BIG BEND
Sentinel

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What's in a name?



ROB D'AMICO

The Shafter ghost town gets a new name with a TxDOT typo.

Shafter

I didn't notice it for quite some time—several trips into my little home ghost town coming north on Highway 67 from Presidio. But finally, I took a closer look at the brand new highway sign for this beloved place tucked against the Cienega Mountains: "Shatfner."

Meh. An "n." Leave it. Might as well confuse tourists or let them post about their visit to social media with the error.

I'm unsure how many people in the little town of Shafter—population 25, 40 miles south of Marfa—noticed the typo. One resident, former Presidio County Judge Monroe Elms, says he also passed it several times without notice until his 10-year-old son, William, pointed it out. "He told me about it, but I just kept driving."

Lauren Macias-Cervantes, a TxDOT spokesperson in El Paso, quelled the anxiety that this snafu might have caused for the Big Bend by telling me a new sign with the correct spelling was installed on Monday, March 23. Macias-Cervantes, by the way, has always been patient with me, even when tensions could have boiled over when TxDOT said the cost of the blinking stop signs installed in Marfa last year were exempt from being public information. Here was the highlight of my career as an investigative reporter being stifled by a highway bureaucrat, but she was right, according to federal law.

Jeffrey Roberts, a Presidio resident who does occasional work in Shafter, might have had the best explanation for the error. "It wouldn't be the first time TxDOT or a contractor had a 'fat finger' moment on a green sign," he posted on Facebook. "We've seen 'Coriscana' instead of 'Corsicana' and 'Gaudalupe River' instead of 'Guadalupe' in the past. It ain't on the good guys who work very hard at TxDOT to ensure that our roadways are safe ... blame Otto Korecht in Austin for the error."

I recall riding my bike in Austin one day long ago and passing a street sign heading toward Lady Bird Lake. "Burt Reynolds DR." "Whoa," I thought. "I never knew he had a street named after him here." He had just died,

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A documentary team films the French murder suspect's former best friend during a trip to Terlingua to look for clues on the whereabouts of Xavier Dupont de Ligonnès.

Investigator traces French murder suspect to Alpine

Documentary team explores the Big Bend for clues

The Big Bend was abuzz last week when Brewster County Sheriff Ronny Dodson posted a BOLO—be on the lookout—on Facebook asking people to report any sightings of a French murder suspect on the lam from his home country. Why? Because an admittedly obsessed French investigator had traveled here, interviewed Dodson and relayed information that the suspect had previously been in Alpine in 1990 and might have returned there 21 years after he fled his native country.

A French film crew, accompanied by the investigator—Gilles Galloux—arrived in the Big Bend last week looking for clues on the whereabouts of Xavier Dupont de Ligonnès, alleged to have killed his entire family in 2011 in Nantes, in Western France, before fleeing the country—never to be seen by friends or police since. The horrific crime is known in France as the "Nantes Massacre," and Dupont de Ligonnès is alleged to have drugged and then shot his wife, four children and two dogs before burying them under their home's porch. The bodies were not located for about two weeks, since Dupont de Ligonnès had sent correspondence to the children's school saying they were moving out of the country, and friends of the wife were told she was ill.



Mindy, Laura, Xavier Dupont de Ligonnès and Michel Rétif at Crystal Bar in Alpine in 1990.

"In making this film, I am not trying to track down the killer, but to understand the story of an ordinary man who, after murdering his entire family, managed to evade the police and disappear," said Adrien Pinon, the film's director, after he sat down for a conversation with *Big Bend Sentinel* in Marfa. "It is one of the most fascinating and mysterious true crime cases in the world." Accompanying Pinon and Galloux was a former best friend of Dupont de Ligonnès who did not want to be named at this time.

Through a Facebook group, the longtime investigator in the case, Galloux, managed to obtain photographs from Alpine in 1990 that show Dupont de Ligonnès hanging out with women in Alpine and Fort Davis. One photo, notably, is with two women, Dupont de Ligonnès, and another male friend, Michel Rétif, at Crystal Bar. Those photographs eventually led to the names of the women, along with another woman who owned a ranch where the suspect stayed at one point.

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SURVEY MARKERS IN STATE PARK RAISE QUESTIONS ABOUT WALL PLANS

Dozens of mapping markers appear on River Road west to Presidio

By Rob D'Amico

A survey marker recently pounded into park land by the Hoodoos Trail in Big Bend Ranch State Park is raising questions about what it's for—in possible relation to a border wall, when it was installed, who put it there and whether any park officials were aware of it.

Opponents of the wall also were concerned that even though Customs and Protection told local officials on March 22 there would be no steel walls in the state park, the CBP smart wall map wasn't updated to reflect that until nine days later on March 30. The stretch west of the park—about 170 miles up the border to Ft. Quitman—is intended to be marked "primary" for possible physical walls. While that map has become a focus for the public on where physical walls could be built, ongoing changes to it indicate that it should never be the definitive information for the overall wall project, and the Department of Homeland Security has never publicly clarified the map's reliability.

The survey stake is shown in an Instagram video posted Thursday from Redford resident Charlie Angell just above the Rio Grande on a hill overlooking the "Hoodoos rapids." "Why would you put a survey marker in if you're not going to do any work here?" Angell asks in his video, which shows three survey sticks tied together with pink ribbons over a metal marker in the ground. Angell sent *Big Bend Sentinel* the exact location of the marker, which is clearly on state park land. He has been a vocal opponent of any kind of wall along the border, both because of environmental and cultural concerns and because it could wall off his home and river expedition business from the Rio Grande.

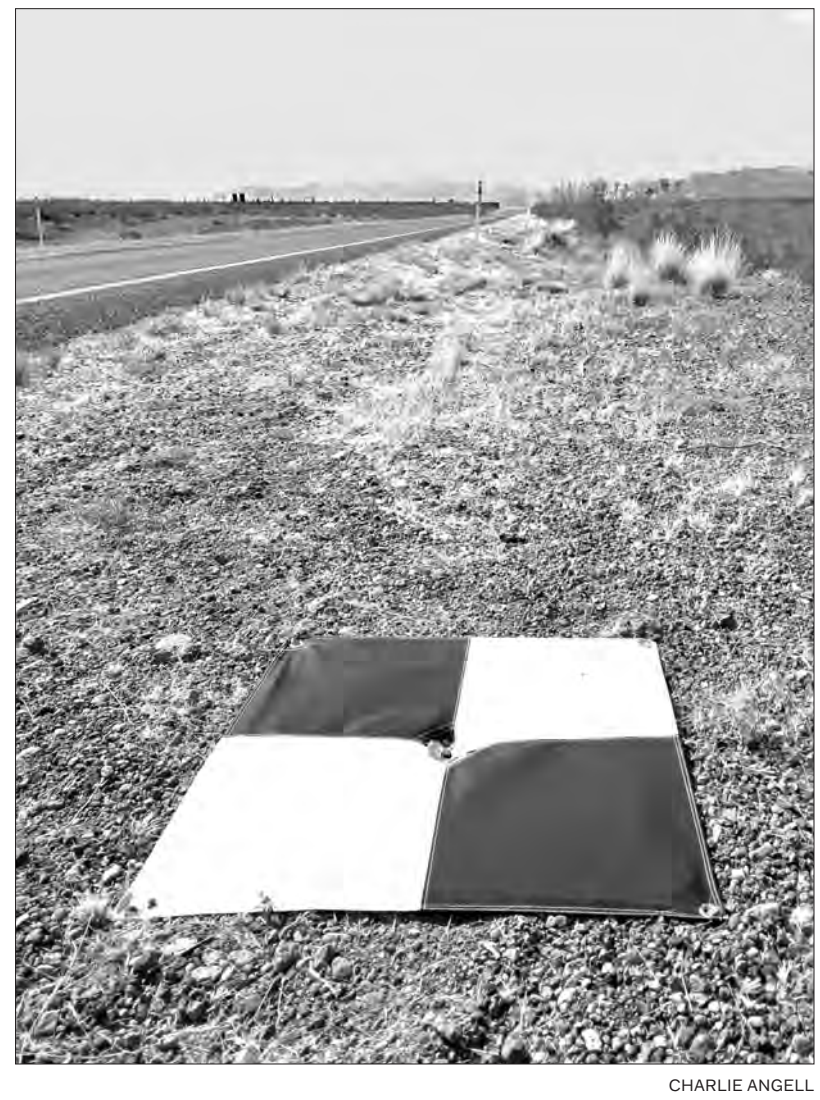
Two days later, Angell posted the discovery of another marker about 250 yards off the highway in state park land. The location is a known archaeological site.

A CBP Big Bend Sector spokesperson, Landon Hutchens, commented that *Big Bend Sentinel* should check with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), which installs markers across the country for mapping and elevation data. However, USGS inscribes its markers, and this marker has no inscriptions. A review of data also shows that while USGS has dozens of markers in the state park, none have ever been placed anywhere near FM 170 (River Road). USGS did not respond to a request for comment.

When Presidio County Commissioner Deirdre Hisler inquired about the marker with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, an official told her that the parks department had no knowledge of it (at least at the regional level). A spokesperson for TxDOT said it was not related to any highway department work.

Also appearing two days ago were dozens of fabric squares—filled with black and white squares—staked into the ground about every half mile between Redford and Presidio along FM 170. They are Aerial Survey Ground Control Points (GCPs), often used by drones to map areas for construction projects. CBP did not respond to an immediate request for comment on who laid down the GCPs and why.

For more background and a list of articles on the border wall project, see bigbendsentinel.com/borderwall

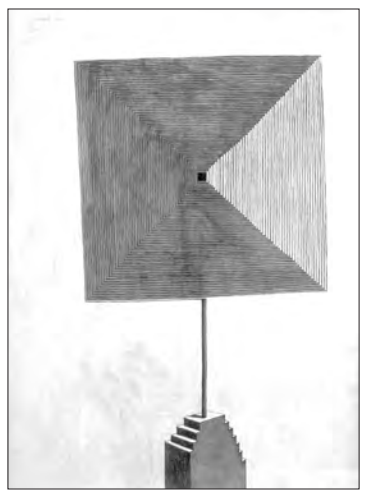


CHARLIE ANGELL

Aerial Survey Ground Control Points, used for construction mapping by drones, line River Road toward Presidio.

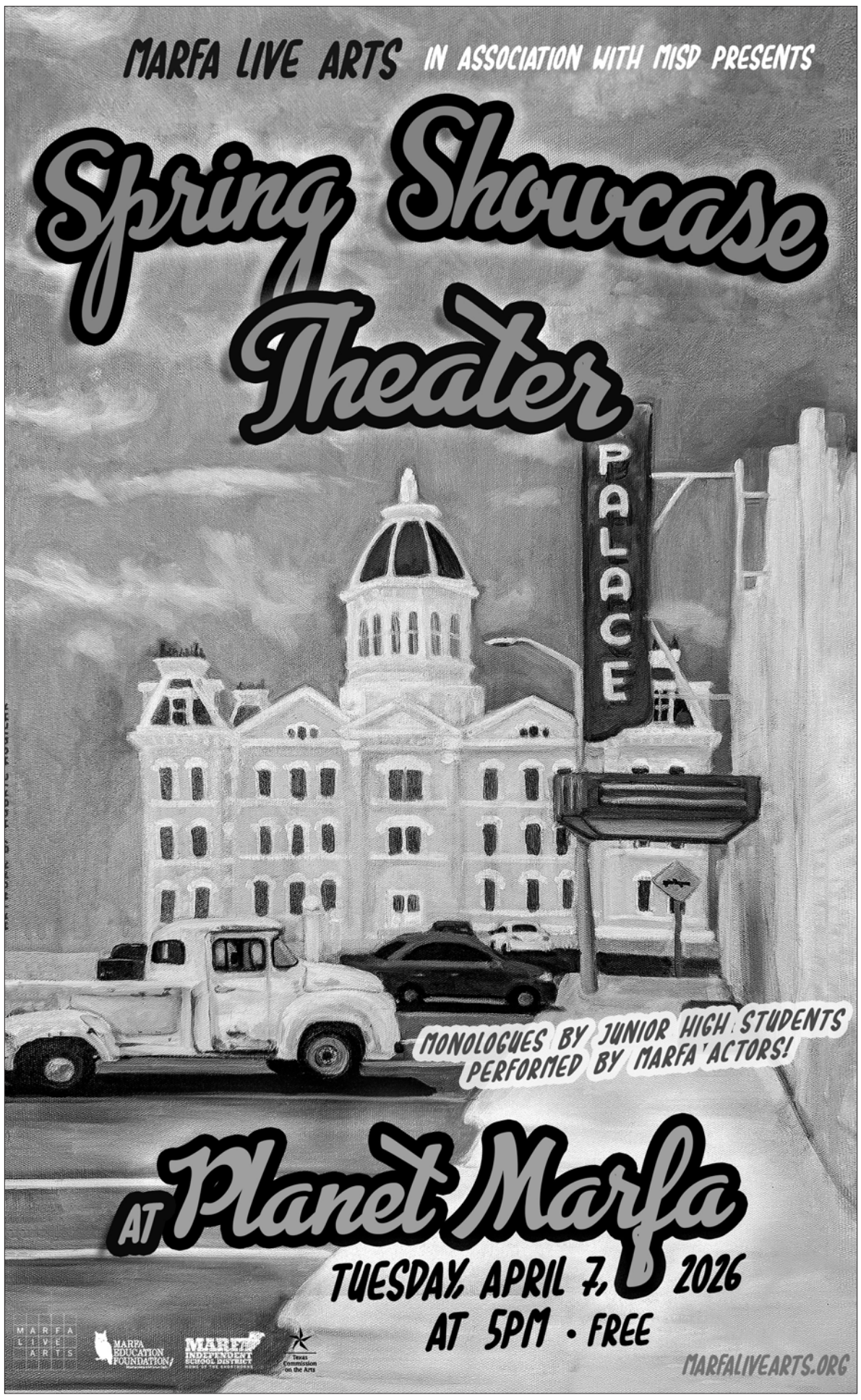
INSIDE

RULE explores outwards and returns



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Sentinel News Project



Photos show suspect on trips to Big Bend

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Galloux said he is not revealing last names yet, at the request of the women, but they are Mindy, Laura, Melissa and Corrinne in his book: Xavier Dupont de Ligonnès. A cop at the heart of the case. Investigation and unpublished documents. Galloux said Laura is the only one who still lives in Alpine. The other man at the Crystal Bar is now deceased, he said.

"Yes, I'm obsessed," Galloux said, sitting at a picnic table outside the Sentinel cafe in Marfa last week. "I think about it every day." In his book, Galloux describes how he became involved in the case: "In 2011, I was an investigator with the French Judicial Police's central office for combating cybercrime at the heart of the digital search for the fugitive. I worked on analyzing his pseudonyms and identifiers, exploiting connections, logs and IP addresses, as well as data from the Internet and telephone operators."

After Sheriff Dodson's first post, it was updated to note: "Xavier was possibly observed in 2020, in South Brewster County, with a black Labrador. If you have any information, please contact us." The dogs that Dupont de Ligonnès killed with his family were



Xavier Dupont de Ligonnès as he would have looked in the few years before 2011.

Labrador retrievers. The note led the documentary team down to Terlingua on Friday to film footage there and take a tour of the area.

Galloux's book outlines several letters sent by Dupont de Ligonnès to acquaintances, including one to Michel Rétif before his family's bodies were found, that said, "Take good care of yourself ... you'll come and visit us at our ranch in a while ... ;-))" The woman Mindy told the investigator that Dupont de Ligonnès and a Rétif had visited her on a ranch near Alpine around 1990. Rétif committed suicide in 2018.

Galloux said it's not as if he believes Dupont de Ligonnès is still in Alpine, although the Dodson South County comment was interesting. But as he wrote in his book: "You can't understand a case of this nature without going back to the scene. You have to walk where the man walked. Look at what he was looking at. Understand what he wanted to show and what he wanted to hide."

– **Rob D'Amico**

See the online version for more photos at bigbendsentinel.com.

Highway department typo renames town

Continued from page 1

so I thought it might be a memorial gesture. I turned around to approach it again and saw that someone had expertly fashioned white tape to make the change from "B.R. Reynolds." Well, maybe "expertly" was a little much, as the construction was obvious with a closer look.

If TxDOT had lost the "f" with the "n" typo, we could have been Shatner, as in William—Captain Kirk. Wouldn't that be a hoot? We could lose the traditional wave to our neighbors and replace it with a fingers-spread Vulcan salute and a: "Hey, y'all. Live long and prosper." And we could opine on current affairs with Kirk's wise words: "Conquest is easy. Control is not."

– **Rob D'Amico**



TINA RIVERA

Marfa Live Arts awardees who will have their monologues brought to life at the Spring Theater Showcase. Logan Pippen, Raivon Hamilton, Olivia Esparza, Itzayanna Gonzales-Duran, Liam Lopez, Ranger Dugan, Azul Contreras, Lyla Luppino and Fatima Floresvillar.

Marfa Live Arts showcases student playwrights

Marfa

Monologues by Marfa Junior High students will come to life at Marfa Lives Arts' Spring Showcase Theater with local actors at Planet Marfa on Tuesday, April 7, at 5 p.m. The organization wraps up its Tenth Annual Playwriting Preparatory Workshop led by Marfa Live Arts' Lead Instructor Rachel Tate in partnership with Marfa ISD teacher Catherine Gore.

The showcase will feature award-winning monologues written by eighth-grade winners Itzayanna Duran, Olivia Esparza, Raivon Hamilton, Juliet Hinojos, Fabian Marquez and Logan Pippen. The seventh-grade winners will feature pieces by Azul Alvidrez, Ranger Dugan, Fatima Floresvillar, Liam Lopez and Lyla Luppino.

"I think the students gained the opportunity to express themselves in ways they don't typically get to in a normal classroom setting," Tate said. "I watched each day as their ideas became clearer and clearer. With that clarity, so came distinctive voices. This workshop gives them the chance to pull from their own desire to speak. What do they want to say and what creative ways will they find to say it?"

She continued, "Through the use of prompts we gradually transferred our thoughts and emotions into new words. While writing about inanimate objects they were given the opportunity to express their feelings through something outside of themselves. Their stories were shared through the experience of a created character. I got to hear them speak through erasers and cavemen, clouds and tired champion athletes."

Tate spoke of one student in particular that caught her by surprise: "One of my favorite examples is of a student that I expected to not enjoy the writing, as he wrote very little throughout the week. The second to last day he told me he wanted me to read what he had written. I was so shocked to see he had conceived a beautiful monologue about a cloud in its conversation with rain. He wrote of the heaviness it felt and asked to let the load be lighter. It was a really wonderful teaching moment for me. To remember that even if it feels like the program won't work, it genuinely always does. They have so much inside of them that touches and moves me each and every time."

"Even if you don't know a student or a teacher, please attend," Tate added. "Come show a student that you want to hear what they think and that you value their voice in this community. We've also lined up some really great actors to participate. I love the opportunity to connect a student with an adult who maybe wouldn't have gotten the chance to know them otherwise. It's a reciprocal benefit. We feed one another with support and ideas which will then go directly into the fabric of our shared community. If we want to sustain true local ideas and values into this place, this symbiotic relationship is necessary."

For more information on past and future Marfa Live Arts, visit their website at www.marfalivearts.org

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PRESIDIO INTERNATIONAL

MONTÍCULO TOPOGRÁFICO EN UN PARQUE ESTATAL SUSCITA INTERROGANTES SOBRE LOS PLANES DEL MURO

Decenas de marcadores de cartografía aparecen en River Road, hacia el oeste, rumbo a Presidio

Por Rob D'Amico

Un montículo topográfico, clavado recientemente en terrenos del parque junto al sendero Hoodoos en el Parque Estatal Big Bend Ranch, está suscitando interrogantes sobre su finalidad –posiblemente relacionada con un muro fronterizo–, la fecha de su instalación, la identidad de quien lo colocó allí y si algún funcionario del parque tenía conocimiento de su existencia.

Los opositores al muro también expresaron su preocupación por el hecho de que, a pesar de que la Oficina de Aduanas y Protección Fronteriza comunicó a los funcionarios locales el 22 de marzo que no se construirían muros de acero en el parque estatal, el mapa del «muro inteligente» de la CBP no se actualizó para reflejar dicha información hasta nueve días después, el 30 de marzo. El tramo situado al oeste del parque –unos 170 millas a lo largo de la frontera, hasta Fort Quitman– está designado como zona «primaria» para la posible construcción de muros físicos. Si bien dicho mapa se ha convertido en el principal punto de referencia para el público respecto a los lugares donde podrían erigirse muros físicos, los constantes cambios que experimenta sugieren que nunca debería considerarse la fuente de información definitiva para el proyecto del muro en su conjunto; asimismo, el Departamento de Seguridad Nacional nunca ha aclarado públicamente la fiabilidad de dicho mapa.

El montículo topográfico aparece en un video de Instagram publicado el jueves por Charlie Angell, residente de Redford; el marcador se encuentra situado justo por encima del río Grande, en una colina que domina los «rápidos de Hoodoos». «¿Por qué colocarían un mojón topográfico si no tienen intención de realizar obras aquí?», pregunta Angell en su video, en el que se aprecian tres varillas de topografía atadas entre sí con cintas rosas, colocadas sobre un marcador metálico clavado en el suelo. Angell envió al **Big Bend Sentinel** la ubicación exacta del marcador, el cual se encuentra, inequívocamente, dentro de los terrenos del parque estatal. Angell ha sido un firme opositor a cualquier tipo de muro a lo largo de la frontera, tanto por motivos de índole medioambiental y cultural, como por la preocupación de que dicha construcción pudiera aislar su vivienda –y su negocio de expediciones fluviales– del acceso al río Grande.

Dos días después, Angell dio a conocer el hallazgo de otro marcador, situado a unos 250 metros de la carretera principal, también dentro de los terrenos del parque estatal. Dicha ubicación corresponde a un sitio arqueológico catalogado.

Landon Hutchens, portavoz del Sector Big Bend de la CBP, sugirió que el *Big Bend Sentinel* consultara al Servicio Geológico de los Estados Unidos (USGS), organismo encargado de instalar marcadores en todo el país con fines de cartografía y recopilación de datos topográficos. Sin embargo, el USGS graba inscripciones en sus marcadores, y este marcador carece de ellas. Un análisis de los datos también revela que, si bien el USGS cuenta con docenas de marcadores en el parque estatal, ninguno ha sido colocado jamás en las proximidades de la FM 170 (River Road). El USGS no respondió a una solicitud de comentarios.

Cuando la comisionada del condado de Presidio, Deirdre Hisler, consultó sobre el marcador con el Departamento de Parques y Vida Silvestre de Texas, un funcionario le informó que el departamento de parques no tenía conocimiento de su existencia (al menos a nivel regional). Un portavoz del TxDOT declaró que el marcador no guardaba relación alguna con trabajos realizados por el departamento de carreteras.

Asimismo, hace dos días aparecieron docenas de cuadrados de tela –con un diseño de cuadros en blanco y negro– fijados al suelo aproximadamente cada media milla entre Redford y Presidio, a lo largo de la FM 170. Se trata de Puntos de Control Terrestre (GCP, por sus siglas en inglés) para levantamientos aéreos, utilizados con frecuencia por drones para cartografiar zonas destinadas a proyectos de construcción. La CBP no respondió a una solicitud inmediata de comentarios sobre quién colocó los GCP y con qué propósito.

Para obtener más antecedentes y consultar una lista de artículos sobre el proyecto del muro fronterizo, visite bigbendsentinel.com/borderwall.



Un mojón topográfico se encuentra junto a un sitio arqueológico en el Parque Estatal Big Bend Ranch.

¿Qué hay en un nombre?



Un residente de Austin rindió homenaje a Burt Reynolds cambiando un letrero de la calle tras la muerte del actor en 2018.

Shafter

Durante bastante tiempo no me di cuenta: pasaron varios viajes a mi pequeño pueblo fantasma natal, viniendo desde el norte por la Carretera 67 desde Presidio. Pero, finalmente, observé con más detenimiento el flamante letrero de carretera de este querido lugar, enclavado junto a las montañas Cienega: "Shatfner".

Bah. Una "n" de más. Que se quede así. Total, bien se podría confundir a los turistas o dejar que publiquen en las redes sociales sobre su visita, con el error incluido.

No estoy seguro de cuántas personas en el pequeño pueblo de Shafter –con una población de 25 habitantes, situado a 40 millas al sur de Marfa– notaron la errata. Un residente, el exjuez del condado de Presidio, Monroe Elms, cuenta que él también pasó por allí varias veces sin percatarse, hasta que su hijo de 10 años, William, se lo señaló. "Él me lo comentó, pero yo simplemente seguí conduciendo".

Lauren Macias-Cervantes, portavoz del TxDOT (Departamento de Transporte de Texas por sus siglas en inglés) en El Paso, disipó la inquietud que este desliz pudiera haber causado en la región de Big Bend al informarme que el lunes 23 de marzo se instaló un nuevo letrero con la ortografía correcta. Macias-Cervantes, por cierto, siempre ha sido paciente conmigo, incluso en momentos en que las tensiones podrían haberse desbordado; por ejemplo, cuando el TxDOT declaró que el costo de las señales de alto intermitentes instaladas en Marfa el año pasado estaba exento de ser información pública. Aquel fue un momento en el que el punto culminante de mi carrera como reportero de investigación parecía verse sofocado por un burócrata de carreteras; sin embargo, ella tenía razón, de acuerdo con la ley federal.

Jeffrey Roberts, un residente de Presidio que realiza trabajos ocasionales en Shafter, tal vez ofreció la mejor explicación para el error. "No sería la primera vez que el TxDOT, o alguno de sus contratistas, tiene un momento de "dedo gordo" (un error tipográfico) en un letrero verde", publicó en Facebook. "En el pasado hemos visto "Coriscana" en lugar de "Corsicana", y "Gaudalupe River" en lugar de "Guadalupe". La culpa no es de la buena gente que trabaja tan arduamente en el TxDOT para garantizar la seguridad de nuestras carreteras... échenle la culpa del error a Otto Korecht, en Austin".

Recuerdo que, hace mucho tiempo, iba en bicicleta por Austin y pasé junto a un letrero de calle que indicaba el camino hacia el lago Lady Bird. "Burt Reynolds Dr.". "¡Vaya!", pensé. "Nunca supe que tuviera una calle con su nombre aquí". Acababa de fallecer, así que supuse que podría tratarse de un gesto conmemorativo. Di la vuelta para acercarme de nuevo y vi que alguien había manipulado con gran destreza un trozo de cinta blanca para transformar el nombre original: "B.R. Reynolds". Bueno, tal vez lo de "con gran destreza" fuera un poco exagerado, pues al mirar más de cerca resultaba evidente que se trataba de un montaje.

Si el TxDOT hubiera perdido la "f" a causa de un error tipográfico con la "n", nuestra calle podría haberse llamado Shatner –como William, el Capitán Kirk–. ¿No sería eso divertidísimo? Podríamos dejar de lado el tradicional saludo con la mano a nuestros vecinos y sustituirlo por el saludo vulcano –con los dedos separados–, acompañado de un: "¡Hola a todos! Larga vida y prosperidad". Y podríamos opinar sobre la actualidad recurriendo a las sabias palabras de Kirk: "La conquista es fácil; el control, no".

– **Rob D'Amico**

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MARY ETHERINGTON

Clouds drift over the dry grasslands on FM 2810 south of Marfa.

Ranchers uncertain on future of grasslands

By Mary Etherington

After many years of drought and learning about the difficult decisions ranchers were forced to make as they sold off their herds and breeding stock in recent years, it was time to check in after our rain this past summer. It was wonderful to see that beautiful green in every direction after those rains. However, was it enough?

Philip Boyd of Dixon Water Foundation on Mimms Ranch said they do have grass, have leased their land, and are very judiciously grazing some cattle. They are still not bringing back their own herd. With about 11 inches of rain last year, there's a hint of cautious optimism in his words, yet a very sober look on his face as he explains they will see what unfolds going forward before any more decisions are made in terms of their own cattle grazing operation.

Chip Love, Marfa National Bank president, has grown philosophical stewarding his ranch through the drought with these words: "There's been less and less rain since 1991 with some decent rains scattered in between. Even if rain comes back more consistently, the lack of grasslands can't be solved all at once. After 30 years of not much rainfall, 30 years of above average would be nice." Love has come to the realization he won't be around to see the land the way he remembers it, with creeks flowing year around. He's decided to pretend it's just going to keep raining. In response to my asking if he has a rain gauge he said, "It's either enough or it isn't, just look at the land."

Will grass get a foothold?

Three years ago Bobby McKnight told me they would need four good years of rain before they would have enough grass established to support cattle grazing again. So far we have had one good year, for some ranches.

There's nothing like hearing the ranch manager on the O2, Will Jewett, talk lovingly about the different grasses on the prairie and rangeland out here. Jewett, formerly of the USDA office and a long-time advocate for healthy watersheds through sustainable land management and rotational grazing, does exactly that. I skip along with him to keep up, as I don't know the names and spellings of all the grasses he lauds. What he does say, that I catch, is the ranch he now manages is lower in elevation than Marfa, and hence more shrubs and fewer grasses, even with the recent rain.

When there's a bare patch of dirt, some desirable grasses are unable to reestablish even after rain without an anchor grass such as blue gramma. Luckily, blue gramma will pop back. Like much of the Marfa area, parts of the ranch Jewett manages got about 11 inches of rain. However, some parts only got 3 inches, so they have suspended their cow-calf operation to a solely stock operation of leased land.

Ranchers match rainfall to stocking operations, and due to the previous years of drought, they are taking it easy this year. Like all the ranchers I spoke with, it's a wait-and-see long game over the next few years.

Because the O2 is a working ranch, as opposed to a hobby ranch, they turn to hunting operations to sustain them economically when the cattle numbers have been radically reduced due to drought.

Tumbleweeds roll through Marfa

Ranchers are not alone. Julie Speed, not a rancher, has a studio that looks out on the field at the Chinati Foundation with the Judd concrete pieces. Years ago when Julie and her husband, Fran Christina, bought their property, the field was primarily grasses. With the years of drought the grasses have turned to tumbleweeds and amaranth. Speed was unsure if the grasses would ever be able to re-exert themselves over the weeds. I turned to soil conservationist and all around know-it-all of the natural world Jim Martinez to get her an answer. Martinez feels sure the grass will come back. He was recently pulling tumbleweeds and amaranth on a ranch down south and said underneath all that growth, there was about 30% grass. Coupled with Will Jewett's confidence in blue gramma, given a little rain, the future could hold more grasses again.

Speed and Christina unsurprisingly also found their fence line was covered in tumbleweeds after these recent winds. The couple hauled them to the street in front of their dumpsters, chopped them up, drove the truck back and forth over them, gathered up the bits, drove over them again and again, and finally swept up the leftovers and deposited them in the dumpster. I know this because they made an Instagram post documenting their endeavor. We should all be engaged in similar defensive actions related to tumbleweeds in this extreme dry (8% humidity!) fire and high wind season. All a wildfire needs is a few tumbleweeds and it's off to the races.

It's not just the herds of cattle we are missing, it's also the trees in Marfa. I drove around taking in all the trees leafing out, and it sets in sharp relief the trees that are dying and also the ones that are full-on already dead. Last year Jim Martinez issued a plea to soak drought-stressed trees to try and save them. Now he adds it seems many folks in Marfa don't understand the gravity of this drought and the effect on even well-established, very old specimens. Shade, one of our most precious commodities in the high desert, will be profoundly missed. Soak your trees if you can.



MARY ETHERINGTON

Will Jewett and Chip Love wonder when the rains will return and if they will be enough.

Out on FM 2810, the first lone blossom of a chocolate daisy showed itself March 2. TxDOT had mowed a few days before, so it was alone and flat to the ground and yet, there it was.

Masses of migrating birds sitting on fence lines flutter up as we pass, and a handful of cattle have appeared in the pasture on one side of the road, widely scattered apart. It's been hot, almost 90 degrees for several days, a tad surprising in March. The first mosquito banged into my face at dusk, and a fly appeared in my kitchen. The clouds and skies have been dramatic and beautifully windswept of late.

Rattlesnakes will return

On yesterday's walk I saw the most precise and defined cloud that was surely the tail of a rattlesnake, clearly an omen. They are climbing back into our lives. While rattlesnakes brumate, I can study the sky and horizon with ease. When the snakes reappear, my eyes are trained on the ground surveying ahead of where my dog and I step, my vigilance fully engaged. Although I will miss the more relaxed walks of the winter months when I get restorative clouds and sky time, I tune into the surprise of wildflowers and beetles. Maybe even tortoises and horny toads will appear underfoot this year. We, along with the ranchers, begin the watch to see if enough rain will come, to see if the anticipated historic monsoons of July arrive on time to set our worry aside and think on how only a few more years of this and we'll get our grasses back. Grit is everywhere. Onward.

CAPITOL HIGHLIGHTS

Paxton calls for Hancock's removal

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton called for Gov. Greg Abbott to remove acting state comptroller Kelly Hancock, calling him an "incompetent loser," The *Dallas Morning News* reported. Paxton said the governor should replace him with Don Huffines, who defeated Hancock in the GOP primary race for the post earlier this month.

"Kelly Hancock was rejected by Texans because he failed to do his job. He failed to take me down during impeachment, and his career is over," Paxton wrote on X. "It's time for him to be fired."

Before his appointment as acting comptroller, Hancock served in the Texas Senate and was one of two Republican state senators who voted to convict Paxton in his impeachment trial. Paxton was acquitted.

The latest dispute comes after Hancock sent a letter to Paxton and to federal officials, calling for stripping the Houston Quran Academy of its charter because of alleged ties to CAIR, the nation's largest Muslim civil rights advocacy organization. Abbott has designated that group a foreign terrorist organization. The academy is suing to overturn the designation.

Texas poised to lead nation in data centers

Texas is poised to lead the nation by 2030 in the number of data centers, the *Austin American-Statesman* reported, surpassing Virginia. The state currently has 6.5 gigawatts of data center capacity under construction, accounting for 20% of the capacity added to the U.S. pipeline last year. One gigawatt can power about 750,000 homes on average.

Data centers provide the infrastructure to support both cryptocurrency facilities and the growth of artificial intelligence. The centers require huge amounts of power and water to operate. The Electric Reliability Council of Texas, which operates most of the state's power grid, said the continuing growth in data centers will increase Texas energy demand by 71% in the next five years.

Central Texas has become the top data center market in the country. The Austin American-Statesman identified at least 55 completed or planned projects between Temple and San Antonio in 2025.

$116 million in FIFA safety grants announced

The city of Houston and the North Central Texas Council of Governments, areas that are both hosting FIFA World Cup events, will receive $116 million in grants to provide for safety personnel, equipment and other public safety needs, the governor's office has announced.

"The FIFA World Cup coming to Texas gives our state a premier opportunity to showcase all it has to offer," Abbott said in a news release. "These public safety grants will help ensure that travelers visiting and traveling throughout Texas can enjoy our great state safely, will bolster Texas' efforts to combat crime, and help prevent potential acts of violence."

The money is coming from the federal government under the omnibus budget bill passed last year. The budget provides $625 million in federal funding to host cities across America. The funds are allocated for recipients to provide extensive security to protect venues, players, staff and attendees against potential terrorist attacks.

License seekers will have to prove they're in country legally

Anyone seeking a professional license in Texas, from barbers to dog breeders, will have to prove they are in the country legally after May 1, *The Texas Tribune* reported. The state's Commission on Licensing and Regulation last week adopted a new rule that could affect thousands of workers.

A long line of speakers at a hearing urged the commission not to adopt the rule, arguing it will hamper the state's economy and push people to work without a license. The commission oversees the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation.

"TDLR has long been evaluating verification of license eligibility in line with federal law. With the transfer of the Texas Lottery to TDLR, the recent launch of our licensing system modernization project, and increased focus on combatting human trafficking, the department is moving forward with lawful presence verification," Caroline M. Espinosa, a TDLR spokesperson, said.

TDLR attorney Derek Burkhalter told commissioners that some non-citizens will still be able to get licenses if they are here legally; for example, if they were granted asylum or admitted as a refugee.

"The proposed rules do not impose a citizenship requirement," Burkhalter said. "Individuals who are not U.S. citizens may still be eligible for licensure if they meet the eligibility criteria."

Pedestrian, bicyclist fatalities continue to increase

With spring and warmer weather here, there are more pedestrians and cyclists out on the road.

More than 20% of all Texas traffic fatalities involve either pedestrians or cyclists, according to the Texas Department of Transportation, which is urging drivers to know and follow the rules for sharing the road.

In 2024, 852 cyclists and pedestrians were killed in crashes on Texas roads. There were 6,095 crashes involving pedestrians and 2,761 crashes involving bicyclists. In 2025, there were 1,372 traffic crashes involving pedestrians in Texas and 527 traffic crashes involving bicyclists. In these crashes, 186 people were killed.

"All of us share a responsibility to watch out for each other, but people on foot or riding a bike are most at risk for serious injury or worse in a crash with a car, which means drivers must be extra vigilant," TxDOT Executive Director Marc Williams said.

Slightly less active hurricane season predicted

Hurricane season is a little more than two months away, and weather media outlet AccuWeather is predicting a slightly less active season this year than in 2025, the Houston Chronicle reported. However, Texas and the Gulf Coast are still at risk of being hit.

AccuWeather is forecasting 11 to 16 named storms, including four to eight hurricanes. Of those, one to three are expected to become Category 3 or strong hurricanes, with winds of at least 111 mph. Three to six storms could directly hit the United States, including one to three along the Gulf Coast, putting Texas and neighboring states at risk.

Last year was the first since 2015 without a hurricane making a direct U.S. landfall. Hurricane season runs from June 1 to Nov. 30.

Gary Borders is a veteran award-winning Texas journalist. He published a number of community newspapers in Texas during a 30-year span, including in Longview, Fort Stockton, Nacogdoches, Lufkin and Cedar Park. Email: gborders@texaspress.com.



CREDIT?

Rescued children

Fort Davis ISD teacher Stessa Miles takes applause with students who performed the one act play *Kindertransport* on March 23. The play, by Diane Samuels, tells the story of nearly 10,000 children—mostly Jewish—who were rescued from Nazi Germany between 1938 and 1940. The children were transported to Great Britain, where most were placed with foster parents.

Anyone? Anyone want to join the school board? Anyone?

Marfa

The March 23 Marfa ISD School Board meeting came and went without public mention of the lack of potential candidates to join the board. Board Member Stela Fuentez's seat remains open, and Board Member Lori Flores will vacate her seat in May.

Fuentez, whose seat expires May 2027, resigned from the board in January, and the board solicited letters of interest from the community to fill her seat at the same time a deadline came up to file for Flores' seat in the May election. The board received one letter of interest and zero applicants to run for the election. That election was finally formally canceled at the meeting.

The one letter of interest came from state District Judge Genie Wright, who attended a meeting in February and met with the board members in closed session. Wright left before the board reconvened, and a motion by Fuentez to accept her appointment died on the table.

With one seat vacant, another empty seat coming up in May and a canceled election, Board President Philip Boyd said they will continue to solicit letters of interest until the seats are filled.

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THE MARFA PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD
meets every third Thursday
of the month at 6:00pm
in the Casner Room at City Hall.
The public is invited to attend.

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AROUND THE BIG BEND

Thursday April 2

Hike with Homeless Dogs
10:00am-11:00am
Davis Mountains State Park
Park Rd 3
Fort Davis, TX

Meditation Classes
6:00pm, Free and open to all
Marfa Public Library
Community Room
Marfa, TX



Paint & Sip Couples Edition
6:00pm-9:00pm
Alcove Social, 211 E Holland Ave
Alpine, TX

Friday April 3

Live Music: Hank Woji
6:30pm-9:30pm
Alcove Social, 211 E Holland Ave
Alpine, TX

Dark Skys Opening Reception
5:00pm-7:00pm
Big Bend Gallery, 121 W Holland Ave
Alpine, TX

Saturday April 4



Live Music: Jack Fister
7:00pm-10:00pm
Alcove Social, 211 E Holland Ave
Alpine, TX

Tan Cologne
8:00pm-9:00pm
Maintenant, 1825 Rabbits Rd.
Marfa, TX

Sunday April 5



Boxing at Maintenant
9:00am-11:00am
Maintenant, 825 Rabbits Rd.
Marfa, TX

Sunday Slow Stretch with Bailey
4:00pm-5:00pm
La Sala Studio, 207 E Holland Ave
Alpine, TX

Open Mic Night: Music
5:00pm-8:00pm
Alcove Social, 211 E Holland Ave
Alpine, TX

Tuesday April 7

Too-Early Tuesdays Sunrise Hiking at CDRI
8:00am, Price: $6.50
Chihuahuan Desert Nature
Center & Botanical Gardens
43869 State Highway 118
Fort Davis, TX

Meditation Classes
6:00pm
Free and open to all
Marfa Public Library
Community Room
Marfa, TX

Trivia Tuesday!
7:00pm-9:00pm
Alcove Social, 211 E Holland Ave
Alpine, TX

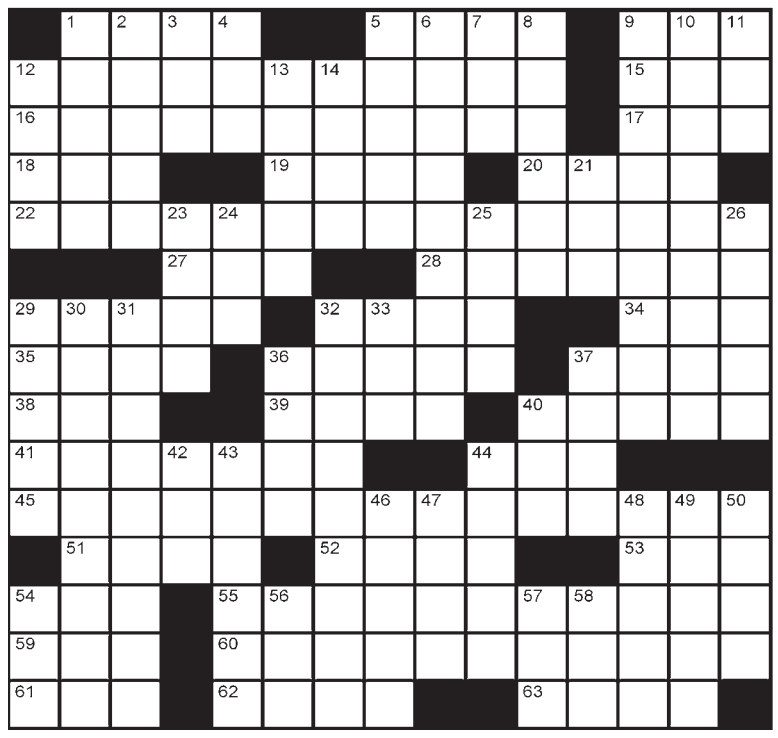
Wednesday April 8

Karaoke Night
7:00pm-10:00pm
Alcove Social, 211 E Holland Ave
Alpine, TX

CROSSWORD

Spring 2026 Themeless Week
By Amie Walker and Darby Ratliff

4/2



Edited by Taylor Johnson

ACROSS
1 Shot in the dark
5 Indianapolis footballer
9 Airbnb alternative
12 "I'm ready to hear some gossip!"
15 Slimy stuff
16 Entertainment setup that typically includes surround sound
17 With 33-Down, decline to participate
18 Biceps's limb
19 "___ on Down the Road" ("The Wiz" song)
20 Reusable shopping bag
22 Distraction at home?
27 Celebrity chef Garten
28 Korean BBQ side often made with vegetables or seafood
29 Sleep disorder
32 Make a meal
34 Tear
35 "After that ..."
36 Grayish-brown hue
37 Yellowfin, for one
38 SXSW's state
39 Painting and printmaking
40 Shabby
41 Trainees
44 ___ choy
45 Some alumni gatherings
51 Scary Spice
52 Laundry batch
53 One of the Stooges
54 App maker
55 Not entirely settled
59 Last number in a New Year's Eve countdown
60 Point guard for the Golden State Valkyries
61 ___ pal
62 Female sheep
63 Out of battery

DOWN
1 Fungus's reproductive cell
2 "The Fairly OddParents" character Turner
3 Part of IPA
4 Short order at a diner?
5 Stop
6 Brand of colorful, frozen treats
7 Director Ang
8 Kilt pattern
9 "Time for me to split!"
10 "Keep your eyes covered!"
11 "Psych!"
12 Onetime Iranian ruler
13 Greek letter that often represents an angle
14 Make warmer
21 Non-Rx
23 Well, in Spanish
24 Gasteyer of "Mean Girls"
25 Make an apple pie, e.g.
26 Get even with?
29 Web site?
30 Extraordinary happenings
31 Truly impressive
32 Pic snapped from the driver's seat, perhaps
33 See 17-Across
36 Zesty flavor
37 Figure in Maori mythology
40 ___ we now our gay apparel (words on a holiday sweater)
42 Letter-shaped extension
43 Scold
44 "Elf" elf
46 Plant supports
47 ___ Grey tea
48 Nebraska's largest city
49 "I hear you"
50 Witnessed
54 Scooby-Doo or Astro
56 Furry foot
57 Finish
58 Abbr. in ancient dates

PREVIOUS PUZZLE ANSWER

S	T	E	P	■	K	A	M	A	L	A	■	S	K	I
P	A	R	E	■	P	L	A	C	I	D	■	W	O	N
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N	E	E	D	Y	■	■	D	R	E	■	S	A	L	E
■	■	C	A	P	E	C	A	N	A	V	E	R	A	L
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3/26

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SUDUKO

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains every digit from 1 to 9 inclusively.

4/2

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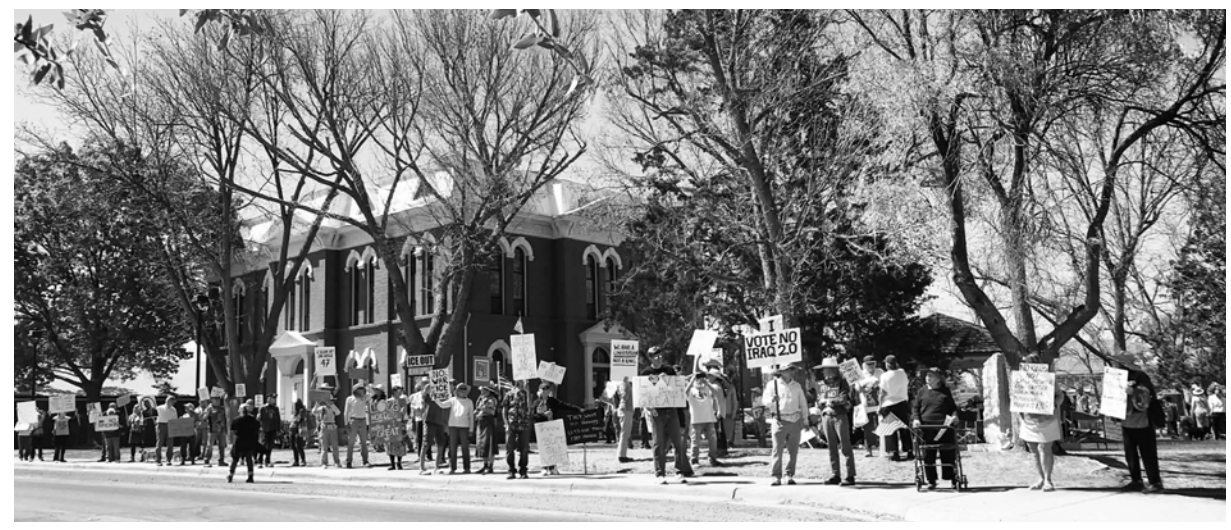
DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆

SOLUTION:

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3/26

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JENNIFER PITTINGER

About 150 people showed up in Alpine for Saturday's "No Kings" event—down slightly from the last protest. However, national organizers said Saturday's events across the country amounted to 8 million people.

Lecturer to tell of his standoff with a mountain lion

James Cornett will be at the Crowley Theater in Marfa, Texas, this Thursday, April 2, for the Roger Conant Distinguished Guest Lecture, sponsored by the Chihuahuan Desert Research Institute. The program will start at 7 p.m., with doors open at 6:30 p.m.

As a desert ecologist, Cornett will tell about becoming cornered by an aggressive adult mountain lion on a warm July morning in a remote mountain range in southern Arizona. The standoff lasted nearly 45 minutes, with Cornett eventually escaping and surviving to share the frightening encounter with others. In his presentation, he will discuss mountain lion habits and behaviors, the potential threat these big cats pose to humans, and provide a historical perspective on lion-human encounters.

Cornett's humor and storytelling skills have made him one of the center's most popular guest lecturers. Over the past eight years, he has presented lectures on "Roadrunners" and "Ocotillo and Hummingbirds." For more information, please call 432-364-2499 or email lgordon@cdri.org.



James Cornett

CLASSIFIEDS AND PUBLIC NOTICES

HELP WANTED

THE CITY OF PRESIDIO IS ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS FOR THE POSITION OF ONE UTILITY WORKER WITH THE PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT. THIS IS A FULL-TIME POSITION. THIS POSITION WORKS UNDER THE GENERAL SUPERVISION OF THE PUBLIC WORKS DIRECTOR. A UTILITY WORKER PERFORMS VARIOUS WORK ASSIGNMENTS IN THE DEPARTMENT.

CANDIDATES MUST HAVE THE FOLLOWING MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS:
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THE CITY OF PRESIDIO IS AN AFFIRMATIVE ACTION/EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER.
THIS POSITION IS OPEN UNTIL MARCH 20, 2026

PUBLIC NOTICE

The City of Marfa City Council has scheduled a Public Hearing for April 14, 2026, at 6:00 p.m., in the Casner Room, City Hall, 113 S. Highland Ave., Marfa, Texas, regarding Special Use Permit Application No. 2026-01 submitted by AEP Texas, Inc. for the construction of an electrical substation located on a property of 4.0388 acres of land situated at 102 and 104 N. Aparejo Street and at the corner of N. Aparejo Street and E. Oak Street, also described as Parcel 1: S ½ of Block 103, Original Townsite of Marfa; Parcel 2: N ½ of Block 103, Original Townsite of Marfa; Parcel 3: a 3.57-acre tract in Section 244, Block 8, G.H. & S.A. Ry. Co. Survey, City of Marfa, Presidio County, State of Texas. For additional information, contact City of Marfa, 432-729-4315.

APARTMENTS FOR LEASE

Two 1Bd/1Ba apartments for lease in Marfa. Both have been recently remodeled and have all appliances including a washer and dryer in each unit. They have a shared, fenced backyard. $1,100 per month each with a one-year lease and $1,100 deposit. Landlord pays water/gas/sewer/trash and lawn maintenance. Tenant pays all other utilities. Text or call 281-785-5847.

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Utilities Maintenance Worker III: Performs work on the observatory's water systems and provides advanced maintenance and repair tasks across one or more craft areas. Will provide on-the-job training for water operator licenses. For more details or to apply, go to *https://www.mcdonaldobservatory.org/jobs*. Salary $40,000 + depending on qualifications and experience.

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THE STATE OF TEXAS
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COUNTY COURT

CITATION BY PUBLICATION

IN THE ESTATE OF: JOSE A. RODRIGUEZ
CAUSE: 2070

TO ALL PERSONS INTERESTED IN THE ESTATE OF JOSE A. RODRIGUEZ, Deceased, Docket No. 2070, County Court, Presidio County, Texas APPLICATION TO DETERMINE HEIRSHIP AND APPLICATION FOR DEPENDENT ADMINISTRATION AND LETTERS OF ADMINISTRATION filed in the County Court of Presidio County, Texas, on the 16th day of September, 2025.

Said application may be heard and acted on by said Court at 10 o'clock A.M. on the first Monday next after the expiration of ten days from date of publishing this citation, at the County Courthouse in Marfa. Texas.

All persons interested in said estate are hereby cited to appear before said Honorable Court by filing a written answer contesting such application should they desire to do so.

All interested persons are further advised that they have the right to employ an attorney and that if they or their attorney fail to file a written answer with the clerk who issued this citation by 10:00 a.m. on the Monday next following the expiration of ten days after the publishing of this citation, the court may enter orders with binding effects upon said persons.

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND AND SEAL OF SAID COURT at office in Marfa, Texas, this the 19th day of March, 2026

Carolina A. Catano
Clerk of the County Court,
Presidio County, Texas
By: Melissa DeRonde
Deputy
Clerk's Address: P.O. Box 789
Marfa, Texas 79843

OPINION



USGS BEE LAB

The cactus bee, a ground dwelling insect found in Texas and Mexico, specializes in collecting pollen from cactus flowers.

Cactus bee springs thoughts of unity in the desert

But oh my desert
yours is the only death I cannot bear

—Richard Shelton, *Requiem for Sonora*

I'M SITTING on a piece of ancient volcanic rock whose upper surface has been worked smooth and flat by the graciousness of time when I see a tiny dot of gold crawling up and down and through the grey-brown sand of a desert floor made by the play of siblings: the mountains behind me and the river before me.

It is a male cactus bee, newly born into this March morning, prowling the sand and gravel for a female still underground. Relative to the slow pace of the mountains' walking—beneath the mountains the dropped limestone is still being uplifted by three inches per century—the cactus bee is lightning quick. Relative to sedentary me, its journey of a few feet covers the length of a feature movie.

The cactus bee moves with a certain innocence, not burdened but lifted by its past. I'm here hunting, too, in my case for ways to protect the desert life of the Big Bend region from human vanity and folly. And what can be more vain than that? The bee is more confident than I am.

Just behind me on the wall of fallen rock are petroglyphs drawn by unknown Indigenous people 3,000 to 5,000 years ago. There are elongated human stick figures who, dreaming, shake their heads at the planned degradation of their world. I can feel them. The president of the United States wants to vandalize the tender landscape of the Chihuahuan Desert along the northern banks of the Rio Grande. It is profane.

The cactus bee pauses briefly and seems to vibrate. Then it's onward over what is no more than an enlarged grain of sand.

The president sees steel walls 30-feet high along the northern bank of the river. He thinks it a symbol of his splendor, a gesture to his followers of his supremacy. It can be no more than that, because it is intended to keep out immigrants from the south who are not there, who do not brave a barrier far more magnificent than he: hundreds of miles of desert mountains of Northern Mexico.

Suddenly, the rolling swagger of the cactus bee reminds me that the desert will, in the end, defeat the presidential nightmare. The desert needs no requiem, but I'll leave Richard Shelton's *Requiem for Sonora* as an epigraph because our fears are real. Still, the desert will be alive and dreaming long after the president's bollards have been rusted to nothing by wind and river.

We can take some comfort in that, but it will not stop the pain and suffering in the shorter term if the president executes his plan. Ways of life along the river will be disrupted or snuffed out. Wealthy landowners and the desert's scrappy working families will share similar fates. Beloved state and national parks will be devastated. The globe's largest binational game preserve, the grand achievement of decades of work by the state of Texas and the United States and Mexican governments, will be destroyed.

Billions of dollars of taxpayer money would be spent on this unnecessary destruction. There are far less intrusive and less expensive measures already in place along the border in the Big Bend region. There are easily movable "autonomous surveillance towers" that keep an eye out for those who might arrive at our national threshold without invitations.

THE CACTUS BEE continues on its way, and I think of the unprecedented political unity I've found out here in West Texas. Conservative and liberals who would argue life and death over what to have for breakfast stand in solidarity against the president's plans. I have seen the hope and frustration in their eyes. The hope's there because like so many Davy Crocketts they know they're right and go ahead. The frustration is there because they also know that many Americans don't understand the simple truths these desert dwellers feel in their bones.

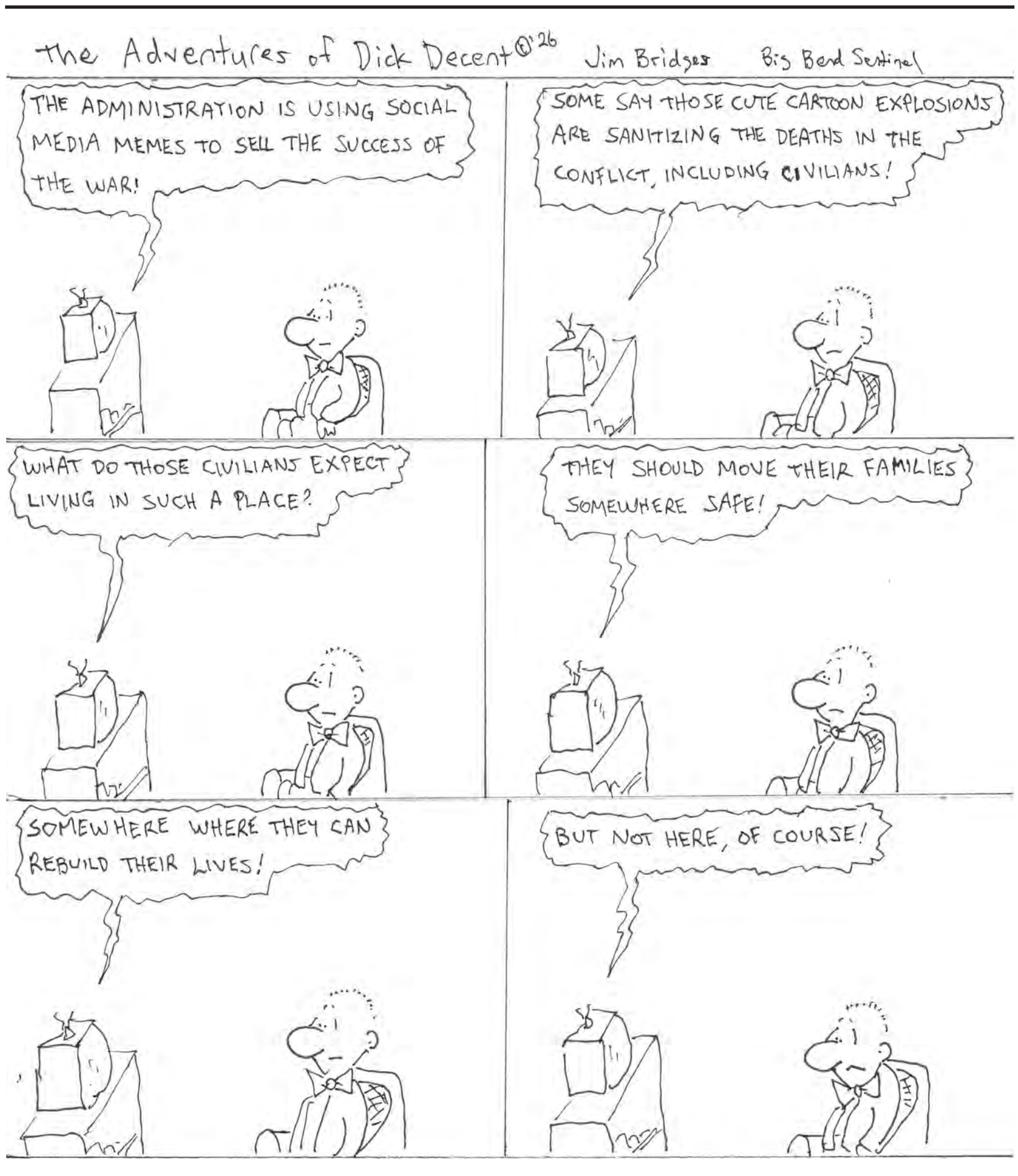
Is there a solution to be had in the U.S. Congress? The cactus bee is still on the hunt. I'm reminded that the word congress means "coming together," and centuries before the American framers chose to use the word in the place of "parliament," it was not uncommon to speak of sexual congress. My hopes are with you, dear cactus bee, but not so much, U.S. Congress. Its current leadership has chosen fealty to the president over fidelity to the American people. This is sad because there appear to be many members from the leadership's party who do understand the damage that could be done to the Big Bend region.

Still, the resolve of those opposed to the presidential plans is enough to give one hope. Every advance toward the American dream has hitched a ride on this kind of resolve. West Texans know they're running against the odds. But I wouldn't bet against them. Like the cactus bee, desert folk are rather solitary, but they are also more sociable than many when the time calls for it. There's power in that.

Perhaps someone will tell the president that there can be no symbolic victory when many of those for whom the symbol is intended read it differently than the president believes they will. Many of these West Texans voted for the president, but they live their lives with an integrity the president does not understand. Yes, maybe someone will tell him and he will choose against poking the bear with an empty gesture that will accomplish nothing in the way of his goals. Everybody out here strongly supports border security. But at the moment they also know they need to secure it against a devastating and unnecessary plan.

It's time to go. I struggle up from my rock. I've lost track of the cactus bee. He's none the worse for that. —**Glenn W. Smith**

Glenn Smith is a journalist and writer based in Austin.



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Damon Locks, This is Our List of Demands*, 2022, ink on paper, 18 x 12 inches.*

ART *Sentinel*

Group exhibition asks artists to 'take a position'

MAINTENANT, Marfa's boxing and gallery space, is presenting *What Are You Fighting For*, a group exhibition that asks artists to take a position—responding visually, materially, conceptually or textually through resistance, care, urgency, refusal, discipline or conviction.

Over 40 artists from across the United States, as well as France and Mexico, are included. The result is a dense, multi-voiced exhibition spanning painting, sculpture, text-based works, video, and sound presented across MAINTENANT's spaces.

The exhibition opens Saturday, April 4, from 5 to 8 p.m., with a sunset performance by Tan Cologne at 8 p.m.

Works signal outward and encounter a return

Marfa

RULE Gallery presents S*ignal and Return*, two concurrent solo exhibitions featuring paintings by Joe Clower (1937–2024) and Polaroid works by the artist collaborative El Disco. Installed in adjacent galleries, the exhibition explores the image as both instrument and event—simultaneously a signal transmitted outward and an encounter received in return.

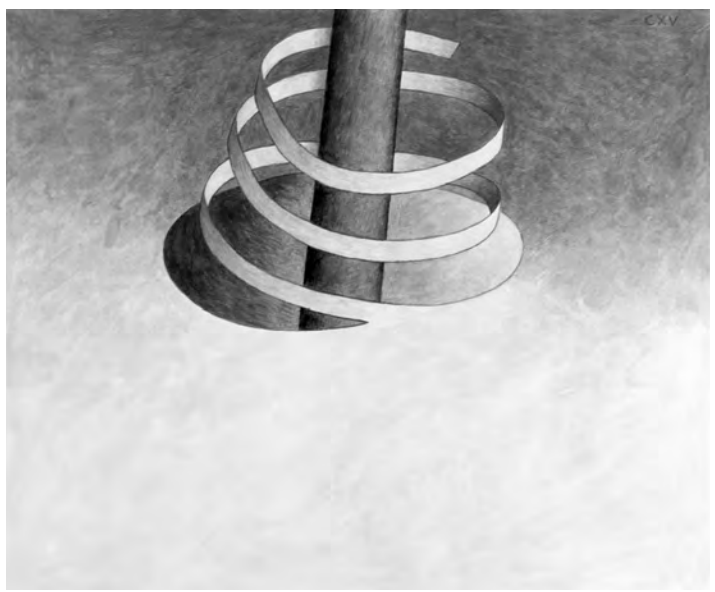
An opening reception will be held on Saturday, April 4, from 6 to 8 p.m. The exhibit will run from April 4 to May 23.

Joe Clower's independent studio practice developed a visual language shaped by speculative architecture and idiosyncratic narrative. Working in watercolor and gouache, Clower constructed scenes in which forms hover between assembly and invention. Drawing from classical scientific mechanisms, comic-book imagery, and a distinctly Western horizon, his paintings compile improbable architectures and symbolic objects into systems of relation. Coils spiral around antennae, forms extend atop plinths, and structures appear poised as if awaiting transmission—suggesting environments where tension, speculation, and narrative coexist without assumed interpretation.

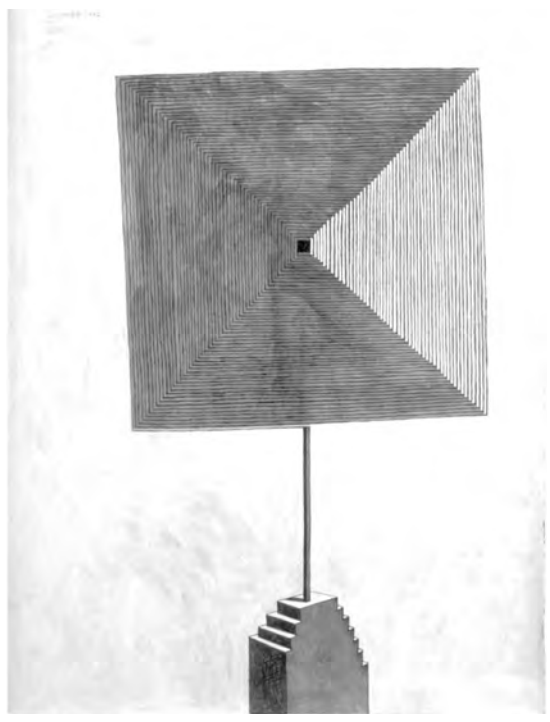
In parallel, the exhibition presents a focused selection of Polaroids from El Disco's expansive archive, produced throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Inspired by observed phenomena, El Disco formed in 1987 as a three-artist collaborative between Joe Clower, Steve Thomsen, and Michael Davey (Tennyson Woodbridge). More than documenting unusual objects in the sky, El Disco's Polaroids record the invisible tensions between belief, environment, and image, blurring the line between witness and interpretation. The Polaroid process itself, a chemistry of diffusion, migration, and time-released meaning, echoes the shifting mystery of light and craft across Western horizons.

Together, the two galleries trace an evolving alchemy of meaning and belief, asking how both continue to reshape evidence long after the initial moment of exposure.

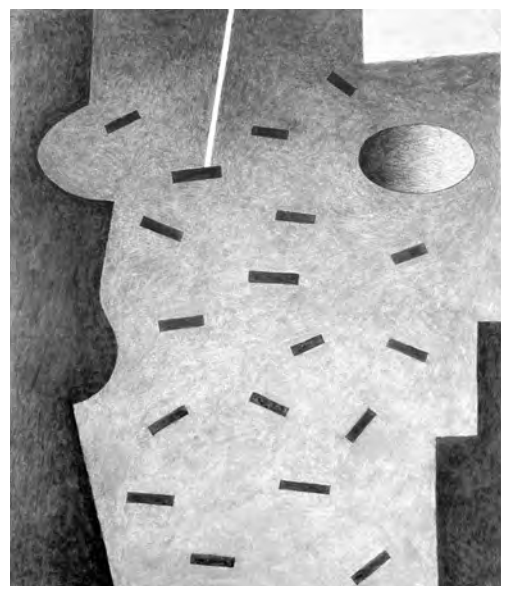
RULE Gallery is open Wednesday through Saturday from 11 a.m. – 5 p.m. at 204 E. San Antonio Street in Marfa.



Joe Clower, Untitled, 2011, watercolor on paper, 20.5 x 23.5 inches (framed).



Joe Clower, Untitled, 1992, watercolor on paper, 38 x 30.5 inches (framed).



Joe Clower, Untitled, 2011, watercolor on paper, 25 x 24 inches (framed).