



JOSHUA CREEK RANCH

BY STEPHEN STAINKAMP



A Hill Country sportsman's haven.

When guns are oiled and put away; when the cacophony of spring gobblers is fast fading and hens are on their nests; when anglers are itching to wet a line and parents are busy planning the kids' vacation; when the air is sticky and the nights are warm—if you listen carefully you may hear the distant cackle of a brightly plumaged ring-neck pheasant or the bugle of a spotted axis buck piercing the tangled cedar in a little bit of heaven known as Joshua Creek Ranch.



MAY IS A MAGICAL TIME of rebirth in the Texas Hill Country, our state's emerald jewel. It is a time of spindly fawns, bursting bluebonnets and golden peaches—a robust axis rut. And what better time to experience nature's opulence—to hunt, fly-fish, shoot sporting clays, take in a conference or be treated like royalty at this Hill Country crown jewel, Joshua Creek Ranch?

Hunt in springtime?

Late spring and summer are the best times to bag a trophy axis buck.

Fly-fish?

Yes, for bluegill, largemouth bass or native Guadalupe bass.

En route to the ranch for a much-awaited, and imminently successful, axis deer hunt, I was filled with anticipation and awe of the spectacle that stretched before me, compliments of TxDOT's wildflower program. Ordinarily monotonous asphalt stretched into infinity as I drove past miles of wavy green—splashed scarlet, white, yellow, pink, lavender and blue, awesome!

Joshua Creek Ranch, JCR, is tucked neatly into 1,200 verdant Hill Country acres where the Guadalupe River meets ranch namesake, Joshua Creek. It is a short commute from San Antonio or Austin. JCR is internationally renowned, known for upland bird shooting—pheasant, bobwhite quail, chukar and Hungarian partridge. Its bounty of Rio Grande turkeys, Texas white-tailed

deer and exotic axis deer is a bonus. JCR is a hunter's paradise and so much more!

The ranch enjoys a Beretta Double Trident rating (many world-class hunting lodges would kill for the coveted Beretta Single Trident rating beside their name) with excellence infused into every facet of its operation, from its elegant lodging and exquisite dining to its upland bird shooting, big-game hunting and trout angling to its laid back, tranquil ambience.

My thoughts were churning as I pulled off blacktop and stared at a phalanx of towering cypress trees that stretched before me, paralleling a pristine, mirrored stream—Joshua Creek.

JCR is high-fenced on its county road side, open at the backside where the Guadalupe River forms a natural boundary. Although best known for wing shooting, the ranch is a wildlife magnet, and all the creatures there, whether of game or non-game status, in one form or another, avail themselves of the well cultivated food plots—oats, wheat, red top cane, milo and sesame grass and the ground cover—switchgrass, Kleingrass, bluestem grass and Wilman lovegrass.

Painted sprites flit through JCR's canopy: buntings, orioles, vireos, warblers. And other, aerial acrobats: swallows, swifts, martins and nighthawks, pirouette in an azure sky at dusk.

JCR accommodations are splendid, matched by a culinary offering fit for a king or queen.

Exotic, free-range trophy axis deer, tall, wide and regal, and native white-tailed deer abound. Fish, too. JCR supplies guests all the accoutrements needed to land rainbow trout November through May, and bluegill, large-mouth and Guadalupe bass throughout the summer.

Kay Read, JCR Food Service Manager and Chef, was born in New Orleans, but moved to Texas, as they say, just as fast as she could. She has a degree in anthropology, but those who know her say her best work is in the kitchen.

Kay's signature dish is Axis Venison with Cherry Chipotle Sauce; her signature dessert, to die for and prepared with absolute tender loving care, is Butter Nut Brownie Pie.

She is often seen prowling through the flowerbeds in search of tender, organically grown herbs: rosemary, sage, chives, oregano, thyme or basil for her guests' discriminating palates.



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“Being a hunting preserve,” she says, “we primarily serve wild game dishes, like our very popular Axis Schnitzel, Axis with Green Peppercorn Sauce and our famous Axis Chili. Also very popular is our Pheasant Pot Pie, Chukar Chimichuri, Fried Quail and Wild Game Gumbo, with axis, pheasant, axis sausage and always delectable, ‘homegrown,’ Gulf of Mexico shrimp.”

Kay’s philosophy on cooking is exemplified by her Cajun-Texas background.

“Have fun,” she says. “Food is beautiful! Play with it. We eat with our eyes first!”

What else is there to do when one is not hunting or feasting indoors on splendid cuisine served in the elegant Cypress Lodge or outside, on the sprawling, tree-shaded limestone patio?

Shop in the gift shop, filled with clothing items, hunting apparel and the Hunter’s Harvest Cookbook authored by JCR President and Co-founder, Ann Kercheville, and Chef Kay Read.

You may decide to buy your next fine Beretta shotgun there.

Try bicycling or hiking throughout the ranch or on the surrounding country roads.

JCR offers a unique indoor-outdoor conferencing venue. Enroll the kids, ages 8 to 15, in a weeklong Joshua Creek Ranch Youth Outdoor Adventure Program where they will learn fun and invaluable outdoor skills.

Go kayaking or canoeing.

Enjoy a private stretch of tubing on the Guadalupe River.

Sample zesty appetizers around the outdoor fire pit while you await the main course.

Upland bird season begins in September and ends in March. Professional guides are there to expertly serve you, whether you prefer a half-day’s traditional walk-up shoot or a European-style driven pheasant or Continental shoot with some of the most amazing dogs on the planet—English setters, German shorthairs, springers, Brittanys and English cockers.

Whatever your tastes, JCR specializes in customized packages to suit your needs and preferences—if only to lounge in a gently swaying hammock overlooking the banks of Joshua Creek.

Imagine a little bit of heaven; imagine Joshua Creek Ranch. ☼

Axis Venison with Cherry Chipotle Sauce

6 portions of axis venison steaks

½ cup dried cherries

½ cup hot water

2 T butter

2 T onion, chopped

2 cloves garlic, chopped

1 cup beef demi-glaze

½ cup cabernet sauvignon

2 T sugar

1 T chipotle peppers, chopped

1 T rosemary, chopped



Let cherries stand in water while preparing the sauce. Melt butter in pan, add onion and cook until clear. Add garlic and stir. Add remaining ingredients and cook slowly. Add cornstarch dissolved in water if necessary to thicken. Makes about 1½ cups of sauce. While sauce is thickening, grill axis to a medium rare. Slice into medallions and top with the sauce.

EVERY HUNT HAS A STORY. WHAT'S YOURS?



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