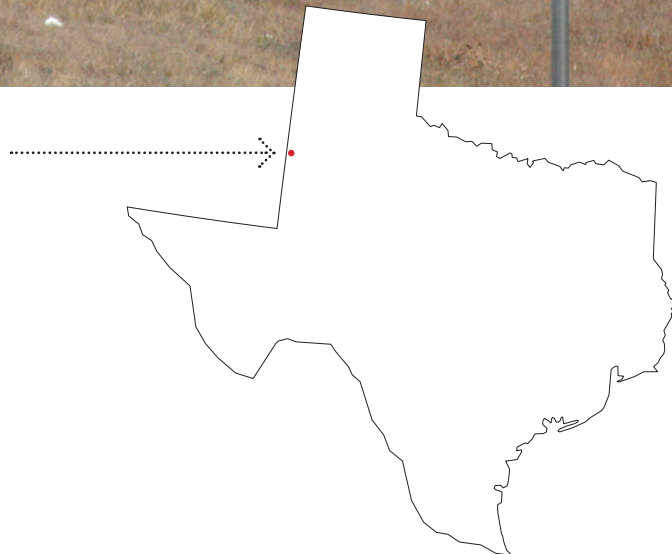


EARTHBOUND MOON: SITE 1



Bledsoe, Texas  
Elevation: 3757 Feet  
Population:  $\pm 70$



SITE PACKET

BLED SOE: An Introduction by artist, Jonathan Whitfill (Lubbock, Texas)

The town of Bledsoe.

I say the town.....it is really no more than a wide fork in the road right before the New Mexico border coming out of Texas. The sign introducing you to Bledsoe gives you some indication of its size by withholding the population number. In actuality there are around sixty to seventy people living in this small community of around one hundred dwellings. Most of the houses in Bledsoe haven't been a home in many years and are slowly crumbling back to the earth. The occasional broken window indicates at least an opportunistic adolescent actively patrolling the deserted streets. On one side of town you have the sparsely used grain and hay barns mirrored by the not-too-distant opposite side holding the sparsely used two-storied schoolhouse. None of the school-aged children go to school in Bledsoe any longer; they have a twenty-mile ride to Whiteface each morning. This beside, the school's pecan wood floors get some action each year as the alumni come back home for the reunion.

Not all is bleak and desolate in this arid border town, however. The energy of its people is one of rejuvenation. Many people from all over the country – from Alaska to Maine – have been recently purchasing property in Bledsoe for the very remoteness that might have driven away tenants of years before. The land is the definition of frugal, yet holds a very charming western appeal of the neo-frontier. Possibly not many can quickly see the potential residing within the backyards and on the outskirts of town, but your garden-variety found object sculptor would be in heaven. Cheap property littered with any possible construction material lying in clear abandonment just makes me jittery as a schoolboy. The most difficult way to obtain these materials would be locating the owner of the property to ask permission, because the town – even though small, might not readily offer forgiveness to a complete stranger. Anyone coming to town would need to keep in mind that it takes years to matriculate into Bledsoe's community. They want “the right kind of people” to move into this unconventional retreat. With a good attitude of being a near-perpetual guest, one finds in time that everyone knows your name and waves as you drive by.

While seemingly unlimited in creatively reconstructive debris material, Bledsoe has little to offer in the way of day-to-day sustenance, and the nuts-and-bolts of art making. The only place open to the public throughout

the day is the post office, and a train car converted into a convenience store. If what you need for lunch is a Hostess® Honey Bun, a bag of chips and peppermint for desert then you will never have need of leaving town. Otherwise you might want to make a trip to Levelland – about 40 miles to the East. You will find almost any of your personal or professional needs in Levelland or most assuredly in Lubbock, some 70 miles away along the same highway from Bledsoe.

The land has beauty, yet it takes a certain joie de vivre to completely appreciate this rugged terrain. Any potential artist with a fitting attitude and ample fortitude can supply Bledsoe with the much-needed proverbial shot-in-the-arm of artistic culture.

In my humble opinion,

Jonathan Whitfill  
December 2009

*Photos from top: A backyard in Bledsoe, the town school and the local snack store.*



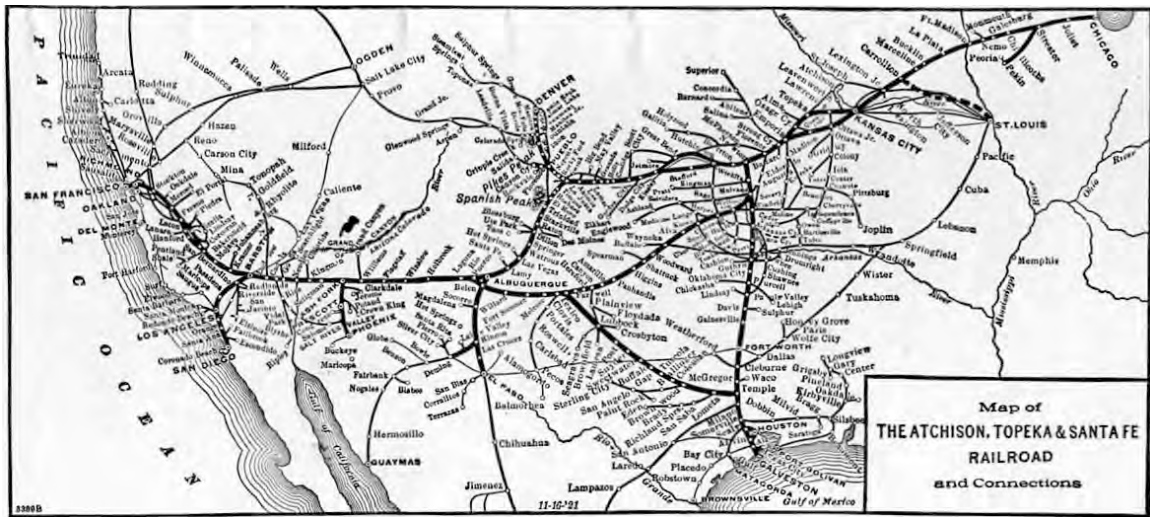


*Photos from top: Old grain mill, town post office and an abandoned gas station*



## BLEDSON: History

Bledsoe is a town located in Cochran County at the western edge of the Texas panhandle. It sits at the junction of Farm market roads, 595, 769, and 125, placing it 73 miles west of Lubbock, Texas (home of Texas Tech University) and 88 miles east of Roswell, New Mexico (home of the UFO Museum).



The town was established in 1925 by land speculator Nelson W. Willard. That same year the Panhandle and Santa Fe Railroad laid tracks to Bledsoe from Lubbock, where it became a shipping point for area cattle ranches. The town is named after Samuel T. Bledsoe, an official of the railroad company. By 1929, Bledsoe had a population of 400 residents and consisted of several stores, four filling stations, three lumberyards, two hotels, a church, a café, an electric plant, an ice plant, a barbershop, a movie theater and a dance hall.



*Photos from top: Railroad map just before Bledsoe was founded, 1996 aerial photograph of Bledsoe showing rail lines.*

By the time the town was established, many of the cattle barons who first settled the area in the late 1880s had died. Their heirs broke up the large ranches into smaller parcels that could be sold as farms. The dream of farming the virgin prairie had lured many of the early settlers to Bledsoe. The primary crop in the area was cotton, which it continues to be today.

The same year Bledsoe hit its economic zenith in 1929, the stock market crashed. Along with the beginning of the Great Depression, Bledsoe was dealt another blow in 1930. An extended drought and deep plowing of the prairie soil brought about the Dust Bowl. Lack of water and the decreasing need for the railroad led to a decline in Bledsoe's population. Despite the Dust Bowl and depression, the Texas Panhandle continued to see population and farming growth (as it had since 1921), a growth that Bledsoe did not experience.

In 1936 the panhandle area experienced another boom due to the discovery of oil. Most of Cochran County (est. 1876) experienced growth from the oil production. Bledsoe was largely unaffected. At the time, the town had 150 residents, and only ten businesses remained. Regular scheduled train service was terminated in 1955.

By 1970 the population level at Bledsoe had stabilized at 125, where it remained in 2000, when three businesses were operating. The railroad's plans to extend from Bledsoe into New Mexico never materialized. As a result the tracks in Bledsoe were finally abandoned in the 1980's and have been subsequently removed.

#### Before Bledsoe

According to archeological evidence, Native Americans hunted in the area that is now Cochran County 5,000 to 10,000 years ago. In the 1600s Kiowas and Apaches both hunted in the region after acquiring horses from the Spanish. From 1591 to roughly 1821, Spain laid claim to the Texas region. During this time, Comanches of the Quahadi or Antelope band dominated the Panhandle area. After Mexico won its independence from Spain in 1821, it claimed Texas as its own.

Texas then existed briefly as a republic (10 years), by revolting from the new Mexican dictatorship in 1836. In 1845, Texas became a part of American Union. During the civil war, Texas was part of the Confederacy from 1861 to 1865. When it rejoined the Union, Texas became the 28th state. In the 1870's, the United States Army eradicated or removed most of the Native populations the in the Panhandle area.

In 1876 Cochran County was formed by the Texas legislature. The area became home to massive ranches. One ranch, Capitol Reservation comprised some 3 million acres of land. Christopher Columbus Slaughter, owner of the C.C. Slaughter, also had ranchland in Cochran County. Slaughter predicted in 1901 that "the fertile Plains...will become the breadbasket of the great Southwest." The ranches continued to grow and prosper until the early 1920s.

## BLEDSOE: Environment

Bledsoe is located at latitude 33.619 and longitude -103.021.

Rainfall averages 15.62 inches a year. Snow does fall in the winter, but no averages were available. Average temperatures vary from 53° F(hi)/23° F(lo) in the winter to 92° F(hi)/64° F in the summer. Daily temperatures are regularly over 100° F in the summer and below freezing in the winter.

The vegetation is mainly mesquite grass, grama grass and shin oak.

Local animals include: black-tailed prairie dogs, pronghorn antelope, white-tailed deer, bald eagles, swift fox, mountain plover and lesser prairie-chicken.

The main geologic features of the area are the result of the decay of the Rocky Mountains. The area is alluvial deposits which makes it loose sandy soil that goes down at least 80". More specifically, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture online soil survey, the distribution of soil is close to 95% Circleback fine sand (deep, excessively drained, rapidly permeable soils that formed in sandy eolian sediments) and 5% Brownfield fine sand (very deep, well drained, moderately permeable soils derived from sandy eolian sediments from the Blackwater Draw Formation of Pleistocene age) with a "thick surface" (after a depth of 24" to 80" the soil is a sandy clay loam).

Erosion and slumping will make digging holes or trenches a challenge.

## SCULPTURE SITE

The land Earthbound Moon is leasing is located just south of Bledsoe, 1.3 miles down Farm Road 125. The 1.17 acre plot is 1/3 mile east of Farm Road 125. At the moment there are no roads. Previously used for cattle grazing, the property is situated in the 430 acre Branding Iron Subdivision. The area has been divided up into hundreds of  $\pm 1$  acre plots. Given this, the future of the area is unknown. The land could continue to be surrounded by wide-open grassland, a few scattered mobile home neighbors or it could suddenly find itself in the middle of a tract home development.



*Above: View along Farm Road 125, northeast, towards Bledsoe. Below: View towards property.*







BLEDSOE

Farm Road 125

Approximate  
Property Location

## A NOTE FROM THE LAND OWNERS

My partner (Scott) and I purchased the land a couple years ago (2008) off of eBay, knowing remarkably little about it. As of January 2010, we still have yet to visit. I've been dreaming about its remoteness and possibilities ever since hitting that "place bid" button.

Earthbound Moon is helping our idea that the land be dedicated to art and the community. The artist chosen will be the first to place anything on the land. In the near future we hope to add a simple structure that can serve as a residency, an art way station where artists can simultaneously be removed (in the largest sense) and a part of a community that we are just learning about and suddenly shaping the future of. We intend to build strong ties in Texas, with long term goals in mind.

We hope that the artist takes these ideas into consideration while creating their work and occupying the space. We hope it's a space you can continue to be a part of after the artwork is installed.

We are excited to welcome Earthbound Moon, the Bledsoe community, participating artists and the public to this small sandy chunk of America.

-Alex Clausen

## GRATITUDE

All on-site images are courtesy of Jonathan Whitfill ([www.jonathanwhitfill.com](http://www.jonathanwhitfill.com)) of Lubbock, Texas.

Satellite image is from Google Earth.

Historical Information and images collected from the following websites:  
Handbook of Texas Online <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/>  
Texas' Last Frontier <http://www.texaslastfrontier.com/>