

Fort Davis

National Historic Site

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



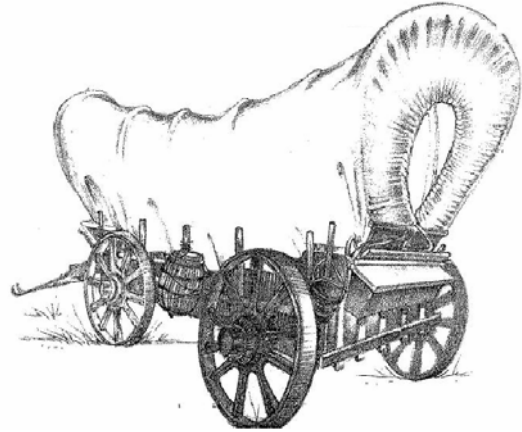
Curriculum Materials Grades 6-8

Student Activities: Traveling the San Antonio-El Paso Road

TRAVELING THE SAN ANTONIO – EL PASO ROAD

Following the Mexican War, interest in establishing a road through the vast 600-mile rugged wilderness of western Texas from San Antonio to El Paso materialized. This interest heightened with the news that gold had been discovered in California!

In 1849, two separate expeditions set out to find such a route. One expedition came through the area where Fort Davis would later be established, while the other followed a more northerly path through the Guadalupe Mountains. The more southerly route became known as the Lower Road, while the one close to the New Mexico border was referred to as the Upper Road. These two roads soon became the two major routes of travel across western Texas.



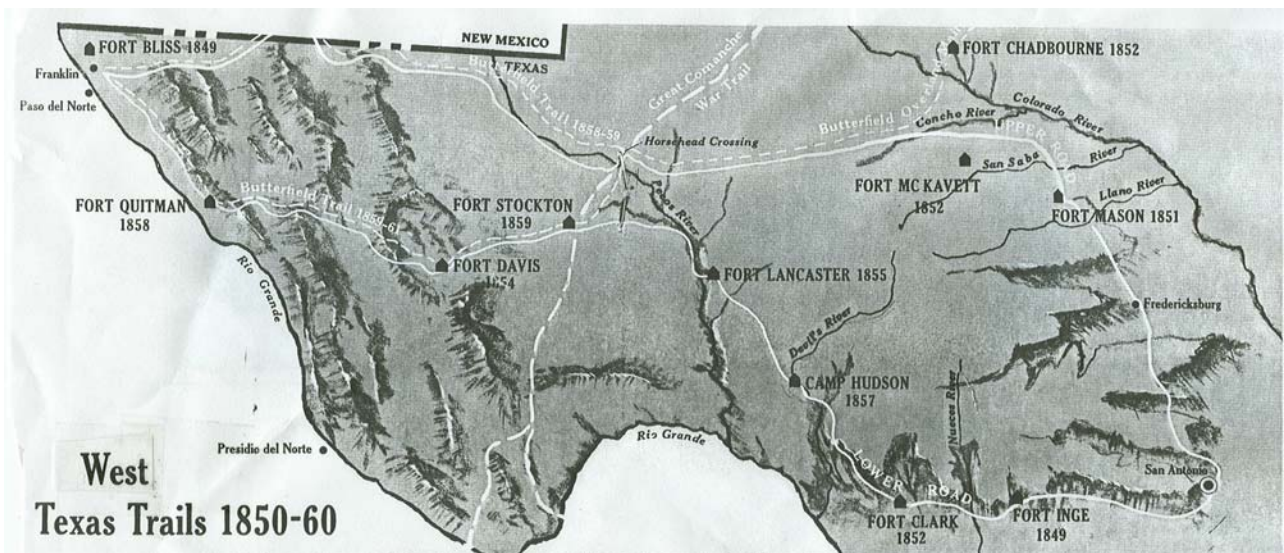
Within the year, gold seekers by the thousands were traveling the routes, but the Lower Road, because of its more reliable water sources, quickly became the preferred route. In 1854, Fort Davis was established to guard the lower segment of the San Antonio–El Paso Road through the Trans-Pecos area of western Texas.

Mail carriers, freighters, and pioneers seeking gold in California and a new life in the West made the journey through the region. From within just a few miles of San Antonio all the way to El Paso, they traveled in constant fear of attack by Apache, Kiowa, and Comanche warriors who were raiding the villages of northern Mexico. They came on horseback and mule, in covered wagons and stage coaches, or they just walked. The route was harsh and the weather often unbearable. Temperatures of over 100 degrees prevailed during the summer months, while cold winds, snow and ice were not uncommon during the winter.

The San Antonio-El Paso Road, like all of the “overland” trails west, had its share of problems. Disease and accidents brought sudden death. The route was marked by rocky canyons, dangerous water crossings, and the graves of those who did not survive the trip. Harriet Bunyard was nineteen and unmarried when she traveled with her parents, three brothers, and two sisters in a wagon train from eastern Texas to California. Their train consisted of eighteen wagons and a herd of cattle. The train traveled about fifteen miles a day.

On June 29, 1869, the wagon train came through Fort Davis and Harriet wrote: “Passed through Fort Davis. It is a pretty little place by the side of the mountains. The valley is wide here and the mountains small. Here are found vegetables. Very high, roasting ears one dollar and 50

cents per dozen, butter one dollar per pound, eggs the same per dozen. This is a beautiful valley. We have a delightful camping place tonight. There is such a nice spring here and splendid water in abundance running out of the mountains. . . . There are 400 soldiers here. They played their band as we passed the fort.”



ACTIVITY: Picture yourself on a trip along the Lower Road.

1. The year is 1869. How would you feel about moving in a wagon across the country to a place you knew nothing about?
2. Your parents tell you that you can take **only five** personal items. What would you choose to take?
3. Imagine traveling all day and only making fifteen miles per day! As you travel, what are some questions you might ask the soldiers who live in this part of Texas?
4. What new things are you seeing that are different from where you lived?
5. Why is it important to have the forts along the trail?

ACTIVITY: Looking at the “Texas Trails 1850-60” map and using a Texas map or Texas Almanac, answer the following questions:

1. Which fort is still an active military base today?
2. What town is near Fort Clark?
3. What towns (three) are near Fort Lancaster?
4. Name three forts are now in the cities/towns named for them?
5. What interstate highway partially follows the route of the Lower Road?
6. If you were a pioneer or soldier, why would it be important to know where springs, water holes, creeks, or rivers were?