

Caprock Canyons State Park

A place of beauty and solitude just four hours away

by Keith Bridwell

If you've had your limit of cell phone calls, unexpected visitors and screaming kids, and hunger for a place to get away from it all, Caprock Canyons State Park is the answer to your prayers.

Located about 230 miles northwest of Bridgeport in Briscoe County, Caprock Canyons is just four hours - yet a lifetime - away.

You may forget the scenery, and spend the first day in disbelief that any place in Texas can offer this much solitude. It really takes a little adjustment time to deal with comfortably.

Once you are at peace with the silence and remoteness of the park, however, its rugged beauty may keep you spellbound - there's a new adventure around every turn.

The area was home to buffalo hunters, traders and various Indian tribes before Anglo settlement began in 1874, when counties were organized and ranches were established.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department says, "Famed cattleman Charles Goodnight moved cattle into Palo Duro Canyon in 1876. In 1882, he bought vast areas of land for John G. Adair, who became owner of the noted J.A. Ranch.

The land on which

the park is located was included in the purchase. A railroad was built into this area in 1887, and by 1890 the town of Quitaque [pronounced "Kit-a-quay"], with a population of 30, was a regular stage stop.

The use of suitable lands for farming increased as more settlers arrived in the early 1900s, but most of the broken country is still ranch land. After passing through the hands of several owners, most of the land that now lies within park boundaries was acquired in 1936 by Theo Geisler, who died on August 15, 1969. The state purchased the land in 1975, and the park's Lake Theo was named after Geisler.

Caprock Canyons State Park was opened in 1982, and consists of more than 15,313 acres (including the Trailway - a 64.25-mile rail-to-trail conversion, acquired by donation in 1992 from a railroad entrepreneur). The canyon area, itself, contains 13,906 acres and has 27 miles of hiking, biking and horseback trails.

The acquisition of that Trailway added recreational opportunities, and the multi-use trail (hike, bike and equestrian), opened in 1993, and stretches the park through Floyd, Briscoe and Hall counties, crossing 46 bridges and running through Clarity

tunnel, one of the last active railroad tunnels in Texas. The 64.25 miles of the Trailway are open to the public from Estelline [in eastern Hall County] to South Plains

whitetail deer, raccoons, coyotes, bobcats, opossums, porcupines, foxes and over 175 species of birds [including a healthy crop of roadrunners].

retreat for nature lovers and photographers.

To reach the park from Wise County, travel U.S. Highway 287 northwest of Childress to Estelline, then take State Highway 86 west through the town of Turkey to the western edge of Quitaque. Turn north to 287 northwest of the park entrance.



A summer rainstorm over the northern portion of Caprock Canyons State Park partially obscures a distant mountain range, giving a dimensional impact on descent into the park.

- Indexfotos by Keith Bridwell

[in northern Floyd County].

Vegetation in the sparse badlands consists of juniper, mesquite and cacti. Bottomland areas offer tall grasses, cottonwoods, plum thickets and hackberries.

The TPWD says, "The park harbors numerous species of wildlife such as African Aoudad sheep, mule and

The pride of Caprock Canyons is its herd of Pronghorn antelope, the official Texas State Bison Herd (the largest herd of buffalo in the state park system), and the not-often-seen Golden eagles. There is good fishing in Lake Theo for bass and catfish.

The park is situated on the edge of what is locally known as the Caprock - the exposed eastern edge of the escarpment of the southern high plains.

Caprock Canyons offers a variety of campgrounds, from lakeside to primitive camping, to numerous recreational vehicle look-up locations.

A few notes of interest: don't rely on good cell phone coverage in the park and surrounding areas - you won't find it!; overnight accommodations are sparse - the Quail Creek Lodge (a bed-and-breakfast located just outside the park and west of Quitaque), and the Hotel Turkey in Bob Wills' hometown 10 miles east of Quitaque are two choices; take plenty of water and other survival gear into the park (there are no stores in the park, and few of them nearby). Prepare yourself to be self-sufficient - commonplace amenities in Wise County are nonexistent in these sparse badlands, particularly on weekends.

Caprock Canyons State Park is a grand place to take youngsters, and just let them go. It's also a magnificent



"The Three Sisters" formation in the South Prong area of the canyon - the deepest, most remote and most scenic area of the park.



The Interpretive Center offers live narratives of the heritage of the area in a location overlooking the canyon.



The Interpretive Exhibit offers a graphic display of the history of the Caprock Canyons area.



One of the camping, fishing and swimming areas around Lake Theo.



Wind and water have combined over the years to produce dramatic erosional formations - several accessible by paved roadway, and many others on hiking, biking and horseback trails.



Lake Theo is the only reservoir in the park, and offers fishing and camping and swimming at several locations.