

de Stolfe Journal ★★★ Broadsheets

Eastland County Rest Stop

*Visited on August 10, 2021
& October 9, 2021*

All photos are by RG de Stolfe, except where noted.



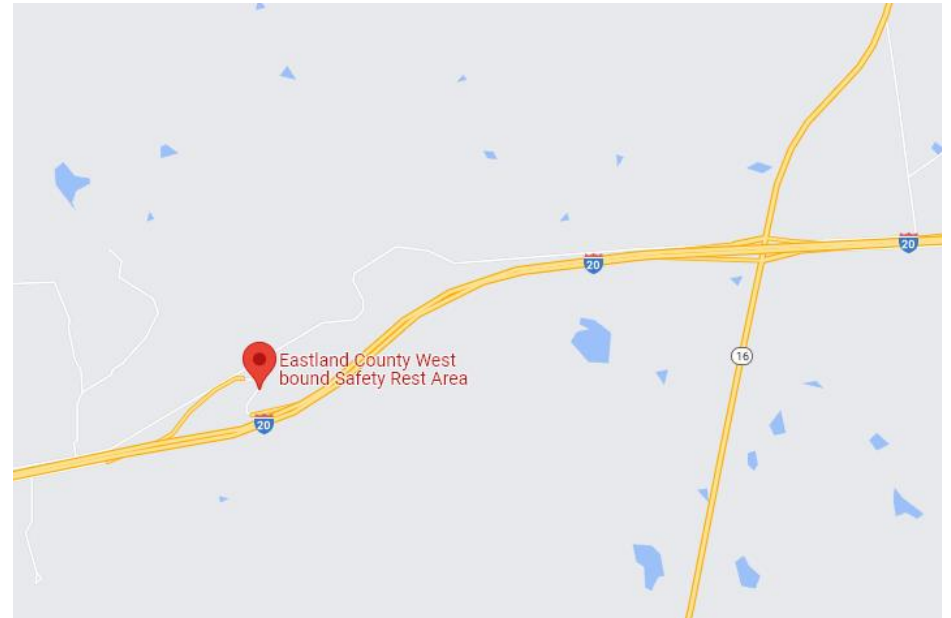
Tuesday, August 10, 2021

I left a little after 3:00 PM from where I was and travelled about ten minutes before getting to a new rest stop on the interstate. You can tell it was relatively still new by how clean everything was, but also by how there was still some last construction going on to finish the project. I stopped here because my friend's wife had something to do with its design. Being more than just a place to pee, this rest stop includes a mini museum of sorts with many interpretive panels and artifacts, including a 1925 Model T!

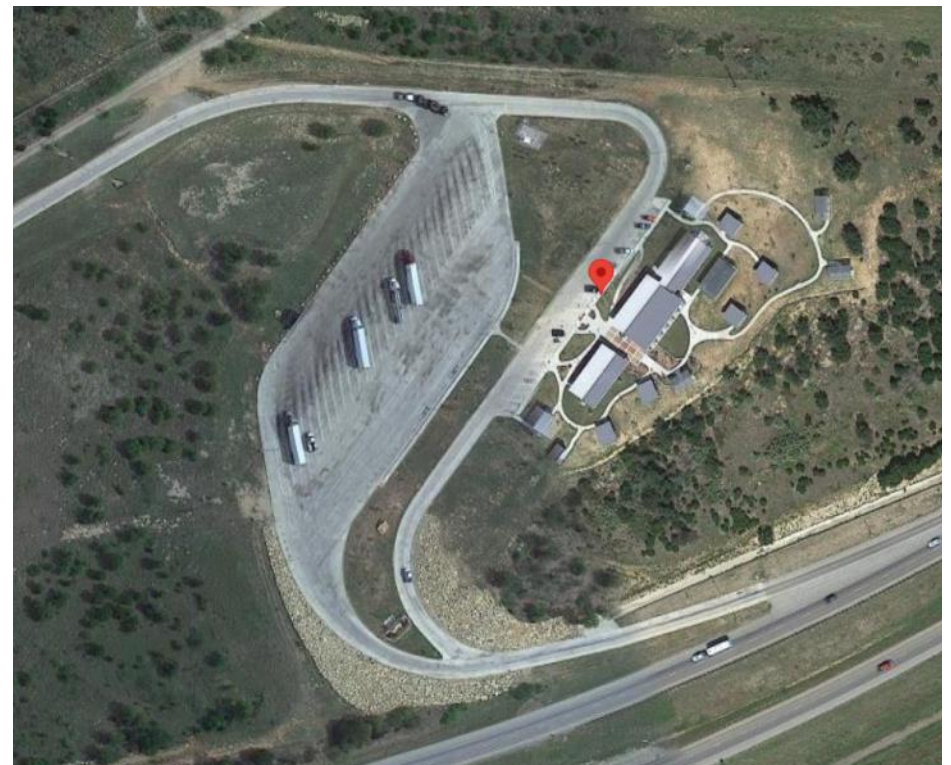
Saturday, October 9, 2021

After attending an event, I stopped back at this rest stop to get a few more photos.

The following pages show the photos I took, but excludes any notes.



Google Maps







Getting

Gassed

In the early days of the automobile, gasoline was purchased at local hardware stores, general stores, livery or blacksmith shops. In some areas curbside vendors carried gasoline to the car in buckets or cans and poured the fuel into the tanks with a funnel. But as the distances drivers wished to drive grew longer, and since a car could hold only so much gas, it was necessary to create places where fuel could be purchased along the route. So, along early roads like the Bankhead Highway a new technology was born that would change the face of America. It was the filling station.



The early filling stations, similar to the one displayed here, no longer dispensed gas in buckets and cans but with metered pumps. They not only sold gasoline, but provided free air and water, generally included a garage for crankcase service, tire and tube installation, some had mechanics, a forge, drill press and other tools to repair or remake automobile parts.

As more and more filling stations were developed, drivers were able to travel greater distances. The whole concept of 'touring' was created. But touring required places to stop for food and sleep. And so the filling station became a magnet for restaurants and tourist courts and these facilities often developed into the main streets of towns. The filling station not only fueled the automobile, it fueled the economy of small town America.

Today, we often think of the filling station as a creation of our brave new modern world. But, in fact, the truth is the other way around. Our brave new modern world was created by the filling station.



Accidental

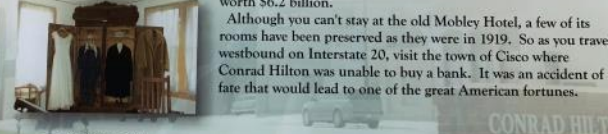
Billionaire



After serving in the Army in World War I, a young man named Conrad Hilton came to the Eastland County town of Cisco to make his fortune. Cisco was a likely place to make a fortune because it was on the edge of the booming Ranger oil field where many fortunes were already being made. He arrived in Cisco with \$5,000 pinned to the lining of his coat. He intended to purchase a local bank, but the seller kept going up on the purchase price. Frustrated, Hilton went across the street to the Mobley Hotel to rest. He noticed the hotel was a beehive of activity, the rooms rented mostly to oilfield workers on eight-hour shifts. Business was so brisk that the rooms sometimes changed hands three times a day. When he found the other hotels in town were full he forgot about a career in banking and within days bought the Mobley Hotel instead. It was an immediate success. He called it half flophouse and half goldmine.

In the next few years he purchased hotels in Dallas, Abilene, Waco and Fort Worth, the first of his hotels to bear the Hilton name. During the Depression, he nearly went bankrupt, but he managed to hang on. In the next decade he purchased more hotels in California, Chicago and New York, including the fabled Waldorf-Astoria. Then he expanded his chain internationally. By the time of his death, he owned 185 hotels worldwide, and by the end of the twentieth century, the chain he created was worth \$6.2 billion.

Although you can't stay at the old Mobley Hotel, a few of its rooms have been preserved as they were in 1919. So as you travel westbound on Interstate 20, visit the town of Cisco where Conrad Hilton was unable to buy a bank. It was an accident of fate that would lead to one of the great American fortunes.



CONRAD HILTON
CENTER

Eastland County

Ghost Towns



Eastland County has a fair share of the state's ghost towns. Among the most fascinating is the community of Thurber where much of the brick to pave the Bankhead Highway and the streets of Austin and Galveston was made. Initially, Thurber was a coal-mining town owned completely by the Texas & Pacific Coal and Oil Company. In the late 1800s, it had a population of about 8,000, had a 650-seat opera house, and a 200-room hotel. The company bosses surrounded the town with a barbed wire fence and hired armed guards to keep labor union organizers from gaining access to miners, largely Italian, Hungarian and Mexican emigrants who were treated in almost total subjugation. Eventually pressure from the labor unions, and the railroad's move away from coal to power locomotives with oil, shut the town down. All that remains is a huge smokestack that has been converted into a popular restaurant for travelers along I-20.

The settlement of Desdemona began around 1857. Its early economy was based on prairie farming, then in 1918, a driller struck oil and the boom began. At the height of the boom, it is estimated the town had a population of 16,000. With the onset of typhoid fever, a series of fires, lawlessness and the end of the oil boom, the town was reduced to little more than ghosts and ruins.



Mangum, Texas, was a farming and ranching community founded in the late 1800s. In 1915, the town had a population of 125 souls, a gin, a school, two doctors, a hospital and a flourishing mineral water company. By the 1920s it had begun to decline. The post office closed in 1929 and by the late 1980s Mangum was no longer shown on highway maps.



The Immortal

Toad

It all began in 1897 when the old Eastland County Courthouse was being demolished to make way for a new courthouse. A time capsule containing a bible, some newspapers and a living horned toad was placed in the cornerstone and then sealed. Then, in 1928, this Eastland County courthouse was demolished so a new Art Deco courthouse could be built on the site. A crowd of thousands came to see the opening of the time capsule. A county judge lifted the small, seemingly lifeless lizard from its tomb and held it high. Suddenly, its legs began to twitch and then the crowd grew ecstatic as its whole body began to wriggle. After 31 years, the little toad was alive. A biology team from Texas Christian University examined the toad, found that he was indeed alive and kicking. Renamed Old Rip, for Rip Van Winkle, he became an immediate sensation. Rarely, if ever, has a lizard, dead or alive been so famous. Because of Old Rip's miraculous resurrection, the demand for horned toads boomed, museums and zoos clamored after them. Prices for lizards went from five cents a head to twenty-five cents.



President Calvin Coolidge kept 300 supporters cooling their heels while he paid a visit to the immortal lizard. But sadly, nearly a year later, Old Rip croaked. An autopsy showed he had died of pneumonia. He was embalmed and placed in a velvet-lined coffin. Whether the story of Old Rip's survival and resurrection is true or was an elaborate hoax is subject to some debate. But still, after nearly 100 years, tourists come to visit the Eastland County courthouse where the remains of the immortal toad lie in state.

Sweet

Chariots

The automobiles that drove the old Bankhead Highway were mobile sculptures, extraordinary works of art. With their flowing curves, rakish lines and technical innovations, they were created by a generation of artist-mechanics like the world would never see again. One of the most popular cars to set out on the Bankhead in those years was the Franklin Touring Car, among the most advanced automobiles of the time. Like most models of the era, this upscale motorcar was essentially handmade and featured many innovations like the first six-cylinder engine and a light aluminum body. Paint colors and color schemes were based on English horse-drawn coach livery. Never before had cars been so colorful. Even Henry Ford said he would offer his cars in any color as long as it was black.



Ford was the first to build motorcars on an assembly line. Of his Model T Ford, he said: "I will build a car for the great multitudes. It will be large enough for a family, but small enough for the individual to run and care for it...It will be priced so low that no man making a good salary will be unable to own one and enjoy with his family the blessings and hours of pleasure in God's great open spaces.

It is easy to fall in love with these beautiful machines. But not everyone does. Note J.D. Salinger. "I don't like old cars," he wrote, "I'd rather have a damned horse. A horse is at least human, for God's sake."

Black Beans And

Big Feet



It is probable the first Anglo to visit Eastland County was W.A. Big Foot Wallace, who would later become a famous Texas Ranger. He entered on what would become Eastland County on a surveying expedition. It is claimed that Big Foot Wallace actually did have big feet. When he was in jail in Mexico, all the other prisoners were issued prison clothing including sandals, except for Wallace whose feet were so big they had to have his footwear made special. But whether this story is true or not, he did play a small part in the story of how Eastland County was named. In 1843, during the Texas Revolution, a group of Texas prisoners, including Wallace, were being marched to Mexico City. On the way, 176 of the men escaped, yet were soon recaptured. As punishment, it was ordered that every tenth man be executed. The victims were chosen by lottery, each man drawing a bean from an earthen jar. Among the white beans there were



seventeen black beans, each black bean signifying death, a white bean meant life. Big Foot had noticed that the black beans were slightly larger, and when his turn came, he fingered the beans and selected one of the smaller ones. Captain William Mosby Eastland was not so cunning. He drew a black bean and was unshackled from his companions, taken away and shot. Those who witnessed the incident were impressed with the cool courage and dignity of Captain Eastland as he was led away. The story spread, his fame grew, and when the county was founded in 1858 it was named for this hero of the Texas Revolution.

Two men whose lives touched the history of Eastland County. One is remembered for his courage and grace under pressure, the other for his shrewdness and his big feet.

The Dinosaur

Myth



It was probably the Sinclair Oil Corporation that started it all. As late as 1933, when scientists were starting to know better, the company sponsored a dinosaur exhibit at the New York World's Fair proclaiming the connection between dinosaurs and oil. But the true story of the origin of oil can be read in the rocks of Eastland County.

Within the County have been some of the richest producing oil fields ever discovered in the United States. Geographers refer to the area surrounding and including Eastland County as the West Cross Timbers eco-region. It is a narrow band of rolling hills, small prairies, forests of oak, ash and hickory, and spectacular outcroppings of limestone.

But there was a time, about 360 to 286 million years ago, when this area was covered with swamps, ferns and large leaf plants. Over time, the seas encroached on the land. The trees and plants died and sank to the bottom of the sea. Bacteria began to break down the organic material. The sediments lain down in horizontal beds of sand, clay and marl were, in time, converted into sandstone, shale and limestone. After the passage of more time, this area emerged from the sea as earth stresses converted the region into permanent land. But deep beneath the surface, trapped within those layers of limestone, sandstone and shale, was the oil and natural gas of the Eastland County fields. It is interesting to note that the rocks of land-locked Eastland County contain fossils of many marine animals, including echinoids that lived in the seas for about 450 million years and are the distant cousins of today's sea urchins.

However, after all is said and done, it is fun to think of dinosaurs as the source of our oil. It's as fun as thinking the moon is made of green cheese.

Probably, the most fascinating features are buried deep beneath the surface in layers of limestone, shale and sandstone that were formed hundreds of millions of years ago. It is trapped within these layers limestone, shale and sandstone that oil can be found.

The question is, how did the oil get there? While it is true we can thank the dinosaur as a source of some oil, the great reptiles account for a mere fraction of our fossil fuels. Most of our crude oil is formed from layers of dead organisms lying on the sea floor. Over millions of years, layers of sand limestone covered the organic material. Pressure, heat and the action of bacteria transformed the organic material into natural gas and crude oil.

The Ranger

Oil Boom



The town of Ranger in northeastern Eastland County was named after the Texas Rangers who had a camp about two miles away. After a few disappointing test wells, in October 1917, the McCleskey No. 1 came in as a huge gusher delivering some 1,700 barrels of oil a day. It was the beginning of a mammoth oil boom that forever changed the town of Ranger, Eastland county and Texas as a whole. It was an economic windfall. The city grew by leaps and bounds, its four banks had more than \$5 million in deposits. New towns in the area sprang up like weeds. But there was a down side to the boom. Ranger was soon

crowded with oil derricks, gambling houses and brothels. Thieves and thugs streamed into the town by the thousands. Soon so many lawbreakers were arrested that the jail was full and the Texas Rangers had to handcuff their prisoners to telephone poles. According to one old oilman, the Texas oil boom often came at a tremendous human cost. "Towns leaped into being overnight and became deserted almost as quick. I've seen old farmers bent with toil become millionaires in a week. And I've seen them blow



every cent and die as paupers. I've seen boys and girls go to the devil wholesale." The oil gushers flowed skyward, torrential rains fell, creating deep bogs of mud and oil in which it was said mules drowned. When some wells came in they caught fire threatening the entire town. The bank failures in 1921 put an end to the boom. Eventually, Ranger recovered from its boom and its bust to become the quiet, comfortable, interesting community you see today.





Water for a Thirsty Land






Photo Courtesy: Tom McMillan

According to computer models created by scientists at NASA and Columbia University, the US southwest could be facing the worst water shortage in 1,000 years. Already Texas is experiencing the worst droughts in the state's history. In view of these dire predictions, it is important for private and corporate citizens to do everything possible to conserve our ever-diminishing water resources. This responsibility to conserve water was central to the design of this facility. The roofs of the buildings are designed in such a way that rainwater drains into an internal roof valley and is then channeled into water storage tanks. The collected water is then used to irrigate the native plants within and surrounding the site.


Water conservation is extremely important here in Eastland County. The county receives about 27 inches of rain each year, some years more and some years less, but on the whole just enough to support livestock, forage and municipal needs. Yet county officials say if three drought years come in a row, they are in trouble, four years in a row, deep trouble. While this facility is but a small part of the county's efforts to conserve water, it is a reminder that we all have a role to play in the conservation of water resources whether here in Eastland County or in your home communities.



How many of these Eastland County residents can you identify? [Answers below]



A



B




C



D



E



F



G

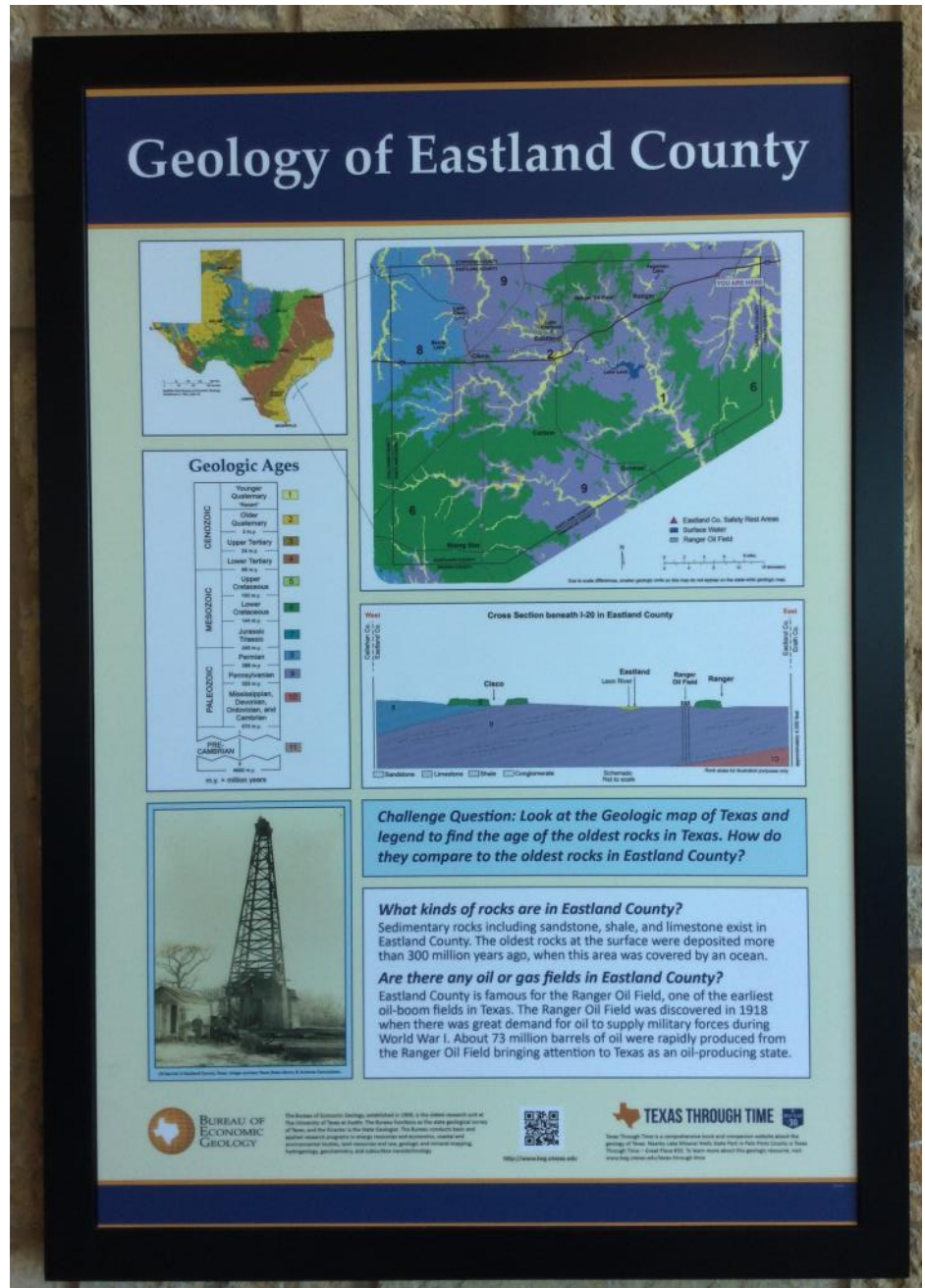
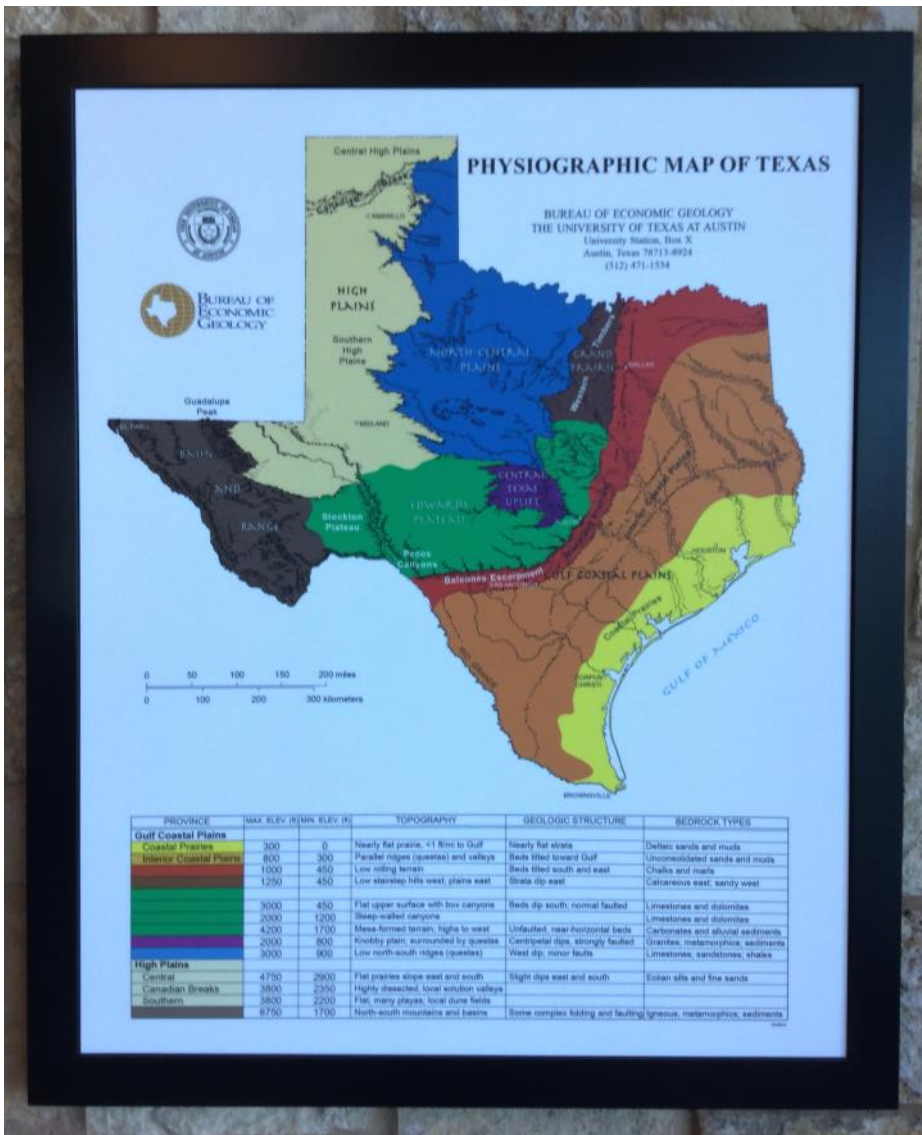


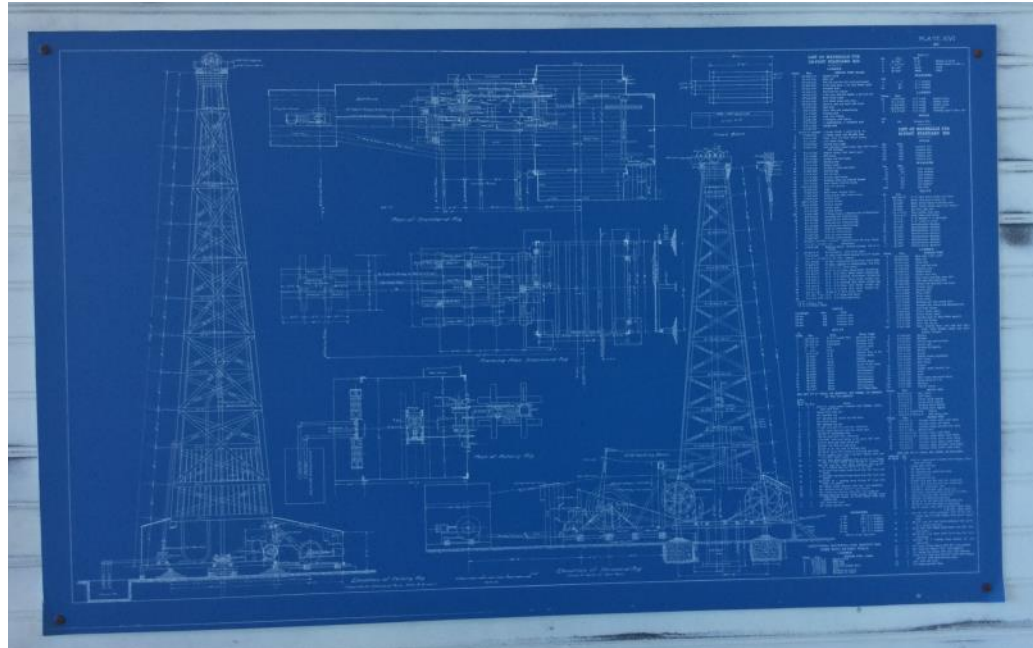
H



I

[A] Bald Eagle, [B] Gray Fox, [C] Horned Lizard, [D] White-tailed Deer, [E] Wild Turkey, [F] Bobcat, [G] Red-shouldered Hawk, [H] Northern Mockingbird, [I] Gray Toad





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I hope you enjoy these de Stolfe Journal Broadsheets!

I started these broadsheets as a means to reduce the number of pages for the regular journal issues. (And let's face it, you don't have time to read 50+ pages of the regular journal when not every topic in them might be of interest to you!) My broadsheets are single topics of special interest in a horizontal page format and restricted to ten pages or less (usually).



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