

Stop 14 – Rancho de las Cabras

Through this west gate, next to the chapel, the *vaqueros* or cowboys returned from Mission San Francisco de la Espada's ranch, *Rancho de las Cabras*. Each week vaqueros drove six or seven longhorn -along with goats and sheep - through treacherous grasslands plagued by the fierce Lipan Apache (drums and rattle in background). They brought this meat on the hoof to feed as many as 270 mission residents. A longhorn not only provided meat but its tallow or fat was used to make candles and soap. Its hide was tanned for trade. Even the bones were boiled so the marrow could be consumed.

Only the most trusted native vaqueros and their families lived at Rancho de las Cabras, or goat ranch. In 1762 a visiting priest observed: "There is a ranch on which stands a stone house with all needed furniture for families who live there and take care of [the animals]." In 1762, an inventory of more than 5,000 animals added to the mission's wealth – which was mainly livestock.

The tools of today's cowboy or buckaroo are those of the Spanish *vaquero*. The cowboy's chaps are *chaparejos*, leather pants to protect the legs; the *lariat*, a woven rawhide rope, is (pause) *la reata* to the *vaquero*; lasso, a variant of the Spanish *lazo*, and of course the *rodeo*, Spanish for a cattle roundup. Even the word buckaroo is the Anglo version of *vaquero*.

Each Spanish colonial mission maintained its own working *rancho*. It was the model for the thriving ranches of twenty first century Texas. You may visit the 99 acre parcel of this ranch - 23 miles south in present day Floresville. National Park Service rangers lead tours on the first Saturday of each month. For more information, contact 210-932-1001.