



In Search of El dorado

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

Hello to Family & Friends

Sunday, March 7th 2021 Day 49



I spent the night at the Walmart in Marble Falls again. This morning I made a rough plan of things to see and do for the next 10 days or so. I will be bouncing around like a pinball and my first stop was back in Bertram, where I ate lunch. As I sat there I noticed the train depot and a couple historic markers and decided to check them out.

It's not the original depot, but it is a pretty good replica. The depot was closed of course, so I just took a walk around it and headed back to the RV and my next stop.

BERTRAM DEPOT

When the Austin & Northwestern Railroad first laid rails through Bertram in 1882, the original Bertram depot was constructed on this site and served railroad passengers until the end of passenger service in 1937.

The depot was demolished in 1964, and the site sat vacant through the 1990's. The George Peters family of Sandia, Texas donated a vintage 1912 San Antonio & Arkansas Pass depot from Orange Grove, Texas to the Austin Steam Train Association in 1997.

ASTA volunteers moved that depot to this site in March of 1998 and have accurately restored it over a five year period. Thanks to their hard work and dedication the old depot has come back to life and now serves the passengers of the Austin & Texas Central Railroad's Flyer trains.

The cast iron and wood bench inside the Depot is an original relic of the first Bertram Depot. The SA & AP depot original counter was not salvageable, so an exact replica was crafted by ASTA volunteers out of long leaf pine flooring salvaged from a 100-year old Bertram house.



J.V. "PINKY" WILSON 1897 - 1980

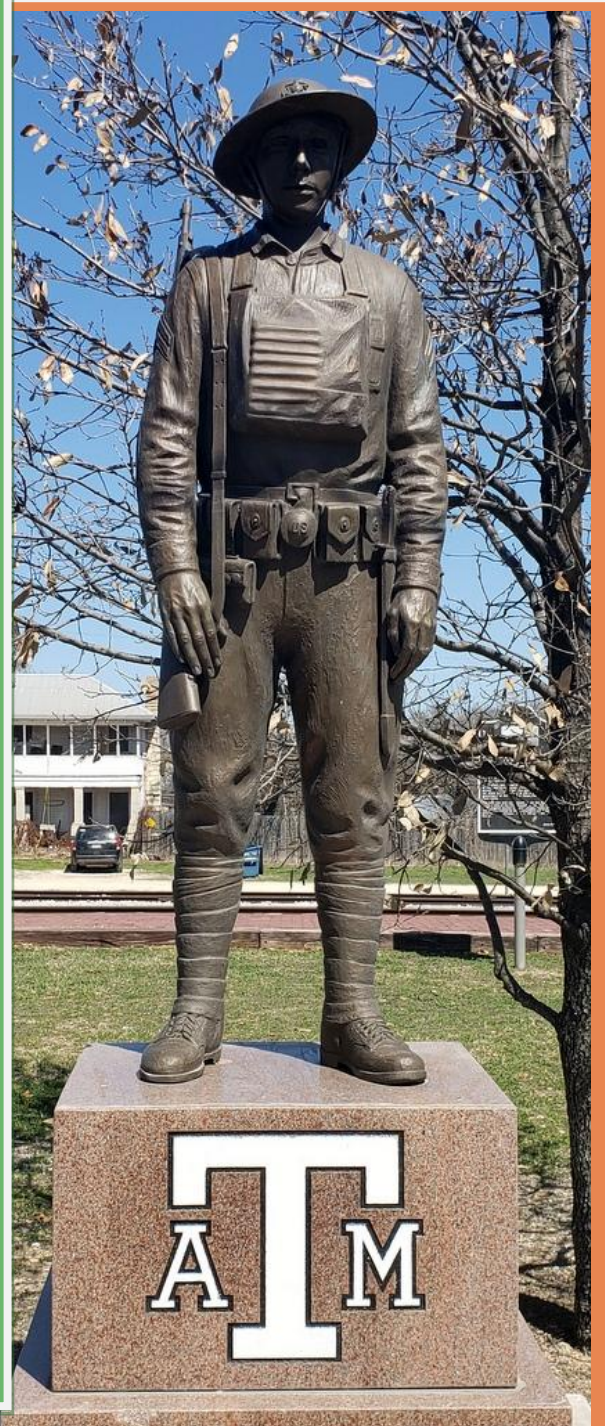
Pinky Wilson is the author of the Aggie War Hymn, the most famous fight song in the world. Pinky was born in 1897 in Florence, TX. He ranched there through 1950, when he purchased a ranch near Bertram, Burnet County TX, where he, wife Erma, and son Joe lived until 1970 when they moved to Burnet, TX.

Pinky entered Texas A&M and in his junior year joined the Marine Corps and fought in the Meuse-Argonne Battle 9/26 - 11/11, 1918. In this horrible battle America lost over 26,000 killed and more than 100,000 wounded. Pinky wrote the War Hymn on the back of an envelope during or shortly after this battle. Over the years his song became world famous and is sung at all A&M athletic events.

Four Memorial Tributes have been placed in his honor:

- Life size bronze statue on the Texas A&M campus facing Kyle Field, 1 of only 4 statues allowed on the campus
- Same statue as above placed here in Bertram
- Granite cenotaph monument in the Texas State Cemetery, Austin, TX
- Granite tombstone and grave blankets at Post Mountain Cemetery, Burnet, TX, burial site of Pinky and Erma Wilson

All Memorials have been placed by Hullabaloo LLC, Friends & Supporters of Texas A&M University.



Being from Wisconsin, I have to admit, I don't think I have ever heard the Texas A&M Aggie War Hymn. I just looked it up and I don't recognize the phrases at all. If you have an interest in reading or hearing it, go look it up on the internet.



THE CITY OF BERTRAM

In 1882 the Austin & Northwestern RR built a rail line through this site to haul granite, quarried at Granite Mountain in Marble Falls to build the State Capital in Austin. The town of South Gabriel was moved here, surrounding the tracks, and Bertram was founded.

The railroad became the lifeblood of the area. Stock pens and a loading dock were built by the tracks. Cattle, sheep, goats, cotton and wool were shipped by rail. Passenger service became a great convenience to the area.

1900: after the Great Hurricane destroyed Galveston, granite rip-rap was hauled through Bertram to build Galveston's sea wall.

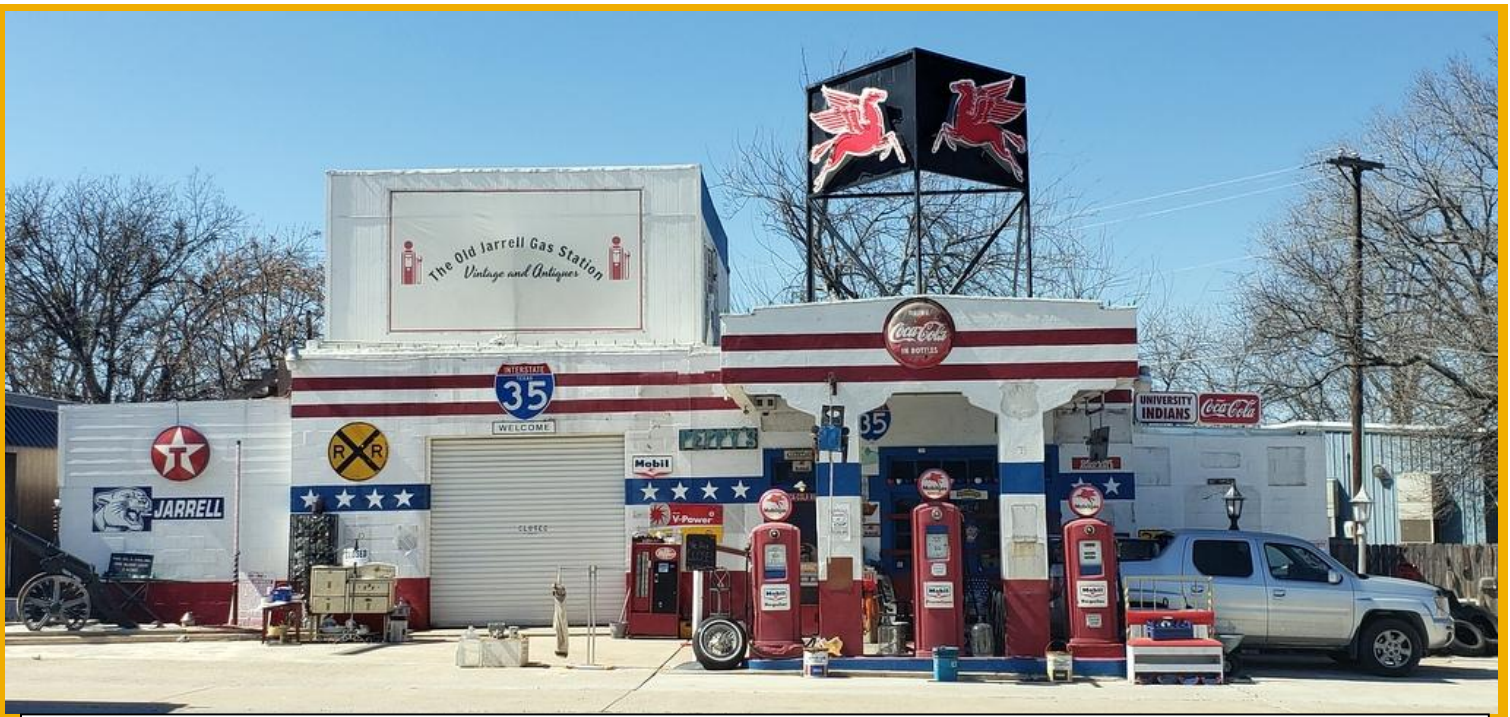
The golden age of Bertram and the railroad ended shortly after WWII, but in recent years the railroad has new life through freight and excursions. Long trains of crushed gravel and lumber are run daily, and the Austin Steam Train Association brings visitors on weekends.

June 16, 2007



As you can see, Bertram Main Street is a real hopping place on a Sunday afternoon. If it wasn't for HWY 29 running through the middle of town, there might be no Bertram at all.

I stuck to the back roads as I made my way from Bertram to Jerrell.



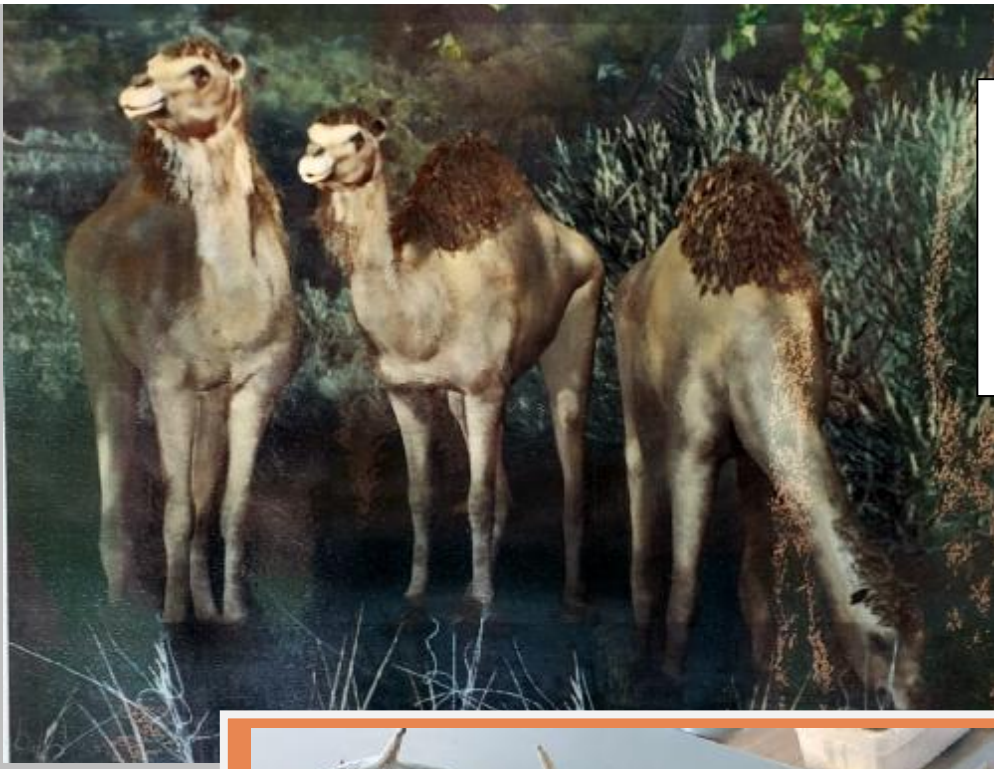
From Roadside America - This restored 1940s gas station used to be a Magnolia station. There were more signs on the street, a "gas station row," but apparently this is the only one left. The man who was there said he had just rented it, and is starting to sell/buy old signs, and is currently putting in an ice cream shop in the front. He was very friendly, and let us peek around inside. There are lots of great photo ops here! [Alyssa, 10/13/2016]



I wanted to make sure I had enough time to check out one of the newest National Monuments, so I hopped on I-35 and headed into Waco.

I flashed my America's Beautiful card to the ranger and was told I had to pay anyways since the monument is a joint effort with the City of Waco, who pays the utility bills, and Baylor University. Right is a lower jawbone from a mammoth discovered at the site. I left the rangers arm in for size perspective.





These are NOT the camels that were brought over during the Civil War. These are American Camels, now extinct, that thrived here during the ice age.

Below is a camel skull that was found with the mammoths.



Look out! Mammoth crossing.



DISCOVER THE WACO MAMMOTHS

Two local men wandering a dry creek bed made an accidental discovery that turned out to be the only one of its kind.

The Find of a Lifetime

In 1978, Paul Barron and Eddie Bufkin were exploring the dry creek bed below when they spotted a bone sticking out of the ground. They knew they'd found something unusual, so they took it to the

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Strecker Museum at Baylor University. Strecker Museum staff member David Lintz quickly identified it as part of a leg bone from a Columbian mammoth.

ENTRAPMENT



Careful analysis of the mammoths' bones and the sediments that surround them reveals some information about how they lived and possibly died.

I was asking myself this question when I came across the info board that answered it.

Sixteen of the mammoths at this site were found in the dry creekbed below. Scientists studied the layers of dirt surrounding the bones and discovered that thousands of years ago, many streams ran through here. The silt, clay, sand and gravel that surround the bones also tell us that the animals were covered by water. Putting this information together, scientists think the mammoths may have been gathered at a watering hole when a flash flood struck, trapping the animals in thick mud, killing them.

The mammoths discovered below are thought to have been a nursery herd consisting of females and juveniles – the only known example of a Columbian mammoth nursery herd in North America.

This is most of the dig.



This is pretty much a full size rendering of the male mammoth found on a different level from the nursery herd. You can see the top and bottom of the man-sized door under this text box for size perspective. He was huge.

These are the tusks of the big guy pictured above. Because of the protection of the building, they can leave the fossils right where they found them.



Older layers are deeper in the ground. The nursery herd and camel were buried in older layer C, while Mammoth Q was buried in a younger, higher layer.



Reading the Bones

Close up
mammoth
molar

We can learn the mammoths' ages and genders by examining their remains. Mammoths developed six sets of teeth during their lifetimes, and each set got progressively larger. We can tell from the size of Mammoth W's molars that she was on her fourth set of teeth putting her in her early 20s when she died. Female mammoths had smaller tusks than the males, and the shape of Mammoth W's pelvis also tells us that she was female.

Mammoth W (Female)

I was truly fascinated by these bones being so complete in the form of the living animal. Usually they are scattered around, but here you get the whole picture.



Discovering a Lost Landscape

Mammoth W's teeth also give us clues about her diet and the climate she lived in. Her large, ridged molars were specialized for crushing and grinding, which would have been necessary to consume the 500-700 pounds of grass she needed to eat every day. This is consistent with geologists' findings, which indicate that this area may have been covered in grass, not ice, during the Ice Age.



Here they are placing a fossil in plaster, called a 'jacket'.

End of an Era

Mammoths, along with many other Ice Age animals known as “megafauna,” became extinct in North America about 10,000 years ago. These included saber-toothed cats, lions, cheetahs, camels, horses, giant bison, giant sloths, giant tortoises, short-faced bears and giant armadillos. Scientists haven’t yet determined the cause for this extinction. Two factors may have been critical: the climate was changing, and humans were beginning to populate North America.



A Curious Companion?



One of the animals buried in the same layer as the nursery herd of mammoths was a camel. Scientists don’t know if the camel was living with the mammoths or if the camel was here by chance. However, camel and mammoth fossils are often found near each other, indicating they lived together on the same landscape. Both species ate plants and preferred open grassland landscapes with scattered trees.



Here is the camel I told you about earlier.

Unlike Anywhere Else

The Waco mammoths are the only known Columbian mammoth nursery herd in North America, and it is located within an unusual site of multiple flooding and death events. With such a long and complex history of events that happened here, this site has the potential to teach us much more about the past.

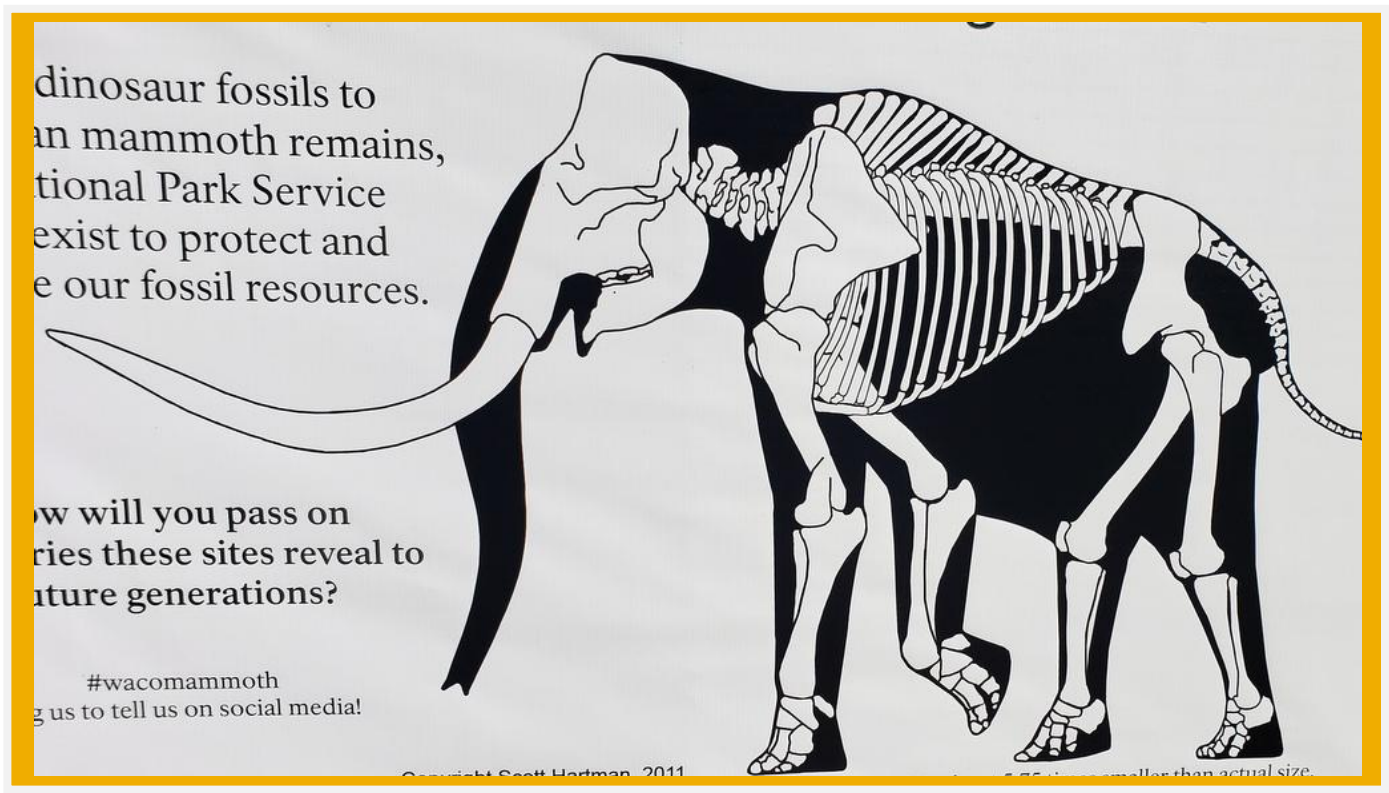
I believe the mammoth site we visited in South Dakota, wow, going on thirty years ago now, was much larger, and I remember the kids really enjoyed it at the time.



This painting was on the wall over the dig. It depicts the nursing herd being overrun by the flash flood waters. This is the most likely scenario for how this site came to be. I had this building to myself for a good twenty minutes and I enjoyed every one. I only wish they would have had a ranger in the building to answer the questions I had.

Shelter in Place

Most of the time, fossils are removed from the ground and put in storage to protect them. Very few are protected in situ like the ones here. By protecting the fossils in the ground where they were found, scientists can continue to learn from them.



The image above was is a very good rendition of the skeleton inside the mammoth's body. It gives a good perspective when you see the bones laid out in the dig.

I think I just have one other item to visit in Waco tomorrow, then I start to zig and zag my way across central Texas, back down to the Rio Grande, then west to El Paso.

Hey Steve M, any suggestions for sights to see in El Paso?

Even though it was a short visit, I really enjoyed the Mammoth Monument. I took a hike around the grounds after seeing the dig, trails laid out and maintained by a boy scout eagle project again. All four trails only totaled less than a half mile.

I thought wrong. There is a large park nearby right along the Bazos River with a lot of hiking trails. If I can find a map I may do some of those. The park was really crowded today, even late on a Sunday afternoon. I am hoping it will be less so during the week.

I think that's about it. I am parked at a Sam's for the night and have to do some shopping tomorrow morning.

As I was proof reading I remembered something – I think it was Texas A&M that Gpops went to off and on for college, and army training nearby, prior to being shipped off to Europe in WWII, somewhere around 1943 or 44 if I recall. I will have to check with him to make sure. Maybe he knows the Aggie War Hymn.

Until next time.....