Partners in Palo Duro Canyon Foundation

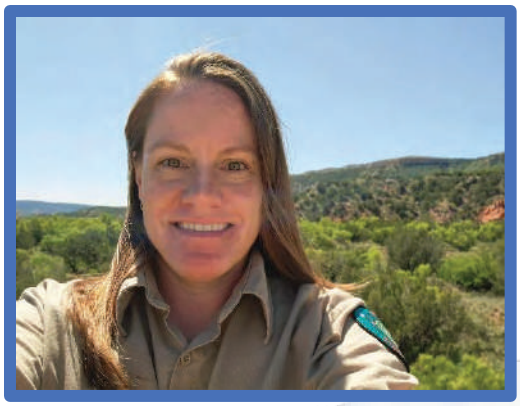
Issue No. 55

On the Edge!

Barn Swallows

Photo by

Casey Watson, Park Office Manager



Barn Swallows: Nature's Acrobats with a Serious Poop Problem

By

Casey Watson

This summer at Headquarters, rangers have enjoyed the nesting swallows on our front porch. We've loved watching all the drama that comes with numerous chicks hatching, maturing, and venturing out into the world.

Barn swallows are interesting little birds. Shimmering blue-black superheroes as if from the insect world, zipping, and diving through the air with incredible agility, making sharp turns and swoops, often just above the ground or just above the heads of people. They're like Top-Gun fighter jets, feasting on flies, mosquitoes, and other airborne insects. Chances are you've seen their aerial ballet and benefited from their natural control.

Our headquarters' swallows are typical swallows. However, the abundant food source creates a unique challenge for rangers and anyone else whose porch they inhabit—that is their seemingly uncontrollable habit of pooping on everything.

Swallow poop on the porch may be the first thing our guests see. We strive to maintain a welcoming environment filled with hospitality, but nothing, says, "Come on in!" quite like a surprise greeting of dubious origin.

Despite their messy habits, it's hard to stay angry at these tiny birds. At the end of the day, they provide a valuable service for ranger entertainment and for devouring insects that otherwise bug us.

The next time you see a barn swallow, admire its beauty and agility. And don't forget to step carefully when you're under their favorite perch. While they're nature's acrobats, they're also a reminder that sometimes the most beautiful things come with a little clean up.***Cw***

Ann Coberley

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Raven

The bird flew so close
I could see how the wind
ruffled small black feathers
beneath its wings
and how fragile his legs appeared
in silhouette against the light.

He hovered and swooped,
circled and cawed,
rode the wind in joyful abandon
as I watched, bound to the earth,
cursing the gale and wishing
I could fly. ***Ac***

El Coronado Lodge
By
Lisa Jackson

In 1928, Stephen Mathers, the first National Park Service Director (NPS), presented a new policy in respect to building trails, roads, and structures on NPS lands. At Palo Duro Canyon State Park, under the watchful eye of talented architect and Regional NPS director, Herbert Maier, the policy guided the structural and landscape architects to stay within the parameters of mandated NPS policy in respect to Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) construction. Within this philosophy as well, CCC construction operated under the premise that structures were ancillary to the beauty and features of surrounding landscapes. The structures were to offer comfort for the visitor but not intrude upon that which nature provided. This was the NPS architectural ideology that was practiced during the 1930s.

Due to this policy, there is a consistency to the architecture that is sometimes called "Government Rustic" or even "Parkitecture." Travelers visiting CCC parks will find a common thread in the style of the buildings. The structures blend with the surroundings by using local materials, by being rustic in nature, and, often, by reflecting regional influences.

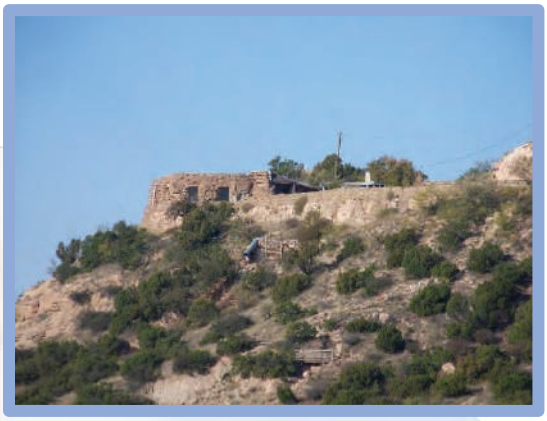
The construction of El Coronado Lodge required drastic measures to create the below-grade surface upon which the structure was constructed. Naturally, this required the removal of overburden material laden with soil and stone through blasting. According to the *Windy Rim* publication, blasts and subsequent excavation removed an astonishing forty-five thousand cubic feet of soil and overburden before reaching bedrock. This bedrock created the low bench for the Lodge to be built upon. (Many of the CCC camps had their own newspaper. For the veteran companies at Palo Duro Canyon, theirs was titled *Windy Rim.)*

No doubt, CCC blasting was invasive and destructive in reference to flora in the path of the explosives. Yet, it created a way to build at sub-level, placing the Lodge out of the normal vision of passing motorists. Prior to blasting, the landscape architects and their crews preserved and transplanted the trees and foliage elsewhere. After blasting, landscape crews also removed evidence of scars created by chiseling and blasting. The crews consistently utilized these preservation methods throughout the Park as well.

Bench before Blast
Photo Provided by Lisa Jackson

Amarillo Architect, Guy Calander, designed the plans for the Lodge to provide a large dining area, museum, kitchen, lounge, and banquet rooms for community groups and individual visitors. His plans originally called for a second story and a one hundred twenty-five foot aerial lookout tower, but the Lodge was not completed as planned before the CCC program was closed at Palo Duro Canyon in December 1937. The CCC men constructed only the ground floor, the first phase.

On May 12, 1934, state park board members and other dignitaries attended the cornerstone ceremony of El Coronado Lodge, celebrating the placement of the carved block of sandstone bearing the date, 1934.



El Coronado Lodge on the Bench

Jack Determan
Park Operations Trainee

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Continued Permanence

As a student of history, I often reflect on the countless people whose experiences echo my own. Whether its camping in the southern

Rockies, hiking around Lake Meredith, or gazing in awe at the grandeur of Palo Duro Canyon from a tent pitched beneath its cliffs, I find deep satisfaction in drawing enduring parallels between the modern world and the distant past.

One account that continues to inspire me—not only for its vivid description of Palo Duro Canyon but for how it captures a feeling familiar to anyone who has stood where I have—is Randolph B. Marcy's *Exploration of the Red River.*

In 1852, the U.S. Army appointed Marcy, an experienced captain in the Army Corp of Engineers, to lead an expedition to locate the source of the Red River. Over four months, from May to August, he led 72 men on a journey of more than a thousand miles across the Southern Plains, documenting everything from geology and weather to wildlife and indigenous customs. While Marcy's detailed, objective reports are invaluable to historians, it is his description of Palo Duro Canyon and the Red River headwaters that transcends the usual military and scientific tone of his writing. In this moment, his style becomes unexpectedly reflective—even poetic. Upon reaching the Canyon, he wrote:

"It is impossible for me to describe the sensations that came over me, and the exquisite pleasure I experienced, as I gazed upon these grand and novel pictures."
He likened the formations to something out of medieval Europe:

"A good representation of the towering walls of a castle of the feudal ages, with its giddy battlements pierced with loopholes, and its projecting watchtowers standing out in bold relief upon the azure ground of the pure and transparent sky above."

After such a long and demanding journey, Marcy must have found that the sight of the Canyon offered not only relief but also a kind of spiritual awe. In his final reflection of this extraordinary landscape, Marcy moves beyond observation into something timeless:

"All here was crude nature as it sprang into existence at the fiat of the Almighty architect of the universe, still preserving its primeval type, its unreclaimed sublimity and wildness; and it forcibly inspired me with that veneration which is justly due to the high antiquity of nature's handiworks, and which seems to increase as we consider the solemn and important lesson that is taught us in reflecting upon their continued permanence when contrasted with our own fleeting and momentary existence."

Marcy's words capture what so many of us feel when confronted with places like Palo Duro Canyon—a humbling reminder of nature's permanence and our place within the long, shared story of those who have stood in awe before it.

If you haven't yet experienced one hidden gem of the Panhandle, also known as the Palo Duro Canyon State Park Wildlife Viewing Area, what are you waiting for? It might just be the respite you seek from a busy world. ***Jd***

Photo taken from Citacanyon, a part of Palo Duro Canyon State Park
(Not open to the public)

Linda Durante

Wildlife Viewing Area

Wildlife Viewing Areas (WVA) within the Texas State Park system provide visitors with a unique experience to enjoy wildlife within an area that protects the wildlife, provides leaning opportunities for both young and old alike, and serves special interest groups, such as photographers and bird watchers. The WVA at Palo Duro Canyon State Park is no exception. Even though the WVA was established in 2007, it is considered a hidden gem in the Texas Panhandle.

Editor's note: Linda Durante is on the Board of Partners in Palo Duro Canyon Foundation.

Ann Coberley

April 30
At sunrise
The moon tarries,
pale and weary
thin as a wafer,
hiding from the sun in mist
that fills the canyons,

reluctant to continue
the pursuit of darkness,
content to rest for a day.

But the earth
spins on its axis, outpacing
the journey of the moon,

so it must drop
and fade
into the western horizon,
continue its journey
toward the darkness
of another day's night.

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On the Edge!

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