



West Texas Scouting History

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More on Early History Of Buffalo Trail Scout Ranch

This article was in the San Angelo Standard-Times - Sunday November 2, 1947 written by Gilbert Webb.

BUFFALO TRAIL SCOUT RANCH

One of the most scenic spots in the entire Southwest -Agua Canyon - has just been acquired by the Boy Scouts of Buffalo Trail Council, and through that action, more than 16,000 boys between the ages of 12 and 16 years will inherit a magnificent example of wind and water erosion's sample of outdoor grandeur.

Nestled deep in the heart of the Davis Mountains, 26 miles southwest of Balmorhea, the property amounts to 6,000 acres of lands that have always been thickly populated with almost every type of wild game known to this part of Texas. It is completely walled in from the outside world that scarcely knows of its existence and overbearing cliffs rise as much as 2,000 feet above the floor of the canyon where deer, bear, squirrel and scores of small fur-bearing animals feed and play.

Wild cherry, wild grape, ash, pine, oak, birch, pinon, juniper and many other native trees and vines turn the rough, rugged land into another Owen Stanley Range. Sly little springs burst forth from under the towering gorge that offer shelter to soaring Eagles and feed the main stream that dashes down Little Agua Canyon, there bass and trout dart when man appears. It is a heaven on earth for the outdoors boy.

This almost inaccessible country is made up of a main canyon and scores of smaller ones that lead off into deep, dark, recesses of mysteriously silent forests where Texas pine grown as much as six feet in circumference. Here and there, as one pushes his way upstream, lies the remains of long-forgotten little log or stone cabins that offered shelter to some of the earlier invaders of the canyon. There is a single pack trail leading into the heart of the country that will be developed for the boys of the Council.

Owner J. B. Odell 1915-1941

One echoing canyon, without a name, has not been invaded within the past 67 years by white man, according to J. B. Odell, local cattleman who became the canyon's first owner in 1915 and sold it in 1941 to retire. Odell, now 73 years old and a native of the mountains since 1906, quotes a Bo McCutcheon who started visiting the remote-little canyon back in 1880 in denying that white man ever visited that part of the forest.

Land of Black Bears

From 1915 until he sold the ranchlands, J. B. Odell and his family of Mrs. Odell and two children made their home at the mouth of the canyon until 1941. From their little homestead of eight sections of land, almost a mile above sea level, they watched civilization spread out into this part of Texas but not touch their little canyon. During the quarter of a century he lived in the canyon and fought wild animals, Odell estimates he killed at least 100 black bears and there were as many when he left as there were at the turn of the century.

Sometime in 1909, he caught a 633 pound black bear in a steel trap up in the canyon. However, since that date he says he has caught at least two others which outweighed this one and according to him there are bears up in those

mountains still bigger. During the 41 years he has been working stock in the Davis Mountains, Odell said stockmen had carried on a constant warfare with bears and without great success.

For a figure, he estimated that ranchmen receiving as much as a 75 per cent calf crop would actually harvest about 20 per cent of that amount if they did not constantly trap bears and chase them with dogs. He has killed as many as a dozen big blacks in a single year.

About the same story goes for panthers and wildcats. He quickly cleared up the theory that these cats would attack a man. "I don't know of a single instance when one of these cats jumped on a man," Odell said. He described them as cowardly stock thieves that had ruined several good stockmen out in the Davis Mountains.

First Owner

If anybody knows, it should be J. B. Odell. He bought that canyon from the State of Texas for \$1.55 to \$3.55 per acre to become its first owner. He operated there after having build a home, raised his children and retired here six years ago.

There is very little written record of the goings and comings of those who lived in or near the canyon. The whole story, gleaned from the memory of men like Odell, reflects primitive rural beauty coupled with tragedy and death. Skeletons of men, missing for years, have been found by stockmen deep in the remote corners of the land of pines. Stories of strange happenings among the Mexican laborers who came to those remote mountains about the turn of the century would fill several volumes.

Strange Stories

Odell tells a story of two Mexicans working up in the mountains. One was married and the other possesses a horse and saddle. The married one traded his wife and small child to the other for the horse and saddle and rode off into Old Mexico. Several years later the remaining pair was rumored to be still living farther up in the valley. There are others, and just as strange.

With the coming of the Boy Scouts of Buffalo Trail Council will come more information about the land that has almost never heard the crack of a gun in modern times. The executive council of "Trail," has already started tentative plans for the creation Of a lake, a road into the camp grounds, some sort of buildings for shelter and a score of other improvements for the comfort of the boys who will be coming out here for a week each summer.

The Scouts have been pledged to pay approximately \$75,000 to Hunter Strain of San Angelo for the wonderland. When it is all figured up, it will amount to less than \$5. per eligible boy in the counties making up the council. P. V. Thorson, Scout Executive for the "Trail," estimates that every year there will be 16,000 boys eligible to be members of some Boy Scout Troop and have a perfect right to use the canyon campsite.

Rex Palmer, Scout executive of Pecos and the man who has seen more of the canyon than anyone else, comes out of the area with a story of Indian paintings on the side of a towering cliff that is well worth the participation of the boys who will make their first official pilgrimage into the virgin territory during the summer of 1948.

This story was written by the Buffalo Trail Council as a news release.

BOY SCOUTS OFFER HIGH AVENTURE WILDERNESS CAMPING

Nestled deep in the heart of the Davis Mountains, 26 miles southwest of Balmorhea, is the 6,000 acre Buffalo Trail Scout Ranch Camp. The camp has been populated with almost every type of wild game known to this part of Texas. It is completely walled-in from the outside world that scarcely knows of its existence; overbearing cliffs raise as much as 2,000 feet above the floor of the canyon, where deer, bear, squirrel and scores of other wildlife feed and play.

Gerald Petty, Assistant Scout Executive, who serves as Camp Director says, "This is where thousands of Scouts and leaders journey each summer for an adventure of a lifetime." The Scout Camp is open the year 'round for Scouts and their leaders. During the summer months the Scouts are involved in special programs that are available to them.

The special Summer Camp programs, assisted by a Trained Camp Staff includes; Horsemanship, Trail rides, Indian Lore, Conservation, and Ecology, Nature, Cooking, Pioneering, Camping, Rifle and Archery, Hiking and Wilderness Survival.

Scouts take overnight camping trips and day hikes to Needle Rock, Blue Hole, The Notch, Hidden Valley, Rustlers Flat, Bear Mountain, Million Dollar Canyon, and Goat Cave. Hiking the many miles of trails at the ranch brings each Scout closer to God's Great Outdoors and makes them more physically fit.

In addition the Camp is used for training of volunteer leaders, boy leaders, special camps for just the boy and his mother, also, father and son activities.

For additional information you can contact the Council Service Center, 1101 W. Wall, Midland, Texas 79701 or call 684-7171

This story was written on the 38th year of the Buffalo Trail Scout Ranch

LOOKING BACK

The Buffalo Trail Council completed its 38th year of successful camping this past summer. During these years thousands of boys have had an opportunity to grow and appreciate the great outdoors.

When we look back at the beginning of the Buffalo Trail Scout Ranch there were many men, who were members of the Executive Board who had a vision of what the 6,000 acres in the Davis Mountains could mean to the youth in west Texas.

One of those men was the late George Abell. Mr. Abell was so interested that he put up \$25,000.00 of his own money to assure the purchase of the Ranch for the Boy Scouts.

The two Buffaloes that stand at the entrance of the camp was also a contribution from Mr. & Mrs. Abell. They designed the entrance and had them made by a local blacksmith.

A few years later it became apparent to Mr. Abell and other Scouters that the Council needed to develop a program to help stabilize the financial condition of the Council. Mr. Abell was named Chairman of the committee to develop a trust instrument that would provide a way for individuals to make contributions to the Trust and have a permanent fund to help in the operations of the Council. When the Trust Fund instrument was completed he made the first contribution of \$25,000.00

While Mr. Abell was on the Executive Board and the Chairman of the Trust Fund Committee of the Buffalo Trail Council, Mrs. Abell was a Den Mother.

The Executive Board, Scouts and volunteers appreciate Mrs. Abell's support which has helped to teach Scouts the much needed values of faith in God, and love of Country, honesty, integrity, and loyalty.

Our thanks to David O'Neill and John Dee Johnson for furnishing us the information for this page.