



Worth Ranch: The Big Adventure

A history of Scouting, service, fellowship, and resilience on the Brazos

Prepared for Longhorn Council, Scouting America | August 25, 2026

Editorial note: This history gives priority to the draft narrative prepared for the Texas Historical Marker on FM 4. Supporting timelines, council histories, Longhorn Council Historical Society records, and personal recollections add context. Where sources differ, the marker draft controls or the wording is qualified.

A Camp Tested by Fire

On August 24, 2026, the Ross Fire began west of Palo Pinto and raced across Palo Pinto and Jack counties under extreme heat, dry vegetation, low humidity, and high winds. By the afternoon of August 25, officials reported approximately 50,000 acres burned and only limited containment. Longhorn Council confirmed that Worth Ranch suffered catastrophic damage. No Scouts, campers, or guests were present, and camp personnel evacuated safely. A building-by-building assessment was not yet possible while the area remained restricted.

The loss is painful because Worth Ranch has never been merely a collection of facilities. Its native-stone buildings, juniper-covered slopes, Brazos River bottoms, campsites, museum, pools, chapel, and trails formed the setting for nearly a century of growth. Thousands of young people found adventure there; adult leaders found fellowship and purpose; families passed the experience from one generation to the next.

The fire therefore marks a devastating chapter, but not the end of the story. Worth Ranch was created during hard times through vision, generosity, thrift, labor, and faith in young people. Those same qualities can rebuild it for a second century.

The Land Before Worth Ranch

Long before Scouts arrived, the Brazos River corridor supported Indigenous peoples. The historical marker identifies Wichita subtribes in the area before the 1850s, while supplemental research also notes Caddo connections. The river, springs, limestone bluffs, game, and broad flats made the region useful for travel, settlement, and seasonal occupation. Later stories sometimes attached other tribes or famous individuals to the exact property, but the marker research wisely uses the more supportable Wichita account.

Ranching became established in Palo Pinto County during the nineteenth century. Henry Clay McClure and his wife, Texas Anna, moved from East Texas in 1876 and purchased approximately 800 acres north of Palo Pinto, later adding another 365 acres to the west. They raised four children and continued ranching. Henry Clay McClure died in 1890, and Texas Anna remained connected to the property for decades.

The rugged site lay along the Brazos in Chick Bend, several miles north of Palo Pinto. A high, comparatively level plateau overlooked steep valleys and the river bottom. Kyle Mountain, Split Rock, Hugo's Crack, cliffs, springs, and winding trails gave the land the wilderness character that Scouting leaders wanted - and that generations of Scouts would come to love.

A Vision for a Wilderness Camp

The Fort Worth Scouting movement began before the national Boy Scouts of America was incorporated in 1910. A formal local council organized in 1919, and Camp LeRoy Shuman on Lake Worth soon became its principal campsite. By the late 1920s, however, the city had grown around Camp Shuman. The property was useful but increasingly civilized and too small for the council's ambitions.

In 1928, Daniel Carter Beard - a founder of American Scouting and the organization's National Scout Commissioner - visited Camp Shuman. He encouraged the council to secure a true wilderness camp. Local outdoorsman Joseph H. 'Joe' Taylor had already guided Fort Worth troops into the Palo Pinto area and recommended the future Worth Ranch site.

Scout Executive A. J. 'Jerry' Fulkerson supplied the drive and administrative leadership. On February 19, 1929, community leaders organized the Boy Scout Foundation, Fort Worth Area Council, specifically to acquire, develop, and hold permanent camp property. The state approved its charter on February 25. On March 4, Texas Anna McClure sold the western section of the family ranch to the Foundation. The original Scout tract was roughly 300 acres and cost approximately \$4,000.

Scouts camped on the new property in 1929 before the permanent complex was finished. Joe Taylor became foreman and 'Hike Master,' living with his family in the Foreman's House and teaching Scouts the country he knew as hunter, trapper, cowboy, rancher, naturalist, and amateur student of archaeology. The camp was named Worth Ranch for Fort Worth, the community whose volunteers and businesses made it possible.

Building Worth Ranch in the Great Depression

Soon after the purchase, Foundation president Charles F. Roeser gathered Fort Worth business leaders for a fundraising luncheon and asked individuals and families to sponsor buildings. Their gifts created an unusually complete permanent camp:

The LeRoy Shuman Museum - A. L. Shuman family

Roeser Hall and kitchen - Charles F. Roeser

Landreth Lodge - E. A. Landreth

The Trading Post - Dan A. Levy

Holmes Infirmary - Floyd Holmes and his mother, Alma Holmes

The stables - Thomas I. Byrne in honor of W. W. Reynolds

The wash house - Frank T. Pickerell

Native stone gave the original buildings their unmistakable character. Historical accounts credit Henry McClure with hauling building stone by wagon. Clyde A. Penry served as the volunteer contractor and building committee leader. The buildings were arranged around a parade ground in a manner reminiscent of old Fort Worth. Red slate roofs, broad porches, arches, and massive walls made the complex practical, fire-resistant by the standards of the day, and visually rooted in Palo Pinto County.

By July 1930, eight equipped buildings were in use, supported by a water system and an electric line connected to Palo Pinto. The Foundation reported expenditures of \$48,805.45 for land, construction,

equipment, general expense, and other improvements. Labor and materials were obtained competitively - evidence of Fulkerson's famous ability to make every dollar work.

Worth Ranch officially opened June 9, 1930, and was dedicated June 15. The first council winter camp followed in December. Creating such a substantial facility as the Great Depression deepened was an exceptional civic achievement. The founders did not build for a season; they built for generations.

Becoming “The Big Adventure”

The early program matched the landscape. Burros carried packs. Chuck wagons supported hikes and outdoor meals. Scouts rode, explored, cooked, swam in the river, studied nature, and followed trails far beyond the boundaries that would be possible today. Camp lore included the mysterious Podunk marker, the Worth Ranch Grace written by Jerry Fulkerson, songs after meals, campfires, and stories shared beneath a vast night sky.

In 1936, Frank Irving 'Cap' Kidd arrived with his wife, Beryl, and their son, Jim. An experienced professional Scouter and camp director, Kidd became ranger and initially also served Scouting in Palo Pinto and Parker counties. He remained at Worth Ranch for 21 years, until 1957.

Cap Kidd could manage a summer program, repair a water system, teach outdoor cooking, tell a story, lead a song, and command a room without theatrics. His morning coffee gatherings gave unit leaders a place to discuss problems before the Scouts awakened. His staff taught newcomers that the camp belonged to them and that fairness, safety, service, and care for the property were part of the adventure.

The name 'The Big Adventure' was in use no later than 1936; surviving camp stationery from that year carries the phrase. It became more than a slogan. It described the physical challenge of the Ranch and the inward change experienced there. The Worth Ranch song, the campfire ring, the view of Kyle Mountain, and the fellowship of a troop became permanent memories for generations.

Depression, War, and Growth

Worth Ranch continued operating through the Depression as membership and attendance slowly recovered. In 1940, Council president John W. Herbert funded a permanent swimming pool because the Brazos was not always suitable for safe instruction. Camp records describe it as the first filtered swimming pool in Texas. It was completed in late 1940 or early 1941, near the time Morris Sheppard Dam began controlling floods upstream and changing the river below Possum Kingdom Lake.

During World War II, the pool was used for military swimming and diving instruction. The historical timeline places this training in 1943, before D-Day. That episode illustrates the practical public service of Scouting: a camp built to teach boys also helped prepare servicemen for war.

By 1946, the original camp had endured nearly two decades of hard use. The kitchen was repaired and plans were made to enlarge Roeser Hall. When Jerry Fulkerson died in February 1947, friends and Scouters created a native-stone outdoor chapel in his memory. The chapel embodied the spiritual foundation that had always accompanied adventure at Worth Ranch. Camp Todd, honoring longtime Council Commissioner D. H. B. Todd, was dedicated on July 13, 1947.

The Fort Worth Area Council became the Longhorn Council in 1949, reflecting the importance of communities beyond Fort Worth. Worth Ranch remained the common ground where Scouts and leaders from a growing North Texas territory became one council.

The River Bottoms, Order of the Arrow, and Aquatics

In the 1950s, the Brazos bottomland was dense with trees, vines, and brush. Senior Scouts and volunteers opened areas for shooting sports and camping. Members of the Order of the Arrow later cleared additional ground through demanding service projects. Their work transformed the Bottoms into one of the Ranch's most distinctive program areas while preserving the sense of wilderness.

Worth Ranch became home to Nishkin Halupa A Pe Lachi Lodge of the Order of the Arrow in 1953. The lodge contributed countless hours to trails, campsites, the council ring, ceremonies, and maintenance. For many members, service at Worth Ranch became a lifelong expression of the Order's ideals.

Aquatics School began in 1954 and became one of the Longhorn Council's signature programs. Scouts learned swimming, lifesaving, rowing, canoeing, leadership, and responsibility. The Brazos provided challenges no ordinary pool could offer: cold releases from Possum Kingdom, shifting currents, shallows, rapids, sandbars, and long canoe journeys. Alumni remembered invitations to Aquatics School as a mark of trust and accomplishment.

Cap Kidd retired in 1957. The Captain Kidd Council Ring, constructed in 1958, honored the ranger whose influence had become inseparable from the camp. Oscar Bilger succeeded him and brought the mechanical skill needed by an aging property. Known for stretching limited resources and fixing nearly anything, Bilger served until his sudden death in 1967. Jeff Mason Robinson followed, adding improvements such as building eaves, windows, and the familiar gazebo near the parade ground.

Traditions Carried Forward

Worth Ranch changed, but its essentials remained remarkably stable. Scouts still marched to meals, sang in the dining hall, swam, hiked, learned outdoor skills, worshiped, explored the museum, and gathered around fires. Campers knew Split Rock, Hugo's Crack, Camp Todd, the boat docks, the parade ground, the chapel, and the climb between the Bottoms and main camp. Nicknames such as Hernia Hill preserved the humor that made hardship part of the fun.

The museum itself became a guardian of memory. Originally the LeRoy Shuman Museum, it displayed Scouting objects, natural history specimens, Indigenous artifacts collected under earlier practices, ranch tools, fossils, wildlife, and Paul Siple's Antarctic snowshoes. After losses and changes during the 1960s, volunteers renovated the building in 1975 and again in the late 1990s, improving displays, lighting, climate control, records, and care of collections.

The camp's story was also carried by its rangers and staff. Allen Johnson began service in 1977 and remained for 24 years, the longest ranger tenure to that date. Staff members returned as adult volunteers, parents, donors, and committee leaders. The Order of the Arrow, the Worth Ranch staff family, the Longhorn Council Historical Society, and generations of unit leaders supplied labor and institutional memory that no operating budget could purchase.

A 50th-anniversary time capsule was placed near the museum in 1980. Volunteers built the Hernia Hill stairway in 1986. These were visible symbols of a deeper pattern: each generation inherited the Ranch, added something useful, and passed it on.

Renewal for a New Century

The 1990s and early 2000s brought major investments. Crawford's Way improved access between the upper camp and the river bottom. A municipal waterline completed in 1993 connected Worth Ranch to

Palo Pinto and supplemented the old well system. Landreth Lodge was remodeled as the camp office in 1994, and the pool complex was reconstructed with a second recreation pool and deck.

A new ranger residence and the Climbing Garden were added in 1997. Breitling Campsite honored John Breitling, a former Worth Ranch camp director and national Scouting author. In 1998, the Council acquired adjacent property to the east, nearly doubling the Ranch's acreage and opening new possibilities near Kyle Mountain.

The air-conditioned Duncan Dining Hall opened in 2000 through the generosity of Arlington businessman Bob Duncan. Youth showers and other support facilities improved health, safety, and comfort while the original stone buildings continued to serve. The Jack Boyd Flagpole was dedicated in 2005. Later additions included Charlie Martin's year-round Ski Slope in 2014; the J. Howard Davis entrance sign in 2015; the Lorenzetti Shelter in 2016, honoring Eagle Scout, Army officer, and diplomat Dario Lorenzetti; the Ideal Scout statue and Deren Wright sundial in 2018; renovation of the Foreman's House for first aid and meetings in 2021; and paving of Welcome Plaza in 2024.

These improvements did not turn Worth Ranch into a resort. They allowed an historic camp to meet changing expectations while retaining its rugged identity. Air conditioning, water, accessibility, communications, and modern program areas supported the mission; Kyle Mountain, the Brazos, service, fellowship, and adventure remained the heart.

What Worth Ranch Has Meant

The significance of Worth Ranch cannot be measured only in acreage, buildings, or attendance. Its real product has been character. A first-year camper learned to care for a tent and keep commitments to a patrol. A swimmer learned courage at the edge of the pool. A staff member learned to teach and lead. A Scoutmaster found fellowship over early coffee. An Order of the Arrow member learned that cheerful service could leave a place better than he found it.

Worth Ranch also bound generations together. Parents brought children to the same parade ground, chapel, trails, and campfires they had known. Former staffers returned for workdays. Rangers became legends; legends became stories; stories became standards for the next generation. The phrase 'Worth Ranch Brand' came to describe that permanent claim of memory, loyalty, and fellowship.

Because the camp was used for its original purpose for nearly a century, its history remained living rather than merely commemorative. The stone arches were not museum scenery. Scouts passed beneath them on the way to meals, instruction, and adventure. The value of rebuilding lies precisely there: future youth deserve to encounter history as something they can enter, use, care for, and continue.

The Next Big Adventure: Recovery and Renewal

The Ross Fire has created needs that will become clearer only after emergency authorities allow a full assessment of the property and its resources. The path forward may involve preserving historic masonry and architectural features, repairing or replacing damaged facilities and infrastructure, restoring utilities, roads, water and fire-protection systems, conserving museum collections and program equipment, addressing erosion and invasive species concerns, restoring habitats, and supporting years of natural recovery and replanting.

As decisions are made, it will be important to honor the recognizable Worth Ranch landscape, traditions, and character while thoughtfully addressing the challenges and risks of the future. Whether through restoration, preservation, replacement, or other approaches, efforts should respect the camp's history

while ensuring it can continue serving future generations. The story of the fire and the recovery that follows may become an important chapter in the continuing history of Worth Ranch.

That work will require a broad coalition: Scouts and families, alumni, staff veterans, volunteers, foundations, businesses, preservationists, conservation partners, emergency-service supporters, and friends of youth development. Gifts of every size can help. So can professional expertise, historic photographs, plans, oral histories, artifacts, and volunteer service coordinated through the Council.

Worth Ranch was born from a community's belief that young people needed wilderness, challenge, faith, fellowship, and responsible freedom. That need has not diminished. The fire damaged the place, but it did not erase its purpose. Determining the future of Worth Ranch, preserving its legacy, and supporting its recovery will be the next Big Adventure.

Worth Ranch was born from a community's belief that young people needed wilderness, challenge, faith, fellowship, and responsible freedom. That need has not diminished. The fire damaged the place, but it did not erase the purpose.

Selected Historical Sources and Editorial Notes

Draft of the story for the Worth Ranch historical marker located on FM 4 (controlling historical narrative supplied for this project).

100 Year Worth Ranch Historical Timeline, prepared for a State of Texas Historical Marker application by Kent Couch and David Moller, Longhorn Council Historical Society.

Maurice G. Lambert, Memories of Worth Ranch and Longhorn Council Historical Society Historical Reference Documents, including files on Worth Ranch, Joe Taylor, Frank 'Cap' Kidd, Oscar Bilger, the museum, the gates, campsites, staff, and the chuck wagon.

Longhorn Council histories: A Resume of the History of Longhorn Council Boy Scouts of America Foundation; 2004 Kurtzman Council History; and A History of the Longhorn Council, BSA, 1908-2022.

Worth Ranch historical summary and Arcadia Publishing topic summary supplied by Kent Couch and the Longhorn Council Historical Society.

Personal Worth Ranch recollections preserved in the uploaded worth-ranch.htm file. Recollections were used for atmosphere and interpretation, not to override the marker draft on disputed facts.

Current fire reporting consulted August 25, 2026: [CBS Texas](#) and [FOX 4 Dallas-Fort Worth](#). Fire acreage, containment, access restrictions, and damage reports are time-sensitive and should be updated before website publication if official information changes.

Claims such as 'first filtered swimming pool in Texas' and 'oldest continuously operating Scout summer camp in Texas' appear in Longhorn Council records. This narrative attributes or qualifies those claims where appropriate. Exact rebuilding needs and losses remain subject to official inspection.

