

Frontier Spirit in Big Sky Country



UTSA's Institute of Texan Cultures, #068-0154

Comanche warrior

The front cover photo was taken at the American Airpower Heritage Museum in Midland, which houses one of the world's largest collections of World War II aircraft nose art. These original nose art panels are titled "Save the Girls" and represent the artistic expressions of World War II bomber pilots. The woman depicted on the cover is featured on a B-17 plane, named "Mystery Lady" whose artist remains unknown. The background photo shows prehistoric rock art from the Fate Bell Shelter in Seminole Canyon State Park and Historic Site in Comstock. Native American rock art can be seen throughout the Texas Pecos Trail Region.

High tabletop mesas rise from wide-open prairies. Ancient rivers course through sheer limestone canyons. Cool artesian springs bubble up from deep underground and ceaseless wind sculpts sand into ever-changing dunes. Above it all stretches a sky so big you can almost reach out and touch it.

This is the legendary Wild West of classic books and movies, and the real-life landscape of the Texas Pecos Trail Region.

The region's 22 West Texas counties cover almost 35,000 square miles, an area larger than a dozen average-sized U.S. states. This big land comprises an ecological transition zone at the junction of the high and rolling plains in the north, Edwards Plateau in the east, mountain basins and Chihuahuan Desert in the west and brush country in the south.

For centuries, scattered Native American groups hunted buffalo and other game across the immense grassland prairies. These same groups also used plant resources and created large plant processing and baking features on the landscape. Dry caves and rock shelters in the Lower Pecos canyon lands display native rock art and preserve material evidence of the prehistoric lifeways. Later, Native Americans such as the Jumano and some Apache groups continued hunting but also lived in agricultural settlements near perennial sources.

Pecos River at high bridge crossing, Comstock

Sixteenth century European explorers mostly bypassed this rugged and dangerous frontier of New Spain. In the late 1500s, Gaspar Castaño de Sosa and Antonio De Espejo explored the upper Pecos River, which De Espejo called *Rio de las Vacas* (River of Cows) due to the numerous buffalo he encountered.

By the mid-1700s nomadic Comanche tribes swept in from the north, hunting buffalo for meat and hides and living in teepees. These mounted, armed horsemen displaced existing Native Americans and controlled traffic and trade; as a result, the Southern Plains were known as the *Comanchería*. To maintain supplies of horses, they raided Mexico along the so-called Comanche Trail — a series of routes later followed by settlers and soldiers.

The U.S.-Mexico War of 1846–48 secured the Southwest as U.S. territory, pushing the American frontier into West Texas. Federal expeditions in 1848 and 1849 mapped trade routes across the upper and lower trails of the San Antonio-El Paso Road. Gold-seeking 49ers en route to California followed the road, as did oxen-drawn freighters. Butterfield Overland Mail stagecoaches, carrying mail and passengers, traveled through the region from the 1850s until the service was terminated in 1861. Many who passed this way faced attacks by Native Americans determined to defend their territory.

To safeguard travelers, the U.S. Army established a new line of frontier forts including Fort Clark (Brackettville) in 1852, Fort Lancaster (Sheffield) in 1855 and Fort Stockton in 1859.

Because the Southwest was so arid, the Army experimented with a Camel Corps, which trekked successfully through the region in the 1850s on their way to California.

In the 1860s legendary cattlemen Charles Goodnight and Oliver Loving drove longhorns up the Pecos River to markets in New Mexico and Colorado, a gritty trip during which Goodnight first used his new invention, the chuckwagon. The Goodnight-Loving Trail became one of the Southwest's most heavily used cattle trails.

During the 1870s and 1880s, the U.S. Army drove a dwindling number of free Native Americans from the plains into government reservations. The end of the Indian Wars coincided with a pivotal moment in West Texas history — the arrival of the railroad.

A race to complete the nation's first southern transcontinental rail line concluded in late 1881 when the Southern Pacific and Texas and Pacific Railroads completed the San Antonio to El Paso section of a shared rail line through West Texas.



Because the railroad's steam locomotives required water, watering stops sprang up across West Texas and towns developed around them. Expanding railroad towns offered ranch hands the chance to frequent saloons that also attracted quick-draw gunslingers and outlaws on the run. In the rough-and-tumble Wild West, the job of keeping order lay with hard-nosed legendary lawmen, such as "Law West of the Pecos" Judge Roy Bean. To demonstrate their ranching skills, tough ranch hands began organizing cowboy contests and what is believed to be the world's first rodeo was held in Pecos in 1883.

Another venerable underground resource changed the face of West Texas, when oil was discovered in the Permian Basin in the 1920s. Ranchers became overnight millionaires. Sleepy ranch towns blossomed into oil boom cities. Riches from ranching and petroleum continued to turn remote villages into towns and, in the case of Midland and Odessa, small towns into bustling cities, where major museums now showcase the region's economic success story.

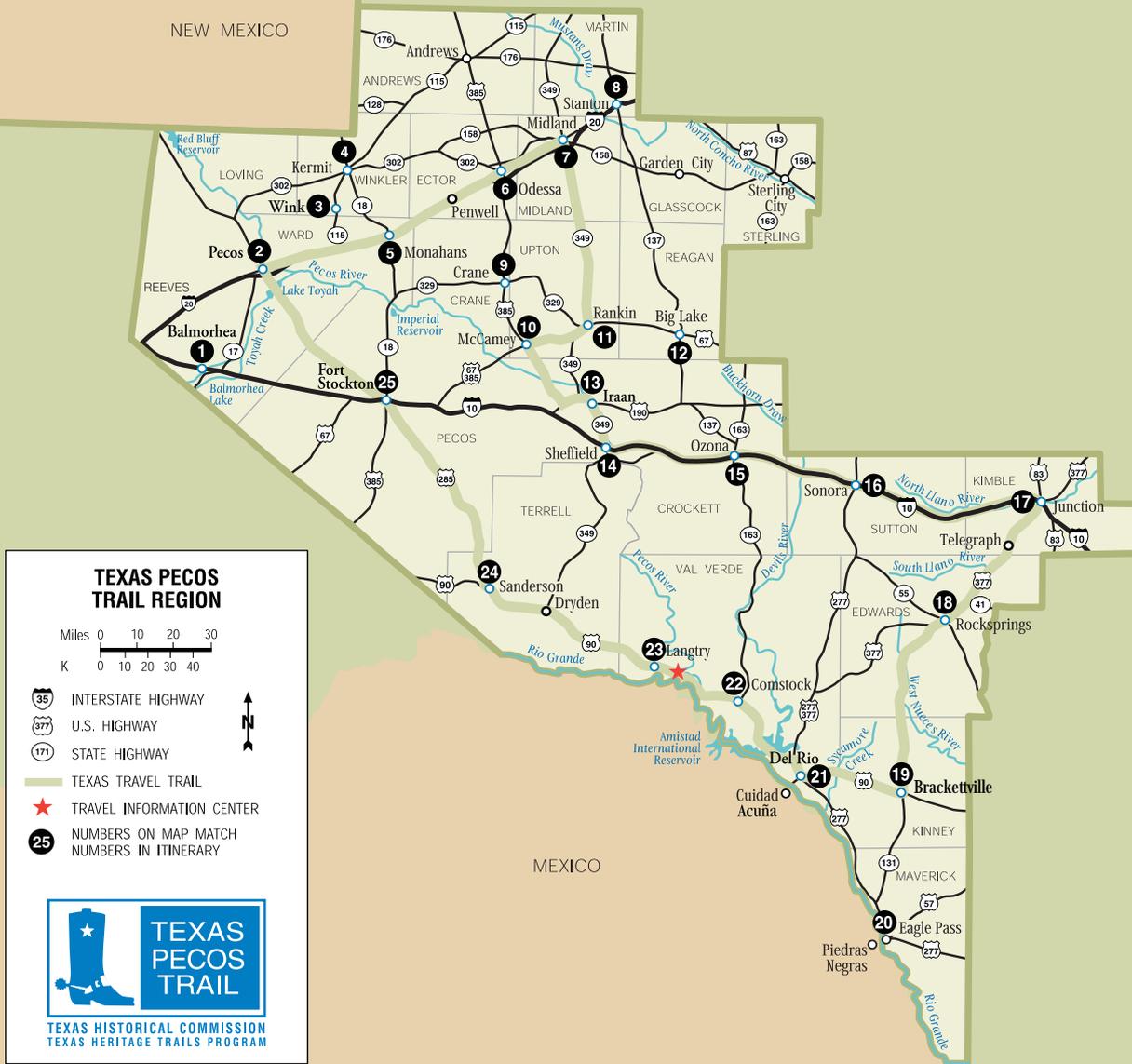
Today's modern highways follow the paths of ancient trails, carrying travelers in the footsteps of rugged individualists — prehistoric people, Spanish explorers, Plains Indians, ranchers, farmers and oilmen. Buildings in

West Texas were greatly influenced by the work of renowned architect Oscar Ruffini, who designed courthouses in Crockett, Sterling and Sutton counties. Wide-open spaces and sparse population meant that folks had to be not only self-reliant but also quick to help out. West Texans proudly maintain a close-to-the-land reputation for independence and neighborliness.

Visiting the Texas Pecos Trail Region allows visitors to experience the rich Western heritage of the Big Sky Country in every sense, by walking in the footsteps of Native Americans, seeing the frontier forts that once housed proud Buffalo Soldiers and other war heroes, hearing the sounds of cattle grazing on the prairies, tasting the region's hearty cuisine and touching living history through area state parks. From ranches to the country's first rodeo, to oil drilling and railroads, this region features thousands of miles of adventure awaiting discovery. The draw of the cowboy and Native American mystique entices visitors to explore the real places of the Texas Pecos Trail Region and find the real story of the pioneering spirit of West Texas.



Background: First passenger train arriving in Kermit, Texas in 1929



The following cities are described in this guide and the number refers to the city's location on the map.

BALMORHEA 1	DEL RIO 21	KERMIT 4	ODESSA 6	SANDERSON 24
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www.thc.state.tx.us/travel
www.texaspecostrail.com



Mission Mary Calera Chapel, near Balmorhea

BALMORHEA

San Solomon Springs gushes 23 million gallons of water a day within sight of the Davis Mountains. For centuries, Native Americans camped here, as did Spanish explorers. Mexican farmers came in the 1850s and diverted water into irrigation canals. After 1900, Anglo farmers arrived, brought in by developers who gave the town its name — Balcum, Moore and Rhea.

The Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps built the world's largest spring-fed swimming pool over the springs and added red-roofed adobe lodging, offering a desert oasis at Balmorhea State Park. The park features camping and a three-acre wetland harboring the endangered Comanche Springs pupfish (reportedly found nowhere else in the world) and the Pecos mosquitofish.

A short drive west of the park is the ghost town of Calera, where a 1902 chapel, Mission Mary Calera Chapel, has been restored to its 1930s appearance.



BIG LAKE

The town's namesake is now the state's largest dry lake. Before its springs dried up, the big lake was a water source in the early 1900s for pioneer ranchers and steam trains of the Kansas City, Mexico and Orient Railway. Big Lake made headlines in 1923 when the Permian Basin's first oil gusher blew in. That nearby well, the Santa Rita No. 1, was the first on university land to provide monetary resources for the University of Texas. The Hickman Museum recalls early ranching and oil boom eras through exhibits in a 1937 rock house. The museum boasts a working scale model of the Santa Rita No. 1. A replica and state marker designate the discovery well 14 miles west of town, off U.S. 67.

BRACKETTVILLE

On raids into Mexico, Native Americans camped at Las Moras Springs. To deter raids, the U.S. Army established Fort Clark in 1852 using Black Seminole Scouts under Col. Ranald S. Mackenzie. Following Mackenzie, Lt. Col. William Rufus Shafter oversaw the fort which later became a garrison for the African American infantry, known as Buffalo Soldiers. After the Indian Wars, the fort remained a horse-cavalry and infantry training post during both world wars.

Deactivated in 1944, Fort Clark is now a resort community where visitors tour the historic post, including residences of World War II generals George C. Patton and Jonathan M. Wainwright, plus a 1931 stone barracks turned lodging. An 1874 guardhouse serves as the Old Fort Clark Guardhouse Museum with artifacts reflecting a century of military heritage. Dozens of panoramas by photographer E. O. Goldbeck show pre-World War II cavalry units. The nearby Seminole Indian Scout Cemetery marks the graves of 19th century scouts.

Brackettville is also home of the original movie set for "The Alamo" featuring John Wayne. Twenty-two miles north is Kickapoo Cavern State Park, offering tours of wild caves and seasonal bat flight observation, by appointment only.



5th Cavalry E company, Old Fort Clark Guardhouse Museum

C risscrossing a land defined by brush, sparse grasses and scattered oaks, one is surprised to discover pockets of life-sustaining water. The Pecos River is the primary source of water in this region, but underground springs have long provided water for native and wandering people, soldiers at military posts and early settlers. The San Felipe Springs, the third largest springs in Texas, supply water for Del Rio and Laughlin Air Force Base. The San Solomon Springs flow into a swimming pool in Balmorhea State Park. Comanche Springs in Pecos County initially supplied water for what was formerly Camp Stockton (now Fort Stockton), but heavy use depleted the springs by 1961. The Las Moras Springs irrigated lands at Fort Clark and Brackettville, but periodically stopped flowing due to excessive withdrawal. In the 1920s, two dams were built on the lower Devils River for power generation and recreation. The 1969 completion of the Rio Grande's Amistad Dam and Reservoir, a joint venture of the United States and Mexico, secured water for generations to come.

Oasis in the Desert



Background: World's largest spring-fed swimming pool at Balmorhea State Park



'Maker of Peace,' by Texas artist Bill Worrell, Seminole Canyon State Park and Historic Site

COMSTOCK

Rock shelters in lower Pecos River canyons serve as massive canvases for world-class ancient pictographs. Drawn thousands of years ago using natural pigments, the rust-colored rock art reveals much about prehistoric life and beliefs. A popular site is Fate Bell Shelter, centerpiece of Seminole Canyon State Park and Historic Site. Interpretive tours offer close rock art views. Visitor center exhibits depict life in a rock shelter, as well as the continent's oldest and southernmost buffalo jump, an ancient hunting event at nearby Bonfire Shelter. Other exhibits chronicle the clash of U.S. Army soldiers and Native Americans, early ranching and railroading, and construction of the Pecos High Bridge. Replaced in 1944, the bridge still offers a panoramic view of the Pecos River canyon, where another major rock shelter, White Shaman Preserve, is open for rock art tours.



Railroad lanterns, Museum of the Desert Southwest

CRANE

After oil was discovered in 1927, Crane County was organized and its only town, Crane, named the county seat. Historic trails forded the Pecos River nearby at Horsehead Crossing. Artifacts from the crossing — such as gun shell casings, pottery shards and a Gold Rush pistol — are displayed at the Museum of the Desert Southwest. Other exhibits recall pioneer ranch life, including a 48-piece spur and bit collection and an 1890 Studebaker chuckwagon. Unusual relics include a Prohibition-era whiskey still and a hospital “shoe tester” that detected static electricity in the days when explosive ether and chlorophyll were used as anesthetics.

*Rock shelters and artifacts,
panoramic views and relics*



DEL RIO

Late 19th-century farmers settled along San Felipe Springs, building irrigation canals that are still in use today. Their community was San Felipe del Rio, later shortened to Del Rio. One early farmer, Italian immigrant Frank Qualia, established a vineyard and winery. The Qualia family still operates Val Verde Winery, the state's oldest continuously operated winery, with a 17-acre vineyard, tours and wine tasting.

An irrigation canal flows through a village of historic structures called Whitehead Memorial Museum. The oldest is the 1870 Perry Store, containing living quarters, period artifacts and military memorabilia. A 1905 wood-frame office has exhibits on Black Seminole Scouts and high-powered 1920s border radio stations. Nearby is the 1925 office of Dr. Simon Rodriguez, the town's first Hispanic physician. A log cabin and blacksmith shop rekindle pioneer times, and a rustic barn shows Native American artifacts. Antique farm equipment and a windmill dot the shady grounds. "Law West of the Pecos" Judge Roy Bean and his son are buried on site, near dioramas depicting his life and a replica of his Jersey Lilly saloon/courtroom.



Del Rio's first Hispanic doctor's office, Whitehead Memorial Museum



High-altitude flying outfit designed for U-2 Dragon Lady pilots, Laughlin Aviation Museum

The U.S. Army patrolled here during World War I and the U.S.-Mexico War. The 1940s brought an air training base, now Laughlin Air Force Base. The Laughlin Heritage Foundation Museum offers photos and artifacts on local aviation history. One of the most impressive features of Laughlin, from the Cold War, is the U-2 "Dragon Lady" reconnaissance plane. On display are a U-2 high-altitude pressurized suit and a camera hatch from which photos were made of 1960s Soviet missiles in Cuba. A photo composite bears signatures of the U-2 pilots. Another exhibit details high-altitude Crow Flights made to detect foreign atomic bomb tests.

The Amistad National Recreation Area Visitor Center offers videos and exhibits on the history of nearby Amistad Reservoir, a U.S.-Mexico joint venture dam on the Rio Grande. Displays demonstrate how prehistoric people made tools and clothing from desert materials. A diorama shows local animals, such as the American bear, bobcat and great blue heron. Another exhibit details the building of the dam, where the annual Fiesta de Amistad takes place typically in October, featuring folklorico dancing and friendship ceremonies between officials of Del Rio and sister Mexican city, Ciudad Acuña.

EAGLE PASS

Designed in 1885, the Maverick County courthouse in Eagle Pass has been fully restored to its former glory thanks to a grant from the Texas Historical Commission's Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program. The courthouse boasts Romanesque Revival-style features with Second Empire influences.

An important part of Texas military history, Eagle Pass Army Air Field was a U.S. Army Air Forces advanced single-engine pilot training school located north of the city. The training school opened in October 1942 during World War II and the airfield employed nearly 600 civilians per month while in operation. The command brought Women Air Force Service Pilots, a Women's Motor Corps detail and African American flying cadets to the West Texas desert during the war.

El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail runs from Mexico to Louisiana through lower Maverick County. For more information, visit www.thc.state.tx.us.

FORT STOCKTON

Comanche Springs was a 19th century watering hole for stagecoaches and wagon trains headed west and for Comanches on raids into Mexico. To deter conflict, the U.S. Army set up Camp Stockton in 1859. Federal troops left during the Civil War, and Native American raids resumed. After the war, the fort was re-established with Buffalo Soldiers. Once the Native American attacks ceased by the 1880s, the fort closed. Revisit those dramatic frontier times at historic Fort Stockton, where the city has restored an 1868



Quanah Parker, last Comanche chief

guardhouse and an adobe officers quarters. Rebuilt barracks replicate soldier life and chronicle fort history through a video, exhibits and 1880s photographs taken by a fort officer.

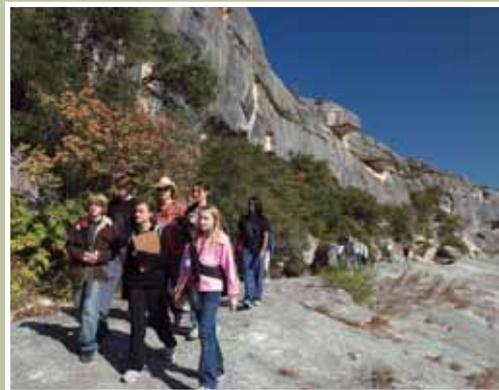
A town grew up around its namesake fort where farmers used Comanche Springs to irrigate crops. One of the most colorful local characters was a hotel owner named Annie Riggs, who married the first Pecos County sheriff and later persevered under various adversities as a true testament to her courageous pioneering spirit. Her 1899 Riggs Hotel is now the Annie Riggs Memorial Museum. The hotel's wide verandas, wrap-around porches and courtyard represent Territorial-style architecture, while the lobby and dining room represent Victorian elegance on the frontier. One guest room is furnished in early hotel motif and others showcase 19th-century clothing, photography, Native American artifacts and cowboy memorabilia.

LOWER PECOS RIVER ROCK ART

The experiences of those who lived along the Pecos River more than 4,000 years ago are captured in the dramatic prehistoric rock art sites of the Lower Pecos archeological region. The 300-acre White Shaman Preserve and nearby Seminole Canyon State Park and Historic Site feature painted images of red, black, yellow, orange and white — all traditional colors of the ancient artists' palette. Located near Comstock, both sites feature some of the country's largest and most diverse examples of rock art, consisting of pictographs, painted images, petroglyphs, carved or etched images and mobile art, including painted pebbles. Although the danger of pollution and increased humidity is a constant threat, this ancient art provides a glimpse into the expressions of shamanistic ritual. The San Antonio-based Rock Art Foundation is a nonprofit organization that owns and maintains the White Shaman Preserve. Providing guided tours of the preserve, the foundation allows the public to experience the imaginative and educational significance of the preserve's rock art. The Seminole Canyon State Park and Historic Site features more than 200 pictograph locations, showcasing numerous figures or motifs that are often repeated, but their precise meaning is still debated.



Prehistoric rock art



*School group on guided tour at Fate Bell Shelter,
Seminole Canyon State Park and Historic Site*

BORDER RADIO

In the early 1900s, AM radio stations brought news reports and religious broadcasts to people in the Texas Pecos Trail Region. By 1962, however, a different animal took to the airwaves when Wolfman Jack began spinning rock 'n' roll records from a small studio near Del Rio.



Radio, Iraan Museum

Several similar stations — often referred to as border blasters — popped up along the Mexican side of the river and became influential proponents of early rhythm and blues music. Their massive wattage (reportedly five times the amount of power allowed by U.S.-regulated stations) transmitted music and advertising across the entire continent.

The best-known border radio station was Wolfman Jack's lair, XER (later called XERF). Thanks to its 300-foot tall transmitters, XERF's rock and country music had a lasting impact on American culture by inspiring teenagers to pick up guitars and replicate the music they heard on this famous border blaster station.



Wolfman Jack Licensing

Wolfman Jack



Gas mask used by local residents when dangerous vapors from oil wells caused hazards, Iraan Museum

IRAAN

A 1926 gusher on the ranch of Ira and Ann Yates gave rise to an overnight boomtown. A contest gave the town its unique name, a blend of the landowners' first names. Iraan's origins and development come to life through exhibits and historic photos in the Iraan Museum. Unusual artifacts include a pie safe made of apple crates and a pioneer homeschool desk with pull-down maps. Prehistoric archeological displays feature early Native American woven sandals, arrowpoints and clay pipes. A paleontological collection features fossilized ammonites (extinct marine life), bird tracks and nautiloids (small marine life with shells). The museum is in Fantasyland Park, with giant recreations of characters from the 1930s comic strip "Alley Oop" drawn by local newspaperman V. T. Hamlin, whose legacy the museum honors.

JUNCTION

This edge of the Edwards Plateau was represented in Congress for 32 years by O.C. Fisher, known as “Mr. State’s Rights.” Relics of his political life and writings are in the Kimble County Library at the O.C. Fisher Museum, a duplicate of his Washington D.C. office. One historic photo shows Fisher on Amistad Dam, authorized by his legislation. The story of another local politician, Texas Gov. Coke Stevenson, is told at the Kimble County Historical Museum. The museum chronicles county history through a genealogy library and wide-ranging photo exhibits. Interesting artifacts include an 1890s “peep sight” surveyor’s compass, a 1930s folding pump organ and an early 1900s leather automobile license plate. Historic photos depict early 1900s local sports teams and Junction during the devastating Llano River flood of 1935.

KERMIT

President Theodore Roosevelt’s son Kermit hunted antelope on a local ranch before Winkler County was organized in 1910. To honor his visit, locals named the county seat after him. About that time, W. H. Seastrunk built a Carpenter Gothic house on his ranch and later disassembled and rebuilt it in town. Now the Medallion Home, it features multiple interpretive period furnishings and, appropriate to its time, no artificial lighting. The kitchen has a wood-burning stove and old-fashioned ice box. One room features the 1915 Victorian wedding dress and marriage license of Kate Lovett Baird, whose family once owned the house. Historic photos recapture Kermit’s history during the 1910s and 1920s, when a nearby oil discovery created a boomtown.



LANGTRY

The legendary Judge Roy Bean epitomized the rugged individualism of the Wild West. The Judge Roy Bean Visitor Center and official Texas Department of Transportation Travel Information Center celebrates that spirit at his restored Jersey Lilly saloon/courtroom where the keen-witted, pistol-packing judge dispensed whiskey and frontier justice. Nearby is his preserved home, called the Opera House. Though Bean named the buildings after his idol, English actress Lillie Langtry, the town was likely named after an engineer on the Southern Pacific Railroad, which arrived in 1882. The center also features dioramas about the judge, a cactus garden and area travel information. Langtry boasts several state historical markers, including one at a scenic canyon overlook above Eagle’s Nest Crossing, a popular Native American ford of the Pecos River.



Lillie Langtry’s photograph in the restored Jersey Lilly saloon; lechuguilla plants in the cactus garden, Judge Roy Bean Visitor Center

MCCAMEY

Centuries of travelers — including Spanish explorer Juan Dominguez de Mendoza, Plains Indians, Gold Rush 49ers and cattle drovers — followed a trail through Castle Gap, a break in nearby high mesas. Legends tell of gold buried on the trail. In 1925, George B. McCamey discovered black gold and a brawling oil boomtown grew up bearing his name. The Mendoza Trail Museum displays relics of the frontier past, such as Native American artifacts, fossils and oil boom mementos. The site also features an early Santa Fe Railroad depot and the 1915 Adrian House, a Western bungalow with multiple interpretive period furnishings and clothing.

MIDLAND

The Texas and Pacific Railroad arrived here in the early 1880s, midway between Fort Worth and El Paso, hence the name Midland. The railroad town was a farming and ranching hub until oil was discovered in the 1920s and today remains the center of the Permian Basin oil industry.

Relive the powerful story of oil — from its geological origins to final production and delivery — at the Permian Basin Petroleum Museum. A sound-action diorama puts you on the floor of an early cable-tool drilling rig. A replicated boomtown and memorabilia displays take visitors back to the 1920s. Interactive exhibits reveal oil production techniques and dangers, including a simulated well blowout. The 40-acre grounds contain the world's largest collection of antique drilling equipment. A cultural gallery boasts Paleo-Indian woven mats and realistic oilfield scenes by artist Tom Lovell. Another gallery showcases 1960s Chaparral racing cars engineered by Midland native Jim Hall.

West Texas oil helped fuel victory in World War II. The war's aviation history is vividly retold at the American Airpower Heritage Museum at Midland International Airport, site of America's largest World War II bombardier-training base, Midland Army Air Field. Videos and interactive exhibits chronicle key World War II battles and the role of aviation. Artifacts depict military life on base and abroad. As part of the Commemorative Air Force, the museum displays approximately 20 restored flyable World War II planes, including the world's only flying B-29 Superfortress bomber and a C-46 cargo plane. The museum also has the world's largest aviation nose art collection. The 75-acre site contains ground transport vehicles, Vietnam War planes and a dramatic exhibit recalls the downing and rescue of aviator George H. W. Bush, the 41st president of the United States.



"The Naming," Museum of the Southwest



The boyhood home of the 43rd president of the United States, George W. Bush, represents the 1950s world when his father entered the oil business. The George Bush Home features photos of the young family and of George W.'s involvement in baseball. Each room contains period furnishings and artifacts. George W.'s knotty pine bedroom has period toys, a built-in desk and bookshelves. The kitchen has a 1950s refrigerator donated by the family. By the dining room's bay window, Barbara Bush held political meetings and one room covers Midland area history.

The 1937 eclectic mansion of independent oilman Fred Turner, Jr. is the home of the Museum of the Southwest, showcasing a large permanent collection, including works by the Taos Society of Artists. The museum's galleries host traveling exhibits and the grounds include a sculpture garden with a dozen bronze pieces in Southwestern and children themes. The adjacent family-friendly children's museum has hands-on explorations of art, science and the humanities. The museum's planetarium is the region's only public facility of its kind.

Nearby is the Haley Memorial Library and History Center. Visitors first encounter a life-sized bronze statue depicting J. Evetts Haley, considered the preeminent historian of the Southwestern range. Another statue depicts Maude, the lead steer of ranching legend Charles Goodnight. More Western sculpture and paintings await inside the Western-themed facility. Some 30,000 volumes include Haley's research library and artifacts on his life, as well as historic photos of famous Texas ranches. The library also contains sketches by Western artist Harold D. Bugbee and 600 photographs by Erwin E. Smith on cowboys and ranch life. A notable artifact is a 1722 bronze bell from the Alamo.

Downtown is the Midland County Historical Museum, with wide-ranging artifacts on county history from prehistoric times to the 20th century. Midland's ranching heritage unfolds in displays of saddles, hats and tack donated by local cowboys. A historic photo shows a locally made 1911 "aeroplane" now on display at the Midland airport. A unique artifact is the heavy wooden door of the early 1900s Pliska Blacksmith shop on which branding tools were tested.

THE GOODNIGHT- LOVING TRAIL

In 1866 Charles Goodnight and Oliver Loving, both Civil War veterans, headed west with 2,000 head of cattle. Forging their way from Belknap, Texas toward Fort Sumner, New Mexico, the men brought their cattle to market outside of the war-ravaged South. The trail ran southwest to connect with the Pecos River and up the river valley to Fort Sumner, continuing north to the railhead in Denver, Colorado. The two cattlemen's route followed along a portion of the Butterfield Overland Mail Route, joining their herds with those of John S. Chisum in New Mexico.

This trek later became known as the Goodnight-Loving Trail and grew to become one of the most heavily traveled routes in the Southwest. All or portions of the trail were used extensively until the advent of the railroads in the early 1880s.

- Goodnight-Loving Trail (1866-1880s)
- Western (1874-1890s)
- Chisholm (1867-1880s)
- Shawnee (1840s-1860s)



*Statue of Western author
J. Evetts Haley, Haley Memorial
Library and History Center*



Replica oilfield boomtown scene, Permian Basin Petroleum Museum

Another downtown site, the Midland Downtown Lions Club Fire Museum, recalls firefighting history with photos of early equipment lining the walls. Artifacts include a World War II fire alarm used at Midland Army Air Base and the city's first two fire trucks, now fully restored, a 1916 unit with a 40-gallon tank and a 1928 American La France T-91 engine.

For engaging entertainment, visit the restored 1927 Yucca Theatre. Each summer its flamboyant Assyrian-style architecture houses the madcap melodramas of Midland Summer Mummies.

Experience local flora, fauna and cultural history at the Sibley Nature Center in Hogan Park. Walk two miles of interpretive trails on the 49-acre site, amid native animals and plants, plus a windmill and pond. Detailed exhibits examine the biological diversity of the area's high plains, known since Spanish times as the *Llano Estacado* (Staked Plains). Rotating displays cover prehistoric people, lake-like *playas*, the Ogallala Aquifer and early Mexican buffalo hunters called *ciboleros*. Animal specimens are in the natural history research library. The center offers educational programs on four cultural eras — the Spanish period, Plains Indians, ranching and the oil boom.

PERMIAN BASIN

While many have heard about the wealth of oil in West Texas, few know about the Permian Basin that is geologically responsible for the area's vast oil fields. The basin covers more than 75,000 square miles of Texas and runs from West Texas into New Mexico. Once the bottom of the Permian Sea, the area is now a basin of grasslands entrenched with rich minerals and petroleum found in the remaining sediment and fossils of a once living sea. First drilled in the 1920s, oil wells in the region have become a primary source of income and development for many Texas cities including Midland and Odessa. Producing some of the largest quantities of oil and gas in the nation, the basin is also a source for potash (a form of potassium) and sulfur deposits, both important in the manufacturing of commonly used items such as glass, soap, fertilizers and other goods. The Permian Basin remains a viable part of the state's economy with more than 14.9 billion barrels of oil produced to date.



Wooden derrick, Permian Basin Petroleum Museum, Midland; Rotary drill bit, Million Barrel Museum, Monahans

MONAHANS

Approximately 40,000 years ago, tributaries of the ancestral Pecos River brought sediment into this ancient seabed. After the last Ice Age, a warming environment dried up plant cover, and winds blew sand into the high dunes of today's 4,000-acre Monahans Sandhills



White sand dunes, Monahans Sandhills State Park

State Park. Visitors walk and slide across the white, glistening sands and wind-sculpted dunes. Along with picnicking and camping, the park offers an interactive museum detailing dune formation and native plants and animals. Displays show how early travelers and railroaders averted the sands, and how Native Americans found fresh water trapped inside. A mature forest of three-foot-high Shinoak (*Quercus havardii*) trees thrives here, keeping the dunes in place and creating one of the largest miniature forests in the world.

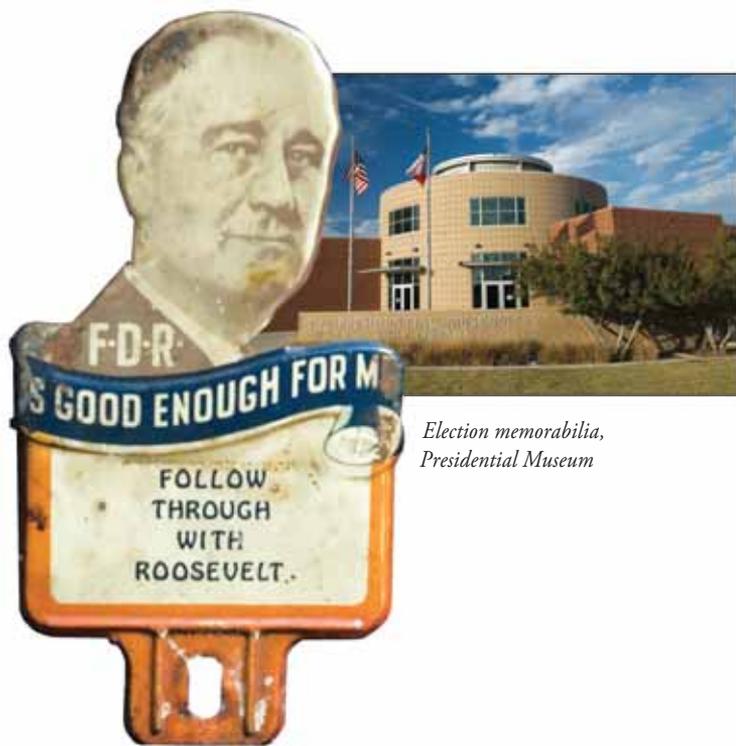
Another unusual Monahans site is a 1928 million-barrel oil storage tank. The concrete bowl-like structure has 35-foot-high walls once covered by a redwood roof. Filled only once, the tank leaked and was abandoned, but was later used for community events as a 400-seat amphitheater. An entrepreneur in the 1950s filled it with water for water-skiing shows, a colorful story retold at the Million Barrel Museum. The museum also boasts the restored Holman House, a hotel on the Monahans-Fort Stockton Stage Line, plus Ward County's first jail and antique oilfield equipment. Also on site is a Texas and Pacific Railroad ticket agent's office.

Fifteen miles west is the Pyote Rattlesnake Bomber Base Museum, where B-17 and B-29 crews trained during World War II. It held German prisoners of war who built the rock base entrance still visible on U.S. 80 and was later utilized as a Cold War radar control center. Housed in a mess hall, the Pyote Museum rekindles military heritage through hundreds of photos and artifacts, including uniforms and an aluminum ingot left from the base smelter.

ODESSA

Legend claims immigrant railroad workers named this 1880s railroad water stop after their home in Odessa, Russia. Among early Midwestern settlers were Charles and Lucy White who built a large red-brick home in 1887. In 1923 the house was bought by Oso Pool who boarded workers during the 1927 oil boom. Restored as the White-Pool House Museum, Odessa's reportedly oldest home features period furnishings from both eras. A White-era parlor displays Victorian wallpaper and rotating memorabilia collections. Reflecting the Pool family are a dining room, second parlor and kitchen with an unusual pie-safe dumbwaiter. Colorful gardens, a wooden windmill and historic water tank adorn the grounds.

After the railroad arrived, Odessa became a livestock shipping center. In 1935, leading rancher Jim Parker located his headquarters in a rock house on the outskirts of town. Today the restored Parker House Museum tells the family's story and ranching history through period furnishings and exhibits. Parker's downstairs bedroom (so he could leave early without waking the family) stands intact, including the elaborate 1908 wedding clothes of Parker and his bride Bessie. Upstairs bedrooms are galleries of early 1900s photos and memorabilia including leather leggings, six-shooters and rifles, barbed wire and spurs, and a McClellan saddle. The sitting room reflects the lifestyle of prosperous pioneers, including a hand-crank Victrola record player.



*Election memorabilia,
Presidential Museum*

Odessa boasts one of the only museums dedicated solely to the U.S. presidency, the Presidential Museum, opened in the 1960s after the assassination of President Kennedy. The modern facility features a five-story atrium with a presidential seal rug ringed by state flags. An animatronic George Washington introduces the Hall of Presidents, which traces the lives and times of every president, including those of the Republic of Texas and the Confederate States. A porcelain doll collection displays the First Ladies' inauguration gowns. Lively exhibits show campaign memorabilia, portraits and period papers. Also on site is the restored and furnished 1940s family home of President George H. W. Bush, wife Barbara and son George W.

Next door is the Ellen Noel Art Museum with three galleries featuring American art ranging from the 1850s to the present. A shaded courtyard offers a handicap-friendly sensory garden with a sound-and-touch sculpture and nesting hummingbirds.

Odessa's downtown post office features a 17-foot-long mural called "Stampede," painted by Western artist Tom Lea in 1940 for the federal Works Progress Administration through one of the job-creation efforts Federal Art Program.

Five miles west lies one of the world's most famous meteor craters. Identified in the 1920s, the Odessa Meteor Crater, reportedly the second largest in the nation, is made of several smaller craters formed more than 20,000 years ago by the impact of thousands of iron meteorites. Originally 550 feet wide and 100 feet deep, wind-blown dirt has filled the hole in to a depth of 10 feet. An interpretive trail leads into the National Natural Landmark crater. A visitor center has interpretive panels and videos on meteorites worldwide. Cases display samples of the dense, heavy rocks.



*1908 wedding clothing,
Parker House Ranch Museum*



Fossilized ammonite, Crockett County Museum

OZONA

Named for its clean air (ozone), the seat and only town of Crockett County touts the phrase “hang your hat in history” and centers around a quaint square with a sculpture of Alamo hero and county namesake David Crockett. A picturesque courthouse faces the square, as does a former church and hospital, built in 1926, now the Crockett County Museum. County history comes alive in more than a dozen rooms of diverse interpretive displays. Prehistory takes shape in collections of fossils and Stone Age tools. Photos and artifacts recall Howard’s Well, a watering stop on the San Antonio-El Paso Road. A blacksmith shop, saddle room, kitchen and general store replicate pioneer life. A more elegant lifestyle appears in collections of stylish hats and teapots from the Roaring Twenties. Another exhibit explains the area’s rich mohair and sheep ranching heritage. The museum also features an award-winning Native American exhibit which includes a variety of artifacts.

A 4,000-square foot visitor’s center houses an abundance of tourist information and travel brochures for the Texas Pecos Trail Region. The visitor’s center is open six days a week and offers 24 hours/7 days a week access to its bathrooms.



PECOS

The Texas and Pacific Railroad arrived in the early 1880s, and Pecos became a cowboy haunt. To test their roping and riding skills, locals held a cowboy contest in 1883 that is considered the world’s first rodeo, still held each summer. Ranch hands frequented saloons, such as one in the 1896 red sandstone Orient Hotel, now the West of the Pecos Museum. The saloon was the scene of a double shoot-out, when local resident Barney Riggs killed outlaws Bill Earhart and John Denson after they threatened him. Retaining that frontier ambiance, the saloon captures visitors with an animated bartender that recalls the gunfight and hotel history. The three-story museum fills 50 rooms with artifacts and interpretive displays on the area’s ranching and railroading past. Guest rooms replicate an early doctor’s office, beauty shop, pioneer kitchen, one-room school and Victorian bridal suite. Other exhibits chronicle the World War II Pecos Army Air Field, the Pecos rodeo and “Pecos Bill,” a larger-than-life figure of Western lore. The museum also features a replica of Judge Roy Bean’s saloon, a Frying Pan Ranch chuckwagon and the gravesite of gunslinger Clay Allison.



Powers #6 cameragraph silent movie projector, West of the Pecos Museum

RANKIN

Another landmark hotel showcases area heritage in the seat of Upton County. Rancher Ira Yates became an overnight millionaire when oil blew in on his ranch in 1926. Within months, he built one of the region’s first fireproof hotels, the Yates Hotel, near the railroad depot. The original wicker furniture, phone booth and ceiling fan grace the hotel lobby, now home of the Rankin Museum. Ten upstairs guest rooms maintain 1920s flair, with steam-fired radiators, louvered doors and shared bathrooms. Some rooms still post Prohibition-era liquor regulations. Diverse exhibits recapture the turn of the 20th century. Unusual artifacts include elegant period clothing, a cowboy’s metal bacon box and license plates from the 1920s.

Inaugural West Texas Rodeo

Home to one of the world's first rodeos, Pecos put cowboy riding and roping on the map as the first organized event to offer prizes to talented cattle herders and bronco busters. The inaugural West Texas rodeo occurred on July 4, 1883 when area cowboys gathered to demonstrate skills in horse riding, roping and tying steer to determine the best cowhand. Rodeo-like functions are traced back to the Spanish settlers of the 16th century, when Mexican *vaqueros* pioneered the way for the American cowboy by making numerous contributions to the sport from saddles to spurs to chaps. The Rodeo Association of America was established in 1929 to organize and regulate rodeos throughout the U.S. While the original committee was dissolved, the sanction of official rodeos today is overseen by the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association. Although the Pecos rodeo was not initially held consistently, since 1929 it has been an annual event. Pecos continues to host its rodeo each summer at the Buck Jackson Memorial Arena.

Photo from West of the Pecos Museum shows twins Eleanor Roberson Prewit and Elise Roberson Schmid in cowgirl attire. They reportedly never missed a Pecos Rodeo and were often riders in the parade.



Hat, tack and saddle of local cowboy, Midland County Historical Museum



Four million bats, Devil's Sinkhole State Natural Area

ROCKSPRINGS

In the 1890s, reliable springs attracted settlers to this edge of the Edwards Plateau. The seat of Edwards County has long been a center for wool and mohair production. However, it was the migratory Mexican free-tail bat that put Rocksprings on the ecotourism map. Daily tours leave the Devil's Sinkhole Visitor Center (April–October) to the Devil's Sinkhole State Natural Area. At dusk, four million bats make a breathtaking exodus from the 400-foot-deep vertical cavern. A million years ago, water carved an underground cavity that collapsed several thousand years ago into what one pioneer dubbed “the outlet to Hell, the Devil's own sinkhole.” The hour-long tour covers natural and cultural heritage. The site also features hike-and-bike trails and picnic areas.

SANDERSON

Tucked in a narrow canyon, Sanderson was a railroad terminal and sheep herding center in the late 1800s. In 1905, it became the seat of newly-formed Terrell County. The first county clerk was former railroad employee, W.H. Lemons, whose wife, Luella, became county clerk upon his death in 1919. The Lemons built a spacious cottage in 1907, and family members lived there until 1987 when it became the Terrell County Memorial Museum. The museum retells family and county history through original furnishings and memorabilia. One exhibit notes the local airstrip from which famous aviator Jimmy Doolittle flew patrols along the Mexican border in the 1910s. An unusual artifact is the so-called “Wolf Gun,” patented by local sheriff J. J. Nance to control sheep predators.

SHEFFIELD

High mesas overlook Fort Lancaster, established in 1855 to deter Native American attacks along the San Antonio-El Paso Road. In 1857, Army foot soldiers, mostly German and Irish immigrants, engaged Native Americans along the road in a pitched battle. That same year, the Army's experimental Camel Corps stopped here en route to California. During the Civil War, U.S. troops abandoned the fort, and Confederate Texas troops took over for two years. After the war, the U.S. Army's 9th Cavalry, made up of Buffalo Soldiers, reoccupied the fort and repelled Kickapoo warriors in 1867. The fort closed in the 1870s, but its history lives on in remaining ruins and lively exhibits at Fort Lancaster State Historic Site, a Texas Historical Commission property. Spanning 82 acres and surrounded by the Pecos River valley, the site offers a walking trail to the ruins, where visitors imagine the once-impressive establishment of 25 permanent buildings.



Above: Texas flag; right: 1850s Texas Rangers re-enactors, Fort Lancaster

*Find the real pioneering
spirit of West Texas
in the mystique of cowboy
and Native American
history and culture*



Twin Corinthian Columns, Caverns of Sonora

SONORA

One-time local cowboy Will Carver turned outlaw and joined the Butch Cassidy and Sundance Kid gang. On the run, Carver was shot in 1900 by lawmen in Sonora and later died in the Sutton County Courthouse, a picturesque Second Empire edifice designed by Oscar Ruffini recently restored to its original 1890s glory. Stories of outlaws and lawmen come alive at the Old Sonora Ice House Ranch Museum, in particular the exhibit of the gun that killed Carver. Housed in a 1920s ice house, the museum also chronicles the area's ranching and pioneer heritage including the varied use of wool and mohair.

The renovated historic building that was once home to the *Devil's River News* now houses the Veterans from All Wars and Ranch Women Museum. Exhibits of wartime photos and memorabilia honor local veterans from World War II to the Iraq War. Other exhibits showcase the various roles of area ranch women. Photos of women roping calves sit beside their silky high school graduation gowns. The museum also showcases locals recognized annually as outstanding pioneer families.

Sonora's Eaton Hill Wildlife Sanctuary combines the beauty of nature with the allure of the area's rugged terrain featuring replica Native American culture, hiking trails, bird watching and fossil displays.

A nearby National Natural Landmark, the Caverns of Sonora, formed approximately two million years ago when underground sulfuric gases rose through faults in Cretaceous limestone. Water percolated into the caverns over millennia creating an amazing array of calcite formations. A two-mile interpretive tour takes visitors 155 feet deep into the earth through narrow passageways layered with stalactites and stalagmites, some opaque white, others brown to rust colored. Dramatic lighting adds to the other-worldly atmosphere. Also available are photo and rappelling tours, as well as a gemstone panning sluice.





School sports exhibit, Martin County Historical Museum

STANTON

In 1882, Carmelite friars established a Catholic farming colony at a Texas and Pacific Railroad stop they called Marienfeld (Field of Mary). They built one of West Texas' first Catholic churches and first Catholic schools in an adobe monastery that still stands. Many Catholic farmers left after a drought, replaced by Protestants who renamed the Martin County seat Stanton, which became a cattle shipping center. The town's religious origins come to life at the Martin County Historical Museum. Artifact-rich exhibits recall the development of farms, ranches, schools and local businesses. Also on tour by appointment is the nearby Connell House. Built in 1902 for local Catholic priests, the home of D. J. and Mary Connell features an altar room and a family sick room.



Roy Orbison Museum

WINK

Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Famer Roy Orbison grew up in this tiny oil town. In high school, he formed a country band, the Wink Westerners, and later played West Texas venues in a rock band. Orbison's early music success came as a songwriter of rockabilly hits, and eventually his trademark three-octave operatic voice brought him worldwide fame. International travelers flock to see his photos, recordings and memorabilia at the Roy Orbison Museum, which sponsors an annual Roy Orbison Festival in June.

Across from Roy Orbison's childhood homesite, a former hospital houses heritage exhibits in the Winkler County Historical Museum. Panoramic photographs recall the 1920s oil boom days when Wink was the "largest town ever built in two years."

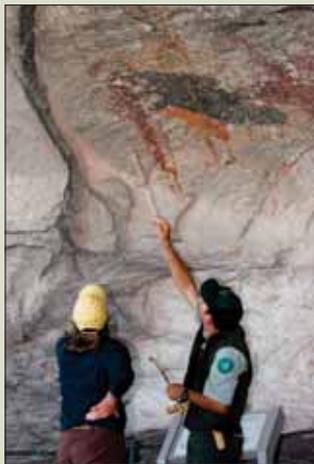


REGIONAL STATE PARKS

Travelers to the Texas Pecos Trail Region can visit the area's beautiful parks and historic sites owned and operated by Texas Parks and Wildlife.

For more information on the following sites, please call 800.792.1112 or visit www.tpwd.state.tx.us.

- Balmorhea State Park, Balmorhea
- Devils River State Natural Area, Del Rio
- Devil's Sinkhole State Natural Area, Rocksprings
- Kickapoo Cavern State Park, Brackettville
- Monahans Sandhills State Park, Monahans
- Seminole Canyon State Park and Historic Site, Comstock
- South Llano River State Park, Junction



Fate Bell Shelter, Seminole Canyon State Park and Historic Site

TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION HISTORIC SITES

Heritage tourists can learn more about the real stories of West Texas at the Texas Historical Commission's **Fort Lancaster State Historic Site** located in the Texas Pecos Trail Region.

For more information, please call 432.836.4391 or visit www.visitfortlancaster.com.

TEXAS MAIN STREET CITIES

Visitors can stroll the sidewalks and peruse shops in one of the region's five Texas Main Street cities. Partnering with the Texas Historical Commission, these communities work to revitalize their historic commercial areas, often the heart of a town.

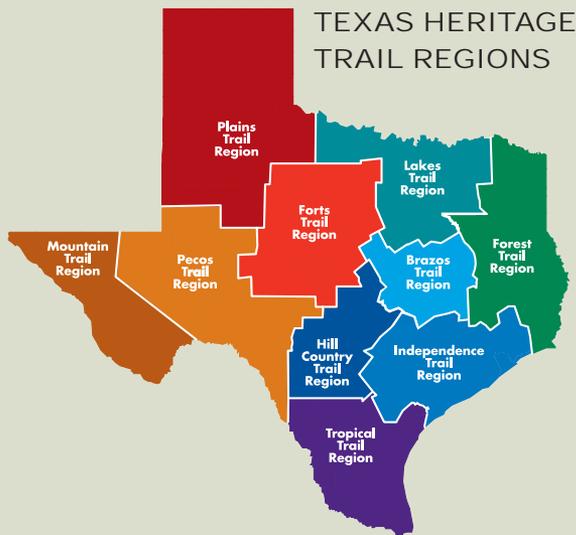
- Del Rio: www.cityofdelrio.com, 830.775.0872
- Monahans: www.monahans.org, 432.943.3418
- Odessa: www.mainstreetodessa.com, 432.335.4682
- Pecos: www.pecostx.com, 432.445.9656
- Sonora: www.friendsofsonora.org, 325.387.2248

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Texas Historical Commission offers free travel guides on the people and places that tell the real stories of Texas. To request copies, call 866.276.6219 or visit www.thc.state.tx.us/travel.



TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
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COMMUNITIES IN THE TEXAS PECOS TRAIL REGION

For more information on the sites in this brochure, visit www.texaspecostrail.com or contact the sources listed below for site locations and hours, as well as details about events and other local attractions. Many information centers are closed weekends; please contact in advance. To obtain a free *Texas State Travel Guide*, call 800.8888.TEX or visit www.TravelTex.com.

■ BALMORHEA

City Hall
432.375.2307

■ BIG LAKE

Chamber of Commerce
325.884.2980
www.biglaketx.com

■ BRACKETTVILLE

Chamber of Commerce
830.563.2466

■ COMSTOCK

Del Rio Chamber of Commerce
830.775.3551
www.drchamber.com



1950s Reagan County brands quilt, Hickman Museum, Big Lake

■ CRANE

Crane County Chamber of Commerce
432.558.2311
www.cranechamber.net

■ DEL RIO

Chamber of Commerce
830.775.3551
www.drchamber.com

■ EAGLE PASS

Chamber of Commerce
888.355.3224 or 830.773.3224
www.eaglepasstexas.com

■ FORT STOCKTON

Convention and Visitors Bureau
432.336.8526
tourtexas.com/fortstockton

■ IRAAN

Iraan-Sheffield Chamber of Commerce
432.639.2232
www.iraantx.com

■ JUNCTION

Kimble County Chamber of Commerce
325.446.3190
www.junctiontexas.net

■ KERMIT

Chamber of Commerce
432.586.2507

■ LANGTRY

Langtry Visitor Center
432.291.3340

■ McCAMEY

Chamber of Commerce
432.652.8202
www.mccameychamber.com



Crow Flight project, Laughlin Aviation Museum, Del Rio

MIDLAND

Convention and Visitors Bureau
800.624.6435
www.visitmidlandtexas.com

MONAHANS

Chamber of Commerce
432.943.2187
www.monahans.org

ODESSA

Convention and Visitors Bureau
800.780.4678
www.odessacvb.com

OZONA

Chamber of Commerce and Visitor Center Park
325.392.3737
www.ozona.com

PECOS

Convention and Visitors Bureau
432.445.2406
www.pecostx.com

RANKIN

Rankin City Hall
432.693.2474

ROCKSPRINGS

Devil's Sinkhole Visitor Center
830.683.2287
www.devilssinkhole.org



Devil's Sinkhole Visitor Center, Rocksprings

SANDERSON

Visitor Information Center
432.345.2324
www.sandersontx.info

SHEFFIELD

Iraan-Sheffield Chamber
of Commerce
432.639.2232
www.iraantx.com

SONORA

Chamber of Commerce
325.387.2880
www.sonoratx-
chamber.com



Sutton County courthouse, Sonora

STANTON

Martin County Chamber
of Commerce
432.756.3386
www.stantontex.com

WINK

Kermit Chamber
of Commerce
432.586.2507



TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
TEXAS HERITAGE TRAILS PROGRAM

www.thc.state.tx.us/travel
www.texaspecostrail.com

The Texas Historical Commission promotes the highest national standards for historic preservation and does not endorse the relocation of historic structures without thorough documentation of the building on its original site. The professional processes required for such action are intended to record and preserve historic properties for the full enjoyment and education of present and future generations.

All photos by Randy Mallory unless otherwise credited

TEXAS PECOS TRAIL

R E G I O N

This travel guide is made possible through the Texas Historical Commission's partnership with the Texas Department of Transportation, Office of the Governor – Economic Development and Tourism, Texas Parks and Wildlife and Texas Commission on the Arts.

The Texas Historical Commission, the state agency for historic preservation, administers a variety of programs to preserve the archeological, historical and cultural resources of Texas.

The Texas Heritage Trails Program

The Texas Historical Commission is a leader in implementing and promoting heritage tourism efforts in Texas. The Texas Heritage Trails Program is the agency's award-winning tourism initiative.

For additional copies of this brochure call 866.276.6219.



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EXPLORING THE SPIRIT OF WEST TEXAS