EXPLORER’S GUIDE
TO THE
HILL COUNTRY
Oasis

YOUR MAP & INFORMATION
TO THE MOST INTERESTING
AND REFRESHING NATURAL
ATTRACTIONS IN CENTRAL TEXAS
Austin Parks Foundation
City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department
Hill Country Conservancy
Save Our Springs Alliance
Wimberley Valley Watershed Association

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Sponsors 2
Introduction 4
Map 6
Site Activities 8
Discovery Sites:
  Barton Creek Greenbelt 10
  Barton Springs Pool 13
  Blue Hole Regional Park 16
  Comal Springs & Landa Park 17
  Goat Cave Karst Preserve 18
  Jacob’s Well Natural Area 19
  Lady Bird Johnson
    Wildflower Center 20
  Lady Bird Lake 22
  McKinney Falls State Park 24
    Meadows Center for Water and the Environment 25
  Mount Bonnell 26
  Red Bud Isle &
    LCRA Redbud Center 28
  Slaughter Creek Trail
    on the Mary Gay Maxwell Tract 29
  Violet Crown Trail 30
  Wild Basin Wilderness Preserve 31
  Zilker Park 32
  Protect Our Land and Water 34
AN OASIS OF LAND AND WATER

In Central Texas, on the edge of the Edwards Plateau, there are places of sublime natural beauty. Over millennia, the forces of earth and water, wind and rain, have carved stories in the land waiting to be discovered by those who choose to look. Rain falls on the landscape, flowing through wildflower savannahs, Ashe juniper and oak forests, then into cypress-lined creeks. Rushing over rocks formed underneath ancient seas, these waters disappear underground to emerge from a multitude of springs and seeps miles away. This is where east meets west, north meets south. It has attracted humans for thousands of years and we all leave our footprints. What adventures will you have in this special place? What stories will you leave for those that come after? This guide can help you answer those questions. We can tell you, we can show you, but to appreciate fully the land and life of the Hill Country and the Balcones Escarpment, you must experience it yourself. So, go ahead; maroon yourself on this island of nature and find your own Hill Country Oasis.

AQUIFER FORMATION

The Edwards Aquifer is the legacy of a shallow sea that covered much of Texas about 100 million years ago, during the Cretaceous period. Thick beds of limestone formed from decomposing shells and other sediments. The Aquifer takes its name from these limestone beds, called the Edwards Formation. Water slowly dissolved millions of interconnected holes in the rock, from tiny pockets to large caves and sinkholes, giving the rock a honeycomb appearance known as karst. The Edwards is exposed along the Balcones Fault Zone, where faulting about 10 million years ago shifted the rock layers. Those rocks on the west side of the fault are older and lie below the Edwards. Faulting created many fractures that allowed for water to infiltrate and continue to dissolve the Edwards where it is exposed at the surface. This area is called the Recharge Zone. The older Glen Rose formation is found at the surface west of the Balcones Fault Zone. This area is called the Contributing Zone because creeks run across this less porous rock eventually reaching the Recharge Zone where water can infiltrate into the aquifer. Seeps and springs such as Barton Springs occur in the Artesian Zone, where the Edwards is confined by overlying, less permeable rock and the level of water in the aquifer is higher than the ground’s surface forcing flow through cracks and fissures.

The Edwards Aquifer extends from Bell County in the north to Kinney County in the southwest. It is divided into three segments: Northern Segment, Barton Springs Segment, and San Antonio Segment. Situated in the middle of the other two larger segments, the Barton Springs Segment extends from Lady Bird Lake south into Hays County near the Blanco River. It supplies all the water that flows from Barton Springs and is also the water supply for over 70,000 groundwater users.
HIKE SAFELY

- Bring a map, or take a picture of one at the trailhead to carry with you.
- Pack snacks, sunscreen, hats, and water.
- Wear long pants if you will be walking among tall grass or poison ivy.
- Wear shoes suitable for crossing creeks and uneven, rocky terrain.
- Check the weather report before you hit the trail.
- Bring a basic first aid kit.

TRAIL ETIQUETTE

- Leave no trace. Pack it in, pack it out. Pick up trash. Leave it better than you found it.
- Stay on the trail to prevent erosion and to steer clear of poison ivy and chiggers.
- Slower traffic, stay to the right.
- Some trails do not allow pets/dogs. Where they are allowed, keep them on a leash.
- Protect the creek – pick up after your pet - Scoop The Poop!
- Obey Closed Trail signs.
- Keep noise down and do not blast loud music.

ECOSYSTEMS OF THE ESCARPMENT

The visible eastern and southern edges of the **Edwards Plateau** are defined by the **Balcones Fault Zone** and is known as the **Balcones Escarpment**. This area was named by Spanish explorers for its tall limestone outcrops and terraced hills that resemble balconies. The **Canyonlands**, formed by the cliffs of the **Escarpment** and the creeks that channel water from the **Plateau**, have a rugged geology that creates the foundation for a wide range of habitats including Ashe juniper-oak forests, grasslands, riparian zones, and surface wetlands. A rich diversity of plant and animal species can be found in this area of **Central Texas**. It is where the grasslands of the **Blackland Prairie** meet the **Edwards Plateau**. There is a complex network of underground communities along the **Escarpment**, including many unique cave ecosystems. As a result, thousands of acres of preserve land have been set aside and some of the country’s strictest water quality monitoring and protections are in place to protect this natural oasis.
1. Barton Creek Greenbelt
   - Swimming
   - Nature watching
   - Hiking
   - Mountain biking
   - Rock climbing
   - [austinparks.org/BARTON-CREEK-GREENBELT/](austinparks.org/BARTON-CREEK-GREENBELT/)

2. Barton Springs Pool
   - Swimming
   - Diving
   - Sunbathing
   - Education center
   - [austintexas.gov/DEPARTMENT/BARTON-SPRINGS-POOL](austintexas.gov/DEPARTMENT/BARTON-SPRINGS-POOL)

3. Blue Hole Regional Park
   - Swimming
   - Children’s play area
   - Picnic areas
   - [cityofwimberley.com](cityofwimberley.com)

4. Comal Springs & Landa Park
   - Swimming
   - Children’s play area
   - Picnic areas
   - Tubing
   - Canoing/Kayaking
   - [playinnewbraunfels.com/splash/comal-river/](playinnewbraunfels.com/splash/comal-river/)

5. Goat Cave Karst Preserve
   - Hiking
   - Nature watching
   - [naturerocks austin.org/GREENSPACE/GOAT-CAVE-KARST-NATURE-PRESERVE](naturerocks austin.org/GREENSPACE/GOAT-CAVE-KARST-NATURE-PRESERVE)

6. Jacob’s Well Natural Area
   - Hiking
   - Nature watching
   - Swimming
   - Children’s play area
   - [hayscountytx.com/departments/hays-county-parks-recreation/jacobs-well-natural-area/](hayscountytx.com/departments/hays-county-parks-recreation/jacobs-well-natural-area/)

7. Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center
   - Hiking
   - Nature watching
   - Education center
   - [wildflower.org/](wildflower.org/)

8. Lady Bird Lake
   - Hiking
   - Biking
   - Running
   - Canoeing/Kayaking
   - Fishing
   - [austintexas.gov/PAGE/LADY-BIRD-LAKE](austintexas.gov/PAGE/LADY-BIRD-LAKE)
IVITIES

9. McKinney Falls State Park
   - Swimming
   - Picnic Areas
   - Hiking
   - Mountain Biking
   - Camping
   [tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/mckinney-falls]

10. Meadows Center for Water & the Environment
    - Glass-Bottom Boat Tours
    - Hiking
    - Education Center
    - Nature Watching
    [meadowscenter.txstate.edu]

11. Mount Bonnell
    - Hiking
    - Nature Watching
    [rootsrated.com/austin-tx/hiking/mt-bonnell]

12. Red Bud Isle & LCRA Redbud Center
    - Hiking
    - Education Center
    [austinparks.org/RED-BUD-ISLE/ OR lcra.org/contact-us/Pages/redbud-center.aspx]

13. Slaughter Creek Trail
    - Hiking
    - Nature Watching
    - Mountain Biking
    - Horseback Riding
    [facebook.com/slaughtercreektrail/]

14. Violet Crown Trail
    - Hiking
    - Nature Watching
    - Swimming
    - Mountain Biking
    [violetcrowntrail.com]

15. Wild Basin Wilderness Preserve
    - Hiking
    - Nature Watching
    - Education Center
    [parks.traviscountytx.gov/PARKS/WILD-BASIN]

16. Zilker Park
    - Picnic Areas
    - Sports Fields
    - Education Center
    - Children's Play Area
    [austintexas.gov/department/zilker-metropolitan-park]
Greenbelt Information:  bit.ly/2JZ27lt
Hours: 5AM - 10PM Daily
Rules:  Keep all dogs on leash; Scoop the Poop; Leave No Trace; Pack it in, Pack it out; Avoid littering; No glass containers; No smoking; No fires; No alcohol; No overnight camping
Explorer’s Checklist

- Relax on the rocks and in the water at Twin Falls or Sculpture Falls.
- See how many rock layers you can find in the canyon walls.
- Have a picnic on The Flats; remember to Pack It In, Pack It Out.
- Skip a rock; close your eyes and listen; find your place to sit for awhile; enjoy.
- Hike the Hill of Life.

(Continued on p. 12)
The Barton Creek Greenbelt is an urban oasis winding 7.8 miles through the canyon created by Barton Creek. It is a popular destination among hikers, mountain bikers, trail runners, rock climbers, swimmers, and creek goers. The clear-running water rushes over rocks and boulders, punctuated occasionally by small waterfalls and cascades. The creek flows primarily during the rainy seasons in the spring and fall. During dry conditions, surface water in the creek disappears, while the underground flow through the Edwards Aquifer continues feeding Barton Springs.

Cutting across the Balcones Escarpment, Barton Creek carves its way through the rocks of the Edwards Plateau, the southern extension of the Great Plains. These thick limestone beds consist of several different layers made up of sediments deposited by oceans and shallow seas that covered this area over 100 million years ago.

Soaring canyon walls and overhanging rock bluffs flank Barton Creek. They provide evidence of the power of wind and water, and the ancient movement of the Balcones Fault over hundreds of thousands of years. The canyon’s dense vegetation and steep walls afford visitors an opportunity to discover for themselves connections with the forces of nature and the beauty of this special place.

The Greenbelt is part of the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve (BCP), a system of protected lands that provide essential habitat for several federally protected Endangered Species of plants and animals. While visiting the greenbelt, many colorful birds can be seen darting through the grasses, bushes, and trees. Their songs echo off the canyon walls. Wildflowers large and small can be discovered, while butterflies and iridescent insects fill the air like flying jewels. Much of the greenbelt is rugged, but the rewards from experiencing this urban oasis make the effort worthwhile.

COMMUNITY ACTION
In 1988, a huge development was proposed within the Barton Creek watershed. Austin environmentalists rallied to protect Barton Springs, its watershed, and endangered species. After much controversy and community input, an ordinance was put to voters to restrict development in the recharge zone, along with bond proposals to expand conservation lands such as the Balcones Canyonland Preserve and the Barton Creek Greenbelt. They passed with overwhelming support.

Annette Lucksinger
Barton Springs Pool, Austin’s iconic swimming hole, is fed by spring water flowing from the underground Barton Springs Edwards Aquifer. Water flowing through Barton Springs may have been rain falling many miles away just a few days before.

Native Americans considered the Springs sacred ground. They were later named after William “Uncle Billy” Barton, who began living on the land in 1837. With his family, Barton brought several laborers who may have been enslaved. If so, those individuals might have constituted one of the earliest groups of enslaved African Americans in Austin; however, research is ongoing.

Barton Springs Pool measures over 900 feet from dam to dam. It boasts a surface area of three acres and the water temperature stays around 72° year round. On average, 31 million gallons flow from the Main Spring every day, eventually joining the Colorado River in Lady Bird Lake.

BARTON SPRINGS SALAManders

Did you know you’re swimming with salamanders? Chances are rare that you’ll spot one though. The Barton Springs Salamander measures only three inches long and hides in gravel at the bottom of the pool where chilly water flows up from the Edwards Aquifer. The Barton Springs Salamander has only been found in the Barton Springs segment of the Edwards Aquifer and its contributing zone. In 1997, it was placed on the Endangered Species list, making these waters federally protected.

Do not disturb salamander habitat. They rely on loose gravel and cobble to hide from predators and to hunt the prey they need. The endangered Austin Blind Salamander makes its home here too and has adapted to life deeper within the aquifer. Sensitive to pollution, both salamanders remind us of the fragile nature of the aquifer.

SPRINGS FOR ALL

In 1960, Joan Means and other African American students from Austin High were told they could not attend their senior class picnic at the segregated Barton Springs Pool. Their response was to challenge that policy. Working with other students and young adults, they took a bold step and jumped into those refreshing waters of the Springs.

Those swim-ins at Barton Springs and other pools began the civil rights movement in Austin.”

~ Joan Means Khabele

(continue on p.14)
BATHHOUSE
Dedicated in 1947, this Streamline Moderne style limestone building, designed by Dan Driscoll, replaced an earlier wooden bathhouse that had been damaged by flood and fire during the 1930s.

DIVING BOARD
Plunge into the pool from the diving board and you’ll be right over the Main Spring, known as Parthenia, the fourth largest spring in Texas.

City of Austin Watershed Protection Department

INFORMATION, HOURS, FEES:
austintexas.gov/department/barton-springs-pool

Explorer’s Checklist
☐ Jump in the cold, spring-fed water!
☐ Snorkel to see fish and aquatic plants.
☐ Spot a salamander in the “Splash into the Edwards Aquifer” exhibit in the Sheffield Education Center. The Center is named after Beverly Sheffield, the first Director of the Austin Recreation Department, who after retirement swam 2,820 miles in Barton Springs Pool.
☐ Find the Spanish Mission Monument; read the quotes at “Philosopher’s Rock”.
☐ Check the spring flow at the USGS gauge.
OLD MILL SPRING (SUNKEN GARDEN)
This historic site is closed to the public as it is protected salamander habitat. In the late 1800s, it was the site of Paggi’s Grist Mill, and the location of the first public bathing area along Barton Creek. In the 1930s, the Youth Works Commission built stone retaining walls to create a water garden.

ELIZA SPRING (ELKS PIT)
Contained in an amphitheater originally built in 1903 by Andrew Zilker, this spring now supports the greatest number of the Barton Springs Salamander. A renovation in 2017 re-established the stream channel that historically flowed toward the pool, creating an aquatic garden and expanding salamander habitat.

“Barton Springs is like heaven, more a state than a place.”
~Beverly Sheffield, Austin Parks Director, 1935 - 1973
This scenic 126-acre park along Cypress Creek is roughly four miles downstream from Jacob’s Well and is the home of an iconic swimming hole. Visitors can splash into chilly, spring-fed water from rope swings and relax along the banks under the shade of giant trees. Set amidst an idyllic natural landscape, trails and paths built from repurposed materials weave through the park. Rainwater is harvested for landscape irrigation, and strategic entry points limit erosion and allow for vegetation regrowth. Such efforts toward sustainability allowed Blue Hole to receive sustainable SITES certification.

**Park Information, Reservation, and Fees:** [bit.ly/2VYxjWY](bit.ly/2VYxjWY)

**Phone:** (512) 660-9111

**Rules:** Service dogs only. No jumping from the trees. No fishing, smoking, alcohol, or glass containers.

**Explorer’s Checklist**
- Take a nature walk through the forest; play sand volleyball; spread a blanket for a riverside picnic.
- Stay overnight on a Family Camp-out.
- Sit in the shade of majestic cypress trees and dangle your feet in these cold, clean waters.

**Community Involvement**
In 2005, the idea for a regional park took shape as residents of the newly incorporated town of Wimberley sought a way to protect Blue Hole and the surrounding ecosystem. They established the Friends of Blue Hole and raised funds to purchase the land.

The community continues to be a central force in the continued stewardship of this park through volunteer restoration and the development of the Cypress Creek Watershed Protection Plan.

The flow of Cypress Creek is sustained by waters flowing from the Trinity Aquifer, the main water supply for the surrounding community.
While the Comal may be the shortest river in Texas, it is fed by seven major springs and hundreds of minor springs, making it one of the largest spring systems in the southwestern United States. In the late 1800s, these waters powered mills and created electricity for the German immigrant communities of the area. At its source, set beneath the limestone bluffs of the Balcones Fault Zone, current visitors will find Landa Park. The plants and groves of trees on this 52 acre green space provide habitat for a variety of wildlife such as yellow-crowned night herons and red-shouldered hawks. The waters of the springs are home to several endangered species including the Fountain Darter.

RIVER ECONOMY

Originally purchased by Joseph Landa in 1860, Landa’s Pasture (now Landa Park) began as a popular resort. With its headwaters flowing up from the San Antonio segment of the Edwards Aquifer at 128,000 gallons a minute and at a cool, constant 70-72 degrees year round, the Comal River makes an ideal spot for tubing, paddle boating, fishing, and swimming.
A WORLD BENEATH YOUR FEET
This 9-acre City of Austin preserve sits atop the many caves, sinkholes, and underground streams that form the Barton Springs Edwards Aquifer. Throughout the ages, water continues to slowly dissolve the weathered Edwards limestone creating thousands of passages and a dynamic subsurface ecosystem. Many of these caves and sinkholes were historically plugged by ranchers to prevent livestock from falling, and to create surface ponds. They were also used as garbage dumps. Through scientific research, we have learned about the importance of these natural features and now volunteers restore these caves for habitat preservation and watershed protection.

Goat Cave got its name in 1957 when cave explorers entered a 3-foot square hole in pasture land to find a goat 35-feet below ground! After a frisky chase on a ledge, they pulled it up to safety by rope. These days, visitors can enter this cave on City of Austin guided tours only.

Hours: 7AM-9PM Daily | Fees: Free | Parking: Street parking in residential area.
Wildlands Programs, Tours, and Volunteer Opportunities: bit.ly/33NfVau

Rules: No dogs allowed on the preserve.

Explorer’s Checklist
❑ Walk the shaded 0.6 mile nature trail.
❑ Peer into Wade Sink and Hideout Cave.
❑ Schedule a guided tour inside Goat Cave.

The isolated conditions of caves have led to uniquely adapted species of invertebrates and amphibians such as the Cliff Chirping Frog and Pseudoscorpion. Efforts to preserve vegetation and prohibit vandalism and illegal dumping help protect these subterranean species.
Jacob’s Well is an iconic spring emerging from the Trinity Aquifer. It forms the headwaters of Cypress Creek and feeds into the Blanco River. The Blanco plays a vital role in supplying the waters of Barton Springs during droughts. In low-flow conditions, water from the Well can take three months to travel down the river to the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone, to be channeled underground and emerge at Barton Springs.

UNDERWATER EXPLORATION

There is more to Jacob’s Well than meets the eye. It is the second largest fully submerged cave in Texas, measuring a mile long and in places 140 feet deep. Researchers continue to explore the Well, creating detailed maps, and providing insight into this hidden world.

PROTECTING OUR HERITAGE

The Wimberly Valley Watershed Association (WVWA), purchased Jacob’s Well saving it from development. WVWA continues to lead local and regional efforts to protect aquifers and springs across the Texas Hill Country.

Wimberley Valley relies on groundwater from the Trinity Aquifer for water supply. Water conservation ensures that all users, human and non-human alike, have enough water to survive, especially during drought conditions.

Jacob’s Well

1699 Mt. Sharp Rd., Wimberley, TX 78676

Park Information, Reservation, and Fees:  bit.ly/2nEJVW1

Rules: Swimming is allowed ONLY from May 1 through Sept. 30 and by reservation only. No pets except assistance animals. No SCUBA diving allowed.

Explorer’s Checklist

- Visit the Nature Center to see footage of Jacob’s Well dives.
- Look for the fault line coming out of Jacob’s Well down Cypress Creek.
- Take a Saturday morning tour of the Natural Area with a Texas Master Naturalist as a guide.
- Look up spring flow at USGS Guage.

Jacob’s Well is an iconic spring emerging from the Trinity Aquifer. It forms the headwaters of Cypress Creek and feeds into the Blanco River. The Blanco plays a vital role in supplying the waters of Barton Springs during droughts. In low-flow conditions, water from the Well can take three months to travel down the river to the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone, to be channeled underground and emerge at Barton Springs.
Bats, bees, hummingbirds, butterflies, and beetles serve as pollinators of native plants, playing an important role in plant survival and food production for a diverse range of species including humans. Currently, pollinators face diverse threats posed by habitat loss, non-native species, pesticides, and climate change.
Love this Guide? Support our work!

Celebrating 40 years of taking action for Austin’s creeks!

Donate Online:  www.savebartoncreek.org/donate

Donate by Check:  Save Barton Creek Association
P.O. Box 5923  
Austin, TX 78763

Suggested donation levels:
- $25 minimum for SBCA Membership
- $50 Family Membership
- $100
- $250
- $400 in honor of our 40 years!
- $1,000+

Your donation will support ongoing initiatives including:
2. Ongoing outreach activities for the Austin community with free educational programs, guided hikes, and public events.
3. Advocacy for protection of our waterways from sewage pollution through the No Dumping Sewage Campaign - www.nodumpingsewage.org.
4. Public policy research and action focused on water quality issues related to Austin and Central Texas creeks, aquifers, springs, and rivers.

Thank you for helping us protect our waterways for future generations! – The SBCA Team
Lady Bird Lake, Austin, TX 78701

Explorer's Checklist

- Visit Ann Richards Congress Avenue Bridge at sunset to watch Austin's famous bat colony emerge.
- Explore the Lake by kayak or on a boat tour.
- Experience the “Violet Crown” over the hills as you watch the sunset from the Pfluger Pedestrian Bridge.
- Stroll the Hike & Bike Trail under a canopy of Cypress trees.
Formed in the plains of northwest Texas, the **Colorado River** extends over 800 miles and is the longest river in the Lone Star State. The dammed section that flows through the heart of Austin is known as **Lady Bird Lake**, named for the former First Lady who made such an impact on our city, state, and country. Here waters from the **Edwards Aquifer** and the city’s creeks join those coming from the west to journey through the **Blackland Prairie** toward **Matagorda Bay** and the **Gulf of Mexico**.

**MEXICAN FREE-TAILED BATS**

From April to late Fall, the **Ann Richards Congress Avenue Bridge** is home to the largest urban population of **Mexican Free-tailed Bats** in the world. On summer evenings, 1.5 million of these flying mammals emerge from the narrow channels underneath the bridge to forage for thousands of pounds of insects. Austinites have grown to love these neighbors and respect their role in a healthy ecosystem.

**TRAIL HISTORY**

In the early 1960s, Parks Board Member **Rorberta Crenshaw** partnered with Parks Director **Beverly Sheffield** and other city leaders to develop a vision for the newly created Town Lake. Their guiding principle was that people needed places to recreate and connect to the wonders of the natural world. **Lady Bird Johnson**, First Lady and long-time Austin resident, threw her support behind this beautification plan and in 1971, their vision for this parkland became reality when the first section of trail was dedicated. Since then, many improvements and additions have occurred including the building of the **Crenshaw Walkway** and **Pfluger Bridge**. In 2011, the **Lake** was renamed to honor the memory of **Lady Bird Johnson**. In 2014, with the opening of the Boardwalk, the 10-mile pathway around **Lady Bird Lake** was completed.
Visitors to McKinney Falls State Park can swim, fish, picnic, boulder, hike, bike, or camp overnight. The biggest draw are the upper and lower falls where Onion Creek flows over large slabs of limestone. A diversity of animals and plants live in these riparian zones where land and water meet. The Largemouth Bass, prized by fishermen, are top predators within their watery habitat. Bald Cypress trees grow where their large roots extend like giant drinking straws. Such healthy riparian zones are critical for healthy ecosystems.

FLOODS

Onion Creek is Austin’s largest creek watershed, and is prone to flooding during big storm events. The 2013 Halloween Flood and the 2015 Memorial Day Flood destroyed homes and displaced residents. Urban growth has increased the rate of stormwater runoff as more land becomes covered in concrete and rooftops (impervious cover). Officials and citizens are working together to solve the problem as they recognize the impact that upstream activities have on downstream neighbors.
Meadows Center Information, Reservations, and Fees: meadowscenter.txst.edu

Rules:
- Pets are not allowed.
- No campfires, glass containers, motor vehicles, weapons, horses, or camping.
- Take only photos, leave only footprints.
- Refrain from biking on muddy trails. Stay on trails.

Explorer’s Checklist
- Take a guided glass-bottom boat tour on Spring Lake to see aquatic wildlife and the springs bubble up along the Balcones Fault Line.
- Look at Native American artifacts and see Texas Blind Salamanders inside the Education Center.
- Walk the Wetlands Boardwalk for an up-close view of aquatic plants and wildlife.

Texas State University purchased the land where the Meadows Center now stands, transforming what was once a theme park into an environmental education center around Spring Lake, Texas’ largest spring and headwaters of the 260-mile long San Marcos River.

LIVING WATERS
Eight federally listed Endangered and Threatened species make their home in Spring Lake, the 3.8 mile-long upper section of the San Marcos River. Salamanders, fish, and other aquatic fauna, as well as unique plants such as Texas Wild Rice, rely on the flow of this clear, clean, constant temperature water from the Edwards Aquifer for survival.

SACRED SPRINGS
Archaeological evidence suggests that Native Americans lived in this area for over 13,000 years. They considered the springs to be sacred. The White Shaman Panel, a 4,000 year-old cave painting (considered the earliest map of Texas) depicts a pilgrimage route to Barton Springs, San Marcos Springs, Comal Springs and San Pedro Springs. Several creation stories are tied to these places and still have special meaning today.
Mount Bonnell
3800 Mount Bonnell Rd., Austin, TX 78731

Hours and Fees: Open 5AM-10PM Daily. Free
Parking: Along Mount Bonnell Rd. Parking is prohibited after curfew.
Rules: Dogs are allowed on leash. Pack it in, pack it out!

Explorer’s Checklist
☐ Count the steps as you climb to the top and enjoy a picnic overlooking Lake Austin.
☐ Look at the difference in the land to the east and west.
☐ Watch a sunset.
☐ Don’t forget to take photos!
☐ Bring binoculars and look for the Pennybacker Bridge.

If the climb up shaded stone steps among the Ashe Juniper, Mountain Laurel, Texas Persimmon and Live Oak doesn’t take one’s breath away, the view at the top will. At 785 feet above sea level, Mount Bonnell rises over and provides a scenic overlook of the Lake Austin section of the Colorado River.

In Central Texas millions of years ago, faulting occurred that has shaped two distinct landscapes. To the east stretch the rolling, coastal plains. The west features the steeply cut hills marking the edge of plateau uplands. Mount Bonnell sits on the crest of the Balcones Escarpment which is the abrupt slope break across the main line of dislocation along the Balcones Fault Zone. It is an edge where east meets west and this geologic break provides the basis for distinct ecosystems between eastern prairies and western plains.
NATIVE AMERICAN PATHWAYS

Many of the roadways we now travel pass over the footsteps of others who came before. Moving along rivers and through passes to springs and favored campsites, **Native Americans** traveled this area extensively forming the pathways we still use.

Various tribes made their home in the **Edwards Plateau** region. As new groups moved in, others were pressured out. For centuries, **Coahuiltecan** subsisted as hunter-gatherers, followed by the **Tonkawa** and **Jumano** and then the **Lipain Apache** and **Comanche**. These migrations and inter-tribal dynamics were greatly influenced by **European** activity beginning in the 1500s with the **Spanish** explorers. These included the introduction of the horse, imposition of colonial rule, establishment of permanent settlements, private land ownership, and, most devastating, the transmission of diseases.

MOUNT BONNELL FAULT ZONE GEOLOGY CROSS-SECTION
Red Bud Isle Hours:  austinparks.org/red-bud-isle

Rules:
- Dogs are permitted off leash. No swimming.
- Obey posted signs.
- Pack it in, pack it out!

LCRA Rebud Center Information:  bit.ly/32XrYBm

Rules:
- No littering, glass containers, alcohol, firearms or other types of weapons.

Explorer’s Checklist
- Weave through the trees and trails with your pup on Red Bud Isle.
- View Tom Miller Dam from the LCRA Redbud Center lookout point.
- Study the multi-tiered interactive model of the Highland Lakes at the Redbud Center and try your hand at managing a river.

DRINKING WATER, DAMS, AND DOGS

The Wilkerson Center for Colorado River Education is located on the grounds of the Lower Colorado River Authority’s (LCRA) Redbud Center. Nearby is Tom Miller Dam that forms Lake Austin, the city’s primary source for drinking water. In 1940, the LCRA completed the dam as part of the Highland Lakes system, designed to manage floodwaters and bring electricity to the Texas Hill Country. Previous attempts to control the extreme flows of the Colorado had failed. In both 1900 and 1915 previous dams were devastated by floods. Granite boulders from those structures can still be found on Red Bud Isle.
ON THE MARY GAY MAXWELL TRACT
9901 FM 1826, Austin, TX 78737

Trail information: facebook.com/slaughtercreektrail
Rules: No dogs allowed. No trash cans or water on site.
       Limited parking. Stay on the trail. Pack it in, Pack it out.

Explorer’s Checklist
❑ Bring a field guide to learn about a new plant.
❑ Hike the entire trail to experience both the Contributing and Recharge Zones of the Barton Springs segment of the Edwards Aquifer.
❑ Take the time to stop and take in the wonders of this place.

This beautiful and little-known nature trail came about through a partnership between the City of Austin and citizen organizations who funded, built, and now maintain and operate the trail. This land is part of the city’s Water Quality Protection Land (WQPL) program and is managed to protect the quality of the water reaching the Barton Springs Edwards Aquifer. The trail is open to hikers, bikers, and horseback riders and allows visitors an opportunity to experience the natural wonders of an Edwards Plateau Savannah.

HEALTHY ECOSYSTEMS EQUAL CLEAN WATER
A healthy oak savannah ecosystem provides the optimum quality and quantity of water to recharge the Aquifer. Active management, including the use of prescribed burns, is used to promote native grasses and wildflowers.

SHARING THE LAND
One of the best tools for private landowners to preserve the natural heritage of their property for future generations is the use of conservation easements: a partnership between private landowners and land trusts or government entities. While families maintain ownership, they sell or donate the right to develop and thereby help keep the land in its natural state in perpetuity. These easements comprise over 60% of the lands protected by the WQPL in the Barton Springs Zone. It should be noted that the Slaughter Creek Trail is not on a conservation easement, but on property owned by the City of Austin.
Trail Information: violetcrowntrail.com


Explorer’s Checklist

- Bike from Convict Hill Rd. and Dick Nichols District Park to the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center.
- Discover the secret beauty of the Gaines Creek Canyon.
- Sit by Slaughter Creek and enjoy a symphony of bird song.

The Violet Crown Trail (VCT), a project of the Hill Country Conservancy, weaves through the canyons of Barton and Gaines Creek, the uplands of Sunset Valley, and crosses both Williamson and Slaughter Creeks to arrive at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. Passing thorough the environmentally sensitive Barton Springs Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone, the VCT connects our communities with the wonders of nature. Written in this landscape are natural and cultural stories that make this part of Texas special. Take the time to discover this heritage as you enjoy the VCT.
In the 1970s, an environmental group of “little old ladies in tennis shoes” amassed support to establish this 277-acre preserve. They sought to balance the natural heritage of this woodland expanse along Bee Creek with urban growth. Today, Wild Basin forms part of the larger Balcones Canyonlands Preserve, a system of preserves that protects the unique environs of seven endangered species and twenty-eight threatened plant and animal species.

NATIVE TEXAN
Something of a local celebrity, the endangered Golden-cheeked Warbler nests only in the oak-juniper woodlands of Central Texas. Each spring, these neo-tropical songbirds migrate from southern Mexico and Central America to breed exclusively in the Ashe juniper-oak forests of the Hill Country. They use the bark of mature Ashe junipers, aka cedar, to build their nests. An indicator species, the vitality of this little bird tells us much about the ecological health of the watershed and habitat it relies on for survival.
The City of Austin is proud to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you require assistance for participation in our programs or use of our facilities, please call (512) 974-3914.

TRAILS
- Shared Use Trails
- Hike Only
- Road, Street & Highway
- City of Austin

LEGEND
- Historic Building
- Playground
- Parking

PARK DIRECTORY
- Austin Nature & Science Center
  2389 Stratford Dr.
  (512) 974-3888
  austintexas.gov/ansc
- Barton Springs Pool
  2201 Barton Springs Rd.
  (512) 867-3080
  austintexas.gov/department/barton-springs-pool
- Park Ranger Station at Caretaker’s Cottage
  2105 Andrew Zilker Rd.
  (512) 978-2600
  austintexas.gov/parkrangers
- Sheffield Education Center
  2201 Barton Springs Rd.
  (512) 481-1466
  austintexas.gov/splash
- Zilker Botanical Garden
  2220 Barton Springs Rd.
  (512) 477-8672
  austintexas.gov/zilkerbotanicalgarden
- Zilker Hillside Theater
  2206 William Barton Dr.
  (512) 974-4045
  austintexas.gov/zilkerhillsidetheater

Park Information: austintexas.gov/department/zilker-metropolitan-park
Contact individual facilities for hours, fees, and other information - See Park Directory

Rules:
- Except in designated off-leash areas, dogs must be kept on a leash no longer than 6 feet. Scoop the Poop!
- Disruptive or criminal behavior may lead to ejection from park.
- No weapons or firearms unless use is expressly allowed.
- PARD may impound parked vehicles that create unsafe conditions.
AUSTIN'S CROWN JEWEL

The land at the confluence of Barton Creek and the Colorado River has been the site of human activity for thousands of years. Indigenous groups viewed the many springs and the accompanying abundance of animals and plants an oasis and essential to survival. During the 1800s, Anglo settlers used the same waters to power mills and the land for agriculture. Stone, gravel, and sand were extracted to meet the needs of a growing city. Local entrepreneur, Andrew Zilker, acquired this land in the early 1900s to grow grains to feed the horses his ice factory used for deliveries. After his wife died, Zilker gave up his plans to build an estate here. Instead, he donated 350 acres to the school district to sell to the City, creating Austin's premier public open space. It was officially designated Zilker Park in 1937.

Explorer's Checklist

- Picnic or kick a ball around on the Great Lawn. Sit atop Rock Island.
- Find the dinosaur footprints in the Botanical Gardens.
- Attend a public guided tour at the Umlauf Sculpture Garden.
- Check out the Birds of Prey and Wildlife Exhibits at the Nature & Science Center. Explore the Naturalist Workshop.
- Enjoy a performance at the Hillside Theater.
- Walk along the edge of the Edwards Plateau as you ramble through the Zilker Nature Preserve.
YOU CAN PROTECT OUR LAND AND WATER

AT HOME
- At home and in your community, actively reduce your impact and give back to the natural environment. [austintexas.gov/department/sustainability](http://austintexas.gov/department/sustainability)
- Consider where you live. When choosing a home, pick a location with consideration of your ecological impact.
- Know your watershed! [atxwatersheds.com/findyourwatershed/](http://atxwatersheds.com/findyourwatershed/)

IN YOUR YARD AND GARDEN
- Plant native plants and trees. [growgreen.org](http://growgreen.org)
- Make your landscape a wildlife habitat. [nwf.org/gardenforwildlife/](http://nwf.org/gardenforwildlife/)
- Avoid synthetic pesticides and “weed and feeds.”

CONSERVE WATER!
- Minimize indoor and outdoor water use. [austintexas.gov/department/water-conservation](http://austintexas.gov/department/water-conservation)
- If you have a yard, install a cistern and/or a rain garden! [austintexas.gov/department/rain-gardens-keeping-water-land](http://austintexas.gov/department/rain-gardens-keeping-water-land)

HELP PREVENT POLLUTION
- In Austin, call 512-974-2550 to report pollution concerns. [austintexas.gov/faq/hotline](http://austintexas.gov/faq/hotline)
  Pollutants include motor oil, gasoline, or other fuel; sewage leaks; fertilizers and pesticides; silt and sediment; soaps and detergents; antifreeze; latex and oil based paints.
- Clean up spills promptly to avoid rainwater washing pollutants to creeks and the river.
- Dispose of chemicals and other household waste properly. [austintexas.gov/dropoff](http://austintexas.gov/dropoff)
- Clean up after your pet! Even in your own yard, pet waste can be a pollutant. *Scoop the Poop!* [scoopthepoopaustin.org/](http://scoopthepoopaustin.org/)
TAKE ACTION! YOU CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE

What else can you do? There are many opportunities to volunteer and contribute to the preservation of the natural world of which we are a part. From participating in workdays to advocating for public policy or pointing out connections between people and the wonders of nature, there are many opportunities just waiting for you. Here are a few of the organizations that could use your help.

**Save Barton Creek Association**
- Trash cleanups, habitat restoration, outreach, and policy advocacy.
  - [savebartoncreek.org](http://savebartoncreek.org)

**City of Austin Wildland Conservation Division**
- Ecological restoration of Austin's Wildlands.

**Austin Parks Foundation**
- Help make Austin's parks healthier, safer, and more accessible.
  - [austinparks.org/volunteer](http://austinparks.org/volunteer)

**Keep Austin Beautiful**
- Working to keep Austin's green spaces and waterways clean.
  - [keepaustinbeautiful.org/volunteer-opportunities](http://keepaustinbeautiful.org/volunteer-opportunities)

**TreeFolks**
- Plant trees, support the urban forest.
  - [treefolks.org/volunteer](http://treefolks.org/volunteer)

**City of Austin Watershed Protection Department**
- Storm drain marking.
  - [austintexas.gov/stormdrainmarking](http://austintexas.gov/stormdrainmarking)
LOVE THIS GUIDE?

Consider donating to our work at savebartoncreek.org/donate

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BROUGHT TO YOU BY SBCA & PARTNERS