

*Interpretive Guide to:*

# COPPER BREAKS

## STATE PARK



Copper Breaks State Park is between Quanah and Crowell on the Pease River and SH 6. In the late 1940s and through the 1950s and 1960s, the Gosage family owned the land and opened

it up to neighbors and the community for recreational use. The small lake and the swimming beach were popular for birthdays and family parties, and trails were open for hiking, horseback riding and other activities. In the 1970s, a local initiative resulted in the creation of the park. The land was purchased under the State Parks Bond Program and was opened to the public in stages by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department between 1972 and 1974.

Despite its beauty, the park's remote location keeps visitor traffic down and helps maintain a sense of seclusion and wilderness. The park offers 10 miles of trails for hiking, biking and horseback riding. There are opportunities for camping, bird watching, nature study, swimming (summer), picnicking, or fishing in Lake Copper Breaks and the 13-acre Big Pond. Its remote location offers dark skies for star-gazing. There is a small interpretive center at the park's headquarters featuring natural and historical exhibits. A portion of the official Texas longhorn herd roams areas of the park, giving visitors a chance to experience this Texas legend.

For more information about programs, volunteering or joining the friends group, contact the park or visit our website.

Copper Breaks State Park  
777 Park Road 62, Quanah, TX 79252  
(940) 839-4331 + [www.tpwd.texas.gov/copperbreaks/](http://www.tpwd.texas.gov/copperbreaks/)



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COPPERBREAKSSTATEPARKISRELATIVELY UNKNOWN AND OFF-THE-BEATEN-PATH, BUT IT IS AN INVALUABLE NATURAL GEOLOGIC TIME CAPSULE. THE PARK TAKES ITS NAME FROM THE GRAY-GREEN STREAKS OF RAW COPPER THAT BAND ITS MANY RUST-COLORED MINI-CANYONS AND ARROYOS. AN ANCIENT INLAND SEA HELPED FORM THE AREA INTO A BROKEN BADLANDS OF GULLIES, MESAS AND JUNIPER "BREAKS."

BORDERED BY THE SEASONAL PEASE RIVER, THIS LAND WAS ONCE RICH IN BUFFALO AND OTHER WILDLIFE AND OFFERED PROTECTION AND BOUNTY TO GENERATIONS OF NATIVE AMERICANS—AS EVIDENCED BY 10,000 YEARS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMAINS. NEARBY HIGHWAY 6, ONCE KNOWN AS THE MACKENZIE TRAIL, WAS A MAJOR CATTLE TRAIL AND PIONEER WAGON ROAD. COMANCHE AND KIOWA, COWBOYS AND SETTLERS ALL TRAVELED AND CAMPED IN THE SAME PLACES THAT VISITORS HIKE AND CAMP TODAY.



## A PLACE AWAY

The geologic history of the park is exposed in the badland topography where the Pease River has carved into the Permian geologic strata. The green and red clays were laid down some 225 million years ago when this area was submerged in a shallow inland sea. Eryops, a 14- to 16-foot amphibious carnivore, was probably the first ruler of the land. The erosional forces of wind and water have determined the landscape of the park, changing level plains into a rough, broken land with eroded slopes and badlands. Most of the park is within the drainage of Devil's Creek that flows southward toward the Pease River, which merges with the Red River about 45 miles downstream. Copper Breaks is in a semi-arid region of prairie bunch grasses, brush land, and narrow shallow breaks of mesquite, juniper, cottonwood, some scattered native pecan, hackberry, soapberry and a variety of wildflowers.

Most species of mammals in the park are best viewed during the early morning and late evening hours. Mule deer are common, along with sightings of bobcats and the occasional mountain lion. Other wildlife includes white-tailed deer, raccoon, armadillo, coyote, fox, cottontail and jackrabbit. Visitors can see numerous frogs, turtles, snakes and even the Texas horned lizard. A large variety of raptors, songbirds and bats are found in the park. Bird sightings include barn owl, red-tailed hawk, Mississippi kite, roadrunner, cardinal, hummingbird, mockingbird and many others. Geese, ducks, cranes and other migratory birds stop briefly in the park in their fall and spring migrations.

*Above, Cynthia Ann Parker with her daughter, Topsannah (Prairie Flower).*

*Quanah Parker left a legacy of peace that helped heal the divide between the Comanche people and the United States government.*

*Courtesy Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum*



## CAPTURE AND RECAPTURE

The Comanche were the dominant tribe of the plains and offered fierce resistance to settlers of the West Texas frontier. They found the Pease River to be a favorable place to hunt bison, find shelter and seek medicine from the spirit world. Medicine Mounds, four conspicuous domes about 10 miles east of the park, is one of the places where the Comanche believed spirits dwelled.

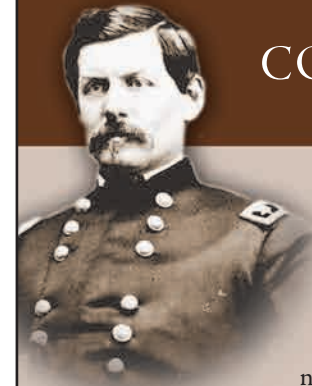


One of the more significant events in the Comanche struggle with settlers occurred nearby on the Pease River. The story begins in 1836 when Cynthia Ann Parker was captured during a raid on Fort Parker in Central Texas. The Noconi Comanche adopted her and raised her as one of their own. She married a Comanche chief called Peta Nocona and had three children with him.

In 1860, a young scout for the Texas Rangers named Charles Goodnight found signs of a Comanche camp. The Rangers followed their trail. Soon they spotted the Comanche, and a brief gun battle ensued. They captured a woman carrying an infant. The pair was Cynthia Ann Parker and her child "Prairie Flower." She was reunited with her relatives, but she did not adjust well to a settler's life and longed for the free lifestyle of the Comanche. She frequently demanded to return to her husband but was never permitted to do so.

Quanah Parker, son of Cynthia Ann Parker and Peta Nocona, became the last war chief of the Comanche. He led raids across the Texas plains and fought the United States Army until the Comanche surrendered in 1875 and were forced onto a reservation at Fort Sill. With the fighting over, Quanah Parker became an advocate for his people, often lobbying government leaders for Native American rights.

## COPPER MINING



After the Civil War, George B. McClellan, former commander of the Army of the Potomac, became involved in a number of mining operations around the nation. He first noticed copper deposits in northwest Texas in 1852

while accompanying Captain Randolph Marcy on an expedition to locate the source of the Red River. In 1877, with a geologic report and eyewitness accounts confirming that copper deposits were common in the area, McClellan organized the Grand Belt Copper Company in Philadelphia. The company purchased 200,000 acres in Hardeman County for 25 cents per acre. Later that year, McClellan set out from Fort Worth accompanied by a large expedition of engineers, miners, carpenters and laborers. McClellan traveled in style. His entourage required more than 200 horses to haul the wagons full of supplies, equipment and McClellan's personal belongings, which included a full-size metal bathtub, carpets and fine furniture.

Mining operations were suspended when McClellan received the Democratic nomination for governor of New Jersey and won a three-year term. But he returned in 1883 with heavy machinery and employees. They set up a primary mine site where Canal Creek and the Pease River meet and began mining in 1884. The ore was mainly found near the surface and was collected from a broad area, including a number of sites within the park. Up to 100 employees worked the steam-powered machinery and rock-crushing equipment, and a nearby shantytown of saloons, brothels and other frontier businesses soon opened.

Major problems and obstacles included transportation, shortages of fuel for the smelters and limited water supply for the ore washers. McClellan died in 1885, but the company continued limited operations until 1887 with little economic success. The venture was abandoned by 1888. Three later attempts at mining the copper ore were made, but none was successful.