

## Notebooks Capture 50 years of Freese and Nichols at Red River

### How It All Began

Jim Nichols was there for the phone call: Simon Freese to Marvin Nichols, long distance from Red River, New Mexico, to Fort Worth, summer of 1960. It went something like this: "Marvin, this is Si. I've just written a check for \$12,000. I hope we have enough money in the bank to cover it."

That's how Freese and Nichols came to own the employees' Upper Valley Cabin in Red River, New Mexico. Simon Freese had a family cabin in Red River since the end of World War II and loved the remote, mountainous retreat.

He was generous enough to share the cabin with Freese and Nichols employees; but, according to Jim Nichols, Red River vacations and weekends for the firm's employees, a whopping 30 at that time, began to interfere with Si's own plans. He purchased the existing Upper Valley Cabin from Dr. Johnson, a dentist in Dalhart, for use by Freese and Nichols employees. Freese and Nichols employees have vacationed at the Upper Valley Cabin and more recently at the Young's Ranch Cabin now for nearly 50 years.

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Upper Valley Cabin visitors writing in the first notebook, which covers from about 1973 to 1987, consistently cite The Jeep.

### Chapter One: The Jeep

At some point, the firm began providing a used Jeep for traveling the area's primitive roads and trails. As soon as visitors described the Jeep in the notebook, it was trouble.

In 1973, Tom Gooch's mother, Rachel, wrote, "Radiator leaks, and brakes are very bad!" Others added lists of needed repairs, which close with an unmanly slap: the Jeep "lacks power." The most foreboding admonition that year: "If battery is down on Jeep, there are jumper cables in wooden box between seats."

The notebook takes up again in 1977, when Dick Spencer warned of the Jeep, "You need to 'ride' the clutch lightly so it won't rattle."

Jeep-related entries in 1978 demonstrate Freese and Nichols' innovative approaches: "The door locks on the Jeep are jammed, but the tailgate is open" and "Jeep clutch 'stop' under dash is bent. It has been repaired by

bending back and using duct tape. If dragging noise is heard, you may need to redo."

Dick Spencer ended his list of repairs that year with: "Right-turn signal hasn't worked in three years, BUT who needs it in Red River?"

Then, in July 25 through September entries, the Jeep is located at the Chevron station in

Red River: "... still does not run . . . still isn't fixed (wrong part came in) . . . in sad shape . . . it rattled our teeth! . . . no idea when it will be fixed."

### Location: Unknown

When the Nichols opened the cabin in 1979, they wrote, "Location of Jeep unknown."

The Camerons found

the Jeep in town and added, "but doesn't work." Susan Bulls later took a more practical approach: "Didn't check on the Jeep."

Toward the end of the 1979 summer season, Bob Boykin predicted the Jeep's demise: "The Jeep is out of service," and added that Lee Freese could decide what to do with it.

The Jeep isn't mentioned again until 1985, when Ernest Clement's family wrote: "Since a Jeep is no longer furnished here (for reasons understood), we had to settle for a Jeep tour up to Middlefork Lake. It's still as beautiful as we remembered."

Lee Freese was asked recently if he had trashed the Jeep. Lee laughed and said, "I don't remember trashing it. If anything, I would've worked on it to get it back up and running."

Did Jeep users' misfortunes diminish their Red River experience? This added by Joy Clement, whose family rented a Jeep: "My parents have been bringing me here for about 27 years now. And the memories

I have of the Red River experience are special. Please take care of the property and do maintenance when you can. Enjoy your stay!"

Eunice and Simon Freese in the early days of the Red River cabin and Jeep.

"The road through the pass was all switchbacks, and the road from the village was really scary," Jim Nichols said of early Red River. "It barely clung to the side of the hill."

Jim said that after her first precarious trip to the cabin, his mother swore that if she ever got out of there alive, she was never going back.



This series is written by George Bowden in Fort Worth.

# Chipmunks, Hummingbirds Highlight History of Red River Cabins

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## Congratulations!

Congratulations to Ashley Johnson on her recent engagement to Justin Sutton. The couple plans to wed in Monroe, LA, in October.

Ashley is a marketing coordinator in Fort Worth.

Three things remain consistent in Red River: nature's beauty, chipmunks and hummingbirds. Guests who have visited the Freese and Nichols' cabins during the past 30+ years almost always commented on the area's breathtaking beauty and then described the voracious eating habits and the welcome-wagon greetings of the chipmunks and hummingbirds.

### Hummingbirds

An ongoing debate over the recipe for hummingbird food continued for more than three decades in the Upper Valley Cabin notebook. The recipe recorded in July 1977 called for: "1 cup water, 2 tablespoons sugar, boil 5 minutes, cool (editor's note: for you non-engineers, this is a 8:1 ratio of water to sugar)."

A week later, a cabin visitor must have wanted more entertainment from the hummingbirds. The new recipe: "2 cups HOT water, ½ cup sugar. Stir to dissolve and let cool," doubling the hummingbird's sugar consumption. Remainder of entry says, "They are FUN to watch, and the orange one is a bully."

The 4:1 water-to-sugar recipe remained in place until 2002, when Jim Humphrey's wife Judy mixed a 3:1 batch. "We set them out every morning and were dive-bombed! They appear to have gained some weight while we have been here."

The sugar-addicted hummingbirds became more demanding. In 2005, Dwain Brown's wife Jan wrote: "We bought a sack of sugar in hopes there would be some left – but word got around and we made over a gallon of hummingbird food."

12-year-old Sarah Dunlap innocently noted a week later: "I loved the hummingbirds and even got some to sit on my fingers while they ate. We fed the hummingbirds a five-pound bag of sugar (and more). They are very hungry little birds."

In addition to the water-to-sugar ratio, feeder chefs debated the need for red food coloring in the mixture. But the Boutwells, in 1984, may have offered the most innovative recipe:

"There was no food coloring to be found. I improvised. We had one can of Big Red soda left from the trip. I poured a little of that stuff in the feeder for coloring. The little hummers loved it."

### Chipmunks

No one ever debated chipmunk food. They ate everything! Melody Allen wrote in 1981 that the chipmunks even enjoyed their own entertainment while they ate: "Our two chipmunks love to eat off the kitchen windowsill and watch while you do the dishes."

Bread has always been the chipmunk staple, but they've enjoyed a wide variety of foods: "a special fondness for tortilla chips, homemade biscuits and brownies," Sara Beth Watson (1981); "love potato peels and bread," the Churchwells (1983); "ate watermelon seeds, melon seeds," Jennifer Zuckman (1984); "some very aggressive chipmunks (one took a cookie out of Kevin's hand . . . talk about an upset kid!)," the Alan Jones family (1989): "and the chipmunks play around the porch, roll in the dirt, and eat the Cheez-Its," Geri Hejnicky (1998).

Chipmunk treats even included people: "the FAT ONE BITES," Norma Reid (1983).

Toss in peanuts, cheeseballs, Cheerios, pancakes, and "steak and potatoes, leafy vegetables, Doritos and popcorn;" and you have the complete Red

River chipmunk diet.

But chipmunk obesity didn't go unnoticed. An anonymous 1991 entry notes: "Sharon's been feeding the wildlife, so don't be surprised next year if you see a 10-lb. chipmunk."

### A Night Visitor

In 1996, Tom Gooch's note described a late-night snack by a different kind of Red River resident: "Something broke the hummingbird feeder I put up outside the living room window. It pulled the bottle from the base, then neatly tore the flowers off the base." Be sure to read next month's @freese.com for more Red River cabin history.



Kyle, nephew of Fort Worth engineer Katie Helmberger, makes friends at the Upper Cabin.

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## Red River bears make early-morning wake-ups, scary introductions

Thirty years of visitors' comments in the Upper Valley Cabin's notebooks almost always highlight the food-seeking antics of the chipmunks and the frantic, sugar-powered activity of the hummingbirds. But late-night visits and unexpected intrusions of less-than-welcome guests regularly make their way into the Red River notebooks.

### No Lions or Tigers, But ...

Bears debuted in June 1978, with a simple anonymous entry: 'Bear reported sighted in meadow south of cabin on Wednesday.' As Red River grew and bears recognized the Upper Valley Cabin as a source of food and the entertainment of sending campers scampering, the notebook entries increased.

In July 1993, Melanie Ripley wrote, "A bear walked through the yard that very morning. We had been looking forward to getting back to nature; we just hadn't expected nature to come looking for us." The following week, Tom Gooch added, "Lunch was interrupted by a cinnamon-colored black bear, which chased all inside (some scared, some terrified, some excited)."

Emily Richardson highlighted bear-related cabin improvements in July 1995: "You have noticed the new screen door on the back porch. Well, that was because during Thursday night, a bear came and ripped up the screen to get our trash can (you may notice the claw marks and teeth bites)." Unfortunately, six years later, David Sloan apparently hadn't read Emily's notes. He wrote, "We left our trash in the screened back porch area and forgot to bring it in the kitchen for the night. A large black bear decided to make it his breakfast about 5:00. So much for a good night's sleep and early departure."

And maybe reading the previous notebook entries is not for everyone, as imaginations ran wild. In June 2000, a sleepy-sounding Jana Collier noted, "Convinced the boys at 2:00 this morning that the shades banging on the porch is not a bear."

But Jana could've been wrong. A few weeks later, Michael Robertson described his early morning interruption: "About 2:45 a.m., we heard a lot of noise

outside, we turned on the porch light, and there was a bear on the front porch. We forgot to bring in the hummingbird feeder and the bear had knocked it down to eat the sweet sugar nectar. It was hard to go back to sleep after finding a big bear on the porch."

### On the Lookout

That same summer, Janis Murphy took note of the previous entries and wrote, "After reading some of the entries in the book, I ran outside to bring in the hummingbird feeder. All I could think of was the 'bears, bats and mice (oh, my!).'"

A few weeks later, the children of an unnamed mom also had read those previous entries and took matters into their own sneaky hands. Their mom recorded, "As I was washing the kitchen windows, the kids wanted to be sure I didn't clean off what they are sure is a bear paw . . . turned out to be an F&N paw though, as it was on the inside of the kitchen window!"

Joel Werland followed David Sloan's 2001 visit and noticed, upon his arrival, local animal control officers setting a trap for the 300-lb. bear that tore through the Sloans' garbage. Joel described his party's response: "I have to admit that our party displayed various degrees of bravery . . . we are going to bed with noise-makers (pots and pans) nearby in case the 'real bear' comes again. Hopefully, this won't be our last entry."

Sherry Beck opened the 2002 summer season with some apprehension: "Our first day here, we had to stop and let a black bear cross the road. He/she had the right of way!"

City slickers often mistake other creatures for the more fearsome bears. In 1994, Jane Arrington wrote about a large black sheepdog, which she described as "very friendly and his tags are up-to-date." Unfortunately, John New was another who must not have read the notebook's previous entries. His family followed the Arringtons and wrote, "If you see a huge black dog, don't mistake it for a bear like one of us did. (I've never seen John run so fast!)"



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