



KARLA HELD/SPECIAL TO THE EXPRESS NEWS

curves and purple sunsets, FM 337 takes you from Leakey to Camp Wood in pure joy. Heading south on Texas 55, Chalk Bluff Park is a perfect spot for swimming, fishing, and paddling in the sparkling azure waters of one the best-kept secrets of the Hill Country — the Nueces River. Let the scenery — reminiscent of an Ansel Adams plate with its limestone cliffs and ribbon-like water — seduce you as it once did the Spanish, who named the river the “River of Nuts” after the pecan trees along its banks.

If time permits, consider exploring old ghost towns near the Nueces River such as Vance. Originally named Bullhead and nestled at the juncture with Bullhead Creek, Vance began as the Real County seat in 1883. Early settlers built a church and post office in 1883 and established the county seat. The area holds a special attraction for trout fishermen. The town population has numbered fewer than 50 for the entire 20th century.

With the exception of a few random dwellings, the town consists only of a church and cemetery.

Finally, if it's a quiet, meditative hike you are looking for with a mystical river as a backdrop, explore the serene wonders of the River of Solitude — the Sabinal River — where cool, clear spring water seeps from mossy banks.

The cool shade of the cypress, pecan, oak and sycamore trees provides an atmosphere perfect for a hike and picnic. The only babble you'll hear is the sound of the waters drifting by. From the town of Sabinal, it's a quick jaunt back to San Antonio going east on U.S. 90.

The next time you find yourself sitting in San Antonio traffic, just smile to yourself knowing that the peace and beauty of the other Texas — that of the San Antonio backcountry amid spring fed rivers, so fresh and sweet — is only a day trip away.

Karla Held is a freelance photo-journalist and avid kayaker based in San Antonio. Contact her at karlaheld@hotmail.com for more information on exploring and kayaking Texas rivers.

Whether it be fishing or paddle-boating, there's something for everyone at Chalk Bluff Park on the Nueces River, north of Uvalde on Texas 55.