

The Paris News

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Outdoor magazine explores scenic Paris

By Mary Madewell

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Eastern wild turkeys, natural grasslands and prehistoric shark teeth drew wildlife freelance photographer and writer Russell A. Graves to the Paris area not long ago.

The result of his visit is "Little Paris on the Prairie," a three-page article in the April edition of Texas Parks and Wildlife, heralded as the outdoor magazine of Texas.

Graves teaches agricultural science in Childress, located in the Texas Panhandle. Agriculture is a natural vocation for a man who grew up in Fannin County — Dodd City to be exact.

"When I was supposed to be checking livestock on our small-time cattle ranch, I would be admiring the wildlife," Graves said of his younger years.

Graves brother gave him a second-hand camera when he was 19, and wildlife photography soon became his passion.

Graves' excursion to Paris resulted from an assignment to do a "Three Days in the Field" section, a regular piece in the monthly magazine.

"We hadn't covered that part of the state; it was close to where my parents live; and I really didn't know that part of the country very well," Graves said.

He explained that even though Paris was only 25 miles away from Dodd City, his family usually shopped in Sherman.

"I guess I had been to Paris less than two dozen times in my life," Graves said.

The photographer's coverage of the Paris area began with a stop along FM 1499 in northwestern Lamar County to watch

eastern wild turkeys at the Pat Mayse Wildlife Management Area.

Afterwards he explored U.S. Corps of Engineers land around Pat Mayse Lake and noticed pine trees begin to intersperse throughout the hardwood forests.

"Over the next three days, I will learn that Lamar County is on the northwestern edge of the East Texas pine curtain and has a Southern charm in which I've never fully immersed myself until this weekend," the visitor wrote.

On Day 2, Graves visited the 97-acre Tridens Prairie west of Paris on the south side of U.S. 82 and the immense 2,100 acre Smily Woodfin Prairie to the north. Both are home to mixed native grasses with Smily Woodfin Prairie being the largest piece of virgin tall grass prairie left in Texas.

Graves toured Gambill's Goose Preserve and learned about John Gambill, a farmer who began feeding a pair of Canada Geese back in the 1920s. The City of Paris and the trustees of the preserve maintain a twice daily feeding program throughout the winter.

Touring the city, Graves found the Eiffel Tower replica and reports in the magazine that it "sports a red cowboy hat." The writer located Evergreen Cemetery, where some 18,000 people are buried. He reports a distinctive divide between the uniformity of size and shape of modern headstones and the "glorious splendor of old headstones."

"I circle the old part of the cemetery until I find what I came looking for — an old headstone with a cowboy-boot-wearing Jesus on top," he wrote. "I'd heard about it through the grapevine, and I just had to see it for myself."

Graves then found the Sam Bell Maxey House, where site administrator Judy Brummett gave the freelance reporter a tour.

The afternoon of the roving photographer's day was spent southwest of Paris exploring the North Sulphur River, a favorite place for amateur paleontologists. It's shallow waters cut through about 100 feet of blackland soil to reveal prehistoric bones and teeth from sea animals.

On his third day, Graves traveled northeast of Paris to explore Lennox Woods, a 375-acre patch of hardwood and pine trees with some as old as 300 years. The Clarksville family acquired the land in 1863 and the woods remain intact today.

Graves reported that he spent the morning exploring the woods and seeing animals such as barred owls, redheaded woodpeckers and various songbirds. He was surprised when a 10-point white-tailed buck passed about 20 yards away.

"In the short time I've spent in and around Paris, I find that I've been missing out on all the natural and historic treasures that the area offers," Graves concluded.

During an interview with The Paris News, Graves also talked about the city's historic features.

"I am really impressed with the restored private homes in town and the Santa Fe Depot," Graves said.

The explorer has a single request of Parisians.

"I would like someone to tell me the reason for the dirt mounds in the pastures both on the north and south sides of the highway near Triden's Prairie and Smiley Woods," Graves requested.

Graves may be contacted by visiting his Web site at www.russellgraves.com.