



## INTERPRETIVE GUIDE

# GARNER STATE PARK



Garner boasts the only CCC-constructed dance pavilion in a state park still used for regular dances.

GENERATIONS FREQUENT GARNER STATE PARK, SUSTAINING CUSTOMS UNIQUE TO THIS PLACE. THE MOST POPULAR OF THESE TRADITIONS, THE DANCE, HAS ITS ROOTS IN THE PARK'S GREAT DEPRESSION-ERA CONSTRUCTION. AN INEXPENSIVE FORM OF ENTERTAINMENT, LOCAL DANCES BECAME A POPULAR PASTIME IN THE 1930S. WHEN THE PARK OPENED, LOCAL BANDS PERFORMED IN THE BEAUTIFUL NATIVE LIMESTONE AND CYPRESS DANCE PAVILION. LATER, A JUKEBOX REPLACED THE BANDS, AND THE ESTABLISHED DANCE CONTINUES ON WARM SUMMER NIGHTS.



Garner State Park is one of the most popular parks in the state. The rich cultural history of the park and its facilities, the clear waters of the Frio River, and steep wooded canyons combine to form a treasured place for all Texans. Help us keep the park a special place for everyone.

- Hike only on designated trails and stay out of closed areas.
- Leave no trace. Keep your park clean by picking up your trash.
- Preserve the park for future generations and leave plants, animals, and fossils where you find them.
- Join the Friends of Garner State Park, a non-profit group that supports the park through donations, service, programs, and running the Visitor Center.

Garner State Park  
234 RR 1050, Concan, TX 78838  
(830) 232-6132 • [www.tpwd.texas.gov/garner/](http://www.tpwd.texas.gov/garner/)



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PLEASE TURN IN FOR REUSE





The land was a kitchen for some Native Americans! Some groups built large earth ovens to slow cook tough roots and tubers.

Great Western Trail. European immigrants also settled in the area, their livelihood based on ranching and farming. German immigrants like the Magers and Streibs moved here, setting up ranching operations to support their families.

The Frio River, serving the needs of people for thousands of years, isn't only valuable today for swimming and tubing. It feeds lakes and aquifers, like the Choke Canyon Reservoir and the Edwards Aquifer, that Texans rely on for drinking water.

## THE DRAW OF THE WATER

Think for a moment about what brought you to Garner State Park. Perhaps it was the promise of leisure time with your family, the opportunity to float in a cool river, or a chance to see plants and animals that live here. Your reasons for visiting this canyon differ very little from what brought people in the past.

Around 12,000 years ago, prehistoric people started to travel through this land. They were attracted to the game animals, useful plants, and stones for toolmaking they could find here. The river provided a dependable source of water and helped to cool the canyons, providing a sanctuary during warm summers. Spanish expeditions in the 1600s were the first Europeans to explore this land, leaving their mark by naming what they saw. Their name for the river, Frio, means cold.

Later, during the rise of cattle drives, the canyon again offered security to cattle and cowboys traveling on the

We still use most CCC-constructed facilities at Garner today, including roads, picnic tables, a lodge, overnight cabins, and the dance pavilion.



## THE MAKING OF A STATE PARK

As the automobile gained in popularity during the early 1900s, vacation camping became a popular pastime for city dwellers. The Frio River and the beautiful canyons made this an ideal location. In the 1920s, the Magers family opened a piece of their land along the Frio River for camping, where the park is today.

Soon after, the Great Depression of the 1930s brought a debilitating unemployment crisis to the country. With more than half the young men under 25 years of age out of work, President Franklin Roosevelt created the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) to provide opportunities for them. In Texas, the program put young men to work developing state and national parks.

Civilian Conservation Corps Company 879 constructed the park between 1935 and 1941. With hand tools and hard work, they built everything the park needed to welcome visitors. June 1, 1941 marked the grand opening and dedication of Garner State Park, named after former vice president John Nance Garner, a local son.

## REMARKABLE RIPARIAN

**T**ake a look beyond the tubes and swimmers and you'll find a special habitat along the Frio River. This riparian landscape is where water, soil, and plants meet along the water's edge. These narrow strips of land help to dissipate floodwaters, stabilize soil on the riverbanks, and filter sediment out of the water. Like the clear waters of the river? You can thank the riparian area for some of that!

A healthy riparian area might look overgrown or unkempt—but it's actually providing a place for animals to live. Wildlife can find cover under branches and search for food in shallow, clean water. You might see the graceful great blue heron stalking fish, frogs, and snakes here. These large birds can be between three feet and four and half feet tall.

Riparian areas also have a diversity of plants, from small sedges to towering trees. Bald cypress trees hang over much of the Frio. These are conifers, like Ashe juniper or pine trees, but they lose their leaves in the fall. Look for their green needles to turn rust red and drift to the ground, leaving the trees "bald" for the winter. You might also see cypress "knees" sticking out of the shallow water. These are extensions of their roots and stabilize the trees during floods. Bald cypress trees help hold the riparian together.

The diversity and structure of riparian areas depends on you! If you're committed to conservation, avoid accessing the river where the vegetation is tall and thick on the banks. Get to the river from areas which are kept open, like the day use area.

