

T1325.6
537
2:02

LINE, TEXAS: POSTMARKED WITH LOVE
S AND THE B&Bs ■ HOUSTON FROM THE BAY

THE TRAVEL MAGAZINE OF TEXAS

TEXAS

HIGHWAYS

FEBRUARY 2005

www.texashighways.com

Real. Simple.

PORT ISABEL

plus: X Bar Ranch NATURE RETREAT

Explore La Salle's Odyssey
AT 7 SOUTH TEXAS SITES



0.50

02 >

09128 47399 4

DO MORE. On the weekend.

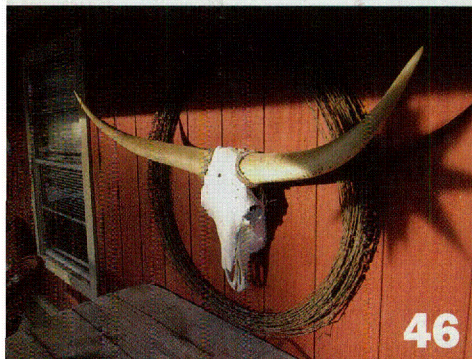


Looking for family fun? Houston in spring means action-packed adventure. Take part in the Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo™, the world's largest rodeo and discover a ton of gold at the Houston Museum of Natural Science exhibit, *GOLD! Natural Treasure, Cultural Obsession*. With more than 5,000 restaurants, teams in every major professional sport, world-class shopping, the 4th largest museum district, a world-renowned theater district and out-of-this-world attractions, Houston has something to offer everyone. For more information on what to do while you're in Houston, log on to www.visithoustontexas.com or call 1-800-4HOUSTON today.

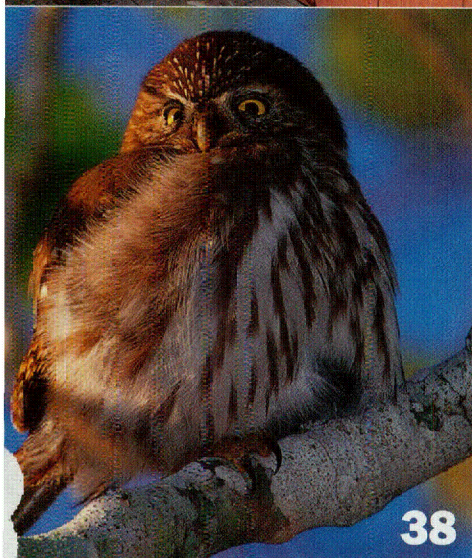
HOUSTON

SpaceCity. A space of infinite possibilities.

Greater Houston Convention and Visitors Bureau
1.800.4HOUSTON • www.visithoustontexas.com



46



38



16

FEBRUARY
2005

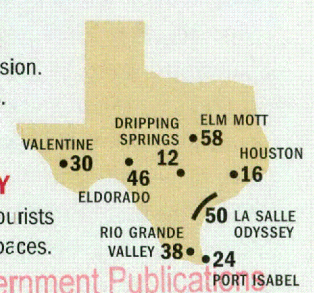
DEPARTMENTS

- 2 UP FRONT** From the Editor's desk
- 4 TALK TO TH** Letters from our readers
- 7 SPEAKING OF TEXAS** History, folklore, and fascinating facts
- 8 FOR THE ROAD** This month's top picks and places
- 10 SPOTLIGHT ON...** Romance
- 12 ESCAPE TO...** Sunrise Exotic Ranch
- 58 JUST PASSING THROUGH** Antiquibles Dog Museum
- 60 FUN FORECAST** A roundup of upcoming events
- 64 TEXCETERA** Timely travel tidbits, plus tips from our readers
- 65 WINDOW ON TEXAS**

ABOUT OUR COVERS FRONT: An 1853 lighthouse figures prominently in Port Isabel's history and dominates its skyline. Story on page 24. Photo © Brad Doherty
 BACK: A radiant sunset graces Valentine's cemetery, the final resting place of many of the town's railroad workers. Story on page 30. Photo © Joel Salcido

FEATURES

- 16 HOUSTON: A VIEW FROM THE BAYOU** There's a reason they call it the Bayou City. Rediscover the nation's fourth-largest metropolis with a trip down Buffalo Bayou. BY KATHRYN JONES, PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOE BARABAN
- 24 PORT ISABEL: SIMPLE PLEASURES BY THE SEASHORE** Tiny Port Isabel, on the way to South Padre Island, captures its share of tourists, who relish its small size and refreshing authenticity. BY BEN CHRISTENSEN, PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRAD DOHERTY
- 30 VALENTINE, TEXAS: HEART LAND** A photojournalist paints a touching portrait of a West Texas town famous for its February postmark. STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOEL SALCIDO
- 38 FOR THE BIRDERS** Many bed and breakfasts in the Rio Grande Valley make it easy for birdwatchers to pursue their passion. Amenities include "rare-bird alerts," as well as comfortable quarters. BY MAXINE MAYES, PHOTOGRAPHS BY LARRY DITTO
- 46 X BAR RANCH NATURE RETREAT: SIMPLY XTRAORDINARY** This Schleicher County spread offers ecotourists hiking, mountain-biking, and more, on 7,100 acres of wide-open spaces. BY HENRY CHAPPELL, PHOTOGRAPHS BY KEVIN STILLMAN
- 50 LA SALLE ODYSSEY** Featuring 17th-Century artifacts found in two recent excavations, seven South Texas museums recount the saga of French settlement in Texas. BY GENE FOWLER, PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL AMADOR



Government Publications
 Texas State Documents
 FEB 28 2005
 Depository
 Dallas Public Library

© BEN CHRISTENSEN



LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY native Ben Christensen wrote this month's cover story on Port Isabel. He was born in Brownsville, grew up in Port Isabel, and lives in Laguna Vista with his wife and three sons. After a stint as a writer for *The Brownsville Herald*, Ben began teaching English at Los Fresnos High School. He also helps manage his family's cattle ranch near Bayview and is a freelance writer.

At press time, Ben is in Iraq with Charlie Company, First Battalion, 23rd Marine Regiment, Fourth Marine Division, which includes more than 80 Marines belonging to two platoons based in Harlingen at the Armed Forces Reserve Training Center, and another two platoons based in Corpus Christi.

When Charlie Company reached Iraq, the commanding officer greeted the troops with the words, "I understand most of you here are from Texas." The Marines loudly acknowledged the fact.

"Well," the colonel said, "Iraq is a lot like Texas was back in the 1800s.... *Lonesome Dove* comes to mind. Gentlemen, welcome to Lonesome Dove."

Ben has been sending dispatches from Iraq. In them, the grim realities of the anarchistic, volatile environment resound. We hope you enjoy Ben's first story for *Texas Highways*, and we look forward to having him return and contribute other work in the near future....

GENE FOWLER wants to clarify a few points made in his story on *La Salle's Texas Odyssey* (page 50). Jean Gery, the deserter who led Spanish troops to La Salle's devastated Fort St. Louis in 1689, is also identified in various texts as Jean Jarry, Jean Henri, and Yan Jarri. Gene calls Fort St. Louis, founded in 1685, "the first European colony in Texas." Ysleta, founded by Spaniards and Tigua Indians near present-day El Paso, was established in 1681, but it lay south of the Rio Grande until the river shifted course in 1829, placing the settlement in Texas. Also,



© FORD GUNTER

Marine Sergeant Ben Christensen (top) wrote this month's story on Port Isabel (on page 24) shortly before he was deployed to Iraq. Ford Gunter is taken with Kiko, a three-week-old chimpanzee at Sunrise Exotic Ranch in Dripping Springs (see page 12).

as Texas Historical Commission archeologist and La Salle Project director **Jim Bruseth** points out, Ysleta was a mission and not a colony, thus La Salle's Fort St. Louis is credited as the first European colony in Texas....

READERS, WE NEED YOUR HELP! Please let us know of any cafes or restaurants that serve **great breakfasts**, as well as any establishments that serve **outstanding barbecue**. In both cases, please restrict your choices to local businesses (no chains). Send your selections to *Texas Highways* Editorial, Box 141009, Austin, Texas 78714-1009; or e-mail us at letters05@texashighways.com. By helping us, you'll be helping your fellow readers....

ENJOY THIS ISSUE. Savor the season. Before you know it, spring and summer will be upon us.

Jack Lowry

THE TRAVEL MAGAZINE OF TEXAS
TEXAS
HIGHWAYS

GOVERNOR OF TEXAS

RICK PERRY

TEXAS TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

RIC WILLIAMSON Chair

HOPE ANDRADE Commissioner

TED HOUGHTON, JR. Commissioner

JOHN W. JOHNSON Commissioner

ROBERT L. NICHOLS Commissioner

MICHAEL W. BEHRENS, P.E. Executive Director

PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE TRAVEL DIVISION

Division Director DORIS HOWDESHELL

Publisher KATHY MURPHY

Editor JACK LOWRY

Managing Editor JILL LAWLESS

Senior Editor ANN GALLAWAY

Associate Editor NOLA MCKEY

Associate Editor LORI MOFFATT

Assistant Editor MARTY LANGE

Photography Editor MICHAEL A. MURPHY

Art Director JANE WU KNAPP

Associate Art Director JANE SHARPE

Design Assistant KIRSTI HARMS

Editorial Assistant NORA M. BALDWIN

Marketing Manager CINDY LEFFINGWELL

Circulation Manager CYNTHIA KOSEL

Business Manager LUCIA CORDOVA

Ancillary Products Manager JULIE JACOB

Administrative Assistant LUPE VALDEZ

Texas Highways (ISSN 0040-4349) is published monthly by the Texas Department of Transportation, 150 East Riverside Drive, Austin, Texas 78704. The official travel magazine of Texas encourages recreational travel within the state and tells the Texas story to readers around the world.

© Texas Department of Transportation 2005. All rights reserved.



The editorial office of *Texas Highways* is at 150 East Riverside Drive in Austin. Call 512/486-5858; fax 512/486-5879.

Internet Sites: www.texashighways.com
www.traveltex.com and www.dot.state.tx.us

Send queries about manuscripts or photographs to Box 141009, Austin, TX 78714-1009. We are not responsible for unsolicited materials.

Subscriptions to *Texas Highways* are \$17.50 annually (\$25.50 foreign). Call 800/839-4997. (Call 850/683-1394 outside the U.S.) Single copies/back issues: current issue, \$3.50, back issues, \$5, plus shipping & handling. Call 512/486-5823.

For subscription services, write to *Texas Highways* Circulation, Box 51564, Boulder, CO 80322-1564, or call 800/839-4997. To be removed from mailing list sales, write to *Texas Highways* Marketing, Mailing Lists, Box 141009, Austin, TX 78714-1009.

For advertising information: AJR Associates, 3229 D'Amico St., Ste. 100, Houston, TX 77019; 800/383-7677; fax 713/942-0277.

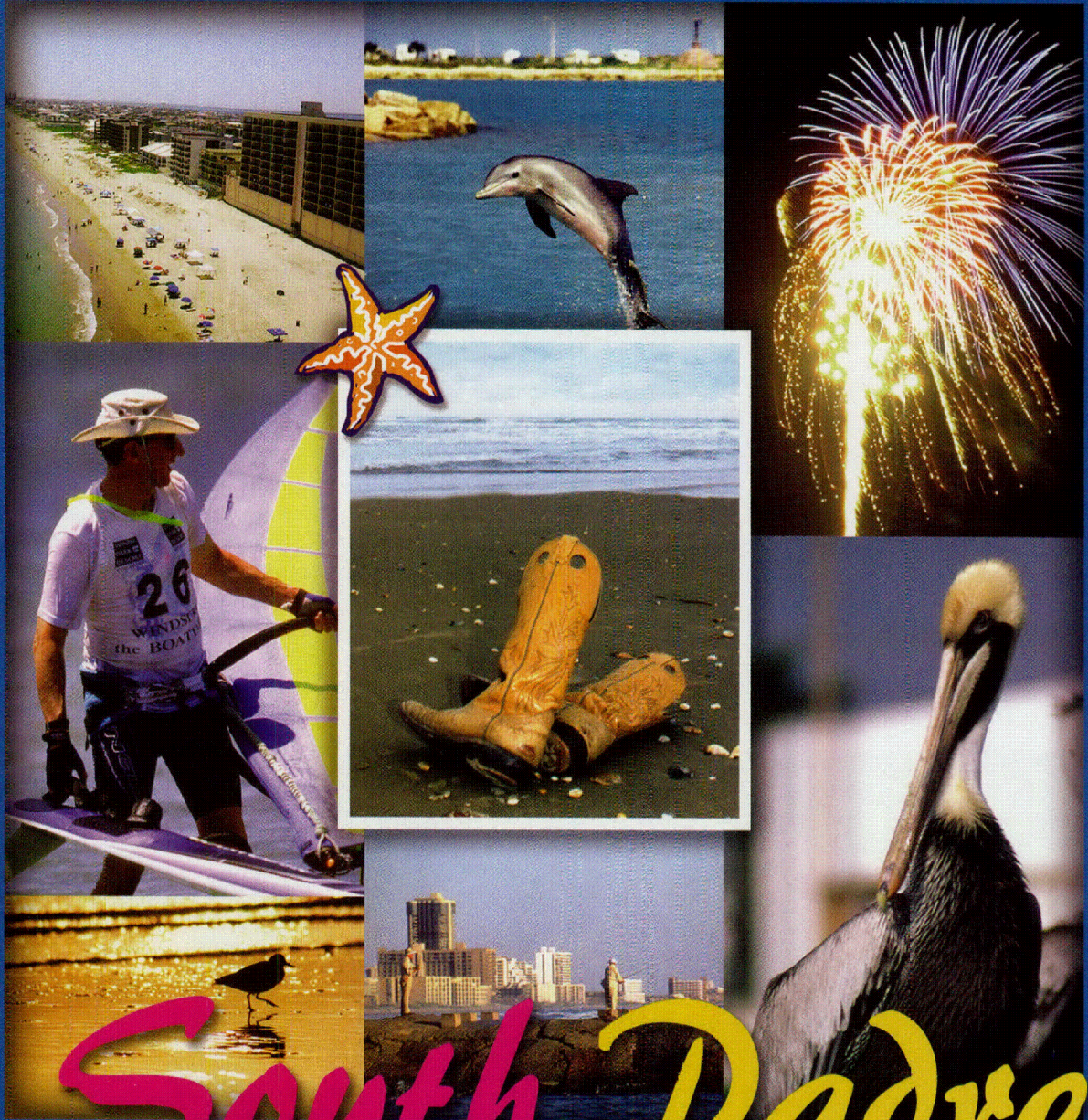
Periodicals Postage paid at Austin, Texas, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Texas Highways* Circulation, Box 51564, Boulder, CO 80322-1564.

IRMA MEMBER, INTERNATIONAL REGIONAL MAGAZINE ASSOCIATION

PRINTED IN U.S.A. ON RECYCLED PAPER



"Where Texans kick their boots off"



South Padre
Island
TEXAS



www.sopadre.com • 1-800-SOPADRE

Viva Austin!

JUST finished the November issue and wanted to say thanks for always having a great magazine every month. I loved the story on essential records. I'm glad you haven't changed your magazine—I just got back from Austin and was saddened by how much of the old Austin was no longer there. How I miss the Austin of the '70s!

ROY CONNER
Fort Worth

I HAVE been a fan of *TH* since the '70s. I really enjoyed last year's series on Texas music, especially Randy Anthony's "Essential Texas Records" in November. I own several of the records mentioned in the article and plan to find some of the others. The one that really jumped off the page at me was Jerry Jeff Walker's *Viva Terlingua!* The first time I heard this album was when my sister Nancy bought it on 8-track. Along with my younger sister Brenda, we listened to it in Nancy's car in Houston



In our November issue, Randy Anthony wrote about "Essential Texas Records," including Jerry Jeff Walker's *Viva Terlingua!* (MCA, 1973).

one Saturday. It inspired Nancy to drive us to Austin that same night. We spent the night in Zilker Park in the car, got up the next morning and checked out Austin, then came back to Houston. Even to this day when I listen to that

album, it evokes the memories of that little trip. Nancy eventually moved to the Austin area, married, and raised a family within view of Lake Travis.

Thanks for your great magazine. I bring it to work to read at lunch, and somebody will ask what I'm reading. I just tear out one of the subscription cards and hand it to them so they can enjoy Texas and *Texas Highways* as I do.

PATRICK KOMINCZAK
Spring

Simple Pleasures, Texas Treasures



IN MY 60th year, I find the things I love about Texas to be the simpler moments in my life here: Parents taking pictures of their children in bluebonnets. Blue northers and hearing the sound of geese signal their approach. The smell of the Gulf Coast before you see the water. Passing through Brady and knowing that it really is the center of my world. Ordering Texas wine from a French waiter in San Antonio and being amused by the expression on his face. Picking up pecans.

Thanks for your September issue and for reminding me that the "Things We Love About

**IT TOOK HUNDREDS OF YEARS TO COMPLETE OUR ROAD TO INDEPENDENCE.
YOU CAN DO IT IN A WEEKEND.**

Up ahead, historic monuments and battlefields are a reminder of Texas' struggle for independence and its nine formative years as a sovereign republic. Off to the side, ghosts of Texas heroes like Davy Crockett and Sam Houston linger. So get in the car. Get on the trail. And take a look around — you can see your history from here.

For free driving maps of the Independence Trail or any other Texas Heritage Trails, call 512-463-6254 or visit www.thc.state.tx.us/travel.

  TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
The State Agency for Historic Preservation

Texas" can be grand and universal, or very personal. God really did bless Texas in his own way.

TRAVIS V. BATSON
Normangee

The Pie's the Limit

IN REGARD to June Naylor's "Life of Pie" [November], let me suggest R.O.'s Outpost, on Texas 71 between Austin and Spicewood. The barbecue is great, but the made-from-scratch pie is the best. My pick is the chocolate meringue.

CHASE K. COMER
Dallas

ED. NOTE: R.O.'s Outpost is on Texas 71 West at Hazy Hills Dr.; 512/264-1169.

Matador and More

REGARDING your story on "Panhandle Plains from A to Z" [November], you should have included Bob's Oil Well (a 1930s landmark currently being restored at the Texas 70 and US 62/US 70 intersection in Matador; very visible with a derrick on top of the building). And some eight miles to the south, the town of Roaring Springs has a first-class veterans memorial, a restored hotel [now the Travelers Inn B&B, 806/348-7304;

READERS, as you may have seen in January's TexCetera, we're planning to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II with a story this November on Texans who contributed to the war effort here at home. We'd love to share your home-front memories, or those you recall of a loved one. Here are examples of experiences you might relate:

- You (or relatives) worked in any of the state's POW camps that held foreign/enemy military during the war.
- You served as a nurse/doctor in Texas military hospitals.
- You volunteered in the state's contingent of the American Red Cross, the USO, or other organizations that fed or entertained the troops.

- You worked in a Texas aircraft, munitions, or ship-building factory.
- You helped patrol the Gulf of Mexico coastline for alien vessels, or you scanned the Texas skies for enemy aircraft.
- You vividly recall bidding goodbye to relatives as they headed off to war.
- You grew a Victory Garden or remember the restrictions of rationing.

Send your memories (and any photos that help illustrate your story; they will be returned to you) to *Texas Highways*, Attn.: WWII-TX, Box 141009, Austin 78714-1009. Please include a telephone number and/or an email address where we can reach you. **The deadline for submissions is April 30.** And thanks!

www.travelersinnbandb.com], and the Roaring Springs Ranch Club. TH is a super publication.

GRADY GLENN
Odessa

ED. NOTE: For more on Matador and Roaring Springs, call the Motley County Chamber of Commerce at 806/347-2968; www.motleycountychamber.org.

Applause and ZZZs

YOU FOLKS do an outstanding job. Every month the magazine is an enjoyable read. I plan many of our vacation trips around your stories.

HENRY LESSNER
Fairview

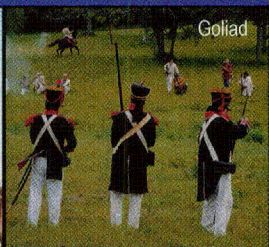
And we fought for Texas ...

Visit the Texas Independence Trail Region



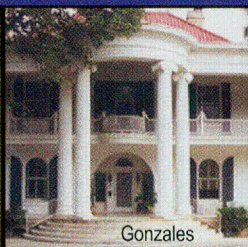
Seguin

www.seguintx.org



Goliad

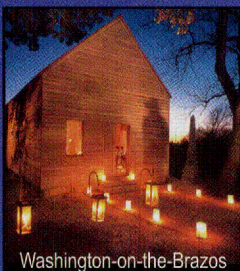
www.presidiolabahia.org



Gonzales

www.gonzalestexas.com

Tx DOT



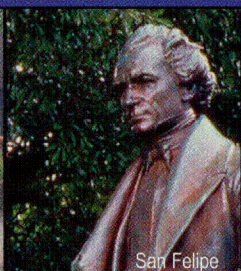
Washington-on-the-Brazos

www.birthplaceoftexas.com



Richmond

www.georgeranch.org



San Felipe

www.sealycvb.org



TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
TEXAS HERITAGE TRAILS PROGRAM

Austin, Bastrop, Bee, Bexar, Brazoria, Caldwell, Calhoun, Chambers, Colorado, De Witt, Fayette, Fort Bend, Galveston, Goliad, Gonzales, Guadalupe, Harris, Jackson, Karnes, Lavaca, Liberty, Matagorda, Refugio, Victoria, Waller, Washington, Wharton and Wilson counties

www.texasindependencetrail.org • toll free 1-877-55-TRAIL (1-877-558-7245)

A Time For Us

Escape with the love of your life to Graham, Texas, just 90 minutes west of Fort Worth in the beautiful North Texas Hill Country. Soak up our small town charm and shop America's Largest Downtown Square. Enjoy horse back riding, hiking, birding and star gazing. Then snuggle up at one of our cozy B&B's.



Graham Convention & Visitors Bureau

Toll Free: 1.866.549.0401
www.grahamtexas.net/cvb



TALK to TH

I MUST tell you the magazine has gotten progressively boring the past couple of years. The December issue is the worst ever. The series on Texas music—not needed. Looking forward to better material on towns, people, and places to visit.

PATTY HOGAN
Keller

Can-dy You Believe It?

LANA Robinson's story on Aunt Aggie De's Pralines [November] made me think of Myrtle McDaniel, who, at the age of 102, still makes divinity and peanut brittle for the Menard Country Store.

BOBEE KIRK
Arlington

ED. NOTE: *And who says sugar isn't good for you! For more on Myrtle's candy and the Menard Country Store, on US 83 North at Magnolia Street in Menard, call 325/396-2506.*

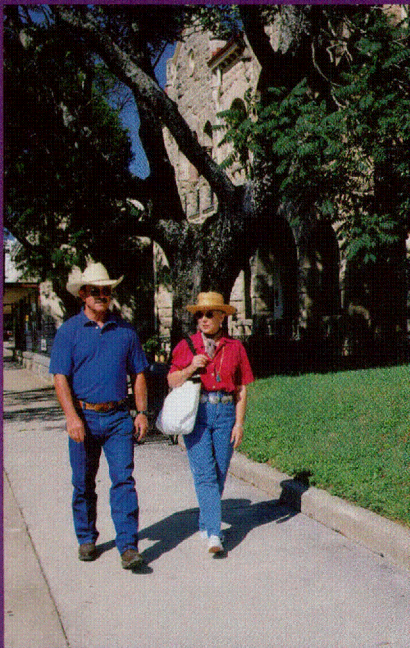
Talking About Talk

I WAS glad to see Larry Maltz give Vernon Dalhart his due in December's Talk to TH. And don't forget about Sherman-born Goebel Reeves, "The Texas Drifter," who recorded about the same time as Carl T. Sprague. Some of Sprague's music that I like best are the 30 original pieces he recorded for Victor between 1925 and 1929. Sprague (born in 1895 in Houston) grew up on the family ranch near Alvin and went on to become a member of the Texas A&M University staff after graduating from there. After his Victor recordings, little was heard of him in the music world until the "folk boom" of the 1960s, when he came back and performed at several festivals. And when he was nearly 80 years old, he re-recorded many of the songs (accompanying himself on guitar) he had recorded for Victor. Those two albums (recorded like any good old Aggie, in Bryan, in 1972) are just wonderful. Keep it up; the Texas music articles appearing in TH recently are great!

PAT GLENN
Blanco

WRITE OR EMAIL: Talk to TH, *Texas Highways*, Box 141009, Austin 78714-1009; fax 512/486-5879; email: letters05@texashighways.com. Web site: www.texashighways.com. Though we are unable to print every letter, we just might select yours to appear in the magazine—whether you send us kudos or criticism. We reserve the right to edit letters.

Lose your heart to the hills.



Relaxing. Browsing. Shops, boutiques, and galleries.

Kerrville – Lots to do, but the space to do absolutely nothing.

And Kerrville is an ideal base from which to explore the treasures of the Texas Hill Country.

Call today for a Visitor's Guide, and discover how easy it is to love Kerrville. 800-221-7958



Kerrville Convention & Visitors Bureau www.kerrvilletexascvb.com

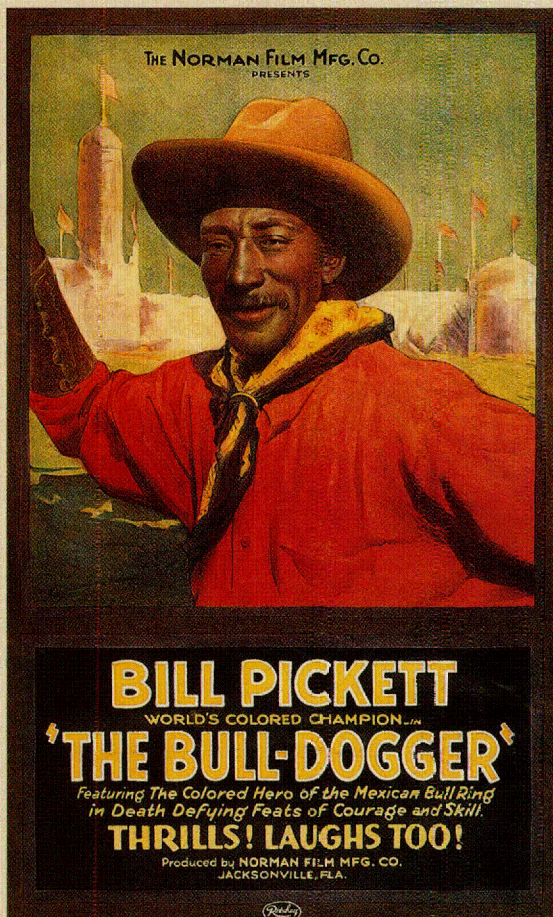
STEER-JERKER

Will Rogers once said of this well-liked black cowboy, “Even the steers wouldn’t hurt old Bill.” William Pickett, the second of 13 children, was born in Central Texas in 1870. As soon as he completed fifth grade, Bill became a cowboy. He competed in rodeos and became

famous for subduing steers by using a trick he had learned from watching herder dogs.

Bill would ride out of the starter gate, fling himself out of the saddle onto the head of a running steer, grab its horns, and pull its head up. Digging into the dirt with his heels to slow the animal, Bill would lean down, grab the steer’s upper lip with his teeth, and sink them into the tender flesh. The steer, wild with pain, slowed down, and Bill jumped off. With his teeth still embedded, and both hands raised in the air, Bill dragged along beside the steer until the animal went down. Crowds went wild. They had never witnessed anything like this before, and the term “bulldogging” was born.

Billed as the “Dusky Deamon” [sic], Pickett traveled throughout Texas before contracting to perform with the 101 Ranch Wild West Show out of Oklahoma. At the 101, he was joined by Will Rogers, soon to become famous for his humor and rope-twirling tricks. In the early 1900s, the two men performed with the 101 show at Madison Square Garden. On opening night, when a wild bull tore out of the chute and headed for the grandstands, Bill and Will ran after him. When the bull crashed through the retaining wall and headed up the aisle, Bill and his horse followed, with Will close behind. Bill jumped off and grabbed the bull’s horns while Will caught the hind legs in his lariat. Together, they dragged the steer out of the grandstand. It was an unforgettable impromptu performance.



According to the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, bulldogger Bill Pickett was “the most famous black cowboy, and perhaps the most famous of all Wild West show cowboys.” The 1921 movie poster shown here was used as the basis for a corrected stamp issued in 1994 by the U.S. Postal Service.

In 1972, 40 years after his death (from a kick to the head by a horse), William Pickett was honored as the first black cowboy to be inducted into the National Rodeo Hall of Fame, in Oklahoma City. In 1993, he was commemorated on a U.S. postal stamp, but it turned out that the stamp accidentally pictured Ben Pickett, one of Bill’s brothers. The U.S. Postal Service subsequently issued a corrected stamp, and sold 150,000 of the incorrect stamps,

through a lottery, to help defray printing costs.

—Elizabeth W. Lewis, Houston

EARLY TEXAS TRAVEL GUIDE

One of the earliest English-language Texas travel guides, *The Prairie Traveler: A Hand-book for Overland Expeditions* was written in 1859 by Captain Randolph B. Marcy of the U.S. Army. The comprehensive guide, which included maps and illustrations, answered almost every question that might occur to pioneers moving from Texas and points east to California. Marcy’s tips covered such topics as choosing the best route, the optimum size and organization of the group, selecting and packing provisions, and choosing camp shelters. He explained how to find water, cross rivers, repair wagons, treat rattlesnake bites, and deal with Indians. Among the routes he described were those coming into Texas from the northeast at Preston (near present-day Pottsboro), on the Red River, and continuing across Texas toward El Paso, and others originating on the Gulf—at Indianola, Corpus Christi, and Brownsville—that joined the northern route at El Paso to continue westward to California.

Marcy, a West Point graduate, gained some of his Western travel expertise in 1851 while assisting General William Belknap in selecting sites for forts across the Texas frontier. Marcy later explored large sections of the American West, finding, in the process, the headwaters of the Red River (in eastern New Mexico) and exploring Palo Duro Canyon. The War Department assigned Marcy to write the guidebook for Army use, but it proved popular with civilians as well.

—Mary G. Ramos, Dallas

For THE ROAD

THIS MONTH'S TOP PICKS AND PLACES

Cowgirls Forever

WHEN ARTIST DONNA HOWELL-SICKLES DISCOVERED a cache of 1930s cowgirl postcards during her final year at Texas Tech, she found a fascination with the cowgirl image that took her career in a new direction. Now in her fifties, Donna paints from a tiny church-turned-studio in St. Jo, and her work has been displayed across the nation. A collection of her paintings, **Donna Howell-Sickles: The Timeless Image of the Cowgirl**, opens February 18 at the **National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame** in **Fort Worth**, where it remains on view through May 22. The more than 40

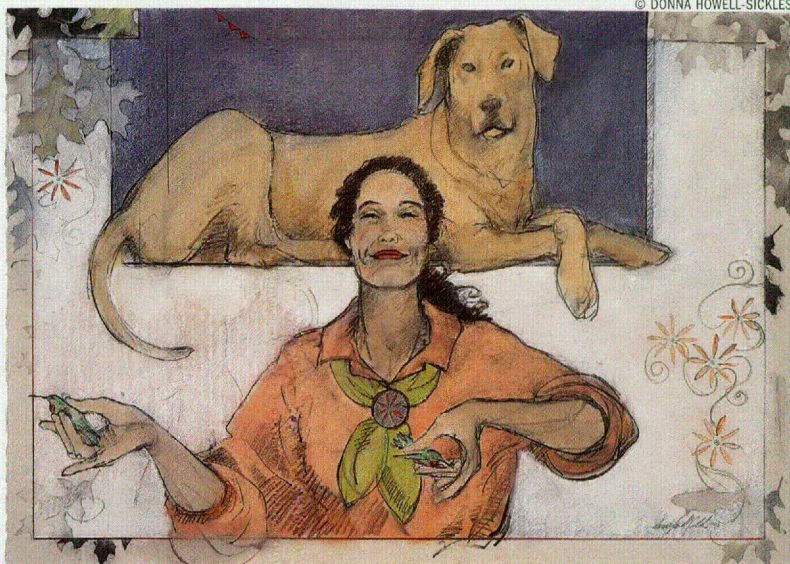
works in the exhibition include drawings, etchings, paintings, and sculpture spanning some 30 years. For more information about the artist, visit www.donnahowellsickles.com. For details about the exhibition or the National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame, call 800/476-FAME; www.cowgirl.net.

UNCOMMON VALOR

ON FEBRUARY 17-21, THE NATIONAL Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg and the Admiral Nimitz Foundation commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Battle of Iwo Jima, one of the most massive—and bloodiest—amphibious assaults in history. For the public, the **Tribute to the Heroes of Iwo Jima** begins on Saturday, February 19 with a heroes' parade down Fredericksburg's Main Street, complete with World War II vehicles and a flyover by WWII aircraft. Afterwards, in nearby Doss from 2 to 3:30 p.m., several hundred reenactors from the U.S.,

Japan, Australia, Korea, and Taiwan will re-create the fighting around the base of Mount Suribachi. Here's your chance to see the museum's working WWII flamethrowers in action, along with tanks and Japanese pillboxes (small forts that held ammunition). The reenactment will take place again on Sunday, at the same time and place.

A memorial ceremony on Sunday, featuring a representative of the Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps, Oliver North, and bestselling author James Bradley, whose father helped raise the flag on Iwo Jima, will honor the brave men who fought at Iwo Jima. The deadly battle for the small island, which lies some 660 miles south of Tokyo and was important as a base from which to support bombing missions against mainland Japan, took place from February 19 through most of March 1945. For more information about the event or about the National Museum of the Pacific War, call 800/210-9440; www.nimitz-museum.org.



That Doggie in the Window, 1996. Artist Donna Howell-Sickles' fascination with cowgirls also extends to bears, horses, moose, deer, and dogs.

THEY'RE NUTS

WHEN CHOCOLATE-LOVER MICHAEL Thompson started **Buford's Fun & Nut Company** in **Sherman** three years ago, little did he know that his mascot, Buford, a buck-toothed puppet with kaleidoscopic-colored curls and a bow tie, would start bringing all his friends around.

You'll find much more than tasty edibles at Buford's. Yes, the shelves brim with pecan pralines, caramel clusters, peanut brittle, smoked almonds, butter toffee, honey-sesame chips, and a full line of nuts and truffles—all packaged in tins or bags decorated with collectible labels.

But you'll also find an impressive collection of marionette memorabilia (not for sale), including several tuxedo-clad Charlie McCarthy dolls, along with his tin convertible, Bingo game, and traveling suitcase; a Jerry Mahoney doll; several Danny O'Day dummies; and scads of Howdy Doody memorabilia. Eight of the freckled, red-headed Howdy Doody dolls perch on high shelves, surrounded by evidence of Clarabell the Clown, Lanky Lou the Cowhand, Phineas T. Bluster, Fub-a-Dub, Princess Summerfall Winterspring of the Tinka Tonka Tribe, and other cast members of the popular 1940s-'50s television show. Here are original Howdy Doody coin banks, spinning tops, cookie tins, drinking glasses, handkerchiefs, record albums, lunchboxes, and even an autographed lithograph of Howdy and his human sidekick, Buffalo Bill. Buford's Fun & Nut Company is at 1521 S. Sam Rayburn Freeway in Sherman (Exit 57 from US 75). Hours: Mon-Fri 9-5, Sat 9-3. Call 877/307-1185; www.bufordsnuthouse.com.

Rekindle Your Sense of Wonder  **Nature Quest April 26-May 1, 2005**



Experience the natural world of the Texas Hill Country River Region this spring. Find out why we're one of the top birding destinations in Texas. Enjoy butterflies, wildflowers, big trees, rivers. Witness a bat flight, see stars.

Relax at a river cabin, rustic retreat, guest home, motel, or B&B.

Photo by Mike Overton

Texas Hill Country River Region
A Vacation Reason for Every Season

Concan • Garner State Park • Reagan Wells
Sabinal • Utopia • Uvalde

Visit our website today at www.thcrr.com or call (800) 210-0380

Lasso Big Savings



Great buy! It's just \$1.46 an issue when you buy a year's subscription to *Texas Highways*. That's 12 full months of the state's official travel magazine, plus the *Texas Highways* Travel Discount Card, good for savings across Texas—all for only \$17.50.

Great gift! For even greater savings, add a subscription for a friend, family member, or business associate. Additional subscriptions, including the Travel Discount Card, are only \$15.50 each.

**To order by phone, call
1-800-839-4997**
(850-683-1394 from outside the U.S.)

Mon-Fri 7am-10pm Central
Sat 8:30am-5pm Central
VISA • MasterCard • Discover
• American

Or visit

www.texashighways.com

THE TRAVEL MAGAZINE OF TEXAS
TEXAS
HIGHWAYS

YES! Start My Subscription—12 Full Months!

Please print

YOUR NAME _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Simply drop this card in the mail—we'll bill you later.

Magazines will begin arriving within 6-8 weeks of order. The *Texas Highways* Travel Discount Card will arrive 6-8 weeks after receipt of payment.

Just \$17.50 for the first U.S. subscription, and \$15.50 for each additional U.S. order! (International subscriptions are \$25.50.)

Includes the
Texas Highways
Travel Discount Card



4B5S

save
58%
off newsstand!

THE TRAVEL MAGAZINE OF TEXAS
TEXAS
HIGHWAYS

YES! Start a Subscription—12 Full Months!

As a gift For myself As a gift and for myself

Please print

MY NAME _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

SEND A GIFT SUBSCRIPTION TO:

NAME _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Simply return this order form in the mail—we'll bill you later.

Upon receipt of payment, we'll send a card announcing your gift directly to your recipient. The *Texas Highways* Travel Discount Card will arrive 6-8 weeks after receipt of payment. For fastest service, please call 1-800-839-4997.

Just \$17.50 for the first U.S. subscription, and \$15.50 for each additional U.S. order! (International subscriptions are \$25.50.)

Includes the
Texas Highways
Travel Discount Card



4B5S

save
58%
off newsstand!

THE TRAVEL MAGAZINE OF TEXAS
TEXAS
HIGHWAYS

YES! Start a Subscription—12 Full Months!

As a gift For myself As a gift and for myself

Please print

MY NAME _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

SEND A GIFT SUBSCRIPTION TO:

NAME _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Simply return this order form in the mail—we'll bill you later.

Upon receipt of payment, we'll send a card announcing your gift directly to your recipient. The *Texas Highways* Travel Discount Card will arrive 6-8 weeks after receipt of payment. For fastest service, please call 1-800-839-4997.

Just \$17.50 for the first U.S. subscription, and \$15.50 for each additional U.S. order! (International subscriptions are \$25.50.)

Includes the
Texas Highways
Travel Discount Card



4B5S



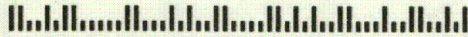
NO POSTAGE
NECESSARY
IF MAILED
IN THE
UNITED STATES

BUSINESS REPLY MAIL

FIRST-CLASS MAIL PERMIT NO. 623 AUSTIN, TX

POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY ADDRESSEE

TEXAS
H I G H W A Y S
PO BOX 51564
BOULDER CO 80323-1564



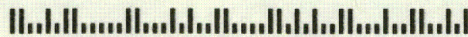
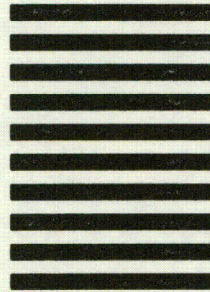
NO POSTAGE
NECESSARY
IF MAILED
IN THE
UNITED STATES

BUSINESS REPLY MAIL

FIRST-CLASS MAIL PERMIT NO. 623 AUSTIN, TX

POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY ADDRESSEE

TEXAS
H I G H W A Y S
PO BOX 51564
BOULDER CO 80323-1564



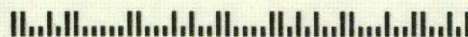
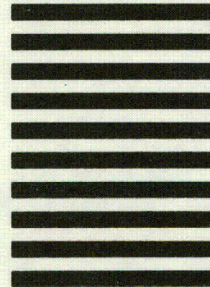
NO POSTAGE
NECESSARY
IF MAILED
IN THE
UNITED STATES

BUSINESS REPLY MAIL

FIRST-CLASS MAIL PERMIT NO. 623 AUSTIN, TX

POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY ADDRESSEE

TEXAS
H I G H W A Y S
PO BOX 51564
BOULDER CO 80323-1564



SUBSCRIBE NOW TO

TEXAS
H I G H W A Y S

SOLID GOLD

BEGINNING FEBRUARY 18, THE HOUSTON Museum of Natural Science presents *Gold! Natural Treasure, Cultural Obsession*, an exhibition that explores the role of gold in history, art, culture, science, and myth. Not only can you see one of the largest collections of gold objects, natural gold specimens, and gold bullion ever assembled, but you can learn how gold is formed and found, explore the three major gold rushes of the 19th Century (in Australia, California, and the Klondike), and learn how gold became the standard medium of exchange throughout the world.

Included in the admission price (\$12 for adults) is the film *Gold Fever*, which takes viewers in search of gold from the Yukon mountains to the Royal Canadian Mint. Several special programs and lectures for adults add yet another layer of fascination: Don't miss the February 15 lecture by Robert Evans, who in 1998 helped locate the S.S. *Central America*, which sank in 1857 as it transported a huge shipment of gold from San Francisco to the East Coast; and



the February 22 lecture by Texas-based archeologist Vendyl Jones, who has excavated treasures on the shores of the Dead Sea since the late 1960s.

The Houston Museum of Natural Science is at One Hermann Circle Drive, in the city's museum district. Call 713/639-4629; www.hmns.org.

Learn about the role of gold in history, art, culture, science, and myth at the Houston Museum of Natural Science.

COURTESY HOUSTON MUSEUM OF NATURAL SCIENCE

EVERYBODY POLKA!

THE TEXAS CZECH HERITAGE CULTURAL Center in La Grange plans to honor the history and legacy of polka music in its new museum, which it will build at the Fayette County Fairgrounds. The Texas Polka Music Museum will showcase instruments, pictures, costumes, and artifacts from the many Czech, German, and Polish musicians who made their mark in Texas.

If you'd like to help raise money for the museum, put on your dancing shoes, grab \$7, and head to La Grange on February 5 for the **First Fund Raiser Dance & Auction for the Texas**

Polka Music Museum. After a 2 p.m. polka Mass, you can take part in a silent auction, a live auction, and dancing to the polka tunes of Vrazels' Polka Band, which has been entertaining Texans for more than 50 years. Call 979/743-4255 or 743-0205.

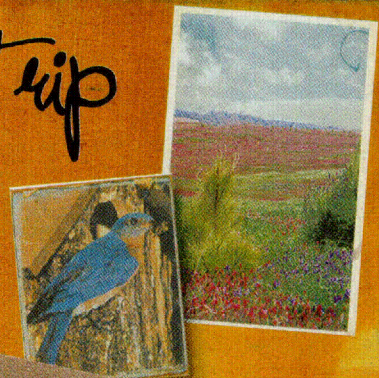
FORBIDDEN SPLENDORS

AT THE DALLAS MUSEUM OF ART through May 29, *Splendors of China's Forbidden City: The Glorious Reign of Emperor Qianlong* presents more than 400 treasures from 18th-Century Imperial China, one of the country's most culturally prolific periods. Among the items on display are the Emperor's gold-lacquered Dragon Throne, the private chamber of one of his wives, his elaborate funeral throne and spirit table, the jade carvings he commissioned and the essays he wrote about them, a selection from his 10,000-strong collection of snuff bottles, and examples of his calligraphy. Qianlong, an avid collector, is credited with fostering innovation in the arts and pacifying the warring territories of western China.

For more information about the exhibit, call 214/922-1200; www.dallasmuseumofart.org.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 15)

East Texas Road Trip



POST CARD

Wish you were here.

e-mail
tour@1starnet.com

Trail of 3 Cities

Mt. Vernon
903.537.4365

Mt. Pleasant
903.572.8567

Pittsburg
903.856.3621

www.visitmtvernon.org

www.mtleasanttx.com

www.pittsburgtexas.com

SPOTLIGHT on Romance

J. GRIFFIS SMITH

Fairy-Tale Tours

FROM CINDERELLA AND HER PRINCE CHARMING TO SHREK AND HIS Princess Leona, lovers throughout pop culture (and history, cars being a relatively modern invention) have clip-clopped their way toward amorous bliss in horse-drawn carriages. If these equine-powered lovemobiles figure into your own romantic fantasies, we're here to help.

We don't claim to have found *all* the carriage rides in Texas, but here is a handful to get those hearts a-thumpin'. Regularly-scheduled, 20-minute treks (available in some cities) cost about \$25 per couple; prices for other excursions vary, so call ahead. And do let us know if any proposals ensue.

In North Texas, call **Once Upon a Time** to arrange romantic carriage outings through Whitesboro's Victorian neighborhoods, Gainesville's historic district, or, for a different spin, along the trails of **Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge** on Lake Texoma. Owner Ann Hamilton

says that her white, vis-à-vis (French for face-to-face) carriages, drawn by beautiful black Percherons, allow for unparalleled wildlife viewing at the refuge. Call 903/564-9991; www.ahorsedrawncarriage.com.

In the Rio Grande Valley, **Royal Carriages of Edinburg** specializes in weddings, *quinceañeras*, and other special events, but owner Norb Nester and his handsome Belgian draft horses also play host to romantic couples wishing to see the Valley's singular sites, from South Padre Island to Roma and beyond.



Meet Tom Francis, owner of Jefferson's LJ Carriage Service.

Call 956/289-1650; www.royalcarriages.net.

In Fort Worth, horse-drawn carriages from **Classic Carriages** embark from 2nd and Main streets for regular sightseeing tours of vibrant Sundance Square, and also provide rides for special events. Call 817/336-0400; www.classiccarriages.net.

In Dallas, **Belle Starre Carriages** owner Bunny Morrissey loves to facilitate marriage proposals with champagne-equipped, vis-à-vis carriage rides along Turtle Creek, one of more than 30 different routes. Call 972/734-3100; www.carriagetours.net.

In Fredericksburg, an Appaloosa or Belgian horse draws a vis-à-vis carriage for **Stardust Carriage Service's** regular sightseeing tours of the town's historic district. You can also reserve for special-occasion outings. Call 830/992-0700.

The Jefferson area's tree-lined historic districts make perfect backdrops for romantic carriage rides. **LJ Carriage Service** (903/846-2165) offers narrated, historically accurate city tours; and **Jefferson Carriage Company** (903/399-8882) offers both carriage treks and horseback rides throughout the region.

If you'd like a starry-eyed trot along San Antonio's Alamo Plaza and Travis Park, **Yellow Rose Carriage** (210/225-6490; www.yellowrosecarriage.com) and **Lone Star Carriage** (210/533-3977) will oblige. Both companies have been in business more than 20 years and embark from carriage stands on Crockett St., by the Alamo. Other trips, including tours of the historic King William neighborhood, can be arranged.

FREE PARKING

Island Fun!

- Houston Area's Favorite Attraction -

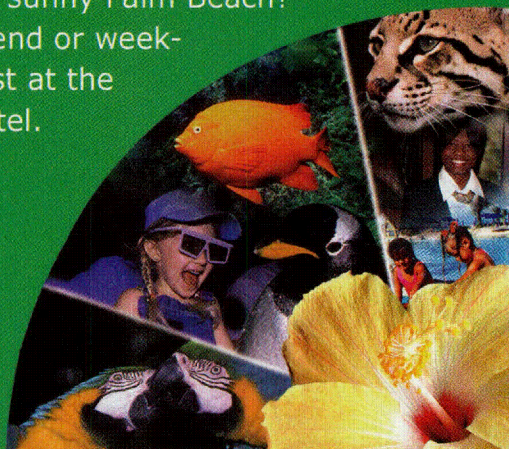
Island Fun awaits just 45 minutes from Houston, where every day is one to be remembered. Where else can you explore tropical rainforests, journey oceans of the world, travel to worlds unknown in the IMAX® 3D or Ridefilm Theaters, then relax to sunny Palm Beach?

Enjoy a fabulous weekend or week-long getaway as a guest at the the Moody Gardens Hotel.



MOODY GARDENS
GALVESTON ISLAND

For more information, call:
800-582-4673
www.moodygardens.org



AQUARIUM • RAINFOREST • IMAX® 3D THEATER • DISCOVERY PYRAMID • RIDEFILM • PALM BEACH • COLONEL PADDLEWHEELER • HOTEL

Seated in the back of a velvet-lined horse-drawn carriage in Galveston's Strand National Historic Landmark District, it's easy to imagine you're vacationing in a working seaport of the 1800s. For regular guided and narrated tours of the city's many sights, call **Island Carriages** (409/765-6951; www.islandcarriages.com) or **Seahorse Carriages** (409/925-3312).

Wanna see **Granbury's** Victorian town square, the first in Texas to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places? There's no better way to do so than by horse-and-buggy. Call the **Brazos Carriage Company** (817/723-2322; www.brazoscarriage.com) for information about historic tours and special events.

There's a lot to see in **Austin**, particularly along Congress Avenue and surrounding streets, which boast century-old buildings, the State Capitol, the Governor's Mansion, and lots of nightlife. To take it all in via horse-drawn carriage, flag down a surrey along 6th or 4th streets from **Austin Carriage Service** (512/243-0044; www.austincarriage.com) or **Die Gelbe Rose Carriage** ("the yellow rose," of course; 512/477-8824; www.diegelberosecarriage.net).

WINE AND DINE

RAISE YOUR GLASS AND TOAST TO LOVE during February's **Wine Lover's Trail** event in the grape-friendly **Hill Country**. Sixteen wineries will participate in the self-guided tour, which takes place February 11-13 and 18-20. Each winery will feature food-and-wine pairings, tastings of new vintages, and other enticements. You can drop by the wineries at random (no charge), or purchase tickets (\$30) that afford you access to VIP amenities. Some of the wineries—including **Alamosa Wine Cellars** in Bend, **Dry Comal Creek Vineyards & Winery** in New Braunfels, **Spicewood Vineyards** in Spicewood, and **Texas Hills Vineyard** in Johnson City—will host romantic evening dinners in conjunction with the trail. To receive a map or to obtain more information, call 830/868-2321; www.texaswinetrail.com.

LUCKENBACH HUG-IN

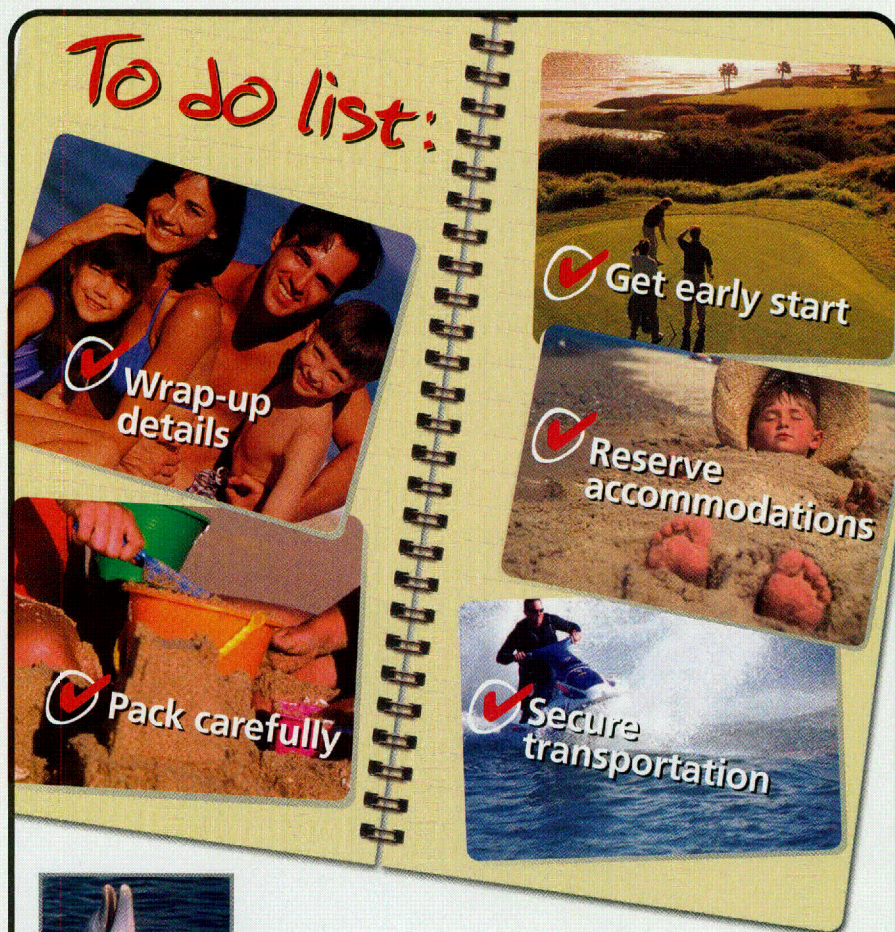
THIRTY YEARS AGO IN MID-FEBRUARY, the movers-and-shakers of the chili-cookoff world convened in the small town of Luckenbach to enjoy some camaraderie and plan the year's fierce chili battles. The annual **Luckenbach Hug-In**, as the gathering came to be known, has now grown into a weekend-long campout and party. This year's Hug-In, on

February 11-12, features live music by Terri Hendrix and Lloyd Maines, food and drink galore, and one of the year's rare opportunities to camp in the town made famous by "Waylon, Willie, and the boys." Call 830/997-3224; www.luckenbachtexas.com.

BLOODCURDLING ROMANCE

FOR AN UNTRADITIONAL TWIST ON Valentine's Day wooing and wowing, adventuresome sorts in **Dallas, Houston, and Austin** can book an evening with **Keith & Margo's Murder Mystery Weekend's 14th Annual**

St. Valentine's Day Massacre, a murder-mystery dinner-theater production on February 12. Tickets (\$179 per couple) include a gourmet dinner, the interactive show, and dancing at fine hotels in all three cities. Featured on the television shows *Entertainment Tonight* and *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*, **Keith & Margo's Murder Mystery Weekend** makes use of professional improvisational actors to play the roles of suspects, detectives, police officers, and bystanders. It's up to you to solve the crime. Call 888/U-SOLVE-IT; www.murdermysterytexas.com.



Texas State Aquarium



USS Lexington Museum

There's not a lot to do before starting your **tropical getaway**, but there's **plenty to do** once you get here! By **land or sea**, Corpus Christi can quench your **thirst for adventure**. Whether you want to **soak up the sun**, mosey through **museums**, visit nose-to-nose with **dolphins** or frequent a **flight deck**, our **attractions** are the **place to play**. And with **great accommodations**, you'll **definitely want to stay** a while!

Corpus Christi
PADRE ISLAND

800-801-4428 • www.corpuschristicvb.com



Escape TO...

HILL COUNTRY SAFARI

Sunrise Exotic Ranch

BY FORD GUNTER

IF IT'S UNUSUAL you're looking for, Sunrise Exotic Ranch may be for you. Right about the time that Kaleb, a 160-pound chimpanzee, spewed a gallon of water all over my girlfriend, Kacy, I began to realize I might not be in Kansas—er, Austin—any more. Though warned about the spitting, we had only half-listened, because we could not get over the three-week-old chimpanzee, Kiko, that ranch owner Karon Glass had dressed in baby clothes, complete with tiny booties. Who could listen at a time like that?

Confused yet? We should back up. Nestled between Dripping Springs and Wimberley about 25 miles west of Austin, Sunrise Exotic Ranch boasts more than 300 nonnative animals scattered over its 320 acres. Karon Glass has worked with exotics for three decades, but her ranch only opened to the public eight years ago. It was not until the city of Wimberley asked her to host an event

to raise money for the fire department and EMS that she officially began welcoming visitors for tours and overnight stays. Word of mouth spread among locals—many of whom had no idea all these animals were there—and soon requests poured in for school field trips, corporate picnics, Boy Scout campouts, birthday parties, and, eventually, weddings and receptions. Just recently, a jun-



ALL PHOTOS BY MICHAEL A. MURPHY



At top, curious llamas seek a handout. Above, Sunrise Exotic Ranch owner Karon Glass feeds breakfast to two eager chimpanzees.

ior high dance went way past curfew when the chaperones appeared to be having as much fun as the kids, leading a load of parents to join the party.

Along with the chimps, you'll find zebras, wildebeests, black buck antelopes, scimitar oryx, Nile lechwe (an African antelope), fallow and axis deer, buffalo, beefalo, llamas, ostriches, emus, crested cranes, kangaroos, camels, and elk roaming the segregated pastures and pens. Karon admires them all, but admits the chimpanzees are her "pride and joy." In addition to providing a home for retired Barnum & Bailey's circus chimps, Karon and her husband, Frankie, raise their own chimps—like the aforementioned Kaleb and five others, including a five- and six-year-old pair who grew up alongside the Glass' grandchildren.

The chimps, kept in several separate

GRAPEVINE, TEXAS

Experience it!

- Great shopping in the Main Street Historic District, Bass Pro Shops Outdoor World and Grapevine Mills Mall
- Over 200 restaurants • Seven winery tasting rooms

- The circa 1896 Grapevine Vintage Railroad
- A central location in the Dallas/Fort Worth area
- Over 4,000 first class hotel rooms and 600,000 square feet of meeting space



800-457-6338



ONE LIBERTY PARK PLAZA • GRAPEVINE, TEXAS • 76051 • www.grapevinetexasusa.com



Overnight guests stay here, one of two handsomely furnished cabins offered by the ranch, or in a comfortable treehouse.

enclosures, are a highlight for ranch visitors, too. A guided tram-tour stops in front of Kaleb's enclosure, where he got us again the following morning, this time with the panache of a gymnast on the parallel bars. The rest of the primates here, including several lemurs and three gibbons—the fastest tree-dwelling primates in the world—attract gawks as well.

Part of the beauty of Sunrise is, however, the lack of gawkers. With only

than 300 visitors in a day, if you stay overnight, you'll have plenty of alone time. With a staff of two—the Glasses maintain the grounds with the help of cook/nanny Maria Arvizu and her husband, Roberto—and ample strolling room, you'll have the place mostly to yourself once the afternoon tours have ended.

During our stay, we enjoyed a serene sunset from the deck of the roomy treehouse (it has a full bath and kitchenette),

Along with more than 300 nonnative animals scattered over its 320 acres, the ranch has two themed cabins for overnight stays—plus a treehouse for the more-adventurous.

two themed cabins available for overnight stays—plus a treehouse for the more-adventurous—the guest-capacity tops out at 10. While the tours sometimes tote more

and only glimpsed the family of three staying in the nearby cabin. The next morning, a basket of Maria's homemade breakfast tacos was delivered to our door—the spiciness of which depends on “how mad Maria is at Roberto,” Karon told us with a laugh.

There is never a dull day at Sunrise, which is also the base of operations for



Two Bactrian camels, an endangered species native to Asia, hover around a water trough.



**Don't just bring back memories.
Bring back some rewards.**

**Stay and earn with
the *Choice Privileges*®
and EASY CHOICE®
reward programs.**

There's a lot to see and do in the Lone Star State. That's why with 8 brands and more than 200 Choice hotels across the great state, you'll have everything you need to experience our unique culture. Plus, you'll earn nights or flights with our *Choice Privileges* and EASY CHOICE reward programs. Call today and ask for the **Texas Highways Rate** to save 10% or for information, visit us online.

**Call 866.228.5160 and ask
for the Texas Highways Rate
to save 10%.**

choicetexas.com



We'll see you there.

CHOICE HOTELS INTERNATIONAL®

Advance reservations required. Subject to availability. Offer cannot be combined with any other discount or offer. Rate not available online. Offer only valid at participating hotels throughout the state of Texas. Offer valid through 12/30/05. *Choice Privileges*: Earn points or miles/credits when paying qualifying rates at any Comfort Inn®, Comfort Suites®, Quality®, Sleep Inn®, Clarion® or MainStay Suites® hotel in the U.S. All program rules and conditions apply. For complete details and participating airlines visit choiceprivileges.com or see the *Choice Privileges* Membership Guide. EASY CHOICE: Earn stamps or miles/credits when paying qualifying rates at Econo Lodge® and Rodeway Inn® hotels in the U.S. All program rules and program conditions apply. For complete details and participating airlines, visit easychoiceonline.com or see the EASY CHOICE stamp card. ©2004 Choice Hotels International, Inc. All rights reserved.



The circular treehouse—with access via a wide stairway—sits atop a 15-foot steel support among the branches of a live oak. The all-around windows afford wonderful views of the surrounding landscape.

Bobbi Colorado, the renowned animal trainer who recently spent several weeks on Tommy Lee Jones' ranch (near San Saba), handling the animals for the film *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* (release scheduled for this year). The morning of our tour, Bobbi popped in to re-

turn the Glass' four-year-old gibbon, Lolly, who promptly stole my water bottle.

While Karon and Bobbi are unlikely to allow their primates free rein while guests are present, interaction with the animals is still possible. You can hand-feed llamas or observe the chimps at close range while



The ranch's wildebeests (left; also called gnus) and zebras live in a common enclosure. In their native Africa, the animals migrate together.

they bed down each night in hand-raked piles of hay. One even flipped a banana peel at us; we found out later the gesture was a request for food. "They think if they give you something, you'll give something back," Karon told us. And watching the gibbons carom around their cage at breakneck speeds is something else.

With the Nutty Brown Cafe (on US 290) and Cypress Creek Cafe (in Wimberley) available for dinner and entertainment just down the road, civilization is never too far away, making Sunrise Exotic Ranch the perfect spot for a birthday bash, corporate picnic, school field trip, or even a romantic getaway.

FORD GUNTER, a former *Texas Highways* intern and presently a graduate student in journalism at the University of Texas, has guided photo safaris in Kenya.

color

Color, we all speak its language.

A FLASH OF RED BURSTING FROM A MARIACHI'S VEST.
 A splash of pineapple agua fresca as you drift through a sun-drenched plaza.
 The hot pink seduction of lush bugambilia.
 In Laredo, the hues are a vibrant expression of our unique border culture.
 The moment you arrive, you'll understand what we're saying.
 Because the language of color speaks to the heart,
 rendering – in a moment – a lifetime of colorful memories.

VIVA Laredo!
 the color of cultures

Laredo Convention and Visitors Bureau • 501 San Agustín, Laredo TX 78040 • 1.800.361.3360 / www.viva-laredo.com

SUNRISE EXOTIC RANCH is south of Dripping Springs, at 25201 Ranch Road 12.

From I-35 in south Austin, take the US 290 exit, and drive west about 20 miles to Dripping Springs and RR 12.

Turn south on RR 12, and drive 2.5 miles. Call 512/894-0728 or 512/913-0922 (cell); www.sunriseexoticranch.org. Tours (by appt. only): Mon-Sat 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. Cost: \$10, \$8 ages 2-18 and age 60 and older. Special rates available for school and other groups.

Nutty Brown Cafe is at 12225 US 290 West, west of Austin and about 10 miles east of Dripping Springs. Hours: Daily 11-10 (bar open till midnight Sun-Fri, till 2 a.m. Sat.). Call 512/301-4648; www.nuttybrown.com. **Cypress Creek Cafe** is on the square in Wimberley, 15 miles south of Dripping Springs via RR 12. Call or go online for dining room (opens 7:30 a.m. Tue-Sun) and club hours: 512/847-2515; www.cypresscreekcafe.com.

FOR THE ROAD

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9)

IT'S WORTH IT

RANDY TWADDLE AND DAVID THOMPSON, two of Houston's most recent eccentric newsmakers, run a "creative concern" called tweek, the advertising-public-relations-media firm that designed several text-laden retaining walls at Allen's Landing, a scenic spot on Buffalo Bayou that was the birthplace of Houston (see story, page 16). Their affectionately irreverent campaign to promote the city, "Houston: It's Worth It," dreamed up six months or so ago during an informal conversation with friends, may be the most controversial city slogan since "What Happens in Vegas, Stays in Vegas."

Log on to the slogan's Web site, www.houstonitsworthit.com, and you'll find a flash-animation barrage of what Randy and David call "the afflictions" of Houston: the mosquitoes, the floods, the traffic, the pollen, the long summers, and so on. And then comes the kicker—Houston: It's Worth It. Here, too, you can read

© JOE BARABAN



One of the many reasons that Houston is worth it: the annual Art Car Parade, which takes place this year on May 14.

the opinions of more than 1,000 Web-site visitors who have written in to state why they think Houston is worth it: Incredible architecture. Shipley's cinnamon doughnuts. The Astros. Year-round golf. Friendly people.

To go along with their offbeat slogan, the tweek (pronounced "tweak") duo offer an equally offbeat selection of apparel and HIWI accessories, including the "Flying Cockroaches Tee," the "Mosquitoes Cap," the popular "20 Afflictions" coffee mug, and the newest tongue-in-

cheek addition to the retail line, the "Houston It's Worth It Ice Scraper." Log on to www.houstonitsworthit.com.

VINTAGE VALENTINES

AT SEBASTOPOL HOUSE State Historic Site, an unusual 1856 Greek Revival-style house in Seguin, year-round exhibits and programs focus on the natural and cultural history of 19th-Century South Central Texas. Through

May 31, an exhibition called *Love's Messenger: Courtship in the Victorian Age* delves into the culture of romance in Victorian Texas. Included are coins called "love tokens," engraved with poetry or other sentiments, hand-painted fans used to convey amorous intentions, vintage Valentines, and replicas of a Victorian wedding dress and trousseau. Call 830/379-4833; www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/sebastop.

VISIT OUR WEB SITE AT www.texashighways.com

An Extraordinary Statement of Texas Social History



610 Main • Orange, TX
P.O. Drawer 909
Orange, TX 77631-0909
409.883.0871
www.whstarkhouse.org

Tuesday-Saturday
10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
Reservations Requested

Admission \$2.00
Closed Major Holidays

Admission limited to adults and
children age 12 and over.
Stairs are an essential part of the tour.



HOUSTON

A View from the Bayou

There is something about a river that sets a man to dreaming," Don Greene said as we glided down Buffalo Bayou in his 20-foot canoe. I nodded, because I was dreaming, too, on this warm June afternoon—dreaming that I was deep inside a forest, pleasantly sequestered from civilization on a lazy river.

Every imaginable shade of green popped up from the lush riverbank. Vines dangled from tree limbs to touch the water and dance on the current. The only sounds were the rhythmic splashes of our paddles as they dipped into the water and the flapping wings of a startled great blue heron high above in a cypress tree.

As I followed the heron's flight, I caught a glimpse of a shiny glass office tower peeking through the green canopy. Then the huge concrete pilings of West Loop 610 near the Galleria shopping mall loomed into view. They slapped me back into the realization that I wasn't in the middle of nowhere. I was in the mid-

dle of Houston. The lulling ride continued, taking us under the Loop and leaving the noise of traffic behind.

Don, a tall man with a gray beard and piercing green eyes, pointed to a log poking out of the water with a delicate-looking insect clinging to the end. "Look, there's a ruby-spotted damselfly," he said.

A bit later we spotted some deep claw marks in the sandy bank. "What made those?" I asked. "Could be an alligator or a big turtle," Don replied.

"Do you think we'll see an alligator?" I asked.

"We're getting into alligator country," he responded. Then I forgot I was in the city again.

I had sought out Don, a well-known whitewater outfitter who has traversed the bayou for 30 years, because I wanted to see Houston from a different

angle. The owner of Whitewater Experience in Houston, Don is also a former president of the Bayou Preservation Association, which was organized in 1966 to defeat the proposed channeling

The bayou proved a stunning contrast to the famously flashy city above us with the "Blade Runner" skyline, the BMWs and Mercedes Benzes whizzing along the boulevards, the super-size sports arenas and shopping malls.

A Sunday-afternoon canoe ride down Buffalo Bayou takes Alex Baraban past historic sites and gleaming big-city landmarks. Thanks to cleanup efforts in recent years, Houstonians can point with pride to the legendary waterway that flows through the heart of the city.



The beautifully landscaped Diana Garden (above), on the grounds of the Bayou Bend Collection and Gardens, contrasts with the wildness of nearby Buffalo Bayou. A view of Main Street (facing page), complete with the new light-rail line, was shot from another historic site on the bayou, Allen's Landing.

of Buffalo Bayou. He feels education is crucial to saving the bayou. He guides the canoe trips that are offered to the public a half-dozen times a year through the Buffalo Bayou Partnership, a nonprofit organization working to rehabilitate the bayou and to revitalize a 10-mile corridor along its banks, from Shepherd Drive to the Ship Channel Turning Basin.

On many previous visits, I've sped around the city on the Loop and passed over its original highway, the historic bayou, which gave Houston the nickname of the "Bayou City" and was its very reason for being. This time, I wanted to experience Houston from beneath the freeways and tap into the source of its Southern soul.

Don has floated down many rivers, but Buffalo Bayou—considered a river by most Texans—is special to him. "I have

been on waterways all over the world, but this one is mine," he said as we drifted downstream. "This one is in my hometown. It's amazing to me that I can feel as peaceful on the bayou as I do on the Pecos or the Colorado or the Rio Grande. Everybody is trying to get away to someplace, and what they're trying to get away to is right here."

The bayou proved a stunning contrast to the famously flashy city above us with the *Blade Runner* skyline, the BMWs and Mercedes Benzes whizzing along the boulevards, the supersize sports arenas and shopping malls. Only hours before, we had fought through the Post Oak area's traffic in Don's weather-beaten Suburban to put the canoe into the bayou just a few miles from the Galleria.

Our journey on the bayou took us past the many faces of

As I followed the heron's flight, I caught a glimpse of a shiny glass office tower peeking through the green canopy.



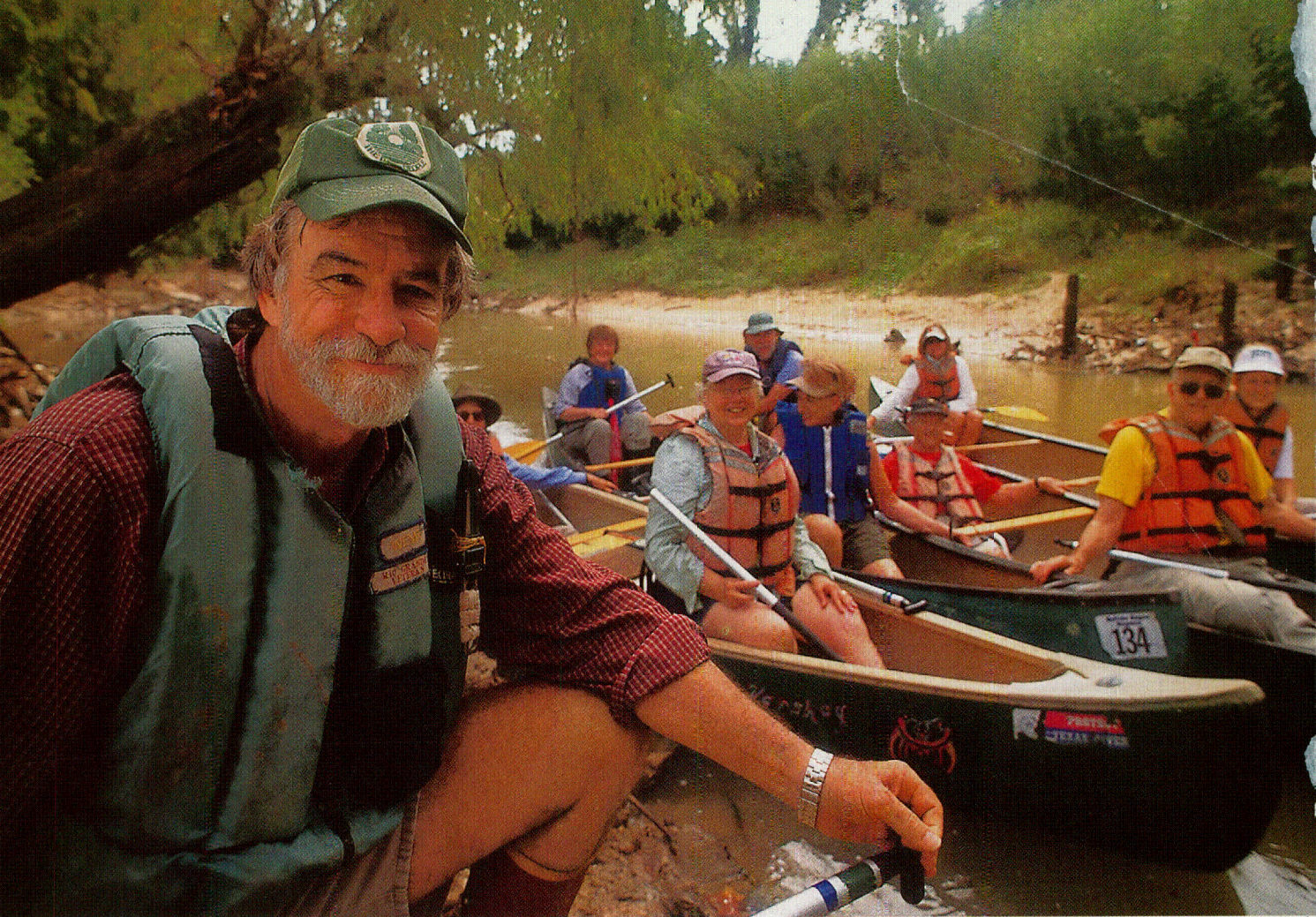
ST A

Kiam



STOP
HERE ON
RED
←





Don Greene and members of the Memorial Park Conservancy prepare to embark on the maiden voyage of the *Terry Hershey* (foreground). The woman for whom the canoe is named led the 1960s fight to save Buffalo Bayou and remains a guiding force in efforts to preserve it.

Houston. We floated by homeless men living under one of the bridges who waved as they fished; the manicured grounds of the chic River Oaks Country Club; the woodlands of Memorial Park; and Rainbow Lodge, an excellent restaurant, part of it formed from a 1935 residence, where you can dock and walk up terraced steps to dine on game and Gulf seafood. Along the trip, Don educated me about riparian ecology as we marveled at the bayou's rich abundance of wildlife: green herons and great blue herons, red-eared sliders (turtles), fish (gar, bass, and shad), and a diamondback water snake sunning itself on the bank. Water moccasins live in the bayou, too, but we didn't spy one on this day. (We did see an alligator; more on that later.)

"Everybody is trying to get away to someplace, and what they're trying to get away to is right here."

Not that Buffalo Bayou is a pristine stream. Decades of neglect and urban development took a toll on the bayou's ecosystems until organizations like the Bayou Preservation Association and the Buffalo Bayou Partnership mounted cleanup programs in recent years. And since Houston's storm drains empty into its bayous, debris and trash still get washed into the waterway. The bayou gets some cleanup help downstream, though, from the *Mighty Tidy*, a 21-foot, specially designed refuse-skimming vessel. Five days a week, the hot pink, floating-garbage guzzler captures debris washed into the bayou from storm drains and street runoff. It also has attachments to remove trash located in trees and on the bayou banks.

Four hours after putting in, we pulled the canoe out of



the water, and I said goodbye to Dor. I hopped in my rented SUV and followed Memorial Drive, which roughly traces the bayou's path. Nearby was one of the best places to capture the feel of the old Southern side of Houston, Bayou Bend Collection and Gardens. The late Houston philanthropist Ima Hogg and her two brothers, who were the developers of this exclusive River Oaks neighborhood, lived in the magnificent, two-story colonial structure, built in the late 1920s. Miss Hogg once called the site "nothing but a dense thicket," but she tamed the wild area into 14 acres of formal gardens while leaving the surrounding woodlands natural. The house, which, along with the gardens, is now part of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, showcases American decorative arts from 1620 to 1870 in period-room settings.

My appetite for history piqued, I wanted to see Houston's birthplace on the bayou. I took Memorial downtown to the end of Main Street and Allen's Landing. Here, in 1836, brothers Augustus and John Allen paid \$1.40 an acre for 6,642 acres and founded what would become Texas' largest city. Reborn as



Diners at Rainbow Lodge (top) sometimes arrive by canoe, docking at the back of the restaurant, which overlooks Buffalo Bayou. Above, University of Houston-Downtown art professor Floyd Newsom Jr. and his students find inspiration in a view of the campus beside the bayou.

a city landmark and small park, Allen's Landing is the site of a temporary Buffalo Bayou Artworks exhibition (through October 2005) that comprises a bevy of intriguing installations, including a swirl of metal that resembles a giant thumbprint. Adjacent to the park lies the three-story, brick Sunset Coffee Building, a



One of 300 artists who participated in last year's Bayou City Art Festival in Memorial Park, Georgia painter Sidney Carter enjoyed interacting with passers-by. The juried show takes place each March (March 18-20, 2005) on the park's South Picnic Loop, which follows the course of Buffalo Bayou.

former coffee-roasting plant built in the 1930s and one of the few remaining industrial buildings on the bayou. Plans call for it to have a restaurant and other amenities.

About a mile downstream of Allen's Landing lies another landmark—the McKee Street Bridge, near James Bute Park in downtown's Warehouse District. More than 40 bridges span the bayou, but this one is the most interesting. Designed by former Houston city engineer James G. McKenzie in 1932, the reinforced concrete-girder bridge is remarkable for its unusual girders, which rise above the roadway and form roller-coaster-like curves on both sides. Painted in pastel blue and white, the girders give the bridge a whimsical look.

As the city's lifeline, Buffalo Bayou passes through the heart

of downtown Houston's recent and continuing renaissance. In the late 1980s, Sesquicentennial Park was developed along the bayou's banks to commemorate Houston's and Texas' 150th birthday; in 1998, a large public-art project was

installed in the form of seven 70-foot stainless-steel pillars, which rise from the bayou's eastern bank. The park also has a sloping lawn that is a popular setting for outdoor events. Meanwhile, redevelopment fever is spilling into Houston's industrial East End area, less than a mile east of downtown. Developers and investors are moving in to build townhomes and refurbish build-

ings constructed in the 1930s and 1940s.

A 20-year master plan for the bayou envisions even more: boat landings, park enhancements, reconstructed wetlands,

As the city's lifeline, Buffalo Bayou passes through the heart of downtown Houston's recent and continuing renaissance.

essentials HOUSTON ALONG THE BAYOU

new canals, and a promenade along Commerce Street. New downtown landmarks such as the Hobby Center for the Performing Arts, the Downtown Aquarium, the 1,200-room Hilton Americas-Houston hotel (next to the George R. Brown Convention Center), and the new Toyota Center arena for basketball and hockey have sprouted in recent years. But old buildings in the Downtown Historic District also have been reborn as restaurants, loft apartments, hotels, shops, and clubs.

On a previous visit to Houston, I stayed at downtown's Sam Houston Hotel, which dates to 1924 and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. This time I stayed at The Magnolia, a renovated, 314-room, 1920s hotel housed in the former *Houston Post-Dispatch* building. The hotel opened in February 2003. The decor is elegantly understated, sleek, and contemporary. Vintage photographs from the *Post-Dispatch*, one of the city's first newspapers, hang on the walls.

Even now, as the bayou's rehabilitation and development build, there's plenty to see and do along the waterway's path through the city. For instance, the annual spring Art Car Parade, featuring outlandishly decorated vehicles, is held in conjunction with the Anything That Floats Parade, featuring equally outlandishly decorated boats on the bayou. The Dragon Boat Festival, held each May, pits teams of 25 (each team includes a drummer), in traditional Hong Kong-style boats painted to resemble dragons. Serious boaters can hone their skills at the annual Buffalo Bayou Regatta, a 15-mile canoe and kayak race in October.

Speaking of dragon-like creatures, back to that alligator I mentioned earlier. Near the end of our float trip, as Don and I glided down the bayou, I spotted a large, unblinking eye that seemed to float on the water. Then I saw the tip of what looked like a dragon's tail resting on the bank. "Is that what I think it is?" I asked.

We paddled closer, but not too close. "Yes, that's one of our gators," Don replied.

The creature was partly submerged, but it looked to be six to eight feet long. I'd never seen an alligator in its natural habitat. Don, ever the preservationist, worried that some people might try to hunt it down if word got out, so I promised not

BUFFALO BAYOU originates west of Katy, winds its way east, and flows through the northern part of downtown Houston and the East End to the Turning Basin and the Houston Ship Channel.

To find out about efforts to preserve the bayou and its ecosystems, write to the Bayou Preservation Assn., Box 131563, 72219-1563; 713/529-6443; www.buffalobayoupreservation.org.

To learn more about the ongoing revitalization of the Buffalo Bayou corridor or to get details on the organization's **guided canoe trips**, write to the Buffalo Bayou Partnership, Vine St. Studios, 1113 Vine St., Ste. 200, 77002; 713/752-0314; www.buffalobayou.org. The trips, conducted by Don Greene Apr-Nov, have various themes (including the bayou's history and public art as seen from the bayou), and some include lunch. Cost: \$42-\$57 a person. All trips leave from 5000 Memorial Dr. and include canoe rental, paddles, shuttles, personal flotation devices, and snacks. Don Greene's Web site, www.whitewaterexperience.com, lists additional guided canoe trips on Buffalo Bayou and other waterways.

Both organizations' Web sites (listed above) offer handy information for **canoeing the bayou on your own**. The first describes 6 canoe trips on Buffalo Bayou, as well as trips on other city waterways. The second Web site offers a map showing the location of canoe and kayak launches on the bayou inside Loop 610.

SITES

Bayou Bend Collection and Gardens 1 Westcott St., off Memorial Dr.; 713/639-7750; www.mfah.org. Reservations required for house tours; call for details and ticket information. Open Tue-Sun (call for hours).

Rainbow Lodge (1 Birdsall, off Memorial Dr.; 713/861-8666; www.rainbow-lodge.com) spe-



cializes in Gulf seafood and game. Reservations accepted.

The **Sam Houston Hotel's** restaurant, 17 (1117 Prairie St.; 832/200-8800; www.samhoustonhotel.com), specializes in American cuisine such as roasted veal tenderloin. The name comes from the 17 railroads that used to run through Houston.

The **Magnolia Hotel** (1100 Texas Ave.; 713/221-0011; www.TheMagnoliaHotel.com) features live jazz 6 nights a week in its **Magnolia Club**.

For general information about Houston, call the **Houston Convention & Visitors Bureau**, 901 Bagby, Ste. 100, 77002; 713/437-5200; www.houston-spacecityusa.com.

EVENTS

Several annual events take place along Buffalo Bayou, including the **Houston Dragon Boat Festival**, to be held May 7, 2005. The **Anything That Floats Parade** takes place each spring in conjunction with the Art Car Parade (May 14, 2005). The **Buffalo Bayou Regatta**, the largest canoe and kayak race in Texas, will be held in mid-Oct. For dates and details, contact the Buffalo Bayou Partnership or the Houston CVB.

For information about the **Art Car Parade**, call the Orange Show Center for Visionary Art, 713/926-6368; www.orangeshow.org.

to reveal its location. The gator slipped into the water out of sight, leaving a trail of bubbles behind before we could even snap a photograph.

As we paddled away, I felt grateful that wildness still lives in the midst of such an urban setting. And I decided Don was right: The serenity I yearned for was in a most unlikely place—under Houston's freeways—where you can float all day on a ribbon of living history. ★

Writer KATHRYN JONES, who lives in the Glen Rose area, likes to spend time on two other Texas waterways, the Brazos and Paluxy rivers.

Award-winning Houston photographer JOE BARABAN has shot for numerous publications, including *National Geographic*, *Time*, *Life*, and *The New York Times*. This is his first work for *Texas Highways*.

BY BEN CHRISTENSEN • PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRAD DOHERTY

PORT ISABEL



SIMPLE PLEASURES



BY THE SEASHORE

Port City Mercantile (top) reflects this coastal community's artistic bent with paintings, silver and pearl jewelry, fine china, collectibles, and shell art (423 Maxan; 866/767-8248; www.portcitymerc.com). Perhaps these sailboats in PI's Channel District (above) speak to your inner Jimmy Buffett.



At ground level, from the top, or from the deck of a boat, the historic Point Isabel Lighthouse provides quite a sight.

PORT ISABEL'S SMALL SIZE HAS KEPT IT INVITING. THESE DAYS, THIS LITTLE GEM OF A TOWN HAS BEEN REDISCOVERED BY ECOTOURISTS AND OTHER VISITORS WHO FIND ITS AUTHENTICITY REFRESHING.



A pelican gets comfortable in its native habitat, a sure sign you're near the Gulf.

AT THE SOUTHERN TIP OF Texas, the big green exit sign on US 77 signals SOUTH PADRE ISLAND in bold white reflective letters, directing traffic to the coast via Texas 100.

No mention of Port Isabel, the quiet seaside hamlet that rests at water's edge on the west side of the Laguna Madre, across from the Island. But the town can hardly be overlooked: Not only does the Point Isabel Lighthouse rise 70 feet above its sea-level surroundings for a commanding 360° view, you can't reach SPI without passing through Port Isabel.

With its population of a little more

than 5,000, Port Isabel is content to be one of those oft-underrated, yet interesting towns where the colorful residents and neighborhoods remain untouched by the fast pace of metropolitan Texas.

It is a town of quiet boat channels lined with shrimp trawlers, sailboats, and sport-fishing boats. Here, sandal-bedecked, deeply tanned fishing guides greet eager clients at dawn, and pelicans groom themselves while waiting for scraps from fishermen deftly filleting a morning's catch of redfish and speckled sea trout. Landlubbers must cast off their landlubbing ways in this town, where people love to be on the water, whether for dolphin-watching,



South of Port Isabel, a picket fence works as a sand trap to slow erosion. In the distance, the Queen Isabella Causeway connects the town to South Padre Island.

birdwatching, fishing, sailing, or kayaking.

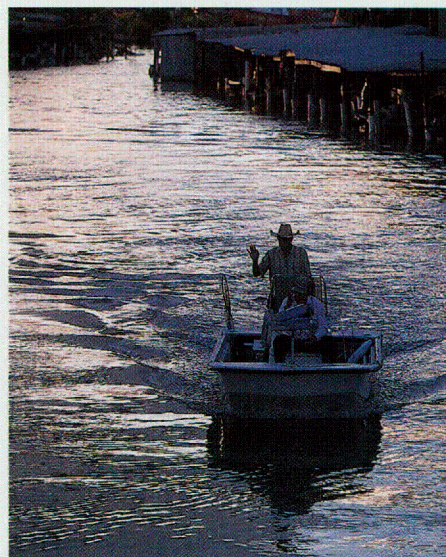
This little gem of a town started off as El Frontón de Santa Isabel, a ranching outpost in the Spanish land grant of Don Rafael García that soon became an official customs center for the thriving Port of Matamoros. When the American Expeditionary Forces under General Zachary Taylor captured this bayside bivouac in 1847, the occupiers renamed it Point Isabel and built a fort—Fort Polk—and then a lighthouse, in 1853, to guide American merchant ships. Port Isabel, as it came to be called, boomed in the early years of the Civil War, when Southern cotton on its way to British textile mills passed through town to Mexican ports. The demise of the Confederacy in 1865 severely curtailed Port Isabel's growth.

Not that this turned out to be a bad thing. Port Isabel's small size has kept it inviting, its economy anchored by commercial fishing and tourism. These days, the town has been rediscovered by ecotourists and other visitors who find its authenticity refreshing.

Geographically and otherwise, the town is made up of two entities, the bustling, commercialized west side, and the older, historic part, which is cut off by a narrow channel.

Only five years ago, the sleepy seaside hamlet began a revitalization program. Restaurant and shopowners formed the Lighthouse Square Merchants Committee, which has helped spark rejuvenation.

Today, "the Square" is the best place to park and hoof it. Parking spaces front the grassy lawn from which the lighthouse



Boaters take it slow on Port Isabel's channels to keep their wake small.

towers, joined by the Victorian-era Lighthouse Keeper's Cottage (home to the Port Isabel Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center). Boutiques, a fishing pier, three restaurants, a pub, and an ice cream shop all crowd the square—more than enough to keep visitors occupied for an afternoon and an evening or two.

Visitors strolling Lighthouse Square will soon have expanded access to the town's three museums, as well as to additional shops across busy Texas 100, south of the lighthouse, with the inception of the pedestrian-friendly Paseo de Santa Isabella. The Paseo, a mutual effort of the Texas Department of Transportation and the City of Port Isabel scheduled for completion later this year, will feature



Purple Parrot Gallery & Gift Shop (956/943-2004), Someplace Else, and Port City Mercantile help frame the north side of Lighthouse Square.

LOCALS DEFIANTLY PLACE BUMPER STICKERS ON CARS AND SHOPS THAT READ "FRIENDS DON'T LET FRIENDS EAT IMPORTED SHRIMP."



Shrimp boats in Port Isabel's harbor await another day of trawling for those delicious crustaceans we so dearly enjoy.



A popular Port Isabel dining choice on Lighthouse Square, **Pirates Landing** (110 N. Garcia; 956/943-3663; <http://pirateslandingrestaurant.com>) has a fine view of Laguna Madre, the Queen Isabella Causeway, and South Padre Island.

hike-and-bike trails, landscaping, benches, rest areas, and bronze plaques that detail the multilayered local history.

Edward Meza, the town's director of historical preservation, has been active in overseeing the development as a means to draw lighthouse visitors to the new and extensive exhibits of the city's nearby museum complex.

"The museums were established with funding from the federal Rio Grande Empowerment Zone program, whose goal was to promote economic development in small and rural areas of Texas," Edward explains. "Port Isabel used its strength—its history—to accomplish this with the Museums of Port Isabel."

Those very museums—Port Isabel Historical Museum, Treasures of the Gulf Museum, and the Point Isabel Lighthouse—cover a broad timeline and include Mexican War and Civil War displays and artifacts excavated locally, an authentically-rendered Victorian parlor, actual and facsimile parts of Spanish ships that went aground just off the coast here in 1554, and large monitors with closed captioning that provide in-depth historical information.

As the sea brought Spanish exploration centuries ago, Port Isabel's saltwater setting continues to trade on Gulf currents with the Texas International Fishing Tournament, or TIFT, Texas' largest saltwater-fishing tournament. Nearly 1,500 anglers annually descend from points north during the first weekend of August, many carrying on family traditions that stretch

back over the tournament's 66 years. In her 17-year role as tournament director, Betty Wells personally oversees the busy weekend with unremitting energy. Wells' husband, Vere Wells, a salty, fourth-generation guide who got his start leading fishing trips as a teenager in the 1960s, epitomizes the professional fish-

ing guides who work out of Port Isabel.

From the Channel District (centered on the low, narrow bridge separating old Port Isabel from the mainland), fishing guides pick up clients just about every morning of the year. In small, shallow-draft boats, they pursue the bountiful game fish found in Laguna Madre's every cranny. Redfish and trout are staples here, but a very short boat ride will take you to snook, tarpon, flounder, black drum, skipjack, and mangrove snapper, as well.

Locals here defiantly place bumper stickers on cars and shops that read

"Friends Don't Let Friends Eat Imported Shrimp," and fourth-generation commercial fishermen like Joe Cuevas sell shrimp right off of their own boats.

Darlene Byrd Herrera, owner of B&A Seafood, stocks locally caught shrimp and shellfish and imports only the seafood (like lobster) not found in these waters. The business has been in the Byrd family, in the same spot by the channel, for more than 40 years. Their adjacent Harbor View Restaurant has a popular deck for dining alfresco by the water.

B&A Seafood is a lot like Port Isabel itself, out of the way and easy to miss, with a small, unassuming sign that serves as a landmark for those who already know of its presence.

"We're hoping to get a bigger sign," says Darlene.

But in truth, she doesn't need it, and neither does her appealing little Gulf Coast town. ★

Freelance writer and U.S. Marine Reserve Sergeant **BEN CHRISTENSEN** grew up in Port Isabel as a third-generation resident. He teaches high school English at Los Fresnos.

Photographer **BRAD DOHERTY** shot our December 2004 feature on McAllen and our November 2004 photo of Harlingen's Iwo Jima Memorial.

essentials PORT ISABEL

FOR MORE information, contact the **Port Isabel Chamber of Commerce**, Lighthouse Square, 421 Queen Isabella Blvd., 78578; 956/943-2262 or 800/527-6102; www.portisabel.org. The area code is 956.

Point Isabel Lighthouse State Historic Site is at Lighthouse Square; 943-2262; www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/portisab/. Winding stairs (and 3 short ladders) take you to the top.

The **Port Isabel Historical Museum and Treasure of the Gulf Museum** are at 317 E. Railroad Ave.; 943-7602; www.portisabelmuseums.com.

In the Channel District: **Quik Stop**, at 501 Texas 100 (943-1159), is a fishing store selling tackle and bait. **R&R Marina**, at 100 Bridge St. (943-6311), will hook you up with prominent local fishing guides. **White Sands Motor Lodge, Marina and Restaurant**, at



418 W. Texas 100 (943-2414; www.the-whitesands.com), contains 30 units and has been in the same location for more than 40 years. Its channelside dining room perfectly captures Pl's essence. Fresh catch awaits at **B&A Seafood/Harbor View Restaurant**, at 604 Texas 100 (943-2461; www.freshtexasshrimp.com). Across from White Sands, **Traveler RV Park**, at 504 Texas 100 (943-3373), stays mostly full year round with its by-the-water quiescence.



EVERY FEBRUARY, thousands of Valentine cards from more than 20 countries pour into the Chihuahuan Desert town of Valentine. Here, in a small adobe post office, postmaster Maria Carrasco and one helper hand-stamp each card with a special Valentine's Day postmark. The cancellation features a new design every year. The quiet town of 185 residents appears untouched by this once-a-year buzz around the post office. Maria says that the first part of February is "the best time of the year, despite the stacks of mail."

WITH THE DAVIS MOUNTAINS IN THE BACKGROUND, A FLAMING HEART MADE OF LEAD ROPE MARKS THE FENCE LINE OF THE GEARHART RANCH, ONE OF MANY SPREADS IN THE VALENTINE AREA.

A heart-shaped lasso made of rope, glowing with fire, set against a sunset landscape in Valentine, Texas. The lasso is made of thick, light-colored rope and is tied to a wooden post. The fire is bright orange and yellow, with a dark, smoky trail. The background is a vast, flat landscape under a sky with soft, colorful clouds. The overall mood is romantic and nostalgic.

VALENTINE, TEXAS

*Heart
Land*

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOEL SALCIDO



PERHAPS

it was also the best time of the year
for a certain hardworking Southern Pacific Rail-
road crew as they toiled to expand the railway eastward.

Local legend says that they reached this site on February 14,

1882, and named it Valentine. The town flourished as it became a shipping point for the surrounding cattle ranches, and it soon boasted all the amenities of a western town: saloons, a general store, and a hotel. The population peaked at some 600 residents in the early 1950s, right about the time that Johnny Porras, now 76, started running his general store and gas station. ♥ Johnny was born in Valentine and remained here to raise his three children. Though the children have moved away, they haven't lost touch with their hometown. Johnny chuckles when he opens his annual hand-stamped Valentine card from his granddaughter, who attends Sul Ross State University in Alpine. Johnny doesn't philosophize about why he remained a lifetime here, but simply says he just "decided to stay in a small town." ♥ Many residents who worked for the railroad followed their jobs to big cities like Los Angeles and Houston. Gradually, the town dwindled in population, and now its main employer is the Valentine Independent School District, which stays busy educating a student body of 54. ♥ Every year, students in grades seven through 12 here compete to design the Valentine Post Office cancellation stamp. Last year's winner, 14-year-old Rebekah Lynn Santabar, rendered seven sketches in about 20 minutes before submitting her final entry—a drawing of intertwined hearts—to the city council. ♥ This is a good place to be an artist. For example, Valentine native Boyd Elder, who returned to his hometown in 1987, creates spectacular abstract creations using holographic and colored foil, which he sells at galleries internationally. Boyd designed several album covers for the Eagles, whom he befriended as an art student in California, as well as for Jackson Browne and for Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young. ♥ The town's mayor, Chuy Calderon, who also is a science teacher and a Federal Express delivery man, often thinks about how to keep the town alive. And for now, the annual deluge of Valentine's love letters helps do just that. ♥

2004 VALENTINE STAMP DESIGN WINNER,



REBEKAH LYNN SANTABAR

JOEL SALCIDO won a Gold award from the International Regional Magazine Association for his January 2003 *Texas Highways* photo feature on Roma.



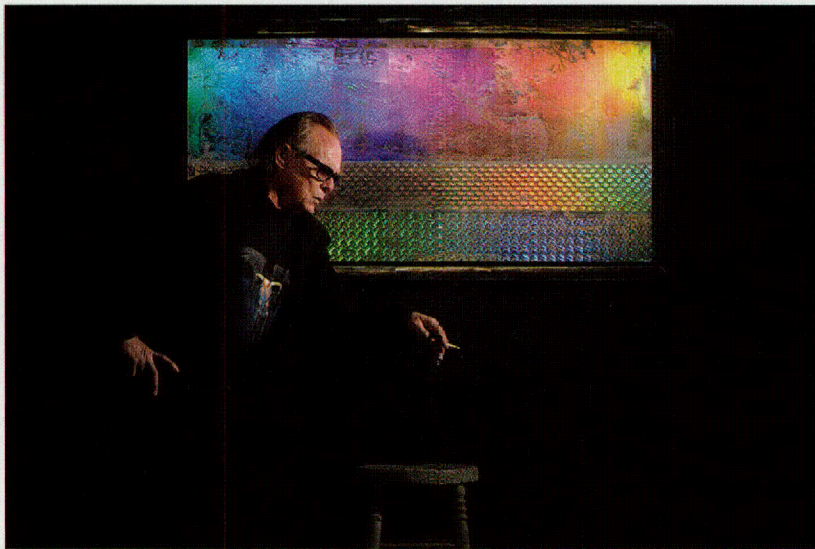
POSTMASTER MARIA CARRASCO HANDLES ALL MAIL IN THE ADOBE VALENTINE POST OFFICE. SHE LIKES TO THINK OF ALL THE ROMANCES SHE HELPS DEVELOP EACH FEBRUARY, WHEN THOUSANDS OF VALENTINE'S DAY CARDS ARRIVE TO RECEIVE THE TOWN'S SPECIAL POSTMARK. RANCHER BILL MILLER AND HIS HORSE NUBLINA STAND IN THE BACKGROUND.

TO MAIL a valentine to be sent with a postmark from Valentine, send your stamp, addressed (and sealed) card inside a larger envelope to Valentine Post Office, Valentine, Texas 79854-9998.

*Heart
Land*



ELVIS AURELIO TARANGO MANAGES THE COAL MINE RANCH NEAR VALENTINE. HIS FATHER-IN-LAW, CARLOS ESTRELLA ORONA (BACKGROUND), RETIRED RECENTLY FROM A LIFETIME OF RANCHING IN THE REGION.



ARTIST BOYD ELDER, WHO APPRECIATES VALENTINE'S "SPLENDID ISOLATION," RETURNED TO VALENTINE AFTER ATTENDING ART SCHOOL IN CALIFORNIA AND TRAVELING THE WORLD.



VALENTINE'S ORIGINAL 1882 RAILROAD DEPOT SITS BEHIND THE SCHOOL'S BASKETBALL COURT. THESE DAYS, THE VALENTINE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT HAS A STUDENT BODY OF 54.



LIFELONG VALENTINE RESIDENT JOHNNY PORRAS, 76, BOWS IN PRAYER DURING A SUNDAY SERVICE AT SACRED HEART CATHOLIC CHURCH.



WEARING SPARKLING SILVER BELT BUCKLES, FIRST-GRADERS RICARDO NATIVIDAD AND ENRIQUE NAVARRETE SHARE A FRIENDLY MOMENT IN THEIR CLASSROOM. THEIR PARENTS WORK ON AREA RANCHES.



Valley B&Bs WITH BIRD-FRIENDLY SURROUNDINGS PUT OUT THE welcome mat.

ABOUT 1,300 MILES SEPARATE TAMPA BAY, FLORIDA, from the Rio Grande Valley, a distance Doug Wassmer and Lilian Saul have covered three times since the year 2000 in search of the Red-billed Pigeon. “Our second attempt was just after a hurricane,” Doug recalls. “We braved a day-and-a-half of strong thunderstorms and crashing tree limbs at Salineno looking for the bird.”

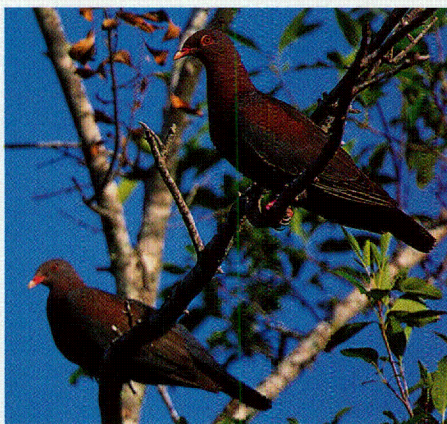
Last June, Dave DeReamus and two friends drove from Pennsylvania to Pharr, stopping only for gas and meals, just to glimpse a Black-headed Nightingale-Thrush, a native of Mexico that had

pushed its textbook boundaries and ventured across the Rio Grande shortly before Memorial Day weekend. It was the third time Dave had rushed to the Valley in response to a “rare-bird alert.”

Serious birders go to extraordinary lengths, either in distance or effort, to add a bird to their “life list.” Legendary birder Kenn Kaufman coined an acronym for this phenomenon: IDIOT—Incredible Distances In Ornithological Travel.

“I guess you could call us idiots,” says Dave, “especially since we call ourselves that.”

Idiot in its colloquial meaning defines me in avian matters. Before this article,



At The Inn at El Canelo (top), one of several Rio Grande Valley bed and breakfasts that cater to birdwatchers, a flock of birders gobbles up the chance for closeups of a flock of wild turkeys. Red-billed Pigeons (above), shy birds that nest in dense Valley woods, perch in an ash tree. A Northern Bobwhite couple (facing page) make plump reflections in a South Texas pond. The Valley hosts more than 500 visiting or resident bird species.

A photograph of two quail birds perched on a log. The bird on the left has a white face with a black stripe through its eye and a reddish-brown breast. The bird on the right has a more mottled pattern with a reddish-brown throat. Both have intricately patterned, scale-like feathers. Their reflections are clearly visible in the water below. The background is a soft-focus natural setting with dry twigs and foliage.

FOR THE *Birders*

BY MAXINE MAYES • PHOTOGRAPHS BY LARRY DITTO



If Vieh's B&B HAD "POSTER" BIRDS, THEY MIGHT BE THE BLACK-BELLIED WHISTLING-DUCKS THAT SET UP HOUSEKEEPING EACH SPRING IN 36 NESTING BOXES THAT CHARLIE BUILT.



The call of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks (top) is a high-pitched, four-note sound. Above, at a gazebo on a *resaca* (oxbow lake) at Vieh's B&B, owner Charlie Vieh views ducks, Kingfishers, and wading birds, among others. The Inn at El Canelo provides all daily meals, which co-owner and culinary-schools graduate Monica Burdette (at right) prepares herself.





Dressed up by palms and the Valley's lush vegetation, the historic Alamo Land & Sugar Co. building now houses the Alamo Inn B&B. Owner Keith Hackland offers breakfast to guests at any hour of the day, a boon for late sleepers and early-rising birders.

I didn't know a chachalaca from a caracara, and I thought a life list was Ten Things I Want To Do Before I Die. But I'm intrigued by the passion that avid birders feel for their sport. So, bearing binoculars and John L. Tveten's *The Birds of Texas*, I visited the Lower Rio Grande Valley where, at last count, 502 of the 626 bird species certified by the Texas Bird Records Committee either live or sojourn. In that birding paradise,

some ornithologically-savvy bed-and-breakfast hosts took me under their wings and welcomed me to the wonders of birding.

THE INN AT EL CANELO

Within five minutes of my arrival at Ray and Monica Burdette's inn north of Raymondville, a string of "wild" turkey gobblers paraded across the backyard, a dramatic start to my birding

foray. More than 300 species of birds have been spotted on the ranch, but I came to see their famous Ferruginous Pygmy-Owls. FPOs, as Monica calls them, are abundant in Mexico but rare in the United States, where much of their habitat has been destroyed. In the Valley, however, habitat on some private ranches has been kept pristine, and thousands of the owls reside and nest there.

When the Burdettes decided to diversify their ranching operation, which has been in Monica's family since the 1860s, they couldn't have dreamed up a better windfall than these soda-can-size owls moving into their backyard. "They nest in cavities in a dead palm tree," Monica explains. "When the babies are fledglings, the parents relocate them to a large oak tree, where they teach them to fly. Then they move them outside the yard and train them to hunt."

My chance to see the FPO came late that afternoon. As I concentrated on a hummingbird perched high in a soapberry tree, faint movement on a lower branch caught my eye. There it was, the tiny, golden-eyed celebrity, glaring at me with a ferocity that seemed incompatible with its cuteness.

The next morning, some solitary bench-sitting moments in the yard and a stroll down one of the ranch's birding trails with Monica netted, among others, a Great Kiskadee, an Eastern Bluebird, an American Kestrel (a small hawk), a Black-crested Titmouse, and a Couch's Kingbird.

Inside the Inn, European antiques mingle comfortably with rustic ranch accents. Warm, dark-wood walls complement the light-colored, rough-hewn stone of the massive fireplace. In a setting that is both elegant and cozy, Monica serves gourmet meals to please the most finicky palate. A graduate of numerous culinary schools, she adds unexpected touches to old standards, like a thin layer of chocolate blanketed between the crust and the filling of a lemon chess pie.

VIEH'S BED & BREAKFAST

"It's a jungle out here!" I thought as I toured the grounds surrounding Charlie and Lana Vieh's bed and break-



[CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT] Two Plain Chachalacas make their noisy presence known from the branches of a mesquite tree. The soda-can-size Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, rare in other U.S. states, resides and nests by the thousands in the Valley. Mesquites and cactus, common sights in South Texas, surround a birdbath and observation point at Casa Santa Ana, a few miles south of Alamo.

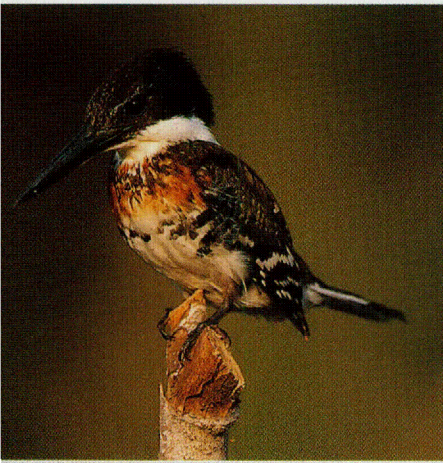
fast near San Benito. Dense tropical vegetation, including 30 species of palm trees, envelops the house and encroaches upon the brick walkways and patio. A profusion of feeders, houses, and water reservoirs for feathered residents and transients leaves no doubt that “this place is for the birds!”

Late in the afternoon, the Viehs and I

trekked down a rutted path to their 10-acre pond. A sudden brisk breeze stirred the branches of the huisache, willow, and retama trees rimming the perimeter and brought momentary relief from the hordes of mosquitoes that had hatched on the heels of a hurricane in Mexico. As we watched from the shade of a gazebo jutting out over the water, a

female Green Kingfisher skimmed past us while a Double-crested Cormorant stared at us from its perch on the pond’s opposite bank.

Lingering over a scrumptious country breakfast the next morning, while a bevy of birds gorged on Charlie’s provisions on the patio, I saw my first Green Jay, one of the “poster” birds for Valley tourism.



The tiny, GOLDEN-EYED OWL GLARED AT ME WITH A FEROCITY THAT SEEMED INCOMPATIBLE WITH ITS CUTENESS.



At top, a Green Kingfisher, uncommon in the U.S., and the extremely rare Blue Mockingbird are two species RGV birders seek to add to their life lists. Above, fish, birds, and other wildlife—not to mention humans—enjoy a pond gracing the grounds of Casa Santa Ana, which lies within walking distance of Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge.

(I don't know who named these beautiful birds, but, to me, it isn't the green that defines this jay but the cobalt blue cap and black bandanna it wears!)

If Vieh's B&B had "poster" birds, they might be the Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks that set up housekeeping each spring in 36 nesting boxes that Charlie built. "I put up four boxes in one spot," he says. "I call it my duck condo."

The Viehs, who ranched in Mexico for 13 years before moving to the Valley, also offer several customized guided outings in northeastern Mexico, including birding treks in the Sierra Madres.

CASA SANTA ANA

In the rooms of Casa Santa Ana, less than a half-mile from the border, superlatives jump from the pages of

OTHER RGV BIRDING SITES

WITH a cloud of mosquitoes following me like a hive of bees, I hurried through the **Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge** at Alamo, the **Valley Nature Center** in Weslaco, and **Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park**, adding five more entries to my ornithological repertoire, including the Plain Chachalaca. Hoping to see the extremely rare Blue Mockingbird, I also visited the **Allen Williams residence** in Pharr, to no avail. Foot by foot, Allen's "labor of love" has transformed his small acreage into a bird sanctuary, putting into practice the eco-tourism that Valley conservationists preach. A Black-headed Nightingale-Thrush, a Slate-throated Redstart, and two Clay-colored Robins have also sojourned at Allen's in recent years, bringing people from all over the world to traipse through his backyard. Contact information for these sites follows:

Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, Rt. 2, Box 202A, Alamo 78516; 956/787-3079 or 784-7500; <http://refuges.fws.gov>.

Valley Nature Center, 301 S. Border Ave. (in Gibson Park), Weslaco 78596; 956/969-2475; www.valleynaturecenter.org.

Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park, 2800 S. Bentsen Palm Dr., Mission 78572; 956/585-1107 (rare-bird alert: 956/584-2731); www.tpwd.state.tx.us. The World Birding Center headquarters are here (see page 64).

Allen Williams leads birding tours of his home acreage in Pharr by appt. only. Call 956/460-9864; \$10 donation per person requested.

guest books: "Wonderful!" "Splendid!" "Perfect!" Mexican adobe brick, Saltillo tile, and colorful Talavera bathroom basins create a fiesta-like atmosphere that sparks another exclamation: "¡Olé!" Beyond the beautiful rooms, a broad veranda faces a koi pond and gardens, all designed to attract birds and butterflies.

Casa Santa Ana, as owners John and Judy McClung planned, is an Eden for birding and wildlife enthusiasts. As one Houston family wrote in a guest



“The more YOU WATCH BIRDS, THE MORE YOU CAN DIFFERENTIATE, JUST LIKE YOU RECOGNIZE FAMILY MEMBERS IN A CROWD.”

B&Bs catering to wildlife-lovers provide benches for sitting and spying; above, guests at The Inn at El Canelo spot a species. The abundant Green Jay (left), also called the Rio Grande Jay, may be the flashier bird, but many birders equally enjoy the solitary, nocturnal Pauraque (left, below), a nightjar most commonly heard, yes, at night.

book, “...the Discovery Channel would be hard-pressed to match it.”

John enlightened me about the process of identifying birds. “It’s more than markings and sounds,” he said. “It’s a combination of many things, including shape and movements, the ‘jizz’. That’s a British term meaning ‘the overall impression of a bird.’ The more you watch birds, the more you learn to differentiate, just like you recognize family members in a crowd.”

Casa Santa Ana guests return home with priceless birding tales—like

hearing the distinctive “pur-wheer” of the Pauraque and tracking its source in the Tamaulipan scrubthorn habitat that borders the manicured yard. Or, for Jim and Carolyn Garber of Dayton, Ohio, the serendipity of seeing a Slate-throated Redstart, thanks to Judy’s knock on their door to relay a “hot-off-the-press” rare-bird alert.

ALAMO INN

When Keith Hackland’s wife, Audrey Jones, wanted to move her medical practice back to her Valley roots, Keith agreed, with two stipulations: “I’m



Often seen in pairs, the elegant—and endangered—Aplomado Falcon (top) strikes an arresting pose atop yucca blossoms. Ten years ago, the first nesting pair of Aplomado Falcons in Texas in 43 years successfully raised a chick. Above, among wild morning glories, Charlie Vieh of Vieh's B&B enjoys a morning's glorious stroll.

always going to wear shorts, and I'm going to do what I like." Nowadays, you'll find Keith, who grew up in South Africa, decked out in Bermudas doing

what he likes, whether it's guiding canoe outings on the Rio Grande, composing nature columns for local newspapers, or playing amiable host at his intimate, historical hotel and adjacent "Birding Information Center" in the oldest building in Alamo. In the breakfast room, circled indentations in the Alamo Inn's floor speak of the soda-fountain stools that occupied the space when the building housed a drugstore. Antiques adorn the Inn's six themed suites, including a prized 135-year-old dresser made of walnut from Germany's Black Forest.

It was Keith who enabled Floridians Doug Wassmer and Lilian Saul to finally see that elusive Red-billed Pigeon on a predawn canoe trip near Falcon Dam. "We were able to observe eight pairs of adult birds, a lot of them performing courtship behaviors," recalls Doug.

Despite his guiding expertise, Keith says, "What most birders want is arm-chair guiding—maps, tips, hotspots."

I was skeptical when Keith guaranteed a gathering of 100 or so Green Parakeets near a busy thoroughfare in McAllen, but I followed his directions to a parking lot adjacent to Hastings bookstore. The birds arrived in clusters of 25 or so for their daily "Happy Hour on the High Lines," chattering excitedly and greeting each other like long-lost friends. By the time they began to scatter to roosting spots in neighborhood trees, they numbered more than 300!

So much for skepticism.

ON MY MAIDEN MOSQUITO-BATTLING birding quest, I "listed" (never mind the purists) 17 of the 50 or so specialty birds of the Lower Rio Grande Valley and sighted dozens of feathered "UFOs." Back home, I upgraded my binoculars

essentials RGV BIRDING B&Bs



The Inn at El Canelo, Box 487, Raymondville 78580; 956/689-5042; www.elcaneloranch.com; email: elcanel@grande.river.net. Rates: \$125 per person per night, all meals included.

Vieh's Bed & Breakfast, 18413 Landrum Park Rd. (FM 675), San Benito 78586; 956/425-4651; www.vieh.com; email: viehbba@aol.com. Rates: \$75-\$95, full breakfast included.

Casa Santa Ana, 3239 S. Tower Rd., Alamo 78516; 956/783-5540 or 821-4842; www.casasantana.com; email: jfmclung@msn.com. Rates: \$75-\$90, full breakfast included.

Alamo Inn, 801 Main St., Alamo 78516; 956/782-9912 or 866/782-9912; www.alamoinnsuites.com; email: alamoinn@aol.com. Call for special birder and senior rates; ample continental breakfast included (available anytime).

Find other Rio Grande Valley B&Bs that specialize in birding at www.rgv-bedandbreakfast.com, and general RGV information at www.valleychamber.com.

and bought a second copy of Tveten's guide for our getaway cabin. And, okay, I confess. I'm checking off all the species that come to our backyard feeders. Will I ever drive all night to glimpse a Yellow-faced Grassquit or some other Texas rarity? Probably not, but since my avian adventure in the Valley, I applaud all who do. So, when my friend Naomi, a retired school librarian, tells me she once hopped from a still-moving vehicle in pursuit of a Blue-footed Booby, I say, "You go, girl!" Like an old farmer once told Charlie Vieh: "We're all crazy about something. It might as well be birds." ★

MAXINE MAYES, formerly of Poteet, now watches birds from the backyard of her new home near Sisterdale.

Photographs by McAllen resident LARRY DITTO are included in the gorgeous new book *Texas Wildlife Portfolio* (KAC Productions/Farcountry Press).

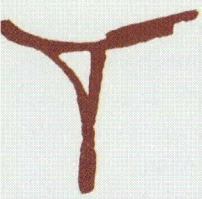


By Henry Chappell
Photographs by Kevin Stillman



Simply **X**traordinary
BAR RANCH





hough it's just past sunrise, I can distinguish oak-covered hills from sky only during lightning flashes. The thunder that shook the stone

southwestern edge of the Edwards Plateau. There'll be time for hiking.

From ranch roads, the hills can look gentle. Light-green mesquite merges with clumps of dark-green cedar and live oak. Take a closer look. Walk the pastures. Note the thorny, deep-rooted mesquite and cedar, the knotted oak, gnarled and bent by wind and drought. Delicate flowers and blooming prickly pear grow from the thinnest layer of soil over rock. Roots, resiliency, and adaptability mean survival here.

The Meador family set roots in the Schleicher County soil in 1903 when C.L. Meador, his wife, Mattie, and their four sons moved to Eldorado from Lampasas

were built in 1933 and are still here, serving the X Bar.

So are the Meadors. "My brother and I represent the fifth generation on this land, and my father and grandfather are still involved," says Stan Meador. "This is still a working ranch. We've never gotten away from our roots."

Stan Meador grew up working cattle with his grandfather Ed Meador, father, Lynn, and brother Chris. But the wider world beckoned. Stan earned a degree in public relations from Texas Tech University and spent several years in Europe on exchange programs. He met his future wife, Gloria, in Spain. "I really loved Europe. I had no plans to move back to Texas," he says.

But like many expatriates, he felt the pull of his native state. "Being overseas really changed the way I looked at the ranch," says Stan. "Friends from Holland would visit the X Bar, and coming from this tiny, densely populated country, they'd see these wide-open spaces, and it just blew them away."

Meanwhile, the Meadors had begun looking for ways to diversify their ranching operation. On visits home from Europe, Stan brought up the idea of opening the ranch to nature-tourism. "We'd discuss it, then the idea would just kind of die," he says. But in March 1996, the talk turned serious.

"After a visit to Texas, Gloria and I returned to Spain for a while, but this time the plan didn't die." Stan spent the next year traveling back and forth, studying successful nature-tourism operations in Europe and the United States. In April 1997, the couple moved back, and X Bar Ranch Nature Retreat soon welcomed its first guests.

walls of the Round House through the night has abated to low rumbles. The previous afternoon, as Stan Meador drove me around his family's ranch, the X Bar, we watched the thunderhead building in the northwest. By nightfall, thick tentacles of lightning blasted the hills, and I sat until bedtime watching the storm through the Round House's two-story window.

I had set the alarm clock and coffeemaker for 5 a.m., hoping to catch sunrise and



NATURE RETREAT

then hike the three-mile loop of the ranch's trail system. But I'm in no hurry to leave my chair and coffee cup. Likely, Schleicher County ranchers are enjoying the storm, too; this is thirsty country here along the

and pitched camp under a big mesquite tree near the center of town. Over the next several years, the family purchased the land that formed the nucleus of the 7,100-acre X Bar Ranch. Headquarters

The Meador family (facing page, top left) welcomes guests to X Bar Ranch, established by their ancestors a century ago (back row: Sue, Christy, Gloria, Stan, and Sofia; front row: Lynn, Andrea, and Ed). Ranch-goers can enjoy a range of activities, including wildlife-watching and mountain biking, or just kick back and absorb the view from the porch at Live Oak Lodge, pictured at left.



business as a working guest ranch, but Stan soon found that most visitors prefer to plan their own activities. "These days, we don't do a lot of hand-holding," he says. "Here's 7,100 acres. Now go have fun."

There's plenty to be had. Well-marked trails—interconnected loops of 1.5 miles, three miles, nine miles, and 12 miles—wend through nearly 2,000 acres of hills, draws, and bottomland, challenging hikers and mountain bikers of all levels. Coe Juracek, a serious mountain biker from Dallas, hits the X Bar trails with his friends several times a year. "The trails are a total blast, but they're tough," he says. "You'd better bring extra parts for your bike."

Six air-conditioned cabins and a

Late morning, despite the raucous warnings of a half-dozen scrub jays, I round a bend in the Green Trail and surprise four white-tailed does feeding among the scattered mesquites. After several seconds, the nearest deer jerks her head up to study this strange new addition to her landscape. She stamps a front hoof; her three companions join the stare-down. I raise a hand, and the does snort and bound away through the mesquite, white flags bobbing.

To the east, rough limestone hills rise beyond Granger Draw. Looking westward, I can see Live Oak Lodge and the X Bar cabins. Knee-high native grasses, wet from the previous night's thunderstorm, cover the floor of the draw, accented by bluebonnets, Indian blanket, yellow-blooming prickly pear, and scores of other wildflowers. This overcast spring morning smells verdant. As I begin to climb out of the bottom, two turkey hens sprint up the hill ahead of me, disappearing and reappearing in the scrub.

It's nearly impossible to hike the trails early or late in the day here without flushing deer and turkeys. "We'll sometimes see 50 to 80 turkeys in a morning," says Stan. The ranch boasts some 150 species of resident and migrating birds. Jackrabbits, cottontails, bobcats, gray and red foxes, porcupines, and javelinas also abound. Yes, and rattlesnakes.

The X Bar began its nature-tourism

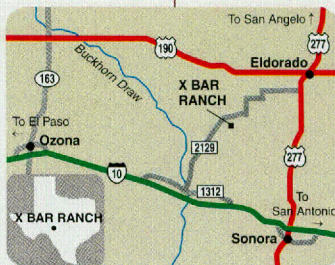


The X Bar's Round House (above) offers a good night's rest and arresting scenery. Guests can also stay in cabins at Live Oak Lodge (detail shown at top) or in the bunkhouse.

essentials X BAR RANCH NATURE RETREAT

bunkhouse offer a comfortable night's sleep after a day on the trails. Cabin guests have round-the-clock access to the 2,000-square-foot Live Oak Lodge, with its fully furnished kitchen, family area, satellite TV, and conference room. From the lodge's back porch, early risers can watch sunrise over Granger Draw, and, in spring, listen to amorous tom turkeys

X BAR RANCH NATURE RETREAT lies near the southwestern edge of the Hill Country in Schleicher County, about 21 miles southwest of Eldorado via FM 2129. *Reservations required.* Write to Box 696, Eldorado 76936; 888/853-2688; www.xbarranch.com.



CAMPING \$8/night per person, \$2.50/night ages 5-10.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS Cabins, Bunkroom, and Round House prices include a self-served continental-style breakfast. Meals for

groups and special events may be arranged through X Bar Ranch. Linens provided for beds; towels provided, except for large groups. Guests should bring their own towels for the pool. All facilities are nonsmoking. No pets allowed. Spring and fall are the best seasons for hiking and mountain biking. Midday summertime temperatures can be high; hikers and bikers should carry plenty of water.

AREA ATTRACTIONS

For information about area attractions, lodging, and restaurants, write to the **Eldorado Chamber of Commerce**, Box 1155, Eldorado 76936; 325/853-3109; www.eldoradotx.com.

LODGING

CABINS Rates vary according to season and length of stay. Single occupancy, \$55-\$65/night. Double occupancy, \$70-\$85/night. \$10-\$20/night for each additional guest age 6 and older.

ROUND HOUSE Rates vary according to season and length of stay. Single occupancy, \$90-\$100/night. Double occupancy, \$115-\$160/night. \$10-\$25/night for each additional guest age 6 and older.

BUNKROOM Single occupancy, \$20/night. Double occupancy, \$35/night. \$15/night for each additional guest age 6 and older.

built of native stone during the late 1960s, seems more a natural land feature than a modern guesthouse. The Meador family first gathered there to watch Neil Armstrong walk on the moon. These days, guests enjoy the stone and cedar architecture, fully furnished kitchen, spiral stairway leading to the upstairs bedrooms and living area, and dramatic eastward view.

Throughout the year, the X Bar reaches out to surrounding communities and outdoor enthusiasts

by hosting dinner shows with professional entertainment (storyteller and cowboy poet Biscuits O'Bryan performed last summer), wine-tasting events featuring local wineries, mountain-bike rallies and training clinics, conservation workshops, stargazing parties, and outdoor-photography workshops.

But amenities and scheduled events make up only a tiny fraction of the X Bar experience. Most visitors come for solitude, scenery, and the chance to view wildlife in native Hill Country habitat. "We love hiking and birding the trails, and just relaxing and grilling hamburgers at Live Oak Lodge," says Jim Garrison of Houston. He and his wife, June, discovered the X Bar in 2002 and visit often. "The view from behind the lodge is especially beautiful after there's been plenty of rain," he says.

"We pride ourselves on return guests," Stan Meador says. "One family will be coming back for its fifth family reunion. Meeting people is one of the best parts of my job. We've hosted people from Kenya, Taiwan, and all over western Europe. Gloria and I really enjoy the international component."

Hospitality—another of the X Bar's abundant natural resources. ★

HENRY CHAPPELL of Plano wrote our May 2002 story on Caprock Canyons State Park.

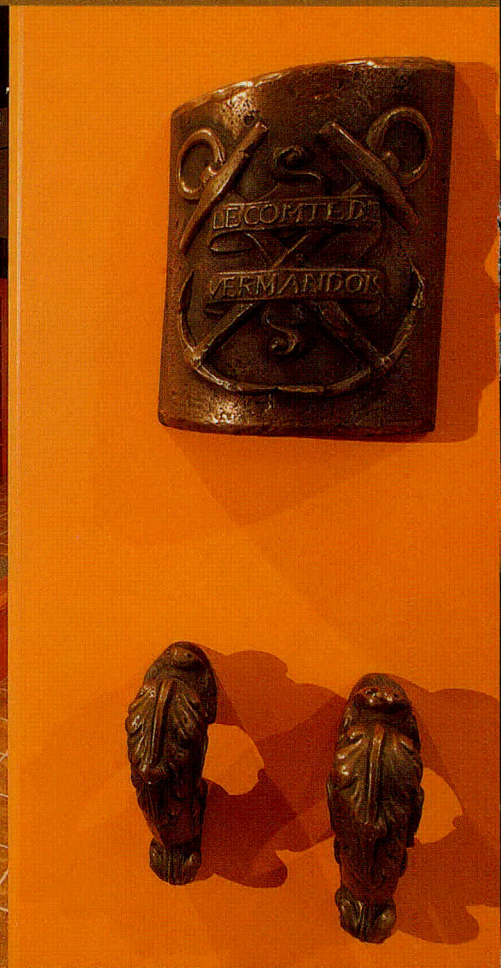
Staff photographer KEVIN STILLMAN enjoyed getting to know the Meador family. He highly recommends the Round House for a weekend getaway.



Like Craig Bolton of Dallas (top), you can take in the Big Dipper at one of the X Bar's occasional stargazing parties, or take a dip in the swimming pool, a converted windmill tank.

gobbling to hens. In hot weather, a 30,000-gallon swimming pool—a converted windmill tank—provides an escape from Texas heat. An adjacent campground offers both primitive camping and sites with RV hookups.

East of Live Oak Lodge, in the hills across Granger Draw, the Round House,



LA SALLE

Odyssey

BY GENE FOWLER • PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL AMADOR



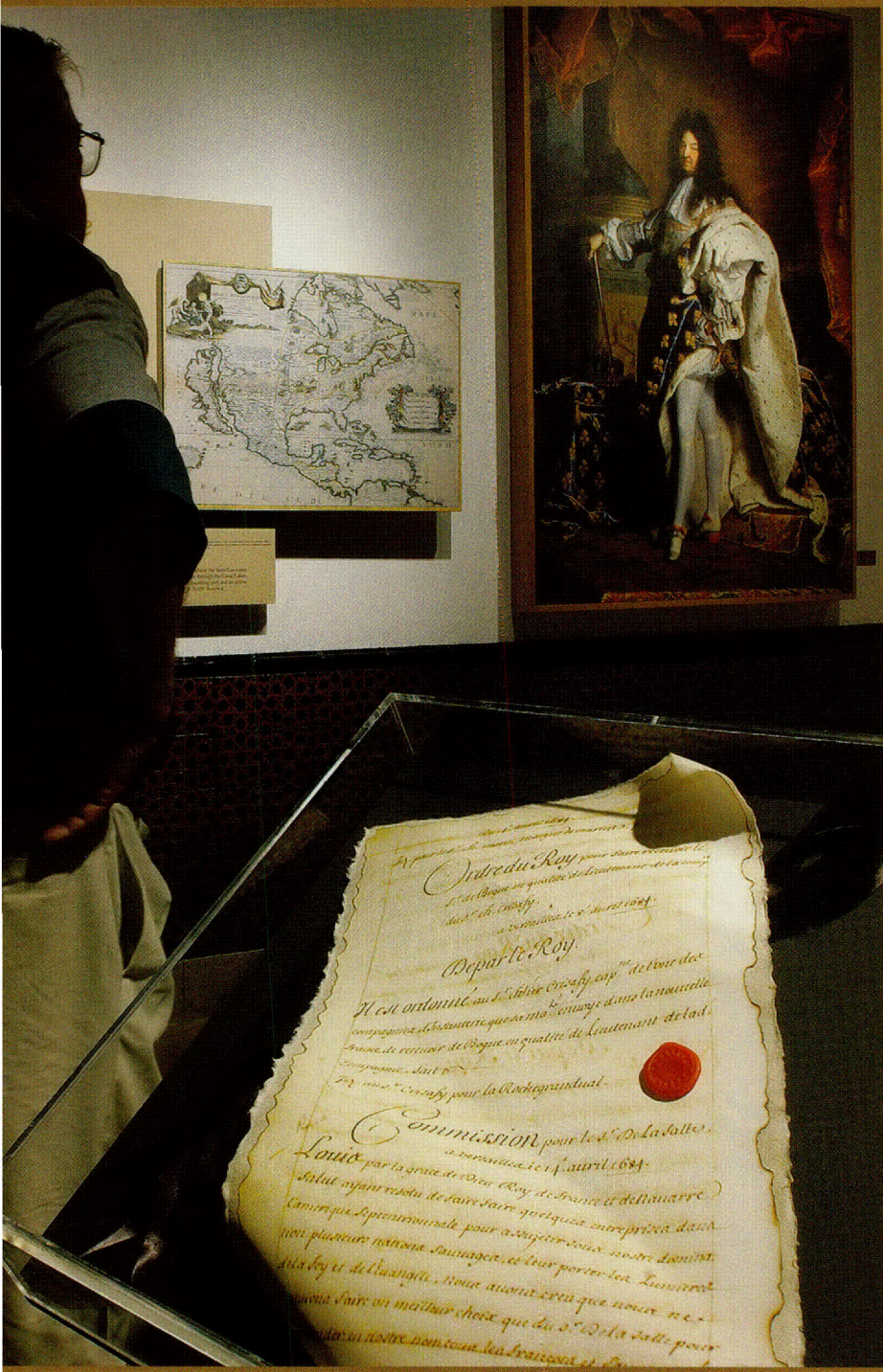
Vo français [I, Frenchman],” proclaimed one Jean Gery when a Spanish search party found him living with 600 Coahuiltecan Indians in the Anacacho Mountains (south-east of Brackettville) in May 1688.

With his face tattooed and primitively attired in the style of his adopted brethren, the Frenchman, though revered by the Indians, struck the Spaniards as a man gone mad.

Monsieur Gery had come to the New World with (and had deserted from) an expedition led by the fabled French explorer René Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, who landed some 200 colonists at Matagorda Bay in early 1685. Rumors of

France’s intrusion on New Spain’s unsettled frontier soon blazed through a grapevine of Caribbean pirates, European diplomats, and Native Americans (who spoke of men living in “houses on the water”). By April 1689, when the “demented” Jean Gery led an expedition commanded by Coahuila Governor Alonso de León to the ruins of La Salle’s ragged outpost, Fort St. Louis, most

OF FRENCH SETTLEMENT



Proficient in many Indian dialects, La Salle discovered the Ohio River, explored the Great Lakes, and—in 1682—became the first European to descend the Mississippi River from Illinois to the Gulf of Mexico.



The *La Salle Odyssey*, a “cultural-heritage trail” that runs from Corpus Christi to Bay City—with stops in Rockport, Port Lavaca, Palacios, Victoria, and Edna—features an intriguing array of artifacts from the 1999-2002 excavation of Fort St. Louis in Victoria County and from the THC’s 1996 excavation of *La Belle*, a La Salle expedition ship that sank in Matagorda Bay in 1686. The fort dig solidified the location, long debated by historians, of the first European settlement in present-day Texas, but in the shipwreck recovery, the archeologists made history themselves.

As Jim Bruseth, the THC’s La Salle Project director, notes in his new book, *From A Watery Grave* (coauthored with Toni S. Turner), the remains of *La Belle* were found in 12 feet of murky bay water. To recover whatever it still possessed—an ornate bronze cannon with a dolphin-shaped handle had been retrieved in 1995—the THC constructed an octagonal, steel-walled cofferdam around the wreck and pumped out the water within the dam (see “Bringing up *La Belle*,” November 1997). The expensive and somewhat experimental technique “parted the sea” and allowed the archeologists to work on “dry land.”

What they found amazed them. “Sediment had seeped in through cracks in the bow and covered the contents of the hull,” explains Toni Carrell, assistant director of the excavation of *La Belle*. The muddy sand created an anaerobic

The Museum of the Coastal Bend in Victoria (facing page) presents the story of Fort St. Louis, which La Salle established in 1685. The museum displays seven of the eight cannons that fortified the colony; the eighth cannon is at the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum in Austin. Above, the Corpus Christi Museum of Science and History displays a painting of Louis XIV overlooking a copy of the King’s order that authorized La Salle to lay claim to much of western North America.

of the French colonists had perished. Seeking the intruders by land and sea, the Spaniards made 11 rigorous *entradas*. Today, travelers trekking the coast will discover much more readily the poignant saga of the star-crossed French colony. A unique collaboration between the Texas Historical Commission (THC) and seven South Texas museums makes the story come alive.

environment that protected from destructive microorganisms not only about 40 percent of the hull itself but also most of the supplies for a New World settlement. Archeologists recovered everything from armaments to trade goods, domestic articles, sailing gear, tools, and medical materials. In other words, a 17th-Century-colony kit.

Sharing the bounty of archeological relics from the two excavations, each *Odyssey* exhibit in the seven museums tells a different part of the story. And such a story will forever be told...

LA SALLE, whose name is inscribed on maps and markers from South Texas to Canada, first journeyed to the New World in 1666 at age 23. Having forfeited a large inheritance to study for the Jesuit priesthood, a pursuit with which he soon grew restless, he prospered as a fur trader in New France. Proficient in many Indian dialects, he discovered the Ohio River, explored the Great Lakes, and—in 1682—became the first European to descend the Mississippi River from Illinois to the Gulf of Mexico. That spring, La Salle stood near the mighty river’s mouth and claimed possession of a third of the continent “in the name of the most high, powerful, invincible, and victorious Prince, Louis the Great, by the grace of God, King of France and Navarre....”

The explorer then returned to France, where Louis XIV approved La Salle’s



Red Barker of Aransas Pass (above) studies the Native American exhibits at the Corpus Christi Museum of Science and History. Texas Maritime Museum education director Scott Enter (facing page) contemplates a detailed, 1:12 scale model of *La Belle*.

plan to establish a French presence at the mouth of the Mississippi. “The colony would have challenged Spanish domination of the Gulf,” explains George Anne Cormier, director of the Calhoun County Museum in Port Lavaca. “Our interpretive exhibits focus on the struggle between France and Spain for control of the land that became Texas.”

Documents recently uncovered in French archives confirm that the colony was also to serve as a base for attacking the Spanish silver mines south of the Rio Grande.

At the Port Lavaca museum and several others along the *Odyssey* trail, interactive video kiosks supplement the tales told by the personal items, weapons, and other artifacts.

The Corpus Christi Museum of Science and History is using a

A fire pot recovered from *La Belle* worked much like a Molotov cocktail. The container would be filled with a flammable liquid, and sometimes a grenade, covered with a lid through which a fuse passed, then hurled at the enemy.

new addition to house its *La Salle Odyssey* exhibits. A domed centerpiece gallery accommodates a large, elaborately carved wooden ceiling that dates to the 1530s. Spanish tile adorns the floor. “The ceiling came from a palace in the Castile area of Spain,” says museum director Rick Stryker.

Exhibits in the new galleries reveal La Salle’s preparations for the journey to the New World. Toni Carrell, an archeologist with Ships of Discovery, an underwater archeology research institute, traveled to France to study the matter further. “Walking through the Musée national de la Marine in Paris, I almost got whiplash when I spotted four large paintings by Claude-Joseph Vernet,” says Toni. The 18th-Century artworks—full-size, digital copies of which now hang in the Corpus Christi museum—depict a royal gun foundry, a shipyard, and the ports of Rochefort, Toulon, and Rochelle. “So much information was embedded in the paintings and the little vignettes they contain,” adds Toni. “I saw glassware, barrels, weaponry, and other artifacts that looked





Some colonists died from eating prickly pear fruit without removing the tiny needles. Karankawa Indians killed many of the French pioneers. The arrogant, madly-driven La Salle forced others to work so exhaustively that they dropped dead in the wilderness.



La Belle will eventually dock in the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum in Austin.

The *Odyssey* exhibit at the Texas Maritime Museum in Rockport features a stunning 1:12 scale model of *La Belle*, crafted of pear wood by professional ship modeler Glenn Grieco at Texas A&M University. Exhibits also examine 17th-Century navigation and life aboard *La Belle*. Artifacts on display include a pair of brass navigation dividers, used to measure distances on maps, and a nocturnal, a wooden timekeeping device used at night—in addition to such personal items as a leather shoe, a clay pipe bowl, wood gaming pieces, and buckles from a belt and a shoe.

Despite cramped quarters (many had to sleep on deck), a poor diet (before provisions were replenished in the Caribbean), and undependable water supplies, only two persons died on the 58-day passage from France to Haiti. “The ship’s officers,” wrote expedition diarist Henri Joutel, “said that it had been a long time since they had had such a fortuitous crossing....”

Alas, such good fortune was not to last.

Though three of the four French ships went to the New World armed to the teeth—they carried some 26,000 pounds of gunpowder—the unarmed *Saint-François* was captured by Spanish priva-

like those we recovered from *La Belle*.”

La Salle’s expedition to colonize the Gulf of Mexico sailed from the twin towers of Rochefort on August 1, 1684, in four ships: *l’Aimable*, a 10-gun merchant vessel; the *Saint-François*, an unarmed ketch; *Le Joly*, a 34-gun warship; and the six-gun light frigate *La Belle*.

The Corpus Christi museum chronicles the construction of the small (approximately 54 feet x 15 feet), elegant *La Belle*, which was built partly with timbers sal-

vaged from older ships. The original plan was to stow *La Belle* in pieces on *l’Aimable* and assemble it in the New World to explore shallower waters. A need for more storage space led to the ship’s construction in France and its ocean crossing with the other three vessels.

Archeologists, working in the Matagorda Bay cofferdam, disassembled *La Belle*’s timbers and transported them to Texas A&M University, where the water-logged wood is undergoing stabilization.

teers near Santo Domingo. And when the three remaining vessels sailed for the mouth of the Mississippi River, they wound up on the coast of present-day Texas. An accurate method of determining longitude had not yet been invented, and hypothetical New World maps showed the Mississippi entering the Gulf of Mexico on the Texas coast. (Later, realizing his error, La Salle led overland marches in search of the big river, perhaps ranging as far west as Presidio/Ojinaga.)

After La Salle had established a temporary camp on Matagorda Island, *l'Aimable* broke up and sank trying to enter Matagorda Bay through Pass Cavallo, and *Le Joly* returned to France with more than 100 men. When *La Belle* and its supplies were lost in a storm early in 1686, the sad fate of the dwindling colony was sealed.

Karankawa Indians killed many of the French pioneers. Some colonists died from eating prickly pear fruit without removing the tiny needles. A rattlesnake bite claimed the life of La Salle's financial recordkeeper, *Sieur Le Gros*, whose pewter plates can be seen in the Corpus Christi museum. The arrogant, madly-driven La Salle forced others to work so exhaustively that they dropped dead in the wilderness. An alligator consumed one subject of Louis XIV, the Sun King.

Though La Salle traveled with his trusted Shawnee guide, Nika, and had interacted successfully with many indigenous peoples, he could not keep peace with the Karankawa. "But it wasn't because they were cannibals. Nor were

© KYLE R. WOOD



Archaeologists Robin Pry and Mike Fulghum mark and map a dig at the Fort St. Louis site above Garcitas Creek, between Edna and Port Lavaca.

the men all seven feet tall. Those are both myths," says Corpus Christi Museum of Science and History archeologist Bob Drolet. After the Karankawa salvaged blankets and other goods from the wreck of *l'Aimable*, the Frenchmen angered the Indians by commandeering some dugout canoes, much like the one visitors see in the Corpus Christi museum's Cultural Encounters Gallery.

IN EDNA, the Texana Museum also explores Karankawa culture and interaction with the French, displaying items that the colonists traded with a number of Texas Indian tribes. These goods, found in great quantities on *La Belle*, include Jesuit rings, iron axe heads, hawk bells (for falconry), brass pins, and some of the ship's more than 700,000 glass beads. Buffalo and deer bones, carved by the Karankawa as implements, illustrate the coastal people's lifeways, along with basketry, ceramics, and perforated oyster and conch shells that the Indians used as weights for fishing nets. A re-created shel-

ter, its bamboo frame covered with deer skins, shows how the Karankawa weathered the wilderness.

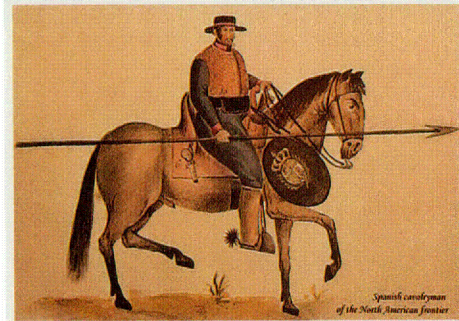
In Victoria, the Museum of the Coastal Bend illustrates life at Fort St. Louis—which stood on a bluff above Garcitas Creek (just north of Lavaca Bay)—and the dig that uncovered it. Seven iron cannons in the center of the museum's large gallery lie in approximately the same alignment they were in when archeologists unearthed them in 2000 (an eighth is currently on display at the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum in Austin). Alonso de León buried the cannons after finding the meager colony ransacked and its inhabitants slaughtered by Karankawas. (The Spaniards buried the remains of three colonists, assuming other bodies had been thrown in the creek. Later, they reclaimed several French children who had been saved by Karankawa women.)

An interactive diorama in the Victoria museum details the Spaniards' 1721 construction of Presidio La Bahía on top of the ruins of Fort St. Louis (the presidio and nearby mission later moved to Victoria



Nails and spikes from the *La Belle* excavation were preserved in the sediment at the bottom of Matagorda Bay.

*The mortal remains of
the famed explorer were left
to the mercy of the wilderness,
but you can visit the grave of
a La Belle voyager at the Texas
State Cemetery in Austin.*



by scratching the ground with his boots. Two decades later, analyzing artifacts from the 1950 dig, archeologist Kathleen Gilmore sent a sherd of green-glazed pottery, with which she was unfamiliar, to Quebec for study. Experts in French colonial ceramics determined that the sample was from the Saintonge region

of France's southwest coast.

Some maps of the 1930s showed "La Salle's Fort" in its correct spot, but not until a ranch hand using a metal detector found the eight iron cannons in 1996 was the site of the first European colony in Texas established without doubt.

FOR YEARS, Matagorda Bay area traditions had also noted the general location of the long-lost *La Belle* before then-State Marine Archeologist Barto Arnold made the definitive discovery of the wreck in 1995. Spanish seamen had mapped the site of the *navío quebrado* (broken ship) in 1687 after finding it (still partly above water) while searching for the French colony.

Odyssey exhibits in the Matagorda County Museum in Bay City chronicle the THC's recovery of the shipwreck in 1996. A large, fiberglass diorama portrays the central portion of *La Belle* after months of excavation. Visible features include the base of the main mast, the bilge pump tube, the hull, and a bulkhead. "It looks so real that schoolkids and even some adults have asked us how we keep the mud wet," says the museum's assistant director, Barbara Smith.

A sword hilt, a swivel gun, trade goods, and dining utensils also represent the bounty of *La Belle*. The "fire pot" on display delivered an explosion and a splatter of burning pine-tar pitch when thrown onto an enemy ship. One of the three

bronze cannons recovered from *La Belle*, bearing the royal crest of Louis XIV, graces the Bay City museum. The crossed anchors and banner refer to the king's illegitimate young son, the Count of Vermandois, Admiral of the French Navy. "The THC is sending some of the rope—like that we have on exhibit—to France, because they have no examples of 17th-Century French-made rope," adds Barbara.

In Palacios, which served as headquarters for the archeologists during *La Belle's* excavation, the Palacios Area Historical Association offers a smaller exhibit on the project in the association's temporary quarters. Currently under restoration, the association's usual museum space is set to reopen with an enlarged *Odyssey* installation in 2006. Meanwhile, every July 4, history enthusiasts in the area reenact La Salle's 1685 landing at Matagorda Bay. "If you'd like to be a French colonist or a Karankawa," says chairwoman Colleen Claybourn, "come on down."

Palacios is also home port to *La Petite Belle*, scheduled to be completed sometime this year. The half-size, seaworthy replica of *La Belle* will sail the coast telling *Odyssey* tales.

Themes overlap somewhat on the *Odyssey* trail, and you can savor this saga even if you visit only one or two museums. Trekking the entire trail, of course, provides the most complete experience. And more sites beckon. At old Indianola, a statue of La Salle has gazed out to sea since 1936. In Navasota, a 1930 bronze of the explorer memorializes the tragic end of his New World journey.

At top, Chanta Proutt of Bay City examines one of *La Belle's* ornate bronze cannons at the Matagorda County Museum. The cannon is topped with two lifting handles resembling leaping dolphins and a pair of crossed anchors with a scroll of the Count of Vermandois, Admiral of the French fleet (see closeup on page 50, upper right). Above, Spanish soldiers found the remnants of La Salle's doomed colony in 1689.

and then to Goliad). Artifacts from the Fort St. Louis site include French, Spanish, and Karankawa potsherds, armaments, trade goods, and personal items. Historians believe the crucible on display, which was used for smelting precious ores, offers evidence of the French plan to attack Spanish silver mines.

"Our exhibits also cover earlier investigations of Fort St. Louis, starting with Herbert Eugene Bolton's 1914 visit to the site, which was identified on a previously unknown Spanish map," says museum director Annette Musgrave. In 1950, Glen Evans directed an excavation sponsored by the Texas Memorial Museum of Austin. Glen noted that artifacts often turned up at the fort site simply

essentials LA SALLE ODYSSEY TRAIL

MUSEUMS

Corpus Christi Museum of Science and History, 1900 N. Chaparral St., Corpus Christi 78401; 361/826-4650; www.ccmuseum.com.

Texas Maritime Museum, 1202 Navigation Cir., Rockport 78382; 361/729-1271; www.texasmaritimemuseum.org.

Calhoun County Museum, 301 S. Ann, Port Lavaca 77979; 361/553-4689; www.calhouncountymuseum.org.

Palacios Area Historical Assn. Museum, 401 Commerce St., Palacios 77465; 361/972-1148 or 972-2270.

La Petite Belle Home Port, 458 Commerce St., Palacios 77465; 361/972-3960.

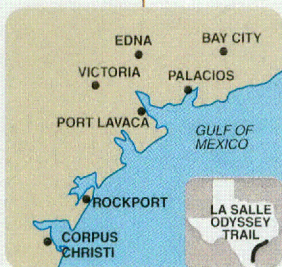
Museum of the Coastal Bend, Victoria College, 2200 E. Red River, Victoria 77901; 361/582-2511; www.museumofthecoastalbend.org.

Texana Museum, 403 N. Wells, Edna 77957; 361/782-5431.

Matagorda County Museum, 2100 Ave. F, Bay City 77414; 979/245-7502; www.matagordacountymuseum.org.

BOOKS

Several books can enrich your *Odyssey* experience. *From A Watery Grave* by James E. Bruseth and Toni S. Turner (Texas A&M Univ. Press, 2005) covers the *La Belle* excavation, with fascinating details about the ship, its cargo, the colonists,



and new La Salle research inspired by the dig. *Wilderness Manhunt* by Robert S. Weddle (Texas A&M Univ. Press, paperback reprint, 1999) tracks the Spanish search for the French colony, and *The Wreck of the Belle*, *the Ruin of La Salle* by Robert

S. Weddle (Texas A&M Univ. Press, 2001) spans the explorer's life and career, with special emphasis on his final voyage. *The La Salle Expedition to Texas*, subtitled *The Journal of Henri Joutel, 1684-1687*, edited by William C. Foster (Texas State Historical Assn., 1998) presents a new translation by Johanna S. Warren of this La Salle classic. *Texas & Northeastern Mexico, 1630-1690* by Juan Bautista Chapa, edited with an introduction by William C. Foster, translated by Ned F. Brierly (Univ. of Texas Press, 1997), provides an eyewitness account of the overland search for La Salle's New World settlement. *Raising La Belle* by Mark G. Mitchell (Eakin Press, 2001) tells the story for younger readers.

VIDEO & AUDIO

Some museum shops along the *Odyssey* trail offer video copies of the documentary *Voyage of Doom*, directed by Alan Govenar in Dallas and broadcast in 1999 on the PBS series *Nova*; see www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/lasalle. Several museums offer a *La Salle Odyssey Listen-and-Drive Tour Audio CD*, or order from Seth Davidson, Wildsteps.com, Box 481, Miami, Texas 79059.

On March 20, 1687, La Salle was leading a party of 17 colonists to French settlements in Illinois, to summon help for the 23 colonists left behind at the Garcitas Creek outpost, when he was assassinated by one of his own men, perhaps in present-day Grimes County. Five of the marchers, including Henri Joutel, made it back to Canada and then to France.

The mortal remains of the famed explorer were left to the mercy of the wilderness, but you can visit the grave of a *La Belle* voyager at the Texas State Cemetery in Austin. Archeologists found the skeleton of one C. Barange curled in a coil of rope, deep in the ship's hold. Identified by personal effects found around him, Monsieur Barange was interred in the historic graveyard in early 2004.

All along the *Odyssey* trail, informed and enthusiastic folks will help you understand the La Salle expedition's long-range effects on North American history. Fearing another French intrusion, Spain established missions and presidios in East Texas, Goliad, and San Antonio, and eventually allowed Americans to colonize the region. As Texas Maritime Museum CEO Kathy Roberts-Douglass puts it, echoing the words of many, "If La Salle's colony had succeeded, Texans today might be speaking *en français*." ★

Austin writer GENE FOWLER wrote about the excavation of *La Belle* in the November 1997 issue of *Texas Highways*.

Staff photographer MICHAEL AMADOR learned more about La Salle with every stop on the *Odyssey* trail.

TEXAS HIGHWAYS

READER SERVICE GUIDE TO ADVERTISERS

(Reader service numbers are in red.)

1. Amarillo, pg. 61
2. Bandera, Texas, pg. 59
3. Brenham-Washington County CVB, pg. 5
4. Choice Hotels, pg. 13
5. Corpus Christi Convention & Visitors Bureau, pg. 11
6. George Ranch Historical Park, pg. 5
7. Georgetown Convention & Visitors Bureau, pg. 60
8. Goliad Chamber of Commerce, pg. 5
9. Gonzales Chamber of Commerce, pg. 5
10. Graham Convention & Visitors Bureau, pg. 6
11. Grapevine Convention & Visitors Bureau, pg. 12
12. Harlingen Chamber Convention & Visitors Bureau, pg. 61
13. Greater Houston Convention & Visitors Bureau, inside front cover
14. Kerrville Convention & Visitors Bureau, pg. 6
15. Laredo Convention & Visitors Bureau, pg. 14
16. Mardi Gras of Southeast Texas, pg. 58
17. Moody Gardens, pg. 10
18. Mt. Pleasant Chamber of Commerce, pg. 9
19. Mt. Vernon Economic Development, pg. 9
20. City of Pittsburg, pg. 9
21. Sealy Chamber of Commerce, pg. 5
22. Seguin Convention & Visitors Bureau, pg. 5
23. South Padre Island Convention & Visitors Bureau, pg. 3
24. Texas Hill Country River Region, pg. 8
25. Texas Historical Commission, pg. 4
26. Texas Independence Trail Region, pg. 5
27. W.H. Stark House, pg. 15

**FREE
INFORMATION**

IT'S EASY to request more information from the advertisers in this issue.

Simply locate the red reader service number to the left of the advertiser's name, and circle the corresponding number on the card at right—you can request information from as many advertisers as you wish.

REMEMBER to provide your name and address, and mail the postage-paid card today. Or, log on to www.texashighways.com and request more information online. For even faster service, fax your card to 1-888-847-6035

PRODUCT ORDERS!

Order from our line of Texas-themed products. We offer unique, well-made products that reflect the Lone Star State... and your good taste.

To order by phone, call **1-800-839-4997**

(850-683-1394 from outside the U.S.)

Mon-Fri 7am-10pm Central
Sat 8:30am-5pm Central
Visa • MasterCard • Discover • American Express

Or visit

www.texashighways.com

THE TRAVEL MAGAZINE OF TEXAS
TEXAS
H I G H W A Y S
www.texashighways.com

Please circle the numbers below that match the red numbers on the Advertiser Guide to the left.

1	7	13	19	25	31	37	43	49	55	61
2	8	14	20	26	32	38	44	50	56	62
3	9	15	21	27	33	39	45	51	57	63
4	10	16	22	28	34	40	46	52	58	64
5	11	17	23	29	35	41	47	53	59	65
6	12	18	24	30	36	42	48	54	60	66

Please print
Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Card expires 8/1/05

**FREE
ADVERTISING
INFORMATION**

050201

THE TRAVEL MAGAZINE OF TEXAS
TEXAS
H I G H W A Y S
www.texashighways.com

Please circle the numbers below that match the red numbers on the Advertiser Guide to the left.

1	7	13	19	25	31	37	43	49	55	61
2	8	14	20	26	32	38	44	50	56	62
3	9	15	21	27	33	39	45	51	57	63
4	10	16	22	28	34	40	46	52	58	64
5	11	17	23	29	35	41	47	53	59	65
6	12	18	24	30	36	42	48	54	60	66

Please print
Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Card expires 8/1/05

**FREE
ADVERTISING
INFORMATION**

050201

THE TRAVEL MAGAZINE OF TEXAS
TEXAS
H I G H W A Y S

Product Order Form

COMPLETE THIS BOX FOR YOUR ORDER

Name _____
Street Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Daytime Phone Number (_____) _____
(In case we have any questions regarding your order.)

Check or money order enclosed (payable to Texas Highways)
Charge my: Visa MasterCard
 Discover American Express
Card number _____
Expiration date _____
Signature _____

Item #	Size	Description	Qty.	Price	\$ Total
Product Total					
Shipping & Handling (See ad for chart)					
SUBTOTAL					
Add 8.25% Sales Tax for deliveries to Texas (products + S&H).					
TOTAL					

Product order must include payment.

Credit card orders are also accepted by phone.

By state law, shipping and handling charges are taxable

4B5P



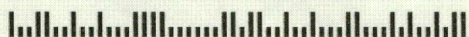
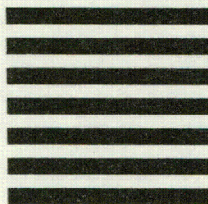
NO POSTAGE
NECESSARY
IF MAILED
IN THE
UNITED STATES

BUSINESS REPLY MAIL

FIRST-CLASS MAIL PERMIT NO. 418 NAPLES FL

POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY ADDRESSEE

TEXAS HIGHWAYS MAGAZINE
PO BOX 413050
NAPLES FL 34101-6832



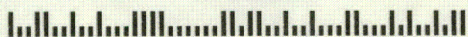
NO POSTAGE
NECESSARY
IF MAILED
IN THE
UNITED STATES

BUSINESS REPLY MAIL

FIRST-CLASS MAIL PERMIT NO. 418 NAPLES FL

POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY ADDRESSEE

TEXAS HIGHWAYS MAGAZINE
PO BOX 413050
NAPLES FL 34101-6832



It's as easy as 1-2-3 to order products by mail:

- 1. Fill out the order form on the reverse side.**
- 2. Remember to include your payment.**
- 3. Enclose in an envelope and mail to:**

**Texas Highways
PO Box 51564
Boulder, CO 80322-1564**

**FREE ADVERTISER
INFORMATION**

**PRODUCT
ORDERS!**

CELEBRATE TEXAS

Texas Highways products are always in season.

Hurry! Limited Quantities

 **2005 Calendar**

Size: 13 1/2" x 10 3/4"

Opens to: 13 1/2" x 21 1/2"

#33141\$11.95



Country Bluebonnet Apron

24" x 33", 50% cotton/50% polyester
Adjustable length

#38101\$18.95



Texas Beauties Coffee Mug

Hand-painted stoneware
Made in Texas
Microwave and dishwasher safe
Holds 13 ounces

#37112\$12.95 each



TEXAS IS A STATE OF MIND T-Shirt

100% heavyweight, preshrunk cotton
Dusky blue embossed in red and white
Machine-wash inside out

Sizes: S, M, L, XL, XXL

#38115\$17.95



Vintage Texas Coffee Mug

Ceramic
Microwave and dishwasher safe
Holds 15 ounces

#37118\$9.95 each



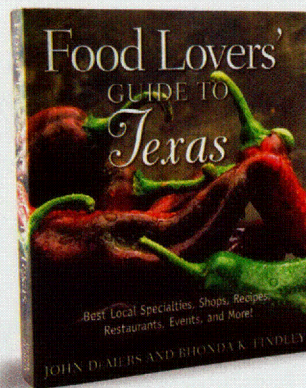
Food Lover's Guide to Texas

Local specialties, shops, recipes, restaurants, and more!

2003, 249 pages
5 3/4" x 6 3/4"

Black and white, paperback

#36131\$14.95



Texas Highways Slip Case

Color: Hunter Green

#34105\$10.95 each

THE TRAVEL MAGAZINE OF TEXAS
TEXAS
H I G H W A Y S



A Texas Highways exclusive item

U.S. SHIPPING & HANDLING

Up to \$15.00	.....\$5.50	\$110.01 to \$135.00	.....\$14.25
\$15.01 to \$25.00	.....\$6.50	\$135.01 to \$160.00	.....\$16.75
\$25.01 to \$50.00	.....\$8.50	\$160.01 to \$200.00	.....\$18.00
\$50.01 to \$80.00	.....\$10.50	\$200.01 and over	.....\$20.00
\$80.01 to \$110.00	.....\$12.25		

Shipping prices are per each address. Please allow up to 2 weeks for regular U.S. delivery. Add \$10.00 for Express Handling (delivery within 3 business days after receipt of your order). Express Handling is not available for P.O. Boxes or outside the continental U.S.

For orders delivered outside the U.S., please add \$12.00 to the U.S. S&H prices. International shipping times vary.

SALES TAX

Sales tax is required by state law for merchandise, shipping, and handling. Please add 8.25% sales tax to your final total for all orders shipped to Texas addresses.

To order, call **1-800-839-4997**

(850-683-1394 from outside the U.S.)

Or visit **www.texashighways.com**

You may also visit the Texas Highways Gift Shop at 150 E. Riverside, Austin

To order by mail, please send payment to

Texas Highways, PO Box 51564 Boulder, CO 80322-1564

Visa, MasterCard, American Express, and Discover accepted

5B51

“WORLD’S LARGEST DOG MUSEUM”

The Bow-Wow Factor

BY HELEN BRYANT

BULLY the brindle bulldog stares balefully out from his glass case. He is man’s best friend—or was, back in the 1800s. After Bully died, his owner had him stuffed. That’s what man customarily did with his best friend in Victorian times. Today, Bully stands stiffly alongside a dog-shaped humidifier and some glass Chinese Foo dogs in the “World’s Largest Dog Museum,” a conglomeration of nearly 8,000 canine collectibles in Elm Mott, just north of Waco.

It’s an unassuming little museum, tucked inside the Antiquibles Antique Mall, on the east side of Interstate 35 at Exit 345. But aficionados of dog collectibles manage to find it.

“We’ve had visitors from all over the world,” says Barbara Hays, who owns the dog museum and Antiquibles with her husband, David. They’ve been collecting dogs for nearly 40 years. In addition to the ones on display, the Hayses have thousands more at home and in the antique mall’s office.

The museum has a celebrity connection: About half the dogs on display come from a collection amassed by director Ron Howard’s aunt, Julia Hall. When Julia died, her will bequeathed all the dogs to her housekeeper, who kept them

in 60 boxes tucked inside her garage in Oklahoma for 10 years until she decided to sell them. Her ad in



The cast of the television show *Happy Days* donated this autographed pooch to the collection.

a trade magazine reached the Hayses, who roared up to Oklahoma to buy them.

“It took us two months to open all the boxes,” Barbara says. “We’d do one a day, they were so much fun. At the bottom of each box were the best dogs.”

The collection includes, of course, an autograph hound signed by the cast of Howard’s



The thousands of canine collectibles at Elm Mott’s Antiquibles Dog Museum range from the sublime to the ridiculous.

sitcom *Happy Days*. There’s also the full-body dog cast from the movie *There’s Something About Mary*.

But most of the dogs at the museum are true collectibles, each valuable as a work of art or a rare kitsch item.

There’s an automaton dog from the 1800s. Wind it up, and its mouth and eyes move.

An ancient Egyptian Anubis (a jackal, the god of the underworld) stands in a display case near a saddle marked “1930s dog saddle.”

Dog saddle?

“In the 1930s, and even earlier, they used to have greyhound races with monkeys on the dogs’ backs,” Barbara explains. “The monkeys sat in the saddle. They had on little jockey uniforms and everything.”

This museum proves there’s virtually nothing that can’t be crafted in the shape of a dog. A chocolate mold, hitching post, space heater, glove stretcher, bookcase, planter, coat rack, inkwell, nutcracker, boot scraper—the museum has canine versions of them all.

There are dogs made from wood, porcelain, glass, soap, shells, and bones. A 1930s papier-mâché figure of the RCA

Mardi Gras Southeast Texas, Inc.

13th Annual Event
February 3-6, 2005
Downtown, Port Arthur, TX

6 Parades • Carnival Rides • Arts & Crafts • Food Vendors
Street Entertainment • 10 Concerts • Petting Zoo
Pony Rides • Fireworks • KidZone



Texas Music
Honky Tonk Jones
Reckless Kelly
Roger Creager
Charlie Robison

Zydeco
Billy Poullard &
Zydeco Combo
Step Rideau

Rock-N-Roll
No Way Out
3 Legged Dawg
Mid Life Crisis
Jive Train

(409) 721-8717 • www.portarthur.com/mardigras

Tucked inside the Antiquibles Antique Mall in Elm Mott, this museum proves there's virtually nothing that can't be crafted in the shape of a dog. There are dogs made from wood, porcelain, glass, soap, shells, and bones.



Here's a museum that has completely gone to the dogs.

Victor dog sits with ear cocked to hear "His Master's Voice." A Buster Brown sculpture is accompanied by his dog, Tige. There's a tiny dog suspended in a marble. A 1940s dog head has clocks for eyes (one tells hours, the other minutes). A spice rack holds a row of Boston terrier spice jars.

A rifle has a dog head carved on its stock. A curling iron is housed in a bulldog's mouth. A Scottie perched on the side of an ashtray has a most novel way of extinguishing cigarettes.

One display case contains oodles of poodles—thousands of them, some standing, some sitting, some on the phone—as well as some excruciatingly long ceramic dachshunds. And countless salt-and-pepper shakers of myriad breeds.

For all its pooch proliferation, is this truly the world's largest dog museum? In terms of square footage, the largest is the American Kennel Club Museum of the Dog in St. Louis, which comprises 14,000 square feet. But its collection is confined mostly to 500 works of art—paintings, sculptures, and such—no stuffed



Barbara Hays, who has been collecting dogs for nearly 40 years with her husband, David, holds a moving bulldog from the 1880s.

bulldogs, humidors, space heaters, or automatons. Elm Mott's museum has the edge in sheer numbers and eclecticism.

Some of these collectible doggies are so adorable you'll want to take them home, but you can't. They're not for sale. The Antiquibles Mall has some that are, however. You can't go wrong with a kitschy canine knickknack.

THE ANTIQUIBLES DOG MUSEUM is inside the Antiquibles Antique Mall, on the Interstate 35 access road at Exit 345 in Elm Mott, just north of Waco. Hours: Daily 10-6. Admission: Free. Call 254/829-1921; www.antiquibles.com.



If you're hungry after your visit, rest assured there's good food in the area. Hop 2 miles south down the road to I-35's Exit 343, where **Heitmiller's Family Steakhouse** (254/829-2651) serves up juicy, affordable steaks and burgers Mon-Sat 11-10. Or drive 8 miles north to Exit 353, and grab some kolaches or a sandwich at the **Czech Stop** (254/826-4161) in West. It's open daily, 24 hours.

HELEN BRYANT is a dog-lover but travels too much to have one. She enjoys her granddogs, Zeus the Rottweiler, Gretchen the miniature schnauzer, and Duke the Chihuahua.

BANDERA, TEXAS
COWBOY CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

Saddle up and ride to the beautiful Texas Hill Country
Where The Fun Never Sets.

www.BanderaCowboyCapital.com 1-800-364-3833

FUN FORECAST March

31-APR 2
GRAHAM
 Young County Rodeo
 866/549-0401

PINEY WOODS

2
HUNTSVILLE
 General Sam Houston's
 Birthday &
 Texas Independence
 Celebration
 936/294-1832

WOODVILLE
 Toast to Texas Independence
 409/283-2272

2-5
LUFKIN
 Angelina County Youth Fair
 936/634-6644

4-6
LONGVIEW
 Zonta Antique Show
 830/426-7015

5
CONROE
 Entergy
 Young Texas Artists
 Music Competition
 Finalists Concert
 936/760-2787

5-6
LONGVIEW
 Model Train Show
 903/753-9512

7-12
TEXARKANA
 Pickin' Around the Campfire
 903/255-0247

8
TEXARKANA
 Steel Magnolias
 903/792-4992

11
TYLER
 Miss Saigon
 903/566-7424

11-12
JACKSONVILLE
 Junior Livestock Show
 903/586-2217

11-13
LONGVIEW
 Longview
 Ballet Theatre
 Spring Gala
 903/758-3822

12
CROCKETT
 New York City
 Tap Festival Tour
 936/544-4276

KIRBYVILLE
 Texas Country Music
 Show
 409/423-5744

MINEOLA
 Star Select Opry
 903/569-6049

18-19, 25-27
CONROE
 Come Blow Your Horn
 936/441-7469

18-APR 10
TYLER
 Azalea &
 Spring Flower Trail
 800/235-5712

19
JASPER
 Azalea Festival & Trail
 409/384-2762

TYLER
 Discovering Our Past
 903/597-5338

WOODVILLE
 Festival of the Arts
 409/283-2272

19, 25-26
WOODVILLE
 Tyler County
 Dogwood Festival
 409/283-2632
 or 283-2272

19-APR 9
NACOGDOCHES
 Azalea Trail
 888/653-3788

25-26
WOODVILLE
 Western Weekend
 Parade & Rodeo
 409/283-2632

25-APR 2
HUNTSVILLE
 Walker County Fair,
 Rodeo & Barbecue Cookoff
 936/291-8763

26
GILMER
 Easter Egg Hunt
 903/843-2413

LIVINGSTON
 Eggstravaganza
 936/327-3656

LUFKIN
 Downtown Hoedown
 936/633-0205

PRAIRIES AND LAKES

1
FORT WORTH
 Cliburn Concerts Presents
 Pianist Nelson Freire
 817/335-9000

1-12
ATHENS
 Trout Harvest
 903/676-2277

1-31
FLATONIA
 Parade of Quilts
 361/865-3920

1-MAY 31
PLANTERSVILLE
 The King's Orchard
 Strawberry Harvest
 936/894-2766

2
GONZALES
 Texas Independence Day
 Celebration
 830/672-6532

SEGUIN
 Toast to Texas
 830/379-4833

WACO
 Seven Brides
 for Seven Brothers
 254/752-9797

2-5
GAINESVILLE
 Cooke County Youth Fair
 940/668-7731

2-6
COLLEGE STATION
 Tartuffe
 979/845-1234

3
FORT WORTH
 Chanticleer
 817/212-4280

3-5
GLEN ROSE
 PRCA Rodeo
 254/897-3081

3-13
ADDISON
 Out of the Loop
 Festival
 972/450-6232

4-5
ARGYLE
 Bluegrass Festival
 940/464-7273

DALLAS
 Burt Bacharach &
 the Dallas Symphony
 Orchestra
 214/692-0203

FORT WORTH
 Postcard & Paper
 Show
 281/565-0771

HALLETTSVILLE
 State Championship
 42 Domino Tournament
 361/798-2662

4-6
DALLAS
 North Texas Irish Festival
 972/943-4624

WEATHERFORD
 First Monday Trade Days
 817/598-4124

4-13
ARLINGTON
 The House at Pooh Corner
 817/265-8512

6
CALDWELL
 Homecoming Festival
 979/567-4248

PLANO
 Plano Book Festival
 972/839-9529

7
BRYAN
 Winemaker's
 Birthday Bash
 979/778-9463

COLLEGE STATION
 Prague
 Symphony Orchestra
 979/845-1234

9
COLLEGE STATION
 Arlo Guthrie
 979/845-1234

10
GONZALES
 Pioneer Village
 Country Music Show
 830/672-6532

10-12
RICHARDSON
 African Violet Show
 972/278-0389

11-13
DALLAS
 Quilt Celebration
 972/480-5939

11, 13
FORT WORTH
 Tosca
 817/212-4280

11-13, 18-20
CLEBURNE
 Little Women
 817/641-6361

4-5, 11-12, 18-19, 25-26
GRANBURY
 Granbury Live
 817/573-0303 or
 800/989-8240

5
CLEBURNE
 Johnson County
 Lawn & Garden Show
 817/793-4625
 or 558-2960

COLUMBUS
 Tribute to Bob Wills
 979/732-8385 or
 877/444-7339

CORSICANA
 Corsicana Opry
 903/872-8226

ELGIN
 Market Day
 512/281-2477

FORT WORTH
 Prague
 Symphony Orchestra
 817/665-6000

5-6
BELTON
 Sami Arts & Crafts Show
 512/441-7133

WASHINGTON
 Texas Independence Day
 Celebration
 936/878-2214

5, 12, 19, 26
COLUMBUS
 Columbus Opry
 979/732-9210

5-APR 10
DALLAS
 Dallas Blooms
 214/515-6512

ANDERSON
 Stagecoach Day
 936/873-2633

ATHENS
 Henderson County
 YMCA Triathlon
 903/264-9622

BELTON
 Texas Western Swing
 Fiddling Showcase
 254/939-8390

BRENHAM
 Spring Fling
 Flower & Garden Show
 888/273-6426

DALLAS
 Greenville Avenue
 St. Patrick's Day Parade
 214/757-9000

Radio Disney Day
 214/670-6826

FLATONIA
 Market Day
 361/865-3920

FORT WORTH
 St. Patrick's Day
 Celebration/
 Cowtown Goes Green
 817/625-9715

PALESTINE
 Palestine Opry
 800/659-3484

ROCKNE
 Texas German Convention
 281/391-5545

ROUND TOP
 Eusia Quartet &
 Pianist James Dick
 979/249-3129

SHOW YOUR COLORS



HERE ARE THREE NEW WAYS to show your colors and support worthy transportation projects. The brand new God Bless America and God Bless Texas license plates raise money for the Safe Routes to Schools Program. All three of these plates are available for Texas-registered passenger cars and light trucks. They can be personalized, too.

To get an application, contact your county tax office or the Texas Department of Transportation at (512) 465-7611, call our toll-free fax-on-demand system at (888) 232-7033 or check the Web site: www.dot.state.tx.us



Cetera

PURE ECSTASY

HERE'S A FUN TREAT FOR YOU AND YOUR special someone on Valentine's Day...or on any day of the year: a cruise and a visit to an exciting Texas city.

Carnival Cruise Lines' 2,052-passenger ship *Ecstasy* recently began sailing four- and five-day cruises from **Galveston** to Mexico. The "SuperLiner" boasts two formal dining rooms, three swimming pools, 12 lounges and bars, an Internet cafe, and extensive fitness facilities. This larger ship replaces the line's *Celebration*, which had sailed the Mexico itinerary since 2000. Carnival, which also operates a seven-day Galveston-Mexico-Belize cruise on its "Fun Ship" *Elation*, expects to host some 280,000 passengers annually on voyages from our popular Gulf of Mexico port.

Ecstasy's four-day cruises call at Cozumel, Mexico; the five-day sails visit Cozumel and Calica/Playa del Carmen. *Elation* stops in Progreso and Cozumel, Mexico, as well as in Belize City.

No matter which itinerary you choose, you can also plan an exciting pre- or post-cruise stay in Galveston, where attractions such as **Moody Gardens**, the lovely **Grand 1894 Opera House**, the **Texas Seaport Museum**, and shopping on **The Strand** combine with fine accommodations and excellent restaurants.

To learn more about voyages on Carnival Cruise Lines, call your travel agent or 800/CARNIVAL, or visit www.carnival.com. (In addition to Carnival, ships of the Royal Caribbean, Princess, and Celebrity lines also sail out of Galveston.) For information about the Port of Galveston, call 409/765-9321. For more about Galveston, contact the Galveston Island Convention and Visitors Bureau, 888/GAL-ISLE (425-4753); www.galveston.com.

A TRIBUTE IN PAMPA

IN JANUARY, THE LOVETT MEMORIAL Library, at 111 N. Houston in **Pampa**, formally dedicated two handsome sculptures that honor the pioneering spirit of the women who helped settle the Panhandle. The works, a gift of Panhandle native R.L. Franklin, particularly com-

COURTESY LOVETT MEMORIAL LIBRARY, PAMPA



At the Lovett Memorial Library in Pampa, David Frech's *The Prairie Woman of Texas* is one of two new sculptures honoring women who helped settle the Panhandle.

memorate the "acumen and industry" of women such as his grandmother Louise Franklin and three other Texans, Virginia Green, Betty Henderson, and Annie Buckler.

Texas sculptor Don Ray's bronze work *The Lesson*, which stands at the library's entrance, illustrates a mother, with a book in her lap, talking with her young son, who sits in the crook of her arm. The second statue, *The Prairie Woman of Texas*, is a six-foot, five-inch bronze by New York sculptor David Frech. It depicts a pioneer woman holding her infant and standing beside a sheaf of wheat as she gazes into the distance. Call the Lovett Memorial Library at 806/669-5780; www.lovettlibrary.org.

THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF BIRDS

BIRDS KNOW ABOUT IT. BIRDERS KNOW about it. Most people in the Lower Rio Grande Valley know about it. And now, you do, too!

We're talking about the new **World Birding Center** headquarters, at 764-acre **Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park** in **Mission**. This biologically diverse area of the Valley (some 1,700 acres of federal refuge land also adjoin the park) hosts birds—such as Plain Chachalacas—that appear nowhere else in the United States. Observers have recorded more than 600 bird species in the Valley.

IF YOU KNOW OF A NOTEWORTHY LONE STAR ATTRACTION, RESTAURANT, EVENT, OR PRODUCT, WRITE OR EMAIL: Readers Recommend, *Texas Highways*, Box 141009, Austin 78714-1009. Email: letters05@texashighways.com. Space constraints prevent us from publishing every suggestion we receive. We reserve the right to edit items. Because we're unable to check out every item in "Readers Recommend," and details can change, please call ahead for more information. For more **TexCetera** items, see "Travel News" on our Web site: www.texashighways.com.

Readers Recommend...

OUR family enjoyed a holiday stay at **The Celtic Queen Country Inn** near **Sulphur Springs**. Hosts Wally and Eleana Jones treated us royally. Everything was wonderful, including beautiful private rooms and baths, marvelous food and beverages, lovely public rooms, and spacious grounds.

THOMAS WELCH, *Longview*

The Celtic Queen Country Inn is on Texas 154, 9.1 miles south of I-30, between Quitman and Sulphur Springs; 903/383-7205; www.celticqueeninn.com.

CHEF **Michael H. Flores** of **San Antonio** sells his condiments and other food products on his Web site, www.chefmichael.com. His Mexican Fudge Dessert Sauce is delicious—chocolatey and smooth, with the added and unusual flavor of peppers, but not at all hot. When I need a chocolate fix immediately, I dip a spoon in the jar and then have to force myself to stop dipping. Yum!

SABRINA O'CONNOR, *Austin*

WE enjoyed a stop at **Chisholm Trail Memorial Park** in **Yoakum**. Topiary sculptures of three Longhorn steers, a cowboy on horseback, and a dog form a centerpiece monument to the achievements of 19th-Century trail drivers. A memorial plaque reproduces a historical photograph of many area trail drivers that was taken during a Texas Centennial reunion.

HENRY AND MARIE ALSMEYER, *Brenham*
Chisholm Trail Memorial Park is at the corner of W. Gonzales and US 77A. On Feb. 25-26, Yoakum celebrates its Land of Leather Days festival (and chili cookoff). Call the Yoakum Chamber of Commerce, 361/293-2309; www.yoakumusa.com or www.visityoakum.com.

The park's new World Birding Center facilities, which officially opened in October, include a bilingual exhibit hall, gift shop, coffee bar, two-story observation tower, viewing blinds, tram service within the park, and hiking trails. Call 956/585-1107; www.worldbirdingcenter.org.

Next month... Saddle up for some **horseback riding** around the state, or put the saddle away and join us at a few "undude" ranches. We'll also visit two diverse cities—**Waco** and **Abilene**—and tour the splendid **San Antonio Museum of Art**.



ANCE VARNELL

window on TEXAS

FEBRUARY IN TEXAS can bring blazingly hot days (at least in the southern part of the state) or teeth-chattering cold temperatures. As this image of Gorman Falls, in Central Texas' Colorado Bend State Park, attests, a beautiful winter scene can make enduring the cold worthwhile.



COMÉZ

NACIO
JUN 2 1926

FALLECIO
ABRIL 22 1988

STRADA

IN MEMORIAM
AMOR