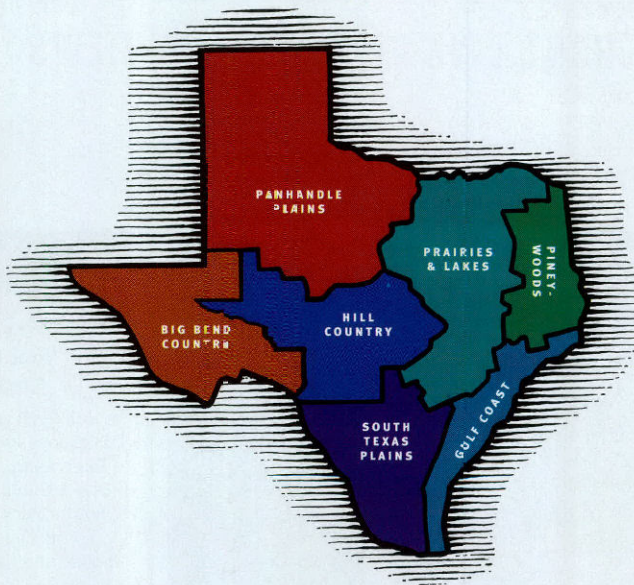
AUGUST: White Shaman Tour, Seminole Canyon SP&HS, Comstock, every Saturday, tours are subject to cancellation, (888) 525-9907

AUGUST 3-7, 10-13: Summer Amphitheater Programs, Davis Mountains SP, Fort Davis, (432) 426-3337

AUGUST 6: Solitario Tour, Big Bend Ranch SP, Presidio, reservations required, (432) 229-3416

AUGUST 12: Stories of Spirits, Magoffin Home SHS, El Paso, reservations required, (915) 533-5147

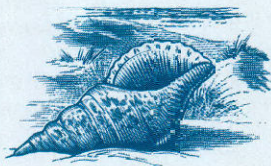
AUGUST 13: Guale Mesa Tour, Big Bend Ranch SP,



For more detailed information on outdoor events across the state, visit www.tpwd.state.tx.us and click on "TPWD Events" in the blue area labeled "In the Parks."

Presidio, reservations required, (432) 229-3416

AUGUST 21: Birding Tours, Hueco Tanks SHS, El Paso, reservations, (915) 849-6684



GULF COAST

AUGUST: Weekend Nature Programs, Brazos Bend SP, Needville, Saturday and Sunday, visit www.tbspvo.org or call (979) 553-5101

AUGUST: Hatchery Tours, CCA/American Electric Power Marine Development Center SFH, Corpus Christi, Monday through Saturday, reservations required, (361) 939-7784

AUGUST: Bay Seining, Galveston Island SP, Galveston, every Sunday, (409) 737-1222

AUGUST: Exploring Sea Life, Galveston Island SP, Galveston, every Saturday, (409) 737-1222

AUGUST: Plant Identification Hike, Galveston Island SP, Galveston, every Saturday, (409) 737-1222

AUGUST: Aquarium and Hatchery Tours, Sea Center Texas, Lake Jackson, every Tuesday through Sunday, hatchery tours by reservation only, (979) 292-0100

AUGUST: Marsh Airboat Tours, Sea Rim SP, Sabine Pass, Wednesday through Sunday, reservations recommended, (409) 971-2559

AUGUST 6: Homemade Ice Cream and Lemonade Demonstrations, Varner-Hogg Plantation SHS, West Columbia, (979) 345-4656

AUGUST 6, 13, 19, 20, 27: Story Time, Sea Center Texas, Lake Jackson, program also available on request by reservation, (979) 292-0100

AUGUST 8: Music at the Mansion, Fulton Mansion SHS, Fulton, (361) 729-0386.



HILL COUNTRY

AUGUST: Gorman Falls Tour, Colorado Bend SP, Bend, every Saturday and Sunday weather permitting, (325) 628-3240

AUGUST: Walking Wild Cave Tour, Colorado Bend SP, Bend, Saturday and Sunday, reservations recommended, (325) 628-3240

AUGUST: Evening Bat Flights, Devil's Sinkhole SNA, Rock Springs, Wednesday through Sunday, reservations required, (830) 683-BATS

AUGUST: Evening Interpretive Programs, Guadalupe River SP, Spring Branch, every Saturday, (830) 438-2656

AUGUST: Saturday Morning Interpretive Walk, Honey Creek SNA, Spring Branch, (830) 438-2656

AUGUST: Wild Cave Tour, Longhorn Cavern SP, Burnet, every Saturday, reservations required, (877) 441-2283

AUGUST 1-5, 8-12: Cowboy Sunset Serenade and Historic Hayride, Garner SP, Concan, available by reservation only, (830) 232-5999

AUGUST 4, 7, 11, 18, 21, 25: Basic Canoe Skills Clinic, Inks Lake SP, Burnet, reservations required, (512) 793-2223

AUGUST 4, 7, 11, 18, 21, 25: Devil's Waterhole Canoe Trip, Inks Lake SP, Burnet, reservations required, (512) 793-2223

AUGUST 5: Range and Wildlife Seminar, Kerr WMA, Hunt, reservations available but not required, (830) 238-4483

AUGUST 6: Crawling Wild Cave Exploration, Colorado Bend SP, Bend, reservations required, (325) 628-3240

AUGUST 6, 13, 20, 27: Go Fishing with a Ranger, Inks Lake SP, Burnet, (512) 793-2223

AUGUST 13: Bluegrass in the Park, Inks Lake SP, Burnet, (512) 793-2223

AUGUST 13-14: Guided Hikes, Bright Leaf SNA, Austin, (512) 459-7269, (512) 323-0544 or (512) 243-1643

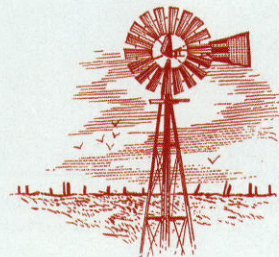
AUGUST 13, 27: Stumpy Hollow Nature Hike, Inks Lake SP, Burnet, (512) 793-2223

AUGUST 13, 27: Bat Flights at Stuart Bat Cave, Kickapoo Cavern SP, Brackettville, reservations, (830) 563-2342

AUGUST 13, 27: Wild Cave Tour, Kickapoo Cavern SP, Brackettville, reservations required, (830) 563-2342

AUGUST 13, 27: Concert in the Cave, Longhorn Cavern SP, Burnet, reservations, (877) 441-2283

AUGUST 27: LBJ's Birthday Celebration, Lyndon B. Johnson SP&HS, Stonewall, (830) 644-2252



PANHANDLE PLAINS

AUGUST 1-13: Annual Summer Art Show, Copper Breaks SP, Quanah, (940) 839-4331

AUGUST 5, 19: Night Noises, Palo Duro Canyon SP, Canyon, (806) 488-2227

AUGUST 6: Sun Fun and Star Walk, Copper Breaks SP, Quanah, (940) 839-4331

AUGUST 6: Victorian Ladies Craft Afternoon, Fort Richardson SP&HS & Lost Creek Reservoir State Trailway, Jacksboro, (940) 567-3506

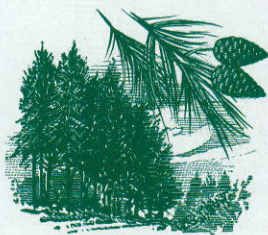
AUGUST 6: Prehistoric Permian Track Tour, San Angelo SP, San Angelo, (325) 949-4757

AUGUST 6, 20: Guided History and Nature Hike, Palo Duro Canyon SP, Canyon, (806) 488-2227

AUGUST 13, 27: Canyon Critters, Palo Duro Canyon SP, Canyon, (806) 488-2227

AUGUST 20: Hoof-N-Hair Barbecue Cook-off, Fort Richardson SP&HS, Jacksboro, (940) 567-3506

AUGUST 20-21: Hunter Safety Course, Copper Breaks SP, Quanah, reservations, (940) 839-4331



PINEYWOODS

AUGUST: Guided Nature Hikes, Lake Livingston SP, Livingston, reservations required, (936) 365-2201

AUGUST: Walk on the Wild Side, Martin Dies, Jr. SP, Jasper, every Sunday, (409) 384-5231

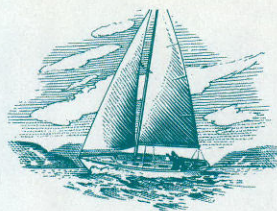
AUGUST: Kids Ride Free, Texas State Railroad SP, Rusk, every Thursday through Sunday, reservations required, (800) 442-8951

AUGUST 6, 13, 20, 27: Saturday Evening Programs, Martin Dies, Jr. SP, Jasper, (409) 384-5231

AUGUST 20: Floating the Forks, Martin Dies, Jr. SP, Jasper, reservations required, (409) 384-5231

AUGUST 20: Pioneer Tools, Toys and Games, Mission Tejas SP, Grapeland, (936) 687-2394

AUGUST 21: Archeology Tour, Mission Tejas SP, Grapeland, (936) 687-2394



PRAIRIES & LAKES

AUGUST: Making Tracks, Lake Somerville SP & Trailway/Nails Creek Unit, Ledbetter, every Saturday evening, (979) 289-2392

AUGUST: Ranger Tales, Purtils Creek SP, Eustace, every Saturday, (903) 425-2332

AUGUST 6: Silent Birds of the Night—Owls, Cedar Hill SP, Cedar Hill, (972) 291-3900

AUGUST 6: Guided Nature Hike, Cooper Lake SP/Doctors Creek Unit, Cooper, (903) 395-3100

AUGUST 6: Cowboy Campfire, Music and Poetry, Lake Mineral Wells SP & Trailway, Mineral Wells, (940) 328-1171

AUGUST 6: Stargazing Party, Ray Roberts Lake SP/Isle du Bois Unit, Pilot Point, (940) 686-2148

AUGUST 6-7, 14, 20-21, 27-28: Tours, Fanthorp Inn SHS, Anderson, (936) 873-2633

AUGUST 12: Wildlife Slide Show, Eisenhower SP, Denison, (903) 465-1956

AUGUST 12, 27: Canoe Tours, Purtils Creek SP, Eustace, reservations required, (903) 425-2332

AUGUST 13: Kids Wilderness Survival, Cedar Hill SP, Cedar Hill, reservations required, (972) 291-3900

AUGUST 13: Poisonous Plants, Cooper Lake SP/South Sulphur Unit, Sulphur Springs, (903) 395-3100

AUGUST 13: Super Cooper Adventure Race, Cooper Lake SP/South Sulphur Unit, Sulphur Springs, reservations required, visit <www.SteelSports.net> or call (903) 871-8466

AUGUST 13: Stagecoach Days, Fanthorp Inn SHS, Anderson, (936) 873-2633

AUGUST 13: Kid's Wilderness Survival, Lake Mineral Wells SP & Trailway, reservations, (940) 323-1171

AUGUST 19: Fish of Lake Texoma Slide Show, Eisenhower SP, Denison, (903) 465-1956

AUGUST 20: Night Sounds, Lake Mineral Wells SP & Trailway, Mineral Wells, (940) 328-1171

AUGUST 27: Penn Farm Tour, Cedar Hill SP, Cedar Hill, (972) 291-3900

AUGUST 27: Reptiles—Our Scaly Friends, Cedar Hill SP, Cedar Hill, (972) 291-3900

AUGUST 27: Night Hike, Lake Mineral Wells SP & Trailway, Mineral Wells, reservations required, (940) 328-1171

AUGUST 27: 6th Annual Lake Whitney Star Party, Lake Whitney SP, Whitney, (254) 694-3793



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AUGUST: Nature Programs, Goliad SP, Goliad, call for dates, (361) 645-3405

AUGUST: Nature Trail Walk, Goliad SP, Goliad, every Sunday, (361) 645-3405

AUGUST 1: Men with a Mission the Civilian Conservation Corps in Goliad, Goliad SP, Goliad, (361) 645-3405

AUGUST 6: The Stars Are Out Tonight, Government Canyon SNA, San Antonio, reservations required, contact educmte@hotmail.com or call (210) 688-2208

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SHS	State Historical Site
SNA	State Natural Area
WMA	Wildlife Management Area
SFH	State Fish Hatchery

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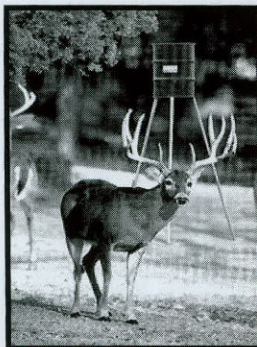
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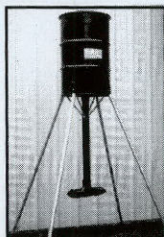
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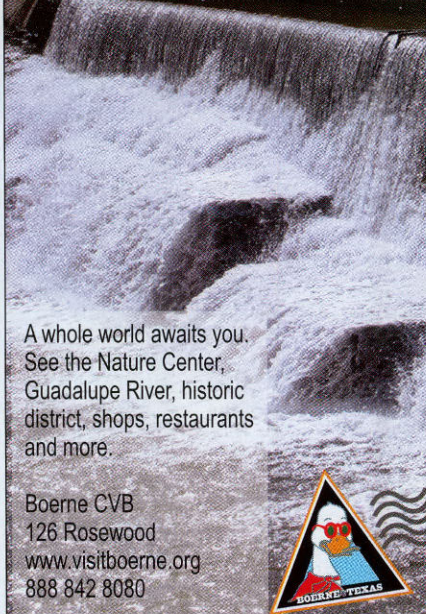
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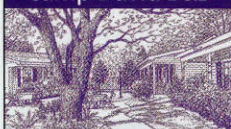
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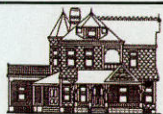
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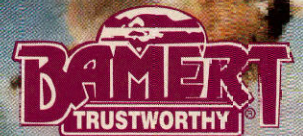
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who get lost every year) are as familiar to Winn as the palm of his hand. But if you need directions, use the local parlance for the landmarks, like Hell's Half Acre and The Big Hole; don't reference lake road numbers — he won't have a clue where you are.

A self-taught naturalist — the former fishing guide wearied of catering to folk more interested in their egos than in nature — Winn's eyes have been opened to the delicate balance through his experiences (which include both lightning and cottonmouth strikes). He's seen most all of the 71 species of fish that make Caddo's population the most diverse in Texas, and he's guided birders to a twitting good number of the more than 200 birds.

Leaving the main boat road, we stop on "Carter's Lake," where the thick silence is like a warm hug. Slowly, the sounds of bird chatter and frogs swell around us. Winn rattles on knowledgeably in answer to any query. He punctuates his lesson on the unseen diversity around us by reaching through the carpet of duck weed to pull out a handful of water millet and parrot feather. My son sits sentry in the bow until I ask about a leggy yellow blossom that Winn identifies as bladderwort. Elliott bounds forward with an enthusiasm that threatens to dunk us all in the drink and launches into a breathless lesson: "That's bladderwort all right and here's how it works. Do you see those whiskery roots — those are feelers and when a water flea or bug approaches they signal the plant to take in water and the insect is sucked into the plant where it is eaten." He takes a breath and says emphatically: "All in the blink of an eye." A bit stunned, we blink back at him. "It's in a book I read on insectivores," he says proudly. It is a vibrant illustration of book learnin' meets real life.

The rest of the morning may rocket by in the outside world, but we poke about in pockets of deep shade and brilliant sun, once crossing over an alligator bubbling contentedly in the silt. Winn notes the beavers' many supply stations and says he has witnessed a significant change to the animal's diet over the years. He believes that the beaver now eats far more soft water plants, increasing the need to hone its teeth on the bald cypress. Large numbers of striped and scarred trees around the dams illustrate his point.

Late afternoon, we are back in town, where we bump around until dark, when we join a dozen other folks for Jefferson's

famed Ghost Walk. Hosted by a staffer from the historical museum (a self-described coward who says she has skittered away from her charges more than once), we meet tourists from the Netherlands and Canada. Among us we speak five languages — but shrieking in fear needs no translation. The walking is limited to two blocks around the very haunted (and proud of it) Jefferson Hotel and a brief diversion above town to a shuttered and rather sinister mansion with a history of woe.

The thrills and chills begin at once. Clustered around a former hotel just above the bayou, we hear a tale of fire, hidden treasure and other mayhem. Recently restored and for sale, the building's tall windows and wraparound verandah had my husband and me talking crazy talk of relocation earlier in the day. It is a wonderful property, catty-corner to the famed Hamburger Store (stop in for pie, if nothing else). After dark, it seems, well, a little less welcoming. Before we climb to the second-story balcony, members of the group with digital cameras are happily shooting into the darkness. One young woman quietly says, "I've got orbs." Jurgen, on crutches, is happy to have an excuse to remain below. As I peer into a dark second-floor window, Elliott, a good 10 feet away, indignantly shouts, "Mom, don't push me!" When he turns and finds I am nowhere near, I see his eyes widen. He bolts down to his father's side. Slightly shaken, I decide to take one more look in a window — just as it rattles violently. As first one shutter, then another, slams shut, I make my run for the stairs. Nothing else encountered that night proves quite as inexplicable — or exhilarating.

DAY 3

A morning drive to nearby Lake O' the Pines, 18,700 acres of water impounded by the Corps of Engineers in 1956, brings back memories of my dad trying to level our travel trailer on the swishy, soft red soil so we could hurry up and catch copious stringers of fish. The tidy parks are timeless; I almost expect to see my 12-year-old self on a copper-brown Schwinn, my first gear bike. When we return to Jefferson, we occupy ourselves with the surprising Historical Museum and sneeze through several good antique shops. When our feet start aching, we hire a carriage to horse around town with Dan Walker, a former Alaskan cowboy who adopted Jefferson six years ago. Walker is a horse-drawn encyclopedia on

the city's history and architecture. Prince, born to pull a beer wagon, plods the course without much guidance, but has little patience for stopping.

On our last night, we head out to Big Pines Lodge, the catfish restaurant outside Uncertain (named for the roads) that is a gotta-go-to in these parts. Something about the velvety darkness of the lakeshore, so unlike the night's envelope at home, defines my best memories of camping. Inside is the sort of rare's nest of tables that recommends the best sorts of family eating establishments. Service is fast and friendly as waitresses deliver towers of all-you-can-eat catfish platters that prove to me there's more than one way to fry a cat. Crispy with seasoned cornmeal, the flaky fish is as sweetly flavorful as I've ever eaten and comes with mounds of jalapeno hushpuppies that seem more closely related to light and lanky churros than lumps of fried dough. Over dinner, we speak of the lake's record catch, a 16-pound bass. Elliott says, "Tell me again why we didn't bring our fishing poles." As we drive out of town, he asks about the bromeliad known as Spanish moss, "Why is it called that, when it isn't a moss or Spanish?" I promise a return trip as the answer to both questions. ★

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