



THE RED RIVER FRONTIER AND THE TEXAS PANHANDLE WERE WILD, UNSETTLED PLACES IN THE EARLY 1870S. THE INDIANS, CHIEFLY KIOWA AND COMANCHE, SAW THEIR WAY OF LIFE BEING DESTROYED AND RESISTED THE ARMY'S DRIVE TO PUT THEM PERMANENTLY ON RESERVATIONS IN INDIAN TERRITORY, NORTH OF THE RED RIVER. DISEASE, HUNGER AND PROBABLY BOREDOM LED MANY BANDS TO ATTEMPT A RETURN TO THE TRADITIONAL WAYS. BETWEEN 1871 AND 1874 INDIAN GROUPS AND CAVALRYMEN PLAYED A DEADLY CAT AND MOUSE GAME OF RAIDS, PATROLS, SMALL AMBUSHES AND OCCASIONAL PITCHED BATTLES ON THE NORTHERN FRONTIER AND THE PANHANDLE. FORT RICHARDSON WAS A KEY POST IN THIS STRUGGLE.



Lost Creek Reservoir State Trailway is a multi-use trail running adjacent to Fort Richardson and along scenic Lost Creek. The nearly 10-mile trail follows the creek, traveling the east side of Lake Jacksboro before crossing the dam at Lost Creek Reservoir. The trail casually winds along the terrain and offers many shaded areas of pecan and oak trees as it travels through the park.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department works to preserve this historic site while maintaining and interpreting the frontier character of this Texas fort. You have a part to play in helping assure this natural and cultural resource endures. Come experience the past and pass on our heritage to future generations. For more information about programs, volunteering or joining the friends group, contact the park or visit our Web site.

FURTHER READING

Sentinel of the Southern Plains: Fort Richardson and the Northwest Texas Frontier, 1866-1878 by Allen Lee Hamilton
Along the Texas Forts Trail by B.W. Aston and Donathan Taylor
Texas Forts, Lone Star Guide by Wayne Lease

NEARBY FORTS OF INTEREST

Fort Griffin State Park and Historic Site, near Albany
 Fort Belknap, near Graham
 Fort Phantom Hill, near Abilene

Fort Richardson State Park, Historic Site
 and Lost Creek Reservoir State Trailway
 228 State Park Road 61, Jacksboro, Texas 76458
 (940) 567-3506

www.tpwd.state.tx.us/fortrichardson/



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Interpretive Guide to:

FORT RICHARDSON

STATE PARK
AND
HISTORIC
SITE



SENTINEL OF THE SOUTHERN PLAINS

Fort Richardson was the northernmost post of a line of forts stretching from the Rio Grande to the Red River. Working in concert with other Texas posts and Fort Sill in Indian Territory, the fort played an important role in subduing the native Plains Indians and forcing them onto reservations north of the Red River. Troops of the 6th Cavalry established the post at its present site on the south bank of Lost Creek, near Jacksboro, in the fall of 1867. Fort Richardson was named in honor of General Israel B. Richardson, a veteran of the Seminole Indian War and the Mexican War who died at the Civil War Battle of Antietam in 1862.

The soldiers of Fort Richardson maintained the post, guarded the military road connecting them with Forts Griffin and Concho to the southwest, helped local law officers keep the peace, pursued criminals and deserters and most importantly, patrolled for Indian raiding parties. On occasion "routine" patrols became bloody battles; one of the most notable being the fierce battle at the Little Wichita River in July 1870. Kiowa Chief Kicking Bird and a large war party ambushed 56 troopers from the 6th Cavalry at Little Wichita. Even though heavily outnumbered, the cavalrymen fought off their attackers. Medals of Honor were awarded to 13 men of the 6th for gallantry.

The Quaker Peace Policy, initiated by President Grant in 1869, placed Indian reservations under civilian control and prohibited military movements on the reservations. Frustrated and dissatisfied with life on the reservation, many warriors responded by attacking white settlements in Texas. The raiders were greeted as heroes, and their new status as warriors effectively undercut the authority of those chiefs who counseled peace.



SECURING THE FRONTIER



Col. Ranald S. Mackenzie

Col. Ranald Mackenzie, Civil War hero and famed Indian fighter, commanded Fort Richardson from April 1871 to December 1872.

In response to a raid on a wagon train a few miles from the fort, commanding Gen. William T. Sherman authorized Col. Mackenzie to begin offensive operations against any Indians not on the reservation. Over a 15-month period Mackenzie led four major expeditions from Fort Richardson into the Texas Panhandle. In July 1874, President Grant rescinded the Quaker Peace Policy, releasing the military to use any means necessary to end hostile activity. On September 28, 1874 Col. Mackenzie ended the Indian domination of the Southern Plains at the Battle of Palo Duro Canyon. By 1875 the Texas frontier was relatively secure, and the soldiers at Fort Richardson were no longer needed. Orders for the abandonment of Fort Richardson were issued March 29, 1878.

The post hospital, completed in 1870, dominates the fort's parade grounds and features 18-inch thick sandstone walls, a wood frame veranda, two large wards, a dispensary, surgeon's office, kitchen, dining rooms and two washrooms. At the time, the imposing hospital was the most modern building between Fort Worth and El Paso. It has been said that your chances of surviving on the frontier were better going on an Indian campaign than having to go into the hospital. One would think that the hospital's primary task would have been patching up wounded soldiers but more men died from diseases than from battle wounds. Highest on the list of complaints requiring medical attention were illnesses caused by bad water and spoiled food, followed closely by alcoholism and venereal diseases contracted during visits to nearby dens of iniquity.

◀ Kiowa Chief Kicking Bird and a large war party ambushed 56 troopers from the 6th Cavalry at Little Wichita. Even though heavily outnumbered, the cavalrymen fought off their attackers. Medals of Honor were awarded to 13 men of the 6th for gallantry. Source: Nola Davis, TPWD artist.



Today, Fort Richardson State Park, Historic Site and Lost Creek Reservoir State Trailway contains 454.16 acres with fort site structures including seven original historic buildings which have been restored along with two replica fort buildings.

LASTING LEGACY

In 1936 the Texas Centennial Commission allocated money to purchase the 41 acres upon which the surviving fort buildings stood and the site was turned over to the City of Jacksboro and the Jack County Historical Society to maintain. Fort Richardson continued to be the center of community activities, including country fairs, circuses, rattlesnake roundups, baseball games, dances, graduations and even political rallies. The National Parks Service declared Fort Richardson a National Historic Landmark in 1963 and five years later the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department took over operation of the post.

In November 1940, Fort Richardson was the mobilization site for Battery F, 2nd Battalion, 131st Field Artillery Regiment, 36th Infantry Division, Texas National Guard. The unit was at sea when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. They were captured in Java in March 1942, having been left behind when the Americans retreated to Australia, garnering them the name the "Lost Battalion." They spent the rest of World War II as Japanese prisoners performing forced labor, suffering untold hardships and starvation. A historic marker at the park commemorates the men who were mobilized at the fort.

