

ROCKY MOUNTAIN OUTDOORS

A Newsletter for Rocky Mountain Outdoor Writers and Photographers



NEWS FLASH!

Conference Registration Is OPEN!

If you haven't already mailed in your registration and check, please take a photo of your registration form first and email it to Maryann at megaug@earthlink.net. Then mail your form and check. That way we'll have nose counts for meals and the field trips by September 9 in case the post office doesn't get your registration to Maryann in time.

You can find the conference schedule on Page 3 of this newsletter. The registration form can be found on Page 8.

We hope to see each and every one of you in Fort Davis on October 1st!

Texas, Here We Come!

by Don Laine

The time is NOW, so polish up your cowboy boots and dust off your Stetson, we're heading to Fort Davis, Texas, for the annual meeting of Rocky Mountain Outdoor Writers and Photographers, Tuesday through Friday, October 1-4.

I'm a bit surprised that this is our very first foray into Texas. Granted, at least according to some sources the Lone Star State is not actually in the Rocky Mountains or even in a state with a Rocky Mountains connection. But we've ventured outside our base before — think Tucson in 1999 or Alamogordo, New Mexico, in 2001 and again in 2021. We did have some attendees at the Carlsbad, New Mexico, conference in 1985 cross the line to drop in to Guadalupe Mountains National Park north of Fort Davis, but that was on their own, so it doesn't count.

However, you'll notice that I said that Texas is not in the Rockies "according to some sources." The actual boundaries of the Rocky Mountains are somewhat arbitrary. Most sources say the Rockies extend south into Colorado and New Mexico, with no mention of Texas, and at least one source states that the Rockies end just south of Santa Fe, New Mexico. However, an authority no less than the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* has a different take: "Davis Mountains, segment of the southern Rocky Mountains, mainly in Jeff Davis county, western Texas, U.S., extending northward for 45 miles (72 km) above the town of Marfa ..."

Virginia and David Staat (with assistance from top dog Samantha, I'm sure) have put together a top-notch schedule — see page 3 — that takes full advantage of the dark skies expected during the conference. And we'll have both local Texas experts and our own skilled writers and photographers to guide us.

Night skies will be a key part of our evening experience, so bring your tripod. You'll also want a jacket and maybe even a hat in case evenings are chilly. And don't forget your appetite. David and Virginia have made certain we won't go hungry.

October is almost here, so get packing. The only question for me right now: "Do my Levi's get creased or not?"



Writers Forum Guidelines

CALLING ALL WRITERS!!! We encourage all aspiring authors to bring a written piece to the conference to share during the **Anne Sullivan Writers Forum**.

Sharing our writing can sometimes be stressful, but we strive to make the Forum experience safe and supportive. Each participant will read their story aloud. Listeners will then offer suggestions or praise for a job well done!

If you're interested in joining us, here's what you need to know:

- The subject matter must be the outdoors.
- Unpublished non-fiction, fiction, and poetry are all welcome.
- This should be a piece either you are having difficulty with or have some specific concerns you wish help with — not a published work.
- Maximum word count: 1,200.
- You are welcome to include up to two photos.
- Bring eight copies to share among listeners.

Moderator Virginia Staat will be contacting you soon. We do hope you will share your wonderful writings with us!

President's Column



RMOWP President Linda Haehnle

Greetings!!

It's hard to believe that Summer is winding down.. and we are beginning to look forward to Fall's arrival! The recent extreme weather conditions have affected many of

us... so the changing colors of the leaves signal a welcome relief!

AND... drum roll please... also means we are Ft. Davis, Texas, bound!!

Conference organizers David and Virginia have lined up engaging workshops, fun activities, incredible photographs for sharing, and opportunities to soak up local Texas history. And, as always, it's so good to reconnect with old friends and make new friends too!

I am looking forward to seeing many of you in a few short weeks. Safe travels to all!

Warmest regards, Linda

Today, we must realize that nature is revealed in the simplest meadow, wood lot, marsh, stream, or tidepool, as well as in the remote grandeur of our parks and wilderness areas. ~Ansel Adams

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Conference Schedule

Tuesday-Friday, October 1-4, 2023, Fort Davis, Texas

(Meetings and meals, unless otherwise noted, will be held at the Methodist Church Fellowship Hall, 200 North Front Street.)

Tuesday, October 1

- 2:00pm Board of Directors Meeting (open to all members)
- 5:00pm Registration, Opening Reception, Happy Hour and Light Buffet (included in registration fee)
- 6:00pm Welcome and Announcements with Linda and Don
- 6:30pm Presentation of Contest Submissions with Frank Zurey

Wednesday, October 2

- 8:30am Carpool to Davis Mountain State Park. *(Entrance requires a \$6 day pass, however, entrance is free with a Texas State Park Pass or if you ride with someone who has a pass.)*
- 9:00am Field Trip — Sky Island Walk and Talk with Ranger Charlie Ewing
- 12:00pm Return to Methodist Church Fellowship Hall
- 12:30pm Lunch (\$13) — Build your own sandwich
- 1:30pm *Astrophotography* Workshop — Lee Hoy, Photographer
- 3:00pm Break
- 3:45pm *Getting It Right: Adventures in Writing Local History* Workshop — Larry Francell, Author/historian/retired museum director
- 4:45pm Break
- 5:00pm Carpool to Prude Ranch for BBQ dinner, hayride, campfire, s'mores, and Sky Party (\$50)

Thursday, October 3

- 8:45am Carpool to Davis Mountain Nature Conservancy (about 30-minute drive)
OR Carpool to Historic Fort Davis National Monument
- 9:30am Field Trip — Guided Davis Mountain Nature Conservancy Talk and Tour (several high clearance vehicles needed) **OR** Walking tour of Historic Fort Davis National Monument with Larry Francell. *(Entrance to Fort requires a \$10 day pass, however, entrance is free with an America the Beautiful Pass, Senior Golden Pass, or if you ride with someone who has a pass.)*
- 12:00pm Return to Methodist Church Fellowship Hall
- 12:30pm Lunch (\$15) — Chef salad
- 1:15pm *Anne Sullivan Writing Critique*, moderator Virginia Staat
- 2:45pm Break
- 3:00pm Photo Critique with Kent Taylor and Friend
- 4:00pm Break
- 4:15pm *Time Lapse Photography* Workshop — Marcus Connolly, Photographer
- 5:15pm Happy Hour
- 6:00pm Dinner (\$20) — Mexican buffet with beef & chicken fajitas, red and green enchiladas, beans, rice, chips, salsa.
- 7:00pm Wrap Up & Announcements
- 7:15pm Evening on your own for astrophotography (Milky Way visible between 8:00pm and 10:00pm, weather permitting). *If you would like to take night photos at the Davis Mountain State Park, you must have a day pass (\$6) plus a night pass (\$3). If you have a Texas State Park pass, you do not need to purchase a day pass, however, you will need to purchase a night pass. Passes can be purchased at park headquarters between 8:15am and 4:45pm daily.*

Friday, October 4

- 6:00am *Sunrise Photo Shoot* with Kent Taylor
- 8:00am General Membership Meeting
- 9:00am Carpool to Chihuahua Desert Research Institute
- 9:30am Field Trip — Walk and Talk at Chihuahua Desert Research Institute (\$7)
- 11:45am Return to Methodist Church Fellowship Hall
- 12:15pm Lunch (\$15) — Oven roasted turkey melt with provolone cheese topped with a creamy pesto sauce, arugula, tomatoes, mozzarella, and balsamic reduction.
- 1:00pm *Before the Shot* workshop — Linda Haehnle
- 2:00pm Break
- 2:15pm RMOWP Auction with David Staat
- 6:00pm Happy Half Hour
- 6:30pm Banquet (\$31) and Awards Ceremony. Buffet includes stuffed pork loin with Gruyere, spinach, and cremini mushrooms and/or grilled chicken breast with avocado cream sauce, salad with strawberries, sautéed squash medley, roasted potatoes, dinner rolls, and cobbler with Blue Bell ice cream.
- 9:00pm Wrap-up and Farewell Until Next Year!

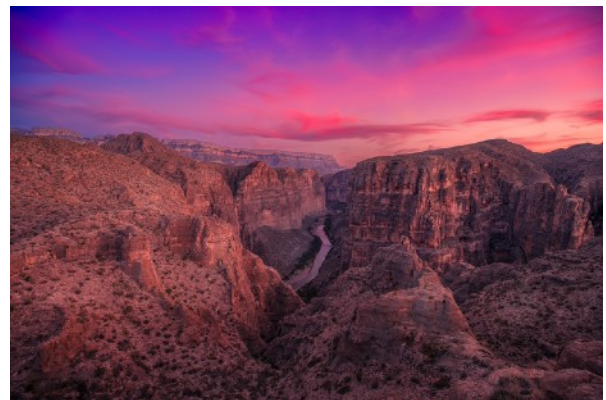
Conference Update

RMOWP welcomes Marcus Connolly for a one-hour workshop on time lapse photography. Marcus is an experienced photographer specializing in the stunning landscapes of West Texas. His workshop session will cover everything you need to know to capture dynamic time lapse photography, whether you're tracking the Milky Way as it moves across the nighttime sky, capturing an amazing sunrise or sunset, or animals in motion.

The workshop will include choosing the right equipment and camera settings to composing your shots and editing the final video. Whether you're a beginner or looking to refine your skills, this workshop will provide practical tips and techniques to help you create captivating time lapse photography and videos.

Marcus is a dedicated landscape and wildlife photographer, specializing in capturing the breathtaking beauty of the Big Bend region of Texas. His diverse portfolio spans astrophotography, time lapse, landscape, wildlife, and adventure photography, showcasing the intricate and often unseen details of the natural world.

An avid hiker and backpacker, Marcus is a *Hiking Texas* ambassador (see hikingtexas.com). He has a deep connection with the rugged terrains of West Texas, allowing him to explore and document remote and wild landscapes with a unique perspective. His academic background includes a degree in Fine Arts with a specialization in Photography from the University of Texas at San Antonio, where he honed his technical skills and artistic vision. To see some of his amazing photography, please visit Marcus at his Instagram account: Texas Traveler @marcusc_photo (see https://www.instagram.com/marcusc_photo/).



Photos from the Big Bend Region by Marcus Connolly

What to Bring to the Conference

Where does the time go? In just over one month we'll be gathering at RMOWP's annual conference in Fort Davis, Texas, and it's time to start organizing the stuff you'll want to bring. So here's a checklist:

- **WRITING FOR THE ANNE SULLIVAN WRITERS FORUM** — Your written work will be gently and positively examined with the purpose of finding ways to improve it. Works can include stories, poems, photo essays, or other formats with an outdoor theme. Participants should bring at least eight copies of the work, and although the length of the works can vary, about 1,200 words or less would be best. It should not be your best work, but something you would like help with. Spectators — and commentators — are welcome. *(For more information about the Forum, please see Page 2 of this newsletter.)*
- **PHOTOS FOR THE PHOTO CRITIQUE** — Entertaining and informative for all, this program looks at photographs with an eye to how they could be improved. Those who want their photos critiqued should bring three to five digital images on CDs or flash drives.
- **PHOTOS FOR THE MEMBERS' CHOICE CONTEST** — Conference participants are the judges for this contest. Members may submit one or two matted prints, either color or black and white, and the photos may have been taken at any time. Altered/manipulated images are eligible. Each entry is to be designated as Scenic, Flora, or Fauna. Print size is a maximum of 8 x 12 inches that is matted to a final size not to exceed 12 x 16 inches, and entries should not be framed. On the back of each submission write "Members Choice" but not your name — we'll keep track of which belongs to whom.
- **DONATIONS FOR THE AUCTION** — The RMOWP Auction is not only a lot of fun but also raises some necessary funds to help pay for the conference. Bring your own matted photos (maybe your Members' Choice Contest entries?) or note cards, published books, craft and gift items, photo equipment, or whatever you find lying around the house — NO spouses allowed!!

THANKS!

Set Your Sites on Fort Davis!



Photo courtesy of Discover Texas Online

They're mysterious and spooky... the Ghost Lights of Marfa. Are they a scientific anomaly, fantasy, UFOs, or some unknown phenomenon? Perhaps you will be the one to discover the answer!

The Marfa lights were first written about in 1883 when Robert Ellison came to Alpine to off-load cattle. As he drove the herd west, he encountered strange lights in the distance. Fearing they were Apache signal fires, Ellison rode his horse towards the lights to investigate. He soon discovered that the lights were not man made. Later, other settlers confirmed to Ellison that they, too, had seen the strange lights.

Those seemingly sourceless Ghost Lights can still be seen today. Viewers report red, blue, or white lights randomly shining throughout the night. Some see a ball of light that separates into many. Some see dim, starry-like lights that brighten in intensity. Others see pops or dancing lights. As Gary Cartwright wrote in *Texas Monthly*, "Scotland has its Loch Ness monster. Bermuda has its triangle. We've got the Marfa Lights."

One legend has it that the lights are the ghost of an Apache chief who roams the hills looking for his lost tribe. Another theory is that the lights emanate from swamp gas, although none exist in West Texas. Perhaps it is the moon reflecting on mica veins, although no such vein has ever been discovered.

If you're interested in an encounter with the strange and mysterious, the best place to see the Ghost Lights is at the Marfa Lights Viewing Platform. The viewing platform is located about thirty miles from Fort Davis and nine miles east of Marfa on US 90 towards Alpine.

May the lights be with you.

Writer's Corner



A bee swarm took over the woodpecker nest box.

Too Small a Box

photo and text by Virginia Parker Staat

The most innovative, exciting idea out there can die a painful, virtually unnoticed death if the wrong medium delivers it to the wrong audience. ~John Hall

Unfortunately, you can't reason with bees. I knew they were in trouble when the bees swarmed in mid-July. It was much too late in the year for the bees to establish a viable colony with sufficient honey stores to overwinter.

These bees, however, not only swarmed in July, but they chose our woodpecker nest box for their new home. It's much too small a space for 30,000 to 40,000 bees. Now it is late August, and the hive is bursting at the seams. The nest box is so full that the bees have begun building comb outside the entrance hole. As the old Texas saying goes, it's the equivalent of trying to cram ten pounds of potatoes in a five-pound sack.

It's too late in the year for the bees to find a new, larger nesting site. It's too crowded for them to build sufficient food stores to sustain them through the winter months. And comb does not do well when exposed to inclement weather. The worst part is that the nest box is located well over fifteen feet above the ground and

permanently attached to the pine tree. There is no feasible way for me to help these bees overwinter. I fear for the colony's survival.

It reminds me of one of my very first writing assignments. My college professor asked us to each write a short story. I labored over a sordid, dramatic tale about a man on the verge of committing suicide. My professor returned the essay with a few very nice comments and one glaring fault. He said that it was impossible to write an effective suicide story in such a short essay. I needed more backstory. I needed more plot. I especially needed more character development.

I soon came to understand that my professor wasn't talking about the length of my story. It was about its complexity. It was about the medium I chose. Like my bees, the box I chose was too small. In his article *It Depends: Choosing the Medium - How You Tell Your Story Has Consequences*, "Christopher Shiller writes, "Stories are flexible things. Gathered around the campfire the same story can change dramatically with each new telling. Stories that are told by a storyteller have a different character than the same story written in a book. Act it out on a stage and it will be different again and so on with movies, television or any other medium. The medium chosen informs the message, colors it, gives it character and nuance different from all other ways of telling the story."

In the Master Class article *Short Story vs. Novel: How To Decide Which To Write*, it suggests asking yourself a few questions before you begin writing, including "Does this story require extensive backstory to make sense to the reader? Does it revolve around a single event or a complex series of incidents? Are there many subplots or digressions necessary to convey the full sweep of the story? The more information you need to convey for the story to resonate, the longer a project you're looking at."

It matters not if your story is fiction or nonfiction or whether it is a screenplay, stage play, documentary, poetry, novel, or essay, the medium you choose will either enhance the story or detract from its telling. My failed short story is the perfect example of choosing the wrong medium to tell the tale. Like my bees, the small box I chose doomed the story's future viability. Now, how do I tell the bees that they have a similar problem?



Tyrannosaurus mcraeensis. Photo courtesy of New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs.

T-Rex Relative Found in New Mexico

Elephant Butte Lake State Park, one of New Mexico's most popular outdoor recreation destinations, appears to have been the home of a recently-discovered dinosaur that lived some five million to seven million years before the famed Tyrannosaurus Rex and would be T-Rex's oldest known relative.

Researchers had discovered the partial skull of a large adult tyrannosaurus, which they recently named *Tyrannosaurus mcraeensis*, in Elephant Butte Reservoir in the 1980s, and at first believed it to be another T-Rex fossil. More recent studies, however, have shown that it is, in fact, an older cousin of T-Rex, just as big but more primitive and with some significant physical differences, including to the jaw bone.

T-Rex is believed to have appeared about 66 million years ago, and was likely the largest and most dangerous terrestrial predator of all time, according to researchers at the New Mexico Museum of Natural History and Science in Albuquerque (nmnaturalhistory.org), where the partial skull is on display. These dinosaurs ate meat and were up to 40 feet long and 12 feet tall.

"This important discovery, made in New Mexico and co-authored by New Mexico researchers, demonstrates that our state remains at the forefront of scientific research and inquiry," said New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham.

Elephant Butte Lake State Park, which contains the state's biggest lake, attracts boaters, anglers, and campers. It's located along I-25 just outside the community of Truth or Consequences, about 150 miles south of Albuquerque (<https://www.emnrd.nm.gov/spd/find-a-park/>).



McDonald Observatory. Photo by Virginia Staat.

McDonald Observatory

A must see during your trip to Fort Davis is the renowned McDonald Observatory. Founded in 1939, it is one of the world's leading centers for astronomical research, teaching, public education, and outreach. According to the observatory's 80th anniversary press release, it "enjoys the darkest night skies of any professional observatory in the continental United States."

The observatory is open to the public every Tuesday through Saturday from 12:00 to 5:00 pm. (It is closed on Sunday and Monday.) All visitors must check in at the Frank N. Bash Visitor Center. To view the calendar for day and nighttime observatory programs, including Star Parties, guided tours, and special viewings, please click here: <https://mcdonaldobservatory.org/calendar>

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RMOWP CONFERENCE REGISTRATION FORM**Fort Davis, Texas****Tuesday - Friday, October 1-4, 2024****Please register by Monday, September 9, 2024**

Name (s) _____

Please provide names (and hometowns if different) of all individuals for name tags).

Address _____

City _____ ST/Prov _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ e-mail _____

Emergency contact, with phone: _____*For questions and special dietary needs contact Don Laine: laine@newmex.com.*

ITEM	COST	NUMBER	TOTAL
REGISTRATION			
Members plus member's family & guests	\$50		
Non-member	\$80		
Wednesday Lunch (10/2) – Build your own sandwich	\$13		
Wednesday Dinner (10/2) – BBQ dinner with choice of meats, salad, vegetable, beans, scalloped potatoes, cheesy bread, and potato salad. Price also includes hayride, campfire, s'mores, and Star Party until 10:00 pm.	\$50		
Thursday Lunch (10/3) – Chef salad	\$15		
Thursday Dinner (10/3) – Mexican buffet with beef & chicken fajitas, red and green enchiladas, beans, rice, chips, salsa.	\$20		
Friday Field Trip (10/4) - Chihuahua Desert Research Institute	\$7		
Friday Lunch (10/4) - Oven roasted turkey melt with provolone cheese topped with a creamy pesto sauce, arugula, tomatoes, mozzarella, and balsamic reduction.	\$15		
Friday Banquet (10/4) - Stuffed pork loin with Gruyere, spinach, and cremini mushrooms and/or grilled chicken breast with avocado cream sauce, salad with strawberries, sautéed squash medley, roasted potatoes, dinner rolls, and cobbler with Blue Bell ice cream.	\$31		
TOTAL			

Best way to register is to send this completed form with a check payable to RMOWP to:

RMOWP Conference
Maryann Gaug, 596 W. Coyote Drive, Silverthorne, CO 80498-9212