

TRAVEL LOG

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During early 20th century excavations, workers uncovered the remains of three Native Americans at this popular rock shelter inside Mother Neff State Park. The park will soon nearly double in size.

TRAVEL NEWS

THE TEXAS PARKS and Wildlife Commission authorized the acquisition of 142 acres of land that will help the state's first official park—the 259-acre Mother Neff State Park—grow to nearly 400 acres, about double its size.

The \$1.15 million deal with adjacent Coryell County landowners involves land with high-quality natural and cultural resources, as well as an infrastructure that will support park operations and future expansion of recreational and educational opportunities.

Money for the land comes from partial proceeds of an earlier TPWD sale of more than 2,000 acres of Fortress Cliff Ranch that overlook Palo Duro Canyon State Park. Funds also were pooled from federal Land and Water Conservation Funds, which come with a requirement that TPWD uses the proceeds for public access to the outdoors.

With the added land comes a half mile along the Leon River, impressive river bluff views, a significant

spring, forest habitat and extensive prehistoric archeological resources. The land, originally Tonkawa Indian territory, also features limestone hills, prairies and woodlands.

The state park began as six acres on the Leon River that were donated in 1916 by Isabella Eleanor (Mother) Neff. After Isabella's death in 1921, her son Gov. Pat Neff created Mother Neff Memorial Park, which would serve as the nucleus of the new Texas State Park System.

For information, call (254) 853-2389 or visit www.texasstateparks.org.

WILL ROGERS Memorial Center in Fort Worth unveiled its \$32 million, 105,800-square-foot Equestrian Multi-Purpose Building on June 6, putting the city in the running for some of the biggest horse shows in the nation. The grand opening was initiated with a Region 9 Arabian Horse Championship Show.

The project, started in 2009 and completed on schedule, showcases 740 Priefert premium horse stalls,

exercise arenas, underground tunnel transport systems and other infrastructure improvements. The Center also features a series of seven porcelain-and-glass murals by artist Mike Mandel that depict various horse breeds and equestrian disciplines. Of special note are two renditions of historically significant horses: Wimpy, the 1941 grand champion of the Fort Worth Fat Stock Show, bred by the famous King Ranch; and Soapsuds, humorist-philosopher Will Rogers' favorite horse and the one on which he taught his children to ride.

Fort Worth Public Events Director Kirk Slaughter told the *Fort Worth Business Press*, "Fort Worth's commitment to significant enhancement of the Will Rogers Memorial Center ensures that our complex remains competitive for the largest and most visible equestrian events in the world."

Dan Wall, executive director of the Oklahoma City-based National Reining Horse Association, told the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, "Fort Worth has repositioned itself as a venue you have to take seriously. I can tell you

in prior years, unfortunately, we did not see Fort Worth as a possible host for some of our major events."

"When our members look for an ideal show venue, they place a priority on having an abundance of general riding locations and adequate training areas to prepare their horses to show; and the recent improvements in Fort Worth definitely meet those expectations," Wall says. "We are also thrilled about the additional stalling capabilities, which make Will Rogers very well-suited to host large NRHA events."

The impact is already being felt. The Appaloosa Horse Club board approved a five-year contract extension with Will Rogers for their World Championship Show and has announced the move of the ApHC National Show/Youth World Championship Show to Fort Worth for 2013-17.

Fort Worth Convention & Visitors Bureau President and CEO David DuBois says, "This new facility allows us to better promote our city as a destination for equestrian events and underscores our strong Western and equestrian heritage."

SEVERAL tourism organizations have been awarded free exhibit space in Texas Department of Transportation's Travel Information Centers. With this free exhibit space in the centers' lobbies, these organizations and communities are able to promote their attractions with special displays, including colorful photographs and other promotional materials. They will have use of the space from September through February.

Every six months, use of the display cases rotates to another set of tourism organizations.

Here are the newly selected exhibit space pairings:

- **Amarillo:** Arlington, Grand Prairie, Mansfield
- **Anthony:** West Texas Co-op
- **Denison:** Hico, Clifton, Glen Rose

- **Gainesville:** Brazoria County Tourism Council
- **Langtry:** Texas Tropical Trail Region
- **Laredo:** I-10 Corridor Association
- **Orange:** Texas Pecos Trail Region
- **Texarkana:** Texas Forest Trail Region
- **Valley:** Texas Brazos Trail Region
- **Waskom:** Frisco, Plano, McKinney

TxDOT will accept applications Dec. 1–10 for the next display period, which runs from March through August 2013. For more information, call the Travel Services Section at (512) 486-5800 or visit www.txdot.gov/travel/tourism_industry/display_cases.htm.

IN AN EFFORT to give travelers easier access to pertinent road-condition reports, the **Texas Department of Transportation has launched Drive Texas, a new mobile-friendly Highway Conditions Map.**

Launched June 20, Drive Texas, at www.drivetexas.org, displays statewide conditions affecting travel, including construction, closures, accidents and live weather feeds to give drivers the tools they need to check travel conditions before they hit the road.



The mobile-friendly site also allows travelers to find a nearby Safety Rest Area or Texas Travel Information Center. In select cities, they also can view traffic camera images, messages posted on dynamic message signs and more detailed information.

While TxDOT has offered highway conditions information to the traveling public for several years, Drive Texas offers a more modern, robust, user-friendly interface that puts information right at users' fingertips in an easy-to-find format.

The application also may be accessed by clicking on the "Highway Conditions" link on the www.txdot.gov homepage.

NOT LONG after celebrating 100 years afloat, the **Battleship Texas remains closed as teams tackle a series of leaks that are plaguing the ship**—a problem

STAN A. WILLIAMS/TXDOT



Iowa Pacific Holdings is set to take over management of the Texas State Railroad in an effort to preserve and revitalize the antique steam engine's 25-mile excursions from Rusk to Palestine.

that underscores the need for a dry-berth option for the World War I and II vessel.

The ship was initially closed June 9 so divers could repair a leak. When that was completed, the ship reopened for only a couple of days before the secondary leaks were discovered.

"The ship is not as good as she was. She's leaking, again," says Andy Smith, Battleship Texas State Historical Site superintendent.

Crews are working around the clock in hopes of reopening the century-old vessel within a week, but at press time, they continued to tackle several holes that appear to be the result of rivets popping out, according to Smith. Another location has water streaming in from a seam where two plates had been riveted together. While the holes are smaller, they are in deeper water, so the flow of the leak is faster.

"It sometimes feels like you're chasing your own tail," Smith told the Associated Press.

In 2010, TPWD signed a contract with an architectural and engineering firm to design a permanent dry berth for the historic vessel before time and the elements scuttle the ship, but if they are unable to find a dry-berthing solution that the department can afford, Smith says TPWD will shift its efforts to repairing the ship in place.

For more information about dry-berthing efforts, visit www.dryberth-texas.com. For information about

helping to preserve the battleship, visit www.battleshiptexas.org.

A MERICAN Heritage Railways' takeover of the Texas State Railroad in 2007 helped preserve the national treasure, but ridership remains low, and **Texas State Railroad Association** officials **have approved a proposal to change hands** once again.

Iowa Pacific—which owns six railroads in the United States (including two in Texas) and two lines in Great Britain—plans for a business model that will change the rail from a tourist-only operation to a combination of tourist and freight rail services.

Iowa Pacific Holdings President and CEO Ed Ellis says, "We are very excited about this opportunity to build on the substantial achievements that American Heritage has made, in cooperation with the Texas State Railroad Authority, in improving the Texas State Railroad's infrastructure and in developing the tourist ridership. It is our intention to continue this progress by further developing passenger services, reconnecting the railroad with the national rail network at Palestine and implementing freight service."

Texas State Railway Association board members offered appreciation and gratitude to American Heritage Railways CEO Allen Harper for taking over the railroad from the state and bringing it to near-profitability. Harper says, "We have had a tre-

mendous experience developing the Texas State Railroad and appreciate all the assistance we have enjoyed from the Texas State Railroad Authority and from local communities in this process."

Texas Railroad Authority President Steve Presley says they fully support the transaction and feel Iowa Pacific's track record in developing passenger and freight business will be a strong positive for the areas served by the Texas State Railroad.

TSR Chief Operating Officer Jeffrey Jackson told KETK-TV in Tyler that there is a 3-mile section of track not being used to which Iowa Pacific hopes to add freight.

"The first order of business for Iowa Pacific will be to repair that track and formally connect the Texas State Railroad back to the Union Pacific main line," Jackson says. He also reiterates that the plan is to build upon what has already been accomplished with the railroad passenger service, so East Texans need not worry.

"They won't see any difference," Jackson says, except for hopefully some economic development improvements for the area if Iowa Pacific's plans come to fruition.

IN THE RANKS

IN THEIR QUEST for the **20 Best Small Towns in America**, **Smithsonian** magazine sought out communities with enlightened good times in an unhurried, charming

setting. Among them, they found **Marfa**.

Smithsonian magazine worked with a geographic information systems company to search its database for towns with populations of less than 25,000 that also have high concentrations of museums, historic sites, botanic gardens, resident orchestras, art galleries and other cultural assets common to big cities. Marfa ranked eighth on the list, which also included Taos, N.M.; Durango, Colo.; and Princeton, N.J.

“With mock couture, edgy movies and ironic motels, it’s no cow town,” the magazine reports about Marfa.

“It’s just a flyspeck in the flat, hot, dusty cattle country of southwest Texas—closer to Chihuahua than Manhattan. But it’s cooking, thanks to an influx of creative types from way downtown: filmmakers like the Coen brothers, who shot *No Country for Old Men* in Marfa (pop. 1,900),” the magazine reports. It adds that open galleries, bookstores, gourmet food trucks and lodgings helped draw the cultural camp followers.

The magazine explains, “It may have all started when people first noticed the Marfa Mystery Lights, an optical phenomenon popularly attributed to UFOs and celebrated with parades, battling bands and exhibitions every Labor Day weekend. Or in the early ‘70s when New York artist Donald Judd landed in Marfa to plant his massive minimalist sculptures on a decommissioned military camp outside town, the core of the collection now at the Donald Judd and Chinati foundations.”

Marfa continues its cultural expansion. An Our Town grant from the NEA is helping Marfa’s not-for-profit Ballroom Foundation create the Drive-In, an open-air art space designed by the New York architectural firm MOS.

DENTON, College Station, Gainesville and Frisco were among the finalists in the **Rand McNally/USA TODAY Best of the Road Competition**, with winners to be announced July 16 at the annual Destination Marketing Association International conference.

Rand McNally and *USA TODAY* teamed up to find the Best Small Towns in America. A small town is defined as having a population of less than 150,000.

More than 450 towns have been nominated by locals, businesses and CVB members to compete for a spot

J. GRIFFIS SMITH/TXDOT



Marfa’s cultural expansion in an unhurried setting helped it earn a spot on *Smithsonian’s* 20 Best Small Towns in America list.

on the Best of the Road® Rally routes. Thirty finalist towns, chosen in voting, will compete in five categories to be named Most Beautiful, Most Patriotic, Friendliest, Most Fun or Best for Food.

With voting now closed, Denton leads in the Friendliest and Most Fun categories. It ranks fourth in Best for Food.

Also among the Friendliest City finalists are College Station (No. 5) and Frisco (No. 10).

Gainesville takes the top spot for Most Patriotic.

Teams of 10 amateur travelers visited the 30 top finalists to see why they should be named the best in their category before determining the winners.

For more information, visit www.bestoftheroad.com.

TOURISM PAGES

THE 10TH ANNUAL edition of the **Official Regional Visitors Guide for Beaumont and Jefferson County** is hot off the press with articles, suggested itineraries and tourism information.

Each year, Jefferson County tour-

ism authorities work together to publish the magazine devoted to the area’s must-see attractions, best dining, shopping and outdoors activities. The new issue is designed to be the ultimate resource for visitors looking for the unique Southeast Texas experience.

Highlights include information on local cuisine, an extensive event calendar, hotel listings, easy-to-read maps and an expanded spread on popular sporting events and recreational activities.

“We’re offering travelers a chance to pack more fun into their road trips,” says Beaumont CVB Director of Marketing Stephanie Molina. “Southeast Texas has so many options for those looking for a refreshing getaway. With challenging events like the Pleasure Island Bridge Half-Marathon to museum-hopping with the family, or enjoying a Cajun night out Zydeco dancing at Larry’s French Market—the possibilities are unlimited.”

Travelers may request an Official Visitors Guide by contacting the Beaumont or Port Arthur Convention & Visitors Bureaus at www.beaumontcvb.com or www.portarthurtx.com, or by calling (800) 392-4401 or (800) 235-7822.

The guide also is available at select locations along Interstate 10 from Orange to Houston, at the Texas Department of Transportation’s 12 Texas Travel Information Centers throughout the state, and at high-traffic businesses and hotels in the region.

THE AMARILLO Chamber of Commerce is carrying a newly published coffee table book—

Amarillo Faces, Places & Open Spaces—that helps showcase the community as a place to live, work and raise a family. The book features original photographs by Ralph Duke and a narrative by Christine Wylly.

Lammert Publications was overwhelmed by the response of companies wanting to be profiled in the book. This is the largest book they have produced to date, with 300-plus pages and more than 80 local company and organizational profiles featured.

“We are so excited to have this beautiful piece to offer those that love Amarillo and the Panhandle as much as we do. It celebrates all of the things that make our city the best place to live and do business. Ralph Duke’s photographs and Christine Wylly’s attention to detail on city information really makes this a first-class piece,” says Chamber President/CEO Gary Molberg.

The book, which retails for \$49.95, is available in limited quantities at the Chamber offices at 1000 S. Polk during normal business hours.

For more information, call (806) 373-7800 or visit www.Amarillo-Chamber.org

INDUSTRY INSIDERS

THE CITY OF South Padre Island welcomes **Lacey Ekberg** as its **new Convention and Visitors Bureau Director**.

Ekberg, who stepped into her new role May 14, has had a career that has spanned many disciplines, beginning with Fox Sports, where she worked on contract negotiations with the National Football League, Major League Baseball and the National Hockey League, and participated in the coordination of two Super Bowls. She has served as an executive director for chamber of commerce and economic development commissions in several jurisdictions, and most recently served as the executive director for the Duplin County Events Center in North Carolina.

TEXAS TRIVIA

What Texas institution was established by the woman who was the force behind the Highway Beautification Act of 1965?

The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin is Lady Bird Johnson's living legacy. She co-founded the Center in 1982 to increase the sustainable use and conservation of native wildflowers, plants and landscapes.

The Center will host a free, July 29 Centennial Tribute Day, tied to the date in 1968 when Lyndon B. Johnson gifted Lady Bird Johnson with the 50 pens used to sign environmental bills inspired by her efforts. The Tribute Day includes the unveiling of a new Lady Bird exhibit, as well as access to the center's botanic gardens, new 16-acre arboretum, historical tour and other activities.

As First Lady, Johnson put beautification and conservation efforts in the spotlight while traveling to natural areas across the nation. In addition to pushing for the Highway Beautification Act of 1965, she championed the establishment of California's Redwood National Park (features the Lady Bird Johnson Grove Nature Trail) and the public preservation of Enchanted Rock in Texas.

TEXAS TRIVIA

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TEXAS TRAVEL INFORMATION CENTERS

VISITOR NUMBERS as of May 31, 2012

TRAVEL CENTER	Month Visitors	Percent Variation*	Year-to-Date Visitors	Percent Variation*
AMARILLO	9,888	+9.73	33,606	-1.28
ANTHONY	3,958	-27.42	22,199	-20.30
CAPITOL	6,549	+4.52	33,284	+1.47
DENISON	20,491	-21.71	90,834	-28.86
GAINESVILLE	21,618	-2.99	99,990	+8.80
LANGTRY	4,087	+11.54	21,835	-7.75
LAREDO	5,865	+4.51	33,591	+6.53
ORANGE	32,587	-12.45	148,726	-13.01
TEXARKANA	31,046	+260.25	121,742	+238.13
VALLEY	7,874	+12.04	70,840	+8.87
WASKOM	34,855	+2.17	121,450	-3.24
WICHITA FALLS	16,299	+0.89	63,510	+0.83
CENTER TOTALS	195,117	+7.44	861,607	+3.80

*Compared to last year

Dial toll-free (800) 452-9292 for travel assistance from
 TxDOT's Texas Travel Information Centers
 (8 a.m.–6 p.m. daily, Central Time)

www.traveltex.com • www.texashighways.com
www.txdot.gov • www.dontmesswithtexas.org

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TRAVEL INFORMATION DIVISION