

HM473.5

R433t

1982

Ride the Texas

TROPICAL TRAIL

Government Publications

APR 30 1983

Miss Public Library



State Department of Highways
and Public Transportation
118210

Fr. Nicholas Balli, the Spanish padre for whom the island is named.

Miles and miles of sandy beaches edge the Gulf of Mexico. Sand dollar, sun dial, lion's paw and angel-wing shells make beach-combing irresistible. Hotels, motels and condominiums overlook the Gulf side, while marina-hotels are situated on Laguna Madre, complete with individual docks for sailboats or cabin cruisers. (Did you bring your cabin cruiser?)

Much of a former highway causeway (replaced by the modern span you drove over) has been converted to a fishing pier by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Among several such conversions in the state, it consistently produces the best catches. The Queen Isabella State Fishing Pier extends from Padre's southern tip. Concessions offer bait and tackle; modest fee for fishing.

Refer to South Padre Island in *Texas! Live the Legend*, and visit the city tourist bureau, a half-mile north of the causeway entrance, next to the Hilton Hotel.

The Trail route between Port Isabel and Brownsville crosses some low-lying lands—part salt marsh, part freshwater ponds. Dunes visible here are mostly clay, instead of sand structures. Because clay particles are much finer, these dunes, once formed, are more stable than their sand counterparts. Almost invariably, the clay dunes are formed on the leeward (northwest) side of the area's shallow marshes and ponds.

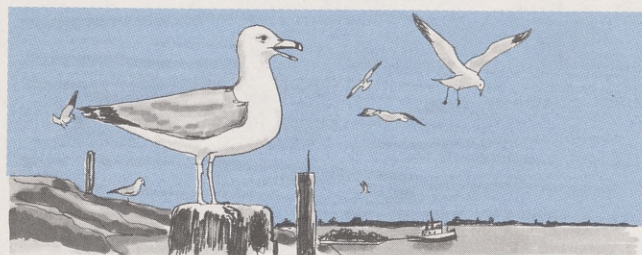
The waterway that parallels much of this highway on the south is the Brownsville Ship Channel 7 that marks the terminus of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway. Built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the waterway girdles the Gulf for 1,300 miles from Brownsville to Florida, providing sheltered passage for barge and pleasure-boat traffic. Although the waterway is seen by the public at only a few spots, its annual transportation volume is enormous, carrying more tonnage than either the Panama Canal or the St. Lawrence Seaway.

At the Port of Brownsville, Trail travelers will see ocean-going freighters, husky tow boats and barges, and a fleet of shrimp trawlers.

BROWNSVILLE
Pop. 84,997

Cameron County
Alt. 57

The Trail has now reached Texas' southernmost city, whose settlement dates from Spanish colonial days, although the town's modern nucleus took shape around Fort Brown, established in 1846. When Texas elected to join the United States (1845) after nearly a decade of independence, the Rio Grande thereby became the new U.S. boundary with Mexico. Unfortunately, Mexico had not fully accepted the loss of Texas 10 years earlier. The appearance of U.S. troops on the north bank of the Rio



TEXAS TROPICAL TRAIL

Charted through the state's southernmost wedge, the Texas Tropical Trail meanders in a leisurely land whose accents are keyed to rustling palm fronds, the scent of orange blossoms, gentle surf splashing on sunny beaches, bougainvilleas glowing in magenta splendor, and the liquid notes of Spanish guitars.

Trail highways bisect empire-sized ranches, whose brushy landscapes gave birth to the American cowboy. They lead to idyllic resorts by the shimmering Gulf of Mexico, through fertile farmlands whose growing season exceeds 11 months, past evergreen citrus groves heavy with grapefruit, oranges and lemons, to exotic markets heaped with avocados, mangoes and papayas. The route samples a blending of cultures where the charm of old Mexico is just a bridge away.

The whole region was once the bed of a shallow, prehistoric sea. As the land gradually rose and dried, prevailing onshore winds carried the sea-bed's sand, silt and organic material to build loamy soils that are the area's fundamental geological characteristic. Far beneath the surface are remains of lush plant and animal life that coalesced into rich pools of oil and natural gas.

Throughout the route, Trail travelers will see evidence of those hidden resources—nodding pump jacks drawing oil from thousands of feet below the surface, silvery tanks to store the raw crude, the complex towers, pipes and vats of refineries where crude oil is converted to gasoline, jet fuel and lubricants, and perhaps an occasional tall, busy "jackknife" drilling rig probing the depths for more energy so vital to modern America.

Over all, the region's benign climate sets the pace of life and liveliness today—a bounty of agriculture, mid-winter golf in shirt-sleeve weather, patio parties beneath tropical sunsets.

Due to space limitations, this folder's descriptions are mainly devoted to interpretations of the driving routes. Before setting out, Trail drivers should obtain a free copy of the state's primary travel guide, the 176-page *Texas! Live the Legend*, which provides supplementary details about points of interest in many of the cities and towns along the route. An Official Highway Travel Map also will be useful. Both may be obtained by mail from the departmental address at the end of this folder, or at any Texas Tourist Bureau.

For even more information about local accommodations, commercial campgrounds, tourist events and activities, visit chamber of commerce and tourist offices listed in this folder.

The Trail's starting point is the city of Corpus Christi, major metropolitan area on the route. The Trail description is then presented in a clockwise direction. However, the Trail may be started at any point and driven in either direction by carefully consulting the accompanying map and descriptive copy. See the map legend for information about special Trail signs and arrows on the highways.

CORPUS CHRISTI
Pop. 231,999

Nueces County
Alt. 35

Corpus Christi bills itself "The Sparkling City by the Sea." Its hosts of tourist visitors agree, finding abundant seaside leisure opportunities and the sparkle of Texas' largest coastal city. While the city is of relatively recent vintage, its historical roots go back to 1519 when Spanish maritime explorer Alonso Alvarez de Pineda discovered Corpus Christi Bay. Today, the city is a deep-water port, industrial center, agricultural hub, and one of Texas' most popular seaside playgrounds.

On the bayfront at the heart of downtown, hundreds of pleasure craft in the city's marina set the mood of holiday fun. Sightseeing and charter fishing boats are based there. There's fishing from municipal piers and jetties, ship-watching at the entrance to the busy Port of Corpus Christi, and swimming along miles of public beaches. The beach slopes are gradual; even children can enjoy the gentle surf. As with all Texas beaches, they're free—just stop your car, kick off your shoes, and wade in.

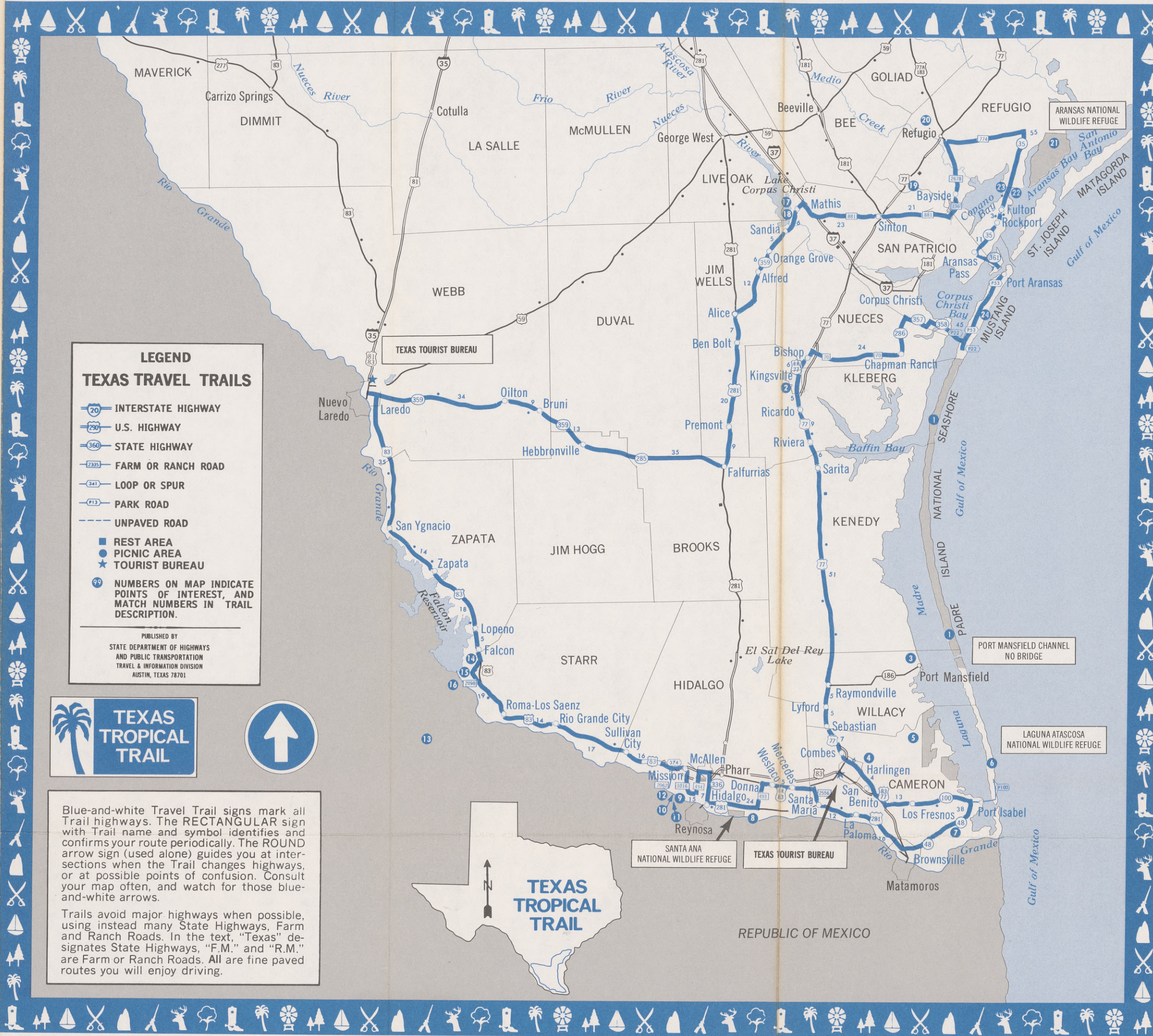
Refer to Corpus Christi's listing in the state travel guide for a summary of the city's abundant attractions. And for first-hand information about lodging, dining, and a calendar full of festival events, visit the Corpus Christi Area Tourist Bureau, 1201 N. Shoreline Blvd.

The city also offers access to Padre Island National Seashore, one of the Trail's premiere attractions. The national seashore provides a developed beach area on the Gulf of Mexico with public pavilion, snack bar and beach rentals, and an extensive primitive beach-camping area. Miles and miles of the seashore are pristine, natural and undisturbed—sandy beaches jeweled with bright shells, dunes laced by beach morning glory, busy fiddler crabs scuttling inches from the frothy surf.

Treasure from Spanish galleons has been found on Padre Island, but such historical resources are protected both by state and federal laws. Otherwise, beachcombers may collect a great variety of sea shells, "sea beans" from the Caribbean, gnarled driftwood in fantastic shapes, and perhaps a rare, beautiful glass float (usually purple) from fishermen's nets in Portugal or the Orient.

On the island, visitors will see ever-present sea gulls (always looking for a food handout) plus white or brown pelicans, snowy egrets, great blue herons, terns, and a variety of migratory bird species depending on the season. Surf fishing can produce redfish, sea trout, black drum, mackerel, and ocean perch.

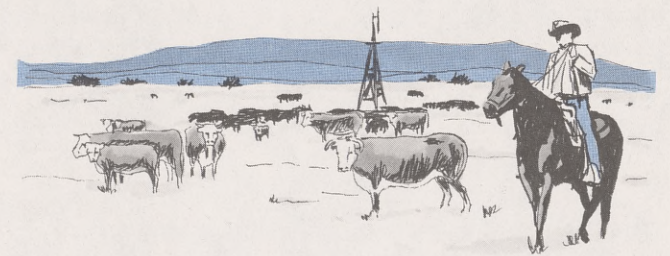
Access to this northern end of Padre Island is via John F. Kennedy Causeway. Those who continue on the Trop-



ical Trail will again approach Padre Island at its other end, 110 miles south.

On the Trail route south of Corpus Christi, Chapman Ranch is interesting from a historical perspective. In early years of this century, it operated much like a complete, self-contained plantation of the Old South, or a mill town of the East. As one of the world's first entirely mechanized ranches, some 200 tractors were in use by 1920. At the huge ranch headquarters, workers could shop for groceries, relax at a soda fountain, buy clothes or hardware, get a haircut, mail letters, fill up with gasoline, or even buy a new car from the ranch auto dealer. Parts of the commercial complex still remain.

Between Chapman Ranch and Bishop the Trail spans both crop and pastures. Frequent cotton gins are reminders that cotton, if no longer absolute king, is still a major cash crop.



KINGSVILLE
Pop. 28,808

Kleberg County
Alt. 66

To many, the city of Kingsville is synonymous with the world-famous King Ranch. But today's diverse residents note that their city is also the home of Texas A&I University and the Kingsville Naval Air Station, a busy pilot-training facility for Navy fliers. On the Texas A&I campus, the John E. Conner Museum features collections devoted to Indian, Spanish, and pioneer Texas eras, plus mammoth bones found in a nearby archeological dig.

The King Ranch headquarters is just west of the city on Texas 141. A 12-mile drive-it-yourself loop gives glimpses of life on the huge spread. Brochures available at the manned gate will help interpret the complexity of the enormous operation that spans more than 800,000 acres in four counties.

Check the state travel guide for a summary of Kingsville visitor attractions, and visit the local chamber of commerce on weekdays, 323 No. 6th St., for details.

The Trail's 73-mile span between Kingsville and Raymondville is through a sparsely populated area devoted almost entirely to lands of the King Ranch and other huge cattle spreads. Automotive needs should be checked in Kingsville or Riviera, and drivers may want to fill a picnic sack. Several roadside picnic areas, with shaded arbors and picnic tables, offer welcome opportunities to pause in this vast land.

The landscapes are typical brushy, thorny rangeland. Traditional cowboy chaps were developed for horseback work in such thickets. American cowboys adopted the garments from earlier Mexican vaqueros. These were also the lands where sturdy Quarter Horses proved their merit as the cowboy's most reliable mount. While still essential to ranch operations, horses are today supplemented by wranglers in helicopters and light aircraft.

In some areas, Trail drivers will see sand dunes, wind-blown from the coast. Where possible, landowners try to establish grass to stabilize the dunes, preventing further encroachment.

As the route approaches Raymondville, a transformation begins—from native brushland to intensive, subtropical agriculture.

RAYMONDVILLE
Pop. 9,493

Willacy County
Alt. 40

"Gateway to the Lower Rio Grande Valley" is Raymondville's sobriquet—an appropriate one. Suddenly the scenery is eminently tropical. Citrus groves and tall palms line the highway; fruit stands exhibit opulent

mounds of green, orange and gold. After long highway miles aiming toward the tropics, travelers at Raymondville know they've "arrived."

Known as "the Valley" for short, four Texas counties comprise the region that's about 50 miles deep and some hundred miles wide. Geographically, it's the most individually distinctive area of Texas.

Raymondville hosts family vacationers during spring and summer, hunters in fall, and thousands of "Winter Texans"—refugees from northern climates who annually flock to the Texas tropics. The city's Tourist Center, Harris and 7th Sts., offers year-round information about lodging, food, and recreational opportunities.

For those whose eyes light up at the thought of fishing, there's a side-trip option from Raymondville to Port Mansfield (off the Trail), that's rated by sports writers among the nation's foremost fishing spots. The village is eminently keyed to sport fishing with abundant facilities and services. Accommodations are comfortable and family oriented, though not quite with the "polish" of holiday resorts.

Sights between Raymondville and Harlingen introduce the huge, diversified agricultural aspects of the Valley—cotton fields and citrus groves, livestock pastures and vegetable farms. Modern cultivation and irrigation have transformed the former thorny wilderness into an oasis. Note several low spots, mostly at right angles to the highway, along the way. They're ancient channels of the Rio Grande, now dried and silted nearly full. The river has changed course many times across these alluvial flats.

HARLINGEN
Pop. 43,543

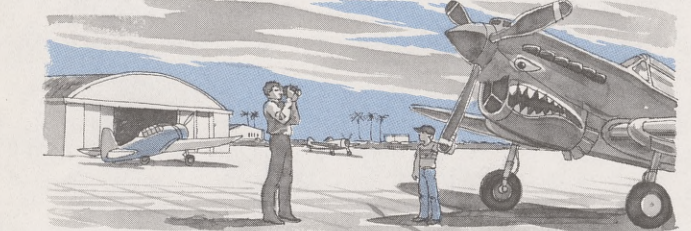
Cameron County
Alt. 36

Harlingen is named for a Netherlands city, a peculiar comparison to a land whose canals become frozen thoroughfares for ice skaters each winter. Dutch visitors would find this Harlingen astonishing; balmy subtropical

temperatures; nearly every month some kind of harvest in progress—peas, carrots, lettuce, spinach, cabbage, grapefruit, oranges, sugar cane.

Harlingen stages an annual contest and award for the first bale of cotton from the year's growing season—usually during the first week of June. By way of comparison with these subtropics, the first bale of cotton up in the Texas Panhandle is usually harvested about September 1.

For visitors, Harlingen's attractions are varied and abundant. Unique in the world is the Confederate Air Force Flying Museum, headquarters of the Ghost Squadron, at the Harlingen Industrial Air Park. The museum is the effort of hundreds of individuals dedicated to preservation of World War II combat aircraft in flying condition. All CAF members are "colonels"—civilian businessmen are colonels; Army sergeants are colonels; genuine Air Force generals are colonels.



Ghost Squadron wings have been organized throughout the United States and in six foreign countries. Membership includes the British royal family, and even some former enemies (German and Japanese) who have banded together to preserve the famous war birds.

Harlingen attractions include the Rio Grande Valley Museum, the original Iwo Jima Memorial sculpture, parks, golf courses, and nearby Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge that shelters thousands of migratory waterfowl, shore birds and native wildlife. Refer to the state travel guide for a summary of these attractions. For further visitor details, visit the Harlingen Chamber of Commerce, 311 E. Tyler St.

Harlingen is also the site of a Texas Tourist Bureau operated by the State Department of Highways and Public Transportation. Professional travel counselors can provide an abundance of free literature, maps, and driving directions to visitor sites throughout the Valley (and anywhere in Texas). Audiovisual programs show travel highlights you'll want to watch for. And the bureau's gardens, patios and grounds showcase a superb collection of tropical flora. The state facility is open seven days a week at the intersection of US 77 and US 83 Expressway at the west edge of town.

SAN BENITO
Pop. 17,988

Cameron County
Alt. 33

San Benito calls itself "the Resaca City." Resaca is a good word for newcomers to learn. It's a former channel of the Rio Grande. Unlike those near Raymondville, many resacas here still contain water—small, placid lakes now far separated from the wandering Rio Grande. One in particular, Resaca de los Fresnos, provides some of the Valley's most picturesque scenery as it loops through this quiet residential community.

First-hand visitor information is available at the chamber of commerce, 210 E. Heywood St.

Note highway traffic signs both in English and Spanish, a practical safety consideration in this bilingual region. Wild flowers like Mexican hat, coreopsis, and blackeyed Susan are abundant in spring and summer. Various species of cacti may bloom at almost any time, while bougainvilleas produce year-round color (and you ought to see them in April!).

Near Port Isabel, The Tropical Trail changes directions at the intersection of Texas 100/Texas 48, but don't miss this side-trip opportunity to visit Port Isabel and adjacent South Padre Island. They're Tropical Trail highlights!



PORT ISABEL
Pop. 3,769

Cameron County
Alt. 15

Here's the kind of seaside village that vacations are made of. It's quaint, historic, and leisurely paced—lots of opportunities for snapshots here. Check out the charming Port Isabel Yacht Club that dates from the 1930s. Browse the shell shops and shrimp boat docks. Dine on delicious fresh seafood. Join a group boat for bay fishing, or charter an off-shore cruiser.

The town's most-visited spot is the Port Isabel Lighthouse State Historic Structure. Built in 1853, it's now a public visitor site at the foot of the Queen Isabella Causeway to South Padre Island. Climb a spiral stairway to the top of the lighthouse for a view across Laguna Madre to South Padre Island.

Visitor information is available at the chamber of commerce, 213 Yturia St.

SOUTH PADRE ISLAND
Pop. 791

Cameron County
Alt. 5

The name is both a geographical description and the corporate title of the town on Padre's southern tip. Across Queen Isabella Causeway that arches over Laguna Madre, visitors to the island will be greeted by a statue of



TROPICAL TRAIL
1982 Ride the Texas

Fr. Nicholas Balli, the Spanish padre for whom the island is named.

Miles and miles of sandy beaches edge the Gulf of Mexico. Sand dollar, sun dial, lion's paw and angel-wing shells make beach-combing irresistible. Hotels, motels and condominiums overlook the Gulf side, while marinas are situated on Laguna Madre, complete with individual docks for sailboats or cabin cruisers. (Did you bring your cabin cruiser?)

Much of a former highway causeway (replaced by the modern span you drove over) has been converted to a fishing pier by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Among several such conversions in the state, it consistently produces the best catches. The Queen Isabella State Fishing Pier extends from Padre's southern tip. Concessions offer bait and tackle; modest fee for fishing.

Refer to South Padre Island in *Texas! Live the Legend*, and visit the city tourist bureau, a half-mile north of the causeway entrance, next to the Hilton Hotel.

The Trail route between Port Isabel and Brownsville crosses some low-lying lands—part salt marsh, part freshwater ponds. Dunes visible here are mostly clay, instead of sand structures. Because clay particles are much finer, these dunes, once formed, are more stable than their sand counterparts. Almost invariably, the clay dunes are formed on the leeward (northwest) side of the area's shallow marshes and ponds.

The waterway that parallels much of this highway on the south is the Brownsville Ship Channel that marks the terminus of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway. Built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the waterway girdles the Gulf for 1,300 miles from Brownsville to Florida, providing sheltered passage for barge and pleasure-boat traffic. Although the waterway is seen by the public at only a few spots, its annual transportation volume is enormous, carrying more tonnage than either the Panama Canal or the St. Lawrence Seaway.

At the Port of Brownsville, Trail travelers will see ocean-going freighters, husky tow boats and barges, and a fleet of shrimp trawlers.

BROWNSVILLE
Pop. 84,997

Cameron County
Alt. 57

The Trail has now reached Texas' southernmost city, whose settlement dates from Spanish colonial days, although the town's modern nucleus took shape around Fort Brown, established in 1846. When Texas elected to join the United States (1845) after nearly a decade of independence, the Rio Grande thereby became the new U.S. boundary with Mexico. Unfortunately, Mexico had not fully accepted the loss of Texas 10 years earlier. The appearance of U.S. troops on the north bank of the Rio

Grande precipitated the Mexican War. Today those hostilities are forgotten in an atmosphere of thriving international trade on both sides of the river. Tourist visitors find an abundance of shopping, dining and recreational options in this colorful, bicultural area. Feature attractions include museums, historic sites, the superb Gladys Porter Zoo, and convenient access to Mexico—as easy as driving across a bridge.

The state travel guide capsules local sites, festival events, and basic regulations for visiting the border cities of Mexico. The excellent Brownsville Information Center offers in-person details, local maps and literature. The center is beside US 77/83 (FM 802 exit) in north Brownsville, open weekdays and Sat. morning.

West of Brownsville, the Trail explores typical Valley agricultural lands and small towns dotted among the fields and groves. The names are musical with Spanish accents—La Paloma, Santa Maria, La Feria.

MERCEDES
Pop. 11,851
Hidalgo County
Alt. 61

In Mercedes is the Red Horse Western Museum featuring frontier room settings, life-sized Western caricature figures, a substantial collection of mounted animals, horse-drawn vehicles and pioneer artifacts.

The transforming power of irrigation is responsible for much of the Valley's modern appearance and prosperity. Mercedes led the way when, in 1904, a group of St. Louis financiers built what was then the largest private irrigation system in the world, and invited settlement here.

On the Trail route between Mercedes and Weslaco, watch for the intersection with FM 1015. On that road just a half mile north, adjacent to the US 83 Expressway, is the Valley Tourist Information Center, an operation of the Rio Grande Valley Chamber of Commerce that represents the four counties of this popular visitor region. The center offers free travel brochures, maps, and information about attractions, events and accommodations throughout the Valley; open Mon.-Fri.

WESLACO
Pop. 19,331
Hidalgo County
Alt. 70

The name Weslaco is an acronym from the initials of W.E. Stewart Land Company that established and promoted the townsite in 1919. This is the very heart of the Valley's enormous agricultural region—citrus fruits, vegetables, cotton and sugar cane. Among food processing industries is the world's largest cannery of grapefruit juice.

The chamber of commerce is at 520 S. Kansas St. Visit them for information on the city's attractions, including Weslaco's small Bicultural Museum that showcases this area's blend of Spanish-Mexican-American cultures.

Trail highways were selected to introduce a smorgasbord of Valley landscapes. To stay with the route as it loops up, down, and across, pay close attention to the Trail map and watch carefully for Trail signs and arrows on the highways.

Most travelers are astonished at the diversity of Valley farm products. Fields of peas, cabbage, spinach, onions, and carrots are easily recognized, but there are less common vegetables, too—daikon, kohlrabi, and aloe vera. This is the origin area of aloe vera, whose marvelous natural cream is recently popular in sunburn and beauty lotions. It's not new to Valley residents or to Mexicans who've used it for centuries.



On the US 281 leg of the Trail between Weslaco and Hidalgo is the opportunity to visit what's called "the gem of the federal refuge system," Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge. Naturalists and birders from throughout the nation journey here to view birds and animals seldom seen anywhere else in the United States. Among more than 300 bird species are colorful, raucous green jays, spectacular orioles, and the pheasant-sized Mexican game bird with the intriguing name: chachalaca. A fuller summary of the refuge's visitor facilities and operating hours will be found in the state travel guide under the city of Alamo.

At Hidalgo an international bridge provides access to the vigorous Mexican city of Reynosa. It's a favorite south-of-the-border spot for shopping, dining and supper club entertainment.

McALLEN
Pop. 67,042
Hidalgo County
Alt. 122

Like many Valley cities, McAllen hosts a multitude of visitors. Tourists are "in" in McAllen, and visitor amenities are high priorities—lodging facilities accented by exotic tropical landscaping, superb dining opportunities, organized shopping excursions, golf on palm-edged fairways, and a calendar full of festival events.

In winter, there are so many visitors from the north,

residents of Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska and other Midwestern states gather for a series of "state" parties of picnicking, sports and games.

Prominent attractions as cited in the state travel guide include the Hudson (vintage auto) Museum, the International Museum, and the McAllen Nature Center, a lush botanical garden. Ever seen an orchid tree? Of course, real orchids don't grow on trees, but no one will dispute that tree's spectacular blooms. The nature center is a prime visitor spot.

Refer to McAllen's entry in *Texas! Live the Legend*, and on weekdays, pay a personal visit to the McAllen Chamber of Commerce at 10 N. Broadway. You'll find lots of information to enrich your stay.

Between McAllen and Mission, the Trail route loops south past several pleasant features. Anzalduas (municipal) Park offers picnic sites, fishing and boating access to the Rio Grande. Nearby is the charming La Lometa Chapel sometimes called "mission." The tiny structure, circa 1865, was built as an overnight way station for Oblate padres who regularly traveled this route by horseback. Just a bit further is La Lomita Museum and Farms a former novitiate that now features arts, crafts, and greenhouse-farm products.



MISSION
Pop. 22,589
Hidalgo County
Alt. 134

Legends say that Oblate priests planted the Valley's first orange groves in this area. The town's name derives from La Lomita Chapel just visited on the Trail route.

Mission calls itself "Home of the Grapefruit," especially the famous Texas Ruby Red. The Texas Citrus Fiesta each January features not only the most luscious specimens of fruit, but also a style show whose elaborate costumes are made from citrus and vegetable products.

Nowhere does the Christmas season blossom more colorfully than Mission during its annual Poinsettia Show in December. Poinsettias, nurtured in city parks and residential gardens, grow as tall as 8 feet!

Again, refer to the state travel guide for Mission highlights, and stop at the chamber of commerce, 220 E. 9th St.

West of Mission is the opportunity for a short side trip to Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park. Situated on the Rio Grande, the park's wildlife is very similar to that of the previously mentioned Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, with added camping and recreational facilities.

On the Trail route between Mission and Rio Grande City, travelers will notice a gradual transition in landscape appearance—the Valley's intensive agriculture giving way to rolling native pasturelands. The Rio Grande is occasionally visible to the south.

RIO GRANDE CITY
Pop. 8,887
Starr County
Alt. 190

Review the city's listing in the state travel guide, especially the story of historic Fort Ringgold. When the post was deactivated in 1944 much of it was taken over by the local school district. The buildings are immaculately maintained, and an historical marker just inside the entrance provides details.

ROMA-LOS SAENZ
Pop. 3,384
Starr County
Alt. 200

History buffs will enjoy exploring the twin towns of Roma-Los Saenz, and you'll find picture-taking opportunities like scenes from old Mexico. Before the railroad came, Roma was the deepest inland port for small steamboats on the Rio Grande. The boats brought army supplies during the Mexican War of the 1840s. Richard King (the King Ranch) and Mifflin Kennedy (Kennedy County) were both steamboat captains here before launching their giant ranching enterprises.

Inquire locally about historical markers, especially one devoted to the Mier Expedition of 1842, an ill-advised attempt to raid Mexico. Captured by Mexican forces, expedition members were blindfolded and forced to participate in a macabre "death lottery" by drawing black (execution) or white (freedom) beans.

The closest Texas mountains are hundreds of miles northwest, but Trail travelers here can look south into Mexico where the Sierra Madre Mountains etch the distant horizon.

Facilities at Falcon State Park are among the most complete in the entire Texas parks system, including utility-equipped tent and RV sites, cabins, boat ramps, docks, and even an airstrip. Falcon Lake jointly owned by the U.S. and Mexico, spreads over 78,000 acres and is very popular for fishing, boating and water sports. Travelers may drive across the dam for a visit to the Mexican town of Nuevo Guerrero.

Continuing through brushy rangeland, drivers should watch for several roadside picnic areas that offer excellent views of the lake and broad landscapes in this sparsely populated region.

If you turn into the village of San Ygnacio on US Busi-

ness 83, it's almost like driving through a time warp. The town was founded in 1790. Jesus Trevino built a stone house here in 1830. It still stands adjacent to a stone fort built a few years later. The structures have been occupied by the same family line for a century and a half.

The atmosphere of old Mexico pervades the dusty plaza and narrow streets. Descendants of U.S. cavalrymen once stationed here still live in the area, as do descendants of Mexican bandits who raided the village in the early 1900s.

After miles of brushy pastures, neat truck farms and row crops reappear as the Trail nears Laredo.



LAREDO
Pop. 91,440
Webb County
Alt. 438

Laredo, the nation's major gateway with Mexico, is a prime visitor city. Trail travelers will want to spend some time here and in Nuevo Laredo across the border. Explore San Agustin Plaza and its historical markers in the heart of the old Spanish section. The church there is Laredo's oldest, and the Republic of the Rio Grande building was the site of efforts to establish an independent country here about 1839.

The blend of Hispanic and American cultures is prominent throughout Laredo, and the city's tourist opportunities would fill several columns. See the state travel guide for Laredo highlights, and visit the chamber of commerce at 2310 San Bernardo Ave. for complete details to enrich your stay.

Just north of Laredo on I-35 (not part of the Trail route) is a Texas Tourist Bureau operated by the State Department of Highways and Public Transportation. Bilingual travel counselors offer a wide selection of free maps and travel literature, information about tourist sites throughout Texas, and expert assistance in charting routes; open daily.

The rolling terrain between Laredo and Falfurrias exhibits vivid differences between the land's native character and what can be accomplished by modern agricultural techniques. Brushy, cactus-infested regions were typical of the whole countryside that tested the mettle of pioneer ranchers, cowboys, and hardy Texas Longhorns. Other areas show clean pastures of knee-high grass and neat cultivated fields. The transformation isn't easy. It is a difficult, expensive process requiring heavy machinery, precise application of herbicides, and an unrelenting regimen of careful maintenance.



Prickly-pear cactus, mainly a pest, is at times a "last resort" resource. Its springtime blooms of yellow, orange and crimson rival any hothouse plant. The young, tender leaves (when peeled and sliced) make a palatable dish much like green beans. In times of severe drought, ranchers use flame-thrower devices to burn thorns from the green leaves, thereby providing livestock food. In late summer, the cactus fruit (called tuna) ripens to a wine-red color. Sweet and delicious, it's often made into jelly and preserves. But it takes knowledgeable handling; the tunas have almost microscopic thorns.

Travelers will note that ranch entrances usually have a broad gate beneath a wrought iron arch announcing the ranch name. Excellent, blooded Quarter-Horses are produced on many of these showcase ranches.

Watch for historical markers in Hebbornville, once the nation's largest livestock shipping point.

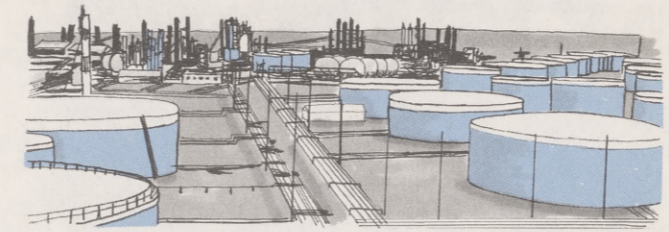
FALFURIAS
Pop. 6,103
Brooks County
Alt. 109

Falfurrias provides a pleasant stopping place at a small, shady park on the Trail route (N. Miller St./US 281) where tables, grills, water and a playground are available. It's also the site of the Heritage Museum, a showcase of artifacts from pioneer days, and the history of a famous Texas Ranger unit, Company D, that headquartered here for many years.

In geographical terms, the route between Falfurrias and Alice crosses a dividing line between Coastal Plains to the south, and Brush Country to the north, both are brushy in their native state, although real Brush Country thickets of mesquite, huisache, dwarf oaks, catclaw and other shrubs are more dense and formidable. Such thickets are the habitat of javelina and some of the state's largest white-tailed deer.

ALICE
Pop. 20,961
Jim Wells County
Alt. 205

Alice was once a roundup area for cattle herds to be driven north along the famed Chisholm Trail, and is still a commercial center for surrounding, huge ranching operations. Visit the South Texas Museum for interpretations



of early Texas ranch life and oil discoveries that began in the 1930s. Beefmaster cattle, a hardy breed compatible with the area's harsh, arid range conditions, were developed here. Brochures, maps and tourist information may be obtained at the Alice Chamber of Commerce, 612 E. Main St.

Crossing a variety of ranch and farm lands between Alice and Mathis, the Trail route aims toward Lake Corpus Christi and a popular state park on the shore of that reservoir.

MATHIS
Pop. 5,667
San Patricio County
Alt. 161

The present town of Mathis results from conservative stubbornness of some community leaders in the 1880s, stubbornness that proved to be wrong. Those leaders guided a nearby town called Lagarto, a village with a thriving population and a college. Railroad builders asked the town to donate right-of-way. The comfortably self-sufficient town refused.

Area rancher Tom Mathis recognized the benefit of rail service compared to long, expensive cattle drives, and donated a strip of land for the iron rails. Isolated from the primary transportation network of the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, Lagarto—college, population and all—dwindled and disappeared.



Mathis is the gateway to Lake Corpus Christi State Park. Freshwater lakes are abundant in several parts of Texas, but relatively scarce in this area. Therefore the lake's water-sports opportunities draw fishermen, boatmen, skiers, and campers in large numbers, especially from the Corpus Christi metropolitan area. See the state travel guide for a list of the park's facilities.

From the Mathis area eastward, the Trail returns to classic Coastal Plains—huge areas of flat, rich, brown soils that produce cotton, grain sorghums, corn, flax and vegetables. Improved pastures (planted with superior grasses for grazing) and hay fields support extensive livestock production.

SINTON
Pop. 6,044
San Patricio County
Alt. 43

Sinton calls itself "a city of parks," several of which are named for the locally prominent Welder family.

The noted Welder Wildlife Refuge is some 8 miles north on US 77. It is the world's largest privately-endowed wildlife refuge (7,800 acres), and a resource for professional naturalists and wildlife students from throughout the U.S. and many foreign countries. Hundreds of birds, amphibians, reptiles, and more than 50 mammal species have been recorded on the refuge. A museum on the grounds interprets refuge activities and features wildlife dioramas and Indian exhibits. Public tours are available at 3 p.m. each Thursday. Group and special tours may be requested (by telephone only) from the refuge tour director, (512) 364-2643.

Refer to Sinton in the state travel guide, and visit the local chamber of commerce, 218 W. Sinton St., for personal details.

Trail drivers will often have seen slim, white birds in pastures throughout the Tropical Trail—usually close to livestock. They are African cattle egrets, so named for their habit of staying close to livestock, and feeding on insects (grasshoppers, locusts, etc.) disturbed by the animals' movement and grazing. The African birds appeared spontaneously in South America decades ago. Discovering a niche in Western Hemisphere ecology, they flourished and expanded northward. Becoming noticeable to the general public in the early 1960s, they are now prominent in pastures over much of the state's southern regions. Ornithologists estimate that the egrets have reached the northern limit of comfortable habitat, and credit substantial benefit to the birds' insect diet.

The community of Bayside marks the site of two early Texas ports—Copano and St. Mary's of Aransas. Both thrived in the mid-1800s, but combinations of storms, economic and political factors (both lost bids for county-seat status) resulted in decline and eventual abandonment. Old pilings mark the sites of wharves that were busy more than a century ago. The St. Mary's Cemetery is still maintained.

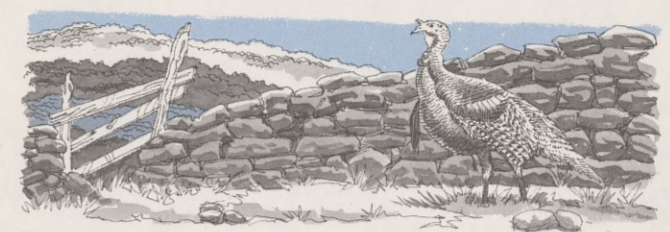
The town of Refugio isn't on the Trail, but for history buffs it's worth the two-mile side trip. An early Spanish mission was located there, and a group of Irish immigrants arrived in 1833. The town played some significant roles during the struggle for Texas independence

and in republic days. Historical markers and monuments are clustered on the courthouse square.

The Trail between Refugio and Rockport crosses vast pasturelands of the coastal plain, with oil-well pump jacks and oil storage tanks visible in all directions. This sharp dog-leg is charted to lead travelers to one of the most eminent visitor sites on the Trail, Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. The refuge is the winter home of the most famous birds in the world, majestic whooping cranes. The flock of less than 100 whoopers nests in northern Canadian marshes in spring and summer, then migrates 2,600 miles to this single spot for a leisurely winter season in the Texas subtropics.

The 47,261-acre refuge is also the habitat of other migratory and native waterfowl, wading and shore birds, wild turkey, white-tailed deer, javelina, other mammals, and magnificent specimens of the American alligator. Visitors may take self-guided tours and utilize strategically placed observation towers.

Access to the refuge is signed near the Trail intersection of FM 774/Texas 35. Literature, maps and details are available at the refuge headquarters; open daily.



Another way to view refuge wildlife is from the 65-foot motor vessel, *Whooping Crane*, berthed near the north end of the Copano Bay Causeway north of Fulton. Inquire locally for cruise schedules.

The Trail's remaining segments explore a whole series of seaside recreational sites. A choice spot for campers and fishermen is Goose Island State Park. Facilities include utility hookups for RVs, rest rooms, showers, boat ramp, and fishing pier. In the park is "Big Tree," national chompian live oak, estimated to be more than 1,000 years old.

Copano Bay State Fishing Pier a former highway causeway replaced by the Trail's modern span, is administered by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Piers extend from north and south sides (not connected). Concessions at both ends offer bait, tackle and snacks; modest fee for fishing.

In Fulton, named for George W. Fulton, another state parks operation is the restored Fulton Mansion State Historic Structure. Completed in 1877 in ornate, French Second Empire Style, the mansion was a showplace of mid-19th century luxury—Italian tile and marble, hand-carved exotic woodwork, ebony mantles, even hot and cold running water. Inquire locally for information.

ROCKPORT
Pop. 3,686
Aransas County
Alt. 20

A seaside recreational haven, Rockport also supports a substantial artist colony. Picturesque, wind-sculptured live oaks are the town's trademark. There's an excellent swimming beach and skiing basin. Visitors will enjoy exploring the yacht harbor, small shipyards that build shrimp trawlers, and luxurious leisure-home developments where homeowners dock their sleek cruisers right at their back doors.

Much of the Rockport area is a wildlife preserve. Watch for great blue herons and cranes solemnly stalking the shallows, and elegant roseate spoonbills.

Review Rockport's entry in *Texas! Live the Legend*, and visit the chamber of commerce, 404 Broadway, for abundant details about accommodations, dining, fishing, and festival events.

Between Rockport and Aransas Pass the Trail slices through coastal marshes, often offering views of the Gulf dotted by picturesque fishing and sport boats.



ARANSAS PASS
Pop. 7,173
Aransas & San Patricio Counties
Alt. 20

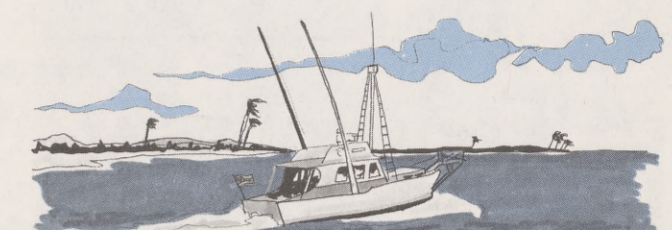
The song, "Shrimp Boats Are A-Coming" could have been written about Aransas Pass. Hundreds of shrimp trawlers dock here at Conn Brown Harbor. A number of local streets provide access to the harbor area for closer looks at the picturesque fleet. The harbor entrance is marked by Seamen's Memorial Tower dedicated to fishermen lost at sea. This is a perfect place for memorable snapshots.

As one of Texas' most popular fishing spots for decades, Aransas Pass offers abundant facilities for fishing fun. Visitors can book most any kind of fishing boat—from small bay skiffs handled by experienced guides, to large, twin-hulled catamarans that ferry groups to offshore reefs where the big ones lurk.

The place for details is the chamber of commerce office at 452 Cleveland Blvd.

From Aransas Pass on Texas 361, Trail drivers will enjoy a brief water-borne experience on free ferries operated by the State Department of Highways and Public Transportation. The route travels by causeway across

Redfish Bay to Harbor Island, whose abandoned lighthouse is visible to the north. (The channel has shifted since the vintage beacon was built more than a century ago.) Then the short ferry ride crosses the Corpus Christi Ship Channel. Porpoises often accompany the ferries, and ocean-going vessels are frequently seen.



PORT ARANSAS
Pop. 1,968
Nueces County
Alt. 20

When the ferry docks, you've arrived in Port Aransas, a fishing village with a resort atmosphere. The small, very popular seaside recreation spot on Mustang Island hosts thousands of summertime vacationers and fishermen throughout the year. Accommodations range from primitive beach-camping sites to luxury condominiums. The town's most venerable lodging is the Tarpon Inn, well worth a visit for its historic atmosphere. Guests have included Franklin D. Roosevelt and Aimee Semple McPherson. A county park provides utility hookups, bathrooms, concessions, swimming in the sparkling Gulf, and access to ship-channel jetties and a thousand-foot pier for fishing.

Refer to the state travel guide for Port Aransas highlights, and get first-hand details at the chamber of commerce, 421 Cotter St.

Heading down the island, the Trail route is marked on Park Road 53, but for a different driving experience, you can drive a designated roadway portion of the beach itself for about 15 miles. Beach campers, swimmers and children playing have absolute right of way; drivers must exercise great caution, and the low speed limits are strictly enforced. Keep carefully to the designated roadway on moist sand. Dry sand just a few feet landward will quickly bog your vehicle.

Even with 4-wheel drive vehicles, driving on the dunes is prohibited. Sand dunes exist in a beautiful, delicate balance of shape, size and vegetation. They're easily destroyed if disturbed.

Making the most of one of Texas' finest beach sites is Mustang Island State Park. It's on a channel through the Gulf and Corpus Christi Bay. Jetties that protect the cut are favorite fishing and surfing spots. Shell collectors find excellent specimens in ankle-deep water, snorkelers can drift along face-to-face with mullet, perch, flounder, or perhaps a hermit crab carrying his house on his back. See the state travel guide (Port Aransas) for a list of the park's visitor facilities.

Near the intersection of Park Roads 53 and 22 (where the Trail heads back to Corpus Christi) are directional signs to two Nueces County Parks that offer a variety of facilities for swimming, camping and fishing.

Straight ahead (off the Trail) are modern commercial developments on the north end of Padre Island—hotels, motels, condos and beach amenities—and then the entrance to Padre Island National Seashore mentioned at the beginning of this Trail folder. A ranger station on Park Road 22 south offers brochures and information about the national seashore.



From here the Trail route spans a causeway back into Corpus Christi where it started. Those who've driven the entire route can speak with authority about much of this deep southern region of Texas—palm-fringed tropics, vast ranches, and seaside playgrounds. But a word of caution, please: The size of Texas dwarfs even this large, diverse area, and there are other regions to discover before the whole can be measured. Against this subtropical triangle compare rugged mountain ranges thrusting above a mile high, enormous green-canopied forests, shadowy moss-hung bayous, and majestic game-rich hills. That, too, is Texas and there are other Trails, listed below, to guide you efficiently through every part. Such is the purpose of the Texas Trails, planned pleasure-driving to make the most of every mile. When travel efficiency is in everyone's best interest, Texas Trails are the way to go!

- TEXAS BRAZOS TRAIL
- TEXAS FOREST TRAIL
- TEXAS FORTS TRAIL
- TEXAS HILL COUNTRY TRAIL
- TEXAS INDEPENDENCE TRAIL
- TEXAS LAKES TRAIL
- TEXAS MOUNTAIN TRAIL
- TEXAS PECOS TRAIL
- TEXAS PLAINS TRAIL

STATE DEPARTMENT OF HIGHWAYS
AND PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION
Travel & Information Division
P.O. Box 5064
Austin, Texas 78763

Lithographed in U.S.A.