



## Lord of the Chiggers

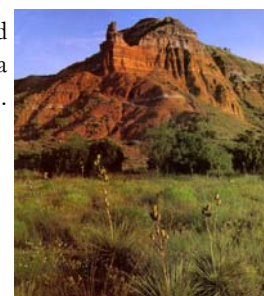
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Michael Nickell will be submitting a more complete trip report about this month's trip to Caprock Canyons State Park but I just wanted to give you a short synopsis (to take up space). Despite "no-seeums" that I now believe were chiggers, we had a great time at Caprock Canyons State Park this past weekend. We had about 16-17 folks attend this trip...which isn't bad for an August trip. Our biggest concern about the bicycling part of the trip was the heat but Mother Nature took care of us in one respect and fouled our plans in another. Michael will fill you in on all of that I'm sure. Caprock Canyons was

absolutely beautiful with all of the rain that they have had. Everything was incredibly green and there were plenty of wildflowers. On Friday night Ma Nature gave us a great lightning light show off to the northeast. We all gathered our chairs in the parking lot of the campsite, talked and watched the fireworks display. The nights were pleasant though you started out on top of your sleeping bag and only later in the night, slip under the covers. Our original plan to bike all 17 miles of the trail was altered but we had a great time nonetheless. Bats galore...lots of bats. For those of you that make the trip, you

missed quite a sight.



*Photo illustration.....i.e. "furnished by software."*

Guano galore and a few rattle-snakes but fun all the same!

### Special points of interest:

- August trip a bit warm but highly entertaining
- A week-long trip in 2011?
- Don't miss next month's trip to the Davis Mountains!

## October trip destination still in limbo, et. al.

The October 15-17 trip will change in destination but the exact destination is still not completely decided. Brandon Hawkins has found a spot on the Rio Grande that is a part of Big Bend Ranch State Park and they have promised the whole site to us exclusively if we want

to option that. We are definitely taking a trip but we haven't made the Rio Grande decision yet. We'll have that decision made prior to the September trip to the Buffalo Trail Boy Scout Ranch and will let all of you know the final decision. On another note, I

need to know how many of you are serious about a week-long trip to northern New Mexico (the aforementioned trip on the Silverton-Durango railroad/backpacking trip. It'll take some time to plan that so I need to know if a significant number are interested.

## August Trip Report—Michael W. Nickell



Ann & Debra on trail—photo by Tom Cooper

The heat was definitely turned up in Caprock Canyons State Park on Saturday, August 21. The ultimate goal was a mountain bike ride to Clarity Tunnel to witness the bat flight and return ride under moonlight. Those intrepid souls choosing to rise to the adventure included Roger and Jan Artley, Bill and Kathy Lupardus, Taffy Armstrong, Tyler Hargrove, Tom Cooper, Richard Galle, Ann McKandles, Ann's friend Deborah, and Michael Nickell. Brandon and Jessica Hawkins were in a different part of the park.

Members gradually arrived throughout Friday evening at the Little Red Tent camping site. Friday evening was warm and muggy, punctuated by a brilliant electrical display emanating from a line of thunderstorms to the north. The Saturday morning sun revealed the vibrant burnt sienna and ochre of the canyon walls juxtaposed with the lush green vegetation produced by above average winter and spring rainfall. It was a perfect opportunity for a casual hike or bike ride, photography, or birding. It did not take long, though, before the day's heat bordered upon being oppressive. Most of Saturday was spent in the shade of a hackberry tree, shooing away biting flies, loading up on water, and otherwise enjoying the company.

There was debate as to exactly when to leave for Clarity Tunnel and by which route, and make it in time for the bat flight. There were two options: leave early and endure the heat and ride the 13 miles to the tunnel from South

Plains, Texas, or leave later at a cooler time and make the shorter five-mile ride from Monk's Crossing. In West Texas, the weather trumps even the best of plans. It was amazing at how quickly a cloudless sky can spawn a thunderstorm directly overhead! We found ourselves huddled in the open picnic shelters hoping to avoid the lightning and driving rain from a sudden microburst. No tents were lost, but one very close call, though. After the rain, Bill Lupardus walked to the edge of an overlook of the Little Red River to witness the leading edge of a flash flood coursing through the streambed below. This should serve as another safety reminder of hiking and camping in canyon lands in adverse weather. For the sake of safety and logistics the unanimous decision was made to ride to Clarity Tunnel from Monk's Crossing.

Taffy Armstrong and Tyler Hargrove walked the trail while the rest of us mounted our steeds of steel and rode the gently climbing trail to Clarity Tunnel. The rains did bring out the rattlesnakes along the trail. There were venomous snakes to the far left and venomous snakes to the far right. The safest place to be was somewhere in the middle of the road. (I wonder if nature was providing some type of metaphor).

Everyone arrived at Clarity Tunnel in ample time for the bat flight. The majority of bats at Clarity Tunnel form a nursery colony of female Brazilian (Mexican) Free-tailed Bats (*Tadarida brasiliensis*) and their

young. The flight began as darkness was setting in around 8:30 PM. The flight was a continuous, steady stream of rapidly beating wings lasting in excess of half an hour. It would not be a hyperbole on my part to venture a guess in excess of one million ravenous bats disappearing into the night sky to make a significant impact on the local insect population! The reason for such great numbers of bats was due to the time of the year. The young bats were born in mid-June, but by mid-August the young are fully furred and capable of flying out to feed on their own. It is estimated that this one species of bat consumes between 6,000 and 18,000 metric tons of insects every year in Texas (Mammals of Texas by David Schmidly, 1994)!

Another interesting habitat was inadvertently discovered by those who entered Clarity Tunnel. There are many, but poorly studied, life forms adapted for an existence living in the sediments of bat guano on the tunnel's floor. Bat guano mites, in particular, hitched rides on each of us! Of course, they began to drop off our bodies when they discovered that we humans were less desirable than bat guano! I don't know whether to be glad or offended.

Heat, driving rain, flash floods, biting arthropods, snakes in the grass, a "gynormous" bat flight, a ride under moonlight, and cave cooties---yup...the making of a great trip!

"We don't necessarily discriminate. We simply exclude certain types of people."

## September trip to Buffalo Trails

The club will be traveling down to the Davis Mountains on the weekend of September 24th through the 26th for our second visit to the Buffalo Trail Boy Scout Ranch this year! As a kid growing up in West Texas I looked forward with a lot of anticipation each year for my week-long stay at the Scout Ranch and I've never gotten tired of going.

For the uninitiated, the Boy

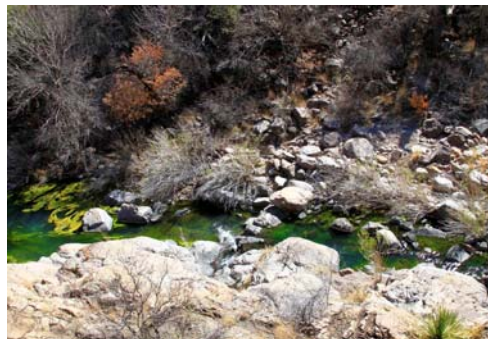
Scout Ranch is located just south of Balmorhea and less than two hours travel for those of us in the Permian Basin. The camp is located in a horseshoe shaped canyon surrounded by mountains, trees, and a perennial stream. I've been to the Davis Mountains several times this spring and summer and I've never seen them greener. I thought that two years ago won the prize for greenery but this year beats them all. The

Scouts furnish us a great campsite and even throw in restrooms and hot showers! We usually camp in one site but if you're feeling like it, you can backpack into the back country and forego the restrooms, etc. or simply day hike into the back country. We're allowed campfires, freedom to move about as we want, and the photographic opportunities are boundless. All of this for \$2/night per person. Incredible deal.



*Microsoft Publisher put this here against my will...what is it....asparagus? I don't want to make Bill Gates mad.....*

## A few pictures from prior Scout Ranch trips



**"Smoking kills. If you're killed, you've lost a very important part of your life."**  
-  
**Brooke Shields(no, I'm not kidding..she really said it!)**

## Summer trips

It has been suggested by a couple of you that we might, in the future, consider not scheduling trips in the summer due to vacations, heat, etc. In the 25+ years of the outing club we have never taken that approach. However, in the old PBOC we did substitute certain summer ventures to

"alternate" activities such as a July "trip" to the Summer Mummies or some other venture that was closer and, in many instances, were easily done in a day (or evening). This version of the club once went to Castle Gap, just south of Crane, about an hour from Midland, for a cookout and

star party. We got there in late afternoon and stayed until well after dark (for what is a star party without dark skies?) If you think that this is a good idea, we'd love to hear from you with some ideas to put on our 2011 Calendar. The idea is to keep it as an "outing" but be sensitive to schedules and heat.

**"We're going to turn this team around 360 degrees."**  
- **Jason Kidd, Dallas Mavericks**  
**(I just had to throw in one more)**

# The Newsletter of the Permian Basin Outing Club

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A few of our intrepid group at Caprock Canyons—  
photo by Tom Cooper

We're on the web at: [www.sibleynaturecenter.org](http://www.sibleynaturecenter.org)

## September PBOC Meeting

The September meeting of the PBOC will be held at Murray's Deli at 3211 W. Wadley here in Midland at 6 p.m. on Tuesday, September 21st. We will be finalizing plans for the September 24-26 trip to the Buffalo Trail Boy Scout Ranch. I will need a final count of how many of you are going before that time so I'll email you separately on that deadline. Even if you're not attending the trip, come eat with everyone!



Waiting for the bats to fly (and Kathy playing  
the cookie harmonica) - photo by Tom Cooper



Taffy Armstrong doing the trail bi-pedal instead of  
bi.....peddling—photo by Tom Cooper



Tom Cooper on one of the many bridges (and after sun-  
down obviously) - photo by Richard...with Tom's camera



Roger and Jan Artley on the trail....and some  
Sasquatch looking dude—photo by Tom Cooper



Taffy emerging from Clarity Tunnel—photo by Tom  
Cooper