



Presidio  
La Bahía



INTERPRETIVE GUIDE

# GOLIAD STATE PARK



## FURTHER READING

Hardin, Stephen L. *Texian Iliad: A Military History of the Texas Revolution, 1835-1836*. University of Texas Press, Austin, Texas.

Jackson, Jack. *Los Mesteños – Spanish Ranching in Texas, 1721-1821*. Texas A&M University Press, College Station, Texas.

O'Connor, Kathryn Stoner. *Presidio La Bahía, 1721-1846, 3rd edition*. Wexford Publishing, Victoria, Texas.

The Texas State Historical Association. *The Handbook of Texas* ([www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/](http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/)).

## OTHER HISTORIC SITES IN GOLIAD

Presidio La Bahía and Zaragoza Birthplace, one-quarter mile south of Goliad State Park on U.S. Highway 183

Goliad Courthouse Square Historic District and Market House Museum, one-quarter mile north of Goliad State Park off of U.S. Highway 183

Fannin Battleground, Nine miles east of Goliad off U.S. Highway 59

You may also want to inquire about joining *Amigos of Goliad State Park*, a not-for-profit friends group, to support the preservation of Goliad's rich historical landscape.

Goliad State Park • 108 Park Road 6, Goliad, Texas 77963  
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R.W. PARVIN

GOLIAD STATE PARK IS COMPRISED OF MULTIPLE HISTORIC SITES THAT TOGETHER REVEAL 300 YEARS OF TEXAS HISTORY. THESE SITES HARBOR MEMORIES OF THE NATIVE AMERICAN, SPANISH, MEXICAN AND AMERICAN CULTURES. HERE THESE GROUPS COLLIDED, BUT FRAGMENTS OF THEIR CULTURES ENDURED, CREATING THE TEXAN IDENTITY.



## A RICH HISTORICAL LANDSCAPE

Missions Espíritu Santo and Rosario tell a story of faith, sacrifice and the creation of a distinctive ranching heritage. The missions also reveal the story of the Karankawa, Aranama and Tamique people's traditional way of life. The El Camino Real de los Tejas Visitors Center showcases the architecture inside the Keeper's Cottage built by the talented men of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and guides guests down a historic trail.

The story begins with the roving bands of hunter-gatherers known to history as the Karankawa, Aranama and Tamique. Their world changed dramatically with the arrival of the French at Matagorda Bay and the thousands of Spaniards who followed. Intent on protecting their land holdings, the Spanish Crown and Roman Catholic Church reasoned that through mission settlements they could create a Spanish citizenry in the New World. They enthusiastically began "civilizing and Christianizing" the native people with the intention of making them Spanish citizens.



GILCREASE MUSEUM

Karankawa – Coastal people



## MISSION NUESTRA SEÑORA DEL ESPÍRITU SANTO DE ZÚÑIGA

Franciscan priests established the first Mission Espíritu Santo at Matagorda Bay in 1722, adjacent to Presidio La Bahía. In 1749, after two other moves, both the mission and presidio were strategically relocated to opposite banks of the San Antonio River protecting Camino La Bahía, a major Spanish trade route to the north and east.

Mission life was radically different from the natives' traditional culture. In return for food, shelter and protection from more aggressive tribes, they agreed to live in the mission, follow its discipline, and receive instruction in the Roman Catholic faith. The result over time was the gradual erosion and eventual replacement of their traditional culture with a distinctly new way of life.

Espíritu Santo's chapel and grounds were the center of a busy community. Supervised by the Franciscan fathers, the men branded cattle, tilled the soil, chipped stone and mixed mortar. The women spun wool for clothing, made clay pots used for storage and cooking, ground corn into meal with stone *manos* and *metates* and harvested crops.

Ranching, however, became the main occupation at Espíritu Santo. Thousands of wild long-horned cattle and horses roamed the mission lands. Native American mission residents adapted Spanish riding and roping styles to their own and soon became accomplished vaqueros. Renowned for its livestock, the mission regularly traded cattle with other settlements. During the American



Revolution mission vaqueros herded thousands of cattle to Louisiana in support of the American struggle for independence.

Franciscan efforts at Mission Espíritu Santo continued until 1830 when declining native populations, lack of money and political turmoil in Mexico forced it to close.

By 1931 when the fledgling Texas State Park system acquired the site, neglect and the use of stone for other construction projects had left the buildings in ruin. Crews of the Civilian Conservation Corps worked to restore the Mission from 1935 until 1941. During the 1970s, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department rehabilitated the chapel and built exhibits in the restored granary.



## MISSION NUESTRA SEÑORA DEL ROSARIO

(Four miles west of Goliad on U.S. Highway 59)

Walking the grounds of Mission Rosario, visitors see evidence of a vanished people. Situated on a slightly elevated point with a panoramic view of cattle grazing in fields and the San Antonio River, the stabilized ruins of the mission walls are all that remain of one of Texas' last intact Spanish mission archeological sites.

Established in 1754, Mission Rosario served the Karankawa people, a tall, robust, nomadic people whose territories stretched among the bays and estuaries of the Gulf coastal bend. The Franciscans were determined to build a mission for

Vaqueros were the original cowboys and started herding cattle in northern Mexico in the 1590s. Artwork by Clemente Guzman III, TPWD.

the Karankawa, and lured them to Rosario with promises of food and shelter. But regimented agricultural mission life had little permanent appeal to these wanderers; most returned to their traditional ways. Nonetheless, Rosario became the center of a large livestock operation. Ten years after its founding, the mission priests and native people managed more than 4,000 branded cattle. Mission Rosario was abandoned in 1781, briefly reopened in 1789 and closed for good in 1792.

Goliad County donated the site to Texas Parks and Wildlife Department in 1972. Recent preservation efforts have stabilized the mission walls. Archeological excavations provide important clues that tie construction periods to known periods of occupation.

## EL CAMINO REAL VISITORS CENTER

Repurposed today as an interpretive museum, the El Camino Real Visitors Center is the restored historic caretaker's cottage built by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), as well as one of Goliad's hidden architectural jewels. As park visitors move through the three main rooms, they will encounter interpretive exhibits, as well as interactive elements that will help tell the story of El Camino Real, a story interwoven with that of the CCC architects who sought to faithfully recreate the bygone era of the Spanish empire through the mission restoration. Among other offerings, visitors have the chance to create their own architectural sketch on a piece of "blueprint" paper, inspired by their own connection to the stories they hear in the museum.



## EXPLORE THE NATURAL SIDE OF GOLIAD

Nestled between rich coastal plains, southern thorn scrub, and the San Antonio River, Goliad State Park sits in a uniquely diverse landscape hosting a variety of habitat types, plants, and wildlife. During your visit, walk the trails, enjoy a picnic under the trees, watch leaf-cutter ants hard at work, paddle the San Antonio River, and gaze up at the stars at night!

Unwind and decompress as you venture down a trail and are enveloped by nature. The San Antonio River Trail is shaded by towering sycamore and pecan trees with abundant wildlife. This 1-mile trail is excellent for birding, biking, exploration, and relaxation. Behind the mission, the Aranama Nature Trail winds its way into the woody thorn scrub to the historic kilns. This 1/3-mile trail offers different flora and fauna, with drier, rockier terrain. Elusive ringtail cats and grey foxes call these woods home. Will you be lucky enough to see one?

Wildflower season in Goliad is tough to beat, with favorites including bluebonnets, paintbrushes, prickly poppies, phlox, sage, and many more. A symphony of wildflowers plays out across the open fields, painting the park with vibrant colors teeming with pollinators. Grab your camera and explore with us!

