

TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE

Interpretive Guide to:

GARNER

STATE PARK





Prehistoric Native Americans built large earth ovens of heated rock for cooking roots and tubers.

THE DRAW OF THE WATER

For thousands of years the cool, clear waters of the Frio River have drawn people to its banks. Between 10,000 and 12,000 years ago, prehistoric peoples came to the area attracted by an abundance of game, useful plants, and stone for making tools. The river provided a dependable source of perennial water and helped to cool the canyons, providing an inviting setting which still pulls people here.

As early as the 16th century, Spanish explorers made entradas into the Americas and brought horses with them. The Comanche and Apache quickly adapted to their use, pushing all other Native American groups from the area in the 1700s.

In the 1850s a trickle of Anglo settlers began making their way west of San Antonio. The lifestyle was one of self-sufficiency, and the people of the area farmed, raised

CCC-constructed facilities at Garner, many still in use today, include roads, picnic tables, water fountains, a lodge, overnight cabins, and a dance pavilion.

THE MAKING OF A STATE PARK

As the automobile gained in popularity during the early 20th century, vacation camping became a popular pastime for many city dwellers. The cool clear waters of the river and the beauty of the canyons made this an ideal location. During the 1920s, the Magers family opened a piece of their land on the west side of the Frio River in the present location of Garner State Park, for camping.

With the onset of the Great Depression in the 1930s, the nation faced a debilitating unemployment crisis. 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 employment opportunities. The program put young men to work developing state and national parks, as well as rehabilitating forests and controlling soil erosion.

Civilian Conservation Corps Company 879 constructed the park between 1935 and 1941. June 1, 1941 marked the grand opening and dedication of Garner State Park, named after former Vice President John Nance Garner, a local son.



FLORA AND FAUNA

Located on the southwestern edge of the Edwards Plateau, Garner State Park is part of a unique natural subregion known as the Balcones Canyonlands. Edwards limestone uplifted millions of years ago to an elevation of 2,000 feet, creating steep canyon walls and some of the most spectacular views in the Texas Hill Country. The canyons angle southeast to northwest, taking advantage of the southeast prevailing winds to cool and moisten the area. This allows more diverse vegetation to thrive in this arid region of Texas. The rugged terrain protects many vegetation communities, including Ashe juniper, oak and cypress, as well as a small population of endangered Tobusch fishhook cactus.

All of this provides some very unique habitat for the abundance of wildlife for which the area has long been known. Populations of white-tailed deer, Rio Grande turkey, squirrels, and several species of migratory birds exist in the park. Endangered species of birds such as the golden-cheeked warbler and black-capped vireo (pictured above) also find a home here.

Non-native, feral, and exotic species create problems in many parks. Non-native species are highly undesirable due to the competition they create with native wildlife and negative impacts on native habitats. Garner's primary exotic, Axis deer (below), compete with the native whitetail populations for food resources.





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

ALIVE WITH TRADITION, SEVERAL 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 OF THE DAY. WHEN THE PARK OPENED, LOCAL BANDS PERFORMED IN THE BEAUTIFUL NATIVE LIMESTONE AND CYPRESS DANCE PAVILION. LATER, A JUKE BOX REPLACED THE BANDS, AND THE TRADITIONAL DANCES CONTINUE TO THIS DAY.



Garner State Park leads the state in overnight camping and has since it opened in 1941. The rich cultural history of the park and its facilities, the attraction of the clear waters of the Frio River, and steep wooded canyons combine to form a very inviting setting for a great variety of park visitors.

FURTHER READING

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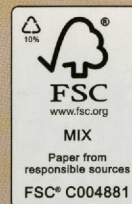
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The Handbook of Texas Online:
www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online

Garner State Park • HCR 70, Box 599, Concan, TX 78838
 (210) 232-6132 • www.tpwd.state.tx.us/garner/



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