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By Jack Canson

Photos by Kent Barker

Aptly named, Salvinia molesta, or giant salvinia, is potentially the most destructive natural calamity ever to threaten southern U.S. lakes. We visit with the folks who are fighting back to preserve the state's only natural lake.

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TEXAS CO-OP POWER

Texas Co-op Power is published by your electric cooperative to enhance the quality of life of its member-customers in an educational and entertaining format.

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POWER TALK



KEEP HARVEST TIME SAFE

The modern farmer, more than ever, relies on heavy equipment to bring in the crops. This year, before heading out to the fields, farmers should make sure they know the locations of power lines and take into account their equipment sizes, especially if they are using something new. Also be aware that even if a clearance was safe last year, something as simple as soil buildup could make it hazardous this year.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, contact with overhead power lines has accounted for more than 450 on-the-job deaths in the United States from 2003-06, the latest statistics available. Of those, 35 occurred on farms.

Keep in mind these safety tips:

- Equipment should come no closer than 10 feet from overhead lines. Even if a line is not directly contacted, electricity can arc.
- When moving equipment from field to field, always lower any attachments—even if you're only moving it a few yards.
- Use a spotter when moving big equipment or big loads. And never attempt to move a power line in your path—always contact your co-op for help.

letters

SOLAR HEAT WORKS

Your solar article (July 2008) seems to be oblivious to the day-in and day-out solar thermal power plants of the parabolic trough design. We have partnered in the past with Sandia National Laboratories and the National Renewable Energy Laboratory in making this type of green power more efficient for the last few decades while turning a profit for the investors year after year. The newest solar thermal power using the parabolic design was put on line earlier this year in Boulder, Nevada, by a few of my former coworkers who now work for Acciona.

GORDON "SOLAR HOMER SIMPSON" BISHOFF
Control Room Operator,
Kramer Junction Solar
Thermal Power Plants
Mojave Desert, California

MORE ON HEAT PUMPS

Just in case you are keeping score, I would like to pass along my experience with heat pumps, which was the subject of two letters in your September issue. If the ambient temperature gets down below 40 degrees, you are in trouble with a heat pump. If it gets below 30 degrees, you are going to be cold unless you utilize the emergency heat strip supplied in most all heat pump units.

JAMES ROUNDTREE
Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative

GOOD TRACK RECORD FOR 24 YEARS

I have two homes with heat pumps, and the one I am living in now has been serviced by heat pumps since 1984. I have replaced the compressor unit twice in 24 years.

Our winters can be very cold, but my heat pumps have

kept me very comfortable all these years. On very cold days, the backup heat strips do come on line, and it certainly does cost more during the coldest months but not unreasonably so.

I have used Lennox, and my current system is Trane. Both worked very well.

ERNEST WELLS
CoServ Electric

OUR PUMPS WORK

We have two heat pumps in our current home, and we love them. The downstairs unit is older than and not as efficient as the upstairs unit. Both the letter writers in the September issue need to have their heat pumps checked out. Something seems very wrong.

TIM BENNETT
United Cooperative Services

Editor's Note: We have received many letters from co-op members who love their heat pumps. Go to www.texascoopower.com to see more comments.

EATING GOOD

I recently made the Aegean Shrimp Nueces that was featured in the September 2008 issue of *Texas Co-op Power*. It was wonderful! The feta cheese and olives made it taste like a true Greek feast. This recipe will certainly be repeated at my house. I also made the Mandarin-Pecan Spinach Salad that was located on the same page as the Aegean Shrimp Nueces recipe sponsored by the Texas Pecan Board. It, too, was a winner. My family ate good that night!

KAY MORSE
Grayson-Collin Electric Cooperative

We want to hear from our readers. Send letters to: Editor, *Texas Co-op Power*, 2550 S. IH-35, Austin, TX 78704, e-mail us at letters@texas-ec.org, or submit online at www.texascoopower.com. Please include the name of your town and electric co-op. Letters may be edited for clarity and length and are printed as space allows. Read additional letters at www.texascoopower.com.



Hungry for a good time? Pour on the fun at the 20th annual **HERITAGE SYRUP FESTIVAL** in Henderson. The festival, running from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on November 8, has a lot on its plate, including folk art demonstrations and antique tractor and car shows. But the sweetest attraction is the ribbon cane syrup, made the old-fashioned way with a mule-powered syrup mill.

From the syrup-making on the Depot Museum grounds, the festivities spread six blocks to Heritage Square in the National Register Historic District. A hay-ride shuttle will operate all day between the two locations, with a bevy of activities and demonstrations on tap, including storytelling and clog and square dancing performances. While the syrup cooks, folk artists will demonstrate lace-making, rope-making, basket-making, blacksmithing, woodcarving and quilting.

For more information, call 1-866-650-5529, ext. 800, or (903) 657-4303 or visit www.depotmuseum.com.

WHO KNEW?



Nearly 50 years ago—on January 3, 1959—Alaska became part of the U.S., and Texas became offended. The admission of the 49th state, a behemoth in size, toppled Texas from its position as the nation's biggest. Suddenly Alaska had the bragging rights. Natives of the upstart ex-territory joked that "all the oil is in Alaska and all the dipsticks are in Texas."

A HISTORIC EL PASO BEAUTY

The jewel of El Paso's nearly century-old **Camino Real Hotel**, which once gave visitors a bird's-eye view of skirmishes across the border in Ciudad Juárez during the Mexican Revolution, is its magnificent Dome Bar. The two-story room, lined with rose-colored gypsum columns, is dominated by a 25-foot Tiffany stained-glass dome that illuminates a central circular bar. The magnificent space is complemented by the Dome Restaurant, which features stained glass windows and large crystal chandeliers.

An expansion in 1986 and a renovation that began in 2004 added modern looks and conveniences to the Camino Real complex, which opened in 1912 as the Paso Del Norte Hotel. The hotel's original two towers, designed by architects Trost and Trost, who were responsible for more than 200 buildings in El Paso, flank a central courtyard that gives every room a view. The hotel is across from the city's convention center, art museum and the renovated Plaza Theater.



—From *Historic Hotels of Texas: A Traveler's Guide*, Texas A&M University Press, first edition, 2007

CO-OP PEOPLE

A DOGGONE GOOD SHOWING

Here's to Bill McFarlin and Star, his Brittany spaniel, who were the classiest duo on CBS's "Greatest American Dog" reality show this summer. Bill and Star, of Flint, are members of Cherokee County Electric Co-op.

The doe-eyed Star won many of the earlier competitions but was eliminated August 27 for using her doggie



smarts on a stunt trick. She was supposed to leap off a tall gantry because McFarlin was calling her. She had a harness on but she didn't know that, so she didn't jump. Maybe she should have gotten an award for being "Smartest American Dog."


As for the kindly McFarlin, he was the only contestant to give dog-handling tips to the other contestants.

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A MONSTER IS LOOSE IN CADDO LAKE

BY JACK CANSON
PHOTOS BY KENT BARKER

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Marshall native Jack Canson moved back to his hometown in 1993 to be close to a great treasure of his youth, Caddo Lake. He soon discovered that people never run short of battles to protect the lake. In May 2006, a new threat emerged—this time from the tea-colored waters of the lake itself. A prolific fern named giant salvinia quickly*

began spreading throughout its fragile ecosystem. Photos accompanying this article depict some of the efforts by Canson and other “Weed Warriors” as they confront and struggle to contain a lake-eating monster.

It has no teeth, claws, scales or fur. It's not a mammal or a reptile that rips victims apart. Rather, it kills by slowly

and cruelly suffocating everything in its path. In addition to Caddo Lake, it lurks in many other lakes, streams and wetlands throughout the South. Toledo Bend Reservoir, Sam Rayburn Reservoir, B.A. Steinhagen Lake, Center City Lake, Lake Texana, Sheldon Lake, Lake Conroe, Brandy Branch Reservoir—all are fighting this new menace in Texas.



Spooky, hazy, always beautiful, Caddo Lake is an endangered East Texas treasure.

It has reached Lake Palestine, near Tyler, and is slowly heading west.

Its victims are everything and everyone who depend on water. The water that plants and animals need for survival. The water in which fish swim and reproduce. The water that power plants and other industries need. The water we drink.

This water-eating monster is a plant. And of all the plants on earth that it could be, this one is what we normally consider the most innocuous of plants. It is, of all things, a fern.

Caddo Lake, straddling the border between northeast Texas and northwestern Louisiana, has survived many threats in its history, but today, Texas' only natu-

ral lake faces its greatest challenge: a rootless, floating, aquatic fern no larger than a child's fist. And all hands are pitching in to try to control it.

Aptly named, *Salvinia molesta*, or giant salvinia, slowly is becoming recognized in the United States as potentially the most destructive natural calamity ever to threaten southern



Weed Warrior Jack Canson nets chains of *Salvinia molesta*. In the water behind him are patches of the invasive weed that can double in size in five to seven days.

water bodies. In warm, still water, the free-floating plant can reproduce explosively. One acre can become two in one week. Plants combine into dense chains and form mats that can carpet entire lakes, large and small. Giant salvinia is most commonly spread by hitching a ride on boat trailers—humans are actually moving it west.

A PLACE OF WONDER

Caddo is a place of myth and legend. It's a place where one can be so intensely surrounded by natural wonder that an outdoor adventure morphs into a journey of the spirit. Its spooky bayous twist through hazy swamps. Shadowy birds zigzag between curtains of Spanish moss. Red-eared turtles slide off snags into tea-colored water. A profound sense of a primeval and distant past drifts along the backwater sloughs like fog.

If you know Caddo Lake, or even if you've only visited here, you feel like it belongs to you—and you belong to it. And because of that emotional connection to this mysterious place—and its ecological, historical and cultural richness—residents, in a spirit of cooperation, were among the first to respond to the emergency.

WEED WARRIORS TO THE RESCUE

On the Texas side of Caddo Lake, what funding has been obtained supports locally managed programs already initiated by Caddo Lake residents instead of adding additional state personnel and equipment. Now, area political leaders are stepping up to the plate, trying to come up with money for a serious fight against the giant salvinia that has taken over an estimated 1,600 acres of the 27,472-acre Caddo Lake.

When giant salvinia was first discovered in Jeems Bayou on the Louisiana side of Caddo Lake in May 2006, concerned residents from all around the lake gathered to press the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) to learn what they planned to do about it. It became apparent early on that neither agency had the money, manpower or equipment to do much of anything. This was not a failure of the dedicated agency biologists and field technicians. Federal funding to control invasive aquatic plants is almost non-existent, and when giant salvinia arrived, neither state's legislature had appropri-

ated the funding that even a modest control effort requires.

With the help of the Caddo Lake Institute, a nonprofit scientific and educational foundation, locals on the Texas side got organized, consulted experts and experimented. One experiment was a burn test with a flame-throwing liquid propane torch that hit the plants with 2,000-degree heat. The heat-treated samples turned black as Sunday shoes and looked as dead as last week's road kill. But 24 hours later, little green buds began to emerge. Within seven days, the burned-out plants were completely covered with new giant salvinia plants that grew out of the blackened mass.

"I've never seen anything that could spring back from that kind of heat," said Mike Welch, who usually uses his propane tanks to sanitize chicken farms. "This is one tough plant to kill."

Giant salvinia, a native of Brazil, reproduces by vegetative fragmentation. If herbicide or freezing temperatures damage 90 percent of the plant, new plants grow out of the remaining part. Chop a bunch of it up, and you've just made a zillion new giant salvinia plants.

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George 'Shorty' Hood caters to anglers at Johnson's Ranch, the oldest inland marina in Texas.

"It's nearly the perfect pest as an aquatic plant goes," said Jeff Sibley, a fisheries biologist supervisor for LDWF.

In Brazil, giant salvinia is held in check by seasonal drought and the cyrtobagous weevil, a tiny insect that eats on its leaves and deposits eggs in the cavities. In some climates in the world, the weevil can be fairly effective. It won't eradicate the plants, but holds them back. There is skepticism that in the climate zone at Caddo Lake weevils could ever damage giant salvinia faster than it grows.

Randy Westbrook, invasive species prevention specialist at the U.S. Geological Survey National Wetlands Research Center in Whiteville, North

Carolina, cautions against placing too much faith in the weevil.

Based on nearly a decade's effort by federal and state officials to control giant salvinia with salvinia weevils in the Toledo Bend Reservoir on the border of East Texas and Louisiana, Westbrook said, "It is questionable whether the weevils would be any more effective in Caddo Lake—which is farther north."

The farther south the better for the weevils, Westbrook said, explaining that they are more adapted to warmer areas. Overall, it appears that giant salvinia has much more tolerance to hot and cold weather, shade and sun than does the weevil, he said.

The plant has thrived at Toledo Bend.

Due to high water levels during summer 2004 that contributed to the growth of giant salvinia, fall aerial surveys indicated that there were more than 3,000 acres of giant salvinia reservoir-wide despite a vigorous herbicide spray program. In spring 2005, about 5,000 acres were documented reservoir-wide.

On the Louisiana side of Caddo Lake, LDWF officials are putting a lot of faith in weevils ... and they're praying. On the Texas side, the Cypress Valley Navigation District has refurbished a TPWD airboat and plans a major herbicide program. They're spraying and praying. Last year, they raised more than \$60,000 from local governments and industries, and volunteers helped



HOW TO FIGHT THE WATER MONSTERS

Here are recommendations from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality on dealing with giant salvinia (which as young plants, left, are just a handful, but which later unfold and link to form lake-choking mats).

These recommendations also apply to other illegal invasive aquatic plants:

- Inspect and clean boats and trailers every time you enter or leave the water.
- Control the area around docks by removing invasives and installing floating barricades when needed.
- Join with neighbors to form shoreline watch projects and encourage elected officials to increase resources for invasive aquatic plant control.
- If you can reach it, rake it. Once the plants are a certain distance from water, they will wither and die. Then compost it for garden use or burn it, bag it and put it in the trash.

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build a 2-mile-long net-and-post fence across the water from the north to the south shore. This slowed the westward advance of the monster into the vulnerable shallow waters on the Texas side. Unfortunately, nature dealt the fence a major beating, and it has since been torn down.

It is a Class C misdemeanor punishable by a fine of up to \$500 per plant to possess or transport giant salvinia in Texas, so TPWD conducted classes to train and license more than 50 volunteer “Weed Warriors” to net and destroy giant salvinia from the Texas side.

The Texas giant salvinia fighters have attracted considerable attention, which has helped them obtain support from elected officials. The Texas Legislature, pushed by State Sen. Kevin Eltife and Reps. Stephen Frost and Bryan Hughes, appropriated \$240,000 to Texas Parks and Wildlife for the next two years to help fight invasive aquatics at Caddo Lake. U.S. Rep. Louie Gohmert, a Republican congressman whose northeast Texas district includes the Texas side of Caddo Lake, and U.S. Sens. Kay Bailey Hutchison of Texas and Mary Landrieu of Louisiana are prodding federal agencies and their col-

leagues, trying to awaken them to this looming catastrophe.

Although the money already obtained is not insignificant, experts believe it is going to take more, much more, before control efforts destroy giant salvinia faster than it grows.

Giant salvinia and other invasive aquatic plants affect the economy as well as the ecology of Caddo Lake. By depleting dissolved oxygen and obscuring sunlight from vital spawning areas, giant salvinia poses a serious threat to Caddo’s vaunted reputation for some of the best fishing in the South.

Many residents, such as George “Shorty” Hood, earn their living providing bait, ice, fish-cleaning and guide services to visiting anglers.

A weed-smothered Caddo would also harm bed and breakfast and other lodging owners, such as Joann Hodges. Hodges operates seven lake cottages in Uncertain.

At nearby Lake Bistineau in Louisiana, a massive giant salvinia infestation has brought tourism to a halt, emptying RV parks, marinas and dining establishments.

On July 15, officials began to draw down Lake Bistineau, hoping to mini-

mize the amount of giant salvinia that escapes downstream while maximizing the amount that gets stranded and dies. The lake will continue to be “dewatered” at the rate of two to three inches a day through January, when the gates will be closed and the lake will be allowed to refill.

Many lakes need help fighting giant salvinia. There will be many more soon. People at Caddo will be sure that whatever help arrives, the lake gets its share.

A common refrain among Caddo Lake lovers fighting the giant salvinia monster can be heard in the voice of Mike Turner, a lifelong lake resident who operates a boat repair shop in Uncertain and is one of the Weed Warriors spraying or removing giant salvinia almost daily.

“If we don’t care enough about Caddo Lake to do what it takes to stop it here,” Turner says, “where else on earth would we care enough?”

Jack Canson, a native of Marshall, is a former screenwriter. He is currently doing a documentary on Caddo Lake.

Go to www.caddolakenews.org or www.caddolakeinstitute.us for additional information.

A converted houseboat is one of several cottages available to Caddo Lake tourists in Uncertain. The collection of cottages was named after owner Joann Hodges and her late husband, Wes.





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What to Do When the Lights Go Out

When severe weather causes power outages, employees of your electric cooperative begin working immediately to restore service as quickly as possible. Then the secondary lines serving just a few customers are serviced. Medical facilities and individuals on life-support systems get top priority.

When your lights go out, look outside and see whether your neighbors are also in the dark. If they're not, check your fuse box or circuit breaker to see if you can locate the problem.

If the outage has affected your neighbors, call your cooperative.

Outages that occur in severe weather, or that last for an extended period of time, can place a heavy burden on the system at the moment power is restored. To prevent an overload on the system and possibly another outage, take these steps:

- Turn off every inside light except one.
- Turn down your thermostat.
- In cold weather, close windows and drapes to save heat. Pick one

room on the warm side of the house (preferably one with a fireplace). Close the door to the rest of the house and use blankets to insulate your windows.

- If the outage lasts over 60 minutes, turn off your electric water heater.
- Make sure your kitchen range is off, both the surface and the oven. Never use it for heat.

- Turn off all unnecessary appliances.
- Avoid opening the freezer door. A full, freestanding freezer will keep food at freezing temperatures for about two days; a half-full freezer about a day. For more information about food safety during and after a power outage, call the USDA Food Safety Hotline at 1-800-535-4555.

- If you see a downed power line, STAY AWAY! And call your cooperative at once!

- Leave your porch light on so workers will know when your power has been restored.

- When power comes back on, slowly switch your appliances and lights back on and gradually return your thermostat to its normal setting.

10 Ways to Save Energy—and Money—this Winter

No money for new windows or thicker insulation? Here are 10 cheap and easy ways to shave your energy use this winter—without feeling cold:

1. Turn on your ceiling fan—yes, in the winter. Switch the direction of the fan to clockwise (just flip the switch on the fan's base into the “winter” position), and run the unit slowly. It will circulate the warm air that rises to your ceiling and make you feel warmer while you're in the room.

2. Add weatherstripping or caulk around windows and doors to keep warm air from leaking out and cold air from sneaking in.

3. Rearrange your furniture. Move it away from heating vents. Push your most frequently used furniture away from exterior walls, which can feel colder than interior walls.

4. Install a programmable thermostat. Turning back your thermostat by 10 to 15 degrees for eight hours a day can save you up to 15 percent on heat.

5. Open drapes and blinds every day to let the warm sun in. Close them when it gets dark.

6. Repair leaks in your ductwork's seams and joints with a duct-sealing compound.

7. Wear a sweater so you can lower the thermostat a few degrees. You can save 1 percent on your heating bill for every degree you drop the heat.

8. Close the vents and doors in unused rooms.

9. Replace burned-out lightbulbs with compact fluorescent lights. CFLs use 75 percent less energy than incandescent bulbs.

10. Switch to cold water for washing clothes and dishes.

PREPARING FOR SEVERE WEATHER

YOUR ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

works hard to keep the power on for its customers, but severe weather can sometimes put us in the dark. You'll be safer and less inconvenienced if you have the following emergency supplies on hand:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| ■ flashlight with fresh batteries | ■ manual can opener |
| ■ radio with fresh batteries | ■ charcoal grill with charcoal |
| ■ candles and holders | ■ paper plates and plastic utensils |
| ■ blankets | ■ lighter |
| ■ matches | ■ bottled water |
| ■ wind-up clock | ■ non-perishable food |
| ■ firewood and kindling | ■ extra batteries |

PORTABLE SPACE HEATER SAFETY

- Keep drapes, newspapers, clothing and other combustible objects a safe distance away.
- Plug portable space heaters directly into the outlet. Do not use extension cords.
- Always put heaters in a place where they can't be tipped over easily.
- Do not use heaters in wet or moist areas, such as bathrooms, unless they are specifically built for that purpose.
- Make sure the plug of the heater fits snugly in the outlet.
- Don't use space heaters in rooms where children are unsupervised.
- Turn off the space heater and unplug it when not in use.



If your fridge is like this—a side-by-side more than 10 years old—replacing it can save energy and money.



CAN YOUR FRIDGE HANDLE THANKSGIVING?

Safe Holiday Lighting Tips

Before the last Thanksgiving pie is finished or the final quarter of that heart-stopping football game has ended, some folks are ready to start stringing up holiday lights. When you get ready to decorate, observe these safety tips to help ensure that your holiday season is safe from electrical hazard:

- Before decorating, read and follow the manufacturer's instructions for installation and maintenance of all decorative electrical products.

- Indoors and out, use lights and other electrical decorations certified by a recognized independent testing laboratory, such as CSA, UL or ETL.

- Outdoors, use only lights and other electrical decorations certified for outdoor use.

- Carefully inspect each decoration before plugging into an outlet. Cracked, frayed, loose or bare wires and loose connections may cause a serious electric shock or start a fire. Replace damaged items.

- Always unplug an electrical decoration before replacing bulbs or fuses.

- Don't mount or support light strings in any way that might damage the cord's insulation.

- Never nail or staple light strings or extension cords.

- Do not connect more than three light strings together.

- Light strings with screw-in bulbs should have no more than 50 bulbs connected together.

- Don't overload extension cords—they can overheat and start a fire. Keep all outdoor extension cords and light strings clear of snow and standing water and well protected from weather.

- Use caution when decorating near power lines. Contact with a high-voltage line could be deadly.

- Never use electric lights on a metallic tree. The tree can become charged with electricity from faulty lights, and a person touching a branch could be electrocuted.

- Don't allow children or pets to play with electrical decorations. Even small lights can produce a deadly electric shock if misused.

- Turn off all electrical decorations before leaving home or going to bed.

- Plug outdoor electric lights and decorations into circuits protected by ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs).

Your turkey—and your family—won't be the only ones who get stuffed this Thanksgiving. Your refrigerator and freezer will be stuffed before and after the big meal.

With all that extra use, it pays to make sure your cold appliances are up to snuff before cooking time rolls around.

If you're one of the many homeowners whose refrigerators are more than 10 years old, you're paying more than you have to for electricity.

That aging appliance may still keep food cold, but it's doing so at a cost. New Energy Star refrigerators gobble at least 15 percent less energy than federal standards require and 40 percent less than models sold just seven years ago, according to the Department of Energy.

When you shop for a refrigerator or freezer, read the EnergyGuide label that you'll see in the store. It tells you how many kilowatt-hours of electricity the unit will consume in a year. The smaller the number, the better.

And opt for a refrigerator with a freezer on the bottom or the top; side-by-side designs burn more energy. Also, stand-alone, chest-style freezers are usually better insulated than upright models.

At One with the Pecan

*In the now while
gathering nuts*

BY MIKE COX

For days the TV meteorologist had been hyping a coming cold front with growing excitement, but this day hardly seemed like fall. In fact, with the temperature climbing toward a new record, only the golden leaves matched the date on the calendar.

Before leaving for work, my wife, Linda, reminded me that she needed a package of pecans for her signature holiday dish—candied yams with apricots. I could have gone to one of the big-box stores, but I decided to save money and gather pecans in our yard the old-fashioned way.

My teenage daughter, Hallie, enjoying the first installment of her three-day Thanksgiving holiday, slept until 10:30 a.m. But as soon as she finished breakfast, I cajoled her into helping me on the pecan hunt before she could turn on the television or go online.

We have two pecan trees on our almost-quarter-acre lot, a native and a paper-shell hybrid. Thanks to nearly unprecedented rainfall the past year, both trees had produced the best crop I could remember in the nine years we'd lived here.

Before we started, I retrieved from the attic a family heirloom still quite serviceable after all these years—my late grandfather's homemade pecan picker. He had taken a dowel about the size of a closet clothes rod and used two roofing nails to attach a Vienna sausage can on one end, which he used as a scoop. Nothing fancy, but it worked.

Like many old-time Texans, Granddad loved picking up pecans. One of my earliest memories is helping him gather pecans on the Capitol grounds. He'd use his pocketknife to break one open, hand me the tasty tidbit and then crack one open for himself. The rest he'd put in the pocket of his starched khaki pants for later snacking or to give to my grandmother.

Only now do I understand what he had been up to in getting me excited about joining him in gathering pecans. He had an energetic helper with a pliable spine. More than a half-century later, I knew I could similarly take advantage of youthful exuberance if I handled it just right. Like many teenagers, if Hallie had her choice, she'd spend most of her time in cyberspace or watching the tube. It would take some finessing to get her enthusiastic about picking pecans.

Though pecans seemed to be scattered everywhere, my daughter and I quickly found that collecting the black-striped nuts would not be a simple process. If you

have a pristine green lawn such as you'd find around the Capitol or at homes where the resident is a better yard technician than I am, the quest is easier. But our lawn was hidden under raked leaves and broken tree limbs, a perfect camouflage for pecans.

I told Hallie we would approach the hunt like CSI pros since she has studied forensic science in school. We would forage systematically, cutting the area around the trees into imaginary grids. Cleverly, I also fostered a friendly daddy-daughter competition to see who could find the most pecans.

"Here's a bunch," Hallie would say excitedly, and then I'd hear multiple thunks as she tossed pecans into her bucket.

The organized search worked for a while, but soon we just milled around, going from honey hole to honey hole. We each toted a white plastic bucket. Thunk by thunk, we accumulated a lot of pecans.

As we hunted, I told Hallie what I knew about Texas pecans. Early arrivals to Texas found the riverbanks lined with the nut-bearing trees, which belong to the hickory family. That's how the Nueces River got its name—*nueces* being Spanish for nuts, which the first explorers found in abundance. Long before the Spaniards, the Indians made pecans a major portion of their diet and used them for trade. For thousands of years, people in Texas have gathered pecans in anticipation of the coming barren months of winter.

Perhaps, as we became increasingly enthusiastic in our hunt, a lingering genetic memory kicked in. We became part of a process as fundamental as the changing seasons—the harvesting and storing of food.

In the here and now, I found looking for camouflaged pecans to be wonderfully focusing. My mind drained as my bucket filled. It later came to me that for a couple of hours, as we foraged in sort of an autumnal Easter egg hunt, we had no past and no future. Both of us had become completely absorbed in the now, the refreshing equivalent of a mental spinal block.

Long ago, philosophers figured out the importance of living in the moment. You can find the philosophy of the all-important now written in the *Tao Te Ching* or being discussed at the nearest 12-step meeting. Unfortunately, that simple truth is lost on us most of the time.

When the wind swung around from the north, we sought shelter. We placed two full-to-the-brim buckets on our enclosed back porch, safe from squirrels. The long-awaited cold front had arrived, the temperature falling faster than ripe pecans.



Mike Cox wrote about coffee mugs in the July issue of Texas Co-op Power. A former longtime employee of the Texas Department of Public Safety, he points out it is legal to gather pecans in parks or other public areas if you aren't lucky enough to have your own pecan trees.

WESLACO

How Sweet It Is

*Nothing compares to
Rio Red Grapefruit*

by Eileen Mattei



For a Christmas red that's uniquely Texas, cut into one of the Rio Grande Valley's fragrant red grapefruit. On cold December days, the citrus brings a cheery reminder of tropical sunshine along with plenty of vitamin C.

Citrus grower Donald Thompson's harvest contributed to the approximate 360 million pounds of Valley grapefruit that were shipped to the fresh fruit market last season. The 70-year-old owner of Thompson's Rio Pride, a gift-fruit shipper, jokes that sweet, ruby-red grapefruit juice flows through his veins. He radiates good health and has eaten a whole grapefruit for breakfast almost every morning since 1959. That's when he finished stints in the Army and college and returned home to Weslaco and a lifelong immersion in grapefruit, oranges and lemons.

"My daddy came from the Panhandle and started in the citrus business in the late 1930s. Kids at that time worked," Thompson recalled. So the young Donald worked, too, and watched the groves being irrigated and the tractors preparing the land for more citrus trees.

Thompson took over the 200-acre farm from his father in 1972 and expanded it to almost 8,000 acres, planting thousands of trees on leased and purchased land. Enduring freezes and droughts, he cared for his own groves and supervised grove care for other growers, ran a citrus tree nursery and began shipping gift fruit in 1986.

"It takes a different breed of animal to be a citrus grower," he said. "If I worried about a freeze, I wouldn't be in the business." Yet, he knows that someday another freeze will decimate his groves, like the one in 1989 did.

Recently, Thompson pared his citrus groves down to 200 acres and got out of the nursery and grove care businesses to concentrate on growing citrus and marketing it. He has more time now to stop and smell the white citrus blossoms that perfume the neighborhood in February and March. By October, the shiny-leaved trees heavy with navel and Mars oranges are ready for harvesting. The prized red Rio Grande Valley grapefruit begins ripening in November and is available until May. Thompson's groves yield between 15 and 30 tons of citrus per acre.

For Thompson, nothing compares to the Rio Red grapefruit: "It's the sweetest in the world." He harvested the first commercial orchard of Rio Red grapefruit after the variety was developed by researcher Richard Hensz at what is now the Texas A&M University Kingsville Citrus Center-Weslaco. "I just jumped in and planted it, since I had faith in Dr. Hensz," Thompson said. "The sugar content is higher in the Rio Red than in any other variety. And it's highest when grown in the Valley because of our soil, sunshine and climate."

For years, Thompson has sold his citrus to peddlers who take the Choice grade grapefruit on the road to Laredo, Houston, San Antonio and up to Oklahoma. Next to the orchard office on Pleasant View Road, he runs a fruit stand that caters to neighbors and winter Texans. "Locals understand that scarring and scratch



marks on fruit doesn't affect its taste," Thompson said, referring to marks caused by branches rubbing against the fruit in the wind.

But perfect Rio Red grapefruit—softball-sized, blemish-free, with a rosy blush on the skin, glowing with promise—are classed as Fancy grade and set aside for gift fruit—premium orbs that command premium prices.

Demand for the beautiful fruit spikes in December. Thompson's crews pick and pack 60 percent of Rio Pride's gift fruit orders in two short, hectic weeks. The boxes go as far as England, Alaska and Canada, but a surprising amount of Texas grapefruit goes to recipients in Florida and California. The red grapefruit in those states just can't compare to the Texas product.

Thompson promotes the Valley's oranges, too, which he calls "the best eating navel oranges in the world." But because their sugar content is so high, oranges spoil easier than grapefruit.

Behind the Rio Pride office in south Weslaco, Thompson grows 23 varieties of unusual fruit—like Buddha's hand, a citron, and pomelos—that he calls his show-and-taste grove. "I take people who come with their grandkids from up north out to see the different kinds of fruit." He enjoys his impromptu tour guiding as much as his visitors do. "Get next to your honey when you taste this mandarin lime," he has joked with them. "It's going to give you pucker power that won't stop."

Thompson eats his grapefruit halves religiously. "People get mad at me because I don't share my private stock with them" in late summer before the new crop ripens, he said. But grapefruit is more than breakfast food. The grower raves about the grapefruit pie his wife, Mary, makes for family gatherings. Even with pumpkin and pecan pies for competition, her grapefruit pie disappears first.

In the past, Thompson's long involvement in the Texas citrus industry has brought him the Grower of the Year Award from Texas Citrus Mutual and the title of King Citrus at the Texas Citrus Festival in Mission. He serves on the Texas A&M University-Kingsville Citrus Center advisory board.

A new grapefruit being developed at the Citrus Research Center has Thompson excited about the future of Valley citrus: "It's so red you can barely tell the difference between a cut tomato and a cut grapefruit of this new variety."

Thompson's Rio Pride, a member of Magic Valley Electric Cooperative, offers a discount to Texas Co-op Power readers who mention the magazine when they place an order online or by phone.

Eileen Mattei wrote about South Texas onions in the July issue of Texas Co-op Power.

MARY THOMPSON'S GRAPEFRUIT PIE

CRUST

- 1 1/2 cups flour
- 2 teaspoons milk
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup oil
- 3 tablespoons sugar
- 1 egg white

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Mix first five ingredients together and press into 9-inch pie pan.

Brush with egg white. Bake

15 minutes. Cool.

FILLING

- 5 medium Rio Red grapefruit
- 1 cup sugar
- 3 tablespoons cornstarch
- 1 small package strawberry gelatin

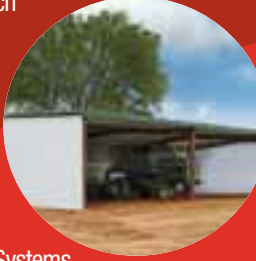
Peel, section and drain grapefruit, reserving juice. Add enough water to juice to make 1 1/2 cups liquid. Mix liquid, sugar and cornstarch. Boil for 3 minutes. Add gelatin. Cool and pour into pie shell. Add grapefruit and chill at least 4 hours. Top with whipped cream to serve.

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e. Free Distribution Outside the Mail	none	none
f. Total Free Distribution	7,272	7,676
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Signature and Title of Editor, Publisher, Business Manager, or Owner Date
Carol Moczygemba, Managing Editor October 1, 2008

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Cookie Swap

BY SHANNON OELRICH Laughter, margaritas, appetizers and Christmas décor met us as we walked into Trudi Dossey's house in Northwest Austin. It was like a bachelorette party for Mrs. Claus. There were hugs and kisses as friends greeted each other, including Katherine Bevins, a Pedernales Electric Cooperative member and wife of *Texas Co-op Power's* sales director, Martin Bevins. "The cookie swap gathering started with a book-club group, but others have joined along the way. We all have kids who go to school together and have (Girl Scout) Brownies together," Bevins said.

This cookie swap isn't just about baking delicious cookies. It's also about presentation. These competitive moms go all-out to put their cookies in the most attractive packaging for others to take home, including decorated tins, holiday gift bags and even a tiny Christmas village that Bevins put together (see photo below).

After eating, drinking and catching up with one another, the friends tried the cookies. Karen Downs won the cookie swap prize with a recipe for Rolo Cookies (see recipe at right). Her advice was, "Don't eat more than three!"

A cookie swap is a fun way to see your friends in the middle of the busy holiday season. It can be a festive party or a low-key potluck; either way, each participant will come away with a great variety of cookies to serve holiday guests or send to far-away loved ones. Follow these simple rules for a super swap:

1. Send out invitations a month before the party as calendars fill up quickly during the holidays.
2. Everyone should bring the same number of cookies so each person goes home with an assortment, but the same number he or she arrived with. Popular amounts are four or six dozen. Equal amounts can either be packaged before arrival (as with the cookie swap mentioned above), or platters can be set out and

attendees can go around the table putting cookies into their own tins or plates to carry home.

3. Ask invitees to bake their cookies two to three days before the swap. Cookies that have dried out and firmed up a bit are less likely to crumble. Undesirable cookies for cookie swaps (because of stickiness or crumbling) are no-bake cookies, bar cookies and meringue cookies.

4. Guests should bring enough copies of their recipes for everyone. As an icebreaker before the actual swap, ask each person to share the story of his or her cookies.

5. Above all, relax and be merry.



ROLO COOKIES

- 1 cup butter
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup packed brown sugar
- 2 eggs
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 2 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 3/4 cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- 48 Rolo candies, unwrapped
- Powdered sugar

In mixing bowl, beat butter until creamy. Gradually add sugars; beat well. Add eggs and vanilla; beat well. In separate bowl, combine flour, baking soda and cocoa. Gradually add to butter mixture, beating to combine. Cover and chill at least 2 hours.

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Divide dough into four parts. (Use one part at a time, leaving others in refrigerator.) Divide one part dough into 12 pieces. Flatten each piece between your hands. Place one Rolo into middle of dough and wrap dough around Rolo. Gently roll in your hands to make a ball. Make sure all of candy is covered with dough. Place on baking sheet, 2 inches apart. Bake for 8 minutes. Let cool 1 minute, then remove to rack to cool completely. Repeat with remaining three parts of dough. When all are cool, sprinkle with powdered sugar. Makes 4 dozen.

Serving size: 1 cookie. Per serving: 114 calories, 1.3 g protein, 4.7 g fat, 16.6 g carbohydrates, 38 mg sodium, 19 mg cholesterol

Partygoers admire a tiny Christmas village that Katherine Bevins, third from left, put together for a cookie swap gathering. Pictured from left are: Sherri Lass, Gloria Chen, Bevins, Helen Gilbert, Marcelle Wendland, Ann Richburg, Traci Wallace, Mary Ann Zeitz, Jennifer Clitheroe (bottom center) and Trudi Dossey (bottom right).



1st **PATSY HILBURN** *United Cooperative Services* Prize-winning recipe: **Raspberry-Almond Shortbread Thumbprints**

These rich, easy-to-make cookies are sure to be a favorite at your cookie swap. The jam filling is a tart counterpoint to the sweet shortbread cookie, which melts in your mouth. And they're attractive, to boot. "I bake dozens of these each year as gifts," Patsy Hilburn says. These cookies also can be made with other flavors of jam.

RASPBERRY-ALMOND SHORTBREAD THUMBPRINTS

- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup sugar
- 1 cup butter (softened)
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon almond extract
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup raspberry jam

Almond Glaze

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In large mixing bowl, combine sugar, butter and almond extract. Beat at medium speed, scraping bowl often, until creamy (2-3 minutes). Reduce speed to low; add flour. Beat, scraping bowl often, until well mixed (2-3 minutes).

Shape dough into 1-inch balls. Place 2 inches apart on cookie sheets. With thumb, make indentation in center of each cookie (edges may crack slightly). Fill each indentation with about a quarter teaspoon of jam. Bake 14-18 minutes or until edges are lightly browned. Let stand 1 minute; remove from cookie sheets. Drizzle with Almond Glaze, then allow to cool completely. Makes about 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ dozen.

ALMOND GLAZE

- 1 cup powdered sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons almond extract
- 1-3 teaspoons water

In small bowl stir together sugar, extract and enough water for glazing consistency.

Serving size: 1 cookie. Per serving: 95 calories, 0.6 g protein, 4.2 g fat, 13.2 g carbohydrates, 0.2 g fiber, 1 mg sodium, 11 mg cholesterol

ANNA'S MORSELS

- $2\frac{1}{2}$ cups all-purpose flour
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon baking powder
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
- 1 cup butter, cut into small pieces
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups light brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon vanilla
- 2 eggs (room temperature)
- 1 teaspoon water
- 1 cup chopped pecans
- 1 package (8 ounces) toffee bits
- 1 package (8 ounces) milk chocolate chips
- 1 package (8 ounces) semisweet chocolate chips

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Whisk together flour, baking powder and salt. Beat butter with mixer at medium-high speed until light and fluffy. Add brown sugar and vanilla; mix well.

Whisk eggs and water. Add to butter mixture; beat well. Add flour mixture; beat at low speed just until combined. Stir in pecans, toffee and chips. Chill 1 hour or until dough is firm. Drop dough by tablespoonfuls onto ungreased baking sheet. Bake about 10 minutes, until lightly browned on edges only. Cool on wire racks. Makes 5 dozen cookies.

Serving size: 1 cookie. Per serving: 139 calories, 1.3 g protein, 7.6 g fat, 16.9 g carbohydrates, 0.8 g fiber, 33 mg sodium, 19 mg cholesterol

ANNA V. THANE


Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative and Mid-South Synergy

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RECIPE CONTEST

March's recipe contest topic was suggested by Kasha Perkins of United Cooperative Services: **FOODS YOU'VE GROWN TO LOVE**. "Recipes could be submitted for things that we typically didn't like as children such as broccoli, asparagus and spinach," she wrote. The deadline is November 10.


Send recipes to Home Cooking, 2550 S. IH-35, Austin, TX 78704. You may also fax them to (512) 486-6254, e-mail them to recipes@texas-ec.org, or submit online at www.texascooppower.com. Please include your name, address and phone number, as well as the name of your electric co-op. The top winner will receive a copy of *60 Years of Home Cooking* and a Texas-shaped trivet. Runners-up will also receive a prize.




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Baked pie shell


- $2\frac{1}{2}$ dozen caramel candies
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup butter
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar
- 2 large eggs, slightly beaten
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon vanilla
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups coarsely chopped pecans

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Combine candies, butter and water in large saucepan over medium heat and stir until melted and smooth. In separate bowl, mix sugar, eggs, vanilla, salt and pecans, then stir into caramel mixture. Pour into baked pie shell and bake for 10 minutes. Reduce heat to 350 and bake 20 minutes more. Remove to wire rack to cool. Then decorate top with Chocolate-Dipped Pecans.

CHOCOLATE-DIPPED PECANS

- 6 ounces semisweet chocolate chips
- 20 roasted pecan halves

Microwave chips in bowl until melted and smooth, checking and stirring every 30 seconds. Dip pecans halfway into chocolate and put on waxed paper until set.



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SIGNS

Your submissions for this month's category left us laughing, a little scared and turning in circles. From these pictures, you can see just how literal, humorous or confusing some signs can be. —ASHLEY CLARY

◀ I don't know about you, but I certainly wouldn't proceed any farther. Some signs are meant to be obeyed, and this buzzard made this otherwise unobtrusive message all the more threatening—enough to give the bravest soul the heebie-jeebies. Pedernales Electric Cooperative member **Nicole Bardwell** sent in this ominous photo taken near the Guadalupe River at the Canyon Lake Dam.



▲ So are both ways right or are both ways wrong? Be sure to argue your case if you get pulled over in San Augustine. **Jan Amen**, a Deep East Texas Electric Cooperative member, found herself not knowing which way to go on this road.

► It's good to know that our feathered friends heed road signs. **Melissa Pollis** of Mid-South Synergy says that every time she passes this junction outside Wimberley, the ducks and geese are using their crosswalk.



◀ That Frio River ain't called "frio" for nothing! **Vicki Campbell** of Bandera Electric Cooperative said, "My husband and I love living in the Texas Hill Country and so close to the river, and in January 2007, we were surprised by an ice storm and the Frio River sign looked very appropriate for its name."



► Oh, Canada! **Linda Stipanovic** and her husband, **Robert**, members of Bryan Texas Utilities, encountered this sign just outside Banff, Alberta, and had no idea what it meant until they crossed over a cattle guard. "Evidently they have adopted them to keep elk and other large animals off the freeways," Linda said.



Upcoming in Focus on Texas

ISSUE	SUBJECT	DEADLINE
Jan	Odd Farm Equipment	Nov 10
Feb	Silly Poses	Dec 10
Mar	Caught in the Act	Jan 10
Apr	Bridges	Feb 10
May	At the (Texas) Beach	Mar 10
June	Stained Glass Windows	Apr 10

ODD FARM EQUIPMENT is the topic for our **JANUARY 2009** issue. Send your photo—along with your name, address, daytime phone, co-op affiliation and a brief description—to **Odd Farm Equipment, Focus on Texas, 2550 S. IH-35, Austin, TX 78704**, before **November 10**. A stamped, self-addressed envelope must be included if you want your entry returned (approximately six weeks). **Please do not submit irreplaceable photographs—send a copy or duplicate.** We regret that **Texas Co-op Power** cannot be responsible for photos that are lost in the mail or not received by the deadline. Please note that we cannot provide individual critiques of submitted photos. If you use a digital camera, e-mail your highest-resolution images to focus@texas-ec.org, or submit them on our website at www.texascoopower.com.

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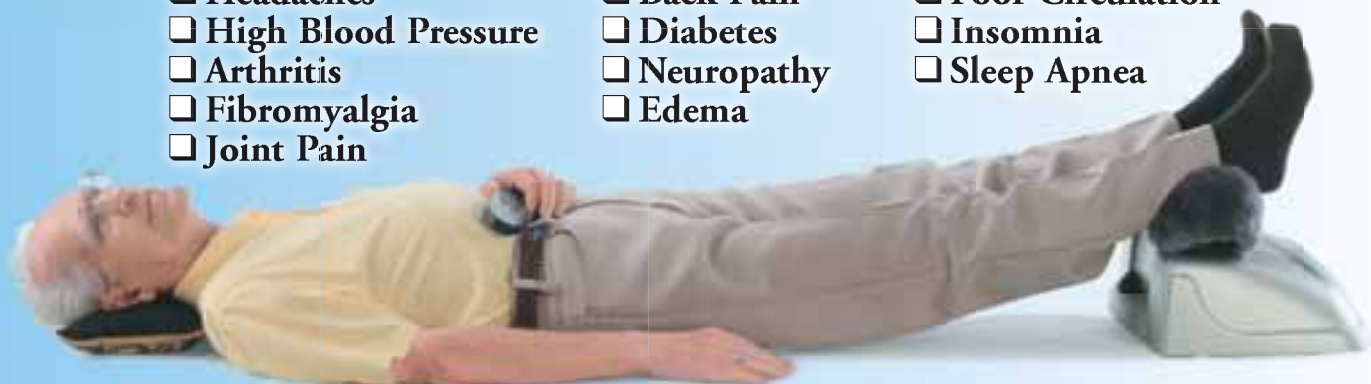
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Increase circulation

Helps relieve stiffness
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How Does the Exerciser 2000 Elite™ Work?

Enjoy the benefits of passive exercise—just lie down, place your ankles on the ankle rest and let the machine do the work.

When you turn the machine on, it creates a 2 inch, right to left movement that gently moves the body back and forth.

This gentle swinging motion cycles up through the whole body, creating an exercise movement without stress or impact on the joints.



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- ETL Approval
- 5-speed operation
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—one for relaxation and one for energizing
- Heavy duty, high torque DC motor
- Wide cushioned ankle rest
- 16 minute digital timer with safety shut-off
- **2 year parts and labor warranty**

These statements have not been evaluated by the FDA. Not intended to treat, cure or prevent any diseases. Price, terms and conditions subject to change without notice.

Don't be fooled by cheap imitations

What people are saying about the Exerciser 2000 Elite™

After using the Exerciser 2000 Elite™ twice a day for one week the swelling in my ankles went away. It has also helped my breathing, as I can get out and walk without having to stop and catch my breath! Thank you. —Shirley H., Florida

As a Chiropractor, I would like to say that the Exerciser 2000 Elite™ enables people to benefit themselves at home. It is a valuable asset in moving lymph fluid, oxygenating the blood, increasing immune system function, maintaining mobility in the spine, and additionally freeing up a spine that has become stiff and arthritic. —Garry Gorsuch, D.C.

The ad I saw almost sounded "too good to be true". With your no risk money back guarantee I figured I had nothing to lose so I purchased the machine...and boy, am I glad I did! I am 75 years old and suffer from sciatica, which makes my back and legs tighten up and causes numbness. After using the machine for only 4 minutes, I noticed my lower back loosening up. Since I have been using the machine I have been almost pain free. My sciatica is not giving me problems anymore and my body stays loosened up. I have also had a snoring problem for quite some time, however, since using the machine my snoring has subsided. My wife is so excited! I cannot tell you how much this machine has turned my life around. —C. Cummings

After having a stroke, I could no longer exercise the way I used to. As a result, I developed edema. A friend of mine introduced me to the Exerciser 2000 Elite™. I loved it and I purchased one for myself. After using the machine daily for a few weeks, my symptoms of edema were completely gone. I now use the machine twice a day for 16 minutes each time on speed 3. What a wonderful way to exercise. —Robert M.

I love using the Exerciser 2000 Elite™ after my morning workout. It is an excellent way to cool down and it helps to start my day off right. —Deanna C., Kansas

I have had constipation problems for over 25 years. Since I have been using the Exerciser 2000 Elite™ I have been regular every day and have begun to lose weight. This is truly a blessing and is so easy to use. —Jeannie

I am in my late 80's and have diabetes. The first thing I noticed when I started using my machine was that my feet were warm when I went to bed. They were always ice cold before. Because one of my problems is poor circulation, I use the machine three times a day for 10 minutes each; in the morning, late afternoon and just before bed. I almost forgot to mention that I have not been able to lift my arms above my head. Now I can do it. You think that's no big deal until you can't do it anymore. —Ralph K.

My husband and I have been into natural products all of our lives but nothing has ever affected us like the Exerciser 2000 Elite™. My husband is 72 and delivers flowers. He carries 5 gallon buckets of water. Since using the machine, his back hasn't hurt him at all. My hips would hurt if I stood too long and I would get weak and have to sit down. Now I can walk and sit as long as I want. I don't take pain medication anymore. In the morning, when I get out of bed I'm not stiff anymore. At 65, wow, this is great! Thank you for offering such a great machine. We are going to tell everyone we know about it. —Cheryl J.

I had suffered with sleep apnea for many years. I was told I would have to use a breathing apparatus. In the meantime, I was introduced to the Exerciser 2000 Elite™ and decided to purchase one. Within two weeks, I was sleeping more deeply and restfully than ever before. —David B.

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I went looking for Utopia, and I found it—even as my heart pounded and hands sweated.

There's just no way around it: If you're going to properly tour the deep Hill Country, you have to commit to driving some scary roads. That means hairpin turns—some tighter than a twist tie on a loaf of bread—spectacular drop-offs of 2,000 feet or more and guardrails not much taller than my knees. When the sign says 10 mph, it means it. On the steep and winding portion of RM 337 between Vanderpool and Leakey, I had to keep laying my perspiring palms, one at a time, against the air-conditioning vents in my car just to keep a tight, dry grip on the steering wheel.

The payoff, of course, when I dared look, was the scenery: steep canyon walls, gigantic rock formations and views with seemingly no end.

Ultimately, I drove about 140 miles on pretty two-lane roads exploring Real, Bandera and Uvalde counties in the heart of Bandera Electric Cooperative country. I drove along the Frio and Sabinal rivers and envied the tubers soaking up the water and the sun.

VANDERPOOL

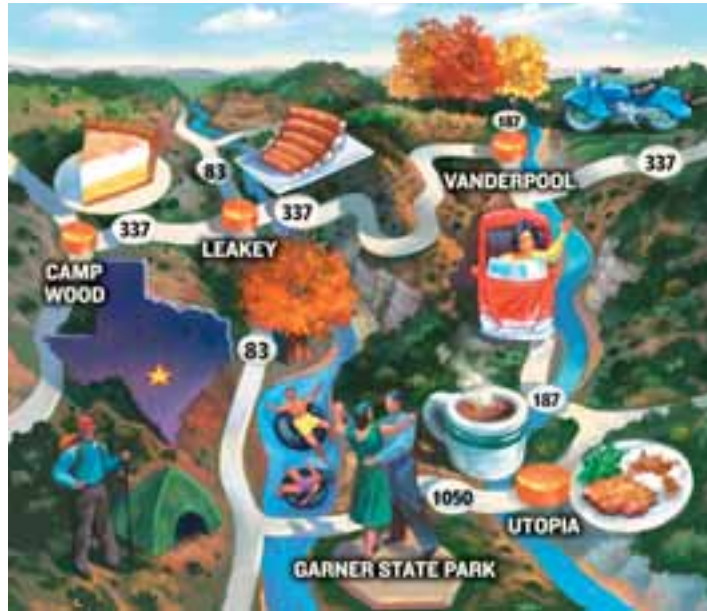
This sleepy little town on the Sabinal River serves a big purpose: It's the southern gateway to **LOST MAPLES STATE NATURAL AREA**, home of the revered big-tooth maples—relics from the Ice Age—whose leaves famously turn red, yellow, gold and orange in the fall. November is a great time to see the colors, but go on a weekday: Parking is limited, and Lost Maples officials estimate that 70 percent of the park's 200,000 annual visitors come during autumn. Lost Maples is five miles north of Vanderpool on Ranch Road 187.

While you're in the area, check out the **LONE STAR MOTORCYCLE MUSEUM** one mile south of Lost Maples. The museum, featuring vintage German, American, French, Italian and British

VANDERPOOL to UTOPIA

Soak up the spectacular scenery ... and keep both hands on the wheel.

BY CAMILLE WHEELER



bikes, is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday through Sunday and is closed December through February.

Lost Maples State Natural Area, (830) 966-3413, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest/findadest/parks/lost_maples/

Lone Star Motorcycle Museum, (830) 966-6103, lonestarmotorcyclemuseum.com

LEAKEY

Using the Real County seat as my launching pad, I drove one leg of the **THREE SISTERS**—a wicked yet scenic trio of country roads to the west composed of RM 337, RM 336 and RM 335. I also watched the Frio River run green and clean at **HAPPY HOLLOW FRIO RIVER OUTFITTERS**, a rental haven for inner tubers eight miles south of Leakey on U.S. Highway 83.

After driving RM 337 west from Vanderpool to Leakey, I continued on to **CAMP WOOD** and rewarded myself with coffee and lemon meringue pie at **BJ'S CAFE AND SWEET SHOP**. Back in Leakey, where **THE HOG PEN'S** barbecue draws

motorcyclists by the dozens, I traveled south on U.S. 83 and FM 1120 to the tiny burg of Rio Frio on the Frio River. Stop here to admire a centuries-old escarpment live oak tree—a former national champion—with a trunk as big as a living room.

For accommodations in Leakey, try the 67-year-old **FRIO CANYON LODGE**, a rustic place with red-cedar furniture.

Frio Canyon Lodge, (830) 232-6800, www.friocanyonlodge.com

GARNER STATE PARK

For many families, it's an annual tradition to return to this park eight miles north of Concan on RM 1050, just east of U.S. 83. But get your camping reservations in early: This popular park fills up fast. Garner, built between 1935 and 1941 by the Civilian Conservation Corps, is all about summer tradition: The Frio River beckons swimmers and inner tubers

who then dance the night away under a pavilion.

Garner State Park, (830) 232-6132, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/garner

UTOPIA

After dipping my toes in the river at Garner, I continued east on RM 1050—a lovely two-lane road that more gently winds through the hills—and headed 15 miles to Utopia where I enjoyed a smooth cup of Guatemalan coffee at **UTOPIA JOE'S COFFEE HOUSE**. In November 2007, a *New York Times* reporter stopped by and was so smitten with a Greek salad that he wrote a story about the place. More tasty food is found at **LOST MAPLES CAFE**, where homemade pie and chicken-fried steak fill diners' plates.

Utopia Joe's Coffee House, (830) 966-5656, www.utopiajoes.com

Lost Maples Cafe, (830) 966-2221

Camille Wheeler is the staff writer for Texas Co-op Power.

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