

First Spanish Expedition Descriptions of Bottomless State Park Area

By Michael Bilbo, La Sociedad de la Entrada

Two Spanish expeditions first documented the area and conditions along the Pecos above, at and below Bottomless Lakes State Park. The Expedition of Antonio de Espejo, 1582-83, was a military party surveying for mineral resources, traveling south on the Pecos River from Pecos Pueblo. That of Gaspar Castano de Sosa, 1590-91, was an illegal colonial expedition, traveling north on the Pecos River following Espejo's account, and possibly other unpublished accounts from slavers (Schroeder, 1965). The De Sosa account was possibly written by the expedition secretary, Andres Perez de Verlanga, describing the journey from Almaden to the Rio Grande - Pecos River confluence to Pecos Pueblo and return. The Espejo account is found in a journal by Diego Perez de Luxan. Descriptions by these chroniclers indicated that both expeditions camped within three miles of Park Headquarters.

The Spanish were very good with their mileage, and chronicler Luxan of the Espejo party in particular with excellent, identifiable landscape and landmark descriptions as they traveled on the Pecos River south from Pecos Pueblo. A league is about three miles. Espejo's small party was averaging six leagues per day, as much as possible over smooth terrain and avoiding the many oxbows characteristic of that river. In mapping the route on BLM 1:100,000 surface management maps, Luxan's distance and landmarks - reached or departed from - seem to be pretty accurate.

“We left this place (approximate center of Bitter Lakes National Wildlife Refuge) on the twenty-fourth of the month (July, 1583) and traveled three leagues (9 miles) through many cienegas (grassy wetlands or meadows) that we found on our way. We named this place (their new camp) El Ancon de la Laguna, because a lagoon formed a bay on this river.” (Hammond and Rey 1967: 122)

De Sosa's narrative is fairly accurate with landmarks also suitably described as his colonial expedition traveled north from the Carlsbad vicinity. De Sosa described camping at an abandoned rancheria (Indian village) one-half league or about 1½ miles south of the Hondo and Pecos river confluence (Hammond and Rey 1966: 262). Both camped in about the same location, near the northmost lake, Lazy Lagoon, Bottomless Lakes State Park, which approximates Espejo's description and mileage from Pecos Pueblo.

Lazy Lagoon is one of several artesian sinkholes that the Spanish apparently did not visit as there are no expedition accounts of these singular unique features. The current lagoon is much reduced from the feature described by Luxan, but a broad, dry depression of about 200 acres between Lazy Lagoon and the Pecos, old river channels, active oxbow lakes, and numerous cienegas remain quite evident. The described embayment is about 2½ miles northwest of Park Headquarters.

Hammond, George Peter and Agapito Rey

1966 *The Rediscovery of New Mexico, 1580-1594, The Explorations of Chumascado, Espejo, Castano de Sosa, Morlete, and Leyva de Bonilla and Humana.* University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque.

1967 *Expedition Into New Mexico Made by Antonio de Espejo, 1582-1583, as Revealed in the Journal of Diego Perez de Luxan, A Member of the Party.* Arno Press, New York.

Schroeder, Albert H. and Dan H. Matson

1965 *A Colony on the Move; Gaspar Castano de Sosa's Journal, 1590-1591.* School of American Research, Santa Fe, New Mexico.