

## Early Travellers Through Wilson County

In the early 1700's, once Spain and France had settled their political differences in Europe and America, Spain began to investigate cost-reduction measures involving their remote presidios in far away places like Texas. Viceroy Juan de Acuña in Mexico City accommodated these "budget cut" desires by appointing Pedro de Rivera y Villalón to inspect the presidios of New Spain's northern frontier. Pedro de Rivera y Villalón was given the duty of travelling from the western edge of California to the most eastern reach of New Spain in Louisiana. The Viceroy instructed Rivera to draw a map of the entire region and assigned engineer Francisco Barreiro to assist in this task. He was also provided him with three thousand pages of documents concerning the frontier and many of the problems it faced. Rivera was to report back his findings and suggest possible savings to be instituted at each presidio.

Pedro de Rivera y Villalón travelled by horseback and reached Texas in the summer of 1727. He planned to visit the presidios of La Bahia, East Texas and Los Adaes. In 1728, he returned to Mexico City with recommendations for the Viceroy. Later, in 1736, Rivera published a diary based on the records he kept during the expedition.

By August of 1727, he completed visiting the presidios west of the Rio Grande River, the expedition then headed for San Antonio. On August 18<sup>th</sup>, 1727, Rivera left the modern-day city and headed east-northeast to the presidio at Adaes. The expedition arrived at Los Adaes on September 15<sup>th</sup>, 1727 and was the first presidio to be inspected in Texas. On September 26<sup>th</sup>, he left Los Adaes and began his return to San Antonio—he followed the same routes and used the same campsites as before. After five days of travel, Rivera arrived in San Antonio on the 31<sup>st</sup> of September. Allowing his horses to rest for three days, Pedro de Rivera y Villalón departed for the La Bahia presidio. After travelling four leagues (11.184 miles) he crossed the Salado Creek in south Bexar County and continued for another eleven leagues (30.756 miles) that day. A camp was constructed at the well-known campsite "El Aguila" close to the junction of the Eagle and Calaveras Creeks.

The next day (November 4<sup>th</sup>) the group travelled east-southeast for nine leagues (25.164 miles) through level land with woods of oak, mesquite and walnut trees. After crossing the Cibolo Creek, the expedition established camp on the eastern side of the stream. On November 5<sup>th</sup> (1727), Rivera headed east; he travelled 6 leagues through very similar terrain as the previous day. The evening campsite was set up on the west side of the Ecletto Creek, this being their last stop in Wilson County. At this site water was not very plentiful; it could only be found in the deepest pools of the creek.

Travel continued on the 6<sup>th</sup> of November—the party ventured 6 leagues (16.776 miles) east through alike landscapes, but with less brush and fewer trees than the past two days, and grass-covered hills. In the evening, the camp was set up in Gonzales County on the west side of a small stream feeding into the Sandies Creek.

Starting in the same direction as the previous day, Rivera travelled for 11 leagues (30.756 miles) through almost identical lands. After journeying approximately five leagues (13.98 miles) the group reached the Guadalupe River and a route was followed along the west side of the river. After the river's junction with Sandies Creek in De Witt County, Rivera constructed camp for the evening.

On November 8<sup>th</sup>, the expedition continued to head east-southeast for 9 leagues (25.164 miles) along the western embankment of the Guadalupe. Another three leagues later, the group forded the river at a crossing near the city of Cuero. They then continued along the eastern side of the river until reaching the La Bahia presidio.

After the inspection of the presidio was completed, Pedro de Rivera y Villalón began the return to San Antonio on the 27<sup>th</sup> of November. He and the soldiers who accompanied him used the same campsites and route as before. The entire return journey encompassed five days of travel covering 54 leagues (approximately 150.984 miles).

In the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century, Apache and Comanche Indians led many excursions into the New Spain area of Texas. This increased hostility between the two entities and the current cost of supporting the missions concerned the Spanish King. To better protect the New Spain Territory and its people, the Spanish Government decided to change its method of support. The presidios were to address the Indian attacks more aggressively and to revise their operating systems as based on the current regulations. Hopefully, these changes would make the presidios more effective and in turn reduce the cost to the Spanish government. To implement these changes, King Charles III appointed

Marques de Rubi in 1765 to visit all the presidios on the New Spain northern frontier. This would be the first such review of their activities since Rivera's inspection some forty years earlier. Included in his responsibilities would be to propose changes to the King of Spain, such as locations and operating procedures to better protect the citizens of New Spain and to lower the operating costs for the government.

Rubi reached the San Antonio presidio on August 8, 1767 after completing all his other visits to the presidios west and north of the Rio Grande River. On August 25, 1767, he resumed his assigned inspections of the Spanish facilities primarily in the northeastern part of New Spain. He started by going to the presidios in the Las Adaes area. He left San Antonio proceeding down along the banks of the San Antonio River to visit missions located along the river margins. After leaving Mission Espada, which is approximately six leagues from the Alamo, he traveled downstream another league where he crossed Salado Creek. At this time there wasn't much water in the creek, so he moved on, continuing southward. Upon reaching the intersection of the Calaveras and Eagle Creeks, he reviewed a previously established camping area here. He continued marching south another three leagues through sandy soil with an abundance of many trees and bushes, with a terrain of gentle hills. He then returned to the San Antonio River where

he camped overnight on the riverbanks at an area called Los Chayopines.

On August 26, he left camp, going southeast for 15 leagues. The scenery was very similar to the day before. After six more leagues they arrived at a large pond named Charco de Marcelina. Four leagues later, they arrived at the Cibolo River. After leaving the Cibolo and heading another five leagues southeast, they passed through gentle hills full of trees and wild life. This daytrip ended at the Ecletto Creek and here he camped on its banks for the night.

On August 27, the group began heading northeast fourteen leagues. The terrain was nothing more than a few gentle hills and scattered trees. About halfway, they ran into a junction of three streams including Coleto Creek and the Guadalupe River. The daily march ended after they arrived at the Guadalupe River where they set up their campsite. From here the river ran northwest to the southeast until reaches the Gulf of Mexico. This river crossing has had many different names such as "El Gobernador", Vado del Gobernador" and "Vado de Adarsenous". It is located near present day Cuero, Texas.

On August 28<sup>th</sup>, Rubi's party headed northeast to Adaes. After inspecting the presidios in that area, they returned to this junction point on October 28<sup>th</sup> and took the third route to the Presidio de la Bahia. Here he camped about 2 leagues below the ford, then crossed the Guadalupe River. The assistance of hand made canoes was needed, as the river was very difficult to cross due to high water conditions. On October 29<sup>th</sup>, he continued down river searching for another way to cross the Guadalupe River.

On October 30<sup>th</sup>, a suitable crossing of the river was located. After crossing the river the group marched for a short distance searching for the Presidio Road. From there on, they traveled south along the road and crossed Coleto Creek.

On October 31, still heading south, the group marched another 7 leagues until it reached the junction of the San Antonio River with the Guadalupe River. Rubi stopped here for several days to inspect La Bahia Presidio.

On November 12<sup>th</sup>, Rubi and his men left La Bahia to travel to Laredo and then move on to Mexico City, inspecting other presidios along the way. He arrived in Mexico City at the end of the year, completing his assigned inspection trip.