

Stop 17 – Espada Dam

The Espada Dam has been described as one of the most picturesque and historic locations along the Mission Trail. Today's functioning dam is one of five dams, several aqueducts, and 55 miles of irrigation ditches that formed the Spanish colonial mission acequia system.

The dams of the mission *acequia* system functioned by diverting the water, not impounding it or storing it like most modern dams. This weir dam, built in a carefully selected curve along the San Antonio River raised the water level enough to channel some of the water into a secondary ditch. This ditch, known as the *acequia madre* or mother ditch, flowed from the main river channel to mission lands downstream. By the 1740s the dam you see today spanned 300 feet across the San Antonio River. Natives dug and stacked large river cobbles, using lime and caliche mortar, to form the structure. A large part of the dam was destroyed during the 1950s construction of the wide, flood-control channel you see as today's river.

During the 17 and 1800s river water was shared by mission, presidio, and civilian residents. Much like today, water was a highly regulated resource. A *mayordomo* managed the water system. He controlled the flow and release of water for each *acequia madre*. Today's farmers still rely on the water that spills over Espada Dam into Espada Acequia and flows over Espada Aqueduct. San Antonio still appoints a *mayordomo* to monitor the use of this water. Espada Dam is located in Acequia Park between Mission San Jose and Mission San Juan. Look for it along the hike and bike trail.