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PRESS RELEASE

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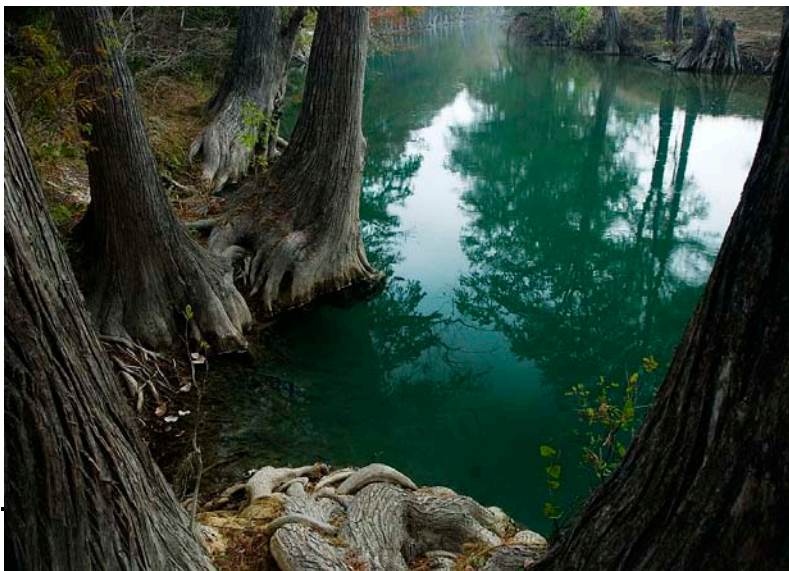
Christy Muse, Executive Director – Hill Country Alliance (christy@hillcountryalliance.org)  
www.HillCountryAlliance.org  
512.560.3135

## Hill Country Photography Exhibit opens this weekend at Westcave Preserve.

Austin (December 2, 2008) – Roughly 40 miles outside of Austin in Southwest Travis County, Westcave Preserve is an oasis in the Texas Hill Country. The 75-acre site lies at the meeting point of two Texas ecosystems: grasslands scattered with wildflower meadows, and a lush, sheltered canyon with towering limestone walls and a 40-foot waterfall tumbling over fern-covered travertine columns into an emerald pool.

“It’s the prettiest place in the world” said John Ahrns who has been working at Westcave for 35 years. “If you want to learn something about the Edwards Plateau and one of the most unique and beautiful regions in Texas, come to Westcave and bring your friends and family.”

All month long, Central Texans will have the chance to capture the natural beauty of the Preserve with their own eyes while capturing other Hill Country landmarks in pictures. The Hill Country Alliance, a nonprofit organization in Central Texas, will place the 12 winning photographs of its 2008 Hill Country Photography contest on display at the Westcave Preserve. Each photograph is featured in the pages of HCA’s 2009 Hill Country Calendar along with valuable information about Hill Country regional planning and preservation.



Beginning this Saturday, December 6<sup>th</sup>, the autographed images will grace the walls of the award winning Warren Skaaren Environmental Learning Center at the Preserve ([.westcave.org](http://westcave.org)). The architectural beauty of this structure alone is well worth scenic the trip down Hamilton Pool Road.

Visitors to the Hill Country Alliance’s website ([.hillcountryalliance.org](http://hillcountryalliance.org)) will be able to bid on each picture in a silent

auction held from Dec. 8 through Dec. 31 at 5 p.m. Each signed and framed photograph will go the highest bidder.

Earlier this year, HCA selected the 12 winning photographs from a pool of more than 400 entrants to appear in their annual calendar and represent the alliance's mission of preservation and conservation. The top three winners of these 12 earned prizes of \$500, \$300 and \$200, respectively.

This year's first-place winner, Herb Smith, also took home the top prize in last year's contest.

"I was very excited and surprised," Smith said. "I never dreamed that lightning would strike twice like this."

Smith took the winning picture, "Emerald Waters of the Blanco" (pictured, above) on the Blanco River upstream from Wimberley. "It's a spot near our home, a place I've enjoyed a lot," he said. "I walk along the river pretty much every day."

Smith grew up loving both nature and photography – he had a darkroom when he was 12. Though he has taken many pictures, Smith remembers that his winning photograph was taken on a crisp November morning at about 8:30 a.m.

"Entering the contest combined my love and enjoyment of photography with the goals of the alliance," he said.



Winning second place in the contest is Jared Holmes, originally from Pennsylvania, near the Pocono Mountains. He came to Texas to attend Texas A&M University for a degree in zoology and has been doing nature photography since he graduated in 2005.

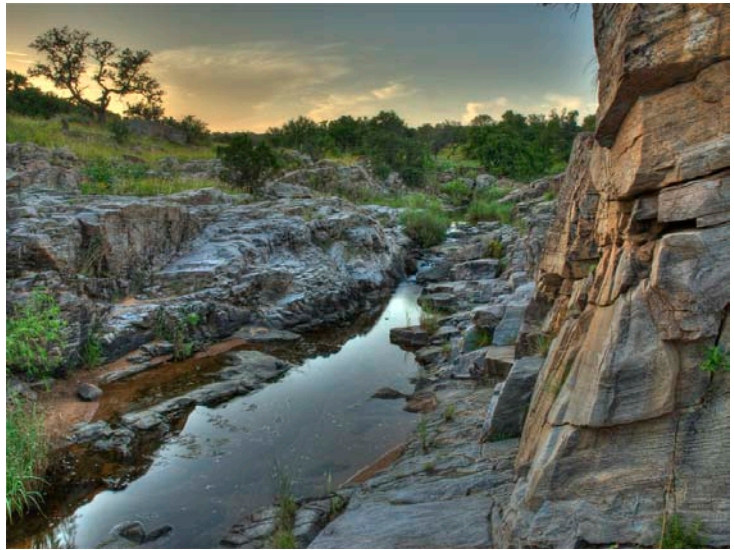
"The Hill Country is in the middle of everything," Holmes said. "There are a few beautiful state parks, a lot of ranches, and plenty to photograph."

Holmes took the winning "Road Runner or Tree Runner" on Rocky Road in Blanco County. He says he was lucky to capture this roadrunner on film. "I chased it up the road and it hopped the fence and then it turned back at me," he said. "When people think of the hill country, they think of hills, roadrunners and rattle snakes."

The third place winner, Rusty Ray lives in Austin, where he was also born and raised. Ray took "Evening Glow in Llano County" at a small stream on the Freeman Ranch. He has taken pictures for a hobby and for business for the last 10 to 15 years, throughout his career as a wildlife biologist. "You can capture images a lot of people don't get to see," Ray said. "You can show them the outdoors."

Ray has been around the Hill Country his whole life, getting his undergraduate degree at Southwest Texas University and completing his graduate work in Central Texas. He currently works for the Lower Colorado River Authority. "It's a pretty fine place to live," Ray said. "Texas is beautiful for me, from east to west."

Along with Ray's photograph, each of the winning entries was chosen by a team of judges out of an original pool of more than 400 photographs. Making up the team are three members of the art and photography world: Damian Priour, Dana Friis-Hansen and Stephen Clark.



Priour is not only a founding member of the Hill Country Alliance, but also a well-known sculptor and the official Sculptor of Texas for 2008, appointed by the Texas Legislature. In addition to being immediate past president of the alliance, Priour serves on the boards of the Austin Museum of Art and the Umlauf Sculpture Garden.

Dana Friis-Hansen is the executive director and curator of the Austin Museum of Art, with a special interest in photography. Stephen Clark is the owner of Stephen L. Clark Gallery, a high-end photograph gallery in Austin. Both are very respected professionals in their fields.

“Their objective was to evaluate the entries technically, artistically and most of all, their ability to capture the essence of the Hill Country,” said Christy Muse, executive director of HCA. “We hope this calendar will serve as an educational tool for everyone in our region, it will take active citizens working with landowners and elected officials to protect the amazing natural assets of the Hill Country.”

*Check the Hill Country Alliance Web site at [.hillcountryalliance.org](http://hillcountryalliance.org) for information on the 2009 Hill Country Photography auction, a look at the 2009 Hill Country Calendar, and for updates on Hill Country news, events and advisories.*

Directions to the Westcave Preserve (Source: [.westcave.org/visit](http://westcave.org/visit)):

From Austin: Travel west on Highway 71 to the village of Bee Caves. Turn left at Ranch Road 3238 locally known as Hamilton Pool Road. Travel 14 ½ miles on Hamilton Pool Road to the Pedernales River. Westcave Preserve is the first gate on your right after crossing the river.

From Areas West of Westcave Preserve: Take Highway 281 to the village of Round Mountain. In Round Mountain, turn east on Ranch Road 962. Travel 17 miles on Ranch Road 962. The gate to Westcave Preserve will be on your left. (Note: To remain on Ranch Road 962, veer left at the y-intersection after Cypress Creek).

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