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LIFE ON THE SABINE

PART ONE OF FOUR

Its reputation is foul and dirty, but some people who know it well believe the river that snakes through East Texas is a natural treasure and vital to life

Ignored, but essential

STORY BY WES FERGUSON
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JACOB CROFT BOTTER



"It can get dangerous. If the river's high and you don't know what you're doing, you can get in a pickle real quick."

Shaun Crook knows the Sabine inside and out. He is the biologist for two of the state's 51 wildlife management areas, Tawakoni and the Old Sabine Bottom, a 5,700-acre reserve northeast of Lindale.

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CLICK IT UP: View a video on the river and see more photos daily online during the News-Journal's four-day series.

THE SABINE RIVER slinks ignored and unloved through the swamps and bottomlands of East Texas.

It is home to alligators that lurk in back-water sloughs, clouds of mosquitoes and snakes — lots of snakes — that writhe across the water. They sun in the low, hanging branches of hardwood trees, and can drop into the boats of unsuspecting fishermen.

In old days, the river bottom was a no man's land where bandits hid from the law. Its reputation lingers today as a dump for dead bodies. Every few years or so, deputies pull a corpse from some out-of-the-way place where civilization meets the Sabine.

"There are people in Longview that go over it every day and don't even look at it," said Tom Gallenbach, a game warden who lives on the river.

From the highway bridge at Texas 31 or Interstate 20, there's not much to see — tangles of brush and a few downed trees; a ribbon of brown water that disappears around a bend.

Photographer Jacob Croft Botter and I set out to look around the bend. We figured we'd camp on sandbars and fish for our dinner, just roughing it, and we'd go as far as we could in four days. We had camping gear, food, fishing poles, bug spray and a flat-bottom boat on loan from Shipp's Marine in Gladewater. We also had a shotgun, just in case.

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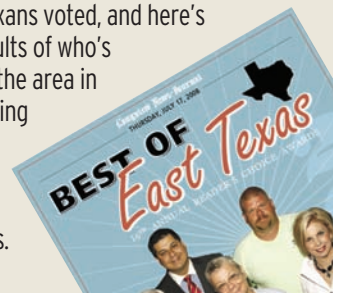
Creatures big, small, dangerous and gentle call the river their home. Numerous snakes, all kinds of waterfowl and even alligators often are spotted.

The series

- **Today:** Getting started
- **Friday:** The first test
- **Saturday:** Unwelcome guests
- **Sunday:** Red-neck heaven

Find it inside

East Texans voted, and here's the results of who's tops in the area in everything from food to services.



Shuttle to KC from Longview discussed

BY JIMMY ISAAC
jisaac@longview-news.com

Each weekday, Chris Craddock commutes from his Longview home to Kilgore College where he works. With gas costing nearly \$4 a gallon, he spends as much as \$200 a month on fuel.

Craddock isn't alone in his daily round trip across the Sabine River. College officials say at least 70 percent of its more than 5,000 students are Longview residents.

In a five-month semester, those students could be paying as much as \$1,000 for gas. By comparison, Kilgore College tuition for 12 hours of course work is \$1,100.

In response, Kilgore College might contract with two Gregg County transportation operators to provide shuttle service between the college's main campus and the Kilgore college Longview campus as early as this fall.

Along with a contract with either See **SHUTTLE**, Page 6A

New report confirms consumers' wallet pinch

June inflation rises at highest rate in 17 years

BY MICHAEL M. GRYNBAUM
New York Times News Service

Almost everything that consumers spent money on last month — from food to electricity and gasoline — took a bigger piece of their paychecks.

Inflation in June rose at the fastest rate in 17 years, the government said Wednesday, just a day after the chairman of the Federal Reserve warned that inflation posed a significant risk to the nation's economic outlook.

The Consumer Price Index, which measures prices of a batch of common household products, rose 1.1 percent in June, the Labor Department said. That increase caps a year in which inflation has surged to proportions seen by some as threatening the stability of the American economy.

In the past 12 months, the price index has risen 5 percent, the biggest annual See **INFLATION**, Page 6A

THE MORNING RUSH

TODAY'S WEATHER



Partly cloudy. High of 97.
SEVEN-DAY FORECAST, PAGE 5B

First Ozone Action Day

Today is the first Ozone Action Day of the summer for Northeast Texas. Because of hot weather and little or no wind, emissions (such as those from vehicles and power plants) are expected to form a smog or haze. This mixture, known as ozone, endangers public health. **More on weather, Page 5B.**

THE NATION

Bush blocks records on CIA leak case

President Bush invoked executive privilege to stop Congress from reviewing a report on the CIA leak case. **Page 3A**

SPORTS

Quarterback education

Young QBs found pigskin knowledge at the Gilmer Passing Academy. **Page 1C**

HEALTH

Low-pressure exercise

If you love to stay active but can't stand to jar your joints, water exercise is for you. Several centers in Longview offer classes. **Page 7A**

EAST TEXAS

Area toddler drowns

A Union Grove 1-year-old playing with her toddler sister drowned after finding a way out of a front yard gate and climbing into a small pool about three feet deep. **Page 1B**



FIND IT ONLINE

Being Me

Which is better, "The Godfather" or "Scarface"? Preston Mitchell has a passion for movies, and he'll tell you straight up. See his story only on the news-journal.com video series, "Being Me."

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Wednesday's lottery

Pick Three A.M.1-8-7	Cash Five4-8-9-26-33
Pick Three P.M.7-8-6	Powerball5-15-23-29-42
Lotto Texas5-17-31-32-43-47	Powerball: 17



Wes Ferguson

John "Wes" Ferguson is a 1998 graduate of Sabine High School. He attended Kilgore College and graduated with a journalism degree from the University of Texas at Austin in 2004. Wes worked as an intern for the News-Journal off and on from 1999 to 2003. He was a full-time writer from 2004 to 2005 before leaving to travel and write. Wes lives part time in Colorado, where he teaches skiing. From time to time, he returns to East Texas, where he's always welcomed at the News-Journal.



Jacob Croft Botter

The Sabine River trip marked Jacob Croft Botter's last full-time assignment with the News-Journal. The Hallsville native has returned to Louisiana, where he earned a master of fine arts degree from the Louisiana State University. Jacob has been a photo instructor in the past and continues to pursue fine arts photography. His work has been published and displayed in various books and exhibits, including the Longview Museum of Fine Art's "Coming Home" show, which opens Saturday.



History and facts about the Sabine River

- The Sabine River flows for 555 miles, from Hunt County in northeast Texas all the way to the Gulf of Mexico. The headwaters of the Sabine are about two miles west of Celeste at a fork called Cowleach Fork. The fork is named for an early Indian chief who lived in the area.
- The name Sabine comes from the Spanish word for cypress. The original name was Rio de Sabinas, or "River of Cypress." That's because of the tremendous growth of cypress trees along the lower Sabine River.
- Alger "Texas" Alexander, the early Texas blues musician, wrote a song called the "Sabine River Blues." The lyrics go like this: "Sabine River, mama, so deep and wide, oh Lordy. Sabine River, mama, so deep and wide, I can see my baby on the other side."
- Writer Jack Kerouac also mentions the Sabine River (he called it an "evil old river") in his 1957 novel, "On the Road."
- There have been inhabitants along the Sabine River for thousands of years. It's been thought the Caddos lived beside the Sabine as early as 780 A.D. Early Caddo mounds have been found along the river.
- The early Spanish considered the area

west of the Sabine River to be Spanish territory. French traders also used the Sabine, and Spain and France each claimed the area.

■ After the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, the United States and Spain create in 1806 what was called the Neutral Ground. That area was from the Arroyo Hondo in Louisiana west to the Sabine River, which covered a large portion of East Texas. For more than a dozen years, there was no law there, which attracted hundreds of bandits and ruffians who knew they wouldn't have to answer for their actions.

— Van Craddock, East Texas historian

Water need threatens river habitat

From Page 1A

We left on the last Tuesday in June.

How bad could it be?

Floods on the Sabine wash the banks out from under trees. The trees cave into the water, where they snarl debris in a current that can run from lethargic to raging in a matter of hours. Where the river is narrow, the logjams make navigation tricky, and often impossible.

"It can get dangerous. If the river's high and you don't know what you're doing, you can get in a pickle real quick," said Shaun Crook, a state wildlife biologist. "I've almost flipped several boats when you get out in that fast current."

Crook is a tall man with a grizzly beard. He wears a denim shirt, tucked into denim jeans, tucked into knee-high rubber boots.

It gets muddy where he works.

Crook is the biologist for two of the state's 51 wildlife management areas, Tawakoni and the Old Sabine Bottom, a 5,700-acre reserve northeast of his hometown of Lindale.

Crook has explored the river along the Old Sabine, and he didn't think we stood much of a chance boating through it. Spring floods had receded, and the water was full of downed trees.

"You're probably gonna come into contact with logjams you can't get around when it's that low," he said. "Sometimes you can go through them if they're real loose, but it's gonna be tough getting up and down that river right now. You probably won't be able to run the whole length of the WMA."

Crook had been spending much of his time doing paperwork, or counting birds and analyzing trees in the forest. He was itching to get back on the river. He didn't think we could handle it by ourselves, but he didn't mind taking us for a ride in his boat, courtesy of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Draining nature's kidneys

It was a cloudy summer Tuesday on the Sabine. The motor hummed as Crook sped around the many logjams that cluttered our path. Occasionally, low tree branches smacked us in the face.

"Watch out," Crook shouted. "Sometimes you're just gonna have to duck down and take it."

We had put into the river at a public boat ramp of mud and dirt at the end of a truck trail on the Old Sabine Bottom, about 10 miles northeast of Lindale. We cruised toward our destination south of Hawkins, a journey that could take 30 minutes or four hours, depending on water levels that had been falling about a foot a day.

The river was about 6 feet deep, but it can drop to less than a couple of feet by late summer, Crook said. During flood times, the water can climb to above 30 feet.

When the river rises high enough, usually in the winter or spring, it surges over the banks. The floodwaters spill into the surrounding bottomlands, creating wetlands and triggering an important cycle in the health of the river, Crook said.

"The wetlands act like kidneys to filter out pollution, heavy metals and effluence" — think sewage — "that come from up above us," he said.

The wetlands trap and break down the harmful bits that have churned in the current. They also filter the silt that makes the water cloudy.

Floodwater trapped in the wetlands soaks into the ground. Eventually, it seeps back into streams, lakes and rivers — and eventually our drinking water — cleaned of much of the harmful sediment.

That's how it has worked for thousands of years, but it's happening less, Crook said. He said Texas has lost three-fourths of its bottomland hardwoods in the past two centuries. And for the past four decades, water flow and floods along the up-



Jacob Croft Botter/News-Journal Photo

"The wetlands act like kidneys to filter out pollution, heavy metals and effluence that come from up above us."

State wildlife biologist Shaun Crook believes the wetlands around the Sabine play an important role in the area, but reservoirs are threatening those wetlands. Some of the area's drinking water comes from the Sabine, and the wetlands are able to clean that water.



Members of an 84-year-old hunting club on the north bank of the Sabine — the Little Sandy Hunting and Fishing Club — camp in covered barges that float on the river.

Jacob Croft Botter News-Journal Photo

Little Sandy Hunting and Fishing Club — turned over its 3,800 acres to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. The river authority sued, but a judge's order effectively killed plans for the reservoir.

The boat goes airborne

Two decades later, Little Sandy club members still hunt and fish with exclusive rights to the federal refuge. Many of them camp in covered barges that float on the river.

More importantly, the refuge is home to what many people consider the last substantial forest of old growth bottomland hardwoods in Texas.

"There are some trees over there that us three holding out hand to hand couldn't reach around them," Crook said.

Across the river from Little Sandy at the Old Sabine Bottom, state wildlife managers are allowing younger trees to grow. The forest will reach old growth status in about half a century, Crook said.

The biologist rounded a bend in the river. He came to another obstacle — a downed log that peeked two or three inches from the water's surface.

"OK, hang on," Crook said. "I'm gonna jump it."

He mashed the accelerator and hit the log dead-on, seesawing his boat across it. He popped the propeller out of the water right before it crushed against the wood, and we fell with a thud back into the river.

Soon we reached our destination — the FM 14 bridge south of Hawkins.

We had completed our first day on the river. Tomorrow, though, would be different. We'd be steering our own boat, without Crook to guide us. Tatum said we could expect more logjams and little concrete dams, called weirs, that might snag our boat as we floated toward Longview.

"Once you leave that bridge and you're heading downstream, you've got to be prepared," he said. "It's a slow-moving river, but it's misleading. You have to be careful because you can get into all kinds of things out there."



Jacob Croft Botter/News-Journal Photo

A field of palmetto plants is part of the natural beauty of the Old Sabine Bottom Wildlife Management Area.

per Sabine have depended on water levels in Lake Tawakoni, a reservoir built at the head of the river.

"Before Tawakoni, we had larger and longer floods," Crook said.

Until heavy rains in 2007, he said, the Old Sabine Bottom hadn't flooded in about five years. After the drought, many ducks and other wetland creatures are only starting to return.

"There's always a threat to bottomland hardwood habitat, but the biggest threat right now is reservoirs, because everybody needs wa-

ter," he said.

So how does one strike a balance between conservation and our growing thirst for water?

Crook laughed and shook his head.

"I don't know," he said. "It's a very, very sticky situation."

Scaring turtles, skirting logjams

Crook nosed the boat through loose debris. He eased off the gas.

A fallen log straddled the water

like a small bridge, just a few feet above the surface. We crawled into the bottom of the boat and coasted underneath it, clearing the log by inches.

"All right, we're good," Crook said. "Till the next logjam."

Snowy egrets and little blue herons glided alongside our boat before veering over the trees. Turtles plopped into the water, and palmetto plants waved like spiky green fans on the tall banks. It was hard to fathom that less than 25 years earlier, this place had almost been submerged in the bottom of a reservoir known as Waters Bluff.

It would have been an excellent reservoir, said Jack Tatum, water resources manager for the Sabine River Authority, the state agency that oversees the river and its watershed area. The reservoir would have supplied the water needs of the region for years to come, he said.

"In Texas, our rivers are ephemeral in nature. There is a lot of flow at times and no flow at other times. Unless you have a storage project, how do you plan for future water needs?" he said. "Even with conservation, if you're gonna double the population of the state, you're gonna have to meet those needs."

Conservation groups fought the construction of Waters Bluff. In 1986, an 84-year-old hunting club on the north bank of the Sabine — the

Officials say Titus man doused girlfriend, child with gasoline

FROM STAFF REPORTS

Titus County sheriff's officials have charged two men with aggravated assault in separate incidents.

One of the men threatened to kill the mother of his child, and the other man doused his girlfriend and her 5-year-old son with gasoline and threatened to set them on fire, the sheriff's office reported.

According to the sheriff's office, a woman took the 19-month-old daughter she shares with Kyle Lee Landrum to his residence on CR 4250 on July 10. She said Landrum pointed a pistol at her and threatened to kill her while removing his daughter from the vehicle, a press release from the sheriff's office said. Landrum grabbed the woman by the throat and

fired one shot above her, officials said. The woman said Landrum ordered her from the car. She refused, and he turned the gun around and hit her on the back of the head, the sheriff's office reported. The woman then fled from the residence. Officers searched Landrum's residence and found three handguns and one spent

See *TITUS*, Page 3B



Animal blessings

The Rev. Michael L. Schutz, left, blesses animals Thursday at the School for Little Children at First United Methodist Church in Longview.

Kevin Green
 News-Journal Photo

LIFE ON THE SABINE

PART TWO OF FOUR

What's to be found on the river? Fish, snakes, abandoned structures and oil rigs, and sometimes people. And often, you'll find a good story.

'Born and raised'

STORY BY WES FERGUSON
 PHOTOGRAPHY BY JACOB CROFT BOTTER



Whatever these giant, concrete pillars were, nature mostly has engulfed them and now owns them for her own uses. The abandoned structures can be found at random spots along the banks of the Sabine River.

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CLICK IT UP: Read past stories in this series, see additional photos and video from the trip online.

TOWERING CONCRETE pillars have crumbled into ruins littering the river. The encroaching forest has wrapped its vines around what is left standing, swallowing the ancient and abandoned structures.

Our little flatbottom boat motored past abandoned pillars that rose from either bank of the Sabine River like monuments to a vanished people. The boat skirted wooden platforms that rotted on the river's edge. Rusting pipes swayed in the current.

It was the second morning of a four-day trip down the Sabine River. The water was wide and calm and brown as we boated downstream from U.S. 271 just south of Gladewater headed toward Longview. Concrete blocks squatted like little pyramids on the banks, while others lay like broken tombstones.

A snake slithered in the water. Though the wide majority of snakes on the Sabine River are harmless, one must watch for the venomous ones that are known to bite, advised Ricky Maxey, a state wildlife biologist in Marshall.

"I wouldn't be overly concerned. They're just trying to make a living, looking for things to eat, and most of the time they're looking to get away from humans," he said.

The morning passed with an easy calm. At lunch time, we tied our boat to a wide tree limb

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6B



Along the banks of the Sabine sit structures no longer in use, such as the building that once was The Sandbar and Marina on River Road, west of Texas 42.



Don McClendon said he grew up near the river exploring ancient Indian hunting and fishing grounds. "I've found a zillion arrowheads down here," he said. "You'll talk to people who just think the Sabine River is an old, nasty, muddy river, but we swam in it all our lives, skied in it. It's just like a lake, but it changes every year. When it floods and goes back down there's always something different."

The series

- **Thursday:** Getting started
- **Today:** The first test
- **Saturday:** Unwelcome guests
- **Sunday:** Redneck heaven

LISD hires director

Special ed administrator one of three new officials employed this summer

BY JIMMY ISAAC
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Vicki Summers, who has led special education efforts in four Gregg County schools for a decade, is moving to Longview Independent School District.

Trustees hired Summers this week to succeed Special Education Director Vicki Green, who retired in the spring after some 30 years with the district, said LISD spokesman Brian Bowman. Summers will receive an \$85,000 annual salary, but a start date has not been set, Bowman said.

Summers has spent the past 35 years in local education. Since 1998, she has worked with four districts — Sabine, Gladewater, Spring Hill and White Oak — as director of the Gregg County Special Education Shared Service Arrangement. Before that, she spent 15 years as Pine Tree ISD's speech/language pathologist, three years as an educational diagnostician for the Harrison County Special Education Cooperative, and seven years as director of the Rusk County Special Education Cooperative.

From 2005 to 2007, Summers was recognized by the Texas Education Agency for her assistance in planning and implementing a multisensory program for children who have severe cognitive disabilities.

Summers is the third administrator
 See *LISD*, Page 3B

Renovations could mean tax rate drop

Hughes Springs schools benefit from election to raise operations fund

BY CHRISTINA LANE
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When parents drive their children to school in Hughes Springs on Aug. 25, they will pull into new parking lots that were resurfaced during the summer break.

Because those and other renovations are being completed this summer, residents might see a decrease in their tax rate, Superintendent Rick Ogden said Wednesday.

The \$588,000 in parking lot renovations is being paid from the school district's general fund, along with other projects, Ogden said.

Money in the fund increased after voters approved a tax rate of \$1.23 per \$100 in taxable value in a 2007 election, he added.

The election was necessary to raise the maintenance and operations side of the tax rate above the state-allowed maximum.

Because the district has been able to complete its major projects, the tax rate could decrease, Ogden said. Ogden declined to comment on how much the tax rate could go down because the
 See *HUGHES SPRINGS*, Page 3B

"When I was growing up, you couldn't even eat the fish in this river it was so polluted. (Oilfield companies) just dumped saltwater into the river, and the fish tasted bad. We had to fish above Gladewater to get fish we could eat. But it's been cleaned up, and there's good fishing now."

Elton P. Woodall

Sabine River resident and trapper



Elton P. Woodall has lived most of his life on the river. Before he became sick recently, he trapped beavers, raccoons, bobcats and even river otters, selling the pelts to a distributor in Canada. Woodall works near his home in a shop on a little island in the middle of a pond. The shop is full of reminders of where he lives, such as the fishing lure decoration (top right) and equipment that stretches pelts (bottom right), on which an insect rests.

Fish are 'fine' in Sabine's waters

From Page 1B

that shaded the water. Tall oaks and elms crowded the other bank.

"It's so beautiful down here," said photographer Jake Botter. "It's so much prettier than I think about it."

East Texas also is hillier than many people realize. Pressing on, we passed bluffs that tower 30 or 40 feet above the river. On one, cows rested under pine trees, watching us as they chewed.

Approaching Texas 42, a few miles south of White Oak, houses began to appear on the southwestern bank. A black dog swam in the water. Maybe his owner was nearby.

The Indians left their fish traps

Sure enough, the dog belonged to Don McClendon, a man who wore a handlebar mustache, Red Wing boots and a pair of short pants. He was spending his afternoon on an old John Deere tractor, leveling dirt at his future home site about 40 feet above the river.

McClendon said he grew up nearby, exploring ancient Indian hunting and fishing grounds.

"I've found a zillion arrowheads down here," he said. "Down about 20 feet from where your boat's parked, there's an old Indian fish trap."

Up and down the river, he said, you can see Indian fish traps late in summer when the water's low.

Indians built U-shaped walls of river stone that looked like jetties, he said. The walls blocked the fish's passage through the channel, leaving them easy prey for an Indian's spear.

The fish traps might have belonged to the Caddo Indians, he said, who had been living in the Sabine River basin for around 800 years when the Spanish reached the area in the 16th century.

Long before the Caddos, the basin was home to the 12,000-year-old Clovis culture, whose chiseled spear points McClendon and others still find on banks and riverbeds.

McClendon looked across the river, admiring the view. He said it's a peaceful place to sit and drink coffee in the morning.

"You'll talk to people who just think the Sabine River is an old, nasty, muddy river, but we swam in it all our lives, skied in it," he said. "It's just like a lake, but it changes every year. When it floods and goes back down there's always something different."

McClendon said no one is more of a Sabine River expert than his downriver neighbor, Elton P. Woodall. We found him on a high bank above the river at the sprawling shack he's been building since he moved in 10 years ago.

"I've lived on the river a pretty good while," Woodall said. "I was born and raised here, and I've been as far as you can go both ways."

Clean water and fine-tasting fish

Woodall is a trapper. Before he got sick a few months ago, he snared

beavers, raccoons, bobcats and river otters along the Sabine River.

After he caught a critter he skinned and stretched it in a shop he built on an island in a wide pond that sits in his front yard, a stone's throw from the river.

A wooden bridge gets him from his yard to the island every day. The island gives him privacy when he works, he said.

Woodall sells the pelts to a distributor in Canada. He also catches and sells catfish to the public.

"Just show up and ask for them," he said.

"I've got them in the freezer. Don't know how many I have left, since I've been sick two or three months."

Woodall figures the nature of his illness is nobody's business but his own. It is serious, though. On the last Wednesday afternoon in June, he rested in a leather recliner under the tin-roof carport next to his house. An industrial-sized box fan blew cool air on his face.

He said his father ran trotlines on the Sabine when he was a child, and he and his friends used to float down the river on inner tubes.

The Sabine has changed dramatically since those days, he said, especially in regard to the oilfield equipment that has been left to decay along the river banks.

"When I was growing up, you couldn't even eat the fish in this river it was so polluted," he said. "(Oilfield companies) just dumped saltwater into the river, and the fish tasted bad. We had to fish above Gladewater to get fish we could eat. But it's been cleaned up, and there's good fishing now. The fish taste fine."

Some East Texans might think their river is dirty, but that's just not the case anymore, said Jack Tatum, water resources manager for the Sabine River Authority.

In the 1970s and '80s, the state government began cleaning the Sabine and other rivers of wastewater contaminants.

Regulators streamlined the standards for water that pours into the river from industries and sewage treatment facilities, and the river authority and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality continue to monitor the Sabine and its tributaries.

Especially downstream from Longview, the Sabine's watershed sometimes has low levels of dissolved oxygen, which can harm fish.

A couple of monitoring sites occasionally show high levels of bacteria after heavy rainfalls, but the river water is generally safe, according to river authority reports.

Tatum said there are no restrictions on fish consumption or bodily contact with the Sabine River water.

"The river's in better shape than it's been in many, many years as far as water quality," Tatum said.

"We've come a long way in protecting our water. Generally speaking, the water quality is excellent throughout the Sabine watershed."



Woodall skins and stretches the critters he traps in this shop he built on an island in a pond that sits in his front yard, right by the river. A wooden bridge gets him from his yard to the island every day. His island gives him privacy when he works, he said.

The Sabine's path to the Gulf of Mexico

- Three forks of the Sabine River merge in Lake Tawakoni, just south of Greenville, to form the Sabine River proper.
- Southeast of Lake Tawakoni, the river forms the boundary lines between Rains and Van Zandt, Van Zandt and Wood, Wood and Smith, and Smith and Upshur counties.
- The river continues into Gregg County, flowing just south of Gladewater, Clarksville City, White Oak and Longview and on to Lakeport and Easton.
- Originally, the Sabine River was the southern boundary of Gregg County when it was created in 1873. In April 1874, another 141 square miles south of the Sabine River in Rusk County were added to Gregg County.
- From Gregg County, the Sabine River forms part of the Rusk-Harrison county boundary, then turns south into Panola County where the river continues east of Carthage.
- The river empties into Toledo Bend Reservoir in extreme southeast Panola County. From there, it forms the border between Texas and Louisiana.
- At the end of its 555-mile journey, the Sabine discharges more water into the Gulf of Mexico than any other Texas river.

— Van Craddock and Wes Ferguson

Frog legs are good eating

Woodall said the Sabine River is home to more game now than at any other time in his 60 years. The previous weekend, he said, his grandchildren caught more than 30 frogs.

"They go up and down the river catching bullfrogs with their hands. They're really good eating," he said. "We fry most of them, just like fried chicken."

The afternoon was getting late. It was time to move on, but not before a warning from Woodall:

"Y'all be careful. You can turn a boat over in that river," he said. "I've done it a hundred times."

He said to watch for a concrete barrier, called a weir, just beneath the water between Texas 42 and Texas 31.

"It's bad dangerous," he said. "I sunk my boat there in January and nearly drowned. Make sure you get out and have a look around before you do anything."

First test of nautical skill

Old oil derricks stretch up from platforms on the water around Texas 42. Some of them are still in use. The river seemed to narrow, and we dodged frequent trees that clogged the channel.

A few miles downstream from Texas 42, we had to stop.

A pair of trees had fallen from opposite bluffs. They formed a wall where they met in the middle of the river, snagging logs and limbs in a massive tangle of woody debris. A thick, gray snake slithered among the branches.

There was no way around.

The smaller of the two trees lay mostly submerged, peeking two or three inches above the water's surface. Only the day before, our river guide had jumped a similar log in his flat-bottom boat.

"Oh, we got this," I said.

Jake wasn't so sure. The logjam diverted the swift current under and around itself. He feared that if the boat struck high center, we would be sucked into the water's path and spun sideways, quickly capsizing.

To make matters worse, a sharp knob jutted from the smaller tree in the only place we thought we could cross. What if we gashed the bottom of our borrowed boat?

We docked to have a look around.

Clinging to exposed pine tree roots, we scrambled up a steep bank of red clay. If we unloaded our gear and somehow hoisted the

16-foot-long boat over the bank, we thought we could walk it about a hundred yards along a game trail and put in just downstream of the logjam. It was an hours-long prospect.

On cue, storm clouds rolled in dark and ominous.

We had to go for it. We gunned the boat toward the lower log to hit it full-speed and jump it, hoping we wouldn't crush the propeller. We were about to hit the log. At the last second, we veered away. We raced for it a second time: We got closer. We were almost upon it. We turned off.

"I just can't do it," Jake said. "I've never gone over anything like that."

Defeated, we called my brother to pick us up. As we backtracked to the highway crossing, the first of the raindrops stung our faces and rippled on the river.

Call us dismal failures

Back at Texas 42, Ronnie King Jr. was loading his tank of a boat at a private ramp just west of the highway.

King, from White Oak, had spent the afternoon riding the river. He said our logjam was pretty easy to cross when heading downstream.

It was only a little trickier on the way back up, he added. That didn't make us feel any better.

"When you're about to jump a log, run it like it's stolen," driving as fast as possible, he advised.

King gave us his phone number. "We run the river pretty hard," he said of himself and a few buddies. "If, God forbid, you lock a motor up, you give us a call and we'll get you drug out of there."

It was only our second day on the river—our first by ourselves—and already the trip was in peril. What if we had gotten over that logjam only to face another, meaner one just a few miles downstream?

"I hope this isn't a sign of what's to come," my brother said.



VAN CRADDOCK

Area hombre's close shave proved fatal

Seaborn Barnes was an East Texas outlaw who just couldn't get any respect. "Seab" Barnes, a Cass County native, died July 19, 1878, when he and Sam Bass tried to rob the bank in Round Rock north of Austin. Folks in Linden knew young Barnes as a troublemaker. Some said he was as mean as Cullen Baker, the Cass County bandit who terrorized post-Civil War East Texas before dying of lead poisoning in 1868. By the age of 17, Barnes had been jailed in Fort Worth for a shooting incident. He wound up in Denton working as a potter's helper. That's where he met up with Sam Bass. An Indiana native, Bass had robbed trains, banks and stagecoaches from Nebraska to Texas. Outlawry seemed a glamorous life to Barnes, who joined Bass' gang and became the bandit's second-in-command. Between February and April 1878, the gang held up trains in the Dallas suburbs of Allen, Hutchins and Mesquite. A gunfight at Mesquite resulted in Barnes being shot through both legs, but he was able to escape with the rest of the gang.

Adam's apple

In early June, Bass and his cronies rode into Denton and retrieved two horses that the Denton County sheriff had taken from Sam. The Dallas Herald reported the gang was composed of "Sam Bass, Henry Underwood, Frank Jackson, Charles Carter and two others, one of whom is said to be named Barnes." At this point, the Texas Rangers got involved in tracking down the Bass Gang, which found support from some residents of North and East Texas. "The arrest of 12 or 15 men who are now lying in jail in Tyler as accomplices shows that the robbers had aid and abettors in the surrounding country," reported the Dallas Herald. Once Barnes' identity was known, an 1878 contemporary account noted he was "rather slender of build, light complexion, dark hazel eyes, his throat marked with a huge Adam's apple ... and rough in his demeanor." In July, Bass decided to rob the bank at Round Rock. However, gang member Jim Murphy had turned informer and tipped off the Rangers to the gang's Central Texas plans.

Shooting starts

On July 19, 1878, Bass and Barnes were casing the Round Rock bank when peace officers approached them. The outlaws drew their weapons, killing deputy Ellis Grimes and wounding deputy Morris Moore. Texas Ranger Richard Ware was getting a shave across the street when he heard the gunshots. Emerging from the barber shop with lather on his face, Ware drew his pistol and fired a shot into Seaborn Barnes' head as he attempted to mount his horse. The East Texan died almost immediately. Lawmen also shot Bass, who rode out of town but was found the next day not far from Round Rock. Bass died on July 21. It was his 27th birthday. Visitors to Round Rock today will find Barnes' grave lying next to the tombstone of Sam Bass. The East Texan's marker reads in part: "Here lies Seaborn Barnes, a member of the Sam Bass gang. Born in Cass County, Texas. He was right bower (anchor) to Sam Bass." The Round Rock Cemetery sits beside Sam Bass Road. Round Rock's community theatre and youth baseball league also are named for Sam Bass. In Cass County, Bloomburg annually celebrates the Cullen Baker Country Fair. (It's Nov. 1 this year.) No streets or fairs commemorate the memory of "Seab" Barnes. Van "Quick Draw" Craddock's e-mail address is vanccraddock@sbccglobal.net.

Reserve deputy charged with false identification

BY RANDY ROSS
 rross@longview-news.com



William Waller

A Gregg County Sheriff's Office reserve deputy has resigned after being arrested on accusations that he falsely identified himself as a state game warden. William Bryan Waller, 61, of Tyler was arrested in Smith County on the misdemeanor charge of false identification as a peace officer. According to a Texas Parks and Wildlife Department report, Waller attend-

ed a Texas Master Naturalist training class at the department's Nature Center in Tyler on Feb. 2. Waller had with him a game warden badge, which he displayed to another person and identified himself as an undercover game warden. A department investigator interviewed Waller on June 20, and he gave a statement saying he had the badge made about 10 years ago. "I showed it to one or two students, and I told them I was a game warden," the department report quotes Waller as saying. "I do not know why I did that, maybe stupidity." Texas Parks and Wildlife Department officials arrested Waller on June 26. See DEPUTY, Page 4B

Longview fire marshal leaves for new position

BY RANDY ROSS
 rross@longview-news.com

Longview Fire Marshal Mark Moore might be leaving the Longview Fire Department, but his public service is far from finished. After more than 24 years working with the Longview Fire Department, Moore has announced he will retire on July 31. He plans to take a month of vacation before beginning a new job with the Gregg County Sheriff's Office. The Gilmer native's exposure to public service began

early in his life. His grandfather was a Gilmer firefighter and his father was a sheriff's deputy. "I didn't know anything else," Moore said with a laugh. Moore's career as a firefighter began in the early 1980s when he joined the Gilmer Fire Department. He transferred to Longview in 1984, and he said he has worked in just about every section of the department, including maintenance, medical and fire suppression. He became the fire marshal in See MOORE, Page 3B

LIFE ON THE SABINE
 PART THREE OF FOUR

Along the river sit ghost communities – once thriving towns in the 1800s that fed on the Sabine and became extinct as the Civil War began.

Lost towns

STORY BY WES FERGUSON
 PHOTOGRAPHY BY JACOB CROFT BOTTER



Above, Mack Smith fishes on the Sabine River at the U.S. 59 bridge south of Marshall. At left, the number of startlingly white sand beaches on the Sabine's banks throughout Panola County might surprise some people.

news-journal.com

CLICK IT UP: Read past stories in this series, see additional photos and video from the trip online.

LIGHTNING FLASHED in the western sky. A thunderstorm rolled toward the river. And here were two guys climbing into a metal boat on an open body of water. Smart. A rainy night approached on the second day of our journey down the Sabine River. We sat underneath a bridge in Lakeport, feeling like a couple of bums, as we waited for the downpour to subside. This trip was not going according to plan. A few hours earlier, photographer Jacob Croft Botter and I had come to a logjam we couldn't get over or around.

We backtracked to a highway crossing south of White Oak and hauled our borrowed boat to the next public boat ramp at Texas 149 in Lakeport. The maneuver bypassed most of the Sabine around Longview and Gregg County, a narrow, winding stretch that several people said was worth seeing. "When you get to that part of the river, it seems like you're lost in the middle of nowhere," said Ronnie King Jr., a resident of White Oak who often fishes on the Sabine. "It's quiet, and you don't see civilization. It's just you and your boat and your rod and your reel, enjoying life." We missed the chance to look for any signs of Fredonia, a riverport that once bustled on the southern banks of the Sabine River, long before anyone ever heard of a younger town miles to the north — Longview. **CONTINUED ON PAGE 6B**

The series

- **Thursday:** Getting started
- **Friday:** The first test
- **Today:** Unwelcome guests
- **Sunday:** Red-neck heaven



A boater travels up the Sabine on a picture-perfect day. Despite its reputation as dirty and muddy, many East Texans flock to the river as a source of peace and tranquility.

Watch out for alligator gar, shoals

From Page 1B Fredonia, a town that vanished

In the years between Texas Independence and the Civil War, little towns sprang up at ferry crossings along the Sabine in East Texas. The cotton trade was thriving, and plantation owners loaded their crops onto barges that steamed down the Sabine to New Orleans and Galveston.

Haden Edwards, a pioneer and entrepreneur in Nacogdoches, had been run out of Texas in 1827 for leading a failed revolt against the Mexican government. He returned during the Texas Revolution, and in 1839, he founded the town of Fredonia where Interstate 20 and FM 2087 meet south of Longview.

By the 1850s, the ferry crossing and riverport had three warehouses and 40 to 50 buildings, including a brick kiln and a post office.

During the Civil War, men left the town to fight, and the ones who stayed couldn't find a market for their cotton. The town disappeared. In the years that followed, freed black people established a settlement a couple of miles to the south. They also called their community Fredonia, and it's still there today.

But we missed all that. The rain and a ticking clock kept us from heading upstream on a search for a town that's no longer there.

Creeneing over alligator gar

The storm passed after an hour and a half. We left the shelter of the Texas 149 bridge, and the river was dark and green in the shadows. We were left with just enough twilight to set up camp on a muddy spot a mile or so downriver, beside a tree with gnarled limbs that stretched down to the water.

We split a can of beef stew, and slept like rocks.

In the morning, the previous night's rain dripped from saturated bluffs and fell in droplets to the river. Red clay bled down the banks. Jake let me steer the boat, and I promptly ran over two alligator gar and drove sideways onto the bank. The back end of the boat dipped below the river's surface, filling our vessel with water that Jake scooped out with a plastic water bottle. He resumed control of the motor.

We looked for signs of the ferry that once moved people to and from the rowdy river port of Camden, where you could drink in saloons and stay at a two-story hotel in the 1850s, as long as you didn't mind sharing your

bed with a stranger.

Where's this thriving river port?

Camden grew in the 1800s at the river crossing of the Trammel Trace, a path that was first used by Indians and later became one of the main routes for Americans who were settling in Texas. A stagecoach line connected the town to Shreveport and Henderson.

Jerry Don Watt, an amateur historian from Tatum, calls Camden the former "hub of East Texas" and the "queen city of the upper Sabine."

Like Fredonia, Camden declined during the Civil War. When the Southern Pacific Railroad chose to bypass the town in 1871, the remaining white residents moved to Tatum and the newly formed town of Longview, Watt said.

Many of the black residents stayed. In 1949, they changed the name to Easton, and about 550 people still live there.

"It's hard to imagine today that Camden was such a thriving community," Watt said. "It is my belief that if the railroad had followed the old stagecoach line, then Camden would have been what Longview is now, the largest town in this part of East Texas."

The Sabine's raging rapids

We heard churning water in the distance. Upstream from Texas 43, a couple of hours past Easton, we came to the first of the lignite shoals; seams of craggy black coal that snag boats in the water.

They are the same deposits miners dig from sites around East Texas.

We had been warned about the many shoals that appear throughout northern Panola County. When the water's not high, they create rapids and even a 2-foot waterfall on the wide, shallow river.

"There's a pretty strong hydraulic current behind that thing," state wildlife biologist Ricky Maxey had advised. "Be safe and look for where the most water passes."

The current pulled us toward the churning water as we searched for the safest place to enter. The propeller scraped the lignite, and Jake killed the motor and lifted the prop from the water.

We would have to paddle. The boat plunged into the rapids, and we slipped into a whirlpool, spinning backward. The boat stuck against the sharp lignite. Jake leaped into the knee-high current to right the



Sandra Hodge of Carthage talks about her love of fishing on the Sabine. Hodge has 19 fishing poles - all named. "If you've got a lot of stress, come down here and watch that water, and it just washes away your concerns," she says.

boat; I used our one paddle to push off against the rocks.

We jerked free. Jake hopped in, and we again were on our way in water that rushed from the rapids.

Gone fishin'

Spoiled chicken livers might not do much for you or me, but they drive the catfish wild, according to the men and women who were casting lines into a more calm flow at the U.S. 59 bridge south of Marshall, less than an hour's ride from the rapids.

Sandra Hodge lined nine fishing rods along the wide, flat bank. She and her sister, Sissy Bishop, were hoping to lure a catfish on their Thursday afternoon away from work.

"If you've got a lot of stress, come down here and watch that water, and it just washes away your concerns," Hodge said. "But I do wish we'd catch something."

Hodge lives nearby in Carthage. She said she enjoys cool evenings at this spot, listening to the water lap against the banks. Hodge fishes whenever she can, and she's the owner of 19 fishing rods. Each has a name scribbled on it in permanent marker. As we visited, "Bumble Bee" and the others stood with no pulls from the water.

"I'm not warped," she said. "I just like to name my rod and reel."

Hodge said her husband taught her to appreciate the river and its bounty. He built and sold minnow traps for spending money when he was a child. The community of Hodge Slough in north central Panola County is named for her father-in-law, who ran trotlines there.

"My husband will not eat a catfish out of a lake," she said. "He says you can taste the mud. River water is running and clean. The fish are a lighter color blue, and they just look cleaner to me. I love the Sabine River."

She loves the river, she said, but she remains careful around it.

"The water may look calm and safe, but the current and undertow are what get you," she said.

Unwelcome guests

Beaches of startlingly white sand mound up on river bends through Panola County. Cypress swamps line the mouths of the many streams and sloughs that merge with the river along this isolated stretch. We saw a doe, more turtles than we could hope to count, and a pack of wild hogs.

The sun was falling behind willow trees that swayed in the breeze.

We found a sloping sandbar tucked behind a sharp bend, and we pitched the tent. We peeled off our rubber boots, dug our toes into the sand, and set out to put our nameless fishing

rods to work. Unfortunately, we'd picked the wrong kind of bait. When we cast the line, the hook sailed in one direction and the bait flew to the other. There would be no fried catfish with our dinner of yellow squash and mashed potatoes.

We sat in camping chairs on our beach in the middle of nowhere, and we had the place to ourselves.

Or so we thought.

A rumbling came from the edge of the forest at the river's bend. A woman was watching us from her ATV. Without word or sign, she backed into the woods and was gone.

Ten minutes later, we heard a boat motor approaching from upriver. A man and a boy nosed around the bend. Like the woman, they took a quick look and reversed out of sight.

Then all three boated by. The man had short, red hair and overalls. He kept his eyes locked on the opposite bank.

This was clearly their sandbar. But we had a right to it as well, according to Tom Gallenbach, a game warden who patrols the Sabine.

"As long as you're below the permanent vegetation line, you can camp there," he said. "Some people will try to run you off, but most people know you can camp there."

Did these people know that?

Read the conclusion Sunday.



Take a look around the Sabine's beaches, and who knows what you'll find. Fossils of leaves ...



... a lone mussel, still moving ...



... and critter footprints. A raccoon, maybe?

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LIFE ON
THE SABINE
PART FOUR OF FOUR

They share freshly caught catfish with each other, then fry it under tall shade trees. The kids swim till the sun sets – and beyond. On the river, there's a hidden community that most people don't even know exists.

River fellowship

STORY BY WES FERGUSON
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JACOB CROFT BOTTER



"It's like a community down here. You've got a lot of good people, and a few that are not so good."

A group of children and teenagers play in the Sabine at twilight near the Yellow Dog Campground in Panola County. The campground is a haven for "river rats."

news-journal.com

CLICK IT UP: Read the series, see more photos and video online. Also, share your river stories and post your own photos at seeya.news-journal.com.

WE WERE BEING WATCHED as the sun set over the river. It was the end of our third day boating down the Sabine, and we had settled in for the evening on a white sandbar on what we thought was a secluded bend in Panola County. Then we noticed the woman at the forest's edge. She stared at us for a moment, then backed into the woods.

A man and boy in a flat-bottom boat peeked around the bend. They quickly retreated. When all three boated by half an hour later, we knew we had pitched our tent on their sandbar.

It was getting too dark to search for another campsite. Anyway, state law says people can camp along rivers, as long as they don't venture beyond the banks.

"If there's trees, you're trespassing," game warden Tom Gallenbach had said.

There were no trees on this sandbar. Photographer Jacob Croft Botter and I weren't budging.

After dark, two hoot owls called to each other, "Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you all?" The shadowy thicket surrounded our camp on three sides. Something rustled in the brush.

"Did you hear that?" I asked.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10A



"I just love to fish. I give enough away to sink a battleship."

Bill Dennis talks about living at the Yellow Dog Campground. Dennis, from Laneville, was a truck driver before he retired. He's lived at the campground for the past couple of months.

The series

- Thursday: Getting started
- Friday: The first test
- Saturday: Unwelcome guests
- Today: "Redneck heaven"

Toll on military families mounts

Violence, marriage woes grip deployed troops

BY DAVID CRARY
Associated Press

FORT CAMPBELL, Ky. — Far from the combat zones, the strains and separations of no-end-in-sight wars are taking an ever-growing toll on military families despite the armed services' earnest efforts to help.

Divorce lawyers see it in the breakup of youthful marriages as long, multiple deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan fuel alienation and mistrust. Domestic violence experts see it in the scuffles that often precede a soldier's departure or sour a briefly joyous homecoming.

Teresa Moss, a counselor at Fort Campbell's Lincoln Elementary School, hears it in the voices of deployed soldiers' children as they meet in groups to share accounts of nightmares, bedwetting and heartache.

"They listen to each other. They See FAMILIES, Page 6A

Brits find high-tech solution to go green

BY ELISABETH ROSENTHAL
New York Times News Service

HOVE, England — When Jeffrey Marchant and his wife, Brenda, power up their computer, turn on a light or put the kettle on to boil, they can just about watch their electric bill rise.

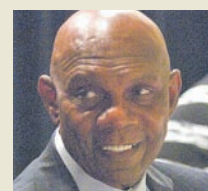
A small box hanging on the wall across from the vase of flowers in the front hall of their tidy Victorian home displays a continuous digital readout of their electricity use and tells them immediately how much it will cost, helping them save energy.

Turn on a computer, and the device — a type of so-called smart meter — goes from 300 watts to 400 watts. Turn off a light, and it goes from 299 to 215. At 500, the meter is set to sound an alarm.

"I've become like one of Pavlov's See METERS, Page 5A

INSIDE

Retired Brig. Gen. Ezell Ware Jr. told about 300 people Saturday at the annual NAACP Freedom Fund Banquet in Longview that "each of us must rise to the challenge of our defining moments." Page 1B



THE MORNING RUSH

TODAY'S WEATHER



Partly cloudy, hot. High of 97.
SEVEN-DAY FORECAST, PAGE 9A

Tell us what you think

The Longview News-Journal wants to hear what you have to say. This summer, we will be holding informal focus groups to get your thoughts, opinions and suggestions for the paper. These sessions will be held Aug. 5 and 6, will last about 1½ hours and participants will receive an incentive for participation. For more information or to sign up for a session, call Judy Stratton at (903) 237-7754.

AROUND THE WORLD

Obama in Afghanistan

Presidential candidate Barack Obama meets with U.S. troops and Afghan leaders on a congressional delegation trip. Page 3A



SPORTS

National honor for Lady Lobo

Senior Longview point guard Brittany Turner has been chosen to participate in the USA Junior Nationals in Ohio. Page 1D

LIFESTYLE

What women want

What are you seeking in a relationship? If you're a woman having a hard time figuring that out, a new book called "Date Decoder" might be the key. Page 1C

BUSINESS

'Eye' on Longview

The Longview Economic Development Corp. premiered Thursday a segment of the national TV series "Eye on America" that focuses on the city. Page 1E



FIND IT ONLINE

Interstate 20 pileup

A chain-reaction wreck in the rain Friday on Interstate 20 involving about 30 vehicles sent at least 29 people to the hospital. See a slide show from the pileup, only at news-journal.com.

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Saturday's lottery

Pick Three A.M.9-7-9	Cash Five12-14-20-30-33
Pick Three P.M.1-5-9	Powerball6-28-46-53-55 PB: 2
Lotto Texas8-25-30-35-41-42	





Justin Alonzo takes a leap into the Sabine River at the Yellow Dog Campground in Panola County.

'River rats' find good times on water

From Page 1A

The noises seemed to be getting louder.

"It sounds like people talking in the woods," Jake said.

He fetched his shotgun from the tent and laid it across his lap. We sat in our chairs at the water's edge, and waited. Twigs and branches crackled in the forest. There was a loud crash. Whatever it was, it was nearby, and it was getting closer.

Then came the squeals and grunts.

"Oh, hogs," Jake said.

They rooted around for a while before returning to the forest.

We left early the next morning. We didn't see the people again.

Slippery otter slides

East Texans who have only seen the Sabine from bridges around Longview might be surprised by a glimpse of the river as it winds toward the Louisiana border.

Above Longview, the Sabine is muddy and narrow, with banks of slick, red clay. Young oaks, elms and other hardwoods crowd the water below tall bluffs where skinny pine trees stand.

As the river travels southeast, the brown water takes on a greenish hue. Drooping willows line wide, gentle banks and sandbars.

On a few of the steeper banks we thought we saw "otter slides," places where playful river otters slip on their bellies, face-first, into the water. Once killed for being predators, the sleek, web-footed mammals are on the return, said state wildlife biologist Ricky Maxey.

"They're very curious animals," he said. "On my encounter with them, I was deer hunting, leaning against a tree being very quiet, when one popped its head up and looked at me. Then five more popped up their heads, and they took off."

What's in the sausage?

Only a few miles downstream from our campsite, a tall bluff of layered gray rock rose from the bank, wrapping around a long river bend. It stretched on for several minutes before descending into the water.

Later, Slim Barber, an 81-year-old man from De Berry, told us we had seen a seam of lignite coal that is famous among people who run the river. It's the Pulaski bluff, he said, the site of an old town that served as the seat for Harrison County in 1841 and Panola County in 1846.

By midmorning, we were getting hungry. We cruised under FM 2517, the last highway crossing before Toledo Bend, where several men fished from boats in spots along the banks.

We planned our next stop to coincide with lunch time, and it paid off: river guide Jane Gallenbach greeted us with slices of homemade pizza, topped with spicy sausage ground from wild hogs — hogs that had been shot on her property.

"We don't buy a lot of meat," she said. "Every once in a while you need real beef, but most of what we eat is wild."

A Sabine queen

Gallenbach, the "queen of the Sabine," grew up hustling bait for her fisherman father. She said the river



Bill Dennis, left, and Jeffrey Anderson check Dennis' trot line near the Yellow Dog. Dennis says he loves to fish, but gives away most of what he catches to his fellow campers.



This cross on the edge of the Sabine at the Yellow Dog is in honor of a man who was a frequent visitor at the campground. His ashes were scattered in the river.

has gotten wider and shallower in the years since then, after construction of Toledo Bend in the late 1960s.

"It wasn't anything to just wade across the river," in the summertime when she was a child, she said. Now her section of the Sabine can stretch a mile wide during the flood season.

"The river's getting wider, but it's getting shallower," she said. "It's changing every time the river comes up, and I think a lot of that has to do with trees that are being cut up closer to the banks. It's just washing away."

Gallenbach said logging companies own much of the land along the Sabine River in her county, and some of them clear-cut their timber to the riverbank.

When those trees are gone, she said, the force of the rising current eats away the banks, and the sediment fills in the riverbed. When the water drops after a big storm, sometimes sandbars have shifted from one side of the river to the other.

Too high, or too low?

On the Sabine River, expect to get muddy, and expect to get wet.

"That's just the way it is," said Gallenbach's husband, Tom. A game warden who patrols the Sabine, he said the river can rise or fall 6 feet in a day.

"A lot of people say when it's too high, it's too dangerous, when it's

low it's too dangerous," he said. "It's never just right."

The changing conditions keep the river guide on her toes, especially when she's leading people to prime fishing spots, she said. The Gallenbachs own the River Ridge campground and guide service south of Carthage.

Every spring, thousands of people from across the nation descend on the spot upriver from Toledo Bend to fish for white bass. The fish, which were introduced to the reservoir a few decades back, swim upstream to spawn in river tributaries.

"I can remember in my late teens my dad just having a fit because the white bass were getting on his trot lines," she said. "We do much more white bass than we do catfishing now."

Catfish is still king

River rat Bill Dennis was running his trot lines on a Friday afternoon when we bumped into him down river from the Gallenbachs' place.

"I'm catching fish," he said. "That's why everybody keeps coming down here, because they want some fish."

Dennis steered the boat while Jeffrey Anderson fished the hooks from the water. Anderson, of Carthage, felt something tugging on the line, and he pulled out a catfish about as long as his arm. Dinner.

"We're gonna have a fish fry," Dennis said. "Y'all stick around; we'll feed you."

First wild hog sausage, and now catfish. Who could say no?

Living at Yellow Dog

We motored the 10 or 20 minutes to Dennis' home at the Yellow Dog campground near Louisiana, and we pulled our boat onto the bank.

Dennis had been living in a travel trailer by the public boat ramp for the past couple of months, and jugs of water and camping and cooking supplies were conveniently strewn on and around the picnic table.

"It's like a community down here," he said. "You've got a lot of good people, and a few that are not so good. Everybody keeps an eye on each other's equipment. The majority of people respect my stuff."

Dennis wore patched blue jeans and a T-shirt that might have been white at some earlier time. He's from Laneville, and he used to drive a truck for a living. Now that he's retired, he said, he's a river rat.

"A river rat just sits here and enjoys the river, loves the river," he said. "You hang out, and a bunch of people infiltrate the place. They love to be around people who live down here."

Anderson hung the catfish from a large hook and pulled away the skin, and Dennis filleted the fish and dropped the pieces into a bucket for later. He said he checks his trot lines throughout the day, but he rarely tastes what he catches.

"I eat fish maybe three or four times a year. I just love to fish. I give enough away to sink a battleship," he said.

It was a Friday. He figured he'd be giving away plenty that night.

Some kind of heaven

As the lazy afternoon wore on, more and more people showed up. Children leaped from a tall bank into a cove in the river, and the women splashed mud on each other.

Anderson tended the fish fryer. His girlfriend, Ginger Williams, went off to find an old car hood. She chained it to the back of her four-wheeler and

About our journey

■ **Day 1, June 24:** The Old Sabine Bottom Wildlife Management Area, northeast of Lindale, to FM 14, south of Hawkins.

■ **Day 2, June 25:** U.S. 271 in Gladewater to Texas 42, south of White Oak (not a public boat ramp).

■ **Day 3, June 26:** Texas 149 in Lakeport to U.S. 79, about 10 miles northeast of Carthage.

■ **Day 4, June 27:** U.S. 79 to the Yellow Dog campsite in southeastern Panola County.

■ **About our boat:** Shipp's Marine in Gladewater supplied a 16-foot aluminum boat. The two-stroke, 25 hp Yamaha motor ran the river like a champion. We used about five gallons of fuel a day.

■ **When to go:** The river is higher and faster in winter and spring, but the water is murkier. In late summer and early fall, the Sabine is much lower and slower. The sediment settles and the water is clearer. A greater variety of topography is exposed, but it can be much harder to navigate.

■ **Camping on the river:** The public may legally camp on the banks of navigable rivers in Texas, as long as they stay below the permanent vegetation line. That means you can't venture from banks and sandbars without a good reason.

■ **What about mosquitoes?** We took lots of bug spray, and they weren't much of a nuisance.

■ **Was it trashy?** Nope. Logjams occasionally snagged plastic bottles downstream from highway crossings, but that was about it.

■ **Why is the river brown?** When acorns and leaves decompose, they leach yellow-brown tannin into the water. Biologists say tannin is healthy for fish.

■ **Who uses Sabine River water?** Longview, Henderson and Kilgore are among the cities that pipe water from the river. Eastman Chemical Co.-Texas Operations and Luminant are two local operations that also use river water.

offered sled rides through the mud puddles.

"I grew up here," Williams said. "I was actually born on the Sabine River, because Mama and Daddy had a flat on the (FM) 2517 bridge."

Texas country music blared from Anderson's pickup. By nightfall, nearly 30 children were swimming in the moonlight, as their parents relaxed around Dennis' camp.

"Redneck heaven," they called this place.

Saying goodbye

From Yellow Dog, the Sabine flows into Toledo Bend. It fills the reservoir and heads south, marking the boundary between Texas and Louisiana. It reaches the Gulf of Mexico after a journey of 555 miles.

Some people, like the trapper Elton Woodall, have gone as far as a person can get, from the headwaters south of Greenville to Sabine Lake in Port Arthur.

But our journey was over. We said goodbye to the people at Yellow Dog, and we drove back to Longview.

We crossed the river at I-20. From the bridge, we couldn't see a thing.