

FRIENDS



OF GUADALUPE RIVER STATE PARK HONEY CREEK SNA



SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2022

A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

A Friends' Journey from Woodland to Savannah

by President, Linda Gindler

The Friends of Guadalupe River and Honey Creek Board of Directors are proud to announce the opening of the Park's newest wildlife viewing blind—Savannah. Savannah, like the existing Woodland wildlife viewing blind is sponsored by the Friends, maintained by a volunteer Care Team, provides a rain-solar powered water feature, and offers exceptional views of the park's wildlife. Look a bit closer and you discover not only their history, but also their differences. It is those differences that first interested Park Staff and the Friends into pursuing a second blind.

Woodland, like its name says, is in a woodland. It is in the very popular Day Use Area where there is always a buzz of activity. A short walk down a wheel friendly path brings you to its beautiful shade

looking for a quiet spot, then Savannah is the place to be. Located in the park's upland area and surrounded by the Painted Bunting Trail loop it is accessible from either of the Painted Bunting Trail heads. Or take the more scenic 1.25-mile hike and park at the Prairie Trail head. Savannah offers a different wildlife buffet as it sits in a sea of grasses and forbs. Plus, Savannah is a good distance to either Honey Creek or the Guadalupe River, so its water feature is a popular wildlife watering hole.

Savannah began its journey in 2017 when the park's biologist began exploring opportunities for a second viewing blind. He soon involved other Park Staff, Friends, and volunteers and together began to consider design, placement, and funding options. By 2018, ideas were consolidated into plans and involvement of TPWD department planners was sought out for further scrutiny and advice. From the beginning, everyone wanted Savannah to highlight different natural elements of the park than what was already viewed at Woodland. By late 2019, the Friends had the funds set aside and volunteer labor commitments from local Master Naturalist chapters (Alamo, Lindheimer, and Hill Country) and Boy Scout Troop 285 of Coker Methodist Church. Soon thereafter, Troop 285 kicked off the first volunteer day by clearing the equipment and supply access trail. Volunteer construction days began in early 2020 and it was thought to be completed that year, but a little thing called Covid-19 changed scheduling considerably. There were other delays too along the way; much needed rains, big snow of 2021, and quiet time for breeding birds to name a few, but the volunteers remained focused on getting it done. On April 23, 2022, Troop 285 returned and completed the final task, clearing and shaping the last segment of trail for park patrons. The Care Team took on responsibilities the next day.



trees offering up a wildlife buffet of acorns, berries, and nuts. Unless you are in the river, it is hard to find a cooler resting spot in the park. Plus, with its proximity to the Discovery Center, it offers a great venue for park programs.

Woodland began its journey in 2009 when Boy Scout, Robert Laird, took on its planning and construction as his Eagle Scout project. By 2015 the Friends had adopted it as an ongoing project. To free up park staff, a volunteer Care Team was organized to perform daily chores, routine maintenance, and to address refurbishments. A wide variety of birds, mammals, reptiles, and insects visit it daily seeking out its water, native plants, and feeders. Today, it is a frequent resting spot for many park visitors.

Savannah, takes a bit more effort to reach, requiring a 350-yard walk down a natural trail, but your effort is rewarded with sweeping views of the surrounding grassland and scrub. If you are



Troop 285 GRSP Service Project

by Dave Kibler

Since 2007, Scout Troop 285, based in north San Antonio, has served Guadalupe River State Park twice each year by conducting workdays in a number of diverse areas of the park and in several different ways. For instance, on Saturday morning, 23 April, twenty-two troop volunteers met at park headquarters to organize to build the new trail section off the Painted Bunting Trail, which will provide access to the new Savannah wildlife viewing blind built over the past five years by the Friends of GRSP/HCSNA.



Three years ago troop volunteers established an initial short trail section providing access to the blind site for the construction process to begin. These two joined trail sections will now provide access to the blind from both sides of the Painted Bunting Loop for park visitors into the future. Scouts and adult volunteers removed grass and weeds in the new section, approximately 1000 feet in length, while removing many of the

limestone rocks from the path of the new trail. As the work was completed, the Scouts were able to enter the new blind and to meet there the Friends volunteers, John Prentice and Linda Gidler, who have served as key facilitators and coordinators of the overall blind project through the years. The official Friends ribbon-cutting for opening the new blind and trail to the public will be held in the near future. Finally, the Scouts enjoyed lunch provided by Cole Finney, senior Scout and project coordinator for the 23 April troop workday at the completion of the work. Troop 285 will look forward to the next opportunity to provide volunteer service at the park in the fall.



Come on out – the birding is GREAT

by Linda Gindler

Summer is here! And that means Independence Day will soon be here too. The 4th of July is a popular time to visit the Park. The river offers a cooling respite from summer heat and there are plenty of quiet places to contemplate our nation's history. Independence Day coupled with a walk in the natural wonder of the Park might make you ponder a wildlife symbol of our country ... the Bald eagle.

Shortly after the Declaration of Independence was signed on July 4, 1776, the Continental Congress assigned



Original Design of the Great Seal of the U.S. (from Nat'l Archives)

Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Benjamin Franklin the job of designing a national seal to be affixed to important government documents. They failed to deliver on the assignment as did two subsequent committees. By 1782, the work was handed off to Charles Thomas (the Secretary of the Continental Congress at the time). Few Americans today have heard

of Thomas, although he was an influential well respected Founding Father. Thomas incorporated elements from the prior committees along with his own to create the design. He chose North America's Bald eagle as the centerpiece and thus a wildlife native became a symbol of freedom and strength. The new design was officially adopted on June 20, 1782.

Today, Bald eagles are viewed as majestic regal birds, but that was not always true at the dawn of our nation. Benjamin Franklin in a letter wrote, "I wish the Bald eagle had not been chosen the representative of our country. He is a bird of bad moral character. He does not get his living honestly." Franklin did have a good point. Bald eagles are notorious thieves that regularly steal the catch of other birds.



Bald eagle-Kendall Co. (Photo by Ken Butler)

The Bald eagle is an infrequent visitor to the Park with

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only one or two sightings every year or two. It is an exciting time for those lucky visitors. Thou there are no known Bald eagle nests in the Park, nests have been found in nearby Burnet and Kerr counties. And birds are regularly seen at Canyon Lake and Boerne City Lake. Thanks to their protected status, Bald eagles can now be seen in every state except for Hawaii. But it wasn't too long ago that seeing one was a rare event. By 1963, Bald eagle populations had dropped to 417 nesting pairs in the lower forty-eight states. Their first significant decline occurred in the 1800s due to development and hunting. After World War II a new pesticide called dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane (commonly called "DDT") was widely used for insect control. Rain waters washed DDT residues into adjacent water bodies where aquatic plants and fish absorbed it. When Bald eagles ate the fish (their favorite diet), their bodies absorbed the chemical and resulted in thin eggshells that broke during incubation. Their numbers plunged further. Thanks to the US banning DDT as well as captive breeding, reintroduction, protection, and law enforcement programs the Bald eagle represents not only our country, but also a true success story of what we humans can do when we work together. Today they have rebounded to over 71,000 breeding pairs in the lower 48 states.

Bald eagles are large with a body length of 31 inches



Bald eagle-Kerr Co. (Photo by John Prentice)

and a wingspan of six to seven feet; a bit larger than the more common Black and Turkey vultures. They are not actually bald, but their white feathered heads give them a bald appearance contrasting against their dark chocolate body and wings. Bright yellow feet and beak along with a white tail complete their noble look. Immature birds are mostly dark all over and it takes five years for them to acquire the adult colors. Find eagles near open bodies of water with large trees nearby. An amazing facet of Bald eagles is their gigantic sized nests. Nests have a diameter of four to six feet but can be up to ten. They start out at two to four feet deep, but pairs return to the same nest year after year and add to the depth each year. Record sized nests can be up to twenty feet deep.

If you would like to learn more about birds at the Park, pick up a birding checklist at the entry Ranger Station, Discovery Center, or either of the wildlife viewing blinds. Follow the Park on Facebook to learn about upcoming birding programs. Stop at one of the viewing blinds for up close observation.



Nest with nestling-Kerr Co. (Photo by John Prentice)

And lastly, a **BIG thank-you to A Little Nature Store** in Boerne (on Theissen St) who regularly donates seed for use at the Woodland Blind.



"To Grandmother's House We Go" A Family Reunion at the Doepenschmidt-Weidner

How would you feel if you were able to go to your grandmother's house again? A house you remember fondly with warm memories of special meals and treats like sweet rice and chocolate pie and Christmas celebrations with cookie ornaments on the tree that you could take home. That is what happened on April 2nd for nine grandchildren of Grandmother Meta and Grandfather Otto Weidner and other Weidner relatives who joined Board Members of the Friends of Guadalupe River/Honey Creek and Park Superintendent Brandon Lopes-Baca for a day filled with stories and memories as we walked around the old farmstead, discussing farm life related to the outbuildings and farm equipment on the way (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. The Weidner Family Members at the Farmstead on April 2, 2022.²

Grandmother Meta and Grandfather Otto had six children (Fig. 2) and lived on the ranch that became Honey Creek State Natural Area. Sara Weidner Turner describes her grandparents as extraordinarily loving and caring, exemplifying hard work, having strong Christian morals, with support and love for family and pride in their heritage. The stories that were told by the grandchildren supported those attributes.



Fig. 2. The Weidner Family (c. 1939) Standing: Lee, Claude, Oswald; Seated: Violet, Grandmother Meta, Gloria, Grandfather Otto, Pearl.
(From Weidner Family collection)

Homestead in Honey Creek State Natural Area

by Charleen Moore and Mackenzie Brown

Farm house yard filled with flowers

Grandmother Meta loved flowers and the entrance to the house and the fence surrounding it were lined with flowerbeds. She loved dahlias and grew an extensive array of irises and various other flowers such as bachelor buttons and larkspurs. The grandchildren always looked forward to the Easter baskets she would make with the flowers and place around the yard.

Acetylene gas generator for lighting in house

The children were not allowed to play near the gas generator. Electricity for the farm was not available until the 1940's as part of the Rural Electrification Act of 1936. Until then gas lights were used burning gas created from the gas generator. Calcium carbide pellets were placed in the container outside the house and water was dripped onto the pellets releasing acetylene gas.

Cistern for Water

On the top of the hill a large square cistern collected water for the farmhouse. The children were not allowed to swim in it, but the men confessed that some of them did sneak up to swim in it on hot summer days.

The telephone

The telephone in the hallway (Fig. 3) was the connection to the outside world and was used by Grandmother to talk with her sister daily. It was also a life-saver, being used to call a midwife who delivered all six children. The second child, Oswald, was so premature that Grandmother had to feed him with an eyedropper, but he grew up strong and healthy.



Fig. 3 The telephone is now in the home of one of the granddaughters.

Armadillo hunts

Several of the men said they routinely hunted on the ranch and the family always had deer to eat. They also told of armadillo hunts at night, getting in the old jeep and driving off to find the armadillos armed with tow-sacks. Grandmother's rule was "If you kill 'em, you eat 'em." The boys did not like armadillo meat, so they simply caught the critters, put a notch in one ear and let them go. The armadillos would not learn and the same ones got caught



**“To Grandmother’s House We Go”
A Family Reunion at the Doepenschmidt-Weidner**

over and over again. They soon had very small ears or none at all.

Chicken dinners from feathers to the pot

Grandmother Meta would make a big chicken dinner for the grandchildren when they visited. This began with Grandmother going to the chicken coop to find a big hen or two, then taking them back to the woodpile behind the house and wringing their necks. Then she would put the chickens on a big log and chop their heads off. They would run around the yard splattering blood everywhere. Grandmother would then pluck the feathers, prepare the meat for the pot and add fresh vegetables from the garden behind the house.

Tractor

Only one tractor was used on the farm, an Oliver 70. A big discussion was led by the men who remembered running a belt-driven take-off from the tractor to power some equipment such as the Letz threshing machine (Fig. 4) that is still in the field.



Fig. 4. Letz Threshing Machine.

Sheep barn

The boys loved the sheep barn. Local young Hispanic men would come to help shear the sheep, and Grandmother would make them a good meal, but the boys always would sneak off to the barn and try to ride the sheep and goats. Grandmother always knew when they had been there because they smelled like goats and were covered in wool.

Homestead in Honey Creek State Natural Area

by Charleen Moore and Mackenzie Brown

Cattle dip

The men remembered helping Grandfather with the cattle dip (Fig. 5), driving the cattle into the water at one end to treat them for various skin disease and the cattle climbing out the other end. Recently, the boy scouts helped clear out the brush around the cattle dip and the park reinforced the edges to prevent erosion of the foundation.



Fig. 5. Cattle Dip.

Windmill

The windmill was added to pump water for the animals and grandparents’ home (Fig 6a). It was destroyed by a tornado probably generated from Hurricane Carla in 1961 (Fig. 6b).



Fig. 6a. Daughter Pearl with a child in front of windmill. (From Weidner Family collection).



Fig. 6b. Windmill blades demolished by tornado.

“To Grandmother’s House We Go”
A Family Reunion at the Doeppenschmidt-Weidner

Two-Seater Outhouse

With six children and a very cold walk outside to the outhouse, a two-seater outhouse made a lot of sense and was almost a necessity (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7. Two-Seater Outhouse.

Swimming in Honey Creek

A favorite treat for the grandchildren when they visited Grandmother Meta was to go down to Honey Creek and have a swim in the area that is near the crossing where the current Honey Creek hike ends at the picnic tables. They remember the clear, very cold water and the fun they had jumping off rocks into it. On holidays such as Easter or the 4th of July, they would also have a family meal at Honey Creek with barbeque. The men remembered Grandfather Otto driving across Honey Creek in the old farm truck. He would “gun it” and make a big splash.

It was a bittersweet day for the descendants in several ways because several relatives had wanted to keep the farm in the family but realized that it was simply not possible due to inheritance taxes and other expenses. They are all grateful, however, that the acquisition by the state has allowed the farmland to stay intact and to be used

Homestead in Honey Creek State Natural Area

by Charleen Moore and Mackenzie Brown

for research and conservation as well as for preserving the pristine nature of Honey Creek.

Future plans for the State Natural Area involve developing public hikes around the farmstead, including ones for individuals with limited mobility. Sara Turner again summed it up succinctly: “Our Weidner homestead is not grand or particularly significant but it represents the hard work and difficult life of the early settlers. I am immensely proud of my rural heritage and grateful for those pioneer German relatives.”³ We hope in the future to share that heritage and the cultural history of the last century with the public.

Notes

¹Traditional Children’s Song based on the original poem, “The New-England Boy’s Song about Thanksgiving Day”, by Lydia Marie Child in *Flowers for Children*, II, New York, C.S. Francis, 1844.

²Photos by authors except where noted otherwise.

³Personal communication with authors, April 5, 2022.



Friends Summer

by Thea Platz, President

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the many people that made this year's return of our Monarch and Friends Pollinator Fiesta another wonderful success!! The work of the park Friends group and staff along with many community organizations and volunteers made for an inspirational and fun-filled day. Visitors enjoyed the many activities focused on the majestic Monarch and pollinators as they made their way down the trail and migrated back again stopping at more than a dozen activities along the way. Presentations on bringing nature into the landscape with proper planning and planting and the amazing life of bees and beekeeping were both entertaining and informative. The Friends of Guadalupe River State Park and Honey Creek board of directors work hard to bring events such as this and the many other activities and enhancements you see here in the newsletter. None of them would be possible without the continued support of you, our members that contribute your time along with the financial support of your membership and donations. As you read about the many events and park enhancements remember that none of them would be possible without you to support the mission. Thank you for the many ways that you support the park and staff. [Become or renew membership here](#)

We have been very blessed to have the wonderful park staff that we work alongside to give the visitors to the park the very best experience possible. We are always so proud of each of them as they are the best of the best. That being the case, it is not uncommon for us to have to say good-bye when other opportunities present themselves to the talented people that have become part of the park family. We once again find ourselves in the position of having to bid farewell to a treasured member of our team.

Park interpreter Holly Platz (Ranger Holly) has accepted a position that is a wonderful opportunity for her and her family but will once again leave a big hole in our park family. We will miss her energy, enthusiasm, and willingness to always go above and beyond! Thank you, Holly, for all the wonderful programming and support you have given during your too short time here. We know your talents will continue to be appreciated in your new position and we wish you the best.

President, Thea Platz

2022 Membership Dues Are Now Payable

Become A Friend / Renew Your Friendship Today:

Memberships at all levels directly support Guadalupe River State Park /Honey Creek State Natural Area. You will be kept up to date on all the upcoming programs, events and park news as well as information on volunteer opportunities through our quarterly newsletter and park updates. As a Friends member you and your family will also have access to member only events.

Fill out the section below and mail to the address below:

Name(s): _____

Phone: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____

Zip: _____ Email: _____

Membership Type: _____ New Member _____ Renewal

Student or Senior (over 62) Friend \$20.____, Individual Friend \$25.____,

Family Friend \$40.____,

Best Friend Forever (lifetime level) \$1000. +____ Other____

If you are also interested in helping the park through volunteering, please tell us your areas of interest: _____

Make 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. Membership dues renew in January.
 We will not share your information or clutter your inbox.

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

3350 Park Road 31
Spring Branch, Texas 78070

We're on the web!

<https://friendsofgrhc.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 5:30 pm - 7:00 pm
And bring a friend!**