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LOOKING FOR THE MOUTH OF THE BRAZOS? IT'S MOVED

Looking for the mouth of the Brazos River? Finding it might not be as easy one might think.

Near the coastal towns of Surfside and Quintana you can find the inlet where ships once reached the Brazos from the Gulf of Mexico. But you won't find the real mouth of the Brazos there today.

It has moved down the coast about three miles.

To see why, one has to understand how the hopes of early Texas entrepreneurs clashed with the river's physical realities.

The Brazos is the longest river segment within Texas, stretching more than 800 miles from near New Mexico to the Gulf. Since it crosses through the heart of the state's prime agricultural region, the Brazos was long desired as a route to transport the cotton, sugar and other crops that helped drive Texas' economy.

Unfortunately, more than a few obstacles stood in the way of making much of the river navigable and useful for commerce.

According to the book "Custodians of the Coast - History of the United States Army Engineers at Galveston," travel was impeded by "many rocks, shoals, bars, snags, bends, rapids and variable water levels." River travel was also hampered by changing water flows – alternately suffering from too little or too much water.

Crews set to work clearing the river. However, compounding the problem, a sandbar at the river's mouth fluctuated in depth from 4 to 10 feet, making the area all but impassable.

As one engineer said in the early 1900s, "As a competitor with the port of Galveston, only 45 miles away, I do not believe the mouth of the Brazos will ever amount to much unless some additional advantages are given to it."

The first significant attempt to address the sand bar and access to the Gulf happened in the mid-1850s, when a group dug a canal linking the river with Galveston Bay, allowing commerce to avoid the sandbar. However, the cost of keeping the canal dredged, coupled with the rise of railroad for shipping freight, soon caused the project to be abandoned.

Congestion at the Port of Galveston and growing regional industry revived interest in the mouth of the Brazos in the early 20th century. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers improved the depth of a channel to more than 20 feet in the Brazos between Freeport and the Gulf. However periodic flooding would cover the improvements with silt.

Finally, in 1929, the Corps dug a new mouth to the river a few miles down the coast, where the sandbar wasn't an issue. A dam was built to divert the Brazos to this new outlet, where it meets the Gulf to this day.

The river's old mouth remains, connected to Freeport Harbor, which reaches inland to just east of the Brazos diversion dam. According to the Army Engineers' history book, officials in Freeport have since dredged that Harbor channel to help



This lighthouse, built in 1896 at Velasco, helped guide ships to safety near the old mouth of the Brazos River. The Brazos Light was scrapped in 1967 after the property on which it sat was bought by Dow Chemical.

with navigation.

Thus with its two “mouths” the Brazos holds a unique place among Texas rivers.

