

Possum Kingdom Reborn

A new light shines on this North Texas reservoir

Written by June Naylor. Photographs by Will van Overbeek.



A nearby cliff island and this 85-foot limestone formation together create Possum Kingdom Lake’s legendary “Hell’s Gate.”

Winding around a curve on Park Road 36 on the way to the eastern shores of Possum Kingdom Lake, I breathe a sigh of relief. A ridge high on the horizon ahead of me presents a much healthier visage than the one I beheld on my last trip to the lake, which has been a weekend retreat since childhood.

In 2011, devastating fires ravaged significant areas around the beloved 16,000-plus-acre Brazos River reservoir, in Palo Pinto County some 90 minutes west of Fort Worth.

But three years after the fires, that same ridge exudes hope in the form of young, healthy growth—in spite of an ongoing drought. What’s more, robust rebuilding and impressive expansion erase all signs of the fires, meaning a reborn Possum Kingdom Lake awaits my family on this trip.

Our explorations reveal more than ever to enjoy at PK, the name we've used since we first took weekend trips out here from the Dallas-Fort Worth area as kids. Here's where we're spending time on our favorite Palo Pinto escape today.

Outdoor Adventures

We find the canoe livery in busy operation at the Possum Kingdom State Park store, where we buy walking sticks to help us navigate our way on the rocky, twisting paths that wind through verdant sections of untouched woods. We pick up picnic provisions, as well, as the store stocks plentiful supplies for folks renting the park's renovated cabins (we particularly like the ones with rocking chairs on the porches) and for anyone heading out on fishing expeditions.



On the lake's western shores, Possum Kingdom State Park has renovated cabins, waterfront campsites, and some three miles of wooded trails.

While inside the store, the clerk explains the prevailing legend about the lake's name: More than a century ago, pioneers discussing various traders in the region would joke about one in particular who dealt in possum pelts from this part of the Brazos River. He was referred to as the one who brought furs from his "possum kingdom." Thus informed, we head to the hiking loop that courses through the primitive camping area, climbing ridges for spectacular views and wandering into the shallow waters to marvel at massive tumbleweeds that came to rest at the lake's edge.

Another sunny day, we find ourselves on the east side of the lake, exploring the peninsula bisected by Farm Road 2951. Friends who keep vacation homes on this corner of the lake point us to the hiking and bicycling trails here—a 16-mile system with 12 trailheads—which the Brazos River Authority maintains. We easily spend a day wandering along Colonels Row,

Burma Road, and Redbird Road, all stemming away from FM 2951, to explore trails leading to scenic lookouts called Arrowhead Point, Horned Frog Lookout, and Angel View.

Every picnic, cookout, beach toy, and sunblock necessity for our day on the peninsula awaits us at The Trading Post, a terrific little grocery and supply store on Park Road 36. These provisions prove invaluable for picnicking and splashing along the lakeshore at our two favorite parks on the peninsula, North D&D, on the east end, and Sandy Beach, at the peninsula's western tip.

Eating, sleeping, luxuriating lakeside



PK pleasures include the waterside patio and porch rockers at The Grille at The Harbor on Possum Kingdom Lake.

A stone's throw from The Trading Post, The Harbor on Possum Kingdom Lake grew from a small marina to an impressive high-end neighborhood over the past decade or so. Though it's lined with expensive homes, we discover the Harbor a delightful place for visitors to hang out for a few days, too.

Executive Chef Steve Mitchell leads us through the large stone archway from The Grille, The Harbor's restaurant, to its waterside patio, laughing when we gasp at the view. "Everyone from the city walks out and exclaims, 'Look at the water! The water!'" In nice weather, there's not a better spot imaginable for enjoying goodies from the new pizza oven, as well as bacon-wrapped prawns and bone-in ribeye with grilled peppers and onions, with corn polenta alongside.

We stay in The Inn, positioned about 100 yards from The Grille, where we sit on the porch in rockers and listen to the waves lap at the rocks. Decorated in a fancy ranch theme, with heavy, rustic wood furnishings and wrought-iron accents, our room provides a perfect rest after a day of play on the lake. We can stay in, but we'd miss The Harbor fun, which includes one-hour boat tours (seeing the PK rock formation called Hell's Gate is a must) and hayrides.

Our two favorite parks on the peninsula, North D&D, on the east end, and Sandy Beach, at the peninsula's western tip, are particularly inviting for picnicking and splashing along the lakeshore.

About 10 minutes or so south of us along Texas 16, The Cliffs is another upscale residential area that welcomes vacationing guests. We wander over one evening to Spurs, a convivial sort of "19th hole" bar that's popular with golfers staying at the resort. Grazing on appetizers, such as Texas Toothpicks—a basket of fried jalapeño slices and onion strings—we find we're tempted by the dinner menu from the adjacent Chaparral Grille. The accommodating staff happily serves us the specialty without our having to change venues, a meatloaf bringing together ground steak, venison cutlets, and pork tenderloin, as well as a Cajun crawfish pasta dish.

The Cliffs' accommodations include comfortable rooms in a hotel-style inn as well as private villas; the latter consist of condos of all sizes. A full-service spa sits a few steps from the inn, while The Cliffs' popular golf course unfolds to reveal stunning views of the lake. The Cliffs Marina offers a number of watercraft rentals, as well.

Our wanderings turn up other good eating and sleeping options away from the resorts. At Boondocks, a friendly bar and grill with local live music, we indulge in sensational green chile-bacon cheeseburgers. At the Hide-Away, near The Trading Post, we find 22 modern cabins and a 16-room inn with lake views.

Even better, the Hide-Away sits in quick reach of those Brazos River Authority hike-and-bike paths. We find that such easy access to mesquite-shaded trails makes early-morning and late-afternoon exploration the best way to see PK in a new light.

Possum Kingdom Lake Essentials

For area information, contact the [Possum Kingdom Chamber of Commerce](#) at 940/779-2424 or 888/779-8330. Also check out the [Brazos River Authority's website](#). Both websites include a map of the Brazos River Authority's hiking and biking trails. Following are sites mentioned in the story.

[Possum Kingdom State Park](#), Park Rd. 33, Caddo, 940/549-1803.

[The Trading Post](#), 1712 Park Rd. 36, Graford, 940/779-2543.

[The Harbor on Possum Kingdom Lake](#), 1693 Park Rd. 36, Graford; 940/779-3600. Inquire about horseback programs and other amenities.

[The Grille at The Harbor on Possum Kingdom Lake](#), 3415 Scenic Point Dr., Graford, 940/779-7600.

[The Cliffs Resort](#), 160 Cliffs Dr., Graford, 940/779-4040. Inquire about the marina, golf course, dining, lodging, and private villa rentals.

[Boondocks PK Bar & Grill](#), 501 N. FM 2353, Graford, 940/779-2200.

[The Hide-Away Inn](#), Park Rd. 36 at FM 2951 (cabins at 1782 FM 2951), Graford, 940/779-2333.

Fort Worth writer June Naylor yearns for a quick escape to canoe and hike at Possum Kingdom State Park. TH photographer Will van Overbeek enjoyed the state park store: “The proprietor is full of local knowledge, and you can buy all of your lake supplies and even a postcard picturing a baby opossum.”

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