



Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program, Inc.

1305 N. Shoreline, Suite 205, Corpus Christi, Texas 78401 • 361-885-6202 • 361-881-5168 (fax)

To: CBBEP Board of Directors
From: Jake Herring
Date: May 14, 2010
RE: April 24th Incident at the Nueces Delta

Caller Times outdoor writer, David Sikes, called on Wednesday April 28th and notified the CBBEP that he was going to write about an incident that happened on the banks of the Rincon Bayou within the boundaries of the Nueces Delta Preserve. At the time Mr. Sikes was not aware that the incident had happened on CBBEP owned property. I told Mr. Sikes that the CBBEP was the land owner and that we were concerned about the event. I asked if we could do more research about the incident before the article was released. He did not want to wait any longer before writing the article and informed the CBBEP that it would be in tomorrow's paper (April 29th). Mr. Sikes went on to inform the CBBEP about the incident and retold the story of Joey Ramos one of the two men involved in the incident.

Immediately following the conversation with Mr. Sikes I contacted TPWD Game Warden Kevin Mitchell. GW Mitchell told me his side of the story. Upon GW Mitchell's arrival at the Rincon Bayou he checked the area and determined that it was safe for the Kayakers to get out of the water. He immediately took the two kayakers off of the property and delivered them back at their vehicle located at Labonte Park. I asked why the CBBEP had not been notified of this event and GW Mitchell stated that he had not even told his Captain about the event because he did not feel that the kayakers were in that grave of danger.

On Monday May 3rd CBBEP met with GW Mitchell on site. Prior to meeting with CBBEP, GW Mitchell had returned to the site to look for evidence of the incident. GW Mitchell nor his Captain could find any bullet casings on CBBEP property or located on the Union Pacific rail road. The Game Wardens also could not find any bullet holes in the mudflat adjacent to the Rincon Bayou where the incident occurred.

After meeting with GW Mitchell, I had a chance to speak with Joey Ramos. I specifically asked Mr. Ramos where the gun shots were coming from. He told me that it sounded like they were coming from an area closer to the Nueces River. This would make a case for not being able to find any bullet casings on the Rincon Bayou. At this specific location the Rincon Bayou is about 1/3 of a mile from the river. Adjacent to the train trestle on the Nueces County side of the Nueces River there is an area that appears to be a high traffic "hang out" for locals. Upon looking around the area CBBEP found many recently spent bullet casings.

The CBBEP takes this event very seriously and we believe that this is not going to be a reoccurring event. CBBEP has asked both the area Game Warden's and also the Nueces County officials to patrol the area down along the Nueces River and the Rail Road trestle. CBBEP has also spoken with Union Pacific about installing additional no trespassing signage on the rail road tracks. The CBBEP is currently looking for appropriate durable "No Trespassing" signs that could be installed along our fence line that borders I-37. These signs would also be installed along the Rincon Bayou. Recently CBBEP had to repair a gate that was pulled off the hinges by some suspected trespassers. Signs that are installed along the NDP fence lines get taken down by suspected trespassers. The TPWD Game Wardens have suggested that CBBEP install the signs inside our fence line and put them higher in the air as to make them less accessible to trespassers.

CBBEP is taking action to reduce the chance of an incident similar to the one on April 24 from reoccurring.

Fishing trip turns into a matter of survival

By David Sikes

Originally published 11:23 p.m., April 28, 2010

Updated 02:01 p.m., April 29, 2010

COASTAL BEND — Local kayak angler Joey Ramos invited a longtime friend on a Nueces River adventure Saturday to catch a few redfish. The trip turned into an unforgettable night of terror.

The pair of experienced kayakers agreed to launch from Labonte Park and paddle downstream a short distance to Rincon Bayou, a partly enhanced channel that runs through the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program's Nueces Delta Preserve. This 5,500-acre private preserve hosts free educational programs for area schoolchildren and teachers. If you're there without permission then you're trespassing.

Ramos simply knows the waterway as a slough south of the park where he catches redfish. He's fished there at night once before and many times during daylight. This would be the first visit to Rincon Bayou and most likely the last for his friend, who asked that I not use his name.

The pair launched before dark, around 7 p.m., with a few bottled waters, snacks, some extra tackle and their cell phones. Their fishing rods were fixed with glow DOA shrimp imitation lures.

Ramos had fished here several days earlier. He easily had caught a limit of redfish and wanted to share his good fortune with a friend.

The sun was setting by the time they reached a railroad trestle spanning the bayou. But there was enough light to see four young men on the tracks above the bayou. Each was holding a can of beer. One of them had reddish hair and a goatee. They appeared to be in their early- to mid-20s, Ramos recalled.

"They didn't look particularly friendly," he said. "Nobody said anything, not even hello. They just stared at us with an empty look."

Ramos paddled under the trestle first then waited for his friend on the other side.

After the pair rounded a bend in the river, they commented to each other about the strange encounter and the unfriendly group.

"We just got a weird vibe about those guys," Ramos said.

Within 10 minutes it was nearly dark. Their plan was to fish near a set of big black culverts that had been installed to allow the bayou to flow under a caliche road, which is on the Nueces River Preserve. The bayou just before the culverts gets a little deeper and often holds redfish, Ramos said. The pair stood up in their kayaks and began casting lures into the gut. The bayou was quiet except for an occasional mullet splash. The moon was bright.

Suddenly the crack of a high-powered rifle broke the silence and buckled the anglers' knees.

"It sounded like it broke the branches near my face," Ramos recalled. "I told my friend that I thought somebody was shooting at us, but he didn't think so. He said it was probably just an innocent misfire or a ricochet."

As a precaution they immediately sat in their boats and began to paddle out. Bad plan.

Twelve shots rang out in succession. They heard lead punching through the bayou's surface around them and ducked instinctively at the sickening whirl of a single bullet overhead, a distinctive sound they had only read about or seen in movies before then.

"It sounds like death. It's a nasty hissing sound I'll never forget. I remember thinking it was two different caliber guns," Ramos said. "I knew right then that they were aiming at us."

But his partner still wasn't sure. He turned on his flashlight and waved it in the air.

"He was yelling 'we're here, we're over here,'" Ramos said. "I told him to turn it off, you're giving us away."

And as soon as he did, another eight bullets whizzed past. The direction of these shots was different from the first.

Maybe the shooters were on the move. Ramos wondered whether they were coming closer. He wondered whether they were being stalked.

"We need to get off our kayaks right now," Ramos said he told his friend. "So we beached them on the bank, got out and hid behind them."

Half submerged and shivering, the pair stretched out on their bellies or sides and clung to their hollow plastic boats. They were cold, muddy and terrified.

"We just laid there and didn't move for a while," Ramos recalled.

Ramos' buddy retrieved his cell phone and dialed 911. The light from their cell phone

must have illuminated their position. Another barrage of gunfire broke branches and splashed into the bayou around them.

So they hunkered farther into the muddy bank to make the necessary call for help.

While Ramos' friend tried to explain where they were to a dispatcher, Ramos called 911 on his own cell phone to help. Confusion and panic combined to frustrate the desperate anglers. It's difficult to explain a remote location such as this without roads to go by.

"I tried to get them to get the coordinates off our cell phones," Ramos said. "But the calls were being transferred between Nueces and San Pat counties. They thought we were on the main river. We gave them a description of our truck and where we had parked.

"You can't imagine how frustrating it was," Ramos said. "We were being shot at while we were talking to 911. Our lives were at stake and we couldn't figure out how to let them know where we were."

Eventually Ramos heard one of the dispatchers suggest this was a job for Texas Parks & Wildlife.

Ramos recalled a feeling of hope and relief when he heard one of the dispatchers say they should call game warden Kevin Mitchell. Of course, Mitchell would know how to find them. This is his territory. And Ramos had reported a poaching violation to the game warden a while back. He even had Mitchell's number programed into his cell phone.

"So I got off the phone with 911 and called Kevin and told him what was happening," Ramos said. "He knew exactly where we were and he said he was on his way."

All they could do now was wait. No more than 3 minutes of silence separated flurries of gunshots for the next half-hour. Conversation on the bayou was sparse, though both men called their wives.

"I didn't know if I was going to make it out of there and I wanted to tell her I love her," Ramos said. "At first I think she was in denial of what was happening."

A 911 dispatcher interrupted the call to say TPW was on the way. Afterward, Ramos called his wife back and during this conversation denial turned to alarm when she overheard the gunfire that had her husband and the father of her children pinned to a muddy bank in the dark.

Meanwhile Ramos' fishing partner, whose wife is expecting a sibling for their toddler this summer, was not taking the news well.

Ramos could overhear his partner trying to calm his wife's fears.

"It was sad, scary and intense," Ramos said. "Such a helpless feeling. We couldn't move. God must have been with us."

More than an hour passed since that first shot. Ramos estimates that the shooters fired about 100 rounds.

Ramos called Mitchell again just to get an update on his arrival and to let him know the situation hadn't changed. Mitchell, who was coming from Sinton, told him he would be there soon but that he couldn't talk. He needed both hands on the steering wheel.

The end of that called was punctuated by yet another 20 shots of what sounded like semi-automatic gunfire.

"This time the shots were directly in front of our face, hitting the water right in front of us," Ramos said.

Mitchell called as he had promised. He was on the property. He told the pair to shine a flashlight in the sky when they heard his pickup approach. They obeyed the order of their savior.

Mitchell shut off his engine and scanned the area with night-vision optics. No shots were fired for a minute or two.

Mitchell called out to the two men across the bayou. They floated across clinging to their kayaks and met Mitchell on the opposite bank. He was carrying an M4 rifle.

For a while they hid behind Mitchell's pickup. Several minutes passed and a single gunshot came from the distance. It was not the final shot of the night.

Mitchell brought the grateful pair to the ranch gate. There they heard two final shots. They sounded far. Mitchell, joined by game warden Nicole Spatz, returned to the property to search for the shooters. But they escaped.

Spatz and Mitchell loaded the kayaks and the exhausted anglers into separate pickups and returned them to Labonte Park. No bullet holes were found in their bodies or their boats.

If you have information about this crime, please call TPW at 289-5566.

David Sikes' Outdoors column runs Thursday and Sunday. Contact David at 886-3616 or sikesd@caller.com.



By Rashi Vats <http://www.kristv.com/news/local-kayaker-speaks-about-life-threatening-experience/>

Posted: Apr 29, 2010 7:15 PM

Updated: Apr 29, 2010 7:22 PM

CORPUS CHRISTI - Two local kayakers' weekend fishing trip turned into a bad nightmare when someone started shooting at them.

They kayakers say hundreds of rounds were fired during the ordeal that lasted two hours.

It happened on the Nueces River on Saturday around 7 p.m.

"We are in cold chilling waters and trembling, being cold and yucky and we had an ugly feeling in our bodies. We decided to call our wives and kind of give them our last goodbyes," said Joey Ramos, one of the kayakers. "We heard 12 shots go off and everyone of those shots was directed at us. We heard the hissing of the bullets passing us, going in front of us and over our heads."

The two men quickly turned their kayaks into a shield to protect them from bullets until the Texas Parks and Wildlife game warden arrived two hours later.

"Roughly five minutes after I got out of the truck, I could hear gun shots, but I couldn't see anybody," said Kevin Mitchell, game warden for Texas Parks and Wildlife.

Ramos believes he saw four men he claims to be suspects. He says him and his friend ran into them before heading out to the water on a dock.

"They didn't look friendly. These guys didn't look friendly whatsoever," said Ramos.

Both men survived with no injuries, just a horrible memory.

Investigators are still searching for the suspects.

Ramos believes that the suspects are four white males in their 20's.

If anyone has information on the suspects you're asked to call Texas Parks and Wildlife at 289-5566.