



*On the  
Edge!*



**A Bowl from Mata Ortiz**

## The Pottery of Mata Ortiz



Soon after David Townsend began his position as store manager of Partners' Canyon Gallery in Palo Duro Canyon's Visitor Center, I began to see pottery of exquisite beauty and form appearing in the front display cases. A small sign placed with the pottery read "Mata Ortiz." Who is Mata Ortiz? I wondered. My question should have been, "Where is Mata Ortiz?" Because Mata Ortiz is not a person but a place.

According to Wikipedia, the on-line encyclopedia, the Village of Mata Ortiz is located 4.5 hours south of El Paso, Texas, in the Mexican state of Chihuahua. "What does this have to do with Palo Duro Canyon?" I wondered again, since the merchandise sold in the Gallery ought to have relevance to the Canyon. Then it occurred to me. The answer was right in front of me each time I entered the state park— Palo Duro.

The Spanish and Mexican influence in Texas is found everywhere in the state, in the names of towns, cities, and scenic wonders, such as the canyon in which I was now visiting. Even the building I was standing in carried the name "El Coronado

Lodge," named after the Spanish explorer Francisco Vazquez de Coronado.

Even though no certainty exists that Coronado actually visited Palo Duro Canyon, certainty exists that he did pass through the area in search for gold, supposedly found in the Seven Cities of Cibolo. A camping site of Coronado's expedition has been found near Floydada, Texas, and has been archeologically researched for a number of years. (It is on private property.)



But back to the Village!

Again from Wikipedia! "Mata Ortiz pottery is a recreation of preHispanic pottery found in and around the archeological site of Paquime...a man named Juan Quezada learned on his own to recreate this ancient pottery then went on to update it.... By the 1990's the pottery was being shown in museums and other cultural institutions and sold in galleries." We are one of the galleries.

Nowadays, many villagers of Mata Ortiz create the pottery and sell it under the Village name. *cf*



When working as a volunteer in the Gallery, I frequently hear the following:

“What does Palo Duro mean?”

“You have a beautiful store!”

The one a question. The other a statement.



Having lived near the Canyon much of my life and having had a smattering of Spanish in school, I think it a strange question that the name is a mystery. But then, if I were in Norway, for instance, I no doubt would ask a similar question of a local denizen. But folks from Texas? No matter! I explain that the name means “hard wood.” I then admit that I have never tried to chop down one of the juniper trees which, I suppose, give the Canyon its name. Then I advise that the visitor not try to chop down a juniper either, at least not in the state park.

As for the statement: I pass the compliment on to our previous store manager, Maggie Johnson, and to our present store manager, David Townsend. I also praise the CCC workers who built the building which houses the Gallery. The building is a work of art itself and a fitting house for the art within—the paintings, the jewelry, the books, and, of course, the pottery, which includes Navajo, Zuni, Hopi—and the pottery of Mata Ortiz. *cf*



## Into the Wilderness

By

John Chandler

**(Editor’s note:** John Chandler is a retired minister and is the recording secretary for the PiP Board of Advisors.)

Palo Duro Canyon State Park has within it extensive wild areas. Overnight backpacking into these areas is probably one of the “lesser done” activities in the Park. Yet it is a downright rewarding experience.

Backpacking is to be done only after contacting Park Staff to let them know when, where, and how long you are to be on your trek. With “burn bans” in effect, you must carry your own heat source for any boiling of water and hot foods. Incidentally, cool seasons are the best time for this activity. Of course, you must carry in all equipment, such as tenting—necessary if you want to avoid the possibility of curious critters, such as mice, snakes, or tarantulas snuggling up for warmth while you’re in your sleeping bag—and food and water. For weight, you better take freeze-dried meals and at least a gallon of water for each 24 hours.

When the burn bans are off, remember that a small cooking fire is plenty for both warmth and pleasure—never a need for a big “city slickers” bonfire. And in the Palo Duro, there are always enough rocks around for a small fire-ring which help hold cooking utensils as well.

Also, remember to make camp when the sun is at least a handbreadth above the horizon. Before dark, pitch the tent, clear space for the cooking fire and dry wood, cook and eat supper, and, most importantly, clean up, including hanging everything that smells of food in a tree branch at the end of a fairly

long rope and high enough off the ground from hungry animals. By doing so, all the wildlife that have been watching you, even if you don't see them, will know you're going to be with them overnight without too much intrusion.

Skunks and porcupines especially do not like to be disturbed. Remember that they are more afraid of you than you are of them. Since firearms are not allowed in the Park, you must rely on a friendly attitude (and maybe a prayer) when confronted with one of these critters. Almost always they will go their own way.

Marshmallows are a light-weight treat for after dark before turning in early for the night, so that you can get up at dawn for a good sunrise breakfast. In breaking camp, take much care to "leave no trace" that you were here. Pack up all trash. If you built a fire, smooth out the area where it was. If you dug rain ditches around your tent, smooth them back in. If you dug a latrine, cover it up with dirt. As you leave, brush out any boot or shoe marks.

A bit of "old timer" advice: please wear long pants or jeans in the wilderness. Contrary to travel ads and popular "he-man" fashions, the wilderness is no place for shorts (unless you like scratches, cuts, rashes, and bug bites). How come cowboys wear boots and chaps?

Finally, after your overnight backpack trip is over, stop by the Trading Post in the Canyon for a big, juicy, civilized hamburger, and be sure to let Park Staff know what a great time you had. *jc*

**(Editor's note:** You might visit also the Visitor Center and the Canyon Gallery on your way out. Treasures await!)



## **Shannon Blalock Park Superintendent**

In 2005 and then again in November 2014, Dr. John Crompton and Texas A&M University completed an economic impact study of Texas State Parks. I would like to provide an overview of the study for each one of you as numbers often make a strong argument for the benefits that state parks provide.

The beneficial effects which impact the parks are considerable and influential. Visitors to your state park system add an estimated \$774 million in sales, \$351 million in added value, and \$202 million to the income of Texas. Economic activity accounted for an estimated 5, 871 jobs for communities across the state. The 2014 study confirms once again the benefits of your state park system. Investment in your Palo Duro Canyon State Park is no different and has a dramatic impact to the local economy.

Palo Duro Canyon State Park has experienced marked continued growth ending last fiscal year with over 305,000 visitors. Many of those visitors also spend money at local hotels, shop at local grocery stores, and buy gas and other items from local businesses. In Randall County, the Park

generated \$237, 125 in sales tax revenue, \$1.9 million in personal income, and created 86 full-time equivalent jobs. The Park is most certainly a lucrative investment.

Nonmonetary benefits also abound. The Park makes a bold statement about Canyon, Amarillo, and the surrounding Panhandle areas. It demonstrates that our communities are strong, safe, desirable, and friendly places in which to live, work, play, and visit. The presence of the Park motivates business growth and relocation. Evidence shows also that when people live near a state park, they are more likely to get outside and reap health benefits from such activity.

The Park plays a key role, as well, in preserving water and air quality, protecting wildlife, and preserving important natural and cultural history.

I hope you find this information useful in discussions about the Park. If anyone would like additional details or information about the Texas A&M study, I can provide them for you.

Palo Duro Canyon State Park is the crown jewel of the Texas State Park system and is a park we can all be proud of. Thank you all for what you do to assist the Park every day. There is no greater group of advocates for the Canyon than the members of Partners in Palo Duro Canyon Foundation.

*sb*



**Bernice Blasingame  
Park Interpreter**

The bountiful amount of moisture we have received in the Canyon has made it literally come alive. Driving through and seeing all the shades of green from grasses to trees is a treat for the eyes. Wildflowers have raised their colorful hearts, and looking at their beauty makes one appreciate the gift of sight.



**Little Yellow Flowers, Name (?)  
Photo by CF**



As I drive and hike, I begin to name all the flowers that I have learned since coming to work here. I don't know all of them, but I can name a majority of them. The first two years I carried a wildflower book in my vehicle so I could identify the flowers I saw. I "hung out" with a friend who is a native plant expert and learned from her also.



### **Spiderwort**

**Photo by Erika McGee**

Once I learned their names, I wanted to know more, so I began to study the uses of them by the native peoples. I discovered that many are "medicine plants." When possible, I share that information with visitors on my hikes.

Sharing knowledge with our guests in a way in which they can remember what they see is what my job as Park Interpreter is all about. Check out the wildflower booklet in

the Visitor Center by the telescope and see for yourself just a few of the beautiful wildflowers that you might see in the Canyon.



### **Firewheel (Indian Blanket)**

**Photo by Erika McGee**

The booklet is one of a kind, because it was produced by two of my Texas Master Naturalists friends who spent hours photographing and identifying the wildflowers after I requested their help. They have made Life Better Outside for me as well as for those who take the time to look through the booklet. *bb*



### **Yucca**

**Photo by Erika McGee**

The editor takes full responsibility for any misnamed flowers.





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Partners in  
Palo Duro Canyon  
Foundation  
11450 Park Road 5  
Canyon, TX 79015  
806.488.2227



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