

United States Department of the Interior

National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Onion Creek Crossings at McKinney Falls

Other name/site number: NA

Related multiple property listing: *Historic Resources of El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail*

2. Location

Street & number: McKinney Falls State Park, 5808 McKinney Falls Parkway

City or town: Austin

State: Texas

County: Travis

Not for publication: ☐Vicinity: ☐

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this
(☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility) meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the
National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my
opinion, the property (☒ meets ☐ does not meet) the National Register criteria.

I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following levels of significance:

☐ national ☒ statewide ☐ localApplicable National Register Criteria: ☒ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D

Mark Wolfe State Historic Preservation Officer
Signature of certifying official / Title

4/11/19
Date

Texas Historical Commission

State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

☐ entered in the National Register☐ determined eligible for the National Register☐ determined not eligible for the National Register.☐ removed from the National Register☐ other, explain: _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Onion Creek Crossings at McKinney Falls, Austin, Travis County, Texas

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

<input type="checkbox"/>	Private
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Local
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Federal

Category of Property

<input type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
0	0	buildings
1	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions: TRANSPORTATION/road-related; LANDSCAPE/natural feature

Current Functions: LANDSCAPE/Park

7. Description

Architectural Classification: N/A

Principal Exterior Materials: N/A

Narrative Description (see continuation sheets 6 through 8)

Onion Creek Crossings at McKinney Falls, Austin, Travis County, Texas

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	A	Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
<input type="checkbox"/>	B	Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
<input type="checkbox"/>	C	Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
<input type="checkbox"/>	D	Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations: NA

Areas of Significance: Exploration/Settlement

Period of Significance: 1709-1821

Significant Dates: 1709, 1716, 1721

Significant Person (only if criterion b is marked): N/A

Cultural Affiliation (only if criterion d is marked): N/A

Architect/Builder: N/A

Narrative Statement of Significance (see continuation sheets 9 through 12)

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography (see continuation sheet 13)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State historic preservation office (*Texas Historical Commission, Austin*)
- ☐ Other state agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other -- Specify Repository:

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): N/A

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: 39.5 acres

Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: NA

1. 30.188836° -97.722353°
2. 30.188905° -97.719286°
3. 30.184720° -97.723054°
4. 30.184186° -97.723931°
5. 30.184142° -97.725287°
6. 30.184589° -97.726099°
7. 30.185064° -97.726352°

Verbal Boundary Description: The boundary encompasses a portion of McKinney Falls State Park, which includes the upper and lower falls of Onion Creek and water crossings near the falls, approximately 2050 feet apart at opposite ends of the property. The property is bounded by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Dept. property line on the west, and to the east runs along the west bank of Onion Creek and the eastern edge of the exposed rock outcrop south of the lower falls. The boundary is delineated on the kmz file submitted with this nomination, and the resulting map on page 14.

Boundary Justification: The nominated property includes natural features that provided crossing points of Onion Creek within the current park boundary and includes the length of exposed rock along the ridge between the crossing points that likely served as a Camino Real corridor.

11. Form Prepared By

Name/title: Lena Sweeten McDonald (HRA Gray & Pape LLC); revised by Gregory Smith (THC)
Organization: National Trails Intermountain Region, National Park Service
Street & number: PO Box 728
City or Town: Santa Fe State: NM Zip Code: 87504-0728
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Telephone: 505-988-6098
Date: April 2011; revised October 2018

Additional Documentation

Maps (see continuation sheets 14-21)

Additional items

Photographs (see continuation sheets 22-29)

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Photograph Log

All photos by Gregory Smith, November 2018.

Photo 1

Upper Falls Crossing, from the south side

Camera facing north

Photo 2

Upper Falls Crossing, detail from the south side above the falls

Camera facing northeast

Photo 3

Exposed rock surface immediately south of the Lower Falls Crossing. Facing north.

Photo 4

Crossing site approximately 440 feet west of the Lower Falls, facing north.

Photo 5

Detail of crossing site approximately 440 feet west of the Lower Falls, facing north.

Photo 6

Crossing site above the Lower Falls, facing northeast.

Photo 7

Crossing site above the Lower Falls, facing northeast.

Photo 8

Lower Falls crossing site, from downstream. Facing northwest.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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Description

The Onion Creek Crossings and the Camino Real corridor that runs between them are within McKinney Falls State Park, approximately six miles SSE of downtown Austin. The crossing at the upper falls (on the south portion of the property) is over a limestone shelf at the edge of the falls, leading to pathways on the exposed rock bed along the left bank of Onion Creek. One of the two crossings at the lower falls leads from the left bank over a shallow portion of the creek approximately 700 feet west of the falls, while the other leads from a large exposed rock plain south of the falls to a path immediately above the falls. The crossing points offered Spanish soldiers and missionaries an opportunity to easily traverse Onion Creek on the route between San Marcos de Neve (in present-day Hays County) and mission sites to the northeast in present-day Milam County. The crossing points are approximately one half-mile apart from each other and offered travelers flexible route options that could change depending on creek flow. The boundary of the McKinney Homestead site, listed in 1974, overlaps slightly with the nominated crossing site (accounting for approximately 2.5 acres), but the presence of the crossing at the lower falls was not a subject of the McKinney Homestead nomination, which details areological sites and historical ruins associated with mid-19th century settlement of the area.

Environmental Setting¹

McKinney Falls State Park is a 744.4-acre property on the southeastern outskirts of Austin, Travis County, Texas. The park is south of the confluence of Williamson Creek and Onion Creek, which drains into the Colorado River approximately 9 miles (14.48 kilometers) east of the park. Onion Creek rises in eastern Blanco County and flows northeast across Hays County to form the western perimeter of McKinney Falls State Park. Onion Creek, located approximately 1500 feet (457 meters) southwest of the project area, is a major tributary to the Colorado River and flows year-round. McKinney Falls is located within the Colorado River basin of Central Texas. The Colorado River basin covers an estimated 600 linear miles (965.6 kilometers). Dense forests are present in much of the park, and some areas are set aside for camping, hiking, and other recreational activities. The Onion Creek lower falls and two nearby crossing sites are approximately 400 feet south of the McKinney house ruins, and a long-abandoned road cut through the forest leads from the crossing site north to the house site. The upper falls and associated crossing site are approximately 2,050 feet southwest of the lower falls.²

McKinney Falls is in the Blackland Prairie geographic province of Texas, with deep soil deposits that support numerous tall and mid-grasses such as gramma and bluestem. In addition, mesquite, pecan, hackberry, juniper, and live oak trees are often observed in the low flat woodlands along streams. In prehistoric times, large numbers of bison were commonly observed within the Blackland Prairie environment. The bedrock geology in the park is predominately comprised of Lower Taylor Group (i.e., Ozan Formation) deposits of dark gray sandy marls, soft mudstones, and shales that formed approximately 66 to 144 million years ago during the Upper Cretaceous period. During the Upper Cretaceous, the park area was located within a vast shallow sea that extended through the center of the North American continent, connecting the Gulf of Mexico to the Arctic Ocean. The Cretaceous limestone deposits (i.e., Edwards, Glen Rose, Taylor, etc.) observed throughout Central Texas today originated from the fossilized remains of calcareous-shelled organisms that inhabited this shallow sea during the Upper Cretaceous. Within the park, Taylor Group deposits extend approximately 500 feet (152.4 meters) in depth, resting on a base of Upper Cretaceous Austin Chalk and Eagle

¹ This section adapted from Jeff Turpin, *A Cultural Resource Survey of Proposed Electric Line Right-of-Way Corridors; Texas Antiquities Permit No. 1217* (Austin, Texas: Galvám Eling Associates, Inc., 1993), and Richard Jones, *Archeological Survey of a Seventeen-Acre Property Inside the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Headquarters Complex, Travis County, Texas* (San Marcos: Southwest Texas State University, Center for Archeological Studies, 2002).

² Turpin, 387; Jones, 5.

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Ford limestone.³ Soils in the park area consist primarily of deep, nearly level calcareous clayey soils. The dark grayish brown stony clays of the Tarrant Soils are significant in that they frequently contain cherts. Lewisville silty clays are generally found occupying terrace slopes 20–80 acres in size along major streams. Park geology consists primarily of Upper Cretaceous Ozan Formation marly, calcareous clays, and quaternary fluvial terrace deposits that include gravels of dolomite, limestone, chert, quartz, and igneous and metamorphic rocks.⁴

Period of Use

The origins of the Camino Real date to the prehistoric period, as native peoples developed a series of trails over the course of several centuries. During the late seventeenth century, Spanish colonial-era explorers began adapting the existing aboriginal trail network to become El Camino Real. The road network formed the backbone of Spanish exploration through the early nineteenth century. The Onion Creek crossing sites are in the vicinity of prehistoric habitation sites, and the crossings are known to have been used by Spanish colonial-era soldiers and missionaries by 1709.⁵ Use of the crossing continued through the late 1830s, when Anglo-American settlers reached the area by way of El Camino Real. By the 1850s, the Onion Creek crossing site primarily served local traffic. A variety of groups used the Onion Creek crossing site within the historic district. Spanish colonial-era explorers, soldiers, and missionaries traveled along the segment of El Camino Real that passed through the immediate vicinity. Anglo-American settlers reached the area by traveling along El Camino Real from Louisiana. Local traffic, primarily made up of white and African-American residents, continued to use the crossing site through the mid-twentieth century.

Site Characteristics

The nominated boundary includes the Onion Creek crossing sites at the lower and upper falls. The north end of property includes a natural limestone outcropping in the creek, approximately 100 feet wide. When Onion Creek flows at full capacity, there is a waterfall over the natural bridge, which now is known as Lower Falls. For much of the year, however, the limestone outcropping is exposed, which allows for easy passage across the creek bed. The upper falls crossing also includes a natural limestone outcropping in the creek above a waterfall when the creek is at capacity. No segments of the Camino Real beyond the corridor along the rock shelf have been positively identified in the park, but potential swales have been found in the brush south and north of the lower falls crossing. Robert Weddle's 2012 analysis of aerial photographs suggested that the wide limestone outcropping extending from the Lower Falls on the south side of the creek shows faint worn pathways, but any marks on the rock are likely modern and should not be interpreted as evidence of historic use.⁶ The hard surfaces at the upper and lower falls are logical crossing points for travelers along the Camino Real corridor, as they are today for visitors to the park.

Beginning around the mid-nineteenth century, the crossing sites and the associated road corridor devolved primarily to serving local traffic needs. The immediate vicinity never was densely populated, keeping traffic levels to a minimum. Since 1976, the Onion Creek crossing sites have been within the boundaries of McKinney Falls State Park. Although foot traffic is common from park visitors, very little vehicular traffic exists. No evidence of looting has been discovered at the nominated site, and it appears to have been only minimally disturbed by modern-era activities. As a result, the site retains integrity of location, setting, materials, feeling, and association. Since the crossings are natural features, they do not exhibit manmade design nor workmanship features, and therefore, these aspects of historic integrity do not apply to the site.

³ Jones, 5.

⁴ Turpin, 387; Jones, 6.

⁵ Robert S. Weddle, *The Camino Real and the State Parks: A Study made for Texas Parks and Wildlife Department* (2012), 33-34.

⁶ Weddle, 34.

Onion Creek Crossings at McKinney Falls, Austin, Travis County, Texas

Previous Investigations

The McKinney Homestead to the north (and sharing 2.5 acres with the nominated property) was listed in the National Register in 1974 for its association with mid-19th century settlement.⁷ The nomination was amended in December 1985 to include Criterion D for the district's potential to yield information regarding the homestead's period of occupation from the 1860s through the 1940s. Between 1975 and the early 1980s, Michael McEachern and Ron Ralph carried out archeological investigations at the McKinney Homestead as well as the associated mill site. They identified historic artifacts associated with the dwelling and two cisterns at the homestead about 394 feet (120 meters) north of Onion Creek, as well as the locations of features associated with the mill site alongside Onion Creek.⁸ Archeological field investigations in search of remnants of the road were conducted by Texas Archeological Research Laboratory in 2011 (Jarvis and Creel 2012). The fieldwork consisted of magnetometer surveys both north and south of the lower falls crossing. No anomalies consistent with a road were encountered, but potential swales within wooded areas north and south of the lower falls crossing have been seen but not yet investigated.

⁷ Alton K. Briggs and Gary L. Hume, "McKinney Homestead" National Register nomination, 1974.

⁸ Michael McEachern and Ron Ralph, Excavation at McKinney Homestead (41TV289) (N.p., 1975); Michael McEachern and R. W. Ralph, An Experiment in Historical Archeology: Archeological Investigations at the Thomas F. McKinney Homestead, Travis County, Texas (San Antonio: Texas Archeological Society, 1980); Michael McEachern and Ronald W. Ralph, "Archeological Investigations at the Thomas F. McKinney Homestead, Travis County, Texas: An Experiment in Historical Archeology, Part 2," *Bulletin of the Texas Archeological Society* 52 (1981): 5-63.

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Statement of Significance

The Onion Creek Crossings at McKinney Falls are in McKinney Falls State Park in southeastern Travis County, Texas. The historic property is classified as a single contributing site, consisting of a linear travel corridor along Onion Creek, with waterfalls and associated crossing points at the north and south ends. The corridor is approximately a half mile long and roughly 800 feet wide. The location offered several crossing points of the creek and a high hard rock surface to better facilitate travel on foot and on horse. During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the corridor was used as part of El Camino Real by Spanish colonial-era soldiers and missionaries. They traveled the route to establish missions and presidios in the region. The Espinosa-Olivares-Aguirre expedition crossed the creek in this vicinity in 1709, and in 1716, that expedition's diarist, Fray Félix Isidro de Espinosa, came through the area again as part of Domingo Ramón's expedition and described the crossing of *Arroyo de las Garrapatas* (now Onion Creek). The Camino Real corridor continued to serve an important transportation function during the Mexican Independence period of the early nineteenth century, as well as the subsequent Texas Republic period and eventual annexation of Texas by the United States. After Texas became a state, new settlers poured into central Texas, many traveling by way of El Camino Real from the Louisiana border to establish new settlements in the agriculturally-rich region. The property is nominated under Criterion A in the area of Exploration/Settlement under the *Historic Resources of El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail* Multiple Property Documentation Form (approved by the National Park Service in 2014), at the state level as essential crossing points of Camino Real. The MPDF acknowledges that segments of the El Camino Real have precedent in earlier Native American trails and that some segments served as integral components of later transportation networks. The period of significance is 1709-1821, the period when the Onion Creek crossing site first was recorded by Spanish explorers through the end of the Spanish Colonial Period in Texas.

El Camino Real

El Camino Real, or the Royal Road, was a major route of travel across Texas during the Spanish colonial period. The road and its many tributaries served as a conduit of trade, a strategic military route, and a supply line for the numerous missions established by the Spanish during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A network of evolving routes, El Camino Real developed over many years, with the earliest routes emerging from the trail blazing efforts of explorers Alonso De Leon (1690), Domingo Teran de los Rios (1691), and Gregorio de Salinas Varona (1693). By the early nineteenth century, El Camino Real also was an important route for immigrants travelling into Texas from the Louisiana Territory. Proximity to El Camino Real was crucial to the success of early Spanish settlements as it served as a lifeline to market centers, military protection, and religious and civic institutions. The road remained a major transportation route through the mid-nineteenth century. Military troops used El Camino Real repeatedly as a supply line and transportation route during the Mexican and Texas revolutions and the Mexican-American War. Sections of El Camino Real also were used during the Civil War, when East Texas cotton growers began shipping their crops to San Antonio, Laredo, and Mexico. By the late nineteenth century, however, newer and shorter roads, as well as railroads, replaced large segments of El Camino Real.⁹

Applicability of listing under the Camino Real Multiple Property Form

The following sub-types of sites have been documented along El Camino Real and are identified as distinct property types in the MPDF: road and trail segments; river crossings and *paraje* sites; Spanish mission sites; presidios and military outpost sites; battlefields; villa sites; rancho sites; cemeteries; and nineteenth century settlement sites. River crossings often lack material culture but retain other forms of physical evidence. Rutted trail segments are the most frequently observed cultural feature. Variations in the environment, such as vegetational changes or steep river banks, may also be a signal that an area was utilized as a water crossing. A depiction on historic maps or a description within

⁹ Sweeten McDonald and Scott, et al, *Historic Resources of El Camino Real* multiple property form, 2014.

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a primary source document, such as a trail-related narrative, is important additional evidence in documenting river crossings.

Water crossings typically were located at natural fords, where stable bottoms comprised of natural bedrock or gravel alluvium provided a stable support for humans, animals, and vehicles, but evidence of human modification of landscape features at river crossing sites also has been documented. Some historic maps and travel narratives show that travelers had to leave the main trail and travel some distance along a river to reach a crossing, then return to the trail.¹⁰ As described in the NPS's 1998 feasibility study, Hubbard and Fox noted that river crossing sites may retain physical features that indicate their historic use. River crossings were used across multiple time periods and for varying purposes by travelers ranging from colonial-era Spanish missionaries to nineteenth-century Anglo homesteaders. If the route of El Camino Real shifted its location, the old river crossings may have fallen into disuse, or they may have remained in use by locals. For example, at McKinney Falls the Onion Creek crossing of El Camino Real has been documented. The crossing likely predates the adjacent property and ruins of pioneer Thomas F. McKinney's house and mill. Similarly, the Reading Site, near the Brazos River crossing on Texas Highway 21, dates to the early Spanish colonial period but saw use in association with Moseley's Ferry, which operated between 1846 and 1912.¹¹ McGehee Crossing in Hays County has been documented for its association with one of the El Camino Real routes starting in the eighteenth century. It continued to be in use through the mid-nineteenth century when Anglo settlers reached the area.¹² In Bexar County, the Dolores Crossing originated during the late Spanish Colonial period. The Paso de Dolores, as it was known, was first identified from the 1808 field notes of the Ygnacio Perez four-league land grant on the southern bank of the Medina River. Later, the crossing came to be associated with the mid-nineteenth century Perez and Applewhite roads.¹³ It was listed in the National Register under the Camino Real MPS in 2014.

Onion Creek Crossings at McKinney Falls

El Camino Real was an important transportation network with roots that extend to the prehistoric period and later used by Spanish explorers, settlers, and other groups for more than two centuries. In their efforts to curb French expansion from Louisiana, the Spanish relied on El Camino Real to aid with establishment of missions, presidios, and other settlements across Texas. During the nineteenth century, El Camino Real brought thousands of Anglo-American settlers, including Thomas McKinney, into Texas. Many segments of El Camino Real remained in use as local roads long after the road network ceased its original function as a trans-Texas route.

Based on current understanding of the paths of the Camino Real corridor, one northbound route runs through McKinney Falls from Manchaca Springs at Onion Creek, about 8 miles to the southwest, and continuing to the Colorado River crossing near present-day U.S. 183, approximately 4 miles to the northeast. The crossings within the nominated area are the most likely means of traversing the creek between Manchaca Springs and the Colorado River. In 1709, the Espinosa-Olivares-Aguirre expedition traveled along El Camino Real through the present-day park. Fray Felix Isidro de Espinosa, diarist of the expedition, noted few details about the crossing. Seven years later, however, while traveling the same stretch with Domingo Ramón, Espinosa wrote, "In this direction of northeast we came to a little spring of water which, years ago [i.e. in 1709], I named San Isidro. From thence we advanced to the hills and

¹⁰ Morgan-Remley, *Draft Cultural Resources Inventory*, 33-34.

¹¹ NPS, *Feasibility Study*, 52, 62, 107.

¹² Nancy Adele Kenmotsu, Sergio Iruegas, Mark Denton, and Timothy K. Perttula, *Searching for San Marcos de Neve, an Archeological Reconnaissance in Hays and Caldwell Counties, Texas* (Austin: Department of Antiquities Protection, Texas Historical Commission, 1995), 4.

¹³ J. M. Adovasio and Melissa M. Green, eds., *Historic Archeological Investigations in the Applewhite Reservoir Project Area, Bexar County, Texas, Report of Investigations No. 6* (Center for Ecological Archeology, Texas A&M University, 2003), 30.

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found some arroyos with pools of water [leading to] the Arroyo of the Garrapatas....”¹⁴ The Arroyo de las Garrapatas has been identified as present-day Onion Creek. After spending the night along the creek bed, the group traveled in a north-northeast direction that passed what is known today as Williamson Creek (located to the west of the McKinney Homestead District boundary). According to the description in the diary, it appears that travelers on El Camino Real would have followed this route to cross Onion Creek to continue along the trail.¹⁵

In 1721, Espinosa accompanied an expedition led by Marqués de San Miguel de Aguayo’s along El Camino Real. Unlike the uneventful crossings of 1709 and 1716, Aguayo’s crossing was made dangerous by heavy thunderstorms that swelled the creek. Espinosa noted for the first time the waterfall made by the stone outcropping and described it as a “ribbon of stones” through the water. Other eighteenth-century Spanish travelers who would have traversed this section of El Camino Real, included Fray Miguel Nùñez de Haro, who delivered supplies to missions east Texas in 1717-1718; Fray Pedro Muñoz, who traveled after Nùñez; and Governor Martin de Alarcón in 1718. As not all journeys were recorded, it may be assumed that several other Spanish expeditions traveled through this area, and therefore, over Onion Creek within the current park.¹⁶ As Camino Real is most accurately understood as a corridor rather than a single narrow road, the choice of creek crossings within the park area and the specific path chosen on any particular journey may have varied due to weather, water flow, means of travel, and other conditions.

Post-Spanish Era

Approximately one century after these known expeditions occurred, Anglo-American immigrants began to utilize El Camino Real to travel across Texas. The fertile soil and plentiful game of Central Texas drew numerous settlers. In 1820, Moses Austin was the first American empresario to try to establish a colony in Texas. Austin traveled along El Camino Real to reach San Antonio to petition the Spanish Governor of the Province of Coahuila y Texas for land to create a colony for 300 families. In 1821, the governor approved Austin’s plan for settlement. Austin died in 1821, leaving his son, Stephen F. Austin, and Philip Hendrick Nering Bögel to implement his colonization plan. At this time, Mexico gained independence from Spain, which delayed Austin and Bögel’s contract for settlement to 1823. The colony was located between the Lavaca and San Jacinto rivers, south of El Camino Real, which was also known as the San Antonio Road. Settlers arrived via several routes, including El Camino Real, since these were well-known throughout the area. The roads, including El Camino Real, were often referenced in the original land grants and deeds of the colonists.¹⁷

Thomas F. McKinney was one of Austin’s original 300 colonists to settle in the region. McKinney was already familiar with the roads that extended across the Texas and New Mexico, as he was involved with trade from Missouri to Sante Fe, and eventually reached Chihuahua. When McKinney arrived in Texas, he continued his trading business, first from San Antonio and later from Nacogdoches.¹⁸ In 1839, he purchased property in Travis County, initially acquiring a tract of nine leagues, or almost 40,000 acres (16,184 hectares). He did not begin improvements to the property until 1849 and did not erect any buildings until 1851. McKinney’s property eventually included a house or cabin for a horse trainer, a mill, a two-story house, and two cisterns.¹⁹ The dwelling was placed approximately 400 feet

¹⁴ Weddle, *The Camino Real*, 33.

¹⁵ Weddle, 33-34.

¹⁶ Weddle, 35.

¹⁷ National Park Service (NPS), United States Department of the Interior, *El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail Feasibility Study and Environmental Assessment* (Washington, DC: United States Department of the Interior, July 1998); A. Joachim McGraw, John W. Clark, Jr., and Nancy Kenmotsu, “Key Aspects of the Historic Context,” in A. Joachim McGraw, John W. Clark, Jr., and Elizabeth A. Robbins, eds., *A Texas Legacy: The Old San Antonio Road and The Caminos Reales, A Tricentennial History*, (1991; repr., Austin: Texas Department of Transportation, 1998), 31.

¹⁸ Briggs and Hume, “Nomination Form: McKinney Homestead.”

¹⁹ Texas Historical Commission, “McKinney Homestead, Updated.”

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(120 meters) north of the Onion Creek crossing on El Camino Real. The proximity of the well-traveled road almost certainly influenced his selection of a building site.

McKinney was a staunch Confederate during the Civil War and lost much of his fortune as a result. His family managed to hold onto the homestead until the mid-1880s, after which it was occupied by a succession of tenants and owners engaged primarily in agriculture. The Johns, Meeks, and Darby families lived on the property until the early 1940s. The house later was abandoned and then burned. The land associated with the homestead was donated to the people of Texas in 1970 and it became part of McKinney Falls State Park in 1976.²⁰ The McKinney Homestead was listed in the National Register in 1974, and amended in 1985, meeting Criteria A and D. A small portion of the lower falls crossing site was included in the boundary, but its inclusion appears to be incidental, as its significance was not noted in the nomination. The period of significance for the nominated corridor (1709-1821) encompasses the period in which the Onion Creek crossing site at the McKinney Homestead was a part of El Camino Real and in use by Spanish explorers during the eighteenth century.

²⁰ "National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form: McKinney Homestead, Updated," on file at the Texas Historical Commission, 1985.

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Onion Creek Crossings at McKinney Falls, Austin, Travis County, Texas

Google Earth Map, indicating boundary of nominated property.
Accessed November 5, 2018.



Onion Creek Crossings at McKinney Falls, Austin, Travis County, Texas

Google Earth Map, showing nomination parcel (pink) and previously-listed McKinney Homestead (yellow)
Accessed November 5, 2018.



Onion Creek Crossings at McKinney Falls, Austin, Travis County, Texas

Google Earth Map, showing likely crossing points and the routes that they served. Accessed November 5, 2018.

White lines indicate likely crossing points. Yellow lines indicate general routes of the Camino Real on the east and west sides of Onion Creek.



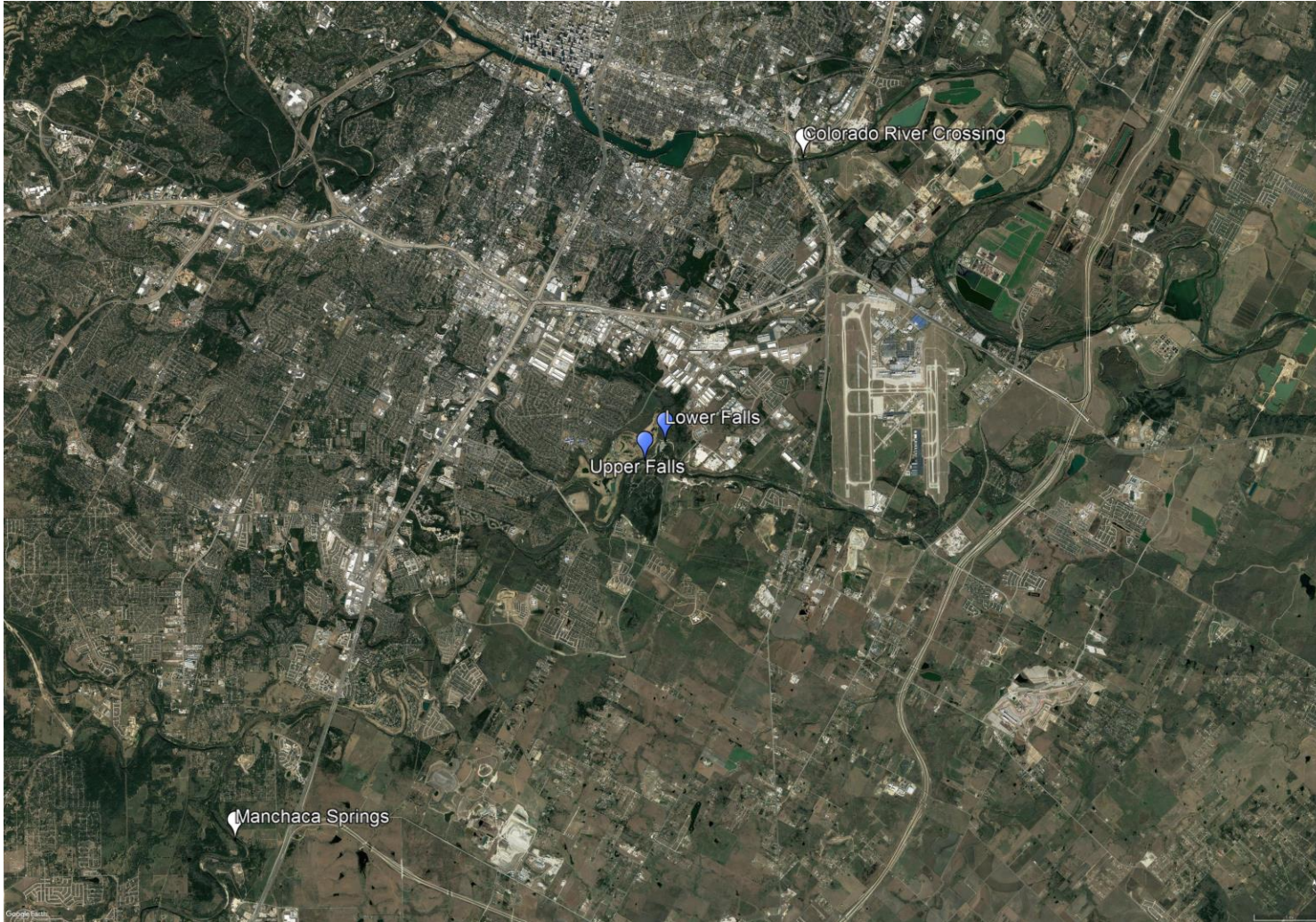
Onion Creek Crossings at McKinney Falls, Austin, Travis County, Texas

Google Earth Map, showing likely crossing point at the Upper Falls. Accessed November 5, 2018.

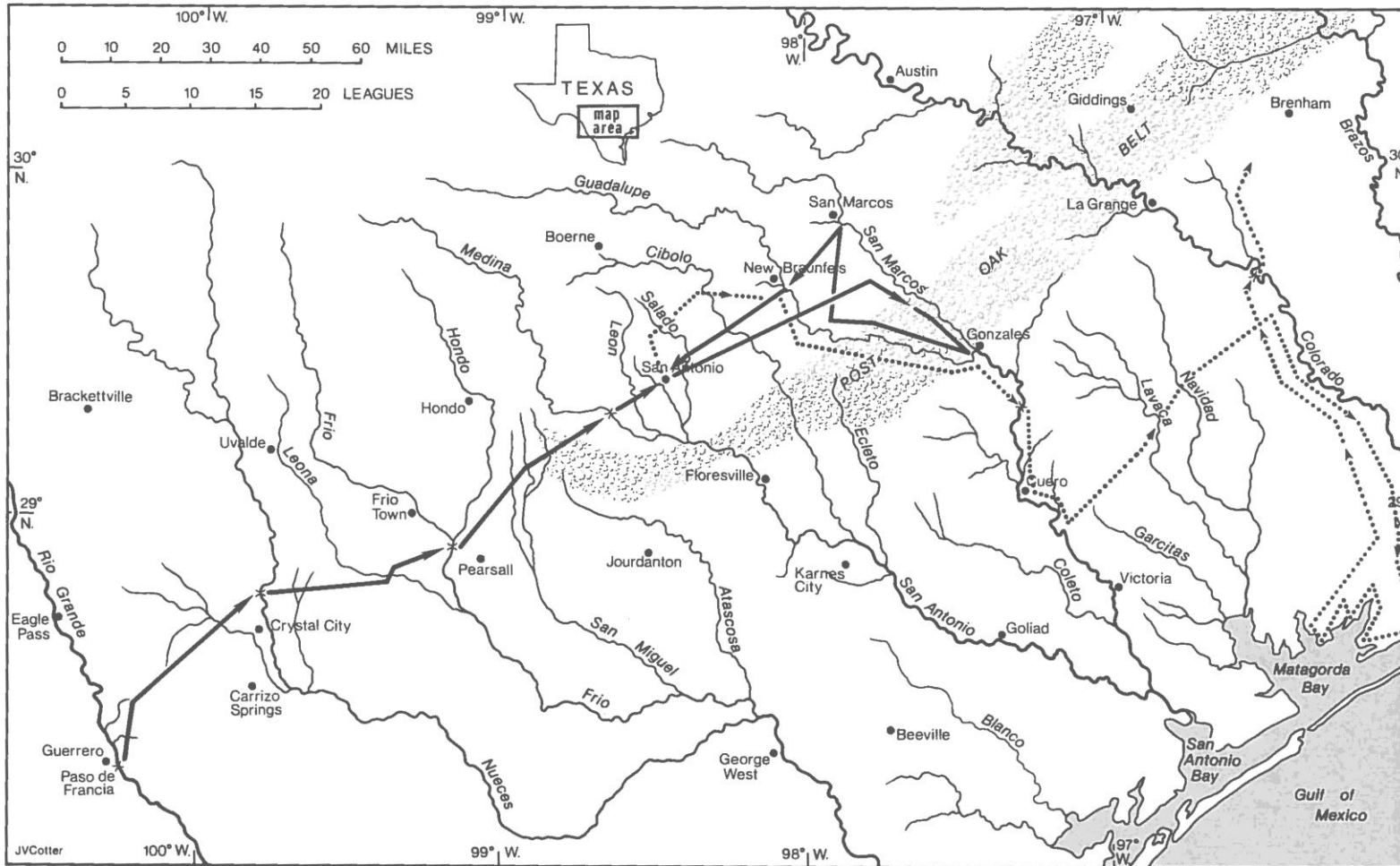


Onion Creek Crossings at McKinney Falls, Austin, Travis County, Texas

Google Earth Map, showing McKinney Falls in relation to the approximate locations of Manchaca Springs to the south and the Colorado River crossing to the north. Accessed November 5, 2018.



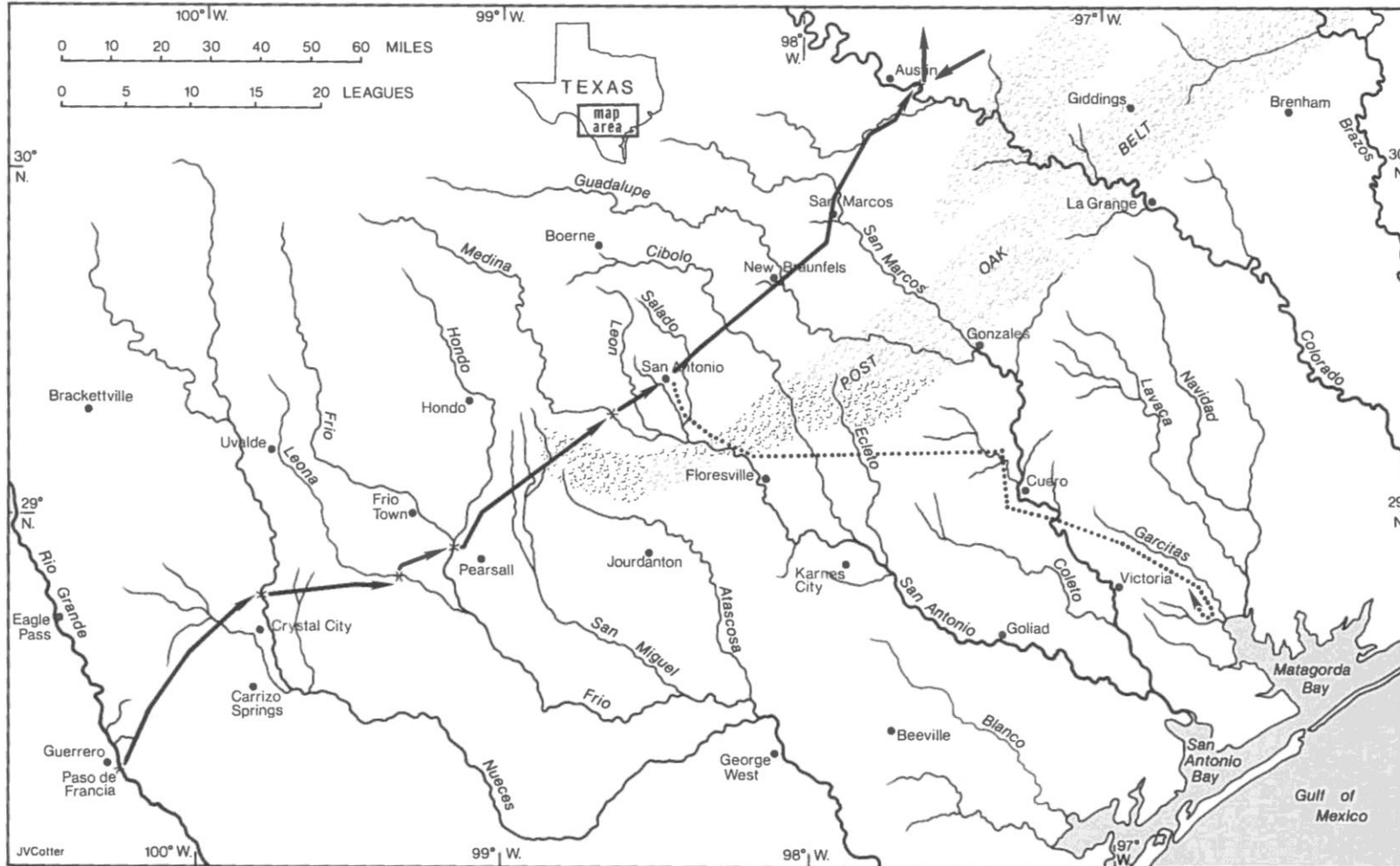
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Onion Creek Crossings at McKinney Falls, Austin, Travis County, Texas

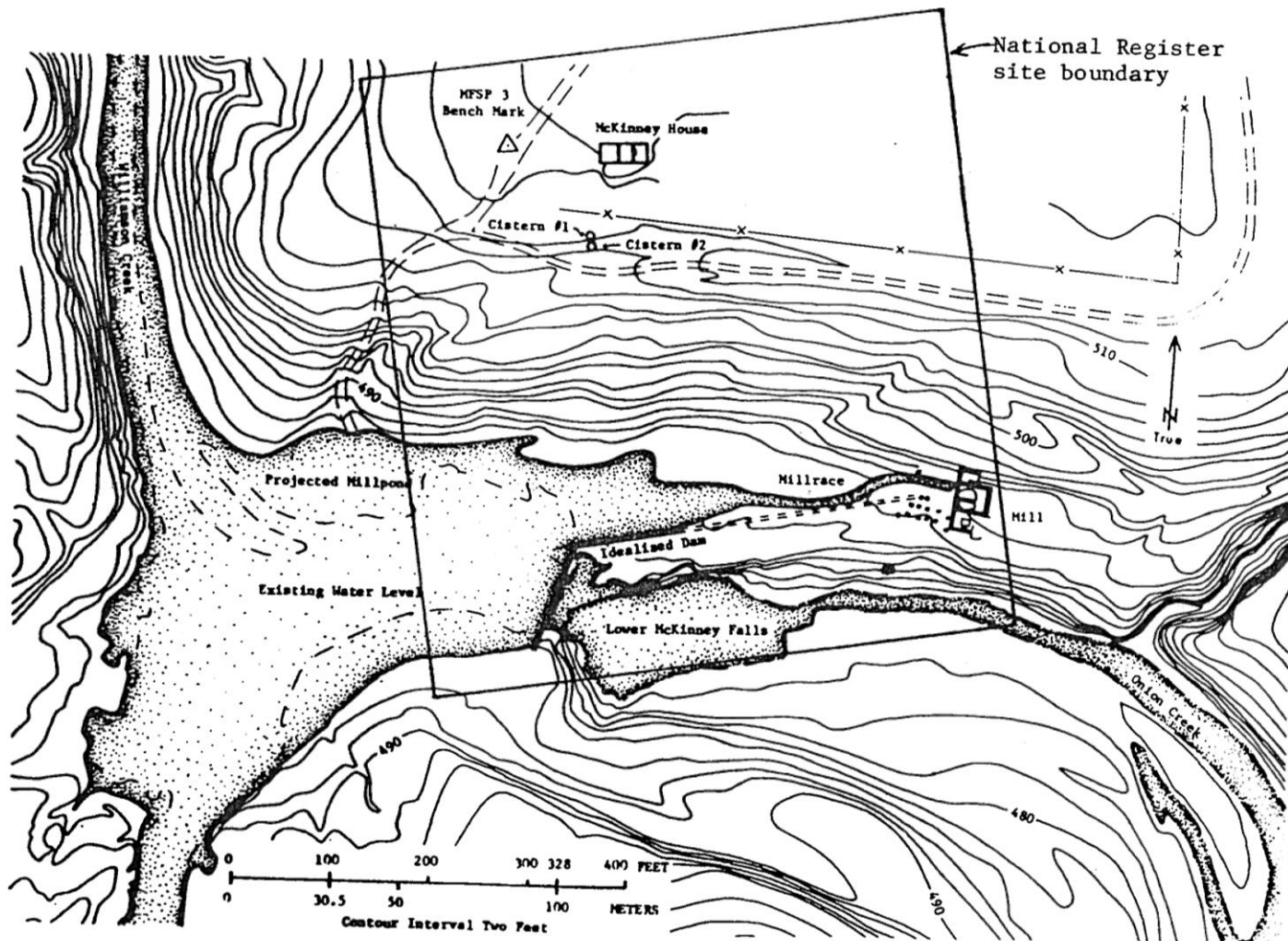
Map showing the expedition route of Governor Marques de San Miguel Aguayo in 1721-1722.

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Onion Creek Crossings at McKinney Falls, Austin, Travis County, Texas

McKinney Homestead district map from the nomination as amended in 1986.



Onion Creek Crossings at McKinney Falls, Austin, Travis County, Texas

Photos

All photos by Gregory Smith, November 2018.

Photo 1

Upper Falls Crossing, from the south side
Camera facing north



Onion Creek Crossings at McKinney Falls, Austin, Travis County, Texas

Photo 2

Upper Falls Crossing, detail from the south side above the falls
Camera facing northeast



Onion Creek Crossings at McKinney Falls, Austin, Travis County, Texas

Photo 3

Exposed rock surface immediately south of the Lower Falls Crossing. Facing north.



Onion Creek Crossings at McKinney Falls, Austin, Travis County, Texas

Photo 4

Crossing site approximately 440 feet west of the Lower Falls, facing north. Shallow water at right-center most likely crossing route at this location.



Onion Creek Crossings at McKinney Falls, Austin, Travis County, Texas

Photo 5

Detail of crossing site approximately 440 feet west of the Lower Falls, facing north.



Onion Creek Crossings at McKinney Falls, Austin, Travis County, Texas

Photo 6

Crossing site above the Lower Falls, facing northeast.



Onion Creek Crossings at McKinney Falls, Austin, Travis County, Texas

Photo 7

Crossing site above the Lower Falls, facing northeast.



Onion Creek Crossings at McKinney Falls, Austin, Travis County, Texas

Photo 8

Lower Falls crossing site, from downstream. Facing northwest.



- end -