

...Young Farmer & Rancher Conference

(Continued from previous page) show The Daytripper, and Matt Rush, an inspirational speaker from the Texas Panhandle. “This conference will also be a great opportunity for networking with other farmer and ranchers,” she said. “You’ll be able to talk with other young producers around the state and gain some ideas and tips to apply to your business, as well as establish some new contacts.” The conference is open to college students and young farmers and ranchers ages 18 to

35. Additional registration information, including costs, can be found online at <https://texasfarmbureau.org/YFR>. CDC guidelines, including social distancing, will be followed at the in-person event. Registration for virtual or in-person participation for the conference closes on March 12. Login or create an account at my.texasfarmbureau.org to register for the YF&R Conference. For questions regarding the conference, contact youngfarmers@txfb.org or call 254.751.2489.

Every Day is Hump Day

By Pam LeBlanc Doug Baum strides through the prickly Chihuahuan Desert of West Texas, a straw cowboy hat shading his face from the sun and a string of five camels sauntering behind him. I’m perched high atop one of those camels, listening intently as Baum, owner of Texas Camel Corps, points out a canyon wren’s nest, stops to inspect a rust-colored millipede marching across our path and then explains the role camels played in the Lone Star State’s history. “Texas is perfect for camels,” says Baum, born in the West Texas town of Big Spring. “That point was not lost on the Army when they decided to use camels out here in the 1850s.” That’s when the U.S. military imported 75 camels from Egypt, Turkey and Tunisia for use as pack animals. For nearly a decade, the heat-resistant creatures carried water and hauled supplies for the U.S. cavalry at Camp Verde, south of Kerrville. When the program ended in 1866, the army sold the animals. Some wound up in California; others hauled freight between Texas and Mexico; a few ended up in traveling shows; and some made their way to Austin, where they were kept along Congress Avenue

near the river and then sold off a few at a time. Today Baum, who lives with his menagerie on a farm near Valley Mills, where he is a member of Heart of Texas Electric Cooperative, keeps the camels’ history alive by introducing his cartoonish but affectionate creatures at events around the state. I’ve joined him at Cibolo Creek Ranch, south of Marfa, for an overnight camel-riding trek to learn more about the role they once played in the Big Bend. I feel like I’m riding a rocking chair strapped to a stepladder that’s being dragged down a gravel road. It’s both rough and rolling, with the bonus that my camel, Cinco, swings his neck around to give me a big goofy smile now and then. Baum first fell in love with camels while working as a professional musician in Nashville in the 1990s, when he played drums for country music star Trace Adkins. He took a day job working at the Nashville Zoo. “I had zero experience with camels,” he says. “Within a week I was absolutely smitten. They’re sweet, affectionate, playful and so, so gentle.” They’ve also got leathery, pie-sized feet; spindly, stiltlike legs; nostrils that squeeze shut to keep

out blowing sand; and peach-sized eyes fringed in lush, 3-inch lashes. Baum stuck with music for a while, but eventually “the camel thing just won,” he says. “It was an obvious choice to me.” He moved back to Texas and in 1998 bought four camels, with the idea of using them for educational programs. Two of those camels - Richard and Cinco - are with us on this cool

September afternoon, slowing periodically to munch on creosote bushes. “They teach me what I should be - patient, observant, methodical,” Baum says of his camels. “These are things I recognize I lack in myself.” He leads treks each spring and fall at Cibolo Creek and delivers members of his eight-camel herd to museums, parks, schools and libraries. He also leads treks

in Egypt, where he has a second home, and if you need a camel for a church Nativity, he’s the guy to call. Part of Baum’s mission is to dispel myths about camels. They’re not, he says, ornery, smelly beasts that spit at people. Their humps aren’t filled with water, either, though a camel can go 10 days or more without a drink. (Continued on next page)

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