

If you go

Outfitters

■ Nueces River Camp Wood — Clear Creek Outfitters, www.kayakthenueces.com
Chalk Bluff Park, www.chalkbluff.com

■ Frio River Star Rentals, www.leakeystar.com

■ Upper Guadalupe
www.guadalupecanoelivery.com (830) 885.4671
Closest outfitter to San Antonio — Guadalupe Canoe Livery, U.S. 281 at Guadalupe River Bridge

Canoe/kayak clubs and resources

■ The Alamo City Rivermen, www.alamocityrivermen.org, goes out on one- to seven-day trips on rivers throughout Texas and Arkansas.

■ Southwest Paddlers, southwestpaddler.com, offers a wealth of information about exploring Texas rivers.

■ Texas Hill Country River Region Visitors Guide, for accommodations and activities: www.thcrr.com

Hill Country rivers: fresh and sweet

BY KARLA HELD

SPECIAL TO THE EXPRESS-NEWS

Next time you're whizzing around Loop 410 during rush hour, imagine yourself lazily floating on emerald waters, with old oak and cypress trees on each side, the sun shimmering through the branches and a warm breeze in your face. Imagine diving in spring-fed water (don't forget to bring your goggles) with a limestone bottom among red-eared turtles and sunfish.

Picture yourself tasting a bit of the sweet life while gliding by on a kayak, a tube or a canoe, or just enjoying some old-fashioned swimming and rope-swinging in some of Texas' best-kept jewels — the Frio River, the Sabinal, the Nueces River, and the upper Guadalupe River.

A quick 40 minutes north on U.S. 281 leads you to the most picturesque and

least commercialized section of the Guadalupe River. You can rent watercrafts several days a week at the oldest outfitter on the Upper Guadalupe at the Guadalupe Canoe Livery right off 281 and the Guadalupe bridge. (www.guadalupecanoelivery.com [830] 885-4671). In the upper Guadalupe River, away from the crowds and beer-drinking college masses of the lower Guadalupe (below Canyon Dam) you'll find that the fish are bigger, the water is cleaner and the air is sweeter. The trees sway not only with the wind but also with the weight of an immense variety of birds not often seen in the southern reaches of the river.

The upper Guadalupe starts near Hunt and flows through Kerrville, Ingram, Comfort, the Guadalupe River State Park and ends at Canyon Lake. As the river is almost entirely spring-fed, the water quality is excellent. Any one of these places serves as a good entry point to the river.

Heading west on FM 337 in Real County, the most sparsely populated area of the Hill Country, you can find the Rio Frio. Known as the "gem of the desert" you can see clear to the limestone river bottom as you swing out on the ropes or float through limestone bluffs and small river rapids. Texas' oldest and most visited state park, Garner State Park, serves as an excellent base to explore the region.

After enjoying a trip on the Rio Frio, head to Camp Wood along one of the most scenic highways in Texas. Through winding



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You're never too old to catch tadpoles in a Central Texas river.