

THE REMARKABLE STORY OF THE GREAT SOUTHERN TRUNKLINE

(The Old Spanish Trail crosses the great drainage systems of the continent at their worst—near the Gulf. In the West it crosses the great ranch country where roads have not existed, and further west, mountain and desert country. It is a highway conquering difficulties for the service of the people, not one seeking easy courses. It is not a highway to be fostered by mere propaganda, but one beset with great engineering problems and laid often through primitive country, where finances are scanty and leadership must rise to great personal effectiveness. Yet it is being built. This series is a story of things men are doing to open the Southern Borderlands from St. Augustine and Tampa in Florida, to San Diego and Los Angeles in California, and to Tampico and Mexico City in Old Mexico, as the perennial playgrounds of the people.—Editor.)

I.

A GENERAL INTRODUCTION.

In 1915, men met at Mobile, Ala., to fashion a highway project to connect New Orleans and Florida. The fact that such a road must cross the forbidding bays, marshes and rivers that are natural to the drainage basins around a sea did not seem to disturb them. Later the Old Spanish Trail, thus conceived, spread its arms westward until today it is no longer a mere highway but a system of highways, for as fast as a section develops its part to carry traffic, and membership support gets behind the work, then contiguous territory must be opened to some spot of attraction or historical value.

The Main Line today from St. Augustine to San Diego is the backbone of the system. The highways from the North will be feeders into the OST as into a reservoir. In turn the OST will serve all the highways from the North. Each is necessary to the other.

Not only is the Old Spanish Trail the natural, national highway of the Southern Borderlands, but historically it is true to its name from sea to sea. Not as one unbroken trail that anciently existed, but a modern-day development through the lands of ancient Spanish adventure.

The Old Spanish Trail reaches no arm northward from its Main Line. That is the field of those legitimate highway projects building southward. But the OST accepts and assumes responsibility exclusively for its own lines and the territory south of them that it may prepare its territory to adequately serve the people the northern highways send. This principle led to the so-called Lake Charles Declaration against the efforts of certain highway promoters to seize sections of the OST, and the slogan of the faithful became: One Great Highway, One Marking Along Its

Line, One Name on the Maps, An Individuality and Distinction, not a Medley and Confusion.

St. Augustine to San Diego.

This is the Transcontinental Trunkline. St. Augustine is the oldest city in the United States and the beginning of things Spanish on the Atlantic shores. San Diego is the beginning of California and of Spanish history on the Pacific shores.

The span of years between the settling of St. Augustine and the settling of San Diego is 204. The span of miles that connect the two over the Old Spanish Trail is 2,900.

Mexico City was conquered by Cortez two generations before St. Augustine was settled, and that ancient capital of Moctezuma is the beginning of history on the North American continent. Within these outposts the destructive adventures of the conquistadores and the constructive ministrations of the padres enriched the lands with romantic history. The Old Spanish Trail is weaving the past into a fabric for the pleasure of the people of today.

Tampa to Tampico.

For historical reasons, and for its great popular appeal, a Mexican Gulf Trunkline from Tampa to Tampico is worth working out. When the pioneers of this movement coined the name, Old Spanish Trail, they gave to the world something singularly alluring and remarkably true to history. It is doubtful if at the time they realized the full significance of the name they called it being.

The Main Line of the OST from ocean to ocean is a great highway, but another dream is reaching fulfillment—the vision of a highway all around the Gulf from Tampa; the ancient eastern gateway of the Spaniards, to Tampico the ancient western gateway. To accomplish this it is necessary to branch from the Main Line at Houston and at San Antonio, Texas, and project a highway southward through primitive country to Old Mexico. Texas is achieving this Mexican extension and it is her gift to her sister states, and Texas looks to Florida for her link along the West Coast to Tampa.

This Mexican extension is being rapidly financed for 300 miles from San Antonio to Brownsville for a paved road. It is a primitive, unsettled country, but the big Texans are voting millions. The connection to Houston will soon also be a reality. In the Rio Grande Valley, with Brownsville the terminus, the women's clubs have combined and an Avenue of Palms is being set out ninety miles long with the palms 100 feet apart.

This extension will go southward to Tampico and then to Mexico City. Entering Mexico, the Old Spanish Trail will reach the very heart of ancient Spanish effort, and the

people of two nations will be drawn together in fraternal understanding.

The Mexican government is giving its co-operation to this work. If nothing happens to weaken the plans so well inaugurated, the day will come when the people of the North American continent will glory in the pride and prestige of this Highway around the Gulf.

It is interesting to recall that De Soto's princely expedition disembarked at Tampa and his ragged survivors four years later found friends and safety at Tampico.

II.

PRESENT CONDITIONS EASTWARD.

Florida Conditions.

Florida, with limited money for the whole state, has been pursuing the wise policy of bridging the great waterways of the Old Spanish Trail through North Florida. Now the barrier sections are approaching completion, and the roads are being built. This year the marking will be put across Florida and traffic will find a comfortable highway, and works of great magnitude will greet the traveler. These waterways and jungles emblazon the stories of the struggles of De Narvaez and De Soto, and they were bulwarks to the Indians as they fought the invaders.

West of Jacksonville, through to Lake City, about 60 miles of concrete and other paving work will be finished this spring.

THE FLORIDA BRIDGES.

The Florida Bridges Are Achievements worthy of That Great State.

APALACHICOLA—Opened July, 1922. West approaches to be extended later. To cost \$1,000,000.00; total length land and water structures, 5,500 feet. Classified by engineers as a "monumental structure."

CHOCTAWHATCHEE—Contracts let. Eight thousand feet, including approaches. Completion in 1923.

BLACKWATER, at Milton—Completed recently. Cement foundation, 48 feet under water, piling 25 feet deeper. The foundation so deep and difficult the state had to assume the work.

ESCAMBIA, 10 miles east of Pensacola—Financed, approved, and ready for advertising for contract. Bridge to be three miles. Another of the great engineering feats on the Old Spanish Trail. Engineers have been one year studying and planning this problem.

Pensacola.

The story of Escambia Bridge is also the story of great achievement by Pensacola—a place noted for its attraction since the earliest Spanish Adventure, and a city of destiny when the OST is open and other big works are completed. A group of citizens and officials are working out difficult problems. Federal aid to the whole state of Florida annually is less than \$1,000,000, yet these Pensacolians and

the Florida highway officials are ready now to build across that three miles of bay and jungle, despite the fact money has also been found for the other barrier sections in North Florida. They are also planning to pave to the Alabama line, and likewise their trunkline feeder from the North. And with their own money they intend building a cement road to the Gulf Beach and make that beach the winter and summer resort of the people.

Alabama.

Two counties project at the bottom of Alabama with Mobile Bay eight miles wide lying between, and the OST crosses the bottom of these counties. Mobile is on the west shore of the bay. On the east shore and extending to the Florida line is Baldwin County with 600,000 satsuma orange trees and groves of paper shell pecans. Its Eastern Bay Shore is a delightful resort summer and winter. The women of Baldwin County are intending to plant azaleas, japonicas and other flowering shrubs along the roadside, for the Old Spanish Trail from one sea to the other runs through a land of flowering plants the year round.

Alabama has just voted \$25,000,000 in state road bonds. Senator John Craft, Alabama Vice-President of the OST, is the "Father of Good Roads" in Alabama and tireless in that work. Bridging the bay is a part of the plan and also a paved road across the state to link with the paving planned in Florida on the east and in Mississippi on the west, for those sections are financed for paving.

III.

A GULF COAST BOULEVARD.

The Old Spanish Trail between Pensacola and New Orleans, a distance of only 200 miles, embraces four states, and includes three cities of importance, and it also includes the Mississippi Gulf Coast, often called the "Riviera of America." All have attained distinction, yet are suffering the strangulation of the section, for this 200 miles is a broken, fragmentary four-state district of disconnected or inadequate roads. Mobile Bay, Pascagoula river and Bay St. Louis have ferries not satisfactory to traffic, yet as satisfactory as present travel can expect. From the Mississippi state line on toward New Orleans is a section that has baffled men since the years Bienville and the French searched for a spot to plant their Nueva Orleans.

The basic trouble is not a lack of interest on the part of the people, nor a lack of courage to attack and conquer the most serious group of problems between the Atlantic and the Pacific. In this short section the Old Spanish Trail not only touches four separate states, but it skirts edges of states that are far removed from the personnel of the state governments. A natural lack of co-ordination among the several states has been one result, and a lack of comprehensive organization among the people has been another, for each little unit has been a law unto itself.

Yet a Gulf Coast Boulevard connecting Pensacola, Mobile, the Mississippi Gulf Coast and New Orleans is within reach.