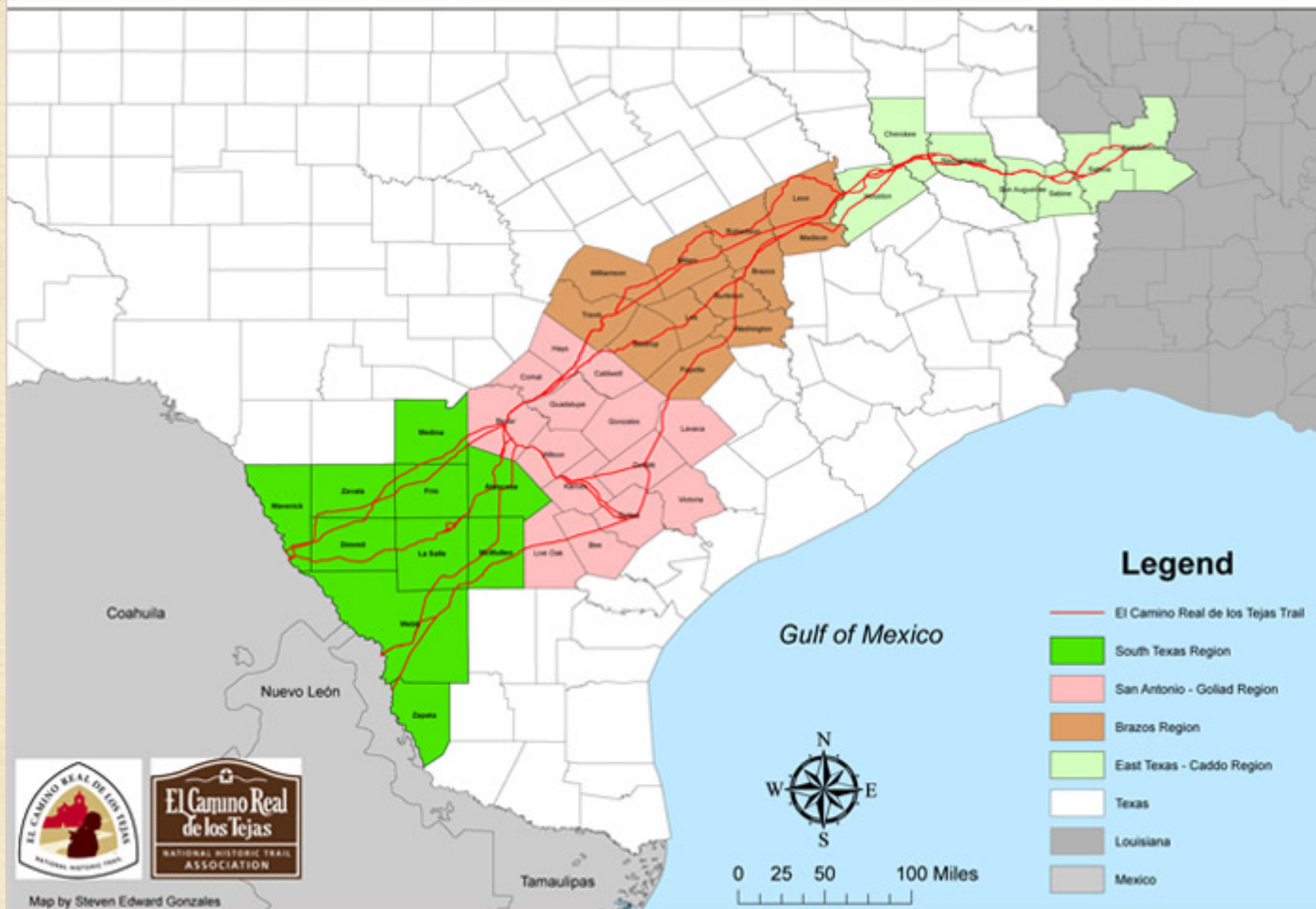


El Camino Real de los Tejas
National Historic Trail

El Camino Real de los Tejas was designated a National Historic Trail by Congress. National Historic Trails follow original routes of travel as closely as possible, and are of historic significance to our nation. El Camino Real de los Tejas is a trail extending from Mexico, across Texas, and into Louisiana.

El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail Association Regional Map



Map by Steven Edward Gonzales

Long before El Camino Real de los Tejas was used for human travel, the trail was created by the paths animals traveled along. Native Americans used the trail, as taking this cleared path from the animals was easier than blazing a new trail. The path was later used by people moving across Texas.



In 1685, Frenchman René Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, mistakenly arrived on the coast of Texas while in search of the mouth of the Mississippi River. In response, the Spanish sent out *entradas*, or military expeditions, in search of their colonial rivals.

Expeditions in search of La Salle and French colonies were taken by both sea and land. Spaniard Alfonso de León led an expedition that resulted in the capture of a Frenchman who aided in locating La Salle's colony. He found Fort Saint Louis a scene of utter devastation as Native Americans had sacked the fort.



Having discovered the ruins of the French colony, along with word from the Tejas Indians that they were seeking Christianity, the Spanish decided to establish missions. In 1690, de León and Father Massanet founded the first mission in East Texas, San Francisco de los Tejas.



With the founding of more missions (religious settlements) and presidios (military settlements), El Camino Real de los Tejas became a major travel route during the Spanish colonial period.

Expeditions and the positioning of missions resulted in a well-established link. The connection of the trail supported trade and movement between the colonial territories of Spain and France, and later, the movement of U.S. settlers heading west.

Moses Austin headed west to San Antonio along El Camino Real de los Tejas, seeking to establish a colony in Spanish Texas. Shortly after approval for the Austin colony, Moses Austin died. His son, Stephen F. Austin traveled the trail to make good on his father's contract. Meanwhile, many Anglo-American colonists were also traveling the trail.

When Texas was seeking independence from Mexico, El Camino Real de los Tejas was a valuable trail used for transporting military forces through Texas to battlegrounds.

The Native American footpath that had long existed in the region spread European culture and influence along El Camino Real de los Tejas. The path initially facilitated Spanish expansion in search of their French imperial rivals. Then, the trail allowed Anglo settlers to travel in Texas. The period of significance for the trail is 1680-1845.

This dynamic flow of people, cultures and trade created Texas as we know it today. This history is an important piece of our nation's story, which earned El Camino Real de los Tejas the designation of National Historic Trail.

