

# *El Correo*

Newsletter of



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## In this issue:

- Little Things Mean a Lot! Goliad and El Camino Real – Page 2
- Victoria County Creates Video Documentary on El Camino Real – Page 3
- Victoria County Receives Approval for Historic Marker from THC – Page 3
- History and Lore: The Mysterious Monster of Espantosa Lake – Pages 4-5
- Upcoming Events – Page 6
- List of Board Members, Associate Members, and Staff – Page 6
- Submittal Information – Page 7

## Little Things Mean a Lot! Goliad and El Camino Real

By

Raymond Starr, Chair, Goliad County Historical Commission; Board member of El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail Association

We are all eagerly awaiting the finalization of the National Park Service management plan and the beginning of major development of our portion of El Camino Real de los Tejas. In the meantime, we can all do lots of little things in our areas to begin to make people aware of the Camino and its possibilities. Here are some of the little things we've done over the last year in Goliad to begin telling the story of the Camino:

1) We dedicated the first Texas Historical Commission marker on El Camino for the Cabeza Creek Crossing of the Bexar-Bahía branch of the Camino; 2) We hosted the Association's Media Day to acquaint the region with the work of the Association; 3) Our Goliad County Historical Commission hosted a talk by Al McGraw on the Camino Real; 4) In the half-million dollar renovation of the exhibits at Presidio la Bahía, we have included a map of El Camino Real and a note that the Presidio is a member of the Association; 5) In my pictorial history of Goliad for Arcadia Publishing, I have included the NPS map of the trail and a caption indicating its importance in the early history of Goliad; 6) Three members of our Historical Commission prepared a float on the Camino Real for our "Christmas in Goliad" lighted-parade; 7) We have opened discussion with Wilson and Karnes County to develop a coordinated marking, interpretation, and marking of the Bexar-Bahía portion of the trail, and we hope to involve the San Antonio River Authority in helping with this (the trail ran on both sides of the river from Goliad to San Antonio).

No one of these things are huge, but taken together, they represent a beginning of introducing the trail to the world. If every other county along the trail did the same, we would begin to make quite a mark!



El Camino Real de los Tejas float in Goliad Christmas Parade – Goliad, Texas. Photo provided by Raymond Starr

## Victoria County Creates Video Documentary on El Camino Real

By

Gary Dunnam, Board Member of El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail Association

Gary Dunnam is the narrator of a documentary on the history of Victoria County. The City of Victoria and Victoria County Heritage Department hosted the premiere of the first episode on February 4<sup>th</sup> at the Victoria County Archives Building. The reception received from an invited audience was excellent.

The first episode centered around Alonso de Leon's discovery of La Salle's settlement on Garcitas Creek on April 22, 1689. As accustomed as we are to calling this settlement "Fort St. Louis," it was never referred to as that in French and Spanish documents. Looking back to the years 1684-1689, we realize that Garcitas Creek was the seedbed of Texas history. The City of Victoria's Public Information Officer, O. C. Garza, is the "director" of the project. Gary Dunnam and Dr. Robert W. Shook are the "historians."

The first episode runs approximately 35 minutes and is now being shown on the Public Information Channel 15 on the local cable network. Episode 2, now in production, deals with the Camino Real in Victoria County. These episodes feature aerial photography, historic photos, video footage of sites along the old road, artwork, and excerpts from Spanish documents.

We are encouraged by the enthusiasm and support we are receiving, and are looking forward to moving onward and upward!

## Victoria County receives approval for Historic Marker from THC

By

Gary Dunnam, Board Member of El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail Association

Gary Dunnam, co-chair of the Marker Committee of the Victoria County Historical Commission, received word recently that the commissioners of the Texas Historical Commission have approved Victoria County's application for a marker entitled "El Camino Real in Victoria County." This is the first of four markers planned which will commemorate the Spanish Colonial history of Victoria County. Documentation for these markers has come from the research done in regard to El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail.

The remaining markers to be approved and signed are: 1) Tonkawa Bank - Second site of Mission Espíritu Santo and Presidio La Bahía, 2) The Atascosita Trail - The Bridge between Spanish Colonial Texas and Statehood 1746-1846, and 3) Garcitas Creek - The Seedbed of Texas History.

Victoria County is working hard to promote its history and the history that lead to the settlement of this great state. Updates on developments will be forthcoming.

# THE MYSTERIOUS MONSTER OF ESPANTOSA LAKE

By

Richard G. Santos, Board Member of El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail Association

Espantosa Lake in Dimmit County got its name in the late 1600s when a Spanish expedition spent a scary night along its banks during “*un tempetad espantosa*” (a horrific storm). Like all other names given to rivers, creeks and lakes by Spanish explorers, the name stuck and 300 plus years later it is still known “*El Espantosa*” or Espantosa Lake. Many have been the stories this writer has collected of fishermen or late night “picnickers” using the lake-side park as a lovers’ lane, reporting strange and scary experiences at the Espantosa. *La Llorona* (wailing woman), *Lechuza* (witch-evil bird), ghosts of people who died at the lake and even a headless rider have been reported. There are also the many hidden treasure stories and the sounds of stampedes, heavy clanking wagons and the yells of muleteers racing and splashing into or out of the lake. There was also one fisherman who told of seeing a strange light swimming under the surface of the water near his fishing boat. Finally, Zeke Romero reported how the fish in his pond next to the lake all disappeared overnight without leaving any carcasses or traces of ever having been in the pond. In his case, however, he discovered another rancher had a similar experience at a pond on his ranch some distance away from the Espantosa. Neither property owner ever got a scientific or acceptable explanation as to how and why all the fish had disappeared.

Now comes this interesting story when on June 23, 1834, Jean Louis Berlandier camped at the Camino Real crossing of the Nueces River in Zavala County near the old road by the detention center. Last time I visited the site slightly over three years ago with former County Commissioner David Lopez, the old steel bridge was still standing but slowly falling apart due to lack of use and maintenance. Because a bridge had to be constructed for crossing the high banks of the Nueces, the group spent an extra day along the river banks. The group resumed its march on the 25<sup>th</sup> continuing on the Camino Real heading toward the Río Grande crossing near present-day El Indio. Before leaving the Nueces River crossing, Berlandier recorded having found a message carved on a large tree. It stated, “The first colony of the Villa de Dolores crossed (here) on 28<sup>th</sup> of February 1834.” The message was in reference to the families gathered by John Charles Beales for the founding of the township of Dolores in present Kinney County. The township failed but land speculator Beales returned to the Nueces to claim the Aguirre Mexican land grant. However, that is a different story not to be told here and now, maybe later.

But back to the diary of Berlandier’s travels in Texas. On June 25<sup>th</sup> he and his group marched from the Nueces River past Espantosa Lake and camped along the banks of Peña Creek in Dimmit County. His entry for that day is most interesting as he noted that many travelers on the Camino Real de los Tejas were afraid of camping along the Espantosa. As recorded by Berlandier, a large mammal (*mamifero*) lived in/on/at the lake and was known to emerge at night and attack anybody camping along the banks of the lake. Among the victims was a group of Lipan Apaches who had camped by the lake. He also stated that in 1813 “two couriers” who had camped at the lake were attacked by the monster and they managed to kill it. The remains were left on site and Berlandier recorded that he searched for the bones but was not able to find any traces of the monster’s remains. Before speculating on what Berlandier might

have been writing about, it is best to give the reader Berlandier's credentials as a highly respected scientist, naturalist, and botanist.

Jean Louis Berlandier was born about 1805 on the France-Switzerland border area. He attended the academy in Geneva and earned a degree in botany. In 1826 he traveled to Mexico to gather and identify plants not recorded by the scientific community. In 1827 he joined the Mexico-U.S. Border Commission headed by General Manuel Mier y Terán. The Commission was to set the boundary between Texas and Louisiana, but Berlandier took advantage of the trip to investigate, name, and collect the unnamed and unrecorded flora of central Mexico, Northeast Mexico and Texas along the various Caminos Reales. Thus included in his diaries are interesting descriptions of the cities, towns, and villages he visited in Nuevo León, Coahuila, Tamaulipas and Texas. The diary of his travels from San Antonio to the Uvalde Canyon with José Francisco Ruiz and a group of Comanche is an invaluable insight into the life and culture of the Native Americans. However, being a college educated European with a different world view and value system, Berlandier's description of the residents of the township in Texas and along the lower Rio Grande is far from favorable. Nonetheless, the published and unpublished work of Jean Louis Berlandier is one of the greatest literary and scientific contributions in Texas, the middle to lower Rio Grande area and Northeast Mexico.

So what man-eating mammal at Espantosa Lake was Berlandier writing about in 1834? Even though he always referred to alligators as caymans, he did know the reptile and frequently reported their habitats wherever he encountered them. So we can rule out the alligator. Because he wrote it was a mammal (*mamifero*), could the so-called monster have been a *jabalina*, feral pig, or bear? We do not know. All we have is Berlandier's statement that a large, monstrous mammal lived in/on/at Espantosa Lake and emerged at night to attack anybody camping along its banks. Like the contemporary stories of Big Foot, Nessy at Loch Ness, Chessie at Lake Champlain, or the swamp-man of the Louisiana bayous, Berlandier was not able to find the skeleton or remains of the "monster of Espantosa Lake." It should also be noted that it is only in Berlandier's 1834 diary that we find a reference to said monster. No other diary keeper traversing the area from the late 1500s to the present period has ever made a similar claim. Ghosts, wagons, buried treasures, stampeding horses, *La Llorona*, *Lechuzas*, *Gritonas*, and UFOs reported at the lake: yes. A man-eating mammal at the Espantosa: no!

Berlandier's massive writings, studies and publications can be found by those interested in reading the material itself. Thus under his name, I recommend you search for 1) *Caza del oso y cíbola en el noreste de Tejas*, 1844; 2) **Luis Berlandier y Rafael Chovel, Diario de viaje de la Comisión de Límites**, 1850; 3) *Espedición científica del general Terán a Tejas*, 1840 and 1857. Reprints of most books were published in Mexico City in the 1940s. Book number one above was translated and published by John Ewer in 1980 as *The Indians of Texas in 1830*. Also in 1980, the Texas State Historical Association published a translation of Berlandier's diary in two volumes as *Journey to Mexico During the years 1826 to 1834*. Whereas this two volume translation features the water colors of the flora Berlandier discovered, recorded, and named, Ewer's book published by the Smithsonian features watercolors of the Native Americans of Texas in 1828 through 1834. All publications are worth reading with or without the illustrations. I also recommend you read the first editions in Spanish to avoid translation errors.

## Events

- March 20, 2010: Spring Fling at Hodges Garden State Park, Louisiana  
- For info on the 5K and Loop Run or Car Show call 1-800-354-3523
- April 30, 2010: El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail Association Semi-Annual Meeting in Goliad, Texas
- May 12-14, 2010: El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail Association hosts a Partnership for National Trails System Workshop in San Antonio, Texas
- July 23, 2010: El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail Association Quarterly Meeting in Nacogdoches, Texas
- October 21-22, 2010: El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail Association Annual Meeting in Rockdale, Texas

Please check our website and future newsletters for specific locations and times.

## List of Board Members, Associate Members, and Staff

- Sally Buchanan – San Antonio/Goliad Region
- Linda Curtis-Sparks – East Texas/Caddo Region
- Chief Rufus Davis, Vice-President – East Texas/Caddo Region
- Frank de la Teja – At Large
- Gary Dunnam – San Antonio/Goliad Region
- Lucile Estell, Vice-President – Brazos Region
- Joy Graham, Secretary – Brazos Region
- Duke Lyons, Treasurer – East Texas/Caddo Region
- Carl Mica – Brazos Region
- John Oglesbee – East Texas/Caddo Region
- Melissa Sanford – At Large
- Andrew Sansom, President – At Large
- Richard Santos – South Texas Region
- Raymond Starr – San Antonio/Goliad Region
- Mark Stine – Brazos Region
- John Stockley – South Texas Region
- Dan Utley – At Large
- Ricardo Villarreal – South Texas
- Kay Wesson – At Large
  
- Mariah Wade – Associate Member
- Jeff Williams – Associate Member
- Steven Gonzales – Executive Director

## Submittal Information

Would you like to submit information about El Camino Real de los Tejas to us? If so, contact Steven Gonzales at (512) 850-9073 or [stevenegonzales@msn.com](mailto:stevenegonzales@msn.com). Submissions must be received by the 10<sup>th</sup> of the month and will appear on a space-available basis.