

PK Away!

Possum Kingdom provides the perfect North Texas Lake Escape

Written by Jill Lawless.



Cliff-top panoramas of Possum Kingdom Lake—such as this vista from the Angel View scenic lookout—reward trekkers on the Brazos River Authority’s 16 miles of hike-and-bike trails. (Photo by Kenny Braun)

Simple pleasures in a grand setting. Sculpting sand on a broad beach. Exploring winding, wooded mountain trails. Casting lazily from a pier as gentle lake waves lap below. Picnicking at water’s edge in the day’s last light. Such unfussy splendor defines my family’s ideal escape.

And our spring trip to Possum Kingdom Lake delivered this requisite bliss in abundance. Tucked into the Palo Pinto Mountains on the upper reaches of the Brazos River, the 17,000-acre lake (known simply as “PK” to the locals) lies some 90 miles west of Fort Worth, and draws Metroplexers and other neighbors to its picturesque shores for watersports (boating, skiing, swimming, fishing, and scuba-diving), along with trail treks, cabin hideaways, and resort retreats.

Even the placename suggests the unpretentious adventure we seek—a modest creature roaming its paradisiacal realm. But in fact, the hilly lake setting alone proved all the enticement my family needed, so I set off with my husband, Scott, and our seven-year-old son, Lucas, for three days in the Kingdom.

Day One Park Playdate

So how did the lake get its name? I pose the question to Rocky Holland, superintendent of Possum Kingdom State Park, situated on the lake's western shores. My family has just blown into the park (literally) behind a spring thunderstorm, and we've joined Holland at a lakeside picnic table in the early-morning sun.

It turns out that there's more than one story behind the name's origins, the most popular relating to the region's once-bountiful possums and raccoons and a fur trader named Ike Sablosky, who settled in the area in the early 1900s. Sablosky called his main hide suppliers "the boys from Possum Kingdom" and the appellation endured, even after the lake inundated the area in 1941.

"We see more skunks now," says Holland. "It's probably a good thing that the founders went with that name."

Other residents of the 1,528-acre park's wild kingdom include white-tailed deer and foxes, and birders will spot turkeys, migrating cranes, and endangered species like the golden-cheeked warbler and black-capped vireo. "We also see bobcats pretty regularly," says Holland, "and we found mountain-lion tracks last year."

Lucas perks up at the possibility of a big-cat sighting, so we head for what turns into a short bicycle exploration of the park's two miles of rugged, cedar- and oak-lined trails. The rain has flooded our path, so we pedal back past the park cabins, which number four at the moment (each has a kitchen and sleeps four), with two new structures to be completed in late 2010. A nearby lodge, also with a full kitchen, sleeps eight. It's all about location at PK State Park; all of the cabins, campsites, and picnic areas lie within yards of the water.

At the park store and marina, you can rent a boat (canoes, kayaks, jet skis, ski boats, and pontoons) and buy groceries, gifts, and fishing and camping supplies. Owners Jeff and Lisa Nichols stock everything from stuffed toy possums to bobber lights for your camper.

Jeff Nichols, the go-to guy for PK fishing tips, tells us that the lake is among the deepest in Texas. "It's well over 100 feet at its maximum depth," he says, and adds that the lake-bottom terrain is varied, which proves good for fish, and fishing. "The variation provides the fish with shallow water and access to deep water. You can find fish in all parts of the lake."

Crappie, sunfish, and catfish all swim in PK's waters, but the bass (largemouth, striped, and white) provide the big draw for anglers.

We drive through the park one last time on our way out, and pick the perfect shoreline campsite for our next visit. This trip, a cabin awaits us on the lake's Peninsula, which lies east of the park—some five minutes by boat, and 45 minutes by car. We make our way east along US 180, then turn up scenic Texas 16, which winds into hilly Palo Pinto terrain and back toward the lake. We cross the 1940s WPA-built arch bridge just below Morris Sheppard Dam, a popular put-in point for canoe excursions along the John Graves Scenic Riverway stretch of the Brazos. (Rochelle's Canoe Rental lies just downriver on FM 4.) We pass the Possum Kingdom Fish Hatchery, which produces striped bass, smallmouth bass, and catfish for PK Lake and other lakes across Texas.

The heart of PK activity, the Peninsula area hums with pockets of restaurants, convenience stores, and a grocery, along with homes and rental cabins, Brazos River Authority trails and public-use areas (including Sandy Beach, with its popular swimming area), and—a big eye-brightener for Lucas—the new PK Speedway go-kart track. Scott and I make a mental note to add the track to our itinerary, as if Lucas is going to let us forget.

Lodging options abound on all sides of the lake, from tent campsites to cozy cabins to ritzy resort accommodations. Our simple waterside bungalow at Golden Cove suits us perfectly, with two queen beds, a kitchenette, and on the grounds, picnic tables and grills, a sandy beach area, and a grassy strip that juts into the lake, from which we would later cast our lines. “We're known for our spectacular sunsets ... and the deer,” says Stephanie Taylor, a member of the Golden Cove crew. Indeed, the furry creatures arrive by the dozens that evening, just as the sun begins to dip below the Palo Pintos.

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