

# **El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail**

As the train tracks traverse central Texas, we cross a 1000-mile historic corridor called El Camino Real de los Tejas. This “royal road” was established to connect a series of Spanish missions and posts along its length from Monclova, Mexico, across present-day Texas, and into what is now northwestern Louisiana. For 300 years the trail saw priests, soldiers and supplies move north and south along what had long been Indian trails and trade routes. Later, during the colonial period, settlers heading from Louisiana into Texas would use the same roads.

The road’s development had irreversible impacts on the native people of Texas and Louisiana. It linked unconnected cultural and linguistic groups, and served as an agent for cultural diffusion, biological exchange, and communication. As Spain struggled with France and England to gain control of North America, they built missions and presidios across this region to stake their claims.

Journals kept by early travelers contain a wealth of information about the indigenous people they encountered, as well as the landscape, topography, plants, and animals. The Spaniards assigned place names to rivers, crossings, and campsites, many of which are still in use today.

El Camino Real de los Tejas was designated by Congress as a National Historic Trail in 2004. The National Trails system currently consists of 30 trails of varying lengths, administered in partnership between federal, state and local agencies, along with non-profit trail organizations.

Visitors to El Camino Real can travel from Natchitoches, Louisiana, through the Texas Piney Woods and Hill Country, and into the arid lands of Old Mexico, enjoying historic cities such as San Antonio, Bastrop, Crockett, Alto, Nacogdoches, and San Augustine.

## **Source(s):**

<http://www.nps.gov/elte/index.htm>

<http://www.elcaminorealtx.com/>

<http://www.nps.gov/nts/>

## **Author(s):**

Written by Susan G. Scott, Lecturer in the Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences at Texas A&M University, as part of a National Park Service Trails and Rails project funded by Amtrak, 2009.