

# BASTROP

**A**

**River**

**Runs**

**Through**

**It**





## The "Pony in the Backyard Syndrome"

So it wasn't long before we discovered that Bastrop had what I have come to affectionately refer to as the "Pony in the Backyard Syndrome."

In Oklahoma I was fortunate to have grown up with a couple horses in our backyard on a small acreage within the city limits. All the kids in my neighborhood wanted to come to my house to play because I had a horse. They would vie for first dibs to ride on my horse, Dusty. I received special favors in exchange for rides, as Dusty patiently complied. While taking care of animals was part of my daily routine, I know now that the joy of having a horse was often overshadowed by the duties of taking care of it. Shoveling manure from the barn was hardly glamorous. So it was easy to take for granted what others would covet.

For the past four years, John and I have made a concerted effort to help Bastrop's pony become appreciated for the jewel it truly is. In all its splendor, the Colorado River is once again becoming a primary uniting resource for economic and community development. No longer content turning its back, Bastrop is beginning to rediscover and promote the river as a focal point for nature and historic tourism.

## River Trips

It's still pretty remarkable to me that there was no outfitter in town, and one day we'll look back and say "Remember when we were the ONLY outfitter?"

We opened the doors of Rising Phoenix Adventures two years ago, conveniently located off Loop 150 across from Bastrop State Park. In

2005, our first season in business, we put nearly 600 people on the river. By the end of last year, the number had more than tripled, requiring an expansion of our operations to include an additional thousand square feet.

Approximately two-thirds of the people who canoed or kayaked with us last year traveled from Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, another Texas city, or some other state. Strangely, Austinites are slow to appreciate this river, opting for the Guadalupe, San Marcos, or Comal Rivers. These figures will likely increase this year as a result of the new Paddling Trails designation with Texas Parks and Wildlife. Three stretches of the Lower Colorado River in Bastrop County will receive this prestigious designation, with the first to roll out in August.

Currently we offer 6-, 14- and 26-mile trips. The 6-mile (soon to be officially designated "El Camino Real Crossing Paddle Trail") starts at Fisherman's Park, in the general vicinity of where the historic trail crossed the river in downtown Bastrop. Depending upon river flow and how much time you have, the 6-mile takes two or three hours.

The 14-mile stretch (soon to be designated as the "Wilbarger Creek Paddling Trail") is up-river and goes from FM 969 Utley Bridge down to Fisherman's Park and can take anywhere from 4-6 hours, a nice leisurely day trip. The 26-mile journey from Fisherman's Park to Smithville generally requires an overnight campout, unless of course you are training for the Colorado 100 Race held over Labor Day weekend each year.

On each paddling trail, Mother Nature has convenient-

ly positioned small islands along the way offering a respite to stretch your legs, skip rocks, and have a picnic lunch. These islands are also perfect for overnight camping. Besides outfitting for kayaking and canoeing, we also provide camping supplies, both for rent and sale.

So if you're tired of fighting noisy crowds and low-water levels, and you'd like to have a nice relaxing, get-back-to-nature experience, Bastrop is the place. Each one of these three gorgeous stretches of the river has its own special beauty and uniqueness.

## Wildlife

I would be remiss if I didn't brag about the incredible wildlife you're apt to encounter on the river, one of the many advantages that a more serene,

less-populated river offers. Besides the ducks and geese who delight in helping you launch at Fisherman's Park, soon you're sure to be greeted by the Great Blue Heron, the chief navigator of the 6-mile. "The Captain," is what I call him, making him a local celebrity of sorts in these parts. In the beginning, it was he, a loner, who would wait for the kayakers to come down the river. When they would arrive, he would then launch into flight, landing several hundred feet down river, again waiting for the kayakers to catch up. All the way down, the Captain would serve as a river escort. Perhaps word of the Captain's fame spread and now, I'm happy to report that there are many new "Little Captains," on the river these days serving as guides for kayakers.



A variety of different wildlife will greet you on your trip down the Lower Colorado River in Bastrop.



Don't mistakenly think, however, that all you'll see is water fowl, for it's not at all uncommon to see kingfishers, killedeer, red-shouldered hawks, barred owls, both turkey and black vultures, and you'll even hear piliated woodpeckers on every stretch of this serene river. One day I heard and counted ten different birds all singing their own song.

On the lower part of the 6-mile is "Ozzy," the Osprey who enjoys performing for river folks. He'll dip and dive right in front of your eyes, snatching small fish. Soliciting applause, Ozzy enjoys boasting about his abilities and is sure to fly close enough for you to see the fish dangling from his beak.

### Buttercup

One day, John came in off the river and said he'd seen an elk alongside the river, to which I responded "Yeah, right ... I'll bet it was a mule deer." He insisted it was an elk and I let him think it was so. I mean, really, what did it hurt, men need their fantasies, right?

Then one busy weekend we had our tiny shop filled with customers waiting to be checked out and put on the river. A customer asked one of us about what wildlife he might see on the river. I immediately spoke about the many birds, turtles, deer, etc. he could expect to see and of course, John had to launch into his story of the young elk he had seen. I cautiously added, "...But it could have been a mule deer." A good-spirited debate ensued between John and I and finally one of the customers waiting to check out spoke up with, "It IS an elk, and her name is 'Buttercup.'" It seems that this gentleman has a ranch on the river where he

is raising some exotics, and beloved "Buttercup," is part of their family. Humbly, I stand corrected.

### Fishing

The river is home to many varieties of fish, but we mostly hear about people catching Guadalupe bass and catfish. One of our customers caught a 24-pound catfish on the 26-mile to Smithville last summer. The river is home to the protected blue sucker and the much fished for "Gaspergoo," a freshwater drum.

If you're always on the hunt for the "big one," then Lake Bastrop, a few miles north and east of Bastrop State Park, is a promising alternative. Attracting serious anglers, a recent TPWD survey ranked this 900-acre stocked lake "high" for bass fishing, which is best December through June. Channel, blue, and flathead catfish are stocked as well, with lots of crappie, perch and the usual suspects. The lake has two public areas for outdoor activities, South Shore and North Shore Parks, both with boat ramps, fishing piers, and picnic and camping areas.

### Camping

As mentioned, Bastrop and Buescher State Parks are two of the most popular parks in the state. Home of the Lost Pines, you can camp out, hike, bike, swim, fish, or just sit back and watch nature happen. Over 250 species of birds have been identified in the parks.

### Biking

While John has always been an avid cyclist, both road and mountain, we didn't originally plan to become a full-blown bike shop. With our close proximity to the state

park, we had always planned to rent bicycles. So when the local bike shop went out of business, we quickly embraced the notion. With our recent expansion, Rising Phoenix Cyclery is now full service, offering a variety of road, mountain, hybrid, cruiser, and comfort bikes, as well as accessories, ace wrenching, and of course rentals.

Recently, Rising Phoenix began organizing and sponsoring the Bastrop Area Riding Club (BARC) and now offers two, sometimes three scheduled rides each week. While I won't mention any names, suffice it to say that a very, very well-known cyclist has found Bastrop and Buescher State

Parks to be a great place to ride in obscurity. With many hills, this challenging 12-mile park road between the two state parks is a cyclist's dream. Then of course, if mountain biking is your thing, we've got the Rocky Hill Bike Ranch just down the road a few miles.

To wrap up, whether you come out to paddle our beautiful, serene river, or you choose to bike, hike, camp, or fish, come on out to Bastrop and Ride Our Pony!!

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