

ENJOY THE PARK

We hope you enjoy your visit to Cedar Hill State Park. Here are some things to do at the park:

- ✦ Take a hike on the Talala Trail or the Pond Trail. Ask for the Talala self-guided trail guide at the office.
- ✦ Learn more about the plants and wildlife in the park by attending an interpretive program.
- ✦ Ask for the "Birds of Cedar Hill State Park" field checklist and go birding.
- ✦ Tour historic Penn Farm. Check the event calendar for guided tours or explore on your own with a self-guided brochure available at the office or the trailhead.
- ✦ Go fishing in Joe Pool Lake.
- ✦ Attend events hosted by the park, such as the Cedar Hill Expo (April), Cedar Hill Days of Old (October) or Caroling at Penn Farm (December).

You can be a partner in conserving the natural and cultural resources of the Cedar Hill State Park by:

- ✦ Leaving no trace as you camp or recreate. If you pack it in, pack it out!
- ✦ Staying on established trails while hiking, biking or riding to prevent soil erosion and damage to the prairie grasses; and staying off the trails when they are closed after a rain.
- ✦ Helping create and maintain trails by volunteering for a group such as the Dallas Off-Road Bicycle Association (D.O.R.B.A.); visit www.dorba.org to find out more.
- ✦ Joining the Friends of Cedar Hill State Park, a nonprofit organization assisting in the promotion, interpretation and operation of the park.
- ✦ Volunteering as a park host. Hosts are needed to help in the campgrounds or with office duties, interpretation or maintenance.

Cedar Hill State Park
1570 F.M. 1382, Cedar Hill, TX 75104
(972) 291-3900 • www.tpwd.state.tx.us/cedarhill/

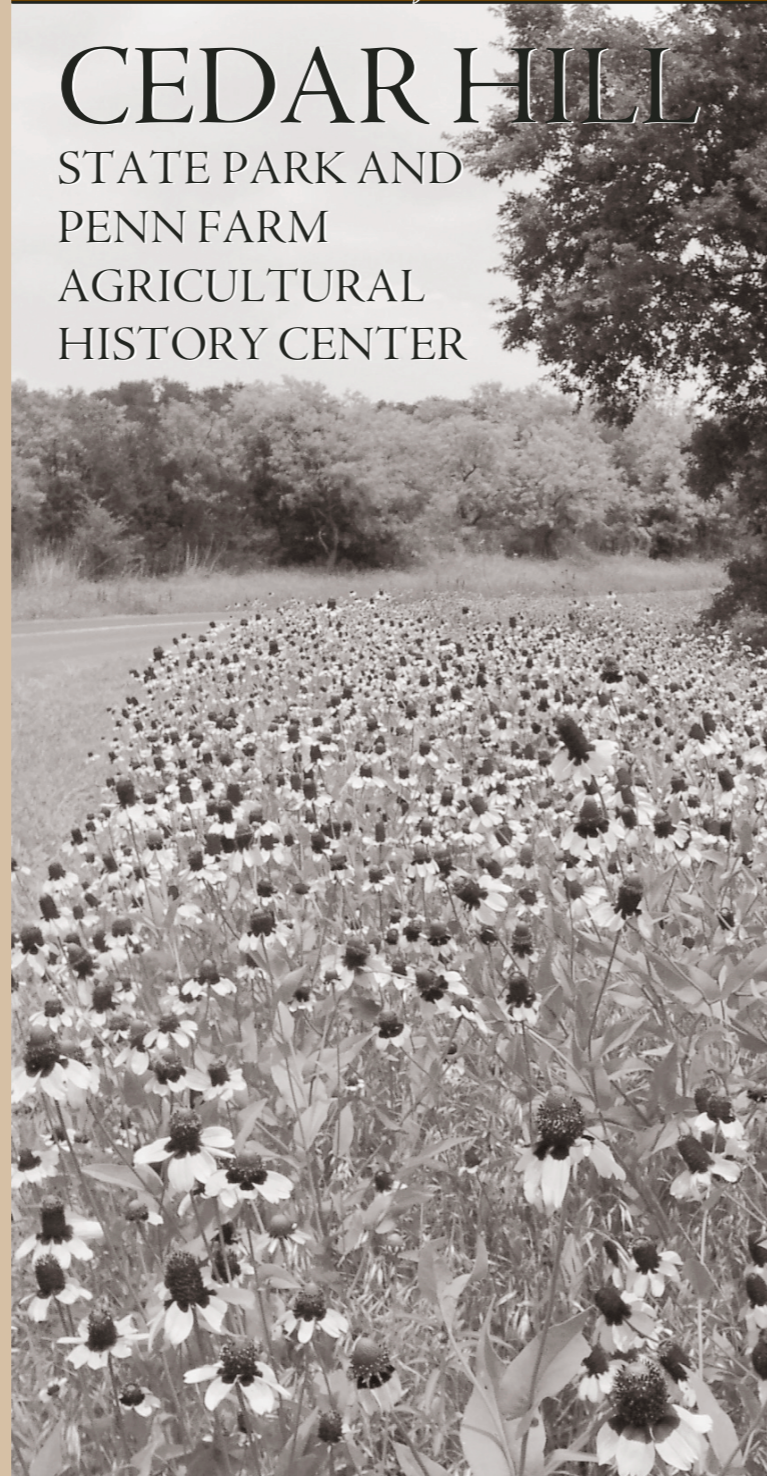


Proud Sponsor of Texas Parks and Wildlife Programs

In accordance with Texas State Depository Law, this publication is available at the Texas State Publications Clearinghouse and/or Texas Depository Libraries.
© 2007 TPWD. PWD BR P4503-1310 (5/07) Printed on recycled paper.

Interpretive Guide to:

CEDAR HILL STATE PARK AND PENN FARM AGRICULTURAL HISTORY CENTER



DISCOVER CEDAR HILL STATE PARK, A NATURAL OASIS NESTLED IN THE SOUTHWESTERN CORNER OF DALLAS COUNTY. EARLY TEXANS NAMED THE AREA FOR ITS RUGGED LIMESTONE BLUFFS COVERED WITH FORESTS OF DARK GREEN CEDARS. THEY SETTLED HERE FOR THE RICH SOILS AND ABUNDANT GRASSES OF THE TEXAS BLACKLAND PRAIRIE. THE PARK HARBORS SIX ENDANGERED PRAIRIE REMNANTS, SMALL PIECES OF THE GREAT AMERICAN TALLGRASS PRAIRIE THAT ONCE STRETCHED ALL THE WAY TO CANADA.



RICH IN DIVERSITY

Today many acres of prairie grasslands lie beneath the surface of Joe Pool Lake as it captures the waters of Mountain Creek flowing north to the Trinity River. The creation of the lake inundated a number of small family farms. However, the farmstead established by John Wesley Penn in 1859 is preserved within the park, a reminder of the agricultural legacy of early Dallas County.

Cedar Hill State Park owes its biological diversity to the convergence of two ecosystems. The grasslands of the Texas Blackland Prairie and the upland forests of the White Rock Limestone Escarpment create a transitional habitat zone that supports plants and animals commonly found in North Central Texas, as well as some species usually found in East Texas or the Texas Hill Country.

The rich combination of grasslands and forests provides an ideal habitat for migratory birds. The park's bird list includes almost 200 species, including year-round residents such as the eastern bluebird and great-horned owl, and seasonal favorites such as the colorful painted bunting.



Great-horned owls are among the many species that rely on the grasslands.



PENN FARM'S LEGACY



The Penn family owned this farm for over a century. It is representative of the small, middle-class farmsteads that once occupied this margin of Dallas County.

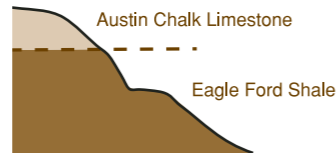
The site shows an evolution of structures constructed or adapted by the Penn family as needs changed and modern conveniences were added.

It also serves as a reminder that humans rendered the greatest impact on the tallgrass prairie. Farmers such as John Wesley Penn utilized the rich natural resources of the land to build farms and provide shelter and sustenance for their families. The Penn family grazed cattle and horses on the native prairie grasses for over a hundred years. During that time, most of the tallgrass prairie in Dallas County vanished—plowed under and replaced with crops of wheat or cotton. Perhaps because of the rocky surface and the hilly terrain of the “cedar mountains,” the prairie remnants at Penn Farm survived. The continued survival of the prairie remnants depends on human efforts to conserve the complex environment by managing the effects of fire and erosion, appreciating and studying its diversity, and protecting it from encroaching development.



THE CEDAR HILLS AND TEXAS BLACKLAND PRAIRIE

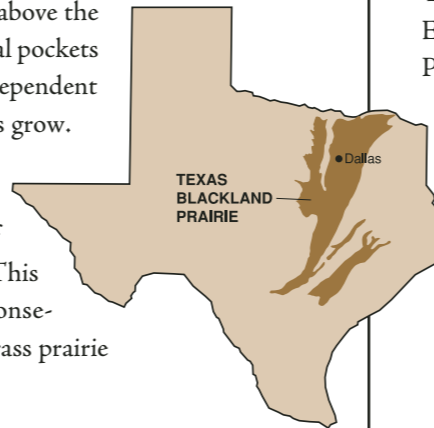
Cedar Hill State Park owes its biological diversity to the convergence of two ecosystems—the Cedar Hills and Blackland Prairie.



The unusual topography of the Cedar Hill area is the result of the geologic interplay of rugged Austin Chalk limestone with layers of erodable Eagle Ford shale. Erosion of

the shale over millions of years created hills and valleys such as these in the Mountain Creek Valley. The limestone also eroded, but much more slowly, leaving the rough, rugged outcrops exposed at the top. Today, minerals from the dissolved limestone enrich the shallow soil at the top of the escarpment where the cedar trees thrive. As water trickles through the limestone layer, it collects in shallow pools above the layers of shale. This creates special pockets of soil where unusual water-dependent plants such as ferns and buckeyes grow.

The fertile, dark clay soils of the Blackland Prairies are some of the richest soils in the world. This attracted early settlers, and consequently, much of the native tallgrass prairie has been replaced by cropland.



UNDERSTANDING THE PRAIRIE



In the early 1800s a vast tallgrass prairie stretched from Texas to Canada, covering the continent like an ocean. Today, less than 1 percent of the American tallgrass prairies survive, mostly in isolated patches resembling scattered islands in a great sea. Of the original 12 million acres of Texas Blackland Prairie, fewer than 5,000 acres remain today. The first wave of destruction came in the 1800s as farmers converted the prairie to farmland. Today urban development consumes the vanishing prairie landscape. Most remnant prairies like those preserved in the park survived because farmers used them as hay meadows or because the land was too rocky for plowing.

The word *prairie* comes from the simple French word for *meadow*. However, prairies represent complex ecosystems composed of a multitude of plants providing sustenance and shelter for a variety of living organisms, from large mammals to songbirds to small insects. Due to this complexity, not all prairies are alike. The eastern tallgrass prairies receive more rain than do the western shortgrass prairies. To understand a prairie, one needs to understand the elements that shape it and forge its distinctive character. Prairie communities emerge as products of their soils, fire and rain.

The prairie remnants at Cedar Hill State Park belong to the Eagle Ford community, the western-most strip of Blackland Prairie growing in soils of the Eagle Ford shale. Early settlers

“...the black prairie soil was built by the prairie plants, a hundred distinctive species of grasses, herbs, and shrubs; by the prairie fungi, insects and bacteria; by the prairie mammals and birds, all interlocked in one humming community of cooperation and competition, one biota. This biota, through ten thousand years of living and dying, burning and growing, preying and fleeing, freezing and thawing, built the dark and bloody ground we call prairie.”

Aldo Leopold, *Round River*, 1953

called them “hogwallow” prairies because the clay soils collected water in slick muddy pits like those created by wild hogs. Trails in the park are closed after a rain to prevent traffic from turning them into a series of “hogwallows.”

Good-quality prairies often contain more than 250 different plant species. Tallgrasses such as big bluestem, little bluestem, Indiangrass and switchgrass dominate the Texas Blackland Prairie. The relict prairies in the park present excellent stands of Indiangrass and big bluestem, also known as “turkeyfoot” for the track-like shape of its seedhead. A wide variety of wildflowers burst into color during spring and summer, including the purple cone-flower, Maximilian sunflower and celestial ghost iris. The roots of the grasses and wildflowers extend deep underground, helping them survive cold winters, hot summers, drought and erosion.

Fire, an essential element in maintaining a healthy prairie ecosystem, sparks an increase in plant diversity and stimulates the growth and flowering of plants. Fire prevents invasive woody species such as mesquite and cedar elm from transforming a prairie into a woodland. Native Americans used fire as a tool on the tallgrass prairie to create islands of fresh grass to attract bison and to control animal behavior while hunting.

TPWD conducts strategic prescribed burns to generate the beneficial effects of fire.

