

American Canal Society Canal Index

CANAL Espada Acequia & Aqueduct, San Antonio		STATUS Operating		ACS		
STATE/PROVINCE: Texas				HAER		
COUNTIES: In San Antonio		ENLARGEMENTS 1 2 3 4	DATES IN USE: 1731-45+	LENGTH CANAL SLACKWATER TOTAL		LIFT LOCKS No./ SIZE
LOCATION (Endpoints of Canal): San Antonio River to Mission San Francisco de la Espada.				4 (Not navigated)		None
TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS: Southton TX 7½'						
HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:						

Of special interest near San Antonio is the ESPADA ACEQUIA (a-CE-kya) which after more than 200 years is still carrying water for 4 mi. from the San Antonio River to the Mission San Francisco de la Espada, crossing Piedras Creek on a famous aqueduct. Take Loop 13 on the southern outskirts of San Antonio, turn S immediately west of the bridge over the San Antonio River, and stop at the dam. The smaller one on the R is Espada Dam, built of flagstones which over the years have been cemented together by calcium deposition from the water. There is no trail at present along the acequia, or canal, from the dam. Drive across the river on the low-water bridge and follow it S to the next road (Ashley); then R to re-cross the river and then the acequia, then L down Espada Road a few yards to the ESPADA AQUEDUCT (UTM 14.552330. 3244730, Southton TX). This was built so well two and a half centuries ago that one can still walk across the 3-arched stone structure, clearly one of the most important early water engineering structures in North America. All of the ace-

quias around San Antonio have been declared a National Historic Civil Engineering Landmark by the ASCE, and the whole Espada Acequia has been placed on the National Register. A useful study of the preservation of the Espada Aqueduct, by David Hoffman, was published in the March 1977 issue of the newsletter of the Texas Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians (P.O. Box 12473, Capitol Station, Austin TX 78711). For an archeological report on the San Antonio mission acequias see Archaeological Survey Report 17 on the Mission Parkway (1976, out-of-print) by the Texas Historical Commission. Survey Report 19, on an excavation of the ACEQUIA MADRE is HemisFair Plaza is still available at \$2 from them at P.O. Box 12276 Capitol Station, Austin TX 78711. A section of this acequia, buried since the 1890's, is now visible, complete with an historic marker. Mardith Schuetz, archaeologist on the project, speculates that these buried stone-lined acequias may have been the source of the legends of "escape tunnels" from the Texas missions!

The Espada Acequia is just one of the many irrigation and water supply canals covered in WATER FOR THE SOUTHWEST (206 pp., 1973) available at \$5 ppd. from the American Society of Civil Engineers, 345 E. 47th St., N.Y., NY 10017. This is part of the work of the History of Engineering Program, Box 4089, Texas Tech University, Lubbock TX 79409. Such canals provide good material for comparative canal engineering studies - the basic engineering problems are the same as for navigation canals - and they also provide good material for linear parks, trails and open space preservation in parts of the country not endowed with proper historic navigation canals. See "Future Canal Parks?" in the February 1979 AMERICAN CANALS.

From THE AMERICAN CANAL GUIDE Part 3, p.15 (1979)

NAMES & ADDRESSES OF GROUPS CONCERNED WITH CANALS PRESERVATION/RESTORATION:

San Antonio Conservation Society, 511 Villita E., San Antonio, TX 78205.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY:

See above; also AMERICAN CANALS 17:5 (May 1976), and February 1979.

UNPUBLISHED RECORDS, PHOTOS, DRAWINGS (CEHR, HAER, HABS, Local or Regional Historical Societies, Libraries, etc.):

EXISTING OR RECOMMENDED LANDMARK STATUS (CEHR, National Register, etc.):

Although not a navigation structure, the aqueduct is one of the most important water-related structures in North America.

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RETURN TO: CANAL INDEX COMMITTEE, c/o P.H. STOTT, HAINES ROAD, MOUNT KISCO, NY 10549