

# TEXAS Chainsaw Road Trip



## Have Leatherface, will travel: Fans flock to sites of cult chiller

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It's only a movie. No one ever met a grisly fate at the business end of a meat hook or served as a cannibal combo meal. Yet three decades and a new Hollywood remake later, Tobe Hooper's 1974 horror hallmark, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, still digs its teeth deep into Lone Star legend.

This tall tale follows a vanload of road trippers whose sweltering excursion finds them running on empty and square into a macabre mess of Southern inhospitality. It's enough to give real-life travelers pause or even night sweats. Others can't resist retracing the steps of the doomed, however.

Four notable filming locations survive, all within 60 miles of the state capitol in Austin, and *Saw* fans know them by sight. Often lugged along for cheeky photo-ops is the chainsaw two-stepper himself, Leatherface, or rather his diminutive and decidedly less cranky stand-in (shown here in photos), an 18-inch figure available for \$39.95 from McFarlane Toys.

So, let's top off the tank and go.

### Four Bears Restaurant

If the film were *Gone with the Wind*, this would be Tara. If *Citizen Kane*, it'd be Xanadu. To horror hounds, this white Queen Anne cottage is the not-so-sweet home of Leatherface and his killer kin. For 27 agonizing hours, in blazing August temperatures, cast and crew holed up inside, shooting cinema's most depraved din-din scene — without air conditioning! No wonder poor, poor Sally Hardesty (Marilyn Burns) so hastily beat feet through that front plate-glass window.



Twenty-five years later, the ailing house was, well, *chainsawed* into seven pieces and hauled from its foundation in Round Rock, roughly 50 miles west to Kingsland where it joined the quaint grounds of The Antlers Hotel. Extensive renovations soothed years of neglect and transformed the former den of horrors into a charming Hill Country eatery known as Four Bears Restaurant.

"They come from all over the country," co-owner Tom Fox says of *Saw*-enthusiast patrons. "They know so much about the movie and want their pictures taken in certain places. I wish we had a break-out window!" But the most requested photo-op? Mr. Fox doesn't blink: "Back there where that first guy got whacked!"

That would be the former steel doorway at the base of the stairs. (It was built for the film and doesn't look the same today.) Left of the stairway is the aforementioned dining room and the adjoining "Chicken Room." Fortunately for diners, lovely lace curtains, handsome hardwoods and Spanish artwork have long since replaced Leatherface's roadkill decor.

Four Bears will likely sellout its inaugural Halloween ode to *Saw*, which will feature an outdoor showing of the film on a 20-by-40 foot screen, filmmaker Q&A, guided house tours and the requisite costume contest. (Careful with those chainsaws, fellas.) Resident culinary

maestro Sebastian Weddle has outlined a special indoor feast for VIP ticketholders of Osso Buco — roasted pork shank with the bone appropriately prominent.

Outdoors? Tasty barbecue and, as featured in *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*, the Sawyer family's award-winning chili. For information on the event, call 512-474-1510 or visit [www.rollingroadshow.com](http://www.rollingroadshow.com).



### One killer Web site

Tim Harden twisted his ankle and landed crossways on a cactus the first time he went hunting for Leatherface's crib.

His second trip was less accident-prone. Early one Sunday morning, a friend's hand-drawn map led then-29-year-old telecom tech and his indulgent wife Cheri straight to the hallowed homestead.

"The house had been moved only days before I got there. It was very disappointing," recalls Mr. Harden who now lives in Round Rock. "But I took good enough pictures to start a very simple Web site."

Five years later, that simple site's swelled into a clearinghouse of all things *Saw* ([www.texaschainsawmassacre.net](http://www.texaschainsawmassacre.net)) and has inspired other chiller fans to make their own pilgrimages.

"One of the most impressive things I see are people traveling from all over the world," Mr. Harden said. "I vividly remember a guy from Australia who asked me a few questions and said he'd be flying in to see the locations. Sure enough, he came and had a ball."

Fellow native Texans often make the trip as well. "Most invite me to come along as a tour guide," says Mr. Harden. "I'm very flattered by that, but think I'm done with my days of jumping fences. My Web site is the best tour guide around."

But how did the movie first become such a personal passion? "I was about 16 years old and a friend of mine somehow got it on VHS. We locked ourselves in the total darkness of his windowless garage," Mr. Harden recalls. "I felt as if I'd been dragged through the halls of insanity when I walked away from that film. It changed me forever."



### Hills Prairie Grocery

After booting an insane hitchhiker for trying to carve his initials into the arm of Franklin (the whiny one), the kiddos stopped at this lonely gas station near Bastrop for a fill-up. Unfortunately, the pumps remain dry today, though the building still stands. Just don't huff or puff. It's here Ms. Hardesty and pals were warned not to "go fooling around other folks property ... [because] some folks don't like it and don't mind showing you." If only they'd listened to their elders! Later that night, the spot is also the finish line of Sally's screeching six-minute foot



race against a certain chainsaw-wielding maniac.



### Bagdad Cemetery

Surprisingly, the pre-credit grave-robbing scene ranks among the flick's most gruesome moments. Flashbulbs burst in the pitch-black night, slowly revealing portions of what morning radio reports describe as a "grisly work of art" lashed atop a headstone. Naturally, no tombs were needlessly disturbed at this Leander graveyard, as the corpse of the movie and its faux perch were placed among existing markers. The neighboring monolith had already stood 108 years at the time of filming.



### Quick Hill

It'd be easier to note what *wasn't* shot here. The remnant of Old Country Road 172, most recently trafficked by strictly vegetarian bovines, was the setting for Sally's climatic rescue by a passing motorist and Gunnar Hansen's immortal chainsaw two-step as a deeply despondent Leatherface. The gentle hill is due to be redeveloped as part of Round Rock's La Frontera business and residential project. A new Marriott overlooks it, and a fresh stretch of State Highway 45 parallels the property where the "Leatherface House" once stood. Signs of its gravel driveway remain, as does the scraggly tree that screened its facade. However, the railroad-tie swing set, windmill and rusted vehicles of countless cannibalized victims have long since vanished. Yet, if fans squint, they'll swear they can almost see Sally scampering down the fence line, steps ahead of a fatal whumping. "Grandpa's House" sat just south of old 172 until it burned less than 10 years after filming.



Wanna take a ride?  
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