



### **San Antonio Missions**

#### **San Antonio River Channel Improvement Project, San Antonio, Texas**

Prewitt and Associates, Inc., Staff: Douglas K. Boyd, Principal Investigator;  
Jennifer K. McWilliams, Project Archeologist

Clients: Environmental Research Group, LLC; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

The four Spanish missions along the San Antonio Missions Trail—Mission San José, Mission Concepción, Mission San Juan, and Mission Espada—represent the largest concentration of Catholic missions in the country. They attract more than a million visitors a year.

But the historic link between the missions and the agricultural lands that supported them is disrupted by modern intrusions, such as the concrete channelization of the San Antonio River. The National Park Service plans to restore the historic landscape by bringing back the acequia and reestablishing irrigated agriculture to the area. Ultimately, it will create Spanish colonial demonstration farms along this historic section of the San Antonio River.

In 2008 Prewitt and Associates, Inc., was hired to identify the historic archeological resources on 55 acres of private farmsteads along this corridor. The land will eventually be transferred to the National Park Service for interpretation as part of the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park.

Using historical maps and a pedestrian survey, PAI archeologists documented six archeological historic sites: five farmsteads and the Lower San Juan Acequia. They discovered that these contemporary farms form linear plots that reflect the layout of the original Spanish *porciones*. Until the late 1970s, these farms were irrigated by the San Juan Acequia, which was built in 1731 and has functioned more or less continuously for more than 250 years. The San Juan Acequia is one of the best-preserved Spanish acequias in the country, part of

what the American Society of Civil Engineers has called "among the earliest engineered water supply irrigation systems recorded in the United States."

The San Juan Acequia and the farmlands it irrigated constitute a unique historic rural landscape. The work revealed important information that will contribute to a rare opportunity to interpret Spanish colonial missions within the context of the agricultural lands that supported them.

*—Elaine Robbins*

Prewitt and Associates, Inc.  
2105 Donley Drive, Suite 400  
Austin, Texas 78758-4513  
TEL: (512) 459-3349  
FAX: (512) 459-3851