

AMERICAN IDYLL

KICK OFF
YOUR
SHOES AND
JUMP INTO
SUMMER'S
MOST
REFRESHING
TRADITION,
A LAZY
AFTERNOON
AT THE
LOCAL
SWIMMING
HOLE ■■

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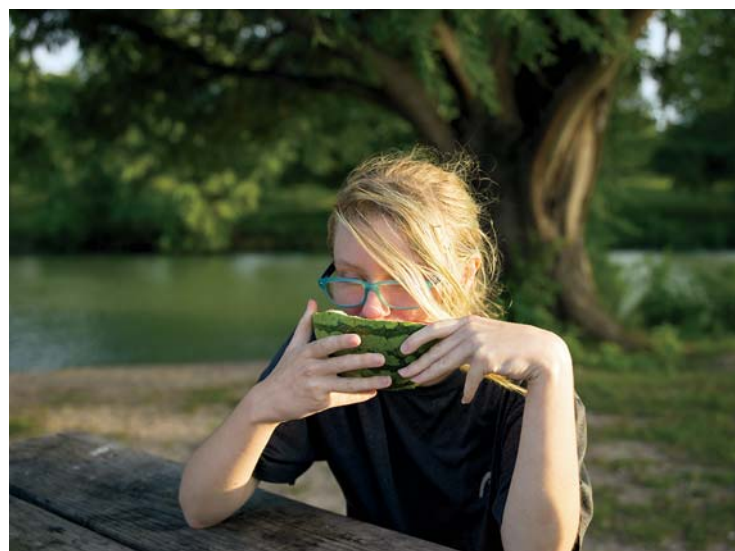
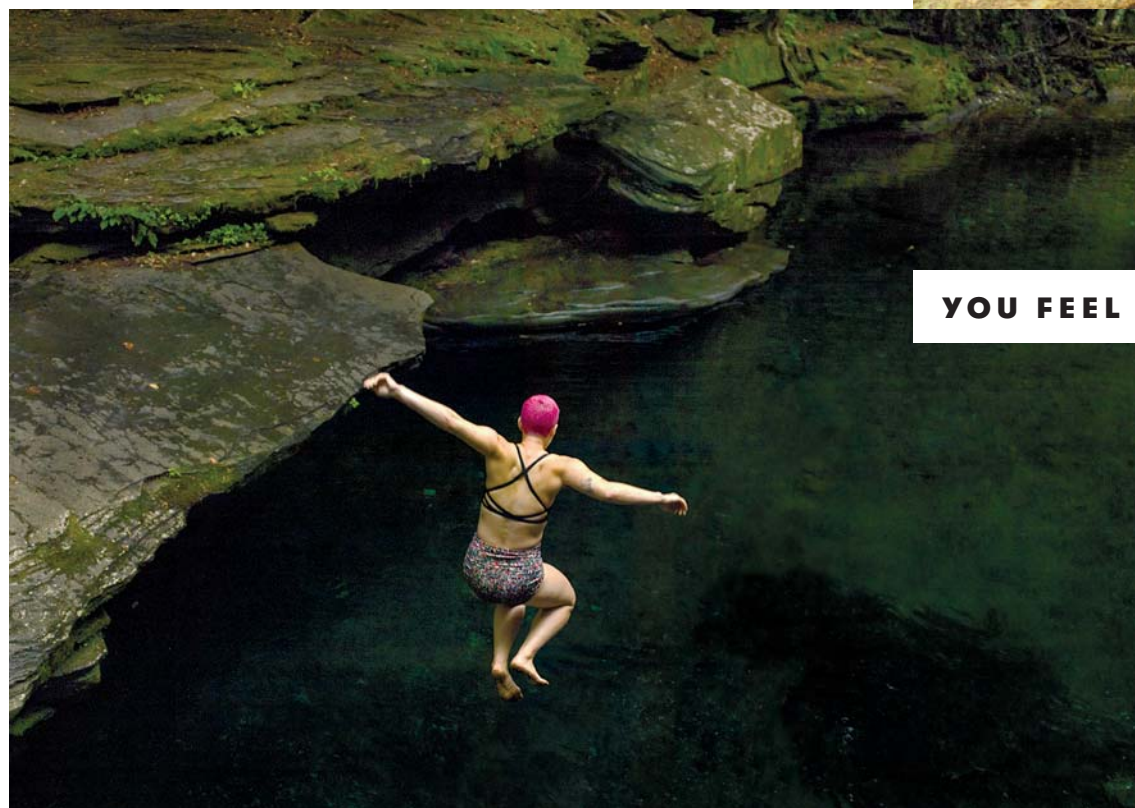
I**F YOU LIVE IN TEXAS**, a desire will overtake you on an unforgiving summer afternoon. Wool-thick humidity, heat fumes undulating over asphalt, your truck's air conditioner outmatched. You should be working, but the pull is relentless. It's a current, a wave, a yearning. You want to journey to a quiet place that surprises you with its depths. You want to be among the few people in the world who know where it is. You long to plunge into cool water. You want to splash, to float. You want—no, *need*—a swimming hole.

If you live in Central Texas, Barton Springs and Hippie Hollow make the most sense. Each is gorgeous—the icy spring-fed pool at Barton, the limestone shoreline hemming Hippie Hollow—but ultimately you're drawn elsewhere.

Highway 71 winds through the southwestern edge of Travis County. You pass churches and taxidermy shops and a man in a straw Stetson selling peaches from his pickup. He mops his brow with a red bandanna. Then comes the Barton Creek Habitat Preserve. Cedar and oak crown the uplands, and for a stretch there's



YOU FEEL THE SUDDEN IMPULSE TO RUN, TO BOLT AND LUNGE INTO THE HIDDEN POOL.



THE PERILOUS AND THE PLACID
Above: The swimming hole at Jacob's Well in Texas leads to an underwater cave that has claimed the lives of numerous scuba divers. Left: A girl eats homegrown watermelon at Texas' Blanco State Park. Far left: Before the internet, Peekamoose Blue Hole in upstate New York was a local secret. Today it swarms with visitors.



A HIKE THEN A FLOAT

Visitors to California's Natural Bridges, about 130 miles east of San Francisco, have to trek on foot for a mile to reach the park's limestone caverns. The water at the cave entrance is shallow and sunlit, a popular place to lie back and relax on inflatable rafts. Many bolder swimmers venture into the dark recesses of the cave, sometimes outfitted with headlamps.



STONE COLD PARADISE Right: UC Davis students from Malaysia splash in the Yuba River, near Grass Valley, California. Along with spectacular scenery, the park is home to historic gold rush sites. Far right: The limestone grotto of Hamilton Pool, west of Austin, Texas. Entry to the popular spot now requires online reservations.



a semblance of shade. How easily you can imagine the descent into the canyon, the sugarberry and pecan trees leading down to the pristine creek. The prospect leaves you lightheaded. If you pull into the preserve now, you'll be in clear cool water within ten minutes. Still, you drive. The steering wheel burns. The AC sputters. You click it off, lower the windows. The air rolls in hot and loud. A web of sweat spreads across your neck. Your shirt dampens against the seat. You smell Texas elm, the parched earth, baking grasslands.

When you arrive, birdsong: water-thrush and golden-cheeked warbler. A breeze whispers through juniper, lifting and spreading the thin branches. There's also the sweet faraway sound of children laughing. You feel the sudden impulse to run, to bolt through the wooded trail until it breaks into the clearing and you can lunge into the hidden pool. You don't. If anything, you linger. This box canyon is so serene, so lush and mysterious, that it demands reverence. Sprawling ferns, chatterbox orchids, red bay and canyon mock orange. You inhale tranquillity. You bide your time on the trail.



ON THE SURFACE, THE WATER IS WARM AND BEJEWELED WITH SHIMMERING LIGHT.

Hamilton Pool—otherworldly—formed thousands of years ago when the dome of an underground river collapsed. Now half the jade-blue water is enclosed by the arching remains of a limestone grotto, its ceiling sharp with stalactites. A waterfall spills into the pool, and the sound is so softly consistent that it slows your pulse. When the sun climbs high enough, a rainbow bends through the tumbling water. The colors seem garish compared with the moss-edged outcroppings, the luminous pool and the willing, endless sky.

The swimming hole teems with children and sun-lulled parents, teenagers with braces and men with farmers' tans and



JUMPING-OFF POINT

The cliffs at Vermont's Warren Falls form natural diving boards of varying heights: 10, 15, 20 and even 50 feet. The area used to be a local secret, but ever since 2015, when USA Today designated it the fourth-best swimming hole in America, Warren Falls' small parking lot has been filling quickly on warm summer days.



white-haired grandparents, all of them delivered here by the same longing. You wade out. You roll onto your back and push off the sandy floor. On the surface, the water is warm and bejeweled with shimmering light, but it's cooler beneath. It folds over your shoulders like draped silk. The waterfall thrums louder, and louder still. The sun drags over you. You close your eyes. You float.

A cliff swallow's whistle, the wafting scent of sunscreen, water sliding through your fingers and between your toes. The pool bears your weight, conveys you toward its center, and as it does, you become keenly aware of the abundance of unseen life

OFF THE WALL

The marble that once filled Dorset Quarry in Vermont was used to build the New York Public Library, among other structures. After the quarry closed around 1917, it filled up with spring water and became a popular swimming spot.



IN THE POOL, PAST AND FUTURE DISSOLVE. THERE IS ONLY THIS MOMENT.



DOG DAYS OF SUMMER

Bethel, Maine, draws most of its visitors during ski season, but in the summer, regional tourists flock to Frenchman's Hole, a dog-friendly spot carved out by a waterfall.

all around you—the fish and turtles underwater, the myriad creatures in the box canyon—and every one of your fellow swimmers. You realize this is why you made this trip, why the pull would not relent. You wanted—needed—to immerse yourself in such long-traveled water. In the thick of a Texas summer, to float in a swimming hole is to feel so relaxed, so connected to the good in the world that you're rinsed of time. In the pool, past and future dissolve. There is only this moment. You are drifting, slow and directionless, content to travel wherever the pool decides. You are cool in the hot sun, and for now, for as long as you stay in this perfect water, you are not alone. ♦

