

## Partners in Palo Duro Canyon Foundation

### *On the Edge!*



**Pebbie Comer and Renovated Room of Sorenson Cabin**

**Photo by Eddie Tubbs**



## **Cabin Renovations**

### **By**

### **Pebbie Comer and Jeff Davis**

Once upon a time, there were three CCC cabins in need of an extreme makeover. CCC stands for Civilian Conservation Corp, a program in the 1930s that helped develop national and state parks. These three cabins were built in a new state park created in 1933, Palo Duro Canyon State Park. All three cabins were built by hand and served the Park quite well for the first fifty years of their lives. Over the past thirty-five years, the cabins have been used as both Park residences and, most recently, as public rentals. Twenty years of daily visitor use left the cabins in serious need of updating and renovation. It took Partners in Palo Duro Canyon Foundation, friends group of the Park, several years to secure the funds, the estimates, and the paper work to start the much-needed renovations. Late in 2019, state park staff blocked off January and February 2020 so the work could begin.

The three cabins are the Lighthouse, the Sorenson, and the Goodnight, each named after a local landmark and local people who love the Canyon. Along with Park Assistant Superintendent Jeff Davis, I led a committee to get the renovations going. We had exactly fifty-nine days and twelve hours to complete the work. I have to say, spending time with each cabin almost daily, I got to know each cabin rather intimately, and each was able to show off its own personality.

Originally, the CCC created plans for five cabins, but only three came to fruition. My favorite part of each cabin is the hand-hewn beams, vigas, and latillas that make up the ceilings. The Lighthouse was probably the first cabin built, as the ceiling looked a bit different from the other two cabins. All three had plans that were drawn in the early 1930s and are built from the local Trujillo sandstone that was quarried in the Park itself. The original wooden windows had weight pullies inside the frames to balance the glass window panes as the windows were opened. We actually found and retrieved some of these weights during the renovation. Only the Sorenson Cabin still had some original wooden windows; the others had been replaced in the past but were now in dire need of replacement again.

The windows' tear-out and replacement proved to be the most time consuming and difficult part of the project. We used vinyl, insulated glass thermal windows in a putty color to blend with the sandstone exterior itself. Much of the original exterior wood trim had rotted out and was replaced with cedar that replicated the detailed, hand-carved pieces of trim from the 1930s. The cedar replaced only the wood within the thick sandstone walls; however, in an effort to prevent future rotting of the wood, an exterior stucco color that matched the putty color on the windows was used as the outside trim. Again, each was carefully carved and finished in place, next to the original 1930s CCC mortar that is still intact on the cabins. This step, it is hoped, will prevent

more deterioration of the original mortar and prevents any water penetration into the cabins through the window areas.

All three exterior front doors were replaced with new raised-panel alder wood and new locks added for a great experience and look for each cabin. The back doors, too, were replaced with metal doors carefully fitted with frames rebuilt to support the doors.

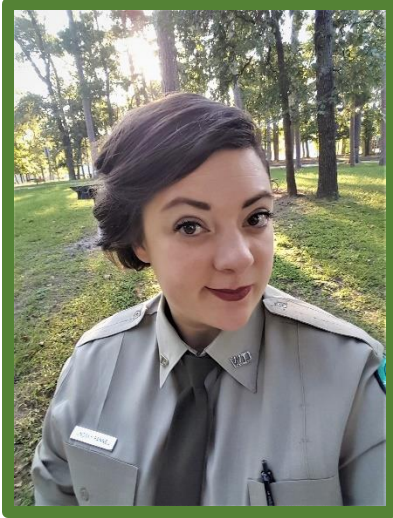
Inside, the shower in each cabin was torn out. After being taken back to the original stone or cinderblock walls, a total shower remake began. This included all new plumbing facilities, water lines and faucets. A white hexagonal tile and a subway tile that fit the time period were used in the showers along with new brushed chrome fixtures. Shower doors were replaced or added to finish out the shower areas. Replicas were used to replace bathroom doors in the other two cabins.

The other cabins had, as well, glass, sliding door areas that needed to be replaced due to age and to fit the time period of the cabin look from the 1930s. All interior trim received a new coat of state-park-brown-paint to freshen everything up, and the old brown drapes were replaced with new window blinds for a fresh look. Finally, each cabin received a long-needed deep clean.

There is no end to what we can accomplish when we work together. The revitalization of these important, historic structures is a great example of the partnership between Partners in Palo Duro Canyon Foundation, Palo Duro Canyon State Park and a wide variety of contractors, artisans, and craftsmen. The renovations will keep these cabins in use and looking beautiful for many years to come. *Pc*

**Editors note:** Jeff Davis contributed to this article by Pebbie Comer.





**Lindsay Pannell**  
**Park Interpreter**

### **The Wheels of Change**

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) built Palo Duro Canyon State Park with a specific design unique to Canyon tourism in the 1930s. They blasted a roadway down into the Canyon for those who could not hike. The decision for better accessibility by the CCC was not made accidentally but with a specific person in mind: President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR), creator of the New Deal, who was left unable to experience, without a vehicle, the full wonder of outdoor recreation because of poliomyelitis.

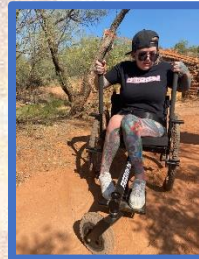
The winding, scenic road offers nearly half a million visitors each year the same accessibility FDR craved. But it is not the last step Palo Duro Canyon State Park has made to provide the same wonder of nature to every person. The team at PDCSP has worked to create accessible trail ways and cabins. Our newest venture toward an inclusive and accessible nature space is the GRIT Freedom Chair.

This chair is engineered to be lightweight, self-propelled, and capable of

trail terrain. The Freedom Chair provides an encompassing experience for those unable to walk our spectacular trails.

Recently, we brought in two amazing people to test the Freedom Chair—Bentli Blaze and Megan Hawkins. Their experience, after hiking our Paseo del Rio trail with the chair, was one of joy and excitement for this newest development for people with disabilities. The chair is designed with independence in mind. FDR said the CCC built the first road towards inclusion, but TPWD will continue to pave new paths for visitors to our wondrous Canyon.

For information on checking out the Freedom Chair at PDCSP, please email Lindsay [Pannell@tpwd.gov](mailto:Pannell@tpwd.gov) or call 806-452-9844. *Lp*





**Joseph Allen  
Park Superintendent**

### **High Quality H2O**

What would we do without water? This is a question that has become real to a lot of us that enjoy Palo Duro Canyon State Park.

The Park's surface water treatment plant was built in the 1960s and is well beyond its life expectancy. The plant is also one of only a half dozen like it within Texas State Parks. The Park's amazing Utility Plant Operations (UPO) team, led by Joe Lindsay, has done an outstanding job keeping everything running, but it was clear that the time had come to replace our water-treatment infrastructure.

Several years ago, the replacement project made it to the capital construction list for Texas State Parks and Wildlife. Next came a multiyear quest to plan and engineer, fund and construct a new facility. The bid process for selecting a contractor to build the new plant began in early 2019; and, after a lengthy bid review process, Dave Brown Construction Services, Inc. of Canyon Texas, was ultimately selected as the preferred option. Construction began in early May 2020 and is ongoing today.

This project will cost over four million dollars when complete and will come with several enhancements over the old plant. The new plant will not only be modernized with current technology but also will have much more raw water (pretreated) storage on site for times when the supply pipeline from the Colorado River Municipal Water Authority goes down for maintenance. Part of this project also includes a new main supply line down to the Canyon-floor water storage area. The new line will be underground as opposed to the current line, which can be seen when looking up the Canyon wall from the Mack Dick Pavilion.

Construction should be complete by early spring 2021 and will allow our UPO team to do their jobs much more efficiently. Between the Park's aging infrastructure that experiences use well beyond its initial design to ever-increasing levels of regulations from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, our UPO team has a tough job to ensure the Park has plenty of fresh, clean water to use. They do it with pride and a "can do" attitude each and every day.



**Raw Water Storage  
Photo  
By  
Joseph Allen**



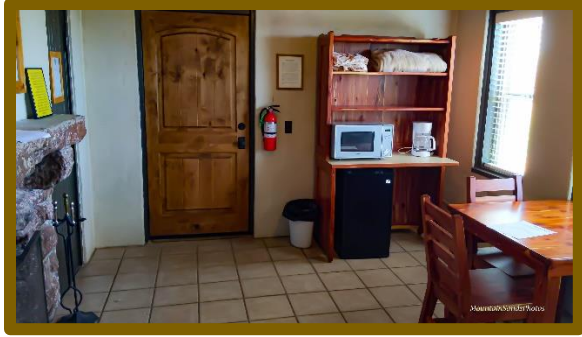
**Existing Water Treatment Plant**

**New Water Treatment Plant**

**Photos by Joseph Allen**



**Cabin Renovations: Photos by Eddie Tubbs**



**Photos by Eddie Tubbs**



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