

Sanderson, TX and the Flood of 1965

Sitting half way between San Antonio and El Paso lies a place where time seems to have stood still, there are no traffic jams, crowds of busy people or coffee shops filled with patrons working intently on their laptops. Sanderson, Texas was founded in 1882. It was once known for being frequented by outlaws, gunmen, rustlers, and border bandits who would ride through the town while fleeing from the Mexican border and the law. Many who lived in Sanderson, Texas at the time feared outlaws such as Pancho Villa and the Mexican bandits who stole cattle from local ranchers. There were not enough Texas Rangers to defend the ranchers and their herds, so they struck a deal with the locals. If the ranchers would provide their own protection from the Mexican Bandits, the state would supply feed for the ranchers and their animals. The group of ranchers in Sanderson who agreed to these terms became known as the “River Riders,” since they patrolled lands near the Rio Grande River. The river sometimes brought other dangers.

The “Great Flood of 1965” challenged the town’s existence. On June 11, 1965 in the early morning hours a wall of rushing water came roaring into the town of Sanderson. Most residents were comfortably settled in their beds, unaware of the danger heading toward them. A torrential downpour caused the Rio Grande to rise above the rim of Sanderson Canyon and flood the town of Sanderson. Though the residents of Sanderson worked hard to help save one another, twenty-five people lost their lives and numerous others were injured. Many in the town lost everything they had and were determined that a disaster like this would not happen again. A study conducted by the U.S. Soil and Conservation Service called for the building of eleven dams that would protect the area from another tragedy like the one that occurred in 1965. Eleven dams were built around the community to protect the area in the event of another catastrophe. If

you look out the windows of the train you can see these dams; they appear at first as rolling hills, but if you look closer the dams become visible with their symmetric sides and regular spacing across the landscape. Sanderson has survived for over a hundred years off of its cattle and sheep production, but mainly the area has endured because of its passionate and determined residents.

Source(s):

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