

From the Outside Looking In

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photos by **Texas Brigades**

“From the outside looking in, you can’t understand it.”

“From the inside looking out, you can’t explain it.”

- Anonymous

This quote is the perfect way to explain the Texas Brigades program. Chances are you have crossed paths with a Brigades cadet or two over

the past 18 years, and they shared with you aspects of the Brigades and enlightened you with their knowledge obtained at camp. You witnessed their confidence while speaking and enthusiasm to educate you on white-tailed deer, bobwhite quail, or largemouth bass.

While some cadets arrive at camp with these skills, others

have never had the chance to practice these skills or allowed them to surface, much less be refined. Many parents, after getting their cadet home, write to Texas Brigades staff and camp instructors some variation of, “what had us both amazed is that this is the kid who you usually have to pull details out of.”

So now is the time to try to put into words the impossible and give you an inside feel for what the cadets gain during camp and return home with; what they may never consciously reveal or even realize themselves until years after their Brigades’ experience.

The mission of the Texas Brigades is “to empower high school youth with the necessary skills and knowledge in wildlife, fisheries and habitat conservation, land stewardship, team building, communication and leadership to become ambassadors for conservation in order to ensure a sustained wildlife and fisheries legacy for future generations.” Ask anyone who has experienced the program, either firsthand or secondhand through their children, and they will answer that the Texas Brigades exceeds its mission tenfold. The mission is the backbone of the program, but the excellence of instruction and elevated standards set forth for, and eventually by, the cadets themselves is what sets the Texas Brigades apart from any other youth development program and greatly attributes to its success.

“Empowerment” may be the closest all-encompassing single word to describe the feeling that the Brigades instills in the cadets, beginning with their week at camp and often continuing throughout lifelong involvement with the Brigades program. Natural resource, wildlife and conservation knowledge is the bait that draws them to camp; slipped in are the team building, communication and leadership skills, sometimes unbeknownst to the cadets. But the true pride of the Brigades program are the feelings of empowerment, self-confidence, honor and increased sense of self worth that the cadets gain during their five days at camp. Yes, they experience all these feelings, plus a multitude more in just five days.

How do the Brigades impact each cadet’s life so immensely? The key to achieving this goal is giving the cadets what every teenager wants, the privileges of being treated as an adult, while simultaneously teaching the responsibilities and obligations that accompany these privileges. A look at a typical camp schedule reveals competition, deadlines, projects and presentations, creating an extremely busy schedule. Although the topics and activities are exciting and fun, many cadets have revealed that they were skeptical of their ability to complete the outlined tasks and considered leaving camp early after seeing what the schedule had in store for them. However, upon graduation



Cadets become acquainted with their focus species. Rolling Plains Bobwhite Brigade cadets measure the height of their quail.





Cadets practice teamwork skills. South Texas Bobwhite cadets work together to find their collared quail.

the cadet had come to know strength and self-respect that enabled them to successfully complete the exhausting, but rewarding, five days. For some, that single point, the decision that cadet made to continue, may be the toughest decision he or she has ever made. That is one of the defining moments of the Brigades!

So what impact does that moment have on a cadet's life? Do you remember the last time you were truly pushed to the brink, asked to give something your all, and then asked to do more? Maybe it was a moment when you felt you

could not handle any more, and then you reached down deeper than ever before and somewhere inside found the strength to continue. After a moment like this, when there was no way to feel or give anything more, a new feeling started to sink in. The feeling is a mix of mental and physical exhaustion with pride, extreme gratification, accomplishment and disbelief. You did it! Now try to imagine feeling this for the first time as a teenager. The Brigades offers cadets the opportunity to experience this major life lesson during the five days at camp: the more you challenge yourself, the more you

grow and achieve; the two are directly related.

The Texas Brigades program allows cadets to control their own fate, to step up and be a leader without barriers, to realize there are consequences both positive and negative for their actions, and that the effort put forth into a project determines the outcome. This is what becoming an adult is all about, obstacles, pressure, people relying on you, and accomplishing your goals. Every graduate of the Texas Brigades goes home with their own version of this feeling, and what they do with this feeling is in their own hands. Some cadets go home and go about their lives, while others immerse themselves in the Texas Brigades' lifestyle and have a desire to continue their journey.

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Just as this quote states, there is truly no way to fully under-

stand Texas Brigades without experiencing it firsthand. This attempt at an explanation, more so a personal insight, describes merely one of countless ways a cadet's life, outlook and perspective change during his or her five days at camp. However daunting and challenging the Texas Brigades program may seem from the outside, each camp guarantees the awe-inspiring transformation described herein. Identify those teenagers in your community that have the urge to discover and mature, and share with them the Texas Brigades; enable them to understand. 🌍



Cadets learn management techniques from the professionals. Bass Brigade cadets go electroshocking to collect information about various species' weight and length.



Cadets feel the pressure as the camp draws to an end. All are working on their projects late into the night.



The finished project! The 11th Battalion of the South Texas Buckskin Brigade has come to an end.

