



**PINE
CURTAIN
OF THE
PAST**

**TRACING EAST TEXAS'
HISTORIC TIMBER BONANZA**

Text by **MATT JOYCE**

Photographs by **WILL VAN OVERBEEK**

Texas Southeastern Railroad Engine No. 7 near Diboll, 1907.



Looking up into the thick pine canopy

of deep East Texas, it's hard to believe that the pristine forests the pioneers encountered here are long gone. Loggers harvested the bulk of the virgin Piney Woods about a century ago during a bonanza that revolutionized the region with an influx of newcomers and industry. Little remains of the bonanza days, but travelers can immerse themselves in the era at local museums and historic sites—and by exploring new forests that have reclaimed some of their old ground.

A good example is the Aldridge Sawmill Historic Site at the Angelina National Forest in Jasper County. The ruins of a few concrete buildings are all that remain of the mill, which operated from about 1906 to 1918. The sawmill anchored a company town of nearly 600 people along the Neches River. Now, loblolly pines and sycamore trees have muscled their way up among the mill's foundation blocks and in the old railroad bed.

“When you see old pictures of sawmill towns, all you see are stumps, because pretty much every tree was cut down,” says Jonathan Gerland, director of The History Center in nearby Diboll. “What you see here today is a big difference.”

Because the Aldridge mill site is now within the National Forest, the ruins have been mostly left alone, Gerland notes, which subjects them to frequent graffiti but also protects them from being bulldozed. “This is what I like to see,” Gerland says, pointing to the forest's regrowth. “It's a railroad grade with a big pine tree growing up in the middle of it. The railroad was what facilitated the harvest of its ancestors.”

The route that linked Aldridge to timber markets in Dallas, Beaumont, and beyond now serves as part of the Sawmill Hiking Trail, a 2.5-mile path between Aldridge and Boykin Springs Recreation Area. The Civilian Conservation Corps developed the recreation area in the 1930s, including a pine-fringed lake for swimming and fishing, campsites, and picnic areas. Near the lake, artesian springs pour cool and clear from a sandstone bluff over Boykin Creek, which flows into the Neches.

Meandering along Boykin Creek, the sandy hiking trail passes through an understory of yaupon, sweet gum, and white oak. Loggers once trudged these woods to harvest the four-foot diameter longleaf pine trees that dominated the forest. Two men called sawyers worked opposite ends of a crosscut saw, felling the trees and removing their limbs; teams of mules or oxen dragged the logs to wagons or the train spur, which took the timber to the mill.

“It was a lot of hand-to-hand work,” Gerland explains. “Nowadays, no human hand touches a board until it's in Lowe's or Home Depot. It's all machines. In those days, you wrapped chains on by hand, you had to work with the animals, and it was a lot more labor intensive.”

Aldridge was one of more than 1,000 sawmill towns that sprang up in East Texas during the timber bonanza, which began after the Civil War and continued until the Great Depression, Gerland says. Abundant pine forests, the expansion of railroads throughout East Texas, and the depletion of softwood forests in the Northeast United States all contributed to the growth of the regional forest industry.

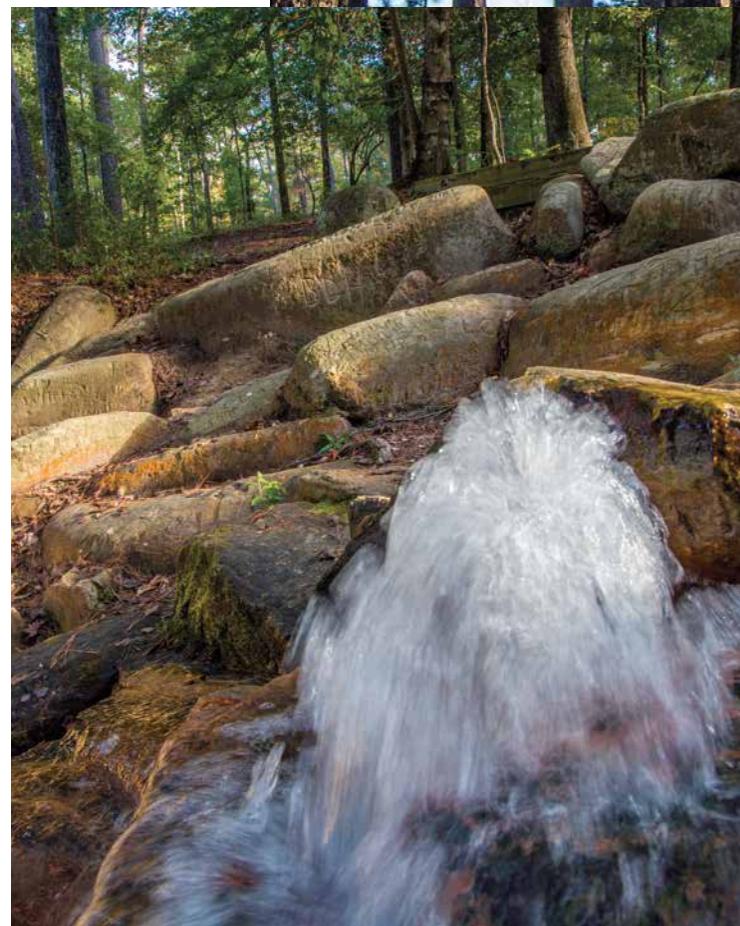
Texas lumber production peaked in 1907, when about 550 East Texas sawmills churned out 2.25 billion board feet, third highest in the nation that year, according to *Sawdust Empire: The Texas Lumber Industry, 1830-1940*, by Robert S. Maxwell and Robert D. Baker. Driven largely by population growth and western expansion, the bonanza collapsed with the onset of the Great Depression, which happened to coincide with the clear-cutting of most of East Texas' old-growth forests.



BOGGY SLOUGH

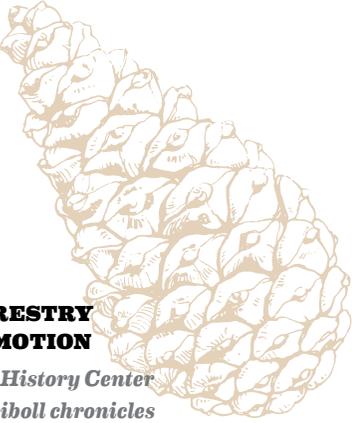
Read about the Temple Foundation's plans for its historic Boggy Slough property at texashighways.com/webextra.

*Boykin Springs
in the Angelina
National Forest*



Meandering along Boykin Creek, the sandy hiking trail passes through an understory of yaupon, sweet gum, and white oak. Loggers once trudged these woods to harvest the four-foot diameter longleaf pine trees that dominated the forest.

To order a print of this photograph, call 866/962-1191, or visit www.texashighwaysprints.com.



FORESTRY IN MOTION

The History Center in Diboll chronicles the history of the East Texas timber industry, including a restored 1920 Texas Southeastern Railroad locomotive. Below, a steam-driven log loader at work in Trinity County, 1907.



Because the Aldridge mill site is now within the National Forest, the ruins have been mostly left alone, which subjects them to frequent graffiti but also protects them from being bulldozed.

But the timber industry didn't disappear. While some businesses moved to the Pacific Northwest, other companies started growing pine trees on clear-cut land and adopted agricultural practices aimed at sustainability. Meanwhile, the economic challenges of the Great Depression prompted timber companies to negotiate the sale of huge tracts of their East Texas holdings to the federal government, resulting in the creation of four national forests: Sam Houston, Davy Crockett, Angelina, and Sabine.



The forest sector is still a significant part of the East Texas economy, generating a direct economic impact of \$5.7 billion and employing 19,000 people in 2012, the most recent data available from the Texas A&M Forest Service. Log trucks piled high with fresh-cut timber are a common sight on the highways of Angelina County, where travelers will find two museums dedicated to the timber industry.

In Diboll, a sawmill town founded by T.L.L. Temple in 1893, The History Center houses an industry archive, research library, and exhibits related to the timber industry. Temple and his descendants operated the region's biggest and longest-running local timber company until it broke up over the last several years.

Constructed in the Craftsman style of native yellow pine and cypress, The History Center's exhibits tell the story of the Temples, Diboll, the railroads, and logging with historic photographs, audio recordings, and artifacts such as a weathered, six-foot crosscut saw. In the courtyard, visitors can climb aboard a restored 1920 Texas Southeastern Railroad locomotive and pull a rope to sound its steam-engine whistle.

"It's said that during the peak of the timber industry, there was not a place in Angelina County where you could not hear a train whistle," Gerland says.

Up the road about 11 miles, the Texas Forestry Museum in Lufkin preserves the history of the industry with exhibits of



easily digestible information, historic photographs, videos, restored equipment, and an outdoor walking trail.

In the *Money Trees* exhibit, the Forestry Museum explains the many uses of pine trees, from newsprint to toilet seats. The display shows the historical methods of tapping trees for their sap to make turpentine, and how East Texas longleaf pine trees were used to build U.S. ships during World War I.

In the History Wing, the museum walks through the steps of logging, moving, and milling lumber during the bonanza days. An impressive collection of historic equipment helps paint the picture, including a steam engine and its moving

LOGGING MILES

A 1946 Chevrolet log truck on display at the Texas Forestry Museum in Lufkin.



parts, which visitors can activate with the push of a button (now run by electricity). Steam engines served as the heart of a mill by motoring the saw and other equipment via belts and pulleys. One of the tools attached to the motor was the sharpening machine, one of which is on display. Saw-sharpeners were a specialized group of employees and among the mill's most highly paid.

"It was one of the most important jobs



THE TIMBER TRAIL

The Texas Forestry Museum's artifacts include a 100-foot-tall fire tower, and below, an early-1900s wood planer (foreground) and mill steam engine (background). In the former sawmill town of Manning, the Texas Forest Country Retreat Mansion on Sawmill Lake provides bed-and-breakfast lodging in a 1905 house, including an expansive wooden deck on the back.



to keep the mill running," says Rachel Collins, director of the Forestry Museum. "He was nicknamed 'the dentist,' because he worked on the teeth of the saw."

In the *Everyday Life in the Mill Town* exhibit, the Forestry Museum recalls daily life in a remote company town. It was standard in sawmill towns for companies to pay their employees mostly with "scrip," rather than cash. Employees could then exchange their scrip for goods at the company commissary. A register with employee charge accounts helps illustrate the system. "The commissary had everything under one roof, from coffins to canned goods and castor oil," Collins says.

Forestry Museum visitors can also see a four-foot-square diorama of Manning, a former sawmill town about 20 miles southeast of Lufkin. The Carter-Kelley Lumber Company built the mill in 1906 and then abandoned it after a 1935 fire. Most of the 1,600 residents moved away, but the Flournoy family stuck around, and in 2011, the family opened the 1905 sawmill manager's house as a bed-and-breakfast called the Texas Forest Country Retreat Mansion on Sawmill Lake.

The two-story home, made of red bricks and longleaf pine, provides elegant country lodging, as well as an atmosphere rich in the history of its sawmill origins. Hefty sycamore trees shade the front of the house, where visitors can relax in a 90-year-old porch swing. In back, a wooden deck looks out on a rose garden and a small wedding chapel that was repurposed from the home's old washroom. An expansive lawn rolls out to a patch of pine forest, which has regrown tall and thick since the sawmill days.

The home's furnishings are a combination of antiques, Flournoy family heirlooms, and furniture selected to complement the historic theme. On the walls, decorations evoke Manning and the logging bonanza—paintings of old sawmills and old-growth longleaf pine forests, and a postcard showing the Manning sawmill fire of 1916.

There's also a black-and-white photo of the Manning sawmill pond chock-full of logs, which are jumbled up like giant

pick-up sticks. Ponds were critical to sawmills as a water source for the steam engine and as a storage place for logs, says Bob Flournoy, who grew up on the property. The logs were better preserved in water and were much easier to move around as they floated on the surface. Some of those logs sank over the years, and Flournoy has recovered several to make furniture that's used in the bed-and-breakfast.

It's a short walk from the bed-and-breakfast to the 15-acre sawmill pond and the Manning sawmills' concrete ruins, which rest in thick stands of vegetation, overgrown in muscadine grapevines. For those interested, the folks at Mansion on Sawmill Lake will show you around the historic ruins and explain the layout of the vanished mill town.

The rivers of deep East Texas were a key water source for the sawmill towns of the bonanza era, but the rivers weren't used much for transporting logs after about 1900. In the waning days of the logging bonanza, conservationists recognized that forested river and stream corridors should be protected for the sake of water quality and wildlife habitat; most timber companies today have followed

suit. As a result, floating the Neches and Angelina rivers is one of the best ways to get a look at relatively untouched portions of the Piney Woods landscape.

The Davy Crockett Paddling Trail follows 9.2 miles of the Neches on the eastern border of Davy Crockett National Forest, with put-in and take-out points not far from Lufkin. The river flows unhurriedly to the southeast through forests of pine and a panorama of hardwood trees—sweet gums, red oaks, willow oaks, and hickories, to name a few.

In the quiet of the river bottom, miles from the nearest highway, wildlife begins to emerge. A little blue heron alights from a downstream sand bank, carefully keeping its distance. Water striders scatter atop the brown water, dispersing like the fracture of a shattering windowpane. Soft-shell turtles emerge for a peek, while a three-foot alligator keeps watch from a muddy bank.

The river wends one way and then the next, forever eroding the bank's outside bend. The trees cling to the bank, their sinewy roots exposed as the soil slowly gives way. Eventually, they'll topple into the river. All the while on the opposite bank, the shore is growing with



ESSENTIALS TIMBER TRAIL

For Angelina County tourism information, call the **Lufkin Convention & Visitors Bureau** at 936/633-0349; www.visitlufkin.com. For Jasper County tourism information, call the **Jasper-Lake Sam Rayburn Area Chamber of Commerce** at 409/384-2762; www.jaspercoc.org. Information for sites in the story follows:

Aldridge Sawmill Historic Site is on Forest Service Rd. 326 about 16 miles southeast of Zavalla. Call 936/897-1068; www.fs.usda.gov/detail/texas/specialplaces/?cid=stelprdb5291444.

Boykin Springs Recreation Area is on Forest Service Rd. 313 about 14 miles southeast of Zavalla. Call 936/897-1068; www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/texas/recreation/hiking/recarea/?recid=30208&actid=71.

The History Center is at 102 N. Temple Dr. in Diboll. Hours: 8-5 Mon-Fri, 9-1 Sat. Free. Call 936/829-3543; www.thehistorycenteronline.com.

The Texas Forestry Museum is at 1905 Atkinson Dr. in Lufkin. Hours: 10-5 Mon-Sat. Free. Call 936/632-9535; www.treetexas.com.

The Texas Forest Country Retreat Mansion on Sawmill Lake is at 156 Grimes-Flournoy Rd. in Huntington. Call 877/829-2422; www.texasforestcountryretreat.com.

fresh dirt and debris—fertile ground for the next generation of the great Piney Woods of deep East Texas. ★

TH Associate Editor Matt Joyce is grateful he doesn't have to work for an early 1900s logging operation. Photographer Will van Overbeek was fascinated by the treasure trove of historical images at The History Center in Diboll.

DRIVE

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COWBOY CHARISMA

*Horse trainer
Joseph Bushnell
at the 2014 Bill
Pickett Zydeco
Trail Ride.*

TEXAS TICKET

Giddyup Zydeco

ZYDECO, RODEO, AND RIDING AT
THE BILL PICKETT ZYDECO TRAIL RIDE

text by MATT JOYCE



warm June sunshine to take part in this celebration of horsemanship, zydeco music, and Creole culture.

“It’s something that brings people from all over together,” says Marcus Semien, a Cypress resident who rides with his family’s group, Semien Stables, based in Orange. “And it brings my family together. We just love it. We love the horses, we love the food, we love the music. We love it all.”

The Bill Pickett Trailriders’ annual Trail Ride, Zydeco Festival & Rodeo is one of hundreds of zydeco trail rides that take place across rural East Texas and Louisiana in the spring, summer, and fall. Rooted in Creole culture, the trail rides honor the heritage of African-American cowboys and the ever-evolving sounds of zydeco music. The Bill Pickett event—one of Texas’ most established, now in its 11th year—is held in the community of Cheek, about 10 miles southwest of Beaumont. Along with the trail ride, the June 12-14 weekend includes two rodeos and zydeco concerts on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.

“What makes our trail ride different is we have the rodeo,” says Acynthia Villery, the event’s producer and founder. “A lot of our cowboys cross over from trail-riding into rodeo.”

The Bill Pickett Zydeco Trail Ride is named for one of the most famous black cowboys in American history. Willie M. Pickett was born in 1871 in the community of Jenks Branch on the Travis/Williamson county line, the son of former slaves, as historian Bailey C. Hanes recounts in his 1977 biography, *Bill Pickett, Bulldogger: The Biography of a Black Cowboy*. Growing up on the rural outskirts of Austin and in Taylor, Pickett excelled as a cowboy, including his innovative trick of subduing a wild steer by jumping on its back, grabbing its horns, and biting its lip. The practice was eventually dubbed bulldogging because Pickett learned it by observing cow dogs at work. Bulldogging evolved over time into the popular rodeo event known as steer wrestling.

Pickett showcased his cowboy and

bulldogging skills at exhibitions around Texas and the West, joining the Miller Brothers’ 101 Ranch Wild West Show out of Oklahoma in 1907. Along with stars like Will Rogers, Pickett toured the United States, Canada, South America, and England into the 1920s, thrilling audiences with his unbelievable bulldogging. In 1932, Pickett died after being kicked in the head by a horse; he’s buried on the 101 Ranch near Ponca City, Oklahoma.

Pickett would feel right at home at the simple outdoor rodeo grounds at Laday’s Arena in Cheek, where, at the conclusion of the Saturday afternoon trail ride, spectators lean along the arena fence or sit on the top rung for a front-row view of the action. Cottonwood trees circle the perimeter of the dirt-floored arena, providing shade for spectators who set up lawn chairs; others take seats in the shaded bleachers. After a smaller rodeo on Saturday night



THE BILL PICKETT TRAILRIDERS’ ANNUAL TRAIL RIDE, ZYDECO FESTIVAL & RODEO

is June 12-14 at Laday’s Arena, 7400 Boyt Road, near Beaumont in Cheek. Call 832/398-1425; www.bptrailriders.com.

with calf roping, steer wrestling, barrel racing, and ladies’ steer undecorating, the Sunday afternoon rodeo features those events along with bull riding, bareback riding, and team roping. For children, there’s a roping clinic, mutton busting, and a calf scramble.

The close-up view adds to the rodeo excitement. In the steer-wrestling event originated by Pickett, suspense builds as a cowboy attempts to back his horse into the box while waiting for a steer to dart out from the chute. In the ensuing pursuit, the cowboy leaps from his sprinting horse to wrestle the animal

down as fast as possible, dust flying.

Most people in the African-American rodeo scene are familiar with Pickett’s legacy in the sport, says Brian White, a bullfighter/rodeo clown from Midwest City, Oklahoma, who’s participating in the Cheek rodeo for the second time this summer. One of only a handful of African-American bullfighters in the country, White has worked for 20 years protecting bull riders after they get thrown.

“A lot of people say Bill Pickett was the first black cowboy,” White says. “Well, no, he wasn’t the first black cowboy. We were cowboys well before we were ever brought to this country. He wasn’t the first African-American cowboy, but he was probably the first to be put in the spotlight because of what he did.”

As the rodeo events unfold in the arena, zydeco bands play on the adjacent concert stage. Incorporating elements of rhythm-and-blues, soul, hip-hop, rap, and country music, the bands

ABOUT THREE HUNDRED HORSES, saddled and raring to go, tug impatiently at their reins as the Bill Pickett Zydeco Trail Ride gets underway near Beaumont. Two-dozen party wagons with big-box speakers blast the propulsive rhythms of accordions and washboards across the muster grounds. Revelers without horses scramble to borrow one or jump aboard a party wagon, laughing and dancing to the music.

After a prayer for safety and a final check for traffic, the pace car noses its way onto the rural Jefferson County blacktop and the trail ride rumbles to a cantering start. The equestrians and party wagons (mostly pickup-drawn trailers, elaborately customized), stretch into a half-mile ribbon, following the road through seven miles of coastal prairie pastureland. As the riders of all ages mosey along, shuffling to the music and dotting upon the horses, bemused neighbors set out lawn chairs in the



RIDE THE ZYDECO TRAIL

For a schedule of upcoming zydeco trail rides in Texas and Louisiana, check out www.zydecoevents.com.

PHOTO: © Nathan Lindstrom

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bring a mix of sounds to the one-third-acre concert tent. On Saturday nights, the crowd overflows from the tent as the floor fills with dancers. Dancing in couples or in synchronized lines, the dancers kick their feet and dip their shoulders in a distinctive zydeco shuffle, driven on by the infectious rhythm. Meanwhile, vendors selling smoked brisket, boudin, fried catfish, and chicken and waffles suffuse the grounds in tempting aromas.

Brian Jack, accordionist with Brian Jack and the Zydeco Gamblers, urges the dancers on with his six-piece band's mix of traditional and R&B-influenced zydeco. Trail rides account for about 70 percent of the Houston band's shows, Jack says, with the remainder at nightclubs, zydeco festivals, and church bazaars. In Texas, zydeco trail rides have supplanted church dances and zydeco festivals as the primary venues for live zydeco music, he says.

"The more popular trail rides are pretty much zydeco festivals with horses, especially when they have a line-up with five bands," says Jack, who will perform on Saturday night at this year's event. "There's always something that's going to keep zydeco going, but the music itself is not going to go anywhere. It's been around too long."

African-American cowboys have been around for a long time, too. Joseph Bushnell, a cowboy, horse trainer, and Pentecostal preacher from nearby Nome, subscribes to the 19th-Century cowboy tradition with his straw hat, brown neck kerchief, leather chaps, and jeans tucked into tall boots. Bushnell was raised on horseback, he says, as are many children in this part of Jefferson County. As a horse trainer, he brings horses that he's gentling to zydeco trail rides to acclimate them to crowds of horses and people.

"They get so antsy, they get so wired

up being in a stall, and sometimes you just got to give your horse something else to do, something different, and just let him relax and be a horse," Bushnell says.

Trail riding, rodeo, and horses are equally important and beneficial to people, Bushnell says, especially young people facing troublesome temptations in today's world. Bill Pickett and his pioneering spirit are worthy reminders of life's possibilities. "He's a great inspiration for young cowboys," Bushnell says. "It sends a positive message and lets a person know that you can overcome all odds to do whatever you set your heart to do." ★



FIND MORE ONLINE

Music lineup for the Bill Pickett zydeco trail ride at texashighways.com/texasticket.

"Sandstone Sentinel" © Jack Sorenson
The Lighthouse in Palo Duro Canyon

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WHAT ARE YOU DOING FOR FUN?

Viva Big Bend!

DANCING IN THE DESERT AT
THIS WEST TEXAS MUSIC FESTIVAL

text by MATT JOYCE



FIRE IT UP

A bonfire pit designed by Todd Elrod brightens the beer garden at Alpine music club Railroad Blues during Viva Big Bend.

Viva Big Bend features more than 50 bands in 10 West Texas music venues.

IF THERE'S A DESCRIPTION THAT COMES UP REPEATEDLY WHEN people talk about the Marfa lights, it's the way they dance. The color and intensity of the lights vary widely depending on whom you ask, but their darting, dipping, and flickering movements often call to mind some sort of supernatural boogie. Maybe it's understandable, therefore, that sightings of the Marfa lights spike during the Viva Big Bend music festival, when everyone has music ringing in their ears.

Viva Big Bend, which takes place July 23-26 this year, features more than 50 bands in 10 venues spread around Alpine, Marfa, Fort Davis, and Marathon. The music fans who journey to West Texas for the festival tend to appreciate its focus on Texas music—roots-rock, country, Tex-Mex, Latin, blues, and folk—as well as the desert mountain landscape and the peculiarities of the setting, such as the Marfa lights. You don't meet too many strangers when everybody in the crowd shares a love of live music and West Texas.



VIVA BIG BEND music festival takes place July 23-26 in Alpine, Marfa, Fort Davis, and Marathon. Four-day passes for ticketed shows cost \$50 in advance and are expected to be \$60 at the event. www.vivabigbend.com.

The **DISTANCE** to **ALPINE** →



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145 miles;
2 hours

Austin
400 miles;
6 hours

Dallas
500 miles;
7 hours

Nacogdoches
600 miles;
9 hours

Houston
570 miles;
8 hours

MARFA SIGHTS

Suzanna Choffel performs at Padre's in Marfa during Viva Big Bend 2014.



"People get on the wavelength out here," reflects Will Dupuy, a stand-up bass player and leader of the Austin band La Tampiquena. "It's got a refreshing feeling, an intriguing feeling—and it's so vast. Life moves a lot slower out here, so you don't have the whole crowd mentality. Versus bigger festivals, it just feels like this is one big party that we're all in together."

La Tampiquena, which plays a funky mix of honky-tonk and Tex-Mex, will be among the acts featured at this year's edition of the party. Other highlights include Shinyribs, Butch Hancock, Grupo Fantasma, Chubby Knuckle Choir, Soul Track Mind, William Clark Green, Bachaco, and an "All-Star Tribute to Doug Sahm," featuring the Texas Tornados, Joe King Carrasco, Kevin Russell, Terri Hendrix, Lloyd Maines, and others. The festival is made up of ticketed events at nightclub venues in Alpine and Marfa, as well as free afternoon concerts at the Gage Hotel in Marathon, the Kelly Outdoor Theater in Fort Davis, the Holland Hotel courtyard in Alpine, and a party on Murphy Street in Alpine.

Stewart Ramser, tourism director for the city of Alpine, started Viva Big Bend Music Festival in 2012 to drum up summer travel activity, celebrate Texas music, and showcase the range of live-music venues in the region. The event drew about 3,000 people per day in 2014, about 70 percent of them from out of town. Lodging in Alpine and Marfa fills up quickly for the festival weekend, and the demand for rooms overflows through the area.

"One of the things people immediately think when they hear 'West Texas in late July' is it's going to be 115 degrees," Ramser says. "While there are parts of West Texas that are extremely hot, in the mountain area, the high elevations, the climate is much different than the rest of Texas. The bulk of our activities are in communities that are at 4,500 feet or higher."

Alpine averages a high temperature of 88 degrees on July 25 (the Saturday

ALL IN THE FAMILY
Texas troubadour Butch Hancock, performing here during last year's Viva Big Bend with his son Rory, will return for this summer's festival. Below, Kevin Carroll leads a ukulele workshop at Planet Marfa during the 2014 festival.



Inside the club, hundreds of musicians' photos—auto-graphed and framed—decorate the walls. A wooden floor welcomes dancers to the front of the stage, while others gather at barrel bar tables. The festival closes each night at Railroad Blues with music until 1:30

of this year's festival) compared to 94 in Houston and 96 in Dallas and Austin, according to the Southern Regional Climate Center. West Texas is also arid, which is a relief for many visitors accustomed to summer humidity. When the sun goes down and a breeze blows through, the air is surprisingly crisp. Alpine's average low for July 25 is 63 degrees, which is 10 degrees cooler than Texas' big cities.

The weather is mild enough that Railroad Blues, an Alpine club that has been serving up live bands and cold beer for decades, lights a bonfire on festival nights. The flames cast a warm glow across the club's gravel yard, which backs right up to the Union Pacific train tracks. The blast of passing locomotives periodically drowns out the rowdy banter rising from the wooden picnic tables.

a.m. You can count on a big crowd and a bustling dance floor.

The diversity of venues is one of the interesting parts of exploring Viva Big Bend, along with the scenic drives separating the host towns. For those who don't want to drive, the festival runs a free shuttle between the host towns.

The Granada Theatre in Alpine is the festival's largest space with a capacity of 500 people. Set in the shell of a 1929 movie theater, the Granada presents the festival's biggest acts, such as Grupo Fantasma and the Doug Sahm tribute show this year, and in years past, the likes of Billy Joe Shaver, Reckless Kelly, and the Texas Tornados. Also in Alpine, the Holland Hotel, the festival's headquarters, hosts free afternoon shows in its courtyard; and the shaded patio of the Reata Restaurant features



TEX-MEX TITANS
Back for this year's Viva Big Bend are the Texas Tornados, pictured here at Alpine's Granada Theatre, and Joe King Carrasco, shown performing at the Kelly Outdoor Theater in Fort Davis.



quieter dinnertime shows, such as The O's and Elise Davis this year. (Patio tables require advance reservation through the restaurant.)

In Marfa, Viva Big Bend puts on shows at Planet Marfa, an outdoor bar with a quirky desert vibe characterized by adobe, Christmas lights, and a sunken tipi; Padre's, a classic nightclub set in a century-old adobe former funeral home; and the Lost Horse, an Old West cowboy dive with stucco walls and an intimate stage.

The free shows are mostly outside. In Marathon, bands take the stage on the

patio of the Gage Hotel's White Buffalo Bar. The terracotta roof tiles, chile ristras, and stucco walls impart a Southwestern feel, while overhanging Mexican elder and pine trees shade the patio. The Fort Davis Chamber of Commerce built a bandstand behind the Jeff Davis County Library to join in on the fun of Viva Big Bend. Hosting several bands on Saturday afternoon, the Fort Davis stage attracts a crowd of locals, who make a party out of the day with picnics and washer-pitching. The Fort Davis stage hosted a series of memorable moments in 2014, including a reunion performance by the short-lived but wildly popular Twang Twang Shock-a-Boom, which took Austin by storm in the early '90s, and a charismatic performance by Joe King Carrasco, who after 40 years of *nuevo wavo* rock-and-roll, still loves to charge into the crowd to play his electric guitar on the tabletops. (Carrasco will play Railroad Blues on Thursday of this year's event.)

Along with the music showcases, Viva Big Bend organizes events for both

musicians and fans to network and explore music, such as instrument and songwriting workshops, and concerts for children.

The festival's "Musicians and their Artwork" series provides intriguing insight into the creative process by showcasing musicians performing among their own artworks. One afternoon during last summer's festival, a small crowd gathered at Galeria Sibley on Holland Avenue in Alpine to listen to a performance by Doug Moreland. Raised in Fort Davis and now a resident of Manchaca, Moreland is a country-western fiddler and songwriter who also creates imaginative chainsaw carvings from wood, such as armchairs flanked by prickly pear cactus and howling javelinas. Moreland, who will participate in the artists' showcase again this year, reveled in the informal setting of the gallery, telling tall tales, calling on his father Glenn to pick a tune, and riffing on the horn of a passing train by playing "Orange Blossom Special."

"One hand washes the other," Moreland says of his dual pursuits of music and chainsaw carving. "I didn't ever mean for it to be that way, but it just kind of always happened. I still enjoy both equally."

The relaxed nature of Viva Big Bend allows for this type of interaction between participants, be they musicians or fans. Consider the example of Colin Gilmore and Nicolette Good, Americana/folk songwriters from Austin and San Antonio, respectively. The two met at Viva Big Bend in 2013, and now they join forces on occasion for performances and tours.

"It was probably going to happen anyway, but anything that happens out here is tinged in this dreamy feel," Good recalls. Says Gilmore, who's on the bill for this summer's festival: "When I saw that Nicolette was playing out here, I thought, 'We're on a similar path now musically,' and it's great that it has led us more than once to this festival."

Ramser, who draws on his connections and experience as publisher of *Texas Music* magazine to book the bands, says some of the performers bring their families and make a vacation out of the trip to Viva Big Bend. And many of them want to return the following year, something he tries to accommodate while also introducing new names.

"We want to throw a lot of stuff at people," he says. "If someone walks away and they feel like they didn't get to see and do everything, well, that's great. We want them to come back next year."

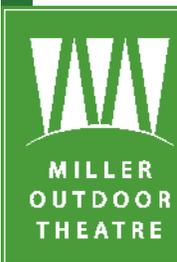
Back for more bands, more new friends, more desert mountains—and maybe, if you're lucky, more dancing Marfa lights. ★



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PLATES

EAT + DRINK + TRAVEL

EAT

Itchin' for Fried Chicken

CHICKEN SCRATCH IN DALLAS

text by MATT JOYCE



WINNER WINNER

Chicken Scratch's chicken biscuit sandwich and chicken and coconut waffle are among its most popular dishes.



EAT

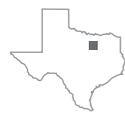
“You know how when you were a kid, and on the Fourth of July you went to the park and threw the blanket out? That’s what it’s meant to be, an overall experience, with the courtyard and music.”

B

BEFORE OPENING HIS RESTAURANT CHICKEN Scratch in Dallas, Chef Tim Byres and a couple of friends made a five-day, 2,500-mile road trip across parts of the South and Midwest on a quest for chicken-fried inspiration.

Regional characteristics revealed themselves along the way, Byres said: the cayenne-infused spiciness of “hot chicken” in Nashville, the buttermilk-battered crispy crusts of Kentucky, and the Thanksgiving-like spreads associated with Sunday fried-chicken dinners in Oklahoma. Byres summoned such influences—both in a culinary and atmospheric sense—for Chicken Scratch, which opened in 2012 featuring chicken (fried and otherwise) in a casual beer garden with a play area for children and an outdoor music stage.

“I think there’s a big turn to nostalgic American things, and you see a lot of that in food like fried chicken and barbecue,” said Byres, a 2014 James Beard Award winner for his cookbook, *Smoke: New Firewood Cooking*, and the culinary



CHICKEN SCRATCH is at 2303 Pittman St. in Dallas. Hours are 11-9 Sun-Thu and 11-10 Fri-Sat; The Foundry bar opens 4 p.m.-2 a.m. Mon-Fri and 12 p.m.-2 a.m. Sat-Sun. Call 214/749-1112; www.cs-tf.com.

creator behind the Dallas barbecue restaurant SMOKE. “That was part of the idea for Chicken Scratch. You know how when you were a kid, and on the Fourth of July you went to the park and threw the blanket out? That’s what it’s meant to be, an overall experience, with the courtyard and music. We went with fried chicken because it just seemed to make sense for that kind of family feeling.”

Nostalgia is surely a factor in the renaissance of the comfort-food staple as a focus of trendy restaurants across the state. (Lucy’s in Austin, Houston-based Max’s Wine Dive, and Sissy’s in Dallas are a few other examples.) But let’s face it: Fried chicken never

PECAN-WOOD ROTISSERIE
Chicken Scratch’s non-fried options include rotisserie chicken, salad bowls, stewed-chicken tacos, and chicken tamales.



went out of style. It’s too delicious. These newer eateries are just offering welcome attention and variations to a dish that has long drawn legions to stalwarts like Babe’s Chicken Dinner House in Roanoke, Allen’s Family Style Meals in Sweetwater, and the Barbecue Inn in Houston.

Set in a semi-industrial West Dallas neighborhood just a few blocks from the

Margaret Hunt Hill Bridge, Chicken Scratch and the adjoining bar, a sister business called The Foundry, share a large courtyard with a cactus garden and picnic tables shaded in daytime by a lofty elm tree, and brightened come evening by string lights. There are monkey bars and half-buried tires that beckon kids to climb, and a spigot and drinking bowls for dogs. In keeping with the



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neighborhood's industrial character, a strip of several shipping containers—cut open on the side to provide covered seating—lines one edge of the courtyard, and an imaginative stage comprised of stacked pallets hems another (bands play most weekend nights in the warmer months).

Chicken Scratch, which also has indoor seating, serves various chicken plates, including fried chicken strips and boneless thighs, as well as bone-in legs, wings, and thighs; pecan-wood ro-tisserie chicken; and stewed-chicken tacos. Byres said the restaurant's most popular dishes of late have been its

“knife and fork biscuit sandwiches.” The sandwiches come in a few different configurations, including the decadent, six-inch-tall Foundry: a split buttermilk biscuit, crispy and chewy, enveloping a fried chicken thigh layered with mashed potatoes, hefty bacon slices, beer mustard, a couple of American cheese slices, and a touch of oregano vinegar honey. Another treat is the Chicken and Coconut Waffle, a buttery waffle served with a strip of fried chicken and coconut-maple-chili syrup.



THE FOUNDRY

Chicken Scratch's adjoining bar, The Foundry, offers a full lineup of craft beers from Dallas and beyond, as well as cocktails, frozen drinks, and wine.

In both dishes, the surrounding cast of characters, such as the hearty mashed potatoes on the biscuit sandwich and the sweet syrup on the waffle, accentuate the spice and tang of the crispy chicken. The kitchen creates the savory chicken flavor, Byres said, by brining the meat in lemon-sage salt water and then coating it in flour spiced with salt, cumin, and pepper. After deep-frying, the chicken is drizzled in a touch of white vinegar and a bit of honey that's infused with fresh oregano. Depending on the dish, the cook then puts a few pickle slices on top for that “spicy-sour-vegetabley flavor,” Byres said, noting he picked up the pickle technique from his mother.

“Fried chicken is mainstream in the sense that everybody knows it, but that's also difficult because everybody has their own style and flavor as they remember it as kids,” Byres said. “It's kind of like brisket in Texas; everyone will fight you over it. You can't compete with a memory, but we're not trying to. At Chicken Scratch we just do our fun take on it.”

And gathering with friends and family over plates of Chicken Scratch's fried-chicken dishes certainly is fun, whether you're making new memories or waxing nostalgic about the past. ★

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Top Hats

MARKING STETSON'S 150TH ANNIVERSARY AT HATCO IN GARLAND

text by **Matt Joyce**

A MID THE HISS AND HUM OF century-old machines, hat-makers steam, press, and sew felt and straw into headwear both fashionable and utilitarian at the Hatco factory in Garland. Their craft hasn't changed all that much since the early 1900s, when American men would no sooner leave home without a hat than without their pants. In fact, some of these very machines made hats that found fame atop the heads of celebrities from Will Rogers to George Strait, and VIPs from Lyndon Johnson to Ronald Reagan.

"As we go through this tour, you'll realize that we have a working museum," says Dan Brown, vice president of Hatco, which today makes Stetson, Resistol, Dobbs, Charlie 1 Horse,



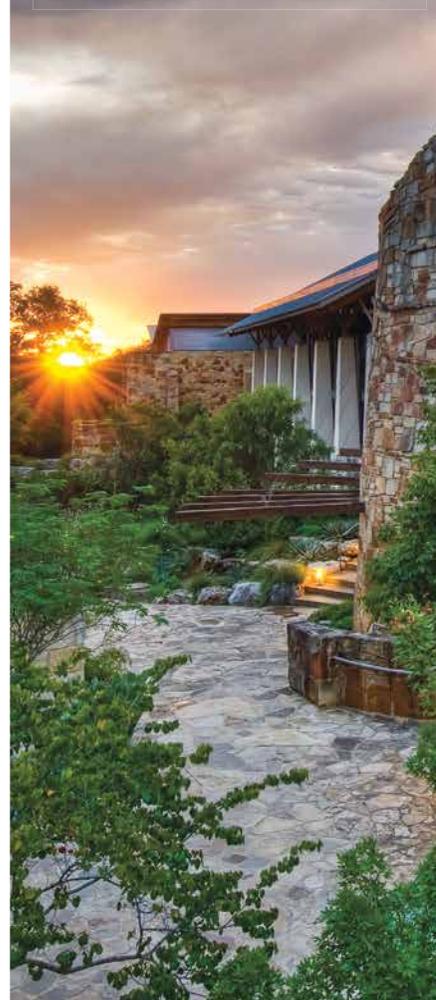
HATCO

The Hatco Outlet Store, at 721 Marion Drive in Garland, opens 9-6 Mon-Sat. One-hour factory tours (\$5) are at 9:30 and 2 on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Call **972/494-0511** for tours; **972/494-0337** for the store.

and other brands. "Some of these presses were made at the turn of the century, and some of the sewing machines are from the '20s and '30s."

This year, Hatco began offering guided walking tours of its 1938 plant in Garland—partly to provide an inside look at the hat-making process and partly to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Stetson Hats. Founded in Philadelphia in 1865, the John B. Stetson Hat Company dominated the hat industry for decades, hitting its peak in the 1920s with 5,000 employees and annual production of more than 2 million

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hats. Hatco acquired manufacturing rights to the Stetson brand in 1987 and moved production (along with some of Stetson's old machinery) to its Garland plant in 2004.

"I have had so many people over the years coming in wanting a hat just like their grandfather's, and fortunately, Stetson still makes hats like they did back in the '20s," says Abe Cortez, owner of Paris Hatters, a downtown San Antonio shop that's been selling Stetsons since it opened in 1917. "Stetson keeps an eye on their quality at all times because they want to protect the integrity of the name, and they have. It's held up very well."

The Hatco tours meet in the factory's outlet store, a 7,500-square-foot building filled with cowboy boots, Western apparel, and thousands of hats—felt and straw Westerns, fedoras, wool outdoors hats, and linen flat caps, among others.

First we watch a 10-minute video that

recounts the history of Stetson back to 1850, when John Batterson Stetson left his New Jersey home for Colorado to mine gold in a climate that might ease his tuberculosis. Struggling in the harsh elements of the High Plains and Rocky Mountains, Stetson called upon the skills he had learned from his hat-maker father and used age-old felting techniques to make a water-repellent fabric out of rabbit fur. He made blankets at first, and then hats. He designed a wide brim to protect the face and neck, and a tall crown to trap warm air and provide insulation. Legend has it that Stetson sold his first hat, which he later dubbed "The Boss of the Plains," to a mule driver for \$5.

The tour then enters the 78,000-square-foot felt hat factory, where Brown passes around samples of beaver and rabbit fur, both of them soft and smooth to the touch. Hatco begins the hat-making process in its Longview

plant, he explains, by felting 7.5- to 8.5-ounce bunches of fur into hat bodies using steam, suction, and a forming machine. The company then dyes the raw bodies, which look like felt cones, and delivers them to Garland.

The tour proceeds through the felt hat factory and the neighboring 23,000-square-foot straw factory. Brown says Hatco ships from 750,000 to 1 million hats per year, about 60 percent of them straw and 40 percent felt.

As we see the hats take shape, Brown explains the steps along the way. Craftsmen block the hats with wooden molds to give them their size and form, stiffen the felts with shellac (straw hats are stiffened with lacquer), and heat and press the hats to shape the brims and crease the crowns. Seamstresses sew in sweatbands and linings, and attach decorative bands with glue or bar tacks.

While the historical machines are impressive, making hats is a hands-on

endeavor. Hatco employs about 400 people, many who have been there for decades and some from families that have worked in the plant for generations. And while the factory uses vintage equipment, Brown says Hatco is vigilant about improving its processes in the face of competition from hat-makers in the United States, Mexico, and China.

"You would think after 150 years, there wouldn't be anything to change, but we're changing daily," Brown says, noting the recent addition of two chromometers to ensure consistent coloring of the hats.

Memorable anecdotes and insights emerge throughout the tour. Brown explains Hatco's "X" system, a rating system for felt quality and price, from an "entry-level" rabbit felt 5X up to a 1,000X beaver and chinchilla felt with a gold-and-diamond buckle set. (Other hat companies also use X ratings, but

MADE IN TEXAS

there's no industry standard for its meaning.) In the felt factory, we come across a stack of familiar-looking taupe hats with five-inch brims. Hatco makes these (in)famous Resistol cowboy hats for Texas State Troopers.

In the straw factory, we come across a batch of distressed hats with brims that swoop down over the eyes—Hatco makes them for country musician Brad Paisley's Moonshine Spirit brand. Another group of hats are bedazzled with feathers and carved leather—it's the Charlie 1 Horse brand that was popularized by racecar driver Richard Petty and that is a favorite among barrel racers on the rodeo circuit.

It's nearly impossible to walk through the thousands of hats in the Hatco factory and not feel compelled to wear one home. Not convinced? Consider Brown's favorite pitch: "It takes a confident person to wear a hat. You just have to put it on and go." ★

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