



In Search of El dorado

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

Hello to Family & Friends

Tuesday, February 10th 2021 Day 25



I thought about moving to a gas station up the road for the night, but I stepped out and analyzed the area around me. There is a semi parked in front and I was still a good foot and a half from the curb. It might just work. I had originally parked with the driver's side door, and slide-out, by the curb. That way the slide opens over grass. But I turned around, got as close to the curb as possible, and the slide did not stick out any farther than the semi. So I just stayed right there.



Back to Nature day. The NWR has a seven mile loop road, great for biking, and about sixteen miles of trails. I plan to bike and hike today.

Above is the levee and canal used to provide water to the fields. This is a big produce growing area.

In the early 20th century, cotton and sugarcane fields replaced much of the native vegetation in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. In response, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1943 established Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge as a sanctuary for migratory birds and other wildlife. The early refuge headquarters was located near here.

Between 1919 and 1927, developer C. W. Swallow brought trainloads of potential buyers to tour irrigated farmlands in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The Alamo Land and Sugar Company built housing for Swallow's guests on what is now Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge.

In the first years of the refuge, the staff used existing structures built by the Alamo Land and Sugar Company. These buildings were located directly in front of where you are now standing. They served as the original refuge headquarters and manager's residence.

There was nothing to see, just undergrowth.

In the 1950s, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service replaced the original refuge headquarters with a new headquarters building. This structure was removed in 1978.

In 1978, the refuge headquarters and visitor facilities were built in their current location near Highway 281. This concentrated the refuge structures and reduced the disturbance to wildlife.



My research stated these towers may be closed due to Covid. I was surprised to find them open.

Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge protects the largest remaining island of subtropical woodland habitat along the Lower Rio Grande.



The subtropical woodlands that surround this tower provide a glimpse of the lush habitats that dominated the Lower Rio Grande Valley hundreds of years ago. Today, about 95% of the native vegetation has been lost to development and agriculture.



The view from the top



The **Old Cemetery**

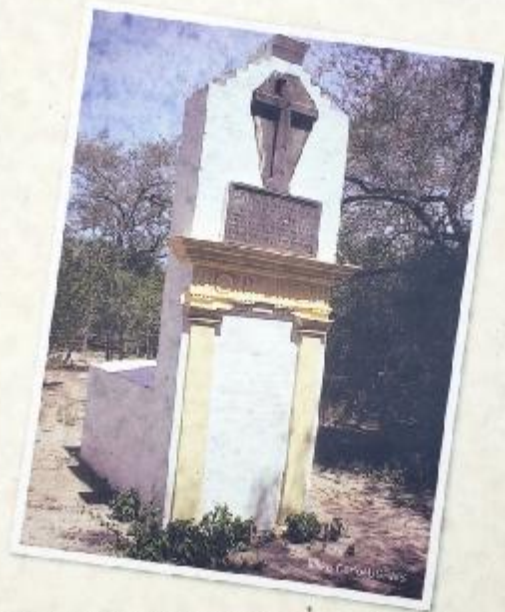
“Here are the memories of Cristóbal Trevino, a Mexican rancher who lived here in the 1800s.”

Long before this land became a National Wildlife Refuge, Mexican ranchers owned the property. Their cemetery from the 1800s provides a final resting place for about 30 people from the ranch and the surrounding area.

Mexican ranchers moved into the Lower Rio Grande Valley after Mexico won its independence from Spain in 1821. Hoping to keep territory north of the Rio Grande under the control of Mexico, the new government provided land grants in the Valley. In 1834, Benigno Leal received the Santa Ana Land Grant and established El Rancho de Adentro, "The Inside Ranch."



A hand-hewn Texas ebony fence surrounds the cemetery. Many of the logs are more than 100 years old, while others have been added more recently to restore the fence. This photograph shows a large Texas ebony tree on the refuge in 1949—visit the refuge viewing tower to experience the best remaining example of a mature Texas ebony forest.



The brick boveda or tomb contains the body of Cristoval Leal and his wife. Cristoval was the adopted son of the original Santa Ana landowner. In the early 20th century, bandits opened the boveda and exposed scattered bones. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service repaired the tomb in 1943.

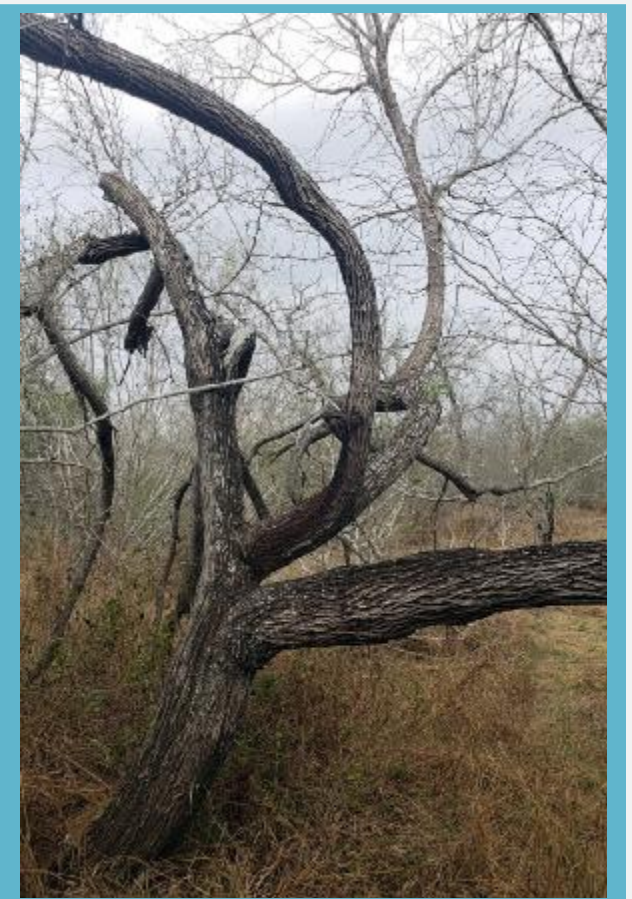
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This is pretty much how all the trails look here.



If you recall, a Resaca is a body of water. It does not look like there has been any water in this Resaca for quite some time.



I did find the tree on the left has an interesting growth pattern of the limbs twisting every which way.

Overall, Back to Nature day was a bust. No owls on the owl trail; no water in the Resaca; maybe a half dozen birds; no animals, not even an ant hill; and no scenery. Oh, there were mosquitoes.

I kind of powered through the remaining four miles or so and headed off to do some housekeeping.

After allowing the RV to take a dump, filling up with gas – Ah gas. The cost of diesel where I spent the night, at the border, was \$2.69. Gas Buddy had WalMart and Sam's about 10 miles north at \$2.13. Gas Buddy was wrong, they were both \$2.24, but it was still worth the drive to save ten bucks – and some grocery shopping, I headed to Hidalgo for a couple sights there.



This thing reminds me of the giant bees in *The Mysterious Island*.

The info below is provided via Roadside America.



Killer Bees have been around since the 1950s, when some African queens escaped a South American lab and began flirting with the local gentry. Their volatile spawn migrated north, growing nastier with each succeeding generation. In October of 1990, they illegally crossed the US border at Hidalgo, Texas.

Most towns would view this occasion with horror, something best left unmentioned in the hope that it would be forgotten. Happily, Hidalgo was blessed with a mayor who knew that killer bees bring honey as well as a sting. John Franz gave the media the buzz: Hidalgo was "Killer Bee Capital of the World" and proud of it. Within two years Franz had wheedled 20 grand from his city's budget to build the World's Largest Killer Bee.

Six years have passed. Mayor Franz is still mayor and Hidalgo has been in Time, The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, The Guinness Book of World Records, and a Snapple commercial. Hidalgo sells posters and post cards of the bee, and carts it down Main Street during their annual Border Fest celebration. None of the tourists who wander the streets seem concerned about what, exactly, this town is celebrating.

"What other city of 4,000 has something like this?" brags Mayor Franz, sweeping his arm in the direction of his nasty mascot. "We're not going to follow the leaders anymore. We're going to take some chances and get out there in front."

WATER UNDER THE BRIDGE

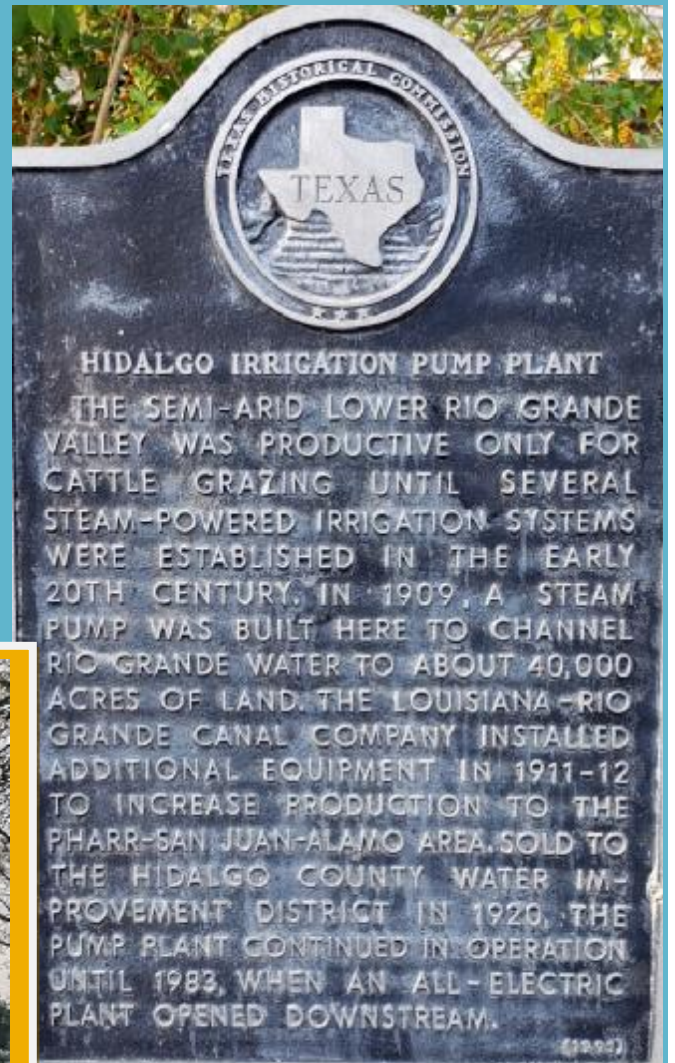
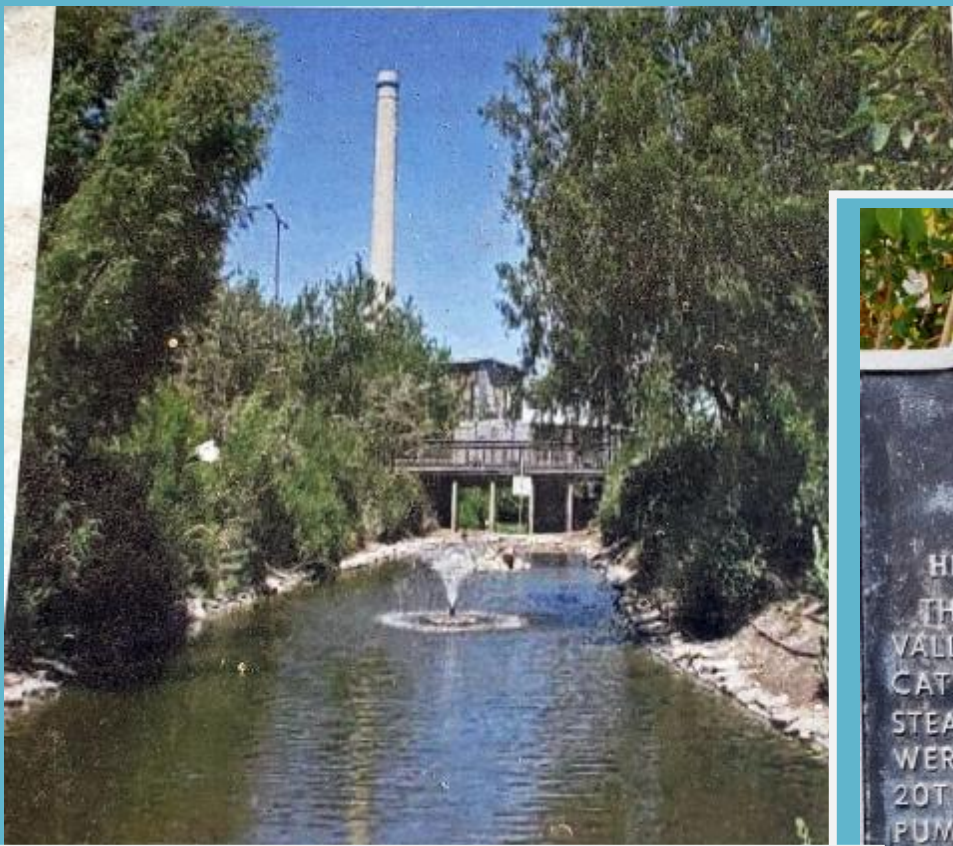
Imagine standing here in the early 1900's. You would hear the sounds of the engines in the Pumphouse and watch as water spilled through the gates in the discharge channel at your feet.

Today the Pumphouse no longer siphons water from the Rio Grande to irrigate Hidalgo County fields, but the stories it has to tell of the life and times of the past century live on.

Officially closed in 1983 by the Hidalgo County Irrigation District #2, the Pumphouse was donated to the city of Hidalgo and reopened as a historical museum and visitor center in 1999.

We invite you to enjoy this important piece of the valley history as you discover the inner workings of the Pumphouse. For your safety, please remain on designated walkways on the grounds and in the building.





Their photo at the top, my photo left.

STEAM POWER



INVENTOR
James Watt

James Watt
Scotland 1730 - 1819
Inventor of the modern
industrial steam engine,
converting steam power
to rotary motion, and
beginning the
19th Century
Industrial Revolution.

Mathew Boulton
England 1728-1809
Businessman who
joined with James Watt
in the firm of Boulton and
Watt, manufacturing and
marketing the steam
engine to mines,
mills and factories.



INVENTOR
Mathew Boulton



INVENTOR
Oliver Evans

Oliver Evans
United States 1755-1819
Famous engineer who
predicted in 1812 that
people would be
transported by steam
engines on steel rail.
The first railroad in the
U. S. was in the 1830's.

Robert Fulton
United States 1765-1815
Utilized Watt's
engine in a steamboat
on the River Seine
in 1803, perfecting the
concept with the
steamboat Clemont on the
Hudson river in 1807.



INVENTOR
Robert Fulton

The Corliss Steam Engine, 1849



INVENTOR
George Corliss

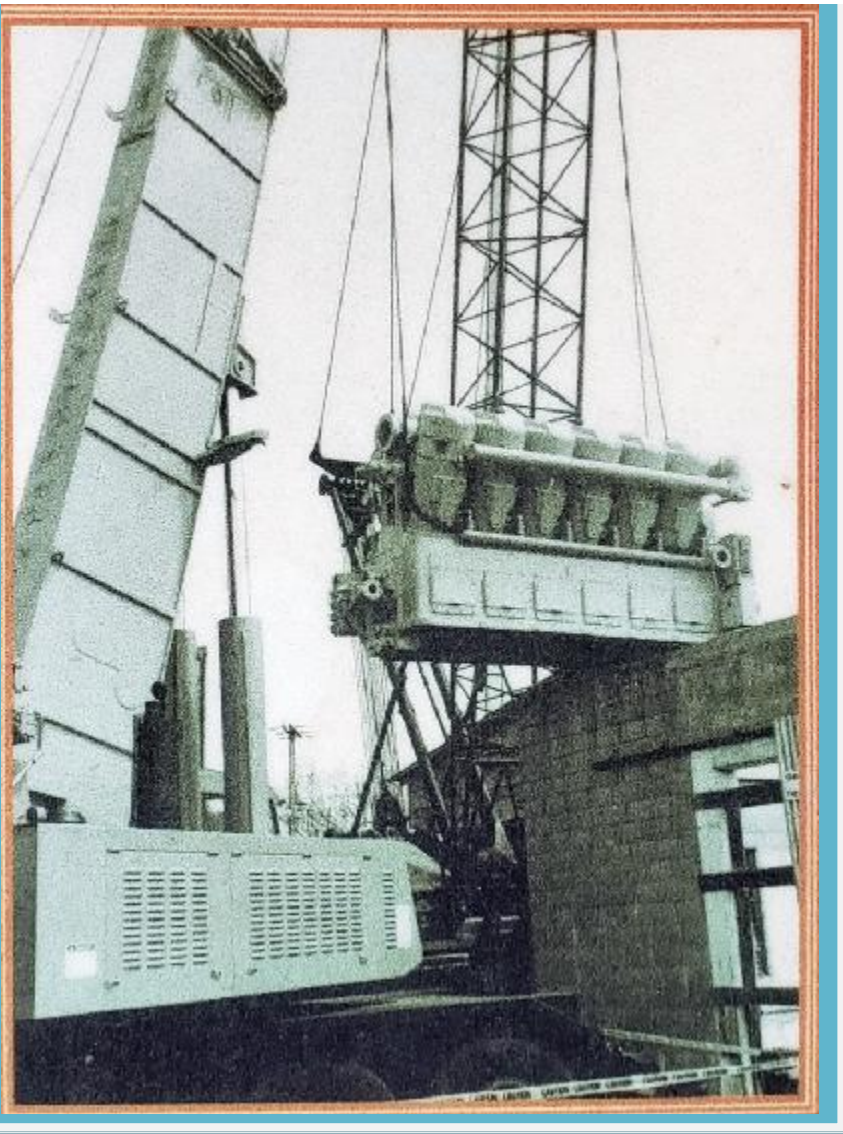
George H. Corliss
United States 1817 -1888
Developed a more efficient
valve system in 1849,
to introduce steam into
the engine cylinder,
then exhaust it.
The Pumphouse has
Corliss engines.

INGERSOLL-RAND ENGINE

Originally installed in 1954, the Ingersoll-Rand engine was removed in 1983 and sold to an Odessa power plant. From there, it went to Houston and was dismantled for parts. The engine you see here is a sister engine donated by K&K Compression Co. in 1994. One 80-ton and

one 120-ton crane were needed to install the engine, lifting it over the pumphouse walls and then lowering it 40 feet into position. Imagine installing the original engines in this pumphouse in the early 1900s when heavy equipment was unavailable and hard manual labor had to get the job done.





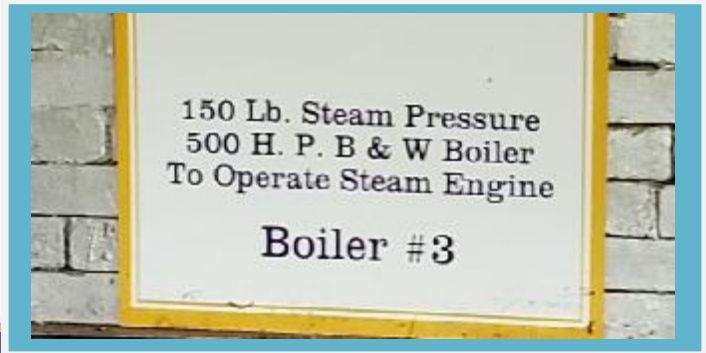
At its peak, the Hidalgo Pumphouse sent water to the fields at a rate of 350,000 gallons per minute. It took three minutes of pumping or over a million gallons of water to produce a single bale of cotton. Imagine how much water is required to produce all the food and fiber you use every day.

1,000,000 GALLONS OF WATER
EQUALS
A BALE OF COTTON

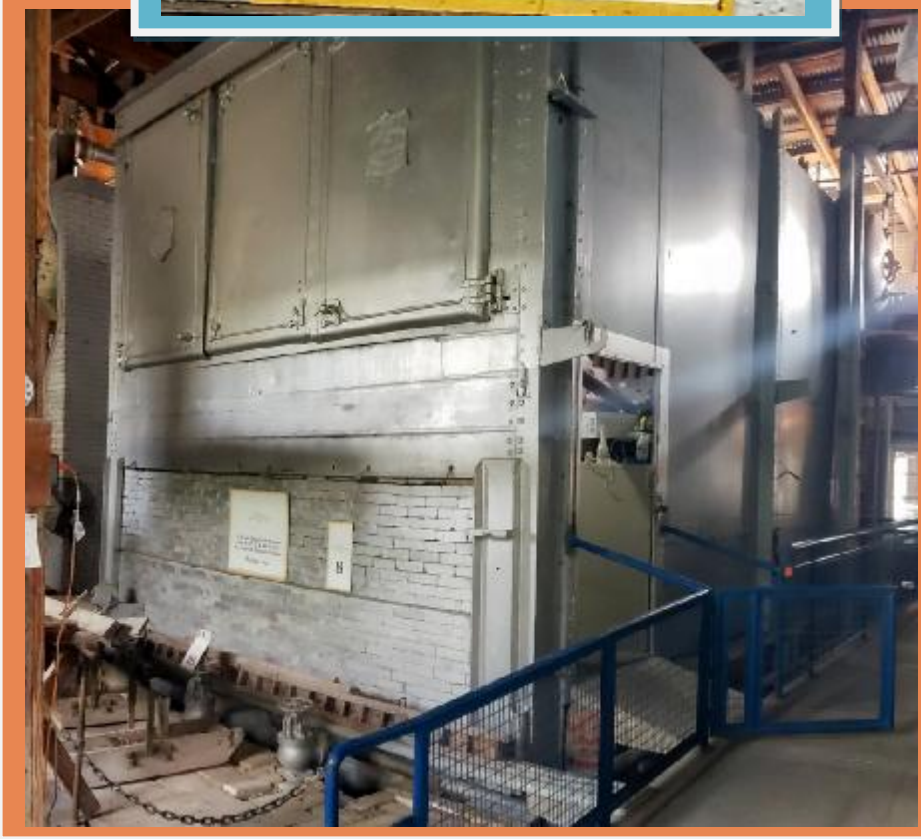


Unfo

I am assuming this is the Real McCoy and not a reproduction. Very cool.
Below - There were two of these boilers. I had to use a panoramic to fit it all in.



150 Lb. Steam Pressure
500 H. P. B & W Boiler
To Operate Steam Engine
Boiler #3

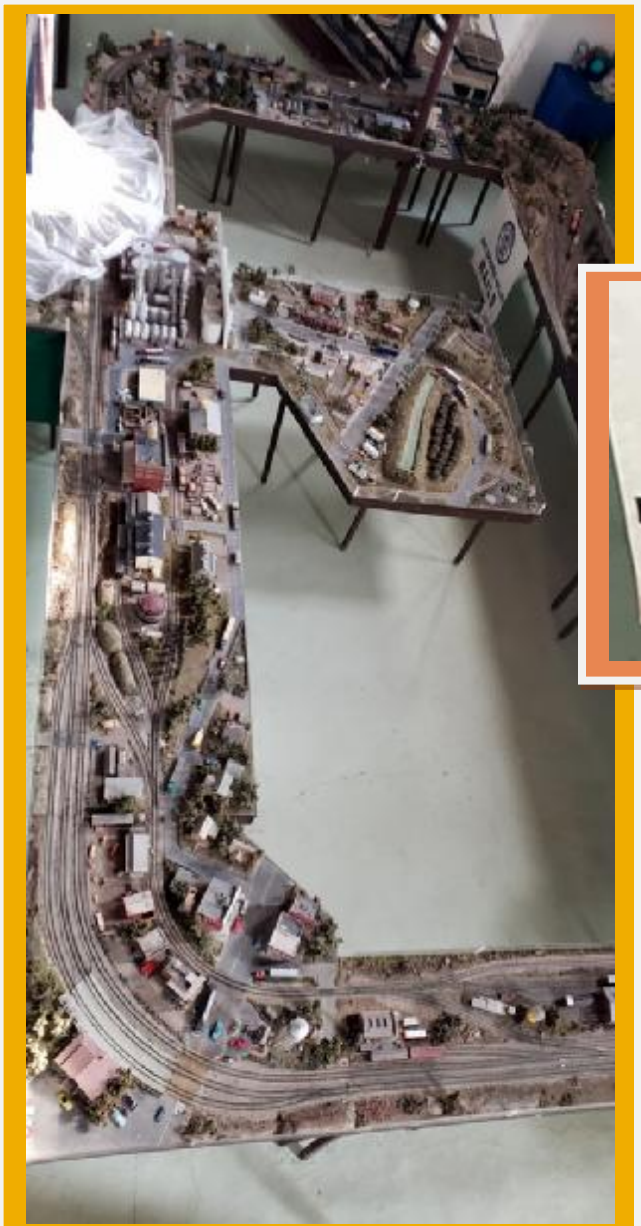


**125 Foot
Smoke
Stack**

I believe this is the first time I have ever seen the base of a smoke stack. Well, almost a base. I gave thought to climbing over the rope, but realized later I didn't have to.



Don't ask me about the mummified looking figure on the right. I have no idea, and I wasn't about to get close enough to find out more.



This museum, the inside tour anyways, is closed to the public (although it looked like they were planning a Valentine's Day party). The boiler areas, as you can see, are accessible, but only from the upper level. My research said nothing about a model railroad layout here. So this photo was taken from the upper level and the angle is super awkward.

HIDALGO IN 1927

The City of Hidalgo is located on lands settled by Spanish colonizer Jose de Escandon in 1749. In 1848, Scottish-born merchant John Young founded a town site straddling Spanish land grants 63 and 64 as a trading post and ferry landing opposite Reynosa, Mexico. Originally named Edinburgh, the name was changed to Hidalgo in 1861 in honor of Mexican patriot Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla for whom the County of Hidalgo was also named. Hidalgo County was formed in 1852 with Hidalgo, the only town in the county until 1905, as its county seat from 1852 until 1908.

The brick sidewalk display in front of you shows approximately what the city streets looked like when it was surveyed in 1927. The street names are different from today, but several of historic buildings that were here in 1927 are still here, and are indicated by concrete blocks bearing their names. As you can see, the Rio Grande was right in the middle of it all.



This was a little different, and I enjoyed walking around on it. Only a few hundred yards away sat the levee, the wall and the Border Patrol.



The water feature in the back depicts the Rio Grande River. This was very well thought out and designed.

I was hoping to bring you some scenery to look at, but that's the way the National Wildlife Refuge crumbles. I think they should re-label it as National Nature Refuge.

The overnight options are starting to get a little scarce as I make my way west to less populated areas. This reminds me of an interesting fact – The reason for the lack of free camping in Texas, like BLM lands, dates back to 1845 when the United States wanted Texas to join the union. Texas would only agree to statehood if it got to keep most of the 225 million acres of unsettled land that was legally owned by the Republic of Texas. The feds agreed.

I was just checking my itinerary and found that the H.E.B. Planetarium in Edinburg is open after sundown on Tuesdays, that's today. A quick check of the website states the last show starts at 9:00. Go figure, its 8:58.

You know, I could have just deleted the paragraph above and none of you would know that I thought it was Tuesday when it was actually Wednesday. But I'm human. I make mistakes. I own up to them.

The planetarium is open for walk-ins to see the various short films they have, and since the weather tomorrow looks wet, maybe I'll visit the planetarium on Thursday. So There.

Until next time.....