

A Texas treasure

Big Bend National Park offers a diverse desert getaway

By Brooke Perkins
Special to The Battalion

If your mind conjures up images of a vast desert wasteland, when you think of Big Bend National Park, think again.

Big Bend, located in the west Texas bend of the Rio Grande River, is extremely varied in the number and types of different ecosystems it contains. From the Chisos Mountains to stretches of the Chihuahuan desert to the Rio Grande River valley, Big Bend includes green meadows, forested woodlands, moist oases, floodplains, grasslands, canyons, and creeks running.

According to George Wuertner, author of Texas' Big Bend Country, this great scenic and biological diversity was a leading factor in the park's selection by the United Nations as a World Biosphere Reserve, a system which serves to protect characteristic ecosystems of the world.

This environmental diversity makes for some exceptional hiking experiences. One excellent hiking trail described by Interpretive Park Ranger Karen Boucher, is the Lost Mine Trail, a self-guiding nature trail through pine, juniper and oak woodlands in the Chisos Mountains. The trail leads 2.3 miles upward to 7,650 feet and a spectacular (albeit windy) view of the desert below.

The trail was named for a legendary gold and silver mine in which Spanish explorers forced native prisoners to work, Boucher said.

"The Indians attacked the hated Spaniards, and killed them off to the last man," she said. "They then sealed the entrance to the mine so the Spaniards would not return."

"Legend has it that if a man stood in the door of the chapel at Presidio San Vicente, Mexico on Easter morning, he could see the sun's first rays striking the mountain on the exact entrance to the Lost Mine," Boucher said.

Another popular trail is the Window Trail, a leisurely path winding along Oak Creek in the Basin of the Chisos Mountains. The trail leads downward 2.8 miles to the "Window," an opening in the rocks that serves as the pour-off of Oak Creek and the only outlet of the drainage system



The Window Trail, Chisos Mountain Basin, Big Bend National Park.

for the Basin. A good time to go on this trail is in the evening in order to see the sunset through the Window.

The park boasts more than 150 miles of hiking trails, including one through the Rio Grande-carved Santa Elena Canyon and another through a volcanic ash-lined ravine called Tuff Canyon.

Two other very popular trails include a trail leading along the Rio Grande to an old abandoned settlement at a natural hot springs and a day-hike trail winding upward through woodlands and meadows of the Chisos Mountains to the South Rim where scenic vistas extending more than 100 miles into Mexico can be seen.

If a four-wheeled drive vehicle or sturdy truck is at your disposal, a trip along one of the backcountry dirt roads will take you to terrain seldom seen by most Big Bend visitors. "Road Guide to Backcountry Dirt Roads of Big Bend National Park," is a handy guide.

A must-see short trail off the Old Ore Road is Ernst Tinaja, an eroded canyon carved in ancient limestone. The colorful layers of rock have been contorted and tilted into beautiful formations.

The "tinaja" is a 12-foot-deep

pool carved into the limestone creek bed by centuries of erosion, which holds water year round. The tinaja is an important source of water for wildlife in the dry desert. Because the limestone sides of the tinaja are steep, when the water level drops animals sometimes fall in and are drowned, unable to get out.

On hikes, drives and other excursions in the park, you're likely to see a great profusion and variety of wildlife.

"The diversity of habitats at Big Bend means an abundance of wildlife species," Wuertner said.

Among the wildlife that can be sighted are 434 species of birds including the Vermilion flycatcher, the very rare Colima warbler, and golden eagles. There are 78 species of mammals including numerous bat species, javelina, Carmen white-tail deer, mule deer, blacktailed jackrabbits, ringtails, antelope, coyotes, and mountain lions. Among the cold-blooded creatures in the park are black-tailed rattlesnakes, spadefoot toads, tarantulas and scorpions.

Big Bend is also home to nu-

merous endangered and threatened species. If you are lucky enough, you might run into Texas' rarest mammal, the Mexican black bear. When hiking the Santa Elena Canyon trail look up on the cliff ledges to catch sight of the endangered peregrine falcon, or look for the rare Big Bend mosquito fish among the reeds of the natural spring on the Rio Grande Village Nature Trail.

As evidenced by the many endangered species found in Big Bend, even this vast land has felt the abuses of man. According to Dennis A. Vasquez, Big Bend Chief of Interpretation, intense grazing by domestic sheep and cattle prior to the parks establishment in 1944 caused the depletion of much of the natural grassland in Big Bend.

"These desert grasslands, which contained waist-high grasses, are now barren and will take years to replenish themselves," he said.

Many animals that previously existed in the park are now gone, Vasquez said. Among them are Desert bighorn sheep, the Mexican

wolf, and the Montezuma quail. Although an attempt to repopulate the park with desert bighorn sheep in the '70s failed when a herd contracted blue tongue disease from domestic sheep, a plan to re-introduce the Mexican wolf to the park is under consideration, he said. Also, a small herd of pronghorn antelope survives in the northern reaches of the park.

Despite the adversity, Big Bend remains a boundless, beautiful land guaranteeing delight and surprise you, so if you happen to venture into Big Bend, country take care to assist the National Park Service in abiding their founding policy — "to protect the land and to leave all within their boundaries unimpaired to the enjoyment of future generations."

Big Bend is open year round and has five campgrounds ranging from three to five dollars a night. The park entrance fee is \$5.00 per vehicle. For more information call the Park Headquarters at (915) 477-2251.

Cud grooves on new album

By Shu Hoong Yong
The Battalion

Cud
"Asquarius"
A&M

The Oxford Dictionary defines "cud" as "ruminant's half-digested food." Granted, it may not sound too appealing as a band name, but don't let that keep you away from Cud's brilliant music.

This as-yet-little-known band from Leeds was formed in 1987, and after three LPs and two EPs (including a "Peel Session" EP recorded under the support of John Peel), Cud has finally come up with a new album that should make the world sit up and pay attention.

Guitarist Mike Dunphy sets the identity of the band with his

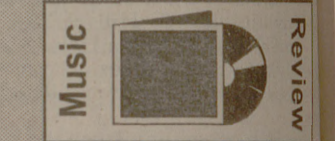
nifty finger works, almost stealing the limelight from lead singer Carl Puttnam's powerful set of lungs. In fact, the first thing that hits you smack in the face when you first put this album on, is Dunphy's jangling guitar sounds which permeate throughout the entire album.

The first track is an off-beat ditty "Rich and Strange" which cranks up Cud's rock n roll engine for a forty-minute joyride through "Asquarius." Puttnam's British-accented vocals give this song the required melodrama that greatly enhances its cheerful mood.

Second track "Easy" echoes with a heaven-may-care aloofness instead, with Puttnam breaking his voice into a wail while heavy drumming grinds in the background. The same rawness and vigor spill over to the other tracks

like "Sometimes Rightly, Sometimes Wrongly," "Magic Alex," and in particular, "Through the Roof," which should bring any house down with its insistent rhythms.

Unlike Manchester rave bands like Happy Monday and the Stone Roses, Cud seeks to prove



that guitar-driven tunes can be groovy without the use of indie dance beat. In that aspect, they have created a stylistic rock sound that is simple yet fashionable. Like what is suggested in a song title, Cud may well be the "Soul Food" for the nineties.



Goodwin, Dunphy, Potter and Puttnam of Cud.

Top 10 movies of all time...(more or less)

By Jayme Blaschke
The Battalion

Once again another summer movie season winds to a close, and once again legions of moviegoers are leaving theaters across the country complaining about the movies just seen.

"Why can't they make good movies anymore like they used to? Whatever happened to classics like Terminator 2?" many film connoisseurs wonder.

To satisfy the celluloid yearnings of these disillusioned, here is the official Battalion Lifestyles Top 10 Movies of All Time, in no particular order. All of the movie listed are currently available on video.

1) Star Wars — George Lucas' space opera masterpiece set the standard for mega-hits and revived heroic adventure. In a galaxy far, far away the ambitious Luke Skywalker, Han Solo and Princess Leia rose up against the vile Darth Vader and the Empire in a classic battle of good versus evil. Great special effects, action and acting.

2) The Empire Strikes Back — The second installment of the Star Wars trilogy was, if anything, bigger and better than the first. Knocked by many because the good guys lost, it was ambitious and broke new ground, avoiding the sequel trap of rehashing the first film. Billy Dee Williams as the friend/traitor/scoundrel was an impressive addition, as was the bounty hunter Boba Fett. Director Irvin Kershner's direction was superb, and there are no ewoks to be seen.

3) Doctor Zhivago — Set against the dramatic backdrop of the Russian Revolution, this romance is an epic of sweeping proportions. Omar Sharif as the title character is flawless in his performance, and Sir Alec Guinness is suitably stoic as the doctor's communist brother. Note: the film's depiction of the Russian winter is incredible — it should only be viewed with several thick blankets handy.

4) The Silence of the Lambs — Quite possibly the most intelligent horror movie ever made. The psychological terror of the the movie keeps audiences far more frightened than any chainsaw massacre, but this movie doesn't shirk on gore. Jodie Foster and Anthony Hopkins deserve all the praise they've received for this film.

5) Howard the Duck (just kidding).

5) Casablanca — Humphrey Bogart never says "Play it again, Sam,"

but that doesn't detract from this classic one bit. Romance, betrayal, murder, intrigue, World War 2 and plot twists galore make this one surprisingly sophisticated film for its time.

6) Monty Python and the Holy Grail — Just about the most innovative movie ever made, but also one of the funniest. John Cleese, Eric Idle, Graham Chapman and crew spend 90 minutes running away from the Knights-Who-Say-"Nee", guessing their favorite color and trying to discover the air-speed velocity of an unladen swallow. It's as silly as sounds.

7) Summer Lovers — A movie that will probably appear on no other list of top 10 movies, this Daryl Hannah sleeper, filmed entirely in Greece, is full of bad haircuts, but has some thoughtful insight into what relationships are about. A low-key film that should be viewed in a low-key mood.

8) Dr. Strangelove — Peter Sellers in about a dozen different roles. Slim Pickens riding a nuclear bomb like a bucking bronco and a political crisis so severe the entire world is in jeopardy. Director Stanley Kubrick's anti-nuke masterpiece confronts the fears of 1960s America head on, and dishes out heavy doses of very black comedy. The world is surely doomed when the Pentagon won't accept collect calls.

9) Mary Poppins — It's Disney all-time biggest hit, it's rated G and it's good. Julie Andrews and Dick Van Dyke give show-stopping performances, and the songs are neat. If anyone is too jaded to enjoy this film, they need to stop taking themselves so seriously.

10) Kelley's Heroes — One of the best, and funniest, war movies ever this spectacular drags for the first 15 minutes or so, then takes off. Clint Eastwood, Carol O'Conner, Telly Savalas, Don Rickles, Donald Sutherland... the film credits read like a who's who of Hollywood. The plot is simple enough — some soldiers in World War 2 decide to rob a French bank. The clever script stretches the bounds of its genre to make Kelley's Heroes much more than a war movie. If nothing else, the film's signature theme song, "Burning Bridges," makes the whole thing worth while. Watch for the picture's takeoffs on other films, especially Eastwood's "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly."

Lovett

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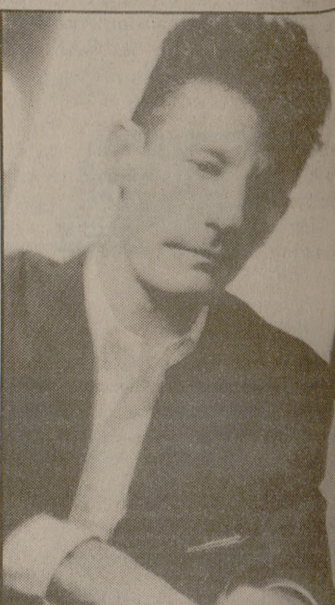
country/rock songs, they are more like waltzes.

"Family Reserve," and She's Leaving Me Because She Really Wants to," are as country as the album get. Both tunes have a little blues in them as well, and the harmonies are beautifully done.

Lovett doesn't stick to just jazz and mainstream blues, he also tries his hand with a little gospel/blues. In "Church" a gospel choir is heard along with a lot of clapping and background voices that really has a lot of rhythm. One can't help but clap along with Lovett and his group.

Blues and Jazz really seem to be Lovett's strong point in the music field and if this new LP is any inclination on what is to come from Lovett in the future, there will be no second guessing him on what musical category he falls into.

"Joshua Judges Ruth," is fantastic. You just gotta "Lovett."



Lyle Lovett

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