



BALCONES TEJAS
BIOREGIONAL
CONFLUENCE
2025





A Truly Magical Confluence

When the moon was full - in her second cycle since Sirius' return with the late summer sun - just east of the Balcones Escarpment, we made real music together. We did. And I could feel the Blackland Prairie beneath us, as well as the Earth beyond, trembling with joy.

It was Sunday evening. Over three dreamy days we'd been riding a magic carpet. Even our preparations held such divine guidance, meet-ups and appointments - all happening rapidly in response to the planet-wide invitation from r3.0 to host local confluences. I have the icon of Ashleigh's ever-smiling face - which I glimpsed again and again over three days - shining forever in my mind and heart.

But I haven't introduced Ashleigh, and first need tell more of the music we made in our closing circle, of the delight we felt as we each chose rhythm instruments once belonging to a group of young children. As it happened, Haley, a trained percussionist, took up the buffalo hide drum of Kiowa origin; while Jay arm-tucked the little djembe. Together, these native drums of American and African peoples gently and harmoniously suggested a beat. Only later did I realize they gave voice to two great rifts of injustice in the human family as peoples of Europe colonized Turtle Island. On this Sunday, hundreds of years later, these drums of original peoples were soulfully played by a woman and a man - each descended from those immigrant peoples. Indeed, most in this circle of about 25, were too.



At first, we made a cacophonous noise, but very soon the rest of us fell in with the drums on small wooden and metal instruments, and a nurturing vibratory field was made. We each had a part in creating it. And this in itself was healing. We've become rather used to passively receiving such healing music, but oh what an experience it was to be involved in its making, its evolution - playing into the vibratory field of life! I found myself striking the fourth, and later, every second beat - all the while gazing at exalted faces around the circle, reveling in the blessed rhythm of the whole.

We'd each picked up an instrument, just after blessing crown, hands and heart with chamomile-flowered fresh water from pressed-glass vessels - which previously held saltwater, representing tears. But that's another story that takes us to the beginning of this journey... to a lovely Friday evening on the Edwards Plateau.

More than 30 people gathered at "The Dome" to open our bioregional confluence on the western side of the Balcones*. Two and a half years before, on the spring equinox that year, an apology ceremony had been offered on this very site as part of a global effort to effect healing of the land and between peoples. The saltwater was poured by colonial descendants down an aged juniper from these glass dishes - which once belonged to a Choctaw great grandmother. "Mary" was daughter of parents who walked The Trail of Tears - from their homeland in gulf coastal forests to the hard scrabble prairies of the southern Great Plains. Her great granddaughter, who knew her well, treasures these little dishes. When one day in coming years, her grand niece bears a child, this Choctaw great granddaughter will know seven generations in her family. Though scars remain, may they be reconciled for that generation!



*The Balcones Escarpment marks an ancient fault zone: which slices a graceful arch a thousand miles long from the Rio Grande River almost to the Red, interrupting the path of still other rivers on their way to the near gulf sea. Topography, soils, water sources, weather and more are strikingly different on either side. For the confluence, we followed the waters' flow: first gathering west on a high point in the dry, rocky hills of the Edwards Plateau; delighting next in the abundant outflow of springs at Spring Lake on the Escarpment itself; and setting our future course together east in the fertile Blackland Prairie.



The Radiance Dome is a circular structure built in 1983 explicitly for meditation. It is the third and smallest of four Maharishi domes (others are in Iowa and the UK), all constructed with the intent of fostering world peace and societal wellbeing through the practice of meditation. Stewardship of the Dome and four surrounding acres was recently transferred to a young mother with a dream. Ashleigh's organization, "Earth Drifters", aims to develop this space as a living classroom - a gathering ground and rallying point for a community ready to reconnect with the Earth. At the heart of it all is a simple but powerful commitment to children**.

Our confluence opening that evening was to be the very first Earth Drifters gathering there. Wondrously, four generations, aged six to 86, attended. Arriving, each was welcomed with a fantastically delicious East Indian vegetarian bowl of chole chawal, served outdoors and homemade for us by one of the octogenarians and her grandson. Having shared such sumptuousness, we paused in circle for introductions outside, then entered The Dome. Inside, a stage had been set or, more exactly, a spiral. 138 feet of soft golden twine lay on the bare floor under the skylighted dome - each foot representing 100 million years of cosmic history.

**Earth Drifters' Mission: Through in-depth experiences, young people will learn the language of land and water, the wisdom of wild places, becoming the protectors our planet needs. They will gain an ecological literacy that no textbook can teach. And the Dome will be the drum at the center of it all - a place where adults and families come together for a plethora of experiences to strengthen our bonds with one another and the natural world. The vision of this dream is a groundswell - for our community to return to its roots, choose connection over consumption, and raise a generation ready to stand for life.



But four billion years, 40 feet more, passed before anaerobic one-celled organisms and Cyanobacteria, along with Earth's cooling, would allow sufficient water and oxygen for an explosion of oxygen-producing and reliant ancient lifeforms. We were now six feet before the end.

Over this brief span, life diversified again and again, indomitable through five mass extinctions. Finally, with the arrival of a massive asteroid near the Yucatán, 66 million years ago, the sun was clouded for 15 years and photosynthesis ceased for two. This, Earth's most recent extinction event, decimated the great reptiles - allowing for the rise of mammals and millions of other organisms alive today. In this brief ending space we crowded all our small figures and artifacts to represent them. In amazement, we felt the true miracle that these six and a half inches hold all of modern life!

From a collection, each person selected a small stone as well as a tiny artifact or figure of a plant or animal. When all were seated and hand fans distributed - since the AC was not yet working well in the newly-reopened Dome - the telling of the 13.8 billion year story began. Fantastically, the story only took about 13.8 minutes - but oh what a story it was!

Had we ever heard it this way or experienced it like this? Together, we remembered the explosion of unfathomable energy we call The Big Bang, followed by the slow emergence of burning stars which brought the light, and the ever shifting balance of dark energy and gravity - both mysteries to us still.

At long last, nine billion years and 90 feet along the cord: our sun and moon, and the other planets emerged- though the Milky Way Galaxy had been present almost since the beginning. We placed our small stones here.



We had reached the present day. We stood and gathered close around the spiral now, pausing for silence and softly-spoken reflections as night drew near...

Eventually, we returned to our seated circle - not yet ready to leave - and the future arrived, with several voicing dreams and intents that the spiral of life would continue.





Our sacred story both enlivened and refreshed us. Gradually, like replenished springs, we trickled out from the primordial space into the darkness outside. Meanwhile, a long brown paper had been unfurled across the floor next to the spiral. Several had taken up brushes and blue paint and were painting a river. There was no particular plan or instruction or coordination, yet the work commenced in a deeply focused and devoted way.

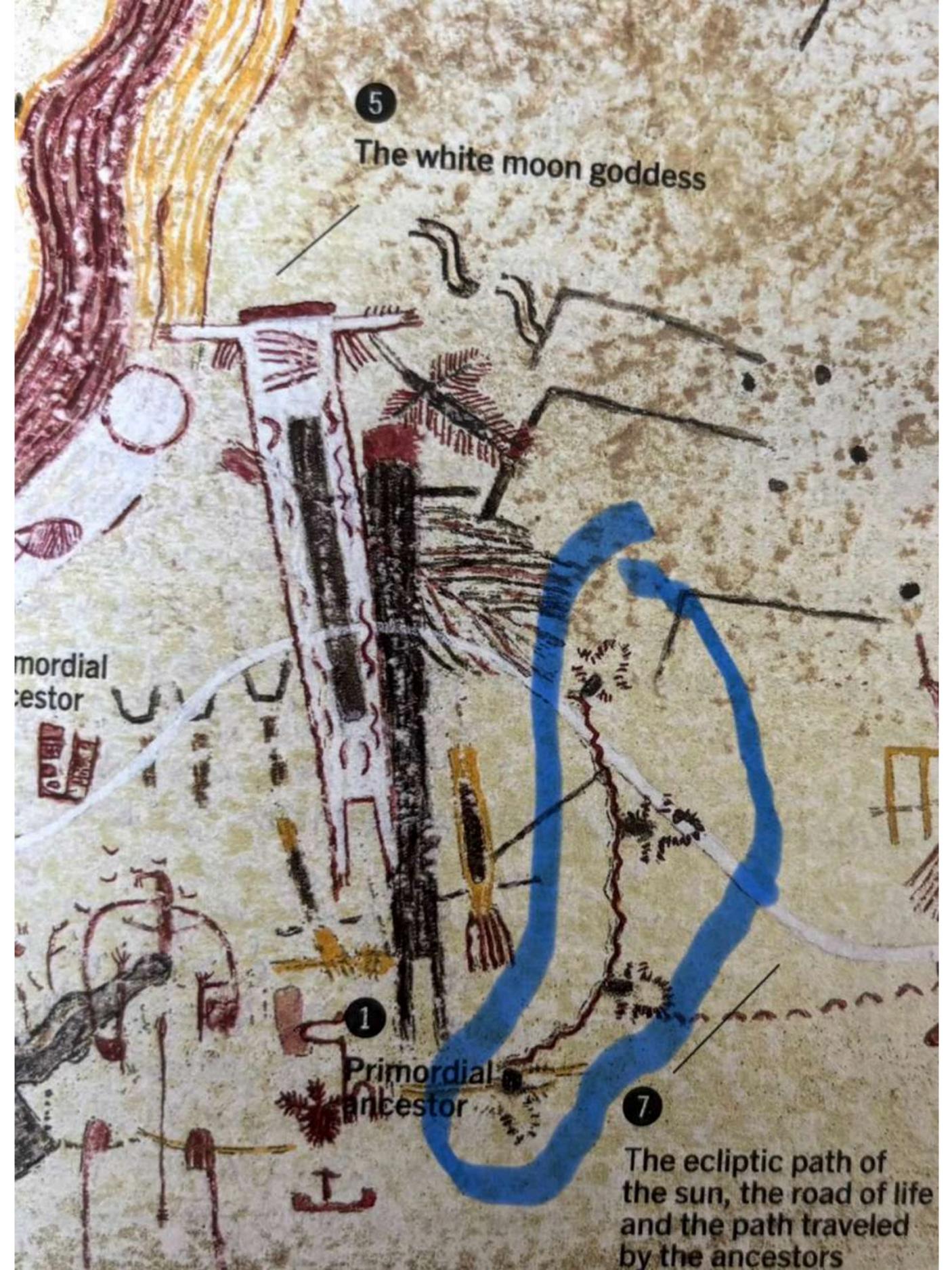


San Marcos Springs is a complex of more than 200 springs that together release 50-100 million gallons of water per day. This is Edward's Aquifer water, surfacing through fissures in the Balcones Escarpment. Until a dam was placed in 1849, this astonishing abundance flowed in river form, with fountains even punctuating the river's course. Now flooded over, the springs fill Spring Lake, the celebrated centerpiece of The Meadows Center for Water and the Environment.

Humans have lived in this area for more than 11,000 years, and it was here we gathered on the morning of Day Two. At The Dome the night before, we opened the evolutionary story understood by science today. Now we balanced and developed our story further on what is considered by the Coahuitecan people to be their birthplace.

Just west of here, in the Pecos River drainages of the Edwards Plateau, are the "first books" of Turtle Island (North America). Hundreds of four-color pictographs, some more than 5000 years old and predating the pyramids in Egypt, were painted by peoples in this area. The White Shaman Mural "communicates a narrative about the cycles of time, outlining a creation story of the birth of the Sun... and creates a visualization of the structure of the Cosmos". Four of the great springs that lie along the Balcones Escarpment are depicted in this fantastic mural. In geographic order from north to south, these are their names since colonization: Barton Springs, San Marcos Springs, Comal Springs and San Antonio Springs.

- Above quote and image on the right from Texas Parks and Wildlife Magazine, October 2025



In the new day's light, we greeted one another on the lake shore, then boarded two glass-bottomed boats for a thoughtfully-narrated journey upon these sacred waters. Fish and turtles, large spotted gar, and aquatic plants of many kinds appeared to be thriving in the fresh and consistently cool water provided by the aquifer's release. Surrounding Spring Lake, two varieties of cypress, as well as oaks, cedar elm, sycamore, other trees and native understory, were lush and supportive of birds and terrestrial animals. On cue, soft rain fell as the boat tour ended. Eden could not have been more idyllic.



Dressed in tee shirt, jeans and sandals, Executive Director Rob Mace met us as we landed, then led us to a clearing where we formed a large circle by the water's edge. Here, he skillfully encouraged us to use our senses in more expansive ways. With arms spread wide, and without moving our heads, we checked the peripheral view of our hands on either side to its limit. Rob had us notice that we mostly have a habit of focusing only on what's directly ahead. What if we became aware of our capacity for a wider view?

Then he asked if we might not have something of an owl's capacity to turn our ears behind us? We cupped our hands backwards and forward to notice. As we reveled and marveled in revitalized senses, hark (!) an elated voice called to us from the water, "She said 'Yes'!!". We cheered and clapped - sharing the young couple's joy, which seemed to match our own growing excitement for what we were becoming together.





More magic awaited our awakened senses as Rob next took us down boardwalk and worn paths on an exploration of the water's edge. With the summer air warming swiftly, he invited us to grasp shoots of the near and abundant cattail. Eureka, they were strikingly cool - constantly imbibing the 72° water! Cattails provided us with a felt experience of the aquifer itself, and communion with the lifeforms thriving underwater there. Like a wonder-filled child, I was drawn to exchange with them over and over as we walked along. Near the end, amongst these cattails, we saw a home built by creatures we would not see - a beaver dam! We marveled and took photos as a large family of the nocturnal mammals slept inside.

Our confluence journey next took us indoors for a deep dive into water management with Pete Van Dyke. Pete's mission? Nothing less than "drought proofing" our lands!

Lying on the eastern edge of the Chihuahua Desert, yet close enough to the Gulf Coast to be impacted by tropical rains, the riverine areas of the Edwards Plateau experience some of the most extreme swings between drought and flood anywhere in the world. Over-grazing since European arrival, impervious cover in urban areas, and 200 years of fire suppression have amplified these natural occurrences. Even with modern weather forecasting and science to help us, tragic flooding is a regular occurrence. At the time of the confluence, we were still grieving the staggering loss, just two months before, of 135 people and countless trees and animals nearby, when the Guadalupe River rose 37 feet in overnight hours. Pete believes we can mitigate such events, helping rain revitalize our aquifers and ecosystem as nature intends.

Over the course of an hour, supported by PowerPoint, Pete shared real life examples and results he's achieved in the field using very simple techniques. On slope he slows the water - torrential or not - using readily available limestone rock, juniper and oak branches, and berms and swales on contour lines. Most critically - we must understand - soil is built by plant roots. On downslopes, if water is slowed, plants can have a chance to grow and rebuild soil over time. On flatland too, simple techniques support the process. Here, this involves insuring bare soil is covered, using mulch or planting ground covers. This way, rain can soak in, keep land hydrated longer, and support new growth. Little wonder that after a brief Q&A with Pete in the large group, he was engaged by small groups of people for well over another hour.



Light refreshments, art materials for free expression, and an opportunity to continue painting the river mural, allowed again for a gentle organic departure. There was also the sense we had found our tribe - here, where the ancestral people of this land, who knew rightly how to live here, were born in the abundant spring waters - and it was clear we were flowing forward together.





Day Three on the other side of the Balcones held the human energy of our confluence like the opposite bank channeling a river's flow. Down a winding path through urban forest, accompanied by birdsong and traffic noise, we arrived on Sunday morning at The Center for Maximum Potential Building Systems, soon to celebrate their 50th anniversary. The center is an internationally respected and awarded leader in sustainable building. In welcoming remarks, co-director Gail Vittori described the center's commitment for construction and functionality to be part of natural cycles and flows - of water, energy and materials - guided always by humble inquiry and respect for "what's here". It is this that forms Max Pot's protocol for building prototypes, which eventually drive the development of policies - even for impactful, ubiquitous and complex structures such as schools and hospitals.

And such natural flow systems should never be hidden, Gail advised us, because the question ever before us needs to be the building's role, not just in human life, but in the landscape and larger flow of the biosphere. If waste management is working harmoniously, for example, we should be greeted by a pleasant, well-watered landscape in front of our building. Conversely, if something is off, we ought to know right away so as to adjust.

Gail's short but potent presentation inspired the group to focus together on particular passion areas for creating a vibrant bioregional consortium going forward. Tables of five or six coalesced around such themes as: education, governance, visioning. And the Balcones Tejas Bioregional Club was born! Two persons even arrived less than an hour before our closing drum circle, and both were thrilled to find themselves immediately swept into our energy flow.

Whoohoo... we were finally hitting rapids... riding the freshness of channeled waters like we had burst through the escarpment itself! One person was overheard to say, "Things were happening, but I couldn't tell who was in charge!".

We had indeed confluenced, and the one stream would be flowing strong.





Caroline Dunn, Zane Liston, Kiran Topiwala, Megan Argo & Annie Spade

Spanning three generations, this dream team - that mostly had only just met - established immediate trust and respect for one another, as well as our gifts and contacts. We rode the wave of a natural coherence stemming from personal commitments to purpose that, streamlike, discover they're flowing into the same river. What joy! It was and is a happy encouragement that was found by all who came to play with us. We are so grateful.

Article by: Annie Spade

Photos by: Kiran Topiwala, Caroline Dunn and Annie Spade

Editing Support by: Megan Argo

Layout by: Lamia Anwar Shama



If you would like to learn more about and support this work, and the work we
continue to do quietly, please reach out to
balconestejasbioregionalclub@gmail.com and kiran@inserviceofearth.org.
