



Center for Environmental Research at Hornsby Bend



MISSION

Urban Ecology and Sustainability

- Community
- Education
- Research

PARTNERS

- Austin Water Utility
- University of Texas
- Texas A&M University

RESEARCH AREAS

- Soil Ecology, Sewage Recycling and Reuse
- Hydrogeology of the Alluvial Aquifer
- Riparian Ecology and Restoration
- Avian Ecology



50 YEARS OF BIRDING



AUSTIN, TEXAS
Hornsby Bend
1959-2009



Center for Environmental Research at Hornsby Bend



AWU-CER Lunchtime Lectures May - August 2011

Each talk begins AT NOON Waller Center [625 East 10th Street – between I-35 and Red River] Room 104

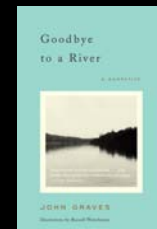
The 1st Wednesday of the Month! Free and Open to the Public – bring a lunch and learn

Rivers: Myth, Meaning and Culture in America

Over the next four months, I will put on my Cultural Geographer’s hat and draw on my English major to look at the meaning of rivers and waterways in American and Texan literature. The four lectures will descend in scale from an overview of American rivers and American literature to Texas and finally to Austin. Join me for a journey down rivers through literature, the first Wednesday of every month.

May 4 Noon-1pm

The Myth of the River: American Rivers and American Art



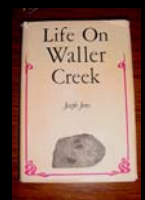
June 1 Monday Noon-1pm

Texas Rivers: On the Brazos with John Graves and “Goodbye to a River”



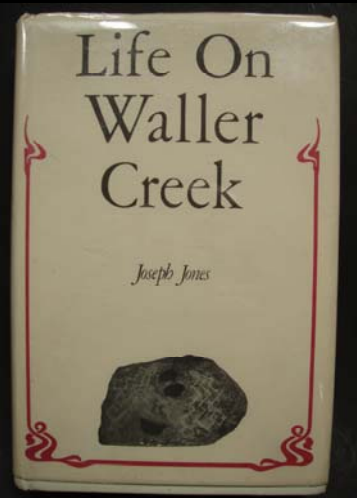
July 6 Monday Noon-1pm

Texas Rivers: On the Colorado with Roy Bedichek and “Karankaway Country”



August 3 Monday Noon-1pm

Life On Waller Creek – The Legacy of Joseph Jones



Life On Waller Creek – The Legacy of Joseph Jones

Kevin M. Anderson
Austin Water Utility
Center for Environmental Research

Cretaceous Limestone Gutter

Forty years and more I have packed my lunch to Waller Creek. Only since retirement, though, have I felt I had time to spend undertaking small improvements along its rugged banks: ephemeral gestures to be sure, but good for body and spirit alike – an hour or so, three or four days a week, before lunch. Instead of going up the wall I go down to the Creek.

P. 1

In this unassuming way, Joseph Jones begins *Life On Waller Creek*, his extraordinary account of a trash-filled urban creek in Austin, Texas which he characterizes as a “Cretaceous limestone gutter.” The stretch of creek adopted by Jones runs through the campus of the University of Texas. Every day for over 50 years, Professor Jones would come down to the creek from his office in the English Department to eat his lunch and explore the creek.



Joseph Jay Jones, professor of English for 40 years, died on February 12, 1999. He was born in Peru, Nebraska, on June 29, 1908, and attended public schools in Tecumseh, Nebraska. After three years at Nebraska State College in Peru (1926-1929), he transferred to the University of Nebraska and graduated in 1930. He then attended Stanford University, where he received his MA in 1931 and his PhD in 1934.

After teaching at Colorado State College in 1934-1935, Jones began his 40 years of service to The University of Texas.



A native Nebraskan, Joseph Jones arrived in Austin in 1935 to teach at the University of Texas, which he has now observed for nearly half of its 100 years. Waller Creek—his "therapy"—he firmly believes has kept him out of hospitals and possibly even off the psychiatrist's couch since his retirement as an active professor of English in 1975. In addition to tidying up bits of Waller Creek landscape daily, he continues to compose the sort of "seventeen-verse" to be found in this volume. Joseph Jones has traveled extensively throughout the world and has written a number of books, which have been published both in this country and abroad. He and his wife, Johanna, live in Austin.

ISBN 0-931052-06-8

IN MEMORIAM - JOSEPH JAY JONES

Joe Jones was an original. A specialist in American transcendentalism, he practiced a type of self reliance akin to the values of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. His exploring mind was attracted to the neglected literature written in English outside England and America, and he worked hard and long to advance the study of the literature and culture of Australia, New Zealand, the Union of South Africa, Canada, and other countries in which literature in English was prominent.

He continually requested funds for the purchase of books representing the riches of Commonwealth literature, offered courses in the field, and promoted visiting and exchange professorships that paid special attention to the literature of Australia and Canada.

The range of Jones' interests may be suggested by the numerous hours he devoted—using a shovel and wearing rubber boots—to cleaning up and caring for his beloved Waller Creek. For ten years he wrote and revised an account of this work, his thinking, and his values in *Life on Waller Creek* (Austin: AAR-Publications, 1982). This became his best-known book, very different from yet comparable to Thoreau's *Walden*.

Jones appeared in Richard Linklater's film, *Slacker*, where his screen presence has been described as striking because of, paradoxically but characteristically, his complete naturalness.

We need to embrace the full continuum of a natural landscape that is also cultural, in which the city, the suburb, the pastoral, and the wild each has its proper place, which we permit ourselves to celebrate without needlessly denigrating the others.

William Cronon *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* [1995]

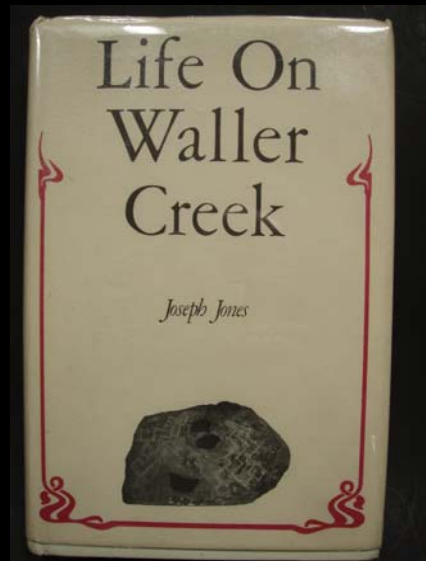
Questions for Literary ones

What kind of book is this? Nature writing? Environmental History? Natural Philosophy? Memoir?

Questions for Philosophical/Geographical crowd

- What is our proper relationship to Nature?
- What does it mean to “know” Nature?
- What can we learn from an urban creek?

Marginal Nature and Marginal Place



Nature writing focuses primarily on remnant wilderness or pastoral nature. A subset of the genre does examine nature in cities, but it is dominated by accounts of urban wildlife or natural history. These accounts may mention nature in wastelands and margins, but only a few writers directly seek out these habitats and assess their ecological and cultural meaning.

Lutz (1941) *A Lot of Insects: Entomology in a Suburban Garden* is a classic example of the natural history genre and Winn (1998) *Red-tails in Love: A Wildlife Drama in Central Park* for recent account of urban wildlife in New York,

Others include Bosselaar (2000) *Urban Nature: Poems about Wildlife in the City*, and Dixon (2002) *City Wilds: Essays and Stories about Urban Nature*.

Sanders (1987) *The paradise of bombs*,

Rockland (1994) *Snowshoeing through Sewers: Adventures in New York City, New Jersey, and Philadelphia*.

Dillard (1987) *An American Childhood*,

Sullivan (1998) *The Meadowlands: Wilderness on the Edge of a City*,

Siebert (1998) *Wickerby: An Urban Pastoral*,

Lamberton (2000) *Wilderness and Razor Wire: a naturalist's observations from prison*.

Gehlbach (2002) *Messages from the Wild: An Almanac of Suburban Natural and Unnatural History*,

and the poet Mary Oliver's essay about a Cape Cod garbage dump, "Waste Land: An Elegy," Oliver (2003) in the journal *Orion*.

Life on Waller Creek:

A Palaver about History as Pure and Applied Education [1982]

palaver *n.* [Port *palavra*, a word, speech *parabola*, PARABLE]

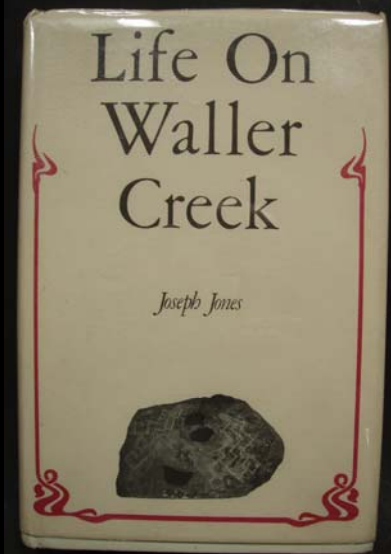
1. idle chatter

Henry Thoreau found that “incessant labor with the hands, which engrosses the attention also, [was] the best method to remove palaver out of one’s style,” but for me – to judge from my title page – hand labor may have conspired to put the palaver *in*. p.2

Social and Environmental History

Personal Engagement and Encounter

[2 aspects of his mode of engagement make this book unique]

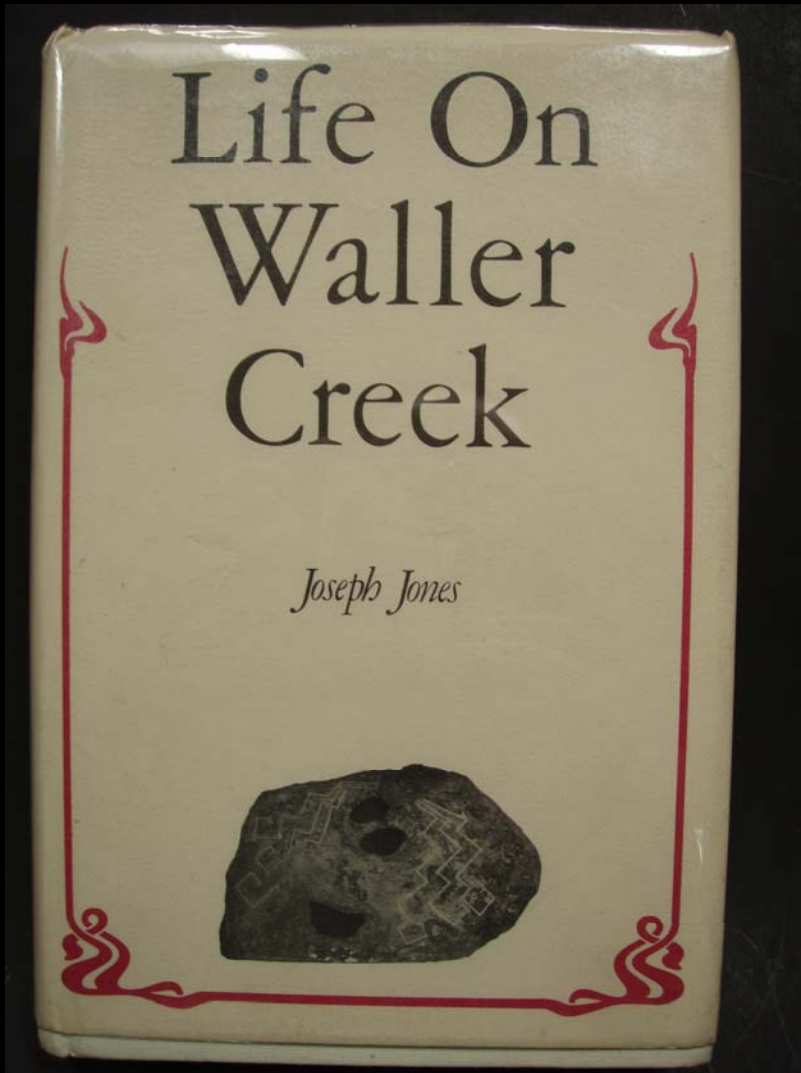


Thalia

Thalia was a rustic goddess, the Muse of comedy and idyllic poetry.

Thalia was the daughter of Zeus and Mnemosyne, the eighth-born of the nine Muses.

In art, Thalia was portrayed holding a comic mask



I don't wear a ten-gallon hat, but I do lug along in a five-gallon green plastic bucket the rest of my tools: machete, (or corn knife, as I knew it in corn country), light sledgehammer, pruning shears, homemade hand pick (patterned after the Polynesian digging stick, which was made from forking tree-branches), and – occasionally – pruning saw and bobbed-off broom-rake.

P.1

Jones does not just go to the creek in search of redemptive encounters with wild nature like other nature writers.

He does not ask the creek to redeem the degradation of the urban nature.

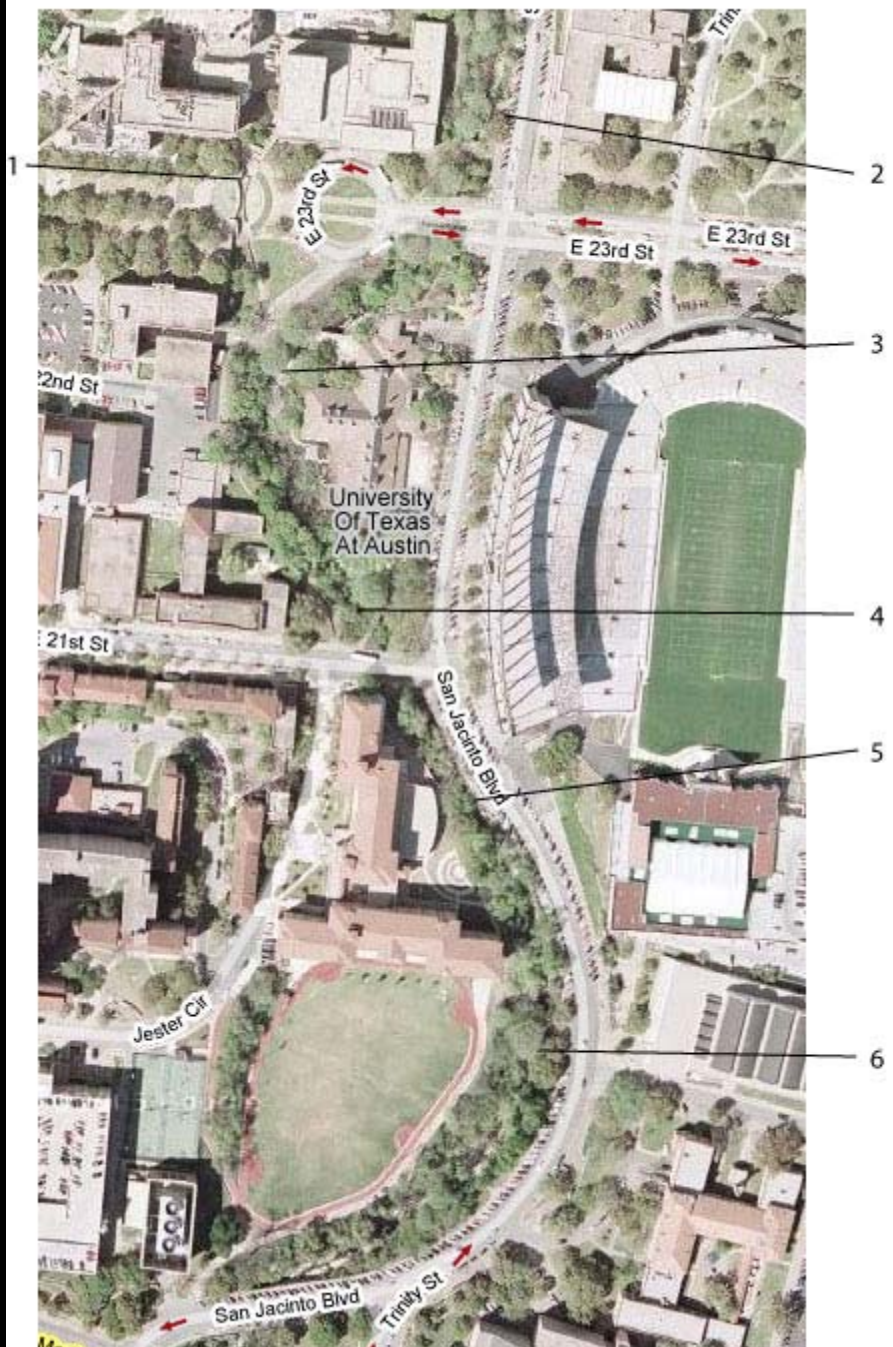
He writes about a place that he knows intimately and, although he makes an argument for its conservation, he presents himself as an engaged observer and unapologetic meddler in this place.

Everyday Jones putters around in the creek bed maintaining informal trails and collecting various bits of interesting natural and manmade detritus.

Jones engages this place not as just a site for the observation of nature but as a lifeworld encounter through constructive meddling.



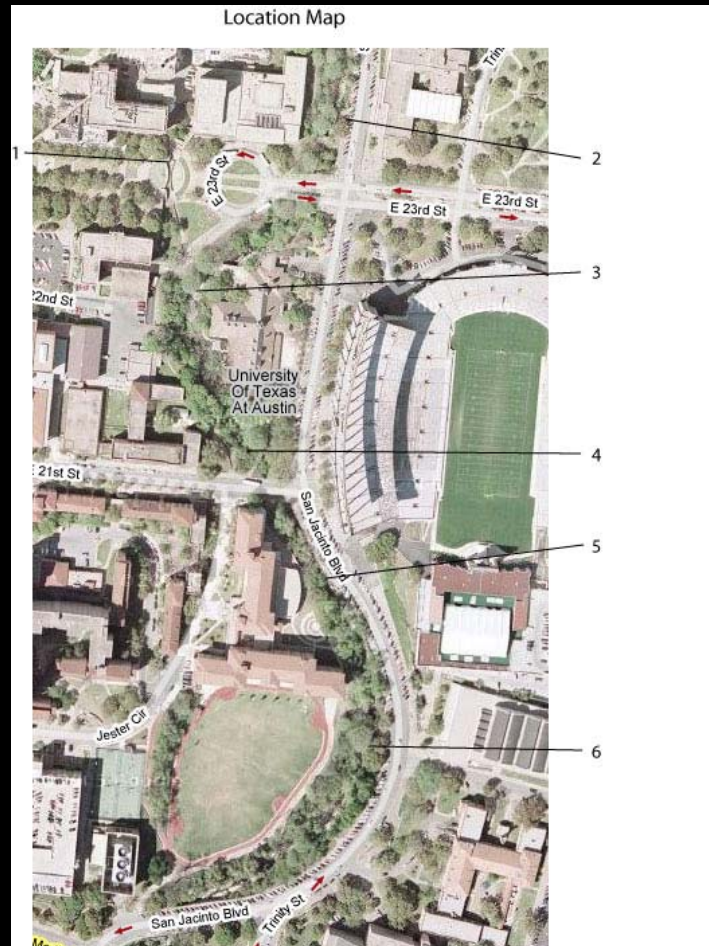
Location Map



Waller Creek Riot

Rapid and often unplanned development, both institutional and domestic, has taken its toll on Waller Creek.

One of the social consequences at the university was the Waller Creek Riot of October 22, 1969, protesting destruction of trees and mutilation of the creekbed along San Jacinto Boulevard south of Twenty-first Street, consequent to plans for the enlargement of Memorial Stadium.



The Waller Creek Riot was touched off when the UT board of regents decided to bulldoze several hundred feet of Waller Creek to expand Memorial Stadium.

In an unsuccessful attempt to stop the bulldozing, student protesters chained themselves to trees; the chancellor of the board of regents, Frank Erwin, complete with hard hat and bullhorn, personally oversaw their arrests.

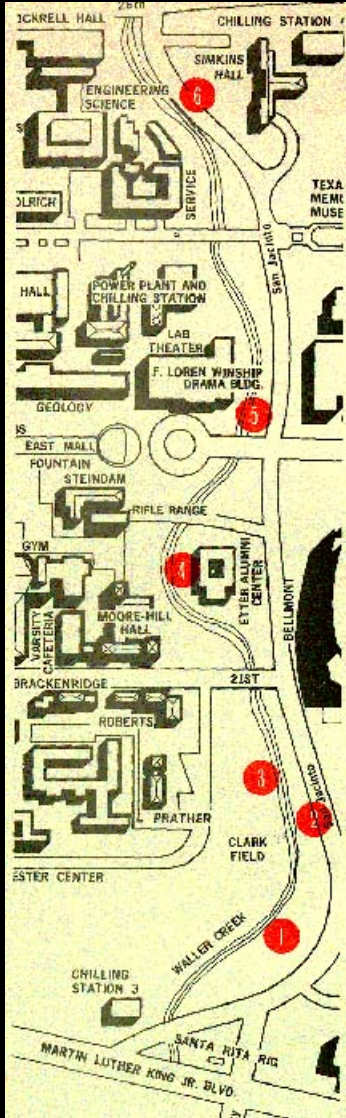


Waller Creek Wilderness Trails and Adjuncts



By: S.P. Ellison, Jr., Joseph Jones, and Keith Young
Prepared for Members of the
University of Texas at Austin Retired Faculty-Staff Association
May 10, 1983

<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/geo/fulltext.html>



Looking down between the MLK and San Jacinto bridges (beautiful pieces of masonry, both of them) you will note that the Creek exposes a floor of Austin limestone (Upper Cretaceous, about 75 millions years old), on top of which is a lot of stream debris in the form of cobbles, boulders, etc.

Take this for only a short distance to where a large pecan tree stands at the curve in the running track of Clark Field (formerly Freshman Field: Clark finally made it into the Upper Division and is due to graduate in another year or so).



Upstream from the pipeline bridge you can observe a series of small fractures or faults on the east bank. The first one is upthrown on the south side of the fracture about 7 inches. Some 100 feet or so north of the pipeline bridge is a giant tangle of cypress tree roots, to the east of which the Austin limestone is faulted several times.



Oaks, elms, cypresses, pecans, and willows, along with one or two ambitious sycamores, are the dominant trees of this area, with vines in profusion invading a fair number of trees to the point of strangulation



After inspecting this Upper Cretaceous geology you will need to reconnoiter to discover the best way of crossing over to the west bank. There are usually enough large, irregular rocks to serve as stepping stones, but they were not deposited there with your convenience in mind and you had better take it slow in making use of them.

Should you along this stretch be challenged by natives, snakes, or jungle animals, bear in mind that only a few steps up the bank to the left is the smooth sanctuary of the hike-and-bike trail, along which you may proceed with as much safety as the modern university campus customarily affords.

This portion of "forest primeval" continues to be the depository of large-size debris of various sorts, chiefly from the Memorial Day flood of 1981.

(The channel narrows here because San Jacinto Boulevard was crowded against the creek bed and actually cantilevered over it in the rocked-over stretch sometimes called "Erwin's Bend", site of the 1969 Waller Creek Riot).



<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/geo/fulltext.html>

WALKING THE FORTY ACRES

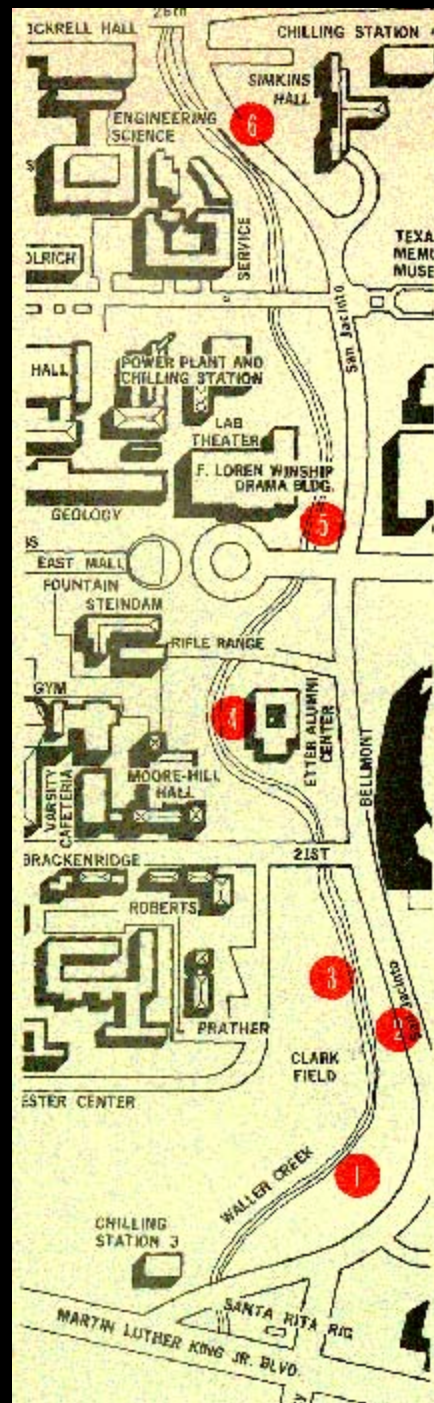
BUILDING STONES – PRECAMBRIAN TO
PLEISTOCENE

BY: *S.P. ELLISON, JR. AND
JOSEPH J. JONES*



Cordova Shell
Limestone

The University of Texas at Austin
Retired Faculty-Staff Association







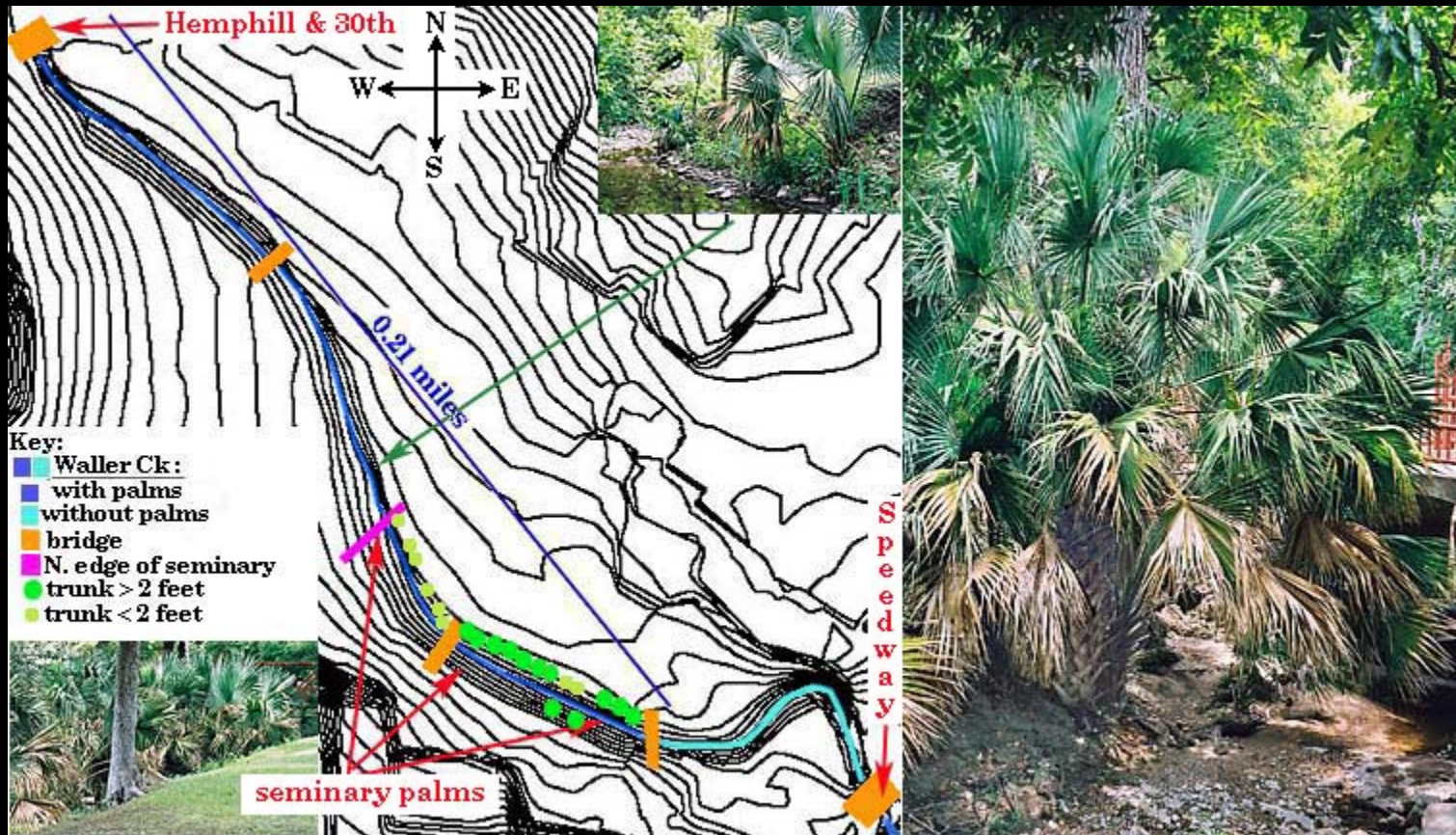
Alumni Center Area

When you reach the 21st St. bridge notice **the palmetto "escape" living** and perhaps slowly growing in the water and gravel just under the west end, downstream side. From here it will be necessary to leave the creek bed (from which the creek is nearly always seen to best advantage)

Immediately north of 21st St. bridge the Austin limestone forms up to 35 feet of the steep west bank of Waller Creek.



Non-humans [palms]
along Waller Creek
Robert Harms



<https://webpace.utexas.edu/harms/WallerPalmCensus/00WallerPalmCensus.html>

The Return (?) of Palms to Waller Creek – Robert Harms

Census of Texas Palmettos (*Sabal mexicana*) along Waller Creek, July 2003

In the summer of 2003 some 400 Texas Palmettos (*Sabal mexicana*; also Rio Grande palmetto) were thriving along Waller Creek between Hemphill Park and the south edge of the UT campus.

When Texas palm authority Landon Lockett suggested that I check out reports of palmettos along campus stretches of Waller Creek I had no idea of the surprises that lay ahead. As a frequent visitor of the creek in the 60s, I knew that palmettos would have to be of recent origin.

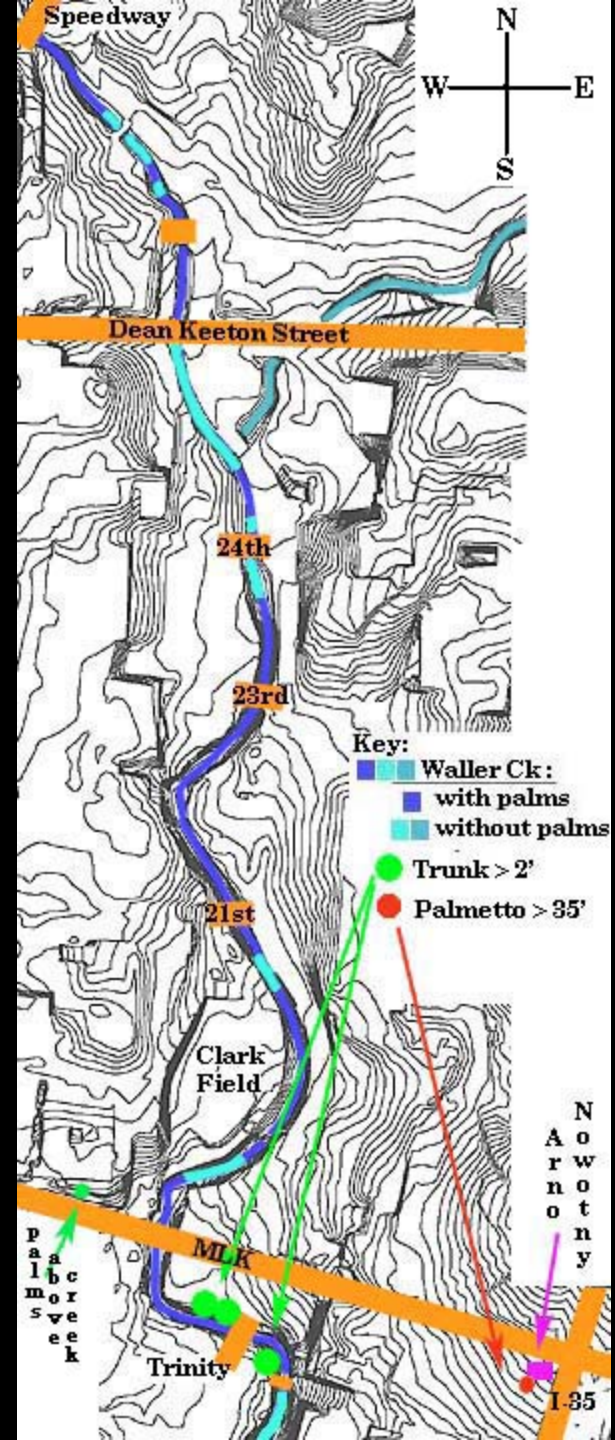
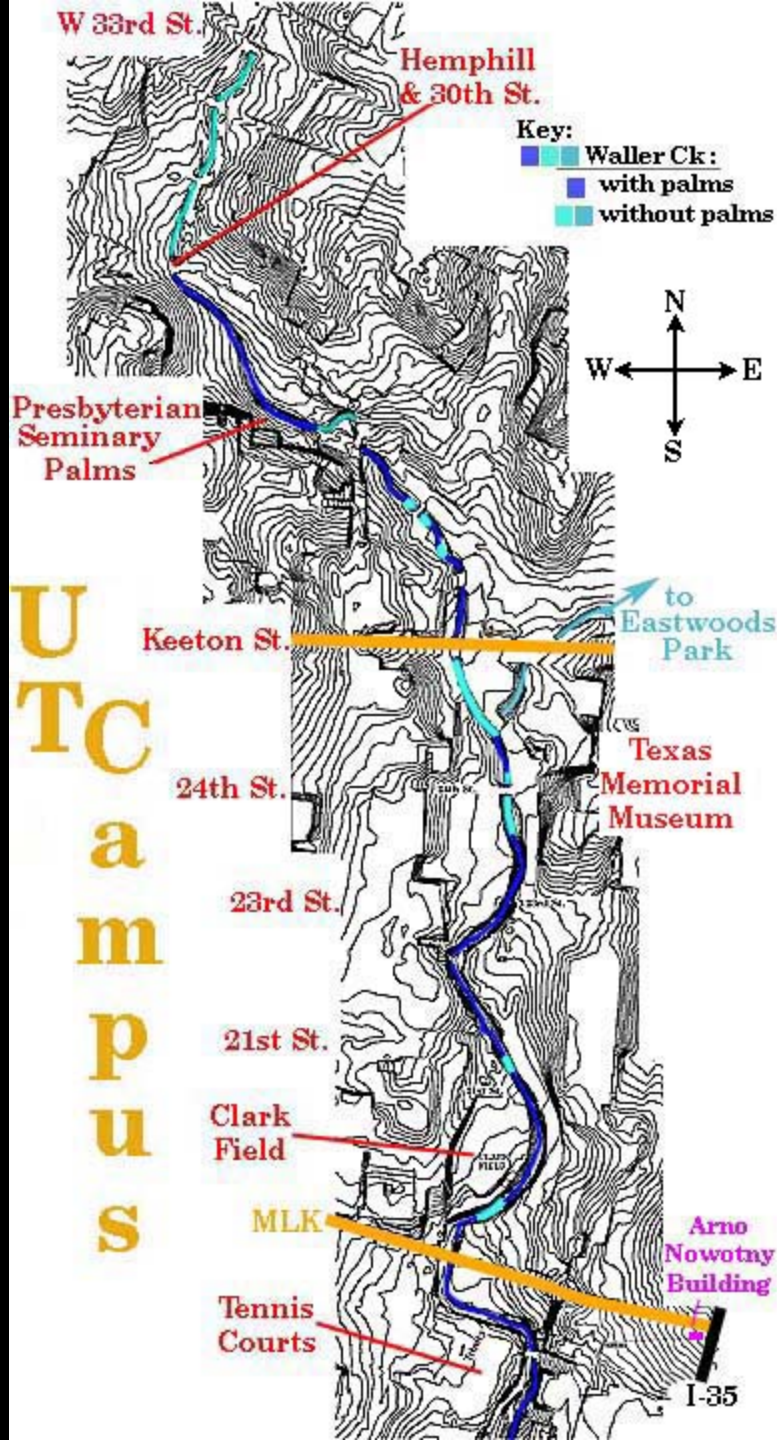
I was familiar with our local Dwarf Palmetto (*Sabal minor*) at Palmetto Park and in the hills just west of Austin. There had been student reports of Dwarf Palmettos in the creek and Landon had recently introduced me to the large population of Texas Palmettos in the Hyde Park neighborhood just north of campus. I expected to find a few plants, perhaps of both species, and if Texas Palmettos, then perhaps as Hyde Park 'escapees.'

I began my search from the south edge of campus, by the tennis courts at Trinity and MLK. I was astonished to find two 15 foot tall Texas Palmettos, one with a trunk of over 4 feet, just west of the Trinity bridge; and a third large palm with a 28 inch trunk at the footbridge behind the tennis courts.

There could be no stopping until I had done the whole creek.

When my survey was completed, I had found only Texas Palmettos - no Dwarf Palmettos had turned up. Further, the evidence indicates that all of these are most probably from two sources - (1) palms originally introduced for landscaping at the Austin Presbyterian Seminary north of Speedway and (2) the tall palm beside the Arno Nowotny Building at MLK and I35.







Census of Texas Palmettos (*Sabal mexicana*) along Waller Creek, July 2003

	trunks > 2'	trunks < 2'	no trunks, 6'-12'	no trunks, < 6'	TOTAL
North of Campus	12	8	42	155+	217
Campus	3	5	18	137+	163
TOTAL	15	13	60	292+	380+

Inventories

The second aspect of this book which sets it apart is, perhaps, a more radical departure from the conventions of narratives of nature than anything envisioned by the new geographers of nature.

In his journals, Jones kept a record of each day's visit to the creek with detailed observations of what he saw there.

Where the conventional expectation is that these catalogues would be a naturalist's observations of nature, Jones was not a naturalist, but rather an engaged literate observer encountering a marginal urban place.

He carefully records what he sees and experiences without censuring the detritus of the urban landscape in favor of redemptive moments of nature.

He calls these lists of prosaic observations "Inventories," and they are interspersed throughout the text like phenomenological snapshots of the place.



INVENTORY:

If what has been tagged “Inventory” – appearing sporadically at numerous places throughout the rest of this book – strikes the reader as contemporary intrusion into the concerns of the past, so be it.

The past intrudes on us; why shouldn't we exercise our right of reciprocity? But I hope it may suggest more than intrusion, a feeling of continuity outside either past or present, strictly viewed.

The Creek is an ever-visible manifestation of continuity, of life; the amount and nature of what it carries along, in addition to its variable current of water, keeps changing; the bed is hardly the same from one day (or even hour) to the next, though the variations are normally undramatic.

Besides being part of the landscape, as one of the most active agents of landscape-making, it is the sum total that it has been interfered with by man, and continues to be interfered with, must be accepted as part of such total process, whatever opinion may be held as to the merits of the interferences, including certain sandbars, eddies, and transitory whirlpools in the writer's mind, commingled with less perishable small events in nature.

In italic passages, then, the casual, the accidental, the wayward all have a little more scope than straight narrative will stoop to tolerate.



I would hope also that the reader, if he should tire of being reminded overmuch of what an efficient trash-receiver (up to a point) the Creek has become in our day, will exercise the reader's privilege of imagining what counterparts to an inventory of the 1970s-80s were almost certainly to be found in Waller Creek pretty steadily after 1839 and indeed even before.

But let him first accept himself as part of the continuum and become his own short-term archeologist: such fugitive creek-things as I will be cataloguing here, when carried and buried, might be thought of as archeology going somewhere to happen.

Thus, for example: Plastic beer cups (Brand X with blue map of Texas) in addition to the ever-ongoing deposit of beer cans...A grackle's reflection as he flies low over a still pool...After a flood, young willows keep reminding us, for many days, "It went that-a-way," ...High-visibility translucent bluish plastic bags – like Portuguese-men-of-war on a Gulf beach, but not biodegradable...scars of the sewer builders, still evident after twenty, twenty-five years...A much-twisted-and-battered yellow umbrella.

pp. 4-5.

[prose poems]



A closer-mechanism for a metal casement window (not in operating order) ...

The name "Billy" neatly scratched with a stick through the algae onto the Creek bottom...

A sky-blue tin lid, decorated with gold trim and other fancywork: American Louis XIV...

Roots projecting straight out from between strata at the base of a cliff, groping for water: what trunk do they feed, at what distance?...

The patriarchal pecan tree on the west bank a few rods south of the Drama Building, sometimes called "Old Geronimo," has seen not only the days of Geronimo himself but probably everybody and everything else in Texas history, and much more. Now slowly dying back, what a life it has had! ...

A rusty bucket-bottom caught through one of its holes on a ragweed stub, two feet up...

Dandelions and some other yellow flowers are out on sunny days in early January...

I'm almost as glad to see readers on the Creek bank as I am to see longear sunfish in the pools...

A pink plastic spoon.



There is playfulness to his engagement with this place that he clearly loves as a site for nature encounter and for reflection, but he deliberately undermines the seriousness of the conventions of nature literature through these inventories,

Inventory:

A yellow candy-wrapper...

Plastic bottle for duplicator ink...

Half a cement block...

I don't know whether or not, in these palmy days of the occult, anyone has yet experienced a genuine illumination or mystical rapture at Waller Creek. I haven't, myself, but I still would like to suppose that at a predestined place beside the easy-flowing water, to someone walking alone along the milky limestone arched and fringed by pecan and cypress shade, there could come a moment that would go-for-broke: when the luminescence of the darting sunfish would be instantaneously intensified a thousand powers...

and from masses of radiant leaves the grackles, no longer wheezing out half-whistles, would carol hymns of glory to God in seraphic harmonies; and the palpable elements of water, earth, and air would blend with the fire of such vision that, at essence lifted clear of its engagement with space and time, the many would coalesce and cohere and rejoice at one. Maybe they do already and we can't perceive it; but then even if we could, who would believe us? ...

A largish sheet-metal cylinder, very rusty...

Cypress needles help traction, too, on a slippery bank.

pp. 296-7.



Traction is the best metaphor for what Jones gives us with grackles, cypress needles and a yellow candy-wrapper.

His inventories have the specificity and immediacy to reflect the phenomenological complexity of Waller Creek.

They are like prose poems that embody the scattershot encounters with the ever changing assemblages of natural and manmade detritus gathered by the creek.

Most importantly, Jones demonstrates with them that he does not look beyond this particular place, this limestone gutter, for redemptive meaning.

They document the labor of his hands and all those decades of meddling with the creek and harvesting insights about appropriate occupation with appropriate nature in the margins.

In doing so, he demonstrates another practice for engaging urban nature.

Jones does not require wilderness to redeem the city.

In this way, he suggests a move beyond the dependence on traditional narratives of nature toward the beginnings of a new, more open narrative of nature.



To explore Waller Creek and environs is to live intensively in the modern world and at the same time to be aware of how brief an instant modernity has been with us; how brief an instant, indeed, the human presence has been here in any guise to contemplate a very old set of surroundings.

The Creek, if we will only let it, will keep reminding us of all this at the same time it offers us other gifts; solitude or limited companionship as needed and wanted; earth, air, and water in slow procession and interaction under the radiant presence of fire; plants and animals living or present in fossil forms; sounds kind to the ear; color, line, mass, and texture both natural and manmade in luxurious profusion; unhasty alteration within encompassing continuity; the gradual submission of mind and body to easy yet powerful rhythms not elsewhere to be felt – a place where, as Izaak Walton liked to say, we may “study to be quiet.”

Joseph Jones [p.311]





Life On Waller Creek

Joseph Jones





Applause!

Questions?





Center for Environmental Research at Hornsby Bend



AWU-CER Lunchtime Lectures September – December 2011

Each talk begins AT NOON Waller Center [625 East 10th Street – between I-35 and Red River] Room 104

The 1st Wednesday of the Month! Free and Open to the Public – bring a lunch and learn

Urban Nature and Urban Ecology: Understanding Urban Ecosystems

Over the next four months, we will explore different perspectives and issues of urban nature and ecology. We will begin in September by examining a range of perspectives on nature in the city, including urban ecology, urban planning, restoration ecology, political ecology, and more. In October, we will focus on the issue of officially sanctioned urban nature versus non-native intruders, and the different views of nature in the study of urban ecology. Focusing on urban planning in November, we will look at how nature is incorporated into the urban landscape and how it resists our planning. We will wrap up in December by assessing encounters with urban nature as revealed by urban nature writers.

September 7 Noon-1pm

Varieties of Possibility: Perspectives on Nature and the City

October 5 Monday Noon-1pm

The Weeds and the Wild: Invasive Species and Urban Ecology

November 2 Monday Noon-1pm

The Proper Place of Nature: Urban Planning and Urban Ecology

December 7 Monday Noon-1pm

Encounters with Nature in the City: Urban Nature and Literature