ENJOY BOTH PARKS

Inks Lake is considered a small, pass-through lake in the Highland Lakes Chain. Typically, Inks Lake fluctuates minimally because of the small volume of water it holds in comparison to other Highland Lakes. This usually allows recreation activities in the park, such as swimming, boating and fishing, to continue unaffected by drought conditions.

Beat the heat with a visit to Longhorn Cavern State Park—the cave is 68 degrees year-round! The park offers guided tours lasting about 1½ hours for the 1¼-mile round trip. Low-heeled shoes with rubber soles are recommended. Call for current tour schedules.

Inks Lake State Park
3630 Park Road 4 West, Burnet, TX 78611
(512) 793-2223 • www.tpwd.texas.gov/inks/

Longhorn Cavern State Park
P.O. Box 732, Burnet, TX 78611
(877) 441-CAVE • (830) 598-CAVE
www.tpwd.texas.gov/longhorncavern/

TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE
Life's better outside.®

TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE FOUNDATION

TOYOTA
Proud Sponsor of Texas Parks and Wildlife Programs

© 2013 TPWD. PWD BR P4507-015U (7/13)
In accordance with Texas State Depository Law, this publication is available at the Texas State Publications Clearinghouse and/or Texas Depository Libraries.

TPWD receives federal assistance from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other federal agencies and is subject to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, and state anti-discrimination laws which prohibit discrimination the basis of race, color, national origin, age, sex or disability. If you believe that you have been discriminated against in any TPWD program, activity or facility, or need more information, please contact Civil Rights Coordinator for Public Access, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Mail Stop: MBSP-4020, Arlington, VA 22203.

Interpretive Guide to:

INKS LAKE
STATE PARK AND
LONGHORN CAVERN
STATE PARK

CONNECTED BY A SHARED HISTORY, INKS LAKE AND LONGHORN CAVERN STATE PARKS BOAST SPECTACULAR GEOLOGICAL FEATURES, EVIDENCE OF PREHISTORIC OCCUPATION DATING TO MORE THAN 8,000 YEARS AGO, AND STRONG CONNECTIONS TO WATER RESOURCES. HOWEVER, THEIR STORIES DON'T REALLY WEAVE TOGETHER UNTIL THE 1930s AND THE GREAT DEPRESSION. BOTH PARKS OWE THEIR EXISTENCE TO THE NEW DEAL WORK PROGRAMS OF THAT TRYING TIME IN AMERICAN HISTORY.

CREATING PARKS

With the onset of the Great Depression in the 1930s, the nation suffered from debilitating unemployment levels. With more than half the young men under 25 years of age out of work, President Franklin Roosevelt created the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) to provide employment opportunities. The program put young men to work developing state and national parks, as well as rehabilitating forests and controlling soil erosion.

Between 1934 and 1942, the young men of CCC Company 854 labored to create two new state parks. At Longhorn Cavern, they removed debris from the cavern, and built trails, an administration building, an observation tower and a lighting system. The beginning of the Second World War cut short plans for Inks Lake State Park, but a road system with dozens of stone culverts and a boathouse were constructed.

The men of CCC Company 854 cleared 2.5 million cubic yards of mud and debris, making much more of the cavern accessible to the public.

LONGHORN CAVERN

The geologic history of Longhorn Cavern is complex, and the theories don't all agree. It is believed that the limestone was deposited some 450–500 million years ago on the floor of a shallow tropical sea which covered most of Central Texas. Another 150 million years passed before the cavern itself began forming. Between 280 and 300 million years ago, mountain-building forces shifted under Central Texas in an event called the "Llano Uplift." During this upheaval, faults and fractures formed in the flat-lying limestone. Water began flowing through the cracks, dissolving the limestone and eventually forming Longhorn Cavern and many caves like it.

During the last million years, the water deposited a thick layer of mud and debris in the cave. Early visitors were restricted to a small area due to this debris. Some of the earliest visitors were the area's prehistoric peoples, who used the large room next the main entrance for shelter. Anglo settlers discovered the cavern in the mid-1800s and began mining bat guano that was used in manufacturing gun powder during the Civil War.

Many stories and legends developed around Longhorn Cavern, the most persistent being that famous outlaw Sam Bass used the cavern as a hideout in the 1870s. There is no evidence that Sam Bass ever visited the cave, but stories like this one drew tourists as early as the turn of the 20th century. By the 1920s, the main room served as a dance hall and concert venue.

Completed in the 1937 by the LCRA after the original builder went bankrupt, Buchanan Dam is the longest multiple-arch dam in the nation. This technique is no longer used in dam building due to the amount of labor necessary. Although less labor intensive, modern dams require many more materials to build.

INKS LAKE

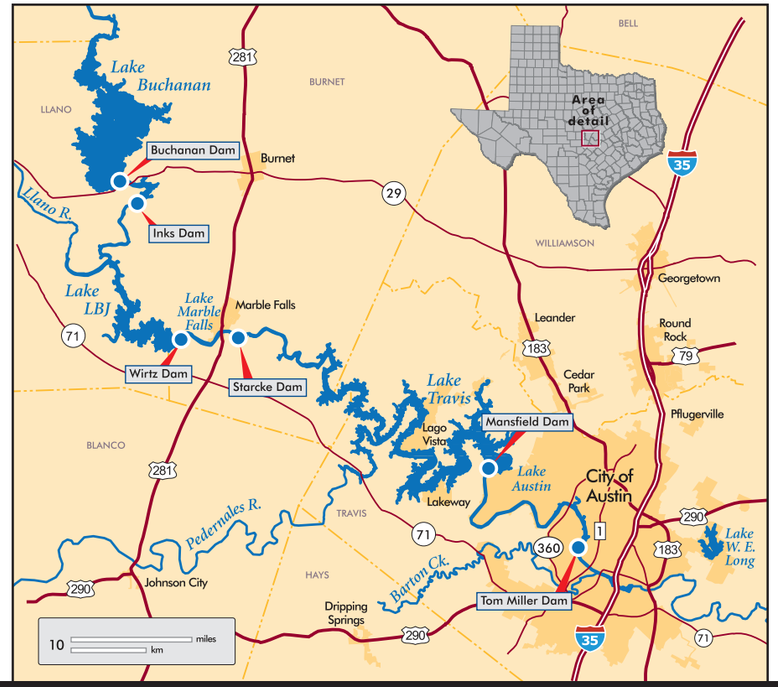
About 8,000 years ago, prehistoric peoples lived and worked here along the banks of the Colorado River. Later, Spanish and Anglo settlers built communities in the area. A dependable water source, abundant fish and game, and the area's natural beauty combined to make this an inviting location. Those same features bring people to the shores of Inks Lake today.

For early Hill Country residents, the river proved as much a danger as a blessing. The Colorado River, the largest river entirely within the state of Texas, has a 900-mile course, through which almost 600 billion gallons of water flow in a typical year. Steep slopes and thin, rocky soils channeled runoff into the river, causing frequent, devastating floods.

Created as a means of flood control, Inks Lake is the second in a series of six lakes which make up the "Highland Lakes Chain." Two dams form the boundaries of Inks Lake—Buchanan Dam to the north, and Inks Dam to the south. Built by the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) at the height of the Great Depression, the construction not only improved flood control but provided employment for as many as 1,500 people.

The Texas State Parks Board originally acquired much of the acreage from the LCRA in 1940. The decision to gift the State Parks Board with the property was part of a larger plan, endorsed by local business leaders, to aid development of the Colorado River. The flood control project on the Colorado River was a signature issue of U.S. Rep. (and future President) Lyndon B. Johnson, who once stated, "Of all the endeavors on which I have worked in public life, I am proudest of the accomplishments in developing the Colorado River."

COURTESY OF LOWER COLORADO RIVER AUTHORITY (LCRA)

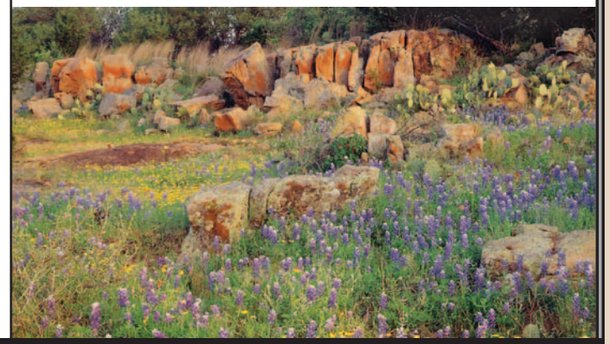


GNEISS ISLANDS AND VERNAL POOLS

At Inks Lake, the pink rock outcrops jutting up through the surrounding limestone are Valley Spring Gneiss (pronounced "nice"), a pinkish granite-like metamorphic rock formed from recrystallized sedimentary rocks.

These gneiss "islands" support unique, localized and ecologically significant microhabitats. Over many hundreds of years, larger rocks are broken down into gravels and soil by the plants that grow in crevices and at the base of these formations. Outcrops support a wide array of wildflowers, grasses, forbs, mosses, lichens and ferns. Most of these plants are small, requiring a keen eye to see tiny flowers, interesting shapes and colors—well worth the search!

Shallow temporary rainwater basins called vernal pools form on rock outcrops. The thin layer of sand and organic material on the bottom of the pools sustains a great variety of aquatic plants which become dormant when the water dries up in summer. All that's visible by mid-summer is a thin crust in a dry basin which regenerates with the next spring rain.

Some of these plants, such as rock quillwort and basin corn salad, are found only in this area of Texas, and nowhere else in the world. Dry, gravelly areas, shaded crevices and the outcrop base may support wild onions, carpets of spikemosses, sedges, native grasses, spiderworts, and several arid land fern species.

Bare rock outcrops offer outdoor laboratories for the study of plant succession, soil development, interesting microhabitats and their plant communities. Many of these outcrops are quarried or developed throughout Central Texas. Inks Lake State Park protects a valuable representative of this special natural community.