

# Peace, insight and nature mingle along the Llano River

CONTINUED FROM 1K

that I asked for her Web site. She lightly laughed and said that if she had a Web site, "too many people would come." I grinned, and thought, "Good point."

The Llano is a far cry from more crowded rivers such as the Guadalupe River near New Braunfels. I liked the fact that I encountered only one fisherman and one other paddler during my trips on the Llano this spring. There were tubers in the river at South Llano River State Park, but not on a stretch of the river southwest of the park.

"This is for the serious nature enthusiast and for people who want to enjoy what Kimble County is all about," Marion said.

Besides the long stretches of river for quiet kayaking and canoeing, there are miles and miles of country roads for mountain biking, and a profusion of birds and wildlife. While hiking the trails in the state park, I saw a variety of birds — my favorite being the painted bunting — as well as rabbits, deer and wild turkeys. Red-eared turtles, soft-shelled turtles and herons kept me company on the river.

Hundreds of natural springs feed the North and South Llano rivers, which converge at Junction; Kimble County lays claim to having more running water than anyplace in the state, earning it the nickname "Land of Living Waters."

South Llano River State Park offers not only river access and tubing options, but also miles of excellent hiking and biking trails. More than 200 types of birds can be seen in the park, while the animals there include white-tailed deer, squirrels, jack-rabbits, javelinas, foxes, beavers, bobcats, cottontails, antelopes and armadillos. The more adventurous explorer may want to go farther afield, into Mason County.

That's what Justin Rice of San Antonio recommended: a six- to seven-mile paddle on the river south of Mason, from FM 2389 to FM 1723.

"I like the Llano for its red



A pleasant view of the South Llano River is available along U.S. 377 near Telegraph, which is southwest of South Llano River State Park on the way into Junction.



Bird-observation blinds are provided in the park.

sandstone cliffs and rock formations, its rural/ranch surroundings and lack of traffic." Rice said. "It's a wonderful way to spend a summer afternoon after barbecued lamb ribs at Cooper's in Mason." Apparently a trip to Mason isn't complete without tasting some of Cooper's BBQ.

His favorite imagery on the trip included those red cliffs punctuated by numerous swallow dens; bleached gravel beds adjacent to pearly green pools; swallows buzzing the cliffs; great horned owls in live oak groves; raccoons and deer at the river's edge; and soft-shelled turtles scooting in the shallows.

The perfect summer day trip for Rice would include a stop for peaches and ice cream on



This stream, along FM 152 near Castell, on the Llano-Mason county line, is typical of the scenic country along the Llano River.

Main Street in Fredericksburg; then on to Mason, about 45 minutes away, with barbecue at Cooper's and a stroll through Mason's quaint downtown; a paddle on the Llano; then catching the evening bat emergence at The Nature Conservancy's Eckert James River Bat Cave Preserve, near Mason ([www.nature.org/wherework/northamerica/states/texas/preserves/art6022.html](http://www.nature.org/wherework/northamerica/states/texas/preserves/art6022.html)).

No matter how ambitious you are or aren't during a trip to the Llano River region, you'll surely return home with a clear mind, a good tan and a desire to return to the land of living waters.

Karla Held, [karlaheld@hotmail.com](mailto:karlaheld@hotmail.com), is a freelance writer and photographer based at Canyon Lake.



Tubing at South Llano River State Park is an easy way to get on the river. You can float in the park or all the way to Junction's city park.



ABOVE: This is a painted bunting, one of more than 200 types of birds you can see in the South Llano River State Park.

LEFT: Turkey tracks can be seen in the state park.

BELOW: Rob Marion paddles on the South Llano River.



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