



# EL CORREO ~ A JOINT TRAIL REPORT

WITH



TEXAS  
HISTORICAL  
COMMISSION  
REAL PLACES TELLING REAL STORIES



FALL 2020 EDITION

## **Table of Contents**

### **ElCaT Updates:**

- 2** Letter from the ElCaT President
- 3** Meet Our Team: Lilly Byrd
- 3** Estancia / Onion Creek Intern Project – Landscape Architecture Planning for Historic Trail Site
- 4** Meet Our Team: Melanie Butler
- 4** A Look into Our Upcoming Website StoryMap
- 5** Model Trail Communities: What are they? How can you help?
- 5** October 2020 Board Election Results
- 6** Austin-Area Trail Projects
- 7** Pasaron por Aquí: Espinosa, Garrapatas and the Continuity of Just Passin’ Through Travis County
- 11** The Camino Connection: Pecans and The Camino Real

### **Model Trail Community Chapter Updates:**

- 12** Annual Report of the Activities of the Rancheria Grande Model Trail Community Chapter
- 13** Annual Report for the Trail de Flores Model Trail Community Chapter

### **Agency Updates:**

- 15** National Trails - National Park Service (NTIR) 2020 Update
- 17** Texas Historical Commission 2020 Update

**Cover photos starting clockwise from the top left of the map:** Nichole Wiedemann’s University of Texas Architecture Studio visiting Mission Tejas State Park, Caddo Mounds State Historic Site, Lobanillo Swales in Sabine County, Los Adaes State Historic Site, Fort Saint Jean Baptiste State Historic Site, Goliad State Park & Historic Site, Representatives of Mexico’s Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) attend a dedication at the Treviño-Urbe Fort in Zapata County, Mission San José - San Antonio Missions National Historical Park, McKinney Falls State Park, and Camino Crossing in Milam County

## Letter from the ElCaT President

Greetings ElCaT Members, Partners and the Board,

First, I want to thank all of you for your continued membership and support both to El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail Association (ElCaT) and to your communities where we all appreciate and commemorate this important historic resource. With this publication we are highlighting only some of the efforts our volunteers and Agency partners have made, and I hope you will enjoy the content. We are presenting this extended Annual Report in lieu of the 2020 Annual Meeting at McKinney Falls, noting with sadness the impact of COVID-19 on our world and praying for a healthy recovery in the months ahead.

I am pleased to welcome Cindy Freeman as the new President of the Association and I want to say it was a privilege to serve as President for the last two years. I want to thank outgoing Board member Sarah Gould of San Antonio who termed out, but I'm glad to note she's a member we can turn to for expert advice. We welcome three new Board members and our re-elected Board members, too. I will continue to enjoy working with y'all as Immediate Past-President. Let's carry-on!

And before I go: Thanks to Staff and Partners!

It has been a pleasure working with Steven Gonzales managing an array of tasks with expertise and keeping us focused on the mission going forward. He has supervised and mentored student interns and leveraged their talent to further promote the trail. So thanks to Steven and staff, and thanks to our partners! Namely, Aaron Mahr's team at the NPS and Brad Patterson and his staff at the THC. We are sharing the same goals and vision and we cannot do it without good partnerships.

One more pitch:

Thank you all for your volunteer service and for helping to document our partnership contributions to the NPS! It is very important for funding and goal setting to know how our citizen efforts are supporting the National Trails and our own El Camino Real de los Tejas.

We continue to work on public outreach via social media and personal speaking engagements, archaeological authentication and documentary research, recognition of trail sites in the National Register of Historic Places, and other interpretive efforts aimed at educating the public. Our signing efforts continue in Bexar, Wilson, Travis, and Nacogdoches Counties, and Sabine and Natchitoches Parishes. The process requires the coordination and facilitation of multiple stakeholders from local governments and organizational partners to state and federal agencies. That process requires the coordination and facilitation of different stakeholders from local governments, organizations and state agencies. We've managed very well in the face of challenges of long distances, a couple of hurricane recoveries and now a public health emergency. I hope you will appreciate some of these efforts highlighted in this extended Joint Trail Report.

-Tom Byrd

Immediate Past-President, El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail Association



Tom Byrd, Immediate  
Past-President



## Meet Our Team By Lilly Byrd



Lilly Byrd

intern under the direction and advice of Steven Gonzales and Coreen Donnelly of the NPS.

Lillian Byrd is in her second year in the Master of Landscape Architecture program at The University of California-Berkeley. Her research in the Spring 2020 semester focused on a re-purposed quarry in San Antonio, Texas that is within today's Brackenridge Park, and limestone extraction as a resource that has shaped the modern Texas architectural and cultural landscape. She drew inspiration from the travel journals of Frederick Law Olmsted in his book: *A Journey Through Texas - Or a Saddle-Trip on the Southwestern Frontier*, where he traveled the same route as the Camino Real de los Tejas to as far south as San Antonio. She continues to be interested in cultural landscapes of Texas and their histories in relation to physical geography and geomorphology. Her work for ElCaT was for class credit as a volunteer

## Estancia / Onion Creek Intern Project – Landscape Architecture Planning for Historic Trail Site By Lilly Byrd

I had the privilege this past summer of returning to Texas to assist with a project with El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail Association. It was an opportunity to collaborate with a private developer whose mixed-use housing development, known as “Estancia,” encompasses a section of the Camino Real and a waterway crossing mentioned in Espinosa’s journals. The site is located near Onion Creek and the Old San Antonio Road (not to be confused with the OSR of Zively / DAR fame). The developer, Stratford Land, was obligated by the City of Austin zoning ordinance to commemorate this section of the road with a small plaza and interpretive signage dedicated to the trail, and to install NPS branded directional roadway signage, and herein came our opportunity to assist.

After research and site visits, I drafted a conceptual plan for the Estancia plaza that would not only commemorate the history, but capture the historic importance of the natural landscape features. The design is simple. It includes roadway and pedestrian signage to notify visitors that they are on the nationally recognized historic trail, as well as a series of interpretive and orientation panels. The first is at the Live Oak Paraje, which reflects the features of a campsite with a live oak grove adjacent to grassland savannah, where travelers could have setup camp under the trees and allowed livestock to graze in the field. Another poignant site worth commemoration is the Onion Creek Crossing, or Arroyo Garrapatas Crossing. This limestone-bedded creek shows a glimpse of the geography to the west, but was also formerly full of gravel, making it a place—and perhaps the furthest west part of the creek—that was easy for livestock and wheeled carts to cross. Just up the hill from here is a registered archaeological site, which indicates that this area was occupied and heavily used for centuries by Indigenous peoples prior to colonialization in North America.

I have been back and forth between Texas and California over the past year, crossing many of the landscapes traveled by the Spanish missionaries. The movement along the convergence of the Edwards Plateau and the Blackland Prairie became especially interesting to me because of the available resources for travelers. Abundance of water from aquifer-fed springs and the ease of movement and cattle-grazing on rich prairie soils is evident to anyone familiar with this part of Texas. This project allowed me to work alongside the National Park Service and further reinstate my love and pride in the Texas landscape; a pride that we share, and which translates into our environmental stewardship and commemoration for geographic history.



Aerial view looking southwest of the proposed interpretive exhibit for the Live Oak Paraje



## Meet Our Team By Melanie Butler

My name is Melanie Butler and I am El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail Association's newest GIS intern. I have been working with the trail since January 2020. I graduated from Texas State University back in May 2020 with a Bachelor of Science in GIS (Geographic Information Science) and a minor in Nature and Heritage tourism. I am excited to use my knowledge of GIS and historical preservation to best serve the trail. I have worked on some exciting projects over the last few months. For example, I created a map of Federal Congressional Districts along the trail. The map was shared with twenty elected officials from the U.S. House and Senate and helped allow representatives to understand the impact of the trail in their districts. I am also working on creating and implementing a new, interactive StoryMap for our website, which is a major focus of my efforts for the Association. This is a big reason I enjoy working for El Camino: I get to create purposeful maps and materials that lead to positive impacts on the trail. I hope to continue using GIS as a tool to work in nature and historical preservation throughout my career.



Melanie Butler

## A Look Into Our Upcoming Website StoryMap

By Melanie Butler

We are currently creating an updated version of our interactive StoryMap. A StoryMap is an ESRI web mapping application used to display geographic locations as points on a map with text and media associated with each individual point. This map will be made up of sections, called tabs, that will highlight different themes and ideas for the trail using pictures, text, and links. There will be tabs that have information on sites you can visit. There will be a Trail Overview tab that gives a general overview of how to see and experience the trail and a tab for each region of the trail for a more localized experience for trip planning. There will also be a Cattle Drives Tab detailing historic sites and ranches across Texas and Louisiana. The map will also have



A snapshot of what's in store with our new StoryMap

information about Association sponsors and we are working towards creating tabs illustrating different cultural histories along the trail such as Native American, Spanish, French, Mexican, and Anglo and African American. We are in the process of reaching out to representatives of the various cultures or researchers with specializations in each to obtain relevant information in this regard. All-in-all, the StoryMap will be an exciting way to convey a rich amount of information to trail users!

## Model Trail Communities: What are they? How can you help?

By Steven Gonzales

Have you heard of ElCaT's Model Trail Community (MTC) chapter program? It's one of the latest efforts by the Association to get local volunteers and communities involved in the identification, protection, and development of trail resources, and it also aims to promote outreach and educational opportunities in local areas.

The program is based on similar programs conducted by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy and the Overmountain Victory Trail Association and it has four goals: 1) Building a Trail Constituency, 2) Partnering with the National Park Service, 3) Getting People on the Trail, and 4) Protecting and Preserving the Trail.

The intent of Building a Trail Constituency is to make sure the trail and its associated historic sites are clearly identified and understood by the local community. The program envisions that there will be locally recognized, grass-roots, community leaders associated with the chapter and that there is a strong and active constituency of individuals advocating for the trail. The constituency will also consist of local governments that have demonstrated their support for the trail and who keep the trail in the planning and budgeting efforts of the local community.

In Partnering with the National Park Service, local chapter members will work through ElCaT and with the NPS to certify trail sites and segments in the area and push for the installation of NPS signing including roadway signs and interpretive and orientation panels.

By Getting People on the Trail, the chapter will ensure that trail resources are open to the public on a regular basis throughout the year and that there are a variety of well-publicized activities planned on the trail. There should also be a strong connection between local schools and the trail and a good relationship with local media to promote activities on the trail.



The Rancheria Grande MTC chapter meets in Rockdale, Texas

The overall goal is Protecting and Preserving the Trail. This can be accomplished in many ways, such as the community purchasing a trail resource or securing the protection and preservation of the trail in some other way, for example, through a conservation easement. A major component of this activity is that the community is planning for future improvements or developments of the trail.

If you are interested in learning more about how you can participate in a current MTC or in starting your own reach out to us! We can be contacted at [staff@elcaminorealdelostejas.org](mailto:staff@elcaminorealdelostejas.org) or (512) 850-9073. In doing so, you can celebrate the trail's history and resources and make your trail the best it can be for the American public!

## October 2020 Board Election Results By Steven Gonzales

Members of ElCaT recently voted on a slate of nominees for the Board of Directors. Board members can serve up to three, two-year terms and officers can serve up to two, one-year terms in office.

On the ballot, were five current members up for re-election and three new nominees. We are pleased to say that all eight nominees were unanimously elected to the Board! The nominees were Adam Adams, Rebecca Blankenbaker, Frank "Chip" Briscoe, Lucinda "Cindy" Freeman, Bob Perkins, Dave Regan, Jesús "Jesse" Treviño, and Lynn F. Young.

A new slate of Association officers was also elected and they are Cindy Freeman - President, John Pruett - Vice-President, Lynn F. Young - Secretary, Dave Regan - Treasurer, and Tom Byrd - Immediate Past-President.

Please join us in congratulating them all! We look forward to their leadership!



## Austin-Area Trail Projects By Steven Gonzales

While the Association is based in Austin, to date, we have had few projects conducted in the local area. Currently, the only Camino Real sign one can see is at McKinney Falls State Park's entrance. That will likely change in the not-too-distant future, however, as there are multiple projects going on within the Austin area. These include the Onion Creek Metropolitan Park project, the Montopolis Bridge pedestrian project, research and archaeology being conducted at the former site of Fort Colorado, the signing of roadways mirroring the Camino in Austin and Travis County, and the Estancia / Onion Creek project that Tom and Lilly Byrd have written about in this issue.

The Onion Creek Metropolitan Park project has recently been approved by the Parks and Recreation Department of the City of Austin. Located in southern Travis County, just southwest of McKinney Falls State Park, the park is 555 acres and has the potential of trail travelers hiking and biking down single-track dirt trails throughout the park! ElCaT and its archaeological contractor, GTI Environmental, LLC are currently seeking grant funding to conduct historic and archaeological research within the park to determine if it is in fact historically linked to the trail or not. While it is sure to be a multi-year effort, we are hopeful that the research will result in several miles of hikeable / bikeable trail branded as the National Historic Trail and interpretive and orientation signing to-boot!

The Montopolis Bridge pedestrian project is being coordinated with the Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority and is intended to place a small interpretive panel onto the Montopolis Bridge, which is being converted to a pedestrian bridge near where the Camino crosses the Colorado River in Austin. Once completed, the panel will be viewable by thousands of pedestrians crossing the bridge each day!

The Association and GTI Environmental, LLC are also working on historic and archaeological research at the Travis Audubon Society's Blair Woods Nature Preserve. Located on Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard in east Austin, the preserve likely contains part of the footprint of Fort Colorado, which was in existence from 1836 until 1838. Historic evidence indicates that the fort was strategically placed to block travel by Native Americans and Mexican people along the trail. If archaeological research indicates that the Blair Woods do in fact contain a footprint of the fort, it is hoped that the site could become certified as an official trail resource, complete with directional and interpretive signage.

And in the realm of signing, ElCaT is working with local partners to place roadway signs on modern roads that mirror historic routes of the Camino Real. The NPS has developed a signing plan for Travis County and it has been approved by TxDOT and is awaiting the approval of the City and County. It is expected that by the end of 2021, roadway signs marking the route will be in place, and collectively, with the additional developments underway, will lead to a full experience and understanding of the Camino in the area!



ElCaT volunteers survey Onion Creek Metropolitan Park



## Pasaron por Aquí: Espinosa, Garrapatas and the Continuity of Just Passin' Through Travis County By Tom Byrd

### *Just Passin' through...*

In April of 2018, when the NPS informed us that Travis County would be on their signage plan, I was glad to know my old home county would be better informed of its Spanish history- even if only in passing through for the first half of the 18th century. I grew up in Austin along the Balcones Escarpment and maintain a fanatic interest in the ecology, geology, and history of the natural interface of rocky Hill Country with the rolling Blackland Prairies. Indigenous people in their lifeways accessed varied resources at this physiographic interface and this ancient corridor would be a persistent route for millennia. That story is told in the dirt and scientific archeological analyses. And it's no surprise the Spanish would use this route -though not of their own making but guided by friendly Siupan and Chaulaame Native guides up the prairies along the escarpment to its rivers crossings and springs. With their travels, the story of the Camino Real in this area is told in the written record, though still subject to debate and interpretation.

This segment of El Camino Real de los Tejas was not the first exploratory entry into the state, but it would be the first route of persistent colonial efforts into the lands of the Tejas and other Caddoan peoples, as Spaniards traveled to the limits of their territory with the French in Louisiana. While some may argue the expeditions of Domingo Teran and Salinas Varona in the 1690s touched parts of this route, the definitive missionary trip of Fray Isidro Felix Espinosa and his companions in 1709 gives us the written

word and a landmark of sorts in southern Travis County. That definitive word is "*garrapatas*" meaning ticks, applied to the Arroyo he found which we now call Onion Creek. (And where the ticks found him.)

Akin to being the first TripAdvisor rating for Travis County, Espinosa marveled at the grapes, oaks and wild hemp he found here, but I wonder how those April ticks would ding his rating. He remarked, at some later passing, that ticks were no longer found there. I've picked up a good many ticks exploring near there myself until the fire ants came through in the 1980s.

Subsequent *entradas* and the *derroteros* (journals) by Espinosa and others yield information to retrace their steps and those of the large herds and pack trains driven to Los Adaes. Those accounts by observers on the entradas of Domingo Ramon (1716 and 1717), Marques de Aguayo's flood detour to McKinney Falls (1719), the Rivera Expedition (1727) and others came from the decade when Los Adaes became the established capital and San Antonio became a civil settlement. Corroborating distances and dates, floods, weather, plants, animals, and Native peoples, these derroteros repeatedly mention Arroyo Garrapatas.

This route continued in official use connecting the Rancheria Grande and San Xavier missions to San Antonio along the same familiar route connecting to Los Adaes.

### *Not passin' through? or Continuous use?*

By the mid 1750s, Lipan Apache pressure (somewhat appeased, if not pacified) gave way to Comanche power in the area and this route fell into official disuse. (It remained dangerous until after Texas annexation.) Spanish traffic shifted southeastward to La Bahia's ranches and missions on the Rio San Antonio and other routes to Los Adaes. After closing Los Adaes in the east, and then ultimately restoring Spanish settlement at Nacogdoches in 1779, the route we now know as OSR (Old San Antonio Road) would be established – not passing through these parts of Travis County.



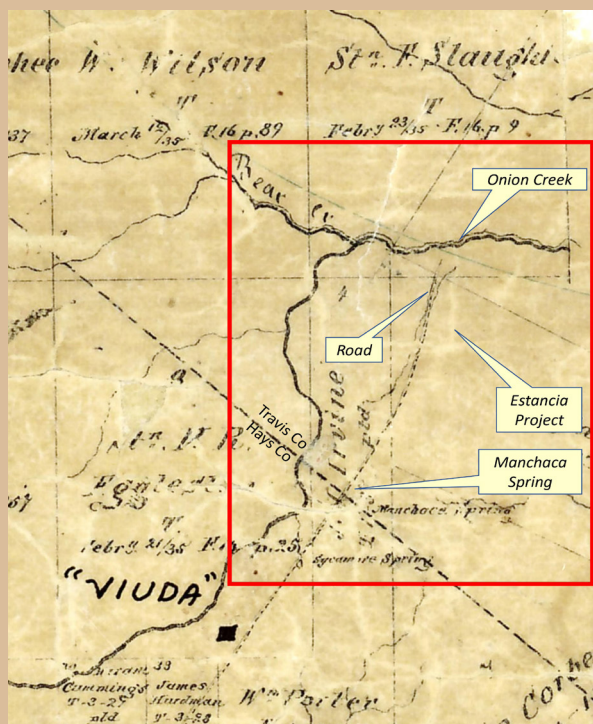
Highlighted trail segment accommodated the entradas of 1709 - 1727 and facilitated travel between San Antonio, the San Xavier Missions, and the Rancheria Grande until the 1750s

Unofficially, and undocumented, we can surmise that the route continued for Indigenous traffic and trade with San Antonio connecting to Los Norteños on the Brazos and Red Rivers to the north. Contraband, bison hunting, and trade doubtless continued, but we can't really know the extent of traffic for these purposes.

Our Arroyo Garrapatas re-enters the record (at least those I'm aware of) when in 1832, Surveyor John Borden describes the first Mexican land grant in this area – that 10 league tract on the Colorado River and “el arroyo que llaman Onion, Burro o Garrapatas” [sic] then granted to Santiago del Valle, a Coahuilan politician. If the trail here was not in continuous official use, our arroyo had a continuous Spanish identity, and a new Anglo identity named for the abundant wild onions found here.

## But what of Arroyo Garrapatas?

When we retrace or authenticate a route, it may be hard to pin down a specific site with certainty and that may not be the



Austin-San Antonio Road is shown on this 1853 map of Hays and southern Travis Counties. Sycamore and Manchaca Springs are depicted along the road. Note “Viuda” (widow) added later (1880’s) which is the site of Buda.

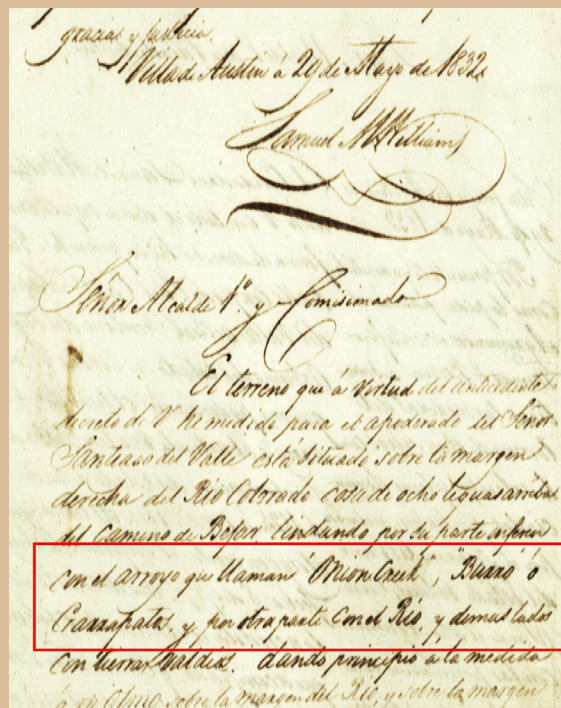
point. When we commemorate the trail, we hope to curate a site which is evocative of the natural setting these Indigenous and Spanish trav-

elers witnessed themselves. Here the *derroteros* are clear, citing distances from San Marcos Springs, the Arroyo San Rafael (Blanco River) and two springs beyond which correlate to Sycamore and Manchaca Springs, the latter being Espinosa’s San Isidro. Campsites or *parajes* were located beyond these springs toward the Arroyo Garrapatas crossing. And that crossing from 1709 (where the congressionally recognized El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail crosses Onion Creek) correlates to the southwest corner of Del Valle’s 1832 Mexican land grant, historic in its own right.

Within the decade, came Texas Independence and the Republic’s new capital at Austin (1839) renewing the documented use of this road connecting Austin to San Antonio. It followed the Del Valle grant’s west line. As the Travis County commissioners’ minutes illustrate, the road would be “reviewed,” suggesting it was already there to simply connect to Congress Avenue. (Curiously, not “laid-out” nor “cut-out,” as these verbs of choice were for new road ordered in the record). That road became the Austin-San Antonio Road and went by several other names in its history to this day – a very significant history in its own right.

## Now we fast-forward to 2020

In January, the Association was approached to assist a land developer in its historic recognition of the Camino at their Estancia Hill Country project. Stratford Land, a Dallas-based development partner, develops the master planning, infrastructure and compliance of large projects, then sells parts to merchant builders. This is a large, phased project which straddles the National Historic Trail at the Onion Creek crossing and south toward Manchaca Spring. The project adjoins the Old Austin - San Antonio / Post Road - our same continuously used



John Borden’s 1832 survey and Samuel May Williams’ land description in Spanish note three names for Onion Creek—a link to its Spanish identity.



camino from Spanish times, through Mexican sovereignty, to the Republic of Texas, and through statehood, and into the workplans of today's urban traffic planners. Until recently these lands were pastures of the Heep Ranch but are now urbanizing – that in itself is also historic.

Stratford Land is committed to dedicate parkland and greenspace parcels to the City of Austin's Parks and Recreation Department (PARC). Additionally, at their initiative, Stratford Land committed to historic commemoration of the Camino Real and the 'Old San Antonio Road,' as it is presently known in Travis County. To clarify, this is not the OSR or Old San Antonio Road over in Bastrop County, which is also part of the NHT, and made famous by the Daughters of the American Revolution's monumental effort in 1918. As you can see, the road has gone by many names and can be a source of confusion, so any commemoration or interpretation will need to explain the distinction.

Natural landscapes will remain preserved along a paved hike and bike trail already in place. Integration with bicycle commuting initiatives are in the works and Austin PARC has acquired lands along the creek for a future park with water recreation potential. With these features, there is a wonderful opportunity to recognize and curate these sites, promoting awareness and educating the public in a natural, recreational setting evocative of the historic Camino Real de los Tejas.

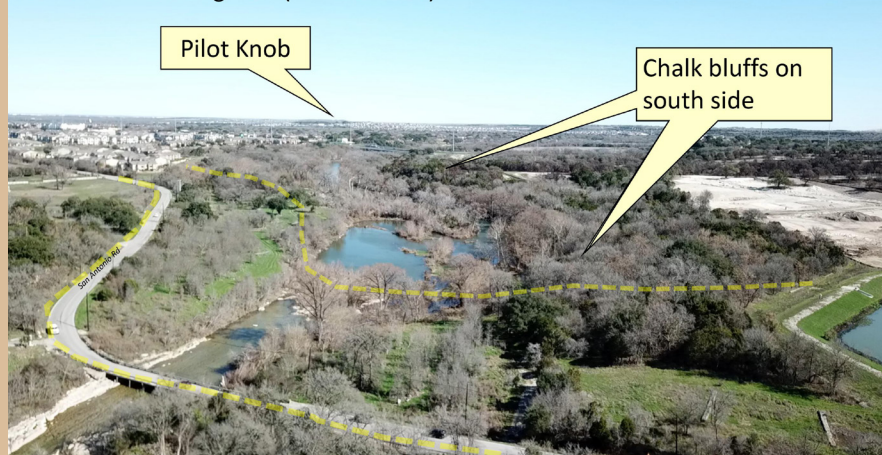
## *Jurisdictions and challenges*

These lands and the road are in the County's jurisdiction, but also within Austin's extraterritorial jurisdiction. To satisfy the zoning ordinance, the developer's commitment has become a compliance matter subject to Austin's planning department. PARC will have its own requirements under its master plan, which will affect its schedule to receive the parkland dedications. The challenge to the Association is to be an effective advocate and liaison between partners within varied jurisdictions. Facilitation is also challenged by pandemic restrictions.

## *Work in progress*

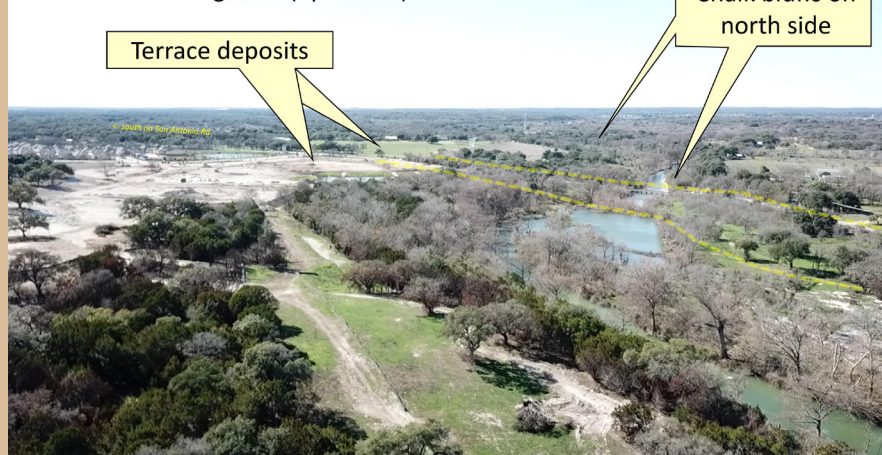
Following last January's Board meeting, a group of us toured part of the site along the creek guided by Archeologist Ron Ralph from the Texas Archeological Society (TAS). Aaron Mahr, Carol Clark and Guy McClellan (from NPS) and John Kisalus, Steven Gonzales and Tom Byrd (from ElCaT) comprised the field tour. From there, the Association has gathered documentary information and offered a draft proposal to the developer to assist them and also to enlist them as partners. We are engaging other partners including individuals from the Travis County Historical Commission, the NPS, and soon the City of Austin in coordination with other efforts at sites along the trail corridor.

Aerial view looking east (downstream)



Between alternating bluffs, this area is passable without obstruction. Easy approaches from each direction and bedrock and gravel bottom.

Aerial view looking west (upstream)

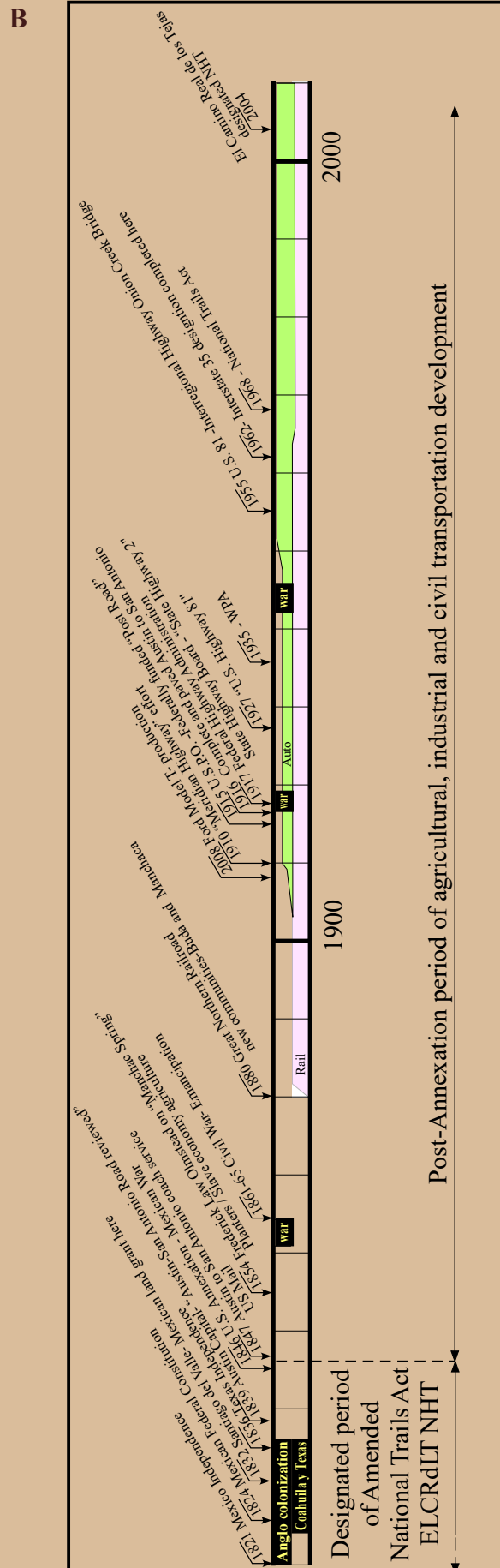


Surficial terrace deposits flank the road. The Austin Chalk is exposed up the slope to the left and along the creek. Extensive archeological deposits are found in the wooded areas above the bluffs.

Aerial images of Onion Creek /Arroyo Garrapatas at the crossing adjacent to the Estancia project.



## NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL ASSOCIATION



10

## The Camino Connection: Pecans and The Camino Real

By Cindy Freeman

Two of my favorite hobbies are heritage tourism and cooking. I especially like discovering unexpected connections between people and places; and when there's a culinary connection, it's even better! A favorite, relatively compact stretch of the Camino Real is the Old Bastrop Road between New Braunfels and San Marcos, with an extension into San Marcos to see San Marcos Springs, then heading northeast on Highway 21 to Bastrop. It's a pretty stretch, away from the I-35 bustle, and you'll see several NPS-branded Original Route signs, as well as historical markers. There are several markers at the crossing of the San Marcos River, one of which discusses Zebulon Pike's journey along the Camino toward Natchitoches, Louisiana, accompanied by Spanish authorities who were suspicious of his efforts to explore the west and southwest. Another describes initial attempts to settle the area in 1808, led by a Spanish-born explorer named Portilla, who brought fifty-one people along the Camino Real from further within the interior of Mexico. The effort was cut short by Native American incursions and river flooding. Near the intersection of Old Bastrop and Highway 80 there's a marker describing the McGehee crossing of the 1840s. The marker states that Moses and Stephen F. Austin likely crossed the river near here. In the town of San Marcos, it's well



Old Bastrop Road in Hays County near McGehee Crossing

worth visiting the springs to learn about Native American settlement of this area, and to take a guided glass bottom boat tour. Reaching the intersection of Highway 21 and 71, it's worth the thirty minute or so trip west to experience McKinney Falls State Park, which features swales near the crossing of Onion Creek, and a Native American Rock shelter.



Several vendors near Bastrop sell pecans

So here's the food connection: pecans! Not only is this Texas' state tree, but Cabeza de Vaca documented how Native Americans along what became the Camino Real were big consumers of nuts in the early 16th century. Fast forwarding to modern times, along a stretch of the San Marcos River near Lockhart, there's a very cool place called Swift River Pecans. Check out their sawmill in back, buy some pecans, and if you're in the mood, you can buy a pecan tree like I did. Near Bastrop, Berdoll Pecan has a great selection of nuts and nut related treats. Now, when I shell my Pawnee pecans, and roast them in butter and Mesquite smoked salt, I think of our long, rich Texas history.



## Annual Report of the Activities of the Rancheria Grande Model Trail Community Chapter By John Pruett

Despite the disruptive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Rancheria Grande MTC chapter, we have managed to have a productive year. Our fiscal year began with our hosting of the Annual El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail Association (ELCaT) meeting in October of 2019. The meeting was held at Apache Pass, near Rockdale, TX. On Friday, we attended the annual business meeting, voted, and enjoyed excellent invited speaker presentations and outstanding meals served by the restaurant at Apache Pass. Saturday was filled with a bus tour of various historical resources in the County to include the San Xavier Mission Complex, Milam County Historical Museum, Sugarloaf Mountain, and the Rancheria Grande archaeological site. The tour ended in Cameron, where we enjoyed Steaktobberfeast and had dinner. The highly successful meeting was the culmination of a period of intense planning led by chairman Joyce Conner. We were greatly assisted by the El Camino Real Master Naturalists (ECRMN), our local Milam County chapter of the Texas Master Naturalists. The ECRMN have an ongoing project designed to identify plants along the designated El Camino Trail in Milam County. The ECRMN project provided a colorful brochure on plants found along the trail for each attendee at the Annual Meeting. The development of the brochure also took hours of planning. It was beautiful to witness the combined advocacy demonstrated by individuals and organizations in the County to make this event possible.

In late October, following the Annual Meeting, a member of the Rancheria Grande Chapter, Linda Jo Conn, traveled to the Lobanillo Swales. Linda Jo, a Master Naturalist with ECRMN, has an intense interest in iNaturalist ([www.inaturalist.org](http://www.inaturalist.org)). The purpose of her trip was to conduct a plant survey of the site. In addition to beginning the study, she has set up a page on the iNaturalist website (<https://www.inaturalist.org/places/lobanillo-swales/edit>), so that anyone can enter their photos captured at the Lobanillo Swales. Linda Jo's many observations can be seen at connlindajo on the iNaturalist website.

In January of 2020, an interested party traveled to Brownsville for the Texas Historical Commission's National Board of Review hearing to consider the Rancheria Grande nominations of an archaeological district and site(s) to the National Register of Historic Places. The group included members of the Rancheria Grande Chapter, ELCaT Executive Director Steven Gonzalez, Sergio and Melinda Iruegas of GTI Environmental, and all six property owners. The Board of Review voted unanimously to approve the nomination, but recommended it be revised before submission to the THC Executive Director for signature. The revised nomination should be submitted to the THC by the end of 2020.

Milam County Judge Steve Young, realtor Dave Cunningham, and Milam County Historical Commission Chair, Lynn Young, met with Sugarloaf Mountain owners to discuss the possibility of acquiring the historic site or signing a long-term lease. Acquisition of access to this site will add this unique

geographical and historical feature to hiking and discovery by those touring the historic trail. While the discussion was very positive, an agreement of terms has not yet been finalized.

We continued to meet bi-monthly as a Chapter up until March of 2020. Since the impact of Covid-19, we have met twice by Zoom. Our current focus is to take oral histories and invite speakers to join us on Zoom.



Dave Cunningham briefing the Annual Meeting attendees before our hike of Sugarloaf Mountain



Hikers climbing to the summit of Sugarloaf overlooking the Little River



## Annual Report for the Trail de Flores Model Trail Community Chapter By Dave Regan

The Trail de Flores Chapter was amongst the first two chapters established by El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail Association on January 18, 2020. Our territory of interest is that portion of the trail that runs through Wilson County, with an early focus on the 2.5 mile “hike-able/bike-able” section of the trail that runs through Floresville.

Our 13 charter members represent a diverse mix of local interests with strong ties to the Wilson County Historical Society and the City of Floresville’s Hike and Bike Trail Committee.

We convened in January 2020 with plans to begin a strong community outreach program through participation in local events, but were challenged by the social restrictions necessitated to control the spread of the COVID-19 virus. As a result, we pivoted to virtual meetings and longer-term planning. Here is a summary of the our year-to-date activities:

**Community Outreach:** In March of this year, just before the COVID-19 restrictions became commonplace, Chapter members attended the Floresville Community Market, situated along the trail at the Beer Warehouse venue. Our table included a map of the local trail, a larger overview of the entire trail system, photographs of the local and larger trail system, and some historical context for the trail. In addition, we provided membership information, ElCaT pamphlets, and a few other trail-related trinkets to anyone who stopped by.

**Creation of a Local Trail Map:** We realized early on that it would be helpful to have a high-quality local map of the trail to assist with our community outreach / education activities. The development has begun, and we hope to have one ready for publication this year.

**Development of a Chapter Logo:** Branding is an important aspect of raising community awareness of our chapter and the trail. Working with the Association staff, we continue to work through drafts of our logo, and hope to have it completed this year.



Floresville Trailhead of El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail in Floresville Texas



Trail de Flores table at the Floresville Community Market, March 2020



Meeting of the Trail de Flores Chapter (clockwise from front): Dave Regan (Chair), Anthony Delgado, Nancy Zerda (guest), Gene Maeckel, Clay Maeckel, LaJuana Newnam-Leus, Claudia Garza (Treasurer), Alan Carvajal (Secretary), Dr. Richard Nimz

**Model Trail Community Maturation:** Floresville was designated a Model Trail Community (MTC) in 2014. Since then there has been no central, local focus on developing initiatives to mature the community’s progress through the MTC criteria. We picked up the ball and have begun to focus on evaluating how well the community has progressed through the criteria. Through this analysis process, we are planning to develop a prioritized list of criteria to focus on, and work with community partners to initiate relevant activities.

**Adopt-a-Sign Program:** Much of the existing trail signage in the area was installed in 2014. Although it has only been 6 years since those installations, Chapter members noticed some serious degradation of the trail logos on the signs. In addition, one sign was found to have been damaged and another

was missing entirely. This discovery led us to initiate an Adopt-a-Sign program. The program involves Chapter members adopting groups of signs and conducting biannual inspections and photographing of each sign so that we can maintain a log of sign conditions over time, and to alert the ElCaT and the NPS when signs need to be replaced. Fortunately, the NPS agreed to fund the replacement of signs this year and we expect to have them installed in the near future.

**Development of Additional Trail Segments:** We identified a couple of “low hanging fruit” that provide us opportunities to create additional “hike-able / bike-able” sections of the trail that contribute to the NPS and ElCaT’s long-term vision to connect Rancho de las Cabras in Floresville with the Mission Reach Trail and Mission Espada in San Antonio.

**Extension of the Floresville Trail into Riverbend Golf Club Community:** The community developer, golf course owner, and City of Floresville City Manager all are onboard to create a trail segment through a new section of the golf course housing development. Such an extension will add about one mile of trail, making the Floresville trail section 3.5 miles long. This portion of the trail would start at the end of the existing trail at the golf course’s southern property line and extend roughly north to the northern boundary of the golf course property. Since it will traverse a housing community, it is expected to be of an improved concrete surface.

**John William Helton San Antonio River Nature Park:** Helton Nature Park is a natural environment property owned and managed by the San Antonio River Authority. It is located north of Floresville bounded by TX 775, the San Antonio River, and the abandoned San Antonio – Aransas Pass rail line. The park includes trails, a boat launch, rustic campsites, and sports fields. Its location is close to the Congressionally-designated trail-line of El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail, and therefore, it presents an opportunity to potentially designate portions of the existing park trails as official parts of the NHT. Chapter members met with Aaron Mahr (NPS) and Steven Gonzales (ElCaT) at the park on Oct 1st to assess the feasibility of creating a trail segment through the park.



Trail within the John William Helton San Antonio River Nature Park



Examples of a natural trail flow design from the Howard Peak Greenway Trail System

In addition to the activities initiated by the Chapter, there are other local trail activities and initiatives worthy of note:

**Trail Paving:** The City of Floresville has secured a grant from TXDOT, through their TA / SRTS program, to pave the portion of the existing trail that runs from Highway 97 to Depot St. This is about one mile of the 2.5-mile trail. The city believes that having a portion of the trail paved will significantly increase foot and bike traffic and, ultimately, add to the small but growing population of trail advocates. The Chapter supports this initiative.

**Trail Design:** We have advocated that the City of Floresville should develop a long-term strategic plan that will provide a vision for how the trail could develop over time. As a result of this advocacy, the City scheduled a workshop in late October to share trail design ideas. We were the primary presenter and advocated our vision of how defining trail design elements up front (before any further trail im-

provements begin), and executing those elements over time will enhance the overall trail user experience. This presentation was developed in partnership with the NPS and ElCaT. The early focus is to explore options with the City and TXDOT on how to accommodate agreed upon design elements into the final paving plan, or at least to ensure the paving plan does not conflict with the trail vision. Understanding that there is no funding now to execute the trail design vision, we feel it is important to begin the trail paving project with the final vision in mind. Examples of these design elements include providing a more natural trail path flow, making accommodations for educational kiosks, strategic plantings, and considering ideas beyond traditional benches for sponsorship opportunities. The Howard Peak Greenway Trail System in San Antonio will be used as a guiding example.

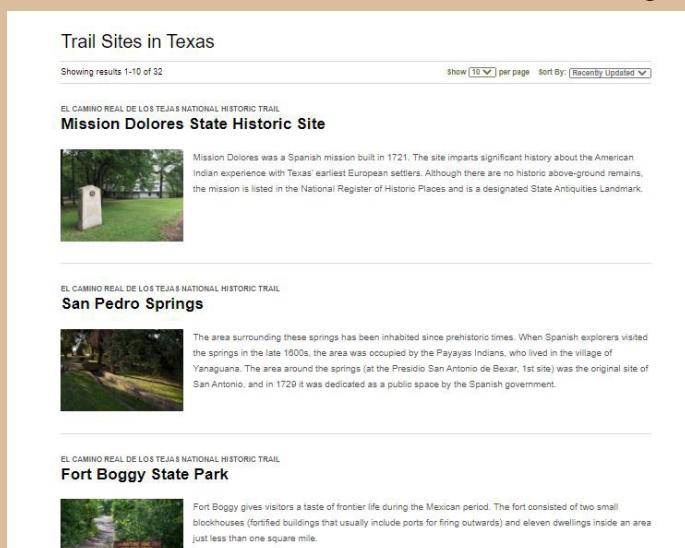


## National Trails - National Park Service (NTIR) 2020 Update

**Dos Caminos Initiative:** In March 2020, Aaron Mahr met with the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) leadership in Mexico City to discuss trail initiatives, including the proposed Dos Caminos trails interpretive workshop, tentatively scheduled for fall 2021, and the next Dos Caminos Datasharing virtual meeting scheduled for December 2020. In preparation for the meeting, NTIR prepared and sent INAH a document with the public data for El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail (ELTE) and is exploring platform options for sharing both public and internal data for the trails across international, federal, state, and local agencies.

**Staffing Update:** From June 14 to October 13, Aaron Mahr was on detail serving as Acting Superintendent at San Antonio Missions National Historic Park. Over the course of FY2020, NTIR welcomed many new employees, including Historian Dr. Guy McClellan, Interpretive Specialist Nick Roll, Cultural Resources Specialist Meg Frisbie, Chief of Planning Dr. Lillis Urban, and American Conservation Experience Fellow Ashley Wheeler.

**Feasibility Studies in Texas:** As part of the feasibility study for the proposed Pike National Historic Trail, NTIR received route data regarding Zebulon Pike's travels through Texas. Information on the project can be found at <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/PlanProcess.cfm?projectID=95651>. Starting in October 2020, NTIR will undertake a feasibility study for the proposed Emancipation National Historic Trail between Houston and Galveston. More information can be found at <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/projectHome.cfm?projectID=95793>.



A screenshot of the recently-completed 'Places' page on the NPS' El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail website, which will help visitors plan their trips along the trail (<https://www.NPS.GOV/ELTE/Planyourvisit/places-to-go.htm>)

**Increased Social Media Audiences:** The NPS-NTIR Instagram account grew 104% in FY20 and now has over 2,850 followers. The El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail Facebook page grew 20% in FY20 and now has approximately 750 followers. Engagement is high, especially among posts created from articles on the trail web site. In FY20, the trail web site hosted 27,000 users and had 72,000 page views.

- o Web: [www.nps.gov/elte](http://www.nps.gov/elte)
- o Instagram: [@nationaltrailsnps](https://www.instagram.com/nationaltrailsnps)
- o Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ElCaminoRealdelosTejasNPS/>

**New Historical Web Content:** We've worked to expand more content about the trail to enhance the El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail web site. Results included essays on Comanche horsemanship and the link between San Antonio's missions and the trail; historians also revised the brief trail history posted on the web site to include more detail on American Indian presence along the trail and an expanded statement of the trail's significance.

**Updated 'Places' Listings:** The El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail web site ([nps.gov/elte](http://nps.gov/elte)) now contains an updated listing of partnership certified sites along the trail. Additionally, trail staff recently finished populating the 'Places' section of El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail web site, which provides practical information (directions, access issues, etc.) and historical background on historic sites along the Camino in both Texas and Louisiana.

### TEXAS

- Baumann Family Village Sites: on private property at 10530 FM 2095, Gause (Milam County)
- Lobanillo Swales: on State Hwy. 21 W 2 miles west of Geneva (near the Sabine-San Augustine county line)
- Wise Family Village Site: on private property off County Road 343 near Kornagay Rd., roughly 5 miles west of Gause (Milam County)
- Treviño-Urbe Rancho: at the corner of Treviño and Urbe streets, San Ygnacio
- Villa Antigua Border Heritage Museum: 810 Zaragoza Street (near Santa Ursula Avenue), Laredo
- Republic of the Rio Grande Museum: 1005 Zaragoza Street (near San Agustín Avenue), Laredo
- Cabeza Creek Crossing: five miles west of Goliad
- Nuestra Señora del Espíritu Santo de Zúñiga Mission (Mission Espíritu Santo): 108 Park Road 6, just west of US highways 77 and 183 and State Highway 239, ¼ mile south of Goliad
- Nuestra Señora de Rosario Mission (Mission Rosario): four miles west of Goliad, just southwest of where US Highway 59 crosses the San Antonio River
- Floresville Hike and Bike Trail: two-mile trail from Trail Street and Goliad Road south to Hospital Boulevard, Floresville
- Dolores-Applewhite Crossing: Medina River Natural Area, San Antonio
- Mission San Antonio de Valero, 3rd Site (The Alamo): 300 Alamo Plaza, downtown San Antonio
- Spanish Governor's Palace: 105 Plaza de Armas (105 Military Plaza), downtown San Antonio
- Acequia del Alamo Dam: just north of the Witte Museum at 3801 Broadway Street, just south of Hildebrand, San Antonio

The fully populated list of partnership certified sites along El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail ([www.NPS.gov/Elte/Getinvolved/certified-sites.htm](http://www.NPS.gov/Elte/Getinvolved/certified-sites.htm))



**Trail-Related Research:** “Researching Indigenous Communities along El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail in Central and Southwest Texas,” a project funded by NPS’s Southwest Border Resource Protection Program (SWBRPP) and NTIR, is ongoing. Dr. Armando Alonzo, historian, Texas A&M-College Station, has completed several research trips to repositories in Austin and San Antonio, and in Monterrey, Nuevo León, Mexico, where he also met with INAH researcher Dr. Moisés Valadez Moreno, who shared some studies relevant to the project. Dr. Alonzo has submitted a working bibliography and two draft maps indicating the geographic location of the various indigenous groups in the region from immediately below the Rio Grande and into central Texas. The planned project ending date is December 2021. In keeping with trail’s enabling legislation, the final narrative will be shared with trail partners in the US and Mexico to support current and future trail initiatives.



Steven Gonzales points out trail trace to staff at the Floresville Hike and Bike Trail (Floresville, TX, January 2020)

**Increased Accessibility:** The final signs will have two QR codes on each exhibit that connect people to more information and automatic AD (audio description). The QR code for content will go to the trail Places websites and include more in-depth info, ideas for where to go next, links to other content, etc. When scanned, the AD QR code will auto-play the audio description, which provides low vision visitors with a descriptive reading of an exhibit.



Looking across the Rio Grande and into Mexico from Arroyo San Francisco overlook at the Rio Grande, which sits along El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail (Zapata County, TX, January 2020)

**New Signage:** National trail staff are currently finalizing consistent orientation and interpretive signage for installation at multiple locations, including Arroyo San Francisco Overlook at the Rio Grande, Apache Pass, Mission Dolores, and Los Adaes. The exhibits are receiving their final colors, as well as labels to highlight individual elements in each scene. In January 2020, NPS trail staff traveled El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail with Steven Gonzales, as well as contractors from 106Group, to generate familiarity with these specific trail resources.



City leaders meeting with local stakeholders on the Camino Real in Floresville, TX (September 2020)

## Texas Historical Commission 2020 Update

### Caddo Mounds State Historic Site

Caddo Mounds State Historic Site is again open to the public after being closed for nine months. On Saturday, April 13, 2019 an EF-3 tornado struck the site leaving massive devastation in its wake. With the help of 200-plus volunteers, various state and public organizations, numerous public workdays, and hard work from the staff, the site hosted its reopening ceremonies on Jan. 11, 2020.

Caddo Council Woman Marilyn Therlkeld participated in the ceremonial planting of a muscadine vine and cedar tree to commemorate the reopening of the site and the temporary visitors center. Currently, site staff are reviewing architectural drawings for the new replacement visitors center museum which is scheduled to be open in early 2022.

In 2021, the staff hopes to complete a couple of projects that will increase visitor access to El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail and its interpretive complex. Site staff and volunteers plan to establish El Camino Real walking trail #2, adding approximately 1 mile of new trail area.

Visitors will experience walking on a portion of the original road. If grant funds are awarded, walking trail #3 will be created, adding an additional 1,600 feet of trail. It will wind through the woods surrounding the interpretive area's marshy pond, and will give access to a new bird blind that will also be built at the pond.

In addition, if grant funds are awarded, the Caddo Mounds staff plans to add an additional 30 acres to its already-established 47-acre prairie restoration project. The additional restored acreage will be adjacent to trail #2 and will benefit several bird Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) and a vast array of pollinators and other grassland birds.



NPS branded Original Route pedestrian sign at Caddo Mounds State Historic Site

### Mission Dolores State Historic Site

Currently, Mission Dolores State Historic Site is experiencing a revival of sorts. In the past year, the site has renovated the visitors center and now includes archival, programming, and office spaces. The museum space is currently under renovation. The new space will include a museum store and guest services center.

Additionally, it will also include new museum exhibits focusing on the history and archeology of our amazing historic site. We look forward to inviting our visitors back in the Spring to help us welcome the museum exhibits to their new home at Mission Dolores SHS!

Like travelers long ago, El Camino Real continues to be a popular destination for those that yearn for adventure. Thankfully, Mission Dolores' scenic RV park is along the El Camino Real. We offer 30/50 amp hook-ups, group pavilions, showers, and a picturesque walking trail, all set in the beautiful, deep East Texas Piney Woods. For more information, or to reserve a campsite, please call 936-275-3815.



EICaT Board Members and agency partners from the THC and NPS pose at Mission Dolores SHS

For additional information please visit: [THC.texas.gov/historicsites](https://thc.texas.gov/historicsites)



# El Camino Real de los Tejas

NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL ASSOCIATION

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### Contact Us

P.O. Box 41286  
Austin, Texas  
78704  
P: 512-850-9073  
F: 512-451-3110

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**El Camino Real de los Tejas**  
**National Historic Trail Association**  
P.O. Box 41286  
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