

# PANHANDLE PATH TO HEALTHY LIVING

TEXAS A&M  
**AGRI**LIFE  
EXTENSION



## Salt Flats Oasis

**Deep in West Texas lies an ancient barrier reef, a massive remnant of the Permian Sea of 250 million years ago.**

West Texas, a typically dry region was flooded with unprecedented rainfall this past summer. Due to the rainfall, a once desert region has transformed into Caribbean-esque pools as far as the eye can see.

These knee high "pools" are actually salt flats, a 2 million-year-old expanse located

east of El Paso and near the small, appropriately named town of Salt Flat, Texas.

Though the salt flats are usually dry, this year's rainy summer has created a kind of magical oasis. As a result, the oasis is attracting tourists from all over Texas.

*Heidi Rehman*

# The El Paso Salt War

## The Salt Flats

Upon approaching the Guadalupe Mountains from the west, visitors traveling from the El Paso area will pass through a landscape of barren beauty. The Salt Flats are a remnant of an ancient, shallow lake that once occupied this area during the Pleistocene Epoch, approximately 1.8 million years ago. Salt collected here as streams drained mineral-laden water into this basin. The basin, called a graben, formed about 26 million years ago as faulting lifted the Guadalupe Mountains and depressed the adjacent block of the Earth's crust. At the end of the last ice age, approximately 10,000 years ago, the lake dried up as the climate became more arid. The salt deposits left behind would later become a precious resource to the people of the El Paso area.

## A Precious Resource

Salt was considered sacred to Native American tribes such as the Apache and Tigua Indians, who used it in the tanning of animal hides and as a condiment and preservative.

In 1692, Diego de Vargas led an expedition in search of salt deposits in and around the Guadalupe Mountains. An Apache prisoner led de Vargas and approximately 20 Spanish soldiers from Socorro, through the Hueco Mountains, eventually arriving at the base of the Guadalupe after a four day trek across the desert.

After discovering the salt beds, de Vargas collected a sample of the salt and returned to New Spain(Mexico). This expedition helped pave the way for future Spanish expeditions to the Guadalupe.

During the Spanish (1848-1821), Mexican (1821-



The Salt Flats are a remnant of an ancient, shallow lake that once occupied this area during the Pleistocene Epoch, approximately 1.8 million years ago. Photo - Courtesy of Dustin Nelson

1848), and early American (1848-1881) periods, Hispanic populations of the El Paso Valley region depended on salt from the Salt Flats.

After the signing of the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, ending the American-Mexican War, over 75,000 Mexicans chose to remain in the United States as U.S. citizens. Approximately 5,000 Mexican Americans lived in the El Paso valley region, formerly part of Mexico, subsisting primarily through farming and livestock grazing. In order to supplement income from farming, the Valley Mexicans would endure the heat and the threat of Apache attack to collect salt. They came from as far south as Chihuahua to load their wagons with this precious resource.

Mexicans and Mexican Americans from the El Paso Valley communities would make a 70 mile, two day journey from San Elizario to the salt beds. The salt would then be transported by mule drawn wagons south to Chihuahua and Sonora, where it was an important trade item. In addition to traditional uses, in Chihuahua the salt was used in the smelting of silver.

Prior to 1848, the salt beds, under Spanish law, were common land not owned by any one individual. After 1848, under American law, these were unclaimed lands, available to anyone who filed there. The Mexicans, believing that everybody had the right to the salt, never thought to file claims to the salt beds in the name of any one individual or group.

### **The Salt War**

The El Paso Salt War began in the late 1860's as a struggle between El Paso businessmen W.W. Mills, Albert J. Fountain, and Louis Cardis in an attempt to acquire title to the salt deposits near the base of the Guadalupe Mountains. Mexican Americans of the valley communities, who had for years collected salt there for free, were now faced with the threat of being charged salt collection fees.

Mills filed his own claims to the salt beds and formed a group that became known as the Salt Ring. Fountain, who had a falling out with Mills, later became the leader of the opposing Anti Salt Ring. He was elected to the Texas Senate with the expectation of securing title to the salt deposits for the people of the El Paso area. Cardis and Mills soon joined forces with Charles Howard, a Missouri lawyer. Cardis helped secure Howard's election to district attorney, but later became bitter enemies with him after Howard filed on the salt lakes for himself. These actions outraged Mexican citizens who considered the lakes public property under the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Cardis later joined forces with Father Antonio Borrajos, an Italian priest who served the Mexican communities, to oppose Howard.

In September 1877, Howard started a riot when he arrested two San Elizario residents who attempted to go for salt. An angry mob captured and held Howard for three days at San Elizario. He finally gained his freedom by vowing to give up claim to the salt beds and leave the country. He retreated to Mesilla, New Mexico, but quickly returned to murder Cardis in an El Paso store. Angry Mexicans de-

manded Howard's arrest. Howard was arraigned for Cardis' murder and placed under bond to appear in court in March.

In early December, a wagon train of Mexicans from both sides of the border left the valley, headed for the salt lakes. Howard brought suit and left for San Elizario to press charges. In San Elizario, he and a handful of Texas Rangers were besieged by an angry mob and held up for four days in the rangers' fort. On the fifth day Howard gave himself up. The rangers also surrendered, believing that Howard was to be freed. On December 17th, Howard, his agent John E. McBride, and John G. Atkinson were shot by a firing squad composed of Mexicans. The rangers from the fort were allowed to leave after forfeiting their arms.

Within a few days, several detachments of troops and a posse of American citizens arrived in San Elizario, killing and wounding an untold number of people. Most of the mob had already fled into Mexico, and no one was ever arrested or brought to trial. The short lived war very nearly led to an armed confrontation between the U.S. and Mexico. The unfortunate consequence of the Salt War was that Mexicans from both sides of the border were robbed, assaulted, and murdered. An exodus of Mexican families from the San Elizario area immediately followed the event. Eventually, the Salt Flats were claimed and the Mexican community was forced to pay for the salt they once collected for free.

For the Hispanic people of the El Paso Valley region, the Salt War was a struggle against Anglo attempts to exploit natural resources believed by the Mexican culture to be on communal land. The transformation of the salt beds from communal to private ownership threatened the very survival of the Mexican border population. They had constructed the road to Salt Flat and therefore had a vested interest in the future of the salt beds. The El Paso Salt War was not merely a quarrel over control of the salt beds, but rather a struggle for the economic and political future of the area.

## What is a Himalayan salt block?

A Himalayan salt block is a slab of Himalayan salt, which is similar to table salt but contains a slightly higher amount of minerals, such as potassium, iron, calcium, magnesium, and sulfur. These extra minerals give Himalayan salt its distinctive flavor and pink color. Slabs of it are mined and carved into a range of shapes and sizes. As it retains high heat for long periods, the end product can be heated in the oven or on the stovetop and used to cook foods.

Himalayan salt blocks also make visually appealing platters for a variety of hot or cold dishes.



## What foods can you cook on a Himalayan salt block?

Himalayan salt blocks can be used to prepare and serve a variety of foods. As they conduct heat efficiently and at high temperatures, they're ideal for baking or grilling meats, poultry, eggs, fish, seafood, fresh fruit, and vegetables. They can even be used to bake cookies, scones, pizzas, and other baked goods. What's more, you can chill them to serve cold dishes and desserts — making them incredibly versatile. For instance, chilled salt blocks can be used to serve sushi, cheeses, meat, fruit, custard, ice cream, or sorbet.

## How to use a Himalayan salt block

A Himalayan salt block is simple to use, but you should keep a few tips in mind.

1. **Start with a dry salt block.** Make sure that your block is completely dry before using it, as any moisture can cause it to expand and crack while heating.
2. **Heat it slowly.** Heating your salt block too quickly can cause it to crack. To prevent this, it's best to increase the oven temperature by no more than 200°F (93°C) every 15 minutes.
3. **Preheat before using it in the oven.** Heating your block directly in the oven increases the risk of cracking, so you may want to preheat it on a grill or stovetop before placing it in the oven.
4. **Changes are normal.** Heating can cause your salt block to develop small cracks and naturally change color over time. Try to always cook on the same side to keep cracks from worsening.
5. **Handle a hot block with care.** A salt block can reach very high temperatures and remain hot for several hours. Regular oven mitts won't offer sufficient protection, so you should consider using high heat-resistant gloves or a carrying rack instead.
6. **Don't use fat.** Butter and cooking oils aren't necessary and will diminish the lifespan of your Himalayan salt block.
7. **Don't submerge your block in water.** Water dissolves salt, so it's best to clean your block with a damp sponge instead. Stubborn areas can be scrubbed with a scouring pad or soft brush.



## Grilling

Start by placing your dry block on a stovetop or outdoor grill, then slowly raise the temperature until you reach approximately 500 F. You can check your block's cooking temperature using an infrared thermometer or by sprinkling a few drops of water atop it — if they sizzle or immediately evaporate, your block is likely ready for use. To cook foods, simply place them directly on your block. If needed, use a pair of silicone tongs or metal cooking utensils for flipping or

turning the food.

Make sure to prep your food into appropriately sized pieces. Items that cook quickly tend to work best — since the longer food remains on the block, the saltier it's likely to get.

To use your Himalayan salt block on an electric stovetop, you'll need to install a special metal ring over the burner to hold it in place. When using a charcoal grill, prevent your block from heating too quickly by stacking the coals to one side of the grill.

## Baking

To prevent your Himalayan salt block from cracking in the oven, slowly preheat it on a grill or stovetop. Add your cookies, pizza, scones, or other baked goods, then place it on a sturdy baking sheet on the middle rack of your oven. Bake as usual. The block will add a nice hint of saltiness to your food.

## Serving cold foods

To use your Himalayan salt block as a cold serving platter, refrigerate it for 2 hours before use. Then, arrange fruit, sushi, cheeses, veggies, frozen desserts, or any other cold foods immediately before serving.

*To avoid over-salting your foods, try limiting the surface area that comes into contact with your salt block by laying food items on their smaller sides.*



## Cleaning and storing

Allow your salt block to cool completely before cleaning, then use a damp sponge or washcloth to wipe it clean, using only water — not soap.

Tough spots can be scrubbed with a scouring pad or soft brush. Water dissolves salt, so the less water you use, the better.

Once clean, pat your block dry and set it on a drying rack. Allow it to dry completely before storing it in a cool, dry place. If you live in a humid region, try wrapping your block in a towel before putting it away.

## Benefits of cooking on a Himalayan salt block

### May add some nutrients to your meals

Himalayan salt is made up of 98% sodium chloride, the same compound found in table salt. The remaining 2% comes from minerals, such as sulfur, potassium, magnesium, calcium, and iron.

These extra minerals give Himalayan salt a slightly different flavor than table salt and impart foods with a few more minerals.

That said, the total amount of added minerals is likely too small to offer significant benefits.

### Enhances the flavor of foods

Cooking on a Himalayan salt block may give your meals an unexpected flavor due to its mineral content.

What's more, Himalayan salt blocks have excellent heat distribution, which reduces cooking time and may prevent your dish from becoming overly salty.

Besides, using a salt block may give your dishes a unique texture.

### May help combat germs

Salt is known for its germ-fighting properties, which is why it's often added to foods to increase shelf life and inhibit unwanted bacterial growth. This may explain why Himalayan salt blocks are marketed as a natural antibacterial or antimicrobial cooking surface that reduces your risk of food poisoning.

Although salt blocks may provide a certain level of protection against harmful bacteria, they are unlikely to offer a replacement for safe food-handling, preparation, and cooking practices.

### Potential downsides

Cooking on a Himalayan salt block may also come with a few downsides.

*For instance, this cooking method naturally increases your meals' levels of sodium — a*

*nutrient most people already overeat. While sodium is necessary in small amounts, excessive intake can harm your health, as well as those on salt-restricted diets, should refrain from cooking on a Himalayan salt block.*

Moreover, if you rely on a salt block for your sodium intake, you may not get enough iodine in your diet. This nutrient is especially important for your thyroid gland, which controls your metabolism.

Although Himalayan salt blocks do contain small amounts of iodine, they don't likely offer as much as table salt — which is usually enriched with this nutrient.

### The bottom line

Cooking on a Himalayan salt block is an interesting way to prepare and serve foods.

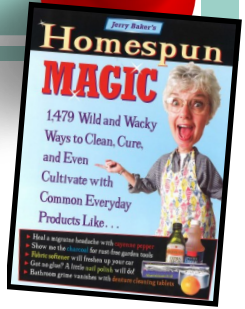
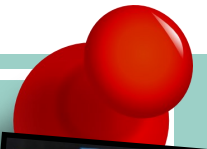
While some of its touted benefits are exaggerated, it may improve the flavor of meals while adding a hint of saltiness.

Still, it may also encourage excessive salt consumption and indirectly reduce your iodine intake.

As such, it's likely best to use a Himalayan salt block in moderation.



Himalayan salt is rock salt mined from the Punjab region of Pakistan. The salt, which often has a pinkish tint due to trace minerals, is primarily used as a food additive to replace refined table salt but is also used for cooking and food presentation, decorative lamps and spa treatments. The product is often promoted with groundless claims that it has health benefits.



## The Layered Look



You know those traditional Russian Stacking Dolls that open up to reveal another doll and then another and another inside? Use this same principle when storing items. For instance, that pair of winter boots will fit nicely inside your empty suitcase. Tape a small list on the outside of the larger package to help you remember what's stored inside of it.



You might have heard that I'll be leaving my position as your County Extension Agent for Family and Community Health here in Randall County.

I am moving on to Hardeman County to be closer to my home and family in Vernon.

I am confident my successor will enjoy their time here as much as I have, and I wish you all the best.

Thanks for everything.

Kelli



We are excited to announce the following dates and times you can purchase 2021 Capitol Commemorative Ornaments from TEEA at the Herbert F. & Jeannie Kuhlman Extension Center off HWY 60 and Brown Road in Canyon.

<b>October 25, 2021</b>	<b>10 AM – 12 PM</b>
<b>November 6, 2021</b>	<b>10 AM – 12 PM</b>
<b>November 9, 2021</b>	<b>5 PM – 7 PM</b>
<b>November 11, 2021</b>	<b>1 PM – 3 PM</b>
<b>November 13, 2021</b>	<b>10 AM – 12 PM</b>



To maintain our tax-free sale of ornaments we ask that you purchase on the scheduled days. Ornaments are \$25 each,. If ordering by mail, note the \$30 will include shipping and handling.

**Please contact TEEA County Association Ornament Chairwoman, Mary Rice, at 806-655-7494 if you have questions.**



Music has always been an important holiday tradition at the Texas State Capitol. Musical groups of all ages and varieties have performed for the public at the Capitol since the early 20th century. To this day, dozens of musical ensembles from all over Texas travel to the Capitol to perform every holiday season.

The 2021 ornament pays homage to these meaningful musical traditions. The scene represented on the ornament is reminiscent of a fanciful snow globe as sparkling snowflakes fall surrounding the south façade of the majestic Renaissance Revival Capitol. A group of Victorian-era carolers gather in front of the Statehouse singing from their songbooks while elaborate gas lamps, like the eight that flank the building’s entrances, provide illumination for the singers. The musical notes from the Texas State Capitol Grand Waltz, composed by Leonora Rives for the Capitol dedication in 1888, hang behind the Capitol.



**ORDER BY MAIL**

Complete the form below and drop in the mail.  
\$30 per ornament and includes Postage and Handling.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ # Ornaments @ \$30 Each = \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Total



**Make checks or money orders payable to EEA Randall & mail to Mary Rice, # 2 Weick, Canyon, TX 79015**



Randall County Texas Extension Education Association

# Pecan Sales

October 12 - 30, 2021

**Pecan Whole \$15**

**Pecan Pieces \$13**

**Pecan Sampler \$18**

All pecan packages and samplers are one pound each.



Checks payable to EEA Randall

Contact **Sylvia Jordan** at **806.353.6005** to pre-purchase.

# TEXAS A&M AGRI LIFE EXTENSION

Panhandle Path to Healthy Living is a Family and Community Health information resource for area families in the Texas Panhandle Counties. The newsletter is published monthly. Readers are encouraged to read the newsletter and then pass it on. Any information may be reproduced for education purposes in any form and credit cited appropriately.



Kelli D. Lehman

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service –  
Randall County, Panhandle District 1

County Extension Agent –  
Family & Community Health

<http://randall.agrilife.org/>

806.468.5543

TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION SERVICE  
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## Path to Plate.....

## Fish Tacos

### Ingredients:

- 1/3cup light ranch-style dressing
- 2 tablespoons lime juice
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 1 jalapeño pepper, seeded and chopped fine (optional)
- 4 cups chopped romaine lettuce
- 10 6-inch corn tortillas 2 tablespoons vegetable or canola oil
- 2 tablespoons cornmeal
- 1 pound firm white fish (catfish or tilapia)
- 1 tomato, chopped (optional)

### Instructions :

1. Wash your hands and clean your cooking area.
2. Stir together the dressing, lime juice, chili powder, pepper, and jalapeño (if desired). Pour over romaine and stir to mix well.
3. Cover and place in refrigerator until serving time.
4. Warm the corn tortillas according to package directions.
5. Heat the oil in a small non-stick skillet over medium heat until hot, but not smoking.
6. While the oil heats, spread the cornmeal on a plate.

7. Pat the fish pieces in the cornmeal to coat on all sides.
8. Fry the fish in hot oil until the cornmeal is lightly browned. Remove and drain on paper towels. Cook until fish flakes.
9. Top each tortilla with some of the fish and some of the salad mix. Fold in half and serve with the chopped tomato, if desired

Prep Time: 15 minutes

Cook Time: 20 minutes

Cost per serving: \$1.23



BETTER LIVING  
FOR TEXANS  
TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION

### Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 2 tacos	
Servings Per Container 5	
Amount Per Serving	
<b>Calories 350</b>	Calories from Fat 150
% Daily Value*	
<b>Total Fat 17g</b>	<b>26%</b>
Saturated Fat 3g	15%
Trans Fat 0g	
<b>Cholesterol 65mg</b>	<b>22%</b>
<b>Sodium 380mg</b>	<b>16%</b>
<b>Total Carbohydrate 31g</b>	<b>10%</b>
Dietary Fiber 5g	20%
Sugars 3g	
<b>Protein 21g</b>	
Vitamin A 70%	Vitamin C 15%
Calcium 6%	Iron 8%

