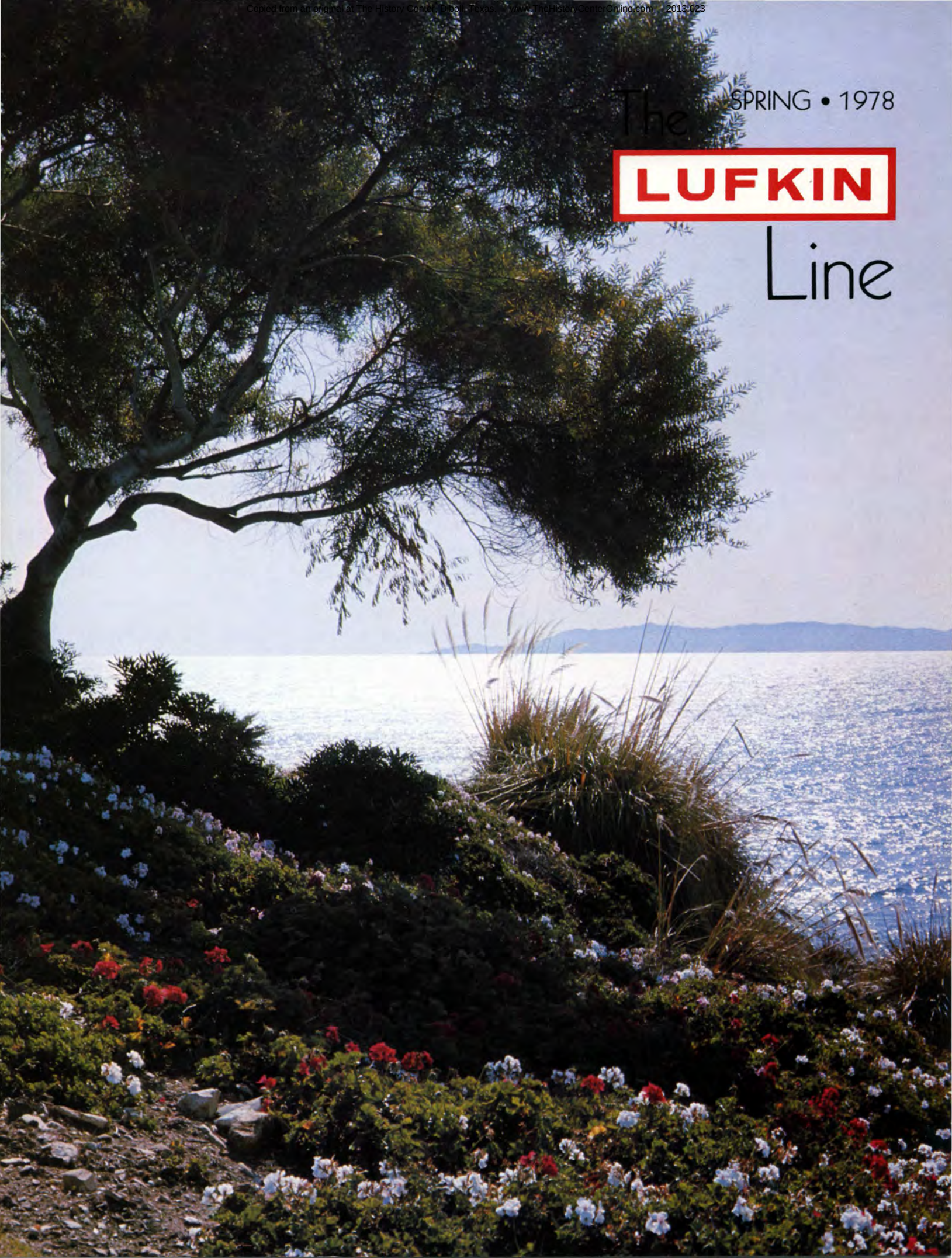
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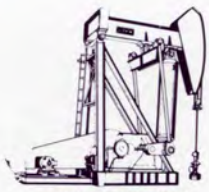
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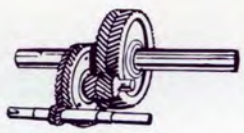


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GULF COAST DIVISION ISSUE

A Trace of History—Tim Champlin 4
LUFKIN Installations 8
Snapshots by LUFKIN Cameraman.....10
LUFKIN's Gulf Coast Division 15

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After years of heavy use, sections of the old Trace were worn several feet deep into the soil.

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A Trace of History

TIM CHAMPLIN

Just as the mighty Mississippi River flows with rich history of the American heartland, so does the land trail which parallels it—the Natchez Trace.

Sought out and pieced together from ancient Indian hunting trails, the Natchez Trace became the return-home route for countless river travelers as they made their way back north and northeast from the port cities of Natchez and New Orleans.

Today, the Trace is a modern, paved parkway closely following the original route of the early pioneers.

French settlers, moving north from the Gulf of Mexico around 1700, found the Choctaw, Natchez and Chickasaw Indians living in the dense forests and swamps of the lower Mississippi Valley as their ancestors had done for centuries.

Threading this wilderness was a series of game trails the Indians had worn into a path to connect their tribal territories. For nearly eight decades after the arrival of the French, the only whites to use this northeastward path were some missionaries, soldiers and traders.

Gradually, farmers from the frontier states of Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee began using flatboats to float their goods of corn, hemp, tobacco, whiskey, flour and pork down the Mississippi to the markets at Natchez and New Orleans. The only way home for these men was a 600-mile walk or ride overland from Natchez to Nashville and points northward. The volume of this traffic continued to increase until a crude road had been trampled out of the old Indian trail.

The paved, bridged and well-marked Natchez Trace Parkway of today is a far cry from what the early travelers faced; thick cane brakes, swamps miles wide with fallen trees and rotting vegetation. Overhead, trees hung with wild grape vines and Spanish moss forming an arch so thick that it blocked out the sun and created a green twilight at midday. Swollen streams brought insects, sickness and accidents. Unfriendly Chickasaws in the early days, and merciless robbers later, formed the gauntlet the homebound travelers faced.

It was then a journey of several weeks, either on horseback or by foot. Small wonder that travelers frequently journeyed together in caravans for mutual protection.

Travelers made their own camps each night and posted sentries. The government encouraged inns, or "stands," as they were then called, and these were used when available. The first was built in 1804, and by 1820, more than 20 were in operation. They were usually run by half-breeds, or by white men with Indian wives.

In 1798, the United States acquired this region from Spain and set up a territorial capital at Natchez. In

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1800, Congress extended mail service to Natchez, but the road was so bad, the next year President Jefferson ordered the army to clear it. This task proved too much for the few troops available, so in 1808, Congress appropriated $6 million for improvements.

Between 1800 and 1820, the Natchez Trace was the most heavily traveled road on the frontier—the interstate highway of its day. After 1820, however, its use declined sharply with the advent of the steamboat which was a much easier and safer way to travel.

One of the most famous travelers on the Trace was General Andrew Jackson. During the War of 1812, he was ordered to march his troops down the Trace to protect New Orleans from an expected invasion by the Spanish. The invasion never came, so Jackson and his troops marched back up the Trace.

General Jackson traveled the Trace again in 1815, after his troops had stopped the British invasion at New Orleans. It was while Jackson was sharing the hardships along the Trace with his men that he acquired the nickname "Old Hickory."

In addition to the famous, the infamous also frequented the Trace. Several notorious outlaws and their gangs terrorized "The Devil's Backbone," as the Trace was sometimes called in its heyday.

Micajah Harpe and his younger brother Wiley, preyed on frontier communities and Trace travelers for several years around the turn of the 19th century. These two, known as "Big Harpe" and "Little Harpe," were apparently psychopathic killers who murdered erratically and without motive. They often even failed to rob their victims.

When irate settlers finally caught and killed "Big Harpe," Wiley escaped and later joined the gang of Samuel Mason. Mason orginally operated out of Cave-in-rock on the north bank of the Ohio River. From here, his gang robbed and killed crews of flatboats. Later, they moved south to specialize in horse stealing and robbing homebound travelers on the Trace.

Considerably safer now than when the Harpes and Masons roamed the area, the parkway, when completed, will roughly parallel—and in many places, overlay—the original Trace. (The exact route of the original Trace varied in places according to the weather and the time of the year.)

The greater portion of the parkway—from Jackson, Mississippi to Tupelo—has been completed for several years. Funding and land acquisition problems have delayed completion of the parkway from Natchez to Nashville, but enough of the 450-mile route has been completed to provide a beautiful, pleasant and historic drive.

The two-lane, paved road winds through woodlands, hills, bottomlands and swamps. There are no billboards, no trucks or buses and light traffic. Historic sights and markers invite frequent stops. Nature trails, picnic grounds, parks, sections of the old Trace, Indian burial mounds 350 years old to 1300 years old, and Civil War battlefields are only a few of the attractions awaiting the Trace visitor.

Few places can offer as many scenic and historic sites for the price of a few days time as the Natchez Trace Parkway.



One of the attractive, (above) rustic signs that mark the points of interest along the Trace

Looking across Buffalo River (right) at Metal Ford, where old Natchez Trace crossed the river on a flat shelf of rock

Typical view (below, right) of the well-maintained parkway

View of open pit (below) Napier Mine shows the reddish, iron-bearing soil



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LUFKIN INSTALLATIONS



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LUFKIN C-228D-246-86 Unit,
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LUFKIN C-160D-200-74 Unit, Alta Mae Dunn Lease,
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LUFKIN C114D-143-64 Unit (above), Joe Mogas #1, Pamale Petroleum Co., Pearsall, Texas

LUFKIN M-228D-256-120 Unit (left), Tesoro Petroleum Corp., Crystal City, Texas

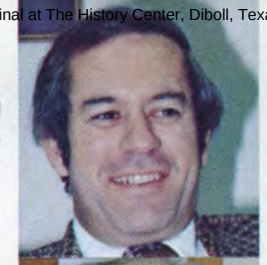
The "Goliath Tide," (below), a 218-foot 7800 SHP offshore towing and supply vessel, powered by four diesel engines driving through a LUFKIN twin pinion compound reduction reducer



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WALTER QUINN
Panhandle Producing Corp.
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Preston Fleming Equipment Co.
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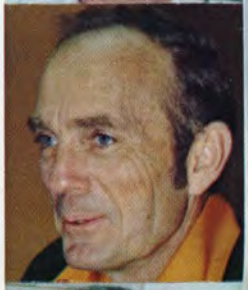
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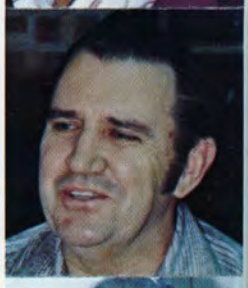
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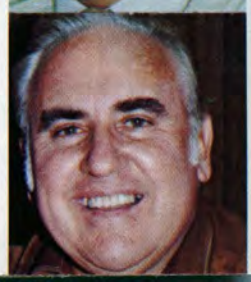
(l-r) LAWRENCE PAYNE, BETTY LEAGO, HENRIETTA ALONZO, ANDY BIELECKI, Monsanto Co., Houston, Texas



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Gulf
Lafayette, Louisiana



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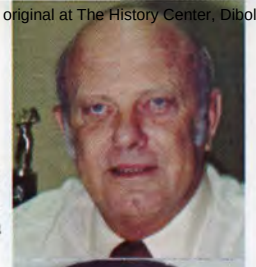


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Houston, Texas



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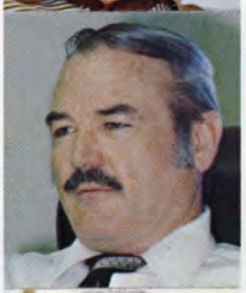
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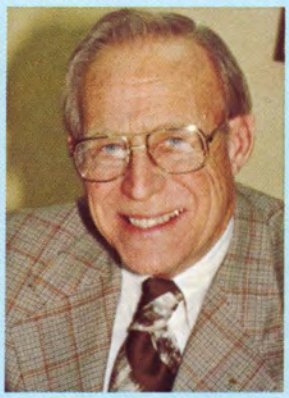
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