



In Search of El dorado

A daily journal of my travels and adventures in my.....Search for Eldorado

Hello to Family & Friends



It will be interesting to see what this Lake Jackson aquarium has to offer. Last year in California I took you to the Birch Aquarium, which is a top of the line aquarium. Sea Center Texas is free, and today the weather is mostly misty with periods of light rain, so I'll be doing the indoor museum thing again.



The building above is not much to look at, in fact I thought my GPS was taking me to the water treatment facility until I saw the sign.

The sculpture to the right is titled "A Fish Story". Well done and finely detailed, it tells the story of a boy scout and his unit leader talking about his recent catch. The artist is Erik Kaposta



A partnership for fish

In 1985, a partnership between the Gulf Coast Conservation Association, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and Dow was formed to establish red drum rearing ponds within Dow's Freeport site—the first saltwater satellite hatchery in the nation.

This unique partnership helped replenish declining saltwater fish populations along the coast and led directly to the creation of Sea Center Texas.

The Center opens at ten, but I had to knock on the door at 10:10 to get it unlocked. It's always nice being the first one through the door.

Dow Chemical is obviously a pretty big fish around here, pun intended. They are not the largest chemical company in town, but they are the first. There will be more on that history later on.

You guessed it, due to Covid the touch tank is closed. However, there were still some small fish, and the two crabs below, in the tank under the plastic cover.

**TOUCH
TANK
CLOSED**



Sawfish are a type of ray with a shark-like body. They were once common in Texas bays, but now are rarely seen. Sawfish use their saw, called a rostrum, to capture food. The sawfish rapidly swings its rostrum from side to side to stun, injure or impale prey fishes with their rostral teeth. In addition, the rostrum serves as a sensory organ to detect buried prey and is used to disturb sandy and muddy bottoms in search of small prey items like fish, crabs and shrimp. The mouth is behind the saw on the underside of the body. The saw is about 25% of the overall length of a sawfish.

On the walls of the Sea Center entry area, gift shop and the first display area are full sized models of many different kinds of fish caught in the Gulf. They are all record size catches. This display caught my eye due to its size, it must be a good 36 inches long, which makes this sawfish about 12 feet in length. Imagine the damage it did to the shrimp net it was caught in.

Center Rostrum
Estimated weight 700-1000 pounds
Caught by a shrimp trawl
in the Gulf of Mexico
near Palacios, Texas in 1950
Donated by Don Boazman

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The Sea Center breaks up the displays areas by their labels: Salt Marsh – Coastal Bay – Jetty – Nearshore Waters – Gulf. The touch tank was in the Salt Marsh area.



Atlantic stingray

Dasyatis sabina

Atlantic stingrays live mostly on the bottom where they feed on worms, crabs, shellfish, shrimp and small fish which they suck into the underside of their heads.

Stingrays won't attack you but they may give you a painful sting if you step on them while wading in Texas bays. Shuffle your feet as you move to frighten the rays away and avoid getting stung.

There are only a couple pictures of fish, those that I found most intriguing. I seriously did not notice the eye until I downloaded the photos to the laptop. Am I crazy? Or does it look like there is a very human like eye inside that fishes head? He's watching me, I just know it.



Jetties are built to last

On the Texas coast, the only rocky shores you'll find are man-made jetties. These structures, usually built in pairs, extend side-by-side into the water to form a channel and to keep the channel clear of sand bars and cross-currents.

Texas jetties are broadly triangular in shape. They're built on a base of 15- to 200-pound stones. Large stones—up to three tons each—make up the core and even larger cover stones weighing as much as 10 tons form a wide walkway on top.

Not the greatest representation, but the water is its typical blue, and the jetty sticks up from the Gulf floor.



Coral Reef



I don't know if anyone out there has a tropical fish tank or not, this is a good sized one, about eight feet long. I was zooming in on that pink coral below, when Mr. Yellow swan into the frame and smiled for the camera.



American eel

Anguilla rostrata

American eels can live in the saltwater Gulf, brackish coastal marshes or freshwater rivers and streams.

Females and some males spend most of the year in fresh water, but during the winter, they migrate through the salt marshes on their way into the Gulf to spawn.

**THE EELS ARE
NOT DEAD**



Thank you for your concern!



That is one ugly fish, is it not? I can only assume that since the eels do not seem to be moving, patrons would report their inactivity to the management, who grew tired of replying that, no, the eels are not dead, so they installed the sign in the upper left.

No place to hide

There isn't much shelter in open Gulf waters but that isn't a problem for some fish. Great hammerhead, lemon and bull sharks rely on sheer size to protect them from becoming another fish's prey.

Smaller fish like bluefish and tarpon blend into the background to avoid being eaten. Seen from above, the fish's dark backs match the seafloor, seen from below, their pale bellies fade into the light from the surface. Stingrays and cownose rays count on camouflage, too, burying their flat, brownish bodies in the soft bottom.



Since I'm not a fisherman, I never really gave any thought to why fish have white bellies. For that reason I found the above explanation very interesting.

I was always given the impression that sharks had to keep moving in order to breathe. This guy just sat in that one place the whole time I was watching. His only movement was the in and out motion of his gills, so I know he was alive.



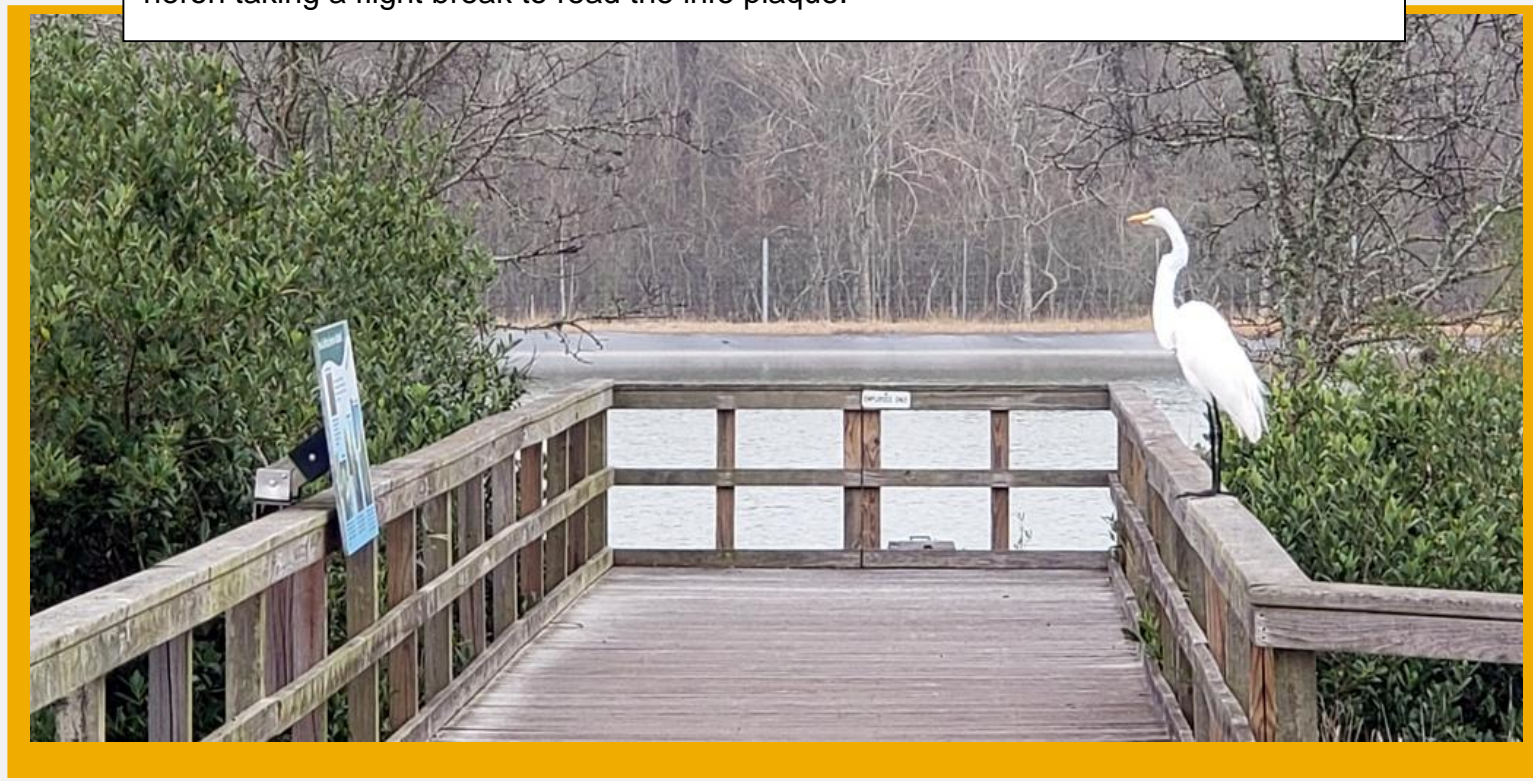
**HATCHERY
TOURS
UNAVAILABLE
TODAY**

I was hesitant to include another aquarium on my itinerary, but I found out, happily I must admit, that the Sea Center Texas is not your average, run-of-the-mill aquarium. There is a nature boardwalk, which I will get to next, but they have 13 acres of fish hatching ponds (that I was unable to tour obviously) which is their main function, restocking the waters near the Gulf. The displays/tanks were interesting, well done and maintained. I enjoyed my visit since it was different from the normal sea aquarium.



It had started to mist and rain by the time I started my nature walk so I made it rather quick. I think the turtle above may be blind. He climbed out of the water to sun himself on a log, but the water is reflecting the drab color of the sky.

Below – I knew birds were smarter than everyone thinks they are. I caught this white heron taking a flight break to read the info plaque.





Next stop is the Lake Jackson Historical Museum.



I never heard of this version of dominos, but it sounds interesting.

Triminoes

Similar to dominos but they are triangles, have three sides of dots, and made of wood. There are 45 pieces to this game and was made by the Triminoes Company in Lake Jackson.



Because of the vast number of natural resources in this area of Texas, in 1940 Dow Chemical decided to build a plant near Freeport and mine magnesium which was in high demand. Being a somewhat remote area, housing was virtually non-existent. Employees were sleeping in their cars, in chicken coops, a first shifter would get out of bed to go to work and a third shifter would hop in and go to sleep.

MIDWAY, TEXAS

Dow first came to Texas in 1940, to construct a magnesium plant in Freeport, TX. As Plant A was being built, it became increasingly difficult for new employees to find housing. Makeshift homes were quickly erected as many were living in substandard conditions.

As a result a frontier town was founded along a shell road halfway between Velasco, TX and Plant A and given the name Midway by Dow Chemical. The Velasco Inn, several stores, a gas station, and even a dance hall made up the short-lived town.

After Lake Jackson was built, Midway slowly disappeared. The town was replaced by chemical factories.

In June of 1941 the Office of Production Management in Washington requested magnesium production be doubled from Dow Chemical. A 670-acre tract of land west of Plant A was purchased to construct a second magnesium plant, Plant B.

During the construction of Plant B, a trailer park was opened to accommodate the arrival of more Dow employees. Upon opening, the park housed 258 trailers with 400 government owned trailers available for rent across the road. Four large service buildings at the park provided laundry equipment, showers and lavatories.

TRAILER, TEXAS



By 1943 Dow realized that the poor living conditions were causing poor work production. Alden Dow, an architect, was contracted to find a site, design, and build an entire town for the workers at the chemical plants. That town would become Lake Jackson

Below is an audioanimatronics figure, robot since they can't use the Disney moniker, of Alden Dow. A motion sensor started him talking about Lake Jackson. The houses were only 16x16, but were a vast improvement over chicken coops. Alden designed the roads in a curving manner, using the gardening tricks learned from his father to not show too much, but make the visitor want to see what's around the next curve of the garden path.



Alden designed all facets of Lake Jackson, the houses, the businesses, the roads, the parks.

Right – For anyone out there who is a GONE WITH THE WIND fan.



Alden Dow and his family were avid equestrians. On the top he is riding with his daughter Mary Lloyd, in the center he is on Rebel, the horse that was the character Ashley Wilkes' mount in the movie "Gone With The Wind", and on the bottom with his brother Willard Dow.



Many of the streets are ways. Center Way, Circle Way, Parking Way, Any Way, or like the ones above, This Way and That Way.

Interesting story 1 – Alden and his secretary were standing in the street and Alden was trying to think of street names. His secretary said he had streets going this way and that way and Alden said “That’s it, we’ll name these two This Way and That Way.”

Interesting story 2 – My research found the following excerpt from the local newspaper *“Downtown business owners and interested residents gathered Thursday to hear more about the \$4 million phase two of downtown revitalization. Streets affected by the construction will include This Way from Circle Way to Center Way, Parking Way from Oak Dr to This Way, That Way from Center Way to Parking Way and Center Way from That Way to Oak Dr.”*

Below is my photo of the intersection of This Way and That Way, taken after I left the museum.





This is another robot who speaks and moves. Dr. A.P. Beutal was the head of the Dow Chemical Texas Division and with Alden Dow, son of Dow Chemical founder Herbert Henry Dow, they were considered the founding fathers of lake Jackson. He gave me most of the information just related to you above.



Stealth

The plane you see hanging in this Museum is credited as being the very first airplane to demonstrate radar invisibility. In 1972 Dr. Leo Windecker provided this plane to be evaluated by the U.S. Air Force at their test facility in White Sands, New Mexico. To his surprise the results were held as "classified", even to him! Six years later, the Air Force announced they had developed a new breed of composite "stealth" aircraft.

This airplane, called the Windecker Eagle, is unique and historic because it was the first "composite" airplane to be certified for manufacture by the Federal Aviation Agency (FAA) in 1969. Nicknamed the Plastic Airplane, the plane's body and wings are fabricated primarily from epoxy resins and a special type of fiberglass.

Abner Jackson Plantation Site

a State Antiquities Landmark

Open the First Saturday of every month 10am-6pm

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Founded in 1842, the Jackson Plantation was the second of three plantations developed by Major Abner Jackson. Originally known as "Lake Place," the land was a bustling sugar plantation that stretched over 6400 acres and was worked by over 80 enslaved people. This State Antiquities Landmark has revealed the true history of sugar plantations in Brazoria County. Come discover for yourself the sugar making process of the 1840s, how convict labor replaced slave labor during the 1870s, and how destructive the hurricane of 1900 truly was.



*Donations
Appreciated*



The Abner Jackson Plantation Site
FM 2004
Lake Jackson, TX 77566
(979) 297-1570
www.lakejacksonmuseum.org
operated by The Lake Jackson Historical Association



ABNER JACKSON PLANTATION

BORN IN VIRGINIA, MAJOR JACKSON CAME TO TEXAS IN 1838. HIS FIRST SUCCESSFUL PLANTATION, 1839-1842 WAS RETRIEVE PLANTATION, NOW THE RETRIEVE PRISON. HERE HE SET UP A SUGAR MILL WITH A DOUBLE SET OF KETTLES. IN 1842, JACKSON DEVELOPED LAND WHICH BECAME THE LAKE JACKSON PLANTATION. HERE HE CONSTRUCTED A SUGAR MILL WHICH IN 1852 PRODUCED SUGAR USING HORSE DRIVEN MACHINERY. BY 1858, JACKSON HAD INSTALLED A STEAM ENGINE IN HIS SUGAR MILL. DARRINGTON PLANTATION, JACKSON'S THIRD, IS NOW DARRINGTON PRISON. ABNER JACKSON AND WIFE, MARGARET, HAD FOUR SONS, ANDREW, JOHN, GEORGE AND ABNER, JR. AND A DAUGHTER, ARSENATH, WIFE OF JARED FULTON GROCE. IN 1861, ABNER JACKSON DIED AND HIS SON, JOHN C. JACKSON, RETURNED FROM THE CIVIL WAR TO MANAGE THE ESTATE.

TEXAS SOCIETY COLONIAL DAMES XVII CENTURY
REV. RICHARD BUCK CHAPTER, LAKE JACKSON
OCTOBER, 1997

SUGAR KETTLE

DURING THE SUGAR MAKING PROCESS, SUGAR CANE WAS CRUSHED, THE JUICE FILTERED, THEN COOKED IN A SERIES OF KETTLES, PROGRESSIVELY HOTTER, ENDING WITH A HIGHLY CONCENTRATED SYRUP. THIS KETTLE, MEASURING SEVEN FEET IN DIAMETER, WAS THE "LA GRANDE" OR THE FIRST IN THE SERIES, THE LARGEST KETTLE, AND WAS FROM THE LAKE JACKSON PLANTATION.

IN 1860, THIS SUGAR MILL PRODUCED 586 HOGSHEADS OR OVER HALF A MILLION POUNDS OF SUGAR. THE 1900 HURRICANE DESTROYED THIS MILL AND CANE FARMING ENDED TEXAS SUGAR CANE FARMING BY 1920.

GIFT OF THE FAMILY OF JOHN T. SUGGS



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Historic Plantation Site

The Abner Jackson Plantation Site is a small portion of the roughly 4642 acres that once made up the original Lake Jackson Plantation established in the 1840s. Designated by the Texas Historical Commission as a State Antiquities Landmark, this historic site contains the remains of a 19th Century sugar plantation.

Despite its ruined state, today this site is unique as the only known site in Texas to contain evidence of the introduction of steam technology in the sugar making process.



Remains of the Sugar Mill.



Since today is NOT the first Saturday of the month, the site is closed. A lot of pictures for someplace that's not open though.

In the picture below, through the trees, you can just make out an informational plaque and maybe part of a porch. Best I could do under the circumstances.



From Lake Jackson it was about an hour drive to Palacios and the City By The Sea Museum.



TO: the burgomaster
of PALAZIOS (Gulf of Mexico)

(Texas).

Dear Sir,

I am an ex-PW who lived in the States for 3 years, and I beg to send you today the heartiest regards from my home-country.

I lived in Camp Hulen and was employed in several districts of the environs. People were always so kind to me! I often remember the nice landscape, the wonderful Gulf of Mexico! I often remember the happy life I enjoyed in the States ~~on comparing the homecomers from Russian captivity~~ with us. They look all so poor, so ragged, so exhausted!

Now we have to face a great many hardships and difficulties in Germany. There are so many deficiencies, above all in food and clothing! Often I wish to be again a PW in your country in order to get enough to eat at least!

I should be very glad to hear again from your city. As I lost all addresses, I beg to turn to you, dear Sir, to thank the American people for their kindness they always showed to me while living there as a PW. I should be greatly obliged to you if you once would drop me some lines, too.

Respectfully Yours,

Frank
(Wilhelm FRANK)

Palacios was home to Camp Hulen, which for a time during WWII served as a prisoner of war camp. The letter is from a former inmate to the Burgomaster, or Mayor, of Palacios. I find it interesting to compare his treatment in the USA to treatment of American prisoners in Germany, Japan or later on in Korea and Vietnam. Those countries just wanted to break us. They were jealous of our freedoms. But Americans knew our ways would win out. We didn't have to break our war prisoners, we treated them like human beings.

I know, I know, someone will come back with how we treated the Native Americans and put them on reservations, robbed them of their land and their way of life, or the prison farms for our own citizens before prison reform.

Hey, nobody's perfect.

Maybe, as Bob Seger sings, "next time we'll get it right"

THE SHIPWRECK OF LA BELLE

In 1684 La Salle set sail with four ships for the Mississippi River, with the plan to claim new territory for France. He arrived in Matagorda Bay instead. In 1686, the smallest ship, La Belle, intended for use in exploring the many rivers and shallow bays, became lodged on a sandbar. Efforts to offload her cargo were unsuccessful. The la Belle was abandoned until being found 300 years later about 12 miles off shore near Palacios. An extraordinary effort went into the excavation and preservation beginning in 1995. I watched a 40 minute documentary about the project in the museum. I will not include a link here, since I hope to visit the Bullocks Museum in Austin and see the exhibit in person.

With such a well preserved model, it was decided to build a half scale replica that could sail the sea again and act as a learning center. There was a poster of "The Petite La Belle" in the museum along with hundreds of photos. The website is very verbose on how proud Palacios is to have the Petite la Belle. But yet, I could find no info about where it's moored so that I could see it. I am still baffled.



As I drove out of Palacios, known as the shrimping capital of Texas, I passed the marina and could understand why. Above is a panoramic showing hundreds of moored shrimping boats.

I already told you how much I enjoyed the Sea Center Texas. The Lake Jackson museum was also almost excellent. I think it was just arranged backwards. The oldest info alcove, beginning with the Karankawa Indians, was to the right, but the info went from left to right. Then I had to go back past all those displays to get to the next section, again from left to right. They should have just started on the left side of the building and worked to the right. Have I bored you enough yet?

I was truly astounded by the founding and designing of Lake Jackson. It's hard to believe that city was designed and built in 6 months. At the peak there were 2000 carpenters building the town, and they could assemble one of those 16x16 prefab houses in 10 minutes. Today it's a major city of over 27,000 people. There are more than a half dozen chemical companies that have operations here. A true success story.

The City By The Sea Museum, without the 40 minute documentary, took me about 30 minutes. They did not overwhelm me with tiny info placards, just labels of what things were (no provenance). Displays of the local high school accomplishments were of no interest, but there were a few more letters like the one you see above which were interesting.

Always a good thing, all three venues today had free admission.

More rotten weather tomorrow as I make my way down the Texas Gulf Coast.

I am parked tonight at a WalMart in Port Lavaca. There was a Class A here when I pulled in and a little later another Navion 24 D parked right in front of me. We look like twins.

Until next time.....