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# TIME OF THE MONARCH



By Sandra Harper

Photo by Barbara Wilder

In Texas, migrating Monarchs will find fall blooming native flowers such as frostwood in their search for life-sustaining nectar.

For most ordinary mortals, the butterfly that captures our imagination is the Monarch. True, the butterfly is rather large, with a 3 to 5 inch wingspan making it easy to spot. And its orange wings – thickly veined in black and edged in white polka dots – give off quite a show. But it is the story of the Monarch's nearly 3,000-mile migration that tugs at our hearts and bolsters our spirits with imaginings of how the tiniest amongst us can overcome an unthinkable challenge.

Butterflies and moths belong to the Lepidoptera order of insects, the scaly-winged ones. The butterfly might be a moth that left its night-bound life behind for a daylight existence to co-evolve with flowers during the Cretaceous Period. The Monarch, *Danaus plexippus*, is one of the brush-footed milkweed butterflies in the Nymphalidae family. Their small brushy forelegs are kept tucked up under their thorax. These lovelies are tropical butterflies. As glaciers retreated after the

Ice Age, they traveled further and further north following their host plant, the milkweed, as far as Canada.

The only plant the Monarch larvae feed on is the milkweed. The females lay their eggs on the underside of the plant's leaves. Its common name comes from the milky latex sap it oozes when a leaf is broken off. An ancient medicinal plant, milkweed takes its scientific name, *Asclepius*, from the Greek god of healing.

The cardiac glycosides in the milkweed, used by plant medicine makers to reduce the inflammation of mucous membranes and to treat heart ailments, are found stored in the bodies of the Monarch caterpillar and butterfly. These chemicals give the insects a noxious taste and protect them from most predators. The bright pumpkin color of the butterfly might be a warning to a hungry hunter saying, "You don't want to eat me. I'll make you sick."

When the summer milkweeds yellow and tufts of their silky seeds parachute

through the increasingly cool air, the last Monarch of the year to metamorphose splits open its chrysalid. Clinging to the transparent remnants of the chrysalis, the butterfly inflates its crumpled wet wings, pumping them full of hemolymph, then hangs upside down for several hours waiting for the wings to dry and harden before taking flight. Unlike the Monarchs of spring and summer, the fall brood will not mature sexually right away but will remain pre-pubescent during the grueling migration south and the months spent in the wintering grounds.

The eastern population of fall migrating Monarchs spends its winters in the fir-covered volcanic mountains of central Mexico. Sixty-foot tall forests of the oyamel fir, moist and cool from mountaintop clouds, shelter the butterfly clusters. As the coldest months of the year pass into warmer ones, millions of Monarchs fully wake from their torpid state more sexually developed. In his

book, *Chasing Monarchs*, the naturalist Robert Michael Pyle writes intriguingly, "the 'courtship' following the winter dormancy can only be considered as ravishment."

"The male simply attacks the female on the wing, drives her to the ground, and wrestles with her. He will maneuver the female onto her back, wings spread, and cover her – a face-to-face embrace I've never seen among other butterflies. In a couple of minutes he will achieve copulation by enfolding the tip of her abdomen within the handlike claspers of his own rear end and inserting his aedeagus. Then he will fly straight up, carrying her in a postnuptial flight, while she remains closed and inert, into a tree. There they will remain in coitus for an hour, two or all night long, while he passes his seed packet (the spermatophore) to her bursa copulatrix."

The sexually mature hibernates celebrate the spring equinox for three to five weeks before the last of them departs for their northern summer breeding grounds by the first week in April.

The female nectars along the way from a variety of flowers but is genetically driven to reach the first emerging milkweed of spring as quickly as possible. The male follows, claspers ready for grabbing and more mating. Besides the transfer of sperm he delivers nutrients to her that give her the strength to support her inexhaustible search for milkweed hosts and to reproduce. The migrants are already eight or nine months old, having hatched, molted, pupated and emerged from the chrysalid the fall before near the Great Lakes or even Quebec.

During the early weeks of the northern migration, the female might find her first host plant in northern Mexico, but she is likely to have to fly to southern Texas or coastal Louisiana before she can begin to lay her eggs. The discovery of an unfolding milkweed kindles her investigation. Using all six legs she drums the leaves to assess the suitability of the plant. Too much moisture on a leaf would rot the egg. She tests the toxicity of the plant. If she has a choice, she flies from one plant to the next, before finding a milkweed she will accept.

Once satisfied, she lays her first dome-shaped egg singly on the hairy underside of the leaf. Seconds later she is in the air, exploring the terrain for another perfect milkweed leaf on which to lay her next pale yellow egg. She

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## Editor's Notes



My mom died at the beginning of May. As she was almost 97 we can only rejoice in a long life, well-lived, but it does not change the missing of her.

I think of Trans-Pecos Texas in much the same way – a long life, well-lived, and I hope, in some small

way, that *Cenizo* is part of the joy we all have in knowing and/or living in this place – and that the stories we tell here will inspire a future informed by a proud past.

Sandra Harper shares with us the fantastic tale of the migration of the Monarch butterfly. The Trans-Pecos is very much a part of this migration. Prepare to be inspired.

Summer theater! From mid-June to mid-July, the Kokernot Theater in Alpine shines with two shows – *Damn Yankees* and the second season of Pueblo Unido – Chicano theater being reborn here in the Big Bend of Texas. Cristina Sosa Noriega tells us all about it.

In early fall, the September motorcycle event Heaven to Hell provides an opportunity for the first 40 folks who sign up to explore the whole Big Bend on a motorcycle in a single day. Ride with Allison Ryan Scott as she relives her 2009 H2H ride.

Lonn Taylor is back with the story of Xavier Gonzalez and the art colony that was born in the Sul Ross art department and made its mark on the whole art world from the 20s to the 50s.

Photo journalist Walt Frerck shows us another Big Bend summer phenomenon – fantastic thunder storms – and tells would-be storm photographers “how to.”

“Green gold” it was indeed – candelilla wax that found itself in everything from rainproof military tents to lipstick. Danielle Gallo explains how it was done.

Jim Glendinning introduces three of our

neighbors who share skills in banking, ranching, teaching and tourism in *Voices of the Big Bend*.

Is a bi-national park across the Rio Grande possible? They're still talking about it after all these years, and Dwight Deal reviews *Conservation of Shared Environments*, a recent book that explores both sides of the Rio Grande and the challenges that face those of us who live along La Frontera.

E.E. Townsend was thought of as the father of Big Bend National Park, and he lived a long and multi-faceted life. Xavier Gonzalez captured Townsend in our cover portrait. Though unsigned, an article in *The Skyline*, October 13, 1937, says, “Mr. Gonzalez has a portrait of Mr. E.E. Townsend on exhibition in Marfa during the fair. It is a character study of the typical West Texas character. It typifies all the romance, courage, bravery and spirit of adventure to be found in a person who has spent all of his life in exciting adventure.” Thanks, Lonn Taylor, for the quote. You'll enjoy Bob Miles' story on this colorful man.

If you are a fan of pictographs – rock painting – you will have seen some of the figures in our occasional art this issue. Texas Parks and Wildlife archeologist Tim Roberts shares some of the images to be found in caves and on rocks in Brewster and Presidio counties.

Four terrific poems by William Darby, Ken Whitley, Janis Shelton and Larry Thomas will inspire; Charlie Angell's Trivia will challenge and Marie French's ponderings on the prickly pear in our new Folkways column will send you to the kitchen for delicious ways to prepare this important desert plant.

Thanks, as always, to our advertisers who are the sole financial support of *Cenizo*. We are here because they are here. Please give them your business, and if you shop somewhere that doesn't advertise with us, ask them to do so. They'll be supporting not only the story of Trans-Pecos Texas but the writers and artists who tell the story.

Thank you, Mom, for my life and for showing me through yours how to live in and love each day.

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# Cenizo Journal

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**Cover:** Attributed to Xavier Gonzalez, E.E. Townsend, 30 inches by 22 inches. Watercolor on board. Probably 1937. Courtesy Museum of the Big Bend, Sul Ross State University.

**Occasional art:** Tim Roberts, 2 by 3 inches, pen and ink on paper. Pictographs (paintings on rock) from the Big Bend region.

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Photo by Denise Solaris Ortega

El Paso artist Denise Solaris Ortega created the image that became the Pueblo Unido T-shirt design. The original drawing, “Cantinflas,” is charcoal on paper, 14 by 17 inches.

When I first moved to Alpine in the summer of 2008, I was stuck by the strong presence of community theater in this small West Texas town. Glossy posters advertised new productions of the Theatre of the Big Bend, a series of plays that takes place every summer in a breezy outdoor theater perched atop the eastern end of Kokernot Park. It is the quintessential small-town venue, but the mountainous backdrop, orange sunsets and blinding night stars add a majesty that few places can match.

And there’s more under these pristine skies – the resurgence of Chicano theater.

### El Sueño

Dona Roman, associate professor of theater at Sul Ross and director of the University’s theater program, has always

had an interest in Chicano theater. But several years ago she had a self-described “heart-rending experience” while running a short-form film festival. Her moment of clarity occurred while reviewing a couple of entries that dealt with border issues.

“I realized that a lot of Latino culture and stories were at risk of being lost because they were not always written down. I felt it was our duty to capture the culture and tales that could be lost, and a great way to do this was through bilingual theater,” Roman explained.

Shortly thereafter, the ball started rolling. Roman wrote a proposal and won a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, bringing Dr. Jorge Huerta, an expert in contemporary Chicano and U.S. Latino theater, and Rupert Reyes and Pueblo Unido to Alpine. The homegrown playwright Liz

# Keep the Drama on the Stage:

Discovering Chicano Theater in the Big Bend

by *Cristina Sosa Noriega*

Castillo returned to Sul Ross. And, as they say, the rest is history.

### Pueblo Unido Nace

In July of 2009, Sul Ross hosted the first Pueblo Unido festival, which boasted prestigious panelists such as Huerta, who is chancellor’s associate professor of theater at the University of California Santa Barbara, and Rupert Reyes, co-founder of Austin’s renowned Teatro Vivo. The event coincided with the Theatre of the Big Bend’s hosting of *Petra’s Sueño* (*Petra’s Dream*), part of a trilogy of plays written by Reyes. It was also the third year that Roman had chosen a Reyes play for the summer series.

Pueblo Unido touched on a myriad of topics, including the ins and outs of playwrighting, funding, scriptwriting and directing. Adding a unique cultural

stamp to the workshops were topics such as language barriers, connecting to the Hispanic and local community, bringing bilingual theater into the classroom and engaging new students. Four days of intense cultural immersion in the Big Bend.

Upon being welcomed to town, the first thing that caught Reyes’ eye was the bold T-shirt bestowed upon him by Roman: “It was black with a skull in grey, almost invisible, with the words ‘Chicano Theater.’ The skull struck me as apropos: Chicano theater is a phrase whose meaning had been nearly dead to me for a while.”

But not in Alpine, of all places. It is alive and well here, having been given a fresh start.

From the moment he arrived in Alpine, Reyes was invigorated by the energy exploding from the tiny depart-



ment. He described this experience at the welcome potluck: "The energy in the room was amazing. Here were seven amazing actors. Excited to be meeting us, excited to be getting ready for the last weeks of rehearsals, excited to be bringing what they called 'Chicano theater' to their community. A theater that they related to, a theater that spoke to their parents."

"It seems that the groundwork that has been laid for the past two years is now paying off. This group of actors is solid. They are talented and dedicated to their craft. So something old can be new again. Chicano theater has been reborn here. I had thought that my style of theater would die with me, but suddenly it looks like it just might be given a fresh start."

At the Pueblo Unido farewell banquet Huerta provided a crash course on Chicano theater from 1965 to the present, starting with Luis Valdez' Teatro Campesino, where the act was born. This uniquely Mexican-American form of drama is defined by its brief sketches relating to working-class Chicanos – sketches also come with a social or political message. A key element: Actos must entertain *and* educate.

### El Teatro Vive Aquí

Alpine is a diverse place, with Latinos comprising roughly half of the town's population. Having a theater program that reflects this shows the community "you matter, and your story matters." Judging by the enthusiastic community response, there is a huge local hunger for this type of real drama.

The good news is that everyone's invited to the party. You don't have to be Latino or even speak Spanish to appreciate what's happening here. Dona Roman and Matthew Hardison, a Sul Ross playwright and actor, are living proof of that. Another case in point? For every one-liner delivered in the *Petra* plays or in Castillo's works, the message is clarified for non-Spanish speakers through

physical gestures or responses in English. Everyone is welcome.

On his blog last year Reyes asked, "How about the universities and colleges? Does anyone know of a college theater program that specializes in creating Latino writers, actors, designers and producers? One could argue that creating theater artists first is more important. But why not give them a focus? Sul Ross is actually moving in that direction. They are producing two bilingual shows annually right now. They are making that kind of commitment."

Roman credits Castillo with having an instrumental role in developing the university's Chicano theater program.

### "Keep The Drama on the Stage"

It's a saying that Castillo, whose self-described niche is autobiographical plays, is fond of repeating. Like other Chicano/Chicana playwrights, Castillo weaves her personal background and experiences into her work. Every play she has written or adapted includes the cultural insights that those in the know can appreciate with a wink and that new audiences will delight in.

Liz Castillo was born and raised in the tiny West Texas town of Balmorhea, an hour northwest of Alpine. She grew up listening to the stories of her grandma and aunt, treasuring the depth of experience they brought forth, and started writing bilingual plays for the benefit of her grandma, who religiously "came to all my plays" despite not really speaking English.

After graduating from Sul Ross and obtaining her master's from Texas Tech, Castillo returned home to the Big Bend. Now, as the director of student support services at Sul Ross, her position allows her to focus on helping low-income and first-generation college students, while also teaching a theater class and continuing to write the semi-autobiographical works that define her.

Castillo's newest work, *¡Ay, No!*, debuted in April 2010 to a

packed house – and it stayed that way performance after performance. Chock full of culturally-relevant gems, I would expect no less. Castillo tells it like it is, using real insights and exploring "taboo" topics like racism in the Latino community, sexuality and a host of other topics that you aren't supposed to talk about. But the fact that she does is a relief, and audiences just can't seem to get enough.

It goes without saying that you don't have to be Latino to relate to meddling extended family members or feeling like an outcast. These uniquely human experiences and emotions, brought out into the open with a brilliant comedic touch, resonate with us all.

### El Futuro

In only four years, the Sul Ross theater department has produced seven bilingual productions and shows no sign of stopping. This summer, the drama continues with *Alicia in Wonder Tierra*, debuting July 15 at the Kokernot amphitheater where it is being featured as part of a Latin Children's Festival. Roman and the rest of the department are working with other arts organizations in the area to provide a full schedule of family-friendly entertainment.

Future plans for the department include a road tour for *Ay, No!* in the fall and a touring children's show in the spring. Roman hopes that Pueblo Unido will continue in the future. Next time she would like to see a bigger selection of plays through a broader call for submission process and to bring in guest actors as well; this, of course, will require additional funding.

For the lucky ones who call this beautiful region home, we can share in the experience by supporting the Theatre of the Big Bend and discovering its bilingual offerings. Roman, Castillo and the collection of passionate students and faculty of the Sul Ross theater department are a delightful surprise in a community that continues to amaze with its talent.

I'll be keeping my eyes peeled from now on.

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Photo courtesy of Bruce Edwards, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Xavier Gonzalez's 1933 mural for the San Antonio Municipal Auditorium, removed in 1935. The offending clenched fist and bleeding palm are at the bottom of the picture.

# XAVIER GONZALEZ

## MURALIST IN THE BIG BEND

by Lonn Taylor

Xavier Gonzalez liked to tell his friends that he slid into art. The Spanish-born artist, who was trained as a mechanical engineer in Mexico before immigrating to the United States in 1922, would explain his comment this way:

Shortly after his arrival in this country he worked as director of publicity for a Chicago manufacturing company. In order to amuse himself he made sketches and caricatures of his co-workers, then, fearful that they would see his

drawings and take offense, would toss them into a chute that led to the shipping room in the basement of the building. One day a friend dared him to slide down the chute. When he did and bounced out onto a table, he looked around and saw his sketches pinned to the walls. Instead of throwing them away, the shipping clerks had saved them. Thrilled by the discovery, at that moment, he claimed, he decided to pursue art seriously and soon enrolled in night school at the Chicago Art Institute.

Gonzalez went on to become one of the most versatile American artists of the 20th century. By the time he died in New York in 1993, his work was in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and half a dozen other American museums, and his murals and sculpted friezes were in buildings across the nation.

Before fame came to him, Xavier Gonzalez spent his summers from 1932 to 1940 in Alpine as a teacher and some-

time director of the Sul Ross Summer Art Colony. He left memories and tangible mementos behind him. Today his 4-foot-by-12-foot oil painting of the Chisos Mountains, done in the summer of 1934 as a mural for the Sul Ross library, hangs in the Museum of the Big Bend, and his portrait of E.E. Townsend, sheriff, state legislator and proponent of Big Bend National Park, is also in the museum's collection.

Gonzalez' path to Alpine was a winding one. In Spain, his father worked as





Photo courtesy Museum of the Big Bend, Sul Ross State University

Xavier Gonzalez' 1937 mural for the federal courthouse in Huntsville, Alabama, depicting the benefits of the Muscle Shoals dam and hydroelectric plant.

an agricultural engineer who took consulting jobs in South America, and Gonzalez dropped out of school at the age of 13 to accompany him. After immigrating to the United States and sliding, as he said, into a career as an artist, he returned to Mexico and taught art in public schools there with Rufino Tamayo, who introduced him to the Mexican muralist movement popularized by Diego Rivera.

In the late 1920s he joined his uncle, the artist Jose Arpa, at an art school Arpa founded in San Antonio. He also taught at the Witte Museum's art school in San Antonio, and that may be when he first discovered the Big Bend. In 1931 he joined the art faculty at Sophie Newcomb College in New Orleans, and he remained on the faculty there until World War II.

But throughout the 1930s Gonzalez spent most of his summers in Alpine. He loved painting the Big Bend's spectacular scenery. He told the Sul Ross newspaper, *The Skyline*, that "It is impossible to be surrounded by the most spectacular landscape in the world without being touched by the desire to put it on canvas." The Art Colony classes met at Kokernot Lodge, but Gonzalez took his

students on field trips to Shafter and the Chisos Basin and even into the Davis Mountains.

On a trip to Paris in 1936, Gonzalez met Pablo Picasso and had several conversations with him. The notes that he made on those conversations are in the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art, and they record that Gonzalez talked to Picasso with great enthusiasm about Texas and the Big Bend. Picasso's response was, "It must be an interesting place – so big and so few artists – no competition."

Photographs taken of Gonzalez during his Alpine summers show a tall, handsome young man with a finely sculpted face, heavy black eyebrows and a mop of unruly black hair. The cover of the brochure for the 1937 Art Colony pictures him outdoors at an easel, surrounded by admiring young women.

Gonzalez spent a month after the 1934 Art Colony traveling in Mexico and studying the contemporary murals in Mexico City. That fall he took flying lessons in New Orleans and obtained a pilot's license. He told a newspaper reporter that flying improved his art. "From the ground one gets only a worm's-eye view," he said, "but in the air you get a

different angle." It was quite easy, he added, to paint while flying in an enclosed cockpit.

In the summer of 1935 Gonzalez married one of his Sophie Newcomb students, a New Orleans girl named Ethel Edwards, in a ceremony in Alpine. She was 21, and Gonzalez was 36. The bride's brother, Bruce Edwards, recalls that his parents were delighted with the match because his sister had a beau in New Orleans who they considered to be something of a bad actor, and that in fact the wedding was held in Alpine for fear that he might disrupt it if it were held in New Orleans. Edwards also remembers that Gonzalez was unfamiliar with Protestant usage and kept addressing the Methodist minister as "Uncle." The marriage lasted until Gonzalez' death in 1993 at the age of 94. Gonzalez' papers at the Smithsonian include hundreds of illustrated love notes that he wrote to his wife over the years.

In the late 1930s, while teaching at Sophie Newcomb and Sul Ross, Gonzalez emerged as one of America's prominent young muralists. One of his first mural projects was painted in 1933 for the San Antonio Municipal Auditorium. It represented the wastefulness of war and was done in the style of Diego Rivera, featuring refineries, ships, loading cranes, artillery pieces, fighter planes and a row of military ambulances. It created such a furor in San Antonio that in the summer of 1935 Mayor Charles Quinn, bowing to pressure from the local American Legion, ordered that the mural, which was painted on canvas, be taken down and returned to the federal government's Civil Works Administration, under whose auspices it had been created. Quinn pointed out that that it included a clenched fist, "the salute of a communistic organization," and an open bleeding palm, "believed to be the insignia of some kind of socialistic group." Gonzalez mildly replied from Alpine that the mural was about war, and

that the fist was intended to express anger at the taking of lives and the bleeding palm the suffering and sacrifice incident to war. He seems to have shrugged his shoulders and gone on with the business of painting.

Gonzalez' other murals were more mature and less controversial. In 1934, in addition to his Chisos Mountains mural, he executed a set of six for the new Art Deco Shushan Airport in New Orleans, showing airplanes over various sites around the world: the Eiffel Tower, the harbor of Rio de Janeiro, the Mayan pyramids. They were in a less realistic style than the Chisos painting and summoned up the accessibility to exotic places made possible by the airplane.

In 1937 he was commissioned by the Federal Arts Project to do a mural for the federal courthouse in Huntsville, Alabama, depicting the benefits of the Tennessee Valley Authority's Muscle Shoals Project; this was the largest and most expensive Federal Arts Project mural done in Alabama.

In 1940 he executed four murals for the Kilgore, Texas post office for the Treasury Department's Section of Fine Arts program, which employed artists to decorate post offices all over the United States. The four panels, contrasting pioneer life with contemporary life in East Texas, were widely praised, and local people were especially gratified by a panel depicting a drilling crew on the floor of an oil rig.

That same year Gonzalez' wife, Ethel Edwards, painted a mural for the Lampasas, Texas, post office, showing cattle, horses and hogs behind a ranch house.

The next year Gonzalez received a Treasury Depart-

ment commission to do a mural for the Mission, Texas, post office, even though the postmaster had written to the assistant postmaster general saying that "if we have any choice, we prefer having a new adding machine." Gonzalez' mural, showing a Texas Ranger standing on a bluff above the Rio Grande adjusting his saddle, was locally acclaimed, and Edward Rowan, chief of the Section of Fine Arts, wrote to him that "the reaction of the general public to your work is most gratifying and, of course, those are the people for whom the work was intended, not the postmaster alone."

Gonzalez went on to paint a total of 17 important murals in major cities across the United States. He left Alpine for the last time in 1940 and spent World War II designing posters for the war effort.

In 1946 he and his wife moved to New York, where he blossomed into something approaching a Renaissance man, a teacher, painter, sculptor, watercolorist, collage artist and jewelry designer. Even so, he mastered his first medium, oil murals, in the mountains of the Big Bend, and the earliest surviving evidence of his talent as a muralist remains on display exactly where it should be, at the Museum of the Big Bend.



*The Museum of the Big Bend will mount a retrospective on the art department and art colony instructors and students, 1921-1950, in the fall of 2011. Please contact Mary Bones at [maryb@subross.edu](mailto:maryb@subross.edu) or 432.837.8734 for further information.*



Photo by Doug Varga

The teepee rest stop along FM 170 (The River Road) offers a break and a spectacular view.

# Riding from Heaven to Hell

by Allison Ryan Scott

Riding Heaven to Hell on an iron horse is a trek every motorcyclist should experience. This 300-plus-mile motorcycle rally, sponsored by the Alpine Chamber of Commerce, offers wide-open spaces, moderate twists and turns, river valley and mountain ranges.

Motorcycle enthusiast and instructor Mike Latta of Alpine organized the first Heaven to Hell Ride in 2005. He said the name comes from the heavenly elevation of the Davis Mountains and the hotter than hell river valley in Presidio. I interpret the name this way: The ride is heavenly in the beginning, but feels like hell 340 miles later. The 2009 rally

was the first time I participated, but the experience makes me want to saddle up and do it all over again this fall.

I love to ride my 650 Yamaha. It's a perfect fit for me – a 52-year-old woman and novice rider. I've been riding for about three years, but the Heaven to Hell ride was the longest one-day trip I had ever taken. Last spring, I organized an all-women's motorcycle run. One woman showed up, so we had a group of two. That was fine. We rode from Alpine to Presidio the first day, spent the night in Terlingua and then rode to Big Bend National Park and returned through Marathon the following day. So, when it came time to ride

the Heaven to Hell, I was familiar with the route and wanted the challenge of riding it in one day.

The September morning was cool when I left home to meet the Marfa group at the "big" Town and Country – the meeting place for every group ride I've ever taken. A small group of people was there – all experienced riders, including one young woman and the rest men. I was definitely the grandmother of the group. As we took off, the sun was just beginning to rise. In early fall, the morning air is crisp and cool, and I was glad I had worn my leather jacket, gloves and chaps. Riding with a group of friends creates a feeling of

camaraderie. I was looking forward to stops along the way when everyone would talk about what they had experienced.

The first stop was at the Alpine Chamber of Commerce. We all registered, picked up a bag of goodies, downed some coffee and posed for a group photo. And that was, as it turned out, my last group activity. Some stayed in Alpine to eat breakfast, while two men and I headed down south on 118. Just a couple of miles out, I had to pull over to adjust my helmet. That was the last I saw my companions. I couldn't decide if this was a compliment or insult. Either they thought I was a good enough rider to

take care of myself, or I was so old I wasn't worth going back for. I wasn't worried. On a ride like this, other riders would be along to help if needed.

After crossing over Big Hill a few miles south of Alpine, I relaxed into the ride, watching the road, leaning into the curves and smelling the desert waking up to the morning. The solitude on a motorcycle ride is not lonely. It is comfortable and peaceful. For miles, there wasn't another bike or automobile – only the highway stretching out like a river.

I could feel the temperature rising as I entered the flat after Elephant Mountain and was thankful that I was moving. Dressing in full leather is great



protection, but it can feel like a sauna when standing still. I was almost at Study Butte and needed to stop at the store for gasoline and more water. Now, as a novice rider I still get nervous when riding around experienced riders. So as I approached the store and saw at least 25 motorcycles, my train of thought was something like – “dear God, don’t let me drop my bike, it’s so hot I can’t wait to strip off this leather, please don’t let me drop my bike . . .” I didn’t drop my bike, but I did drop my helmet, and the face shield popped off. Thank goodness Jerry Agan was there to help me put it back together. Agan had been the previous owner of my bike, so it’s always good to visit with him about “our” bike.

The next stop was lunch in Terlingua, where I met up with the two I started the ride with in Alpine. Of course, they had to tease me about driving too slow, and I harassed them about driving too fast. Lunch was quick, and, while others rested in the shade, I was anxious to get back on the highway. I love to ride and don’t take the time to do it as much as I want to. Today, I was going to spend more time riding than talking.

One of the best parts of the ride was just ahead – past Lajitas where FM 170 snakes along the Rio Grande. The River Road is considered one of the best motorcycle highways in the state. The views are beautiful, the traffic is minimal, and we get to ride over Big Hill. Now, I mentioned a Big Hill south of Alpine on 118, but that one is ordinary compared to this mountain. After the teepees rest area, I down-shifted and rode up the mountain. I laughed when I saw the highway sign with the simple word “HILL” This was no hill, and I

was having a blast riding up and over. Many bikers had stopped at the top to take in the view. Not me. I pushed on to Redford and Presidio.

For the next 40 miles the road is a series of curves, dips, hills and dry water crossings. In places, the highway is narrow with no shoulder and the river cane and willows crowd in, creating a quiet solitude with glimpses of the river. Just before Redford I spotted someone selling water and food. I didn’t stop. I wanted to keep going to feel the wind and smell the desert. Presidio was just 15 miles up the road.

I slowed down as I approached Presidio and looked for a place to fill the bike with gasoline and me with water. With most communities in the south counties more than 60 miles apart, it’s always a good idea to fuel up at every opportunity. I pulled into the station and began stripping off everything I could and still stay decent. It was hot. Hot as hell. I walked into the cool store to grab some water and use the restroom. Stripping off leather chaps to go to the restroom is a challenging feat, but I managed. Just as I was putting the gear back on, a group from Marfa arrived, but it was too hot to visit. I wanted to head north to the high country.

The ride between Presidio and Shafter is fun. The highway is wide with some passing lanes and the traffic is sparse on a Saturday afternoon. I passed Shafter, the old silver mines and Cibolo Creek. Just a few more miles north is the Bill Shirley Ranch entrance and one of the most beautiful vistas in Presidio County. As I topped the hill, I could see Cathedral Mountain to the west and Marfa was just a speck in this wide-open space.

Marfa came into view. I

honked my horn as I passed my house and then headed to the gas station. The next stop before leaving town was the Marfa volunteer fire station where the Red Knights Motorcycle Club was providing water and snacks. I rode with the Knights for a couple of years, so it was like visiting family when I stopped. After some water and conversation about local politics, I got back on my bike and headed to Hwy. 166 just south of Fort Davis.

This highway forms a loop around Blue Mountain and Mt. Livermore and intersects with Hwy. 118 and McDonald Observatory. I’d ridden the lower part of the loop that leads to Kent, but this was the first time to ride Hwy. 118 which crosses over Mt. Locke and in front of the Observatory entrance. What a great ride. There are lots of curves and beautiful mountain scenery. I took my time. I wasn’t in a hurry.

Fort Davis was the next stop. The riders were invited to stop for ice cream and water. When I pulled in on the gravel parking lot, I had those familiar fears of making a mistake in front of other riders. I pushed my fears away. I had ridden almost 300 miles and, so far, no disasters.

From this point, the riders would head to Alpine for dinner, music and door prizes. Not me. I headed to Marfa. I had a wedding to perform. (That’s another story.) As I headed south on Hwy. 17, my backside was sore, and I shifted around to get comfortable.

Looking out at the landscape I thought that perhaps I was looking at country that today is not unlike what settlers on horseback must have seen as they traveled this way.

The constant chatter in my head had stopped, and I was alone with my thoughts. I had, indeed, ridden heaven to hell and back to heaven.



*The route for the H2H ride is different every year to keep it interesting for returning participants. This year Big Bend National Park will be part of the ride. In 2010 the Heaven to Hell is September 26th. Registration information at: [www.heaventohellride.com](http://www.heaventohellride.com)*

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# Photo Essay

*by Walt Frerck*

With summer here, thunderstorms will be in the Big Bend along with lightning, hail, rain, high winds and sometimes tornadoes. Lightning is fun to watch but deadly. Even so, people like me will still get out to take pictures. Staying in a vehicle while taking photos is good for

several reasons; first, it keeps both you and your camera from getting wet, and, more importantly, vehicles offer protection from lightning.

I use a Nikon, but there are a variety of digital cameras available in all price ranges and most of them now even take video. I also carry an Olympus digital

splash camera in a case on my belt. It has a three-to-one wide-angle zoom lens and also takes video.

Video offers another way to go and lets the lightning flash while your camera is running. It is important to have the camera on a tripod or braced on something to stop shaking. It also helps if you

have a video camera with a locking focus to stop it from constantly trying to focus.

TV stations and newspapers are always looking for good pictures and video of weather.

I started taking photos before the digital age, but now there is so much more to work with. I hope you'll get out and have fun.



Taken just east of Alpine looking east from Country Club Estates Drive, I had set my Nikon D-90 camera on a tripod and made a four minute long exposure using a Nikon 18-200 zoom lens at set at f:11. This exposure, at about 9:15 p.m., let lightning happen during the time the shutter was open, and the f:11 lens setting was about right for the bright flash of lightning, which only lasted a most two seconds. I was lucky.





This was taken north of Alpine just past the airport on Hwy.118 north during a thunderstorm which produced a cloud that looked like a tornado trying to get started. Taken in June at about 5:30 p.m. with a Nikon D70 digital camera with an 18-200 zoom lens at f:5.6 at 1/60 of a second, iso 400.



Taken in Sunny Glen during a summer storm in August at about 8:30 p.m. with a Nikon D70 digital camera with a 18-200 Zoom lens at f:4 at 1/60 of a second, iso 400.

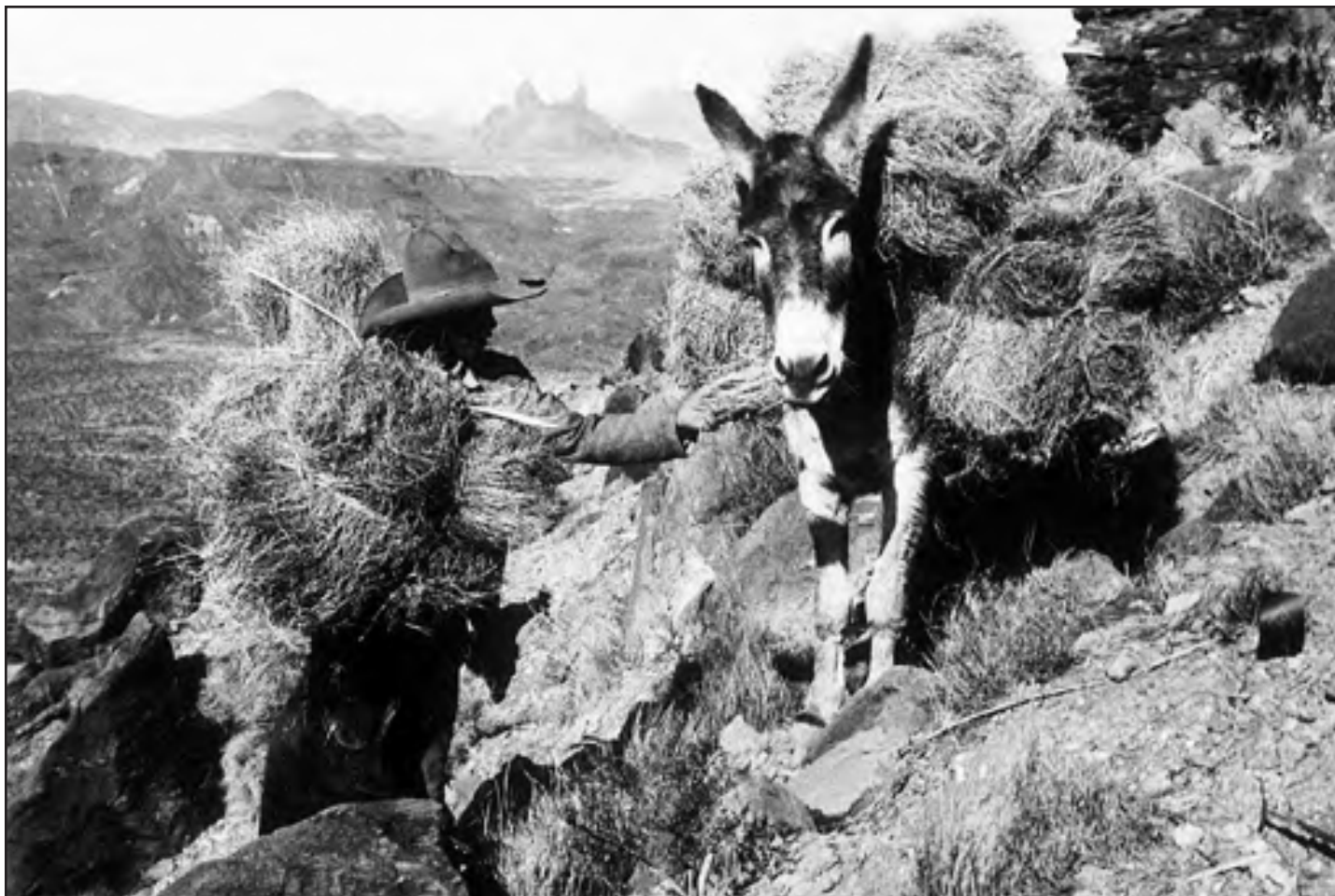


Photo courtesy of the National Park Service

After a Mexican export tax was passed in 1937, smuggling candelilla to the United States became a lucrative trade. Here a smuggler harvests the plant with Mule Ears Peak in the background.

# CANDELILLA ~ GREEN GOLD

*By Danielle Gallo*

The major industry of the Big Bend has always been ranching, with forays into mining, guayule rubber, oil and tourism. This breathtaking and remote sector of the Chihuahuan Desert was left out of the massive resource rushes of the 19th century which occurred elsewhere in the United States, from timber and gold to cropland and more easily exploited fossil fuels.

There is, however, a resource in the northern Chihuahuan Desert which enjoyed a rush of sorts in the first half of the 20th century: candelilla wax.

Candelilla is a plant native to the Chihuahuan Desert which grows in clumps on well-drained slopes and rises. Seemingly leafless, it does, in fact, produce small leaves and inconspicuous pink and white flowers which drop off during the first dry spell of the year. A hardy perennial, it can grow to 3 feet in

height and will spread in ever-widening clumps up to 6 feet in diameter if left undisturbed.

Candelilla produces a waxy coating on its straight green stalks to protect itself from moisture loss during the desert summers. This wax is second only to carnauba wax in quality for high-grade floor and furniture polish, cosmetics and – most importantly for the wax industries of the Big Bend – an excellent waterproofing agent.

The wax rush was fueled largely by the First World War, when its exceptional waterproofing abilities were sought for the tents and ammunition of soldiers; even before the war, however, there was a great deal of interest in the wax for commercial purposes.

When the 30th Texas Legislature issued the first permits for the gathering of candelilla plants in Brewster and

Terrell counties in 1907, there was already enough interest in the commercial possibilities of the product to make the leases valuable commodities. When a five-year lease for harvesting was issued in 1911 to G.B. Fenley and G.E. Brashear of Uvalde by the General Land Office, which regulated the harvesting of candelilla, it cost the entrepreneurs \$1,000. The pair immediately sold their lease to E.D. Lowe of Brewster County for \$7,000 in cash and \$13,000 in stock options in the American Wax Company.

The process for economically extracting the wax was developed by Oscar Pacius, a chemist in Monterrey, Mexico. Pacius worked for the Continental Wax Company of Arkansas, which had wax factories in Northern Mexico as early as 1910.

Pacius' method involves boiling the

plants in a vat set into the ground. The plants are compressed into the vats by stomping. Sulphuric acid is added to the water, and the stompers must take care not to burn their feet in the mixture: many wax campsites, both modern and historic, are littered with the spent shoes of stompers. As the boiling process continues, the wax floats to the top of the vat and is skimmed off and left to harden, after which it can be further refined. The boiled candelilla plants are spread out to dry and are later used to fuel the vat fires.

Large factories for wax production were appearing all over Northern Mexico in the second decade of the 20th century, where candelilla had been exploited for generations for use in candles, figurines and waterproofing. One of the first production factories belonged to Ralph Ogden, a Texan who



established his business in Mexico to be close to areas heavy in candelilla growth. In these early years of candelilla exploitation, the majority of large factories were located in Mexico but owned by Americans. The largest of these, in the Monterrey Consular District, had an output of some 650 pounds of wax per day, representing around 30,000 pounds of candelilla plants.

One of the earliest large wax factories to be established on the U.S. side of the border was the factory at Glenn Springs, begun in 1914 by W.K. Ellis and C.D. Wood. The presence of ample water made for an ideal factory location, and soon there were some 50 Mexican families living in a thriving village there, with a general store and complex system of hoists, boilers, large production vats and smokestacks.

Glenn Springs was the site of the infamous attack by Mexican raiders in 1916, when in spite of the presence of U.S. Calvary troops, four people were killed, several buildings burned and the store looted. Despite the ongoing tensions along the U.S.-Mexico border, the operation continued until the end of World War I.

Prior to the end of the war, there were numerous large factories scattered throughout the region. Ellis and Wood ran an earlier operation at McKinney Springs. The Lowe factory was established in 1911 at Double Mills south of Maravillas Creek, where a large natural water hole provided the means of production. Near Lajitas, the Fisher wax factory was in full production in 1916. In Fresno Canyon in Presidio County, H.H. Harris and J.L. Crawford ran a large production facility.

After the war, the demand for candelilla wax waned considerably, and most of the aforementioned factories closed or greatly reduced production; yet, the product still sold for between 12 and 20 cents per pound. In 1923 the Fresno Canyon wax factory alone shipped over \$100,000 worth of wax. In the years after the war, wax production reverted to small roving camps of

wax workers, known as cereros or candelilleros, who would harvest the plant, extract the wax and sell it to buyers for large-scale refining.

Wax production in the Big Bend continued throughout the 1920s and 30s in spite of the drop in demand and was revitalized in the 1940s with the advent of World War II. Those wax entrepreneurs who kept their operations flexible stood to gain considerably during this time.

One example of just such a success story was that of Eulice and Elba Adams. The Adamses began producing wax on their ranch late in the 1930s and had up to 150 workers harvesting and processing candelilla at various times. During World War II they produced as much as 25,000 pounds of unrefined wax per month. In later years, Eulice's son David Adams added refining and marketing to the family business.

No efficient method of mechanized harvesting or cultivation was ever employed successfully for candelilla, and even today the wild plant is harvested by hand by cereros. It takes approximately 50 pounds of the candelilla plant to produce a single pound of wax, and though the plant is a perennial, which will re-grow from its rootstock, it is generally pulled out by the roots during harvesting. Needless to say, once an area has been exploited for wax production, it can be a very long time before it can be exploited again. This means that cereros must continually travel farther and work harder to maintain a steady rate of income.

In the 1920s Mexican laborers working for a large factory such as that at Fresno Canyon would earn \$1.50 per ton of candelilla harvested. In other factories, workers would be paid a dollar a day for their labor.

In 1936, the Union de Credito de Productores de la Cera de Candelilla was formed to help improve the lot of cereros and their families. The union, in concert with the Banco Nacional de Comercio Exterior, managed to pass an export tax on candelilla wax in

1937, placing control of the wax industries in the hands of Mexican companies and greatly improving the working conditions for wax workers.

While these efforts helped those cereros in the legal wax trade, it also opened up a number of smuggling operations in the Big Bend region. U.S. wax refiners and retailers would pay a pretty peso in cash for unrefined wax smuggled across the Rio Grande, and tales abound of clandestine nighttime meetings between cereros and wax buyers, including the story of one nervous buyer who, disliking the idea of traveling with 20,000 pesos in cash, had it sewed up in a bundle and transported by a light plane. When the transaction was complete and the wax found satisfactory, the buyer signaled the plane to drop its load, and buyer and sellers spent the rest of the night searching for the bundle on the rocky slope where it had fallen.

When Lady Bird Johnson made a visit to Big Bend National Park in April of 1966, she was taken on a float down the river. Four Mexican nationals on the banks shouted greetings to her and cheered as the flotilla went by. The former First Lady graciously returned their greetings, never suspecting that the men were concealing a pile of unrefined candelilla wax in burlap bags, ready to smuggle across to a buyer.

The history of candelilla wax production in the Big Bend is ongoing, with transient camps common throughout the sparsely populated areas of Northern Mexico. Though it is an industry born barely a century ago which thrived only briefly before settling down across our border, it remains an example of the gains that can be made through hard work and ingenuity and the resources hidden in plain sight even in the harshest of environments.





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# Poetry

## Finding Peace in the Desert

Shadows on the desert floor  
A mosaic of shapes.  
The sun reflects off the mountain ridges,  
Silent land, peaceful.  
How many have stood here before us and contemplated this beauty?  
Did they find strength and courage?  
Will there be others that come after us to walk these same paths?  
We feel the peace of the desert.  
If we listen we hear the voice of God in the wind  
The jagged peaks, strong and forbidding.  
The shadows of the sun and clouds chase each other across the heights.  
Silently, we glide along the river, this border between two worlds.  
We look beyond the politics of the river to see its beauty.  
We hear the silence of the land,  
This river that continues on its long journey pays no heed to conflict,  
It will always be,  
So also human impact  
For good?  
For ruin?  
Morning clouds, heavy and low, hang over the desert.  
The wind is still.

*Janis Shelton*



## In Alpine, Texas

The locals, with greatest care,  
curry their stallions and their mares,

and saddlery is still a thriving business.  
The evenings are lavender,

abuzz with hummingbirds  
whose throats are dazzling,

jagged with purple thunderbolts.  
Even the tap water,

sucked up from the wells,  
is clear and cold,

valuable as liquid diamonds.

*Larry D. Thomas*

## Pacific Offensive

Steely gray cloud-ships  
slice cumulus waves,  
darkening sky with spray.

Sloppy drops strike earth;  
searing, steam rising,  
scenting air.

Cold bullets pelt hot skin,  
exhausting mental steam,  
cleansing dusty being.

Landscape and pedestrian surrender,  
polished with precision  
to a bright, clean sheen.

*William H. Darby III*

## Seasons Greetings

The desert  
travels in  
funnels of  
dust

Devils  
blasting their  
way across  
the arid land

The ocean  
shuffles back  
and forth  
endlessly

Leaving this  
and taking  
back that

New highs  
lows and  
stormings

In the new  
warming

The seasons  
raging Each  
in its way

The Sun  
the Moon  
trying to  
have their  
sway

With the  
footprint  
of man in  
the way

*Ken Whitley*

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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*

## CHIP LOVE

W. E. "Chip" Love IV, President, Marfa National Bank, says the business card, but the imposing title in no way reflects the affable, candid man talking to me in his sunlit office. He starts by describing how the Loves have ranched southwest of Marfa since 1885 and that he was only 2 years old when his father Wert died in 1960 in a small plane crash. The death left Wert's wife Polly, his son and his daughter, Worthy, to fend for themselves.

A year later Polly married Conoly Brooks, a banker from Pecos, himself widowed with two children, and the family lived in Fort Stockton where Chip went to school from first grade through high school. He has fond memories of a large family (six children in all), and he enjoyed most everything at school, as well as the social life of a town with a strong sense of community.

After the comfortable small town life in Fort Stockton, attendance at Southwestern University in Georgetown in 1976 took some time getting used to. "College wasn't easy," he recalls, laughing, but he got up to speed and graduated with a B.A. in business administration. He had already had summer banking experience in Fort Stockton, and, after graduating in 1979, he started his first job at the First Savings & Loan Association there, which lasted until 1984.

He continued in banking through the 80s at the First National Bank in Fort Stockton. Business and banking life was not easy in those years due to the oil bust. Distressing as it was, he now considers it a good learning experience.



Photo by Jim Glendinning

**CHIP LOVE**  
Marfa

Banking tells you a lot about people, and, in a small community, he reflects, bankers feel their customers' pain.

In 1988 he married Kelly Card and from 1991 to 2004 he managed the family ranch, relishing the freedom of the outdoor life and establishing a strong connection with the land. The physical separation, (their home was in Fort Stockton) took its toll on the marriage however, and they divorced in 2002. Their daughter Lesli, now 17, is in high school in Austin.

In 2004 he returned actively to banking life as president of the Marfa National Bank, whose board he had sat on since 1994. Later, he resumed contact with Barbara Fountain who had



Photo by Jim Glendinning

**KATHY BENCOMO**  
Fort Davis

been a roommate of his sister at Sweetbriar College. He made his first visit to Boston, her home town, in 2005, and they married in 2006. Barbara retains her radio job at WGBH Boston, commuting to their Marfa home at weekends.

In what he sees as "a front row seat to the community," Chip Love is well positioned to judge new Marfa. Generally he thinks Marfa has evolved successfully, and he challenges those who try to draw friction lines in the community.

Growth is good, says this banker who continues to manage his ranch with two ranch hands, keeping links with the old, while tending to the banking needs of new Marfa, about which he is bullish.



Photo by Jim Glendinning

**MIKE DAVIDSON**  
Alpine

## KATHY BENCOMO

Kathy Bencomo was born in San Antonio on June 14, 1960, the first child of Charles and Barbara Mueller. Her brother John was born two years later. Charles ("Chick") was a successful geologist, even earning from his company, Viking Drilling, a gold Cadillac, and the family lived comfortably.

After grade and high school in San Antonio, Kathy's dad offered her one year at a college of her choice. She chose Sweetbriar College in Virginia, studied there from 1979 to 1980 and developed her tennis game. In 1980, she moved to Texas A&M, a military, macho place she remembers, only slowly beginning to



change. Unhappy in her marketing class, she switched to elementary education and enjoyed studying to be a teacher.

In 1982, she transferred to Sul Ross State University in Alpine to be with her fiancé. The engagement was broken off, but she persevered with her education course, graduating in 1984. She loved the smallness of Sul Ross, and the beauty of the region grabbed her heart, she says.

Kathy had intended to return to San Antonio and start teaching, but stopped at the Church in the Mountains in Fort Davis before leaving. There she heard about a teaching job in the church's one-room school house. She took it and stayed over four years. Country life was an intriguing mystery to her, and she relished Fort Davis' small-town manners.

The challenge was to teach 12 students, from grades one through 10, at the same time and in the same place. The subjects were history, Bible, science and current events. She found it demanding but fun and was a natural at it. She was excited to be able to teach from the Christian perspective and challenged at having to be especially organized due to the spread of ages of the students.

The school closed in 1989, and for the next 20 years she homeschooled her three children and engaged in constant church and civic volunteer work. So successful was this work, due to her positive, practical and non-confrontational approach ("helped by God's wisdom," she adds) that when a vacancy rose on the Jeff Davis County commissioners court, she was offered the post by County Judge George Grubb. Her talents have served the community well in this capacity.

In 1988, Kathy married Jimmy Bencomo, whom she had met at the Church in the Mountains. The Bencomo family had been in Fort Davis for generations. Jimmy's dad Arturo started the Exxon garage, which he later passed on the Jimmy. Kathy helps out at the station, as does elder son

Caleb, 19, who is studying industrial technology at SRSU. Younger son Josiah, 13, is at Fort Davis High School.

Her eldest child Addie, 20, will graduate cum laude from Sul Ross State University in August with a B.A. in English. She was recently named SRSU woman of the year for her leadership achievements in a variety of campus activities. Soon to be married, she plans to attend Bible college and become a youth minister. Like mother like daughter.

### MIKE DAVIDSON

There was always a piano in the Davidson home in Sugarland, Texas, where Michael, the first of three sons of Sue and Don Robertson, was born on January 10, 1953. Don was a Presbyterian minister, and the family subsequently moved to various towns in Tennessee, Missouri and Arkansas. Sue was a housewife, played the organ in church and later in life taught school. Mike's brothers Tommy and Terry, like Mike, learned to play music at home and continue to play today.

At high school in Sugarland, Davidson learned Spanish, which was to stand him in good stead when later doing business in Mexico. He entered Rice University at 17 and left a year later, disillusioned at the class size and multitude of courses. Later he resumed his studies of math and history at a community college, but where he really started to feel fulfilled was as an itinerant carpenter. As such he was able to move around in Central and later West Texas. This suited him.

In the mid-70s two events occurred which shaped Mike Davidson's life. He took an outdoors course in South Brewster County run by David Sleeper. It included rock climbing and river rafting and was his first introduction to desert life, which gave him a sense of freedom and satisfaction. Soon after, he participated in a three-day rafting trip through Mariscal Canyon in Big Bend National Park where he met Steve Harris. Leaving the tour

group, the pair continued on their own through the Lower Canyons for 140 miles.

It was during this 12-day trip, when they ran short on food, that the idea for Far Flung Adventures, a river rafting company, was hatched. This, the first professional river outfitter in the Big Bend, was founded in 1976. By the mid-80s Far Flung was running river trips from Alaska to Mexico. The company continued until 2001 when it was bought, merged with another outfitter and renamed Far Flung Outdoor Center.

Today Mike Davidson is still connected with Big Bend tourism as executive director of Visit Big Bend. The only paid staff member, his almost full-time job consists of directing Big Bend's major tourism agency, with an annual budget of \$400,000. Based in Alpine, his duties mainly involve planning and marketing. He is also director of the Trans-Pecos Water Trust, the aim of which is to preserve the integrity of the area's major rivers, notably the Rio Grande, a vital and vulnerable asset. He was recently elected to the Alpine city council.

Music still plays a large part in Davidson's life. Since founding the Terlingua All Stars in 1981, and later playing with Craig Carter's band in the 90s, he has headed up Los Pinché Gringos, Big Bend's first and ever-popular border music band. He lives on "A" Mountain in Alpine with his son Jett. A second son, Nick, studies at Austin Community College.





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# Book Review

## Book Review by Dwight Deal

*Conservation of Shared Environments: Learning from the United States and Mexico*

Laura Lopez-Hoffman, Emily D. McGovern, Robert G. Varady, and Karl W. Flessa, editors,  
University of Arizona Press, Tucson (2009) \$24.95, 296 pp.

This book is about ecology and the most important animal in the desert: man. It is about people, politics and the land along the border of the United States and Mexico. The ecological setting was there before man, but mans needs, aspirations and actions – both deliberate and accidental – drive changes occurring today.

The stated aim of this book is to provide citizens and leaders in Mexico and the United States with a blueprint to work together to conserve their shared species, ecosystems and ecosystem services. This ambitious goal has resulted in a fact-filled compendium from 46 authors. Unavoidably there is uneven coverage of topics and a wide variation in styles of writing which can be distracting, but this is not a novel. It is filled with facts and history and is an exceptional reference work for those trying to understanding the complex story of water and land management and the ecological changes occurring along our southern border. Without this historical perspective, today's conflicts are impossible to understand.

I was both surprised and gratified to learn about the many, often personal, efforts that have been made in the last 30 years which attempt to resolve conflicts and focus on improving the ecological wholesomeness of the region. These tasks are not easy and remain daunting, if not seemingly impossible. Most readers are likely already members of the choir. But as a unique reference work, I know of no equal to this book.

A great value of this book is clearly pointing out the many players and the many conflicts. It focuses more on the Sonoran Desert of Arizona and California, but our own Big Bend receives significant mention.

Humans have utilized and altered existing ecosystems for at least 10,000 years. Deforestation occurred; grasslands were converted to agriculture; streams were diverted and minerals mined. Native American Indian tribes remain players who are involved and concerned.

Europeans, lead by the Spanish, introduced new concepts and management practices in the late 16th century. They brought implements for construction, agriculture, irrigation and mining that profoundly modified the land. Environmental changes were already evident by the 18th century. These changes accelerated with the 1884 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the 1853



Gadsden Purchase, which established the present boundary line and brought additional conflict between Spanish and English legal and management systems.

Water-ownership and allocation regimes have driven economic change. In the western United States, surface and groundwater were allocated according to the doctrine of "prior appropriation." In Mexico, in contrast, water rights were federally held and allocated to institutions,

companies and individuals. These two modes of water ownership complicated the transition from Spanish and Mexican legal systems to the U.S. one. Dam building further complicated the issues with the construction of Boulder and Hoover Dams on the Colorado River, Elephant Butte (1916) on the Rio Grande and its sister dam, La Boquilla (1916), on the Rio Conchos.

Institutions reshaping the landscape and ecosystems that dealt explicitly with natural and water resources arose late in the 19th century and nearly all were associated with governments. The most prominent was the International Boundary Commission, established by the Convention of 1889. The role, scope and responsibilities of this commission were redefined by the Water Treaty of 1944, which renamed it the International Water and Boundary Commission (IWBC).

Until 1983, the IWBC, although narrowly focused on water resources, remained the only truly binational federal institution with a stake in the environment. Legislation in both countries created a number of agencies charged with managing agriculture, forestry, mining and fisheries. However, as both countries sought to populate and exploit their border regions, few of these agencies saw land or water stewardship as priorities. In 1983 the La Paz Agreement set up binational task forces on water and air pollution, natural resources and habitat, solid waste and cross-border transportation of hazardous materials.

The task forces included representatives of the environmental ministries and the region's 10 state governments as well as the diplomatic corps. Although the La Paz Agreement has remained the bedrock of official U.S.-Mexico environmental cooperation, it has been politicized and modified considerably. The chief criticism is that plans have lacked needed financial resources.

NAFTA was adopted in 1993 and spawned two environmental offspring. One was the Com-





Map is from Shared Environments, Figure 3.1, page 40.

Idealized map of the Big Bend reach of the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo showing federal and state protected areas involved in this binational conservation effort.

mission for Environmental Cooperation whose effectiveness has been limited by small budgets and lack of power to enforce any findings. A separate agreement established two sister institutions to fund water and environmental projects.

In addition to formal governmental institutions, civil society groups and NGOs have been critically important in promoting cooperation for transboundary conservation in the border region and beyond. Now, overlaid on all of this, are the 2005 REAL ID Act which gave the U.S. Department of Homeland Security authority to waive laws as necessary to hasten border wall and road construction and the 2006 enactment of the Secure Fence Act. In combination, these laws have resulted in ecological degradation and the creation of new environmental conflicts in the border region.

All this and more is discussed in detail, with multiple examples, in this book.

Turning to our backyard, the Big Bend, which the authors refer to as "The Forgotten Reach," we find documentation of a remarkable number of activities to restore this stretch of the Rio Grande. For almost a decade the World Wildlife Fund, Big Bend National Park, Comission Nacional de Areas Naturales Protegidas, Big Bend Ranch State Park and more than 20 other agencies, insti-

tutions and organizations from both sides of the border have been conducting a variety of activities. Binational cooperation, the participation of divergent disciplines and the involvement of riverside human communities are key ingredients to move forward and address conservation issues.

One criticism I have of this book is that, by necessity, various authors focus on the parts of this complex set of issues that they know best, based on their own work and experiences. There are a number of disconnects, and I am reminded of the blind men who are describing an elephant. They accurately describe what they feel and sense, but provide a sometimes misleading vision of the whole.

One example of this is the inadvertent propagation of the myth that damming of the Rio Grande in New Mexico cut off significant flow through the canyons of the Big Bend. Chapter three discusses the flow of the Rio Grande, but at El Paso, not Big Bend. It is accurate as far as it goes but fails to consider the documented flow of the Rio Conchos. The Rio Conchos always has been the master stream through the Presidio Bolson, Big Bend Ranch State Park, Big Bend National Park and the Lower Canyons of the Rio Grande.

The IBWC compiled 19 years of flow data from 1896 through 1914, before any of the big dams were constructed

upstream, from three gauges at Presidio: one below the confluence of the Rio Grande and the Rio Conchos and one on each of those tributaries. During these 19 years of record, over 70 percent of the flow through the Big Bend came from the Rio Conchos. The gauge on the upper Rio Grande, toward El Paso, recorded 41 months with flows less than 1,000 acre-feet, which included 30 months with no measurable flow whatsoever. There were six consecutive months in 1900-1901 and seven consecutive months in 1903-1904 when there was no measurable flow in the upstream Rio Grande.

Early explorers regularly reported that they walked the dry stream bed of the river between what is now Presidio and McNary. The data cited above document those observations. As far as the Rio Grande upstream from its confluence with the Rio Conchos is concerned, the proper conclusion is that the damming of the river in New Mexico has only made a chronic problem permanent. Only now that the Mexican authorities restrict the flow of the Conchos do the Big Bend canyons commonly suffer very low water conditions.

Another oversight that I noted is the lack of mention of the even more forgotten reach: the Lower Canyons of the Rio Grande extending downstream from Big Bend National Park to Amistad Reservoir. Here a few ancient populations of plants and animals still resisted foreign invaders in the 1970s. Perhaps, in this comment, I reveal myself as one of the blind men who once lovingly touched that part of this particular elephant.

I said earlier that I thought that most of the readers of this book would already be members of the choir. That's good if a few individuals in the choir, armed with these and other facts, take it upon themselves to affect political decisions. This publication offers knowledge, insights and logical actions to arrest or reverse some of the deleterious changes that are occurring along our shared border with Mexico.

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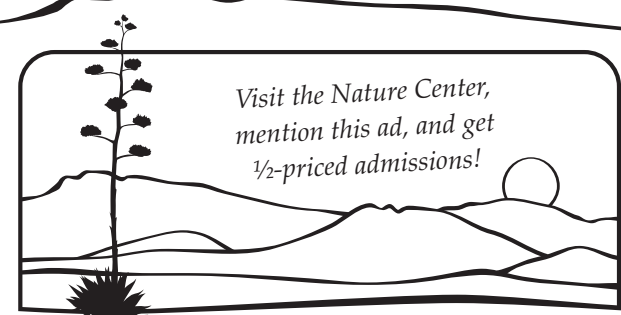


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Iconic photo of Sheriff E. E. Townsend.

# E.E. TOWNSEND

## FATHER OF BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK

by Bob Miles

Sometimes dreams do come true. One man's dream did with the creation of Big Bend National Park.

One day in 1933, Everett Ewing Townsend of Alpine was discussing the canyon country along the Rio Grande with fellow Texas legislator R.M. Wagstaff of Abilene. "I told him that ever since I came there more than 40 years ago, I

had dreamed of buying the Chisos Mountains, fencing them in and keeping them as a game preserve for myself and friends. Since my 'ship had not come in,' my dream was still only a dream."

Upon investigation, the two legislators found that the state owned some land in the area, and a bill was drafted to transfer these lands to the State Parks Board, creating Texas

Canyons State Park. The bill was signed by the governor on Oct. 27, 1933.

Then, in March of 1935, Rep. R.E. Thomason of El Paso introduced a bill in Congress to create a national park in Brewster and Presidio counties. A commission of National Park Service officials tentatively set the boundaries of the park to include 780,000 acres. The state of Texas acquired the land, and in 1943 the land deeds were turned over to the National Parks Service by Gov. Coke Stevenson in ceremonies at Sul Ross.

On June 12, 1944, Big Bend National Park became the 27th and sixth largest national park. Plans were to include adjacent lands across the river in Mexico to create a international park of some 2 million acres. While these plans are still pending and Townsend's dream might not have come true quite as he dreamed it, the area he had come to love had been preserved. He would become known as the father of Big Bend National Park.

Townsend was born in Colorado County, Texas, on Oct. 20, 1871. His father, Capt. William Wallace Townsend, was a Confederate veteran. He farmed and raised livestock in Colorado County until 1884, when they moved to Eagle Pass to give the children a better chance to attend school.

The elder Townsend soon became incapacitated and unable to work, so the boys went to work to provide for the family. Everett worked a number of jobs from cowhand to railroad fireman's helper. In 1891, Townsend enlisted in Texas Ranger Frontier Battalion Company E under Captain J.S. McNeel. He served along the border in the Laredo area for some 18 months. The state adjutant general and McNeel continuously disagreed upon matters, and the captain was asked to resign, at which time the other rangers in the company, including Townsend, also resigned.

After a brief time as a deputy U.S. marshal, Townsend

was appointed as a U.S. Customs mounted inspector assigned to Presidio in 1894. From Presidio he patrolled up and down the Rio Grande in some of the most the rugged and isolated country in Texas. While in the Marathon area, he met Miss Alice Jones, and about a year later, they were married. They made their honeymoon trip to Presidio by stage coach.

Their early life there was described in a 1937 article in *Farm and Ranch* magazine: "During her first year as a bride, 'Miss Allie' rode 1,000 miles on horseback with her husband as he went about his duties. With only a pack mule to carry food and bedding, the young couple followed the trails wherever they led, sleeping under the stars which shine so brilliantly in this desert land. When their child (a daughter, Margaret) was born in Presidio, there was an American doctor, but no woman of her own race to attend the young mother."

While there were few Anglos in that stretch between Langtry and El Paso, the Townsends made many friends among the Mexican population on both sides of the border.

In 1898, Townsend resigned from the Customs service and served another two years in the Texas Rangers, resigning in 1900 to manage a 100,000-acre ranch in southwestern Pecos County for the Elsinore Cattle Company. For the next 16 years, he built up the ranch with limited funds, improving the quality of the livestock, acquiring much of the state land within the limits of the ranch and making the E.L. Ranch pay its way.

The Townsends moved to Alpine in 1916, having invested in a ranch near town. Alpine had grown from when he first saw it. "When I first drifted into the Alpine country back in the early 90s of the last century, I found a lot of good fellows scattered around here," he said. "Alpine was a little 'cowtown' spraddled across the railroad tracks as uncertain in conformity as a pair of ragged overalls.

The ranch owners and cowboys from the ranches were honest hardworking examples of true Americans."

Two years later, Townsend was elected sheriff of Brewster County and re-elected for three additional terms. During his tenure as sheriff he was involved in a tragic shootout with the son of Wigfall Van Sickle, a prominent Alpine attorney, county judge and two-term state legislator.

The incident occurred when Townsend attempted to investigate some automobiles he suspected contained bootleg whiskey. The vehicles were parked outside the movie house Hatley Van Sickle managed, and he tried to stop Townsend from investigating the automobiles. Words, then shots, were exchanged. The sheriff survived, thanks to a notebook in his vest pocket which deflected a bullet. Van Sickle was mortally wounded and died a few days later. The incident divided the town, but in the trial that followed Townsend was acquitted.

Following his last term as sheriff, Townsend spent eight years working in private business and civic affairs and making frequent trips south to his beloved Big Bend country.

In 1932, he was elected a representative in the Texas Legislature where he began working for the establishment of a national park in the ruggedly beautiful country he had grown to love. In 1947, Townsend was named commissioner of the Big Bend Park, and his interest in the region continued until his death on November 19, 1948.

Sometimes dreams do come true – with a little luck and a lot of hard work.





## Prickly Pear Cactus: The Genus *Opuntia*

by Marie French

**P**rickly pear cactus loves the Big Bend – Golden Spined prickly pear, Texas prickly pear, Englemann prickly pear, Cows Tongue prickly pear, Purple prickly pear, Plains prickly pear, Purple Fruit prickly pear, Spiny Fruit prickly pear, Blind prickly pear – so many prickly pears in the Big Bend of Far West Texas.

Prickly pear is easy to propagate. They drop their pads on our gravelly, clayey soil and root. To propagate these for yourself, all you need to do is pick up a pad, with leather gloves or tongs. Then let it sit out of dirt and callus over for three to five days. Lastly, put it right into the ground. You don't even have to water it; actually it's better if you don't for at least a week. In about three weeks, it will root and start its own family.

Prickly pear has many practical uses. It has been used from time immemorial for medicinal purposes. When the pads are cut open they are a soothing poultice for wounds, burns and bruises. They are being researched for medicine for diabetes as well.

The Navajos dyed their wool in the uncooked juices of the prickly pear fruit for about a week. It would produce a magenta pink color that would fade somewhat in the sun. Nowadays, you can presoak the wool in soda ash or alum to make the color fast.

Prickly pear has also been valued as a windbreak and soil stabilizer.

Many feel that the prickly pear is a weed and must be eradicated. However, it is the weeds that stabilize the soil until the land can repair itself after periods of abuse. Land is not meant to be monocropped. The land will always introduce weeds within the monocrop to stabilize a landscape, in order for it to be productive and supply needed life-sustaining nutrients for wildlife.

If you wonder why the prickly pear seems so prevalent, it's because much of the land has

been degraded. The prickly pear offers itself as a quick propagator, soil stabilizer, food for humans and livestock, dyes and fruit, beautiful flowers and as a windbreak that allows other plants to grow around it.

So instead of trying to remove it from the landscape, perhaps it's time we saw the humble prickly pear's important attributes.

There are many delicious ways you can prepare prickly pear. Try these:

### Fried Nopalitos

*1 cup nopalitos (prickly pear pads, small, with the thorns taken off with a sharp knife)*

*1/3 cup wheat flour*

*2/3 cup cornmeal*

*1 tsp chili powder*

*Salt and pepper to taste*

*Vegetable oil*

*Place flour, cornmeal and seasonings in a plastic bag, shake bag to mix. Drop in nopalitos, and shake until well coated. Heat oil in a skillet and fry until golden brown. . . . Serve with eggs for a yummy Southwestern breakfast.*

In the summer, the blooms will produce red to purple fruits (tunas) on the pads. It's time to make prickly pear jelly!

### Prickly Pear Jelly

*15-30 tunas - skin and take thorns off with stones or a knife. Make sure you don't pick these with bare hands or you'll get a handful of thorns. Make sure you only pick ripe fruits.*

*Lemon or lime juice*

*Powdered pectin*

*Sugar to taste, about a cup and half*

*Remove spines. Mash the fruits, and follow the directions on the pectin box.*

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continued from page 4

could lay up to 400 hundred eggs before dying.

Each hatched egg produces an insatiable leaf-eating larva that molts five times and becomes increasingly larger. The fifth instar, a plump 2-inch long dazzling yellow and black and white striped caterpillar, urgently searches for a discreet green haven in which to hide the final transformation. Here the caterpillar spins a silk pad and attaches it securely to a stem or the underside of a leaf. Hooking into the silk pad, it lets itself hang upside down.

Before long the caterpillar begins to shed its exoskeleton. A chrysalid takes its place and hardens into a thing of beauty – a spring green capsule. The chrysalid is dotted here and there with metallic gold spots. Near the top a half necklace of gold forms along the crest. Inside the capsule the secret of life takes place as the liquefied caterpillar forms organs and body parts.

Within 35 days of the egg laying, the first Monarch broods are mature enough to continue the migration north, staying east of the Rockies. The females search for milkweed and lay eggs along the way. These multiple generations increase the population and protect against species loss during the migration and the long overwintering. The males move north too but linger longer in the milkweed meadows of summer staking out territory and patrolling for females.

Three or four generations of Monarchs migrate as far as southern and eastern Canada until the shortening daylight of late August produces the last generation of the year. This fall brood of Monarchs will read the sun and follow it south to the wintering colonies concentrated in a belt of volcanic mountain ranges and valleys in the states of Michoacan and Mexico.

They will glide on thermals like migrating birds, resting when the wind is unfavorable or cold, to conserve their stores of fat. They will nectar along the way on the flowers of fall – gold-



Photo by Greg Lasly

Hundreds of Monarchs cluster on a salt cedar in Balmorhea in the fall of 2009.

enrod, aster, Joe Pye weed, gayfeather and the eastern groundsel bush. In Texas they will find frostweed and cowpen daisies in bloom. During their journey they will visit fields of blooming clover and alfalfa and stands of sunflowers.

Their ability to see ultraviolet light allows them to read a flower and see where its nectar is concentrated. The butterfly lands and tiptoes over the petals. When the toes of its back legs taste sugar, the proboscis, rolled up tight, uncoils to suck the high-energy nectar, sweeter than soft drinks. Stored as fat, the nectar from the flora in the flyway will keep the butterflies alive during the winter and start them on their way in the spring. By November they will have reached their winter home.

For a number of years scien-

tists have known how the Monarch is guided by a circadian clock in its brain that interacts with a sun compass also located in the brain. The findings of an astounding experiment focused on the navigational skills of the Monarch were published in the September 2009 issue of *Science*.

In a report on the Web site Science Daily, Steven M. Reppert M.D., professor and chair of neurobiology and senior author of the study, said, "We've known that the insect antenna is a remarkable organ, responsible for sensing not only olfactory cues but wind direction and even sound vibration." Reppert and his colleagues studied the antenna more closely and found that the Monarch also has an antennal clock. This second antennal clock commu-



nicates with the one in its brain to keep the Monarch on its migratory path.

Reppert's team experimented on the Monarch's antennae in three ways. First, they surgically removed the antennae to determine that this disabled the butterfly's navigational ability altogether. Second, they dipped the antennae in black paint and discovered that the butterfly could not navigate. Last, they covered the antennae with clear paint and found that the butterfly could fly where it intended.

This description might sound like a simple experiment any high school student could try, but Reppert and his scientists are cutting edge. They are mapping the Monarch's genome.

The Monarchs' bi-annual migration is an unfolding mystery. We now understand that their sense of direction is an interaction between their two clocks and their sun compass. And we comprehend generally that they know where to winter-over because this inherited behavior is embedded in their genetic chemistry. But we don't know how it works. Until the mid-70s we didn't know where the eastern Monarchs were going every fall.

#### AT LAST, THE WINTER COLONY

As early as 1857, entomologists, beginning with the Canadian W.S.M. D'Urban, began to make notes about the Monarch: "such vast numbers as to darken the air by clouds of them."

C.V. Riley, Missouri's first state entomologist, suggested in 1878 that Monarchs migrated like birds.

"Almost past belief... millions is but feebly expressive ... miles of them is no exaggeration," is how J. Hamilton described the Monarch migration at Brigantine, New Jersey in the fall of 1885.

Ancient peoples in Mexico have known for millennia where the Monarchs spend their winters. The indigenous Mazahua speak of the

Monarch as *seperito*, "the butterfly that passes in October and November." The winter Monarch colonies were a long kept secret amongst the forest people.

In the late 1930s Frederick Urquhart, a Canadian biologist, and his wife Norah began to tag Monarchs. By 1972 they knew that the Monarchs followed a northeast to southwest migration pattern. Norah placed notices in Mexican newspapers asking for volunteers to tag the butterflies. Another husband and wife team, Ken and Catalina (Cathy) Brugger, living in Mexico, undertook the Urquhart's challenge. They tracked the butterflies in and around the plains and mountains of eastern Michoacan. Though they felt they were getting closer to uncovering the secret, their trail kept running cold. Near the village of Donata Guerra an older man agreed to show them where the butterflies congregated. They were led 10,000 feet high first to a colony of millions on Cerro Pelon and then to another one on Cerro Chincua. When the sun shown through the clouds whole colonies of Monarchs lifted into the air. Color-blind, Ken Brugger missed the fireworks but witnessed the experience of his life.

The Urquharts arrived the following year in 1976 to realize their dream and climbed the butterfly mountain. They found a Monarch wearing one of the little gummed tags that had been issued to a volunteer. The tag read: "Send back to the University of Toronto Zoology."

Later that year, the Urquharts released their scientific discovery in the August issue of *National Geographic*. "Found At Last: The Monarchs' Winter Home," the article triumphantly announced. Urquhart added this poetic description to the annals of Monarch history: They "filled the air with their sun-shot wings, shimmering against the blue mountain sky and drifting across our vision in blizzard flakes of orange and black."

This announcement marked the beginning of a new chapter in the story of the Monarch that includes the conservation of the butterfly's winter habitat, flyway and summer breeding grounds. The work of tagging the Monarch has expanded and is now presided over by Dr. Orley R. "Chip" Taylor at Monarch Watch, a citizen's scientist effort to collect data for research.

Follow the Monarch at [www.learner.org/jnorth/Monarch/](http://www.learner.org/jnorth/Monarch/)  
Read Eduardo Rendon at [www.worldwildlife.org/species/finder/Monarchbutterflies/Monarchbutterflies.html](http://www.worldwildlife.org/species/finder/Monarchbutterflies/Monarchbutterflies.html) and learn more from the North American Butterfly Association: [www.naba.org](http://www.naba.org)



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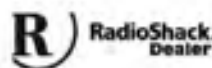
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## Trans-Pecos Trivia

by Charles Angell

### Rio Bravo del Norte – History of the Rio Grande

- Geologically speaking, the Rio Grande is a tributary of what pre-existing river that flows into the Gulf of Mexico?
  - the Pecos
  - Devil's River
  - Rio Conchos
  - Guadalupe River
- In 1945 naturalist-photographer Peter Koch floated through Santa Elena Canyon for six days on a hand-crafted boat. What did he construct his vessel from?
  - shipping pallets
  - Maguey (Century Plant) stalks
  - mercury flasks
  - Carrizo Cane
- What rare species of fish that once swam in springs feeding into the Rio Grande now exists only in a pond in Big Bend National Park?
  - Lamprey Eel
  - Pygmy Tilapia
  - Desert Angelfish
  - Gambusia
- In 1899 Robert T. Hill floated and surveyed all the major canyons of the Rio Grande for the U.S. Geological Survey. Who was the trapper he hired as a guide who is also known as probably the first person to have successfully explored these canyons prior to the survey?
  - James McMahon
  - W.L. Wright
  - Duff C. Green
  - Jose Salazar Ylarregui
- The Rio Grande changed course between Presidio, Texas, and Ojinaga, Chih., creating a border dispute. This came to be known as the Ojinaga Cut and was resolved with each side ceding acreage to the other. What year was this?
  - 1882
  - 1912
  - 1945
  - 1970

Bonus: The informative and well-written book *Exploring the Big Bend Country* was authored by which of the persons listed above?

Answers: 1-c, 2-b, 3-d, 4-a, 5-d, Bonus Answer: Peter Koch

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May 20 - 23: BBC vs Desert Valley Mountain Lions

May 27 - 30: BBC @ Las Cruces Vaqueros

June 3 - 6: BBC vs Desert Valley Mountain Lions

June 10 - 13: BBC vs Coastal Kingfish

June 17 - 20: BBC vs Coastal Kingfish

June 24 - 27: BBC vs Desert Valley Mountain Lions

July 1 - 4: BBC vs Coastal Kingfish

July 6: All Star Game (Kokernot Field, Alpine, Texas)

July 8 - 11: BBC vs Las Cruces Vaqueros

July 15 - 18: BBC @ Coastal Kingfish (neutral site TBA)

July 22 - 25: BBC vs Desert Valley Mountain Lions

July 29 - August 1: BBC vs Las Cruces Vaqueros

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