

The Magic of Texas' Hill Country

- a part of the world that time forgot!



ALONG FM HIGHWAY 337 BETWEEN VANDERPOOL AND MEDINA in Bandera County, signs of quieter times are everywhere (in addition to mountainous roads with hairpin turns and no bannisters)! Numerous parks in the area - including South Llano River State Park, Garner State Park, Lost Maples State Natural Area, Hill Country State Park, Kerrville-Schreiner State Park and Adminral Nimitz State Park - offer welcome retreats for the road-weary.

- Indexfotos

by Keith Bridwell

When you yearn for clear streams, fresh air and a remoteness that don't exist in much of north Texas, it may be time to head south to the Texas Hill Country - an area bounded roughly by Lampasas on the

north, Austin on the east, San Antonio on the south and Rocksprings on the west.

It is an area of rugged beauty - much of it unchanged over the decades, except by an occasional paved road and miles of barbed wire fences.

It is also an area where your automobile "cruise control" is more of a nuisance than a convenience, and where good brakes are more important than horsepower!

Much of the Hill Country is famed for its prolific crop of

bluebonnets, but there is so much more to witness.

Llano is home to one of the most beautiful manmade dams (across the Llano River) anywhere in the southwest, and is the unofficial rallying point for Hill Country deer hunting.

Mason - 35 miles to the west - is "southern headquarters" for barbecued goat, looked upon as a real delicacy by many folks.

Junction is still a "wild west" town, despite the fact that Interstate Highway 10 is their main thoroughfare.

South of Leakey (pronounced 'Lakey'), you'll find the beautiful and spacious Garner State Park. Rocks sparkle in the shallow water of the Frio River, which runs through the park.

Just north of Vanderpool, you'll find Lost Maples State Natural Area, which offers gorgeous orange and red foliage during the fall. (The park, however, offers little incentive to travelers at other times of the year).

The road (FM Highway 337) from Leakey to Vanderpool to Medina is somewhat like a mountain trail in the Rockies, with sharp turns and slow speed limits - not the path to take if you're in a hurry.

Kerrville is a bustling, prosperous town of almost 20,000 which sets at the junction of several of those mountain roads, the Guadalupe River, and just two miles from Interstate 10.

Northeast about 25 miles is the "tourist capitol of Texas" - Fredericksburg.

The entire city of about

8,000 is built to accommodate tourists. The downtown area is a mecca of speciality shops and restaurants designed to entice you to stay forever and spend every dollar you have!

It is a spotless town which is alive day and night - the "favorite son" of electric power companies!

Southeast less than 10 miles is the settlement (there isn't enough there to accurately label it a town) of Luckenbach - the place of Willie and Waylon lore.

It is laid back, to the point that the chickens run free in the front yards, entertainment is free (if you're willing to sit on hard benches and hay bales), and boasts just one store in "downtown."

The famed LBJ Ranch is just 10 or 12 miles to the northeast, and straddles the Pedernales River.

Boerne (pronounced 'Berney') is about 35 miles northwest of San Antonio, and is home to one of the best "trades days" in the state, at the Kendall County Fairgrounds.

Almost due north of Fredericksburg on FM Highway 965 is Enchanted Rock State Park, where cactus, mesquite trees and bluebonnets are all around, and a clear stream runs year-round.

The park is named for a giant monolith, where trails have been worn by hikers who want a view from the top. Hikers and climbers of all levels of ability and stamina will find challenges in the park.

You'll notice several things of interest in the Texas Hill Country: (1) try to get where

you're going before dark, because deer along the roadway are plentiful (and unwelcome at night); (2) relax, because you'll not set any land speed records in the region; (3) and the shallow creeks and lakes are rock-lined and rock-bottomed, with crystal-clear water (one hint - the area is notorious for stranding motorists at times of heavy rainfall. The floodwaters rise in a hurry, and fall in a hurry).

The hills consist mainly of limestone, and the entire area has only a thin layer of topsoil, which contributes to its propensity for flash flooding.

The area drains primarily to the Colorado, Llano and Pedernales Rivers.

Several natural attractions are available for your exploration, including many caverns scattered throughout the region. Inner Space Caverns north of Austin and Natural Bridge Caverns north of San Antonio are two of the more popular.

The region has been for many years the center of the wine industry in Texas, and it also offers a unique blend of many cultures - Spanish, European, German, Swiss, Austrian, and Czech.

Those cultures are reflected in the variety of eateries available throughout the area. For a small city, Fredericksburg offers many unique dining choices.

To enter the Hill Country at Llano from Mineral Wells, follow U.S. Highway 281 to Stephenville, U.S. 377 to Comanche and State Highway 16 to Llano.



THE POST OFFICE, GENERAL STORE, TOWN HALL AND OUTDOOR THEATER, all rolled into one! During spring and summer months, hundreds of visitors make the short (and virtually unmarked) trek on a back road to the center of Luckenbach on FM Highway 1376, southeast of Fredericksburg. Up-and-coming entertainers - along with occasional appearances by country music "oldtimers", give impromptu performances.

Indexfotos by Keith Bridwell

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THE BLUEBONNETS OF ENCHANTED ROCK STATE PARK between Fredericksburg and Llano add color to an area dominated by cactus, mesquite trees and clear, rock-bottomed creeks. Enchanted rock, pictured here, offers trails to the top for beginners and experienced climbers. The park is open year-round.