



Spring 2012 NEWSLETTER

Friends of Guadalupe River, Honey Creek, Inc.

A non-profit organization

Trails to the Past

Guadalupe River State Park

by Bryden Moon

Sticking to the Past – Recycling at Molasses Time



Whenever someone ever mentioned a molasses press, the image of a draft animal pulling a small hewn tree log in continuing circles was the stock mental image that had stuck in my mind. The log extended from the beast of burden into the interior center of the circle and was wedged into a small metal mechanical

device, the molasses press, which was firmly affixed to the ground for stability. In my mind's eye, a farmer hunkered over the compact piece of equipment, which had rollers that would crush just about anything that was pushed into it, including cane. The Agricultural Heritage Museum in Boerne has a molasses press and many remain scattered throughout farms in the area still firmly set into the ground. So a few years back with this sepia image in mind, after getting a call from Carmen Rittimann, it didn't take a second call for me to take a trip over to Bulverde to see first-hand how they made molasses.

The loud and ever-present chugging of a 1956 German tractor motor, was the first thing I noticed when arriving at Charlie Biessenbach's place in Bulverde, early on that Saturday morning in November. Soon the noise was overtaken by the second thing you notice: the beehive of activity. And after a few minutes, with all the activity, the din fades - you have forgotten that it is droning on in the background. This special day is dedicated to a disappearing family tradition that was practiced here, and over at other farms in the surrounding hillsides: sugar cane is transformed step by step over a day's journey into molasses.



The vital steps of making molasses draw as much from past traditions as it does from vintage equipment. This is a process that Charlie remembers from his youth, as a family event. It starts with that old noisy German tractor (the draft animal and log have long been replaced) which has been connected to a circa 1930's – 1940's portable cane press. A truckload of cane is continuously hand-fed into and pulled through the antique device. The juice pours out a chute when the sugar cane is squeezed through it rollers. An empty bucket is manually rotated under the sluice, just before the full one is carried to its next venue.....a specialized outdoor oven made in the 1940's for the purpose of molasses making (Charlie's father-in-law, Alvin Heimer had the exact year written in drying concrete when it was built. However in shoring up the structure, some of Charlie's handiwork covered up a portion of that date.)



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There is as much energy surrounding the boiling of the cane juice, as there is at the cane press. Each 5 gallon bucket of juice is carried a short distance. On the large oven sits a huge uniquely-constructed rectangle cooking “pan.” At one end of the pan, a canvas feed sack is draped to serve as a sieve. Here as many as 100 gallons of raw cane juice might be poured, 5 gallons at a time. The seine is the first step in eliminating any impurities. After each pouring, this makeshift filter is then washed out. Other duties at the cooking oven involve: keeping an already heated fire going - from time to time an attendant opens a large metal door in the base of the oven structure to add more wood. Also this is where the next step of the purification process takes place: a small pizza-sized, perforated disk is dipped by its wooden shaft into the oversized holding pan to skim the impurities as they bubble to the surface. Here is the first example of recycling I came across that day: as Charlie relates, **“Although we might not like the scum that is sifted off by the skimmer, my hogs sure do.”**



By 10:30 you’ve actually forgotten all about that loud engine, until the cane pressing operation is shut down.



Now all that remains, other than a startling silence, is a mountain of flattened cane stalks (the second example of recycling – after drying out in a few years, it is converted to mulch). And although there seems to be a lot work involved on the front end of the morning, Charlie says that hardest work had already taken place the day before – **“Cutting down the cane with a machete and removing the leaves, this was the harder job.”** Of 13 acres that he has on the Cibolo, 6 acres are currently dedicated to “raising cane.”

The rest of the day settles into routines: stoking the fire and skimming the floating debris. The extent of time devoted to this varies every year due to volume of juice and the temperature of the oven, but there have been years when they needed to string up lights to finish. Charlie tells us: **“The normal ratio is 10%, which means that 100 gallons of juice gets distilled down to 10 gallons of molasses.”** In other words, between the evaporation by boiling and the removal of byproduct by skimming, 90 % of the brew is missing by the end of the day.

When the bubbling solution is of a certain hue and consistency, in order to avoid scorching, the specially made cypress-walled & metal-bottomed pan is lifted by its four handles by four stout helpers off of the oven and placed on a rack. Here as the sun sets and the syrup cools, we learn of one more example of recycling....in the form of that special holding pan. The wood used for the sides was donated by Carmen Rittimann - wood that had been stored in her barn - old cypress wood that once had been part of an old farm cistern.



There are more stories to be told!



Rust House

by Wilt Shaw

Rust House Seating Area for Hikers

A few years ago, we asked San Antonio native landscape consultant, Jean Robinson, to provide us with a design for planting and seating for the Rust House. After approval by Texas Parks and Wildlife, we slowly began laying out the groundwork and started by testing various native plants to see what would grow well in given locations and of course survive hungry deer.

We appear to have the right plants that the deer avoid but we didn't count on those pesky armadillos! They have now found an alternative to rock-laden Hill Country soil in the form of soft, moist dirt to excavate in search of their favorite food, worms



and grubs. They thus are wrecking havoc on the root systems of the new plants. We are still working on a solution to discourage them and hope recent rains will get the dillos to move on to other digs.

Now about the seating: We put out bids and selected Julio Martinez from Boerne to build the benches adhering to the Jean's layout. With twelve-inch footings and curved rectangles made from Texas Hill Country limestone, Julio and his crews' handiwork is nothing short of stunning! It is from this location that the Saturday morning Honey Creek State Natural Area hike begins. The five benches are designed to comfortably seat around 60 hikers who will be briefed on the forthcoming hike and hear about the history of the Honey Creek area and its settlement. You are invited to come see for yourselves!



What's left to do: After the rains abate and the ground dries, we will spread a layer of mulch in the new bench area. Also, we have laid out a new trail leading from the Rust House bench area to the Honey Creek State Natural Area entrance that will be used by the Saturday morning hikers. This trail will be bordered by cedar logging and mulched.

If you wish to volunteer for these remaining projects, please let know. The work is enjoyable and fulfilling, and you'll get to see and contribute to the beautification of our fantastic park.

Wilt

Exciting Return of the Eagle Lady

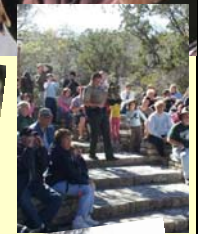
by Nancy Gray



Doris Mager, “the Eagle Lady” made a return visit to Guadalupe River State Park on the afternoon of January 14. Over 100 people responded to the invitation to get up close and personal with this remarkable woman and her travelling companions, a fascinating collection of birds of prey. Doris introduced the audience in the amphitheater at the park to “ET”, a Great Horned Owl”, “Cara”, a crested Caracara, “Dolittle”, an American Kestrel and “Tex”, an Eastern Screech Owl. Doris tours the country with her collection of birds of prey to educate others regarding the need for their protection. All of the birds that Doris takes care of have been rescued and are not capable of living in the wild. The people



present were treated to “performances” by each of these interesting birds. Joel Parker and Tina Lund from the park staff and Susan Bogle from the friends group all assisted and held some of the bird stars. Many people took the opportunity to interact with the ET or Cara by holding or touching them. Doris is a wealth of information concerning birds of prey and is passionate about their protection. She started working with raptors in 1963, and with eagles in 1968 while working for the Florida Audubon Society(FAS). She has had over 80 eagles in her care as well as other birds of prey. In June of 1983 after 19 years with the FAS, she started her own non-profit organization,



Save Our American Raptors which is still going strong as is Doris. We thank Doris for coming to Guadalupe River State Park and hope that she returns in the future to teach us more about American Raptors.



Saturday Night Program

by Park Staff

Date	Subject	Time	Speaker
3-Mar	Hill Country Birds	5:30-7:30PM	Patsy and Tom Inglet
10-Mar	Plants and Animals of the Hill Country	7:00PM	Doug Dalglish
17-Mar	Dutch Oven Cooking	7:00PM	Liz Palfini
24-Mar	Owls	7:00PM	Susan Campbell
31-Mar	Skulls and Skins	7:00PM	Tom Anderson
14-Apr	Star Party- SAAA	7:30PM	Danielle Rappaport

Park Store

by Georgia Davis & Bill Beach



Been to the park store lately? No? Well, you're in for a nice surprise! Not only can you purchase a spiffy new t-shirt in one of three designs, you can also get a patch with the park logo, a generous mug with a few breathtaking images of the park on it, a lapel pin, a nice little hiking stick medallion, and a hiking stick to put it on! Something new to all TPW park stores is a PathTag—and we have them! It's a coin like object that was originally used for GeoCaching activities which, is now a collector's item. If you want to pop some popcorn over an open flame, come see us! And if you have a craving for s'mores—we've got you covered, as well!

So stop by the park store to see a delightful array of site specific items. And don't forget—if you belong to the GRSP Friends Group, you get a 20% discount on all store items!

GRSP ABBREVIATED PRICELIST

GRSP Cap/T-shirt Combo	19.95
GRSP T-shirts (2 designs)	13.95 – 15.95
Child's T-shirt (1 design)	11.50
GRSP Cap	14.00
GRSP Map Bandanna	3.95
GRSP Magnet	3.00
Hiking Medallion	4.50
Hiking Stick	15.00
GRSP PathTag	3.00
GRSP Patch	4.00
GRSP Lapel Pin	3.50
S'mores Supplies	
Chocolate Bar, lg.	2.50
Graham Crackers	1.49
Marshmallows, bag	2.00
Jiffy Pop	2.50
Nature Guides	7.95
Dragonflies, Butterflies, Tracks & Scat, Wildflowers	
Trees of Texas, Snakes, Birds, Fish	
Propane Tank	4.95
Propane Stove (1 burner)	23.99



President Letter

by Tom Anderson



We seem to always have reasons to be happy. Even though we lost the park interpreter, Chris Dooley, to promotion the park staff has stepped up and we have the first Saturday night amphitheater presentation March 3rd from 5:30-7:30 with Tom & Patsy Inglet. This couple has taken a hobby and turned it into a wealth of information that they enjoy sharing. This is a must program if you can find the time. They will be sharing about Hill Country Birds. Other Saturday night programs and presenters are listed in the newsletter and will also be on our website. Another reason to be happy is the upcoming Homesteader Homecoming. Look for the article in the newsletter. If you have never been I suggest you make a real effort to be there. You can learn so much listening to the ancestors about the cultural history of the Honey Creek area.

I am extremely happy about the dedicated park hosts that come back year after year. They make many improvements in the park with the Friends supplying the necessary supplies it is a partnership that has served the park well. This winter they were able to remodel the headquarters so that we now have a small store. Look for the new GRSP patches and hiking medallions as well as many animal guides, t-shirts, and hiking sticks. Elsewhere in the newsletter there is a price list and pictures of some of the offerings. The hosts also helped the park staff continue to improve our new wildlife viewing area by adding a cistern that catches rain water from the roof and holds it until needed for the water feature. More work will continue on the area in the near future. We also will be sponsoring a river clean-up this spring as we have partnered with scout troops and individuals to clean debris from the river area and spread mulch on the hiking trails as well as around our new benches at the Rust House. The Day of Discovery 3rd grade program at Honey Creek will be happening during the month of March. This program has been in existence since 1999 and has continued to grow with the excellent guidance of our Holly Camero at the helm. Come by and see the new benches at the Rust House and read the article elsewhere in the newsletter. There is a lot going on at the parks and we hope to see you there and help us make this the best that it can be.

Park Happenings

by Scott Taylor

Hello Friends, It has certainly been a while since we last spoke. As some of you know and for those of you who don't, Chris Dooley our park interpreter has moved on to another position with Texas Parks and Wildlife. Chris now works as the Assistant Manager of Lockhart State Park and I would like to take a moment to thank Chris for the work that he accomplished while here at Guadalupe River State Park and moreover wish him well in his new position. Although Chris has left the park our interpretation and education mission has not. With this vacant position there will indeed be compromises that will have to be made until we can fill the position, but we are committed to doing everything that we possibly can to meet the wants and desires of the park visitors. We will still be hosting Saturday evening programs each Saturday evening down at the amphitheater and we are still looking to fill in numerous vacant slots. If you or someone you know is interested in presenting a nature based program please contact the park and ask for Bill Beach. In addition to the Saturday evening programs we will make every attempt through volunteer staffing to keep our Discovery Center open as much as possible. This would not be possible without the continued support and dedicated hard work of all of the Friends Group Board members.

Let's Move on to another topic. I would like to fill everyone in on a few of the happenings here at the park. As you may remember from the last newsletter we were just about to kick off our Public Hunts here at the park. We are now just about finished up with only one youth turkey hunt remaining. The results of this year's hunt were about the same as in the past, though still disappointing. With all of our efforts here at the park we were only able to meet about 50% of our recommended harvest goal. The Actual harvest totals came to 56 white-tailed deer and 24 exotic or non-native species. Although we did not meet our harvest goals we did meet another need with the hunts. The public hunts are also used to provide hunting opportunity in Texas. With upwards of 97% of all land in Texas being privately owned there is very little hunting opportunity on public land, leaving the majority of Texans without a place to hunt. There is the option of leasing land for the purpose of hunting but as many of you know the hunting industry in Texas has become a very big business. This is especially true in the Hill Country where hunting leases can run into the tens of thousands of dollars. So all things considered, the hunts were successful after all.

In other news, the park staff will begin preparing for what we call our busy season. Before you know it spring will be here, then shortly and relatively seamlessly summer will follow. The staff will turn their attention to customer and visitor services and the inevitable heat will bear down on us all. If the rains continue the park should be in great shape with the river flowing nicely. At least that is what we hope for.

If you haven't been out to the park in a while, please make plans to do so. Texas State Parks need your help now more than ever. As many of you know, the park system is facing a significant revenue shortage due to heat, drought and wildfire. Approximately 50% of the park systems operating dollars come from entrance fees and with visitation down significantly you can see how this can cause a problem. There are many opportunities out there to help out your State Parks. The best option is to go out and visit one. Other options include the \$5 opt-in when you register your vehicle or boat; you can even make a tax-deductible donation either here at the park or through the Texas Parks and Wildlife website. Whichever way you choose to support your Texas State Parks just know that you are actively participating in the protection and preservations of some very special places in Texas for present and future generations. And for that you should be proud. Thank you for your time and I will see you around the park.

6th Homesteader Homecoming

Sunday, April 15, 2012

@ 2:00 pm

Honey Creek Ranch

26226 Highway 46 West

(Less than a mile west of St. Joseph – Honey Creek Catholic Church)

Come be a part of the search for our park's heritage.

Please direct any questions to Bryden Moon at (830) 336-3375 or bemoonjr@aol.com



2009



2011



2007



2010

2012 Dues

by J.W. Pieper

2012 Membership Dues Are Now Payable

With the New Year approaching it is a time of renewal, and if you have not renewed your Friends of GRSP/Honey Creek membership for 2012 it is time to do so. As you know, this newsletter keeps you current with the activities at the Park, but the costs of sending out the newsletter are continuing to increase.

As a reminder, we are a 501 (c) 3 organization which means that contributions to the Friends organization are tax deductible. Just use the application on the inside back cover of this newsletter and mail your check to the official address for the Friends, 3350 Park Road 31, Spring Branch, Texas 78070 or drop it off at Park Headquarters on your next visit.

The Board of Directors has authorized the cancellation of subscription privileges to the Quarterly Newsletter in June for all members who are in arrears.

Friends of Guadalupe River / Honey Creek, Inc. Membership

(Membership Renewal date is January 1st)

Name(s): _____ Date _____

Address: _____ City, State, Zip: _____

Email _____ Phone: _____

Membership Type: _____ New Member _____ Renewal _____ Change of Address

Level of Membership: _____ \$5 Education or Youth Organization _____ \$50 Sustaining Member
_____ \$5 Student (under 18) _____ \$100 Contributing Member
_____ \$10 Individual (over 18) _____ \$500 Corporate Partner
_____ \$15 Family _____ \$1000 Life Membership

I would like to help the Friends by volunteering for:

_____ Interpretive hikes _____ Outdoor Ed. Programs _____ Trail Maintenance
_____ Historical Drama _____ Evening Programs _____ South Island Beautification
_____ Trail Ride Event _____ Fundraising _____ Other _____

Send checks payable to "Friends of GR/HC, Inc. Mail to: 3350 Park Road 31, Spring Branch, TX 78070

Friends of Guadalupe River/Honey Creek, Inc. is a 501(c)3 organization. All donations are tax deductible.

**Friends of Guadalupe River
and Honey Creek, Inc.**

3350 Park Road 31
Spring Branch, Texas 78070

We're on the web!
www.honeycreekfriends.org

**The Friends of Guadalupe River and
Honey Creek, Inc. is a
non-profit organization working with
Guadalupe River State Park and
Honey Creek State Natural Area.**

**The "Friends" meet monthly at the Park.
Please join us on the first
Thursday at 6:30 pm.
And bring a friend!**