



Figure 42. Delayed by mud on the Blackland Prairie. A photograph of a “highway” through the Blackland Prairie of Central Texas depicts driving conditions in the 1920s in rainy weather similar to conditions the Traveler Family experienced in April 1922. Mrs. Traveler wrote of the area near Georgetown, “The next evidence we found of the recent rains was a half mile of mud stretching away before us. Through it ran two deep ruts that looked unfathomable.” Here, a mule waits patiently to haul a car, while the farmer anticipates making a fee. Source: Photo library, TxDOT.

The Traveler Family Goes up the King of Trails & Meridian Highways

Between April 2, and June 4, 1922, The San Antonio Light ran a weekly installment that described auto travel on the King of Trails and Meridian highways from San Antonio to the Red River. Entitled “The Traveler Family, The adventures of a San Antonio family who decided to tour in their car,” the series was written by “Mrs. Traveler” and began with a description of the family’s preparations for the trip. Equipment, besides their trusty car, “Ginger,” included limited clothing, suitcases, cots, blankets, an army truck covering, and a traveling bag. The day before they left, a friend took Mrs. Traveler to see the Chapel of the Miracles, where she felt she had “stepped back from another century and another country—Spain.” She would be leaving with “a new impression of old San Antonio to take away” with her.

The family of five left San Antonio in mid-April, passing through Fort Sam Houston and entering open country. They arrived at the New Braunfels “wide, white plaza” an hour later at the same time as another touring party composed of a covered wagon pulled by four mules. They camped at Landa Park, cooking over a fire, sleeping on cots, enjoying the park landscape, and learning about the park’s history from Mr. Landa. After several days, they left for Austin, guided by signs on telephone poles that marked the road as the King of Trails. They remarked on the cotton fields and cedars before arriving at Rogers Park in San Marcos, where they ate a picnic lunch. Badly broken pavement slowed their trip to Austin, but they picked up a passenger who was able to identify two camping parks, one two miles south of the Colorado River and another within Austin’s city limits. They decided to camp at Pease Park until a late night thunderstorm sent Shoal Creek out of its banks; the Traveler Family checked into a hotel at 1:00 a.m. The next day, they visited the French Embassy, old land office building, and capitol, and then headed for Georgetown.

The trip was rough, with bridges and culverts washed out by the rain and miles of mud that taxed the car. They arrived in Georgetown after two hours and were directed to a city campground on the river across the road from a cemetery. The next day, they detoured past Southwestern University on their way to Jonah after learning that the main bridge over the San Gabriel had washed out. They found “good pike roads” on their way to Granger, Holland, Temple, and Waco, where they arrived at 6:00 p.m. Impressed by the “wide, straight streets and high buildings,” they stopped at a public market and

bought food and other supplies. The city camping ground was a disappointment, being a muddy lot with a street on one side and the Brazos River on the other. When they drove through a neighborhood, looking for a more appealing location, a resident allowed them to camp; a car repair was done with the assistance of an African-American employee of a local serviceman named Bob Gay.

The Travelers left Waco and headed north, “dreading Hill County” which “had the reputation of having had the worst roads in the state....” To their relief, the family found good pikes. They stopped for gas and oil in Hillsboro, then continued on to Waxahachie, where they left the King of Trails. They entered Dallas by way of a bridge over the Trinity and visited the city, seeing the post office, library, municipal building, and new Magnolia Building. Leaving town, they decided to camp at a farm along the road. From that point on, they chose to camp at farms from North Texas to Kansas, always finding “good water, and milk and eggs in abundance.” Dallas and Fort Worth were impressive to Mrs. Traveler, but she felt that, in their straight streets and tall buildings, the cities had lost “a spirit that San Antonio [had] retained.” She wrote, “Over the more southern city, with its winding river, its crooked side streets, and its buildings dating back into the centuries, there lies a shadow of mystery and romance that is charming. In the large cities of the more northern part of the state that old-world air is forfeited to modern hustle.”

A substitute for less urban charm was the value of travel education. Mr. Traveler remarked on the oil cars lined up outside Fort Worth and explained the importance of the city to the oil industry. The family stopped at the chamber of commerce to inquire about further travel on the Meridian Highway and then decided to continue on it to Bowie despite advice to the contrary. So they picked up their “M-H’s on the telephone poles” and proceeded. They passed up a trip to Lake Worth, noted the changes in landscape and agriculture, which had evolved from cotton to cattle, and remarked on the pipelines that ran through the region to converge on Fort Worth. After more than 10 days on the road, the Travelers turned north from Bowie and left Texas by way of a Red River toll bridge.¹³⁰