

**Partners in Palo Duro Canyon Foundation**

*Issue No. 51*

***On the Edge!***



**Join us for an a Authentic**

**Chuck Wagon Meal**

**In Beautiful**

**Palo Duro Canyon**

**Saturday, October 5, 2024**

**10:am—2:pm**

**Eric Miller**

**(Press Release)**

The **Chuck Wagon Roundup** with its authentic chuck wagon meal, celebrates the living heritage of Palo Duro Canyon. **Eleven chuck wagons** will camp next to the Pioneer Amphitheater. Each will prepare an **authentic chicken fried steak lunch with all the trimmings** for only **\$25 a ticket**.

*Lunch will be served at 12 noon.*

**Tickets are available through the**

**Sad Monkey Mercantile.com or**

**Scan the QR code**



**Tickets will not be sold on-site**

**Mark your calendar for Saturday, October 5, 2024**

The Roundup is sponsored by Partners in Palo Duro Canyon Foundation, the friends group of Palo Duro Canyon State Park, with cooperation from Palo Duro Canyon State Park and the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department. Numerous other Texas Panhandle organizations will participate too.

All proceeds from the Chuck Wagon Roundup will go to Partners in Palo Duro Canyon Foundation. The Foundation supports many important needs within the Park, most recently buying gates for all trailheads to keep hikers and bikers off the trails and safe when temperature alerts are issued in the summer.

“The Chuck Wagon Roundup, with its authentic chuck wagon meat, celebrates the living heritage of Palo Duro Canyon. We think there is no better place to spend time outdoors than in our favorite state park,” says Eddie Tubbs, president of Partners in Palo Duro Canyon Foundation.

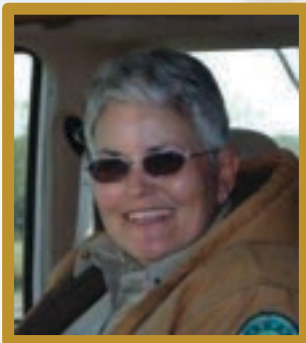
**Editor’s note: Eric Miller is a member of the Partners Board of Advisors.**

**Partners’ members, please consider buying tickets and participating in the fun.**



**Photo by David Townsend**

**Mark Hassell  
Retired**



**Bernice Blasingame  
Park Interpreter (2005-2015)**

Mark Hassell retired July 1, 2024, after 17 years of service to Palo Duro Canyon State Park. He worked in three positions: Maintenance Specialist, starting in 2006; Trails and Resources Manager, starting in 2008; Office Manager, from 2023 to his retirement. Before coming to PDCSP, he spent four years in the Army and then

attended West Texas State University, earning a BS in Geology. He worked for a local geologist and then moved on to be assistant manager at a resort on Lake Whitney.

One of the most challenging assignments Mark had as Trails and Resources Manager was to make a trail from the floor of the Canyon to the rim. TPWD had purchased the Fortress Cliff Ranch in order to sell it to purchase land in the state for new state parks. More than 800+ acres were retained along the rim to protect the view into the Canyon, and he was mandated to create a trail to access the land. Mark spent much time “bush whacking” and climbing around trying to figure out a way to the top. The Trujillo sandstone layer was difficult to get over.

Mark enlisted the help of the volunteer trail crew, and they finally figured out a way to

cut the trail which we all know now as the Rock Garden Trail.

Another project that Mark worked on was the construction of the Wildlife Viewing Blind. I had received permission to build the blind, and the Panhandle Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists (of which Mark was a member) secured a grant to purchase materials. Mark and his brother, Chuck, drew up the plans and worked to construct the Blind which is in place today.

Mark is an expert birder, and he spent many break times in the Blind documenting the various bird species visiting the area. He taught me to recognize the various birds that visited the Blind during the seasons. He could identify them by sound, a skill I did not master.

**(Editor's note: Since the construction of the Blind, it has undergone extensive renovation and upgrade. Board members Karen Copeland and Linda Durante have been instrumental in its upgrade along with Rodney Hess and others. The Blind has been expanded and been fitted with a whole new dress. You need to see it for yourself. Thanks to all those who have contributed to its new look.)**

As a child, Mark spent many hours in the Canyon with his family. He and his siblings were allowed to explore and have many adventures in the Park. One of his memorable moments while working as a Maintenance Specialist was a bittersweet one when he had to disassemble the slide and swing set at the Cottonwood Picnic Area where he had played as a kid. The area was no longer considered safe.

When asked about memorable moments during his time at the Park, he listed the following: meeting: George W. Bush at the Wounded Warrior 100 and trying to make the trails safer by installing Carsonite millage markers and thermometers and working with some of the best people in the TPWD system. One of these days, Mark will return as a volunteer for the Park, but now he is enjoying his retirement and following his passion— bird watching.



### **Wildlife Viewing Area By Karen Kopeland**

The Wildlife Viewing Area, which is hidden behind the Trading Post, has proved to be a frequently visited attraction not only in the Panhandle but also from all over the USA and many other countries. People come to admire the flora and fauna of our beloved canyon, including Europe, Africa, and Canada among others. Many visitors take photos of birds drinking from and bathing in the water pool and see the colors of the species frequenting the feature. Deer, Wild Turkey, Northern Cardinals, and Greater Roadrunners are favorites of many visitors.

Volunteers prove to be great ambassadors of not only Palo Duro Canyon but also of the Texas Panhandle. Please consider becoming viewing-area volunteers and members of Partners in Palo Duro Canyon Foundation. As viewing-area volunteers, you can distribute seed to the birds and greet and answer visitor questions. Many visitors

comment that our Wildlife Viewing Area is one of the best they have seen. If interested in volunteering, you can apply at [webirdtxp@gmail.com](mailto:webirdtxp@gmail.com).



**Haley Richardson State Parks Division  
Palo Duro Canyon State Park  
Trails and Resource Manager  
(Park Interpreter)**

Palo Duro Canyon, with its majestic and expansive landscape, holds diverse meanings for each of us, reflecting themes like home, history, culture, and life. It's a place rich with various organisms and currently hosts our overnight campers.

Since I began my role as the Resource Manager of the Park here in the Texas Panhandle, I've been deeply aware of these aspects. Despite some challenges, including the departure of our park interpreter, I've taken on the management of all educational programs and initiated several key projects. One of my notable efforts has been the restoration of our longhorn pastures to their

original prairie state. This project aims to enhance the visibility of our herd and improve their food sources. Additionally, I'm working behind the scenes to expand the Park's offerings, including archery as an educational tool for visitors of all ages.

We're making several changes within our interpretive department, focusing on developing more interactive programs for visitors. Planned additions include archery, crafts, and a homeschooling program. I'm also excited to introduce the B.A.R.K Ranger program which stands for

Bag your pet's waste  
Always leash your pet  
Respect wildlife  
Know where you can go

This program is designed to ensure a safe and enjoyable experience for visitors and their pets, promoting responsible pet ownership as more visitors come with pets.

I've been collaborating with various organizations, including the Texas Forest Service, Law Enforcement Division, Wild Life Division, Texas Master Naturalists, and Partners in Palo Duro Canyon Foundation. I'm grateful for the support from these organizations and our volunteers, whose contributions are invaluable.

To engage volunteers, we have scheduled a monthly workday. The next session is on September 7<sup>th</sup>, where we plan to refurbish two shade structures in the Hackberry camping loop Building on our previous volunteer apprentice event, I'm working to establish an annual event to recognize and thank our volunteers, with the next celebration planned for April 20-26, 2025. We're currently gathering photos of

volunteers in action for this occasion.  
Upcoming major events at the Park include:

Sad Monkey Trail Run-September 7<sup>th</sup>

Volunteer Work Day-September 7<sup>th</sup>

150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Red River  
War-September 28-29

Halloween in the Park-October 19<sup>th</sup>

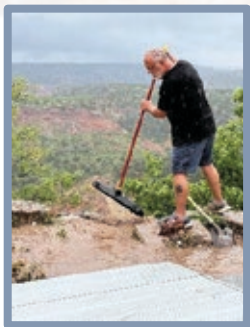
Haunted Hike

Trick or Treating

Crafts, Booths, and Fun!

My contributions to our interpretive program have significantly impacted attendance and engagement in our Park programs. Since I took over the role of interpreter in January, our year-to-date interpretive contacts have doubled, totaling 9,825 interactions through school programs, educational activities, and other events. While I've faced some challenges with social media, our public engagement has improved markedly.

In summary, I'm pleased with the positive changes we've implemented and look forward to seeing continued progress within the Park.



**A Volunteer Shows his Skill**



**Lighten Up  
By  
Ann Coberley**

I roam back over  
the landscape of this day,  
the second one absent the sun,  
gray skies spitting snowflakes  
and the birdbath a block of ice.  
Clouds have leaned in too close  
with icy breath that frosts the trees,  
whispering of Springtime,  
as if I believed their frozen lies.  
I can't shake a vague sadness  
An irrational conviction  
that this season will never end,  
that blue skies have left us forever  
and the sun is losing interest.



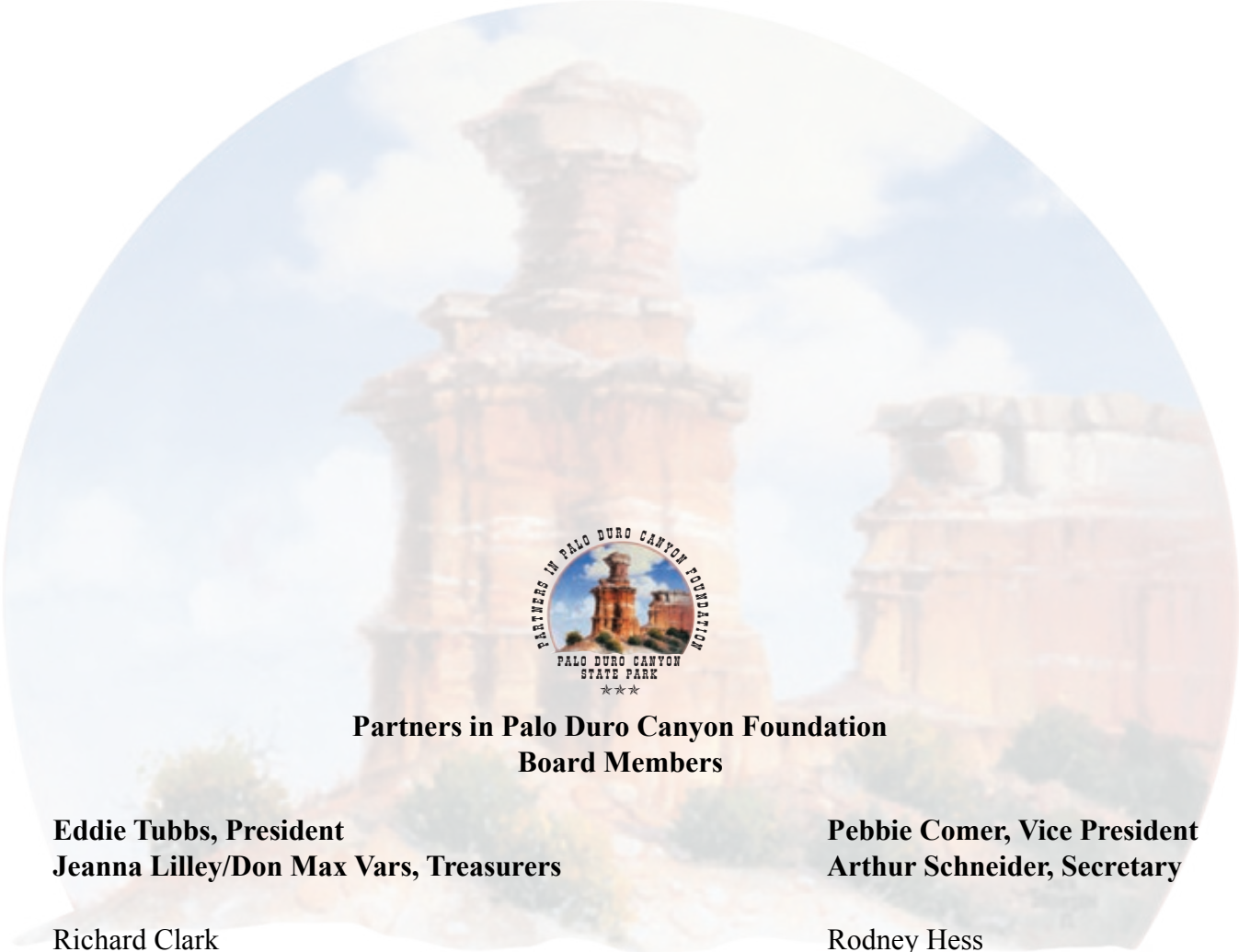
Photo by Eric Miller

**Editor's note: A few months ago, a couple visited the Canyon Gallery/Visitor's Center. They seemed interested in the purpose of Partners in Palo Duro Canyon Foundation--that is to be a partner to Palo Duro Canyon State Park and to assist the Park in providing whatever the Park might need. Several weeks later, a package arrived containing a hundred dollars and a giant chocolate bar. Eddie Tubbs, Pebbie Comer, and Bailey Hess show off the chocolate bar before it was devoured by the Partners' board. Rodney Hess used a hammer to provide the treat to the board.**



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*September 2024, Partners in Palo Duro Canyon Foundation, Editor: Carl Fowler*