

LOST PINES CHAPTER

Texas Master Naturalist



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East of Plum Creek by Larry Gfeller

Some waterways make their own history. The San Marcos River separates Caldwell and Guadalupe counties, but much of southern Caldwell County is located in the Guadalupe River Basin, a watershed drained primarily by Plum Creek and its tributaries. This creek, however, has bigger claims to fame. Just east of Plum Creek today stands a historic marker on State Highway 20 outside Lockhart. It marks the location of the old cabin of Isham Good, one of only two Republic of Texas homesteaders in the 1840s who were brave enough to settle in this once remote area of central Texas.

These were days of desperation and isolation, when roads were little more than sunbaked cattle trails and neighbors lived miles apart; yet it was Good's cabin where militiamen, Texas Rangers, soldiers from the Republic of Texas and assorted Tonkawa Indians gathered to end the 100-year reign of Comanche dominance in south central Texas. The coup-de-gras occurred at Kelly Springs, several hundred yards outside of what is now the front entrance to Lockhart State Park.

The conflict, depending on from which perspective it is told, goes by two names: to the Comanches, it was the Great Comanche Raid; Texans refer to it as the Battle of Plum Creek.



Historical marker on SH 20 outside Lockhart

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As settlers encroached on traditional Comanche hunting grounds, armed conflict in the area was already at a high level. After being humiliated by the summary execution of 33 Comanche chiefs in San Antonio, along with two dozen of their family and followers at what came to be known as the Council House Fight in March 1840, the Comanches launched the largest Indian attack on white settlers in the history of our country.

By August, the Penateka Comanches were able to accept the leadership of their remaining chief, Buffalo Hump, who led a formidable retaliatory force out of Comancheria, slicing down through the

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Plum Creek, cont.

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Guadalupe valley all the way to the coast of Texas.

Altogether, the raiding party comprised some 1,000 souls, including camp followers. Actual Comanche warriors probably were between 400 and 500, although some argue the figure was higher. A good number of Kiowas and Mexican guides rode along. There is evidence that this raid also was part of a scheme among Mexican Centralists to punish the citizens of Victoria and Linnville for providing Mexican Federalists a port and site for the short-lived provisional government of the Republic of the Rio Grande.

Regardless, this was a massive force designed to kick some serious butt. It would not disappoint. Astounding it was that a force this large could infiltrate south Texas relatively unseen, but, except for a few farms attacked along the way, that's what happened.

The raiding party followed Plum Creek, which provided cover, and moved east and south of Gonzales. Although the Texas rangers had discovered the tracks of the huge war party, some of the warriors broke off from the main body on August 6th and attacked Victoria before the citizens could be warned.

The Comanches then moved largely undetected to the small town of Linnville, Texas, which was the second largest port in the Republic of Texas at the time. Early on August 8, 1840 the Comanches surrounded the small port and began an extended rampage of pillaging and burning the stores and homes. Linnville, which is now a ghost town, is located 3 ½ miles northeast of present-day Port Lavaca.

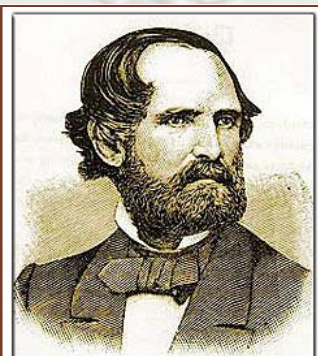
The sacking of Linnville was both a stunning victory for the Comanches and the eventual determinant of their fate. For three days the Indians ravaged and celebrated while survivors watched from the safety of boats in the Gulf of Mexico.

Overstuffed warehouses full of dry goods were looted and burned. The Indians became giddy gorging on brightly colored ribbon, bolts of cloth, frockcoats, top hats, brass buttons, parasols, mirrors and other extravagances. There was even an undisclosed amount of silver bullion taken. War chiefs swaddled themselves in shiny trinkets and fancy accoutrements. To the Comanche, the spoils of war were an entitlement—and they loaded up every horse, every pack mule, every conveyance to the hilt!

Sated in every way, Buffalo Hump eventually called for the return ride to Comancheria. The Indian procession struggled under its burden of contraband, prisoners and stolen livestock. It looked like a gaudy, slow-moving and ponderous Mardi Gras parade! Meanwhile, riders were galloping all over central Texas spreading news of the raid and seeking volunteers to confront the marauders.



Comanche warrior



Ben McCulloch

Further west, veteran frontier leaders like Matthew “Old Paint” Caldwell and Ben McCulloch were busy gathering the scattered volunteers at the cabin of Isham Good. The Texans organized a volunteer army under Republic of Texas general Felix Huston and hid them all along Plum Creek.

As the Comanches approached the Texas positions along the creek, Caldwell pleaded with Huston to make a surprise attack. Just as the general was to reach a decision, a courier arrived from Bastrop with word that Colonel Burleson was on his way with nearly a hundred more men. Huston decided to wait for Burleson. By

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Look to the Experts

by Larry Gfeller

There are many opportunities for master naturalists to develop real expertise in specialized areas. The re-emergence of biological surveys in our chapter is perhaps the newest opportunity.

A biological survey (or census) is an assessment of the condition of an ecological resource, like a water body, wetlands or a forest. In our case, the need to study two parcels of land, both private and public, have popped up from unexpected sources.

The first instance was driven by chapter member Allen Guisinger, a Caldwell County resident, whose vision convinced the city manager of Luling that land owned by the city along the San Marcos River could be enhanced by the creation of a nature trail designed by the Lost Pines Master Naturalists.

Next, through a LPMN outreach booth at Elgin's Sip, Shop & Stroll event in October, a personal request was received. Chapter members Bruce Siebert, Melissa Cole and Wesley Smith met many local citizens that night, but one in particular was so impressed that she asked if our chapter could do a plant and bird survey on her private property.

If someone is involved in environmental planning—which both of these engagements are—there is a need to understand what resources are there before committing additional time and money. This is where the biological survey comes in—the collection and analysis of specified bio-indicators. In both projects, the initial focus has been on plants and wildlife. Although these surveys have been completed, both projects remain open at this point for broader purposes.

To effectively tap into the chapter skills needed to deliver a quality biological census, we first need a leader who understands the requirements of the request, is familiar with the talent within the chapter and who can orchestrate a scientific, disciplined process. That person is Kathy McAleese. Although the composition of each team is slightly different, collectively it's a broad cross-section of expertise. Louise Ridlon and Anna Stalcup have handled bird identification, while plants have been identified by Liz Pullman, Judy Turner, Jim Estes and Marsha Elrod. We even had outside help from Linda Jo Conn of the El Camino Real chapter.



This is not to say that other bio-indicators—like soils, geology, insects, reptiles, etc.—are not important; they weren't requested. While doing biological surveys is nothing new for our chapter, responding to requests from private citizens is. Our board of directors believes these surveys are a valuable service to landowners of Bastrop and Caldwell Counties.

The public surveys program is only in its infancy, so process and procedure is likely to be tweaked in coming months. Here is the important point: if you have an interest in birds or native plants there is no better way to deepen your skills than to learn from a master. Let Kathy McAleese know of your interest (kathrmacl@gmail.com). If you have highly developed skills in other areas of biological interest, let Kathy McAleese know of your willingness to help so that we may expand our services in the future.

There is little doubt that providing professional, science-based assessments of natural resources delivers education, outreach and service dedicated to the beneficial management of those resources to the communities we serve. This is the basic reason why we exist. It's also a lot of fun!

LPMN Illustrated

Photos by Michelle Belden



Little lady tresses (*Spiranthes tuberosa*)



Cricket frog (*Acris crepitans*)

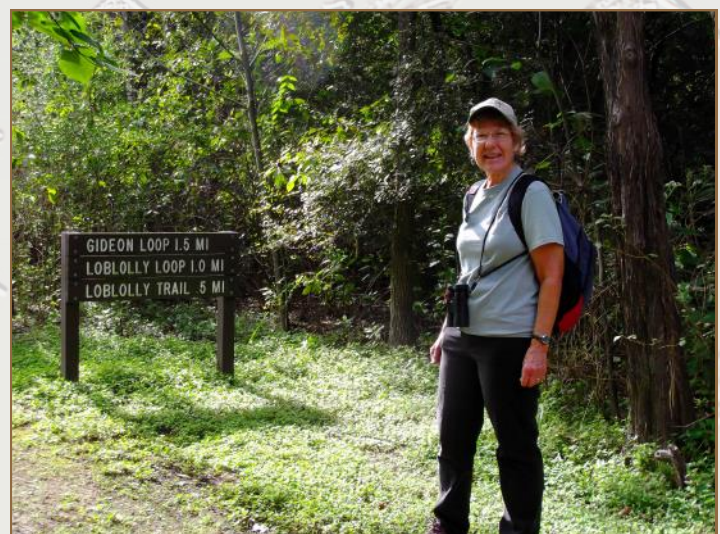
Have a story in pictures?
We welcome your contributions!



A handful of the Bridge Maniacs



Training some Junior Master Naturalists



Hike leader Louise Ridlon

Brooks on Books

by Bill Brooks

Every town needs a Paul Robbins, the author of the Austin Environmental Directory. Many of you may know Paul or his publication.

Paul Robbins began his work in the mid-1970s as part of Austin's movement to fight the South Texas Nuclear Project. In the early '80s he helped kick-start Austin's nationally recognized clean energy programs. Paul's articles on clean energy, food, and the environment are well represented on the Internet. He is currently part of a volunteer group reviewing Austin Energy's Generation Plan.

In 2007, the Austin City Council named District Cooling Plant 1 in honor of this unpaid environmentalist.

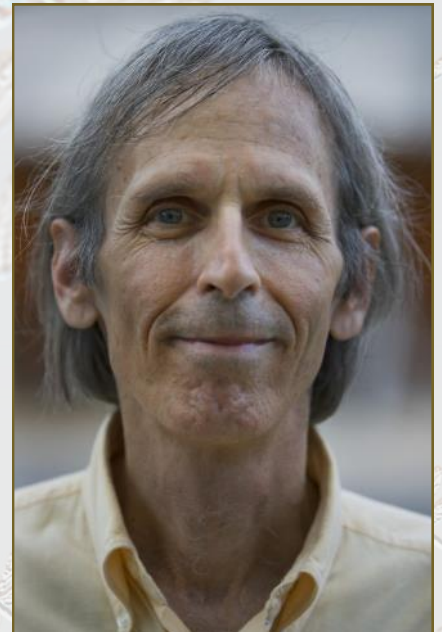
Paul has also won awards from the City of Austin and Keep Austin Beautiful. In 2010 the Austin Chronicle's readers voted Paul Robbins the best environmentalist. In 2013 his Environmental Directory was voted best green living guide.

The Environmental Directory is a user-friendly guide to environmental organizations, purchasing environmentally friendly products and learning about environmental issues. The first edition was published in 1995. The 2017 edition will be the 9th. The theme for this issue will be how to run an electric grid completely on green energy in the real world.

I have known Paul since the early days of his Directory. The publication includes the Horned Lizard Conservation Society, a 501(c)(3) non-profit. The 2017 edition will list about 70 environmental groups and will have a print run of 35,000 copies. Many will be direct mailed and they can be picked up free around Austin. I'll have a few copies of the 2017 edition when it comes out. It will also be on the Internet.

Groups are given free listings but the publication is supported by advertising, infomercials, and donations from individuals and environmental groups. Donations are always gratefully accepted. (Paul Robbins, P.O. Box 1374, Austin, TX 78767) This project has never been a big money maker. It is a labor of love. Perhaps this is why we don't see someone doing an Environmental Directory in every city.

If you would like to keep up with the most up-to-date Austin and Central Texas Conservation issues and events join Amy Stansbury's Austin EcoNetwork and subscribe to their free weekly e-newsletter, the Austin EcoNews.



Paul Robbins (Photo by Ralph Barrera, Austin American Statesman)

Lost Pines Master Naturalist Monthly Business Meetings

The monthly business meeting, which occurs on the third Monday of each month, is an opportunity to hear first hand about volunteer and advanced training opportunities. The chapter's project leaders update members on their work and recruit volunteers if needed. In addition, chapter administration issues are discussed: brief committee reports, financial decisions, and news from our state organizers. Stay tuned to Meetup.com to learn more about upcoming meetings.

One hour volunteer time is awarded for attendance at qualifying business meetings.

What's Blooming?

by Liz Pullman & Judy Turner

Early February—what could possibly be blooming? You have to look down at your feet and think “small.” Some of our so-called lawn weeds have already been blooming for several weeks. There are the lowly and much abused dandelions (*Taraxacum officinale*) doing their best to brighten up the stormwater containment areas with yellow flowers. *Taraxacum* translates to “disorder or remedy.” Hmm—probably describing Dandelion Wine. Henbit (*Lamium amplexicaule*) plants can usually be found in some form all year and have already started blooming. Magnify those purple flowers and you will have a very exotic orchid look-alike. Recently I came across a new common name for this plant (on the BONAP website)—Giraffehead. Cool name, but I have to wonder who is responsible for it since the resemblance seems vague. No clue in the Latin name either—*amplexicaule* means “clasping stems.” Another abundant and now blooming plant is Common Chickweed (*Stellaria media*), sometimes called Starwort. Chickweed multiplies rapidly in flower beds and is well-cursed for this habit. It is easily pulled out and if you just take a moment and look at it through a lens this little white flower competes with Anemones. Latin-wise, the name describes the flower—“star shaped center.” An evergreen vine that consistently blooms very early is Carolina Jessamine (*Gelsemium sempervirens*). Here's a photograph of this vine with yellow flowers that decorates my back fence.



Carolina Jessamine (*Gelsemium sempervirens*)

With a bit of effort, many plants can be identified very early in the year by simply studying their leaves as they emerge. This week (February 8th) a group of LPMN's were doing an initial invasive plant inventory at Lockhart State Park and found a small Red Buckeye (*Aesculus pavonia*) with fully formed and easily identifiable leaves (five leaflets). At ground level the large purple oxalis (*Oxalis drummondii*) had already sent up its distinctive clover-like leaves through the mulch and flood debris along Clear Fork Creek. The basal leaves of the Broad Leaf Wood Oats (aka River Oats, Inland Oats, Creek Oats, Indian Wood Oats, Wild Oats, ad infinitum) had also pushed through the mulch and the entire creekside promises to be thick with this easily identifiable grass with so many common names. *Chasmanthium latifolium*—The scientific species name actually means wide or broad-leaf.

Another type of leaves near the creek caught my eye, and after looking up some descriptions and photos, my best guess is Baby Blue-eyes (*Nemophila phacelioides*), an annual in the Borage Family. The habitat is perfect for Baby B's; I am anxious to go back and check it out next month and if mistaken in my ID, I will confess and worst case scenario, will have learned something.

Given the “winter” season in the LPMN counties and the absence of any extended deep freezes, something can usually be found blooming if you seek a south facing slope with scant shading. Spiderworts, violets, redbuds, Mexican plums and mountain laurel are all possible in February and early March.

Plum Creek, cont.

(Continued from page 2)

the time Burleson and his men rode in nearly two hours later, only the rear guard of the distended war party remained.

The Comanches were known as deadly horse cavalymen, striking quickly and disappearing like vapor into the plains. They were not accustomed to slow and deliberate maneuvering and did not shy away from a knock-down, drag out slug fest when their numbers were superior. Yet, when the Texans finally attacked, the Comanches fought a rear guard delaying action, trying to get away while protecting their plunder. The battle of Plum Creek was really a proverbial running gun battle.

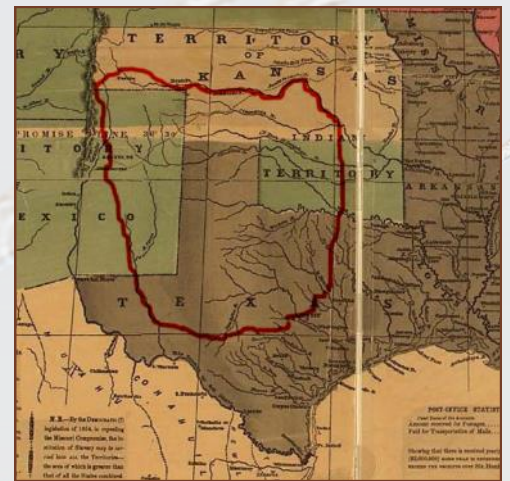
The battle raged for miles, across and through what was to become the city of Lockhart until the Indians found tree cover at Kelly Springs and turned to face their pursuers directly. As the sun was dying in the apricot sky, one Comanche war chief boldly road his charger out onto the field of battle to challenge the Texans to individual combat. Like a scene out of some Indiana Jones movie, a shot rang out from an unknown militia marksman, knocking the war chief off the back of his horse—stone cold dead in the dust.

Unfortunately for the Comanches, the untimely death of the war chief had ripped the fighting heart out of the warriors and the day quickly became a massacre rather than a battle. The Comanches struggled to get away with what they could as casualties mounted. Then an odd thing happened. When the militia discovered the stolen bullion, discipline gave way to greed. The Texans abandoned the fight, divided the loot and went home . . . allowing the Comanches to disappear into the hills . . . like vapor!

After the hostilities, more than eighty Comanche dead lay strewn along the fifteen mile battlefield. This was a serious defeat. Only one Texan was killed in the fighting, however the white prisoners weren't as lucky. Many of them were put to death before they could be rescued.



Comanche returning from Linnville



Comancheria

There is meaning in old places; we just need to stop and appreciate it.

If you gaze on Plum Creek today, it looks as deceptively quiet and secretive as it did in 1840. If you stand out by the Lockhart State Park entrance today and look to the northeast, just beyond the farmhouses and CCC relics, you can see the famous tree line. With your imagination, it all unspools in slow motion. You can also see the open field of battle where the reign of terror ended for south central Texas. This was the tipping point. It would only be a matter of time before the end of an era—the greatest warriors to ever ride the Great Plains would never raid this part of Texas again.

Newsletter Deadline

Submission deadline for the next issue is April 21, 2017. We welcome relevant contributions, photos, announcements, or other material relating to the mission of the Texas Master Naturalist program, particularly those pertaining to our local area. Submissions may be edited for clarity, grammar, spelling, and space requirements. Please send information to the editor at Roxanne.M.Hernandez@gmail.com.

Bill's Snippets

JAGUARS IN ARIZONA

Three Jaguars have been photographed in the U.S. since 2009. "El Jefe" wandered around Arizona a year or so ago. He killed a bear, the first such kill on record. Presumably El Jefe returned to Mexico. Late in 2016 another young male Jaguar was photographed in Arizona.



SNAKE VENOM DEADLY? IT DEPENDS...

A single bite from a taipan snake contains enough venom to kill 25,000 mice. Not all mammals are so susceptible to snake venom. Mongooses, ground squirrels and even hedgehogs are all capable of surviving the bites of certain snakes; bites that could easily kill humans (bbc.com).

ENDANGERED OCELOT DEN FOUND

There are less than 100 endangered ocelots found in Texas. [Wildlife biologists found the first ocelot den \(and a male kitten\) in 20 years last December.](#)

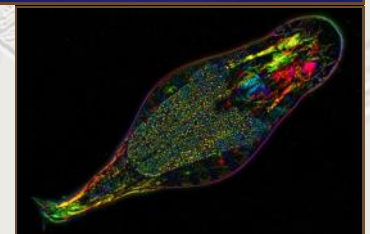


NORTH AMERICA'S "CENTER"

[The dead center of North America is now](#) ironically located in a small town called Center, North Dakota. In 1931, the USGS called a spot near the town of Rugby, North Dakota the geographic center, only to update it in 1995 to a small body of water about 20 miles to the southwest of the town. As Peter Rogerson, a professor of geography at the University at Buffalo in New York who developed the new geographical method to identify Center, ND, said, "It could always be more exact." He added that other scientists may take different approaches to the problem, and that his answer doesn't close the door to future pursuits.

FUN FACTS ABOUT ANIMALS

- Over 95% of all animal species are invertebrates.
- The largest animal is the blue whale at 30m long (longer than a basketball court) and the smallest animals are rotifers, which are plankton that can be as small as 0.05 mm (not visible to the human eye). Rotifers are 154 times smaller than the smallest vertebrate which is the tropical frog *Paedophryne amauensis* (and is about the size of a housefly).
- Bioluminescence has evolved at least 50 separate times. Bioluminescence is the ability of a living creature to produce light. We know that it has evolved separate times because it is produced in many ways, such as with the enzyme luciferase and endosymbiotic bacteria. Bioluminescence is produced by fireflies, glow worms, mollusks, centipedes, deep sea fish, and krill.

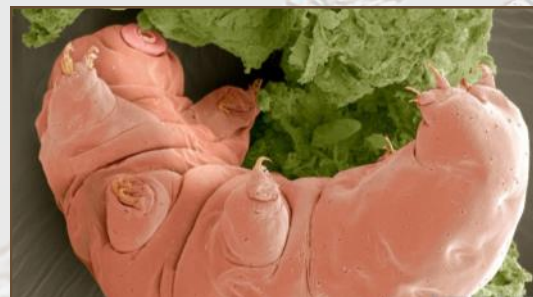


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Snippets, cont.

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- The mollusk ocean quahog has been found to be up to 507 years old.
- 15,000-20,000 new animal species are discovered each year. At least 80% of all of the animal species in the world have not yet been discovered. At the pace we're going, it will be another 480 years before the estimated 8.7 million species on earth are discovered.
- African elephants have the longest pregnancy. Their pregnancy takes 22 months— that's almost 2 years! Baby elephants are born very developed; they look like miniatures of their parents and can walk shortly after being born. At the other end of the spectrum, some opossums are pregnant for the shortest time of any animal— only 12 to 13 days. However, as opossums are marsupials, their babies are born immature and have to spend some time in their mother's pouch to complete their development.
- Tardigrades, known as water bears for their bear-like appearance, are less than a millimeter long. And they can survive almost anything! Temperatures between -272 and 150°C are not a problem. They can survive pressures greater than in the deepest part of the ocean and ionizing radiation. Tardigrades even can survive living in outer space. They need water to survive but when there is no water available they dry out so they have only 3% of their body water left. These little guys can survive like this for 30 years. When water arrives they rehydrate and go on to look for food and to reproduce like nothing ever happened.



THANK YOU, TREE FOLKS!

As of February 4, 2017, Tree Folks has planted 2 million pine trees in and around Bastrop. Go Tree Folks!!!



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Snippets, cont.

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FIRST RED SEAHORSE SEEN & PHOTOGRAPHED

A 9" Ruby Dragon was photographed off the southwest coast of Australia. [Watch this very cool video.](#)

EXTINCTION COUNTDOWN

- Madagascar's beloved ring-tailed lemurs (*Lemur catta*) have all but disappeared from many of the island nation's forests. [According to two worrying new studies](#), the species' population has fallen to between 2,000 and 2,400 animals—a shocking 95 percent decrease since the year 2000.
- Only about 30 vaquitas remain in the world, scientists have revealed in a [new report](#). Vaquitas, the world's smallest and most endangered porpoises, are found nowhere other than the Gulf of California—and their extinction is imminent unless Mexico permanently and effectively bans gillnet fishing.



I CAN EAT THAT

[Harvester ants soften large seeds by letting them germinate before eating them.](#) Some 18 genera of ants harvest seeds, and colonies of some species can store more than 300,000 seeds in their underground granaries. This is the first example of ants relying on germination to consume large seeds, although some worms seem to do it, too. The only other example of ants farming plants for food is of the Fijian ant *Philidris nagasau*, which grows *Squamellaria* plants and harvests their fruit.



STATE PROGRAM CONTACTS

Website: <http://txmn.org>

State Coordinator: Michelle Haggerty, 979-845-5777, mhaggerty@ag.tamu.edu

The Texas Master Naturalist program is sponsored by the Texas AgriLife Extension Service and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

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