

PALMITO RANCH BATTLEFIELD

National Historic Landmark

Acknowledgments

Attributed, in part, to a “good-neighbor policy” practiced by the NPS, the THC owes a great deal of thanks to Palo Alto Battlefield NHP for its continued support in preserving the history of this battle.

A great deal of thanks is owed to the Civil War Preservation Trust which has supported the THC’s efforts at this site by providing access to a tract of Palmito Hill for this project’s archeological survey, resources for Park Day activities, and a cover article about the battlefield in the Fall 2009 edition of its national magazine *Hallowed Ground*.

The USFWS Santa Anna National Wildlife Refuge is owed a great deal of thanks for its support in increasing the historic interpretation of the battle, most notably funding toward a radio broadcast repeater project and their expertise in determining the appropriate time of year for the archeological survey to ensure that endangered species would not be disturbed.

The THC wishes to thank the many private individuals and donors who have supported projects for this battlefield including an archeological survey on private land.



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Although Texas possesses no Gettysburgs or Antietams, our state does include a wealth of military and home front sites that are important to telling a complete history of the American Civil War in Texas (1861-1865).

One of the most significant Civil War military sites in Texas—both regionally and nationally—is Palmito Ranch Battlefield near Brownsville. This National Historic Landmark (NHL) is the site of the last land battle of the war (May 12-13, 1865).

Palmito Ranch Battlefield lies within a barren stretch of coastal plain, approximately midway between Brazos Island, a Union Army post during the war, and Fort Brown, the Confederate headquarters in Brownsville. The battlefield’s strategic position in the vicinity of the mouth of the Rio Grande along the Texas-Mexico border was no accident. During the war, the South’s only international boundary was critical to the Confederacy’s



Above: Park Day at Palmito Ranch Battlefield NHL
April 4, 2008

Cover: 2007 view of the Battle of Palmito Ranch

pursuit of international recognition and economic viability. Recognizing the significance of Brownsville to the Confederacy and aware of French influence in Mexico under Napoleon III, the Union made repeated attempts to seize control of South Texas during the war.

In an effort to interpret and preserve the history of this unique battle, the Texas Historical Commission (THC) has developed partnerships with local and national preservation organizations, such as Palo Alto Battlefield National Historical Park (NHP), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - Santa Anna National Wildlife Refuge (USFWS), the Civil War Preservation Trust, the Cameron County Historical Commission, and the Brownsville Historical Association. In an effort to increase public awareness of this battlefield’s preservation needs, the THC and its local partners began [in April 2008] inviting the public to Park Day (a national clean-up and interpretation day at America’s Civil War battlefields, sponsored by the Civil War Preservation Trust and HISTORY™) at Palmito Ranch Battlefield.

ONGOING EFFORTS

In 2009, the National Park Service's (NPS) American Battlefield Protection Program (ABPP) awarded a grant to the THC to assist in the preservation and protection of one of America's historic battlefields. This grant award has made possible a three-pronged approach, by the THC, toward preserving the history of the Battle of Palmito Ranch.

- An archeological survey of portions of the western edge of Palmito Hill (located in the core-battlefield area)
- The facilitation of four public meetings in Brownsville (Sept. 2009-Dec. 2010) designed to increase interest in the site
- The publication of this brochure

The THC's preservation efforts have benefited greatly from the ABPP's support and have helped spur additional grants for the battlefield's interpretation. In late 2009, thanks to a private donor's grant, the THC researched and analyzed the Papers of Colonel John Salmon "Rip" Ford (Commander of the Texas Expeditionary Forces during the Civil War), archived and fully catalogued at the Haley Memorial Library and Museum in Midland. Among other undertold topics, the Ford Papers have revealed that the May 1865 battle was actually the second at that location.

In 2010, the THC received funding from the USFWS, the NPS, and two private donors to establish a radio broadcast repeater onsite. With an anticipated launch in mid 2011, it will allow visitors to drive the length of the NHL, listening to its history.

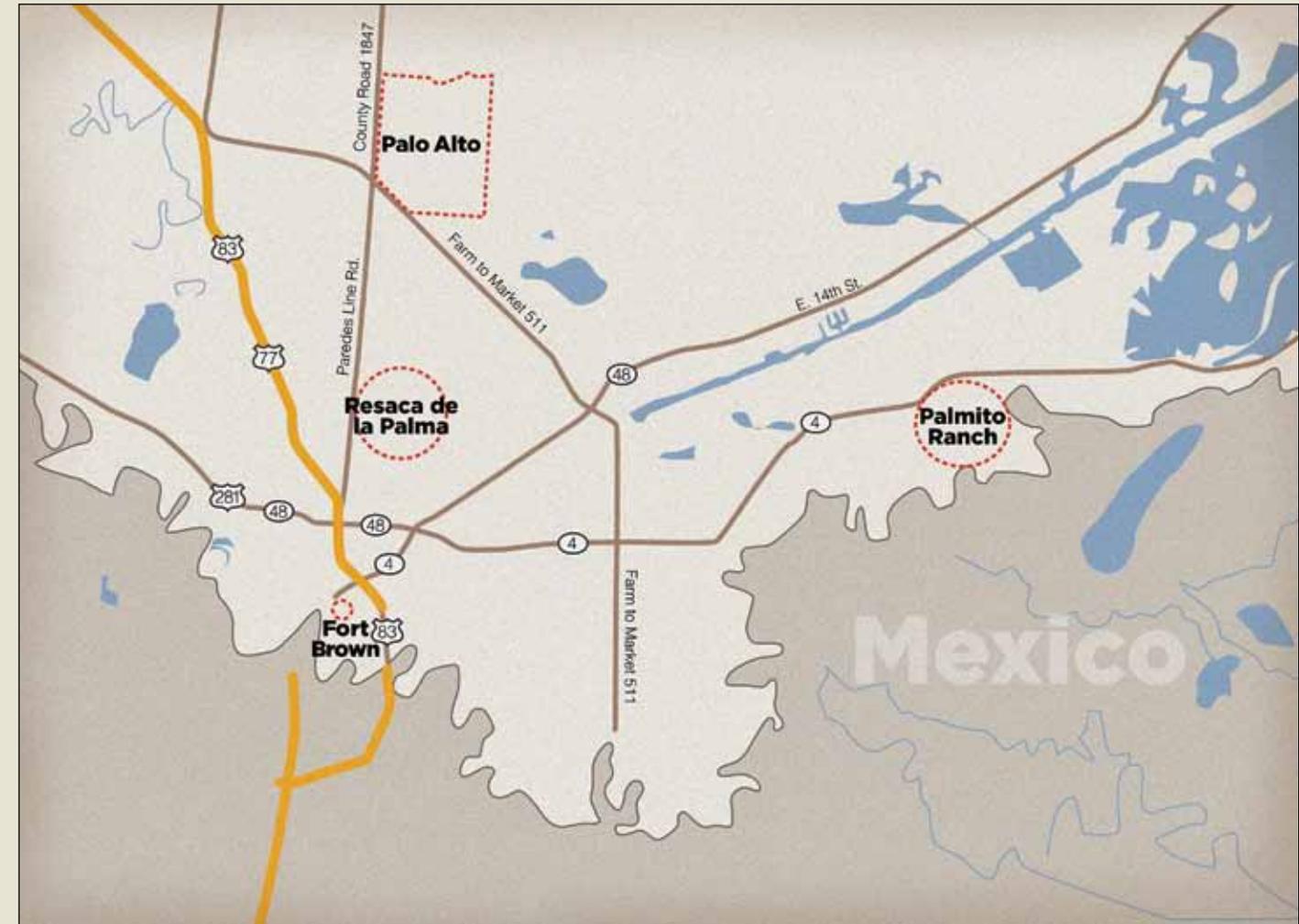
As the sesquicentennial commemoration of the battle nears (May 2015), long-term plans on how to fully interpret the site are still in the concept stage. For more information on this ABPP grant funded project or how to participate in future projects, contact the THC at 512.463.5833.

Left: Palo Alto Battlefield NHP Archeologist/Chief of Resource Management Rolando Garza conducting one of the archeological surveys on Palmito Hill

Right: Area map indicating the locations of Palo Alto, Resaca de la Palma, and Palmito Ranch Battlefields

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How to get there

Palmito Ranch Battlefield National Historic Landmark lies in the Texas Tropical Trail Region, which showcases the heritage, natural beauty, and rich culture of South Texas for the benefit and enjoyment of Texans and travelers. The site is currently not well marked, and there is limited onsite interpretation.

➤ From Fort Brown, proceed 14.5 miles east on the Boca Chica Highway (Hwy. 4) until you reach Palmito Hill Road. From this point, continue further east a few hundred yards to the THC's Official Texas Historical Marker to the battle, located on the northern edge of the core-battlefield area, next to the highway.

