

Tockonhono Naturalist, continued

by Chris Kneupper

“On its banks, more than a century and a half ago, a handful of barefoot Franciscan friars, who had prayed and fought their way across the country from Mexico, founded the Presidio of St. Jago, and corralled within the boundary walls a flock of Yndios reducidos (mission or Christianized Indians). There were a stately church, cloistered and towered and rose-windowed Š a curious flower of architecture abloom in the savage wilderness Š and the blockhouse with its narrow loopholes, and the hut into which the Indian women were thrust at night under lock and key.

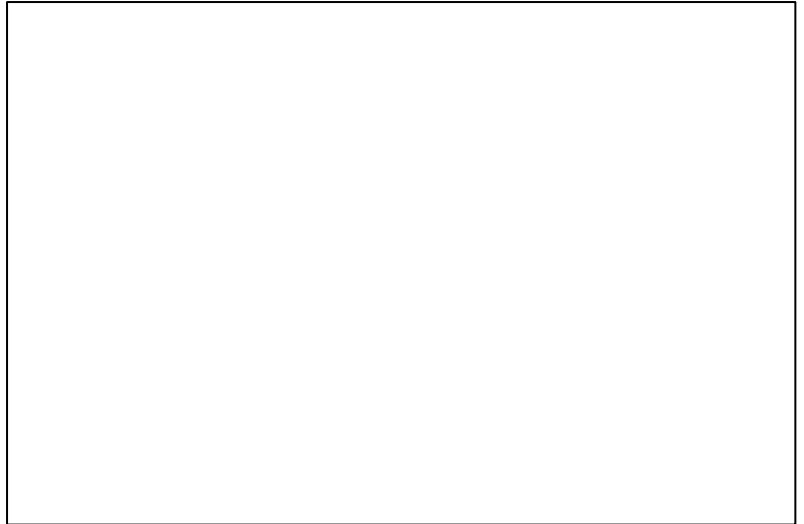
“The mighty forest and open prairies around teemed with Yndios bravos (wild Indians), who hated the burly cassocked, fighting monks, and their own Christianized tribesmen. These came, in number like the leaves of the live oak, to hurl themselves against the Presidio. And, after many days of hard fighting, the single friar who remained alive turned his eyes away from the demolished church, and, under the cover of smoke from the burning blockhouse, led the remnant of Yndios reducidos (who because they had learned how to pray had not forgotten how to fight) out of the enclosure by a little postern-gate, and down the steep bank to the yellow thread of the river below.

“Midway of the stream Š thridding the ankle-deep water Š they were, before the red devils above discovered their flight. The demoniac yell from a thousand throats pushed them like a battering ram up the opposite bank, whence, looking back, they saw the bed of the River Tockonhono swarming with their foes. Then the Yndios reducidos opened their lips and began to chant the death-song of the Nainis; and the friar, lifting his hand, commended their souls and his own to God who gives and who takes away.

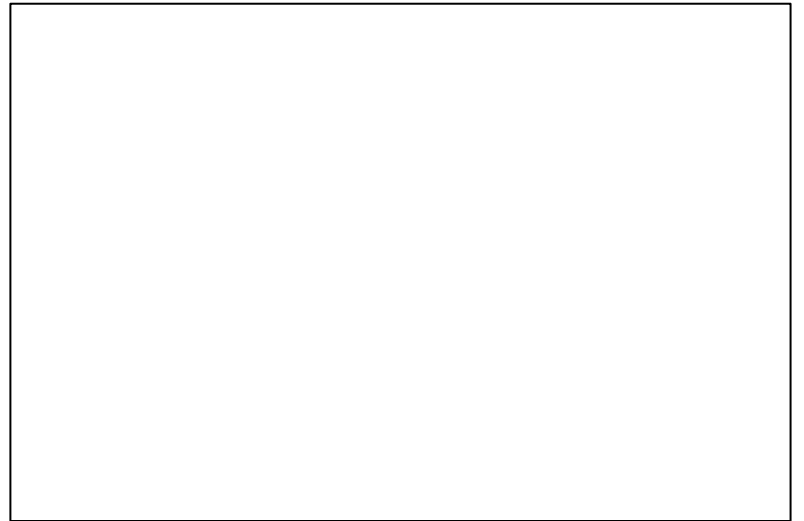
“But, lo a miracle! Even as the waves of the Red Sea – opened by the rod of Moses for the passage of his people – closed upon Pharoah and his host, so, with the hoarse roar of a wild beast springing upon its prey, the foam-crested wall of water fell upon the Yndios bravos, and not a warrior of them all came forth from the river bed but as a bruised and beaten corpse. So, the friar, falling on his knees, gave thanks. And, the river, which was the Tockonhono, became from that day Los Brazos de Dios, which is to say, The Arms of God .

Such is the legend of the river.”

So, we selected the earlier name of the river to represent our efforts in writing this column. We hope you all will contribute any interesting tidbits that you discover in your explorations of the bottomlands anywhere near the Tockonhono !



The Brazos River enters the Gulf of Mexico at the west end of Bryan Beach. After a winter storm in March of 2012, the strong river current carried trees from many miles upstream and deposited them on the banks of the river (above) and on nearby Bryan Beach (below). Photos by P. Romfh



At the river's end, signs warn of the dangerous currents that exist where the river meets the Gulf of Mexico, 1280 miles from its source. Photo by P. Romfh

