

**Native History and Foodways in the Post Oak Savannah: A Lower Brazos River Basin Perspective**

A Presentation at *La Tortuga* to:  
Camino Real Texas Master Naturalist Group  
by  
Alston V. Thoms, Anthropology, TAMU  
April 15, 2008

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**The *La Tortuga* (aka Sugarloaf) area of the Brazos Valley lies within a vast Oak Savannah belt that forms a boundary zone between eastern forests and western grasslands**

Map based on Life Areas of N.A., by John W. Aldrich, *Journal of Wildlife Management*, Oct. 1963.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Natural Regions of Texas

- 1 PINE WOODS
- 2 OAK WOODS & PRAIRIES (aka Post Oak Savannah)
- 3 BACKLAND PRAIRIES
- 4 GULF COAST PRAIRIES & MARSHES
- 5 COASTAL SAND PLAIN
- 6 SOUTHWESTERN BRUSH COUNTRY
- 7 SHORTER PRAIRIES
- 8 ISLAND UPLIFT
- 9 HOLLING PLAINS
- 10 GREAT PLAINS
- 11 TRANS Pecos
- 12 MARSH ENVIRONMENT

Source: *Shirley Bar, Natural Change: 18 Years of Change in the Post Oak Savannah* (Texas A&M University Press, 1994)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

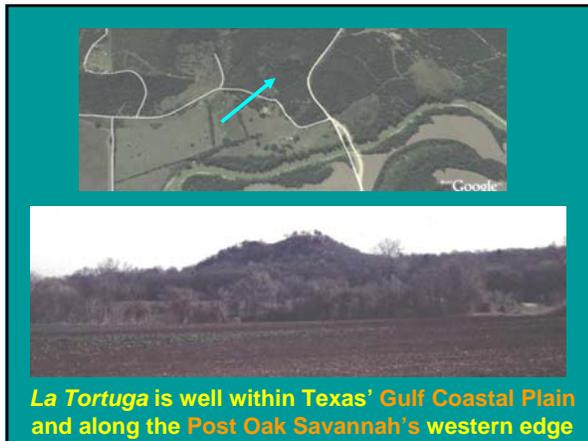
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---

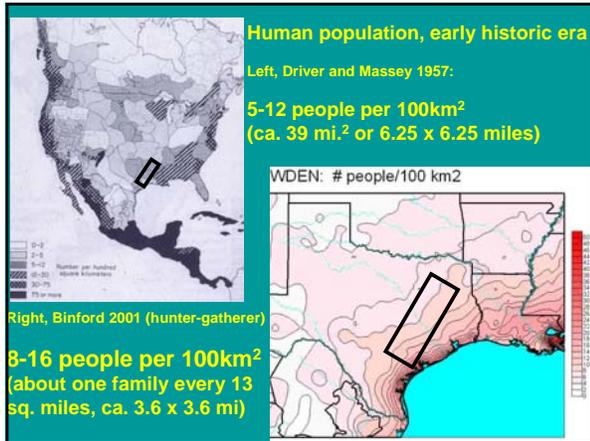
---

---

---

---






---

---

---

---

---

---

---

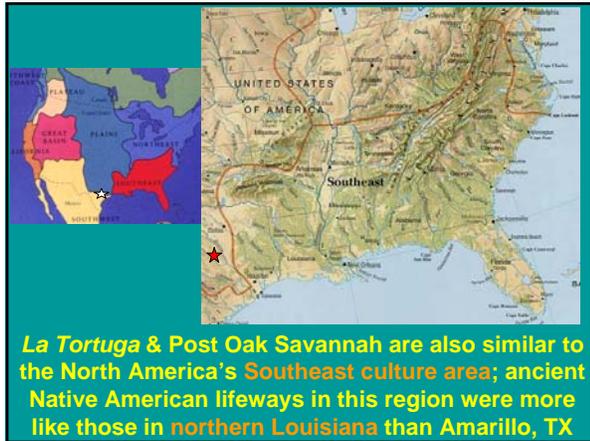
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

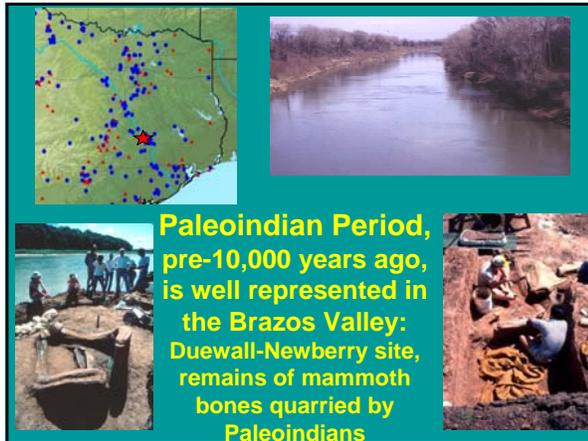
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---

---

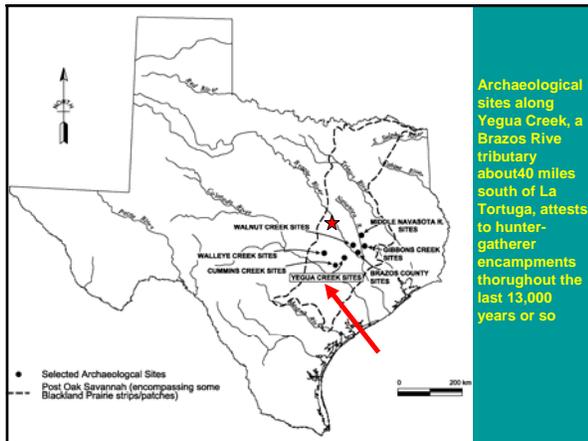
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---

---

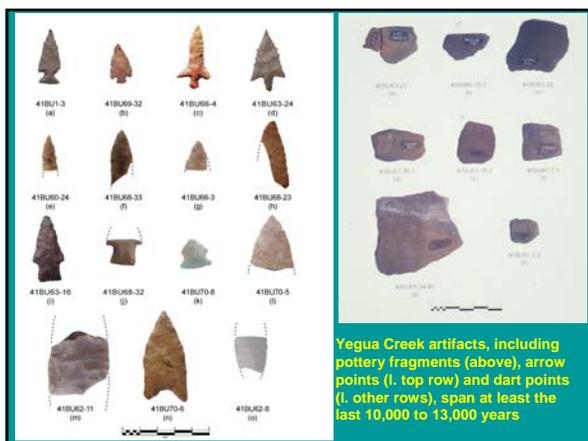
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

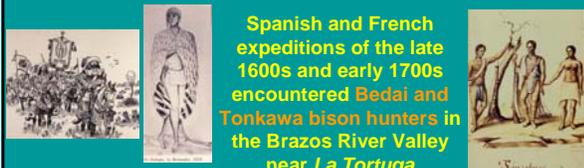
---

---

---







Spanish and French expeditions of the late 1600s and early 1700s encountered Bedai and Tonkawa bison hunters in the Brazos River Valley near La Tortuga



Tonkawa cosmology attests to their origin near confluence of the Little and Brazos rivers at La Tortuga (aka Sugarloaf)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



Based on archeological evidence, bison were far less important than deer throughout the Post Oaks

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Native American Diversity in the middle Brazos River basin varied through time and across space

Yerribame		Apache		Tejas
Payaya		Bedai		Cocos
Cantonae		Kickapoo		Meyeye
Mixcal		Cherokee		Jojuane
Xarame		Choctaw		Tancague
Sijame		Caddo		Waco

---

---

---

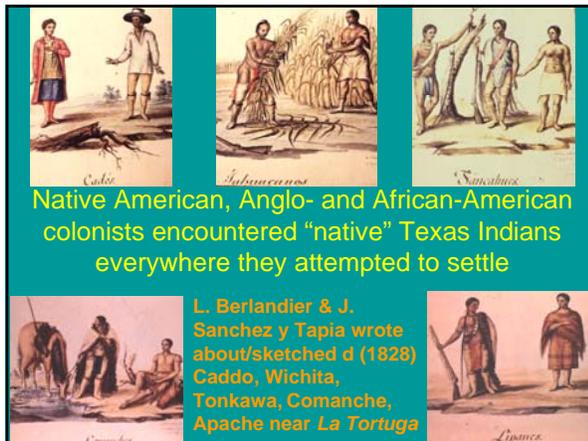
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Some 75,000 American Indians live in Texas today, as per 2000 U.S. census**

Among those are descendants of many "Texas" tribes, including 1,370 Comanche and 2,971 Apache; their ancestors were among a multitude of tribes that lived or raided, at one time or another, in the Brazos River Valley




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



**Most Texas Indians live in D/FW, Houston, Austin, & San Antonio; 30,000 are from tribes (e.g., Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw) with ancestral homelands in Southeast North America (aka Old South)**

---

---

---

---

---

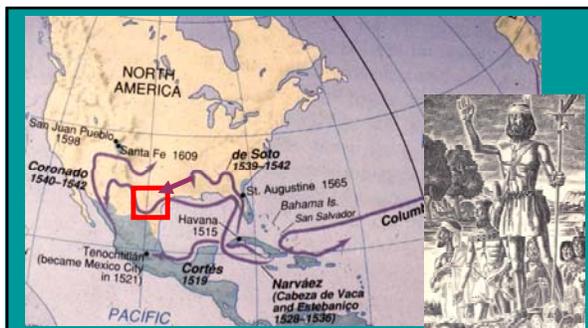
---

---

---

---

---



**Cabeza de Vaca's trek across S-C. North America with two other Spaniards & Esteban, an enslaved African, in the early 1530s AND Moscoso's (de Soto Expedition) fast trip to vicinity of Austin in 1542**

---

---

---

---

---

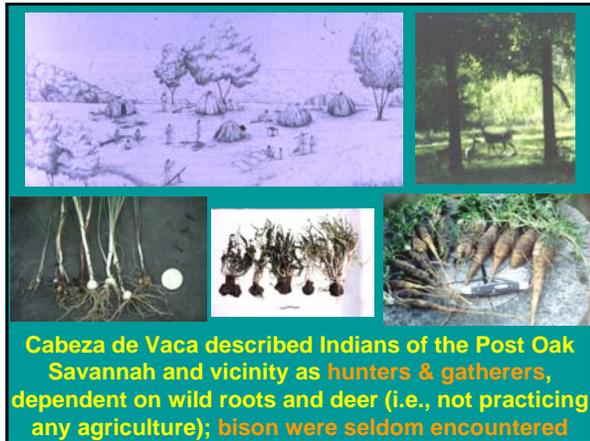
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

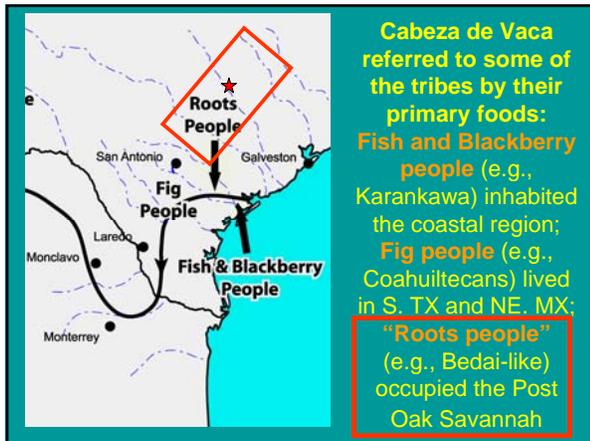
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



Cabeza de Vaca did not say just what kinds of roots were most used by Indians in Post Oak Savannah, but he did tell us that most roots were cooked in earth ovens, some for only a few hours, others for 48 hours

---

---

---

---

---

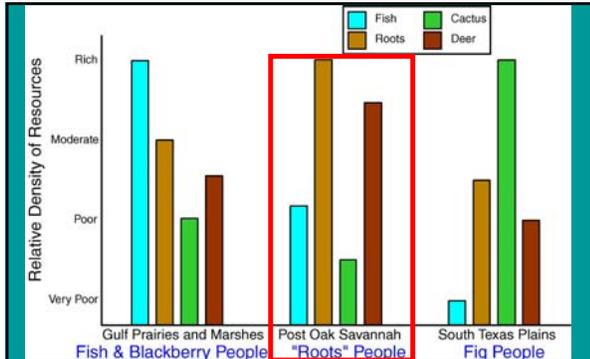
---

---

---

---

---



Hunter-gatherers of the Gulf Coastal Plain, and everywhere else for that matter, tended to rely on wild food resources proportional to availability

---

---

---

---

---

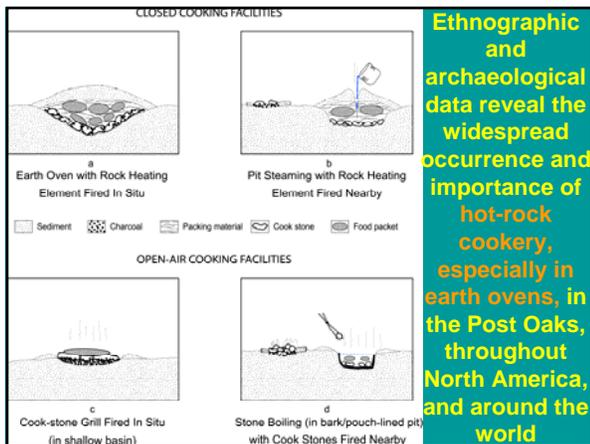
---

---

---

---

---



Ethnographic and archaeological data reveal the widespread occurrence and importance of hot-rock cookery, especially in earth ovens, in the Post Oaks, throughout North America, and around the world

---

---

---

---

---

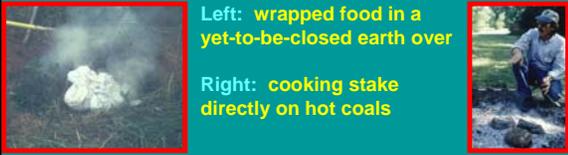
---

---

---

---

---



Left: wrapped food in a yet-to-be-closed earth over

Right: cooking stake directly on hot coals

Cabeza de Vaca also of cooking techniques, including cooking in earth ovens, directly on/above hot coals, and by stone boiling



Stone boiling




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

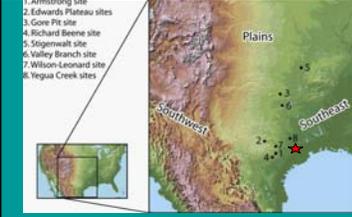
---

---

---

---

---




100s of oven remains, represented by fire-cracked-rock concentrations perhaps dating to last 3,000 years, occur along Yegua Creek; projectile points span 10,000 years or more




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



onions, lily family (*Allium* spp.)  
no starch grains; primarily carbohydrate is inulin, a dietary fiber

false garlic (aka crow poison, *Nothoscordum bivalve*)  
starch grains present

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

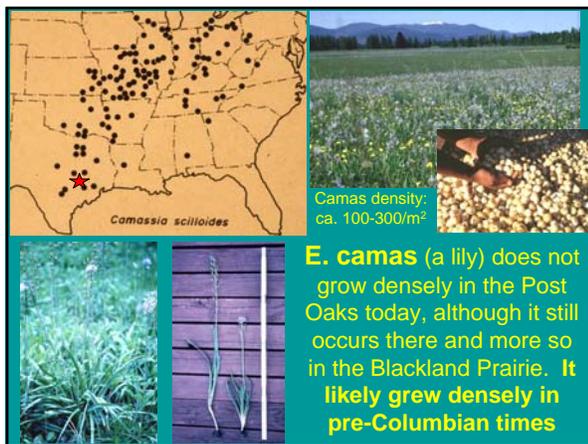
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



**Ethnographic Account:**  
 C. Sternberg (1876) witnessed/described a Comanche family in south-central OK (Cross Timbers) cooking camas in an earth oven





---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



eastern camas, lily family (*Camassia scilloides*)  
 no starch grains, primarily carbohydrate is inulin, a dietary fiber

Bullbrier greenbrier (aka catbrier, *Smilax bona-nox*)  
 starch grains present

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



**Spring beauty (*Claytonia virginica*)** grows widely and densely

---

---

---

---

---

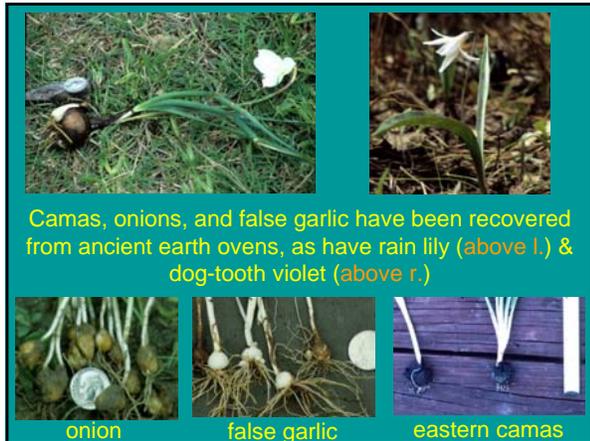
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

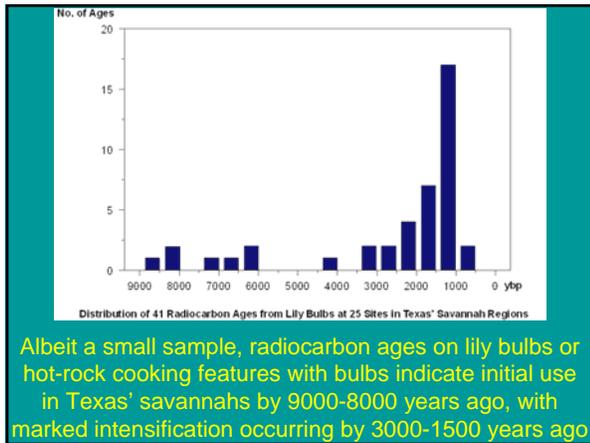
---

---

---

---

---



Albeit a small sample, radiocarbon ages on lily bulbs or hot-rock cooking features with bulbs indicate initial use in Texas' savannahs by 9000-8000 years ago, with marked intensification occurring by 3000-1500 years ago

---

---

---

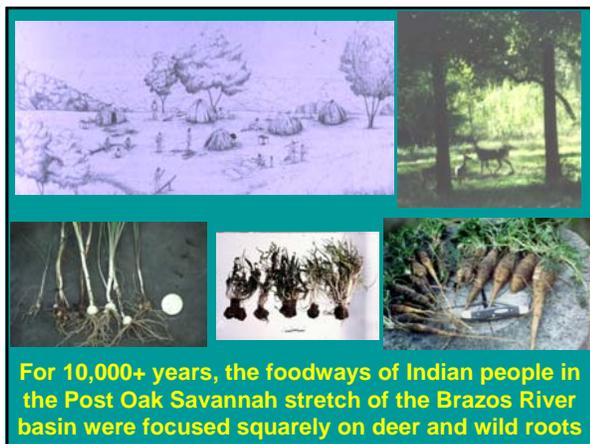
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---