

# A trip through Texas' Canyon Country



THE OLD HOTEL TURKEY, located just north of downtown in the Hall County town of Turkey, is the hometown of famed fiddle player and band leader, Bob Wills. Few changes have been made in the hotel, which still hosts guests year-round. It is a favorite haunt of those wanting to tour Caprock Canyons State Park.

by Keith Bridwell

If you long for a remote location, where the only eyeballs you'll see will be those of a horned toad, a mule deer or an occasional "lost" soul like yourself, you will enjoy the solitude and scenery that Caprock Canyons and Copper Breaks State Parks offer.

When you take into consideration the 64.25-mile Trailway, Caprock Canyons State Park has more than 15,300 acres of land - much of it inaccessible except by hiking, riding or trail biking.

The park is located in an extension of Palo Duro Canyon to the northwest on the east side of the Caprock - that geological formation which signifies a return from the "high plains" of Texas to the plains of northwest Texas.

The park is more than 200 miles from Bridgeport, and can most easily be reached by following U.S. Highway 287 through Childress to the settlement of Estelline. From there, take State Highway 86 about 40 miles to the west to the town of Quitaque (pronounced Kit-A-Kway), where you will access FM Highway 1065 for three miles to the north.

You might think that such a remote location has no amenities, but Caprock Canyons State Park offers several - including a new state-of-the-art headquarters and interpretive center (built in October, 2007), RV hookups, Lake Theo with its scenic park area, and an equestrian center where you can board your horses.

One word of caution concerning motor homes and travel trailers: areas of the main park road are quite steep. In order to avoid "high center-

ing," you will want to park your RV on park property before you drop into the canyon.

Average maximum temperature in July is 91 degrees, and average rainfall is 20.4 inches per year, so dress appropriately.

The park drops in elevation from 3180 to 2180 feet, and a branch leading to the Red River originates from a spring in a creek bottom. Formations caused by years of erosion are the most prominent features in the park, which has such wildlife as African auodad sheep, mule and white-tailed deer, raccoons, coyotes, bobcats, opossums, porcupines, foxes and over 175 species of birds.

The pride of the park is the official Texas State Bison Herd (the largest herd of buffalo in the state park system), and the not-often-seen Golden Eagles.

Vegetation varies from juniper, mesquite, and cacti, to tall grasses, cottonwoods, plum thickets and hackberries in bottomland areas.

The park is open from 8 a.m. until 6 p.m. Friday and Saturday and from 8 a.m. to noon, then from 1 until 5 p.m. Sunday through Thursday.

Caprock Canyons has a rich Indian history, dating from the Folsom culture of more than 10,000 years ago through the Comanches as recently as the 1870s.

New Mexican buffalo hunters, known as ciboleros, and traders, known as Comancheros, were frequent visitors to the area. Las Lenguas Creek, a few miles south of the park, was a major trade area, and a site excavated on Quitaque Creek has produced artifacts indicating that it may have been a cibolero camp.

Lake Theo is named after Theo Geisler, from whom the park was acquired in 1936, and is 120 surface acres in size and 30' deep when full.

Copper Breaks State Park is more suited to a quick tour, being just more than 150 miles from Bridgeport. Follow U.S. 287 to Quanah, then turn south for 11 miles on State Highway 6.

Copper Breaks has many of the same amenities as Caprock Canyons State Park, although on a much smaller scale. It is about 1900 acres in size, and borders the Pease River on the north, in Hardeman County.

The famous Pease River Battle Site, in which Cynthia Ann Parker was recovered from the Comanches in 1860, lies just three miles to the east of the park, just south of Medicine Mounds, important ceremonial sites of the Comanche.

Ms. Parker had been captured by a raiding party of the Comanche Indians as a young child, and grew up with the Indians. Her son, Quanah Parker, was to become the last great war chief of the Comanche nation.

Copper Breaks was acquired from a private owner in 1970 under the State Parks Bond Program and was opened in 1974. Two lakes, including Lake Copper Breaks, range in size from 60 surface acres to 10. Elevation is 1568 feet, and average rainfall is 23.4 inches, with a July maximum temperature of 97 degrees.

The park offers rugged scenery, with mixed grass and mesquite-covered mesas and juniper breaks. Wildlife includes roadrunners, great blue herons, quail, dove, mule deer, rabbits, raccoons, armadillos, opossums, bobcats and porcupines, with an occasional horned toad. It is open year-round.



A rainstorm approaches the "lower prong" canyon inside Caprock Canyons State Park, where the graphic tells of formation of the canyon and of its ecosystem. Much of the canyon can be seen only by hiking or biking, and is scarcely populated by humans, even during the spring months.

Numerous camping and RV sites are available, some with electricity and showers. It offers a group picnic area with

meeting room for up to 35 people. A swimming beach is also available.

If you have just one day to

see the wonders of Texas and its canyons, Copper Breaks State Park is a good starting point.



The new park headquarters and interpretive center at Caprock Canyons State Park was built in October, 2007. It is located just three miles north of Quitaque in Briscoe County.



A fly fisherman plys his trade in the upper lake at Copper Breaks State Park 11 miles south of Quanah alongside the Pease River.



CAPROCK CANYONS STATE PARK IN THE RAIN - A spring storm system moves through the canyon, obliterating many of the canyon details.



WIND POWER IN A DIFFERENT FORM - these turbines are located just outside Turkey on the high plains, and are turning and generating power year-round.



The upper lake at Copper Breaks State Park is one of the more picturesque spots in the park, and boasts many campsites along its shores. The area near the lake is at "the end of the road" in the park, and is home to regular "telescope parties" during the year because of its remote location.