

ON THE ASHES OF AN EXTINCT VOLCANO AWAITS AN URBAN OASIS WHERE THE PRAIRIE MEETS THE PLATEAU. ONION CREEK'S RUSHING WATERS CARVE WATERFALLS – BECKONING SOLITUDE SEEKERS AND EXPLORERS. A PREHISTORIC ROCK SHELTER AND 1850'S HOMESTEAD REMIND US THAT THE FATE OF HUMANITY AND NATURE ARE INTERTWINED. YOU ARE PART OF THIS STORY.



### THANK YOU FOR VISITING!

McKinney Falls State Park is just 13 miles from the state capitol. Hike or bike the winding trails or relax by the waterfalls. Cast a line, sleep under the stars, and keep an eye out for wildlife! The paths of the past and future meet at the creek.

### FURTHER READING

Margaret Sweet Henson, *McKinney Falls*, Texas State Historical Association, 1999.

James Wright Steely, *Parks for Texas*, University of Texas Press, 1999.

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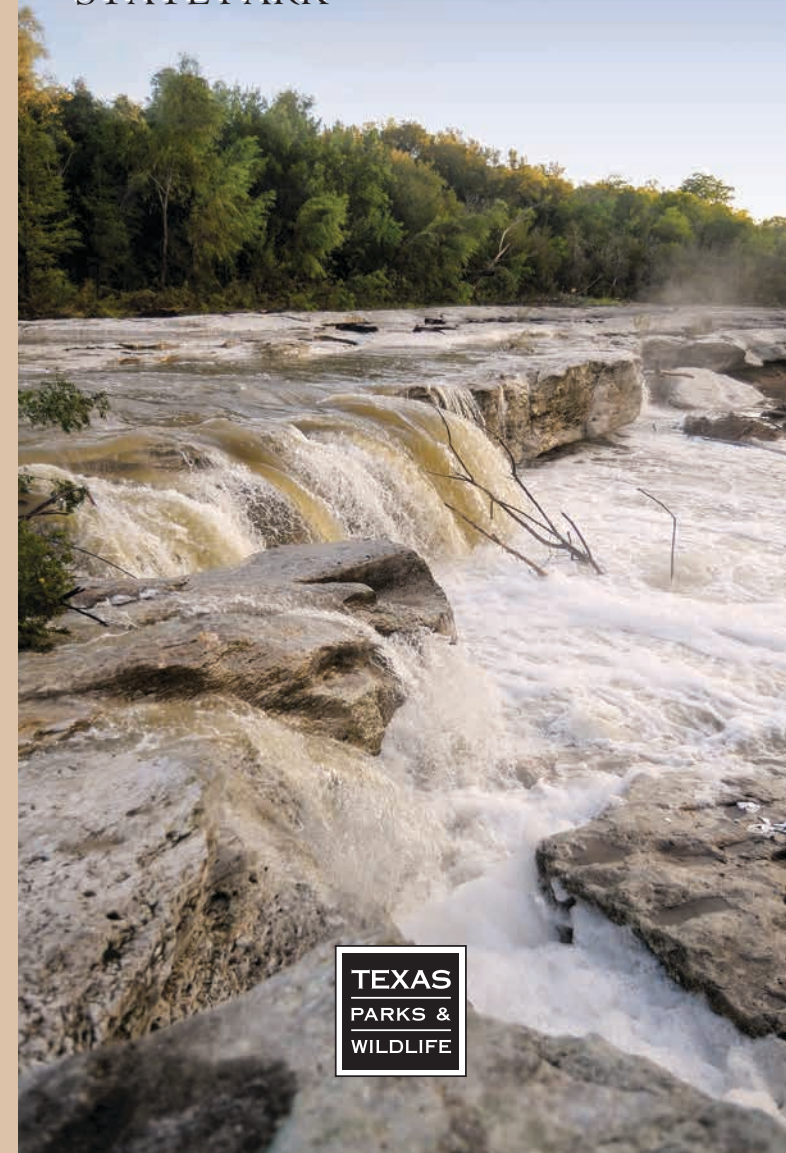
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## INTERPRETIVE GUIDE

# McKINNEY FALLS

## STATE PARK





## UNDER THE SEA

If you stood here 80 million years ago, you would be at the bottom of an ancient sea.

Fish, oysters, sharks, and 30-foot-long mosasaurs would dart around you in the deep. Rumbles from eruptions would make your world tremble. Green ash would blanket the ocean floor. One day the submarine volcano, Pilot Knob, would grow silent. Today, it remains extinct like the many sea creatures that make up the limestone beneath your feet. This limestone is the foundation of everything that lives here.

Over time, the ocean receded to where the Gulf of Mexico is today. Water rushed down the Balcones Escarpment into Onion Creek carrying sediments and soils. This is where the Blackland Prairie and the Edwards Plateau collide. Today, ringtails, roadrunners, bobcats, and bald cypress trees thrive here while water continually carves waterfalls and homes out of the limestone.

## MEET ME AT THE CREEK

For 10,000 years, over 300 generations of Native Americans hunted, fished, and camped here. A 500-year-old bald cypress tree we call Old Baldy grew up alongside them and still stands today. On Old Baldy's 200th birthday, life in the Smith Rock Shelter changed forever.

Spanish missionaries, revolutionaries, and settlers arrived in 1716. They were all traveling between Mexico and Louisiana on El Camino Real de los Tejas (The

### McKinney Homestead



Rock Shelter

Royal Road). Most were passing through. In 1850, the park's namesake, Thomas Freeman McKinney, decided to stay.

Thomas's second wife, Anna, adopted daughter, Minerva Fannin, and 14 enslaved people followed. Thomas was an Old 300 settler and wealthy slave owner who financed 10% of the Texas Revolution. Enslaved people built two houses, a grist-mill, and miles of livestock walls here. They hired a horse trainer, John Van Hagan, to run the ranch. Hundreds of sheep and purebred racehorses turned the prairie into pastures.

After the Civil War, the enslaved people and John Van Hagan left. Thomas grew ill and passed away in 1873. Outstanding debts mounting, Anna remained to settle the estate. She sold this land to James Wood Smith in 1885. They hired families of tenant farmers that grew cotton, vegetables, and tended livestock. In the 1940s, the land grew quiet. According to Thomas McKinney's nephew Reynolds Lowry, cultivation ceased "... owing to its being too rolling and subject to rapid erosion ... at times the floods ... rip the roof of the world off in cultivated areas." In 1943, Sandy Nixon and his wife – nearly 80 years old – were the last known residents of the property. Later that decade the Homestead caught fire. The tenant families were gone. Imposing limestone walls are all that remain.



Life as a tenant farmer like the Nixon's was onerous – but they were free.

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## LEAVING A LEGACY

In 1973, the Smith Family donated this place to Texas Parks and Wildlife and to you. Old Baldy has seen more people since this park opened in 1976 than it has in the entire 500 years it has been alive. Once surrounded by wide open spaces, city life has built up to our doorstep. This wild place is for you to explore. Your efforts help us protect the park's geology, nature, and history for future generations. We hope you enjoy your adventure!

### Old Baldy

