

Stalk the Past, Revel in the Present at Dinosaur Valley State Park



The tracks of yesterday's giants, as well as great fishing, canoeing and camping, draw hundreds of thousands each year to the Paluxy River that flows through one of Texas's most popular state parks.

by Casey Kelly Barton



Above: A 45-foot model of a Tyrannosaurus rex is the first thing visitors see at Dinosaur Valley State Park. A relative of the T. rex made the tracks found in the park.

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Moviegoers this summer have thrilled to the sight of a *Tyrannosaurus rex* wreaking havoc on San Diego. But did you know that 111 million years ago a relative of the *T. rex* roamed the area that now is Texas? Back when the Cretaceous Sea covered much of the region, dinosaurs walked the tidal flats and left their mark in the form of footprints. Now, visitors

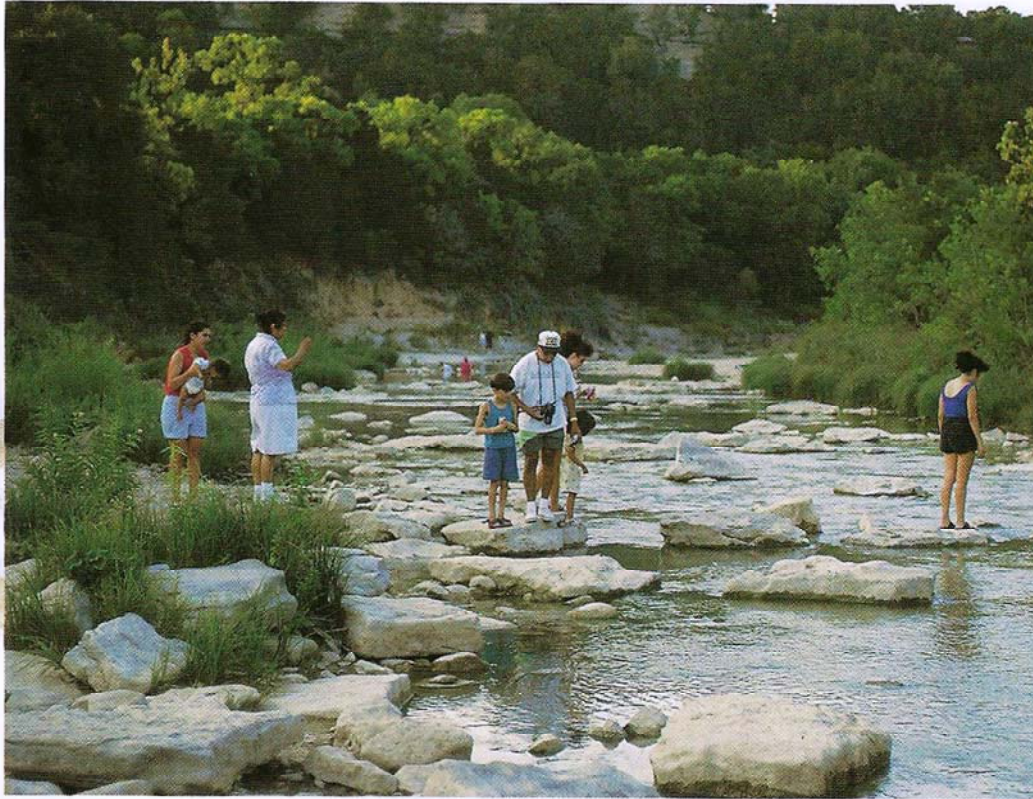
to Dinosaur Valley State Park near Glen Rose can retrace the steps of the prehistoric beasts and enjoy camping, playing in the Paluxy River, hiking and biking on trails through oaks and Ashe juniper.

Dinosaur tracks were found along a bend in the Paluxy in 1908, in a layer of limestone named the Glen Rose formation. (More tracks in that limestone layer have since been found from the Del

Left: An exhibit near the visitor center shows the types of dinosaur tracks that can be seen in the Paluxy River.

Rio area to north of Dallas.) Nearly three decades after the initial discovery, the Glen Rose site gained renown when Roland T. Bird with the American Museum of Natural History supervised the excavation of a trackway for study and display at the museum in New York. In 1969, Dinosaur Valley State Park opened on the site.

The next year, in a move guaranteed



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Above: All of the park's dinosaur tracks are in the riverbed, so visitors should plan to wade while they search. **Right:** A detail from the mural in the visitor center.



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to excite children, the park put two life-size models on display. A 45-foot-long *Tyrannosaurus rex* and a 70-foot-long *Apatosaurus* (the creature formerly known as *Brontosaurus*) are the first things visible past the park entrance. The models, brought to the park from the 1964 New York World's Fair, are in a clearing, where visitors can get close enough to feel tiny by comparison.

Paleontologists think relatives of these two species made the tracks in the park. Three-toed prints are thought to be the work of *Acrocanthosaurus*, a 20- to 30-foot-long meat-eating predecessor of *Tyrannosaurus*. *Pleurocoelus*, a 30- to 50-foot-long younger relative of *Apatosaurus*, is believed to have made the park's larger, rounded tracks. There also is a third kind of track in the park,

a stubbier three-toed print that some scientists think may belong to *Iguanodon*. Bones of that species first were found in Texas in 1985.

All of the tracks are in the riverbed, so visitors should plan to wade and search. Depending on the water level, some tracks may be exposed on dry rock, others may be camouflaged as leaf-filled puddles, and still others may be seen



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Left: Dinosaur tracks first were discovered in the Paluxy River in 1908 in a layer of limestone known as the Glen Rose formation.

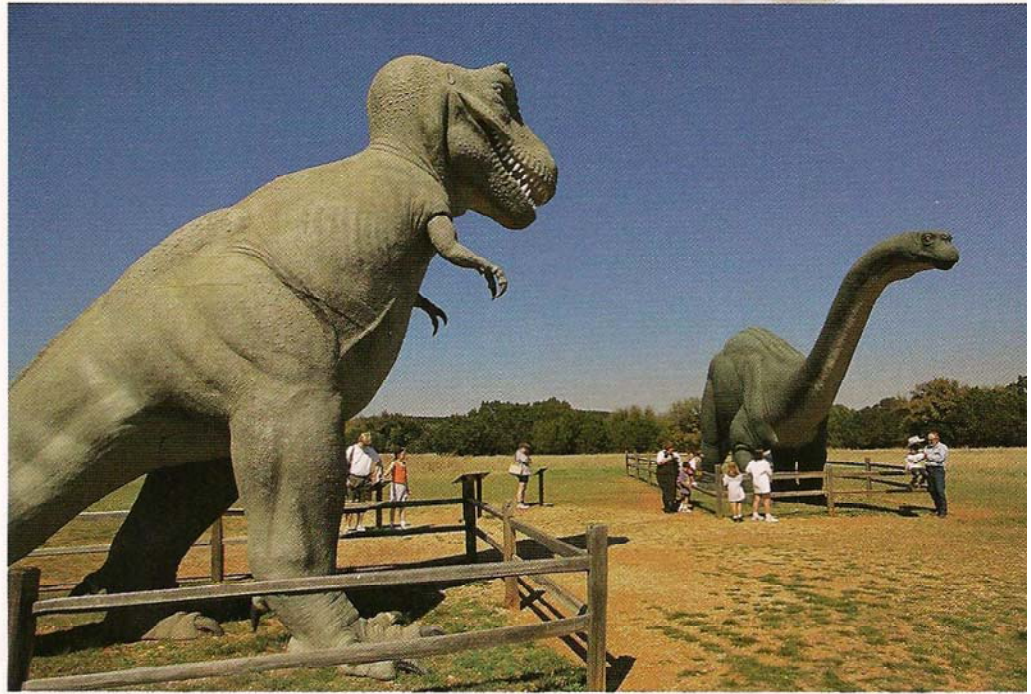
underwater. Maps available at headquarters mark four viewing areas, but park superintendent Billy Paul Baker said there probably are other prints yet to be discovered. "If you get out here and explore this river, you might find something I haven't seen. Of course," he added, "you'd have to look pretty hard." Looking at the right time is important. Heavy rains and flash floods raise the river

level and make viewing impossible. Baker recommends calling ahead to make sure the tracks are visible.

When the river is down, usually during hot weather, the tracks are impressive. At viewing area number two, downstream from the picnic site, visitors can see where a *Pleurocoelus* turned in the mud and stepped in its own tracks. Near the Denio Creek trail at viewing

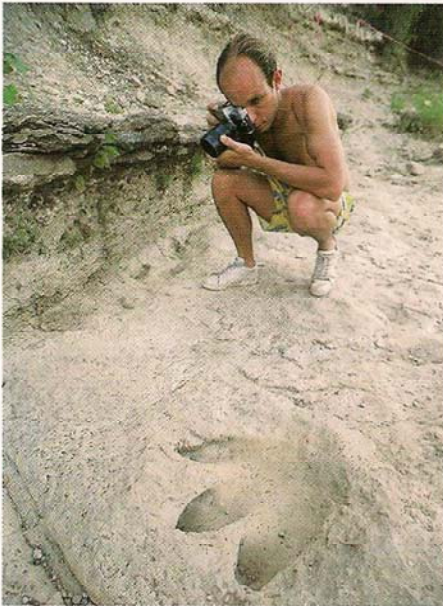
area four, a trail of three-toed prints marks an *Acrocanthosaurus*'s walk along the riverbed. Both kinds of tracks are found up and down the river, although scientists don't know if both species were there at the same time.

No one knows exactly how many tracks there are. The weather thwarted a previous attempt to count them; Baker said the river rose eight feet as survey crews



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Left: When the river is down, usually in the hottest part of the summer, the tracks are impressive. People planning a visit should call ahead to make sure the tracks are visible. **Above:** The T. rex and Apatosaurus models came to the park from the 1964 New York World's Fair.



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flew in from Indiana University. And more prints are cropping up as time goes by. When the Paluxy rises, it washes away layers above the limestone, revealing previously hidden tracks.

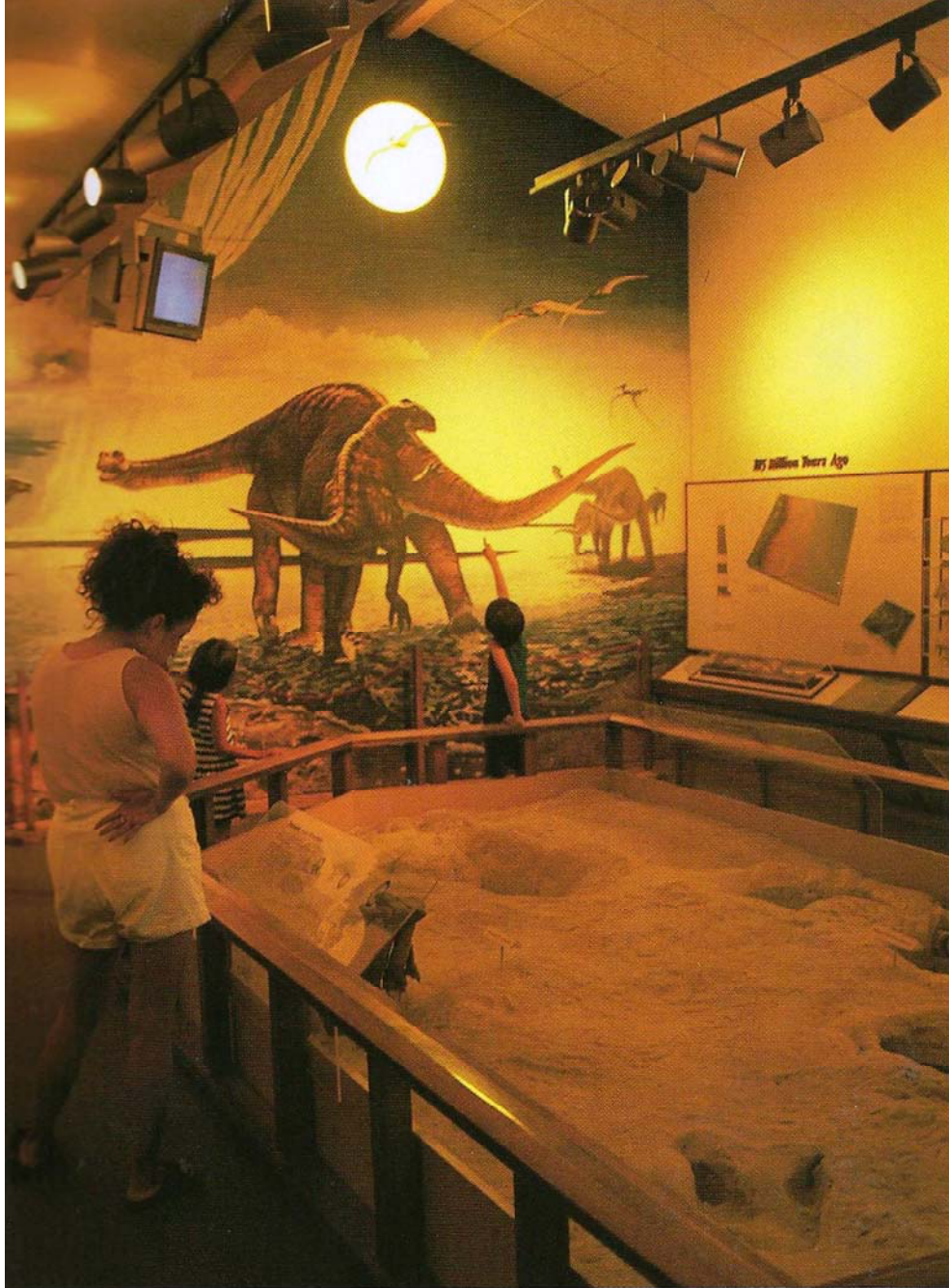
When the river level is right visitors can swim and canoe, with boat rentals available in Glen Rose. Anglers may catch catfish, Baker said. There is a picnic area close to the river, a playground

near the campsites, an interpretive center featuring track models and a prehistory lesson, and an amphitheater for slide programs during some parts of the year.

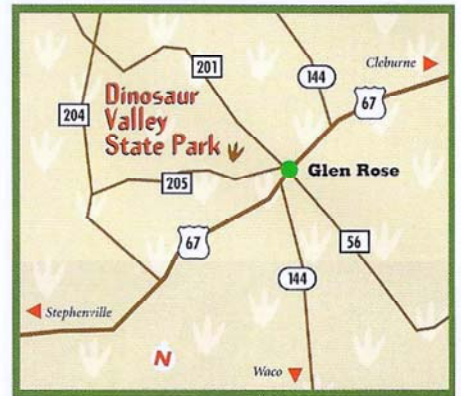
The park's wildlife includes white-tailed deer, armadillos, raccoons, wild turkeys, skinks and other kinds of lizards and snakes. Among the birds are two endangered species. Golden-cheeked warblers are fairly common in spring and

summer along some of the trails. Black-capped vireos are harder to find, but have been seen from spring to fall. Baker said he has found nesting pairs of both species in the park.

June is the park's busiest month but no matter what the season, Baker recommends that campers make reservations as far in advance as possible—preferably at least a month



Left: Exhibits in the park's visitor center tell the story of the area's dinosaurs. The mural depicts a carnivor dinosaur attacking a larger plant-eating dinosaur.



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ahead—to make sure they get the site they want. There are 46 campsites with water and electrical hookups and 16 primitive sites. Ground fires are not allowed at some of the primitive sites and all other campers must bring their own firewood.

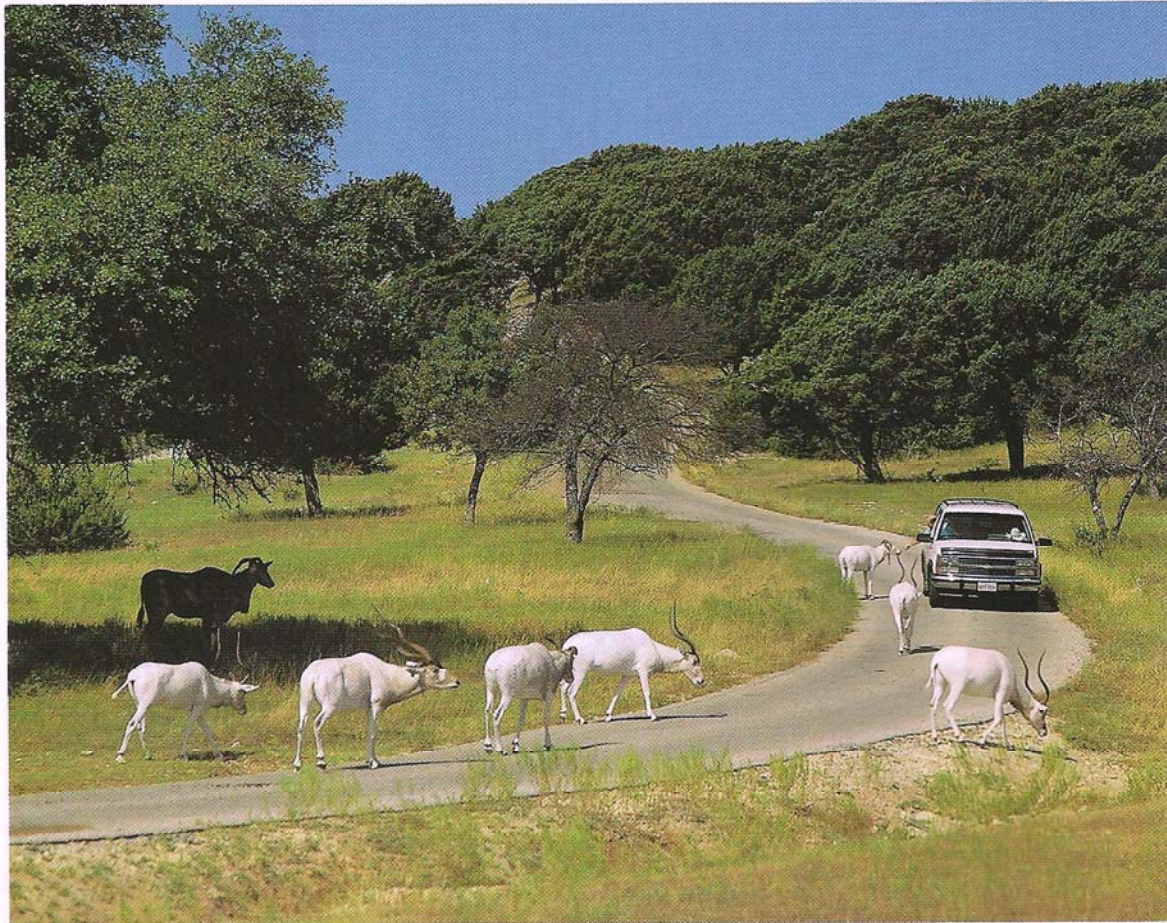
About 330,000 people visited the park in 1995, and more are expected this year. Baker is eager to add features for

the growing number of visitors, including wayside exhibits near some of the track areas. Funds for the project came from the park store, run by local volunteers. The store stocks plenty of dinosaur-related items, ranging from scholarly books to T-shirts. ★

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Dinosaur Valley State Park

Dinosaur Valley is open year-round, with park headquarters open daily from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Daily entrance fee is \$5. The park is on Park Road 59, five miles north of Highway 67 just west of Glen Rose. For more information or to check on track visibility, call 817-897-4588. For campsite reservations, call 512-389-8900.



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Above: Visitors to Dinosaur Valley might also want to take a driving tour through nearby Fossil Rim Wildlife Ranch.

While You're There

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Outdoorsfolk and animal lovers will find plenty to keep them busy in and around Glen Rose. Chief among the area's other attractions is the 2,788-acre Fossil Rim Wildlife Ranch just west of town, which features native animals plus threatened and endangered species from around the world. Most of the animals are free-roaming; visitors can drive nine miles of auto trails through the park and enjoy picnics and walks along the nature trails.

For children, Fossil Rim offers a playground, a "petting pasture" and a

variety of educational programs and camps. Special tours featuring black rhinos and other animals in the ranch's endangered species breeding program are available by prior arrangement. Visitors can stay overnight at the park's lodge or safari camp. The park is closed Thanksgiving and Christmas. Call 817-897-2960 for more information or to make reservations.

Most weekends bring horse shows and livestock events to the Somervell County Exposition Center in Glen Rose. Call 817-897-4509 for a schedule of events.

The Texas Amphitheater is part of the Expo Center. "The Promise," a musical Passion play, is performed

there Friday and Saturday nights from June through November (except July 4th weekend). Call 800-687-2661 for performance and ticket information.

The Somervell County Museum displays local historical artifacts, fossils and replicas of the dinosaur tracks that were collected from the area in the late 1930s. Call 817-897-4529.

From the museum, visitors can stroll around the courthouse square and check out nearby antique shops and boutiques. (Keep an eye out for the area's many buildings made of native, fossil-laden limestone.) For more information, call the Glen Rose/Somervell County Chamber of Commerce at 817-897-2286.