

Award of Excellence - Arboricultural Project

“Observations and Recommendations for the Care of Historic Cottonwood Trees, Fort Davis National Park”

Patrick Wentworth and Kevin Bassett

Presented by ISAT Board member Oscar Mestas who assisted with the project.

Near the site of the old Fort in Fort Davis Texas is a grove of cottonwoods, based on early photographs and written accounts these trees are at least 100 years old and possibly as old as 200 years. Good afternoon, I'm Oscar Mestas and I'm going to tell you a story about two interesting fellows. I'm going to start with a quote from an article in the local paper in Fort Davis, from Park Superintendent Todd Brindle, “We are extremely sensitive to the historical importance of the trees as well as their significance to the community. We hope people will understand that closing the cottonwood grove is necessary to ensure the safety of the general public as well as to achieve our long-term goal of preserving and propagating these wonderful old trees”

The National Park Service has a long-term management plan for the grove that was first written in the mid 80's. Since then a couple of attempts to cable some of the trees have been tried and failed, the last time being about 8 years ago. I have been working with The National Park Service for several years, I was able to point out some past errors and suggested new action needed to be taken. Being that I don't bid out work or install cabling, or lightning protection, I knew it was time to bring in some back up.

I approached the ISAT Board and Patrick Wentworth of Austin Tree Specialists, and Kevin Bassett of Arborilogical Services, volunteered their time to come out and perform a thorough evaluation.

On the morning of December 30th, I met Kevin Bassett, Pat Wentworth and Regina Heiner (Administrative Assistant for the fort). Also assisting and learning was Melanie Migura, a new Urban Forester for the City of Fort Worth.

On that chilly morning Pat and Kevin began evaluating the situation and went to work describing the trees, tagging, measuring, estimating heights, and asking lots of questions of the staff.

Pat was very professional and took time to explain each problem to Regina. It was also amusing to hear Kevin using and throwing out old lingo and terms. I think this was just a ploy for Kevin to get Pat into some friendly banter. (For those of you who don't know Pat just go up to him and ask about water sprouts).

I learned a long time ago not to give advice when you don't know the answer. I do know the basics and have book knowledge of cabling trees and lightning protection, but I would never attempt to tackle a job this big without help. Pat and Kevin do this every day, I learned a lot that day about cabling and lightning protection and I'm sure Melanie did also.

I'm hoping that by the end of my career in Urban Forestry I can say that all the practicing arborist in West Texas have the same amount of knowledge and expertise as Kevin and Pat. Pat, I know that would be hard to accomplish but it's a goal to shoot for!

To sum things up the following is also from the same article from which I took the earlier quote. Fort Davis National Historic Site will be implementing recommendations made by the International Society of Arboriculture Texas Chapter concerning the management of the historic cottonwood grove.

I want to thank Pat Wentworth and Kevin Bassett for volunteering their time and expertise. They drove a long way for the purpose of promoting good and sound arboriculture. I also want to thank Russell Peters and the current ISAT Board for their support. Let's give Kevin and Pat a big round of applause.