

SAN JACINTO RIVER AUTHORITY KID'S PAGE



HOW DID THE SAN JACINTO RIVER GET ITS NAME?

Have you ever wondered HOW rivers get their names, WHY they have the name they have, WHAT the names mean, WHO named them...and WHEN?

For rivers with names that don't have a clearly documented history, historians are like detectives as they search for pieces that fit together.

Here's a chance for you to be the detective and investigate some circumstantial evidence about how the **San Jacinto River** may have been named. We're going to start off by making some guesses, drawing some conclusions, and weaving together a story that starts with Spanish explorers about 500 years ago.

Let's start off with a basic story. Your role as the investigative historian is to circle the answers you think are the most accurate from the choices in parentheses. Consider carefully, put the pieces together, and decide which one of the two conclusions (or maybe both) about the origin of the San Jacinto River's name seems most likely to you.

During the (2000s, 1200s, 1500s) Spanish (explorers, farmers, teenagers) and (kids, priests, peasants) came to this part of what was to become (Iowa, Texas, Oregon) in search of (straw, iPods, gold).

Spanish ships landed at a number of sites along the (Rocky Mountains, Gulf Coast, eastern seaboard). Once on land they faced a dense wall of (cement, plastic, vegetation) with vast areas of mosquito-infested marshy swamps, very little drinkable (soda, coke, water), and even less food. These explorers began their journey by slashing and cutting the dense vegetation before they could take even one step forward into the interior. They walked for days that turned into (centuries, millennium, weeks) and then into months. The seasons changed. Some of them became (ill, happy, lazy); others died. It was a (pleasant, grueling, vacation-type) trip. After



months of walking, they came to a beautiful slow-moving, flat, broad (meadow, prairie, river). The water was (salty, bad smelling, drinkable). They had endured and survived!

Now it's time for you to take a stab at how this river got its name as there is not a single ancient written record that tells us that the men who found this river called it the San Jacinto.

First, you know that the explorers had experienced an ordeal of insects, spiny/tangled vines, hunger and thirst. Being from a catholic country, enduring such hardships may have reminded them of one of the Church's patron saints, Saint Jacinto, who had experienced life-threatening ordeals in the 12th century as he Christianized northern Europe. Maybe the river was named after Saint Jacinto because those who found it had suffered and survived as they believed this saint had.

A second possibility is that the explorers who came upon the river did so on what they thought was the birthday of Saint Jacinto, the 16th of August. We do not know if they had or kept written daily records. It is not too difficult to imagine, however, how daunting it must have been to travel to the river in the extreme Texas heat. When the Spanish explorers came upon the river, they may have remembered the hardships of Saint Jacinto, and named the waterway after the saint.

Either ending to this story is possible. Long after the explorers had departed, Anglos moved into Texas and many Spanish names were changed or evolved. Over the years *Saint Jacinto* became *San Jacinto* on maps and in history books. Today, both branches of the river and its River Authority are officially called San Jacinto. ■