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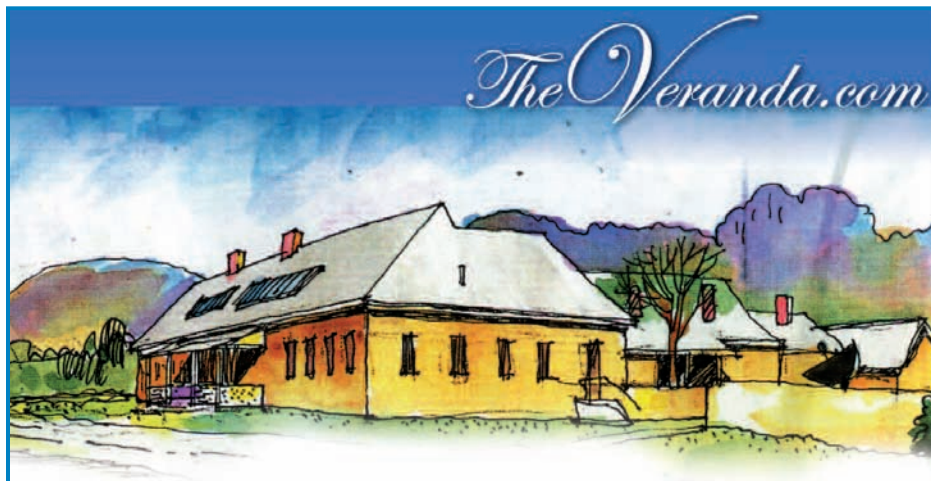
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THE CHARACTER (AND THE CHARACTERS) OF THE TERLINGUA PORCH

*“Some people call sitting on the porch ‘goofing off.’
I like to think of it as research.”*

– Blair Pittman, from his book *More Tales from the Terlingua Porch*

By Phyllis Dunham

Porches are important, or at least they used to be. After a hundred years, the Terlingua Porch still is. This seductive place is a Cannery Row, a salon, an oasis, a human tide pool, a mirador, a legend and a prayer of appreciation for the days when humans genuinely understood their need for the company of others like or unlike themselves. People, both locals and tourists, still gather here daily to linger and learn. They just can't seem to stay away.

Among the porch's seductive qualities are its stunning setting, readily available cold beer from inside the Terlingua Trading Company, the almost daily impromptu concerts by the likes of Uh Clem and Pablo Menudo and a chance to catch up on the local news and gossip and chat with some of the more interesting characters you'll ever meet.

Sit for a while on the Porch, and your companions may include a famous photographer, a janitor, a retired racecar driver, a construction worker, a cook, a former heroin addict and a Ph.D. You won't be able to guess from appearances alone just which is which. You may encounter these varied backgrounds in as few as three people. But no matter what your own background is, your company and contributions to the verbal communal stew are appreciated. These folks may have come here to drop out, but they sure don't mind you dropping in.

Of course, not everyone succumbs to the charms of the porch. Now and then you see a couple of accidental tourists who just don't get it striding the length of the porch in a purposeful manner looking for no more than a bathroom and a way out. These folks aren't smiling, and they probably aren't staying. When Big

Dave sees this type on the porch, he hollers out in a warm, friendly voice, “Hey! Get your smile on!” Some of them do, suddenly remembering where they are and that life is good. Dave in a delighted whispered aside says, “Now they'll be here a while.”

Only the most curmudgeonly could fail to be awed by the backwards sunsets on the changing façade of the Chisos Mountains. The locals, most of whom don't own televisions, call this daily transformation “the Terlingua Channel” as they watch the folds and juts of the mountains morph from pale coral and lavender to incandescent watermelon pink and violet to glowing orange and navy. Enthralling. Watching the sunset from the Terlingua Porch, oddly enough, means looking to the east – to the reflection on the mountainsides and not to the western horizon. Some bother to walk around the old adobe building that is the excuse for the existence of the porch to look west at sunset. Most don't.

Most stay put for conversation or stray in and out of the store or check out the bulletin board on the north end of the porch where you can find garage sale notices mixed with posters for such events as the Cookie Chill-Off, the upcoming Chihuahua races, the Stupid Race (use your imagination) or any number of other home-brewed fundraisers, the ideas for which were likely conceived right here on the porch. The events take care of everyone and everything from the Family Crisis Center a few steps away, to the local guy who recently had a motorcycle accident or the family whose home burned to the ground. Whatever tragedy may occur, Terlinguans have a way of meeting the challenge with wit and humor and an



Photo by Mike Wrob

By late afternoon and into the evening, the Terlingua Porch is filled with people, conversation, dogs, music and cold beer.

uncharacteristic, for this community, swiftness.

According to Gregg, a Terlinguan who has lived outdoors for 16 years, “We believe in a mañana attitude. Only to us mañana doesn't necessarily mean tomorrow. It just means not today.” Gregg recently had electricity installed at his place, but he hasn't used it yet. Maybe next week? What's the hurry when you've already lived without it for a decade and a half?

Dr. Doug, one of the more famous denizens of the porch, does his best to encourage everyone to slow down and not take themselves so seriously. He tells

me, “Meeting people is my hobby.” Regarding tourists Doug says, “We like 'em. They're good for the economy. We tell 'em stories.” So what if he's not a real doctor? There's no doubt that his special brand of therapy does some folks a lot of good. Doug refers to Terlingua as the largest open air asylum in the world and to the porch itself as “group therapy.” He's happy to sit down with you on the porch with a bottle or can of what he calls “ice cold medicine” and discuss it

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Editor's Notes



Now still in the high elevations, fruit trees flowering in the valleys, and, between the two, the turkey vultures float in silent sentinel. It's spring in the Big Bend of Texas; the season of growing is upon us.

We hope this issue of *Cenizo* will see you into the warm months with stories

to amuse, history to teach, poetry to inspire and lots in between.

If you haven't sat on the porch in Terlingua with your own cold beer in hand, you've heard about it and, perhaps, wondered if it were really like all the stories. Phyllis Dunham is here with a story of the character – and characters – of the Terlingua Porch.

No doubt you've marveled at the ceiling in the Museum of the Big Bend and wondered how the Sul Ross Campus came to be a tree-filled oasis in the high desert. The answer is Victor J. Smith, who seems to have designed all of the campus in the early days of the college. Melissa Keane tells readers about the amazing man who created the physical campus and yet, even today, has no building named for him.

Orie Gilad helps us think about the benefits of mountain lions on our Big Bend lands – read on!

Jim Glendinning tells the story of our part of Texas through the "Voices of the Big Bend." You'll meet three of our friends who have dedicated their lives to the railroad, hospitality and teaching.

Cenizo Journal is named for the state native shrub of Texas, the cenizo – sometimes called Texas Sage. Our very first *Cenizo* cover was a photo taken of cenizos down south after much winter rain had made the desert floor magenta and green. The photographer was Crystal Allbright, whose eye catches all the things the rest of us see –

but never *see*. Her photo essay tells us more.

Thursday is newspaper day in the Trans-Pecos. While the big cities mourn the shrinking, even the passing, of their dailies, we have a slew of weekly papers to choose from. Charles Boisseau offers us a bird's eye view of each publication.

Three Martinis – not liquid but words that flow from Lauren Martini, Houstonian and Big Bend lover who writes love letters disguised as poems.

Since we're headed to the growing season, let's look at the native flowers that fill our desert scrub with color and scent. Jean Hardy Pittman guides us through *Lone Star Wildflowers*, where we learn not only what these flowers look like but also what they do, be it cuisine or pharmacopeia.

The Nature Conservancy Preserve at Independence Creek comes under the keen eye of Kelly Fenstermaker. Her story makes you want to explore this beautiful place, and the dates of future Open Days let you know when you can.

Bob Miles introduces Barry Scobee – another of those people who came to the Big Bend and stayed to make his mark. Scobee was largely responsible for the rebuilding of historic Fort Davis and was honored by having the mountain that looks across Hwy. 118 to the fort named for him.

And Trans-Pecos trivia will test your knowledge of our local parks – put on your thinking cap!

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Cenizo Journal

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Cover: Scott Winterrowd, "The Window from Pinnacles Trail," 2008, 10 inches by 10 inches. Watercolor and pen on paper.

Occasional art: From an Archives of the Big Bend exhibit *Prints in Print – Art prints in The Skyline 1925-1936*. Linoleum block prints were created by various artists and used during this time to illustrate stories and facets of campus life in the campus newspaper, *The Skyline*. Images courtesy Archives of the Big Bend, Bryan Wildenthal Memorial Library, Sul Ross State University, Alpine, Texas.

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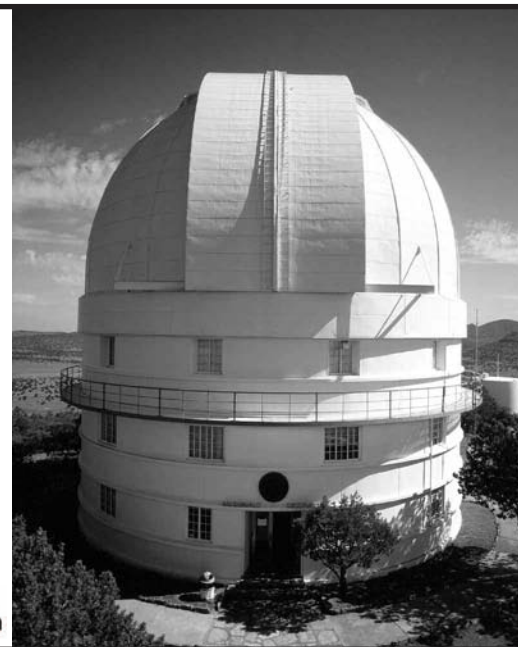
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Professor Victor J. Smith, circa 1951

Victor J. Smith: Human Dynamo

by *Melissa Crowfoot Keane*

Many of those who established Sul Ross State University are remembered in the names of campus buildings, such as presidents H. W. Morelock and Bryan Wildenthal. But the name of one of the most dynamic forces on the campus has slipped into obscurity. Known as “Mr. Sul Ross” throughout the first half of the 20th century, Victor J. Smith contributed much to the landscape and spirit of Sul Ross. From his arrival in Alpine in 1919 until his death in 1956, Professor Smith guided students, designed buildings, explored the region’s archeology and attracted national recognition with the Big Bend Memorial Museum (known today as the Museum of the Big Bend).

Raised and educated in Austin, Victor James Smith moved to San Angelo in 1912 to teach industrial arts. During his four years in San Angelo, Smith met and married the domestic science teacher and became the first principal of the first junior high. In early 1920, as the first Sul Ross building took shape east of the little town of Alpine, the new college president hired Smith away from his San Angelo position to oversee construction of the new normal school. Smith arrived in Alpine and took over construction of the first two build-

ings on the Sul Ross campus, the Main Building and the college president’s house.

He would repeat the role of construction overseer many times before his retirement. Between 1920 and 1951, most of the buildings constructed on the Sul Ross campus bore “the special marks of the ever-active hand of Victor J. Smith (who) drew the plans, called for bids, helped in approving the contract and then supervised the construction,” according to Sul Ross historian Clifford B. Casey.

Several of Smith’s buildings are familiar to today’s students, including a gymnasium (1928), the library (1931), a museum (1937) and Lawrence Hall (1939). Others have been demolished, included a bowling alley, band hall, cafeteria, student union and student cottages.

Equal in importance to the design of the buildings, Smith sketched the future layout of the campus along a central mall. Off-campus, Smith applied his talents to the Lodge and the Outdoor Theater in Kokernot Park, the wrought iron gates at Kokernot Field and the First Methodist Church. Smith became a registered architect in Texas in 1938.

A story told about the construction of the cafeteria reveals Smith’s energy and skills. Modern college campuses of the 1930s were adding cafeterias to the list of

student amenities. Within two months after college president Morelock suggested to Smith that Sul Ross might benefit from such a facility, Professor and Mrs. Smith designed, built and began operating a campus cafeteria. Smith enlisted the help of his students in fabricating the dining room furniture, kitchen work tables and sinks.

Perhaps more significant than the creation of the Sul Ross campus were Professor Smith’s enthusiastic interactions with the students and his contributions to the emerging culture of the new normal college. As professor of industrial education, Smith first acquired war surplus machinery and equipment for the Sul Ross campus and then offered classes in a wide variety of manual arts: mechanical and architectural drawing, carpentry, furniture design, cabinet work, concrete construction, metal work and gasoline engines. After class, he helped the students build floats and make posters.

In the first years of the new school, Smith’s fertile brain suggested the Bar-SR-Bar as the school emblem, and its resemblance to a branding iron led to the adoption of *The Brand* as the name of the yearbook. In the spring of 1925, Smith’s manual arts students prepared an outline of the emblem, and in a stu-

dent assembly, he recruited another 50 students (20 percent of the student body) to haul several tons of boulders up the hillside behind the college to create the 50-foot-by-100-foot Bar-SR-Bar emblem.

In addition, Smith suggested the name of the student paper, and the description of that incident reveals Smith’s unassuming personality. During a 1923 meeting pondering a name for the student newspaper, Victor Smith gazed out the window. Quickly, he made a pencil sketch of the ridge of mountains. Below the sketch he wrote “The Skyline.” Silently, he handed his drawing to the committee chairman, who shared it with the rest of the attendees. The committee recommended Smith’s suggestion to President Morelock who selected *The Skyline* over the second place choice, *The Rossonian*.

The affection that students felt for Smith is evident in several yearbooks, and the yearbook staff dedicated the 1923 volume to Smith with these words:

To the friend of the students, the faculty humorist, the man indispensable about the college; to him who came as a pioneer to Sul Ross and has been such a tremendous factor in its making, we, the students of '23, in token of our unbounded and sincere appreciation of the man and his work, dedicate this, the third number of THE BRAND, to Mr. Victor James Smith.



Photo courtesy Archives of the Big Bend, Bryan Wildenthal Memorial Library, Sul Ross State University, Alpine, Texas

Sul Ross State University President H.W. Morelock and Victor J. Smith stand inside the newly built Big Bend Memorial Museum in 1937. The two paintings, *Moonlight on the Chisos* by Xavier Gonzalez (at the back of the room) and *Branding Scene at Cathedral Mountain* by Julius Woeltz (at right) remain in the Museum collection today.

Perhaps teaching manual arts classes, overseeing campus construction and interacting with the students might be considered a full load for some, but these represented only a portion of Smith's activities. One can begin to understand why President Morelock thought Smith to be a "human dynamo who possessed all the traits of a genius."

While Smith dedicated portions of his summers to advanced training in education, he spent other summer days and holidays exploring the archeology of the Big Bend region.

Immediately after classes ended in early May 1921, Smith fired up his Model T for his first archeological field trip. His notes for that day describe a site near Terlingua with 16 "potholes" (bedrock mortars). During 1921, Smith reconnoitered 35 archeological sites from Point of Rocks to Ranger Canyon, from Marathon to Shafter, traveling the dirt roads of the Trans-Pecos in his Model T. His investigations continued throughout the next dozen years; by the end of 1933, Smith had visited and described 207 sites.

Professor Smith's holiday archeology spilled over into his campus activities. In addition to adding anthropology classes to his teaching load, he also

penned three dozen articles for scientific journals between 1923 and 1951. Smith housed his growing collection of Indian artifacts in the basement of the Main Building, and, with the vision of a larger museum in mind, he worked to create a new society to collect and preserve "materials of anthropological, biological, geological, mineralogical and historical value" in "fire and vermin proof storage cabinets." The West Texas Historical and Scientific Society met for the first time in December 1925; over the next 12 years, the society, spearheaded by Victor Smith, collected specimens, raised funds, and built a new museum building. Collections grew from 600 items in 1926 to more than 12,000 items at the time of the dedication of Big Bend Memorial Museum in 1937. The collection encompassed the full breadth of life in the Big Bend from arrowheads to a stuffed mule deer buck and a black silk sunbonnet.

In May 1939, the American Academy for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) held their annual meetings at the new museum, master-minded by Smith. Speakers included archeological luminaries of the day. One can imagine Smith's pride as he welcomed colleagues from across the Southwest to the museum and

the campus, which he had helped create on a hillside that had been empty two decades earlier.

Professor Smith continued to teach and to serve Sul Ross through the 1940s. During the war years, he taught additional classes in pilot training ground school. As he approached retirement in 1951, his professional accolades mounted up – Smith was named a Fellow in AAAS and an honorary life member of the Texas Academy of Science.

Victor Smith appears to have always been thin and fit. In the spring of 1956, he lost weight rapidly and became concerned about his health. On May 5, Smith drove his automobile one mile south of Alpine on Hwy. 118 and killed himself with a rifle shot to the head. Curious, I, too, drove south on Hwy. 118 expecting a panorama of the city of Alpine, but that is not the view from one mile south – the view is that of the campus of Sul Ross marching up the hillside under the Bar-SR-Bar emblem. I wonder if "Mr. Sul Ross" chose that particular spot so that he could gaze on "his" campus.

Dr. Bryan Wildenthal memorialized Smith as "one of the most excellent and devoted teachers and one of the finest gentlemen who has served Sul Ross. (We) will forever be indebted to Victor J. Smith for what he did to make Sul Ross State College one of the most beautiful in Texas. As long as the grass grows in West Texas and the mesquite leaves shimmer in the dry winds, Victor J. Smith's influence will be felt."

Postscript: In 1960, an elegant concrete block men's dormitory was christened "Victor J. Smith Hall" in his honor; it has since been demolished. Today, no campus building or structure carries the name of the man who dedicated so much of his time and talent to Sul Ross.





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TEXAS MOUNTAIN LIONS ~ why should I care?

by *Orie Gilad*

West Texans have had a long love-hate relationship with mountain lions. Up until the 1930s, when raising sheep and goats was a primary source of their income, ranchers suffered substantial losses from predators. Government and local programs paid bounties and employed trappers to eliminate predators, including mountain lions. Coupled with habitat changes, the programs were successful, and mountain lions disappeared from the Texas landscape, together with wolves, brown and black bears and the occasional jaguar.

But times have changed. Ranchers have moved on to raising cattle and leasing land for hunting or eco-tourism, and some have sold their land to individuals who may not visit the land and are termed “absentee owners.”

In 2007 I founded a non-profit organization, called Balanced Ecology so I could work directly with landowners and other stakeholders on a volunteer basis to try and establish an acceptable coexistence between humans and cats. The need for such work became clear to me during the time I was conducting work on the local mountain lion population in Guadalupe Mountains National Park as part of my doctoral dissertation at Texas A&M University.

I was surprised to find out that despite generations of humans and cats sharing the same land, there was a lack of understanding of mountain lion behavior and the important benefits ranchers can gain from having these predators on their land.

When I discuss predators with West Texans, I encounter diverse attitudes towards the issue. There are those who let the lions be, unconcerned



Photo by Jeff Parker

Even captive mountain lions such as this one remain shy and elusive.

about their presence on their land; there are those who want them gone, for whom just the sighting of one causes a surge of activity for the killing of the lone cat. And then there are those who, in the past decade, have started asking if having mountain lions on their land can actually benefit them and if

they can protect their livelihood and yet coexist with the cats as part of the Texas ecosystem.

It seems that most Texans know little of the status of the species in the state.

Some mistakenly believe mountain lions are extinct, while others believe, also mistakenly, that the population is

growing and expanding. The majority of Texans believes that mountain lions are or should be protected, while others, regardless of their feeling towards the cats, are adamant about keeping the government out of their business, including the protection of any species, mountain lions included.

A common belief about mountain lions is that if their number is not controlled, they will overpopulate, just like deer, cattle or sheep. The fact is that unlike deer and livestock, which are “prey species” and require a predator (mountain lion, human) to control their numbers, predators are “self-regulators.” This means that if you have a resident adult mountain lion on your land, that cat may kill or chase away any invading lion entering his or her territory to compete for food, water or shelter.

On the other hand, if you kill that lion, you have immediately opened a territory to any roaming cat. Under these circumstances, it is possible that until a new lion establishes a territory on that land and protects it, you may end up with more lions per area than you would have had had you just let that resident adult live.

Possibly of more concern to ranchers today is the presence of feral hogs on their land, and after learning that having mountain lions around may keep feral hogs at a lower number and distribution, some landowners think twice before killing the mountain lion patrolling their land. In the words of one landowner: “If you can show me that, I’ll raise those lions myself!”

Balanced Ecology is in the process of identifying/recruiting landowners who wish to explore this further. With no financial or labor cost to them, we will survey their land for scat and kill sights and will monitor activity of lions, feral hogs and other middle-sized predators, such as coyotes and bobcats. Some studies show that in the presence of large predators, such as mountain lions, the number of coyotes and bobcats is lower. Cattle raisers and those who are interested in leasing

land for hunting are more concerned with losses to coyotes than to lions. If having a lion on their land could decrease feral hogs, coyotes and bobcats, they are all for lions, since keeping coyote and hog numbers in check is labor-intensive and financially taxing.

“What about the deer?” I am often asked. Large areas in western Texas are leased for hunting, and owners fear that lions will kill all the deer. The reality is that mountain lions and deer coexisted side by side for thousand of years before humans joined the landscape. Predators do not eliminate their source of food. They will die off if they do.

A resident adult lion kills its

prey, eats parts of it, covers it for future meals and returns to the kill over the course of several days. The resident lion, after making one kill, is taken out of the hunting cycle, sometimes for as long as 10 days. They will hunt hogs, javelinas, aoudads and porcupines as well as deer. If the territory is lacking a resident lion, any passing lion or lions may stay around for a few days, killing multiple times since they cannot protect a hidden kill and are not familiar with the habitat and do not feel safe.

A resident mountain lion will benefit landowners by improving the quality of the deer. Some landowners are worried that a mountain lion

will kill their prized buck, costing them money. It is more likely, though, that a mountain lion will go after the weaker, not-so-healthy animal, taking it out of the gene pool.

Many studies showed this exact thing: that in the presence of a resident lion, deer are larger, healthier and are prized more. There are, of course, no certainties that a lion will not take down a large male, especially after the rut, when the males are exhausted and leave the sanctuary of the other animals.

But it does not often happen; it is more likely that a resident lion will know the movement of the herd, will follow the larger numbers, know where other species such as hogs and javelina travel and will stalk and feed on a variety of other species before he or she will choose to take down a large, healthy deer such as a prized buck. Taking down such an animal is a risk for the lion, and lions tend to avoid such risks.

In addition to traditional use of land, some landowners have seen an increase in their income beyond the hunting season when they open their ranch to wildlife viewing. The concern over losing a prized buck to predation is diminished when people are willing to pay money for a chance to view and photograph wildlife, including a mountain lion.

Balanced Ecology, in addition to studying the impact of mountain lions on other species such as feral hogs, coyotes, bobcats and, in some areas, wild burros, is also working on identifying “source,” “sink” and “stable” areas for mountain lions.

“Source areas” are those areas that will allow lions to live and reproduce without disturbance, while “sink areas” are those where the tolerance to lions is minimal. “Stable areas” would be those areas separating source and sink areas, where mountain lion numbers are kept stable. These areas are also used as dispersal routes for

young lions.

This source-sink-stable approach is successful in allowing a healthy, viable population of mountain lions to exist, while recognizing that there are some landowners who must kill lions to protect their livelihood.

Mountain lions are a native species of Texas, and with so little public land, it is up to landowners to be the best stewards they can be of Texas wildlife, Texas natural habitat and other resources for the sake of future generations. With this commitment and with the recognition that people are an integral part of the ecosystem, a balanced coexistence between humans and nature can prevail.



HOW MANY MOUNTAIN LIONS SHOULD I EXPECT ON MY LAND?

Male mountain lions occupy an area of 25,000-51,000 acres, and females occupy an area of 13,000-19,000 acres. Males and females overlap in their territories, and sometimes related females (mother, daughters and sisters) will share portions of their territory.

What does this mean?
In a NON-HARVESTED population:

If You Own	You May Have:
10,000 acres	One mountain lion visiting your land on occasion as part of its territory. The rest of the time, the mountain lion will spend patrolling and hunting in adjacent lands.
25,000 acres	One-two mountain lions partially residing on your land and spending the rest of their time in neighboring lands.
50,000 acres	Two-four mountain lions
100,000 acres	Three-eight mountain lions

TO DECREASE LOSSES TO PREDATION:

- Don’t open a predator restaurant; bury or compost dead livestock to make them unavailable to lions or other predators. Predators will revisit areas more often if they find food.
- Try to calve in areas you can monitor. Human activity around calving operations can discourage predation.
- Consider livestock-guarding dogs. Pyrenees and other breeds have proven track records to reduce predation.

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Voices of the BIG BEND

Jim Glendinning recreates some of his popular radio interviews from “Voices of the Big Bend,” an original production of KRTS, Marfa Public Radio, which is broadcast throughout the region at 93.5 FM.

by Jim Glendinning

Gary Harrell was born in Sanderson on November 13, 1936. Felix Harrell Jr., Gary’s father, who married Lily McDonald, worked for 44 years as brakeman for Southern Pacific Railroad.

The Harrell and McDonald families have lived in Sanderson, Terrell County, since around 1900. The Harrells ranched, and grandfather Felix Harrell was sheriff of Terrell County. An uncle, Jim Nance, was a Texas Ranger.

Sanderson was a good, safe place to grow up in. More prosperous then, with a population of 2,000 (today it is around 800), it was a center for sheep, goat and cattle ranching and an important depot and crew change point for the Southern Pacific Railroad. In high school, Gary worked summers for the railroad, which had a roundhouse in Sanderson where the locomotives were turned around.

Leaving Sanderson in 1956, Gary enrolled for one semester at Texas Western in El Paso to study geology. He switched to Sul Ross a year later, enrolled in sociology and geology classes and played baseball. The geology class was bluntly told by the university that there was a glut of geologists graduating, and job prospects were poor.

When Southern Pacific called him with a job offer, Gary quit Sul Ross and started a career that would be the love of his life. He hired out on June 14, 1959. In those days, five personnel worked the train, three in the locomotive and two in the caboose. Gary’s job was up front as brakeman, responsible for all of the train except the locomotive. Today Southern Pacific crews number two.

The job itself was relatively routine, maintenance of the rolling stock and supervision of cargo. The satisfaction came primarily from being in the Chihuahuan Desert, observing nature at work – a romantic life. There was also a feeling of solitude, detachment from crowds, being away from an office and

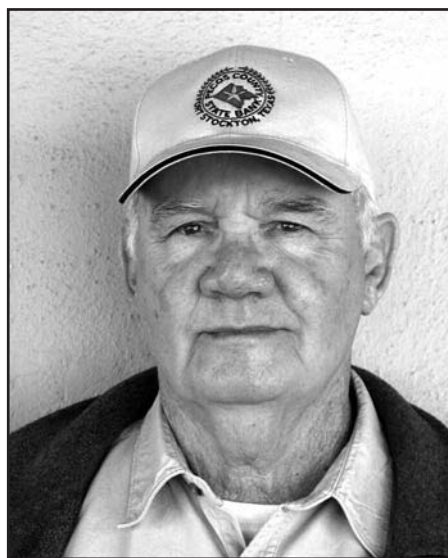


Photo by Dallas Baxter

GARY HARRELL
Sanderson

out in the open. “I was privileged,” he says quietly.

Two major tragic events occurred in Sanderson during this period. The first was the flood of 1965. Eleven inches of rain flooded the area west of Sanderson, drained into two draws and swept through town, washing away a rock-built wool house. Twenty-six persons died. Gary’s train was delayed overnight by the flood, and when he walked into town the next morning, he saw the full effects of the catastrophe.

The second tragedy was a head-on collision between two Southern Pacific freight trains. This occurred in 1994, the year before Gary retired, just west of Sanderson, and resulted in the death of all four crew members, all Sanderson men. The company blamed the accident on crew fatigue, and the crew change point was switched to Alpine, further reducing Sanderson’s economy.

Never married because, as he says, he



Photo by Dallas Baxter

MONA GARCIA
Marfa

never found the right woman, Gary exudes a calmness reflecting a philosophy more typical of former times. He reads a lot. When asked for a few final words on his working life and conditions, he says “I wish we could go back.”

Mona Blocker was born in 1936 in Houston, the eldest of four children of Helen and Dan Blocker, a petroleum engineer, whose family ancestors (Von Bluecher) came from Prussia.

Her first life-affecting experience was in first grade in Petronila Creek, near Corpus Christi. There, in a one-room school with 35 kids, 85 per cent of whom were Mexican, the first two hours of daily instruction were in Spanish, giving Mona a command of the language for life.

Since her mother did not cook, Mona, as the eldest child, assumed that role from age 8.

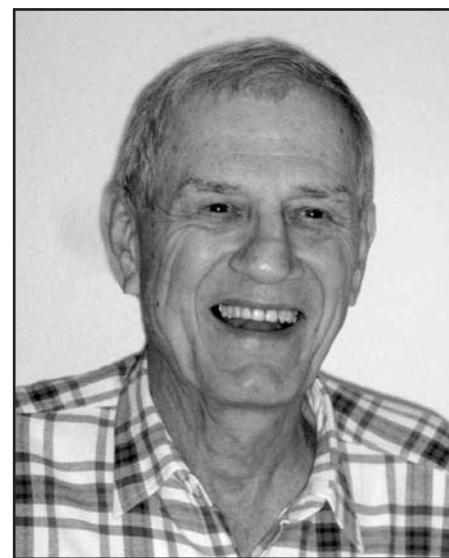


Photo by Jim Glendinning

MICHAEL POWELL
Alpine

After high school in Alvin, Mona entered the University of Texas in Austin in 1955 to study art history. Soon after her arrival, she spotted a tall, dark-haired student outside the Student Union. This was Rudy, whose family came from Spain’s Basque country and with whom she started taking tango lessons. They were married on January 29, 1956.

Rudy was studying geology and upon graduation in 1958 joined the Sun Oil Corporation and was posted to Venezuela. This was what Mona calls the golden age of oil exploration and development. Their life was *un memento de duende* (a magical moment) with servants, a large house and status in the community. They stayed there 14 years, and all four children (Cassandra, Gregory, Anthony and Gavin) were born there.

In 1974, after two years in Philadelphia, Rudy, now vice president for exploration, was sent to Lima. It was

during their five years here that Mona converted her interest in antiques into a business of buying and selling them. She later added an interior design service which, upon return to the States in the 80s, became a substantial business.

Rudy meanwhile took early retirement in 1982 from Sun Oil Corporation. After a stint in Houston, he was hired by Spanish National Oil Company and sent to Madrid for five years. Mona visited the Prado Museum every Tuesday. In 1995 they returned for good to the States and chose Marfa ("the most foreign place in Texas") in 1996 as their future home. The house they purchased on Austin Street had previously been a rooming house, so they opened the Arcon Inn (archaic Spanish for treasure) as a bed and breakfast and filled it with it Peruvian antiques.

Mona's current project combines artistic development with healthful aging. In Peru, she watched two very talented female artists die unnecessarily early and unfulfilled. Her aim in Marfa was to develop a center for mature women with artistic talent. In 2004, she established the International Women's Foundation and with fortunate timing, she was able to purchase Building 98 at old Fort D.A. Russell in Marfa. This building, which also has a fine collection of murals painted by German prisoners of war, is now functioning with two artists in residence. Meanwhile, guests at the Arcon Inn enjoy excellent breakfasts in a dining room with colonial art on the walls, regaled by their hostess with news of contemporary Marfa or bygone days on another continent.

Sitting in the basement of the Warnock Science Building on the Sul Ross State University campus and talking with an easy-going and modest former professor, it takes some time to realize the huge body of work produced by the interviewee, Distinguished Professor Emeritus Dr. Michael Powell. Pertinent to the interview were the surrounding cases of dried plant specimens which filled the basement – the herbarium – a research collection of an estimated 100,000 plants, of which he is director and curator.

Albert Michael Powell was born in Coleman, Texas in 1937, one of three children of Welma and Everett Powell. His father was a contractor/bricklayer. Powell describes high school in Coleman as easy. He was interested in biology but not plants; that came later at Sul Ross. He was headed toward a coaching career due to his athletic ability, but as he describes it, a turn in the road occurred at Sul Ross where he was exposed to the teachings of charismatic Dr. Barton Warnock. This influence would lead to a career commitment in the field of botany to research, writing and, above all, teaching.

After high school, Powell obtained an A.A. in 1957 from Howard County Junior College in San Angelo, a B.S. and M.A. from Sul Ross and a Ph.D. in 1963 from The University of Texas at Austin.

Starting on the Sul Ross faculty in 1963, he was promoted to professor in 1968 and was department chairman from 1978 to 1997. He retired in 2003. He also designed and wrote a pamphlet on the cactus garden at Sul Ross, was super-

visor of the greenhouse operations, helped plan and establish the experimental vineyard and was a founder of the Chihuahuan Desert Research Institute.

Barton Warnock was not an easy act to follow. But it is clear when talking with Powell that the work itself was the main thing. Teaching, he says, gave him most satisfaction. He taught for 40 years, missing one class only due to illness. He talks with pride about the biology graduates from Sul Ross, many of whom have gone on to obtain Ph.D.s. He loved teaching and sought to instill in his students "a continuing curiosity in the natural world and a desire to continue learning throughout their lives."

In addition to receiving various research grants and being affiliated with numerous professional biology associations, Michael Powell wrote over 100 articles in professional journals as well as seven books, some in collaboration with his wife Shirley and also with James F. Weedon, for which he received a Lifetime Achievement award from the Native Plant Society of Texas. His first book was *Trees and Shrubs of the Trans-Pecos* (1988). *Cacti of the Trans-Pecos* (2004) was 10 years in the making and contains over 300 color pictures. *Cacti of West Texas, a Field Guide* came out in 2008.

Mike and Shirley Powell live south of Alpine. They have three children, Leisa, Michael and Dana, living outside the region. He is within easy daily commute to the Sul Ross herbarium, and the Chihuahuan Desert, his workshop and inspiration, is always accessible. What more could a scientist ask for?



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photo essay

by Crystal Allbright



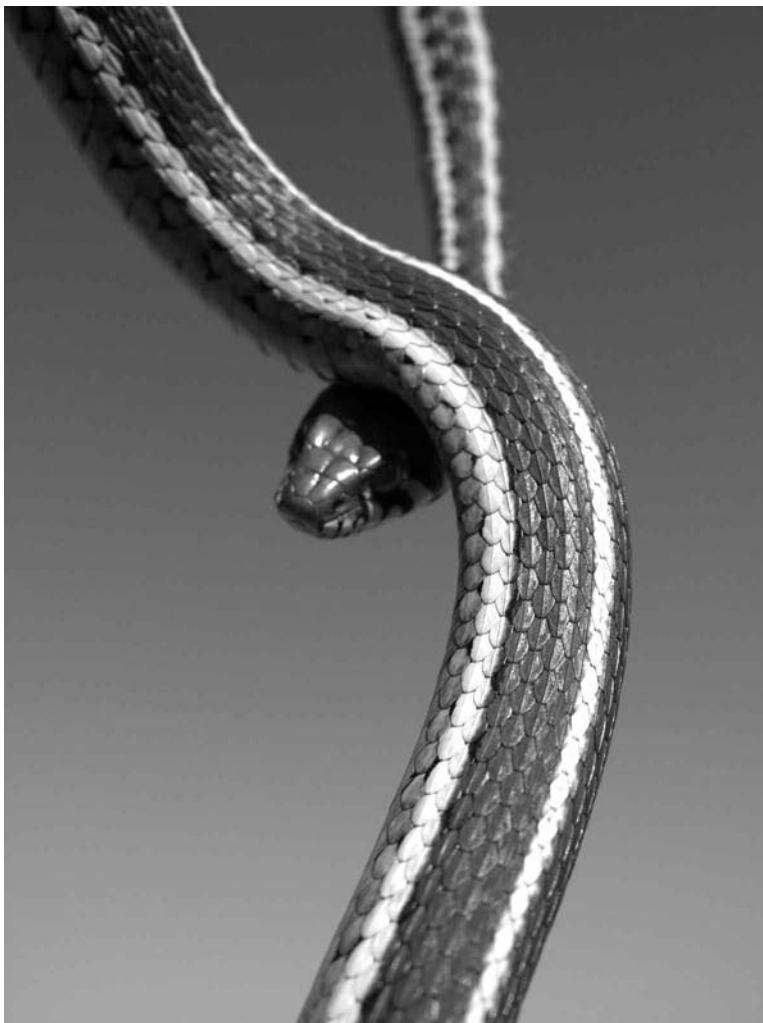
River Rock Skip

The border can be crossed with a skip of a rock.
If a note could be tied to the rock
I'd say Take care of the River – Cuida del Rio.
Together US & Mexico can keep the river flowing
To sustain the environment
To supply the farmers and ranchers
To support the river runners
To let all enjoy the magnificent Rio Grande.



Santo Gecko

While wandering through memories at the San Vicente gravesite in Big Bend National Park, I peeked into a votive candle to find this preserved Texas Banded Gecko – *coleonyx brevis*. Picking up the glass to get a closer look, the gecko fell over to reveal a hole in its stomach that perfectly matched a hole in the dirt below. Sustenance for another.



Garter Rope

Seven snakes in seven days – that's what we encountered after tidying up building materials in the yard last summer. A mellow diamondback rattlesnake, a red racer feeding on a young rabbit, a lovely Trans-Pecos ratsnake, a mildly venomous night snake, a blackneck garter snake (see image) and two other species we had never met – a variable ground snake and a 6-foot whipsnake. The ground snake comes in a variety of colors and patterns, and this one had a pale body with dark crossbars. We learned the whipsnake is diurnal – its long, thin body helps it handle the heat so it can hunt lizards in the day.



WEEKLY PAPERS...

Still Kicking in Far West Texas

by Charles Boisseau

The conventional wisdom is newspapers are yesterday's news. Few people would be surprised if newspapers are pushed aside in the years to come by bloggers and citizen journalists. The question remains — what would be lost? How much would it truly matter if newspapers disappeared?

Many who live in Far West Texas believe something important would disappear with newspapers. Fort Davis businessman Joe Duncan, who owns historic hotels in Fort Davis, Marfa and Van Horn, said, "It's the glue that holds things together in a town. I think it's really critical in a small town to have (a newspaper). If it's not there I think it would be a loss to the towns."

Weeklies located in six counties across the mountainous Chihuahuan Desert and the Big Bend region serve some of the most sparsely populated and largest counties in Texas. Each paper is the only weekly serving its county, some of which

are larger than states. (Presidio County has two papers, the *Big Bend Sentinel* and *Presidio International*, but they share the same owner). None of the papers has its own printing facilities, so editors must arrange to print hundreds of miles away at presses in Midland, Monahans, El Paso or Ozona and drive them back for mailing and distribution each week.

To be sure, the remoteness has its advantages. For one thing, there is little competition from other news outlets. The scarcity of other media has helped shield the weeklies from the upheaval that's causing problems for the big dailies, which have made the Big Bend region seem ever more isolated by pulling back distribution and coverage. The Internet may be shaking up the newspaper business, but it seems mostly an afterthought here. Two papers don't even have Web sites.

On their good days, these ink-stained editors also believe what they do matters.

Despite long hours and little money, they find solace in the belief they are providing a public service, one that helps create a community, a place where people come together to work and live and die far from the bustling and problem-filled big cities, in quiet places where people still have the most faith in traditional values — honesty, hard work and being good neighbors.

Sanderson

Jim Street stands outside his small rented newspaper office, with an ocotillo plant in front and a sprawling RV park in back.

Inside the office, Street says he purchased the *Terrell County News Leader* in 2001 after a career working as a reporter (including at the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*), a public information officer at the Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport and as operator of a limo company.

"I wanted to get back to my journalis-

tic roots," says Street, a 74-year-old with a curly gray moustache. "I sort of envisioned contemplating my navel a lot as the editor of a small-town newspaper. It didn't work out that way. But it's been interesting."

A woman enters the office to inquire about a classified ad for a garage sale (ads are \$3). Craigslist, which offers free classified ads in 325 U.S. cities, has yet to target this unincorporated hamlet of about 800.

Street admits his paper isn't much of a money maker, though he says he has increased its circulation since he took over. A divorced father of two grown sons, Street lives on his Social Security check and limited funds from the paper to cover expenses. He has partly financed operations by dipping into his now nearly drained savings. Street relies on two part-time independent contractors to help put out the 16-page tabloid each week.

In the past year, Street has tried many ways to trim costs and increase revenues, with mixed results. Last April, he discontinued a separate local edition in Marathon (53 miles west in Brewster County) because it was losing money. He also began charging people \$34 a year to view full stories on the paper's Web site – the same as subscribers pay for the printed paper. But a move to increase the newsstand price to \$1 from 50 cents was quickly reversed after Street found that he was losing too much business.

Finances got so bad that Street wrote a July 24 column headlined "Is it all over?" about coming to the painful decision to close his little newspaper. In the days following, officials with the county, the local school district and Sanderson State Bank met with Street and committed to increasing their advertising. As long as his health holds up, Street said he no longer has any plans to shut the paper, though he would consider selling it.

Alpine

Cindy Perry warmly greets a visitor to the offices of the *Alpine Avalanche*. She is the wife of Mike Perry, the editor and publisher.

The couple met when they both worked their first newspaper jobs at the *San Angelo Standard-Times* in the early 1970s. They moved to Alpine three years ago to take over the operation of the *Avalanche* and fulfill a long-held desire to move to the area.

Within a few minutes, Cindy receives a visitor: a high school journalism teacher bearing a disc loaded with photos he took of a high school volleyball game. "Thank you! Thank you!" says Cindy, giving the teacher a hug. Unpaid contributors help make small-town papers like the *Avalanche* possible.

Founded in 1891, the *Avalanche* is the region's oldest, largest (18 to 24 pages, weekly circulation of about 3,000) and only full-color paper. It has four full-time employees – "and half of the staff lives together," jokes Mike, age 63.

Bucking industry norms, the *Avalanche* has enjoyed improved business of late. Buoyed by a state university, a smattering of

retail and cultural amenities, Alpine has grown to an estimated population of about 6,300 at a time most of the region's other small cities and unincorporated areas have lost population. Despite the U.S. recession, the paper had a bump in revenues and in circulation in 2009, and the numbers have improved for several years running.

"It's a better paper than it was," Mike Perry explains. "It was not a very good paper. With four people it's hard to put out a great newspaper. We put out a good newspaper occasionally."

The *Avalanche* is owned by Granite Publications, a Taylor-based newspaper company that also owns the *Fort Stockton Pioneer*. It is the only one of the six papers that is not locally owned. Mike insists that the owners have very little say in the local news or editorial product. "They've never told me what to do – other than to make a profit," he says. "Their main guidelines are to make more money this year than last year. And that's fine. It's a business."

Mike does a bit of everything – writing a regular column, covering high school sporting events, shooting photos, laying out pages. Occasionally he has run afoul of advertisers – a well-known occupational hazard of small-town newspapers.

Last year, five advertisers pulled ads in protest over an editorial Mike wrote advocating for passage of the federal health care reform legislation. Though he said most readers' reactions were favorable, some criticized Mike for being a "socialist" or sent hate-filled letters. All but one advertiser has since returned.

Despite such conflicts, Mike says he has grown to savor life as a small-town newspaperman. There is a close contact with the public that he never had when working at big metro papers. Here, he is ever accessible. Residents engage with him in his office, in the stands at a high school football game or in line at the grocery store.

"You'll probably work harder than any other place you've ever worked and for not much money," says Mike. "But it's

incredibly gratifying. It's the most fulfilling and demanding journalism I've been in."

Marfa

Robert Halpern is on the phone at the *Big Bend Sentinel's* sunny offices on Highland Avenue, the main thoroughfare in Marfa. With him are his two other full-time employees: Rosario, his wife and the company's chief financial officer, and Sterry Butcher, a reporter who has worked at the paper for more than a dozen years.

Halpern, 55, has built a reputation as perhaps the region's top local newsman. A native of Alpine, he graduated with a journalism degree from the University of Texas at El Paso and worked at dailies in Odessa and El Paso before returning in 1988 to join the Marfa paper at the urging of then-owner Bob Dillard, a long-time Big Bend newspaperman.

In 1993, Dillard sold the *Sentinel* to the Halperns. In 1994, the couple purchased the weekly in Presidio, on the Mexico border in south Presidio County.

The business is much the family affair. The Halpern's daughter, who lives in Spain, translates stories via e-mail each week for the Spanish-language pages inside the *Presidio International*. Until recent years before heading off to college, their two sons worked for the business. His brother and sister-in-law handle distribution, picking up the paper each week from the press in Monahans, 130 miles away. In addition, Halpern uses freelancers and a retired advisor to the Sul Ross student newspaper to produce the paper.

He is proud of the hard-hitting reporting his team has produced. Among the stories he cited were the U.S. Border Patrol's program starting last fall to regularly release hundreds of illegal immigrants captured in Arizona at the international bridge in Presidio, exposing the program at Big Bend Ranch State Park to kill wild donkeys (a practice stopped after the newspaper's

continued on page 26



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Poetry

On 166

Flat-footed on the desert floor,
I am chance incarnate, nothing more.
For want of water or a shard of shade,
I might be undone, as I am made
of vulnerable stuff:
delicate vessels, shocking impulses,
humid interiors, and bone enough
to stand upright inside my skin.
But when I see this pile of rocks,
heap of crumbs from Earth's own crust,
my hunger for the challenge numbs
all fear of falling. I try to trust
my corporal self.
Eyes to the summit, taking aim,
one boulder at a time, I climb.
Legs stretch wide to cross a void;
I slide my soles along a shelf,
intent and action all the same,
each finger to its purpose,
scraping at the faulty surface.
How lovely are the levers of my arms, I think;
elegant and quite complete
the concert of synapses sweet song
lifts me to the brink,
where I recline at 30 degrees,
fully prone,
flesh and bone against the stone,
limbs splayed, sweat scattered,
the world entire
in my embrace, its breath against my face
in dry gusts of birdcall
and grasshopper chatter.

Lauren Martini

Dust Devil
after a photograph by James Evans, 2007

For moments it is visible,
a twisted, tenuous thread
frayed at both ends.
How it writhes
like an angry bright vein,
pulses and bends,
touches down and snaps back
in an instant,
while we whirl away free,
yet engulfed in an ocean
of currents and heat,
breathing tides we can't see.

Lauren Martini

Flotilla

Antelope go gliding by
on gilded grasses belly-high,
like sailors in a lambent sea
(taking little note of me,)
all legless, weightless, grazing down
below the waves, above the ground,
bright bottoms and buff tails galore,
flashing pronghorn semaphore
off each dainty heart-shaped stern,
a silent code that none can learn.

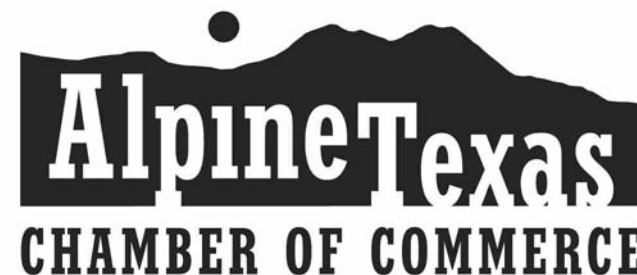
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Book Review

Book Review by Jean Hardy-Pittman

Lone Star Wildflowers: A Guide to Texas Flowering Plants

LaShara J. Nieland and Willa F. Finley, authors

Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press (2009) \$29.95, 322 pp. 5.5"x 9" trade paper.

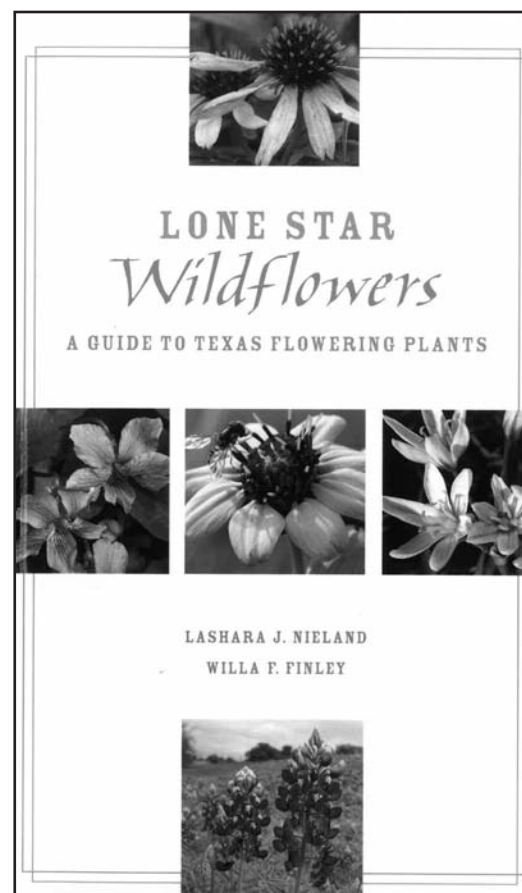
What? Another Texas wildflower book? Holy cowpen daisy, why?

That was my reaction not long ago when I saw *Lone Star Wildflowers* in the Texas Tech University Press catalog. My shelves already groaned with books on Texas native plants, most of them focusing on the flowers. So what could a new book possibly offer?

This skeptic has become a believer. First of all, *Lone Star Wildflowers: A Guide to Texas Flowering Plants* is handsomely designed. At almost 6-by-9 inches in size, it's larger than most field guides and has shiny, supple covers with French flaps. Inside, fine paper is imprinted with elegant body type (Stempel Schneidler, I'm told) and major headings are printed in shades of ink appropriate to the color sections throughout.

Crisp, high-quality photographs are coated to be glossier than the paper, making them pop. The photos are as instructive as they are beautiful, revealing curious fruit forms, eccentric plant and flower structures and other characters often omitted in field guides in favor of perfect floral displays.

But the genius of the book is its intricate yet user-friendly organization and beguiling content. The writers' first task was deciding which taxa to feature, winnowing down the 5,000 or so species that call Texas home to 218 exemplary ones. This is the only shortcoming of the book. For use as field guide, it should cover more plants. Another popular Texas wildflower guide, for example, features 482 species in its second edition. To be fair, the authors do not call it a field guide. They had to choose, for cost reasons, certainly, between



depth of coverage and breadth of coverage; and they chose the former. Ironically, it is also what makes the book special.

The plants chosen represent 54 families ranging from Agavaceae to Zygophyllaceae. Most are either annual or perennial herbaceous plants, some with woody basal parts. Certain cacti, trees and shrubs also receive treatment, and grasses are excluded.

Many of the selections will be familiar to native plant aficionados: bluebonnet, claret cup, gailardia, Texas mountain laurel, purple coneflower, Drummond phlox and Texas thistle, for example. But there are many surprises – less familiar plants intended to interest, inspire or dismay.

Consider the lowly goathead (*Tribulus terrestris*), whose armed seedpods have long, strong stickers that can puncture bare feet or bicycle tires. Yet dried and powdered goathead leaves and stems may be brewed into a tea that is said to be mildly diuretic and to lower blood pressure and serum cholesterol. And there are other positive attributes. Who knew?

Or discover the many chemical constituents in the unlovely horseweed (*Conyza canadensis*), whose compounds can be palliative or poison, depending on whether you are a sheep or human. "Conyza also is a remedy for meteorism – an old-fashioned euphemism for frequent passing of gas," deadpan the authors.

Notice the humble Heller's plantain (*Plantago helleri*), so inconspicuous and seemingly unimportant, yet full of possibilities for the medicine chest. Leaves are high in vitamins A and C and may be eaten raw in salads. Dried leaves were brewed into a tea for diarrhea or urinary tract infections.

And a related species, *P. psyllium*, is the primary source for the active ingredient in the “regulating” product Metamucil.

For the writers and native Texans LaShara J. Nieland and Willa F. Finley, botanical study is both vocation and avocation. They love what they do, and they do what they love, and it shows in the book. The two met in the biology department at Abilene Christian University in 1970 and quickly discovered their common interest in biology and plant science. Both taught botany labs.

Nieland earned an M.S. degree in biology education at Abilene Christian and began teaching in public schools. Finley completed Ph.D. studies at the University of Nebraska and pursued a career in agriculture. She has worked in ag research and agribusiness around the world.

Though the two biologists’ careers took diverse paths, they reconnected in 1997 in the Odessa public schools, where Nieland was teaching honors biology classes. Finley took a job there teaching science at the secondary level for four years. She

now is a senior agricultural economics researcher for LMC International in Oxford, England.

Both women have always enjoyed identifying and photographing native plants in the field, and they produced all 500 or so photographs (without individual credits). Nieland created plant study guides and workbooks for her students over the years and enjoyed taking them and their parents into the field for plant identification and study.

Obviously penned by serious biologists, *Lone Star Wildflowers* is nevertheless intended for a general audience. The book is written in clear, accessible language without compromising scientific accuracy. Rather than compiling a separate glossary of specialized terms, Nieland and Finley make all such terms clear within the text, a method referred to as an embedded glossary.

The section early in the book describing plant families is arranged alphabetically and discusses each family’s most relevant characters, growth habits, uses and so on. Such useful information is often omitted

from other native plant field guides. Or it is presented only in a complex botanical key. Nieland and Finley, however, give one just enough botany to satisfy without turning the book into a science lesson. And instead of calling the section “Family Descriptions” or “Selected Plant Families,” they call it “Family Biographies,” a wonderfully sensitive title suggesting relationships of living things.

The main body of the book is the 218 species discussions arranged according to flower colors. The hues range from red and orange to gold and yellow, green/lime, blue and lavender/purple; then to rosy pinks and finally, shades of white. This is not the first wildflower field guide to employ flower-color grouping, but as far as I know, it is the most refined. And the color renditions of the flower photos are for the most part right-on.

Within each color section, plants are further grouped by family and then by genus. “Exploring Further” pages at the end of each color section

provide supplemental photos and text that illustrate more striking details, such as leaf shapes and arrangements, seed-pods, field appearance and so on. Abundant cross references to related pages are an invaluable aid to study.

The authors write in complete sentences throughout the text – rare in field guides – using precise, colorful, witty and informed language. They describe the swollen nodes of the Polygonaceae, for example, as resembling “knobby arthritic knees.” The stamens of some species of the Solanaceae (night-shades) are “shamelessly huge.” The flower structures of certain verbenas are “reminiscent of a gingerbread man that has fallen into the purple dye vat.”

Other kinds of facts included in the text: traditional medicinal uses by Native Americans and early settlers, food preparations used historically in Southwestern cultures, plant toxicities to humans and livestock and forage value for wildlife and livestock, competitive behavior of plants with implications for rangeland management, land-

scaping suggestions, legends and myths based on plant characteristics, origins of scientific and common names and growth stages (young plants, buds, mature seed heads and fruits) depicted in photos.

One caveat for the Far West Texan: The book is statewide in range and therefore cannot cover but a fraction of our plants. However, it is excellent on the Trans-Pecos plants that it does include, and you will learn a great deal that will augment and enrich your knowledge and appreciation of plants in general.

This is the first book by this knowledgeable and talented duo, but let’s hope it is not the last.



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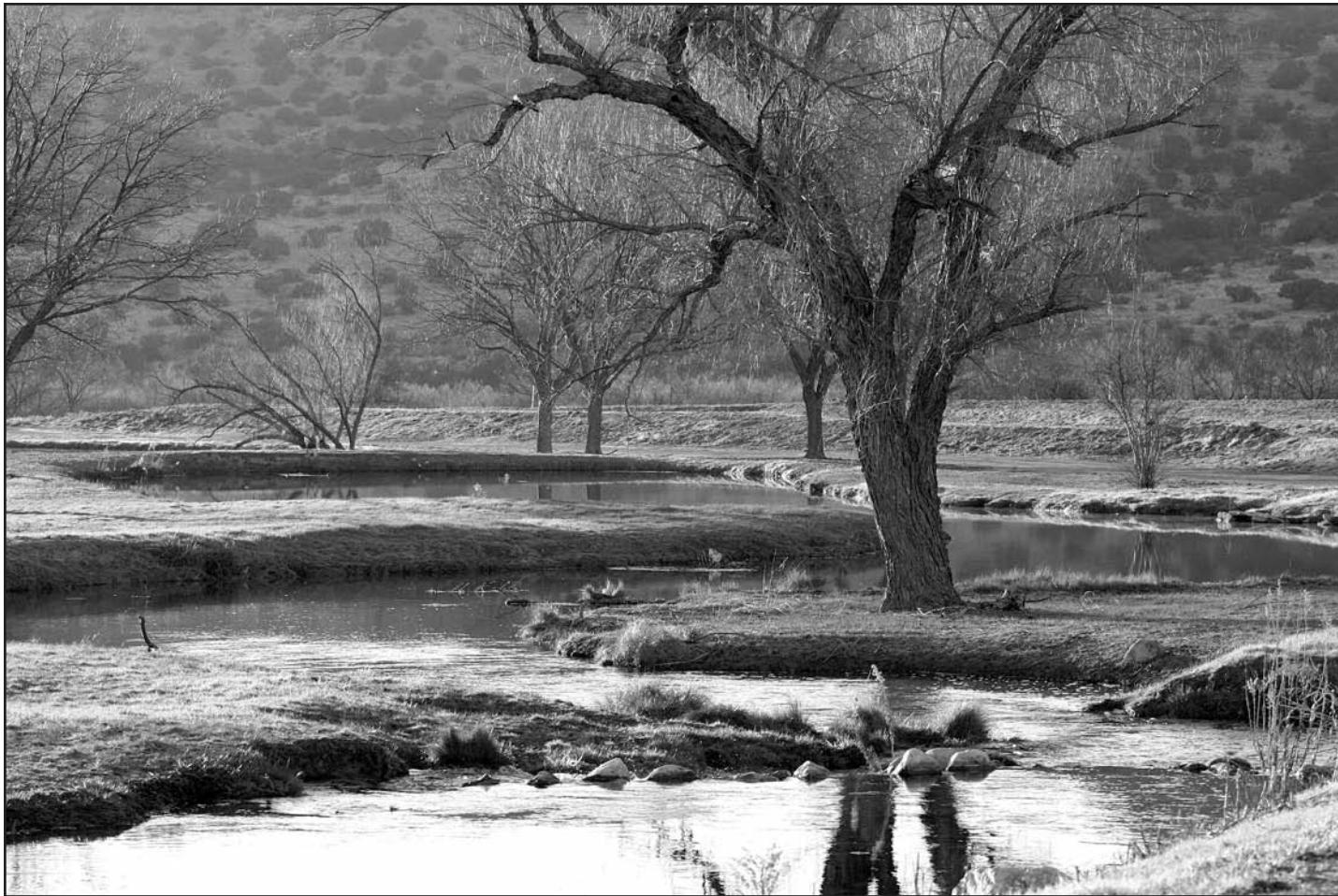


Photo by © TNC/Lynn McBride

Two large ponds, about the size of a couple of football fields, dominate the scene near preserve headquarters

INDEPEDENCE CREEK PRESERVE:

THE HIDDEN OASIS

by *Kelly Fenstermaker*

After a stop in Balmorhea, a friend and I set out for a drive through some of the most desolate land in West Texas. About three hours later, the last part of which involves missing a turn on a long dirt road, we reach our destination: Independence Creek Preserve, owned and operated by the Texas Nature Conservancy. This 2,000-acre piece of land once belonged to the Oasis and Canyon Ranches and was purchased from them in 2001.

We drive through the gate

and surface a hill, and suddenly, on the other side, a lush river bed appears with a creek running through it. Stands of oak shade the banks of this unexpected source of water.

Not too many people have ever heard of Independence Creek, let alone have any idea where it is. One reason is probably its middle-of-nowhere location. The closest towns are Sheffield, 22 miles away, and Dryden, 37 miles, both virtual ghost towns. If you didn't know the creek was there, you'd never guess. The vast land-

scape of desert scrub and bare earth gives no hint. And who would find reason to go there?

Yet, people have.

This part of the lower Pecos River area was first occupied about 12,000 years ago by Archaic people who depended on its constant supply of fresh water. They left behind artifacts, and along the Pecos River, large concentrations of rock art. Later the Apaches arrived. Eventually, they were displaced in the 19th century by cattle, sheep and goat ranchers who were drawn to the rich

grass along the creek's banks.

In the 50s, Charles Chandler opened his ranch, adjacent to the preserve, to guests, offering water sports, hunting, fishing and even a nine-hole golf course. For many years it was one of the most popular recreation areas in southwest Texas, partially due to the fact that it was the only entertainment spot on the Pecos River.

A half mile from the preserve's entrance the road takes us to headquarters, site of the old Oasis Ranch. Two large ponds, about the size of a cou-

ple of football fields, dominate the scene. The guest house in which we are staying with friends is right near the bank. The drive to get here had been a long and parched one, but this delicious sight of water, trees and grass more than makes up for it.

The back of the guest house opens to a rock terrace and beyond that, a lawn sloping down to the water. In warm weather that lovely clear water would invite a plunge. It being winter, I'm not tempted, but I do wish for a canoe. A little

stroll around to one end of the first pond takes you to an outdoor entertainment area, referred to as the Pavilion, framed by attractive rock work. It is equipped with a barbecue grill, tables and chairs, and there's enough space for large groups.

Our ranch-style house is attractive and comfortable. The spacious living room is furnished with deep, comfy chairs and couches and has a rock fireplace that covers most of one wall. The kitchen is equipped with everything a cook would need.

Friends who have driven in from San Antonio, Dallas and Austin come wandering in. After a communal lasagna dinner, we all turn in early. Tucked under the folds of a soft quilt, I fall asleep to the sound of absolute quiet.

Next morning, I take a jeep ride with two others to check out the preserve. A prairie dog settlement has established itself on the other side of the pond. Dozens of these curious little creatures pop their heads out of holes and blink at us with large black eyes.

The road follows the creek. Kept full year round by several springs, the creek is one of the few remaining recoverable fresh-water tributaries of the lower Pecos River. Caroline Spring, located at the headquarters, produces 3,000 to 5,000 gallons per minute and comprises about 25 percent of the creek's flow. The creek itself increases the Pecos River water volume by 42 percent.

The pristine waters of this desert oasis make a substantial contribution to wildlife downstream of the Pecos River corridor. The creek itself sustains diverse, abundant flora and fauna, including several rare and endangered species.

Although we don't see any fish, they are here. The threatened proserpine shiner makes its home here. Its dwindling numbers are the result of a vanishing spring-fed habitat. Fortunately, they will always have a home here in Independence Creek.

Many species of birds flock to the area. It's an ideal spot for birders or anyone who appreciates birds. Among the species to be seen are vermilion flycatchers, three species of kingfishers, indigo bunting, scissor-tailed flycatchers, prairie falcons, golden eagles, wood ducks, great blue herons, ladder-backed woodpeckers, zone tailed hawks and wood ducks. If you're lucky, you might catch sight of the endangered black-capped vireo.

Independence Creek is in a valley. Its lush plateau makes a dramatic contrast to the surrounding rugged canyon hills, covered with desert scrub and juniper woodlands. Live oaks, remnants of vegetation that once grew here thousands of years ago when the climate was wetter and cooler, grow down by the water. They intermix with a variety of other trees, including little walnuts, Texas persimmons and black willows.

The jeep passes a few other roads marked with faded,

unreadable signs. Since it is drawing close to departure time, discovering the mystery of where these signs lead will have to wait until another time.

Noon has passed, and it's time to head back home. The visit has been far too short, but the tranquil beauty of this place has been a wonderful escape from "real" life. To fortify ourselves for the long desert drive back to Fort Davis, we search for a Coke and hope to get one in either Sheffield or Dryden, but both towns are closed up tight. Once you leave the hidden oasis you're on your own for a good many miles.

This summer, I look forward to returning for one of the preserve's open weekends. It will be a chance to refresh the spirit and finally go swimming. The water looks lovely.

The preserve hosts scheduled Open Weekends for the public when camping on the premises is allowed.

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*For more information about Independence Creek and its programs:
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Some of the local citizenry aren't as social as Doug, but when they come out of the desert to town, they make the time to come to the porch to reconnect with humanity. True desert dwellers tend to connect to nature more than they do to people, but everyone needs the human presence once in a while. And this is a place where one can come in contact with a gentler, more accommodating brand of human nature than generally found elsewhere. As Dr. Doug says, "You'd have to be a real sociopath not to get along with people here. We have a few of 'em (sociopaths), but we're still nice to them, and they just don't cause much trouble."

On a recent visit to the porch I met a woman named Luma who lives 30 miles off the nearest paved road. She showed me pictures of the home that she built by hand in the desert by lapping layers of calf-wire over one another and then covering the infrastructure with stucco and rocks. Her house is set against a natural rock wall and blends so cohesively with its environment that it's barely noticeable as a human structure. This shy and sweet-voiced woman claims it's quite comfortable, even though she has to chase rattlesnakes out every now and then. I think it takes a bit of crazy bravery to live like that, but as Gregg says, "There's more intelligence and courage out here than any

place I've ever seen."

I would add humor, whimsy and tolerance to that list as well. Some tourists from Del Rio who've made this area their home away from home after numerous visits to the desert and the porch recently decided to go all-out Terlingua. While here, they gathered up a collection of spray paints and made an art car out of their van, complete with rainbow stripes and "Viva Terlingua!" sprayed on the hood. Turns out that Terry Anderson, a well-known photographer and part-time Terlinguan, owns that exact same make, model and color of vehicle. Dave, who sometimes house-sits for Terry, insisted that they remove Terry's vehicle from the carport and replace it with the gaudily painted alternative. And, of course, they immediately e-mailed photos to Terry. Still haven't heard what Terry's reaction was, but I will, no doubt, next time I visit the porch. And, as always, I'll hear all manner of diverse discussions on a wide variety of esoteric topics.

A recent sampling of overheard porch talk:

"No, 'Northeast Texas Women' by Willis Alan Ramsey is the best Texas song ever written. I mean 'cast iron curls?' You can't beat that."

Or –

"Yeah, I liked the new president at first myself. But then I realized that Obama don't dance and Obama don't rock and roll!"

Or –

"I know it don't make much sense, but roadrunner is the best eatin' for a desert bird if you cook 'em right."

Or –

"Wanna go drop some Roman candles down a mine shaft?"

Or the oft-heard –

"I feel better already. Thanks, Doc!"

Author, photographer and longtime Terlinguan Blair Pittman blames the lack of good old-fashioned outdoor socialization in American urban and suburban culture on central air conditioning. According to Blair, air conditioning keeps people in their houses. They don't get together outside anymore and practice the art of "visitin'" as they once did. The Terlingua Porch gives people a place to visit, to listen to music, to have a cold one and to engage with each other and nature at the same time. Viva that, indeed!

Once, when I sat on the porch with several local fellows exchanging end-of-the-day thoughts and readying for the evening of good Texas music next door at the Starlight Theatre, I blurted the question, "What makes this spot so special?" Simultaneously, and without hesitation, all three raised their arms and pointed east to the color-draped Chisos Mountains and said, with reverence, "That." In the moment, I couldn't help thinking that these rugged, emphatically individual Terlinguans could just as accurately have pointed toward themselves.



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BARRY SCOBEE MOUNTAIN

by *Bob Miles*

BARRY SCOBEE MOUNTAIN, 6300 Ft. Elevation, *Camp grounds and lookout post (1850's-1880's) for military, mail coaches, freighters, travelers, emigrants. Site of area's last Indian raid, 1881. Part of John G. Prude ranch. Named by Gov. John Connally, Dec. 21, 1964 to honor Barry Scobee whose efforts were largely responsible for the preservation of old Fort Davis. He was born, 1885, in Missouri. Served in U.S. Army in Philippines and later on merchant ship in World War II. Was editor, reporter, printer, publisher. Came to Fort Davis in 1917 and became an authority and writer on Trans-Pecos history. (1965)*

— State Historical Plaque, 1965

Barry Scobee first came to Fort Davis in 1917 to help author Carlisle Graham Raht research and write his book, *Romance of the Davis Mountains and Big Bend Country*. He stayed until he and his wife entered a Kerrville nursing home more than 50 years later. He left Fort Davis for a few years when he volunteered for military service and a few years living in Washington state, but was back by 1925.

He was born Albert Barry Scobee in 1885 on a Missouri farm. He became a printer's devil (assistant) for a country newspaper. After a three-year stint in the Ninth Infantry in the Philippines as a prison guard, he went to work for a daily newspaper in Pittsburgh, Kansas. He married Katherine Ford in 1911, and they moved to San Antonio in 1914. Employed by the *San Antonio Express-News*, he worked as a military reporter in the lower Rio Grande Valley covering the revolutionary activities in Mexico. In San Antonio, he met Raht, who told him of the beauty of the Davis Mountains area. Back in Fort Davis, Raht sent word to Scobee that the owners of the Limpia Hotel were looking for a manager. Although, as he later stated, "Neither Katherine nor I knew any more about running a hotel than keeping warm in an igloo," the Scobees became hotel managers and moved to Fort Davis. Scobee soon began helping Raht research and write his book (probably doing much of the writing himself).

The men travelled all over the area, interviewing old-timers and collecting their stories. Scobee later recalled that at one time, they were accused of being German spies. Some people in the area were concerned that German troops might move into the country from Mexico, and there were rumors that there were German agents working in the Big Bend.

Shortly after coming to Fort Davis, Scobee was named editor of the *Fort Davis Post* newspaper, but the next year he volunteered for military service



Photo courtesy Archives of the Big Bend, Bryan Wildenthal Memorial Library, Sul Ross State University, Alpine, Texas.

Barry Scobee examines an old adobe home near Fort Davis. The mountain named for him is visible through the window.

and then lived in Washington state until 1925. Returning to Fort Davis, Scobee became a freelance journalist, writing both fiction and non-fiction for various newspapers and magazines, while his wife served as deputy county clerk and secretary. He served as a justice of the peace from 1939 until 1974.

Over the years, Scobee became recognized as an authority on the history of the area, and there is no question that he did a great deal to promote and preserve the history of the Davis Mountains. However, as an old-time newspaper man, he did not always let the facts get in the way of a good story. (One example of this is his promotion and refining, the never-documented story of Indian Emily.) He wrote and published a number of books that have become collectors' items. These include *Old Fort Davis*, *Fort Davis Texas*, *The Story of Fort Davis*, *The Steer Branded Murder* and *Nick Mersfelder: A Remarkable Man*.

He did much to help publicize the attraction of the "mile high" town of Fort Davis, often acting as a one-man chamber of commerce and was active in attempts to preserve the old fort, which was finally acquired by the National Park Service in 1961.

In April of 1965, a mountain along Limpia Creek on the outskirts of Fort Davis was officially named Barry Scobee Mountain by the Texas Historical Commission. A special act by the State legislature was necessary for a mountain to be named for a living person. However, not everyone was pleased by the naming of the mountain for Scobee as it already had a name — La Granada — for Trinidad Granado, who had lived at the base of the mountain for many years.

In 1974, Barry and Katherine moved into a Kerrville nursing home, where she died in 1975 and he in 1977. They are buried in Fort Davis, the little "mile high" town he worked so hard to promote.

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stories) and a Midland businessman's plan to pump water from an underground aquifer on state-owned land within arid Presidio County ("Sterry got wind of it, and we shut them down," he said).

"In terms of a newspaper's value, it being the Fourth Estate," Halpern says. "It's watching the three branches of the government. We become the citizen's advocate."

Last fall, the paper received some national attention for its coverage of the local arrest of actor Randy Quaid and his wife, Evi, for not paying a bill at an upscale California ranch hotel. Halpern gleamed when he showed me a copy of *The Sentinel's* Oct. 1 front page, which was devoted to "exclusive" coverage, including an interview with Evi and a photo of the sheriff escorting Quaid to a bank ATM for bail money.

The economic downturn has made the business tougher in recent years, Halpern says. Advertising revenues declined last year. He has increased the single-copy price to \$1 from 75 cents. He decided not to fill a position vacated when a reporter left. He said they are considering charging online users for access to *The Sentinel's* Web site. (*The International* doesn't have one.)

A new revenue model is needed, Halpern says. He wonders whether newspapers are better suited to a nonprofit business model and whether they can charge readers to access content via handheld readers, such as Amazon.com's Kindle or the new Apple iPad.

"None of us work for free. We have to find a way, and the reader needs to understand that it takes resources to go to city council meetings and to cover what we cover," Halpern says. "It costs money to put out a quality product like we do."

Fort Davis

The *Jeff Davis Mountain Dispatch* is housed in a little cabin a block from the Jeff Davis County Courthouse. Bob Dillard is the editor and publisher, and he commutes between Fort Davis and Stanton, where

he owns another weekly.

As the longest-serving newspaper editor in the region, Dillard, 64, has a historic perspective. A native of the Fort Worth area, Dillard moved to Alpine after graduating with a journalism degree from Baylor.

He and a partner purchased the *Avalanche* and then later the Marfa paper. He eventually sold these properties to concentrate on the *Jeff Davis Mountain Dispatch*, which he founded with his wife Christi in the 1980s. Later, they purchased another weekly, the *Martin County Messenger* in Stanton. Each week, Dillard commutes some 200 miles each way between Fort Davis and Stanton to produce the papers.

Not only is he the long-time voice of Fort Davis, Dillard also managed simultaneously to serve as Jeff Davis county judge from 1990 to 1994.

In the past, big-city newspapers — El Paso, Fort Worth, Dallas, even San Angelo — had regular coverage and distribution in the Big Bend region. As business has deteriorated, however, these papers have pulled back.

"It's left us the only game in town," Dillard says. "Whether we are a viable game, I don't know."

Neither of Dillard's papers have Web sites, a fact of which he is well aware, though I didn't sense he is in a hurry to launch one. "We're all trying to figure out: How do we make the Web put some dollars in your pocket?"

His eight-page Fort Davis paper (circulation 1,175) is a traditional brew, with hyper-local news, lengthy letters to the editor, a church page and humorous columns. Dillard's occasional commentaries often skewer politicians in Austin, including "Governor Good Hair" (Rick Perry).

"When you are in a small rural area, there's a need (for local news). We try to supply as much information as possible — kids' names, faces, obits. When you have a baby it's news. When you get married it's news."

He expects to continue the long hours — squeezing in vacation breaks only over long weekends — as long as enough readers remain.

"I don't plan to retire when I'm 85. I hope to be working 20

years, 25 years from now. What could be more fun than going to a (high school) basketball game, a football game, stock shows? It's life. I live in a great part of the world. People say 'Where do you go on vacation?' Well, hell, I go to the front yard sometimes."

Van Horn

Larry Simpson runs the *Van Horn Advocate* from the back room of an office supply store on Van Horn's main drag, a few blocks from Interstate 10, a stretch of asphalt populated mostly with motels, gas stations and a lot of shuttered store fronts.

Simpson and his wife, Dawn, a Van Horn native, have owned the paper since 1975, a period that has proven to be nothing if not remarkably static. Today, the couple prints 1,000 copies of the six-page broadsheet each week — the same number they printed 35 years ago.

They have survived by branching into other businesses, the office supply and electronics store and a fixed-based operation at the local airport, where Simpson sells fuel to private pilots. (Simpson, a helicopter pilot during the Vietnam War, answers his cell phone "West Texas Aviation.")

The Simpsons are the only employees of the newspaper, except occasional part-timers. Dawn writes a regular column, while Larry covers local government meetings and sporting events, sell ads and designs pages. Larry says the paper reflects the couple's conservative philosophy, mostly reporting positive community news.

Larry's biggest scoop was the 2005 story about Amazon.com founder Jeff Bezos' plans to build a private rocket launch facility on a Culberson County ranch between Van Horn and the Guadalupe Mountains National Park. After months of speculation, after quietly purchasing thousands of acres from local ranchers, Bezos and the launch manager for his Blue Origin space venture dropped into Larry's office to explain the project. The project, which employs only a few locals, has so far launched only unmanned test flights but plans manned flights in the future.

Back to earth, Simpson, 67,

says he is quietly looking to sell the newspaper. While he is proud it sells out virtually every week – people lined up for it when he was running late on a recent Thursday morning – he fears it is unlikely someone will step up to buy the business.

“The biggest problem is it’s just too much work for anybody,” Simpson says. “I’m gone three, four nights every week, at meetings, and I work all during the day. A lot of people flat out don’t want to work that hard.”

For now, he plans to continue publishing, at least until his health starts to falter. Then he would close. Already, he has planned his last headline: a big “30,” journalism slang denoting end of story.

Hudspeth County

The *Hudspeth County Herald* is the smallest of the bunch, based in Dell City, a hamlet of about 400 people near the Texas-New Mexico border. The paper’s long-time owner is James Lynch, 86, a local rancher whose wife, Mary, served as the paper’s editor for a generation until she died in 2006.

Andrew Stuart, 35, took over as editor last year after he moved into a small recreational vehicle he placed on land he purchased about 20 miles west

of Dell City. Stuart’s living quarters are nothing if not spartan. When he stands up his head touches the ceiling inside his Toyota Dolphin camper, which is powered by solar and a 12-volt battery. Every month or so, he trucks water to a storage tank.

Raised in Austin, Stuart had worked as a print and radio journalist in Alpine and Marfa for several years. He graduated from Brown University with a degree in religious studies and, on a Fulbright Scholarship, conducted field research on Hindu monks in India.

He decided to move to remote Hudspeth County to devote his spare time to nature writing. (Among his favorite writers: Edward Abbey, Aldo Leopold and Henry David Thoreau.)

The newspaper job pays just \$500 a month before taxes, not including possible ad commissions, Stuart says. As the paper’s only paid employee, he writes stories, edits columns and letters, designs pages and tries to sell advertising. It is supposed to be part-time, about 25 hours a week.

Before Stuart’s arrival, the newspaper rarely, if ever, reported negative news about locals, but Stuart says that has begun to change. For example, in May

2009 he reported about two indictments handed up from a county grand jury: A former clerk was accused of misapplication of county funds and two local youths were accused of shooting and beating a couple of Mexican workers during a drunken spree.

“For the most part the responses have been: ‘We need to see that stuff; that’s what a newspaper is for,’” Stuart says. “They were appreciative that we printed it.”

Lynch, the owner and publisher, says he considers the newspaper “a community service. It’s one minor contribution we give the county. We ask for support. We solicit advertising, but there are times when it is quite hungry.”

Stuart has begun a second job with the 2010 Census, training teams of census takers in order to supplement his income. This has meant recently driving to El Paso for training during the day and putting the paper out at night.

A Web site seems out of the question. Friends have offered to help design the paper’s first Web site, but he has declined. “It’s more work for one person to do,” Stuart says. “I already feel like I’m maxed out.”

FYI:

WEEKLY NEWSPAPERS OF THE BIG BEND REGION

Newspaper	Circulation	Founded	Editor, Publisher
Alpine Avalanche	3,000	1891	Mike Perry Owner: Granite Publications (Taylor)
Big Bend Sentinel (Marfa)	2,604	1926	Robert and Rosario Halpern
Jeff Davis County Mountain Dispatch (Fort Davis)	1,175	1983*	Bob and Christi Dillard
Van Horn Advocate	900	1910	Larry and Dawn Simpson
Terrell County News Leader (Sanderson)	800	1997	Jim Street
The Presidio International	796	1986	Robert and Rosario Halpern
Hudspeth County Herald (Dell City)	750	1956	Andrew Stuart (editor), James Lynch (publisher and owner)

Sources: Newspapers and Texas Press Association

*According to the Texas Press Association; owner Bob Dillard said it was later, in the late 1980s, but didn’t immediately have the exact date.

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IN THE NEXT ISSUE ~

Next issue is July, and among our stories then is the inspiring one of the migration of the beautiful Monarch butterfly. But as with many of the migrations of fragile birds and insects, there are dangers. Below, writer Sandra Harper tells us of something we can do to help ensure the future of this species which is currently one of the World Wildlife Fund's 10 Most Threatened Species in 2010.

EMERGENCY IN THE MONARCH BUTTERFLY'S WINTER HOME!

by *Sandra Harper*

A cry for help from the Monarch butterfly community: On Feb. 5, after days of pounding rain in the mountains of Michoacán, where the butterflies cling to fir trees in the winter months, a torrent of water and soil came crashing down the hillsides, destroying homes and flooding the village of Anganguero in the heart of the sanctuary.

The flooding was exacerbated by the deforestation of the hillsides. The challenges facing the preservation of the Butterfly Biosphere Reserve and the sur-

vival of the people who live in and around the region have never been more desperate.

At the same time, the community of citizens and scientists, governments and conservation groups has never been more coordinated and determined to save the Monarch's migration and the people of the butterfly mountains.

Journey North, a global migration studies project with a particular interest in the Monarch, needs help to address the immediate crisis. Learn more at learner.org/jnorth/monarch

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Trans-Pecos Trivia

by Charles Angell

Parks of the Trans-Pecos Region

- 1) Fort Davis National Historic Site was home to the Buffalo Soldiers from 1867 to 1885, during the Indian Wars. What recording artist paid tribute to them in song?
 - a) Rosemary Clooney
 - b) Bob Marley
 - c) Charlie Pride
 - d) Mike Kasper
- 2) What well-known author wrote of his exploits in Big Bend National Park while accompanied by his fiancé?
 - a) Cormac McCarthy
 - b) Ken Whitley
 - c) Edward Abbey
 - d) Stephen King
- 3) The largest state park in Texas is Big Bend Ranch State Park. Approximately how many acres is the park comprised of?
 - a) 75,000
 - b) 150,000
 - c) 250,000
 - d) more than 300,000
- 4) Balmorhea State Park, with its clear flowing spring waters, was originally given what name by early settlers?
 - a) Murphyville Watering Hole
 - b) Mescalero Springs
 - c) Ojo Canoa
 - d) Agua Fria
- 5) The tallest mountain in Texas is located in Guadalupe National Park, called Guadalupe Peak. What is its elevation?
 - a) 7,921 ft.
 - b) 8,498 ft.
 - c) 8,749 ft.
 - d) 9,206 ft.

Answers: 1-B, 2-C, 3-D, 4-B, 5-C




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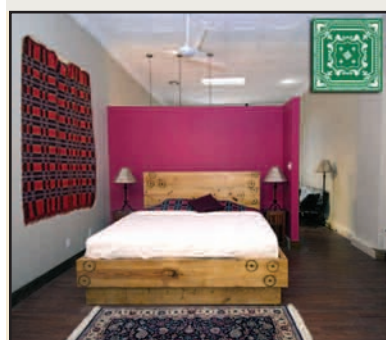


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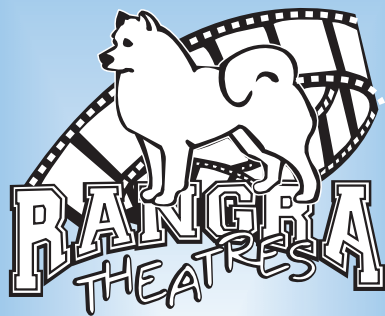
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