

A Guide to Country Living

Blanco County

INTRODUCTION

It is important for you to know that life in the country is different from life in the city. Some of the differences are good; some require adjustment. This information is being provided to help you make a educated and informed directions to purchase rural land.

HISTORY OF BLANCO COUNTY

Blanco County ¹ was organized in 1858 from Burnet, Comal, Gillespie, and Hays counties. It was named after the white caliche soil, hence “Blanco”, which is the Spanish word meaning white. Blanco county is located in the heart of the Texas Hill country. Austin, Fredericksburg, San Antonio, and Marble Falls surround it.

The two state parks following the Pedernales and Blanco ² rivers, along with the many flowing creeks into Blanco County make it one of the most beautiful, scenic counties in Texas. The economic foundation is mostly agricultural, including cattle, sheep and goats, hay and feed production, along with livestock, are the main sources of livelihood.

Major population center include Blanco Johnson City and Round Mountain. The country is comprise of 457, 825 acres.

^{1 & 2} See extended articles about the Blanco County & Blanco River at end of this document

ACCESS

Blanco County maintains 195 miles of rural roads, but private and public roads that are maintained by private associations serve many rural properties. Natural disasters, especially floods can destroy roads. Blanco County will repair and maintain county roads; however, private roads are maintained by individuals.

A dry creek bed can become a raging torrent and wash out roads, bridges and culverts. Residents served by private roads and/or bridges have been hit with large bills for repairs and/or reconstruction after floods.

You may experience problems with maintenance and cost of maintaining your road. Make sure you know what type of maintenance to expect and who will provide that maintenance. It wis wise to determine whether or not your road was properly engineered and constructed.

Be cautious when the seller of any property indicates any unpaved roads will be paved. Check carefully with the Precinct Commissioner regarding plans for paving. Unpaved roads generate dust. They are not always smooth and are often slippery when they are wet. You may experience an increase in vehicle maintenance costs when you regularly travel on rural county roads.

The fact that you can drive to your property does not necessarily guarantee that you, your guests and emergency service can achieve that same level of access at all times.

There can be problems with the legal aspects of access, especially if you gain access across property belonging to others. It is wise to obtain legal advice and understand the easements that may be necessary when these types of questions arise.

If you plan to build, it is prudent to check out construction access. Large construction vehicles cannot navigate small, narrow roads. Also, it may be more expensive and time consuming to building a rural residence due to delivery fees and the time required for inspectors to reach your site.

Delivery of major newspapers is not available to all areas of the county. Check with the newspaper of your choice as to your status.

AGRICULTURE

Agriculture is an important business in Blanco County and an integral part of our environment. Owning rural land means knowing how to care for it. Ranchers and farmers often work around the clock, especially during planting and harvest time. Dairy operators sometimes milk without stopping and hay is often cut and baled at night. It is possible that adjoining agriculture uses can disturb your peace and quiet.

Land preparation and other operations can cause dust, especially during windy and dry weather. Animals and their manure can cause objectionable odors. What else can we say?

Landowners occasionally burn their pastures to manage brush and stimulate grasses. This burning creates smoke that you may find objectionable. Chemical (mainly fertilizers and herbicides) are often used in growing crops. You may be sensitive to these substances.

These practices enable agricultural enterprises to continue producing food and fiber. If you choose to live among the farms and ranches of the Hill Country, do not expect county government to intervene in the normal day-to-day operations of your agri-business neighbors.

Before buying land you should know if it has noxious weeds that may be expensive to control. Some plants are poisonous to horses and other livestock.

Also, animals can be dangerous,. Bulls, stallions, rams, board, even wildlife can attach human beings. Children need too know that it is not safe to enter pastures or pens where animals are kept. An on rural roads, livestock have the right of way.

Household pets can become predators if allowed to run free. If your dog's roam into neighboring property, they may be dealt with as predators, and you may not be pleased with the result. Domesticated dogs, especially when in a group or pack, can be very dangerous to livestock and wildlife. Plan for control of your pets in the country as residents do in urban areas.

Blanco County generally received about 32 inches of rainfall annually. Some years when this level is not reached, there may be a problem with overgrazing and blowing dust.

There is a limit to the amount of grazing the land can handle. For more information about conservation of land, water, and other natural resources, contact the USDA- Natural Resources Conservation Service or the County Extension Agents' Office (See Directory at the end of article).

MOTHER NATURE

Residents of the country may need to consider the natural elements when deciding if and where to build on their rural land. The physical characteristics of the land can be positive or negative.

Trees are a wonderful environment amenity, but can also involve your home in a rush fire. Building at the top of a brush-filled draw should b be considered as dangerous as building in a flash flood area. Defensible perimeters are very helpful in protecting buildings from brush fires and, inversely, can protect the brush from igniting if your house catches fire.

If you start a brush fire, you may be responsible for paying the cost of extinguishing that fire.

The topography of the land can tell you where the water will go in the case of heavy rainfall. When property owners fill in ravines, they have found that the water that drained through the ravine now drains through their house.

A very small creek may become a river in the event of flash flood. It is wise to take this possibility into consideration when building. For more information regarding flood plains, contact the county flood plain administrator (See Directory at the end of the article).

Nature can provide you with some wonderful neighbors. Most, such as deer, are positive additions to the environment. However, even "harmless" animals like deer can cross the road unexpectedly and cause traffic accidents. Rural development encroaches on the traditional habitat of coyotes, bobcats, rattlesnakes and wild hogs. These animals can be dangerous and you need to know how to deal with them. In general, it is best to enjoy wildlife from a distance and know that if you do not handle your pets and trash properly, they could cause problems for you and

the wildlife.

For more information on living in the wild, contact Texas Parks and Wildlife Department or the County Game Warden (See Directory).

THE PROPERTY

It is important to research some of the issues discussed below before purchasing land or building on rural land. The surrounding properties will probably not remain as they are indefinitely. The view from your property may change.

Soil types and underlying materials can affect your choice of building location. You can know the soil conditions on your property. You can know the soil conditions on your property if you have a soil test performed. To determine types of soils present in your area, you may obtain a soil survey book from the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Many property owners do not own the mineral rights under the property. Owners of mineral rights have the ability to extract their minerals. It is important to know what minerals may be located under the land and who owns them.

Many subdivisions and planned developments have covenants that limit the use of the property. It is important to obtain a copy of the covenants (or confirm that there are none) and make sure that you can live with those rules. Also, a lack of covenants can cause problems between neighbors.

Property owners associations (POAs) are required to take care of common elements, roads, open space, etc. A dysfunctional property owners association or poor covenants can cause problems for you and even involve you in expensive litigation.

Dues are almost always a requirement for those areas with a POA. The by-laws of the POA will tell you how the organization operates and how the dues are set.

Easements may require you to allow construction of roads, power lines, water lines, sewer lines, etc. across your land. Check these issues carefully. You may be provided with a plat of your property, but unless the land has been surveyed and pins placed by a licensed surveyor, you cannot assume that the plat is accurate. Fences that separate properties are sometimes misaligned with the property lines. A survey of the land is the only way to confirm the location of your property lines.

TAXATION ISSUES

The Texas Constitution permits agricultural appraisal only if the land and its owner meet specific requirements defining farm and ranch use.

When you purchase which has an existing 1-d-1 Agricultural Use Exemption in place, that exemption is only good for that year. January 1st of the following year, you are required to qualify the land upon your own merit by meeting the degree of intensity for Blanco County. Generally, anything 10 acres or less is considered to be residential. Large tracts of land are usually stocked at a ratio of 1 animal unit for every 25 acres. Animal units may consist of 1 cow, 5 sheep or 6 goats.

Wildlife Management is another option which allows the property to receive agricultural exemption, for meeting 3 of the 7 following criteria necessary to sustain and encourage a breeding population of indigenous wild animals for human use. Wildlife management activities included:

- * habitat control
- *erosion control
- *predator control
- * supplemental food
- *supplemental water
- * supplemental shelter
- *census counts to determine population

Property owners must show a history of 1-d-1 Agricultural Use before applying for the Wildlife Management Exemption and then a detailed management plan should be submitted for review. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department can provide additional information on these activities at 1-800-792-1112 or via their website www.tpwd.state.tx.us.

The decision to grant exemptions is made annually at budget time by the taxing entities and is subject to change.

Other exemption offered include the following:

| Entity | Amount | Entity | Amount |
|--------------------------|---------|--------------------------------|----------|
| Blanco County Homestead | \$5,000 | City of Johnson City Homestead | None |
| Over 65 | \$5,000 | Over 65 | None |
| Disabled Person Ex. | None | Disabled Person Ex. | None |
| City of Blanco Homestead | None | Johnson City ISD | \$15,000 |

| | | | |
|---------------------|----------|---------------------|----------|
| Over 65 | \$10,000 | Over 65 | \$10,000 |
| Disabled Person Ex. | None | Disabled Person Ex. | \$10,000 |
| Blanco ISD | \$15,000 | North Fire & EMS | None |
| Over 65 | \$10,000 | Over 65 | None |
| Disabled Person Ex. | \$10,000 | Disabled Person Ex. | None |
| South Fire & EMS | None | | |
| Over 65 | None | | |
| Disabled Person Ex. | None | | |

*All taxing entities are required to grant the disabled veteran exemption, which is based on the % of disability.

| Disabled Veteran Exemption | | |
|----------------------------|-------------|----------|
| DV1 | 10 to 30% | \$5,000 |
| DV2 | 31 to 50% | \$7,500 |
| DV3 | 51 to 70% | \$10,000 |
| DV4 | 71 to 100% | \$12,000 |
| DV4, DV3W | Active Duty | \$17,000 |

Detailed pamphlets on the previous exemptions may be obtained by contacting the Blanco County Central Appraisal District at (830) 868-4013 or P.O. Box 338, Johnson City, TX 78636

UTILITY SERVICES

Water is a very valuable resource and in much demand in Blanco County. If you have access to a supply of treated domestic water, the tap fees can be expensive. Subdivisions must perform a water availability study before construction begins.

The most common method for obtaining water in rural areas is a water well. The cost of drilling and pumping can be considerable. The quality and quantity of well water can vary considerably from location to location and from season to season. Not all wells will be sufficient for watering of landscaping and/or livestock. It is strongly advised that you research this issue very carefully.

Sewer service may not be available to your property. If it is not available, you will need to use an approved septic system or other treatment process.

You must have at least 5 acres of land to have both water well and septic system. The type of

soil you have available for a leach field will be very important in determining the cost and function of your septic system. Contact the On-Site Sewage Facility Officer for Blanco County to obtain complete information and permits (See Directory).

Electric service is available to all electric consumers in Blanco County. Pedernales Electric Cooperative (PEC) builds and maintains all lines, poles, meters, etc. PEC is a member-owned distribution utility.

If electric service has never been established at your location, a line may need to be built. Completing an application and paying the required fees is the first step. If the proposed line crosses another consumer's property, a Cooperative approved easement is required. It is important to know who owns the property adjacent to your location.

If a meter has been set at the location in the past, a line extension will not be necessary. In this case, only the membership and establishment fees are required. Contact a PEC representative as soon as you purchase the property for more information about applying for membership and electric service.

PEC makes no guarantees against service interruptions. Consumers who need continuous, uninterrupted power may want to consider a backup generator. If the generator is improperly installed, back feed can cause serious damage and injury to property and individuals. As of December, 2001, fees are as follows: \$75 membership fee, \$100 establishment fee, and/or \$500 impact fee (for new service if PEC is required to come out and install infrastructure).

Contact a PEC representative by phone at 1-888-554-4732 or by mail at the following address:
Pedernales Electric Cooperative
P.O. Box 1
Johnson City, TX 78636-0001

Securing telephone service is not difficult, but can take up to 90 days. Notify the phone company as soon as you know you will need phone service. Obtaining another line for fax or computer modem may be more difficult, and cellular phone phones may not work in all areas.

Trash removal can be much more expensive in a rural area than in a city. It is illegal to create your own trash dump, even on your own land. It is good to know the cost for trash removal as you make the decision to move into the country. Recycling is available on a drop off basis in Johnson City and Blanco. Check with City Hall for hours and location.

WATER RIGHTS

Surface water - The Texas Water Code says that the water in every natural stream and watershed is the property of the State of Texas. It also says that no one may appropriate any state water without first obtaining a permit from Texas Natural Resources Conservation Commission.

However, a person may, without a permit, “construct on his own property a dam or reservoir with normal storage of not more than 200 acre-feet of water for domestic and livestock purposes.” Check with an attorney about your rights and obligations.

Ground water - Water to be pumped from underground sources, wells, is subject to the “right of capture.” Under current law, a person may pump all of the water they want from under their property, regardless of any negative effect it may have on the neighbors’ water supply. This is often called the rule of the biggest pump. Our citizens recently created a Groundwater Conservation District, which in the future may be used to limit extreme amounts of water extraction.

CONCLUSION

This information is by no means exhaustive. It is recommended that you consult a lawyer or title company to assist with purchase of property.

There are other issues that you may encounter that we have overlooked and we encourage you to be vigilant in your duties to explore and examine those things that could cause your move to be less than you expect.

We have offered these comments in the sincere hope that they can help you enjoy your decision to reside in the country.

| DIRECTORY | | | |
|--------------------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| Blanco County offices: | | | |
| Appraisal District | (830) 868-4013 | Extension Agents | (830) 868-7167 |
| Appraisal District Mapping | (830) 868-7036 | Indigent Health Care | (830) 868-7208 |
| Attorney’s Office | (830) 868-4447 | Judge’s Office | (830) 868-4266 |
| Adult Probation | (830) 868-4008 | Justice of the Peace #1 | (830) 868-4888 |
| Clerk’s Office | (830) 868-7357 | Justice of the Peace #4 | (830) 833-4212 |
| Commissioners: | | Motor Vehicle Registration | (830) 868-7178 |
| Precinct #1 | (830) 833-5331 | Property Tax | (830) 868-4013 |
| Precinct #2 | (830) 868-4471 | 911 Rural Addressing | (830) 868-0208 |
| Precinct #3 | (830) 825-3270 | Sheriff | (830) 868-7104 |
| Precinct #4 | (830) 833-1077 | On Site Sewage Facility Inspector & Flood Plain Administrator | (830) 868-2117 |
| County Attorney | (830) 868-4447 | Tax Assessor/Collector | (830) 868-4013 |
| Drivers’ License | (830) 868-7581 | Treasurer’s Office | (830) 868-4566 |
| Emergency Mgmt. 24-hr. - (830) 868-7124 | (830) 868-4888 | Voter Registration | (830) 868-7179 |

| | | | |
|--------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| City Offices: | | Federal Offices: | |
| Blanco City Hall | (830) 833-4525 | USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service | (830) 868 7237 Ext. 3 |
| Johnson City Hall | (830) 868-7111 | USDA - Farm Service Agency | (830) 868-4656 Ext. 2 |
| State Offices: | | Other Offices: | |
| TX. Dept. of Agriculture | (800) 835-5832 | Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) | (800) 776-5272 |
| TX. Dept. of Wildlife | (800) 792-1112 | | |

This information compiled and made available by the following persons/agencies:

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|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Blanco County Judge's Office | Mary Earney |
| Blanco County Appraisal Office | Amy Hurlbut |
| Blanco County Attorney's Office | Melinda Armbruster |
| Pedernales Soil & Water Conservation Dist. | Gail Rushing |
| USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service | Dean Myane |
| Pedernales Electric Cooperative, Inc. | |

Everything you wanted to know about the Blanco River

The Blanco River rises from springs three miles south of the Gillespie county line in northeastern Kendall County and flows southeast for eighty-seven miles, through the Hill County counties of Blanco and Hays, to its mouth on the San Marcos River, inside the San Marcos city limits.

In 1721 members of the Aguayo expedition named the river for the white limestone along the banks and in the streambed. Other early Spanish expeditions reportedly crossed the Blanco, including those of Pedro Vial in 1786 and José Mares in 1788. Indians, including Comanches and Apaches, inhabited the region along the river well into the 1850s.

Barlett Sims first surveyed the land along the Blanco River in what is now Blanco County in 1835, and land grants were made during the period of the Republic of Texas. By the mid-1940s the first settlers had come to the region.

The countryside is used principally for ranchland and secondarily for residences. Much of the bank is privately owned. The river is generally shallow and is impounded by a series of low-water dams. Springs from Glenrose limestone in the Middle Trinity Aquifer support the Blanco River in its upper reaches.

Two major tributaries in Blanco County, Callahan Branch and Flat Creek, join the main (or north) fork (once known as Martin's Fork) of the river. In western Hays County the Little Blanco River adds volume to the Blanco. Cypress Creek, another major tributary, rises from

Jacob's Well and flows into the Blanco River in Wimberley.

Some unique features along the Blanco River include the Narrows in western Hays County and the Devil's Backbone near Wimberley.

Dinosaur tracks are embedded in the limestone from Blanco State Recreation Area in Blanco.

Indian mounds and related archeological sites can be found along the river downstream from the Little Arkansas Springs, east of Wimberley. The Blanco River also flows underground along several spots in its course.

During the 1960s a major reservoir was proposed at Cloptin's Crossing, two miles southwest of Wimberley. The dam was never built, however, and in 1990 the Cloptin Reservoir still remained the subject to debate.

Excessive pumping of the Trinity and Edwards aquifers has reduced spring-flow in the area and caused some concern for the quality of water in the Blanco River.

Several recreational areas, including Blanco State Recreation Area in Blanco, private parks and resorts in Wimberley, and Dudley Johnson (Five-Mile Dam) Park near San Marcos, operate on the Blanco.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: An Analysis of Texas Waterways (Austin: Texas Parks & Wildlife Dept. 1974). Gene Kirkley, A Guide to Texas Rivers & Streams (Houston: Lone Star, 1983). John Moursund, Blanco County History (Burnet, Texas: Nortex, 1979). U.S. Geological Survey, Water Resources Data: Texas, Water Year 1983 (3 vols., Washington: GPO, 1984) - Laurie E. Jasinski; Information found in the Handbook of Texas Online at www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online.

Source: Blanco County News - Hill Country Antique Guide

Where did we come from and how do we get here?

Blanco County is in the Hill Country of south central Texas, bordered on the west of Gillespie County, on the north by Burnet and Llano counties, on the east by Hays County, and on the south by Kendall and Comal counties. Johnson City, the county seat, is four miles north of the center of the county, forty miles west of Austin and sixty miles northwest of San Antonio.

According to archeological evidence that Indians camped in the Blanco County area as early as A.D. 1150, and ancestors of the Lipan Apaches, who had migrated from the great Northwest, may have been roaming the area when the Spanish arrived in the sixteenth century.

There is not much concrete evidence of Spanish and French exploration of the area at that time, but the fact that there was a proposal for a mission on the Pedernales River submitted by a Father Santa Ana, plus the fact that the Marques de San Miguel de Aguayo named the Blanco River in 1721, does suggest that the Spanish knew the area fairly well. Small expeditions continued to cross the territory throughout the eighteenth century, but most of what is now Blanco County had been explored by 1749.

Land agents, impresarios, and Indian fighters began visiting the area about 1821. Land grants, however, were not issued by the Mexican government until 1826, when Benjamin R. Milam was given a contract to settle 300 families between the Colorado and Guadalupe Rivers. The land grant constituted a small part of the early Blanco County area.

In 1835, Jessie L. McCrocklin, Horace Eggleston, Noel Mixon, and Benjamin Williams each received a league of land now in Blanco County, but these tracts remained largely undeveloped until the middle of the nineteenth century.

By 1836, the Comanches had claimed all lands within the present boundaries of Blanco County. This hostile tribe made war on Apaches and white settlers alike, causing them to band together to fight their common enemy.

Capt. James Hughes Callahan first visited the Blanco River area on his way to an Indian battle. He was apparently impressed with the land along the river and so returned in 1853 with his friend, Eli Clemens Hinds. Both men built homes on the Blanco River in 1854, thus becoming the first white settlers in what is now Blanco County. Later that year Joseph Bird established Birdtown, now known as Round Mountain, in the northern part of the county.

Also in 1854 Gen. John D. Pitts, who had fought in Indian campaigns with Callahan, came to settle in the Blanco County area. Pitts, with Callahan, Judge William S. Jones from Curry's creek in what was then Comal County, Andrew M Lindsay of San Marcos, and F. W. Chandler of Travis County, chartered the Pittsburgh Land Company and laid out the town of Pittsburgh between 1854 and 1855.

The first church in the county was built in 1854 by a Methodist circuit rider named Daniel Rawls. In 1855, settlers in the western part of what was then Comal County began to agitate for a new county. As a result, Kerr County was established in 1856.

This, however, did not help the people of northern Comal County. They continued to petition the legislature, and through the efforts of members of the Pittsburgh Land Company, Blanco County was formed on February 12, 1858, from parts of Comal, Hays, Burnet, and Gillespie counties and named for the Blanco River.

Some historians believe that Blanco County also acquired two small unattached pieces of Travis County. The total area of the new county was 1,043 square miles.

The act that established Blanco County also stipulated that the county seat should be called Blanco and that an election should be held to determine the location, which should be within five miles of the center of the county.

A spot on the north bank of Martin's Fork of the Blanco River, just across from Pittsburgh, was chosen as the site for the new town. The Pittsburgh Land Company donated a 120-acre tract of land there, and Blanco was founded. A courthouse was erected on the town square in 1860. It was replaced in 1885 by a limestone structure that came to be known as the Old Courthouse, which fell into private hands after Johnson City became the county seat; the Old Courthouse was restored in the early 1990s.

Blanco County was settled predominately by natives from Tennessee and Alabama, mostly Anglo-Saxon Protestants, although about a tenth of the residents were natives of Germany.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: John Moursund, *Blanco County History* (Burnet, Texas; Nortex, 1979).; John W. Speer, *A History of Blanco County* (Austin; Pemberton, 1965).; Mary H. Ogilvie and John

Leffler; Information found in the Handbook of Texas Online at www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online.

Source: Blanco County News - Hill Country Antique Guide

Tidbits of Information on Blanco County

The Texas Comptroller's Office issued a special report on Rural Texas – Rural Texas in Transition. The following information is culled from that report:

* The following Hill Country Counties are considered “Rural Retirement Haven”: Burnet, Blanco, Llano, Gillespie, Kendall, Kerr, Bandera, Real and Kinney. A total of 27 Texas counties are considered “retirement havens.” There populations aged 60 years and older increased by 15 percent or more between 1980-1990 primarily because older people moved into these counties.

* Kendall, Bandera, Medina, and Atascosa are considered to be “Commuter counties.” Interestingly, about 90% of rural commuting occurs between rural locations rather than to the big city.

* Throughout the country, all age groups have been moving back to non-metro rural communities. The counties that profited the most were those that had the highest level of “natural amenities”, such a water, mountains, temperate climate and natural beauty. There are other amenities that make counties attractive, including small-town character and proximity to urban centers.

* Farming and the oil and gas industry, which have been rural Texas's mainstay industries, have provided little or no employment growth in the last three decades.

* In the Hill Country, Bandera, Kerr, Kendall, Gillespie, Blanco, Llano, and San Saba are considered to be service dependent counties. That is, these counties rely on private and personal services, wholesale and retail trade, agricultural services, finance and insurance, transportation and public utilities for 50 percent or more of their total income.

Census Data - 2000

| | |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| Blanco County | 8,418 (1990 - 5,972) |
| Outside City Limits | 5,722 (1990 - 3,802) |
| City of Blanco | 1,505 (1990 - 1,238) |
| Johnson City | 1,191 (1990 - 932) |