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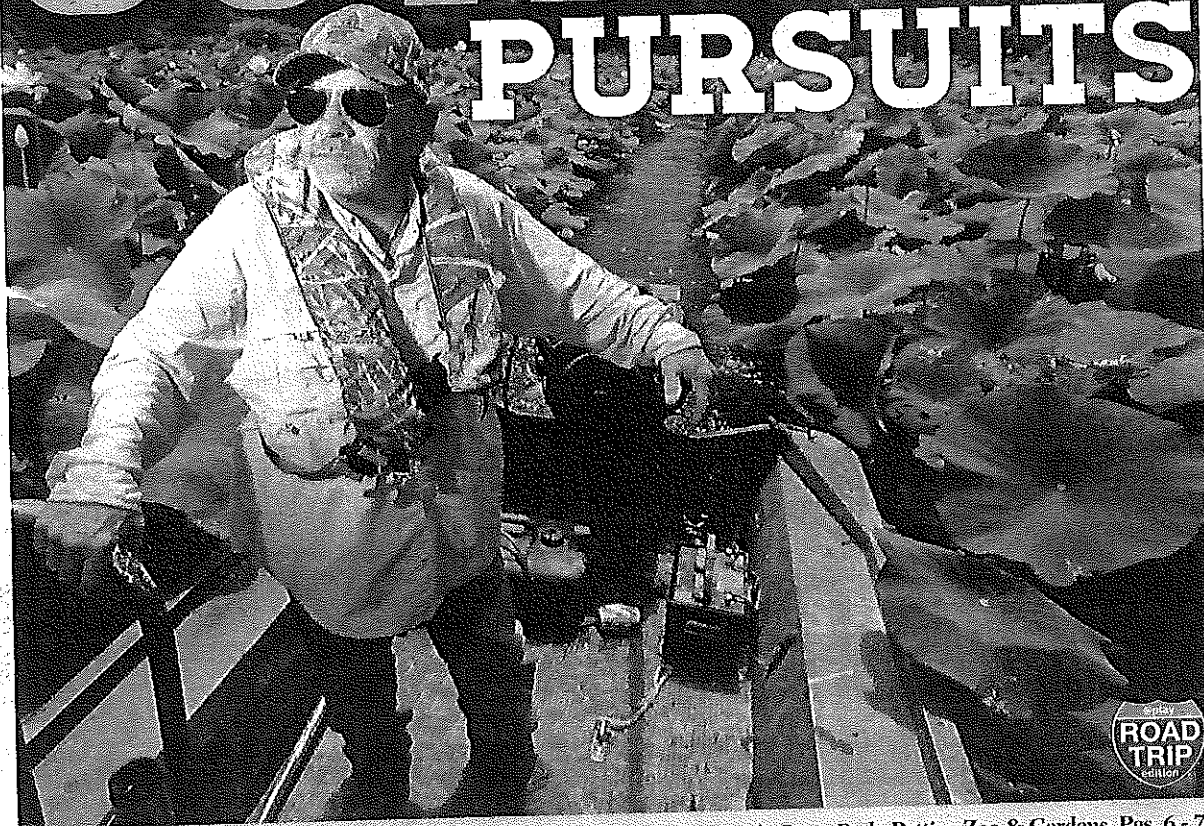
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YOUR WEEKLY GUIDE TO EAST TEXAS ENTERTAINMENT

AUGUST 15-21, 2013
A TEXAS COMMUNITY MEDIA PUBLICATION

OUTDOOR PURSUITS



Get a closer look at Caddo Lake with Go-Devil Tours, Pgs. 4 - 5 | Captain Ron's Gator Park, Petting Zoo & Gardens, Pgs. 6 - 7

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Traversing hidden waters

Go-Devil tours allow Caddo Lake visitors to tour salvinia-covered bayous.

By Christina Lane
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UNCERTAIN — Though much of the waters at Caddo Lake have become blocked because of invasive species, there remains one way to traverse them.

The Go-Devil motor was developed in Louisiana for traveling through shallow water and vegetation, and Go-Devil tours allow Caddo Lake visitors to see places that canoes, pontoon boats and steamboats can't venture.

"Two years ago, you could take a canoe out here," said Billy Carter as he looked out recently at Caddo Lake from his Go-Devil, surrounded on all sides by giant salvinia. "Today, if you were in a canoe, it'd be like trying to get through molasses."

Since 2006, Caddo Lake has been battling giant salvinia. The floating fern from Brazil is one of the most problematic aquatic plants in Texas and has covered a majority of Caddo Lake, according to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Go-Devils and other forms of aquatic transportation with similar motors can still traverse the hidden waters of Texas' only natural lake.

Located on the border between Texas and Louisiana, Caddo Lake is a sprawling maze of bayous, sloughs, waterways, channels, islands and cypress thickets dripping with Spanish moss. Depending on rainfall, the maze covers about 26,800 acres of cypress swamp.

Caddo Indian legend attributes the formation of the lake to a giant flood; however, scientists believe the lake formed when floodwater, blocked by log jams on the Red River, backed up into the Cypress Bayou, according to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

A trip to Caddo Lake allows visitors

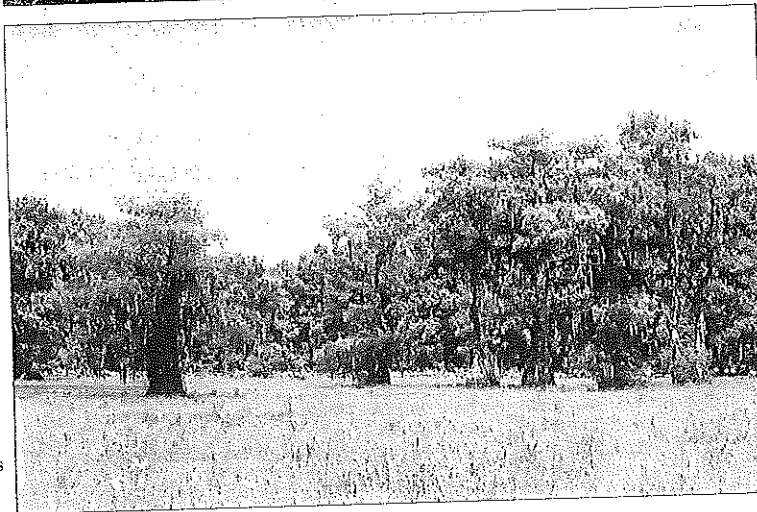
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Above: Billy Carter gives a tour on his Go-Devil boat recently on Caddo Lake. The boat allows Carter to take visitors to areas of the lake no longer accessible to traditional pontoon boat or canoes because of giant salvinia.

At left: "It looks like pasture land," Carter says of some areas of the lake. "That's all it looks like anymore."

Michael Cavazos
@play Photos



@the main event

Tours

From page 4

to take in the sights at the Caddo Lake State Park, from which people can take canoe tours or have overnight stays by renting a cabin. Sportsmen can load up on live bait and artificial lures at Johnson's Ranch Marina, which opened in 1908. It's the oldest inland marina still operating in Texas. The nearby Caddo Lake National Wildlife Refuge, free and open to the public, allows visitors to see natural vegetation of the area as well as take a gander at more than 216 resident bird species.

For those who want to observe the heart of Caddo Lake, a trip to Uncertain isn't complete without a tour of the lake.

For years, Capt. Ron Gibbs has operated his steamboat lake tours on the Graceful Ghost. He continues to do so; however, giant salvinia and other invasive species have limited the areas where Gibbs' steamboat can go.

"This year, we have sufficient water, but we can't get in there because of the non-native, invasive species," Gibbs said in July.

Carter has offered lake tours for more than 25 years. His Go-Devil tours allow visitors to get a view of areas of Caddo they wouldn't normally see because of the salvinia.

As Carter stopped into his boat docked at Johnson's Ranch Marina on a recent Tuesday afternoon, he pointed toward an egret sitting on an island in the distance.

"You see the island he's sitting on, it's moving," Carter said. "There no dirt beneath him. That's just salvinia and nutgrass. The salvinia moves with the wind and the current. Some days you can't even see the water."

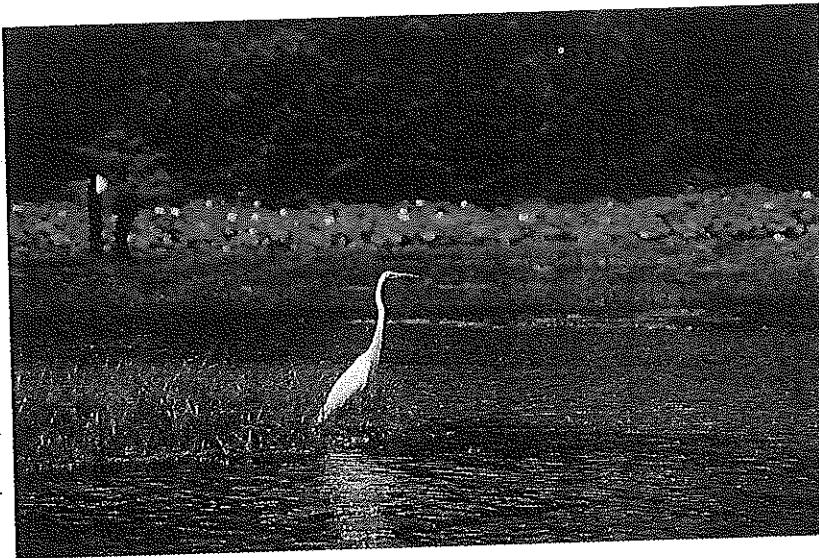
As Carter started on his tour, the waters were mostly clean and free of salvinia.

"In 1950, there wasn't even a weed in this lake. You could troll all over the lake," Carter said. "Sixty years later, look what has happened to this little hidden gem of a lake."

He stopped in front of Boat Road Q, facing an immeasurable amount of giant salvinia.

"Go-Devils can get past this. Everybody else's tour ends here," Carter said.

With that, Carter revved up his



An egret rests on an island recently at Caddo Lake near Uncertain. Michael Cavazos @play Photo

IF YOU GO

What: Caddo Lake

Where: Caddo Lake spans more than 26,000 acres between Texas and Louisiana. In Texas, it is accessible from locations in Uncertain and Karnack.

Cost: Free, although there are fees with some activities.

Things to do: Caddo Lake State Park can be accessed seven days a week at 245 Park Road 2 in Karnack. Cost is \$3 for adults; children 12 and younger are admitted free. Billy Carter offers daily Go-Devil tours that depart from Johnson's Ranch Marina, 5131 E. Cypress Drive in Uncertain. The marina also features fishing supplies. Capt. Ron Gibbs offers steamboat tours of Caddo Lake, departing from Big Pines Lodge, on the Graceful Ghost. Tours are offered Wednesday through Friday.

motor and began traversing down Boat Road Q as the boat shook off the salvinia that attempted to wad up against it.

"The first tour of the day is always a guess because you don't know if the salvinia will end in a quarter mile, a mile — there may not be an end to it," he said.

From the Go-Devil, the lake didn't look like a lake at. Its waters were entirely hidden.

"It looks like pasture land," Carter said. "That's all it looks like

anymore."

He said new, invasive species have been found this year. Carter noted that 2013 is the first year he has seen nutgrass on the lake.

"They say the salvinia doubles in size every two and half days," Carter said. "I believe it. There's not much water left."

Most of the clear water is on the Louisiana side of the lake, where Carter said there is saltwater that helps battle the salvinia. He noted that Texans do not want to salt the waters on this side because of concerns that it will harm the cypress trees.


As Carter came upon another bayou, the salvinia was replaced by dozens upon dozens of spatterdock

lilies, lotus and white lilies — all of which are invasive to Caddo Lake, he said. Water still could not be seen.

"This boat is made to run over stuff," he said as he breezed through the plants. "It's not like other boats."

Carter grew up on Caddo Lake and said he wants to see a solution to the invasive plants. Though some permanent fixes, such as weevils unleashed on the salvinia in 2012, are in the process, their results will be slow to see.

"This is the oldest natural lake in the South, and it's the only natural lake in Texas," Carter said. "I don't want to see it get run out by weeds."



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