

Stop 16 – Espada Aqueduct

Standing before the arches of the Espada Aqueduct you are viewing a two-century old life giver. An aqueduct is a bridge that carries water over a gap. This gap was formed by Piedras Creek, also called Six-Mile Creek. The Espada Aqueduct was built between 1731 and 1745 and today still carries the waters of the Espada Acequia to farm lands and to Mission Espada downstream. For more than 150 years San Antonio depended on a medieval system of acequias, or irrigation channels, to deliver water to homes and croplands.

The Aqueduct does show its age now. If you look closely at the random rubble masonry and lime mortar that forms Espada Aqueduct you get a first-hand feel not only for its age but for the threats to its structure. Weathering, leaks, vandalism, and invasive vegetation constantly undercut the aqueduct's walls. But marvel at this instead -- the engineering triumph you see before you is the only 18th Century Spanish aqueduct in the entire United States to remain fully functional. This significance placed the Aqueduct on the National Register of Historic Landmarks as of 1964.

Take yourself back in time to fully appreciate what you are seeing. Examine the placement of the hand-carved stones in the arched design. Measure the thickness and width of the base. Imagine the labor expended in creating this structure using primitive tools. The water flowing over the aqueduct is diverted from the San Antonio River at Espada Dam. The Dam is about a miles and a half upriver of where you are at the aqueduct. You can visit the dam by turning right out of the parking lot and following the brown signs to Espada Dam. Or walk the hike and bike trail out of the back of the parking lot and uphill to the river, then turn left and follow the trail along to the dam.