



INTERPRETIVE GUIDE

CAMP WOLTERS

Camp Wolters was established next to the lake in 1926 for Texas National Guard Training. Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) Company 1811 was garrisoned at Camp Wolters in 1933 as part of President Roosevelt's New Deal. The CCC and Works Progress Administration (WPA), both New Deal agencies, used native materials to build rustic facilities around Mineral Wells during the 1930s. Some of the facilities still in use at Lake Mineral Wells State Park include the stone railing and steps at Penitentiary Hollow, the concession building, and sandstone picnic tables, benches, and fire pits in the park.

Camp Wolters served as a training center for infantry during World War II. Renamed Fort Wolters in 1963, the post trained helicopter pilots bound for Vietnam. When closed in 1974, the Army transferred nearly 3,000 acres, including Lake Mineral Wells, to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, which opened to the public in 1981. With the addition of property donated by the City of Mineral Wells and the recent acquisition of Lake Mineral Wells Trailway, the park has grown to 3,282 acres.

FURTHER READING

The Cast Iron Forest – A Natural & Cultural History of the North American Cross Timbers by Richard V. Francaviglia

Crazy Water, The Story of Mineral Wells and Other Texas Health Resorts by Gene Fowler

Time Was in Mineral Wells, A Crazy Story but True by A. F. Weaver

Lake Mineral Wells State Park and Trailway
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LAKE MINERAL WELLS

STATE PARK AND TRAILWAY

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LAKE MINERAL WELLS STATE PARK IS THE ONLY STATE PARK IN TEXAS PRESERVING THE WESTERN CROSS TIMBERS, A WOODED RIBBON OF LAND RUNNING NORTH TO SOUTH FROM OKLAHOMA THROUGH NORTH CENTRAL TEXAS. THE PARK FEATURES STEEP HILLS, DEEP RAVINES AND OPEN PRAIRIE CHARACTERISTIC OF THE SANDSTONE FORMATIONS AND LIMESTONE OUTCROPS OF THE WESTERN CROSS TIMBERS.



LEGENDARY CATTLEMEN

Early settlers discovered these strips of forest running like rivers through the vast Texas prairies. The dense growth of black-jack and post oak trees proved hard to navigate on horseback or by wagon. The writer Washington Irving popularized the name "Cross Timbers," one commonly used today to identify this unique geographic region bordered on the east by blackland prairie and rolling plains to the west.

The lush grasslands of the Western Cross Timbers attracted cattlemen such as Oliver Loving. In 1855 Loving settled about 10 miles north of Lake Mineral Well State Park, ranching 1,000 acres of land and running a small country store. Loving opened new markets for Texas cattle, first driving cattle north to Illinois along the Shawnee trail and later taking herds to Denver to feed hungry gold-miners. Following the Civil War, Texas was glutted with cattle. Loving teamed with neighboring rancher Charles Goodnight to herd cattle west to Fort Sumner, New Mexico where 8,000 Navajos had been relocated. This trail became famous as the Goodnight-Loving Trail. Loving died of gangrene in Fort Sumner in 1867 after being wounded during an Indian attack while on a cattle drive. His friend Charles Goodnight arranged for his body to be returned to Weatherford in 1868, inspiring a storyline used by Larry McMurtry in his novel Lonesome Dove. Loving's son Jim carried on the family tradition as one of the founders of the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association.

Today both the cowboy and the cattleman are living links to the past. The cattle industry still plays an active role in the local economy.



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THE CAST IRON FOREST

In addition to rough terrain, pioneer settlers crossing this timbered region encountered bands of Comanche and Kiowa that used the rugged area as a base for raids throughout north central

Texas during the 1860s and 1870s. The impenetrable nature of the Cross Timbers allowed native Americans such as the Caddo and the Tonkawa to use the forest as a buffer as European settlers moved across Texas.

Given plentiful forage, wildlife abounded. Indians and pioneers hunted white-tailed deer and wild turkeys. Smaller animals such as raccoons, opossums, cottontail rabbits, fox squirrels and coyotes were also abundant. Even today watchful visitors may see porcupines, armadillos, bobcats and ringtail cats in the Cross Timbers habitat preserved at Lake Mineral Wells State Park.

The Western Cross Timbers of Texas supports a variety of plant life. In addition to the dominant black-jack and post oaks, cottonwood, red oak, pecan and cedar elm trees are found in the ravines. Settlers used this woodland timber to build and heat log homes. Areas of open upland savannah feature mesquite trees and short grasses of high grazing quality.



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CRAZY WATER



James Lynch, founder of Mineral Wells

When Mrs. Lynch found she was not bothered by rheumatism after drinking the water, visitors began camping at Mineral Wells seeking cures for their ailments. The “crazy water” phenomenon began when a lady suffering from mania was cured after drinking the water. Later tests revealed that lithium in the well water might have accounted for her improvement.

Mineral Wells grew as people came to “take the cure.” Large, spacious hotels such as the Crazy Water and the Baker were built to serve the tourists that flocked to the resort. Famous guests included Judy Garland, Clark Gable, Will Rogers and Tom Mix.



Crazy Water Hotel

Mineral Wells soon needed an additional water supply to meet the growing demands of the city. An earthen dam was constructed across Rock Creek about three miles east of the city creating 646-acre Lake Mineral Wells, which also provided recreational fishing, boating and picnicking.

◀ I shall not easily forget the mortal toil, and the vexations of flesh and spirit, that we underwent occasionally, in our wanderings through the Cross Timber. It was like struggling through forests of cast iron.

—Washington Irving, “A Tour of the Prairies,” 1832

TAILS OF A RAIL-TRAIL

The Lake Mineral Wells State Trailway once was the Weatherford, Mineral Wells & Northwestern Railroad (WMW&NW). The discovery of mineral waters in the 1880s launched new businesses catering to tourists and health seekers. In 1889 capitalists invested \$500,000 to build a railroad connecting the resort town of Mineral Wells to the rail hub in Weatherford. Service began with two locomotives and 90 cars. The railroad and the communities it served grew and changed as tourism, manufacturing and the military brought prosperity to the local economy.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE A.F. WEAVER COLLECTION

The railroad carried both passengers and freight over the 25-mile route. Although nicknamed the “Whiskey, More Whiskey & No Water,” the railcars actually carried up to 3 million bottles

of mineral water a year. Mineral Wells became the largest shipping point for water in the South.

Bands greeted travelers arriving at the railroad depot during the early 1900s. Up to 150,000 tourists arrived each year to enjoy the waters and the resort culture that flourished at local hotels and bathhouses.

During the 1930s people began to enjoy the benefit of the mineral waters in their own homes by adding tap water to dehydrated Crazy Water Crystals. The Crazy Water Company promoted the crystals in radio programs featuring the theme song “Dream Train” and delivered the product across the country in distinctive Crazy Crystal boxcars.



Original product packaging for Crazy Water Crystals.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE A.F. WEAVER COLLECTION



Water boxes are loaded onto the Crazy Crystals boxcars.

The Great Depression caused the mineral water resort business to decline. Business boomed again during World War II with the rapid growth of the army and the need for Camp Wolters as a training center. Over 100 cars each month delivered supplies to the troops stationed there. Troops shipping out after their training also traveled by rail.

American culture changed after World War II. With more Americans buying cars and the cross-country trucking industry competing for freight, many shortline railroads went out of business. The WMW&NW changed hands many times, finally being bought by the City of Mineral Wells in 1989. It closed for good in 1992 due to a lack of traffic.

Hikers, bikers and equestrians enjoy recreation opportunities along this historic rail corridor. The Lake Mineral Wells Trailway opened in 1998, the result of a partnership between the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, the Texas Department of Transportation, the Federal Highway Administration and the cities of Mineral Wells and Weatherford. The 20-mile trail can be accessed from trailheads in downtown Mineral Wells near the old railroad depot, the state park, the farming community of Garner and Cartwright Park on the northwest edge of Weatherford.

