

**Partners in Palo Duro Canyon Foundation**

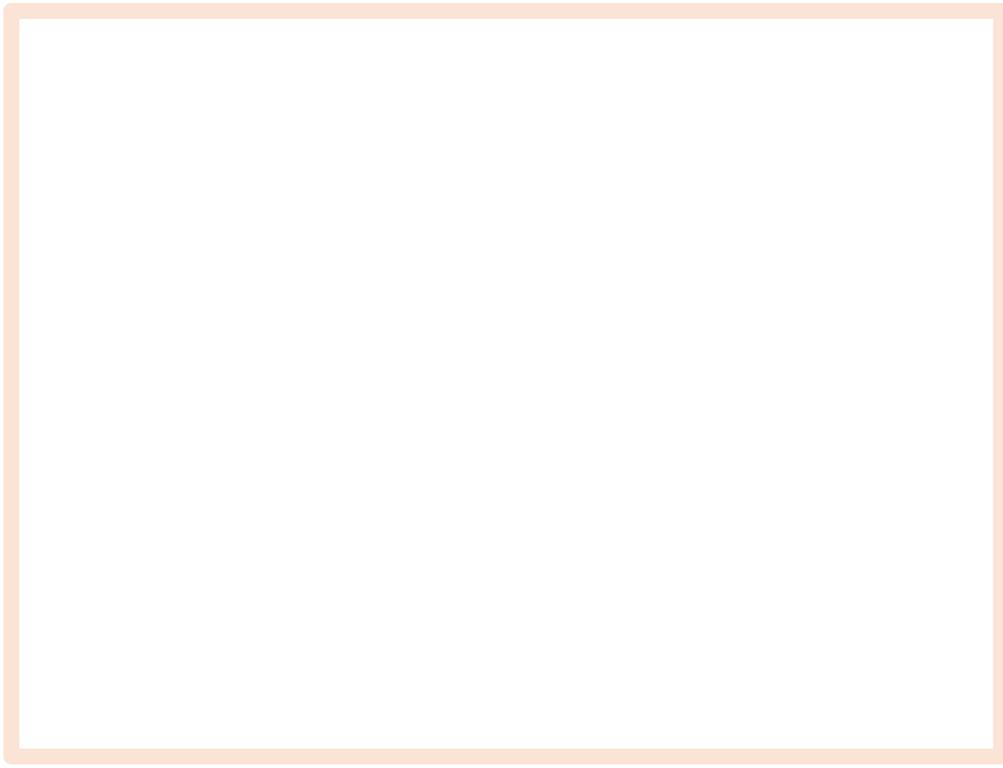


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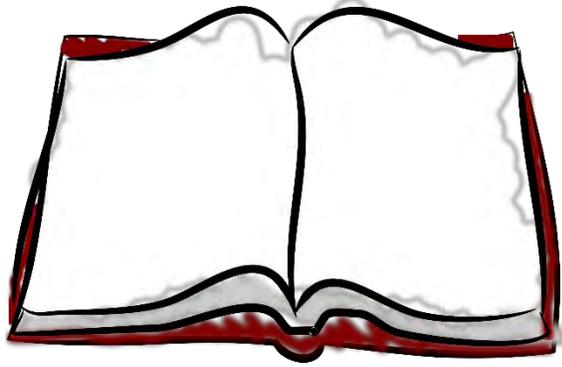
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**The Palo Duro Canyon Book**



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**Photo by Editor**



### **A Work in Progress**

Partners in Palo Canyon Foundation is writing a book—that is, the members of the Board of Advisors are writing the book—about (what else?), Palo Duro Canyon.

Mel Phillips, board member, known locally as the Fishman because of his weekly radio show, Southwest Outdoors on KGNC radio, is coordinating the book. Mel has been soliciting from board members, Partners membership, and local community members, pictures, articles, and trivia about the Canyon—that is to say, anecdotes or “fillers”—to enhance the transitions between the articles.

The most frequently asked question in the Partners Gallery in Palo Duro Canyon State Park Visitor’s Center is, “Do you have a book about the Canyon?” Well, we did have a book, but we no longer have access to the book which was a best seller. So we (Partners) are creating our own. If you have something you know (picture, fact) about the Canyon that you think is unique or unusual, please contact David or Erika at [Partners@midplains.coop](mailto:Partners@midplains.coop). Cf



### **Shannon Blalock Park Superintendent**

The busy season is upon us. As we enter the Park’s busiest time of the year, I am reminded how critically important are the partnerships we work diligently to cultivate with surrounding communities as the number of visitor emergencies increase, wildfire risk increases, and visitation grows.

Park staff simply could not manage incidents without the help of many outside agencies. A quote by Henry Ford says it all: “Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.” Without the assistance of Canyon Fire Department, Randall County Fire Department, Randall County Sheriff’s Office, Texas Game Wardens, and the Texas Department of Public Safety, the Park would not have the specialized equipment or the resources to respond to the myriad of incidents that occur at the Canyon. Park Staff are overwhelmingly grateful for their committed partnership. With their assistance, park visitors receive the best possible service in the midst of an incident. If ever you have the opportunity, take a minute to thank them for their service and dedication to this place we all so dearly love.

*Sb*



Training



Air Evac



Training



Rescue

**Partnerships**  
**Photos by Shannon Blalock**



**Jeff Davis (and ET)  
Park Interpreter**

The most common question folks ask when meeting a park interpreter for the first time is “What language do you speak?” I can put that to rest right now. I speak English, Swahili, and a little bit of German.

All dumb jokes aside though, the mission statement and job description of any park interpreter is the same: Through educational programming we do our best to help the visitors to Palo Duro Canyon State Park “connect with the resource.”

But what does “connect with the resource” mean? It begins with the realization that simply sharing knowledge is not enough.

Recently, the Park was fortunate enough to host a visit by Mr. John Muirhead. Mr. Muirhead, who just turned 96 years old, served as a CCC (Civilian Conservation Corp) enrollee in Unit 894, the last unit to work at Palo Duro Canyon State Park before the end of the CCC program. He was originally from Tulsa, Oklahoma, and had not returned to Palo Duro Canyon since 1937.

Mr. Muirhead told fascinating stories of hard labor, such as moving concrete with a wheelbarrow, which he called an “Irish

Buggy.” He recalled how all the furniture in the barracks had to be cleared out every Thursday morning so that the building could be mopped out with lye water. He had nothing but positive things to say about his experience in the Canyon.



**John and Jeff  
Photo by Jeff Davis**

CCC enrollees were paid \$30 per month, \$25 of which had to be sent home to their families. The other \$5 they got to keep to use in the camp store or in town on those special occasions when they got to go to town. This story is an interesting piece of information, and sharing it with you is the start of my job as an interpreter. But if I stop there, I am only a tour guide. I have not yet helped you forge a connection with the resource and its history.

When I met Mr. Muirhead, I asked him what he did with the money he got to keep every month. Without hesitation, he said he bought “a Coke, a Mr. Goodbar, a bag of Bull Durham tobacco, and a ticket to the picture show” Suddenly, the somewhat interesting-but-still-kind-of-dry fact of \$5 worth of spending money comes alive through his memories. Now we can gaze back through time and connect with the

hopeful seventeen-year-old worker who had so much amazing life ahead of him.

It is my great pleasure to get to spend my days at Palo Duro Canyon, deepening my own connection with the place so that I can share that experience and others with our visitors who come from all parts of the world.

And, fortunately for those of us who love and cherish this place, we all have the opportunity to be interpreters in our own way. *Jd*

**(Editor's Note:** Jeff Davis recently became a member of the Park staff, taking the place of Bernice Blasingame, who was Park Interpreter for many years. Bernice is enjoying a well-deserved retirement.)



**John and Bernice**  
Photo by Jeff Davis



## **Partners in Palo Duro Canyon Foundation Board of Advisors**

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## **An Evening in the Palo Duro**

**By**

**Betty Rathjen**

Almost everyone would agree that a buzzard (turkey vulture) is not a pretty bird, especially on the ground. How is it then that a bird so unattractive close

up can be so beautiful soaring in the sky?

One evening the Amarillo Symphony Orchestra was scheduled to give a concert in the amphitheater in Palo Duro Canyon State Park. At dusk, the music began—a beautiful piece. It was then that I noticed a number of birds—about seven or eight—gliding over the orchestra, seeming to keep time with the music. The movement of the birds was extraordinarily graceful as they swayed and dipped through the air. It almost seemed as though their movements had been choreographed.

As the piece came to an end, one by one the birds disappeared over the Canyon wall. Their flight was a sight to be filed away in memory.

Question: is it possible that birds, (Buzzards?) can respond to music? *Bj*

**(Editor's Note:** Betty Rathjen works as a volunteer in the Canyon Gallery in the Visitor's Center)



## What's in a Name?

A four-year-old boy sat on a school bus as the bus descended into the newly opened Palo Duro Canyon State Park. The road down which the bus travelled was a graded dirt road built by the Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC). As the bus continued its drop into the Canyon, the color of the eight-hundred-foot cliffs changed from white to brown and then to red, the cliffs recording, geologically, the strata of the Canyon as it was carved into the earth over a period of a million or so years through the more than two-million-year-old age of the ancient sea bed.

The geological strata which the boy viewed, although unknown to him at his young age, had gradually been revealed during the million-year erosion by the forces of water and wind. The stream at the bottom of the Canyon now carrying the name Prairie Dog Town Fork of the Red River, was much larger at its beginning as it began its work. And, of course, it had no name at its beginning. No humans existed to name it.

The wind, a constant on what is now known as the Texas High Plains, assisted the water, carving the twisting, large Canyon into smaller side canyons, creating hoodoos (rock capped formations with eroded soil to create the base) and other majestic wonders, such as the signature icon of the Canyon: the Lighthouse formation, which is not a hoodoo (though often called one) but a pinnacle, standing more than three-hundred feet tall. (A pinnacle slopes upward toward a rock crown.)

The colors of the Canyon walls which the boy viewed with curiosity and then wonder had names, such as the Tecovas layer (white), Triassic layer (brown), and Permian layer (red), although he did not know the names at the time. Upon closer inspection the boy may have seen that as each upper layer

faded into the lower layers, the colors did not change abruptly but changed into muted shades of each, such as some shades of gray, some of yellow, some of other colors that only an artist would know. But he was more interested in the animals and birds—the deer, the turkeys, the roadrunners—and the dinosaurs. He did not know at his young age, of course, that dinosaurs were never in the Canyon, although other prehistoric beasts did exist there, such as the large crocodile-like creature found in the Permian strata. Nevertheless, a boy must have his fantasies.

The bus stopped somewhere at the bottom of the Canyon. Now the view was up instead of down, and his neck was stiff from looking at the jagged and ragged edges of the rim. He waited until the older kids, the school kids, from the small rural school in New Mexico in which his mother was a teacher, dismounted from the bus. He was too young to follow them as they explored the area in which the bus was parked. He was the youngest person on the bus, not even a student, but he would remember with awe the day he travelled with the school's students as they celebrated their end-of-school year and, for a time, forgot the gloomy days of the Great Depression

The boy would learn many years later that this canyon was once the seasonal, ancestral home of the Comanche, Cheyenne, Kiowa, and Apache, the Indian tribes who occupied the Southern Great Plains and for whom the Canyon had another name, not the present name Palo Duro (“hard wood”) given to it by early Spanish explorers, such as Francisco Vazquez de Coronado. To these early inhabitants of the Plains, these early Native Americans, this revered place and sometimes home, was “The Sacred Canyon.”

And that's the way it was in 1935. *Cf*



**Photos by Editor**



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**ET**

***On the Edge!***

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