



Frontier Naturalist: Jean Louis Berlandier and the Exploration of Northern Mexico and Texas

Russell M. Lawson

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This is a true story of discovery and discoverers in what was the northern frontier region of Mexico in the years before the Mexican War. In 1826, when the story begins, the region was claimed by both Mexico and the United States. Neither country knew much about the lands crossed by such rivers as the Guadalupe, Brazos, Nueces, Trinity, and Rio Grande. Jean Louis Berlandier, a French naturalist, was part of a team sent out by the Mexican Boundary Commission to explore the area. His role was to collect specimens of flora and fauna and to record detailed observations of the landscapes and peoples through which the exploring party traveled. His observations, including sketches and paintings of plants, landmarks, and American Indians, were the first compendium of scientific observations of the region to be collected and eventually published.

Here, historian Russell Lawson tells the story of this multinational expedition, using Berlandier's copious records as a way of conveying his view of the natural environment. Lawson's narrative allows us to peer over Berlandier's shoulder as he traveled and recorded his experiences. Berlandier and Lawson show us an America that no longer exists.

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