

Stop 18 – Hike and Bike Trail

More than 250 years ago, soldiers, missionaries, and natives followed the meandering San Antonio River to travel between the five Spanish colonial missions. Today's nine mile mission trail extends from the Alamo, the first mission established in the area, to Mission Espada. From Aqueduct Park take the cement path at the back of the parking lot and uphill to the mission trail. Go right for Mission Espada or left for the others. Now imagine you're a messenger in 1762. Frey Jose Maria Alegre, the missionary at Espada, sends you to Mission San Jose with a supply list. You and your mule would roughly ride the same river route traveled today.

In 1762 a supply messenger might have to contend with the fierce Lipan Apache or the Comanche along this route. Today a foot or bike traveler between the Alamo and Mission San Jose contends with motor vehicles. If you want to avoid vehicle traffic, take the trail between San Jose and Espada. This segment is just for walkers and bikers. But always remember to take water.

The river you see today along the mission trail does not have the same gentle curves and lush vegetation it had in the 1700s. River flooding has always been a problem. In the 1950s the US Army Corps of Engineers widened and straightened the river. Today, a river restoration project is planting thousands of native trees, grasses, shrubs, and flowers along the river and restoring natural meandering curves.

Today's river walk trails offer a unique experience compared with that of villagers, natives, and missionaries of the 1700s. Enjoy the trails along this natural treasure, the San Antonio River.