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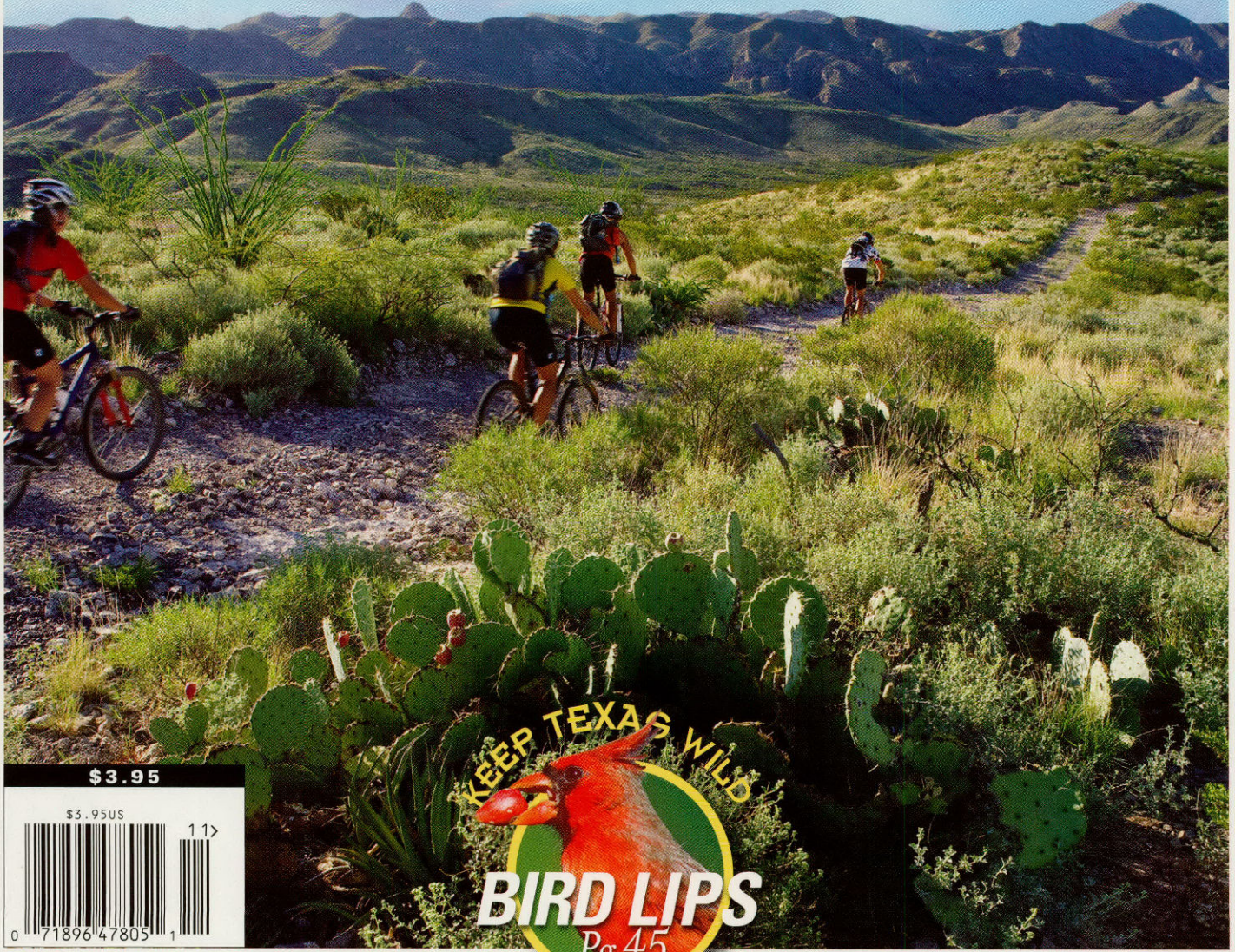
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The OUTDOOR MAGAZINE of TEXAS

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KEEP TEXAS WILD

BIRD LIPS

Pg.45



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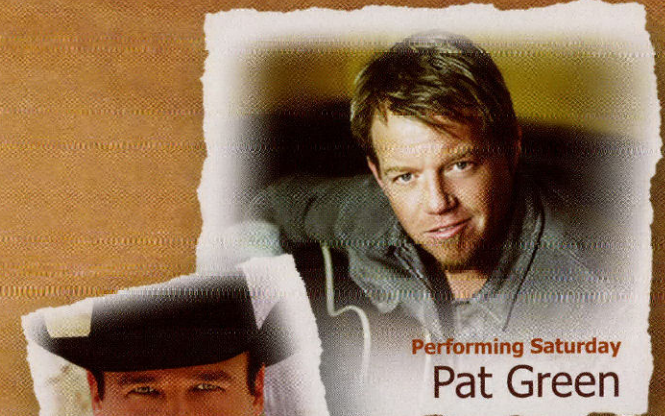
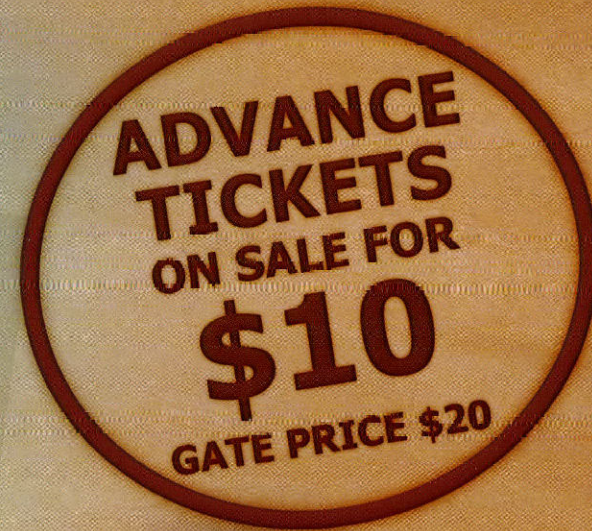


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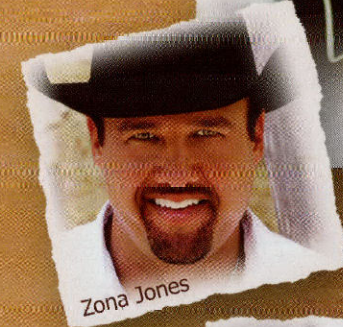
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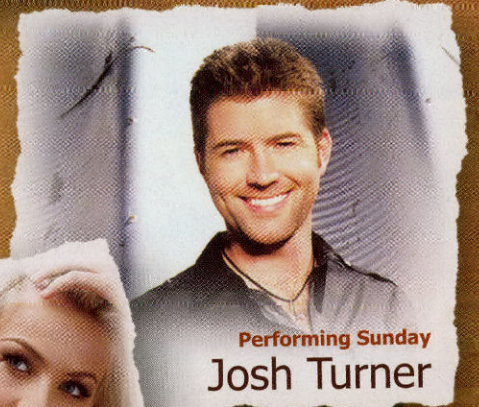
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Features

30 Autumn Ablaze

Introduction by Earl Nottingham

Photography by Jerry Cotten

Take a virtual fall color tour through Lost Maples State Natural Area and McKittrick Canyon.

38 Repairing Mother Nature

By Tom Harvey

Leopold Conservation Award winner J. David Bamberger turns

'worst ranch in Texas' into conservation showcase.

45 Keep Texas Wild

Bird Lips!?

Animals use claws and beaks and teeth and tongues to eat their favorite foods.

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CONTENTS

N O V E M B E R 2 0 0 9

COVER STORY

22

Dream Ride

By Karen Hoffman Blizzard

A backcountry bike trek through remote Fresno Canyon will take you out of the ordinary and into 'the zone.'

Departments

6 At Issue

By Carter P. Smith

8 Outdoor Notes

By Governor Rick Perry

9 Mail Call

Our readers share their ideas.

10 HOME, SWEET BAT HOME

By Angela Lindfors

Simple retrofit turns ordinary bridges into homes for bat colonies.

12 PARK PICK: HISTORY BY CANDLELIGHT

By Sheryl Smith-Rodgers

Fanthorp Inn takes the holidays back to the 19th century.

13 WILD THING: CRIMSON CROONER

By Sheryl Smith-Rodgers

Cardinals come for the sunflower seed, then stay all year.

14 FLORA FACT: A PATCH OF BLUE

By Sheryl Smith-Rodgers

Big bluestem provides small-animal homes, prevents erosion.

15 TEXAS READER: 100 CLASSIC HIKES IN TEXAS

By Angela Lindfors

Author enlivens guidebook with tasty tidbits of information.

17 SKILL BUILDER: GREEN AROUND THE GILLS

By Scott Sommerlatte

It's easy being green, especially when you're fishing.

20 Three Days in the Field

By Melissa Gaskill

Viva Terlingua!: Bring a flashlight and your hiking boots to this remote outdoor heaven.

50 Legend, Lore & Legacy

By E. Dan Klepper

Focus on Reality: W.D. Smithers' photographs chronicle the state's Western frontier.

56 Parting Shot

By Tim Fitzharris

Covers

FRONT: Cyclists at Big Bend Ranch State Park. Photo by Earl Nottingham/TPWD

BACK: Fall leaves. Photo © Jerry Cotten

PREVIOUS SPREAD: A dead tree and an agave on the Chisos Mountains South Rim in Big Bend National Park. Photo © Laurence Parent

THIS PAGE: Rock art left by Native Americans along Fresno Creek at Big Bend Ranch State Park. Photo by Earl Nottingham/TPWD

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THE OUTDOOR MAGAZINE OF TEXAS

NOVEMBER 2009, VOL. 67, NO. 11

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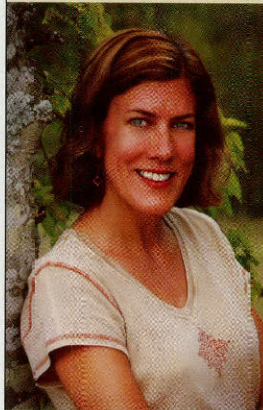
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In the Field

KAREN HOFFMAN BLIZZARD

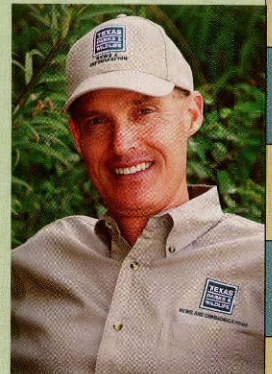
is a native Austinite and outdoorswoman who has been exploring West Texas since 1998. "The Big Bend bike trip described in this issue was my first mountain biking adventure," she says. "Big Bend Ranch State Park is a magical place, and I hope more bikers will take the journey to discover it." Karen



spends her indoor time as an award-winning writer, editor and musician. Currently holding the position of publications manager for the Creative Services branch of TPWD, she has worked in publishing for more than 20 years and has contributed articles to *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine. She spends her free time exploring Texas state parks, rivers, creeks and the Hill Country with her husband, Mike, and their two adventurous dogs.

TOM HARVEY

is currently the TPWD News and Information Director and finds time to contribute to *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine on water resources, habitat conservation and land use. Tom has written about Leopold Conservation Award winners for the past four years. "It is a humbling yet empowering privilege to get to know people who are pouring their money, time and life's passion into taking care of the real Texas," Tom says. "In every case, I find that private land stewardship begins in youth, is founded on family, and is propelled by a burning desire and unwavering determination to serve a cause greater than themselves."



MELISSA GASKILL

first visited Big Bend National Park on a family camping trip at age three. For the coastal flatlander, it proved a transforming experience, and she was eager to introduce her own children to this magical place. Her family has visited Big Bend a number of times—to hike, float the river and camp in the back country. Several years ago, they discovered the nearby town of Terlingua and realized it makes an ideal base for exploring the wider area. "We can hike all day, in the Basin or farther afield, then have a hot shower and a cold drink and watch the sun set over the mountains of Mexico and the park," Melissa says. "Plus, the people in town all have good stories." Melissa lives in Austin, where she writes travel and nature articles for numerous publications.



AT ISSUE

FROM THE PEN OF CARTER P. SMITH

I first met J. David Bamberger a number of years ago at our family place over in Edwards County. We were standing at the base of a high bluff along the river bottom, where J. David was trying valiantly to convince my father that they should scale it to collect seeds from some endangered Texas snowbell plants.

Mr. Bamberger had just started a project to recover this critically imperiled Texas Hill Country plant, and to do it, he needed private landowners to work with. Someone told him that we had a few wild snowbells growing on the ranch and that my father was likely to be supportive of such an enterprise. Mr. Bamberger, whose powers of persuasion are rather well honed, convinced my father that he needed to get involved and that the first order of business was to see if they could collect some seeds from the wild plants on the ranch in order to propagate additional seedlings for future restoration plantings.

So there we found ourselves that fateful day, listening intently as J. David passionately described his recovery efforts and his plan to climb that cliff to see if the plants had produced any seeds for collection and future propagation. Mind you, the bluff under which we were standing that morning was quite steep and wholly saturated from the numerous seeps emanating from the limestone. Moreover, the plants were perched way up above, living precariously along a small ledge where no self-respecting deer or goat could reach them, much less my father and J. David, who were not exactly spring chickens anymore.

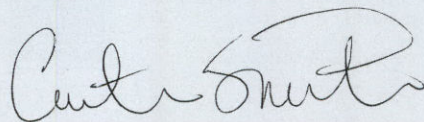
As I turned towards my mother, fully expecting her to exercise her veto power over this little escapade, off J. David went, scampering up the cliff like a little billy goat, until he proudly and triumphantly reached the snowbells. He turned around and looked down upon us all with his trademark ear-to-ear grin as if to say, "I told you I could do it." It was abundantly clear then and there that there were very few mountains in life that J. David wasn't prepared to climb.

In so many ways, J. David Bamberger is living proof of an old adage passed along to me by a dear family friend: "Whatever you are looking for in life is also looking for you." Fortunately for him, and for an old, worn-out Blanco County ranch now known as "Selah," the two found each other nearly three decades ago. The remarkable story of his love affair with that ranch is captured in the accompanying article by my colleague Tom Harvey.

Mr. Bamberger, along with his late and dear wife Margaret, was honored by TPWD and the Sand County Foundation with our 2009 statewide Leopold Conservation Award, the state's most prestigious stewardship award for private landowners. As anyone who has gone out to Selah to observe the fruits of his labors can see, J. David loves the land and everything on it, below it, coming from it, and produced by it. Along with his highly talented and capable team at the ranch, Mr. Bamberger has transformed that corner of the Hill Country into a showplace for habitat restoration, water conservation, wildlife management, spring recharge and recovery, and outdoor education.

His efforts are an inspiration for us all. The future of wild places and wild things in Texas depends upon landowners and stewards such as J. David Bamberger. Rest assured, we need him, and others like him, more than ever.

As anyone who has gone out to Selah to observe the fruits of his labors can see, J. David loves the land and everything on it, below it, coming from it, and produced by it.



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

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OUTDOOR NOTES

FROM TEXAS GOVERNOR RICK PERRY

Hunting is a unique part of the Texas experience that increases one's appreciation for our state's rugged natural beauty while contributing to our overall quality of life. Thanks to the efforts of hunters committed to preserving the environment, the sport has played an essential role in sustaining natural habitats through the promotion, protection and maintenance of Texas' wildlife and ecosystems. Now hunters can do even more.

Earlier this year, Agriculture Commissioner Todd Staples announced the GO TEXAN Wildlife Initiative to promote businesses, associations and organizations that focus on wildlife recreation in the state, such as hunting, fishing, exotic animal farms and fisheries. The Wildlife Initiative builds on the success of similar GO TEXAN programs for Texas food, wine, restaurants and communities.

When roughly one million hunters head into the field each year, they have a positive economic impact on communities across the state. Programs like GO TEXAN will enhance that impact and strengthen the sport's reach into new areas.

As more people contemplate taking up the sport, they need to know it involves much, much more than the mere harvesting of wildlife. Hunters not only advocate for conservation, they also help pay for it through the purchase of hunting licenses, federal taxes on sporting goods and voluntary donations to groups like Ducks Unlimited. This highly successful conservation model has restored populations of deer, turkey and other game animals across North America. In addition, by protecting and restoring the habitat that sustains all wildlife, hunter-driven conservation also benefits many rare species and nongame animals.

Hunting also promotes clean water and air, as maintaining healthy, thriving habitats like wetlands and bottomland forests is essential to Texas wildlife. Hunters' dollars have funded the creation of national wildlife refuges and state wildlife management areas. They also pay for technical assistance for landowners, wildlife law enforcement on private property in Texas and economic incentives for good land stewardship.

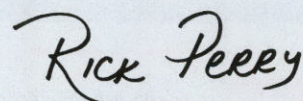
As it is in so many essential areas like exports and job creation, Texas is number one when it comes to the hunting industry as well. A 2006 report by Southwick and Associates indicated hunting generates an annual economic output in Texas of \$4.6 billion while supporting more than 44,000 jobs. Texas leads the nation in hunting-related retail sales, amounting to almost twice as much as each of the next three states: Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Missouri.

Significant economic and ecological benefits aside, hunting also brings families together. I would never trade memories of talking quietly in a deer blind with my children, or talking strategy while waiting under a mesquite tree by a dove field.

Like hunting itself, special moments like these require us to slow down, listen and learn. When we do, we improve our chances to succeed in the hunt, and in life.

If you love the outdoors and/or appreciate hunting, I hope you'll take the time to learn more about the GO TEXAN Wildlife Initiative and consider joining. When you see a hunter in a store or in the mirror this fall, thank them for strengthening our economy and keeping Texas wild.

Hunting generates an annual economic output in Texas of \$4.6 billion while supporting more than 44,000 jobs.



RICK PERRY
TEXAS GOVERNOR

Texas Governor Rick Perry writes about outdoor issues four times a year for Texas Parks & Wildlife magazine.

MAIL CALL

PICKS, PANS AND PROBES FROM OUR READERS

LETTERS

UNDERGROUND ALTERNATIVE

In reading the "At Issue" feature in the October issue of *TP&W* magazine, I got to wondering if maybe the transmission lines for the power generated by wind turbines could be delivered by underground transmission lines. This would reduce the number of potential roosting or perching sites for predators of these birds. Surely someone involved in this development already has thought of this potential partial solution to helping LPCs and wind power development grow together.

JERRY EBANKS
Carrollton

COOPER LAKE BIRTHDAY TRIP

We had a fantastic trip with Tony Parker last Saturday afternoon at Cooper Lake ("Cooped-Up Fish," August 2009). It was a birthday present for my 10-year old grandson, who loves to fish. We had a wonderful time and caught lots of hybrids and sand bass. Tony is a great guide and person and made the whole experience very special for my grandson Blake.

Thanks for your article. We have been showing it around and I'm sure some of my friends will be making the trip to Cooper Lake. I know we plan to go back.

JERRY SMITH
Richardson

TPWD EMPLOYEE LENDS A HAND

In mid-September, I was boating in Dickinson Bay and hit a reef. We were all wearing life vests and no one was injured, but the boat would not move due to a mechanical issue. I was only a few feet from the barge traffic area and was concerned about drifting into it without power. We had not sounded any alarm signals yet and were trying to see what options we had. One of your employees, who was

off duty and in her personal boat, stopped to check on us.

This TPWD employee had just bought her boat and was taking it on its first trip out. She had her nine-year-old son with her and offered to tow us out. She then spent the next two hours slowly getting us back to the dock. I offered to pay her for her time and effort but she would not take it. She said the best payment would be for me to help someone else when needed. I am so sad that I cannot remember her name so you can acknowledge her for her kindness. She told me she participates in gill net surveys, dock surveys and has been with TPWD for 15 years.

I want to thank you for having the kind of employees that will do this. She went out

of her way, turned around and ran aground with her boat just to see if we needed anything.

She truly was a welcome sight on the bay.
CHRIS WALTERS
Houston

Sound off for "Mail Call!"

Let us hear from you!

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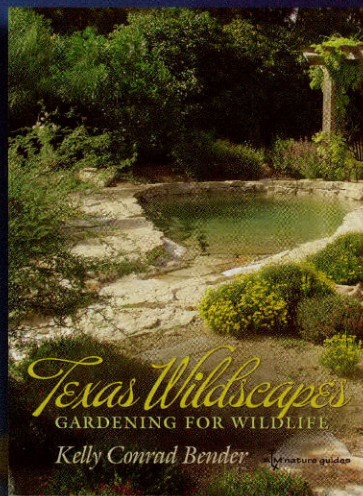
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HOME, SWEET BAT HOME

Simple retrofit turns ordinary bridges into homes for bat colonies.

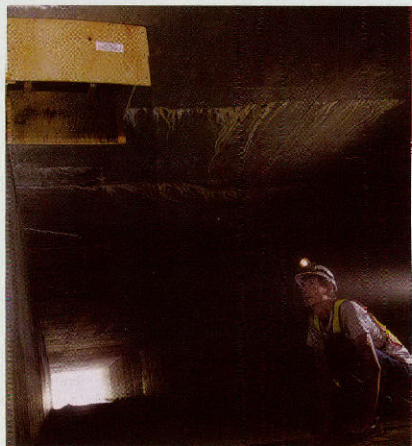


A kayaker watches the flight of the Mexican free-tailed bat colony at the Congress Avenue Bridge in Austin.

Tourists and locals alike gather with their eyes on the sky every clear summer evening at the Congress Avenue Bridge in Austin. The object of their fascination is not the sunset; they have gathered to witness the flight of more than 1.5 million Mexican free-tailed bats from their home under the bridge and into the mosquito- and moth-rich Austin airspace.

Since the colony formed there, a series of studies have been launched and completed by the nonprofit Bat Conservation International (BCI) and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT). Initial concerns included worries about the stability of a bat-laden bridge and public safety, but the studies show that the bat presence is actually beneficial to people, not only in Texas, but in the entire United States.

Some bats can consume up to 1,000 mosquitoes in a single hour. Every year, bats eat billions of mosquitoes and other pests that might otherwise be dealt with by farmers and suburbanites with chemicals. Bats are nature's own flying insect control mechanism. Farmers in the United States likely save millions of dollars in pesticides and crop damage, thanks to large bat colonies — many of them in Texas — stopping the insects at their source before they migrate to the crops of the upper Midwest. In addition,



Bats cluster under a bridge (top), while a worker checks on the progress of a retrofit project (above).

tourists who come to see the Congress Avenue Bridge bats bring nearly \$8 million into the local economy.

Bats, for all their usefulness, are quickly declining in number as their natural habitats are compromised. The Texas Department of Transportation and BCI hoped to replicate such a successful bridge colony elsewhere, to provide homes to bats in places where they are needed.

One such example is Canadian Middle School in the Texas Panhandle. More than 30,000 Mexican free-tailed bats made the school attic home, causing local concern. Students and teachers, with help from BCI, TxDOT and local businesses, retrofitted a nearby bridge, providing a new home for the bats to roost when they were ousted from the attic.

A 1994 survey by bridge engineer Mark Blosscock found that only 0.01 percent of Texas highway structures were suitable for bat roosts, but many of them could work with minor changes. Currently, 218 Texas highway structures are inhabited by bats, and Blosscock's Bats and Bridges program is now being used in 25 states. The changes are usually simple and inexpensive, and can be accomplished using recycled highway

signs. Retrofitters are able to influence what type of bat they attract by how they build the structures under the bridges, and can regulate the size of the colony by the number of crevices added. They can also be upsized, downsized and even moved, if necessary. So far, every retrofit effort has ended successfully.

Farmers and engineers aren't the only ones trying to attract bats. BCI encourages people all over the United States to build bat houses. While not all species of bats eat mosquitoes, all North American bats are considered beneficial. Urban bat colonies will eat many garden pests, as well as mosquitoes hatched in man-made pools of stagnant water, such as retention ponds and unused fountains. With proper education about bat safety, there is no reason not to invite some warm-blooded flying neighbors to your neighborhood.

Want to attract some bats to your yard? Go to www.batcon.org/index.php/get-involved/install-a-bat-house.html to build your own bat house. Or, by shopping around, you can buy a pre-made BCI-certified bat house for as little as \$60. ★

—Angela Lindfors

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History by Candlelight

Fanthorp Inn takes the holidays back to the 19th century.

Sounds cliché, interpreter Tom Scaggs admits, but history really does come alive at Fanthorp Inn State Historic Site, especially after dark when candles and luminarias softly illuminate the two-story clapboard inn.

But that only happens once a year during Twilight Firelight, a yuletide celebration hosted the Saturday after Thanksgiving.

"There's just something magical about the inn that night," says Scaggs, who drives the inn's replica stagecoach, outfitted in a top hat and coattails. Visitors park near the Grimes County Courthouse in Anderson and board the horse-drawn, cherry-red coach. "The short ride slows down their train of thought and sets the mood for life in the 1850s," Scaggs explains.

Reminiscent of those simpler days, innkeepers Henry and Rachel Fanthorp — actually interpreters dressed in period clothing — usher guests inside the decorated inn, where they're treated to hot wassail

and homemade cookies. Other characters, dressed to portray bygone travelers and boarders, recite cowboy poetry, strum dulcimers and sing Christmas carols.

Year-round, visitors may take weekend tours of Fanthorp Inn, first built in 1834 as a dogtrot home by Henry Fanthorp, an English immigrant. As postmaster, he often let travelers on the stagecoach, which carried the mail, sleep overnight in his home. In 1850, he added a large downstairs dining room and 12 to 16 rooms.

In 1867, the couple died of yellow fever; the inn closed a year later. Family members lived in the home until 1977, when the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department purchased the property. After a decade of research and restoration, Fanthorp Inn reopened in 1987 as a historic site, where visitors can experience the 1850s and daily life at a Texas stagecoach stop.

Twilight Firelight runs 4:30 to 7:30 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 28. No entrance fee; dona-



A horse-drawn coach sets the mood for this 19th-century holiday event.

tions accepted. Regular tours given Saturday and Sunday, 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Open Wednesday through Friday for group tours (reservation only). Stagecoach Days (second Saturday each month) feature stagecoach rides, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Fanthorp Inn State Historic Site in Anderson is located approximately 10 miles east of Navasota and about 30 miles southeast of Bryan/College Station. For more information, call 936-873-2633 or visit www.tpwd.state.tx.us/fanthorpinn.

— Sheryl Smith-Rodgers



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Crimson Crooner

Cardinals come for the sunflower seed, then stay all year.

Commonly seen but far from common looking, the male northern cardinal — with its brilliant red plumage, jaunty head crest and black face mask — ranks as one of our best-recognized songbirds.

Cardinalis cardinalis — named for the red robes worn by Roman Catholic cardinals — inhabits the eastern two-thirds of Texas. Bird feeders — especially those stocked with black-oil sunflower seeds — have steadily expanded their northern range through the years. While most other songbirds migrate south for the winter, northern cardinals don't travel far, and even sing year-round, too.

Duets between a mated pair peak in the spring and early summer. During courtship, a male will often alight near his mate, then gently feed her a seed or insect. Come nest time, he'll continue to feed her. During one season, a cardinal couple may nest up to four times with two to five eggs per clutch. Juveniles resemble their pale brown mother, except their stout beaks are gray, not orange-red.

Beauty aside, the species can be temperamental. Because they're so devoted to family, northern cardinals will fiercely defend their territory against intruders, real and otherwise. The behavior can be perplexing as well as irritating.

"That's one of our most common calls," says Georgina Schwartz, who answers the San Antonio Audubon Society's information line. "People want to know why a cardinal keeps pecking at their window or a car mirror and what they can do about it. I explain that the bird is seeing its reflection and thinks he or she is fighting off an intruder."

Schwartz suggests hanging a towel in the window or draping one over a car mirror. "Cardinals can be very persistent," she adds. "You'd think they'd catch on about their reflection, but they never do." ★

— Sheryl Smith-Rodgers



↑ Cardinals often go on the defensive when they see their reflections in mirrors.

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Once on the endangered species list, bald eagles have made a return to Texas. Watch the week of November 1–8.

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A Patch of Blue

Big bluestem provides small-animal homes, prevents erosion.



Come fall, the dense stands of big bluestem that blanket much of Penn Prairie at Cedar Hill State Park fade into reddish browns and beiges, turning the 13 acres into a seemingly dull, lifeless place. But take a closer look at the leggy bunchgrasses, and you'll find that's not the case at all.

"Even as big bluestem nears the end of its life cycle, the grass provides shelter and nesting material for birds, small animals and insects," says Michelle Varnell, park interpreter.

In a habitat, big bluestem grows from 3 to 10 feet high and turns blue-green during the summer. Purplish, three-branched seedheads resemble a "turkeyfoot," another common name for the grass. Root systems can burrow as deep as 10 to 12 feet, allowing the perennial to survive drought and fire. Its strong rhizomes and fibrous roots help anchor soils and prevent erosion.

Historically, *Andropogon gerardii* once heavily vegetated the vast tallgrass prairies that stretched across the Midwest. In fact, big bluestem tops the "big



Three-branched seedheads resemble a turkey's foot, giving big bluestem another nickname.

four" native species (along with little bluestem, Indiangrass and switchgrass) that typified a tallgrass prairie. Gradually, though, those enormous grasslands that once nourished bison in the 1800s gave way to crops and farms. Today, only small remnants, such as Penn Prairie, remain. ★

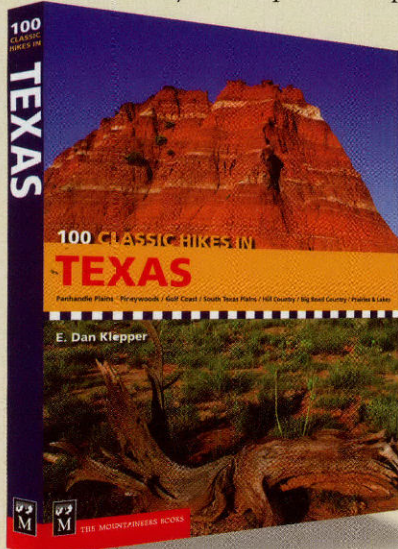
—Sheryl Smith-Rodgers

100 Classic Hikes in Texas

Author enlivens guidebook with tasty tidbits of information.

From the beginning hiker looking for a place to start to the experienced outdoorsman in search of the next great adventure, E. Dan Klepper's *100 Classic Hikes in Texas* is a must-read.

Each hike is rated by difficulty in a handy chart that indicates the region and preferred season for hiking that trail and includes a particular perk to spark a reader's interest. After whetting your hike-happy appetite, Klepper provides a necessary overview of Texas-specific hiking safety information. Some may be tempted to skip



over it, but Klepper's friendly, matter-of-fact tone and interesting anecdotes avoid the preaching and stick to the practical.

100 Classic Hikes in Texas offers detailed hike descriptions, sectioned by region. The individual trail synopses offer basic information, such as maps, helpful statistics, available views and driving directions. But they are also rich with fascinating historical and ecological tidbits, giving each trail a personality and each summary the feel of a tantalizing movie preview.

Klepper's love for the Texas outdoors shines through in each hike description, leaving readers with something to ponder as they consider

any particular trail: "This beautifully eroded limestone slot canyon is home to a selection of interesting desert dwellers, but unless your hiking partner has a tendency to turn ornery on you, demons aren't on that list. While Devils Den may appear from a distance like a hellacious

chasm of biblical proportions, it is, in reality, a place of peaceful quietude and heavenly shade."

These insightful descriptions and beautiful photos are enough to persuade anyone to get out for not just a hike, but also a Texas-sized adventure. ★

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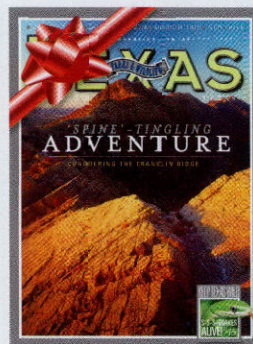
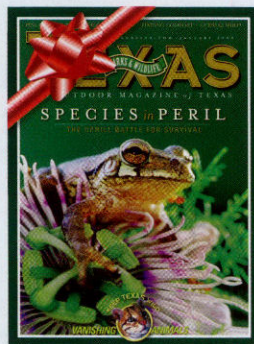
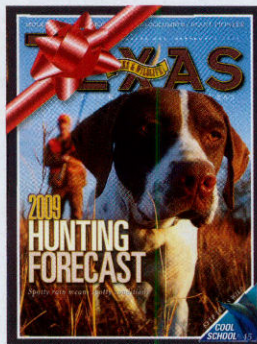
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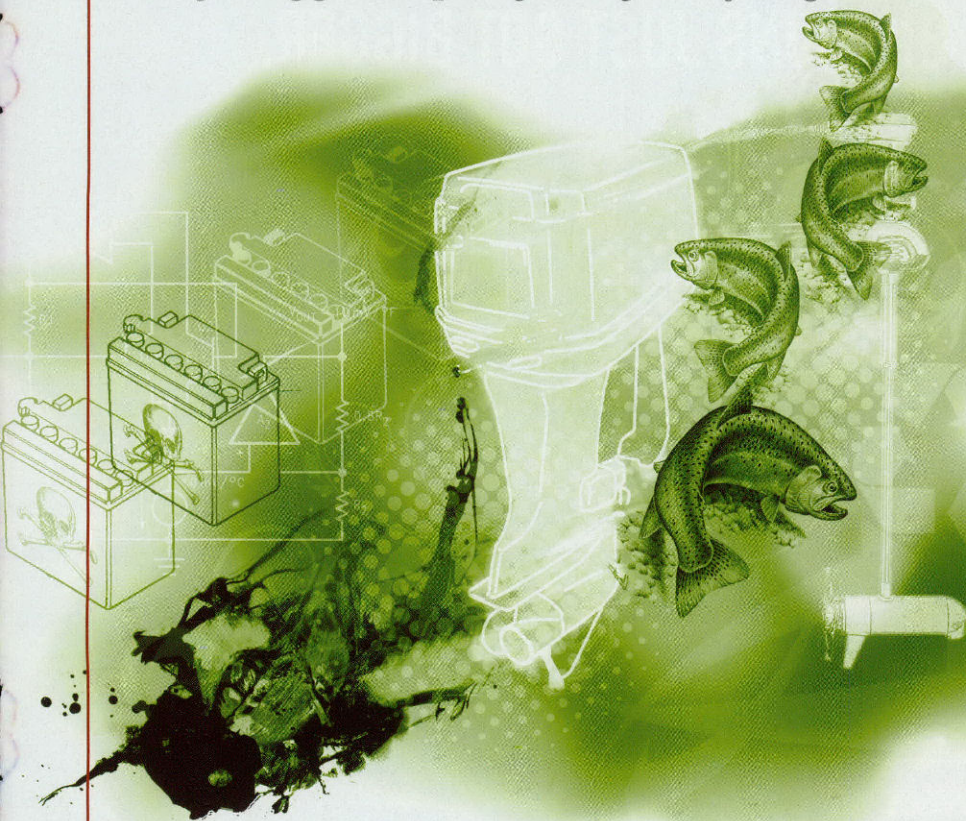
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Green Around the Gills

It's easy being green, especially when you're fishing.



meat. Daily, I watch anglers quickly and haphazardly run an electric fillet-knife along the backbone of a redfish or trout, and then immediately toss the carcass into the water. Quite a bit of meat goes to waste. Instead, try cutting out the meat in the throat or even saving the backbone to cook the meat off it — you can make a great fish salad and create stock to use for soup or gumbo.

Whether you recycle fishing line, use brass or tungsten sinkers instead of lead, or even wooden bobbers instead of plastic — it all helps create a cleaner environment, which in turn creates a healthier ecosystem. Down the road, our children and grandchildren will have the same — if not better — quality of fishing we enjoy today. I don't know about you, but I am all for being "green." It's easy! ★

We often hear the term "green" used to signify a healthier environment or the movement to clean up the world we live in. While anglers have been instrumental in working on better stewardship of the environment, we are still part of the problem. How do we become "greener" and continue to lead the way toward a cleaner environment?

One of the most obvious first steps is to reduce emissions. For many, that means repowering your boat with a more fuel-efficient motor, making the move from an oil-burning two-stroke motor to a cleaner-running four-stroke motor, or even both. Another option is to fish more and burn fuel less. Just running a smaller boat helps because you don't need a big V8 truck or an SUV to tow it to and from your favorite fishing hole.

Some anglers might consider running an electric trolling motor, but while they do not burn fuel and pollute the air and water, they are far from being "green." The disposal of used batteries is a con-

cern, as deep-cycle batteries use lead and form toxic waste. Options for reducing this type of waste range from spending extra money on a quality glass-mat battery that will last longer (reducing the number of batteries needing disposal) to utilizing a push pole instead of a trolling motor to propel a boat through shallows and along shorelines, where the fish lurk.

Purchasing gear manufactured in the United States can also reduce emissions and toxic waste. Companies here are more likely to adhere to higher standards when it comes to the disposal of waste generated through the manufacturing process, while some overseas manufacturers have fewer regulations governing them. Consider also the amount of fuel used to ship all of those products from there to here. Remember, the point is to make the whole world a cleaner place, not just our own backyards.

There are other things that anglers can do to promote a healthier environment. Instead of filling an ice chest with fish, keep fewer fish and make the most of the

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3 Days in the Field / By Melissa Gaskill

DESTINATION: TERLINGUA

TRAVEL TIME FROM:

AUSTIN – 8 HOURS / BROWNSVILLE – 10.75 HOURS / DALLAS – 10 HOURS

HOUSTON – 10.75 HOURS / SAN ANTONIO – 7 HOURS / LUBBOCK – 6.5 HOURS / EL PASO – 5 HOURS

Viva Terlingua!

Bring a flashlight and your hiking boots to this remote outdoor heaven.

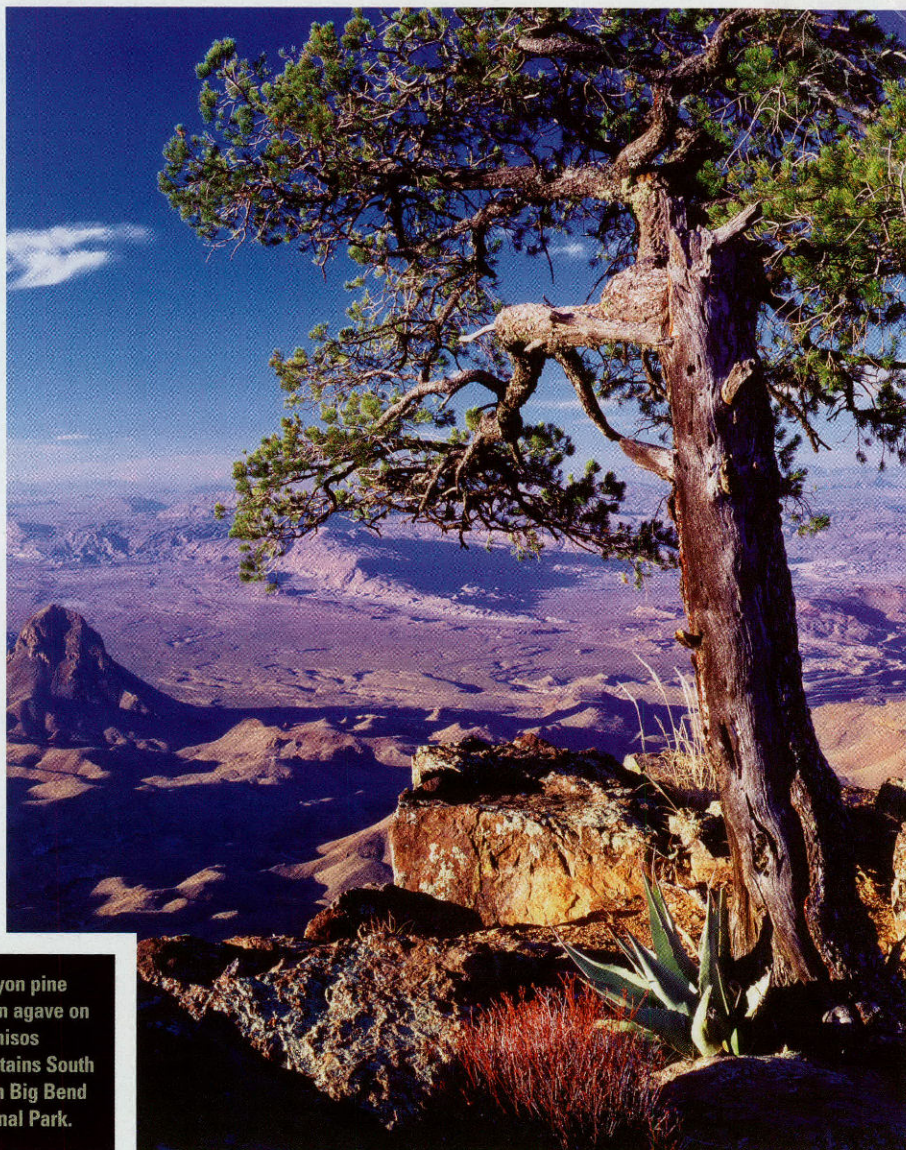
The town of Terlingua straddles several miles of FM 170, an eclectic string of mostly odd buildings amid cactus and brush on dun-covered hills. At first glance, it doesn't look like much, but those who look again find colorful history, inspiring views and nights dark enough that stars still put on a show. Best of all, Terlingua makes a great base from which to explore the wonders of Big Bend National Park, Big Bend Ranch State Park and the scenic River Road.

My family arrived on Friday night, stopping first at the no-frills Chili Pepper Café for authentic Chihuahuan beef tacos made from scratch. Down a dirt road through the Ghost Town, an envelope taped on the office door at La Posada Milagro Guest House instructed us to proceed up the rocky hillside, where our key dangled in the door. The four guest rooms, formed from the dry stacked rock ruins, enjoy wide open views that include Big Bend's Chisos Mountains and Mule Ears, and peaks in nearby Mexico.

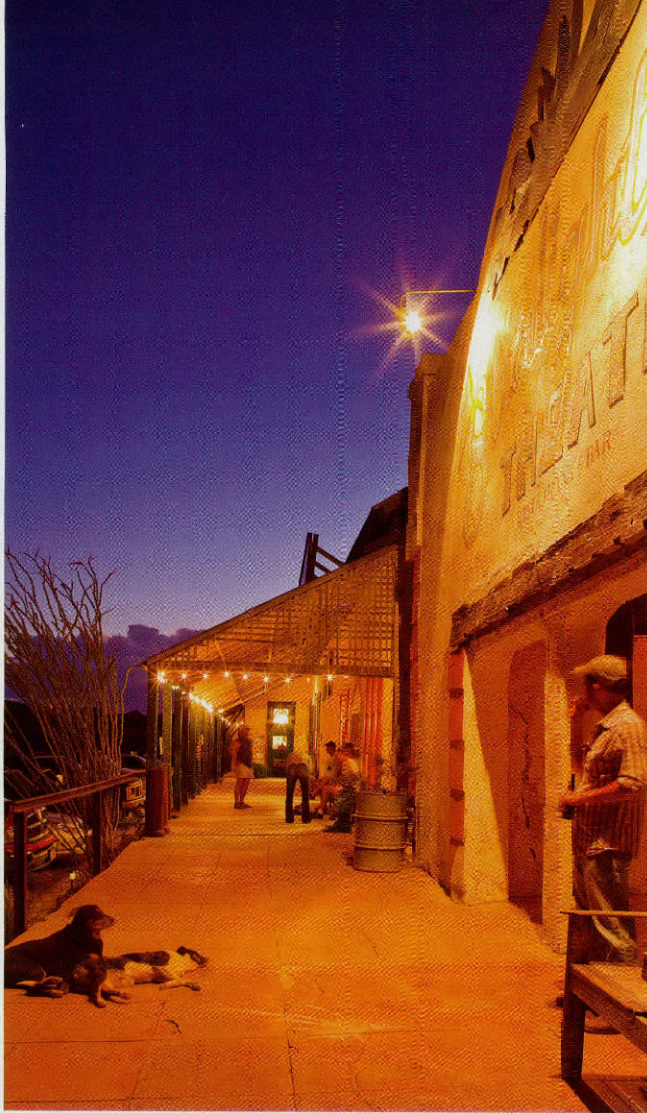
From the spacious gravel patio, we watched as the setting sun behind us painted the distant cliffs and peaks before us in a riot of colors, eventually fading to deep blue. Cue the clichés — stunning, jaw-dropping, breathtaking, magnificent. Darkness brought a chill to the desert air, but a ready-to-light fire pit kept us comfortable. More stars appeared as it grew darker, and I had the poignant experience of explaining to my 15-year-old city child that a hazy cloud spilled across the blackness was, in fact, the Milky Way galaxy.

The next morning, after coffee, fresh juice and hand-made tacos on the ocotillo-

covered patio of the guest house's coffee shop, "Espresso ... Poco Mas," we headed to Big Bend River Tours, one of several outfitters in Terlingua. Since we had only one day, a professional guide seemed the way to go. Jack Lowery has worked for BBRT since 1999, and even he hasn't seen all of Big Bend's 800,000 acres. But he's certainly seen a lot of it, and we



A pinyon pine and an agave on the Chisos Mountains South Rim in Big Bend National Park.



counted on him for a memorable experience. He combined an off-the-beaten-path hike to Ernst Tinaja with an iconic one, The Window, for our Big Bend Day.

Reaching the first required about five miles of bouncing on high-clearance, four-wheel-drive road. The actual hike covers roughly two miles round trip, ending at the eponymous *tinaja* (a Spanish word for water vessel), a rock-lined pool of water that seldom dries out. The hike is a scenic study in Big Bend's complex geology, covering millions of years in its short mile.

Following a picnic lunch, we drove into the Basin, a bowl in the center of the Chisos Mountains, igneous rock exposed by eons of erosion. The Basin's higher elevation and twice-as-abundant rainfall create a green island in a sea of desert, where temperatures can be 20 degrees cooler. Inside the ring of peaks ranging from 5,688 to 7,825 feet sit a visitor center, store, campground, picnic area and lodge. The Window, a notch formed by water erosion between Ward and Vernon Bailey peaks, drains all the rain that falls in the Basin. Starting near the visitor center, the trail follows the natural drainage for nearly three miles, through open chaparral slopes, terminating at the pour-off at 4,600 feet. The westward view from here makes the uphill return hike worth every step.

If you have another day (okay, we cheated and took one), hike the South Rim trail, where vistas of the Basin, Blue Creek Canyon and Boot Canyon and of the 2,500-foot escarpment to the Sierra Quemada, Santa Elena Canyon and Mexico's Sierra del Carmen will have you filling up the camera mem-



Life is laid back on the porch of the Starlight Theatre in Terlingua (left). Above, the Terlingua Church under starry desert skies. Rocks line a *tinaja*, a pool of water that seldom dries out.



ory card. The entire trail is rugged, taking hikers up and down for 14.5 miles, pushing the limits for one day, but numerous backcountry campsites make it easy to turn it into a two-day trip, and route options cut the distance to 13 miles, or nine, sans the escarpment overlook.

The trail ascends on steep switchbacks and steps through evergreen sumac, mountain mahogany, madrone, beebrush, junipers, pinyon pines and even quaking aspen. We spotted several Carmen Mountain white-tailed deer, found here in the Basin, as well as bright blue Mexican jays and wrens, rock squirrels and canyon lizards. On a rest stop at Boot Springs, we spied fresh scat likely left by a resident black bear. Mountain lions prowl the area as well, so keep a watchful eye. Pick up a Chisos Mountains Trail Map for \$1 in the visitor center, or tote a copy of *100 Classic Hikes in Texas* by E. Dan Klepper, which covers this and many other Big Bend area trails.

That evening, La Posada's outdoor kitchen-with-a-view tempted us, but we opted to dine at the Starlight Theatre restaurant in the former mining camp movie theater next door. Generous portions of chicken tacos and pork medallions revived us all. We didn't mind when our waitress requested "Amarillo by Morning" from the guitar player and took a short break to dance.

The next morning, we headed to the Barton Warnock Environmental Education Center, 12 miles west, which serves as an eastern gateway to Big Bend Ranch State Park. It would take weeks to explore this 300,000-acre park. But we got a taste at the Warnock's indoor exhibit on 570 million years of geology and natural history, and a self-guided tour of the outdoor botanic garden, home to hundreds of plants from the Chihuahuan Desert's five biological landscapes.

We had lunch on the spacious outdoor patio at Lajitas Resort's Candelilla Cafe, then continued on FM 170, aka the River Road. It rises and falls, winding along the Rio Grande

(continued on page 55)





By Karen Hoffman Blizzard

[Dream Ride]

Photography by Earl Nottingham

*A backcountry bike trek
through remote Fresno Canyon
will take you out of the
ordinary and into 'the zone.'*

Fueled by adrenaline,

coffee and a full breakfast, we quickly fell into pace on the smooth trail leading into Big Bend Ranch State Park from the East Contrabando trailhead at the southeastern corner of the park, near the Barton Warnock Visitor's Center and the town of Lajitas. Soundless except for the buzz of our wheels, we rode the first hour through lush stands of mesquite and creosote as the East Main Trail unfurled before us like a desert carpet, leading northward toward Fresno Canyon into a majestic world of mountains, arroyos and springs.

As I careened into the vast wilderness on my pink dual-suspension bike rented from the Bicycle Sport Shop in Austin, I was grateful to have as my guides Dan Sholly, an avid biker and the deputy director of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's state parks division, and David Riskind, the state parks division's natural resources director, who would be sharing his knowledge of the park and driving a support-and-gear (SAG) vehicle to meet us for lunch each day. Although physically fit, I was new to the sport of mountain biking. I knew that the desert could become dangerously hot in May and that water sources were unreliable, making SAG support more necessity than luxury. Dan advised me early on: "Start slow, and then taper off."

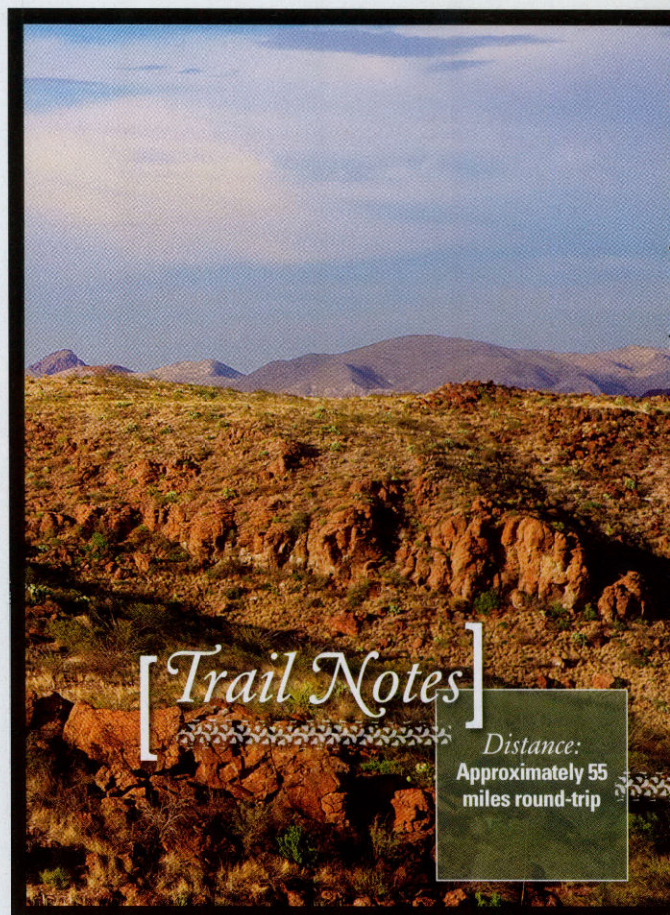
We had just launched a two-day bike adventure from Lajitas across the park and back through Fresno Canyon, which was opened to the public in 2008 thanks to the TPWD's purchase of the Fresno Ranch in-holdings with the help of The Nature Conservancy.

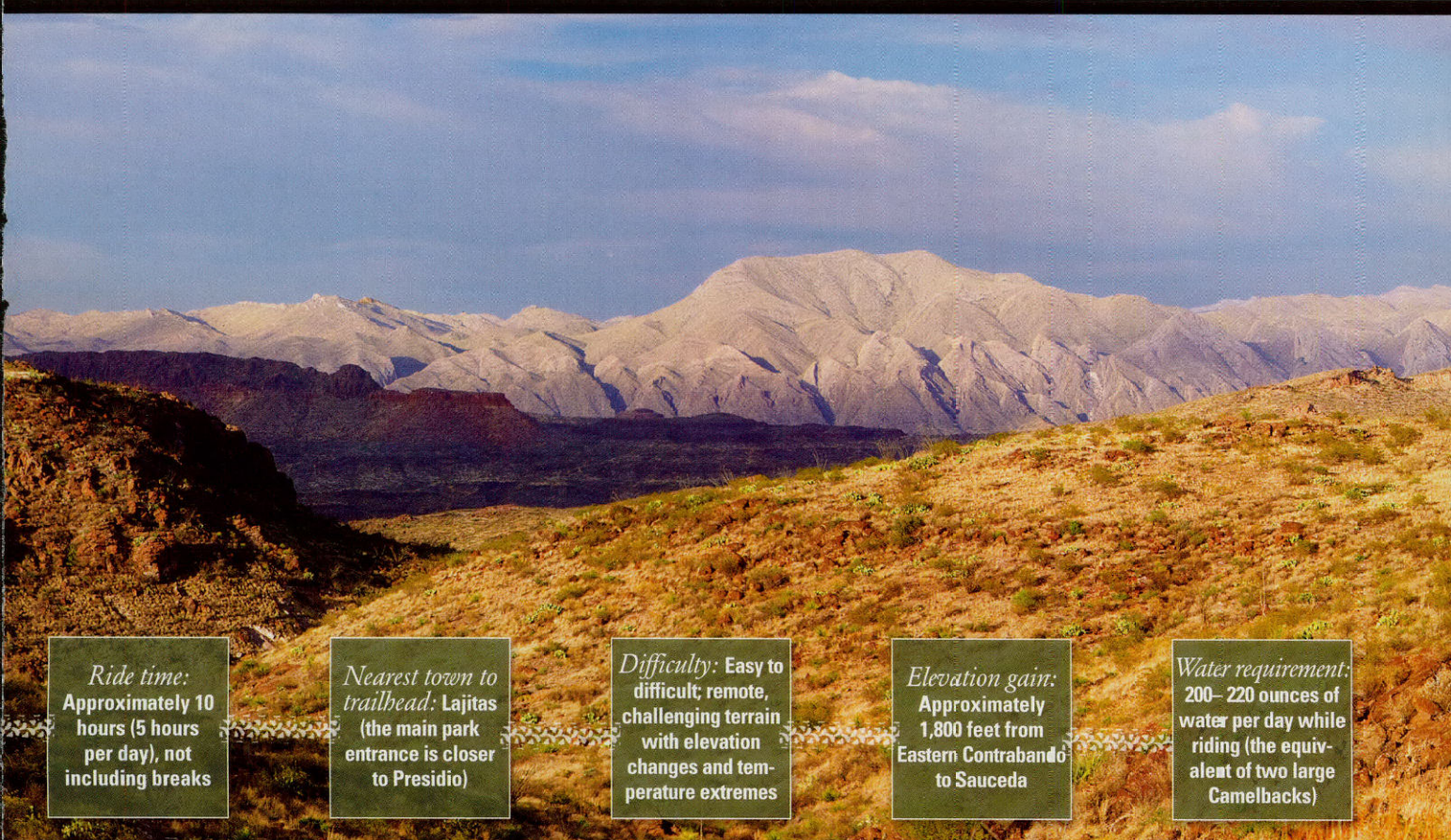
"Having access to Fresno Canyon is a significant gain for bikers and other outdoor enthusiasts who want to spend extended time in remote areas of the park," Dan explained. "It's possible to create longer trip itineraries using Fresno Canyon as a natural north-south corridor to connect with the Rancherias, Solitario, Contrabando and Oso Loop trails." The acquisition has also allowed the opening of new backcountry trails and campsites.

For mountain bikers, Big Bend Ranch State Park's 300,000 acres of incredible desert is a vast playground that can challenge even the most hardened biker. The old four-wheel-drive jeep roads, single-track spur trails, side canyon hikes, stunning scenery, cultural treasures and natural resources make for great biking adventures. Because the trail-marking signage in Fresno Canyon is not complete, visitors unfamiliar with the area are strongly encouraged to use guide services, such as Terlingua-based commercial outfitter Desert Sports, one of several certified park guides. At Desert Sports, the experienced bikers on staff create custom trips, including SAG support and meals, for any level of rider. Owner Mike Long gave an enticing description of the food they provide, adding, "We even do fresh guacamole right there at the campsite."

The park's reservation system makes it easy to plan multi-day trips because (unlike at many parks) you can reserve specific campsites in advance. For those wanting an occasional bed and shower, two lodging options are available by advance reservation at the Saucedo Ranger Station complex at park headquarters — the Big House, a sprawling adobe ranch house that sleeps eight, and Saucedo bunkhouse, which sleeps 30. Public restrooms and bike rentals are also available.

A majestic view of El Solitario (top) is the payoff for long hours on a tough trail. Mike Long (center left) and the crew at Desert Sports keep the riders well supplied. A longhorn (bottom right) shares a moment of mutual curiosity with a cyclist.





Ride time:
 Approximately 10
 hours (5 hours
 per day), not
 including breaks

*Nearest town to
 trailhead:* Lajitas
 (the main park
 entrance is closer
 to Presidio)

Difficulty: Easy to
 difficult; remote,
 challenging terrain
 with elevation
 changes and tem-
 perature extremes

Elevation gain:
 Approximately
 1,800 feet from
 Eastern Contrabando
 to Saucedo

Water requirement:
 200–220 ounces of
 water per day while
 riding (the equiv-
 alent of two large
 Camelbacks)





*For mountain bikers,
Big Bend Ranch State Park's
300,000 acres of incredible
desert is a vast playground that
can challenge even the most
hardened biker.*





Eight miles from the trailhead, we moved into the rugged terrain of lower Fresno Canyon. I was struck by its remote beauty and the cultural reminders of the Native Americans, Spanish explorers, ranchers and cinnabar miners who came before.

“The East Main Trail, which becomes a four-wheel-drive road in the upper reaches of Fresno Canyon, at one time connected the Lajitas/Terlingua mining district to the rail lines at Marfa,” David explained. Along the road through Fresno Canyon there are junctures with other historic roads that once carried supplies and passengers to and from Fresno Canyon. TPWD planners are gradually retracing these old roads and converting them to multi-use trails.

We stopped briefly to peer down the shaft of the now-defunct Whit-Roy cinnabar mine on the right. Across the trail we admired the imposing Wax Factory Laccolith, a natural cliff-like formation named for the former Fresno wax factory, where candelilla plants were processed to make wax for waterproofing military supplies during World War I. The laccolith resembled a rock-layer sandwich piled ever higher toward the sky, as if stacked over time by some orderly chef of nature.

At 10.6 miles, we marveled at Red Rock, a tall, striking, red boulder in the creek bed. Upstream we reveled in the tall, sheltering cottonwoods of Fresno Falls, a beautiful oasis near the convergence of Fresno Creek with Arroyo Primero. Here, the pebbly creek bed gives way to smooth, water-worn rock etched deeply by the creek. Archaeological rock shelter and

A primitive shelter and rock art left by Native Americans along Fresno Creek (top left). The park has many remote campsites, some with great vistas (opposite lower left). The descent into Fresno Canyon (top right). The adobe ruins of the Crawford-Smith House and strawberry pitaya cactus blossoms are sights along the trails (bottom).

bedrock mortar sites indicate this a gathering place for Native Americans thousands of years ago. I thought about how the treasured places that we enjoy today were enjoyed by others over time for similar reasons — proximity to water, shade and natural rock “shelves” for sitting or working.

As lunchtime approached, I craved electrolyte replenishment. We biked two more miles and stopped to wait for David at our designated lunch spot near the Crawford-Smith Ranch site, where in the 1920s the James L. Crawford family planted citrus orchards, raised goats and operated the Fresno Canyon wax factory. Motorized vehicle access through the ranch site is not permitted; SAG drivers can only reach the Crawford-Smith Ranch site from the north, through Saucedo.

To be honest, I had some doubts that David would find us, due to a slight wrinkle in logistics involving a “Y” in the road and a cryptic note left under a rock about a mile back. If it had been up to me, I would have been on the satellite phone immediately to make sure he knew where we were, but these guys have their own style of communicating in the backcountry that is somewhat akin to mind-reading. Just as I started to worry, we heard the distant rumble of David’s vehicle, and he materialized before us bearing burritos, cold water and much-welcomed Gatorade.

After lunch, the real challenge began. We biked the hills through upper Fresno Canyon, past a series of campsites with fall-off-your-bike views in every direction. Jutting upward to the northeast were the brooding flatirons of El Solitario, a 10-mile-wide eroded dome containing a volcanic crater, with a killer bike loop around its perimeter. Los Portales, a cavelike “eye” in the side of a grayish flatiron, watched us balefully as we traveled past the west side of the Solitario rim. We stopped briefly at a Native American rock shelter site, Manos Arriba (Hands Up), to marvel at the ancient pictographs of upward-turned handprints on the rock ceiling.



We settled in for the three-mile Fresno Hill “mountain stage.” As I propelled my bike forward, the slow burn became an endorphin rush and I felt ecstatic and all-powerful. Unfortunately, I was not actually any faster. Dan patiently joined me when I dismounted and walked the rest of the way up the hill, where at the top we were rewarded with an unforgettable vista. We had gained 1,800 feet, and the air was cooler here. We sped along the last few miles to Saucedá, where we settled in for the evening at the Big House and enjoyed its large kitchen, dining area and screened-in porch. It was the perfect place to rest before another full day of biking and to perform a little bike maintenance, including repairing a cactus-caused flat tire.

The next morning, after a hearty breakfast at the bunkhouse, we biked south out of Saucedá along Madrid Road through a mesquite- and creosote-filled Eden waking to the sun’s early rays. We fell into a moving meditation as we hummed along the trail, easing into the day. Six miles from Saucedá, we began a rocky descent down the backside of Madrid Hill. The world opened before us, and we were awed by one stunning vista after another. From the Vista del Chisos campsite, we could see straight into the Chisos Mountains.

We met David for lunch at the Pila de los Muchachos campsite. After lunch, we walked our bikes eastward for over half a mile through the sandy Arroyo Primero, and at 13.8 miles reached the Madrid adobe ruins, named for Andrés Madrid, a rancher who settled the area in the mid-19th century. Though the house was in ruins, I loved the picturesque location and its proximity to springs. Near the house, we circumvented a sensitive raptor nesting area, which may be closed off during spring nesting seasons in the future. (It’s always advisable to inquire about park closures before planning a visit.)

Navigating our way down more hills, we continued through Arroyo Primero, rejoining the trail to meet Fresno Falls and head south through Fresno Canyon. For the rest of the afternoon, we retraced our path through lower Fresno Canyon, past the mine, back onto the East Main Trail. Knowing the last eight miles would be smooth riding, I sped up. After a day and a half of biking, I was in “the zone,” flying toward the sky and merging with everything. The words of the Sufi poet Hafiz came to mind: “The sun and all light have forever fused themselves into my heart and upon my skin.”

I was overlooking a critical factor, though — unlike the previous morning when we raced along the trail, at this moment it was 2 p.m. and 110 degrees. I quickly learned never to be tempted by a fast stretch of trail in the desert when the temperature is over 100 degrees!

About five miles from the trailhead, I felt as if I were melting in a convection oven. There was no escape from the heat radiating upward from the limestone and downward from the sky. I wanted to rest for five minutes in the shade, but there was none to be seen, only stoic mesquite everywhere filtering and absorbing the sun, and magic purple hills wavering mirage-like in the distance. Dan’s early advice hovered like a thought bubble in the hot air: “Start slow, and then taper off.” I noticed him eyeing me with alarm as I worked to out-bike the heat.

Finally we reached the trailhead and crossed the road to relax in the air-conditioning at the Barton Warnock Center before returning to Lajitas. I felt exhausted, yet fully awake. Big Bend Ranch State Park has that effect on you: it’s unforgiving ... and unforgettable. ★



Time for rest and repairs at the Saucedá Headquarters (center left). Riders head out at dawn to beat the heat (lower left). The uplifted flatiron ridges of El Solitario dwarf the riders along Fresno Creek (opposite).

We biked the hills through upper Fresno Canyon, past a series of campsites with fall-off-your-bike views in every direction.





[If You Go]

Plan ahead: Because Big Bend Ranch State Park is extremely remote and rugged, advance planning is crucial. Obtain maps and study them before your trip. Get your bike and gear together, arrange for guide services and SAG support, and be sure you have containers large enough to carry sufficient water (plan on 200–220 ounces per day). Hard-sole shoes are recommended for walking in rocky arroyos and creekbeds. A GPS unit is helpful. **ALWAYS CARRY TWO SPARE TIRES!**

Access: Obtain a park permit from the Barton Warnock Visitor's Center in Lajitas (432-424-3327); Fort Leaton State Historic Site in Presidio (432-229-3613); or Saucedo Ranger Station inside the park (432-358-4444). Hours are 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. every day. Allow time for a mandatory orientation session (about 15 minutes). There are minimal day-use and camping fees.

Maps and trail guides: Visit the TPWD website (www.tpwd.state.tx.us) to obtain maps and trail guides in advance, as the park may have a limited supply. Other online map sources include Google Earth, USGS (www.usgs.gov) and TNRS maps (www.tnris.state.tx.us).

Park lodging: Campsites are available by advance reservation. Find campsite descriptions, photos and GPS coordinates at www.tpwd.state.tx.us. The Big House and bunkhouse at Saucedo are available by advance reservation (432-358-4444).

Lodging outside the park: Lajitas Resort and Spa (www.lajitas.com) offers 103 rooms, a restaurant, spa and pool. Chinati Hot Springs (www.chinatihotspings.com) offers sustainably designed cabins, a community kitchen, a "cool pool" and hot-spring pools to soothe a cyclist's aching muscles.

Commercial outfitters: Terlingua-based Desert Sports (888-989-6900) is the nearest outfitter and guide service. SAG and guide support are highly recommended for multi-day trips through the park. Bikes are available for rent at commercial outfitters and at the park.

AUTUMN

Photos by Jerry Cotten

ABLAZE

TAKE A VIRTUAL FALL COLOR TOUR THROUGH LOST MAPLES STATE NATURAL AREA AND MCKITTRICK CANYON.

AS DAYS GROW SHORTER and cooler temperatures offer respite from the brutal Texas summer heat, autumn's arrival heralds the season of walks in the woods, fireside evenings and Friday night football.

For many, the mention of autumn color evokes postcard images of quaint New England villages nestled in landscapes of blazing foliage. While it's true that fall color in Texas is not as widespread as in other parts of the United States, particularly the Northeast, the stands of color we do have are unique in their own right due to the diverse climates and geology in a state so large. From the hardwood forests of East Texas to the mountainous desert of the west, nature finds a variety of quiet places to display its full palette in an annual explosion of color that rivals other parts of the country.

If fall color can be considered artwork, then McKittrick Canyon at Guadalupe Mountains National Park and Lost Maples State Natural Area are Texas masterpieces.

Although separated by more than 300 miles, McKittrick Canyon and Lost Maples State Natural Area share similarities. The delicate beauty found in these relatively small sanctuaries stands in stark contrast to the very undelicate desert scrub and cactus country that surround them. Sheltered canyons combined with abundant water sources create the optimum micro-environments for a variety of color-producing trees, including the star of the show—the big-tooth maple.

Other supporting players such as the Texas madrone, alligator juniper and ponderosa pine in McKittrick and the red oak, lacy oak and sycamore in Lost Maples create a multi-hued tapestry from a cosmic color wheel of reds, oranges, yellows, browns and greens, complemented by a blue autumn sky.

The acoustics created by the enclosed canyons permit only the sounds of running water, rustling leaves and birdsong, softening even the visitors' steps along the path and filling these small cathedrals with a palpable sense of solitude and reverence.

—Earl Nottingham

















PHOTO © LAURENCE PARENT



REPAIRING MOTHER NATURE

*Leopold Conservation Award
Winner J. David Bamberger
turns 'worst ranch in Texas' into
conservation showcase.*

BY TOM HARVEY

J. DAVID BAMBERGER is visibly emotional as he steps to the podium and surveys the crowd. It is a mountaintop moment after 80 years of life, half of them spent sweating, worrying, persevering and ultimately exulting on his 5,500-acre ranch in Blanco County.

It is May 27, 2009, at the annual Lone Star Land Steward Awards in Austin. Bamberger and his staff are here to receive the Leopold Conservation Award for Texas, the state's top honor for private land stewardship, bestowed by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Sand County Foundation. The hotel banquet room is filled with other land stewards past and present, plus TPWD commissioners, staff and many interested others.

Bamberger rests an elbow on the podium and lifts his left hand to his chin, placing one index finger alongside his mouth. He looks out at the crowd, turning his head, scanning the room. The hand and finger are quivering. His eyes are wet. It is a grand culmination, what he calls "a last hurrah." He has received the principal honor in the awards program he helped create in 1996.

But the moment is bittersweet. His wife and partner, Margaret, who also poured her heart and soul into the ranch for many years, will never savor this moment. She died of cancer two months earlier.

Bamberger begins to speak. Award organizers had planned to show a video about his ranch and work, but this is somehow forgotten as he tells his story.

It is really the same story told across the world in many times and places, one told by and known to everyone in the room. It is the land conservation story, a story about a piece of dirt with trees and grass, water and wildlife. But at its core it is about people, about the lives and hopes and struggles and passions of those who care about these things.

By the time he finishes, there are few dry eyes in the house.

I AM rolling along the smooth, paved road through Selah-Bamberger Ranch Preserve in a pickup. Bamberger is driving, showing me the ranch, and while he drives he talks, doing what he does best — delivering the message. Selah, he explains, is a biblical term used in Psalms that invites the reader to "pause and reflect" on the message. Back in the pickup bed is his dog Corye, which stands for Canine Of Red coat and Yellow Eyes.

We round a curve toward The Center, the ranch meeting and lodging space that can sleep 48 and seat 100. On the roadside we roll up on The Bluebonnet, a long covered trailer with bench seats that takes visitors around the ranch. Today it's filled with Kerrville seventh graders, and they howl and wave as we stop.

Science teacher Peggy Thompson steps up to Bamberger's open window and introduces her son Andrew, who's working toward a college degree in conservation. "He's headed to West Texas to work on a drilling rig for his third summer to pay for school," Thompson says. "And he's not going to owe any money when he graduates. I'm so proud of him. Dean's list — five semesters in a row."

"Now, listen," Bamberger tells the young man. "You have a good work ethic and you're interested in what we're doing here, so you get back in touch with us. We're always looking for new help."

Thompson produces a copy of the book *Water from Stone: the Story of Selah-Bamberger Ranch* by Jeffrey Greene and pushes it through the truck window for Bamberger's autograph. "Sign it to Buck and Peggy," she says. As he signs it, she tells him: "I hope that I'll be able to bring kids here for many, many years. This is a wonderful experience. You have a fantastic group of people working for you. They honor you."

When we begin to drive away, the school bus's driver, Raymond Hardee, steps out into the road. "I been driving this bus out here for years," he says. "I seen ranches like the Y.O., but this one surpasses them all." Something about this place has spoken to the bus driver, and he, too, wants to thank Bamberger.

As we park, ranch Executive Director Colleen Gardner rushes up with a question. "Can I clean a toilet and meet you at The Center?" She whisks off and Bamberger frowns and mumbles something about how the director shouldn't be doing things like that, but I think secretly he's proud. Earlier he told me, "I hired her right out of the Peace Corps and she is very passionate about everything we do here."

But now, something about her doing this menial task prompts him to spout one of his many aphorisms. "Never initiate something you can't sustain," he says. I think maybe he's thinking about his staff continuing the work.

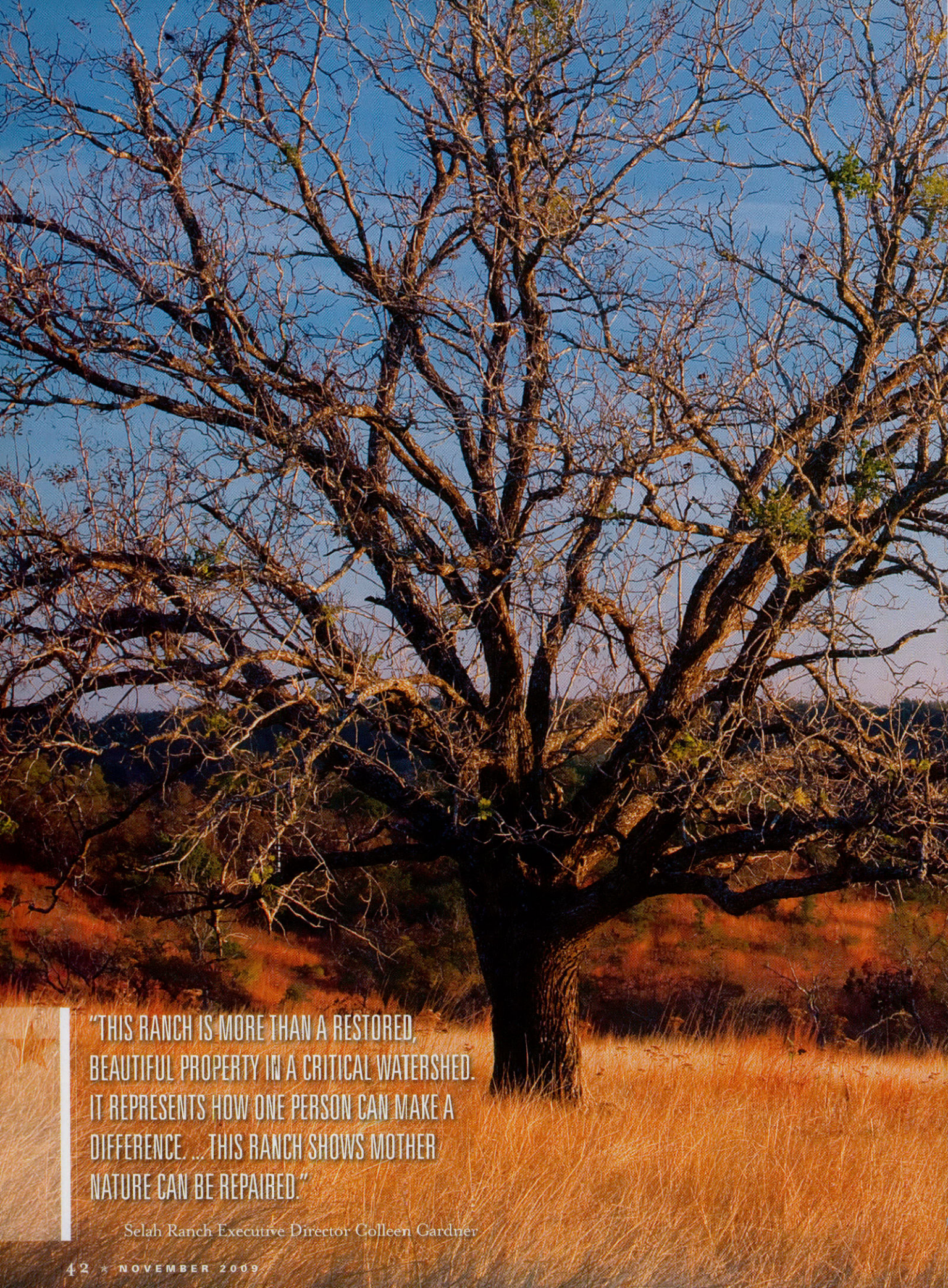
BAMBERGER came to Texas in the 1950s in modest circumstances, selling Kirby vacuum cleaners door-to-door with Bill Church, whose father owned four chicken restaurants in San Antonio. Bamberger read a book on franchising, and suggested the idea to Bill. When Church's Fried Chicken went public on the New York Stock Exchange in 1969, they became millionaires.

Soon after, Bamberger went looking to buy "the worst ranch in the Hill Country" because he wanted to show how overgrazed and damaged land could be restored and made healthy again by removing invasive cedar trees, replanting native grasses, using light/rotational cattle grazing, prescribed fire and



THE 5,500-ACRE RANCH IS KNOWN AS A PLACE WHERE ROCKY AND ERODED PASTURES BECAME LUSH AND GREEN, AND DRY CREEKS AND SPRINGS BEGAN TO FLOW AGAIN.





"THIS RANCH IS MORE THAN A RESTORED,
BEAUTIFUL PROPERTY IN A CRITICAL WATERSHED.
IT REPRESENTS HOW ONE PERSON CAN MAKE A
DIFFERENCE. ... THIS RANCH SHOWS MOTHER
NATURE CAN BE REPAIRED."

Selah Ranch Executive Director Colleen Gardner



Opposite: The rustic beauty of Selah Ranch. Top: Bamberger's water recovery methods have allowed springs to flow again, creating several small lakes on the ranch. Left: Cattle are part of Bamberger's land management. Right: Fock-filled cages called gabions are used for signage around the ranch.

OPPOSITE & BOTTOM RIGHT © LAURENCE PARENT; TOP BY EARL NOTTINGHAM/TPWD; LOWER RIGHT BY CHASE A. FOUNTAIN/TPWD

other methods of responsible land management. Four decades later, his innovation, passion and success have made him a legend in land conservation circles. The 5,500-acre ranch is known as a place where rocky, eroded pastures became lush and green and dry creeks and springs began to flow again.

"This ranch is more than a restored, beautiful property in a critical watershed," Gardner tells me. "It represents how one person can make a difference. It's what society in general doesn't hear often enough — good news stories about the environment. This ranch shows Mother Nature can be repaired."

Some other ranch achievements include:

- **Construction of a chiroptorium, or artificial bat cave, now home to some 200,000 Mexican free-tailed bats each summer.** This is a site for university research about how bats help pollinate crops and control insect pests.

- **Efforts to save an endangered flowering tree called the Texas snowbell, including a greenhouse dedicated to raising the plant.** In five years, the ranch planted 682 plants on dozens of other private ranches totaling more than 120,000 acres.

- **Cooperative effort with the American Zoological and Aquarium Association to aid an endangered antelope, the African scimitar horned oryx.** After 25 years of work, the ranch now helps to restock this animal in Senegal and Gambia.

The Selah-Bamberger Ranch Preserve has used its demonstrated successes as the basis for environmental education and outreach to schools and rural landowners. Hundreds of landowners and other visitors attend workshops on restoring native grasses, trees and water resources. Approximately 3,500 visitors come to the ranch each year, half of whom are schoolchildren from Austin,

San Antonio and the surrounding region.

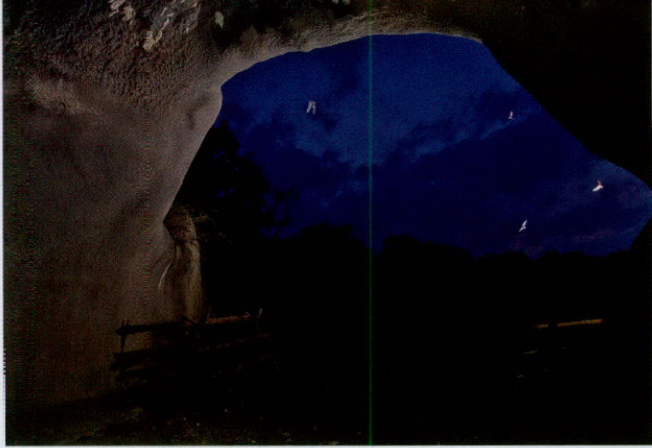
For example, donations and grant funds have been used to transport students from Metz and Pickle elementary schools in Austin to the ranch, where students are engaged in hands-on science learning. "After two years of going to Bamberger Ranch, student science scores improved by 30 percentage points from around 52 to 81," says Joel de la Garza, principal of Pickle Elementary and former principal of Metz Elementary.

"I'm not saying it was only the ranch tours, but I do believe the hands-on experiences at the ranch were an important reason for the improvement in scores," de la Garza says. "Just being able to be in the outdoors for students who normally live in the city and don't have those experiences, seeing land formations and biological systems — it's just awesome. It's an eye-opener for those kids and very, very positive. They'll remember those things for life."

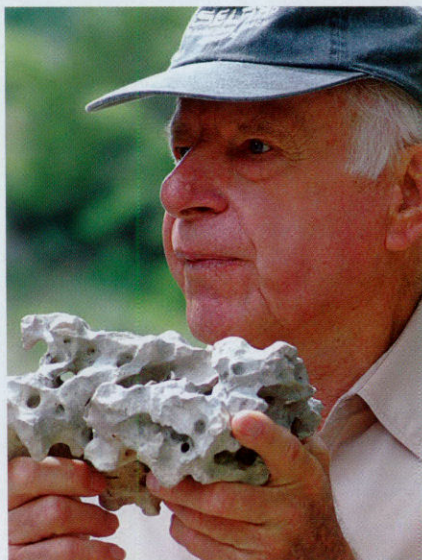
SITTING in his office, Bamberger and I look out a big picture window onto a splendid scene of green grass and trees. A splash of blue water in the distance marks a pond, and the round tops of hills curve along the horizon. These hills are the focus of Bamberger's latest brainstorm, a five-year project to catch and hold rainwater in "perched aquifers." He shows me photos of low, white limestone walls curving in terraced rows around the tops and sides of hills on the ranch.

I ask Bamberger to pause and reflect on 40 years of achievement. What's the biggest thing, the most important thing, I ask.

"Our most important achievement is the model we have established for many, many other landowners to follow,"



Top: Bamberger's chiroptorium (artificial bat cave) is home to 200,000 Mexican free-tailed bats each summer. Right: Bamberger holds a sample of the land's porous limestone. Far right: Bamberger shows captured waterflow from the ranch's seeps and springs.



★
**"NOTHING GREAT
 WAS EVER
 ACCOMPLISHED
 WITHOUT
 ENTHUSIASM."**

J. David Bamberger

lot. I don't recommend that to people anymore. It doesn't take a lot of money to restore the land, to do conservation. Anyone can do this. It just takes work, commitment and determination."

Later, on a ranch tour for news media, Bamberger explains that people can walk along rural roadsides in fall, find native grasses still growing where the ground hasn't been plowed and run their hands up the stems, harvesting all the seeds they need.

"We started with 48 bird species year-round here and have dramatically increased bird diversity as plant diversity and land health improved," Bamberger says. "Now we are up to 225 bird species."

He leads the tour group past a pond fed by the new perched aquifer project. About halfway up the hill, he turns a faucet

Bamberger says. "I show people that grass on the ground is the most important, least expensive and quickest-responding conservation measure that one can do."

"This was a piece of land that nobody wanted. It was almost un-saleable. We've cleared over 3,000 acres of wall-to-wall cedar. We planted over \$25,000 of native grass seed, which is a

connected to the hilltop aquifer and clear water gushes out. "Over these 40 years, as the habitat was improved, we got 11 springs and two creeks that started to flow again. We have 22 ponds that weren't here when I came. Two of them we call lakes because of their significant size. When we first started, it took 41 acres to support one animal unit. Now it takes 18."

As we ascend the hill, Bamberger tells tour participants they don't need a health club to stay fit, just hard work. The example he sets seems proof enough, as he charges nimbly up the rocky trail.

"Water is the most important issue in Texas today," he says in a TV interview that day. "Our goal here is to maximize rainfall by holding it on the ranch long enough for it to percolate down into the aquifer without running off. How the rancher out here in the country manages his land determines how well the Edwards Aquifer holds up."

Later in the interview, he shares another guiding principle: "I have a lifelong philosophy that nothing great was ever accomplished without enthusiasm." Then, he proceeds to demonstrate enthusiasm. Standing on the breezy hilltop, Bamberger waves his arms up and down and shouts like a Pentecostal revival preacher. "Anybody can do this! Preach the gospel! Oh my God, what we can do! Oh, hallelujah. Brother! Conservation for everybody!"

More information about the Lone Star Land Steward Awards, including how to nominate property owners for awards, is online at www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landsteward. Nominations are accepted June 1–Nov. 30. ★

TOP & BOTTOM LEFT: BY CHASE A. FOUNTAIN/TPWD; RIGHT: BY EARL NOTTINGHAM/TPWD

Keep Texas Wild

BIRD LIPS!?

Animals use claws and beaks and teeth and tongues to eat their favorite foods.



Barn owl

» HAPPY MEAL

IF ANIMALS ALL ATE THE SAME THINGS, there wouldn't be enough food to go around. Animals dine in different ways because they have adaptations. Some eat only other animals, some eat only plants, and others eat both. This way, animals all have a part to play in nature. The barn owl uses a sharp beak to eat a mouse. The sea star eats other animals, like clams, in a special way – by pushing its stomach out through its mouth. Grass-eating animals need large, flat teeth to chew.

PHOTO © ROLF NUSSBAUMER

Carnivores
eat meat



PHOTO © BILL DRAKER/ROLFNPCOM
PHOTO © ROLF NUSSBAUMER



PHOTO © DERRICK HAMRICK/ROLFNPCOM

WHAT BIG TEETH YOU HAVE!

CARNIVORES, like mountain lions and coyotes, eat meat. They have sharp teeth at the front of their mouths to help them catch and eat their prey. These teeth look like fangs and are called canines. Snakes, like the garter snake (above), swallow their food whole. Gulp! Alligators like to give their food a big crunch or two with powerful jaws before they swallow.



PHOTO © DERRICK HAMRICK/ROLFNPCOM



PHOTO BY TRWD



PHOTO © DAVID STONEMISUALS UNLIMITED

Omnivores
eat everything

IT ALL LOOKS GOOD!

OMNIVORES HAVE ALL three types of teeth: canines, incisors and molars. Omnivores, like raccoons and blue jays and even you, eat just about anything. (The prefix "omni" means "all.") Raccoons also have special front paws with five fingers, just like your hands. Many omnivores use hands and paws to help them eat.



PHOTO © ROLF NUSSBAUMER



PHOTO © ROLF NUSSBAUMER

Beaks & Bills

help birds eat

SWEET NUTCRACKER

YOU CAN TELL by looking at the bill of a male cardinal that he munches on seeds. He uses his bill (the proper name for a beak) like a nutcracker to break seeds open and eat what's inside.

YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT

ROSEATE SPOONBILLS use their odd bills to strain small food items out of shallow water. Their pink color actually comes from some of the foods they eat.



PHOTO © LARRY DITTO

WHOOOO'S HUNGRY?

Look at the great horned owl's bill. It has a special hook at the end. That's because owls are meat-eaters and use their sharp, hooked bills to tear open their prey and pull off bite-sized pieces.



PHOTO © KATHY ADAMS CLARK/KAC PRODUCTIONS



PHOTO © ROLF NUSSBAUMER



BUILT-IN STRAW

RUBY-THROATED hummingbirds can reach deep into a flower and sip out the tasty nectar, just like drinking soda from a straw. They sometimes also dine on insects, but the shape of their bills tells us that nectar is their number-one meal.

PHOTO © KATHY ADAMS CLARK/KAC PRODUCTIONS



PHOTO © ROLF NUSSBAUMER



PHOTO © KEN LUCAS/VISUALS UNLIMITED

Herbivores

eat plants

NO MEAT FOR ME!

ANIMALS THAT EAT ONLY plants, like squirrels and rabbits, need their teeth for cutting and grinding. Herbivores have sharp incisors up front, and molars for chewing their food. Besides grass, they eat fruits, bark, roots and leaves. Some herbivores, like the white-tailed deer, also have a second stomach to help them digest plants.



PHOTO © ROLF NUSSBAUMER



PHOTO © ROLF NUSSBAUMER



Spike's Activity Page



>> WILD SCIENCE

Read the clues and decide if the animal is a carnivore, herbivore or omnivore.



Beaver

A BEAVER uses its two flat front teeth to eat the bark off of trees and branches.



American kestrel

THIS BIRD is a good hunter with a hooked bill.



American alligator

ALL 80 of the alligator's teeth look like fangs.

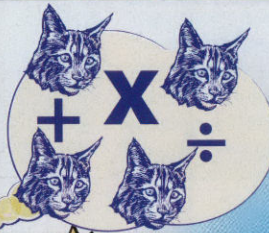


Striped skunk

A SKUNK is not a picky eater and will eat insects, animals, berries and fruit.

>> WILD MATH

BOBCATS ARE PREDATORS that eat mice, rabbits, birds and other small animals. These carnivores have a total of 28 teeth. How many teeth do you have? Is that more or less than a bobcat?



10 mph

20 mph

30 mph

BOBCATS HAVE POWERFUL BACK LEGS to help them chase their prey. They can run up to 30 miles per hour (mph). Most humans can run about 10 mph. How many times faster can a bobcat run than a human?



15" inches

?

BOBCATS ARE ABOUT TWICE the size of pet cats. If your cat is 15 inches long (without its tail), about how long will a bobcat be?

>> KEEPING IT WILD



WHAT DO THE BIRDS in your neighborhood eat? Take a closer look at their bills (you might call them beaks) and draw what you see. Try to guess what they eat and how their bills help them.

NEXT MONTH: Regions of Texas

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PHOTOS BY STAN



Thank You ExxonMobil.

An important goal of this magazine and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department is to help foster a love of the outdoors in our state's schoolchildren. ExxonMobil, recognizing the vital role that these children will play in the future of Texas' natural resources, became our partner in this effort. Due to ExxonMobil's generosity, the vision of "Keep Texas Wild" became a reality, not only in these pages but in free copies

supplied to more than 9,000 schools across the state during the pilot year. Tens of thousands of Texas students have now connected with nature through the feature's engaging photography and illustrations, fun-filled nature lessons and cross-curriculum activities. Our heartfelt thanks go out to ExxonMobil in appreciation of their support for this essential project.

Focus on Reality

W.D. Smithers' photographs chronicle the state's Western frontier.

BY E. DAN KLEPPER



Childhood can prove to be a difficult time, wrought with experiences that influence an individual's path to adulthood. But a life-and-death moment for Texas photographer W.D. Smithers bordered on the supernatural. "A curandera brought me into the world," Smithers wrote in his autobiography, *Chronicles of the Big Bend*, "and a curandera saved me, with potions, prayers, and physical nourishment, from typhoid."

Born in San Luis Potosi, Mexico, in 1895, Smithers spent the first 10 years of his life immersed in Mexican culture while his father worked as bookkeeper for the American Smelting and Refining Company. "Our family curandera, Maria ... began each morning of my illness with the gathering of dried and fresh medicinals at the markets. ... I was administered donkey's milk and medicines made from plants that Maria purchased from the vendors, who also sold such things as dried lizards, herbs, small fish, insects, snakes, and the ground bones, horns, and hooves of livestock."

The curandera's aid worked, and Smithers slowly recovered. But his trauma didn't end. His mother, eight-year-old sister Anna and two brothers would all die before Smithers' 10th birthday.

It was an inauspicious beginning for a boy who would become one of the most important chroniclers of the Texas frontier. In 1905, Smithers' father moved the remaining family to San Antonio, where Smithers, at a remarkably young age, began his lifelong career in photography. Paid photography apprenticeships weren't readily available in the early 1900s, so Smithers worked for free at two photography studios. Every afternoon for five years, Smithers would alternate between Archer's Art Shop and Rayburn's Studio after working 12-hour shifts delivering blocks of ice from a horse-drawn wagon. This dedication provided Smithers with a hands-on education in photography.

Smithers concentrated on photojournalism until another of life's events changed everything for him. The death of a familiar face,

114-year-old Juan Vargas, caused Smithers to deepen his focus.

"Thinking of all the things this old man had seen that could never be recaptured, I began to feel that my photography should direct itself to historical and transient subjects — vanishing lifestyles, primitive cultures, old faces, and odd, unconventional professions. Before my camera I wanted huts, vendors, natural majesties, clothing, tools, children, old people, the ways of the border. I was to find all of these things and more in the Big Bend."

Smithers didn't have to wait long. The ice delivery job taught him to handle teams and wagons, landing him a position as a mule teamster delivering supplies to troops stationed around San Antonio. Shortly thereafter, Smithers hired on as a teamster for a pack train — a line of mule-driven wagons — delivering supplies to the cavalry stationed along the border with Mexico. Smithers' first job was a delivery to Eagle Pass, then on to Del Rio, where he and his crew picked up 98 sacks of oats for delivery to the troops stationed in Marfa, a location 275 miles farther west and in the Big Bend.

It took the pack train nine days to arrive at Camp Marfa, where a collection of national guardsmen from Texas, New Mexico and Arizona were stationed. The southern border was considered under assault, and the National Guard units had been sent to the Big Bend to defend it. The year was 1916 — Mexican bandits had raided Glenn Springs in what is now Big Bend National Park, and General Pershing was in pursuit of Pancho Villa after his raid on Columbus, New Mexico. Twelve military outposts had been established throughout the Big Bend, and Smithers began delivering supplies to them, traveling by mule and wagon over the toughest terrain in Texas.

With his camera and journal at his side, Smithers documented the countryside and everything in it, eventually creating an extensive archive of early Big Bend history. The work was exhausting, but Smithers loved it. His images of cavalry life and pack trains against a backdrop of mountains, ocotillos and desert canyons are emblematic of the early 20th century in far West Texas.

Smithers enlisted in the U.S. Cavalry in 1917 and served two years, then returned to driving mule teams. By 1920 he was ready to hang up the reins and devote himself full-time to photography. He opened his own photography studio in San Antonio, a successful venture that allowed him time to travel and explore the Big Bend country he had come to love.

Smithers made frequent trips to the Big Bend and began filing newspaper stories for the *San Antonio Light*, managing to bridge the 350-mile distance via carrier pigeon in order to submit his timely articles. His longest story, written on an 8.5- by 11-inch sheet of paper, took 10 hours and 15 minutes to arrive by wing at the *Light's* San Antonio headquarters from Lajitas. His features, covering an assortment of Big Bend subjects, often appeared with pictures of the pigeons responsible for delivering them.

Smithers designed and built much of his own photography

equipment in order for it to survive the Big Bend's rough and primitive conditions. The success of his San Antonio studio also afforded his purchase of large-format cameras and lenses that helped improve his results.

But by 1929, the lure of the West proved too strong for Smithers, so he closed up shop and moved to the Big Bend for good. The move required him to become just as inventive with his livelihood as he had been with his handmade camera gear. Smithers found work as an aerial photographer for the U.S. Army, took photographs for the U.S. Border Patrol, photographed traveling circuses, acted as a guide for researchers and contracted with the International Boundary and Water Commission to photograph the U.S./Mexican border from Brownsville to San Diego.

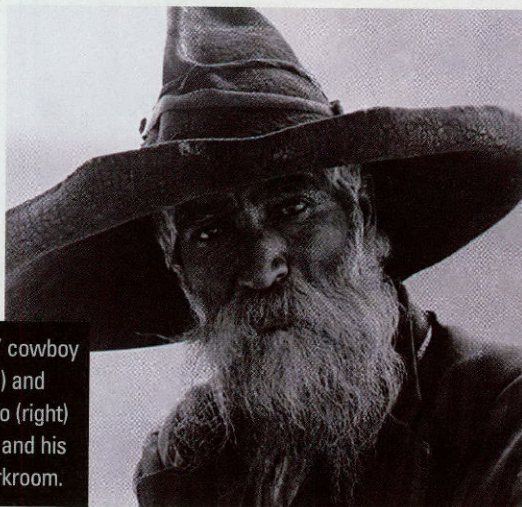
Eventually he settled down in the West Texas town of Alpine and opened up shop again. There he produced and sold thousands of postcards and kept up a steady business in lantern slides — glass plates of hand-colored images depicting scenes of West Texas and Mexico. Curiously, Smithers may be best known for the lamps and lampshades made from his photographs. The lampshades featured photos of ranching, landscapes, plants and animals printed on a parchment-like material, then hand-colored and laced onto wire frames.

After more than 30 years in Alpine, Smithers moved west to El Paso, where he continued to work, publishing his autobiography in 1976. He died in Albuquerque in 1981.

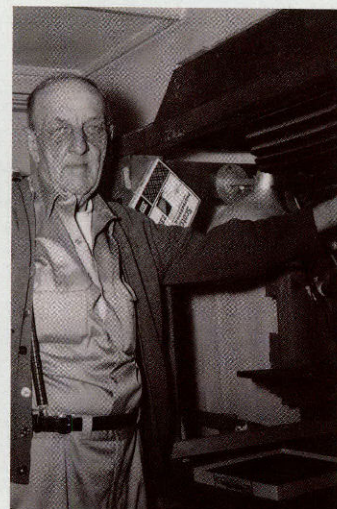
Smithers shot more than 9,000 images in his lifetime and, together with his own extensive notes, created one of the most compelling archives of West Texas and the state's borderlands with Mexico. Stored and catalogued at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center in Austin, Smithers' entire life's work is accessible for study. Pragmatism, rather than creativity, imbues Smithers' straightforward style, and this is perhaps what makes the archive more vital than one inspired by artistry.

Smithers showed us what he saw in those fleeting moments of history: an unbiased glimpse into a frontier responsible for creating the rich natural and cultural diversity Texans celebrate today. ★

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Smithers' cowboy (opposite) and curandero (right) portraits, and his home darkroom.



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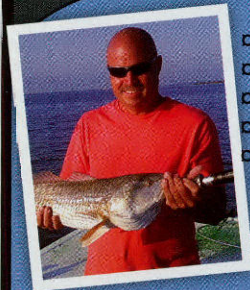
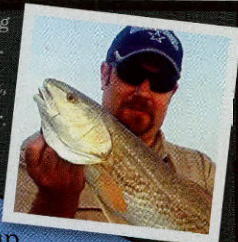
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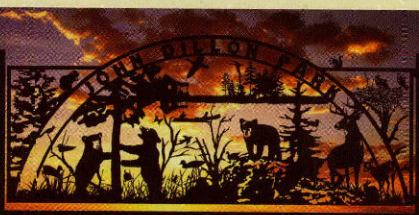
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19. Signature and Title of Editor, Publisher, Business Manager, or Owner: **Randy Brudnicki** Date: **9/30/09**

(continued from page 21)

from Lajitas to Presidio. A picnic area featuring large fake teepees provided a stop to gaze into Mexico and ponder the work of floods of historic proportions in September 2008. The rushing water dramatically altered the river landscape, removing dense invasive brush and sculpting new gravel bars and channels in the river.

Roughly 20 miles from Lajitas, we hiked Closed Canyon, a tall, narrow slot canyon. It extends about 1.5 miles to the Rio Grande, but depending on rainfall and other conditions, water-filled tinajas can render the route impassable. While we managed to scramble around a few of them, steep walls and an impressive beehive finally stopped us, probably less than a half-mile from the end. I recommend this unusual hike, even if only for a short distance.

Fort Leaton State Historic Site anchors the western end of River Road. First built in the late 1800s as a trading post, the presidio now features both restored rooms and others revealing original adobe bricks and stucco. An indoor exhibit covers the area's natural and archaeological history, as well as that of residents in the 15th century. Park staffers put together a notebook of impressive photographs from the 2008 floods.

From Presidio, we headed north on Highway 67 to Cibolo Creek Ranch. Luxurious guest rooms featuring fireplaces, tile floors and rustic furnishings occupy an adobe fort built by Milton Faver in the 1800s and restored by current owner John Poindexter. Some rooms look out on a spring-fed stream through a lush courtyard, others on a serene lake. Accommodations include three meals a day, served family style.

Our final day's agenda included a tour in a modified

Humvee, with open seats offering a 360-degree view. Our guide, Dugan Taylor, headed up a ridge bristling with cane cholla and brushy grass. Cibolo Creek Ranch covers 30,000 acres of the Chinati and Cienega mountains, where visitors in the 1800s described an "ocean of grass" as high as a horse's belly. Overgrazed first by cattle, then sheep and goats, that ocean became a wasteland of invasive creosote, cedar and mesquite. The ranch is restoring the grassland with selective removal of invasives and ongoing maintenance, and has reintroduced bison and elk.

We viewed the falls, then bounced through a narrow passage between two hills to emerge at 5,200 feet with a sweeping view of the ranch and all the way to Mexico. The route descended a steep slope to the Cibolo creekbed, lined by about a dozen rock squatter's ruins. Taylor pointed out rock paintings from 800 to 2,500 years old, and along the way we spied jackrabbits, mule deer and a variety of birds.

We headed north, reluctantly, toward home. In three days, we may have hit the highlights of Terlingua, but just barely. On the long drive back to Austin, we plotted our next visit. ★

DETAILS

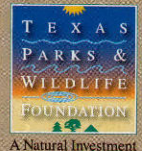
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Photographer Tim Fitzharris says he likes to combine the smooth texture of the agave with the round texture of the mountains. "The challenge is to find a nice agave in the right position to capture the mountain's best side," he explains. "So it requires a bit of legwork and proper timing to capture the two elements together when the sun is nearing the horizon. You plan out most of your day with these few seconds of actual photography in mind."

IMAGE SPECS:

Pentax 645, Fujichrome Velvia 50, f/22 @ 1/2 second, 35mm Pentax 645 lens, polarizing filter.

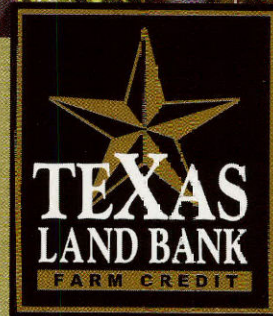


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