



Devil's Backbone

by Betty Sharp



So far, all the ghosts I've met have been friendly. But would they be in a place called Devil's Backbone? If I stayed late enough at the scenic overlook on FR 32, would an ethereal conquistador on a stallion float by? Would I hear the pounding hoofbeats of ghost horses, perhaps carrying displaced Indians or sad Civil War veterans? Would I hotfoot it back to the nearby bars, only to have locals tell of encounters with spirits who both warned of danger and played tricks?

I didn't get a chance in July to test my courage in a faceoff with a ghost, but I did refresh my spirit. It's a gorgeous drive on 32 between 12 and 281. It's a gorgeous drive anywhere in the Hill Country, but there is something mystical about looking across the Balcones Fault Zone while standing on the Edwards Plateau. My geologist friend says the legendary ghostly sounds may be caused by rock formations, not paranormal phenomenon. I'm going to bring her with me sometime and have her explain that. I'll pass it on when I understand it.

It's important to pay attention to the winding road--not the view--when driving 32. As a Wimberley Visitor's Center volunteer cautioned, please don't park on the side of the road. Heading west on 32 from 12, the scenic overlook is on your right, just a short distance past the bars on your left. It's a lovely place.

My travelling buddy and I sat for quite a while, gazing at the formations. I'm not much of a picture taker, but artists and photographers will want sketch pads and cameras. I'd rather keep memories in written words. As I wrote down my

thoughts, it occurred to me that this place had a special aura beyond spectacular beauty. It had to do with the chain link fence that keeps people from tumbling down hill.

We found dozens of tributes to individuals and some to animals along the fence. Crosses, purchased and handmade, bits of jewelry and flowers, signs—even a collar for a dog named Ollie—were threaded in the chain link.

Our first thought was of memorials to those in roadside accidents, but that didn't seem to fit. A woman near us said these were tributes to those who loved Devil's Backbone. I think she's right. These are tributes not to sad accidents but to treasured lives. No matter one's difficulties, the beauty of a special place is healing. This is a good place to honor memories.



I hope to sit all night under the stars along Devil's Backbone someday. I'm not sure what I'd do if I heard unexplainable sounds or saw an apparition, but what an adventure it would be! Just for fun in the meantime, there's "Ghostly Chills, the Devil's Backbone 2." Compiled by Bert Wall, who was a Texas rancher and historian, this short book of scary stories is perfect Halloween storytelling. It's available online along with a wealth of material about Devil's Backbone.

A venerable site for Texas stories is Texasfolkloresociety.org. Look for their older anthologies in libraries. I checked out 1965's "Coyote Wisdom." It takes me right to the heart of Texas legends.