



In Search of El dorado

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

Hello to Family & Friends

Friday, January 29th 2021 Day 14



I took my time getting going this morning. I had some business to take care of and then plan my route. Since the museum in Port Aransas does not open until 1:00 I had time to kill. I passed an H-E-B grocery store and stopped to restock the larder and headed east to take the ferry over to Mustang Island and the small town of Port Aransas. I passed (above) some oil rigs, I think, under construction. What's odd is that those white things lined up along the bottom look like giant windmill blades.

Below – My view from the ferry of another ferry coming in to dock.

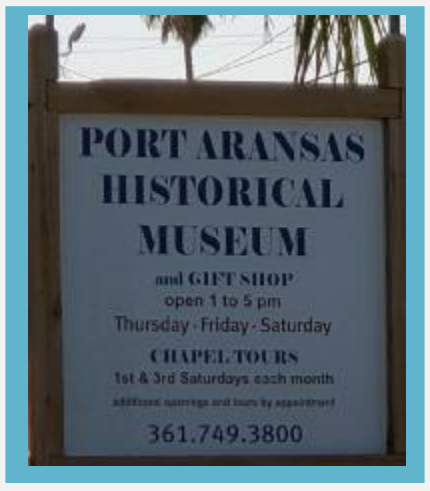




My ferry is the Michael W Behrens. They are named after retired ferry engineers.



I stopped in this parking lot for lunch. A nice selection of yachts.



The museum building is a Sears Kit House built in 1917. It has been moved to several locations on the island before settling here and showcasing the history of Port Aransas.



Man Rocks

Rocks of this size and a bit larger were called "Man Rocks", and it was expected that jetty laborers would lift and throw them into the water by hand.

Imagine lifting rocks this size 14 hours per day.



Hard Work

The fellow in this picture shows signs of long term strain from lifting Man Rocks: bandaged hands, sloping shoulders and ragged clothing.

Hundreds of laborers like him worked long and hard to build the jetties on the Aransas Pass.



My back gets sore just *looking* at this picture. All this info was on the front porch. I haven't even entered the building yet.





Totsy's Tarpon

Port Aransas was known as the Tarpon fishing capital of the world. In fact, until 1910 the name of the town was Tarpon. As you will see as you read on, the information is provided in much wider paragraphs than normal or oddly broken up from side to side. I will try and fit them in, but I might have to retype the info.

The tarpon was so important to Port Aransas that local businessman and fishing guide Barney Farley, along with Corpus Christi newspaperman Grady Kinsolving, organized the Tarpon Rodeo in 1932. It is now recognized as the oldest tournament on the Texas coast.

A go-get'm competitor in the competition was Mrs. North "Totsy" Millican of Austin. Totsy caught the first fish in the first Tarpon Rodeo. Additionally, that fish (the one on our wall) was the second largest of the entire tournament, much to the chagrin of the men!



Tarpon, virtually inedible, are strictly a game fish. People would come to Port Aransas from all over the world to try for a tarpon.

Totsy's tarpon stretches to a respectable 6'2" (the current state record is 7'7"). Totsy Millican started a trend with women bringing in big fish: the next three Tarpon Rodeo winners were women.

The Farley Boat Builders Arrive

The powerboat Edward Green brought to Port Aransas, and the growing number of tarpon guides, primed the town for powered fishing boats. That promising economic situation attracted a talented and industrious individual named Farley. Here is how that happened.

The brothers Barney and Fred Farley arrived on the Texas coast in 1910. Barney ended up in Port Aransas, while Fred lived just north in Rockport. Barney aspired to be a tarpon guide. While he was learning those skills, he determined that a man who could provide the guides with reliable and affordable power fishing boats could do well in Port Aransas. Barney shared that thought with his brother, who just happened to be a master wood worker. Seeing a good business opportunity at hand, Fred Farley moved wife Mabel and his sons to Port Aransas in 1914 and established the Farley and Son Boat Works. (The son was Jim, but eventually his brothers Don and Fred Jr. became involved in the family business.) The boat builders got right to work, and the first Farley boat produced expressly for Port Aransas tarpon fishing was launched in 1915.

The arrival of Charles Fredrick "Fred" Farley ushered in six decades of excellence in both the building of boats and the conducting of business affairs. Indeed, the Farley boat building story is an important chapter in the maritime history of Port Aransas, Texas. (Barney Farley did become a fishing guide, and then went on to be a leader and prominent businessman in the town's fast growing sport fishing industry.)

Mr. Roosevelt Catches His Big Fish



In 1937, President Franklin Roosevelt docked his yacht, the *Potomac* in Lydia Ann channel and called over to Port Aransas to have someone come and take him fishing. He was answered by Don Farley, Teddy Mathews and Barney Farley, and he caught a Tarpon.

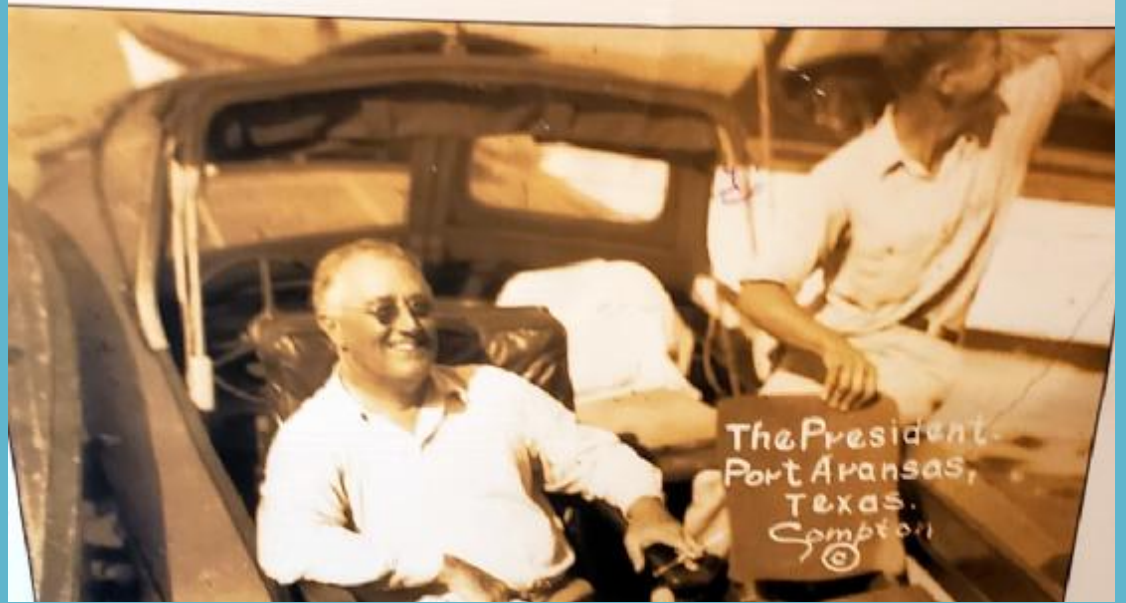
The document stated that the President's yacht was accompanied by two battleships.

The President's visit was a prime opportunity for the townsfolk of Port Aransas to show off their Farley boats and the tarpon fishing that put the town on the map. The image above shows FDR aboard an open cockpit Farley boat (seated at the helm is Don Farley). A tarpon caught by the President is held up by guide Barney Farley and tall son Elliott Roosevelt. Forward of the windscreen are a sailor (white hat) and a military aide to the President. As is evident, FDR was surrounded by quite an entourage—and outside the frame were close-by boats as well. Because tarpon are spooky creatures, several guides and boatmen summoned up their resolve and asked the President if he might thin out the crowd a bit for the sake of fishing. Accordingly, the press and security boats were ordered to stand off a greater distance from the President's fishing boat.



This is the richest photograph of the FDR trip. The image has it all: both Roosevelts, well known Port Aransas guides, classic open cockpit Farley boat, suspense, and the Big Fish.

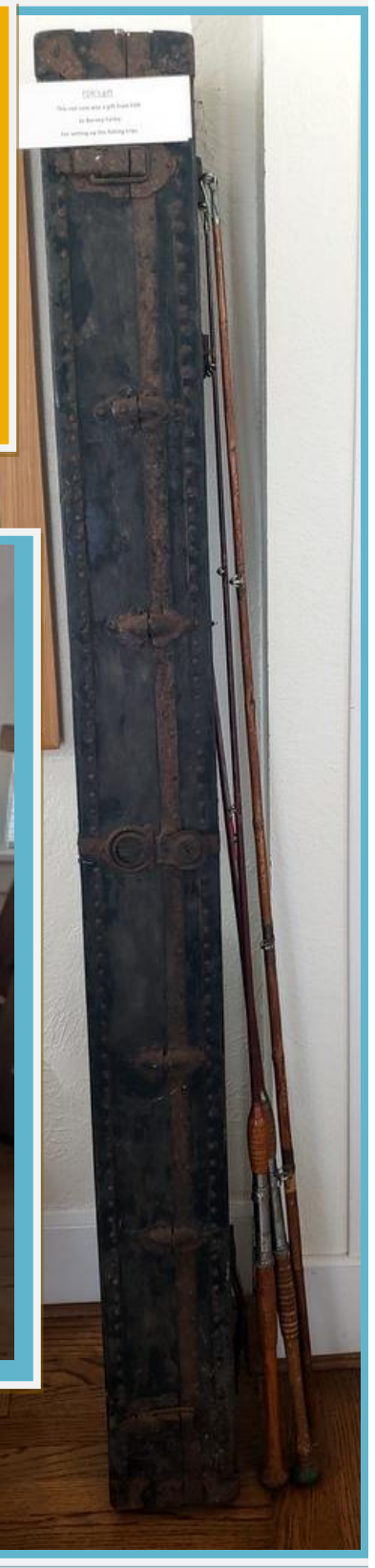
Up to when this photograph was taken, on the last day of the trip (May 8th), Mr. Roosevelt had not caught a presidential size tarpon. On this day, the President and son Elliott boarded Ted Mathew's boat with Barney Farley and motored to the south jetty. After a couple of hours of fishing with nothing to show for it, Mr. Roosevelt accepted that a good size tarpon was just not in the cards, and he said it was time to go in. Ted and Barney exchanged glances, after which Barney asked Mr. Roosevelt for a few more minutes. And that is when Lady Luck smiled on the President: he hooked and expertly fought a hard charging, 5 foot 1 inch, 77 pound tarpon. Barney and Elliot are holding up this quite respectable specimen, while Ted stands on the boatman seat behind FDR. Barney and Ted's smiles express both joy and relief that the President's "big" fish was finally out of the water.



On the day of the big catch, FDR went to the Port Aransas waterfront to greet the townsfolk. Here, the President, with the famous cigarette holder, is at the docks (Ted Mathews stayed aboard with him). In front of Ted is the standard fisherman's chair, a puny affair compared to the luxuriously padded chair Ted installed for this once in a lifetime event.

Sitting just off the Port Aransas docks was as close as Mr. Roosevelt got to Mustang Island. He did, however, go ashore on neighboring San José Island at the invitation of the island owner, oilman Sid Richardson. To move the President in his wheelchair onto San José a cattle chute was rigged next to the President's launch. FDR was a bit concerned about that arrangement, but Mr. Richardson put his guest at ease by declaring in his best Texas drawl, "Why, Mr. President, you're the biggest bull that ever went down that chute!" The Roosevelt tarpon fishing trip was covered by *Time* and *Life* magazines. It was great publicity for Port Aransas, its fishing guides, and of course the Farley boats.

FDR's gift
This rod case was a gift from FDR
to Barney Farley
For setting up the fishing trips.

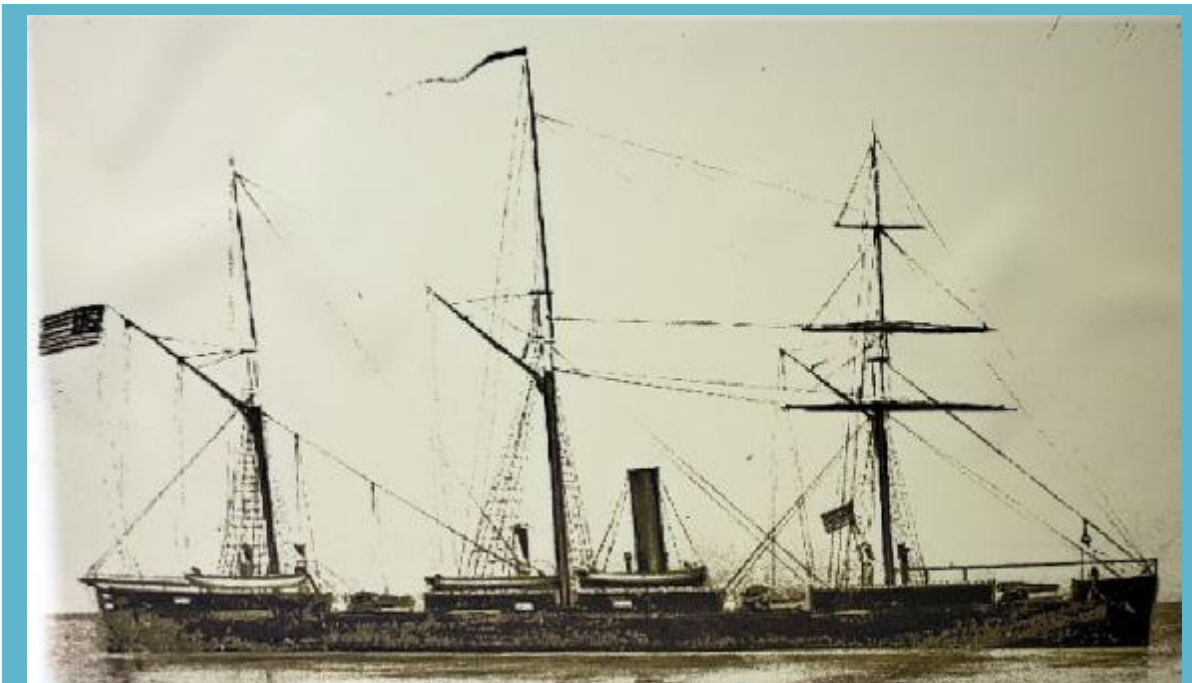


Above is the actual stern/transom of the Farley boat that President Roosevelt caught his fish from and is in the photos above. The bow was damaged beyond repair in Hurricane Harvey, but they were able to salvage this much.



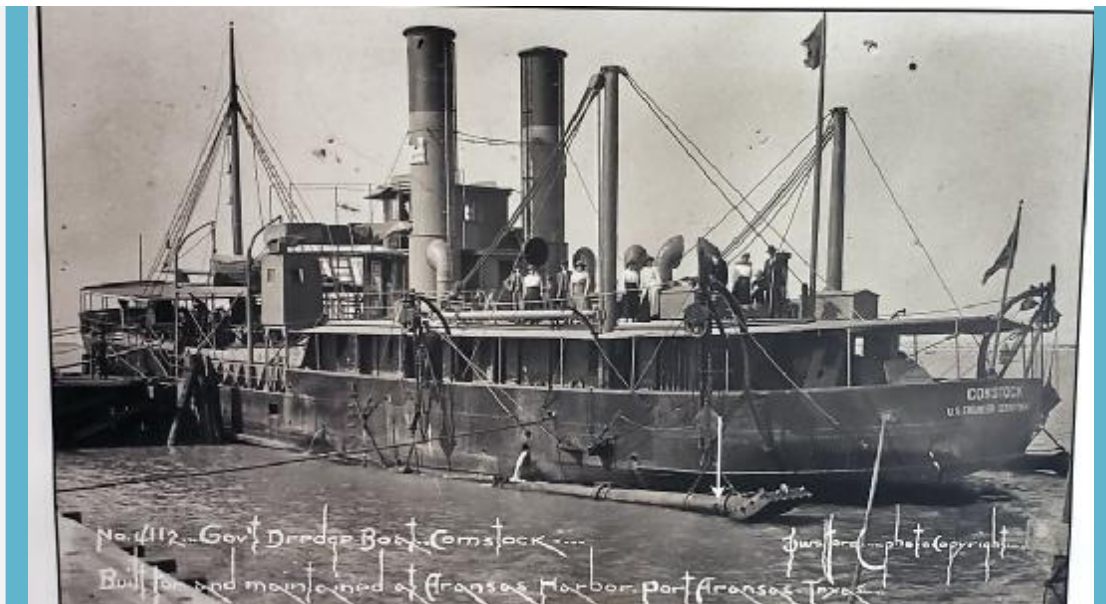
MUSTANG ISLAND ABANDONED

This is a “bark” type sailing ship. In the Civil War year 1862, the armed bark USS Arthur blockaded the Aransas Pass waterway. When her Northern sailors took cattle and water from Mustang they were fired on by disgruntled Islanders. In turn, the Arthur captain ordered the shelling and torching of homesteads. Seeing that strife and mayhem had arrived, the Islanders wisely abandoned Mustang until the end of the war.



ASSAULT ON FORT SEMMES

The Federals had been driven away from the Aransas Pass in the Spring of 1863, and the Confederates took the opportunity to emplace canons on Mustang Island to guard the pass. Manned by 100 troops, the cannon site was called Fort Semmes. In November 1863, the Federals returned with 1,500 infantry to attack this Rebel fort. USS Monongahela (shown above) supported that attack with a bombardment. Fort Semmes surrendered, and Mustang Island was garrisoned by the Federals until 1864.



COMSTOCK DEEPENS THE PASS

After the Aransas Pass jetties were built, there was the matter of dredging a deep ship channel between them. Much of that dredging was done (c. 1910) by Comstock, a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers hopper dredge boat. A long extension pipe (see white arrow) lying alongside Comstock was pivoted into the water until it touched bottom, whereupon the sand was sucked into Comstock's hull, called the hopper. When full, Comstock steamed away and the sediment was discharged from the hopper into a spoils area. Then it was back for another hopper load. Re-dredging is periodically needed to keep the pass channel at the required depth.



SOCIAL JUSTICE AFLOAT

The work force that built the Aransas Pass jetties included men freshly arrived from Europe and speaking little if any English. The people of Tarpon, the town name before the Port Aransas moniker was adopted in late 1910, discriminated against those men through a town ordinance denying them access to the town saloon. Tom Mathews responded to that injustice by opening his Deep Water Saloon (c. 1910). The saloon was atop a barge anchored in the town harbor—the water location was a legal way around the prejudicial ordinance. All were welcome at Tom Mathew's place.

The sloops were manned predominantly by Mexican-Americans who left their signature on these boats. The correct terms for many of the parts of the vessels had a Spanish nautical heritage. These two photos show that they also had a sense of humor and a little disregard for the licensing authorities. When the agent would ask the name of the first boat, the crew would say "I don't know" (No Se). He would then ask the name of the second boat, to which the reply was "Who knows?" (?Quien sabe?)

This museum covers only the first floor of the house, and as you can see they pack quite a bit of history into that small space. It's a relief not to see display case after display case with little antequy things. They just need to compress, condense, reconfigure, their way of providing the information. I spent a little over an hour and enjoyed it. The docent was talkative and knowledgeable. She used to live in Wisconsin and still has a son in Waukesha and a daughter in Manitowoc.



I took a gander at Google and found that there is a road along the beach, named Beach Rd (how unique) and I thought that would be more fun than the highway. Little did I know, the road is literally, The Beach.

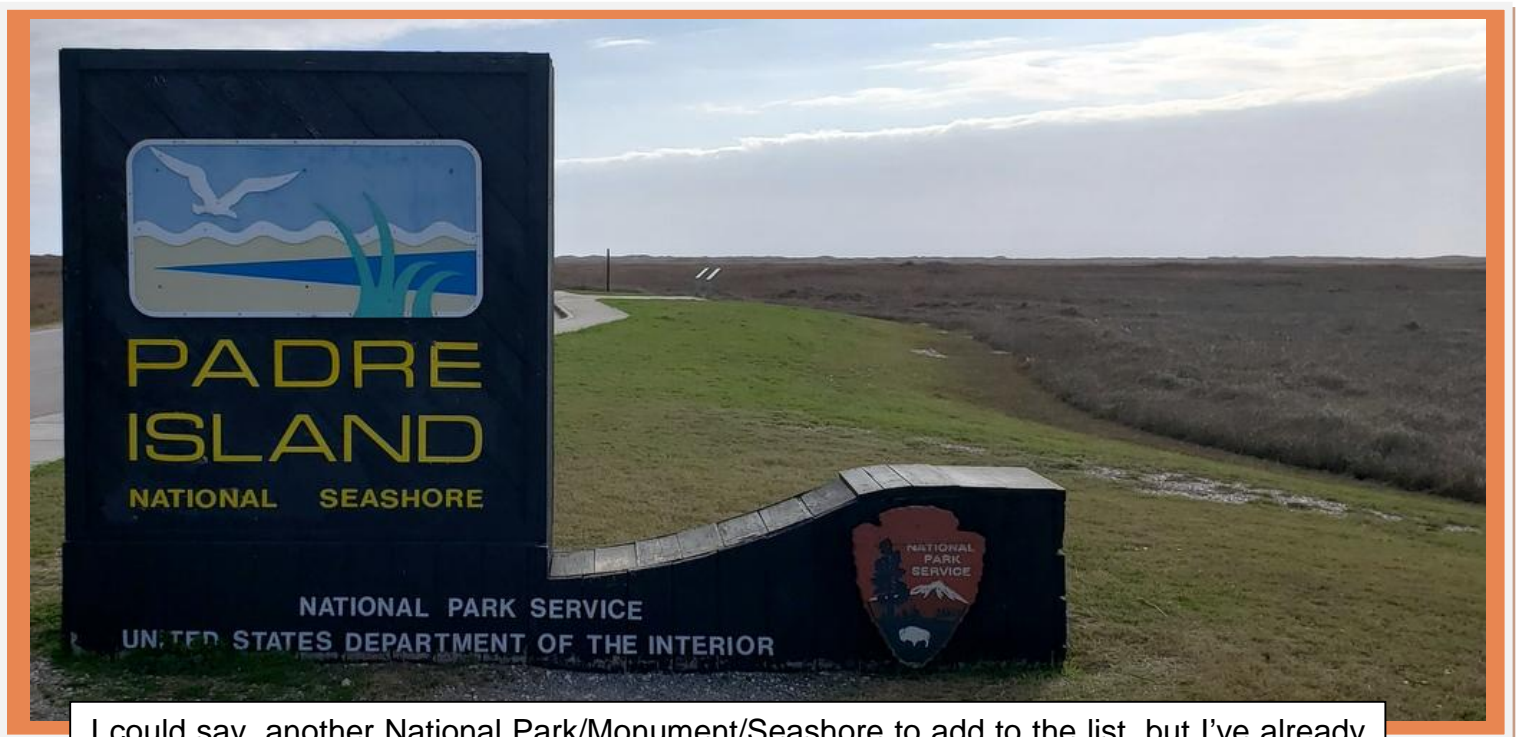




There were about three or four spots where, I assume, they were selling kites since they each had several in the air. Some of them are huge.

After several miles I was asking myself, "self, how do I get off this beach?" It was rather boring, other than the fact of making sure the RV did not bog down in the sand.

I finally found an access road and started to make time to my next destination.



I could say, another National Park/Monument/Seashore to add to the list, but I've already been here. On a family trip back in August of 1968, yes we made the mistake of traveling to Texas for the month of August, I remember getting sick from the heat. We made it into Mexico and were duped by a Mexican who we thought was putting money in our parking meter. Dad likes his steaks well done and had to send it back three times until it was, that was in Laredo I think. I'm not sure if it was Padre Island or Corpus Christie, but the beach sand was so hot it was an all out sprint to the water. We also watched a Houston Astros game at the Astrodome since it was part of the stadium tour. Morgan and I went to the Rodeo in Houston two years ago when I visited and I was able to walk around the outside of the now defunct Astrodome. I could go on and on, but I'm sure we all could.

One of a Kind

The grassland prairie you see in front of you once covered approximately 13 million acres (5 million hectares) of coastal Texas and Louisiana. Because of extensive cattle ranching, farming, and development, only two percent of this coastal prairie habitat remains today. Padre Island National Seashore preserves this habitat—along with **the longest section of**

undeveloped barrier island beach in the world. It now appears much the same as when it was populated by the Karankawa Indians hundreds of years ago. Bordered by the Gulf of Mexico behind you and the Laguna Madre in front of you, Padre Island is comprised of grasslands, dunes, beaches, and scattered ephemeral marshes and ponds.

They Came... and Left

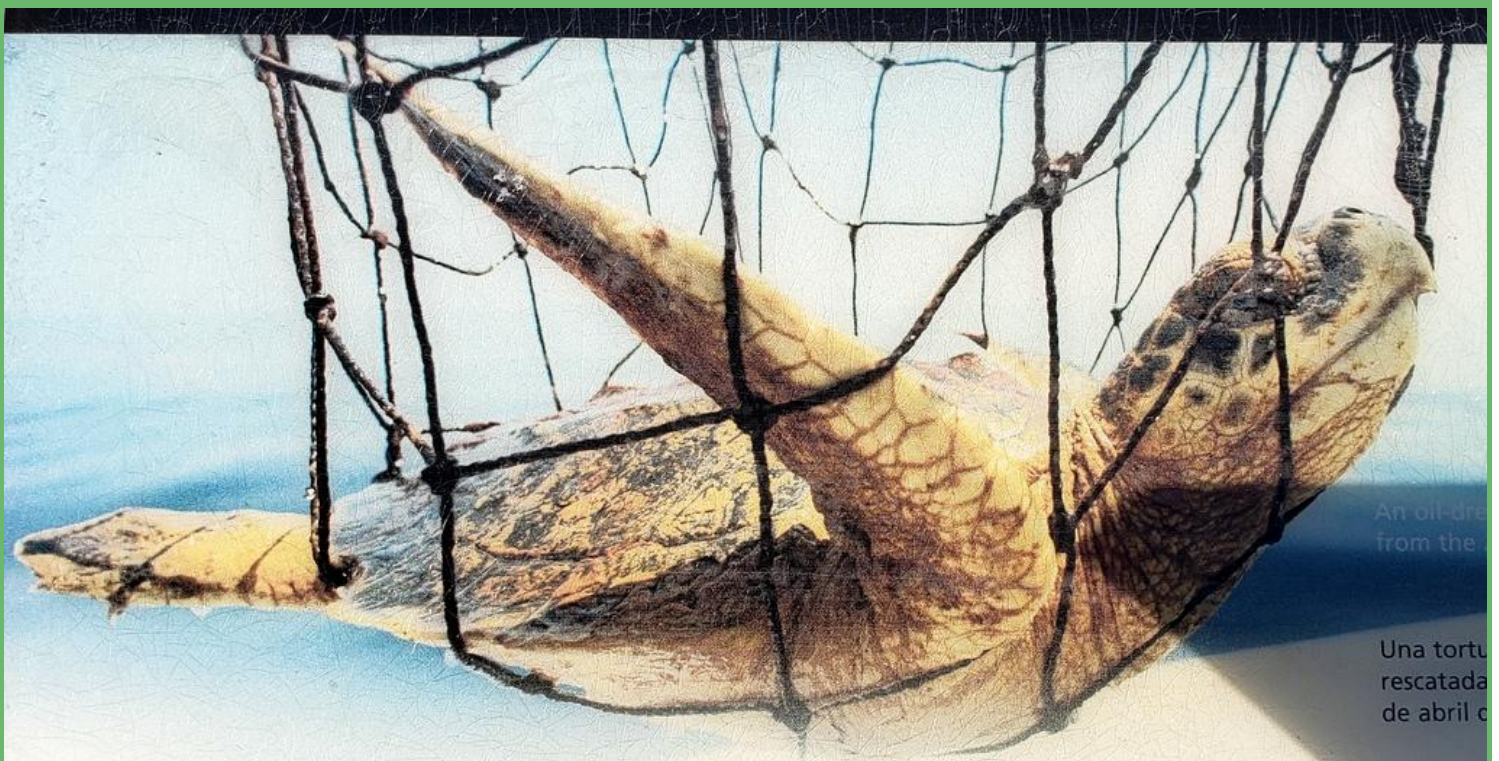
Three distinct groups of people have lived here—Indians, explorers, and ranchers. Today, this island is mostly undeveloped, preserved by Padre Island National Seashore.

Centuries ago, nomadic Coahuiltecan lived here in short-term settlements. They hunted and fished along the coast and Laguna Madre using dugout canoes.

In the 1600s and 1700s, Spanish explorers ventured north from central Mexico, expanding their empire. Around 1804, Padre José Nicolas Balli built the first ranch on this island, 26 miles north of the southernmost tip.

Do you notice the difference I mentioned earlier? The National Seashore plaques have short paragraphs, wider spaced, with not usually more than ten words per line. It is so much easier to read and photograph.

As Texas grew in population, this island changed from an isolated wilderness to ranchlands. Water on all sides made this an ideal place for open grazing—until the 1970s. Then the discovery of natural gas drew oil and gas companies here. Add growing tourism coming to the beach, and the old ways of life changed.



An oil-dre
from the

Una tortu
rescata
de abril c

Why We Have to Do Something

I may have to visit Texas a couple more times. I would truly enjoy seeing the turtles come to shore and lay their eggs. And then come back to see the hatchlings making their way back to the Gulf. That would be a sight.

The Numbers Speak

In 1947 over **40,000** nest sites were found on a Mexican beach in **a single day**. By 1985, fewer than **800** nests were found worldwide.

The numbers of sea turtle nests are increasing today. Many threats still remain.

Gulf Coast Dump?

Why do you see so much trash on Padre Island's beaches? Blame the swirling currents out in the Gulf of Mexico — and the onshore winds. Some of the flotsam you see here are long-distance travelers. They came down rivers from many states that surround the Gulf. Fishermen threw some of this overboard. Some came off oil and gas platforms. Some were dumped offshore illegally.



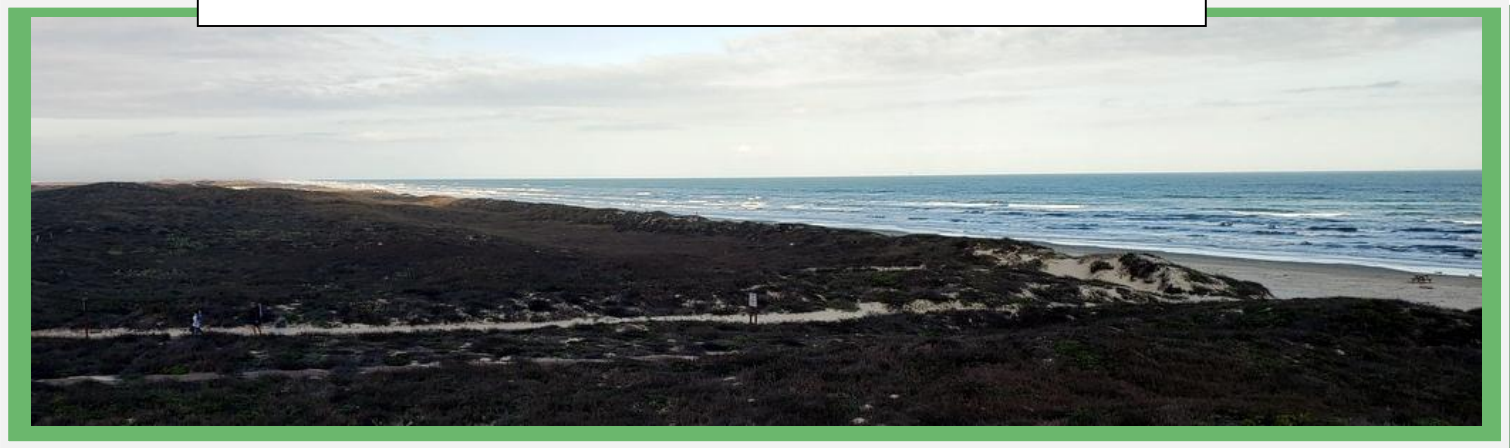
Using this map, you can see why this area of Texas is called the Coastal Bend



The visitor center is closed due to Covid. I was surprised since the website said it was open until five. The gift shop is open, but had closed by the time I arrived.



Above – Looking south from the visitor center
Below – Looking north. Not a hotel or condo high rise in sight.





Here I am on the beach again for the night, about 40 feet from the water. I cropped the photo, so you can't see the line of campers up and down the beach. This is the south beach. I believe my dad said we camped on the beach here. That I don't remember. I do remember camping on the beach in Florida, a couple times. He didn't say if it was the north or south beach we camped on back in '68 so I don't know if I'm in the same spot or not. But here I am, 53 years later, on the same shoreline.

If you get this on the 29th or 30th I will consider it lucky. I am having a hard time raising the internet down here. It is 60 more miles to the end of Padre Island. The only road is this beach road, and about 25 miles from here it becomes four-wheel drive only and ends just eleven miles from the Mexican border. It's a good 10 miles north before you hit any kind of civilization. I will try the cell phone booster, not sure if it will help or not.

So a little more nature tomorrow before hitting Corpus Christie. I was hoping to arrive there during the week and avoid the weekend, but that's the way the cookie crumbles.

Speaking of crumbles reminds me of a restaurant I saw in Port Aransas, Grumbles Seafood. I may have to try some seafood down here, it should be pretty good.

Until next time.....