

A View Through History
With Kyle Schiller Barrett
Milam County Historical Museum Director

Museum Exhibit Highlights Plants Along El Camino Real

The Milam County Historical Museum in Cameron is proud to currently have on display an exhibit featuring the plant life along the El Camino Real de los Tejas Historic Trail. This informative exhibit is presented by the local Rancheria Grande Chapter of the El Camino de los Tejas National Historic Trail Association. The exhibit highlights the wildflowers and other plants that have blanketed our area of Texas for centuries.

The El Camino Real Trail criss-crosses Milam County and is now designated a National Historic Landmark. The trail's history dates to the 1700's, when Spanish Explorers and Native Americans both used the pathway to travel from Mexico to Eastern Texas and Northwestern Louisiana.

In modern times, we can only imagine what it would have been like to travel this route through present-day Central Texas. Spanish Explorers and Indians, Catholic Missionaries/Priests and Texas Settlers all saw this land's flora and fauna long before any of us. Perhaps they marveled at the beautiful wildflowers and plants that grow in today's Milam County. In addition, research has also shown that many of these plants provide early inhabitants with medicines, dyes, teas, lotions, and in some cases even food.

During the Spring and Summer months of 1716, Captain Domingo Ramon led an expedition into the new Spanish territory. Their task was to establish a road for both travel and trade from Mexico through the vast wilderness of Texas. This became the El Camino Real or The Royal (King's) Road.

The El Camino Real Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalist program of Milam County has organized a group project to identify the various wildflowers that grow along a segment of Captain Ramon's Road. This part of the El Camino Trail crosses Milam County and relates to the historical importance of Sugarloaf Mountain and the Little River Basin. The plants that have been identified in this area are those which are on display through October at the MCHM. Note, that the ecosystems, soils, and plant species change as you travel across Milam County, from the Blackland Prairies waxy soil in the west to the much sandier soils of the Post Oak Savannah in the east. Never the less this recent exhibit contains an excellent sampling of the plant life of our area.

A description of the traveling plant display as given by Joyce Conner of the local Rancheria Grande Chapter of El Camino Real de los Tejas Association (ElCaT for short) reads as follows: Texas Master Naturalists in the El Camino Real Chapter have been collaborating for several years with the S. M. Tracy Herbarium located at Texas A&M, College Station. As volunteers, they have helped identify, photograph, collect, and mount plants found along El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail in Milam County. Dale Kruse, Curator of the Herbarium, and Monique Reed, retired Biologist at Texas A&M, provided expertise for this group of volunteers.

In 2017, the El Camino Real Chapter donated 40 of their mounted plant specimens that were collected near the Sugarloaf Mountain Bride. They were given to Steven Gonzales, Director of ElCaT, as a

traveling exhibit. Master Naturalists: S. Berger, L. J. Conn, J. Conner, S. Dworaczyk, C. Lewis, D. Lewis, B. Moore, and N. Webber collected the donated plants.

Texas Master Naturalists are volunteers who provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities for the State of Texas. The Master Naturalists are sponsored by Texas Parks and Wildlife and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Services. Information about El Camino Real Chapter can be found online at <http://txmn.org/elcamino/>.

This traveling plant exhibit can be seen Thursday-Saturday, from 10am to 3pm at the Milam County Historical Museum. The exhibit will be on display through October 14, 2023. Come by the museum located at 112 West 1st Street in downtown Cameron and pick up a complementary "Wildflowers of Milam County, Texas: Along the El Camino Real Trail" brochure. Also available are Trail Association pamphlets and maps. Joyce Conner and Paula Sisco of the local Rancheria Grande Chapter (ElCaT), with help from Keri Harris, Kathy Barrett, Kyle Barrett, and museum volunteers are responsible for setting up this display. The museum director would also like to thank Paula Sisco and Joyce Conner for their contributions and information for this article. The MCHM appreciates the various organizations who had a part in bring this educational exhibit to the museum.

If you would like more information about El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail Association, go to <http://www.elcaminorealdelostejas.org/>.