



# Tales of Texas

## NEWSLETTER



### December 2024

This issue of Tales of Texas details a little road trip anyone can make, and you don't have to leave Texas.

If you need something to do when the kids are out of school, consider taking them on a trip to one of the attractions or you can do the whole loop in a few days.

The photo above taken at Camp Mabry, Austin.

All other photos are labeled and taken by the author.

If you want to learn more: <https://thc.texas.gov/>

Comments? Go to website listed below.

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## Texas History Road Trip

As most of my readers know, I take my grandsons on various history trips, depending on their grade level. They are home-schooled, but they adhere to curriculum and are taught by my daughter, a teacher by degree and trade. Our fourth grader, Brody, was anxious to do his trip as fourth grade is Texas students' introduction to their state's history.

I'm putting this little loop trip in the Christmas letter for folks who are looking for something the kids might like to do over the holidays. The loop in this case starts in Jacksonville, Texas, about 30 miles South of Tyler.

### First Stop: Waco Mammoth National Monument, Waco



This place was a real surprise. It's in Waco and part of the National Park system, however, your national park passes won't work here. You pay a small entrance fee and go on a guided tour of the area. (About a 500-yard walk over level sidewalk) The ranger takes you to a creek where a heard of mammoths and other prehistoric creatures died. After a brief talk about it, you follow the ranger to a climate-controlled building where you can see an active dig (See photo at left). It's super-fascinating, Brody loved it. The scientists' field lab is right there so you can see them working with microscopes, etc. Brody and I learned a lot about Texas in the Ice Age and it's a good spot to start a history tour, since it's the oldest stop on our loop.



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*Texas Ranger Museum, Waco*

## 2nd Stop: Texas Ranger Museum, Waco

The Texas Ranger Museum is either on or contingent with the campus of Baylor University. It's a first-class museum with exhibits on the origin of the Texas Rangers under Stephen F. Austin. It has several galleries that have everything from horses (stuffed) and saddles to the world-famous, history changing Colt revolvers which Col Colt's first customer, President Sam Houston obtained for the Rangers to fight Mexican incursions and Comanches. It doesn't stop there, it goes through the Civil War, Old West, Gangsters, and to modern day ranger activities. It's all good here, except the video presentation which is too long (45 mins) and dated.

## 3rd Stop: Texas Sports Hall of Fame, Waco

Literally, right next door to the Texas Ranger Museum is the Texas Sports Hall of Fame.

Brody is a huge sports fan, but as you can imagine, he hasn't heard of most of the athletes in this HoF because of his age. He liked the exhibits about the sports themselves but lacked enthusiasm here. Although he liked Alan Ashby's catcher mask that was bent in by a Nolan Ryan fastball.

If you are a sports fan of a certain age, and you remember the glory days of the SWC, Dallas Cowboys, Houston Oilers, Houston Colt 45s, and the Houston Rockets, this is your place. One of the newest inductees in Christa Williams. I remember when she went to my old high school, Dobie, and then applied for the US Olympic Softball Team. She had to have her pitches clocked by radar. She came by the HPD Clear Lake Substation, and we were glad to support her Olympic dreams with our radar gun. She has an exhibit at the Texas HoF.



*Texas Sports Hall of Fame  
Waco*



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## 4th Stop: Baylor University, Waco



Baylor University

I needed to do some quick research for a project, and the Baylor Library had the stuff. Brody and I parked at the Welcome Center (across the street from the Ranger and Sports Museums). We walked around the campus to get to the library. Brody was intrigued by the robotic delivery vehicles going around campus delivering pizzas, etc to the students. Brody got to see the stadiums where current NFL, MLB, NBA players got their starts.

## 5th Stop: Camp Mabry, Austin



Camp Mabry Diorama

We left Waco and drove to Austin and spent the night, ready to get busy the next day. Our first visit in Austin was to Camp Mabry, an active army base and HQ of the Texas National Guard/Army Reserve. You will need your ID at the gate, then ask for directions to the museum. After a short drive, you come to the museum and park. It has indoor/outdoor exhibits and is across the street from the Audie Murphy Training Center. This place is an absolute treasure trove of information about all things military in the history of Texas. It has hands on exhibits, films, and Brody's favorite: dioramas. If your kiddos have a learning or reading disability, the hands on, interactive is something they will enjoy. The museum covers the time from Spanish/Mexican Colonialism to present day operations in the Middle East. Anywhere the Texas Army, Texas National Guard, or 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division went, it's in the museum. The photo on the top of page one was taken at an outdoor exhibit at Camp Mabry.





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## 6th Stop: Bullock Museum, Austin



Sam Houston  
Bullock Museum

If there's such a thing as an official Texas State History Museum, this is it. The facility is located within steps of the capitol and houses multiple floors of exhibits, all first-class. This one basically starts with European contact in the form of an actual sunken treasure ship located on the first floor. There are numerous interactive exhibitions, including a nice one about the Alamo. I have to advise you not to miss the museum's film. There is an Imax theater there so it could get confusing. The film that you want to make sure you see is called "Star of Destiny". It's a multi-sensory spectacle that I guarantee will impress you. It's extremely well done, as is the rest of the museum. It's well worth the price of admission.

## 7th Stop: Capitol of Texas, Austin



The Capitol of Texas

The capitol of Texas is quite the building. There is a lengthy tour of the building and tunnels that connect it to other state agencies. To be honest, if you have kids, they aren't going to be interested in it that much. Brody loved the huge picture of Davy Crockett in the lobby of the building. There is a visitor center that's basically underground on the grounds outside the building. You can see stuff in there, including a capitol made of Lego's.

The more interesting stuff, I thought, are the grounds. Outside has statues and memorials of all things Texas. Be sure and read the memorials such as the Alamo one and the Gonzales one. They are fascinating, including the men's names and whose squad they were in. Don't be shocked that there are Confederate things there as well since Texas was in the Confederacy.



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## 8th Stop: Pioneer Museum Fredericksburg



Pioneer Museum

The Pioneer Museum doesn't get much attention in Fredericksburg because it's overshadowed in a big way by the National Museum of the Pacific War. Don't let that stop you. This little museum is a powerful learning tool if you have any inclination to learn about German immigration to Texas. Among its many exhibits is a classroom with lessons still on the board as the German kids had to learn English. There is a sixteen-minute film that is a MUST see, if you're in town. It tells you all you need to know and learn in sixteen minutes. This museum is quite possibly the most underrated museum in all of Texas. It has a livery stable, barber shop, blacksmith shop, log cabin, etc. It is located on Main and Milam. Get there when it opens and park on Milam, the side street. It's much easier to get in and out of town that way. It is a twenty-minute walk to the Pacific War Museum, but you can have lunch on the way.

## 9th Stop: Pacific War Museum Fredericksburg



Pacific War Museum

The National Museum of the Pacific War (Nimitz Museum, Bush Museum) gets all the press in the town. It's a huge place with planes, guns, a submarine conning tower, a peace garden, and all sorts of interactive exhibits. On some holidays, they do reenactments and things of that nature. The main gallery is a maze-like structure where you begin with Pearl Harbor and you walk all through the place following an arrow. You'll see the war in the Pacific unfold before you in chronological order. Brody was never bored as he really didn't have to read much. There were video clips that went with everything which explained the exhibit for people and young students like Brody. You end up looking at an atomic bomb. The Japanese donated a "peace garden" that is on the grounds and is thought provoking. Some of the outlying locations have different operating hours, so be sure and check that before you do too much.



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## 10th Stop: The Alamo

The Alamo, of course, is the crown jewel of historical sites in Texas. The Cradle of Texas Liberty is sacred and should be visited by every Texan. This page has two photos on it. The top one is in the brand-new museum that the rock star Phil Collins donated. You have to pay admission to go into the museum, but it is well worth your ticket price. There are more rooms and exhibits in it than I have pictured. This photo shows a diorama of the Alamo. It lights up as the narrator (Phil Collins) tells you what is going on during the siege and battle. Brody loves dioramas as it gives him a good feel for size and space. They fit his learning style. You should look at the back wall. HPD's own forensic super-artist, Lois Gibson, painted portraits of Alamo defenders based on family traits passed down to descendants. Be sure and look at these. They are marvels thanks to Lois's talent.

The second photo is an artillery piece manned by a reenactor. There was also a musket squad that showed everyone how to load and fire the muskets of the day. Check the Alamo's website and coordinate your visit with the reenactors' schedule, especially if you have kids.

If you haven't been to the Alamo in the last few months, you really need to go. It is truly a destination worthy of the sacrifice that its brave defenders gave. Some parts of the complex are still under construction and rehabilitation, including the Alamo Cenotaph.





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## Final Stops: “Old Baylor”, Independence Baptist Church, and Washington-on-the-Brazos

The final day, we spent around Brenham. The top photo is Independence Baptist Church, the oldest Baptist church in Texas. Sam Houston was baptized here and his wife, Margaret, is buried here. There is a museum inside worthy of your time, but it's closed on Sundays. The church is across the street and is open for worship on Sundays.

The lower left is Washington-on-the-Brazos. This is where delegates declared independence from Mexico as the Alamo was under siege. The Alamo defenders did not know about the declaration before they perished. This is also where Sam Houston and the remainder of the army initiated the counterattack that would culminate at San Jacinto.

The lower right is where the original Baylor was located. It was tied to the church just a few blocks away in the top left photo. It had a “female department” that would become the University of Mary Hardin Baylor in Belton. Many of Texas’ first teachers came out of this location.

