



In Search of El dorado

A daily journal of my travels and adventures in my.....Search for Eldorado

Hello to Family & Friends



The Museum of the Coastal Bend is my objective for today.



But my first stop of the day is the weekly Victoria Farmer's Market. I am hoping to find some sort of meat to have with my salads. This time of year there are not a large number of vendors. I saw jams & jellies, pickles, baked goods, veggies, iron work and a few other items. But I found some homemade polish sausage, which incidentally, is cooking right now as I type this paragraph, and putting an enticing aroma into the RV.

I will warn you right here, there is a lot of reading in this newsletter. This is by far the best museum, information wise, so far. Of course Victoria is the largest city so far. But here we get the complete story of La Salle's voyage, a more complete account of the *La Belle*, and what happens with the Spanish afterwards. Look at it this way, I shouldn't have to take any more photos of La Salle's voyage at the remaining museums. It is very interesting though. Oops, smoke alarm, gotta go. I'm back. Nothing to worry about. I think it was just the humidity from the polish. Not bad. Not as good as back home.

The Trek Across the Atlantic La Salle and the Wreck of *La Belle*

Robert Cavalier, Sieur de La Salle set out with his expedition from France on July 24, 1684 for the New World aboard four ships. His goal was to find the Mississippi River, establish a permanent settlement, and open the continent to France for trading.

After crossing the Atlantic Ocean and reaching the Caribbean, one ship was taken by Spanish privateers. When the expedition stopped at Petit Goave (in present-day Haiti), they gained some new crewmembers – pirates.

Life didn't stop for the colonists during the trip. They slept on the cargo, ate a diet consisting almost entirely of salt fish and bread, and one couple even added to their family: Isabelle and Lucien Talon had a son named Robert at sea.

In late February 1685, six months after leaving France, the colonists had reached what they assumed to be the western edge of the Mississippi delta, where the best map available showed it.

La Salle missed the mouth of the Mississippi River and instead landed off the coast of Texas. With only 180 of the original 300 colonists left, he decided to build a temporary camp. During its construction he led numerous forays to search for the Mississippi where he planned to establish a permanent site. Before one search, La Salle put the colony's remaining supplies on their last ship, *La Belle*. He ordered the ship's captain to await his return in the bay.

When the expedition of about 400 people arrived in Texas, they set out looking for the Mississippi River. Almost immediately, their supply ship *l'Amable* sank. Then their warship escort *Joly* returned to France, leaving only the small ship *La Belle*. In the meantime, they established a settlement on Garcitas Creek, less than 20 miles from where you stand now. A larger building was built with wood from *l'Amable*, and some small shelters were built for the colonists. Meanwhile, La Salle and some of the colonists were exploring Texas, looking for the Mississippi River and the Spanish.

A storm broke out while the ship was anchored in the bay, causing *La Belle* to run aground along the Matagorda Peninsula. Of the 27 people onboard *La Belle* when it wrecked only 6 survived.

Before The Bow

Movies show indigenous people hunting with bows and arrows. But before the bow and arrow came to Texas, people still had to hunt. What did they use?

The people who lived in the Coastal Bend used a throwing stick called an atlatl. The word atlatl is a Nahuatl word. Nahuatl is the language of the people in central Mexico. We don't know what the Coastal Bend people called this tool, since we don't have written records from them. Whatever they called it, it was an extremely effective tool. A long dart (which looks like a spear) can be thrown a lot farther and faster with an atlatl than by hand. Because the atlatl is essentially a lever that extends the length of your arm, an atlatl can deliver 200 times as much power and six times the range as a dart thrown by hand. If you'd like to try throwing one for yourself, ask at the museum's front desk!

Thousands and thousands of years ago, mammoths and mastodons roamed this area. The people who lived here hunted them, and they used the atlatl to do it.

Throwing these darts can be hard work, and hard on the joints. Skeletons have been found with the sort of injuries that are found on modern tennis players, which come from over-using the arm joints. Many very old skeletons even show signs of elbow arthritis from too much atlatling!

That so called 'dart' is about 5 feet long. In the box lower left are fossilized mammoth and mastodon teeth.



The point to the right was named by archaeologists who work in this museum's archaeology lab. They called it the Anaqua point, named after the anaqua trees that grow in this area. Can you find it anywhere in the exhibit?

On a windy February day in 1686, yet another disaster befell the struggling French colony. A windstorm swept across Matagorda Bay and dragged their only remaining ship, *La Belle*, across the bay. The ship had been low on water, and the captain had sent the five best sailors ashore to look for more. The wind increased and the sailors were unable to return to the ship. As the water situation became more desperate, sailors started to die from dehydration. Captain Tessier decided to move the ship closer to Fort St Louis for more supplies. The remaining sailors were unskilled, and were unable to control the ship. Soon, *La Belle* had run aground and was filling with water. The survivors built a raft and went ashore. They returned to salvage cargo from the sinking ship, but were not able to save much. Only seven people were left from the *La Belle*. Worse, the ship had been packed with most of the colony's supplies, as La Salle had decided to move the colony if he found the Mississippi. Now the colony had no ship, which meant they had no supplies, no lifeline, no transportation.

Stranded, with Karankawa settlements between them and their home, *La Belle's* survivors lived on the beach for three months, subsisting on their meager supplies. When all their food and drink was gone, they paddled to Fort St Louis in a canoe that had washed ashore, and told the story of the ship's loss.

La Salle decided the only chance at this point was to make a final trip – this time to walk to the French settlement at the Illinois River. He set out with 17 people, another small group chose to stay behind at the settlement. Along the way, a dispute over bison meat led to a group of men killing one of La Salle's lieutenants. The murderers were upset about the situation of the colony and, unable to explain their actions, decided to kill La Salle also.

One of the men, l'Archeveque, distracted La Salle while his co-conspirator, Duhaut, snuck up and shot him in the back of the head. His body was left in the wilds of Texas. With only a small contingent left back at Fort St Louis, the French effort in Texas was drawing to a close.

Henri Joutel, who kept a detailed journal of the expedition, eventually made it back to France.

Discovery

Forensics: Bringing Bones to Life

La Salle was dead, and the settlers who walked to either Illinois or Quebec had either reached their destination, or had been dispersed into the frontier. What happened to the colonists who stayed at Fort St Louis? Sometime in late 1688 or early 1689, the Karankawas killed the remaining colonists and took the children. We don't know what caused this final tragedy. The children lived as Karankawas for two years, until they were bartered for by the Spanish and interrogated. Their testimony paints a picture of their mother, Isabelle Talon, being killed by a blow to the head, and the other members of the colony being killed as well.

The Spanish Experience

Don Juan Xaviata, the governor of the Cibolo and Jumano native peoples, had received word in 1686 that foreigners were on their way. He went to a village on the Rio Grande to investigate, and heard from some of the local residents that a group of French men had arrived, along with a native person who spoke the local language. This was a group from the La Salle expedition, and they were seeking information about how far away the Spanish silver mines were. Xaviata got this information back to the Spanish, who started looking for this new French threat.

In 1687, a small Spanish expedition found *La Belle's* wreck in Matagorda Bay, but failed to find Fort St. Louis itself. The following year, Alonso De León, governor of Coahuila, crossed the Rio Grande near present-day Piedras Negras with 85 soldiers, two priests, some servants and a contingent of natives. They had information from Jean Gery, a Frenchman who had arrived with the La Salle colony and was living with the natives near the Rio Grande. After crossing rivers and getting intelligence from surrounding native groups, the De León expedition found the tragic scene of the Fort St. Louis colony. The people living there had been killed by the Karankawas, and several bodies were still visible on the ground. The Spanish buried the bodies and wrote a poem in honor of the dead.

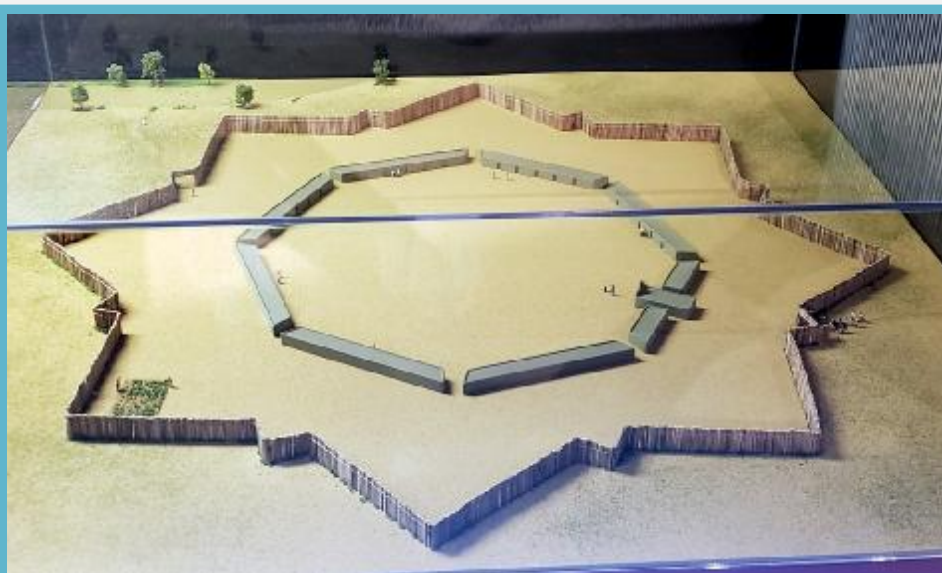
Though there were no living people at the French colony when the De León expedition found it, that did not mean that the French would never come back. The De León expedition buried La Salle's cannons, and made plans to return and establish their own settlement on the site.

Aguayo's Vision

33 years after the last French settlers died at Fort St. Louis, Europeans returned to the site. The French didn't return, but the Spanish built a fort on top of the French colony. They called it *Nuestra Señora Santa María de Loreto de la Bahía del Espíritu Santo...* but usually called it Presidio La Bahía.

This presidio and an accompanying mission were part of a grand vision for Texas by the Marqués de Aguayo, the governor of Coahuila y Tejas, a province that included what's now part of northern Mexico and present-day Texas. He wanted to solidify Spanish claims to Texas, and settle families across the region. While half the families would be from Cuba, the Canary Islands and northwestern Spain, the other half would be Tlaxcalteca. Though the settlers that came to Texas didn't end up matching Aguayo's planned numbers exactly, his designs helped set the scene for Texas' current Hispanic heritage.

Life at the Presidio



Presidio La Bahia itself, was a star shaped fort, with wooden walls. Buildings inside were made out of clay daub over wooden poles. These huts, called *jacales*, housed the soldiers. They were clustered around the perimeter of the fort, leaving a large open area in the middle. Outside the walls, archeologists found non-European artifacts, suggesting that the Karankawa were living outside the fort.

Life at Presidio La Bahia was almost as hard as life at Fort St Louis had been. The environment was just as harsh as it had been three decades earlier. When the Presidio had been established, the Spanish thought that the Karankawas would be easy to convert to Christianity and to a lifestyle of farming.

The Spanish Empire

After a few years of disastrous relations with the Karankawa, the mission and presidio on Garcitas Creek were moved. The mission moved first, to what's now Riverside Park in Victoria. In 1726, the mission moved again, to Mission Valley, just north of Victoria. The presidio moved with it. Forty-one years after La Salle first founded the colony on Garcitas Creek, the site was abandoned, and no one had plans to come back.

The missions in the Victoria area were attempting to convert the Aranama people. This was an easier task than trying to convert the Karankawa had been. After a few more years, the mission and presidio were moved a final time to Goliad, where their remnants can be visited today.

By the 1790s, unrest was growing around the fourth location of Mission Espiritu Santo and Presidio La Bahía. While some unrest was local, much came from the north. The horses and guns introduced to North America by Europeans radically changed native cultures. One of the cultures most changed were the Comanche. They adopted the horse and gun as central ways of life, and used them to expand their influence. As they swept into north Texas, they displaced the Lipan Apaches, who in turn moved even further south. Aggression between the Lipan and Comanche people sparked violence throughout Texas. San Sabá Mission was burned, and Spanish expeditions were attacked. Escalating violence and competing land claims caused tension for the mission and presidio at Goliad. The Spanish were increasingly trying to phase the missions out, believing that their job was mostly complete. As funds diminished and the Mexican War of Independence started, the mission and presidio at Goliad were largely ruined.



In addition to claiming the area's land, the presidios and missions that Aguayo started were intended to change local native culture. Native people who converted to Christianity and who maintained a more European lifestyle were called "gente de razon" – people of reason. The divisions in the Spanish Empire weren't just between people of reason and those without. The Spanish had a large and complex caste system based on race.



This proved to be easier said than done. The Karankawa were not as docile as the Spanish had hoped, and Domingo Ramon, who was in charge of the Presidio, did little to help the situation. A fight between a native resident of the mission and a soldier angered the native population. In response, Ramon imprisoned some of the Karankawas, planning to hang them. As they tried to escape, one of them stabbed Ramon in the chest with a pair of scissors. Ramon ordered a cannon fired at the hut containing the Karankawa prisoners. Predictably, this demolished the hut and allowed the prisoners to escape. The following week, Ramon died of his injuries.

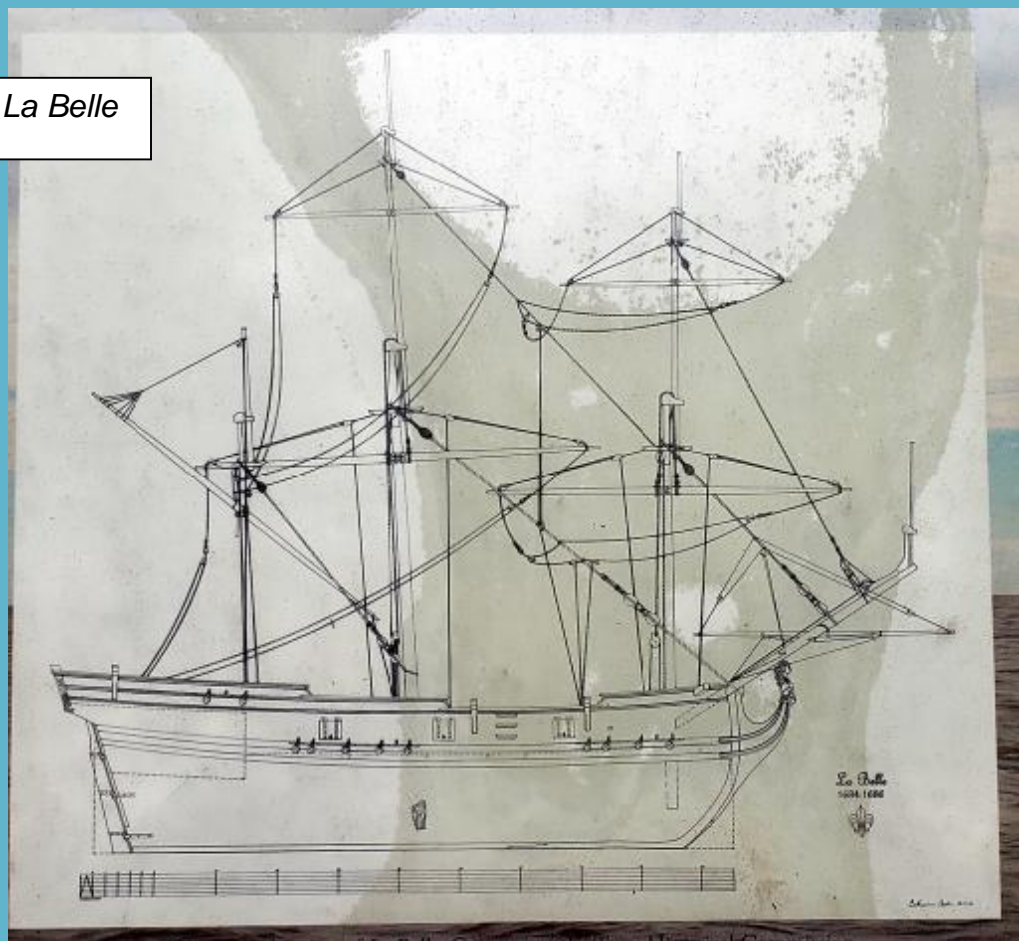
Rediscovering the Colony

The French colony in Texas was never forgotten. Historians were curious about exactly where it had been for years. But the documents describing it were complicated and could describe many places. What they needed was an object that proved where the colony had been. Objects would also tell them much about how the first European residents of Texas had lived.

The big break for archaeologists came when the Texas Historical Commission found the shipwreck of *La Belle* in 1995. Right away, they knew they had the right ship because of the bronze cannons that had French designs and the name of a French admiral. They built a cofferdam around the ship and drained the bay water, making a dry "hole" in the bay. Then they carefully removed the mud and almost two million artifacts from the ship. The remains of the ship itself were removed from the bay, and were taken to Texas A&M University to be studied and preserved for future generations.



The *La Belle*





This white oak timber is a part of *La Belle's* framework. *La Belle* was a ship "kit" where its timbers were marked so that anyone could put the ship together. The "XIII I" carved on the right side identifies it as being part of the 13th frame towards the stern.

The holes and tunnels on the left side of the timber were caused by *Teredo Navalis*, the naval shipworm, which ate through the wood of *La Belle's* hull. If you sliced this timber in half it would look like Swiss cheese!

To preserve *La Belle*, conservators soaked the ship in polyethylene glycol and individually freeze-dried each timber of the ship. This process helped prevent the timbers from warping and preserved their original appearance.

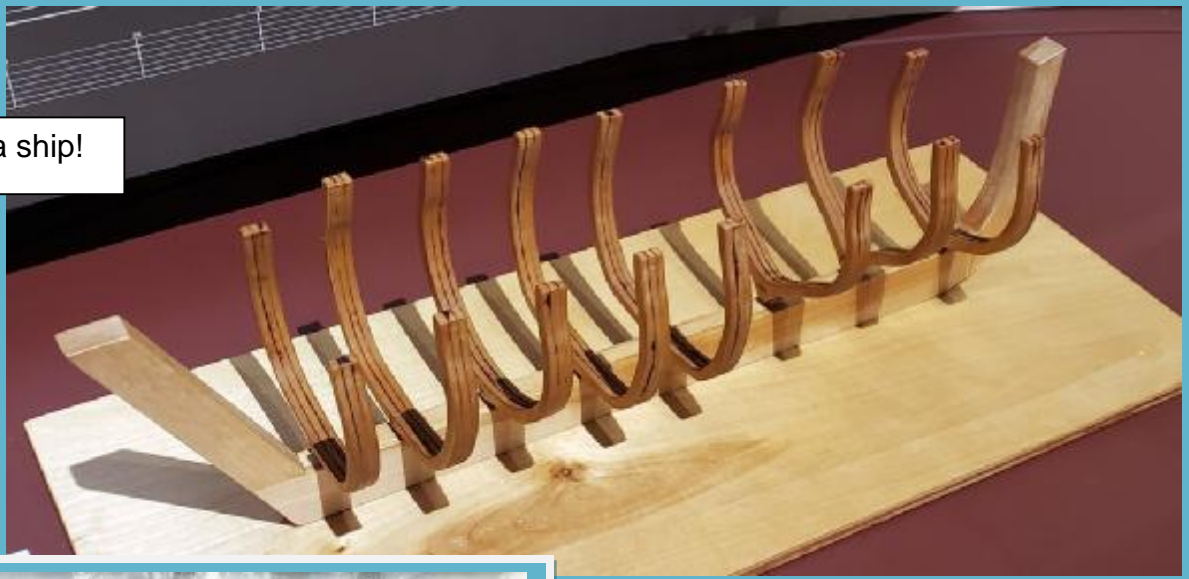


Can you build *La Belle*?

La Belle was designed as a “ship kit.” Shipbuilders in France cut the beams making up the frame, and numbered them. The pieces were also marked with “A” to denote those which go in the front of the ship and “D” for the back. The colonists would then put them together and build the rest of the ship.

By looking at the numbers on this model, can you recreate the frame of *La Belle*?

Look – I built a ship!



La Belle Outline

This is an approximate outline of the deck of *La Belle*.



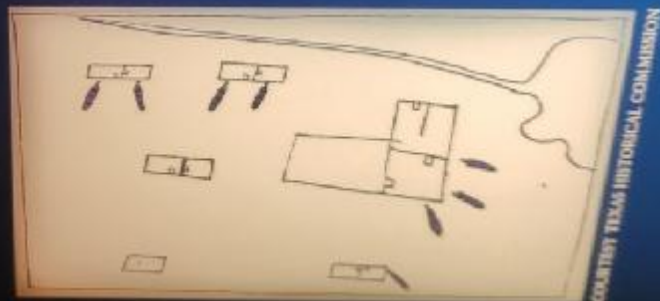
Location of cargo found on *La Belle* shipwreck.



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In 1689 Alonso De León's expedition found the remains of La Salle's Fort St. Louis. Juan Bautista Chapa accompanied De León and drew a map of the French settlement. The Spanish buried the eight iron cannon they found and marked the location with stones. A year later they returned and burned what was left of the buildings. In 1722 the Spanish returned to Garcitas Creek and built the first Presidio La Bahía directly on top of the French settlement.

Marqués Aguayo designed the presidio in the shape of a sixteen pointed star. Archeologists at Fort St. Louis confirmed a wood palisade had been built on the site in the shape of a sixteen pointed star.



COURTESY TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Archeologists were able to use the map drawn by Chapa in 1689 as they excavated Fort St. Louis. They found the map surprisingly accurate. This model illustrates how the areas of French and Spanish occupation overlaid one another.

Compare the actual locations of the French buildings as illustrated on the model to Chapa's sketch.



De León described the main house, "It was built like a fort, two stories and made of ships timbers. The roof was covered in buffalo hides and it was sloped so water could drain off." Adjoining the fort was another structure that the Spanish determined was used as a chapel for saying mass.

Archeologists found remnants of a ship's timbers. Joutel's diary describes the timbers as coming from the wreck of the Aimable and used to build the fort. He also describes the adjoining chapel.



De León and his men found the remains of three colonists scattered over the plains. One was that of a woman, her dress still clinging to the bones. They gathered up the corpses, recited mass, and buried them in a shallow pit. Archeologists found the burial pit on November 10, 2000. The remains were sent to a forensic specialist for analysis. It has been determined that these are the remains of a man, a woman, and of a boy about 8 years old.



During the excavation of the Fort St Louis site in the early 2000's, archeologists found a small communal grave. Bones were mingled together in it, but forensic analysis showed that there were three people buried there – a man, a woman and a child. The woman had a blow to her head, and was consistent in age with Isabelle Talon, the woman who gave birth aboard ship on the voyage from France.

Only a few bones from the child were present, but we know he was male and between 7-10 years old. Other than that, little is known about him.

In 1689, Alonso De León had the eight iron cannon found at the French settlement buried and the location marked with three stones. In 1722 Marqués Aguayo ordered the Presidio La Bahía to be built directly on top of the remains of La Salle's colony. He instructed his men to dig up the cannon buried 31 years before but they could not find them. In 1950, Glen Evans led a team to Garcitas Creek to excavate at the site. He too was unable to find the cannon. In 1996, 307 years after De León buried them, the eight iron cannon were recovered by the Texas Historical Commission.



While the ship was being worked on, an employee at Keeran Ranch in Victoria County made an exciting discovery – the iron cannons that are now in the center of this museum. The cannons were found in the same position in which they were buried by the Spanish when they first discovered the remains of Fort St. Louis in 1689. This confirmed it: Fort St. Louis had been found.



These cannons weigh about 800-1000 pounds each.

In 1821, Mexico achieved independence from Spain. Martin De León, a merchant and soldier who had been ranching in northern Mexico and south Texas, used the opportunity to start a colony of forty-one Mexican families on the Guadalupe River. This colony, named Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe Victoria after the Mexican general and president, was the beginning of the city of Victoria.

Texas

An Enduring Legacy

The name
"Texas"
comes from the
Caddo language,
meaning
"friends."

I'll bet you thought the word "Texas" came from Spanish roots

The mission and presidio that were established at the site of Fort St. Louis made huge contributions to Texas history and culture. The Spanish brought cattle to Texas, and the missions and presidios ran huge herds of cattle, forming the beginning of the Texas cattle industry. The open land and abundant grass were the perfect environment for cattle, and they thrived.

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Anatomy of a Spur



Button: slips into the spur straps to hold them on the spur.

Heelband: fits onto the back of a boot. Sized to fit the rider.

Shank: connects the heelband to the rowel. These can be different lengths and angles to suit the rider's preference.

Rowel Pin: holds the rowel onto the shank.

Rowel: spins on the rowel pin, and is the part of the spur that has contact with the horse.

According to Vicki, from the Port Lavaca Museum, when the Spanish entered the area to be known as Texas and saw bison for the first time, they called them vaca, the Spanish word for cow.

But What About...

Where do you fit in on this timeline? The average modern human lives about 80 years...about the length of this line on our timeline: —

To get to the first “anatomically modern” humans (humans with about the same body type and appearance as modern humans) on this timeline, you’d have to leave the museum, turn a corner, and go almost to the other end of the building next door.

What about dinosaurs? You’d have to go to Edna, Texas (about 24 miles) to reach the point on the timeline when the last dinosaurs died, 66 million years ago. To get to the first dinosaurs, you’d be almost to Houston!

Even that is a tiny distance compared to the age of the Earth. To get to that point on our timeline, you’d have to keep walking until you got to Boston!



You have to admit, I chose the best direction to visit the museums, each one has been better than the one before it.

Not to toot my own horn or anything, but a lot of work went into today's newsletter. As you can tell by the backgrounds of the informational photos, many of them on the same page are different, only to see a similar one two or three pages farther down. It would have been nice for the museum to have done it the same way. I was taking pictures here, then over there, then back here, then to the left, then to the right – you get the picture (no pun intended). Then breaking down three or four paragraphs from on the same placard and moving them to be with other info of the same vein.

Usually I can just insert the next photo in line. This time I had to use Picasa to view the pics and decide where to put them. It was exhausting work!

After leaving the museum I sat in the RV for awhile trying to find something to keep me here in Victoria. The BBQ joints are either closed on Sunday, or close by 4 p.m. No BBQ to enjoy during the Packers game. I had seen everything else, so I decided to drive over to Cuero (**kweh**-row). It's my next destination. The museums here are not open on Sunday, but they are supposed to have several murals on buildings. I also noticed a couple really nice old mansions right on the main drag with historical plaques out front. So if the weather cooperates, I just might go for a ride in the morning.

The photo above is across the street from my parking spot at a closed gas station next to WalMart. Wally itself does not allow overnights. I might get kicked out of here too, but hey, that's part of the adventure.

Until next time.....