

1956: The Year That Comal Springs Dried Up

By Paul Foerster, Bexar County Master Gardener

At a BCMG monthly meeting several years ago, Mr. Gregg Eckhardt of the Edwards Aquifer Authority and San Antonio Water System gave a presentation describing the reach of the Edwards Aquifer and how it works.

He mentioned the importance of uninterrupted flow from the Aquifer at Comal Springs (located at Landa Park in New Braunfels) in preserving endangered species such as the Fountain Darter (*Etheostoma fonticola*). When the Aquifer dried up during the droughts of the 1950s, these species were saved by relocating them to other areas and re-introducing them when the Springs resumed flowing later in the 1950s.

Mr. Eckhardt also mentioned that there were no known photographs of the dry Comal Springs. As one of the people in the audience that day, I stated that I had taken such a photo in 1956, as shown below.



Photo credit: © 1956 – 2019 by Paul A. Foerster



The photo “surfaced” recently as I was combing through my files. Mr. Eckhardt was thrilled to learn that this photo existed and said that people had been searching for decades to find such a picture.

He has since had a high-resolution electronic copy made and will make it available on a case-by-case basis, subject to my permission, as the photographer. Presently, the Weather Channel has permission to use it in a story being compiled about Comal Springs.

For those of you interested in mathematics, once during my fifty-year teaching career I gave my math students data on Edwards Aquifer levels (measured at the J-17 index well near Fort Sam Houston) and Comal Springs flow rates.

For instance, in mid-July, 1983, the J-17 level of 653 feet (above sea level) corresponded to a flow rate of 240 cubic feet of water per second. The students used the data to find an equation for predicting flow rate at any given aquifer level. They also used the equation to predict the aquifer level at which Comal Springs would stop flowing.

The actual value reported on the Internet is 618 feet. As I write this article on July 20, 2022, the level is 634 feet and dropping almost a foot a day. The lowest aquifer level ever recorded was 612.5 feet in August 1956, about the time I took this photo.

Let's hope it starts raining soon!