

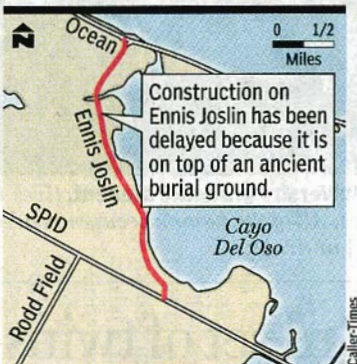
# Some American Indians upset over paving of burial grounds

**BY MATTHEW STURDEVANT**

*Caller-Times*

Local American Indians are angry that they just recently learned the Texas Department of Transportation has spent years paving Ennis Joslin Road over an ancient burial ground, and a local Indian group plans to bless the road with a march today.

"It's not a protest march because it's already done, but we plan on blessing that whole area," said Larry "Running Turtle" Salazar, a spiritual leader and past president of the Gulf Coast Indian Confederation. "I wish they would have contacted us. They should just leave



them alone."

The transportation department maintains it followed the regular procedure for building a highway near a burial ground

by consulting the Texas Historical Commission and descendants of some tribes.

"They were active partners in coming up with what the plans were," said Nancy Kenmotsu, director of cultural resources within the department's Environmental Affairs Division.

However, a local American Indian student group said they also were surprised by Friday's news.

"Our organization, as far as I know, they didn't know anything about it," said Erica Gray, president of the Native American Student Association at

# FROM THE COVER

## SMOKING From 1A

and all that, but I am not going to pursue litigation," said.

Sonja Silversmith, owner of Sonja's European Restaurant & Bakery, said she struggled with her decision to sign the statement.

"I don't smoke and it doesn't matter to me," she said. "The main part in my life and business is I want people to come in and enjoy themselves. If they want to smoke, so am I to tell them not to?"

Brad Lomax, who had supported the Coastal Bend Restaurants Association's bid to amend the ordinance to exempt restaurant bars with separate areas and ventilation systems, said he signed the statement but would not be taking a leadership role in the opposition.

"I would sign a petition but I would probably not circulate it to people at my business," said Lomax, who owns restaurants including Executive Surf Club and Water Street Seafood Company. "It's just too divisive and notional an issue."

Lomax said some customers have told him they agree the issue is one of property rights but others have welcomed the ban.

"In all honesty, a number of people have left very nice messages, saying, 'We'll come to the Surf Club even more; don't worry.'" Lomax said.

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## BURIAL From 1A

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. "I would have hoped they would have moved it before paving over it."

### GROUNDS KNOWN

The transportation department has known about the cemetery for at least nine years because an archaeologist was hired in 1996 to conduct test excavations to determine the extent of the burial grounds.

Construction to widen the road from two to five lanes began in June 2000 and is expected to wrap up in September.

News of the cemetery came out Thursday while transportation department engineer Craig Clark was briefing members of the Rotary Club of Corpus Christi on local highway projects.

Ordinarily, the transportation department would contact living descendants of a tribe if their ancestors' cemetery was in the path of a highway, but the tribe is extinct.

When the transportation department can't contact descendants, the department contacts other tribes to speak on behalf of the buried, Kenmotsu said. Some American Indians were notified, and they recommended the site not be disturbed, or be disturbed as little as possible, which changed the engineering design to some degree, Kenmotsu said.

The report of which Indians were notified was not available Friday.

Officials at both the transportation department and the Texas Historical Commission

said they didn't bring attention to the burial grounds because they feared scavengers might come looking for bones or artifacts. Tampering with artifacts is a misdemeanor and desecration of human remains is a felony.

### FINES FOR TAMPERING

"The fines are up to \$1,000 for each day (of tampering with artifacts)," said Jim Bruseth, director of the historical commission's archaeology division.

Usually, the transportation department would build the road around the burial site, but Ennis Joslin is nestled snugly between rows of houses.

"We try to avoid it, but to avoid it we would have to go through houses," Kenmotsu said.

Hundreds of people were buried in a cemetery between 1000 B.C. and 1000 A.D. where Ennis Joslin now runs from South Padre Island Drive to Ocean Drive, according to local archaeologists and the Texas Historical Commission.

The theory among archaeologists is that the people buried along Oso Bay are ancestors to the Karankawa tribe.

The Karankawas left the Coastal Bend in the 1850s, went to northern Mexico, and later died off. There are no descendants of the tribe, according to many published reports.

But there is no certain link between the Karankawas and the people buried by Oso Bay, although it is quite possible they are Karankawan ancestors, according to Robert Ricklis, who has a Ph.D. in archaeology



**Crews work on Ennis Joslin Road.** Some local American Indians are angry that the state highway department has contracted out construction on the road for years, aware that it runs over an ancient Indian burial ground. The highway department says Indians were consulted in the planning stages.

from the University of Texas and wrote the book "The Karankawa Indians of Texas."

In 1996, the Texas Department of Transportation hired Ricklis to do some test excavations around Ennis Joslin so they could learn about the extent of the burial grounds. He uncovered a body dating back to 800 B.C., buried in the fetal position with a ceremonial fire and shells placed with the body.

### FACING THE SOUTHEAST

In the 1930s, University of Texas archaeologists uncovered about 60 skeletons from the Ennis Joslin area. Many were buried facing the southeast, giving some indication of reverence

for burial in that direction.

Robert Drolet, an archaeologist at the Corpus Christi Museum of Science and History, said the tribe buried near Oso Bay hunted and gathered plants for food.

Based on fish remnants and artifacts of shell tools, the tribe lived near the coast and ate fish during the winter, and likely moved inland up to 40 miles during the summer to hunt deer and other animals.

Little is known about the tribe, but local Indians are not happy with the transportation department.

Gulf Coast Indian Confederation Vice President Jennifer Jones notified United Native

America, a national Indian activist group, on Friday to tell them about the highway project.

Jones lives at the corner of McArde and Ennis Joslin, and never knew a cemetery was being paved over in front of her home.

"That makes me very angry," Jones said.

When told that some would say paving over the cemetery was disrespectful, the transportation department official, Kenmotsu, said, "We all have to live with what we do."

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George Tuley/Caller-Times