

Partners in Palo Duro



Canyon Foundation

On the Edge!

The Sad Monkey Railroad



**Photo by Gary Mitchell 1986
(Located in the Visitor Center/Gift Shop)**

The Sad Monkey Railroad

“Whatever happened to the Sad Monkey?” is an often asked question by visitors to the Visitor Center/Gift Shop. “I was here when I was a kid and rode it, but it isn’t there “

“Well, it isn’t where it used to be,” I tell them. “And it doesn’t run anymore, but it’s still around.” I then relate what a Mayan guide once told me about the Mayans when my wife and I, some time ago, visited the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico: “They say the Mayans are gone, but I’m still here.”

The Sad Monkey Railroad is indeed gone from the Canyon floor where it existed for forty-one years, from 1955 until 1996, but the engine and sightseeing cars are still here—on State Highway 217 three miles from the Park entrance. Most of you reading this have seen it. It is located on the north side of the highway in the yard of the Blessed Buckers Ranch, owned by Gaylon and Joey Childers, the yard of people who cared enough about the historical significance of Palo Duro Canyon State Park to preserve an “artifact” of that history.

Instead of old bones, primitive people, and more recent American Indian relics, the Sad Monkey Railroad is a product of the 20th Century and brings affectionate memories to many who still remember the train. Thus we tip our Texas hats to those who have helped to preserve those memories.

The Sad Monkey was more than just a children’s ride; it was an interpretive ride in which the “engineer” pointed out geological features of the Canyon and its flora and fauna. The ride lasted about twenty minutes and covered a roundtrip of approximately two miles. The depot was where the Old West Stables, managed by the Harris family, is now located, an interesting reversal from the “iron horse” to the living horse. Both contributed to the “taming of the West,” but their roles in the Canyon are

a turnabout of their historical positions in the national and state expansion of civilization.

I suppose, however, that in the general sense of historical transitions, the disappearance of the Sad Monkey from the Canyon floor parallels the disappearance of the ubiquitous passenger trains of the first half of the 20th century. The numerous railroad museums around the country support the perception that when a measure of history begins to disappear, its remains are placed in a museum. And that is as it should be. We thank the folks who cared enough about the train to preserve it for the rest of us to enjoy with our memories.



Sad Monkey RR Spikes (Small)



**Photo Taken from a Video by Bill Acord
1991**



**Photo Taken from a Video by Bill Acord
1991**



**Photo Taken from a Video by Bill Acord
1991**



**Photo Taken from a Video by Bill Acord
1991**

The photos by Bill Acord, taken with a video camera, were made on a camping trip he made through the American Southwest and West in 1991.



Photo Taken by C. Simpson 1954

The picture of the little girl in the photo immediately above by C. Simpson is that of his sister, Janice. According to the website where the picture was found, Mr. Simpson grew up in Clovis, New Mexico, and now resides in Lubbock, Texas.



**Sad Monkey RR Blessed Buckers Ranch,
Texas Highway 217**



Cory Evans, Park Superintendent

Is It That Time Already?

Winter is over, spring has arrived, and summer is just around the corner. As most of you know, the Park saw over 280,000 visitors last year, the vast majority of those coming during the summer months. It seems that there is never enough time during the winter to get to everything that we would like, but we have made a lot of progress. Multiple projects have been proceeding and completed during the “slow season,” including work on the Juniper Multi-use Area, multiple roof replacements, and numerous grounds and facility repairs.

Although it is nice to have time to devote to these projects, the reason we are here is for the visitors that will soon be pouring through the gates to visit the Park.

It is always good to see the Canyon come back to life in the spring. For the staff and volunteers, getting the Park ready to welcome our guests back into this great place is a privilege. Seeing visitors hiking the trails, birding, camping, and relaxing make the efforts worthwhile.

Speaking of enjoying the park, I call your attention to one of the events scheduled for this spring, the 80th Anniversary Celebration of the formation of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) that will be held

in the Park on Saturday, April, 6. The 80th Anniversary Celebration will give us all a chance to see what the CCC has done for our Park and the state park system as a whole. Numerous exhibits and demonstrations will be available on Saturday, April 6th, at the Mack Dick Pavilion, so please join us as we celebrate the legacy of the CCC.

The CCC left its mark on the Canyon in a timeless manner that is still reflected in the visitor experience today. Many of the original CCC structures are still in use and being enjoyed by visitors in a variety of ways. Watching the sunset from one of the three rim cabins, taking in the view from El Coronado Lodge, and just being able to drive down into the floor of the Canyon are all things we owe to the “CCC boys” and their exquisite work.

I look forward to seeing everyone out at the Park this spring and summer taking part in one of these events, enjoying a CCC facility, or just watching a sunset.



Sorenson Cabin, One of Three Rim Cabins





Bernice Blasingame
Park Interpreter

Interpretative programs tend to slow down in the winter due to the unpredictable weather, but that didn't keep some schools from coming anyway. January and February saw two large groups in the Park taking advantage of two days that happened to be mild. Teachers from both scheduled the field trips knowing the possibility of having to re-schedule, but the days turned out to be beautiful.

The winter months are the ones that I use to plan new programs and do research for those programs. This year there will be some changes in interpretive programs with the use of resource trunks and doing more evening events. We will continue to offer children's nature programs and guided hikes. By the time this article is published, the CCC room in the Interpretive Center will have been redone to accommodate the donated items from the Panhandle Plains Historical Museum.

[Editor's note: a resource trunk contains specific items for specific programs. The concept was developed by

Interpretive Services in Austin. Examples are a CCC Trunk, a Chuck Wagon Trunk and a Cowboy Trunk—all of which contain items which the interpreter can use for purposes of demonstration and hands-on experiences.]

One of the newest interpretive exhibits is the tent frame seen on the flat below the Overlook Parking Lot. A part of the Park's history that has not been interpreted is the Palo Duro Art School that was active in the 1930's. Students were allowed to rent the tents on the flat during the course of their instruction, some of which took place in the Coronado Lodge by H.D. Bugbee.

No matter how long I have been in the Park, I continue to discover new things to interpret. Even in the 30's, visitors discovered that "Life's Better Outside."



New Home



The permanent site of Fred Rathjen's bench is located on the CCC trail. Partners wishes to thank park manager, Cory Evans, and Park personnel for establishing a permanent place for the bench and for moving the bench to the site. (Photo by David Townsend.)



The President's Perspective Frannie Nuttall

I can't believe spring is around the corner. David Townsend, store manager, and Lea Nelson, board member, went to Market in Phoenix, Arizona, in February, and the merchandise they purchased is now in the Canyon Gallery Gift Shop, located in the Coronado Lodge Visitor and Interpretive Center. Much of the new merchandise is already displayed. We are ready to greet another Spring Break and anticipate many visitors to the Visitor Center during this annual school holiday. (By the time this article is published, the Spring Break will have come and gone—we hope with a profitable result for the store. As most of you know, the profits earned by the store are dedicated to the needs of the State Park.)

We have several events coming up on the calendar. The CCC celebration, April 5th and 6th will be a real boon to our Park, and we will need many volunteers available.

We sent a letter to the membership in late January requesting help with the event and have had several responses, but not enough. I hope you will consider giving some of your time to Partners that weekend in April and be able to assist with our volunteer support as well as participate in the activities.

If you are able to help, please contact me at fnuttall@suddenlink.net. You may also contact Lisa Jackson, Partners CCC liaison: LJackson@pphm.wtamu.edu.

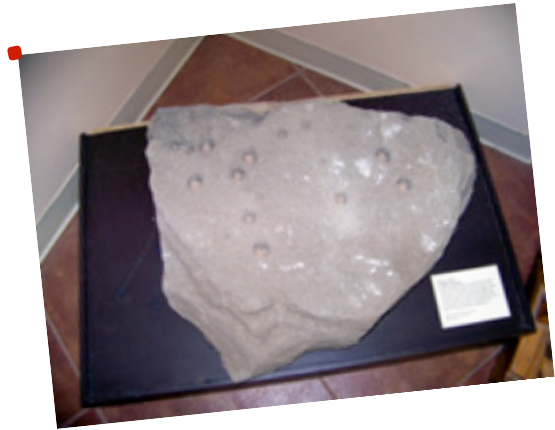
We will be getting ready for a busy summer season in the Park. We really never slow down after Spring Break and can always use new volunteers for working in the gift shop, working on the trails in the Park (usually one Saturday a month. Contact Bernice Blasingame), and participating in the many special events offered at the Park. We hope to see you at the Park this spring and summer welcoming our visitors to our fabulous Palo Duro Canyon.

To volunteer for Gift Shop

Tommy Nisbet (806 355-4923)
E-mail: partners@midplains.coop

To Volunteer for Park

Bernice Blasingame, Park Interpreter
(806) 488-2227, ext.106
Bernice.Blasingame@tpwd.state.tx.us



CCC Artifacts

CCC Room Arranged by Bernice
Blasingame
Park Interpreter

Meditations on Palo Duro Canyon, a book of poetry by Dr. Ann Coberley, with illustrations by Andy Clouse, is now available in the Gift Shop. A book signing was held March 23 in the Gift Shop/Visitor Center. After a year's hiatus, Ann has rejoined the Partners Board, a welcome return. Her poetry of the Canyon and its environs accentuates her deep feelings for this magnificent place we all love, including our love for the Sad Monkey (not a poem) who lost part of its face a few years ago. Treat yourself to a grand exploration of Ann's beautiful book.



Sad, Sad Monkey
On the Edge

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