

# Partners in Palo Duro Canyon Foundation

*Issue No. 49*

## *On the Edge!*



**Real Photo Postcard of a Blast: “Shot in caliche pit Apr. 9, 1934” “Note rise in ground and how stones stayed in air to be photographed.” Signed EAK (E.A. Kingsley, NPS superintendent overseeing construction.) (Images from: NARA. Denver, CO.) Photo and caption provided by Lisa Jackson.**

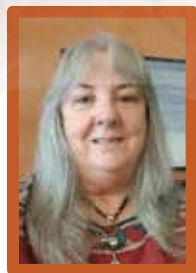


**Veteran CCC crew members preparing to blast rock for the Goodnight Trail. (Image donated to Palo Duro Canyon State Park by Doris Hill Fern.)Photo and caption provided by Lisa Jackson.**



**Point where the blasting took place to create the bench upon which El Coronado Lodge sits. Note the dashed lines that designate where explosives removed the soil and rock. (Image from: NARA, Denver, Co)**

**Photo and caption provided by Lisa Jackson**



***What a Blast!***  
***By***  
***Lisa Jackson***

Without Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), Palo Duro Canyon State Park would not exist today. From 1933-1937, a total of seven CCC companies of men lived and worked in the Canyon building the trails, roads, and structures.

The National Park Service (NPS) oversaw the CCC construction in the Canyon adhering to the policy+landscape. “True to this policy, the three rim cabins, Lighthouse, Goodnight, and Sorenson, along with El Coronado Lodge were all constructed below grade so as to not interfere with tourists’ magnificent view of the Canyon as they drove around the first bend. Here the Canyon opens up before their eyes. To further complement and blend within the natural landscape, the men of the CCC built the Park structures using the Trujillo sandstone of the Canyon.

Construction of the El Coronado Lodge required extensive excavation work to remove tons of overburden in order to create the bedrock bench upon which the Lodge sits. The CCC men used dynamite to blast through 45,000 cubic feet of soil and rock to do so. After blasting, the architects and their crews removed evidence of scars created by chiseling and blasting the scars. They did this throughout the Park.

Explosives also played a huge role in the construction of the road going down to the Canyon floor. Prior to blasting, the dynamite crew prominently displayed warning flags and ordered everyone to clear the area. The *Canyon News* reported that during one blast in October 1933, the crew used 1,160 sticks of dynamite that “dislodged” over 11,000 yards of rock weighing over two thousand tons.

However, the most impressive blast occurred on 12 February 1934. The *Canyon News* called it the largest explosion ever in the Texas Panhandle. One “shot” dislodged 6,400 cubic feet of rock that dangerously teetered over the newly formed road. When explosives hurled rock into the air and subsequently crashed to the Canyon floor, a steam shovel removed the remaining debris from the new roadbed. It required a twenty-five man crew a month to drill sixty holes into the stone in preparation for that day. They then poured black powder into the holes and placed dynamite sticks into each hole.

Even with all precautions taken, human error can still cause devastating effects. In August 1935, veteran W.A. Walton sustained serious injuries from an inadvertent explosion at the rock quarry. Holes drilled into the bedrock sandstone created pockets for strategic dynamite placement. After drilling a hole



with a compressed air drill, Walton stopped for a lunch break . While he was away, another crew member dropped a charge into the hole Walton made. Unaware of the charge, Walton decided to drill farther. He began to cut deeper into the rock, only to be thrown back when the dynamite exploded. The blast tore away at his clothes and peppered his body with gravel and rock. The concussion of the explosion forced his head back which kept debris from hitting him squarely in the face. Although he sustained extensive injuries, Walton fortunately recovered.

Once explosives dislodged the rock, the CCC men used hand tools to further shape the stone. Often the blasting teams used sledgehammers and handheld star drill bits to cut quarry holes into the stone for the dynamite. One man would hold the drill bit and twist it after each hammer strike made by his partner, driving the bit deeper into the stone. There is no doubt that the enrollee holding the drill bit had to place great trust in the accuracy of his partner swinging the hammer.

The backbreaking work endured by the CCC enrollees created Palo Duro Canyon State Park, a favored park for ninety years within the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. To learn more about the history of the CCC in Palo Duro Canyon, visit the CCC museum inside El Coronado Lodge which serves as the Visitor Center and includes the gift shop—the Canyon Gallery.



## **Black History Month at Palo Duro Canyon**

**by  
Bradley Kliemann  
Park Interpreter**

It's February as I write this article. Being February—Black History Month—I'm reminded of the many contributions of African Americans to the Canyon. Although you're likely reading this in March, any time of year is an excellent time to celebrate people and cultures that have had a profound

impact on the Canyon and on the Texas Panhandle. In Palo Duro Canyon, African Americans built our image of the Wild West on the frontier, built up defenses of settlers in Texas, and even built up our state park.

While we often have an image of the Wild West provided for us from Hollywood westerns, the frontiers of Texas didn't always look like what we might see on screen. Many kinds of people were drawn to the west with hopes and dreams of making it big; people who traveled west were often the most disenfranchised people in the east. After emancipation, many Black men were drawn west with the allure of the cowboy life style. In fact, it's estimated up to a quarter of cowboys were black. These cowboys shaped the way we think of the Wild West in the stories they told and the lives they lived. Men like Nat Love roped and saddled along with some of the greatest cowboys and cowgirls, leaving behind a legacy of the Black cowboy, and giving us a spirit of the Wild West.

Not all African Americans sought the cowboy life style. Many were instead drawn to military service. In Texas, one such group gained a reputation as fierce warriors and stalwart protectors of the frontier. These men were known as buffalo soldiers, so named because of their hair which resembled that of the bison. While nicknames like this may have had negative connotations elsewhere, their name was a title of respect on the frontier. The comparison to bison was an upmost compliment to the tenacity of the buffalo soldiers. These soldiers fought to create safety for the settlers to found many of the Panhandle communities we know today.

Another group of African Americans helped build the state park. These men, as a part of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), helped build the foundation for what would eventually become Palo Duro

Canyon State Park. Two of the CCC troops were comprised only of Black men. These were Troops 2875 and 2876. Although the CCC troops were segregated on paper, they lived together with the white troops, tearing down racial barriers in the Canyon while building the state park.

In Palo Duro Canyon, the impact of African Americans cannot be understated. They became some of the most proficient cowboys, protected the land, and worked together with others to build what we know today. African Americans gave us the spirit of the Wild West, became fierce buffalo soldiers, and helped to create Palo Duro Canyon State Park. Regardless of what time of year you read this, I hope the contribution of these individuals and their culture inspire you to dig deeper into how all of us created our community.



**Bradley Kliemann**  
**Park Interpreter**



## **Photo Contest**

**By**  
**Karen Copeland**

The 2024 Partners in Palo Duro Canyon Foundation Photography Contest was a huge success. We revived the popular contest after a brief hiatus. The Sad Monkey Mercantile graciously hosted the contest, and we received entries from 34 photographers from across Texas, including one from Nashville, Tennessee. There were 85 beautiful photos, all taken in Palo Duro Canyon in 2022 and 2023. The categories were Wildlife, Plants, Landscapes, and People. Awards were given for first, second, and third place in all categories with one photo chosen from all the entries for Best of Show.

The judging was open to the public, and we had 138 individuals who came throughout the day to participate in the judging. Best of Show was chosen by the organizing committee and the Board of Partners in Palo Duro Canyon Foundation.

We owe a great deal of gratitude to Sad Monkey Mercantile and its employees for graciously hosting our contest and providing the prize for Best in Show, a one-night stay in a Dove's Rest cabin. We are also grateful for Bernice Blansingame, our former PDC Park Interpreter, who returned from retirement to chair the photo contest committee. We plan to continue holding an annual photography contest in the coming years and urge you to come to the Park to hike and bike or to simply enjoy our beautiful Canyon and to take photos to submit next year. Thank you for your support.





## Winners from the Photo Contest

**Category: Landscape**



**“Blue Sky Over the Canyon”  
Reynold Brookens**

**Category: Wildlife**



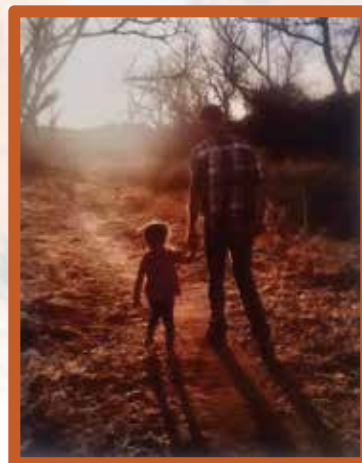
**“Cardinal in Water”  
Vicki Walmarth**

**Category: Plants**



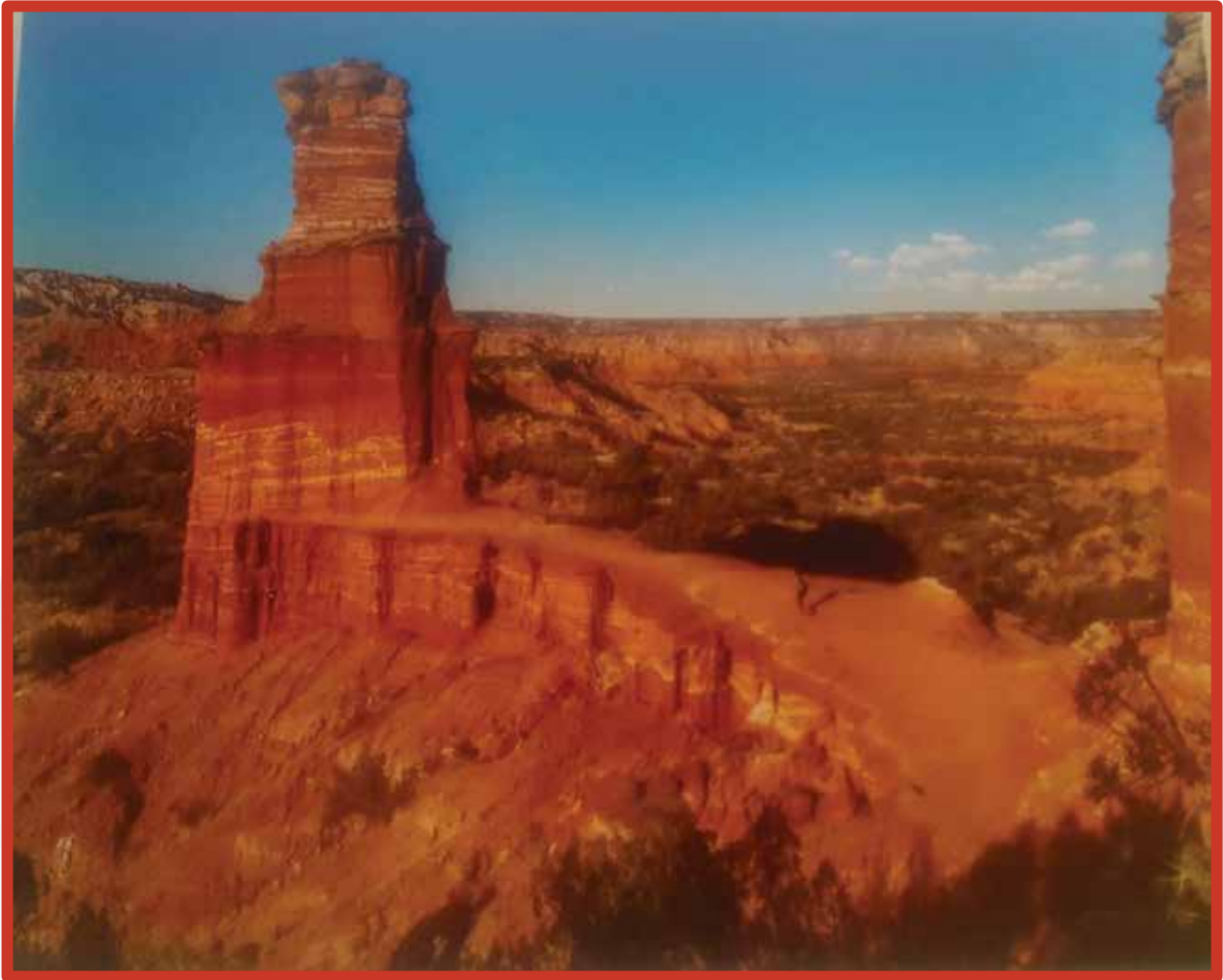
**“Bee on Flower”  
Linda Drake**

**Category: People**



**“Holding Hands”  
Stacy Williams**

## Best in Show



**“Lighthouse View”  
Charles Knowles**

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### **Adventures of a Buying Trip By Kati Hawkins**

This year’s annual buying trip was one for the record book. After selling out of our reserve stock of jewelry and pottery, we were faced with one option—to go shopping.

We took to the road at the beginning of February and headed west to buy the latest and finest handmade Native American Jewelry and pottery. We were not disappointed.

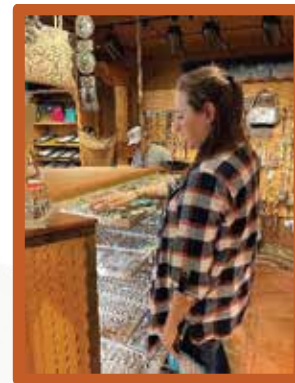
We made it to Gallup, New Mexico, before a snowstorm hit; but with I-40 shut down to the west, we were unable to continue

to the reservations. Thankfully, with our Senior Buyers contacts within the tribes, we were able to get a selection of jewelry sent to us in by Lucy Owaleon of the Zuni Nation. The Zuni jewelry showcases the fine inlay work of the Zuni smiths. We were disappointed not to be able to see our friends on the reservations, but the snow lent itself to some beautiful scenery and afforded us the opportunity for some valuable fellowship, memorable moments, and a surprise purchase from a local artisan selling her wares to patrons at a local restaurant. [Visit the Gallery].

There were some questions as to if and when we would be able to get out of New Mexico with the snow having shut down I-40 in both directions within a day of our arrival. We passed the time sharing laughs over meals and supervising the Foundation President (Eddie Tubbs) while he scurried around the best he could, snapping photos and schmoozing shop owners. The conversation was easy amongst the three of us, making the trip feel less like work and more like a leisurely road trip. Although the age difference between myself and the other two of my trio suggested this was some chaperone outing from a senior home, the banter and laughter was more indicative of a family reunion. We shopped and laughed and got to know each other even more, strengthening our working relationships and, yes, friendships.

This was my second buying trip, and the knowledge I gained has been invaluable to me. As the assistant manager/buyer for The Gallery, I feel that I have an even greater understanding of the items we showcase in our store and a growing confidence to select pieces that match or exceed the standard we strive for. I will

continue to look forward to these trips, both from a work perspective and a personal one.



**Kati at the Kounter**



**David Needs Some Hats**



**Rio Grande Pottery  
Albuquerque**

**Photos by Eddie Tubbs**





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