

ROBIN CRAVEY

Attorney

Friends of Barton Springs Pool, Founder

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The creek is the beautiful juice of a dynamic geology. From the time that a shallow sea floor solidified into rock, through the epoch when its western edge was lifted and weather began to sculpt it, to this day, it has gone from a buried stone to a living rock open to the elements. It lives and dies by the fall of the rains.”

I first got involved in Barton Creek preservation in the early 1970s. I was publishing an irregular called Ecology in Texas. I won't say we covered the state, but we paid attention to it. Like most of my generation, I was moved to reverse the assault on the natural world. It was not just a philosophy for me. Camping with my father had taught me to love the piney woods, the gulf coast, the freedom to walk among those reservoirs of sanity.

I was lucky, when I began my advocacy, to find a beacon of homely idealism. Geraldine Watson lived in Silsbee, Texas, and she loved the Big Thicket. She knew how to find pitcher plants, how to burn off an acid bog so that it can regenerate, how to negotiate for a geobiology curriculum at the local college. Quietly, she changed things.

Naturally, I wanted to work in my own town. The new environmental organization in town was the Austin Environmental Council, and they were active on Barton Creek issues. Already, it was an old fight.

I've done various things in service to Barton Creek and Barton Springs over the decades. I made my biggest commitment to Barton Springs in 2006. Along with others, I formed a new volunteer organization we called Friends of Barton Springs Pool.

It began in the summer of 2005, when the pool showed the stress it was under. The water turned green and filled with algae. Swimming was no longer a pleasure.

Old pool-cleaning methods could no longer be used. New methods required lots of manpower. The Friends of Barton Springs Pool resolved to be that manpower. We organized the first spring cleaning in February 2006, then regular cleanings after that, down to the present.

I recruited a hard-working board. Steve Barnick, a friend from Zilker Neighborhood Association, came on as Service Chair, and he made the railroads run. I did much recruiting for the board among our volunteers.

ROBIN CRAVEY CONT'D

From the beginning, I developed a succession plan. After a couple of years, Steve took over the presidency. The next year, he let me have it back. After several more years, I persuaded Gary Beyer to step up. When he stepped down, I recruited Mike Cannatti to take the lead. After a few years, Mike persuaded Steve to come back. Though no longer president, I continued to be active.

The volunteer cleanings were a huge success. The pool got cleaner, and squads of volunteers learned how to take care of the pool.

Once we were invested in the pool in this new way, we looked at it anew, and we saw that it was rundown. We saw room for improvement everywhere, so we talked to the city council. The council responded by funding short-term improvements and authorizing the creation of a master plan for long-term improvements.

Writing a master plan was a huge undertaking, and we put our backs into it. We were lucky to have architects Limbacher and Godfrey to help us. We shepherded the master plan through a years-long gauntlet of public input and public votes. Gradually, the short-term projects were built and the master plan was adopted.

The history of Austin, and of Barton Creek, is one of visionary plans never built. I did not want that to happen to this plan. I helped Mike put together a new group, the Barton Springs Conservancy, dedicated to raising money for the long-term improvements. The fundraising succeeded, and the improvements are moving ahead with all the speed that the city of Austin can muster. (ahem)

I've retreated from Barton Springs to Barton Creek, where I hike and swim and write poetry. Soon I'll release a new book, a meditation on Barton Creek, titled Watermarks.



Love

The creek is the beautiful juice of a dynamic geology. From the time that a shallow sea floor solidified into rock, through the epoch when its western edge was lifted and weather began to sculpt it, to this day, it has gone from a buried stone to a living rock open to the elements. It lives and dies by the fall of the rains.

Imagine a broad plain, submerged beneath a shallow sea, and the sea saturated with a falling rain of dissolved wealth from the surface.

It was a layer of limestone. To the west, a hot boil of magma rose, sought the surface, pushed against the edge. The limestone was exposed to the most powerful force on earth, weather.

With weather came seasons, and seeds, and leaves, and life. With life came drama. The drama continues.

ROBIN CRAVEY CONT'D

Memory

I love the creek on spring days when it runs clear and strong, but not too deep. It's good to have some pools in the curves, but for the straightaway, it should be a foot deep. This is the perfect depth to do horizontal climbing on the creekbed.

Horizontal creekbed climbing is the spontaneous engagement with a current of the right force. Lie on your stomach facing upstream. Our hands and feet should be bracing you from being swept downstream.

If all your strength is not enough to keep you from being swept downstream, get out of the creek and wait for the current to fall.

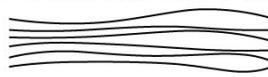
Clinging to the creek bottom, the current sweeping over you is far more powerful than gravity. If you can, let your legs dangle behind while you grasp the rock with your hands. It's an exhilaration like rappelling and surfing.

But, then you have to get to work. The work is to traverse the creekbed. If the current is amenable, climb upstream. With goggles, watch the turbulence and effervescence ahead. If the current is stronger, climb downstream.

That's harder. You are facing upstream, but lowering yourself downstream. Behind you, your feet search for firm purchase. You look over your shoulder to read the current and spot the big rocks.

Eventually, you reach deep water. Flip over and float butt down, fending off obstacles and guiding yourself with your feet. It's easy, then you bump on the shallows, flip over again, and resume your climb.

BARTON CREEK



TIME STREAM