

T E X A S FORTS TRAIL

R E G I O N

This travel guide is made possible through the Texas Historical Commission's partnership with the Texas Department of Transportation; Office of the Governor-Economic Development and Tourism; Texas Parks and Wildlife and Texas Commission on the Arts.

The Texas Historical Commission, the state agency for historic preservation, administers a variety of programs to preserve the archeological, historical and cultural resources of Texas.

The Texas Historical Commission is a leader in implementing and promoting heritage tourism efforts in Texas. The Texas Heritage Trails Program is the agency's top tourism initiative.



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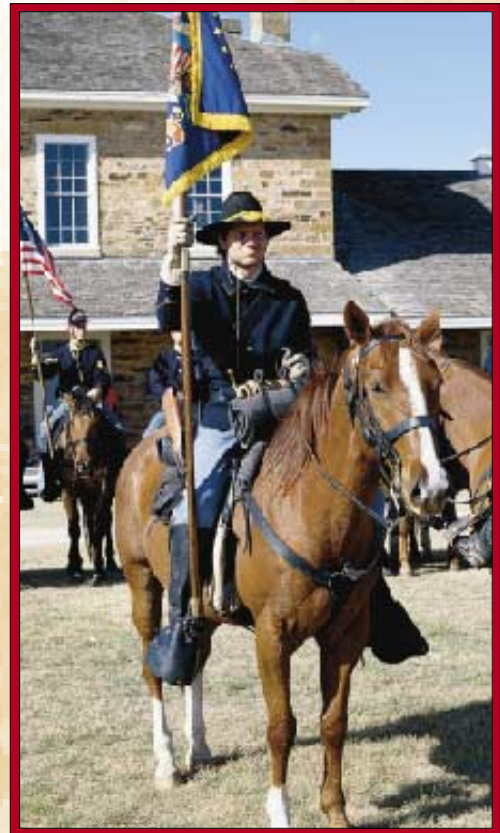
**TEXAS
HISTORICAL
COMMISSION**

The State Agency for Historic Preservation

P.O. BOX 12276 • AUSTIN, TX 78711-2276
PHONE 512/463-6100 • FAX 512/463-6374

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TPWD

**EXPLORING THE HERITAGE
OF TEXAS**

T

he frontier forts of Texas were lonely outposts in wild country. As settlers streamed west with dreams of new opportunity, the federal government established lines of forts to protect Texans on the advancing frontier.

The passions of that era often resulted in conflict: frontiersmen on one side, tough and self-reliant, accustomed to taking what they wanted; Native Americans on the other side, resentful of intruders into their domain.

In between stood the frontier soldier. His hardships were many and his dangers very real. Usually, the soldier built the fort — he felled trees and shaped crude timber, quarried stone and heaved both into place with muscle and sweat.

As frayed tents gave way to barracks, the soldier looked around and found the nucleus of a town huddling in the safety of the new fort. “Civilization” had arrived — the frontier had moved. Along with it marched the soldier, trekking farther west into an uncertain environment.

From 1848 to 1900, the U.S. Army built 44 major posts and set up more than 100 temporary camps in Texas, the nation’s largest military department. In addition, a number of earlier Republic-era forts, private bastions erected by pioneer families, and a host of much older *presidios* (forts) from the Spanish colonial period had been built and abandoned.

The Texas Forts Trail



TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION



R. W. PARVIN

Ghostly Fort Phantom Hill chimneys salute another sunrise.



The Texas Forts Trail leads to eight of the famous frontier forts of West Central Texas, including one *presidio*. Using a copy of the *Texas State Travel Guide* will enhance your travel experience. The guide and a Texas Official Travel Map are available from any Texas Travel Information Center or by calling 800/888-TEX. Be sure to contact local visitor information bureaus listed inside for more tips on area attractions and events.



R. W. PARVIN

Ruins of Menard's Spanish fort, Real Presidio de San Saba.

From 1848 to 1900, the U.S. Army built nearly 150 posts and camps in Texas — the nation's largest military department.



TxDOT

Fort McKavett, shown right, has restored nearly half the original buildings and is open daily for visitors.

Unique boots and traditional cowboy hats are just a taste of Forts Trail shopping.

Cattle and ranching heritage remains strong throughout the region.



TxDOT



A conflict between the stubborn westward march of Anglo settlement and the equally determined defense of Indian hunting territories produced three decades of Army–Indian warfare in Texas, with more than 200 battles between 1849 and 1881.

Historic buildings, like this one in Mineral Wells, demonstrate preservation in architecture.

Begin your exploration of the Texas Forts Trail Region at Abilene, the major metropolitan area on the 650-mile route. The trail description is presented in a clockwise direction. However, the route may be started at any point, driven in either direction or explored in sections.



ABILENE

Pop. 115,930 • Alt. 1,738 • Taylor County

The economic and cultural hub of the Texas “Big Country,” Abilene ❶ delivers an appealing blend of the old and the new. The town sprang up in 1881 as a railroad shipping point for ranchers, and today Abilene remains fundamentally Western in outlook and lifestyle. Traditional ranching operations spread a hundred miles in all directions. Visitors can find some of the best Western dining opportunities in the state. You may have heard the popular song calling Abilene the “prettiest town I’ve ever seen.”

Cowboys showcase ranching life at rodeos throughout the region.



TxDOT/R. W. PARVIN



R. W. PARVIN

A museum fills Abilene’s restored Grace Hotel.

To learn more about the history of the city, named for the rowdy cowtown in Kansas, visit The Grace Museum. Located downtown in a restored historic hotel, the museum features exhibits on local history and art, as well as an educational children’s area. Nearby is the restored Paramount Theatre with Spanish Colonial Revival details. All form part of a National Register Historic District.

The first leg of the Forts Trail aims north to Lake Fort Phantom Hill. Crossing the dam, the Trail leads to an attractive lakeside park.

Just a few miles north are the lake’s namesake ruins, **Fort Phantom Hill** ❷. The ruins stand on a hill that seems to flatten out somewhat upon approach — a “phantom” hill. Privately owned, the site is open to the public and offers interpretive signs.

Fort Phantom Hill burned in 1854. Solitary chimneys and a stone commissary, guardhouse and powder magazine still remain. Local legend says that troops set fire to the fort so they’d never

have to return to such a “barren waste,” as one soldier described the spot. Never a thriving post, duty at lonely Fort Phantom Hill was hard and diseases often plagued the troops.

The Abilene Convention and Visitors Bureau, housed in the old T&P depot, provides details about the fort’s three-year life in an interpretive folder.

Leaving the fort, the highway crosses gently rolling plains near Albany, then loops into the Western Cross Timbers region, once an area of dense woods but now mostly cleared for grazing.

ALBANY

Pop. 1,921 • Alt. 1,429 • Shackelford County

A sign proclaiming Albany ❸ “The Home of the Hereford,” refers to the popular cattle breed. An important supply point on cattle trails to Dodge City, Albany celebrates its heritage in late June with the renowned outdoor musical pageant, *Fort Griffin Fandangle*, that began in 1938.

Sixteen buildings around Albany’s turreted, 1883 courthouse make up a quaint National Register Historic District. The exceptional Old Jail (1883) Art Center Museum exhibits original works by Picasso and other masters. The Ledbetter Picket House on Railroad Street is a restored dog-run cabin built with vertical poles daubed with mud.



TxDOT

Fort Griffin’s Texas Longhorns.

North of Albany, the Forts Trail leads through rolling pasturelands, occasionally passing small oil pump jacks.

The site of frontier **Fort Griffin** ④, whose ruins and restored buildings spread on both sides of the highway, is a state historical park. Visit the headquarters on the west side of the highway to see a model of the fort. Historical markers and exhibits give more details.

Fort Griffin is home to the official state herd of Texas Longhorns. A video on the tough, rangy creatures that sparked the Texas cattle boom can be viewed at park headquarters. The herd can usually be seen roaming the park grounds.

Col. Samuel D. Sturgis and four companies of the Sixth Cavalry established the post on the Clear Fork of the Brazos River in 1867. At its peak, the fort housed several regiments of cavalry and infantry, a band, officers' quarters, stables and hospital.

The rowdy town of Griffin once occupied the flat north of the fort's hilltop. Thriving stores and boisterous saloons lined board sidewalks. Buffalo hunters shipped more than 200,000 hides from here, and trail-weary cowboys quenched their thirst at the Bee Hive Saloon, where disputes were settled in the swift and violent tradition of the frontier.

Between Fort Griffin and Throckmorton, the Forts Trail spans low, rolling pasturelands and thickets of mesquite and oak.

Albany's elegant Shackelford County Courthouse.



R. W. PARVIN



R. W. PARVIN

The ruins, scenery and Texas Longhorn cattle herds draw visitors to Fort Griffin.

South of Throckmorton, a region of exposed outcrops and roadcuts showcases a 250-million-year-old Permian formation, rich in fossils. In ancient times, plants and animals thrived here in what was a verdant corridor through a desert, much like today's Nile Valley.

THROCKMORTON

Pop. 905 • Alt. 1,442 • Throckmorton County

Known as the "Capital of Cow Country," ⑤ this farming, ranching, oil-producing community is midway between Fort Griffin and Fort Belknap. On the grounds of Throckmorton's 1890 courthouse is a marker about Camp Cooper, once located some 17 miles south. Founded in 1856 by Col. Albert Sidney Johnston, its most distinguished commander was Lt. Col. Robert E. Lee.

About 19 miles east of Throckmorton, two markers ⑥ recall the anguish endured by settlers on an undefended frontier.

Travelers who enjoy historic architecture can make a short side trip to Newcastle ⑦, once a thriving coal-mining town. Although its prosperity faded in 1921, interesting structures remained, including the elegant old First National Bank.

Just beyond the Brazos River crossing, the Trail follows a segment of Texas 251 to Fort Belknap ⑧. Several restored stone structures and historical markers offer a wealth of details.

A county museum in the former post commissary is open daily except Wednesday. The fort's rustic granary now serves as the Women's Building and exhibits formal gowns worn by Mamie Eisenhower and Lady Bird Johnson.

Established June 24, 1851, Fort Belknap was the northern anchor of a second line of antebellum forts that extended from the Red River to the Rio Grande. The first line, some 80 miles to the east, had been overrun by settlers pressing westward.

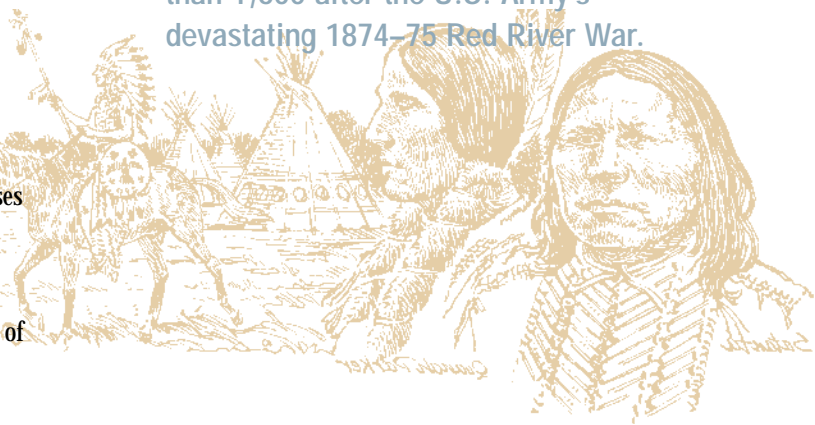
Fort Belknap became a hub of roads and trails, including the famous Southern Overland Mail Route (Butterfield Stage). Before heading west from Fort Belknap, riders traded their horses for less desirable mules to avoid Comanche raiders.

Buildings included barracks for five companies of infantry, officers' quarters, a guardhouse, library, hospital and forage house. Among the commands at Fort Belknap were companies of the Second Cavalry, the most elite unit on the Texas frontier. From its officer corps, 17 served as generals in the Civil War, including Albert Sidney Johnston.

Fort Belknap was abandoned in 1859 and was briefly reactivated in 1867 before the site that became Fort Griffin, 35 miles southwest, was selected as more advantageous.

The route between Fort Belknap and Graham skirts lakes Graham and Eddleman. To the south are the scenic Belknap Mountains.

Once numbering in the thousands, the powerful Comanches of the Texas Plains were reduced to fewer than 1,600 after the U.S. Army's devastating 1874-75 Red River War.



R. W. PARVIN

Buffalo Soldiers, established in 1866 as black regiments, were stationed at frontier forts from Texas to the Dakota territories.



TPWD

A crossroads of history comes together at Fort Belknap's museum.



1874-75
RED RIVER WAR

GRAHAM

Pop. 8,716 • Alt. 1,045 • Young County

This Texas Main Street City 9 offers pleasant amenities for trail travelers. The Graham airport houses the Robert E. Richeson Confederate Air Force Cactus Squadron Memorial Museum. Downtown offers the restored National Theater, dating to the 1920s. Firemen's Memorial Park, at the western edge of Graham, beckons with shady groves, picnic facilities, playgrounds and a fishing pond. At the south edge of town, Shawnee Springs Park, believed to be the site of the Brazos River Indian Reservation, features a nature trail.

Wooded hills and dramatic rock outcroppings accent the landscape between Graham and Graford. Watch for a choice roadside picnic area next to Rock Creek, a tributary of Possum Kingdom Lake. From rocky overlooks, travelers can get close-up views of native flora and bird life.

Between Graham and Graford the Trail skirts Possum Kingdom Lake. Before the reservoir was built in the early 1940s, locals claimed the area was good for nothing but possums. Today, the scenic 1,615-acre Possum Kingdom State Park 10 is a prime recreation spot. The park is reached via Park Road 33 from Caddo. The Forts Trail bends at Graford then steers across vast ranchlands to Jacksboro.



Possum Kingdom Reservoir overlook.

JACKSBORO

Pop. 4,533 • Alt. 1,074 • Jack County

Unlike most frontier fort towns, the city of Jacksboro preceded **Fort Richardson 11** by a dozen years. Originally known as Lost Creek, the 1853 settlement now houses 19th-century limestone buildings along the courthouse square. Just west of the square, the county's oldest house (1882) is preserved as the Jack County Museum.

Although it only served a dozen years, Fort Richardson played a key role in the post-Civil War Texas Indian campaigns.



Artillerymen reenact a blast from the past.

The post was officially established in 1868 and served as regimental headquarters for the Sixth U.S. Cavalry from 1871 to 1873. Now the compound is a state historic site. Its buildings include the native fieldstone hospital, morgue, guardhouse, commissary, officers' quarters, barracks and the bakery, where bakers produced an average of 600 loaves of bread daily.

Commanding Fort Richardson's Fourth Cavalry was Col. Ranald S. Mackenzie, a Civil War commander (brevetted to a two-star general at age 24) and bold leader during the Indian campaigns of Texas and the American West.

Gen. William T. Sherman visited Mackenzie in May 1871. A few hours after the general arrived at Fort Richardson, a wounded survivor stumbled into the fort and described the killing of a wagonmaster and six teamsters by Indians along the same road Sherman had just traveled. The incident radically changed Sherman's opinion of how dangerous the Texas frontier was. The attackers, led by the Kiowas Satank, Satanta and Big Tree, returned to their reservation near Fort Sill, Oklahoma, where Sherman later personally arrested them.



Fort Richardson

Satank was killed trying to escape, but Satanta and Big Tree were returned to Fort Richardson for trial in the Jacksboro District Court. The chiefs were convicted of murder and sentenced to hang, but a national



R. W. PARVIN

Interest in history often spans the generations at Fort Richardson.

outry changed the ruling to life terms. Later paroled, both violated the terms of their release. Satanta was recaptured and sent to prison at Huntsville, where he killed himself. The elusive Big Tree remained free; in later years, he became a deacon of an Oklahoma Baptist church. The Jacksboro trials set the stage for the end of the Texas Indian Wars.

During the Red River War of 1874–1875, Fort Richardson was the most heavily garrisoned military installation in the United States. From here, Mackenzie led his regiment on four major offensive campaigns to uproot the Comanches and Kiowas from the Texas Staked Plains.

South of Jacksboro, view a section of the huge Boonesville Conglomerate Oil Field 12. Heavy pump jacks nod across prime ranching country. Geologically, the trail crosses a fan delta — gravels, sands and conglomerates deposited millions of years ago by an ancient river.

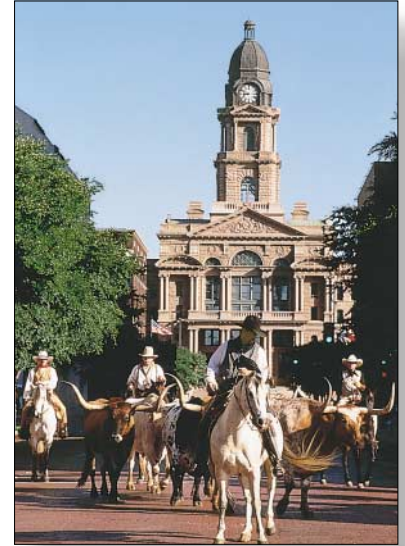
FORT WORTH

Pop. 534,694 • Alt. 670 • Tarrant County

The city of Fort Worth 13 is a good place to begin a trip to the Texas Forts Trail Region. Fort Worth was established in 1849 on a strategic bluff where two branches of the Trinity River converge. The fort, built to protect settlers from Plains Indians, was a military post from 1849 to 1853. In 1851, the U.S. Army began building forts further west and abandoned Fort Worth in 1853. As soon as the soldiers left, local settlers moved into the fort's wooden buildings and thus began the development of Fort Worth as a town.

Today, the 1895 Tarrant County Courthouse stands at the site of the old fort, and is one of many historic and cultural attractions in the city. Pioneer Rest Cemetery, near the original

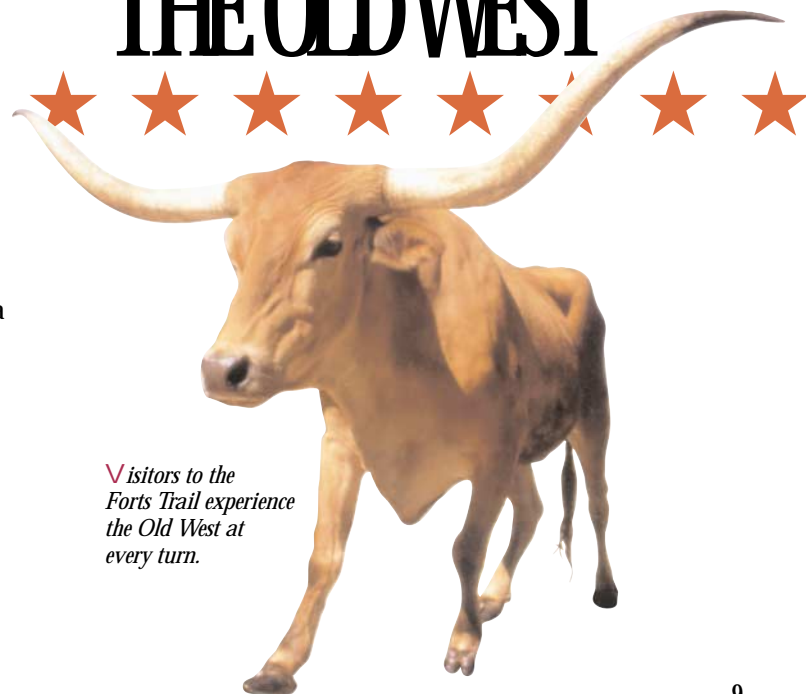
fort location, marks the final resting place of 11 soldiers who died at Fort Worth when it was a military post. Sundance Square is a beautifully restored area with museums, shops and restaurants. Two miles west of the old fort site is the famous cultural district with several nationally recognized museums, such as the Texas Cowgirl Hall of Fame, the Will Rogers Memorial Center and the outstanding Fort Worth Zoo. Two miles north of downtown is the Stockyards National Historic District, with daily cattle drives, Billy Bob's "Honky Tonk," the White Elephant Saloon, the Coliseum and other western attractions and shops.



TxDOT

Tarrant County Courthouse in Fort Worth.

THE OLD WEST



Visitors to the Forts Trail experience the Old West at every turn.

MINERAL WELLS

Pop. 16,946 • Alt. 925 • Palo Pinto County

When a well drilled in the 1880s tapped mineral waters, the rush was on to create the town famed for the medicinal qualities of its water supply. Health spas became big business, as evidenced by the 1926 Baker Hotel. According to local legend, a deranged woman became sane after drinking the water — thus the name, Crazy Water. Minerals extracted from the water were marketed as Crazy Water Crystals. A plaque at 109 S. Oak Avenue marks the original Crazy Well. Sample the water at the Famous Mineral Water Company, 209 NW 6th Street. Lake Mineral Wells State Park 14 is three miles east of the city, and Lake Palo Pinto is 25 miles to the southwest.

Between Mineral Wells and Palo Pinto, the trail winds through beautiful vistas of steep, wooded hills. The Brazos River Valley offers sweeping panoramic views.

In Palo Pinto (“painted stick” or “mottled wood” in Spanish), plan to see the courthouse and massive 1880 jail (now a museum). It is open only on weekend afternoons in summer or by appointment.

To the northwest, the four peaks of the Palo Pinto Mountains rise to 1,420 feet. The trail then heads toward Strawn, where pyramid-like bare hills to the east are actually coal mines that operated from about 1860 to the 1930s.

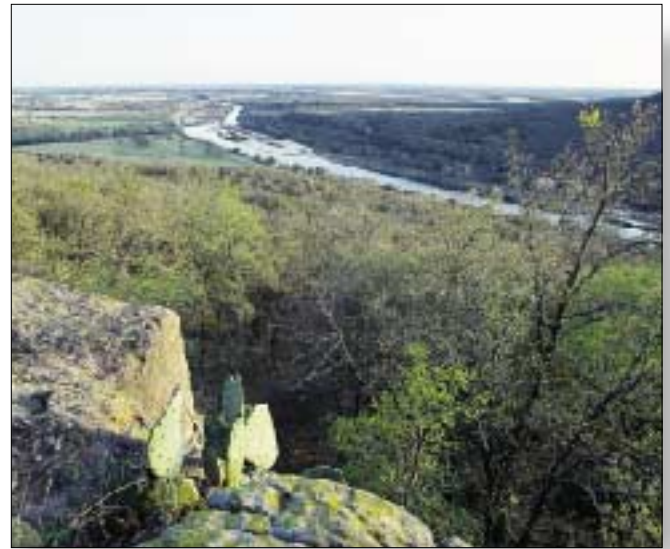
The trail turns west on I-20, but the historic coal-mining and brick-making ghost town of Thurber is worth a visit just six miles east. From here the trail climbs easily over the ridge of the Palo Pinto Mountains to Ranger.



Century-old Thurber bricks.



Spa hotels from the 1920s dominate Mineral Wells' skyline.



Sweeping scenic views of the Brazos River Valley near Palo Pinto.

TEXAS BOOMTOWN

RANGER

Pop. 2,584 • Alt. 1,429 • Eastland County

To learn about Ranger's 15 larger-than-life oil boom days, which lasted from 1917 to 1921, visit the Roaring Ranger Museum in the 1923 railroad depot. Historic photos, artifacts and an old drilling rig tell the story of this classic example of a boomtown (Open Mon.–Fri., 8 a.m.–5 p.m.; ask for the key at the auto parts store across the street).

Between Ranger and Desdemona, the trail arrives at Lake Leon, which offers picnic areas, public boat ramps and marinas. Just southeast of the trail crossing at FM 571, limestone-based soils form a gently rolling farmland.

During its oil-boom days, Desdemona was nicknamed Hogtown. Old-timers still talk of “drilling in Hogtown” where, in 1919, as many as 400 derricks were seen within a four-mile radius. South of Desdemona a historical marker 16 by the roadside tells of Fort Blair, a private family fort established amid frontier dangers of the 1850s.

Travelers will note expansive peanut fields, since Comanche County leads the state's peanut production.



○ *il pump jacks nod around Ranger.*

DE LEON

Pop. 2,247 • Alt. 1,268 •

Comanche County

De Leon 17 is a shipping point for agricultural products. The Texas Central Railroad, which crosses the trail in town, connects Dublin, De Leon and Gorman. Locally it's

called "the Peanut Line" because of the immense quantities of the crop carried each harvest season. Another agricultural venture, just west of the trail on Texas 6, is one of the nation's largest orchards — mostly pecans but also peaches, apples and persimmons. The orchard's 65,000 trees would make a row 236 miles long. Fruit and nuts are available in season at roadside stands.

The trail between De Leon and Comanche passes near popular Proctor Reservoir, covering 4,600 acres and providing four public-use areas for fishing and water sports.

Recognized in Norman Crampton's book, "The 100 Best Small Towns in America," Stephenville 18 offers an authentic experience to travelers. The town's appreciation of its heritage is apparent in its restored historic homes and structures. Most of the stone buildings on the town square were built in the 1890s and still stand today as proud reminders of the past. Stephenville celebrates its western heritage every year during the Cowboy Capital Walk of Fame Celebration that features a parade, induction ceremony and PRCA Rodeo.

Dr. Pepper enthusiasts have long traveled to the small community of Dublin 19, just south of Stephenville. Opened in 1891, the Dr. Pepper Bottling Company gives visitors the chance to experience the bottling process in the plant and view Dr. Pepper memorabilia in the museum. After sampling the world-famous soft drink, head over to the Rodeo Heritage Museum to learn more about Dublin's exciting rodeo past. The museum honors the men and women that participated in the Pre-World Championship Rodeo, held in Dublin from 1940-59.

COMANCHE

Pop. 4,482 • Alt. 1,358 • Comanche County

Establishing their town in 1858, the pioneers of Comanche 20 battled with Native and Americans for 15 years. Today this Texas Main Street City thrives as a trade center for dairy products and peanuts. On the square, visit Old Cora, one of the oldest existing county courthouses in Texas, dating from 1856. Other attractions include the 15-room Comanche County Historical Museum more than 50 historical markers in the county.

TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

BROWNWOOD

Pop. 18,813 • Alt. 1,342 • Brown County

Watch for a pleasant picnic area beside Pecan Bayou at the Brownwood/Early city limits. Brownwood 21 attracts visitors to such historic landmarks as St. John's church, a Gothic structure dating from 1892; historic landmarks on the courthouse grounds; and the 1902 Romanesque Revival jail with its castle-like tower. The historic jail houses the Brown County Museum of History, which is open Saturdays. The Douglas MacArthur Academy of Freedom, a museum devoted to the history and governments of Western civilization, is at FM 2524/Austin Avenue.

Brownwood's eight city parks cover almost 300 acres. They are highlighted by beautiful Festival Park, near the southern edge of the city, and Riverside Park, at the northeast edge on Pecan Bayou.

From Brownwood, a 20-mile side trip awaits to Lake Brownwood State Park 22. The park overlooks the 7,300-acre lake and offers cabins, campsites, rest rooms with showers, RV hookups and excellent fishing. Admission is charged. Take Texas 279 north from US 67 to Park Road 15.

Southeast of Brownwood lies the quaint community of Goldthwaite 23. Visitors to the Mills County Museum can tour replicas of pioneer rooms and view general exhibits and historic photographs. On the courthouse square, the Mills County Old Jail Museum features exhibits on the history of area law enforcement and houses the Chamber of Commerce office. Another popular site, located 20 miles west of town off F.M. 574, is the Regency Suspension Bridge. Erected in 1939, it survives today as one of Texas' last swinging bridges.

At the Richland Springs highway intersection, a historical marker describes pioneer John Duncan's private 1850s fort. Six miles east of Brady, another marker 24 chronicles an 1866 battle between frontiersmen and Indians.



Nostalgia fills Comanche's Museum.

R. W. PARVIN

BRADY

Pop. 5,523 • Alt. 1,670 •

McCulloch County

The city 25, near the geographical center of Texas, was built on a military road between forts Mason and Griffin and on the old Dodge City Cattle Trail from South Texas. Historical markers are on the courthouse grounds, and a block west is the Heart of Texas Museum (open Sat. and Mon., 1–5 p.m., Sun. 1–4 p.m.) in a red brick Romanesque Revival jail (c. 1910).

The site of Texas Ranger Camp San Saba is located 11 miles south, off of US Highway 87/377. Camp San Saba was established in 1862 as a ranger station for the Frontier Regiment, created by the Texas Legislature to replace federal troops pulled out to fight in the Civil War.

Richards Park, in town beside Brady Creek, offers picnic tables, rest rooms, pavilions and a playground. Year-round fishing is available on nearby Brady Reservoir and Brady Creek.

Between Brady and Mason the trail crosses the San Saba River. Camp San Saba (mentioned above) was about three miles upriver from this crossing.

South of Fredonia 26, occasional granite domes mark the Llano Uplift mineral region. The pink granite outcrops are the tops of buried mountains, the result of ancient molten rock thrust toward the surface from depths of 35 to 40 miles. They are a feature of the Llano Basin, one of Texas' most unique geological regions, covering about 1.5 million acres in Mason, Edwards and Gillespie counties.

MASON

Pop. 2,134 • Alt. 1,550 • Mason County

The town of Mason 27, which sprang up around **Fort Mason** 28, was partly constructed with sandstone and timber salvaged from the fort when it was finally deactivated in 1869. The ruins of the cavalry stable are all that remain of the original post, but a reconstruction of officers' quarters at the site gives an idea of the fort buildings, described in an 1853 inspection report as "substantial and comfortable" and "neat and well ventilated."

Be sure to visit the Mason County Museum and the elegant "Maverick Victorian" Seaquist House, gem of Mason's extensive historic district that includes the fort and downtown. For rock hounds, visit the Seaquist Ranch and other Texas topaz hunting



R. W. PARVIN

Brady's 1910 jail/museum.

sites, where, for modest fees, travelers may pause for rock hunting and camping.

The museum has details about the Mason County War, which was an ethnic confrontation between German and Anglo-American settlers here. The land-hungry Europeans bought property and fenced it with rock walls. The Anglos favored the open range for their cattle. After the lynching of five men charged with rustling, retaliation erupted, and a dozen more persons were murdered in less than a year.

Col. Albert Sidney Johnston and 19 other future Confederate generals were stationed at Fort Mason, including the flamboyant Lt. John Bell Hood. During the Civil War, he was promoted more rapidly than any soldier on either side, North or South. The future Confederate general, Lt. Col. Robert E. Lee, also served at Fort Mason.

A historical marker 20 miles west of Mason tells about events at the Pegleg Crossing of the San Saba River. A marker on US Highway 83, at a picnic area just south of Menard, notes that this pass between the hills was a landmark for old Spanish trails.



TxDOT

Digging for Texas topaz in Mason.

MENARD

Pop. 1,653 • Alt. 1,960 • Menard County

Menard 29 was established in 1858 near the ruins of the Spanish fort, Real Presidio de San Saba. The Menard County Museum, located in the old depot on US Highway 83 North, is open by appointment and gives details about the area's 250 years of history.

A historical marker downtown tells about an *acequia*, an irrigation canal dug during Spanish times that still works; another marker, on the courthouse grounds, gives details about Fort McKavett. A city park alongside the beautiful San Saba River offers picnic tables shaded by towering pecan trees.

The entrance to the ruins of **Presidio San Luis de Las Amarillas** 30 (partially reconstructed in the 1930s, though not entirely accurately) is at the western edge of Menard. A marker on the highway gives brief details of the site. The ruins are

located at a county park with picnic facilities, golf course and campgrounds. Four miles east of the *presidio*, the ruins of Franciscan Mission Santa Cruz de San Saba were rediscovered by archeologists in 1993. In 1758, two thousand Comanches and their allies destroyed the mission — a conflict that marked the beginning of Comanche warfare against European pioneers in Texas and the retreat of the Spanish frontier.



R. W. PARVIN

Restored Fort McKavett ruins.

Seventeen miles west of Menard, FM 864 leads south to **Fort McKavett 31**. The drive is through rolling hills, woodlands and farms often irrigated from the San Saba River.

The extensive ruins of Fort McKavett, a state historic site, are being preserved and restored. On display at the park headquarters are exhibits and a model of the fort as it was in 1876.

At its peak, Fort McKavett had some 40 buildings. Today, 16 have been restored, including the schoolhouse, officers' quarters, post headquarters, bakery, barracks, hospital and morgue. This is a prime historic site to explore, with military reenactments staged periodically during the year.

Many of the soldiers on the Texas frontier were African Americans. They were referred to as "Buffalo Soldiers" probably because of their courage and stamina in battle. One of them, Sgt. Emanuel Stance of Company F, 9th Cavalry, became the first enlisted man in Texas to earn a Medal of Honor for his heroism in an 1870 skirmish at nearby Kickapoo Springs.

ELDORADO

Pop. 1,951 • Alt. 2,410 • Schleicher County

Eldorado 32, the seat of Schleicher County, was laid out in 1895 amid the 2,500-foot highlands of the Edwards Plateau. Dissected by the Devils, South Concho and San Saba rivers, the plateau's rugged edges form prime habitat for abundant white-tailed deer.

Eighty percent of the county's agricultural product income is from sheep, wool, goats and mohair. Colorful, long-lasting woolen blankets, upholstery materials and sportswear are locally produced and available for shoppers. At the X Bar Ranch, observe how wool is shorn and spun. From there, take a tour of the Eldorado Woolen Mill where wool is cleaned, spun and woven into beautiful products.

The Tom Ratliff Civic Theater in Eldorado puts on several productions annually.

Northward toward San Angelo, quiet Christoval 33 offers picnicking, sports fields, trails, swimming and good fishing at Pugh Park along the South Concho River.

From Christoval, the trail moves into a formation of Permian Age sandstone and gypsum formations that extend almost to Abilene. The surface sandstone shows evidence of having trapped oil. This is what an oil field of today would look like if it were lifted to the surface of the earth.

Near San Angelo, a matched pair of prominent hills to the west give their name to Twin Buttes Reservoir. Much of the farmland here is irrigated from this lake, and the Trail crosses the main irrigation canal at Loop 306. Nearby is Lake Nasworthy, and northwest of the city is San Angelo State Park at O.C. Fisher Lake. All three offer extensive water sports.



R. W. PARVIN

Colorful Eldorado-made woolens.

BUFFALO SOLDIERS

SAN ANGELO

Pop. 88,439 • Alt. 1,847 • Tom Green County

The buildings of **Fort Concho** 34, described by one military historian as “the best preserved Western fort in the United States,” are centered along South Oakes Street and Avenues C and D. At its prime in 1879, Fort Concho had 40 limestone buildings and a garrison of eight companies.

Fort Concho is a National Historic Landmark, the highest recognition for historic structures in the U.S. Its 23 original and restored structures include barracks, officers’ quarters, post headquarters, chapel/school and hospital.



Historic district in San Angelo.

R. W. PARVIN



Officers’ Row at Fort Concho.

Officers’ Quarters No. 4 is home to the E.H. Danner Museum of Telephony, and the north ward of the post hospital houses the Robert Wood Johnson Museum of Frontier Medicine. Four living history units, including the Fort Concho Buffalo Soldiers, stage programs throughout the year.

Fort Concho protected settlers until 1889 when it closed and the remaining soldiers marched to San Antonio. Today, El Paseo de Santa Angela, a public space, follows a path used by soldiers to cross the Concho River where they sought entertainment in the village of Santa Angela. Downtown, points of interest range

from Miss Hattie’s Museum, a restored brothel and saloon, to the San Angelo Children’s Museum, housed in the 1929 Cactus Hotel that forms part of a National Register Historic District. The San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts is located in an architectural masterpiece across from Fort Concho.

Open during the school year, the Angelo State University Planetarium is the nation’s fourth largest university planetarium.

In the town of Robert Lee 35, a county park offers shaded picnic tables, with a swimming pool and golf course nearby. A historical marker in the cemetery east of town notes the burial spot of 34 Confederate veterans.

Paint Rock 36, 30 miles east of San Angelo, offers excursions to one of the largest Indian pictograph sites in the United States. Between Robert Lee and Bronte, the Kickapoo Mountains lie to the north.

In Bronte 37, a marker where the trail turns recalls historical details about the town. Other markers explain the 1911 Santa Fe Depot and a quaint 1940s movie theater. A city park offers a swimming pool, playing fields and nine-hole golf course.



Indian pow-wow dancer.

R. W. PARVIN

FORT CONCHO



History comes alive for school kids at Fort Concho.

T. ADOT



R. W. PARVIN

Standing walls of the 1850s barracks at Fort Chadbourne.

Just north of the “Y” intersection of Texas 70 and US 277 is Oak Creek Reservoir. Texas 70 (three miles north) leads to lakeside camps, fishing docks and boat ramps. At the “Y,” a marker 38 details the history of the Southern Overland Mail (Butterfield Stage), whose route crossed here.

Within two miles, a granite historical marker 39 honors **Fort Chadbourne**. The well-maintained historic cemetery is nearby. Time and weather have taken their toll on the cemetery, and many inscriptions are gone. Some of the legible tombstones date to the 1870s, often yielding poignant epitaphs. The ruins of nearby Fort Chadbourne are open during daylight hours. Fort Chadbourne’s history was relatively brief, although it served as an important contact and parley point with Indians. Eighth Infantry soldiers established the fort in 1852. Stone buildings eventually replaced the original wooden structures. The fort was built beside Oak Creek, which often proved stingy with its water supply. Troops left in 1859, and with the outbreak of the Civil War, the remaining property was surrendered to Confederate forces. The fort was reoccupied from 1865 to 1867, but the water shortage again forced the troops to abandon the post and build Fort Concho in San Angelo.

On FM 53, rich farmlands appear after miles of brushy pasture, and the trail slices through two oil fields, providing close views of pump jacks.

In the north part of Winters 40, a small, pleasant park has picnicking and camping sites. The huge mesa top of Moro Mountain looms 2,350 feet high beyond Winters. Farther north, the hills of the Callahan Divide break the horizon, forming a barrier between the watersheds of the Colorado River and the Clear Fork of the Brazos River. Some of the notches in the divide have been identified as streambeds of prehistoric rivers.

West of Tuscola, at a sharp turn off FM 613, a sign points to Abilene State Park 41. A better access road is available at Buffalo Gap, via FM 89. The park covers 500 acres along Elm Creek, which helps to form Lake Abilene, and offers numerous recreational facilities.

The Medal of Honor was awarded to 59 military officers and troopers during the Texas Indian Wars.



BUFFALO GAP

Pop. 463 • Alt. 1,926 • Taylor County

The community 42 lies at a natural gap in the Callahan Divide where well-worn buffalo trails were visible when settlers first arrived. During the great cattle trails era, the Dodge City or Western Trail passed through here, resulting in the community of Buffalo Gap. Oliver Loving and Charles Goodnight drove their herds through this pass, as did other famous early Texas cattle barons.

Today's travelers will find several restaurants and art-souvenir-specialty shops. Of special interest is Buffalo Gap Historic Village, a complex of 20 historic structures, including the original 1880 Taylor County Courthouse and jail. Named for the three Taylor brothers who died at the Alamo, the county seat was moved from Buffalo Gap to Abilene shortly after Abilene's founding in 1881.

SWEETWATER

Pop. 11,415 • Alt. 2,164 •

Nolan County

The Commercial Downtown Historic District contains more than 50 structures listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Sweetwater 43 is home to Avenger Field where the Women Air Force Service Pilots (WASP) trained from 1943–44. Of the 25,000 applicants, 1,830 were accepted and 1,074 ladies earned their wings. They simulated bombing missions, gave instrument instructions and flight-tested aircraft. A WASP Walk of Honor and flight memorabilia are located at the Pioneer City/County Museum. ★



Texas barbecue is a main attraction for visitors.



As settlers streamed west with hopes of new opportunities, frontier soldiers built forts linking wild country and settled lands. Standing between eager colonists and defensive Native Americans was a hard and dangerous business with constant treks farther west as the frontier became civilized. Today's visitors to the Texas Forts Trail Region can experience what it was like for these brave men and women by exploring the battle sites, pioneer settlements and other places where history was made and the West was won.



Fort Mason, Mason

The Texas Historical Commission offers free travel brochures on the people and places that shaped Texas history. To request copies, visit www.thc.state.tx.us/travel.



**TEXAS
HISTORICAL
COMMISSION**

The State Agency for Historic Preservation

www.thc.state.tx.us/travel

COMMUNITIES IN THE TEXAS FORTS TRAIL REGION

Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau
325/762-2556
www.abilene.com/visitors

Albany Chamber of Commerce
325/762-2525
www.albanytexas.com

Anson Chamber of Commerce
915/823-3259

Aspermont Chamber of Commerce
940/989-3197

Baird Chamber of Commerce
325/854-2003
www.bairdtexas.com

Ballinger Chamber of Commerce
325/365-2333
www.ballingertx.org

**Brady-McCulloch
Chamber of Commerce**
325/597-3491
www.bradytx.com

Breckenridge Chamber of Commerce
254/559-2301
www.breckenridgetexas.com

Bronte City Hall
915/473-3501

**Brownwood Area
Chamber of Commerce**
325/646-9535
www.brownwoodchamber.org

Cisco Chamber of Commerce
254/442-2537
www.ciscotx.com

Clyde Chamber of Commerce
325/893-4221
www.clydetx.org

**Coleman Chamber of Commerce,
Ag & Tourist Bureau**
325/625-2163
www.colemantexas.org

Colorado City Chamber of Commerce
325/728-3403
www.coloradocitychamberofcommerce.com

Comanche Chamber of Commerce
325/356-3233
www.comanchetx.org

Cross Plains Chamber of Commerce
254/725-7251
www.crossplains.com

DeLeon Chamber of Commerce
254/893-2083
www.deleontexas.com

Dublin Chamber of Commerce
254/445-3422
www.dublintexas.com

Early Chamber of Commerce
325/649-9317
www.earlytx.com

Eastland Chamber of Commerce
254/629-2332
www.eastland.net/eastland/

Eden Chamber of Commerce
915/869-3336
www.edentexas.com

Eldorado Chamber of Commerce
325/853-3109
www.eldoradotx.com

**Fort Worth Convention
& Visitors Bureau**
800/433-5747
www.fortworth.com

Gorman Chamber of Commerce
254/639-2317

Graham Chamber of Commerce
940/549-3355
www.visitgraham.com

Hamlin Chamber of Commerce
325/576-3501

Haskell Chamber of Commerce
940/864-2477
www.westex.net/dco

Jacksboro Chamber of Commerce
940/567-2602
www.jacksboro-tx.com

Knox City Chamber of Commerce
940/658-3442

Mason County Chamber of Commerce
915/347-5758
www.masontxcoc.com

Menard Chamber of Commerce
915/396-2365
www.menardchamberofcommerce.org

Merkel Chamber of Commerce
915/928-5722
www.merkeltexas.com

Mineral Wells Chamber of Commerce
940/325-2557
www.mineralwellstx.com

Munday Chamber of Commerce
940/422-4540

**Possum Kingdom
Chamber of Commerce**
940/779-2424
www.possumkingdomlake.com



The riverwalk in San Angelo is a scenic retreat.

Ranger Chamber of Commerce
254/647-3091

Rising Star Chamber of Commerce
254/643-4261
www.risingstartexas.com

Robert Lee City Hall
915/453-2831

Roby City Hall
325/776-2271

Roscoe City Hall
325/766-3871

Rotan City Hall
915/735-2251

Rule City Hall
940/996-2214

**San Angelo Convention
& Visitors Bureau**
325/655-4136
www.sanangelo.org

Santa Anna City Hall
325/348-3403

Snyder Chamber of Commerce
325/573-3558
www.snydertex.com/chamber/

Sonora Chamber of Commerce
325/387-2880
www.sonoratlx-chamber.com

Stamford Chamber of Commerce
325/773-2411
www.sunsetpass.com/scoc

Stephenville Chamber of Commerce
254/965-5313
www.stephenvilletexas.org

Sweetwater Chamber of Commerce
325/235-5488
www.sweetwatertexas.org

**Throckmorton County
Chamber of Commerce**
940/849-3076

Tye City Hall
915/692-8588

Winters Chamber of Commerce
325/754-5210
www.winters-tx.org



Visitors to Possum Kingdom Dam enjoy camping, canoeing and scuba diving.



Ranch vacation opportunities abound.



Red River War weaponry at Fort Concho Museum.



www.thc.state.tx.us/travel

FORTS IN THE TEXAS FORTS TRAIL REGION

■ Fort Belknap

Newcastle, Texas
940/846-3222
www.visitgraham.com

■ Fort Chadbourne

Bronte, Texas
325/743-2555
www.fortchadbourne.org

■ Fort Concho National Historic Landmark

San Angelo, Texas
325/481-2646
www.fortconcho.com

■ Fort Griffin State Park and Historic Site

Albany, Texas
915/762-3592
www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/fortgrif

■ Fort Mason

Mason, Texas
325/347-5758
www.masontxcoc.com

■ Fort Phantom Hill

Abilene, Texas
325/677-1309
www.fortphantom.org

■ Fort McKavett State Historic Site

Fort McKavett, Texas
325/396-2358
www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/fortmcka

■ Fort Richardson State Park and Historic Site

Jacksboro, Texas
940/567-3506
www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/fortrich

OTHER FORTS IN TEXAS 1830-1900

■ Fort Bliss Museum

Fort Bliss, Texas
915/568-5412
www.bliss.army.mil/museum/fort_bliss_museum.htm

■ Fort Davis National Historic Site

Fort Davis, Texas
432/426-3224
www.nps.gov/foda

■ Fort Lancaster State Historic Site

Sheffield, Texas
432/836-4391
www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/fortlanc

■ Fort Leaton State Historic Site

Presidio, Texas
915/229-3613
www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/fortleat

■ Fort Martin Scott

Fredericksburg, Texas
830/997-9895
www.fortmartinscott.com

■ Fort Sam Houston

San Antonio, Texas
210/221-1886
www.cs.amedd.army.mil/rlbc

■ Historic Fort Stockton

Fort Stockton, Texas
915/336-2400
www.ci.fort-stockton.tx.us

■ Old Fort Parker

Groesbeck, Texas
254/729-5253
www.oldfortparker.org

Note: Forts that are not open to the public are not included.



TEXAS HERITAGE TRAIL REGIONS



Military reenactments are held year round at Fort Richardson.



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