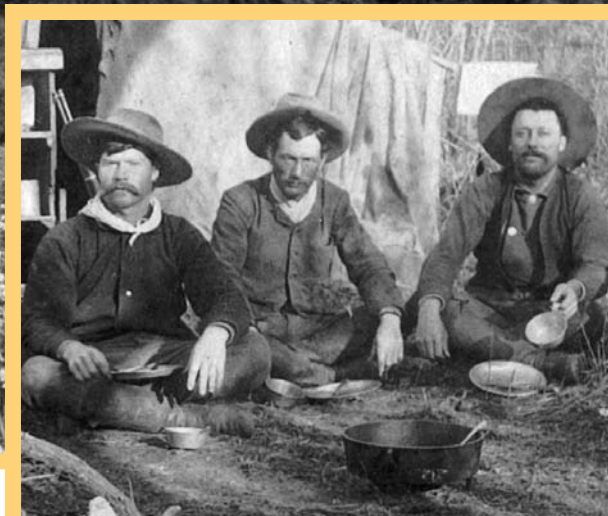


Rugged Beauty



Learn About Cowboys, Canyons and Culture in the Texas Plains Trail Region

Legends are born in the Texas Plains Trail Region, and a particularly popular fable relates to one of its geographic namesakes — the Llano Estacado. Local lore suggests the name came from Spanish conquistador Francisco Vázquez de Coronado, who reportedly used sticks to mark water sources on his trek across the flatlands, resulting in a “staked plain,” or *llano estacado*.

Historians typically don’t dispute the *llano* part of the equation. It’s the *estacado* portion that jabs at them.

In his book *El Llano Estacado: Exploration and Imagination on the High Plains of Texas and New Mexico, 1536–1860*, John Miller Morris points out several possible misconceptions regarding the geographic moniker. Among them are the beliefs that *estacado* referred to the yucca plants’ sharp stalks, stakes used to secure horses, or even

the perception of “stockades” from the mesas’ vertical bluffs.

Morris concludes the origin of the name remains unknown; however, he’s able to accurately capture the area’s mystique in the following passage: “The beauty, mystery, and compelling magic of this legendary land still touch the heart and mind...and a remarkable series of Spanish, French, Mexican, and American explorers have attempted to make sense of its curious environment.”

These complexities and charms are the focus of the Texas Historical Commission’s (THC) newest heritage tourism brochure, *The Texas Plains Trail Region*. Covering a sizable 52-county area in the state’s Panhandle Plains region, the brochure showcases history and cultural attractions in this rugged land of cowboys, canyons and wide-open spaces.

“This part of Texas has a real mystique to it, and I think the brochure captures that feeling in a comprehensive and colorful way,” said Janie Headrick, state coordinator for the Texas Heritage Trails Program.

The free brochure, available by calling 866/276-6219 or visiting www.thc.state.tx.us, will help visitors discover the Texas Plains Trail Region’s multi-cultural history, numerous heritage attractions and trivia related to Route 66, Western Swing music and more. Informative sections also detail ranching life, pioneer women, the Red River War and Hispanic ancestry.

In addition to its rich history, the region boasts an unmatched natural splendor. From the wide-open spaces and dazzling wildflowers to big skies and stunning sunsets, the beauty of this area is one of its biggest attractions. The region’s predominant geographical

feature is an enormous flat plateau called the Caprock — a hard layer formed millions of years ago atop sedimentary deposits. The eroded eastern edge of this 36,000-square-mile mesa forms ravine-like cliffs and canyons plunging 300 to 800 feet, most notably in Palo Duro Canyon, the second-largest canyon in the United States.

The Texas Plains Trail Region's rugged beauty and numerous historic and cultural sites provide an incomparable experience for visitors. The following communities represent a sampling of the area's distinctive appeal.

BIG SPRING

The town's namesake spring once drew buffalo, Native Americans and adventurers — a dynamic history preserved in the Heritage Museum. This "collection of collections" includes 50 early phonographs, an extensive doll exhibit, and one of the world's largest set of longhorns, boasting a 10-foot-6-inch span. Big Spring's aviation heritage takes flight at the Hangar 25 Museum, where artifacts retell stories of the World War II-era Big Spring Army Air Corps Bombardier School and the later Webb Air Force Base.

CANADIAN

Nestled in the Canadian River Valley, this county seat was laid out in 1887 when the Southern Kansas Railway built a bridge over the Canadian River. One of several theories regarding the river's name (and subsequently, the town) is that early explorers thought it flowed into Canada.

The River Valley Pioneer Museum chronicles area history with exhibits from prehistoric archeology to the pioneer period. A recreated bunkhouse and historic photos depict early ranching, and an exhibit shows that local cowboys held one of the state's earliest commercial rodeos on July 4, 1888, a tradition which continues annually. Canadian's downtown offers

an impressive courthouse, movies at the 1909 Palace Theater, and dining and lodging in historic buildings.

CANYON

This Texas Main Street city is the gateway to the state's largest canyon, Palo Duro Canyon, and home to the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum. Featuring a 1930s Art Deco building (later enlarged), the museum at West Texas A&M University preserves three million artifacts on natural and cultural heritage. Ranching exhibits include reconstructions of cattleman Charles Goodnight's log cabin and the 1870s T-Anchor Ranch House.

For centuries, water and wood attracted wildlife and people, and possibly Spanish explorer Francisco Vázquez de Coronado, to what is now Palo Duro Canyon State Park. High multicolored canyon walls surround miles of hiking, biking and equestrian trails, as well as tent, cabin and RV camping. The park also boasts a replica dugout of the Panhandle's first rancher, Charles Goodnight, and a historical musical drama, "Texas Legacies." Near the park, Elkins Ranch offers canyon jeep rides, historical tours and Western entertainment and dining.

DALHART

In 1882, the Texas Legislature gave three million acres of state land to Illinois investors in exchange for a new Capitol building in Austin. The land became the XIT Ranch, which initially covered part or all of 10 different counties.

A model of an XIT division headquarters is among ranching exhibits at Dalhart's XIT Museum. Housed in a 1920s Spanish Colonial Revival former auto dealership, displays portray the lives of XIT cowboys who herded cattle along a 200-mile stretch

— Continued on page 8



Francisco Vázquez de Coronado

“This part of Texas has a real mystique to it, and I think the brochure captures that feeling in a comprehensive and colorful way.”

— Janie Headrick, state coordinator for the Texas Heritage Trails Program

On the cover: Pioneer life in the Texas Plains Trail Region is captured in photos and exhibits at Canadian's River Valley Pioneer Museum. Background: Palo Duro Canyon.

Opposite page: Foreground, the region's history is captured in historic photos at the River Valley Pioneer Museum. Background, Caprock Canyon State Park, Quitaque.



of the Texas-New Mexico border. Room scenes furnished with period artifacts recreate an early kitchen, parlor, bedroom and chapel, while dozens of historic photos retell the area's development.

Dalhart's XIT Ranch Reunion and Rodeo, held annually since 1936, serves a colossal free barbecue dinner. Its downtown offers the Classical Revival 1922 Dallam County Courthouse and live theater at the LaRita Performing Arts Theatre, a 1920s movie palace.

MULESHOE

With a mule's shoe as its brand, the Muleshoe Ranch was carved out of the historic XIT Ranch. The railroad pushed through in 1913, and a town formed at the ranch's cattle-loading pens.

The Santa Fe depot is now part of the Muleshoe Heritage Center, along with an 1897 XIT cookhouse (later Muleshoe Ranch), two 1915 mail-order ranch houses and an early 1900s hotel. The 27-foot-high "World's Largest Muleshoe," erected as an Eagle Scout project, looms over the complex. Muleshoe also boasts a life-sized mule statue as a tribute to the animal's role in World War I.

POST

In 1907, cereal magnate C.W. Post established his namesake town as a model farming community. The Garza County Historical Museum explores Post's life and displays equipment he used for surveying and rain-making experiments. Located in a 1910 sanitarium, the museum features archeological finds, Native American relics and ranching and farming artifacts.

C.W. Post's 1911 office houses the OS Ranch Museum. The art gallery showcases paintings, sculptures, textiles, porcelain and jewelry collected worldwide by Giles C. McCrary and family, descendants of early OS Ranch owners. A Texas Main Street city, Post offers the 1920 Garza Theatre for live entertainment and historic lodging at the 1915 Hotel Garza.

Visitors can catch the spirit of the Texas Plains Trail Region by discovering frontier life, diverse cultures and the pioneering spirit in dynamic museums, unique historic buildings and vibrant festivals. *The Texas Plains Trail Region* brochure is the ultimate guide. To order a free copy, call 866/276-6219 or visit www.thc.state.tx.us. ★

This article was written by Andy Rhodes, managing editor of The Medallion, and Randy Mallory, Texas Plains Trail Region brochure contributor.

Opposite page (clockwise from top): Windmills punctuate the landscape near Lubbock; a cowboy cookout at Elkins Ranch near Canyon; Quahadi Comanche chief Quanah Parker (photo courtesy Panhandle Plains Museum).



Clockwise from above: The cover of the Texas Plains Trail Region brochure; one of the world's largest set of longhorns is on display at Big Spring's Heritage Museum; Dalhart's XIT Museum features cowboy life along the Texas-New Mexico border; bridge over the Canadian River; artifacts on display at the 1915 Hotel Garza in Post.

The Texas Plains Trail Region's rugged beauty and numerous historic and cultural sites provide an incomparable experience for visitors.

