

Staff Map by James A. Black

Wilbur Foster remembers when his family bought Barton Creek frontage because of the view and the water hole.

Staff Photo by David Kennedy

Foster family park is gem in Austin greenbelt plan

Geologists call it a typical Hill Country creek, but to Austinites, Barton Creek represents something special and all that is right with the city. With development creeping to its edges, water quality in the creek is in danger. This is the 10th in a series of articles that look at the present, past and future life along the creek, and the pollution that threatens it.

By PETE SZILAGYI

American-Statesman Staff

When the inventive Foster family began beautifying a 2½-mile stretch of Barton Creek in 1953, its members had no idea they were building an Austin city park.

And it's not just any city park, but possibly the most spectacular in Austin, with oak groves, waterfalls, swimming and fishing pools, sheer bluffs, meadows and enough pecan trees to keep an army of squirrels fat.

The new park, along the creek just south of Lost Creek, won't be open for several months, but the prospect of Austinites swarming into his former domain has Wilbur Foster concerned.

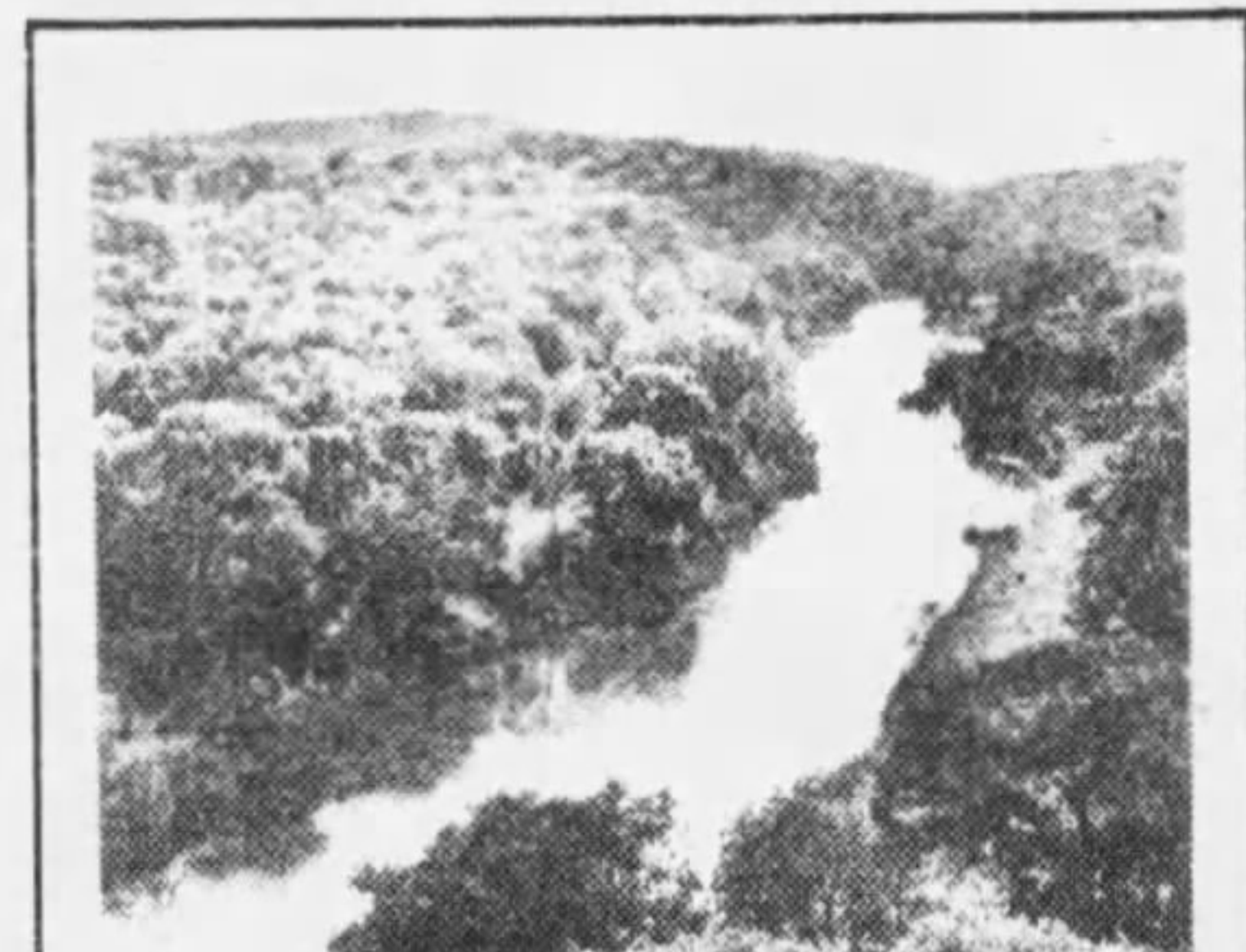
That stretch of the creek has been a big part of his family's life.

Wilbur's father, Edwin, bought 100 acres of creekside land at \$165 an acre in 1953, and through the years increased the family's holdings to 435 acres, he said. The grown Foster children and their father built houses on a hill overlooking the creek.

"We bought it because of the creek. It had a nice view and a water hole that supposedly never went dry, according to legend," Wilbur Foster said.

Using boulders that periodically tumbled down the hill, the Fosters built a dam at the water hole "so there would always be water for the wildlife."

That dam was destroyed by three floods and rebuilt, then four more dams were built to contain the flow of other springs. The Fosters removed the saplings that sprouted in the creek, and cleaned



**Barton Creek:
its life and spirit**

up silt and debris that storms washed into it.

They planted pecan trees and cleared cedar and poison ivy. A washed-out flood plain was restored to a grassy meadow, and a road was built the length of their 2½-mile creek frontage. The Fosters also stocked the creek with fish and bought a bulldozer, grader and dump truck for their work on the land.

When trespassers began violating the private creekside preserve, the Fosters would clean up after them every Monday morning.

Twenty years of fooling with the creek cost \$200,000, Foster estimated, but to have it done now would cost several million dollars.

The land and improvements were paid for by Edwin Foster's inventions, conceived and developed in a workshop high above the creek, he said. Among them were a retractable seat belt spring and clips that hold plastic hubcaps on automobile wheels. The clips were tested at a bumpy creekside road, now overgrown with brush.

Working on the creek was a "hobby for my father," Foster said. "His work is so extremely mental, that it was recreation for him to move stuff around and actually see what he had accomplished."

Last year, through eminent domain proceedings, the city bought 170 acres of the land from the Foster family as part of the Barton Creek greenbelt.

Foster recalled that "it took us a long time to get used to the idea" that it would become a city park.

Although the city has closed the Foster tract to public use until facilities can be built, trespassers are coming by the dozens, he said. Scars from their dirt bikes are evident, and their litter is scattered to and fro.

If it's necessary to insulate themselves from the park, the Fosters are prepared to fence off their remaining land, where the workshop and houses are. But they hope the city will be good stewards of the land they've nurtured and loved.

"We've protected this creek for so long . . . we just want to make sure it's not going to get messed up, because we're going to continue to live here. If it's not maintained, it will just all go away."

Tiny navy rules Ohio lake's waves

FOSTORIA, Ohio (AP) — The first tongue-in-cheek step toward Fostoria's military might has been launched on a tiny lake as the flagship of the town's Royal Navy — the Titanic II.

The pontoon boat stands ready to protect the five reservoirs around Fostoria, a town of 15,000 in the middle of northwestern Ohio's cornfields. The invading Huns, Fostoria officials fear, may come from bone-dry Western states.

Mayor Kenneth Beier, who last year proposed buying a tank and invading nearby Findlay, said the navy is needed.

"After all, we have five reservoirs, we should