

Community Fact Sheet

Cattle Dip Tank Area

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Palo Alto Battlefield National
Historical Park



THE PALO ALTO BATTLEFIELD NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK...

Palo Alto Battlefield was declared a National Historic Landmark on December 19, 1960, and was formally declared a National Historic Site in June 1992. On March 30, 2009 the unit was re-designated as a National Historical Park, with the addition of the Resaca de la Palma Battlefield in the City of Brownsville. This park was created to preserve and interpret the site of the first major battle of the United States-Mexican War. The park has also been given a broad mandate to discuss the war in its entirety, including the broad story of the causes and consequences of this important conflict.



The centerpiece of this effort is the Palo Alto Battlefield. This 3,400-acre expanse of coastal prairie and dense chaparral is recognized as one of the best-preserved battle sites in the nation. Efforts to restore the battlefield to its 1846 appearance are currently underway, and the park continues to develop trails, facilities, and visitor services. The park's entrance is located at 7200 Paredes Line Road (FM 1847), just north of the intersection of FM 1847 and FM 511, approximately five miles north of downtown Brownsville, TX.

A SITE HISTORY...

The former cattle-dipping operation area (the Site) is located within the boundaries of Palo Alto National Historical Park. Ranchers used two concrete and brick "dipping tanks" in the period from the 1920s to the 1970s to rid cattle of parasites. Chemicals (arsenic) used in this process spread beyond the walls of the tanks and contaminated soil and groundwater in the vicinity with arsenic. The dipping tanks were abandoned and the area had been idle for about 25 years when the National Park Service acquired the land in 1998.

AND NOW...



The NPS has moved forward with efforts to investigate, clean up, and restore this area. The dipping tanks and most other ranching features have been removed from the battlefield area. All that remains is a holding pond in the resaca. Mesquite trees, grasses, shrubs, and prickly pear cacti now dominate the area. A concrete walkway, heading from the park's visitor's center to observation pavilions, is located about 150-feet south of the former dipping tanks.

ENVIRONMENTAL INVESTIGATIONS AND CLEANUPS...

In 1999, NPS began environmental investigations to evaluate potential risks posed to human health and the environment by contaminants at the Site and to evaluate potential remedies to address identified risks. These investigations are being conducted pursuant to NPS's cleanup authority under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), also referred to as Superfund. NPS is the CERCLA "lead agency" at the Site, and is responsible for planning and directing the Site investigation and cleanup activities.

A Level I Environmental Site Assessment of the area was conducted on February 5, 1999. The assessment identified a visible cattle dipping tank as a potential environmental concern (a second, buried dipping tank was discovered later). In January 2001, a sample of the sludge material in the bottom of the tank was collected and analyzed for contaminants including organic compounds and metals. Only arsenic was detected. Arsenic is a natural occurring inorganic element, but can be toxic at high levels. Site activities continued in the following months of 2001. Soil samples were collected from several locations surrounding the dipping tank. These samples were analyzed for arsenic and indicated that soil around the dipping tank was contaminated.

A larger-scale investigation, called a Preliminary Assessment/Site Investigation or PA/SI was conducted in 2004. The purpose of the PA/SI was to determine if a hazardous substance release required additional investigation or response action. During the PA/SI, soil samples were collected to determine the vertical and horizontal extent of contaminants in the soil. Groundwater-monitoring wells were installed and samples collected to assess impacts to the aquifer. Arsenic was detected in the soil west and south of the dipping tank area. Arsenic was also detected in groundwater southwest of the dipping tank.

A soil removal action, called a Time Critical Removal Action, was conducted in June 2009 to reduce the threat to public health, welfare, and the environment by removing the highest levels of arsenic in soil that were exposed to visitors, workers, and wildlife. The cattle dipping tank was removed during this action. A second, buried dipping tank was discovered and removed during this action. The waste was transported to a permitted and secure landfill located in Donna Texas. This removal action removed some, but not all of the arsenic-contaminated soil.

An Engineering Evaluation and Cost Evaluation (EE/CA) was completed in October 2016 to evaluate the threat to public health, welfare, and the environment from the remaining contaminated soil. The EE/CA concluded that there was a threat from the remaining contaminated soil and that it should be cleaned up. The EE/CA looked at several cleanup action options that would eliminate the threat, yet preserve the battlefield and visitor facilities. Final design documents are being prepared prior to the start of the removal project.

Visitors are advised to stay on the park's developed trails at all times due to the hazards associated with flora and fauna indigenous to the area. Although the Site appears to pose a slight risk to human health through contact with soil, visitors should stay on the concrete walkway to ensure their safety which is consistent with park procedures.

THE NEXT STEP...

Community involvement is an important factor in the CERCLA process. The public will have the opportunity to be involved in reviewing and commenting on the EE/CA and proposed cleanup action. An administrative record was established which contains documents upon which the selection of the Site cleanup action will be based. The entire file, including the EE/CA are available for public review at the following two locations:

Palo Alto Battlefield National Historical Park
1623 Central Blvd, Room 213
Brownsville, TX 78520-8326
Contact: Mr. Douglas Murphy
Phone: (956) 541-2785 ext. 330
Mon.-Fri. 8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

NPS, Intermountain Regional Office
12795 West Alameda Parkway
Lakewood, CO 80225-0287
Contact: Mr. Paul Torcoletti
Phone: (303) 969-2671
Mon.-Fri. 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

It is anticipated that a public meeting will be held in February 2017 to present the findings of the EE/CA and the proposed cleanup action. The final cleanup could occur as early as the summer of 2017.

FOR MORE INFORMATION...

If you have questions concerning the information contained in this fact sheet, please contact Douglas Murphy, Palo Alto Battlefield National Historical Park at (956) 541-2785 ext. 330, or Paul Torcoletti, National Park Service Intermountain Regional Office at (970) 969-2671.