

TEXAS HILL COUNTRY OUTDOORS

By Steve Ramirez



CANYONS THE SPACE IN-BETWEEN

Canyons are places where time bends and twists; rising and falling, spilling and unfolding like the streams of water that carve them. They are the space in between the illusion we live in and the reality of all that lives beyond our mere senses. Canyons are spirit places. If you listen you will hear the echoes of those you once loved and of the person you once were; and it is then that you realize that you will always love them...they will always be with you, and you will always hold within you the spirit of that far away time. Canyons are magical like that.

I have walked through canyons across many miles of the Texas Hill Country. For me, God lives there. I could never find God within the walls of a building or the shallow veneer of a congregation of equally lost souls. If I want to see God...I have to go deeper. I have to walk across the limestone that over time erodes and drifts away like so many youthful dreams, and under the cedar trees that cling desperately, patiently, knowingly, to the canyon wall. I understand them and they know me all too well.

There is a canyon that was formed by the Sabinal River where big tooth maples are said to be lost. They of course have never been lost; they are home. The only lost souls in that canyon are the tourists that drive in to see the leaves and fail to see the trees, the river, and the echoes of past lives...the canyon. The canyon at Lost Maples is a special place for me.

When I returned from dangerous times, serving as a Marine—back when I was a younger man with still older eyes—I came to this canyon with my best friend from the Corps, Dave. We served together and lived through it all by fortune or grace depending on the theology we chose. As we walked along the canyon floor we talked of the past, enjoyed the moment, and looked down the winding trail. We didn't know then where the trail would take us or how long we had left to walk across its weathered stone, facing into the wind. Later we climbed to the rim of another canyon and sat on a boulder overlooking the Frio. Dave told me what his wishes were when the day came that he might cross the river and rest under the shade of the trees. Dave died that year. He was only 41, but like me so much older. Now when I return to the canyon and sit on the rock, Dave sits with me. Canyons are magical like that too.

Anyone can write of mountains. Everyone seems to want to look at them from afar, and then climb them so that they can then look back to where they stood in the first place. Mountains are lovely, but canyons teach us more. So many people only think of canyons as something to look into or climb out of. Like the mountains, they stand at the canyon's rim looking down and away. They cannot see that our lives are more enclosed, more immediate; here and now, not there and another time. Our lives are carved by the streams of experience. We meander along the path of least resistance and tumble toward our tail waters.

The Texas Hill Country is a land of rivers and streams and therefore a canyon land as well. I have walked Echo Canyon between the two great granite domes of Enchanted Rock. There the wind that blows constantly across the rock is silent and the trees seem to be waiting for something to happen. As I pause to look within I wonder how many souls have stood where I stand; be they Comanche or Cowboy, Settler or Sojourner. I wonder if they noticed that it is not only the rock that is enchanted.

Sometimes I stand in the rivers that form the canyons. As I cast my line back and forth and allow my mind to drift with the fly, I pause. The descending song of a wren calls from the canyon wall. I listen to it reminding me that all of the cares of humanity are insignificant, illusions that we all agree to believe in. I look up, not down, and see the many layers of history carved into the rock. Standing in skinny water, the same water that carved the canyon, I smile. Life is good. Time is bigger than me. I will come and I will go but the canyon will remain. The river will flow without me and someday someone else will stand there listening to the descending song of my friend's progeny.

So when the time comes that I am to cross the river and rest beneath the shade of the trees, I will return to the canyon lands of the Texas Hills. And, someday another soul will climb a rock that overlooks the river; looking at the falling autumn leaves and the blooming white flowers...and I will sit with them. Canyons are magical like that. X

steve@hillcountryexplore.com