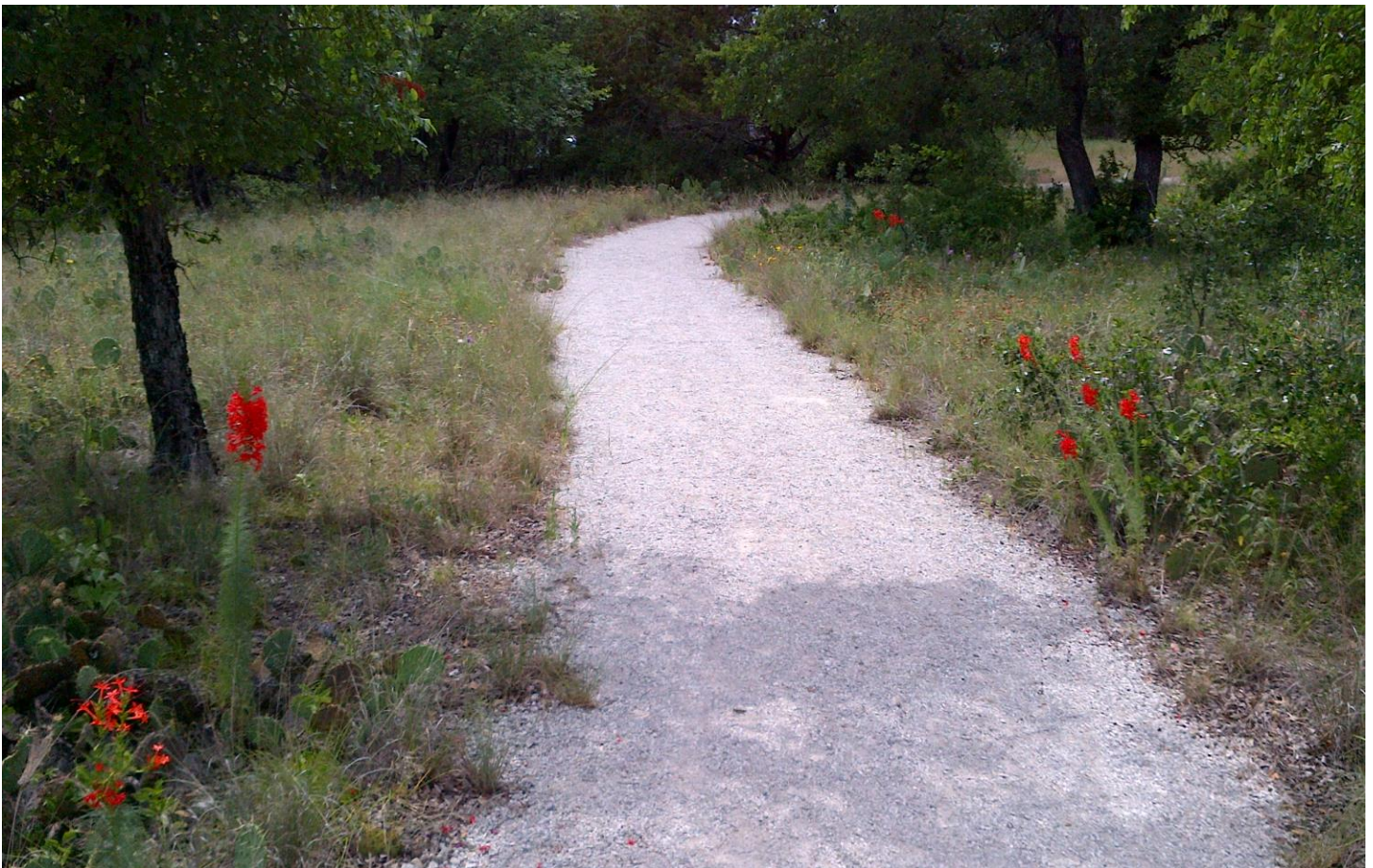


The Call of the Trail

Rob Denkhaus, Nature Center Manager



*The Limestone Ledge Trail is wheelchair and stroller friendly, with a flat, compacted surface of crushed limestone.
FWNC&R Staff Photo.*

“I could never resist the call of the trail.” — Buffalo Bill Cody

I often think of the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge as an organism. The river and its tributaries, along with associated marshes, are the Refuge’s circulatory system, flowing through the body and delivering vital elements. The forests and prairies are the muscle mass, providing strength and endurance throughout the organism, but the trails provide the structure—the skeletal system—of what we know as the Fort Worth Nature

Center & Refuge. Without our trail system, the Refuge would be only a collection of habitats, inaccessible to most and, therefore, nothing more than an underappreciated mystery to the masses.

The 20+-mile trail system, comprised of a dozen named trails and countless numbers of animal tracks and human-caused routes known as “rogue trails,” currently provides access to approximately two thirds of the 3,621-acre Refuge. Ranging in length from the less-than-a-quarter-mile Lotus Marsh Boardwalk Trail to the almost four-mile-long Riverbottom Trail, a trail is available for most everyone. Most trails connect to other trails, allowing hikers to create custom-length treks to meet their needs.



*Some trails are narrow, hardly more than an animal pathway, but with signs of human influence, in this case water bars to control erosion.
FWNC&R Staff Photo.*

Some trails venture through shady woodlands, providing a respite from the intense summer sun, while others span the prairies, offering access to the sun’s warming rays in the winter. The Oak Motte Trail is a two-mile loop that weaves through prairies, savannas, and small forests, affording an opportunity to experience the landscape mosaic that covered North Texas prior to urbanization.

While nature is the focal point of all the trails, some feature a look back at human activities, some positive and some negative. Canyon Ridge Trail on the Refuge’s south end dips into forested canyons and then climbs to ridges covered in prairie grasses, yuccas, and a myriad of wildflowers. Along the way, hikers will encounter structures built by Civilian Conservation Corps members in the 1930s as part of a nationwide effort to provide employment, develop skills among the workforce, and improve the state of our parks and natural resources in general. Hikers may also notice the impact of humans where simple gravity and water flow bring the trash and detritus of civilization down to the trail from Jacksboro Highway located high above.

Maintaining an extensive trail system is a challenge met by our Natural Resource Management staff and an extremely valuable and hardworking collection of volunteers known as the Natural Guard. Through the efforts of staff and volunteers, every inch of the trail system is monitored at least monthly and more frequently during periods of storms and other natural disturbances that may cause treefalls or erosion. The Natural Guard meets on Thursday and Saturday mornings from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m., and all trail lovers are encouraged to participate and invest a bit of sweat equity into the trail system.

Some maintenance activities are beyond the capabilities of both staff and volunteers. Such was the case with the Crosstimbers Trail, which had been closed for years due to a break in the levee. With the recent completion of work funded by the City of Fort Worth, contributions from the Friends of the Nature Center, and the extreme generosity of the Tarrant Regional Water District, this jewel of the trail system was reopened on October 13, once again providing access to Todd Island, also known as the Cross Timbers. The trail is



Other trails are cleared wider, creating a more comfortable experience for some users. FWNC&R Staff Photo.

described in detail by Natural Resource Specialist Michelle Villafranca elsewhere in this issue of *Bluestem News*.

Trail improvements and additions are on the horizon, with improvements planned for the Greer Island trails (including the Margaret Parker Memorial Trail) and Canyon Ridge Trail and new additions planned that will expand the trail system to the west and north of the existing trail system.

These changes will not happen overnight, but in case you are chomping at the bit to see something new along the trails, sometimes it can be as

simple as hiking during a different time of the day. The trail experience changes throughout the day; if you typically hike in the morning, try hiking later in the afternoon to get a new experience. Or try hiking in a different season; each season is vastly different in the prairie or the forest.

You can also take advantage of one of the many naturalist-led trail hikes offered on the Refuge, as described by Friends President Chris Smith in this issue. Hiking the trails with a naturalist will provide you with the opportunity to notice features you might have missed and to ask questions about anything that you see. Be sure to take advantage of your Friends membership to avoid program fees.

I've read that most nature center visitors do not venture farther than a half mile away from their cars. The Refuge's trail system offers opportunities to stay close or to range far and wide. I encourage you to seek out new adventures around the next bend in the trail.