

NATURALIST NEWS



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Gladiolus—August “birth flower”

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NATURALIST NEWS —TEXAS MASTER NATURALIST, ELM FORK CHAPTER

AUGUST 2014

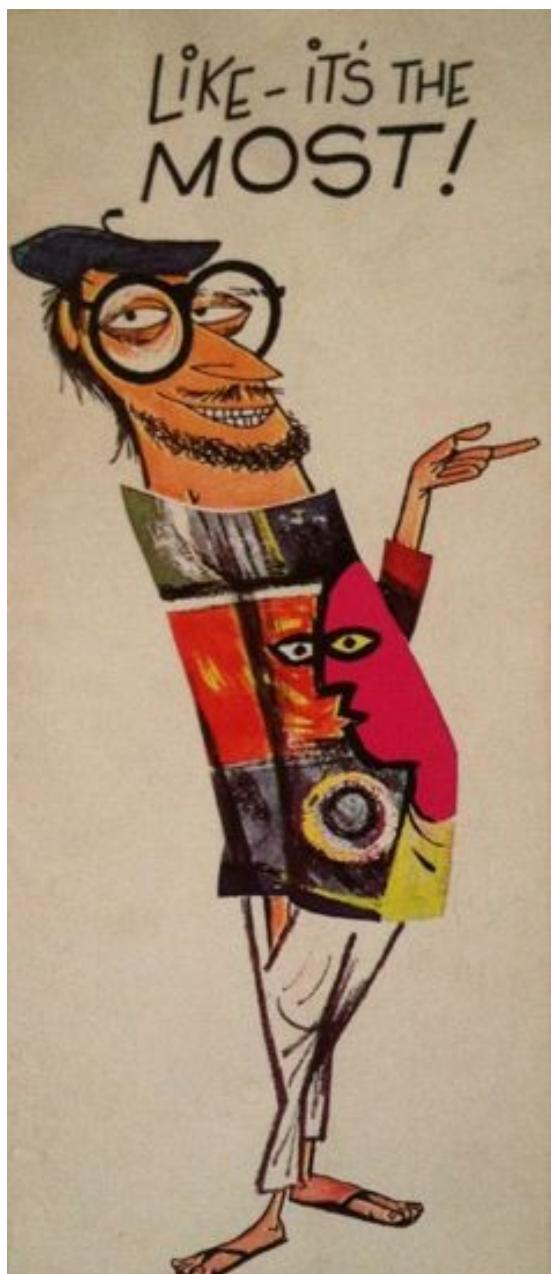
VOLUME 15, ISSUE 8

Our vision... in our community, Elm Fork Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalist program will be recognized as a primary source of information, education and service to support natural resources and natural areas today and in the future.



Elm Fork Chapter

WHETHER OR NOT YOU WERE "FAR OUT" ON THAT AUGUST 21 . . .



SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- ◆ Ready for the Roundup?
- ◆ Some background on Indian Marker Trees
- ◆ What will be your legacy?

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**COME BE "IN" THIS AUGUST 21 AND HANG OUT
WITH THE BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE . . .**

WHERE?



Elm Fork Chapter Texas Master Naturalist Membership Drive

Map & Directions to Meeting Location, 2200 N. Bell, Denton TX

August 21, 2014, 10 AM to 1 PM



From the intersection of N. Carroll and W. Hickory drive North on N. Carroll, approximately 1.2 miles, to Sherman Drive. Turn right on Sherman Drive and drive approximately 6/10 of a mile to the intersection of Sherman and Bell. Turn left on Bell at the stoplight and Trinity Presbyterian Church is on the right.

If you are coming from out of town take I 35E to the 377/Fort Worth Drive [Exit # 4658]. Turn North on 377/Fort Worth Drive. At the intersection of W. Collins and 377/Fort Worth Drive continue straight (North) on Carroll. When arriving at the intersection of N. Carroll and W. Hickory, follow the map above. A photo of the Church with key points is below.



1. **Trinity Presbyterian Church**
EFCTMN membership drive location.
2. Front door=West side building.
3. **Meeting facility=Fellowship Hall**
From front door walk straight into hall.
4. Large parking lot on the right (South side) of the building.
5. Intersection Sherman & Bell.

Assistance needed, call

214-287-4350

LIKE—WE'LL HAVE A BLAST . . .





Van Elliott—President
Class of 2010

ROUND UP—AUGUST 21, 2014

R

ound Up time has arrived once again. We have out-grown our meeting room at the Carroll building and this year we are meeting at the Trinity Presbyterian Church, 2200 N. Bell Avenue, Denton. See map included. Thanks to Shari Brand who helped coordinate the change of venue.

Display set up is on Wednesday, 8-20-14, 4-6 p.m. or on Thursday, 8-21-14, beginning at 8 a.m. Please coordinate with Susan Myers (symyers@yahoo.com).

Bring your dishes as early as 8 a.m. on Thursday. The meeting starts at 10:00 a.m. and we will be finished by 1:00 p.m. There is access to a full kitchen for those who wish to bring dishes that must be kept hot.

Ample parking is available on the South side of the building. Enter through the main doors and walk straight back to the Fellowship Hall.

This should be a fun and exciting meeting as there will be project displays and people to talk about them. There will also be short videos of some of the projects. And, of course, plenty of food. The Chapter is furnishing a ham and fried chicken with members asked to bring side dishes. If you have any questions, contact Linda Cox (lindabcox2000@yahoo.com).

Please help us spread the word about the meeting. Invite someone you know who may be interested in joining our chapter. Welcome our visitors and enjoy yourself!

If you have any questions, please contact **Van Elliott** (velliott2015@msn.com).



DID YOU NOTICE?

At the July 17, 2014, General meeting these members received recognition for re-certification:



Left to right: **Bob Ross, Susan Pohlen, Jan LaPine, Marian Kester, Jeanne Erickson, Larry Brennan, Marilyn Blanton and Renee Province.**

Award achieved, but not present to accept:

Judy Guthrie & Scott Kiester

From Van Elliott

HAVE YOU HEARD?

Steve Houser and **LeeAnn Weaver** (Jernigan) will present the September 18, 2014, program on **Indian Marker Trees**.

In anticipation of that presentation, Mr. Houser has submitted the following articles to give attendees some background of these remarkable reminders of Native American history and culture. Naturalist News was given specific permission to include the photos seen here.

Indian Marker Trees¹

By Steve Houser



This Cherokee Marker Tree exhibits the typical slight bend low on the trunk (near the ground) and a second sharp bend upward. Photo courtesy of the Mountain Stewards.

Historically, living in complete harmony with nature has been a way of life for Native Americans. They relied on Nature for all their needs. Many years ago, traveling from place to place required good navigational skills, directions along the way, and a method to mark common trails. Native Americans used trees not only to mark a trail, but also to signal the presence of important features, some of which were critical for survival.

Today, some call these old road signs *Indian marker trees*. They are known by others as *trail trees*, *thong trees*, or *culturally modified trees*. Years ago, Linda Pelon, one of the first anthropologists researching the subject, taught me the term *Indian marker tree*. I will stick with this name.

An Indian marker tree is a tree that was purposely bent over as a sapling and held in a bent position throughout most of its young life. The trees were tied down using a thong of animal hide, which is where the name “thong tree” originated. They were used to guide the Native Americans to a source of water, a good place to cross a river, a campsite or other important natural features. To those who could interpret their meaning, they were similar to a life-saving road sign. However, I doubt there was one for “rest stop.”

Why are most folks not aware that Indian marker trees exist? Many years ago, the Native Americans were not fond of explaining all the details regarding their way of life to outsiders. They always saw the need to live within the balance of nature and had a great reverence for all the glorious things that nature provided. They were the ultimate stewards of our natural world, whereas the “white man” only saw endless opportunity. “White man look -- but not see.”

¹Originally published in Neil Sperry eGardens Newsletter—
www.neilsperry.com

Indian marker trees are the living witnesses to the history of a past civilization and their incredible way of life. These trees are a significant part of this nation's cultural heritage and a gift to our current society. They provide lessons about our past and lessons yet to be learned, but their life expectancy is limited. This underscores an urgency to study and document as much information as we can about those trees that do exist. A number of suspected Indian marker trees in the DFW area are currently being researched, and more details are expected in the future.

Although the exact shape and tree species may vary, the Cherokees had a different way of shaping a marker tree than the typical Comanche marker tree found in the DFW area. Most all trees found by the Mountain Stewards are the Cherokee style, which has a slight bend low on the trunk (near the ground) and a second sharp bend upward.

The typical Comanche-style Indian marker tree in North Texas has a trunk that is often described as a "half-moon," which may touch the ground before growing upward.

Since there are different shapes for some tribes, the trees could have been used to mark tribal boundaries, signaling other tribes to stay away -- much like "no trespassing" signs.

Although there is enough documentation on Indian marker trees to more than verify and confirm their existence, skeptics remain. More on that next month.

These articles are written out of profound respect for our Native Americans as the greatest stewards our lands will ever know, and as a way to honor those who are "One with Nature," according to Comanche Tribal Elder, James Yellowfish.

About the author: Steve Houser is a Dallas native with more than 30 years of experience as a consulting arborist and tree climber. He is the president of a DFW area tree care expert firm.



Gateway Park Comanche Indian Marker Tree, recognized in 1996. Photo courtesy of Linda Pelon.

Indian Marker Trees²

By Steve Houser

Part 2

The purpose of discussing Indian marker trees in a public forum is to increase awareness of their existence and to recognize them as living witnesses to our history as well as priceless cultural treasures (link to part 1: <http://neilsperry.com/articles/2011/04/25/texas-tree-tips.html>). Indian marker trees should be celebrated, preserved, and properly maintained to ensure future generations have an opportunity to enjoy them. All trees are lost over time. Therefore, recognizing them beforehand seems to be a moral obligation. In addition, the elders who have knowledge of Indian marker trees within the various tribes around the nation will not be around forever and any remaining knowledge of these trees must be recorded. We cannot preserve significant trees or cultures that we have not taken the time to recognize, or fully understand.

According to tribal elders of various Indian nations, individual tribes had different styles of selecting and bending marker trees. For example, Indian marker trees found in Florida may be from the Seminole tribe, where trees found in Alabama may be Choctaw or Chickasaw. The form and function of each tree can vary considerably, but all of them served an important purpose that may not be clear without researching the surrounding area for clues and checking with various experts. As an example, the California Crossing Marker Tree, in Dallas, signified a good area to cross the Trinity River with shallow water, an important fact to know many years ago.

²Originally published in Neil Sperry eGardens Newsletter—

www.neilsperry.com



(Photo courtesy of Bill Seaman)

The California Crossing Marker Tree has been blessed by tribal elders and the Gateway Park Marker Tree (noted in the previous article) was officially recognized with a proclamation from the Comanche nation on April 26, 1997. The proclamation notes that the site was a favored campground due to the abundant resources in the area.



(Photo courtesy of Doug Taylor)

Ironically, the entire top of the tree was broken off just above the long bend, during a subsequent storm on Memorial Day. A section of the tree was preserved and used to date the age of the tree, which was over 500 years old. In addition, an unsuccessful effort was made to revive the tree by planting saplings near the base and grafting the top growth into the trunk of the tree.

Guidelines to help distinguish between what may or may not be an Indian marker tree are currently being developed for the north Texas area. A few important points include the following:

- They must be at least 150-200 years old. Quantifying their age will be the subject of a future article. Unlike humans, trees can't hide their age. (Glad you're not a tree?)
- They are always a native tree species, which is known to be long-lived for a given part of the country. Without a doubt, the Native Americans were quite knowledgeable about the life expectancy and cultural habits of tree species.
- They often include sharp bends in the trunk, which would have required an acute knowledge regarding the biological function of a tree's vascular system. To create the bend, often called a "hip", may have required the removal of bark and underlying tissues. If any of the bends in the trunk are higher above the ground level than a person could have created from standing on the ground, the tree may not be an Indian marker tree.
- They are often associated with significant natural features such as a tree recently submitted in Bowie, which marks a natural spring.
- They are often associated with witness reports and records that indicate arrowheads or other artifacts were once found in the area.
- They may show injury scars along the trunk, resulting from the thongs that tied them down, or possibly wounds created to maintain their bend.



(Trunk scars, photo courtesy of Steve Houser)



Trees that are not Indian marker trees, but may have a similar bend, are typically trees that are blown over, or forced over by ice and snow accumulations. These trees will often show exposed roots on one side of the trunk and a mound of soil created when the roots are forced upward and the trunk goes over.

To the skeptics that say nature, not Indians, created these trees, I would pose a simple question: How could nature create two trees near each other (termed "doublets") or even three trees close together?



(Photos courtesy of Mountain Stewards)

Native Americans understood, celebrated, and lived in complete harmony with all aspects of our natural world. They were the ultimate stewards of our lands and they understood the importance of maintaining a healthy balance in any ecosystem--something we should carefully consider in determining how we live in the future.

Resources:

www.Mountainstewards.org
www.DHTC.org
www.Texastreettrails.org

About the author: Steve Houser is a Dallas native with more than 30 years of experience as a consulting arborist and tree climber. He is also the president of a DFW area tree care expert firm.



ARE YOU AWARE THAT?

From Van Elliott

Jonathan Smith is leading a project at **Clear Creek Natural Heritage Center** to capture flower and tree information for signs/brochures to be done in the near future. They are off to a great start and have made several field trips to collect data. Serving on the committee are Dorothy Thetford, Shirley Holland, Nadine Beall and Veronica Ruangskul. The committee met on July 22, 2014 and put together a list of flowers and trees to submit to Katherine Barnett for approval by the City of Denton. This group of MNs are reigniting excitement at CCNHC and good things are on the horizon. All are from the class of 2013 except Dorothy and she is from the class of 2001.

Jonathan is working closely with CCNHC project managers Dave Rowley, Sherrill Campbell and Cheryl Kesterson.



Pictured here during their planning meeting are Left to right:
Veronica Ruangskul, Jonathan Smith, Dorothy Thetford and Nadine Beall.