

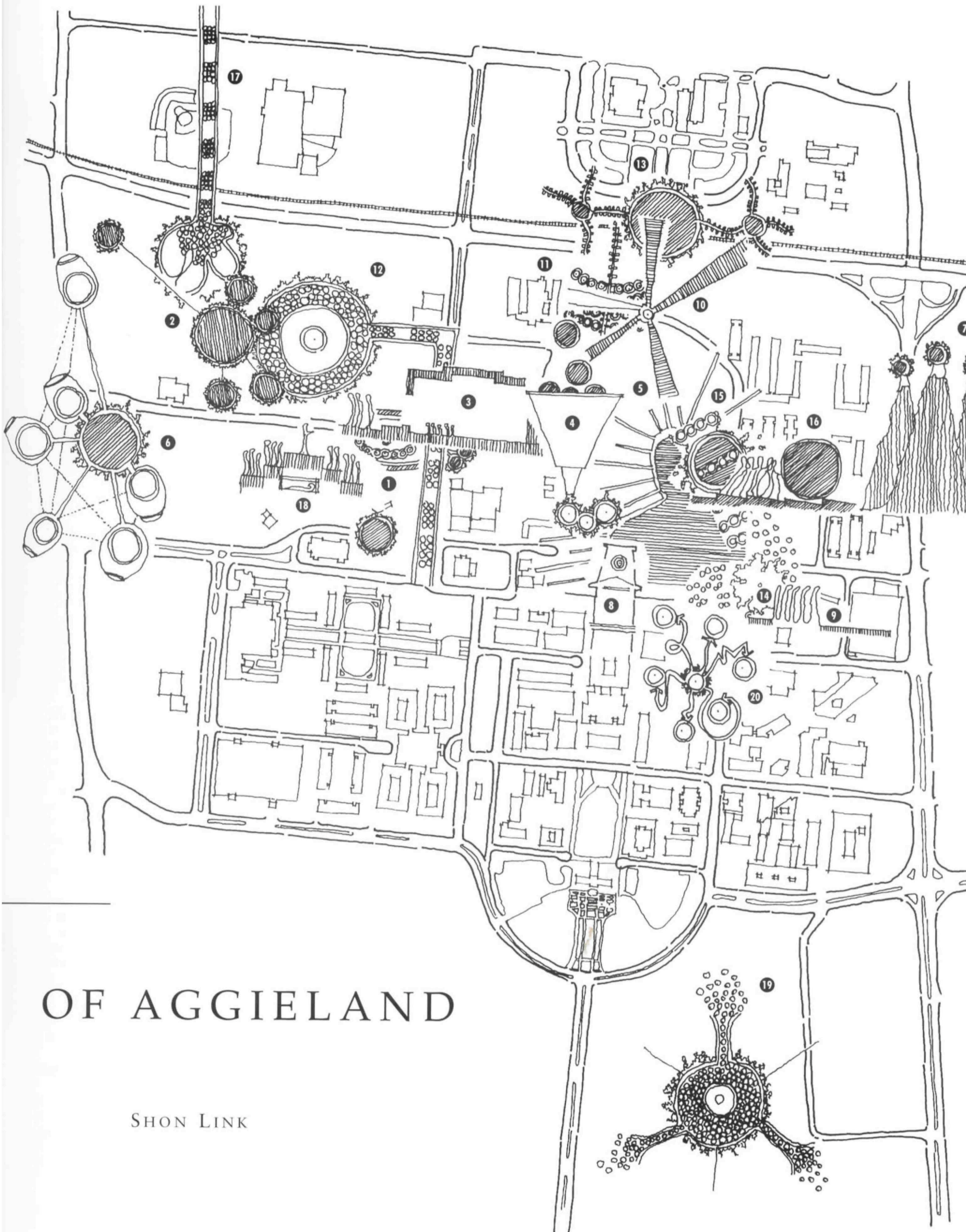


courtesy Cushing Memorial Library, Texas A&M University

Aggie Bonfire, ca. 1975.

This drawing is best understood as a cognitive map. Common maps, as society constructs them, select certain physical features of a locale — roads, buildings, streams — and record their spatial relationships in terms of linear distance, capturing a world by miniaturization and reduction. Such maps are suspect because they require selectivity about what gets included and what gets left out. Who decides? The mapped size, shape, and elements of Bryan-College Station are determined, no doubt, by agencies using accepted engineering practices. Such maps, however, ignore the three-dimensional qualitative knowledge by which Aggies guide themselves through their life-world. Cultural geographers make a distinction between the abstract knowledge of engineers (space) and the cognitive knowledge of residents (place). Shon Link's cognitive map attempts to represent the knowledge of the Texas A&M campus and College Station that is constructed in the process of becoming an Aggie. Link interviewed Texas A&M undergraduates and alumni and consulted several histories that document the relationship between events and places. The result is a map of shared experience. *Steven A. Moore*

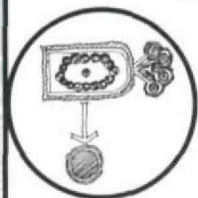
THE SACRED PATHS AND PLACES



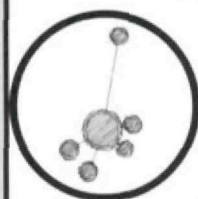
OF AGGIELAND

SHON LINK

- 1 All U Night:** Freshmen at Texas A&M are called Fish. During the summer before their first year, Fish go to **Fish Camp** to meet each other and learn lore and yells. Fish Camp is held not on campus but at various Texas campsites and ranches. At the beginning of the fall semester, Fish assemble in the G. Rollie White Coliseum for All U Night. The football team is introduced, and yells are rehearsed. This is the on-campus introduction to Aggie tradition for freshmen, who arrive at the event as individuals and depart as members of the Texas Aggie Twelfth Man.



- 2 Kyle Field:** Much of the Aggie experience is linked to Kyle Field, where A&M football games are played. For Aggies the game itself is far less important than the spirit, dedication, and tradition of the **Twelfth Man**. On January 2, 1922, during a Texas A&M football game, the Aggies suffered a series of injuries that left their ability to field a complete team in question. Aggie coach D. X. Bible remembered that he had one player in the stands. Coach Bible walked over and summoned E. King Gill to the sidelines. Gill never hesitated; he suited up and stood ready to play. This point in Aggie history defined the Aggie student body as the Twelfth Man. To this day, a member of the student body suits up wearing jersey number 12 and participates as a member of the Aggie kickoff coverage unit. More significantly, the student body stands throughout the football game, displaying the loyalty, respect, and readiness to support the team that E. King Gill did over 75 years ago.

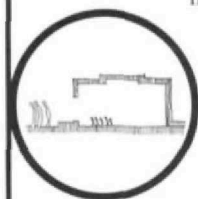


The collective Twelfth Man does not cheer. Instead, Aggie alumni and friends yell according to scripted hand signals from the **Yell Leaders** (elsewhere called cheerleaders). Some yells require the Twelfth Man to **Hump It** (placing your hands on your knees, squatting, and vocalizing an Aggie yell). But nothing compares to the **Texas Aggie Fight Song**. At the crescendo of the song, Aggies join arms over shoulders and sway left-to-right while singing "Saw Varsity's Horns Off!"

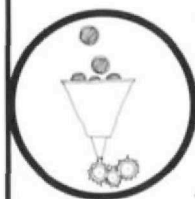
The night before home games, the Twelfth Man assembles at Kyle Field for **Midnight Yell Practice** (elsewhere, a pep rally). The lights at Kyle Field are turned off and, once the yells have been rehearsed, the Yell Leaders relate how the Aggies are going to beat the hell outta the next day's opponent.

The **Midnight Yell Practice** and Twelfth Man rituals are not confined, however, to Kyle Field. I remember my first Yell Practice; it was in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The Aggies were in town to play Louisiana State University, and thousands of Aggies had assembled on the steps of the Louisiana State Capitol for Midnight Yell Practice. My stepfather, an Aggie, took me. At the time, I found a lot of humor in the body language and verbiage of the yells, but I was awed when we all locked arms and sang the Texas Aggie Fight Song. Even a child could recognize the collective spirit as extraordinary. Kyle Field is an associative mechanism that reminds Aggies of their A&M experiences. The steps of the Louisiana State Capitol hold an equal place in my memory. But few people in Baton Rouge accept their capital as a piece of Aggieland.

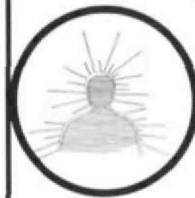
- 3 Memorial Student Center (MSC):** Aggies are aware and respectful of the significant contribution that fellow Aggies have provided in serving this country. The Memorial Student Center was dedicated to the 918 Aggies who died in World War II. The MSC also houses a plaque honoring 104 Aggies who stood in defense of Bataan and Corregidor (December 8, 1941 to May 6, 1942). Now the MSC stands for all Aggie veterans. For Aggies, entering the MSC is like entering a sacred domain. Certain behaviors are enforced there as a matter of respect: no hats are worn, and the surrounding lawn is off limits. If either of these codes is broken, there is always someone around to correct the inappropriate behavior. The MSC remains a poignant symbol of the war experience and sacrifices of fellow Aggies.



- 4 Final Review:** Simpson Drill Field, the original football field, has become significant as the site of the Corps of Cadets Final Review. On the day of Final Review, just before graduation in the late spring, the Corps has two parades. The first includes all Corps members. During the second parade, the junior Corps of Cadets members ceremoniously take the place of the senior members. The Final Review is an emotional ritual, where the seniors bid farewell to the Corps and to Texas A&M.

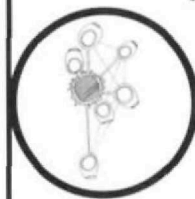


- 5 Polishing Sully:** The tenure of Sul Ross, former governor of Texas, as president of the university from 1891 to 1898 was a particularly significant time in the history of Texas A&M. Ross brought credibility and respectability to the university and successfully strengthened Texas A&M's position as a state university. A statue of "Sully" stands on the west side of the Academic Building. In 1933 two freshman cadets were ordered by upperclassmen to polish the statue with rags and brass cleaner. To this day, Corps underclassmen symbolically pay homage to "Sully" by polishing his statue.



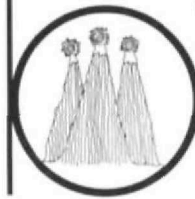
- 6 The Aggie Ring:** The Clayton Williams Alumni Center is where Aggies go to pick up their college rings. The Aggie Ring is an icon that reminds the wearer of personal and collective experiences at Texas A&M. The Aggie Ring is also a sign that allows Aggies to identify each other outside Aggieland.

Individual parts of the ring provide distinct symbolic meanings. The shield on top represents the desire to uphold the reputation of the university. The 13 stripes represent the 13 original states and the intense patriotism of Aggies. The five stars in the shield refer to the five phases of student development: mind, body, spirit, emotional poise, and integrity. The eagle represents power and the ability to reach great heights. On the side of the ring, the seal of Texas shows loyalty to the state. The live oak represents the strength to fight. The star surrounded by olive leaves signifies a desire for peace. The crossed flags again represent allegiance to nation and state. The cannon, saber, and rifle signify a ready willingness to defend.

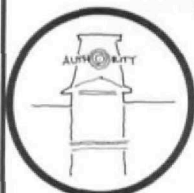


The traditional celebration of achieving an Aggie Ring occurs at **Ring Dance**. When one receives his or her Aggie Ring as a junior, it is placed on the finger with the class number facing the wearer. After graduation, the ring is turned so that the number faces outward, symbolizing the readiness of the graduate to face the world.

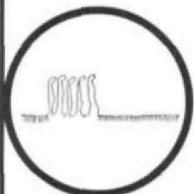
- 7 Ring Dunking:** The Chicken and Duddley's are both bars in the Northgate Shopping Center. Some say more beer is consumed in The Chicken than in any bar in the world. Aggies go to these places to play dominoes (Aggies love dominoes) and to perform the Ring Dunking ritual. Once an Aggie has earned an Aggie Ring, it is traditional to place the ring in the bottom of a pitcher of beer and then consume the beer at a rapid pace — or Ring Dunk.



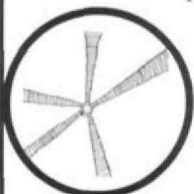
- 8 Prexy's Moon:** Prexy is the nickname given to the president of the university, and Prexy's Moon is the light on the dome of the Academic Building. In a discontinued but not forgotten tradition, cadets used to regularly shoot out Prexy's Moon with their Corps rifles.



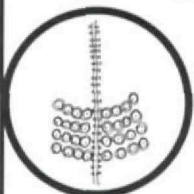
- 9 Silver Taps:** The ceremony honoring deceased Aggies. On the first Tuesday of each month the names of those to be remembered at Silver Taps are placed at the base of the flagpole in front of the Academic Building. At 10 p.m. students gather at the flagpole with friends and relatives of those who have died recently. All lights are out, and the carillon in the Albritton Bell Tower plays. The Ross Firing Squad delivers three volleys, then buglers play *Silver Taps* from the dome of the Academic Building. All present leave silently as the firing squad marches in and gives a 21-gun salute, and *Silver Taps* is played once more.



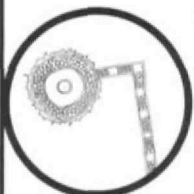
- 10 Albritton Chimes:** Albritton Bell Tower marks the west gate entrance to the campus. The tower houses a 49-bell carillon. The bells ring distinct tunes for significant Aggie events such as Silver Taps, Commissioning, Military Review, and Graduation. All Aggies within earshot of the bell tower can identify the occasion by the melody of the chimes.



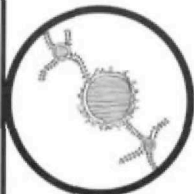
- 11 The Grove:** The Grove is the outdoor theater brilliantly placed across from the railroad tracks. Performances are traditionally interrupted by Aggies shouting "Whoop!" as trains pass.



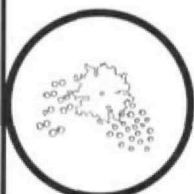
- 12 March In:** This ceremonial parade, consisting of the Corps of Cadets and the Fightin' Texas Aggie Marching Band, begins at the Quad and ends at Kyle Field. March In precedes all home football games. The band, called "The Pulse of Aggieland," is a precision military marching band that Aggies claim has never been out-performed during a half-time show. Rice University's Marching Owl Band (The MOB) was once held at swordpoint by cadets for performing a satire of the Aggie Band at half-time in Houston. Wherever the Aggie Band plays, that location becomes Aggieland.



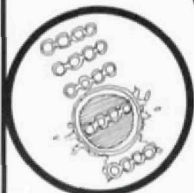
- 13 Train Rides:** The railroad station originally labeled "College" was the stop on the primary source of transportation to and from the university in the early years. The experience of riding a train with hundreds of other Aggies must have been interesting. According to Amtrak, the last train stopped in College Station in November 1996.



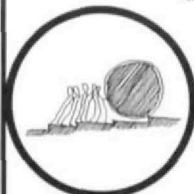
- 14 The Wedding Tree:** The Wedding Tree, or Century Tree, is a giant, sprawling live oak near the Academic Building. It is Aggie tradition to propose marriage beneath the canopy of the Wedding Tree.



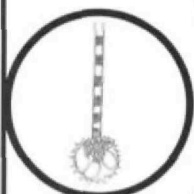
- 15 Fish Pond:** Fish Pond is located across from Sbisa Dining Hall. After Aggie football victories, freshmen in the Corps of Cadets capture the Yell Leaders from the field, haul them over to the Fish Pond, and toss them in. It is also tradition for seniors to march through the Fish Pond during Elephant Walk (see below).



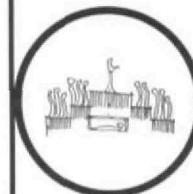
- 16 Yell Practice at the Y:** After the Fish Pond dunking, the soaked Aggie Yell Leaders and their entourage hold a post-game Yell Practice on the steps of the YMCA Building.



- 17 March to the Brazos:** A while back it was believed that a couple of Corps members were responsible for several explosions on campus. Corps superiors conducted an inquiry, but no one would admit responsibility. The suspected unit was ordered to march from campus towards the Brazos River until someone confessed. No one confessed, and to this day cadets annually march all the way to the Brazos River.

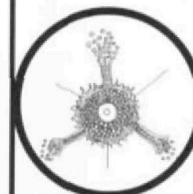


- 18 Muster:** Every April 21 (the anniversary of Sam Houston's victory at San Jacinto over Santa Anna), Aggies, wherever they may be, gather to honor their fellows who have died during the past year.



Muster begins with a roll call for the absent, during which a friend or family member answers "Here" when the name of their deceased Aggie is called. This signifies that the Aggie spirit endures, even after death. Candles are lit for each of the honored dead, and on campus, a firing squad gives a 21-gun salute, and buglers play *Silver Taps* three times.

- 19 Bonfire:** Members of the student body spend three months building the Bonfire. The original fire stack was a relatively short pile of haphazardly assembled wood, but today Aggie students rise at dawn to cut logs of precise measurements. After the logs have been transported to the Bonfire field, students gather for the ceremonial raising of the Center Pole. Then they work around the clock carefully aligning and stacking logs as high as 60 feet off the ground. The Bonfire is finally prepared for the evening prior to the t. u. (University of Texas) football game. The ceremony begins as students march in behind the band. Around 60,000 Aggies assemble annually for Bonfire. Senior football players are introduced, the head coach makes a speech, and then the Yell Leaders conduct a Yell Practice. Finally, to the dramatic pulse of a drum brigade, select cadets march in with torches and circle the Bonfire stack. The cadets, evenly spaced around the stack, hurl their flaming torches onto fuel-soaked logs. The Yell Leaders and the crowd, yelling all the while, remain assembled until the center pole falls. Bonfire symbolizes a love of the university and a "burning desire" to defeat t. u.



- 20 Elephant Walk:** A ritual performed by Aggie seniors during the week before the t. u. football game. After gathering in front of the flagpole on Military Walk, they wander around campus without direction, like elephants on the verge of death. During Elephant Walk the marchers go through the Fish Pond, down Military Walk, and eventually to Kyle Field for Yell Practice. This ritual recognizes the termination of the seniors as part of the Twelfth Man. ■

