

Los Caminos del Rio National Heritage Corridor

The Lower Rio Grande is a large and diversified landscape, characterized by historical land uses and architecture, social traditions and ecosystems. A “layering” of successive periods can be experienced as you travel through the corridor. For example, remnant sabal palm grove forests can give a sense of the landscape as it was seen by early Spanish explorers in 1520; land surveys still reflect Spanish land distribution patterns of the mid-18th century in the form of *porciones* (long tracks of land perpendicular to the river); early ranching forts with walled compounds and *tróneras* (gun ports) still exists as the ore of some river communities as well as in isolated areas; military forts and battlefields related to the Mexican-American and U.S. Civil Wars, as well as sites related to Mexican political and revolutionary upheavals are dispersed throughout the region; 19th century river trade and the coming railroads spurred tremendous growth and development seen along the river; mechanized irrigation transformed the semi-arid landscape into today’s commercial and agricultural empire.

The U.S./Mexico “border” itself is a significant landscape feature and theme. Tejano festivals, interchange of Spanish and English languages, Tex-Mex cuisine, bullfighting, religious practices including saint’s days, cemetery decorations, and observations; Mariachi music, matachine dances, charreadas (Mexican-style rodeo), and traditional dress gives one a sense of being “on the border” – a land apart with its own customs and distinct identity.

The boundary given to Los Caminos de Rio has been defined by these cultural-geographic themes and characteristics. The Rio Grande/Rio Bravo is and has always been the lifeblood of the region. Therefore, the concentration of resources naturally lie within a narrow swathe along both sides of the river. Because Los Caminos de Rio Heritage Corridor is expected to have far reaching impact, the corridor boundary is expanded beyond the river itself and includes five Texas counties (Webb, Zapata, Starr, Hidalgo, and Cameron).

