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WAYS: AMARILLO BY MORNING, NOON, AND NIGHT
K TOURS - A PERSONAL JOURNEY TO THE BIG THICKET

THE TRAVEL MAGAZINE OF TEXAS

TEXAS

HIGHWAYS

OCTOBER 2005

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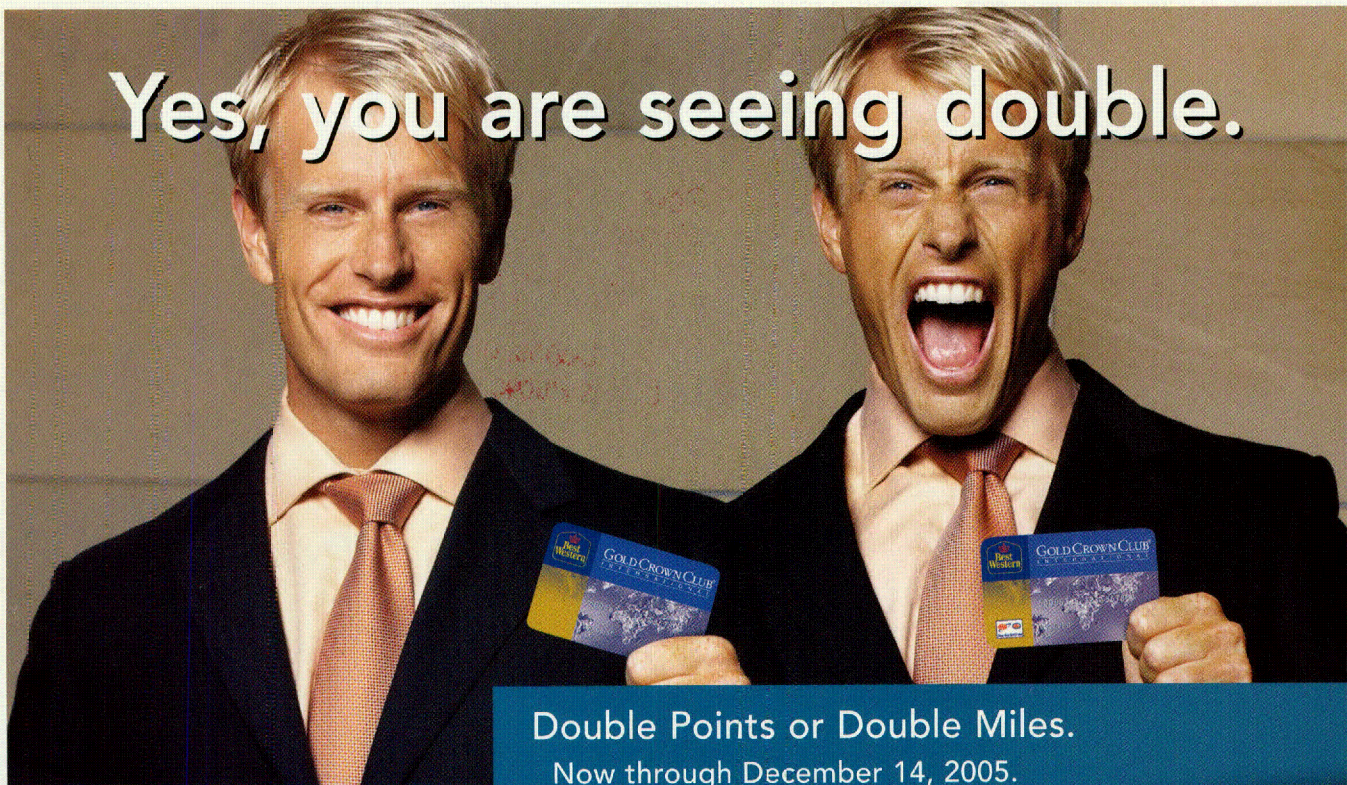


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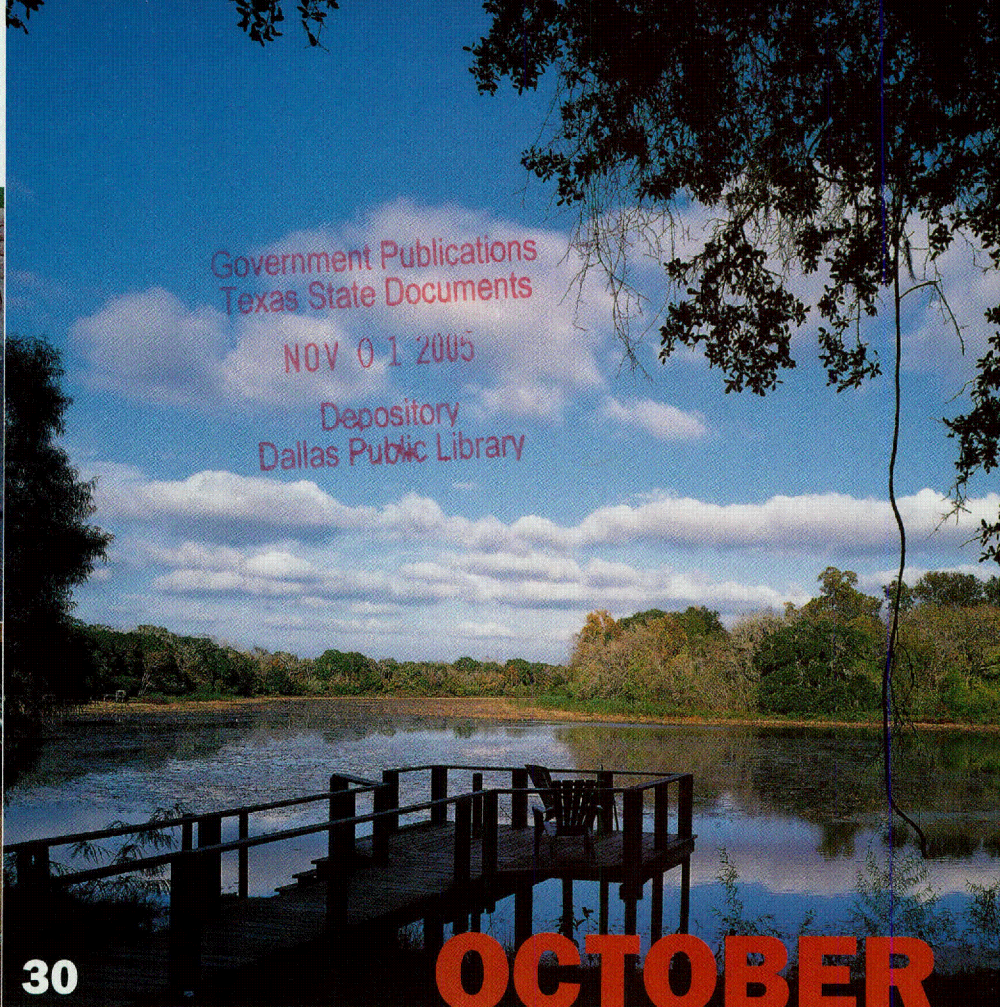
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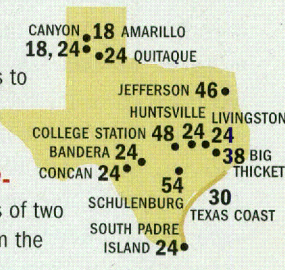
- 2 **UP FRONT** From the Editor's desk
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- 73 **WINDOW ON TEXAS**

ABOUT OUR COVER Exploring Palo Duro Canyon by horseback makes for a quintessential Texas experience. With its rugged Technicolor backdrops and vast blue sky overhead, you can understand why Western writers like the late Louis L'Amour chose the canyon as a setting for their novels. For more about riding this Texas range and others, turn to page 24. Photo © Earl Nottingham

PHOTOS FROM TOP LEFT, CLOCKWISE:
 © E.J. DEERING; © LAURENCE PARENT; © RANDY MALLORY

FEATURES

- 18 **HIGH AND LOW IN AMARILLO** A fan of the Plains finds Amarillo a wonderful example of "real Texas," offering a mix of city fun, food, and friendliness, and refreshing lack of facade. It doesn't hurt that Palo Duro Canyon and other amazing sites lie nearby. BY MARTY LANGE, PHOTOGRAPHS BY RUSSELL GRAVES
- 24 **BACK IN THE SADDLE AGAIN** You don't have to own a horse to enjoy an adventure on horseback. We've rounded up seven stables that will help you find your inner cowpoke. BY MELISSA GASKILL, PHOTOGRAPHS BY EARL NOTTINGHAM
- 30 **TEXAS COAST** Two Texas journalists have pooled their talents to produce a stunning new book about our state shore. If you can't go to the coast, you can have the next best thing on your coffee table. INTRODUCTION BY JOE NICK PATOSKI, PHOTOGRAPHS BY LAURENCE PARENT
- 38 **NOTES FROM A JOURNAL: MY BIG THICKET** A distinguished tree-hugger relates some of his experiences in the Big Thicket, the East Texas ecological wonder that he and his friends helped save more than 30 years ago. BY HOWARD PEACOCK
- 46 **WHERE'S BIGFOOT?** Each October, Bigfoot buffs gather in Jefferson to debate the existence of the elusive primate rumored for years to inhabit East Texas. The verdict is still out. BY RANDY MALLORY
- 48 **TEXAS FLAG IMAGES: A SHOW OF LONE STAR PRIDE** The state banner appears on everything from barns to Cadillacs. An exhibit in College Station documents the phenomenon. INTRODUCTION BY NOLA McKEY, PHOTOGRAPHS BY E. JOSEPH DEERING
- 54 **STANZEL MODEL AIRCRAFT MUSEUM: TOP-FLIGHT FUN** A museum in Schulenburg honors the inventiveness of two local entrepreneurs who produced myriad models of flyable aircraft from the 1930s to the 1990s. STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY RANDY MALLORY



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PEACOCKS are known to strut their stuff. I know one who does it magnificently, seemingly without ruffling a feather. San Antonio-based author **Howard Peacock's** memories about the **Big Thicket** (page 38) reveal a sense of the awe that the area, its plants, people, and creatures inspire. The Big Thicket brings Howard joy, and that is something he loves to share with others. Joy, and the wisdom and good humor of his thoughts—these are qualities he brings to his walks in the woods.

Not only is Howard an engaging, talented writer and naturalist, he's *the* man to write about the Big Thicket for readers of *Texas Highways*. His books, *The Nature of Texas* (Texas A&M Univ. Press), *The Big Thicket of Texas: America's Ecological Wonder* (Little, Brown and Co.), and *Nature Lover's Guide to the Big Thicket* (Texas A&M Univ. Press), are testament enough to his knowledge and style. A child of Beaumont, Howard's relationship with the Big Thicket began some seven decades ago as a boy. He later joined a great group of people who helped save the Big Thicket as the country's first national preserve. Howard has walked the Thicket, hugged its beech trees, camped in it, led novices and cognoscent through it, photographed it, listened to and stared at its incredible living creatures, and written eloquently about America's ecological crossroads. Read Howard's story, and you'll see that the Big Thicket is truly one of the planet's biological masterpieces.

In case you're interested in helping to preserve the Big Thicket and join with others who share your interest in "America's Ark," Howard suggests that you join the nonprofit **Big Thicket Association**. For information, write to Box 198, Saratoga 77585; visit www.btatx.org; or call **Mickey Johnston** at 936/262-8522. Membership is \$15 for one year....

IF YOU want to know the best times to see **fall foliage in East Texas**, the area's foliage spotters report weekly on the color beginning in late October. The reports alert visitors to events and attractions, routes and itineraries, and current conditions, and the Web site includes digital photographs that are updated weekly. The bright colors usually occur from late October until early December, with a peak around mid-November.

"It comes in waves," says **Howard Rosser**, executive director of the East Texas Tourism Association. "When the first hard rains and freeze come, you think it is gone—all those leaves on the forest floor. But in the background come those late-turning hardwoods, lasting past Thanksgiving."

For updates, call 903/236-7541; www.easttexasguide.com/fallfoliage/destinations.html#top...



© HOWARD PEACOCK

This half-husky, half Canadian-wolf puppy has just knocked down Big Thicket author Howard Peacock and gnawed his cap askew for the second time. Named "Bowser" by half mountain-man, half Big Thicket woodsman Neal Wright, the fun-loving pup should weigh 150 pounds or more when grown, Neal says.

JEANNE Roth, curator of the **Cloister Gallery** in Houston's **Christ Church Cathedral** (see *TH*, September 2005, page 55), says that this month's featured artist will be **George Boutwell**, who creates watercolors and prints. George, who was the art director of *Texas Highways* from 1966 to 1972, has been chosen by the State Legislature as the 2006 Official State Artist in the category of two-dimensional art. For details, call Jeanne at 713/222-2593, ext. 334; www.christchurchcathedral.org...

OUR STORY on the **Texas flags** exhibit (page 48) at the **George Bush Presidential Library and Museum** in College Station was meant to coincide with the original exhibit dates. Unfortunately, the closing date was moved up just as we were going to press. The exhibit now ends on **October 6....**

THIS is a great month to travel Texas. From the Piney Woods to the High Plains, from Big Bend Country to the South Texas Plains, you'll find great destinations all across the state.

Jack Lowry

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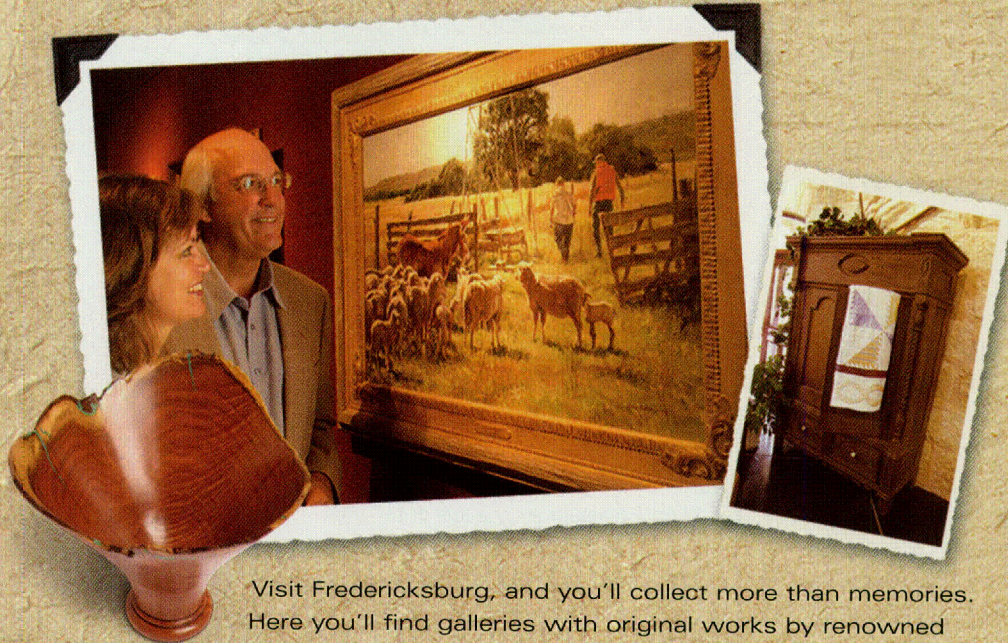
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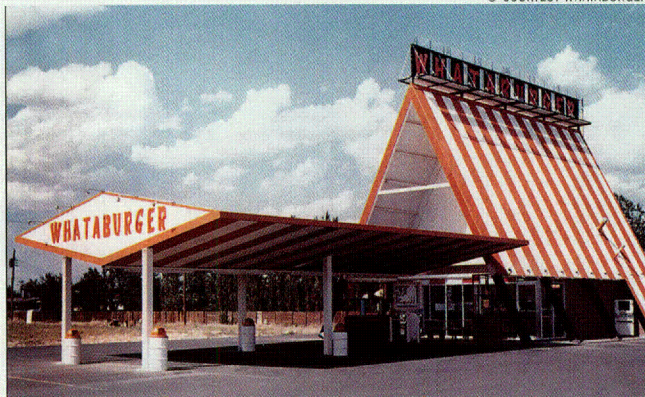
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Whata-Response!

GREG Wooldridge's wonderful story on Whataburger [August] touched a very special memory for me. In December of 2003, I had just fallen in love with a wonderful woman, and we visited one of her friends living outside of London, a Texan who was barely surviving without her beloved Whataburger fix. We stopped at a Whataburger location in Cedar Park the night before our flight, explained the situation, and were promptly given Whataburger hats, T-shirts, and other memorabilia by a sympathetic manager.

When we stepped off the flight at Heathrow, we were wearing the hats and carrying a bag of ice-cold Whataburgers. Much to the amusement of the proper Brits, our friend immediately started wolfing down the cold burgers on the spot. I haven't gone in a Whataburger since without smiling at that priceless memory.

DAVID GARLOCK
Austin



Several readers devoured August's story on Whataburger, which celebrates its 55th anniversary this year. Above, the chain's first "A-frame" building debuted in Odessa in 1961.

FOR THE past several years my parents in Tyler have sent me a subscription to *TH*. On the day it arrives, I place it next to my favorite reading chair and patiently wait until the day is done and the house is quiet before meandering into those precious pages.

While I generally shed a tear or two from homesickness, the August article on Whataburger brought a watershed of tears and memories, from my first love to my last meal before moving out east.

When I make the 10-hour drive home, the

day is spent fasting and talking about getting to Marshall for the first Whataburger inside the state line off of I-20. (I realize Louisiana has Whataburgers, but it's just not the same.)

A million thanks and kisses to all of y'all at *TH* from a fifth-generation Texan now living in Alpharetta, Georgia, a suburb of Atlanta.

RHONDA WILSON
Alpharetta, Georgia

Artistic Inspiration

I REALLY enjoyed Ann Kelton's item on Naomí Polk in *Speaking of Texas* [August]. I thought it was a great story of the creative spirit of not only Texans, but Texas women. Bravo.

BARBARA SCOTT
Round Rock

Choke Hold

WOW! The August issue was again packed with great places to see and things to do. My hus-

NO MATTER WHERE YOU ROW THERE'S HISTORY.

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For a free driving map of the Lakes Trail or other Texas Heritage Trails, call toll free 866/276-6219 or visit www.thc.state.tx.us/travel.

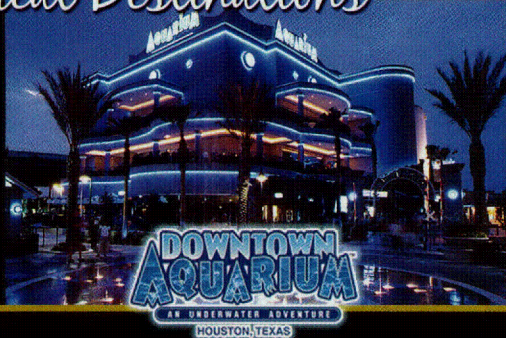
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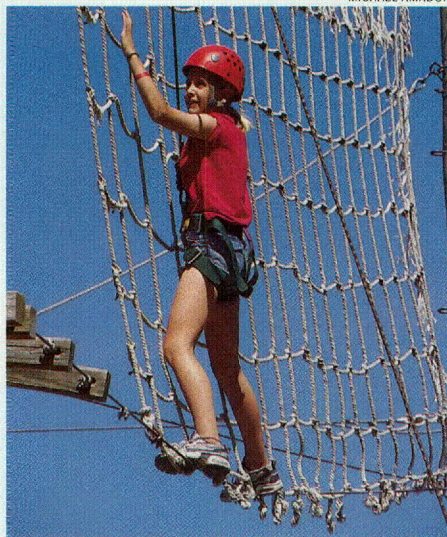
band (David) and I were fortunate to have camped at Choke Canyon's Calliham Unit last April. We birded with Fran Bartle, who is an excellent guide and artist. I was very happy to add yellow-headed blackbirds to my life list, as they had evaded me for years. We will soon retire and visit more of the places you feature—it may be years before we have time to travel outside of Texas.

NORMA FRIEDRICH
Port Lavaca

The Eyes Have It

MY FAMILY has always kidded me about my poor handwriting, but this time, *TH* had a hand in the joke, too!

Being a longtime fan of your magazine, I purchased a gift subscription for my grandson-in-law when he and my granddaughter moved to Texas last year. I guess I didn't fill out the form very clearly, and as a result, the magazine has been arriving listed as "A Gift From John Itester." The funny thing is, I am an eye tester, as I was an optometrist for more than 50 years! My



MICHAEL AMADOR

Nettie Teter, of Arlington's Country Day School, learns the ropes at Mo-Ranch (featured in the August issue).

friends and family sure have gotten a kick out of this little coincidence, and I hope you will, too.

DR. JOHN L. HESTER, O.D.
Beeville

August Applause

MO-RANCH and Whataburger in the same issue? Be still, my heart! Whenever I return to

Texas, I hit a Whataburger within 20 minutes of my plane's landing. You just can't beat it.

And I spent many summer days enjoying every aspect of Mo-Ranch: the slide, the catwalk, the bowling lane, the outdoor hillside chapel, and the exquisite pool. The family chapel was so special, I thought of getting married there one day, but it only held 24 people. Thanks for the wonderful stories.

JAN RIEGER
San Diego, California

Road-Trip Warriors

THANK YOU for the "Thunder Road" item in April's For the Road. My husband, James, and I decided to celebrate my 68th birthday with a road trip. As antique-car aficionados (we own a 1956 Packard Clipper), we visited the two museums closest to us: the Sterling McCall Old Car Museum in Warrenton and the Central Texas Museum of Automotive History in Rosanky. It was about a 300-mile round trip, but what a delightful drive through some of Texas' most scenic country! In Warrenton, we were pleasantly surprised to find as fine a museum of antique automobiles as can be found anywhere in the country. We then drove

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on to Rosanky, where our trip was rewarded with even more great cars.

On the way there, we stopped for lunch at a delightful little Czech steakhouse (Sodolak's Original Country Inn) in Snook that was featured in "Texas Steak-Out" (March 2002). We look forward to *TH* to help us continue exploring the great state we call home.

PHYLLIS TAUNTON
Hilltop Lakes

Memorable Month

WHAT a treat the July issue was. Although it was sad news—the note about the passing of Charles Shaw—I was also reminded of the few pleasant encounters with a really nice man who happened to also be a fantastic artist.

The article about Krause Springs also stirred good memories, both of that special place and of Elton and Jane Krause. And for a few short years, I lived only a few miles from Guadalupe River State Park—such a treasured place. I loved walking along the riverbank and drawing the fantastic cypress trees. Even driving by the turn-

off from Texas 46 was a treat—usually, the pasture to the west had a few Longhorns grazing. I was especially happy for the mention of Graves Peeler in July's Longhorn story—he is not often mentioned in recounting the saving of the breed. And finally, the Speaking of Texas item about the Texas Ladies Aside. I was fortunate to be acquainted with a member of the group some years ago—and was honored to ride with them as a substitute (astride) for one performance.

PAUL HUDGINS
Snyder

Of Names and Nuts

I ENJOYED Lori Moffatt's story on Fort Davis and Balmorhea State Park [August]. As a resident of the area and a former superintendent of the park, I have been in a running debate over the origin of the name Balmorhea. I recently received a copy of an abstract of title for some Balmorhea property from Frances Jones, librarian of the Balmorhea Public Library, which clearly shows that the men involved were E.D. Balcom (no e), H.R. Morrow, and either J.E. or J.W. Rhea. These men were directors of the Toyah Valley Irrigation Company, formed in 1907.

BOB MILES
Fort Davis

IN THE Fort Davis/Balmorhea story, you said that the Limpia Creek Hat Company in Fort Davis is next to the Helping Hand thrift store, when, in fact, the Davis Mountains Nut Company lies between the two. You really missed a gem. It is in a very small building, but from it are produced some of the best-tasting pecans imaginable.

GUS BILLING
Fort Davis

ED. NOTE: *Thanks, Gus. Unfortunately, the store was closed when writer Lori Moffatt visited. Readers, to contact Gus' Davis Mountains Nut Co. (at 510 State St.), call 800/895-2101; www.allpecans.com.*

CORRECTION: *In September's story on "Forks in the Backroads," we gave the wrong FM road number in the main story for Carol's at Cat Spring. The restaurant is on FM 949 (as stated in the Essentials section).*

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.

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BILLY ANSON

For centuries, the law of primogeniture in England and other countries meant that the first-born son inherited the bulk—land, home, and titles—of a noble family’s estate. Later-born sons had to seek a life of their own—sometimes in a new country. Thus it was that 18-year-old William “Billy” Anson, the seventh son of the 2nd Earl of Lichfield, ventured from England

to the Lone Star State in 1891. He followed in the footsteps of his brothers Claude and Frank (the earl’s fifth and sixth sons, respectively), who raised horses near Valera, in Coleman County.

When the Boer War began in South Africa in 1899, Billy contracted through his uncle, British Cabinet member Lord Lansdowne, to supply horses to his countrymen at war. Billy bought the horses, and his brother Frank handled the financing.

Through newspaper ads and handbills, the brothers announced purchasing days in towns like Brady, Mason, Lampasas, and Goldthwaite.

When horses arrived at the rented livery-stable pens on the appointed day, Billy evaluated the animals as to size, age, color (they had to be dark, to be less noticeable at night), breathing capacity, blemishes, and responsiveness to the rein. Once a trainload passed muster, the Anson brothers shipped the horses to the Texas coast. From there, the animals endured the long voyage to Cape Town, at the southern tip of Africa, where Englishmen rode them into battle.



English-born Billy Anson (1872-1926), who raised Quarter Horses on his ranch near Christoval, traced the breed to colonial times and helped preserve its history and pedigrees. He is honored in Amarillo’s American Quarter Horse Hall of Fame. During the Boer War, Billy evaluated more than 100,000 Texas horses, and sent more than 20,000 of them to the British in South Africa.

The Boer War ended in 1902. The next year, Billy Anson left Coleman County after purchasing the Head-of-the-River Ranch, on the South Concho River. At his home near Christoval, he bred and trained Quarter Horses. By keeping meticulous records on these horses, he helped preserve the history and pedigrees of the Quarter Horse breed in its early years, and thereby helped establish a basis for a registry.

Anson enjoyed polo, a game he played from Texas to New York. He and friends are believed to have played the first horse polo match ever held in Fort Worth.

Claude and Frank Anson eventually returned to their homeland, but Billy received his U.S. citizenship in

1896 and served as a captain in the U.S. Army during World War I. He married in 1917, but ill health plagued him. He returned to England a sick man and died there in 1926.

—Barbara Barton, *Knickerbocker*

THE GOAT MAN OF BIG SANDY

A large tombstone—with a goat’s head carved to the right and a revolver to the left—marks the resting place of John “Overland Jack” Rose in Chilton Cemetery in Big Sandy. Centered above his name, a small oval holds a picture of John, his wagon, and his goat team.

John, born in Virginia in 1888, fell beneath the wheels of a freight train and lost both of his legs at age nine. By means of hand-walking props that he made himself, he was able to remain ambulatory and complete his education. At age 20, he began traveling the country, driving a small wagon drawn by goats. He eventually settled in Big Sandy, built a home beside Everman Lake, and, refusing public aid or charity, supported himself and his goats by doing small repair jobs on watches, eyeglasses, guns, and antique clocks. Each year in early spring, “The Goat Man,” as townspeople affectionately called him, would set out from Big Sandy, making about 10 miles a day, stopping to sell postcards of himself for a dime, and doing repair work whenever he could find it. By the time automobiles made the roads too dangerous and ended his travels, he had toured 19 states and covered some 30,000 miles.

Overland Jack died in 1962. His personal property was auctioned, and his goat cart donated to Tyler’s Caldwell Zoo. One of his postcards is in the archives of the Historic Upshur Museum (903/843-5483) in Gilmer.

—Gay Ingram, *Big Sandy*

FOR THE ROAD

THIS MONTH'S TOP PICKS AND PLACES

Down on Main Street

BEFORE BIG BOX STORES AND AIR-CONDITIONED MALLS, HOUSTON'S Main Street was once *the* place to shop in southeast Texas. By 1930, 11 blocks of department, variety, and specialty stores, plus movie theaters, restaurants, and soda fountains stretched south from Buffalo Bayou through the central business district.

A new outdoor exhibit in downtown Houston, **Window Shopping on Main Street, 1920-1930**, gives visitors a glimpse of the business district's heyday.

Photomurals fill a dozen store windows in historic buildings in the 400, 800, and 1100 blocks of Main Street. The life-size images spotlight mannequins in flapper-era swimsuits and showcase early versions of modern conveniences. One elegant display promotes the 1928 Atwater Kent single-speaker radio, the Roaring '20s equivalent of the home entertainment system; another touts General Electric's new washing machine and wringer with the promise, "It's

Easy to Stay Young when Electricity does the Work." The highly detailed images of store windows were fulfillment pieces that retailers sent to manufacturers in order to prove the merchants had carried out special promotions.

Accompanying text panels examine Main Street's retailing past, including such familiar store



Swimwear display, Foley Bros. Department Store, 1928. In Houston, window-shopping along Main Street takes you back to yesteryear.

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names as Foley's and Bering, as well as the lesser known Levy and Liggett. The exhibit—a joint project of Greater Houston Preservation Alliance and Houston Downtown Management District—also celebrates the stores' architectural heritage. From Stowers Furniture's "Big White Store" of 1912 to the modernistic 1934 Byrd's Department Store building, these local landmarks are being restored and redeveloped to bring new life to downtown Houston.

The exhibit will be in place through March 2006. Call 713/216-5000; www.ghpa.org. Selected images may be viewed online at www.sloanegallery.com.

—DAVID BUSH

BLACK GOLD

WHEN COLUMBUS MARION "DAD" JOINER landed in Rusk County from Oklahoma in 1927, he was the biggest thing to happen to East Texas since the pine tree. "Dad" scavenged the ground for oil for several years before finally clanging a "come and get it!" bell on October 3, 1930. This was the day that his lucky well, the Daisy Bradford No. 3—the first of some 32,000 wells—spurred into the history books and started the East Texas Oil Field frenzy. "Dad" Joiner had tapped into the largest and most prolific reservoir in the contiguous United States.

The oil boom centered on the city of Kilgore, and the town's population skyrocketed from 700 to 10,000 in a month's time. Wildcatters and speculators rushed in, hoping to beat their neighbors to the black gold. Fortunes were made and lost overnight, and martial law ruled the streets until President Franklin D. Roosevelt sent federal troops and inspectors to regulate the field in 1933. To date, the field has yielded more than 6 billion barrels of oil.

This fall, towns in the "oil patch" will celebrate the 75th anniversary of the East Texas Oil Field. The big gusher of events occurs October 3, when Kilgore kicks it up with free admission and events at Kilgore College's East Texas Oil Museum; a flower show sponsored by area garden clubs; an exhibit of oil field-related art; signings of a new children's book, *Bluebonnet at the East Texas Oil Museum*, by Mary Brooke Casad; and a large display of oil field equipment. Surrounding towns like Gladewater, Henderson, Joinerville, and White Oak join in with special dedications and events, as well.

Call 903/984-5022 or 983-2834; www.kilgore.edu/jubilee. —KATE McCANN

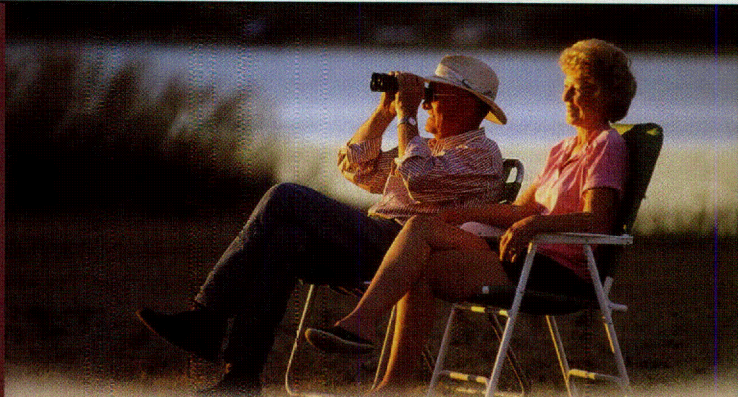
PAGING BOOK-LOVERS

VISIT THE TEXAS STATE CAPITOL IN Austin for the 10th annual Texas Book Festival, October 28-30, and you'll find the gorgeous grounds abuzz with literary celebrities of every ilk. Hey, there's humorist David Rakoff (trying his best not to get too comfortable)! *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy's* food-and-wine expert Ted Allen! Perspicacious music writer Peter Guralnick! Historians H.W. Brands and T.R. Fehrenbach! Novelist Jane Smiley and gossip columnist Liz Smith!

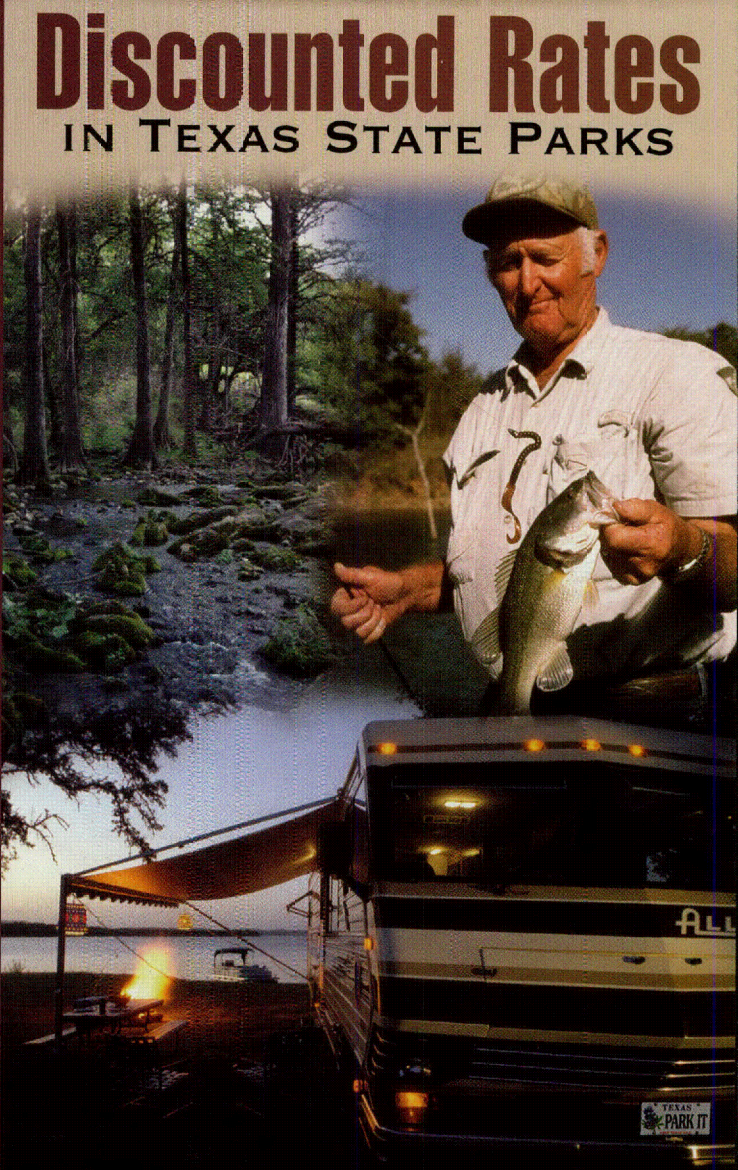
Some 150 authors in all, including headliners Lemony Snicket (recovering from a series of rather unfortunate events), author Salman Rushdie, movie icon and University of Texas graduate Eli Wallach, and historian David McCullough, will share their thoughts on writing, celebrity, and living a life of letters. Admission to most events is free. Call 512/477-4055, or, for a complete list of participating authors and events, log on to www.texasbookfestival.org.


In Houston, the Annual Jewish Book and Arts Fair (Oct. 30-Nov. 13) also celebrates the written word. Almost 40 authors, including architect Daniel Libeskind, whose designs for the Ground Zero memorial in New York City have generated much controversy; author and "Trainer to the Stars" Jake Steinfield; children's author Judith Viorst; and Senator/novelist Barbara Boxer, are

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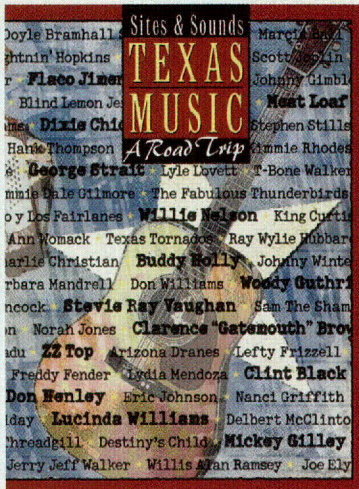
For THE ROAD

expected to read from their works, sign books, and lead discussions on topics ranging from America's entrepreneurial spirit to the challenges of writing fiction. Call 713/729-3200; www.jcchouston.org.

DRIVE BUYS

YOU'VE HEARD OF ECOTOURISM, OFTEN defined as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people." Well, if shopping improves the well-being of local people, does a buying binge fit the bill? Of course it does. If driving and buying sounds like heaven, don't miss the fourth annual **Historic US 80 Hi-Way Sale & Cruise**, which takes place October 7-9 and 14-16.

Here's how it works: Along a 267-mile route from Calhoun, Louisiana, to Grand Prairie, Texas, hundreds of roadside vendors will set up impromptu shops, offering everything from furniture and tools to musical instruments and food items. The event, which coincides with two clas-



sic-auto cruises, honors historic US 80, which was designated in 1926 and is the nation's first southern transcontinental highway. Call 903/757-4444; www.us80.com or www.easttexasguide.com.

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festivals, and performers with roots in the Lone Star State. Simply go to the Web site, click on "Music" in the tool bar, then go to Sites & Sounds: A Texas Music Road Trip. You can download a pdf file of the guide, which you can use to stay tuned. Happy trails!

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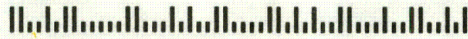


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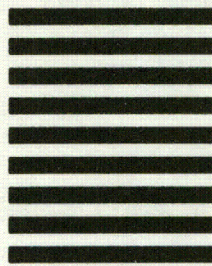


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McAllister Auditorium, the festival continues across the street at historic San Pedro Springs Park, where the day unfurls with performances by numerous musical groups, including the 80-member Philharmonic Orchestra of the Youth Orchestras of San Antonio. Later in the day, professional guides will offer walking tours through downtown and to the missions, and storytellers will portray significant events in the shaping of the city. Bring a picnic, or plan to buy refreshments at the park, but don't miss this festive occasion! The park is on San Pedro Ave., about two miles northwest of downtown. Call 210/525-6905; www.sanantoniofoundersday.org.

IF YOU'RE THINKING BARBECUE, YOU'RE REALLY THINKING

JUST WEST OF ABILENE, THE SLEEPY little town of Rotan nestles between two branches of the Brazos River. On October 15, Rotan shakes things up a bit with the first annual **Boot Scoot and Wild Hog Fest**, which, in the tradition of all successful West Texas shindigs, shines a respectful spotlight on barbecue, barbecue, and more barbecue. Barbecued wild hog? Got it. Rattlesnake? But of course. Brisket and chicken? Yes, indeed. But the festival also features airplanes (both historic and contemporary) taking to the skies, as well as a kids' goat rodeo and a dance and concert by gonzo-country legend Gary P. Nunn. The folks in Fisher County figured they had better include some way for guests to work off all that tasty 'cue. Call 325/735-3475.

SEE YOU AT THE PASS

WITH THE RECENT OPENING OF THE **Aransas Pass City Park Aquatic Center**, water-sports-lovers in the area have been behaving quite swimmingly. Open year round, the park boasts several pools (one with two-story slides), a birdwatching pavilion, and even a kayak-launching spot for those wishing to explore the bays. From October 21-23, the city, along with **Aransas Kayak Works** and **Coastal Bend Kayak**, hosts an event dubbed **Aransas Pass Kayak Days**, whose goal it is to turn folks on to the joys of kayaking. Make no mistake: kayaking is *really, really* fun, and here's your chance to try it out. Coastal Bend Kayak offers kayak tours of the Lighthouse Lake Trails, wildlife tours of Redfish Bay and adjacent waterways, and moonlight tours of the area. Call 361/537-8668 or 800/633-3028; www.aransaspas.org.

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SPOTLIGHT on Oktoberfest

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German Culture Thrives at Beethoven Hall

ONE OF THE BEST THINGS ABOUT OKTOBERFEST AT SAN Antonio's Beethoven Hall and Garden is watching the little kids dancing right in front of the band. They swing and sway, prance and goof off, often (okay, mostly) to a beat of their own making. At nearby picnic tables beneath the spreading pecan trees, parents, aunts, uncles, and friends, many in traditional German costume, momentarily still their own eager feet and enjoy the antics.

Smiles all around. Before long, the ubiquitous "Chicken Dance" has everyone up and acting silly. Not even the plentiful *bier*—or the yummy noodles, pretzels, goulash, bratwurst, and pancakes—can explain *that* phenomenon. Who knows, or cares, if the dance is German. It fits the spirit of merriment here. And anyway, there will be polkas and schottisches to spare till midnight.

Tucked into the Alamo City's lovely King William Historic District, Beethoven Hall has a modest face—only a small yellow sign atop a pole on Pereida Street announces its presence:

Beethoven Maennerchor. Founded in 1867, the 50-member "men's choir" is the oldest German choir in the state, and one of the oldest in the nation. The mission of this 500-strong membership club (but you don't have to be or speak German to join) is to preserve German song, music, and language.

A century-and-a-half ago, the King William Street neighborhood, beside the San Antonio River just south of downtown, was known as



All ages enjoy music and merriment at Beethoven Hall's Oktoberfest.

"Sauerkraut Bend" and, more nicely, as the "little Rhein." Prominent local businessmen such as Pioneer Flour Mills founder Carl Hilmar Guenther and lumberman Edward Steves built fine homes that still survive. In those days, the original Beethoven Hall, a stately, columned building on Alamo Street (now home to the Magik Theatre), a German-English School, and a lively men's club called Casino Hall served the close-knit community of recent immigrants. Setbacks—including a fire and anti-German sentiment during World War I—resulted in sale of the old hall. Today's Beethoven Hall opened in the 1920s.

A decade or so after the Hall moved to Pereida Street, a *Damenchor* (women's choir) formed, and later, a *Kinderchor* (children's choir). Now there are also a *Volkstanzverein* (folk-dance group) and the terrific, 60-member Beethoven Band. All of the groups rehearse regularly here, and all will perform during Oktoberfest.

Through all of the changes, the men kept singing. One member, Johannes Scholze, who recently died at age 103, had sung with the Maennerchor for 75 years. Rudolf Biedermann, the group's present vice president and director of this year's Oktoberfest, came with his family from Germany as a baby; he's been singing with the group for 57 years. Former vice president Herb Kriese, who immigrated at age 10, joined in 1982. "He couldn't speak any English when he came to this country in 1952," Herb's wife, Diane, tells me. "He learned English soon enough, but when he joined the Maennerchor, he reconnected with his culture." Diane recently retired from a five-year presidency of the *Damenchor*. Tradition indeed.

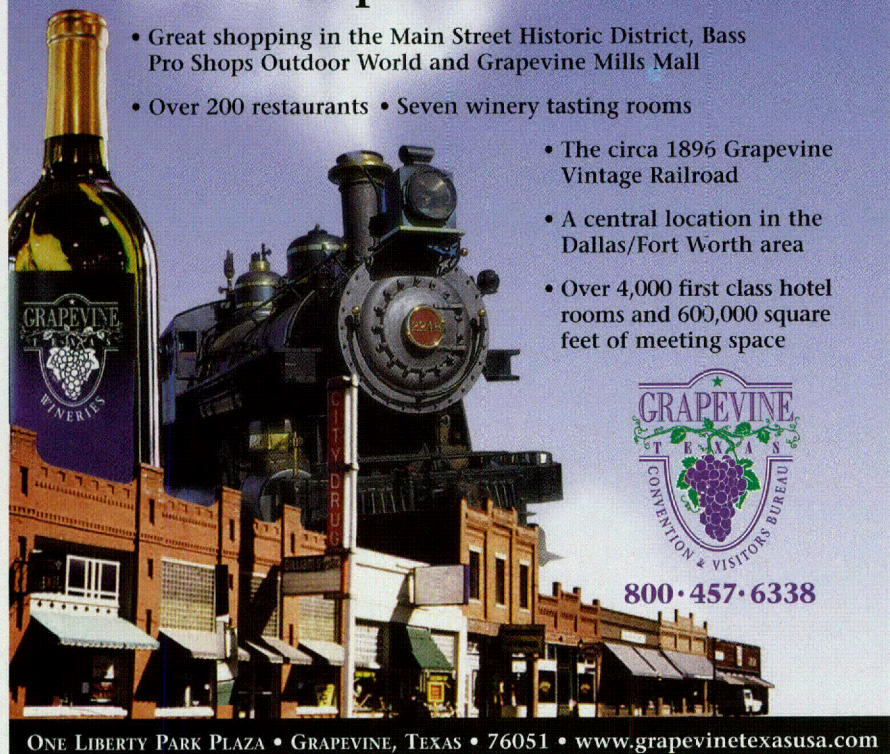
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Tuesday through Saturday, everyone welcome—the walls hold large framed pictures of Maennerchor members of long ago, substantial, serious-looking men, many sporting luxuriant mustaches and well-trimmed beards—hard to imagine any of *them* doing the Chicken Dance! From behind the long wooden bar, club manager Gordon Wade dispenses some four dozen imported and domestic beers and several varieties of wine (and sometimes a bit of bratwurst as well). Almost anywhere you look in these lace-curtained rooms, you'll spy a bust or portrait of—who else?—Ludwig van Beethoven.

Outside, the large concrete patio provides space for Oktoberfest, for a Fiesta celebration in April, and other events throughout the year (including many Saturday-afternoon wedding receptions). Next door, a lovely Victorian house is being restored as the Beethoven Museum, to chronicle San Antonio's German culture and heritage.

As always, Oktoberfest offers continuous, toe-tapping entertainment—this year, dancing by the Cadence Cloggers and music from such groups as the Accordionaires, Markmann Polkateers, Bohemian Dutchmen, Cloverleaf Orchestra, and Jubilee Polka Band. For the first time, George and Charlene Campbell of South Carolina will be on hand with their Raffin Organs, street-music

instruments associated with organ grinders (and cute monkeys) and still heard in Europe. If there's a singalong as in past years, a cheat-sheet will provide the words—and no one will scold if you mispronounce the German.

If you can't make Oktoberfest, no problem. You'll find similar merrymaking during Fiesta and the popular First Friday Art Walks, when nearby shops and art galleries beckon the strolling public. In summer, there's a *Gartenkonzert* every third Friday. (When I asked Gordon Wade if visitors could dance at the Garden Concerts, he replied, "It's *always* okay to dance here. We *love* dancing.") December's *Kristkindlmarkt* gives visitors a jump on Christmas shopping.

In the meantime, come to Oktoberfest to experience the four essential "f's": food, family, friends, and fellowship. As Rudolf Biedermann puts it, "There's nothing highbrow about it, but you'll have a lot of fun." —ANN GALLAWAY

Beethoven Hall is at 422 Pereida St., in San Antonio's King William Historic District. Oktoberfest is Sep. 30-Oct. 1 and Oct. 7-8, 5 p.m.-midnight. Admission: \$5, free age 12 and younger. Food tickets \$1 each. Parking in 2 lots on Pereida and on street. Call 210/222-1251; www.beethovenmaennerchor.com.



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BY EILEEN MATTEI



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Conveniently located on Highway 290 between Houston and Austin.



BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! Drumbats carry across Lake Pasadena from five dragon boats splashing their way to the finish line. Adorned with a dragon head and tail, each of the 41-foot-long canoes carries a drummer, whose pounding cadence urges the craft's 20 paddlers down the 500-meter course.

Legend has it that in 277 B.C., after the death of the beloved Chinese poet and scholar Qu Yuan, his friends paddled decorated boats around the lake where he had drowned, beating drums to chase away the evil spirits. Centuries later, in the 1970s, Hong Kong tourism officials revived the tale with a festival, and dragon-boat racing began to spread worldwide. Today, dragon-boat racing is popular in more than 50 countries and is among the fastest-growing watersports.

With one of the nation's largest Chinese populations, Houston hopped aboard the dragon-wagon five years ago,

Bay Area Houston hosts the Gulf Coast International Dragon Boat Regatta at Clear Lake Park. The event has a festival atmosphere, but the focus is on the boat races.



Although dragon-boat racing has become an international sport, the Regatta's activities (a fire-knife dancer performs above) and the boats themselves reflect the event's Asian roots.



when the Texas Dragon Boat Association (TDBA) launched the Houston Dragon Boat Festival in conjunction with National Asian Heritage Month each May. The TDBA also inaugurated the Gulf Coast International Dragon Boat Regatta, which returns October 22-23 to Clear Lake Park in Seabrook, near NASA/Johnson Space Center. Although the Regatta has a festival atmosphere (spectators enjoy diverse Asian entertainment, arts and crafts, and cui-

sine), the focus is on the boat races.

Dragon-boat teams compete for industry, regional, and international titles, racing in at least three heats along a certified course. An experienced steersperson in the stern of each boat navigates the course. Although some of the entrants—more than 1,000 competed last year—have experience, most of the paddlers waiting their turns are pick-up crews of co-workers and friends, out for a couple of days of serious fun.

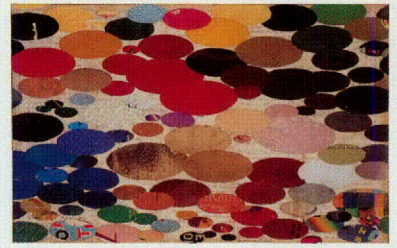
“Corporations sponsor many of the crews because of the team-building aspect,” says TDBA president and executive director Dr. Caroline Long. “But a lot of people just do it for fun or to challenge themselves. We have a special race for breast-cancer survivors, for example.”

Strolling by the colorful tents of various teams spread across the grassy slopes of Clear Lake Park, I eavesdrop on strategy talk: Stay in rhythm. Watch only the paddle in front of you. In a sea of team T-shirts, the most motivated crews are stretching and bending and practicing air-paddle strokes, but the preferred “workout” seems to be eating and drinking and laughing.

Mingling, I bump into the members of the Ukrainian national team, who have misplaced a translator. My few words of Russian trigger an incomprehensible babble from the blue-clad group, so I circle back to Dr. Long to tell her what she already knows: No one understands these guys. “Do you (*continued on page 58*)

THE 2ND ANNUAL Gulf Coast International Dragon Boat Regatta will be held Oct. 22-23 at Clear Lake Park in Seabrook, one of several cities collectively known as **Bay Area Houston**. To reach the park from Interstate 45, go east on NASA Pkwy. about 2.5 miles, drive past NASA, and look for the entrance to the park on the left.

Opening ceremonies begin each day about 8:30 a.m.; races usually end about 4 p.m. In addition to dragon-boat races, spectators can enjoy diverse Asian entertainment, arts and crafts, and cuisine. Admission: Free. For details, call the Texas Dragon Boat Assn. at 713/225-0514; www.texasdragonboat.com.



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Details from "Medium Pallet"
by Lance Letscher

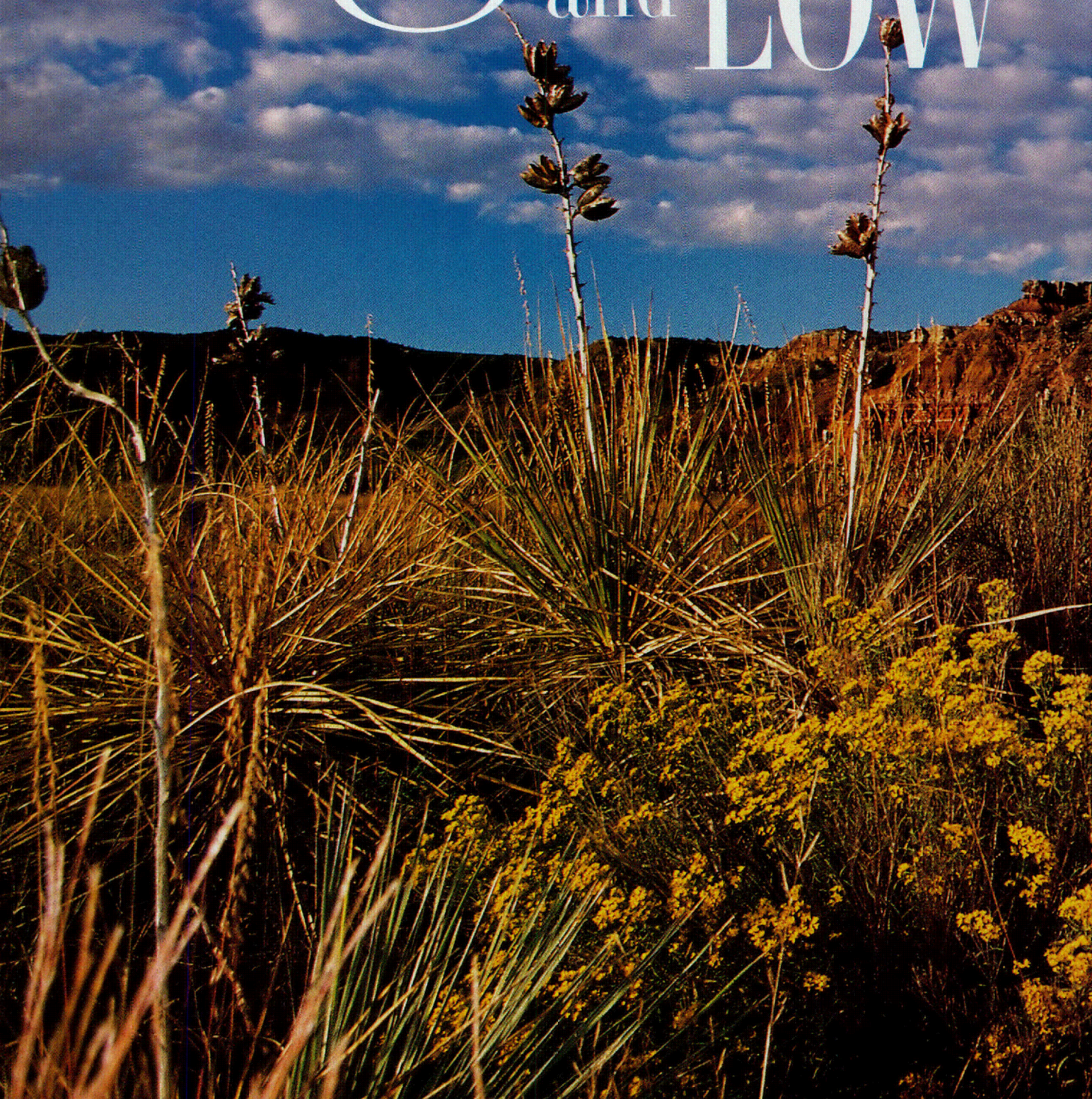
FESTIVAL UNDERWRITER



FESTIVAL SPONSORS



High and LOW in



BY MARTY LANGE

Amarillo

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RUSSELL GRAVES

Just southeast of Amarillo, colorful Palo Duro Canyon helps define the majesty of the American West.

Amarillo.

FUN TO SAY. EVEN MORE FUN TO EXPLORE.

From the top of the landmark 1930 Santa Fe building or the even taller, 31-story Bank One Tower, this High Plains city of 173,000 has its share of noteworthy heights—not to mention V-22 Osprey tiltrotor aircraft, mammoth C-5A Galaxy transports, and KC-135 Stratotankers flying through big blue skies. And, from its street-level, commemorative triad of City Center arches, near the glass pyramid of KVII-TV, to panoramic Palo Duro Canyon just down the road, this proud Panhandle metropolis offers a full roster of earthbound pleasures, too. It's all here...restaurants and museums, Quarter Horses and culture.

I always connect with Amarillo's down-the-middle Plains-ness. The combination of sweeping flatland, rolling hills, dramatically etched escarpments, Kodachrome-colored canyons, surprising elements of green, and a mix of city fun, food, friendliness, and lack of facade makes for a potent package. Texas most certainly has many realities, but this city's "Step into the Real Texas" slogan has always rung true.

Quintessential Amarillo? Try breakfast or lunch at the Stockyard Cafe, at the historic Amarillo Livestock Auction. You'll get an interesting glimpse into the Panhandle's ranching heritage. Take in the free-and-open-to-the-public cattle auction on Tuesday. Too bad for the cows, but then, how else would we enjoy the famous Big Texan Steak Ranch, sirloin at Stockmans, prime filet at Sakura Japanese Steakhouse, prime rib at Marty's, La Fiesta Grande's steak ranchero, filet mignon at David's, Jorge's Tacos Garcia, the classic Beef Burger stand, Dyer's Bar-B-Que, Outlaws Supper Club, or a great burger at homely-but-happy Coyote Bluff Cafe? And, there's more variety to savor at eateries like the Village Bakery Café on West 22nd, Bourbon Street Café on Wolflin Boulevard, and My Thai on Coulter. Multiple locations of the popular Donut Stop should encourage you to put on your brakes in the morning, too.

Downtown's exciting new Globe-News Center for the Performing Arts, a wavy-topped, multilayer cake of a building, opens January 2006. It adds a dynamic new dimension to the city's entertainment possibilities, expanding the stage and audience for Amarillo's symphony, opera, ballet, theater, and a multitude of national touring shows from Broadway musi-

cals to Lyle Lovett. Can't wait? Catch a show at the Amarillo Little Theatre on Civic Circle. Established in 1927, the ALT is one of the oldest continuously operating community theaters in the nation.

Rodeo? Hey, this *is* West Texas. Cowboys and cowgirls saddle up at downtown's Civic Center, where the city hosts the World Championship Ranch Rodeo November 9-13, 2005. The Will Rogers Range Riders Rodeo convenes around July 4, at Range Riders Arena, while Cowboy Roundup USA (the first week in June) and the long-standing Tri-State Fair & Rodeo (September) come out of the chute at the Amarillo National Center on the Tri-State Fairgrounds. And you must see the American Quarter Horse Heritage Center & Museum on I-40 East, an informative repository of art, equine history, cowboy culture, and the West. A little farther east on I-40, fill up your dream-catcher at Kwahadi Kiva Indian Museum and Performance Center, which offers Native American architecture, art, crafts, dance, and more.

On the west side of town, historic Route 66 honors its proud past and present with shops and restaurants along 6th Avenue, between Western and Georgia. Check out the Golden Light Café and historic Nat Ballroom.

The triumvirate of the Don Harrington Discovery Center & Space Theater, the Helium Monument, and the Amarillo Botanical Gardens, along Medi Park and Streit Drive, offers one of the city's best educational diversions. Be sure and watch a film at the Space Theater with its state-of-the-art sound and visuals. I particularly liked the Discovery Center's exhibits on weather and tornadoes, and I loved the animated Archimedes talking head. Here,



Toebi Boehning serves up Coyote Bluff Cafe's famous burgers and fries. Kwahadi Kiva celebrates the Native American culture of the Plains.

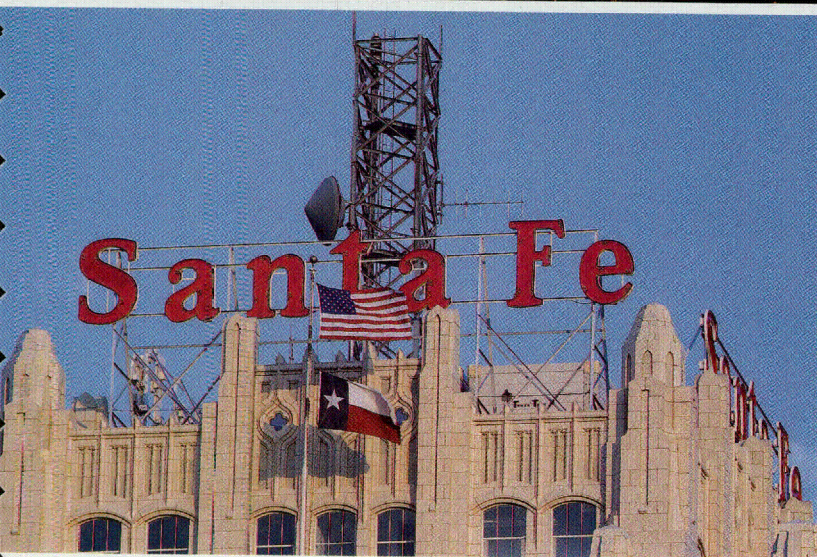
you'll appreciate just how amazing science can be. And, nearby on Coulter, the Texas Pharmacy Museum at Texas Tech University's School of Pharmacy (806/356-4000, ext. 268) contains a fascinating slice of medicinal history.

Farther out, on I-40 West, Cadillac Ranch, a classic piece of quirky art, is cooler than ever. You may also enjoy Wildcat Bluff Nature Center, a northwest Amarillo outdoor escape in a natural prairie setting. If you choose to take in even more scenic area landscapes

The combination of sweeping flatland, rolling hills, dramatically etched escarpments, Kodachrome-colored canyons, surprising elements of green, and a mix of city fun, food, friendliness, and lack of facade makes for a potent package.



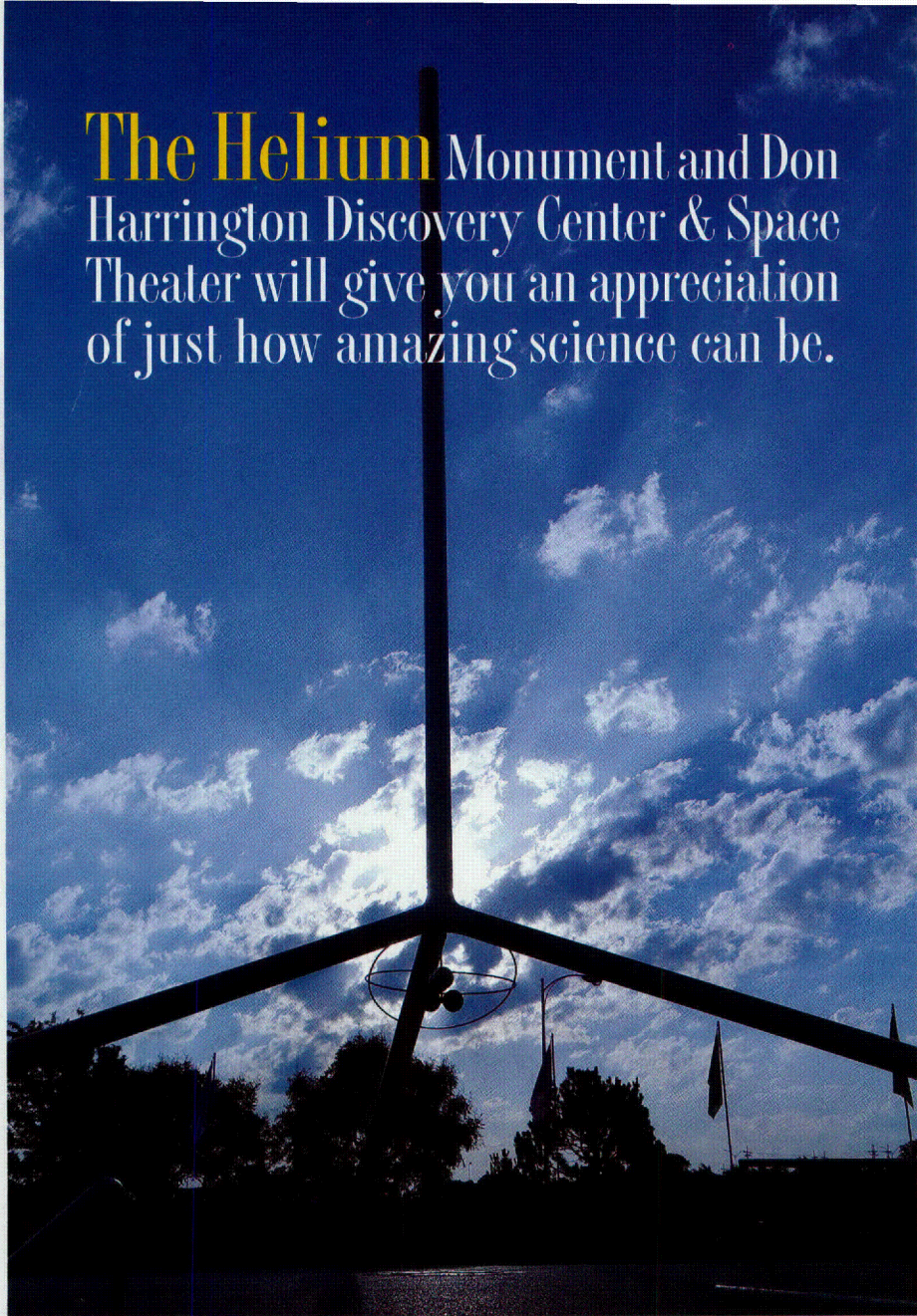
© LAURENCE PARENT



COURTESY AMARILLO OVC

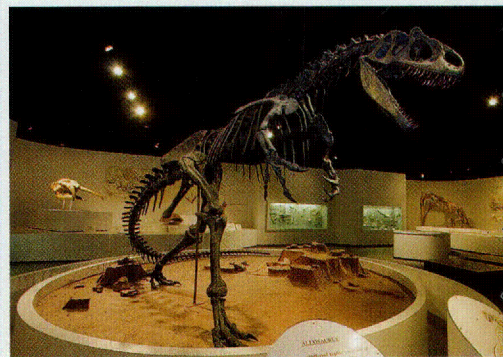
Stanley Marsh 3's Cadillac Ranch registers smiles per gallon. The World Championship Ranch Rodeo is one of several annual Amarillo events honoring cowboy culture. Downtown's historic Santa Fe building has been beautifully restored for official Potter County business.

The Helium Monument and Don Harrington Discovery Center & Space Theater will give you an appreciation of just how amazing science can be.



(which I strongly suggest), Cal Farley's Boys Ranch (36 miles northwest) and Lake Meredith National Recreation Area and Alibates Flint Quarries National Monument (both 38 miles northeast) are all well worth your time and travel.

Back within the city limits, the Amarillo Zoo is of modest size, but its setting in Thompson Park (along with its inhabitants, which include a Bengal tiger, black



The splendid holdings of the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum cover a vast continuum of West Texas natural history, civilization, and art.

bear, buffalo, mountain lion, and spider monkeys), was a treat on a recent visit. A gorgeous spring morning at the zoo welcomed several hundred schoolchildren, delighted and transfixed by various members of the animal kingdom, and confirmed why such a collection of fauna provides a most worthy civic enterprise.

Bicycle riders, take note: Though I wasn't able to knock off a few miles on the city's recently opened Rock Island Rail Trail and BP (British Petroleum) Arbor Trail, it's on my next Amarillo agenda. This westside project is a terrific idea, and an excellent opportunity for both native and visiting casual cyclists. Additionally, the Old Tascosa Classic in June is an annual two-day cycling festival for the whole family, featuring a bike tour, criterium, and road race.

I've always been impressed with the Amarillo College neighborhood, which includes the Amarillo Museum of Art and its diverse collection, from a 9th-Century Buddha figure to an 18th-Century Francesco Guardi masterpiece, 20th-Century Dorothea Lange photography, and 21st-Century modern works. This area's green lawns, big trees, beautiful homes, and old red brick streets are quite appealing, and along with the Polk Street Histori-



The Helium Monument (top) commemorates the discovery of this elemental gas in the Panhandle. Above, wonders of the scientific world captivate young Bailee Graves at the Don Harrington Discovery Center. At left, executive director Tom Toperzer welcomes you to the Amarillo Museum of Art's collection of antiquities, sculpture, paintings, and photography.

essentials THIS WAY TO AMARILLO



At Amarillo's Wildcat Bluff Nature Center (806/352-6007; www.wildcatbluff.org), naturalist Robin Price and director Mike Boley handle a native rat snake.

cal District and Bivins neighborhood, create pleasant residential environments that most people might not envision when they think of this Heart-of-the-Panhandle community.

Best for last? Call it suburban Amarillo or just a perfect Plains small town, but Canyon, 19 miles to the south, has its own special enticements. Don't miss the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum at West Texas A&M University. This timeless Texas treasure won't disappoint with its substantive permanent collection and touring exhibits of art and history. And any Panhandle itinerary must encompass Palo Duro Canyon State Park, just east of Canyon. This vast and venerable natural wonder has been home to Native Americans and pioneers, and inspired such famous artists as Alexandre Hogue, Frank Reaugh, and Georgia O'Keeffe, and frankly, anyone else who's been lucky enough to experience its Mother Earth magnificence. Consider the Elkins Ranch Cowboy Morning Breakfast (800/658-2613) at the canyon's edge, a pure Texas escape. This region's subterranean layers of gas and oil wealth aside, Palo Duro is both the region's low point (literally) and its height of grandeur. Miss it, as well as all that Amarillo promises, and you really miss out. ★

Assistant editor MARTY LANGE drove a Nissan Altima to Cadillac Ranch in the golden glow of a West Texas sunset. He highly recommends Ignatz Sahula-Dyck's painting *Early Washburn* (Texas), at the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum.

A native of Dodd City in northeast Texas, photographer RUSSELL GRAVES now calls the Panhandle town of Childress home.

FOR MORE information, contact the **Amarillo Convention and Visitor Council**, at 1000 Polk St. in the beautiful historic Bivins home, P.O. Drawer 9480, Amarillo 79105; 806/374-1497; www.visitamarillotx.com. The city's visitor information center is at 401 S. Buchanan, Ste. 101, Amarillo 79101; 806/374-8474 or 800/692-1338. The **TxDOT Travel Information Center** is at I-40 East and Airport Rd; 806/335-1441.

ATTRACTIONS

The historic **Santa Fe building** is at 900 S. Polk.

The new **Globe-News Center for the Performing Arts** opens January 2006 at 400 S. Buchanan. Call 806/374-8288; www.globenewscenter.com.

The **Tri-State Fairgrounds**, including the Amarillo National Center, are at 3310 E. 10th. Call 806/376-7767; www.tristatefair.com.

The **American Quarter Horse Heritage Center & Museum** is at 2601 I-40 East. Hours: Mon-Sat 9-5. Admission: \$4, \$3.50 age 55 and older, \$2.50 ages 6-18, free age 5 and younger. Call 806/376-5181; www.aqha.com/foundation/museum.

Kwahadi Kiva Indian Museum and Event Center is at 9151 I-40 East. Hours: Jun-Oct, Wed-Sat 11-6, Sun 1-5; Nov-May, Thu-Sat 12-5, Sun 1-5. Closed Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas holidays. Admission: \$3, \$2 seniors, \$1 students; performances \$6, \$5 seniors, \$3 age 15 and younger. Call 806/335-3175; www.kwahadi.com.

The **Amarillo Museum of Art** is at 2200 S. Van Buren. Hours: Tue-Wed and Fri 10-5, Thu 10-9, Sat-Sun 1-5. Closed Mon., holidays, and installation weeks. Admission: Free. Call 806/371-5050; www.amarilloart.org.

The **Don Harrington Discovery Center & Space Theater** is at 1200 Streit Dr. Hours: Tue-Sat 9:30-4:30, Sun 12-4:30. Closed Mon., New Year's Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. Admission: \$5.50, \$5 age 60 and older and ages 13-22, \$4.50 ages 3-12. Call 806/355-9547 or 800/784-9548; www.dhdc.org.

Amarillo Botanical Gardens, at 1400 Streit Dr., opens a new geometric glass Tropical Conservatory in early 2006. Hours: Oct-Apr, Mon-Fri 9-5; May-Sep, Mon-Fri 9-5, Sat-Sun 1-5; closed

holidays. Admission: Free. Call 806/352-6513; www.amarillobotanicalgardens.org.



Cadillac Ranch is just west of the city limits on the south side of I-40, between exits 60 and 62. Free.

The **Amarillo Zoo** is at NE 24th and US 287 N. in Thompson Park. Hours: Tue-Sun 9:30-5:30. Admission: Free. Call 806/381-7911.

The **Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum** is on the campus of West Texas

A&M University, 2503 Fourth Ave., in Canyon. Hours: Sep-May, Mon-Sat 9-5, Sun 1-6; Jun-Aug, Mon-Sat 9-6, Sun 1-6. Closed New Year's Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, and Christmas Day. Admission: \$7, \$6 age 65 and older, \$3 ages 4-12, free age 3 and younger. Call 806/651-2244; www.panhandleplains.org.

Palo Duro Canyon State Park, 11450 Park Rd. 5, Canyon. Entrance fee: \$3, \$2 age 65 and older, free age 12 and younger. Call 806/488-2227 or 800/792-1112; www.tpwd.state.tx.us. Horseback riding in the canyon at Old West Stables (see feature on the next page).

Alibates Flint Quarries National Monument is at Fritch. Free guided tour with park ranger by reservation only. Call 806/857-3131; www.nps.gov/alfl/.

DINING

Big Texan Steak Ranch, 7701 I-40 E.; 800/657-7177; www.bigtexan.com.

Coyote Bluff Cafe, 2417 S. Grand; 806/373-4640.

Stockyard Cafe, 101 S. Manhattan; 806/342-9411.

Village Bakery Café, 2606 W. 22nd; 806/358-1358; www.villagebakerycafe.com.

My Thai, 2029 S. Coulter; 806/352-9014 or 355-9541.

LODGING

Hampton Inn & Suites, 6901 I-40 West; 806/467-9997.

The **Galbraith House Bed & Breakfast** (a Texas Historic Landmark home), 1710 S. Polk; 806/374-0237; www.thegalbraithhouse.com.

Back in the

Saddle Again



By Melissa Gaskill
Photographs by Earl Nottingham

IT'S HARD TO THINK OF TEXAS without horses coming to mind, and no wonder: More than a million of them graze within the state's borders. That means it's easy to find one when the hankerin' to ride hits, and, this being Texas, it's easy to find pretty country for riding, too. Here are some of my favorite places to hit the trail, most of them in or near scenic state parks.

ELM CREEK STABLES, Concan

I rode my first horse as a three-year-old at Garner State Park, sitting in front of the guide. An old home movie shows him handing my sleeping self down to Dad at the end of the trail.

Some 40 years later, I rode in a more lively state at Elm Creek Stables, a quarter-mile from Garner and run by descendants of that original guide. Owner and trail guide George Streib helps match riders with a mount before leading an hourlong ride around the family ranch on a dirt trail that goes uphill and down, through pasture land, and into oak and mesquite woods, where you're likely to spot deer and wild-

A blazing sunset paints the sky orange in this iconic Texas scene. Go ahead, giddyup! PHOTO © CONNIE THOMPSON





Exploring beautiful Palo Duro Canyon by horseback dispels the fast-paced 21st Century in no time.

flowers. The stable offers rides all day long, but evening rides are special: A soft light filters through the trees, and a cool breeze is likely even in summer. Also, you can hang out at the ranch a little longer, riding a hay-covered flatbed trailer to the picnic area for some real down-home barbecue. Fiddler Dick Walker, one of several local talents who frequents the barbecues, entertained my group with songs and stories as we tucked into melt-in-your-mouth brisket, potato salad, beans, bread and tortillas, sweet watermelon, and a thick slab of chocolate cake for dessert. If this is a typical cowboy evening, sign me up.

ISLAND EQUESTRIAN CENTER, *South Padre Island*

I used to think that horseback riding at the beach meant a scruffy nag that plodded down the shore, then perked up and couldn't go fast enough when I turned back toward the stable. Things are different at the Island Equestrian Center on South Padre Island. In the spacious, tin-roofed stable, guides skillfully match each horse and rider according to whether you're a novice or an old pro, and children age six and older can sit their own mounts.

Guided rides of one or one-and-a-half hours follow the beach on the Gulf or bay side of the island, with riders in casual groups meandering along the shore. This allows for a variety of paces, with guides on the longer rides even offering to lead the more adventurous on a brisk, exciting canter across the sandy flats. (If you haven't cantered before, it isn't as easy as they make it look in the movies.) You can splash through the shallow bay of Laguna Madre, too, if you don't mind getting a little wet. Warm sun on your shoulders, a sea breeze ruffling the horse's mane, a faint scent of saddle leather, and the sound of hooves on thick sand will have you humming a Beach Boys tune and wishing for endless summer.

RUNNING-R RANCH, *Bandera*

Rides at the Running-R Ranch, just outside Bandera, may have the most authentic cowboy feel around, thanks to wranglers who talk and ride like the real thing, and routes that take you through rugged



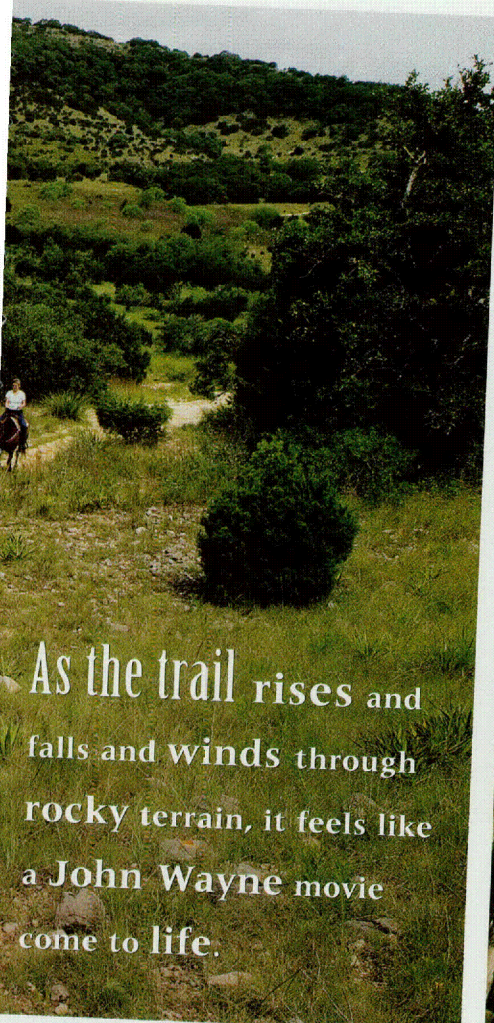
At the bucolic Running-R Ranch near Bandera, riders can explore more than 40 miles of trails in the adjacent Hill Country State Natural Area. With their canine buddy Hogdog in hot pursuit, Layne, Caitlin, and Will Thompson explore the dogwood-studded forests of East Texas.

country with few signs of civilization. The daily rate for a cabin at the ranch includes two hours of horseback riding on more than 40 miles of trails in the adjacent Hill Country State Natural Area, which sprawls across more than 5,500 acres of rocky hills, grassland, and oak groves. (Guests can request longer rides of four or five hours, with one day's notice.) One riding trail follows a clear gurgling creek through woods and open areas sprinkled with wildflowers. Splashing across the creek several times thrills the younger riders, espe-



cially when their horses stop for a long, slurping drink of water. Here and there, my kids and I spotted tiny fish in the water and dragonflies just above the surface.

Another route heads the other direction, past campgrounds and over the creek to climb a substantial hill, which affords a panoramic view of the Hill Country. The wranglers joke, sing, and willingly




As the trail rises and falls and winds through rocky terrain, it feels like a John Wayne movie come to life.

How to Ride

Always mount a horse from the left side, and avoid the rear of the horse. Sit up straight, to the back of the saddle, with weight evenly on the stirrups, which should be adjusted so there is a slight bend to your knee. Keep your heels down, and squeeze gently with your thighs to keep your balance. Hold your reins in one hand (it's okay to hold the saddlehorn with the other), and pull left to turn left, right to turn right, and toward you to stop.

Chances are you'll be sore after a good ride, since you're using muscles differently, says Val Clark, director of shows for the Texas Quarter Horse Association. To minimize soreness, stretch your muscles and walk around after a ride. A good soak in a hot bath works wonders, too.



A blanket of pine needles quiets the clomp-clomping of horses' hooves at Lake Livingston Stables, which offers rides through peaceful Lake Livingston State Park.

answer questions about the ranch, the horses, and the plants along the route.

QUITAQUE RIDING STABLES, *Caprock Canyons State Park and Trailway, Quitaque*

For the ride at Caprock Canyons State Park, my husband, children, and I met our guide, Tomas Hinojosa from Quitaque Riding Stables, at the park's equestrian camping area. He unloaded horses from his trailer—white, black, brown, red, and even a paint—and we hopped in the saddle and headed out on one of the park's trails. We followed a narrowing canyon, crossing and re-cross-

ing a tiny, trickling prong of the Little Red River, where multihued rocks littered the red-gold sand like spilled gems. The sandy surface muffles sound, and as the trail rises and falls and winds through rocky terrain, for brief moments you're all alone with your horse, just a lone rider in wild canyonlands. It could be a hundred years ago. Then the trail climbs to a rough and rocky area with craggy peaks and buttes against the wide blue sky, a John Wayne movie set come to life. (I was tempted to scan the cliffs for bandits.)

We rode on through a narrow, rocky pass, then headed back into the scrub, crisscrossing the cool waters of another

stream. Sharp eyes can spy coyote scat, raccoon tracks near the water, the rooting scars of wild pigs, and flashes of bright cardinals. On our early-spring ride, hundreds of sandhill cranes passed overhead, their eerie calls echoing off the canyon walls. Dismounting back at the horse trailer felt like stepping down from a time machine, leaving the Old West to return to the 21st Century. But it was a time machine at my beck and call.

Spend a night in one of several campgrounds in the park, and soak up the wide Texas night sky, complete with coyote serenade. Nearby is Caprock Canyons Trailway, a 64-mile, multipurpose trail converted from railroad right-of-way (see *Texas Highways*, May 2002). It's good for hiking and biking, and Quitaque Riding Stables can arrange horseback rides there with advance notice.



If you're a fan of sand, surf, and saddles, check out the Island Equestrian Center, on South Padre Island. In Concan (right), a group gathers at Elm Creek Stables for an exciting ride through owner George Streib's family ranch.

OLD WEST STABLES, Palo Duro Canyon State Park, Canyon

Rugged, dramatic canyon walls form the backdrop for hourlong guided rides inside Palo Duro Canyon State Park, known as the Grand Canyon of Texas (see *Texas Highways*, June 2003). In a sun-beaten corral of reddish sand, the wrangler matched riders with sturdy, saddled horses—and two mules named Thelma and Louise. Much to my chagrin, he placed me on a mule, but disappointment in my floppy-eared mount turned to affection as we rode the trail up and down some impressive little arroyos. Louise was as surefooted as, you guessed it, a mule, and I knew I'd have no trouble making it back to the stable. Four-hour guided trips take riders to the 300-foot columnar formation called The Lighthouse, conditions allowing (e.g., no washed-out creek beds). Wear a hat—the scenery is awe-inspiring, but shade is scarce, at least in the riding area. Juniper,



mesquite, and cottonwoods do cool the campgrounds.

LAKE LIVINGSTON STABLES, Lake Livingston State Park, Livingston

About an hour north of Houston, Lake Livingston State Park's 635 acres hug the shores of an 84,800-acre reservoir, offering camping, picnicking, swimming, boating, fishing, biking—and horseback riding. Guided rides follow a two-and-a-half-mile trail that twists through a forest of towering loblolly pines. On the ground, a blanket of pine needles quiets all sound, including that of horses' hooves. These horses know the trail and each other, leaving the rider little to do

What to Wear

Shoes with a low heel, preferably boots, keep your feet in place in the stirrups. Traditional cowboy boots are best, says Iris Kirchner, owner of Eandera's Running-R Ranch, but hiking boots or tennis shoes will do fine in a pinch. Wear long pants so the saddle won't rub sore spots and to ward off sunburn and scratches from brush. Every cowboy needs a hat.

When you call for reservations, inquire about helmets. Some places provide them, some don't. If necessary, bring your own, especially for children. Always take along bottles of water, even if the wranglers have canteens. Riding in the Texas sun can stir up a powerful thirst.

These horses know the trail, leaving the rider little to do but relax, listen to the sounds of nature, look for ducks on the pond, and, if you're lucky, spy an owl or white-tailed deer.



the term peaceful, too: Although I sometimes heard shrieks and splashes from nearby Lake Raven (and the calls of its eponymous bird), I saw little but woods from the saddle. The stable offers breakfast and dinner rides, and welcomes riders of all ages and abilities.

From smooth beaches to craggy mountains and everything in between, for leisurely rides through the woods or an exciting race on the sand, Texas stables offer just about every kind of horseback-riding experience a cowboy-wannabe could ask for. Seek out stables whenever you're on the road, or make a special trip just for the ride, but don't miss the true Texas experience of spending an hour or two in the saddle. And don't forget, if you have a good time, pat your horse and tip your wrangler! ★

As a child, Texas writer MELISSA GASKILL wished for a horse of her own.

EARL NOTTINGHAM specializes in nature photography.

At the Running-R Ranch in Bandera, the daily rate for a cabin includes two hours of horseback riding in the adjacent Hill Country State Natural Area. Impromptu two-stepping, of course, is always free—wherever you are in Texas.

but relax, listen to the sounds of nature, and look for lichens or mushrooms on the forest floor, ducks on the little pond, and, if you're lucky, an owl or white-tailed deer. The hourlong ride gets my vote for the most peaceful in the state. Evening rides include the option of a steak or hamburger dinner. On Saturday nights in October and November (as well as in the spring and on holidays), you can work off the meal on the stable's dance floor, and, on cool fall nights, enjoy a bonfire.

LAKE RAVEN STABLES, *Huntsville State Park, Huntsville*

At Lake Raven Stables, just inside Huntsville State Park, in the piney woods of the Sam Houston National Forest, rides start from a shaded corral where saddled horses wait along the split-pine rail. The scenic riding path follows sandy Chinquapin Creek, crosses a wooden bridge where the horses' hooves make a satisfying clomp-clomp, then winds up and down gentle hills covered with loblolly and shortleaf pine, the occasional palmetto, and wildflowers. This ride earns

essentials SADDLE UP!

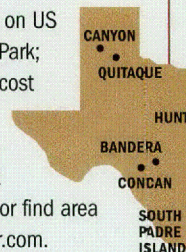
Be sure to call each spot for reservations.

CONCAN Elm Creek Stables, on US 83 just north of Garner State Park; 830/232-5365. Hourly rides cost \$20, including catch-and-release fishing-hole privileges. Dinner rides (7 p.m.) begin at \$25. Camp at the state park, or find area accommodations at www.thcrr.com.

SOUTH PADRE ISLAND Island Equestrian Center, on Padre Blvd. one mile north of the Convention Center; 956/761-4677; www.horsesonthebeach.com. Ride prices range from \$30-\$45. Visit www.sopadre.com for information about accommodations.

BANDERA Running-R Ranch, about 9 1/2 miles south of Bandera on Ranch Road 1077; 830/796-3984; www.rrranch.com. Riding costs \$25 per hour, \$22 ages 6-12. Packages with accommodations and meals are available.

QUITAQUE Quitaque Riding Stables, adjacent to Caprock Canyons State Park and Trailway; 806/455-1208. Guided or unguided rides cost \$25 per hour. Camping available in the park; 806/455-1492; www.tpwd.state.tx.us.



CANYON Old West Stables, in Palo Duro Canyon State Park; 806/488-2180. Guided one-hour rides cost \$35, 4-hour guided trips to the Lighthouse cost \$140. Camping and cabins available in the park; 806/488-2227; www.tpwd.state.tx.us. Accommodations also available in nearby Canyon; visit www.canyontx.com/lodging.html.

LIVINGSTON Lake Livingston Stables, in Lake Livingston State Park; 936/967-5032. Open daily on weekends year round, also weekdays in Mar. and June-early Aug. One-hour rides cost \$18. Call for information about breakfast and dinner rides. Camping available in the park; 936/365-2201; www.tpwd.state.tx.us, or try accommodations in nearby Livingston (www.livingston-polkcounty.com).

HUNTSVILLE Lake Raven Stables, in Huntsville State Park; 936/295-1985. One-hour rides cost \$18. Call for information about breakfast or dinner rides. Camping available in the park; 936/295-5644; www.tpwd.state.tx.us, or try accommodations in nearby Huntsville (www.huntsvilletexas.com).

A NEW BOOK BY PHOTOGRAPHER LAURENCE PARENT AND WRITER JOE NICK PATOSKI DISTILLS THE

THE LONG, LANGUID COASTLINE OF TEXAS TAKES HER OWN SWEET TIME SEDUCING THE SENSES.

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FROM *TEXAS COAST*, PHOTOGRAPHS BY LAURENCE PARENT, TEXT BY JOE NICK PATOSKI (UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS PRESS, AUSTIN, 2005). TO ORDER (\$29.95, PLUS SHIPPING, HANDLING, AND APPLICABLE TAX), CALL 800/252-3206; www.utexas.edu/utpress.

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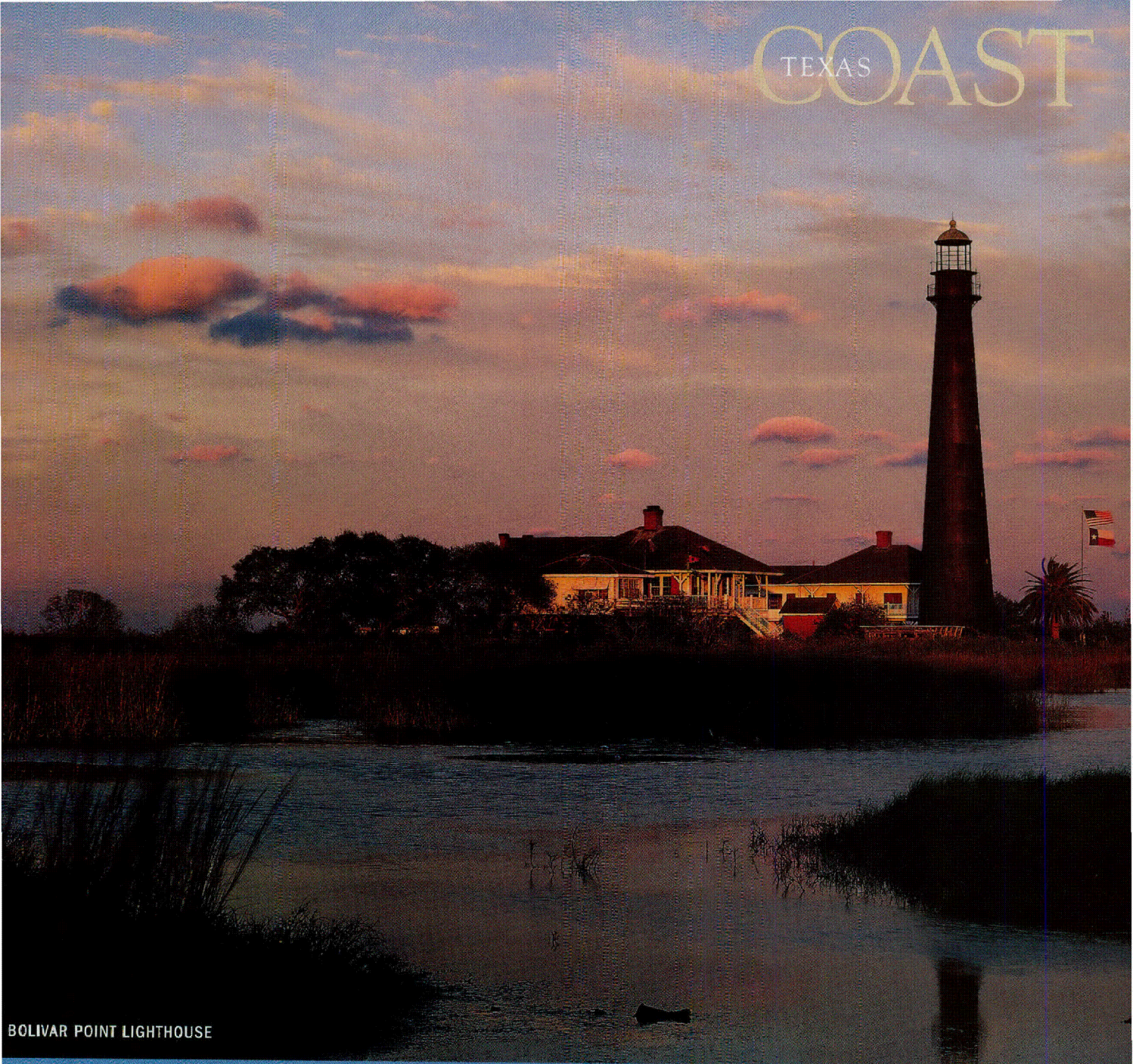
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TEXAS COAST



BOLIVAR POINT LIGHTHOUSE



TANKER, FREEPORT

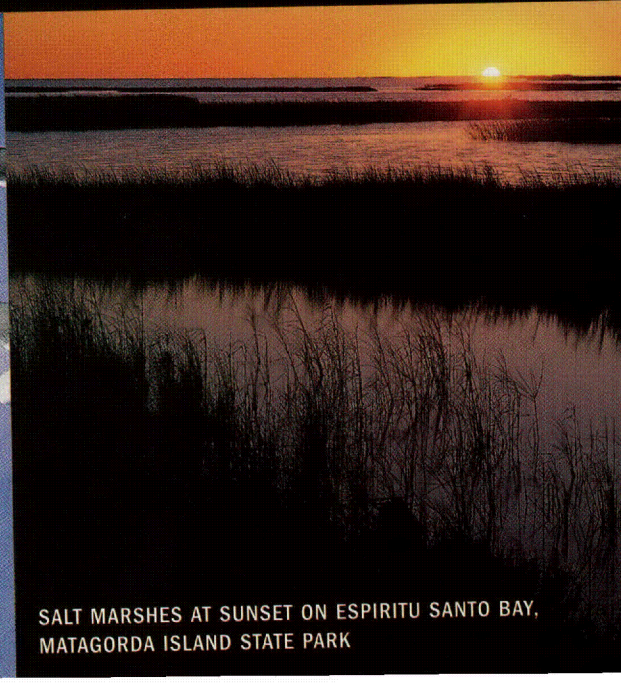
TEXAS COAST



HORSESHOE LAKE, BRAZORIA COUNTY



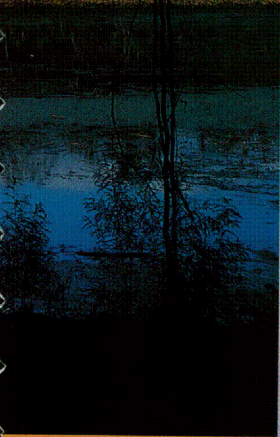
SEA GULLS, PORT ARANSAS



SALT MARSHES AT SUNSET ON ESPIRITU SANTO BAY,
MATAGORDA ISLAND STATE PARK



GREAT EGRET IN MARSH, SAN BERNARD NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE



MARINA WITH SAILBOATS IN THE FOG, CORPUS CHRISTI

TEXAS COAST





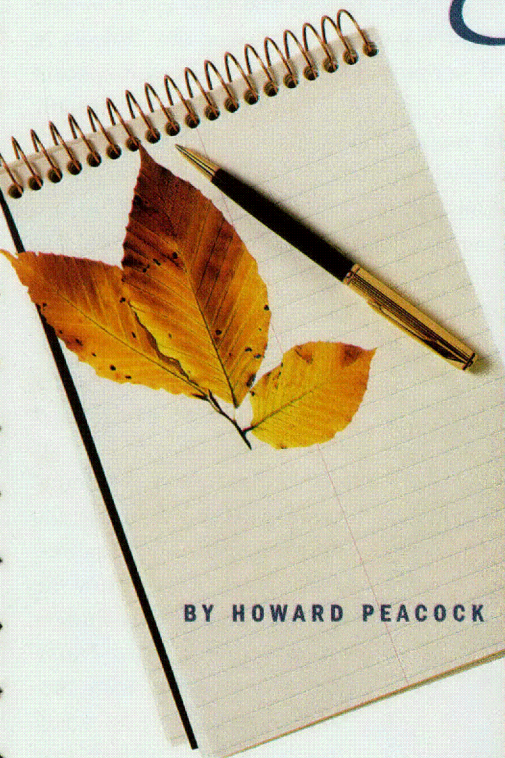
SUNRISE, PADRE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE

**To order a print of this photograph, see page 1.*





My *notes from a journal* Big Thicket



TALK ABOUT bonehead questions! Here's one from my overflowing bag. I popped it to two classy ladies, causing them to back away from me with a grim glare on their faces. I wasn't sure whether they were staring through my skull into my brain or at my dirty mouth.

It happened on a perfect October day in the Big Thicket—cool, bright, just right. The three of us were sitting together in a crowd at ceremonies dedicating the new Visitor Center of the Big Thicket National Preserve.

Mary Ann, a sweetheart from our high school class in Beaumont, now a well-known California artist, graced my left. Annie, a statuesque young Austin artist, bloomed under a big hat on my right. Squeezed between them, I sat upright, arms stiffly stretched forward so that my elbows wouldn't press on theirs.

My mind was on the Kirby Nature Trail, which winds through a wonderful forest two miles away. I've been trekking it for about 35 years, ever since we called it the Kirby Primitive Tract. It's a favorite old haunt, always with signs of evolving.

When the ceremonies ended, the three of us arose. My mind still played on images of the nature trail. As I turned toward Annie and Mary Ann, a great idea came over me.

"Would you beautiful girls," I began, smiling toothily, "like to take a little walk in the woods with me?"

I must have wiggled my eyebrows, like Groucho Marx, or winked an eye against the bright sunlight. They froze as if a bomb had dropped between us, ticking.

Bonehead question! Big time!

"No! No!" I protested, finally catching on. "I swear I didn't

[CLOCKWISE FROM FACING PAGE] A hiking trail winds its way through an oak-gum flood-plain forest in the Turkey Creek Unit of the Big Thicket National Preserve. Author Howard Peacock has hugged and talked to the Thicket's trees since he was a child. Boardwalk trails make it easy to visit boggy portions of the Big Thicket.

PHOTOS FROM TOP: © RANDY MALLORY; © JOHN ELK III

mean it that way! Let me explain! Just let me explain!”

They relaxed a mite and let me explain. They even let me describe the wonders of the Kirby Nature Trail. And, hot dog, they agreed to the walk. Away we went.

A hundred yards or so down the trail, the first squadron of mosquitoes struck. Big babies. The females drilled their needle noses into our skins and sucked blood while the males flew around whining.

Annie and Mary Ann began slapping at their own faces, arms, and legs. Then they teamed up on slapping my face, neck, and virtually hairless scalp. “Gotta kill these ‘skeeters!” one of them shouted, whacking me with a combination left and right.

They wanted to retreat. I kept promising wonders of peace and beauty ahead. But the stinging devils swarmed all the more.

At one point, Annie started dancing up the trail instead of just running to escape. Maybe she thought joyful whirling might confuse the mosquitoes or charm them into submission. Maybe she had been driven nuts. Meantime, Mary Ann kept on whamming my face.

At last the trail ended, and with it the ordeal.

“That was extremely unusual,” I said. “It’s never happened to me before on this trail.” We stumbled, bleeding, to our sep-

THE WAY YOU WALK

The way a person walks in the woods has a lot to do with how much pleasure he or she will get from a visit to the Thicket.

The best way to walk in the woods is like a curious but contented cat. You’re alert to sounds, smells, sights, textures, and yes, if you know your wild berries, your taste. I know a woman-walker who tastes the air. She sticks out her tongue and waits a few moments for the air to make its contents known. Snakes do that, too (just a scientific fact, ma’am, not a slur).

Walking that way, you see trees, leaves, lizards, tracks, and birds in a new light. You see sunshine as never before. You appreciate the spaces between trees so that your eyes can venture farther back into the woods. You notice tiny flowers at your feet, and avoid stepping on them. You use your pocket magnifier to watch tiny critters go about their day, usually looking for food or mates. The last thing you do is hurry. You’re not going somewhere; you like being where you are.

The pace I’m talking about is what Henry David Thoreau, the great American naturalist, called “sauntering.” At Walden, he found and knew the right pace.

One time, a cranky nurse called Daisy Mae told me, “You

walk so slo-o-o-w.” Then she added, “You even drink water slow.” I started to respond with something smart, but just said, “It’s how Henry David walked. We have the same birthday. We saunter. But I don’t know how he drank water.” You understand, I didn’t want Daisy Mae to get upset with me. Your nurse can be an angel from heaven or a *numero uno* witch from hell. I wanted to be on Daisy Mae’s good side.

So, if you walk like a curious but contented cat, you will learn a lot from nature,

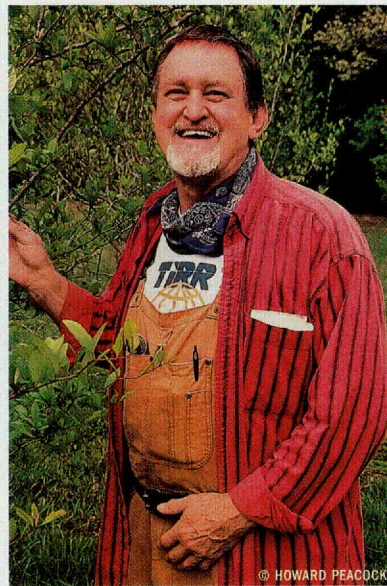
and you will surely love the Big Thicket. Moreover, you will be considered “very cool,” whether anyone is looking or not; a very Cool Cat, indeed.

MICKEY J. AND SNAPPING TURTLES

Strong nostalgic feelings about the Big Thicket begin to build up in my head and feet each fall and spring (I grew up in Beaumont, on the edge of the Thicket, but live in San Antonio now). I get lonesome to see and walk among beech trees and bladderworts, pitcher plants and migrating birds, all sorts of



© RANDY MALLORY



© HOWARD PEACOCK

arate cars. “There must have been a heavy rain here 21 days ago,” I said. “That’s how long it takes for mosquitoes to mature.” I thought a little science might help the situation. “By the way, ladies, did either of you bring any anti-itch cream?”

Another bonehead question! Ow-w-w-w!

As the two beauties roared away in their car, now sporting numerous, itching welts smeared with blood and smashed insect bodies, I set myself two rules for future outings: 1) always carry bug spray and anti-itch stuff, and 2) think twice or thrice before asking questions of ladies.

Maxine “Mickey” Johnston, left, and Neal Wright, right, know the Thicket as well as anyone. Mickey has been at the center of the Save the Big Thicket movement for 35 years. On Howard Peacock’s recent visit to the Thicket, Neal said to the author, “Howard, we could live a good life in these woods, starting from scratch, and stay strong, and almost never get an ailing, and keep on learning, ‘til no telling what ripe old age.” Neal got all spiffed up for this portrait.



*I know fall
is here when
the leaves of
the beeches turn
golden, a unique
shade of gold,
like a queen's
party gown.*

flowers, places, and friends that made memories over the past 70 years, dating from my first campout on Village Creek at age 10.

Friends such as Pete Gunter, professor of philosophy and religion at the University of North Texas, who is the wittiest, most eloquent spokesman for the Big Thicket we ever had. He lives in Denton but shows up at the Thicket often. Like Geraldine Watson, super scientific-naturalist, author, artist, poet, and what-all. Like Neal Wright and his dog Bowser, who jumped on me in greeting and knocked me down. Bowser will soon weigh 150 pounds.

"He's only a pup," Neal said proudly. "Just look at that head and those big feet." Bowser is half husky, half Canadian wolf, Neal says. "He was given to me by a Shoshone medicine man." A native of the Thicket, Neal spends his summers around the Shoshone Indian Reservation in Wyoming doing construction work. At first snow, he returns to the Thicket, living much like a hermit, but happily in the deep woods almost two miles from his nearest neighbor. When Bowser knocked me down again as I was leaving, Neal said, "He likes good people, but he's ready to hurt bad people. He knows the difference." Dusting myself off, I looked Bowser in the eye and said, "I ain't all that good. Let me leave."

On my pilgrimages, it's essential that I go "woods stompin'" with my Forever Friend, Mickey Johnston. Maxine, as formal people call her, has been the heart and soul, guts, runnin' legs,

and a big part of the brains of the Save the Big Thicket movement for 35 years. Geraldine Watson told me, "If we hadn't had Mickey, America wouldn't have the Big Thicket National Preserve." This world-class ecological jewel is the first sanctu-

ary of nature in America to receive the name "National Preserve." It was in danger of being leveled by chain saws, with chunks of the best parts being paved over.

We were rambling over the Old Ghost Road when Mickey said, "It's time we had a DIS-organization—no committees, no set meetings, no officers or directors, no bylaws, no agendas, no anything like that." She proposed that only individuals with at least 20 years in the front-line foxholes of the Big Thicket wars be eligible for inclusion. "You and I," she suggested, "will be the Charter Members."

What to call it? We reacted rather snappishly to each other's ideas for a name—which brought us to agreeing on the name, "Old Big Thicket Snapping Turtles." So I've been "Tush Hog" to pals here for a long time. Now I'm also a Snapping Turtle. It feels a bit like getting a Ph.D. in Big Thicketry.



© FRED RIRSCHMANN

I didn't make the following story up. The star of the story is a huge, ancient, mean-as-hell snapping turtle that stopped heavy traffic on US 59 just south of Livingston.

I was traveling north on the highway one afternoon recently when a dark blob of something lumbered out of the brush onto the high-speed lane. I swerved to the other side and hit my brakes, then rushed out to the center stripe to wave at cars to slow down and steer clear of the monster.

He must have weighed 80 pounds, maybe closer to 100, including all the algae, barnacles, and leeches piled up on his

shell. With my foot I tried to head him toward the creek on the other side of the road, where he wanted to go. He got mad at my prodding and snapped at my leg with open jaws colored livid red. By now an audience was collecting—people in passing cars who stopped and got out to watch the action. They cheered every time the monster lunged at me.

Then came a crucial moment. He made a 90-degree turn into oncoming traffic. That's when Mr. Greatfellow jogged up to the scene.

This stout young man with a broad grin and very broad back placed his hands on either side of the massive shell, found

Towering cypress trees thrive in the mushy soils of the Big Thicket. Carnivorous pitcher plants (facing page), which grow between two and three feet tall, attract insects and small frogs with sweet nectar, then drown their prey in digestive juices.



BEECH TREES

Of course I hug beech trees. I've always thought they're the most beautiful trees in the woods. They're the royalty of the most picturesque of all the major ecosystems in the Big Thicket. It's known sometimes as the Beech-Loblolly-Magnolia forest.

I know fall is here when the leaves of the beeches turn golden, a unique shade of gold, like a queen's party gown. Backlit by a brilliant November sun, the leaves emit a startling glow. Later on, they will turn a kind of rosy or peachy tan. Their nuts fall in high numbers, clattering on your tin roof, or if you're camping, clicking pleasantly on the top of your tent.

When the limbs of beeches go bare in the winter, you can spot the buds of next spring's leaves already filling out. They're the sharpest-pointed leaf buds in the Thicket, maybe anywhere.

I know spring in the Thicket has truly arrived when the buds unfurl sparkling-new, in chartreuse-green leaves. There's no packaging job in nature like the way beech leaves are furled in the buds. There's no green like the green in the new leaves. For a little while, the color is almost electric. They'll darken to a deep green before long.

Beeches occur from northern Nova Scotia, then throughout the eastern half of the United States, and end in East Texas, primarily in the area of the so-called Primitive Big Thicket.

The late Professor Claude McLeod of Sam Houston State University, a virtually peerless authority on Big Thicket botany, found what he believed to be the final southwestern point of the beech's natural North American range. (When I say beech, I mean *Fagus grandifolia*; there are other species that also use the common name of beech.) The point was a grove on private property near Conroe.

Knowing my special admiration of the tree, Claude phoned and suggested that we visit the site. Our party included Mickey Johnston and Ann Roberts, another invaluable volunteer worker in the Save the Big Thicket movement.

For me it was a great thrill to go anywhere with Claude McLeod. At one stage in his career, he had collected thousands of plant specimens and meticulously prepared them for a scientific herbarium, only for them to be destroyed in a fire. He immediately began trips in the Thicket to start a new extensive collection.

Of the 50 or so books in my library that were authored and inscribed by friends

This world-class ecological jewel is the first sanctuary of nature in America to receive the name "National Preserve."



spaces underneath where he could get a good hold on the shell, exhaled a mighty breath, and lifted. The turtle struggled and snapped in outrage, legs thrashing in the air, but to no avail.

"Where's the creek he wanted to get to?" the young man asked. I pointed to a small meander about 30 yards away. And as quick as you could say, "So long, King Turtle," he was settling in soupy mud. The young hero returned to the roadside café whence he came, to the sound of cheer and whistles.

—which constitute my real treasure and pleasure—the inscription I value most is Claude’s in his book *Memories and Recollections of a Country Boy*. Some kind of country boy. Some scientist. Some friend.

I admit I not only hug beech trees, but also kiss them. Not many of them, of course; just the prettiest. They look so grand in their sleek silvery sheaths of figured bark. M-m-m-m. Smacko! If a person is a kisser, it’s a good thing to kiss your favorite tree.

THE OLD GHOST ROAD

This is the blackest black I’ve ever seen. There’s no light for scribbling in my Journal, not even moonlight or starlight. I’m standing at the edge of the road, leaning against my old VW camper and dictating into a recorder. The blackness of the night has a palpable presence, a thing to be felt. It’s a vast womb surrounding the whole world. I’m a mere pulse of protoplasm floating in the void.

I’m here for the third time to see The Light. Thousands of adventurous or skeptical folks have come to this road over the years to check out reports of the “Saratoga Light.” Most have stayed the night, awake and aware, or taking turns on the watch with a companion. I’m not counting generations of East Texas young people who have come here to park and spark.

“It comes charging through the woods like a ball... It bounces along the road, glowing... Well, sir, it kind of drifts through the trees like a firefly... They say it’s the head of the Santa Fe fireman—or was it the conductor of the train?—who got murdered...” Those and countless other reports, written and verbal, form the legend. Yep, there are photographs. But have they been doctored in some way?

This celebrated stretch of sand and soil in the folklore of the Thicket lies on the western edge of the town of Saratoga. It pierces through the thick woods for a straight shot 11 miles northward, from its turnoff on Farm Road 787 to Farm Road 1293 at the ghost town of Bragg. Until 1901, the area was all wilderness. Then the Santa Fe Railroad cut the road and laid tracks. Every day, the *Saratoga* chuffed and chugged to Beaumont and back, hauling people, cattle, logs, and oil from the spouting oil fields. Then came the Great Depression, and in 1934 Santa Fe pulled the tracks. Soon afterwards, the sightings of The Light started coming frequently. Even before



the tracks were pulled, people said they had seen The Light.

Scientists have reservations. Some have said The Light is a reflection of car headlights. Believers reply that Model T Fords and even later models of cars in the ’30s did not have headlights with that degree of power. Chemists say The Light is a gaseous thing. Big Thicket natives know so-called “swamp fire,” which is a gaseous flare, from way back. The Light isn’t that gaseous, they say.

Today, the road has been graded to better serve visitors. The grading process has inadvertently choked out roadside ponds that were home to scores of bladderworts, the most ingenious of the Thicket’s four genera of carnivorous plants. All of North America has only five. Mickey Johnston says it’s possible that a nature trail will be threaded through the west woods to a sizable lake. My question: Will the lake welcome bladderworts? They’re getting harder and harder to find.

The Old Ghost Road welcomes believers in such phenomena as The Light, and skeptics, and folks who like pure dee blackness. (Later entry. No, I didn’t see The Light on the above night).



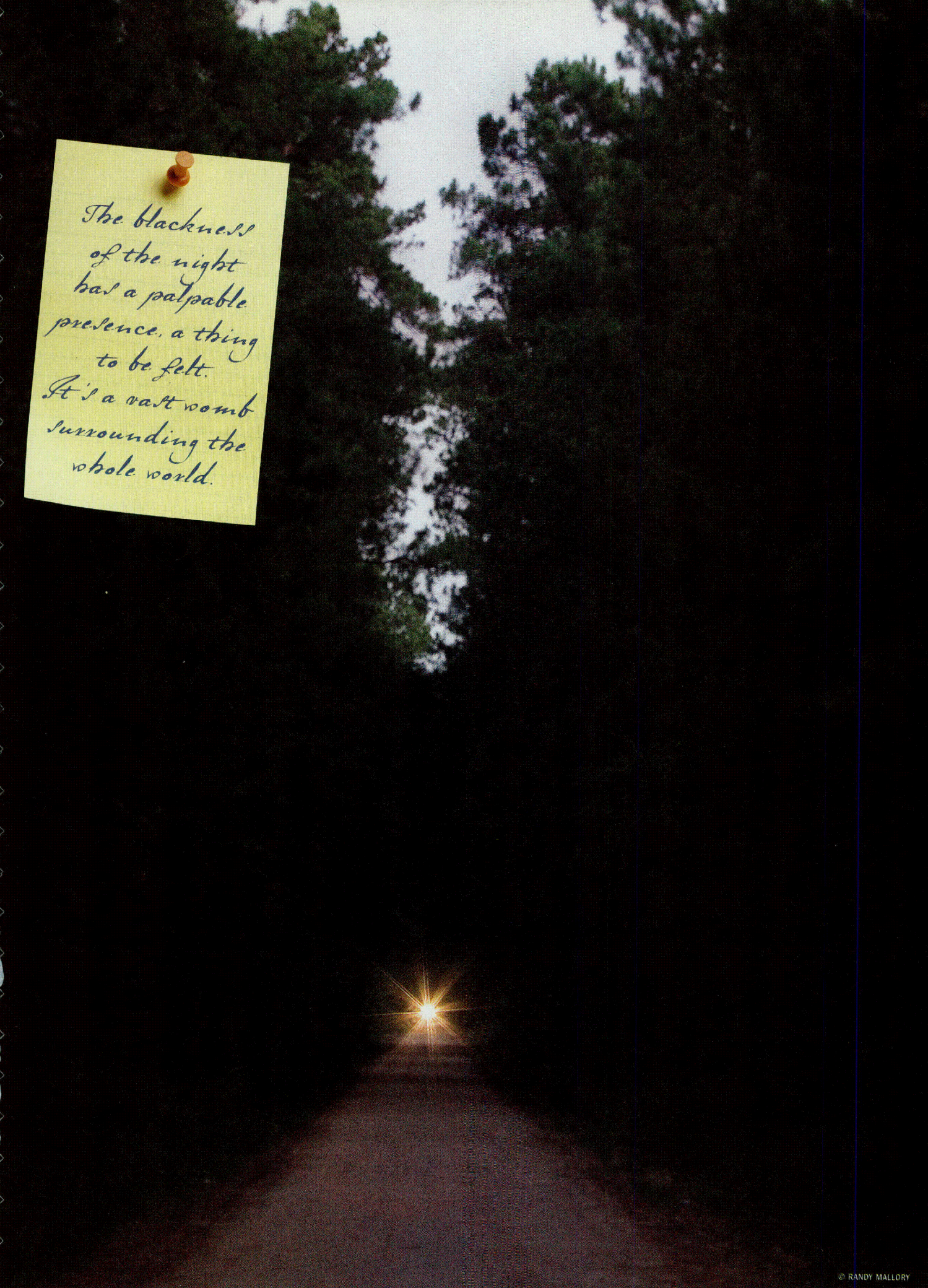
LAST MORNING

I’m sprawled out on a pallet of fallen leaves, leaning against a tree, soaking up the scene where the Kirby Nature Trail opens up to a bend in beautiful Village Creek. Massive, towering cypress trees dominate this spot, their knobby old knees protruding from the shallows. In late fall, the cypress leaves turn to a shade of cinnamon. School books call the cypress tree an “evergreen,” but it’s not. As winter nears, the needle-like leaves lose their greenery and drop from the limbs.

Right now, I try not to dread the drive back home to San Antonio, but just enjoy being where I am, in this lovely and peaceful place. After all, the Big Thicket area was home for most of my life. I want to be home in San Antonio without doing the drive. I need my pillows, Mama!

Here comes a mosquito, soloing, and landing on my hand that holds my Journal. First one I’ve (*continued on page 67*)

A hackberry emperor butterfly (above, left) feeds on Texas lantana. A common yellowthroat warbles from a perch in the Thicket. Howard Peacock reports that “Parked lovers and other trustworthy witnesses say they’ve seen balls of ‘ghost light’ (facing page) about the size of a man’s decapitated head, skittering through the woods on Bragg Road, also called the Ghost Road.”



The blackness
of the night
has a palpable
presence, a thing
to be felt.
It's a vast womb
surrounding the
whole world.

*The ivory-billed woodpecker may have been found,
but a group of Texas believers asks ...*

Where's

BY RANDY MALLORY

BIGFOOT?

LAST APRIL, a cadre of ornithologists unveiled video footage shot in the backwoods of Arkansas, of what they said was an ivory-billed woodpecker, a species considered extinct. The video brought a collective gasp from a skeptical scientific community and a delighted general public. The news also put a twinkle in the eyes of an eclectic group of self-styled cryptozoologists—folks who study animals alleged (but not yet proven) to exist. Some believe another elusive creature lives in the remote hinterlands of Arkansas and East Texas—an unidentified primate called Bigfoot.

It's one thing to rediscover a known species. It's a leap of faith to seek a creature that remains more fiction than fact. True believers and the merely curious make that leap October 15-16 in Jefferson at the fifth annual Texas Bigfoot Conference, which attracts speakers and attendees from several states.

Jefferson proves the perfect haunt for a gathering of the crypto clan, as I discovered at last year's confab.

Spooky Caddo Lake, with its gray, moss-bearded, bald-cypress groves, lurks a short boat ride away, along Big Cypress Bayou. The swampy lake was the filming site of the 1976 cult horror flick, *Creature from Black Lake*, about a Bigfoot sighting. Cryptozoologists also look to the Jefferson-Caddo area—along with bottomlands of the nearby Sulphur River—as an epicenter for alleged Bigfoot sightings, reports of which have circulated for decades.

For centuries, legends of a giant, hairy, bipedal primate—variously called Bigfoot, Yeti, Sasquatch, and Skunk Ape—have permeated cultures worldwide, including North American native peoples.

In a northwestern U.S. logging camp in 1958, Sasquatch-seeker Ray Wallace turned up giant footprints, which later proved a hoax. The Holy Grail for cryptozoologists appeared in 1967, when Roger Patterson and Bob Gimlin shot a compelling and much-debated short film of a strange creature striding beside a northern California riverbank.

Southern Bigfoot mania stomped into public view on the heels of the Patterson film. Headlines in 1969 recounted reports of a Bigfoot “monster” sighted at Lake Worth near Fort Worth. Another Bigfoot sighting in Fouke, Arkansas, 15 miles southeast of Texarkana, inspired the 1973 docudrama film, *The Legend of Boggy Creek*.

Dallasite Craig Woolheater grew up fascinated with the legend. Late one moonless night in 1994, the legend crossed his path, Craig says. He believes he saw a hairy, seven-foot creature walk upright across a deserted highway near Alexandria, Louisiana. Others reported seeing it, too.

In June 1999, Bigfoot buffs formed the Texas Bigfoot Research Center (TBRC), an organization that investigates reports of Bigfoot sightings. The TBRC Web site has received more than a million cyber-visits in the last 12 months alone, plus

THE TEXAS BIGFOOT Research Center holds its 5th annual Texas Bigfoot Conference Oct. 15-16 at Jefferson's high school common area at 1 Bulldog Dr. For details, call 877/529-5550; www.texasbigfoot.com. Another Bigfoot conclave, the **Southern Crypto Conference**, occurs each June in Conroe. Contact Chester Moore, 101 Broad St., Orange 77630; www.cryptokeeper.com.

150 sighting reports that describe a giant creature walking erect, often making an eerie call and emitting a foul odor.

Most reports come from hunters, campers, and hikers who venture into the deep woods of East Texas. Half of the reports turn out to be pranks or hoaxes, says Craig. But 50 or so each year prove compelling enough for the organization to investigate with interviews or field trips—most recently in several southeast Texas counties, the Sam Houston National Forest, and Wood County in northeast Texas.

Fieldwork involves a small (and quiet) group of TBRC volunteers who fan out across a hotspot under the cover of night, says North Texas investigator Jerry Hestard. The group goes equipped with night-vision scopes for viewing, infrared and special digital cameras for low-light photography, and parabolic dishes for sound recording. The group also main-

tains unmanned heat- and motion-sensitive “game cameras” in baited hotspots.

“Our evidence includes casts of footprints we've found and vocalizations recorded in the field,” explains Craig. “Our most convincing evidence will come from unmanned technology. Credibility is everything.”

At last year's Bigfoot conference, the speakers decried hoaxes while deliberating over casts of odd and unidentified footprints, intriguingly fuzzy photos, and strange voice recordings. They theorized how Bigfoot *could* exist in remote pockets of Texas and elsewhere. The speakers seemed...well, at least logical, if not credible (though one speaker's conjecture about a “desert ape” hiding in underground caves near El Paso seemed incredible).

The most compelling conclusions came from Jimmy Chilcutt, a retired police fingerprint expert from Conroe. (He returns to the conference this year.)

Five years ago, Jimmy saw a television report by Jeff Meldrum, a professor of anatomy and anthropology at Idaho State University, on body prints found in the Northwest of a large unknown creature with a 13-inch-plus footprint. (Meldrum also speaks at the 2005 Jefferson conference.)

Jimmy contacted the professor and compared a cast of the footprint to his collection of primate and human prints. “The footprint was definitely a primate, but not like any primate or human known to exist,” Jimmy told me. “Since then, I've seen four or five similar prints, including ones from the South, that I consider believable. I'm not a Bigfoot enthusiast, but I say there's an animal out there that needs more scientific investigation.”

Bigfoot fan Craig Woolheater couldn't agree more. “The recent rediscovery of the ivory-billed woodpecker shows what can be done with adequate resources. The search for Bigfoot in Texas is being done in our volunteers' spare time.”

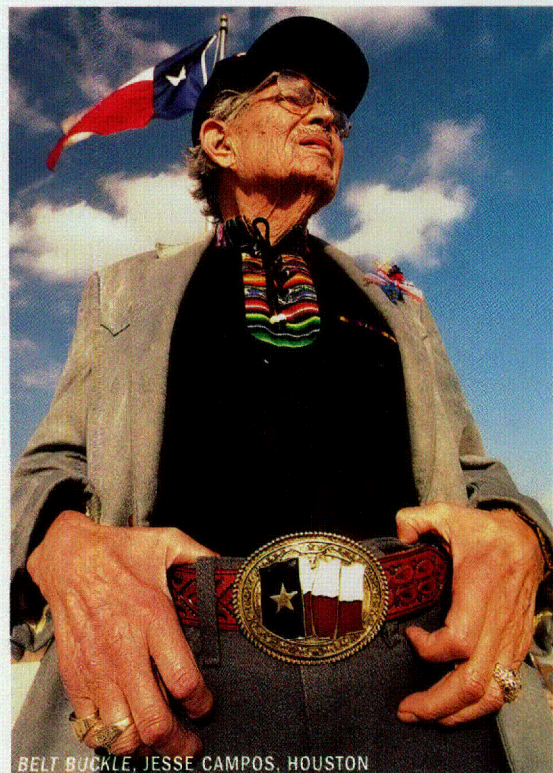
Last year's Jefferson conference proved interesting and fun, but I remain a skeptic with an open mind...but also a skeptic who once believed the ivory-billed woodpecker was as gone as the dinosaur. ★

Although photojournalist RANDY MALLORY lives in the heart of Bigfoot country—East Texas—he remains a sympathetic disbeliever.

TEXAS FLAG IMAGES: a show of **LONE STAR PRIDE**

After traveling the state for 30 years as a *Houston Chronicle* photographer, E. Joseph Deering still considers himself a student of Texas culture. One thing he's sure of, though: Texans aren't shy when it comes to showing love for their state. ★ About four years ago, E. Joe, as he's called, started noticing images of the Texas flag on everything from barns to billboards. After ruling out taking pictures of flags used as commercial images, he started shooting the phenomenon for fun. "What interested me," he says, "was the way people use the flag in so many ways to show pride in their state. In another place, you'd run out of material, but not here. Texans show their pride more than other people do." ★ Sure enough, E. Joe eventually amassed more than 200 photos from around the state that show the Lone Star banner depicted on canvases ranging from boots to belt buckles, from horse trailers to hot air balloons. A collection of 135 of the photos forms *Texas: Lone Star Pride*, an exhibit on display through October 6 at the George Bush Presidential Library and Museum at Texas A&M University. ★ E. Joe, who retired from the *Chronicle* in April and recently moved to Kerrville, says one of his favorite images in the exhibit—the Cadillac in front of the state capitol (facing page)—almost didn't happen. Seems he had just composed his shot when a DPS officer (note the patrol car in the photo) appeared, intent on keeping the area in front of the south gates clear. After hearing about the project, she relented and told the group they had five minutes. "I finished in three," says E. Joe. ★ Another Austin shot proved even more exciting. Bruce Lavorgna, owner of the hot air balloon shown on page 50, arranged for the photographer to go up in another balloon piloted by a friend of his so that E. Joe could shoot the Lone Star balloon from above. The balloon E. Joe was in had a crash landing, but not before he got his shot. (Luckily, no one was hurt.) ★ While not all of the shots required this much derring-do, each of the photos in the exhibit tells a story, and, collectively, they illustrate the love affair Texans have with their state and its flag.

—NOLA McKEY

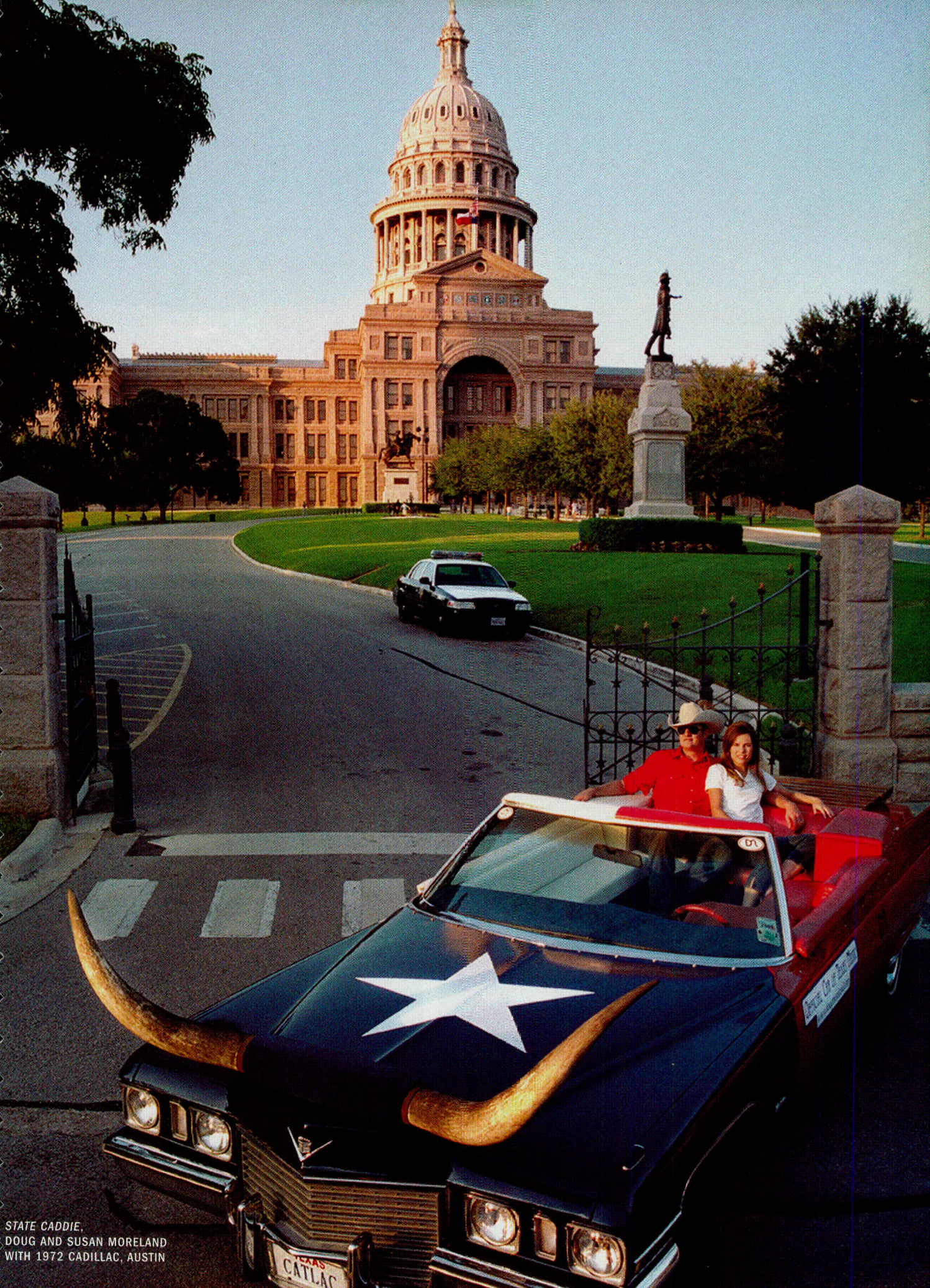


BELT BUCKLE, JESSE CAMPOS, HOUSTON



MUFFLER LOVE,
DENNY A.D. TALLEY, DAYTON

TEXAS: LONE STAR PRIDE will be on exhibit through October 6 in the Fidelity Gallery of the **George Bush Presidential Library and Museum** at Texas A&M University in **College Station**. Part of the museum's permanent collection, the exhibit is expected to travel to other Texas venues later; check the museum's Web site (listed below) for updates. Hours: Mon-Sat 9:30-5, Sun 12-5. Admission: \$7, \$5 age 62 and older and active retired military with ID, as well as groups of 20 or more with advance reservations; \$2 ages 6-17; free age 5 and younger and Texas A&M Univ. and Blinn College students. For details, write to the George Bush Presidential Library and Museum, 1000 George Bush Dr. West, College Station 77845; 979/691-4000; <http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu>.



STATE CADDIE,
DOUG AND SUSAN MORELAND
WITH 1972 CADILLAC, AUSTIN



AERODACTYL, BRUCE LAVORGNA, BALLOON PILOT, OVER AUSTIN *To order a print of this photograph, see page 1.



LONE PUDDLE, JOY ARNOLD, HOUSTON



HAPPY TRAILS, MIKE SMITH, NEW ULM

LONE STAR PRIDE



PAINT BUCKET, THE PAINTED HORSE B&B, KERRVILLE



SKEETER'S BARN, SKEETER SCARBOROUGH, DIBOLL



WINDMILL, WELCOME WINDMILL, TEXAS CITY

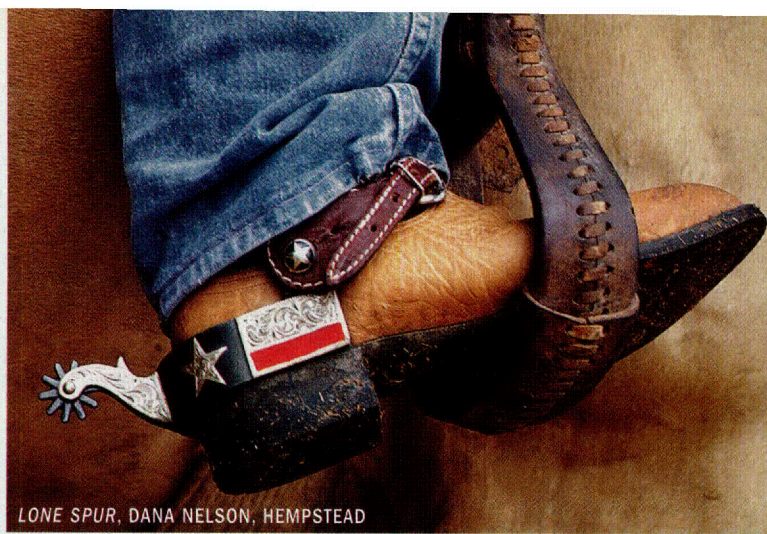


TRACTOR PEEL, ANDY MCGINTY, WASHINGTON COUNTY

LONE STAR PRIDE



LONE BOAT, THE CORDELLS ON WEST BAY, GALVESTON



LONE SPUR, DANA NELSON, HEMPSTEAD



GATE CLOSURE, CHRISTINA KALKA, BANDERA



GROUNDING WHEELS, CADILLAC RANCH, AMARILLO



SURFER BOY, BRONSON HILLIARD, GALVESTON



PLANE FARM, MILLER'S FAMILY FARM, RICARDO



8 WHEELER, FRED MOREFIELD, SOMERVILLE



WESTERN SHADE, JAMIE KERR, HOUSTON



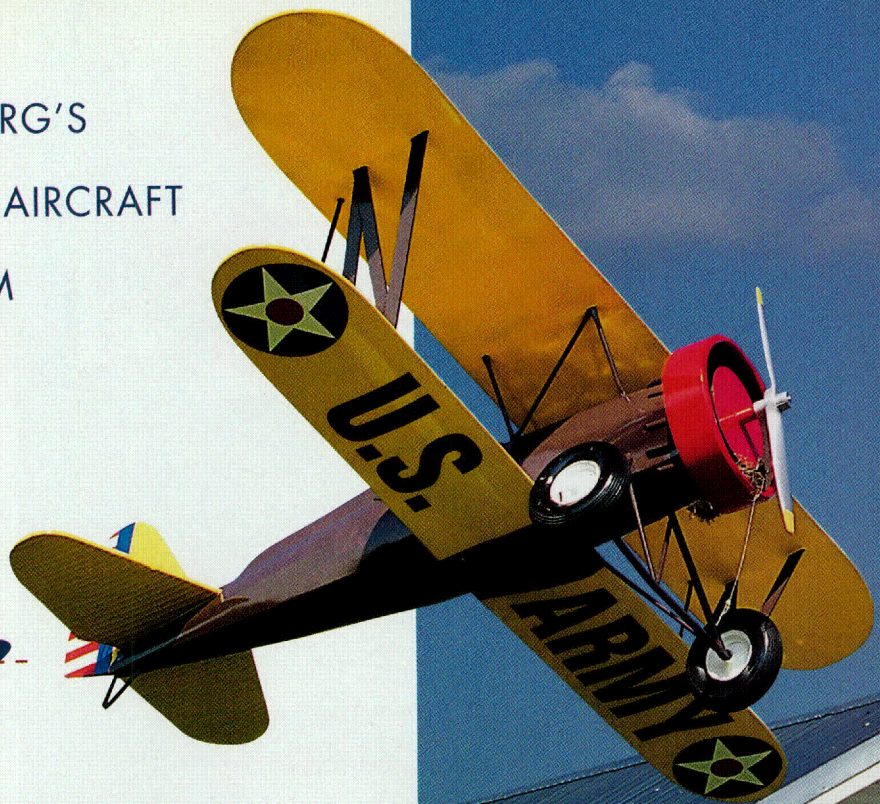
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LONG TALL TEXAN, DAVID JAMES, I-45 WRECKER CO., FAIRFIELD

Top-Flight Fun

SCHULENBURG'S STANZEL MODEL AIRCRAFT MUSEUM



STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY RANDY MALLORY

MENTION SCHULENBURG, and tourists think of the century-old “Painted Churches” found nearby in Ammannsville, Dubina, High Hill, and Praha.

A high-flying museum, which opened in 1999 (and recently expanded), aims to add “Painted Planes” to the visitor vocabulary of this small town halfway between San Antonio and Houston.

The Stanzel Model Aircraft Museum showcases the aerial inventiveness of two local entrepreneurs, brothers Victor and Joe Stanzel. For seven decades, the Stanzels delighted generations of hobbyists and children with their invention and production of 47 models of flyable toy aircraft. The feat landed the brothers, who died in the 1990s, in the Model Aviation Hall of Fame of the Academy of Model

Aeronautics in Muncie, Indiana, in 1986.

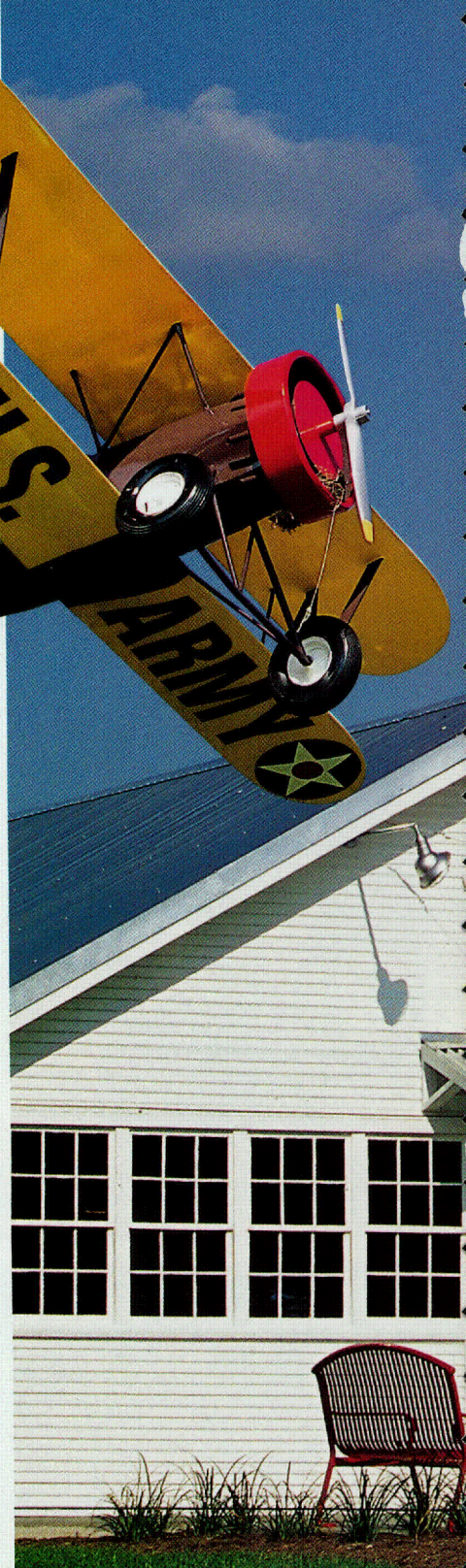
The Stanzels’ scale-model savvy soars at the museum’s newest attraction—the adjacent restored factory where the brothers began producing their fanciful flying toys in the 1930s.

Thirties-era Big Band music greets me as I step onto the original hardwood floor of the 1,800-square-foot factory. The music mixes with the occasional popping sound of the building’s sheet-metal roof and walls expanding in the midday sun.

In the factory’s front office, life-size mannequins of Victor and Joe pore over a drawing table and scale-model plans. Piled on a desk along with a prototype plane are Fifties-era model-aircraft magazines. Framed on the wall, two of the Stanzels’ 25 patents protect future plans for a “remote control and



Schulenburg’s Stanzel Model Aircraft Museum recently expanded into the Stanzel brothers’ first factory building, built in 1935. A decorative wing suspended from the ceiling adds to the aviatric atmosphere.



A supersize version of Victor Stanzel’s Boeing P-12 model (cutout, above, left) soars over the Stanzel Model Aircraft Museum. Above, a one-fourth-scale model of the Stanzel brothers’ “20th-Century Stratos-Ship” amusement ride hovers above the adjacent factory.

steering mechanism for a model watercraft” and for a “combined lamp and smoking stand” that looks like a spacecraft.

I push a button beside the office door,



and the Big Band music gives way to an audio recollection of the Stanzels' model-plane successes. A timeline display along the factory walls adds more details through text and historic photos.

As teenagers during the late 1920s, Victor and Joe were fascinated by World War I-era military planes that flew over Schulenburg on training missions from

San Antonio's Army Air Corps bases. In 1932, Victor began carving solid balsa-wood scale models of the planes and selling them via mail order for a then-pricey \$20 each. (A 10-foot-long supersize version of his Boeing P-12 solid-body model plane rides atop a 15-foot-high pedestal outside the museum.)

Eager to make more-affordable planes,

25-year-old Victor built his first factory in Schulenburg in 1935 to produce model-plane kits that sold for less than \$5 each (Joe—eight years younger than Victor—was still in school at this point). Each kit contained detailed plans and wooden sticks, sheets, and blocks of balsa wood that hobbyists would shape and glue together, add a small gas-powered engine



Plane wonderful. The museum spotlights many of the Stanzels' planes (refurbished by associate Dale Kirn), along with old photos, campy advertising of the day, and other memorabilia.

(sold separately), and fly. The museum houses many of the colorful balsa-wood planes and the machines—planers, saw-joiners, and sanders—that produced them.

Two early models—the 45-inch-wingspan *Texas Ranger* and the 53-inch *Interceptor*—were typical free-flight planes that enthusiasts had to chase down after each brief flight. While other model-plane pioneers experimented with radio-controlled aircraft, the Stanzels introduced the world's first control-line model kit in 1939. Their 36-inch-wingspan *Tiger Shark* was connected via a control line to the end of a fishing pole. Moving the pole up and down as the plane flew in a circle provided modelers limited control for the first time. The prototype for this yellow-and-red plane rotates inside a showcase at the museum's entrance.

The Stanzels later invented more-sophisticated mono-line controls—including a movable elevator on the plane's tail—which worked even when wind slackened the line. Greater control meant

greater speed and fancy aerial acrobatics for modelers, who flocked to control-line competitions nationwide.

"LOCAL FOLKS were busy picking cotton, and here these two brothers set up a flying amusement ride. People must have thought they were crazy!"



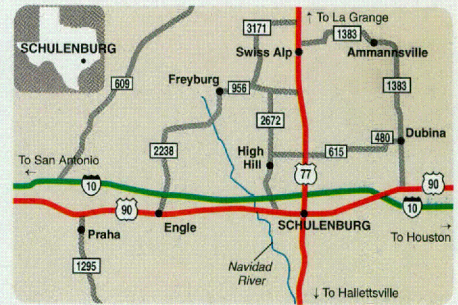
By the mid-1950s, Victor and Joe had produced 17 gas-powered model kits, including the popular *Lil' Raider* (on display at the museum), a 22-inch-wingspan combat plane that performed stunts at the end of a 50-foot control line.

Public interest turned to television viewing during the late 1950s, and interest in model kits nosedived. To adapt, the Stanzels began making battery-powered, control-line "Ready-to-Fly" plastic planes, plus model jets, helicopters, and rocketships. They also produced trigger-launched planes and space shuttles. The plastic-injection molding machine, vacuum forming machine, and die cutter that produced the plastic models still sit on the factory floor.

VICTOR AND JOE Stanzel also briefly toyed around with amusement ride designs. As their model plane business got off the ground in the 1930s, the brothers created an amusement ride called Fly-A-Plane that resembled a four-seat, single-engine aircraft (you can see a scale model at the museum). The Stanzels believed in testing every design, so they built a full-scale Fly-A-Plane prototype in Schulenburg and offered 25-cent rides.

"Local folks were busy picking cotton,

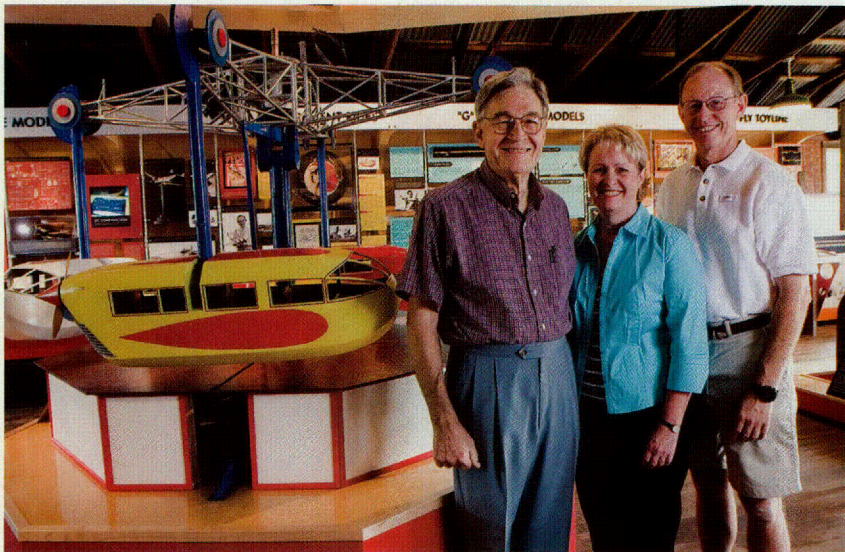
SOARING IN SCHULENBURG



THE STANZEL Model Aircraft Museum, operated by the Stanzel Family Foundation, is at the intersection of Baumgarten St. and Kessler Ave. (US 77 Bus.); 979/743-6559; www.stanzelmuseum.org. Hours: Mon, Wed, Fri-Sat 10:30-4:30, Sun 1:30-4:30. On Sep. 24, the foundation celebrates the opening of the restored **Stanzel Brothers Factory** with a model-plane airshow. (In 2006, the foundation and museum revives its annual October “Joy of Flying” celebration, including model-aircraft competitions and a Cub Scout space derby.) Two blocks south of the museum is the factory store of the **Victor Stanzel Co.**, 1201 Kessler Ave. (US 77 Bus.), 979/743-4121 or 800/422-6823 (www.stanzel flyingmodels.com).

While in Schulenburg, learn local history at the **Navidad Valley Heritage Museum**, downtown at 631 N. Main St. (979/743-4241 or 561-8616). Catch a first-run movie at the historic **Cozy Theater** (979/743-6521), downtown at 607 Lyons in the 1927 Von Minden Hotel. Sate your appetite with kolaches and strudel at **Kountry Bakery** (979/743-4342), barbecue and German sausage at **City Market** (979/743-3440 or 800/793-3440), and home-style breakfast, lunch, and dinner buffets at **Oakridge Smokehouse** (979/743-3372 or 800/320-5766).

For more information on Schulenburg, or to schedule a tour of the **Painted Churches** (in nearby Ammannsville, Dubina, High Hill, and Praha), call the **Schulenburg Chamber of Commerce** (618 N. Main St., 78956); 979/743-4514 or 866/504-5294; www.schulenburgchamber.org.



Ted Stanzel, Ginger Stanzel Bosl, and Bob Stanzel help to keep their uncles’ legacy flying high.

and here these two brothers set up a flying amusement ride,” says Lucy Stanzel of La Grange, who is married to Bob Stanzel, one of Victor and Joe’s nephews. “People must have thought they were crazy!”

The imaginative brothers also built a Buck Rogers-style amusement ride named the 20th-Century Stratos-Ship, which they demonstrated at the 1936 Texas Centennial in Dallas. They sold the ride

recalls Bob Stanzel. “Victor was the creative force, and Joe was the ‘get it done’ guy.” A niece, Ginger Stanzel Bosl (of Schulenburg) adds, “They were so frugal, they did everything themselves, from design and production to packaging and advertising.”

Frugality was “in the blood” of German and Czech immigrants who settled Schulenburg in the 19th Century. I sample that immigrant lifestyle at the Stanzel ancestral home, located next to the museum and open to the public. A quick walk takes me through the 1870 period-furnished, wood-frame house of Franz and Rozina Stanzel, Victor and Joe’s grandparents.

Two blocks away, I also sample the entire gamut of Stanzel models—

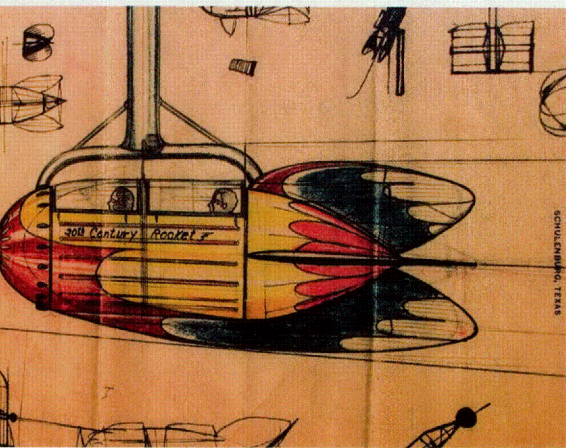
dating from the 1930s to the 1990s—left over after the Victor Stanzel Co. (separate from the Stanzel Family Foundation, which operates the museum) ceased production in 2001. Nephew Ted Stanzel is company president and is in charge of selling out the remaining model aircraft, still in their original boxes.

No longer state-of-the-art toys, these nostalgic flyable aircraft are now collec-

tibles, the legacy of a bygone era of fun.

As I rummage through plane models and decades-old advertising display cards, I smile at the models’ now-campy slogans—such as “The Ones That Really Fly,” “Boy! Be a ‘Crack’ Jet Pilot,” and “Flying Toys, Wow! They’re FUN.” And I realize just how much fun that era really was. ★

RANDY MALLORY of Tyler also wrote the story on Bigfoot in this issue.



Diagrams and patents on display detail the Stanzel brothers’ innovations and motivations.

to a Pennsylvania company that installed 20 of them in the United States and Britain. A one-fourth-scale model of the Stratos-Ship looms above the factory-turned-museum. Inside the factory, the original one-fourth-scale prototype of another Stanzel amusement ride, the G-Ride, features four space rockets flying in a circle (the ride was never produced).

“The brothers had a great synergy,”

Escape Dragon Boat TO... Regatta *(continued from page 17)*



"Pink the Magic Dragon," a team from the M.D. Anderson Breast Cancer Support Network, readies for action in a special race for breast-cancer survivors. Win or lose, these women are triumphant.

need someone who speaks Russian?" a man behind me asks. It's astronaut Dr. Edward Lu, honorary cochair of the 2004 Regatta and the NASA science officer who spent six months speaking Russian on the International Space Station. Dr. Lu goes to talk with the Ukrainians. Dragon-boat crews remind him of NASA crews, he says. "It takes a lot of working together. You need each individual working hard."

In a sea of team T-shirts, the most motivated crews are stretching and bending and practicing air-paddle strokes, but the preferred "workout" seems to be eating and drinking and laughing.



Twenty paddlers practice synchronizing their strokes on land before hitting the water.

Everyone uses the same five dragon boats, so only three to five crews compete at any given time. (Last year, 30 races spread over two days.)

The first teams strap on orange life jackets and walk onto the floating dock. "I need a paddle," cries a blonde, dashing back to land. Teams compete in three categories: open, women's, and mixed (male and female members). According to International Dragon Boat Federation rules, each mixed team must

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have at least eight women paddlers.

As the paddlers climb aboard and sit down two abreast, the canoes sink low in the water, only a few inches of freeboard separating them from the choppy lake. The drummer sits on an elevated platform in the prow, a fat drum clutched between his or her knees, facing the crew and commanding attention; the steersperson sits aft. The dragon boats lurch in zigzags to the starting line. Once all the boats have come to the line, an official starter sounds the air horn, the drumming begins, and the boats surge forward.

In theory, teams are supposed to paddle in sync the whole time so that the boat moves like a well-oiled machine. I notice, however, that some crews seem to discard the paddling-in-unison concept and adopt The Wave approach (think of the stadium "wave" at sporting events)—their boats look like uncoordinated caterpillars. Water flies in all directions as all those paddles move furiously. Traveling about one-third of a mile using arm power is apparently much tougher than going that distance with your legs. Still, in less than three minutes, the first contest is over.

BAY AREA HOUSTON ATTRACTIONS

KEVIN STILLMAN

THE HUB of the multi-city region known as **Bay Area Houston**, home of the Gulf Coast International Dragon Boat Regatta, is NASA/Johnson Space Center and Clear Lake, a 2,000-acre inlet of Galveston Bay.

As soon as the dragon boats are snug against the shore, cruise along NASA Parkway to sample the restaurants and other attractions. **Mediterraneo Market & Café** (18033 Upper Bay Rd., Nassau Bay; 281/333-3180) serves moussaka, salads, and sandwiches worthy of stars, while **East Star Chinese Buffet & Sushi Bar** (1025 E. NASA Pkwy.; 281/280-8819) offers an astounding variety of delicious seafood, sushi, and Chinese dishes.

Tour **Space Center Houston**, the official visitors center for NASA/Johnson Space Center (281/244-2100; www.spacecenter.org), and let your spirits rise. Get close to history and the stars in the Starship Gallery, displaying an early *Mercury* spacecraft (smaller than an SUV!), an *Apollo* command module, and a Skylab trainer that you can walk through. Then test your space skills on flight simulators located near the memorable spacesuit collection. Other activities include IMAX films and behind-the-scenes tram tours.

Come back to earth again at **Armand Bayou Nature Center** (281/474-2551; www.abnc.org), and hike its nature trails, follow the boardwalk through forest and marsh, or try the pontoon-boat tours of



A group enjoys a scene in the Armand Bayou Nature Center from the boardwalk.

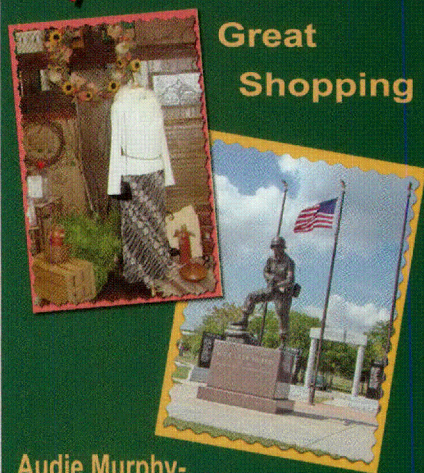
the wetlands. Bison, hawks, and alligators are among the 360-plus species that call this 2,500-acre wildlife refuge home.

Kemah Boardwalk rocks with attractions and at least eight restaurants, including Landry's Seafood House (877/285-3624; www.landryseafoodhouse.com), which dishes up a bananas Foster large enough to feed half a dragon-boat crew. While the lights of the amusement-park rides slice the starry sky over Galveston Bay and gleeful shrieks of kids and adults fill the air, watch for night herons, lit by the boardwalk lights, fishing in the bay.

For general information on restaurants and attractions, call **Bay Area Houston Convention & Visitors Bureau** at 800/844-5253; www.visitbayareahouston.com.

A Snapshot of Greenville

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Escape Dragon Boat TO... Regatta

As the winning crew crosses the finish line, they raise their paddles overhead in triumph. The other crews slump over, grinning, but with arms and shoulders clearly shocked by the workout. Back at the dock, the damp boaters debark and hand their paddles and life vests to the teams up next.

One dragon-boat crew comes up a female short, and as a short female, I volunteer.

After each race, team members relax and relive their performance while sampling the festival's on-land offerings, which can include Pad Thai noodles and spring rolls, Polynesian music, and



Young Kekoa Granado of the local Lei Aloha's Hula Company wows spectators with her hula dancing.

a dragon dance. The biggest crowd surrounds the six massage tables set up by Texas Chiropractic College.

All day long, drumbeats and laughter compete with the loudspeakers playing themes from *Chariots of Fire* and the various Olympic contests. When the experienced paddlers from Ukraine, Canada, and Great Britain line up their dragon boats, the novices (*continued on page 63*)

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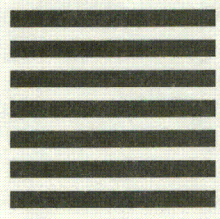


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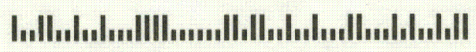
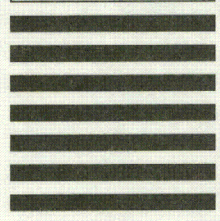


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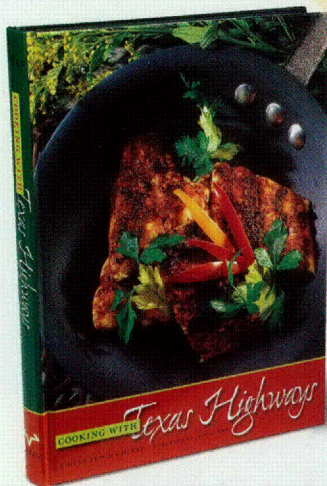
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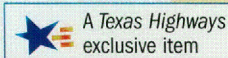
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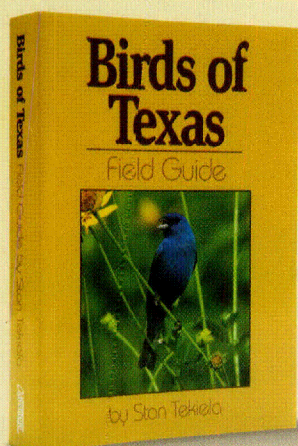
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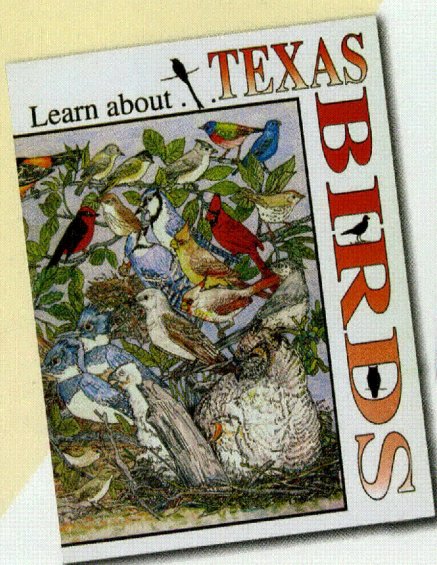
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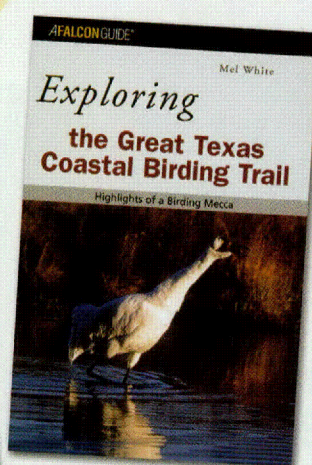
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Escape Dragon Boat TO... Regatta *(continued from page 60)*



Spirits run high, both before and after a race. Note the enthusiasm of the Houston Baptist University team (top) as it departs from the dock and the broad smile of a returning victor (above).

ashore scrutinize techniques and tactics.

One dragon-boat crew comes up a female short, and as a short female, I volunteer. Pulling on an official Dragon Boat Regatta T-shirt, I join my friendly young crewmates from Mercer HR (a Houston human resources consulting firm), who have already raced once today. This casual approach to the contest appeals to cocaptain Brian Chiu. "It's competitive, but everyone can enjoy themselves. You meet people you wouldn't otherwise have met, even though you may have jobs at the same company."

Life vests on, paddles in hand, we move onto the floating dock and squeeze into our dragon boat. Our coach shouts, "Put your hips right against the side. Paddles up." The wind is picking up, and I try to remember Girl Scout camp and J-stroke fine points as we angle toward the starting line.

"Start out with five strong, deep strokes so your lower hand goes under water" is our last instruction. For a little while, we

dig into the water, keeping pace with the drumbeats. Then I start clacking paddles with the man in front of me. I skip a stroke to start on the beat again, but I find I have to stop counting out loud to save my breath for paddling. Funny how from the shore, the races seemed to be over in a matter of minutes.

Our sprint seems to go on and on and on, until we streak across the finish line...last, soaked through, yet exuberant. Nobody fell in, and we didn't crash into another canoe. That amounts to success for this team, just as two days' worth of dragon-boat racing and camaraderie amount to a successful, if muscle-wrenching, weekend.

EILEEN MATTEI wrote the feature on the Rio Grande Valley town of McAllen in our December 2004 issue.

LODGING Bay Area Houston offers a local twist on B&Bs. Amid the forest of masts and pennants swaying over Clear Lake and the Kemah Marina, several catamarans and sailboats do double duty as **boat-and-breakfasts**. Some luxurious 43- to 60-foot yachts come complete with teak paneling, leather couches, and, if you want a dinner cruise, a captain. The owners of **At the Helm Boat and Breakfast** at Kemah Boardwalk Marina launched the concept. Call 281/334-4101, www.atthehelm.com.

For the more traditional B&B experience, try **A White Texas Pelican**, in Kemah at 408-A Bay Ave. Call 281/538-3900; <https://awhitetexaspelican.com>. And check out the offerings on Texas 146, in **Old Seabrook**, which recalls yesteryear's seaside, letting visitors enjoy the slower pace of tranquil B&Bs, birdwatching, and antique shopping.

For conventional lodging, **Best Western** is at 889 W. Bay Area Blvd, Webster; 800/528-1234. **Hilton-NASA Clear Lake** is at 3000 NASA Pkwy., Nassau Bay; 281/333-9300.

For general information on lodging, call **Bay Area Houston Convention & Visitors Bureau** at 800/844-5253; www.visitbayareahouston.com.

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Welkumme to Windthorst!

WINDTHORST, winner of the German Club of Texas' 2003 "German Town of Texas" award, is a wholesome Archer County hamlet. Farming and oil fuel the local economy, but dairying is Windthorst's bread and butter. Some 75 dairy farms in the area have given the town bragging rights as the "Dairy Capital of North Texas." A prominent sign featuring a black-and-white Holstein cow greets travelers on US 281.

The town, which lies 25 miles south of Wichita Falls on the Archer-Clay county line, owes its existence to a one-two punch of harsh weather more than a century ago. The bitter winter of 1885 killed thousands of cattle in northwest Texas, where domestic livestock had prospered on the region's abundant grasslands for more than a decade. Then a grueling drought on the heels of the blizzard further reduced herds. The bad stretch of weather bankrupted a number of cattle operations, including the Circle Ranch.

In 1891, attorney F.T. Ledergerber of St. Louis, along with other devout German Catholics, purchased some 75,000 acres of land carved out of the defunct ranch. Within five years, a fledg-



At St. Mary's Catholic Church in Windthorst, a grotto known as Our Lady of Highway 281 honors war veterans. World War II soldiers sent home portions of their pay to help pay for the statue of the Virgin Mary.

ling community—named Windthorst in honor of the Prussian political leader and Catholic statesman Ludwig Windthorst (1812-1891)—boasted a post office, church, rectory, school, and 75 immigrant families. St. Mary's Catholic Church, built on a hill that rises about a thousand feet above town, anchored the settlement. The church burned twice, in 1894 and 1924, and was rebuilt both times on the same site. Parishioners also included Germans from Russia, most of whom had migrated to Archer County from the Northern Plains states and through the

port of Galveston. Windthorst's population grew in the 20th Century, peaking at 1,000 in 1977. About half that many live here now.

Although Windthorst's population has declined, St. Mary's membership today approaches 1,000. The burg has remained true to its Catholic roots. After more than a century, St. Mary's, with a clock steeple and 22 inspiring stained-glass windows, is still the town's only organized church. Next to the red brick sanctuary, a rustic grotto, fashioned to look like a natural opening in the hillside, enshrines a statue of the Virgin Mary. Dedicated in 1950 to honor the safe return of all 64 of the community's young men who fought in World War II, "Our Lady of Highway 281" now serves as a memorial to all veterans.

After a stroll around the church and grotto, visitors enjoy browsing through Joe Zotz's nostalgic Windthorst General Store, at the intersection of US 281 and FM 174. Founded by the Weinzapfel family in 1892 (the present building dates to 1921), the store gives you the feeling that most of the last century passed it by. Out front, atop a metal awning, its

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“Whatever we can sell, we put in here—hardware, electrical, vet supplies, clothing, and groceries,” says Russell Zotz, who owns the Windthorst General Store with his father, Joe.



Joe Zotz and his son Russell stand amid the eclectic offerings of their Windthorst General Store, founded more than a century ago.

sign combines with early Coca-Cola logos and other retro elements for charming curb appeal. Inside, you'll find a deli, groceries, clothing, curiosities, and a variety of household and farm essentials, including rubber boots, fly swatters, hoe handles, buckets, and cotton work gloves (in University of Texas burnt orange or Texas A&M maroon).

“Whatever we can sell, we put in here—hardware, electrical, vet supplies, clothing, and groceries,” says Russell Zotz, friendly co-owner of the store with his father, Joe. “We try to stick with the general-store atmosphere.”

Joe and Russell bought the store from Joe's uncles, Albert and Henry Ostermann, in January 1993. The Ostermann brothers had owned and operated it since the 1950s. The 2,800-square-foot establishment has retained its original hardwood floors, wood-and-glass display cases, and old-timey counter with rolls of brown paper and string once used for wrapping merchandise. On the east wall, an old-fashioned, hand-operated Otis lift (which predates the elevator and runs by counterweights) is still operational.



“We don't use it much, but they did in the old days,” says Russell. “They used to keep barrels of vinegar and molasses down in the basement. My great-uncle said Mr. Weinzapfel once split a carload of flour with somebody, and they kept it in bags down there. The lift was a necessity.”

Locally-made German sausage is the most popular deli item at the Windthorst General Store. “The sausage is made by Windthorst Fine Meats,” says Russell. “Here at the store, we cook it up and serve it with mustard, cheese, and jalapeños on a coney bun or wrapped in a tortilla. We also sell it

raw, in two-pound packages, in our grocery section.”

In fact, Windthorst is famous for its tasty German sausage. The community

THE WINDTHORST General Store is on the northeast corner of the US 281/FM 174 intersection in Windthorst. Hours: Mon-Sat 7-7, Sun 8-7. Call 940/423-6205.



For information about the two annual **Sausage Festivals** and other local events, write to the Windthorst Economic Development Corp., Box 128, Windthorst 76389; 940/423-6100.

For more information about **St. Mary's Catholic Church** (at 100 St. Mary's St.) and the grotto/veterans memorial affectionately known as “**Our Lady of Highway 281**,” write to Box 230, Windthorst 76389; 940/423-6687.

Prints of **George Boutwell's** print *Windthorst, Texas* are available from the artist. Write to 3083 Hwy. 6, Clifton 76634; 800/243-4316; www.gboutwell.com.

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Just PASSING Through



The area's rich grasslands support numerous dairy farms that gave rise to Windthorst's nickname, "Dairy Capital of North Texas."

has hosted two sausage suppers annually for many years. One, celebrated each first Sunday in December, is a fund-raiser for the Windthorst Knights of Columbus. Proceeds from the second sausage event,

held the first Sunday in March, help support the local fire department.

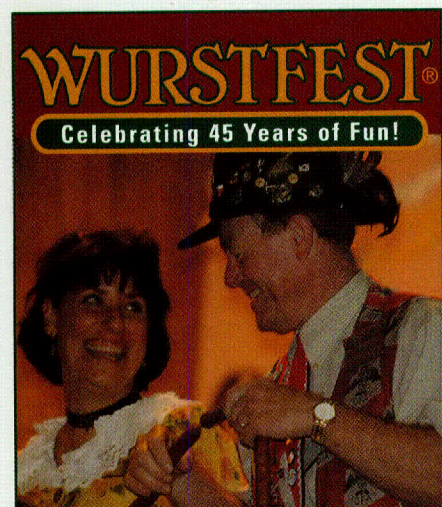
While at the general store, you might run into Windthorst's milk-fed, award-winning athletes, who stop in regularly for snacks. The high school's Trojans were football state champs in 1996 and

OTHER ATTRACTIONS About 4.5 miles south of Windthorst, on US 281, a hand-painted sign denotes the **Marcy Trail**, mapped in 1849 by U.S. Army Capt. Randolph B. Marcy (see *Speaking of Texas*, February 2005). Traveled by California gold rush pioneers, buffalo hunters, West Texas settlers, and cattle drovers, the route linked Texas Ranger frontier posts. The path was also used for the Indian Exodus of 1859, when the U.S. Cavalry escorted Native Americans from the short-lived Comanche and Brazos Indian reservations to Indian Territory, north of the Red River.

A historical marker, about 10 miles south of Windthorst, chronicles the **Battle of Stone Houses**, a deadly conflict between Texas Rangers and a band of Kichai Indians that occurred here Nov. 10, 1837. The site derives its name from rock formations, near the West Fork of the Trinity River, that from a distance resemble early houses or tipis. An 18-man Ranger party had tracked the Indians to the rock mounds in the hills when 150 to 180 Kichais charged with rifles and bows and arrows. Only eight Rangers survived.

To find the marker, erected in 1970, go south from Windthorst about 6 miles on US 281 to its junction with Texas 16, then about 4 miles south on Texas 16. (The actual Stone Houses lie west of the historical marker, down Prideaux Rd., a gravel country lane that intersects with Texas 16 near the marker.)

The skirmish is documented in *Trails Through Archer, A Centennial History 1880-1980* (Eakin Press, 1979) by historian and Windthorst resident Jack O. Loftin (being reprinted; available for purchase from Jack Loftin, 2627 Loftin Rd., Windthorst 76389; 940/423-6426; www.forttours.com/pages/loftinhome.asp).



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Some 75 dairy farms in the area have given Windthorst bragging rights as the "Dairy Capital of North Texas."

2003, the high school girls' volleyball team has won the state championship nine of the past 13 years, and the girls' softball team won their second straight Class A state championship in June. "We've got quite an athletic bunch here," says Joe proudly.

When leaving the store, check out the framed print by Clifton artist George Boutwell, which hangs left of the door. The watercolorist (a former *Texas Highways* art director, and named "official Texas state artist for 2006") created the painting of the Windthorst General Store, with vintage vehicles out front, for his December entry in a 1994 calendar.

If your travels take you through Windthorst, milk the local history for all it's worth. Step back in time in the quaint environs of the Windthorst General Store. Ascend St. Mary's hill, where the faithful are found each Sunday, and pay your respects to the nation's veterans at the "Our Lady of Highway 281" memorial. It's a worthwhile stop.

Freelancer LANA ROBINSON, husband Mel, and aunt and uncle Dot and Larry Hanna of Godley visited Windthorst last fall on their return from the Wichita Falls Ranch Rodeo.

Photos from WYMAN MEINZER's recent book, 6666, *Portrait of a Texas Ranch*, were featured in the June issue.

My Big Thicket

(continued from page 44)

seen here in a coon's age, to coin a phrase. I start to slap that baby—she's poised like a bloodsucker—but don't. If she starts being nasty, I'll flick her away. Her name is "Meau," fancy for "Mo," short for Mosquito. Maybe Meau has some kind of genetic memory, like DNA passed on from her ancestors that had a feeding frenzy on Mary Ann, Annie, and me a while back.

Mary Ann Poletti, ever a gracious lady as well as a fine artist, sent me a large watercolor painting of that experience. She portrayed it in the style of children's art, adding to its charm and humor. We're shown in the deep forest. Annie Sweat has just leapt into her free-spirited dance up the path, a Big Thicket ballet.

Mary Ann is beating a bearded old codger over the head and upper body with a leafy limb, torn from a tree....

There goes Meau, lifting off from my unstung hand. Mosquitoes have their niche in the overall system, too—don't they? Food for birds, lizards, and other critters. I could think up some other purposes like the scientific study of aerodynamics. But for now, I need to get up and go. Where's the "giddy-up," boy? Just think that six hours from now, friends will be waiting on the River Walk with a frozen margarita and hot enchiladas. Olé! ★

Hoary HOWARD PEACOCK, "Tush Hog" to Big Thicket pals, was president of the Big Thicket Association in 1975-76. A veteran contributor to *Texas Highways*, he credits Maureen "Moo" Turner for valuable assistance in preparing these excerpts from his personal papers for this article.

essentials EXPLORE BIG THICKET

THE BIG THICKET is a region of southeast Texas often called "America's Ark" for its phenomenal diversity of plant species. The Big Thicket

Natl. Preserve, created by Congress in 1974 with 84,500 acres, consists of 15 units that represent major ecological systems, ranging from upland mixed hardwood-evergreen forests, familiar to Appalachia, to the Southwestern desert. Even reindeer moss, common to the arctic tundra, thrives in one part of the Big Thicket. In 1981, the Preserve was designated an International Biosphere Reserve by the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Man and the Biosphere Program. In 2001, the American Bird Conservancy recognized the Preserve as a Globally Important Bird Area. The Natl. Preserve now includes approximately 100,000 acres of significant and delicate environments, including wildlife.

The Preserve's Visitor Center, on FM 420 at the intersection of US 69/287, about 7 miles north of Kountze, is a good place to start a visit to the Thicket, with exhibits, photographs, books, maps, helpful personnel, and an introductory film. Hours: Daily 9-5; closed Dec. 25 and Jan. 1. Call 409/246-2337; www.nps.gov/bith.

Visitors with special interest in wild orchids, carnivorous plants, wild ferns, wildflowers, native grasses, and differing ecosystems may contact



Geraldine Watson, the Big Thicket's "superstar guide," for a tour of her Pinelands Preserve and Studio. Important: Call ahead for an appt., 409/385-7239 or 547-3543. No charge for admission or guided tour. Mrs. Watson is also an author, artist, and musician.

Accommodations and restaurants near the Big Thicket are available in Beaumont, Kountze, Liberty, Livingston, Lufkin, Silsbee, and Woodville.

BOOKS

Tales from the Big Thicket ed. by Francis E. Abernethy (Univ. of Texas Press, 1966)

Wildflowers of the Big Thicket by Geyata Ajilvsgi (Texas A&M Univ. Press, 1979)

Impressions of the Big Thicket, paintings by Michael Frary, text by William A. Owens (Univ. of Texas Press, 1973)

The Big Thicket: An Ecological Evaluation by Pete A.Y. Gunter (Univ. of North Texas Press, 1993)

Boardin' in the Thicket by Wanda A. Landrey (Univ. of North Texas Press, 1990)

Nature Lover's Guide to the Big Thicket by Howard Peacock (Texas A&M Univ. Press, 1994)

The Big Thicket of Texas: America's Ecological Wonder by Howard Peacock (Little, Brown and Co., 1984)

Reflections on the Neches by Geraldine Ellis Watson (Big Thicket Assn. and Univ. of North Texas Press, 2003)

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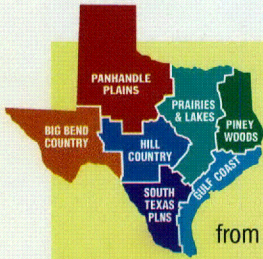
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October



PLEASE NOTE—NEW NAME, NEW TIMETABLE!

We now list events for the current, rather than upcoming, month. Fun Forecast is now called Texas Events Calendar, to better reflect the quarterly events calendar published by our Travel Publications office, from which we draw many of these listings.

SEND FUTURE EVENT INFORMATION TO: Texas Events Calendar, Box 141009, Austin 78714-1009; fax: 512/486-5879; email: trv-tec@dot.state.tx.us.

LISTING DEADLINES: Spring (Mar., Apr., May) Dec. 1; Summer (Jun., Jul., Aug.) Mar. 1; Fall (Sep., Oct., Nov.) Jun. 1; Winter (Dec., Jan., Feb.) Sep. 1.

BECAUSE OF SPACE LIMITATIONS, we can't print every event we receive. Please note that dates sometimes change after we go to press. You may want to confirm a particular event by calling the number listed with the festivity or by contacting the local chamber of commerce or convention and visitors bureau.



FOR A QUARTERLY, MORE DETAILED SCHEDULE OF EVENTS, write for a free *Texas Events Calendar*, Box 149249, Austin 78714-9249. For a current listing of events, go to www.texashighways.com.

FOR INFORMATION ON ANY DESTINATION IN TEXAS: Call 800/452-9292 toll-free from anywhere in the U.S. and Canada, between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. Central Time. A professional travel counselor at one of the Texas Department of Transportation's Travel Information Centers will answer your Texas travel questions, provide routing assistance, send brochures (including the official *Texas State Travel Guide* and map), and advise you of any emergency road conditions.

See www.texashighways.com for an expanded Events Calendar with descriptions of events.

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1

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MIDLAND

Strings of the West
432/563-0921

1-2

EL PASO

Wine & Food Festival
915/751-1181

MIDLAND

Fina-CAF AIRSHO 2005
432/563-1000

2

ODESSA

Strings of the West
432/563-0921

5-8

FORT STOCKTON

Big Bend Open Road Race
432/336-8525

7-8

FORT DAVIS

Art Show
432/364-2651

8

KERMIT

Dutch Oven Cookoff
432/586-2507

8-9

EL PASO

Chamizal Festival
915/532-7273

MARFA

Chinati Foundation
Open House
432/729-4362

8, 15, 22, 29

EL PASO

Stories of Spirits
915/533-5147

13-15

ODESSA

Antique Car Show
432/580-8297

14-16

BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK

Ride for Trails
432/477-2242

14-16, 21-23

LAJITAS

Big Bend Gourmet Raft Trip
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15

MARATHON

Marathon to Marathon
432/386-4249

15

SHEFFIELD

Fort Lancaster's 150th Anniv.
432/836-4391

21-23, 28-30

ODESSA

The Diary of Anne Frank
432/580-3177

22

DEL RIO

Fiesta de Amistad Parade
830/703-6879

MIDLAND

West Texas Winds
432/563-0921

22-23

DEL RIO

Fiesta de Amistad
Arts & Crafts Fair
830/775-9715

23

ODESSA

West Texas Winds
432/563-0921

29

McCAMEY

Chili Cookoff
432/652-8202

29-30

ODESSA

Harvest Fair
432/366-5237

8-9

HOUSTON

Festa Italiana
713/524-4222

Wings Over Houston Airshow
713/266-4492

KATY

Rice Harvest Festival
281/828-1100

SOUTH PADRE ISLAND

Marathon Relay & Triathlon
210/366-3701

9

HOUSTON

Art Car Show
281/890-5500

SANTA FE

Haaktobberfest
409/925-1401

13-15

GALVESTON

Harvest Moon Regatta
281/474-2511

13-16

BROWNSVILLE

Latin Jazz Festival
956/831-9590

13-23

BEAUMONT

South Texas State Fair
409/832-9991

14

HOUSTON

Día de la Hispanidad Festival
713/284-8350

14-16

HOUSTON

Home & Garden Show
713/529-1616

14-22

ANGLETON

Brazoria County Fair
979/849-6416

15

GALVESTON

Canadian Brass
800/821-1894

HOUSTON

All-British
Motor Vehicle Expo
281/346-2417

Museum District Day
713/529-9802

NEEDVILLE

Harvest Festival
979/793-4030

ROSENBERG

Ride to Rosenberg
281/342-6804

VICTORIA

Heritage Fair
361/572-4935

15-16

GALVESTON

ARToberFEST
409/762-3617

20-23

SOUTH PADRE ISLAND

Sand Castle Days
800/767-2373

21

LOS FRESNOS

Elvis Festival
956/233-5482



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21-23
CORPUS CHRISTI
Texas Jazz Festival
361/688-1296

22
GALVESTON
Robert Earl Keen
800/821-1894

WEST COLUMBIA
Haunted Halloween
979/345-4656

WHARTON
U.S. Marine Band
979/532-0404

Oktoberfest
979/532-3375

22-23
CLEAR LAKE AREA
Gulf Coast International
Dragon Boat Regatta
713/225-0514

HOUSTON
Asian-American Festival
713/861-8270

22, 25, 28, 30, Nov 5
HOUSTON
Houston Grand Opera's
Boris Godunov
713/228-6737 or
800/626-7372

23
ALVIN
Pumpkin Patch
281/756-9204

PASADENA
Philharmonic Society
Symphony Concert
713/941-3332

26-27
VICTORIA
South Texas
Farm & Ranch Show
361/582-0024

27
FRIENDSWOOD
Halloween in the Park
281/482-3329

27-30
HOUSTON
International Quilt Festival
713/781-6864

29
ALVIN
Fall Festival
281/756-3686

BAYTOWN
Heritage Scapitage
Festival
281/424-7229

EDNA
Haunted Halloween Trail
361/782-5718

GALVESTON
Brian Stokes Mitchell
800/821-1894

Island Oktoberfest
409/762-8477

HOUSTON
The Marriage of Figaro
713/228-6737 or
800/626-7372

SANTA FE
Italian Festival
409/925-1401

TEXAS CITY
Fall Festival
409/643-5990

29-30
ANGLETON
Austin Town Festival
979/864-1208

29-30
BEAUMONT
Rockin' Beaumont
Blues Festival
409/835-2787

HOUSTON
Day of the Dead
Festival
713/802-9370

30
GALVESTON
Ghostly Gardens
800/582-4673

QUINTANA
Ghosts of the Gulf Coast
979/864-1541

30-31
BROWNSVILLE
Boo at the Zoo
956/546-2177

31
ALVIN
Fall Festival
281/331-8201

FREEPORT
Halloween Festival
979/233-6061

HILL COUNTRY

1
BULVERDE
Taste of the Hills
830/438-4285

FREDERICKSBURG
Fredericksburg Peach Opry
210/831-3272

LUCKENBACH
35th Ladies Chili Cookoff
888/311-8990

MASON
Old Yeller Days Festival
325/347-5758

1-2
AUSTIN
Muster Days
512/782-5659

Texas Parks & Wildlife
Expo
512/389-4472 or
800/792-1112

BUDA
Fine Arts Festival
512/295-2022

GEORGETOWN
Fiddlin' Fest
800/436-8696

ROUND ROCK
Texas All-British Car Day
512/892-4068

1-2, 5-9, 12-16
ROCKSPRINGS
Evening Bat Flights
830/683-2287
or 683-3762

1-31
BOERNE
Pumpkin Patch
830/249-2565

3-7
LLANO
Llano County Book Festival
325/247-5248

6
KERRVILLE
Symphony of the Hills
830/792-7469

6-9
AUSTIN
Ben Franklin: Unplugged
512/471-1444

6-23
BULVERDE
Love Thy Neighbor
830/438-2339

7-9
GRUENE
Gruene Music & Wine Fest
830/629-5077

7-10
AUSTIN
Il Trovatore
512/472-5992

8
BEND
Fall Friends Festival
325/628-3240

CANYON LAKE
Shrimpfest
830/964-2223

LAMPASAS
Herb & Arts Festival
512/556-5172

8-9
BURNET
Fort Croghan Day
Festival
512/756-8281

FREDERICKSBURG
Wildseed Farms
Monarch Celebration
830/990-8080

8-11, 13-18, 20-25, 27-30
MEDINA
Great Hill Country
Pumpkin Patch
800/449-0882

9
AUSTIN
Austin Symphonic Band
512/345-7420

13-16
AUSTIN
A Day Out with
Thomas the Tank Engine
512/477-8468 or
866/468-7630

13-29
INGRAM
The Taming of the Shrew
830/367-5121

14
AUSTIN
Philip Glass Ensemble
512/471-1444

BRACKETVILLE
Bluegrass Festival
830/563-9608

COMFORT
Scarecrow Invasion
830/995-3131

14-15
KYLE
Fair on the Square/
Kyle's 125th Birthday Party
512/268-5341

14-16
AUSTIN
National Finals
Kart Race
512/530-RACE

BOERNE
Festival of Arts & Music
830/229-5188

14-16
CONCAN
Texas Hill Country
River Region
Bicycle Classic
800/210-0380

15
AUSTIN
Farmers Market
Pumpkin Festival
512/236-0074

BOERNE
Chili Cookoff/
Craft Show
830/995-2310

HUTTO
Olde Tyme Days
512/759-4400

LLANO
County Heritage Festival
325/247-5354

15-16
CANYON LAKE
Moving Waters Powwow
830/964-3613

17
KERRVILLE
Canadian Brass
830/896-5727

20-27
AUSTIN
Austin Film Festival
800/310-FEST

21, 23
AUSTIN
Austin Symphony
888/462-3787

21-23
MASON
Oktoberfest
Fly Fishing Festival
325/347-5758

22
FREDERICKSBURG
Food & Wine Fest
830/997-8515

LUCKENBACH
Harvest Classic &
European Motorcycle
Rally
888/311-8990

22-23
GRUENE
Texas Clay Festival
830/629-7975

25
AUSTIN
Yamato Drummers
of Japan
512/471-1444

MASON
Country Opry
325/347-5758

28-29
AUSTIN
Miami City Ballet
512/471-1444

28-30
AUSTIN
Texas Book Festival
512/477-4055

KERRVILLE
Kerr County Fair
830/257-6833

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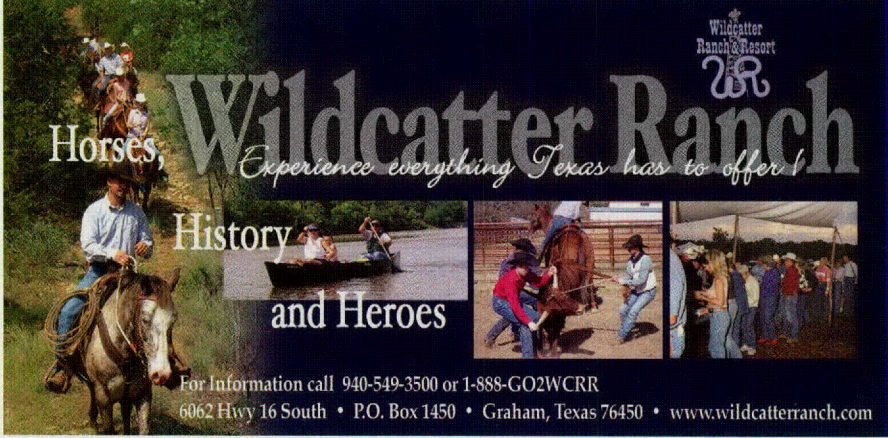
For more information about these and other fall events, go to www.wildflower.org

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28-31

KYLE
Haunted House
512/268-5341

29

CASTROVILLE
Pumpkin Festival
830/931-3533

29-30

BANDERA
Ranch Heritage
Weekend
800/364-3833

31

SATTLER
Halloweenfest
830/964-2223

TAYLOR
Halloween Spooktacular
512/352-3463

PANHANDLE PLAINS

1

BIG SPRING
Big Spring Symphony
432/264-7223

CANYON
Battle of Palo Duro
Anniversary
806/488-2227

Museum Day
806/651-2244

CHILDRESS
Tour d' Cotton Bicycle Run
940/937-2197

COLEMAN
Fiesta de la Paloma
325/625-2163

LUBBOCK
(began Sep 23)
Panhandle-South Plains
Fair
806/763-2833

SWEETWATER
Jenny Bruce
325/235-1418

1-2

AMARILLO
Fall into the Arts Festival
806/373-7800

FRITCH
Arts & Crafts Show
806/857-3062

6-8

LUBBOCK
Lubbock Music Festival
806/761-7000

VERNON
Vernon College Rodeo
940/552-6291

7-8

POSSUM KINGDOM
Possum Fest/
Barbecue & Chili Cookoff
940/779-2424

7-9

POST
Old Mill Trade Days
866/433-OMTD

8

CISCO
Cruisin' & Groovin' Festival
254/442-2537

FLOYDADA
Punkin Days
806/983-3434

LUBBOCK
Ranch Day
806/742-0498

MINERAL WELLS
Crazy Water Festival
800/252-6989

SEYMOUR
Autumn Leaves Festival
940/889-2921

8-9

COLORADO CITY
Ranch Rodeo
325/728-3404

11

SAN ANGELO
Taste of San Angelo
325/653-7785

14-15

QUITAQUE
Buffalo Days
806/455-1492

VERNON
MRCA Rodeo Finals
940/552-5474

14-16

ALBANY
Fort Griffin Reenactment
of Texas' Last Frontier
325/762-2525
or 762-3592

PLAINVIEW
Running Water Draw
Arts & Crafts Festival
806/293-1057

15

AMARILLO
Amarillo Symphony Orchestra
806/376-7127

CANYON
Palo Duro Trail Run
806/488-2227

JAYTON
Jayton Jam
806/237-3822

15

ROTAN
Boot Scoot & Wild Hog Fest
325/735-3475

TYE

Classic Truck Show
325/695-8253

15-16

AMARILLO
Celtic Festival & Craft Faire
806/374-4243

BIG SPRING
Arts & Crafts Festival
432/263-7690

WICHITA FALLS
Horse Expo
940/855-2116

16

SLATON
St. Joseph's Sausage Fest
806/828-6761

22

ABILENE
Erinshire Folk Festival
325/677-8420

ANSON
Mesquite Daze
325/823-3259

28-29

LUBBOCK
Lubbock Symphony Orchestra
806/762-1688

SAN ANGELO
Halloween Haunted House
325/481-2646

28-30

SAN ANGELO
Roping Fiesta
325/653-7785

29

ABILENE
Philharmonic
325/677-6710

LUBBOCK
Día de los Muertos Procesión
806/767-2686

SWEETWATER
Halloween Extravaganza
325/235-7396

29-Nov 5

AMARILLO
U.S. Team Penning Assn
National Finals &
World Championships
817/378-8082

31

QUANAH
Halloween Fun Day
940/663-2222

PINEY WOODS

1

CONROE
Broadway in Conroe
936/760-2144 or
888/823-6610

HUNTSVILLE

Fair on the Square
936/295-8113

JASPER

Fall Festival
409/384-2762

KILGORE

KTPB Fine Arts
Festival/Kidsfest
903/983-8625

LONGVIEW

Neal McCoy & Friends
Concert
903/297-9000

PINELAND

Pineland Day
800/787-1421

TEXARKANA
Archaeology & Heritage Fair
903/793-4831

1-2

COLDSRING
Wolf Creek Rod & Bike Show
936/653-2184

5-9

NACOGDOCHES
Pineywoods Fair
936/564-0849

6

TYLER
The Voices of London
903/566-7424

6-8

HENDERSON
PRCA Dodge Series Rodeo
866/650-5529

7-8

CLEVELAND
Great Outdoor Gospel Sing
281/432-0816

8

GLADEWATER
Folk Artisan Fair
903/845-5501

NEWTON

Homecoming Parade & Bazaar
409/379-5527

TYLER

Harvest Festival
903/894-8995

WOODVILLE

Ranch Rodeo/Chili Cookoff
409/283-2632

8-9

MARSHALL
Fireant Festival
903/935-7868

RUSK

Pioneer & Heritage Festival
903/683-4242

13-15

CENTER
East Texas Poultry Festival
936/598-3682

13-16

TYLER
Texas Rose Festival
903/597-3130

14-16

CONROE
Cajun Catfish Festival
713/863-9994 or
800/324-2604

JEFFERSON
Bigfoot Conference
877/529-5550

15-16

WOODVILLE
Harvest Festival
409/283-2272

16

JEFFERSON
Taste of Jefferson
888/467-3529

19-22

GILMER
East Texas Yamboree
903/843-2413

20-22

LONGVIEW
Harvest Festival
903/236-8428

21-22

GOLDEN
Sweet Potato Festival
903/765-2444

21-23

CROCKETT
Heritage Festival
936/544-2359

21-22, 28-30

CONROE
The Diary of Anne Frank
936/441-7469

22

HUNTSVILLE
Rocky Raccoon 50-K/25-K
Trail Run
903/894-3788

23

TEXARKANA
Miami City Ballet
903/792-4992

25

TYLER
Miami City Ballet
903/566-7424

28-29

SAN AUGUSTINE
Sassafras Festival
936/275-3610

29

COLDSRING
Octoberfest
936/653-2255

HUGHES SPRINGS
Pumpkin Glow
903/639-2351

31

HUNTSVILLE
Scare on the Square
936/295-2150

31

MONTGOMERY
Halloween in the Park
936/597-4400

PRAIRIES AND LAKES

1

AUBREY
Peanut Festival
940/365-9162

BOWIE

Chicken & Bread Days
Heritage Festival
940/872-6246

DECATUR

Frijole Fest
940/683-2743

DENISON

Main Street Fall Festival
903/464-4452

DIME BOX

Homecoming
979/542-3684

HONEY GROVE

Davy Crockett Day
903/378-7211

SEAGOVILLE

(began Sep 29)
Seagofest
972/287-5184

SMITHVILLE

Cajun Fest
512/303-4747

WESTLAKE

Arbor Days
817/490-5736

WHEELOCK

Pioneer Days
979/828-4627

1-2

RICHARDSON
Cottonwood Art Festival
972/744-4580

1-8

BURTON
La Bahia Antique Show
979/289-2684 or
888/273-6426

1-23

DALLAS
(began Sep 30)
State Fair of Texas
214/565-9931

1, 7-8, 14-15,

21-22, 28-29

GRANBURY
Granbury Live
800/989-8240

1-Nov 20

PLANTERSVILLE
Texas Renaissance Festival
800/458-3435

2

FLATONIA
Sacred Heart Fall Festival
361/865-3920

HILLSBORO

Fall Festival
254/582-5640

6-8, 20-23

DALLAS
Dallas Symphony Orchestra
214/692-0203

ROUND TOP

Antiques Fair
512/360-3562

6-9

DENISON
Grayson County Fair
903/465-1551

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6-9
SEGUIN
 Guadalupe County Fair & PRCA Rodeo
 830/379-6477

6-Nov 13
GRANBURY
I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change
 866/572-0881

7-9
CUERO
 Turkeyfest
 361/275-2112

SOUTHLAKE
 Oktoberfest
 817/481-8200

7-15
WACO
 Heart O' Texas Fair & Rodeo
 254/776-1660

8
BRENNHAM
 Autumn Fest
 979/836-9652

CALVERT
 Victorian Gala & Tea
 979/364-2935

DENTON
 ¡Fuego y Alma!
 International Latino Music & Art Festival
 940/898-3673

ELGIN
 Sausage Stampede
 5-K/1-K Run
 512/285-4515

GAINESVILLE
 Depot Day Festival
 940/668-4530

GLEN ROSE
 Moonshine Festival
 254/897-3081

Paluxy Pedal Bike Ride
 254/897-3081

JEWETT
 Fall Frolic
 903/626-4202

MOUNT VERNON
 Countryfest
 903/537-3048

TEAGUE
 Parkfest
 254/739-2061

8-9
CHAPPELL HILL
 Scarecrow Festival
 979/836-6033

GRAND PRAIRIE
 Champion Barbecue Cookoff
 972/647-2331

9
BRYAN
 OctoberFeast
 979/778-9463

DEANVILLE
 VFD Barbecue
 979/535-4761

11-16
RICHARDSON
An Evening with Groucho
 972/744-4650

12-15
BONHAM
 Fannin County Fair
 903/583-7453

12-16
ADDISON
 Shakespeare Festival of Dallas
 800/233-4766

12-16
BELLVILLE
 Austin County Fair
 979/865-5995

14-15
KERENS
 Kerens Cotton Harvest Festival
 903/396-2665

LOCKHART
 Historical Cemetery Tour
 512/398-4322

14-16
CLEBURNE
 Freedom Flight Air Show
 817/645-2455

YORKTOWN
 Western Days Festival
 361/564-2661

15
CARROLLTON
 Country Fair
 972/242-4490

CLIFTON
 Oktoberfest Dinner
 800/344-3720

COOPER
 Chiggerfest
 903/325-4216

ENNIS
 Fall Festival
 972/878-4748

GRAPEVINE
 Butterfly Flutterby
 817/410-3185

LA GRANGE
 Best Little Art Show in Texas
 979/968-5756

LEXINGTON
 Chocolate Festival
 979/773-4337

MIDLOTHIAN
 Fall Festival
 972/723-8600

NIXON
 Wild Hog Cookoff
 830/672-6532

PALESTINE
Murder on the DisOriented Express
 903/729-6066 or 800/659-3484

SHINER
 Boctoberfest
 800/574-4637

THE GROVE
 Jamboree
 512/282-1215

WAXAHACHIE
 Cotton Fest
 972/938-9617

WHITESBORO
 Peanut Festival
 903/564-3331

15-16
FAYETTEVILLE
 Lickskillet Days
 713/444-6219

GRANBURY
 Harvest Moon Festival
 800/950-2212

ROUND TOP
 Conspirare
 979/249-3129

18-Nov 21
ATHENS
 Scarecrow Trail
 903/675-5630

19-22
ROCKDALE
 Rockdale Fair
 512/446-2030

21-23
FORT WORTH
 Red Steagall
 Cowboy Gathering & Western Swing Festival
 888/269-8696

22
BRENNHAM
 Heritage Festival
 979/830-8445

CEDAR HILL
 Days of Old Celebration
 972/291-3900

CHRISMAN
 "Perk" Williams 5-K Walk & Festival
 979/567-0573

COLUMBUS
 1886 Stafford Opera House
 Dinner Theatre
 979/732-5135 or 877/444-7339

ELGIN
 Hogeve Festival
 512/285-5721

MADISONVILLE
 Saturday on the Square
 936/348-3591

Texas Mushroom Festival
 936/349-0742

MESQUITE
 Cowboys of Color
 Invitational Rodeo
 972/285-8777

PALESTINE
 Dogwood Jamboree
 903/723-3014

Hot Pepper Fest
 800/659-3484

22
TEMPLE
 Austin Symphony
 254/773-9926

VAN
 Oil Festival
 903/963-5051

WACO
 Wine & Food Festival
 254/754-1454

22-23
BELLVILLE
 Antiques Festival
 979/865-1122

FORT WORTH
 Japanese Garden
 Fall Festival
 817/871-7686

23
HALLETTSVILLE
 Falling Leaves
 Polka Fest
 361/798-2662

28-29
PARIS
 Festival of Pumpkins
 903/784-9293

STEPHENVILLE
 Texas Ag Expo
 254/965-2406

28-30
FLATONIA
 Czillispiel XXXIII
 361/865-3920

FORT WORTH
 Women's
 National Finals Rodeo
 817/625-1148

28-30
GLEN ROSE
 Fossilmania
 254/897-3081

WAXAHACHIE
Carousel
 972/723-6976

29
LULING
 Catfish Cookoff at Zedler Mill
 830/875-3214

SAN FELIPE
 Lone Star Legacy Festival
 979/885-3613

29-30
KAUFMAN
 Whole Kit & CaBooodle
 Fall Fest
 972/932-2216

31
FORT WORTH
 Stockyards Station
 Halloween Festival
 817/625-9715

SOUTH TEXAS PLAINS

6-7
LAREDO
 TAMIU Alumni Festival
 956/326-2180

8-9
SAN ANTONIO
 Garden Festival of Roses
 210/451-4565

13
EAGLE PASS
 Rededication of
 Maverick County Courthouse
 830/773-9228

13-16
BEEVILLE
 West Fest
 361/358-3267

SAN ANTONIO
 Junior League Olé
 Marketplace
 210/979-5710

14-16
FALFURRIAS
 Fiesta del Campo
 361/325-3333

14-31
EAGLE PASS
 Maverick County
 4-H Pumpkin Patch
 830/513-9345

15
LAREDO
 Viva el Mariachi Festival
 956/721-5330

20-23
MISSION
 Texas Butterfly Festival
 956/585-2727

22
EAGLE PASS
 Día del Río Festival
 830/773-1836

26-29
ALICE
 Jim Wells County Fair
 361/664-7595

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SESQUICENTENNIAL EDITION 1857-2007

Readers RECOMMEND...

TIPS FROM OUR READERS

MY DAUGHTER and I found a beautiful bed and breakfast in **Wharton** called **Birdsong Inn**. The cottage is actually an old gas station/general store that the owners, Ludvik and Diane Matula, moved next to their lovely home, also done to perfection. With great care and an eye for detail, they transformed the station into the sweet refuge that it is. Surrounded by beautiful and whimsical gardens, the cottage has both a back deck and a front porch. We reserved for three days and stayed four—and could have stayed much longer!

CELIA MURRAY, *Portland, Oregon*
Birdsong Inn Bed & Breakfast is at 612 N. Resident St.; 979/532-0242; www.birdsonginn.com.

RECENTLY we were in **Blanco** and picked up a wonderful apple-pecan cake from **The Deutsch Apple**, just east of town.

JACK AND PHYLLIS RADEMACHER, *Georgetown*
The Deutsch Apple is at 602 Chandler; 830/833-2882; www.homemadepies.com.

THE SHOOT-from-the-hip chorus in David Allan Coe's classic, "The Ride," asks the quintessential question that every great musician must answer: "Mister, can you make folks cry when you play and sang...Can you bend them guitar strangs...Boy, can you make folks feel what you feel inside."

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, and because hours vary and details can change, please call ahead for more information.



Composer/pianist Doug Smith has several upcoming performances in Texas. For details, call 800/269-7552, or go to www.dougsmith.com.

We all love musicians who are blessed with that "magical" talent. Last July at the New Braunfels Museum of Art and Music, I was privileged to experience such an artist. The great news: He is a true "Texas Treasure," and, of all things, a pianist!

The artist: **Doug Smith**, a native of **Kermit**. His talent is truly magical. He has the wonderful ability to transform a Steinway from an inanimate object to a fire-breathing music-machine that burns with soul-warming notes that lift us into the musical stratosphere.

BILL McCALISTER, *San Antonio*
For information on Doug Smith's upcoming performances, or to order his CDs, call 800/269-7552; www.dougsmith.com.

THE **HICKORY Stick Bar-B-Q Restaurant** in **Everman** has been family-owned and -operated since 1976. Everything is tasty, and the restaurant is clean. The ribs are award-winners, and the desserts are still homemade by owner Mark Jones' mother.

DAVE BROWN, *Hillsboro*
The Hickory Stick Bar-B-Q Restaurant is at 900 E. Enon; 817/478-9997; www.hickorystickbar-b-q.com.

WE'VE been meeting, along with five other couples from across the state, at the **Haven River Inn** in **Comfort** for the past several years. It's a great place for old

friends to gather and enjoy the "comfort" of being with one another in a beautiful, peaceful setting. Beds are good, food is great, and the atmosphere is like "coming home."

KAY AND LEON MILLER, *Kerrville*
The Haven River Inn is at 105 FM 473; 830/995-3834 or 888/995-7200; www.bed-breakfast-comfort.com.

YOU'LL find good chicken-and-dumplings at **Susannah's Homestyle Cooking** in **Cleburne**. They have the best I've ever eaten—and I'm 75 years old.

HERBERT F. MOORE, *Cleburne*
Susannah's Homestyle Cooking is at 1514 W. Henderson St.; 817/641-3848.

IF YOU'RE wanting the best chicken-fried steak, head to **Hondo's** in **Fredericksburg!** The cream gravy—well, I'm craving it right now!

BARBARA USKOVICH, *Dallas*
Hondo's is at 312 W. Main St.; 830/997-1633; www.hondosonmain.com.

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5K52

Next month... As the leaves turn, so will the pages of *TH*, with stories on fall-foliage hotspots, historic Denton County bridges, and Houston's ethnic markets. We'll feature readers' World War II home-front memories, and head to **Vattman**, a tiny South Texas town that celebrates Thanksgiving in a big way.



RICHARD REYNOLDS

window on TEXAS

MARSH GRASS AND CATTAILS grow profusely in the Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge in Brazoria County. October's a fine time for visiting the great Texas outdoors, no matter what part of the state you reside in.

** To order a print of this photograph, see page 1.*

