

FP-032

LEONHARDT LAGOON

Federal Work Progress Administration funds constructed this shallow body of water, now called The Leonhardt Lagoon after philanthropist Dorothea Leonhardt. The lagoon made its debut -- along with many of the buildings around it - at the Texas Centennial Exposition in 1936.

At that time, it was surrounded by a component of the Ford Motor Company exhibit, called the Roads of the Southwest. Visitors to the exposition could take a test ride in a Ford vehicle on different surfaces designed to mimic famous roadways in the region. Those roadways included the Santa Fe Trail, the Chisholm Trail, the Old San Antonio Road and the Pan-American Highway, among others.

Since then, the lagoon has been the site of a variety of unusual events and activities. In 1938, it hosted a major bait and fly-casting tournament. During World War Two, army engineers used the lagoon to demonstrate how quickly a pontoon bridge could be built. In 1957, it hosted replicas of two paddle-driven Mississippi-River-style showboats, each of which carried 30 persons. And in the 1960s, the world's first commercial monorail transported visitors over a small section of the water.

Today the lagoon is more a venue for relaxation and contemplation. You can rent a swan boat and gracefully float along the lagoon's surface. Or, you can learn about the lagoon's ecosystem by taking the Leonhardt Lagoon Nature Walk. Approximately 25 numbered markers, and four descriptive panels, highlight the birds, insects, plants, trees, fish and other wildlife that make their home at the lagoon. A printed walking guide, keyed to the markers, provides you with even more details about the flora, fauna and wildlife living around the area of each marker.

All the while, a fountain in the center of the lagoon trumpets its existence by jettisoning a spray of water into the air.

The lagoon houses a variety of aquatic life including cattails, lily pads and turtles. It also is the home for two examples of environmental art created for the lagoon in 1985 by Patricia Johanson. Tour stations elsewhere on the edge of the lagoon will provide you with details about those two interesting art forms.

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