

Stop 29 – San Jose Grist Mill

Most days the reconstructed San Jose gristmill operates as it did in 1794 when we believed it was first built. The grinding stones in the mill today were discovered on the mission grounds, and are believed to be the ones used during Spanish Colonial times.

Both corn and wheat were grown in the fields outside the mission walls. But experts believe that this mill was only used to grind wheat kernels into flour. Although corn is a native plant of the Americas, Indians of the San Antonio River area didn't eat much corn. Corn has to be cultivated. The hunter-gatherers who eventually came to live in the missions didn't plant and grow crops until the Spanish taught them to be farmers.

Examine the workings of the mill. The same irrigation ditches called, *acequias*, that brought water from the San Antonio River to the fields, powered the San Jose gristmill. You'll see that the two grinding stones do not actually touch each other and only the top stone turns. The distance between the two stones and speed of the rotation, is controlled by the miller. The distance between the two stones determines the coarseness or fineness of the milled grain. If the stones touch, they will be damaged. If the top stone goes too fast the grain would be burned spoiling the flour. Wheat flour can be explosive, so the skill of the miller is critical in keeping the stones level and the proper distance from each other.

The mill was reconstructed in the 1930s but not operational again until 2001. Masons and carpenters employed by the National Park Service and skilled in historic preservation pieced together the machinery and power mechanism in a project funded by Los Compadres, the park's friends group. On a rainy day in August 2001, President George W. Bush rededicated the historic mill, and what is believed to be the oldest operating mill in Texas has been grinding for visitors ever since.