

Partners in Palo Duro Canyon Foundation
Issue No. 40

On the Edge!



Laramie Estel, Park Police Officer
Photo by Eddie Tubbs

During the recent flood in Palo Duro Canyon State Park, Officer Estel, in waist-high water, rescued a woman from her flooded vehicle.

Kudos to Officer Estel.



Photos by David Townsend

The new four-million-dollar Water Treatment Plant

Recently, Partners in Palo Duro Canyon State Park Advisory Board toured the new Water Treatment Plant. I'm not sure the members of the Board comprehended all the gismos and gadgets that are necessary to manage such a wonder, but the manager of the plant, Joe Lingvay, patiently explained how the plant functions. The experience was not only enlightening but also educational. Thanks Joe! *Cf*



Joe Lingvay



Photos by Eddie Tubbs

Articles by the Park Superintendent and the Park Interpreter are unavailable for this issue of *On the Edge!*

The following profile on Jack Sorenson by Eric Miller, Board member, was first published in the Winter, 2021, issue of Panhandle Magazine. It is available for free at United Super Markets and Toot n Totem outlets.



Eric Miller

Jack Sorenson Profile

Jack Sorenson may have had the ideal childhood and he knows it.

The Sorenson family owned land on the rim of Palo Duro Canyon, next to the state park. He explored acres and acres of beautiful canyonland, absorbing the Western lore and rich tradition of Palo Duro, as well as its kaleidoscope of color, with every step.

His family ranched, so he rode horses from an early age and helped with the variety of ranching duties as he grew up.

His family operated the popular tourist attraction Six Gun City, the remains of which are located just west of the state park entrance. So, he helped with all sorts of gun fight and Western enactments and fed thousands of visitors in the 60s and 70s. He even drove a stage coach.

His dad would say that Jack was good at “messin’ with horses.” Translated, that meant he was good at “breaking” horses, getting them ready to be ridden by private owners or at area ranches. He would work on 10 horses a day. It was tough work that left him sore from head to toe. Yes, maybe horses were his future.

Except Jack had been drawing since a very early age. He drew family pets at age 3 and quickly moved up to other things in his life, from ranching to Palo Duro Canyon. So much so that when he was 11, he announced to his family that he was going to be an artist.

Silence!

In his late teens, he worked horses during the day but returned home to paint at night. It took a while but he began painting full-time in 1974 (he was 20) and he sold out his first one-man show later that year.

There was no looking back. His new wife, Jeanne, certainly liked that her husband’s chances of breaking bones were reduced. She joined in on the business side of things, freeing Jack to do all the work an artist does but that non-artists never really understand

“It’s a gift, I know that. So, it’s my duty to see that I make the most of it,” Sorenson says.

And together Jack and Jeanne have done that. Jack was looking, always looking, for ideas and inspiration. Research could be a hike or a family trip: his favorite sites included Palo Duro Canyon, the New Mexico mountains, and any congregation of

cowboys. Sketches were made, photos were taken and drawings and paintings slowly emerged on canvases in his Amarillo studio.

Jeanne loved raising their five kids (Jessica, Jacob, Josha, Jacqueline, and Joseph) but also helping Jack start his brand. A big-city girl (Tulsa, Chicago and Dallas before Amarillo), she thrived staying at home while Jack painted. She knew it would take a team.

“We never put a value on personal things. It was always about faith and being true to our calling,” she says.

Then came a phone call.

Rich Wiseman, an art scout from New Mexico, thought Jack had the stuff to be an artist for the Danbury Mint, a large collectible business that still exists today. Wiseman called Sorenson to feel him out and see if there was any interest. By the end of the call, it was Sorenson who had sized up Wiseman and he asked Rich to be his agent. It was just the nudge Wiseman needed to make the leap into the art licensing business as an agent.

They hammered out a first contract, for one year, with an automatic renewal for a year. It gave either of them an out, in case things just didn’t work out. It was signed on August 1, 1995. That contract has rolled over for a quarter of a century. Their art partnership is the stuff of legend.

“Jack’s no longer a client” Wiseman says. “He’s a friend,

One of the first successes was a Leanin’ Tree greeting card project. Jack had been rejected by them on his own. Wiseman re-packaged several of Sorenson’s images for the greeting card giant and they bit hard. One of Jack’s first images at Leanin’ Tree, *Bringin’ Christmas Home*, is still in their catalog over 20 years later. Sales of Sorenson Leanin’ Tree cards total more than 10

million. In fact, Jack has a Leanin’ Tree display at his house filled with just some of the work he has completed for them.

“I don’t think there is another Western artist who covers it all,” Wiseman says. Jack was good but he always wanted to get better. It shows in his work, his cowboys, livestock scenes, kids, Native Americans and all the details of a Western story, Wiseman explains

His work glows around light, from sunrises and sunsets to gas lamps and early electric lights. It is historic, accurately depicting rural life, ranching, and cowboys. It is respectful, always reflecting the life and belief of Native Americans. It is contemporary, with each work telling a story. Take *Thunder in the Palo Duro*.

“I put the viewer in the middle of the herd so he or she can almost feel the ground shake,” Jack explains.

Of course, all are beautiful. Many of his landscapes have a stronger appeal than photographs. Look at *Sandstone and Twisted Cedar* and *Sandstone Sentinel*, two images of The Lighthouse done about 20 years apart for the Amarillo Chamber of Commerce. (I found one of those posters framed in an Austin office overlooking the state capitol.)

“As good an artist as Jack is, I think he’s a better husband, father, and grandfather,” Wiseman says.

Jack’s work has appeared on 16 covers of Western Horseman magazine. His images are licensed on jigsaw puzzles (you can find them at the Canyon Gallery in Palo Duro Canyon State Park), blankets, mugs and cross-stitch sets, among many things. His web site, www.jacksorensonfineart.com, sells a catalog of his work in a variety of sizes and with a variety of framing options (don’t use his Facebook page-it’s been hacked). His

originals are in private collections across the country.

“We made more from licensing than I ever imagined,” Sorenson says giving most of the credit to Rich and Jeanne’s hard work. That’s typical.

Jack and Jeanne have given almost as much. They are long-time supporters of Partners in Palo Duro Canyon Foundation, the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum and the American Quarter Horse Association. They love Goodnight Under the Stars, an annual fund-raising effort for the Charles and Mary Ann Goodnight Ranch State Historic Site about 40 miles southeast of Amarillo. (Charles Goodnight is one of my heroes,” Sorenson says.) And good friends around the region tell stories of receiving the untimate Sorenson gift—an original oil painting.

“Jack is more national than most people realize,” Michael Grauer, Curator of Cowboy Culture and Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City says. “I thought he was a good artist back in 2006 when the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum mounted an exhibit of his work but Jack is a better artist today.”

“Without a doubt, he has a spiritual connection as well as a physical commitment to Palo Duro Canyon,” Grauer explains.

“Better still, I could count on Jack and Jeanne’s support when I was at the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum”, Grauer concludes.

After years living in Amarillo, Jack and Jeanne have moved back to the canyon, recently building a beautiful house on the rim on 11 acres his granddad gave him. The house has been on his mind quite a while—he designed it when he was 16. Back then TX 217 was a very different highway, with just a few houses between the state park and

the Canyon city limit. Now, there are hundreds, growth that concerns Sorenson.

The Sorensons call the new house Camp Grandkid; all 12 of them love visiting Papa and Nonna at the place they have named “Paparosa.” The house is rustic inside —lots of canyon colors, very western and everthing “distressed,” perfect for their large family (25!). The patio and window wall facing southeast into Palo Duro Canyon give the couple new inspiration each day.

Jack still paints every day. He regularly joins the Plenn Air painting group in Palo Duro Canyon looking for that latest inspiration from his favorite place on earth. Wherever he paints, he’s probably in his trademark cowboy hat while wearing some sharp-looking cowboy boots. He loves a scarf pulled up around his neck with a bolo as well. It’s good to wipe the dust and sweat from his brow.

While Jack is talented, he is humble. His awe-shucks personality combined with a Texas Panhandle accent and a friendly smile make him an outstanding guest speaker (although he never gives the same speech twice). He frequently gives credit to someone else (that would be Jeanne). He always gives credit to God, both for his talents as well as the wonderful places God has created for him to paint.

“I don’t know how anyone could be more blessed,” Jack says. *Em*



Photo by Mary Fowler



Editor's Notebook

In the mid 1970s, I enrolled in an archaeology class under Dr. Jack Hughes (deceased), professor of archaeology at what was then West Texas State University. The dam for what was to be Lake Mackensie near Silverton, Texas, was under construction; and the Department of Archaeology at WTSU obtained permission to excavate any Native American sites which would be covered by the waters of the lake. Then is when I learned that I did not want to be an archaeologist.

During the semester, our class of perhaps twelve or fifteen met each Saturday morning on the campus of the university, climbed into a university van, and drove to the site of the lake (Dr. Hughes driver). On the way to the lake site, we passed the old school house at the very small community of Wayside, a school long since abandoned but at the time occupied by professional archaeologists affiliated with WTSU. These archaeologists (perhaps three or four) were to “dig” the choice sites. We students were to scrape the hardpan at a site away from the pros. Their site was a bison kill site at the base of a cliff. Our site was a few hundred feet away from the cliff. No intermixing of the pros and the cons (students). (A little humor here.)

Each Saturday, our student tasks were to follow time-honored practices of archaeological excavation. We marked off a Nineteenth-century Comanche campsite with

string strung in squares of, I think, four-foot plots and began scraping the hard ground with trowels, each student assigned a specific plot. Being a novice (translated idiot), I had brought my excavation tool—a mason's trowel, a big trowel, not the kind used by archaeologists, generally a small trowel. I had to grab the tip of the towel as well as the handle to drag the trowel in a big scrape. What I got mostly was dirt.

That isn't to say that the site was barren. Others found flint chips and a few scrapers (the flint kind, not the mason's kind) and even one metal arrowhead which even to me indicated that the tribe had had interchange with the “white man.”

The hard work with little “discovery” led to my decision to throw in the trowel at the end of the semester. I stayed with my desk job—teaching English.

In the meantime, over at the pro site a great discovery was made. Beneath the bison bison kill site (commonly called “buffalo”) appeared the head of a giant bison, an animal that pre-dated bison bison.

A young professor, who was in what I believe was his first year at WTSU, was dashing around the giant bison site yelling “Jack, Jack, come here!” “Jack, Jack come here!” Poor Jack could not divide himself into enough parts to go where Gerry wanted him to go. The young professor was Dr. Gerald Schultz, Professor of Geology with a speciality in paleontology. Dr. Schultz was one of the founders of Partners in Palo Duro Canyon Foundation and a long-time member of the board. He could get very excited.

The skull of the giant bison is on display in the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum. I never enrolled in another archaeology class. My trowel has been assigned to a box labelled “useless tools.” Dr. Schultz is deceased. We miss him. Cf



Partners, in conjunction with Palo Duro Canyon State Park, is in the process of planning a playground for children who visit the park. A representative from Texas Tech University displays designs for playgrounds developed at the university. The designs are labelled "OLE," i.e., "Outdoor Learning Experience."



Photo by Eddie Tubbs

A Different Perspective



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**Christmas Rush
Oil by Jack Sorenson**

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