

BY LIZ CARMACK
PHOTOGRAPHS BY LAURENCE PARENT

The Legend of Fort Boggy

AS THE LAST swimmers of the day collect their beach balls and a lone angler cleans his catch, a beaver plows a rippling “V” across the small lake at Fort Boggy State Park, near Centerville. Then, with a loud *thwack* of its tail upon the water’s blue-green surface, it dives below.

The beavers, pileated woodpeckers, and wood ducks usually have this slice of East Texas to themselves the first part of the week. But starting around Wednesday, they share it with visitors who come here to fish, swim, picnic, hike, and camp.

Opened in 2001, Fort Boggy State Park encompasses 1,847 acres in Leon County—land donated 16 years earlier to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department by Eileen Crain Sullivan, the widow of prominent Centerville banker Joe Sullivan. The Sullivan family’s roots in the county date to 1860.

Visitors exploring the park shouldn’t expect to find remains of its namesake, Fort Boggy, a palisaded fort constructed



A misty morning sunrise rewards visitors to the fishing pier at Fort Boggy State Park near Centerville.

in the area in 1840 and itself named for a nearby creek. The former garrison’s exact location is unknown, but a written account of the area’s history says the 75-square-yard fort consisted of two blockhouses and 11 dwellings and sheltered 75 residents who sought refuge

from raids. Both the Keechi and the Kickapoo tribes inhabited the region at that time.

FORT BOGGY STATE PARK, 4994 TX 75 South is about 4 miles south of Centerville. Call 903/344-1116; www.tpwd.state.tx.us.

The Sullivan family dug a 15-acre lake here a century later, in 1940. Today, the unnamed lake is the

park’s focal point and attracts waterfowl and wildlife, as well as recreation-seekers.

“Fort Boggy provides a sanctuary for migrating waterfowl,” says Jeff Beshears, chairman of the Leon County chapter of Delta Waterfowl, a North American conservation group. “It has tons of shallow water, an attraction for blue-winged and green-winged teal, wood ducks, mallards, gadwalls, northern pintails, and American widgeon.”

To see a diversity of ducks, birders should visit September-March. Teal appear in September, and other ducks arrive in mid-November. Wood ducks call the park and nearby Boggy Creek home year round.

next to a small dock. A canoe, kayak, or small boat powered by a trolling motor (no wakes allowed) affords the easiest access for fishing and birding here. Anglers find the waters full of brim and crappie, and also catch the occasional bass.

To help cultivate a new generation of anglers, the county’s Delta Waterfowl chapter sponsors an annual Kids’ Fishing

Park Service Rustic) reminds me of similar facilities built throughout Texas parks by the Civilian Conservation Corps during the 1930s. But Texas prison labor constructed this native-red-ironstone shelter in the late 1990s.

Because the park is at the eastern end of the region’s post oak savanna and the western edge of a mixed pine/hardwood

This secret slice of East Texas attracts waterfowl and wildlife, as well as recreation-seekers.

Day after park staff stock the lake with rainbow trout. Chapter members teach the children to fish, and provide a hot dog lunch to all the young participants and their families.

“It’s free, and all the fishing equipment is provided by Texas Parks and Wildlife,” says Beshears.

During the summer, anglers share the water with families who crowd a grassy “bathing beach” and a roped-off swimming area, which extends roughly 60 yards into the lake. “The most popular activity is swimming,” says park superintendent Wesley Hamilton.

On a gentle slope leading to the bathing beach, a playground and 20 concrete picnic tables are dappled by sunlight filtered through red and white oaks, maples, and sweet gums. A pavilion at

the top of the hill, next to the parking lot, accommodates large groups. The park’s location, midway between Dallas and Houston, and its proximity to Interstate 45 make it a popular rendezvous spot for friends and families who live in North and southeast Texas.

The tunnel of sweet gum trees at trail’s end makes for a great photo opportunity,

I haven’t fished since I was a kid, but the relaxed expressions on the faces of two fly fishermen—who have the lake to themselves this late spring day—make me consider trading my hiking boots for a fishing pole. The men slowly float around the lake on their pedal-driven kayaks, casting in shallows along the shore and



Writer Liz Carmack hikes through a Tolkienesque canopy of sweet gum trees.

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Cedar Park

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1/6 v

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as do the carpets of pink phlox and golden coreopsis along the path in spring, and the goldenrod and little bluestem in the fall.

A second trail rings the lake for about a mile-and-a-half, cutting through thick forest with understory vegetation that includes American beauty-berry, yaupon, and Alabama supplejack. A few clearings provide views across the lake of the picnic area and beach.

From one of these I spot the perfect post-hike perch—a table 20 feet from the water. After my hike, I sit and meditate on lengthening shadows and dragonflies flitting along the green, gold, and buff-colored reflections on the water's mirror-like surface. The fly fishermen and the only bathers depart, leaving me alone with the approaching evening.

A frog chorus arises as the beaver begins its water ballet, and I remember what

Jeff Beshears told me, "Fort Boggy is the best-kept secret in central East Texas." I'm glad I know about it.

LIZ CARMACK is the author of *Historic Hotels of Texas: A Traveler's Guide* (Texas A&M Univ. Press, 2007). She relishes the time she spent at the park and in Centerville.

Acclaimed landscape photographer LAURENCE PARENT fondly recalls shooting dawn's morning mist hanging over the lake at Fort Boggy.

Centerville Attractions

Woody's Smokehouse has 2 locations on either side of I-45 at the intersection of TX 7 (exit 164). Customers like the wide variety of smoked meats, baked goods, and preserves. The store on the northeast side of the intersection offers the largest selection and includes a barbecue restaurant. Call 903/536-9663; www.woodys-smokehouse.com.

Country Cousins Barbecue, 930 W. St. Mary St. (on the southeast side of I-45 and TX 7) sells primarily take-out, but offers outdoor seating and caters parties in the park. Beef brisket and Slovacsek sausage—made in Snook with a combination of beef and pork—are customer favorites. Call 903/536-3271.

Town Café, at TX 7 and TX 75, is well known for its breakfasts, chicken-fried steak, and the all-you-can-eat catfish on Fri. nights. Call 903/536-2919.


The **Leon County Courthouse**, at Commerce and St. Mary's streets, is an 1886 Renaissance Revival building constructed of brick with cast-iron columns. It underwent restoration in 2006-2007.

Parkview RV Park and Cabins, 4447 TX 75 South, offers 7 cabins, 7 campsites with full RV hookups, a pavilion, and barbecue grills across from the park. Call 903/344-3641.

Country Memories, 126 N. Commerce St., features antiques, collectibles, furniture, glassware, and china. Call 903/536-5222.

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Don Puckett of La Porte enjoys a day of fly fishing in his kayak.