

# Comanche Peak, Travis County

Richard Denney, Travis County Historical Commission

Charles Bergh, Director, Travis County Parks

I'd like to acknowledge the following persons for their help in research, fact checking, review and feedback: Jimmy W. Arterberry, Comanche Tribal Member, Comanche Historian and Author; Linda Pelon, Comanche Historian and Author; Lanny Ottosen, Associate Member Travis County Historical Commission; Steve Rossignol, Blanco County Historical Commission; Anthony Whitt, Author, Preece descendant.

## Context

While most Austinites know Comanche Trail (the road) as the way to get to The Oasis on Lake Travis, self-proclaimed "Sunset Capital of Texas", few realize those fantastic views over the lake are due to its location next to (indeed part of) Comanche Peak. Even long-time Austinites asked about Comanche Peak will often respond, "Oh yeah, what is that all about anyway?". Even less known is the existence of the adjacent Defeat Hollow much less why it is called that. This marker application is meant to tell these undertold stories and begin to redress the lack of Native American focused historical markers in Travis County by providing a *geographic and historic context* for Comanche Peak.

In Travis County there is a single peak named for an American Indian tribe: Comanche Peak by Lake Travis. Indeed, according to the USGS' Geographic Names Information System (GNIS)<sup>1</sup> it may be the only *natural geographic feature* (not man-made, e.g. a street, development sub-division) in Travis County named for an American Indian tribe. Its location helps us better understand the Comanche geography of Travis County and the trail system into Austin along the Colorado utilized by the Comanche.

---

<sup>1</sup> The GNIS classifies Comanche Peak as a summit, one of only three in Texas to bear that name, elevation 1070'. Defeat Hollow is classified as a valley and the only one in Texas to bear that name.

The story of Defeat Hollow, located next to Comanche Peak, was first recorded by Mulky Owens of the Travis County Historical Commission based on oral histories of long-time residents of Hudson Bend (Owens). That story has since been printed (Perkins) and augmented with additional interviews (Sikes).

Defeat Hollow is a place name that recalls what may have been the last skirmish between Comanches and Texans in Travis County, and the only place in Travis County named for a skirmish between the Comanche and Texans. *But most importantly*, the story of Defeat Hollow, coupled with census, grants, and deed records, provides a way to date how late into the 19th century the Comanche were utilizing Comanche Peak and its surrounding trails. This is a part of Travis County history that has not been documented.

Please note, references to raids, skirmishes, etc. are in no way meant to extol or judge events or participants. These topics are, quite simply, one of the few historic references available that provide locations and dates relevant to documenting the role of Comanche Peak in the Comanche geography of Travis County.

## Overview

In this section I will provide historical and geographic context for Comanche Peak. I will start with a brief history of the Penateka Comanche in early Travis County; then discuss the Old Burnet Road as geographical context for Comanche Peak and Comanche Trail Road; provide context for Comanche Peak in terms of Comanche geography, navigation, surveillance and signaling; review oral histories surrounding Comanche Peak, and finally look at the origin of Comanche Peak as a place name recording oral history documented by the USGS ca. 1930.

## Brief History of Penateka Comanche in Early Travis Co.

At Austin's founding, historically recorded tribes included Apache, Comanche, Tonkawa and Waco (a branch of the Wichita). The Tonkawa were probably the oldest residents of the area at its founding<sup>2</sup>, but the dominant tribe was the Comanche who were in control of much of Texas while still part of Spain, then Mexico. As a republic, then a state, Texas' battle for control with

---

<sup>2</sup> "Traditionally, the Tonkawa have been regarded as an old Texas tribe, but new evidence suggests that the Tonkawa migrated from the high plains as late as the seventeenth century. (Handbook of Texas).

the Comanche lasted far longer than that with Mexico. Texas' battle with the Comanche was the genesis of the original republic era Texas Rangers and numerous forts along the state's western frontier as settlement moved west. The Comanche in Texas were an integral part of the Texas mythos expressed in so many stories, books, and even movies like John Wayne's *The Searchers*.

Likewise, Austin's early history is inseparable from the history of the Penateka Comanche, the southernmost division of the tribe whose Comancheria ranged from the headwaters of the Colorado River into the Hill Country, Austin and further. It is the Comanche that Noah Smithwick, author and Texas Ranger at Fort Colorado on the eastern edge of what would become Austin wrote about. And as Austin was being built, as T.R. Fehrenbach wrote, "...while surveyors and engineers laid out Austin's future streets, curious parties of Pehnahterkuh (sic) sat on their ponies on the surrounding limestone bluffs above the river, watching." <sup>3</sup>

It was the Penateka involved in the pivotal events of 1840. The raid in August 1840 by Penateka Comanches, led by war chief Buffalo Hump, on Victoria and the Port of Linnville, on Lavaca Bay, Texas, is said to be the largest raid by American Indians on a city in U.S. history. Linnville was sacked and burned by the Comanches, and the port was never rebuilt. Citizens of Linnville escaped to safety by taking to small boats and a schooner in the waters off the bay, watching as their town was burned to the ground.

The raid on Victoria and Linnville was one in a sequence of strikes and counterstrikes in Republic of Texas history that defined bitter relations between Comanches and Texans. Events began with the "Council House Fight" (the Comanche saw it as an ambush & massacre) in San Antonio, March 1840 in which Republic of Texas officials attempted to capture and take prisoner a large number of Comanche chiefs who had come to negotiate a peace treaty and return hostages, killing them all, together with dozens of their family and followers. The Comanche raid on Victoria and Linnville in August of 1840 was in revenge for what they saw as an ambush by Texans at the Council House in San Antonio. The Battle of Plum Creek, near Lockhart, Texas, shortly after the raid on Linnville, was Texans' retaliation against Comanches on their return from Linnville. And finally, the "Comanche Village Massacre" in October 1840, was further revenge by Texans for the raid on Victoria and Linnville by striking Penateka Comanches

---

<sup>3</sup> see Anderson with respect to various spellings of the band's name in English. I've used "Penateka" here as it is in common use.

in their homeland near what is now Colorado City (Texas Historical Marker 995, “Comanche Village Massacre”).

## Context for Comanche Peak: Trail from Mt. Bonnell to Burnet

Janet Long Fish in an oral interview in 2000 speculated on the connection between the north-south Comanche trail along Shoal Creek and the trail to Mount Bonnell, on past Bull Creek to Comanche Peak. That trail, from Mount Bonnell to Comanche Peak, was, I will argue in this section, a segment of a longer trail that would later become a road.

While we have here in Austin a road today called Comanche Trail running next to Comanche Peak by Lake Travis, I think it’s relevant to look at the bigger picture and consider the trail then road of which today's Comanche Trail was a part. That road is (or was) one of two roads connecting Burnet and Austin. Segments of that old road still exist by Lake Travis as Old Burnet Road.

The Penateka, our local division of the Comanche, called the headwaters of the Colorado River home. It was near Colorado City, TX, John Moore attacked a Comanche village in 1840. That attack was the culmination of a string of conflicts that year between Texans and Penateka beginning with what is variously called the Council House fight or massacre; followed by a revenge attack by the Penateka on the towns of Victoria and Linnville; followed by the battle at Plum Creek. The attack by John Moore was intended to take the fight to the Penateka in their homeland.

Along the swath of the Colorado River and its tributaries closer to Austin, the area of Burnet, Texas was a favored campsite, hence the reason for Fort Croghan’s location. In 1847 Texas Rangers under Henry McCulloch (Ben McCulloch's brother) set up a camp south of today's Burnet to disrupt Comanche occupation and protect Texas settlement. The location was later moved north of Hamilton Creek at the base of Post Mountain and became U.S. Fort Croghan. As was often the case, where there was a fort, a town sprang up giving us today's Burnet, Texas (originally called Hamilton Valley as is shown on some old maps).

TX A&M Forest Service’s official Indian Marker Tree was located on Hamilton Creek, near where the fort would be later located, in Burnet. From their website: "In the fall, [the

Comanche] passed through Central Texas and one of their favorite camping spots was along Hamilton Creek which flows through Burnet".

Comanche Chief Yellow Wolf made appearances at the fort, had his portrait painted there by the fort's commander, Capt. Arthur T. Lee (Anderson, p.249), and camped near what would later be the site of Gabriel Mills. It was atop nearby Mt. Gabriel, AKA, Pilot Knob, a mesa and highest point in Williamson County, Comanches said to have been associated with Yellow Wolf watched the approach of the ill-fated Webster wagon train in 1839 (Dolbeare, p8). It was Yellow Wolf, camped near Gabriel Mills, Frank Dobie wrote about in his classic *Coronado's Children* telling tales to Samuel Mather of a silver mine "three suns to the west".<sup>4</sup>

Burnet Road(s) are from a time when roads were named for their destination, in this case Burnet, Texas. From Austin, there were historically two Burnet Roads. The "high road" was east of the Colorado, out of the river valley and the route most travelers today would take; it is the general route of today's US 183 / SH 29. On this route was Tumlinson's blockhouse fort, built 1836, burned by the Comanche in 1837. On this route was the attack on the Webster wagon train by Comanches in 1839 near today's Leander. And this route was also known as the "military road" which ran through Bagdad, so-called because it was the road to Fort Croghan. Not much is left of Bagdad today but the cemetery.

But there was a second "Burnet Road". Any traffic into Austin down the Colorado river valley would, of geographic necessity, probably have tracked this route which I'll refer to as Old Burnet Road as there are remnants of that road by that name around Lake Travis. A GLO map surveyed in 1877 shows the length of the road<sup>5</sup>. The skirmish at Defeat Hollow, near Comanche Peak, between Joel Harris and Indians had occurred only years before this map was surveyed, ca. 1870. It may well be today's Comanche Trail (the road) was a side road off this longer road; i.e. a pull-off from the main road to reach the top of Comanche Peak. A review of an early aerial

---

<sup>4</sup> The mine is described as "three suns to the west ... under a bluff near the junction of two streams". This description fits Packsaddle Mountain near the junction of the Llano and Colorado Rivers, investigated by geologists and archeologists as the possible location of the "cerro de almagre" silver mine reported by the Spanish in 1756 ("Los Almagres, the Lost Spanish Mine", Texas Beyond History). The relevance of Packsaddle is its tie to a skirmish between Comanches and Texans in 1873; more later.

<sup>5</sup> See GLO Map of Travis County, Texas, surveyed 1877. See also USGS, Burnet (County) Sheet, Texas. Surveyed 1885, published 1887.

photo of Comanche Peak, taken in 1937 by Tobin Imagery, shows today's road, Comanche Trail, was indeed just a trail in 1937.

Starting from Austin, Old Burnet Road was today's FM 2222<sup>6</sup> to 4-points, then straight ahead on what is today Bullick Hollow Rd. It ran to Anderson Mill, to Volente, Travis Peak and on to Burnet. Parts of the road emerge from Lake Travis today (in Google Maps search for "Old Burnet Road, Leander, Texas"). Commissioners Court Minutes show the segment between Anderson Mill to Burnet (then still called Hamilton Valley) being discussed as early as 1853 (Commissioners Court Minutes, book B, p.39).

Mt. Bonnell was a historically referenced entry to Austin for Native Americans. Julia Lee Sinks talked of the "beaten track of the Indians into town from the pass of Mount Bonnell". Of Bigfoot Wallace's refuge in the cave on Mount Bonnell, when asked why there, he responded "Well ... the cave was right on the old Indian trail leading down to Austin". It was the route of escape of the Comanches<sup>7</sup> that abducted the Simpson children from West Pecan in 1844. Old Burnet Road was the road that connected Burnet to Mt. Bonnell, passing at the base of Comanche Peak.

Old Burnet Road is probably the most significant route coming down the Colorado River in connection with Comanche Peak passing at its foot. But once there, Comanche Peak would have been a jumping off point for other trails. Santa Monica Springs is less than four miles south of Comanche Peak and is said to have been a Comanche watering stop (Gelo 2000)(Brune), and a ford across the Colorado leading to today's Bee Caves Road then east to Barton Springs (Brune), or alternatively to various other sites to the west.

---

<sup>6</sup> For clarification today's 2222 was also known as Bull Creek Rd. Bull Creek Rd has changed routes over time, at one point going to then passing below Mt. Bonnell before Lake McDonald, now Lake Austin, were created. After the creation of Lake McDonald, it was elevated and connected with Mt. Bonnell Rd. See Travis County Historical Commission blog: "What does Bull Creek Road have to do with Bull Creek?"

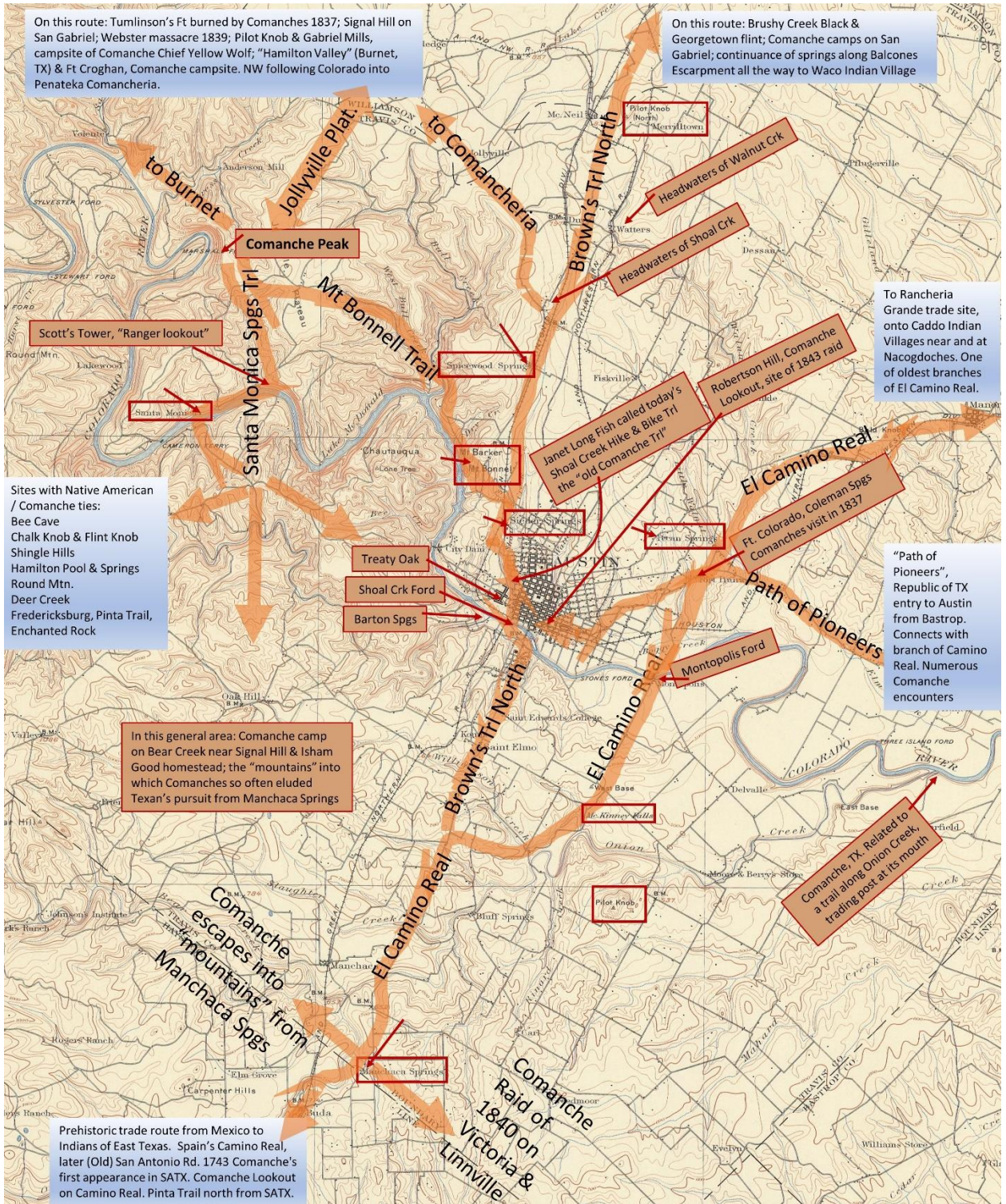
<sup>7</sup> Initially Waco Indians were cited in the abduction, but later identified as Comanche; see *The Indian Papers of Texas and the Southwest 1825-1916: Volume 2* pp. 283-84 & 298-99. Michno summarizes, p.82 "Apparently a significant number of Comanches [under Chief Cut Arm] were trying to remain at peace with Texans. They knew who [Comanches under Chief Mopechucoppe] had led the raid on the Simpsons"; those responsible were confronted resulting a fight in which Cut Arm was killed, along with the son and father responsible for the abduction.

The map below provides an overview of trails crisscrossing Austin and Travis County that would have been familiar to the Comanche and where Comanche Peak fits into the bigger picture. The map uses the USGS Austin Quadrangle surveyed in 1896:<sup>8</sup>

- Open red squares are landmarks shown on the 1896 map related to trails.
- Those with red arrows are historically tied to Native American use, or encounters with Texans.
- Red squares with text provide information not shown on 1896 map.
- Blue squares provide information about destinations off map.

---

<sup>8</sup> Some of this was covered in the article “Tracing Ancient Trails” (Barnes, p.3).



1896 USGS topo map with Native American trails.

## Context for Comanche Peak: Comanche Geography in Navigation, Surveillance and Signaling

In addition to the fact an important trail down the Colorado River passed by Comanche Peak, the role of Comanche geography in navigation, observation and signaling provide context for understanding Comanche Peak. Daniel Gelo (2000, 2003) provides insight into the prominence high ground -- peaks, mesas -- played in Comanche geography. Not just places of spirituality, prominent elevations such as Comanche Peak had a more practical use: they were landmarks for navigation, and places from which to see, and be seen (signaling).

### Landmarks for Line of Sight Navigation

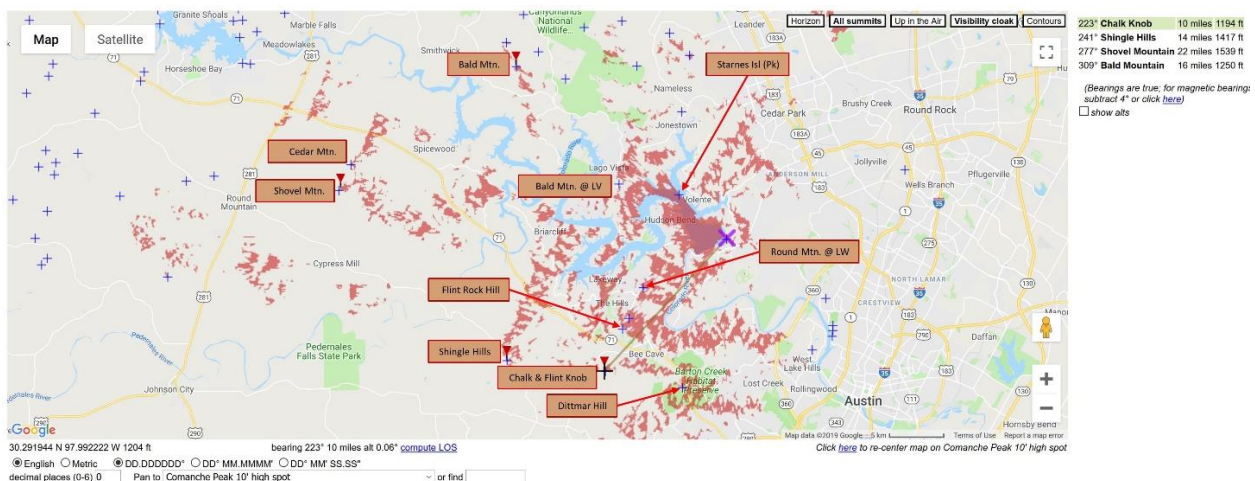
Early Anglo-American / German settlers to Texas were sometimes in disbelief at the great distances Comanches were said to have traveled on raids, often reported by recovered hostages. Raids into Mexico illustrate distances traveled. Big Spring, Texas, near the headwaters of the Colorado River, served as a staging ground, a rendezvous point, for raids into Mexico. From there Comanche trails went south, crossing into northern Mexico and even into the tropics of interior Mexico. Pekka Hämäläinen in his book *The Comanche Empire* (pp. 220-224) says raids from Texas into Mexico grew into a “veritable industry” generating a “massive northward flow of property from Mexico into Comancheria and its trade channels” to the north. The full extent of the Comanche trails into Mexico stretched nearly 1,000 miles from Comancheria in the north of Texas, deep into Mexico. Raids into Mexico started in the 1700s; the last documented raid is said to have taken place in 1870 attacking Lampazos, Coahuila, Mexico (Adams), a straight line distance of about 170+ miles south of the Texas border near Del Rio, or 300+ miles from Big Spring if that is where the raid began.

But as Daniel Gelo has pointed out, “[It is not that] Comanches have some extraordinary aptitude for navigation, but simply that by custom they pay attention to the lay of the land.” (2000). Part of the lay of the land used in navigation would of course have been creeks and rivers. But for distant line of sight navigation prominent peaks and mesas were an important navigational tool. The use of prominent peaks and mesa was of course not unique to the Comanche; place names like Pilot Knob are indications of early Texas settler's use of prominent peaks and mesas for navigation. In Travis County we have two Pilot Knobs. The highest point in

William County, now called Mount Gabriel, was also known as Pilot Knob; it is historically connected by a primary source (Dolly Webster) to Comanche utilization (Dolbear, pp.8-9).

In addition to being visible from a distance, aiding line of sight navigation, once at a high peak or mesa the Comanche could climb atop for a better view to the next key navigational landmark. If you've been to the Oasis restaurant and bar on Lake Travis, located next to Comanche Peak, you know the view is phenomenal.

A recent GIS technique used by archeologists to study what geographical features are visible on the landscape is viewshed analysis. The image below shows the viewshed analysis from Comanche Peak, marked by the purple X. Other high peaks visible from the top of Comanche Peak include: Flint & Chalk Knobs, flint procurement sites (Texas Beyond History); Flint Rock Hill landmark for Lohman's ford on the Colorado; Shingle Hills historically linked to Hamilton Pool as an Indian campground, raids (Perkins, p.59) (Barkley, p.99) (Spence, p.4) (Brown). Further, Comanche access to telescopes, acquired through trade or raids, extended viewing distances beyond what is possible with the naked eye.



Viewshed analysis from Comanche Peak

## Observation & Signaling

High peaks and mesas served an additional purpose beyond navigation: observation (surveillance) and signaling. It was from atop "Pilot Knob", today's Mt. Gabriel, the highest point in Williamson County, the Webster party were first spotted by Comanches camped nearby. In

retreat to Austin the Webster party was attacked near today's Leander and all killed except for Dolly Webster and her two children. After the attack the Comanches with their captives traveled northwest, Mrs. Webster writing later "The Indians would frequently ascend (sic) the highest hills, to ascertain if they were [being] pursued..." (Dolbeare, p.10).

While Comanche Peak is labeled a "peak", if one looks at its extent which includes today's Oasis and homes to the north, it resembles more a mesa, not dissimilar from similar mesas historically utilized by the Comanche: Comanche Peak, Hood County; Santa Anna Mtns in Santa Anna, Texas; Mt. Gabriel in Williamson County; San Saba Mtn. in Mills County; Scenic Mountain, Big Springs, Texas.

Several mountains named "Sugarloaf", like that in Milam County, were historically associated with the Comanche. A sugarloaf is a conical, molded mass of sugar and the usual form in which refined sugar was produced and sold until the late 19th century. Peaks which take this conical shape were often named "Sugarloaf"; ascent to the top allowed for quick 360-degree views of the surrounding countryside; signal fires were visible from all directions as well.

These peaks and mesas coincide with trails and campsites, e.g. Comanche Lookout in San Antonio on El Camino Real, and Cross Mtn. in Fredericksburg on the Pinta Trail, were historically utilized by the Comanche for observation and signaling. Bollaert (p.251) was a contemporary source for the use of Comanche Lookout, which he referred to as "Indian Lookout", as an observation peak.

While the historical connection is not always available, peaks named "Signal Hill", "Signal Mountain" or "Signal Peak" are often indications of remembered use as places for Native American signaling. Wikipedia provides an article listing peaks that bear the name "Signal Mountain", "Signal Peak", etc. (Wikipedia, List of peaks named Signal). From that article: "A signal mountain or signal peak is a mountain suited to sending and receiving visual signals, either from its topographic prominence and isolation or from being located where signal communications are most needed."

Primary sources documenting Comanche use of smoke signaling include Berlandier ca. 1830 (p.57, p.148); Duval ca. 1842 (*Big-Foot Wallace*, p.65); Marcy (*The Prairie Traveler*) and

Parker<sup>9</sup> (*Through Unexplored Texas*) ca. 1854. It has been discussed as a research topic by Gelo, Pelon, and with Beers providing a good compilation of sources on the topic as a whole, including probable use in the prehistoric period.

A footnote from (Berlandier, p.57) is worth quoting: “Berlandier described the Comanche method of smoke-signaling in his Journal (vol. 2, p.86): ‘The smoke of a fire, allowed to escape in puffs by removing the burning brands and then suddenly dropping them, its direction, and so on, communicate to other Comanche groups the news of a victory or defeat in pursuit of an enemy, the direction of an expedition is taking, its progress, etc.’”.

Neighboring counties Hays and Williamson both have Signal Hills; the former was near a historically documented Comanche campsite on Bear Creek (Hays County Historical Commission); the latter on the trail up the Colorado River followed by the Webster party. While we have no direct evidence that Comanche Peak was used for signaling, the local presence of such “Signal Hills” suggests it would not have been unlikely.

Finally, referring back to the viewshed analysis of Comanche Peak, keep in mind that smoke signals rising hundreds of feet in the air would be visible from even greater distances.

## Flint Procurement

Finally, a bonus to peaks and mesa is the likelihood of exposing strata with flint. Cross Mountain in Fredericksburg, Texas, is a great example of a flat-topped peaked historically linked to Comanche observation and signaling, with a layer of limestone near the top exposing a beautiful amber flint. Gelo (2003, p.109) references an archeological study of Comanche Lookout in San Antonio in 1997 which noted natural outcrops of flint near the top. What better use of time while on "guard duty" atop a peak than quarrying flint.

As previously noted, Chalk & Flint Knobs, both flint procurement sites, are in the viewshed of Comanche Peak. Archeological work would need to be done to establish if Comanche Peak itself might have been a procurement site. The limited archeological investigation done on Comanche Peak on Travis County owned property has documented lithic

---

<sup>9</sup> Parker was part of the Marcy expedition.

scatters; the area below Comanche Peak that is now under Lake Travis is rich in archeological sites.

## Oral Histories Surrounding Comanche Peak

In this section I expand upon an oral history about Defeat Hollow first documented by Mulky Owens of the Travis County Historical Survey Committee, and revisit / better document oral histories of the Harris, Stanford and Preece families here in Travis County.

The *significance* of the skirmish at Defeat Hollow is that, coupled with census and deed records, provides an indication of how late into the 19th century the Comanche were utilizing Comanche Peak and its surrounding trails. This is a part of Travis County history that has not been documented elsewhere.

But first let's look at the broader context in which these oral histories exist.

### The Broader Context: Comanche-Texas Relations of Late 19th Century

Bull Creek School was a one room log cabin started in 1867 (later renamed Pleasant Valley School; photos of the cabin are at the Austin History Center and called the Champion log cabin). Of the school the 1936 *Defender* says "This [1867] was during the time when Indians were prevalent." Romantic nostalgia for the loss of the "Wild West"? Maybe. But maybe not. Consider, White Parker, son of Quanah Parker, was just 49 yrs. of age (1887-1956). In 1936 children who attended school there in 1867 were likely alive; definitely their children and grandchildren. It is reasonable that the *Defender* is a recorded remembrance of the Bull Creek community of 1867. After all, the school sat on West Bull Creek on the Old Burnet Road at the intersection of today's FM 2222 and Loop 360 which I've argued was a Comanche trail that led to Mount Bonnell.

The last decade plus of the Texas-Indian war are commonly associated with battles fought in North Texas and the Panhandle, e.g. the first and second battles at Adobe Walls (1864, 1874); Satanta et.al.'s wagon train raid, AKA Salt Creek massacre (1871); Randal Mackenzie's raid on the Comanche camp in Palo Duro Canyon (1874); Quanah Parker's surrender and move to the Fort Sill reservation in Oklahoma (1875). But during this period, late 1860s to mid-1870s, in which the oral histories given here apply, the Comanche had by no means stopped visitation and raids into Central, South and West Texas, and Mexico.

The years 1867 and 1868 saw an uptick in raids, abductions and killings in Texas (Anderson p.349). Michno (p.386) says "The winter of 1868 was one of the worst seasons for Indian raids and killings that the frontier people of Texas ever experienced", and this included nearby counties such as Llano, citing a raid there of a party of 15 Comanche in 1868.

There are multiple reasons for the increased Indian visitation and raids in Texas. The Civil War and Reconstruction had left Texas in a weakened, vulnerable state. The frontier that had expanded west before the war had retreated east during and after. Likewise, the Comanche had suffered from their battles with the Texans, the introduction of disease<sup>10</sup>, shrinking hunting grounds, and a dramatic decline in game, notably buffalo, their basis for food and resources. Raids were a way to subsist and try to reestablish shrinking horse herds, so important to the Comanche lifestyle and economy.

But there was more. Comanche mistrust of Texans was singular: the Council House Fight/Massacre (Texans saw it as a fight; Comanches saw it as an ambush and massacre) was never forgotten by the Comanche. That coupled with failed treaties, and failed attempts at putting the Comanche on reservations, first in Texas<sup>11</sup> then Fort Sill, OK, had resulted in polarization of all parties: federal, state and Native American<sup>12</sup>. Some on both sides called for continued attempts at peace; others, again on both sides, called for warfare and annihilation. At a council meeting in 1870 at Fort Sill, OK, the Comanche relayed two messages. From those already on the reservation, the boundary lines of the reservation needed to be "eradicated", in good part because the promise of provisions and food on the reservation were not being met and the Comanche felt they needed to resume bison hunting off the reservation to survive. And from the

---

<sup>10</sup> The smallpox (1848) then cholera epidemic (1849), a result of immigration and the gold rush, were devastating to the Comanche in Texas.

<sup>11</sup> "Comanche Indian Reservation. The Texas legislature passed a law on February 6, 1854, that established the Brazos Indian Reservation for the Caddos, Wacos, and other Indians, and also provided four square leagues of land, or 18,576 acres, for a Comanche reserve to be located at Camp Cooper on the Clear Fork of the Brazos in Throckmorton County" (Handbook of Texas)

<sup>12</sup> Pekka (p.309,310): "The reservations [established 1854] marked a turning point in Texas Indian policy, but they failed to resolve the larger issues. There were still thousands of Comanches on the plains, who were growing increasingly desperate. When large-scale raiding began anew in 1854, all seemed chaos." Among the unintended consequences of the reservation system Pekka says "[Comanche] War bands from the north were reported to use the Clear Fork reservation as a way station, a place where they recruited additional warriors, ate, and rested before striking into Texas or Mexico."

Comanche Chiefs that had yet refused offers of peace and life on the reservation: "[the Texans] had stolen their country and they [the Comanche] would get some of it back." (Anderson p.353).

So, while we often associate the Texas-Indian war of this period with North Texas, raids were being made much farther south. To illustrate just how far south, in 1870, the same year of the council meeting at Fort Sill, the Comanche raided far into Mexico, the last documented raid said to have taken place that year attacking Lampazos, Coahuila, Mexico, a straight line distance of about *170+ miles south of the Texas border* (Adams). And raids into Mexico by the Comanche, as always, involved traveling the various Comanche trails of Texas from north to south.

## Closer to Home: Central Texas & Travis County

Bringing our focus closer to Travis County, newspaper articles, historical marker research, and various reports and books -- *Report of the Adjutant-General*, Michno, Wilbarger, Winfrey and Day -- document skirmishes, raids and abductions in Central Texas well into the 1870s.<sup>13</sup>

Brown says that in March 1864, "Indian raiders invaded Travis county, coming within about twenty-five miles of Austin. At Shingle Hills, four or five miles east of the Pedernales river, on the Hammett road, they killed and scalped a young man named Lohmann, son of the old settler"<sup>14</sup>. Spence recounts another, or more likely the same, incident at Shingle Hills saying the party was Comanche. Shingle Hills is approximately 14 miles southwest of Comanche Peak. Hammett Road is today's Hamilton Pool Road, runs by Hamilton Pool, then crosses the Pedernales at "Hammett Crossing"<sup>15</sup>. Hamilton Pool has an oral history of having been a Native American campground (Perkins, p.59) with Shingle Hills sitting adjacent to, or straddling, the road.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Appendix B provides a timetable of some skirmishes, raids and abductions in Travis and nearby counties.

<sup>14</sup> This was the son of John Henry Lohman as in Lohman's Ford on the Colorado River at today's Lakeway. Born in Holland, immigrated to Texas in 1842 through Galveston. Originally Johan Heinrich Lohmann.

<sup>15</sup> See 1898-1902 Travis County Road Maps; Hammett and Hamilton Pool Road track almost exactly.

<sup>16</sup> At the writing of Brune's *Springs of Texas*, the springs at Hamilton Pool were owned by Eugene Reimer, but are now part of Hamilton Pool Preserve, part of the larger Balcones Canyonlands Preserve, owned and managed by Travis County, Texas. Following archeological studies done in the late 80s, the Hamilton Pool Preserve was designated as a state archeology landmark. The Travis County Parks webpage says cultural remains date back over 8,000 years. Elaine Perkins says oral tradition has the pool had long been a camping place for Indians and in the early days an old Indian trail led down to the pool. Bernhard "B.J." Reimer, who "discovered" the Hamilton Pool in

In many cases the tribe is unspecified. In some the tribe may have been misidentified. A rather famous battle atop Packsaddle Mountain involving eight local ranchers and a party of twenty+ Indians occurred in 1873 in Llano County. Wilbarger's account (p. 638) speculates based on "camp equipments (sic)" recovered after the battle, in particular a saddle marked "Tucson, Arizona", the Indians were Apache from Arizona. But as others have suggested it seems more likely the party was Comanche (Roberts p.29) (Zelade p.93). Packsaddle is located at the junction of the Colorado River and Llano River (both Comanche highways), and just miles northeast of Comanche Creek. Packsaddle is the typical mesa the Comanche used for navigation, observation and signaling.

Comanche Peak sets along the Colorado River, a major thoroughfare of the Comanche into Travis County. *The Special Report of the Adjutant-General of the State of Texas*, September 1884 documents Indian activity into the mid to late 1870s in many counties that border, or through which the Colorado runs; just northwest of Travis: Concho, Coleman, Brown, McCulloch, San Saba, Llano, Mason, Blanco, and Burnet, which borders Travis and to which the Old Burnet Road runs, and along which Comanche Peak is located.

If one expands the scope to adjacent counties and a wider swath along the Colorado and other nearby rivers such as the Guadalupe and San Antonio, *The Special Report of the Adjutant-General* documents activity in even more counties: Comanche, Tom Green, Menard, Mason, Kimble, Gillespie, Kerr, Bandera, Kendall, Comal, Guadalupe and Bexar.

One of the most written about incidents is that of Little Bull. In 1874 members of a "Frontier Battalion"<sup>17</sup> engaged a party variously reported in number as 6, 9 or 11 Comanche in Menard County. One Comanche was captured and held in jail in Austin where he was interviewed. His name was Little Bull and his party came down into Texas from Fort Sill, OK

---

1898, remembered when "Old-timers" said "300 Indians lived here and used this place for a trading post. It was also a fortress against intruders." Perkins also states that "At the time of the Civil War ... it was still a spiritual meeting place for Indians, as well as a hiding place for Unionists", i.e. those Texans opposing secession from the Union needing to take refuge from pro-secessionists. References available at [https://traviscountyhistorical.blogspot.com/2014/03/indian-springs-of-travis-county\\_21.html](https://traviscountyhistorical.blogspot.com/2014/03/indian-springs-of-travis-county_21.html)

<sup>17</sup> "The Frontier Battalion, composed of six companies of Texas Rangers of seventy-five men each, was organized in 1874 as a result of a recommendation of Governor Richard Coke that Texas organize its own force to protect the frontier ... During the first seventeen months of its organization, the battalion had twenty-one fights with Indians." (Frontier Battalion, Handbook of Texas).

and were five days into their trip when the battle ensued (Denney, Travis County Historical Commission blog, "When Little Bull Came to Austin").

Not just U.S. Army or Texas Frontier Battalions were involved in Indian skirmishes during this period. A report to Texas Governor O.M. Roberts in 1880, "Expeditions for Frontier Defense from 1855 to 1879", mentioned *citizens* "fighting Indians within fifty miles of the Capitol of the State".<sup>18</sup> While not specifically stated, both the fight at Packsaddle Mtn. and Deer Creek Battle fit the description of local citizens engaging a party of Indians. Both preceded the formation of the Texas Frontier Battalions and were part of the impetus for the battalions' formation.

The fight at Packsaddle Mtn. (previously described) in 1873 involved local ranchers; Packsaddle Mtn. is right at fifty miles from the Capitol.

And / or the report may have been referencing the much written about, even celebrated<sup>19</sup>, Deer Creek Battle just south of today's Johnson City; approximately 38 miles from the Capitol of Texas.<sup>20</sup> The "Deer Creek Battle" (or "Deer Creek Fight") of 1872<sup>21</sup> involved a "volunteer force of minute men [citizens] formed in Blanco [County] due to the increased frequency of raids", one in particular being on Cypress Creek near Round Mountain in 1869 when Thomas and Eliza Phelps (variously Felps) were killed (Handbook of Texas).<sup>22</sup>

The report to Governor Roberts concluded there were skirmishes and raids "never reported and of which there is no record anywhere" (p.438). Such was probably the case for the still remote sections of northwest Travis County to which we now turn our attention.

---

<sup>18</sup> *The Indian Papers of Texas and the Southwest 1825-1916*: Volume 4 p.436-38.

<sup>19</sup> Citizens involved were recognized by the Texas legislature for "services rendered to the state" and presented with engraved 1873 Winchester rifles (Handbook of Texas)

<sup>20</sup> The location of the Deer Creek Battle was about 3.5 south of today's Johnson City near where today's highway US 290 passes between "Lone Man Mtn." and "Big Mtn" (When Grandpa Fought the Indians, *The Austin American*, Apr 12, 1936]. This was confirmed in correspondence with the Blanco County Historical Commission.

<sup>21</sup> Roberts' *Rangers and Sovereignty* says 1873, and that date is often quoted based on his statement, but an account by James Ingram was reported in the news in 1872: *Austin Tri-Weekly State Gazette* Vol. 5, No. 109, Ed. 1 Friday, August 23, 1872, p.2. A very hard to read copy is available on the Portal to Texas History. Also confirmed in correspondence with the Blanco County Historical Commission; this is also the date used by the Handbook of Texas.

<sup>22</sup> Round Mountain is about 28 miles west of Comanche Peak.

## Defeat Hollow; Its Significance to Comanche Peak

Following the end of the Civil War in 1865, Reconstruction began. As a confederate state, U.S. Army soldiers began arriving in Texas to take possession and restore order. As the capital of Texas, Austin was a major stronghold for the U.S. Army. The Adjutant-General report does not record U.S. Army engagements with Indians in Travis County during this period. Due to a large presence of an army in Austin, it was probably wisely avoided by Comanches traveling south down the Colorado. Yet parts of Travis County, like Bull Creek along the Old Burnet Road and beyond, remained remote into the last half of the 19th century as illustrated by the ability of Unionists to mount resistance there against the Austin based Confederacy during the Civil War. We know Indians were present during Reconstruction in neighboring counties as discussed in previous sections with skirmishes “within fifty miles of the Capitol of the State” as late as 1872 and 1873 at the Deer Creek Battle and Packsaddle Mtn. fight, respectively.

The Austin History Center is home to the James Mulkey Owens, Jr. papers. Mulkey Owens was an Austin resident that worked for the Texas Highway Department, was an author, and key member of the Travis County Historical Commission. One of Owen's projects was to collect and document oral histories of Hudson Bend resulting in his publication *Hudson Bend*, 1970, on file at the Austin History Center. It is from this collection of oral history we learn the origin of the place name Defeat Hollow on Lake Travis, adjacent to Comanche Peak.

Defeat Hollow was named after a minor skirmish, no casualties, between Joel Arthur Harris, an early settler on Hudson Bend, and ten to twelve Indians. The tribe is not recorded in Owen's publication. The story recorded by Owens has been retold in other books, first in *A Hill Country Paradise?* by Elaine Perkins, and then *Hudson Bend and the Birth of Lake Travis* by Carole Sikes. Sikes, a former resident of Hudson Bend, conducted additional interviews while a resident and columnist for the Lake Travis View newspaper. Sikes offers additional variations on the story based on her interview; one source stated the Indians were Comanche.

Here's a shortened version of the story as recorded by Owens; "Grandpa Harris" is Joel Arthur Harris:

“Hudson Bend was not without its Indian troubles. As told by John C. Hudson, son of Joseph Alexander Hudson and grandson of Wiley Hudson, first white settler of Hudson Bend,

Grandpa Harris went out one morning to look for some calves. He trailed them down into Horseshoe Bend and across the Colorado River at about opposite where St. Luke's by the Lake now stands. He started up this draw when he came upon some ten or twelve Indians. He immediately dismounted and headed for the brush as the Indians were reluctant to follow a person into the brush. The Indians were shooting at him with arrows and one of them hit the stock of his gun and knocked a chunk out of it. He then decided that he would have to shoot some of the Indians. One of the Indians had mounted Grandpa Harris horse and was trying to ride off ... About that time, someone appeared on the bluff above and began to call out for Grandpa Harris. Apparently, the Indians thought that reinforcements had arrived and ran off taking Grandpa Harris' horse and saddle with them. Since that time this draw has been known as Defeat Hollow."

While a minor skirmish it is significant as possibly the only place name in Travis County named for a skirmish between the Comanche and Texans, and one of the last such skirmishes in Travis County. *But, more importantly, if dated the story of Defeat Hollow would provide an indication of how late into the 19th century Comanches were in the vicinity of Comanche Peak and its trails.*

Unfortunately, Owens did not record a date so a goal here is to build on Owens work to set a likely time frame. As we'll see, the skirmish at Defeat Hollow must have taken place no earlier than 1868. While Owens publication wasn't published until 1970, the place names Defeat Hollow and Comanche Peak appear on USGS maps as early as 1930, no more than sixty years after the incident, well within the collective memory of the residents of Hudson Bend.

## Dating the Skirmish at Defeat Hollow

Knowing the approximate date of the skirmish at Defeat Hollow is key to estimating how late into the 19th century the Comanche were utilizing Comanche Peak and its surrounding trails. This will require some genealogy, census data, grant and deed records to establish the date of Joel Harris' arrival on Hudson Bend.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Looking at Hudson Bend grants and deeds alone are not enough; we must establish Harris was not living on Hudson Bend prior to his grant, e.g. as a renter or with a family member. To do this we have to establish his whereabouts prior to Hudson Bend, including his known family members.

Joel Harris was one of the first settlers to Hudson Bend. Prior to moving to Hudson Bend he was living in Burnet County. Harris and family did not make the move from Burnet alone; they were accompanied by his son-in-law and his family, also from Burnet County.

In 1859 Andrew Jackson Stanford, Harris' future son-in-law, patented land in Smithwick, Texas, where the Smithwick Cemetery is located (GLO, 160 acres, Abstract 815, Class: Travis 3rd, Patent #631). As a preemption grant, he had been living on the property for at least three years; the original document indicates maybe since 1855.

Per the 1860 census Joel Harris and family were also in Burnet County.

Exactly when Joel Harris and AJ Stanford met is not clear, but certainly by 1864, when, during the Civil War, Joel Harris (Pvt.) and Andrew Jackson Stanford (2nd Sgt.) were members of the 3rd Frontier District Muster Roll; their commanding officer was Capt. Christian Dorbandt. Their base was Burnet, Texas, the location of Fort Croghan. (Muster rolls on file with Texas State Archives).

Both Harris and Stanford were Masons. In 1864 per records of the Grand Masonic Lodge Library and Museum in Waco TX, Joel Harris was a member of the "Valley" Lodge No. 175 of Burnet, Texas. He then shows up as a charter member of the Henry Thomas Lodge in Smithwick (near today's Turkey Bend) in 1865 (Burnet County Historical Commission, History of Burnet County, p.264).

Shortly after the death of Stanford's first wife, Carolyn E. Rogers (1828–1867; buried in the Smithwick Cemetery on Stanford's property, along with a son), he married Joel Harris' daughter Eliza Cherry Harris that same year, 1867, in Burnet County.

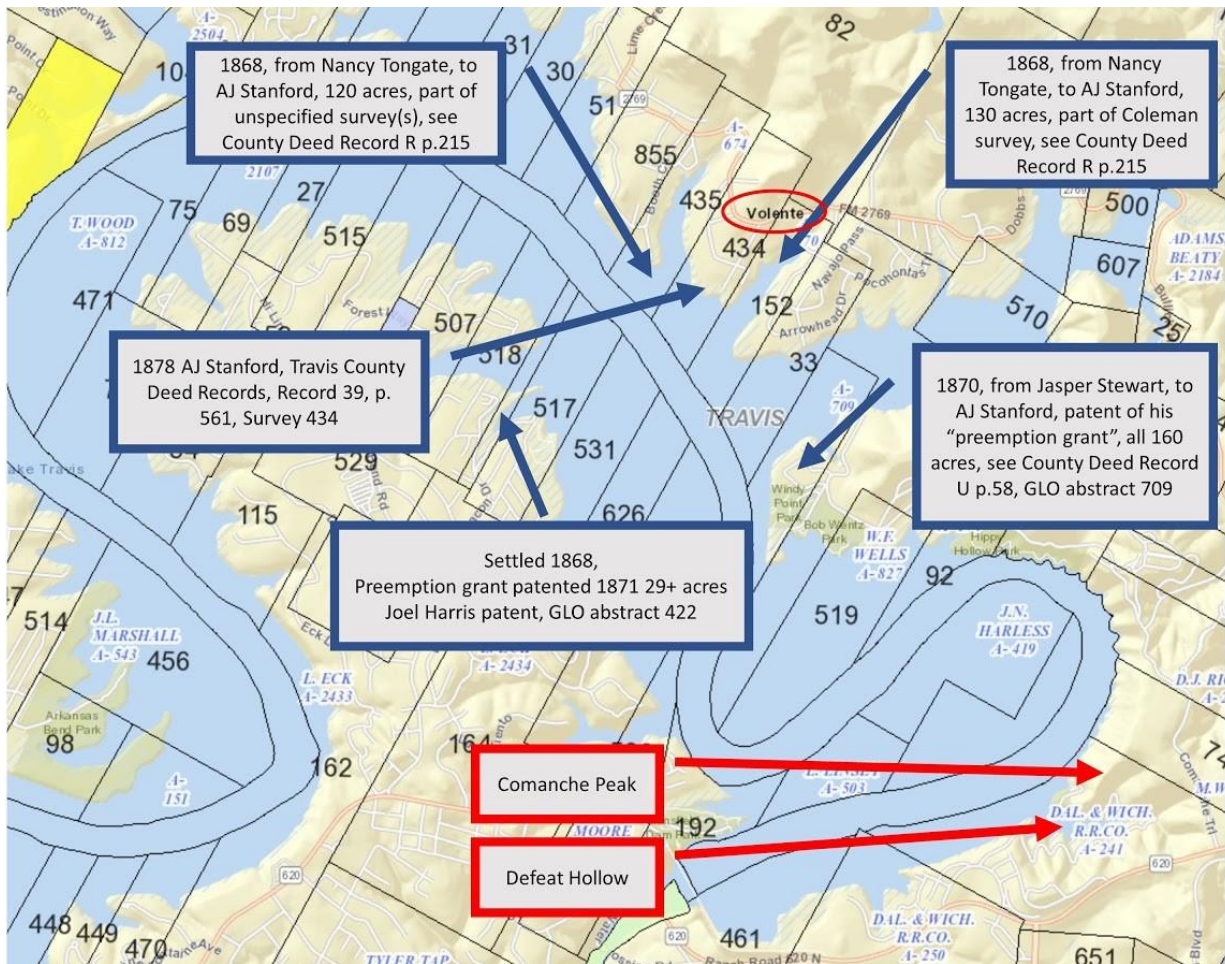
To summarize to this point, it's clear Joel Harris was in Burnet County through 1867, his whereabouts clearly established.

It was this family unit -- Harris and Stanford -- that made the move from Burnet County to Travis. In 1868 A.J. Stanford acquired land on the east bank of the Colorado along the Old Burnet Road near what would later be Volente, Texas. Indeed, he would later, in 1886, be Volente's first postmaster (*Handbook of Texas*). Joel Harris settled directly across the river on Hudson Bend. As a preemption grant, Harris received a patent for the land in 1871 meaning he

had been on the property for 3 years (i.e. since 1868) making improvements in the form of a homestead and farm.<sup>24</sup>

*Thus, the skirmish at Defeat Hollow could not have happened before 1868.*

See map below of GLO grants and land purchases by Joel Harris and AJ Stanford in relation to Comanche Peak and Defeat Hollow.



Map of land purchases by Joel Harris and AJ Stanford in relation to Comanche Peak and Defeat Hollow

<sup>24</sup> For details on preemption grants <https://www.glo.texas.gov/history/archives/forms/files/categories-of-land-grants.pdf>

Mintie Ann Stanford, the granddaughter of Joel Harris, was born in February of 1869, the first child of AJ Stanford and Eliza Cherry Harris. She was born on the east bank of the Colorado on that land purchased by AJ Stanford in 1868. In the 1870 census Joel Harris is dwelling / family 246/275 and A.J. Stanford and family (Eliza Cherry Harris and daughter Mintie Ann Stanford) are dwelling / family 248/277, so the families are in close proximity.

Before her death in 1951 she lived with her son Aldis C. Stanford's family in Stephenville, Texas, which included Lorena Faye (Stanford) Denney, her granddaughter, my mother. Mintie related to her firsthand that when she (Mintie) was a child, her parents used to "hide her under a wash tub when the Indians came". Was that a singular event, or a description of an ongoing practice? If she were a newborn to say four years in age (small enough to hide under a wash tub) that would have been 1869-1873.

Texas was clearly concerned about the abduction of children at this time. An article that ran in *The Dallas Daily Herald*, August 1868, reported on the legislature in Austin: "Ten Thousand dollars have been appropriated to the ransom of children which have carried off by the Indians". While I do not know the actual amount of money paid out on ransoms, such a large appropriation is a measure of the level of concern and an indication it was happening. See also Michno (p.432)

Reiterating Michno (p.386) "The winter of 1868 was one of the worst seasons for Indian raids and killings that the frontier people of Texas ever experienced." And the Old Burnet Road, which ran at the base of Comanche Peak, passed through the land AJ Stanford and his family settled on in 1868.

Based on sources like Winfrey and Day, Wilbarger, the Adjutant-General report, Michno (focus on captives), Travis' *closest* neighboring counties -- Williamson, Burnet, Blanco and Llano -- were still being visited by Indians as late 1872 - 1873. Neighboring counties farther west even later.

To summarize: the skirmish at Defeat Hollow could not have happened prior to 1868. Further, if oral history collected from Mintie Ann Stanford is correct, Indian traffic along the Colorado by Comanche Peak was still going on after her birth in 1869.

## The Preece Ranch<sup>25</sup>

Among the early Anglo settlers to the hill country west of Austin were William Martin Preece (1800 - ca.1870), wife Mary Elizabeth Giddens (1810-1878), son Richard Lincoln Preece AKA Dick Preece (1833-1906), and his little brother William Martin Preece, Jr., AKA Little Will (1838-1870).

Dick Preece and Little Will were both Texas Rangers before the Civil War involved in skirmishes with the Comanche. During the Civil War they were Unionist resisting the Confederacy from the hollows of Bull Creek, later joining the 1st Texas Cavalry fighting against the Confederacy. After the Civil War the Preece Ranch was associated with the cattle drives up the Chisholm Trail.

The General Land Office records show that in 1859 Dick Preece patented 160 acres along the Colorado River, in the area of what we now associate with River Place / Steiner Ranch subdivision, and across from today's Commons Ford Ranch Park. While the land patent is dated 1859, as a preemptive grant he was living on and improving the land in 1856 (3 years previous), had it surveyed in 1857, then final patent in 1859. Over the years the ranch expanded east along the Colorado River to what is now River Place Natural Trail in Panther Hollow.

The Preece Ranch was less than 4 miles south of Comanche Peak and family oral tradition of Comanche trails running by and through the ranch have appeared in various written forms over the years. Harold Preece, Dick Preece's grandson, wrote several articles referencing the Comanche trail in *Real West* and *Texas Ranger Magazine*; Harold's sister Louise Preece wrote letters with references to "Comanche hunting grounds" near the Preece ranch.

A Native American burial discovered on the property of Dick's son, Richard Lincoln Preece, Jr., AKA Byrd Preece, was reported in the *Austin American-Statesman*, 8 Mar 1932, p.10: "Indian Skeleton Found in Cave Near Here ... [the burial cave] is located on the old Comanche trail, which runs through the backyard adjoining the house of Mr. Preece. This is said to be the chief trail from which the Indians made their large raids on Austin."

---

<sup>25</sup> For reference and additional information on the Preece Ranch see "Dick Preece: Travis County's Texas Ranger" in the Travis County Historical Commission blog.

While the age of the burial is uncertain (excavation was done by UT, but the results don't appear to be recorded in the site atlas), the article references again the family oral tradition of a Comanche trail passing through the property. And while not clear what “large raids” they are referring to, this reference is consistent with Old Burnet Road’s connection to Mount Bonnell.

Earlier yet, an article in the *Austin American-Statesman*, 26 May 1914, p.4 references "The old Comanches (sic) trail" passing through Byrd Preece's property. Most recently a descendant of Dick Preece, author Anthony Whitt’s book *Hard Land to Rule* begins with a raid on a smokehouse by Comanches; a story Anthony says was based on an actual event passed down through the generations that occurred on the Preece Ranch.

References to a Comanche trail or trails passing by or through the Preece ranch make geographical sense. As noted, the ranch was at its closest point (River Place's Panther Hollow) 3.3 miles south of Comanche Peak. Just to the east was old Burnet Road which ran at the base of Comanche peak. This was discussed previously.

Santa Monica Springs, AKA Sulfur Springs, was located on the Preece Ranch. Brune (*Springs of Texas*) says Santa Monica Springs were once the basis for Comanche and Tonkawa Indian campgrounds. Gelo (*Comanche Land and Ever Has Been*) called them “a watering place” for the Comanche. The springs were an attraction to Texans in the late 19th early 20th century for the "curative properties" of the water; a fact likely not lost on the Comanches that visited the springs. A crossing near the springs, near today's Commons Ford Ranch Park, would have connected with today's Bee Cave Rd. leading east to Barton Springs, another Comanche hangout on the Colorado River, or alternatively to points south and west with known Comanche ties. See previous map, *1896 USGS topo map with Native American trails*.

At the close of the Civil War, one of Texas' best economic resources during reconstruction was an abundance of longhorn cattle that could be sold in Kansas and other markets to the north. The Chisholm Trail was in use from about 1867 to 1884. The Preece Ranch is said to have been a supplier of horses to the nearby Chisholm Trail.<sup>26</sup> To the north of the

---

<sup>26</sup> The Preece ranch was a livestock ranch. Dick Preece’s grandson, Harold Preece, wrote cattle and horses were raised (Preece, 1964) and was a supplier of horses to the Chisholm Trail. David Preece, Dick Preece's son, references raising longhorn cattle (Zelade, pp. 166-67). In 1868 & 1870 three marks and brands were filed for by the Preece family for the ranch: P2, P4 and P6, recorded in Travis County Clerk Records, Marks and Brands Record 1, p.337.

ranch, south of Comanche Peak, runs today's R.M. 620. When you drive R.M. 620 today, you are likely on the feeder trail the Preece Ranch would have used to drive horses and cattle to the old Chisholm Trail. If we look at modern day map, R.M. 620 runs from near the Preece Ranch all the way to the Chisholm Trail crossing of Brushy Creek in Round Rock, near where the actual "round rock" is located. R.M. 620's route is largely determined by a geographical feature of that area: the Jollyville Plateau, a flat, level land bridge of sorts providing a path through the canyon lands created by Colorado River and East and West Bull Creeks.

As this relates to Comanche trails, The Jollyville Plateau connects Comanche Peak to the other Burnet Road, US 183 / SH 29; the route to Burnet and Fort Croghan on which Tumlinson's blockhouse fort was burned by Comanches in 1837 and the attack on the Webster wagon train occurred in 1839 near today's Leander.

## First USGS Map Citing Comanche Peak, Defeat Hollow

The first maps to use the place names "Comanche Peak" and "Defeat Hollow" appear to be the USGS maps from the early 1930s.

The USGS was established in 1879. In the early years of the USGS its survey work was hampered by lack of funds and as late as the 1920s nearly 60% of the US was still unmapped. Travis County was lucky enough to be one of the first areas to be topographically mapped producing what is known as the "1902 Austin folio": 1902 being the year it was published, the survey work being done in 1895-1896. Defeat Hollow, Comanche Peak, and many other place names did not appear on those first 19<sup>th</sup> century maps due to the low resolution of the maps and probably because the focus was on the more populated areas of Travis County: as the survey notes, "The Austin quadrangle has a comparatively dense population, but nine-tenths of its inhabitants are found .. east of the Balcones scarp, the Edwards Plateau country to the west being but sparsely populated...".

That original survey from 1895-96 was the basis for subsequent updates issued over the years until the 1930s. Post WWI there was a push to get the rest of the country mapped, and existing mapped areas surveyed in better detail. This push for better, more detailed surveys was due in good part to the demand for better maps for industry, roads, mining, and no doubt for

Travis County, construction of dams. Defeat Hollow and Comanche Peak both appear for the first time on these 1930s USGS maps when surveyors "zoomed in" for more detail.

It's important to understand how the USGS determines the place names on its maps. This is an edited and expanded version of "Place and Feature Names" (p. 87) in Chapter 5, "Boundaries, Names, and Marginalia" of *Maps for America*, Third Edition, which has additional details on names for different kinds of features; p. 90 has more details on quadrangle names (underlining is mine for emphasis)<sup>27</sup>:

"The geographic place names shown on USGS quadrangle maps are those in local usage, as nearly as could be ascertained (by the mapmakers) from officials and residents of the area and from other sources, such as previously published maps, historical records, and reference publications. In selecting place names, the mapmakers made sure that the most important ones were included and that the overall density of names and descriptive labels was appropriate for the scale of the map (one of the many reasons why it originally took several years to create each USGS topographic map!). The date of the original USGS maps varies considerably, and place names were (and are) sometimes changed on updated versions as needed. Names that disagree with other government publications or are controversial in local usage are referred to the U.S. Board on Geographic Names (BGN), which is the legal authority on names used on federal government maps and publications. The Board includes representatives from multiple agencies. Although the Board's decisions are widely followed in non-federal publications, there is no legal requirement to do so. The quadrangle name itself is usually that of the most prominent city, town, or other feature appearing within the mapped area. Official BGN names can be changed (as with changing Mount McKinley to Denali), but those changes are not made easily or lightly. The BGN requires extensive documentation, review, and the support of the local community."

Defeat Hollow was a place name remembered by the community from the skirmish between Joel Harris and Indians. The USGS surveyors earlier in the 1930s no doubt got that place name, as well "Comanche Peak", the same way: from interviews of locals during their surveys.

---

<sup>27</sup> From personal correspondence March 2019 with Bard "Ryan" Lynch, Science Information Services, Office of Communications and Publishing, USGS in Denver Colorado on the question of how USGS place names on topographic names are assigned.

# Significance

Comanche Peak is the only peak, and maybe the only natural feature (not a man-made thing, e.g. street, subdivision) named for an American Indian tribe in Travis County. Its location helps us better understand the Comanche geography of Travis County and the trail system into Austin along the Colorado utilized by the Comanche.

Defeat Hollow is a place name that recalls what may have been one of the last skirmishes between Texans and Comanches in Travis County. It may be the only place name in Travis County named for a skirmish between the Comanche and Texans.

*But more importantly*, the significance of the story of Defeat Hollow, coupled with records such as land grants, provide an indication of how late into the 19th century the Comanche were utilizing Comanche Peak and its surrounding trails. The skirmish at Defeat Hollow happened during Reconstruction, sometime after 1868. This is a part of Travis County history that has not been documented.

# References

Adams, David B. "Borderland: Northern Nuevo León and the Indios Bárbaros, 1686-1870" *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 95, No. 2 (October 1991), pp. 204–220

Anderson, Gary Clayton. *The Conquest of Texas: Ethnic Cleansing in the Promised Land, 1820-1875*. 2005. Anderson notes that spellings of band names are problematic using "Penateka" as an example with upwards of twenty variations (p. 382). I've used "Penateka" here as it is in common use.

Adjutant-General's Office of Texas. *Special Report of the Adjutant-General of the State of Texas, September 1884*

*The Austin American*, "Ranger Captain Met Fire Early; Indians Routed in 1873 Battle". March 26, 1939. Describes a battle between Texas Rangers and a party of Indians, estimated to be about 27, just south of today's Johnson City. This is what is called the "Battle of Deer Creek". Various dates are reported but is most likely 1872. <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/deer-creek-battle-of>

*Austin American Statesman*. "Another Ranger-Indian Fight". Nov 1874, p. 3. Skirmish with Comanches in 1874; one captive – Little Bull -- brought to Austin and jailed. See "When Little Bull Came to Austin", <https://traviscountyhistorical.blogspot.com>

Barkley, Mary Starr (1963). *History of Travis County and Austin, 1839-1899*. Waco, TX: Texian Press.

Barnes, Michael. *Indelible Austin: More Selected Histories*. Waterloo Press, 2018. Article "Tracing Ancient Trails" by Richard Denney.

Beers, Ward. "Fire and Smoke: Ethnographic and Archaeological Evidence for Line-of-Sight Signaling in North America". *Papers of the Archaeological Society of New Mexico*, pp. 23-32, 2014.

Berlandier, Jean Louis. *The Indians of Texas in 1830*, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1969. Introduction by John C. Ewers provides biographical information about Jean Louis Berlandier; his exploration of Texas; and descriptions of his botanical and ethnological specimens, drawings, and writings, which were eventually deposited at the Smithsonian and other institutions. Text includes Berlandier's 330-page manuscript, translated from French, describing Indian life and customs in Texas 1828-1829.

Bollaert, William. *William Bollaert's Texas*. W. Eugene Hollon (Editor), University of Oklahoma Press, 2000. Bollaert, an English writer and adventurer, arrived in Texas in 1842. The book is based on his six diaries and notebooks and two volumes of journals from 1841-1844.

Brown, Frank. *Annals of Travis County and of the City of Austin (From the Earliest Times to the Close of 1875)*. Available on Portal to Texas History. 1864 killing of Lohmann at Shingle Hills, volume 8, portal page 254 link <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth841233/m1/254/>

Brune, Gunnar. *Springs of Texas, Vol. 1*. Texas A&M University Press, 1981.

Burnet County Historical Commission. *Burnet County History: A Pioneer History 1847-1979, Vol I*. 1979.

Denney, Richard. Informal video reviewing Comanche Peak, Preece Ranch and Santa Monica Springs on 1937 & 1964 aerial photos <https://youtu.be/l319zxHSnwE>

Denney, Richard. *Travis County Historical Commission blog*. <https://traviscountyhistorical.blogspot.com>

- "Dick Preece: Travis County's Texas Ranger"
- "What does Bull Creek Road have to do with Bull Creek?"
- "Mount Bonnell's American Indian Trail"
- "When Little Bull Came to Austin"

Dolbeare, Benjamin. *A narrative of the captivity and suffering of Dolly Webster among the Camanche (sic) Indians in Texas: With an account of the massacre of John Webster and his party, as related by Mrs. Webster*. Facsimile edition, re-published 1986, but originally published

story was 1843, so not long after the actual incident.

Duval, John C. *The Adventures of Big-Foot Wallace, The Texas Ranger and Hunter*. J.W. Burke & Co. 1870. Retrieved 01/18/2021 <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph5831/m1/3/>

Fehrenbach, T.R. *Comanches: The Destruction of a People*. 1974.

Fish, Janet Long. Oral History Transcript. Interview by Thad Sitton, July 20, 2000. Available at Austin History Center. Pertinent bits are covered in this blog:

[https://traviscountyhistorical.blogspot.com/2014/03/mount-bonnell-american-indian-trail\\_17.html](https://traviscountyhistorical.blogspot.com/2014/03/mount-bonnell-american-indian-trail_17.html)

Gelo, Daniel J., "Comanche Land and Ever Has Been: A Native Geography of the Nineteenth-Century Comanchería." *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol 103, No. 3, 2000, pp. 273-307

Gelo, Daniel & Wayne Pate. *Texas Indian Trails*. Republic of Texas Press, 2003.

GLO Map of Travis County, Texas. Surveyed 1877; published 1880. Available on-line through Library of Congress. Retrieved 01-19-2021 from <https://www.loc.gov/item/2012592087> This map covers the route of Old Burnet Road from Austin to Travis Peak on the western edge of Travis County.

Hagan, William T. *Quanah Parker, Comanche Chief*. University of Oklahoma Press, 1993.

Hämäläinen, Pekka. *The Comanche Empire*. Yale University Press, 2008

*Handbook of Texas*, Deer Creek, Battle Of. Various dates for when the Phelps were killed are given; Daniel Webster Roberts himself claimed it was just days before the Deer Creek Battle, but discussions with Blanco County Historical Commission and contemporary newspaper reports of the raid convince me 1869 is correct. <https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/qfd02>

*Handbook of Texas*, Volente, Texas. Andrew Jackson Stanford, first postmaster in 1886. <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/volente-tx>.

Hays County Historical Commission. Meeting notes from March 25, 2010 at the Isham Good Ranch, Dripping Springs, pp. 4-5. Documents the Isham Good ranch and its location "close to the Comanche campground over by Bear Creek, so [Isham Good] could trade with the Indians." This location is near Signal Hill and would have been on route from Comanche Peak to Manchaca Springs.

Marcy, Randolph B, Captain, U.S. Army. *The Prairie Traveler*. Originally published 1859. His section "TELEGRAPHING BY SMOKES" discusses the use of smoke signals, p.226.

Michno, Gregory & Susan. *A Fate Worse Than Death: Indian Captivities in the West, 1830-1885*. Caxton Press, 2007. Good focus on Texas and Central Texas.

Owens, J. Mulky. Hudson Bend, Travis County. 1970. On file at the Austin History Center.

Parker W.B. *Through Unexplored Texas*. Texas State Historical Association, 1990. This is a publication of notes taken by Parker, attached to the expedition commanded by Capt. R. B. Marcy by Parker in 1854.

Pelon, Linda. Issues in Penatuhkah Comanche Ethnohistory. University of Texas at Arlington, Master's Thesis, 1993.

Pelon, Linda Nash. *Texas Comanche Land Revisited*. 2019.

Perkins, Elaine. *A Hill Country Paradise? Travis County and Its Early Settlers*. 2012

Preece, Harold. "Dick Preece, Eagle of the Mountains", *Texas Rangers Magazine*. 1949

Preece, Harold. "My Grandfather, Dick Preece", *Real West Magazine*. 1964.

Roberts, Dan Webster. *Rangers and Sovereignty*. In May 1874, Dan W. Roberts (Daniel Webster Roberts) was given his commission as second lieutenant of Company "D" of the Ranger Battalion; he would remain with them for the next eight years, later becoming Captain. His account of his time with the Texas Rangers, *Rangers and Sovereignty*, was published in 1914. Describes Blanco County's Deer Creek Fight near today's Johnson City 1872 or 73, and Llano's 1873 Packsaddle Mtn. fight. Roberts appears to be mistaken in his recollection (or publisher made error) about the year of death of the Phelps, or "Felps". News articles of the time report the incident in 1869.

Sikes, Carole McIntosh. *Hudson Bend and the Birth of Lake Travis: Transforming the Hills West of Austin*. 2014

Smithwick, Noah. *The Evolution of a State, or Recollections of Old Texas Days*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983

Spence, Joseph. AF file letter 1, Austin History Center. See Comanches at Shingle Hills.

Texas Historic Commission, "Comanche Village Massacre", historical marker #995, erected by State of Texas, 1936. <https://www.hmdb.org/marker.asp?marker=73318>

Texas Historic Commission, "Cross Mountain", historical marker #10025. Cross Mountain lay on the Pinta Trail, west of Austin, running north out of San Antonio, through Fredericksburg, north to the area of the San Saba Mission in Menard, TX. Cross Mountain has a tradition of being a Comanche signal hill, a conical shape hill with visibility in 360 degrees. Great for seeing,

and great for being seen, as in signal fires. From the marker text: "This marl and limestone hill, elevation 1,915 feet, was an Indian signal point, advancing news of the intrusions of white settlers." Comanches probably had another reason for visiting Cross Mountain: near the top of Cross Mountain runs a layer of limestone with nodules of beautiful amber chert.

Travis County Rural Schools, 1936 Yearbook Staff. *The Defender 1936: Travis County Rural Schools*, published 1936. A copy is available at the Austin History Center, and on-line via Portal to Texas History. <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapht1283454/>

USGS Geographic Names Information System (GNIS), <http://geonames.usgs.gov/pls/gnispublic>

USGS, US Topo and Historical Topographic Map Collection. Both Comanche Peak, and Defeat Hollow appear on maps starting in 1930. See USGS 1:48000-scale Quadrangle for Austin-2, TX 1930. See USGS 1:62500-scale Quadrangle for Mt. Bonnell, TX 1932.

USGS, Burnet (County) Sheet, Texas. Surveyed 1885; published 1887. Available on-line through the USGS Historical Topographic Map Explorer, <http://historicalmaps.arcgis.com/usgs/> This map covers the route of Burnet Road from Travis Peak to Burnet, Texas.

USGS, Austin folio, 1902. Folios of the Geologic Atlas, series 76.  
<https://pubs.er.usgs.gov/publication/gf76>

USGS, History of the US Geological Survey. By USGS and Mary C. Rabitt, 1975. Retrieved 03/30/2019 from <https://pubs.er.usgs.gov/publication/70039204>

Texas A&M Forest Service. Famous Trees of Texas: Indian Marker Tree.  
<https://tfsweb.tamu.edu/websites/FamousTreesOfTexas/TreeLayout.aspx?pageid=16045>

*Texas Beyond History*, Flint Knob and Chalk Knob. "Flint Knob (41TV1463) in western Travis County was a source for flint for prehistoric peoples over thousands of years. Flint (technically chert) was the most commonly used stone for making tools in Texas. In the archeological literature, such sites are usually called lithic procurement sites or, less accurately as quarry sites." Also discusses nearby Chalk Knob.

Texas GLO, Preemption Grants. Preemption grants of 160 acres were re-instituted in 1866 and continued until 1898. To qualify for a preemption grant, settlers were required to live on the land for three years and make improvements.  
<https://www.glo.texas.gov/history/archives/forms/files/categories-of-land-grants.pdf>

Tobin Imagery, a part of P2 Energy Solutions. Source of 1937 aerial of Comanche Peak and surrounding areas. <https://www.p2energysolutions.com/tobin-data/tobin-imagery>

Travis County Clerk Records: Road Book Precinct 2, pp. 260-281. Online at Portal to Texas History, retrieved 5/16/19 <http://bit.ly/2JL7Dcj>

Whitt, Anthony. Personal correspondence and e-mails. Anthony is a descendant of Texas Ranger and rancher Richard Lincoln Preece, AKA Dick Preece. 2019. <https://www.anthonywhitt.com>

Wikipedia. Comanche-Mexico Wars. Retrieved 06-16-2019.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comanche%E2%80%93Mexico\\_Wars](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comanche%E2%80%93Mexico_Wars)

Wikipedia. Comanche History. Retrieved 06-16-2019.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comanche\\_history](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comanche_history)

Wikipedia. List of peaks named Signal. Retrieved 06-16-2019  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_peaks\\_named\\_Signal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_peaks_named_Signal)

Wilbarger, J.W. *Indian Depredations in Texas*. 2nd edition, Hutchings Printing House, Austin, Texas, 1890.

Winfrey, Dorman H. & Day, James M. *The Indian Papers of Texas and the Southwest 1825-1916*. This extensive, five-volume collection, drawn from the original copies in the Texas State Archives is a re-print of a historical compilation of Native American papers in the American Southwest region from 1825 to 1916. Available on The Portal to Texas History

Zelade, Richard. *Texas Hill Country: Lone Star Travel Guide*, 6th edition, 2011.

# Appendix A Distances from Comanche Peak

Chart of distances from Comanche Peak to some of locations referenced.

<b>Location</b>	<b>Miles from Comanche Peak (Straight Line)</b>
<b>Defeat Hollow</b>	0
<b>Santa Monica Spgs.</b>	4
<b>Mt. Bonnell</b>	8
<b>Shingle Hills</b>	14
<b>Round Mtn.</b>	28
<b>Burnet, TX &amp; Ft. Croghan</b>	32
<b>Deer Creek</b>	32
<b>Packsaddle Mtn.</b>	40

# Appendix B Timetable for Central TX 1864-74

This is a timetable of incidents involving Indian-Texas encounters from 1864 to 1874 in Central Texas; it is not meant to be an exhaustive listing and focuses on Travis and Burnet (the Old Burnet Road being a connector) and Blanco and Llano which border Travis. Travis and Burnet appear in bold font.

1864 Lohman killed at Shingle Hills, **Travis County**

1866 Indians stole 30 horses, **Burnet County**, (Adjutant General Report, p.35)

1866 raid on Doublehorn Creek, **Burnet County** forty-head horses stolen, party of 15 to 25, The Dallas Daily Herald, 8 Dec 1866, p.1

1867 Indians stole 29 horses, **Burnet County**, (Adjutant General Report, p.35)

1867 A raid on Castroville, TX near San Antonio; one resident losing more than a hundred "blood mares"; the article concluded "...we can call to mind no time in the past twenty years, when so many depredations have been committed in the same length of time, as in the last three or four months ..." (San Antonio Herald, reprinted in The Dallas Daily Herald 13 Apr 1867)

1867 Attack on Friend family, Llano County (Handbook of Texas)

1868 An article that ran in *The Dallas Daily Herald*, August 1868, reported on the legislature in Austin: "Ten Thousand dollars have been appropriated to the ransom of children which have carried off by the Indians".

1868+ Defeat Hollow, **Travis County**

1869 Indians killed Emma Jones **Burnet County**, (Adjutant General Report, p.35)

1869 Indians killed F. M. Smith, stole 49 horses. **Burnet County**, (Adjutant General Report, p.35)

1869 Thomas and Eliza Phelps (variously Felps) were killed near Round Mtn., Blanco County

1870 Indians stole 25 horses **Burnet County**, (Adjutant General Report, p.35)

1870 Indians stole 5 horses, **Burnet County**, (Adjutant General Report, p.35)

1870 Indians killed Captain Habey. **Burnet County**, (Adjutant General Report, p.35)

1870 Indians stole 45 horses, **Burnet County**, (Adjutant General Report, p.35)

1870 Whitlock family attacked, Llano County (Handbook of Texas)

1870 Party of eighteen Comanches came down into **Burnet**, stole about one hundred horses, and left for the mountains." (Wilbarger p.626)

1870 "about forty Indians" were involved in a skirmish with the 4th Cavalry near San Antonio in (The Galveston Daily News, 20 Apr 1870)

1871 Indians stole 40 horses, **Burnet County**, (Adjutant General Report, p.35)

1871 Indians stole 31 horses and killed 2 girls, **Burnet County**, (Adjutant General Report, p.35)

1871 Just to Austin's north, "some thirty or forty Indians" raid Gatesville area in Coryell County (The Galveston Daily News, 9 Dec 1871).

1871 Indian raid near San Antonio "A party of fifteen or twenty ... stole a lot of horses from a ranch within five miles of the city..." (Austin Weekly Statesman, August 1871, p.4.)

1871 Kimble County (Wilbarger p.644)

1872 "Indians passed down to Llano county, through **Burnet**, and came to within three and half miles above Bluffton, and what is there called the "Colorado Saline". Austin American-Statesman, 20 Feb 1872, p.2. This is a reference to the Bluffton-Tow Salt Works. Native Americans were aware of the salt deposits there: "The Cowans [early settlers] were directed by local Indians to a salt bed near the Colorado River, which they developed into a successful saltworks." (Tow, TX, Handbook of Texas)

1872 "... from a citizen of Blanco county that [on] the road leading from Austin to Fredericksburg" a large party of Indians attack citizens threshing wheat. The Galveston Daily News, 4 Jul 1872, p.3

1872 Deer Creek Battle, Blanco County

1872 Kimble County (Wilbarger p. 646)

1873 Gillespie County (Wilbarger p. 648)

1873 Packsaddle Mtn. Fight, Llano County

1874 Members of a "Frontier Battalion" engage party of Comanches in Menard County; Little Bull jailed in Austin

1874 "A band of forty Indians made a raid through **Burnet**, San Saba and Brown counties..." (Denison Daily News, Vol.2, No. 26, March 25, 1874).

