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Happy Trails

ON A RECENT WEDNESDAY MORNING, I TOOK A DRIVE TO LOCKHART TO SAMPLE WHAT I HAD HEARD WAS SOME OF THE BEST BARBECUE THE STATE HAS TO OFFER.

by [Jeremy Simon](#)

I grew up in Connecticut, a state not exactly known for its barbecue. So as a young boy, whenever I took a trip to see my grandparents in Dallas, I always relished the opportunity to enjoy some fine Texas barbecue. Back then, nearly any barbecue would satisfy my craving. However, my tastes have matured now that I live in the Lone Star State. That was why on a recent Wednesday morning, I took a drive to Lockhart to Kreuz Market and Smitty's Market to sample what I had heard was some of the best barbecue the state has to offer. My traveling companion was a fellow northeasterner who had recently relocated to Austin. For him, eating in Lockhart would be another thing to check off his "to-do" list before heading back to New York.

The short drive on U.S. 183 south from Austin to Lockhart took us through low, rolling hills. The land opened up to allow greater space between houses, and we came across the occasional cow grazing not far from the road. Soon we reached Lockhart, and the decision of which restaurant to try first was quickly answered for us. My friend hadn't eaten breakfast, and Kreuz Market suddenly appeared on the right side of the road. So in we went. As we made our way back toward the pit, we read the rules Kreuz has posted for its customers: "No barbecue sauce. No forks. No salads. No credit. No kidding." At the counter just in front of the pit, I placed my order for the fatty beef brisket, with a few slices of white bread on the side, while my friend opted for a selection of BBQ delicacies, including ribs, sausage, and brisket, accompanied by nearly an entire sleeve of saltine crackers. The smell of wood smoke from the pit had my mouth watering, and we hurried to the sparsely populated dining room to dig in. Before I sat down, I requested some complimentary pickles and onions from a heavy-set employee in an apron and purchased my first ever Big Red soda. As we laid our spread of food on the table, I glanced around. Scattered about the dining room were a number of grey-haired men, some wearing caps and suspenders, and a very Texas-looking couple comprised of a woman with a beehive hairdo and her man. I did the best I could to cut the meat with the plastic knife and place it on the slices of white bread. Without any sauce, the complexity of the meat was evident—the beef smoky and salty, with the sharp onions and dill pickles adding their influence. Delicious. I could have

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eaten more, but I knew that I had to save room. There was another meal to come soon.

In order to both burn off some of the meat we had just consumed and to get a feel for Lockhart, we strolled around its historic downtown, where a beautiful courthouse rose up to meet the blue sky. Tracing a square around the courthouse, the sidewalks were very quiet that afternoon. With my friend in need of a trim, we ducked into a barbershop that appeared to be straight out of the fifties. Despite the quiet, the lone barber (who perhaps had been working there since the fifties) informed us that he was booked solid for the rest of the day. “If you had only been in ten minutes earlier,” he noted, as a young man with already-short hair walked in for his appointment, right on time. Adding to the downtown’s time-warp feel, we later passed a store whose dusty front window (it was closed) looked onto a floor full of old jukeboxes. After our walk, we soon decided it was time to eat again

The screen door creaked open, and to my unadjusted eyes, the hallway for a split-second reminded me of a haunted house, relatively foreboding, dark and cavernous. We headed to the back room, where the meats provided the delectable smells and the fires supplied the intense heat. “The wind feels nice,” remarked a man behind the counter dressed in an apron, as he gestured toward the screened windows. “It gets to be 120 degrees in here during the summer, and people in line get impatient.” Luckily for us, there was no line that afternoon, and we were served quickly. I requested a combination of the lean and fatty brisket, and my friend went with the rib-sausage-brisket combo just as before. Smitty’s also opts for the no forks regulation, as well as placing the meat onto butcher paper, which acts as your plate. At Smitty’s I had to pay extra for a side of pickles and onions, and I stood dumbfounded for a second when the names of the various pickle varieties were listed by the young woman at the dining room counter. My rumbling stomach sped my decision along. We found that it was not only the rules and presentation that are shared at Kreuz and Smitty’s but also the flavors of the food. It was hard to decide which place was better. Perhaps a more discerning judge than myself might have accompanied his second meal with another Big Red (I drank a decidedly less sweet beverage—a bottle of water), or would have found a way to eat the brisket from both restaurants side by side. All I know is that this Yankee transplant will just have to return to Lockhart again for further research into this important matter. After all, in my short time living here, I have learned that barbecue is serious business in Texas. ✦

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