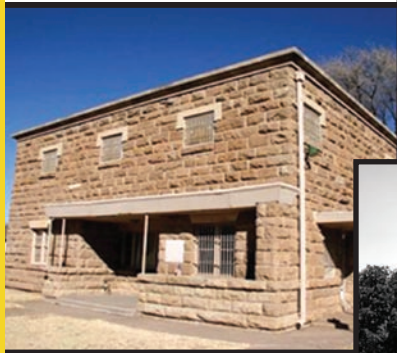


# PANHANDLE CANYONS

By Shelly Horan, TRT Editor/Owner

At first glance at a map, there doesn't look to be much around Amarillo. I've done a stint through here heading to Colorado one year, and only recall lots of flat lands with nothing much in between towns. But taking a closer look, there is a lot of history around this area. Match that with some beautiful scenic rides and you have one heck of a nice trip. If you're from the area or already staying around Amarillo, this makes a nice day trip. For those of us who live elsewhere, you can start from any one of the towns on the loop. Accommodations include everything from hotels/motels to dude ranches to bed-and-breakfasts. So pick a spot and get on the road!

On our map, we start in Claude and work our way clockwise. The town, originally named Armstrong, was established as a stop on the Fort Worth and Denver City Railroad in 1887. It was renamed for Claude Ayers, a railroad engineer, when he drove the first train into town. Today it is the seat of Armstrong County. Claude claims to have had the first Boy Scout Troop (#17) west of the Mississippi. The small town is also a big hit with Hollywood, being host to three movies: The Sundowners (1960), Hud (1963), and Sunshine Christmas (1977).



From Claude, travel east on Highway 287 to Goodnight. Named for famed cattleman, Charles Goodnight of the JA Ranch, the first building in town was reportedly Goodnight's ranch house, built in 1887. Still there, the Goodnight



Ranch facilities, including the buffalo herd (established to help preserve the species); two churches; and the cemetery.

Continue on Highway 287 to Clarendon. Seat of Donley County, the town began with Methodist preacher, Lewis Carhart in 1878 and named it after his wife, Clara. It was established as a no-liquor, no-gambling Christian colony; a "sobriety settlement", as Carhart called it. But became known as "Saints Roost" by those not allowed to be rowdy there. The original town site is underwater now (the Greenbelt Reservoir).

For those who love old architecture, the 1890 Donley County Courthouse sits on East 4<sup>th</sup> Street surrounded by old red brick streets. Recently restored, the Romanesque Revival stone and brick building is the oldest functioning courthouse in the Panhandle. Also in town is the Saints Roost Museum, housed in the former Adair Hospital. Originally founded in 1910 for local cowboys, the museum features antiques and memorabilia from area ranches, farms, and businesses; as well as a renovated railroad depot and a Red River War collection.

Taking a turn south, heading out of Clarendon on Highway 70 with 44 miles of sweepers,



**DONLEY COUNTY COURTHOUSE**  
DESIGNED BY THE ARCHITECTURAL FIRM OF BULGER AND RAFF, AND BUILT BY TROUTMAN BROTHERS CONTRACTORS, BOTH OF TRINIDAD, COLORADO, THIS DISTINCTIVE PUBLIC BUILDING OPENED IN NOVEMBER 1891. THE ORIGINAL ROMANESQUE REVIVAL DESIGN INCLUDED PROMINENT TOWERS, CONTRASTING RED BRICK AND QUARRIED LIMESTONE, AND COMPLEX PROJECTING ELEMENTS. WORK IN THE 1990s RESULTED IN REMOVAL OF THE ENTIRE THIRD FLOOR, AS WELL AS MANY ARCHITECTURAL DETAILS. THE COUNTY RESTORED THE COURTHOUSE TO ITS ORIGINAL SPLENDOR AND REDEDICATED IT ON JULY 4, 2003. TODAY, IT IS THE OLDEST FUNCTIONING COURTHOUSE IN THE TEXAS PANHANDLE.  
RECORDED, TEXAS HISTORIC LANDMARK 2008

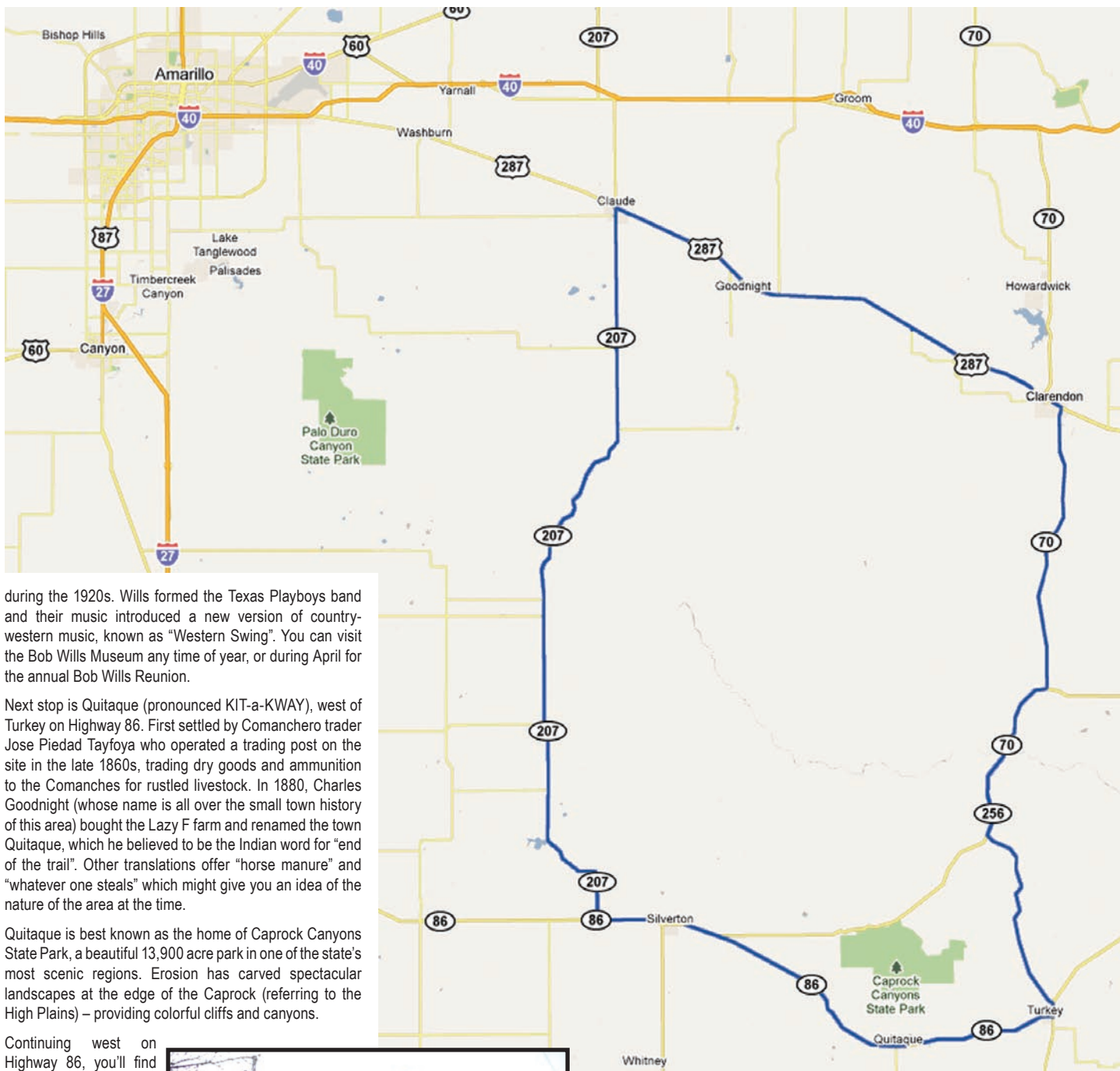
towards Turkey. Riders leaving notes on MotorcycleRoads.us describe this route as "beautiful twisting canyon roads around the edges of Caprock Canyon State Park..." and "the colors in the canyon, both rocks and flora, are incredible."

Just as you would think, Turkey (originally named Turkey Roost) was named for the wild turkey roosts found on nearby Turkey Creek. Originally settled in the 1890s, the town grew to its "height" in 1928 when the railroad came through town, making it an important



shipping point for area farmers and ranchers. However, the Great Depression brought the growth to a stop and population started scaling back.

Turkey is best known as the home of Bob Wills, the King of Western Swing. Wills was a barber here



during the 1920s. Wills formed the Texas Playboys band and their music introduced a new version of country-western music, known as "Western Swing". You can visit the Bob Wills Museum any time of year, or during April for the annual Bob Wills Reunion.

Next stop is Quitaque (pronounced KIT-a-KWAY), west of Turkey on Highway 86. First settled by Comanchero trader Jose Piedad Tayfoya who operated a trading post on the site in the late 1860s, trading dry goods and ammunition to the Comanches for rustled livestock. In 1880, Charles Goodnight (whose name is all over the small town history of this area) bought the Lazy F farm and renamed the town Quitaque, which he believed to be the Indian word for "end of the trail". Other translations offer "horse manure" and "whatever one steals" which might give you an idea of the nature of the area at the time.

Quitaque is best known as the home of Caprock Canyons State Park, a beautiful 13,900 acre park in one of the state's most scenic regions. Erosion has carved spectacular landscapes at the edge of the Caprock (referring to the High Plains) – providing colorful cliffs and canyons.

Continuing west on Highway 86, you'll find more beautiful canyon landscapes. Silverton, the county seat of Briscoe, is next on our



route. The name was reported to have derived from the silvery reflections of the shallow lakes in the area, suggested by the town founder's wife.

the Center for Severe Weather Research DOWs (Dopplers on Wheels). The area has long

You can sometimes spot funny looking vehicles,



been plagued with fires, grasshoppers, dust storms, and tornadoes. The worst disaster was the night of May 15, 1957, when a tornado killed 21 people and did over \$1 million of damage. In town, you can visit the Old Jail Museum (and, yes, a Points Across Texas™ qualified destination). It was built in 1892 and is the oldest building in the county.

Take Highway 86 out of Silverton until you pick up Highway 207. Then it's a beautiful 48 miles through the western edge of the Palo Pinto Canyon, heading north on Highway 207 towards Claude. On nice Sunday afternoons, you can find local riders cooking out on "The Overlook", the south end rest area found about midway on this portion of 207. The route offers changing scenes, from flat agricultural land to plunging grandeur of the canyons. Be sure to take it slow enough for safety – but also to enjoy the phenomenal view.

