

Stargazing, Mushrooms, Maples, Cliff Jumping, and Texas Adventures

























Some of the photos are from Brownwood State Park, Texas. Also

in San Saba, Texas.

We spent the past weekend exploring a new state park, Lost Maples in Vanderpool, Texas. The park is rather open which prevents privacy but ideal for RVs and each site provides a covered picnic area among the 30 sites; \$20 a night. They do have six primitive sites available; \$10 a night. This park really reminded me of Colorado Bend State Park because of the exquisite display of the Milky Way at night and literally every star and planet was visible. Words cannot describe the ambiance of the wilderness at night here.

We used our canopy tent frame and our mosquito screen as a makeshift tent. After using our fine mesh backpacking MSR tent and our 4 season car camping Marmot tent we have found that the minimalist approach, one step above sleeping in the open with no covering, is coolest for Texas camping. So we plan to build a pcg frame for this reason. We used our recycled pop bottle rug I acquired from Gaiam many years ago. It has proved to be the perfect addition to taking to the beach, hanging as a shade curtain at the farmers market, and for laying on the ground to establish a cozier campsite. It's light, ventilated, waterproof, and one of the most ideal items to have for your outdoor spaces.

What's most popular at Lost Maples State Park is the vast array of fall color changes due to the fact that there are acres of Maple trees dispersed throughout the park. Maple trees are hard to find in Texas and the majority of the state does not embody the fall color changes that the cooler parts of the U.S. do. They have a status update foliage report on the fall color changes so that visitors can come peruse the park in it's prime on the Texas State Park website-Lost Maples State Natural Area page. Although we went before witnessing the transition of chlorophyll in action, there were just a few trees that have changed and were changing, less than 10 from what saw. They recommend visiting mid week in the fall, I'm guessing late Sept-early November is going to be ideal this

year from what we observed. We have seen some beautiful color changes in the trees in McKinney, and Northeastern Texas, while headed to Arkansas. This may be the case in Eastern Texas and perhaps Northwest Texas too.

We were able to cross this park off our bucket list of State Parks in Texas to visit and wouldn't mind going again to witness the peaking of the fall turn. We saw a lot of juniper and cypress beds which we feel this would also be a great place to find Morel mushrooms during the wetter times of the year, spring, and fall. We have learned this from the founder of the Texas Wild Mushroom Group. If you are into mushroom hunting in Texas this is a good start to becoming more in the know. We were overzealous to learn that we can actually acquire Morels here! Wohoo, this Michigander has found Morels and Maples in Texas, peace at last.

We went for a 5 mile hike the following morning and it was a pleasant excursion that ended near a spring fed pond (we hiked the East trail and the Maple trail.) Boy was that refreshing, I went swimming while Davin sat atop a cliff. I finally was inspired to jump off it into the waters below after another Texan showed me that it was safe. I'm guessing I was 30 feet up or so. It was exhilarating for sure. I've learned that the older I have gotten, the less nerve I have! Davin recorded my plight on his outdoor extreme camera, which consisted of me talking myself through the jump for the first 10 min, boring, and by the time I jumped I had a crowd of 30 or so watching. No backing out then, and alas I did it! "So dramatic," my husband said! If you know me you know this to be true. Ha ha. We recommend this park, you will enjoy the drive in and out, the winding roads submerged between rock reminded me a little of Pennsylvania and Colorado.

We stopped through Bandera, Texas on the way home. This town claims to be the Cowboy Capital of the world. We witnessed the tail end of a western enactment of Jesse James robbing a bank at the Cowboy Festival, over Labor Day weekend. We sipped on

homemade sarsaparilla soda and talked to local vendors. We went to a local restaurant that was ok but was delved in historical roots, nothing to write home about. We wished we had waited to eat because while driving through Boerne we stopped at our favorite local brewer, The Dodging Duck Brewhaus, and man, their food and beer is delectable and a place for your foodie & beer bucket list! They had a pumpkin ale on tap that resembled the taste of Chai in the form of a beer, it was exquisite. Their Nitro Stout was full of body too and Davin enjoyed their 8 time hopped IPA and their Pale Ale on tap. We had the pleasure of meeting the owner Keith and he shared his stories of playing the Trombone at the reunion of the UT Longhorn Band last Saturday in Austin. The first time we visited we met with some old friends of mine from Michigan who were in town. We had a Vanilla Pecan Ale from what I recall then, again, unparalleled to others we've tasted in Texas. Don't miss this gem of a find, especially if you live in Texas!