



BIG THICKET BULLETIN

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Time to Reflect and Give Thanks

Wendy Jo Ledbetter, BTA Executive Director

Fall has come to the forest with the turn of color of the sweetgum, hickory, and sumac. What a great time to be outdoors! I hope you have been enjoying outdoor time in the Big Thicket and reaping the benefits of our natural world for your wellness and happiness.

With the holidays and the end of the year fast approaching, it is time to reflect and give thanks. Despite the pandemic impacting some of our work, BTA has received generous financial support from several local business and service organizations. We continue to engage with our steadfast conservation partners and are developing new relationships with others. All good news!

I am thankful for the efforts of everyone working together as we transition to new leadership for BTA. Please join in me in congratulating Bruce on his time as Executive Director with best wishes for retirement. You will still see him as a volunteer captain on the Ivory Bill and at our board of directors table.

I wish everyone a happy holiday season with family and friends as we close out this most challenging year. I look forward to serving BTA and working together to protect and celebrate the beauty and diversity of the Big Thicket.

Yours in Conservation,
Wendy Jo

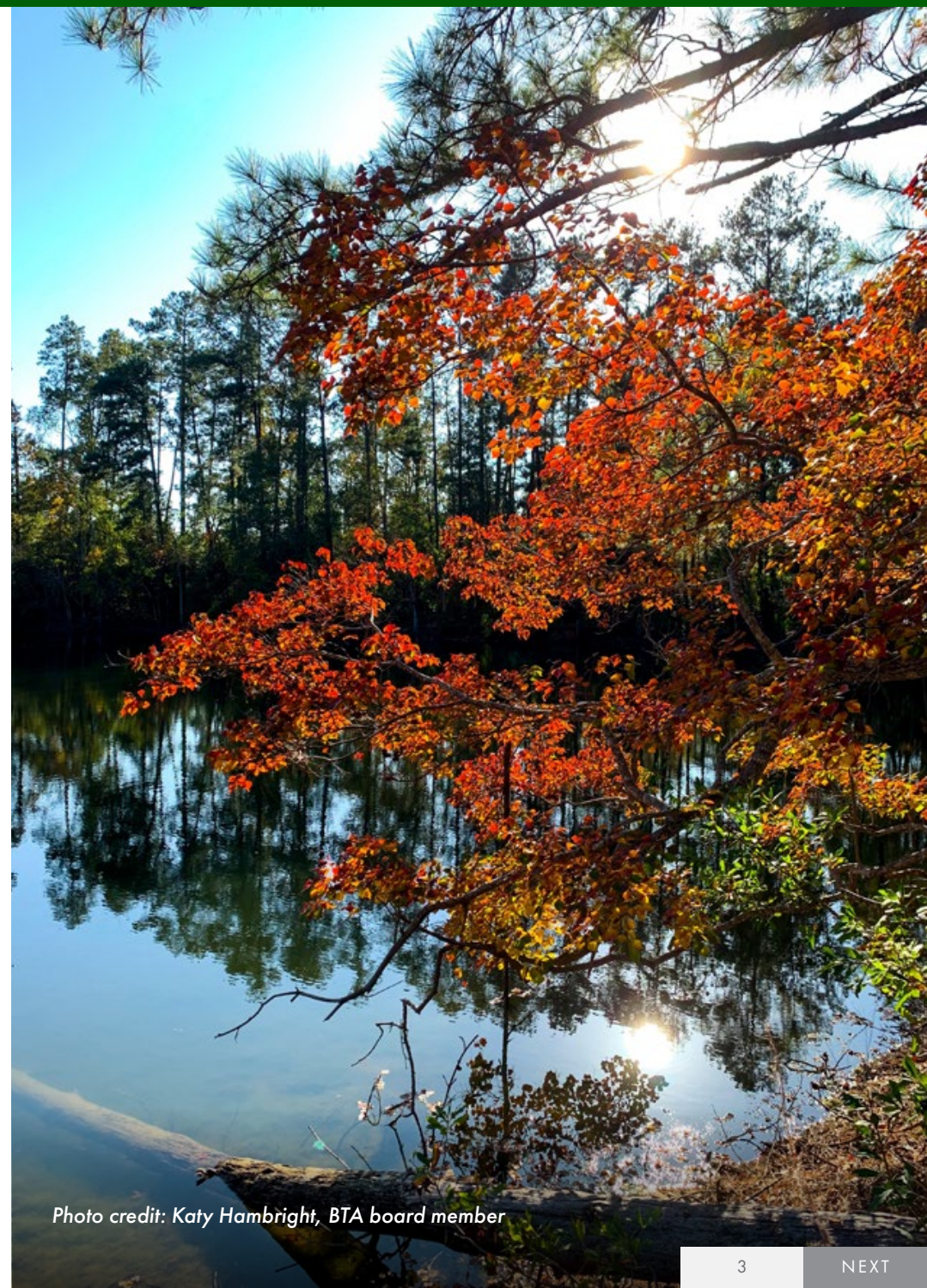


Photo credit: Katy Hambricht, BTA board member

Paddling Through the Pandemic

By: Avery McElhone, Texas Conservation Corps. Intern, NPS & Jason A. Ginder, Chief of Interpretation and Education, NPS

"Wherever there is a channel for water, there is a road for the canoe." – Henry David Thoreau

Paddling your kayak or canoe down the Neches River or along one of many creeks in Southeast Texas can provide you with the peace and serenity needed to recharge in this complex world. With a small group of family or friends whom you trust to practice proper physical distancing, paddling our regions waterways is a perfect activity to undertake during this pandemic. Below are a few quick tips that are vital for any paddling trip.

- Always check the water level and weather when planning your trip. The hazards of high water include rapids and hidden obstacles that could cause you to capsize. The hazards of low water include dry passages and exposed branches that can create treacherous obstacles. Prepare accordingly for the temperature. Know the signs of heat exhaustion and hypothermia.
- Always wear your PFD (life jacket), even if the water level is low. Even if you are a good swimmer, always wear your PFD!
- Look at a map to plan your trip. Mark emergency take-out points on your map where emergency services could easily reach you in an ambulance. Always leave a float plan with someone you trust in case of emergency. Include where you will start, where you will end, and your estimated time of return. Keep your map with you.
- Double check to make sure you have all the supplies you may need. Always bring extra water! Never drink directly from the river or creek.
- Lastly, remember to have fun and enjoy the experience paddling through this region. Visit us online at <https://www.nps.gov/bith/index.htm> for more information on the three official paddling trails in the park and other helpful tips for exploring the preserve by water.

Have fun, be safe and enjoy a paddle trip.



Kountze Native Debuts Powerful Short Film

by Mary Catherine Johnston

Kountze native Terrence Spivey is an author, actor and now Artistic Director of his own theater company, Powerful Long Ladder, in Cleveland, Ohio. He works in all-black theater, showcasing new voices, and honoring the classics of the past.

Spivey earned a B.A. degree in theater from Prairie View A&M in 1984. He served as Artistic Director of the Karamu House, the oldest black theater in the US from 2003 to 2016. In 2016 he was honored by Ohio House Representative John Barnes, Jr. for his contributions to the arts. In 2016, Spivey left the Karamu House, and began working as a freelance director, acting instructor, theater lecturer, and speech coach. With the Powerful Long Ladder Ensemble Theater Company, Spivey debuted productions of James Baldwin's *The Amen Corner*. He also directed productions of *The Bloodless Jungle*; *Radio Golf*; *Breath, Boom*; *Bootycandy*; and *Neighbors*. In 2016, he directed *Objectively/Reasonable: A Community Response to the Shooting of Tamir Rice*, which received national acclaim and was featured on NPR's *Going There* with Michel Martin. In 2017, he received the Best Bold Direction for a Shocking Piece Award for his premiere of *Neighbors* by Brandon Jacobs-Jenkins.

In 2018, after playing to sold-out houses, standing ovations and an extended run at Weathervane Playhouse, one of Akron's premiere theatre companies, *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar and Grill* was staged in Cleveland under Spivey's direction. Weathervane's original cast was used in the collaborative effort between Powerful Long Ladder and Holy Trinity Cultural Arts Center. Akron native, Ms. Marissa Davis, was featured in the role of Billie Holiday along with Cleveland musicians Ed Ridley and Bradford McGhee.

In 2020, Spivey completed writing and directing a short film, *Resurrection of The Last Black Man*, on the death of David Gregory, a tragedy documented in Wanda Landrey's 1976 book, *Outlaws in the Big Thicket*. The haunting story is a lyrical poem, and the setting is 1933 in the small town of Kountze, Texas. Powerful Long Ladder artists performed under Spivey's direction, with photography by Jen Hearn Photography. According to Spivey, the film's concept was inspired by the French classic "La Jetee".

Terrence Spivey was featured in the *Silsbee Bee's* July 22nd issue article by Dannie Oliveaux. His biography is documented in TheHistoryMakers, the nation's largest African American Video Oral History Collection.



THE NOLAN COUNTY NEWS, SWEETWATER, TEXAS, THURSDAY, DEC. 14, 1933

Frenzied Crowd Mutilates and Burns Negro's Body



HERE ARE pictures taken at Kountze, Texas, immediately after a mob of whites dragged the body of David Gregory, negro ex-convict, at the end of a chain behind an automobile, mutilated it, then burned it before the home of his mother. Gregory was shot to death by officers who were hunting for the attacker and slayer of Mrs. Mell'e Williams, young white farm woman. The left photo shows Gregory's charred remains, still smouldering. "You done right, white folks," said his mother when the mob brought her son's body to her front door. Sheriff Miles Jordan of Hardin county, pictured right, was overpowered by the mob and the negro's body taken from his possession. He refused to surrender a ever, and throughout the night of terror guarded the jail with the aid of sev

Big Thicket Association Receives Medallion from Jefferson County Commissioners

by Bruce Walker

The Big Thicket Association received this Deepwater Horizon restoration commemorative medallion, a replica of the County Seal placed in the center of the Courthouse's ground floor in 1931.

Accompanying the medallion was a letter from County Judge Jeff Branick, which stated, "The Jefferson County Commissioners Court is deeply grateful for the strong support our Deepwater Horizon restoration efforts received from local leaders and organizations. We believe Austin and Washington decision makers recognize the breadth of support Jefferson County's projects receive from local partners."

The letter further stated, "The County's Deepwater Horizon projects, that your organization helped enable, will reestablish the freshwater balance in our coastal marshes to conserve the unique ecological richness of Texas' largest coastal marsh and bolster our hurricane and storm surge protection. To date, we have received in excess of \$150 million from all funding sources, which will allow us to complete Coastal Restoration Projects by mid-2021."

Bruce Walker, John Stafford, Jan Ruppel, Bruce Drury and Michael Hoke participated by writing letters of support and by attending restoration meetings that occurred in Southeast Texas and Southwest Louisiana, in addition to one-on-one meetings with Deepwater Horizon liaison, Tim Richardson.



Photo credit: Tera Adler



BTA incoming and outgoing executive directors Wendy Ledbetter and Bruce Walker accept Hancock Whitney award at A Harvest of Giving Award Ceremony, Event Center, Beaumont, Oct. 28, 2020

Big Thicket Day Invocation

Saturday, October 17, 2020

Phoebe H. Dishman, BTA Director/BTA Bulletin Editor

Gathered here we now invoke
 the One who made the ash and oak,
 the One who made the Tupelo sweet,
 the One who made the River deep.
 There could not be a lovelier church
 than Sweet-spire, Silverbell, Cherrybark, Birch,
 Longleaf, Sugar maple, Bayberry, Beech—
 all these wonders within our reach.
 Loblolly, Cottonwood, Southern magnolia,
 Overcup, Ironwood, Ponderosa,
 Fringe tree, Sycamore, Sumac, Plum—
 roots go deep and branches hum—
 murmuring leaves and curling bark—
 Buckeye, Basswood, Bois d'Arc,
 Pignut, Pecan, Cypress knees,
 Flowering Dogwood if you please,
 Sassafras, Shortleaf, Cedar elms—
 verdant beauty overwhelms.
 But so do virus, storm, and strife
 as we take our turn in the Thicket of Life,
 where every step matters, and matters dearly
 help us see the trail more clearly.
 Lord of all, and all divine,
 Thou who hears the whispering pine—
 we your partners in preservation,
 conservation, education,
 honoring those who went before
 and trusting good is still in store,
 showing up to make connections,
 fanning the flame of new affections,
 hearts aglow and Thicket for all—
 hear us now, as now we call.

Amen.



River elm on the Neches, image by Charles Kruvand

Neches River Adventures (NRIB) Captains Update: Adding New Captains

by Bruce Walker

Despite Covid-19 and the 2020 shutdown of our all our BTA programs and projects, we were able to accomplish some minor upgrades to the Ivory Bill this year. We got a new look with just some paint and some new signage. And we also added 3 new captains to our roster.

BTA received a \$2,400 grant from The Foundation for Southeast Texas to underwrite two scholarships for the Maritime School at Lamar State College Orange. This grant, plus a donation from a BTA board member, allowed three participants to attend the class, so we will end the year with a gain of three new USCG approved Captains. This donation was very welcome in a year of reduced revenue from traditional sources.

After a lengthy and meticulous process, Nick Huckaby, Tim Wynkoop and Bruce Walker have now received their certifications. All three are members of the Sabine Neches Chapter of Texas Master Naturalist (TMN) and active docents or deckhands on the Ivory Bill. All 3 are members of BTA and active volunteers for both TMN and BTA.

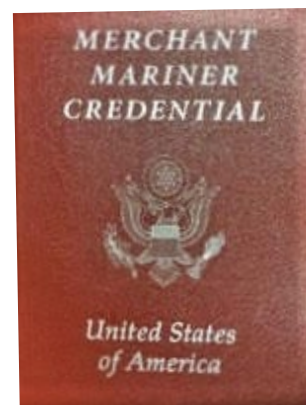
To qualify for a Masters Captain's Certificate, the participants completed the 80-hour, two-week course under the instruction of Captain Chris Horner, Lamar Orange. In addition, the applicants were required to submit numerous documents regarding "sea time", pass a complete medical exam, hold current First Aid and CPR certificates and qualify for Transportation Workers Identification Credentials (TWIC Card), and to be enrolled in the Maritime Consortium (a random drug testing program).

Bruce Walker, Nick Huckaby, and Tim Wynkoop are newly approved Master Captains for Self-propelled Vessels of 25 Gross Register Tons or Less upon Inland Waters i.e. the Ivory Bill.

Although the 2020 season for public tours ended on Saturday, November 7th, the Ivory Bill continues to offer private charters upon request. Private charters can be booked any month of the year, any day of the week, and any time of day (during daylight hours and favorable weather conditions).



Captains Tim Wynkoop, Bruce Walker, Nick Huckaby





Blazing the Paths Through the Turkey Creek Unit

by Jason A. Ginder, Chief of Interpretation and Education, NPS

Have you ever been hiking a trail and not known which path to follow at an unmarked intersection? Or maybe you've been hiking along in the woods and suddenly had the feeling that you're no longer on the trail. Well, this happened to a significant number of park visitors in 2019. Last year

park staff had to respond to several lost hikers, including one intense night-time search and rescue effort during a significant storm event. In response to this increasing trend, park managers chose to blaze most of the trails in the Turkey Creek Unit, in accordance with basic standards for marking national hiking trails like the Appalachian Trail and the North Country Scenic Trail.

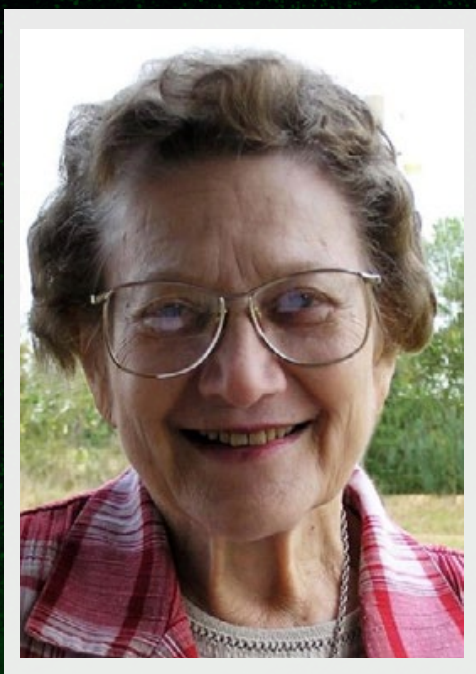
The trail blazes on each trail or loop in the Turkey Creek Unit have a unique color to help distinguish one trail from another and assist with visitor navigation.

- The 14.5-mile **Turkey Creek Trail** from FM 1943 in the north to the bridge over Village Creek on the South (**Red Colored Trail Blazes**)
- The 1.0-mile **Pitcher Plant Loop Trail** (**Green Colored Trail Blazes**)
- The 0.85-mile **Sandhill Loop** (**Yellow Colored Trail Blazes**)
- The 0.9-mile **Outer Loop of the Kirby Nature Trail** (**Blue Colored Trail Blazes**)

The Inner Loop of the Kirby Nature Trail is a well-established high-traffic trail with an abundance of signage, including a trail guide that's available at the preserve visitor center. As a result of the plethora of existing signage on this section of the trail, we will not be adding trail blazes to this well-traveled route. Interpretation and Education staff who would traditionally be assigned to the preserve visitor center installed these new trail blazes during the months of June and July while visitor services were on hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently there are no plans to blaze the other trails in the preserve in this same manner.



I N M E M O R Y



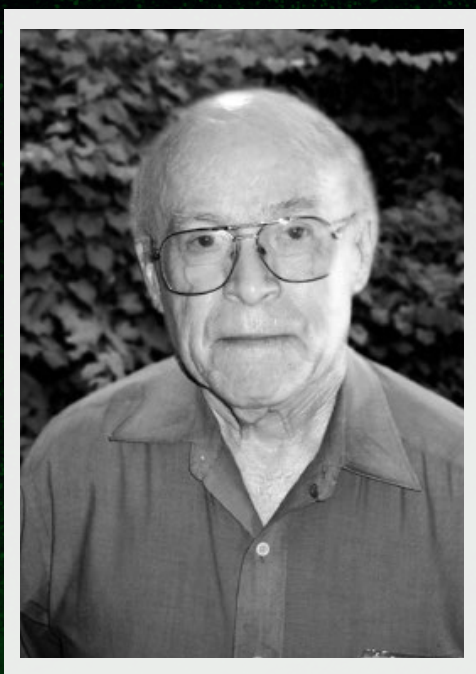
Marion Holt

1930-2020

Elsie Marion Holt (Ware), of Beaumont, Texas, died Wednesday, November 4, 2020. Associate professor of history at Lamar University until her retirement in 1996, she was a long-time member of St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Beaumont, TX, and an active member of the East Texas Historical Association and the Texas State Historical Association. A lovely person in spirit and kindness, she was known for her cooking and storytelling. She volunteered with a group that helped establish the Big Thicket as a National Preserve, in 1974. She cared about the natural wonders of the Big Thicket and devoted many hours to BTA's mission. We are thankful to have shared time with her. Please keep her family in your thoughts and prayers—may they find comfort in good memories and the beauty of our natural world. For Marion's full obituary [click here](#).



I N M E M O R Y



Dr. Larry Eugene Brown

1937-2020

Dr. Larry Brown of the Spring Branch Science Center Herbarium significantly contributed to the study of vascular plants in the Big Thicket through the Thicket of Diversity. He was recognized in 2002 with the Charles Leonard Weddle Memorial Award for his lifetime achievement in the field of Texas Native Plants and received the BTA's R.E. Jackson Conservation Award in 2012.

Says BTA Executive Director Wendy Ledbetter, "Dr. Larry Brown was a joy to be in the field with and offered so much to others for learning about the natural flora of our state. His inventory work of the Big Thicket National Preserve and other conservation lands in southeast Texas remains of value to ecologists and land managers. I personally will miss his quiet but spirited demeanor, his wry smile and twinkle of the eye!"

Today the Mercer Botanic Gardens in Houston houses many of his collections. He will be greatly missed.

For full obituary [click here](#).

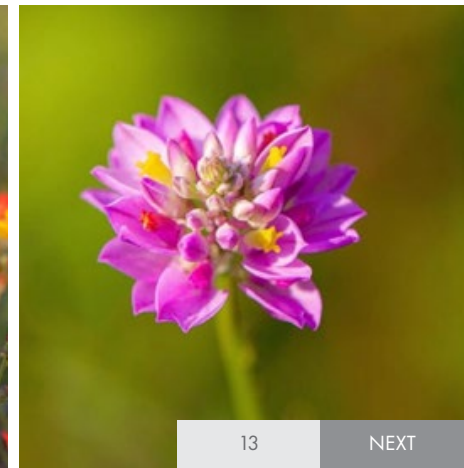
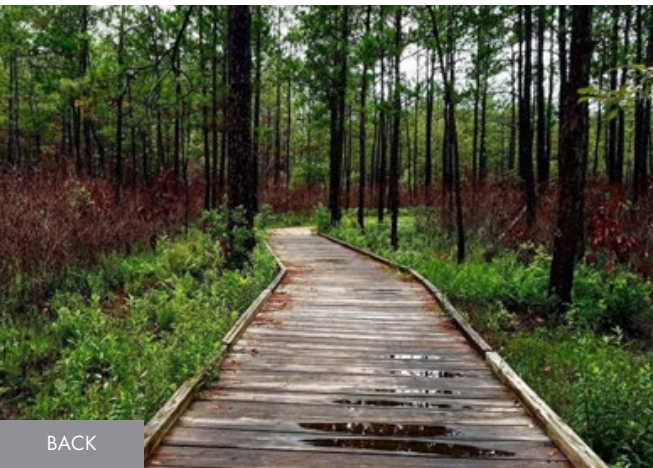




BIG THICKET ASSOCIATION

PARTNER IN PRESERVATION

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Web Sites

Big Thicket Association
www.bigthicket.org

Big Thicket National Preserve
www.nps.gov/bith

Conservation Fund
www.conservationfund.org

Gulf States Mycological Society
www.gsmyco.org

National Audubon Society
www.goldentriangleaudubon.org
www.houstonaudubon.org

National Parks Conservation Association
www.npca.org

Native Plant Society of Texas
www.npsot.org

Nature Conservancy
www.nature.org/texas

Outdoor Nature Club, Houston
www.outdoornatureclub.org

Sierra Club Golden Triangle Group
www.texas.sierraclub.org/triangle

Texas Black Bear Alliance
texasblackbear.weebly.com

Texas Conservation Alliance
www.TCAtexas.org

Village Creek State Park
www.tpwd.state.tx.us.park

Big Thicket Association Mission

The purposes for which the Big Thicket Association is organized are

- » To work for the preservation of the flora, fauna and historical culture of the Big Thicket area
- » To promote the conservation of natural resources and natural history of the Big Thicket area, and education for same
- » To maintain and perpetuate, so far as possible, the many species of trees, plants and animals found in the Big Thicket area, and to do whatever else may be done to preserve for posterity the abundance of flora and fauna and natural beauty with which this area has been endowed
- » To promote and to fund research contributing to knowledge of the Big Thicket area
- » To publish or support publication of cultural and scientific Big Thicket literature
- » To promote the welfare of the Big Thicket National Preserve

For more information about the Big Thicket Association and upcoming events, please click here to visit us online.

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