

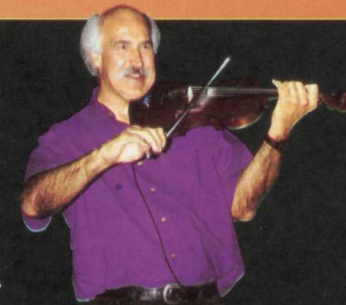
A Cultural Crossroads

Chamizal National Memorial celebrates Mexican-American friendship and goodwill. It is a memorial to the peaceful settlement of a long-standing dispute over the location of the international boundary between El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juárez in Chihuahua. On August 29, 1963, after more than a century of arguing about who owned the piece of land that was created by the meandering of the Rio Grande, the question was finally settled by the Convention of the Chamizal. By this agreement, the Rio Grande was constrained within a concrete channel, which acts as the permanent border between the two nations. More than 5,000 people residing in the disputed area were relocated at the expense of both governments. In addition, a portion of the former Mexican land that now lay in the United States was set aside by the federal government for recreational and cultural use—Chamizal National Memorial. Here at Chamizal, music, visual arts, dance and drama become cultural bridges as strong as the concrete spans that cross the Rio Grande.

Theater

On most nights of the year, Chamizal's 500-seat indoor theater comes alive with performances that include musicals, modern dance, opera, and ballet folklórico. Each March, the park hosts the Siglo de Oro Drama Festival, ten days of dramatic works performed by theatrical groups from all over the world; there are performances in both Spanish and English. This festival celebrates Spain's Golden Age of literature and drama—the mid-1500s to the mid-1600s—which is roughly analogous to the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods of English drama. There is no admission charge to the Siglo De Oro Festival. For a schedule of theater performances, call or write the park staff.

Ballet folklórico dancers grace the outdoor walls of the visitor center. The scene is from the mural created by Carlos Flores in 1993.



A violinist performs for "Music Under the Stars." Concerts are held in the amphitheater on Sunday nights during the summer season. An American Indian hoop dancer (below) delights spectators at the Border Folk Festival.

Michael D. Kimak



Michael D. Kimak

The Mural

Visitors to Chamizal are greeted by Carlos Flores' bold, bright depictions of the history and culture of two nations. Painted on the outside walls of the visitor center, "Nuestra Herencia," or "Our Heritage," is one of more than 100 murals around the city. The mural was donated by the El Paso Junior League's Los Murales Project and dedicated in 1993. The 18-foot-high, 120-foot-long mural illustrates the blending of cultures of the United States and Mexico. The scene unfolds in four panels: The far left panel represents some of the different cultural groups of the United States. To its right is a panel devoted to Mexican heritage, a blending of two cultures—native peoples and Spaniards—that created the Mexico of today. The third and longest panel honors U.S. President John F. Kennedy and Mexican President Aldofo López Mateos, who initiated the search for a solution to the Chamizal problem. President Lyndon B. Johnson, who completed negotiations after Kennedy's assassination, is also shown. A final panel traces the Spanish influence on the area from colonial times to the present. For detailed information about the mural, ask for a brochure at the visitor center.

Music Under the Stars

El Paso's mild summer nights are the setting for "Music Under the Stars," a series of outdoor concerts held in the amphitheater each Sunday night, June through August. Bluegrass fiddlers, mariachis, big bands, Caribbean dancers—all might be among the acts featured during the lively evening concerts. Amphitheater seating is on the ground; bring blankets or lawnchairs, and a picnic if you wish. The concerts are a joint presentation of the City of El Paso and the National Park Service. Admission to the concerts is free.



Michael D. Kimak



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Festivals and Special Events

Chamizal presents several intercultural fiestas, shows, and celebrations each year. At the end of April, the First Thanksgiving, or Oñate Historical Festival, commemorates Don Juan de Oñate's expedition of colonists into what became New Mexico. After traveling through the Chihuahuan Desert, the weary group of Spaniards finally arrived at the Rio Grande where Oñate held a solemn feast of thanksgiving on April 30, 1598. The festival features a pageant with reenactors in period costume. The United

States' Independence Day is celebrated in grand style on July 4, with music, fireworks, and barbecues. One of the highlights of the year occurs on the first weekend after Labor Day. The Border Folk Festival gathers artists from around the world, including dancers from Mexico, cowboy poets, and bands performing American Indian, Cajun, bluegrass, country-western, Irish, salsa, marimba, and Latin jazz music. Visitors to the festival may also attend workshops on subjects ranging from the history of music to storytelling. Admission to the festival is free.

Los Paisanos Gallery

The visual arts of numerous countries and cultures—painting, drawing, photography, sculpture, collage—are displayed in the Los Paisanos Gallery. The gallery is part of the visitor center complex. Exhibits in the gallery are intended to promote the spirit of cultural and international cooperation. Exhibitors also include individuals and organizations dedicated to the preservation-recreation mission of other national park areas. Drawings, paintings, prints, and sculptures from the memorial's permanent collection are displayed throughout the complex.



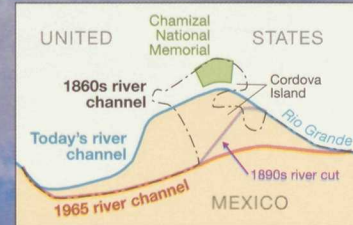
Laurence Parent

Los Paisanos Gallery is a showcase for visual arts from all over the world. Below, a ballet folklórico is one of the acts at the Border Folk Festival.

At the Siglo de Oro dramatic festival, actors perform a 16th-century Spanish play (upper left). Audiences enjoy the informal atmosphere of evening concerts at the amphitheater (left).



Michael D. Kimak



The diagram above shows the Rio Grande's channel—and international boundary—at three stages: in the 1860s, just prior to the 1960s agreement, and after the present concrete channel was constructed.

This scene along the Rio Grande exemplifies the kind of landscape that inspired the name "Chamizal," a Spanish term for a place where riparian vegetation—chamiza and carrizo—grow in the river's floodplain.

Photo by Laurence Parent

Río Bravo, Rio Grande

To Mexicans, it is the Río Bravo. North of the border, it is the Rio Grande. For hundreds of miles, the river separates the United States and Mexico, forming the major portion of the international line. And for more than a century the river's role as border has been the cause of international discord. The story of the Chamizal, a tract cut off from Mexico as the river shifted course, illustrates how the disputed ownership of an obscure piece of land can create confusion and mistrust at the highest levels of government.

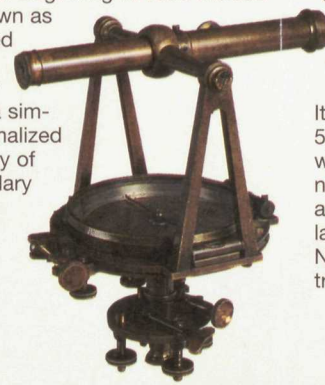
The first Joint Boundary Commission was formed in 1849 to survey the new international line resulting from the Mexican War treaty. Maj. William Hemsley Emory of the United States and Maj. José Salazar y Larrequei of Mexico led the survey party. The Emory-Salazar surveys disclosed that the United States and Mexico faced each other along a frontier of some 1,900 miles. Nearly 675 miles was a land frontier; 1,248 miles of the Rio Grande and 23 miles of the lower Colorado formed river frontiers. It was the rivers that accounted for most of the boundary difficulties that plagued both countries for more than a century. Historian Leon C. Metz described the problem in his book *Border: The U.S.-Mexico Line*: "Rivers are never absolutely permanent. They evaporate, flood, change channels, shrink, expand and even disappear. Rivers are by nature, capricious."

As early as 1856, even as the Rio Grande flowed through mostly unpopulated country, Major Emory had glimpsed something of the troubles that could develop as more people began settling along the boundary river. One of the founders of El Paso, James Wiley Magoffin, wrote to Emory that the Rio Grande threatened to change its course in the El Paso Valley. What, he wanted to know, would this do to the boundary line so recently surveyed? Emory referred the question to the U.S. Attorney General and got back an opinion that summed up the principles of international law governing river boundaries: If the river changed its course by the slow process of erosion of one bank and accretion to the other, then the boundary moved with the deepest channel. If, on the other hand, the river changed its course suddenly by avulsion—that is, if it deserted its old bed and cut a new one in a short amount of time—then the boundary remained in the old bed even if it was now dry. These guidelines were reaffirmed by the Convention of 1884, a formal agreement between the two nations which declared the boundary as the center of the deepest channel.

Which brings us to the Chamizal. In the mid-19th century, a dispute arose concerning a section of privately owned farmland between the small settlements that grew into El Paso and Ciudad Juárez. The land was bordered on its south by the Rio Grande, whose course was gradually shifting southward in that location. Beginning in 1895 Mexico laid formal claim to the tract, hereafter known as the Chamizal. But the Mexican claim elicited counter-claims by the United States, and over the years the dispute became a major impasse. At first the Chamizal looked like a simple enough question, for the principles formalized in 1884 should have held. But the testimony of old settlers and the investigations of boundary commission engineers showed that the change in the river channel could not be definitely ascribed either to erosion or to avulsion but rather to a process that fell

At right is an early 1850s surveyor's transit, of the type used on the early U.S.-Mexico border surveys.

Smithsonian Institution



September 25, 1964—President Lyndon B. Johnson and President Adolfo López Mateos unveil a commemorative boundary marker at Chamizal.

somewhere between the two. This technical impasse led to prolonged negotiation, arbitration, and further disagreement in the first half of the 20th century. By this time, Chamizal had grown into an international issue that made the continuing technical and diplomatic negotiations fruitless.

Compounding the already complex issue was the tract known as Cordova Island, a detached part of Mexico on the north side of the Rio Grande. This "island"—the result of an early flood control effort which cut off the banco at its neck—adjoined the Chamizal tract. With the title to Chamizal clouded and Mexico's Cordova projecting incongruously into El Paso, the orderly development of both cities was hampered. In 1962 Presidents John F. Kennedy and Adolfo López Mateos moved to break the deadlock. This time it was technology, rather than international law, that came to the rescue: a new concrete-lined channel for the Rio Grande would bisect Chamizal and Cordova. All land south of the center of this channel would go to Mexico; land north would belong to the United States (see map at left). After Kennedy's death in 1963, President Lyndon B. Johnson, long an advocate of improved U.S.-Mexico relations, completed negotiations which resulted in the Chamizal Treaty of 1963. The final agreement was signed on October 28, 1967; water was diverted into the new channel the following year.

It was not just parcels of land that were affected by the treaty; about 5,000 residents of El Paso who had occupied the disputed territory were forced to relocate, along with businesses and industries. Both nations have used their acquired land for schools, public buildings, and parks. Additionally, the U.S. Congress set aside a portion of the land acquired from Mexico as Chamizal National Memorial. Here the National Park Service presents activities that celebrate the cultural traditions of the people who share the borderlands.

Your Visit to Chamizal



Laurence Parent

Stone monuments were erected in 1897 to mark the international border when Cordova Island was cut

off from the rest of Mexico by a new channel through the neck of the river bend.

Chamizal National Memorial is located in south-central El Paso, just north of the Rio Grande and immediately adjacent to the international boundary. Enter the park from either San Marcial Street or Delta Drive. A lighted parking area is provided on the grounds. Picnicking is permitted, but there are no overnight camping facilities. The park is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. September through May; hours are 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. June through August. On days when performances are scheduled, the park is open until 11 p.m. There is no fee for admission to the park, but tickets are sold for some theater performances.

Things to do
Stop first at the visitor center, located in the center of the grounds. Bilingual employees of the National Park Service are on hand to answer questions and to provide information about the day's activities and upcoming events. A video presentation introduces the park and its related history and culture. A museum explains the history of the U.S.-Mexico boundary.

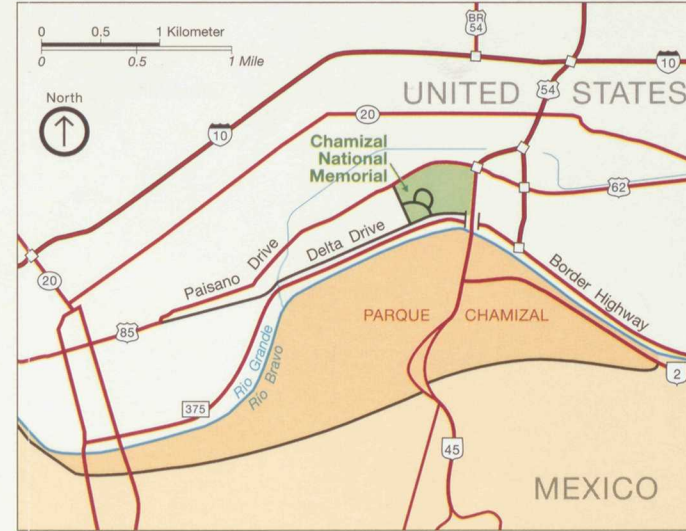
The visitor center complex also includes a sales area for books and artworks, the 500-seat theater, the Los Paisanos Gallery, and a courtyard with a garden and fountain.

On the outside walls is the mural by Carlos Flores depicting the principal players in the Chamizal settlement as well as the cultural life of both countries. The park grounds have foot trails through native vegetation. The amphitheater is located just southwest of the visitor center. The park also has picnic areas with tables and grills.

Throughout the year, the National Park Service sponsors special programs and activities to broaden understanding and to encourage perpetuation of cultural heritages in the performing and graphic arts. Professionals and outstanding amateurs of both countries present theater performances in the fields of ballet, folk, drama, music, and other arts.

For your safety
Please be careful of traffic while walking across the roadways and parking areas. Also remember to be especially cautious on theater stairs; please use the handrails.

Parque Chamizal, Juárez
Directly across the Rio Grande, on a portion of the Chamizal ceded to Mexico in the 1960s, is Parque Chamizal, a Juárez city park. The park's 541 acres of handsomely landscaped grounds include a visi-



tor center, an anthropology museum, statuary, and an abundance of recreational facilities. You are cordially invited and encouraged to visit the park. Keep in mind that vehicle traffic on the international bridges is heavy, especially during commuting times. You may choose to walk or bicycle.

Administration
Chamizal National Memorial is part of the National Park System, one of more than 370 parks that are examples of our nation's cultural and natural heritage. For information, write to: Superintendent, Chamizal National Memorial, 800 S. San Marcial Drive, El Paso, TX 79905-4123. Phone: 915-532-7273.

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