TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE

BIG SPRING STATE PARK

GUIDE TO HISTORIC ROCK CARVINGS ON SCENIC MOUNTAIN

Atop Scenic Mountain

A poem by Nancy Michaelie
January 9, 2017

On going to the top of Scenic Mountain in Big Spring State Park on the first warm day of the last three – wanting the sun – strolling and noticing the names chiseled in the limestone – graffiti – taking pictures and wondering:

Did they climb this small peak
To seek
A permanent spot
At the top
Or to feel closer to God
Than on the far stretching sod
Of surrounding plains?

Did they go to the park
On a lark
With chisel and nail
Their names to avail
To set into stone
And claim as their own
A small piece of rock?

Did they stop as their names they did sink
To take a moment to think
Of the heat, rain and wind
That nature would send
To slowly erase their work?

Yet these many years later I ponder,
As the top of the hill I wander,
That these names carved in stone
Are never alone,
There's critter scat – and me.

Civilian Conservation Corps members work on the road in the state park. TPWD Archives

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for completing the Rock Imagery Inventory

Cover photo by Matt Warren

INTRODUCTION

Scratched deep in Scenic Mountain's Edwards limestone, 210 feet above the city of Big Spring, over 300 carvings in Big Spring State Park tell the stories of past visitors. Scenic Mountain is the center point of Big Spring State Park with sweeping views of the surrounding area and town of Big Spring. It's easy to see why people have been visiting this spot for hundreds and maybe thousands of years. Some of those visitors left their mark in the form of rock carvings visible throughout the park.

An oasis in the middle of a semi-arid region, Big Spring is in an ecologically diverse area at the crossroads of the Edwards Plateau, Llano Estacado and Osage Plains. A mix of grasslands with juniper, scrub oak and mesquite makes this area unique; bison were spotted here through the 1880s.

As the limestone cliffs of Scenic Mountain can be seen for miles, many people were drawn to the area. Most visitation to the area recorded before 1881 is tied to the "big spring" located a half-mile southeast of the state park and now in the Comanche Trail Park. Many Native American artifacts and carvings have been found near the spring's life-giving waters. One rock carving on Scenic Mountain is thought to be Native American (see page 21). A prominent branch of the Comanche War Trail followed Sulphur Springs Draw to Big Spring, but Apache and Jumano peoples also roamed the area.

Rock quarry marks

After 1881 Anglo-Americans began to move into the area, and with the laid tracks of the railroad, the city of Big Spring began to flourish. Most of the carvings on Scenic Mountain were made after that time. Another generation of carvings appeared between 1934 and 1936 with the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). CCC Company 1857 developed many of the roads, rock buildings and structures in the park using locally quarried limestone and hand tools. You can see their handiwork all over the park. Check out the rocks making up the park headquarters and pavilion to see hand-chiseled marks on the rock and the long scars from the quarrying techniques they used.

Civilian Conservation Corps hand-chiseled marks on Scenic Mountain Road

Now, the park is appreciated by city residents for family picnics, community events and exercise. It's also an easy stop-off Interstate 20 for day visitors. The legacy of Big Spring State Park is to share and preserve the stories of our great country and local community.

We hope you enjoy the wonderful views, a glimpse of the area's history and the lovely native plants and wildlife that call Big Spring State Park home.

Only a few of the 300 plus carvings are mentioned in this guide, but with some exploring and a good eye, you'll be able to spot many more!

WE NEED YOUR HELP

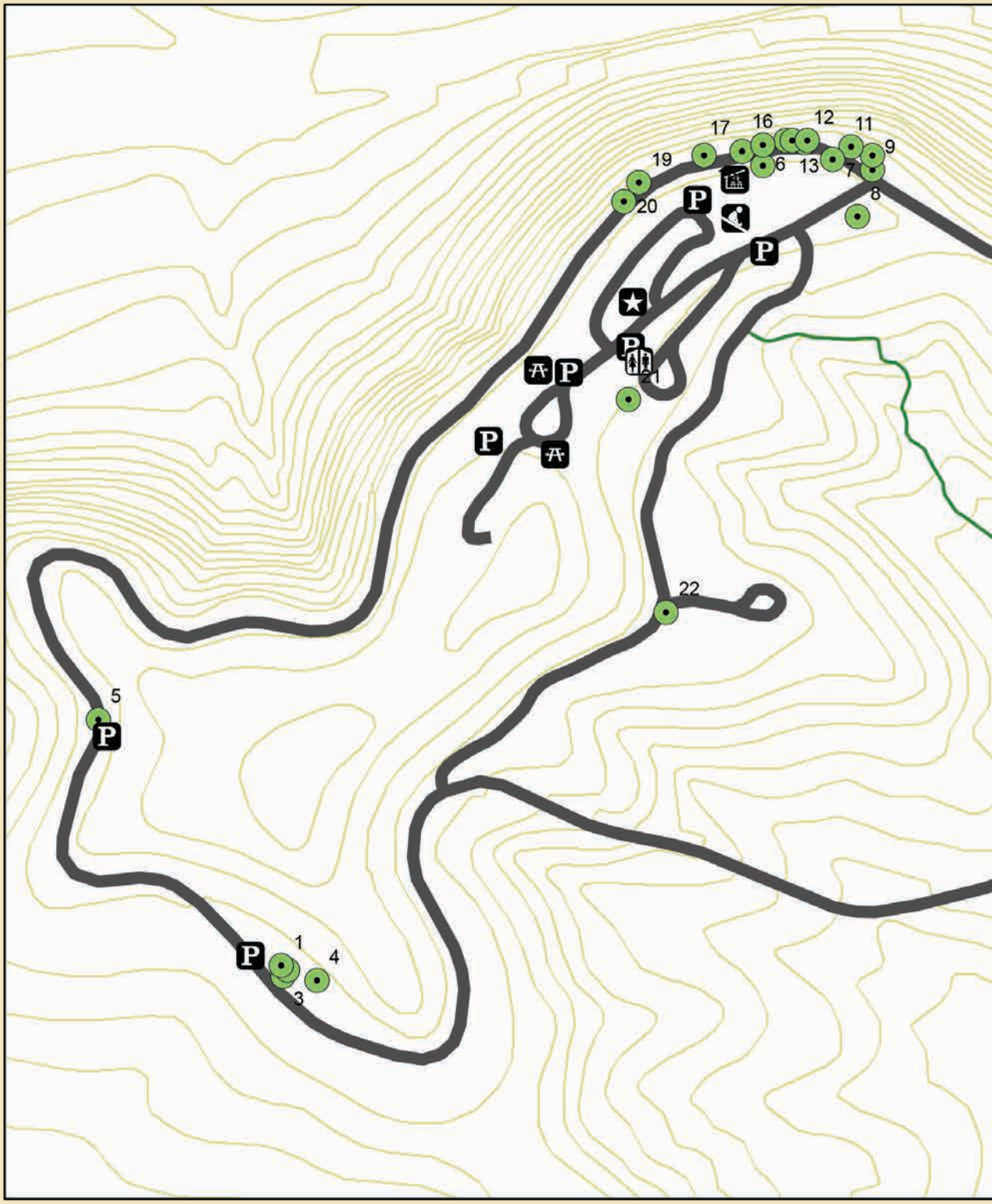
Please help protect these carvings by only enjoying them with your eyes, camera or sketchpad.

Report any vandalism to park staff:

Ronald Alton, Park Superintendent

ronald.alton@tpwd.texas.gov

(806) 241-5741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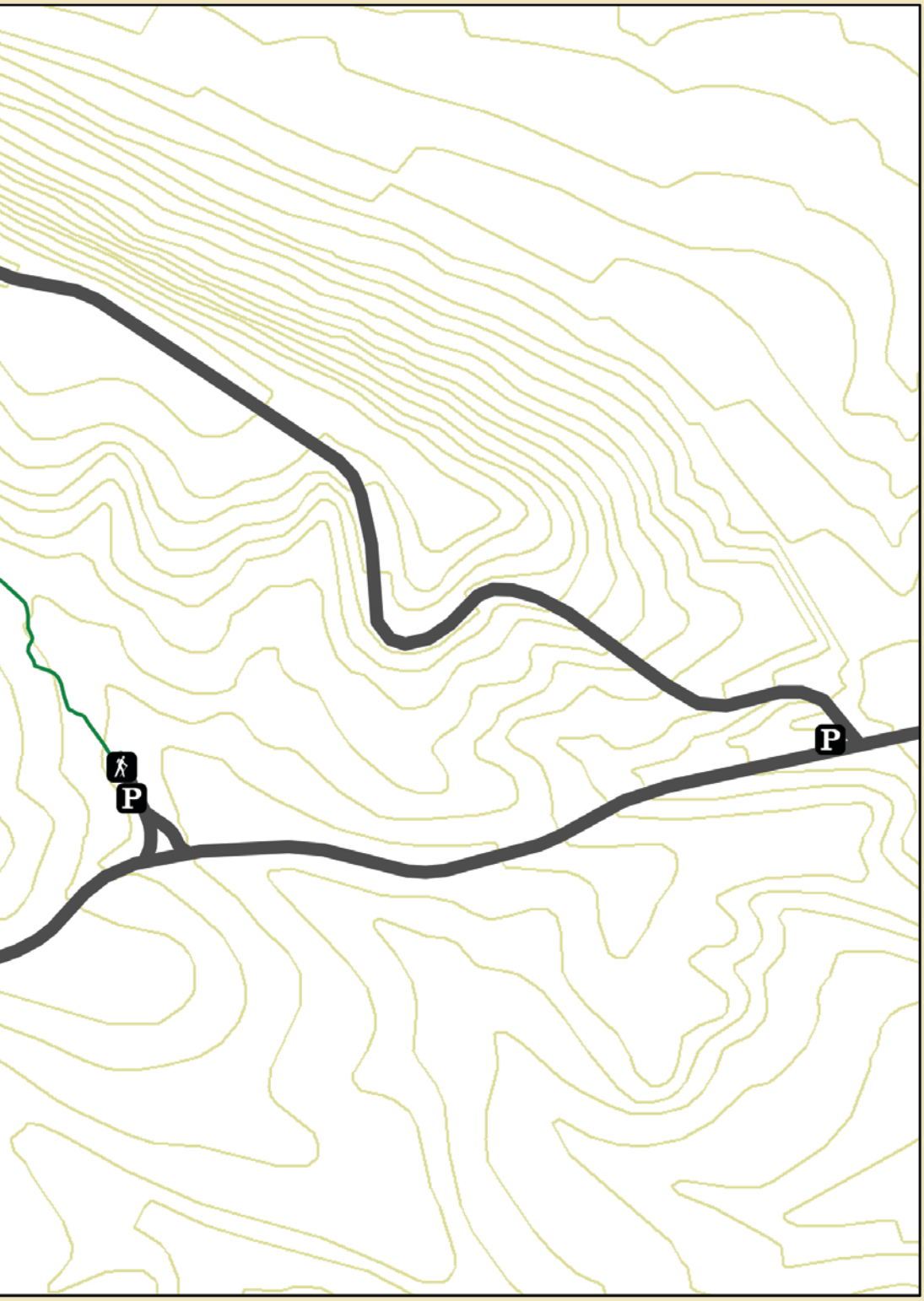

Legend

- Trail
- Loop Road
- Carving
- Park HQ
- Comfort Station
- Parking Area
- Pavilion
- Playground
- Trail Head
- Picnic Area

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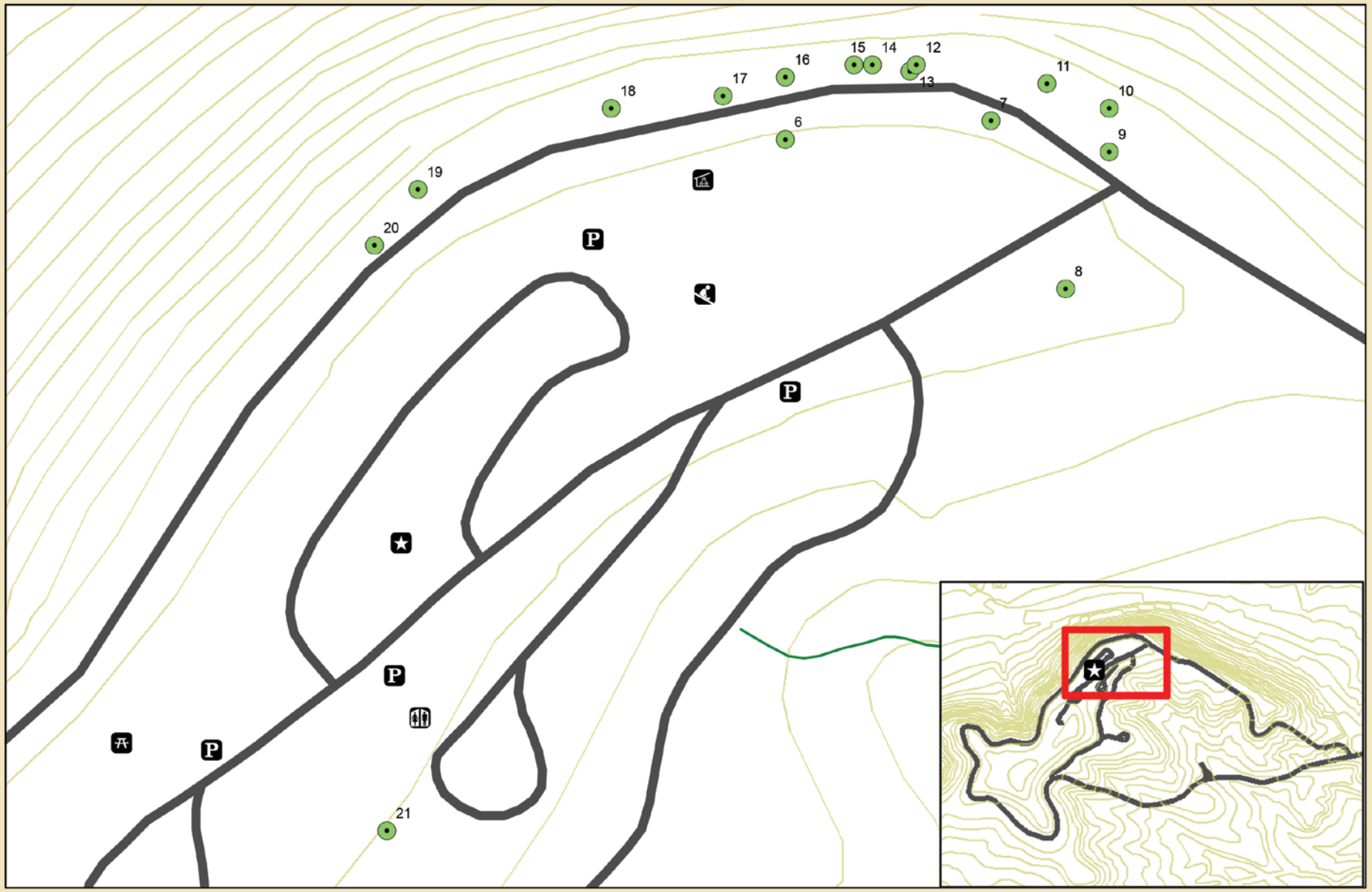
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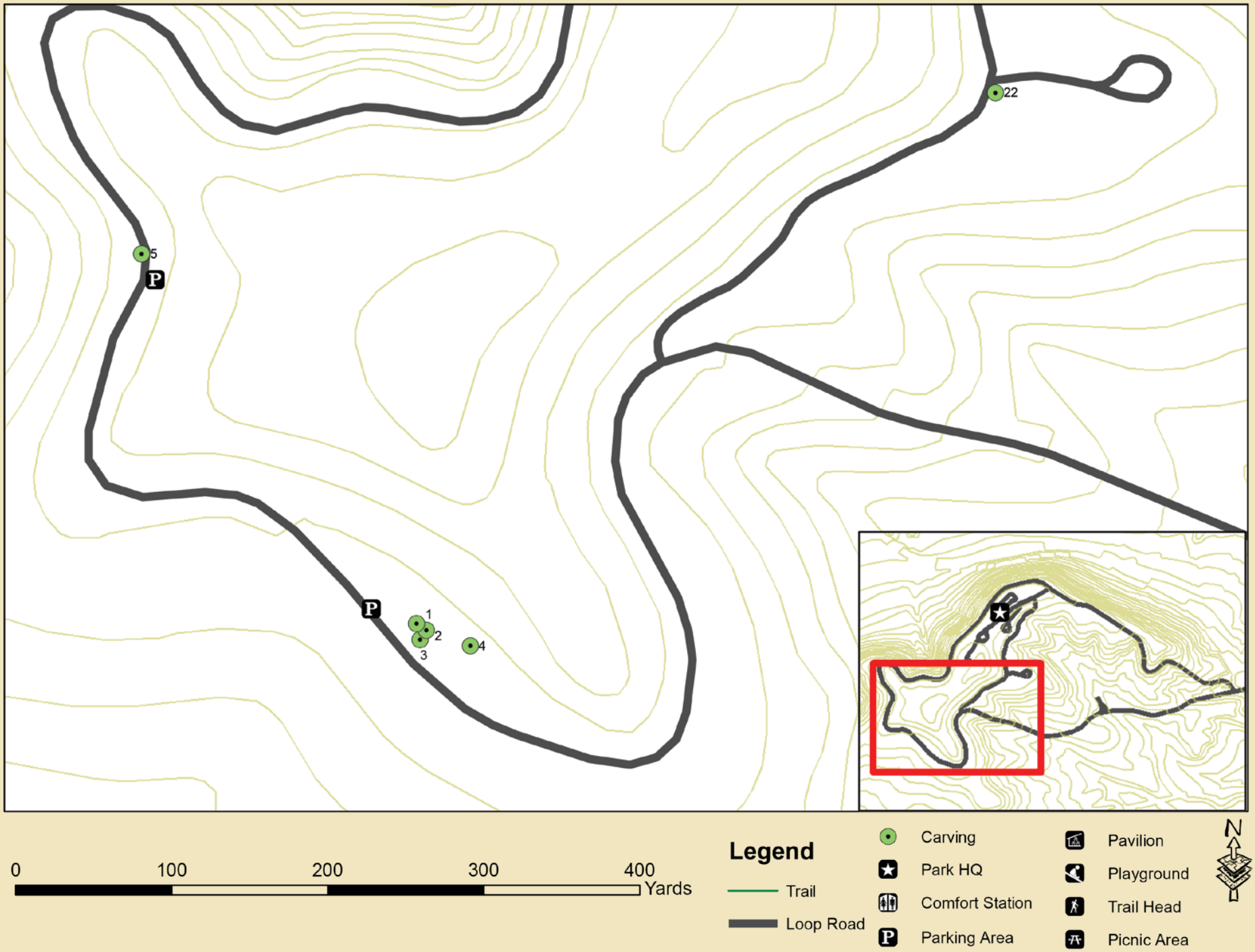
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JIMMIE GARZA'S SAILOR

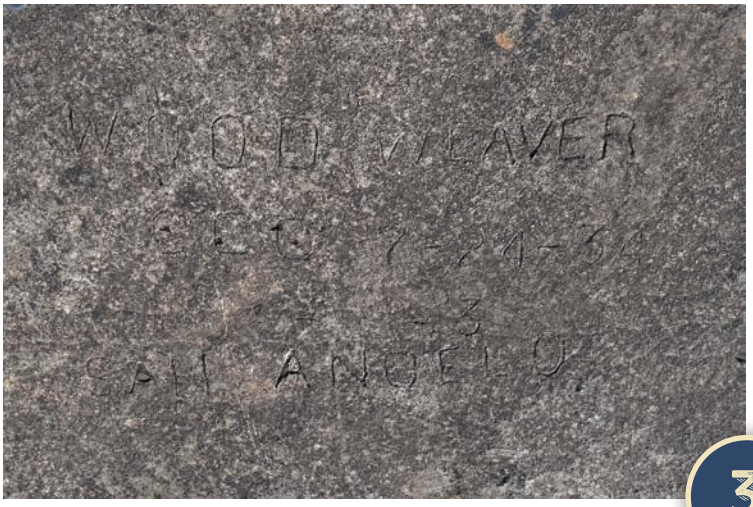
"Jimmy Garza" is listed on the Civilian Conservation Corps Company 1857 roster. From 1934–35 this company quarried limestone blocks nearby for the construction of buildings in the park. As you walk around the old pavilion, park headquarters and other structures, look for the long rod and chisel marks from the quarrying and masonry process. Was Jimmie previously a sailor? Did he want to be a sailor? Was he about to ship off? We do not know for sure, but we can see what he was working on in his free time after completing daily duties with Company 1857.

2

MAN IN HAT

In between Mr. Garza and Mr. Weaver is a very lightly etched man in a tall hat. Some might call it a "10-gallon" cowboy hat. We weren't able to get a good image of this carving, but we hope you can spot it for yourself. As you go up into the northern part of the park, you'll notice many more carvings than are in this guide. There are likely many others that have not yet been discovered. Our goal is to preserve these carvings for future generations to discover and explore. Help us out by treading lightly and not adding your own carvings.

WOOD WEAVER OF SAN ANGELO



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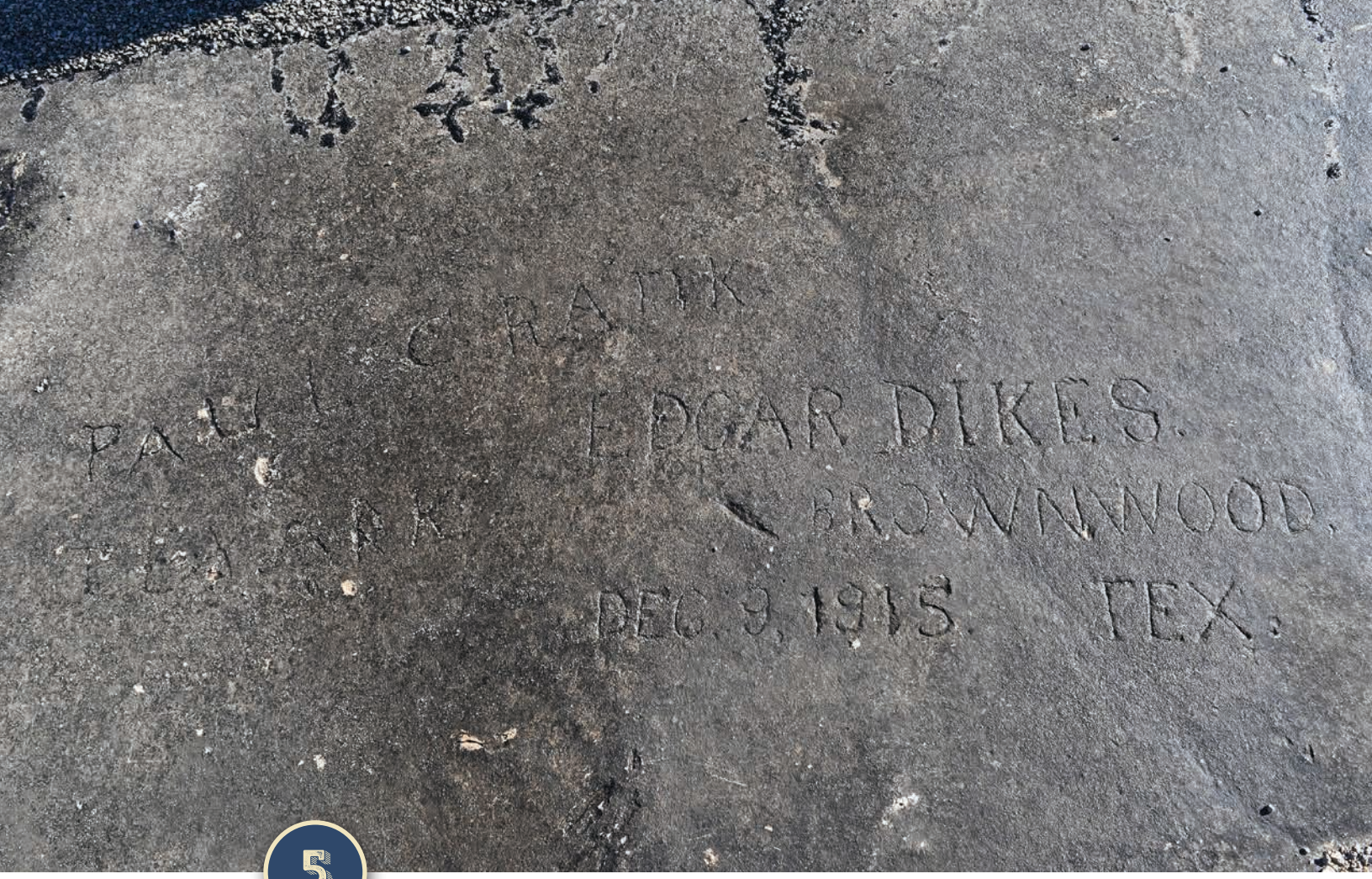
Another Civilian Conservation Corps member from nearby San Angelo, Texas signed his name and date of arrival, 7-24-34. He planned to add his departure date but left without doing so. Can you imagine the life of a CCC corpsman? What do you think they did for fun in this area?

4 QUARRY ROCK HOLES



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NEIGHBORS

It looks like Edgar Dikes from nearby Brownwood, Texas visited Scenic Mountain in 1915. Perhaps he and Paul Crank visited at the same time. Is Paul from Texarkana? Where are you visiting from?

BLANK SCROLL

This scroll was carefully crafted, but its message was never completed. It's likely 100+ years old. What do you think the creator wanted to say? A love poem? Their name? What would you write if this was your scroll? Luckily no one has attempted to add to the carving. It's best left as the original artist did, with story untold. We can use our imaginations to think about what they might have said.

6

CARVED BENCH

We wonder how long carving this "bench" or seat must have taken? You can see the chisel marks throughout.

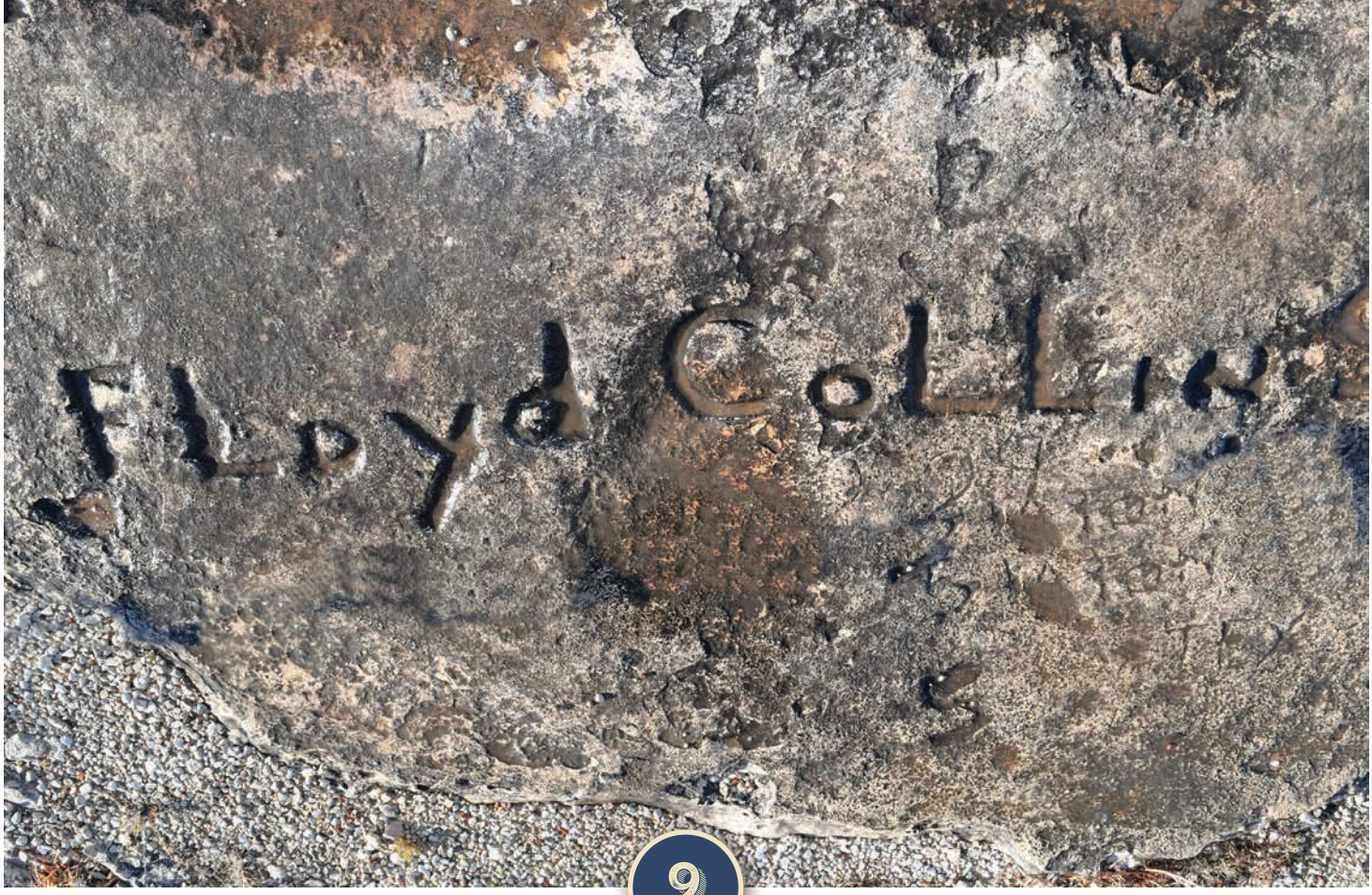
7

8 FANCY SCRIPT SIGNATURES

This area has several signatures. The Gothic-style font for Leonard Fisher and Barney Russell are some of the best in the park. Mark Harwell's is impressive as well. Note that the dates of the signatures are from the early 1900s. Both Leonard and Barney were residents of the city of Big Spring. Leonard Fisher is very likely a member of the well-known Fisher family who were dry-good merchants in town. According to local historian, Tammy Schrecengost, Barney Russell is on the right in the 1902 photograph working on a carving of his initials on top of Scenic Mountain (see page 13). Also in that photo is Peter W. Agnell, Barney's brother-in-law, who is likely carving a tribute on his wedding day for his new wife, Della Russell. The picture below is of Peter and Della's wedding on top of Scenic Mountain that was followed by a big picnic. And well over 100 years later, the park is still used for all sorts of family events!

Peter Agnell and Barney Russell leave their mark on Scenic Mountain. Courtesy of Big Spring Heritage Museum.

Peter and Della are married on top of Scenic Mountain. Courtesy of Big Spring Heritage Museum.



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FLOYD COLLINS

Floyd Collins was a spelunker (cave explorer) from Kentucky who visited Scenic Mountain and Big Spring in search of a cave in the area. We don't know if he found what he was looking for or how long he stayed, but we know it was long enough to leave his mark in the rock.

Floyd Collins discovered and claimed Crystal Cave in 1917 which is now a part of Mammoth Cave National Park in Kentucky, the longest known cave system in the world. In 1925, Collins was exploring Crystal Cave, also known as Sand Cave, when a fallen rock trapped his leg. The attempted rescue of Collins was a national newspaper sensation and one of the first news stories shared through nationwide radio broadcasting technology. All of America was listening when his death was announced after two weeks trapped in the cave. "The Death of Floyd Collins" is a song written by Vernon Dalhart to commemorate the fallen adventurer. Collins' news story made him famous, and on his tombstone in Mammoth Cave National Park, he's memorialized as being the "Greatest Cave Explorer Ever Known."

CUPULES

These carved dots, known by archeologists as cupules, were likely made before 1881 and possibly by Native Americans. Cupules are man-made historic and prehistoric rock art that have been found on every continent except Antarctica. We don't know what they mean, but we know that they were significant to the people making them as a lot of time and effort goes into their creation. What do you think this series of cupules means?

10

11

FROM A FAR-OFF LAND

Bobie and friend J.A. from New Mexico visited Scenic Mountain in 1917. What do you think brought them to the area?

CURSIVE SIGNATURES

Clay and Lillie appear to have been carved in 1883 which is when the courthouse in Big Spring was built. The delicate and curvy nature of the names took considerable time and care to complete. What other carvings do you see in this area?

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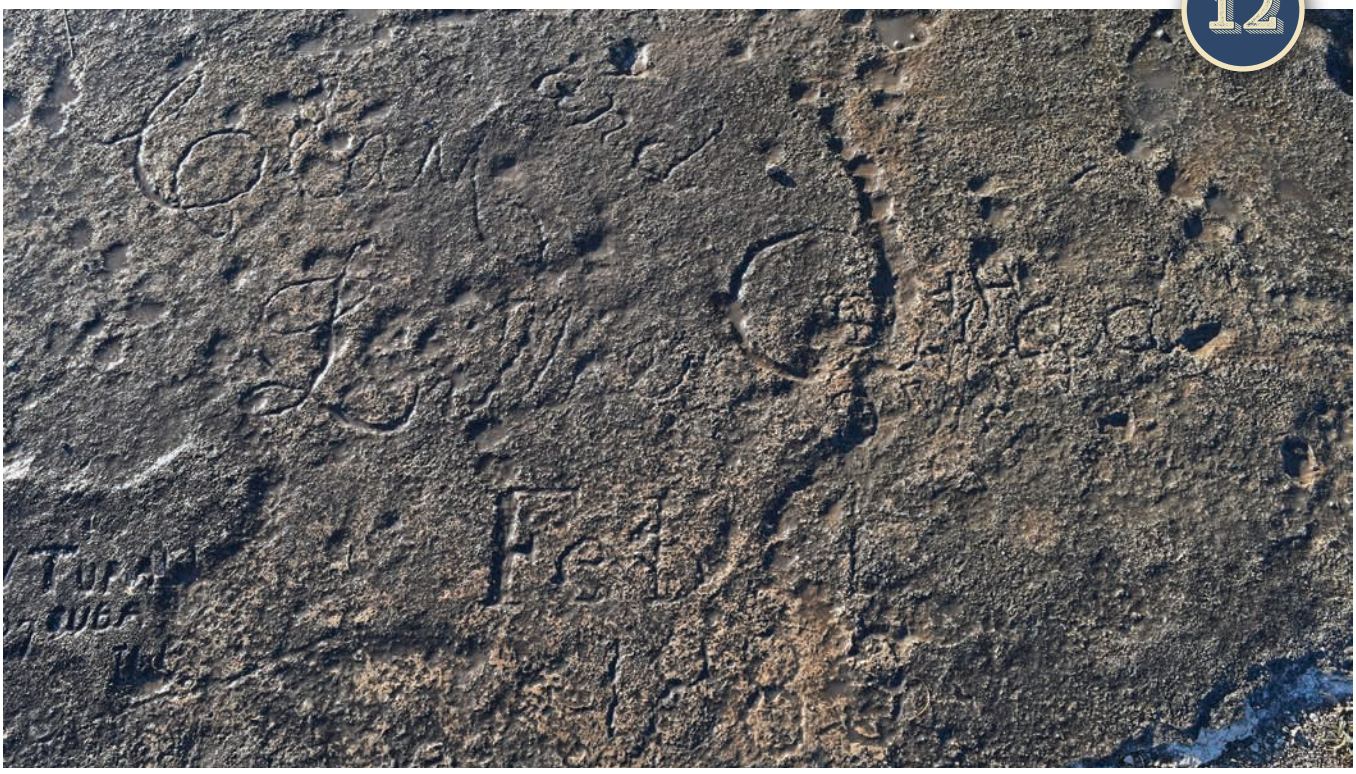


13

PAVED DESIGN

Per county records, a Mr. G.H. Brown married Fannie Leatherwood on October 1, 1903. Perhaps Mr. Brown made this carving a few years before? As you can see, some of the carvings along the road edge have been covered by asphalt. Texas Department of Transportation (TXDOT) crews try to take better care nowadays to prevent more of the carvings from being covered up. Vehicle and foot traffic have also damaged several carvings. How many other rock carvings do you think are hidden up under the road asphalt? We may never know, but our job now is to protect the rest of these carvings for others to discover and enjoy in the future. Watch where you step, please and park in designated parking spots.

14

LOVELY LADY

Unfortunately, foot and vehicle traffic has damaged our lovely lady. It is a complex bas-relief style carving which means it was sculpted into the rock to create a three-dimensional figure, almost like a statue. There are no other carvings that are sculpted in this way in the park. You can imagine the difficulty and precision needed to sculpt such a delicate figure. Was it a CCC boy dreaming of a girl back home? Is it a memorial to a loved one who passed? We don't know the story but we do know that it was a very difficult figure to sculpt that took a lot of imagination, time and care to create.

15

GEOLOGIC ROCK HAMMERS

J.J. O'Connor added some geologic rock hammers above his carved name. Did this mean J.J. was a part of the Civilian Conservation Corps local Company 1857? Did he work on rock quarrying or masonry? When you spot this carving in person, just to the left, you'll notice that J.W.F. appears to have carved a six-sided diamond shape with a faint arrow inside. What do you think that represents? A compass pointing the way home? A family crest?

MR. ANDERSON

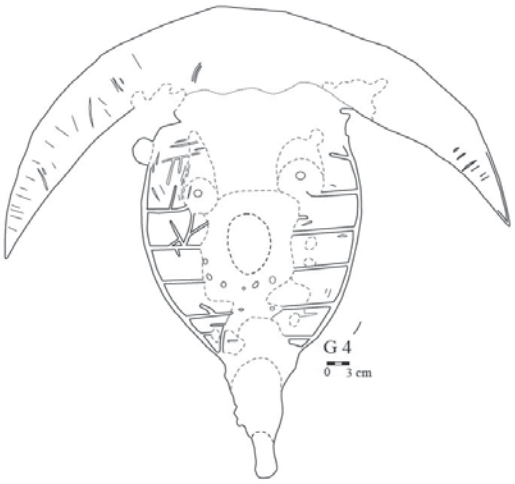
This carving of Alf. Anderson with year 1888 is one of the oldest dated in the park. We haven't discovered any information about Mr. Anderson, but we know his story is important and in need of protection. He made his way to the top of Scenic Mountain and gazed at the same horizon as you. Things were certainly different at that time, but the mountain, the view and the sunsets remain the same. People have long flocked to this spot and always will.

16

17

HORNED HEAD

Archeologists think this carving was made before 1881. It's possible Comanche peoples made it, but another Native American tribe could have been the artists. Jumano and Apache peoples also roamed the area. The carving may represent a bison skull or have a spiritual meaning. What do you think it looks like? Archeologist Kay Sutherland thinks the carving might represent a mask like those painted on rock walls at Hueco Tanks State Park and Historic Site in El Paso, Texas. This could mean that Jumano peoples carved it over 600 years ago. Though we may never know the true age of and meaning behind the "horned head" carving, we do know that it took considerable time and effort to make. Look closely at all the lines and details. What tools do you think they used to make this carving?



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PAINT BRUSH

We think this carving represents a wide paint brush. Do you agree? Perhaps it was carved by a CCC boy whose job was to paint? Nonetheless, we thought it was an interesting carving!

CUP AND SPOON

This is an interesting carving that we are guessing is a cup or bowl and spoon. Was it a Civilian Conservation Corps carving? The CCC was organized because of the Great Depression. People were out of work and hungry, many starving. Times were so lean for many families that there were even recipes circulating for how to best cook grass and many people were foraging and hunting to feed themselves. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "New Deal" provided jobs for young men so they could send money back home. They built bridges, parks and many other public projects that still stand to this day. Not only did they get paid, they also got three hot meals a day which was a great boost for morale. We can't be certain that this carving is one from a CCC boy, but when we saw it, it definitely reminded us of dining equipment the young men would have.

19

20

SCRIBBLE ROCK BASIN

These carvings are unique because the artists chose this naturally occurring rock basin as their canvas. In a heavy rain, the basin will fill with water and slowly pour out the small gap in the bottom creating a mini-waterfall. The rectangular shape with little “ears” could be a tombstone. What else can you find in this scribble rock basin?

GEOMETRIC PATTERN

This pattern might appear to be a vehicle tire tread in concrete, but it is actually a design carved into the rock by an unknown artist. Their lines are straight, and their shapes are carved with precision. Whoever worked on this carving took time to make sure it came out perfectly. One hit too hard on the chisel and your line would be ruined!

21

22

EAGLE

This great American symbol was likely carved by a Civilian Conservation Corps trooper of Company 1857 stationed in Big Spring. Many of the rock buildings and structures in the park, including the main park road, were projects of the CCC. In 1933 when president Franklin D. Roosevelt was inaugurated, more than 25% of Americans were unemployed, hungry and without hope due to the ravages of the Great Depression. F.D.R.'s New Deal programs helped energize the economy by providing jobs. The CCC was one of these programs. The goals of the program were conservation of America's natural resources and strengthening the economy. The men were fed three hot meals a day, provided uniforms, did daily drills and learned skills such as masonry and carpentry that would make them competitive in the workforce. The young men were paid $30 a month, $5 of which they got to keep and the rest they sent back home. Help preserve their life and legacy by reporting any vandalism to state park staff.

NOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS

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Life's better outside.®

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