DEFINITION AND DOCUMENTATION OF EL CAMINO REAL

DEFINITION

Four main royal roads led to Mexico City during the Spanish period. One ran from Veracruz in the east, another from Acapulco via Chilpanzingo in the west, a third crossed into Oaxaca from Guatemala in the south, and the fourth road traversed the interior of Mexico to Santa Fe in the faraway northern province of New Mexico. These four capitals connected with the viceregal capital in Mexico City, in keeping with the traditional relationship established under Spanish custom and practice governing royal roads in Europe and the New World. Historically, a *camino real* (royal road) is defined as a road that connects Spanish capital with Spanish capital, a distinction not shared with roads connecting ordinary Spanish or Indian villages.

The term *Camino Real* implied that the status and privileges granted to the villas and capitals it connected were extended to the main routes of travel through use by officials and others acting in the interest of the crown (see maps: El Camino Real, United States and Mexico, and U.S. Portion of El Camino Real). Unlike ordinary Indian and Spanish villages, villas like San Antonio and others along the route had charters that prescribed royal privileges (*reales* and *regalias*). An important factor under which a town received a set of privileges was its economic importance to a region, province, or colony. Similarly, the main road through the villa or series of villas enjoyed the privileges granted. Historically, royal roads connected economically important Spanish towns, capitals of provinces, and mines that possessed a charter prescribing royal privileges.[2]

As defined in the enabling legislation, El Camino Real de los Tejas was established to connect a series of Spanish missions and posts between Monclova, Mexico, and Los Adaes, the first capital of the province of Texas (in what is now northwestern Louisiana). The legislation also defines El Camino Real as an approximately 1,000-mile long corridor of changing routes from Saltillo through Monclova and Guerrero, Coahuila, Mexico; San Antonio and Nacogdoches, Texas, and then east to the vicinity of Los Adaes in what is now Louisiana. It constituted the only primary overland route from the Rio Grande to the Red River Valley in Louisiana during the Spanish Colonial Period.

Over time, geographic, religious, political, economic, and military factors resulted in the evolution of the early routes of El Camino Real into a series of changing roadways and trails.[3] Although the legislation authorizing this study recognizes these changing routes as

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2. A more detailed discussion of the definition of a *camino real* is available in the unpublished paper, "Toward a Definition of the Spanish *Camino Real: Cabañas,* Villas, Armies, and the Spanish Crown," by Joseph P. Sánchez, María Luisa Pérez González, and Bruce A. Erickson. That report is on file at the Spanish Colonial Research Center of the National Park Service (NPS), at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, and at the NPS Long Distance Trails Group Office in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

3. Many of these roads were not contemporaneous. For contemporary routes, the traveler's choice of a route often depended on the seasons and natural conditions (McGraw 1991, 4). For example, alternate routes may have been used when nonmission Indians were in the area or during wet or dry seasons so that travelers could avoid flooded streams or find adequate water supplies.

components of El Camino Real, each route has its own distinctive history and nomenclature. The Old San Antonio Road, one of the better known of these changing routes, was used from about 1795 to 1850 as the primary migration route from the east to what is now Texas.

DESCRIPTION OF ROUTES

The road from the Rio Grande to Los Adaes, near Robeline, Louisiana, must be considered in two segments separated by San Antonio. Ordered geographically and chronologically, the first extended (in the United States) from the Rio Grande to San Antonio. From 1721 through 1772, El Camino Real ran from the present state of Coahuila, Mexico, through San Antonio to Los Adaes, the first capital of Spanish Texas, near Natchitoches, Louisiana. When San Antonio was the capital of Texas (1772–1821) it was the terminus for El Camino Real from the Rio Grande and points south (see maps: El Camino Real de los Tejas in the United States,segments 1–4, beginning on page 13).

Rio Grande to San Antonio

The three basic routes between the Rio Grande and San Antonio were the Pita Road, the Lower Presidio Road, and routes from the Laredo area. The first Spanish expeditions into Texas from Monclova, Coahuila, crossed the Rio Grande at fords long used by the indigenous people of the area. Later, the *presidio de San Juan Bautista* and its associated missions were established near modern Guerrero, Coahuila. Of the several fords in this area, Paso de Francia was most commonly noted by travelers. Starting in 1689 El Camino Real between Paso de Francia and San Antonio evolved, gradually becoming known as the *"Camino Pita,"* or the Pita Road, named for a campsite first used in 1716. These roads, which went northeast from Paso de Francia and then east toward San Antonio, were used by the first Spanish explorers and settlers of Texas. This remained the set route of subsequent expeditions through the 1720s, until Indian conflicts forced traffic to move farther south. Detailed records and site investigations for a segment of the route near the current intersection of Maverick, Zavala, and Dimmit counties are not available, so that segment is shown as a dashed line.

The second, later route, used primarily from 1750 to 1800, was known as the Lower Presidio Road. It went almost straight east from Paso de Francia before turning north to San Antonio. This route was also known as Camino de en Medio (see map: U.S. Portion of El Camino Real) because the route was between two other roads, the Pita Road to the north and, on the

south, another main road to San Antonio that ran east from the Laredo crossing of the Rio Grande.

The third route between the Rio Grande and San Antonio came into use with the founding of the *villas* of Dolores and Laredo in the 1750s and the requirement that they provide boats for travelers to cross the river. By the late 1760s many official expeditions to Texas crossed at one of these new *villas*. The routes from Laredo to San Antonio and Los Adaes connected to Monclova and Saltillo, just as the earlier routes had done. A spur from Antonio Road (1750–1830) goes directly north-northeast from Laredo. A second route from Laredo to San Antonio (1750–1830) ran east-northeast to La Bahía, near the present Goliad, Texas. The route then turned back to the northwest, following the San Antonio River to San Antonio.

Later, an "Upper Presidio Road" was opened (1795–1850). That road generally followed the route of the earlier *Camino Pita* to a point east of the Frio River, a short distance west of San Antonio, where the two roads diverged (see map: U.S. Portion of El Camino Real).

Together, these roads from San Juan Bautista to San Antonio represent continuous use across the centuries. Segments of the roads were used by indigenous people when the first Spaniards followed them to cross the Rio Grande and settle in Texas, and the roads were used intermittently and in changing patterns over the years.

San Antonio to Los Adaes

During the 18th century there were two main routes between San Antonio and Los Adaes, the Upper Road, or the *Camino de los Tejas* (1691–1800) and the Lower Road (1730s–90s). The Upper Road through or near modern New Braunfels and San Marcos reached the Colorado River just east of Austin and extended to the missions in eastern Texas in 1716. With some variations, the Upper Road was the predominant route for the explorers and early settlers of eastern Texas. Even after use of the Upper Road decreased, it remained an alternate route to the east.

The Upper Road is not well defined from a point about 10 miles northeast of Austin to the San Gabriel River. From the San Gabriel River to the Trinity River, variations are shown, one that can be identified from records and other, more northerly routes that are shown as dashed lines on the route maps. Diaries, chronicles, records, and onsite investigations do not provide sufficient information at this time to locate the dashed routes on the ground.

During the 1720s the road east from San Antonio shifted south to avoid conflicts with Indians. The Lower Road (circa 1730–90s) followed the Rio San Antonio downstream and turned east to cross the Guadalupe River near the present Cuero, Texas, the Colorado River just north of La Grange, and the Brazos at the mouth of the Little Brazos River, near Hearne. It joined with the northern route before their common crossing of the Trinity River. Most traffic, and especially official expeditions, followed the Lower Road between 1727 and the closing of Los

Adaes in 1773. The Lower Road's significance lies in its being the primary route to Los Adaes over most of the 52-year period in which Los Adaes was the capital.

East of the Neches River, all three routes, the Upper Road (also known as El Camino Real de los Tejas), the Lower Road, and the Old San Antonio Road (which was sometimes called Camino de Arriba), are all on the same general alignment, with a few variations.

San Antonio to Natchitoches, Louisiana

After the presidio at Los Adaes was closed and the capital moved to San Antonio, Spanish residence and interest in eastern Texas declined but did not end. Both the Upper Road and the Lower Road to the east continued in use, with the Lower Road receiving more traffic. In the interest of straightening the route to East Texas, a new mail road was pioneered in 1795. Many segments of the new road, which Anglo-American immigrants would later call the San Antonio Road, are the same as the Upper Road; other segments are the same as the Lower Road. In the area of New Braunfels, the San Antonio Road turns slightly south to avoid crossing the Comal and Blanco Rivers. It then headed straight for the Brazos crossing of the Lower Road, passing the Colorado River at Bastrop. The Old San Antonio Road follows the Upper Road from San Antonio to the New Braunfels area where it turns slightly south to cross the Guadalupe and San Marcos Rivers. It then heads through Bastrop to the Brazos River, where it crosses in the same area as the Lower Road.

The earlier and later roads coincide in some places in Louisiana and Texas; in others, the routes changed through time. The establishment of ferries also helped to change regional transportation patterns. In what is now Leon County, Texas, parts of El Camino Real were essentially abandoned when Robbins' Ferry (across the Trinity River) and other downstream ferries (on the Sabine River) were built (Texas Parks and Wildlife 1994, 13).

Summary

Together these segments joined to form the long corridor known as El Camino Real de los Tejas and the later immigration and trade route that is now identified as the Old San Antonio Road. El Camino Real and its variations, along with the Old San Antonio Road, contributed to the settlement and development of the Texas frontier during the Spanish, Mexican, and Anglo-American periods.

The historic routes across south central Texas and northwestern Louisiana can be divided into two general categories on the basis of their locations, periods of use, and primary functions. In this feasibility study, the term El Camino Real de los Tejas will be used for the various routes between the Rio Grande in Maverick and Webb counties and Los Adaes, Louisiana. These routes were used by early explorers, missionaries, soldiers, and Spanish and Mexican settlers during the period from 1680 to 1821.

The term "Old San Antonio Road" will be used to describe the 19th century route between San Antonio and Natchitoches, Louisiana. The primary uses of this route were for emigration, trade, and commerce. The Old San Antonio Road also provided an important transportation corridor for military activities during the Texas Revolution and the war between Mexico and the United States.

DOCUMENTATION

The identification of the route of El Camino Real de los Tejas and its early variants was based largely on travel diaries, chronicles, and records of Spanish explorers. After missions and presidios were established in the province of Texas, other 18th-century travelers used much the same routes, bringing supplies to the fledgling missions, opening the area to trade, and making regular inspections of Spanish facilities.

More recently, historians and archeologists have studied prehistoric and historic trails followed by Spanish and French explorers, seeking to identify these early routes. Researchers have also studied the Indian names for streams and landmarks that are mentioned in travelers' journals (Johnson and McGraw 1991, 121–8; McGraw 1991a, 115–20). Journals kept by these early travelers contain a wealth of information about the indigenous people they encountered, as well as the landscape, the topography, the plants, and the animals. The Spaniards assigned place names to rivers, crossings, and *parajes* (campsites) along the routes. In many cases the early Indian meaning that described a locale or feature was later translated into Spanish and remains as a commonplace name today.

These descriptions, which document the routes that would become known as El Camino Real, include the following published transcriptions and translations of travelers' accounts:

Alonso de León, 1689, 1690 (Canedo 1968; West 1905; Bolton 1908)[4]
Domingo Terán de los Ríos, 1691–92 (Canedo 1968; Hatcher and Foik 1932)[5]
Gregorio de Salinas Varona, 1693 (Canedo 1968; Foster, Jackson, and Brierley 1993)
Fray Isidro de Espinosa, Fray Antonio de Olivares, and Capt. Pedro de Aguirre, 1709 (Tous 1930)
Domingo Ramón, 1716 (Foik 1933; Tous 1930)[6]
Martín de Alarcón, 1718 (Hoffman 1935, 1938)[7]

4. Massanet also described this expedition (Canedo 1968).

5. Accounts of this expedition were kept by both Terán and Massanet. The two documents can be found in both Canedo (1968) and Hatcher and Foik (1932).

6. Accounts of this expedition were kept by both Ramón and Espinosa.

7. Alarcón's journey was documented by the diary accounts of Fray Francisco Céliz (Hoffman 1935) and Fray Pedro Pérez de Mezquía (Hoffman 1938).

Marqués de San Miguel de Aguayo, 1721–22 (*Documentos para la Historia Eclesiastica y Civil de la Provincia de Texas o Nuevas Philipinas 1720–1779* [1961], Santos 1981)[8]
Pedro de Rivera, 1727 (Alessio Robles 1946; Jackson and Foster 1995)
Marqués de Rubí, 1767 (Jackson and Foster 1995; Alessio Robles 1939; Kinnaird 1958)[9]
Fray Gaspar José de Solís, 1767–68 (Forrestal 1931; Kress 1931)
Fray Juan Agustín de Morfí, 1777–78 (Alessio Robles 1935; McLean and del Hoyo 1967)

New routes such as the Old San Antonio Road (known in Louisiana as the Texas Road or the Road to San Antonio) developed between communities that had been linked by El Camino Real. In some cases the new routes incorporated segments of the earlier route. The following are some of these later travelers' accounts:

W. C. C. Claiborne, early 19th century
Frederic Gaillardet, early 19th century (Gaillardet 1966)
William Dunbar, 1804–05 (Dunbar 1904)
Henry Brackenridge, 1810–11 (Brackenridge 1962)
Amos Stoddard, early 19th century (Stoddard 1812)
William Darby, early 19th century (Darby 1817)
Timothy Flint, early 1820s (Flint 1968)
Jean Louis Berlandier, 1830 (Berlandier and Chovel 1850)
José María Sánchez, 1828 (Translated by Castañeda 1939)
Randolph Marcy and G. B. McClellan, early 1850s (Marcy and McClellan, edited by Foreman, 1968)
Frederick Law Olmsted, 1850s (Olmsted 1857)
Zebulon Pike (Pike 1810; 1966 reprint)
Gen. Adrian Woll 1846 (Kinsall 1996)
Capt. George W. Hughes (1846)

The early historic use of El Camino Real has been described in the *Draft Historical Geographical Dictionary of El Camino Real para los Texas,* which was compiled by the Spanish Colonial Research Center of the National Park Service (NPS 1997). The dictionary contains abstracts of information from the journals and reports of explorers, missionaries, and soldiers, written official documents, and records of travelers. Research into these accounts, dating between the late 1600s and about 1854, has documented sites, communities, and places associated with El Camino Real. The Texas Department of Transportation (TXDOT) also documented the early camino routes in a 1991 study. TXDOT researchers used a wide variety of resources and methods, including review of the route surveyed by V. N. Zivley in 1915–16 and markers subsequently placed by the Daughters of the American Revolution (Clark and McGraw 1991, 11 et seq.).

The Old San Antonio Road was designated as one of Texas's historic trails in 1929, and much of the route is still in use as Texas Highway 21 and related county roads (McGraw 1991b, 3).

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8. The only known diary of this expedition was kept by Padre Juan Antonio de la Peña.

9. A translation of Rubí's own journal was published by Jackson and Foster (1995); that of the expedition's engineer, Nicolás de Lafora, was published in the original Spanish by Alessio Robles (1939) and in English translation by Kinnaird (1958).

Using county survey maps from the Texas General Land Office, The Texas Department of Transportation identified land grants in which El Camino Real formed a grant boundary or was otherwise described. To aid in plotting routes on 7.5-minute maps and 1:100,000 scale USGS survey maps, the researchers also used early journals and explorers' accounts, identification of landmarks, and Spanish Colonial names, historic maps, aerial photographs, file searches, and onsite inspections of archeological and historic sites (Clark and McGraw 1991, 11–15).

A number of researchers have compiled additional data on route segments and sites related to El Camino Real. These researchers include James Corbin (Stephen F. Austin University), Pete Gregory and George Avery (Northwestern State University in Louisiana), W. C. Foster (Cuero, Texas), Tommy G. Johnson, (Natchitoches, Louisiana), and Jack Jackson (Austin, Texas).

In a 1981 study of "El Camino Real and the Great Migration Route," prepared by Mark Swanson of New World Research for Bovay Engineers, the 18th and early 19th century roads in Louisiana were examined. This study was based on area geography, contemporary travel narratives, and other primary sources, including original maps of the region and old plat and grant maps. This study identified and mapped known historic and prehistoric sites 5 miles on either side of the selected route. Swanson discusses Louisiana sections of the camino using a wide variety of maps, including the LaFon maps of 1806, the Darby map of 1816, and the Tanner map of 1820 (Swanson 1981, 20–4, 91–119).

Lawrence E. L'Herisson's 1981 thesis examined the evolution of the Texas Road and the subsequent settlement of the area between Natchitoches and the Sabine River. L'Herisson used oral histories, surveys, and land grant records to document segments of El Camino Real (L'Herisson 1981).