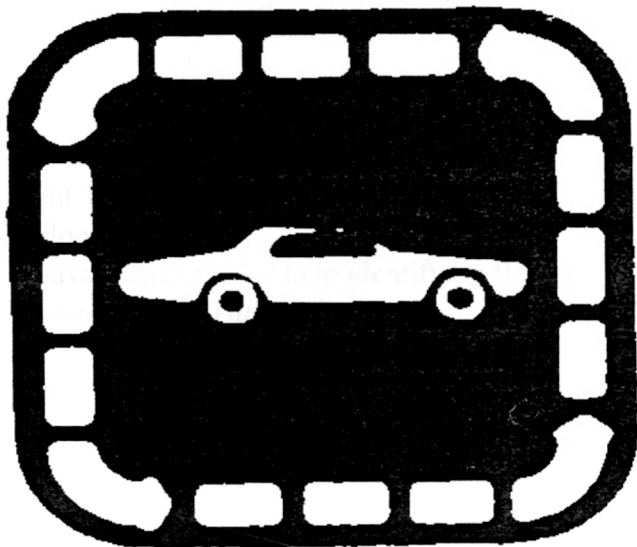


Big Thicket

Self-guiding Auto Tour
Half Day



Welcome to the Big Thicket, y'all!

The Big Thicket region of southeast Texas is famous for its incredibly diverse natural and cultural history. Major North American biological communities merge here: southern swamps, eastern forests, central plains, southwestern deserts. Cactus plants grow within plain sight of baldcypress trees growing in standing water. Yucca plants grow in the shade of Eastern dogwood trees. Birdwatchers add roadrunners, egrets, and bluebirds to their checklists, and botanists key out 85 kinds of trees and over 500 species of wild flowers.

Add to this rich mix of plants, the colorful history of indians, Spanish explorers, outlaws, lumbermen, and roughnecks and the Big Thicket becomes a fascinating place to visit.

This tour is an opportunity for visitors to sample a little of the biological and cultural richness of the Big Thicket region.

Half Day Self-guiding Auto Tour

The distinctiveness of some of the plant communities are obvious from the road but several of them cannot be appreciated at highway speeds. This auto tour guides motorists to specific stops where a short walk will reveal typical examples of the vegetative contrast which characterizes the Big Thicket.

The Big Thicket had a profound effect upon the people who first settled it; and the people, in turn, had a dramatic impact upon the thicket. We learn the Big Thicket's most valuable lessons when we don't try to separate its natural history from its cultural history. This tour includes both.

The tour begins and ends at the Big Thicket National Preserve information station on FM 420. The tour route is exactly 64.7 miles. At legal and safe speeds it requires 1 hour and 38 minutes of driving time. Stopping time is additional. The tour follows both paved U.S. highways, farm-to-market county roads, and one-lane dirt roads in remote areas. Use wet dirt roads at your own risk. There are 7 stops. The route can begin at any station, but must be followed in a counterclockwise direction. Record your odometer reading or set it on zero, and have a pleasant and safe drive.

We might recommend:

A picnic stop at either the Pitcher Plant Trail or the Sundew Nature Trail.

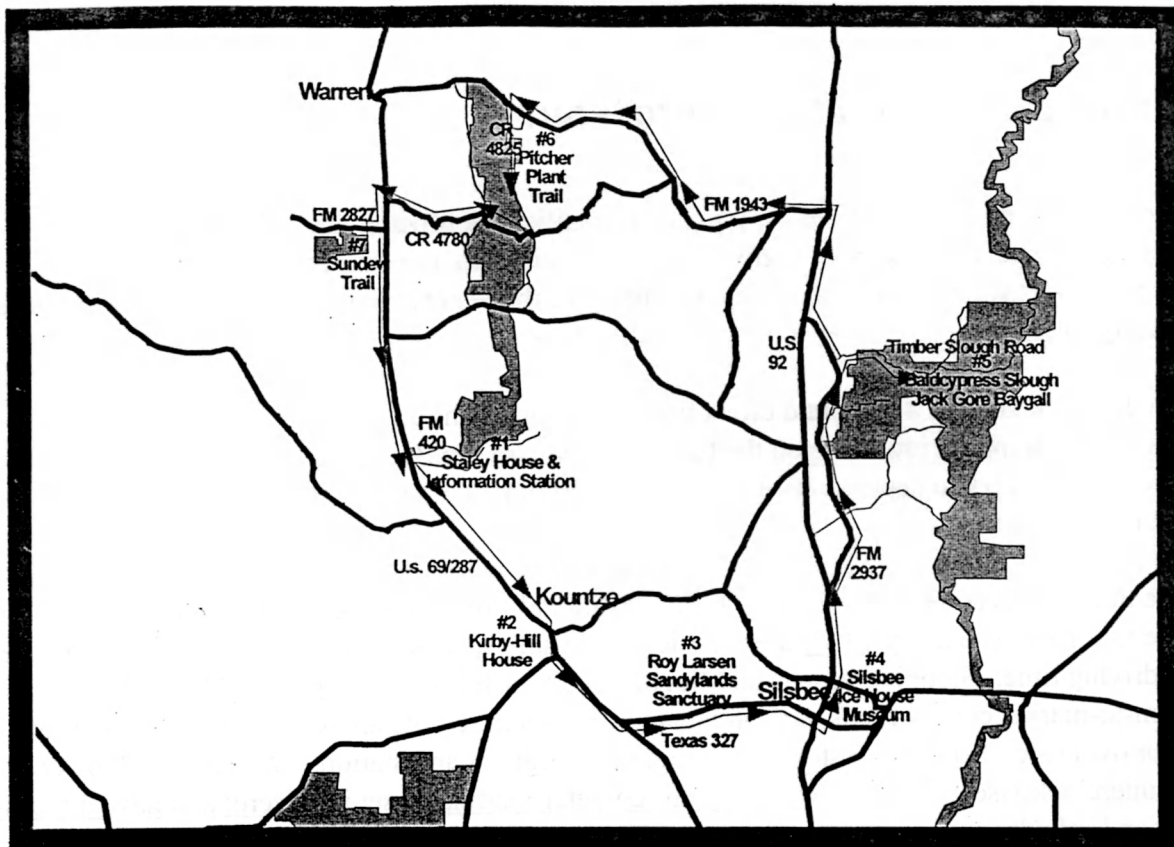
Early April when Pitcher Plants are blooming.

Wild Flowers of the Big Thicket by Gayata Ajilvsgi for help identifying flowers.

A copy of the free publication *Big Fun in the Big Thicket* for kids.

Bottled water, especially in summer.

Insect repellent, especially in summer.



Half Day Self-guiding Auto Tour



#1 Jimmy Staley Cabin and Big Thicket Information Station

- ☐ Handicapped accessible information station, public restrooms, water fountains, and picnic tables.
- ☐ Southwest Parks and Monuments Association sales outlet.
- ☐ Not handicapped accessible access to Kirby nature trail and Turkey Creek hiking trail.



J. H. (Jimmy) and Elda Staley built their 24 foot by 32 foot log cabin in 1936 on land owned by the Kirby Lumber Company. The Staley's cleared 4.3 acres of land in 1938, and by 1944 they had a hog-proof fence around their vegetable garden, and were raising hogs and cattle.

Farm to market road 420 was built in 1945.

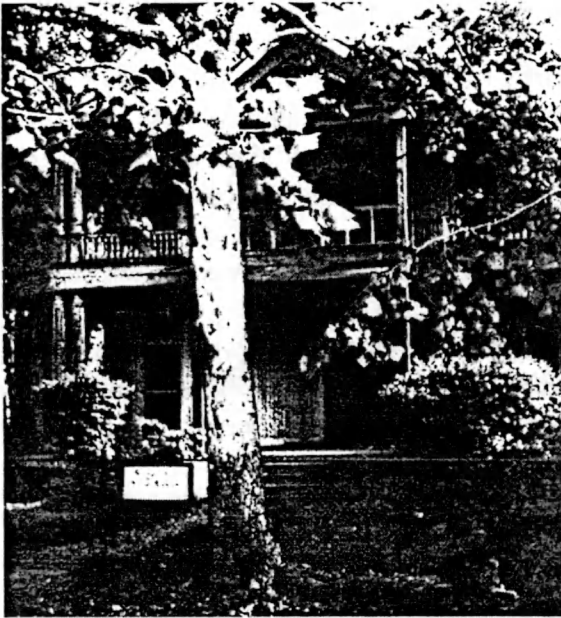
By 1955 Jimmy and Elda were separated. Jimmy had broken a hip in a car accident, and was unemployed. In 1956 the 4.3 acres of land were re-seeded in pine.

Directions to Kirby-Hill House:

Return on FM 420 to U.S. 69/287. Go south 10.2 miles. Turn west on Main Street in Kountze. Go two blocks. Total driving time is 13 minutes. Total driving distance is 10.4 miles.

#2 Kirby Hill House

- ☐ Handicapped accessible.
- ☐ No public restrooms.
- ☐ Hours: Monday to Friday 1-5 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m.-3 p.m., Sunday 1-3 p.m.
- ☐ Guided tours (1/2 hour)
- ☐ Phone: (409) 246-8000
- ☐ Chamber of Commerce Office at Pine and Wiliford in Kountze.
- ☐ Restaurants, groceries, and motels in Kountze



John Henry Kirby was the organizer of the Texas and Louisiana Land and Lumber Company, the Texas Pine Land Association, the Gulf, Beaumont and Kansas City Railroad, and most importantly the Kirby Lumber Company with capital assets of \$10,000,000. John Kirby established the town of Silsbee, Texas and named it after Nathaniel Devereaux Silsbee of Boston, who helped manage both the Texas and Louisiana Land and Lumber Company and the Texas Pine Land Association.

Kountze lawyer, A. M. Hill married Lucy Kirby, who was the daughter of Jim Kirby (John Kirby's brother). Their son, Austin Jr., and his wife, Esther Pye, lived in the big house all their lives (more than 65 years for "Esta").

We might suggest:

Call to inquire if a tour of Wellborn Art Studio in Kountze may be added to your tour. (Phone 246-3050).

Good opportunity to pick up some picnic supplies in Kountze.

Directions to Roy E. Larsen Sandylands Sanctuary:

Return to U.S. 69/287. Drive south 2.5 miles to Texas 327. Go east 2.5 miles. Driving time is 8 minutes. Total distance is 5.0 miles.

#3 Roy Larsen Sandylands Sanctuary

- ☐ Day use area with picnic pavillion.
- ☐ Trail system with 6 miles of trails (self-guiding booklet for 0.8 mile section)
- ☐ Public restroom.
- ☐ No handicapped accessibility.
- ☐ Guided tours requested in advance. Phone: (409) 385-0445



Sanctuary exhibits the intermingling of forest and wetland communities. Of special importance are the longleaf pine communities that occur on the uplands. Although sparsely vegetated, the longleaf sandhills display the greatest variety of wildflowers in the Big Thicket. Fire adapted plants such as the rare Texas trailing phlox, white firewheel, and scarlet catchfly are found here.

In adjacent low areas, ponds and baygalls abound with lush wetland vegetation including rare orchids, carnivorous plants, and acid loving ferns.

Directions to Silsbee Ice House Museum:

Drive east on Texas 327 3.8 miles to Silsbee. Turn north on U.S. 92. Drive 3.4 miles, and go east on Earnest Avenue for one block to the museum. Total driving time is 13 minutes. The total distance is 7.8 miles.

#4 Silsbee Ice House Museum

- ☐ No handicapped accessibility
- ☐ No public restrooms
- ☐ Restaurants, groceries, and motels in Silsbee
- ☐ Chamber of Commerce in Silsbee



In the summer the Big Thicket is oppressively hot. The ice house in Silsbee accomplished the seemingly impossible task of making ice in the summertime in the Big Thicket by removing heat from water. City water was filtered through sand and gravel, settled, and pumped into ice cans. The ice cans were lowered into brine water. The brine was cooled to 16 degrees Fahrenheit by ammonia circulating through evaporator coils. In 36 hours, the 312 pounds of water in the ice cans was a solid block of ice.

Today the building that transformed water into ice, has been transformed into a museum that features the work of Big Thicket artists.

Directions to Baldcypress slough in Jack Gore Baygall Unit:

Return to U.S. 92. Go north for 2.8 miles to FM 2937 (Old Spurper Highway). Continue north for 9.4 miles to Timber Slough Road. Continue east 0.9 mile to dirt road. Turn right and drive 3.1 miles to pullout on left side of the road. Total driving time to baldcypress slough in Jack Gore Baygall is 25 minutes. Total driving distance is 13.1 miles.

#5 Baldcypress Slough in Jack Gore Baygall Unit

- ☐ Drive up view of cypress slough
- ☐ One lane dirt road through scenic Big Thicket bottom land.
- ☐ No handicapped accessible facilities.
- ☐ No public restrooms.

The perpetually wet baygall community takes its name from red bay and the gallberry holly. Highly acidic, tea-colored seepage water stands in baygalls during much of the year, effectively pickling the spongy layers of organic matter that accumulate. Black titi usually grows beneath a canopy of water tolerant trees such as black gum, bald cypress and sweet bay.



Sloughs are slow moving water drainages. Though filled with water much of the year, they do not collect the highly acidic tea-colored water or the layers of undecayed organic matter found in baygalls. Sloughs wash out with every flood, and contain very little vegetative growth in the channel itself other than bald cypress and tupelo gum trees. Both trees have swollen bases, but cypress is fluted at the base. Tupelo trees have gray bark, while the trunks of bald cypress have a reddish cast.

Directions to Pitcher Plant Trail:

Return to U.S. 92 on Timber Slough Road. Drive north 8.0 miles to FM 1943. Go west 12.0 miles to Turkey Creek Unit sign on CR 4825. Go south 2.4 miles to Pitcher Plant Trail. Driving time to Pitcher Plant Trail is 35 minutes and the total distance is 22.4 miles.

#6 Pitcher Plant Trail

- ☐ Handicapped-accessible picnic tables, restroom and 0.25 mile nature trail
- ☐ A 1.0-mile loop trail with free interpretive brochure.
- ☐ Charcoal grates.



Pitcher plants (*Sarracenia alata*) capture insects in their tubular leaves. Nectar dots on the leaves attract insects down inside the pitcher. Once inside, downward-pointing hairs prevent insects from escaping. Captured insects are eventually digested in a pool of enzyme in the bottom of the pitcher.

Directions to the Sundew Nature Trail:

Continue south on CR 4825 for 2.1 miles. Turn west on CR 4780 and drive 4.7 miles (through the center of the Turkey Creek Unit) to U.S. 69/287. Go south 0.9 mile to FM 2827. Go west 0.7 mile to CR 1910. Go south 0.4 mile to parking area. Driving time from the Pitcher Plant Trail to the Sundew Trail is 25 minutes, and the total distance is 7.9 miles.

#7 Sundew Nature Trail

- ☐ Handicapped-accessible picnic tables, restroom, and 0.5 mile nature trail loop.
- ☐ Self-guiding nature trail with 0.5 mile or 1.0 mile loops. Trail booklet, 50 cents.
- ☐ Covered picnic pavillion with charcoal grates.



Normally, insects eat plants; but in wetland savannahs, the plants eat the insects. Four of the five kinds of carnivorous plants found in the United States occur in this location: pitcher plants, bladderworts, butterworts, and sundews. They do well here because poor drainage causes low mineral content in the soil, and the carnivorous plants can supplement their diet with insects.

The trail is named after a tiny carnivorous plant that looks like a small pin cushion. The leaves are covered with red hairlike glands. The tip of each gland produces a glistening droplet of sticky fluid. These sticky droplets act like fly paper, trapping unwary insects. The same droplets that capture the insects contain digestive enzymes that dissolve their prey.

National Preserve
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

For Additional Information:

Big Thicket National Preserve

Information Station
(409) 246-2337

Headquarters
3785 Milam
Beaumont, Texas 77701
(409) 839-2689
FAX (409) 839-2599
<http://www.nps.gov/bith/>

Kountze Chamber of Commerce

1015 North Pine
Kountze, Texas 77625
(409) 246-3413

Silsbee Chamber of Commerce

835 Highway 96S
Silsbee, Texas 77656
(409) 385-5562