

## **Gillespie County, Texas**

### **The Pinta Trail**

The Pinta Trail, which extended approximately 180 miles northwest from San Antonio to the site of Santa Cruz de San Saba Mission near Menard, has served as a transportation route through the [Texas] Hill Country from the time of the Plains Indians to the present. Indians, Spanish explorers, Mexicans, German immigrants, Forty-niners, and United States soldiers used this trail. There is little surviving physical evidence of the trail, however. The orientation of Main Street in Fredericksburg and the house arrangement in the Cain City area provide some clues to the location. Natural geographic features such as river bends and Cain City Mountain Pass in Gillespie County serve as directional indicators. Also, the Puerta Pinta, or Paint Mountain Pass, located northwest of San Antonio near the three branches of the Salado River headwaters, was a prominent landmark on an 1829 Mexican map.

Oral tradition has provided a major source for trail identification. Benjamin L. Enderle, Gillespie County surveyor for more than sixty years, heard about the Pinta Trail from local ranchers and passed on the story to his high school students and friends. In addition, field notes of Republic of Texas land-grant surveys and county maps noted the trail location. Historic narratives from scientists, explorers, and Texas Rangers provided accounts of trail use.

The name of the Pinta Trail, with variants Pinto, Pintas, Pintos, and Pientas Trail and Paint Road, was derived from Spanish pinto, "painted." B. L. Enderle referred to the route as the Pinta Pony Trail, named for the small calico pony used by the Plains Indians. The origin of the route was attributed to the historic Plains Indians, mainly the Apache and Comanche peoples. Spanish expeditions in the Hill Country and military campaigns against the Lipan Apaches dating from 1732 to 1756 suggested the use of the trail. Later expeditions utilized this transportation route between San Saba Mission, founded in 1757 on the San Saba River, and San Antonio de Bexar.

Ferdinand von Roemer, a German naturalist who explored the Hill Country from 1845 to 1847, described the Pinta Trail as an old Indian trail and related its use by German immigrants, especially teamsters.

A battle between the Texas Rangers and the Comanches occurred at the trail crossing of the Guadalupe River in Kendall County, where John

Coffee Hays and a company of Texas Rangers defeated Yellow Wolf and his warriors in 1844. The year 1849 marked the discovery of gold in California, and an extensive exploration of the state of Texas by the United States government was initiated to locate possible wagon routes from San Antonio to Chihuahua via El Paso. Although the Pinta Trail was traveled by the Forty-niners and the government troops, the road to El Paso from Corpus Christi was also used by troops and merchant trains. Nevertheless, the Pinta Trail continued to be used by stagecoach, mail, and freight lines from 1858 to 1880.

The development of the railroads in the late 1880s and early 1900s signaled the decline of intensive use of the Pinta Trail. The Kerrville branch of the San Antonio and Aransas Pass Railway was laid down directly west of the trail from San Antonio to Cibolo Creek. The Fredericksburg and Northern Railway, completed in 1913, paralleled the Pinta Trail in southern Gillespie County and northern Kendall County. At present, highway systems also parallel the Pinta Trail. From San Antonio, U.S. Highway 87 and Interstate 10 follow the trail to Boerne, Ranch Road 1376 continues along the trail through Sisterdale, U.S. Highway 290 parallels the route from Cain City to Fredericksburg. U.S. 87 proceeds along the trail through Cherry Spring and Mason, and State Highway 29 follows the Pinta Trail from Mason to Menard. The Pinta Trail is thus a cultural landmark that was transformed from a primitive trail to an engineered highway.

[Information taken from: A. B. Bender, "Opening Routes Across West Texas, 1848-1850," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 37 (October 1933); cont. as "The Texas Frontier, 1848-1861: Government Explorations in Texas, 1851-1860," *ibid.* 38 (October 1934), Philip St. George Cooke et al., *Exploring Southwestern Trails, 1846-1854*, ed. Ralph P. Bieber and Averam P. Bender (Glendale, California: Clark, 1938; rpt., Philadelphia: Porcupine, 1974). Robert H. Thornhoff, *San Antonio Stage Lines, 1846-1881* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1971). Robert S. Weddle, *The San Saba Mission* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964). J. W. Wilbarger, *Indian Depredations in Texas* (Austin: Hutchings, 1889; rpt., Austin: State House, 1985); written by Nina L. Nixon; Submitted by Jimmy Davis]

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