

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and  
Social Sciences

Great Plains Studies, Center for

---

Spring 1999

**Review of *The Texas Red River Country: The Official Survey of the  
Headwaters, 1876* Edited by T. Lindsay Baker**

John Allen  
*University of Connecticut, Storrs*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsresearch>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

---

Allen, John, "Review of *The Texas Red River Country: The Official Survey of the Headwaters, 1876* Edited by T. Lindsay Baker" (1999). *Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences*. 443.  
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsresearch/443>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

**The Texas Red River Country: The Official Survey of the Headwaters, 1876.** Edited by T. Lindsay Baker. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1998. xxii+ 234 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, index. \$29.95 cloth (ISBN 0-89096-803-9).

This slim volume contains a reprint of Lt. E. H. Ruffner's 1876 official survey of the sources of the Red River of Texas, along with civilian draftsman C. A. Hunnius's journal and maps, and the ornithological notes of Lt. C. A. H. McCauley. The book is a great deal more than its size or the seemingly obscure nature of its subject matter would indicate. At the beginning of the Ruffner survey, the Red River was one of the few major American rivers still unsurveyed to its source—an incredible affair in light of Thomas Jefferson's noting in 1803 that locating the sources of the Red and Missouri river tributaries of the Mississippi was the most critical goal of western exploration during his administration. Jefferson had sought unsuccessfully to pursue a Red River survey at the same time that Lewis and Clark were dispatched to locate the head of the Missouri and "whatever river heading with that" flowed westward to the Pacific. But what Lewis and Clark had done to great fanfare for the Missouri in 1804-06, no explorer throughout the ensuing nearly three-quarters of a century had done for the Red River of Texas. For this reason alone, the little-known survey of Lt. Ruffner

represents the ending of an era of exploration begun with the opening of the nineteenth century and is more than worthy of being brought before the public.

Of equal importance is the fact that the Ruffner survey was undertaken at a critical juncture in the environmental history of the Southern Plains. The buffalo were gone, or nearly so—swept away by a decade and more of rapacious hide hunting. The Comanche, who had long ruled the Red's upper reaches, were finally quelled and removed to reservations. And the herds of Euro-American livestock ranchers were not yet a part of the environment of the central Texas Panhandle. The Ruffner survey, then, captured the regional environment at a crucial moment, before it would be changed irretrievably by commercial livestock raising and a fixed rather than nomadic human population. And unlike other government explorers of the post-Civil War era, Ruffner and his civilian topographer Hunnius wrote with flair. Here is Ruffner on the unexpected canyonlands of the upper Red: "so washed and twisted shapen as to marvel the eye with its intricacy and daze it with its brilliancy." The German-born Hunnius agreed: "the grandest sight I [have] had in this great United States . . . made a hasty sketch, but one can not do justice to this magnificent scenery." In addition to their landscape evaluations, Ruffner and his companions wrote agreeably on botany, geology, ornithology, meteorology. And Hunnius's maps and sketches, if not as detailed and skilled as those of others attached to military surveys, provide a first-hand look at the landscape from both vertical and horizontal perspectives.

Add an evocative foreword by Dan Flores and a splendid introduction by editor T. Lindsay Baker to the mix of the narrative report by Ruffner, the daily log of Hunnius, the scientific attachments for birds, plants, and reptiles, and the maps of the "detail atlas," and the end result is a most satisfying work indeed. **John L. Allen**, *Department of Geography, University of Connecticut, Storrs*.