

Beautiful, relaxing and a nearby historian's paradise -

Fort Richardson State Park

by Keith Bridwell

One of the most beautiful and historically-significant facilities operated by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department is less than 30 miles from Bridgeport, at the southern edge of Jacksboro.

Fort Richardson State Park and Historic Site offers fishing, camping, Lost Creek Reservoir State Trailway, the partially reconstructed Fort, and numerous annual organized activities.

Fort Richardson was the northernmost in the line of federal forts established in Texas after the Civil War, and was among the most significant of the frontier

posts.

At the time of the fort's establishment in 1867, the frontier situation was critical. Increased raids by Comanches, Kiowas, and Kiowa-Apaches had all but depopulated the northwestern frontier of Texas and had seriously threatened the entire westward settlement. Fort Richardson, only 70 miles from the Indian Territory (Oklahoma), occupied a highly strategic position in a new line of forts created to protect travelers and settlers.

Troops of the Sixth Cavalry under the command of Colonel S.H. Starr first set up quarters near Jacksboro in 1866. The garrison was

later moved 20 miles north to Buffalo Springs. Due to unhealthy conditions there, the post was removed to Jacksboro in the fall of 1867 and located at its present site on the south bank of Lost Creek.

The boom in Jacksboro which followed the establishment of the fort brought gamblers, saloons and camp followers. Tiny cells housed soldiers confined to the guardhouse for drunkenness and gambling.

Fort Richardson was named in honor of General Israel B. Richardson, who died in the battle of Antietam during the Civil War.

The Quaker Peace Policy, initiated by President U.S. Grant in 1869, placed the Indian reservations under civilian control and prohibited military movements on the reservations. Some tribes took advantage of this policy by raiding into Texas and returning to the sanctuary of the reservation, knowing troops from Fort Richardson would not cross the Red River in pursuit.

Unending drudgery was the normal lot of the frontier soldier. They guarded the military road connecting Richardson with Forts Griffin and Concho to the southwest, provided escorts for mail and supply trains, and made it possible for traffic to move along the vital routes.

One of Fort Richardson's most famous commanders was Colonel Ranald Slidell Mackenzie of the Fourth Cavalry - a highly successful Indian fighter who commanded the post from April, 1871 to December, 1872.

Mackenzie, you will recall, ended the Indian domination of the Southern Plains at the Battle of Palo Duro Canyon on September 28, 1874.

By 1875, the frontier of Texas was relatively secure, and the services of Fort Richardson were no longer needed. Orders for the abandonment of Fort Richardson were issued March 29, 1878; on May 23, the last troops marched to their new station at Fort Griffin.

Many of the buildings in use between 1867 and 1878 at Fort Richardson have been preserved or reconstructed, including the hospital and morgue (by far, the largest structure), officers' quarters, barracks, bakery, guard house, magazine and commissary.

Numerous public activities are conducted at the park each year, and a Trail Smart program conducted by Peace Officer Clyde Watson was concluded on September 17.

Activities still available during 2005 are Archaeology Experience on October 15 - a mock dig guided by Diane Dismukes; Dinner with the Commander on October 22 - an 1870's-style meal typical of the era with continuing entertainment all evening; and Fort Richardson Days on November 5-6 - where you are invited to experience a day in the life of the soldiers stationed at Fort



The completely restored hospital and morgue, largest of the buildings dating from the 1860's inside Fort Richardson State Park.

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Richardson during the 1870's. Visit with the Ladies of the Garrison and learn of the trials and tribulations experienced by the officers' wives. Relax on the hospital veranda and be transported back in time.

For times, cost and other details of these events, you are invited to telephone 940/567-3506.

The Lost Creek State Trailway is an 18-mile round-trip multi-use trail along the shore of Twin Lakes, suitable for hiking, biking or horseback riding. Take note, however, that there is no potable water available on the trail.

Daily entrance fee per adult to the park is \$2, but children 12 and under are admitted free. Campsites with water and electricity are available for \$14 per site. Screened shelters with water and electricity are \$20. In either case, you may add sewer service for \$2.

Primitive campsites for one to eight people are available for \$5, and a group pavilion is offered for \$30 per day.

Tour fees are \$1 for adults and 50¢ for children. Lost Creek Trailway passes are available on an annual basis for \$40 per family or \$25 per individual. The Customer Contact Center phone number is 512/389-8900.

Pets are permitted on the trails, but must be under control and on a leash at all times.

A gift shop is housed in the State Parks Store (headquarters building). Restroom facilities, showers, a dump station, interpretive center and picnic areas are available.

Other frontier fortifications operated by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department include Fort Griffin in Shackelford County, Fort McKavett in Menard County, Fort Lancaster in Crockett County, Fort Leaton in Presidio County and Fort Parker.



A plaque honoring members of the Lost Battalion of World War II fame is near the Interpretive Center.



Entrance to one of the tree-lined playground and picnic areas at Fort Richardson.



The park headquarters and gift shop is reflected in Quarry Lake.



Quarry Lake is the primary bank-fishing facility in the park.



A well-equipped and maintained playground and picnic area is within easy walking distance.



Abundant wildlife - including almost-tame deer and a healthy crop of roadrunners - thrive in the park.



A monument honoring "F" Battery Lost Battalion in World War II, with the Fort hospital in the background.



The restored Officers' Quarters stands sentry over the parade ground at Fort Richardson Historic Area.