



## INTERPRETIVE GUIDE

# FORT RICHARDSON

## STATE PARK AND HISTORIC SITE



In 1936, the Texas Centennial Commission purchased the surviving fort buildings and surrounding 41 acres. The site was turned over to the City of Jacksboro and the Jack County Historical Society to maintain. Fort Richardson became a National Historic Landmark in 1964. Five years later, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department assumed operation of the post. Today the park offers over 70 campsites, multiple hiking trails, a swimming beach, and more!

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department works to preserve this historic site while maintaining and interpreting the frontier character of this Texas fort. You have a part to play in assuring this cultural and natural resource endures. Do not remove artifacts from the park and help preserve natural surroundings by staying on trails and throwing away trash.

### FURTHER READING

*Sentinel of the Southern Plains: Fort Richardson and the Northwest Texas Frontier* by Allen Lee Hamilton, Texas Christian University Press, 1988.

*Five Years A Cavalryman* by H. H. McConnell, University of Oklahoma Press, 1996.

*The Indian Trial* by Charles Robinson, University of Oklahoma Press, 2015.

*Carbine and Lance* by Colonel W. S. Nye, University of Oklahoma Press, 1969.

*Frontier Forts of Texas* by Bill O'Neal, Arcadia Publishing, 2018.

*Empire of the Summer Moon: Quanah Parker and the Rise and Fall of the Comanches, the Most Powerful Indian Tribe in American History* by S. C. Gwynne, Simon & Schuster, 2011.

Fort Richardson State Park, Historic Site  
and Lost Creek Reservoir State Trailway  
228 State Park Road 61, Jacksboro, Texas 76458  
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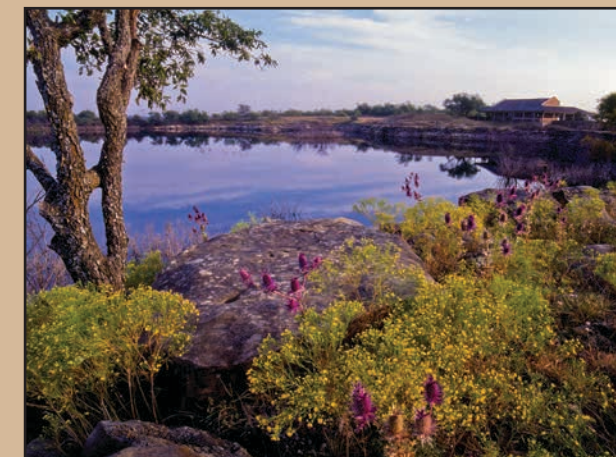
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## LOST CREEK TRAIL

Fort Richardson State Park and Historic Site is not only steeped in history, but rich in natural wonders as well. Multi-use trails within the park provide an opportunity to travel through beautiful prairie habitat, home to many species of birds including northern bobwhite, Western meadowlark, and American kestrel. Overnight visitors may hear the gentle rustle of armadillos as they forage for insects and grubs, and coyotes may sing at dawn and dusk. Look for stately white-tailed deer in the early evening. You may even have a group of wild turkeys pass you on the trail.

The Lost Creek Reservoir State Trailway connects Fort Richardson's main park to its satellite park nestled on the shore of Lake Jacksboro. The 9-mile trail follows the creek, traveling the east side of Lake Jacksboro before crossing the dam at Lost Creek Reservoir. The trail casually winds along the terrain and offers cool, shaded spots to rest beneath pecan and oak trees. Look for great blue herons, kingfishers, and even osprey hunting fish in Lake Jacksboro. Enjoy a cool swim after your hike and relax on the beach.



**THE RED RIVER FRONTIER AND THE TEXAS PANHANDLE WERE WILD, UNCERTAIN PLACES IN THE EARLY 1870S. NATIVE AMERICANS, CHIEFLY KIOWA AND COMANCHE, SAW THEIR WAY OF LIFE UNDER ATTACK. THE UNITED STATES ARMY, SENT TO PROTECT SETTLERS AND AMERICAN INTERESTS, DROVE NATIVE GROUPS FROM THEIR HOMELANDS ONTO PERMANENT RESERVATIONS.**

**BETWEEN 1867 AND 1875, SOUTHERN PLAINS TRIBES AND U.S. CAVALRY AND INFANTRY CLASHED ON THE NORTHERN TEXAS FRONTIER. FORT RICHARDSON WAS A KEY POST IN THIS STRUGGLE.**





## SENTINELS OF THE SOUTHERN PLAINS

Established in 1867, Fort Richardson was the northernmost post of a line of forts stretching from the Rio Grande to the Red River.



NOLA DAVIS, TPWD

The U.S. Army named Fort Richardson in honor of General Israel B. Richardson, a veteran of the Seminole Indian and Mexican Wars, who fought for the Union and died in the Civil War in 1862. Frontier forts played a critical role during Reconstruction and the Indian Wars, when troops were tasked with the job of subduing the plains Native Americans and forcing them onto reservations north of the Red River

Relocated tribes, however, became frustrated by confinement, inadequate supplies, and failed treaty promises. Other tribes resisted relocation and fought back. Their warriors crossed the Red River into Texas and terrorized frontier settlements. In response, the U.S. government sent additional Army personnel to protect these communities and bring those responsible to trial. On occasion, these retaliatory raids and patrols became bloody battles; one of the fiercest was the battle at the Little Wichita River in July 1870.

Kicking Bird, a Kiowa Chief, attempted to secure a peaceful resolution for his people, but failed peace talks led some in his tribe to question his leadership. To regain the confidence of his people, Kicking Bird led



warriors into Texas in 1870. Against his orders, a small group of young warriors attacked a civilian mail stagecoach. Fort Richardson dispersed 59 troopers of the 6th Cavalry Regiment, led by Captain McLellan, to locate and fight the Kiowa responsible for the attack.

The 6th Cavalry tracked down the Kiowa and attacked, despite being outnumbered two to one. McLellan only lost three soldiers and eleven were wounded before retreating, while the Kiowa reportedly lost fifteen men. Captain McLellan praised Kicking Bird for his leadership in the battle and requested more men to protect the frontier. The army awarded McLellan's unit, including civilian James B. Doshier, with 18 Medals of Honor.

In 1871, The U.S. Army held Kiowa Chiefs Satanta and Big Tree at Fort Richardson for leading a raid known as the Warren Wagon Train Massacre. These chiefs became the first Native Americans tried in Texas Civil Court and their guilty verdict shifted public opinion to support offensive western advancement.

Three years later, in 1874, the conflict between U.S. Army troops and the plains Native Americans would come to an end in the Battle of Palo Duro. Led by Col. Mackenzie, the army dealt a decisive blow to the Comanche, Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Kiowa, forcing the tribes permanently onto reservations. This final battle effectively ended the Red River War.

Kicking Bird later regretted his use of violence and devoted the rest of his life to working with Americans and seeking peace for his people.

## LIFE AT THE FORT

Life was hard for soldiers at a frontier fort. The men made long, difficult patrols along the frontier, sometimes trekking all the way to Palo Duro Canyon, 300 miles away. They guarded the military road connecting them with forts to the southwest, and helped local law officers keep the peace in the nearby town of Jacksboro. The post hospital, completed in 1870, dominates the fort's parade grounds. More men died from diseases than from battle wounds. Highest on the list of medical complaints were illnesses caused by bad water and spoiled food. Other common ailments included alcoholism and venereal diseases contracted during visits to nearby brothels.

After the Battle of Palo Duro, the north Texas frontier was relatively secure and soldiers were no longer needed at Fort Richardson. Orders to abandon Fort Richardson were issued March 29, 1878. The 60+ buildings, including our still-standing morgue, bakery, magazine, commissary, and commanding officer's quarters were soon sold, scavenged, and fell into disrepair.



EARL NOTTINGHAM, TPWD



## LOST BATTALION

During World War II, Fort Richardson became an active Texas National Guard installation as the mobilization site for Battery F, 2nd Battalion, 131st Field Artillery Regiment, 36th Infantry Division. In February 1942, the battalion fought alongside the Dutch on the island of Java to repel a Japanese invasion. The unit and 368 sailors from the USS *Houston* were captured when the Dutch surrendered the island in March. The fate of the men remained a mystery until the end of the war. They became known as the "Lost Battalion."

During their 42 months imprisonment, the men suffered untold hardships. They were transported to Burma and Thailand in the cramped lower holds of ships. With no fresh air, food, water, or latrines, the journey was unbearable. In the jungles of Burma and Thailand the men were forced into manual labor, clearing jungle, digging roads, and laying tracks. The prisoners suffered in the jungle heat, monsoons, and tropical diseases with no medical treatment. The 738 members of the Lost Battalion who managed to survive this grueling time were liberated on August 15, 1945.

Today a State Historical Marker commemorates these men and their sacrifice.

Texas National Guard troops train at Fort Richardson. Photo courtesy of Paula Schaeper.

